

Module-2 : Reading Victorian Poetry

Unit-1 □ Alfred Lord Tennyson :

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2.1.0. Introduction

In this Unit you will be introduced to the most prominent of Victorian poets, Alfred Tennyson—who later became the Poet Laureate of England in 1850. Tennyson’s poetry can be seen in his treatment of and approach to Nature. Like Shelley, he presents the various aspects of Nature with a scientific accuracy and precision of detail. Influenced by the evolutionary theory, he discards the traditional idea of a benevolent and motherly Nature, and brings out her fiercer aspects as well. He also

finds Nature ‘red in tooth and claw’, and shows the cruelty perpetrated in the form of the struggle for existence. His scientific temper blunts his sensitiveness to the soothing charms of Nature. Tennyson is a true representative of his Age, who voices the various feelings, sentiments, ideals and trends as well as social and moral concerns of his Age. He cherishes the values and ideals of his Age, but he also protests against those of them that he finds to be wrong or unsuitable for people. Tennyson’s poetry contains the most faithful reflection of, and offers the best commentary on, the life, thoughts and beliefs of the Victorian Age.

2.1.1. Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Literary Life

More than any other Victorian writer, Tennyson (1809-1892) has seemed the embodiment of his age, both to his contemporaries and to modern readers. In his own day he was said to be—with Queen Victoria and Gladstone—one of the three most famous living persons, a reputation no other poet writing in English has ever had. As official poetic spokesman for the reign of Victoria, he felt called upon to celebrate a quickly changing industrial and mercantile world with which he felt little in common, for his deepest sympathies were called forth by an unaltered rural England; the conflict between what he thought of as his duty to society and his allegiance to the eternal beauty of nature seems peculiarly Victorian.



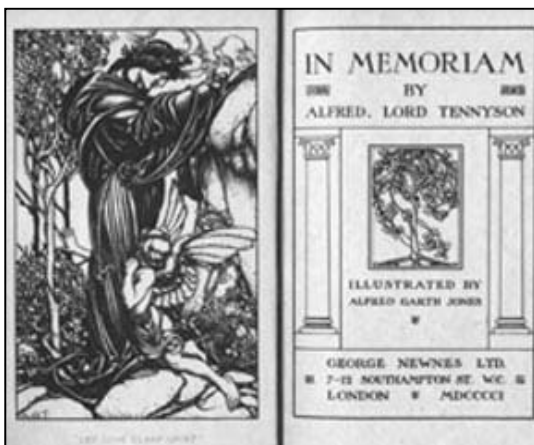
When he was not quite eighteen his first volume of poetry, *Poems by Two Brothers* (1827), was published. Alfred Tennyson wrote the major part of the volume, although it also contained poems by his two elder brothers, Frederick and Charles. It is a remarkable book for so young a poet, displaying great virtuosity of versification and the prodigality of imagery that was to mark his later works; but it is also derivative in its ideas, many of which came from his reading in his father’s library. Few copies were sold, and there were only two brief reviews, but its publication confirmed Tennyson’s determination to devote his life to poetry.

Most of Tennyson’s early education was under the direction of his father,

although he spent nearly four unhappy years at a nearby grammar school. His departure in 1827 to join his elder brothers at Trinity College, Cambridge, was due more to a desire to escape from Somersby than to a desire to undertake serious academic work. At Trinity he was living for the first time among young men of his own age who knew little of the problems that had beset him for so long; he was delighted to make new friends; he was extraordinarily handsome, intelligent, humorous, and gifted at impersonation; and soon he was at the center of an admiring group of young men interested in poetry and conversation. It was probably the happiest period of his life.

Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and Arthur Henry Hallam

Arthur Henry Hallam, (1811-1833), English essayist and poet who died before his considerable talent developed, is remembered principally as the dear friend Alfred Tennyson commemorated in his fine elegy *In Memoriam*. Hallam met Tennyson at Trinity College, Cambridge (1828), where they joined other artistically and politically progressive students in the club called The Apostles. The sudden and unexpected death of Hallam was a brutal shock to Tennyson, who took years to recover from it. *In Memoriam* remains a testament to the years of struggle to come to terms with his personal grief and the Victorian search for faith in the midst of skepticism unleashed by the theories of Evolution, to ultimately find anchorage in a renewed hope for union with his friend.



2.1.1 a) 1. The Text of 'Ulysses'

*It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
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 me.*

*I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
 Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd
 Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
 That loved me, and alone, on shore, and when
 Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
 Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;
 For always roaming with a hungry heart
 Much have I seen and known; cities of men
 And manners, climates, councils, governments,
 Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;
 And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
 Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
 I am a part of all that I have met;
 Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
 Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
 For ever and forever when I move.
 How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
 To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
 As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on 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 wile it were
 For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
 And this gray spirit yearning in desire
 To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
 Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.*

*This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
 To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,—
 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. He works his work, I mine.*

*There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me—
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
Death closes all: but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
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.
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 that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One 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.*

2.1.1.a) 2. Glossary - 'Ulysses'

1. Barren crags - it refers to the island of Ithaca which is covered with rocks that are barren as nothing can grow on them.
2. Drink life to the lees - make the most use of life
3. Rainy Hyades – Hyades is a group of stars that was held by the ancients to indicate rainy weather; therefore called rainy Hyades.
4. there gloom... seas – the sea looks dark and sombre
5. touch the Happy Isles – in Greek mythology the Happy Isles were considered to be the paradise of perpetual summer where spirits of dead heroes of the past lived.
6. Achilles – the great Greek hero of the Trojan war famous for his valour and manly beauty.
7. Ulysses (Odysseus in Greek) is a legendary figure in Tennyson's poem whose adventures were first recorded in Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. Tennyson draws on Homer's narrative in the poem although most critics think that his poem recalls Dante's Ulysses in Inferno. The poem is in the form of a dramatic monologue. Ulysses himself is the speaker and he seems to be addressing his mariners who were his companions in the Trojan War. His son Telemachus seems to be standing by him.

2.1.1.a) 3. Summary of the poem 'Ulysses'

Ulysses (Odysseus) declares that there is little point in his staying home "by this still hearth" with his old wife, doling out rewards and punishments for the unnamed masses who live in his kingdom.

Still speaking to himself he proclaims that he "cannot rest from travel" but feels compelled to live to the fullest and swallow every last drop of life. He has enjoyed all his experiences as a sailor who travels the seas, and he considers himself a symbol for everyone who wanders and roams the earth. His travels have exposed him to many different types of people and ways of living. They have also exposed him to the "delight of battle" while fighting the Trojan War with his men. Ulysses declares that his travels and encounters have shaped who he is: "I am a part of all that I have met," he asserts. And it is only when he is traveling that the "margin" of the globe that he has not yet traversed shrink and fade, and cease to goad him.

Ulysses declares that it is boring to stay in one place, and that to remain stationary is to rust rather than to shine; to stay in one place is to pretend that all there is to life is the simple act of breathing, whereas he knows that in fact life contains much novelty, and he longs to encounter this. His spirit yearns constantly for new experiences that will broaden his horizons; he wishes “to follow knowledge like a sinking star” and forever grow in wisdom and in learning.

Ulysses now speaks to an unidentified audience concerning his son Telemachus, who will act as his successor while the great hero resumes his travels: he says, “This is my son, mine own Telemachus, to whom I leave the scepter and the isle.” He speaks highly but also patronizingly of his son’s capabilities as a ruler, praising his prudence, dedication, and devotion to the gods. Telemachus will do his work of governing the island while Ulysses will do his work of traveling the seas: “He works his work, I mine.”

In the final stanza, Ulysses addresses the mariners with whom he has worked, traveled, and weathered life’s storms over many years. He declares that although he and they are old, they still have the potential to do something noble and honorable before “the long day wanes.” He encourages them to make use of their old age because “ ’tis not too late to seek a newer world.” He declares that his goal is to sail onward “beyond the sunset” until his death. Perhaps, he suggests, they may even reach the “Happy Isles,” or the paradise of perpetual summer described in Greek mythology where great heroes like the warrior Achilles were believed to have been taken after their deaths. Although Ulysses and his mariners are not as strong as they were in youth, they are “strong in will” and are sustained by their resolve to push onward relentlessly: “To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.”

2.1.1.a) 4. Critical Appreciation of the poem ‘Ulysses’

In this poem, written in 1833 and revised for publication in 1842, Tennyson reworks the figure of Ulysses by drawing on the ancient hero of Homer’s *Odyssey* (“Ulysses” is the Roman form of the Greek “Odysseus”) and the medieval hero of Dante’s *Inferno*. Homer’s Ulysses, as described in Scroll XI of the *Odyssey*, learns from a prophecy that he will take a final sea voyage after killing the suitors of his wife Penelope. The details of this sea voyage are described by Dante in Canto XXVI of the *Inferno*: Ulysses finds himself restless in Ithaca and driven by “the longing I had to gain experience of the world.” Dante’s Ulysses is a tragic figure who dies while sailing too far in an insatiable thirst for knowledge. Tennyson combines these

two accounts by having Ulysses make his speech shortly after returning to Ithaca and resuming his administrative responsibilities, and shortly before embarking on his final voyage.

However, this poem also concerns the poet's own personal journey, for it was composed in the first few weeks after Tennyson learned of the death of his dear college friend Arthur Henry Hallam in 1833. Like *In Memoriam*, then, this poem is also an elegy for a deeply cherished friend. Ulysses, who symbolizes the grieving poet, proclaims his resolution to push onward in spite of the awareness that "death closes all" (line 51). As Tennyson himself stated, the poem expresses his own "need of going forward and braving the struggle of life" after the loss of his beloved Hallam.

The poem's final line, "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield," came to serve as a motto for the poet's Victorian contemporaries: the poem's hero longs to flee the tedium of daily life "among these barren crags" (line 2) and to enter a mythical dimension "beyond the sunset, and the baths of all the western stars" (lines 60–61); as such, he was a model of individual self-assertion and the Romantic rebellion against bourgeois conformity. Thus for Tennyson's immediate audience, the figure of Ulysses held not only mythological meaning, but stood as an important contemporary cultural icon as well.

"Ulysses," like many of Tennyson's other poems, deals with the desire to reach beyond the limits of one's field of vision and the mundane details of everyday life. Ulysses is the antithesis of the mariners in "The Lotos-Eaters," who proclaim "we will no longer roam" and desire only to relax amidst the Lotos fields. In contrast, Ulysses "cannot rest from travel" and longs to roam the globe (line 6). Like the Lady of Shallot, who longs for the worldly experiences she has been denied, Ulysses hungers to explore the untraveled world.

As in all dramatic monologues, here the character of the speaker emerges almost unintentionally from his own words. Ulysses' incompetence as a ruler is evidenced by his preference for potential quests rather than his present responsibilities. He devotes a full 26 lines to his own egotistical proclamation of his zeal for the wandering life, and another 26 lines to the exhortation of his mariners to roam the seas with him. However, he offers only 11 lines of lukewarm praise to his son concerning the governance of the kingdom in his absence, and a mere two words about his "aged wife" Penelope. Thus, the speaker's own words betray his abdication of responsibility and his specificity of purpose.

Ulysses is old now in age but not in spirit. He is greatly dissatisfied with his present condition as the king of Ithaca, an island. His subjects are rugged and savage in the sense that they do not value the importance of work and justice in life. They are the people who only “hoard, and sleep, and feed and know not me.” His wife is old now and his son is young enough to take over the responsibility of his father’s kingdom and family. Ulysses has been a great explorer and has made great discoveries. Though old now his spirit yearns for new adventures abroad. He says that he has been to different places of different kinds of people and of different “manners, climates, councils, governments” and all those people have paid honour and tribute to him as a result of which his name has become a substitute for great adventurer and explorer. He has proved his exploits in the Trojan war and as an explorer he has found that the world is too large to be measured by a single life and that the more he explores the more of it remains to be discovered. He says that his spirit is indefatigable and for him old age is not the time for rest and rusting but to gain more experiences in life. He is of the opinion that life means experiences and the more one gathers them the greater in age one becomes.

He then contrasts his present life with that which has been and wishes “to shine in use”. He also says that he will not be alive for any more years and wishes that before he is laid to rest he wants to become a discoverer of new things. His spirits are very high and his ambition is to follow knowledge even beyond the seas.

He also says that in his absence his son Telemachus will be the king of Ithaca and he will try in every possible way to civilize his rugged and savage people by slow degrees and try to make them useful and good. Moreover, his son knows what his duties towards his family are and he will also properly worship his household gods. While he goes abroad his son will remain at home and perform all the duties that are expected of the head of a family. All preparations for Ulysses’s departure have been completed — the sails of his ship full of air and his mariners are prepared to sail with him to meet any and every kind of adventure that comes their way. His mariners are undaunted and have never known any fear. They have been “free hearts, free foreheads” and though as old as he himself is yet they and he are alike in spirits. Like him his mariners also believe that though death is an unfailing certainty yet before death and even in old age “some work of noble note” can be done. For they were the people who “strove with gods” in the past.

All is ready for his departure. It is the evening time, the moon is visible in the

sky and the sea seems to invite the mariners with many kinds of noise. Ulysses asks his mariners to get ready immediately for “pushing off”, because his ambition is to reach the legendary

“Happy isles” where he hopes to see his great ancestor Achilles face to face. He now regrets that he and his mariners are now not in possession of that energy and vigour that were theirs in their former youthful days when they could move “earth and heaven”. They have now been considerably weakened both by fate and by time. But for them there is no cessation from activity. They are all of “One equal temper of heroic hearts” and by defying both time and fate they must continue their old mission “to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield”.

This poem is written as a dramatic monologue: the entire poem is spoken by a single character, whose identity is revealed through his own words. The lines are in blank verse, or unrhymed iambic pentameter, which serves to impart a fluid and natural quality to Ulysses’s speech. Many of the lines are enjambed, which means that a thought does not end with the line-break; the sentences often end in the middle, rather than the end, of the lines. The use of enjambment is appropriate in a poem about pushing forward “beyond the utmost bound of human thought.” Finally, the poem is divided into four stanza-like sections, each of which comprises a distinct thematic unit of the poem.

Tennyson had once said, “There is more about myself in Ulysses, which was written under the effect of loss and that all had gone by, but that still life must be fought out to the end”. The loss referred to in the foregoing lines is the death of his father in 1831 but the more important event for him was the death of his close and intimate friend Arthur Henry Hallam in 1933. Hallam had been Tennyson’s close Cambridge friend and Tennyson was emotionally tied to him.

2.1.1.b) 1. The text of ‘Break, Break, Break’

*Break, break, break,
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.
O, well for the fisherman’s boy,
That he shouts with his sister at play!
O, well for the sailor lad,
That he sings in his boat on the bay!*

*And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!
Break, break, break
At the foot of thy crags, O Sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.*

2.1.1.b) 2. Explanation/Analysis of the Poem - 'Break, Break, Break'

The sea is breaking on the "cold gray stones" before the speaker. He laments that he cannot give voice to his thoughts. Yes, the fisherman's boy shouts with his sister while they play, and the young sailor sings in his boat, but the speaker cannot express such joy. Other ships travel silently into port, their "haven under the hill," and this observation seems to remind him of the disappearance of someone he cared for. No longer can he feel the person's touch or hear the person's voice. Unlike the waves, which noisily "break, break, break" on the rocks as they repeatedly come in, the "tender grace" of bygone days will never return to him.

➤ Analysis

This short poem carries the emotional impact of a person reflecting on the loss of someone he (or she) cared for. Written in 1834 right after the sudden death of Tennyson's friend Arthur Henry Hallam, the poem was published in 1842. Although some have interpreted the speaker's grief as sadness over a lost lover, it probably reflects the feeling at any loss of a beloved person in death, like Tennyson's dejection over losing Hallam.

The poem is four stanzas of four lines each, each quatrain in irregular iambic tetrameter. The irregularity in the number of syllables in each line might convey the instability of the sea or the broken, jagged edges of the speaker's grief. Meanwhile, the ABCB rhyme scheme in each stanza may reflect the regularity of the waves.

On the surface, the poem seems relatively simple and straightforward, and the feeling is easy to discern: the speaker wishes he could give voice to his sad thoughts and his memories, to move and speak like the sea and others around him. The poem's deeper interest is in the series of comparisons between the external world and the poet's internal world. The outer world is where life happens, or where it used to

happen for the speaker. The inner world is what preoccupies him now, caught up in deep pain and loss and the memories of a time with the one who is gone.

For example, in the first stanza, the sea is battering the stones. The speaker appears frustrated that the sea can keep moving and making noise while he is unable to utter his thoughts. The sea's loud roar, its ability to vent its energy, is something he lacks. The repetition of "break" aptly conveys the ceaseless motion of the waves, each wave reminding him of what he lacks.

In the second stanza, Tennyson similarly expresses distance between himself and the happy people playing or singing where they are. They possess joy and fulfillment, whether together or alone, but he does not. The brother and sister have each other; the sailor has his boat; the speaker is alone. They have reason to voice pleasure, but he does not. One might sense envy here, but "O, well" also suggests that these blithe young people have losses yet to come.

In the third stanza the poet sees the "stately ships" moving to their "haven under the hill," either to port or over the horizon. Either way, they seem content with a destination. But the mounded grave is no pleasant haven, in contrast. That end means the end of activity; there is no more hand to touch, no more voice to hear. Again the speaker is caught up in his internal thoughts, his memory of the mourned figure overshadowing what the speaker sees around him. The critic H. Sopher also interprets the contrast in this stanza as such: "The stateliness of the ships contrasts with the poet's emotional imbalance; and the ships move *forward* to an attainable goal ... while the poet looks *back* to a 'vanish'd hand' and a 'voice that is still.'"

In the fourth stanza, the speaker returns to the breaking of waves on the craggy cliffs. The waves come again, again, again, hitting a wall of rock each time. But for him there is no return of the dead, just the recurring pain of loss. Why speak, why act? It explains that "the poet's realization of the fruitlessness of action draws the reader's attention to the fact that the sea's action is, seemingly, fruitless too—for all its efforts [it] can no more get beyond the rocks than the poet can restore the past." Nevertheless, both the sea and the speaker continue with their useless but repeated actions, as though there is no choice. The scene evokes a sense of inevitability and hopelessness.

While the feeling here could involve merely the loss of a romantic relationship, it seems more poignant if the speaker has no hope for the return of the one who is lost. Without a death, there is no opportunity to connect the "hill" to a mounded

grave, the “still” voice would be harder to interpret, and the “day that is dead” would be a weaker metaphor.

2.1.1.b) 3. Dominant Themes of the poem ‘Break, Break, Break’

The poem pronounces the emotional state of loss and the apprehension that there is something beyond the progression of life and death. The elegy encompasses Tennyson’s mental state of melancholy. The suffering in this poem is identical with “In Memoriam”. The personal loss of his friend weaves the lines together.

1. Theme of Death:

The speaker does not explicitly use the word death, but he ironically refers to his friend's death when he wishes to “touch” the “vanish’d hand” and to hear “the voice that is still” which dominantly emphasises the missing part from the speaker’s life. Then he refers to “day that is dead” for the first time embedding the theme of death through time which will never come back thereby making his friend mortal. The speaker sees emblem of death in all the material objects around him like the “cold grey stones” which is the symbolic grave stone. The “stately ships” that travel to their “haven under the hill” is the symbolic coffin which is in transit to be buried. The “haven under the hill” sounds rather gruesome – it advocates entombment knolls in graveyards, where the dead find rest or “haven” and the wooden “ships” might represent wooden coffins touching progressively toward burial. He only imagines a disembodied “voice” that is now “still.” Instead of envisioning his friend in his completeness, he visualises him only as a sequence of absenteeism. To the speaker it’s the time that he has spent with the friend that is “dead” and never to come back again.

2. Theme of time:

The repetition of the words “Break, Break, Break” suggests the monotony of time consumed grief and loss which is increasing with the rolling waves. The speaker seems to suggest that time rolls by and is ever evolving, which instead suggest that the bygone cannot be enlivened and ceases with continuity of forlorn days. The first two lines of the first and last stanza are starkly compared with the static and the evolving. Towards the end it seems that the speaker realised that time takes one to his future overcoming the past belongings which resides in the mind. It seems that time has paced down the speaker’s life compared to the jovial surrounding as the speaker delves further with grief accumulated by time.

3. Theme of Memory and Nostalgia:

The speaker constantly brings back in the poem the theme of memory and nostalgia by his mourning for his friend who is dead. In the first and the last stanza that wailing vowel sound “O” makes us listen to the enragement of the sea. The negative ‘Break, break, break’ creates a gloomy atmosphere and in ‘O, well for the fisherman’s boy’ the lasting sigh can be heard. The narrator cannot enjoy or find pleasure in the virtuousness or innocence appreciated by the people he observes. Here Tennyson uses images of youth in this stanza, adding to the regretful tone of the section: ‘boy’, ‘play’ and ‘lad’. The use of memory and nostalgia aggravates the theme of death and loss where the poet metaphorically alludes to death, “ And the stately ships go on / To their haven under the hill;” - the ship acts as the metaphor of life, which has gone to its rest (or ‘haven’) and is out of sight buried under the earth.

4. Theme of Youth:

Tennyson’s friend, Arthur Hallam, was only 22 when he died. The trauma of Hallam’s death captivated Tennyson and made him realise how precious the youth is. To accentuate this impression, and to unravel the distress he suffers at the loss of young Hallam, Tennyson weaves images of youthful joys: the fisherman’s son playing with his sister and the “sailor lad” singing in the bay.

2.1.1. b) 4. Symbolism in the poem ‘Break, Break, Break’

1. Sea:

The sea acts as an appropriate image in this poem. The speaker realizes that time waits for no one which looms large over this poem. It seems to the speaker that the world has stopped with the loss of his friend. The speaker also seems to be angry on the sea for it seems to him that the sea doesn’t bother about his friend’s loss and is constant with its daily chores. In lines 1 and 2 (later in lines 13 and 14) the speaker apostrophises the sea as he speaks with it resembling a communication.

2. Utterances:

The speaker is terribly concerned with the voice, which will narrate the content. In the first stanza he delimits his talking, which shapes up the psychological turmoil in his mind. He then refers to the shouting, playing and singing which are audible. In the third stanza the speaker explains his tongue tiredness and the voice which is “still” as he is clogged up with grief. The fisherman’s boy is shouting but the content

of his shouting isn't clear. Similarly the sailor's boy is singing, but it is not clear if it is happy or unhappy lyrics.

3. The Vanish'd hand:

The speaker symbolises his friend in the form of the allegorical "vanish'd hand". The friend is never primarily cited but he exists in the form of fragmented symbols of human life as the voice which is "still". He is represented by a series of absences trapped in the dead of time which is never to enliven. The synecdoche expressions are nothing but the remains of the friend in the poet's mind.

2.1.1. b) 5. Break, Break, Break: A Sea Elegy

Break, Break, Break is a sea elegy written by Lord Tennyson on the death of his university friend Arthur Henry Hallum. Here, the ever-breaking sea, the fisherman's boy, the stately ships, etc. all show the permanence of the world around and yet they remain unaffected by the poet's personal grief. However, the thoughts contained in this elegy are not so elaborate and high as in *In Memoriam* but the Current of thoughts is not less pathetic.

In this short lyric, Nature serves as a mirror of poet's intense feelings of sorrow. The poem has reference to a watering place on the Bristol Channel where his friend is buried. Simple and lucid, the poem regards the poet's intense grief which is shared by Nature. In the opening lines, the impression of an unpleasant face is being hammered into the poet's consciousness. The poet wishes, he could give his voices to his humbled and anguished feelings just as sea breaks on the story surface. Farther, the cold gray stones could be interpreted as gravestones, as well as the cliff walls.

Break, break, break,
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

In the next stanza, the dead past and sea both create a feeling of soft melancholy. The friendship between the children and the contentment of the sailor boy make him feel the loss of his friend more acutely:

O well for the fisherman's boy,
That he shouts with his sister at play!

O well for the sailor lad,
That he sings in his boat on the bay!

Life goes on as usual, once the poet is miserable and solitary and longs for his company of his dead friend. The stately ships of life are taking its voyage towards the domain of death- under the hill. Thus in the description of Nature there goes the image of deceased Arther Hallum who has been silenced forever by the hidden hand of death. The following lines seem to indicate the poet in a melancholy mood. He is missing his dear friend who was a source of comfort. In fact, in *In Memoriam* the image of touching hands is repeated frequently and almost becomes a motif for Tennyson's grief for his friend. He always wants to touch his hands once more and it is similar in this poem, he longs to be able to touch Hallam again because he knows he never will:

And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But o for the touch of a vanished hand
And the sound of a voice that is still"

Life flows on uniformly in Nature, only the poet will not be able to recover the joy of his early life when Hallum was alive. The melancholy notes of breaking the sea waves remain Sophoclean eternity in the concluding lines:

But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.

2.1.2. Summing Up

- The poem 'Ulysses' by Tennyson makes him realize that for him there was no escape and that life had to be lived and fought and at this time
- The myth of Ulysses gave him great encouragement. He wrote that the poem gave him an impetus about the need of going forward and braving the struggle of life.
- On the other hand the poem 'Break, Break, Break' describes feelings of loss and the realization that there is something beyond the cycle of life and death.

2.1.3. Comprehension Exercises

● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. Critically comment on Tennyson's use of autobiographical content in the two poems.
2. Do you consider 'Break, Break, Break' a poem of melancholy? Elucidate.
3. Comment on Tennyson's handling of 'Ulysses' Legend.

● **Medium Length Questions-12 Marks**

1. Discuss on 'Ulysses' as a dramatic monologue.
2. Briefly comment on Tennyson's narrative technique in both the poems.
3. Is there any spirit of optimism in Tennyson's 'Ulysses'? Answer with textual references.

● **Short Questions-6 Marks**

1. What story is the poet referring to when he says "I cannot rest from travel: I will drink/ Life to the lees"?
2. Explain the lines— "And the stately ships go on / To their haven under the hill; /But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand, / And the sound of a voice that is still!"
3. "Yet all experience is an arch" – To whom 'experience' seems like an 'arch' and why?

2.1.4. Suggested Reading

1. F.L. Lucas, Tennyson (London, 1957)
2. W. H. Auden, Tennyson: a Selection and Introduction (London, 1946)
3. P.F. Baum, Tennyson Sixty years After (London, 1949)
4. Walker, H. The Age of Tennyson (London, 1897)
5. Graham, Richard. The Masters of Victorian Literature 1837-1897 (London, 1897)