

The background of the book cover is a classical painting. On the right, a large wooden sailing ship is partially visible, with its mast and rigging. On the left, a dark, craggy rock formation juts out into the sea. In the distance, a small boat with a single sail is visible on the horizon. The sky is a mix of soft, hazy colors, suggesting a dawn or dusk setting. The overall style is reminiscent of 19th-century maritime or classical painting.

Hermione de Almeida

BYRON &
JOYCE
THROUGH
HOMER

Don Juan and Ulysses

BYRON AND JOYCE THROUGH HOMER

Don Juan and Ulysses

Hermione de Almeida



© Hermione B. de Almeida 1981

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without permission

First published 1981 by
THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
London and Basingstoke
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

ISBN 0 333 30072 6

Printed in Hong Kong

For two good men:
Carl Woodring and Lionel Trilling

Oh Love! O Glory! what are ye? who fly
 Around us ever, rarely to alight;
There's not a meteor in the polar sky
 Of such transcendent and more fleeting flight.
Chill, and chained to cold earth, we lift on high
 Our eyes in search of either lovely light;
A thousand and a thousand colours they
Assume, then leave us on our freezing way.

And such as they are, such my present tale is,
 A non-descript and ever varying rhyme,
A versified Aurora Borealis,
 Which flashes o'er a waste and icy clime.

(vii, i)

My eyes are tired. For over half a century they have gazed into
nullity, where they have found a lovely nothing.

(Joyce to Giorgio, 1935)

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Random House, Inc. (New York) and the Bodley Head (London) for permission to quote from James Joyce's *Ulysses* (copyright 1914, 1918 by Margaret Anderson, renewed 1942, 1946 by Nora Joyce, 1961 by George and Lucia Joyce); Viking Penguin Inc. (New York), Jonathan Cape Ltd (London) and the Society of Authors for permission to quote from Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (copyright 1916 by B. W. Heubsch, 1944 by Nora Joyce), and *Finnegans Wake* (copyright 1939 by James Joyce, renewed 1967 by George and Lucia Joyce); Faber and Faber Ltd (London) and Viking Penguin Inc. (New York) for permission to quote from *The Letters of James Joyce*, edited by Stuart Gilbert and Richard Ellmann (copyright 1957, 1966 by the Viking Press); Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. (New York) and Faber and Faber Ltd (London) for permission to quote from T. S. Eliot's *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (copyright 1936 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., renewed 1943, 1963, 1964, by T. S. Eliot, 1971 by Esme Valerie Eliot); New Directions Publishing Corp. (New York) and Faber and Faber Ltd (London) for permission to quote from Ezra Pound's *Personae* (copyright 1926 by Ezra Pound). I rely on the 1971 revised Variorum Edition of *Don Juan* (University of Texas Press) and on the 1961 Random House edition of *Ulysses* for my quotations from the poem and novel.

I am grateful to Columbia University for continued fellowship support while I was a student there; to Frances Steloff for endowing a fellowship in honor of William York Tindall which I received; to the staff of the libraries of Columbia University and the University of Miami; to William Bernhardt; to Donald Reiman for advice that was always cheerful and astute; to my colleagues in the English Department at Miami, especially William Babula and George Gilpin, for their good-humored support and encouragement.

I must also name here four individuals in whose debt I shall remain without hope of making recompense. Olivia Estella de Sodder, Felix Joseph de Almeida and Lionel Trilling passed on while this book was

being drafted, and can only be acknowledged in memory as the subjects of countless impossible wishes. Carl Woodring, an incomparable teacher for so many of his students, will always be my ideal of intellectual and personal goodness.

Coral Gables, Florida

H. A.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	I
1 Odysseus and the Realm of Gold	5
2 Myth and Tradition	23
3 The Hero and his <i>Areté</i>	62
4 Society and its <i>Paideia</i>	89
5 Styles: Parodies and <i>Parallax</i>	115
6 Conclusions: Paradox and <i>Nostos</i>	163
<i>Notes and References</i>	190
<i>Index</i>	220

Introduction

— And who do you think is the greatest poet? asked Boland, nudging his neighbour.

— Byron of course, answered Stephen.

Heron gave the lead and all three joined in a scornful laugh.

— What are you laughing at? asked Stephen.

— You, said Heron. Byron the greatest poet! He's only a poet for uneducated people.

— You may keep your mouth shut, said Stephen, turning on him boldly.

— In any case Byron was a heretic and immoral too.

— I don't care what he was, cried Stephen hotly.¹

Flayed by the boy's canes, his flesh torn by barbed wire, Stephen Dedalus, like any good martyr, would rather be persecuted for his beliefs than admit the poet was 'no good'. Dedalus's experience is one Joyce had as an adolescent; his estimate of Byron, Ellmann tells us, was his creator's, one Joyce held to in later life.² The opinion is certainly in character for melancholic, self-centered young artists. We presume that the mature Joyce, by showing his youthful persona's affinity with Byron, declared his own aversion to the poet and egocentric Byronism.

It would be difficult to find two more antipathetic writers than Byron and Joyce. The former, a man of action, wrote verse because it was 'in fashion'. The latter, a man of introspection, wrote prose because it was most fitting to the breadth and high intention of his art. The first was a worldly nobleman, a parliamentarian, philanderer, philanthropist and collector — of, according to Shelley's count, ten horses, eight dogs, five cats, five peacocks, three monkeys, two guinea hens, an eagle, crow, falcon and Egyptian crane, plus an indeterminate number of bears, women, Greek turtles, retainers, bastards and, albeit unwillingly, Yahoos (the little Hunts); he was a man who exulted in his reputation as the unfaithful, unprincipled roué who had murdered his mistress and made her skull into a drinking cup, who

had conjoined saintly Annabella Milbanke with the devil for one long year, who was known to favor all political novelties, and who, a true courtier, tossed off idle verse without remuneration and published only at his friends' request. The second was a family man, unacceptably poor and lower-class, bookish, withdrawn, a near-priest whose only collections were a brood of starving, quarrelling siblings, a series of domestic crises, and a set of anti-social legends – by his own account, he was known to be a crafty, cynical, selfish, dissimulating Ulysses-type, a jejune Jesuit, a dour Aberdeen minister, a spy in Switzerland, a cocaine addict in Trieste, a dying man in New York, a crazy who carried four watches and always asked the time, a kind of Dick Swiveller, and a good-for-nothing;³ he espoused no politics, loved but one woman and, a consecrated artist, sacrificed motherland, mother Church, and Mother Joyce to his calling, and made much of his ability to live, and sometimes starve, on the profits of his art. One lent his name to the mood that was a hallmark of the Romantic age; the other's name became synonymous with the spirit of nihilistic modernism, with chaos, alienation and futility.

The antipathies in temperament carry over to Byron's and Joyce's primary works. *Don Juan* and *Ulysses* seem to be quite inimical. The poem is a merry, random, careless, digressionary sail through the sophisticated world and its inheritance, apparently indifferent to the literary flotsam that surfaces in the passage. Undisciplined, subjective, reading like the public chatter of a gossip column, it tells of a young boy's adventures; some would say it is written for the uneducated eye and ear, that it is surface poetry holding no secrets from the mind, the product of a crude ear. The novel, on the other hand, is a web of scrupulous organization, precision and literary competence. Patterned and highly objective, reading like a compendium of abstruse learning for the select, it tells of Ulysses in a modern Ithaca; most would agree that its cross-references and symbolic minutiae make it profound, secretive literature, that it is a private myth, the product of a refined mind.

Frank Kermode has said that the major modern novel 'is a poem'.⁴ John Galt, a novelist and Byron's friend, called *Don Juan* 'a poetical novel'; critics since have noted that Byron's poem belongs not so much to English poetry as to the history of the Victorian novel.⁵ This tenuous connection in mode between poem and novel must be countered by the fact that Joyce, in *Ulysses*, wrote against the nineteenth-century novel tradition that Flaubert and James closed. It must also be supported by the realization that if Joyce conceived of his

work as a monumental criticism of his century and its antecedents, a counter that would send the Romantics and his contemporary Dubliners spinning into the Abyss, so also did Byron proffer a counter-voice on his century in *Don Juan*, a highly critical, 'satirical perspective on the vatic stance of his Romantic contemporaries'.⁶

Robert Durling, in his study of the poet in Renaissance epic, makes an unexpected but prescient concluding statement. Asserting that Spenser and Ariosto represent two of the most significant literary traditions we have inherited from the Renaissance, he says: 'Spenser looks forward to Milton and ultimately to Wordsworth and Yeats. Ariosto looks forward to Montaigne, Byron, and Joyce'.⁷ My inquiry will examine whether Byron's and Joyce's writing does indeed belong in one literary line as Durling implies it does: whether *Don Juan* and *Ulysses* might come close to being epic equivalents, each functioning for the post-Kantian era in much the same way as Homer's epics did for early Greek civilization; whether, despite all the odds, antipathies and inimicalities, *Don Juan* and *Ulysses* might prove to be about the same tasks and, with like manners, productive of near identical effects.

Any attempt to place Byron and Joyce within one tradition must also take into account the ambivalence toward literary tradition and the cultural heritage that *Don Juan* and *Ulysses* manifest. In these works the authors intentionally take the *Odyssey* as their first pattern, as Chapter 1 will document; they deliberately address themselves to its criterion. They also wilfully depart from the *Odyssey's* epic formulae by absorbing and criticizing other major works and directions in the Western tradition, and by highlighting the differences between early Greek culture and its achievements and post-Enlightenment culture and its problems.

Any attempt to address Homeric precedent necessitates a consideration of epic tradition and its mock-heroic, picaresque, and comic epic mutants. Nor can the discussion cease at these, for the innovative *Ulysses* and the novelistic *Don Juan* face forward and invoke their times. Any attempt to recall the early Greek manual for noble action and civil behavior within the *polis* as a foil for present conduct requires that one reflect, also, on not only the unlikely prospect of distinctive action in a democratic milieu, but on the inevitable mutations in human behavior that have contributed to the state of the polity of Europe's decadent courts and Dublin's slums. All these subjects, in turn, must be subsumed by the preconceptions on writing of the skeptical, self-concerned, post-Kantian consciousness.

Homer is an obvious starting-point, and Byron and Joyce thought so too. Their poem and novel provide us with the pattern for our inquiry. They could not stop at Homer any more than we can. Through Homer they reach, and we perceive, a very different end.

Acknowledging their necessary dependence on Homeric example and the literary-cum-cultural tradition since Homer, Byron and Joyce accomplish a most subversive assumption of literary precedent and a highly traditional abuse of the Western heritage. Endorsing Saintsbury's premise that 'Ancient without Modern is a stumbling block, Modern without Ancient is foolishness utter and irremediable', they yet achieve radical novelty. Revolutionary and inner-directed, but displaying precedents everywhere and insisting on their epic status, *Don Juan* and *Ulysses* are their creators' declarations of independence,⁸ their manifestos for the future.

I Odysseus and the Realm of Gold

'We are all Greeks – our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their root in Greece. But for Greece, Rome, the instructor, the conqueror, or the metropolis of our ancestors would have spread no illumination with her arms, and we might still have been savages and idolaters.' Shelley, the most Romantic poet of them all, was also the most Greek. Because of Shelley's sheer classicism Joyce, when he was not affirming Byron as the greatest English poet, would award the palms to this poet of Hellas. In tribute to the truth of the assertion in the Preface to *Hellas* with which I have begun, Joyce and Byron made their epic stories *Ulysses* and *Don Juan* turn on the story of Odysseus and its traditions.

However singular their individual responses to the classical tradition and to Homer, Byron and Joyce partake in common of Western man's ineluctable return to Greece. For, as Werner Jaeger says, our history begins with the Greeks, and we always return to Greece. The return presupposes the timeless influence and authority of Greece, but the variety possible in our response denies blind, rote imitation: on the contrary, 'we always return to Greece because it fulfills some need of our own life, although that need may be very different at different epochs'.¹ Jaeger's clarification is important. The needs of Byron's and Joyce's epochs were different; classical example was hardly an unchallenged authority for either of them, and their responses mirror all the distinctions and corruptions that time and space have wrought for each one. Yet, Byron and Joyce 'return to Greece' – by way of the Age of Revolution.

The romantic nineteenth century was infinitely more classical, and specifically more Greek, than its reputation. As an age that produced Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, Goethe's *Roman Elegies*, Chateaubriand's *The Martyrs* and Alfieri's tragedies – with a Shelley who knew more Greek than Pope, a Goethe who knew more Greek than Klopstock, an August Wilhelm

Schlegel known as one of the strictest metricians in German literature, a rigorous ethical philosopher named Fichte, and classical scholars Leopardi, Hölderlin and Chenier among its elect² – the revolutionary era belies its old reputation for permissiveness, emotion and excess. The Romantic age was not anti-classical but anti-classicist and, where late eighteenth-century dicta of tasteful composition colored this, anti-Latin.

The difference between it and preceding centuries was essentially one of emphasis. The classics were read for those aspects of particular significance to the age's values. A romantic charm was found in the *Odyssey*, in Sappho, even in Virgil; the tragic joy in Euripides and Aeschylus received special praise; Greek literature for its purity and spontaneity was exalted over Latin literature; and Homer, the supposed composer of heroic ballads, took precedence over Virgil, the court-poet and his literary epic. Highet notes that the Renaissance and Romantic eras represent complementary stages in the exploration of antiquity. The former marked the assimilation of Latin. The latter meant a closer approach to Greek. Renaissance men like Montaigne would speak of 'the ancients' but in practice think of the Romans; they would quote Homer sparsely but fifth-rate Latin poets like Silius Italicus freely. Goethe and Shelley, in their dramas, sought to emulate not Seneca but Aeschylus and Euripides; during their turbulent times the rococo garlands and cupids copied from Latin adaptations of late Greek art disappeared – to make way for the Elgin Marbles.³ Gibbon and the Baroque marked the end of the Age of Rome in modern Europe. Thereafter came the Age of Greece.⁴

In and of this age, chronicled for both its revolutionary nature and its reverence for the ancient Greek spirit, Byron lived and wrote. To this age, James Joyce was heir. One must acknowledge, Lionel Trilling says, how entirely Joyce was a man of the century in which he was born, how thoroughgoing his commitment was 'to its concerns and sentiments, how deeply rooted he was in its ethos and its mythos',⁵ for Joyce was heir not only to the nineteenth century's presentiment for originality, but also to its primary values, which exalted the natural over the civilized, pagan over Christian, man over God, Greek over Roman, and Homer over Virgil.

Because of their ages' inclinations, despite their ages' reputations, Byron and Joyce chose 'Homer and his unchristian heart'. Their decisions to have *Don Juan* and *Ulysses* turn on Homer's *Odyssey* (the specifics of which we will discuss shortly) are certainly part of that potent modern reaction against Christian doctrine and morality

which found its apotheosis in the century that nurtured Shelley's juvenile pamphlet 'The Necessity for Atheism'. Greek ideas of God and morality were deemed better, more real, more positive, less austere and misanthropic, more human.⁶ Homer, the 'blind illiterate minstrel', became for the nineteenth century (with its interest in folklore, Märchen, ballads and 'original' epics) the pre-eminent example of the pagan, the primitive, the spontaneous, the natural, the human. For the twentieth century, which has fostered a naturalism more excessive than Zola's, Pound – Eliot mythopoetry, and Mann, Homer was all this and, most of all, author of Western man's first myth.

The two centuries are hardly unique in their reverence for The Poet. He is the force Western tradition has always had to come to terms with. Virgil based his story of Aeneas on the time and location of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; Aristotle based his standards in the *Poetics* on Homer's example; Dante welcomed Homer by way of Virgil; Petrarch and Boccaccio placed Homer within the Renaissance; Chaucer put 'grete Oomere' in his Hall of Fame; Spenser permeated his *Faerie Queene* with Greek mythology; Shakespeare wrote his *Troilus and Cressida*; Milton wrote of paradises lost and gained, and of Comus, son of Circe; Chapman, Dryden and Pope did their translations and their mock-epics; and Swift attempted to settle the problem of Homeric criticism once and for all in *Gulliver's Travels*. In recent times we have, among others, Keats's sonnet on reading Homer, *Hyperion*, Tennyson's *Idylls* and *Ulysses*, Arnold's *On Translating Homer*, Ruskin's envisioning of Homer as a standard of literary excellence, *Don Juan*, and *Ulysses*. Like the needs of the eras, the responses are diverse. But Homer remains the touchstone against which character, human behavior, civilization and, above all, the writing of literature is tested. No longer a body of work of about the mid-eighteenth century, Homer is a tradition. Every acknowledgment of Homer responds to other such acknowledgments since Homer. Even when these responses take a parodic cast, as they do with Byron and Joyce (and as they did with Rabelais and Cervantes, Pope and Fielding), a genuine sense of the precedent prevails.

For those who would make an epic response to the task of writing literature, 'The Epic is Homer'.⁷ Homer did not invent the epic himself;⁸ a long line of precursors must have felt their way ever nearer to the perfect form until, at last, The Poet came and achieved it. But once the form was incarnate, it was not possible or right to go beyond it.⁹ Any later poet seeking to narrate a heroic story, be he writing a

millennium after, had yet to reckon with the Homeric manner: the meter, the diction, the machinery. One might revivify and update the form, as Brian Wilkie discusses in his study of the Romantics and epic tradition,¹⁰ but one cannot dispense with its conditioning. This truth applies directly to Milton and those of his time who felt Homer and Virgil were the irreproachable models of style and primary sources of poetic material, but it includes, no less, the Byron and the Joyce who address epic pattern and declare epic intention in *Don Juan* and *Ulysses*. This was the situation under which they, also, wrote. Homeric organization was historic, impeccable, and inexorable. In using Homer they accepted the tradition with full ramifications, for better and for worse.

Joyce and Byron saw themselves as distinctly *within* classical tradition. They were writing at the end of a long line of literary endeavor that had begun with The Poet; however novel and combative or rejective of its parts they might be, they were still *ipso facto* part of it. Whatever their reason or purpose, whatever fate they intended for Homer, whatever they might do in the end, by invoking the pattern they wilfully placed themselves in the tradition.

One is surprised at the paradoxical significance of their action. For as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were themselves, despite their place at the start of Western tradition, cumulative and culminative works, perfected forms of earlier heroic ballads and aspirations to epic form¹¹ — so, too, were *Don Juan* and *Ulysses* to be cumulative works and end-products. The novel and poem were situated at the end of the process that began with Homer, but they were to serve also as summaries of Western literature and culminations to Western civilization. As Byron and Joyce inherited the older myths and tales that went into making the *Odyssey*, so also did they inherit the patterns, conventions and variations that had become part of the epic machinery since Homer.

When speaking of how Homer represents a culminating pinnacle and summary of the early Greek experience, Hermann Fränkel says that the Greeks themselves, retroactively, constructed a theory according to which all Greek literature, indeed Greek education and civilization as a whole, had its origin and end in Homer.¹² The story of Odysseus has become for us, even more so than for the Greeks, a multiple myth; its author is the basis of our literature also.¹³ By declaring their affinity with Homer, by appropriating the pattern of the *Odyssey* for *Don Juan* and *Ulysses*, by absorbing and criticizing Homer at once, Byron and Joyce assume responsibility for recording

and criticizing not only the developments and variations on Homer's myth, but the departures – whether comic parodies or serious substitutes – from the epic tradition this myth (and the *Iliad*) spawned. They share totally with Homer his culminative task, his purpose of representing, at its end, the ways and manners of a long and diverse literary tradition.

Precedent piles on precedent to create new precedent; diverse directions in literature are superimposed upon each other for cumulative representation. The credentials for the poet's and the novelist's unusual use of Homer in *Don Juan* and *Ulysses* become impeccable. Byron and Joyce begin with Homer so that, summarizing all that has preceded them like Homer also, they might best end the tradition he began.

I

One should be aware of the ambivalence underlying these two writers' response to Homer before one considers the precise use and function, in and after creation, to which Odyssean pattern is put in *Don Juan* and *Ulysses*. This ambivalence is echoed in, and partly caused by, their attitudes to Greece and classical learning.

Greece was a symbolic place for Byron (as his 'Isles of Greece' suggests). Its liberation from the Turks would be an assertion of the virtues of classical civilization over the vices and tyrannies of the modern world. It was the place where he came of age, emotionally and politically.¹⁴ Greece had Turks, Giaours, bandits, bearded priests, black-eyed virgins, Ithaca, and a passionate, compelling history: 'I was happier in Greece than I have ever been before – or since, and if I have ever written [well?] (as the world says I have – but which they will pardon my doubting) – it was in Greece – or off [of] Greece'.¹⁵ Contemporary Greeks, beaten, divided and insecure, did not always live up to the poet's ideal. Nevertheless, cursing Greek inefficiency, stupidity and greed, he died for Greece.

The classics received yet more qualified support from Byron. Classical erudition was 'antiquarian twaddle' perpetrated by 'emasculated fogies'. In young Juan's education:

His classic studies made a little puzzle,
Because of filthy loves of gods and goddesses,
Who
– . . . never put on pantaloons or bodices;