

On Finding a Small Fly Crushed in a Book

Charles Tennyson Turner

Biographical Details

- Born 1808 in Somersby, Lincolnshire.
- Lived a relatively quiet life as the vicar of a church in a town called Grasby.
- Was the older brother of Alfred Tennyson, a widely acclaimed poet of the day.
- Changed his name to Turner in order to fulfill the dying wishes of a relative, and in doing so receive money from his will.
- He died in 1879, having written about 300 sonnets in his lifetime.

Some hand, that never meant to do thee hurt,
Has crush'd thee here between these pages pent,
But thou has left thine own fair monument,
Thy wings gleam out and tell me what thou wert:
Oh! That the memories, which survive us here,
Were half as lovely as these wings of thine!
Pure relics of a blameless life, that shine
Now thou art gone: Our doom is ever near:
The peril is beside us, day by day;
The book will close upon us it may be,
Just as we lift ourselves to soar away
Upon the summer-air. But unlike thee,
The closing book may stop our vital breath,
Yet leave no lustre on our page of death.

Style

- The poem is a structured Shakespearean sonnet, with 14 lines. Although the poem is not visibly split into stanzas, there is an idea change in line 8, as is to be expected in sonnets.
- Rhythmically ordered into 3 quatrains and a couplet.
- Although the poem's language may be considered archaic today, the meaning still relevant.
- While the title conveys a reflective, albeit lightweight and informal topic, there is little of this style used in the body of the poem.

Analysis

- The poem opens with an almost remorseful tone, conveyed by language such as '*never meant to do thee hurt*'.
- The second line continues this mood, by referring to the hurtful act- '*crush'd thee here between these pages pent*'.
- Pent is the past tense form of pen- this refers to the fact the pages are not blank, but instead filled with a history, but it can also stand for imprisoned.
- This opening is considerably strong- it introduces engaging points that seek to interest the reader by introducing a unique and quirky predicament.

- In the third line the poet then discusses the '*own fair monument*' - this represents the memory of the fly.
- The line '*Thy wings gleam out and tell me what thou wert;*' shows how the fly left behind a message.
- Positive language is used, such as '*fair*' and '*gleam*' to show that while the poet feels remorse, he still has respect for the character of that which he destroyed.

- With the fifth line, the focus changes from the concrete (eg. wings) to the abstract – memories.
- The poet expresses how it is a shame that the memory's of the fly have in part been lost. All that remains is '*half as lovely*'- conveying to us that the remaining memories are only a tiny reminder of the fly's life.
- These two lines are also the only that use exclamation marks. They are used to stress the relationship between what goes with that which dies, and what is left behind, to live on. In this case memories are what remains, albeit in abstract form.
- The praise for the fly is continued, with the line '*pure relics of a blameless life*' that suggests it is almost an angelic being. This is reinforced by the use of the word '*shine*' that conveys purity.

- Line eight marks the idea change typical in sonnets. In this case it is a shift to a more morose and pessimistic tone, shown by words such as '*doom*', and '*peril*'.
- '*Now thou art gone:*' suggests that the passing of the fly brought about the doom, perhaps the poet seeks to form an allegory about the flies fate and humanity. Now that a less significant being is now gone that our fate is near.
- The proximity of our doom is suggested when it is described as '*ever near*' and that our peril is '*beside us day by day*'

- In line ten, the poet continues the comparison between humanity and the fly, in starting to describe the circumstances of our doom.
- There is a new metaphor used by the poet- a book closing- the exact circumstance under which the fly died.
- Also the timing of our doom, described as when we soar away, is also identical to that of the fly.
- In those two and a half lines, through the use of '*soar*' and '*summer-air*s' to convey a positive feeling, that the time of our doom will come when humanity is in its prime.

- In the final couplet the poet presents a difference. When humanity needs its doom, we will leave no '*lustre*'- a reference back to the gleaming monument of the fly.
- There is also a continued reference to a book, with the '*closing book*' and the our '*page of death*', helping to further strengthen the link between the fly's fate and the that of humanity.

Rhyme, Rhythm and Structure

- The poem has a rhyme scheme of ABBA CDDC EFEF GG. This differs slightly from the usual Shakespearean scheme.
- Iambic pentameter is adhered to on every line of the poem, is scheme of five 2 syllable feet, each with the first syllable unstressed and the second stressed.
- The structure closely follows those of the Shakespearean poems, only differing in that the predicament is introduced within the eighth line, not after it.
- Overall these slight departures from standard form give the poem a stream of consciousness, as if the poet didn't care that he didn't use the proper form.