“Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers...”: A Genealogical Reading of Tennyson’s *Locksley Hall*

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Abstract
This paper analyzed various themes and stylistic features of Lord Tennyson's poem, ‘Locksley Hall.’ The main themes that were examined include pessimism versus optimism, love and romance, future. Two stylistic features, namely monologue and the dramatic placement of trochaic rhythmic units, were examined. The analysis section provided a comprehensive analysis of these elements as they are depicted in the poem. The theoretical framework of this research was anti-historicism, as particularized in Foucault's genealogy. The discussion section placed these elements in the context of the theory of anti-historicism. The findings of this research indicated that this poem depicted the elements of the concept of the “history of the present” of the Victoria era.

Key words: Anti historicism, Friedrich Nietzsche, Genealogy, Locksley Hall, Lord Alfred Tennyson, Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, Victorian poetry

Introduction

*Locksley Hall* is a dramatic monologue poem authored by Alfred Lord Tennyson. The poem was written in 1835 and published in 1842. Since its publication, the poem has attracted praise from a variety of literary scholars and has been referenced in several literary genres over the years. The poem has also been a subject of a variety of critical comments from several literary analysts and commentators since the time it was first published. The most notable criticism that has over the years, been directed towards the poem is the fact that it presents frequent subject matters, which makes it sound as an untautfully thought-out piece from an inexperienced writer (Pearsall, 2015).

As a result, most of these critics argue that they find it extremely challenging to categorize or put into context the poem. This partly explains the reason why there are a few literary materials that provide an in-depth analysis of the poem. These criticisms are rather confusing as the poet has artistically structured these themes in an orderly and concise manner to represent the main aspect of human existence while still maintaining the aesthetic qualities of the poem. However, considering the period in which it was written and published, it could be confusing why the author of the poem decided to use this artistic structure, which mostly coincides with the principles of post-modernism. For instance, in his study, Alvesson (1995) argued that postmodern pieces are fond of employing numerous subject matters or themes that could be taken seriously, but no effort should be put to combine them under the same concept.

This research paper focuses on the themes presented in Tennyson’s poem *Locksley Hall*. However, since it is almost impossible to incorporate all the themes present in this poem into one research paper, the research will limit its discussion to the theories of anti-historicism, as presented in the poem through the themes of industrial advancements and poverty. The paper will also discuss the concept of colonization and the stereotypical notions of the colonizers as presented in the poem based on their view of the less developed civilizations. In this regard, the concept of anti-historicism can be described as the practice that rejects the philosophical analysis of human behavior based on experiences, history, or tradition (Del Caro & Norman, 2015). On the contrary, historicism refers to the concept of ascribing evocative implication to space and time (Zhang, 2006). From an anti-historicist point of view, human existence, consciousness, and ethical positions should be interpreted from a naturalistic perspective (Del Caro & Norman, 2015).

Research Methodology

The research methodology of this poem analysis focuses on the theory of anti-historicism and particularly genealogy, as elaborated further in the subsequent paragraph. The analysis of this poem highlights the principles of anti-historicism while discussing various stylistic and thematic elements relevant to the overarching aim of this research. In this way, the paper concentrates on the specific period in which this poem was written, that is, 1842, to derive the societal aspects that motivated the poet to craft the piece. In most analyses of poetry, analysts usually focus on a given theory such as modernism, post-modernism, historicism, anti-historicism, and many more. Many other approaches to analyzing poetry also do exist. For example, in his scholarly work of 1963 that was published in the Journal of *Victorian Poetry*, William Templeman provided a chronological approach to interpreting the poem. Similarly, in his literary work of 2013, Roger Ebbatson
interpreted the poem by using almost a similar approach to that of Templeman but with particular focus on the futuristic elements of the poem and how they might have depicted the scientific revelations of the contemporary world by considering that the piece was balanced between the scientific orientations of the future and Utopian visions of the future. The paper chooses anti-historicism theory because of the reasons elaborated in the explanation of this theory provided below.

“Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay”: Lord Tennyson and Anti-historicism

Anti-historicism that was set forth by Friedrich Nietzsche – a German philosopher and artistic analyst - was later expanded by the French philosopher, Michel Foucault, by introducing to it the concept of genealogy. However, before providing a further elaboration of the concept of genealogy, it is imperative to highlight more on the theory of anti-historicism while considering the views of its critics. Historicism and anti-historicism are conflicting concepts insinuating philosophy with its history and philosophy without its history, respectively. In the notion of philosophy with its history, it is believed that one man's experience is extremely limited and hence the need to draw insight from history to enhance one's experience before deriving unique philosophical stances. In his scholarly paper, Kuntz (1969) notes that someone could live up to the old age with his boyish health hence cannot deeply understand the experiences of those who undergo episodes of sicknesses. To draw an all-inclusive philosophical stance, one must consider the experience of others, and this could only be achieved through a historiastic view of things. On the contrary, in the same piece of work, Kuntz (1969) notes that anti-historicists believe that philosophy and writing the history of philosophy are two different disciplines with highly divergent logical approaches, hence, it is wrong to mix them. Per se, it is wrong to be subject to the two diverse sets of standards. In that light, there is a possibility of writing philosophy without talking about the development of other philosophies. In this way, Kuntz believes that the philosophical creativity of people improves as they do not have a direct influence on previous philosophical developments. Therefore, considering that the poem is a monologue, it might contain some philosophical stances of the poet without the direct influence of the development of previous philosophies. Consequently, this poem will be analyzed from an anti-historicist point of view, whereby the author will not focus on the philosophical analysis of human behavior based on experiences, history, or tradition.

Moreover, Foucault described genealogy as a detailed examination of the aspects of human existence that can be perceived without relying on historical experiences of the same (Prado, 2018). He argued that anti-historicism is the surest way to understand the origin of human beings and their societies. According to Foucault, this concept of genealogy is the basis for human consciousness, advancements in technology, creativity, and innovation, amongst other things, without consulting a similar event or pattern in the past. Scholars like Benjamin Sax and Andrea Rossi, and including Foucault, refer to the concept of genealogy as the “history of the present”. They use this phrase to refer to those elements felt by the people without history – the concept does not employ a linear model to examine things, but rather consider present ideas and issues such as sexuality to draw critical philosophical stances. In other words, Foucault did not reject the possibility that history
influences the present but acknowledged that the present is not wholly a product of the past, but a combination of things felt both in the past and the present.

Seemingly, Tennyson crafted the poem by using an anti-historicist stance because he provides multifaceted themes in the poem that seem to be his imaginations of the present time – the Victorian era. The poet did not draw any inferences from periods preceding the Victorian era hence leading to the notion that anti-historicism, and particularly genealogy, would be the best theory to evaluate the stylistic and thematic elements of the poem. This research paper will, therefore, rely on this disposition to analyze, discuss, and illustrate Alfred Tennyson’s poem, *Locksley Hall*. Additionally, based on these observations, it is also imperative to highlight the life experiences of Lord Tennyson that might have shaped his philosophical dispositions evident in the thematic and stylistic elements of the poem as well as how the poem is exemplary of the Victorian era.

“I the heir of all the ages, in the foremost files of time”: An Overview of Lord Tennyson

Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) is a renowned British poet during the Victorian era. He has authored numerous poems that carry diverse themes that cannot be described in a single piece of writing. Some of his most celebrated poems include “Morte d’Arthur”, “The Two Voices,” “Locksley Hall”, and “The Vision of Sin”. His poems have received a lot of criticism both from conventional and modern scholars. For example, as Colon observes, scholar Sayers, an author of several scholarly materials addressing Tennyson's writing style and thematic development in the modern times (the 1980s to early 2000s), argues that most of his poems make the reader feel naïve. However, Colon (2017) urges critics of Tennyson to be a bit careful by arguing that he was a man of the Victorian era who was never exposed to the 20th-century enlightenment. Hence, modern scholars should not take a superior stand to critique his poems as it may make them even misinterpret the pieces.

Perceptibly, based on the principles of anti-historicism, it can be argued that Tennyson used an anti-historicist philosophical viewpoint to craft his poems, thus making his readers feel naïve due to lack of a first-hand touch of his life experience, which he expressed in the form of "history of the present". Instead, people are used to the linear interpretation of past events, whereby they palpate logic when events are linearly or chronologically related. In other words, most people rely on historical data, which focuses on the linearity of events about time and space (Buckley, 2016). Instead, Tennyson presented a myriad of themes in his pieces based on his experiences and perceptions in the present time. For example, in the poem "Locksley Hall", Tennyson depicted a theme of conflict between religion and technological or scientific advancement. It is during the Victorian era when major scientific discoveries were made, such as anti-biotics that led to a conflict with religion, which had a different view of the world. Therefore, the poem being analyzed in this paper fits in the Victorian era. The stylistic and thematic development of the poem fits many aspects of the Victorian era, as elaborated further in the subsequent section.

The analysis section of this paper opts for some themes and stylistic features of the poem and discusses them in the context of genealogy and anti-historicism. The analysis section will highlight the themes and stylistic features that will be discussed in the “discussion section” in the context of the doctrines of anti-historicism.
Thematic and Stylistic Analysis of Tennyson’s *Locksley Hall*

Tennyson authored this poem between the years of 1837 and 1838, which is the time in Great Britain's history when political tensions were high, and the economy was declining from its peak. During this period, the political atmosphere was filled with the clamor for the abolishment of the Corn Law, which culminated in the foundation of the Corn Law League, agitation for the formation of the People's Charter, and the debate over the New Poor Law (Robertson, 2017). Furthermore, at the time of the poem's publication in 1842, the country was experiencing sporadic acts of violence in the form of riots as a result of the rejected Chartist petition. This tumultuous political environment of the time was characterized by high unemployment rates, with many industries shutting down operations and high food prices coupled with poor relief systems by the government, which resulted in a population languishing in poverty and hunger (Ebbatson, 2013). These had a great deal of influence on the literary works of the period.

For instance, Tennyson’s poem overall portrays a tortured soul in the face of dynamic earth, whereby “[S]cience moves…”. This characteristic portrays the Victorian era as described above, whereby the main challenge people faced was to balance their views between religion and science. In addition to the hard economic and political situations, many people nearly felt trap of pessimism but maintained the optimism of the Victorian era. For example, in real life, Tennyson dropped out of Cambridge in 1830 due to financial reasons following the death of his father (History.com).

The poem, therefore, is a balanced dramatic monologue, which is a combination of fiction and facts based on the prevailing political atmosphere to predict the future. For instance, Tennyson says “…into the future far as human eye could see. Saw the vision of the world and all the wonder that would be…”. His vision of the future society is grim. He notes “…[S]lowly comes a hungry people, as a lion creeping nigher. Glares at one that nods and winks behind a slowly-dying fire…” (Ebbatson, 2014, p. 1). In general, the poet deploys a cynical and solitary mood to the poem as the central character in the poem contemplates and complains about his life and the social aspects of Victorian society that bore technological advancement.

The poem deploys the use of the images of spring to vividly describe to the reader how and why the protagonist’s love for his cousin started and proceeds to also narrate that the love eventually transforms due to external factors leading his lover to betray their love and subsequently marrying another wealthier individual, “…O my cousin, shallow-hearted! O my Amy, mine no more!”. This disappointment changes his visions and perspectives about the moorland, love, and the entire society terming it as a “…barren, barren shore!” (Ebbatson, 2014, p. 1).

As a means of setting the poem’s mood and setting the poem up for the ensuing conflicts, the poet begins by introducing the readers to a botched romantic relationship between two young individuals. In this preamble, the narrator tells of a soldier whose return to his childhood home reminds him of the experiences he had in his youth. These include his youthful love for his cousin – Amy – which gets destroyed when his lover opts to marry a wealthier lord of the manor. The memory of his denied love permanently affects the soldier’s view of Locksley Hall and the moorland. The soldier is expressing his anger at his lover’s relationship with the lord of the manor.
when he says “…He will hold thee when his passion shall have spent its novel force / Something better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse…”. Amy's act of choosing to marry a wealthier man over the soldier's love, informs his view and dismissal of the society at large. He considers the present society to be inclined towards materialism. To this effect, he says, "…Cursed be the social wants that sin against the strength of youth! Cursèd be the social lies that warp us from the living truth!". According to the narration, the soldier bears in his mind a skewed notion that the presented society is governed by a thirst for wealth, which determines an individual ability to marry or get married. The poem narrates, "…[E]very door is barred with gold, and opens but to golden keys. Every gate is thronged with suitors, all the markets overflow…” (Ebbatson, 2014, p. 2).

As opposed to the conventional romantic literary works that focused on finding solutions to social conflicts regarding intimate matters of love and marriage between an antagonist and a protagonist, the realist literary work aims at identifying the connection between these intimate concepts and the overt social aspects of human existence in order to understand their point of divergence (Hall 2). This notion that was first discussed by Catherine Hall in her 1985 article, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, which coincides with Heidegger’s (1971) analysis of poverty by saying that “…the humanness of man and the thingness of things dissolve into the calculated market value of a market which […] spans the whole earth”, with the effect that all beings become subject “to the trade of a calculation that dominates” (pp. 112, 114). In the poem, Tennyson’s main character is determined to find a solution for his intimate issues of love for his cousin, which he briefly achieves when he contemplates the prospects of a future filled with industrial prosperity and society with shared goals and beliefs. He says “…Men, my brothers, men the workers, ever reaping something new… That which they have done but earnest of the things that they shall do…” (Ebbatson, 2013, p. 3). Furthermore, Tennyson is using this bold assertion by his central character to introduce his premonitions about a future where men will be working harmoniously and in unison to restructure the society into a more productive society. In so doing, the poet successfully predicted the Saint-Simonian movement, which had adverse influences on global trade.

‘‘For I dipped into the future, far as human eye could see’’: Tennyson’s Prophetic Visions
The poem presents the reader with an individual – the protagonist – who is conflicted with his views about the future and the conceptualization of his present disposition. On the one hand, the protagonist is excited and passionate about the prospects of the future world, while on the other, his analysis of his present is filled with sarcasm and disapproval. By so doing, the poet seems to be arching towards Heidegger's (1971) vision of the prophetic role of the poet, which involves reporting on the present real-life experiences of human beings while forecasting possible future occurrences. According to Heidegger's notion of the role of the poet, it is only those with the poetic license that have the ability to assume this role of the gods in order to sensitize the society on their current state of affairs while enlightening the same society on the possible outcomes that awaits them in the future. Therefore, through the poem Tennyson assumes this role by composing a poetic masterpiece for the societies of the 1840s. It is worth noting that Tennyson predicts the future without history, hence indicating his anti-historicist standpoint when he was writing the poem. According to Urbach (1978), one of the main characteristics of historicism is the heavy utilization
of unconditional historical prophecies rather than scientific predictions to make statements about the future. It is evident in the poem that Tennyson made statements about the future without history, thus aligning with the tenets of anti-historicism.

Moreover, the poem’s narrator heralds the advent of Heidegger’s (1971) notions of the role of the poet as one whose word predicts and speaks of the future occurrences as if they were happening in the present. In the poem, the central character’s visions of the future are disguised as consequences of his internal conflict and escapist mindset that does not want to accept the present realities of losing the love of his life to another man. However, the protagonist’s belief and attitude towards this vision of the future is so persuasive that it contradicts the notion that this was a means of escaping from present realities.

The poem is composed of several dramatically placed trochaic rhythmic units, which effectively highlight the dramatic changes in the protagonist's mood. This is witnessed when the protagonist's vision of industrial advancements in the future is melodramatically replaced by the notion of the looming political reforms movement, "…hungry people, as a lion creeping nigher" (Ebbatson, 2013, p. 1). In this aspect, the readers witness the liquidation of this dramatic monologue, where the single voice of the protagonist is disintegrated into several fitful tones depending on his mood. As can be seen from the poem, the protagonist's conflicting views of the future, and the present is a simulation of the tensions that existed during the composition and publication of the poem. In the years leading up to the publication of Locksley Hall, Great Britain was highly stratified both politically and economically due to the consequences of the industrial revolution that began in the 1680s. People of a low social class suffered poor housing conditions, infectious diseases like tuberculosis, long working hours, and premature death (Allen, 2018).

These changing visions of the protagonist come to a turning point when he starts fantasizing about a desert-island. At this point, the protagonist’s colonial attachments are brought to the fore depicting him as an individual with rudimentary desires as he calls “…for some retreat. Deep in yonder shining Orient, where my life began to beat…”. The readers also get to learn about his father, who, just like the protagonist, was a soldier and died, “…in wild Mahratta battle cry…”, leaving him under the care of his uncle, “…a trampled orphan and a selfish uncle’s ward…” (Ebbatson, 2013, p. 4). According to Homi Bhabha (1984), the constant recollection of the unpleasant and unsettling time of the colonial rule and the realities of the era was a major characteristic of people in nineteenth-century India. In a similar manner, the poem presents the building of Locksley Hall as the constant representation of disparities of the colonial history of Moorland. This history is portrayed in the poem in a manner suggesting that the founding laws are consistently amended or changed, so much so, that the inhabitants or colonizers feel as if they are, “…orphan[s]…” (Ebbatson, 2013, p. 4). Tennyson’s presentation of a protagonist who is in love with his cousin is material to the protagonist’s anomalous desire to live in contradiction of the societal norms and way of life. The poet says, “…there to wander far away, On from island unto island at the gateways of the day…”. His desire is to live a life free from the influences of industrialization under “…Breadths of tropical shade…. Never come to trade, never floats a European flag….”. The protagonist believes that in this country or rural setting, his life will be more
enjoyable with no interference from the advancements in technology in the form of "…steamship, in the railway, in the thoughts that shake mankind…" The narrator's description of this perfect place is laced with a sexual element "…There the passions, cramped no longer, shall have scope and breathing space. I will take some savage woman, she shall rear my dusky race…". This vision is, however, short-lived as the protagonist jolts himself back to his earlier vision of a progressive society and continues with his criticism of the present way of life, "…herd with narrow foreheads, vacant of our glorious gains. Like a beast with lower pleasures, like a beast with lower pains!” (p. 5).

**Locksley Hall A Multifaceted Poem**

The theme of pessimism versus optimism is also evident in various works of Tennyson. The theme is also evident in the present poem, as highlighted in the previous section. From the standpoint of anti-historicism, it could be argued that Tennyson never borrowed his philosophical stances from previous philosophical developments as themes majorly depict elements of the Victorian era that cannot be felt through history. Even the use of monologue as a stylistic feature further affirms that Tennyson must have exclusively borrowed the themes of the elements mentioned above from his experiences rather than sourcing them from historical events. Instead, he focused on the future by trying to figure out the image of the future world provided that “[S]cience moves…” (p. 189). According to Berman (2015), the Victorian era was an age of reform from 1832 to 1867. Reformers were divided along with various religious and political standpoints.

Incidentally, in a multifaceted poem characterized by sophisticated thematic development, love also emerges to be a major theme. Tennyson tries to give a feel of at least every aspect of life during the Victorian era, thus further supporting the anti-historicist point of view. For instance, in his paper, Kuntz (1969) implies that the aspects of life that can be felt without history are lesser than those that can be felt with history. In that regard, for Tennyson to craft a significant poem, he had to mix up several themes in a single piece as long as they portray the various aspects of the Victorian era. Also, the way he depicted the theme of love in the poem aligns with how other romantic poets of the Victorian era, like Elizabeth Barret Browning, portrayed it. The only difference demonstrated between the works of the two is their philosophical stances: if Tennyson could be considered an anti-historicist, then Browning would be a historicist because she considered the elements of time and space in her love poems. Tennyson drew from the history of the present to depict the theme of love.

In the light of how Tennyson makes statements about the future, one of the critical questions that emerged in the mind of the researcher when presenting the argument on how historicists and anti-historicists view the future is that whereas historicists draw evidence from the past trend of events (history), what does anti-historicists use to make their future statements? Urbach (1978) indicated that it could be scientific predictions – even Tennyson, although not formally recorded, he might have predicted about the future by using observations of the present. This observation aligns with that of Heidegger, who indicates that the role of the poet as one whose word predicts and speaks of the future occurrences as if they were happening in the present. This remark is
indicative of using the concept of the "history of the present" to predict the future, thus aligning with the tenets of the theory of anti-historicism.

Moreover, the dramatically placed trochaic rhythmic units, which effectively highlight the dramatic changes in the protagonist's mood, could also be connected to the theory of anti-historicism. For example, one could argue that the use of monologue reaffirmed that the poet was drawing evidence from the present to pass across various themes, as portrayed in the multiple mood changes evident in the poem, as highlighted above. Also, based on the claim that the number of things felt without history is lesser than those felt with history, it could be argued that the poet was struggling to attain ultimate sophistication in the poem, as evidenced by the multiple presentations of themes and mood changes.

Conclusion
The discussion of the theme of advancement and its implications, as presented in Tennyson’s Locksley Hall, has elicited different views and perspectives from several scholars and critics. Adorno (1984) in his discussion of this subject posited that as much as advancements might result in a society focused on lavish living, the main implications of advancements are the degeneration of the value of human existence into the accumulation of wealth and a life of affluence that is focused on wealth creation. On the other hand, Knox (1850) declared that 'The Saxon will not mingle with the dark race' (p. 23). This notion resonates with the protagonist in Locksley Hall, who declares that he is unable to ‘Mated with a squalid savage’, while he proclaims that Europeans are the ‘heir of all the ages’ (Ebbatson, 2013, pp. 6-7). Therefore, he believes that the white European male is obligated innately to spearhead advancements through systematic innovation and invention.

Overall, the thematic and stylistic development of the poem is deeply connected to the theory of anti-historicism than historicism. It is evident in the poem that the poet used the concept of “history of the present” to present various themes such as love and poverty. The poet tries to balance between a Utopian vision of the future and a scientific view of the future by using the observations of the present.

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