

Alfred Lord Tennyson

Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom He was born August 6th, 1809, at Somersby, Lincolnshire; he was the fourth of twelve children. Despite having wealthy relatives, the Tennyson's lived in relative poverty. Alfred Tennyson became the most popular poet of the Victorian age. With royal patronage, his poetry helped define an era. In the Twentieth Century his influence waned. However, he ranked second in the list of the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, after Shakespeare. He succeeded William Wordsworth as Poet Laureate in 1850, a position he held for 42 years. His works are known for their melodic quality, philosophical depth, and reflections on personal and national concerns. Tennyson's style is often marked by a mastery of meter, lyrical beauty, and a deep sense of melancholy, reflecting both personal loss and the broader uncertainties of his time. His influence on Victorian poetry and culture was profound, and many of his lines, such as "Tis better to have loved and lost / Than never to have loved at all," have become iconic. Characteristics of Tennyson as a poet:

1. Melancholy and Reflective Nature: Tennyson's poetry often reflects a deep sense of melancholy and introspection. He frequently contemplates themes of loss, death, and the passage of time. His personal experiences, such as the death of his close friend Arthur Hallam, deeply influenced his poetic tone. His poem *In Memoriam A.H.H.* is an extended elegy written in response to this loss, and it captures the profound grief that permeates much of his work.

2. Spiritual and Philosophical Thought: Tennyson's poetry is deeply philosophical, often grappling with existential questions about life, death, faith, and the meaning of existence. While he was a devout Christian, he wrestled with doubt and uncertainty, particularly in relation to the rise of scientific theories like Darwin's evolution. Poems like *In Memoriam* explore these spiritual dilemmas, reflecting his inner struggles with faith and doubt.

3. Master of Imagery and Language: Tennyson was a master of vivid and evocative imagery. His poems are filled with lush descriptions of nature, the sea, and the countryside. He had an unparalleled ability to translate abstract emotions into concrete,

visual imagery. For instance, in *The Lady of Shalott*, his descriptions of the idyllic landscape and the isolation of the Lady create a hauntingly beautiful atmosphere. His skillful use of language also extended to his manipulation of sound and rhythm, making his poems melodious. His use of alliteration, repetition, and meter enhanced the musicality of his verse, contributing to its emotional depth.

4. Use of Classical and Mythological References: Tennyson frequently incorporated classical and mythological allusions into his poetry, showing his scholarly background. Poems like *Ulysses*, *The Lotos-Eaters*, and *Oenone* draw directly from Greek and Roman mythology. He used these ancient stories not only to retell them but also to reflect on Victorian concerns about identity, purpose, and human nature.

5. Romantic and Victorian Influences: Though Tennyson wrote during the Victorian era, his work was heavily influenced by the earlier Romantic poets like Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron. He inherited the Romantic preoccupation with nature, emotion, and the individual's relationship with the universe. However, Tennyson's poetry often bridges Romanticism and Victorianism, exploring the tension between emotion and reason, faith and science, and the individual's place in an industrialized world.

6. Concern with Social and Political Issues: As a poet laureate, Tennyson was expected to write on matters of national importance. Some of his poems, such as *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, address contemporary events and societal issues, reflecting his patriotism and concern for national identity. However, even in these works, he often focused on the broader human condition, such as duty, sacrifice, and honor.

7. Emotional Depth and Sensitivity: Tennyson's poetry often displays profound emotional depth, resonating with universal human experiences like grief, love, and longing. His sensitivity to human emotions and his ability to express them poetically made him one of the most beloved poets of his time. His personal grief over the loss of Arthur Hallam, for instance, became a central focus of his work and resonated deeply with readers.

8. Strong Narrative Voice: Tennyson was an accomplished storyteller. His poems often feature a strong narrative voice, whether in dramatic monologues or narrative verse. His ability to create compelling characters and tell their stories with emotional depth is exemplified in works like *Ulysses*, where he captures the restless spirit of the aging

Greek hero, or Tithonus, where the mythological figure reflects on the burden of eternal life.

9. Patriotism and National Identity: As poet laureate, Tennyson wrote poems that celebrated British nationalism and its imperial destiny. Poems like *The Charge of the Light Brigade* highlight the virtues of bravery, duty, and sacrifice, aligning with the Victorian ideals of heroism. Tennyson's patriotism was complex, and he often balanced pride in Britain with an awareness of the personal costs of war and empire.