Ulysses as Modern Prototype of *Homo Viator*

Ioana-Gianina Haneş*

Abstract:
This paper emphasises, through the notion of generic intertextuality, the Homeric inheritance in the literary modernity. Specific techniques of transtextual communication are employed to analyse how the myth of Odyssey was valued in modern literature, i.e. the novels of two emblematic writers, Joyce and Faulkner. In *Ulysses*, desacralisation is visible at all levels, but it does not eliminate the identity of the protagonists who are saved by their humanity. *Soldiers' Pay*, a rewriting based on allusions to the myth of Odysseus, denies the perspective of recovery. Ulysses' counterpart is an alienated being suffocated by the superficial world he lives in, an example of de-heroisation that modernity uses without restraint.
Keywords: rewriting, modernity, desacralisation, de-heroisation, identity

1. Introduction

Characterised by the repudiation of the past, modern literature is nonconformist and innovative, marking the rupture with tradition and therefore with the mythological universe. This should not be construed as a cancellation of the myth, but a resignification of its values done most often through the means of parody. The myth of Odysseus cannot be absent from the modern author's imagery. It is the basis of Joyce's and Faulkner's rewritings that highlight the peculiarities of perceiving this myth at the beginning of the twentieth century. The analysis of *Ulysses* and *Soldiers' Pay* reveals how the myth was perceived in modernity, as well as the role of the author's intention in rewriting Homer's hypotext.

Theorist Gérard Genette laid the foundations of one of the best-known delineations of transtextual practices. Transtextuality is "all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" (Genette, 1992: 83–84) or, more precisely, it includes the various interactions between texts occurring either with the author's obvious and explicit intention or in an apparently unexpected manner. Of the five categories of relationships between texts (intertextuality, metatextuality, paratextuality, architextuality and hypertextuality), Genette pays special attention to hypertextuality, which is "any relationship uniting a text B

* PhD Student, West University of Timişoara, hanes.gianina@yahoo.com

(which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*) upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (Genette, 1997: 5). The methods of hypertextuality and the other transtextual categories will be identified in the above-mentioned novels, while insisting on their mechanisms in the narrative materials of the proposed hypertexts. Both of the above-mentioned novels are "serious transformations" (Genette, 1997: 212), fundamental reconfigurations of the hypotext, consistent with the auctorial intention and the cultural background. The metamorphosis of the source text includes the entire diegesis, the story, the characters' identity or nationality.

2. Self-proclaimed rewriting – from the prototype of the ancient hero to that of modern man

When dealing with rewriting in literary modernism, the novel *Ulysses* by James Joyce is the major point of reference, and the analysis of its mechanisms becomes imperative. The hypotext, the *Odyssey*, is obvious from the title that is a direct reference to the Homeric hero. However, before identifying the correspondences on which the rewriting is based in the text of the novel, one should recall the author's confessions about Homer's epic and what the character Ulysses means to him. These confessions, made to his friend Frank Bugden, constitute the rationale behind the rewriting:

"As far as I understand, you believe Ulysses is the only complete person in literature." "Yes. […] Ulysses is son to Laertes, but he is father to Telemachus, husband to Penelope, lover of Calypso, a companion in arms of the Greek warriors around Troy and King of Ithaca" (Bugden, 1972: 16).

Consequently, Ulysses is not the character, but the complete individual with multiple sides, with qualities and flaws, like the modern man who has more than one status both in the society and at home. This is the prototype that fascinates Joyce. His appetite for the *Odyssey* borders on obsession, dominating even his private conversations with friends: "The most beautiful, all-embracing theme is that of Odyssey. […] The most beautiful, most human traits are contained in the *Odyssey*" (Seidel, 2002: 100). Therefore, the reasons for rewriting Homer's *Odyssey* are already given by the author, who is attracted not by Ulysses' heroism, but his humanity. Ulysses is the man in every sense of the word and the Irish writer's novel relies on this interpretation of the *Odyssey*. That is why, based on the image of the complete individual, *Ulysses* takes the form of a complete narrative, a human living organism, each chapter being associated with a vital organ that provides it with body and spirit, therefore with life: "Intended to be the embodiment of the writer's idea of the «complete», the «perfect» work,

Ulysses was also meant as a secular substitute of the Book of Books, a «Bible» dedicated to the earthly man" (Brezianu, 1977: 167–168).

Leopold Bloom corresponds to Ulysses, Stephen Dedalus corresponds to Telemachus, and Molly, Bloom's wife, corresponds not only to Penelope, but also in Calypso. All the narrated events take place on June 16 1904, in Dublin, a city symbolising the Ithaca of an author who is often far from his homeland. The temporal and spatial change occurring in relation to the hypotext places Joyce's novel in the category of *theme transpositions of the diegetic type*. The implications are defined by Genette as follows: "the action can be transposed from one period to another, or from one location to another, or both" (Genette, 1997: 296). *Ulysses* obviously belongs to the third variant suggested by the French theorist: not only time and space change, but also the elements that are related to the action in the hypertext, as "the reader is confronted not by mythical heroes, but petty individuals moving within gloomy interiors and grey streets" (Brezianu, 1977: 154).

The chapters of the novel contain unquestionable references to the *Odyssey*, to key characters like Telemachus, Calypso or Nausicaa, to mythical places such as Hades or Ithaca, to ancient gods or monsters like Proteus, the Cyclops or the Oxen of the Sun. The connection of the novel with its paratext is easy to notice; all the paratextual elements, from the title to the subtitles, reveal the hypertext-hypotext relationship and guide the reader's horizon of expectation. Paratextuality, Genette's second transtextual category, plays a crucial role in interpreting the novel, as the connections established with the hypotext are those that make *Ulysses* "the very type of the self-proclaimed hypertext" (Genette, 1997: 309). Not only the structuring of the narrative material, but the whole text is based on the Homeric epic; it abounds in symbols, motifs and allegories that are specific to the *Odyssey* and are hidden under daily banalities. This entitles Andrei Brezianu to state that Joyce's novel is not a parody in the strict sense of the concept, but "the geometric locus of the prestigious transcendence of parody in allegorical mimesis" (Brezianu, 1977: 154), the mythical elements being disguised and transposed in the writer's contemporaneity. Rewriting the *Odyssey* involves the desacralisation of the epic events by transferring them on the streets of the Irish capital. In the same way, the sacred is profaned in the *Oxen of the Sun* episode, when the theme of life and fertility represented by the birth of Mrs. Purefoy's son mingles with the conversations of the medical students who have no respect for the miracle of creation. The young students correspond to Ulysses' companions who disregard the sacred by killing the oxen of Helios, the Sun god. Like Ulysses, who does not take part in this sacrilege, Bloom declines the students' invitation to join them for a drink, so he is not guilty of impiety. Therefore, Joyce keeps the theme of the *Odyssey*, but

subjects it to transformations, his hypertext being classified by Genette as a *serious transformation* that reconfigures the source text creatively, through a radical modification imposed by the auctorial intention. In this regard, Mircea Mihăieş notices that the rewriting of the Homeric epic is not based on the imitation principle, modernism providing the text with the chance to reinvent itself: "the *Odyssey* is reflected in *Ulysses* through analogies and permutations; it is not neither direct reflection nor literal imitation" (Mihăieş, 2016: 21).

The correspondences between the hypertext and the hypotext are apparent. For this reason, their detailed analysis does not concern this paper. What is interesting to emphasize is the mechanism of the rewriting, as the poetics of *Ulysses* is not only complex, but also elaborate and suggests a network of allegories, a mosaic of typical modernist forms of expression and a discontinuous narrative structure. Joyce rewrites the *Odyssey* using the multiple perspectives technique. As a result, an innovative, antitraditionalist work takes form as Joyce removes the Homeric omniscient perspective of the events. It is obvious that in the *Odyssey* Homer is the only source of information and the reader/audience sees the events only from the viewpoint of the narrator, who undertakes an omniscient role. Joyce deconstructs this manner of narrating by employing multiple perspectives. In this case, the reader's role is to solve the puzzle and provide a new interpretation of the events, judging the characters and their deeds from their own angle. Thus, the reader becomes familiar with the plot details, just as Bloom-Ulysses travels through Dublin – doubtful, frustrated and confused: "The only one who travels through the whole Odysseic universe of the book and copes with all the difficulties, advancing slowly and stopping more than once in a confused state of mind, is the reader" (Grigorescu, 1984: 311). The readers' road is the longest and their mission is definitely the most demanding, because the narrative text abounds in allusions, symbols and interconnections whose clarification depends on their competence, their familiarity with the hypotext and their assiduous exploration of Joyce's rewriting. Consequently, in the case of modern rewriting, the readers' status changes dramatically, as they are the ones who have the final say, their interpretation relying on the overall view. Nevertheless, the difficulty of the mission does not exclude the joy of "travelling" through the text. Wayne C. Booth underlined *the pleasure of deciphering* and *the pleasure of collaboration* within the complicity between the reader and an author as demanding as Joyce (Booth, 1976: 301–308).

It is certain that the change in the reader's status occurs as a consequence of the change in the auctorial perspective. Joyce not only cancels the single viewpoint of the *Odyssey*, but also proposes a sequence of narrators, each episode of the novel having one or several different voices, thus also diversifying the narrative styles. The author's

modern vision brings several variants of the same story to light and the characters' voices, silent in Homer's epic, are now heard. Relevant to this is the version of Molly, Penelope's correspondent who, unlike her Homeric counterpart, has the opportunity to voice her frustrations caused by her husband's aloofness in the past ten years, as in Penelope's case. A narrator of her own thoughts, the image Molly creates of herself is that of a mediocre, unfaithful woman, "an Emma exasperated by the lack of perspective of a Charles Bovary whom she understands too little and who neglects her" (Grigorescu, 1984: 385). The modern author's portrait of the female character, created by bringing disparate images together, mocks the celebrated faithfulness of the Homeric character.

Dublin, a city the author knows too well, is perceived subjectively, as a labyrinth that suffocates the characters who are in search of their own identity. Created with a touch of irony, the characters desacralise the heroic image of their Homeric counterparts. Bloom's wandering through Dublin is doubled by his wandering in the labyrinth of his own thoughts and feelings. This *homo viator*, entrapped in his day-to-day existence, is the image of the common man who lacks heroic virtues and knocks Ulysses off his Homeric pedestal, making him human. Nevertheless, the suppression of the divine attributes and the virtues specific to a legendary hero does not involve the shift from a hero to an antihero. Bloom attracts the reader emphatetically, promoting values that do not define an exceptional character, but make him different from the dehumanised world he lives in. As a result, in Joyce's case, the parodic register of modern rewriting functions in an original manner, since the desacralisation of Ulysses does not equate with his elimination, but with highlighting the quality that helps modern man survive, giving his insignificant life a meaning: "Through its parodic element – a rewriting of the *Odyssey* in a minor register and with changed signs – it reveals itself to be creative despite its destroying appearance [...] and releases energy that generates the beautiful at the edge of chaos" (Mihăieș, 2016: 19).

A representative of values such as compassion, concern for the others and empathy, Bloom is different from the other members of the gloomy and chaotic universe to which he belongs. When the Cyclops asks Homer's hero who he is, the latter answers – not accidentally – that his name is "Nobody". The reply symbolises the lack of an identity due to the absence of the essential elements that define it: the homeland and the family. At the end of his adventures, having recovered his homeland and his family, Ulysses finds himself again. Similarly, Leopold Bloom rebuilds his lost identity: his virtues, such as his caring nature and his concern for Stephan Dedalus, help him reactivate his paternal instinct. Bloom returns home and the victory of his return lies in the father-son close relationship strengthened late at night, over a cup of cocoa. By

rebuilding the paternal image he longed for, Stephen reaffirms his own identity. Moreover, the differences between the two protagonists, Ulysses and Bloom, are revealed in the episode in which the suitors are killed. Unlike Ulysses, who proves his force and courage by murdering Penelope's suitors, Blooms kills Molly's lover symbolically, by apparently ignoring him. At the end of the day, Bloom's attempt to become detached before falling asleep, his humanity and concern turn him into a winner: "In Joyce's work the soul – a word which he never renounced – carries off the victory" (Ellmann, 1959: 390).

The assertion of human communion and empathy is the heroic side of this modern Ulysses, through which Joyce manages to transform the essence of the Homeric myth: "Joyce has managed, by invoking an ancient myth, to conjure up a modern one" (Levin, 1969: 10). Thus the modern rewriting of the *Odyssey* requires not only the annihilation of the myth lying at its foundation, but also its reconstruction in harmony with the Irish writer's innovative vision and the aesthetic values that prevailed in the first decades of the twentieth century.

3. Concealed rewriting – Ulysses, killed at the end of the modernist journey

An American writer included among the representatives of modernist literature, William Faulkner is known for his works set in the famous fictional Yoknapatawpha County. His writings are a true epic with hundreds of characters whose destinies mingle to highlight the main literary themes or principles in the writer's time. The stories and novels set in the southern Yoknapatawpha County are the centre of Faulkner's work. Everything he wrote before was experimental or merely preceded his well-known novels. His works outside Yoknapatawpha are not deprived of significance, although critics focused mostly on the above-mentioned cycle. The modernist essence is unquestionable and the characters embody profound ontological concepts. A good example is the writer's debut novel, *Soldiers' Pay*, published in 1926, a rewriting of the myth of Odysseus in a modernist manner, using analogies and interpretation adapted to contemporaneity.

Unlike Joyce, Faulkner does not make direct reference to the hypotext. Instead, he appeals to the reader's ability to identify the mythological allusions throughout the whole narrative. Faulkner's technique of using mythological symbols, deconstructing ancient myths and assigning new meanings to them in a specific modernist manner is a true challenge for the reader: "Faulkner's techniques may sometimes exasperate, but they are effective in compelling the reader to join the writer's search for truth" (Volpe, 1964: 32). The success of such kind of reading depends on the reader's cooperation, as well as his erudition. Only an experienced reader who has read Homer's *Odyssey* before can

identify the mythical substrate of Faulkner's text and establish the necessary correspondences. The paratextual elements that, in Joyce's case, support the interpretation in a mythical register, do not contain allusions useful for deciphering in Faulkner's case. Nevertheless, the novel's plot thread, reduced to the main idea, approaches the Homeric theme of returning home at the end of the Trojan War: Donald Mahon comes back to Charlestown when the First World War has ended. His homeward journey is, undoubtedly, not without obstacles. While Ulysses was helped by goddess Athena especially, soldier Donald Mahon will arrive home aided by two travellers he meets on the train: Joe Gilligan and Margaret Powers. The help Donald Mahon receives is crucial to his return, as he is wounded and partly amnesiac. Ulysses returns from war a healthy man, but his adventures on the way back to Ithaca send him to the island of the Lotus-eaters. The lotus plant causes amnesia and he escapes from that island only with difficulty, after tying his three comrades that have tasted the plant. Throughout his journey, Ulysses is at the border between amnesia and clinging to reality: he has to be lashed to the mast against the Sirens' alluring song and is detained on Ogygia Island, a prisoner of goddess Calypso's spells, for seven years. Maimed by the cruel war, Mahon's close ones do not recognise him when he first returns home. His involuntary disguise is useful for exposing shallow characters who are attracted only by what they see on the outside. Such is his fiancée Cecily, who cheats on him and eventually leaves him because she cannot stand her lover's hideous face. The author reveals the lack of moral values in the society of those times and mocks the patient and faithful woman's traditional role. The role of the physical mask was first experimented by Ulysses, this time voluntarily. When he has arrived on the shore of his native island, he disguises himself as a beggar so that he may not be recognised and have the chance to analyse the situation as it is. Cecily's ancient counterpart, Penelope, proves to be faithful and honest.

Penelope is obviously demythicised by the creation of Cecily, as Faulkner discards precisely the Homeric heroine's fundamental features. While Penelope finds in weaving the web a way to keep her suitors at bay and avoid marrying one of them, Cecily embodies the reversed myth of faithfulness; she is a frivolous, fickle and selfish woman who flirts with several men both before her fiancé's return and after that. Moreover, Mahon's ugly, repulsive face sends her in the arms of other men. She is the proof that society does not live by moral standards, but chooses to be frivolous, like herself: "Cecily is an excellent rendition of the much-described flapper of the period. Into her portrait, Faulkner pours all his venom for the superficiality and shallowness that he sees in society" (Volpe, 1964: 53). Femininity and motherhood mean nothing to this character who does not want to have a baby that could deform her

body. Shape becomes valuable in a world in which essence is no longer of interest. Women's decadence is shown not only in Cecily, but also in Emmy, who becomes estranged from Mahon and is attracted only to his image before the war. For her, the thought that Donald will die is a disillusion, once again proving the shallow feminine nature. Mircea Mihăieş sees in Cecily and Emmy modern versions of Penelope and identifies correspondences that are specific to rewriting, related to the Homeric character's occupation:

> […] in Chapter VI, Cecily tells George Farr, her ardent suitor to whom she will eventually surrender, unlike Odysseus' wife: "Oh, no, I can't come back this afternoon. I have some sewing to do." As we learn from Chapter III, Penelope's other version, Emmy, "got a job sewing for a dressmaker" (Mihăieş, 2009).

The modern author's irony is visible in the creation of these two female characters who confirm the disappointment of a man in disagreement with his time. As simple parodic portraits of Penelope, Cecily and Emmy desacralise the myth of the faithful woman and the old ideal of femininity. Their opposite may be Mrs Powers, who is kind-hearted and capable of sacrifice when she decides to help Donald arrive home and then takes care of him until he dies. Although she marries him before his death, she cannot be Penelope's counterpart, because their marriage is not based on love, but on her compassion for her dying husband. As she is always there for him, she could be Faulkner's version of the goddess Athena, who was always there for Ulysses when he needed her. Her name suggests her role as a beneficent guide endowed with the power to cure the soldier's spiritual wounds (Harrington, 1990: 13). In a manner typical of the modernist demythisation, this correspondence is rather ironical, since Mrs. Powers, for all her kindness, is herself a victim of the war that stole her husband and she is unable to cure the protagonist's alienation.

The war and the shallow nature of society in the first half of the twentieth century amplify the individual dramas, the human being caught up in an irreversible process of alienation and seclusion. Although he returns in his native tow-n, Donald Mahon is unable to recover his identity, feeling a stranger in his own house. The problematic struggle for self-recovery is modernist in nature and combines with the theme of uprooting and the absurd human destiny in a society without principles and moral standards: "[…] twentieth-century society is seen as the enemy, encroaching upon the individual's integrity and strangling humanistic values" (Volpe, 1964: 21). Consequently, Donald Mahon is an uprooted Ulysses whose identity issue remains unresolved after he has arrived home. On the contrary, it grows even more complex. He keeps being an absence, never taken into consideration by his dear ones. While Ulysses confirms his identity

when he has recovered his family and homeland, his demythicized modern version, Donald Mahon, remains alienated until his death. Thus, the modern rewriting of the *Odyssey* proposes a reversed myth of the hero who, once home, kills his wife's suitors and reconfirms his status, as in Faulkner's novel the protagonist dies and Penelope (Cecily or Emmy) chooses one of the suitors. It is the drama of the modern man who is constantly searching for a meaning, but dies without resolving his existential issue.

The mythical level of Faulkner's novel is undeniable, as is the presence of the Homeric myth at its foundations. The concealed rewriting of the *Odyssey* is the central pillar of the novel and the arguments are supported by a number of correspondences and allusions that parody the ancient hypotext. On analysing the Homeric myth in Joyce's and Faulkner's novels, Gary Harrington comes to the conclusion that Faulkner's rewriting is obviously deliberate and continues Joyce's rewriting right from where the Irish author left it, i.e. the moment the protagonist has arrived home (Harrington, 1990: 12). In addition, the first allusion that catches the reader's attention is the character's returning home from war, only to find his wife surrounded by suitors. From this moment, the character continues his journey symbolically, because in the modern society the recovery of one's family does not automatically involve self-recovery. The author weaves the net of correspondences and makes use of ontological themes specific to literary modernism, employing mythology and parody techniques.

4. Conclusions

Having analysed how the myth of Odysseus is perceived, one can draw the conclusion that the exclusion of the heroic nature is the modernist approach of dealing with rewriting – approach that involves an ample process of desacralisation. Ulysses, the prototype of *homo viator*, is metamorphosed in the analysed novels, his heroic essence being the subject of the authors' irony. Therefore, the rewriting of canonical works – such as Homer's epic – by modernist authors involves distancing and even the deconstructing of the old system of significations.

The repudiation of the past is followed by the reconstruction based on new aesthetic values. The myth, the embryo of the Homeric epic, is desacralised, because modern society no longer believes in stories with gods and heroes and entraps the narrative thread in the ordinary day-to-day existence, in the individuals' fight with their inner phantasms.

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