

## TOPIC : ULYSSES

1. Occasion : The death of Tennyson's friend Arthur Henry Hallam in 1833 completely demoralised the poet. He felt as if his life came to a standstill. Soon the feelings of depression passed away and he felt the need to come back to the main stream of life by recreating Odyssey myth. He found this poem as a way of forgetting bereavement.
2. Genre of the poem: Dramatic monologue. A dramatic monologue is a special type of poetic form in which-1) a single speaker speaks in front of a silent listener 2) the presence of the listener is felt from the gestures and postures of the speaker 3) the speaker faces a crisis in his life and in course of the poem he reacts to this crisis 4) his reactions or speech reveal his personality or character. It was invented by Robert Browning.
3. No rhyme scheme used in the poem.
4. Written in 1833 and published in 1842.
5. Written in blank verse(verse written in unrhymed iambic pentameter.)
6. The name ULYSSES is the LATINIZED version of GREEK ODYSSEUS.
7. Tennyson's ULYSSES is is Dante's ULISSE (INFERNO CANTO XXVI) instead of Homer's Odyssey. In Dante's retelling ULISSE is condemned to hell for his pursuit of knowledge beyond human bounds.
8. Ulysses is the son of Laertes, king of Ithaca, husband of Penelope, father of Telemachus, hero of Trojan War and Homer's epic Odyssey
9. "It little profits..." The pronoun it refers to the traditional, stereotyped life in Ithaca which holds no charm to Ulysses because his is a yearning for a dynamic life-life full of exploration and adventure.
10. Still hearth: Hearth is a fireplace. Symbolizes dull domestic life.
11. Barren crags: Rocky Island of Ithaca. Means life of the people of Ithaca is unproductive having no meaning and purpose because they live a traditional static life.

12. Matched with an aged wife.: Speaks of Penelope. Upon his return from the Trojan War Ulysses considers his wife a mismatch. This is because Ulysses thinks that he may have physically grown old but is still green in spirit unlike his wife
13. Mete and dole: mete means to rule. Dole means to distribute food and money /administer.
14. Unequal laws-means laws are variable.
15. Savage race-refers to the people of Ithaca. To the Ithacan people, life means eating, sleeping and hoarding wealth. They are no better than animals storing food for hibernation.
16. "that hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me." - Ulysses speaks of the Ithacan people and their attitude to life. Theirs is a meaningless life without having any purpose like the animals. Polysyndaton.
17. '... know not me' - the people of Ithaca have no knowledge about the philosophy of life of Ulysses.
18. "I will drink life to the lees" - Ulysses here compares life to a cup of wine. Incidentally a drunkard drinks wine to the lees(sediment /bottom part) leaving not a single drop untasted. Likewise Ulysses wants to delve into the depth of life leaving nothing unexplored, unseen, unknown, unvisited.
19. "All times I have enjoyed greatly, have suffered greatly." - relates Ulysses' philosophy of life. Whatever he has done, he has done it to the extreme point irrespective of time, place and situation knowing that success and failure are but the part and parcel of life.
20. Scudding drifts=mass of cloud driven or drifted by wind. Implies pounding showers of rain one might encounter at sea during storm.
21. Rainy Hyades vext the dim sea-Hyades are group of seven stars(in the constellation Taurus) like a **V** whose rising and setting indicate storm and rain. Here they are presented as agitators of the sea. Personification. The sea is dim because the sky is overcast with clouds. Vext sea means stormy/agitated sea.
22. "I am become a name" - means Ulysses has become famous for his wide range of travels and adventures. . He has become a type or symbol of daring adventure and enterprise.
23. "always roaming with a hungry heart." Hungry heart refers to Ulysses' insatiable thirst for knowledge and adventure. An implied comparison is here with predatory animals.

Ulysses resembles a Renaissance traveller with insatiable desire for knowledge and adventure. Metaphor. Alliteration.

24. "Much have I seen and known" - Ulysses has seen and known **CITIES OF MEN AND MANNERS, CLIMATES, COUNCILS, GOVERNMENTS.**
25. "myself not the least" -Means he was treated with honour in the countries he visited.
26. "and drunk delight of battle with my peers." Metaphor. Compares battle to drinking. Means he enjoyed the thrill of fighting against his opponents.
27. "far away on the ringing plains of Troy" - Onomatopoeia. Plains are ringing because of armour clashing in the battlefield. The Trojan war was fought between the Greeks and the Trojan.
28. "I am part of all I have met" Man grows with experience and is therefore its product. Ulysses means his present character is made up of elements drawn from his varied life. **Or** may be Ulysses means he does not only belong to Ithaca.
29. "all experience is an arch where through gleams the untravelled world" - Arch literally means vaulted passage or door. Metaphor. Compares experience with arch. Incidentally an arch is the supposed meeting point of the earth and the sky. The more we proceed to touch it, the more it recedes. Likewise gaining knowledge or gathering experience is a never ending process.
30. "How dull it is.... To rust unburnished and not to shine." Metaphor. Compares life to a metallic sword. Incidentally a sword grows rusty and becomes of no use if it is not used for long. Likewise if one lives a static, traditional life, it will lose its meaning and purpose.
31. " as though to breathe were life! "-speaks of traditional, stereotyped life like that of the people of Ithaca to whom life means adding years to the age.
32. "life piled on life were all too little" -Dichotomy between the finite and the infinite. Ulysses means if he is offered multiple lives, it would be too little a time to explore the treasures and pleasures of the world.
33. "and of one to me little remains." - Ulysses realizes that he has reached the western sky of his life.
34. "every hour is saved from that eternal silence" - Euphemism, periphrasis. Eternal silence means death. Ulysses means Every hour of human life can add meaning and purpose to life itself through work and adventure before he is conquered by death.

35. "something more, a bringer of new things." - Every hour of human life is valuable if it brings fresh knowledge and experience.
36. "vile it were for some three suns to store"- By "three suns" Ulysses perhaps speaks of the three stages (childhood, youth time and old age) of man's life or the remaining three years in his life as realizes he has grown. Ulysses means a single life is finite enough to capture the infinite sea of knowledge.
37. "this grey spirit.... Sinking star" - 'grey spirit' is a case of transferred epithet. Ulysses means his years may be grey but his spirit is evergreen. \*\*\*Simile. A star sinks in the horizon and it is impossible for someone to reach it. Likewise one is unable to meet the last dregs of knowledge.
38. "to follow knowledge... beyond the utmost bound of human thought." - We are here reminded of Dante's **Ulisse(Inferno, Canto xxvi)** who was condemned to hell for his pursuit of knowledge beyond human bound. Likewise Ulysses wants to pursue knowledge beyond human bound.
39. Telemachus =son of Ulysses. So far as their attitude to life is concerned, father and son are foil to each other.
40. "to whom I leave the sceptre and the isle" - Sceptre is a ceremonial staff that symbolizes royal authority. Ulysses hands over the kingship of Ithaca to Telemachus.
41. "this labour by slow prudence to make mild a rugged people through soft degrees" - 'this labour' refers to labour of ruling the people of Ithaca. \*\*\*by 'slow prudence' Ulysses means Telemachus is patient and is fit to make the best decision for them without being hasty. \*\*\*\*"rugged people" refers to the uncultured, uncivilised people of Ithaca. \*\*\*soft degrees means Telemachus will civilize the people of Ithaca gradually and in a nice way.
42. "... Decent not to fail... gods" - Ulysses means Telemachus is smart enough not to fail at doing nice things for the people of Ithaca to make them cultured. Simultaneously he will not fail to pay respect to the household gods.
43. "He works his work, I mine." The pronoun 'he' refers to Telemachus whose work is to rule the state and to be mindful to the domestic affairs of life. By 'I' Ulysses speaks of himself. Ulysses lives a totally iconoclastic life-life full of exploration and adventure.
44. " That ever with a frolic welcome took/ thunder and sunshine " - Thunder and sunshine here stand for bad time and good time.
45. Ere-means before

46. "come my friends, It is not too late to seek a newer world." - Ulysses here gives a clarion call to his mariners to join in his last great adventure.
47. "push off, and sitting well in order spite the sounding furrows" - Ulysses here infuses the energy of his soul into his comrades.
48. "for my purpose holds/To sail beyond the sunset and the baths of all the western stars." - Ulysses here expresses his desire to sail really, really far away - beyond the horizon of the known universe - until he dies. \*\*\***Western Star** means western horizon. The Greek believed that the stars sank into the sea when they set because their cosmology describes the earth as a flat land surrounded by a sea river.
49. "It may be that... great Achilles." - Happy Isle refers to Elysium, the legendary island of the Greek hero Achilles. Or we may say it means Greek paradise. \*\*\* In their last great adventure Ulysses says that they may either be washed down by sea waves or they may reach Happy Isle and get the opportunity to meet Achilles. \*\*\*The story of Achilles appears in Homer's **Iliad**.
50. "Though much is taken, much abides" -by "much is taken" Ulysses refers to the loss of youthful strength. Yet in him still abides the ever green spirit.
51. "One equal temper of heroic hearts" - speaks of his mariners who are equally brave and heroic.
52. Ulysses realizes that he and his mariners have been made weak by the onslaughts of time and fate.
53. "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield." - Last words of Ulysses. A satanic spirit is discernible here. Asyndeton. Climax.

**By Dr. A Rahman**