

Poetic motifs and allusions in *To the Lighthouse*

1. The Window: Sections 3, 4, 6

The Charge Of The Light Brigade
by Alfred, Lord Tennyson
1809-1892



Alfred, Lord Tennyson
1809-1892

This poem was written to memorialize a suicidal charge by light cavalry over open terrain by British forces in the Battle of Balaclava (Ukraine) in the Crimean War (1854-56). 247 men of the 637 in the charge were killed or wounded. Britain entered the war, which was fought by Russia against Turkey, Britain and France, because Russia sought to control the Dardanelles. Russian control of the Dardanelles threatened British sea routes.

Many in the west best know of this war today because of Florence Nightingale, who trained and led nurses aiding the wounded during the war in a manner innovative for those times. The War was also noteworthy as an early example of the work of modern war correspondents.

The Charge Of The Light Brigade
by Alfred, Lord Tennyson
Memorializing Events in the Battle of Balaclava, October 25, 1854
Written 1854

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 & 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 & 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 & Russian
Reel'd from the sabre-stroke,
Shatter'd & 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 & 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!

2. The Window: Section 12

The Invitation by Percy Bysshe Shelley

Best and brightest, come away!
Fairer far than this fair Day,
Which, like thee to those in sorrow,
Comes to bid a sweet good-morrow
To the rough Year just awake 5
In its cradle on the brake.
The brightest hour of unborn Spring,
Through the winter wandering,
Found, it seems, the halcyon Morn
To hoar February born. 10
Bending from heaven, in azure mirth,
It kiss'd the forehead of the Earth;
And smiled upon the silent sea;
And bade the frozen streams be free;
And waked to music all their fountains; 15
And breathed upon the frozen mountains;
And like a prophetess of May
Strew'd flowers upon the barren way,
Making the wintry world appear
Like one on whom thou smilest, dear. 20

Away, away, from men and towns,
To the wild wood and the downs—
To the silent wilderness
Where the soul need not repress
Its music lest it should not find 25
An echo in another's mind,
While the touch of Nature's art
Harmonizes heart to heart.
I leave this notice on my door
For each accustom'd visitor:— 30
'I am gone into the fields
To take what this sweet hour yields.
Reflection, you may come to-morrow;
Sit by the fireside with Sorrow.
You with the unpaid bill, Despair,— 35
You, tiresome verse-reciter, Care,—

I will pay you in the grave,—
Death will listen to your stave.
Expectation too, be off!
To-day is for itself enough. 40
Hope, in pity mock not Woe
With smiles, nor follow where I go;
Long having lived on your sweet food,
At length I find one moment's good
After long pain: with all your love, 45
This you never told me of.'

Radiant Sister of the Day,
Awake! arise! and come away!
To the wild woods and the plains;
And the pools where winter rains 50
Image all their roof of leaves;
Where the pine its garland weaves
Of sapless green and ivy dun
Round stems that never kiss the sun;
Where the lawns and pastures be, 55
And the sandhills of the sea;
Where the melting hoar-frost wets
The daisy-star that never sets,
And wind-flowers, and violets
Which yet join not scent to hue, 60
Crown the pale year weak and new;
When the night is left behind
In the deep east, dun and blind,
And the blue noon is over us,
And the multitudinous 65
Billows murmur at our feet
Where the earth and ocean meet,
And all things seem only one
In the universal sun.

3. The Window: Section 17

Luriana Lurilee by Charles Elton

Come out and climb the Garden path
Luriana, Lurilee.
The China rose is all abloom
And buzzing with the yellow bee.
We'll swing you on the cedar bough,
Luriana, Lurilee.

I wonder if it seems to you,
Luriana, Lurilee,
That all the lives we ever lived
And all the lives to be,
are full of trees and changing leaves,
Luriana, Lurilee.

How long it seems since you and I,
Luriana, Lurilee,
Roamed in the forest where our kind
Had just begun to be,
And laughed and chattered in the flowers,
Luriana, Lurilee.

How long since you and I went out,
Luriana, Lurilee,
To see the Kings go riding by
Over lawn and daisy lea,
With their palm leaves and cedar sheaves,
Luriana, Lurilee.

Swing, swing, swing on a bough,
Luriana, Lurilee,
Till you sleep in a humble heap
Or under a gloomy churchyard tree,
And then fly back to swing on a bough,
Luriana, Lurilee.+

+from *Another World Than This...*: an anthology compiled by V. Sackville-West
and Harold Nicolson 1945 p109

*He was related by marriage to Lytton Strachey. This is why Virginia Woolf
knew this unknown poem and quoted in *To the Lighthouse* (1927).
cf. VW's letter to Philippa Strachey (13 Dec. 1927)

4. The Window: Section 19

The Sirens' Song, by William Browne, of Tavistock. 1588–1643

STEER, hither steer your wingèd pines,
All beaten mariners!
Here lie Love's undiscover'd mines,
A prey to passengers—
Perfumes far sweeter than the best 5
Which make the Phoenix' urn and nest.
Fear not your ships,
Nor any to oppose you save our lips;
But come on shore,
Where no joy dies till Love hath gotten more. 10

For swelling waves our panting breasts,
Where never storms arise,
Exchange, and be awhile our guests:
For stars gaze on our eyes.
The compass Love shall hourly sing, 15
And as he goes about the ring,
We will not miss
To tell each point he nameth with a kiss.
—Then come on shore,
Where no joy dies till Love hath gotten more.

Sonnet 98 by William Shakespeare

From you have I been absent in the spring,
When proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim,
Hath put a spirit of youth in every thing,
That heavy Saturn laughed and leapt with him.
Yet nor the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell
Of different flowers in odour and in hue,
Could make me any summer's story tell,
Or from their proud lap pluck them where they grew:
Nor did I wonder at the lily's white,
Nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose;

They were but sweet, but figures of delight,
Drawn after you, you pattern of all those.
Yet seemed it winter still, and you away,
As with your shadow I with these did play.

5. The Lighthouse: Section 1

The Castaway

William Cowper (1731–1800)

OBSCUREST night involved the sky,
The Atlantic billows roared,
When such a destined wretch as I,
Washed headlong from on board,
Of friends, of hope, of all bereft, 5
His floating home for ever left.

No braver chief could Albion boast
Than he with whom he went,
Nor ever ship left Albion's coast

With warmer wishes sent. 10
 He loved them both, but both in vain,
 Nor him beheld, nor her again.

Not long beneath the whelming brine,
 Expert to swim, he lay;
 Nor soon he felt his strength decline, 15
 Or courage die away;
 But waged with death a lasting strife,
 Supported by despair of life.

He shouted: nor his friends had failed
 To check the vessel's course, 20
 But so the furious blast prevailed
 That, pitiless perforce,
 They left their outcast mate behind,
 And scudded still before the wind.

Some succour yet they could afford; 25
 And such as storms allow,
 The cask, the coop, the floated cord,
 Delayed not to bestow.
 But he (they knew) nor ship nor shore,
 Whate'er they gave, should visit more. 30

Nor, cruel as it seemed, could he
 Their haste himself condemn,
 Aware that flight, in such a sea,
 Alone could rescue them;
 Yet bitter felt it still to die 35
 Deserted, and his friends so nigh.

He long survives, who lives an hour
 In ocean, self-upheld;
 And so long he, with unspent power,
 His destiny repelled; 40
 And ever, as the minutes flew,
 Entreated help, or cried 'Adieu!'

At length, his transient respite past,
 His comrades, who before
 Had heard his voice in every blast, 45
 Could catch the sound no more:
 For then, by toil subdued, he drank
 The stifling wave, and then he sank.

No poet wept him; but the page
 Of narrative sincere, 50
 That tells his name, his worth, his age
 Is wet with Anson's tear:
 And tears by bards or heroes shed
 Alike immortalize the dead.

I therefore purpose not, or dream, 55
 Descanting on his fate,
 To give the melancholy theme
 A more enduring date:
 But misery still delights to trace
 Its semblance in another's case. 60

No voice divine the storm allayed,
 No light propitious shone,
 When, snatched from all effectual aid,
 We perished, each alone:

But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelmed in deeper gulfs than he.