



Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Victorian Ballads

The Victorians:

- Nobody loved a good story like the Victorians!
- During the Victorian era, the world moved on apace and ordinary people had more leisure time than ever before.
- This was the Age of Steam, of Engineering, of literacy for the masses. It was also a time of great artistic and literary innovation – the British Empire was the largest the world had ever seen and the British people wanted to understand what made them so unique, so successful and so filled with the Spirit of Endeavour...
- ... and how better to understand the present, than by exploring the past?



The Myths of Camelot:

- One of the ways in which the Victorians sought to understand their heritage was through the myths of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.
- Their code of chivalry, their Christian ethos and their adventurous spirit appealed to the Victorians; they liked the ideal of the brave knights, who slayed dragons, defeated enemies and saved their ladies fair.
- This chivalric tradition gave people a sense of pride and place – they knew that, as they were descended from such great heroes, they too could be heroic in the face of adversity.



Lesson One – King Arthur:

- We are going to explore one of the greatest Victorian poets: Alfred, Lord Tennyson. Before we do, however, it would be nice for you to understand some of the myths which informed his famous ballad poetry.
- Asking a grown-up for help, research King Arthur, Camelot and the Knights of the Round Table. You may wish to use books or the internet.
- When you have done some research, choose **one** of the following tasks:
 1. Create a painting, collage or model which depicts Camelot. Try to include as much detail as possible.
 2. Choose one of the characters you have researched (for example, you might wish to pick Queen Guinevere, Sir Lancelot, Merlin or even King Arthur himself) and write a story or monologue in which you tell your readers about them.



Alfred, Lord Tennyson:

- Alfred, Lord Tennyson, was born in Lincolnshire in 1809.
- He began writing poetry when he was in his teenage years. After attending King Edward VI Grammar School, he won a place at Trinity College, Cambridge where, in 1829, he was awarded the Chancellor's Gold Medal for Poetry.
- Tennyson was appointed Poet Laureate in 1850, after the death of William Wordsworth (about whom you can learn in the lesson entitled *Poetic Techniques*, on the **Patriotic Alternative** website).
- Some of his best-known poems are *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, *Mariana* and *The Lady of Shalot*.
- Tennyson had a great deal of influence upon The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. You can learn more about this group of artists in the **Patriotic Alternative** document called *Be Proud of Your People*.
- Alfred, Lord Tennyson, died on 6th October, 1892.





The Characteristics of Ballad Poetry:

- Ballads are stories told in verse.
- They are usually written in the rhythm known as *iambic pentameter* (which goes “da-dum-da-dum-da-dum-da-dum”)
- They have a regular rhyme scheme (usually abcb).
- There is often a refrain or repetition.
- Stock phrases or epithets are often used to remind the reader of certain characters and characteristics (remember “Homeric epithets”?)
- Most ballads have a clear moral perspective. Victorian ballads, in particular, are firmly placed in the Christian Tradition.



The Charge of the Light Brigade

The Charge of the Light Brigade

- This beautiful poem was written in 1854, during the Crimean War.
- As Poet Laureate, Tennyson was charged with writing poetry which was patriotic and celebrated the achievements of the British Empire.
- This poem celebrates the charge of the Light Cavalry Brigade which took place in the Battle of Balaclava, during the Siege of Sevastopol.
- The brave, outnumbered cavalry charged into almost certain death: in this poem, Tennyson rejoices in their courage in the face of such adversity.



The Charge of the Light Brigade

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
"Forward, the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!" he said:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

"Forward, the Light Brigade!"
Was there a man dismay'd?
Not tho' the soldier knew
Some one had blunder'd:
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred.



Flash'd all their sabres bare,
Flash'd as they turn'd in air
Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while
All the world wonder'd:
Plunged in the battery-smoke
Right thro' the line they broke;
Cossack and Russian
Reel'd from the sabre-stroke
Shatter'd and sunder'd.
Then they rode back, but not
Not the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell,
They that had fought so well
Came thro' the jaws of Death,
Back from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them,
Left of six hundred.

When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wonder'd.
Honour the charge they made!
Honour the Light Brigade,
Noble six hundred!

Lesson Two – Analysing *The Charge of the Light Brigade*:

- Read the poem aloud, making sure that you take time to understand the sounds of the words and the rhythm. Look up any words which you do not know.
- Now consider the characteristics of ballad poetry, which we explored earlier. Tick off those which you can see in this poem.

<u>Characteristic:</u>	<u>Yes / No:</u>
A story, told in verse.	
Iambic Pentameter.	
Regular rhyme scheme.	
Refrain or repetition.	
Stock phrases or epithets.	
Clear moral and/or Christian perspective.	

The Meaning of the Poem:

- In full sentences, answer the questions below and give **reasons and evidence** for your responses:
 1. What do you think is Tennyson's opinion about the men in the Light Brigade?
 2. How would you describe the charge? How would you describe the men who took part in the assault?
 3. Looking at Tennyson's use of language, how typical is this poem of the ballad tradition?
 4. What do you think is the **moral** of this poem? Can we learn any lessons from it?
 5. What is **your** opinion of this poem? Did you enjoy it? If so, why? If not, why not?





Mariana



Mariana

- *Mariana* is one of Tennyson's most famous poems.
- It was first published in 1830 and was later painted by the celebrated Pre-Raphaelite, John Everett Millais.
- It concerns the themes of loneliness and isolation, which Tennyson often considered.
- Its subject, Mariana, is the archetypal "Damsel in Distress" – she is alone in the world and waiting for her "knight in shining armour" to rescue her from her tower.



Mariana

With blackest moss the flower-plots
Were thickly crusted, one and all:
The rusted nails fell from the knots
That held the pear to the gable-wall.
The broken sheds look'd sad and strange:
Unlifted was the clinking latch;
Weeded and worn the ancient thatch
Upon the lonely moated grange.
She only said, "My life is dreary,
He cometh not," she said;
She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!"

Her tears fell with the dews at even;
Her tears fell ere the dews were dried;
She could not look on the sweet heaven,
Either at morn or eventide.
After the flitting of the bats,
When thickest dark did trance the sky,
She drew her casement-curtain by,
And glanced athwart the glooming flats.
She only said, "The night is dreary,
He cometh not," she said;
She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!"



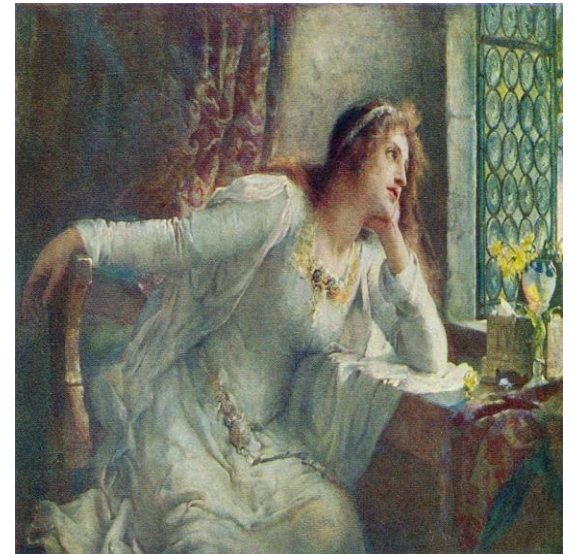
Upon the middle of the night,
Waking she heard the night-fowl crow:
The cock sung out an hour ere light:
From the dark fen the oxen's low
Came to her: without hope of change,
In sleep she seem'd to walk forlorn,
Till cold winds woke the gray-eyed morn
About the lonely moated grange.
She only said, "The day is dreary,
He cometh not," she said;
She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!"

About a stone-cast from the wall
A sluice with blacken'd waters slept,
And o'er it many, round and small,
The cluster'd marish-mosses crept.
Hard by a poplar shook alway,
All silver-green with gnarled bark:
For leagues no other tree did mark
The level waste, the rounding gray.
She only said, "My life is dreary,
He cometh not," she said;
She said "I am aweary, aweary
I would that I were dead!"



And ever when the moon was low,
And the shrill winds were up and away,
In the white curtain, to and fro,
She saw the gusty shadow sway.
But when the moon was very low
And wild winds bound within their cell,
The shadow of the poplar fell
Upon her bed, across her brow.
She only said, "The night is dreary,
He cometh not," she said;
She said "I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!"

All day within the dreamy house,
The doors upon their hinges creak'd;
The blue fly sung in the pane; the mouse
Behind the mouldering wainscot shriek'd,
Or from the crevice peer'd about.
Old faces glimmer'd thro' the doors
Old footsteps trod the upper floors,
Old voices called her from without.
She only said, "My life is dreary,
He cometh not," she said;
She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!"



The sparrow's chirrup on the roof,
The slow clock ticking, and the sound
Which to the wooing wind aloof
The poplar made, did all confound
Her sense; but most she loathed the hour
When the thick-moted sunbeam lay
Athwart the chambers, and the day
Was sloping toward his western bower.
Then said she, "I am very dreary,
He will not come," she said;
She wept, "I am weary, weary,
Oh God, that I were dead!"



Lesson Three – Creative Writing:

- Read through the poem carefully and look up any words you do not know.
- Read the poem aloud, in order to ensure that you understand the poem's rhythm and rhyme schemes.
- What do you think is the **moral** of the poem?
 - Imagine that you are Mariana.
 - Write a **monologue**, from Mariana's perspective, in which you explore her situation and her feelings. Create a story in which you explain her loneliness and isolation.
 - How do you think her story will end?





The Lady of Shalott





The Lady of Shalott:

- This poem is probably Tennyson's most famous. It was written in 1832 and focuses on the Arthurian legend of Elaine of Astolat, who was a young noblewoman imprisoned near the city of Camelot.
- In this extraordinary poem, Tennyson encapsulates all of the most celebrated characteristics of the Victorian ballad.
- It demonstrates every trope of the ballad form, comprising Christian morality, Arthurian legend, Homeric epithet and chronological narrative.
- It is, to all intents and purposes, the most perfect ballad in modern English.

The Lady of Shalott: Part One

On either side the river lie

Long fields of barley and of rye,

That clothe the wold and meet the sky;

And thro' the field the road runs by

To many-tower'd Camelot;

The yellow-leaved waterlily

The green-sheathed daffodilly

Tremble in the water chilly

Round about Shalott.

Willows whiten, aspens shiver.

The sunbeam showers break and quiver

In the stream that runneth ever

By the island in the river

Flowing down to Camelot.

Four gray walls, and four gray towers

Overlook a space of flowers,

And the silent isle imbowers

The Lady of Shalott.



Underneath the bearded barley,
The reaper, reaping late and early,
Hears her ever chanting cheerly,
Like an angel, singing clearly,
O'er the stream of Camelot.
Piling the sheaves in furrows airy,
Beneath the moon, the reaper weary
Listening whispers, ' 'Tis the fairy,
Lady of Shalott.'

The little isle is all inrail'd
With a rose-fence, and overtrail'd
With roses: by the marge unhail'd
The shallop flitteth silken sail'd,
Skimming down to Camelot.
A pearl garland winds her head:
She leaneth on a velvet bed,
Full royally apparelled,
The Lady of Shalott.



The Lady of Shalott: Part Two

No time hath she to sport and play:

A charmed web she weaves alway.

A curse is on her, if she stay

Her weaving, either night or day,

To look down to Camelot.

She knows not what the curse may be;

Therefore she weaveth steadily,

Therefore no other care hath she,

The Lady of Shalott.

She lives with little joy or fear.

Over the water, running near,

The sheepbell tinkles in her ear.

Before her hangs a mirror clear,

Reflecting tower'd Camelot.

And as the mazy web she whirls,

She sees the surly village churls,

And the red cloaks of market girls

Pass onward from Shalott.



Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
An abbot on an ambling pad,
Sometimes a curly shepherd lad,
Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad,
 Goes by to tower'd Camelot:
And sometimes thro' the mirror blue
The knights come riding two and two:
She hath no loyal knight and true,
 The Lady of Shalott.

But in her web she still delights
To weave the mirror's magic sights,
For often thro' the silent nights
A funeral, with plumes and lights
 And music, came from Camelot:
Or when the moon was overhead
Came two young lovers lately wed;
'I am half sick of shadows,' said
 The Lady of Shalott.



The Lady of Shalott: Part Three

A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,
He rode between the barley-sheaves,
The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves,
And flam'd upon the brazen greaves
Of bold Sir Lancelot.
A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd
To a lady in his shield,
That sparkled on the yellow field,
Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,
Like to some branch of stars we see
Hung in the golden Galaxy.
The bridle bells rang merrily
As he rode down from Camelot:
And from his blazon'd baldric slung
A mighty silver bugle hung,
And as he rode his armour rung,
Beside remote Shalott.





All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,
The helmet and the helmet-feather
Burn'd like one burning flame together,
As he rode down from Camelot.
As often thro' the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
Moves over green Shalott.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd;
On burnish'd hooves his war-horse trode;
From underneath his helmet flow'd
His coal-black curls as on he rode,
As he rode down from Camelot.
From the bank and from the river
He flash'd into the crystal mirror,
'Tirra lirra, tirra lirra:'
Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web, she left the loom
She made three paces thro' the room
She saw the water-flower bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
 She look'd down to Camelot.
Out flew the web and floated wide;
The mirror crack'd from side to side;
'The curse is come upon me,' cried
 The Lady of Shalott.



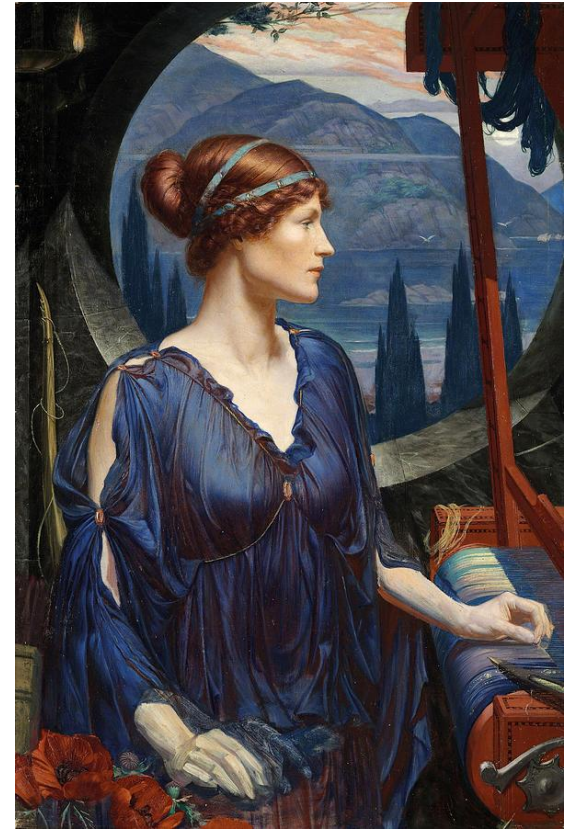
The Lady of Shalott: Part Four

In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining
Over tower'd Camelot;
Outside the isle a shallow boat
Beneath a willow lay afloat,
Below the carven stern she wrote,

The Lady of Shalott.

A cloudwhite crown of pearl she dight,
All raimented in snowy white
That loosely flew (her zone in sight
Clasp'd with one blinding diamond bright)
Her wide eyes fix'd on Camelot,
Though the squally east-wind keenly
Blew, with folded arms serenely
By the water stood the queenly

Lady of Shalott.





With a steady stony glance—

Like some bold seer in a trance,

Beholding all his own mischance,

Mute, with a glassy countenance—

She look'd down to Camelot.

It was the closing of the day:

She loos'd the chain, and down she lay;

The broad stream bore her far away,

The Lady of Shalott.

As when to sailors while they roam,

By creeks and outfalls far from home,

Rising and dropping with the foam,

From dying swans wild warblings come,

Blown shoreward; so to Camelot

Still as the boathead wound along

The willowy hills and fields among,

They heard her chanting her deathsong,

The Lady of Shalott.

A longdrawn carol, mournful, holy,
She chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her eyes were darken'd wholly,
And her smooth face sharpen'd slowly,

Turn'd to tower'd Camelot:

For ere she reach'd upon the tide
The first house by the water-side,
Singing in her song she died,

The Lady of Shalott.

Under tower and balcony,
By garden wall and gallery,
A pale, pale corpse she floated by,
Deadcold, between the houses high,

Dead into tower'd Camelot.

Knight and burgher, lord and dame,
To the planked wharfage came:
Below the stern they read her name,

The Lady of Shalott.



They cross'd themselves, their stars they blest,
Knight, minstrel, abbot, squire, and guest.

There lay a parchment on her breast,
That puzzled more than all the rest,

The wellfed wits at Camelot.

'The web was woven curiously,

The charm is broken utterly,

Draw near and fear not,—this is I,

The Lady of Shalott.'



Lesson Four – *The Lady of Shalott:*

- This is by far the most complex of the poems we have studied in this unit.
- Before moving on, complete the following tasks and refer to the poem when appropriate:
 1. Read the poem aloud and pay close attention to the rhythm and rhyme scheme. Look up any words which you do not know.
 2. Make a list of all of the characters whom you meet in the poem – you will need this later.
 3. Design a storyboard, with six panels, outlining what you think are the main events of the poem. Use quotations from the poem to indicate to which lines your pictures pertain.
 4. Look again at all of the pictures on these slides. Many artists have seen this poem and its story as inspirational – why should this have been the case? Explain why you think this poem has been so influential to other artists in the last two centuries.



Lesson Five – Essay:

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, is often considered the finest ballad poet of the modern age. To what extent do you consider this to be the case?

- You are now going to write an essay about the poems you have studied in this unit.
- You should use the following guide to help you and you should ensure that you always give **evidence** to support your assertions.
 - Opening paragraph: introduction, in which you discuss the topic of your essay.
 - Central Paragraph One: an outline of ballad traditions, from Classical times until the modern era.
 - Central Paragraph Two: an analysis of *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, including its adherence to the ballad tradition.
 - Central Paragraph Three: an analysis of *Mariana*, including its adherence to the ballad tradition.
 - Central Paragraph Four: an analysis of *The Lady of Shalott*, including its adherence to the ballad tradition.
 - Central Paragraph Five (optional): an analysis of other celebrated Victorian ballad poets and a comparison with their works.
 - Conclusion: a summary of your analyses, answering the initial question and giving your own opinion.





Lesson Six – Creative Writing:

- Now, over to you!
- Think back to all that you have learned about ballad poetry.
- Using the techniques which you have studied, you are going to write your own ballad poem.
- Think about something exciting which has happened to you or to a member of your family.
- Write a ballad poem about your tale and which has a moral at the end. When you have finished, read your poem to your friends and family... they would surely love to hear the stories you have to tell ... because you are walking in the steps of your ancestors!