

## Tennyson's Poems Summary and Analysis of "Ulysses"

Ulysses complains that he is “idle” as a king, home with his elderly wife, stuck passing enlightened laws for a “savage race” that sleeps and eats but does not know him. He does not want to cease his travels; he has made the most of his life, having suffered and experienced pleasure both with others and alone and both at sea and on the shore. He is a famous name; he has seen the world and has been honored everywhere. He also has enjoyed battling at Troy with his fellow warriors.

He is “a part of all that I have met,” but this is not the end, for his experience is an archway to new experiences, with the horizon always beyond reach. It is boring to stop and wither away and be useless in his old age; simply breathing is not life. Multiple lives would be too little to get the most out of existence, and little of his one life remains, but at least he is alive and there is time for “something more.” It would be a shame to do nothing for even three days; he does not want to store himself away. His “gray spirit” yearns to attain knowledge and follow it “like a sinking star, / Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.”

In contrast, his son Telemachus, who will succeed him as king, seems content to stay put and simply rule the people. Ulysses loves him and knows that he will use his prudence to govern wisely, turning the “rugged” people “mild,” and he is “blameless” and “decent” in his “common duties.” He honors the family’s gods. Yet, Telemachus does not have his father’s energy; “He works his work, I mine.”

Ulysses looks at the port and the sea beyond, calling to him. He recalls “the thunder and the sunshine” of his mariners’ exciting travels together, their “free hearts” and free minds, and understands that he and they are old now. Yet, they still can do something noble and suited to their greatness, especially as they are men who once fought with gods.

Light fades, and the day wanes. Ulysses calls out that it is not too late to discover a “newer world.” They can leave this shore and sail beyond the sunset, exploring until he dies. Perhaps they even will reach the Happy Isles and meet Achilles. Although they are weak in age, much vigor remains; they still have “heroic hearts” which are “strong in will” and want to persevere, to explore and discover and never give up.