

Discuss Tennyson as a Representative Poet.

Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) is a great British poet of the Victorian Age (1832-1901). He was the Poet Laureate of Great Britain and Ireland during much of Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901). His poems reflect the themes and concerns of the time. He is regarded as the representative poet of the Victorian Age.

The Note will cover the following questions:

- Discuss Tennyson as a representative poet.
- Or, Tennyson is the most complete and comprehensive representation of his age.
- Or, How does Tennyson highlight the Victorian spirit in his poems?

Meaning of Representative Poet:

The term 'Representative Poet' means a poet who displays contemporary society, art, philosophy, and religion. Alfred Lord Tennyson represents the Victorian spirit entirely. Tennyson, as a representative poet, is discussed below.

Desire and Aspiration for Adventure: Adventure was the soul of the Victorian spirit. Tennyson's poems relate to the thirst for adventure. In the poems "The Lotos Eaters" and "Ulysses", we find Odysseus's indomitable, adventurous attitude. Tennyson has reflected on the lives and tendencies of Victorian people through Odysseus.

I cannot rest from travel: I will drink

Life to the Lees:

Inferiority to Women:

Early and middle Victorian people viewed women as inferior to men from the perspective of mental power and prestige. They thought the responsibilities of women were to handle household chores and reproduce children. Such attitude to women is firmly declared in the poems of Tennyson such as "Locksley Hall." Tennyson says,

Nature made them blinder motions bounded in a shallower brain:

Woman is the lesser man,

The Victorian husband considered marriage to be an institution for securing his comfort and satisfaction.

Excessive Materialistic Tendency: The excessive materialistic tendency is dominant in “Locksley Hall”. This is evident in the speaker’s failure in love. Amy’s father wanted and forced her to marry a wealthy man. Tennyson depicts a society where love is of no value to money. Being an unwealthy orphan, the speaker lost his love. Moreover, the speaker envisions that future nations will become obsessed with money and commodities. He highlights that this nation will engage in war with one another.

Conflict Between Science and Religion or Faith: Perhaps no period witnessed such an acute conflict between faith and religion as in the Victorian era. Tennyson, in many of his poems, offers a remedy for this acute conflict between science and faith, which he calls “Victorian Compromise.”

Class Distinction: Victorian society divided people into two classes, creating conflict between the upper and lower classes. The hero of the poem “Locksley Hall” could not marry his beloved because of his lower social and economic background.

Cursed be the sickly forms that err from honest Nature's rule!

Cursed be the gold that gilds the straiten'd forehead of the fool!

Tennyson sketches society's excessive materialistic outlook and class differences through such a wrathful expression.

Escape from Responsibility: Human beings are not machines. They feel tired and need to rest after a long struggle in life. Victorian people were no exception to this tendency. They sometimes wanted to escape from the responsibility of life, as the poem “The Lotos Eaters” declares.

Let us swear an oath, and keep it with an equal mind,

In the hollow Lotos-land to live and lie reclined.

Besides, the desire for eternal life in the poem "Tithonus" and the passion for beauty in "Oenone" are also signs of Victorian temper.

In conclusion, to modern readers, Tennyson reflected his era more than any of his contemporary poets. His poems accurately portray the thoughts, attitudes, and lifestyles of the Victorian era. These helped him establish himself as a representative poet of that time.

LxNotes