

**Lesson
Eleven****Tennyson's Later Works****Aims**

By the end of this lesson you should be able to:

- analyse some of Tennyson's later and longer works
- continue to recognise the features of Tennyson's poetry in these poems as discussed in Lesson Nine
- consider the relevance of Tennyson's own personal life to an understanding of his poetry

Context

This final lesson continues the analysis of Tennyson's poems considering his later and longer works. Tennyson was a master of variety and in this section we consider the idylls, the monologue, the short epistolary poem, dialect poems and the elegy. This period of his life involved many changes such as the publication of the first penny newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* in 1855. Dickens was proving to be the first major author to cater successfully for the new lower-class readership. Most significantly, Tennyson achieved his childhood ambition to be 'a popular poet'.



Oxford Open Learning

'The Princess' – 1847

Can anybody in his senses,' asked a Victorian critic, 'imagine posterity speaking of our age as the age of Tennyson?' We may reasonably call it just that: for all its main features are reflected in his poetry. For example, the horrors of town life described by Tennyson in 'Maud' are the result of overcrowding as Tennyson lived in a period of momentous change. The population of England and Wales was increasing rapidly and the whole structure of society was being transformed by the Industrial Revolution.

Advances in education were also very slow. In the 1840s only about 2/3rds of the male population and half of the female were able to sign their names. Lord Brougham encouraged the formation of Mechanics' Institutes. These establishments enabled small libraries to be collected and working men could meet here for lectures and discussions. Tennyson used the annual festival of the Maidstone Mechanics' Institute as the scene of 'The Princess' (1847). This poem was published more than 20 years before the first serious statement of the feminist case by an established male writer (J.S. Mill's *The Subjection of Women* in 1869). This poem demonstrates how progressive Tennyson, who wasn't an established poet at the time, dared to be. This was his chance to focus on a political theme: women's rights, the education of women and the education of the poor. The following example demonstrates the situation in society at that time regarding attitudes to female education. In 1848 the Bishop of London forbade women to attend lectures at King's College on electricity.

The Princess was Tennyson's first long poem and some critics have described this as an attempt at Shakespearian comedy in narrative form. Tennyson spoke of this poem twenty-two years after its publication and he stated he thought of it 'with something of regret, of its fine blank verse, and the many good things in it,' adding that 'though truly original it is, after all, only a medley'. The framework setting to the main narrative includes a prologue and a conclusion. The main narrative consists of seven 'cantos' with the prince and narrator. The interludes chosen provided a respite from the main political concept, which dealt with issues of female liberation and education. Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera 'Princess Ida' was based upon this Tennyson poem.

The setting is Vivian Place, the seat of Sir Walter Vivian, who has given his park to the local Mechanics' Institute for a Victorian era summer fete. The premise of the poem is that seven students in the prologue create a storytelling game, which was an entertainment form popular with the Victorians. In between the tales the women were asked to bring light relief by singing and the lyrics are embedded within the framing narrative.

The anthology chosen by AQA only requires you to consider four lyrical sections of this long poem: 'The Splendour Falls...'; 'Tears, Idle Tears...'; 'Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal...' and 'Come Down, O Maid...'

It is important that you attempt to read the whole poem though and then this lesson will consider the individual analysis of each interlude. As you read try to consider what quintessential point you think Tennyson is trying to make about female education? What happens in the conclusion?

'The Splendour Falls...' is the third song in the poem and appears before Part Four. This interlude is sometimes called the bugle or echo song and it denies the power of fame to combat time, therefore denying Princess Ida's argument. The bugle plays a key role in this lyrical work as this instrument is used to express the poignancy and sorrow of life as it is played as an act of respect on the death of an individual. The bugle represents the presence of humanity (losses and longings) and the speaker's recognition that all human life is temporary. The personal 'echoes' of human lives 'grow for ever and for ever' through time. A number of literary devices are used to represent the view that human love and continuity are immortal. Tennyson uses onomatopoeia to highlight the echoes of the bugle call fading: 'Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying'. In the second stanza the fact that the bugle is played in a large natural setting indicates the longing of the living for eternal connection with the dead.

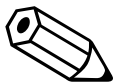
'Tears, Idle Tears' is a grave and elegiac poem that was composed at Tintern Abbey in Monmouthshire, an abbey that was abandoned in 1536. The convent inspired Tennyson as it seemed full of old memories so it is a poem about the 'passion of the past.' Tintern Abbey is not far from Hallam's burial place and this abbey is also the title and subject of a poem by William Wordsworth.

The structure is of four five-line stanzas consisting of unrhymed iambic pentameter. The poem does not rhyme and readers don't seem to notice its absence – why? Each stanza closes with the words 'the days that are no more'. This poem has been set to music a number of times.

The speaker describes the tears that rise in his heart when he thinks of the past. It is looking at the 'happy autumn-fields' that elicits his tears. The fact that these are autumn fields implies that they only hold memories of the spring and summer that has just passed. The poet has nothing to look forward to except the dark and interminable winter.

Activity 1

1. What effect does Tennyson's employment of similes have upon your understanding of the poem?
2. Consider the unusual adjectives Tennyson uses to describe the memory of the past. Comment on the use of these adjectives in the different stanzas and their effectiveness.
3. How does the speaker's response to his emotions contrast with that of Tithonus?



There are two seduction songs in the seventh section: 'Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal...' and 'Come Down, O Maid...'. Both songs herald the occasion and the cause of the princess's final yielding.

'Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal...' is a superb example of Tennyson's short lyrics and exquisite use of poetic language and is a celebration of sexual release and fulfilment. The poem emphasises the word 'now' as this word begins each of the four stanzas, which provides the poem with a sense of urgency.

This interlude refers to peacocks, cypresses, stars and lilies, which are all familiar symbols in Persian (modern-day Iran) love poetry. Ida sings this song to herself when she is considering the Prince's proposal. Each stanza is written in free verse. The word 'me' is repeated at the end of each stanza.

The first stanza provides a frame for the rest of the poem. The tranquil scene is set with the flowers in the garden described. The cypress not waving in the palace walk implies the stillness of the air around the palace. The nighttime scene is set as 'the firefly wakens, waken thou with me'.

Activity 2

Now consider the remaining stanzas. What literary devices does Tennyson use in each stanza and why?



'Come down, O maid...' immediately follows 'Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal...'. Tennyson composed this poem while travelling in Switzerland in 1846. This poem considers the height of the mountains and the cold juxtaposed with the warmth and shelter of the lowlands as 'Love is of the valley'. The poem finishes evocatively with the sensuousness of natural love: 'Sweeter thy voice, but every sound is sweet; Myriads of rivulets hurrying thro' the lawn, The moan of doves in immemorial elms, And murmuring of innumerable bees.'

'In Memoriam'- 1850

On 1 October 1833 the news reached Tennyson of the death of his friend, Arthur Henry Hallam, of apoplexy, in Vienna. His body was brought by sea from Trieste to England, and was buried at Clevedon, Somerset, on 3rd January 1834. The poem contains references to many of these facts and also to some other matters not directly connected with Hallam. It is a sequence of elegiac and meditative pieces, which are often confessional in nature.

Arthur Henry Hallam was the son of Henry Hallam the historian, and was about 18 months younger than Tennyson. At Trinity, Cambridge, they formed an intimate friendship, and travelled in Germany and France together. On a visit to Somersby, Hallam fell in love with the poet's sister, Emily, but their relationship was frowned upon by Hallam's father, Henry Hallam. But by the time of his son's death, the elder Hallam had relaxed his attitude to the union, and the lovers had been engaged to be married.

Arthur Hallam's death was the single most important event in Tennyson's life. He was devastated by the news. All Hallam's friends and contemporaries, including Gladstone, later Prime Minister of Britain, concurred that Hallam was one of the most brilliant minds of his generation, and that had he lived he would have achieved great things. To make matters worse, Hallam was a staunch champion of Tennyson's poetry at a time when the poet was struggling against hostile reviewers and an indifferent public. As well as writing articles on Tennyson's poetry, Hallam acted informally as Tennyson's literary agent. When Hallam died, Tennyson lost his best friend, his future brother-in-law, and his most enthusiastic critic and supporter.

There has been much debate about the precise nature of Tennyson's feelings for Hallam. Was the relationship homosexual? It seems unlikely, despite the fact that Tennyson often addresses Hallam as if he were a lover. Speculation is futile, largely because Tennyson's son destroyed all his father's letters from Hallam, and Hallam's father destroyed his son's letters from Tennyson.

The Stanza Structure of 'In Memoriam'

Rhyming ABBA, the stanza ebbs and flows, always returning upon itself. It is not a stanza form which is particularly suited to connected argument. Rather it seems always to stave off the point where a conclusion must be reached.

Charles Kingsley said of the stanzas:

their metre, so exquisitely chosen, that while the major rhyme in the second and third lines of each stanza gives the solidity and self-restraint required by such deep themes, the mournful minor rhyme of each first and fourth line always leads the ear to expect something beyond.

Look at some of the ways Tennyson uses this stanza pattern in 'In Memoriam'.

In VII the paradox is that the familiarity of the street and the house to the poet only serve to make the experience more alien to him when the dawn reveals a loved scene to be 'bald' and 'blank'.

What is the Date of Composition?

(Some of the following notes deal with issues that pertain to the whole poem, notwithstanding the fact that your set work contains only a small selection from the whole sequence.)

This is a long and intricate question, and all that can be done here is to give the conclusions reached by scholars, based on internal and external evidence. We know that certain sections were written soon after Hallam's death.

Certain others belong to the years 1836-7. One of two can be dated about 1840. Many others belong to a period between 1840 and publication in 1850. But both Prologue and Epilogue imply that the bulk of the poem belongs to a time separated by some distance from 1849 and even 1842. Beyond this we cannot go. The sections are thus by no means chronologically arranged. But this makes no difference, in the event, to our enjoyment of the poem, or even our understanding of it.

Tennyson settled on this final arrangement of the sections because he found that, thus arranged, they formed a coherent whole and offered a significant structure. Tennyson sometimes referred to 'In Memoriam' as 'The Way of the Soul', and the changes in the 'Way' should be carefully observed by an attentive reader, otherwise much of the beauty and meaning of the poem is lost.

Structure


'In Memoriam' is a vast work consisting of a total of 131 separate, numbered poems, all of which use the same four-line stanza. They vary greatly in length, with some as short as three stanzas. Others are much longer. The last poem in the series, no. 131, for example, is 39 stanzas long.

It is impossible to obtain an impression of the whole work based on the extracts given in your set work (only 14 of the 131 poems are presented). However, the notes below are intended to give you an approximate picture of the overall pattern of 'In Memoriam'.

Before looking at the notes below, here is an activity for you to do that is based on identifying some of the central images of the poem and working out how frequently they occur.

Activity 3

Look at the table below, which lists the frequency of occurrence of certain images in the whole of 'In Memoriam'. In the blank column, write down how often each of these images occurs in the selection in your set work. (You will need to read through pp. 50-60 carefully in order to be able to complete this activity. An answer is given at the end of the lesson.

	number of occurrences in whole work	image	number of occurrences in selection
		9	bell, ring
	6	Christmas	
	97	death, sleep	
	12	door	
	24	dream, vision	
	31	hand	
	22	bird	
	17	shadow	
	30	ships & seafaring	
	33	song	
	18	tears (& cries)	
	37	time, hour	
	6	veil	
	4	wasteland	

The poem falls into four main parts, with groups within each part. The following scheme indicates the principal changes in the course of ideas through which Tennyson moves:

1. To the First Christmas (Prologue to XXVII)

The poet is absorbed in his grief but rises at length to the conclusion 'tis better to have loved and lost / Than never to have loved at all'. Love should survive loss. There is no suggestion that the lost friend still 'exists'. Distinct groupings of poems emerge in this part. For example, IX-XVII allude to the coming of the ship, while XXII-XXV consist of a retrospect of the years of friendship.

2. To the Second Christmas (XXVIII to LXXVII)

In this section we meet the idea that the dead continue to exist, and by reflecting on this concept of immortality the poet can move forward in faith. There is much philosophic speculation. Distinct groups of poems can be analysed as follows:

XXVIII – XXX: At Christmas the thought of the continued life of the dead emerges.

XXXI – XXXVI: Immortality is 'a truth revealed' and implied inhuman nature.

XL – XLVII: the question of future reunion is raised; is earthly life remembered after death?

L – LVI: a longing that the dead friend should be near the poet now raises fears and doubts; the poet's unworthiness, the pain, waste and wrong in the world. He only has a blind trust in the hope that love is the law of creation.

LX – LXV: here the poet loses his doubts and expresses the faith that love cannot be lost, and there is a gradual advance towards quiet resignation, sympathy with others, acceptance of the beauty of the past.

LXVII – LXXI: Night, Sleep and Dreams.

LXXIII – LXXVII: Fame.

3. To the Third Christmas (LXXVIII – CIII)

An overview of this section is difficult to achieve, since many sections are really 'occasional' poems, and the idea of future life is remote again. Distinct groups are as follows:

LXXIX – LXXXIX: far from coherently related, but the tone of quiet looking backwards and sense of a new life make up the prevailing impression.

XC – XCV: the possible contact of the living with the dead, an idea considered from various angles, and apparently realised in the 'trance' of XCV.

C – CIII: the poet's farewell to his childhood home: he begins to turn his eyes from the past.

4. From the Third Christmas (CIV – CXXXI)

A sustained forward-looking optimism prevails, regret diminishes, love grows and deepens. Hallam becomes a 'type' of the nobler humanity to come, and is mingled with that Love that is the soul of the universe.

Distinct groups of poems can be identified as follows:

CIV – CVI: Christmas and New Year in the new home.

CVII –CVIII: a resolve to abandon sorrow.

CIX – CXIV: Hallam's character, and the dangers of progress.

CXVII – CXXXI: a loosely-knit group, unified by expression of faith in the individual and the collective future. The poet looks back to the stages by which he has 'won through' to complete faith in 'the one far-off divine event'.

Activity 4

See if you can find a copy of the whole of 'In Memoriam' in a library or via the Internet. You will probably not want to read the whole elegy, as it's very long, but you should look at several pages of consecutive poems, at least, to see how they fit together in a sequence.

Faith and Doubt

Tennyson's friend Spedding analysed the state of mind explored in a poem of Tennyson entitled 'The Two Voices'. Although this poem does not appear in your set work, Spedding's comments have a bearing on our understanding of Tennyson's personality, and also on some of his poems that are presented in *The Victorian Poets*, particularly *In Memoriam*:

The disease is familiar; but where are we to look for the remedy? Many persons would have thought it enough to administer a little religious consolation to the diseased mind; but unfortunately despondency is no more like ignorance than atrophy is like hunger; and as the most nutritious food will not nourish the latter, so the most comfortable doctrine will not refresh the former. Not the want of consoling topics, but the incapacity to receive consolation, constitutes the disease. Others would have been content to give the bad voice the worst of the argument; but, unhappily, all moral reasoning must ultimately rest on the internal evidence of the moral sense; and where this is disordered, the most unquestionable logic can conclude nothing . . . The dialogue ends, (as such a dialogue, if truly reported, must always do,) leaving everything unsettled, and nothing concluded.

Tennyson himself said of his despondency:

In my youth I knew much greater unhappiness than I have known in later life. When I was about twenty, I used to feel moods of misery unutterable! I remember once in London the realization coming over me, of the whole of its inhabitants lying horizontal a hundred years hence. The smallness and emptiness of life sometimes overwhelmed me.

And Edward Fitzgerald wrote:

We have surely had enough of men reporting their sorrows: especially when one is aware all the time that the poet wilfully protracts what he complains of, magnifies it in the Imagination, puts it into all the shapes of Fancy: and yet we are to condole with him, and be taught to ruminare our losses and sorrows in the same way. I felt that if Tennyson had got on a horse and ridden 20 miles, instead of moaning over his pipe, he would have been cured of his sorrows in half the time. As it is, it is about 3 years before the Poetic Soul walks itself out of darkness and Despair into Common Sense.

T.S. Eliot made a provocative remark about 'In Memoriam', claiming that the poem 'is not religious because of the quality of its faith, but because of the quality of its doubt. Its faith is a poor thing, but its doubt is a very intense experience'. Tennyson himself said 'It's too hopeful, this poem, more than I am myself'.

'The Charge of the Light Brigade'

Tennyson's feelings about national issues were explored extensively in later poems such as 'Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington'. This was a commemorative poem with a sonorous funeral ode. Tennyson produced a large number of pieces about the subject of war and heroism. Tennyson's instinctive feeling was that courage was an admirable thing, even in the context of sheer inefficiency.

The Crimean War began with the defence of Turkey against Russia. To Tennyson and his contemporaries the Crimean War was viewed as just and necessary. To us in modern society retrospectively the war seems an example of diplomatic and military incompetence.

'The Charge of the Light Brigade' was a very popular piece with the British public. This poem was written a few minutes after Tennyson had read *The Times* (2nd December 1854) in which there was an account of the Crimean charge which took place on the 25th October 1854. In the article written by the world's first war correspondent, William Howard Russell, occurred the phrase 'some one had blundered' and this was the origin of the metre of the poem.

The reporter had viewed the battle at Balaklava from a height and he had described what he had viewed as plainly 'as the stage and those upon it are seen from the box of a theatre.' The report was graphic and explained the attack and the retreat: 'At 11:35 not a British soldier, except the dead and dying, was left in front of those bloody Muscovite guns.'

Activity 5

1. Why do you think Tennyson wrote this poem? What is the function of this poem?
2. What ideal of heroism does the poem depict?
3. Do you find it convincing? Why or why not?

**'From Maud: a Monodrama' – 1855**

The original title of this poem was 'Maud or the Madness'. Madness is the central theme. Personal experiences made up the raw materials of this poem. The narrator's pathologically resentful father sounds like Dr. Tennyson. Tennyson described this as a 'monodrama' in which the speaker tells their story in a sequence of short lyrics in varying meter. This is perhaps his most experimental piece of writing and the reader must fill in the story by inference. 'Maud' was published in the same year that Tennyson received a doctorate from the University of Oxford. Tennyson described this poem as:

'the history of a morbid, poetic soul, under the blighting influence of a recklessly speculative age. He is the heir of madness, an egotist with the makings of a cynic, raised to sanity by a pure and holy love which elevates his whole nature, passing from the height of triumph to the lowest depth of misery, driven into madness by the loss of her whom he has loved, and, when he has at length passed through the fiery furnace, and has recovered his reason, giving himself up to work for the good of mankind through the unselfishness of his great passion'.

The hero is divided against himself in a similar way to the nation in which he lives and this division is symbolized in the text by the different types of stanzas deployed by Tennyson.

In this poem we again see the feature of Tennyson's poetry that enables him to distance himself from his speakers. For example, in 'The Princess' the central male figure is prone to fainting fits. In 'Maud', the hero is verging on insanity.

As in *In Memoriam*, the fact of death is physically present. The opening statement reveals the shock at the death of the hero's father in the 'dreadful hollow'. The hero is disturbed at his father's suicide and his mother's early death. He is horrified but he also dwells on the details involving the father's body: 'Mangled, and flatten'd, and crush'd, and dented into the ground'.

The narrator lives in a similar way to Mariana 'alone in an empty house'. The emptiness is filled temporarily by Maud's arrival. The hero was betrothed to Maud, the lord's daughter, when they were children but she and her family had left the area after the suicide. In Part 2 Maud is described as a cold and distant vision:

'A cold and clear-cut face, as I found when her carriage past,
Perfectly beautiful: let it be granted her: where is the fault?
All that I saw (for her eyes were downcast, not to be seen)
Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null,
Dead perfection, no more;'

'Come into the garden, Maud' is one of the most well known sections of the poem. This dramatic monologue appears in section 22 of Part One and marks the fulfilment of the narrator's love and the separation from life, which characterizes the hero's situation. The narrator standing 'at the gate alone' tries to convince Maud to leave the vitality and life of the ball, implying that she is weary of dance and play. It demonstrates the extreme sensuousness of nature. The sexually explicit imagery of this section is violently juxtaposed with the opening of Part Two. In the missing gap between Parts One and Two the duel has occurred.

'The fault was mine, the fault was mine'-
Why am I sitting here so stunn'd and still,
Plucking the harmless wild-flower on the hill? -
It is this guilty hand! -

Part Two provides the counter-reaction to the delusory romantic comedy. The killing of Maud's brother and Maud's subsequent death from grief mean that the rest of the poem relies on the memories of the heroine, which exist within the narrator's disintegrating consciousness.

Finally, Part Three uses the episode of the Crimean War as the solution for the hero's difficulties. It could be implied that by entering the war the narrator has exchanged self-destruction for the destruction of others. 'I have felt with my native land, I am one with

my kind, I embrace the purpose of God, and the doom assign'd (III, 6).

'Merlin and Vivien'

Tennyson's ideas for a large piece of work developed from his own boyish hero-worship of King Arthur. Tennyson called this 'the greatest of all poetical subjects' (*Memoir*, volume 2, p.125). *Idylls of the King* is based on a recasting of the Arthurian legend. They display the decline of man's kingdom; in which Tennyson projected the downfall of Victorian society through a number of moralizing episodes. Arthur is often seen as the embodiment of Victorian ideals. These idylls comment on the history of England during Tennyson's lifetime, which he saw as a period of political and scientific progress followed by one of spiritual decline.

'Merlin and Vivien' is one of the best and most simplistic idylls and central to the entire *Idylls of the King*. This is the second of the idylls to be written, after 'Morte d'Arthur'. It is the sixth of the twelve poems. The anthology only provides a section from this epic tale. The premise is taken from a very short paragraph in Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* that depicts Merlin's infatuation with, and failure to seduce, the lake damsel Nimue. Nimue becomes Vivien in Tennyson's poem.

Merlin is the magician whose purity was the wellspring of his power. Vivien is the harlot, a destroyer of the Idylls and a creature of the elements who is determined to try to enchant Merlin. The main element of the story is described in lines 214-216:

... upon the great Enchanter of the Time,
As fancying that her glory would be great
According to his greatness whom she quench'd.

Vivien plays upon an old man's desire for love: 'Would flatter his own wish in age for love,/ And half believe her true.'

Music symbolism is rife throughout the *Idylls of the King*. In each of the first eleven Idylls, except 'Geraint and Enid' there is a song. Lines 385-397 of 'Merlin and Vivien' include a song, which is part of Vivien's disruptive persuasion. The song expresses the view that trust is all or nothing. In a similar way, if there is a small fault in a lute it will affect all of the music and eventually make the instrument unemployable. Vivien is the 'little rift within the lute' of her own song.

The final section printed in the anthology shows Merlin being swayed a little by Vivien, 'And Merlin look'd and half believed her true'. This foreshadows the end of the poem when he can't resist her charms. Suddenly Tennyson informs us that Merlin has given in.

Tennyson actually avoids describing the precise moment. Vivien uses the magic charm against the great magician. Merlin's fall represents the defeat of the mind that informs the kingdom. Critics and readers are often puzzled why such a wise man yields to Vivien. This is the failure of human wisdom because it is human and subject to time and linked to flesh.

In most versions of the story Merlin is infatuated with Vivien. In this one, he is not.

Activity 6

1. Why does Tennyson interpret the story in this way?
2. What do you think this story says about Victorian attitudes?
3. Look at the description from lines 217- 242. Is this a typical Victorian way of describing Vivien's revealing dress and seduction techniques?



Julia Margaret Cameron was a well-known British Victorian photographer. Her friend and neighbour Alfred Tennyson commissioned her final project in 1874. He asked her to illustrate a new extravagant edition of his *Idylls of the King*. Cameron took a number of photographs of people dressed and posed to be characters from Tennyson's poems. In the picture below we see Cameron's husband, Henry Hay Cameron, posing as Tennyson's Merlin. The girl playing Vivien is unidentified.



Mr. Cameron, in the role of Merlin stands in front of “the hollow oak” (carried in from Tennyson’s property). ‘Merlin and Vivien’ opens with a description of this huge oak, a national symbol of stability and endurance, now old and hollow, helpless against the impending storm. The poses and positions the actors adopt are revealing. Look at Vivien’s gesture as she turns and points to Merlin (Cameron termed this gesture as ‘piquante’). Merlin appears in a trance, which makes this image representative of the casting of a spell. Merlin’s downfall by Vivien marks the end of hope: the fall of Camelot, the person who had represented wisdom is lost.

Tennyson's later poetry was wide-ranging including dialect poems ('Northern farmer, old style' and 'Northern farmer, new style') and epistolary poems ('To E. Fitzgerald').

'To E. Fitzgerald'

This is a verse letter to Tennyson's old friend 'Fitz' Edward Fitzgerald (1809-83). Lines 1-56 are an example of an epistolary poem. This is written in unseparated quatrains. It recalls past times and intimate memories. It is witty and poignant.

Tennyson also wrote seven poems in Lincolnshire dialect beginning with 'Northern Farmer, old style' (1864) and ending with the Church-warden and the Curate (1892). These dialect poems were based on first-hand knowledge gained from Tennyson's youth at Somersby. They are all highly original poems, which show his capacity for humour and subtlety. These dialect poems are realistic and contain unsentimental characterisation. The phonetic spelling and dialect words can be easily overcome and they reveal an unexpected aspect of Tennyson's personality and talent.

'Northern Farmer: new style' – 1869

This is a dialect poem from the North of England – a poem about common life. Tennyson uses characteristics of the Northern dialect throughout the poem, e.g. 'thou', 'tha' and 'awaay' which demonstrates the characteristic Northern vowel lengthening. This was intended as a companion poem to 'Northern Farmer: Old Style' in which a dying father faces death with a stoical attitude and remembers how he cleared a notorious stretch of wasteland. He also demands his nurse bring him his own favourite tipple-gin!

In 'Northern Farmer: New Style' this farmer is obsessed with property or 'propetty' as he calls it. He is independent and intent on extending his property. The farmer offers business advice on the subject of love and marriage. His son Sam has fallen in love with the parson's daughter although the father doesn't approve, as the parson is poor. He informs his son that he is a fool and that he must marry wisely (in his dad's eyes this would mean marrying for money): 'Thou'll not marry for munny-thou's sweet upo' parson's lass- Noa- thou'll marry for luvv-an' we boath on us thinks tha an ass'.

The father even tells his son that he doesn't do this he will be disinherited in favour of Dick (the younger son): 'But if thou marries a bad un, I'll leave the land to Dick'.

This conversation is played out while they are driving on the highway or sitting in the gig waiting for Sam to break a stick for the horse.

'Crossing the Bar' - 1889

Traditionally, this is always the last poem in Tennyson's collections. He had asked his son Hallam to ensure that this was at the very end of all his editions of his work. It is believed this was written as his elegy as there is a finality to it. He wrote this during a serious illness at sea, three years before he died. It is composed of four stanzas with a mixture of long and short lines and an ABAB rhyme scheme. Scholars have commented on the wavelike quality of this poem, which complements the narrative theme of the poem.

There is an extended metaphor of death and crossing to the other side. Tennyson wants to die in a peaceful way and the sea is a metaphor for death. The waves and the nature of the sea are seen as the way you go, the manner in which you die. The pilot is assumed to be God.

Notice the symmetry of the poem's construction. It is composed of two sentences, each occupying two stanzas. Each of the two sentences begins with an exclamation. The last rhyme of stanza four, 'far / bar', returns us to the first rhyme, 'star / bar'. The poem thus returns to its beginning. In its own words it 'turns again home'.

The metaphor of the sandbar depicts the divider between life and death. A sandbar is a ridge of sand that is built up by currents along a shore. To reach the shore, the waves must crash against the sandbar and Tennyson calls this sound, 'the moaning of the bar'. 'Liminal states' are referred to throughout Tennyson's poetry. The bar in this poem is an example of liminality.

Sample Essay Questions on Tennyson

1. Discuss Tennyson as a poet of contrasts and conflicts.
2. Write on Tennyson's treatment of any one of the following themes, making close reference to two or three poems in your anthology: old age, death and immortality, isolation, religious doubt.
3. Write on Tennyson either as a poet of nature or as a dramatic poet.
4. Write an essay about Tennyson as a poet of paradox.
5. Tennyson sometimes referred to his 'In Memoriam' as 'The Way of the Soul'. Basing your answer on the extracts from the elegy

that appear in your set work, comment on the aptness or otherwise of this alternative title.

6. In what ways does Tennyson interpret the thought and tastes of his age?
7. Comment on the view expressed by F. L. Lucas that 'what survives in Tennyson is the painter and the musician'.

Suggested Answer to Activity Three

number of occurrences in whole work	image	number of occurrences in selection
9	bell, ring	2
6	Christmas	4
97	death, sleep	10
12	door	3
24	dream, vision	1
31	hand	3
22	bird	4
17	shadow	2
30	ships & seafaring	1
33	song	5
18	tears (& cries)	1
37	time, hour	6
6	veil	2
4	wasteland	1

Images of death and sleep are the most common in his work as a whole and in this selection. Many of the images of time passing also express related ideas.