Alfred Tennyson was born on August 6th, 1809, at Somersby, Lincolnshire. He was fourth of twelve children of George and Elizabeth (Fytche) Tennyson. The poet's grandfather had violated tradition by making his younger son, Charles, his heir, and arranging for the poet's father to enter the ministry. The contrast of his own family's relatively strained circumstances to the great wealth of his aunt Elizabeth Russell and uncle Charles Tennyson made Tennyson feel particularly impoverished and led him to worry about money all his life.

He also had a constant fear of mental illness, for several men in his family had a mild form of epilepsy, which was then thought a shameful disease. His father and brother Arthur made their cases worse by excessive drinking. His brother Edward had to be confined in a mental institution after 1833, and he himself spent a few weeks under doctors' care in 1843. In the late twenties his father's physical and mental condition worsened, and he became paranoid, abusive, and violent.

- In 1827 Tennyson escaped the distressed atmosphere of his home when he followed his two older brothers to Trinity College, Cambridge, where his tutor was William Whewell. Because they had published Poems by Two Brothers in 1827 and each won university prizes for poetry (Alfred winning the Chancellor's

Gold Medal in 1828 for ÒTimbuctooÓ) the Tennyson brothers became well known at Cambridge. In 1829 The Apostles, an undergraduate club, whose members remained Tennyson's friends all his life, invited him to join. Among the group, which met to discuss major philosophical and other issues, included Arthur Henry Hallam, James Spedding, Edward Lushington and Richard Monckton Milnes — all eventually famous men who merited entries in the Dictionary of National Biography.

Arthur Hallam was one of his most important friends. Hallam, another precociously brilliant Victorian young man like Robert Browning, John Stuart Mill, and Matthew Arnold, was uniformly recognized by his contemporaries (including William Gladstone, his best friend at Eton) as having unusual promise. He and Tennyson knew each other only four years, but their intense friendship had major influence on the poet. On a visit to Somersby, Hallam met and later became engaged to Emily Tennyson, and the two friends looked forward to a permanent companionship. Hallam's death from illness in 1833 (he was only 22) shocked Tennyson profoundly, and his grief lead to most of his best poetry, including In Memoriam , "The Passing of Arthur", "Ulysses," and "Tithonus."

As Tennyson was always sensitive to criticism, the mixed reception of his 1832 Poems hurt him very much. Critics in those days delighted in the harshness of their reviews: the Quarterly Review was known as the "Hang, draw, and quarterly." John Wilson Croker's harsh criticisms of some of the poems in our anthology kept Tennyson from publishing again for another nine years.

In 1830s Tennyson grew concerned about his mental health and visited a sanitarium run by Dr. Matthew Allen, with whom he later invested his inheritance (his grandfather had died in 1835) and some of his family's money. When Dr. Allen's scheme for mass-producing woodcarvings using steam power went bankrupt, Tennyson, who did not have sufficient money to marry, ended his engagement to Emily Sellwood, whom he had met at his brother Charles's wedding to her sister Louisa.

The success of his 1842 Poems made Tennyson a well-known poet, and in 1845 he received a Civil List (government) pension of £200 a year, which helped relieve his financial difficulties; the success of "The Princess" and In Memoriam

and his appointment in 1850 as Poet Laureate finally established him as the most popular poet of the Victorian era.

Already 41, he had written some of his greatest poetry, but he continued to write and to gain in popularity. In 1853, as the Tennysons were moving into their new house on the Isle of Wight, Prince Albert dropped in unannounced. His admiration for Tennyson's poetry helped consolidate his position as the national poet, and Tennyson returned the favor by dedicating The Idylls of the King to his memory. Queen Victoria later summoned him to court several times, and at her insistence he accepted his title, having declined it when offered by both Disraeli and Gladstone.

Tennyson suffered from extreme short-sightedness — without a monocle he could not even see to eat — which gave him considerable difficulty while writing and reading, and this disability in part accounts for his manner of creating poetry — Tennyson composed much of his poetry in his head, occasionally working on individual poems for many years. During his undergraduate days at Cambridge he often did not bother to write down his compositions, although the Apostles continually prodded him to do so.

Unhealthy like most of his family Alfred Tennyson died on October 6, 1892, at the age of 83.

1.0.1 TENNYSON AS A REPRESENTATIVE POET

Tennyson's Poetry as a Mirror to the Age

Or Tennyson as a Representative Poet

Tennyson's Poetry : An Epitome of His Age

Every age has a poet or the other who represents in his poetry the very spirit of that age. Thus Tennyson in his poetry expresses the very spirit of the Victorian age. He stands in the same relation to his times as does Chaucer to the 14th century and Pope to the early eighteenth century England. W.J. Long says, “For nearly half a century Tennyson was not only a man and a poet, he was a

voice, the voice of a whole people, expressing in exquisite melody their doubts and their faith, their grief and their triumphs. As a poet who expresses not so much a personal as a national spirit, he is probably the most representative literary man of the Victorian era”.

Horror of Extremes : The Victorian Compromise

The three important movements of the age were (a) Industrial revolution,

(b) the rise of democracy, and (c) the rise of evolutionary science and its impact on religion. In all these matters Tennyson's views are characterised by the well- known Victorian compromise or the avoidance of extremes. With the excesses of the French Revolution still fresh in their memory, the Victorians had a natural horror of all revolutionary enthusiasm. He craved for law, for order, for peace and stability. The dominant element in Tennyson's thought is his sense of law and order. He calls the French Revolution, "the Red-fool fury of the Seine", and advocates slow progress, the freedom which,

Slowly broadens down

From precedent to precedent.

He believes in disciplined, ordered evolution, rather than in revolution.

Narrow Nationalism

The Victorian age was an age of intense patriotism. The Victorians were very proud of their Queen, they were proud of their country, and of their empire. This narrow nationalism of his age is reflected fully in Tennyson's poetry. "Love thou thy land", is his motto and not international love. Likewise, he believes in imperialism, that, "subject races preferred good British government to self- government". In other words, he shares the current belief in "white man's burden". And in keeping with this he believes in a strong navy for England and writes proper national and patriotic poems such as Maud, Charge of the light Brigade, and Ode to the Duke of Wellington. In his later years he shows more hardened conservatism than in the early years. This development may be seen by a comparison of Locksley Hall and Locksley Hall Sixty Years After.

The Democratic Spirit

It was an age in which the democratic spirit was rising and the people were clamouring for equal rights and political freedom. Tennyson's outlook is one of compromise between the claims of the masses and the continuation of the older landed aristocracy. While he is in full sympathy with all sound measures for the amelioration of the poor, there is always a touch of the aristocrat in his attitude. He has no sympathy with the demand for equality, and in poems like The Lord of Burleigh he supports the claims of the landed aristocracy. One aspect of the rise of democracy was the movement for the liberation of

women. Tennyson deals with the question in The Princess. While he is in full sympathy for the cause of woman's education, his attitude towards the whole question in typically that of a Victorian. The proper place of women is within the home, and they should try to be good housewives and enjoy the blessed life at home.

Materialism of the Age

As a result of the industrial revolution, the country was enjoying an extraordinary economic prosperity. This Mammon worship of his age is reflected in his Maud, a Monodrama. It reflects the unprecedented commercial prosperity of England at a time when "Britain's sole God", was the millionaire. It also renders the revolt of a cultured mind against the corruption and hypocrisy of a society degraded by the worship of money.

Treatment of Love and Marriage

Tennyson symbolizes the Victorian prudery, hypocrisy, and the spirit of compromise in his treatment of love, sex and marriage. In these matters, his attitude is typically Victorian. Conjugal love rather than romantic love is his ideal; he has a horror of illicit passion. He cannot even contemplate the possibility of any relation between man and woman other than the conjugal. He emphasises the cultivation of domestic virtues of the home. He idealises married life. The sort of love that Tennyson upholds and likes is well exemplified in The Miller's Daughter. It is a simple story of true sweet-hearting and married love, but raised into a steady and grave emotion worthy of a love built to last for life betwixt a man and a woman. Tennyson concentrates very firmly upon the advantages of spiritual as opposed to physical love, and the age felt satisfaction in his

delineation of love. The Victorian feeling is expressed by the poet when he says,

Arise and fly,

The reeling faun, the sensual beast, Move upward, working out the beast, And let the ape and tiger die.

Art and Morality

The Victorians believed that the aim of literature is fundamentally moral. They had a particular fascination for moralising and teaching lessons of morality to the younger generations. In this regard Tennyson is the mouthpiece of the Victorians. In his poetry there is a strong feeling for moral preaching and ethical edification.

In The Place of Art the poet describes and condemns that spirit of aestheticism whose sole religion is the worship of Beauty and Knowledge for their own sakes, and which ignores human responsibility and obligation to one's fellowmen.

The Scientific Spirit

Another important event of Victorian England was the rise of evolutionary science and its impact of religious faith. Hadow says, “His attitude towards the scientific progress of his day is more difficult to determine. Sometimes he speaks of it with a sort of impatience.” Socrates once asked, “Have these men solved all the problems in human life, that they have leisure for abstract speculations?” Tennyson also asks, “Is it well that while we range with Science, glorying in the time, City children soak and blacken soul and sense in city slime?” Sometimes, again, he seems to shrink back in dismay before the immensities that Science has revealed. He asks, “What is our life? What is it all but a trouble of ants in the gleam of a million, million of suns?”

However it would be unfair to estimate him by such passages as these alone. Like almost all poets, he feels Science as something alien and remote; he cannot scale its heights or breathe in the rarity of its atmosphere : but for all that he can honour its work and approve its singleness of purpose.

Religion : Doubts and Anxieties

The rise of science resulted in religious scepticism, doubts, anxieties and uncertainties and Tennyson is a typical Victorian in his efforts to reach a compromise between science and religion. Thus in a famous passage of In Memoriam he says,

Let knowledge grow from more to more And more of reverence in us dwell

That mind and soul, according well, May make one music as before.

He would like to have science, but he would also have religion, and he would have the two work in harmony for the realisation of the Victorian dream of progress unlimited. In Memoriam, he puts forward the claims of science. He upholds the theory of Evolution propounded by Darwin, and supports the view that honest doubt is better than blind faith:

There remains more faith in honest doubt Believe me, than in half the creeds.

In others, he emphasises the claims of religion, God and soul. He proudly declares his faith in God and the immorality of the soul and in a life beyond death. He gives an opinion to the people of his age to cling to faith beyond all forms of faith, to trust and hope, to look to,

One far-off divine event

To which the whole creation moves.

In the Higher Pantheism he declares the supremacy of God and regards Him as the supreme controller of the universe:

God is law, say the wise, O Soul, and let us rejoice, For if He thunder by law, the thunder is yet his voice

In every object of nature, and also in the sun, moon and the starts, the poet sees the vision of God:

Conclusion

The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills and the plains Are not these a Soul ! the vision of him who reigns.

Thus in all these respects, Tennyson represents the Victorian smugness, its narrowness, its hypocrisy, its prudery, its compromise, its doubts, anxieties and uncertainties. But finally, it is as an artist that we revere him, and it is as an artist that he will live. His longer narrative poems, which deal with political, moral, social, and economic questions of the day may suffer an eclipse, but his lyrics and his romantic tales, which do not reflect the age, shall be loved and admired as long as the English language and literature last.

1.0.2 TENNYSON AS A LYRIC POET

Tennyson as a Lyric Poet

His Lyrical Impulse : All Pervasive and Long-lasting

Tennyson's genius was really lyrical. He produced exquisite lyrics all through his long span of poetic activity, and he kept up his power of melody and song right upto the age of eighty. The lyric impulse never dried up in him. Not only was his lyric impulse long-lasting, it was also all-pervasive. It penetrates even his longer poems. Thus In Memoriam is essentially a collection of lyrics which voice the poet's loneliness, doubts, anxieties and fears; Maud also is a series of lyrics, in which the story is told largely through; the songs of The Princess constitute the most glorious lyric poetry ever written in the English language. The beautiful songs interspersed between the parts of The Princess belong to this period.

Passion and Force

The passionate fervour of which Tennyson's lyric strain was capable is best illustrated from Maud. In truth, the faults of this poem are more than redeemed by such lyrical outbursts as, "Come into the garden, Maud", and, "O that 'twere possible.". If an anthology of Tennyson's poetry was to be prepared today, it would include his songs as well as such deeply passionate and lovely

lyrics as Mariana ; Oriana; Fatima; Merman; The Lotus-eaters; Ulysses; Break, Break, Break; Locksley Hall; The Brooke; Tears, Idle Tears; and many others.

Pure Lyrics

Harold Nicholson discussing the greatness of Tennyson as a lyric poet points out that the Lyric in the original Greek sense denoted a poem meant to be sung to the lyre, but in common usage it has come to signify a poem of personal emotion which can be sung, with or without accompaniment. In other words, the lyric may be more complex, mixed with reflection and thought. Tennyson writes both these kinds of lyrics. When the inspiration dawns on him, he writes "pure lyrics", lyrics of the highest order, lyrics which sing as if by some magic of their own. For they vibrate, these songs of Tennyson, with something vague and poignant wit:

I knew not what of wild and sweet,

Like that strange song I heard Apollo sing While Ilion like a mist rose into towers.

And they vibrate with more than this—vibrate with that, "divine excess", with that glimpse of the Dionysian, that unique sense of impulsive continuity falling haphazard upon the only word; they vibrate with that conviction of the inevitable and the inimitable, with that conviction of the inspired, which only

the greatest lyric poets can attain in the moments when they feel the force and beauty of their own genius.

Their Musical Quality

Such lyrics are beyond criticism and even elucidation. The key notes of a lyric are music, melody and subjectivity. A lyric is musical, and it is an expression of the poet's personal emotions. Tennyson's lyrics are among the most musical in the English language. Words are carefully chosen both with reference to their sense and their sound. His skill in the manipulation of vowel sounds, in the use of alliteration and liquid consonants, and in the avoidance of harsher sounds.

The Personal Note

Tennyson's genius was basically subjective, he had the true temperament of a lyricist. Whatever may be the subject chosen, it is coloured by his own personal moods and emotions. Thus his Ulysses, a classical lyric, written after Hallam's death, expresses his own urge to move forward and face life regardless of the bereavement he has suffered. The Idylls of the King is similarly suffused with the poet's own moods and emotions. Thus the gloom of Sir Bedivere at the passing away of Arthur is Tennyson's own gloomy mood at the recent death of his friend. Crossing the Bar is expressive of the mood of the poet just on the eve of his death.

Complex Lyrics : Thought and Reflection

This is more so the case with the lyrics of the In Memoriam. The pieces are the finest example of the lyrics in which personal emotion is interwoven with reflective matter resulting in complexity rather than simplicity, and as Elton aptly points out such complex lyrics are more characteristic of the poet. The lyrics of In Memoriam are a landmark in English poetry, combining, as they do, the poetry of ideas with the poetry of feeling. The lyrics of In Memoriam are remarkable as expressions of terror, loneliness. and the inner void that turns Nature and Life into nightmares. Some of the lyrics are of deep psychological interest ; the most striking illustration of it are the following stanzas that describe the chaotic images that pass through his mind as he lies awake at night:

Cloud-towers by ghostly masons wrought, A gulf that ever shuts and gapes,

A hand that points, and palled shapes In shadowy trough fares of thought;

And crowds that stream from yawning doors, And shoals of pucker'd faces, drive;

Dark bulks that tumble half alive, And lazy lengths on boundless shores.

Variety of Moods

J.C. Grierson in his Critical History of English Poetry points out that Tennyson is a poet of, “not so much of passion and passionate thinking as of moods—moods, subtle, and luxurious and sombre, moods in which it is not always easy to discern the line that separates waking from dreaming...” The moods to which Tennyson has given poetic idiom are as varied as his metres, and include a rare feeling for the beauty of English scenery. This variety of moods is best illustrated by Maud, a Monodrama, in which the entire story of the wooing and winning of a girl has been told trough a series of exquisite lyrics which have no parallel in the English language. The moods in the poem range from melodramatic horror in the opening stanzas to loving and joyous melodies in the middle part, sinking into a dolorous wail, rising into frenzy and closing with the trumpet note of war. In the beautiful song of ecstatic expectation, “Come into the garden, Maud”, the poet rises to the highest point of his lyrical verse. According to O. Elton, each of the lyrics, “introduces a new moment in the situation, with its special mood, which is embodied in the metre.”

Some Limitations

Tennyson was a great lyric-poet, he had the temperament of a true lyricist, but the lyric impulse in him was not allowed free play by his other interests, narrative, dramatic, even epic. As Harold Nicolson aptly remarks, “Temperamentally he possessed all the qualities of a lyric poet. His genius was essentially subjective. His was a lonely soul, melancholy and afraid. The deepest note in his soul is one of frightened agony, as of some, wild creature caught in a trap at night.” Spontaneity is an important quality of the true lyric. The lyric poet sings with strains of unpremeditated art, but Tennyson is too self-conscious, there is too much of after-thought, too much of revision and deletion for such spontaneity. The artist in him retards his lyrical-impulse and it is only occasionally that his lyrics acquire that spontaneity which we associate with Shelly and Burns.

Conclusion

Tennyson is a great lyric poet, but due to such shortcomings he cannot

take his rank with the greatest lyric poets of the world. The Olympian radiance of a lyric by Sappho or Sophocles, the audible ring of Shelley's lyrics, the moving

quality of Shakespeare's songs, or the pinching pathos of the Scottish songs of Burns and Scott, is hard to find in Tennyson's lyrics. In fact, as Oliver Elton has pointed out, “Tennyson is more at home in classical lyrics.... ode-like or commemorative-carefully concerted pieces, be they short or long, with full rolling lines, than in the briefer spontaneous kind”.

1.0.3 A GENERAL ESTIMATE OF TENNYSON AS A POET

A General Estimate of Tennyson as a Poet.

Or Tennyson's Poetry : Its Merits and Demerits

Or Tennyson's Greatness as a Poet : His Place

In order to form a correct estimate of Tennyson as a poet, we must consider him as (a) a representative poet, (b) an artist, (c) a poet of nature, and (d) a thinker.

A Great Representative Poet

Tennyson is a representative poet, one who represents his age not in fragments but fully, in all its manifold variety and complexity. According to Hudson, he was to Victorian England what three centuries earlier Spenser was to the England of Elizabeth, and much that is most deeply characteristic of the Victorian spirit entered into the texture of his writings. As Stopford A. Brooke remarks: “For more than sixty years he lived close to the present life of England, as far as he was capable of comprehending and sympathising with its movements; and he inwove what he felt concerning it into his poetry.” The extraordinary diversity of his work is itself typical of the immense complexity of his age. He further remarks, “He wrote on classical, romantic, and modern subjects; on subjects taken from humble and rustic life; on English history and Celtic legend; on the deepest problems of philosophy and religion; and the range of his method and style is scarcely less remarkable than that of his matter.”

But even more typical are the content and quality of his poems. His Locksley Hall, 1842, is full of the restless spirit of 'young England' and of its faith in science, commerce, and the progress of mankind; while its sequel, Locksley Hall Sixty Years After, 1886, shows the revulsion of feeling which had occurred in many minds when the fast development of science seemed to threaten the very foundations of religion, and commerce was filling the world with materialistic greed. In The Princess the poet grapples with one of the rising questions of the day—that of the higher education of women and their place in the fast-changing conditions of modern society; Maud quivers with the patriotic passion of the time of the Crimean War and with the general ferment which followed this war. It also reflects the Mammon worship of the day. In the Idylls of the King, while the medieval machinery is retained, the old story is turned into a parable the lessons of which have a direct bearing upon contemporary life. Hudson writes, “The change which Tennyson's thought underwent in regard to social and political questions itself reveals his curious sensitiveness to the tendencies of his time ; for the sanguine temper of his early manhood, the doubts, misgivings, and reactionary utterances of his middle age, and the chastened

hopefulness of his last years, are alike reflections of the successive moods which were widely characteristic of his generation. But politically and socially he stands out as, on the whole, the poetic exponent of the cautious spirit of Victorian liberalism".

Tennyson was essentially the poet of law and order as well as of progress. He held resolutely to the great heritage of English tradition; and while he firmly believed that in the divine scheme of things,

The old order changeth, yielding place to new, And God fulfils himself in many ways,

Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

He was very firmly opposed to, 'raw haste', rash experiments, and everything that savoured of revolution. Tennyson's poetry is often the vehicle of the spreading democratic sympathies of Victorian England. Recluse and aristocrat as he was, he was deeply interested in common people and common things. It is not the least significant feature of his work as a whole that along with The Princess, Maud, The Idylls of the King, it contains such things as The Mab Queen,

Enoch Arden and Dora.

While Tennyson's poetry is thus historically interesting as reflecting the social and political trends of his age, it is even more important as a record of the intellectual and spiritual life of the time. Being a careful student of science and philosophy, he was intensely impressed by the far-reaching meaning of the new discoveries and speculations by which the edifice of the old thought was being undermined. More especially was he impressed by the wide implications of the doctrine of evolution. At once sceptical and mystical in his own temper, he was peculiarly fitted to become the mouth-piece of his century's doubts, difficulties, and craving for the certainties of religious faith. He represents the Victorian spirit of compromise when he writes:

Let knowledge grow from more to more But more of reverence in us dwell.

The 'two voices' --science and religion-- of that century are perpetually heard in his work. In In Memoriam, more than in any other contemporary piece or verse of prose, we may read of the great conflict of the age between doubt and faith; while in many later poems, as in The Ancient Sage, we may see how the poet challenged the current materialism and asserted the eternal verities of God and immortality.

Greatness as an Artist: Some Limitations

Tennyson is a great representative poet, but he is still greater as an artist. He was a very careful writer, revising what he had written again and again. Among the elements which make up his art, the following may be mentioned : (a) A minute observation of Nature, which furnished him with a store of poetic description and imagery; (b) a scholarly appreciation of all that is most picturesque in the literature of the past, (c) an exquisite precision in the use of words and phrases; (d) the picturesqueness and aptness

of his similes, (e) an avoidance of the commonplace (f) his use of repetition and assonance, (g) the expressive harmonies of his rhythm, and (h) the subtle melody of his diction.

Praising Tennyson as a literary artist Albert says, “No one excels Tennyson in the deft application of sound to sense and in the subtle and pervading employment of alliteration and vowel-music”. Such passages as this abound in his work:

Myriads of rivulets hurrying thro’ the lawn, The moan of doves in immemorial elms, And murmuring of innumerable bees

This is perhaps not the highest poetry, but shows only a kind of manual, or rather aural dexterity; yet as Tennyson employs it, it is effective to a great degree. His excellent craftsmanship is also apparent in his handling of English metres, in which he is a untiring experimenter. In blank verse he is not so varied and powerful as Shakespeare, nor so majestic as Milton, but in the skill of his workmanship and in his wealth of diction he falls but little short of some of the great masters.

In his word-painting, Tennyson follows the example of Keats. Nearly all Tennyson's poems, even the simplest, abound in ornate description of natural and other scenes. His method is to seize upon suitable details, dress them in expressive and musical phrases, and thus present a glistening image before the reader's eye. Such ornate descriptions reveal Tennyson at his best; but once again the doubt arises as to whether they represent the highest poetry. They show accuracy of observation and a rare loveliness of epithet; but they lack the deep insight, the ringing, romantic note, of the best efforts of Keats.

Originality as a Nature Poet

Tennyson is a great and most original nature poet, and in his nature poetry the impact on him of contemporary science can best be studied. It is seen in the minuteness and accuracy of his observation. His attitude to Nature is not like that of Wordsworth. His view of Nature is that of science—that Nature is full of the brutal struggle for existence. He finds her, “red in tooth and claw”. He does not paint her as a kindly mother. Looking at Nature the poet does not find any evidence to support the human faith in the immortality of the soul. This is what he says in his masterpiece, In Memoriam. But as an artist he makes excellent use of Nature as a background to human action. He knew how to relate the natural setting to the mood of a lyric or a longer poem. The Lotus Eaters is the best example of interior landscape-painting. The poem displays his unequalled powers of observation. Tennyson is simply superb in using nature to intensify human

moods. His skill in landscape painting is remarkable. The whole landscape is vivified through a few fitting touches.

A Great Lyric Poet: His Limitations

Modern critics believe that the best of Tennyson is not to be found in his longer and more ambitious poems, but in his lyrics. The typical Tennysonian lyric is the lyric of mood—a poem in which what is expressed is not a simple feeling but a complex mood, which is rendered in terms of a natural setting. Tennyson wrote lyrics of many kinds. In Memoriam is a long elegy that consists many short lyrics. The elegy was peculiarly suited to Tennyson's melancholy and reflective temper. In In Memoriam, an elegy which was inspired by the death of his friend Henry Hallam, Tennyson deals with all the phases of his personal grief and sorrow, discusses the conflict between knowledge or science on the one side and faith on the other, and traces his gradual recovery of faith. Tennyson also wrote a number of lyrical poems dealing with classical subjects. Tithonus is an example. The poem is not quite dramatic—it reveals a feeling rather than a character. His patriotic lyrics also deserve mention, some of which are popular in England even today. Though some of his lyrics as Break, Break, Break; Crossing the Bar, and the songs in The Princess, are musical and attractive, and truly great. However says Albert, “On the whole his genius was too self-conscious and his life too regular and prosperous to provide a background for the true lyrical intensity of emotion.”

Not Considered a Great Poet of Man

Though Tennyson is really great as a nature-poet, he has less power of dealing with men and women, or with the passions. He deals with types rather than with individuals. Hadow remarks, “He describes his own Lincolnshire country-folk with close sympathy, and with the humour that is born of sympathy; outside their limit he is little able to depict characters and tempers that are different from his own. All his best men are of one pattern—noble, courteous, chivalrous, a little deficient in force and passion, yet bold in adventure and temperate in success; the pattern, in short, of just such an English gentleman as Tennyson himself was. His women are hardly ever clearly seen—they are either mere sketches or pictures of which the features are incongruous”. That is one of the reasons why he failed in drama. He is too self-centred, too lyric, to give his

dramatic personae a free hand; he makes them say not what they mean, but what he means.

As a poet of man, he concentrates the noblest of English manhood into one best type. That a man should love truth, country and freedom, that he should serve God and his lady, that he should respect all

womanhood and be tender to all weakness, that he should strike his blow for the right and care nothing for reward—these were the laws of his Round Table, these are his principles of government. No doubt, as Hadow writes, “There are depths of feeling that he has not sounded, there are whole tracts of human life which he has not sounded, there are whole tracts of human life which he has not explored; but within the boundaries of his own realm he has set up for ever the example of staunch and fearless loyalty to a high ideal.” Thus he can be considered as the poet of Man, but not of men.

His Limitation as a Thinker

As a thinker, Tennyson lacks originality and depth. His thought is puerile, and it is this aspect of his poetry which has done the greatest harm to his reputation. Compton-Rickett aptly observes, “No poet was more exercised by religious problems than he; and no poet was more sensitive to scientific thought than he.” His attitude is one of compromise between science and religion. From In Memoriam we can gather much about his views on God, the immortality of the Soul, and the governance of the universe. He has a strong faith in the supremacy of law and order which he finds at work throughout Nature. His poetry is fundamentally religious in temper, and he “has a faith in God and his love and goodness which shines, like a clear and quiet flame in his poetry.” Occasionally, he does get beset with despair and doubts, but always, ultimately, he returns to his faith in, “one far off divine event, to which the whole creation moves.” But there is little definition and little sound theorising, and often he is incoherent and unsure.

Conclusion

Tennyson has expressed himself on various matters, political, social, religious and ethical, but his philosophy is neither great nor inspiring. Today, he is considered not as a thinker, but as a consummate literary artist. Hadow writes,

“No poet ever understood more fully the ‘glory of words’ : none has sounded a

music more rich, more varied, more pure in style, more beautiful in colour and tone. To study him is to learn the possibilities of our native speech: to love him is an artistic education.” He was a demigod to his contemporaries, but younger men strongly assailed his patent literary mannerisms, his complacent acceptance of the evils of his time, his flattery of the great, and his somewhat arrogant assumption of the airs of immortality. Consequently, for twenty years after his death is time in his favour, and his detractors have modified their attitude. His many merits are now being better appreciated. E. Albert rightly observes, “He is not a supreme poet; and whether he will maintain the primacy among the singers of his own generation, as he undoubtedly did during his lifetime, remains to be seen; but, after all deductions are made, his high place in the Temple of Fame is assured”.

1.0.4 ULYSSES

Ulysses

It Little profits that an idle king,

By this still hearth, among these barren crags, Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole Unequal laws unto a savage race,

That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me. I cannot rest from travel; I will drink

Life to the lees. All times I have enjoy'd Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those

That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when 10

Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades Vext the dim sea. I am become a name; For always roaming with a hungry heart Much have I seen and known, cities of men

And manners, climates, councils, governments, Myself not least, but honor'd of them all,-

And drunk delight of battle with my peers, Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.

I am a part of all that I have met;

Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'

Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades 20

For ever and for ever when I move. How dull it is to pause, to make an end, To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!

As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life Were all too little, and of one to me

Little remains; but every hour is saved From that eternal silence, something more, A bringer of new things; and vile it were

For some three suns to store and hoard myself. 30

And this gray spirit yearning in desire To follow knowledge like a sinking star,

Beyond the utmost bound of human thought. This is my son, mine own Telemachus,

To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,- Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil

This labour, by slow prudence to make mild A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees

Subdue them to the useful and the good.

Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere

Of common duties, decent not to fail In offices of tenderness, and pay

Meet adoration to my household gods,

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail; There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,

Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me, - That ever with a frolic welcome took

The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed Free hearts, free foreheads,-you and I are old;

Old age hath yet his honor and his toil.

Death closes all; but something ere the end, Some work of noble note, may yet be done, Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods. The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks;

The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends, 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.

Push off, and sitting well in order smite

The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds

To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths

Of all the western stars, until I die.

It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;

It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles, And see the great Achiles, whom we knew. Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'

We are not now that strength which in old days Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are-
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Write the brief introduction of the Poem Ulysses and give its summary in your own words.

Introduction to the Poem.

Ulysses by Lord Tennyson, is a poem based on a hint in Homer's Odyssey. This poem has its origin in Homer's Odyssey. Ulysses, the great hero had gone to fight in the Trojan War. He had been out of his country for more than a period of ten years and after the conclusion of war he came back to rule over his people. Ulysses did not like to sit in the island and again wanted to set out in search of new lands leaving the administration and governance of the country to the charge and care of his son Telemachus. He did not like to waste his years of life in idly rotting in a land where there was little scope for his heroism and courage.

Ulysses actually stands for the spirit of adventure and bold explanation and the quest of new knowledge and new lands. Ulysses typifies not any one particular king who ruled in ancient times, but stands as the representative of all persons who believe in the gospel of work, and who are wedded to the principle of activity. It is better to die in action rather than waste one's youth and time in idle rotting and inaction.

In this poem Tennyson presents the philosophy of action and quest for knowledge and search for new lands. It is an inspiring poem of activity and action and stands in contrast to "Lotus-Eaters" where the poet had taught the lesson of inactivity and idleness. The spirit of the two poems Ulysses and the Lotus-

Eaters is quite different. Whereas the 'Lotus-Eaters' teaches us the lesson of rest and inactivity, the second poem 'Ulysses' inspires and excites us to be active and

energetic in our life. The tone of Ulysses is that of a ruddy and vigorous optimist and a modern adventurer and conqueror of new world and the new lands.

The poem contains certain remarkable lines which should be learnt by heart and also followed in one's life. The poem is one of the best poems of Tennyson and ought to be read with great interest and attention by the readers.

Summary of the Poem

1. Ulysses had returned from the Trojan War and came back to rule over his people. He did not like ruling over the people in the company of his aged wife, for that life of the ruler did not give him any scope for further adventure.

2. Ulysses was a man of adventure and heroism. All his life he had been a traveller. Still he wanted to be a traveller and adventurous in life.

3. The name of Ulysses had gone down among all the classes of people and almost in all countries. He had been known as a great warrior and as a great adventurer and explorer of new lands.

4. Although Ulysses had achieved much in his life yet there was much to be achieved by him. He did not like to waste and rot away passively. Ulysses thought that it was a sin to be inactive and rust unburnished and not shine in use.

5. His opinion was that life piled on life was not sufficient for the achievement of man's salvation. Every moment that could be saved from death should be utilized for the achievement of things. One should follow knowledge and pursue it to the utmost bound in the realm of human thought.

6. Ulysses wanted to give the reins of his kingdom to his son Telemachus. He was a good young man and in his absence would be possible for him to rule over the people and give them good laws. The work of Ulysses was to go out in search of new lands and make his mark in the world of adventure and travels.

7. Having so decided, Ulysses asked his fellow mariners to gather round him and once more start for the search of new lands. They all had

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become old. Yet there was no reason why they should feel any sense of despair. Old age had its honour and old men were expected to do their work. No doubt they would die but before their death they should do something noble and great in their lives.

8. Though much had been taken away from the lives, yet there was much to be done by them even in the state of their old age. Though they had been made weak by time and fate, but they were yet strong in their will. They should devote their time in finding out new lands rather than yield to their old age.

Write the critical appreciation of the poem Ulysses.

Introduction

Published in 1842, but written soon after Hallam's death (1833) which had been deeply felt by Tennyson. This poem expressed his deep sense of the need of going forward and having the struggle of life. The fundamental qualities of this poem are as follows:

A Dramatic Monologue

This poem is a dramatic monologue because a character is speaking aloud and expressing his thoughts to a silent audience of his followers. As in the dramatic monologues of Browning, the mind of the speaker is being dissected and analysed. While, there is usually some sort of movement in Browning's monologues, there is no such quality in Ulysses. We get the impression that a man is standing on the sea-shore and delivering a speech. However we get complete picture of the mind of Ulysses, particularly because Telemachus is drawn as a foil to him. The poem represents a type of character. It is not a mere narrative of action.

Its Philosophy

The poem advocates the philosophy of action, of struggle, and of endeavour. It urges the need for going forward and braving the struggle of life. Ulysses says, “How dull it is to pause, to make an end, to rust unburnished, not to shine in use”. His grey spirit is yearning in desire to follow knowledge. This insatiable yearning for knowledge, this quenchless thirst for new discoveries, this

wild desire to know the unknown is typical of the 19th century and it is curious that Tennyson has given us a modern interpretation of a character from Greek Mythology. Ulysses is a well-known explorer who probably loved adventure for its own sake. Here however, the poem thus becomes a fine blend of ancient mythology and modern philosophy. We see Tennyson's tendency to Victorianize a mythological personage.

Contrast with Lotus Eaters

This poem with its inherent philosophy of action may be contrasted with the Lotus-Eaters which also has Ulysses as its main character but which is marked by a dreamy atmosphere of languor and repose. It is apparent that a poem embodying such a philosophy of action will stimulate us to effort and urge us to shake off inaction and sloth. Ulysses goads us to make efforts and urges us to shake of sloth. Ulysses is an inspiring poem. The thought of the poem is psychologically true. The richer the mind, the greater is its capacity for more knowledge and experience. The poem is notable for its healthy tone and masculine vigour in opposition to the sleepy softness to the Lotus-Eaters. Tennyson's Ulysses is “a symbol of the modern passion for knowledge, exploration of limitless fields and conquest of new regions of science and thought”.

Its Pictures

The poem is not written in that ornamental and embellished style which marks The Lotus-Eaters. That style would not have suited a poem with such a vigorous theme. But we have a couple of exquisite word pictures:

"There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail; There gloom the dark, broad seas."

"The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks

The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep Moons round with many voices."

The accumulation of vowel sounds which produce musical effect may also be marked in the above lines. The lines are an example of assonance or repetition

of vowel sounds. There are many other examples of assonance in this poem. We have a fine sound picture here:

"Push off, and sitting well in order smite The sounding furrows"

The scene is set on the shore of Ithaca. The time is evening. The moon is rising and the sea is darkened by the shadows of the coming night. There is no description of the landscape; yet when Tennyson touches Nature in this poem, it is done with great mastery. A whole world of ocean, weather and of the sea experience is in these two lines:

On shore, and when

Through shrouding drifts the rainy Hyades Vext the dim sea"

All is in harmony—the waning day, the ship in port, the aged king with a strong spirit craving for a wider life, and restless to be gone.

Its Felicity of Diction

Tennyson, always a master in the choice of happy words and phrases, employs appropriate diction in this poem also. "I will drink life to the lees"; "I am become a name", "I am part of all I have met"; "To rust unburnished, not to shine in use"- these and several others are fine examples. This poem is written in an astonishingly compact style. The language employed is terse, and epigrammatic in vigour, as the expressions quoted above show. In other words, the ideas have been expressed through the fewest possible words. The maximum economy in the use of words has been exercised. The phrases and lines have been packed and loaded with meaning. The language put in the mouth of Ulysses makes him a man of action. The man is accustomed to rule and be obeyed. The severe and unadorned language is in contrast with the fine and ornamental diction of The Lotus-Eaters.

Its Meter

The poem is written in blank verse which has been very much admired by critics for its grandeur. The blank verse of this poem approaches Miltonic greatness by virtue of its movement and majesty. Hardly any other poem of the

same length can claim comparison with Ulysses as regards the grandeur of its blank verse and compact expression.

1.0.5 IN MEMORIAM

Write a brief summary of Tennyson's “In Memoriam” indicating

the main theme of the elegy.”

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Introduction

Alfred Tennyson wrote In Memoriam on the death of his friend, Arthur Hallam, in 1833 at the age of 22 years. It comprises 131 elegiac lyric series. All were written at irregular intervals between 1833 and 1850. He added to it a 'Prologue' and an 'Epilogue'. It is a voice of human race speaking through him.

Background of the Elegy

Arthur Hallam and Tennyson were fast friends at the Trinity college, Cambridge. Both used to move about the surrounding countryside. Both would compose poetry. Hallam had the occasion to visit the house of Tennyson wherein he became engaged to the poets sister Emily. But Arthur died suddenly at Vienna on September 15th, of a stroke of Apoplexy. Tennyson felt the shock of his friends death very seriously, and he wrote In Memoriam in a new style. The elegy contains reference to many of the events of their friendship, and shows the spiritual voice of the poet.

Summary of In Memoriam

In Memoriam is divided in four separate parts. (I) Part first-The part first upto the first Christmas consists of sections I-XXVII. The theme of these parts is that of absorption in grief and the poet gradually takes courage to rise above his grief to a clearer conviction. There are frequent reference to the continued existence of the dead friend. This part is subdivided into two groups (1) section IX-XVI. They give account to the coming of the ship and to the burial (2) Sections (XXII-XXIV) A review of the past friendship and the events associated with it.

The prologue was added to the elegy in 1849, when the elegy was about to be published. It exhibits the sense of merriment of Tennyson in his victory over doubt, and his faith in God and His love and mercy. The different phases of his grief are portrayed here and the poet could not suppress his grief or love. He tries to seek relief through sleep. He finds no consolation from any source. He visits the home of his friend and finds the surroundings lonely and desolate. He also visits the Cleveden Church where Hallam was buried.

Poet's Grief and Despair

The poet finds a similarity between the excitement of his own heart and the tide of river Sever on whose bank Cleveden Church lies. The poet then realises the immortality of true love. Sections XXVIII up to XXX deal with the first Christmas after the death of Hallam. The emotions of the poet turn from the past to the future, and he feels that his friend is not really dead. In sections XXXI-XXXVI the poet finds hope for the immortality of the human soul and of a life after death in the Biblical story of Lazarus who was raised from the dead. The poet has doubts whether he is really worthy of his lofty theme.

Mood of Melancholy Declines

This part consists of sections XXVIII-XXVII. The idea of continued life of the dead is seen spreading, and it gives a philosophical touch. The poet addresses the Yew tree which blossoms in that spring like other trees. The poet imagines the chances of reunion with his dead friend, and the immortality of the soul is entertained. In section XVIII-XIX the poet analyses the nature of his elegy. He apologises to philosophy as previously he did to theology. In section-XI the poet prays his dead friend to help him; through faith in the ultimate triumph of good, which is frustrated by service. He discusses the possibility of communion between living and the dead.

Moral Attitude and Hope

Part third upto the third Christmas consists of sections XXVIII-CIII. The idea of the future life subsides. A sense of new and joyful life is doomed. Section XC-XCV show the possible contact of the living and the dead. Sections C-CII show the poets farewell to the home of childhood. He proceeds from the sorrowful past to the hopeful and joyful future. The poet compares his spirit to a

weak and humble wife, and Hallam's spirit to a wise and well-versed husband. He remembers their earlier friendship on earth, and believes that Hallam's spirit still loves him. In section C-CII the poet bids farewell to the Rectory at Somersby, his home. His thoughts turn away from the past to the future. He visits the garden of his home. He and the members of his family are to leave the Rectory.

Spiritual Satisfaction

The part consists of sections CIV-CXXXI. The poet is thinking of the past, and hopes for the future. His old melancholy is vanished and this is replaced by love and wide optimistic outlook. His friend being dead is mingled with that love which is the soul of the entire universe. This celebrates the Christmas and new year in the new home. He forgets his private grief and looks to the future and has good hopes for mankind. He expects to be reunited with his friend. In section CIX-CXIV the character of Hallam as an ideal man is portrayed, while the dangers of human progress are also pointed out.

The poet is of the belief that man is not mere mechanical energy, but has a soul itself. He considers over the influence of science. Thus he has acquired the cheerful optimism.

Conclusion

The occasion of his friend's death has convinced the poet that finally good will come out of evil. Truth would get victory over wars and revolutions. He thinks that man would go forward spiritually. He imagines that his friend Hallam is made one with nature, like Keats in Shelley's Adonais. He hears the voice of his friend in the rolling air and the flowing water. It is divine spirit in man that purifies human deeds. He concludes the elegy with a marriage songs, which is symbolic of a new lease of life, of reunion and of joy.

1.0.6 TENNYSON'S VIEW ON GOD AND RELIGION

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'In Memoriam' is not merely an elegy on Arthur Hallam but also

a poetic philosophy of life. Elucidate.

Or Explain critically Tennyson's view on God and religion as

expressed in 'In Memoriam'.

Or Write a note on Tennyson's idea about life and death as you find

them in 'In Memoriam'.

Or 'In Memoriam' is not monotonous, it has immense variety. Justify

Introduction

In Memoriam is a fine elegy which indicates elements of classical and medieval elegy, and does not follow the pastoral pattern. It tells the story of poet's sorrow along with expression of poet's views on God, religion and philosophy of life. Percival remarks, “Tennyson has kept up Hallam' connection by making his spirit to be his own particular guardian angel, and a seraph that serenely watches over his own country men, over all mankind.”

Structure of Elegy

There is clearance and consistency in the time scheme which provides clarity and unity to the structure. There is a fine arrangement in groups and clusters. The separate clusters are ingeniously bound up, and

the whole poem finally achieves unity. There seems a progression from the sorrow at the origin of the poem, and hope and optimism is available in the end.

Theme of the Elegy

The first part deals with grief and gloom of the poet along with recollection of friendship between the poet and Arthur; the second part is full of

hope and optimism, the third is charged with victory over despair and the peace, while the fourth part declares the joy of the poet. The poet then realises the divine spirit and aspires for the final union with his friend. It is a progressive and calm transition from grief to joy.

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One far of divine event

To which the whole creation moves.

The Philosophy of In Memoriam

The poem tells the story of the poet's grief, and parallel to the elegy there runs a theology. It is record of poet’s religion and philosophy of life. He believes in the immortality of the soul. He does not believe in the immediate absorption, but in the final one, connecting into supreme soul and the eternity. He has a faith in divine love. He has made the soul immortal. His attitude towards nature is exhibited in the elegy. The message of nature is exemplified plainly and vividly. C.M. Young writes, “In his highest mood, Tennyson, sometimes, speaks like an arch angel assuring the universe that it will muddle through.”

Conclusion

The genuine greatness of the poem lies in its being a great work of God, an exhibition of poets grief, a manifestation of his religious ideas and an expression of his optimism. Morton Luce says, “In Memorial holds a high position, it is best known and best loved.”

1.0.7 SOME IMPORTANT EXPLANATIONS

Lines:

It Little profits that an idle king,

By this still hearth, among these barren crags, Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole Unequal laws unto a savage race,

That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.

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Explanation: These lines are the opening lines of Alfred Tennyson's poem "Ulysses". Ulysses has returned to his native island, Ithaca in Greece from Troy. He has wandered for twenty years. His life has been full of action and adventure. On his return to Ithaca, he has taken up his kingly duties. The atmosphere of his family is joyful and calm. But being a man of action and adventure he feels bored with his life.

Here Ulysses, the king of Ithaca is speaking. He points out that he finds little delight and profit as an idle king to rule over his people and give unfair and imperfect laws to the uncivilized and barbarous people because he had been away from the kingdom for quiet some time from Ithaca. They had no higher ideas to govern and dominate their lives. They spent their time in material needs of their lives. The accumulated wealth, they ate and drank and spent their precious time in sleeping. They were a vegetative sort of people and had no spirit of adventure in them . Hence Ulysses did not like to rule over such backward people.

Lines:

I am become a name;

For always roaming with a hungry heart Much have I seen and known,-cities of men And manners, climates, councils, governments, Myself not least, but honor'd of them all,-

And drunk delight of battle with my peers, Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.

Explanation: These lines have been taken from Alfred Tennyson's poem "Ulysses".

Ulysses points out that all through his life he has undertaken travels of distant countries and distant lands. He has seen much and has known lands generally unknown to the people. His name has become associated with the name of an adventure. He has undertaken adventures to distant countries and has come across person of different cultures and manners, climates and conditions of life. He has visited councils, lands, governments of different countries and wherever he went

he was honoured and warmly welcomed by the people. He has taken part on the battle fields and has fond delight and pleasure in fighting with his companion in the Trojan War for ten years on the battle fields where the wind swept the plains of Troy resounding with the din of war. Ulysses feels delight in recounting adventures of his life and his heroic part in the Trojan War.

Lines:

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Life piled on life

Were all too little, and of one to me Little remains; but every hour is saved

From that eternal silence, something more, A bringer of new things; and vile it were

For some three suns to store and hoard myself. And this gray spirit yearning in desire

To follow knowledge like a sinking star, Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

Explanation: These lines have been taken from Alfred Tennyson's poem "Ulysses".

Ulysses does not like the life of idleness and laziness that he is leading. He believes in action. He says that action should be the keynotes of his life. Men should not allow himself to rust by leading a lazy life. On the other hand, he should always keep his mind bright and fresh by constantly gathering fresh knowledge.

Ulysses points out that one life after another will prove insufficient for gathering all the experience and travels of all new lands in the world. Experience is so wide and so expensive that one life is very insufficient for acquiring experience of all activities in human life. Of his present life only few years remained behind because of his old age. He has completed most part of his life and is now on the last legs of time before coming to his grave. But he does not bother about death. Every hour that is saved from the jaws of death can be

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utilized in acquitting new things of life. Hence it would be very wrong on his part to stay for some three years among the people and spend his life like them in storing and hoarding the material things of life. He does not find any comfort in staying and hoarding because his spirit, though grown old in his old age, is yet very anxious to move after the acquisition of knowledge and pursue it to the farthest limits to which human thought and imagination can go.

Lines:

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail; There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,

Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me, - That ever with a frolic welcome took

The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed Free hearts, free foreheads,-you and I are old; Old age hath yet his honor and his toil.

Death closes all; but something ere the end, Some work of noble note, may yet be done, Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.

Explanation: These lines have been extracted from Alfred Tennyson's Ulysses. Ulysses talks about his own son Telemachus. He decides to transfer the duties of kingship to his son who would be able to perform all his duties well.

Ulysses and his mariners decide to go out in search of new lands and new adventures in life. He directs the attention of his mariners to the port where the ship stands on the dark water of the sea ready to set for the new lands. The mariners have been persons of daring courage and they have worked hard with him through all the toils and difficulties of their travels. They have all taken the thunder and the sunshine in a very cheerful spirit and in a cheerful manner and have opposed all kinds of difficulties that had come in their way. They have now become old, and Ulysses and his mariners have lost their youth and are now passing through their old age. Yet there is nothing to be afraid of. Old age has also

its good points. There is much in old age which deserves honour and respect. Even in the old age one can do work of goodness and nobility before death brings about the end of life. Ulysses therefore exhorts his mariners, though old they may be, to undertake the work of nobility quite befitting their dignity because in the past they had fought with gods on the battle-field of Troy. Since they had fought with gods, they were men of honour and dignity, and even in their old age they should perform deeds quite in harmony with their past records of magnificent achievements.

1.1 ROBERT BROWNING

NOTES

Robert Browning was born on May 7, 1812, in Camberwell (a suburb of London), the first child of Robert and Sarah Anna Browning. His mother was a zealous Evangelical and an accomplished pianist. Mr. Browning had angered his own father and forgone a fortune: the poet's grandfather had sent his son to oversee a West Indies sugar plantation, but the young man had found the institution of slavery so abhorrent that he gave up his prospects and returned home, to become a clerk in the Bank of England. On this meagre salary he was able to marry, raise a family, and to acquire a library of 6000 volumes. He was an exceedingly well-read man who could recreate the siege of Troy with the household chairs and tables for the benefit of his inquisitive son.

Without a doubt, most of the poet's education came at home. He was an extremely bright child and a voracious reader and learned Latin, Greek, French and Italian by the time he was fourteen. He attended the University of London in 1828, the first year it opened, but left in discontent to pursue his own reading at his own pace. His extensive education has led to difficulties for his readers: he did not always realize how obscure were his references and allusions.

In 1830 he met the actor William Macready and tried several times to write verse drama for the stage. At about the same time he began to discover that his real talents lay in taking a single character and allowing him to discover himself to us by revealing more of himself in his speeches than he suspects—the characteristics of the dramatic monologue. The reviews of Paracelsus (1835) had been mostly encouraging, but the difficulty and obscurity of his long poem

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Sordello (1840) turned the critics against him, and for many years they constantly complained of obscurity even in his shorter, more accessible lyrics.

In 1845 he saw Elizabeth Barrett's Poems and contrived to meet her. Although she was an invalid and very much under the control of a authoritarian father, the two finally married in September 1846 and a few days later eloped to Italy, where they lived until her death in 1861. The years in Florence were among the happiest for both of them. Her love for him is to be seen in the Sonnets from the Portugese, and to her he dedicated Men and Women, which contains his best poetry. Public sympathy for him after her death (she was a much more popular poet during their lifetimes) surely helped the critical reception of his Collected Poems (1862) and Dramatis Personae (1863). The Ring and the Book (1868-9), based on an "old yellow book" which told of a Roman murder and trial, finally won him considerable popularity. He and Tennyson were now mentioned together as the leading poets of the age. While he lived and wrote actively for another twenty years, the late '60s were the peak of his career. His influence

continued to grow, however, and finally lead to the founding of the Browning Society in 1881. He died in 1889, on the same day that his final volume of verse, Asolando, was published. He is buried in Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey.

1.1.1 BROWNING WAS THE BEST VICTORIAN

Is it correct to hold that all the poet of his age Browning was the

best Victorian?

Or Write a short essay on the Victorian moral outlook in Browning's

poetry.

Introduction

Browning is symbolic of the Victorian moral outlook. The formative years of his life were spent in the very beginning of the new era. The impulses he received at the beginning continued to inspire him all through. He was to some degree influenced by the political and social events of those years. His poetry shows no awareness of the contemporary social changes. While Tennyson

faithfully represents its age in his poetry, the contemporary social and economic trends and problems find a better place in his poetry. Hugh Walker says: “Browning's ultimate position in the hierarchy of English poets is more doubtful than that of any other English poet of nineteenth century.”

Reflection of Age

The age of Browning is not reflected in his poetry. He kept himself aloof from the problems of his age. His poetry failed to reflect the condition of his times. His main theme was soul dissection. He stood alone among his contemporaries. Hugh Walker aptly observes, “Browning did not much love to work on topics connected with his own generation. To him time was a matter almost of indifference, for the human soul in which his interest was concerned, has remained much the same since the days of Adams. If he had a preference, it was for the Italian Renaissance rather than for any other age of country.” The contemporary social economic tendencies are not faithfully represented by Browning. He was an ardent admirer of Italian Renaissance. A critic said, “Perhaps no English poet ever knew any foreign country so

well as Browning knew Italy, certainly none has dedicated more of his work to a land which was not his own." John Ruskin says, "Robert Browning is unerring in every sentence, he writes of the middle ages." He says in 'One Word More':

"Oh the crowd must have emphatic warrant! Theirs the sinai-forehead's cloven brilliance, Right-aim's rod-sweep, tongue's imperial fiat Never dares the man put off the prophet.

The reputation of Browning suffered from a general reaction to Victorianism. The neo-classics criticised Browning for his lack of art, and his excessive emotionalism. Chesterton says: "The eminent Victorian poet, dead fourteen years, was sponsored by one of the loveliest, soon to be one of the famous of the Edwardians."

A Poet of Victorian Morality

Browning was not a man of his age but a man much in advance of his age. As a moralist and religious teacher he holds a distinct place among the writers of

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the Victorian age. He is not touched by the social, political, or intellectual movements of Victorian Era. His new philosophy of love is expressed.

No indeed for good above

Is great to grant or mighty to make And creates the love to reward love.

Browning had faith in God, faith in amorality of the soul and faith in Victorian morality. He had firm faith in human life and human nature. He gave a distinct theory of the relation of man to the universe. Compton Rickett says : “Browning’s writings are experimental studies in spiritual experience: Whether he deals with love, or patriotism, intellectual ambition or artistic passion, it is all brought to one common denominator—its effect upon character, its value in the making of the soul.” He says:

"Therefore I summon age To grant youth's heritage,

Life's struggle having so far reached its term Thence shall I pass approved

A man far age removed.

Victorian Optimism

Browning is the chief exponent of Victorian optimism. He is placed firmly at the head of forces of the Victorian dogmatism. S.A. Brooke writes, “His poetry was not spread at first, but afterwards, the world having reached him, he became a favoured poet.” Browning was placed firmly at the head of the forces of late Victorian dogmatism. His optimism is not blind and cheap, but based on the ground realities of life.

Chesterton says, “Browning’s optimism is founded on imperfections of man, he derives hope from human deficiency.” He says:

God is in His heaven.

All is right with the world

1.1.2 BROWNING'S DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE

Write a short note on Browning's dramatic Monologue.

Or

“It is not soliloquy of a soul that we suddenly come upon, it is rather a self-disclosure in which we have the collaboration of an analyst at work.” Is this true of dramatic Monologues of Browning. Give your reasoned comment.

Or Comment on the dramatic element in the poetry of Browning.

Definition of Monologue

A dramatic monologue is a fine blend of dramatic lyric. It is a speech by one outstanding character other than the poet himself, to a silent listener. Of course, the poet may put his own ideas and philosophy into the mouth of the speaker, who is in a dramatic situation under the circumstances, may reveal the inner traits of his character and the deepest motives for acting in a particular way.

Difference between a Soliloquy and Drama

A dramatic monologue differs from a soliloquy materially, whereas the former is addressed to a passive listener whose reaction to, what is being laid bare is hinted at, now and then, by the speaker himself, the latter expresses the private thoughts of the actor and is not supposed to be heard by anybody. A dramatic monologue is not “the spontaneous utterance of a living being, it is not the soliloquy of a soul that we suddenly come upon, it is rather a self disclosure. We do not feel that we have before us a human soul unwillingly revealing itself, but a psychologist who is dissecting and a moralist who is judging it.” A dramatic monologue differs from drama in its complete lack of active and interchanged speech.

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Characteristics of Browning's Dramatic Monologues

Browning's dramatic monologues are known for their obscurity. He makes the hero speak without giving a reference to circumstances. Hence, we completely fail to understand his speech and his meaning. To illustrate the charge of obscurity against him we may cite My Last Duchess, in which the Duke of Ferrara is making a speech to the Ambassador who has brought an offer of marriage for the Duke. We cannot appreciate the intensity and strength of his jealousy without knowing at the very beginning that the Duke has an indulgent wife “who smiled no doubt, whenever I passed her, but passed without much the same smile.”

The second characteristic of his dramatic monologues is that characters of his dramatic monologues have faith in God. They believe that their actions are the result of God’s will. Accordingly, Bishop Blougram is certain that his life of pain- stricken and tottering compromises has been really justified by God's divine. Andrea Del Sarto says to his wife:

At the end

God, I conclude, compensates punishes and All is as God over rules.

The third characteristic of his dramatic monologues is that they are mixtures of half truths and falsehood. In the monologue, we do not find uniformity in the statements of the characters. What they say at one place is contradicted by them at another place. For example Andrea Del Sarto says to his wife:

speech:

"Had the mouth there urged never for gain God and the glory ! never gain

Up to God all there !

I might have done it for you.

And later on, he concludes the fault of his wife and makes a contradictory

Why do I need you?

What wife had Rafael, or has Agnolo?

In this world, who can do a thing will not- And who would it, cannot, I perceive.

The fourth quality of his monologues is satires against those, who speak them. But G.K. Chesterton held a different view. He says that “they are not satires or attacks upon their subjects. They are not even harsh and unfeeling exposures of them. They say or are intended to say the best that can be said for the persons with them they deal.” To illustrate in The Last Ride Together, the poet has defended the lover in every possible manner without commenting on his love or passion.

The fifth characteristic of his dramatic monologues is the coarse and brutal language.

The sixth characteristic is that they state Browning's philosophy of life. They are the best vehicle to express his philosophical ideas. The characters, as in The Last Ride Together serve the same purpose. The poet has defended the lover in every possible manner and express his views in a simple and elegant manner. In The Last Ride Together the philosophy is based on the glories of failure. For example :

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Fail I alone, in words and deeds? Why all men strive and who succeeds? Look at the end of work, contrast

The petty Done the undone vast.

Browning's dramatic monologues are his best poetic pieces.

Browning's own Personality in his Dramatic Monologues

However soul-stirring and revealing these monologues may be, they are not sufficiently dramatic and objective. There is tendency of the poet's own personality to intrude itself into the action of his pieces. They are not impartial and dispassionate mirror of reality. There is always some moral preoccupation in his psychology. If he is describing souls that are steeped in vice and in crime, he cannot keep back his disgust for them.

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Only one Character in a Piece

Browning would take a character, get inside it and make it speak in such a way that it expresses its whole personal history and philosophy. Like Shakespeare, “Browning is incapable of creating many characters together in a piece, influencing each other's conduct and action.”

The Last Ride Together

The Last Ride Together is one of the loveliest lyrics of Browning and has not being surpassed so far in the English literature. It has all the essentials of a dramatic monologue; a dramatic situation and a person under the stress of an experience delivering himself of his feelings. It is the request of a rejected lover to ride with his beloved. The rejected lover is no objective character—somebody other than the poet. In fact, he is the spokesman of Browning and believes after his own creator that one's failures on this earth are temporary and will very soon give way to access in heaven, where one is bound to be born once again after death.

Conclusion

The element and energies of life are tightly knit in microcosmic completeness. Such situations offered Browning different moods of confusion, sophistry, and self-deception; of every type of complication and aberration of thought. The typical apologies and self-justifications of his subjects give him the fullest

opportunity of exhibiting his talent as leading counsel, one of whose art is to induce his victim to speak freely in self-defence; it is the occasion on which the people are apt to reveal most. The poet acquired such mastery of his method that he could use it to any degree of complexity.

1.1.3 BROWNING'S OPTIMISM

Browning's Optimism.

Or

Browning's Philosophy of Life.

Or

Write a note on Browning's Philosophy of life with particular

reference to his optimism.

Or In what way is Browning's all too confident optimism reflected

in his poetic technique.

Introduction

Robert Browning was one of the greatest philosophic poets of England during the 19th century. The study of his poems reveals his philosophical view on spiritual and material things of life. Though he did

not formulate a system of philosophy of life, yet his philosophical ideas bring closer to the philosophic thinkers of the world.

Taken Certain Things for Granted

In estimating Browning's philosophy of life we have to bear in mind that he took certain things for granted and never allowed doubts and confusions to rise regarding them. He was not ready to enter into any arguments about the veracity or certainty of his philosophical thoughts and ideas.

Existence of God

The first thing that Browning took for granted was the existence and supremacy of God as the creator and Governor of the universe. He was not prepared to question the existence of God even for a moment. In Pauline, Browning says “I saw God everywhere-I felt His presence.”

In Paracelsus, Browning once again expressed his faith in the supreme being, pointing out:

God is seen

In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and the cloud.

Browning did not conceive of God as a cruel and tyrannical being. His God was the God of sympathy and mercy, looking with kindness at his creation.

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God made all the creatures and gave them Our love and our fear

We and they are His children One family here.

Immortality of the Soul

The second principle that Browning took for granted is the immortality of the soul. He could never believe that death brings an end of the divine spark irradiating human life. God is the potter and the soul is the clay. Both of them endure for ever. This faith of the poet is well expressed in Rabbi Ben Ezra :

Food ! All that is at all, Lasts ever, past recall,

Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure

Time's wheel runs back or stops: Potter and clay endure.

Salient Points of his Philosophical System

(a) The ultimate object of life :

Having understood the fundamental principles of Browning's philosophical system let us now examine the salient points of his Philosophical thoughts. Browning first of all, gave out the answer to the question of man's ultimate end and object in life. In Paracelsus Browning's conceived the purpose of human life in acquiring power. Since the power of knowledge was the supreme power the poet considered acquisition of knowledge as the objective of human life. But knowledge by itself was not enough for knowledge is dry and unless it is coloured by the thought of love, it cannot hold out any attraction. Hence, at a later stage Browning has brought about a change in his original conception and made knowledge combined with love as the main quest of human life. This conviction of the poet is expressed in the following lines:

Love preceding power,

And with much power, always much love."

"O world, as God has it! all is beauty And knowing this is love and love is duty.

(b) World is a fit place for Action :

Browning believed that the world was the fit place for action. He had no sympathy with those philosophers who sought to escape from the world into the forests to realise salvation or with these who considered the world as an evil place and a vale of sorrow. Browning accepted the world as it is and considered it good and noble. In Soul the poet says:

How good is man's life, the more living, how fit to employ

All the heart and the soul and the soul and the senses for ever in

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joy.

(c) Man can achieve success in the achievement of his Ideas :

Having clearly the aim and end of man's life Browning examined whether it was possible for man to achieve success in the achievement of his ideas. He was confronted directly with the problem of evil. Although man strove to realise perfection and complete success in his aspirations, he was baffled and discomfited by the over powering forces of evil in the world which retarded men's progress. Browning dealt with the problem of evil in the philosophical poems. Browning welcomed evil for it checked man from achieving perfection. Evil was necessary for balancing human life and saving him from reaching perfection because “what comes to perfection perishes.” Evil was, in Browning's opinion, a condition of man's moral life and his moral progress. Further evil was not so powerful as to subdue good. The forces of evil, however, powerful were likely to be subdued and controlled by the forces of goodness in the world. In Abt Vogler Browning says:

There shall never be one last good, What was will live as before

The evil is null, is naught, is silence implying sound What was good shall be good, with evil so much

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Presence of Evil is no Check on Aspiring for Higher Ideals

The presence of evil should not check man from aspiring for higher ideals. A man should keep his eyes fixed on higher ideals which may not be gained by him in the course of his earthly life. In Andrea Del Sarto, Browning emphasised fighting against the odds and difficulties that come in the way of man's life. In Rabbi Ben Ezra, Browning gives us the advice of struggle and fighting against difficulties of life. He says :

Youth should strive through acts uncouth Towards making.

Further in the same poem he gave the exhortation :

Then, welcome each rebuff

That turns earth's smoothness rough,

Each sting that bid nor sit nor stand but go ! Be our joys three parts pain,

Strive and hold cheap the strain

Learn nor account the pang, dare, never grudge the thorn.

Browning admonished the readers of his poetry to be warriors and fighters, strong and indomitable strugglers, never allowing thoughts of cowardice and craveness to distract them from their chosen path of heroism and bravery. In the poem The State and the Bust, he condemned cowardice and reproached the two lovers for their lack of courage and enthusiasm in their love.

Struggling May not End in Success

Browning was ready to answer the question as to what use was of this struggle if at the end man has to fail and suffer miseries. It is not necessary that struggling should end in success. Bitter struggles end in failures. In the face of failures what is the use of a struggling life? To such doubts Browning gave suitable answers. In the opinion of the poet man was not judged by this aspirations, his noble ideals and his success in only his life. Success was not the yard-stick by which a man's actions were judged by God. In the eyes of God a

man was judged not by what he actually attained and by all his hopes and aspirations. The faith of the poet in Rabbi Ben Ezra is expressed when he says:

Not on the vulgar mass

Called 'work' must sentence pass

Things done, that took eyes and had the prize But all the world's coarse thumb

And finger failed to plumb

So passed in making up the main account, All instincts immature

All purposes unsure

That weighed not as his work, yet welled the man's account.

Failure on the Earth has no Importance

Secondly, failure on the earth was not in any way an object of dismay, for what we fail to achieve in the world, we might succeed in getting later on in heaven after the end of our journey on the earth:

And what is our failure but a triumph's evidence For the fulness of the days.

Browning followed that on earth we have the ‘Broken arc’; but in heaven there is ‘the perfect round’. Failure need not dishearten or depress us. The lover in The Last Ride Together, gives a spirited defence of failure in life:

Fail I alone in words and deeds?

Why, all men strive and who succeeds? Look at the end of work contrast

The petty done, the undone vast.

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Life Follows Life

Life is a probation. Man's soul is immortal. Death need not scare us. What man fails to achieve in this world would be attained by him in the next life. Browning's faith and hope is expressed in Grammarian's Funeral he says:

"Leave now for dogs and apes! Man has Forever."

Conclusion

Such is the optimistic philosophy of Browning. His optimism, as G.K. Chesterton aptly opines, "was not founded on only argument for optimism, nor on opinions, but on life which was the work of God. Unlike

some spiritual voyagers in our literature, he never hugged the shore, but sailed for the open, loving the salt sting of the buffeting waves. A courageous soul, vigorous and vital comrade for those suffering from spiritual anaemia."

1.1.4 MY LAST DUCHESS

My Last Duchess That's my last Duchess painted on the wall, Looking as if she were alive. I call

That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf's hands Worked busily a day, and there she stand.

Will't please you sit and look at her? I said "Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read Strangers like you that pictured countenance, The depth and passion of its earnest glance, But to myself they turned (since none puts by

The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)

And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,

How such a glance came there; so, not the first Are you to turn and ask this, Sir 'twas not

Her Husband's presence only, called that spot Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps

Fra Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps Over my lady's wrist too much;" or "Paint Must never hope to reproduce the faint

Half-flush that dies along her throat;" such stuff

We courtesy, she thought, and cause enough

For calling up that spot of joy. She had

A heart-how shall I say?-too soon made glad, Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er

She looked on, and her looks went everywhere. Sir, "twas all one! My favour at her breast,

The Dropping of the daylight in the West, The bough of cherries some officious fool Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule She rode with round the terrace-all and each

Would draw from her alike the approving speech,

Or blush, at least. She thanked men,-good! but thanked Somehow-I know not how-as if she ranked

My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name With anybody's gift. Wo'd stoop to blame This sort of trifling? Even had you skill

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In speech-(which I have not)-to make your will Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,

Or there exceed the mark"-and if she let

Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set 40

He wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,

-E'en that would be some stooping; and I chuse Never to stoop. Oh Sir, she smiled, no doubt, Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without Much the same smile? This grew, I gave commands; Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands As if alive. Will't please you rise? we'll meet

The company below, then, I repeat,

The Count your master's known munificence

Is ample warrant that no just pretence 50

Of mine for dowry will be disallowed; Though is fair daughter's self, as I avowed At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go.

Together down, Sir! Notice Neptune, though, Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,

Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

The Date of Publication : The Setting

My Last Duchess was first published in the volume of poems called, Dramatic Lyrics, in 1842. It was republished in the Dramatic Romances of 1863. It is a dramatic monologue and Phelps regards it as one of the finest dramatic monologues, not only of Browning, but in the whole range of English literature. The speaker is the Duke of Ferrarra, an important city in Italy. It was an important cultural centre during the Renaissance. Whether the character of the Duke in the Monologue is based on some real historical figure or not, there is no denying the fact that in the Monologue, the poet has captured the very spirit of Renaissance Italy, its intrigues, its sensuality, its greed, and its cultural and artistic activity as well.

As a Dramatic Monologue

Browning's monologues grow out of some crisis or critical situation in the life of the main figure, and embody the reaction of that figure to that particular situation. Placed in such a situation, the chief figure, the speaker of the monologue, indulges in self-analysis and self-introspection and in this way his soul is laid bare before us. In his monologues, generally, the speaker refers to other character or characters, and in this way reveals not only his character but that of others also. The presence of some listener or interlocutor is also implied. Thus the monologue is a remarkable piece of character study not only of the Duke but also of his last Duchess, and the messenger of the neighbouring Count forms the listener and the interlocutor.

Critical Summary of the Monologue

The Duke of Ferrara, a powerful, proud, and hard-hearted Italian Duke of the 16th century, has been widowed recently. He intends to marry a second time. The messenger of a powerful Count, who has his estate in the neighbourhood, comes to the Duke's palace to negotiate with him the marriage of the Count's daughter. The Duke takes him round his picture gallery and shows him the portrait of his last Duchess. The portrait is life-like and realistic, and the Duke, who is a great lover of the fine arts, is justifiably proud of it.

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The Duke points out the portrait to the messenger and tells him that he alone uncovers the picture and nobody else is allowed to do so. At this point, the Duke notices an inquiring look in the eyes of the messenger and immediately understands that he wants to know the cause of the deep, passionate look in the eyes of the Duchess, and proceeds to satisfy his curiosity. In this way Browning turns the monologue into a colloquy. The inquiring looks, particular gestures and movements of the listener, here the messenger, serve as big question-marks, and provide the speaker with an occasion for explanation and self-analysis. In this way, much valuable light is thrown on character, and much that is past and dead is brought to life.

In response to the inquiring look of the messenger, the Duke tells him that the deep passion in the eyes of the Duchess does not result from any sex-intrigue or guilty love. He never gave her any occasion to be unfaithful to him. Even the portrait on the wall is done not by an ordinary artist, but by a monk, and he was allowed only one day to complete it. He did not allow the Monk any longer time, for he did not want to provide them any occasion for intimacy. This shows that the Duke is a jealous tyrant and the poor Duchess could never enjoy any freedom of movement as the wife of such a man.

The Duke continues with his explanation. The Duke tells the envoy that his last Duchess had very childish and foolish nature. She was pleased with trifles, would thank others for even the slightest service they happened to render to her, and had no sense of dignity and decorum. For example the faint blush of joy on her cheek and neck was not caused by the presence of her husband. If the painter happened to mention that her cloak covered her wrist too much, or that paint could never hope to capture the light pink glow on her throat, she would take such chance remarks as compliments and blush with pleasure. She had a childish nature, and was pleased too easily by such trifles as the gift of a branch laden with cherries, the beautiful sunset, or the mule presented to her by someone for her rides round the terrace. She would blush with pleasure at such trifles, just as much as she would blush at some costly ornament presented by him. She was the wife of a Duke who belonged to an ancient family, nine hundred year old. But she regards even this gift of his at par with the trifling services rendered to her by others.

As a matter of fact, she had no discrimination, and no sense of dignity and decorum. She smiled at everybody without any distinction; she thanked everybody in the same way. He expected better sense from his wife. He did not try to correct or reform her, for even to notice such frivolity would have meant loss of dignity, and he did not like to suffer this loss. Besides, she would have argued and discussed with him instead of listening to his advice. Her habit of smiling continued to grow till it became intolerable to him. At last he gave orders, and, “Then all smiles stopped together”. The line has been left intentionally mysterious. We cannot say for certain how the smiling stopped. But, most probably, the poor, innocent Duchess was murdered at the command of her brutal and hard-hearted husband.

The Duke then asks the messenger to come down, where the other guests are waiting. In passing, he tells the messenger that he would expect a rich dowry from his master, the Count, though, of course, he adds very cleverly, his primary concern is the daughter, and not the dowry. The Duke is not only hard-hearted, proud and tyrannical, but also greedy and cunning. He is a great hypocrite . The only good point about him is his love of art. As they go down the stairs, he asks the messenger to have a good look at the bronze statue of Neptune, the sea-god. In this statue, the god is shown riding and controlling a sea-horse. It was done specially for him by the great sculptor, Claus of Innsbruck. It is the name of an imaginary artist invented to impress the messenger, just as earlier he had invented the name of the painter, Fra Pandolf.

Characterisation

The present monologue is an admirable piece of character-study. It is a poem merely of fifty lines, but within its brief compass the poet has rendered a vivid and moving description of both the Duke and the Duchess. The tyranny, the pride and self-conceit, the hard-heartedness, and the dictatorial attitude of the Duke have been thrown into sharp relief by contrast with the genial and cheerful good nature of the Duchess. As Phelps tells us, she was a frank-hearted, charming girl with a genial disposition and zest for life. But all her expressions of delight, and her innocence, not corrupted by the ways of the world, received only a cold response at the hands of her husband. The result was she pined away, or was murdered at the order of the tyrant husband. Critics have read into the portrait an autobiographical significance. They have likened her life in the home of her

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husband to that of Elizabeth Barret, the poet's wife, in the home of her father. Just as Elizabeth suffered from the tyranny of her insensitive father, so did the Duchess suffers from the tyranny of her proud and arrogant husband.

An Epitome of Renaissance Italy

The monologue is not only an admirable piece of character-study, but also the epitome of the Italian Renaissance. The very spirit of the age has been captured in this short piece. Its intrigue, its greed, its cunning, and hypocrisy, as well as its love of the fine arts, have all been brought out.

Style and Versification

The style of the Monologue is dense and epigrammatic. The line, “And all smiles stopped together”, is a concentrated expression of a whole life's tragedy. But despite this density and concentration, the poem is lucid and clear. It is entirely free from the usual faults of Browning. No doubt, there are a few parentheses, but they do not come in the way of our understanding. The poem is written in Heroic couplet, but as the sense runs on from one line to another, the readers are almost not conscious of the rhyme.

1.1.5 THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER

The Last Ride Together

I SAID--Then, dearest, since 'tis so, Since now at length my fate I know, Since nothing all my love avails,

Since all, my life seem'd meant for, fails,

Since this was written and needs must be-- My whole heart rises up to bless

Your name in pride and thankfulness! Take back the hope you gave,--I claim Only a memory of the same,

--And this beside, if you will not blame;

Your leave for one more last ride with me.

My mistress bent that brow of hers, Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs When pity would be softening through, Fix'd me a breathing-while or two

With life or death in the balance: right!

The blood replenish'd me again;

My last thought was at least not vain: I and my mistress, side by side

Shall be together, breathe and ride, So, one day more am I deified.

Who knows but the world may end to-night?

Hush! if you saw some western cloud All billowy-bosom'd, over-bow'd

By many benedictions--sun's

And moon's and evening-star's at once-- And so, you, looking and loving best,

Conscious grew, your passion drew Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too, Down on you, near and yet more near,

Till flesh must fade for heaven was here!-- Thus leant she and linger'd--joy and fear!

Thus lay she a moment on my breast.

Then we began to ride. My soul Smooth'd itself out, a long-cramp'd scroll Freshening and fluttering in the wind.

Past hopes already lay behind.

What need to strive with a life awry?

Had I said that, had I done this, So might I gain, so might I miss.

Might she have loved me? just as well She might have hated, who can tell!

Where had I been now if the worst befell?

And here we are riding, she and I.

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Fail I alone, in words and deeds?

Why, all men strive and who succeeds? We rode; it seem'd my spirit flew,

Saw other regions, cities new,

As the world rush'd by on either side.

I thought,--All labour, yet no less Bear up beneath their unsuccess. Look at the end of work, contrast The petty done, the undone vast,

This present of theirs with the hopeful past!

I hoped she would love me; here we ride.

What hand and brain went ever pair'd? What heart alike conceived and dared? What act proved all its thought had been? What will but felt the fleshly screen?

We ride and I see her bosom heave. There 's many a crown for who can reach. Ten lines, a statesman's life in each!

The flag stuck on a heap of bones, A soldier's doing! what atones?

They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.

My riding is better, by their leave.

What does it all mean, poet? Well, Your brains beat into rhythm, you tell What we felt only; you express'd

You hold things beautiful the best,

And pace them in rhyme so, side by side. 'Tis something, nay 'tis much: but then,

Have you yourself what 's best for men? Are you--poor, sick, old ere your time-- Nearer one whit your own sublime

Than we who never have turn'd a rhyme?

Sing, riding 's a joy! For me, I ride.

And you, great sculptor--so, you gave A score of years to Art, her slave,

And that 's your Venus, whence we turn To yonder girl that fords the burn!

You acquiesce, and shall I repine?

What, man of music, you grown gray With notes and nothing else to say, Is this your sole praise from a friend, 'Greatly his opera's strains intend,

But in music we know how fashions end!' I gave my youth: but we ride, in fine.

Who knows what 's fit for us? Had fate Proposed bliss here should sublimate My being--had I sign'd the bond--

Still one must lead some life beyond,

Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried.

This foot once planted on the goal, This glory-garland round my soul, Could I descry such? Try and test!

I sink back shuddering from the quest.

Earth being so good, would heaven seem best? Now, heaven and she are beyond this ride.

And yet--she has not spoke so long! What if heaven be that, fair and strong At life's best, with our eyes upturn'd Whither life's flower is first discern'd,

We, fix'd so, ever should so abide?

What if we still ride on, we two With life for ever old yet new, Changed not in kind but in degree, The instant made eternity,--

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And heaven just prove that I and she Ride, ride together, for ever ride?

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INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

Date of Publication

The poem The Last Ride Together is regarded as one of the finest love poems of Browning. It is a rather long poem of ten stanzas, each of eleven lines. It was first published in 1855 in Vol. I of the Collection of Browning's poems entitled Men and Women. Later, it was included in Dramatic Romances published in 1868.

As a Dramatic Monologue : The Critical Situation

The Last Ride Together is a dramatic monologue and it shows Browning at his best in the handling of this poetic form. It has also been called a dramatic lyric because it is not an expression of his own personal

emotions, but that of the imaginary character. It is spoken by a lover who loved his lady over a long period of time, and who, after making him wait for so long, finally rejected him, and turned to another lover. The lover then prayed to her to grant two requests of his. First, that she should remember his love of her, and secondly, that she should come with him for a last ride together. To his great joy the lady consented.

Critical Summary of the Monologue

It is out of this love-situation that the monologue grows. It is spoken by the lover as he rides by the side of his beloved for the last time. As they commence their ride, the beloved for a moment bends over him and places her head over his shoulders. It seems to him as if heaven itself had descended over him, so great is the bliss he experiences at the moment.

As they ride along, the lover experiences a heavenly bliss. His soul which had lost its happiness and on which grief had left its ugly marks and wrinkles, now smoothens itself out like a crumpled sheet of paper does, which opens out and flutters in the wind. All hopes of a happy life with his beloved, were now dead and gone. His love was now a matter of the past. But the lover does not love hope. He shares Browning's optimism and says that it is no use to regret or to feel

sorry for a life which has been ruined. What is ended cannot be mended. It is no use speculating over his possible success, if he had acted and spoken differently. It is just possible that had he acted differently, instead of loving him, she might have hated him. Now she is only indifferent to him. Now at least she rides beside him. Instead of brooding sadly over the dead past he derives consolation from this fact.

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The lover then reflects over the lot of humanity in general, and derives further consolation from the fact that he is not the only one who has failed in life. Such is the lot of man that they all try, but none succeeds. All labour, but all fail at last to achieve their ends. How little of success and achievement, and how much of failure does the whole world show! He is lucky in the sense that, at least, he rides by the side of his beloved. Others do not get even that much of success. There is always a wide disparity between conception and execution, between ambition and achievement. Human will is seldom transformed into action; human limitations always hamper action and the achievement of one's desires.

Hardly anyone gets an adequate reward for his achievements. The only reward, even of the most successful statesman, is a short obituary notice, and that of a heroic warrior only an epitaph over his grave in the Westminster Abbey. The poet, certainly, achieves much. He expresses human thoughts and emotions in a sweet, melodious language, but he does not get any of the good things of life. He lives and dies in poverty. The great sculptor and musician, too, are failures. From even the most beautiful piece of sculpture, say a statue of the Goddess Venus, one turns to an ordinary, but a living, breathing girl; and fashions in music are quick to change. Comparatively, he is more successful for he has, at least, been rewarded with the company of his beloved. At least, he has the pleasure of riding with her by his side.

It is difficult to say what is good and what is not good for man in this world. Achievement of perfect happiness in this world means that one would have no hopes left for life in the other world. Failure in this world is essential for success and achievement in the life to come. He has failed in this life, but this is a blessing in disguise, which means that he would be successful in the life to come. He can now hope for happiness in the other world. Because he did not get his beloved here, he is sure to enjoy the bliss of her love in the life after death. Now for him, “both Heaven and she are beyond this ride.” Failure in this world is best.

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Further, so hopes the lover, "the instant become eternity" and they may ride together for ever and ever. Who knows that the world may end that very moment? In that case, they will be together in the other world if it ends that very moment? In that case, they will be together in the other world, and will be together for ever.

Soul-Study : A Study in Optimism

The monologue lays bare before us the lover’s soul. As he muses over his past failure in love, his bliss in the present, and his hopes for the future, we get a peep into his soul. He is a heroic soul who is not discouraged by his failure in love. He derives consolation from failure itself. He shares the poet's cheerful optimism, his faith in the immortality of the soul, and believes, like him, that, “God creates the love to grant the love.” It is better to die, “without a glory garland round one's neck,” for there is a life beyond and one should have some opening left for it, “dim-descried”.

An Excellent Love Poem

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Lines:

What is he but a brute Whose flesh hath soul to suit,

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Whose spirit works lest arms and legs want play? To man, repose this test-

Thy body at its best,

How far can that project thy soul on its long way.

Explanation: These lines have been taken from the poem Rabbi Ben Ezra by Robert Browning. In these lines the poet compares the life of a man that of an animal and points out the difference between them.

In the opinion of Rabbi Ben Ezra that man cannot be considered better than an animal who adopts his soul to the needs of the body, and cares only for the play and action of the body rather than the soul . The man who neglects his soul at the cost of the body. The soul will ultimately depart from the body and travel all alone in the dis-bodied from its spiritual voyage. In that state the body will not help the soul and the non-cultivated soul shall have to bear great difficulties in its spiritual journey. Hence the test before man is not to neglect the soul and keep the cultivations of the soul and then alone the soul would march ahead on its way to spiritual progress after it has shuffled off the mortal coils.

Lines:

For pleasant in this flesh; Our soul in its rose-mesh

Pulled over to the earth, still yearns for rest; Would we some prize might hold

To match those manifold

Possessions of the brute—gain most, as we die best.

Explanation: These lines have been taken from the poem Rabbi Ben Ezra by Robert Browning. Here the poet means to say that bodily pleasures for pleasures of the sense are tempting. In his eyes the pleasures of the bodily sense are quite sweet.

The Rabbi praises God for his perfect plan and thanks him making him into perfection. This is possible by making the soul strive hard to ennoble itself. But the aspirations of the soul are apt to be damped under the influence of the flesh. The physical experience are indeed pleasant, and we are likely to content ourselves with sheer physical existence unmindful of the ennobling of the soul. The earthy pleasures are as a sweet-scented rose mesh trying to pull the soul ever down making it desire for rest from struggle. The Rabbi desires that those might be some reward for the struggling and aspiring soul which would compensate for the various pleasures of the flesh, so that there would be an incentive for the soul to struggle upwards.

Lines:

Thoughts hardly to be packed Into a narrow act,

Fancies that broke through language and escaped; All I cold never be,

This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

Explanation: These lines have been taken from the poem Rabbi Ben Ezra by Robert Browning. Browning complains that the world judged his worth only by a material standard; and that is why, it never took any notice of his inner longings and aspirations which cannot be properly translated into either words or actions.

Rabbi Ben Ezra points out that many thoughts and ideas which could not be translated into practice, many fancies and imaginative thoughts which could not be adequately expressed in words, many aspirations and ambitions of life which could not be realized and of which the world took no notice Would be taken into account by God in making final judgement on his worth as a man. God the creator of man, would certainly consider all these unfulfilled aspirations when judging man's work and worth in this world.

Lines:

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Oh Sir, she smiled, no doubt,

Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without

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Much the same smile? This grew, I gave commands; Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands As if alive. Will't please you rise?

Explanation: These lines have been taken from Robert Browning's poem "My Last Duchess". The Duke tells the envoy that the Last Duchess was very free with her smiles. She smiled when her husband showed her a favour. She had the smile same for the beauty of the sunset, for a fellow who brought a worthless branch of cherries or the mule on which she rode. She could not make a distinction between the honour shown by a common man and that conferred on her by the Duke who belonged to a family of reputation nine hundred years old.

Lines:

The company below, then, I repeat,

The Count your master's known munificence Is ample warrant that no just pretence

Of mine for dowry will be disallowed; Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed At starting, is my object.

Explanation: These lines have been taken from Robert Browning's poem "My Last Duchess". When the Duke told the envoy of the Count why he had to pass orderes for the death of the Duchess, he asked him to leave his seat and accompany him down to meet the people who were waiting for them.

The Duke was greedy man. He did not like to loose the dowry. So he said to the envoy: "I may tell you again that the renowned generosity of your master, the Count, is quite a god guarantee that the dowry for which, I have just claims will not be refused. Nevertheless I may assure you as I told you in the beginning when our talks about the marriage began that my chief aim is to procure your master's beautiful daughter in marriage, and not the dowry.

Lines:

Fail I alone, in words and deeds?

Why, all men strive and who succeeds? We rode, it seemed my spirit flew,

Saw other regions, cities new.

As the world rushed by on either side.

Explanation: These lines have been taken from Robert Browning's "The Last Ride Together." Here the poet tells us that actual achievement of every person is far short of his hopes. We hope very high but actually achieve very little.

The lover consoles himself with the thought that he is not the only one to have failed in life. Failure is very common in this world both in words and in deeds. All men exert themselves to achieve their object but few succeed. The attainment of ambition is very rare. Then the actual achievement of people always fails short of their expectations. People aim big but achieve little. The lover says that he aimed at winning his mistress's is love and has attained only the pleasure of a last ride with her. His achievement, though far below his aim, was however, no small one. As he rode side by side with his beloved, he felt that his soul was breathing a new air. In other words, experience a delightful feeling of exhilaration.

Lines:

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Who knows what's fit for us? Had fate Proposed bliss have should sublimate My being; and I signed the bond-

Still one must lead some life beyond Have a bliss to die with-dim descried.

Explanation: These lines have been taken from the famous poem The Last Ride Together. Here the lover thinks that if all our ideals were achieved in perfection, we would have nothing to look forward to in the next life after death.

The lover says that a man cannot positively say what is good for him and what is not. If his love had achieved its fulfilment in this life there would have been nothing for him to look forward to in his next life. Man always turns to

something noble to achieve in his future life beyond the success he attains in this world. Of course, the bliss of the next life is only dimly perceived by man yet it is something which makes him. One should not die without some sort of hope for one's next life. Therefore one's all desires and aspirations ought not to be satisfied here.

1.2 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

1. Describe Tennyson's Poetry as a Mirror to the Age.

2. Discuss Tennyson as a Representative Poet.

3. Write a note on the Merits and Demerits of Tennyson's Poetry .

4. Discuss Tennyson's Greatness as a Poet.

5. Write the critical appreciation of the poem Ulysses.

6. Is it correct to hold that all the poet of his age Browning was the best Victorian?

7. Write a short note on Browning's dramatic Monologue.

8. Write a brief note on Browning's Optimism.

Fra Lippo Lippi

Fra Lippo Lippi", Robert Browning satirizes the essentially corrupt relationship between the Italian Renaissance tradition of art patronage, the Medici family, and the Roman Catholic church. The poem takes a dialectic structure enabling Lippi to describe and debunk the tradition of art patronage and then pose his own theory about the role of art and artist in society. He describes the censorious limitations which occur when representatives of the Church tell the artist

Your business is not to catch men with show,

With homage to the perishable clay,

But life them over it, ignore it all,

Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.

Your business is to paint the souls of men. [ll.183-87]

Browning suggests here that church doctrine transform art into propaganda rather than creative expression. These devotional works do not promote a critical awareness of life because the friars compel Lippo Lippi to create idealized representations of life, claiming that art should depict God's desires rather than human folly.

God's works-paint any one, and count it crime

To let a truth slip. Don't object, "His works

Are here already; nature is complete:

Suppose you reproduce here-(which you can't)

There's no advantage! You must beat her, then." [ll. 295-99]

Lippi tells the reader that the friars object to realistic art because it does not inspire obedience to church doctrine; but the Fra clearly believes that devotional art does not foster the spiritual and intellectual development of the individual. By placing more faith in the masses, Lippi acts far more discriminatingly than his patrons and superiors. He further attacks idealized devotional art by relentlessly emphasizing the moral hypocrisy of the men of the church. It is important to note that Browning does not debunk belief in God; he castigates those religious authorities who dictate moral imperatives to the common people which they themselves do not follow. Browning uses this hypocrisy to persuade his readers that idealized, artistic representations of life do not inspire people to uncritical devotion. He argues for a less exclusionary vision of art which permits the exploration of life's "plain meaning". For the Fra, the night watchman represents a kind of new ideal because he engages all of life, not the censored version sanctioned by the church. Lippi asks,

What's it all about?

To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,

Wondered at? oh, this last of course! — you say.

But why not do as well as say, — paint these

Just as they are, careless what comes of it?

God's works-paint any one, and count it crime

To let a truth slip. [ll.290-6]

Browning satirizes the hypocrisy of the monks and condemns a theory of art which denies the potential of ordinary people to cultivate a conscious awareness of life and art. As with the other friars, Fra Lippo Lippi believes art should capture moments of experience and transform them into focal points of beauty. Yet, Browning suggests that the traditional, idyllic definition of beauty espoused by the church turns art into propaganda. Instead, he proposes that honest, realistic portrayals of life should be channeled into these aesthetic moments.

Browning increases the drama of "Fra Lippo Lippi" by portraying the monk as an artist still caught in this traditional system of art patronage. Lippo Lippi emphasizes the hypocrisy of his position because the inspiration for his exalted, religious paintings comes from abased sources. For example, he finds the inspiration for patron saints in the face of the Prior's so-called niece and informs the night watchman in the final stanza that the evening's incident - being caught leaving a brothel - will inspire his next painting. The monk makes clear the depths of his frustration regarding the powerful force of censorship in which he is caught.

So I swallow my rage,

Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint

To please them-sometimes do and sometimes don't. [ll. 242-4]

Appropriately, in this interlude the Fra invokes the Medici name, relying upon the entrenched social hierarchy to protect himself. Above all others, the Medici family propagated the system of art patronage which Fra Lippo Lippi condemns. They represent the Roman Catholic church at its most abased level. Thus, in "Fra Lippo Lippi" Browning relentlessly indicts religious hypocrisy and elitist conceptions of art with his realistic, satirical portrait of one monk. In this, the poet reflects the increasingly democratic mores of nineteenth-century British society.