Characteristics of Romanticism

Assistant Lecturer Sarah A. Khuder

Romanticism

- Romanticism is a literary movement which revolted against the neo-classicism in all its aspects. It started during the second half of the eighteenth century and ended in the first period of the nineteenth century. It began in arts in general then moved to literature and poetry in particular. Regionally, the movement started in Germany then developed in France and got matured in England. This movement is characterized by the following qualities:

- 1- It is called the age of passion. There are two forces in man: the power of mind and the power of passion. The last age was dominated by mind and was called the age of reason while now people were fully indulged in passions (feelings, emotions and sensibilities).
- 2- The romantic poets revolted against all conventions, customs and rules of the former age. Now, it is called a revolutionary society.
- 3- They cared much about the individual for they believed that man had been wronged by current circumstances and cruelty of society. So they talked about individual cases.
- 4- They deserted the city life and moved to the countryside where they could find peace, simplicity, and natural beauty.

- 5- In association with this point, they used the language of common people which is simple but highly suggestive. So poetry was written in a simple way but highly suggestive which can have many interpretations at the same time. Beside they used symbols and poetic images.
- 6- They looked at religion in a comprehensive way. They adopted a theistic point of view toward religion.
- 7- They considered nature as a source of inspiration. Romantic poets used to get to the countryside where they could be inspired by the natural atmosphere.
- 8- They looked at poetry as a gift or talent. They believed that only talented people could write poetry. They no longer believed that poetry is a craft or a skill can be learned by training. They defined poetry as a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility.
- 9- They wrote poetry in a stanzaic form or sometimes sonnets form.

Cultural Background

- The romantic movement was a result of three major reasons took place at that time:
- A- The Industrial Revolution
- B- The French Revolution
- C- The Tendency for Change

A- The Industrial Revolution:

- The industrial revolution started first in England when the government encouraged industrialization of everything inside the country. As a result, great changes took place in all the fields of life; social, economical, political and even religious which were finally reflected in literature and poetry in particular. The industrial revolution materialized everything in life and man became a slave instead of being a master. Man turned out to be a lifeless working machine with total absence of passions. People at that time revolted against that boring and humiliating condition and poets as sensitive people looked for an outlet, for a change or solution to that state.

B- The French Revolution:

The French revolution was one of the greatest revolutions in the world. The French people revolted against the royal authority and changed everything fundamentally and announced the republic rule. They raised the slogans: liberty, fraternity and equality. The slogans were very much influential and impressive on people, literary men in particular.

C- The Tendency for Change:

- The majority of people at that time were fully convinced to make some changes in order to get out of the deadly routine of the previous age. They had been fed up with the rigid rules of the former period. The poets in particular made these changes.

The Romantic Movement, Romanticism

Assistant Lecturer Sarah Abdulrahman Khuder

Romanticism

- There are two terms which are similar in spelling, but different in meaning: romance and romanticism. The word ''romance'' is totally different from ''romanticism''.
- Romance is a story of love and adventure which flourished during the middle Ages. Whereas Romanticism is a literary movement by itself, complete in everything which rose during the second half of the eighteenth century and ended with the early period of the nineteenth century. This movement did not emerge all of a sudden. In fact, it took a lot of time to get matured and crystallized in a gradual way. It started with a poet called Robert Burns who was a transitional poet. Then later highly developed with major romantic poets, the pioneers, like William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, Percy Pesshe Shelley, John Keats.

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The Victorian Period

1830-1901

A Time of Change

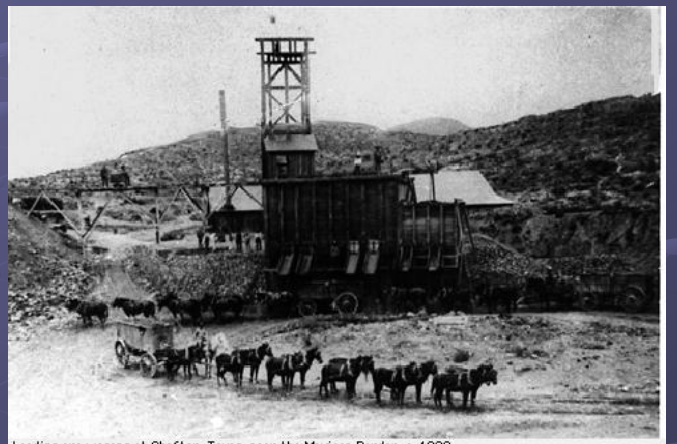
- London becomes most important city in Europe
- Population of London expands from two million to six million
- Shift from ownership of land to modern urban economy
- Impact of industrialism
- Increase in wealth
- World's foremost imperial power
- Victorian people suffered from anxiety, a sense of being displaced persons in an age of technological advances.

Queen Victoria and the Victorian Temper

- Ruled England from 1837-1901
- Exemplifies Victorian qualities: earnestness, moral responsibility, domestic propriety
- The Victorian Period was an age of transition
- An age characterized by energy and high moral purpose

The Time of Troubles 1830's and 1840's

- Unemployment
- Poverty
- Rioting
- Slums in large cities
- Working conditions for women and children were terrible



Loading ore wagons at Shafter, Texas, near the Mexican Border, c. 1920
(Institute of Oral History, UTEP)

The Mid-Victorian Period 1848-1870

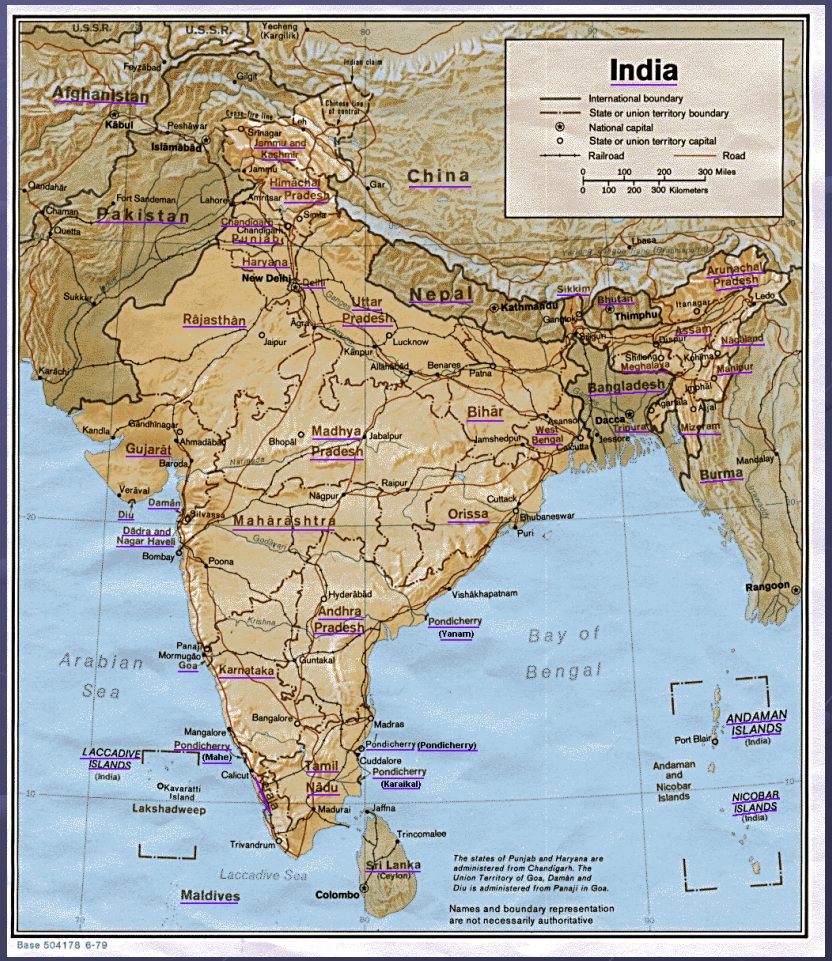
- A time of prosperity
- A time of improvement
- A time of stability
- A time of optimism

The Crystal Palace

- Erected to display the exhibits of modern industry and science at the 1851 Great Exhibition
- One of the first buildings constructed according to modern architectural principles
- The building symbolized the triumphs of Victorian industry

The British Empire

- Many Between 1853 and 1880, large scale immigration to British colonies
- In 1857, Parliament took over the government of India and Queen Victoria became empress of India.
- Many British people saw the expansion of empire as a moral responsibility.
- Missionaries spread Christianity in India, Asia, and Africa.



Challenges to Religious Belief

- Science
  - Darwin- the Origin of Species and The Descent of Man
- Higher Criticism
  - Examination of the Bible as a mere text of history
  - Source studies
  - Geology
  - Astronomy

The Late Victorian Period 1870-1901

- Decay of Victorian values
- British imperialism
- Boer War
- Irish question
- Germany became a rival power
- United States became a rival power
- Economic depression led to mass immigration
- Socialism

The Role of Women

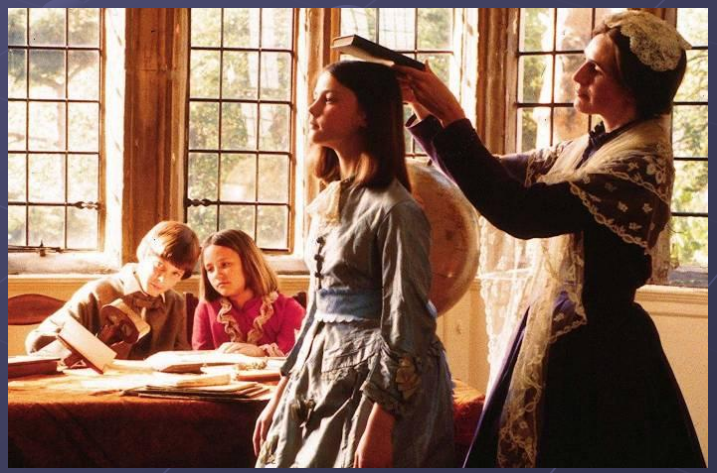
- The Woman Question
- Changing conditions of women's work created by the Industrial Revolution
- The Factory Acts (1802-78) – regulations of the conditions of labor in mines and factories
- The Custody Act (1839) – gave a mother the right to petition the court for access to her minor children and custody of children under seven and later sixteen.
- The Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act – established a civil divorce court
- Married Women's Property Acts

Educational Opportunities for Women

- First women's college established in 1848 in London.
- By the end of Victoria's reign, women could take degrees at twelve university colleges.

Working Conditions for Women

- Bad working conditions and underemployment drove thousands of women into prostitution.
- The only occupation at which an unmarried middle-class woman could earn a living and maintain some claim to gentility was that of a governess.



Victorian Women and the Home

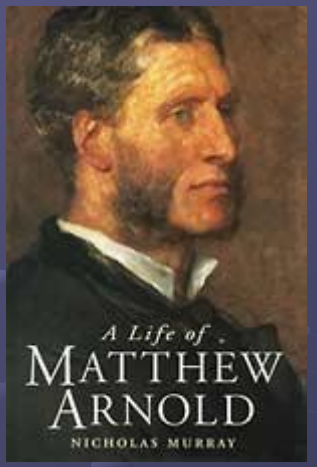
- Victorian society was preoccupied with the very nature of women.
- Protected and enshrined within the home, her role was to create a place of peace where man could take refuge from the difficulties of modern life.

Literacy, Publication, and Reading

- By the end of the century, literacy was almost universal.
- Compulsory national education required to the age of ten.
- Due to technological advances, an explosion of things to read, including newspapers, periodicals, and books.
- Growth of the periodical
- Novels and short fiction were published iin serial form.
- The reading public expected literature to illuminate social problems.

Victorian Poetry

- Victorian poetry developed in the context of the novel. Poets sought new ways of telling stories in verse
- All of the Victorian poets show the strong influence of the Romantics, but they cannot sustain the confidence the Romantics felt in the power of the imagination.
- Victorian poets often rewrite Romantic poems with a sense of belatedness.
- Dramatic monologue – the idea of creating a lyric poem in the voice of a speaker ironically distinct from the poet is the great achievement of Victorian poetry.
- Victorian poetry is pictorial; poets use detail to construct visual images that represent the emotion or situation the poem concerns.
- Conflict t between private poetic self and public social role.



Samuel Taylor Coleridge
Frost at Midnight

Introduction

The poem discusses Coleridge's childhood experience in a negative manner and emphasizes the need to be raised in the countryside. The poem expresses the hope that Coleridge's son, Hartley, would be able to experience a childhood that he could not and become a true "child of nature". The view of nature within the poem has a strong Christian element in that Coleridge believed that nature represents a physical presence of God's word.
“Frost at Midnight” was written in February 1798 when he described to Thomas Poole aspects of his childhood at Christ's Hospital grammar school that are similar to the content of the poem. The rest comes from Coleridge's experience with his friend, William Wordsworth. It was Wordsworth who provided Coleridge with a detailed description of the Lake District which served as a basis for Coleridge's description of the place. The relationship between Coleridge and Wordsworth was a close friendship, and Coleridge helped rewrite many of Wordsworth's poems during this time....

Frost at Midnight
BY SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

The Frost performs its secret ministry,

Unhelped by any wind. The owlet's cry

Came loud—and hark, again! loud as before.

The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,

Have left me to that solitude, which suits

Abstruser musings: save that at my side

My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.

'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs
And vexes meditation with its strange
And extreme silentness. Sea, hill, and wood,
This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood,
With all the numberless goings-on of life,
Inaudible as dreams! the thin blue flame
Lies on my low-burnt fire, and quivers not;
Only that film, which fluttered on the grate,

Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.
Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature
Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
Making it a companionable form,
Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit
By its own moods interprets, every where
Echo or mirror seeking of itself,
And makes a toy of Thought.

But O! how oft,
How oft, at school, with most believing mind,
Presageful, have I gazed upon the bars,
To watch that fluttering *stranger* ! and as oft
With unclosed lids, already had I dreamt

Of my sweet birth-place, and the old church-tower,
Whose bells, the poor man's only music, rang
From morn to evening, all the hot Fair-day,
So sweetly, that they stirred and haunted me
With a wild pleasure, falling on mine ear
Most like articulate sounds of things to come!
So gazed I, till the soothing things, I dreamt,
Lulled me to sleep, and sleep prolonged my dreams!
And so I brooded all the following morn,
Awed by the stern preceptor's face, mine eye
Fixed with mock study on my swimming book:
Save if the door half opened, and I snatched
A hasty glance, and still my heart leaped up,
For still I hoped to see the *stranger's* face,
Townsman, or aunt, or sister more beloved,
My play-mate when we both were clothed alike!

Dear Babe, that sleepest cradled by my side,
Whose gentle breathings, heard in this deep calm,
Fill up the interspersèd vacancies
And momentary pauses of the thought!
My babe so beautiful! it thrills my heart
With tender gladness, thus to look at thee,

And think that thou shalt learn far other lore,
And in far other scenes! For I was reared
In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim,
And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.
But *thou*, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,
Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores
And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language, which thy God
Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself.
Great universal Teacher! he shall mould
Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,
Whether the summer clothe the general earth
With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
Of mossy apple-tree, while the night-thatch
Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall
Heard only in the trances of the blast,

Or if the secret ministry of frost

Shall hang them up in silent icicles,

Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.

Summary and Analysis of the Poem

Summary

In this conversation poem, Coleridge is the speaker and the silent listener is his infant son, Hartley Coleridge. The setting of the poem is late at night, when Coleridge is the only one awake in the household. Coleridge sits next to his son's cradle and reflects on the frost falling outside his home. He takes this instance of solitude to allow his reflections to expand to his love of nature.

Coleridge describes to his son how his love of nature dates back to his boyhood. During school, Coleridge would gaze out the schoolhouse windows and admire the frost falling outside and would daydream about leaving the city and returning to his rural birthplace. Coleridge tells his son that he is delighted that his son will have more opportunities to observe the beauty of nature and will not be "reared/ In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim" as Coleridge himself was. Coleridge then wishes that "all seasons shall be sweet" to his son and that his son will learn to appreciate all aspects of nature.

Analysis

In "Frost at Midnight," Coleridge explores the relationship between environment and happiness and also reflects on the idyllic innocence of childhood. The construction of this poem, in which Coleridge's infant son is the silent listener, is significant for Coleridge's musings on the above themes. In "Coleridge the Revisionary: Surrogacy and Structure in the Conversation Poems," Peter Barry highlights the "surrogacy" element that is present in many of Coleridge's conversation poems. Barry defines surrogacy as "the core of the central meditative episode" that is "a transaction between the speaking persona and a surrogate self, that is, another person onto whom are projected or disposed key elements of the speaker's own personality, dilemmas, or thought processes". In "Frost at Midnight," the infant Hartley serves as Coleridge's surrogate. After

Coleridge shares his lamentations on his physical and emotional confinement in urban England during the latter part of his childhood, Coleridge declares (and rejoices in the fact) that Hartley will be brought up in a more pastoral life and will be closer to nature than his father was. Thus, Coleridge projects on his son his own longing for childhood innocence and his belief that closeness to nature brings happiness.

The familiar motifs of the power of sleep, dreams, and imagination are also present in “Frost at Midnight.” The image that connects these themes is the “thin blue flame” in the fireplace. In “Coleridge and the Scene of Lyric Description,” Christopher R. Miller identifies the “flickering of [the] ember” as a “[counterpoint to] Coleridge’s own insomniac musings” (521). Likewise, Peter Barry asserts that the dying flame is representative of Coleridge’s reproof of the “directionlessness in his thinking” (620). Barry further clarifies Coleridge’s use of the dying flame as a metaphor for his “idling Spirit”: “like the flame, his own intellectual spirit is puny, unable to achieve lift-off, purposeless, narcissistic, and prone to interpret everything as a reflection of itself, so that thought becomes an idle plaything rather than a purposeful instrument” (610). Ultimately, in the first stanza of the poem, Coleridge laments that his insomnia stifles his imagination. Perhaps this is why Coleridge takes pleasure in watching his son sleep, for the poet understands that dreams allow for the flourishing of creativity.

Coleridge begins by creating a tone of solemn gentleness in the first line, as the frost is described as performing a "secret ministry." The frost ministers without the help of the wind (line 2), thus taking the bite out of the chilly night air and maintaining a silence throughout the landscape. The only sound is the owl of lines 2-3, but its sudden interruption of the quiet is counterpoised with the sleepers in the cottage whose rest remains undisturbed. The speaker enjoys this midnight solitude, although he notes that he is not truly alone: his "cradled infant slumbers peacefully" beside him (line 7), The baby's presence serves only to accentuate his solitude since this child, too, sleeps while the speaker alone is awake at this late hour. He finds the absolute stillness disturbing at first, taking comfort in the seeming sympathy of the only stirring object in the house or beyond--a flim across the grate is the "sole unquiet thing" (line 16) and the speaker sees a similarity between himself and the "puny flaps and freaks" of the grate (line 20). Just as the insensible film "interprets" the moving of air

without a guiding reason, so too does the speaker "makes a toy of Thought" (line 23).

By shifting the scene of the second stanza to his boyhood and summer time, Coleridge manages to create a sense of this inner discomfort that the speaker feels in his midnight vigil in the cottage. The boyhood speaker is also looking out a window, discontent with where he sits (inside a schoolroom, attempting to study) and longs for the wild familiarity of nature. Although he attempts a "mock study" of his "swimming book" (line 38) when the stern preceptor draws near, nonetheless he finds his thought already out the half-open door he spies out of the corner of his eye. He seeks a "stranger" (lines 26 and 41) which he sees "fluttering" out the window--perhaps a butterfly or bird which comes to his memory as he sits--as an adult--within his winter cottage listening to the rustling flap on the grate. He finds this stranger desirable, "more beloved" than townsman, aunt, or sister to his eyes (line 42). This spirit of nature is in fact his "play-mate" when they are "clothed alike" (both outside enjoying the pervasive presence of nature).

The speaker's thoughts return to the present, specifically to his sleeping baby. The sounds he hears are now the breathing of the child, which fills the moments between his somber thoughts. He is moved to wonder at the baby's beauty, and turns his mind to the "far other lore/and in far other scenes" which the child will one day learn. He notes his own limited upbringing--kept as he was in "the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim" (line 52) where the only natural beauty he could ever see was the sky and stars. This baby, on the other hand, will wander the mountains and fields, gaining an education only Nature in all its glory can bestow. The child will learn "that eternal language, which thy God/Utters" (lines 60-61); in other words, he will learn the spirit of Nature and see in it the wonder, majesty, and beauty of its Creator.

The speaker declares that an education gained in the realms of nature will make all seasons "sweet to thee," giving the baby a perspective on life that the speaker cannot fully hold because of his own limited exposure to nature in its various forms. While the father has difficulty settling in to the silent solitude of a frosty midnight, and similarly could not focus on his studies indoors while summer spent itself without, the son will have no difficulty embracing nature in her various dresses, because he will be more connected to the natural order than his father ever could be.

Themes of the Poem

1- Family

In "Frost at Midnight," Coleridge is concerned with one specific family member: his infant son, Hartley Coleridge. Everyone else is asleep in the cottage, and Hartley is the only person in the room with Coleridge, as his thoughts bounce around, gradually concluding in his high hopes for Hartley. Specifically, he wants his son to grow up close to nature, having the kind of spiritually-inspired childhood Coleridge wanted to have (but didn't, because he had to go to school in London). Also, Coleridge reflects on how he wished different family members (like his sister, Ann) would pay him a surprise visit while he was stuck in school.

2- Happiness

Happiness is a huge part of Coleridge's poem. For him, it needs to have a spiritual solution. Genuine joy comes with encountering God in nature. Coleridge reflects on the roots of his own unhappiness and melancholy—his distance and alienation from nature in his childhood—and hopes that his son will find a pathway to something better. Ultimately, happiness doesn't come from exerting your willpower over people or desiring more distractions. Rather, in Coleridge's view it comes from appreciating reality and from cultivating personal relationships with friends and family.

3- Isolation

Isolation isn't really a bad thing in "Frost at Midnight." A better term might be "solitude." By being alone at night (except for his sleeping baby) Coleridge is able to attain deep insights, while reflecting on his past, his relationship with nature, and his baby's future. He wishes for his son to

experience solitude in nature, but that won't really be solitude, since his son will be able to sense God in nature, to feel a sense of companionship when he seems to be isolated.

4-Man and the Natural World

In "Frost at Midnight," Coleridge views Nature as a source of wisdom for humanity. What he wasn't able to find in his boring classroom, he thinks his son will be able to find in nature. Humans have made everything in the city, but God has made everything in nature, which, in Coleridge's view, makes it a superior source of instruction and knowledge. Even if something in nature seems unpleasant or weird or mildly creepy or hostile to life—like the frost, arguably—it is still testifying to God's creative power. Since God has "all things in himself," says Coleridge, people should be able to find evidence of God in all things.

5-Spirituality

Coleridge is deeply religious, but—thanks to his opium addiction and his other difficulties (like his unhappy marriage)—he thinks he hasn't fully lived up to his spiritual ideals. (Opium addiction will do that). He's hoping that his son will live up to his own lost promise and have the kind of spiritually-fulfilling life that he hasn't really been able to appreciate. God is, in Coleridge's eyes, wholly loving and benevolent. He wants human beings to enter into a relationship with him. In "Frost at Midnight," Coleridge is hoping that Nature provides the key to developing that relationship.

Ode to the Nightingale

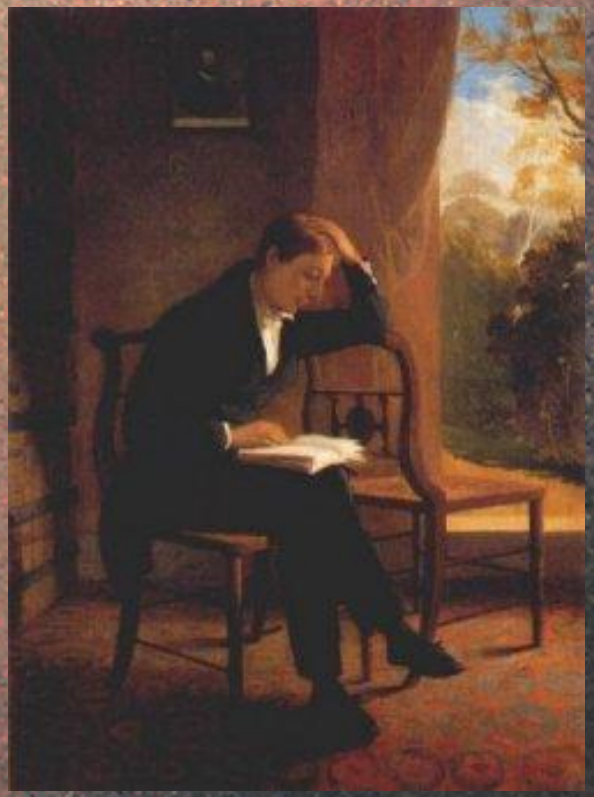
John Keats

-John Keats (1795-1821) was born in England as the oldest of four surviving children, died of tuberculosis at age 25

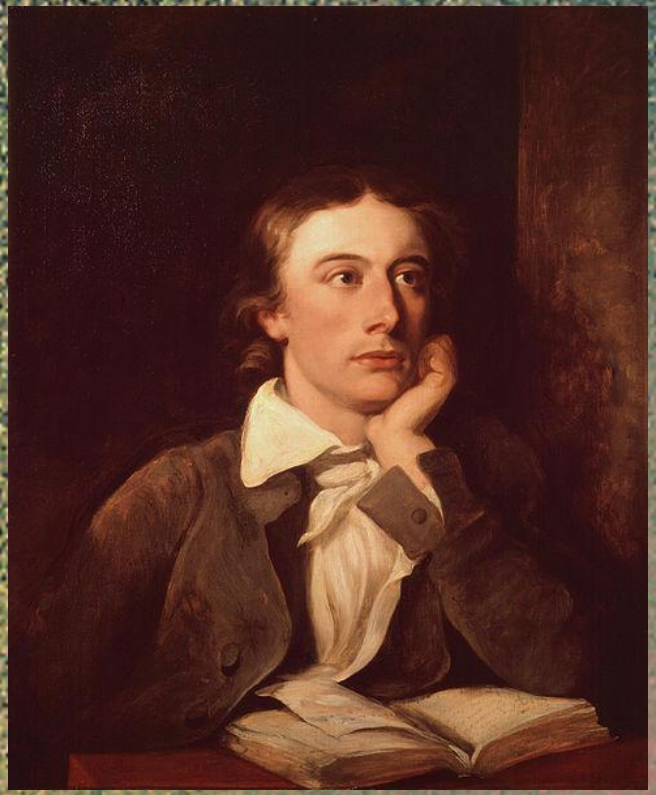
-His father fell off a horse and cracked his skull when Keats was 8, his mother died of tuberculosis when he was 14

-Keats was put in the custody of his grandmother, who appointed two guardians for Keats

-He was removed from school in 1810 to become a surgeon's apprentice, but chose to write instead of using his apothecary license



Keats and His Contemporaries



-Keats became acquainted with Leigh Hunt (influential editor of the *Examiner*, who published “O Solitude” and “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer.”

-Hunt then introduced Keats to Percy Shelly and William Wordsworth

-Influenced by these writers, Keats published a volume of poems that received negative reviews, with the exception of Shelley’s opinion.

-Keat’s declining health over the years is often attributed to his broken spirit after receiving so many unfavorable reviews of his poetry.

Ode to a Nightingale - Background

- Ode to a Nightingale is a poem by John Keats. Written in May, 1819. The poem describes Keats" journey into the state of Negative Capability. The poem explores the themes of nature, transience and mortality, the latter being the most personal to Keats, making as he does a direct reference to the death in 1818 of his brother, Tom.

The title

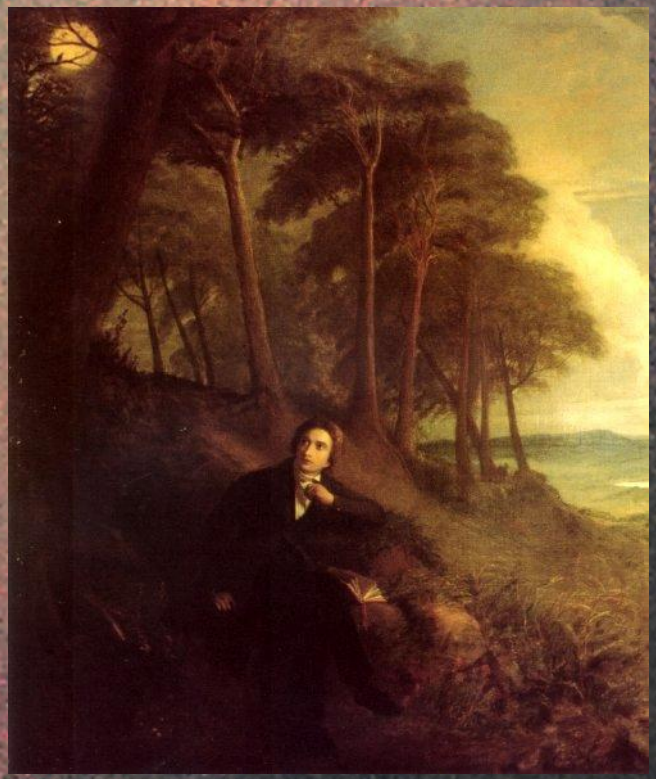
- The title tells us the form of the poem, the ode. But it's not just any ode, it's an ode that is addressed "to" its subject. Throughout the poem, the speaker talks to the nightingale as if it were a person. The title helps set up this little trick. The "nightingale" is a bird that is known for singing at night.

Ode to a Nightingale - Form

- The ode consists of eight stanzas, each containing ten lines. The rhyme scheme (ababcdecde) has a link to the Sonnet form. The poet makes use of enjambment between stanzas two and three.
- Ode: long poem divided into 3 parts, describe the feelings of the poet.
- The sound from the beginning is melancholy, sad and sorrow.

First Stanza

- Keats, says that his heart hurts as he just drink poison, Hemlock is a herb poison.
- Lethe: In Greek mythology, "Lethe" river that made people forget all their memories if they drank from it.



- The song of the nightingale is sad and dark and he see it happy, this is ironic.
- He wants to clarify that the pain he feels is not because he is jealous of the bird's happiness. Instead, he is excessively happy for the bird's happiness. He's like that friend

- Dryad: is a nymph (female spirit) that lives in the trees that love and enjoy nature. personifications of natural features. And it is a Greek mythology.
- There's really no way to dance around it: the speaker is comparing his feeling to being totally strung out on drugs.
- "Opium" is a powerful drug made from the poppy flower.

Second Stanza

- Keats wishes for wine that tastes like “Dance” and the “country green” so that he could be drunk with the nightingale to forget his sorrow.
- Keats longs for a drink of wine or some other spirit that has been kept cool deep in the earth. "Vintage" wine is made from grapes from the same harvest, and people often refer to a particular year at a winery as a "vintage."

- He wants wine to just start bubbling up out of the ground, as if you could stick a tap right into the soil and let the good times flow.
- Good wine needs to be kept cool, the earth is like a giant wine cellar.
- Line 3, Flora: goddess of flowers and fertility. If you drink wine out of the earth, it's no surprise that it might taste like flowers ("Flora") and plants ("country green").

- Not only does the earth's wine taste like flowers, but it also tastes like dancing, song, and happiness ("sunburnt mirth"). Specifically, he is thinking of "Provencal," a region in the south of France known for its wine and sun.
- The speaker wants to stick the south of France, or just the South in general, into a bottle ("beaker"). He wants to distill the earth down to its powerful, intoxicating essence.

- Hippocrene is a spring sacred to the Muses in Greek mythology. Drinking its waters inspired poets. He wants to drink something that will make him a great poet…and that'll get him drunk. – Keats is showing off his knowledge of Greek mythology again.
- The speaker describes the appearance of the wine. It has little bubbles at that burst, or "wink," at the brim of the beaker, like little eyes.
- It also stains your mouth purple when you drink it, like any strong red wine will do.

- He wants to get drunk on this magical wine so that he can leave the "world" without anyone noticing and just "fade" into the dark forest with the nightingale.

Third Stanza

- Keats lists things that the nightingale “has never known,” such as palsy, and solemnly admits that in the human world, youth, beauty, and love don’t last forever. He dreams of "fading" out of the world, of just disappearing in a very quiet way.He dreams of "fading" out of the world, of just disappearing in a very quiet way.

- That's a pretty bleak view of the world, but it just goes to show how much of an effect the nightingale has had on him. Compared to the nightingale's carefree song, our voices sound like groans.
- In this section, Keats confronts one of his favorite enemies in which he tries magically to stop time.
- Time is the speaker's enemy because it causes young and beautiful people to turn old, "pale," thin as a ghost, and, eventually, dead as a doornail.

- **The world is a place where any kind of thinking leads to depressing thoughts and worries. There are no thoughts that can ultimately bring joy or peace: thinking itself is the problem.**

Fourth Stanza

- Keats decides that he will not use wine to float away with the bird. “Though the dull brain perplexes,” he tells the bird to fly away, so that he can follow it on the wings of poetry.
- All this thinking about how depressing the world makes the speaker think, "Get me outta here!" He needs to hatch an escape plan.

- He wants fly away to join the nightingale in its refuge from the world. But he knows that the booze isn't going to take him. He can't rely on Bacchus, the Greek god of wine, or any of Bacchus's buddies ("pards"), which is what he wanted earlier in the poem.
- Instead of wine, he's going to fly on the wings of his own poetry. Poetry's wings are invisible, or "viewless."
- He's hopeful that poetry will take him to the nightingale's world even though his brain is not so helpful in making the trip. His brain confuses him and slows him down.

- And, the, all of a sudden, he's with the nightingale. How did that happen? Count us slightly suspicious of how he can be "already with" the bird, even though he just complained about how his brain was such a big roadblock.
- One possibility is that he joins the nightingale in his dreams, because the imagery in this section is associated with darkness and night.
- He is in the kingdom of the night, which is soft and "tender," and the moon is visible in the sky. The imagery is more fanciful and imaginative here.

- The phrase "tender is the night" was made famous by the American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald, who used it as the title of one of his novels.
- The moon is surrounded by her attendants ("fays"), the stars. Despite all these sources of light, there is no light in the nightingale's world beyond what filters down through the trees.
- What he is really describing in this complicated-sounding line is the fact that the nightingale lives in the forest, where trees block the light. "Verdurous glooms," just means the darkness that is caused by plants getting in the way of the moon.
- Still, the nightingale's home sounds like a magical place, something out of a fairy tale.

Fifth Stanza

- Keats writes that although he can’t see the different flowers, he can use each flower’s scent to label them in the “embalmèd darkness.”
- He remains in the nightingale's nighttime world. (Get it? The *night*-ingale's home is the *night*? Keats, you're so clever!)
- Without light, the speaker can't see the flowers on the forest floor or the plants that produce that pleasant smell ("soft incense") in the trees. (We don't know if he's talking about the trees themselves or something that grows on them...)

- Marco! Polo! The speaker is still groping around in the dark, but he's having fun.
- Because he can't see, he has to guess what "sweet" flowers and plants he smells, which depends on what month it is. It's a delicious guessing game.
- The darkness is "embalmed," where "balm" is a sweet-smelling substance like a perfume.
- He's guessing all kinds of different plants: "Grass!' "Fruit tree!" "Wait, wait, I know this one: white hawthorn! No, it's eglantine!"
- Or maybe he smells all of them at once, like a bouquet.

- The speaker names more plants that he smells in the darkness. He also begins listing things that he can hear. This section all relates to the experience of being alone in a dark – but not a frightening – forest.
- He sees violets, a summer flower, and the musk rose, a flower that blooms in May. The dew of the musk rose is intoxicating, like the wine he spoke of earlier.
- He hears the sound of flies on a summer evening.
- In short, he seems to experience both spring and summer at the same time, which tells us that we have left the world of strict reality. As Dorothy might say, we're not in Kansas anymore.

Sixth Stanza

- The stanzas in this poem actually connect seamlessly. At the end of stanza 5, the speaker moved from smells to sounds. Now he says that he is listening in the darkness.
- The experience of being alone in the dark seems related to the experience of death, and he thinks maybe death wouldn't be so bad. "This is easy," he thinks. "I could get used to this."
- Death would be another way to free himself of all his worldly cares. Maybe he's confusing death for sitting on a beach in Barbados….

- This is turning into a love story between the speaker and death. The speaker whispers sweet nothings to death. And by whisper we mean, "writes rhyming poetry about." Yeah.
- It's true: Keats was obsessed with the idea of death, and he often wrote about it.
- Line 54 is mysterious: we think it means either that he wants death to take the air from his lungs, or that the air takes his breath along with his verses.

- He's really quite taken with this death idea. While in the world of the nightingale, he thinks it would be "rich to die." Many people are afraid that death will be empty, but richness is associated with an abundance of good things, which is almost the opposite of emptiness.
- He'd like to go out quietly, in the middle of the night. He'd just stop existing: "cease."
- This part of the poem is kind of creepy, because Keats did die very young.
- He wants to die at midnight, while listening to the nightingale singing.

- We were wondering what happened to the nightingale. He seems to forget about the nightingale at the beginning of the stanzas and then return to it at the end, as if he suddenly remembered: "Oh, right: this is supposed to be a poem about a bird!"
- The nightingale is kind of like a poet, sending its voice into the air just as Keats sends his rhyme into the air. The bird's music expresses its "soul." Birds have souls? This one does.
- The bird is completely lost in the moment of pure joy and "ecstasy."

- Keats has been “half in love” with the idea of dying. The nightingale’s song would make dying then and there easier, but his ears would then only be able to hear the bird’s song “in vain.”
- He imagines what would happen after the moment of his death. Basically, the bird would keep singing as if nothing had happened.
- The speaker would still have "ears," of course: or at least. his corpse would. But the ears would be useless ("vain") because there is no brain to process the sounds.

- The bird would be then singing a "high requiem," a kind of church service with music sung for a dead person. Lots of classical musicians have composed amazing requiems, like Mozart, but we'd bet the nightingale probably doesn't know it is singing one.
- And neither would the speaker, of course. By that point, he'd just be an inanimate object, like a piece of grassy soil or "sod.“

Seventh Stanza

- He thinks that the nightingale must be immortal: it can't die.
- Being immortal, the nightingale is not followed by future generations, which are metaphorically "hungry" in that they take the place of their parents. This is a very pessimistic view of the cycle of life. Basically, the younger folks are hunting down their own parents to run them off the planet.

- So he doesn't necessarily mean that each nightingale is immortal. He means that the nightingale's voice is immortal, because all nightingales produce the same beautiful, haunting sound.
- His talk of generations leads him to think of human history.
- Emperors and clowns in the old days listened to the same voice of the nightingale that he hears now How old? The reference to emperors makes us think of Ancient Rome. Keats was an Italian buff.
- The speaker moves slightly further back through history, from Imperial Rome to the Old Testament of the Bible

- The Book of Ruth is one of the lesser-known books in the Hebrew Bible. The story goes that Ruth married a guy and moved to a new country. Then her husband died, and Ruth's mother-in-law told her to return home and get married again. But Ruth was like, "I'm totally loyal to you and can't leave you." She supports her mother-in-law by working in the fields of this (to her) completely strange and random place. Eventually she finds a new husband. The end.
- Keats imagines that Ruth heard the nightingale's song while she was working in the fields in this foreign or "alien" place, and it caused her to start weeping.

- He notes another time that the nightingale's song might have been heard. But now he has left regular human history all together in favor of fantasy.
- A "casement" is either a normal case or a window that opens on a hinge. The speaker thinks the nightingale's song has "charmed" a casement on a ship, and the casement opens. Somehow "magic" is involved, but we think Keats is just using words that conjure up the images of fantasy.
- The nightingale flies out the window and over the open ocean. There is an air of danger: this is no regular ocean. It is the ocean surrounding a fantasy world or "faery land."

- After it flies out the window, the nightingale is alone and abandoned – "forlorn" – in this strange land.
- Keats comments on the bird's immortality, saying it sang for emperors "[i]n ancient days." He also writes that the bird's song could open "magic casements."

Eight Stanza

Stanza 8 Summary of death, but the spell is broken when the bird flies away unexpectedly. The entire poem is characterized by the speaker's "altered" mental state, which he claims is not due to alcohol or drugs, although he compares it to these things.

Keats halts his adoration of the nightingale to concentrate on himself. He is saddened by the bird’s flight elsewhere and by his seeming lack of imagination.

Ode to a Nightingale Themes

1- Happiness

"happiness" or "unhappiness" a more appropriate theme for "Ode to a Nightingale"? We're not sure. The speaker is mighty unhappy about the demands placed on him by life, time, and age. He hates to consider that young, beautiful people – the Romantic A-list – will eventually be old and incoherent. But he claims that the "ache" his heart feels is due to extreme happiness for the nightingale, so we'll have to take his word for it. He seems content enough, at least, to have an "I could die happy" moment around the middle of the poem.

2- Theme of Mortality

The speaker of "Ode to a Nightingale" fools himself into believing that the nightingale is immortal, or at least its song is. But this statement seems only to give him another excuse to complain about human mortality – a common complaint in Keats's poetry. The nightingale's song echoes through generations of history, from Ancient Greece to Biblical times through the present. Keats was maybe the most "romantic" (notice the small "r') of the British Romantic poets, and he might have agreed with the saying that you shouldn't trust anyone over thirty. It seems that the worst aspect of death is not that old people must die, but that young people must turn into old people who die. The poem seeks an escape from this cycle.

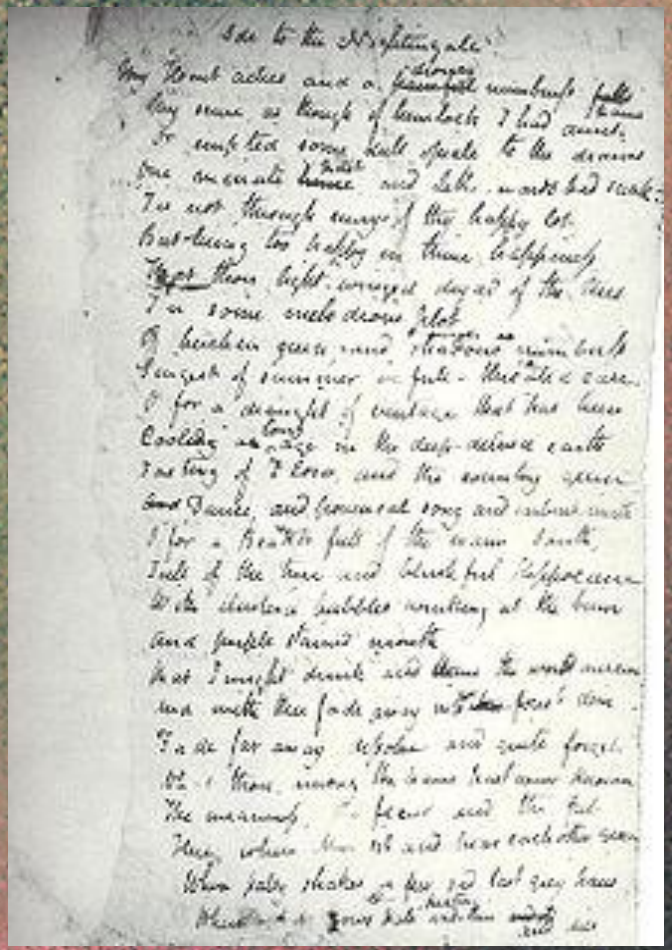
3-Theme of Transience

- The fleeting nature of happiness and youth is one of the great themes in Keats's Great Odes. In "Ode to a Nightingale," the speaker manages to imagine himself into such a state: the nightingale's world. But the imagination is not powerful enough to carry on the fiction after the nightingale has flown away, and his waking vision ends after only a few stanzas of bliss.

4-Theme of Man and the Natural World

- The speaker of "Ode to a Nightingale" loves nature, but he can't get on board with the whole natural-things-have-to-die-sometime thing. He even fancies that the nightingale is some immortal, godlike creature. However, nature is his best hope for escape from the world of work, stress, responsibility, and complicated human relationships. Although he begins the poem sitting just outside of a wooded area, he will not be satisfied until he can experience the forest from the perspective of one of its creatures: from the inside. He imagines becoming intoxicated from the smells of all the forest plants and flowers.

Holograph of Keats's Ode to a Nightingale written in May 1819



The More You Know

- An ode is a complex, long lyric poem on a serious subject, intimate, meditative; not a story, but emotions and thoughts
- Keats' use of slant rhyme (been + green)
- Ode to a Nightingale is an example of Quintessential Romanticism.

Conclusion

- Ode to a Nightingale by John Keats par excellence. It is one of the most representative of Romantic poems. It showcases almost all the features of romantic poetry.
- It is a subjective and lyrical poem which is primarily about the poet's response to and interpretation of the unseen bird's song. The bird is just a stimulus for the self to begin its transcendental flight to a dreamland, but then, the mystical land of fantasy is replete with suffering and the golden pangs of tragedy still, thus marking a subjective oscillation and a return to the sordidly mortal world of reality, as charged by the crucial word "forlorn". The poem employs a synesthetic imagination, evoking all possible senses and the meditative melancholy, the temporal flux and the tragedy of the decaying beauty , all that seemed eternal, being unmade, the melody of the cadence, the emotional primacy, the humanistic assumptions, the mood of awe and wonder. All these elements contribute to the making of this classic of romantic poetry.

Done By :

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"Kubla Khan"
by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Sarah Abdulrahman Khuder

Introduction

- Kubla Khan
- By Samuel Taylor Coleridge

- Born in Ottery St Mary, Devonshire
- He went to Christ's Hospital School in London, and studied at Jesus College.
- He married Sara Fricker, although he didn’t love her.
- He was an English lyrical poet, philosopher, and critic.
- His lyrical ballads, written with William Wordsworth started the English Romantic movement.
- He left France and went to Germany where he studied philosophy at Göttingen University and mastered the German language.
- At the end of 1799 Coleridge fell in love with Sara Hutchinson, the sister of Wordsworth's future wife, to whom he devoted his work.
- In 1816 "Kubla Khan" was published, and it is said it was inspired by a dream vision.
- He died in Highgate, near London on July 25, 1834

“Kubla Khan”

- **Kubla Khan by Samuel Taylor Coleridge**

- In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round:
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momently was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:
And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momently the sacred river.
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war!

“Kubla Khan” Continued…

- The shadow of the dome of pleasure
  Floated midway on the waves;
  Where was heard the mingled measure
  From the fountain and the caves.
  It was a miracle of rare device,
  A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

  A damsel with a dulcimer
  In a vision once I saw:
  It was an Abyssinian maid,
  And on her dulcimer she played,
  Singing of Mount Abora.
  Could I revive within me
  Her symphony and song,
  To such a deep delight 'twould win me
  That with music loud and long
  I would build that dome in air,
  That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
  And all who heard should see them there,
  And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
  His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
  Weave a circle round him thrice,
  And close your eyes with holy dread,
  For he on honey-dew hath fed
  And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Paraphrase

- Basically he smokes opium (first phase)
  He enters a place thats super beautiful
  The place is amazing but at the same time evil (look for the dichotomy)
  He can feel it leaving him.
  At the end he warns people not go look at it because its so beautiful.

- Kubla has a place that so amazing that it brings pain, pain from not being to be there forever, pain of knowing its out there when he cant be there, pain of not wanting to share it.

  Its like anything we really love and covet. Nothing brings beauty without bringing pain with it.

- And all who look shall see them there,
  And all should cry, Beware ! Beware !
  His flashing eyes, his floating hair !
  Weave a circle round him thrice,
  And close your eyes with holy dread,
  For he on honey-dew hath fed,
  And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Diction

< the poem is very abstract and vivid like this picture

- **DICTION**
- The poem is a visionary poem, formal, abstract, vivid, and has obsolete words. It uses intricate language to portray the vision that Coleridge had. The words are flowing and mellow. like "sinuous", and "enfolding" at the end summons a feeling of being embraced by the peacefulness of Xanadu.
- This poem is famous not for the story it tells, but how it is told. It uses elaborate, vivid language used to describe places and sights. "Gardens bright with sinuous rills," and "sunny spots of greenery."
- This poem was written while Samuel Coleridge was high on opium, so in the poem he presents us with words full of “image rich metaphors” for the joys, pain, and temptation that drives someone to use opium. A "pleasure dome" (2) near which runs a sacred river, which is surrounded by fertile lands, gardens, and ancient forests, this is the Xanadu that Coleridge first presents for us. This place is peaceful, like the state that is brought by using opium.
- While writing Kubla Khan Coleridge was high on opium. This drug was used in Classical Greece, Rome, India, and China, where it was the cause of two wars. Physicians prescribed it to kill pain, it was used as a social drug and it was used by a lot to forget about the grief in their lives.

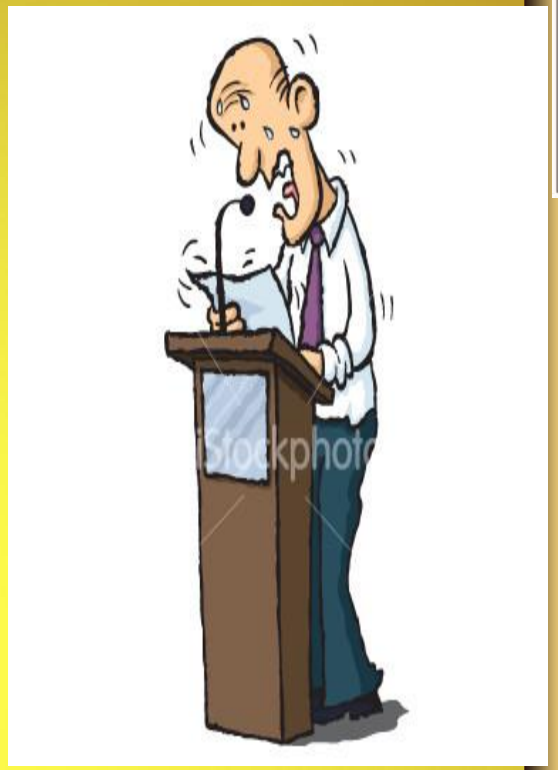
Tone and Mood

^ picture of how the utopia described might look

- The introduction to the poem is vivid and exciting as it describes a sense of utopia. A palace is described with lush green forests and a beautiful river running through the canyons. The tone then changes to eerie as a woman is described crying for her demon lover. The author portrays excitement when talking about the lush river.
- The reader feels wonder and enthusiasm about the palace and river. The mood of the reader is frightful and scary when talking about the woman by the river.
- Toward the end of the poem, the tone of the poet's attitude is mysterious as you hear him describe visions of the past.
- The poem conveys situational irony in the beginning when the author talks about how perfect the palace is but then mentions the spooky place where the women cries for her demon lover.

Rhetorical Situation

- The speaker of the poem seems as if he is speaking to a crowd. The speaker uses great imagery to pull the reader in to make it feel like you are being spoken to directly. This is why the speaker uses dramatic descriptions in the beginning of the poem.
- The speaker makes sure not to lose the audiences attention, and to do so he makes sure to throw in some figurative language and vivid descriptions.
- The speaker appears as a mysterious figure trying to impress a large crowd. He does so by making his descriptions fast.



^ the author seems like he is speaking to a large crowd of people trying to pull in their attention

Figurative Language

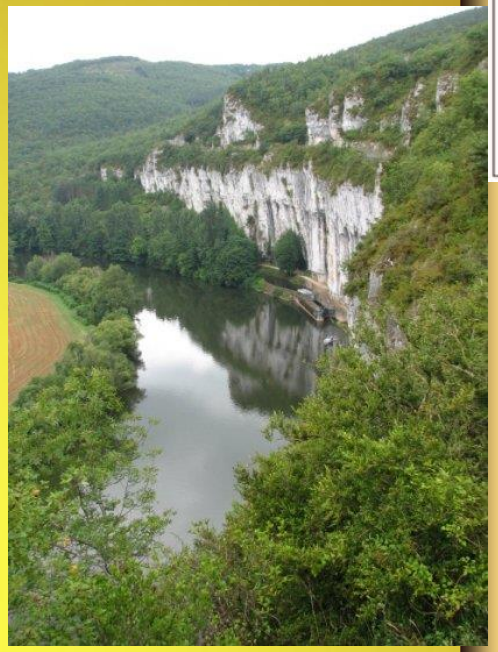
- Alliteration- use of the same beginning consonant sound
  - Ex: “sunless sea” (line 5), “sunny spots” (line 11)
- Personification- giving human characteristics to inhuman objects
  - Ex: “a savage place! as holy and enchanted” (line 14), “beneath a waning moon” (line 15), “as if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing” (line 18)
- Smiles- a comparison using like or as
  - Ex: “And here were forests ancient as the hills” (line 10), “huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail” (line 21)
- Metaphor- a direct comparison
  - Ex: “down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!” (line 13)

Imagery

^ picture of what the palace that was described might look like

- Samuel Taylor Coleridge uses descriptive imagery to make the reader picture this great utopia, the Emperor's palace, but with disturbing thoughts, such that it was "haunted by [a] woman wailing for her demon lover!" (15-16).
- He describes in great detail a scared river that flows through a canyon. Kubla Khan himself was seen listening to the noisy river and thinking about war.
- The reader can picture this lush ground and hear the noisy river from the descriptive language used.
- Examples of imagery used in this poem: "sunless sea" (line 5), "gardens bright with sinuous rills" (line 8), "enfolding sunny spots of greenery" (line 11).

Symbolism



- The River: The speaker mentions the river in over half the poem, the descriptions on how powerful it is draws us to the conclusion that the main image is about the excitement and power of the Earth's natural wonders.
- The Ocean: The ocean is described as dark, gloomy and mysterious. It seems to be a dead-end and an unknown open space. It could possibly be seen as an underworld type environment when compared to the lush utopia also described.
- Woman and Demon Lover: The description of the woman wailing for her lover who is also a demon describes supernatural power and romance but it can also be related to excitement.

Sound

- **Rhyme Scheme**: It has rhyme either back to back or every other line. Ex: “round” & “ground”, “slanted” & “enchanted”, “hail” &”flail”
- **Alliteration**: It has alliteration within each stanza. Ex: “sunless sea”, “woman wailing”, “mazy motion”, “deep delight”
- **Cacophony**: Throughout the poem there are several lines that rhyme but are broken up by words that don’t rhyme after a few lines so it breaks the rhythm of the poem. Ex: ***“But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover! A savage place! as holy and enchanted As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted”***
- **Repetition:** In this poem repetition is used with certain words that sounds the same and have the same ending. Ex: “seething”, breathing”, “rebounding”, “prophesying”, “dancing”, “waning”, “lifeless”, “measureless”, “ceaseless”,

Poem Structure

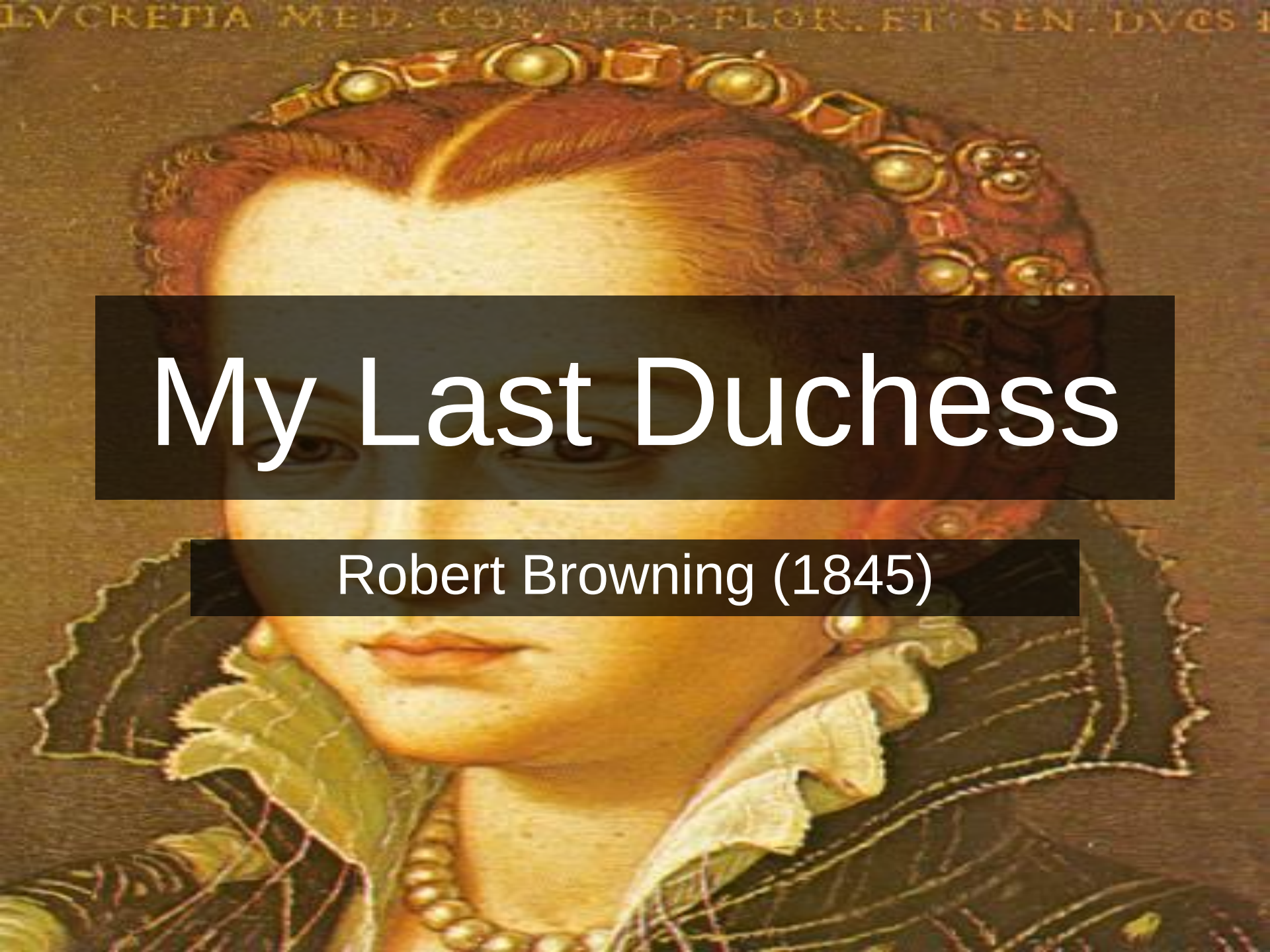
- The structural elements might include the line, couplet, strophe and stanza. Poets and Dark Poetry combine the use of language and a specific structure to create an imaginative and expressive poem such as Kubla Khan. The structure used in Dark Poetry types are also used when considering the visual effect of a finished poem.
- Elements that make this poem dark are repetition & a lot of imagery.
- **Ex:** "The shadow of the dome of pleasure
  Floated midway on the waves;
  Where was heard the mingled measure
  From the fountain and the caves. "

- **Ex:** "And all who heard should see them there,
  And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
  His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
  Weave a circle round him thrice,
  And close your eyes with holy dread"
- This poem is written in iambic tetrameter and uses an alternating rhyme scheme:
- **First stanza:** ABAABCCDEDE
- Second stanza: ABAABCCDDFFGGHIIHJJ
- **Third stanza:** ABABCC
- **Fourth stanza:** ABCCBDEDEFGFFFGHHG
- .

Conclusion/Evaluation

- The writer of the poem made his point very fast in the beginning, getting right to it. He started out real dramatic in his descriptions. He repeats himself plenty of times for dramatic effect; as if he were telling a story to a crowd or preaching to an audience. He never lets his energy drop throughout the poem.
- The fact that most of the poem rhymed and parts of it didn't made the flow off so it matched with his mood and the dark them of the poem. Elements the author used the most were repetition and imagery. These elements were effective because it makes a more vivid vision for the reader.

^ KUBLA KHAN!!!!!



My Last Duchess

Robert Browning (1845)


LVCRETIA MED. COS. MED. FLOR. ET SEN. DVCIS
Read the Poem

Robert Browning

- **Robert Browning** (7 May 1812 – 12 December 1889) was an English poet and playwright whose dramatic monologues put him among the foremost Victorian poets. His poems are noted for irony, characterization, dark humour, social commentary, historical settings and challenging vocabulary and syntax. His career began well, but shrank for a time. The long poems *Pauline* (1833) and *Paracelsus* (1835) were acclaimed, but in 1840 *Sordello* was seen as wilfully obscure. His renown took over a decade to return, by which time he had moved from Shelleyan forms to a more personal style. In 1846 Browning married the older poet Elizabeth Barrett and went to live in Italy. By her death in 1861 he had published the collection *Men and Women* (1855). His *Dramatis Personae* (1864) and book-length epic poem *The Ring and the Book* (1868–1869) made him a leading British poet. He continued to write prolifically, but his reputation today rests mainly on his middle period. By his death in 1889, he was seen as a sage and philosopher-poet who had fed into Victorian social and political discourse. Societies for studying his work formed in his lifetime and survived in Britain and the United States into the 20th century.

What is it about?

- Based on the life of Alfonso II, Duke of Ferreira, Italy
- The Duke's first wife died in 1561 after 3 years of marriage
- We learn about the Duke by what he says about her and how he says it
- We also learn about their relationship; what was expected; how she responded

Subject

- The speaker (the Duke of Ferrara) talks to the representative of a Count whose daughter he wishes to marry.
- He shows this man a portrait of his previous wife. The portrait is usually kept behind a curtain.
- He describes what his “last duchess” was like.

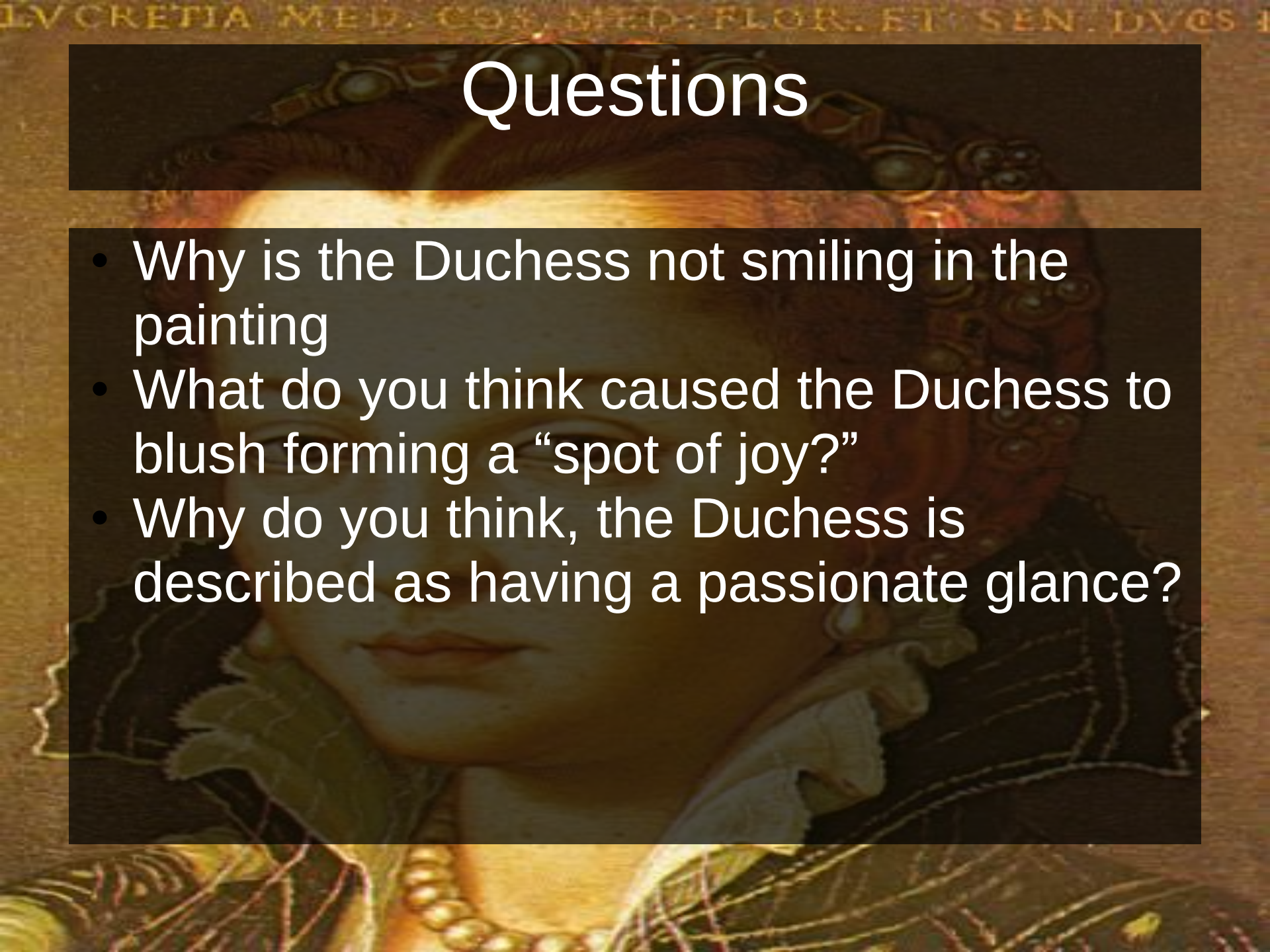
The Duke of Ferrara was a real person..

He was Duke of Ferrara (in Italy) from 1559 to 1597.

He was married three times and his first wife’s death was treated suspiciously – poisoning

Important points

- The Duke is possessive – he chooses who does or does not see the Duchess – something he could not achieve when she was alive.
- The Duke actually sees women as possessions – this is highlighted when he refers to the sculpture of Neptune which “Claus of Insbruck cast in bronze for me.” He also tells the messenger that “beauty is my object.”
- The Duke did not tell the Duchess that he was displeased with her behaviour – he thinks that he would have been “stooping” or lowering his standards.



Questions

- Why is the Duchess not smiling in the painting
- What do you think caused the Duchess to blush forming a “spot of joy?”
- Why do you think, the Duchess is described as having a passionate glance?

Answers

- She is not smiling because, the Duke stole her smiles away
- The poem insinuates the Duchess is blushing because she in the company of her lover. Her passionate glance might have been in result of the painter who is a rival for her love.

Analysis of “My last Duchess”

- At the beginning of the poem when the Duke is first introducing the painting he states: “Strangers like you that pictured countenance, the depth and passion of **its** earnest glance”(7).
- By the Duke referring to the painting as, **it**, it is implied that the Duke has developed more of a relationship with the painting, than the woman this painting represents.

- Later in the Poem the Duke describes his wife's imperfections
- "A heart—how shall I say?– Too soon made glad, Too easily impressed; She liked whate'er She looked on, and her looks went everywhere"(28).
- The Duke blames her for not seeing any difference between being the wife of a great man or any other simple pleasure. He believes she gave all men the kind of respect that only a man with his family's rank deserves.

- Near the end of the poem, the Duke implies the Duchess's death
- "Oh sir, She smiled, no doubt Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands; Then all smiles stopped together" (45).
- When 'the smiles stopped' the audience can assume that either the Duke restricted the Duchesses behavior in a way that dampened her life, or he may have ordered her assassination

The Duke is very possessive

Dramatic monologue

My Last Duchess

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will 't please you to sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to my self they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 't was not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps

An imaginary artist, name dropping: everything has monetary value

He likes beautiful things

There is a reason for drawing the curtain, it's so the person can see his prized possession

Fra Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat:" such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart--how shall I say?--too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed: she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 't was all one! My favor at her breast,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace--all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,--good! but thanked
Somehow,--I know not how--as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name

She was a modest person who got embarrassed by compliments

Her only crime was enjoying life and not respecting his rank/title

The Duke's jealousy; he starts to reveal more than he planned

His only pride is in his wealthy family name

Contrast: genuine romance or a posh title, he expects her to value the latter more

With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech--(which I have not)--to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"--and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
--E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,

He accidentally reveals more of his weaknesses

What kind of man expects his wife to be rude like this?

He is getting jealous over her being kind

HE KILLED HER? Catholic renaissance Italy…

Makes monologue feel like conversation

The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Robert Browning (1812-1889)

Money for marrying his daughter

He is talking to an emissary of his future wife's father

And a beautiful wife to boot

He returns to material things; all his money and power will never buy him love though

The Duke doesn't realise how much of himself he has given away in his criticism of his former wife

young woman's "faults" were qualities like compassion, modesty, humility, delight in simple pleasures, and courtesy to those who served her.

Common Themes

- Pride- throughout the poem it is understood that in this hierachial society- people can be seen as objects which can be bought and owned.
- Art- Twice in this poem art is mentioned: the picture itself, and the statue of Neptune taming the see horses.

Key Questions

1. Find clues about how the Duke feels about the picture of his last Duchess.
2. Find clues which tell you about the personality of the woman.
3. How did the Duke feel about her behaviour?
4. What might have happened to her?
5. What does the Duke say about how people react to the portrait?
6. Why do you think Browning used enjambement in this poem – what effect did he try to achieve?
7. What impression do we get of the character of the Duke?
8. Themes: What are the key themes here?
9. How can this poem be linked to other poems you have looked at so far?

Ode to a Nightingale

BY JOHN KEATS

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
    My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
    One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
    But being too happy in thine happiness,—
        That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees
            In some melodious plot
    Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
        Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
    Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
    Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
    Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
        With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
            And purple-stained mouth;
    That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
        And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
    What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
    Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
    Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
        Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
            And leaden-eyed despairs,
    Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
        Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,

Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path

Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

The Lamb

Assistant Lecturer Sarah Abdulrahman

William Blake's "The Lamb"

- Little Lamb, who made thee?
- Dost thou know who made thee?
- Gave thee life, and bid thee feed,
- By the steam and o'er the mead;
- Gave thee clothing of delight,
- Softest clothing, woolly, bright;
- Gave thee such a tender voice,
- Making all the vales rejoice?
- Little Lamb, who made thee?
- Dost thou know who made thee?

- Little Lamb, I'll tell thee,
- Little Lamb, I'll tell thee;
- He is called by the name,
- For He calls Himself a Lamb,
- He is meek, and He is mild;
- He became a little child.
- I a child, and thou a lamb,
- We are called by His name.
- Little Lamb, God bless thee!
- Little Lamb, God bless thee!

Theme

- This song is lyrical or it is a song sung by a child. It consists of two stanzas;
- **The First Stanza**: A child is speaking here, addressing a little lamb, raising a series of questions and inquires. He asked the lamb about its creation, feeding, clothing and delightful soft voice which rejoices on the meadows and in vales making people happy.
- **The Second Stanza:** The child himself answers all these questions. He sees that there is an association between this gentle creature, the lamb, and Jesus Christ who once called himself a lamb. He is the messenger of God came in the shape of a lamb holding the message of peace, love, innocence and mercy. So there is much similarity between Jesus Christ, the messenger of God and this gentle creature.

Evaluation

- **Critical Points of This Song:**
- 1- The poem is lyrical, simple, instructive and easy in meaning. On the surface, it is about a nice, mild, gentle and tame lamb or creature but in the deep structure the poem implies a religious fact. It is about the first coming of Jesus Christ. At the beginning of His coming, He brought the principles of love, innocence and forgiveness and called people to follow Him.
- 2- This poem is dramatic. It has two stanzas. In the first stanza, there is a speaker and a silent listener, asking him a series of questions while in the second stanza, this speaker answers all his questions instead of the lamb. However, the poet wants to shed light on one great aspect of God. The greatness of God is obviously seen in his creation; Jesus Christ, the child and the lamb. This is one aspect of his great qualities.

The Tyger

ASSISTANT LECTURER SARAH ABDULRAHMAN

WILLIAM BLAKE (1757-1827)

- His life in brief:
- He is one of the romantic pioneer poets. He was the first who published his first collection of poems "Songs of Innocence", "Songs of Experience". The first part of this collection is sung by a child who is a symbol of innocence. He is spontaneous, naive and unexperienced. He tells in first part, short stories or makes notes about life or people around him. Whereas the second part of the collection is sung by a grown up. The first part is characterized by simplicity, beauty, love, passion,, and innocence. A grown up has a lot of experience about people. So this part is characterized by cruelty, hatred and evil.

THE TYGER

Tiger! Tiger! burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame they fearful symmetry?
In what distance deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes!
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare sieze the fire?

And what shoulder and what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? And what dread feet?

What the hammer? What the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? What dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

- *When the stars threw down their spears,*
- *And watered heaven with their tears,*
- *Did He smile His work to see?*
- *Did He who made the lamb make thee?*
-
- *Tiger, Tiger, burning bright,*
- *In the forests of the night;*
- *What immortal hand or eye,*
- *Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?*

THEME

- This poem is also a lyrical one, yet it is sung by a grown up or it is one song of (Songs of Experience). In this song, the poet deals with a completely differently theme or idea. He describes a wild animal, the tiger, which has certain qualities that are completely different from those of the lamb. This animal is wild, strong, fearful, but beautiful at the same time. According to the poet, this animal has combined totally different qualities. In fact, they are highly contradictory qualities: fear and beauty.
- The poet presents in details the physical qualities of this animal. It has great powerful physical fitness. On the surface, the poet admires this great creature, but in deep structure he admires the creator who creates such a fascinating animal. At last, the poet wonders whether the creator who created the lamb with its special qualities created the tiger with completely different ones. They are two absolutely different creatures.

EVALUATION

- In examining this poem, The Tyger, we can sum up the following critical points:-
- 1-The whole poem is built on a paradoxical statement *"fearful symmetry"* oxymoronic phrase. The poet believes that this animal has two completely different qualities: fear and beauty. Its sight is fearful because it is dangerous but its shape is highly beautiful and fascinating. So he expresses his admiration starting from the head, the mouth, the shoulders, and end of the legs. This beautiful shape is glowing with fire in the eyes fear in the movement and death. One can admire it, but he/she cannot approach it.
-
- 2-Seemingly the two poems are about completely different animals, one is tame while the other is wild. However, in depth the poet refers to completely different religious aspects represented in Jesus Christ the messenger of God. Christ came at first holding the message of love, peace, mercy, innocence and forgiveness and he called his followers to adopt these principles and apply them to their lives and warned in his second coming that he would punish severely those who have forgotten his principles and disobeyed him. He would come near the end of life on earth in the shape of great power and punish the disbelievers. So the
- two poems represent two different religious implications.

- 3- If we look deeper into the two poems, we would soon discover that they embody two totally dissimilar aspects of God Al-Mighty. As long as God is merciful and compassionate, He is also revengeful who punishes the criminals, the sinners, and the disbelievers. So the two poems, though are different, yet they have mutual qualities mainly religious.

Poetry for Students

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Volume 2

Marie Rose Napierkowski, Editor
Mary K. Ruby, Editor

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Ulysses

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

1833

"Ulysses" is based upon the *Odyssey,* written by the Greek poet Homer, who is known to have lived some time before 700 B.C. In that tale, Ulysses is gone from his home for thirty years: for ten years he is involved in fighting in the Trojan war, and the journey back from Troy to his homeland of Ithaca takes him through a series of adventures that last another twenty years. Another source that Tennyson is assumed to have used, that is similar in spirit to this poem, is the *Inferno,* by Dante Alighieri. In Canto XXVI of that poem, Ulysses is unable to give up his life of adventure and returns to the sea, as he does in this poem.

"Ulysses" was written in 1833 but not published until 1842, in Tennyson's *Poems.* This collection marked the poet's return to publication after a period referred to as his "ten years' silence." Tennyson has identified the source of the poem's emotion as rising from his feelings about the death of his college friend, Arthur Hallam, when Tennyson was twenty four. Although they knew each other for only five years, Hallam had a profound influence on Tennyson's life and work. (One of the poet's greatest accomplishments, the long poem *In Memoriam,* directly addresses his feelings about Hallam's life and early death.) Tennyson related his friend's death to this tale of a Ulysses' desire to return to a life of adventure on the sea when he noted in his *Memoir* that the poem "gave my feelings about going forward, and braving the struggle of life."

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Tennyson's noble sentiment is not entirely accurate in describing this poem, though. The speaker of this poem is braving life's struggles to some extent, but he is also abandoning his family and responsibilities in what some have called a selfish pursuit of adventure. Ulysses' feelings about adventure are best expressed in lines 19-20, where the speaker observes that "all experience is an arch wherethrough / Gleams that untravelled world...." The experiences of Ulysses' travels away from home have opened bridges to new adventures that are so attractive, or gleaming, that going for them can be seen equally as being either brave or self-gratifying.

Author Biography

Tennyson was born in 1809 in Somersby, Lincolnshire. The fourth of twelve children, he was the son of a clergyman who maintained his office grudgingly after his younger brother had been named heir to their father's wealthy estate. According to biographers, Tennyson's father, a man of violent temper, responded to his virtual disinheritance by indulging in drugs and alcohol. Each of the Tennyson children later suffered through some period of drug addiction or mental and physical illness, prompting the family's grim speculation on the "black blood" of the Tennysons. Biographers surmise that the general melancholy expressed in much of Tennyson's verse is rooted in the unhappy environment at Somersby.

Tennyson enrolled at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1827. There he met Arthur Hallam, a brilliant undergraduate who became Tennyson's closest friend and ardent admirer of his poetry. Hallam's enthusiasm was welcomed by Tennyson, whose personal circumstances had led to a growing despondency: his father died in 1831, leaving Tennyson's family in debt and forcing his early departure from school; one of Tennyson's brothers suffered a mental breakdown and required institutionalization; and Tennyson himself was morbidly fearful of falling victim to epilepsy or madness. Hallam's untimely death in 1833, which prompted the series of elegies later comprising *In Memoriam,* contributed greatly to Tennyson's despair. In describing this period, he wrote: "I suffered what seemed to me to shatter all my life so that I desired to die rather than to live." For nearly a decade after Hallam's death Tennyson published no poetry. During this time he became engaged to Emily Sellwood, but financial difficulties and Tennyson's persistent anxiety over the condition of his health resulted in their separation. In 1842 an unsuccessful financial venture cost Tennyson nearly everything he owned, causing him to succumb to a deep depression that required medical treatment. Tennyson later resumed his courtship of Sellwood, and they were married in 1850. The timely success of *In Memoriam,* published that same year, ensured Tennyson's appointment as Poet Laureate, succeeding William Wordsworth. In 1883 Tennyson accepted a peerage, the first poet to be so honored strictly on the basis of literary achievement. Tennyson died in 1892 and was interred in Poet's Corner of Westminister Abbey.

Poem Text

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 enjoyed
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 honored 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 untraveled world whose margin fades
Forever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!
As though 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.

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the scepter and the isle—
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfill
This labor, 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, centered 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 toiled, 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 honor and his toil.
Death closes all; but something ere the end,
Some work of notable 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,
'Tis 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.
Though much is taken, much abides; and though
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.

Poem Summary

Lines 1-5:

This poem begins with Ulysses having come home from the thirty-year adventure (which included participation in the Trojan War) that is the subject of Homer's long poem, "The Odyssey," and having resumed his position as king of Ithaca. This opening stanza establishes the speaker's discontent in its first words, "It little profits," and goes on to describe the role of king in negative, unappealing terms: the land he rules is seen as "these barren crags," his wife "aged," and even the traditionally most comforting image of home life, the fireplace hearth, is "still," offering no warmth. The king's subjects are described as "a savage race," and their actions, sleeping and eating, are basic animal behavior; the only thing they do that might require human thought, the capacity to see beyond the immediate moment, is the greedy act of hoarding.

But the speaker balances this unflattering view of his home and subjects with contempt for himself. He describes himself as "an idle king," and notes the unfairness of the laws that he passes, calling them "unequal." By the end of the stanza, it becomes clear that the problem with his reign is not the shortcomings of either his subjects or himself, but the fact that he is not mentally matched to the people he leads. He feels distant from the people that he is supposed to rule because they "know not me." Here Tennyson gently implies Ulysses' wisdom, by making him realize that a king and his subjects are not suited if they cannot understand each other. He also implies that there is a bit of egotism involved on Ulysses' part by having him phrase the misunderstanding in this way, instead of "I know not them" or "we know not each other."

Lines 6-17:

In these lines Ulysses remembers his travels fondly, even those times when he was alone and those times when he was sailing a turbulent sea. Line 6 contains a structure (Ulysses making a direct statement about himself, followed by a semicolon that indicates that further explanation is to come) that will be repeated two more times in this stanza, in lines 11 and 18. The "lees" referred to in line 7 are the sediment at the bottom of a cup of wine: in his enthusiasm to "drink life to the lees" the speaker wants to fully experience all things, good and bad. The Hyades mentioned in line 10 are sisters, daughters of Atlas, who according to legend were turned into a constellation

of stars by Zeus, king of the gods. By saying that they vexed, or tormented, the sea with blowing sheets of rain ("scudding drifts"), the speaker is suggesting that the constellation influences the sea and weather, as he is describing the worst conditions that a sailor might face. Even although he is as aware of the horror and danger as he is of the quiet times, he still wants, as stated in line 6, to travel again.

The unusual diction of "I am become a name" in line 11 gives the phrase an unmoving, static quality, removing some of the minor motion that would be implied by "I have become a name": this strengthens the contrast between Ulysses' present stationary life with all of the action the poem has described. Being a name grants Ulysses the glory of the legend that is associated with his name (as described in lines 12-17), but it also reduces his existence to just one word.

Lines 18-21:

In these lines, Ulysses states the philosophic problem that is troubling him: he has had an effect on everything that he has come into contact with, but every experience has inevitably led to more experiences (every experience is an "arch" or passage to new experiences—"that untravelled world"). However, like the horizon, which always recedes as you try to approach it, the border ("margin") of that new world "fades" away as Ulysses moves toward it.

Lines 22-32:

In this section of the poem, Ulysses convinces himself that the best thing to do would be to leave Ithaca and become a wanderer again. To start with, in lines 22 and 23 he makes the quiet inactive life seem not only boring but useless. The word "dull" in line 22 suggests boredom, but line 23—which evokes the image of a sword that rusts when it is unpolished ("unburnished") and shines when it is used—subtly connects dullness with uselessness, implying that while he is inactive Ulysses feels as useless as a dull (meaning both blunt and unpolished) sword. (This is a good example of what many people like about poetry: the packing of a lot of meaning into just a few words.) With his exclamation in line 24, in which he makes a distinction between truly living and simply breathing, his thought takes on a sense of urgency. Lines 24-26 indicate that many lives would not be enough for this speaker, and that there is not much left of the one he has. Each hour saved from death, therefore, must not be a mere passage of time, but rather be made meaningful with new experience. After he considers (in lines 28-30) that leaving this potential unfulfilled would even be ignoble ("vile it were ... to store and hoard myself"), the stanza ends with grand, uplifting language in the last two lines. What was previously portrayed as discomfort and discontent becomes a noble quest "to follow knowledge like a sinking star / Beyond the utmost bond of human thought."

Lines 33-43:

In this stanza Ulysses describes his son Telemachus, who is to take over control of the kingdom when he leaves. It is important that Tennyson has Ulysses state his bond to Telemachus twice in line 33 ("my son, mine own") because the son is then described by the father as having the opposite qualities to his own. Telemachus and his actions are described using words like "discerning," "prudent," "soft," "good," "blameless," "centered," and "tender," qualities that come from the kind of cautious living that Ulysses has already established is not for him. Still, he recognizes that a personality like Telemachus' is better suited than his own to "make mild / A rugged people" (lines 36-7). Regardless of what Ulysses might admire in Telemachus, and how confident he is of his son's ability to lead the population of Ithaca, the stanza ends with a flat statement that points out the basic difference between father and son: "He works his work, I mine."

Lines 44-53:

The first two lines of this stanza continue a tendency, begun in the previous stanza with "*this* is my son," to localize the setting of this poem in a particular place ("*There* lies the port"; "*There* gloom the dark, broad seas"). By line 45, the physical location is so directly established that the speaker, who for most of the poem speaks to no one in particular or speaks to himself, directly addresses the mariners who have sailed with him before. This apparent inconsistency in the narrative voice has been identified by some critics as a flaw in Tennyson's presentation.

The verb used in conjunction with the seas in line 45 is "gloom," which is commonly used as a noun today; this is a way for Ulysses to mention, as he did earlier in the poem, the bad aspects of the life he desires as well as the good. This wide scope of events is shown even more directly in line 48, where he brings up "the thunder and the sunshine." Line 47 uses another familiar word in an unfamiliar way: "frolic," which is used today as a verb and

sometimes as a noun, is an adjective here, describing the mariners' welcome of the weather.

In lines 48-49, Ulysses makes reference to the fact that he and his crew "opposed / Free hearts, free foreheads." Since most Greek city-states operated under systems of slavery, many of the opponents Ulysses faced in battle were slaves. By specifying that his mariners "opposed" adversity with free in hearts and minds, Ulysses presumably is emphasizing the nobility of his crew, stressing that they were not mere slaves who met challenges because they were forced to. Similarly, line 53, in referring to the Greek gods who, according to legend, played an active part in the Trojan war, he inspires his men with pride in their past accomplishments. In addition, this suggests that not only are these men much more than slaves, they are rivals to the gods.

Lines 54-61:

The imagery of lines 54 and 55 is of sunset, a fitting time of departure for a ship full of old men who know that they will probably not survive the journey. In lines 55-6, the sound the ocean makes is suggestive of the moans of sailors who have already died and sunk into the deep sea. Even while reminding his men of their impending death (and, in line 61, of his own impending death), Ulysses encourages them to "seek a newer world," and to brace themselves in the boat in order to bring their oars down vigorously against the sea's waves—"smite the sounding furrows." Their destination is nowhere specific, just west, "beyond the sunset, and the baths / Of all the western stars," echoing the desire that Ulysses stated in line 31 "to follow knowledge like a sinking star." Here knowledge does not refer to learned, orderly information, but to experience. The "baths" mentioned in line 60 refers to the outer ocean which ancient people believed surrounded the earth; thus, as the stars set in the west, they would descend into the "bath" of this ocean.

Lines 62-70:

The Happy Isles in line 63 refers to Elysium, also known as Elysian Fields. In Greek mythology, this was the place where the blessed went after death. According to legend, Achilles went to Elysium after being killed in the battle of Troy.

In line 67, Ulysses says of himself "that which we are, we are," repeating the sound and spirit of his statement about Telemachus in line 43: "He works his work, I mine." Although there are places in the poem where Ulysses seems eager to depart on another voyage, the dominant tone, as shown in these two phrases, is that he feels he is a victim of his fate, that he and the mariners who sail with him must, despite the ravages of "time and fate" (line 69), continue to experience life as fully as possible. Ulysses uses the powerful wording in the final line to encourage his men, despite circumstances that will probably overwhelm them. Although Ulysses has been seen through the years both as a quitter who cannot take society and a brave man following his fate, the tone of this last line supports Tennyson's assertion in his *Memoir* that the poem is about "braving the struggle of life."

Themes

Culture Clash

The first stanza of this poem establishes the irony of holding the honored position of ruler of a nation but being completely unimpressed, or even bothered, by it because the population is so different in temperament than the ruler. Ulysses is not displeased with his subjects, but with the entire situation: true, he calls them a "savage race," but he uses the phrase more descriptively than judgementally and with the same acceptance in his tone that he has when he says the laws he hands down are "unequal" and that he himself is an "idle king." What troubles Ulysses in this poem is not that his subjects are rugged, his wife is old, or that he himself is more inclined to wander than to sit still, but that all of these elements are forced together. There is nothing unusual about a ruler who is not happy with the people he controls. What is unique about Ulysses' situation is that he is aware of his own limits—while he has power to give his people commands, he cannot change them. He knows himself: he is a man of war, not of politics; he is a man who understands how to make ships follow the currents, but he cannot steer his subjects toward civility, even if he knew what it was. In his description of Telemachus, he acknowledges what the traits of a good peacetime ruler would be: "soft," "slow," "tender," "centered in the sphere of common duties," and willing to pay tribute to the lower-order gods, the ones who watch over the household. Ulysses knows that he is not the man to civilize Ithaca, and he accepts it; as he says in the 67th line, "that which we are, we are." His personality is the exact opposite of a good peacetime leader, and he, either because of born personality or because of his twenty years of adventure, is best suited "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

Topics for Further Study

- Write a sequel about a famous literary figure, picking up after the end of the story that we all know. Explain how the main character feels about going home after the original action is finished.
- Imagine that you are a citizen of Ithaca, and that the king, coming home after being gone for twenty years, has left again. What do you think of him? Would you be happier with Telemachus on the throne than with Ulysses? Write a letter to Ulysses, telling him how things are going at home since he left the second time.
- Are there still people in the world today who feel as Ulysses felt? Where do you find them? What jobs do they have?

Growth and Development

The most obvious thing about Ulysses as he is presented in this poem is that he does not seem to believe that he can develop into a good king for Ithaca, but instead considers himself to be stuck forever with the personality he currently has. He sees that Telemachus would be a good ruler and, far from wanting to acquire that type of personality, proclaims, "He works his work, I mine." To a degree, this attitude reveals a man who is suspicious concerning things of the mind, who believes in action, not in personal growth. He does not have the imagination to let him see himself as the type of ruler Telemachus is. Another possible interpretation is that he feels that he could be a great king, but does not feel motivated to work toward it. In calling his old crew together to sail from Ithaca, he tells them, "Some work of noble note may yet be done / Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods." There is no clear answer to whether he feels unable to develop into the leader of Ithaca or he just chooses not to.

Throughout the poem, there is evidence of Ulysses' growth, in his constant references to what old age is like. Although he does present himself as a wanderer by nature, he also shows how his nature has been changed throughout his life, if only because each moment is making him think more and more about death. "Though much is taken, much abides," he says in the final stanza. A few lines later he clarifies that he means physical ability was taken when he says he has been "Made weak by time and fate." The Ulysses of this poem makes much of the fact that he and his men are the adventurous types who are not content to stay still; he mentions after the fact that they are old and near death. With these ideas he implies, but true to his character does not think much about, the fact that his ideas are developing with age into a need to keep active in order to escape death.

Politics

When we think of politics, we think of the struggle for public approval, because in a democracy the leaders are held accountable for their actions by the voting public. In a monarchy like Ithaca, though, that accountability is removed, and the business of politics can practice a more useful goal: bringing peace to society. Since the country of this poem is populated by a "savage" race, a politician's job, as Ulysses sees it, is to "subdue them to the useful and the good." In theory, at least, Ulysses' travels should make him an effective politician, because he has been exposed to different sorts of governments and councils that could give him theories to apply in ruling. But he does not have the patience to transform his experiences into practice. He only hungers for more experience. In Telemachus, Ulysses sees the qualities that are needed in order to change the people from the way they are into what they should be. He is "discerning," "blameless," "centered," and "decent." In a time of war, when there is a clearly defined enemy outside of the population, these qualities might make a leader too indecisive or easy to manipulate. In governing a civilized state, a leader might not need to present such a strong moral example, but in civilizing savages, this poem tells us, a great degree of gentleness is required.

Style

This poem is written in iambic pentameter. Iambic means that the rhythm is in segments of one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable. Pentameter (from the Greek word "penta," which means "five") means that there are five of these segments—five feet—on each line. Iambic meter

is the most common metric pattern used in English poetry because it resembles the natural rise and fall of the way we ordinarily speak the language. This meter is so natural that in reading a poem like "Ulysses," which has no rhyme scheme or evenly divided stanzas to indicate that there is indeed structure, a casual reader might not notice that this poem has a metric pattern at all. The fact that this poem has a constant rhythm and the lines have the same number of syllables gives the reader a sense of the poet's control without making the reader feel manipulated.

Because the poem lacks rhyming words at the ends of lines, its form is called blank verse. A speaker who addresses an audience in blank verse gives the impression of being individualistic, an independent thinker, not bound by convention. By contrast, a speaker whose thoughts are strictly organized around rhymes may seem to have thoughts that fit more clearly into recognized social patterns. From the subject matter of the poem, we can see that the speaker of "Ulysses" is not repeating common ideas but is saying what is deep within his heart, and this lack of decoration in his language supports that understanding.

One more technique that is prominent in this poem is the use of enjambment—the running over of a sentence or thought from one line to the next without any punctuation at the end of the line. Like the use of blank verse, this technique gives the impression that the speaker's thoughts are not prepared for presentation to the reader, but are flowing down the page in a manner close to how they would flow through Ulysses' mind. The lines that do come to a complete stop at the end therefore draw more attention to themselves, because of their rarity. These lines often have a caesura, or pause, in the middle, as in line 23 ("To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!"), line 43 ("When I am gone. He works his work, I mine."), and line 41 ("Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old"). By varying the poem's pacing, alternating long streams with fragmented lines, Tennyson makes the structure mimic Ulysses' thoughts, which mostly charge forward but have moments of hesitation.

Historical Context

"Ulysses" was written in late 1833, soon after Tennyson received news of the death of his dearest friend, Alfred Henry Hallam. Tennyson's son, Hallam Tennyson, reported in a biography of Tennyson published after the author's death that his father acknowledged the poem as an effect of his grief and said that writing the poem "gave my feeling about the need for going forward, and braving the struggle of life ..." Beyond the personal significance to the writer, "Ulysses" is a product of its times, the second bloom of the Romantic Period when it was already established as an artistic movement: a period commonly referred to as the Age of Romantic Triumph.

Because the Romantic Period was not an official organization but is a way we use of designating the spirit of the times, no strictly undisputable dates can be attached to it. This philosophical and artistic movement is generally recognized to have grown out of the social turmoil of the late 1700s—which included the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1794—and to have solidified during the Napoleonic Wars, which affected all of European society. Most critics agree with placing the starting date of the Romantic Period in 1798, when William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge published the groundbreaking *Lyrical Ballads*. There is, however, some dispute about what to consider the period's end: some emphasize the continuation of the Romantic spirit through 1870, when novelist Charles Dickens died, while others emphasize the change in the public mood after Queen Victoria took the throne in 1837. There seems to be no reason the Romantic and Victorian periods cannot be seen to exist during the same period, depending upon what elements of a work are being examined.

The Romantic Period came about when the development of democracy and the growth of cities forced artists and philosophers to focus attention on the individual and to question the suffering that they might, in an earlier time, have been able to avoid seeing or considering. It was a time of optimism, of advancing the belief that society, whatever its problems, can be perfected. It was a time of humanism, as people came to care more about other people. It was a time when the arts came to be looked to, not only as tools of communication, but as important in and of themselves; genius and creativity were valued. In *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth called poetry "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," making poetic expression morally equal to nature, and he revered nature. Romanticism embraced the individual and rejected the previous century's values of harmony, balance, idealized perfection, and Classicism.

"Ulysses" has some elements of the coming Victorian attitude that eventually settled on the

Compare & Contrast

- **1833:** Parliament passed a bill that freed slaves in all British colonies.

  1865: The American Civil War ended and the 13th Amendment outlawed slavery in the United States.

  1991: The apartheid system in South Africa, which segregated the country's blacks from the whites, was abolished.

  Today: Official government policies that support oppression of ethnic groups are rare, but increasingly, ethnic hostilities are the causes of wars.

- **1833:** Oberlein College became the first U.S. college to admit women.

  1920: The Nineteenth Amendment gave women the right to vote.

  1995: The Supreme Court ruled that the Citadel, a military academy accepting federal funds, must admit women.

- **1833:** Andrew Jackson became the first president of the United States to ride a train.

  1861: Abraham Lincoln's train ride from Illinois to his inauguration in Washington D.C. was used for publicity, as it was the first time many of the voters who elected him would have a chance to see him.

  Today: With air transportation, there is no need for politicians to ride trains, but many use the traditional "whistle-stop" tour as a campaign gimmick.

country (just as Tennyson eventually proved to be so favored that Queen Victoria appointed him Poet Laureate in 1850), but the poem's influences are strictly Romantic. The early part of Romanticism, called the Age of Romantic Triumph or, sometimes, the Classical Romantic Period, was an especially vibrant time in literature, as writers fought to throw off the expectations of the generation before them, to cope with the confusion of the world, and to cope with the new-found respect that was given to artists. For example, an eighteenth-century poem or painting might depict a tale from ancient Greece that had been told before, and it might be admired for the smart handling of technique that the artist displayed. A Romantic writer, such as Sir Walter Scott, might write about the history of his own country (as in *Ivanhoe*), or, like Tennyson, he might use a classical situation but give the hero a new level of psychological depth.

In the 1800s, Romanticism spread across the globe, and some of the great practitioners in every field of art have either been part of the Romantic movement or, like Tennyson, have been influenced by it without following all of its principles. The names we most readily identify with Romanticism are the poets Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, and Byron. American authors writing at the same time who shared a similar outlook are Irving, Hawthorne, Longfellow, and Poe. We also see the Romantic influence worldwide in Mary Shelley, Victor Hugo, Stendhal, Pushkin, and Dumas.

Critical Overview

"Ulysses" is generally well-regarded by critics, because of the thoughts with which it deals. The poem captures the heroic mood of the seafaring wanderer that has charmed Western civilization since the original tales of Ulysses from antiquity, but it also adds the twist of the father abandoning his responsibilities to follow the call of adventure, while leaving his son to be a sensible ruler of the land. In an 1885 review, novelist George Eliot compared "Ulysses" to Homer's ancient work. Tennyson's poem, she claimed, "is a pure little ingot of the same gold that runs through the ore of the *Odyssey*. It has the 'large utterance' of the early epic, with that rich fruit of moral experience which it has re-

quired thousands of years to ripen." In a 1903 essay, another famous novelist, G. K. Chesterton, expressed his admiration for Tennyson's overall ability to plant radical ideas into seemingly conventional works: "Underneath all of his exterior of polished and polite rectitude there was in him a genuine fire of novelty; only that, like all the able men of his period, he disguised revolution under the name of evolution."

Concerning the way Tennyson's ideas are expressed, however, critics have been less impressed with "Ulysses." T. S. Eliot noted, as other critics have, that, regardless of his other gifts, Tennyson was at his weakest when trying to tell a story. "[F]or narrative Tennyson had no gift at all," Eliot wrote in a 1936 essay. "For a static poem, and a moving poem, on the same subject, you have only to compare his 'Ulysses' with the condensed and intensely exciting narrative of that hero in the XXVIth Canto of Dante's *Inferno.*" Although Tennyson does use his gift for describing nature to some extent in "Ulysses," there is some dissatisfaction with the extent to which he does not. Herbert F. Tucker, in his essay "Tennyson and the Measure of Doom," stated the commonly held opinion that "his poetic renderings of natural phenomena are rarely less than brilliant"; but, as Rhonda L. Flaxman stated in her 1987 analysis, his brilliance is underused in this particular poem: "'Ulysses' contains memorable flashes of visual imagery—for example, the lines 'to follow knowledge like a sinking star' or 'the lights begin to twinkle from the rocks / The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep / Moans round with many voices.' This suggestion of setting, enormously successful because so carefully selected and so rhythmically appropriate, is not allowed to flower into a fully developed description."

What Do I Read Next?

- The *Odyssey* of Homer is the original tale of Ulysses' ten-year journey to return to Ithaca after the Trojan War. The translation by Robert Fitzgerald (1978) is considered the most authoritative and readable.
- Douglas Bush's *Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry* gives background material about how Tennyson and his peers made use of ancient verse to express their aesthetic ideals.
- *The Golden Bough* by Sir James George Frazier is one of the most influential texts in history about primitive practices and beliefs across all cultures. When Ulysses calls his people a "savage race," this book shows what their beliefs might have been. The reader who is interested in the development of society will be fascinated by the diverse cultural beliefs represented here.
- In *Moby Dick,* especially the early chapters, Herman Melville captures the sensibilities of men of all eras who have been drawn to a life at sea. This book was published in 1833, approximately the same time that Tennyson wrote "Ulysses."
- *The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson* are published in three volumes. The volume that covers Hallam's death and the writing of this poem is *Volume I: 1821-1850,* which was published in 1981 and edited by Cecil Y. Lang and Edgar F. Shannon.

Criticism

Arnold Markley

Arnold Markley is a freelance writer who has contributed essays and reviews to Approaches to Teaching D. H. Lawrence's Fiction *and* The Journal of the History of Sexuality. *He is currently an Assistant Professor in English at Penn State University, Media, PA. In the following essay, Markley considers how Tennyson's use of the dramatic monologue form lends ambiguity to the poem's meaning, leading to an ongoing debate by readers over whether this Ulysses was an aging yet honorable ruler or a selfish man hoping to escape his responsibilities.*

Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem "Ulysses" has remained one of the most popular poems of the Victorian period, and the difficulty in interpreting the poem's ultimate message has kept critics arguing for years. The poem is a dramatic monologue, a popular poetic form in the nineteenth century in which the entire poem is narrated by a single speaker. The title of this poem indicates that the

speaker is Ulysses, a legendary hero of ancient Greek literature, but Tennyson has chosen to give the speaker his Roman name rather than his Greek name, Odysseus, and this detail is important to keep in mind when interpreting the poem.

Odysseus was the hero of the ancient Greek poet Homer's great epic poem, the *Odyssey.* Homer's earlier epic, the *Iliad* tells the story of Achilles and the other mythological heroes of the Trojan War. After the Trojan Prince Paris abducted the legendary beauty Helen of Troy from her husband, the Greek Menelaus, the Greeks launched a ten-year war against the Trojans in an effort to win Helen back. After a long and difficult war, the Greeks finally defeated the Trojans, and the Greek warriors returned to their homes in Greece. Odysseus's homeward journey, an arduous ten-year journey filled with many dangers, distractions, and adventures, comprises the story of the *Odyssey.*

One of the intriguing aspects of Tennyson's "Ulysses" is the fact that he sets his monologue years after the events of the *Odyssey*—after Odysseus's many adventures on his journey, and after his long efforts to reclaim his household on the island of Ithaca. During his twenty-year absence, a host of greedy suitors had been hanging around his home, trying to convince Odysseus's lovely wife Penelope to give up waiting for her husband to return and to marry one of them instead. Tennyson's Ulysses is an old man, apparently addressing a group of men in an effort to raise a new crew for one final adventure at sea. The situation may have been suggested in part by the old prophet Tiresias' mysterious prediction of Odysseus' death in Book 11 of the *Odyssey,* in which he predicted that Odysseus would return home to Ithaca after many hardships, slay the suitors in his house, and finally that death would come to Odysseus in some manner from the sea, once he had become an old man.

The content of Tennyson's poem, however, follows the great Italian poet Dante's version of the character more than Homer's. In fact, Tennyson's choice of the Latinized name "Ulysses" as the poem's title emphasizes this connection. In Canto 26 of Dante's *Inferno* (one of the three parts of his great work *The Divine Comedy*), Dante visits the many levels of Hell and meets Ulysses, who is being punished there for his deceitfulness, a fact that also may affect one's interpretation of Tennyson's "Ulysses" as being less than the "ideal" hero. Ulysses tells Dante about his final voyage and describes his quest to sail beyond the prescribed limits of the world at Gibraltar, the edge of the Mediterranean Sea. Dante's Ulysses professes an attitude of persistence and tireless seeking that is much like that of Tennyson's version of the character.

There has been much critical controversy about the character of Ulysses and his sincerity—whether or not he is meant to embody the great adventurous spirit of Homer's Odysseus, or whether his continuing quest represents a shirking of familial responsibility and even veiled disillusionment with the life he tried so desperately to get back to throughout Homer's *Odyssey.* For Ulysses describes Ithaca as a place of "barren crags," and he disparagingly refers to his "aged wife" Penelope and to his boredom with the duties of being a king. He metes out laws to a people who sound more animalistic than human in their "hoarding, sleeping and feeding," and who, Ulysses tells us, "know not me," despite the fact that he tells us a few lines later that "I am become a name."

In the third stanza, Ulysses refers to his son, Telemachus, and his statement, "This is my son" may be intended to suggest that Telemachus is standing near Ulysses and that the old man is introducing his son to the people he is addressing. Ulysses praises Telemachus' virtues here, mentioning his "slow prudence" and the fact that he is "centred in the sphere / of common duties," but in praising his son, he also points out a significant contrast in their personalities. "He works his work, I mine," the old king says; a statement that has encouraged a number of critics to read a tone of irony into this "praise" of his son. In Ulysses' description of him, Telemachus is not, after all, the kind of man Ulysses himself strives to be. Readers who are familiar with Homer may remember the great lengths to which Telemachus went in the *Odyssey* in both searching for his father and in protecting his father's home from the suitors. Recalling these details may encourage the interpretation that Ulysses undervalues his son, as his brief mention of Penelope as "an aged wife" undervalues the great lengths that Penelope underwent in fending off scores of suitors and in remaining loyal to her husband in the twenty years that he was absent from Ithaca.

Tennyson began composing "Ulysses" in 1833, immediately following the shocking and sudden death of his closest friend, Arthur Henry Hallam. In the ten years following Hallam's death, Tennyson worked on a grand elegy for his friend, a series of many short poems lamenting his friend's death that he eventually published in 1850 as *In*

Memoriam A. H. H. But Tennyson took care to point out that "Ulysses" was also inspired by the death of Hallam, and in his biography of his father, Tennyson's son Hallam Tennyson recorded that Tennyson said, "The poem was written soon after Arthur Hallam's death, and it gave my feeling about the need of going forward and braving the struggle of life perhaps more simply than anything in *In Memoriam.*" Tennyson again compared the poem to *In Memoriam* in a comment to his friend James Knowles that, "there is more about myself in 'Ulysses,' which was written under the sense of loss and all that had gone by but that still life must be fought out to the end. It was more written with the feeling of his loss upon me than many of the poems in *In Memoriam.*" Tennyson's emphasis of this poem as an expression of his feelings concerning his friend's death suggests that one consider whether or not there is a message in the poem concerning death and dying. Perhaps "Ulysses" is meant to be a encouraging poem, suggesting that one ought not give in to death, but instead live life to the fullest. Some readers have even interpreted Ulysses' reference to seeing the "great Achilles" again in the afterlife as a veiled reference to Tennyson's own hope that he would one day be reunited with his friend, Arthur Henry Hallam.

Ulysses' rhetorical stance in dedicating himself to "drink / Life to the lees," to "follow knowledge like a sinking star," and "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield," most frequently has been taken at face value by readers in the Victorian period, and in the twentieth century. The Victorians, particularly, saw this as a truly noble expression of a spirit tireless in the face of death and relentless in the quest for new accomplishments and discoveries. This perception of the poem's moral is what has made it one of Tennyson's most widely and consistently popular pieces. Nevertheless, Tennyson's statement that the poem was written "about the need of going forward and braving the struggle of life" should not be taken as a simple commendation of Ulysses' point of view. As it was difficult to decide how to interpret Ulysses as a character, it is difficult to determine whether or not we are intended to see his will to live and his desire for adventure as honorable qualities, or rather to see that his wish for escape and for constant stimulation indicates a resistance to accept the idea of his own death. There may be another way to interpret the theme of death in the poem. Tennyson's Ulysses does seem to be preoccupied with his own mortality in such statements as "Life piled on life / Were all too little, and of one to me / Little remains," and in how he looks to every hour as an opportunity to evade death, saying that "every hour is saved / From that eternal silence, something more, / A bringer of new things." Ulysses also brings up the issue of death when he says, "Death closes all: but something ere the end, / Some work of noble note, may yet be done." Is Ulysses obsessed with dying, is he merely trying to get the most out of life, or is he looking for a final opportunity to garner a bit more fame before it is too late? Is he the great and noble hero of Homer's epic, or the deceitful Ulysses of Dante, shirking his responsibilities to a loyal family and kingdom? The brilliance of this poem, as readers throughout the years have continued to discover, lies in its many possibilities for interpretation and in the many differing messages a reader may take from it.

Source: Arnold Markley, in an essay for *Poetry for Students,* Gale, 1997.

Lynne B. O'Brien

In the following excerpt, O'Brien considers the emotional turmoil experienced by an aging hero.

A close reading of "Ulysses" reveals contradictions and conflicts within Tennyson's thought concerning the nature of heroism, the meaning of achievement, and the consequences to the individual and society arising from a life devoted to heroic action....

Significant critical attention has focused on the form of the poem, with critics debating whether it is a rhetorical or dramatic monologue....

By focusing on the question of categorization, the traditional criticism has overlooked the primary importance of the emotional milieu within the poem—Ulysses' sense of alienation. Whether Ulysses speaks from the shore to an actual group of men, about to embark, or whether he lies in "solitude on his deathbed" does not really matter; it is his emotional crisis which confers meaning on the poem. The impossibility of knowing the setting in which Ulysses speaks mirrors our uncertainty about his character. The ambiguity of the "truth" represents the poet's thematic expression of the problematic nature of "heroism." This poem asks us to consider "What is a hero?" and "What are the consequences of a life devoted to heroic action?" It is as though Tennyson designed this work to challenge readers' perceptual biases: we expect our heroes to be pure and uncomplicated. That Ulysses violates our expectations becomes central to the poet's elucidation of the problem inhering in our concept of heroism.

Many critics have examined the kind of knowledge which Ulysses seeks. Perhaps a more interesting question is "Why does the aged warrior continue to strive?" Ulysses is discontented because he is idle and because the "savage" people of Ithaca "know not me"...

Ulysses feels a sense of loss, emptiness, lack of use, and indifference to others. These melancholy emotions are countered by his intellect, which generates the stirring rhetoric to forge on. His current emotional state is the result of having dedicated his life to the pursuit of glory. "I am become a name," he puns, exquisitely capturing the contradiction inherent in his celebrity. As a famous warrior he is widely known, but as a person he has been reduced to "just a name." In the same way as he has been accused of trying to deceive his mariners into accompanying him on this last, suicidal voyage, to use them as hands to row, so too has he himself been used by Ithaca as a military tool. While the critical consensus maintains that Ulysses is abandoning his family and abdicating his governing responsibilities, he may already have been rejected by his family and country as yesterday's hero....

Ulysses has performed a lifetime of martial duty... and if he is now unable or unequipped to embrace his civic responsibilities, perhaps that is precisely because his acquiescence in the aggressive mode has been so complete as to obliterate other dimensions of his existence, so much so that he cannot even perceive other duties. Tennyson is showing that the hero is frequently the victim of his own success, as Ulysses' triumph in his warrior role has prevented him from moving back into the social or domestic world....

That Ulyssess is abandoning his paternal obligations we cannot be certain, as the circumstances surrounding the transfer of administrative power are unknown. Perhaps Telemachus has already been governing Ithaca for many years in his father's absence. Perhaps Ulysses is now a superfluous figure who has already been forced out and is trying to deceive himself into thinking that he has relinquished that power which he has unwillingly lost. Perhaps his homecoming to Ithaca has been his first defeat. Far from creating the cunning figure which Dante portrayed, Tennyson may here be depicting the pathetic figure who cannot understand or accept defeat by his countrymen. The "enemy" is now within his country, and within his psyche. Tennyson may be illustrating the death-in-life of a once-revered ruler who has lost his social niche, and is consequently suffering a loss of identity, a kind of psychic injury which is more damaging than the wounds inflicted in battle.

Ulysses' language [in the last stanza] expresses his concern with what is left of his own powers of self, and what remains for him on earth:...

Rather than await a prosaic death in Ithaca, he seeks a glorious death commensurate with his heroic self-image. He desires to guarantee his place in history by dying in his heroic element, the sea, which has been his theater of action. He seeks the immortality conferred by the endless retelling of his story, which will elevate him to an almost mythical status. He remains future-oriented, telling his mariners, "'Tis not too late to seek a newer world," as though this newer world were not a place, but rather a future time in history. For a man who claims that he "strove with Gods," it seems appropriate to seek enshrinement in the collective memory. In his conviction that he has been a giant among little men, Ulysses has created his own laws. As the manipulative rhetorician his objective has been his own self-aggrandizement, which is an effort to manipulate reality to conform to his own image. In a fascinating substitution of words, Ulysses tells his mariners, that they are "Souls that have toiled, and wrought, and thought with me" when the rhyming word "fought" more accurately describes the nature of their combative work. Here Ulysses fashions an illusory cerebral component to his martial endeavors. This line also captures his nostalgia for his former power as the hero-in-charge who could create the laws or rules which others passively followed.

Is Ulysses trying to deceive an actual group of mariners into accompanying him, or is he trying to hide from the truth of his frail, powerless, human identity? The "historical crisis" of the monologue seems to be that for the first time he is confronted with the illusory nature of his lifelong self-identification as a "hero." He continues to strive (if only in his mind) because he knows nothing else. His worldly "knowledge" derived from years of adventure is no substitute for the self-knowledge and spiritual capabilities which he lacks. His tragedy is that he is confronted with the emptiness of his achievement. He is aware that the goal which he has pursued in life—glory—has fallen far short of the preconceived ideas which he absorbed from his culture.

This hero who hopes to achieve immortality through an incorporation into the collective memory had his origins in a cultural creation process. Ulysses strove to become the supreme fighter, be-

cause the ability to triumph in battle was prized by his culture and was how maleness was defined....

Ulysses did not at a given moment in his history suddenly renounce a life of spiritual harmony for glory. His development as a warrior was impelled by those cultural forces which dictated male behavior. The young boy models himself on those vaunted figures celebrated by society. Society is the mirror by which the young man comes to "see" or to know himself. Ulysses' voyage has taken him from celebrity to encroaching obscurity as he can now no longer "see" himself in that social mirror—that "savage race" no longer knows him. Tennyson is suggesting the danger inherent in the reductive merging of the individual with his achievement. Ulysses can only define himself as a warrior. His self-definition hinges on his achievements. Tennyson may be questioning the validity of his country's materialistic values by creating the Ithacan hero as a nebulous figure who, in his symbolization as the apex of achievement, casts into doubt those societal values which helped to shape that achievement. Paradoxically, it is Ulysses' act of resistance against his society which preserves his individuality....

Source: Lynne B. O'Brien, "Male Heroism: Tennyson's Divided View," in *Victorian Poetry,* Vol. 32, No. 2, Summer, 1994, pp. 171–176.

Charles Mitchell

In the following excerpt, Mitchell examines Ulysses' "conflict between his will and death."

Past criticism of Tennyson's "Ulysses" has tended to view Ulysses' tension as that between "the 'romantic' withdrawing, passive Tennyson, and the 'classical' outgoing, active Tennyson." However, I feel that Ulysses' major tension is of a different kind, fixed in the outer conflict between his will and death. The poem commences just as the inner tension between Ulysses' duty to country and higher obligation to himself is being resolved. The new, outer conflict, between Ulysses' will and death, frames the new inner tension of his uncertainty about whether spiritual reality exists in death: although Ulysses' will seems certain of the existence of spiritual reality, his mind seems unsure of it. Ulysses' assertion of will in the last line resolves both the inner and outer tensions about death: after his mind has arrived at some certainty by examining the past performance of his will, his will, reassured by his mind, asserts the presence of spiritual reality in the future. The voyage for which Ulysses is preparing is the act of dying, and his goal is spiritual reality. Time seems destructive of all value in the world, including his own physical nature, but Ulysses asserts that his will will not yield to the culmination of time's opposition—death.

> *"The ambiguity of the 'truth' represents the poet's thematic expression of the problematic nature of 'heroism.' This poem asks us to consider 'What is a hero?'"*

When the question of the form of "Ulysses" has been considered, it has generally been assumed that the poem is formally a dramatic monologue. However, that assumption is not easily established, for the disclosure that Ulysses faces an audience comes gradually and belatedly. The first section (ll. 1–32) might well be soliloquy since there Ulysses seems to be generalizing about himself in private; the second section (ll. 33–43) seems to address someone while pointing to Telemachus; only late in the poem, in the third section (ll. 44–70), is an audience designated. Since we become aware of the transition from self address to public address tardily, we cannot easily determine whether the poem is entirely a dramatic monologue, or part soliloquy and part dramatic monologue, or perhaps soliloquy in the guise of dramatic monologue. Although most past criticism has categorized the poem as dramatic monologue, some recent criticism has argued that the first thirty-two lines present a soliloquy. However, it seems likely that the whole poem is a soliloquy presented as a dramatic monologue. That is, the progress of what seems to be the literal occasion may exist only in the mind of the speaker as a metaphor for an inward voyage which he contemplates. "By this still hearth" fixes Ulysses' situation. Then the sequence of his thoughts develops out of his contemplation of the past (ll. 1–32) into a formal farewell, perhaps to his subjects while still on shore (ll. 33–43), goes on to the speech to his mariners on board the ship (ll. 44–56), then to his embarkation (ll.56–61), and

ends on the anticipated voyage (ll.62–70). The transitions from one position, and audience, to the next, however, are not filled in; the fact that a jump from one to another (especially in l. 32 to l. 33 and in l. 43 to l 4) is made suggests that the occasion takes place in Ulysses' mind.... We do not perceive the scene directly *through* the mind of the speaker so much as we view it *in* his mind. That the poem is not clearly a dramatic monologue coincides with the fact that it is not concerned with the immediacies of social issues. Instead of voicing a desire to escape social responsibility, the poem presents more universal intellectual issues and hence the soliloquy form seems more suited to the private contemplation of such issues. Since that private contemplation requires action to confirm belief, the speaker presents what is soliloquy in the form of dramatic address which implies action. The dramatic stage, then, is an illusion contrived 1) to establish the vital connection between the outer world of action and the inner world of contemplation and 2) to establish the symbolic connection between the two whereby action in the seen world (the embarkation on a sea voyage) is symbolic of action in the unseen world.

The issues in the poem become clear only with an understanding of the goal Ulysses seeks. Whereas in the first paragraph Ulysses implies that in the past he has explored the known world, in the last paragraph, which deals with the future, he goes to "seek a newer world." He also describes that goal as an "untravelled world," one which only gleams through the travelled world and one which can never be reached in the world of time since its "margin fades / For ever and for ever when I move." That this world is a realm of pure spiritual being found on the other side of death is clear from the fact that Ulysses hopes to find the deceased Achilles there. The direction of the journey further clarifies that his goal is in death:

> for my purpose holds
> To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
> Of all the western stars, until I die.

Here the westerly direction and the setting of the sun, the emblem of temporal life, make it clear that the goal is in death; and the concluding clause associates this last voyage with Ulysses' own death. However, one needs to emphasize that Ulysses' goal is not *death,* but is *in death:* that is, Ulysses seeks not death, but life in death....

The sea voyage is a traditional symbol of the spiritual journey, including the act of dying.... That the sea voyage is a means of figuring Ulysses' own death is indicated by what has already been said and is established further by the details of the occasion: "The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs." Ulysses' voyage and his death are identified by the nightfall—the occasion when the sun sets and the moon rises, when the body dies and the soul endures: "Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will." The literal details of the occasion also suggest that Ulysses is preparing for death. For one thing, he is near death:

> Life piled on life
> Were all to little, and of one to me
> Little remains.

In addition, the fact that he now relinquishes the rule of Ithaca to Telemachus with decided finality is appropriate to preparation for death and suggests that he intends a voyage from which he will not return:

> This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
> To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle—
> .....
> When I am gone.

Ulysses' reference to himself as spirit and to his shipmates as souls further enforces the suggestion that he intends to seek a spiritual realm by dying:

> And this gray spirit yearning in desire
> To follow knowledge like a sinking star
> Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

The phrase "like a sinking star" would seem to modify the verb "follows" since Ulysses can pursue ultimate knowledge only by dying. To the mariners he says,

> There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
> Souls that have toiled, and wrought, and thought
> with me.

The mariners are not common sailors, but are souls who are prepared to go on a mental or spiritual voyage, doing more than tend to the rigging. Like death, the sea is dark and broad, mysterious and limitless. The star sinking into the sea mirrors the spirit plunging into the destructive element, an act prefigured in the past when

> Through scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
> Vext the dim sea.

If this image corresponds with Ulysses' later reference to himself and his mariners as "men that strove with Gods," including Poseidon, the implication would be that sinking into the sea now is similar to striving with the gods in the past.

The problem for the mind of the yet-living Ulysses is to determine that there is evidence for the existence of spiritual reality. His mind seems unsure about the future because it does not know

whether death contains complete annihilation or offers spiritual fulfillment, the two alternatives which Ulysses considers:

> It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
> It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
> And see the great Achilles.

The past, however, seems to support the latter alternative because Ulysses' past actions suggested that a spiritual reality impinged upon finite existence:

> Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
> Gleams the untravelled world.

Hence whereas the mind views the two possibilities for death as exclusive alternatives, the imaginative will perceives them as a single event. Since Ulysses' mind cannot posit the absolute truth of its desired conclusion, it must maintain a logical scepticism even to the end. Ulysses' will, however, has to contravert logic and assert the continuance of itself in death even before he has died. The immediate difficulty is that the connection between the vital past and the desired vital future is severed by the present, which is a barren existence devoid of spiritual vitality.

The forces which seem to disprove the existence of spirit are time, fate (l. 69) and the weakness of human nature. The goal of Ulysses' future quest is infinite, but the goal of his past quest was finite: wife and country. Penelope has not remained an unchanging goal, but rather time has made her an "aged wife." Perhaps Ulysses considers it fate that he who could not rest from travel must become static in administering laws to a people who are not improved by his efforts. He feels that he is an "idle king" not because he is idle (he does "mete and dole"), but because his people are idle. Ulysses feels that his fruitless activity as ruler is stasis for him ("How dull it is to pause") but that it may be accelerated in his son to "slow prudence," the people gradually becoming "rugged" instead of "savage." Because Ithaca is finite, it is not the unlimited goal toward which Ulysses needs to direct his will if it is to remain active....

As Ulysses perceives it in his subjects, who represent the majority of mankind (in contrast to the minority, his mariners), human nature seems to disprove the existence of spirit in man, for instead of exercising the active will of individual spirit, they perform only bestial functions: "a savage race, / That hoard, and sleep, and feed." From Ulysses' superior standpoint, such life is really death ("As though to breathe were life!") and the death he seeks is life.

The voyage for which Ulysses is preparing is the act of dying, and his goal is spiritual reality."

Ulysses' evidence that spiritual reality may exist is himself. His unexpressed argument seems to be that if one can prove in life that man is spirit, one has a right to hope that man remains spirit in death. This underlying assumption of the poem is implied by the fact that Ulysses hopes to see Achilles in the Happy Isles. Ulysses emphasizes his difference from, and superiority to, his subjects because their natures would seem to indicate that man is spiritless. Many readers have thought that the sentiments which Ulysses expresses in the first paragraph indicate his self-pride: "know not me," "I have suffered greatly," "I am become a name," "Much have I seen and known," "Myself not least, but honoured of them all." But when one sets these statements and Ulysses' description of himself over against his description of his subjects, one realizes that Ulysses' remarks about himself have a much larger purpose than to reveal his vanity at the moment of death, for greater issues are at stake than the pluming of pride. Ulysses is trying less to inflate himself than to convince himself that he is proof of his own immortality since his experience has proved him to be supra-animal.

Ulysses persuades himself that he is more than a body. Whereas his subjects merely sleep and feed, he is awake both literally and imaginatively. He has "seen and known" much, including "Gleams [of] that untravelled world"; moreover, whereas his subjects sleep, he is awake for action this night because he "cannot rest from travel." And whereas they merely feed their bodies, he nourishes his spirit:

> I will drink
> Life to the lees.
> .....
> For always roaming with a hungry heart
> .....
> And drunk delight of battle with my peers.

Hence, Ulysses' reflection that his subjects "know not me" may express less a proud disdain or self-pity than a regret that they do not heed his

efforts to guide them or do not attend what he, as their spiritual exemplar, represents: he has "become a name," that is, become for all mankind ("cities of men / And manners, climates, councils, governments") the lasting symbol of the "heroic heart." Although in the present his subjects do not honor him, and thereby seem to negate what Ulysses is trying to prove to himself, those he has known in the past did recognize his worth: "Myself not least, but honoured of them all."

By recognizing him in the past, his "peers" have confirmed what Ulysses has learned about himself, that he possesses spirit:

> I am a part of all that I have met;
> Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
> Gleams that untravelled world.

Closely connected are Ulysses' spirit, the spiritual reality of the untravelled world, and his past experience. The untravelled world "gleams" and Ulysses "shine[s]": the nature of that other world and the nature of Ulysses are linked through his active experience. He is all that he has met, for his experience has discovered to him his unstoppable will: "All times have I enjoyed / Greatly, have suffered greatly." He and his men manifest their superiority of spiritual will by responding joyfully not only to happy, but also to trying, occasions:

> ever with a frolic welcome took
> The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
> Free hearts, free foreheads.

Experience proves the spirit in the man, and man thereby proves the spiritual world outside himself. Ulysses' remark in the last paragraph is in keeping with his previous expostulations which seemed to smack of vanity:

> Some work of noble note, may yet be done
> Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.

The subjunctive verb and the double negative of the participial construction, as well as the preceding admission that "you and I are old," indicate that the statement does not express mere vanity but is Ulysses' attempt to fortify himself and his men for the future with the memory of their past. The implication is that men who strove with gods may be godlike. In the past they apparently could perform like gods, possessing "that strength which in the old days moved heaven and earth."

The past seems to mirror the future, but the present stands between the mirror and the reality. Opposed to Ulysses' will and imagination (identified respectively with "Free hearts, free foreheads") is the bestiality of his subjects, which does not permit him to exercise more than the rational side of his mind ("slow prudence") in governing them. The practice of "the useful and the good" is admirable, but these are "in the sphere / Of common duties": they reveal man's practical and moral nature, but not his spiritual nature. Thus Ulysses leaves behind the lesser duties to his son, while he presses forward beyond the limits of the rational mind ("Beyond the utmost bound of human thought") in an attempt to prove that man is spirit. Past is freed from present to unite with the future.

The symbolic sea voyage of dying seems contradicted by the literal sea voyage, which is to be completed "ere the end." The repeated urgency to undergo a new voyage *before* death occurs ("Death closes all") tends to distract us from realizing that the literal voyage is also a metaphor for the literal event of dying. The great energy with which Ulysses and his men rush toward their goal does not suggest that they are dying: "Push off and well in order smite the sounding furrows." The strength, however, is not physical, but volitional: "We are not now that strength," but "that which we are, we are— ... strong in will." The symbolic voyage, which is to take place just on the other side of death, is presented as a literal voyage, which is to take place on this side of death. The area where literal and symbolic voyages overlap marks the place where past and future merge: "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield." The first two verbs mark the past and are balanced by the second two verbs, which mark the future; that is, the verbs are related as a:b::b:a. The two pairs are divided by death but are joined by the undying will, which never yields: not to opposition in the past, stasis in the present, or death in the future. The body dies, but the will remains constant through both life and death. The man who experiences *greatly* will find at last the *great* Achilles. Achilles and Ulysses have an "equal temper of heroic hearts": as peer, Achilles is what Ulysses was and will be.

Source: Charles Mitchell, "The Undying Will of Tennyson's Ulysses," in *Victorian Poetry, Vol. 2,* December, 1964 pp. 87–95.

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For Further Study

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The author argues convincingly that the sensibilities that formed this poem fit more closely with social attitudes prevailing twenty years later. This work is more focused on the era of Tennyson's greatest recognition, notably the 1850s on, than about the early poems, but it gives a good sense of Tennyson the man.

Kissane, James, *Alfred Tennyson,* New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1970.

Kissane's analysis of the poems is very involved and clear: he looks at Tennyson's works as poems, not as pieces of history, and writes about them in a way that is easy to understand. This book is a good start for the reader who wants to understand Tennyson as a craftsman.

Ricks, Christopher, *Tennyson,* New York: The MacMillian Company, 1972.

This author gives a detailed background of Tennyson's life and career around the time that "Ulysses" was written, intertwining literary themes with background information.

William Wordsworth

(1770-1850)

His life in brief:

He is the most important romantic poet of the first generation. It is he who composed the main principles of romanticism in a mutual or joined effort with his close friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge who published their work Lyrical Ballads. He was outstanding in everything. As a person, he was very active and energetic. He travelled widely all over Britain and European countries. He was born in Lake District. The surrounding environment was fascinating and inspiring to the poet. So nature played a very important role in his life and was reflected in his poetry. As a poet, he was very productive. He wrote a lot of poems notable among them were: "*The Solitary Reaper", "The Excursion", "The Thorn", "The World Is Too Much with Us".*

The Solitary Reaper

By William Wordsworth

Behold her, single in the field,

You solitary Highland Lass!

Reaping and singing by herself

Stop here, or gently pass!

Alone she cuts and binds the grain,

And sings a melancholy strain;

O listen! For the Vale profound

Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale did ever chaunt

More welcome notes to weary hands

Of travellers in some shady haunt,

Among Arabian sands:

A voice so thrilling never was heard

In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,

Breaking the silence of the seas

Among the farthest Hebrides

Will no one tell me what she sings?

Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow

For old, unhappy, far-off things,

And battles long ago

Or is it some more humble lay,

Familiar matter of to-day?

Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,

That has been, and may be again?

Theme:

This is a lyrical poem. It is an ideal romantic poem. It reflects a subjective experience he had once in the past. While he was travelling in the Scottish Highlands, he heard a young pretty lady singing and cutting down grains. The song was sad and depressing which appealed to the poet. He was deeply affected believing that no singing bird could sing like this lady did. The charming song reminded him of some traditions in the East or in general. He was reminded of travellers in Arabia who used to recite and sing poetry while travelling long distances in order to fade away the sense of loneliness and depression. Then the idea of jews who were lost in the desert moving aimlessly and singing sad songs. However, the poet did not understand the meaning of the song would not like anybody to tell him about it. He would like only to enjoy the joyful effect of the

song. He did not care what it was about. So feelings were mutual between them for he could find himself in this lady. Feelings communicate each other.

Certain important points are to be taken into consideration in evaluating this poem:

1- This poem is built on a romantic definition of poetry a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility. Accordingly, the poet did not write the poem at the moment of the incident, but he wrote it later on when he was in quite moments somewhere away from the lady. The poem is therefore a product of imagination.
2- The poem shows much concern with the individual. The romantic poets pay a special attention to the individual cases as human ones. Wordsworth in his poem cared much about a lady working hard and alone and suffering from a sense of alienation.
3- The natural environment played a great role in this poem for the romantic poets were deeply fascinated by nature. So we can find a lot of elements of nature here such as (field, island, reaping, vale, nightingale and so on...). These are elements of nature.
4- This age is called the age of passion. So emotions, feelings and sensibilities are very important to connect people wherever they are. In this poem we find that the poet managed to communicate emotionally and sympathetically with a lady unknown to him at a distance. We could find mutual feelings between them.
5- The language is simple in structure and easy in meaning, but it is highly suggestive. It can breed a lot of meanings.

For example, there is an implicit reference to the Arabian tradition when they used to travel long distances in the desert singing or reciting poetry.

6- As to the form of the poem, the poet used stanzaic forms or stanzas. It has three stanzas each of which has eight lines.

7- There is a mixture between tenses in this poem. The first stanza is written in the present tense while the second stanza is written in the past tense , then he comes back in the third stanza to the present tense again. This combination of tenses reflects his present spontaneous feelings mixed with his own educational background.

The World Is Too Much With Us

By William Wordsworth

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune
It moves us not. Great God! I 'd rather be
A Pagan shackled in a creed outworn
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

Theme:

The poet sees that people of this time are fully indulged in the material side of life. Their main concern is to get money and spend it in different ways which is a waste of their powers. In this sense they have ignored the emotional or passionate side of life. As a romantic poet, he believes that people should care about nature and its beauty. So they have forgotten about their passions represented in their hearts as unwanted gifts. The poet gives some examples from the natural surroundings. He believes that there is a full harmony among the elements of nature such as moon, sea, and, winds, whereas people are outside this harmonic atmosphere, they are "out of tune". He therefore would prefer to go to the ancient time to the old Greek and Roman civilizations. Although they are pagan, they care much about nature and its elements. In fact, they are constant with a natural harmony. There he could find some interest and joy.

Evaluation:

In evaluating this poem we can summarize the following points:

1- Romanticism in general is a reaction against the industrial revolution. In the past industrial society, people have become slaves to materialism. They are in fact lifeless

creatures wasting their powers and having no emotions.

2- The poet rejects this declining material state and prefers to get back to the ancient pagan life where people enjoyed a balance between the emotional and the material sides of life. They cared much about the natural surrounding atmosphere and its elements and would be one number of that society.

3- This poem is an escape from the miserable condition of the present to the old enjoyable or at least enjoyable one.

4- The language of this poem is rich with meaning though it is simple and plain. In some lines he has summarized the whole miserable conditions or circumstances of the English people at that time.

5- The poet has used a lot of poetic devices such as:

a- Allusion in " *a sordid boon*" referring to the undesirable gifts (hearts)

b- Personification: the poet personifies the sea as a human being, as a lady who has bosom where emotion lies.

c- Simile: the relationship between the sea, the moon, and the wind are compared to sleeping flowers when they settle quietly for a while.

There is a metaphorical expression in the sentence "we are out of tune" which means out of harmony or inharmonized with the all harmonized atmosphere.

There is a nature image in lines 5, 6, 7