

## ULYSSES Alfred Tennyson

It little profits that an idle king,

By this still hearth, among these barren crags,  
 Matched with an aged wife, I mete and dole  
 Unequal laws unto a savage race,  
 That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.

I cannot rest from travel: I will drink  
 Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd  
 Greatly, have suffered greatly, both with those  
 That loved me, and alone, on shore, and when  
 Through scudding drifts the rainy Hyades  
 Vexed the dim sea: I am become a name;  
 For always roaming with a hungry heart

Much have I seen and known, - cities of men  
 And manners, climates, councils, governments,  
 Myself not least, but honour'd of them all -  
 And drunk delight of battle with my peers,  
 Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.

I am a part of all that I have met;  
 Yet all experience is an arch where-through  
 Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades  
 For ever and forever when I move.  
 How dull it is to pause, to make an end,  
 To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!

As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life  
 Were all too little, and of one to me  
 Little remains: but every hour is saved  
 From that eternal silence, something more,  
 A bringer of new things; and vile it were  
 For some three suns to store and hoard myself,  
 And this gray spirit yearning in desire  
 To follow knowledge like a sinking star,  
 Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

*In this poem, Ulysses, now an old man, having returned to Ithaca after twenty years absence and much adventure, has grown restless, and is now contemplating setting out with his crew again:*

Non giova (**It little profits** = It does not help much, non è molto utile) un Re neghittoso (**Idle** = lazy, inactive),

alla vampa del mio focolare tranquillo (**still hearth** = unlit fireplace (cuore spento, caminetto non acceso)) tra sterili (**barren**) rocce (**crags**), stare (**matched** = confrontarsi) con antica consorte (**aged wife**, Penelope), e misurare (**mete**) e pesare (**amministrare**) le leggi ineguali (**unequal**) a selvaggia gente (**savage race**) che ammuccia (**hoard**, accumulate, save up for the future), che dorme, che mangia e che non mi conosce.

*Ulysses proclaims that he "cannot rest from travel":* Non posso fermarmi dall'errar mio: Io berrò la vita sino alla fine (**to the less**, to the end). Per tutto il tempo ho molto gioito, molto sofferto, e con quelli che in cuor mi amarono e solo: tanto sull'arida terra (**shore**, spiaggia), e dove attraverso tempestose nubi (**scudding drifts** = stormy clouds) le Iadi piovose (**rainy Hyades** = five stars in the constellation of Taurus which became visibile when it began to rain) travagliano (**vexed** = disturbed, troubled) il mare oscurato (**dim**): acquistai il Nome; sempre errando (**roaming** = wandering, exploring) con avido cuore

*Ulysses is nostalgic for his past adventure and glory. His travels have exposed him to many different types of people and ways of living:* Molto ho visto e conosciuto, città di uomini, e conobbi modi, climi, concili (riunioni di persone), governi, io incluso (**Myself not least** = myself included), ond'ero nel cuore di tutti: e bevvi la gioia di lontane battaglie (**drunk delight of battle** = drank to celebrate victory) coi miei simili (**peers** = equals, companionous), là nei campi dei suoni della battaglia (**ringing plains** = battle field ringing with war cries) di Troia (**Troy**: site of the Trojan wars of which Ulysses was a hero) battuti dal vento.

*Ulysses declares that his travels and encounters have shaped who he is: "I am a part of all that I have met" he asserts:* Io sono parte di tutto ciò che incontrai nella mia strada;

*Tennyson compare experience through an arch (the experience is window open to the new):* Pur ciò ch'io vidi è l'arcata (che s'apre sul nuovo) attraverso la quale (**where-through** = trough which). splende (**Gleams** = shines) questo mondo di cui non viaggiando sfuggono i margini via, via ma che sempre rimangono quando viaggio. Stupida cosa (**Dull**) il fermarsi, il conoscersi un fine, il restare sotto la ruggine (**rust**) opachi (**unburnished** = corroded, not bring anymore, che non brucia) nè splendere più nell'attrito.

*Ulysses declares that it is boring to stay in one place; to stay in one place is to pretend that all there is to life is the simple act of breathing:* Come se il vivere sia quest'alito! vita su vita poco sarebbe, ed a me d'una, ora, un attimo resta. Pure, è un attimo (**hour**, instant) tolto all'eterno silenzio (death), ed ancora porta con sè nuove opere, e indegno sarebbe, per qualche due o tre anni (**three suns**: three years), riporre me stesso con l'anima esperta ch'arde e desidera (**yearning** : wanting) *His spirit yearns constantly for new experiences that will broaden his horizons; he wishes "to follow knowledge like a sinking star"* seguire la conoscenza: la stella che cade oltre il confine del cielo (**utmost bound**: furthest limit), al di là dell'umano

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,  
 To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,--  
 Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil  
 This labour, by slow prudence to make mild  
 A rugged people, and through soft degrees  
 Subdue them to the useful and the good.  
 Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere  
 Of common duties, decent not to fail  
 In offices of tenderness, and pay  
 Meet adoration to my household gods,  
 When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:  
 There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,  
 Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me--  
 That ever with a frolic welcome took  
 The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed  
 Free hearts, free foreheads--you and I are old;  
 Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;  
 Death closes all: but something ere the end,  
 Some work of noble note, may yet be done,  
 Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.  
 The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:  
 The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep  
 Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,  
 'T is not too late to seek a newer world'.  
 Push off, and sitting well in order smite  
 The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds  
 To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths  
 Of all the western stars, until I die.  
 It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:  
 It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,  
 And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.  
 Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'  
 We are not now that strength which in old days  
 Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;  
 One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
 Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
 To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

pensiero.

*Ulysses introduce his son Telemaco. Telemaco has the appropriate quality to govern the country. Now Ulysses is free to leave home without fear of the anarchy (during his previous travel).*

*Telemaco represent the Victorian view devoted to the social duties:*  
 Ecco mio figlio, Telemaco mio, cui isola (**the isle**: Ithaca, of which Ulysses was king).e scettro lascio; che molto io amo (**well-loved of me**: i loved him); che sa quest'opera, accorto,compiere (**discernine to**: capable of, able to govern Itaca); rendere mansueta la gente selvatica (**rugged**: rough, uncultured), adagio (**through soft degrees**: gradually), dolce, e così via via sottometterla all'utile e al bene (typical victorian values). Irrepreensibile (**most blameless**: without reason for criticism) egli è, ben fermo nel mezzo ai doveri, pio, che non mai mancherà nelle tenere usanze, e nel dare il convenevole culto agli dei della nostra famiglia (**household gods**: i lari), quando non sia qui io: il suo compito e' compie; io, il mio.

*In the final stanza Ulysses turn to his mariners who propose them a new travel and he is optimistic. The romantic idea has got the imperialism idea (the great empire of queen Victoria):* Eccolo il porto, laggiù: nel vascello si gonfia la vela: ampio nell'oscurità si ramarica il mare. Compagni, cuori ch'avete con me tollerato, penato, pensato, voi che accoglieste, ogni ora, con gaio ed uguale saluto tanto la folgore quanto il sereno, che liberi cuori, libere fronti opponeste: oh! noi siam vecchi compagni; pur la vecchiezza anch'ella ha il pregio, ha il compito: tutto chiude la Morte; ma può qualche opera compiersi prima d'uomini degna che già combatterono a prova coi Numi! Già da' tuguri sui picchi le luci balenano: il lungo giorno dilegua, la luna insensibile monta;  
 l'abisso geme e sussurra all'intorno le sue mille voci (**Moans round with many voices**). *He encourages them to make use of their old age because "tis not too late to seek a newer world"* Venite: tardi non è per coloro che cercano un mondo novello.

Uomini, al largo, e sedendovi in ordine, i solchi sonori via percotete: ho fermo nel cuore passare il tramonto ed il lavacro degli astri di là: fin ch'abbia la morte (**push off...baths**: the baths: the place where the stars seem to plunge into the ocean death is coming; this reference to death gives a note of melancholy in the poem).

Forse (**it may be**, rivela un'incertezza) è destino che i gorghi del mare ci affondino (**wash us down**: The ocean was imagined by Homer as a river encompassing the earth, and on the west plunging down a vast chasm where was the entrance of Hades);forse, nostro destino è toccare quelle isole della Fortuna (**happy isles**: Elysium, a paradise where herpes were said to go after their deaths and which was throught to lie west of the straits of Gibraltar), dove vedremo il già a noi noto, magnanimo Achille (**Achilles**: Greek hero of the Trojan wars who suffered an early death). Molto perdemmo (**though much is taken** → melancholy), ma molto ci resta (**much abides**: remains → optimism): non siamo la forza più che nei giorni lontani moveva la terra ed il cielo: noi, s'è quello che s'è: una temprà d'eroici cuori, sempre la stessa: affraliti dal tempo e dal fato, ma duri sempre in lottare e cercare e trovare ne cedere mai (**To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield** → storicism. Mans ostinate attent - tentativo - to give a purple toh is life even if death i approaching).

**Tema:** This poem , written in 1833 and revised for publication in 1842 (in Poems), was composed in the first few weeks after Tennyson learned of his friend Arthur Henry Hallam's death. In this dramatic monologue he celebrated man's obstinate attempt to give purpose to his own life even if he is approaching death.

Based on a passage in Dante's Inferno, canto XXVI. Tennyson exalts his hero's eternally restless aspiration, whereas Dante condemned his curiosity and presumption. Both poets recalled Odyssey, XI, 100-37, where the ghost foretold Ulysses' fortune.

The speaker is Ulysses and he is speaking about his past. Ulysses is old, he is back to Itaca but he doesn't like his present situation because he prefers travelling.

**Form:** 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. The lines are in blank verse, or unrhymed iambic pentameter, which serves to impart a fluid and natural quality to Ulysses's speech. The poem is divided into four paragraph-like sections, each of which comprises a distinct thematic unit of the poem.