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Elaine's "Priceless" Pearls and Enid's Faded Dress: The Self and the Thing in "Lancelot and Elaine" and "The Marriage of Geraint"

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by

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Abstract of the Thesis

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This thesis takes an object-oriented approach to Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* through an analysis of Elaine's pearled sleeve in "Lancelot and Elaine" and Enid's faded dress in "The Marriage of Geraint." It considers the pearl as a *thing*; a thing that can be exchanged, a thing against which one can orient and identify the self, and finally a thing that exists already within English cultural history. It considers Enid's dress as a material garment upon which numerous meanings can be inscribed. The thesis argues that Elaine and Enid each demonstrate the unique role women have in relation to their objects within Camelot; while neither woman has complete control over the objects that they possess, these objects ultimately speak both for and with the women who own them. Things amass multiple meanings within the *Idylls* and thus allow Elaine's pearls and Enid's dress to communicate and embark upon troubled trajectories of signification. Through paying attention to how objects resonate within the idylls in which they appear — in terms of cultural resonance, contemporary relevance, and plot significance — it becomes clear that Tennyson used objects to create a specific narrative of material/human relationships. If meaning can be inferred from the organization of things into texts, meaning about Elaine's pearls and Enid's faded dress can be found through observing the movement, loss, and recovery of these objects within Tennyson's *Idylls.*

Dedication

This is dedicated to my family, for whose continuous love and support I will always be grateful.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Looking at things in Tennyson's *Idylls*……………………………………………1

1. Pearl as Non-Commodity/Thingly Gift Exchange……………………………………......6

2. Pearl and the Orientation of the Self…………………………………………………..11

3. Pearl in Cultural Memory……………………………………………………………...21

4. Her "faded silk": the Absence of Pearls in "The Marriage of Geraint"……….…………25

Conclusion: Enid's (Un)pearled Gown…………………………………………..……31

Works Cited………………………………………………………………………….…34

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Introduction: Looking at things in Tennyson's *Idylls*

"'True, my child. / Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me: / What is it?' and she told him 'A red sleeve / Broidered with pearls'" - Lancelot and Elaine

"See here, my child, how fresh the colors look, / How fast they hold, like colours of a shell / That keeps the wear and polish of the wave." - The Marriage of Geraint

If Elaine is both "fair" and "loveable," then she is also "wilful," and it is this willfulness that prompts the exchange of that "red sleeve / Broider'd with pearls" that constitutes so significant a *thing* in Tennyson's *Idylls*[1] (LE ll. 1, 205, 370-1). Through the act of giving the favor to Lancelot, the pearled sleeve is implicated within a narrative of chivalric gift exchange that necessarily has implications for (unequal) reciprocity. By accepting this gift, Lancelot tacitly indicates to Elaine that he equally returns her love — which he does not — thus nullifying the value of the dowry arrangement he ultimately does offer her in place of his affection. If read as a metonymic extension of Elaine herself, the pearled sleeve facilitates her movement between public and private space; the sleeve is permitted to be publicly visible when worn by Lancelot at the Tournament and also remains ensconced within private and erotically charged separate spheres when kept afterward in the cave in which his body heals. Further, the pearled sleeve referenced the place of pearls within English cultural memory, specifically their relation to Queen Elizabeth I, her virginity, and the 'impure' transaction history of the pearls with which she was adorned. These associations are ultimately contingent meanings, for the embroidery of Elaine's sleeve is delicate; not only because of their biological constitution, but also — and crucially — because the poem hinges itself upon pearled associations that would not be possible with any other gem. The mention of pearls recalls also the biological gestation of the pearl itself within the oyster, a maternal and generative image that complicates the conception of the pearl as virginal; for, the pure object created within the oyster can be endowed with both virginity and sexuality. Pearls themselves are delicate, and the pearls embroidered on the favor of Elaine's sleeve are placed in a delicate position, which position the content of this paper will take up.

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[1] All references to Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* are from the 2004 Penguin edition, edited by J. M. Gray. Citations from "Lancelot and Elaine" will be designated by "LE," "MV" will designate citations from "Merlin and Vivien," and "MG" will indicate citations from "The Marriage of Geraint."

I will consider pearl as a *thing*; a thing that can be exchanged, a thing against which one can orient and identify the self, and finally a thing that exists already within English cultural history. The pearl of Tennyson's *Idylls* gathers gendered meanings as it moves through the poetic realm of Camelot; the pearl, also, participates in a larger and historically relevant cultural history of pearl in Britain. The pearl's ability to amass multiple meanings suggests the material role of objects within Tennyson's poem in creating contingent narratives of meanings (narratives that can easily be overlooked). Through an analysis of the pearl in *Idylls of the King,* paying particular attention to "Lancelot and Elaine," this thesis suggests that the pearls ultimately come to 'stand in for' not only Elaine but also Lancelot, such that their identities are each bound up within the pearl. The pearls fail as things in that they mean too much; Elaine endows the pearls with sexual desire while Lancelot insists on reading the pearls as strictly chaste, and thus empty. It is the fullness of the pearls that prevent them from working, either as an object of exchange, thing, or cultural object. That is, it is precisely because the pearls can adopt multiple and perhaps contradictory meanings that there is the potential for interpretive failure, made manifest in Lancelot and Elaine's tragic inability to read the pearls in the same way.

And yet, the *absence* of pearls can also create thingly clothing in the form of communicative garments that mean too much to function properly for the Arthurian women who own and wear them. Thus the pearls of "Lancelot and Elaine" are absent from an earlier — and arguably parallel — idyll, "The Marriage of Geraint." Things move and mean within this idyll in the material form of Enid's clothing — "a faded silk, / A faded mantle and a faded veil" — which, even without having been embroidered with pearls, speaks for and against her marriage and relationships (with Geraint specifically but also with the whole of Arthur's court) (MG ll. 134-5). Although Enid never wears pearls, her relationship with the clothing she does wear will ultimately suggest Elaine's troubled relationship with the pearls that embroider her sleeve. Both Enid and Elaine have similar object relationships (with faded silk clothing and pearled sleeves, respectively) but experience unique levels of failure in relation to these objects. Each of these individual idylls — and their unified focus on clothing and thingly exchange — suggest that Tennyson was well aware of the material realities of the world of his text (and it is therefore worth paying attention to the material things that populate his epic). Reading Tennyson's *Idylls* through the lens of the material allows us to see just how much the material fails to communicate (even as it is exchanged, gifted, faded, or nearly destroyed). I will argue, then, that Enid's faded silk prefigures Elaine's priceless pearls: Enid's inability to maintain her appearance in relation to her material garments ultimately suggests Elaine's loss of control over her embroidered sleeves (as well as her troubled relationship with diamonds). Each woman individually demonstrates the unique role women have in relation to their objects within Camelot; while neither woman has complete control over the objects that constitute them, these objects ultimately speak both for and with the women who hold them. It is the thing's abundance of meanings within the poem that allows Elaine's pearls and Enid's dress to communicate and embark upon troubled trajectories of meaning. The problem that both Enid and Elaine have is that they want their objects to mean one thing; however, in the context of Camelot and in relation to object/human relationships more generally, this is simply not the case. Things possess multiple meanings and choose to speak those meanings in multiple ways.

The assumption that things can speak for themselves necessarily links my account to thing theory — for, in taking an object-oriented approach to Tennyson's *Idylls*, we stand to gain a better understanding of how the poems participate in and contribute to material and cultural narratives. John Plotz has argued in *Portable Property* for the significance of paying attention to the material within the literary, suggesting that "we ought to investigate ways in which cultural value is imagined circulating, in objects, practices, even in persons — even imagined as precisely inhering in that capacity to circulate, rather than in any detail of those two categories so beloved of economists, production and consumption" ("Portable Property" 9). The thing can certainly participate in economic production and exchange. However, as Plotz suggests, objects exist above and beyond the limitations of the economic realm. Thus Elaine's pearled sleeve and Enid's faded dress exist apart from economic considerations, instead amassing nuanced value in relation to their transactions. Through paying attention to how these objects resonate within the idylls in which they appear — in terms of cultural resonance, contemporary relevance, and plot significance — it becomes clear that Tennyson used objects to create a specific narrative of material/human relationships. Objects circulate within Camelot through varying means that — without exception — leave a particular resonance, or an "aesthetic resonance" ("Portable Property" 9). This essay is interested in these resonances insofar as Tennyson's *Idylls* seem to hinge upon the contingency of objects — the trajectory of "Lancelot and Elaine," for example, would resonate quite differently should Tennyson have decided Elaine's sleeve should be embroidered with, for example, diamonds or rubies. Elaine Freedgood in *The Ideas in Things* has contended that meaning "is not immanent in things; meaning is created in the organization of things into exhibitions, pictures, novels, and other 'realist' representations. The split is cognitively similar to the one that divides a commodity from its use value" (Freedgood 146). If meaning can be inferred from the organization of things into texts, meaning about Elaine's pearls and Enid's faded dress can be found through observing the movement, loss, and recovery of these objects within Tennyson's *Idylls.*

1. Pearl as Non-Commodity/Thingly Gift Exchange

The pearl, as a jewel endowed with multiple meanings — especially in relation to tourney favors that can be given as gifts — is a *thing* subject to exchange. Michael Hancock has suggested that Camelot's jewels can be defined by "the failure of the transactions in which they figure" (Hancock 2). Jewels in Camelot, it seems, do not ever change hands without incident. Hancock regards Elaine's pearls as "tainted" gifts in relation to the "surreptitious way" that the sleeve is offered to Lancelot (Hancock 12). The gift exchange does indeed occur in private — Elaine hands Lancelot the pearls only after Lavaine has stepped out of the hall — but most "surreptitious" is the way that the gift becomes endowed with meaning far beyond that associated with a tourney favor (Hancock 12). In the moments before the transaction, Elaine clandestinely observes Lancelot in an unguarded moment in which he "[smooths] / The glossy shoulder" of his horse (LE ll. 345-6). Finding that she is "[h]alf-envious of the flattering hand," Elaine moves closer to Lancelot and is seemingly surprised by her own inclinations:

> Suddenly flash'd on her a wild desire,
> That he should wear her favour[2] at the tilt.
> She braved a riotous heart in asking for it. (LE ll. 355-7)

The suddenness of this decision, made while watching Lancelot in a moment of subtle affection she would prefer be directed at her, embeds the gift of Elaine's pearls with not only respectful admiration but also unanticipated sexual ambition. Her inclination to gift Lancelot her own sleeve is not tempered by the realities of Lancelot's place as a stranger in her home as well as a man of advanced age in relation to her own youthful naivety. Indicated by the gift of her pearled sleeve, then, is the implicit desire for a further relationship between her and the great — and as yet unknown — knight.

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[2] I read Elaine's giving her pearled sleeve to Lancelot as a tournament favor as a *gift* insofar as she freely offers it and specifically desires him to be given ownership of (as well as the ability to display) her sleeve. "Favor" has been defined in the following way: "Something given as a mark of favour; *esp.* a gift such as a knot of ribbons, a glove, etc., given to a lover, or in mediæval chivalry by a lady to her knight, to be worn conspicuously as a token of affection" ("favour"). Thus women who gave favors to knights expected them to be regarded as gifts (and met with the proper return of, or acknowledgement of, an implied affection).

That Elaine's favor to Lancelot is a pearled *sleeve* suggests that the sleeve itself is significant (as opposed to her giving some other favor, such as a ribbon from her hair or a veil). The giving of a sleeve as a favor was not, however, unusual:[3] sleeves were frequently and easily given to knights as favors, if only because the standards of medieval dress involved sleeves that were easily detachable at the elbows and thus easily tied to a knight's armor. If somewhat commonplace, a detached sleeve as a favor was not necessarily chaste: as an article of women's clothing, it necessarily carried erotic suggestions of the female body and the bare skin both touched and covered by the sleeve. Helmut Nickel's analysis of scenes of armoring within chivalric literature suggests that the armoring of knights — and the adornment of that armor — was never insignificant. Thus tournaments differ significantly from other knightly expeditions, such as a war or spiritual quest, in that women's favors would be worn and deliberately displayed prominently (Nickel 9). According to Nickel, a lady's sleeve that is "torn off" and "[leaves] her arm deliciously bare" is "one of the sexier 'favors' in the game of courtly love" — a favor particularly capable of inciting Guinevere's anger (Nickel 9). Elaine, however, does not rip the sleeve off of her dress — at least not the one that she is currently wearing when she offers the sleeve to Lancelot — for she is told by him to "fetch" it (a command that requires she leave him momentarily) (LE l. 369). Elaine then does not bare any of her skin in front of Lancelot, suggesting that her gift transaction occurs in a less overtly sexual manner than it could have. However, the sleeve is a far more intimate gift than either a veil or hair ribbon — neither of which Elaine considers giving to Lancelot — suggesting that the sleeve was a specifically deliberate choice. Thus, she proves herself capable of conveying erotic desire without placing herself in a deliberately sexualized situation. Elaine makes certain, then, that the sleeve Lancelot will accept and wear is that which is embroidered specifically with pearls.

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[3] Sleeves are mentioned as favors in chivalric literature even centuries before Malory—Tennyson's primary source—as is evident, for example, in Chretien de Troyes' romance, "Erec et Enide": "A month after Pentecost the tournament assembled, and the jousting began in the plain below Tenebroc. Many an ensign of red, blue, and white, many a veil and many a sleeve were bestowed as tokens of love. Many a lance was carried there, flying the colours argent and green, or gold and azure blue" ("Erec et Enide"). The occurrence of a tournament goes hand in hand with the wearing of ladies' favors, those favors often taking the form of the sleeve.

Hancock suggests that Lancelot's acceptance of and wearing of the favor causes the diamonds he wins for Guinevere to accumulate "surplus meaning" (Hancock 10). This "extra" meaning is made manifest in Lancelot's appearance at the tournament as a stranger who can be wounded as well as in Guinevere's eventual reading of the diamonds as worthless to her in that the ninth and final diamond won while in possession of Elaine's favor is a jewel won primarily for a rival lover. Although the previous eight diamonds have been won solely in Guinevere's honor, Lancelot's transgression in tourneying for Elaine ultimately causes these diamonds to take on a hateful taint. The pearls themselves, however, accumulate surplus meaning in relation to Elaine's sexuality. To Elaine, Lancelot's acceptance of the pearls signifies a relationship of intimacy between them, vocalized explicitly by his response to her that he has "never yet [. . .] done so much / For any maiden living'" (LE ll. 373-4). Lancelot's acceptance of the pearls as a gift implicate him in a relationship of reciprocity with Elaine, for gifts differ from commodities in that they necessitate not monetary compensation but the receipt of a gift in return (Kopytoff

69). Lancelot, of course, has no such intentions — his acceptance of the pearled sleeve is done both carelessly and without any regard for Elaine's (or Guinevere's) feelings.

As an object of exchange, Elaine's sleeve is placed in a particular situation. Igor Kopytoff suggests that certain things are "publicly precluded from being commoditized" insofar as they may be a part of the "symbolic inventory of a society" (Kopytoff 73). Elaine's pearled sleeve, while neither a ritual object nor public monument, is ostensibly one of a kind; even if Elaine does possess a second sleeve, the one given to Lancelot would be necessarily unique in that Elaine has never before given and Lancelot has never before received such a favor (Kopytoff 73). Such objects can resist the process of becoming a commodity through the process of singularization, or sacralization. However, there is one caveat: "If sacralization can be achieved by singularity, singularity does not guarantee sacralization" (Kopytoff 74). That the sleeve is a singular work does not guarantee that it will ever be regarded as sacred or even sold successfully on the commodity market. "To be a non-commodity," according to Kopytoff, "is to be 'priceless' in the full possible sense of the term, ranging from the uniquely valuable to the uniquely worthless" (Kopytoff 75). I wish to suggest here that Elaine's pearls are priceless in this "full possible sense" — the pearls are worthless even as they maintain some degree of value (Kopytoff 75). They are uniquely valuable if only through cultural admiration and in the unique meanings that are embedded within the pearls themselves, and worthless if only because the non-commoditized exchange of the pearls ultimately fails to acquire for Elaine that which she wants: the invaluable prize of Lancelot's love.

The pearls are priceless insofar as they implicate Lancelot and Elaine within the chivalric bonds of courtesy. These bonds are widely and readily accepted throughout Camelot, serving ultimately to affirm and further reinforce Elaine's belief in the power of her pearls. Thus

Gawain's sexual attraction to Elaine is mediated by the pearls and what they represent: although Gawain attempts to "play upon her" with "golden eloquence / And amorous adulation," Elaine resists this implied courtship with reference to Lancelot being not only the "greatest knight of all" but also — and crucially — *her* knight (LE ll. 642, 645-6, 663). When Gawain subtly warns Elaine that she would not love Lancelot if she knew about his illicit relationship, he indirectly comforts — and reinforces — her by explicitly referencing her sleeve:

> One golden minute's grace! he wore your sleeve:
> Would he break faith with one I may not name?
> Must our true man change like a leaf at last?
> Nay - like enow: why then, far be it from me
> To cross our mighty Lancelot in his loves! (LE ll. 680-4)

The one whom Gawain cannot name is of course Guinevere; Lancelot's breaking faith with the woman he has for so long carried on a committed — if adulterous — relationship with would suggest within Camelot that a "true man" has flippantly changed his affections (LE l. 682). While this is of course little concrete comfort to Elaine, the moment clarifies the extent to which Lancelot's acceptance of the sleeve is, in some sense, a contract. Elaine is thus herself implicated in the transmission of the tourney prize diamond to Lancelot, for Gawain gives the gem directly to her, explaining himself to Arthur in the following way: "and to her, / Deeming our courtesy is the truest law, / I gave the diamond" (LE ll. 706-8). If Arthur is displeased with Gawain's own failure to deliver the gem specifically into Lancelot's hands, the transmission of the diamond to Elaine adds both pricelessness and worthlessness to her pearls: while she is permitted to provisionally hold a valuable gem, she is not permitted — even temporarily — to hold Lancelot's love.

2. Pearl and the Orientation of the Self

Whether pearls as non-commodities are uniquely valuable or uniquely worthless, they undoubtedly remain *things.* According to Bill Brown, we "begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us," when "their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily" ("Thing Theory" 4). Elaine's pearls command so much attention within the *Idylls* precisely because they fail as things; Elaine's sleeve as a tourney favor demands of Lancelot a relationship that he is not prepared to honor, and the movement of the pearls connect not only Elaine but also Lancelot to the pearls. A thing, in relation to an object, "*seems to name the object, just as it is, even as it names some thing else*" ("Thing Theory" 5, original emphasis). More simply, John Plotz suggests that the "thing" emerges when language to name an object otherwise fails ("Can the Sofa Speak?" 110). The pearls are thus things against which Lancelot and Elaine can orient themselves within Camelot; they are also things that the people of Camelot come to associate with both Lancelot and Elaine, such that they each come to be enmeshed within the pearls themselves. Objects as things can come to represent what Bill Brown calls the "problematics of otherness," or the "uncertainties that inhere in any identification of sameness or difference be it argued or experienced or acted out" ("Objects" 186). That a culture constitutes itself in relation to objects suggests that human subjects in some sense come to "depend on inanimate objects to establish their sense of identity" ("Objects" 191). The pearls of Elaine's sleeve are thus things against which the self can be oriented and through which the self can be defined. They are, however, also things through which the self can be abnegated; for, Elaine's inability to win with her pearls the object she most wants facilitates her decision to die while Lancelot's own relationship with the pearls encourages him to lose faith in his own name.

It is necessary then to ask why Elaine's sleeve is adorned specifically in pearls and not, for example, diamonds. Stefanie Markovits suggests that while Elaine may "justly" wear diamonds, she is "more 'like' pearl," such that her tourney favor is pearled (Markovits 612). In a community "constituted by similitude," Elaine's right to wear diamonds depends on Lancelot's suggestion that she is *like* them, even if diamonds in Camelot are more readily associated with queens (Markovits 613). Lancelot notes:

> 'If what is fair be but for what is fair,
> And only queens are to be counted so,
> Rash were my judgment then, who deem this maid
> Might wear as fair a jewel as is on earth,
> Not violating the bond of like to like.' (LE ll. 236-40)

Elaine, considered to be as fair as any fairest jewel, can thus rightly wear diamonds — or pearls — without presuming to wear adornments meant for a more renowned woman. Pearls, however, come to be specifically associated with Elaine insofar as Guinevere seems unable to wear them, thus the moment in "Merlin and Vivien" in which Vivien recalls the queen's "fair pearl-necklace:"

> That burst in dancing, and the pearls were split;
> Some lost, some stolen, some as relics kept.
> But nevermore the same two sister pearls
> Ran down the silken thread to kiss each other
> On her white neck — (MV ll. 449-454)

That this moment is narrated specifically by Vivien immediately suggests the extent to which pearls can become enmeshed with adverse meanings; while Guinevere may not purely wear pearls, pure pearls can be spoken of by a woman who is, of course, not much more chaste than Guinevere. This moment also recalls Michael Hancock's suggestion that Camelot's jewels "become identified with the women who own and wear them" (Hancock 5). The implication here is that Guinevere cannot properly contain that which constitutes pearls — or the multilayered symbolism behind them — but Elaine can. Pearls then come to be associated with Elaine within her name-bearing *Idyll,* such that while Guinevere is initially referred to as "the pearl of beauty," Lancelot suggests that Elaine may wear the most beautiful jewels (LE l. 114). Lancelot is of course referring to Elaine's ability to wear diamonds, but what she does wear — and give — is pearls.

As a detached sleeve, that Elaine gives the pearls to Lancelot is ultimately commensurate with a giving over of her self. The sleeve, as a material garment that touches, or has touched, the female body, cannot avoid being associated with that body. E. Jane Burns has suggested that clothing and "other bodily adornments" offer significant ways through which chivalric women could navigate their place within the realm of courtly love (Burns 1). Burns considers the demoiselle d'Escalot — Elaine's counterpart in Malory — in order to question specifically the role of the sleeve. Burns calls Elaine's offer of her sleeve to Lancelot "both familiar and surprising" (Burns 4). She notes: "That a courtly lady's sleeve might function as a love token attached to the helmet of the knight willing to defend and protect her forms part of a well-known constellation of courtly traditions involving the exchange of love tokens and the concomitant exchange of women as valuable beauties to be won in combat" (Burns 4). Implied here in this "exchange" is the woman's professed belief in her favored knight — this faith is publicly signified by the wearing of the favor and suggests that a knight successful in that tournament will win the body of the woman whose clothing he already wears (Burns 4). For Tennyson's Elaine, the favor only functions on the first level. When Gawain informs her of the success of the "knight with the red sleeve," she replies quickly and definitively that she "knew it" (LE ll. 617, 618). Elaine's simple response declares the completeness of her faith in Lancelot, a faith that is necessarily one-sided; for Gawain, along with the rest of Camelot, is aware that Lancelot has already “[won]” the body of another woman (Burns 4).

The pearls as things can go where Elaine cannot go, but when understood metonymically they are an extension of Elaine’s body traversing both private and public space. Indeed, the “conferral of the lady’s sleeve, scarf, or silk banner provides a record of amorous attachment displayed openly in the chivalrous arena” such that the woman moves “visibly” into “the position of the desiring subject” (Burns 9-10). This desire is not only felt by Elaine but also made visible throughout Camelot. The giving of the sleeve to Lancelot has instilled in Camelot the idea that Elaine and Lancelot are somehow bound; thus, as we have seen, Elaine is permitted to bring to Lancelot the tourney prize of the diamond. Through the transmission of this gem, Elaine is able to see the sleeve within private space, and crucially to see it as embedded with meaning:

> And her, Lavaine across the poplar grove
> Led to the caves: there first she saw the casque
> Of Lancelot on the wall: her scarlet sleeve,
> Tho’ carved and cut, and half the pearls away,
> Stream’d from it still; and in her heart she laugh’d,
> Because he had not loosed it from his helm,
> But meant once more perchance to tourney in it. (LE ll. 799-805)

The sleeve as here described has been through significant assault, battered and missing half the pearls; the pearls may have a lesser economic value but the “affective” meaning of the pearls has been significantly multiplied (Markovits 596). That the pearled sleeve remains within the private space of the cave suggests to Elaine that they mean more than what they actually do — that they will be used again in a future tournament, and that Elaine’s place will continue to be alongside Lancelot.

The physical, if battered, presence of the sleeve within the cave and the pearls that remain embroidered *means* for Elaine that her own place is there and her own immediate purpose is to nurse Lancelot back to health. That the sleeve remains permits Elaine to see Lancelot in a moment of unguarded intimacy and vulnerability more intensely personal than the previous moment in which she watched him with his horse: he is "lying unsleek, unshorn" and appears to be as gaunt as "the skeleton of himself" (LE ll. 810-11). That the "little tender dolorous cry" that Elaine utters wakes Lancelot insofar as it was a "sound not wonted in a place so still" does not register with Elaine; she sees only his glistening eyes as he awakens and wonders "Is it for me?" (LE ll. 812-13, 817). Thus Elaine enters subtly into a role most traditionally reserved for a man's wife; yet for Elaine this role is eroticized insofar as she is wholly unaware of the extent to which she is transgressing, maintaining sexual distance yet remaining cognizant of her own desire. In Elaine's dedication to her love for Lancelot, she refuses to see the extent to which it would be scandalous for both — but especially for herself — to enter his bedchamber alone. She is aware only of her own comfort with Lancelot, a comfort that she is concretely fortified in by the presence of her pearls. Indeed, near Lancelot, she is "at rest" (LE l. 828). Elaine, of course, cannot always rest here. Her care for Lancelot must follow structured timelines of propriety, but even these timelines are somewhat unclear:

> Then rose Elaine and glided thro' the fields,
> And past beneath the weirdly-sculptured gates
> Far up the dim rich city to her kin;
> There bode the night: but woke with dawn, and past
> Down thro' the dim rich city to the fields,
> Thence to the cave: so day by day she past
> In either twilight ghost-like to and fro
> Gliding, and every day she tended him,
> And likewise many a night. (LE ll. 838-846)

Elaine, "ghost-like," travels in and out of the cave, spending nights with her family in Astolat but rising with earliest light to continue caring for Lancelot (LE l. 844). The city with her family is emphatically "dim;" the true object of her desire resides not within Astolat but rather in the cave, the erotically charged — if dim — space from which she must leave but to which she always returns (LE ll. 840, 842). That Elaine spends “likewise many a night” caring for Lancelot makes ambiguous whether or not Elaine spends full nights with him or only remains lately by his side — to return only once the morning dawns — but what is very clear is that the pearls themselves remain (LE l. 846). Whereas Elaine herself cannot remain unambiguously by Lancelot’s side throughout his sickness, the pearled sleeve maintains its place, not only within the cave but noticeably still affixed securely to Lancelot’s casque where it was publicly displayed as a tourney favor. The pearled sleeve as thing can thus remain where Elaine cannot, serving as an object that validates her continued returns.

The pearls as things stand in for Elaine, but not for her only — for the pearls also become a thing through which Lancelot is himself identified. As the “force” and “grace and versatility” of the man with the blank shield at the tournament immediately suggest to Lancelot’s kin that he must be exactly who he is — “Is it not Lancelot?” — it is precisely the pearled sleeve that solidifies his anonymity and thus his association with the pearls (LE ll. 469-71). For the question of whether or not the unknown knight is Lancelot is answered in the following way:

> [. . .] ‘When has Lancelot worn
> Favour of any lady in the lists?
> Not such his wont, as we, that know him, know’
> ‘How then? Who then?’ A fury seized them all,
> A fiery family passion for the name
> Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs. (LE ll. 471-6)

When Lancelot is wounded in the tournament, his disguise makes it impossible for the Knights of the Round Table to identify who he is. However, they are not prevented from attempting to reconcile the “passion” they associate with Lancelot and the seemingly unknown knight they see before them (LE l. 475). Thus the prize of the diamond is announced as *thing* to be awarded to the knight "who wore the sleeve / Of scarlet, and the pearls" (LE ll. 499-500). Elaine later asks Gawain: "What news from Camelot, lord? / What of the knight with the red sleeve?" (LE ll. 616-617). For, from the moment the diamond is announced as having been won by the knight in possession of Elaine's pearls, the pearls come to be necessarily associated with the prize diamond. Elaine's gift of the pearled sleeve to Lancelot will be the rationale behind Gawain's transfer of the diamond to her own hands (and her own increasing dependence on Lancelot's potential to reciprocate her affection for him).

The pearled sleeve is the thing that identifies the knight in the absence of a proper identity: thus Lancelot becomes, in a sense, the pearl. While Lancelot's decision to accept the pearls was informed by a desire to disguise his name, his ultimate loss of faith in his name will be inherently linked to pearls. His acceptance of them as being only part of his disguise will be superseded by his desire to be rid completely of his name once he sees the tragedy it will bring to Elaine. The pearl orients both Lancelot and Elaine within Camelot as existing one and for the other, prompting the following popular refrain among the people at court:

> All ears were prick'd at once, all tongues were loosed:
> 'The maid of Astolat loves Sir Lancelot,
> Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Astolat.' (LE ll. 719-21)

Within Camelot, the pearled sleeve has then served as a thing capable of bonding Elaine and Lancelot: for they are largely seen as a justified couple between maiden and (ostensibly) single knight, but for Guinevere the two are in a transgressive sexual relationship that rivals her own. The pearled sleeve as object thus orients Elaine in relation to Lancelot, and Guinevere in hateful opposition to Elaine. When at feasts Lancelot is joyfully pledged to Elaine, the Queen sees the offered meats as "wormwood" and "hated all who pledged" (LE ll. 738-9). Elaine, bonded by the pearls to Lancelot, becomes faultlessly the recipient of Guinevere's resentment.

The meaning of the pearls takes on cultural resonance insofar as the association of Elaine with Lancelot amasses the currency of Guinevere's hatred, a hatred that culminates ultimately in Guinevere's rejection of Lancelot's pledge to give her the nine diamonds. Interpreting the rumors as fact, Guinevere associates the diamonds not with Lancelot's love for her, but with his "new fancy" (LE l. 1209). She expounds:

> So pray you, add my diamonds to her pearls;
> Deck her with these; tell her, she shines me down;
> An armlet for an arm to which the Queen's
> Is haggard, or a necklace for a neck
> O as much fairer - as a faith once fair
> Was richer than these diamonds - hers not mine -
> [. . .] She shall not have them. (LE ll. 1217-25)

Guinevere's angered plea that Lancelot "add [her] diamonds to [Elaine's] pearls" suggests a consubstantial pairing of diamonds and pearls that Camelot's orientation to gems seems to preclude (LE l. 1217). However, Guinevere's rash decision to throw the gems causes them to pass directly over Elaine's dead body and the arms that at one point wore pearled sleeves. Even if Elaine cannot truly possess the diamonds in death, she unquestionably prevents Guinevere from possessing them; if Elaine cannot possess the gems, neither can the Queen. Elaine, rightly able to wear diamonds, encounters them in death and thereby adds them to her pearls. Thus the pearls prove themselves to be "volatile" within the narrative; the pearls here consume wealth (through the irretrievable drowning of the diamonds) and force both Guinevere and Lancelot to look guiltily upon Elaine's dead body (Markovits 612).

Of course, prior to Elaine's death Lancelot does remain faithful to Guinevere, but he does this at Elaine's peril: for her love of Lancelot and the giving of her pearls to him has been an orientation of her self not only in relation to him, but into him. To return to the idea of the pearl as a gift, the transaction fails because there is no proper way to compensate for the giving of a self apart from the return of the self in reciprocity: that which Lancelot cannot do. Marcel Mauss has suggested that the object of the gift is so important precisely because the gift is “never completely detached from those carrying out the exchange” (Mauss 42). Elaine’s gift of her pearls is thus inseparable from her self, requiring that Lancelot give of his own self in return through a further relationship. If Elaine does not receive a promise of a full marital relationship from Lancelot, she has in essence given openly of herself only to receive nothing (save the deathly emptiness that takes its place). Lancelot’s offer to provide her with land and territory should she choose a poor husband — even if a remarkably good and arguably reasonable arrangement — cannot compensate for what Elaine has freely and deliberately given.

That Elaine successfully heals Lancelot prompts him to offer her such a reciprocal gift, forcing Elaine not only to realize the extent to which her pearls failed as things, but to desire, in a sense, to become one. When Lancelot denies Elaine’s direct suggestion of marriage, Elaine suggests a more informal union:

> ‘No, no,’ she cried, ‘I care not to be your wife,
> But to be with you still, to see your face,
> To serve you, and to follow you thro’ the world.’ (LE ll. 932-4)

This is precisely what the pearled sleeve has already done: travelled with Lancelot to the tournament, remained ensconced within the private space of his cave, and influenced so significantly the world of Camelot through the aforementioned spread of rumor. That Elaine is denied even this request forces the pearls to become caught up with death, for in refusing Lancelot’s offer of a dowry — “Of all this will I nothing” — she falls into a swoon that will steadily progress into her passing away (LE l. 961). In some sense, Lancelot himself does not escape the association of the pearled tendency towards death, insofar as the end of the poem demonstrates the extent to which Lancelot is dissatisfied with his name, and thus has come to embrace his association with Elaine's pearls. Once Lancelot encounters Elaine's dead body, he is immediately forced to question the greatness of his name, wondering why Arthur should "dwell on [it]" when "[his] own name shames [him], seeming a reproach" (LE ll. 1391-2). Thus the pearls are no longer solely a part of Lancelot's disguise; rather, they become part of him, made manifest in his desire for a self-abnegation similar to that which Elaine acts out through her orchestrated death. Lancelot's name becomes for him representative not of his great reputation, but of pain. After wishing that the Lady of the Lake had drowned him, he asks:

> For what am I? what profits me my name
> Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it:
> Pleasure to have it, none: to lose it, pain;
> Now grown a part of me: but what use is in it?
> To make men worse by making my sin known?
> Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great? (LE ll. 1402-7)

Lancelot's name — his identity itself — has not profited him. The original reason for wearing Elaine's pearled favor, a temporary disguise, has become ultimately a desire to orient himself away from his name — away from his own identity. He will orient himself towards the pearls and their multiplicity of meanings, including those that are particularly precarious. The pearls then become a way not only of orienting the self, but of abnegating the self: Elaine's willful death and Lancelot's fervent desire to be dissociated from his great name contribute to the destructive meaning enmeshed within the pearls, which meaning challenges contemporary cultural associations with the gems.

3. Pearl in Cultural Memory

Just as Elaine can be said to bear a likeness to pearl, pearls bear many likenesses within English cultural memory, particularly in relation to English royal history and the royal production and consumption of pearls. For, as material objects, they have an accompanying material history. Jewels and jewelry, according to Marcia Pointon, "is a key cultural component in symbolic and economic exchange rituals and as a textual field is heavily invested in ideological significance relative to bodies, and by extension also to colonialism, gender and sexuality" (Pointon 493-4). Jewelry and the jewels that constitute it become both "material artefact" as well as sites of "cosmological myth and symbol" — the jewel thus becomes a text upon which cultural meanings can be inscribed (Pointon 494). The wearing of certain jewels and the adornment of certain bodies with jewelry can textually express things about the wearer, particularly when that wearer is female and within the public eye (whose view Elaine enters through giving her favor to Lancelot, and Enid through her marriage with Geraint). Elaine's pearled sleeve can be read as a jeweled adornment insofar as it is a material garment that decorates the body and necessarily recalls that body when given as a gift. It is also of course monetarily valuable, infusing the giving of her sleeve with more practical meaning in relation to economic exchange — which meaning will be ultimately surpassed by its role as a gift. The jewels of royals were specifically economic assets and the adornment of bodies with them signified wealth both of the royal family and of the nation; royal sales of jewels designated prices to gems, suggesting that jewels were frequently read as economic expressions. In a discussion focused specifically on Queen Charlotte, Pointon points out the extent to which forms of jewelry "symbolically reiterated the notion of fecundity" (Pointon 498). Jewels that were worn near or otherwise adorned the stomach could be representative of fertility, of the possibility for the woman's womb to bear 'jewels' in the form of children, propagating both the health of the royal family as well as by extension the good of England.

Pearls, as specific jewels, have "a distinct and more nuanced discursive function" (Pointon 503). In English memory the representation of pearls is most readily associated with Queen Elizabeth I and her virginity; pearls as gems are thus related to purity and virginity and the regulation of royal women's bodies. Images of the Queen as they were circulated during the time of her reign demonstrated, as Louis A. Montrose describes, the state's attempts to mediate and subvert her appearance in politics as well as popular opinion (Montrose 109). Thus the image of Elizabeth as "the Virgin Queen" places her "womanly *chastity*" under an equivocal status: "Here chastity was not merely a conventional sign of female obedience to a patriarchal order but was also the source of a mystical feminine power. In other words, it was a strategy for the enhancement of Elizabeth's personal authority and a means to secure her subjects' loyalty and obedience to her regime" (Montrose 145, original emphasis). This mystical power is "eroticized" and its "efficacy lies in its being seen and not seen;" the fact that virginity could not be seen with the eye eroticized it as something that holds mystery and thus power[4] (Montrose 146). Pearls, however, are also mythically associated with the goddess Venus and an accompanying abundance of physical love, making the symbolism of pearls necessarily troubled — and thus quite fitting to Tennyson's purposes (Pointon 504).

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[4] Although Montrose does not specifically mention pearls, the painting of Elizabeth he explicitly refers to throughout this argument—the "Rainbow" portrait of Elizabeth I, c. 1600-1603—shows Elizabeth to be adorned with a great number of pearls. They cover her headpiece, are embroidered on her clothing (including her sleeves) and are worn both around her wrists and throat as necklaces (Montrose 129).

Elaine's sleeve and the pearls that adorn it are thus infused with troubled meanings — chastity is implied as much as sexuality — even before they are battered by Lancelot's use of them in the tournament. Elizabeth's jewels also have a specifically troubled background; they were acquired from Mary, Queen of Scots without her express approval, and thus indicate the problematic exchange of pearls and the extent to which even pure objects can have impure histories (Fields). The physical production of the pearl as a material thing is biologically suggestive of sexual reproduction. For the pearl divers who dangerously mine pearl beds for the gems, pearls were often considered to be representative of the "generative power of the sea," or of the sea as a particularly reproductive space (Saunders 248). The entrance of a troubling particle into a mollusk and the subsequent production of a pearl mirrors in many ways the human embryonic development process, not to mention the actual process of conception. Marcia Pointon clarifies the interrelation of female fertility and pearls as follows: "At the level of myth and theory, while female fertility is — as in the case of oysters producing pearls — a beneficent part of the natural world — female consumption is unnatural (literally cannibalistic) and destructive. Women transform the beauty of the natural world into luxury and excess, exposing as futile the martial exploits of the male subject" (Pointon 508). Thus women — and women's wombs — were bound up with simultaneous ideas of excess and necessity; women were expected to be fertile and produce children, but they were expected to prevent these children from becoming enmeshed in luxurious consumption (including the consumption of jewels). In Marcia Pointon's estimation, luxurious consumption went hand in hand with fears of "uncontrolled female sexuality;" for female fertility, along with the production of the pearl, could be considered both "universal and biological" even as it was "controlled," "wasteful," "greedy," and thus subject to regulation (Pointon 508, 506).

Pearls were also delicate and subjected often to destruction in a way that gems like diamonds were not: James T. Fields notes that pearls are “perishable beauties;” they are “exquisite in their perfect states, but liable to accident from the nature of their delicate composition” (Fields). While Tennyson never explicitly says that Elaine’s pearls are actually destroyed by the tournament — only lost — that they are in a precarious position is evident. So also is Elaine’s virginity in a precarious position. Arthur captures this concern towards the end of the idyll when he voices his regret that Lancelot could not love Elaine, her being a maiden:

> [. . .] shaped it seems,
> By God for thee alone, and from her face,
> If one may judge the living by the dead,
> Delicately pure and marvelously fair,
> Who might have brought thee, now a lonely man
> Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons
> Born to the glory of thy name and fame,
> My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake. (LE ll. 1355-62)

The tragedy, in Arthur’s eyes, is that Elaine has died a virgin, and it remains unknown whether or not the potential fecundity of her womb would have indeed brought forth “noble issue” (LE l. 1360). Elaine does, however, die “delicately pure” and “marvelously fair,” thus relating her in her final moments of life — and the final moments of the poem — with the delicacy and fairness of the pearl as *thing* (LE l. 1358). Elaine may have been able to wear pearls in relation to her female purity, but she can still inscribe her pearls with her own desire, even when that desire cannot be successfully communicated and thus consummated. Elaine can be delicately fair even as she erotically desires, especially — and in spite of — the failure of this desire. The pearl, then, functions within the realms of gift exchange, orientation of the self, and royal history. That Elaine’s sleeve is rimmed with pearls allows her to participate within each of these realms, the pearls as things functioning specifically, and with a fullness of meaning, within each.

4. Her “faded silk”: the Absence of Pearls in “The Marriage of Geraint”

While the pearls of Elaine’s embroidered sleeve specifically resonate within English cultural awareness, Tennyson is also aware that fabric itself — most generally in the form of clothing — can (mis)communicate a great deal. It is Enid’s “faded silk” that is so particularly resonant, for what Enid wears is the means through which she can communicate with her husband (MG ll. 134). This communication is carried out in a manner similar to Elaine’s attempts to communicate through the gifting of her pearled sleeve, but Enid’s clothing — insofar as it covers the entirety of her body — creates a larger canvas on which to inscribe meanings. Thus Enid and Geraint’s marital relationship is immediately characterized in terms of her communicative clothing: Geraint loves “To make her beauty vary day by day, / In crimsons and in purples and in gems” while Enid herself attempts to please her husband by “daily front[ing] him / In some fresh splendour” (MG ll. 9-10, 13-4). Clothing here undoubtedly communicates, but it fails to communicate the same message to both husband and wife; the fabric, then, can be used to communicate different things even by those who do not actually wear or touch the garment. While Geraint enjoys adorning his wife in rich or embellished fabrics so that her beauty will vary “as the light of Heaven Varies,” Enid intends always to make her outfits appear “fresh” — regardless of the time of day (MG ll. 6, 14). Enid’s concern is that her clothing effectively cloaks her from the “state / Of broken fortunes” in which her husband first found her (MG ll. 12-3). Enid is worried not only about her husband’s ability to remember the level of poverty in which she had lived, but also — and crucially — the faded fabric she was forced to wear as a result of that time. This time had marked a period of profound shame and Enid’s preference for new fabrics is a means to divert her husband’s consciousness. Enid’s desire is to make herself more appealing to her husband, which she accomplishes by manipulating the clothing she wears such that each garment appears not only particularly bright and attractive but also, and necessarily, new.

However, Enid's faded clothes do not preclude Geraint's ability to feel immediately attracted to Enid (in much the same way that Elaine is initially attracted to Lancelot). After hearing her sing, Geraint is taken by the beauty of her voice, which beauty is visible to him despite the state of her material clothing:

> He found an ancient dame in dim brocade;
> And near her, like a blossom vermeil-white,
> That lightly breaks a faded flower-sheath,
> Moved the fair Enid, all in faded silk,
> Her daughter. In a moment thought Geraint,
> 'Here by God's rood is the one maid for me.' (MG ll. 363-368)

Even if she is dressed in "faded silk," what stands out to Geraint is her fairness that, "like a blossom vermeil-white," remains beautiful even if not more brilliantly sheathed (MG ll. 366, 364). Thus Enid is initially able to communicate successfully in spite of her faded clothing, for she is able to indicate to Geraint not only that she is beautiful, but also that she would carry out successfully the role of an Arthurian wife. Ingrid Ranum has argued for the significance of Geraint's fixation on Enid's thumb as she helps in preparing the dinner service: "he does not focus his physical attraction on her lips or a lily-white hand, gracefully extended, but rather on the most serviceable of digits — her thumb — employed in the act of performing her duty" (Ranum 246). In Ranum's estimation, Geraint's level of affection for Enid has less to do with her physical beauty (though she certainly is attractive to him) than with her *utility*, or her potential for wifely duties. I would take this point further to suggest that Enid actually *uses* her clothes to communicate her aptitude for marriage; in preparing the table, Enid "brought sweet cakes to make them cheer, / And *in her veil enfolded*, manchet bread" (MG ll. 388-9, emphasis added).

Although the quality of Enid's clothing is far from fine, she can successfully attempt to use these lackluster garments to her advantage. Through making use of the clothing she wears to carry out necessary domestic tasks, Enid communicates the ease with which she could complete the duties — and ultimately wear the clothing — of a wife. Geraint appears to value marital domesticity, and Enid is here able to cultivate that desire to her own benefit simply by making practical use of her clothing. Through making such use of her less than perfect garments, Enid indicates that she is well equipped to handle the domestic duties to be expected of her.

While Enid appears beautiful to Geraint — both physically and domestically — the fact of her poor clothing remains. Thus Enid's growing fears about traveling to Camelot and becoming Geraint's wife are inevitably enmeshed with her concerns for her lackluster clothing, such that she increasingly fears the potential result of Arthurian society encountering her as she currently looks:

> At this she cast her eyes upon her dress,
> And thought it never yet had looked so mean.
> For as a leaf in mid-November is
> To what it was in mid-October, seemed
> The dress that now she looked on to the dress
> She looked on ere the coming of Geraint.
> And still she looked, and still the terror grew
> Of that strange bright and dreadful thing, a court,
> All staring at her in her faded silk[.] (MG ll. 609-17)

Enid's fear is rooted in the fact that, regardless of the extent to which she can make her own peace with the meanness of her dress, this peace will mean nothing in the face of the entirety of Arthur's court. The assumption that Enid (as well as her mother) holds is that the people of Arthur's court will inevitably associate her with the clothing she wears, clothing that, given the faded nature of the fabric, is ultimately suggestive of marital unfitness. Clothing is collectively viewed as a surface upon which meaning can be inscribed — not only by wearer, but also viewer

— such that Enid would be in danger of being socially ostracized should she be forced to enter Arthur's court in her faded silk.

Enid's fear and discomfort is rooted in the fact that the clothing that adorns her body is a necessarily public signification — as a material creation of faded fabrics, it *means* something to those who look upon her in much the same way that Elaine's pearled sleeve *meant* something to the people who watched Lancelot adorn his armor with it at the tournament.[5] What Enid so desperately fears is the extent to which she will be judged by the people of Camelot should she be required to accompany him to court wearing her current garments. However, Enid's concerns — shared also by her mother — are anything but unfounded. Enid worries explicitly that her incorrect dress will "discredit" her future husband, a fear that would have resonated particularly well with Victorian contemporary readers of the *Idylls*[6] (MG l. 621). Elizabeth Langland, for example, has argued that women's clothing was solidly enmeshed with issues of social class (and the class of women's husbands). She writes: "The clothes, like the customs, were constructed to distinguish the middle-class woman from her social inferiors. Her apparel, physically inhibiting as it may have been, was also a sign of her class power because it precluded physical labor and displayed her managerial status" (Langland 294). While Langland notes that women often did work — taking up where a maid left off — the work itself was not intended to be visible (Langland 294). For a woman who could afford to dress luxuriantly — if impractically — visibly demonstrated the class of her husband and thereby respected him. Enid is therefore right to be concerned that her faded clothing will project a public material image that will reflect poorly on both self and husband (and, quite possibly, her husband in place of her self).

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[5] It is important to note, however, that while E. Jane Burns has commented on the extent to which the gift of a sleeve is "both familiar and surprising," this gift constitutes only a small piece of detachable fabric in relation to the entirety of a garment of clothing (Burns 4). While the detached sleeve is physically absent from Elaine's body, Enid can have no such physical separation from the undesirable clothing that she would have been forced to wear to court.

[6] This resonance may also be explained by the extent to which Tennyson altered details of dress within his source material for the Enid idyll. According to Arthur Wayne Glowka: "Tennyson literally dresses up his version of the tale of Geraint with clothing symbolism not present in his sources. He develops this symbolism from Victorian attitudes regarding clothing as a means of judging social class, character, and, most importantly for the Idylls, the nature of sexual relationships" (Glowka 302). Where Enid would have worn linen, Tennyson dresses her instead in faded silk (which would have been associated with undergarments) (Glowka 304). Thus, Enid goes to court "ill-dressed, not undressed;" this change "is minor but consonant with Tennyson's general effort to load his tale with contemporary attitudes toward clothing" (Glowka 304).

Enid's fear seems to be assuaged, however, when Geraint's performance in the tournament results not only in the marriage proposal but the righting of her family's economic status — a change that is accompanied by one of her finest gowns being returned to her. Awakened from her anxiety, she is presented with a "suit of bright apparel" that her mother wishes her to wear to court (MG l. 678):

> [']So clothe yourself in this, that better fits
> Our mended fortunes and a Prince's bride:
> For though ye won the prize of fairest fair,
> And though I heard him call you fairest fair,
> Let never maiden think, however fair,
> She is not fairer in new clothes than old.
> And should some great court-lady say, the Prince
> Hath picked a ragged-robin from the hedge,
> And like a madman brought her to the court,
> Then were ye shamed, and worse, might shame the Prince
> To whom we are beholden; but I know,
> When my dear child is set forth at her best,
> That neither court nor country, though they sought
> Through all the provinces like those of old
> That lighted on Queen Esther, has her match.' (MG ll. 717-731)

Enid's mother here reinforces the idea that the clothing makes right the marital exchange that her daughter will be entering into: through wearing the finer gown, Enid will be doing right by the man to whom her entire family is "beholden" (MG l. 727) and ensure that he is not "shame[d]"

(MG l. 726) and made to look like a “madman” (MG l. 725) at court. Her primary interest is that Enid wears clothing that best reflects her status — both in terms of her family’s returned wealth and her need to appear before Arthurian court. The garment as a thing is capable of speaking for Enid, for its blatant visibility cannot be hid and thus any rash judgments cannot be prevented.

Enid, however, is not allowed to wear the fine garment that is returned to her — Geraint will instead force Enid to arrive at court dressed in her current faded silk. After Elaine “[l]aid from her limbs the costly-broidered gift, / And robed them in her ancient suit again,” Geraint is more than pleased with her appearance (MG ll. 769-70):

> Never man rejoiced
> More than Geraint to greet her thus attired;
> And glancing all at once as keenly at her
> As careful robins eye the delver's toil,
> Made her cheek burn and either eyelid fall,
> But rested with her sweet face satisfied[.] (MG ll. 771-76)

While Geraint is obviously pleased with the physical beauty of Enid that is on display regardless of the clothing she wears, Enid is left to feel that she has been silenced. Even when she has been given the opportunity to live up to her expectations of dress, her new clothes are not allowed to speak — it is the old, faded silk that is forced to speak for Enid. Geraint’s refusal to allow Enid to wear her fine dress is an indication of the ease with which clothing (and objects) can adopt meanings above and beyond those with which they can be associated. The faded silk is the only text on which Enid’s body can be written, for it is only after she has acceded to Geraint’s wishes that she can dress herself in fine clothing.

Conclusion: Enid's (Un)pearled Gown

Enid's recovered dress, however, bears a striking resemblance to Elaine's pearled sleeve — even though the dress itself is actually unadorned with pearls. Both the pearled sleeve and faded dress ultimately suggest the extent to which things amass meanings while existing already within the realm of Camelot and the larger realm of British cultural history. When Enid's mother first presents her with the dress, it is described in the following manner:

> 'See here, my child, how fresh the colors look,
> How fast they hold, like colours of a shell
> That keeps the wear and polish of the wave.
> Why not? It never yet was worn, I trow:
> Look on it, child, and tell me if ye know it.' (MG ll.680-684)

This description of Enid's gown calls to mind the physical production of the pearl within the shell — the gown is, then, characterized by the pearl's absence. It is therefore unsurprising that Enid should be ultimately not allowed to wear her newly recovered garment into court, for her place of subservience to her husband makes her ultimately unable to act with the gown. That Enid is not allowed to wear the gown that she rightfully owns — and that her mother is proud to dress her daughter in — also bears connections to Elaine's pearled sleeve and the object relationships that are permitted within Tennyson's Camelot.

Enid's inability to wear the fine gown into court has less to do with its material difference from her faded silk than with its relation to Guinevere; for, it is the Queen who indirectly precludes Enid from wearing finery into court. This preclusion occurs because the Queen herself has expressed a wish to clothe the future wife of Geraint "like the sun" whether she is "the daughter of a king" or "a beggar from the hedge" (MG ll. 229-31). After asking that Enid remove her fine gown and dress herself once again in her faded clothing, Geraint refers to the Queen as the rationale behind what seems like a particularly cruel request:

> ‘When late I left Caerlon, our great Queen,
> In words whose echo lasts, they were so sweet,
> Made promise, that whatever bride I brought,
> Herself would clothe her like the sun in Heaven.
> Thereafter, when I reach’d this ruin’d hall,
> Beholding one so bright in dark estate,
> I vow’d that could I gain her, our fair Queen,
> No hand but hers, should make your Enid burst
> Sunlike from cloud — and likewise thought perhaps,
> That service done so graciously would bind
> The two together; fain I would the two
> Should love each other: how can Enid find
> A nobler friend?’ (MG ll. 781-93)

Enid’s right to wear a gown which she owns is superseded by the Queen’s desire to exercise the role of dressing her for her wedding. If Geraint were to allow Enid to wear the recovered gown, he could be perceived as going against Guinevere’s wishes — a potential decision that would have certain negative results. Guinevere’s words are those “whose echo lasts,” thus her desires reverberate throughout Camelot (MG l. 782). It is for this reason that Enid is not allowed to wear her new gown to court; it is also for this reason that Elaine’s gift to Lancelot of her pearled sleeve results so tragically in her death. For, in giving the sleeve to Lancelot in expression of her love — a vow which she hoped to be returned — she was transgressing on a well-established relationship within Camelot: the adulterous affair of Lancelot and the Queen. Objects thus can speak for the women who own and wear them, but they cannot speak louder than the relationships and resonances that possess so significant a place within the realm of the poem.

However, while Enid is eventually allowed to wear fine garments after having been initially dressed by Guinevere, she does not get rid of her garment of faded silk — she keeps it, and it is thus readily available to her when Geraint asks her to wear it again in his unfounded mistrust. Though the garment is far from fine, Enid’s agreement to wear it demonstrates her ability to communicate her faithfulness (that which Elaine’s pearls, ultimately, also represented).

While Elaine and Enid might not have communicated perfectly through the objects with which they come to be associated, that these objects speak is nonetheless clear.

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