

How does tennyson create a memorable character in ulysses essay sample

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This poem is a dramatic monologue spoken by Ulysses, the King of Ithaca. He has just returned to his kingdom after fighting in the Trojan War, but once caught up in his daily routine, he expresses his unhappiness with his life and indifference towards his family and people. Ulysses compares his heroic past to his current state of boredom, and emphasises his desire to revisit his past. Tennyson creates a memorable character in Ulysses, by giving him two sides - a heroic one, and a cowardly one.

His desire to flee from Ithaca can be seen as selfish, as he is running away from his family and people, leaving his inexperienced son to take over his role. However, it can also be seen as admirable, as he is following his life long dream and wants to explore the world. Ulysses heroic desire to discover new worlds and to fight life to the end makes him a memorable character. The use of enjambment represents the idea of pushing forward 'beyond the utmost bound of human thought'. Tennyson's constant use of movement verbs, for example 'roaming', emphasises Ulysses desire for travel.

The eating and drinking metaphors such as 'hungry heart' and 'drunk delight' represent the idea of fulfilment and Ulysses insatiable appetite for life and adventure. The intensifiers such as 'greatly' and 'much' emphasise this. Ulysses wants to live life to the full, and inspires the reader to do the same. The image of the sea represents freedom and the future, as well as the unbounded possibilities of life and death. Tennyson uses rhythmic emphasis, for example 'there glooms the dark, broad seas', and long vowel sounds such as 'the deep' and 'moans round'.

Ulysses says 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world'. This is linked to the image of the sea, as he refuses to let his age restrain or limit him from following his dreams, and has high hopes for the hidden future. Instead, Ulysses accepts the fact that he is ageing, for example he says, 'you and I are old'. Ulysses is unafraid of the sea, and is therefore unafraid of both life and death. In the last two lines the poem settles into powerful and regular iambic rhythm, perhaps representing the rhythm of oars. This shows determination, energy and purpose.

Ulysses attitude towards his people, island and family are extremely negative, making him a memorable figure. Tennyson makes it clear that Ulysses is bored of Ithaca by using words such as 'idle' and 'rest' when describing him, and 'mete' and 'dole' when describing his actions. Ulysses reluctance to accept his domestic responsibilities suggests that he is lazy, and would rather be in a place of leisure and pleasure rather than of struggle and study. The 'barren crags' of Ithaca are an image of infertility, and the 'still hearth' indicates lack of movement.

Both of these images are associated with femininity and domesticity. This suggests that Penelope is boring him, especially since Ulysses says 'matched with an aged wife'. This makes it sound like he had no choice to be with her and was forced to. In addition, Ulysses never directly addresses Penelope, and is rude about her even though she has waited for him for twenty years, just to be abandoned again. The phrase 'hungry heart' can be seen as a euphemism for Ulysses' sexual desires. Ulysses makes himself

seem inactive and motionless, and the image of a rusty sword may symbolise his ageing fertility and wasted sexuality.

Ulysses attitude to his people is also negative, and he sees them as docile and unsophisticated. He describes them as a 'savage race' and 'rugged people', and is obsessed only with material and their material needs. The use of polysyndeton, such as 'hoard, and sleep, and feed' suggests monotony and emphasises Ulysses boredom. 'Life piled on life' suggests useless hoarding and may represent the accumulation of money and goods. Ulysses does not want to 'store and hoard' himself, but wants to live fully. This can be seen as Tennyson's comment on Victorian England, as he sees it as conventional, materialistic and dull.

Ulysses seems fonder of his previous experiences rather than his family and people, and his craving for adventure and victory overpowers his need for his family. He longs for the respect of his mariners, and addresses them directly towards the end of the poem. In addition, he wishes to travel with them to 'the Happy Isles'. Ulysses regards his son Telemachus as feminine and docile. He uses phrases to describe him such as 'blameless', 'soft degrees' and 'slow prudence'. These suggest that Ulysses sees his son as an efficient, but dull and unheroic, administrator.

He believes that Telemachus is therefore a suitable leader, as he is an unheroic leader of unheroic people. When Ulysses introduces Telemachus, he speaks with contempt and says 'this is my son', as if he is trying to convince himself. Ulysses' egotism is portrayed through his emphasis on the

pronouns ' I' and ' me'. His selfishness is emphasised when he expresses his desire to leave Telemachus in charge of Ithaca. Ulysses describes his duties as ' common' and his life seems to revolve around fighting, travel and money. He seems to think that he is too important to rule Ithaca and look after his family, and thinks very highly of himself.

The use of juxtaposition, for example ' Greatly, have suffer'd greatly' emphasises Ulysses loneliness and makes us almost feel sorry for him. The poem is very dramatic, making Ulysses, the narrator, extremely memorable. There are signs of dramatic performance, including deictic utterances such as ' this', ' there' and ' these', which almost act as stage directions. The poem is also very macho-masculine. There is disdain for his home and family, a desire to be sailing again with the mariners and constant sexual frustration.

Tennyson creates a memorable character in Ulysses by making us feel mixed feelings towards him. We are made to pity him, as he is a lonely character who wants to escape from his boring life and follow his dreams. However, we also picture him as a selfish, old man, reluctant to accept his responsibilities. Ulysses attitude to his people and family is very ignorant, especially since they have been faithfully waiting for him. His decision to run away from his life and abandon his loved ones, make him seem cowardly and un-heroic. The intimacy of the dramatic monologue brings us closer to both Ulysses and Tennyson.