



ULYSSES

◦ In this poem the character, Ulysses, declares he “cannot rest from travel” because he believes that there is little point in his staying home “by this still hearth (fireplace)” with his old wife, doling out rewards and punishments for the unnamed masses who live in his kingdom.

◦ He has enjoyed all his experiences as a sailor who travels the seas, and he considers himself a symbol for everyone who travels around the earth. His travels have exposed him to many different types of people and ways of living and vice versa. Ulysses declares that his travels have shaped who he is: “I am a part of all that I have met,”.

- Ulysses declares that it is boring to stay in one place. (rust vs. shine, breathing vs. contains much novelty) so he wishes “to follow knowledge like a sinking star” and forever grow in wisdom and in learning.
- Because of Ulysses wants to travel he declares that his son Telemachus, who will act as his successor (replacement) while the great hero continues his travels: he says, “This is my son, mine own Telemachus”, “He works his work, I mine.”

◦ In the final stanza, Ulysses speaks to the sailors with whom he has traveled. He declares that although he and they are old, they still have the potential to do something noble before “the long day wanes (get smaller). He encourages them to make use of their old age because “it is not too late to seek a newer world” before their death. Perhaps, he suggests, they may even reach the “Happy Isles,” or the paradise described in Greek mythology where great heroes like the warrior Achilles were believed to have been taken after their deaths. Although Ulysses and his mariners are not as strong as they were in youth, they are “strong in will” and are continued their travels “To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.”

dramatic monologue

- This poem is written as a dramatic monologue: the entire poem is spoken by a single character, whose identity is revealed by his own words.

enjambment

- Many of the lines are enjambed, which means that a thought does not end with the line-break; the sentences often end in the middle, rather than the end, of the lines.

blank verse

- The lines in this poem are in blank verse, or unrhymed iambic pentameter

Important points

1- Tennyson combines two important figures in the Medieval age: firstly, the ancient hero of Homer's *Odyssey* and secondly Dante's Ulysses is a tragic figure who dies while sailing too far in an insatiable thirst for knowledge.

2- However, this poem also concerns the poet's own personal journey, for it was composed in the first few weeks after Tennyson learned of the death of his dear college friend Arthur Henry Hallam in 1833 (elegy for a deeply cherished friend).

3- "Ulysses," like many of Tennyson's other poems, deals with the desire to reach beyond the limits

4- The poem's final line, "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield," indicates the hero wants to flee from the daily life "among these barren crags" (line 2) and to enter a mythical dimension "beyond the sunset, and the baths of all the western stars" (lines 60–61); as such, he was a model of individual self-assertion and the Romantic rebellion against bourgeois conformity. Indeed, the poet gives the specific model to his contemporaries Victorian poets.

5- Indeed Ulysses interests to the travels more than his responsibilities. We understand it from his division, 26 lines for his description, 26 lines for his mariners, 11 lines to his son concerning the governance of the kingdom in his absence, and a mere two words about his “aged wife” Penelope.

themes

- **The Reconciliation of Religion and Science**

- Tennyson lived during a period of great scientific advancement, and he used his poetry to work out the conflict between religious faith and scientific discoveries. Notable scientific findings and theories of the Victorian period include stratigraphy, the geological study of rock layers used to date the earth,

- **The Virtues of Perseverance and Optimism**

- After the death of his friend Arthur Hallam, Tennyson struggled through a period of deep despair, which he eventually overcame to begin writing again. During his time of mourning, Tennyson rarely wrote and, for many years, battled alcoholism. Many of his poems are about the temptation to give up and fall prey to pessimism, but they also extol the virtues of optimism and discuss the importance of struggling on with life. The need to persevere and continue is the central theme of *In "Ulysses"*

- **The Glory of England**

- Tennyson used his poetry to express his love for England.