

Crossing the Bar

by Alfred Lord Tennyson

1. (a) Analyse the poem, "Crossing the Bar" and explain what meaning does the 'clear call' retain for the poet?

Answer: In the poem, 'Crossing the Bar' the poet Lord Tennyson depicts an approaching evening and relates it to his imminent death. The sun has set and the evening star is clearly visible with all the diminishing glory of the day. This poem was written in the last days of the poet and being in his 80s he seems to be wondering about the approach of death. Like many other poetic works, in this poem, a sea voyage is used as a metaphor for death. At the start of the poem, the poet says that the sunset and the evening star are a clear call for him which means that he is being informed of his approaching death. The most appropriate connection of the 'clear call' is the call from heaven. The poet has understood that after living a long life it is now time for his final journey to God. In a general sense, if one is visiting the shore to enjoy the day, it is obvious that the setting of the day is an indication that one should return back home. In this poem, "the return back to home" may refer to one's return to the kingdom of God. The poet says that the setting of the sun is a clear call to him so that he may return back to his actual home, which is life after death.

(b) What are the poet's hopes regarding his final journey? What is the reference to 'moaning'?

Answer: Tennyson talks about the breaking of the waves at the sandbars. He uses it as a reference to the final moments of a person's life when most people become sad and wish to delay their departure. The poet expresses how he wants to leave peacefully avoiding moaning and regret. Sandbars form at the mouth of rivers and harbours and when one has to leave for a journey on the sea, the sandbars have to be disturbed and crushed. The poet probably indicates that when he leaves for his final journey, that is, when he dies, he doesn't want the people left behind to create much fuss about it. He does not want them to moan when he passes away. The poet says that in order to pass the bars without disturbing them, the waves have to be too high and loud. Tennyson wishes that when he passes away, his death should be discreet and not many people should know of it, which will prevent the moaning and weeping. Also, he hopes that when he embarks on the journey the sea is quiet and calm appearing asleep and undisturbed. This may mean that he does not want his death to disturb the living as well as the dead in the heavens.

(c) What are the natural elements that the poet uses as metaphors in the poem?

Answer: The poet has used a lot of references of natural elements as metaphors for life and death. The poem starts with a description of the sunset and the evening star. The scene is

the seashore where sandbars have formed and the waves are coming towards the bars. The poet talks as if these bars are the living people one leaves behind after death. The poet calls the hitting of the waves at the bar as a cause for 'moaning while he himself intends that when he passes away there be no moaning and crying. A sea voyage is used as a symbol for embarking on a journey, where the ships have to cross the sandbars. These sandbars are broken when a ship passes over them except in the case when there are huge waves that ride high over the bars. The poet wishes the tide to be high when he is about to leave for the deep sea because of which he will be able to pass over the bars peacefully. This is a reference for his hopes that when he dies he doesn't disturb too many people. He intends his departure to be a calm and peaceful one, which he expresses by calling the sea as calm as in sleep, a metaphor for death or one's final journey.

Long Questions and Answers

1. How does Tennyson convey his thoughts in the poem 'Crossing the Bar'?

Answer: Tennyson wrote 'Crossing the Bar' three years before he died. The poem takes place in a boat at twilight as the speaker is heading out to sea, however figuratively: the setting of the poem is in some sort of spiritual realm somewhere between life and death. In Crossing the Bar, Tennyson presents a sense of serenity by expressing his actions confidently that all is well. Tennyson uses the metaphor of a sand bar to describe the barrier between life and death.

The persona of this poem is trying to tell us about life and what death means. He uses the image of the sea to present the barriers of life and death. He also tries to convey that when he dies people shouldn't be sad as he will go up to heaven. He hopes that no one will cry when he departs from this earth and wishes for smooth and peaceful sailing and not to hit the troublesome sandbar along the way.

In the last two stanzas, the time has come; it is moments away from darkness. The poet expects no sadness, whether it is his or that of others when he departs. The reason not to mourn is that he has hope to see his Pilot, that is, God, face to face once he has passed into the afterlife. The other important image in the poem is one of "crossing," suggesting Christian connotations: "crossing refers both to "crossing over" into the next world and to the act of "crossing oneself in the classic Catholic gesture of religious faith and devotion. The religious significance of crossing was clearly familiar to Tennyson, for in an earlier poem of his, where: the knights and lords of Camelot "crossed themselves for fear when they saw the Lady of Shalott' lying dead in her boat. The cross was also where Jesus died: now as Tennyson himself dies, he evokes the image again.

The poet also wished that the poem 'Crossing the Bar' to be published in the last volume of his literary words.

2. What is the bar that the poet wants to cross? In what way and why does he want to cross the bar?

Answer: The poet wishes to cross the sandbar, the only obstacle before he can set sail into the sea. Beyond him lies a vast sea with an unknown journey but known destination. He wants the level of the sea to rise so that he can sail over it, without any disturbances and obstacles.

In stanza two.

“But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.”

The poet expresses the same feeling as explained in the answer. It tells the difficulties the speaker faces in his journey to cross the sand bar. The speaker wishes to cross the sandbar without facing any obstacle or being an obstruction to it by treading over it. Instead, he wants to go with the flow of nature and leave the environment undisturbed around him.

The speaker compares the sandbar to his family, friends, memories he created during his time on the earth. He doesn't wish to be an obstacle to his memories and trouble his acquaints because he knows that death is only a part of life and should be accepted just like every other part of life. He wants to cross the bar of memories successfully to let life and relations continue as usual. He wants to cross the bar in order to continue his journey before he reaches his destination and meets his maker - God.

3. Crossing the Bar' is a poem with metaphors playing an important role in the poem. What role does the metaphor play in the poem? Provide instances or phrases from the poem to support your answer.

Answer: A metaphor is a direct comparison of things without the use of 'like' or 'as'. Metaphors have a vital role to play in the poem with human emotions. Human emotions have always been difficult to comprehend and are a mystery to even the one who expresses. It is a feeling that cannot be made physical yet has a great impact on the physical world. The idea Tennyson wishes to express in the poem is death. Metaphors are used throughout the poem to shield the true idea and create a subtle effect on people.

Metaphors fulfil their role by minimizing the emotions of the poem and make people feel that death although not as welcoming as birth, yet is a great adventure and is the good side to face such tragedy. Using metaphors in the poem makes the poem enjoyable and makes the reader realize that all things come to an end. Just like sailing on the sea and meeting God - The Maker. There are ample references to display the role the metaphor presents and the effects of their presence in the poem. Sunset is the reference to death and by evening star. the poet conveys the final good things that remain before he sets on his adventure to

the sea. 'Sea' is another metaphor to describe the blank, unknown, unpredictable world after death. The poet uses many things to compare to life and death. The beach is where people live and beyond the beach is the sea, which is the other name of death. The sandbar is a metaphorical name for the barrier between life and death - relations and things that bind a soul to the earth. God himself is described in a metaphorical sense and is called the pilot. Metaphors also play the role of explaining the unknown with the known experiences. Tennyson has used a myriad of metaphors in the poem 'Crossing the Bar'.