

# Ulysses as a dramatic monologue essay



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A Dramatic monologue is a lyric poem in which a single imaginary speaker or a historical personage expresses his thoughts and feelings to an imaginary silent audience. The dramatic monologue as we understand it today “ is a lyric poem in which the speaker addresses a silent listener, revealing himself in the context of a dramatic situation” (Murfin 97). “ The character is speaking to an identifiable but silent listener at a dramatic moment in the speaker’s life. Robert Browning is well known for dramatic monologues.

Tennyson another Victorian genius like Robert Browning is good at composing dramatic monologues. . “ My last Duchess”, “ Andrea Del Sarto”, “ Fra lippo lippi”, “ Ulysses and Tithonus” are some of his best known Dramatic Monologues. His well-known poem ‘ Ulysses’ is an excellent example of dramatic monologue in which he adopts a classic hero Ulysses or Odysseus as the main character. Here he tries to focus on the adventurous as well as knowledge seeking spirit of Ulysses. But the philosophy given through the mouth of Ulysses is actually Tennyson’s own philosophy.

The entire poem is spoken by a single character, whose identity is revealed by his own words. The lines are in blank verse, or unrhymed iambic pentameter, which serves to impart a fluid and natural quality to Ulysses’ speech. Many of the lines are enjambed, which means that a thought does not end with the line-break; the sentences often end in the middle, rather than the end, of the lines. The use of enjambment is appropriate in a poem about pushing forward “ beyond the utmost bound of human thought.”

Finally, the poem is divided into four paragraph-like sections, each of which comprises a distinct thematic unit of the poem. In the poem ‘ Ulysses’,

Ulysses is supposed to be speaking and expressing his thoughts and feelings to the silent listeners. He is standing before the royal palace of Ithaca and speaks before the mariners, who had been his fellow sojourners during his long journey to Troy. The monologue begins with his cynical remarks towards life. "It little profits that an idle king By this still hearth among these barren crags, That hoard and sleep and feed and know not me".

Ulysses, the man of nimble wit, is not satisfied with his life among his subjects, who are unaware of his heroic mould. His aged wife Penelope also cannot understand his heroic soul. But his intention is not clear until he says. "I cannot rest from travel, I will drink Life to the lees". Here by the word 'travel' he means the journey which he made to rescue Helen from Paris and the perilous journey after the destruction of Troy. But he refuses to take rest and in determination to take a life of adventure to the very end.

He compares life to a cup of wine. Just as a man drinks till he has reached the sediment at the bottom, Ulysses also will taste all aspects of life without leaving anything behind. Through these words, Ulysses' insatiable passion for knowledge is expressed. He is the man who can never rest from pursuit of knowledge. Ulysses has become old but it is the knowledge and experience which he has gathered so long urges him on even in the old age to sail in the quest of knowledge. He knows that the life spent in idleness is not life at all.

Sword loses its polish and gets rusty when it is kept out of use for a long time. So, vigor and energy will be blunted if we do not exercise them always. He is perfectly aware that knowledge is vast and unlimited and our life on

earth is too short to learn everything. Even a number of lives taken together would be too short for gaining all knowledge. So far he is considered he has a single life to live. And of this single too a greater part has already been spent. Only a few years of life are left to him.

Hence he is determined to make the best of every moment of the remaining years of his life. To him an hour spent in some profitable work means an hour saved from the silence of the death. The monologue of Ulysses reached to the point of climax, when he inspires his sailors and makes appeal to them to enter upon a life of exploitation with great courage. He says, “ Death closes all, but something ere the end Some work of noble note, may yet be done”. Ulysses knows that he and his sailors being old are near death.

But, he has not given up hope and believes that old man also can earn great glory and achieve great deeds. So, he inspires his sailors to achieve some great deeds even in their old age before they die. The paths of knowledge may be full of dangers, but he is strongly determined. And finally he makes a noble resolution to carry on his quest. He is not upset by the passing away of his youth and body strength. He knows that even old age cannot rob great men of their courage, bravery and other spiritual qualities. Therefore he asks his sailors to show the same courage that they had in youth.

He reminds them that every one of them is brave and strong willed, every one of them knows how to labor, how to struggle hard and how to pursue a great aim. Every one of them will teach out any bad situation and never bow his head before hardships or troubles. Thus in his monologue Tennyson portrays the character of Ulysses. His portrayal of the character Ulysses

deserves huge appreciation for there is a consonantal moment of thought, pervading the character Ulysses from beginning to the end. Every word of Ulysses teaches readers that life is short and knowledge is unlimited.