

# Ulysses college essay



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“ Ulysses” by Lord Alfred Tennyson Lord Alfred Tennyson presents to us in the poem “ Ulysses” an old sailor, a warrior and a king who is in retrospection on his experiences of a lifetime of travel. Ulysses old age and strong will causes him to be restless and unable to be comfortable at home.

He chooses a life of travel over his family because that is what he knows best. Because of his faults, we identify with his character. As a result, Ulysses attempts to go on to face a new but familiar journey, not knowing if it would be his last. By connecting with Ulysses’ courage he awakens the heroic spirit in all of us. Some themes that are important are The Quest for Paternity, The Remorse of Conscience, and Compassion as Heroic.

The Quest for Paternity is important because at its most basic level, Ulysses is a book about Stephen’s search for a symbolic father and Bloom’s search for a son. In this respect, the plot of Ulysses parallels Telemachus’s search for Odysseus, and vice versa, in The Odyssey. Bloom’s search for a son stems at least in part from his need to reinforce his identity and heritage through progeny. Stephen already has a biological father, Simon Dedalus, but considers him a father only in “ flesh. ” Stephen feels that his own ability to mature and become a father himself (of art or children) is restricted by Simon’s criticism and lack of understanding. Thus Stephen’s search involves finding a symbolic father who will, in turn, allow Stephen himself to be a father.

Both men, in truth, are searching for paternity as a way to reinforce their own identities. The other main one is The Remorse of Conscience because the phrase agenbite of inwit, a religious term meaning “ remorse of

conscience," comes to Stephen's mind again and again in *Ulysses*. Stephen associates the phrase with his guilt over his mother's death—he suspects that he may have killed her by refusing to kneel and pray at her sickbed when she asked. The theme of remorse runs through *Ulysses* to address the feelings associated with modern breaks with family and tradition.

Bloom, too, has guilty feelings about his father because he no longer observes certain traditions his father observed, such as keeping kosher. *Ulysses* juxtaposes characters who experience remorse with characters who do not, such as Buck Mulligan, who shamelessly refers to Stephen's mother as "beastly dead," and Simon Dedalus, who mourns his late wife but does not regret his treatment of her. Though remorse of conscience can have a repressive, paralyzing effect, as in Stephen's case, it is also vaguely positive. A self-conscious awareness of the past, even the sins of the past, helps constitute an individual as an ethical being in the present. Compassion as Heroic because In nearly all senses, the notion of Leopold Bloom as an epic hero is laughable—his job, talents, family relations, public relations, and private actions all suggest his utter ordinariness.

It is only Bloom's extraordinary capacity for sympathy and compassion that allows him not as heroism in the course of the novel. Bloom's fluid ability to empathize with such a wide variety of beings—cats, birds, dogs, dead men, vicious men, blind men, old ladies, a woman in labor, the poor, and so on—is the modern-day equivalent to Odysseus's capacity to adapt to a wide variety of challenges. Bloom's compassion often dictates the course of his day and the novel, as when he stops at the river Liffey to feed the gulls or at the hospital to check on Mrs. Purefoy.

There is a network of symbols in Ulysses that present Bloom as Ireland's savior, and his message is, at a basic level, to "love." He is juxtaposed with Stephen, who would also be Ireland's savior but is lacking in compassion. Bloom returns home, faces evidence of his cuckold status, and slays his competition—not with arrows, but with a refocused perspective that is available only through his fluid capacity for empathy. At home Ulysses is unable to adjust to old age.

Regardless of his physical body he feels his spirit is still longing for travel. He feels as though his wife is too old, and he governs the people with no respect, "Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole / Unequal laws unto a savage race, / That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not of me"(3-5). Ulysses humiliates his own son by describing him shy to rule the people and how his son is more capable of the common duties. Ulysses boasts with a sense of superiority in trying to reassure himself.

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 thro' 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 (33-43). Being a lifelong traveler prevented Ulysses from learning any of the responsibilities of being a father and a husband. Instead, he was traveling abroad consoling with kings, generals and gods, traveling to "cities of men / And manners, climates, councils, governments" (13-14). The only thing he gained from his travels was the unending quest for more.

Retiring home is an unsatisfying dull life, which is impossible for Ulysses bear. After all the battles and fame he has won Ulysses realizes his old age and feels required to “ pause, to make and end, / To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use! / As though to breathe were life! (22-24) Ulysses reveals on lines 25-31, his old age and fear of dying, but rejects death's attempt to muscle its way into his 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 grey spirit yearning in desire To follow knowledge like a sinking star, Ulysses directs the next verse toward his mariners, who have been with him through the bad times unlike his wife who was unable to. Souls that have toiled, and wrought, and thought with me-”(46). At this point both the bad and the good side of Ulysses can be identified and we are called to join in on the final journey.

... 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 the gulfs will wash us down: It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles (56-61). Tennyson seals the bond to the readers and gives us a since of connection to Ulysses courageous mission. We are left with the encouraging Idea that no matter how old we might be physically the soul lives on. This awakens the hero at heart for everyone and makes us feel proud and motivated to take on life. We are not now that strength which in old days Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are- One of 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 (66-70).