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The Lotos-Eaters (Illustrated) (Top 100 Poems Of All Time)

By Alfred Lord Tennyson



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The Lotos-Eaters (Illustrated) (Top 100 Poems Of All Time) By Alfred Lord Tennyson

*In the afternoon they came unto a land
In which it seemed always afternoon.
All round the coast the languid air did swoon,
Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.
Full-faced above the valley stood the moon;
And, like a downward smoke, the slender stream
Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem.*

#100 in the **Top 100 Poems of All Time**: Alfred Lord Tennyson's haunting 1832 masterpiece **The Lotos-Eaters**.

In the summer of 1829, Tennyson and Arthur Hallam made a trek into conflict torn northern Spain. The scenery and experience influenced a few of his poems, including **Oenone**, **The Lotus-Eaters** and **Mariana in the South**. These three poems, and some others, were later revised for Tennyson's 1842 collection. In this revision Tennyson takes the opportunity to rewrite a section of **The Lotus Eaters** by inserting a new stanza before the final stanza. The new stanza describes how someone may have the feelings of wholeness even when there is great loss. It is alleged by some that the stanza refers to the sense of loss felt by Tennyson upon the death of Hallam in 1833.

The story of The Lotos-Eaters comes from Homer's **The Odyssey**. In terms of story, *The Lotos-Eaters* is not obscure like **The Hesperides** nor as all-encompassing as **Oenone** but it still relies on a frame like the other two. The frame is like *The Hesperides* as it connects two different types of reality, one of separation and one of being connected to the world. Like **Oenone**, the frame outlines the song within the poem, and it allows the existence of two different perspectives that can be mixed at various points within the poem. The perspective of the mariners is connected to the perspective of the reader in a similar way found in **The Hesperides**, and the reader is called to follow that point of view to enjoy the poem. As such, the reader is a participant within the work but they are not guided by Tennyson to a specific answer. As James Kincaid argues, "*in this poem the reader takes over the role of voyager the mariners renounce, using sympathy for a sail and judgment for a rudder. And if, as many have argued, the poem is 'about' the conflict between isolation and communality, this meaning emerges in the process of reading.*"

The poem discusses **the tension between isolation and being a member of a**

community, which also involves the reader of the poem. In the song, there are many images that are supposed to appeal to the reader. This allows for a sympathy with the mariners. When the mariners ask why everything else besides them are allowed peace, it is uncertain as to whether they are asking about humanity in general or only about their own state of being. The reader is disconnected at that moment from the mariner, especially when the reader is not able to escape into the world of bliss that comes from eating lotos. As such, the questioning is transformed into an expression of self-pity. The reader is able to return to being sympathetic with the mariners when they seek to be united with the world. They describe a system of completion, life unto death, similar to Keats's **To Autumn**, but then they reject the system altogether. Instead, they merely want death without having to have the growth and completion before death.

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