CHAPTER VI

Tennyson’s Art and Technique
Tennyson handled the themes and plots of his verse tales with great skill and artistry keeping in mind the literary taste of the reading public. He clothed the thematic structure of his narratives with the colourful tapestry of his dignified language, marvellous styles, life-like word-pictures, melodious music and excellent versification.

"Tennyson was before all things a flawless artist." "The gifts by which Tennyson has won, and will keep his place among the great poets of England are pre-eminently those of an artist. His genius for vivid and musical expression was joined to severe self-restraints, and to patience which allowed nothing to go forth from him until it had been refined to the utmost perfection that he was capable of giving to it. And his law of pure and flawless workmanship controlled his composition in the larger sense; it is seen in the symmetry of each work as a whole, in due subordination of details, in the distribution of light and shade, in the happy and discreet use of ornament," He is remembered more as an artist than for anything else.

Tennyson is extolled as a poet prophet, a supreme artist who was also a seer, one of those immortals in literature, whose works have been a beacon-light through the ages. He is looked upon as the representative poet of victorianism, one who voices forth the profoundest hopes and doubts, the noblest ideal, and aspirations of the world's
great age that began with the intellectual revolution of the 19th century, and beckoned humanity towards a new Jerusalem. No doubt, his poetry reflects his thoughts on social, economic and political problems of his day, but his fame rests less on his thought than on his achievements as an artist. The merit of Tennyson lies in giving his thoughts form and shape. It is not by "What he said" but "how he said it" that Tennyson has been able to win for himself a host of admirers.

Says Cazamian "While Romanticism had tended rather to lay stress on spontaneity of feeling, Tennyson deliberately emphasises the importance of discipline in form. He is an indefatigable, conscientious, and melodious artist. His poems after going through successive revisions are sometimes hardly recognisable, and almost always closer to perfection."

The poetry of the Romantic Revival, with one exception, had little influence on the artistic development of Tennyson. As artists, Worsworth and Shelley have scarcely anything in common with Tennyson. He owed a technical debt to the supreme skill of Coleridge as a metrist, but save in the imitative period of the early volume. Keats alone, whom the poet admired and revered above all his immediate predecessors, affected his artistic ideals. The practical richness, and "sensuousness of Keats, the delicate sensitiveness to external impressions, the atmosphere of
pensive beauty that hung over his scenic pictures, these matters appealed intensely to young Tennyson. " Like Keats he started as a sensuous artist and worshipper of beauty, the picturesque, colourful and remote from every day life, redolent of the pomp and luxury of Arabia, or the weird magic of the Middle ages or the mythological aroma and pensiveness of the classical past. Everywhere the details are precise, vivid and clear-cut and the artistry which combines the general atmosphere of mystery with the mathematical precision of the particular details is a precursor of the pre-raphaelite ideal which was much indebted to the 'sensuous' Keats. Yet while Keats engages all the senses and imparts considerable warmth and intensity into his sensuous descriptions, Tennyson is more purely a pictorial artist, with a strong sense of colour. 'Colour like the dawn' said Emerson, 'flows over the horizon from his pencil in waves so rich that we do not miss the central form.'

We must not exaggerate this influence. Later Tennyson distinguished himself by a greater command over the musical and technical resources of the language. The minuteness of observation probably owned something to crable, with whose natural descriptions Tennyson's pictures of the fen country are curiously alike in their love of microscopic effects.

The merits of Tennyson's first volume, *Poems Chiefly Lyrical*, lie in their grace and melody. Many of them were revised by the poet later almost out of recognition but they remain to testify to the delicate artistry of the new writer.

"His early poems show him to a master in a facile, graceful, and harmonious key. In these first efforts he deals in wordpainting and delightful harmonies, he shows exquisite feeling for the music of syllables and the chain of imagery. In these poems, the caressing music of the melody, the unerring felicity in the metrical translation of feelings are a contribution worthy of the most talented artists."

Yet "the thinness of inspiration, the wildness and obscurity of some of the poems of 1830 volume invited the free, frank and brutal criticism of critics which appeared in Blackwood's, the Quarterly, and elsewhere."

Tennyson underwent a very considerable artistic development between 1832 and 1842. The 1842 edition consists of winnowings from the earlier volumes, made with scrupulous care, and some new English Idylls. The nature of the revision showed how keen a self-critic the poet was, and how wisely he had taken to heart the bitter wisdom of his reviewers. In the opinion of some critics, Edward

Fitzgerald for instance, Tennyson never reached so high a standard again as was achieved in this volume of 1842. "It was to be the richest and most impressive of all Tennyson's publications." 

It exhibits some of the best representative work of Tennyson e.g. the revised Lotos Eaters and Lady of Shalott, the exquisite Day Dream, such perfect essays in classic art as Ulysses and Morte D' Arthur, such lovely songs as Break, Break, Break and Come not, when I am Dead. This volume is rich in those characteristics that individualise his best work-clarity, melody and dignity. His lyric note is ampler and more varied in the lovely songs that decorate The Princess; and more passionate and more ecstatic in Maud. The Princess showed a fine command of blank verse, and contains passages of great beauty. These verse tales are magnificent in the simplicity and dignity of the language and the absolute assurance of the verse movement.

After that Tennyson worked at "the Memorial poems," carefully revising and elaborating them. The monumental elegy "In Memoriam" published in 1850, was the outcome of Tennyson's twenty year's thought and craftsmanship. In the same year Tennyson wrote his great patriotic verse tale "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" which demonstrates Tennyson as a master of dignified, often

1. Introduction, from Tennyson - New Oxford English Series, page no. - 26
stately compliment. The form of this tale is firm and precisely integrated with the subject. The unity of it is strengthened by the patterning of sound and rhythm achieved especially by the constant recurrence of particular sounds, words, and even whole lines.

"Tennyson's re-shaping and modernising of the Arthurian legends were started in 1859 and concluded in 1885. Technically, the Idylls are a great achievement. Tennyson's blank verse is inexpressibly finer in quality than any attempted by the poets of the Romantic Revival, and to rival it one must go back to Milton. Previous to these Arthurian stories he made various essays into blank verse with notable results e.g. Ulysses, Lucretius, Aylmer's Field but he had never tried on so large a scale as in the Idylls, and if he can not match the majestic organ notes of Milton, his verse has a grace, a flexibility, a noble cadence and what is peculiarly Tennyson's, a delicate and caressing tenderness."

The fresh development we have to note in Tennyson's later years are in the direction of drama. Hitherto his work has no dramatic tendency, it had been for the most part descriptive and panoramic in quality. But on the whole the dramatic form proved alien to his genius. Only Becket is a testimony to his preservance, and to his unique gifts as a literary artists.
In Tennyson's later work e.g. The Death of Oenone, Locksley Hall Sixty Years After, The foresters, and Crossing the bar etc, there is no decay of artistry. In certain passages of these poems, the craftsmen's ancient cunning asserts itself. "In reviewing the whole body of Tennyson's work, we feel that he is at his happiest and the best when actualising for us the beauty of the visible world. It is here that his dominant characteristics — clarity, melody, and dignity — are exhibited in their ampest power. None could excel him in the lines of limpid lucidity such as these:

"The league of grass wash'd by a slow, broad stream."
"The little speedwell's darling blue."
"A light blue lane of early dawn."

Or in haunting music:
"The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmuring of innumerable bees."
"Night slid down one long stream of sighting wind,
And in her bosom bore the baby sleep."

Or for noble dignity:
"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways."
"Poor little that toddles for an hour
Crown'd with a flower or two, and there an end."
"It may be that the gulf will wash us down,
It may be we shall touch the happy isles,
And see the great Achilles whom we know."

1. Poetry: Alfred, Lord Tennyson's, Book — A History of English Literature by Compton Rickett, Page no — 412
Tennyson employed all the poetic ornaments and literary devices to enrich and decorate his poetry.

Tennyson's style has an epigrammatic terseness, finish and polish. Every word is carefully chosen and every phase is well-chiselled. He gave considerable thought to the art of expression, and he succeeded in coining phrases, "jewels five words long" with the dexterity of a skilled craftsman. Because of the terseness of expression, many of his lines have passed into common proverbs since the period of the Essay on Man, from which writer can we cull so many wise and fine proverbial phrases as from the poet who says:

"Knowledge comes but wisdom lingers
Things seen are mightier than things heard."

(Locksley Hall)

again:

"It's better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all."

(In Memoriam)

"Old order changeth yielding place to new"

(Morte D' Arthur)

Another significant characteristic of Tennyson which strikes us is his scientific perception rather than his poetic imagination. Browning often wrote like a poet with strong scientific predilections; Tennyson like a scientific with a marked aptitude for poetry. This scientific perception, being the source of his strength, gave exquisite accuracy to his scenic pictures, form and balance to his craftsmanship, clarity to his utterance.
Tennyson's art was distinguished by a sense of beauty and adoration of the beautiful aspects of Nature and human life. He was a votary of beauty. He possessed an unfailing instinct for poem in beauty. He had the power of shaping beauty and loveliness in Nature and human life. His love of the skilfulness of art, the careful study of words and their power in verse, his mingled strength and dainties, all his technique was not for its own sake, but was first urged by his love of beauty. He reacts quite sensitively to all forms of beauty whether physical or spiritual, and his adoration of beauty is rendered in the manner of an artist.

What is an artist if he has not natural passion for beauty. Tennyson has it in abundance, because he was born and brought up in the heart of a beautiful country, and from his early boyhood onwards he cultivated his taste for beauty by his constant habit and practice of accurately observing and recording his impressions of beauty. He admired Keats, just because Keats was as much a lover of beauty and the past as Tennyson himself was. Writes Stopford A. Brooke: "But the power of seeing beauty, and the love of beauty are not all that make the great artist. He must also have the power of shaping the beauty which he sees, and in a way peculiarly his own. There must be in the work the personal touch, the individual surprise, the unique way, the unimitated shaping which provokes imitation. Of every great poet it is true, and it is plainly true of Tennyson. Every
line is alive with own distincton."

Tennyson has used the device of allegory to convey the deeper meaning of the themes of his verse-tales. An allegory is a sustained story which conveys a different meaning from that which is directly conveyed. The word 'allegory' is a derivation from Greek word 'Allegoria' (allos' - other, 'goria' - speaking). It is "Narrative description of a subject under the guise of another suggestively similar" - (Oxford Dictionary). It is figurative narrative or description, conveying a veiled meaning; an extended metaphor, or a sustained personification.

Tennyson invests objects, actions or ideas with an allegorical and symbolic meaning. He aims at presenting idea and emotions through indirect suggestion rather than by direct expression. In the Lady of Shalott the lady symbolises the retired artist or poet living in his ivory tower, her web the work of art on which he works, and the curse, the contact with harsh reality. As soon as the artist faces the reality of life, his day dreams are shattered. In Idylls of the King Tennyson intended Arthur "to represent the ideal in the soul of man coming in contact, with the waring elements of the flesh." He is "the highest and most human too. " The kingdom which 'for a space' he establishes, and which in spite of downfall he will come to establish again, is the rule of conscience; and
in his coming, his foundation of the Round Table" for love of God and men ", his continued endeavour to keep his knights true to their vows, his failure, and his mysterious passing which is not death, we see a reflection of the conflict eternally waged in human life between the spirit and flesh, "with the lusts thereof". Arthur's more subtle foes are the evil passions and the mystic delusions of his own christian court and household, which in the end prevail over and ruin his, "boundless purpose". The mystic Lady of the lake represents the church or religion and Excalibur represents spiritual power with which Arthur wages war against Evil. The purity of the family is also necessary for human growth and progress. When there is sin and corruption in the family, discord shakes the social fabric, and death and destruction are the result. Thus the illicit love of Guinevere and Lancelot, and the treachery of Modred result in the dissolution of the society of the Knights of the Round Table and the departure of Arthur. Tennyson wants to make the reader understand as to what happens to individuals and societies who neglect the Christian principles.

In Tithonus, Tennyson through the mask of Tithonus wants to say that man should not desire to "vary from the kindly race of men" nor seek to "pass beyond the goal of ordinance". Life should be accepted with all its beauty and glory, as well as with all its limitations. Oenone is an
allegory of the wooing of man's spirit by power, knowledge and love, and the overwhelming temptation that lurks in the last. This legend of the golden apple has a deep allegorical meaning. Paris stands for a man wavering between the various values of life or ideals which he is going to follow. Tennyson tells us the highest ideal or value of life. He is in favour of Moral Law, which asks a man to know and do the right without fear of consequences. Those who, like Paris, follows sensuous pleasures come to grief.

Tennyson has used the element of supernaturalism in some of his verse-tales to suit the subject matter and to give them a medieval look. In Morte D' Arthur, we are told of the magic sword which king Arthur received from a mysterious hand from the depths of the lake. Holy Grail, is totally coloured in an atmosphere of supernaturalism and mystery. All the Knights, leaving their ordinary duties, are wandering here and there in desolate places to pursue Holy Grail. We, with our scientific outlook on life, may not believe in such miracles and supernatural elements; but we should not forget that these are the stories of the middle ages when beliefs in magic and miracles were widespread. In The Lady of Shalott the supernatural element has also been brought in through the mysterious curse on the lady, the magic web which she weaves, and the way in which the curse befalls her and she dies :-
"There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay.
She has heared a whisper say
A curse is on her if she stay
To look down to Camelot."

The note of pathos and tragedy is very pronounced in most of the verse-tales of Tennyson. The elegiac strain seems to pervade the bulk of his work. T.S. Eliot called Tennyson "the saddest of all poets." The Lady of Shalott, Oenone, Morte D' Arthur, Tithonus, Locksley hall, The vision of Sin, Maud and some other verse-tales illustrate this aspect of the Laureate's poetical output. Tennyson's was a temperamental melancholy, fostered and reinforced by his experience as a child and subsequently by his religious doubts and spiritual uncertainties and by the premature death of A.H. Hallam. His sorrow was the sorrow if a great genius, who, despite the savage attacks of his critics in early life, achieved unique recognition as a poet in England. The readers can easily discover the underlying despair.

In The Lady of Shalott, the atmosphere is sad throughout (excepting a few stanzas), the climax of the tragedy being reached the Lady's death:

For ere she reach'd upon the tide
The first house by the water-side
Signing in her song she died,
The Lady of Shalott.

Oenone, too, breathes the spirit of tragedy, reminiscent of Mariana:
"My eyes are full of tears, my heart of love,
My heart is breaking, and my eyes are dim,
And I am all aweary of my life."

The lament of Tithonus, doomed to immortality and old age, is noteworthy:

"Alas! for this grey shadow, once a man --
So glorious in his beauty and thy choice,
Who modest him thy chosen, that he seem'd
To his great heart none other than a God!"

Locksley Hall depicts a Byronic hero who suffers all the disaffection of earlier Tennysonian protagonists though in the end he yields to a belief in progress. In this poem, we are confronted with the irresolute figure of modern youth, depressed and bewildered by his own inability to face the bustling competition of ordinary English life, disappointed in love, denouncing a shallow-hearted cousin, and nursing a momentary impulse to "wander far away."

The sadness and poignancy of Maud and Dora are too well-known to need illustration. Tennyson wrote Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington, of a man who reminded him to the statesman lament in Arthur Hallam, and The Idylls of the King, which broods over the disintegration of an ideal society and the fall of a heroic lay-figure. Such moods of melancholy sometimes mellow, sometimes acute, give rise to Tennyson's poetry. He was a master in the lyrical expression of a sorrow-a-sorrow 'drawn from the depths of some divine'. In his verse-tales he has created beauty enough to be beyond fear of the ultimate verdict of
Tennyson was a great pictorial artist. He was a great painter of word-pictures. "His method is to seize upon appropriate details, dress them in expressive and musical phrases, and thus throw a glistening image before reader's eyes." He could use words as the painter uses his brush for conveying the impression of a scene's true outline and colour. Says Hadow - "There is no English poet who can set before us more clearly and more concisely the essential features of a scene or landscape." He could create an excellent pictorial effect blooming before our eyes. Referring to the pictorial quality of Tennyson's poetry, Steadman has observed in Victorian Poets, "Leaving the architecture of Tennyson's poetry and coming to the sentiment which it seeks to express we are struck at once by the fact that an idyllic or picturesque mode of conveying that sentiment is the one natural to this poet----. He does not, like Browning, catch the secret of a master passion; on the contrary, he gives us an ideal picture of an ideal person, but sets against a background more tangible than other artists can draw - making the accessories, and even the atmosphere, convey the meaning of his poem. As we study his verse, the sound and colour of it enter our soul, think with him, we partake of his feeling, and are led to regions which he finds unable to open for us except in the suggestive way."
The *Princess* is full of charming pictures. Here the purest and the freshest impression of Nature is re-created in mind and memory by the picture of Melisa with:

'All her thoughts as fair with in her eyes
As bottom seen to wave and float
In crystal currents of clear morning seas.

*Tears Idle Tears* is far beyond praise; once read it seems like a thing that has always existed in the world of poetic archetypes. The many pictures and similitudes in *The Princess* have a magical gorgeousness:

"From the illuminated hall
Long lanes of splendour slanted o'ver a press
Of showy shoulders, thick as heared ewes,
And rainbow robes, and gems and gem-like eyes,
And gold and golden heads; they to and fro
Fluctuated, as flowers in storm, some red, some pale."

Here every word is like a stroke of the painter's brush, put in to complete the sketch and to round off the impression, and this is characteristic of all Tennyson's workmanship. He does not give the effect of the scene, but the scene itself.

The *Lady of Shalott* is replete with fine pictures of the scenes which are reflected in her mirror. The following is an excellent example of Tennyson's pictorial quality :-

"All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick - jewell'd shone the saddle - leather
The helmet and the helmet - feather
Burn'd like one burning flame together,
    And he rode down to Camelot.
As often thro' the purple night,
Below the starry cluster bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
Moves over still Shalott."
Exquisite and telling similes and metaphors are used to vivify the narrative and to make the readers see with their mind's eye the scene which is being described. The image in the above lines has been admired by all readers of Tennyson. "An apt word, a well-chosen epithet, an illuminating simile, and the picture is made. That is the method of true art, and it is a method of which every page in Tennyson will furnish an illustration."

Tennyson's use of simile and metaphor is characterized by originality and aptness. His imagery is highly original, and individual, and it seems to vivify a scene and present it to the imagination of the reader.

The picturesqueness, the elaborate aptness, and the individual and personal character of Tennyson's similes are noteworthy. The following are examples of their picturesque aptness:

"The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the northern sea,"
(Morte d' Arthur)

His similes are not so much the long-developed Homeric figures, in which Matthew Arnold delighted, as the perfectly wrought pictures of Virgil. The following occurs at the end of The Passing of Arthur:
"and the barge with oar and saddle
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood.
With swarthy webs."

His similes in many cases "do not so much appeal to common experience, as bring before us some special thing or some peculiar as poet of Nature, which the poet has vividly presented to his own mind, while to the reader perhaps the picture suggested may be quite unfamiliar. A remarkable instance of this originality occurs in Gareth and Lynette:

"Gareth lookt and read
In letters like to those the vexillary
Hath left crag-carven o' er the streaming Gelt."

the Gelt being a small stream in Cumberland, not named in any of the ordinary gazetteers or atlases; and the reference is to an inscription on a limestone rock near this stream.

Tennyson is, thus, unequalled in the beauty, appropriateness and grandeur of his similes. The beauty infact consists in their wonderful picturesqueness, the appropriateness in the elaborate aptness of details, and the grandeur in the grandeur of the source from which the comparison is taken.

No where is the scientific perception to which I have already referred, more clearly shown than in his love of Nature. The varying and complex spell of nature's multitudinous moods as a whole has found no finer artistic expression than is given us in the verse of Tennyson.
Accurate observation and delicate poetic feeling are happily blended. He impresses us with microscopic effects. Examples of his minuteness of detail and accuracy of observation of Nature may be found even in his imaginative poem, *The Lady of Shalott*:

"Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
Little breezes dusk and shiver _ _ _ "

"In the stormy east wind straining
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining _ _ _ "

For minute observation and vivid painting of the details of natural scenery, Tennyson has not been equalled e.g.,

"hair,
In gloss and hue chestnut, when the shell
Divides three fold to show the fruit within"

(The Brook)

"those eyes
Darker than darkest pansies, and that hair
More black than ash-buds in the front of March."

(The Gardener's Daughter)

"A stump of oak half dead,
from roots like some black coil of carven snakes,
clutch'd at the crag."

(The Last Tournament)

Tennyson's singular skill in briefly sketching broad landscape is seen in the following lines:

"As the crest of some slow - arching wave,
Heard in dead night along that table - shore,
Drops flat, and after the great waters break
Whitening for half a league, and thin themselves,
For over sands marbled with moon and cloud.

(The Last Tournament)"
Everywhere indeed the observation of the scientist is glorified by the sensibility of the artist; the stark fact is clad in lovely imagery. Thus objective scientific touch is one feature of his nature poetry which adds laurels to his artistic skill. But another feature lies in its atmospheric subjectivity. Nature for him is always a background for reflecting some human emotion; it carries no message of its own, but harmonises with delicate adaptability to the mood of man. Thus in depicting moods of indolence, of sorrow, of love, he chooses such scenic accessories as may best accentuate these moods. How admirably the desolate background of Mariana suits the mood of despondent isolation, the melancholy autumnal touch in Tithonus, the tranquil charm of the sea-coast village in Enoch Arden. In The lady of Shalott, nature is bright and beautiful before the curse befall the lady. But when the curse befalls her and she is to die, nature, too, changes and becomes dark and gloomy.

"In the stormy east-wind straining
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining".

In the Princess, the following passage puts us in the mind of the manner in which Victor Hugo makes nature interpose to sympathise with human emotions:

"Till notice of a change in the dark world
was lispt about the acacias, and a bird
That early woke to feed her little ones
Sent from a dewy breast a cry for light".
Tennyson's love of classicism is evident, not only in his love of form, simplicity and restraint in style, but in his taste for classical allusions. He enriches his poetry with the wide knowledge of classical literature. Many of his verse-plays are interpersed with references to classical mythology which impart them distinction but, Tennyson never allowed these references to clog the smooth flow of his verse, as is the case in Milton's epics. His Oenone, Tithonus, Idylls of the King, all are marked by classical references.

Tennyson's art is sublime, stately and dignified. He presents ordinary ideas with decent dignity. He believes in an artistic work of perfect finish. The "jewelled and polished perfection" of his work is the result of his conscious and repeated efforts. "With the exception of Gray", says Grierson "English poetry had produced nothing since Milton that is so obviously the result of strenuous and unwearied pursuit of perfection of form". He was one of those poets who, like Milton and Wordsworth, consider themselves as consecrated spirit. He considered himself consecrated spirit and it imparted stateliness to his verse, gives it moral virtue, a spiritual strength, and emerges in a certain grandeur or splendour of style.

We can simply describe Tennyson's style as "ornate". He has indeed many styles. Perhaps no other poet of the time showed such a variety of manner as well as of theme-
"from the delicate, hovering elusiveness of 'The Hesperides' to the ultra- Wordsworthian and biblical plainness of Dora, from the romantic relation of Mariana to the macabre relation of Rizpah, from the heroic stateliness of the Ode on Wellington to the heroic balladry of The Revenge, from the ecstasies and hysterics of Maud to the ecstasies and hysterics of The Holy Crail". As Tennyson essayed a great variety of themes, they naturally clothed themselves in a great variety of styles. His style progresses from the luxuriant to the classically finished, from misplaced elaboration to directness of presentation, from cloying sweetness to stateliness. J.C. Squire hardly exaggerate his gift of style when he says:

"Whenever the impulse was strong he could do everything that could be done with words; not only were they perfectly chosen for the making of distinction, but he had mastered them for every sort of elegance of expression and he never had an imaginative conception to which he was not equal".

Tennyson has a Keats-like power of and using telling sensuous words and phrases, which give us at a flash, as it were, a complete picture. For example: many towered Camelot, willows whiten, willow-veiled, ambling pad, bearded meteor, willowy hills, gleaming shape (in The Lady of Shalott), frozen-hills, knotted waterflags, (Morte D'Arthur), Snowy Cradle, furrow cloven (The Princess) Marriage pillows, blossomed bower, ringing grooves (Locksley
Hall) etc.

In technical excellence, as an artist in verse, Tennyson is the greatest of modern poets. He was a great metrical artist and his poetic technique is particularly worth studying because he used such a variety of metres and verse forms and treated all of them with such remarkable freedom and complete mastery. The metrical variety of his poems, his experiments in classical prosody, and his development of the resources of the language for harmony are note worthy. With few exception, he used the accentual type of metre, which has been the normal basis of English poetry since Chaucer.

In Latin poetry, which has directly and indirectly been largely responsible for moulding the form of English versification, metre was based on quantity. Every syllable in the Latin language was held to be either long or short, according to a set of generally accepted rules. Following these, the poet evolved regular patterns of sound and poems were made in these patterns - sometimes, as with hexametre; sometimes in a pattern covering two successive lines, as in the elegiac metre e.g. hexametre and pentametre, sometimes in stanza form, e.g. the alcaic and sapphic poems. In all these various forms the lines were built up with 'feet', of which the main types were the 'iambic' (short syllable followed by a long syllable), 'anapaest' (two shorts, then one long), 'trochee' (one long followed by one short),
'dactyl' (one long followed by two shorts). The English poets adopted the principles of the Latin poets, substituting for quantity the natural accent of the English language. In the pronunciation of every English word of more than one syllable it will be found that one or more syllable are more heavily accentuated than others. In monosyllable the accentuation varies in accordance with the nature of the word and its position in the sentence. In English versification the accented syllable takes the place of the long syllable in Latin, the unaccented syllables correspond to the short syllable in Latin. In English scheme iambics, anapaests, trochees and dactyle are formed according as one or more unaccented syllables precede or succeed an accented syllable. Another important thing of the structure of English verse is that in every spoken sentence the voice lays additional stress on certain syllable according to the meaning of the sentence. This stress is quite different from the syllabic accent mentioned above, and the relation between it and the syllabic accent is skilfully used by English poets and gives variety and effect to their verse. Another point in which English verse differs fundamentally from Latin verse is in the use of rhyme.

From the very beginning of his poetic career Tennyson displayed his taste and interest in metrical experiments. Tennyson's first volume, poems, chiefly lyrical, published
in June 1830, was extraordinary precocious technically and showed that he had already fully mastered the principles of English prosody and realised to a surprising degree the possibilities of their application. Every variety of rhythm was employed, through the 'rising' foot was more common than the 'falling' and both dactyls and anapaests were freely used to give the rhythms speed and lightness. There was great variety in length of line — lines of 2, 3, 4, and 5 feet being included. There were poems in regular stanzas, and some in the 'Pindaric' form made popular in the 17th and 18th centuries by Cowley, Dryden, Gray and Collins. One remarkable feature about the lyrical writing in this volume is the extraordinary freedom of the rhyme schemes. He discontinued the experiment after 1830, probably because he found that no new system of the kind could provide the musical basis which was, to him, an essential part of poetry.

Tennyson's second volume (published at the end of 1832, but dated 1833) was much more substantial than the first. There was several important lyrical poems which, though not all of them had yet reached the perfection to which subsequently revision brought them, showed that his grasp of structure and rhythm was increasing.

The Lady of Shalott presented a perfect specimen of matrical technique and skill. It is written in a stanza of seven lines, the first four all with the same rhyme ending
and the last three also with one, though a different rhyme ending, and a refrain after the third and fourth lines. This different metre, handled with great lightness and freedom gave the poem an extraordinary speed and 'punch'. 'The Palace of Art' and 'the Dream of fair Women' each presents a series of pictures, and second considerably more dramatic than the first. They are composed in a slightly different four-line stanzas, the slow, rich movement of which gives the effect of tapestry.

The volume contained the earlist examples of his popular romantic verse-tales - 'The Miller's Daughter', and 'The May Queen'. The second of these poems foreshadowed the technique which he was to apply to all the popular ballads of his later life - 'The First Quarrel', 'Rizpah', 'Despair', and so on. It is written in a rising rhythm of seven iambics, irregularly varied by anapaests, by the inversion of a foot (particularly at the beginning of the line), by the use of a single suspended syllable in the middle of the caesura or natural sense — break in the line. A remarkable instance of inversion is the first line of the poem; this is really trochaic throughout:

"You must wake and call me early,  
Call me early, Mother dear."

The variation of caesura is very frequent:

"He thought I was a ghost, mother,  
for I was all in white,  
And I ran by him without speeking,  
Like a flash of light."
In the second line the caesura comes one syllable later than in the first.

Another important feature of his second volume was the inclusion of the first of the mature poems in blank-verse, 'Oenone'. Another very interesting verse tale of this volume is 'The Vision of Sin'. The first two sections of this contain the only extended use of the heroic couplet in Tennyson's mature work. The rhythm is, however, so slightly handled with so many inversions and clauses overrunning the end of the couplet, that few readers recognise it. In the course of the second section the rhythm grows freer and wilder, until it changes into a four-foot trochaic line irregularly rhymed. After other variations designed to express the changing emotions of the poem, the final section (V) reverts to the heroic couplet in a more serene and regular form.

Within nine months of the publication of the volume of 1833 Arthur Hallam died, and Tennyson, shattered by his loss, and depressed by the critical attacks on his poetry, published no more until 1842, when he brought out two volumes, the first containing a revised selection of his earlier work and the second entirely new poems. The latter showed a remarkable change from the poet's previous work.

1. In Unpublished Early Poems, P.I., there is a brilliantly effective, if conventional, translation from the Proserpine of Claudian into this metre, made when Tennyson was thirteen or fourteen.
Nearly one third of its 231 pages were occupied by blank-verse poems, after whom the most striking novelty was the long poem in trochaic (falling) rhythm, 'Locksley Hall', with a line of eight feet (sixteen syllables normally). This was the first trochaic poem of importance that Tennyson had published. The subject - matter of the poem needs a reading at a rattling pace and with the maximum of dramatic expression. The regularity of the beat helps to give the sense of speed and enables the rhythm to be maintained, however intense the drama of the reading.

The subject of 'In Memoriam', the annus mirabilis, in 1850, is one which needs a slow and majestic rhythm and even a certain monotony, and Tennyson succeeded in giving it such variation as was necessary and adapting it to the changing moods of his poem, by a skilful use of vowel music and alliteration: by occasional inversions of rhythm: by running the sense over from line to line and ever from stanza to stanza, and other such devices.

The years from the publication of The Princes (1847) to 1855 saw the culmination of Tennyson's lyric genius, including the famous songs placed between the cantos of The Princes, the 'Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington' and Maud.
The Wellington Ode is just as truly melodic as either of the earlier poems, but it has more coherent form, so that interest and emotion are concentrated instead of being dispersed and distracted. But the form is exceedingly free. The poem is composed of nine sections of very unequal lengths, the longest comprising 77 lines, the shortest only 5. The metre is iambic, occasionally varied with anapaests and sometimes given a trochaic quality by the inversion of the first foot (in section V the words "Let the bell be toll'd" must be read with three beats to suggest the sound of the bell), and the lines vary in length from three to five feet. The use of vowel sound and rhyme is exceedingly skilful and varied. The melodic line is freely and beautifully varied to express the emotions of the poem.

In the next poem which he published, Maud, Tennyson applied to an intensely dramatic subject the method which had made his threnody for the Great Duke so memorable. Maud is a lyrical monologue reflecting in about 1200 passionate lines a story of love, death and madness. The metre has an iambic base, plentifully varied with anapaests. The lines vary in length from six feet to three and the rhyme schemes are exceedingly fluid and so well managed that it never

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1. Tennyson used to emphasise the melodic nature of the Ode by the way in which he chanted it when reading it aloud. In certain passages he would suddenly raise the pitch of his voice several notes with surprising effect, e.g., section II, "where shall we lay the man whom we deplore to end of the section, and the last five lines of section IV, 'O fall'n at length ", etc.
fails to act as an effective link in the chain of sound. By these means Tennyson evolved a form of extraordinary speed, fluency and adaptability.

After 1855, Tennyson wrote a number of verse-tales. 'The Revenge' and 'The Defence of Lucknow' are in the Lincolnshire dialect, and in iambic metres, broken up to adjust them to the character of the speaker and the nature of the subject. In the Revenge, metrically an interesting poem, lines of seven, six and five feet are used. The Defence of Lucknow has a line of six feet and is basically identical in metre with Maud.

More than half of Tennyson's total output is in blank-verse. He used blank-verse very effectively and skillfully in The Princess, The Idylls of the King, and the English Idylls. On the instrumental resources of blank-verse he sets the highest value. He had his own secrets of arranging and diversifying it: and all those who have used it after him have been profited by his lessons in this essentially English metre.

The normal blank-verse line is composed of five iambic feet, which make ten syllables in all. But a normal line does not often occur to avoid monotony. Poets, therefore, diversify their lines by the free use of inversions, by substituting two short (or unaccented) syllables for one long (or accented) syllable, and various other means. As a
result blank verse lines sometimes have eleven, twelve, or even thirteen syllables. Tennyson used all these devices very freely. His blank-verse has striking merits of its own, such as — amazing flexibility, its power of achieving, through rhythm and vowel music, and a lyrical singing quality. The lyrical quality appeared striking in the opening lines of *Morte D'Arthur*:

"So all day long the noise of battle rolled."

Perhaps the most striking examples of all the blank-verse lyrics in *The Princess*—'Tears Idle Tears', "O Swallow Swallow", "Now sleeps the crimson petal", and "Come down, O Maid ..."

This quality, beautiful as it is in lyrical passages, is necessity limited in its application, and it is the flexibility of Tennyson's verse and his varied control of rhythm that enabled him to use the metre successfully for so many different types of poem— for example, the almost conversational English *Idylls*, the nostalgic richness of 'The Gardener's Daughter', the austere and restrained emotion of *Dora*, the comedy, drama and burlesque of the *Princess*, and for the infinitly diversified narrative of the *Idylls of the King*.

Critics have sometimes found a too deliberate artistry and refinement in Tennyson's blank-verse, particulary that of the *English Idyls* and the later *Idylls of the King*, a
kind of criticism which is delightfully illustrated in caverley's parody of 'The Brook', for example, the poet's farewell to the tramp, who takes the place of the 'babbling brook' in Tennyson's poem:

"Then I 'The sun has sunk behind the hill
And my Aunt Vivian dines at half past six.'
So all in love we parted, I to the Hall
He to the village. It was noised next day
That chickens had been missed at Syllabub Farm."

Tennyson himself called it "the foolish facility of Tennyson's verse;" but this facility, combined with his unrivalled control of the medium, gave his verse a flexibility and range which is unrivalled by any other poet. We can realise this truths by contrasting the romantic opening lines of 'Morte D' Arthur' with the conversational introductory poem 'The Epic'; the stark simplicity of Dora with the hectic and contorted ravings of 'St. Simeon'; the noble declamation of the lines to the Prince Consort with the singing lyricism of 'Come down, O maid' from canto VII of The Princess.

Tennyson's delicate ear enabled him to enhance his verse with innumerable felicities, rhythm and vowel sound, mental and sensual images to reinforce the literal meaning of his words. Some examples of such felicity are to be found in The Princess and the Idylls of the King:— e.g.,

1. Tennyson's Versification; from Six Tennyson Essays by Sir Charles Tennyson; page no — 148
"Pledge of a love, not to be mine, farewell"
(Canto VII 'Princess')

"The broad anbrosial aisles of lofty elm
Made noise of less and breeze from end to end."
('Princess')

"......... the spires
prinked with incredible Pinnacles into heaven."
(The Holy Grail)

"Whereat the novice, crying with clasp'd hands
Shame on her own garrulity garrulously .......
(Guinevere)

From the above analysis, we get the impression that Tennyson's blank-verse has a natural freedom, simplicity and tenderness. When his theme is reflective and oratorial, the blank-verse becomes melodious, sonorous, variously paused and felicitously drawn into paragraph. "Tennyson's blank-verse," says Compton-Rickett, "is inexpressibly finer in quality than any attempted by the poets of the Romantic Revival, and to rival it one one must go back to Milton."

Indeed, Tennyson's mind was stored with the rhythm of nature and art and, as he brooded over his subject, he evolved rhythmic forms to suit it. He made deliberate experiments in imitation of classical metres. As a great artists, he achieves his results by subtle and instinctive combination of rhythm, vowel sound, assonance and alliteration which are coloured by the meaning and emotions of the poem and the mental association of the words used, so that the same rhythm has very different implication in different contexts.
Tennyson considered poetry as an art. From the very beginning of his poetic career, he laboured hard to attain perfection in poetic art. His high position among the poets of England is assured mainly on account of the artistic qualities of his verse. He developed his artistic qualities in a particular pattern of thought, emphasising the necessity of cultivating the quality of simplicity, lucidity, clarity, sublimity and completeness. His language, thus, is uniformly excellent. His diction has sublimity, dignity and stateliness about it. His imagery, similes and metaphors, words and phrases, are original and apt. Every word is carefully chosen both with reference to sense and sound, and in this way his diction becomes melodious and musical.

In Tennyson's art, the first thing that strikes us is simplicity. His style is stamped over with simplicity, and yet this simplicity never borders on the land of baldness. "Vital sincerity or living correspondence between idea and form, that absolute necessity for all fine art as for all noble life, was his, and is in contained in his simplicity. "In The Lady of Shalott, this simplicity may be noted in what is, after all, the most moving passage of the poem:

"But Lancelot mused a little space,  
He said, " She has a lovely face;  
God in His mercy land her grace,  
The Lady of Shalott. ""
Morte D'Arthur is memorable for its restraint as for its perfection of ornament. Note the simplicity of these lines from The Princess:

"Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn - fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more."
('Tears Idle Tears')
Princess

Clarity and lucidity are the main characteristics of Tennyson's style. Stopford Brooke observes: "Deliberately he did not attempt to write about that which he could not express with lucidity of thought and form. He determined to be clear."

The poems of Tennyson have achieved immortality not for its depth of thought, but for its diction which they provide.

Tennyson uses the right words in the right places. His phrases are happily chosen. The felicacious use of words may be noted in the following lines from Tithonus:

"Ay me! ay me! with what another heart
In days far off, and with what other eyes
I used to watch - if I be he that watch'd
The lucid outline forming round thee; saw
The dim cusps kindle into sunny rings;
Changed with thy music change, and felt my blood
Glow with the glow that slowly crimson'd all
Thy presence ............"

Tennyson tries to say whatever he has to say in the fewest possible words. The result is that his language has
an epigrammatic terseness, finish and polish. His verse-
tales are remarkable for their felicity and terseness of
expression, and provide numerous example of Tennyson's
capacity to chisel, "jewels five words long":

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of.

(Morte d'Arthur)

"Happy men that have the power to die."

"Kisses balmier than half-opened buds."

(Tithonus)

Nothing that is not perfect or unusual in its beauty
and effect appeals to his fine sensibility and taste.
Therefore, he avoids all that is commonplace, which is one
of the characteristics of Tennyson's diction and style. He
rigidity excludes all commonplace, stock epithets and
stopgap phrases, and makes a conscious effort at selecting,
not only the most apt idea or word or phrase, but one that
has some uncommon beauty or appeal about it. He selects one
less known but equally true and expressive. For instance,
he has a special liking for old saxon words, which he often
prefers to commonplace and familiar words. This tendency to
avoid the commonplace is noticeable not only in separate
words, but in the rendering of ideas. He gives a poetic
dress to the most commonplace idea. For example in The
Princess, the hero's northern birthplace is indicated by
his telling us that, "on my cradle shone the Northern star",
and, the blue smoke rising from household chimneys is described as "azure pillars of the hearth" — an expression which P.M. Wallace aptly calls, "almost reverent"; to picture the hour before the planet Venus had sunk into the sea, the poet writes:

"Before the crimson-circled star
Had fall'n into her father's grave."

In Morte d'Arthur, Tennyson uses 'Moving isles of winter' for 'floating icebergs'; the knightly growth that fringed his lips" for "his beard"; "the great light of heaven "for the "sun"; "the place of tombs" for "churchyard".

Tennyson often uses archaic word or words in their archaic meaning, or the archaic form of spelling, e.g. 'hest' for 'behest', 'break' for 'broke', 'climb' for 'climbed', 'spake' for 'spoke', 'chased' meaning 'engraved', 'curiously' meaning 'delicately', 'quick' meaning 'living'.

It has been said that Tennyson's poetry lives by its imagery, and a number of felicitious poetic images are scattered all over his verse tales. For example in Locksley Hall:— there is that exquisite image of love, with the glass of Time and the Harp of life:—

"Love took up the glass of Time, and turn'd it in his glowing hands;
Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands,
Love took up the harp of life, and smote on all the chords with might;
Smote the chord of self, that trembling pass'd in music out of sight."
There is also the highly fanciful image in which the Pleiads is likened to, "a swarm of fire-flies tangled in a silver braid."

In the same way the greatest glory of the lyrics of The Princess is their abundant wealth of imagery. The poet's imagination works at white heat and one exquisite image after another comes out of his pen, as do sparks from a chimney fire. In the following, the beloved on the mountain height is compared first to a sun-beam and then to a star:

"But cease to move so near the heavens and cease imagery
To glide a sun-beam by a blasted pine,
To sit a star upon the sparkling spire."

In the following, the abstract and the concrete mingle to give an image of rare felicity:

"Their thousand wreaths of dangling water-smoke
That like a broken purpose waste in air"

In "Now sleeps the Crimson Petal' the imagery of roses, lilies, peacocks, stars and cypress is praiseworthy:

"Now droops the milk-white peacock like a ghost, And like a ghost she glimmers on to me."

"The savour of the artificial, the superiority of ornamental effects, of a highly finished form, of a fastidious exclusiveness, as against the originality of thought, all introduce the subtle atoms of decadence into his poetry, supremely refined and impeccable as it is. Whole sections of his work are marred by his undue striving after
style, which he vainly strains his almost unerring tact to hide, and which, with the lapse of time, already assumes the character of a mannerism. His art relatives a sufficient sincerity of tone, it is supported by a sufficient vigorous truths of feeling, to render acceptable the elaborate elegance of his style. His work as a whole will assumedly keep its appeal, and not be relegated to the class of writings with a refined but ephemeral brilliance" (cazamian).

He was often incapable of expressing the familiar and the concrete in Language that was simple and unadorned. His poems often tended to have a beauty like Maud's:

Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null.
Dead perfection, no more."

Ornate expression was in Tennyson the natural outcome of his genius. But the decoration sometimes becomes mere tinsel. When he writes in The Passing of Arthur Arthur's curls clotted with blood:

"Mixed with the knightly growth that fringed his lips."

he absurdly exalts the diction at the expense of directness and simplicity. He had to pay the price for his artistry, as Wordsworth did for his simplicity, and Browning for the dynamic onrush of his thought.

There is a lusciousness in Tennyson's style, a sweetness that more than anything else discredited his work in the eyes of post - victorian critics. "Lawn Tennyson he
has jocularly been called with reference to that patient cultivation which gives to his poetry the well ordered beauty of a garden rather than the untrimmed loveliness of Nature. But it would be remembered, as Drinkwater says, that his progress in poetry was towards economy of effect; that the decorative art of The Lady of Shalott became after many years the simplicity of Crossing the Bar."

R.H. Horne says "Perhaps the first spell cast by Mr. Tennyson, the master of many spells, he cast upon the ear... . Nay, he will write you a poem with nothing in it except music, and as if its music were everything, it shall charm your soul." Whitman says, "To me, Tennyson shows more than any poet I know how much there is in finest verbalism." Examples of this 'finest verbalism' are to be found in Mariana's 'refrain "I am aweary", in the refrain "dying, dying, dying" in the Bugle song, and in the magic moment in The Princess when the wind arises and whispers to the Prince, "Follow, follow and win."

Tennyson's sensitivity to the sound and shape of words is very early evident. Speaking of his education at Louth School, he says, "The only good I ever got from it was the memory of the words, 'sonus desilientis aquae', and of an old wall covered with wild weeds opposite the schoolwindows". Actually "the words he must have been referring to are Ovid's ex alto desilientis aquae (water leaping down from on high), and it is evidence of the
auditory quality of his imagination that in his memory he
imported the sound (sonus) of the water into the phrase.

Tennyson is one of the most musical of English poets.
A sense of music governs the style of Tennyson's
versification. "He is a great poet because he is a great
artist, a master of words and metres, a maker of magical
music". Says Wallace, "In no English poet, perhaps only in
Homer and Virgil, is the kinship of poetry and music so
evident as in Tennyson". In no other poet are sound and
rhythm so intimately and deliberately expressive as in
Tennyson. In order to get the best out of Tennyson's verse
it is essential that it should be read aloud. "Tennyson's
poems, whether sentimental, tragic, lyrical or humorous,
were intensely felt, and he himself read them with great
intensity. Some poems he felt so intensely that he could
never read them to an audience."

The musical effect is produced by him by his mastery
over metres and by the aid of various devices like
repetition of words, alliteration, assonance, use of
melodious vowel and liquid consonants.

Tennyson's mastery in vowel music is unparalleled in
victorian poetry. Dexterous manipulation of vowel sound
constitutes Tennyson's most original contribution to the

1. "Tennyson, Tennyson, Tennyson", Book - "The poetry of
   Tennyson" by A. Dwight Culler, p.p. - 6
2. 'On Reading Tennyson', Book - Six Tennyson Essays by Sir
   Charles Tennyson, p.p. - 188-189
harmonies of English poetry. It was his perfection of vowel balance which made his poetry musical. The most important sound element is the broad vowel. He achieved a great variety of sound with the vowel 'a'. Being a North Countryman, he used the light North Country pronunciation before a consonant - "dance", not "darnce", for example -

'But follow, let the torrent dance thee down'

Here 'darnce' would entirely spoil the effect, which must be light and rapid like the torrent. Where he could, 'O' Tennyson pronounced long; 'knolledge' he particularly abhorred.

'Knowledge comes but wisdom lingers'.
(Locksley Hall)

'Knolledge' would ruin the line. Confirmation of Tennyson's treatment of these vowels comes from the description of the poet in the prologue to Morte d' Arthur, who read:

'Mouthing out his hollow oes and aes'.

Tennyson used muted sounds also effectively as in the opening of the Wellington Ode:

"Bury the great duke - "

A line which Edward Fitzgerald criticized, saying that so great a poem ought to have opened with broad sonorous vowel. In fact, Tennyson deliberately used the muted vowels to indicate the dull tramp of the funeral cortege.
Tennyson created music and melody in his poems by the skillful use not only of melodious but also of liquid consonants. He pronounced his "r's" with a good strong roll. An example of it can be found in the line from The Princess:

"Let the great rrvrr take me to the main".

He disliked the recurrent 's' sound in English and if he used it, it was done with a purpose. The purpose is sometimes extremely subtle; for example, in The Princess (Canto VII):

"But cease to move so near the Heavens, and cease
To glide a sunbeam by the blasted Pine,
To sit a star upon the sparkling spire;"

The last line is intended to suggest the cold sparkle of a solitary ice-peak high up in the Alps.

In fact the examples of melodious lines are to be found spread at large on every page of Tennyson's poetry. In the following lines, music is created by the clear use of vowel sounds:

"So all day the noise of battle rolled,
Among the mountains by the winter sea."

In order to provide the musical effect, tennyson made the skilful use of alliteration also. For instance, the well-known lines in Morte d'Arthur:

"The base blank cliff changed round him, as he based
His feet on just of slipping crag that rang
Sharp - smitten with the dint of armed heels - "
-302-

Here the alliteration of "b's" and "c's" in the first line is much helped by the clanging vowel sounds 'bare', 'blank' and 'clanged'.

Another famous examples are here:

"His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
   and faith unfaithful kept him falsely true."
   (Lancelot and Elaine)

"Chanted loudly, chanted lowly"

"The bridal bells rang merrily"

"Burn'd like one burning flame together"
   (The Lady of Shalott)

In the following examples, the repetition is an echoing of words, akin to the parallelism of Bible verse:

(a) Elaine the fair, Elaine the lovable,
    Elaine the lily maid of Astolat.
    (Lancelot and Elaine)

(b) Music that gentlier on the spirit lie
    Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes.
    (The Princess)

In general, Tennyson preferred to get his effects by 'assonance': that is to say, by repeating consonants and vowels at some distance, so as to get an echo and patterned repetition of sound. For example:

(a) "Even to tipmost lawns and topmost helm",

(b) "Thy paynin bard
    Had such a mastery of his mystery
    That he could harp his wife up out of hell."
    (The last tournament)
His sense of music is equally to be found in the melody of his diction. The mere sound of his words and phrases lingers in the mind, apart from any meaning. This is chiefly due to his selection of melodious vowel, liquid consonants, and his skilful use of alliteration:

"The moan of doves in immemorial elms, 
And murmuring of innumerable bees."
(The Princess)

"The long low dune and lazy plunging sea"
(The Last Tournament)

"Breast - high in that bright light of bracken stood."
(Pelleas and Etaire)

No poet has used the twin devices of alliteration and onomatopoeia to such effect. The following, is a perfectly wrought melody produced by the use of liquid consonants -

"The splendour falls on castle walls
And snowy summits old in story;
The long light shakes across the lakes,
And the wild cataract leaps in glory."

It would be no more possible to alter a word in either of these lines than to alter a note in one of the great tunes of Schubert or Mozart.

Tennyson often used his control of sound and rhythm for more definite ends than the production of melody e.g., the third of these lines from 'The Gardener's Daughter' describing the long - drawn onset of night:

"......... or as once we met
Unheedful, tho beneath a whispering rain
Night slid down one long stream of sighing wind
And on her bosom bore the baby sleep."
Another example is to found in 'The Defence of Lucknow' where vowel sound, assonance, and rhythm combine vividly to picture the receding echoes of the exploded mine:

"Soon as the blast of their underground thunderclap echo'd away."

More subtle are the lines in the Wellington Ode describing the fruitless French charges at Waterloo:

"Dash'd on every rocky square
Their surging charges foam'd themselves away."

The most brilliant descriptive use of rhythm, vowel sound, assonance and alliteration is to be found in the closing lines of 'The revenge':

"When a wind from the lands they had ruin'd awoke from sleep, And the water began to heave and the weather to moan, And or ever that evening - ended a great gale blew, And a wave like the wave that is raised by an earthquake grew, Till it smote on their hulls and their sails and their masts and their flags, And the whole sea plunged and fell on the shot - shatter'd navy of Spain, And the little Revenge herself went down by the island crags To be lost evermore in the main."

A strongly contrasting device which Tennyson occasionally uses is the repetition of the same rhythm over a series of lines to produce a cumulative effect; we get an example of this in Guinevere where Arthur tells the Queen the nature of the vows which he imposed on his Knights:

"To break the heathen and uphold the christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To honour sweet his own word as if his God's
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds,
Until they won her; ..................

In contrast to these repetitive paragraphs are the long continuous verse paragraphs, which should be read as far as possible without pausing to draw breath. Tennyson had phenomenal lung power and enjoyed reading such passages and in making others read them.

To show how Tennyson could apply the full range of his poetic technique to convey, through lines which seem starkly simple, an infinity of meaning and suggestion, aural, visual and spiritual, we should read the opening stanzas of 'Crossing the Bar', :

"Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,
But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound or foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep,
Turns again home."

If we read these lines slowly, giving rhythm, vowel sounds and initial consonants full weight, it is easy to see how they have become perhaps the most famous in all Tennyson's poetry.

As a musician in words Tennyson will always be appreciated and loved. His melodies vibrating and quivering
sweetly resound in the ears, and the high soaring flights of his rapturous chants entrance the hearts of his readers. Harold Nicolson says:

"Tennyson's very dexterous manipulation of vowel sounds, which might be said, indeed, to constitute his most original contribution to the harmonies of the English language, can be illustrated from many of his poems. In fact it was his perfection of vowel balance which made his poetry so difficult to set to music, and he was himself fully aware of his talent in this direction, and would at times exploit it somewhat unduly. It must be admitted, indeed, that Tennyson was apt to exaggerate the importance of harmonies, and to rely a little too often and too lavishly upon the mere device of a verse-upon onomatopoeia and alliteration."

Tennyson's mastery over rhythm and metre is seen ever to better advantage in his lyrics. "Beneath his hand the tiniest lyric stanza unfold, the stiffest metre becomes flexible." "No doubt much of this may be due to artifice; it may fall below the spontaneity of Wordsworth or the untrained luxuriance of Keats; but surely artifice was never employed in a cause more noble or with a skill more consummate." And the same is true of his structural poems; the lyric perfection of The Bugle Song, the funeral-march of The Ode on Wellington, the magnificent swing and cadence of The Revenge. "Grant that it be, as Browning said of all
poetry, 'Art in obedience to laws', yet the obedience is that of a freeman and the laws are based on the very foundation of our human nature. So long as pure beauty has power to move, so long as it draws its materials from tone and rhythm and its principles from a wise organisation and control, so long will Tennyson take high rank among the great craftsmen of language."

We have a little discussion in this chapter of Tennyson's various technical excellences, the much-praised 'fine-ear', the mellifluousness and the 'vowel-music', the word-pictures and the mastery of figurative devices. No critic has refused to concede him a remarkable technical virtuosity, an almost overpowering control of the resources of the English language. Tennyson's exquisite polish, chiselled phrases, and perfection of form are outstanding merits of his art. His well chosen epithets and images imply a habit of brooding an eye for close and sympathetic observation, a pictorial imagination and at times a passionate intensity of feeling. He is, indeed, of all our poets the greatest artist, working with infinite care and subtlety upon his canvas. He could play with an expert's hand upon the instrument of his verse - its rhythm and rhyme; and he could paint with a cunning hand the colour and form of what he saw, especially in the exquisite detail of Nature in her vaster panorama. Thought not a poet of nature in a Wordsworthian sense, Tennyson had a capacity for keen
observation of natural phenomena, and in his poetry he associates Nature with his themes to create a background of sympathy or to provide a contrast. His poetry is fraught with a twilight quality, a subtle suggestiveness alongwith soft ease, airy beauty and a haunting romantic quality. He is in fact, as Cazamian points out, "the heir to the romantic tradition, and he completes and corrects it by incorporating in it the essential tenets of classicism. In his poetry romanticism finds its balance, and its excesses are corrected and modified by the painstaking efforts of a sincere artist."

Compton Rickett's praise of his art is quite eloquent: "of Tennyson's work as a literary artist, and as a painter of English life, no lover of beautiful verse could speak too highly. As a word painter of typical emotions of every body life, he holds a treasured and honourable place. His delicacy and crystalline chain, his dignified and melodious utterance, will always endear him to English men and women."

The views of Harrison are also noteworthy: "The crown has been won............. mainly by the supreme perfection of his form. In his early life he formed a poetic style of his own, of quite faultless precision - musical, simple and lucid. And in sixty years of poetic fecundity, his style may have gained in energy, but not in precision. It was never careless, never uncouth, never (or rarely) obscure. Every line was polished with the same unerring ear and the
same infallible taste. In some sixty thousand lines it is rare to find a really false rhythm, a truly bungling verse, a crude confusion of epithets .......... verse so uniformly harmonious as those of Tennyson with their witchery of words, yet so clear, so pure, so tender, so redolent of what is beautiful in nature, in man, woman – all this won over the entire public that cares for poetry, and truly deserve to win it."

Indeed, Tennyson had added to English poetry a body of work which deserves to be ranked with the best of our great English poets in virtue of its astonishing display of poetic art. "No poet ever understood more fully the 'glory of words' : none has sounded a music more rich, more varied, more pure in style, more beautiful in colour and tone. To study him is to learn the possibilities of our native speech : to love him is an artistic education." (Hadow)