iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 12 **Issue:** XII **Month of publication:** December 2024

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2024.65841

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International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.538
Volume 12 Issue XII Dec 2024- Available at www.ijraset.com

Poems on Mythical Placks and Miscellanious Used of Myths by Alfred Tennyson

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Abstract: ***In this paper we take up the set of poems poem after mythical places, viz.. "Ilion. Ilion. " a fragment (not published in his life time), written during the poet's Cambridge days and hence belonging to his early youth and "Parnassus." a poem written when the poet was an old man Though the titles of these poems are drawn from mythological places their themes are related to these places only to the extent to which they are relevant to Tennyson's aspiration as a poet. While the poems on personages are the repositories of his tensions as a man and a poet, with claims and counterclaims of pure art and social responsibility on him. these two poems are about this dream of being a great poet and the ultimate blighting of that dream.***
Keywords: Alfred Tennyson poems, Ilion-Ilion, Parnassus, Mythical placks, Myths etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tennyson holds a unique place in English literature history as it transitions from the Romantic to the Victorian periods. Grierson refers to him as "the successor of the homentic Hevlval"| 11 because of his age and his own sensibility and inventiveness. "He had outgrown Byron, he considered Shelley weak, but he had learnt something from Coleridge and Kests. and sought to learn something from Wordsworth: and he had a solider underpinning of classical scholar- assistance than any of them."[2] he said. His interest in the classion, however, was not limited to academic pursuits. Its mythology was especially meaningful to him. and he composed a lot of poems on it. A passage in his prize-winning juvenile poetry "Timbuctoo" hints at the significance mythology held for him. He asserts that a "fable" contains "men's hopes and worries."

What Tennyson writes about fables is true of his own mythology poetry. They represent his soul's deepest secrets. They are a disguised reflection of his personal experiences, emotions, and outlook on life and art. An imaginative reorganisation of situations that may have triggered the inspiration that blended the childhood haven of legend and lore with the immediate problems that confronted him reveals that, while clustered together in his early years and sparsely and unevenly distributed from his middle years onward, these poems invariably reflect the crises that beset him from time to time. They are both metaphorically and symbolically linked. Poetic production on myths was not an intellectual exercise or recreational activity for him. as it may have been for other educated Victorian poets. [3] It might be argued that the poet had a very deep personal link with these myths from his boyhood.

Classics by his father [4], and was so enthralled with its legend that he lost himself in reverie, seeing the Trojan ladies "floating around the streets of Troy with their long robes flowing out behind them - breezy Troy." [5] In "Lines," a fragmented poem, he recalls his daydreams about Ilion on the shores of Kablethope.

Such ruminative immersion surpassed all senses of place and time inside him, resulting in an association of the poet's pelf with mythological personages. This emotional participation is a distinguishing and distinctive element of his handling of myths. It may be stated that they were a sanctuary from the harsh realities of the world for him in later life as well, a potion that invigorated his drained energies and gave him with an area of peaceful reflection on topics of significant consequence. As a result, these poems are critical to knowing the poet.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The current paper seeks to highlight the effect of Tennyson's classical education on his sensibility, as well as his response to it in his use of mythology in his poetry. Such a research has long been needed, and there is a need for an investigation into Tennyson's deep interest in and relationship with the role, which frequently results in his ruminative immersion in it. During difficult times in his life, he frequently found solace in the classics, particularly mythology. Its contemplation assisted him in rationally analysing his own condition, since myths were a sanctuary for him from the harsh facts of reality. They energised him and assisted him in resolving his concerns. This research aims to examine Tennyson's poems on myths and demonstrate how the poet breathes fresh life into these ancient tales. These poems have been examined in light of his earlier works as well as key topical topics.

III. METHODOLOGY

For the sake of this research, these poems have been split into two main categories: poetry about mythological characters and poems about fabled settings. They were then reorganised into four distinct theme groupings or sets. The Bach group has been given a title based on a common formal and thematic trait of the group's or pet's poetry. These sets are - "Ilion. Ilion" and "Parnassus" are two poems about mythical places. This pair appears to be tied to mythological locales rather than mythical personages, and so differs from the preceding pairs on personages.

He makes them mirror some of the major conflicts of his time, namely

1) Social responsibility of the artist
2) Within the Victorian social context, the dilemma of love and marriage, particularly with regard to women,
3) The expanding panorama of knowledge, evolution theory and its influence on society, and
4) In the Viotozlan period, the age-old confrontation between Hellenism and Hebraism was foreseen.

IV. POEMS ON MYTHICAL PLACKS AND MISCELLANIOUS USED OF MYTHS

Tennyson's aspimitionr were based on an early realization of his exceptional power as a poet. The first poetry that moved him was his own when he was just five years old.[6] He says of his. early compositions ":.... when I was about eight years old. I covered two side of a slate with thomsonian blank verse…. About ten or eleven pope's. Homer's Iliad became a favourite of mine and I wrote hundreds and hundreds of lines in the regular Popeian metre ..."[7] He continues; AL about twelve and onward I wrote an epic of six thousand lines a'la Walter Scott.— full of battles. dealing too with sea and mountain scenery . . . ."[7a] Hallam writes. "These poems made my grandfather say with pardonable pride. 'If Alfred die. one of our greatest poets will have gone'.[8] The awareness of his own poetic potential made him ambitious. Once, in one of his "long rambles" with his brother Arthur. Tennyson emphatically said. "'Well Arthur. I mean to be famous'. (From his earliest years he felt that he was a poet, and earnestly trained himself to be worthy of his vocation)."[9]

"The life time dream of almost every poet has been to write a grant epic. Jenkyne. however, draws our attention to a strange phenomenon regarding a queer kind of diffidence that had come over the poets of the nineteenth century. It w-as a failure of confidence. He writes:

This failure of confidence may seem strange in the age of Wordsworth. Coleridge. Byron and Shelley, but it is an attitude that runs through much nineteenth century literature. Its origins are in the experience of an earlier generation. 'By the general consent of critics', wrote Johnson, 'the first praise of genius is due to the writer of en epic poem'; yet the eighteenth century produced no great epic poem, either in England or anywhere else . The critics called for epic, but the poets failed to provide it. and this failure was bound to produce a sense of defeat. Shelley wrote, 'The human mind attained to a perfection in which has improved its image on those faultless productions, whose very fragments are the donpair of modern art'

Thirty years before Keats even Goethe had felt the arms oppression. Renlizing that the Hind is inimitable ....never again did he attempt epic poetry. In his old age.., he declared that modem writers would create only heroines: 'Nothing, can be done with the men. Homer has got all beforehand in Achilles and Odyesous. the braveat and the most prudent'. [10]

"Ilion. Ilion" can be said to reflect the secret ambition of the poet to venture into a region where even Goethe dreaded to tread. Poets have often treated Apollo as the lord of the bards, the supreme, incomparable and heavenly poet. In his "Hymn to Apollo" Keats pays homage to him as "God of the golden bow./And of the golden lyre," [11] Tennyson makes him his symbol of the supreme poet an ideal poet who created 'Ilion' on the notes of his music and alludes to him as such in " Ilion, Ilion." "Oenone," "Tithonus" and "Tiresias." "Ilion. Ilion." however, appears to be underlined with the poet's deep yearning: for another masterpiece like Iliad, wherein figures the archetypal poet Apollo's melody born Ilion. Remembering it he sings:

> Ilion. Ilion, dreamy Ilion, pillared Ilion, holy Ilion.
> City of Ilion when wilt thou be melody born? (11. 1-2)

and thus brings alive the "blue Scamander" and "yellowing Simois" from the heart of "piny Ida" in the following words:

> Roll Scamander. ripple Simois. ever onward to melody,
> Manycircled, overflowing: through and through the
> Flowery level of unbuilt Ilion.
> City of Ilion, pillared Ilion. Shadowy' Ilion, holy Ilion,
> To a music merrily flowing-, merrily echoing
> When will thou be melody born? (11. 5-9)
> To a music from the golden twanging harpwire heavily drawn.

Many gated, heavy walled, many towered city of Ilion,
To a music sadly flowing, slowly falling.
When wilt thou be melody bom? (11. 17-22)

It is noteworthy that the poet is young, conscious of his powers, with an ambition to prove his mettle and yet, instead of closing the verses with lines suggesting that he will make it "melody born," hepersists with the refrain—"When wilt thou be melody born?" It can safely be conjectured that it is not mere modesty but the general mood of defeatism of the poets, added to Tennyson's own self consciousness that has contributed to his hesitation. We are. however, positive that he had a deep yearning to create a masterpiece like Iliad, and Ilion which figures in it, is its symbol. In "Tithonus" he writes that in the first flush of his love for Eos. he "would hear the lips that kissed/ Whispering 1 knew not what of wild and sweet./ Like that strange song heard Apollo sing,/ While Ilion like a mist rose Into towers."(l 1.61-63) Tithonus' love for Eos has been described as "the first thrilling visitation of the creative impulse" by E.D.H. Johnson.[12] And this "creative impulse" is "whispering" things both "wild and sweet" like the strange songs of Apollo to whose music rose the towers of Ilion, When the poet is under the spell of a strong creative urge, his vision inspires him for something similar to what Apollo achieved with his music —an Ilion in an epic like Iliad. In "Tiresias" he says that in his explorations of the hills "Subjected to the Heliconian ridge" his "wont/ Was more to scale the highest of the heights/ With some strange hope to see the nearer God."(I l. 26-28) This again points to his deep rooted desire and attempts at writing poetry which would be "the highest of the heights"—obviously the greatest epic. Adumbrated in the refrain "When wilt thou be melody bon?" is a ray of hope which keeps assuring him that he himself would be the creator of such a creation on the notes of his melody.

"Parnassus" is a poem of his old age. A long interregnum separates "Ilion. Ilion" and "Parnassus." His life during this period can be succinctly summed up in the words of his own Ulysses: "…..all times 1 have enjoyed/ Greatly, have suffered greatly, both with those/ That, loved me. and alone…. " ("Ulysses," 11. 7-9). The searing pain of bereavement at the death of loved ones, the sense of loneliness in the face of calumny in the garb of criticism, the sweet taste of success at the reception of "In Memoriam," the quiet pride in the recognition of his genius on being honoured as poet Laureate all these seem to compress and condense themselves in these soulful lines composed much before success came to him. One dream, however, remained unfulfilled—the dream of writing a great epic. But by the time the poet reached "Parnassus." the hope that underlined "Ilion. Ilion" was already dead. Time, people, values, all had changed. Poetic vision and imagination had been gradually eroded by the new cult of science and knowledge. The poet, in this poem, rues that two mighty and fearful Muses Geology and Astronomy have created a havoc on the sacred mount. They
have blasted the evergreen laurels of the bards, till now secure on Parnassian heights, and have caused all the other Muses to fly from their sacred habitat.

This makes the poet denpair of ever attaining the greatness and immortality achieved by the bards of old. The age and its environment is no longer conductive to the creation of a great epic, Imaginative creativity can hardly withstand the onslaughts of science and its new knowledge. The onset of scientific temper is a sign that the age of poets and poetry is past. The poet should no longer "hope for a deathless hearing." The note of hope gingerly sounded in "Ilion. Ilion" is dead, not because of the poet's diffidence but because of the changed values of the people. The spread of industrialism, along with new inventions and discoveries, made life more materialistic and matter of fact. Just as "Ilion. Ilion" symbolizes the poet's secret aspiration to write a great epic, "Parnassus" pronounces the impossibility of the creation of ouch a work any more.

A major part of Tennyson's poetry is built out of his reminiscences of Homer, Virgil, Theocmus. Catullus, Pindar, Horace, Sappho, Ovid, Euripides and other classical writers. He used some of the myths culled from their works as subjects of his poems. They have already been discussed. We now take up his use of mythology in two other ways: ,

(a) as allusion and imagery in his non-mythical poems and
(b) translations of passages from Greek epics into English,

(a) ..... Some of his mythical allusions in non-mythical poems are so picturesque that they seem to be inspired by actual paintings. Given below is an allusion to Aphrodite in "The Princess":

Glowing all over noble shame: and all
Her falser self slipt from her like a robe,
And left her woman, lovelier in her mood
Than in her mould that other, when she came
From barren deeps to conquer all with love ..... (VII, 11. 145-149)

Similarly, a blend of Christian faith and pagan myth, visually realized, is noticed in the following allusion in “On a Mourner":

And when no mortal motion jars
The blackness round the tombing sod. Through silence and the
trembling stars Comes faith from t r a c t s no feet have trod,
And Virtue, like a household god
Promising empire; such as those
Once heard at dead of night to greet
Troy's wandering prince, so that he rose
With sacrifice, while all the fleet
Had rest by stony hills of Crete. (11.26-35)

Allusions, by their very nature may either ‘’build a remote, unearthly world of Imagination, or they may lift everyday things into ideal perfection.”[13] In Tennyson's use of allusions one can say that “mythology becomes a kind of evocative short-hand, a language that satisfies the human need for imaginative and emotional .transcendence of mortal and earthly imperfection.”[14] Sometimes Tennyson gives titles drawn from mythology to his non-mythical poems, e.g., “Amphion” and "The Golden Year.” These titles are a kind of artistic device to reinforce the theme and are. in a way, a novel use of the technique of allusion.

(b) Tennyson was fond of translating passages from the classics. His first extant poem is a translation into English of part of the myth of Persephone from Claudian's De Raptu Proserpinae. which he did between the age of eleven and fourteen. [15] He often translated passages from Homer's Iliad. Rawnsley considered these attempts to be extremely good. It was often suggested to him that he should translate the whole of Iliad or Odyssey, but Tennyson always declined, saying he did not think it a poet’s task.[16] The poet felt translating Homer was difficult. As for his own translated passages from Homer, he said their merit could be judged only by a comparison with the original, for it "can only be appreciated by the difficulties overcome.”[17]

In his translations and compositions he did not seem to make a distinction between Greek and Roman names of the gods and heroes and used them according to the appeal of their sounds to him. He used Roman names of Greek deities in his translation of a passage from Iliad (XVIII, 202). Gladstone criticized it and argued with him on the usage. Ho (Gladstone) Insisted that the very softness of the sound of Jove instead of Zeus, instead of Achaens made the passage appear less Greek inspite of his assertion that "These lines are word for word. You could not have a closer translation .... [18] The fact that Tennyson eventually accepted the contention is obvious from his substitution of names.[19]

Tennyson translated orally, too. Hallam recalls that when at Farringford in 1854. the poet translated aloud three idylls of Theocritus — "Hylas," "The Island of Cos" and "The Syracusan Women." This dabbling in translation is significant only to the extent to which it throws light on his great love of the classics and the use he made, as a pastime, of the myths contained in them. As stated earlier, he never undertook to translate a whole epic. He considered himself to be only a poet who had a deep and tender love for Greek epics and legends.

V. CONCLUSION

The preceding examination of Tennyson’s handling of myth poems emphasises their thematic implications and artistic values while also connecting them to the rest of his poems. "Ilion. Ilion" and "Parnassus." two poems from the group, are fundamentally distinct from the rest. They depict his yearning to be a great epic poet through mythological imagery, and his final sorrowful understanding that this ideal could not be realised in his materialistic, unimaginative age. The rest of the mythological poems, whether by intention or by unconscious instinct, deploy a common theme of image and symbolism, reinforcing their connection to ancient antiquity. Their mythological, metaphorical, and symbolic oneness distinguishes them as a coherent community. Mythology's framework integrates personal metaphor, making them a one-of-a-kind journal in which the poet chronicles his innermost secrets via the symbolic hieroglyphs of the tales. They reveal more about him than any biography, even that of his son. because they reflect the poet's intellect and spirit in an unrestrained and unselfconscious manner. Thematic arrangement of the poems for the sake of this research highlights pivotal periods in his life. The dramatis personae in them include not only the recognisable figures, but also his parents, the Apostles. Arthur Hallam, his own brother and sister, and the poet himself, all concealed beneath the smoke-screen of mythological personages.

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[3] Gilbert Hight. The classical Tradition: and Roman Influences on western Literature (1949; rpt. New York and London: oxford university press. Inc., 1959). pp. 451-452.
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[6] A Memoir. II, p. 93.
[7] A Memoir I. p. 1 1. A Memoir I. p. 12.
[8] A Memoir I, p. 12.
[9] A Memoir. I. p. 17. Browning said of Tennyson, "...nobody has more fully found at the beginning what he was bom to do—- nor done it more perfectly."(Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson p.326).
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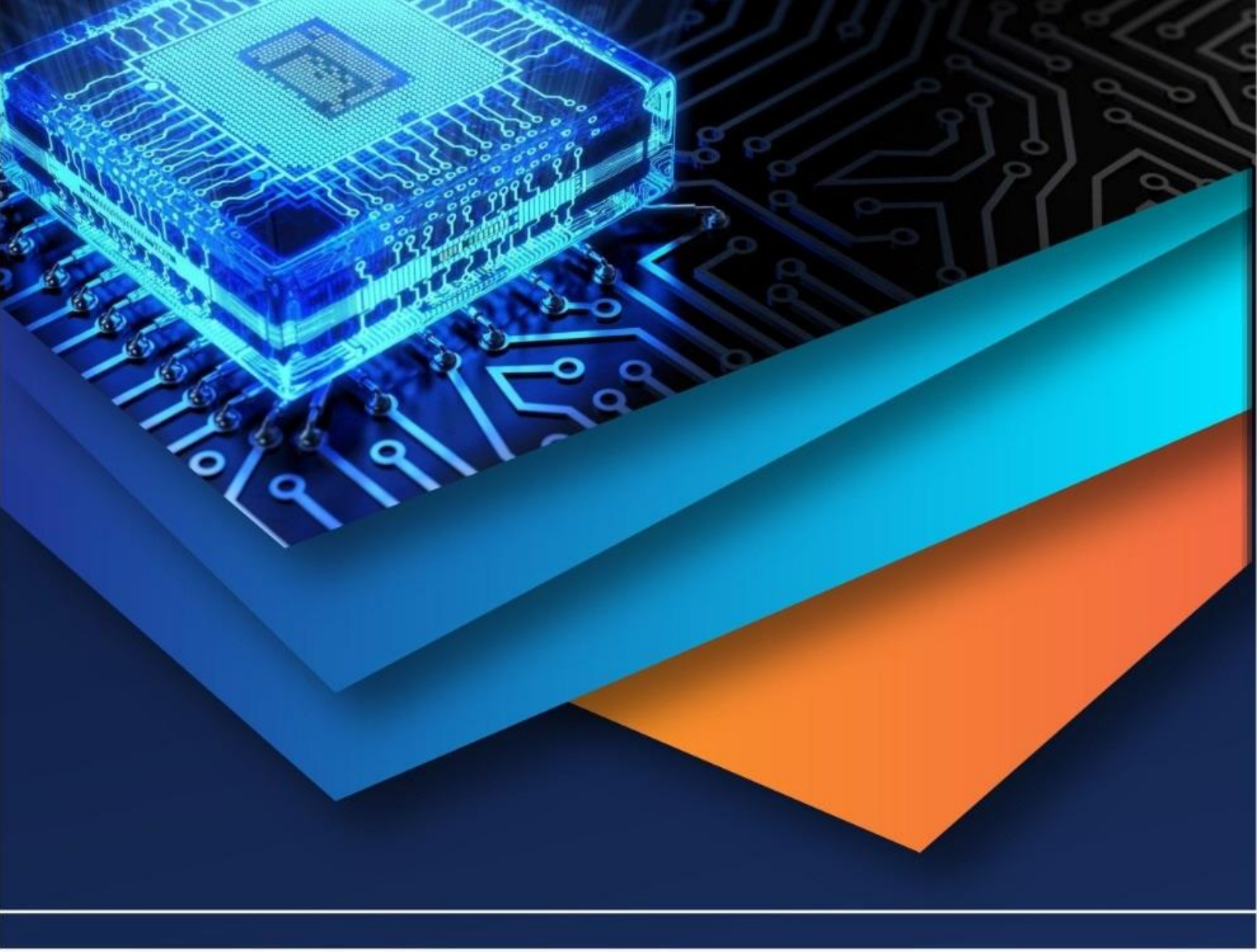
[17] Quoted from Letters and Papers of John Addington Symonds, ed.. Horatio F. Brown. "Miscellanies." pp. 1-8. by Philip Henderson in Tennyson Poet and Prophet, p. 144.
[18] Philip Henderson in Tennyson. Poet and Prophet, p. 146.
[19] The translated passage is printed in The Poems of Tennyson. In the head note to the passage Ricks has pointed out the substitution, p. 1158.



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