

## Tennyson's *treatment of* EXHAUSTION, INACTION AND DEATH in "The Lotus Eaters"

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Tennyson is the representative voice of the Victorian Era and one of the most celebrated and well-loved English poets of all time. This writing is an effort to let the readers feel the major themes of his poem "The Lotus Eaters" such as exhaustion, inaction and death.

In the poem we find a band of soldiers, tired to the last point, looking for a harbor to rest their tired bones. Tiredness becomes the dominant note of the poem at this stage. In the struggle of life, it so happens that, at some point, human being becomes immeasurably tired and long for rest being away from all the dins and noise, ties and relations. The projection of such feeling is pervaded and palpable throughout the poem:

*All things have rest: why should we toil alone,  
We only toil, who are the first of things  
And make perpetual moan, .....  
Nor ever fold our wings,  
And cease from wanderings \**

If we plunge deeper into the poem it would be easily felt that the notion of avoidance is very strongly present and this urge of retirement is deeply nestling in the mind of those sailors. The theme of inaction or shunning responsibilities is certainly there and all evident. So the dominant theme of the poem is the theme of retirement or withdrawal. They want to settle down in a world of blessings and luxuries in exchange of a world of unbearable burden. A group of soldier-sailors, who had been able personalities in their fatherland and in the battle field of Troy, now renounce to work anymore. Even at some culminating point they invite death. No matter death, if it can assure rest only. So it shows the peak of tiredness or the exhaustion at the crushing end. At such a stage human heart cry for finality- "Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful ease."\* Putting forth this pretext of supreme creation **they want to have an anchorage in this island of the lotus eaters and remain forgetful of their manly duties. This is clearly an escapist tendency.** It is true that they have undergone untold sufferings. Once in the ground of the battle and once again on the sea fighting against the adversities one after the other. Now they do not find any reason in mounting the mounting waves and they want to take rest. They want to close their eyes deliberately to the active life. Being the best of creation they are not supposed to flee from life. They are to stand upright and face the challenge. Their passive mood finds expression. This type of tendency becomes conspicuous when they say:

*Let what is broken so remain.  
The gods are hard to reconcile: \**

There is repetition of their choric agreement that they would not

wander any more. This tendency reaches the peak when they finally declare:

*Surely, surely, slumber  
is more sweet than toil, the shore  
Than labour in the deep mid ocean, wind and wave and oar;  
Oh rest ye, brother mariners, we well not wander more.\**

The group of soldiers takes the decision to withdraw from the antagonistic world of mounting waves, sprouting monsters, jerking between starboard to larboard.

In the poems the idea of death appears and re-appears. Either bursting joy or biting sorrow, death puts everything to an end. In the poem "The Lotos Eaters" the sailors are frustrated to the last level and they think that they have suffered enough once in the battle field and again on the sea. Their longing for coming to a stoppage from this limitless suffering becomes all the more poignant when they find a sharp contrast between their lives and life of nature in the island. They see every natural phenomenon in the surrounding nature of that island has got an opportunity of rest or stoppage at some point in their life. They find before their eyes the sun, the wind, the river, full-juiced apple- everything taking rest and only they are deprived of such a rare boon. For them life was not agreeable the least rather it was just the opposite. Life was a lifelong punishment for them. Life becomes tortuous to those tired wayfarers and they dream death as only and only escape left. So they cry for death aloud thinking that it can ensure a dreamful life of pleasures and enjoyment or at least can bring a seizure to their ceaseless agony. "Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful ease"\* Life walks unwaveringly towards a cemetery or crematory. Finality of life is of course death. They argue, what is the use of all these fury and hurry? Why wouldn't they shake off the yoke of drudgery? Isn't it better to get ready and avail themselves of the finality? Accordingly, death appears to them as an outlet from unending suffering, an assurance of rest and a promise of a life of ease. The sailors come to the realization that life is nothing but:

*..... a mound of grass.  
Two handfuls of white dust, shut in an urn of brass! \**

Thus, we see, through Tennyson human exhaustion finds eloquent expression. He becomes the poet of all men and all age while he gives vent to human being's unwavering urge for withdrawal, heart rending cry for rest, desperate longing for death. Crossing the boundary of time and place, the poet's cry echoes and re echoes in the hearts of the exhausted wayfarers of the world.

\*Extractions are from the poem "The Lotos Eaters" by Tennyson.