Joseph Campbell

Mythic Worlds, Modern Words

Ulysses:

Introduction

In honor of the centennial of Bloomsday, the day on which James Joyce's epic novel, Ulysses, *is set (June 16, 1904), the Joseph Campbell Foundation and New World Library have reissued the authoritative collection of Campbell's lectures and essays on Joyce's art,* Mythic Worlds, Modern Words: Joseph Campbell on the Art of James Joyce. *In this section, Campbell begins his exploration of the mythic, Jungian underpinnings of Joyce's great novel,* Ulysses.

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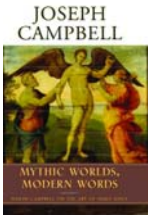

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Ulysses

Introduction

The Waste Land

In Paris, Stephen receives a telegram from his father that says, "Mother dying come home father."* So he returns to Dublin, and it is in Dublin, on June 16, 1904, that *Ulysses* opens. He has returned to the land of death, the wasteland. As I once wrote:

> *Ulysses*…is cast on the plane of waking consciousness, with citizens and characters aware of nothing else; and there Bloom and Stephen roam—both wearing the black of mourning—as it were through a hell. For in hell, they say, the souls are linked forever to their sins—that is, to the limitations by which their lives were bounded, and so, lost—which, in the reach of timeless time, prove, beyond endurance, dull; whereas in Purgatory, on the other hand, the protective molds are broken, dissolved, and there is process, change, motion: a purging away of those various states of pride in ignorance that on earth encumber the soul's realization of its own true and deepest yearning, which is to say, as we are told, for God.
>
> Through the dreaming micro-macrocosm in ferment of *Finnegans Wake,* the One that is in all things immanent ("*iste*") is felt and perceived to be ubiquitous in its duality (*"isce et ille"*: 92.7–11), whereas in *Ulysses* there is no such fermentation, save in the minds of the counterpoised heroes, Stephen and Bloom. Its world is depicted, rather, as a wasteland, once fair, now sterile, dry and without rain. The cattle are dying of a plague. Women are unable to give birth. The government is of aliens: England's Crown and Redcoats, Rome's Priests and Papal hat. And the complacent, garrulous citizenry is largely an assortment of easy-going jokesters—singularities self-enclosed, stone-dry—rattling around and among each other without inward transformation, while maintaining by all means the general convenant of innocence of their own boredom and banality.†

T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* came out the same year as *Ulysses,* but Eliot had read *Ulysses* before he wrote *The Waste Land*. There are constant echoes in *The Waste Land* of themes and images from *Ulysses*—the drowned man, the voice of the thunder, and others.

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*[The Corrected Edition of *Ulysses* restores the reading of U35.199 as "Nother dying come home father." "Nother" was apparently overcorrected by the various printers of *Ulysses* until the Corrected Edition.]

†From Joseph Campbell's unpublished papers, "Joyce Fragments," (MC18).

Ulysses takes place mainly on Thursday—Thor's day, Jeudi, Jove's day; the Day of Thunder.—and in the exact middle of the book, a thunderclap wakes Stephen's heart.* In Sanskrit, the word for "thunderbolt" (*vajra*), also signifies "diamond" and connotes transcendent illumination. As the lightning shatters phenomenal forms, so too does transcendent illumination; and as the diamond can be neither cut nor marred, so neither can Illumination by any cut of phenomenal experience. So, the thunder in the middle of *Ulysses* marks the instant of transition from Stephen's fixed and sterile, self-protective pose of spiritual pride to the commencement of a purgatorial process which is to culminate, "whirled without end to end," (582.20–21) in the consubstantial night-sea of *Finnegans Wake*, to which the last five chapters of *Ulysses* are the passage.

Eliot also uses the voice of thunder as the waking motif. It is the same thunderclap that resounds in "What the Thunder Said," Part V of *The Waste Land.* Eliot takes as his text the passage in the Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad where the thunder voice speaks his ultimate word to gods, men, and demons; and what it says is "*Da.*" Now *da* is a Sanskrit root that lies behind three great words: *damyata, datta,* and *dayadhvam,* which mean "restrain yourself," "give," and "be compassionate." These are the sentiments that open one to the world and turn one into a beneficent bodhisattva.† These are also the sentiments that are coming to statement in Stephen's heart in *Ulysses*.

Eliot regards London as a wasteland in the same way that Joyce regards Dublin as a wasteland: both cities are filled with people doing what they are supposed to do instead of what their inner urgency moves them to do. These dead souls are all pretenders of one kind or another, ice-hard and stone-dry, self-enclosed, witty and self-protective, always verbally fencing, letting no one through—and Stephen, himself, is worst of all: "Kinch, the knifeblade," his stately pal Mulligan names him. [Yet Stephen and Bloom will both find purgation in the circular swamps of the Dublin hell.]

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* *Finnegans Wake* starts with the thunder: "bababadalgharaghtakamminarronnkonn-bronntonnerronntuonnthunntrovarrhounawnskawntoohoohoordenenthurnuk!" appears on the first page, and there are repetitions of these thunderwords throughout the book.

† For a more detailed discussion of this motif, see Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1968), pp. 283285.

Ulysses and the Odyssey

Joyce's model for *Ulysses* is the *Odyssey*. Some critics once said that his use of the *Odyssey* was just a device to give order to chaos. That's not true. [The two works are similarly structured and use the same mythic motifs, and the central concern of both is male initiation into a world different from that of brutal masculine assertion].

Ulysses is divided into three sections, which roughly correspond to the three divisions in Homer. In the *Odyssey*, Books I–IV recount the adventures of Telemachus, the son of Odysseus; Books V–XIV recount the adventures of Odysseus; and Books XV–XXIV recount the combined adventures of Telemachus and Odysseus. In *Ulysses*, the central figures are Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom. In the first section, all three chapters have to do entirely with Stephen; in the second section, made up of twelve chapters, the center of gravity shifts from Stephen to Bloom (although Stephen has some chapters of his own) and in the later chapters of this section, the two of them come together; an the third section, then, which also contains three chapters, has to do with Stephen and Bloom together.

The central imperative of the *Odyssey* is twofold: one concerns Odysseus; the other, Telemachus. When Odysseus was drafted into the army to go to Troy, his son Telemachus had just been born. So Telemachus grows up for twenty years with no father, and his imperative is: "Young man, go find your father." What that means is: "Find your model. Find your life path." The boy's finding of the father is a very important part of the *Odyssey* [and of the life of every male human being].

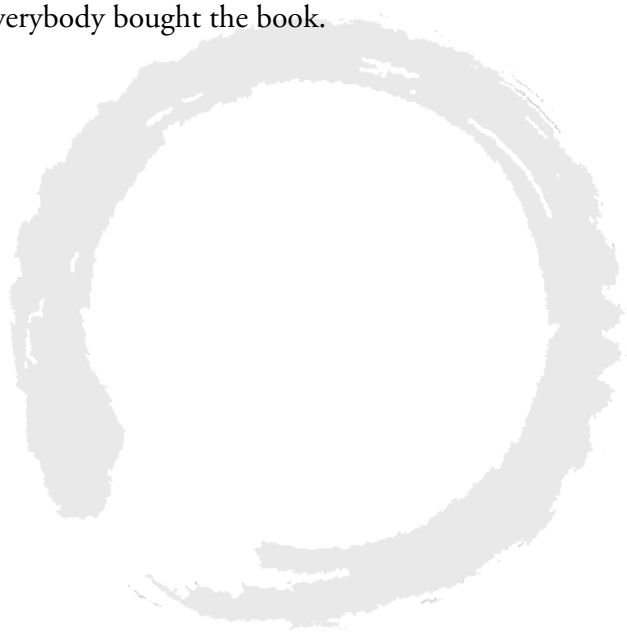
The first three chapters of *Ulysses* show Stephen in the role of Telemachus, who has not found his father and is called to find him. Stephen, of course, has an actual father, Simon Dedalus, but Simon is not his spiritual father. Here we have the problem of spiritual fatherhood. It's not uncommon in our culture for the son, following in the father's footsteps, to find his own career eventually; and then he has to find his spiritual father (or as we now say, his guru), the one who will show him, not so much by pedagogical instruction as by example, what the aim and direction in his life is going to be. So Stephen is Telemachus, and in the beginning of *Ulysses*, he is living in a Martello tower with two other young men, one of whom, Buck Mulligan, calls the tower the "Omphalos," the world navel. These three young men, all intellectuals, are cut off by the thick fortress walls of the tower from Nature and the natural world. It's just the three of them—the Father, Son and Holy Ghost—living there.

The second section of *Ulysses* is largely about the adventures of Leopold Bloom as he moves around Dublin. Bloom, who is totally different from these three intellectuals, is a mature man with many rambling intellectual interests who knows how to assimilate and relate what he knows to living life. Bloom will be Stephen's spiritual father, [the Odysseus to his tormented Telemachus.] Near the end of the middle twelve chapters, Stephen and Bloom meet in a maternity hospital (the place of rebirth), where they hear the thunderclap, after

which Stephen, casting off his old ego, begins to be reborn as the new trans-Stephen character.

The next three chapters—the *Circe* chapter from the second part of the book, and *Eumaeus* and *Ithaca* from the third part—show Bloom and Stephen together. The chapter after they meet in the maternity hospital takes place in Nighttown, the brothel section of Dublin, which is, of course, the place of Circe with her death initiations. By this time Stephen is infinitely drunk and ends up in quite a mess. He's knocked down on the street by a couple of British soldiers, and Bloom [keeps him from being arrested, and] takes charge of him.

Then, in the third section of *Ulysses*, Bloom invites Stephen to his home for a cup of cocoa. They go there, and in a way refresh each other. Then Stephen leaves, and Bloom goes up to bed with Molly, and we have the last chapter, the *Penelope* chapter, Molly Bloom's soliloquy, for which everybody bought the book.



The Odyssey of Initiation

Who was Odysseus? He was a much-traveled man who had had every kind of experience. For ten years, he has been in Troy, fighting a war in a he-man world, where no dialogue between men and women takes place, and women are simply booty—just argent goods to be possessed and used. Now the earlier religious tradition [of Greece and Asia Minor] was of the great goddess, but when the patriarchal Indo-Europeans came in, the goddess was put down, just as she is in the Bible, where she is called the Abomination, the goddess of the Canaanites, and so forth. She was put-down in Greek literature also.

[The *Iliad* and the origin of the Trojan war] are based on masculine put-downs of the concept of the great goddess. You will recall that the Trojan War was caused by the judgement of Paris—this languid lad, of a kind which in my own youth we used to call a "lounge lizard." Paris was called upon to award a golden apple to one of the three great goddesses of Greece: Aphrodite, the goddess in her literary aspect of lust, who represents(to use biblical terms) seduction and sin; Hera, who was the spouse of Zeus and represents woman as wife, mother, and matriarch; and Athena, the young virgin goddess born from the forehead of Zeus, her father. (Zeus had a pain in his head one day and sent for Hephaestus; he cracked Zeus's head open, and out jumped Athena in full armor—voilà!—Daddy's girl.) These same three aspects of the goddess are the aspects of the female that appear in *Ulysses* [to initiate the male characters]: woman as Hera, the wife, is Molly; woman as the temptress Aphrodite, we get in the brothels; and woman as Athena, the daughter-virgin, is Bloom's young daughter, Milly, whose name echoes that of her mother, Molly. The *Odyssey*, then, is [an account of the maturing of Odysseus and the story of his initiation into the mysteries of manhood.]

When the Trojan war is over, there come what are known as the *nostoi*, the "returns," when the warriors return home. Menelaus returns home with Helen—Helen of Sparta: that must have been a happy mansion; Agamemnon goes home and gets killed in the bathtub; and Odysseus's adventures begin with his attempts to return home with twelve ships. They sail north to a little town called Ismarus, where he and a bunch of ruffians go ashore, plunder the town, and rape the women.* They are still in the warrior mode. Their psychological drives are those of the exploiter, the buccaneer, with no relationship to the female . The gods say, "This is no way for a man to go home to his wife." So they blow the ships around at sea for ten days, until Odysseus doesn't know where they are. Then the real story begins.

The *Odyssey* could be seen as a night sea journey, a dream trip. The first port that Odysseus and his men come to after being blown around is that of the Lotus-Eaters, probably a town in North Africa. Lotus-Eating: this is LSD. So, they are in Dreamland, and

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*In Homer there is no actual mention of rape: Odysseus reports that they slew the men of the Cicones and "took their wives…and divided them among us" (Book IX, ll.40–42).]

from this moment on, they don't meet human beings. They meet nymphs—little goddesses—and several monsters.

Their first monstrous encounter is with Polyphemus, the giant cannibal with one eye in the middle of his forehead. Polyphemus is the son of Poseidon, Lord of the Abyssal Waters, so he represents the threshold guardian, the foreground of the power that is going to be initiating Odysseus throughout his journey. Whenever one goes into a field of adventure, there is a threshold guardian, the foreground of the adventure that is to come. The Cyclops has one eye, and when Odysseus and his men pierce his eye, it represents their going over the threshold, through the narrow gate, and into the realm of dream.

So, Odysseus and twelve men go ashore to explore this strange land. They discover a cave, go in, and find pots of milk and curd and butter. They think, "Well, we're in the home of a shepherd." But when this shepherd comes in, he turns out to be a giant cannibal. This monster asks Odysseus, "Who are you?" and Odysseus has the wit to answer: "Noman"—which is to say, having moved into the dream realm, the real of the gods, he has divested himself of his secular character. Well, everybody knows what happens. The Cyclops eats half a dozen of the men, and Odysseus concludes that he has a serious problem. So, with one of the meals, he offers Polyphemus some wine that the priest of Ismarus has given him. The Cyclops drinks the wine, goes to sleep, and the men then drive his eye out with a great big beam. Oh, he hollers then. But when the other Cyclopes ask, "What's the matter in there? Who's hurting you?" he says "Noman." So they say, "Well, then, shut up and keep it to yourself."

Then Polyphemus sits outside the cave to get Odysseus and the six remaining men as they go out. Here we have a very important scene. How do they get out of the cave? Odysseus ties three sheep together with one of his men underneath them; when the sheep go out of the cave, the blind Cyclops touches them and, thinking they are only sheep, lets them pass. Odysseus repeats the ploy: three more sheep go out with another man, three more with another, and so on. Finally, Odysseus ties himself underneath the great ram, the leader of the flock, and the ram carries him out of the cave. Now at that time, in that part of the world, the ram was symbolic of the solar power. So Odysseus, divesting himself of his secular character, takes the name of "Noman," and identifies with the solar power. He establishes his consubstantiality with the sun, as it were, and his final adventure, you will recall, is to be in the Isle of the Sun.

Having passed over the threshold, having escaped from the Cyclops on the solar ram, going through the narrow gate past the dangerous door guardian, having done all of this, one could feel the type of spiritual exaltation known as inflation. It happens in every ashram: you can see inflation all over the place. And so Odysseus turns up next on the island of inflation, the volcanic isle of Aeolus, the God of the Winds, who gives Odysseus a wallet full of all the winds except the one that would send him home. Then, when the ships are in sight of home, Odysseus's men, thinking there is treasure in the wallet, open it, and all the contrary winds

escape and blow the ships far away from Ithaca. Odysseus and his men are now deflated. Inflation, deflation, inflation, deflation: manic depression.

They come next to the isle of the Laestrygonians, who are also cannibals, and they smash eleven of Odysseus's twelve ships. So, now there is only one boat left, and this brings us, then, to the second great initiation, the initiation of Circe, the woman who turns men into swine. The one who was put down by the patriarchal judge is the one who now has to be faced, and she introduces the hero to the two other great initiations: the first, into the abyss, the biological force; the other, to the Isle of the Sun, the light, the illuminating source—and both come from the negative woman. These are also the initiations Bloom and Stephen will undergo in the Dublin brothel.

[The initiations are introduced by a dismemberment motif that is found in many myths.] The twelve ships having been reduced to one, which is dismemberment of a sort, the surviving ship arrives on Circe's Isle. The dismembered party goes ashore to see where they are. They come to a big swampy area,* in the midst of which is a great palace, and in it is Circe of the braided locks, weaving. Most of the men go inside and are turned into swine, but Odysseus, fortunately, does not go with them. Hermes comes to him and says, "Look, you're in trouble. This is a woman who can not be pushed around. I'm going to give you a charm to protect yourself from her magic." And he gives him a little plant called a *moly.* We'll see that Bloom carries in his pocket a potato to protect himself against arthritis, rheumatism, or sciatica. This is his *moly*, and when it's taken from him, he stands in the midst of swine. Then Hermes says, "When you go, keep this with you. She will attempt to enchant you. but just pull out your dagger and threaten her and she'll quiet down and invite you to her bed. Well, go." The temptress, the seductress, the one who leads you into the realm of sin and turns you into a pig: she is the initiator. It is through that aspect of the female that the male comes to perceptions beyond the bounds of what one learn from school and from the pulpit.

There are two initiations in the Circe episode: one is Odysseus's initiation to the underworld, wherein he meets the Ancestral Powers that build our body; the other is his going to the land of her father, the Isle of the Sun, where he comes to illumination of consciousness. Circe gives Odysseus both of these initiations. First, she sends him to Hades, the underworld, where the energy of biological forces are encountered. Most of the figures he meets there are just shadowy spooks; but he has one important encounter with a diplastic presence, the main figure in the underworld: Tiresias, who represents the androgyne, of which each of us is a part.

The story of Tiresias is that he was out walking in the forest one day when he came upon a pair of copulating serpents, and he placed his staff between them and was

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*[In Homer, there is no mention of a swamp, although Circe's isle is described as "lying low" (***χθαμαλη κειται***), and Circe's palace is in a "place of wide outlook" (***περισκεπτω ενι χωρω***); see Book X, ll. 196, 211.]

transformed into a woman. He was a woman for seven years, and at the beginning of the eighth year, she/he was walking through the forest and came upon two copulating serpents. And she/he placed his/her staff between them and was turned back into a man.

[Then, one day, Zeus and Hera were discussing whether men or women had greater delight from sex. Tiresias, of course, would be the ideal one to consult on the matter, since he had been both man and woman. So, they sent for him. and he decided in Zeus' favor, that women had the greater joy in sex.] Well, for some reason, Hera took this badly and struck Tiresias blind.

I remember talking about this in a seminar one time, and in the interval between sessions, a woman came up to me and said, "I can tell you why Hera got angry." Well, it's good to learn from women, so I said, "All right, I'd love to hear it." She said, "Because from now on she cannot say to Zeus, 'I'm doing this for you, darling.'"

So Zeus, feeling a certain responsibility for Tiresias' plight, gave him the gift of prophetic sight. Having closed his eyes to the mere phenomenality of the world, Tiresias was on the inside and in touch with the great morphological powers that shape and terminate life courses. So, having been both man and woman, Tiresias knows both sides of the mystery: not just the he-man side, but the woman's side as well. Hence, Odysseus meets him in the underworld; for the hero's great problem is to acquiesce in a dialogue with the female, where the male is not dominant, but in interaction with an equivalent, but different, entity. That, we will see, is Stephen's problem: "Can I, like Tiresias, become one with the female power?" That's Bloom's problem also.

The second initiation Circe gives him is the solar initiation in the Isle of the Sun, the Lord of Light. [Here Odysseus's hungry men kill the sacred cattle of the Sun, and Zeus promises to destroy the sacrilegious killers of light. Odysseus himself is spared, because he did not eat the cattle, but his ship is struck by Zeus's lightning.] Here he undergoes complete self-divestiture: his ships and men are all smashed up, and he is pulled back from Penelope once again.

He stops then for seven years on the island with Calypso. She is [a nymph, a little goddess, the second magical female creature in his journey.] Again the female introduces the hero to that side of life which he had not taken into account. He is learning down in this realm of dream, of spiritual experiences, the dialogue (so to say) of the feminine principle, first through Circe, then through Calypso.

From Calypso's isle he goes to the Isle of Creations, where he learns other things from the lovely young Nausicaa, and it is here that he tells his story to her parents. The Phaeacians then put him on a ship, transport him back to his homeland, and leave him asleep on the shore. So on this whole voyage, he has been, as it were, in sleep, being introduced to the female powers of the psychological world to which he had paid no attention.

In his own land again, Odysseus meets his son. Where? In the swineherd's shelter: again the pig motif. The pig was an important sacrificial animal in the ancient world. It was the animal whose blood was poured downward into the underworld in sacrifice to the abyssal powers. It is with the swineherd then (as it was with Circe, who turns men into swine) that the great chthonic crises are to be experienced. And so in *Ulysses,* the meeting of father and son is in a brothel, and the mother superior of the brothel is depicted as a pig woman; and it's there that the whole underside of Bloom's character comes up, and he is turned into a shy little female piglet. But you must remember: although Circe turned Odysseus' men into swine, he compelled her to turn them back into men; and when she did, they were younger and fairer and stronger than they had been before they were turned into swine. That is the lesson to be learned here.

So that's the story of how Odysseus, his fixation on ego and self interest having been cancelled, undergoes this induction of the male into the mystery of union with the female power. Having been opened up to compassion—not passion, but compassion—he is now ready to meet his wife in a proper way. And with that opening to compassion, one opens to the world, as well as to the female power.

Homer has presented in the *Odyssey*, which was created in the eighth century B.C., the three aspects of the female in relation to the male in the western world. However, these aspects are archetypes still operative in our own time, and Joyce uses these archetypes: they are the aspects of the female that Bloom has in his mind and will encounter. With these aspects of initiation in mind, then, we will now go through *Ulysses* in detail, chapter by chapter.