

A Photograph by *Shirley Toulson*: Salient Features

About the Poet : *Shirley Toulson*: (20 th of May 1924 to 15 May 2014) was a Poet, journalist, and travel-writer was a highly regarded poet and an innovative writer She was greatly influenced by her father who was a writer too. She edited the works of Charles Dickens , Rudyard Kipling, John Milton and William Shakespeare . All these works indeed made her more famous. Shirley Toulson's 'A Photograph' is a tribute written in memory of her dead mother.

Central Idea of the Poem A Photograph

In this poem, Shirley Toulson deals with the transience and futility of human life

The passage of time changes humans but not nature.

The title A Photograph per se suggests that the cardboard stands for lack of durability and hints at the lack of permanence of human life

A Photograph by Shirley Toulson is a dysphoric poem which captures the three different moods of the poet in three different stanzas of the poem.

It is all about the memories associated with two women- the poet and her mother

The poem describes three stages in the passage of time.

In the first stage, the photograph affixed to a cardboard frame, shows the poet's mother enjoying the Beach holiday with her cousins Betty and Dolly

The Poet's mother, the eldest of all, was around 12 years old at that time So she held the hands of both her cousins .

They happily stood and faced the camera for a still picture taken by their escort uncle.

The sea breeze was quite strong that their hair fell on their faces and caressed their faces while taking their snapshot.

The poet claims that her mother looked young and sweet in the photograph

This beach holiday had happened way before the poet was born.

Now Mother's face has changed considerably but the sea in the photograph had not changed much

twenty or thirty years later. Mother, with a beaming laughter nostalgically recollects the past with Betty and Dolly

They were nicely spruced up and appropriately dressed for a beach trip.

But the same nice special dress of the yesteryears now looks strange, quaint and funny that evokes laughter.

12 years after her mother's demise, the poet looks at the same photograph and remembers her mother's laughter.

The agony of the lost mother and the separation brings in a sense of remorse in the poet

The Poet could overcome the loss with much difficulty and the poet completely maintains silence because of her mother's 'silence' ie death.

Let us get to know a few poetic devices from the poem

A Photograph by Shirley Toulson

Allusion: An allusion is a reference or an incidental mention of something, either directly or by implication. An example of allusion in this poem is 'cardboard' which actually refers to the photograph.

Alliteration: Alliteration is the repetition of the initial sound (generally a consonant) of several words marking the stressed syllable in a line of poem. Examples of alliteration in this poem are 'stood still to smile', 'terribly transient', 'Its silence silences' etc.

Transferred Epithet: An Epithet is an adjective. If it gets transferred from its literal place to a metaphoric place 'Transient feet' is an example of the transferred epithet in the poem. It refers to human feet but it is used to describe the lack of permanence of human life.

Oxymoron: In this literary device, there are two opposite ideas that are joined to create an effect. 'Laboured ease' in the poem is an example of an oxymoron. Laboured meaning with 'great difficulty' and ease means 'comfortably'. Both words have opposite meanings but here they are clubbed together.

Synecdoche : In this poetic device, part stands for the whole. Transient Feet where feet part of a body stands for the whole Human being

