

James Joyce's Trojan Hobby-Horse: The Iliad and the Collective Unconscious Ulysses

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Abstract

James Joyce's Ulysses rewrites the Homeric Odyssey in such a way that the ancient myth provides a structural pattern, which gives order and meaning to a seemingly chaotic and meaningless contemporary world – an aspect which T. S. Eliot called the “mythical method”. As the characters of Ulysses are ignorant of this ordering device, they function as Jungian archetypes rather than individuals: Their deeds correspond to a mythical framework which is not actively remembered but provides a collective unconsciousness that guides their lives as a principle of order and continuity. What they do is meaningful although they consider themselves as insignificant agents thrown into a seemingly chaotic world.

Whereas scholars have focused on Homer's Odyssey as an archetypal (i.e. collective unconscious) key to the cultural memory of the mythical roots of Western culture, they have turned a comparatively blind eye to the fact that Homer's corresponding work of the Iliad has a similar function for the mythopoetic design of Ulysses. This paper is going to reconstruct Joyce's neglected intertextual dialogue with the Iliad as an archetypal key to the cultural memory of the roots of Western civilisation.

Keywords: *James Joyce, Ulysses, Homer, Iliad, intertextuality, T. S. Eliot, mythical method, C. G. Jung, archetypes, Collective Unconscious.*

It is well known that James Joyce's *Ulysses* reflects the roots of our cultural memory by referring to the Homeric *Odyssey* as one of the foundational myths of western culture. Joyce, however, applies the ancient myth of Odysseus in a “presentist” rather than historicist way: he applies the Homeric epic as an ordering device that gives coherence and meaning to a seemingly chaotic and meaningless contemporary world – an aspect which T. S. Eliot called the “mythical method”: “a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.”¹

¹ T. S. Eliot, “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber & Faber, [1923] 1975), 177.

As the characters of Joyce's fiction are ignorant of this ordering device, they function as Jungian archetypes rather than individuals. Their deeds correspond to a mythical framework, which is not actively remembered but provides a collective unconscious that guides their lives as a principle of order and continuity. What they do is, archetypically speaking, meaningful although they consider themselves as insignificant agents thrown into a seemingly chaotic contemporary world.

Whereas the scholars in pursuit of Joyce's "mythical method" have focused on Homer's *Odyssey* as the structural backbone of *Ulysses*, they have turned a comparatively blind eye to the fact that Homer's *Iliad* has a similar function for the mythopoetic design of Joyce's text.² Hence, this article is going to reconstruct Joyce's neglected intertextual dialogue with the *Iliad*, whose plot reflects the pre-history of the *Odyssey*: the Judgement of Paris as the archaic Ur-scandal responsible for the outbreak of the Trojan War. Whereas the *Odyssey* focuses on the incidents that occurred after the Fall of Troy, the *Iliad* tells us what happened before and thus constitutes an even more archaic allusive background for the cultural memory stored in James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Before we are going to elucidate this intertextual dialogue in detail, let us recall the mythical Judgement of Paris – a judgement which not only triggered off the Trojan War as the greatest armed conflict of the ancient world; it also resulted in the Fall of the Trojan mega-city and the rise of Greco-Roman culture as a long-term shift of imperial hegemony from the Eastern to the Western hemisphere.³

The Judgement of Paris and the subsequent Fall of Troy originate in a debate between God and Man over an apple as a key to potentially destructive knowledge: to take revenge for not being invited to an Olympian dinner party, Eris, the goddess of discord, throws a golden apple into the round: the famous Apple of Discord inscribed with the words "for the fairest one". When three goddesses – Hera, Athena and Aphrodite – claim this award of beauty, Zeus determines that it is up to Paris – the son of the king of Troy – to decide the beauty contest. When offered the bribe of kingship by Hera, wisdom and martial success by Athena, and the world's most beautiful woman by Aphrodite, Paris crowns the love goddess queen of divine beauty. His reward is fair Helen, wife to the Spartan king

² cf. Dieter Fuchs, "«Judgements of Paris and Falling Troy» – The French Metropolis as a Site of Cultural Archaeology in James Joyce's *Ulysses* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's «Babylon Revisited»,” in *Rive Gauche - Paris as a Site of Avant-Garde and Cultural Exchange in the 1920s*, eds. Margarete Rubik and Elke Mettinger-Schartmann (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010).

³ The Fall of ancient Troy, or Ilium situated in the Eastern borderland of Europe and Asia fosters the growing hegemony of the Greek city states described in Homer's *Iliad* and the subsequent rise of imperial Rome fashioned in Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Menelaus, whose abduction to Troy causes the Trojan War and the mortal hatred of Athena and Hera alike.

James Joyce's Ulysses approaches the Olympian beauty contest corrupted by the bribe of mortal Helena as an archetypal example of the folly and vanity of mankind:

“A woman brought sin into the world. For a woman who was no better than she should be, Helen, the runaway wife of Menelaus, ten years the Greek made war on Troy” (U⁴ 2; 390-2).⁵

In order to integrate this aspect into the main intertextual framework of the Homeric *Odyssey* indicated in the title of *Ulysses*, the unfaithful Helen is furthermore fashioned as the vain and infidel counterpart of Penelope, the faithful wife of Odysseus, who is presented as the positive example of married womanhood:

“Antisthenes [...], took the palm of beauty away from Kyrios Menelaus's brooddam, Argive Helen, the wooden mare of Troy in whom a score of heroes slept, and handed it to poor Penelope” (U 9; 621-3).

Paris, the corrupt judge of feminine beauty – who is referred to as “the wellpleased pleaser” (U 9; 268) of himself, Helen and Aphrodite alike – enters the world of *Ulysses* when Stephen Dedalus takes a walk on Sandymount beach and recalls the memories of the time he spent in the modern city of Paris (cf. U 3; 199 & Ellmann 1982, 128 & U 3; 209-64). Although the mythical Paris and the city of Paris have, etymologically speaking, nothing in common at all, Joyce's Irish humour and eccentricity fuse Paris the man and Paris the city in terms of punning and wit. Even if in the following quotation Stephen may primarily recall the famous horse race known as the “Grand Prix de Paris”, it cannot be denied that he links this thought with the archetypal Judgement of Paris the king of Troy's son: “*Prix de Paris*: beware of imitations. Just you give it a fair trial” or judgement. (U 3; 483-4, cf. entry in Gifford & Seidman)

As a brilliant example of Joyce's mythical realism – which fuses the topical and the archetypal – the empirical horse, which won the *Prix de Paris* a few days before the plot of *Ulysses* sets in on June 16 1904 – carried the name of the Greek hero Ajax⁶ – a hero who, like Menelaus, Achilles, Hector and Ulysses, fought the

⁴ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Vintage, 1986). Further on *U*.

⁵ This, however, is the vantage point of a minor character of *Ulysses*: Mr. Deasy, a pedantic and anti-semitic bromide.

⁶ Cf. the online archive of *The New York Times*: http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?_r=1&res=9407E2DE113DE633A25750C1A9609C946597D6CF (01/12/2013).

battle of Troy in order to retrieve Helen the beautiful from her illegitimate spouse Paris.

As far as the scrupulously realist plot of *Ulysses* is concerned, Stephen receives the topical information of Ajax winning the Paris derby from daily gossip or from the Dublin newspaper, whereas the reader of *Ulysses* remains entirely ignorant of this background unless he actively engages in archival research. As the reader is denied such information, he has to reconstruct these data from a flood of circumstantial evidence from the actual world of 1904. Thus the reader is forced into the position of a cultural archaeologist teased by the Joycean game of authorial irony.

As far as the archetypal dimension of these circumstantial raw data is concerned, the reader has to connect this set of realist allusions to modern everyday life with the mythopoetic framework of the Judgement of Paris and the Battle of Troy as a storehouse of the collective memory of the western world.

Owing to the fact that this exemplary text passage hides an archetypal truth under the disguise of realist contemporary life, – the mythical Judgement of Paris alluded to via the modern Paris derby – this technique of multi-layered allusion may be justly called Joyce's "Trojan Hobby-Horse." This is the quite astonishing background of Joyce's tongue in cheek statement that: "The demand that I make of my reader, is that he should devote his whole life to reading [and one may add studying] my works".⁷

Let us look at a second example of Joyce's ironically blurred method of mythopoetic allusion lurking behind the Trojan Horse-like disguise of realist contemporary everyday life. Whereas our first example focused on Stephen Dedalus' thoughts presented in the third chapter of *Ulysses* known as the Proteus-Episode, our second piece of intertextual evidence concentrates on Joyce's modern Odysseus-figure Leopold Bloom in the thirteenth chapter modelled on the Odysseyan Nausicaa-Episode.

In this section of the book, Leopold Bloom rests at the same part of Sandymount beach where Stephen contemplated Paris as an actual place and a mythical person in chapter three. By way of multiple allusion, Bloom's archetypal role profile does not only correspond with that of Ulysses mentioned in the title of

⁷ Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 703.

Joyce's book; as mentioned by Margot Norris, Bloom's role profile also corresponds with that of Paris in this situation:

For Joyce layers myth in "Nausicaa", letting the Homeric narrative conceal and [...] repress one of its own causal myths, the Trial of Paris, the beauty contest whose outcome contributed to the Trojan War.⁸ [Thus] Joyce undermines his own mythical intertext with a hidden mythical counter-text, Homer's "Nausicaa" reinterpreted by the Trial of Paris.⁹

Without being consciously aware of it, Bloom re-enacts the unfortunate judgement of divine beauty and becomes the alpha and the omega of Joyce's intertextual network owing to the fact that he is fashioned as both Paris responsible for the Trojan War and the witty Odysseus trying to return to his home after having brought about the Fall of Troy as the inventor of the trick of the wooden horse:¹⁰ when Bloom watches three young women – Gerty MacDowell, Cissy Caffrey and Edy Boardman, who take the baby twins Jacky and Tommy to the beach – he not only functions as a modern Odysseus washed ashore on the land of the Phaeacians when he is hit by a ball which escapes Princess Nausicaa and her friends during their game; he also has to cope with the task of Paris and to elect one of the three girls as the recipient of the apple-shaped toy:

The twins were now playing in the most approved brotherly fashion till at last Master Jacky who was really as bold as brass there was no getting behind that deliberately kicked the ball as hard as ever he could down towards the seaweedy rocks. Needless to say poor Tommy was not slow to voice dismay but luckily the gentleman in black who was sitting there by himself came gallantly to rescue and intercepted the ball. Our two champions claimed their plaything with lusty cries and to avoid trouble Cissy Caffrey called the gentleman to throw it to her please. The gentleman aimed the ball once or twice and then threw it up the strand towards Cissy Caffrey but it rolled down the slope and stopped right under Gerty's skirt near the pool by the rock. [...] Gerty smiled assent and bit her lip. (U 13; 345-60).

Conversely Gerty MacDowell – who gets hold of the orb-like object thrown back by Bloom – is not only presented as a mock-heroic counterpart of Nausicaa

⁸ Margot Norris, "Modernism, Myth, and Desire in «Nausicaa»," *James Joyce Quarterly* 26 (1988), 37.

⁹ Norris, "Modernism, Myth, and Desire in «Nausicaa»," 48. As far as the macro-structural intertextual analogies are concerned, Norris states: "In their competition to win the attention of the exotic stranger on the beach, Cissy, I would say, takes the part of Hera, Gerty, the part of Aphrodite, and Edy Boardman [...] plays the part of Athena [...]." *Ibidem*, 43.

¹⁰ Like the Homeric Odysseus, Leopold Bloom constructs a "Trojan Horse" in *Ulysses*. Although he is not aware of it, Bloom's statement that he is about to throw his newspaper away is retrospectively taken as an inside tip that Throwaway (note the phonetic similarity with "Troy"!), an apparently chanceless horse scheduled for the Ascot race, will be the champion to bet upon. Quite unexpectedly Throwaway wins the derby.

meeting Ulysses while playing at ball, but also as Aphrodite flirting with “Parisian” Bloom in order to receive the ball-shaped “Apple of Discord” as a beauty award.¹¹ Like the Greek goddess of love, who undresses herself and asks Paris to “examine me thoroughly, part by part, slighting none, but lingering upon each” (Lucian [[2nd ct. A.D.]] [1921] 1995, 403), the “Greekly perfect” Gerty (U 13; 89) tries to attract Bloom’s favour by showing off as much of her private bodily parts as possible. As both parties – like Aphrodite and Paris at the original Judgement – engage in this voyeuristic encounter for selfish purposes only, their flirt at the beach climaxes in the circumstance that “Aphrodisiac” Gerty and “Parisian” Bloom have sex with themselves rather than each other:

The eyes that were fastened upon her set her pulses tingling. She looked at him for a moment, meeting his glance, and a light broke in about her. Whitehot passion was in that face, passion silent as the grave, and it had made her his. [...]. His hands and face were working and a tremor went over her. She leaned back far [...] and she caught her knee in her hands so as not to fall back looking up and there was no-one to see only him and her when she revealed all her graceful beautifully shaped legs [...] and she saw that he saw [...] and she was trembling in every limb from being bent so far back that he had a full view high up above her knee where no-one ever not even on the swing or wading and she wasn’t ashamed and he wasn’t either to look [...]. (U 13; 689-730)¹²

In addition to that, the rubber ball thrown by Bloom functions not only as an Apple of Discord among the girls, but also as a bone of contention among the baby twins in their company (“Our two champions claimed their plaything with lusty cries” U 13; 350-1), so that the Judgement of Paris is fused with the Trojan war it leads up to.

As we shall see now, this mythopoetic syncretism can be also observed from the circumstance that Joyce presents the twin toddlers’ quarrel about a sandy toy fortification they built on the beach as an “apple of discord” and a parody of the battle of Troy alike:

The apple of discord was a certain castle of sand which Master Jacky had built and Master Tommy would have it right go wrong that it was to be architecturally improved by a frontdoor [...] (U 13; 42-4).

¹¹ In allusion to Aphrodite accompanied by Cupid, the eyebrows of Gerty are compared to “Cupid’s bow” (U 13; 88).

¹² This “telekinetic way of sexual intercourse clearly indicates the circumstance that – like Paris, who awards Aphrodite the «Apple of Discord» to enjoy the pleasures of Helen in recompense – it is Leopold Bloom’s wife Molly rather than «aphrodisiac» Gerty who turns out to be the champion of his love in the end.” (cf. Norris, “Modernism, Myth, and Desire in «Nausicaa»”).

As the fraternal conflict culminates in the debate over the castle's architectural improvement of a front door, *Ulysses* parodies the decisive turning point of the siege of Troy at the moment when the witty Odysseus comes up with the strategy of the wooden horse, which was built in such a size that the Trojans had to remove the fortifying wall covering their city gate in order to move it into their citadel.¹³

By presenting the girls' combat for beauty and the boys' struggle for honour and power as two related aspects of the one and the same coin of vanity and self-deception, *Ulysses* sheds light on the human condition and reduces the alleged greatness of Homeric goddesses and heroes to all too human dimensions. By satirizing the mythical greatness of the siege of Troy as a children's quarrel about a sandy toy, *Ulysses* elucidates the fact that – be it in the archaic or the contemporary period – people wage war for rather petty and selfish reasons. Fusing the cultural memory from the archaic past with a strictly realist presentation of contemporary life, Joyce's *Ulysses* alludes to the Trojan War as an archetypal counterpart of the Great War at the beginning of the twentieth century. In this respect, *Ulysses* may be considered a satire on the timeless stupidity, complacency and self-destructive disposition of mankind.

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¹³ Maro Publius Virgilius, *The Aeneid*, ed. J. W. Mackail (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [29-19 B.C.] 1930), II; 1-245.

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