

Tears, Idle Tears

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Alfred Lord Tennyson

Dr. Mithilesh Kumar Manjhi
Dept. of English
J. N. College, Madhubani.

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"Tears, Idle Tears", part of a larger poem called The Princess, has been written by Alfred Lord Tennyson. Tennyson wrote The Princess to discuss the relationship between the sexes and to provide an argument for women's rights in higher education. This poem is written in blank verse, or unrhymed iambic pentameter. It consists of four five-line stanzas, each of which closes with the words the days that are no more.

The poet, in the first stanza, says that his tears are idle. He means to say that the tears are not the immediate result of identifiable grief. At the same time he says that his tears are the result of a divine despair. By this he means to say that there is definitely a source of the tears. According to him the tears rise in heart owing to a very deep universal cause. There is a paradox in the description of tears and their origin. On one hand he calls the cause a "Divine despair" but doubts that the despair can't be divine, for the Christian belief calls it a sin. The first stanza focuses on platonic love, the kind of love between friends. In the second stanza he explains adjectives which are chiasmic. Example for:-

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,

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That brings our friends up from the underworld,
Sad as the last which reddens over one

That sinks with all we love below the verge;
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

Through these lines the poet compares the bitter-sweet nature of memory to the freshness of seeing dead friends returning from the underworld, but also to the sadness of seeing them journeying down there. Here the poet uses **visual imagery**. This imagery could symbolise human lives, comparing them with a sunrise and a sunset. This might imply that the person is trying to say life is as short as just one day and therefore to encourage us not to waste it. Besides visual imagery, he also used **symbolism** and **contrast**.

In the third stanza, the memory of the part is described as "**sad - strange - sad - strange**". The **sad** adjective is introduced in the image of a man on his deathbed who is awake for his very last morning. However, 'strangeness' enters in, too, for it is strange to the dying man that as his life is ending, a new day is beginning. To a person hearing the birds' song and knowing he will never hear it again, the twittering will be imbued with an unprecedented significance - the dying man will hear certain melancholy tones for the first time, although, strangely and paradoxically, it is his last.

The final stanza contains a wave of adjectives that rush over us - now no longer confined within a neat chiasmic structure - as the poem reaches its last, climactic lament:
**Dear as remembered kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned**

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On lips that are for others; deep as lone,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
O death in life, the days that are no more!

By these lines the poet declares the past to be dear, sweet, deep and wild. It is as dear as the memory of the kisses of one who is now dead, and it is as sweet as those kisses that we imagine ourselves bestowing on lovers who actually have loyalties to others. So, too, is the past as deep as "first love" and as wild as the regret that usually follows this experience. The speaker concludes that the past is a "Death in life".

In short, this poem elevates the importance and power of loving relationship, comparing their ending to a kind of death in itself. This poem also reveals the relationship between the sexes and to provide an argument for women's rights in higher education. However, the work as a whole does not present a single argument or tell a coherent story. Rather, like so much of Tennyson's poetry it evokes complex emotions and moods through a mastery of language. "Tears, Idle Tears" is one of several interludes of song in the midst of the poem.