

The fact that history repeats itself is quite a prominent thought in the mind of Leopold Bloom, Joyce's Ulyssean traveller through the streets of Dublin on June 16, 1904, as his voyage progresses around his "own little world" (p. 374).¹ From the point, early in the morning of that memorable day, where Molly interrogates her Poldy on the meaning of metempsychosis (pp. 66-67), or "met-him-pike-hoses" (p. 379), as Bloom remembers it, to where grandpapachi Virag triumphantly, with waxing eyeballs, exclaims: "Noting new under the sun" (p. 481), *Ulysses* consistently echoes the idea that, like the hands of the clock in Ithaca, mankind is but a movable indicator on an unmoving dial (p. 615), always pursuing the same round.

There is thus a hint of Vico's historical determinism in Joyce's use of myth, a determinism that finds its critical counterpart in Eliot's thesis that "the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer . . . has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order."² But there is also a positive side to this point of view: "a historical determinism reflects a distorted understanding of the fact that all human cultural activity . . . is necessarily *tradition-bound* and therefore must be understood in terms of its tradition."³ In short: Western literature forms a factual aesthetic unity that can only be disregarded to the detriment of our understanding of literature.

In Homer's *Odyssey* Teiresias prophesies that Odysseus, having cleared his palace of the suitors, will set out once more upon his travels,⁴ and that death will come to him, after he has returned by sea. In Dante's *Inferno* Ulysses tells Dante of his restless *wanderlust* which neither

" . . . fondness for my son, nor reverence
Of my old father, nor return of love
That should have crowned Penelope with joy,
Could overcome . . ."
(Canto xxvi).⁵

Exhorting his faithful band with

" . . . 'Call to mind from whence ye sprang:

1. Page references to the Penguin Modern Classics (1973) edition of *Ulysses*.
2. "Tradition and the Individual Talent", in Eliot's *Selected Prose* (ed. John Hayward), Penguin Books in association with Faber and Faber, 1963, p. 23.
3. Wolters, A., *Our Place in the Philosophical Tradition*, Inaugural Address at the Institute for Christian Studies, Wedge Publishing Foundation, Toronto, 1975.
4. Cf. Book XI: "The Book of the Dead", (Penguin Classics, tr. E.V. Rieu, 1945, pp. 175 ff.)
5. *The Vision of Dante Alighieri or Hell, Purgatory and Paradise*, tr. H.F. Cary, J.M. Dent & Sons, London, 1913, p. 111.

Ye were not form'd to live the lives of brutes,
But virtue to pursue and Knowledge high,' ”

Odysseus then sails out to beyond the pillars of Hercules. Little did Homer know, upon composing Teiresias' prophecy, that it would find its literary fulfilment in authors ranging as wide as Tennyson, whose Ulysses yearns for the untravelled world,

“To follow knowledge, like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought,”

and, in more recent times, Arthur C. Clarke, whose Ulyssean spaceman, David Bowman, travelling beyond the limits of space and time, becomes the representative of the entire human race: an Ambassador Extraordinary – Plenipotentiary – for all mankind.⁶ No wonder then that to Bowman, killing time on his long journey, the *Odyssey* speaks most vividly of all books across the gulfs of time.⁷ His emotions, we are told, are much like those of old-time sailors on a long voyage,⁸ and he eventually finds himself in a celestial Sargasso.⁹

Appropriately, too, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (both as a film¹⁰ and, as the title page of the book claims, a novel), with its Homeric echo, “seems to posit two contradictory views: that man has progressed very far and that he is still basically the same.”¹¹ It is no accident that Bowman's space odyssey is a voyage skirting asteroids and planets bearing the names of mythological antiquity: Io, Ganymede, Europa, Callisto, Saturn and Jupiter (“The ancients had, indeed, done better than they knew, when they named this world after the lord of all the gods.”¹²). The blending of the old and the new is emphasized also by the traditional Louis XVI furniture and the futuristic luminescent floor of the room where Bowman is received after his long journey. However novel the order of creation through which Bowman moves in *Inferno* (Chapter 43), Heraclitus' four elements are still there in sea (water), land (earth), air and fire,¹³ and the ancient theory of the fiery heavens, together with Kantian space and time,¹⁴ has merely been turned inside out.

It must be remembered that Joyce's aestheticism¹⁵ also finds its roots

6. Clarke, A.C., *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Arrow Books, London, 1973, p. 202.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

10. Produced by Stanley Kubrick, 1968.

11. Kinder, M., and Houston, B., *Close-Up: A Critical Perspective on Film*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972, p. 85.

12. Clarke, A.C., *op. cit.*, p. 132.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

14. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 222, 226, 230.

15. Cf. Kettle, A., *An Introduction to the English Novel*, Vol. II, Hutchinsons University Library, London, 1953, p. 135.

in Kant's thesis that aesthetic contemplation is disinterested,¹⁶ and that Joyce used the Kantian categories of space and time as unifying dimensions¹⁷ (cf. *The Wandering Rocks* and *Nausicaa*) in *Ulysses*.

The idea that man is basically unchanged is reinforced by the formal three-part structure of the film (the book has six major parts), Homer's *Odyssey* and Joyce's *Ulysses*, for "it is a static form, externally imposed, based on established narrative conventions."¹⁸

Joyce's twentieth century mythmaking, with Bloom's trip across Dublin forming Odysseus' return journey, Stephen's unsure wandering paralleling Telemachus' search, and Molly's transformation from the faithful Homeric Penelope,¹⁹ is, I suspect, linked up with the interest in things primitive that characterized the search for universals in expressionistic art at the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁰ His purposes in using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, T.S. Eliot has pointed out, was simply 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."²¹ This is also the conclusion of Litz, after having subjected the worksheets of *Ulysses* to a detailed examination.²² But it does also present just going a step further than that: Joyce also used myth to fit, in a symbolic way, our everyday lives into the general pattern of human experience.²³ This is in keeping with what Bedgen tells us about Joyce's laboured technique: "He was constantly and indefatigably in pursuit of the solution to some problem of homeric correspondence."²⁴ It seemed to Budgen that Joyce found the Homeric correspondence more difficult in Circe than in any other episode.²⁵ This relentless pursuit of minutely detailed parallels has led Stewart to state that "it is in fact hard not to conclude that the elaborative method

16. Cf. Abrams, M.H., *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1971, p. 1.

17. Cf. Daiches, D., *The Novel and the Modern World*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1965, pp. 108-110.

18. Kinder, M., and Houston, B., *op. cit.*, p. 85.

19. Cf. Karl, F.R., and Magalaner, M., *A Reader's Guide to Great Twentieth-Century English Novels*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1963, p. 35.

20. Cf. Rookmaker, H.R., *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*, Inter-Varsity Press, London, 1970, chapter five.

21. "Ulysses, Order and Myth", in the *Dial*, 1923.

22. Litz, A.W., *The Art of James Joyce*, Oxford University Press, London, 1962, p. 39. Cf. too Kimpel, B.D., "James Joyce in Contemporary World Literature", in Zyla, W.T., *Proceedings of the Comparative Literature Symposium, Vol. II - James Joyce: His Place in World Literature*, Interdepartmental Committee on Comparative Literature, Texas Technological College, Lubbock, 1969, p. 96.

23. Kimpel, B.D., *op. cit.*, in Zyla, W.T., *op. cit.*, p. 97.

24. Budgen, F., *James Joyce and the Making of 'Ulysses' and Other Writings*, Oxford University Press, London, 1972, p. 175.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 234.

at times becomes merely mechanical, something that goes on operating by rote rather than upon specific artistic consideration."²⁶

Joyce's intention with his use of the Homeric original is, as Stewart has put it, to point Bloom's insignificance and ignobility; the Homeric correspondences "are also capable, as in the best mock-heroic, of working the other way, so that Bloom's positive qualities, his representative character, his pathos, all take emphasis from his original."²⁷

In a manner by far not as calculated as Joyce's, Clarke's Ulysses is nevertheless on a voyage representing all voyages, and including all the risks of voyages into the unknown.²⁸ Even if the spaceship were destroyed, its remnants would continue to trace the original orbit for ever, "like wreckage tossing on the surface of an ocean where some great ship had sunk."²⁹ Sea imagery and sailing lore crop up everywhere: the spaceship from certain angles has a fleeting resemblance to an old-time sailing ship,³⁰ and the gesture made by Poole, Bowman's crewmate, as he is being dragged off to eternity by one of the space-pods, "was an echo of Captain Ahab's when, lashed to the flanks of the white whale, his corpse had beckoned the crew of the *Pequod* on to their doom."³¹

Neither is the Homeric parallel as laboured and skilled as Joyce's. When Bloom descends into Hades, for example, Joyce packs in the four rivers of the underworld, Sisyphus-Cunningham, Cerberus (Father Coffee), Ajax in the guise of Menton, and Elpenor, alias Patrick Dignam,³² together with other minor correspondences.

What is missing, though, is Teiresias' prophetic announcement³³ about Ulysses' future. In *2001: A Space Odyssey*, epic language finds a new, ultracivilized context when Dr. Floyd and his colleagues are skimming over the lunar surface on their way to the excavated monolith, T.M.A.—1: "It was the corona, harbinger of the lunar dawn, giving notice that before long the sun would smite this sleeping land."³⁴ Clarke here seems to bypass Joyce in favour of the Homeric original, for when they descend into this modern Hades (the site of the excavation) T.M.A.—1, the space-age Theban seer, emits a prophetic signal that indicates the linear path that man's odyssey in the twenty-first century must follow.

26. Stewart, J.I.M., *Eight Modern Writers*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1963, p. 459.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 453.

28. Clarke, A.C., *op. cit.*, p. 100.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

32. Cf. Gilbert, S., *James Joyce's Ulysses: A Study*, Faber and Faber, London, 1930, pp. 155 ff.

33. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 168.

34. Clarke, A.C., *op. cit.*, p. 81.

In *Ulysses* one of the most successful exploitations of the Homeric parallel is the Cyclops episode. Bloom's small cigar is Ulysses' red-hot stake, and Joyce painstakingly deflates the false security of the Cyclops-Citizen's little world by inflating it to gigantic proportions. Unlike the prudent Odysseus, Bloom, with dire results, does not stand his round of drinks.³⁵ In *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the Heuristically programmed Algorithmic computer, commonly known as Hal, takes the place of Poseidon's gigantic descendant. On the main console this talking machine-Polyphemus has a single lens for an eye.³⁶ Like his Ulysean forebear, who told Polyphemus he was No-one, Dave Bowman refuses to speak to Hal while he is slowly disconnecting the latter's human functions. In the film Odysseus' red-hot stake has been transformed into a key, proportionately not much bigger than Bloom's cigar, but no less effective than its Homeric counterpart. An event not in the book, that comes across strikingly in the film, is the episode in which Bowman, after he has failed to rescue Poole, returns to the mother ship in one of the space-pods with the sole intention of disconnecting Hal's ego. Hal, in the fashion of Polyphemus, has closed the round airlock doors leading to the space-pod bay, and refuses to open up. Bowman then proceeds to shoot himself into the ship through an emergency hatch, all the while clinging, like Odysseus, to a platform in the stomach of his space-pod, which has all the appearance of a sturdy Merino, and is fittingly termed an Aries-1B.³⁷

The book, as well as the film, is drenched with biotic imagery. The spaceship's slender, arrow-like body³⁸ is the male spermatozoon, cluttered as it is with umbilical plugs and other attachments,³⁹ which meets its ovum after it has fallen through the Star-Gate at the eye of Japetus. One recalls that Joyce too, in *The Oxen of the Sun*, intended the nurse to be the ovum, Bloom the spermatozoon and Stephen, the growing and expanding soul, to be the embryo within the womb for which the maternity hospital of Dr. Horne is the symbol.⁴⁰

But the biotic imagery of *2001: A Space Odyssey* is not limited to one chapter or one trend of allusion (cf. Ithaca, where Bloom returns to the bowels of Mother Earth, p. 658); here it is predominant, the result of the overriding biologicistic starting point of the book. Through each skin-of-their-teethish survival of the first apemen to that of modern man, we learn that man is living, biotically speaking at least, on borrowed time,⁴¹ and

35. Cf. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

36. Cf. Clarke, A.C., *op. cit.*, p. 154.

37. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 52.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 105, 114.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

40. Budgen, F., *op. cit.*, p. 221.

41. Cf. Clarke, A.C., *op. cit.*, pp. 40, 45, 46.

that his evolution is towards freedom⁴² (of mind over matter⁴³), towards new goals — the end of the evolutionary process being God.⁴⁴

Bowman's rebirth as Star-Child is therefore accompanied by strong Nietzschean overtones (emphasized still further in the film by the music of Strauss's "Also Sprach Zarathustra"): the creatures who had planted T.M.A.—1 are pure energy, roving *at will* among the stars.⁴⁵ To David Bowman, whom they are leading on to be reborn as superman, they bequeath their superior will-power.⁴⁶

Leopold Bloom, as we know, is no superman in the making. His meditations on the stars include the provisional: "... if the progress were carried far enough, nought nowhere was never reached" (p. 620). And (although now in another context) Bloom also knows the futility of triumph or protest or vindication, and the apathy of the stars (p. 655). Budgen finds Bloom a very pessimistic character in spite of his unperturbed, complacent air: "He seems to have an innate knowledge of the second law of thermodynamics. His universe is running down."⁴⁷

Against an anti-heroic canvasser for ads we have in David Bowman a heroic spaceman, travelling in a straight line⁴⁸ towards his superhuman destiny, on a ship with the over-optimistic name of *Discovery*. This linear progress is broken paradoxically, by the circular images of planets, satellites, the wheel-like Space-Station 5, the globular space vehicles and the embryonic child.⁴⁹ Time also, as Kinder and Houston point out, "is not a singular linear development but a recurring cyclical pattern, a concept that can combine both a static pattern and progressive development." Whereas Ulysses-Bloom's route is the two dimensional circle, Odysseus-Bowman's progress requires to be measured by the addition of another dimension, in the figure of the upwardly progressive spiral.

But the conflicts in Joyce's *Ulysses* are complex, whereas those in *2001: A Space Odyssey* are quite easily reduced to the struggle of man versus the machine. The ultimate message of *2001: A Space Odyssey* seems to be that man will ultimately despair that the "conflict between mind and machine might be resolved at last in the eternal truce of a complete symbiosis." For even in the electronic Eden of that ultimate in machines, the HAL 9000 computer, there lurks a snake.⁵¹

42. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 215.

46. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 254.

47. Budgen, F., *op. cit.*, p. 283.

48. Cf. Clarke, A.C., *op. cit.*, pp. 99, 117.

49. Cf. Kinder, M., and Houston, B., *op. cit.*, pp. 86, 92.

50. Clarke, A.C., *op. cit.*, p. 201.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

Joyce's point of view, if he had to formulate one, would undoubtedly have approached what Ionesco has to say on this score. In his unpublished article, "Un Temoignage Faux: La Vingt-cinquieme Heure", Ionesco says it is not so much the machine and the oppression of the robot, both products of civilization, that we have to fear, but that the real danger lies in "the automatism of passions and of evil instincts, the biological and physiological automatism of the Fascist beast," which is dangerously sub-human.⁵² Joyce is no Darwinian rationalist, like Bloom,⁵³ and his endorsement of Ionesco's view is most explicitly stated in *Ulysses* in the Circe episode; Budgen comments on the Homeric parallel of Odysseus' companions being changed into swine: "The essence of the animal into man metamorphosis seems to be that man becomes an animal when he loses his many-sided human wholeness."⁵⁴

Another of Ionesco's views applies to both Joyce and Clarke: in an interview he stated that "the artist is seldom able to renew literary themes. There are few new themes."⁵⁵ And in an interview on the SABC's English Service programme, "Radio Today" on January 1, 1976, Clarke in so many words repeated this view. But Ionesco goes on to say: "What he can do is renew language" — and this applies only to Joyce.

Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey* is so lacking in verisimilitude and the complexity of everyday life that it can almost be called a vulgarization of the Odyssean literary tradition. In short: it has no subtlety. Where in *Ulysses* the mere mention of a span of twenty years would conjure up echoes of Ulysses and Rip van Winkle (cf. e.g. p. 494), here it has no more than a chronological significance.⁵⁶ And one can hardly envisage, furthermore, Bloom blatantly reading *and* finding Homer's *Odyssey* absorbing.

If *Ulysses* is an expression of the credo 'l'art pour l'art', then *2001: A Space Odyssey*, like the eight different terrestrial landscapes available for interior decoration at the lunar base Clavius, is art for the sake of sanity⁵⁷ in a thoroughly humanistic and secularized twenty-first century.

Ulysses and *2001: A Space Odyssey* present us with nothing less than two opposed views of life: the first with an almost playful and mundane scepticism, the latter with the excesses of humanistic optimism and unchecked faith in human progress.

But lest our judgement be too severe, let us hope that Clarke, with

52. Coe, R.N., "Utopia and After", in Lamont, R.D. (ed.), *Ionesco: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Prentice-Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1973, p. 145.

53. Cf. Budgen, F., *op. cit.*, p. 254.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

55. Wager, W., *The Playwrights Speak*, Longmans, London, 1969, p. 124.

56. Cf. Clarke, A.C., *op. cit.*, p. 43.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

Joyce and Homer looking over his shoulder, will continue to admit, in Eliot's words:

“ . . . what there is to conquer
By strength and submission, has already been discovered
Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one
cannot hope
To emulate . . . ”

(East Coker 182 – 185).