

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 5. Issue.2., 2018 (April-June)

ISSN

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

**‘FAMILIARITY BREEDS CONTEMPT’ IN THE CONTEXT OF ALFRED TENNYSON’S
‘THE FLOWER’**

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ABSTRACT

Alfred Tennyson one of the prominent Victorian poets has many illustrious poems for his credit. He is the embodiment of his age and his works deal with issues of political and historical concern, scientific matters, mythology and deeply personal thoughts and feelings. Tennyson took a great deal of interest in the scientific discoveries of his age and its impact on people. In the poem ‘The Flower’, Tennyson uses an extended metaphor to make a sarcastic comment on how most of us react and respond to change or novel things in life, how subsequently we get adapted to it and further how we consider it once it becomes mundane. The present paper focuses on the above mentioned facet of people where in excess familiarity or acquaintance with something leads to contempt.

Keywords: Metaphor, change, familiarity, contempt

Introduction

Alfred lord Tennyson(1809-1892) was one of the eight children born to Revd George Clayton Tennyson and his wife Elizabeth Fytche Tennyson. He was educated at Louth Grammar School and Trinity College. He became a member of the Apostles in 1827. His first publication was a collection of “his boyish rhymes and those of his elder brother Charles” entitled ‘Poems by Two Brothers’, published in the same year. He won the Chancellor’s Gold Medal for poetry in 1829. Tennyson’s works include short lyrics like “ Break, Break, Break”, “ The Charge of the Light Brigade”, “ Tears, Idle Tears”, blank verse like “ Idylls of the King”, “ Ulysses”, “ Tithonus” and other poems like “ The Lotus Eaters”, “ In Memorium A.H.H”, “Ringout Wild Bells”, “ The Flower” etc.

Most of us don’t accept change that easily though we all know that the only constant thing in the world is change. We tend to reject the unfamiliar as unproductive and paltry as we are unsure and skeptical about anything new. We always don’t welcome new ideas and concepts not because they are not worthy but because we feel if we don’t know something, it is worthless.

About the Poem

The poem “The Flower” was initially called “My little Fable” as it is a universal apologue and Parable through which Tennyson tries to throw light on how humans in general react to unfamiliar things. A ‘Parable’ is a moral or spiritual lesson or story told by Jesus and a ‘Universal Apologue’ is a moral fable.

‘Flower’ in this poem is used as an extended Metaphor, which could symbolize anything new. It could be an idea, a concept, a discovery or an invention. A Metaphor is a word or an expression which denotes one kind of action or thing applied to a distinctly different kind of an action or thing without asserting a

comparison. It also means symbolism. An extended Metaphor or Sustained Metaphor means use of single Metaphor at length throughout a poem or story, just as 'flower' Metaphor has been used in this poem.

Once in a golden hour the poet tossed a seed to earth and eventually the seed blossomed into a flower. People who had never seen such a flower till then, called it a 'Weed' as human psyche cannot accept anything new at once and tend to brush it aside without realizing its importance. People simply moved to and fro through the garden, whined discontent and cursed the poet and his flower.

Eventually, the flower grew bigger, totally unmindful of people's criticisms and became famous. People on the other hand grew curious and envious about it and conspired to steal it. After a while thieves from over the wall stole the seed and sowed it in every nook and corner by every town and tower. It became so famous that the same people who were initially apprehensive, exclaimed, 'Splendid is the flower!'

Through this flower Metaphor, Tennyson makes a wry comment as to how most of the people these days can raise flowers as the 'Seed' or the basic concept has already been stolen. Not all those flowers are pretty, though.

Later, when people adapt themselves to the new, when new things get assimilated into the old, when novelty is lost, the same people who once praised it and called it 'Splendid', shall abandon it calling it a weed again.

The poem also emphasizes on how one should be unmindful of compliments or criticisms in life and suggests us to stick to our convictions. We need to firmly stand for what we believe in as people mightn't accept our thoughts or ideas at the very first go.

Conclusion

Tennyson in this poem leaves it to readers intellect and understanding to relate to any new conception or notion as he doesn't relate to anything specific deliberately. "The Flower" may represent Industrial Revolution and its products or Christianity or his own poetry which was not accepted and welcomed by his contemporaries. The general human tendency is such that when they are unaware of the value of something new, they criticize and regard it as a weed but eventually people embrace it because 'change is the way of the world' and 'old order shall give way to the new'. In the due course, when the new is adopted widely and when it becomes common place, people develop a kind of aversion and again call it but a weed or unwanted as 'Familiarity Breeds Contempt'.

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