



**Alfred Lord Tennyson
(1809-1892)**

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Tennyson's life and literary Career

Tennyson was born on 6th August 1809 at Somersby Rectory Lincolnshire. His education began at the age of seven when he was sent to grammar school in Louth. He left that school nearly at the age of twelve and rest of his boyhood study he completed under his father.

He went to Cambridge for his further education in 1828. He received the chancellor's medal for his poem *Timbuctoo*. During this period, he made friendship with eminent personalities --- Spedding Milnes and Arthur Hallam.

In 1832, his volume of poems appeared -----'The Lady of Shalott', 'The Lotos Eaters'.and 'Dream of Fair Women'.

In 1842, the volume contained English Idylls and other poems appeared --- 'Break, Break, Break, 'Ulysses, 'Morte D. Arthur', 'The Gardener's Daughters'etc. and a revised form of 'The Lady of Shalott' and 'The Lotos Eaters'.

In 1850, he got married with Emily Sellwood. His famous elegy 'In Memorium' was published. **In the same year, he was appointed Poet Laureate after Wordsworth's death.**

At the age of 81, he composed two of his finest poems 'Crossing the War' and 'Locksley Hall Sixty Years after'.

in 1884, he was raised to peerage and became Lord Alfred Tennyson, of Aldworth Sussex and of Freshwater, Isle of Wight.

on 6th october 1892, Tennyson died at the age of 84 and he received a public funeral in Westminster Abbey.

Tennyson: Poet of Victorian Age

Lord Tennyson was born in 1809 and enjoyed his poetic career for 60 years. He was appointed Poet Laureate on Wordsworth's death. He is a great representative poet of Victorian age and reflects its restless spirit of the progressive attitude. Tennyson's greatness lies not in his poet laureateship but in his art and poetic craftsmanship, treatment of Nature and lyricism. The themes that Tennyson chose and selected were many. He wrote on classical, romantic and modern subject. He also wrote on rustic life and philosophy and religion. He strikes a skilled compromise between science and religion in his poetry.



A Great Representative Poet of Victorian Age

Tennyson is a great representative poet, who represents Victorian age not in fragments but completely in all manifold variety. He is as good a representative and chronicler of his as Chaucer, Spenser and Pope were of their respective ages. Tennyson's career extended over more than half century and many changes took place during this period. His poetry, therefore, represents the ideas and the taste, the prevailing currents of thoughts, religious liberalism, a spirit of doubt, the increasing sympathy with poverty and distress. His poem 'Ulysses' represents the curiosity of knowledge and advancement of his age--

*“ And this grey spirit yearning in desire,
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond utmost bound of human thought.”*

Passion for orderly progress



Tennyson was essentially the poet of law and order as well as of progress. He reflects adequately the Victorian respect for balance and order and corresponding fear and contempt for lawlessness and disorder. His poetry is often the vehicle of the spreading democratic sympathy of Victorian age. Tennyson firmly believes in the divine scheme of things -----

*“The old order changeth yielding place to new,
And god fulfils himself in many ways in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.”*

His Evolutionary Science



Tennyson's poetry is historically interesting as it reflects the social and political trends of his age but it even more important as a record of the intellectual and spiritual life of the time. Tennyson was much impressed by the evolution of science, its new discoveries and new ideas. But he nowhere brings science in conflicts with religion. Instead he presents a Victorian compromise in his poetry. He observes -----

*“Let knowledge grow from more to more,
But more of reverence in us dwell.”*

His Greatness as an Artist

Tennyson is a great representative poet, but he is still greater as an Artist. He is the most careful writer. The following elements make up his art-----

- A minute observation of Nature with rich imagery.
- An appreciation of all that is most picturesque in the literature of the past.
- Precision in the use of words and phrases.
- A rare gift of lyricism.

In his word painting Tennyson follows the example of Keats. Nearly in all his poems we find the ornate description of natural scenes. In 'Ulysses' the following lines can be quoted----

*“The long day wanes:the slow moon climbs; the deep
Moans sound with many voices.”*

His Nature Poetry

Tennyson's Nature poetry is original and bears the impact of contemporary science. His view of Nature takes into full account the brutal 'struggle for existence'. He finds 'red in tooth and claw' and does not paint Nature as a kindly mother. He does not give a soul to Nature like Wordsworth. Tennyson used Nature as a background for reflecting human emotions and feelings. In other words he humanised Nature. Nature looks joyful or gloomy according to the human mood.

Tennyson's Nature poetry is intellectual. His world of Nature a world of imaginative scientific man who has an eye for beauty and a heart to feel it. To him Nature is soulless and lifeless but beautiful, cruel and indifferent. In 'Break, Break, Break' he quotes his helplessness to express his feelings of sorrow against the background of cheerful Nature-----

*"And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me."*

Tennyson's Lyricism



Modern critics believe that Tennyson is found at his best not in his longer poems but in his lyrics. Tennyson's lyrics do not express the simple feelings of the poet but they express his complex mood. 'In Memorium' is a long elegy composed of many short lyrics. The elegy was particularly suited to Tennyson's melancholy and reflective temper. Some of his short lyrics like 'Break, Break, Break' are extremely musical and attractive-----

*“And stately ships go on,
To their Heaven under the hill,
But o for the touch of vanished hands,
And the sound of a voice that is still.”*


His views on love, sex and women

Tennyson does not sanction the unbridled passion of love and sex urge. It should remain holy and unpolluted. He favours the married love unrestrained passions of love and sex are destructive to the social order and morality. He agrees with 'Addison' that "*Family is the proper sphere for a woman to shine in.*"

Ulysses : Critical Appreciation

Tennyson is a great representative poet of Victorian age. He shows the spirit of scepticism, confusion and fears as well as the restless curiosity of his age in his poetry. The poem 'Ulysses' is in the form of dramatic monologue in the manner of Robert Browning. In this poem, the character of a great hero of the war of Troy is reflected through Ulysses himself. He comes back home 20 years after the war of Troy. Ulysses is the king of Ithaca and feels uneasy to live among the savage race-----

"That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me."




The poem is made with the typical Victorian characteristics of restless curiosity and unquenchable thirst for wandering abroad and exploring new lands. It also strikes the note of curiosity for knowledge, jest for adventure, a passion for experience and exploration. Ulysses says -----

*“I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees.”*

Since, Ulysses is a tireless wonderer who does not want to lie idle at home to administer the unequal laws on savage people. He plans to handover the rule of Ithaca to his son and proceeds on the voyage on adventure. He is an embodiment of renaissance spirit having a passion for knowledge and adventure -----

*“And this grey spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star”*




Through this poem, Tennyson reveals the philosophy of life --- *“Life is action not passive contemplation.”* Life is worthless if we lie action less and idle. Rest from travel is death for Ulysses-----

“How dull it is to pause to make an end.”

It expresses the philosophy of action and struggle to face the hardships of life as a challenge. In fact, Ulysses symbolises in his character the modern passion for knowledge and experience. It exhorts that the idleness and passivity kill the very motive of life and drag us to subjugation before the tyranny of circumstances. Life becomes like a rusted sword which proves worthless when the occasion arises. Tennyson through this poem gives a serious message to face the hardships of life boldly and cheerfully without surrendering to indolence. He teaches-----

“To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.”

Ulysses endeavours to follow knowledge like a sinking star. Thus the poem is a call for action. Life and action are complementary to each other. Therefore life without action is worthless and vain.



The poem is autobiographical in its approach. Like Ulysses Tennyson was also curious to achieve literary grace in his old age. He did not lose his interest in poetry even in old age. He was always experimenting new things and new techniques just like the curiosity of Ulysses in new discoveries. Like Ulysses, Tennyson also longs to drink life to the lees in old age and believes that-----

“Old age hath yet his honour and his toil.”

Tennyson desired to follow knowledge like a sinking star and therefore, he enjoyed his poetic career for 60 years.



Tennyson succeeds admirably not only in the portrayal of the character but also in depicting the atmosphere of the briskness contrary to the atmosphere of his former poem "The Lotos Eaters". In this atmosphere a man is prohibited to become mouldy and indolent physically as well as intellectually. The vigorous language of the speaker makes him a man of action. The language is simple and free from any exaggeration of embellishments. It is written in compact blank-verse with the idea of "Brevity is the soul of wit." The fewer the words, batter the effect, the description of the world of land and ocean is picturesque-----

*"Thro' scudding drifts the rainy hyades
Vext the dim sea."*

A very good example of figure of speech onomatopoeia where the sound suggests the senses----

"The deep moans sound with many voices."



Thank You