

preserves a critical balance between sympathy and judgement in the reader. It is difficult to resist the appeal voiced in the poem to a life of indolent ease and delight in the senses; the world of change is rejected for a world of sameness, but a sameness which promises ecstasy. The lotus seems curiously to allow complete self-absorption, and also communality, as the poem suggests in 'The flower ripens in its place,/ Ripens and fades, and falls, and hath no toil,/ Fast-rooted in the fruitful soil'. The final line of the poem expresses rather more than an appeal to the 'brother mariners': it is a direct appeal to the reader, an appeal which we can neither wholly embrace nor, such is the subtlety of the art, reject.

### 'Ulysses' (1842)

Ulysses is about to leave his island kingdom of Ithaca to his prudent and dutiful son Telemachus and set out on a great adventure which may reunite him with his dead companion of the Trojan wars, Achilles. In this fine monologue Tennyson meditates creatively upon the death of Hallam. Indeed, the poem was completed within three weeks of Tennyson hearing the fatal news. The poet claimed that the chief model for his poem was not the Homeric protagonist but rather Dante's *Ulisse*, a mighty sinner with an insatiable thirst for knowledge and experience. 'Ulysses' may be read on one level as expression of the triumph of the will, but it is a more complex work than such a description allows for. Whilst Ulysses speaks of noble work and demonstrates that Ithaca requires such Carlylean virtues, he is essentially passive and has left the cares of office to Telemachus. Although he claims that he is seeking knowledge, the reader may reflect that he seeks oblivion through activity. Once again, the poem precariously balances the claims of action and escape. Ulysses faces the alternatives of a useful life, tending to the well-being of his people:

... by slow prudence to make mild  
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees  
Subdue them to the useful and the good.

or a life of travel and the exotic, 'To follow knowledge like a sinking star,/ Beyond the utmost bound of human thought'. The poem falls into four sub-sections, two declaring nobility of aim and two running counter to this nobility. The first movement (11.1-5) is restless and even bitter in its rejection of domesticity: diction and rhythm are harsh and explosive, notably in the undermining of traditional views of Penelope as the ideal wife. Home appears unattractive and mean. The second movement (11.6-

32) contrasts this sense of dissatisfaction with a gloriously remembered and celebrated past, the language moulding itself into a positively Homeric resonance and re-enactment of the deeds of heroism. But the subversive undercurrent hinted at in Ulysses' somewhat indiscriminate attitude to experience, in drinking life 'to the lees', erupts into the third movement (11.33-43), where the heroic speaker again recalls the listener to the Ithaca he seems to despise. The rhythm here is flat, the energy dissipated into a somewhat bored acceptance of the necessity of those civic virtues to which Ulysses himself can never aspire, and this complex of ideas is concentrated in the description of the role of his son Telemachus:

Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil  
This labour, 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, centred 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.

In the final peroration (11.47-70) Tennyson seeks to resolve, through grandeur of language and exercise of poetic decorum, the tensions set up in his monologue. Yet the declarative utterance and devil-may-care mood is subtly undercut by the melancholy sound of the verse which mimetically acts out a very different mood:

The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:  
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep  
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,  
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.

There is perhaps a muffled note of hysteria in 'Come, my friends...', a note which is not altogether lost in the Churchillian gestures of the ending.

'Ulysses' is a poem which generates meaning by postulating an Ithaca which represents limitation of human action. The vocabulary associated with Ulysses' home - 'idle', 'still', 'barren', 'savage' - suggests sterility and stagnation. For the hero 'all experience is an arch wherethro' Gleams that untravell'd world', and the final night voyage, like the one projected in D. H. Lawrence's 'Ship of Death', is towards the unknown region, the beyond. Death is thus the final adventure which Ulysses