

## An Analogy between Ulysses and Its Archetype Odyssey

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**Abstract:** As a renowned writer of Modernist literature, James Joyce meticulously crafted the structural patterns and plots of *Ulysses* to echo those found in *Odyssey*. By combining an extraordinary imagination with a masterful art of storytelling, *Ulysses* is known as the epic of the disintegration of Western society, and the spiritual epic of the wandering adventure of modern people. In order to profoundly understand the intertextual relationship of the two masterpieces, the paper makes an analysis from the analogy of the protagonists, structure and plot. Through analyzing the intertextual consciousness, the classical consciousness and historical consciousness can be connected and the text transformation of corresponding features in the connection can be realized. This approach delves deeper into the vulgar national consciousness of the colony, and reveals the crises that Ireland is facing during that era. After making an analogy between the two literary works, the readers can grasp the characteristics of *Ulysses*, such as superconstancy, association, experience, variability and penetration better, thus quickly stepping into the deep heart of the characters to perceive and experience the psychological and emotional connotation of the main characters.

**Keywords:** Analogy; Archetype; Structure; *Odyssey*; *Ulysses*; Symbolism; James Joyce

### 1. Introduction

Since the publication of *Ulysses*, the novel has become the research focus of scholars at home and abroad for its varied language innovation experiments, wonderful narrative techniques and perfect novel structure. According to Weiping Li, Joyce's novels are a Daedalus Maze [1]. As a master of modernist literature, James Joyce's *Ulysses* has long been a challenging read for many people due to his intricate and systematic use of the Symbolist techniques. These

techniques, including metaphors, implications, mythical stereotypes and intertextuality, not only enrich the novel with profound meanings, but also serve as vehicles to communicate its central themes.

Actually, *Ulysses* can be named after Clive Bell's "meaningful form" because James Joyce directly alluded to the reality with meaningful forms, thus obtaining epoch-making innovative significance [2]. In fact, *Ulysses* is a parody of Homer's *Odyssey*, an ancient Greek epic.

*Odyssey*, along with *Iliad*, stands as one of the two most significant epics of Ancient Greece, jointly referred to as Homer's Epic. Considered to be authored by the blind poet Homer who was born sometime during the 9th or 8th century B. C in Ionia in ancient Greece, *Odyssey* serves as a sequel to *Iliad*, continuing its narrative thread. Central to its narrative is the adventurous sea journey of its protagonist, Odysseus, making it a precursor to nautical novels. Odysseus, the focal hero of *Odyssey*, is characterized by his relentless self-improvement, lending the novel a profound and stirring tragic tone. Marked by Odysseus' triumphant return to his hometown, the poem is divided into two distinct halves. The first half chronicles Odysseus's challenging journey, fraught with various obstacles and setbacks, resulting in his decades-long drift following the Trojan War's conclusion. The second half, in contrast, highlights how Odysseus, with the aid of his own wit and the support of others, exacts revenge upon his return to his hometown, guided by the gods.

In *Odyssey*, Homer retraced Odysseus' decade-long maritime adventure through flashbacks, a thrilling journey incorporated numerous ancient myths. These myths reflect the fantastical interpretation of natural phenomena and encapsulate the ancient Greeks' struggle and triumph against nature. *Odyssey* offers an intricate perspective on time, implicitly expressed through its ring structure, and is an epic that interweaves positive narratives with flashbacks and interjections. The narrative does

not simply follow a singular storyline, but also incorporates a parallel dual thread, both unfolding chronologically within a defined timeline. The circular and ubiquitous parallel structures serve as representations of the linear flow of individual time, exhibiting diachronic characteristics that arise from an individual's lived experiences and the seeds of a societal and historical understanding of time. This is attributable to the fact that spatial shifts are governed by temporal processes; for instance, Odysseus's son Telemachus is an infant when his father departs for war, but has grown into a handsome young man by the time of his father's return. The intricate and linear temporal threads exert a profound influence on the novel. It is not an exaggeration to state that *Odyssey* stands as a foundational work of the Western literature, ranking among the oldest surviving literary works alongside the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and *Iliad*. Borrowing its title from the eponymous hero of Homer's work, Joyce modernized and reversed the narrative of the Greek hero who, after a decade-long *Odyssey*, ultimately has returned home. Through his comparative symbolic portrayal of the parallel relationships, Joyce highlighted the mediocrity of the modern society in stark contrast to the noble sentiments exhibited by the ancient Greek heroes. When the intertextual consciousness starts, the writer enters into an open network related to the intertext, and its original closure is shaken and broken [3].

## 2. Symbolist Implication of the Archetype of *Odyssey*

Although *Ulysses* is dated "Trieste-Zurich-Paris, 1914-1921", its genesis actually traces back to Joyce's earlier life experiences. During 1917, while he was deeply immersed in the writing of the novel, Joyce confided to his friend Georges Borach in Zurich about his enduring fascination with the *Odyssey* from his younger days:

When I was twelve years old, we studied the Trojan War in school, but it was the *Odyssey* that left a lasting impression on me. I want to be candid: at twelve I liked to choose the title *Ulysses* in Dublin, but gave up the idea.

In Rome, when I had finished about half of the *Portrait*, I realized that *Odyssey* had to be the sequel, and I began to write *Ulysses* (Borach: 146-147) [4].

The *Odyssey* version Joyce came across was *Adventures of Ulysses* by Charles Lamb, and the

mysticism he found appealing likely stemmed from Lamb's blend of realistic action and Symbolism. This was his attempts to make the characters both human figures and figures denoting "external force or internal temptations" [5]. Lamb's "mystical" interpretation of the *Odyssey*, which differed significantly from that of most nineteenth-century translators and critics, had a profound and lasting impact on Joyce's imagination. This perspective convinced Joyce that the Homeric plot could be reinterpreted in the language of contemporary life and serve as a basis for symbolic actions.

*Ulysses*, the Latin translation of *Odyssey*, is the king of Ithaca in Greek mythology. The title of the novel reflects its parallel relationship with Homer's epic in terms of character, structure, and intricate details. Joyce viewed *Odyssey* as the fountainhead and fundamental pillar of Western literature, and he employed the mythical epic's structure, metaphorical elements, and symbolic meanings to expose the complexities of the modern society, thus endowing the novel with profound underlying meanings.

### 2.1 Analogy of the Main Characters

Joyce intentionally paralleled the three protagonists of *Ulysses* with those of *Odyssey* in order to extract its general symbolic meaning and employ the past to criticize the present. He deliberately mirrored the plot of Homer's *Odyssey*, linking the daily life experiences of these three characters to the decade-long wandering and tribulations of the *Odyssey*. Joyce offered a vivid portrayal of the continuous and fluctuating mental landscapes of three Dubliners, revealing their profound feelings of alienation and loneliness. By juxtaposing the legendary narrative with the mundane, contemptible and fantastical realities of their lives, Joyce created a stark contrast between history and the present, legend and reality, heroes and anti-heroes, generating a powerful ironic effect. In this novel, the modern-day *Ulysses* (the protagonist Bloom) is portrayed as a vulgar and cowardly advertisement salesman; Molly (Bloom's wife, akin to Penelope) is depicted as a vampish singer; while Stephen (analogous to Telemachus) appears as a spiritually barren and despairing young teacher. Evidently, the correspondence between the epic and the contemporary setting generates a widespread and profound symbolic significance.

Consequently, understanding the corresponding relationships between Ulysses and Odyssey is crucial to comprehending the novel.

## 2.2 Analogy of the Structure

In order to derive the overall symbolic significance and employ the past as a means to criticize the present, Joyce deliberately employed a framework and structure that mirrored the layout of Homer's Odyssey.

Actually, Ulysses and Odyssey share a structural analogy, creating a sharp contrast between the dignified and inspiring heroic tales of the past and the contemptible realities of the present. Characters like Bloom and Stephen, who are products of the Western civilization, serve as foils to the ancient heroes, appearing humble, frail, and mediocre in comparison. The disparities in meaning revealed through these parallel structures serve as the foundation for the satirical and exposing functions of Ulysses.

Just as J. W. Beach says, "The juxtaposition of the ancient Greek hero with the paralyzed state of the present Ireland is obviously a satirizing exposition." [6].

Joyce's mythical structure also serves as a mediator of metaphor, affording us a detached lens to observe people's actions and words. Through this structure, Joyce elevated platitudes to the pinnacle of artistic expression. An American critic Levin once said, "The linking of the modern life and the ancient mythical rites makes the smallest details have the universal meanings" [7]. Therefore, the utilization of an analogous structure serves Joyce's intention of portraying Bloom, Stephen, and Molly as spiritual explorers akin to Odysseus, Telemachus, and Penelope in Odyssey. He aimed to employ the framework and significance of the epic to establish the order of the present era, endowing the chaotic life of the Western society with structure and meaning. Additionally, he sought to delve into the value of life amidst modern individuals through this approach. When T. S. Eliot wrote about Joyce's work soon after its publication in 1922, he argued that "the use of Odyssey as both subtext and pretext made the modern world possible for art" [8].

Ulysses adopts the original structure of Odyssey and reinterprets it with a modern lens, allowing Joyce to express the idea of a modern man's search for his lost self through mythical archetypes. In this novel, Joyce transformed Odysseus into a Dublin Jew named Bloom, who,

despite lacking the physical strength of his epic counterpart, experienced similar spiritual tribulations. Similar to Odysseus' journey in the Odyssey, which appears as a linear voyage but ultimately ends in a circular return, Joyce saw this pattern as a fitting model for human history. Throughout Ulysses, Bloom comes to recognize his place in the world over the course of a single day. His journey not only traces a circular physical path from leaving his home to returning, but also mirrors a mental process of alienation followed by the restoration of his humanity.

## 2.3 Analogy of the Plot

In Ulysses, Joyce drew parallels between Bloom's daily pursuits and the decade-long Odysseus. Joyce believed that the world inhabited by Bloom served as a contemporary reimagining of Homer's ancient world. Although Bloom is regarded as a modern incarnation of Odysseus, he is portrayed as an anti-hero. According to Ellmann, Bloom is the Divine Nobody [9]. A cursory comparison of Bloom to Odysseus assists in understanding the satirical undertones of the novel. However, a deeper exploration of Bloom through a symbolic lens reveals the essence of the ancient hero within the modern man.

Compared to Joyce's other works, Ulysses stands out as a particularly challenging piece to comprehend. Although the majority of key characters in Ulysses have counterparts in Odyssey, they exhibit a mix of similar and contrasting characteristics. For instance, Bloom, Stephen, and Molly are often regarded as anti-heroes. Most Western critics believe that grasping the corresponding relationships between the characters in both works is crucial to understanding Ulysses. Of course, decoding the symbolic characters also requires delving into other aspects, such as imagery, statements, and actions.

In essence, this single day serves as a microcosm of life in the early twentieth century. The feelings of anxiety and depression experienced by Bloom and Stephen are not isolated to just a few individuals; rather, they reflect the collective aspirations of people living during that era. Bloom is a complex figure, possessing both strengths and weaknesses. A superficial comparison of him to Odysseus may aid in grasping the satirical intent of the novel. However, when we delve deeper and consider Bloom from a symbolic perspective, we discover

characteristics of the ancient hero within the modern mortal.

The uniqueness and depth of Ulysses stem from Joyce's clever use of metaphorical substitutions, particularly in assigning historical figures such as Odysseus and Telemachus, a father and son, to Bloom and Stephen respectively. Reading the novel reveals how Stephen and Bloom become symbolic representations of each other. Therefore, the novel's originality and power are greatly attributed to its employment of metaphors and symbols.

As Bloom searches for a son and Stephen searches for a father, both are in pursuit of someone who can bring them a sense of completeness by embodying what they lack to feel whole. Since Stephen and Bloom lack fulfillment within themselves, they seek a complement, not just as an additional element, but as the fulfillment of their fundamental purpose. In essence, Stephen and Bloom are both seekers on a journey to find something that will complete them, and throughout the novel, they make significant progress in their respective quests.

It's noteworthy to observe the parallels between Stephen's and Bloom's thoughts. Bloom's mindset reflects a more materialistic inclination compared to Stephen, a man with less education and intellectual prowess. While Stephen is engrossed in the philosophical aspects of the senses and science, possessing precise and assured knowledge in these areas, Bloom is interested in their mundane expressions and applications, and his understanding of them is often hazy and incorrect.

Hence, Stephen and Bloom are frequently seen as reflecting two distinct aspects, yet they are interconnected in some way: Stephen, the intellectual and introverted son; Bloom, the materialistic and extroverted father. It can be said that Joyce deliberately reminded the reader in the most concise way that the names of the protagonists may contain historical and literary allusions or political context, and they may increase the ironic effect of the real heroes and

the non-heroes [10].

### 3. Conclusion

After a meticulous examination of James Joyce's Ulysses from a Symbolic perspective, we discover certain recurring features and recognize that the novel's connotations can be unearthed by exploring angles such as the analogy between the structure, characters, and plot of Odysseus and Ulysses. Nevertheless, since its publication, Ulysses has often been perceived as absurd and abstruse, leading to frequent misunderstandings. To gain a deeper understanding of the novel's theme, it is crucial to appreciate and explore its symbolic implications from the perspective of comparing Ulysses with Odysseus.

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