

## **Section one**

### **Life and Works of Alfred, Lord Tennyson**

Alfred Tennyson was born August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1809, at Somersby, Lincolnshire, fourth of twelve children of George and Elizabeth (Fytche) Tennyson. The poet's grandfather had violated tradition by making his younger son, Charles, his heir, and arranging for the poet's father to enter the ministry. The contrast of his own family's relatively straitened circumstances to the great wealth of his aunt Elizabeth Russell and uncle Charles Tennyson made Tennyson feel particularly impoverished and led him to worry about money all his life.

He also had a lifelong fear of mental illness, for several men in his family had a mild form of epilepsy, which was then thought a shameful disease. His father and brother Arthur made their cases worse by excessive drinking.

His brother Edward had to be confined in a mental institution after 1833, and he himself spent a few weeks under doctor's care in 1843. In the late twenties his father's physical and mental condition worsened, and he became paranoid, abusive, and violent. In 1827 Tennyson escaped the troubled atmosphere of his home when he followed his two older brothers to Trinity College, Cambridge, where his tutor was William Whewell – see nineteenth-century philosophy. Because they had published poems by two brothers in 1827 and each won university prizes for poetry (Alfred winning the Chancellor's Gold Medal in 1828 for "Timbuctoo", the Tennyson brothers became well known at Cambridge. In 1829 The Apostles, an undergraduate club, whose members remained Tennyson's friends.

All his life, Whewell invited him to join. The group, which met to discuss major philosophical and other issues, included Arthur Henry Hallam, James Spedding, Edward Lushington (who later married Cecilia Tennyson) and Richard Monckton Milnes – all eventually famous men who merit entries in the Dictionary of National Biography.

Arthur Hallam's was the most important of these friendships. Hallam, another precociously brilliant Victorian young man like Robert Browning, John Stuart Mill, and Matthew Arnold, was uniformly recognized by his

contemporaries (including William Gladstone, his best friend at Eton) as having unusual promise he and Tennyson know each other only four years, but their intense friendship had major influence on the poet.

On a visit to Somersby, Hallam met and later became engaged to Emily Tennyson, and the two friends looked forward to a life – long companionship. Hallam's death from illness in 1833 (he was only 22) shocked Tennyson profoundly, and his grief led to most of his best poetry, including "Memorial", "The Passing of Arthur", "Ulysses", and "Tithonus".

Since Tennyson was always sensitive to criticism, the mixed reception of his 1832 poems hurt him greatly. Critics in those days delighted in the harshness of their reviews: the Quarterly Review as the "Hang, dram, and quarterly", John Wilson Croker's harsh criticisms of some of the poems in our anthology kept Tennyson from publishing again for another nine years. Late in the 1830s Tennyson grew concerned about his mental health and visited a sanitarium run by Dr. Matthew Allen.

With whom he later invested his inheritance (his grandfather had died in 1835) and some of his family's money. When Dr. Allen's scheme for mass-producing wood carvings using steam power went bankrupt, Tennyson, who did not have enough money to marry, ended his engagement

to Emily Sellwood, whom he had met at his brother Charles's wedding to her sister Louisa. The success of his 1842 poems made Tennyson a popular poet, and in 1845 he received a civil list (government) pension of £200 a year, which helped relieve his financial difficulties, the success of "The Princess" and *In Memoriam* and his appointment 1850 as poet laureate finally established him as the most popular poet of the Victorian era.

By now Tennyson, only 41, had written some of his greatest poetry, but he continued to write and to gain in popularity. In 1853, as the Tennysons were moving into their new house on the Isle of Wight, Prince Albert dropped in unannounced. His admiration for Tennyson's poetry helped solidify his position as the national poet, and Tennyson returned the favor by dedicating *The Idylls of the King* to his memory. Queen Victoria later summoned him to court several times, and at her insistence he accepted his title, having declined it when offered by both Disraeli and Gladstone.

Tennyson suffered from extreme short-sightedness – without a monocle he could not even see to eat, which gave him considerable difficulty writing and reading, and this disability in part accounts for his

manner of creating poetry: Tennyson composed much of his poetry in his head, occasionally working on individual poems for many years. During his undergraduate days at Cambridge he often did not bother to write down his compositions, although the Apostles continually prodded him to do so, (we

owe the first version of "The Lotos – Eaters" to Arthur Hallam, who transcribed it while Tennyson declaimed it at a meeting of of the Apostles ).

Long – lived like most of his family ( no matter how unhealthy they seemed to be) Alfred , Lord Tennyson died on October 6 , 1842, at the age of 83.

## Section 2

### The Theme of Nostalgia in "Ulysses" and "The Lotus Eaters"

#### Nostalgia, Regret, and Futility-Exploring the Tone and Language of Tennyson's "Ulysses"

"How dull it is to pause, to make an end / To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!"(22-33)

Thus speaks the aged Greek hero in Tennyson's famous poem "Ulysses" as the king contemplates the futility of life, bemoaning the passing of this youth. Although widely celebrated as a majestic piece that exhorts us to press onward in the face of grief, "Ulysses" contains yet a deeper meaning that Tennyson suggests using both the poem's language and its tone- underneath the surface, "Ulysses" is a lament that muses with regret upon the vanity of life wasted chasing after adventure. As Charles C. Walcutt of Michigan State Normal College writes, "The voice which speaks is not that of a trumpet, clear-throated and vigorous; it is the mournful sighing of strings" (Walcutt, 1946). Tennyson conveys his theme of regret using the following literary tools-tone and word choice.

Tone is a powerful element of "Ulysses"- Tennyson portrays the attitudes and overall character of his poem using the aged warrior's expression of feeling. Throughout its development, the hero of "Ulysses" articulates a broad range of emotions, from his initial frustrated reflections on his current situation, to his final determination to experience one last adventure before death-from "Matched with an aged wife, I mete and dote/ Unequal laws unto a savage race, /That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me. / I cannot rest from travel" (3-6) to "Tis not too late to seek a newer world ....

To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths/ Of all the western stars, until I die" (56-61) In the opening lines of "Ulysses" Tennyson paints his readers a picture of an elderly Greek king sitting by an empty fireplace, Lamenting the monotony of his current life. This emotion of frustration however quickly gives way to nostalgia, as Ulysses muses fondly upon his past adventures:

***Much have I seen and known,- cities of men  
And manners, climates, councils, governments,  
Myself not least, but honored of them all,-  
And drink delight of battle with my peers,  
Far on the singing plains of windy troy. (13-17)***

Then Ulysses turns to reflecting upon his son Telemachus and upon the differences between their characters- he observes that Telemachus seems contented with his lot governing the people of Ithaca, while Ulysses still feels restlessness in his own heart; " He works his work, I mine" (43). Ulysses next passes from thoughts of his son to contemplations of death and old age. His attitude towards death is similar to that of Preacher in Ecclesiastes: " This also is vanity. For there is no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever, since all that now will be forgotten in the days to come. And how does a wise man die? As the fool !" (Ecc. 2:15-16). Likewise Ulysses exclaims, " As tho' to breathe were life ! Life piled on life / were all too little, and of one to me" (24-25), implying that just because he breathes doesn't mean he feels alive-in fact, he feels his death drawing near, and the thought that "death closes all" (51) fills him with a growing sense of despairs. Ulysses has come to the same realization as the preacher-no matter how many great

deeds he's accomplished during his lifetime, death is the inevitable end of all men. There is no escape from mortality.

The last emotion expressed by Ulysses in this poem is one of renewed, grim, and almost reckless determination to experience one final adventure before death overtakes him: "come, my friend, / 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world" (56-57). Tennyson enforces the despairing tone of his poem with this dramatic conclusion, in which Ulysses exhorts his fellow-mariners to join him once more on a sea-voyage. He cries,

Tho' much is taken much abides; and tho'

We are not now that strength which in old days

Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are (65-67)

The reader is never told whether or not Ulysses actually carries out his plan for a journey- he may have simply been dreaming of one last glorious adventure before death. As Walcutt states, "the effect of the poem is nearer to being an evocation of the states of mind of an aged warrior who dreams of former glory than it is to being the actual beginning of a new heroic quest" (Walcutt, 1946). The 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian poet Dante describes Ulysses' final journey in his poem *The Inferno*, and according to Dante's version, Ulysses and his crew perish a watery death because of the wrath of Zeus: "The poop rose and the bow went down /till the sea closed over us and the light was gone" (130-131). Whether or not Ulysses actually set out on this final adventure and was lost at sea is not revealed in Tennyson's text, but the expression of Ulysses' emotion is the same-he senses the futility of his life and is frustrated with the impotence of old age. His solution is to turn to glorious visions of battles, and adventures, which he thinks will bring him the happiness he lacks.



Throughout the poem "Ulysses" the aged Greek warrior gives voice to a wide array of emotions, ranging from discontentment to nostalgia to hopelessness to grim determination Tennyson sets the tone of his poem through this expression of attitude but he also conveys the poem's deeper themes using word choice and language. There are two specific passages in "Ulysses" where Tennyson's word choice particularly strengthens sense of futility and hopelessness of this poem.

First of all, Tennyson employs the use of metaphor when describing Ulysses' feelings of helplessness. Ulysses compares himself to an old sword that has seen great deeds in battle but now sits abandoned and rusty with disuse (22-23) and used the adjectives "dull" "unburnish'd" and "gray" to describe his sense of feebleness and age (23-30). He yearns "to follow knowledge like a sinking star" (31). Ulysses' language and choice of adjective in this particular passage strengthen the poem's sense of regret and its message of life's meaninglessness.

Towards the end of the poem, Tennyson once again employs an implied metaphor when his hero describes the ending of the day, signifying the closing of his life:

The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks;  
The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep  
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,  
Tis not too late to seek a newer world. (54-57)

Ulysses realizes that, like the long day waning, his life is also drawing to a close. This realization seems almost to frighten him, and he grasps for comfort at the only thing he knows and loves-adventure. Instead of

examining himself and apprehending the futility of the things he has spent his chasing after, his conclusion is that , though "death closes all; but something ere the end, / some work of noble note, may yet be done , / not unbecoming men that strove with gods"(51-53).

The ultimate message of Tennyson's poem "Ulysses" is a deep and powerful one, similar to the final conclusion of Ecclesiastes; "let us hear the conclusion of the whole matte: fear god and keep his commandments, for this is man's all"(Ecc.12:13).The pursuit of anything else in place of god-whether it be money, power, fame, glory in battle, or adventure – is fruitless and devoid of meaning. A life waster chasing after these things is one that will end in regret and despair, as Tennyson's Ulysses comes to partially realize. Tennyson conveys this message using his hero's attitudes, expression of feeling, and choice of language – without God, our lives are meaningless. Without God, we have nothing to turn to when our end draws near and begin, like Ulysses, to sense the futility of our life's pursuits. And without God, the prospect of death is a frightening one indeed.

## **Ithaca**

"Ithaca" takes place at Bloom's house at 7 Eccles St. at about 2:00 a.m. on June 17. Bloom and Stephen discuss a huge variety of topics; Bloom makes Stephen cocoa (Joyce implies that this is a "communion"), and, after Stephen leaves, Bloom assesses his day's activities and gingerly crawls into bed beside Molly in an upside-down position, kissing her rump. The sleepy Molly asks him what he has been doing all day (and night), and Bloom supplies a partial litany of the events, leaving out anything incriminating.

In fact, "Ithaca" is Joyce's preparation (his preliminary groundwork) for *Finnegans Wake*, with its shadowy, hulking archetypal personages. Finally, the "objectivity" of the episode permits Bloom to use the screen of logic as a kind of filter in order to bear the almost unendurable pain which he feels

from Molly's assignation. He perceived Boylan's presence almost from the start of the chapter — as early as the incident of the betting tickets that Boylan tore up in anger after Sceptre lost the race. What is perhaps most regrettable about the assignation itself is that Molly and Blazes make no real attempt to disguise the adultery. Bloom, however, imagines the act; he, in a sense, uses fancy and imagination to disguise the painful blatancy of the adultery; now he is confronted with its direct evidence — that is, with the facts of its physical reality: for example, there are the chairs, rearranged so that the two lovers could sit beside each other to sing "Love's Old Sweet Song"; there are also the cigarette butts, as well as a male's impression in the Blooms' bed, and also there are the traces of Plumtree's Potted Meat (Boylan, metaphorically, "potted" Molly with his "meat").

## "The Lotus-Eaters"

The Lotus-Eaters was published in Tennyson's 1832 poetry collection. It was inspired by his trip to Spain with his close friend Arthur Hallam. Where they visited the Pyrenees mountains. The poem is based on a short episode from the Odyssey in which the weary Greek veterans of the Trojan War are tempted by a desire to abandon their long voyage homeward. As Odysseus later reported: on the tenth day we set foot on the land of the Lotus-eaters who eat a flowering food ....I sent forth certain of my company who ...mixed with the men of the Lotus-eaters who gave... them of the Lotus to taste. Now whosoever of them did eat the honey-sweet fruit of the Lotus had no more wish to bring tidings nor to come back, but there he chose to abide... forgetful of his homeward way; it must be noted that in Homer, Ulysses and his mariners, on their return from the Trojan war, come to the land of Lotus-Eaters but there is no description of the land in Homer; while Tennyson expands Homer's brief account into an elaborate picture of weariness and

the desire for the rest and death. The poet presents the dreamy mood of perfect contentment of the mariners who had once dared to defy the gods in the Trojan war. Now having eaten the lotus fruit and seen the dreamy atmosphere of the falling waters of streams, they forget that they have any responsibility towards their land and families. The atmosphere of the land presented by the poet is extremely bewitching and attracts the mariners

The poem is divided into two parts: the first is a descriptive narrative (lines 1-45), and the second is a song of eight numbered stanzas of varying length (lines 46-173). The first part of the poem is written in nine-line Spenserian stanzas. The rhyme scheme of the Spenserian stanza is a closely interlinked ABABBCBC, with the first eight lines in iambic pentameter and the final line an Alexandrine

(or line of six iambic feet). In the choric song both the line-length and the rhyme scheme vary widely among the eight stanzas.

In the first part of the poem Odysseus tells his mariners to have courage, assuring them that they will soon reach the shore of their home. In the afternoon, they reach a land "in which it seemed always afternoon" because of the languid and peaceful atmosphere. The mariners sight this "land of streams" with its gleaming river flowing to the sea, its three snow-capped mountaintops, and its shadowy pine

The mariners are greeted by the "mild-eyed melancholy lotus-eaters," whose dark faces appear pale against the rosy sunset. These lotus-eaters come bearing the flower and fruit of the lotus, which they offer to Odysseus's mariners. Those who eat the lotus feel as if they have fallen into a deep sleep; they sit down upon the yellow sand of the island and can hardly perceive their fellow mariners speaking to them, hearing only the music of their heartbeat in their ears. Although it has been sweet to

dream of their homes in Ithaca, the lotus makes them weary of wandering, preferring to linger here. One who has eaten of the lotus fruit proclaims that he will "return no more," and all of the mariners begin to sing about this resolution to remain in the land of the lotus-eaters.

The rest of the poem consist of the eight numbered stanzas of the mariners choric expressing their resolution to stay forever. In the first stanza they praise the sweet and soporific (causing sleep) music of the land of the lotus-eaters, comparing this music to petals, dew granite, and tired eyelids.

In the second stanza they question why man is the only creature in nature who must toil they argue that everything else in nature is able to rest and stay still, but man is tossed from one sorrow to another. Man's inner spirit tells him that tranquility and calmness offer the only joy, and yet he is destined to toil and wander whole life.

In the third stanza, the mariners declare the everything in nature has own lifespan and that they bloom and fade. As examples of other living things that die, they cite the \*\*folded leaf, which eventually turns yellow and drifts to the earth, as well as the \*\*full-juiced apple. Which ultimately falls to the ground, and the flower, which ripens and fades.

In the fourth stanza, the mariners ask if death is the end of life, why should life all labor be?' questioning the purpose of a life of labor. They question what is that will last ? proclaiming that everything in life is fleeting and therefore futile. The mariners also express their desire for long rest or death, either of which will free them from a life of endless labor.

The fifth stanza echoes the first stanza's positive appeal to luxurious self-indulgence; the mariners declare how sweet it is to live a life of continuous dreaming. They paint a picture of what it might be like to do nothing all day except sleep, dream. Eat lotus, and watch the waves on the beach. Such an existence would enable them peacefully to remember all those individuals they once knew who are now either buried ("heaped over with a mound of grass") or cremated ("two handfuls of white dust, shut in an urn of brass").

In the sixth stanza, the mariners reason that their families have probably forgotten them anyway, and their homes fallen apart, so they might as well stay in the land of the lotos-eaters and "let what is broken so remain." Although they have fond memories of their wives and sons, surely by now, after ten years of fighting in troy, their sons have inherited their property; they will merely cause disturbance and trouble their joy if they return now. Their hearts are worn out from fighting wars and navigating the seas by means of the constellations, and thus they prefer the relaxing death-like existence of the land of the lotos to the confusion that are return home would create

In the seventh stanza, as in the first and fifth, the mariners take great pleasure of the sight and sounds of the island. They imagine how sweet it would be to lie on beds of flowers while watching the river flow listening to the echoes in the caves .

Finally, the poem close with the mariner' vow to spend rest their lives relaxing and reclining in the hollow lotus land. "they compare the life of seclusion, which they will enjoy in lotus land, to the carefree existence of the gods, who could not care less about the famines, plagues, earthquakes, and other calamities that afflict human beings on earth. These Gods simply smile upon men. Who sow the seed, and reap the harvest with enduring toil until they either suffer in hell or dwell in the 'Elysian valleys' of heaven. Since they have concluded that slumber is more sweet than toil. "the mariners resolve to stop wandering the seas and instead, to settle in the land of the lotus-eaters.

Critics from the 19<sup>th</sup> century tended to regard the poem, as critic Malcolm MacLaren writes "as primarily artistic rather than didactic" and "an implied criticism of idleness and indifference," while more recent critics see the poem as "a defense of the life of the detached, self-sufficient artist. "These critics suppose that Tennyson means to praise the decision mariners to abandon the outside world, as it is clearly stated in the poem that begins with "courage" and adventuring on the land, and it is not until they taste the lotus that they choose to stay and idle .

One recent critic, William Flesch, writes it is not necessary to derive a moral from "The lotus-Eaters; which seems more about the fact that poetry attempts to offer some consolation for the difficulties and essential painfulness of human life. "Yet, such a decision ----not to judge----seems to side with the men rather than with the adventurous Odysseus. Who thrives on such difficulties and pains as a key to making the most of his life.

## Notes

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