ABSTRACT

LITERATURE AS CULTURAL CATALYST OR CATAclySM?:
FRICION ZONES IN MYTH, FOLKLORE, AND RELIGION IN
VICTORIAN FICTION

Taking as its subjects Alfred Lord Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* and Thomas Hardy’s novel *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, this thesis establishes a methodology for reading texts that uncovers moments in literature where the overarching Judeo-Christian narrative asserts itself as the dominant, hegemonic narrative over narratives that are decidedly outside of the Judeo-Christian narrative—those narratives the Judeo-Christian narrative labels as pagan or heathen. I argue that Judeo-Christian hegemonic power structures are active agents of separation between itself and pagan other-narratives, and it is in moments where those narratives intersect in literature that create interpretative anomalies—this is what I refer to as Friction Zones. The Friction Zone Methodology, then, offers readers a way to rediscover pagan narratives antecedent to yet silenced by the Judeo-Christian narrative. Finally, I argue that Victorian England is a particular hotspot for Friction Zones in light of the Victorian sense of doubt, anxiety, and spiritual crisis that characterized nineteenth century England and, in many ways, anticipates modern concerns under a similar rubric.

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LITERATURE AS CULTURAL CATALYST OR CATACLYSM?:
FRICITION ZONES IN MYTH, FOLKLORE, AND RELIGION IN
VICTORIAN FICTION

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CHAPTER 1: SUBDUCTION AND THE SUBALTERN

Literature, particularly poetry and drama, has long been a bastion for the subaltern, a place where ideas contrary to the self-interests and self-preservation of hegemonic power structures can be expressed and subvert those power structures. In terms of mythography, poets (and later, novelists) are often able to masquerade their subversion as merely joining a literary tradition; this phenomenon, as it has occurred from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* through the Magical Realist movement in Latin American literature and beyond, is well-covered territory in modern scholarship. Examining Romantic and Victorian texts as subversive objects is not new, either, for as Margot Louis explains, “Poetry was to a large extent protected by its traditional association with myth and by the symbolic mode developed in the [British] Romantic era” (330). Consequently, poets were largely "exempt from evangelical pressure” (330). Yet It seems as though with the rise of structuralism and post-structuralism in the 1970s, critics since then have continued to focus less attention on the presence and effects of myth in texts unless the text is itself a myth (scholars, of course, are still examining Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Indian, Norse, Celtic, etc. myths). Scholars who do examine the presence of myths and legends in the literature of the nineteenth century focus primarily on how or why those myths or legends are parodied or coopted by the authors¹. Although frequently a topic for stimulating and helpful scholarship for texts like *Beowulf* and *The Prose Edda*, very few critics in recent history concern their analyses with how those moments of myth, legend, and folklore are interacting with the

¹ See, for example, Felicia Bonaparte’s article “The Deadly Misreading of Mythic Texts: Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles,*” Roger Ebbatson’s article “The Plutonic master: Hardy and the steam threshing-machine,” and Tom Nash’s article “*Tess of the D’Urbervilles: The Symbolic Use of Folklore.*”
overarching Judeo-Christian narrative in British Romantic and Victorian texts. In my view, however, the presence of myth and folklore in all literature deserves to be consistently revisited in the context of new theories and approaches.

Myths, legends, and works of folklore—as scholars like Claude Levi-Strauss and Vladimir Propp have thoroughly argued—are incredibly structural in nature; in the context of perpetually evolving hegemonic power structures, they are fertile grounds for hermeneutical studies because of the interpretative anomalies and paradoxes they frequently present. This in particular includes references to myths and how myth is treated in texts that are not in and of themselves myths: Alfred Lord Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* and Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* are a small yet representative selection of texts from the canon of Victorian literature that have the substance of myth, legend, and folklore. Although separated by space, time, and genre, both *Idylls of the King* and *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* have a variety of interwoven moments of myth that confound the Judeo-Christian narrative with narratives that are antecedent, tangential, or altogether independent of Christianity; thus I believe that that the mythic, the legendary, and the pagan—that which is decidedly outside of the Judeo-Christian narrative and often in contrast to it—deserves more of our interpretative labor.

Taking Judeo-Christian hegemonic power structures as active agents of separation between itself and Pagan other-narratives, this thesis constructs a method of reading texts that calls our attention to places of interpretive anomaly where separation and unity are in flux, anomalies I refer to as “friction zones.” The ambition of this thesis then, in its broadest sense, is in pursuing cultural and symbolic movement along a spectrum from separation, marginalization, and war toward unity and peace. More specifically, this and subsequent chapters labor under a framework of these particular competing power structures: in the West for
the majority of the Common Era (with some noted exceptions which I detail later in this chapter), the Abrahamic, Judeo-Christian narrative has and continues to operate as the dominant, hegemonic narrative and image, a concept borrowed from Daniel J. Boorstin that will be subsequently developed. For now, it is useful to understand Boorstin’s concept of image simply as the collected projection of a culture’s ideals on to a single image. In contrast to the Judeo-Christian hegemonic narrative and image are the mythological and pagan other-narratives which are necessarily positioned as antipodal and subaltern. Of particular interest here are the instances in texts where the Judeo-Christian narrative and pagan narratives intersect, creating friction zones. It is my aim, then, to reveal how through these friction zones the Judeo-Christian narrative attempts to maintain its hegemonic position over other mythological and pagan narratives (some of which are, as I will reveal, direct antecedents to the Judeo-Christian narrative itself). Through this new hermeneutical approach, I submit that it is the intent of writers like Alfred Lord Tennyson and Thomas Hardy not only to create these friction zones but, in some instances, also to bring our direct attention to them. Finally, as a work of peace, my prime motive is to illustrate and expose these power dynamics as revealed by literature so that they may be challenged and deconstructed, identifying the perquisites afforded to those wearing the Judeo-Christian image so that the advantages thereof may be made universally available regardless of the image one wears.

Seeing as though the heart of this thesis is in revealing friction zones between the Judeo-Christian narrative and pagan narratives as they occur in literary texts, the primary focus of Chapter 1 is to establish the methodology of friction zones as a way of reading texts to discover where the Judeo-Christian narrative is attempting to overshadow pagan narratives; conversely, just as
feminist deconstruction operates, this methodology also allows us to identify places where pagan narratives are attempting to subvert the Judeo-Christian hegemony. To help understand the friction zone framework more precisely and to use it to reveal interpretative anomalies in texts with more nuance, I define terms important to the framework that are commonly confounded in Chapter 2. Taking Alfred Lord Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* as its subject, Chapter 3 applies the friction zone methodology to problematize the origins of King Arthur and the silence of Merlin with the hopes of illuminating the failure of Camelot. Following the trajectory of Victorian tensions between faith, knowledge, and doubt, Chapter 4 examines a later Victorian work, Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, using the friction zone methodology to reveal the power structures that doom Tess, Alec, and Angel to a life of suffering. In Chapter 5, noting the Victorian era as an influential antecedent to 21st century Britain and United States, I discuss the implications of friction zones and the continuing Judeo-Christian hegemony in a modern context.

One of the general mechanisms that powers friction zones comes from the power dynamics that exist between the Judeo-Christian narrative and pagan narratives. This power dynamic is created particularly by the Judeo-Christian narrative’s process of self-othering. Understanding this power dynamic in a more visual sense, however, should make the friction zone abstraction more clear; therefore, as a way to help pre-visualize these narrative power dynamics, I offer a brief summary of plate tectonics from geological studies.

Subduction is part of the theory of plate tectonics\(^2\) which conceives of a set of continental plates that, in various places in the Earth’s crust, collide with each

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\(^2\) For more detailed information concerning plate tectonics and subduction zones, refer to [http://www.sanandreasfault.org/Tectonics.html](http://www.sanandreasfault.org/Tectonics.html)
other in such a way that one plate moves downwardly against another plate, sliding underneath it as it is recycled into the lower layers of the Earth. This cycle is continuous and not visible to the naked eye because 1) the process happens over an extremely long period of time and 2) the process happens in subterranean environments, usually at coastal regions or in mid-ocean trenches.

We need merely to substitute the nouns to understand literary subduction zones, where one narrative—in the power-dynamic of this thesis, this would be any mytho-pagan narrative—is forced downward against and eventually below the Judeo-Christian narrative. And like geological subduction, literary friction zones occur at places of contrast, places where distinctly different plates collide with one another.

The point of contact where this downward/upward movement happens is the focal point of my analytical approach. As I will continue to illustrate throughout this and subsequent chapters, the Judeo-Christian narrative is the narrative that continually attempts to assert itself as the top-layer narrative. We thus end up with a hegemonic narrative that is dominant, preferred, and absolutely visible as it attempts to appropriate or subsume the non-hegemonic narrative(s) into its own narrative. Friction zones, then, reveal what’s left unseen but absolutely still there—the mytho-pagan substance of the Judeo-Christian narrative. Kenneth Burke’s paradox of substance, in fact, helps to enrich the friction zone framework. The paradox of substance, according to Burke’s *Grammar of Motives*, is such that we understand an object and name it uniquely precisely because we want to understand the object as distinct from all other objects; therefore, the object’s *substance* becomes all of that which the object is not (23). For example, we understand a tree, possessing a variety of tree-like *qualities*, as a distinct object from a bird and thus name the object “tree” as distinct from “bird”; what Burke
allows us to see, however, is that the tree is also that which it is not—the tree is also the water, the soil, the oxygen, the carbon-dioxide, and even the bird that helps to spread its seeds. These are the tree’s \textit{substance}. Through Burke’s perspective on \textit{substance}, we can say that at least in part, the \textit{substance} of the Judeo-Christian narrative is that which is not what we perceive as the Judeo-Christian narrative; under the Judeo-Christian hegemony, we only encounter \textit{qualities} of the Judeo-Christian narrative, not the \textit{substance} of the Judeo-Christian narrative. The friction zone framework, then, recognizes that the \textit{substances} of the Judeo-Christian narrative are the narratives explicitly outside of the Judeo-Christian narrative. Levi R. Bryant also offers a valuable extension to Burke’s idea of “substance” arguing that “the very essence or structure of substance lies in \textit{self-othering} and \textit{withdrawal}” (Bryant 85). This idea is particularly useful in understanding the nature of Judeo-Christian subduction zones because of the self-othering nature of the Judeo-Christian narrative. Indeed one of its \textit{qualities} is that it presents itself as the true narrative of the cosmos, of human creation and human morality, of death and the afterlife. This comes with the necessary implication that other narratives are relatively less true or altogether false, yet the paradox remains that those “less true” or “false” narratives are logically a part of the Judeo-Christian narrative’s substance.

The essential problem here is not that the Judeo-Christian narrative is paradoxical but that the narrative itself denies that it is paradoxical. The paradox of substance is certainly an interpretive anomaly, but the self-othering system of the Judeo-Christian narrative is the mechanism that provides critical mass to the friction zone methodology. This is the critical mass that births the power dynamics between the Judeo-Christian narrative and other-narratives that are the subjects of the friction zone framework. Moreover, the self-othering language present
throughout the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament is a major part of the overall mechanism that drives friction zones between the Judeo-Christian narrative and other-narratives.

The Bible’s self-othering language illustrates the Judeo-Christian narrative’s regard to other-narratives, positioning itself as the narrative of truth and other-narratives under the threat of obliteration. The Book of Isaiah, for example, makes Biblical self-othering absolutely explicit: “Remember the former things of old,” Isaiah tells, “for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me” (Oxford Annotated Bible, Isa. 46.9). Though acknowledging antecedent narratives, the Book of Isaiah wants us to believe that those “narratives of old” are “former” narratives (as opposed to current narratives). Furthermore, the Judeo-Christian narrative is the only true divine narrative, that other narratives, even those also claiming to be divine in origin, are somehow less true. A passage from the Book of Jeremiah reinforces the self-othering mechanism of the Judeo-Christian narrative as well: “But the Lord is the true God,” the Hebrew prophet says, “he is the living God and the everlasting King,” necessarily implying that there are false other-gods (Jer. 10.10). The Book of Jeremiah takes the self-othering mechanism to another level, suggesting that other-narratives will suffer the wrath of the one true god: “At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation. . . .The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens” (Jer. 10.11). As a book appearing early in the Old Testament, we are already given a sense that not only are other-narratives somehow less true or altogether false but that they are under the threat of indignation and wrath. Another passage from the more popularly known Ten Commandments from the Book of Exodus suggests the same threat: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me” (Exo. 20.1-3). But Exodus reveals yet another paradox, for as the one true god has freed his people from slavery—in a sense, provided them with free will—they are only free so long as they successfully join the Judeo-Christian hegemonic narrative; or, rather, they are free to not join that narrative, but they risk punishment for not doing so, leaving us to question the freedom of that will. And these sentiments are not limited to the Hebrew Bible, for the Book of John also illustrates the self-othering of the Christ, where “Jesus said to [Thomas], ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14.7, emphasis added). So in order for the Judeo-Christian narrative to maintain its self-othered and self-ultimate-truth position, it must either destroy or subsume the other, the conflicting or contradictory narratives.

An added feature of the self-othering, ultimate-truth claims of the Judeo-Christian narrative is its insistence on fixity. Although religious scholar Reza Aslan argues that the power of religion and scripture lies in its infinite malleability, I would suggest that what he reads as malleable in fact illustrates fixity (“What the New Atheists Get Wrong”). Aslan offers the following passage to illustrate the malleability of scripture:

The same gospels that compel a middle-class American Christian in the Midwest to “turn the other cheek” compel the pummeled and poverty-stricken Christian in the hills of San Salvador to “sell his cloak and buy a sword.” The same Torah that commands the elderly Jew in Palm Beach to love his neighbor as himself commands the zealot settler in Israel to violently cleanse the Holy Land of all Arabs. The same Quran that feeds the religious fascism of Iran’s
supreme leader nourishes the young Iranian activist willing to risk his life for democracy. ("Democracy")

In part, I agree with Aslan that when we read texts, we are merely looking at symbols on some object—a page, a book, a screen, and so on; it is the reader who brings meaning to those symbols, and thus texts are at least partly malleable because they are subject to all of the reader’s attitudes, assumptions, collective experiences, and terministic screens through which those symbols are processed. At the same time, Aslan’s narrative illustrates my point of fixity. Indeed these texts begin at the point of plasticity and a plethora of interpretations have taken hold over the centuries, but once a hegemony takes hold of those narratives and insists upon its interpretation of those symbols, the narrative—or the interpretation of that narrative—becomes less malleable and more rigid; although there certainly is a spectrum of interpretation and a variety of different collections of scriptures that have been canonized over the eons, each instance in that spectrum eventually comes to a point where it resists shifting colors. In fact, as I’ll later argue in subsequent chapters, bending these narratives in ways contrary to the best interests of the hegemony places one under the risk of exile from the hegemonic (just as Aslan implies in his illustration that the young Iranian is put in the position of risking his life by being contrary to his region’s hegemonic power structures). All that being said, there is a reason why images of a White Jesus exist and will always exist in the United States (as opposed to a more geographically accurate Palestinian Jesus): the United States hegemony has appropriated that narrative, and now it is fixed, insisting on its image of Jesus. Turn no further than Fox News for Megyn Kelly to reveal the friction zone of how Jesus (and Santa Claus) is White: “he just is [White]” (qtd. in Harris). Taken a step further, if the Judeo-Christian narrative and religion in general was truly malleable as Aslan argues and
not subject to hegemonic approval, the United States would see far more prominent images of Black Jesus in the collective, cultural, and public consciousness. And by far more, I mean at least one. Religion may be malleable as Aslan argues, but it is not infinitely so: there are wider cultural power structures that attempt to make religion less plastic. Moreover, explicit withdrawal, self-othering, and fixity are not the only elements pushing the friction zone framework toward critical mass.

In addition to the literal level of texts, the friction zone framework also invites examination of the meta-narrative structure of texts; more specifically with my analytical approach, I examine interpretive anomalies between the Judeo-Christian narrative’s linearity and with mytho-pagan narratives which are at times less linear and more cyclical. For example, the very idea of an immortal god is anti-cyclical. This is in contrast to—or causes friction with, we might say—narratives and gods from other mythos that are more cyclical and often under varying degrees of threat. And those threats tend to repeat with each (re)cycle of the mytho-pagan narrative in question. The super-narrative of Bible positions itself in what we perceive as “real” time: it has a definite beginning, middle, and end. Although the “end” of the narrative is understood to be an ever-lasting end, it is nonetheless an end-phase of a linear timeline. Of course there is not the space here to summarize the biblical narrative in detail, but in brief, there is the beginning creation and the Fall as described in the Book of Genesis, the coming of the savior to redeem mankind (sic) from original sin (which brings the narrative of humanity to where it is at present), and the end-times as described in the Book of Revelation; finally, those who have been redeemed through the messiah will go on to live in the kingdom of heaven. In this super-narrative, there is no cycle—there is a definite beginning, middle, and end phase. The ancient and antecedent
Egyptian sense of time, however, contrasts the Judeo-Christian sense of linear time. For example, part of the Egyptian cosmology describes the daily voyage of the sun god, Ra, who travels through the underworld at night. There, he encounters “enemies of the divine order” who try to prevent him from “renewing creation” at dawn (Pinch 26-27). This is a prime example of an etiological myth, a narrative attempting to explain the natural cycle of something—days and nights in this case. Additionally, in contrast to the immortal “one true god” from the Judeo-Christian narrative, the Egyptian god Osiris is murdered by his brother, Seth, but quickly resurrected by the goddess Isis so that she may procreate with him (Pinch 114-15). Less of a linear tale with a sense of immortality, the Egyptian gods go through a cycle of life, death, and rebirth, constantly under the threat of destruction from chaotic deities like Apophis and Seth. Similarly, the Demeter and Persephone myth from the Greek mythos—most thoroughly rendered in the “Homeric Hymn to Demeter”—is another etiological myth explaining the nature of the cycle of seasons. It is likewise told as a cyclical narrative: Hades takes (or, the archaic “rapes” as in “takes”) Demeter’s daughter, Persephone; while Persephone is in the underworld with Hades, Demeter’s despair at the absence of her daughter is said to cause the winter seasons while spring and summer are returned by Demeter’s delight at their reunion (Rayor 1-495). So like the subduction zones of plate tectonics, moments where the Judeo-Christian narrative interacts with mytho-pagan narratives in relatively modern texts generate interpretive hotspots, the cyclical narratives in a sense rubbing against the fixed, linear narrative.

Although the Christianization of texts has caught the attention of scholars since Beowulf and before, I believe that Victorian literature is particularly fertile for this analytical framework because there are a variety of social and cultural nodes at which the Judeo-Christian narrative and elements that contrast that
narrative intersect. Too, while this methodology in part operates under the historical framework of Christianity overlaying itself on non-Christian writings, cultural practices, and cultural artifacts (i.e. texts) in order to more easily facilitate conversion—often denigrating those non-Christian texts it is overlying in the process—the friction zone framework takes as its starting point the resurfacing of pagan elements in later texts, not the initial subduction of pagan elements by Christian evangelical pressures.

Although I am arguing primary from the vantage point of Victorian fiction, it would be a mistake to take for granted the influence of Victorian England's social and cultural climate on its literature; on the other side of the same coin, I argue that the literature both reacts to and influences that climate. But it is the nodes between the hegemonic and non-hegemonic that makes Victorian England such fertile ground for the friction zone framework. One such node is the contact zone between faith and reason.

William Whewell, a Victorian mathematician, philosopher, and priest, in his response to Laplace’s Nebular Hypothesis, attempts to use reason to defend a religious stance to the origins of the Cosmos; however, he has difficulty in escaping the mutual exclusivity between faith and scientific reason. He writes that though science has reasoned some of the causal forces that set the solar system into existence, it has yet to reason what set those antecedent motions into motion. Following this logic of questioning unknown antecedents—a move I would characterize as *ad ignorantium*—he attempts to denigrate the emerging scientific method by suggesting that it cannot reason its way to the *primum movens*; only faith in a divine mover can accomplish that (180-85). The underlying attitude Whewell uses to warrant this logic is that the human mind wants to rest on an answer (185-86). However, the emerging scientific method and thirst for science-
centric knowledge compounds the friction zone that Whewell creates, contributing greatly to Victorian England's growing sense of doubt, anxiety, and sense of loss as faith alone becomes less and less sufficient in understanding one’s place in existence, science fueling this existential crisis.

Contrary to this, adding even more friction, Charles Lyell produces *Principals of Geology* not long after the most productive period of Whewell's life; therein, Lyell implicitly challenges aspects of the Judeo-Christian narrative. Furthermore, Lyell's work converted science from a hobby to a career (Mermin and Tucker 50). On Geological studies, he candidly writes, “Never, perhaps, did any science, with the exception of astronomy, unfold, in an equally brief period, so many novel and unexpected truths, and overturn so many preconceived opinions” (60). By its nature, Lyell's work in geological studies challenges what science now refers to as the "Young Earth Creation Theory," the linear narrative The Book of Genesis, Exodus, etc. tells. *Principals of Geology* is among the first widely read works that attempts to reveal that events previously interpreted as catastrophic instances may instead be gradual changes that occur over eons, that the explicit linear time of the Judeo-Christian narrative may not be compatible with the narrative of the Earth and its cycles. Where Whewell and people of faith desire a place for the mind to rest, the science brought about by Lyell and his contemporaries probes on. Likewise, the cyclical pagan narratives refuse to let the mind rest by virtue of ongoing cycles and, in some cases, threat to the divine.

Similar to the friction zones between faith and reason are the friction zones caused by another piece of the rubric through which Victorian studies is often used: The Woman Question. While Mermin and Tucker claim that most Victorian women likely accepted their relegated roles in the “private sphere,” they also acknowledge a growing minority of women who wanted more opportunities for
roles in public life (81). But as concerns the friction zone framework, Jones and Pennick suggest a correlation between the emergence of women’s rights movements and the resurfacing and revisioning of Paganism. Most pagan theologies, including those around the area of England, are polytheistic, “recognizing the plurality of divine beings”; they view nature not as a “fallen” space as the Judeo-Christian narrative sees it but rather nature as a “manifestation of divinity”; as an extension to that divine manifestation, pagan theologies tend to acknowledge the “female divine principle”; this mythos allows room for women to at least approach the level of “dignity” men enjoy because the “lineaments of divinity” are shared between men and women (2-3). This is not to say that women in mytho-pagan theologies share equal “lineaments of divinity” across the spectrum, but the female divine aspect in mytho-pagan narratives are, I submit, sharply contrasted in the Judeo-Christian narrative where Woman is on the one hand idealized by the paradoxical Virgin Mother and on the other hand standardized by Eve who was responsible for the Fall from Grace. To be clear, Jones and Pennick write about the resurfacing of pagan religions in post-modern Europe where those theologies have undergone processes of translation and revision over time; however, I suggest that the friction zones created by writers like Tennyson and Hardy are at least implicitly connected to the Victorian “Woman Question,” perhaps offering women a space in literature where their denigration can be brought to light (the same light feminist deconstruction invites us to see).

With a cursory understanding of the friction zone framework in mind, the fissures that are the substance of cultural and sacred texts become more visible. In chapter 2, in order to use this methodology as a way of reading texts with more
precision and nuance, I define terms that are frequently confounded or transposed as well as make explicit connections to other closely related critical approaches.
CHAPTER 2: NUANCES OF FRICITION ZONE TERMINOLOGY

I have thus far used the phrase “Judeo-Christian narrative” and variants of it several times, and I chose each variant of the phrase with specific purposes in mind. In short, each label I use is intended to reflect the scope of the narrative that applies to the moment of my analysis. I use the term “Abrahamic” to refer to any and all of the narratives that operate under the common value of Abraham as the Biblical patriarch (this includes, generally, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). The phrase “Judeo-Christian narrative,” which I will use most frequently, refers to those narratives that are more particularly included in the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, or both. The term “Christian” or phrase “Christian narrative” narrows the scope further, making a distinction between the strictly “Jewish narrative” which ignores the New Testament and the “Christian narrative” which, of course, must by definition include the New Testament. Thus “Christian narrative” refers to ideas or acts more particularly associated with narratives that do not exclude but rather must include the New Testament.

Some scholars attempt to make distinctions between myth and religion, but in my view, some of those distinctions distort and denigrate myth to such a degree that makes the friction zone framework fuzzy. The traditional hierarchy of myth and folklore studies usually positions “myth” as largest in the scope, followed by legend, then by folklore. Myths are the large narratives that attempt to explain origins of things and reasons for why things are the way they are. Although some scholars make distinctions between myths and religion, there appears to be some confusion among the terms “myth,” “mythos,” “mythology,” and “religion.” I have also coined the term “mytho-pagan,” and will also make use the terms “mythography,” “mythopoetic,” and “mythopoeic,” so I want to be sure that my
use of each of these terms within this thesis is clear. Alan F. Alford, for example, claims as “true” that the difference between myths and religion is that religion includes such non-myth elements as “a moral code, a faith in a supreme being, and an obedience to the Church” ("Myth-Religion"). Such a distinction, however, denigrates works such as The Iliad and The Odyssey as not having any impact on the moral codes from the cultures that generated and celebrated those texts—yet they most certainly did. Furthermore, Alford’s distinction that religions, as opposed to myths, demand an obedience to “the Church,” is a Christian-normative statement in its implicit suggestion that “the Church” is the only church and that other cultures from around the world antecedent or lateral to Abrahamic religions have had no churches or temples of their own. The only distinction between myths and religion, in my view, is the relative distinction that we tend to bring to these terms: “ours” is religion while the “others’” are myths. This is a distinction in our relative position to texts rather than the texts themselves. In other words, one’s “religion” is the collection of myths that one believes are true. As an extension to the distinction between myth and religion, I coin the term “mytho-pagan” to refer to myths that are decidedly outside of the Judeo-Christian surface-narrative (even though many of these mytho-pagan narratives, as I mentioned earlier, are part of the Judeo-Christian substance). I use the term “mythos” (plural “mythoi”) to refer to a collection or body of intra-textual myths (which is frequently confused with “mythology,” which is more precisely the study of a collection or body of intra-textual myths, or “mythography,” which is a process of writing myths). For example, the aforementioned Hymn to Demeter does not come from “Greek Mythology” but rather from “The Greek Mythos.” Finally, I make the fine distinction between the terms “mythopoetic” and “mythopoeic” as follows: the term “mythopoetic” refers to the making of myths in a more ancient context—
these are the myths that exist in what we call the real world. “Mythopoeic” refers the making of myths in a more recent, fictional context—these are the myths that exist within a body of fiction. When considering the myth-making of Classic Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Celtic, Norse etc. myths, think “mythopoeic.” When considering the myth-making of J.R.R. Tolkien’s Middle Earth, think “mythopoeic.” On to a much simpler term to define, largely in part because it stands on its own as opposed to a relative position to something else: legend.

In the friction zone framework, it is important to make a clear distinction between legend and myth because of the way these genres interact in texts, often causing the interpretative anomalies that create friction zones. This happens because Legends by definition are more malleable than myths, so texts that confound legend, myth, and religion—like *Idylls of the King* does—are compounded with inherent contradictions. To see the nuances of those interactions clearly, then, it is necessary to have a clear working definition of legend as genre relative to myth as genre. Legends are those narratives that feature not gods or large-scale creators and creations but human beings that are presented in narrative as unusually strong, cunning, smart, or any other number of attributes traditionally associated with desirable human traits. Legends are often framed within the narrative itself as being historical in nature (whether or not the events actually took place). Finally, legends are a kind of middle-ground between myths and folktales in their variability through space and time (myths do not vary much at all, and legends vary only a little through space and time).

Folklore and the folktale genre is a trickier genre to define because of its variability and because of the nature of the people who generate the lore and the tales. However, Elliott Oring’s work simplifies matters much. Simply put, the folk are the common, everyday people who generate the lore and the tales, and unlike
myths and legends that are more fixed, the lore, the tales, and the performances thereof are subject to wide variability throughout space and time from folk to folk (13-18). For example, Tess Durbeyfield’s participation in the May Pole Dance at the beginning of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* would classify as a folklore event, and this is a focal point of a friction zone I will later discuss in Chapter 4.

The word “pagan,” itself is a friction zone because its meaning has shifted over time due to Judeo-Christian attitudes and influences, is central to the overall analysis of this thesis and thus deserves space to be understood from a non-Judeo-Christian-hegemonic point of view. Touching on *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* for a moment, bear in mind that the ancestor D’Urberville is named “Sir Pagan D’Urberville,” and the surname at least suggests hints of “urban” and “ville.” It is useful, then, to understand the term “pagan” in relation to its antipodal term, “urban.” According to Charlotte M. Yonge, the word “urban” comes from the Latin “urbanus” which refers to “one who dwells in the *urbs* (a city), a person whose courtesy and statesmanship are assumed, as is shown by the words civil, from *civis* (a city), and polite, politic, polish. . .” set “in contrast to rustic rudeness” (202). The rustic, on the other hand, leads us to the term “Pagus” which signifies the non-urban, country-dweller (202). Over time, however, the word “pagus” began to take on additional connotative meaning. In the early days of the Church, the reach of The Gospel was short. Only those who lived in cities and towns (i.e. the Urbanus, again whose politeness, politic, and statesmanship were assumed) were subject to The Gospel while those who lived in the country remained untouched by those narratives (202). The rustic pagus eventually became “Pagans,” associated with otherness, and subsequently labelled as heathens and idolaters (202). Though a bit dated, Ernest Weekley’s *Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* offers additional insight. He explains that the term “paganus” was
used by Roman soldiers as a “contemptuous name for a civilian, or for an incompetent soldier” (1026). Later when the early Christian Church began using the phase *miles Christi* ([good] Soldier of Christ), the term “paganus” became the “colloquial opposite,” denoting “one who was not a good soldier of Christ” (1026). “Pagan,” then, becomes the binary opposite to “Christian.” Thus later and popular understanding and attitudes toward the word “pagan” largely as a pejorative term comes from terministic screens influenced solely by the Judeo-Christian hegemonic, leading those either labelled or self-identified as “pagan” as immediately othered, subaltern, *personae non gratae*. However, there is unmistakable irony in the way that the Judeo-Christian hegemony has appropriated pagan narratives, festivals, and rituals into its own narrative, and while cultural anthropologists and religious scholars have been tracing this pattern for centuries, I submit that literature is also a fertile field in which this pattern may be examined. Consider briefly, for example, Jones and Pennick’s argument that “We have...seen Pagan practices and beliefs continuing here and there, unnoticed by official sanctions, and also being incorporated into Christian practice as this developed” alongside the Judeo-Christian hegemony’s appropriation of Christmas as exposed by Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* (196).

Christmas, a condensed term for “Christ’s Mass” is a prime example of Christian subduction in the holiday and festival in and of itself, and Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* neatly extends that friction zone from the Christian narrative into literature and thus even more into cultural consciousness. The pagan origins of what we now call and celebrate “Christmas” are well documented and discussed, along with a variety of other annual holidays, so I’ll not take the space

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1 I am purposefully borrowing this term from Kenneth Burke which he initially develops in his book *Language as Symbolic Action*. 
here to reinvent what has already been aptly covered by scholars across the
disciplines, the work of Janet and Colin Bord’s book *Earth Rites: Fertility
Practices in Pre-Industrial Britain* being particularly helpful. Although they do
not name it as such, they do help us see an instance of a more socio-cultural
friction zone where, “with the advent of Christianity the midwinter festival, which
was practiced over a wide area of Europe, was designated as Christ’s birthdate,”
and subsequently over time the “pagan fertility practices” of the midwinter rituals
“became overlaid with Christian symbolism” (J. Bord and C. Bord 175-76). So
while this methodology similar to friction zones has been of interest to cultural,
historical, anthropological, sociological etc. scholars, my primary interest with
friction zones is in seeing how the same mechanism occurs in more modern
literary texts, looking particularly at instances where the pagan is attempting to
resurface after being submerged by the Judeo-Christian hegemony.

Suffice to say, the appropriation of pagan holidays, festivals, customs,
rituals, and symbols by the Christian narrative is a friction zone in and of itself,
but Dickens creates yet another friction zone through his use of what is largely a
ghost story. Set during Christmas, Dickens’ plot espouses to its main character,
Ebenezer Scrooge, values associated with (but not exclusive to) the Judeo-
Christian narrative, particularly charity, generosity, and good will toward
humanity. This is done through Scrooges’ experiences with the ghosts of
Christmas past, present, and future (which is seemingly linear time, but Scrooges’
movement through those spaces in relation to the present pulls him out of linear
time). Furthermore, the very idea of ghosts or spirits is contrary to scripture. As
the Book of Ecclesiastes states, “The living know that they will die, but the dead
know nothing; they have no more reward, and even the memory of them is lost”
(Ecc. 9.5, emphasis added). Additionally, in the next verse, it is stated that the
dead’s “love...hate and...envy have already perished; never again will they have any share in all that happens under the sun” (Ecc. 9.6, emphasis added).

Consequently, according to scripture, ghosts cannot and should not exist in a Judeo-Christian worldview insofar as they are understood to be spirits of the dead. The very appearance of ghosts and their function in Dickens’ narrative about the spirit of Christmas contradict and as a result subvert scripture. Even if Scrooge’s experiences are read as dream-sequences as opposed to actual ghosts that have become manifest, it is also fair to say that Dickens creates a friction zone by pulling Scrooge out of Judeo-Christian-normative linear space and time in order to inculcate values where the Judeo-Christian narrative itself has failed Scrooge and, by extension, Dickens’ audience. Thus this becomes a text that attempts to subvert the Judeo-Christian narrative, yet the mytho-pagan aspects of the text remain under the surface until we explore the apropos friction zones.

Just as feminist deconstruction invites us to consider how women are (or are not) represented in texts, friction zones invite us to consider how mytho-pagan narratives are (or are not) represented in texts. Taken a step further, friction zones also force us to critique social and cultural representation of mythoi outside of the Judeo-Christian hegemony. Feminist Deconstruction allows us to hear the silence of women in this narrative and to see how men are the shapers of this world—and men not only get the only word, they also get the last word. This experience, in other words, is painted through male terministic screens. The exact same thing is happening with the Judeo-Christian narrative as an extension of the patriarchal male – that narrative gets the last word in *A [Pagan] Christmas Carol*, as Tiny Tim famously remarks, “God bless Us, Every One” (117). Even though the antecedents of the holiday are pagan and Dickens’ narratives works to re-paganize it, the pagan is silenced at end with Tiny Tim’s blessing (it is understood, I
contend, that Tiny Tim is referring to the mono-theistic Christian god). While the friction zone methodology can succinctly expose and unpack such contradictory elements from a shorter and internationally popular work like Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, which has been widely retold and adapted across multiple mediums, much more care and nuance must be taken with more dense texts like Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* and Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*.

At first glance, *Idylls of the King* and *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* are seemingly unrelated texts, and through certain critical lenses, relationships between these texts might be tenuous at best. The texts are of different genres, *Idylls of the King* being a collection of idylls and *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* being a novel. The writers are separated by space and time—Tennyson spent a great deal of time writing in Surrey, publishing *Idylls of the King* in 1859 which is of course set in Arthurian England; Hardy spent most of his life in Dorset, setting *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* in semi-fictional 19th century Wessex, England, publishing the novel in 1891 near the time of Tennyson’s death. But it is precisely through their differences that the shared commonality of their friction zones becomes all the more interesting, and my hope is that the texts’ separation of genre, space, and time will illustrate how the occurrence of friction zones is not just a singularity unique to one author or genre. I believe a comparative approach to these texts will allow for a more nuanced analysis by allowing us to understand the texts not just based on what they are but, in the spirit of Kenneth Burke’s concept of the negative⁴, also based on what they are not.

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⁴ In his book *Language as Symbolic Action*, Kenneth Burke argues that language gives man[kind] the unique ability to identify and define a thing according to what it is not and further that a thing’s substance consists of that which it is not.
Although we can identify friction zones across space, time, and genre—again it is the nature of the Judeo-Christian narrative to overtake and/or subsume other narratives—the Victorian space for friction zones is particularly intriguing because of the large-scale shifts in religious thinking during the Long Nineteenth Century—“Faith, Doubt, and Anxiety” being a standard rubric through which Victorian Studies is often contextualized. Higher Criticism as an approach to biblical studies as literature rather than solely as the revealed word of a divine being gained traction, beginning nearly the same year that Queen Victoria takes the throne in 1837. Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, originally published in 1859, suggests a natural order that is not benign to humankind as the Judeo-Christian worldview would have it but, rather, is indifferent to humankind. This all brought about shifts in the Victorian cultural climate, leading people to question their position in the cosmos, prompting poets to move away from lines like Wordsworth’s “Knowing that Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her; ’tis her privilege / . . . to lead / from joy to joy” to lines like Tennyson’s “Who trusted God was love indeed / And love Creation’s final law— / Tho’ Nature, red in tooth and claw / With ravine, shriek’d against his creed—“ (“Tintern Abbey” 122-125, In Memoriam 56.13-16). And although Tennyson’s red-toothed and clawed Nature mirrors Victorian doubt and anxiety so poignantly, I find John Stuart Mill’s reflection on cultural assimilation and an individual’s waning agency to resist populist movements is equally poignant:

As the various social eminences which enabled persons entrenched on them to disregard the opinion of the multitude, gradually become levelled; as the very idea of resisting the will of the public, when it is positively known that they have a will, disappears more and more
from the minds of practical politicians; there ceases to be any social support for non-conformity. (On Liberty 137)

In a sense, Mill’s concerns reflect the very things at the heart of this thesis, those points of friction between the hegemonic (conformity of and into the dominant culture) and non-conformity. Mill’s apprehension about personal liberty, as I will later illustrate, reflects several of the stress points creating the friction zones in both *Idylls of the King* and *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*—and like so many of the challenges that heavily weighed on the Victorian mind, Mill’s concerns are absolutely relevant today. In brief, the philosophers show us the trajectory of 19th century socio-political crisis; the poets show us the trajectory of 19th century spiritual crisis; and both sets of crises are interrelated and inescapable aspects of this thesis precisely because the spiritual has been made a part of the socio-political by the Judeo-Christian hegemonic. Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*, as a re-working of nationally-sacred English narratives, thus becomes the perfect place to apply the friction zone methodology.
CHAPTER 3: SUBMERGING THE SUBVERSIVE PAGAN IN
TENNYSON’S IDYLLS OF THE KING

An initial glance at Tennyson criticism reveals that quite a few critics have been interested in looking at his works through a feminist lens, yet there has been almost no focus on the idylls “The Coming of Arthur,” “Merlin and Vivien,” or “The Holy Grail” in the last several years and certainly none that consider interpretations along what I identify as friction zones between the Judeo-Christian narrative and those pre-Christian narratives identified as pagan. Therefore in this chapter I situate Idylls of the King and several of its characters—namely Arthur, Merlin, Vivien, and Galahad—as objects that exist in a liminal space between the Judeo-Christian narrative and other mythopoetic narratives. In some cases, the narrative layers of the friction zones contradict their counterparts, leading the text to be anomalous in and of itself by mixing symbols and metaphors from mythic narratives that are, as I explain in the introductory chapter, mutually exclusive through the Judeo-Christian narrative’s self-othering mechanism. I argue that the other mythopoetic narratives, as they enter into the friction zone with the Judeo-Christian narrative, go through the process of subduction, which was developed in the introductory chapter, where the Judeo-Christian narrative is the top, most visible layer. To illustrate this, I will situate the first idyll, “The Coming of Arthur,” in the mythopoetic tradition of a variety of other mythic creation cycles to show how “The Coming of Arthur” joins this narrative tradition; I will then reveal how the secular and pagan elements from Idylls of the King problematize a Judeo-Christian vision of Camelot and, by extension, Victorian England, perhaps shedding light on Tennyson’s motive for constructing an Arthur and a Camelot of middleness within friction zones, an Arthur and a Camelot that are at once Christian and pagan. Although these moment in Idylls of the King all variations of
friction zones, they all point toward problems with middleness—the specific point of contact in the friction zone. Characters existing in the middle are consequently silenced or destroyed, suggesting that middleness is not a habitable zone in Camelot and, by extension as I will argue, in the Judeo-Christian narrative as well.

The most current critical conversation with *Idylls of the King* focuses primarily on gender roles and politics in Tennyson’s Camelot. Not so different from how this entire critical school examines the marginalization of women (and men) who refuse to conform to society’s ideals, my analysis attempts to extend this conversation by introducing and examining how the mythological, fantastic, and pagan elements from the Arthurian legends are similarly marginalized, overshadowed by the Judeo-Christian narrative which perpetually attempts to assert itself as the true narrative.

Although limited for my purposes, feminist interpretations of *Idylls of the King* have proven useful; recent scholarship on Tennyson has much to offer in terms of aiding audiences in understanding the complex women of Camelot along with the complex chivalric relationships between knights and maidens—which at first glance are deceptively simple—and the ideals to which both genders are forced to conform. Furthermore, this critical conversation draws attention to Tennyson’s purposes in appropriating his source material from Sir Thomas Malory and Chretien de Troyes in order to fit his own rhetorical purposes in nineteenth century England. And I would likewise submit that one of Tennyson’s primary rhetorical purposes is to call attention to rising problems with the social mores of his time. Recent scholarship in *Idylls of the King* generally sees the idylls through this socio-critical lens though the focus has mostly been in feminist deconstruction. Helene Roberts’ reading of *Idylls* functions along these lines, arguing that the narratives in *Idylls* invest a lot of energy in pursuing unrealistic
ideals, and this is especially seen in the ongoing quest for the Holy Grail and for chastity (32). Stephen Ahern likewise reads Tennyson’s treatment of women in Camelot as a way for Tennyson to epitomize the gender politics of both his day and of Camelot’s social strata where women are expected to conform to the ideals of society (which is generally scripted and, I would further distinguish, normalized by hetero-normative men) (88-89). The greater the discrepancy between the ideal relationship and the real relationship, in fact, the greater the destructive power the relationship has on the culture that is attempting to enforce these ideals, and Tennyson uses the problematic relationship between Arthur and Guinevere to illustrate this to a great degree. With his focus on gender politics, Ahern anticipates my reading of Arthur and Guinevere through friction zones which see that problematic relationship relative to the Judeo-Christian hegemonic structures that force expectations on Arthur and Guinevere. Ingrid Ranum’s reading is not far from this analysis when she writes about Tennyson’s “true” women compared to his “false” women, Elaine and Enid being in the “true” women cycle and Vivien and Guinevere being in the “false” women cycle (40). Taken a step further, we can see that the relationship between Geraint and Enid resolves into an ideal portrait of a chivalric relationship and thus poses little threat to the security of Camelot. The love triangle between Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot is the furthest from the ideal presented in the Idylls and throughout the entire Arthurian milieu and thus poses the greatest destructive force in the entire narrative. As Ahern rightly points out, Arthur realizes that there is nothing worse than a knowing cuckold to reign; and this realization is what leads him to surrender his sovereignty (107). And I would add to this that it is because of the Judeo-Christian hegemonic structures that Arthur must surrender and Camelot must fall. Sharon Phillips examines the “fissure” that runs through British and French iterations of the Arthur legends
where the former focuses on “military courage, Christianity, and group loyalty centered on Arthur” and the latter focuses more on Lancelot, how women are the prime movers of knights to do courageous deeds, and the more magical aspects of the narratives (241-42). Clinton Machann also adds to the conversation of gender roles and ideals in the Idylls through his examination of male gender expectations in the Arthurian milieu and Victorian England, arguing that Arthur is generally unable to keep Camelot together because he refuses to conform to the violent behavior expected from the ideal male (199, 203). Again, through close examination of social power dynamics, Machann’s analysis problematizes gender roles in Tennyson’s Camelot and, like Ahern, Runam, and Roberts, helps to set the critical stage for the examination of friction zones which, as I argue in the introductory chapter, are also caused by friction between societal expectations of women and the reality of women. But discrepancies in these power dynamics are not the only fissures the friction zone framework allows us to see.

In an Arthurian context, one way in which the Judeo-Christian narrative takes control of social and cultural norms is through the codes of chivalry. In truth, a central tenant of chivalry is piety—both in the literary and the practical, social sense. Consequently, I argue that the mythical and pagan images that contribute to the construction of the entire Arthurian Romance while simultaneously contradicting its chivalric ideals deserve much more attention than they have received in recent scholarship. Moreover, the importance of religion in both Tennyson’s day and the ancient culture of which he is invoking cannot be overstated. The culture that generated the Age of Chivalry which Camelot is intended to epitomize lived its religion in its daily life. Rituals, proselytizing, praying, and engaging in the sacraments were every day occurrences. Jim Rhodes explains that religion was “an integral part of work, play, and significant events in
the calendar year” (81). Knights, who were at the center of the Arthurian milieu and the culture that originated it, held piety as one of the primary tenants of their chivalry (Kaeuper 104-05). The Romance genre, including Arthurian Romance, was not merely escapist literature, either: Richard Kaeuper explains how Romance literature and the chivalry which it glorified was in practice a two-way exchange between authors and audience. “Knights,” Kaeuper reveals, “say that they have read this literature, show[ing] that they have read it by using it in their own writings” (98).

Perhaps as a reaction and commentary¹ to Victorian anxiety, doubt, and uncertainty, Tennyson—through a re-working of these nationally sacred narratives—explores these problems thematically and symbolically in Idylls of the King most specifically in the idylls “The Coming of Arthur,” “Merlin and Vivien,” and “The Holy Grail.” In “The Coming of Arthur,” Tennyson forces us to deal with several layers of ambiguity concerning Arthur’s origins, his spiritual guides, and the implements he uses to construct Camelot. Merlin is likewise ambiguous as a pagan mentor in a narrative that is fixed on driving the “heathen” out while Vivien, another pagan presence in the Idylls, disrupts the binary of construction and destruction. The Holy Grail, the gateway to immortality and explicit connection to the linear and immortal Judeo-Christian narrative is largely obfuscated throughout the Idylls, forever out of reach, reflecting poignantly the cultural climate of anxiety, doubt, and uncertainty.

These idylls also reveal how the Celtic and pagan aspects of the Arthurian milieu are overshadowed and deemphasized—even marginalized—by the privileging of the impossible ideals propagated by the Judeo-Christian orthodoxy

¹ As other scholars have argued in feminist and post-structural readings, at least part of Tennyson’s purpose in producing the Idylls is social commentary.
and chivalry by the denizens of Camelot. Bearing in mind that this is a culture which has roots in Celtic, Welsh, Anglo-Saxon, and Greco-Roman mythoi, I suspect that the un-sustainable nature of Camelot and her ideals—chivalry being a chief ideal among them—and the disproportionate valuing of the Judeo-Christian narrative over those antecedent narratives are interrelated, perhaps leading to the cultural system’s undermining and eventual destruction of itself. Exploring these fissures may reveal why there was such cognitive dissonance and anxiety in Victorian England’s national consciousness with regard to England’s own unsustainability during a period of vast and unprecedented change. Consider, for example, the ambiguities and interpretive challenges Tennyson presents in “The Coming of Arthur.”

Tennyson’s take on “The Coming of Arthur” causes a friction zone with the idea of Arthur being a middle-ground or an attempted negotiation between the Judeo-Christian narrative and pagan remnants from the Celtic peoples of ancient Britain. As a matter of fact, Tennyson visited Cornwall and Ireland in 1848, “taking up again the idea of writing a long poem on the Arthurian legend” (Gray 7). Not surprisingly then, Tennyson himself had a special sort of relationship with the Irish. As Matthew Bevis notes, “Irish ‘charm’ is something to which the poet continually returns when trying to define his feelings [about the Irish]” (347). Tennyson’s mixed feelings toward the Irish and the Celts are complicated and in need of some attention in order to screen the Idylls through a Celtic mytho-pagan lens. For instance, he once wrote, “I like the Irish—I admit the charm of their manners—but they’re a fearful nuisance,” and further that “our ancestors were horrible brutes! And the Kelts [sic] are very charming and sweet and poetic. I love their Ossians and their Finns and so forth—but they are most damnably unreasonable!” (quoted in Bevis 347, Allingham 298). This resonates perfectly
with Dafydd Moore’s analysis of Tennyson’s use of Ossian to “find a mediating epic heroism to his nineteenth-century audience” and that Tennyson’s “Ossianic sensibility is an important filter through which Thomas Malory’s rendering of the events leading up to the death of Arthur are passed” (374-75). So seeing as though both Welsh and Celtic legend contribute to the overall Arthurian milieu, Tennyson’s travels to Cornwall and Ireland along with his prevailing attitudes toward the Celts and their poetic sensibilities should be taken into consideration in dealing with some of the *Idylls’* interpretative anomalies. Similarly to Moore, I argue that because “The Coming of Arthur” is a mythopoetic text, understanding the mythopoetic tradition and how Tennyson attempts to join that tradition is another important filter through which Tennyson’s rendering of the Arthur and Camelot legends passes.

In my view, there is no mistaking that *Idylls of the King* is at least in part a mythopoetic text and, furthermore, one that situates itself in the fundamental friction zone between the Judeo-Christian narrative and narratives decidedly outside of the Judeo-Christian narrative. Although one of the most widely read and known creation cycles in the western world is the Book of Genesis, the presence of a mythic creation cycle is not uniquely Judeo-Christian or uniquely Arthurian: similar features of creation happen in a variety of mythoi with creators and their creations varying in degrees of greater or lesser specificity. As a foundation for situating “The Coming of Arthur” as a mythopoetic text and then as a friction zone, it is necessary to revisit the Judeo-Christian creation cycle; additionally, to illustrate that the Judeo-Christian narrative has no special license in this mythopoetic pattern, I will show how it shares or borrows features from a variety of other creation cycles.
Although I have chosen to briefly explicate the Hebrew creation cycle first because it is the creation cycle with which we are typically most familiar in literary studies, it is important to note that there are other creation cycles that are both temporally and logically prior to the written Hebrew creation cycle. As characteristic of a variety of creation cycles, the Book of Genesis begins with the earth described as a “formless void” where the only thing named or made distinct from nothingness is a great body of water (Gen. 1.1-2). Next in the narrative, a creative force separates the void into binary systems—light from darkness, land from sea, day from night (Gen. 1.3-10). After shaping the overall cosmos, the creator then goes on to create lifeforms on the earth (Gen. 1.20-26).

Similarly in the Egyptian cosmogony, the Memphite Theology speaks of “the beautiful moment” and “the first time” when a mound manifested from the primeval ocean. This gave a place for the creator god Atum-Ra to come into being and, through a rather graphic asexual reproductive act, breathed life into being (Pinch 47-48). The features particularly noteworthy are the emergence of a creative force from a body of water, the separation of land from water, and an ambiguous or perhaps supernatural creation of progeny.

Along the same lines in Book I of Metamorphoses, Ovid writes that “Before the seas and lands had been created . . . Nature displayed a single aspect only / throughout the cosmos; Chaos was its name,” and, like the state of nature before Genesis, “The sun as yet did not light up the earth” (6, 8-9, 14). Here the primordial ingredients are fused together in one “inert mass,” and, just as is the pattern in Genesis, the separation and organization of air, land, and water are necessary precursors in the narrative for creation to take place (15-25). Further, the bringer of order who separates the heavens, the ether, the earth, and the sea, is merely referred to as “Some god (or kinder nature)” (26-30). Note that not only
does Ovid obscure the identity of the creator, he subverts the hegemonic that divinities frequently represent by suggesting that there may be a “kinder nature” much like Tennyson does with Arthur’s origins which I will soon detail.

The Mayans’ creation cycle as described in the Popol Vuh also begins with “only the pooled water, only the calm sea, only it alone is pooled” (Tedlock 64). Creation then takes place when the occupants of the pooled water, Sovereign Plumed Serpent, and three thunderbolts—Thunderbolt Hurricane, Newborn Thunderbolt, and Sudden Thunderbolt, collectively referred to as Heart of Sky—conspire to empty out the water “for the formation of the earth’s own plate and platform, then should come the sowing, the dawning of the sky-earth” followed by the “rise of the human work, the human design” (Tedlock 65). The mediation between sea and land is once again a common feature and the primary antecedent for human creation.

Like the preceding examples, the Norse cosmogony as represented in the Prose Edda also begins with narratives that see the formation of the landscape through interaction of primal elements. But unlike the preceding examples, the earthy middle ground does not emerge between sea and air but between fire and ice. In the “Gylfaginning,” Muspellheim is described as “bright and hot. [A southern] region [that] flames and burns and is impassable for foreigners” (Sturluson 12-13). To the far North is Niflheim whose “poisonous rivers” and “icy rime” were tempered by “sparks and glowing embers flowing from Muspellsheim,” creating the habitable zone of Ginnungagap which was “mild as a windless sky” (Sturluson 13).

With Tennyson’s intrinsic interest in the Celts in mind, the Celtic creation cycle is yet another important screen through which Tennyson’s reproduction of Camelot should be considered. The trouble, however, is that according to J. A.
MacCulloch, “No Celtic myth of creation as a whole has survived” (86). Of course this statement does operate under the assumption that the Celts had a creation cycle in the same sense as do a variety of other myths. An article from the now defunct journal *Seanchas* provides a possible Rosetta Stone to this conundrum and makes the Celtic creation cycle the most divergent from those previously detailed. In contrast to the linear Judeo-Christian narrative, the author argues that, leaving room for change and evolution, the Celts did not see the creation of the world as a fixed moment in time; rather, the Celts saw creation as an ongoing process ("The Celtic Creation Myth" 9). Thus there is no narrative that describes a single instance in time when creation occurred because that was not a part of the Celtic world view. I recognize this as merely possible; still, it is unlikely that scholarship during Tennyson’s day had access to this information; however, Tennyson’s documented interests in the Celts and Celtic mythopoetics does warrant attention. The nature of the Celtic creation cycle, mysterious as it may be, could shed light on why Tennyson renders Arthur’s mysterious origin the way he does.

Although Tennyson’s move in including a creation cycle at the beginning of *Idylls of the King* is one that Paul Ricoeur might term as Tennyson’s appeal to the mythopoetic nucleus of the founding of post-Anglo-Saxon Britain or that Mircea Eliade might say is Camelot’s axis mundi, I argue that this creates a friction zone through conflating Judeo-Christian imagery and symbolism with pagan imagery and symbolism. I see Tennyson immediately invoking the pagan

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2 This term generally refers to the genealogy of Irish Gaelic peoples.

3 Literally “center of the world,” Eliade argues that myths allow readers to experience the heart of the world by looking back and through reading myths, in this case, re-experiencing and participating in the beginning of the creation of Arthur and Camelot.
perspective on the Arthur legend throughout the first Idyll, “The Coming of Arthur,” placing Arthur as a clear and present middle-ground between the old—which I associate with the pagans or “heathens” as Tennyson names them through Judeo-Christian terministic screens—and the present Judeo-Christian hegemonic, two paradigms which are mutually exclusive and thus make Arthur an anomaly.

The overall narrative movements of “The Coming of Arthur” invite us to see cyclical rather than linear narratives, and this is done through Arthur’s middleness: he is the pivot-point by which the narrative cycles between past and present, and this creates a friction zone with the Judeo-Christian narrative because, as I argue in the introductory chapter, the Judeo-Christian narrative is more fixed and linear than cyclical. This friction zone has added tension, too, seeing as though Tennyson is using a cyclical narrative to narrate the possible coming of Christianity (or at least that which is not “heathen”) to Camelot. Before I directly illustrate Arthur’s middleness by way of the idyll’s narrative structure, however, I submit Arthur’s middleness is indirectly suggested by his invisibility in the opening lines. We are first introduced to “Leodogran, the King of Cameliard,” and his daughter, “fairest of all flesh on earth, / Guinevere” (1-4). The opening emphasis of “The Coming of Arthur” is curiously not Arthur but an antecedent king and his daughter, “fairest of all flesh on earth, / Guinevere” (1-4). The opening emphasis of “The Coming of Arthur” is curiously not Arthur but an antecedent king and his daughter, Guinevere. And, once Arthur is made present in the narrative, “tho’ his face was bare,” Guinevere does not see him, keeping Arthur’s presence without emphasis (53-54). Moving forward in time, Arthur is subsequently made miles Christi, described as having driven off the “heathens”—a term the narrator and Arthur must use because the Judeo-Christian terministic screens are becoming the hegemonic discourse as Camelot is being founded—and I’ll soon point out the irony here through illustrating Arthur’s pagan origins. The narrative eventually moves back in time, trying to account for Arthur’s mysterious origins. Finally, the
idyll ends with Arthur and his knights celebrating the founding of Camelot after having driven off the “heathen” hordes.

Just as the narrative movement of “The Coming of Arthur” positions Arthur in a grey area between the Judeo-Christian narrative and pagan narratives, specific instances concerning Arthur’s origins share patterns with other mythopoetic creation cycles, shifting “The Coming of Arthur” away from being purely Judeo-Christian. Yet the idyll does contain some language and symbolism that are particular to the Judeo-Christian narrative which further compounds this friction zone and Arthur’s position within it. Tennyson first gives us a glimpse of the past, a sort of “In the beginning there was” if you will, then he moves forward in time from a sense of chaos toward order:

> And still from time to time the heathen host
> Swarm’d overseas, and harried what was left.
> And so there grew great tracts of wilderness,
> Wherein the beast was ever more and more. (8-11)

The beasts, the wild, and the untamed are literary devices frequently used to refer to the heathen/pagan; in this case, through the image of swarming “overseas,” Tennyson is particularly making present the Anglo-Saxon pagan⁴. So while Tennyson may literally be invoking a sense of untamed land, he’s symbolically pulling in resonance from mythic creation cycles—of which the Judeo-Christian narrative is but one example of many—through this movement from the perceived chaos of the Anglo-Saxon pagan toward the order of Camelot. Moving forward, Arthur operates in a contact zone between these narratives by bringing order to the chaotic wilderness and heathen population where he “and his knighthood for a

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⁴ Although the only outside threat to England must by geographical necessity come by way of the sea, the Angles, the Saxons, and the Vikings were all known as particularly capable seafarers.
space / Were all one will, and thro’ [Arthur’s] strength . . . [they] Drew in the petty
princedoms . . . . . / . . . / and made a realm and reign’d” (514-18). This final
arranging of chaos into a manageable, ordered realm is precisely what we would
expect as an end-cap a mythopoetic creation cycle.

The mysterious birth of Arthur, the arranger of order from chaos, is another
narrative feature that aligns the *Idylls* as a mythic and therefore at least a partly
secular and pagan text. But before the full significance of that moment can be
decomposed, a brief reflection on Tennyson’s treatment of Merlin—the bringer
of Arthur—is necessary for two reasons: on the one hand, Tennyson’s treatment of
Merlin throughout the *Idylls* ultimately parallels how pagan elements in the *Idylls*
are for the most part muted by the Judeo-Christian elements, and this mirrors how
pagan narratives are muted by the Judeo-Christian narrative even though those
pagan elements are antecedent and substantial to it.

Merlin himself is an anomaly in Tennyson’s *Idylls* because he is the
character in the entire Arthurian Romance most capable of inviting us into the
pagan world of Arthur and Camelot, yet Tennyson keeps Merlin mostly silent just
as the Judeo-Christian narrative keeps the pagan narratives in silent exile or under
threat of God’s wrath. Although Merlin is the title character of one of the idylls, it
is also the idyll where Merlin is most explicitly silenced. This ironically parallels
the narrative of “The Holy Grail,” an object mostly obscured, intangible, and
constantly moving away; just like the Grail, we cannot apprehend the pagan within
the narratives—both the Grail and the pagan then become the substance of the
knights’ and our own apprehension. When Merlin does speak, just as when most
of the knights see the Grail, he confounds and frustrates his listeners with riddles.
This is in keeping with the paradigm that I have thus far scaffolded: Merlin is the
silent sub-stance of Camelot just as pagan narratives are the silent sub-stance to the Judeo-Christian narrative.

The irony in this relationship is that the pagan and the Holy Grail—a Christian relic—are functioning in exactly the same way: they’re both silent phantoms either pushed out of reach or removed from reach. In “The Coming of Arthur” Tennyson reminds us that Merlin is one who “can walk / Unseen at pleasure” (346-47). Likewise, the Holy Grail is “The phantom of a cup that comes and goes” (“The Holy Grail” 44). Catherine Stevenson, in her helpful essay titled “Druids, Bards, and Tennyson’s Merlin” sees the silence of Merlin as an extension of Tennyson’s concerns about the reception of poetry in Victorian England. As an aside, I would add that perhaps the accessibility of the Holy Grail mirrors Tennyson’s concern as well. Moreover, she writes that Tennyson’s Merlin is a product of his “reading in the 1840’s and 50’s about Druids, bards, and the legendary wizard of Camelot” and further “embodies Tennyson’s reflections on the aesthetic limitations of bardic art” (361, emphasis added). Subsequent revisions of the Idylls, she points out, reveal Tennyson’s evolving treatment of Merlin as a prophet and bard relative to an unreceptive audience, paralleling Tennyson’s own concerns about gifted artists’ positions within unreceptive societies (361). Where Catherine Stevenson sees a reflection of Tennyson’s anxiety about audience reception, I see a friction zone. It is through Tennyson’s readings of nineteenth century druid revivalists like Bochart and Stukeley that he revises Merlin in a way that distinguishes his Merlin from that of Malory’s, a Merlin who is less politically manipulative and more visionary which is consistent with the nineteenth century revivalist attitude toward the Celtic druids (C. Stevenson 364-65, Hughes 380). So we must understand Tennyson’s Merlin as a magic-using prophet and bard rendered through Celtic romance, placing this
Merlin absolutely outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Tennyson’s own attitude toward Merlin was as a Celtic prophet and bard, a visionary artist with an unreceptive audience. This neatly coincides with Tennyson’s general attitude and anxiety about audience reception with the bards of his own time—poets (Schur 61). But Tennyson’s Merlin is more than mere narrative anomaly.

Tennyson’s Merlin is also a textual anomaly in how he differs from the Merlin of Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*. As a non-biblical prophet and “mage,” Merlin is at the pagan core of the *Idylls* (279). Tennyson’s characterization of him as an anomaly is consistent with Tennyson’s treatment of pagan features throughout the text which are also often unseen like Arthur, unheard, or overshadowed by Judeo-Christian elements. With this in mind, treating Tennyson’s Merlin as a remnant of Celtic Druidism—part of the “heathens” and perceived chaos that Arthur is destined to tame—Merlin’s hand in the coming of Arthur is all the more interesting.

Though Tennyson presents Arthur further as a Christ-like figure through his mysterious origins and miraculous birth, I would also argue that Merlin’s hand in this miracle compounds this friction zone by mixing these features from the Judeo-Christian narrative with pagan narratives, and the imagery Tennyson uses to deliver Arthur clearly places him as a middle-man between Judeo-Christian and pagan worlds. Bellicent, the Queen of Orkney frames the friction zone by saying, “I know not whether of himself [Arthur] came, / Or brought by Merlin” (345-46). Others have remained unsure of Arthur’s legitimate claims to kingship: “…for he of Arthur newly crown’d, / Tho’ not without an uproar made by those / Who cried, ‘He is not Uther’s son’” (41-43). Arthur’s physical resemblance is even called in to question: “…who hath proven him / King Uther’s son? For lo! we look at him, / And find nor face nor bearing, limbs nor voice, / Are like to those of Uther whom
we knew” (68-71). The mystery and miracle is further developed when she speaks of the night of Uther Pendragon’s death, “a night / In which the bounds of heaven and earth were lost” where “in heaven, a ship, the shape thereof / A dragon wing’d” delivered the infant Arthur at the feet of Merlin (370-83). The paradoxical interplay between fire and water in this scene also warrants attention. Just as mythopoetic creation cycles commonly split an inert mass into binary masses in order to have a space for human creation, the infant Arthur emerges from something of a tempest of conflicting elements. Likely an attribute to Tennyson’s fondness of Old English, Anglo-Saxon texts, the intersection of fire and water as opposed to land and water connects more explicitly with the Norse creation cycle than the Biblical creation cycle. This suggests that Tennyson wants to generate a mythopoetic nucleus or an axis mundi that has shades of both the Judeo-Christian and the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon creation cycle:

Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,
Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep
And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged
Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame
And down the wave and in the flame was borne
A naked babe. (378-83)

Much like the origins of Christ, Tennyson—through Queen Bellicent’s narrative—frames the origins of Arthur in mystery where she is unsure whether or not Merlin had a hand in his arrival. Further, as she “tell[s] . . . another [possible] tale,” Tennyson loads the miraculous birth of Arthur with conflicting imagery (358). In the initial setup of Arthur’s coming, Tennyson blurs the lines between the Christian sense of the holy—that being “heaven”—and the pagan sense of the holy—that being something which is “of the Earth.” From heaven does not come
an angel as we might anticipate from Judeo-Christian lore but a ship shaped like a
dragon. Now one might be tempted to associate the dragon with the horned beast
that emerges from the sea in the Book of Revelation, thus keeping this allusion
firmly in the Judeo-Christian Biblical tradition, and this would be worth exploring
but for Tennyson’s careful use of “a ninth wave,” the number nine complicating an
association with the 7-headed, 10-horned beast featured in The New Testament
(Rev. 12.3-5). Although the image of the dragon juxtaposed with the arrival of a
new babe does in part parallel the Biblical narrative from the Book of Revelation,
the parallel is only partial; thus I argue that this dragon should be considered as a
folkloric and legendary foil, a conscious departure from the Judeo-Christian
invocation of heaven in this scene. Finally, the mixture of fire and water also
conflat Judeo-Christian and secular imagery. The presence of water in the coming
of Arthur is unmistakably baptismal and connects with the image of heaven that
frames the scene, yet the mixture of water and Arthur and Merlin being “clothed in
fire” maintains the connection with the image of the dragon that also frames the
scene (389). Eventually, however, unlike the habitable middle-zone of
Ginnungagap, Arthur will struggle to exist in the space of Camelot, for he is the
product of an intermingling Judeo-Christian and pagan narrative who will soon
find himself in the paradoxical position of being a Christ-like, pacifist figure along
with being a warrior-king.

The paradoxical position of Arthur as Christian pacifist leader and pagan
warrior king is also illustrated with prominent details surrounding Excalibur
including the Lady of the Lake, the sword’s appearance, and the sword’s symbolic
role in the narrative as an impermanent, constructive, yet violent instrument. The
very concept of sword, in fact, is central to English identity. With these features of Excalibur in mind, Arthur’s role in the construction and destruction of Camelot becomes yet another interpretative anomaly through the mixed metaphors between the Judeo-Christian narrative and pagan narratives. Margot Louis’s observations about the nineteenth century cultural demand for an expansion of mythography beyond the Judeo-Christian narrative provide a useful socio-cultural context here (329). Moreover, I argue that Tennyson responds to that cultural demand by mixing these symbols, consequently creating this friction zone. First, I would submit that The Lady of the Lake is in and of herself a conflation of Judeo-Christian and pagan symbolism: she is pagan in that she “knows a subtler magic than” the pseudo-Druid Merlin, and she brings with her a sense of Christ in that she “Hath power to walk the waters like our Lord” (283, 293). This is especially significant because she is the keeper and giver of Excalibur, the artifact that enables Arthur to construct Camelot and is in and of itself also a conflation of Judeo-Christian and pagan symbols, described as a “huge cross-hilted sword” (285). Indeed, many swords feature a cross-style hilt (as opposed to other pommel variants that do not feature a cross but rather a “disc” hilt), so we may take the “cross-hilted” image for granted as mere visual detail. Yet it is interesting to note that cross-hilted swords were not prominent until the later Middle Ages—certainly a sword design that is post Anglo-Saxon England. Additionally, Tennyson’s familiarity with the Anglo-Saxons is evidenced by his translation of the Old English poem “Battle of Brunanburh,” so his choice to historicize the design of Excalibur in this way complicates interpretation, for this is understood to be an ancient brand yet contemporary in design. This friction zone is further

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5 Ing is the Saxon God of the Sword, and the word “Saxon” literally translates to “The Sons of the Sword.”
compounded by the following line where Tennyson invokes the holy sense of “cross” by juxtaposing it with a contrary element, for Excalibur was given “Whereby to drive the heathen out” (286, emphasis added). Tennyson’s positioning of the word “heathen” creates a binary, making the association of “cross” with the Judeo-Christian narrative inescapable. Excalibur also invokes a sense of the ancient and conflates it with the modern with the language that appears on the cross-hilt:

Graven in the oldest tongue of all this world
“Take me,” but turn the blade and ye shall see,
And written in the speech ye speak yourself,
“Cast me away!” (301-04)

Herein is, in my view, the greatest interpretative anomaly in “The Coming of Arthur,” for Arthur’s task with Excalibur is to “drive the heathen out” (286). Yet his spiritual guides and the tool with which they provide him are all confluences of holy symbols from pagan narratives and the Judeo-Christian narrative. This confused sense of purpose is perhaps one of the anomalies that undermine Camelot’s ideals before Camelot itself is even constructed. We are left with a sense that the tool with which Arthur must use in order to bring order from the “heathen” chaos is both pagan and Christian; as such, it is impermanent. It can only be used or exist in the liminal space between the ancient and the modern, between the revisable and interpretive pagan and the non-revisable Judeo-Christian (which presents itself as not a truth but the Truth). Just as the Victorian Judeo-Christian hegemonic structures are ebbing toward collapse as the century of science, doubt, and existential crisis flows toward a growing sense of fin-de-siècle, Tennyson mirrors the fissures in those structures through Arthur’s middleness. Consequently, Arthur thus finds himself in another paradoxical dichotomy, for one
cannot at once be a Christ-like pacifist-healer and a warrior at the same time. Stuck between these idealized and mutually exclusive roles, the very elements that construct Camelot in the opening idyll foreshadow its destruction, and the friction zone framework reminds us that it is the self-othering Judeo-Christian narrative which demands on fixity that makes these mixed metaphors mutually exclusive. Neither Arthur nor Camelot can survive within this friction zone because the Judeo-Christian narrative simply does not allow for middleness.

It is because Arthur is not able to exist within both sets of ideals that the Idylls are forced to destroy Camelot. By the end of “The Coming of Arthur,” Arthur rallies his men in song where they close their verse with following lines: “‘The King will follow Christ, and we the King / In whom high God hath breathed a secret thing. / Fall battleaxe, and flash brand! Let the King reign.’ / So sang the knighthood” (499-502). Here the knighthood demonstrates its own confused sense of purpose, their song conflating images of war while invoking Christ, images which are mutually exclusive. According to the mythos established earlier in the Idyll, too, the knighthood is misinformed as to Arthur’s origins. They sing that “God hath breathed a secret thing” to Arthur, but insofar as the narrative reveals, Merlin and the Lady of the Lake are Arthur’s spiritual guides. But with the growing Judeo-Christian hegemony in Camelot, the knights have only the Judeo-Christian terministic screen at their disposal to name these events. With the mythological roots of Arthur established, the knighthood further misinterprets Arthur’s purpose by insisting that “The King will follow Christ” (499). If Arthur’s roots are both mytho-pagan and Judeo-Christian, why must he follow only Christ? And how can he accomplish this when he’s expected to be a warrior as well? Arthur himself makes the same mistake in interpreting his own purpose when he responds to the knights:
'Behold, for these have sworn
To wage my wars, and worship me their King;
The old order changeth, yielding place to new;
And we that fight for our fair father Christ.’ (506-09)

It is through the entire community’s misinterpretation of Arthur’s principal purpose—which is perhaps to embody the balance between Judeo-Christian and pagan values rather than be forced to conform to any one set of ideals—that Camelot begins to destroy itself before it is even constructed. It is in fact through this subdued treatment of the pagan side and, alternatively, the over-privileging of the misinformed Judeo-Christian ideals of Arthur’s purpose that problems manifest in subsequent idylls, and they explicitly foreshadow Camelot’s destruction.

At first glance, the middle idylls present an interpretative problem, for there are only minor references to the pagan mythos that had a hand in Arthur’s coming and the construction of Camelot, and those subtle pagan forces tend to be manifested as malevolent forces that threaten Camelot, but I argue that those forces only appear malevolent because the Judeo-Christian terministic screens encourage us to see them as such; looking more closely, it is the subversive pagan forces that are able to critique Camelot and nudge it toward a peaceful balance between conflicting sets of ideals. When we are first introduced to Vivien in the middle of “Balin and Balan”—the last Idyll Tennyson wrote—she says to her squire thus:

This fire of Heaven
This old sun-worship, boy, will rise again,
And beat the cross to earth, and break the King,
And all his Table. (450-53, emphasis added)
Here Vivien presents old sun-worship—paganism in a phrase—as a force to overtake Christianity by “beat[ing] the cross to earth” which threatens to destroy Camelot by “break[ing] the King.” At first glance this illustrates both paganism and woman as malevolent, destructive forces; however, the malevolent presentation by Vivien is truly matter of perspective. After all, Vivien has a point: Camelot is ideal in theory but, as demonstrated in “Balin and Balan” and the surrounding idylls, it is being slowly yet surely corrupted in reality. Preceding this particular scene, Balin sees physical evidence of the courtly love between Guinevere and Lancelot (235-84). “But I see not what I see. / Damsel and lover? Hear not what I hear” (276-77). Instead of acknowledging this, he “mad for adventure,” elects to “[dash] away” (284). Balin, a newly inducted Knight of the Round Table, dismisses the corruption that is right in front of him. Immediately following the sun-worship scene is the violent, mutual fratricide between Balin and Balan (535-554). This is what Camelot has come to. From Vivien’s point of view, perhaps Camelot must be exposed for what it is becoming and, consequently, needs to be re-shaped with a more realistic and peaceful balance between pagan and Judeo-Christian cultural scripts. In this way, I see eye-to-eye with Vivien, especially when she ironically recalls Lancelot’s song to Merlin, “In Love, if Love be Love, if Love be ours, / Faith and unfaith can ne’er be equal powers: / Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all” (“Merlin and Vivien” 385-87). Camelot’s façade failing (in the façade of Arthur and Guinevere’s relationship coming to light), Vivien’s actions may not be altogether malevolent—she’s pointing out the differences between what Camelot sees and what is really transpiring. Balin sees Lancelot and Guinevere and refuses to acknowledge what he saw; critics likewise frequently discuss how Arthur must be aware of Lancelot and Guinevere’s courtly love, yet he either refuses to acknowledge it or refuses to
react in a way that is culturally expected. So Vivien’s purpose is perhaps only malevolent at first glance, but her motives in exposing and correcting a flawed system are ultimately benevolent. But that makes her seduction and subjugation of Merlin all the more complicated.

Seeing as though Merlin is the strongest pagan and prophetic presence in Tennyson’s Arthurian milieu, Vivien’s seduction and subsequent subjugation of Merlin presents an interpretive anomaly, one that potentially reveals Vivien as not only a subversive female but a subversive pagan, and her working of the charm to mute Merlin may also be an extension of Tennyson’s own anxieties about unresponsive audiences. At the beginning of “Merlin and Vivien,” Tennyson describes the setting:

A storm was coming, but the winds were still,
And in the wild woods of Broceliande,
Before an oak, so hollow, huge and old
It look’d a tower of ivied masonwork,
At Merlin’s feet the wily Vivien lay. (1-5)

The “wild woods” and “huge and old” oak tree invoke a sense of the ancient, of the pagan, while at the same time paralleling the appearance of ancient and tired Merlin himself. “A storm was coming,” aptly foreshadows the dark age and eventual loss of Camelot. Yet the strongest pagan symbol in the narrative, one who is the master of his art, the seer, the sage, has his charm worked against him by the force in the narrative that wants paganism to re-render Camelot. The interpretive anomaly here lies in why Merlin allows himself to be charmed (or, alternatively, why Tennyson allows Merlin to be charmed). In my view, Tennyson takes this narrative in this direction with a single purpose in mind that carries with it two results. Catherine Harland and I believe that Tennyson had the same
purpose here: “The modern poet [read: Tennyson] and mythmaker can no longer ‘read’ divine purpose face-to-face; he can only try to come to terms with loss” (57). Merlin’s loss of identity, fame, and ability to communicate through language is Tennyson’s way to try to come to terms with loss. Additionally, seeing Merlin as the silenced druid/bard, this language of loss implicitly joins Catherine Stevenson and Schur’s conversation about Tennyson’s anxiety of unreceptive audiences. I believe Stevenson, Schur, and Harland are on point here, but the purpose-to-result ratio is not a one-to-one ratio, for there is another narrative result from the charm scene. As the idylls have developed to this point in the collection, the presence of the pagan in Arthur’s court seems to be vanishing, so it makes sense that Merlin’s power would be waning as well, allowing him to be subdued by a stronger, more domineering pagan force like Vivien who is more willing to critique and expose Camelot’s ideal façade and the flaws under its veneer. This subversion of hegemonic power structures is consistent with Jones and Pennick’s argument about the correlation between the resurfacing of pagan religions with the rise of women’s rights movements and a cultural need for spiritualities less rigidly patriarchal (219-20). Ingrid Ranum might agree that it isn’t without a sense of irony that one of Tennyson’s leading “false” women—who also becomes the most domineering pagan presence in the Idylls—is one of the true agents of change within Camelot’s flawed system.

What the subversive pagan and narrative in Tennyson’s Idylls teaches us is that we ought to be cautious in overvaluing a system of ideals that is impossible to achieve and maintain, a system that has within it inherent contradictions that serve only to undermine and destroy itself. Camelot’s ideals do not match its reality, so the society which is dependent on the ideals in order to function is doomed to fail. In his re-imagining of the Arthurian Romance tradition, just as he overlays Judeo-
Christian symbols and themes on top of pagan symbols and themes, Tennyson successfully overlays the problem that undermines Camelot on the problems that are undermining Victorian England, a culture that is similarly in danger of destroying itself because of its over-valuing of ideals that are impossible to obtain, maintain, or revise. Similarly, though later in time and working in another genre altogether, Thomas Hardy also creates friction zones between the Judeo-Christian hegemonic and those caught in various shades of grey between the hegemonic and the subalteran.
CHAPTER 4: REAPING THE RAPE OF WESSEX IN HARDY’S TESS OF THE D’URBERVILLES

Thus far friction zones have illuminated a variety of interpretive anomalies that would otherwise remain below the surface in texts like Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* and Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*. The friction zone framework, by deconstructing Judeo-Christian power structures vis-à-vis a renewed exegesis, questions and critiques the social mores of these authors times in order to help us understand how or why their characters are saved or destroyed. Unlike Tennyson and Dickens, however, Hardy seems to have less of a desire to have it both ways—that is, to have both the Judeo-Christian system and the non-Judeo-Christian system merge. As the social and spiritual conditions of England continues to head toward collapse during Hardy’s time, he is perhaps more motivated to use pagan narratives to critique the Judeo-Christian hegemonic more directly. And the friction zone framework illuminates this clearly. Similarly to Tennyson, however, Hardy also accomplishes much of this purpose through character development and plot.

In this chapter, I argue that Tess represents the rural and pagan world presently being subducted by the Judeo-Christian hegemonic while in contrast Alec represents encroaching urbanization, mechanization, and a sense of the Judeo-Christian orthodoxy (but in “half-clerical” image only). Hardy situates Angel Clare in the middle of this friction zone, showing that the only way to survive in the fault line of fin de siècle England is through close self-examination (demonstrated not only by Angel’s literal survival but also the growth of his character throughout the novel). Ultimately, a synthesis of these distinct readings of *Tess* has the potential to uncover a crucial message embedded in Hardy’s narrative—that a sense of rape is occurring on all of these levels. With this reading
of *Tess*, Hardy forces us to reflect on the trajectory of 19th century sexuality, spirituality, industrialization, urbanization and their effects on a lingering sense of an Anglo Saxon and Celtic England, leaving us to question the nature of the existing and the emerging hierarchal power structures from his time.

There have been a great variety of readings and analyses of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* in modern scholarship, many of which touch on the power issues that the friction zone methodology invites us to examine. It has been read as a novel that exposes the subjection and victimization of women in Victorian England; it has been read as a novel that explores the cyclical nature of power with regard to personal power and spiritual/religious power; and it has been read as a novel that explores the mechanization and urban encroachment into the rural countryside. As I do in this analysis, Judith Weissman likewise takes a comparative approach to *Idylls of the King* and *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, arguing that Hardy, by inverting a selection of Tennyson’s lines in *Tess*, responds to Tennyson’s assumptions about sex. She submits that Tennyson constructs a Camelot that is under constant threat of female sexuality whereas Hardy attempts to revise this view by presenting sex as neutral, neither good nor evil (Weissman 191). Weissman’s feminist approach, like the friction zone methodology, recognizes the social structures that create the good/evil binary and the subsequent association of that binary with female sexuality. Applying my methodology to *Tess* extends this critique, encompassing the Judeo-Christian / Pagan binary alongside the patriarchal male / female binary with the same goal of collapsing those binaries. Jeffrey Sommers, while giving a helpful overview of Bildüngsroman, argues that *Tess* has a place in the Bildüngsroman genre (161-62). Although my approach to *Tess* focuses less on Tess’s coming of age pattern, thinking about her journey with spiritual growth in mind is a useful rubric for
examining friction zones under a Judeo-Christian hegemony which insists on its own variety of spiritual growth and, as Weissman might also argue, sexual growth (or lack thereof). In her essay “Nature and Paganism in Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*” Charlotte Bonica convincingly argues that Hardy constructs and treats with sympathy a sense of rural paganism in his contemporary England, yet because that culture “is circumscribed by the encroachment of civilization, their paganism is powerless” (851). Although she does not examine the friction between the Judeo-Christian hegemony and the mytho-pagan narratives in the same way as my analysis, she likewise concludes that through Hardy’s sympathetic portrayal of the rural pagan, he “suggest[s] that the pagan relationship with nature offers modern individuals a useful replacement for Christianity” (851). Finally, although a bit dated, Henry Kozicki’s article “Myths of Redemption in Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*” offers a reading of *Tess* that does see direct relationships between the Judeo-Christian narrative and mytho-pagan narratives. While Kozicki sees the Judeo-Christian narrative as a complimentary parallel to the sacrifice and redemption of Tess, “where [the] fallen world [of Wessex] demands a Christ as sacrifice,” I situate Tess and, eventually, Angel as pagans of Wessex with whom Hardy uses to critique the Judeo-Christian hegemony through friction zones (151).

Each of these readings has clearly deserved their own space, yet a synthesis and extension of all of these readings has the potential to uncover a crucial pattern embedded in Hardy’s narrative. Subjection and oppression in Victorian England indeed happens on a variety of fronts, and Hardy exposes several of these fronts in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, particularly the subjection of women and their sexuality to Victorian cultural scripts which is visible from the onset of the novel. And as I argue in the introductory chapter, I believe we can modify and extend this feminist deconstruction approach to have a closer look at what Hardy is doing with the
subversive pagan in the text. For in the novel, too, there is the subjection of the natural world and rural landscapes like The Chase and Talbothay’s Farm along with the people who live and work there like Tess, Izz, Retty, and Marian. As the novel progresses, these rural locales and milkmaids are to varying degrees effected by mechanization, industrialization, and urbanization, the shocking conditions at Flintcomb-Ash illustrating the opposite end of the pastoral spectrum Hardy creates in the novel’s earlier chapters. Additionally, and most poignantly, there is the subjection of pagan values from country denizens like Tess by the Judeo-Christian hegemonic. While all of these aspects happen symbolically throughout the novel, I propose that each front is also figuratively represented by the specific characters of Tess, Alec, and Angel as hitherto elaborated.

In my view, Hardy openly invites us to see Judeo-Christian structures through his continued efforts to help us see those structures from outside of the Judeo-Christian narrative; in other words, he creates friction zones in his narrative by using pagan narratives to help us see the cultural norms perpetuated by the Judeo-Christian narratives that would otherwise be less visible (as is the ancillary effect of norms), giving us the agency to see and critique the Judeo-Christian hegemony from the pagan perspective. He does this by looking back at narratives, texts, and cultural artifacts that are antecedent or are altogether outside of the Judeo-Christian narrative; he does this through language and word choice (at times further revealed through the novel’s revision); he does this through narrative structure; he does this through modified parallels to Classical myths; and just like Tennyson, although through means of a different genre and medium, Hardy illustrates how difficult it is to avoid destruction when one either desires or is forced to operate in a space of middleness, and as I continue to argue, this is
primarily because the Judeo-Christian narrative and hegemonic does not allow for middleness.

Ever mindful of using the past to illuminate the present, the habit of looking back longingly at the past is a motif to which Hardy continually returns, and he often does so in a way that reminds us of a pre-Christian England, bringing the pagan back to the surface of his readers’ consciousness. Hardy’s novels are set, generally, in Hardy’s present-day, yet he refers to the region in which the novels take place as “Wessex,” an anachronism that forces us to think about the distant past of England. In the preface to the later Harper edition of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy reflects that it was this novel that he “first ventured to adopt the word ‘Wessex’ from the pages of early English history, and give it a fictitious significance as the existing name of the district once included in that extinct kingdom” (vii). As there were objections to using a merely invented name, Hardy chose to designate the locality of his novels by a name that “was known but vaguely,” often prompting questions even from educated people as to where Wessex was (vii). He goes on to write that any instance of the word or idea of Wessex as in “a Wessex peasant” or “a Wessex custom” would not refer to anything “later in date than the Norman Conquest” (viii). But this unifying anachronism keeps our imaginations fixed on a pre-Christian England even though we are reading a narrative set in Anglican England, inviting a close look at the friction zones the anachronism creates.

Aside from setting, Hardy also keeps our imaginations in a middle zone between the pagan past and Judeo-Christian present through mixing symbols and histories in character names and plot. For example, the first character to whom we are introduced in *Far From the Madding Crowd*—generally agreed to be Hardy’s first major novel—is Gabriel Oak. The main character’s name brings to us
symbolic connections to England’s Druidic past, and though less of a friction zone in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, the tension between the biblical name Gabriel and pagan image of Oak anticipates the tension in a name from *Tess*: Sir Pagan D’Urberville, the friction zone thereof I detail later in this chapter. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Casterbridge is a city that “announced old Rome in every street, alley, and precinct. It looked Roman, bespoken the art of Rome, [and] concealed dead men of Rome” (68). Michael Henchard even chooses the Roman amphitheater as the “safest [place] from observation” to conduct his intrigues, yet the amphitheater is “easy to find by a stranger,” as though the Roman past of England is somehow shrouded yet plainly visible (70). Perhaps the most poignant moment of Hardy’s reflections is at the beginning of his last novel, *Jude the Obscure*, where the young Jude of eleven years, on his way to labor on a farm, is prompted by his aunt to “be kind to animals and birds” (10). And he does just that while laboring on Farmer Troutham’s farm: for a moment, rather than scaring off the birds as is his charge, Jude decides to be one with the birds with whom he feels a kinship and feeds them rather than scare them away, “A magic thread of fellow-feeding united his own life with theirs. Puny and sorry as those lives were, they much resembled his own” (15). After Jude’s brief flirtation in being one with the land as the more ancient, animistic religions of Anglo-Saxon England would have it, Jude is caught feeding the birds and beaten by Farmer Troutham, the calamity of which echoes through the brand new church in the distant background, the “structure [to which] the farmer had largely subscribed, to testify his love for God and man” (16). Hardy then leaves us with a poignant commentary: “. . .what [is] good for God’s birds was bad for God’s gardener” (16). Though more literally looking back to reveal an instance from Jude’s past, this scene also makes implicit connections with a nature-loving meaning-making system and a Church-loving
meaning-making system (albeit one that has been perverted through Farmer Troutham’s glaring hypocrisy). In each instance, Hardy refuses to let the Judeo-Christian narrative be visible without also revealing that which is even more ancient and outside of it. In the same ways yet even more deeply, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* has a place in this pattern.

There are several instances in *Tess* where Hardy invites us to look back to pre-Christian England, creating friction zones between conflicting mythos that ultimately problematize Tess’s relationships. Like the examples I have listed previously, one instance happens right at the beginning of the novel thus inviting us to screen the entire novel through the friction zone framework; however, I also submit that more unique to *Tess* than Hardy’s other novels, the instances that invite us to look back also labor to create narratives that are more cyclical and less linear. This is particularly illustrated by the way Hardy book-ends the novel with pagan imagery vis-à-vis the May Pole fertility ritual at the beginning and the sacrifice at Stonehenge and subsequent rebirth at the end, all of which are framed by narrative divisions of perennial “Phases.” This makes sense when the content of the novel keeps reminding us about natural cycles. To be clear, in agreement with Dale Kramer’s observations, neither Hardy nor I mean the term “cycles” as mere repetition: Kramer reminds us that Hardy sees cycles in terms of Auguste Comte’s theory of the progression of knowledge, that meaning making is not a linear process but rather a “looped orbit” (Kramer 112). Hardy also wrote that “Things move in cycles; dormant principles renew themselves, and exhausted principles are thrust by” (Literary Notebook 78). As evidenced by Hardy’s habit of looking back in the context of this philosophy, it is difficult to escape the notion that Hardy wishes to renew dormant principals in light of the principals presently dominant. For example, in the opening pages of the novel, Tess’s father is
informed that he and his name are the progeny of an ancient line of knights going back to the days of the Norman Conquest, and as John Durbeyfield desires to transition back into Sir John D’Urberville, we are given an initial sense of the cyclical nature of family names. Shortly thereafter, we are first introduced to Tess as a participant in the May Pole Dance\(^1\) ritual at the May Day festivities. Although I detail this more thoroughly later in this chapter, it is worth mentioning now that Tess’s dress and adornments at this folklore event attach her to images predating the Norman Conquest (particularly to the Druids and the festival of Beltane). This moment is also significant because it is when Tess and Angel Clair first meet, but their dance—in a part a celebration of spring, fertility, and the cycle of rebirth—is interrupted when the authoritative “church clock [strikes],” preventing them from completing their courtship ritual (18). Like a factory bell calling its workers back to their labors, the church bell pulls Angel away from Tess, interrupting the old pagan courtship ritual, calling him back to the town and away from the country. Later in the novel Hardy brings us to Stonehenge, another portal through which we are reminded of a pre-Norman past\(^2\). The pattern of Tess and Angel’s interruption continues at Stonehenge in the closing pages of the novel, too, when their relationship is interrupted by the authorities who are pursuing Tess for the wasting of Alec. In fact, it is on Stonehenge’s Altar Stone—where some believe that human sacrifices may have been performed—that Tess and Angel share their last intimate moment (Burl 20, Hardy 394-96). Finally, even though the novel ends

\(^{1}\) For further reading on the May Pole Dance ritual and other fertility rituals, see “Traditional customs with fertility overtones: banishing winter and welcoming spring” from Janet and Colin Bord’s book *Earth Rites: Fertility Practices in Pre-Industrial Britain.*

\(^{2}\) This is similar yet unique from Hardy’s reminiscing with the Roman structures in *The Mayor of Casterbridge,* another example of his continual habit of looking back to pre-Christian England to help illuminate the present.
with the death (re: sacrifice) of Tess, it also ends with the beginning of new life in her sister Liza-Liu, a sort of *tabula rasa* of Tess with whom Angel has a second chance (396-98). Thus the novel ends at the beginning of a new cycle where the audience is compelled to complete the new cycle with Angel and Liza-Liu in their imagination in light of what happened to Tess. While the form of the novel leans toward the cyclical rather than the linear, the content also points at cycles. But before I detail the cyclical content of the novel, briefly tracing the publication and revision history of the novel will eventually help us see the cyclical content more clearly.

The publication history of *Tess* is important because it reveals Hardy’s increasing inclusion of mytho-pagan narratives, an aspect textual scholars have thus far missed, and these inclusions create new friction zones and further illuminate existing friction zones. Textual scholarship also reveals that the “additions” to subsequent editions were likely in Hardy’s original manuscript but were censored, exposing a social-cultural friction zone at work in Victorian England proper. In the general editor’s preface to the Penguin series of Hardy’s novels, Patricia Ingham reminds us that all of Hardy’s fourteen novels aside from *Jude the Obscure*, which originally appeared as a volume in the Wessex Novels, were originally conceived as individual texts; furthermore, excepting *Desperate Remedies*, and *Under the Greenwood Tree*, all of his novels were initially published as serials in periodicals, and thus all of them, unlike Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*, fell under the scrutiny of editorial censorship (viii). *Tess* was certainly no exception to this, appearing first in censored-form in the weekly *Graphic*, a family magazine (Higonnet xix). Before finding that publication venue, Hardy’s novel was rejected on moral grounds three times in a row by three separate publishers (Higonnet xix). Considering the novel’s rejection history and the
sensibilities of the *Graphic*’s editors and audience, it is surprising, then, to read Hardy’s explanatory note at the beginning of what is commonly referred to as the novel’s first three-volume edition: “The main portion of the following story appeared—with slight modifications—in the *Graphic* newspaper” (3). Several scholars subsequently question Hardy’s sincerity in his use of the phrase “slight modifications.” As Alfred A. Knopf puts it, the title—originally *Tess of the D’Urbervilles: A Pure Woman Presented Faithfully by Thomas Hardy*—and the text was subject to “mutilation inflicted by Hardy himself in the interests of censorship for those who had serialized it” (vii). Mary Ellen Chase also questions Hardy’s sincerity when he writes “slight modifications.” Chase notes that the overall form of the story is virtually identical from the serial edition to the first and later editions, but she argues that “in the essentials of style it [the 1889 serial edition] was inferior” to the 1891 novel edition (69-70). J. T. Laird’s seminal work, *The Shaping of Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, also takes a close look at Hardy’s revisions from manuscript to print, at times pointing to places where Hardy’s revisions work to point more toward the “landscape and the seasons as symbolic commentary on human and cosmic affairs” (53). A key change Laird highlights occurs in the “seduction (sic)” scene in the Chase (54). Hardy alters the original manuscript as follows:

> Darkness & silence ruled everywhere around. Above them rose the primeval yews & oaks of the Chase, & the in which were poised gentle roosting birds in their last nap; & around all about them where the hopping rabbits & hares. (54, emphasis added)

Although he does not name it as such, Laird goes on to point out a friction zone when he recognizes that “‘the primeval yews and oaks,’ especially the latter, carry with them overtones of mystical and sacrificial rites deriving from the classical
and Druidical sources” (54). And I would add that Hardy’s choice to alter the phrase “around them” to “all about them” brings a more all-encompassing feeling in which Tess is more a part of the mystical rather than a temporary guest or other to it. Though perhaps merely a revision for stylistic sensibilities as Mary Ellen Chase points out, the change in this phrase carries with it a more inclusionary rather than exclusionary relationship between Tess and the mystical world nonetheless. Simon Gatrell continues this conversation with his focus on what publishers now refer to as the “fifth and later editions,” though his work focuses mainly on changes in plot from the first to fifth editions. The common thread of interest here are Hardy’s choices to revise in light of problems with editorial censorship during his initial attempts to publish Tess. The major friction zones that these textual scholars have missed, however, are in places where he revises and adds passages where the word “pagan” is present.

There are two distinct places in the novel where Hardy later chooses to emphasize the word “pagan,” and while under less editorial pressure than he was while publishing in the Graphic periodical, he is able to subvert the Judeo-Christian editing process and add significantly to the novel’s friction between the sense of the pagan and the sense of the Judeo-Christian. As such, he is freer to more explicitly direct his audiences’ sympathies toward Tess and the pagan. In other words, he can more directly—though subtly—challenge the hegemonic.

One of the friction zones Hardy adds in later editions is with the ancestor D’Urberville’s name, “Sir Pagan.” Hardy, in fact, used a different name for the D’Urberville ancestor in earlier editions. At the very beginning of the novel, Parson Tringham, on his “whim,” refers to Tess’s father Jack Durbeyfield as “Sir John,” revealing to Mr. Durbeyfield that the Durbeyfields are the descendants of the D’Urbervilles, “who derive their descent from Sir Pagan D’Urberville, that
renowned knight who came from Normandy with William the Conqueror” (7-8). This is the interaction that throws into motion all subsequent plotlines in the novel, and it is worth pointing out now that it was at the “whim” of a church official, and the significance of the very name “Sir Pagan” and this knight being associated with William of Normandy will be discussed later in this chapter, but the focus for the moment are points of contention with the text’s revision as concerns the knight’s name. In the first edition and fifth and later editions, the knight’s name at this moment in the narrative is “Sir Pagan,” and another knight later in the line of D’Urbervilles is mentioned, specifically named “Brian” (spelled exactly as such in the text, an important distinction to note here) (Penguin 8, Macmillan 4). Toward the end of the novel, the epitaph on John Durbeyfield’s headstone diverges from the first edition to the fifth and later editions. The first edition reads “. . . Direct Descendant through and Illustrious Line from Sir Bryan (sic) D’Urberville, one of the Knights of the Conqueror” (Penguin 373). The fifth and later edition reads, “Direct Descendant through an Illustrious Line from Sir Pagan d’Urberville, one of the Knights of the Conqueror” (Macmillan 477). The inconsistency from the early “Sir Pagan D’Urberville” and “Sir Bryan D’Urberville” in the Penguin edition is an anomaly explainable only through access to the original manuscripts which are generally beyond the scope of this thesis (the ancestor is “Sir Pagan” in both editions in chapter 1; it is only in chapter 54 that the name is different). However, the very appearance of “Sir Bryan D’Urberville” raises several questions. It is spelled differently than the earlier mentioned “Brian,” a D’Urberville placed generations after the ancestor D’Urberville who came with William the Conqueror. “Sir Bryan D’Urberville” is also placed temporally prior to “Brian” by the epithet “one of the Knights of the Conqueror,” so there is no confusing “Sir Bryan D’Urberville” with “Sir Brian D’Urberville” – these are
clearly different knights placed in a different time. The conflation is between “Sir Pagan D’Urberville” and “Sir Bryan D’Urberville.” Even though the Penguin edition seems to confuse “Sir Pagan” and “Sir Bryan” in chapter 1, the appearance of “Sir Bryan D’Urberville” in an earlier edition reveals one of Hardy’s crucial revisions: he changes the name of the ancestor D’Urberville from “Bryan” to “Pagan.” And this is not the only addition of the word “pagan” to subsequent revisions.

Because of his close association with the Judeo-Christian hegemony, the significance of further associating Angel with Paganism in relation to his rejection of Tess cannot be understated, particularly because it is through revision that Hardy builds this association. In extending the paragraph where Angel Clair reflects on his “hasty judgment” and subsequent rejection of Tess, Hardy adds a dichotomy between the pagan and the Judeo-Christian and a more complex layer to the character of Angel in forcing him to try to deal with his own middleness (340; ch. 49). In a paragraph preceding the revision, Angel is described as having “mentally aged a dozen years,” reflecting that after “discredit[ing] the old systems of mysticism, he now began to discredit the old appraisements of morality. He thought they wanted re-adjusting” (340; ch. 49). Hardy extends this reflection in the fifth and later editions by adding this passage six paragraphs later: “His own parochialism made him ashamed. . . . His inconsistencies rushed upon him in a flood. He had persistently elevated Hellenic Paganism at the expense of Christianity” (434; ch. 49). What we gain by realizing this passage as an addition to the novel are hints at Hardy’s motives with his treatment of the pagan in the novel. Now we know that in Angel’s mind, there is a mutually exclusive relationship between the Judeo-Christian narrative and other pagan narratives, that Angel believes he is a part of a system that does not allow for him or anyone to
exist in the middle of these paradigms. The revised passage continues, “yet in [the Hellenic] civilization an illegal surrender was not certain disesteem” (434; ch. 49). The “illegal surrender” here points back to Tess’s “moment of passion,” or “seduction”—which I later join the argument that interprets this scene not as “seduction” but what it is, rape—but what Angel realizes is that in a moral code outside of the Judeo-Christian narrative, Tess would not be held in “disesteem.” Precisely at the moment that Angel begins to see the Judeo-Christian hegemonic structures under which he and Tess are subjects, he sees both his own middleness and Tess’s middleness. And I submit that Hardy, though subversive revision, wants us to see this, too.

The most poignant moment of Judeo-Christian subduction in the novel is the rape scene, and I associate carefully the Judeo-Christian with rape through analysis that positions Alec as the Christian (in-image-only) and Tess as the pagan; moreover, just as it is difficult to detect the Judeo-Christian hegemony’s appropriation of pagan narratives from within the Judeo-Christian language system (i.e. its terministic screens), it is equally difficult to detect the rape because of its ambiguous position in the narrative and the lack of language the Victorians had to talk about sex, let alone sexual assault. Ultimately, then, I see Hardy creating an allegory between Alec’s rape of Tess and the Judeo-Christian narrative’s rape of mytho-pagan narratives.

The ambiguity of the rape scene in Tess has received much critical attention for a century and continues to warrant attention because—as the most profound life-changing moment for the heroine, a moment that will affect her for the rest of the novel—it should be clear to readers and critics what exactly happened between Tess and Alec. This ambiguity is further complicated because it happens not just between chapters but between phases in the novel. While it is a standard Victorian
novel convention to divide a narrative into smaller chapter segments and larger book segments (or “phase” segments as is particular to *Tess*), we must ask why Hardy allows this life-changing action to occur, in a sense, off-stage, among the largest gaps in the novel’s narrative structure and chronological timeframe. This clearly leaves room for interpretation and skepticism as to what may have occurred; thus one primary concern for this analysis is to establish why Hardy intends for this act to be read as a rape. Some critics like Laird have chosen to appropriate the words “seduction” or “crime of passion” to the scene instead of “rape” (as noted by William Davis in his essay “The Rape of Tess: Hardy, English Law, and the Case for Sexual Assault”). Although her thoughtful analysis of the symbolic use of the color red in *Tess* is useful for understanding Tess as marked for sacrifice, Annie Ramel might criticize my interpretation of the passage as a rape, arguing instead that the sex between Tess and Alec was rather a “crime that passion finally drives her to commit” (102, emphasis added). It is my contention, by means of extending Davis’ analysis of the scene, that Hardy constructed the passage with the intent for it to be read as rape, and understanding the passage as such gives Hardy’s audience (and this analysis) a sort of touchstone with which to reflect upon other power relationships—like friction zones—which share similar characteristics of rape.

Hardy’s ambiguous presentation of the scene is consistent with the types of ambiguities the friction zone methodology allows us to name and deconstruct. Additionally, the ambiguity is appropriate to communicate rape for a variety of other related reasons, and understanding this scene as a literal rape is critical to interpreting the rest of the novel which is full other power dynamics sharing characteristics similar to rape and friction zones. My overall argument continues to be primarily concerned with understanding and dismantling the power dynamics
between the Judeo-Christian hegemonic and the non-hegemonic, thus the primary focus here is to establish Alec D’Urberville as the hegemonic Judeo-Christian image-only as the rapist of the pagan Tess; removing the proper names, we are left with a sense of the Judeo-Christian raping the pagan\(^3\), a much more violent yet accurate depiction of one of the core friction zones in the novel. But the goal of this chapter is to extend that analysis so that the rape of Tess becomes allegorical with the rape of the pagan which I believe Hardy also wants us to see.

On the one hand, the ambiguous presentation of the rape scene reflects the nature of rape itself. Literature has a voyeuristic quality: it allows readers to live a life through the eyes, minds, and feelings of others. Rape, however, is a horror that rarely has an audience. It is an anomaly that occurs only between the violators and the violated. Were Hardy to stay in mimesis during the rape scene it would be contrary to the nature of rape itself, and as I have already established, Hardy is clearly concerned with bringing unity to the content and the form of his fiction. So instead of mimesis, he switches to a diegetic mode to set the scene into motion then leaves the action to occur between phases, an ambiguous space where those not a part of the rape can experience the passage in the only space they realistically can—by not directly experiencing it.

The ambiguity of the scene also reflects Tess’s inert state during the violation, brought about by exhaustion, stress, and drugs, for all of which Alec is either directly or indirectly responsible. Her pre-existing fatigue is a result of having been awake for some 20 straight hours (waking up at 5am to work for Alec, the current time being 1am the following day), so she’s already suffering

\(^3\) To be clear, I do not mean in any way to diminish the value of deconstructing the scene to expose it for what it is on a literal level, that is to say, as sexual assault: that is a conversation that needs to continually happen in order to continue to expose and subsequently dismantle the power dynamics that allow for this to happen.
from sleep deprivation (69-70). Not only has she had to deal with Alec’s constant, unwanted advances, she has just had to deal with a group of drunk women while traveling on a dark road near midnight, one of whom was ready to engage with her in a fist-fight because of a sense of competition for Alec’s affections (67). Most profound of all, in/at the heart of the Chase, Alec “went to the horse, took a druggist’s bottle from a parcel on the saddle, and . . . held it to her mouth unawares” (72). Note that Tess did not consent to drinking from the druggist’s bottle similarly to how she did not consent to eating the strawberry Alec had offered her previously, and we should be aware of how Hardy is joining and modifying the Classical Demeter-Persephone-Hades myth cycle here. Like Tess, Persephone was also taken by Hades and tricked by him to eat the fruit of the underworld in order to bind her to him (Rayor, “Hymn to Demeter,” 370-375):

Alec also insisted on feeding the strawberry to Tess despite her resistance, and Tess only drank from the bottle forced into her mouth to “prevent the catastrophe” of spitting the liquid on and thereby ruining her “pretty frock [coat]” (42, 72). After briefly abandoning her to slumber, he returns and sees her, saying only, “Tess!”—and Hardy poignantly writes, “There was no answer” (73). So perhaps one of Hardy’s reasons for having the rape take place in an ambiguous space in the narrative is because it reflects Tess’s current state of inertia, and Davis’ argument generally agrees with this conclusion. His analysis of Tess from a legal perspective also informs us that according to English law of the time—law with which Hardy would definitely have been familiar—rape was defined has having “unlawful and carnal knowledge of a woman by force, and against her will,” yet this can also be further extended as a sexual act that occurs absent of consent (223). Given that Tess was inert, she was incapable of giving consent, therefore by legal definition, what occurred between Alec and Tess was rape. This parallels the power dynamics
between the Judeo-Christian narrative’s appropriation of some mytho-pagan narratives while rejecting others which, again, create friction zones in text and culture writ large. Furthermore, the ambiguity in the narrative presentation of the rape scene along with Tess’s inert condition also has the potential to reflect the language with which the Victorians used to discuss rape.

Blurred lines between seduction, violation, and violence are some of the key ingredients in the recipe of rape culture that brewed in Victorian England (and largely hold true through the current cultural climate on both sides of the Atlantic). Young men and women are and were brought up believing that it is “not nice” for proper girls to express sexual desire, and “nice girls” do not say yes (at least when first propositioned); thus young men are indoctrinated with the notion that a “no” from a woman is really the prelude to or an unspoken “yes,” that he must continually pursue his target beyond the first and subsequent “no” responses. Yet for the Victorians, it was not as simple as “nice girls do not say yes.” Kim Stevenson writes of the public discourse which sexual violence against women was reported or, rather, “encrypted,” just as I believe the Judeo-Christian narrative at times “encrypts” its appropriation of pagan narratives. She observes that the language used in the public sphere to present images of sexual violence against women was “often ambiguous and desexualized” (232). She also notes that the voices of women in these public conversations were largely “muted” even in the case of “victims [sic]” of rape, though they could sometimes make their voices heard “in other ways” by means of nonconformity (232-33). This “muted” sense of language to describe rape is clearly manifested in Tess through Tess’s inertia and the ambiguous space of the rape in the narrative. Kim Stevenson also writes about blurred lines between seduction and violation through studies of actual court cases. Of particular interest is her study of Matilda, “apparently virginal and true
to stereotypical expectation, did not know the difference between rape and attempted rape and probably,” similarly to Tess, “thought that any assault short of penetration was in fact the full act” (237). So in an age when women were (kept) in the dark about the physical act of sex, how could they even speak about rape? How could they know the difference between rape and consent, between seduction and violation? What does consent even mean when cultural expectations of women, in a sense, forbid consent? This is the culture that keeps women in the dark so that they can be raped in the dark—just like the dark setting Hardy describes preceding the rape of Tess, where “Darkness and silence ruled everywhere around” (73). Or, as put by Kim Stevenson, “women (and indeed men) became increasingly ignorant, and no doubt confused about the language of sex and sexuality” (239). What’s most troubling is that this hegemony, by sanitizing language, prevents women from being able to offer an accurate account of this violation: it keeps the act of rape as an ambiguous act. This is exactly what happened to Matilda in the case Kim Stevenson examines, and it is exactly what happened to Tess. The ambiguity of the rape scene in Tess is ultimately completely appropriate not because it conforms to the linguistic standards of Hardy’s day but because it mirrors the reality of rape of Hardy’s day.

The friction zone framework recognizes the intrinsic interests of censorship of pagan narratives by the Judeo-Christian hegemonic, for those narratives which have not been subsumed (read: “raped”) by the hegemonic are consequently named by the hegemonic as blasphemous; likewise, the same hegemony works to silence sexuality, particularly female sexuality. Problems with censorship in the publishing of early editions of Tess is well documented and previously elaborated on in this chapter, and the ambiguity concerning the rape of Tess may additionally reflect Hardy’s concern about adhering to his publisher’s and audiences’
expectations. To put it another way, the ability to mass-produce periodicals for the increasingly literate masses caused trepidation among those in the public sphere; it was thought that literature that directly expressed incidents of misconduct had the potential to “inspire youths to commit criminal acts” (K. Stevenson 234). This is perhaps yet another reason why Hardy chose to have the rape scene happen not only between chapters but between phases in the novel. It is a response to current public opinion on the language used to describe (or rather not describe) the act of rape (or using the word ‘rape’ itself), yet all of the details surrounding the event convincingly lead us to the conclusion of rape. It may be added that Hardy’s ultimate goal in this case is to call attention to the public and legal discourses of sexual violence and perhaps revise them. After all, even though Tess is a rape survivor, she does not survive the narrative.

Her rape and her survival thereof is hardly acknowledged by others in the novel; instead, Tess becomes the focus of negative energies from those who surround her. Her mother, unlike Demeter, does not bring about the new spring cycle with Tess’s return but instead sends her away because the Judeo-Christian hegemonic structures demand that Tess be treated as a ruined woman. Angel, who even though through his “Hellenic Paganism” terministic screen eventually realizes he made a mistake in forsaking her, does indeed abandon her initially. And Alec, in the late phases of the novel, stalks and ultimately absconds with her from Angel after Angel’s “Hellenic Paganism” finally allows him to value Tess for who and what she is as opposed to what was done to her. So for Hardy, in order for rape survivors to survive in the long run, a new language and a new hegemony that can communicate human sexuality—both consensual and nonconsensual—must be adopted in order to expose and cope with this violence as well as give the survivors of rape a voice and a chance for long term survival.
Now that the case is laid for the rape of Tess, my attention now turns to laying the case for the rape of the pagan by the Judeo-Christian hegemony as a core friction zone of the novel by clearly establishing Tess as the pagan and Alec as the hegemonic Judeo-Christian in-image-only.

Phase the Sixth makes a clear case for Alec D’Urberville being representative of the in-name-only Judeo-Christian hegemonic, for the subtitle of the phase is “The Convert” who is revealed to be none other than Alec. Certain people—particularly Alec as a White cisgender male—have the agency to merely wear the “Christian” as an image, a privilege not afforded to all. Hardy anticipates this problem when he describes Alec’s dress as “half clerical, a modification which had changed his expression sufficiently to abstract the dandyism from his features” (305); and he describes Alec later again as wearing a “semi-clerical costume” (315). This is enough to give pause “to Tess’s sense” and consider Alec’s transformation in a series of dyads:

The lip-shapes that had meant seductiveness were now made to express supplication; the glow on the cheek that yesterday could be translated as riotousness was evangelized to-day into splendor of pious enthusiasm; animalism had become fanaticism; Paganism to Paulinism. (305)

Hardy’s use of the phrase “were now made” suggests not a sense of authenticity but a sense of forgery. Furthermore, the shrinking length of the dyad-phrases draws particular attention to the last, shortest pair, “Paganism to Paulinism.” For a novel that overall seems to cull our sympathy for Tess and the pagan as both Bonica and I argue, it seems odd that Hardy would position the idea of Paganism as a pejorative term—as the un-preferred pair to this transformation. Too, it would challenge the entire premise of this analysis if Hardy desired to associate both
Tess and Alec-the-rapist as antecedently pagan; however, what this use of the term “Paganism” reveals is Tess’s own subjection to Judeo-Christian terministic screens, placing her, similarly to Tennyson’s Arthur and Merlin, in a friction zone. As the hegemonic, the Judeo-Christian has the privilege of naming things, so even though Tess is pagan, she has no words to recognize herself as such in a way that escapes the good/evil binary on which the Judeo-Christian hegemonic insists. The same power dynamics prevent her from having a language to name Alec as her rapist—she is only able to conceive of the word “pagan” as an opposite to Christianity, accurate as though that may not be. Here is another place where Hardy reveals how the Judeo-Christian hegemonic prevents Tess from walking her own perennial path toward understanding her place in the world.

As the first phase transitions into the second phase—the rape of Tess bridging the gap between the two—Hardy shows how Tess’s naturalistic, folkloric, and pagan qualities are also violated, instantiating another friction zone. Early descriptions of Tess in the novel illustrate her as a figure of the countryside and nature as well as a willing and content participant of folklore and pagan ritual. Our first sense of Tess as a young woman of nature and progeny of Celtic paganism is found simply in her family names. The “field” syllable in “Durbeyfield” immediately ties Tess to the country, and this is not contradicted by her ancient name, D’Urberville, for while I do recognize the phonetics of “urban” and “ville” in her ancient name—which will become important in Alec’s family’s appropriation of the name—the full name of “that renowned knight” from whom Tess is descended is “Sir Pagan D’Urberville” (8, emphasis added). In the introductory chapter I detail the etymology of the word “pagan,” revealing its origins as a Roman label for “country dwellers” and those who are not miles Christi, so the connection furthering Tess’s association with the country and idea
of paganism should be clear. Even in Tess’s ancient name, then, she is connected to the country and paganism, a sharp contrast to Alec Stoke-D’Urberville’s dandyism, the contrast in the association of the D’Urberville name between the characters compounding this friction zone even further.

In contrast to Tess’s family’s attempted reappropriation of the D’Urberville name, Alec’s father’s “work of imagination” in “annexing” the name D’Urberville “for himself and his heirs eternally” is only a façade that strips all traces of “Sir Pagan” from the tradition of the name (39). This leaves the name representing Alec with only “urban” and “ville” to consider, Hardy’s careful choice of the word “annex” drawing attention to the friction zone between country and town. So in the names themselves, Tess is clearly united with the rural and the pagan while Alec is positioned on the side of urban with only the whimsical appropriation of the tradition Tess’s name represents. And as Tess is eventually destroyed by the Judeo-Christian hegemony, none of this is unlike the evolution of the word “pagan” from “country-dweller” to “those who are not miles Christi,” and thus branded as heathen others.

Tess is further situated in echoes of paganism with our first glance of her in the novel at the May-day dance, and the subtle hand that Hardy uses to weave paganism into the narrative reflects the subordinate position of paganism in the current Christian/Pagan hierarchy. In other words, the pagan aspects of the novel must occur largely on a symbolic level. Hardy writes “some old customs . . . remain. . . . Many, however, linger only in a metamorphosed or disguised form” including the May-day dance in the “guise” of the “club revel” (13). This is a perfect example of the guise of pagan and folk tradition where language acceptable to the Christian hegemonic simply renames a pagan event (yet the event remains intact; it is only the language that appropriates the reality).
Nash recognises this all too well when he illustrates the symbolic use of folklore throughout the novel with special attention given to the dance, itself an instance of reviving the ancient Druidic festival of Beltane (40-41). Tess’s various adornments at the dance—a white frock, a peeled willow wand, and a bunch of white flowers, for example—at once illustrate her purity through all of the white colors as well as her connection with nature through the willow wand and the flowers (13-14). She also echoes the image of the druids, the ancient Celtic priests themselves, as lingering images of druids depict them garbed in all white (Barnes 126). Additionally, Nash recognises the significance of the red ribbon she wears and the fact that she’s the only one in the company of dancers who wears one, as it symbolically represents the fire festival element from the ancient Beltane festival; it also serves to foreshadow the tragedy of the novel, marking her for sacrifice in order to purify the agrarian community, ultimately illustrating the suffer-sacrifice-death-rebirth cycle that Beltane and Tess represent (Nash 41); additionally, this is a cycle that the Druids believed in as well. This rich symbolism and imagery clearly place Tess in this world, yet the natural imagery used to characterize Tess does not stop at the May-day dance.

Through using natural imagery to bring Tess to life on the page, Hardy continues to create friction zones between Tess and Alec with scenes following the May Day fertility ritual, Alec’s entrance into the novel disrupting and violating Tess not only on a physical level but on the natural level in which she lives as well. In addition to Nash’s take on the symbolic use of folklore throughout the novel, John Humma’s analysis clearly illustrates how deeply Tess is rooted in natural imagery, also at times touching on the folkloric connection between Tess and nature: her holmberry red lips, for example, further connect Tess as a symbol of life based on the treatment of red holly berries in English folklore (65-66).
Annie Ramel is also concerned with the significance of the red colors throughout the novel, the aforementioned red ribbon being no exception. While her primary argument centers on the appropriation of the color red in the closing pages of the novel, she also recognises that the color red becomes emblematic for Tess’s sexuality, sexual violence, and eventual sacrifice where the red ribbon she wore at the May-day dance foreshadows the blood flow at the loss of her virginity, “the fault that brands her as a fallen woman” (102). So it is not surprising that when Alec comes into Tess’s life, another red berry foreshadows and ultimately appropriates natural imagery and the color red from that of life to that of sexual violation. On her first visit to the Stoke-D’Urberville estate, Alec asks if Tess likes strawberries, to which she responds, “Yes…when they come” (41-42). In other words, Tess would have strawberries when it is natural (when they’re usually ripe) and on her terms, yet Alec persists despite her directly saying “no” and “putting her fingers between his hand and her lips” adding, “’I would rather take it in my own hand,’” and he essentially force-feeds her (41-42). She then consumes them “in an abstracted half-hypnotized state” (42). So on a level intimately connected with nature and how Tess has been illustrated up to this point in the novel, Hardy foreshadows Alec’s sexual violation of Tess through physical violation and violation of Tess’s own perennial quest to make sense of and enjoy the world around her.

Hardy also expresses how the natural world fades when the urban world forces itself into the natural world, mirroring how the Judeo-Christian narrative attempts to fold pagan narratives into itself. As the novel’s second phase begins, after Alec has subsumed her, Tess is several times described using language that is contrary to the natural imagery she has been hitherto described, matching precisely
how the D’Urberville estate in Tantridge is set in contrast to The Chase in the first phase of the novel:

. . . a truly venerable tract of forest land, one of the few remaining woodlands in England of undoubted primaeval date, wherein Druidical mistletoe was still found on aged oaks, and where enormous yew-trees, not planted by the hand of man, grew. . . . All of this sylvan antiquity, however, though visible from The Slopes, was outside the immediate boundaries of the estate. (38)

Alec and his estate are seen as separate and distinct from this primeval wilderness, and this is the place where he rapes Tess. Tess, having been subsumed by Alec, is temporarily seen as distinct from the wilderness as well. While she carries a basket “like a person who did not find any especial burden in material things,” the first adverb phrase used to describe Tess’s actions in the second phase of the novel is how she stops to rest “in a mechanical way” (75). While the first phrase is something we might expect from a woman of nature, the second certainly is not. Soon after Alec finds her, he “mechanically [lights] a cigar” and they have conversation that is characterized as “broken” and “unemotional” (76). The similar adverbs Hardy uses clearly expresses how Alec’s encroachment into Tess’s life has influenced her. Although characteristic of every time Alec has kissed or has attempted to kiss Tess, the kiss immediately preceding Alec’s exit from this section of the novel is especially telling of Tess’s removal from nature: while he “[imprints] a kiss upon her cheek,” she “[remains] like a marble term” where her eyes “vaguely rested upon the remotest trees in the lane” (78). In the presence of Alec, Tess is clearly removed from nature and struggles with the ability to act in resonance with the natural world; she can only view it from afar in a half-hypnotized state. Following this action, Hardy does return to a nature-driven
metaphor to describe Tess’s skin: “his lips touching cheeks that were damp and
smoothly chill as the skin of the mushrooms growing around them” (78). What’s
especially poignant here is that Hardy is not using nature-based symbols of life to
c characterize Tess but nature-based symbols of death and decay to characterize her
in this instant. Finally, in the moments after Alec leaves, Hardy invokes even
deeper natural imagery and symbolism to describe Tess: “Sad October and her
sadder self seemed the only two existences haunting that lane” (79). Not only does
Hardy personify a season and the passing of time by characterizing it as “sad,” he
connects that with the current emotional state of the “sadder” Tess. This is
certainly in line with Bonaparte’s reading of Tess as a modern re-telling of the
Persephone myths where the rape of Persephone by Hades brings about the
seasons, the “saddest” of which is when she is kept from her mother, Demeter,
during the fall and winter months. Ultimately, what’s really at stake in this section
of the novel is Tess’s return to the natural world while Alec is no longer
encroaching or forcing himself upon her. However, Tess is not out of the woods
(or, rather, back into the woods) yet.

Just as the systematic appropriation or obliteration of outside narratives by
the Judeo-Christian narrative marginalizes the pagan, once appropriated by Alec,
Tess is unable to escape the fissure caused by the friction zone and fully
reintegrate herself into the natural world. As she begins her journey home, she is
again assaulted, this time by an evangelical narrative that further marginalizes her.
She comes across an unnamed man known only as an “artisan” who, in a sense,
rapes Tess with language. Hardy describes the words she reads—“Thy, damnation,
slumbereth, not”—as a stark contrast against the natural landscape where
“vermillion words shone forth” and “seemed to shot themselves out and make the
atmosphere ring” (79-80). With a nod toward the color of red being appropriated
by this convert, we can trace how the earlier symbolism of the color continues to develop in the novel—in this case, not as a part of Tess herself but as something that causes her cognitive dissonance: “the words entered Tess with accusatory horror. It was as if this man had known her recent history; yet he was a total stranger” (80). Not surprisingly after this case of linguistic and spiritual rape, Hardy once again uses the adverb “mechanically” to describe how Tess walks beside the artisan (80). After Tess explains how she finds the text “Horrible,” “crushing,” and “killing,” the Artisan goes on to say, “That’s what they are meant to be! . . . Not but what this is a very good text for the rural districts” (80). So in a single chapter following the rape of Tess, Hardy illustrates how Tess is not only temporarily removed from the natural world of which she is a part, she and the rural world she represents is also raped by the Christian hegemonic, compelling her to behave mechanically as opposed to naturally.

While the initial natural imagery after Alec disappears from the narrative is primarily that of sadness, death, and decay, Tess’s life does return to a more positive natural harmony after her pregnancy and the death of her child. In a sense, while tragic, the child who was fathered by Alec was the last thread that attached Tess to Alec. Free of that attachment, Tess is finally able to reintegrate herself with the natural world, all of which happens at Talbothays, the setting of the novel that illustrates, at least at times, the most agrarian harmony and the greatest degree of Tess’s contentment, and this is so for a variety of reasons. Alicia Carroll recognises one of them in her thoughtful analysis of novel in the context of breastfeeding and being a dairymaid. On the one hand, participating in a lactation process that serves to nourish a great many people is a role that allows Tess to sublimate her failure at nursing her own child; however, this does not come without its own complications. As Carroll suggests, “the diluted milk at
Talbothays suggests a correspondence to Tess’s own disembodied and disembodying experience of maternity” and that her arrival at the dairy “constructs breastfeeding among the novel’s rural labors lost to industrialization” (179). However, one cannot help but read a certain sense of harmony between the dairymaids on the land when Hardy writes “A field-man is a personality afield; a field-woman is a portion of the field; she has somehow lost her own margin, imbibed the essence of her surrounding, and assimilated herself with it” (88). While Carroll’s concerns are absolutely well-read, I would submit Talbothays—in addition to placing Tess as a cog in the dairy machine necessitated by the nutritional demands on a growing urban population—is essentially a contested middle-ground between a purely rural and purely agricultural-industrial zone, and Tess is able to thrive in this middle-zone only for a short time. Beyond harmony with the land, Tess also finds harmony with people at Talbothays.

The country denizens of Talbothays, especially the women, offer an important contrast to the more urban women of Tantridge in that the women at Talbothays provide Tess with a sense of solidarity as opposed to competition. Recall that one of the final factors that leads to the rape of Tess is the woman known as The Ace of Spades who threatens Tess with physical and emotional violence because of her sense of competition with Alec (67). The women of Talbothays, while feeling the same sense of competition with Tess for Angel’s affections, do not threaten Tess. On the contrary, the country women Marian, Izz, and Retty—despite a variety of misunderstandings—remain mostly friendly and helpful to Tess throughout the novel, ultimately supporting her union with Angel.

Tess’s time at Flintcomb-Ash offers another instance of a friction zone which illustrates the novel’s trajectory from ruralism, to agrarian balance, to a more agri-industrial paradigm as especially depicted by the Steam-threshing
machine. “Close under the eaves of the stack . . . was the red tyrant that the women had come to serve . . . the threshing-machine . . . kept up a despotic demand upon the endurance of their muscles and nerves” (325). This passage illustrates a landscape where the farmers are no longer a part of the land but, rather, are a cog in the industrial machine, subject to the demands of the people who wield this new industrial power. Roger Ebbatson also sees the relationship between the more harmonious imagery Hardy uses to describe life at Talbothays versus life at Flintcomb-Ash, and the industrial steam-threshing machine plays a clear role in that distinction. It is a clear representation of mechanized and urban encroachment into rural life and carries with it the interested adjective of “despotic,” which points out a sort of tyrannical power relationship between those who work the farm and those who reap the rewards of the farm. It is certainly no coincidence that Alec D’Urberville returns to haunt Tess in full force at this point in the novel, entering the scene having shed his Convert, “semi-clerical” façade in order to pursue Tess once again, even going so far as to shift the blame of his religious failure on to her (314). Alec and the industrial steam-threshing machine are also similarly described: both are initially silhouetted and obscured by darkness which suggests a connection between Alec, the Urban, and mechanization (Hardy 325, 337).

Analyses concerning rape, religion, and the rise of industry in Tess are, I hope, augmented by being treated together. Each individual seed informs and complicates the other so that the novel as a whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts. It is perhaps Hardy’s goal to give his readers pause by forcing them to consider not only how power relationships between dominant and subordinate groups are cyclical but how each group is affected by its interaction with the other. In Tess, there are definitely those who have the potential to reap the rewards of
exerting their power in these old and new realms, but Hardy’s image of the rising, silent black flag of justice cautions us to the nature of power dynamics that marginalize and criminalize those who simply do not wear the image of the social, cultural, and religious hegemony.
CHAPTER 5: FRICTION ZONES FROM ANTECEDENT TO HEIRLOOM

This thesis, through its exploration of friction zones, aims to reveal cultural, structural, and systematic privileges by deconstructing the unearned entitlements that lead to those privileges (particularly as concerns positions within and outside of the Judeo-Christian hegemony). Moreover, I mean to extend this conversation by looking at an entitlement system that is more specific than merely White and male, for the persistent hegemony in the West consists of a certain type of “White” and a certain type of male. Perhaps the best way to explain what is essentially a modified feminist deconstruction approach to textual interpretation and how it is relevant to contemporary cultural-criticism is to set this approach in relation to Peggy McIntosh’s landmark work, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Hidden Knapsack of Privilege.” Through this new hermeneutical approach to a selection of Victorian texts, I hope to unpack and deconstruct the "hidden knapsack" of White cisgender male Christian privilege as it existed for the Victorians (and continues to exist today as permeated and synthesized from the perspective of 19th century British Empire through current day Britain and, by extension thereof, present day United States).

When we begin to move toward a “more finely differentiated taxonomy of privilege,” as McIntosh urges, our interests in unpacking hidden privileges and unearned entitlements remains the same (13). The desired results from this analysis are likewise the same, for as McIntosh argues, “some of these [perquisites of being White] are only what one would want for everyone in a just society, and others give license to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant and destructive” (13, emphasis added). So as this thesis moves forward with the mission of unpacking the hidden knapsack of privilege of White Cisgender Male Christian privilege, the
way Christian and non-Christian literary and narrative objects are treated by the hegemonic becomes what I would characterize as slightly modified feminist deconstruction with the goal of making the perquisites afforded to the Judeo-Christian hegemonic available to all. One might say that I am essentially substituting the “woman” in feminism with myths and pagans; just as feminist deconstruction seeks to uncover the value of female experience despite having been silenced and marginalized for centuries, my analysis seeks to uncover how paganism and folklore have likewise been marginalized and appropriated by the Judeo-Christian tradition. The analysis, the critical lens, and the potential revelations therein are the same; merely the subjects of the lens are different.

Unpacking the invisible knapsack of Christian privilege is a challenge unique from unpacking the unearned entitlements from being white and being male because being Christian is not something one is born with—it is, in many cases, merely an image that some may (and some must) choose to wear. Although Daniel J. Boorstin’s concerns about human images and “pseudo-events” were primarily aimed at the idea of “celebrity,” I believe his ideas concerning human images are useful in helping us to understand what I mean by “Christian image” (58). Boorstin argues that our own need for human perfection is the channel through which celebrities are generated and venerated, “his relation to morality and even to reality. . .highly ambiguous” (58). Essentially, we create celebrities based on “our exaggerated expectations of human greatness” (58). Focusing on the word “our,” we must query the antecedent to that collective pronoun: “our” as in the aggregate expectations of literally every single person (in which case the hegemonic by its very nature would be dominant), or “our” as in the aggregate expectations particularly of the hegemonic itself? In either case, when Boorstin refers to “our exaggerated expectations,” it is impossible to consider any “our”
without the hegemonic in mind. And that includes, for the West, the Judeo-Christian structures that have made up a significant portion of the hegemonic’s terministic screens. Allowing images of this sort to become the collective expectations of ourselves is certainly problematic, and Boorstin discusses this at length—but where Boorstin focuses on celebrity, I turn my eye to the body politic, Christian images, and political representation.

There are friction zones concerning representation in government office which expose a Judeo-Christian hegemonic that is attempting to overwrite current cultural and historical narratives, and as a socio-political friction zone that has such widespread implications, it is one that in my view must be brought to the cultural consciousness of all. Government representation in the United States and the United Kingdom has simply not kept pace with the growing demographic of those who religiously self-identify as “None,” or “Unaffiliated,” or “other,” suggesting that if one self-identifies or is labeled as something other than an Abrahamic faith, there is little to no chance of being fairly represented or being elected as a representative. To put it bluntly, in the United States and the United Kingdom in particular, my choice to use the phrase “Abrahamic faith” is too kind, for in the United States there have been only three presidents on record as “unaffiliated” and over half have been members specifically of an Episcopal or Presbyterian church, leaving the rest of the Abrahamic faiths and other Christian denominations and subsects severely underrepresented (“The Religious Affiliations of United States Presidents”). On the other hand, contrary to popular belief, several of the early American presidents and other Framers of The Constitution were either Deists or Unitarians which directly contradicts a popular notion that the United States was founded as a “Christian Nation.” Recalling the historicity of the Founders and Framers’ faith prevents the United States’
democracy from being a complete irony in light of Reza Aslan’s recent comments that “no religion either encourages or discourages democracy. . .because religions are in their nature absolutist. . .reject[ing] the principles of liberalism and popular sovereignty that are at the heart of the democratic ideal” (“Democracy May Be Rejected by Religions, but Not by Believers”). Still, a significant portion of the United States’ citizenship believes that the United States is a Christian nation founded on Christian principals. More specifically on the legislative side, Tracy Miller from the Pew Research Center reveals that although the 114th Congress is more religiously diverse than the congresses of the 1960s and 70s, the relative representation in congress is lagging behind the religious demographics of its constituency in one key category: [religiously] unaffiliated. This would include those who self-identify as agnostic or atheist. According to another Pew Research poll, over 16% of United States citizens self-identify as unaffiliated—including Agnostics and Atheists—and that demographic is the fastest growing demographic in the United States ("Religious Landscape Survey"). Conversely, there is presently one member in the United States congress who self-identifies as [religiously] unaffiliated. If the congressional demographics accurately reflected its constituency in terms of religious affiliation, there would be at least 16 senators and 70 house representatives publically unaffiliated with religion. I want to emphasize the notion of being publically unaffiliated here because, as I argue earlier in this chapter, public affiliation must conform to the public’s image or, put another way, the ideal projected by the hegemony—so while on paper some representatives may be affiliated with some religion, this is something that must be done in order to have a real chance at election; privately, they may indeed be unaffiliated, and I see this as problematic because it denigrates all worldviews encompassed by “unaffiliated,” instantiating one of the most serious cultural
friction zones of contemporary American politics. Incidentally, the United Kingdom’s representation is equally problematic.

In 2014, Matthew Purvis discussed religious representation in Parliament in Lords Library Note 17; therein, he suggests that because members of the House of Commons are under no obligation to disclose their religious affiliation, any attempt to compile those demographics would be at best a blurred segment of the whole picture (3). As a nation with an official Church, of course it stands to reason that the Anglican hegemony would operate under the assumption that no political leader would be “unaffiliated” or “other,” thus the system has no invention for tracing those demographics. Extending this friction zone, Kevin Theakston of the Political Studies Association in the United Kingdom recently noted that "nearly every British prime minister of the last half-century has been a self-professed Christian, their faith important to them even if they did not (in office) speak as openly about it as [David] Cameron has now done” (“‘Doing God’ in Number 10: British prime ministers and religion”). Like the United States, the United Kingdom’s Office for National Statistics reveals that the demographic for citizens self-identifying as having no religious affiliation far outweighs the corresponding representation in British government, the “no religion” category rising to a startling 25% (“The percentage of the population with no religion has increased in England and Wales”). Clearly one must wear the Christian image in order to be a political and legislative representative even though the demographic for “no religious affiliation” is and has been increasing in recent years. I believe, then, that this thesis is not only pertinent to Victorian studies, for friction zones and the scrutiny of the Judeo-Christian hegemony is also topical if not imperative to our own time.
Ultimately, while my analysis labors to expose fissures and the cultural cataclysm created by friction zones, my hope is that once the power structures that support these patterns are exposed through close literary analysis, we can collectively move toward catalyzing a greater sense of cultural togetherness. Just as Hardy did in his explanatory note to Tess, I invite us to reflect on the “well-worn sentence of St. Jerome’s: ‘If an offence come out of the truth, better is it that the offence come than that the truth be concealed.’” The necessary first step in this process—a painful first step for many, to be sure—is to recognize and then renegotiate the Judeo-Christian hegemony’s insistence on fixity; otherwise, we risk the cataclysm of our own Camelot and our own Wessex as we put many at the risk of living in a silent middle-zone like Tennyson’s Merlin or in a fatal friction zone like King Arthur and Tess D’Urberville.


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