

Ulysses leaves his kingdom, his well-earned repose, his wife and son to exchange for his sceptre, the oar ; for rest, toil and watchfulness; for his family, perhaps the chill embraces of the ingulfing seas. The Grammarian, when a wasted youth has gone, leaves the world's allurements ; forsakes men's pity; disregards his body's call for rest; scoffs at disease's warning, and with resolute choice, gives up the world to solve its meaning ; forsakes Life's arms that he may read her heart—deciding not to live, but know.

Alike they counted nothing dear—all things but dross—that they might obtain this knowledge, Ulysses scorns his people ; mocks at proffered ease ; finds in the recollections of past achievements only an invitation from the future, in the bellying sail, a beckoning hand, in the waning day and moaning ocean-voices chiding incitements to hasten ere his pursuit of the Ideal be overtaken by the swifter feet of Death. The Grammarian finds the world which had seemed his host these many years in reality a gaoler with whom he “grapples bent on escaping,” yet in escaping, bent too on wresting from the world the secret whose very existence had so far been hidden from him. Ease, rest and life itself he spurns. Even over the grave he triumphs. To Ulysses the sound of Death's inexorable footfall was the one summons to forego pursuit which he could not gainsay. But to the Grammarian Death comes, God's messenger, herald of power to achieve success. God's hand is now about to turn the page where the sentence unfinished here, will reach its close, and the meaning of life be revealed.

Such was the character of their pursuit. But even such a pursuit is not in itself noble. It must be the pursuit of a high ideal. Such an ideal these men pursued. Novalis has said (quoted in Macterlinck's essay on Emerson) “The only thing in life that matters is the search for the transcendental self.” The ultimate thing in life is life's meaning. To seek it is the one thing worth doing, to know it will unriddle the universe. To accept life is to miss living, and man's highest joy as well as his sternest duty lies in the quest of an answer for the Sphinx's riddle.

But does the method of the pursuit matter ? Ulysses seeks to find life's meaning in the objective world—in the world of things. Life has expressed itself in institutions—it is shaped by environment. What is it that exhibits itself in cities of men, in customs, manners, governments?