

"Crossing the Bar"

Sunset and evening star,

And one clear call for me!

And may there be no moaning of the bar,

When I put out to sea,

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.

Twilight and evening bell,

And after that the dark!

And may there be no sadness of farewell,

When I embark;

For though from out our bourne of Time and Place

The flood may bear me far,

I hope to see my Pilot face to face

When I have crossed the bar.

Introduction:

Tennyson wrote "Crossing the Bar" in 1889, three years before he died. The poem describes his placid and accepting attitude toward death. Although he followed this work with subsequent poems, he requested that "Crossing the Bar" appear as the final poem in all collections of his work. Tennyson uses the metaphor of a sand bar to describe the barrier between life and death. A sandbar is a ridge of sand built up by currents along a shore. In order to reach the shore, the waves must crash against the sandbar, creating a sound that Tennyson describes as the "moaning of the bar." The bar is one of several images of liminality in Tennyson's poetry: in "Ulysses," the hero desires "to sail beyond the sunset"; in "Tithonus", the main character finds himself at the "quiet limit of the world," and regrets that he has asked to "pass beyond the goal of ordinance."

Summary:

The speaker heralds the setting of the sun and the rise of the evening star, and hears that he is being called. He hopes that the ocean will not make the mournful sound of waves beating against a sand bar when he sets out to sea. Rather, he wishes for a tide that is so full that it cannot contain sound or foam and therefore seems asleep when all that has been carried from the boundless depths of the ocean returns back out to the depths. The speaker announces the close of the day and the evening bell, which will be followed by darkness. He hopes that no one will cry when he departs, because although he may be carried beyond the limits of time and space as we know them, he retains the hope that he will look upon the face of his "Pilot" when he has crossed the sand bar.