Conclusion

In literary scholarship, it has never been sufficient to delineate a source; the scholar must show how that source is used in the work at hand, how it itself becomes a tool of creation. To be able to show how the poet uses myth and, in doing so, to concentrate not on the identity of the myth, but on its function, not on its closeness to the known pattern, but on the changes which the poet effects in that pattern, not on origin, but on use would seem to me to constitute the proper aim of the myth critic.

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Joyce does not use myth as an ordering principle in *Ulysses*. Rather, his "mythic method" follows the course dictated by the realistic base of Irish history. To deny history its role is to completely miss the point about Joyce's art. His method forges links with the smaller and larger historical details that form the natural world of the novel. Irish history dominates and foregrounds the canvas of the novel, and Joyce submits the "mythic method" to the pressure exerted by this factor of reality. It is important, therefore, that this method be seen in its proper perspective and context.

For instance, the myth criticism of the novel should take note of the fact that Joyce uses the method to deepen the significance of the critique of nationalism that he is attempts in the novel. Concepts from anthropology or psychology are used to further this end, not to bypass a crucial aspect of Irish history of which Joyce was always conscious. Joyce situates Stephen's 'self-realization' in the context of Irish history, specifically that of Irish nationalism, and only the myth criticism of the novel that sees this can grasp the central meaning of the novel. The analyses of myth critics only prove finally that "every critical tool" (Staley 488) has been used to study Molly, Bloom, and Stephen in their
human dimension. However, the "tool" of myth criticism fails if it indulges in a
decontextualized study of the characters apart from the nationalism that dominates the
novel.

An important corollary of this understanding of the "mythic method" as used by
Joyce is the fact that it is based on a lack of mythic correspondence rather than on an
insistence on parallelism. As Joyce's method is chiefly based on his relationship with
Irish history, it is only through deviation from the expected that Joyce exposes the
dichotomy between myth and reality. When he uses the concepts from anthropology and
psychology in relation to the serious socio-political and economic issues of Ireland, the
equation changes. A dynamic relationship comes into play, orchestrating the complex
working of the "mythic method" as it interweaves the concrete details of Irish history
with concepts from anthropology like those of the priest-king and sacral regicide, the
scapegoat and his ritual sacrifice or the fear of the dead. Similarly, concepts from
Jungian psychology such as the archetypes of the anima, the child, and the Old Man are
used by Joyce to reflect the significant turning points that affect Stephen and Bloom's
consciousness and thoughts through memory, conversation or imagination. If the myth
criticism of the novel starts off with a priori assumptions, and hails correspondences as
ultimate discoveries, it is committing an avoidable blunder.

Joyce is not interested in conforming to the established literary tradition. Clearly,
his aim is to transform the existing literary tradition, not by offering easy or even
sensational solutions but by questioning and provoking the reader to grasp his irony, the
chief weapon he uses. As one of the approaches to understanding a novel, the myth
criticism of Ulysses should be more concerned with identifying the different ways Joyce
subverts the literary tradition by creatively transforming and even turning it "upside
down" (Gould 139). The three frameworks used in the novel share the common fault of
taking Stephen's alleged self-realization seriously, without taking into consideration
Joyce's ironical stance towards an immature Stephen who is groping with the idea of self-
hood. All the myth critics are collectively obsessed with the myth they have fashioned--
that of Stephen's meeting with Bloom, then with Molly through her pander-husband, and
finally his self-realization. Joyce's irony seems to be directed as much at these scholars
(a butt of Joyce's ridicule, by the way) as at Stephen, a version of the immature Joyce
whom the older one has outgrown.

One of the chief problems that we notice here is the discrepancy between the
philosophy of myth criticism and its practice. Most critics agree that the practice of myth
criticism leaves much to be desired. In its conceptualization, myth criticism as a branch
of criticism is related to the external disciplines of anthropology and analytical
psychology and has, theoretically speaking at least, a broad perspective on literary
criticism. Insights derived from these disciplines should make for a positive contribution
to the critical interpretation of literary works. Unfortunately, the myth criticism of
_Ulysses_ as it is practised has a more tragic tale to tell. Concepts from anthropology and
psychology are isolated from their roots in the parental context, and artificially grafted on
to the novel when in actuality, they have their roots in the specific and concrete world of
Dublin. Parallels are drawn indiscriminately with no thought given to the manner in
which these concepts and their functions are transformed in a changed context. The
result is a brand of criticism that reveals itself for what it is--a myth of a section of the
academics. Only a critical understanding of the novel that takes into account Joyce's
inventiveness, creativeness and irony can open up the future for a myth criticism of the novel that is insightful and relevant.

The future of the myth criticism of *Ulysses* looks hopeful if its practitioners keep in mind the fact that Joyce’s incisive treatment of Irish history should form the starting-point for all their analyses. Research may prove fruitful if new concepts are applied to the novel and the interplay between them and the historical base of the novel is observed, whereby fresh insights can be gained into the novel. *Ulysses* can be studied episode by episode for single concepts that link them thematically, so that the entire novel is studied, keeping Irish history integrally linked to the thematic deployment of the concepts. In this way, a larger picture of Joyce’s representation of Irish history through the “mythic method” can be attempted. Instead of opting for Frye’s classificatory scheme of studying the novel, the myth critic can arrive at a more holistic perception of it. It is important that he realize that there is more to the novel than meets the mythic eye, and that he must engage with it on its own terms. Finally, one could perhaps echo with Gillespie that “each work proves its value to readers through its ability to articulate alternative responses, to enhance ambiguity, and to increase the richness of the aesthetic experience by making us more aware of our own creative involvement in every act of reading” (93-94). Joyce’s *Ulysses*, rich as it is in ambiguity probably qualifies for providing a feast of an aesthetic experience. Myth critics are free to invite themselves to it if they are prepared to shed a few assumptions. They have nothing to lose except a bizarre phantom of their own creation.

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Notes

1 Quoted in Herd 77.