

Tennyson's Ulysses as a Victorian poem

Tennyson was a representative poet of the Victorian era. He is known for his famous work "In Memoriam" written in commemoration to Arthur Hallam. "Ulysses" is a poem dedicated again to his friend Arthur Hallam and reworks the mythical narrative of Homer's "The Odyssey".

We can consider "Ulysses" as a Victorian poem because the poem reflects the Victorian spirit and echoes the political exposition. The poem gives insight into Victorian writing of multiple essence of life, Victorian compromise, impact of Reform Bills of 1832, spirit of inquiry and colonial spirit. These aspects of Victorian temperament is reflected in the poem "Ulysses".

Tennyson's writing heavily influenced the Pre-Raphaelites Brotherhood with the representation of multiple views of life. It bridges the Romantic essence of subjectivity and Victorian realism and creates a sense of balance within. The poem shrouds the subjective essence of Tennyson's mournful emotions towards the death of his deceased friend Arthur Hallam. Ulysses cannot remain idle and wanted to progress "cannot rest from travel" which gives the Victorian realism of progress and at the same time gives insight into poet's emotional response to stop his grief and move forward with his creative forces.

The political attribution during the Victorian era was the introduction of the Reform Bills of 1832 which gave equal representation to lower strata of society but unequal against the status of woman as they had to use the male identity to represent themselves. Ulysses calls on to his comrades "mariners" which shows the representation of the lower strata of society and the impact of Reform Bills on the society. Ulysses also states that the kingdom had "unequal laws unto the savage race" and the "unequal laws" could politically represent the injustice against the woman's representation in the society given by the Reform Bills.

The Victorian spirit was no less than the spirit of Renaissance. The Victorians were eager to know and learn more about life. The spirit of inquiry was that many Victorians including Charles Lyell who tried to give an analysis of the Biblical Flood and drew his own conclusion that the catastrophe resulted due to a natural calamity in his seminal text "Principles of Geology". It shows that many Victorians tried to transcend the worldly knowledge which is beyond human consciousness. Ulysses stated that he wants to discover knowledge that is "beyond the utmost bound of human thought" and "follow knowledge like a sinking star" which reflects the Victorian spirit of inquiry that transcends beyond human consciousness and logic.

Furthermore, the colonial spirit was at its escalated peak. Ulysses dynamism clearly shows the Victorian spirit of colonization. He had explored and odyssey many journey and knee many men, councils, governments and climate and even acquired a name for "roaming with a hungry heart". The "hungry heart" gives a political expression of colonial spirit to colonize and discover lands. The famous quote "To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield" can be interpreted as to strive for new lands, to find new discoveries and to seek for new knowledge and never to give up in life. This quote evokes the Victorian colonial spirit and the maxim of poet's own emotional response towards the societal movements giving an implications of art for life's sake.