

# *Word Art: Two Poems for the New Year*

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## **Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 1809–1892**



Alfred Tennyson, 1st Baron Tennyson FRS (6 August 1809 – 6 October 1892) was an English poet. He was the Poet Laureate during much of Queen Victoria's reign and remains one of the most popular British poets. He was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he met and became friends with Arthur Henry Hallam, also a poet and considered the most brilliant student of his generation. In the spring of 1831, Tennyson's father died, requiring him to leave Cambridge before taking his degree. He returned to his father's rectory, where he was permitted to live for another six years and shared responsibility for his widowed mother and the family. Arthur Hallam came to stay with his family during the summer and became engaged to Tennyson's sister, Emilia Tennyson. In 1833 when Tennyson and Hallam were in Vienna, Hallam died of a stroke at the age of 22. This was the most important event in Tennyson's life, and the one which most shaped his work. Tennyson began to write elegies about his beloved friend, which were eventually amalgamated into one long poem considered the pinnacle of Tennyson's career, "In Memoriam A.H.H", published in 1850. The poem uses individual bereavement to grapple with broader questions of faith, meaning and nature. "In Memoriam" combines the expression of a deeply personal experience of intense male friendship and mourning with discussions of public concerns, including major debates of the day about science and religion.

More than any other Victorian-era writer, Tennyson has seemed the embodiment of his age, both to his contemporaries and to modern readers. In his own day he was said to be—with Queen Victoria and Prime Minister William Gladstone—one of the three most famous living persons, a reputation no other poet writing in English has ever had. As official poetic spokesman for the reign of Victoria, he felt called upon to celebrate a quickly changing industrial and mercantile world with which he felt little in common, for his deepest sympathies were called forth by an unaltered rural England. His lyric gift for sound and cadence is considered unequalled in the history of English poetry. See over for the section of "In Memoriam" which welcomes the New Year.

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### **“Ring Out, Wild Bells” (from “In Memoriam A.H.H.”)**

by

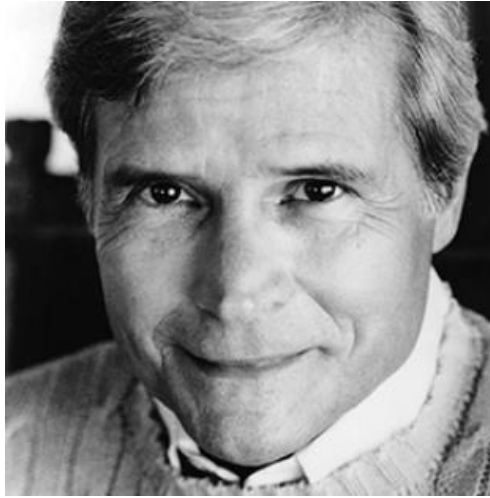
**Alfred, Lord Tennyson**

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,  
The flying cloud, the frosty light:  
The year is dying in the night;  
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.  
Ring out the old, ring in the new,  
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:  
The year is going, let him go;  
Ring out the false, ring in the true.  
Ring out the grief that saps the mind  
For those that here we see no more;  
Ring out the feud of rich and poor,  
Ring in redress to all mankind.  
Ring out a slowly dying cause,  
And ancient forms of party strife;  
Ring in the nobler modes of life,  
With sweeter manners, purer laws.  
Ring out the want, the care, the sin,  
The faithless coldness of the times;  
Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes  
But ring the fuller minstrel in.  
Ring out false pride in place and blood,  
The civic slander and the spite;  
Ring in the love of truth and right,  
Ring in the common love of good.  
Ring out old shapes of foul disease;  
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;  
Ring out the thousand wars of old,  
Ring in the thousand years of peace.  
Ring in the valiant person and free,  
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;  
Ring out the darkness of the land,  
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

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### **Philip Appleman, 1926 – 2020**



Poet, novelist, editor, humanist, and Darwin expert Philip Appleman was born in Indiana and holds degrees from Northwestern University, the University of Michigan, and the University of Lyon. He served in US Army Air Corps during World War II, and was a merchant marine after. Appleman is known for his biting social commentary and masterful command of form. The author of numerous volumes of poetry, three novels, and half a dozen collections of prose, Appleman's range of subject matter includes Darwin, politics, morality, and sex. He was a Professor Emeritus in the Department of English at Indiana University, Bloomington, until his death in 2020. His poetry and fiction have won many awards.

In the whimsical poem, "To the Garbage Collectors in Bloomington, Indiana, the First Pickup of the New Year", the narrator is dozing in a warm bed when he hears the garbage collectors coming by. He speculates on the motivations for their energetic pursuit of their job, and then reflects that there is something perhaps sacred in their work: as we produce all sorts of material rubbish, the garbage men come around to clean up the world for us; thus they are in some way like a secular version of Jesus who came to clean up the spiritual rubbish of mankind.

### **"To the Garbage Collectors in Bloomington, Indiana, the First Pickup of the New Year"**

The Ninth Day of Xmas, in the morning black  
outside our window: clattering cans, the whir  
of a hopper, shouts, a whistle, *move on* ...  
I see them in my warm imagination  
the way I'll see them later in the cold,  
heaving the huge cans and running  
(running!) to the next house on the street.

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My vestiges of muscle stir  
uneasily in their percale cocoon:  
what moves those men out there, what  
drives them running to the next house and the next?  
Halfway back to dream, I speculate:  
The Social Weal? "Let's make good old  
    Bloomington a cleaner place  
    to live in—right, men? *Hup, tha!*"  
Healthy Competition? "Come on, boys,  
    let's burn up that route today and beat those dudes  
    on truck thirteen!"  
Enlightened Self-Interest? "Another can,  
    another dollar—don't slow down, Mac, I'm puttin'  
    three kids through Princeton?"  
Or something else?  
Terror?

A half hour later, dawn comes edging over  
Clark Street: layers of color, laid out like  
a flattened rainbow—red, then yellow, green,  
and over that the black-and-blue of night  
still hanging on. Clark Street maples wave  
their silhouettes against the red, and through  
the twiggy trees, I see a solid chunk  
of garbage truck, and stick-figures of men,  
like windup toys, tossing little cans—  
and *running*.

All day they'll go like that, till dark again,  
and all day, people fussing at their desks,  
at hot stoves, at machines, will jettison  
tin cans, bare evergreens, damp Kleenex, all  
things that are Caesar's.

O garbage men,  
the New Year greets you like the Old;  
after this first run you too may rest  
in beds like great warm aproned laps  
and know that people everywhere have faith:  
putting from them all things of this world,  
they confidently bide your second coming.

from *New and Selected Poems, 1956-1996*, University of Arkansas Press, 1996

