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ORNATENESS IN TENNYSON'S POETRY

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Abstract:-Alfred Lord Tennyson was a Poet Laureate of Great Britain and Ireland. In his poetry he used a wide range of subject matter. Romantic poetry including John Keats' poetry influenced him and as a result, observations of Nature is seen in his poetry. He has painted all flowers, trees, herbs, woods with the magic of imagination, myths and music also. Very few English poets present before us more clearly and more concisely the essential features of scene and landscape and Tennyson is one of them. When he was working at any object, he seemed to be smiling at it and it is shown when we read his poetry. His use of the musical qualities of words to emphasise his rhyme, rhythm, movement is really praiseworthy and class apart.

In this paper I have tried to show ornateness in Tennyson's poetry with special emphasis on some of his eternal poetry.

Keywords: Picturesque element, Pictorial quality, Musical element.

INTRODUCTION

Tennyson was not only a man and a poet; he was a voice, the voice of the whole people, expressing in exquisite melody their doubts and their faith, their griefs and their triumphs. Literature generally and poetry in particular should strive to attend what may be called the density of effect. And one recurring perception about Tennyson's poetry is that although its subject is often spiritual effort, its language manifests a pictorial and musical quality as well. He was a consummate artist. He polished and repolished his verse, till near perfection was reached. In his essay on Tennyson in 1864, Walter Bagehot showed Wordsworth, Tennyson and Browning as major practitioners of pure, ornate and grotesque art respectively. And his observations about the ornate style of Tennyson are still useful.

The main question is why should there be so much picturesque delineation of objects in Tennyson's poetry. The Victorians slowly lost the romantic intuition of a perfect correspondence between mind and nature. This loss can be seen in the habit of conveying states of mind through imaginary landscape. The interior landscape of the mind had its objective co-relative. If we take a look at 'The lady of Shalott' and 'The Lotos eaters', only it becomes clear that basically two kinds of ornate descriptions are to be found in Tennyson's poetry-a) precisely observed minutiae and b) imaginary setting which is rather dim and vague. The reason for the second kind of description was partly personal in the case of Tennyson. It may be possible that his extreme short sightedness tormented him always

Tennyson is a great painter of word picture. With the exceptions of Keats and Shakespeare, no other English poet has given us so many, such gorgeous and such vivid word pictures as Tennyson. As far as the pictorial element in Tennyson's poetry is concerned "the lady of shallot" and "The Lotos eaters" should be enough examples. In part one of the "The Lady of Shalott", we have a brilliant example of precisely obscure details. He beautifully describes the scenery of the island of Shalott and its surroundings:

"On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye
That clothe the word and meet the sky." (The lady of Shalott, part I)

In later part of the poem, the poet goes on to picking out the colours in which he has dabbled in gay abundant:

“Four gray walls, and four gray towers
Overlook a space of flowers.” (The lady of Shalott, part I)

As we read the lines, the grey walls and grey towers overlooking a garden of flower flash in our inward eye. In part three, the picture of brightness captivated us as we go through some lines where we get Sir Lancelot full of colours:

“Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
Moves over green Shalott.” (The lady of Shalott, part III)

There is a good picturesque simile where we find Sir Lancelot riding by Shalott with his armour shining in the sun is being compared to a meteor with a trait of bright light shooting across the sky. In part IV the description of the lady's last journey is full of pictorial elements. Here he goes on weaving the fabric in multicoloured wharf and woof:

“In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning.” (The lady of Shalott, part IV)

“The Lotos Eaters” is the finest example of Tennyson's intention in landscape painting. Tennyson knew how to relate the natural background to the mood of a lyric on a longer poem. The atmosphere of lethargy and drowsiness created is achieved through the description of the objects and forces of nature in the island:

“All round the coast the languid air did swoon
Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.” (The Lotos-eaters)

The three silent pinnacles of aged snow and the sunset add to the total effect of the atmosphere of the island “Where all things always seem'd the same!” (The Lotos-eaters) Even in the shorter poems of “In Memoriam”, Tennyson's pictorial quality is unmistakable. In “In Memoriam II” the calmness of the place is described with full force of pictorial quality.

The discussion regarding Tennyson and Tennysonian poetry would be incomplete without the discussion of the musical element. He is one of the most musical of English poets. Music and melody is created by the skilful use of sonorous and musical words. In “The Lady of Shalott”, the musical element can be seen even in the simple repetitive lines: the cadence of the lines do not allow us to see that even a single pronoun has been repeated six times:

“She left the web, she left the loom
She made three paces thro' the room
She saw the water-flower bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
She look'd down to Camelot.” (The lady of Shalott, part III)

Here poetry is working like music. “The Lotos eaters”, especially the choric song is full of musical elements. Everywhere there is slow crawling rhythm of the iambic lines in keeping with the lethargic drowsy mood of the mariners. Onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance, monosyllabic feet, repetition of words and phrases are introduced here. We can mention a few examples of these various devices from ‘Choric song’-

Repetition of “tir'd” in line 6 – “Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes; (Choric song I)

Alliteration of ‘s’ sound in line 7-“Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies.” (Choric song I) and ‘L’ sound in line 10- “And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep” (Choric song I)

Continuous rhymes in line 8-12-

“Here are cool mosses deep,
And thro' the moss the ivies creep,
And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep,
And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep.” (Choric song I)

The use of the word ‘falls’ in line 31 and ‘drops’ in line 34. These are accented monosyllables each making a foot and excellency conveying the sound of sudden break-

“and turning yellow Falls, and floats adown the air”(line 31) (Choric song III)
Drops in a silent autumn night. (line 34) (Choric song III)

Use of several words with long vowels in a line to prolong the rhythm in keeping the drowsy feeling and weary mood of the mariners as in line 31 and in several lines-

“and turning yellow Falls, and floats adown the air”(line 31) (Choric song III)

It is for these magical sound effects reflecting the mood that the poem is valued and not for its philosophy of indolence. Tennyson's "The Brook" is really the finest example of music in words. Its music is created with words. These are of 'movement' and 'sound'. They are onomatopoeic also. The repetition of 's' and 'g' sounds in "I slip, I slide, I gloom, I glance". 'M' sound is seen in "I murmur under moon", 'T' sound in "twenty thorpes, a little town", "F" sound in "Philip's farm I flow"/"a field and fallow". These add music to the poem together with the rhyme.

CONCLUSION:

Tennyson's creative process seems to centre-ground a verbal sequence which is beautiful and rhythmic in sound. Tennyson probably learned all these from Virgil whom he admired. Tennyson's son has pointed out that Tennyson would base on a seminal or nucleus phrase which would melodiously roll on to create a fabric. Tennyson was not trying to grope after a transcendental reality; he was actually presenting a given or constructed reality. In the construction of this reality he wanted to make his language as dense and substantial as possible.

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