

Criticism: The Charge of the Light Brigade

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"The Charge of the Light Brigade" is generally considered to be an only moderately successful work, at least from a critical standpoint, although it is one of the most well-known poems in the English language. In fact, the work proved so popular that it was adapted into a Hollywood movie in the 1940s. In an 1895 essay from his *Corrected Impressions: Essays on Victorian Writers*, critic George Saintsbury notes that "at no time was Tennyson a perfect master of the quick and lively measures" or meters, and adds that "his difficulty in this respect has not improved 'The Charge of the Light Brigade.'" The theme of the poem has also come under criticism; following World War I, after the world had experienced the horror and destruction of war on a previously unheard-of scale, critics abandoned this poem due to its glorification of heroic, senseless death.

Herbert Foltinek, however, in a 1985 essay from *A Yearbook of Studies in English Language and Literature*, asserts that the poem "cannot be all that easily dismissed as a collection of sabre-rattling sentiments." The critic explains that there are a number of reasons why the poet may have written this poem in praise of a battle that ended in senseless defeat. "As poet laureate, he might . . . have felt called upon to compose a tribute to the Queen's troops who had fought so bravely for a good cause." Foltinek also mentions a tendency that the British have to "glory in defeat." Another possibility that he considers is that Tennyson may have started the poem to protest the "blunder" he had read about in the paper, which led to the Light Brigade's defeat, but in writing it found himself swept up in his own noble tone. Because the poem fails to fully address the responsibility for a "blunder" which led to hundreds of senseless deaths, Foltinek declares, "The Charge of the Light Brigade" "falls short of illustrating the human condition of our time."

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