

The Lotus Eaters

SETTING: Published in 1832, “The Lotus Eaters” is one of the most admired and widely read poems by Tennyson. The poem takes its inspiration and foundation from Homer’s *Odyssey*, deriving the basis of its context from the story of Odysseus’s mariners been described herein. Homer writes about a storm that made the great hero’s mariners deviate from their destination to homes in Ithaca, while returning back from Troy. Instead, they land themselves in a place where people are found doing nothing else other than eating lotus, a flower so delicious that, upon tasting it, at once, some of his men fail to recall their purpose and desire to return to Ithaca. Alternatively, they just to remain in the Land of the Lotus. Odysseus, as depicted through the episode, must draw his men away so that they can undertake their predestined journey. In this poem, Tennyson evokes the mariners’ desire to spend their lives in a sensuous land, to get themselves settled into a life of peacefulness, rest, and even death.

Besides drawing a context from Homer’s *Odyssey*, the poem also illustrates or rather portrays, through a different episode, the scene of biblical Eden Garden in the Book of Genesis. However, unlike in the Bible, where Adam was punished with a ” life of toil” on tasting the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, in “Lotus Eaters,” Tennyson portrays a different result; the fruit(the lotus), here, provides a release from the life of labor. He provides a tempting and seductive vision of a life, that is seen free from all materialistic pleasures and toil, getting themselves subsumed with their instinctual drive. In this sense, the [poem has been pointed by critics](#) to be a subversion of the story in the Book of Genesis.

POETIC DEVICES

This is a long poem, divided into two parts: the first appears a descriptive narrative, consisting forty-five lines, and the second is a song of eight numbered stanzas- Choric Song; several lines can be seen indented throughout. The first [part is written](#) in nine-line Spenserian stanzas, so called because it was used by Spenser in his renowned work “The Faerie Queene,” consisting eight iambic pentameters and an alexandrine, employing a rhyming scheme of ababbcbcc. The choric song follows a far looser structure: both the line-length and the [rhyme scheme vary widely among](#) the eight stanzas.

Tennyson employed a wide range of styles, and had a deep understanding of meter and [rhyme scheme](#). He employed allusions in different genres, and often added motifs, symbols and images.

Imagery: The very [title of the poem](#) employs the image of “lotus,” that which can be read under the figurative use of organic imagery. It is this flower, which on being consumed by the mariners talked about in the poem, draw them away from their destined journey to Ithaca. It leads them into a state of trance or temporal amnesia. The other images seen are “folded leaf” and “full-juiced apple,” that depicts the natural tendency of a life-birth and death.

Symbol: The “full-faced” of the moon that stands above the valley can be seen as employing two

meanings simultaneously: one that it was a full-moon day, and the second implication is that the moon had a more clear-cut identity than the inhabitants of the island, as it was more aware of its basic functions.

The lotus Eaters Summary by Alfred Tennyson

The poem begins with the Odysseus pointing a finger towards the land that was seemingly the mariners' destination. This gesture on the part of Odysseus functions not just as a direction for guidance, but also infuses them with optimism regarding reaching their target, from which they have deviated being drawn towards the "land of streams," which profoundly affected their intellect. The mariners reach a land "in which it seemed always afternoon," because of its surrounding peaceful and languid atmosphere; no action was seen in this land, that could define time or vice-versa. The lethargic air is seen to draw the individuals here in a state of trance. It seemed as though it was in a weary dream. The mariners are spoken as being greeted by the "mild eyed melancholy Lotus-eaters," whose dark faces appear pale against the rosy sunset. These Lotus-eaters offer the flower and fruit of the lotus to Odysseus's mariners, who on its consumption loosen their intellectual capacity, and is deviated into a feeling of deep sleep. Sitting upon the yellow sand of the island, they loosen their sense of perseverance, and at the same time fail to perceive their fellow mariners speaking to them; they just can hear now the music of their heartbeat. Instead to continuing their journey towards their home, they prefer to stay in this languid land.

The other part of the poem, Choric Song, is an expression of the mariners' resolution to stay in this utopian land forever. They praise the sweet and lethargic music of the land, comparing it with that of petals, dew, granite, and tired eyelids. Further, they interrogates as to why man is destined to toil and suffer, unlike everything else in the nature that enjoys the capacity to rest and stay still. Man's inner spirit answers him with an optimistic approach, saying that it is the tranquility and calmness that offers joy, and that man is fated to toil and wander along throughout his lifetime. In the following stanza, there is seen a declaration from the mariners, who speaks about the natural tendency, according to which everything in nature is allotted a lifespan during which it can bloom and fade. To illustrate this point, he gives the example of the "folded leaf," that turns yellow with time and eventually die, and that of the "full-juiced apple," that ultimately drops down to the earth once it ripens.

In the very next lines, the mariners question the very purpose of a life of labour, since nothing on this earth continue to live forever, without coming to a final end. He asserts that every accomplishments on the part of human beings lead nowhere, nothing remains cumulative. And this is so because the death is made to be the final destination. Seeing everything as futile, the mariners desire for a long rest or death, because they believe that either of them would free them from a life of endless labour. In the next stanza, however, they are seen to echo back their optimistic appeal to luxurious self-indulgence. They wonder how sweet it would be to life a life of continuous dream, where they could just enjoy their sleep, dream, and the lotus fruit without

any interruptions made by external pressures. They believe that such an existence could provide them peaceful capacity to remember their loved ones who no longer exists in their life; this state would bring them closer to their cremated beloveds.

Their inertia to remain in this land strengthens with their view that their [returning home](#) would only create confusion in the family; and this is so because they perceive that their family must have forgotten them in these ten years of their absence, being out on a fight in Troy, and sons must have inherited their property. They infer that their return would only create hassle among the peaceful lives of family members. The seventh stanza echoes the first and the fifth, with the mariners speaking in favour of the life among the pleasant sights and sounds of the island. The concluding stanza closes with the mariners' vow to spend their remaining part of lives in this "hollow Lotus land." Their inclination to be close to their natural instincts and enjoy the nature wins over the external [forces that drives](#) man away from the nature.

"The Lotus Eaters" is an intriguing poem through which Tennyson seems to create an existential awareness. The mariners, at the same time, show their attitude towards life; seeing the futility of human struggle, they wish for a life of languor. Heroic achievements, epistemic growth, and intellectual pursuits are reduced to ineffectual, futile things in the course of the poem. Though the choric song reflects such a philosophy, the poet can be understood as making an attempt to echo the opposite through these understatements, especially when he recapitulate the idea of sameness screeching 'boredom' and the qualities of a monotonous sterile subsistence.

CENTRAL IDEA: By providing a tempting and seductive vision of a life from from toil, Tennyson in the [poem attempts to establish the nature of human life](#), which is predestined to be spent with labour and pain. Though the mariners, here, crave for a dream-like existence, the [poet's intention could be seen](#) as its opposite, that which can be echoed from his another poem "Ulysses," wherein he exerts the real motto with which one could lead a meaningful life: "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.""

TONE: The poem begins with a sluggish tone, since the mariners are seen to deviate from their real purpose of returning to their homelands, and it ends with a similar tone, with them having an inclination towards a dream-like existence. The natural beauty is appraised from the very beginning till the concluding stanza. Arthur Henry Hallam defines this kind of poetry as "picturesque," as combining visual impressions in such a way that they create a picture that carries the dominant emotion of the poem.

CONCLUSION: The mellifluous lyric "The Lotus Eaters" can be seen as an aesthetic verse that portrays the lifespan of a mortal man, who has to live his life with labour, pain and happiness. The poem can even be read as a dramatization of the modern man's psyche who have a tendency to incline towards enjoying his life without a purpose. At the same time, it represents the lost fervor towards one's existence, when one attains old-age.

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