
CHAPTER - 1

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The title of my dissertation is, "Matthew Arnold as an Elegiac Poet". The objective of this dissertation is to study elegy as a form of poetry with reference to Matthew Arnold's elegies and evaluate him as an elegiac poet. I have chosen "elegy" form because it is a neglected form of poetry. It is an ancient form which originates in ancient Greece. The Greek poet Bion has used pastoral elegy in his "Lament for Adonais",. Though it is a minor form of poetry many good poets have used this form successfully. Thomas Gray in his "Elegy written in a country Church Yard" has used this form. Milton in his "Lycidas" and Shelley in his "Adonais" have used the form of pastoral elegy very effectively. Also Tennyson in his "In Memoriam" has used this form. The popularity of this form aroused interest in my mind. Again while teaching English poetry I realized, that Matthew Arnold, a pessimistic poet was very much interested in the 'elegy' form. He has written several elegies of the highest quality. The elegiac note surely runs through all his poetry. One might be tempted to say of Arnold's verse that he wrote nothing which he did not elegise. This aspect of Matthew Arnold fascinated me arousing curiosity in my mind about his elegies. It is hoped that this study will deepen our understanding of Matthew Arnold's elegies and his mind. It will also throw light on the so far neglected 'elegy' form.

The focus in this study is a critical analysis of Matthew Arnold's elegies. But before that is taken up, it is quite necessary to study the elegy form with reference to its practitioners. I have discussed the famous elegies of Thomas Gray, Milton, Shelley and Tennyson and have made an attempt to point out the common features of the form noticed in these elegies. The second chapter deals with the biographical account of Matthew Arnold, the influencing focus and a survey of his poetry. In the third chapter I have worked out critical analysis of Matthew Arnold's seven elegies. The last one, conclusion, sums up the findings of the foregoing chapters.

THE ELEGY

1. INTRODUCTION :

In English literature there are a number of major types of poetry - the ballad, the metrical romance, the epic, the brief dramatic poetry, the song, the sonnet and the ode - all have been persistent types, that is, they have all retained certain characteristics of form and subject matter since their introduction. There are, in addition to these major types, a number of minor types as well as Elegy is one of them. ?

"Elegy is a brief lyric of mourning, or direct utterance of personal bereavement and sorrow." ¹ Walter Blair says, "Elegiac poetry is poetry dealing with death." ² One of the critics says "Elegy is the sister of tragedy, because it deals with the transitory nature of earthly things and always indulges in serious thoughts". ³ Some critics class elegy as a type, though elegies vary so greatly in method and attitude that it is impossible to find anything in common in all of them except the fact that they treat one very broad subject. They may be lyrics, odes or almost any other type with regard to the formal pattern. Burns wrote an elegiac sonnet; Tennyson wrote an ode on the death of the Duke of Wellington and a collection of Philosophical lyrics on the death of his friend Hallam.

Who?

1.1 ORIGIN AND SCOPE :

In ancient Greece, where it originated, the term Elegy covered war songs, love poems, political verses, lamentations for the dead, in fact, a wide range of subjects, both grave and gay. The Greeks judged this composition by its form and not by its subject matter. It was written in the elegiac Measure, a couplet composed of a dactylic hexametre followed by a dactylic pentametre. Any poem written in this metre ranked as an elegy, whatever its theme might be.

1.2 MODERN CONNOTATION OF ELEGY :

In modern usage, it is the theme that matters, not the metre, and the classical Elegiac measure is not used in English verse. The elegy nowadays takes its name from its subject matter, not from its form. While no rules are laid down for the metre, the theme of an elegy must be mournful or sadly reflective. It is usually a lamentation for the dead, though it may be inspired by other sombre themes, such as unrequited love, the fall of a famous city and the like. It is written as a tribute to something loved and lost. One of the critics says, "In fact, a pensive note has always been regarded the characteristic of elegy. The principal theme of elegy must be sorrow or love. The least suspicion of insincerity ruins an elegy." As a rule, it is less spontaneous than the lyric, except when it takes a purely

lyric form as in Tennyson's, "Break, break, break". It is often elaborate in style like the ode.

Thus, in writing an elegy, an English poet is not limited to any one form, but may choose whatever seems to him most fitting. Though some of the most touching poems of personal loss have been written in very simple language. The formal Elegy usually aims at an effect of dignity and solemnity without a sense of strain or artificiality. This was magnificently achieved by Thomas Gray in his "Elegy Written in a country Churchyard", and the form he adopted - quatrains in iambic pentametre (lines of ten syllables, alternatively short and long) was ideal for his purpose. We read it, however, as it was intended to be read, as a conscious work of art, not a spontaneous expression of sorrow. Otherwise any elaborate and complex mode of utterance might cause us to question the sincerity, of the poet's emotion, as Dr. Johnson did when he remarked, "Where⁵ there is leisure for fiction, there is little grief"

In the evaluation of literature the elegy has undergone great elaboration and has expanded in many directions. It has sometimes become the medium of communal feeling, as in the five poems of the 'Book of Lamentation' which, while fashioned on the professional mourning songs of the Hebrew "Cunning Women", are dirges, not for an individual but over the fall of city "that was full of people." It has grown

into a memorial or encomiastic poem, containing the poet's tribute to some great man (not necessarily relative or personal friend), and often a study of his life and character with reminiscences and thoughts suggested by them, as in Spenser's *Astrophel*, Ben Jonson's celebrated verses, 'To the memory of My Beloved --- Mr. William Shakespeare', Milton's 'Lycidas', Arnold's, 'Rugby Chapel' and 'Thyrsis', Whittier's 'In Remembrance of Joseph Sturge'. Often too, the philosophic and speculative elements become predominant in it, sometimes even to total subordination of the purely personal interest; the poet, brooding upon his subject, being moved/meditates over questions immediately raised by it, or over the deepest problems of life and destiny as in Shelley's 'Adonais'.

"The one remains, the many change, and pass;
Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadow's fly;
Life, like a dome of many coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments." (460-464)

And Brownings 'La Saisiaz'. In many cases, of course, all these characteristics are combined as in some of the examples just cited and even more notably in 'In Memoriam', which is at once one of the most frankly of personal elegies, a large tribute to the dead friend.

"So runs my dream; but what am I?

An infant crying in the night,

An infant crying for the light,
And with no language but a cry."

It is a spiritual autobiography extending over some three years of intellectual struggle and a philosophic poem of immense reach and significance. Moreover, under the powerful influences of a bookish age, the elegy in modern literature has often been used as a vehicle for literary criticism, as by Arnold in 'Heine's Grave'

"The spirit of the world,
Beholding the absurdity of men -
Their vaunts, their feats - let a sardonic smile,
For one short moment, wonder o'er his lips" (206-209)

In the two 'Obermann poems

"A fever in these pages burns,
Beneath the calm they feign;
A wounded human spirit turns
Here, on it's bed of pain" (21-24)

And in Memorial Verses

"Time may restore us in his course
Goethe's sage mind and Byron's force;
But where will Europe's latter hour
Again find wordsworth's healing power?" (60-63)

And by Sir William Watson in Wordsworth's Grave -
unquestionably the finest poem of the kind in English
language.

1.3 OTHER FEATURES :

The elegy lends itself more readily than other forms of poetry to discursive reflections on the part of the poet. Death is so vast and evocative a subject that it leads the poet to regions of thought, he might not normally explore. As A.R. Entwistle observes, "Sometimes Death is the inspiration and sole theme; at other times it is merely common starting point from which poets have launched various themes - speculations on the nature of death and the hereafter tributes to friend, the poet's own mood, even literary criticism." ⁶ Milton laments the degradation of poetry and religion in 'Lycidas', an elegy on the death of a 'Learned friend', Edward King, whom he sincerely mourned,

"As killing as the canker to the rose,
Or taint - worm to the weanling herds that graze,
Or frost to flowers that their gay wardrobe wear;
When first the white-thorn blows;
Such, Lycidas, thy loss to Shepherd's ear". (45-49)

Tennyson philosophises on the puzzle of life and destiny in 'In Memoriam', an elegy on the death of his friend, Arthur Hallam.

He Says,

"One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event.
To which the whole creation moves."

Matthew Arnold pauses to reflect on, the course of the life of mortal men on the earth' in 'Rugby Chapel', an elegiac poem on his visit to his father's grave fifteen years after his death; and so on. These reflections are digressions, of course, in relation to the main theme, but at the same time they seem an integral part of the entire structure. 'Lycidas' would be substantially poorer without its passage on fame, and the onslaught on the corrupt Clergy of that day. Milton thinks that Saint Peter feels shocked that one who is good should die and others who are unworthy of being Clergymen should live. He says,

"How well could I have spared for thee, young swain,
Anow of such as for their bellies' sake
Creep and intrude and climb into the fold" (113-115)

When he sees the untimely death of a noble poet he says saracastically,

"Were it not better done as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade
Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair?" (67-69)

So too, would the other poems, if we removed the passages in which they seem perhaps to deviate from their theme.

Though grief is the dominant emotion in the early part of the elegy, the note often changes towards the close to one of resignation or even joy as the poet reconciles himself to the inevitable, or expresses his faith in

immortality and future reunion. Thus 'Lycidas' closes on a note of optimism :

'Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more,
For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead,
Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor.'

In Shelley's 'Adonais' an elegy on the death of Keats, the transition from mourning to consolation and then to triumph occurs long before the close :

Nor let us weep that our delight is fled
Far from these carrion - Kites that scream below ---
He has outsoured the shadow of our night;
Envy and calumny and hate and pain;
And that unrest which men miscall delight
Can touch him not and torture not again ---
He lives - he wakes - 'tis death is dead, not he---"

1.4 THE PASTORAL ELEGY :

An elegy can be written in two ways. One way is called 'Direct elegy', in which the poet mourns over the death of a person directly. The other way is mourning over the dead person under the guise of a shepherd. This is called 'pastoral elegy'. Technically, a pastoral has the following divisions - Invocation, Sympathy of Nature, Procession of mourners, Personal digression, Lament, Change of mood, or Turning point and the Final consolation. An ideal pastoral elegy follows these divisions very carefully.

The form arose among the sicillian Greeks, originating probably with Theocritus whose 'Idylls' and 'Epigrams' are the earliest poems known to us which are written in the pastoral manner. It was perfected later by the Latin poet Virgil, whose 'Eclogues' and 'Georgics' are noted for their vivid treatment of the scenes and labours of the countryside. It then fell out of use for a long time, till it was revived in Italy during the 15th and 16th centuries in the period of general rebirth of classical culture. It soon found imitators in other parts of Europe, including England. It followed a convention by which the poet represented himself as a shepherd bewailing the loss of a companion. In his "Lament for Adonais" the Greek poet Bion tells of his grief at the death of his fellow poet, the two poets being portrayed as shepherds who could 'tune the lyre' while resting from their humbler duties. From this lament sprang what is now called the pastoral elegy, paster meaning shepherd. Again and again.

"The same sweet cry no circling seas can drown
In melancholy cadence rose to swell
Some dirge of Lycidas or Astrophel
When lovely souls and pure, before their time -
Into the dusk went down."

In this pastoral tradition are the laments of many poets for the death of fellow poets. 'The manner of speech

and the setting were borrowed from rustic life, and whatever the poet had to say or describe was phrased accordingly. With Spenser's 'Shepherd's Calender', it may be said to have taken root in English soil. This convention lasted down to modern times. Milton, when he was asked to contribute to a volume, in memory of a former college-mate and poet, Edward King, chose the pastoral form, presenting King Lycidas, the shepherd who knew

"Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme"

Similarly, Shelley mourned Keats in "Adonais" and Arnold mourned Arthur Hugh Clough in "Thyrsis". These three poems are the most famous pastoral elegies in English. Analysis of typical examples of pastoral elegies reveals a fairly definite procedure that some great poets followed. In the execution of his moderately rigid design, the poet presents a thoroughly conventionalized expression itself. The entire background is of idealised shepherd life in a golden age in which the shepherds "were assumed to be men of the most delicate and gentle feelings, living a life of simplicity

and calm tranquility." ⁷ But there were no metrical restrictions as a study of 'Lycidas', 'Adonais' and 'Thyrsis' reveals. sp

The authors who followed the model of pastoral elegy expected their readers to give their works an appreciation which was in a sense, allusive, since it depended partly upon the readers knowledge of elegies in classical sp

literature. Modern students who do not know the classical models are therefore handicapped when they try to appreciate formal elegies of this sort. However, all can sense the ritualistic quality which gives such a poem the appeal of hallowed procedure and all can appreciate the beauty and loveliness of the pastoral world which for centuries has been the golden dream of poets.

Professor Wright says, "The elegy is not / as often thought, merely a lament for an individual but an elaborate literary memorial intended to perpetuate his memory"⁸ / He further says that the duty or practical job of the elegist / as of the sculptor in similar circumstances, is to commemorate the dead by creating a worthy and enduring work of art; only if the work endures as literature has the intention of the elegy been fulfilled. Consequently the predominant motive of the elegist, however sincere his personal grief, must be an artistic one, implying a *sp* literary detachment.

Let us now consider some of the well known practitioners of the elegy form. The study of their representative elegies would give us the necessary background and facilitate us to foreground Matthew Arnold as *sp* an elegiac poet.

1.5 SOME PRACTITIONERS OF ELEGY :
MILTON-LYCIDAS.

'Lycidas' is one of the famous elegies in English. Milton published it in 1638 to mourn the death of his fellow-student Edward King.

Milton mourns over the death of Edward King under the guise of one shepherd mourning for another. Milton begins by saying that he must again take to poetry to mourn the untimely death of Lycidas, who was drowned in the sea. Milton invokes the help of the muse to inspire his poetic effort. Under the guise of pastoral imagery, Milton recalls his life at the university together with Lycidas. They had common walk and studies and their verse gave delight to their teacher. But now Lycidas has gone and 'never must return'. The shepherds as well as the woods and caves and trees, all mourn for Lycidas. The nymphs were certainly not any where when their beloved Lycidas died. But the poet thinks that even if the nymphs had been there, what could they have done? The muse herself has not been able to save her son, Orpheus, when he was killed by the Thracian women.

This thought leads Milton to a digression. If a life of the finest intellectual is cut short prematurely, then what is the use of aspiring to lead an austere intellectual life? Milton then reverts to his pastoral theme and describes three figures in succession who lament the death

of Lycidas. First comes the Herald of the sea, Triton who says that the death of Lycidas was not due to tempestuous weather but due to the unseaworthiness of the ship itself, being built in an eclipse. Next comes Comus, the local deity of Cam and expresses his sorrow at the loss of Cambridge, one of her darling sons. Lastly comes St. Peter, the guardian of that Church of Christ for the service of which Lycidas has been destined. Saint Peter mourns the loss to the church of a true shepherd like Lycidas, especially because the Church is full of false and ignorant shepherds. From this digression on the church Milton again turns back to the pastoral style and calls upon the valleys of the landscape to yield up their choicest flowers to be strewn over the dead body of Lycidas. The mood of the poem suddenly changes from lamentation to consolation. Though Lycidas is dead, he is not lost. By the power of Christ, he has been saved, and a higher world, heaven has received him already.

Milton has written this pastoral elegy on the model of Virgil and Theocritus. He has not only followed the form of the pastoral, but also brought out the spirit of it. Nature descriptions in the poem are specifically pastoral dealing with the everyday life of the rustics. He has also used classical names of Arethuse, Mincius and Alpheus to invoke

the spirit of pastoral poetry. Even in the St. Peter passage we have nothing but pastoral imagery e.g. Shearer's feast, sheep-hook, lean and flashy songs, scannel pipes, hungry sheep, grim wolf. On many occasions Milton has presented the sensuous, classical beauty of descriptions in this poem. "Lycidas" has always been claimed as one of the greatest lyrics of Milton. Lycidas challenges our praise by it's marvellous style and no less marvellous melody. It shows Milton's usual mixture of styles and his fine blending of classical and Christian Mythology. His youthful sensuousness and his mature spirituality are finely blended.

The poem is a succession of different moods. The first two sections express grief, disappointment and indignation, then follows the quiet, colourful description of the flowers and the reassuring meditation on christian glory that brings eternal peace. The poem ends on a note of regeneration. Lycidas is not dead though he is drowned. Milton exercises his creative and poetic imagination by taking the analogy of the sun going down the sea in the evening and coming up in the morning.

"Thus sang the uncouth swain to the oaks and rills
while the still morn went out with sandals gray.

He touched the tender stops of various quills with eager
thought warbling his Doric lay.

And now the sun has stretched out all the hills.

And now was dropt into the western bay.

At last he rose and twitched his mantle blue.
Tomorrow to fresh woods and pastures new."

Thus it is a conclusion both classical, christian and Miltonic. The poem is written in iambic ten syllabled lines varied by shorter lines of six syllables. The lines rhyme at varied intervals.

Professor Wright says, "Milton chose to work in a form of the elegy sanctioned by the long tradition and by the outstanding names of Theocritus, Virgil and Spenser. The poem is partly inspired by a literary ambition, the ambition to produce in English a consummate example of the pastoral elegy. His success in this literary ambition measures his success as an elegist, but for 'Lycidas' the name of Edward King would long ago have been forgotten".⁹

It will be seen from the analysis given above that Milton has followed the major elegy conventions.

1.6 THOMAS GRAY : ELEGY WRITTEN IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD.

Thomas Gray has written this popular elegy. "Gray is a poet whose scholarship and breadth of literary and intellectual interests helped to fashion his poetic ideals and practice."¹⁰ His most popular poem and for long the most popular poem in English is his "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard".

Thomas Gray has composed this poem at Stoke-Pages between 1742-50 and it was published in 1751. The poem is a general elegy as it does not mourn the death of any particular person. The poem opens effectively by gradually emptying the landscape of both sights and sounds as dusk descends and the elegiac, meditative tone is sustained throughout a variety of turns in the thought. There are two main ideas in the poem. First, there is the mourning over the death of the rustics, and secondly, how the poet himself will be mourned over after his death. The poem is clearly divided into two parts. It possesses so many merits. Gray's love for nature is fully reflected in the opening stanzas. The dusk-hours, the country churchyard, the misty landscape, his walking over the grassy land, the seeing of moonrise, his sitting under the beech tree, his looking at the brook, all these have been described in a picturesque manner. The vividness of the natural scenes is one of the merits of this poem. The universal thoughts and feeling are expressed in an exquisite manner. The poem moves with ease from a contemplation of the landscape to a consideration of "the short and simple annals of the poor," to suggest moral ideas which arise from this consideration. There is no lofty, philosophical manner, but simple unpretentious way. There is the truest and broadest humanity in the poem. It is rather a meditation than a lament. The poem does not mourn the loss of any particular person but reflects on the

lives of those who lie buried in the country churchyard and what they might have been (had if they) lived under different circumstances.

"Some mute inglorious Milton may rest

Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood."

Gray has used a very simple elegiac stanza. It is a slow moving stanza and it is handled very skilfully. The Iambic Pentameter is used very aptly. The diction of the poem is very artistic, simple and yet very effective. Gray uses too many personifications to have real effect of them. He has personified Pride, Riches, Honour and Death and many more. The lines like,

"All paths of glory lead but to grave."

have become proverbial. "The Elegy in a country church" is so beautiful and so simple, so entirely devoid of anything that is 'Caviare to the general', and reflects so perfectly that mood of gentle regret which is neither too bloomy for fascination nor too intense for a quietly imaginative heart, that it has almost stamped him on the national mind as the

¹¹
elegiac poet of our country". The poem moves with ease from image to image. The contemplation regarding the rustic is the very central force. The poem abounds in various Figures of Speech like Personification, Metaphor simile, synecdoche, Metonymy and many more. The rhyme scheme of the poem is ab ab throughout the poem. The opening is

romantically sensuous from the point of view of the sad notes of the knell,

"The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,.
And leaves the world to darkness and to me"

We can see the musical sweetness in following lines,

"The breezy call of incense - breathing morn,
The swallow twittering from the straw build shed,
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed,"

Gray uses Miltonic compounds like "ivy mantled",

"Straw-built", "Long-drawn", "incense-breathing", etc.

He makes use of significant metonymy in following lines,

"Let not Ambition mock their useful toil"

"Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile".

etc. However, the popularity of this poem is due to the unaffected, sincere feeling for the downtrodden. It is a truly democratic elegy. Musical sweetness, felicity of expression, pure, perspicuous, philosophical pathos, Miltonic compounds, careful workmanship, purity and beauty of style and thought have thus made this poem highly successful. The poem is so superbly chiselled that Dr. Johnson who didn't exactly like Gray's poetry, wrote : "Had Gray written often thus, it had been in vain to blame and
useless to praise him."¹²

In the elegy Gray finds answer to his problem, finds the complete expression of his private despairs and frustrations. The elegy was most probably begun soon after the death of Gray's school friend West, some reminiscences of whom remain in the conclusion of the poem. West has been Gray's dearest friend and confidant and like himself a melancholy young man.

"A youth to fortune and to fame unknown" of the closing epitaph might be either West or Gray himself.

I. A. Richards has called this elegy, "That triumph of an exquisitely adjusted tone"¹³ is certainly part of truth. The poem is written with the most perfect of good manners. The contemporary critic John Hill, in the first of his series of contributions to the Daily Advertiser entitled 'The Inspector' on 5th March 1751 praised the elegy enthusiastically, asserting that it "Comes nearer the manner of Milton than any thing that has been published since the time of that poet"¹⁴

It will be noticed from the above comments that Gray has followed the elegy tradition to a great extent ----- However, he deviates from the tradition in one important respect. While in the other elegies the death of a particular person is mourned, in Gray's elegy, the theme is a general sense of human mortality, mortality that makes no distinction between high and mighty persons and undistinguished rustics.

1.7 SHELLEY - 'ADONAI'S'

Shelley's 'Adonais' is a pastoral elegy. It was published in 1821. One important advantage of pastoral is that you can criticise the persons indirectly. Shelley has taken full advantage of this.

wrote

Shelley has written this poem of lamentation over the death of John Keats. He died at Rome of a consumption, in his twenty fourth year on the 23rd of February 1821. But it was believed that Keats took to his heart the harsh criticism made by the orthodox critics over his poetry and the most sensitive young boy fell a victim to this harsh criticism. Shelley believed this and he lamented his grief in this poem. Though, Shelley and Keats were not bosom friends like Wordsworth and Coleridge, they had met on many occasions and Shelley was noble enough to admire the qualities of the young poet - Keats. Shelley would not have been able to attack the cause of the death of Keats if he would have written the 'Direct Elegy'.

Shelley has followed the classical convention very carefully. He opens the lamentation in the first stanza. He invokes the Muse Urania in the second stanza. Various mourners like Dreams, Sorrows, Pleasures appear on the scene from stanza No.9. Then from stanza No. 19, Nature begins to weep over the death of Adonais (Keats) upto stanza No. 29. Then in stanza No. 30 appear the various shepherds to mourn

over the death of their fellow shepherd. Among these shepherds are Byron and Leigh Hunt. Then in stanza No. 31 Shelley himself appears and mourns over the death of his friend. Then the most important point - the turning point comes in stanza No. 38. From here the thought is changed and then upto last stanza, there is personal philosophy on the part of the poet. The elegy closes on a note of consolation that the poet himself feels that Adonais is calling him from the gates of heaven. Thus, Shelley has very carefully followed the classical pattern of such a pastoral Elegy.

The various moods, of the poet's mind have been presented very successfully. In the beginning there is mere deep sorrow as the poet is greatly shocked at the unexpected death of the young friend of his. Then there is the beautiful, highly poetical description of the mourners. All these mourners are abstract, as nothing was abstract to Shelley. Dreams, Desires, Sorrows, Pleasures all these abstract things have been personified very vividly and they have been made alive.

"Oh, weep for Adonais! - The quick Dreams,
The passion - winged Ministers of thought,"

The chief mourner is of course, Urania, the Muse of poetry, as she has lost her youngest son. Shelley's description of Byron is also very vivid and appropriate.

"The pilgrim of Eternity, whose fame over his living head like heaven in bent."

He has equally, beautifully described his own sorrow, in the death of his dear friend. His thoughts over death are highly platonic and they are capable of consoling the mourners. This platonic philosophy has given the poem the necessary weight. He thinks that Adonais or Keats shines in the firmament as Vesper (or Hesperus, the evening star). The star symbol of the platonic epigram is structurally useful in the poem too. Then there is the famous image in the stanza where Shelley says : "The One remains, the many change and pass." In that image Shelley compares life to,

"a dome of many coloured glass"

which stains the white radiance of Eternity, until Death tramples it to fragments. The image has been called the best epigrammatic expression of platonism in English poetry. Shelley shows a genuine and deep feeling for Nature. 'Adonais' abounds in Nature imagery. The finest pictures, are those which depict the surging of a new life through Nature with the coming of the spring. This description of the rejuvenation of Nature is highly moving. 'Adonais' is written in Spenserian stanzas. He has handled the metre very skillfully. The diction and style of the poem is worthy of admiration. The poem is full of exquisite similes and choicest words. In short, 'Adonais', the pastoral elegy, has

become a bright and unforgettable instance of the classical form.

M.M. Bhalla says, "Shelley's quest for a synthesis between reality and man on the one hand and man and society on the other hand had created two problems : the problem of man's finitude as symbolized in death, and the problem of the origin of evil. Both of these problems are elaborated in Adonais."¹⁵

It will appear from the foregoing analysis/critical comments that Shelley follows the elegy conventions rather closely. For example - Technically, a pastoral elegy has the following divisions, Invocation, Sympathy of Nature, Procession of Mourners; Personal Digression, Lament; change of Mood or the Turning Point and the Final Consolation. And Shelley has followed this pattern successfully.

1.8 TENNYSON - IN MEMORIAM :

The complete title of this poem is, 'In Memoriam A.H.H.' It means - 'In the memory of Arthur Henry Hallam.' The poem was begun in 1833 and completed in 1849. Alfred Lord Tennyson is one of the most popular Victorian poets. He wrote this poem in memory of his dear friend Arthur Hallam. Hallam and Tennyson were very close friends at Cambridge. However very suddenly quite unexpectedly at Vienna, Hallam died in 1833 at the age of twenty two only. Tennyson was totally stunned at this blow from blue. His grief knew no bounds. His profound grief is given

expression in this poem. After Milton's 'Lycidas' and Shelley's 'Adonais' this is the great elegy written in the Victorian period. But this is a direct elegy and not a pastoral elegy. The poem consists of the Prologue, Epilogue and 120 parts consisting of several stanzas. It at once gained popularity and is held to be his masterpiece. When the poem was published Tennyson rightly called it to be his 'Divine Comedey'. The poem clearly indicated the three stages of the mood of the poet's mind. In the beginning, when the most shocking news of the cruel death of his most dear friend came, he was stunned. He could not even feel sorrow; his mind was benumbed. Then he began to think over the ways of God and lastly, he consoled himself.

As the poem is not written by the poet at a stretch, the structure of the poem is somewhat loose. Nowhere the poet mentions the name of Hallam in the poem. The content of the poem may be divided into three parts - Despair, Sorrow and final consolation.

In the first section, the poet is utterly despaired about human life. He feels that sorrow has no end at all. He looks upon the changes in Nature only to read his own sorrow reflected in it. He feels that human life has no significance at all. This life has created a desert in his mind. He compares his state to that of a maid.



"To her perpetual maidenhood,
And unto me no second friend."

The middle part of the poem is full of regret for the loss of the friend. This also describes doubts caused by the loss. In the final part of the poem, the poet finds deep and sincere consolation in the right attitude towards God and Nature. Now his agitated heart has become calm and quiet and says,

"One God, one law, one lament,
And one far - off divine event
To which the whole creation moves."

Thus the long elegy closes upon the calm note of consolation. Temperamentally, Tennyson was already a melancholy person. The sufferings in his life made him loose his faith in human life and in ways of God. Where would he turn to regain his lost faith and the hope for the better? He began to meditate over the problem of evil, Immortality of soul, Nature of God and Love, and the result is the composition of the great poem which took him seventeen years to compose. Hence the central theme of the elegy is how to get consolation when one is extremely bereaved by the accidental death of someone whom you love very very dearly.

Tennyson has rightly called the poem to be his 'Divine Comedy' because just as Dante in that great poem has described superbly his soul's journey through the various

stages and parts of Hell, Paradise and the earth, so Tennyson too has undergone these stages in this poem. When the most shocking news of Hallam's accidental death reached Tennyson, he could not even understand the meaning of the total news. In this initial stage, he was brooding only upon the cruelty of fate and he became more and more melancholy. Then he began to doubt about the heavenly purpose. His soul was tormented by these doubts. In the last stage of the poem the poet comes to a conclusion, that there must be some universal law behind the working of the world, and death is not the end of life. May be, it is the beginning of a new life like in ^ULycidas. The human body is perishable but the soul is immortal. The elegy thus moves through various stages of mental agony, despair, doubt, faith and final consolation.

'In Memoriam' is a personal elegy as it mourns over the death of a dear friend. It is the personal loss that is mourned by the poet. However, the poet goes beyond the personal loss in the poem, and deals with the universal problems. On this level the poem ceases to be a mere personal lament and climbs up the level of a universal poem. Tennyson is called the most correct representative of Victorican age. Because he had taken care of examining what the modern age had to say. This is important in connection with 'In Memoriam' because he has reflected the spirit of the

age. This is another characteristic of 'In Memoriam' as an elegy. This is the only elegy having such wider scope. Though, Tennyson has taken the notice of new scientific thought, it was difficult to be satisfied by it. He had also accepted the shortcomings of the old dogmatic theological concepts. But as regards the substitute, he was doubtful. He weighed arguments and in the end he was convinced that the concept of God requires some modification, but it will not be advisable to throw away the whole concept of God and faith. He took seventeen years to regain his faith in God and to seek universal philosophy to seek a satisfactory consolation. This has made his elegy ^{to} cross the boundry line of a personal elegy and make it to ^{? to} enter the universal plane. Herein lies the greatness of this personal impersonal elegy.

The Elegy is written in spenserian stanza. Metrically the poem is a grand success. The usual Tennysonian Velvet like style is present everywhere. Musicality and softness of style are experienced everywhere. For example - such lyrical passages as

"The time draws near the birth of christ,

The moon is hid; the night is still."

"When on my bed the moon light falls." or

"Now fades the last long streak of snow"

The following lines also create musicality in the poem.

"I do but sing because I must
And pipe but as the linnets sing."

In this elegy, Tennyson perfected the stanza of four iambic lines of four feet each with enclosed rhythms (abba). Instead of being monotonous the stanza proved to be eminently successful. The above elegy displays number of common classical conventions. "In Memoriam" is a Direct Elegy; not a pastoral Elegy like that of "Lycidas" by Milton, or "Adonais" by Shelley, or "Thyrsis" by Matthew Arnold. But like the Pastoral elegy, this direct elegy too has a definite structure. The poem could be divided into three parts, thus : In the first part, the poet describes through various occasions how he was almost stupified because of the unexpected death of his most dear. In the second part, he sings of his profound sorrow caused by the sudden death of Hallam, and goes on meditating about life after death, nature of God, the immortality of the soul etc. This part is essentially speculative by nature and there is much pro and con about the existence of God, the universe and life after death. In the Third and last part, the poet has regained his belief in God and has realised that though the body is perishable, the soul is immortal.

We have considered some of the practitioners of the elegy form - Milton, Thomas Gray, Shelley and Tennyson. These poets have used the elegy form effectively in their

elegies. By studying their elegies we can point out certain characteristics and common points used in these elegies. Milton used the form of pastoral elegy for his 'Lycidas' Shelley also used the pastoral form for his elegy 'Adonais'. Thomas Gray and Tennyson used the form of 'Direct Elegy' for their elegies 'Elegy written In a Country Churchyard' and 'In Memoriam' though 'In Memoriam' is a personal elegy and 'Elegy written In a Country Churchyard' is a General elegy.

In both their choice of theme and in style all these poets conform to tradition using the form of traditional elegy, leading up to the climax of sorrow and closing on a note of hope. Milton and Shelley used the technical divisions of pastoral elegy very carefully - Invocation, sympathy of nature, Procession of mourners, Personal digression, Lament, change of mood or Turning Point and Final Consolation. They wrote their elegies on the model of Virgil and Theocritus. Hence the classical and Christian elements are blended artistically in these elegies.

All these poets mourn the death of their fellow friends, through their elegies. Milton weeps for Lycidas or Edward King, while Shelley weeps for Adonais or Keats. Tennyson weeps for Arthor Henry Hallam and Thomas Gray weeps for his friend West though he weeps for common men apparently.

Grief is the dominant emotion in all these elegies. But we can see it only in the early part of the elegies. The note changes towards the close to one of resignation or even joy as the poet reconciles himself to the inevitable or expresses his hope and faith in immortality and future reunion. Thus Lycidas closes on a note of optimism. He says,

" 'tis Death is dead, not he"

In 'Elegy written In a Country Churchyard' Gray finds answer to his problem and a complete expression to his private despair and frustrations. He says

"He gave to misery all he had, tear;

He gained from heaven, 'twas all he wished, a friend"

Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' also closes on a calm note consolation and quiet and he says,

"One God, one law, one element

And one far-off divine event

To which the whole creation moves"

Shelley consoles himself at last by thinking,

"The one remains, the many change and pass

Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly"

Shelley in his 'Adonais' and Tennyson in his 'In Memoriam' have used the spenserian stanza for their elegies. 'Lycidas' is written in iambic ten syllabled lines varied by shorter lines of six syllables. Tennyson in 'In Memoriam' perfected the stanza of four iambic lines of four feet each with

enclosed rhythms (abba). Thomas Gray used a very simple elegiac stanza for his 'Elegy written In a Country Churchyard.' the Iambic pentametre has been used very aptly by him in it. The diction of these elegies though simple yet artistic and quite effective.

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