

Arnold's Scholar Gypsy - As a Pastoral Elegy

^{PG. Eng}
The Scholar Gypsy is a popular poetic creation of Matthew Arnold, the great poet and critic of the Victorian age. It is one of the greatest pastoral elegies in English literature. But, unlike Milton's Lycidas, Shelley's Adonais and Tennyson's In Memoriam, the great pastoral elegies, it is not a record of grief over the death of an individual. Here, the poet does not lament the loss of an individual. Rather, he mourns the death of an age. That is in the melting pot he contrasts the simple life of the Gypsies with the feverish one of his own age and deplores its pitiable condition of spiritual barrenness. The background of the poem is pastoral with the pastoral details of the country life. Let us see the poem in a brief.

In 'The Scholar Gypsy', the poet expresses his deep concern over the spiritual decay and dying faith of the modern age. At the same, the poem displays all the pastoral elements commonly found in a pastoral elegy. Historically, the Greeks initiated a different pattern of verse that was called pastoral poetry. It was mainly based on a romantic idealization of rural and pastoral life against the artificiality of the urban life. The Renaissance writers as well as the Elizabethans adopted and immensely popularised this form. Consequently, it became almost a custom to write elegy in a pastoral setting. However, 'The Scholar Gypsy' is not a merely a carbon copy of the conventional pastoral elegy. It is more than that. ^{how beautifully} See ^{that} the poem begins with a reference to a shepherd and other pastoral elements.

"Go, for thy call you, shepherd, from the hill:

Go, shepherd, and untie the wattled cotes

No longer leave thy nestful flock unfed

Nor let thy hawking fellows rack their throats:"

But, we notice that the shepherd is soon dismissed and the poet himself is not a shepherd. He is only a person who is in quest of the Scholar Gypsy. In course of his quest, he meditates

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on his contemporary life and gives vivid details of the pastoral life and natural beauty. Hence, it becomes obvious that, in structure, this poem is a pastoral elegy and in spirit, it is typically Victorian, breathing the spirit of unrest seeking spiritual illumination.

The elegiac tone is dominant one through out the poem. The central thesis of the poem is the quest for the scholar Gypsy who has left the civilised life and has joined the Gypsies. He, now, leads a simple life and enjoys all the blessings of a happy life. He wanders in search of the 'heavenly fire' that may assist him in acquiring true knowledge how to make others happy. The poet's heart is heavily loaded with grief and sorrows when he compares the peaceful world of the Gypsies with the modern world of confusion. He strongly feels that the scholar is happy only because he has complete devotion to one aim. Whereas the modern men, caught in materialism, are thoroughly confused. They do not have any fixed aim. In other words, they are the poor victims of their divided aims.

"O barren is days when wells were fresh and clear
And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames.
Before this strange disease of modern life
With its sick hurry, its divided aims."

The modern life with its sickening hurry and divided aims is a death trap. What produces weariness, nervousness, fatigue, misery, despair and decay is the lack of fixed aim, a definite purpose. The scholar Gypsy is depicted as a symbol of health in spiritual life. The modern spiritual life is diseased for its lack of faith, patience and hope. The ideals which inspired our forefathers no longer satisfy the modern men. Thus, in a way, Arnold suggests that we must recapture faith, if we wish to save our soul.

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In short, 'The Scholar Gypsy' is a pastoral elegy in which Arnold laments ^{the} loss of spirituality in the modern life. In his opinion, faith has been destroyed by the rising material tendency. This materialism has made ~~our~~ our life miserable and unhappy. The scholar is blessed for ~~him~~ he has faith and hope. But the modern men are wearysome for they lead aimless life.
