

The Image of the Anti-Hero in James Joyce's Ulysses

صورة الابل في "بوليسيس لجيمس جويس

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I

The hero traditionally has such admirable traits as courage, fortitude, chivalry and patriotism. In the literary works, the hero is the leading character and the pivot around which all the characters and the events revolve. The characteristics of the hero usually reflect the cultural values of his time. Because, in each age, Man's attitudes towards himself and the world change, different images of the hero emerge.

In Greek Mythology, the hero is frequently favoured by the gods; therefore, he is himself semi-divine. The Greek hero is of princely birth and is endowed with good physique, exceptional strength, skill in athletics and battle, energy and eloquence, like Odysseus who is the hero of the *Odyssey*, long epic poem traditionally ascribed to the Greek poet Homer. Odysseus is the king of Ithaca and he is a valorous, mighty leader who took part in the siege of Troy. On his way back to Ithaca, after the end of the war, he passed through many dangerous adventures in which he encountered ruthless monsters such as Cyclopes, a giant with one eye, and Scylla, an equally dreadful monster with six head.¹

So, the Greek hero is frequently portrayed as a deified hero. The support which he has from the gods and his superhuman power enable him to transcend the human limitations. On the other hand, The Shakespearean hero is not a semi-divine, mythical figure; he is a real man. He is not favoured and directed by the gods, he is a man of will and

determination. However, he cannot be described as an ordinary man because he has many virtues which magnify and ennoble him and make him appear as a hero. He is usually of noble birth and he has high position and great prowess which make the others revere and owe him. However, he has a certain shortcoming in his character which brings about his downfall. The Shakespearean hero struggles, not with monstrous creatures, like dragons or giants, but with himself and with villains. He undergoes psychological and spiritual conflicts. Consequently, he always appears as a man of thought rather than as a man of action.²

For instance, in Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604), Othello is a victorious leader and a foremost officer who is characterized by soldierly courage and great dignity. In spite of his being an aged negro, the fair-skinned Venetian lady, Desdemona, loved and married him because she was charmed by his valour and gallantry. Othello loves his wife so excessively and so blindly that he becomes an easy prey for the suspicions and jealousy with which the devilish Iago poisoned his mind. Throughout the play, Othello is mentally agonized by the pangs of jealousy which becomes, as it is described in the play, "the green-eyed monster"³ with which he was struggling. The conflict ends up with Othello's murder of Desdemona and his subsequent suicide.

Another important Elizabethan image of the hero which is worth considering is in Christopher Marlow's *The Tragic History of Dr. Faustus* (1588). Dr. Faustus is an ambitious and learned man who has found nothing further to study because he has mastered all arts and all sciences. So, he turns to the supernatural. He conjures up the servant of Lucifer, Mephistopheles, and through him he makes a contract with Lucifer according to which he obtains twenty-four years of absolute power and pleasure in exchange for his soul. Dr. Faustus is a tragic hero, he is a man of potential greatness but he is brought down by his tragic

flaw which is his limitless ambition and hunger for the forbidden knowledge which makes him sell his soul to the devil.

Dr. Faustus who is ready to suffer the torment of hell in return for the intellectual satisfaction and access for ultimate truths depicts the spirit of the Renaissance which is dominated by the urge for limitless power, knowledge, enterprise and human freedom⁴

Dr. Faustus who challenges the existing doctrines by bartering his soul for divine knowledge is a rebel. The Romantics glorify and idealize such rebellious heroes as Dr. Faustus because they value individualism, inspiration and creativity. It is from Dr. Faustus that the main elements of the Byronic hero, which distinguishably emerges in the Romantic Period, have been driven.

The Byronic hero is the type of the hero, portrayed in the narrative poems of the Romantic poet Lord Byron, like *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-1818), and *Manfred* (1817). This heroic figure is generally dejected, isolated, brooding, deeply sensitive, mysterious, handsome and hypnotically fascinating to others. He is an individualist with an extraordinary capacity for passion. He is a restless, solitary wanderer who seeks exotic travel and wild nature, hungering for an ultimate truth to give meaning to his life in a seemingly meaningless universe. The Byronic hero is anti-social; he is proudly defiant in his attitude towards ordinary moral values and conventional social codes. He suffers greatly and he is guilty of some unspecified sin, but he bears his guilt with pride as it sets him apart from society. However, the Byronic hero remains a sympathetic figure; his nobility in grief inspires awe and his capacity for eloquence testifies to his extraordinary sensitivity.⁵

II

A very significant kind of character which indicates further development in the history of the hero and in man's view of himself is the anti-hero. The anti-hero is drastically different from the traditional hero and his attractiveness lies in his inability to perform heroic deeds. The first elements of the anti-hero can be seen clearly in the character of Don Quixote, the protagonist of the satirical romance *Don Quixote* (1605) by the sixteenth-century Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes. Don Quixote is a poor, weak and old man who is maddened by reading too many romances about the knights of chivalry till he has come to believe that he himself is a knight. Thus, Don Quixote becomes a mad adventurer who constantly comes into absurd conflicts with reality. In his fits of madness, he sees the windmills as giants, and he attacks innocent people and destroys their properties, thinking that they are lawless rascals. He also fights a servant of a traveling lady whom the insane knight has taken to be a princess kidnapped by a sorcerer; and he imagines that a hunchbacked maid in an inn is the daughter of the governor who has fallen in love with him. Through the pathetic and comic figure of Don Quixote in whose madness the quality of idealism takes on an ironic dimensions, Cervantes, of course, does not mean to disparage the knightly chivalry but to satirize

the extravagant manners of romances which depict idealized and almost perfect figures who pass through incredibly heroic encounters with incorrigible evil. Romances were never about real human beings and it never describes realistically the human life with all its imperfections.⁶

Cervantes's *Don Quixote* paves the way for the appearance of the English novel in which there is not only fiction but also a realistic depiction of contemporary life. The protagonists of the first father of the English novel Daniel Defoe are completely devoid of heroic qualities, they are rogues or "picaro."⁷ In his writings, Defoe portrays with

naturalness and authenticity the lives of thieves, highwaymen and prostitutes. For instance, *Moll Flanders* (1722) is "a sociological novel dealing with the making of a criminal."⁸ It is written in the form of a confession of a bad woman who tells her own life-story which begins in jail and which is full of disastrous marriages, scheming, cajoling, and thieving. Defoe individualizes the character of this woman and throughout the novel much emphasis is placed on the effects of the environment on her character. So, Defoe makes the reader concentrate his attention on an ordinary character in a completely realistic setting; not on the exotic and the bizarre of a fictional figure.

Another important novelist who adds more modifications to the concept of the hero is Laurence Sterne in his *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767). The title of the novel leads us to expect that we, as in *Moll Flanders*, will be introduced to a man and his circle of acquaintances to find out what kind of person he is and what his story has been. Surprisingly nothing of this happens and throughout the novel, which consists of seven volumes, little is heard about Tristram's life.⁹ The novel is concerned with the events which take place in Tristram family circle at the time of his birth, and the hero is not born until the fourth volume. Whenever we think that the story is about to develop, Sterne introduces an incredible digression -- a long piece of Latin or a blank sheet or a page with a marbled design or a collection of asterisks. Suddenly the young Tristram disappears from the novel which ends with his uncle's account of his abortive attempt to woo a widow.

Sterne has obviously turned the concept of the hero upside down. In this eccentric novel, which is narrated by Tristram himself, Sterne tries to show how his hero is not in control of his mind.¹⁰ Tristram Shandy foreshadows the hero of the modern novel who always finds commitment to ideals difficult or impossible because of his sense of helplessness in a

world over which he has no power and whose values he suspects; therefore, he accepts his final status as an outcast.

III

Ulysses (1922)

Ulysses is a novel by James Joyce (1882-1941). Joyce is an Irish novelist who holds a unique position in Modern Literature. Because Joyce wants to re-create a modern version of the *Odyssey* in which he epitomizes his vision of the modern hero, he calls his work *Ulysses* which is taken from the name of the hero of Homer's the *Odyssey*, Ulysses, (he is also called Odysseus). Surprisingly, *Ulysses* has nothing to do with the Greek work except in its form. Joyce's *Ulysses* consists of eighteen chapters; each corresponds to an episode in Homer's the *Odyssey*. It also incorporates an elaborate structure of allusions to the Homeric epic.¹¹

Ulysses records the peregrinations and wanderings of Leopold Bloom, a Jewish advertisement canvasser, who is to be the modern Ulysses. *Ulysses* which is composed of 933 pages records meticulously what happens to Bloom in a single day, 16 June 1904. Like any other day, this day is not distinguished by any heroic or important event. As Bloom wanders from place to place, he eventually meets Stephen Dedalus, a young poet and the hero of Joyce's earlier autobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). During the course of the novel, local landmarks are visited including a public bath, a newspaper office, a cemetery, the national Library, a maternity hospital, a brothel and other various public houses. The novel ends with Bloom's unfaithful wife, Molly, as she drowns in the bed, contemplating her lovers.

It is possible to read the book as a story about two characters and the way in which the disconnected incidents of a random day brought them together. Obviously, there is almost no plot, no story and no conflict. This is simply because *Ulysses* is not a novel of events; it is a psychological novel in which the chief action and the fundamental narrative do take place in the minds of the characters. Therefore, throughout the novel, we are allowed to enter directly into the characters' minds through the technique of "the stream of consciousness" which refers to the depiction of the thoughts and feelings that flow through the mind of a character with no apparent logic. *Ulysses* is often described as being chaotic and difficult to interpret because it deals with the human psyche which is unformed, undisciplined, capricious, fluid and free of the conventional time and place concepts.¹² For example, in the following quotations, Joyce first describes Bloom as he meticulously examines his nails; then he abruptly presents his inner feelings and thoughts, aroused by the disquieting sight of his wife's lover, Blazes Boylan:

Mr Bloom reviewed the nails of his left hand, then those of his right hand. The nails, yes. Is there anything more in him that they she sees? Fascination. Worst man in Dublin. That keeps him alive.¹⁶

Furthermore, Joyce in *Ulysses* substantiates the theories of the Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) who maintains that the human psyche is divided into the "Id" which is the instinctual energy and the "Ego" which is the rational self. The "Ego" is part of the "Super Ego" which Freud defines as the "prolongation of the parental influence and a defender of moral sanctions."¹⁴ Like Freud, Joyce holds that the unconscious mind (the "Id") is what represents the real man, the man of instincts whereas the conscious mind the ("Ego") stands for the artificial man, the man of conventions and expediency.

Joyce concentrates on unveiling the subconscious mind of his characters. Consequently, many are the times in which they appear as immoral and perverted figures who repudiate morality, society and religion. Obviously, Joyce puts much emphasis on the animal part of human nature in the portrayal of his characters. Certain repulsive physical processes, and sensual appetites and declinations are described in detail in nauseating passages which are based on an incongruous view of the human body. *Ulysses* is accused of being obscene and indecent since Joyce magnifies the vulgarity and ignobility of mankind and dwells on nasty matters. Consequently the novel becomes replete with morbid and sickening descriptions of Man. Such appalling portrait of Man makes some critics, like Stuart Gilbert, liken the characters of the novel to the Yahoos that are presented by Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) in the Fourth Book of *Gulliver's Travels*. The Yahoos are disgusting apelike brutes that are characterized by fiery sensuality and extreme filthiness.¹⁵ Joyce, in this respect, is also reminiscent of the French naturalist Emile Zola (1841-1900) who always portrays his character as organism of flesh, blood and nerves whose course is determined by their animalistic instincts.¹⁶

The hero of the novel who is supposed to be the modern Ulysses is Leopold Bloom. On Bloom all the despicable attributes are heaped. He is a sensual, lazy, irresponsible and feeble figure without any particular talent. He has masochistic tendencies and other unacceptable sexual inclinations. Worst of all, He is a cuckolded husband. He is quite aware of his wife's infidelity, but he forgives her as he thinks that her betrayal is relatively harmless. At the end of his journey, the Greek hero Ulysses slays the suitors of his wife, Penelope, while Bloom returns peacefully to his bed where he can easily read the signs of sexual intercourse, and he sleeps contentedly with the imprint of his wife's recent lover.

Bloom is characterized by not only physical deviance but also emotional estrangement. His mood is darkened by a sense of the endless, futile routine of his life. He feels that:

Things go on the same; day after day; squids of police marching out, back;
trams in, out. . . No one is anything. . . Dull, gloomy: hate this hour.
Feel as if I had been eaten and spewed.

(chap. 8, p.208)

His alienation is caused by the death in infancy of his son, Rudy, the suicide of his father and his humiliation as a cuckolded husband. He also suffers from the feeling of being, by virtue of his Jewishness, an outsider. However, he is cut off from the Jewish faith and he has only a theoretical knowledge of Hebrew. He is frequently humiliated by the Irish citizens since he is regarded as a rootless recruit to the race and religion of Ireland, from which many traditionally national heroes sprang out.

His wife views him as a dirty-minded masochist who deliberately connived at her casual adultery. Molly is a sluttish, Spanish Jewess of highly sexual nature. She is, of course, the opposite of Penelope who decisively resists all the solicitations of the lusty wooers and remains absolutely faithful to her husband during his absence which lasts for twenty years. On the other hand, Mrs. Bloom betrays her husband once he leaves his house. She probably tries, through her erotic experiences, to escape from her frustrating life. The novel closes with the gross, sexual fancies of this terrible woman. She lies in bed besides her husband recalling her lovers one after another. Some of her thoughts are dedicated to Stephen Dedalus whom Bloom has described to her. She fondly welcomes the proposal that he should lodge with them, and she begins to fancy herself being the beloved of this sensitive, young poet. She

compares him to her recent boisterous and ill-mannered lover, Blazes
Boylan:

No that's no way for him has he no manner nor no refinement nor no nothing in his nature slapping us behind like that. . . because I didn't call him Hugh the ignoramus that doesn't know poetry from a cabbage.

(chap. 18, pp.923-924)

Stephen Dedalus is an arrogant intellectual, who is tortured by a vast, unrealized ambition. He is hardened and embittered by his failure and humiliating poverty. He describes himself as "a conscious rational animal proceeding syllogistically from the known to the unknown. . . upon the incertitude of the void." (chap. 17, pp.817-818) He repudiates Ireland, the church and his family, and he works in Paris as a teacher of history which he views as "a nightmare from which I am trying to awake." (chap. 2, p.42) The occasion of his return to Ireland is the death of his mother whose phantom often haunts him as he is tormented by his remorse for refusing to gratify his mother's last wish which is to kneel at her deathbed and pray for her:

Her glazing eyes, staring out of death to shake and bend my soul. On me alone. The ghostcandle to light her agony. Ghostlylight on the tortured face. Her hoarse loud breath rattling in horror, while all prayed on their knees. Her eyes on me to strike me down.

(chap. 1, p.10)

Stephen is the counterpart of Ulysses' son Telemachus. He becomes the spiritual son of Bloom with whom he shares the sense of spiritual isolation. He wanders with Bloom, seeking to impose order and meaning on his sterile and chaotic life. At the end of their journey, they return to their starting-point and neither Stephen nor Bloom has apparently found any answer to the bewildering sense of futility, frustration, desperation, desolation and loneliness which overwhelms them.

In *Ulysses*, Joyce presents a very pessimistic view of human nature which denies most human aspirations. Bloom, Molly and Stephen are certainly anti-heroes; they are satirical figures exemplifying the degeneration and collapse of the Western Civilization. These lost and solitary figures are "a representation of what the heroic shrinks to in an age of *mufliisme*."¹⁷

It is worth mentioning that some recent critics, like Marelyn French, consider Bloom's ability to come to terms with his wife's betrayal as a moral heroism. French describes Bloom as the unconquered hero who, through accepting Molly's affairs with other men, does slaughter the suitors. Another critic who praises Bloom is Sydney Bolt; he regards him as the embodiment of "the classic Aristotelian virtues of moderation, temperance and prudence with the stoic virtue of resignation."¹⁸ Ruth Ellman also considers Bloom's submission to the humiliation of the others as a renunciation of violence and aggression, and she hails Bloom as "a persistent opponent of chauvinism and force".¹⁹ Of course, such opinions in contemporary criticism reflect the perversion and disintegration of the values of heroism in Modern Age.

IV

Modern Age is rich with many critical issues and radical transformations. Heroism is one of the basic concepts which has taken new dimensions to represent the spirit of the age and its problems. The image of the modern hero is drastically different from the traditional one. In modern novel, there is almost no character which can be described as being heroic. An ordinary, unheroic protagonist is often portrayed in twentieth-century literature, to the extent of being a stereotype in modern fiction. The emergence of the anti-hero comes as a result of many

modifications which the image of the hero has undergone throughout the literary ages.

The destructive influences which contribute to the degeneration of the image of the modern hero are highlighted in Joyce's *Ulysses*. Leopold Bloom is a typical anti-hero. He is an outcast and an object of ridicule and derision. He is a pathetic and comic figure whose interest lies in his incapability of performing any deeds of bravery, like his resignation to the adulteries of his wife. Stephen Dedalus also exemplifies the modern man whose faith in himself is undermined by the uncertainty which has overwhelmed the age, and subsequently he finds himself totally lost in a spiritual and moral wasteland.

The shattering of the image of the hero and the emergence of the anti-hero in modern novel is an indication of the authors' sense of responsibility and sincerity. In hard times when all the heroic values are disintegrating, Man is in an urgent need of a hero to be his trustworthy guide, but he also has to be conscious of his defects in order to be able to overcome them. This is what the writers try to help him to do through vividly presenting an authentic and realistic depiction of life with all its imperfections and shortcomings.

Notes

¹W. H. Stanford, "The Untypical Hero," *Homer: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. George Steiner and Robert Fagles (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1962), p.122.

²John Burgess Wilson, *English Literature: A Survey for Students* (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1958), p. 63.

³William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. Lovis B. Wright (New York: Washington Squire Press, 1959), p. 102.

⁴Wilson, p. 93.

⁵J. R. Watson, *English Poetry of the Romantic Period 1789-1830*, (New York: Longman Group Limited, 1985), p.94.

⁶W. H. Auden, "The Ironic Hero," *Cervantes: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Lowry Nelson (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1962), p.69.

⁷"Picaro" is a Spanish word which means good for nothing. The "picaro" is the main character in the "picaresque" novels which present a pessimistic view of the possibility of human goodness; their view of life is harsh, mean and cynical. Gray, p.157.

⁸Walter Allen, *The English Novel* (Australia: Penguin Books, 1954), p.41.

⁹Robert Bernard, *A short History of English Literature* (Norway: Universitetsforlaget, 1984), p.79.

¹⁰Sterne is writing in accordance with the theory of the philosopher Lock that the association of ideas in the mind is an irrational process. Sterne tries to explain to his reader how Man cannot think logically because he is not in control of his thoughts that do not follow each other in orderly sequence as memory always makes the mind digress. Allen, p. 78.

¹¹Patrick Parrinder, *James Joyce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 50.

¹²Robert Humphrey, *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), p. 90.

¹³James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: The Bodley Head, 1960) chap. 6, p. 115. Page numbers are hereafter incorporated in this edition.

¹⁴Sigmund Freud, "*The Structure of the Unconscious*" in *the Modern Tradition*, ed. Richard Ellmann and Charles Fiedelson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.560.

¹⁵Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce's Ulysses* (A Peregrine Books, 1963), p. 31.

¹⁶Naturalism is based on the Darwinian view of Man, according to which, Man is viewed as a descendent of the lower animal whose life

is a brutal, endless struggle for survival which ends up with the survival of the fittest. Lilian R. Furst & Peter N. Skrine, *Naturalism* (London: Methuen & Co., 1971) p. 16.

¹⁷Walter Allen, *The English Novel* (Australia: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 353.

¹⁸Sydney Bolt, *A Preface to James Joyce* (Longman Group UK Limited, 1981), p. 149.

¹⁹As quoted by Parrinder, p. 189.

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