

## **ELEGY- A TOUCH OF A WET HEART**

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### **Abstract**

Life is quite strange. Nobody cannot imagine what happens in the next moment. Even God who incarnated as a human being, according to mythology, cannot escape the slings arrows of the outrageous fortune. If that; is the case with God, nothing is to say about human beings. Birth of human being itself is bondage. Right from the beginning of birth to the ending, there are bundles of sorrows and struggles thronging into the life. Sometimes these sorrows and struggles over lead the confidence of an individual and push him into the well of inferior. In the web of loss of will and self-resistance, one can struggle what to do in the next moment. At this juncture, if he gets any solace or peace he continues the life or he himself resorts to close life in different ways. In his span of life he associates with many people he might share and exchange ideas which establish the personality of an individual. His problems struggles, sorrows and so on all are inside but to the outside world, he appears to be cheery, jolly and respected and loved by all. The sudden disappearance of a person forms our association pains and wounds our heart. At one stage, everyone thinks that the world is dark and illumine. There are many poets who expressed their heart touching feelings with whose association they cannot forget in their life. Sir Aurther Hallam to T S Eliot used literary technique i.e. Elegy as their tool for expressing their pathetic ideas in a systematic manner. In this article we try to elaborate and express our views on the Technique used by the poets in expressing their feelings.

It is possible to only to literature to give a beautiful shape to the feelings of the heart which is filled with full of love and affection. It shares the feelings with full fledged faith and mutual understanding. If those, who shared the feelings, are unfortunately disappeared to the unreached world, the pity that the heartfelt, and the sorrow that the mind experiences is unexplainable. The agonies of the heart with full of tears in the eyes expresses the longing for the love even not possible to language. It is possible only to poetry to give a beautiful shape to such feelings. A poem whether it is a free verse or traditional one gives an organic beauty with a solace to the disturbed heart. It is a mournful song, melancholic poem especially a funeral song and or a lament for the dead. A poem which mirrors the vanishing values of the contemporary age in a heart touching and moving way is an Elegy.

It is quite adventurous to create a letteric image to the deep bond surrounded by under woven souls. A pathetic situation moved an illiterate person like Valmiki (1) to shed tears at the cruel killing of birds which lead to a great epic in the World “the Ramayana” (2). Indian rhetoricians exhorted it as the first and the best elegy in the Indian Literature. M H Abrams in his “Glossary of Literary terms” defined elegy as a poem lament for death of a particular person. Alfred Tennyson wrote an elegy on the death of his close friend Arthur Hallam in his famous elegy “In Memoriam”. W H Auden expressed his grief at the sudden and sad demise of W B Yeats in his poem “In Memory of WB Yeats” Milton’s “Lycidas”, Shelly’s “Adonis” and Mathew Arnold’s “Thyrus” all these poems uphold the pain and wound in the heart the poets at the loss of their close and intimate friends. With the influence of ancient Greek and Rome literature Elegy is incarnated as a poetic form with the name of Elegois. The sorrowful songs sung by Greeks when their close associate departed are treated as elegiac songs. They followed separate structure and theme for elegy. It reflected various philosophical and transcendental feelings of ancient Romans and Greeks. It gained well reputations in the Puritan, Neo-Classical, Romantic and Victorian Ages. 20<sup>th</sup> century literature has given a new dimension to the elegy. As called by Wallace Stevens, “Mother of Beauty” death is a favorite muse for modern poets. Modern poetry tried to find a language of mourning in an age of mass death, religious doubts and forgotten rituals. The subtle reading of the elegies by the eminent poets enriches critical understand of their poetry. Wilfred Owen, Wallace Stevens, Langston Hues, Sylvia plath and Seamus Heaney. Grounded in genre theory and in the psychoanalysis of mourning, elegiac readings also draw on various historical, formal, and feminist critical approaches. The best reason among them is the breaking the thread of human bonds among the modern people. In the modern age, life has become a concrete jungle. Human relations are transformed into financial relations. There is no mutual understanding on humanitarian grounds. Everything is “what Profit?” basis. At this juncture it is not out of context to have a brief outlook at the origin and development of Elegy. The elegy, with its Greek metrical form, is traditionally reflected to the death of a person or group. The three stages of loss are mirrored in the traditional Elegy. First, there is a lament, then the speaker’s grief and sorrow and in final stage the admiration of the idealized dead, consolation and solace. We would like to observe these three stages of Elegy in a few poems. W. H. Auden’s “In Memory of W. B. Yeats,” written in commemoration of the Irish poet

With the farming of a verse  
Make a vineyard of the curse,

Sing of human unsuccess  
In a rapture of distress;

In the deserts of the heart  
Let the healing fountain start,  
In the prison of his days  
Teach the free man how to praise.

Other well-known elegy written in memory of President Abraham Lincoln by Walt Whitman is "O Captain! My Captain!". In "O Captain! My Captain!" Whitman celebrates the bond that patriotism creates between the average citizen and the leader of the people. The captain is portrayed as a patriot who has risked his life in some mission for the people on shore. The masses on shore celebrate the captain's success, and the ship's return, with all the trappings of patriotism: flags, bugles, and bells. As discussed earlier, many elegies were written not simply out of personal grief or sorrow but feeling of a great loss by missing a legendary personality. Another famous elegy is by Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country churchyard". The Critics say that this is a poem elegy in name but not in form. It followed the methods similar to contemporary odes, but it embodies a meditation on death, and remembrance after death. The narrator finds comfort in pondering the lives of the obscure rustics buried in the churchyard. There are two versions of the poem, *Stanzas* and *Elegy*, approach death differently; the first contains a stoic response to death, but in an epitaph the narrator's fear of dying is expressed. The poem has possible political ramifications, but it does not make any definite claims on politics to be more universal in its approach to life and death. "Lycidas" by John Milton is an elegy expressed in pastoral form on his friend Edward King who was drowned on a voyage to Ireland. An excellent images of nature and village life are brought into the poem. In this elegy Edward King is been pasteurized as a shepherd in its idyllic setting. Actually Milton borrows the name Lycidas and gives to Edward King. He has taken this name from Theocritus' Idylls in which Lycidas is a shepherd and poet. By giving the very name Lycidas to King, Milton fulfills the first requirement of a pastoral poetry. In this genre we can also see praises for the shepherd. Here in Lycidas Milton calls King as selfless even though he was of clergy. Milton tries to compare Cambridge to pasture, latter on he tries to speak about the heavy change suffered by nature because of the death of King. He says that willows, hazel groves, woods and caves lament Lycidas's death. At the end of the poem Lycidas appears as a rejuvenated figure, Milton says, "Burnished by the sun's rays at down, King resplendently ascends heavenward to his eternal reward." Arthur Henry Hallam's death in 1833 moved Lord Alfred Tennyson by forcing him to question his faith in nature, God, and poetry. He reveals in his "In Memoriam" the transitory emotions that buffeted him after Arthur's loss. Creating poetry of fragments, Tennyson leads the reader of In Memoriam from grief and despair through doubt to hope and faith, but at each step stubborn, contrary emotions intrude, and one encounters doubt in the midst of faith, pain in the midst of resolution. Shelley expressed his grief over the death of his fellow poet John Keats in his famous Long Elegy "Adonis". The mood of the poem begins in dejection, but ends in optimism—hoping Keats' spark of brilliance reverberates through the generations of future poets and inspires revolutionary change throughout literary world. "Adonis" is the stand-in for Keats, for he too died at a young age after being mauled by a boar. In Shelley's version, the "beast" responsible for Keats's death is the literary critic, specifically one from *London's Quarterly* who gave a heart breaking review of Keats' poem "Endymion". Urania (also known

as “Venus” or “Aphrodite”), who is Adonis’ lover in the myth, is rewritten here as the young man’s mother. In a sense, Keats is not dead, for like other great poets, he lives within those who benefited from his life and poetry, and he is alive because he is “one with Nature.” He is even Christ like, a divinity among the best of poets. He beacons the living to join him in eternity even in death. “Thyrsis” is a pastoral elegy written by Matthew Arnold to honor his friend Arthur Hugh Clough, who died in 1861. It is one of the greatest elegies in English literature. Thyrsis is 240 lines long, divided into twenty-four ten-line stanzas.

Having a brief note on a few elegies in English literature which we discussed above, Elegies that one finds in twentieth century literature are far from what we read above. A few changing conventions that were brought into Elegy started with Thomas Hardy and Sylvia Plath. Actually switching from novel to poetry Thomas Hardy’s way of dealing poetic instinct in employing Elegy is completely different from other poets. He startled his readers by writing *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* with a frank treatment of sex. His poem written about the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century is “The Darkling Thrush,” which stands for his attitude of despair and pessimism. Actually it is titled as “By the Century’s Deathbed”. In the poem the poet expresses his despair which echoes his own world of weariness and loss of hope for future of humanity. He also sees a death haunted landscape and ‘sought their household fires’. He himself cried for the passing agricultural society and construction of concrete jungle by rapid industrialization in England. He hoped that past is severed and cannot find any meaning in the present ‘breeding lilacs in the dead land’ in future. Thus he unfurled curtain to the new dimension to the theme of elegy. Sylvia Plath is another poet who born after hundred years of Thomas Hardy, whose poetry reflects the themes of suicide, death and depression. Her elegies revolve around her father. Her poem “Daddy” is an excellent example of her version of an elegy. Her elegies are anger which made her unique in writing elegies. So far elegy is treated as a poem of lamentation by many a poets. Now it modified into a genre as to write about loss in general. Poem about the decline of human values and death of a culture were also considered as elegies. Elegies of the twentieth century did not give the audience an opportunity for consolation, or a way to recover from their loss. For the most part these poems were simply about some sort of loss.

Elegies in 19<sup>th</sup> century are for the queen who gave the century its name, for the unknown soldier of its imperialist wars, and for God who had been dying through much of the century. The works in the Victorian Period like “Dover Beach” and others persists with works like “the Waste Land”.

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