Tennyson's Dramatic Monologues As Poetic Texts

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Introduction

Though he excels at writing lyric poems, Tennyson's poetry contrives a strong dramatic element. Since the publication of "Poems Chiefly Lyrical" in 1830 in which he informs his lyrics his own thoughts and feelings so poignantly, Tennyson's poetic intution craves for magic selection of words, soft music of his verse, splendid imagery and the perfection of metre and rhyme. Nonetheless, the Victorian poet treads the path of drama to express his conceptual and aesthetic vision. Not only that, but Tennyson is looked at as the poet in whose texts the weariness and the doubts of the age are encoded.

This study procedes on the hypothesis that the linguistic strata or the "formal levels", in terms of Halliday's Functional Linguistics, help the poet build up the ideational picture of the world. Phonological, syntactic and semantic levels are the elements of design accessible to the poet.

The aim of this study is to show how Tennyson's dramatic monologues function as a vehicle for the poet's world-view. Two dramatic monnologues by Tennyson will be analyzed from the standpoint of Stylistic Criticism.

Dramatic Monologue as a Critical Term

There is a general consensus among critics that a dramatic monologue is a poem in which a single speaker who is not the poet utters the entire poem at a critical moment. The speaker has a listener within the poem, but we too are his/her listener, and we learn about the speaker's character from what the speaker says (Abrams, 1957: 25-6). The dramatic monologue, in other words is a poem that reveals a "soul in action" through the speech of one character in a dramatic situation.

In this light, it is plausible to identify the main traits of this distinctive literary term as follows: (i) the dramatic monologue focuses upon the creation of a dramatic character, not the voice of the poet, but " " " venriloquized character " which is called a "persona ", (ii) there is a sort of exchange between the principal character and a listener or an audience. In other words, the " I " and " you " of the piece correspond to the dramatic persona of a play .(5) The human characteristics of the addressee my be revealed by and through

the verbal utterances of the dramatic character and (iii) the whole poetic discource is uttered in a dramatic situation , i.e the speaker is presented at some higly significant , critical , or dramatic moment (Francis , 1953:212).

Though the dramatic monologue requires a dramatic character to address the listener directly, there should be "an advanced degree of impersonation." but, on the whole, the audience as well as the speaker become a part of the total area of imagination (Ibid.).

Modern critical theory states that Robert Browning is the pathfinder of the dramatic monologue; yet , the origins of the term is traced back to the classical literature . Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (Preminger 1974:529) gives a brief chronological data , showing that the term was found in ; (1) Greek classics (Ovid) , (2) Christian devotional literature (the Virgin addresses the Cross) , (3) Anglo-Saxon Poetry (The Wanderer , The Seafarar) , (4) the Middle Ages (Dunber , Lyndsay) , (5) early & late Renaissance (Skeleton , Raleigh , Drayton) and (6) Metahpysical Poetry (Donne's Canonization & The Flee). The Encyclopedia ; however , doesn't have any clue , in this respect , to Maesopotamian Literature where we could find the earliest specieman of the dramatic monologue in " Gilgamish " .

Impersonation is the salient feature of the dramatic monologue . In romantic poetry; however, there are certain instances where the dramatic voice is identified with the poet's . This is clearly shown in Wordsworth's "Composed a few Miles above Tinterm Abbey",

How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee.

O Sylvan Wye 1 thou wanderer thro" the wood, How often has my spirit turned to thee! (Brett & Jones, 1963, 113 – 118)

T.S. Eliot (1957:89-102) skillfully distinguishes the three voices of poetry. He says :

The first voice is the voice of the poet talking to himself – or to nobody. The second is the voice of the poet addressing an audience, whether large or small. The third is the voice of the poet he attempts to create a dramatic character speaking in verse, when he is saying, not what he would say in his own prson, but only what he can say within the limit of one imaginary character addressing another imaginary character.

Then Eliot shows the variations on these voices. He

concedes:

The distiction between the first and the second, between the poet speaking to himself and the poet speaking to other

people , points to the problem of poetic communication ; the distinction between the poet addressing other people in either his own voice , and the poet inventing speech in which imaginary characters address each other , points to the problem of the difference between dramatic , quasidramatic and non-dramatic verse (Ibid).

So the inerfusion of the first and the third voices or the absence of impersonation vitiates the achievement of monologue in the more usual sense of the word (Preminger, 1974: 529).

In modern poetry , however , the dramatic monologue is widely manipulated since it is the dramatic means by and through which modern poets can express their own visions, as we'll see in Tennyson's dramatic monologues .

Tithonus & Ulysses: Stylistic Analysis

To analyse Tennyson's dramatic monologues as poetic texts , Tithonus (1833-1850) and Ulysses (1842) are selected as linguistic data . The chosen poems have some charateristics in common . The themes of the dramatic monologues are derived from the classical universe . Tithonus , according to the legend , was a Trojan youth so beautiful that Aurora , the dawn , fell in love with him . He asked her ,a goddess, to grant him immortality ,but omitted to request eternal youth , and Tennyson's monologue is delivered by a Tithonus withered and aged but unable to die . In Ulysses , Tennyson deals with a classic , heroic figure in a classic situation , but Ulysses , here , is not the hero of Homer's Odyssey . Rather, Tennyson's text is based upon a passage in Canto (26) of Dante's Inferno . Ulysses , there , addresses his mariners , " Consider ye your origin ; yet were not made to live as beasts , but for pursuit of virtue and knowledge (Bukley and Woods , 1965 : 42) . These ideals are akin to Tennyson's . The poet has the classic hero speak as if he were a Victorian Englishman .

The other characteristic that Tithonus & Ulysses have in common is the poetic style. Tithonus and Ulysses are written in blank verse . What is

characteristic of the "unrhymed iambic pentameter" is that it is suitable for the serious treatment of serious themes. The openning lines of Tennyson's Tithonus manifest the critical situation of the hero,

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall, Tha vapors weep their burthen to the ground, Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath, And after many a summer dies the swan (Ibid.: 44-45).

Metrically, The iambic pentameter consists of a line of (5) feet, as shown in the first line of the verse,

u - u - u - u - u -The woods/ decay/ the woods/ decay/ and fall.

The iabambic is the classical English measure, used for drama, epic didactic, descriptve and narrative verse by all the great English poets (Blackstone, 1965:43-4). Likewise, we notify the unrhymed iambic pentameter used in Ulysses to show the psychological trait of the dramatic character. The hero who resides "by this still hearth among these barren crags/ Matched with an aged wife," is apt to start a new adventure "to follow knowlesge like a sinking a star",

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Matched with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That heard, and sleep, and feed, and know
not me (Ibid.: 42-43).

On lexico grammatical level , the cognitive content of Tennyson's Tithonus and Ulysses is expressed through the grammar of clause . The material process clauses are the dominant feature of the poem , as shown in the selected verbs "decay "(1) ,"fall"(1) "weep"(2), "come) (3) , "till",etc . In Ulysses , the salient feature is also the material process clauses represented by the chosen verbs , "mete"(3) . "hoard "(5) , "sleep" (5) , "feed "(5) , etc. The clauses in both monologues consist of two patterns: the transitive and the intransitive . The transitive pattern involves the actor (= the dramatic character) , the process (= the trans. / intrans. verb) and the goal (= the addressee). These syntactic selections charge the whole setting with movemnt, but it is the sluggish movement that indicates monotony and oldness . The atmosphere of oldness and

suffering is implemented by the lexical items (decay / fall / lie / die / cruel / consumes) and the compound adjectives , " white-haired "(7) , "ever-silent "(8) and " far-folded"(9). In Ulysses , the word selections are , "idle'(1) ," still "(2) , " barren" (2) , "aged "(3) , "savage"(4) and "sleep"(5) . This network of lexicogrammatical options build up the mental picture of the brutal worlds that the two heroes live by . The dramatic tension in Tithonus reaches its climax when the weary aged character cries , " Let me go ; take back thy gifts (21)" . it is a cry of self-pity , but the answer , " The gods themselves cannot recall their gifts (22)" . In Ulysses , the dramatic tension is approached to when we hear the authoritative tone of the dramatic hero addressing his mariners , " Death closes all ; but something is the end/Some work of noble note , may yet be done (23)" .

At this point, Ulysses, a poem, departs Tithonus in thematic structure. Though he is week and aged in body, Ulysses is strong in will, "'Tis not too late to seek a newer world (24), whereas Tithonus, the "white-haired" hero tends to taste everyman's end, i.e. death.

The poetic images play a significant role in expressing the cognitive, psychological and aesthetic content of the poem. Looking closely into Tithonus shows that the semantic structure is based upon on the principle of contrast. , immortal age beside immortal youth (25)". Images , here, can be classifiede into two types : " light " & " ash " images . The first type is attributed to Aurora , the dawn goddess , as in ,

Thy cheek begins to reden through the gloom,
Thy sweet eyes brighten slowly close to mine
Ere yet they blind the stars ... (26).

or

The lucid outline forming round thee; saw The dim curls kindle into sunny rings; (27)

The lexical images , here , are full of light and sensuousness . The beauty and ardour of Eos are beheld as the irradiating glory of sunlight in a dark world

The " ash " images , on the other hand , are attributed to Tithonus. They are full of gloom , mist and cruilty :

Me only cruel immortality Consumes; I wither slowly in thine arms, Here at the quiet limit of the world ' A white-haired shadow roaming like a dream The ever-silent apace of the East (Ibid.).

In Ulysses, the poetic imagery is tied up to the epistemological universe:

And this gray spirit yearning in desire To follow knowledge like a sinking star, Beyond the utmost bound of human thought (Ibid.: 42-43).

The types of the poetic image show that they are stylistically associated with the subject- matter. These types are not merely an extra beauty. Rather, They sort out the psychological and cognitive content of the dramatic character. It is noteworthy that the psychological variations within the poem lead to stylistic variations on the metaphorical level.

The analysed aspects of Tennyson's style manifest The poet's manipulation of the |"grand " style in these two monologues . Of the characteristics of this style is the nobility and dignity of the cognition . Ulysses , for instrance , is characterized by its powerful expression and its imagination. In other words , the eloquent declamation is the stylistic brand mark of Ulysses . The other characteristic is the use of the archaic words , as shown in the Maedival diction in Tennyson's Tithonus (thou /Thee / thine) . The poetic style is used to create the external and the internal worlds of the heroes' consciousness since a work of literature is but the representation of human experience and human truth . Tennyson's vision is expressed as much by the grammatical clauses and structures as by his choice of words .

Poetic Style and World - View

Tennyson's poetic style with its various strata or levels is manipulated to express the poet's world-view . Epistemologically , " world-view " is the sum of ideas which an individual within a group or that group have of the universe in and around them (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences , 1968 : 576). Rosenthal and Yudin (1967: 482-483) concede that the term refers to " system of views , concepts and notions about the surrounding world ".

Tennyson's poetry is viewed as the Victorian urn that keeps all the transitions and the preplexities of the age . It was the age of moral rebellions , intellectual insurrections , religious revolts . Such dramatic changes " were transforming the old and stable world into a chaos whence a new order could not

, by many anxious watchers , be seen to emerge (Bukley and Wood , 1065:948-958) .

For Tennyson , he was profoundly religious , and he recognized the necessity , both for himself and for his generation , of reconciling if possible the new knowledge with the old faith (35)" . Tennyson believes that man's mortality is a blessing . So by and through Tithonus , a poetic creation , he raises the auntological question ,

Why should a man desires in any way
To vary from the kindly race of men
Or pass beyond the goal of Ordenance
Where all should pause, as is most meet for
All? (Ibid.: 44-45)

The doctrine to live by ordenance or law is intensified In Aenon, a dramatic monologue, which mirrors Tennyson's world-view,

... to live by law, Acting the law we live by without fear (Ibid. : 20).

Moreover, Tennyson kept in close touch with the new science and the doctrine of evolution. Such mental transformation are menifested by the monologues. The poet speaks through his dramatic hero:

We are –
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in
Will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield (Ibid.).

So Tithonus, Ulysses and, in a way, Aenon are the poetic texts in which Tennyson's system of views, concepts and notions are encoded. That is to say, the abstractions are claded in gowns of beauty by his poetic artistry.

Concluding Remarks

The literary work , imaginatively , represents the poet's experience in the world he lives by . The study has shown that Tennyson's dramatic monologues , namely , Tithonus , Ulysses and Aenon function as carriers to the poet's world-view . The network of the linguistic levels , generated throughout the poetic texts , of linguistic levels help the poet build up the imaginative picture of the

world. Such a picture cannot be implemented without the fittingness of style to the lofty subject – matter he is concerned with. In this sense, Tennyson's poetic intuition plays a significant role in manifesting his own vision.

Notes

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