ABSTRACT

A poem written by Alfred Tennyson entitled “Ulysses” is a poem which main character is controversial and it was not a new or strange character in the world of poetry. Ulysses is a character that often appeared in some previous works, the most well-known ones are “Odyssey” and “Iliad” written by Homer. The interesting thing in Tennyson’s poem, he depicted Ulysses’ life after the Trojan War. In Homer’s, Ulysses was a brave man and the image of self-reliant (independent), smart, heroic and calm personality that could be seen from how he handled the war of Troy. But in Tennyson’s, Ulysses is different; he is characterized as suffered from the estrangement after the war. In analyzing the poem, New Criticism will be used to elaborate the process of Ulysses’ estrangement. In New Criticism, intrinsic elements of the poem are very important since the poem itself is the autonomous text that its linguistic devices will be useful to reveal the main character’s estrangement in the poem. In his estrangement, Ulysses leaves his family and his people to get freedom that he considers in balance with what Achilles did. The analysis is aimed to give distinctive portrayal about the main character and the meaning of Tennyson’s “Ulysses” as a whole.

Keywords: Estrangement; Portrayal; Freedom; Self-Reliant; Controversy; Harmony

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

The interpretation of the text can be referred to the biographical-historical background of the text. To search and prove the author’s intentional meaning about the text that the author created, although it is not easy to point the meaning of the works intended by the author, especially if the author of those literary works passed away and never mentioned their intention of their works in the previous event can be done through the poet’s background. However, the reader may also have their interpretation about the text based on the text, as the main source, without relating to the author’s historical background without denying the fact that most works, if not all, should have the meaning given by the author. The research which the main source was based on the text itself, may have different result given by the author, while it is not necessarily to be the same or similar with the meaning intended by the author, as long as it was supported by the text. According to Tyson (136), “sometimes literary text does not live up to the author’s intention. Sometimes it is even more rich, meaningful, and complex than the author realized.”

Without denying the importance of how literary works may represent the condition when the text was written, also where the text was written, it may become an important asset for those who desire to understand the event which happened in the past. Despite the fact that different authors may have different perspective towards their surroundings, and also the condition of the authors which may affect their process of writing, will also affect the result of their writing. While the same thing can also happen to the reader and their interpretation toward the text, while it may represent the condition of their time and place.

The method of New Criticism is close reading, using the text as the main source of our understanding. It is also important that each aspect of the formal elements supports each other in order to keep the harmony of the text interpretation which will lead the interpretation to be directed into one way, instead of contradicting with our own interpretation.

Alfred Tennyson’s Ulysses is a controversial poem which uses Ulysses, the character which appears in several works previously. The poem was often related with some other poems since Ulysses, was originally created by Homer, where the character appeared in his Odyssey and Iliad. Ulysses also appeared in Dante’s Inferno, but in portrayal. Due to different characters of Ulysses, the writer is interested in discussing Tennyson’s “Ulysses” in this thesis.
The controversy of Ulysses is actually related to other Ulysses, as the character was portrayed in different works and was portraying different condition with different background in which Ulysses appeared as the character in those literary works. The character Ulysses portrayed in Hommer’s works showed the image of self reliance (independence), smart, heroic and calm personality that could be seen from how he handled the war of Troy. On the other hand, it is quite contradictory toward what the writer learned from how Tennyson’s image of Ulysses in his poem, in which he suffered from estrangement, where he denied his presence as the king which led his people through their glorious and peaceful life in Ithaca. This was what interested the writer to choose the topic of estrangement, because there are some differences between how Ulysses is portrayed in the other works and in Tennyson’s works. Ulysses was the hero in the war of Troy as appeared in Hommer’s works and he miserably lefted his people and family in his work to chase his self-satisfaction which quite the opposite, beside the controversy of the character itself.

The character, Ulysses that was portrayed in Tennyson’s poem took event after the war of Troy in his return to Ithaca as the king for his people. It is interesting how in the poem, Ulysses was portrayed in a condition in which he was doubtful about his surrounding behavior, paradox, can perform between his life after the war and during the war. It was quite surprising that he seemed to be more enjoying and missed his life during the war, with a goal of winning that war, compared to his life as a king after he actually won the war.

The study is going to analyze linguistic, semantic, structural, and cultural aspects of the poem. These aspects were portrayed in the poem in relation to the character’s estrangement. The writer will focus the analysis on the estrangement of the character through the formal elements and the figurative language of the poem. This is where new criticism works in order to relate the character’s estrangement through the text.

1.2 Objective of the study
The objective of the study is to reveal the meaning of the poem by elaborating the estrangement suffered by Ulysses to find the portrayal of Ulysses in the poem.

1.3 Theoretical Background and Method
The study is focusing on the representation of estrangement suffered by the character in the poem and how the poem portrays the estrangement of Ulysses. The text is the poem, will be the main source, therefore, the theory that will be used is New Criticism. New Criticism was formed due to the fact that in the past a text was bounded to the author, or historical event. Mark Jancovich stated through his book, *The Cultural Politics of the New Criticism*, that new criticism is raised due to the overuse of the relation between a product including literary works and the historical background and the author. (247), the interpretation of the text using New Criticism can be referred to the readers’ participation toward the text they care about or giving meaning of its own. This lead to an idea where interpretation toward a text is a form of a participation of cultural and structural practices, even though it may be used with any theory based on an interpretative use such as New Criticism, Reader response, or even New Historicism (bias history).

In New Criticism, the interpretation of the text is based on its formal elements that support one to another, even though there might be an ambiguity. The important part is that it will be an organic unity which supports the main idea, in this case, is the estrangement of Ulysses, in Tennyson’s poem “Ulysses”.

The main source of this analysis is the text itself which is “Ulysses”, a poem by Alfred Tennyson. The text will be examined in close reading. The linguistic devices will build the conclusion to establish the organic unity of the text. Other method used in this study is qualitative method which includes research in the library in order to help to find the reference. The writer also browses the online reference to find more information related to the study. Both used in order to support and ensure the elaboration of the poem.

In analyzing the poem, the writer uses descriptive interpretative method; the data will be analyzed in the form of descriptive explanation in order to prove that the data supports the idea of the estrangement suffered by Ulysses.

2. Analysis
The estrangement is a social issue which involves the relation and interaction between one and another, where one might feel that they were being estranged by certain person or group of people. Theodor Adorno (2006) stated in his book, *Minima Moralia* related to the case in what kind of situation could estrangement happen, “Estrangement shows itself precisely in the elimination of distance between people”. This point happened to Ulysses; he felt the estrangement in his own kingdom, where he was the king. Ironically, as a person who led his people to achieve what they got, he envied his people. He felt that it was not fair that his people were able to live the way they were while he was not satisfied with how his life was.

The process of estrangement in Ulysses case is quite unique as the relationship between him and his people plays a significant role. It seems to be that his life when he was the king in his kingdom was quite different from what he had been through, especially compared to his life during the war of Troy; he seemed to miss the days when he was fighting and to be in a dangerous situation, where their life was at risk the moment where it was. They seemed to share their joy during the war where he felt that he was more notable person, in comparison to his life as an “idle king” where he feels that he did not do anything during that time, yet he also did not mention that he needed material support. We can conclude that he has no problem related with material need even though he called himself as an “idle king” and mentioned that his people was “Hoard, and sleep and feed” it was quite absurd, from where did he get supply of material need. Further analysis will be explained through the formal elements and linguistic devices which will examine the lines of the poem that is sufficient with the estrangement of Ulysses.

2.1 Linguistic Devices

The linguistic devices of the poem will be analyzed in order to support the finding of the estrangement of Ulysses. The analysis of the linguistic devices will be divided into four parts as Tyson suggests that there are four kinds of linguistic devices. According to Tyson (138), “The complexity of a text is created by the multiple and often conflicting meanings woven through it, and these meanings are a product primarily of four kinds of linguistic devices: paradox, irony, ambiguity, and tension”.

2.1.1 Ambiguity

Ambiguity, according to Bressler (62), “language’s capacity to sustain multiple meanings”. The ambiguity in the text mainly involves with the reasoning of the character where Ulysses points out a certain condition or person which done in order to avoid or even to back up his plan in order to get out of Ithaca and to leave his throne behind to his son, Telemachus.

From the beginning of the poem it can be seen how Ulysses mentioned his wife “By this still hearth among these barren crags, / Matched with an aged wife, I mete and dole” (2-3). It was described as if he was attracted to her. He also mentioned that she was the person who he shared his time and wealth with, yet he also described that she was getting older. At one point, it seems that he was losing interest in her for that reason, and on the other hand, she was also precious to him. When we relate this with the estrangement of Ulysses it appeared that he was going to leave the island on the later part of the poem. Yet, it seems that something seems holding him back, his family, wife and son, yet, he chose to leave. It’s proven that the first point that even though his wife was precious to him, after he mentioned the “barren crags” he also mentioned that his wife seemed to be the same as this thing that might lead to his decision to leave the island as he stated that she “matched” with those.

The next line that consists of the ambiguity appears when he mentioned his people, he stated that in the first stanza, “That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me” (5). This line is quite vague which describes the relationship between Ulysses with his people. While he was the king and a hero, yet implied that they knew not him, though they were “feed” and lived in abundance as they were able to “hoard”, which how the people may not know him if they were all able to live such abundant life. Another point that can be seen from this line is that how it appears as if he served his people while it was quite contrast towards what he said on the first line of the poem that he was an “idle king”, and how was it possible that he was able to “feed” them. This was quite vague, yet he wanted to take credit from what his people got.

The next line can be found in the second stanza that appears as if Ulysses was trying to imply that he had always been accepted wherever he was as he described “I am a part of all that I have met; / Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough” (18-19). While on the other hand, we can see that from the fifth line he implied that his people “know not me” which means there is a distance between them. It seems that
these lines lead into two different directions; while it actually supports each other because after all happened to him it seems that it was not always turns out to be as how he expected. In the first line he expected that his will noticed his existence for he think that he contribute to his society, for what happened for them for all this time until they were able to “hoard”, yet it appears to him that they did not notice him. On the other hand, he also thought that he was always been a member or a part of those people he met, yet, it seems that his people was the proof that, it did not turn out the he wanted it to be. It even creates a gap between them.

The next line can be seen in the last stanza when he mentioned about the journey, he was about to have “And see the great Achilles, whom we knew” (64). This line is quite ambiguous, Achilles died during the war of Troy, yet Ulysses and his mariners went to see Achilles. Ulysses was referring to Achilles as a symbol of hero on his time and that his journey might be the last one before they might possibly turn out to meet Achilles after they passed away. On the other hand, it can also be a fake hope for the mariners so that they will go with Ulysses on his leaving from his kingdom.

2.1.2 Paradox

The paradox on the text involved with mainly the part which contradicting between words or lines which lead to a condition which may be involved with certain condition which described in the early part of the text or the later part of the text in order to gain more information and to keep the unity of the text.

The first paradox appears in the second stanza when he mentioned about his journey in the past “I cannot rest from travel: I will drink, Life to the lees: all times I have enjoyed” (6-7). This line represents his strong will that seems to be contradicting each other as he was not able to stay in one place, yet he was able to continue his journey without resting. This line represents his strong will, and explains how he felt that he wanted to leave his kingdom. This might represent one of his habits, which he was enjoying his journey. On the other hand, he also mentioned that he will “drink” even though he can also drink on his journey with his supply of water. It was also clear that they also take a rest even in a brief moment. This line also contradict the fact that he was staying in his kingdom for quite sometimes, and he was decided to leaves after he thought that his own people did not notice him, and the fact that he said it did not turn out to be the way he expected it.

The next line, still in the second stanza, talks about his own moment during the same journey that represents how Ulysses was able to overcome both his joy and suffering “Life to the lees: all times I have enjoyed greatly, have suffered greatly, both with those / That loved me, and alone” (7-9). Even though it mainly talks about how he overcomes his joy and suffering, this also represents that how he plans to continue his life no matter how it whether he will be alone or not, and whether it will be a joyful one or in reverse. While Ulysses mentioned that he will go even if he has to do it alone, really in the last stanza he provokes his mariners and persuades them to go with him in his journey, he even promised them that they will meet Achilles, while Achilles was already dead. Even though he did not mention whether they would meet him alive or after they all passed away.

The next line appears in the third stanza while Ulysses was introducing his son, “A rugged people, and through soft degrees / Subdue them to the useful and the good.” (37-38). In these lines it appeared that he was hoping that his son might be able to bring change for his people, the one that he was not able to do, and chose to leave them instead, even though they were one of the reasons of his leaving. It appears that he wanted his son to cooperate with them and to lead a better future for them.

2.1.3 Irony

The irony of the text mainly shows the characteristics of Ulysses mostly in regard with his relation towards the others in which he is trying to separate people by status and yet try to imply that he is on top of them all, and also to show his idea towards his incoming journey upon leaving Ithaca.

The first irony comes from the second stanza when he mentioned about his experience and his position “Much have I seen and known; cities of men and manners, climates, councils, governments, myself not least, but honoured of them all” (13-16). Here he mentioned several positions people can achieve in society, yet he somehow puts himself in the list with them, but makes himself also on top of them. This part somehow shows that he might seem to be a part of a certain group of people while he also separates himself from them.
The next line also comes from the second stanza when he mentioned that even though there was not much time left, there was still time for him, yet it also led him to have a hope to leave his kingdom “Little remains: but every hour is saved” (22). This line may refer to his life on his older day, yet it was not all one sided since he was trying so hard to leave his people and throne which he felt that he did not gain their attention which he felt he deserved, and would leave them into long journey to achieve what other heroes does.

The next irony appears from the third stanza when Ulysses was introducing his son “To whom I leave the scepter and the isle, / Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfill” (34-35). In these lines it appears as if he was leaving something good to his son and the words “whom” in that line refers to his son which he said he loved, yet he was about to leave him his throne to lead the people he mentioned as “savage rave” which “Hoard, sleep, feed” yet he felt that did not notice him.

2.1.4 Tension

The tension in this poem helps to understand the relationship between Ulysses and the others, and also describes the condition or the situation whether in the current state of the text or what he wants to happen in the future.

The relation of Ulysses in the text was described from his own perspective; it is quite unique that how the description of the relation between characters and even the whole things mentioned in the text was coming from one character. In this monologue we can see quite unique relation between Ulysses and his people and how those relation affect his life and his thought about them, and how it’s involved with the estrangement which he suffered from this relation and the condition of his surrounding which build it bit by bit until he decided to find the resolution for himself.

The first relation from Ulysses with his surrounding can be seen from the first stanza when he mentioned his wife “Matched with an aged wife, I mete and dole” (3). This part shows that their relation was in a good term, yet the word “matched” was preceded “barren crags” which represents boredom. It may appear that he was bored by his own homeland and this situation encouraged him later in making decision on leaving his kingdom.

The second relation between Ulysses and his surrounding can be seen from his relation with his people. “Unequal laws unto a savage race, / That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.” (4-5). These lines show how Ulysses felt towards his people which was quite contradictive to the condition of the poem. The king remains unnoticed while the people remain in peaceful, yet he describes as savage race, while he was also a hero which brought those peace. The only interaction shows between him and Telemachus, and description of his wife, yet no interaction shown between him and his people, that can be questioned because the view was one sided from his point of view.

The next one represents his thought of his current state that can be seen from the second stanza “How dull it is to pause, to make an end, / To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!” (22-23). These lines show his opinion towards the condition during his time as a king he was “rusty” and the in the first line of the poem he was “idle” which was relevance. Yet other lines prove that his kingdom was quite success and all of them got anything they needed there, which require a lot of works in order to achieve those conditions.

The next tension can be seen in the third stanza about his thought toward his son “When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.” (43). This line represents his relationship with his son, Telemachus, in which as far as his concern was to leave his throne and the people he called “savaged race”, yet when he was gone they might not be supporting, nor helping each other as he said “he works his, I mine”.

The next line can be found in the last stanza “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.” (68-69). These lines represent his opinion towards heroism, and also himself and his mariners in which they were weakened physically as he got older, yet their will was strong since remain to strive, to seek, which also represent his idea that a hero is the one that appears in the battle field, not those who seek delegation in other form, as how he experienced in his kingdom.

3. Conclusion
The estrangement of Ulysses is derived through these aspects in the poem, it is caused by several reasons. From the characterization the writer sees that his arrogance creates the gap between him and his people. On the other hand, he also felt that his life before he was in his kingdom was more interesting and there he was noticed by his surrounding, even share their moment where he seemed to enjoy it, what he count as a joyful memory while in his kingdom he felt that he was not noticed by his people. Another factor that can also be found is his boredom towards the stagnant condition in his kingdom.

These factors evolve and caused his surrounding to react towards his arrogance. How he act as if he was responsible for any good that happened in his kingdom as he wanted to be credited by his people for what they are able to achieved, while he himself mentioned that he was a stagnant king. He also always used connotation such as “rugged people” and “savage race” when he was mentioning his people. The people might react toward his act and his personality, appeared to be how they did not pay attention to their king, which was a person who had won a war, and fight for them. Yet, he later become stagnant where they think that he did not contribute but trying to use his reputation from his past for him to use other people. Their reaction appeared to be effective it can be seen from how he felt that he was estranged by his society which caused him to leave his kingdom.

4. Works Cited