

Reinterpretation of Alfred Lord Tennyson's Selected Poetry: A Thematic Analysis

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Abstract

Alfred Lord Tennyson was the most loved and acclaimed poet of the Victorian Era. He was born on 06 August 1809 in Somersby, Lincolnshire, England. He belonged to an influential family as his father was a clergyman having a large family. Alfred Lord Tennyson had 11 siblings and he showed his interest for writing in his early age. When he was merely thirteen years old, he wrote a 6000-line poem in epic style. His father was suffering from mental breakdowns and had an addiction for alcoholism. One of Tennyson's brothers would quarrel with his father and another was sent to mental asylum. One more brother had opium addiction like T.S. Eliot. Tennyson entered Trinity College, Cambridge in 1827 and he wrote *Poems by Two Brothers* in collaboration with his brother there. Tennyson had close friendship with Arthur Henry Hallam and both of them went to Europe tour in 1830 and 1832. Tennyson wrote an elegy In memoriam on Hallam's death. He dedicated some of his poem to Hallam. He published *Poems Chiefly Lyrical* in 1830 and then *Poems* in 1832. People criticized these books and consequently he did not write for nine years. He got emotionally attached with Emily Sellwood. He rose to fame in 1942 and when his elegy published in 1850, he became the most popular poet of England. He became the Poet Laureate of England after the death of William Wordsworth and when Samuel Rogers refused this offer. He got married with Emily Sellwood. He died on October 6, 1892 and was buried in Westminster Abbey. Present paper is an attempt to analyse Tennyson's selected poems from multiple angles.

Keywords- Feminist Stance, Human Tendencies, Pastoral Tragedy, Rural Life

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Alfred Lord Tennyson has written many poems, ballads and a play *The Foresters* (1891). “The Lady of Shalott” is also a lyrical ballad which is based on La Damigella di Scalot. It is a tragic tale of Elaine of Astolat – a noblewoman who was kept as a prisoner in the tower. It inspired the Pre-Raphaelites and the followers. Tennyson wrote this ballad in 1833 in 20 stanzas while in 1842, it was published in 19 stanzas. The origin of this ballad is legend of Elaine of Astolat. He uses the stance of romantic poets of his time as Edgar F. Shannon Jr. also writes, “By the time [Tennyson] left Cambridge, [he] was fully responsive to the fresh impetus of the great Romantics” (212).

Alfred Lord Tennyson was much famous for this poem. The poet describes that there is crop of barley and rye near river. The poet describes the island of Shalott in the first stanza where there are lily flowers. There are willow and aspen trees, and a cool breeze blows there. The poet describes the building of the fort that there are four gray walls and four gray towers where the Lady of Shalott has been imprisoned. The poet describes that many heavy and light ships pass through the river and asks a question whether someone has seen the Lady of Shalott waving her hand or sitting at the casement. The poet describes that the reapers of the barley hear the song sung by the lady of Shalott. These people become much tired by evening while collecting the sheaves and recognise her voice. In the second part, the poet describes what the Lady of Shalott does. She weaves a magic web. She has a curse that she cannot stop her action of weaving this web. When she moves to her magic mirror, she looks the images of the world. She sees the nearby highway. She sees some village people doing some parade and then there are some market girls who have worn red clothes. The poet describes that some happy girls, an abbot on his old horse, a curly shepherd lad or a knight's servant in red clothes pass that way. The color of the mirror is blue and this mirror shows her some magic sights such as the funeral scenes, lights and music. When the moon is over the head at night, she notices that two lovers come on the roof to enjoy the moonlit night. The Lady of Shalott now feels tired of such kind of life.

In the third part of the poem, the poet describes that the lady sees a man who was coming through the barley sheaves. His armour was shining and he was Sir Lancelot – a Red Cross knight. The poet has taken this character from Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. The bridle was glittering like stars in golden galaxy due to diamonds. The bells were also ringing

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on the bridle. He has hung a baldric (a wide belt over the shoulders to waist) and a silver bugle was hanging and all this was making a notice. He saddle was made of weather and the thick-jewellery was shining. His helmet was burning in the sunlight. It was a feathered helmet. The poet compares his helmet with a meteor or a shooting star. His forehead was shining in sunlight. His hair was moving from one side to another in air. Sir Lancelot was singing a song “Tirra Lirra” which has been taken from Shakespeare’s play *The Winter’s Tale*.

After seeing Sir Lancelot in the mirror, the Lady of Shalott left her loom forgetting the curse and moved thrice in her room. She saw water lily flowers and saw Camelot which was forbidden for her. The web flew outside and the glass also started cracking and she says, “The curse is come upon me”. Here the third part ends and there are some changes in the soundings and in nature. The Pre-Raphaelite poets also liked the simplicity of Nature,” Martin Meisel writes that “they worried that their art would inevitably be a poor substitute for Nature proper” (340).

The east wind starts blowing and the yellow woods were waning and the river and banks were complaining. It was raining heavily also. The outside world was also reflecting her plight. She came down and found a willow tree and in the front part of the ship she wrote her name. She was looking like a seer who has come to know about her bad future. She loosed her chains and she lay down and the river was carrying her away. She was wearing a white robe and the leaves were falling on her in the night. Her ship was flowing among the willowy hills and fields and the reapers or the farmers heard her last song. These people heard her mournful and holy song. Her blood was freezing and her eyes were getting dark. Before reaching to the first house of the Chamelot, she dies. The people – knights, burgher, lord and dame – came on the wharf and saw her name on the ship. The people were disturbed to see this sight. The people made cross sign for their protection. Sir Lancelot says that she has a lovely face and Hod has given her all that grace. He says so because she is dead.

The poem “Ulysses” has been taken from homer’s Greek epic *Odyssey*. Ulysses is a Greek hero and Tennyson has composed this poem in 1833. It has been written in the form of a dramatic monologue. Dante’s *Inferno* also has this character. Ulysses returns to his home Ithaca after the Trojan War. He does not like the domestic life. That’s why he says, “It little

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profit that an idle king". His house is on the barren rocks and he orders sitting near the hearth. He is making laws for his uncivilized subjects. He says:

I cannot rest from travel

I will drink life to the lees:

He has enjoyed his travelling with the people in the dry and rainy season. He says, "I am become a name" as he has a hungry heart to know this world. He was given the honour and respect wherever he went. He enjoyed the battle of Troy with his fellows. He says that "I am a part of all that I have met". He further says:

How dull it is to pause, to make an end

To rust unburneish'd, not to shine in use.

He says that this remaining life is also giving him a new hope. He is old but still he wants to gain more knowledge in his life. He tells about his son Telemachus whom he is giving his kingdom and throne. He is able to raise the responsibility. He tells that his son is blameless and devoted to his duty. He says, "He woks his work, I mine". His sailors have also learnt a lot in his company. Ulysses tells his fellow sailors that though they are in the old age yet some work of noble nature can be done by them. He says, 'Come, My friends! 'T is not too late to seek a newer world". He hopes to meet Achilles, a hero of Trojan War after his death. Ulysses knows that he does not have that strength like a young man yet he says that he will not yield before his death.

Allred Lord Tennyson's poem "The Process: A Medley" is a socio-comic blank verse published in 1847. This poem has been written in 7 cantos, a prologue and an epilogue. In the poem, the price is betrothed with the princess Ida in his infancy. The princess becomes young and beautiful and she denies marrying anyone because she hates men now. In this poem, the princess Ida determines to get education in a woman university where no man can enter. Lady Blanche and Lady Psyche have also determined not to marry a man at all. The prince and his two friends named Cyril and Florian finally make a plan to infiltrate the university so that the princes may change her ideology towards men. They were in the guise of women and enroll as girl students. Florian is Lady Psyche's brother and their teachers Lady Blanche and Lady Psyche come to know about men's subterfuge but they conceal their identity. In this poem the King says:

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Man for the field and woman for the hearth:

Man for the sword and for the needle she:

Man with the head and woman with the heart:

Man to command and woman to obey. (5:437-40)

The princess Ida tells the prince to sing a song when they were gone at a picnic. He does sing in a female voice and Ida makes fun of him. Cyril also sings a drunken tavern song and here their identity is revealed and a chaos is created. "Tears, Idle Tears" song is sung by a court maiden. It has been written in four stanzas in 5 lines each. The opening lines of the song are:

Tears, Idle teas, I know not what they mean,

Tears from the depth of some divine despair.

Ida falls into the river but the princess save her. The prince and Florian are captured. The Prince's father sends a letter that the prince must not be harmed otherwise he will storm the fort. Finally they marry.

Tennyson's next poem Lotus Eater has been written in 1829 when he went on a trip in Spain with his friend Arthur Henry Hallam. He was highly impressed to see the scenery. Homer has a epic *Odyssey* in which there are some sailors who reach to a queer land. He tells his fellow sailors to have courage. "Courage!" he said, and pointed towards the land" (Line 1). The poet speaks about three mountain tops where snow remains always. This land has always afternoon and the air remains languid. There are some habitants of that island having dark faces and who are the lotos-eaters. It is said that whosoever eats this fruit becomes drugged. There is a choric song in eight stanzas where sailors speak after eating Lotos fruit. The odd stanzas describe the beauty of that island while the even stanzas speak about enjoying human life. The sailors say that they must not always work and must have some rest in life. They say that noting is permanent in life that's why there is no use in sailing always as they tell that all things of the world "ripen toward the grave / In silence". They say that nobody waits for someone in the world.

Thus, Alfred Lord Tennyson's poetry provides a wonderful idea on the life. His poetry is related with human life. Readers always enjoy his poetry. Khalid Qais Abd and

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Sarmad Majeed Midhin write that “Tennyson had succeeded to convey an actual image of the Victorian era throughout his poetry” (112).

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