

Relevance of Tennyson Today

Abirami Balakumar

Assistant Professor, SASTRA University, Kumbakonam.

Tennyson's popularity rose in his lifetime and faded soon after, with a number of critics debunking him as a simple ruminator. But, our own mechanical existence will get reoriented as a sensible and sensitive life with the reading of Tennyson's poetry.

Analysis of the poem "EAGLE" by Tennyson

The Eagle

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.
The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

"The Eagle" stands as a prominent example for the perfection of Tennyson's style -- his mastery of English language at once simple, pure, and the exquisite and varied music of his verse. The poem is composed as a couple of triplets, rhyming aaa, bbb.

In his biographical account, Tennyson is described to be inspired by his recurrent exposure to the activities of the Eagles while he passed through the Pyrenees, the mountain range on the border between Spain and France, during the services as a messenger between a group of English Sympathisers and Spanish Revolutionaries. The poem remains

Tennyson's irresistible response to the sight

'He clasps the crag with crooked hands'

Tennyson in the first line refers to the male eagle, with the personal pronoun 'he'. The personification is reinforced, when he describes the 'claws' of the bird as 'crooked hands'. The alliteration in the words 'clasps', 'crag', 'crooked' – a series of monosyllables, makes the verse at once musical and slow moving. The place where the eagle lives is not a dense forest but a mountain top. It does not seem to bother about the comfort of the place. Its claws are designed to hold the cliff that is rough and uneven. The eagle can handle tough and rigid things. The motion of the bird coming to sit is referred to as 'clasps' and not simply 'holds'. The mountain place is surrounded by the blue sky (heaven). It is Tennyson's optical illusion when he sees things from bottom-up position.

'Close to the sun in lonely lands'

The Eagle lives on the top of the mountain in solitude. He lives close to the sun. The mountains are not inhabited by many living beings because of difficulty of flying or climbing to the height.

'Ring'd with the azure world he stands'

Ring'd refers to the circular form of the sky and indicates the endlessness of the sky. The entire range of the sky is blue in colour. The immeasurable height of the mountain and the vast unlimited sky serves as its place to rest.

If the first triplet built a series of hyperboles and upward vision, the second triplet begins with the understatement and a top-down vision.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls'

From the height of the cliff, the sea seems to be a dull lake with slow movement of waves in it. It is also downgraded through a series of negative personification as the sea is described as 'wrinkled' and 'crawling' both emphasising, old age and slow movement.

'He watches from his mountain walls'

The mountains are the walls (fortress) for the eagle and from there he observes the sea steadily.

And like a thunderbolt he falls

Suddenly at an unexpected moment, he sweeps down as a thunderbolt. 'falls' here may refer to the flight of the bird downward as it has been clearly indicated that he has been sitting on the top of the cliff. Very few living beings can become adoptable to mountainous regions especially mountain-tops. Eagles are a rare variety of birds which inhabit mountain tops in their solitude.

The text is unified and coherent. It develops from one stage to another. First, the eagle comes and sits on the cliff. It monitors from the top of the cliff. It sweeps down like a thunderbolt.

The author uses monosyllabic words which accounts for the slow movement of the verses which provides the poet with the chance to observe the circumambient nature; but 'thunderbolt' in the last line of the poem denotes the swiftness and force of the bird in action.

Tennyson's Eagle is a perfect combination of sound and meaning. The poem when read aloud adds to the rhythm as it contains stressed words with

alliteration of the sound 'k' in 'clasps', 'crooked', 'craggs', 'w' as in 'watches', 'wrinkled', 'l' as in 'lonely lands'

Tennyson's greatness lies in his minute observation and meticulous rendering of it in choicest English words. He is a master-craftsman in landscape painting. F. L. Lucas states in his study of 'Tennyson', "...But no poet has caught with clearer eye and ear that quiet beauty (which we are rapidly doing our best to destroy) of English landscape, sky and sea -- a beauty that does not strive nor cry; the bird and its environs are picturised in precise memorable words.

In Victorian age, when people's faith as well as scientific theories and philosophies were questioned, Tennyson was criticised for lack of high seriousness and comforting philosophy. But after a long period of depletion of nature, our present day situation makes Tennyson's poetry more relevant to our era. As F. L. Lucas puts it,

"Humane and humanist, he was, but perhaps his special power was, rather, to feel better than most and to express far better than most, that sense of natural beauty which needs today more than ever to be cherished." "Like savages we are befouling the natural beauty of the world; like rabbits, we are recklessly overcrowding it. But one may still dream-however many centuries away-of a different world, with population drastically reduced, where human quality replaces the horrible human quantity of today, and there is room again for the natural beauty of the much-loved earth which poets like Theocritus and Virgil, Wordsworth and Tennyson have made lovelier still."

WORKS CITED

Lucas, Frank Lawrence, *Tennyson*. Longmans, Green & Co. 1894. Print.

Tennyson, Baron Alfred Tennyson, and Christopher B. Ricks. *The Poems of Tennyson in three volumes*. Vol. 3. Longman, 1987. Print.