

## WHAT MAKES JOYCE'S *ULYSSES* TERRIFYING: A KALEIDOSCOPIC VIEW OF *ULYSSES*

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to dissect the layers of Ulysses, and show how these layers contribute to the tremendous bulkiness of the novel. From its themes, narrative style, parallels and its enigmas and riddles. Ulysses is a controversial novel; it has been on the dissection table of critics and artists since it has emerged, a schism between those who are with it and those against it. The aura that surrounds it and what makes it terrifying for people to read, it is such a kaleidoscopic novel that discusses everything. The sample of the study is Ulysses (1922), one of the best novels of the twentieth century written by James Joyce. The study reveals how Ulysses is related to Modernism as a literary movement, and how the style of narration Joyce adopted contributed in it being difficult to read, the study also points out that metaphors and allusions were greatly manipulated by Joyce for various aesthetic reasons. Also, the study explains how all these elements contributed to the greatness of Ulysses.*

**Keywords:** modernism, stream of consciousness, intertextuality, James Joyce and *Ulysses*

### INTRODUCTION

*Ulysses* (1922), is written by James Joyce, his full name is James Augustine Aloysius Joyce, he was born in the 2nd of February 1882 in Dublin Ireland and died in the 13th of January 1941 in Switzerland, he is a renowned modernist writer who is known for his distinctive experimental writings (Atherton, 2020). He has published several books *Dubliners* (1914), *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (1916), *Finnegans Wake* (1939), and *Ulysses* (1922) which is the scope of this study.

When he was six years old he was sent to a Jesuit boarding school that is called Clongowes Wood College. However, due to his family financial conditions he left Clongowes in 1891, and after two years in (1893) of home self-education, he and his brother Stanislaus were admitted to Belvedere College with no fees, which is a Jesuit grammar school in Dublin then he attended University Collage, Dublin, where he studied languages. After his eighteenth birthday he published an article in the London Fortnightly Review in 1900 reviewing Ibsen's play *When We Dead Awaken*. In which, confirmed his determination to become a writer (Atherton, 2020).

*Ulysses* (1922) is a modern novel, and Modernism is a literary movement that emerged in the last decade of the 19th century as a break from Romantic and Victorian Literature; influenced by modern theories of psychology, philosophy and anthropology. Modernist writers saw the need to focus on the individual suffering not the communal one; discussing loneliness and alienation of the individual. They fashioned their own style of reality, and they created stories with multiple narrators to show that truth is relative; also they used the technique of stream of

consciousness which lights on the psyche and the internal thoughts of characters (Qutami, 2011).

The conscious, unconscious and the subconscious were the occupation of modernist fiction. Modernist writers were interested the aesthetics of language, taking language as a mean of bringing a pleasurable experience to the readers, as what Parsons puts it “desperately insisting on the power of art to give shape to a world that has lost all order and stability” (Parsons, 2007). James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, Earnest Hemingway, T.S Eliot and Scott Fitzgerald were some of the major representative writers of modernism.

Modernist writers celebrated and admired the language of myth, symbols and allusions, features of any modern work includes the use of classical allusions as in *Ulysses* (1922), multiple narrators, indirect speech and the stream of consciousness. Stream of Consciousness is modernist technique of narrative that presents the flow of thoughts of the characters. In her essay “Modern Fiction, 1921” Virginia Woolf argues that modern novels are psychological, that is why it depends on the stream of consciousness to indulge in the intricacies of the inner life of characters (Yousif, 2017).

Intertextuality is also one of the features of Modern literature, it is textual reference in a text, which refers to the used text as a reference, and it is how texts influence each other. For instance, the *Odyssey* is retold by James Joyce in *Ulysses* (Literary Devices, 2020).

*Ulysses* (1922) takes place in Dublin on a single day the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 1904, following three major characters, Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom, and Molly Bloom. In terms of style, *Ulysses* (1922) has a unique style with every episode, in a way that readers are in the characters’ heads and can feel and understand what they feel (Smith,2016). For T.S. Eliot, what Joyce created is a piece of art that no one before him came with the idea of building a novel on the foundation of the *Odyssey* and using a “mythical method” instead of the “narrative method” is considered “a step toward making the modern world possible for art” (Eliot, 1923)

## THE STRUCTURE AND NARRATION OF *ULYSSES*

*Ulysses*’ structure aligns with the *Odyssey*; the epic poem written by Homer. Both of them talks about a man goes on a journey and encounters different situations and different people. However, the journeys that are embarked by Stephan or Bloom are in the streets of Dublin that lasted for several hours a day, whereas as the journey of Odysseus lasted about twenty years. The characters of *Ulysses* parallel the ones in the *Odyssey*; Bloom being Odysseus, Stephan being Telemachus the son of Odysseus and Molly Bloom becomes Penelope Odysseus’s wife; and Boylan becomes the representative of the suitors who were after Penelope (Cummings, 2004). The episodes or the chapters of the novel are also Homeric (Calypso, Lotus Eaters, Hades, Aeolus, Lestrygonians, Scylla and Charybdis, Sirens.)

According to Mambrol (2020), Joyce established the method of literary modernism through the use of myth, and language, the focus on individuality and also irony. Joyce’s writing and the way he wrote his artistic writing achieved modernism under the influence of Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and Ibsen. Mambrol also claims that the effect of these literary parallels is ironic; instead of Joyce’s characters being heroes or countering gods, they are merely humans who represents as what he calls it “neurotic symptoms” of “modern urban life”. Characters that have issues of daily life mundane heroes; they have anxiety, confusion, alienation, sometimes they suffer from loneliness, they repress their desires and have weird obsessions and fetishes.

Joyce succeeded in creating unforgettable characters who are complex in nature that resemble real people that we meet in our everyday life, but what make these characters exceptional is

that readers are able to read, feel their feelings and thought. The door to *Ulysses*' characters is held open, offering not only glimpses of their inner thoughts and desires, but also justifications for their thoughts and actions. He made his characters think loudly of what we are ashamed to admit between ourselves.

How brilliantly Joyce shifts the narrative and moves freely between the internal thoughts and deep suppressed desires of the characters, that is cleverly done so that readers may sympathized and relate to the characters.

*"Here. Am I going to aunt Sara's or not?*

*My consubstantial father's voice.*

*Did you see anything of your artist brother Stephen lately? No? Sure he's not down in Strasburg terrace with his aunt Sally? Couldn't he fly a bit higher than that, eh? And and and and tell us, Stephen, how is uncle Si? O weeping God, the things I married into! De boys up in de hayloft. The drunken little costdrawer and his brother, the cornet player. Highly respectable gondoliers! And skeweyed Walter sirring his father, no less! Sir. Yes, sir. No, sir. Jesus wept: and no wonder, by Christ!"* (*Ulysses*, 1922, pp.38-39)

Some maybe are confused that Stephen is the one talking here, but it is his father, we are still in Stephen's head though, and these are his thoughts and flashbacks.

This form of narrative makes the novel an experimental novel, offering enigmas to the readers. Also, the novel is filled with literary and religious riddles that make the readers wonder how they fit in the context. *"Hello! Kinch here. Put me on to Edenville. Aleph, alpha: nought, nought, one."* (*Ulysses*, 1922, p.38) whom Stephen was trying to call? According to Hunt (2013), Edenville is an area in Dublin but it could refer to Eden, Aleph is the first Hebrew and Greek letter; and it could be invoking the biblical saying of that God is the alpha and the omega. Nought equals zero, and one is the divine creation, then *"you are on the phone with Adam and Eve, by a miracle of ancient technology."* Hunt (2013).

The novel is full of references from the bible, in addition to poems and plays, one could possibly say that *Ulysses* is the mother of modern novels; for the literary references it contains, from Homer to W.B.Yeats. The songs, the nursery rhymes, plays and theatrical performances that were popular at that time gave away the scent of realism to the novel, and how these references may influence the characters and their thoughts. These pop culture references have their own plots that were manipulated for a certain purpose in the novel.

*"Leah tonight. Mrs Bandmann Palmer. Like to see her again in that. Hamlet she played last night. Male impersonator. Perhaps he was a woman. Why Ophelia committed suicide. Poor papa! How he used to talk of Kate Bateman in that. Outside the Adelphi in London waited all the afternoon to get in. Year before I was born that was: sixtyfive. And Ristori in Vienna. What is this the right name is? By Mosenthal it is. Rachel, is it? No. The scene he was always talking about where the old blind Abraham recognises the voice and puts his fingers on his face.*

*— Nathan's voice! His son's voice! I hear the voice of Nathan who left his father to die of grief and misery in my arms, who left the house of his father and left the God of his father.*

*Every word is so deep, Leopold.*

*Poor papa! Poor man!"* (*Ulysses*, 1922, p.73)

*Lea* is a nineteenth century melodrama about a Jewish Heroin, after running away from a pogrom in Hungary; Lea was passing by an Austrian village, which is an anti-Semitic vehement village. A catholic man named Rudolf falls in love with her and offered to flee with her but they were overheard by Nathan who is an apostate Jew, who was hiding from his past. Nathan snitches to Rudolf's father and was able to convince Rudolf and his father to test Lea

by offering her money. Nathan took the money for himself and told Rudolf and his father that Lea accepted the money. Then Rudolf got married to an Austrian girl that was picked out by his father, and learned from Lea about the truth after the wedding. After five years, Lea shows up and called out for Rudolf and condemns Nathan, Nathan was taken down by the police and Lea fell dead at Rudolf's feet.

Bloom's father loved this play and there is a particular scene that is stuck in his head and he told Bloom about it, is when the identity of Nathan being Jewish is revealed. Which makes Bloom feels guilty for abandoning his Jewish faith and it also shows how Bloom feels guilty for his father, like Stephen he also suffers from the loss of a parent. Hunt (2019)

### **THEMES, METAPHORS AND ALLUSIONS**

*Ulysses* is a feared, heavy to digest and misunderstood novel, for it not only deals with daily life, mundane issues; it also talks about faith, religion, the idea of god as a creator and as the destroyer, god the merciful and the merciless, the punisher and the forgiven. It also offers a view on how god can be found in different matters and forms, how it began by him and how it will eventually end on his hand and by his will. It addresses Judaism, Christianity and its sects, and discussing the difference between absolute faith and hypocrisy.

Cummings (2004), argues that Joyce mocks the Roman Catholic Church and its rituals, and by that mocking Jesuit priests who taught him at school, leaving behind his faith because he was oppressed by its morality and rules and the effect they had on the Irish society.

*“Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed. A yellow dressinggown, ungirdled, was sustained gently behind him by the mild morning air. He held the bowl aloft and intoned:*

*— Introibo ad altare Dei.*

*Halted, he peered down the dark winding stairs and called up coarsely:*

*— Come up, Kinch! Come up, you fearful jesuit.” (Ulysses, 1922, p.3)*

that was the opening scene of *Telemachus*, where Mulligan was imitating a Catholic priest celebrating mass, and the “yellow dressing gown” according to Hunt (2013) is associated with “heresy and treachery” for some Christian countries.

The allusion to the *Odyssey* is very apparent in *Ulysses* it is from the names of the chapters to the event to even the characters. The concept of wandering, the absent father and faithful son; Odysseus being and Telemachus being Stephen. And, sometimes Stephen takes the role of Odysseus as a wandering artist; wandering to find a way to his passion, who keeps looking for someone to appreciate and acknowledge him as an artist, as a thinker; with art taking the form of the father who Stephen is faithful to.

There are also allusions to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, so how does Stephen resembles Hamlet? Stephen is driven by the apparition of his dreams and desires of being an acknowledged artist he is also haunted by the flashbacks of his life, also the ghost of religious commitments keeps following him. In addition, Telemachus and Hamlet were miserable sons who were devoted to an absent father (Hunt, 2011).

*“Buck Mulligan slung his towel stolewise round his neck and, bending in loose laughter, said to Stephen's ear:*

*— O, shade of Kinch the elder! Japhet in search of a father!” (Ulysses, p.18)*

The novel also shed some light over different coping and defense mechanisms through the dilemmas of the characters, for instance how Stephen is dealing with the death of his mother, Bloom's trying to ignore the infidelity of his wife by denial and by writing letters to another

woman. It is that novel that gives lessons about life, from religion to parenthood, nationalism to love, death and resurrection, sexual desires and infidelity. Literary anecdotes, pop culture of that time, every element is set to allow readers to live every moment vividly to make it as realistic as possible these elements corporate in showing the realism of the novel.

## CONCLUSION

As the famous phrase puts it “people fear what they don’t understand” the same goes for the terrifyingly exceptional *Ulysses*. Understanding its multilayers leaves people in awe. Because of its artistic language, for its metaphors, allusions and the narration, makes it look as if it is an unapproachable novel that one has to read every piece of literature before it. It is of no doubt that one should be at least familiar with the *Odyssey* and its major events and characters, so that parallels can be easier to understand. Yet, it can be the modern guidance of the *Odyssey*. Readers have to simply enjoy it as piece of art on its own; difficult to read, yet never boring and it unfolds wonders every time it is being read.

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