

The People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research



University M'hamed Bougara at Boumerdes
Faculty of Sciences
Department of Foreign Languages

Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Magister

Major:

Language and Literature

Option:

Language and English Literature

by **BOURAHLA Djelloul**

Title

Modernism in James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*: A Comparative Study

Defended: 10/05/08

Examination Panel:

| | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Prof. M'hamed BENSEMMANE | University of Algiers | Chairman |
| Prof. Si Aberrahmane ARAB | University of Boumerdes | Supervisor |
| Prof. Bouteldja RICHE | University of Tizi Ouzou | External Examiner |
| M.C. Hocine MAOUI | University of Annaba | External Examiner |

Academic Year: 2007-2008

To the memory of:

My grandmother Baya Sabi

My grandfather Belkhir Bourahla

God Bless Them

Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to challenge the orthodox view of Modernism as an art dismissive of politics, history and social commitment and as exclusively oriented towards style, technique and cosmopolitanism. By comparing James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, we aim at redefining European and African Modernism through taking the colonial and postcolonial context into account and employing a Marxist critical approach to assess the political implications of the Modernist mode of writing.

The first Chapter is a review of the traditional and contemporary perspectives on Modernism as a mode of writing and as a worldview.

The second chapter deals with the historical, social, cultural and personal backgrounds of James Joyce and Wole Soyinka.

In the third chapter, we discuss the form of Joyce's *Ulysses*. We find that the different innovative techniques in the novel evince a subversive political vision.

The fourth chapter studies the content of Joyce's *Ulysses*. We discuss those aspects of *Ulysses* that can be read as a diagnosis and criticism of social ills brought to Ireland by British imperialism, capitalism and the Catholic Church.

The fifth chapter is concerned with the form of Soyinka's *The Interpreters*. We contend that the salient features of Soyinka's style are motivated by context. We explore Soyinka's language as part of his critique of 'late capitalism' and neo-colonialism.

In the sixth chapter, we analyse the content of *The Interpreters*. We find that Soyinka shows a high concern with the socio-historical background of post-independence Nigeria essentially through capturing the state of disillusionment that characterizes his society.

In the conclusion, we find that the Modernist mode of writing is highly capable of producing powerful subversive political statements through its form and content, but that this subversion can have its limitations and little political impact as the ordinary reader is not equipped to appreciate it and as the two writers fail to suggest alternatives to the order they undermine.

Abstract

Le but de cette thèse est de remettre en question la conception orthodoxe du Modernisme en tant que mouvement artistique dédaigneux de la politique, l'histoire et d'engagement social et comme exclusivement concerné par le style, la technique et le cosmopolitisme. En comparant le roman *Ulysses* de James Joyce au roman *The Interpreters* de Wole Soyinka, nous visons à redéfinir le Modernisme européen et africain en tenant compte du contexte colonial et postcolonial et en adoptant une approche critique néo-Marxiste pour évaluer l'impact politiques de l'écriture Moderniste.

Le premier chapitre est une révision des perspectives traditionnelles et contemporaines du Modernisme en tant qu'écriture et vision du monde.

Le deuxième chapitre rappelle les circonstances historiques, sociales, culturelles et personnelles de James Joyce et de Wole Soyinka.

Dans le troisième chapitre, nous analysons la forme d'*Ulysses* de Joyce. Nous constatons que les techniques novatrices du roman font montre d'une vision politique subversive.

Le quatrième chapitre explore le contenu d'*Ulysses* et faisons ressortir sa démarche diagnostique et critique vis à vis des maux sociaux infligés à l'Irlande par l'impérialisme britannique, le capitalisme et l'Église catholique.

Le cinquième chapitre analyse la forme de *The Interpreters* de Soyinka et faisons ressortir la centralité du contexte dans le texte. Nous étudions le langage romanesque de Soyinka en tant que critique du capitalisme et du néo-colonialisme.

Dans le sixième chapitre, nous traitons du contenu de *The Interpreters*. Nous constatons que Soyinka ne se désintéresse nullement au contexte socio-historique du Nigeria indépendant, et cela essentiellement par son aptitude à rendre l'état de désenchantement latent.

Dans la conclusion, nous montrons que l'écriture Moderniste à une capacité réelle d'engagement politique subversif par sa forme et son contenu, mais que cette subversion peut avoir des limites et peu d'impact politique si le lecteur n'est équipé pour l'apprécier et étant donné que les deux auteurs n'offrent aucune alternative à l'ordre qu'ils attaquent.

ملخص

الغرض من هذه الأطروحة هو إعادة النظر في النظرة المعهودة لمذهب التحديث كفن موجه حصريا نحو الأسلوب و التقنيات وكغير مبالي بالسياسة، التاريخ و البعد الإجتماعي . نسعى من خلال مقارنة 'يوليس' للإيرلندي جيمس جويس و رواية 'المؤولون' لول شوينكا إلى إعادة صياغة المذهب التحديثي الأوروبي و الأفريقي و ذلك باخذ بعين الإعتبار النقد الكولونيالي و مابعد كولونيالي و إعتمادا على النظرية النقدية الماركسية لتوضيح التفاعلات السياسية للكتابة التحديثية.

الفصل الأول يراجع وجهات النظر التقليدية و المعاصرة للمذهب التحديثي ككتابة ونظرة إلى العالم.

الفصل الثاني يتمحور حول البعد التاريخي، الإجتماعي، الثقافي و الشخصي لجيمس جويس و ول شوينكا.

في الفصل الثالث نتبع قراءة شكلية لرواية جويس 'يوليس'، و نجد ان التقنيات المستخدمة في هذه الرواية لها غرض سياسي تخريبي و مناوؤ للسلطة ايا كانت.

في الفصل الرابع نقوم بتحليل مضمون "يوليس". نناقش في هذا الفصل تلك الخصائص التي يمكن قرائتها او اعتبارها معالجة للأمراض الإجتماعية المجلوبة إلى إيرلندا من طرف الإستعمار الإنجليزي، الرأسمالية و الكنيسة الكاثوليكية.

في الفصل الخامس نأخذ نظرة مفصلة في شكل رواية "المؤولون" لول شوينكا. نعتبر ان العناصر المكونة لأسلوب شوينكا مستوحاة من البعد التاريخي، كما نبين أن اللغة الروائية المستعملة من طرف شوينكا تتحدر من موقفه المناهض للرأسمالية و الإستعمار الجديد.

في الفصل السادس ندرس مضمون "المؤولون". نستشف أن شوينكا يولي اهتماما كبيرا للبعد السوسيوثقافي لتجربتها المستقلة و هذا خصوصا من خلال إبراز حالة الإحباط التي عرفها مجتمعه.

في الخاتمة نجد أن الكتابة التحديثية قادرة، و بشكل كبير، على صياغة تصريحات سياسية قوية من خلال الشكل و المضمون، لكن نجد أن هذه القوة السياسية المناوؤة للسلطة القائمة قد تكون لها حدود و تأثير سياسي محدود إذا كان القارئ غير مؤهل لفهمها او فك رموزها و نظرا لأن الكاتبين لا يقترحان أي بديل للنظام الذي يهاجمان.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is entirely the result of my investigation and that due reference and acknowledgement are made, whenever necessary, to the work of other researchers.

30/09/2007

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank God Almighty for blessing me with the passion for knowledge and scholarship and for giving me the strength and will to further my studies.

This work would not have been possible without the support and valuable guidance of Professor Si Abderrahman Arab under whose supervision I chose this topic and brought it to completion. He taught me a lot about writing and about developing confidence.

I am equally indebted to my teachers Pr. Bouteldja Riche and Dr. Nadjia Amrane, for their instructive and much needed seminars during the 2004-2005 academic year.

Next, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my parents, my two brothers Mourad and Brahim, for their unconditional moral and financial support during the composition of this thesis and throughout my student life.

I am also indebted to all my friends especially Mouhamed Boulifa, Abdelhamid Barkat, Dif Abdullah, Omar Boulifa, Allawa Riadh, Adel Massoudi and Taha Maghrebi; I owe them particular thanks for their unfaltered encouragement during the difficult moments I went through when writing this dissertation and during my undergraduate studies.

I would like to express my deepest thanks to my family in Algiers, especially my cousin Hakim, for warmly hosting and for their support during my studies in Algiers and Boumerdes.

Special thanks are also due to all my classmates of First Year Magister class (2004-2005 academic year) and to all members of the Department of Foreign Languages of M'hamed Bougara University at Boumerdes.

Finally, I would like to thank Maxime Foerster for reading and commenting upon modest work and Allen Bellot for providing me with online library membership.

INTRODUCTION

African literature, since its coming of age (in the fifties and sixties) showed particular interest in modernist techniques. From Kofi Awoonor's stream-of-consciousness novel *This Earth, my Brother* to Ayi Kwei Armah's symbolism in *Why Are We So Blest*, to Kateb Yacine's fragmented form in *Nedjma* and to Wole Soyinka's 'mythic method' in *The Interpreters*; African writers have appropriated the themes and styles of Modernism.

This trend has been given controversial interpretations. On the one hand, some critics consider the appropriation of modernist techniques by African novelists and poets as irrelevant. In *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* for example, the three Nigerian critics Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, and Ihechukwu Madubuike assume that poetry and fiction by contemporaries of Wole Soyinka is

a stiff, pale, anemic, academic poetry, slavishly imitative of 20th-century European modernism, with its weak preciousness, ostentatious erudition, and dunghill piles of esoterica and obscure allusions, all totally cut off from the vital nourishment of our African traditions and home soil...¹

They also accuse critics, Africans and Western alike, of encouraging these 'euromodernist' writers to perform 'within the canons of that tradition and that tradition alone, and to abandon the devices and approaches of African poetry for those of European modernism.'²

¹ Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike, *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*. Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1983, p3.

² Ibid, p156.

On the other hand, some other critics have welcomed the presence of modernist techniques in African literature as appropriate. In his *The African Novel and the Modernist Tradition* for instance, David I.Ker argues that “African novelists have taken full advantage of the experimentation that modernism offers to tackle their own ‘crisis of culture’”³, in a sense that:

...modernism’s consciousness of disorder, despair and anarchy is the perfect medium for the African novelist for conveying on the one hand his nostalgia for the past, with all its imperfections and on the other hand his bitterly ironic indictments of the present [...] I accept the definition of Bradbury and MacFarlane who see modernism as ‘the movement toward sophistication and mannerism, towards introspection, technical display and internal self-scepticism.’⁴

The major flaw in both views of African Modernism lies in the fact that both consider ‘art for art sake’ as the determining factor of their standpoints. In fact, the ‘supporters’ of the African Modernist novel rely on the received New Critical readings of European modernist texts, which focus on the text itself and on its technical display and ignore specific political and historical facts in favour of an all-encompassing disapproval of the modern world as opposed to a yearning for a better pastoral past. The detractors of the Modernist African novel seem to be well aware of such ‘failing’, but have offered no particular alternative, such as comparing European and African Modernist texts through incorporating history and politics, and opted rather for a rejection of the Modernist African novel all at once considering it a new form of colonial subjection.

³ David I.Ker, *The African Novel and the Modernist Tradition*. New York: Peter Lang, 2000, p1.

⁴ Ibid.

In interpreting the appropriation of Modernist techniques by African novelists, Lewis Nkosi points that the definition of Modernism as an art which seeks ‘not so much the oddity of the subject-matter as the deliberate focusing of our attention on technique as interesting in itself’ and implies that New Criticism therefore is ‘too extreme to apply without qualification to the specifically African conditions.’⁵ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in their classical *The Empire Writes Back* make the suggestion that analysing Post-colonial works from a New Critical perspective is inappropriate:

...New Criticism had a profoundly negative impact, too, rendering its effects on post-colonial culture deeply ambiguous. The assimilation of post-colonial writers into a ‘metropolitan’ tradition retarded consideration of their works within an appropriate cultural context, and so seriously militated against the development of a ‘native’ or indigenous theory. This tendency was consolidated by the New Criticism’s misleading claims to objectivity. It was also, of course, the critical practice imposed by a British education system throughout the colonial world at a time when many post-colonial literatures were undergoing rapid development and needed consideration in the context of their own cultures. In this respect New Criticism prevented them from being seen as innovative, distinctive, and subversive of imported European values.⁶

Such misgivings, I would like to suggest, are applicable to European Modernist texts as well. What we need to do first then, is to bypass the New Critical (and even early Marxist) account of Modernism as an ahistorical and apolitical movement. Indeed it is irrelevant to compare African Modernist texts to their European counterparts only on the basis of style and technique or under such loose suggestion that European Modernist

⁵ Lewis Nkosi, *Tasks and Masks. Themes and Styles of African Literature*. Harlow: Longman, 1981, p54.

⁶ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*. New York: Routledge, 1989, pp 160-1.

techniques came as a reaction to the bleakness, darkness, alienation and disintegration of the modern age.

For the purpose at hand I have elected to compare James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), with Wole Soyinka's novel *The Interpreters* (1965). By comparing these two novels, I intend, by the same token, to make a reassessment of European Modernism in the light of African Modernist literature.

Canonized in the 1950s by the New Critics, Joyce and his novel *Ulysses* have been represented as the ultimate fulfilment of the 'art for art's sake' doctrine and as the expression through style of the 'the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history', in T.S Eliot's words, characteristics which have been attributed since then to the whole Modernist movement. Such an orthodox view dismissed any political, anti-colonial, social or historical reading of his works.

It is only in recent years that the political potential of Joyce's writings has began to be appreciated. But as M.Keith Booker notes in concluding his *Joyce, Colonialism and Capitalism*, it is only through comparing Joyce with African literature that the most important step in reassessing Joyce and European Modernism can be made:

Given the strength and the extent of New Critical appropriations of Joyce and other modernist writers during the Cold War, the project of recovering the original political potential of Joyce's texts is only just beginning. And the efforts by critics such as Kiberd, Nolan, Duffy, Cheng, and Trevor Williams to recover that potential within the context of postcolonialism should certainly be applauded. But we should also be careful to recognize that these efforts are but a first step and that much work still needs to be done. For one thing, we need to read Joyce closely and carefully alongside other

postcolonial writers in order to be able to assess both the similarities and the differences between Joyce's work and that of postcolonial writers from Africa and the Caribbean.⁷

At another but connected level, by appropriating the Modernist mode of writing, African writers inherit the old problematic of audience associated with the Modernist movement: 'Could I write for an audience that had never read a novel in the same way as I write for an audience that had read or was aware of James Joyce, Joseph Conrad, Wole Soyinka or Ayi Kwei Armah?'⁸ asks the African writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. It is the task of this dissertation then to answer the following question: is Modernism, be it European or African, an appropriate mode of writing for a popular readership? And does it, therefore, touch people's daily lives?

Our methodology will be mainly based on Postcolonial theory and contemporary Marxist literary criticism. In analysing the two texts I shall conform to the following definition that Terry Eagleton suggests in *Marxism and Literary Theory*:

Marxist criticism is not merely a 'sociology of literature', concerned with how novels get published and whether they mention the working class. Its aim is to *explain* the literary work more fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and meanings. But it also means grasping those forms, styles and meanings as the products of a particular history.⁹

In our discussion of the two novels then, we will stress the inseparable relationship of form and content and argue that both are subversive, thus political. We will therefore divide our analysis of *Ulysses* and *The Interpreters* into two parts: the first concerned

⁷ M.Keith Booker, *Ulysses, Capitalism, and Colonialism. Reading Joyce after the Cold War*. London : Greenwood Press, 2000, p187.

⁸ Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind : The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1986, p75.

⁹ Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. Londobn : Routldge Classics, 2002, p3.

with the formal characteristics of the works and everything related to technique, language and style. In this section, we shall pursue the following order of discussion: the use of the stream-of-consciousness technique and the interior monologue, time treatment, and the use of myth and archetypes. In the second part, we shall focus on the content of the work. History, politics, imperialism, anti-colonialism, decolonization, capitalism and the bourgeoisie, among others, will be the key words of our discussion. Such elements will be investigated mainly through characters and characterization, dialogues, and plot.

We shall also read the two novels in the light of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. With its amalgamation of postcolonial and Marxist thought, Fanon's work is most suitable for analysing the Irish society of *Ulysses* and the Nigerian society of *The Interpreters* under (neo)colonial, petty-bourgeois and capitalist dominance.

In addition, intertextuality, analogy and influence shall be the beacons that will help us clear out way throughout this study. Indeed, by means of comparative analysis, we shall establish Joyce's influence on Soyinka and bring out relations of analogy between the two through a pertinent exploration of their historical and social backgrounds.

Our dissertation will be divided into six chapters: Chapter I is devoted to a disquisition on Modernism as mode of writing and as a worldview. In this chapter we shall first give a review of the Modernist techniques and their significance from a (broadly) New Critical point of view, then give an account of the most recent developments in the

assessment of literary Modernism; Chapter II deals with the historical, social, cultural and biographical backdrops of the two writers and their respective works. Chapter III is concerned with the form of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Chapter IV with its content. Chapter V is devoted to the form of Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* while its content shall be discussed in Chapter VI.

This study is a contribution to the efforts made in recent years towards the historicization and politicalization of modernist writers and texts. Although we find modernist texts highly capable of subversive statements through their form and content, we are skeptical as to the validity of such political vision since they do not seem to offer any possible substitutes for the establishments they subvert and since their notorious difficulty makes them inaccessible to the masses.

Chapter I

Modernism as a Mode of Writing and as a World View, Old and New Perspectives

In *Writing Degree Zero*, Roland Barthes makes a clear distinction between style and mode of writing or what he calls *écriture*:

A language and style are blind forces; a mode of writing is an act of historical solidarity. A language and style are objects, a mode of writing is a function: it is the relationship between creation and society, the literary language transformed by its social finality, form considered as a human institution and thus linked to the great crises of history.¹

This third dimension of form is not concerned then with the use of language by a particular writer or in a given book, but rather with the general and unifying characteristics of a group of works experiencing similar historical and social circumstances. It is what we tend to call 'movement', of the kind we broadly call 'Romanticism', 'Naturalism', 'Realism' or 'Post- colonialism'.

A movement, however, has historical limits: it begins and ends; it rises and falls. A mode of writing has no such chronological limitations. It springs out of a movement but does not cease with its death. It may be taken up by another writer or generation of writers at another epoch, who consider it the most suitable for their purposes, without, however, suggesting the rebirth of the movement but rather an adaptation, a matter of 'new wine in old bottles.'

Following up the Barthesian meaning of *écriture* and on the theory of binary opposition (metonymy/metaphor) propounded by Roman Jakobson, David Lodge, in his *The Modes of Modern Writing*, suggests that the modernist mode of writing is based on metaphor or substitution as opposed to the realist mode of fiction which is based on metonymy or contiguity. A modernist writer, for example, uses an interior or symbolic landscape; the world is structured symbolically or metaphorically as

¹ Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture, suivi de Nouveaux Essais critiques*. Seuil : Paris, 1953, p8.

opposed to Realist representations of the external world as a physical and historical experience. The structure of *The Interpreters* and *Ulysses*, as will be shown in detail in Chapter 3, is metaphorical, being based on substitution and similarity particularly through the use of myth.

Yet Lodge does not exclude metonymy in Modernist writing. He admits that Modernist writing uses both metonymy and metaphor. In *Ulysses* for example, Stephen's stream-of-consciousness is metaphoric; Bloom's is metonymic. Stephen's flow of thoughts "proceeds by perceived similarities and substitutions"², his stream-of-consciousness is directed by his intellectual knowledge, often the relation and transition between one idea to the other is symbolic and rather obscure. Bloom's thought "proceeds by associating items that are contiguous rather than, as Stephen's, similar"³. His stream-of-consciousness on the other hand is directed by his senses, by what he sees or hears. One physical experience, then, leads on to another.

Such a dual dimension of Modernist writing is part of the hybrid nature of Modernism. Modernism is a 'melting pot'; the movement of movements, Robert Scholes in an article entitled '*In the Brothel of Modernism*' says:

I now see modernism as a late--perhaps the last?--phase of the Romantic movement in art and letters. From Romanticism, modernism gets its emphasis on originality, on the need to make things "new"--to be perpetually innovative at the level of both form and content. And from Romanticism modernism also gets its sense of the artist as a kind of secular priest or prophet, whose role it is to purify the language of the tribe or free vision from the shackles of older perspectives, and whose struggle to accomplish this is held to be interesting in itself. And finally, it is from Romanticism

² David Lodge, '*The Language of Modern Fiction*' in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane eds *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature: 1890-1930.*, London: Penguin, 1991, p485.

³ *Ibid*, p486.

that modernism gets its special form of classicism, an emphasis on myths and archetypes.⁴

Equally Modernism owes much to Realism and Naturalism. *Ulysses* is the best example of this cross-relation of movements. It depicts, for example, the city of Dublin in the most realistic way; so much so that, as Joyce declared, if the Dublin of 1904 were completely destroyed, the book would serve as a perfect means to resituate it. In its extensive concern with details, the book is also highly naturalistic while in its richness of association and cross-referencing and in the density of its language it is a symbolist work.

Modernism, nevertheless, has its own specifics that make it quite different in style and thought from the other movements. Actually, it is generally defined as a reaction to 19th century Realism and its dominant conventions. Its birth is usually linked to the ideas that prevailed at the beginning of the 20th century. Christopher Butler says in an article entitled '*Joyce, Modernism and Postmodernism*':

Modernist artists at the beginning of the century were to a large degree moved to this unprecedented freedom and confidence in stylistic experiment by what they saw as radically new ideas, current in that period, concerning consciousness, time, and the nature of knowledge, which were to be found in the work of Nietzsche, Bergson, Freud, Einstein, Croce, Weber and others.⁵

In fact such proclamations as Nietzsche's 'God is dead', Mathew Arnold's poetry as substitute to religion, or Freud's discovery of new aspects of the mind which cannot be controlled by the human being, all encouraged literary artists to engage in

⁴ Robert Scholes, "In the Brothel of Modernism", www.rci.rutgers.edu/~marinos.html

⁵ Christopher Butler, "Joyce, modernism, and post modernism" in Derek Attridge ed., *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p259.

experimentation and new methods of writing different from those practised by nineteenth century realist writers.

To put it simply, much of modernist literature tends towards what Barthes calls in *S/Z* the *scriptible* or the ‘writerly’, in opposition to the *lisible* or ‘readerly’ which characterizes 19th century Realism and much of the classical texts. The ‘readerly’ does not require much effort on the reader to be understood; the ‘writerly’ text, like *Ulysses*, *To the Lighthouse* and much of the modernist works, demands much more effort on the part of the reader as it is filled with symbols, metaphors and allusions.⁶ The author of a ‘writerly’ text tends to draw our attention to the techniques he is using; ‘to lay bare the device’, ‘to defamiliarize’ the form, to use the Russian Formalist’s terms. Thus form becomes more important than content. The ‘writerly’/modernist text, then, becomes self-conscious, a living whole concerned with style and technique as vehicles of meaning and experience; as Mark Schorer argues in ‘*Technique as discovery*’:

What we need in fiction is a devoted fidelity to every technique which will help us to discover and to evaluate our subject matter, and more than to discover the amplification of meaning of which our subject matter is capable.⁷

On Joyce’s *Ulysses* he adds:

If we read *Ulysses* with more satisfaction than any other novel of this century, it is because its author holds an attitude towards technique and technical scrutiny of subject matter, which enabled him to order, within a single work and with super coherence the greatest amount of our experience.⁸

⁶ Barthes, however, admits that a ‘readerly’ text can be read as a writerly text by suggesting some conceptual means by which one could do so.

⁷ Mark Schorer, ‘*Technique as Discovery*’, in David Lodge *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: Reader*. London: Longman, 1998, p388.

⁸ *Ibid*, p396.

David Lodge in *The Modes of Modern Writing* sums up much of these techniques by describing the modernist style as:

[...] experimental or innovatory in form, exhibiting marked deviations from existing modes of discourse, literary and non-literary. Next, it is much concerned with consciousness, and also with the subconscious or unconscious workings of the human mind. Hence the structure of external 'objective' events essential to narrative art in traditional poetics is diminished in scope and scale, or presented selectively and obliquely, in order to make room for introspection, analysis, reflection and reverie. Frequently, therefore, a modern novel has no real 'beginning', since it plunges us into a flowing stream of experience with which we gradually familiarize ourselves by a process of inference and association; its ending is usually 'open' or ambiguous, leaving the reader in doubt as to the characters' final destiny. By way of compensation for the weakening of narrative structure and unity, other modes of aesthetic ordering become more prominent –such as allusion to or imitation of literary models, or mythical archetypes; or repetition-with-variation of motifs, images, symbols, a technique often called 'rhythm', '*leitmotif*', or 'spatial form'. Lastly, modern fiction eschews the straight chronological ordering of its material, and the use of a reliable, omniscient and intrusive narrator. It employs, instead, either a single, limited point of view, or multiple viewpoints, all more or less limited and fallible; and it tends toward a complex or fluid handling of time, involving much cross-reference back and forward across the temporal span of the action.⁹

This passage certainly sums up the most salient features of modernist writing, but more importantly all these aspects characterize, as will be argued later, both *Ulysses* and *The Interpreters*.

In what follows we shall make some generalizations about these techniques and try to link each to its appropriate worldview. We will not analyse all the modernist techniques, but only those directly related to the two works at hand. This will, we hope, pave the way for a detailed textual analysis of these techniques and aspects in the chapters to come. We shall proceed in our investigation in the following order: the stream-of-consciousness technique and the interior monologue, the handling of time (flashback, spatial form), and the use of archetypes and myth.

⁹ David Lodge, 'The Language of Modern Fiction' in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane eds *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature: 1890-1930*, p482

The stream-of-consciousness technique and the interior monologue

The concern of the modernist writer with consciousness and the unconscious which Lodge refers to manifests itself through the experimental use of two interiorization methods; the stream-of-consciousness technique and the interior monologue. The first “seeks to depict the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind”¹⁰ of characters. The writer records into words the uninterrupted flow of thoughts abandoning, therefore, the use of grammatically correct sentences, logic and sometimes punctuation. The second technique, the interior monologue, is very close to the stream of consciousness technique: it aims at “recording the continuum of impressions, thought and impulses either prompted by conscious experience or arising from the well of the subconscious”¹¹. Unlike the stream-of-consciousness, however, the interior monologue has a touch of logic in it: its sentences are usually more structured and the conventions of grammar and syntax are respected. Moreover, it is a technique of self-revelation: the character muses about his state, about his environment or about the world; it is, in fact, a kind of Shakespearian soliloquy or dramatic monologue.

These two techniques are today accepted as the innovation *par excellence* of the modernist fiction. They constitute a move away from the omniscient narrator of Realism. The task of the novelist became the breaking of barriers between reader and character, offering, therefore, an objective narrative, ‘unspoiled’ by the writer’s views and comments.

¹⁰ J.A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*. London: Penguin Books. 1999, p866.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p422.

When using these techniques, the events of the story in a novel become of secondary importance to the author, as very little actually happens. In *To the Lighthouse*, for example, Virginia Woolf is interested in the inner lives of her characters, and lets us into these lives by presenting their thought and observation from their own point of view. She rejects the common method of presenting her characters by providing the reader with a physical description of their outward appearance in preference of allowing the reader to share the characters' thoughts and observations. Similarly, in *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf's focus is on the characters' inner lives and subjective perceptions of reality instead of on the telling of the story.

These two techniques were possible thanks to the great achievements made in the field of psychology at the end of 19th century. Sigmund Freud, the key figure of psychoanalysis formulated the theory of the unconscious which, certainly, had a direct influence on modern writers. Freud's theories are all too well known to be exposed and discussed in detail here, but a brief survey of his theory of the unconscious is, nevertheless, necessary.

The authority of the 'unsaid' over the 'said' is the basic idea behind Freud's theory. The repressed things (sexuality, taboos, male authority...) are those which give structure to our thoughts and acts. Our unconscious is the basket where all our desires and fears are thrown; they come to the surface through such normal acts as dreams, jokes, flashbacks or false memories. In modernist literature, this was given shape by such devices as Hopkins' 'inscape', Woolf's 'moment of being' and Joyce's

‘epiphany’. The latter for example is a moment of revelation triggered by commonplace things to reveal to a character a desire that had been repressed.

Henri Bergson’s influential *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (1889) must also be mentioned here. Bergson argued that the mind had a special subjective logic different from the familiar logic of our everyday life: the mind moves in a constant stream which resists either the grammatical tense or the ordinary logic.¹² On the same track, William James, in *Principles of Psychology*, argued that our mind had its own way and structures of understanding experience and reality; he suggested: “in talking of [the mind] hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or the subjective life”.¹³

These important proclamations encouraged modernist writers to shift from the objective narratives and traditional narrative to the use of new structural renderings of experience such as psychology and psychoanalysis through the use of the stream-of-consciousness technique and the interior monologue.

Apart from the fact that they came as a reaction against the subjective Victorian narrative, the use of these techniques has its reasons, as well, in their view of modern times and life. In her essay ‘*Modern Fiction*’, Virginia Woolf tells us her view (and that of the majority of her modernist contemporaries) about life:

Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and the external as possible?¹⁴

¹² Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane eds *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature: 1890-1930.*, p82.

¹³ Malcolm Bradbury, quoted in *The Modern British Novel 1878-2001*. London: Penguin Books, 2001, p28.

¹⁴ Virginia Woolf, ‘*Modern Fiction*’ in David Lodge ed, *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: Reader*. p88.

She differentiates between characters which are “life-like” (well described and plausible, but without life) and characters which are “real” (which she strove to create). To achieve this reality she believed that the writer must try to imagine himself to be within the consciousness of his creation. She then explains that Joyce’s use of the stream-of-consciousness technique is the ideal approach to give structure and meaning to life:

Mr Joyce is spiritual; he is concerned at all costs to reveal the flickering of that innermost flame which flashes its message through the brain...If we want life itself, here surely we have it...For the moderns...the point of interest lies very likely in the dark places of psychology.¹⁵

It was impossible to reproduce the complexity of the modern age and of the human mind by using traditional techniques. As Conrad/Marlow complains in *Heart of Darkness*:

...No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one’s existence –that which makes its truth, its meaning- its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live as we dream –alone...¹⁶

In the age of Woolf, Faulkner and Joyce, this became possible thanks to the stream-of-consciousness technique and the interior monologue.

Modernist Time

The handling of time is yet another aspect by which the modernists manifested their rejection of the realist mode of writing. The 19th century novel was characterised by its use of linear time, therefore the events of the novel move through a ‘railway’ line

¹⁵ Ibid p89.

¹⁶ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*. London: Penguin Books, 1994, p39.

carriage following one another in the most basic view of historical time. Michael Hollington tells us thus about Victorian literature and time that:

For the nineteenth-century novelist, time is the medium in which people grow, individually and collectively. Events mark the critical point of change. Individual development is regarded as of general human importance and considered logical in form: laws of psychological cause and effect, of interaction between character and circumstantial environment, are in operation.¹⁷

In modernist literature this use of chronological time was substituted by what is known as psychological time and spatial time. This notion was first propounded by Bergson, who noted that events are symbolic and imaginary spatial points in the flow of time, i.e. psychological time or what he calls *durée*.¹⁸ A similar theory in literature was formulated by Joseph Frank in his '*Spatial Form in Modern Literature*', in which he argues that modernist novels are designed as single, static images outside time, to be simultaneously apprehended; which puts emphasis on the literary work as a self-contained verbal icon:

Since the primary reference of any group is to something inside the poem itself, language in modern poetry is really reflexive..... Instead of the instinctive and immediate reference of words and word groups to the objects and events they symbolize, and the construction of meaning from the sequence of these references, modern poetry asks its readers to suspend the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern of internal references can be apprehended as a unity.¹⁹

He suggests that modernist literary works (particularly by Eliot, Pound and Joyce) are 'spatial' in so far as they replace history and narrative sequence with a sense of mythic simultaneity that disrupts the normal continuities of English prose.

¹⁷ Michael Hollington, '*Svevo, Joyce and Modernist Time*' in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane eds *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature: 1890-1930.*, p431.

¹⁸ Patricia Waugh, *Revolutions of the Word*. London: Arnold, 1997, p42.

¹⁹ Joseph Frank, '*Spatial Form in Modern Literature*' in M.Schorer, J.Miles and G.Mckenzie eds, *Criticism: The Foundations of Modern Literary Judgement*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1958,p73.

Simultaneity and discontinuity are then the distinguishable features of texts that we label spatial; in this sense they become anti-temporal, a view which became the cornerstone of New Criticism and an orthodox characteristic of Modernism.

One type of disruption as we have seen is the use of the stream-of-consciousness technique as it gives the text a disjunctive syntactic arrangement. Within this technique the linearity of time is also disrupted; the writer blurs the boundaries between past and present as time is moved into the interior: it becomes psychological time (innerly experienced). Spatial form is then a method of structuring these fragments; as David Lodge notes: “Spatial Form gives unity to a literary work by a pattern of interconnected motifs that can only be perceived by ‘reading over’”.²⁰

The flashback is the essential technique by which a writer manipulates time. Through it he can abruptly move backward in time to tell us of a past event. In *The Art of Fiction* David Lodge explains time-shifts thus:

Through time-shift, narrative avoids presenting life as just one thing after another, and allows us to make connections of causality and irony between widely separated events. A shift of narrative focus back in time may change our interpretation of something which happened much later in the chronology of the story, but which we have already experienced as readers of the text.²¹

Novels using the stream-of-consciousness technique are usually known as ‘time novels’: the time shifts happen inside the minds of characters as part of the functioning of memory.

²⁰ David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*. London: Penguin Books, 1992, p82.

²¹ Ibid, p75.

An extensive use of time shifts in a novel, however, must not only be considered in technical terms as illuminating the parts of the narrative and the reader, but also as part of the themes of the novel if not the predominant one.

Time shifts in modern literature reflect an important modernist view about history and time. It marks their distress and uneasiness with history and time; that sense of continuity that cannot be stopped. As Stephen Dedalus declares to the Headmaster in *Ulysses*: “History is a nightmare from which I’m trying to wake.” This view of time and history as a continuum that would never stop is not a new one; Macbeth’s soliloquy is one of the best formulations in words of man’s distress with time:

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time:
And all our yesterdays, have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle,
Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing²²

To ‘vanquish’ time then, modernists abandoned the use of chronological time in narrative and opted for space-time and time shifts that occur inside the characters’ mind and which is a kind of metaphor that entails their control over time and their capability to ‘arrest’ it as they refuse to see it chronologically.

This is the discontinuity Joseph Frank referred to. As to simultaneity, it manifests itself through the juxtaposing of events of different times as in Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. The title of this poem itself refers to elements in an ancient fertility rite. In fact,

²² William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*. London: Penguin Books, 1994, p101.

it has been argued that to substitute history and chronological time, modernist writers found refuge in the timeless: myth.

Myth and Archetypes:

The disintegration of modern life, the fragmentation of the modernist narrative by the stream-of-consciousness and by time shifts are all supposedly given order and structure through the use of myth and archetypes. As T.S Eliot notes in his review of Joyce's *Ulysses*, the use of myth is "a way of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history"²³. This is what Eliot terms the 'mythic method'.

Before explaining this modernist method, let us first make some clarifications about myth and archetypes: what is myth? What is the relation of myth with literature and history? What is an archetype and how is it used in literature?

These questions have been given many divergent answers in the last decade and have given birth to what is known as Myth and Archetypal theory and criticism. We will not go into explaining and discussing the different theories and answers to these questions (often polemical), but rather give some basic notions about myth and archetypes generally accepted by literary scholars. The following definitions are from Daniel-Henri Pageaux's illuminating chapter on myths in his *La Littérature Générale et Comparée*.²⁴

²³ T.S Eliot, "Ulysses, order and myth", www.rci.rutgers.edu/~marinos/MythicalMethod.html

²⁴ Daniel-Henri Pageaux, *La littérature générale et comparée*. Paris: Armand Colin, 1994, p95-112.

Myth:

Myth is a narrative which is not “true”, involving gods and supernatural beings, and is concerned with creation and explaining how something comes to exist. According to Mircea Eliade: “myth tells us about a sacred story. It relates an event which took place in primordial times, the fabulous time of the beginnings”.²⁵ And to Gilbert Durand myth is “a dynamic system of symbols, archetypes and schemes which, under the impulsion of a diagram, tends to compose itself in a narrative.”²⁶

Myth is a narrative of explanation. It tells us about what reality is, how the world developed and what kind of relation men have with it. At the cultural level, it is an authority and a reference more or less permanent and which call for the idea of ritual. In fact, the first study of myth was conducted by religious anthropologists. The ethno-religious myth is a founding narrative, anonymous, collective and believed to be true. When this myth passes into literature it saves its ‘symbolic saturation’ and ‘tight’ organisation but it loses its founding and truthful character. There exist other myths that come from literature: Faust, Don Juan, and there also exist in literature ‘mythic elements’ such as ‘the devil’s pact’. Others manifestation of myth in literature, and which can be called ‘literary myths’, are the myths of the cities like Venice for example. There are also politico-heroic myths like Caesar, Alexander; Napoleon, in which the possibilities of narrative are unlimited. Finally there are the proto-biblical myths as that of the Wandering Jew.

²⁵ Ibid, p96.

²⁶ Ibid.

From this quick survey of the various definitions and manifestations of myth, the difference between the latter and history becomes obvious. Myth is timeless, a well structured narrative that has no particular date or point in history; as Isidore Okpewho notes; “The closer a tale gets to historical reality, the less capable it is of being an illustration or vehicle of larger, timeless, abstract ideals”.²⁷

This does not exclude, however, turning history into myth: history becomes myth (the myth of Napoleon for example) when it becomes a ‘grand narrative’; when a ‘secondary’ story duplicates the ‘true’ one in a structured narrative: ‘the legend of the Emperor’, or ‘the annals of the Empire’ for example. This ‘mythisation’ is more reinforced when history enters literature: Tolstoy’s use of Napoleon in his novel *War and Peace* for instance. Moreover, the relation between history and myth is not a simple one nor is it a relation of polar opposition. Myth in modernist literature is not always used to replace or deny history as Eliot and Joseph Frank presented it; the famous historian Arnold J. Toynbee wrote an insightful comment on the complex and rich relation between history and myth in his *A Study of History*:

History, like the drama and the novel, grew out of mythology, a primitive form of apprehension and expression in which—as in fairy tales listened to by children or in dreams dreamt by sophisticated adults—the line between fact and fiction is left undrawn. It has, for example, been said of the *Iliad* that anyone who starts reading it as history will find that it is full of fiction but, equally, anyone who starts reading it as fiction will find that it is full of history. All histories resemble the *Iliad* to this extent, that they cannot entirely dispense with the fictional element. The mere selection, arrangement and presentation of facts is a technique belonging to the field of fiction, and popular opinion is right in its insistence that no historian can be ‘great’ if he is not also a great artist; that the Gibbons and Macaulays are greater historians than the ‘Dryasdusts’ (a name coined by Sir Walter Scott—himself a greater historian in some of his novels than in any of his ‘histories’) who have avoided their more inspired *confrères*’ factual inaccuracies.

²⁷ Isidore Okpewho, *Myth in Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p69.

The function of myth as revelation gives significance to its use by writers. If myth reveals the sacred; the literary myth is, equally, an ‘answer’. The writer who refers to myth questions an answer and the writing is carried out on an answer, a readymade scenario.²⁸

In this sense myth is a structure. As Aristotle suggests, myth is a synthesis, an organisation made a totality; an organic totality. When new formulations of myth occur, they can go as far as contradicting the initial text: a Don Juan saved but not punished for example. The inversed or parodied scheme, however, admits and supposes the existence and recognition of the scheme that served as a model. This brings us to a fundamental question: how far are literary writers self-conscious in their use of myth? As far as Modernism and Realism are concerned, it can be argued that Modernist literature is more self-conscious than the Realist in associating its images, plot and symbolism with myth. As Northrop Frye argues in *Anatomy of Criticism*, “in realistic modes the association becomes less significant and more a matter of incidental, even coincidental or accidental, imagery.”²⁹

The use of myth in modernist literature is part and parcel of its technique. Eliot’s two essays ‘*Tradition and the Individual Talent*’ and ‘*Ulysses, order and myth*’ in addition to his poem *The Waste Land*’ can give us a clear idea about what he meant by the ‘mythic method.’ He tells us about Joyce’s *Ulysses*:

²⁸ *La littérature générale et comparée*, opcit, p100.

²⁹ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*. London: Penguin Books, 1990, p137.

In using myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. It is a method already adumbrated by Mr. Yeats, and of the need for which I believe that Mr. Yeats to have been the first contemporary to be conscious. Psychology (such as it is, and whether our reaction to it be comic or serious), ethnology, and *The Golden Bough* have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago. Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythic method. It is, I seriously believe, a step towards making the modern world possible for art.³⁰

The mythic method looks to the past to offer meaning and understanding for what has been lost or destroyed in the present, by means of paralleling events in myth and events in the present by stressing the mythical, anthropological historical and the literary. This method demands the participation of the reader to catch meaning, because, as with the stream-of-consciousness, it aims at diminishing the authoritative voice of the writer. This serves the theory of depersonalization that Eliot argued for in *'Tradition and the Individual Talent'*: "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."³¹ The artists, as he argues, must let the voices of the past speak for him.

In *The Waste Land* for example, the reader must structure the discontinuity (caused by multiple time shifts and seemingly arbitrary collage and quotations) and make his own connections within the text in a sort of quest, rather than being led by the narrator's voice.

Myth in this sense, offers a new ground of understanding man and the world. But as we shall see later, this is far from being the only end to the use of myth: it is also, and

³⁰ T.S. Eliot, "Ulysses, order and myth".

³¹ T.S. Eliot 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in David Lodge Ed, *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: Reader*. p182

more importantly, a way “of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to” the *text itself*.

Archetypes

The distinction between archetypes and myth has often been blurred and the theories of C.G. Jung on archetypes have been appropriated by Archetypal and Myth critics alike, especially by Northrop Frye, who used Jung’s archetypal vocabulary for his myth discourse (He entitled the second essay of his *Anatomy of Criticism* “Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths”!). What is peculiar about Jung’s theories, however, is the fusion of anthropology, myth, psychology and literature.

Jung’s most influential idea is that of the “collective unconscious”, a racial memory, consisting of ‘primordial images’ or archetypes. He tells us in *‘Psychology and literature’*:

We mean by collective unconscious, a certain psychic disposition shaped by the forces of heredity: from it consciousness has developed...It is a fact that in eclipses of consciousness –dreams, narcotic states, and cases of insanity- there come to the surface psychic products or contents that show all the traits of primitive levels of psychic development. The images themselves are of such a primitive character that we might suppose them derived from ancient, esoteric teaching. Mythological themes clothed in modern dress also frequently appear.³²

Archetypes find expression in such characteristic forms and images as: the Earth Mother, the divine child, the wise old man, the man-animal monster, the cross. They provide the primordial elements in the myths and narrative constructions of widely different cultures.

³² C.G Jung, *‘Psychology and Literature’* in David Lodge ed, *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: Reader*. p183.

An archetype in this sense is a symbol. But, as Northrop Frye explains, it is a symbol that relates a literary text to another, or more accurately a ‘modern’ text to a primitive one; to myth. It is “the psychic residua of numberless experiences of the same type”.³³ Therefore, it is a way of unifying our (and that of the writer) view of literature as a whole. In fact, Frye suggests a conceptual means of drawing individual and apparently unrelated archetypal images into a coherent framework of ‘mythoi’; one organizing not only individual literary work but the entire system of literary works, that is literature. Thus the texts that use the ‘mythic method’ are, as he says, “the most abstract and conventionalized”³⁴, because, as myth, their characters have the greatest possible powers and act “near or at the conceivable limits of desire.”³⁵ These qualities Frye attributes to the ‘ironic mode’, i.e. to modernist literature in the first place, as opposed to the ‘low mimetic’ mode or realistic literature in which a recurrent image, an archetype or myth, is, as we said earlier, merely accidental. He concludes that:

...the structural principles of literature are as closely related to mythology and comparative religion as those of painting are to geometry...we shall be using the symbolism of the Bible and Classical mythology, as a grammar of literary archetypes.³⁶

This view asserts the inescapable place of myth itself in Western literature as a whole: the ‘grammar’ of biblical and classical myths is the structure by which Western literature can give a structural and critical account of any historical development; which reminds us of Eliot’s statement that myth gives “shape and

³³ Ibid, p180.

³⁴ *Anatomy of Criticism*, opcit, p134.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid, p134-135.

significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary *history*.”

Jung and Frye share with Eliot the same view the latter expresses in ‘*Tradition and the individual talent*’: art is impersonal and a writer must refer to his ancestors in order to be as objective and innovative as possible; Frye argues:

The possession of originality cannot make an artist unconventional; it drives him further into convention, obeying the law of the art itself, which seeks constantly to reshape itself from its own depths³⁷

In stressing the importance and significance of using myth and archetypes Jung gives us another lesson in ‘tradition and the individual talent’:

It is to be expected of the poet that he will resort to mythology in order to give his experience its most fitting expression. It would be a serious mistake to suppose that he works with material received at second hand. The primordial experience is the source of his creativeness; it cannot be fathomed and therefore requires mythological imagery to give it form.³⁸

Other functions of archetypes and myth in a literary text (intertextuality, parody, symbolism...) will be discussed in later chapters and with reference to the two texts under study, so let us now turn our attention to the relation of Modernism with Africa, imperialism, nationalism and Marxism.

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A large number of countries, by the beginning of the 20th century, were under British rule. The British Empire numbered 400 million people by 1900. Excuses and causes of Imperialism (economic, political, cultural) are so familiar to us today that it would be a waste of time to go into a disquisition on them. It is imperative, however, to

³⁷ Ibid, p132.

³⁸ ‘*Psychology and Literature*’, opcit, p183.

retain one fundamental myth behind imperialism which is related to the works under study and to Modernism: the superiority and supremacy of the white man and his culture. Imperialism was not just a system of political power and economic exploitation; “it was also an ideology, a faith, fascinating intellectuals and writers, businessmen, soldiers, missionaries and politicians alike.”³⁹

The cultural and racial superiority of the European white man was carried out through what post-colonial critics term the colonial discourse; a “system by which dominant groups in society constitute the field of truth by imposing specific knowledge, disciplines and values upon dominated groups.”⁴⁰ Through this system the colonial power can impose its superiority and the inferiority of the colonised. It can also justify its presence by pretending for example that it is there to uplift the ‘native’ and suppress ‘savage customs’.

It is against such imperialist pretensions that some modernists reacted, without, however, denying the ‘savage’ and ‘primitive’ nature of the colonised, and bringing out savagery and primitivism in the ‘centre’. A famous example in this case is Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, in which he questions the claims of imperialism by showing its inefficiency in Africa and the horrid exploitation it imposed on natives; yet he represents Africa as place of a darkness and represents the natives as mere ‘savages’.

³⁹ Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane eds *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature: 1890-1930*, p60.

⁴⁰ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. New York: Routledge, 2000, p142.

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in their *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, make a link between “the encounter with the African cultures in the so-called ‘scramble for Africa’ period of the 1880s and 1890s”⁴¹ and the modernist movement as crucial for the development of the latter. Thus, while the Europeans were suppressing African cultures, they imported into Europe objects (masks, jewellery...) of the ‘other’ world. These African works “reflected a ‘stage’ in the development of ‘civilized’ art”.⁴² Such modernist works as W.B Yeats’ *Savage God*, Pablo Picasso’s well-known *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. M.)*, or Igor Stravinsky’s musical piece *The Rite of Spring*, contain many references to African myths and materials, which may suggest that behind the present age and the whiteman’s culture lies the primitive; a modern world of universal savagery. These artists then were questioning the claims of Europe to being a unique civilization; as Conrad puts it in *Heart of Darkness*, “And this also has been one the dark places of the Earth.”

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said holds a similar view and goes as far as suggesting that the modernist techniques are in fact a reaction against Imperialism, and a means of claiming one’s cultural independence; he tells us thus:

I would like to suggest that many of the most prominent characteristics of modernist culture, which we have tended to derive from purely internal dynamics in Western society and culture, include a response to the external pressures on culture from the *imperium*. Certainly this is true of Conrad’s entire oeuvre, and it is true of Forster’s, T.E Lawrence’s, Malraux’s; in different ways, the impingements of Empire on an Irish sensibility are registered in Yeats and Joyce, those on American expatriates in the work of Eliot and Pound.⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid, p143.

⁴² Ibid, p144.

⁴³ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994, p188.

Said suggests that irony was the principal device by which modernists expressed their scepticism towards imperialism. They could not openly attack colonialism, so they had to wear a set of 'rhetorical masks' by which they could question colonialism and the superiority of the white man's civilization.

The 'circularity of structure', according to Said, was an important feature in the form of the modernist text which helped to deal with questioning imperialism in an ironic mode. *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, *To the Lighthouse* and many other modernist works have also a dislocated and displaced form through the "juxtaposing of comic and tragic, high and low, commonplace and exotic, familiar and alien".⁴⁴

Marxism and Modernism:

It is well known that early Marxist critics reacted negatively to Modernism. Marxist critics saw in the modernists' concern with psychology, the subjective experience of time, and the form of the novel itself a sign of 'introversion' or of a lack of political commitment, corresponding to a rejection of the external reality that concerned nineteenth-century realist novelists. As George Lukacs writes in his classical essay '*The Ideology of Modernism*':

Man is *zoon politikon*, a social animal...The ontological view governing the image of man in the work of leading modernist writers is the exact opposite of this. Man, for these writers, is by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter in relationships with other human beings...Man, thus conceived, is an ahistorical being...This negation of history takes two different forms in modernist literature. First, the hero is strictly confined within the limits of his own experience. There is not for him –and apparently not for his creator- any pre-existing reality beyond his own self, acting upon him or being acted upon him. Secondly, the hero himself is without personal history. He is 'thrown-into-the-world': meaninglessly, unfathomably. He does not develop through contact with the world; he neither forms nor is formed by it. The

⁴⁴ Ibid, p189

only 'development' in this literature is the gradual revelation of the human condition. Man is now what he has always been and always will be. The narrator, the examining subject, is in motion; the examined reality is static.⁴⁵

If it is totally true that modernist texts are generally too much concerned with Man's existential isolation ('We live as we dream alone'), the idea that the 'solitariness' of man in modernist literature conveys the latter's ahistoricity is, however, erroneous. Yet in view of the predominance of New Criticism and the unavailability of a postcolonial literary theory in the 1920s and 1930s, Lukacs attack on Modernism can be regarded as legitimate: his attack is not so much on Modernist texts as on 'the approach generally adopted by bourgeois-modernist critics themselves: that exaggerated concern with formal criteria, with questions of style and literary technique.'⁴⁶

Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature, compiled and edited by Seamus Deane, marks an important turning point in Marxist literary criticism: this book can be described as the manifesto of a 'postcolonial/Marxist theory' since it comprises three essays, one by the renowned postcolonial critic Edward Said, and the two others by the important Marxist figures Frederic Jameson and Terry Eagleton. The most important essay for our purpose is Jameson's '*Modernism and Imperialism*', in which he states that "The traces of imperialism can . . . be detected in Western modernism, and are indeed constitutive of it; but we must not look for them in the obvious places,

⁴⁵ George Lukacs, 'The Ideology of Modernism' in David Lodge ed, *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: Reader*, p476-477.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p474.

in content or in representation”⁴⁷. Indeed, Jameson suggests that the formal and structural characteristics of Modernist literature mark the dramatic presence of imperialism in the British political life. At the same time, Jameson importantly notes that *Ulysses* may be taken as the sole exception in this regard since both its *form and content* are responses to Imperialism, making his suggestion one of the first postcolonial assessments of Joyce.

In a recent interview, Terry Eagleton insisted on the necessity of relating the form of Modernist texts to the historical context and to politics:

Said's dialectical view of Conrad seems to me far superior to those who either praise him as a proto-post-colonial theorist, or dismiss him out of hand as a racist and imperialist. He was indeed in a sense both. *Heart of Darkness* announces: 'Look, Westerners are just as much savage brutes as the Africans.' Is this a pro- or anti-imperialist attitude? E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* says: 'Look, India is such a vast, impossible sprawling chaos that the West's petty-minded schemes for subduing it are ridiculous.' Is this pro- or anti-imperialist?

The true ambivalences of Conrad, however, seem to me to lie in questions of form rather than abstractable political content. *Heart of Darkness*, for example, is both surrealist modernist 'textuality' and traditional sea tale. To those who simply extract political attitudes from literary works, I would say: look for the politics of form. That's where everything happens, not what the author or work 'says.' Don't just stare through the signifier to the signified. Don't talk about or ethnic stereotypes while cavalierly ignoring tone, pitch, pace, texture, syntax, address, rhythm, register, narrative structure. So there you are, you see: I'm just an old-fashioned product of the Cambridge English School. Just as Edward Said was an old-fashioned product of Lionel Trilling's Columbia. But as Trotsky wisely remarked, we Marxists have always lived in tradition.⁴⁸

Our next Chapter then shall discuss the political and historical backgrounds of *Ulysses* and *The Interpreters* so as to clear the ground for the interaction between these backgrounds and the content and form of the two works.

⁴⁷ Fredric Jameson, 'Modernism and Imperialism' in Seamus Deane ed. *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*. Comp. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990, p65.

⁴⁸ Terry Eagleton, 'Edward Said, Cultural Politics, and Critical Theory'. *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, N. 25, 2005.

Chapter II

Background: Historical, Social, Cultural and Personal

In her article *'Through the looking glass: African and Irish Nationalist Writing'* C.L

Innes states that:

Celts and Africans are indeed culturally similar, and in some ways no doubt they are either as a result of colonial oppression or because their pre-colonial and pre-industrial cultures contained some elements in common...both groups are reacting to the same Western myth and are caught up in the same Western dialectic. In other words, the redefinitions of Irish and Africans are similar because the colonial image of Irish and blacks was almost identical.¹

Our main concern in this chapter is to investigate whether these assumptions apply to the Nigerian Soyinka and to the Irish Joyce. Indeed the main points of analogy will be made here. We shall then investigate the similarities and maybe the differences in the personal, social and historical backgrounds that could have produced similar works.

Because Ireland is so germane to Joyce's works, a detailed survey and knowledge of its historical conflict with England, of its different authorities and institutions (Roman Catholic Church, Irish nationalism, Literary Revival) is necessary. Any serious study of Soyinka's works also, requires some knowledge of the socio-historical background of Nigeria. Thus, in this section we shall review his personal and Yoruba backgrounds at some length. Soyinka has deep roots in Yoruba culture; he is not merely naturally part of it; he is also one of its most important scholars and theoreticians.

Ireland

Joyce's relationship with Ireland is complex; the source of strong and contradictory feelings. On the one hand, he resented his fellow-countrymen's propensity for recurrent

¹ C.L. Innes, *'Through the looking glass: African and Irish Nationalist Writing'* in Eldred Jones, ed. *African Literature Today: No. 9, Africa, America and the Caribbean*. London: Heinemann, 1978, p11.

betrayals of their leaders and for their narrow-mindedness. On the other hand, Joyce's deep-rooted love for his native land made it equally impossible for him to repudiate it emotionally or mentally. He, consequently, chose to express his thoughts and feelings through the filter of his country, its history, and its people.

The 1800 Act of Union gave Ireland a paradoxical fate. It was deprived of its freedom because of permanent insubordinations; at the same time it was granted all the liberties that were to be granted progressively for the rest of the United Kingdom following the democratisation of British society.² Accordingly, Ireland would, throughout the 19th century, emancipate itself from colonial supervision: a religious emancipation guided by Daniel O'Connell, an agrarian and parliamentary emancipation under the direction of Charles Stewart Parnell; a cultural and literary emancipation initiated by such leading literary figures as Lady Gregory, W.B Yeats and the other members of the Abbey Theatre; and a political emancipation as a result of the Easter Rising of 1916 and the Anglo-Irish war of independence (1919-1921).

Today, the independence of Ireland turns out to be unfinished and botched as violence still persists over Northern Ireland's sovereignty (though a truce of sorts has been agreed upon recently). During the colonial period, this part of the island was used

² Emer Nolan writes in the introduction of her book: '...modernization becomes explicitly associated with the culture of the colonial power. Any straightforward embrace or rejection of modernity is difficult for the colonized people, who very often seek to enjoy its benefits, but on their own terms. In early twentieth-century Ireland, a variety of cultural and political movements struggled with the difficulties and ironies of anti-colonial nationalism and decolonization. Emer Nolan, *James Joyce and Nationalism*. London: Routledge, 1995, p. xxi.

to create ethnicity into Irish society. F. S. L. Lyons in *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland*³ identifies four cultures within the Irish society: the Anglo-Irish culture of the Ascendancy, the English culture of the colonizer, the Gaelic culture of the colonized Irish people, and the Presbyterian culture of Ulster.

As a Catholic, Joyce belonged to the religious majority, which was subject to the political control of an ethnic and religious minority, the Anglo-Irish Protestants who dominated Northern Ireland. The cultural and political distance between the two parts of the country was a deep one; Stephen Dedalus tells us about a student from Belfast:

The voice, the accent, the mind of the questioner offended him and he allowed the offence to carry him towards wilful unkindness, bidding his mind think that the student's father would have done better had he sent his son to Belfast to study and have saved something on the train fare by so doing.⁴

This kind of division is typical of any colonial power that wishes to tighten its grip over a colonized country. Indeed, between 1702 and 1705 the Irish Parliament passed a set of laws that led to the oppression of the catholic majority: they did not have the right to work in a public office, nor did they have the right to buy or inherit land and were unable to vote until 1829. The oppression was economic as well: in view of the fact that Ireland had only a colonial status, it did not have the right to compete against England, and several procedures were taken to limit the English importation of livestock and textile products from Ireland. Thus the Irish industry and trade were deliberately sabotaged by England. This discrimination reinforced the process of 'othering' the Irish

³ F. S. L. Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.

⁴ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. London: Penguin, 1996, p. 240.

people, a process to which we will come back later in this chapter. At the political level, this oppression and division in Irish society made it difficult to achieve any political change. It was this oppression, however, which made of Ireland a nuisance to Britain.

The rise and fall of Parnell

Indeed, many revolutionary organisations emerged as a reaction to this set of oppressive rules. Chief among them was the Irish Parliamentary Party led by the charismatic Anglo-Irish politician Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-1891). He was seduced by the Fenian ideology and by the movement in favour of a Home Rule. In 1879 he allied with the American representatives of the Fenian movement and also accepted the presidency of the Agrarian League founded in the same year by Michael Davitt. The eight months of imprisonment for incitation to social revolt took his popularity in Ireland to its highest level; so much so that he was acclaimed “Ireland’s uncrowned king”. After solving many agrarian problems, Parnell turned his attention to the question of internal autonomy, Home Rule. He persuaded William Ewart Gladstone, the Prime Minister and Liberal Party leader, to inscribe this Irish claim in the programme of the party. Meanwhile, the whole country was agitated as different forms of extremism erupted everywhere: the Presbyterians of Ulster, inflamed by the calls for revolt by Randolph Churchill, armed themselves to defend the Union. In June and July 1886, they devastated many catholic neighbourhoods in Belfast.

The Home Rule bills were rejected one after the other, and attempts to defeat Parnell were of all kinds. He was accused of complicity with the 'terrorist' fraction of the Fenian movement but he triumphed. Unfortunately, in that same year (1889) Parnell lost whatever power he had when he was accused of adultery with Mrs. Katherine (Kitty) O'Shea whose husband was suing her for divorce. The charge was true, and the Irish Catholic Church mobilized public sentiment against him. All the political parties deserted him and he was forced to give up the leadership of his party. He died one year later persecuted and abandoned by all.

Parnell's story is significant in many ways: first, it shows the strong grip the Catholic Church had over Irish society and the tensions between religion and politics; second, the post-Parnell era was pervaded by a kind of remorse if not dissolution in the Irish society as the chance for a Home Rule evaporated; third, Parnell's fall, the responsibility of the Church and the bitter feelings it left behind pervade much of Joyce's works, for 'whenever he looked, in Irish political or literary history, he found that the master theme was betrayal.'⁵

Joyce and Catholicism

According to legend, St. Patrick had brought Christianity to Ireland in the Middle Ages; ever since, most Irish observed a rigorous brand of the religion. The Roman Catholic

⁵ Seamus Deane, 'Joyce the Irishman' in Derek Attridge ed., *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 32.

Church expanded its power over the different layers of Irish society, which made many people, especially Joyce, consider that Ireland suffered from a double imperialism: on the one hand they were victims of Britain, which controlled them politically, and on the other hand they were also victims of the Roman Catholic Church which ruled them spiritually from Rome. Anyone who came across Joyce's *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, would certainly have noticed Joyce's rejection of the Catholic Church.

Joyce was brought up in a catholic family. His parents made sure that he would have a rigorous religious education so they sent him to the well reputed Jesuit Clongowes Wood College, but after three years there he was withdrawn in 1891 because of financial difficulties. He studied some time at the Christian Brothers School, and then the former rector of Clongowes managed to grant him a free place at the Jesuit Belvedere College where he studied from 1893 to 1898. While there, Joyce was noted for his piety; he even became, in 1896, the head of the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary. His early experience with prostitutes, however, was the main reason that separated him from orthodox Catholicism. He tried to come back to a life of religion and piety after feeling a deep guilt and after confessing, but could not hold for long as his fate disintegrated. By 1904, the year his mother died, Joyce had totally abandoned the religion of his birth. In that year, he met Nora Barnacle whom he lived with from 1904 to 1931 without

marriage although they had two children during that period.⁶ All this made of Joyce one of the most famous atheist writers of his time.

It seems that Joyce's rejection of religion and the Catholic Church in particular is tightly bound to his wish to fulfil himself as an artist. He considered the Catholic Church an obstacle in the process of his development as well as of Ireland's. Throughout his works, it seems clear that Joyce held the Church accountable for the failure of the Irish to advance in step with the rest of Europe; as he tells us:

The Church made inroads everywhere, so that we are in fact becoming a bourgeois nation, with the church supplying our aristocracy...I do not see much hope for us intellectually.⁷

What particularly annoyed Joyce were the ways in which the church recruited intellectuals like himself to serve in priesthood –he for himself refused the suggestion to become a priest-- instead of encouraging them to dedicate themselves to what they were interested in, or use their minds in the service of progress; thus Stephen decides towards the end of *A Portrait*:

I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use— silence, exile, and cunning.⁸

When Joyce left Ireland in 1904, the Provost of Trinity College Rev. Sir John Pentland Mahaffy expressed the opinion of the Church on Joyce and on 'rebellious' intellectuals like himself:

⁶ He married her in 1931 for 'testamenrary' reasons.

⁷ Derek Attridge ed., quoted in *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*. p. 46.

⁸ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 270.

Thank God they [Joyce and George Moore] have both cleared out of Dublin. But not before they squirted stink upon all the decent people like a pair of shunks. James Joyce is a living argument in defence of my contention that it was a mistake to establish a separate university for the Aborigines of the island.⁹

Life in Exile

To 'clear out of Dublin' was then the only way by which Joyce could set himself free from the institutions that he regarded as obstacles to fulfil his artistic growth. In many ways, Joyce exemplifies the situation of numerous modernist writers who rebelled against the forces that helped shape both their lives and their art: T.S Eliot, Ezra Pound, the group of American writers called 'the Lost Generation', D.H Lawrence and many others saw in exile the perfect way of being fully dedicated to their art. Moreover, they considered that to be cosmopolitan was the best way of expressing what they considered a chaotic age; the chaos was universal.

Ulysses is a book written in exile. The famous by-line, after Molly's final word 'Yes', is 'Trieste-Zurich-Paris, 1914-1921', which is the best testimony of the exilic 'vocation' of Modernist writers and of Joyce in particular.

Joyce's lifetime exile began in 1904: he left the family home for a variety of residences in Dublin, among them the Martello Tower at Sandycove, a place that served him as the opening setting for *Ulysses*. In the same year, he left Dublin for Europe with Nora Barnacle and obtained a job in the Berlitz School in Trieste; in 1906 he moved to Rome where he worked as a bank clerk; in 1907 he returned to Trieste where his

⁹ David Norris and Carl Flint, quoted in *Introducing Joyce*. Cambridge: Icon Books, 1997, p. 172.

daughter Lucia was born; in 1912 Joyce made his last visit to Ireland; in 1915 the Joyces settled in Zurich then returned to Trieste in 1920; in 1920, at Ezra Pound's suggestion, the Joyces moved to Paris and remained there for twenty years at a variety of residences; as World War II broke out in 1939, Joyce moved to southern France then to neutral Zurich in 1940 where he died a year later.

This life of self-imposed exile has been given many interpretations and reasons: first, the need to free himself from the 'nets' that could restrain his artistic growth; second, the ambition to become a cosmopolitan writer; last but not least, to put his art in the service of his country, colonized Ireland.

At the end of *A Portrait*, Stephen decides to leave Ireland and states: "I will go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race."¹⁰ Whether Joyce had the same objective as Stephen is open to debate, for it seems more likely that Joyce, throughout his works, did not aim at creating a new national consciousness or identity for his countrymen, but rather aimed at giving the Irish people an objective and unsentimental image of themselves. What would further sustain this argument is that Joyce rejected the cultural nationalism of the Irish Literary Revival, a movement that sought to revive Ireland's proud literary Celtic heritage. He considered it another form of Nationalism and opposed it. As Collin MacCabe tells us:

¹⁰ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 282.

We can see clearly that the Dublin in which Joyce grew up was a city in which cultural debates were producing the identifications which were to prove strong enough to dislodge the British from most of Ireland by 1922 and which have continued to dominate Irish political life until the present day; for Joyce those debates were as constricting and repressive as either the imperialist discourse of the British oppressor or the religious discourse of the Roman church.¹¹

Joyce, Nationalism and the Literary Revival

Lady Gregory, W.B Yeats, J.M Synge and others followed the campaign for political independence with enthusiasm in the cultural sphere; which resulted in the establishment of the Irish National Theatre in Dublin. The Revivalists depended on native or folk culture: oral tradition, myths, fragmentary manuscripts, epics and ballads were used by these poets and playwrights to recreate a once glorious Irish tradition. In a letter written in 1897 these artists expressed the ambition of their art:

We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment which is not found in theatres in England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed. We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery or easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of ancient idealism. We are confident of the support of all Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all the political questions that divide us.¹²

These artists, then, set themselves the task of correcting colonial stereotypes and at giving memorable representations of the Irish character, which they certainly did. But Joyce disliked the Revivalists' methods; witness this statement of his:

Ancient Ireland is dead just as ancient Egypt is dead. Its death chant has been sung, and on its gravestone has been placed the seal. The old national soul that spoke during the centuries through the mouths of fabulous seers, wandering minstrels, and Jacobite poets

¹¹ Colin MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. xiv.

¹² Emer Nolan, quoted in *James Joyce and Nationalism*. London: Routledge, 1995, p. 25.

disappeared from the world with the death of James Clarence Mangan. With him, the long tradition of the triple order old Celtic bards ended; and today other bards, animated by other ideals, have the cry.¹³

Moreover, nowhere in Joyce's work do we find an attempt to correct the colonial image of the Irishman; worse: he sustained it. Around 1914 he declared:

Dubliners strictly speaking are my fellow countrymen, but I don't care to speak of our 'dear dirty Dublin' as they do. Dubliners are the most hopeless, useless and inconsistent race of characters I have ever come across on the island or on the continent. This is why this English Parliament is full of the greatest windbags in the world.¹⁴

According to Seamus Deane in *Joyce the Irishman*, the Revivalists believed in a 'positive force'¹⁵ in the Irishmen, while for Joyce Ireland represented only a negative place because he came, as Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw, from the city, a place of squalor, alcoholism and sordidness. This is certainly true but it is important to note that some of the Revivalists were not at odds with the city problems and with representing Dublin. In *Juno and the Paycock*, Sean O'caesy renders the sordidness of the soul-destroying slums of Dublin. Moreover, his character 'Captain' Boyle is as 'hopeless, useless and inconsistent' as Joyce thinks of Dubliners, but O'Casey still represents Juno as a 'positive force' that can bring change.

Joyce was aware that the image he gave in his writings about the Irish character was close to that of the colonial stereotype or worse; Stephen Dedalus is accused by a friend of his thus: "No West-Briton could speak worse of his countrymen. You are simply

¹³ Derek Attridge ed., quoted in *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, p. 40.

¹⁴ David Norris and Carl Flint, quoted in *Introducing Joyce*, p. 11.

¹⁵ Seamus Deane, *Joyce the Irishman* in Derek Attridge ed., *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, pp. 38-39.

giving vent to old state libels –the drunken Irishman, the baboon-faced Irishman that we see in *Punch*”.¹⁶

Rather than correcting or idealizing the Irish character then, Joyce aimed at representing an unsentimental image, close to the colonial stereotype, in order to show his countrymen what they really were. When his editor suggested changes of the content of his collection of short stories *Dubliners*, Joyce answered thus:

It is not my fault that the odour of ashpits and old weeds and offal hangs round my stories. I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilization in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass.¹⁷

Part of the image Joyce wanted to show the Irish is how they have been assimilated by the British, how they have become ‘mimicmen’. As a comic writer,¹⁸ Joyce couldn’t refrain from satirizing them, just as Wole Soyinka was to do later in relation to his fellow-Nigerians.

In any case Joyce’s detachment from the Revivalist movement seems to be due to the fact that he did not want to be exclusively Irish but also European in his concerns and writings; he refused to set himself one set of cultural roots, as Colin MacCabe tells us:

When Joyce harks back to the medieval splendours of Ireland, it is to Ireland as an actor within European history and not as the land of primitive myth that he refers. This European dimension, so vital in Joyce’s thought, was certainly in tune with, if not borrowed from, Yeats and indeed Joyce went much further than Yeats in his determination to be an Irish European. His early pamphlet ‘The day of the Rabblement’

¹⁶ Derek Attridge ed., quoted in *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 41.

¹⁸ The comic dimension of Joyce’s writing will be discussed in the next chapter mainly through his use of parody.

castigated the Abbey theatre for its failure to produce a European programme of drama, opting, as it did, for plays based on Irish myth.¹⁹

Joyce always considered himself a writer with no particular Irish precursor. Witty and arrogant, he once told Yeats that he [Yeats] was too old to be influenced by him. Joyce's influence came rather from Europe, especially from the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen. Everything in Ibsen fascinated Joyce: his life in exile, his repudiation of moral and religious standards, and his dedication to art.²⁰ He was also influenced by French writers, especially Gustave Flaubert, from whom he developed much of his realist skills, not to mention such minor French writers as Edouard Dujardin to whom Joyce attributed the authorship of the stream-of-consciousness technique. His dependence on a wide frame of references, such as Greek myths and narratives, shows his increasing reliance on European and world literature.

Joyce's use of the English language may also be of interest here. He was fluent in German, French and Italian but never attempted to write in any language other than the English language. Again, this may be due to the fact that he was against the Revivalists of the Gaelic language; he was so grounded in English literature as we have seen that he was contemptuous of people who tried to put the Gaelic language forward by disparaging English.²¹ There is, however, evidence that Joyce may have felt

¹⁹ Colin MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*, p. xviii-xiv.

²⁰ Klaus Reichert, 'The European background of Joyce's writing' in Derek Attridge ed., *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, p. 62-66.

²¹ Harry Blamires, *James Joyce: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Beirut: York Press, 1984, p. 9.

unconformable writing in the language of Ireland's conqueror. In Chapter V of *A Portrait*, Stephen, while talking to an English priest, thinks:

The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. . . . His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.²²

If we suppose that Joyce had the same reaction as Stephen, we may interpret this statement in post-colonial terms and argue that Joyce considered English as an acquired language; so he appropriated it and deliberately manipulated it in his writing as a token of independence. Nowhere is this more evident than in Joyce's final work, the linguistic encyclopaedia *Finnegan's Wake* in which he 'mixed' the English language with nearly fourteen other languages (including the Gaelic language) through what is known as 'portemanteaux' words. In this sense, we can consider that Joyce saw in art a means of resistance; he would free his country through art rather than religion and politics; as he declared to the editor of *Dubliners*: his work was 'the first step towards the spiritual liberation of [his] country.'²³

Nigeria

Soyinka's Nigeria, like Joyce's Ireland, was part of the British Empire. It was governed through the Indirect Rule doctrine, which implemented colonial authority by means of

²² James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 194.

²³ Derek Attridge ed., quoted in *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, p. 41.

traditional authorities. This British rule remained until 1960, the year Nigeria became independent.

In colonial times and before, the lands known now as Nigeria were composed of small nations with many cultural differences. Sir Hugh Clifford, the Governor-General of Nigeria between 1920 and 1931, described Nigeria as ‘a collection of independent native states, separated from one another by great distances, by differences of history and by ethnological, racial, tribal, political, social and religious barriers.’²⁴ Many attempts were made by the colonial administration to unify the country, but none was as dramatic as the 1914 Act which amalgamated the previous two parts of the country but kept different development policies and an indirect rule for each.

Further changes were made in 1940 when Nigeria was divided into four administrative regions: the Northern, Eastern and Western Provinces and the colony of Lagos. Sir Arthur Richardson’s 1946 constitution reinforced the regionalism resulting from this geographical and administrative separation. When the post-World War II nationalism in Africa flourished, the political parties in Nigeria were founded on a regional and ethnic basis. According to Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo the former president of Nigeria: ‘the only point on which Nigerian political leaders spoke with one voice was

²⁴ Abubakar A. Atofarati, quoted in *‘The Nigerian Civil War, Causes, Strategies, And Lessons Learnt’*.1992.
www.Nigeriamasterweb.com

the granting by the British of political independence –and even then they did not agree on the timing.’²⁵

Once independence was granted, political problems appeared and ‘the ugly embers of tribalism and sectionalism [were] fanned into a deadly flame by all the political leaders.’²⁶ These leaders used the division and ignorance of the people as a road to power, at the expense of national unity and the nation.

The dangers of such political and social strife were not apparent until the civil war and dictatorship took the country by surprise. For just after its independence, Nigeria, unlike many other African countries, gave the impression that it would rapidly become a strong democratic, bourgeois and liberal state.²⁷ An apparent political stability was reflected in the democratic Federal State, but behind the scenes each of the different representatives of the Federal State tried to identify himself with his own ethnic group corrupting, in the process, the different layers of the Nigerian society, administration and political system. A fierce race for power characterized, then, the 1961-1966 era, which inevitably resulted in a *coup d'état* then into a civil war in 1966.

"The Federation was sick at birth and by January 1966, the sick, bedridden babe collapsed"²⁸. Not everyone could, however, come to such a conclusion at that time. That apparent stability could only be unmasked by the sensibility of an artist, the social

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Elikia M'bokolo, *Le Continent Convoité*. Paris : Edition Etudes Vivantes, 1980. p. 117.

²⁸ Abubakar A. Atofarati, quoted in ‘*The Nigerian Civil War, Causes, Strategies, and Lessons Learnt*’.1992.
www.Nigeriamasterweb.com.

observer: Soyinka could feel and render, through a new tradition of writing in Africa, the complexity, division and corruption that characterized post-colonial Nigeria and consequently warn that this would only end up in war and dictatorship.

The Interpreters was published in 1965, five years after independence and one year before the military rule and the beginning of civil war. A crucial year, then, for anyone who wants to study pre-civil war Nigeria, and for those who want to find in literature some effective causes that could have led to the war. Both seekers will not be disappointed: Soyinka renders the post-colonial corruption of Nigeria with so much force and efficiency that the novel stands as one of the most famous early novels of disillusion in African literature as we will show in detail in Chapter IV; for the time being let us get acquainted with Soyinka's ethnic background and heritage.

Yoruba religion, culture and myth:

Nigeria comprises over two hundred ethnic groups, each with its own language, customs and traditions. Ten of these groups constitute 90% of the Nigerian population. As argued above, ethnicity formed one the most acute challenges that faced the colonial and post-colonial Nigerian society and political system. To this day, each major group dominates a domain and a particular sphere in Nigerian society: the Yoruba, to whom Soyinka belongs, for example, dominate the public and private sectors of Nigeria and provide part of the nation's elite.

The Yorubas encompass over 20% of the ethnolinguistic groups. It is the third largest group and inhabits parts of Southwestern Nigeria. The Yoruba people are divided into many independent kingdoms and share a common origin myth, culture and religion but never combined into a single political organization. They have, however, a common allegiance to their sovereign, the Alafin of Oyo.

The Yoruba religions have a similar structure: Olorun (or Olodumare) is the all-powerful god who rules over the universe along with several hundred lower gods, each of them with a specific domain of rule. Olorun is never represented physically. For example, Kola in *The Interpreters* does not portray this god in his canvas. Obatala is the supreme creating deity after Olorun. In the Yoruba religion, Obatala is the shaper of human bodies while Olorun is the one who breathes life into these bodies. Obatala, though subordinate to Olorun, is king over all the *orisha*, or minor gods. There are about four hundred Yoruba gods. The ones referred to in *The Interpreters* hold high places in the Yoruba Pantheon and society. Kola's canvas includes: Obatala, Sango, god of lightning and electricity, Erinle an animal spirit, Esu the spirit of disorder, Esumare the rainbow, Obaluwaiye (Sopana), god of smallpox and Ogun the explorer, warrior, creative god and the favoured god of Soyinka.

Sango has a wide popularity in Yorubaland; he is the creator of thunder and lightning; he casts 'thunderstones', which are collected by the priests and preserved in temples dedicated to the god.

Ogun, the god of war, of hunting and iron working, is also considered as among the most important gods in the pantheon. He is the chief deity of whoever uses metal in his occupation as is the case with warriors and blacksmiths. Ogun is also known to revenge on those who break a pact made in his name, Soyinka tells us in *'The Fourth Stage'* that:

Ogun [...] is best understood in Hellenic values as a totality of the Dionysian, Apollonian and Promethean values. Nor is this all. Transcending even today, the distorted myths of terrorist reputation, traditional poetry records him as 'protector of orphans', 'roof over homeless', 'terrible guardian of the sacred oath'; Ogun stands in fact for a transcendental humane but rigidly restorative justice.²⁹

In some regions Ogun is combined with Eshu, the trickster god, mistakenly identified by Europeans in the past with the Devil. The Yoruba Pantheon, however, does not include any evil god and Eshu is rather known for his mischievousness and for trying men's faith: a myth about Eshu recounts how he tore a family apart after selling (disguised as a merchant) alternately more and more beautiful gifts to each of a man's two wives.

Shokpona, the god of smallpox, is a very feared god because he is believed to be responsible for the smallpox plagues and other diseases that resemble it. The Shokpona priests too were feared and had great power. The white rulers were obliged to outlaw the cult because the priests were responsible for spreading the disease to keep their power.

The Yoruba faith is, however, more difficult to understand as it varies from one part of Yorubaland to the other: the characteristics of two gods in one place may be embodied in a single god at another place, or the same deity may be male in one village and female

²⁹ Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

in the next. Such variations are due to the fact that the myths were passed orally and to the merging into the Yoruba faith of other religions especially Christianity and Islam.

Many of the Yorubas are now either Christian or Muslim, or mingle Christianity or Islam with Yoruba traditions and rituals. Ake, the place where Soyinka spent his childhood, for example, had very strong links with Europe; hence the frequency of Christian missionaries there. The fusing of Christian and Yoruba materials in Soyinka's writing and his fascination with the myths and customs of his country are all indebted to childhood experiences in Ake and its neighbouring region Isara.

Ake is a town situated in the Abeokuta region in Western Nigeria and formed part of an Egba refugee settlement. The Egba is a numerous and powerful tribe to whom Soyinka's mother belonged. Soyinka second's name 'Olu', is a name that belong to a child of high or princely birth by reference to the Egba tribe. In the Yoruba tradition, a child is given three names: a birth name, 'Amutorunwa', a Christian name, 'Absio' and an attributive name, 'Oriki'. Soyinka's parents adhered to the traditional naming procedure by given their child three names: *Akinwande Oluwole*; *Olu*, combined with *Wole*, and *Akin*, in *Akinwande*, which means strong. Despite this rich religious upbringing, adult Soyinka practises neither the Christian nor the Yoruba religion. When an interviewer asked him if he took to Christianity at any stage of his life he replied:

Never really - not even as a child. I remember distinctly my first essay prize at secondary school - that was in my first year. My essay was entitled: "Ideals of an

Atheist." Yes, I went through all these phases. I just felt I couldn't believe in the Christian god and for me that meant I was an atheist.³⁰

It seems that Soyinka saw religion as system of restrictions that are inadequate for an artist like himself; he adds:

What use is a system of beliefs like Islam and Christianity in the contemporary world? And they cannot see that they have totally failed to make the leap: to take the Yoruba religion on the same level as any system of belief in the world, that they are committing a serious scholarship lapse. In other words they are totally brainwashed by what I call these "elaborate structures superstition" - Islam and Christianity particularly. They have accepted these as absolute facts of life which cannot be questioned.³¹

To come back to Ake, this region joins many areas of Yorubaland in celebrating the god Ogun. His festivals include animal sacrifices and "processions marked-tipped palm fronds to appease/please him".³² Ake, however, was not as committed as Isara (the place where Soyinka was born) to Yoruba rituals, traditions and spiritual life. Soyinka declared that his knowledge of the Yoruba culture came mainly from 'the annual visits to *Isara* - which was a very different situation from Abeokuta.'

Situated in an extremely isolated region, Isara strongly kept committed to many cultural and religious Yoruba beliefs. Its major deity is Agemo. His festivals include processions, rituals and acrobatics performed by men who wear carved masks.³³ As it was unconquered by Christian missionaries, Soyinka found in Isara the perfect place where he could freely expand his knowledge of the Yoruba culture. Life in Ake was

³⁰ Wole Soyinka on Yoruba Religion, www.yoruba.org

³¹ Quoting this passage out of the long interview may alter Soyinka's views. I would like to add therefore that Soyinka, as he declares in this interview, believes in the co-existence of religions but not in 'fundamentalism'. For further inquiry and the full text I urge the reader to consult the following link: www.yoruba.org

³² www.postcolonialweb.org/nigeria/yorubarel2.html

³³ *ibid.*

different: Soyinka recounts in *Ake: The Years of Childhood*³⁴, how the Christian school compound where he lived was all surrounded by high walls that were designed to shield the students from the traditional life that was going on outside; to watch the Egogun masquerades he had to ask somebody to lift a ladder for him.

Such an anecdote shows how the Yoruba traditional religion and customs, as any other faith in Nigeria, have not always been comfortably and freely practised; colonialism had an impact on the Yoruba life that altered these traditions. Michael Crowder tells us that:

The period 1906-12...marks both the beginning of effective administration and the beginning of the rejection of standards and customs that had endured almost intact for many centuries. It was the first time that Nigerians were subjected in any large measures to Western influences, which in the next fifty years were to have such great effect on Nigerian society. A whole new economic world was to be opened to Nigerians. Christianity, as the official doctrine of the colonial masters, began to spread throughout Southern Nigeria and the non-Muslim areas of Northern Nigeria. New forms of administration and justice were introduced. Finally, education in the Western way of life was made available to a wide range of Nigerians as a result of missions.³⁵

The colonial power placed many restrictions on what they considered 'pagan' religious practices: polygamy and incestuous marriages were permitted in the Yoruba marriage customs but were banned in the early twentieth century. Night gatherings, so vital to the worship of Ogun, were severely restricted. The Yoruba bury their dead in the house to 'keep in touch' with their relatives, but the white rulers insisted upon burying the dead in communal graveyards.

³⁴ Wole Soyinka, *Ake the Years of Childhood*. London: Minereva, 1981.

³⁵ Micheal Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria*. London : Faber and Faber, 1978. p. 189-190.

In many of his works, however, Soyinka shows us that in post-colonial Nigeria, the Western civilization has not been forced on the Nigerian society but chosen and adopted by the younger generation. Micheal Crowder tells us about this fact:

The emergence of the elite was one of the most dramatic post-war phenomena and was the result not only of the programme of Africanization carried on after 1950, but also of the expansion of educational opportunities...this elite tended to accept British cultural norms as the desired ones. There was nothing very unusual about this since the majority of the elite had gained their education in Britain and even when they obtained higher education in Nigeria the history they learnt was British, the books they read were by English authors.³⁶

Likewise, *The Interpreters* is about a group of intellectuals who come back to Nigeria after receiving their education in Europe and America. If Soyinka is against European assimilation, he is also against 'Africanization'. In *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Soyinka expresses his unsympathetic view of one of the first movements of rehabilitation of the black man's image, Negritude. His famous phrase, "A tiger does not shout about his tigritude, it acts", summarises his opposition to the quest of 'Africanness'; Africans, he argues, 'never at any time had cause to question the existence of their—Negritude.'³⁷

Soyinka argues that the Negritudinists mis-applied to the colonial African situation a set of western philosophies:

The fundamental error was one of procedure: Negritude stayed within a pre-set system of Eurocentric intellectual analysis both of man and society and tried to re-define the African and his society in these terms. In the end, even the poetry of celebration of this

³⁶ Ibid, p. 256.

³⁷ Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, p. 135.

supposed self-retrieval became indistinguishable from the mainstream of French poetry.³⁸

Soyinka cannot deny that he is a contributor to the western philosophic traditions and that his texts bear re-writing of Greek drama as well as a deliberate use of Nietzsche and Sartre among others; or does he have a different appropriation of this Western heritage?

European background, political activism and exile

Soyinka's education, working experience and exile in Europe and other parts of the world constitute the second facet of his writing. These experiences, as Gerald Moore notes, "brought him into contact with ideas from the whole modern world."³⁹ As we aim to show in this dissertation, his writing is a blend of traditional African forms of expression and of Western avant-garde techniques and philosophies.

After graduating from the University College of Ibadan, Soyinka moved, in 1954, to England where he studied English literature at the University of Leeds and received his B.A. in 1959. It is reported that during this period, Soyinka started study of the work of the modernist playwright Eugene O'Neil. He worked as a playreader at The Royal Court Theatre in London where some of his first plays were tried. Some English reviewers of these plays, according to Moore, noted influences of such classic dramatists as Ben Johnson, Wycherly, Chekov and Joyce's favorite artist Ibsen.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid, p. 136.

³⁹ Gerald Moore, *Wole Soyinka*. London: Erans Brothers Limited, 1971, p 3

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 8.

As Joyce, Soyinka has also experienced, throughout his life, many years in self-imposed exile. Although these years of exile came long after the publication of *The Interpreters* (which was not a novel written in exile like *Ulysses*), they may help in understanding the Nigerian scene and Soyinka's political activism.

Soyinka was first imprisoned in 1964, after broadcasting in a radio station his own protest tape that claimed electoral fraud instead of Akintola's victory speech. He was also imprisoned, without trial, in 1967-69 by the Federal military government for his pro-Biafran stand. In 1971 he decided to go into voluntary exile, and settled in many places around the world not returning until 1975 the year Yakubu Gowon was overthrown. His successor was assassinated a year later and Nigeria sank in an unprecedented governmental corruption and social inequality. Soyinka, as a defender of human rights, social improvement and democracy, reacted by fierce social criticism and was, therefore, harassed many times by the agents of the military regime. He was forced to go into exile again twenty years later (1996-1998) after serious threats from the regime of General Sani Abacha.

As a Professor of literature and art, Soyinka is certainly fully aware of the significance of exile for any artist and certainly aware of his own exile and its relation to his art; in his article '*The plight of writers in exile*', he tells us:

The theme of exile appears to hold great fascination for literary critics, artistic consumers, anthologists and festival directors of all artistic genres; and a week or two had hardly passed after my vanishing trick from my homeland before I began to be

bombarded with enquiries about how exile was affecting my writing: "Are you still able to write?" "What does exile mean to your writing?"⁴¹

He then explained that he was away from Nigeria on a 'political sabbatical', and that he refused to call it exile:

I was not in exile because I did not feel that I was in exile: I feel, therefore I am; I do not, therefore I ain't. I had not remotely begun to sense the beginning of an exile identity. Even if, objectively, some obstinate critic would refer to me as having swelled the increasing stream of exiled Nigerian writers, professionals and intellectuals, he would be hard put to it, I insisted, to prove that my identity was thereby transformed and could now be described not as African, Nigerian or Yoruba, but as uniquely Exile.⁴²

When Joyce was once asked if he would ever return to Ireland he replied by a question: 'Have I ever left it? When I die, Dublin will be found engraved upon my heart.'⁴³

We would certainly not like to force some kind of simplistic and common conclusion about Joyce's and Soyinka's exiles, but would like at least to propose the following: Joyce's and Soyinka's exiles were a response to what they considered a tyranny. A 'tyranny' that demanded from them to be ideologically correct and would, therefore, shape their art. Nowhere is this attitude more obvious than in their being both atheists.

Although one of the most famous exiles in the history of literature, Joyce's exile may seem to us capricious and much close to the romantic or transcendental exile of Whitman into nature; the indifferent artist locked up in his ivory tower. In Soyinka's case, the threat was certainly more serious as he risked imprisonment and assassination.

⁴¹ http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,,754167,00.html#article_continue

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ David Norris and Carl Flint, quoted in *Introducing Joyce*. p. 11.

Both remained, nevertheless, committed to their homelands by a locally coloured literature.

It may have become clear by now that Joyce's life and background show parallels to those of Soyinka: both Ireland and Nigeria have witnessed divisions within their societies; ethnic, religious and geographical partition characterized much of their pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial history. As we have seen, the partition of Ireland into a northern Protestant province and a southern Catholic republic, which itself had many conflicting powers, result in endless social and political squabbles that persist to this very day. The difference with Nigeria is of degree rather than kind. Nigeria comprises over two hundred ethnic groups, each with its own language, customs and traditions. As we argued, ethnicity formed one the most acute challenges that faced the colonial and post-colonial Nigerian society and political system. Fragmentation rather than fusion characterized the country, a fragmentation that would culminate in a civil war.

The colonial image, as C.L. Innes notes, was identical: both the Africans and the Irish were, stereotyped by their colonisers; the image of the African was always that of a 'savage' and a 'primitive'; the Irish was always seen as a 'buffoon' and a drunkard: 'Ireland sober is Ireland free!' boasts one of Joyce's characters in *Ulysses*. As C.L. Innes explains, the most important thing for the colonizer was not only to sustain these images but also to make the colonized admit the 'superiority' of the white, and to have the

'other' behave like himself. This process of assimilation occupies a central place in much of Joyce's and Soyinka's works and more particularly in *Ulysses* and *The Interpreters*. Both writers, as we shall see, did not aim at correcting this image or at idealizing their people but rather strove to dis-alienating their peoples through a shock of self-recognition. To this end they artistically moved from the 'periphery' to the 'centre', by appropriating, mastering and manipulating the English language as well as Modernism.

Chapter III

Ulysses: The Form

Joyce's style is difficult. Such a value judgement becomes comprehensible only when one is *confronted* with a text like *Ulysses*: a bulky book full of excessive details, filled with boring interior monologues that can go up to fourteen pages without a single punctuation mark, jumbled and fragmented sentences, obscure references, difficult metaphors and incomprehensible allusions. The temptation to give up reading *Ulysses* after thirteen pages is seldom fought. Re-reading the book several times (with all the courage such a task may demand) is often the first advice given to readers of *Ulysses*. Joyce was aware of the difficulty of his prose style; he once told an interviewer: 'The only demand I make of my reader, is that he should devote his whole life to reading my works.'¹ And on another occasion he quizzically commented on *Ulysses*:

I've put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that's the only way of ensuring one's immortality'²

Enigmas and puzzles confront us from the very beginning of the book; from its title, which is the sole direct allusion to Homer's *Odyssey* the narrative from which the novel took its structure, plot and symbolism.

But after all, Joyce's difficult style is similar to the process of decolonization; as Andrew Gibson suggests: "Joyce's work draws its readers into a labour which knows no end. As such, it resembles what Joyce himself shows to be the unremitting and unendingly ironical work of liberation."³ Indeed, decolonization is a long and

¹ <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/jjoyce.htm>

² Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern World. Ten Great Writers*. London: Penguin Books, 1989, p 158.

³ Andrew Gibson, *Joyce's Revenge : History, Politics, and Aesthetics in Ulysses*. London : Oxford University Press, 2002, p18.

difficult process, one which is filled with twists and turns, with contradictions;

‘Decolonization, Fanon wrote,

which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come as a result of magical practices, or of a natural shock, or of a friendly understanding. Decolonization, as we know, is a historical process: that is to say that it cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible nor clear to itself except in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and content.⁴

We shall see that this disorder ‘migrates’ to literature essentially through the fragmented form of the novel, and argue that this formal fragmentation parallels the social fragmentation under the dominance of capitalism and imperialism, and then show the ways in which Joyce’s text attacks fragmentation rather than celebrate it.

In my consideration of form therefore, I do not look at it in strictly technical terms, as autonomous or as exclusively relating to the text; I look at it as related to the ideological, historical and political content of the novel, as a product of the historical circumstances and context in which the novel was produced, in what Terry Eagleton calls the ‘ideological form’:

Forms are historically determined by the kind of ‘content’ they have to embody; they are changed, transformed, broken down and revolutionized as that content itself changes. ‘Content’ is in this sense prior to ‘form’, just as for Marxism it is changes in a society’s material ‘content’, its mode of production, which determine the ‘forms’⁵

We shall therefore link Joyce’s use of innovative techniques such as the stream-of-consciousness technique, interior monologue, flashback, myth and archetypes to the Irish condition and specific historical circumstances. And since, as we will argue

⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York : Grove Weidenfeld, 1963, p36.

⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 2002, p21.

later, Joyce's content is loaded with a critique of colonialism and bourgeois ideology, I equally regard the form of his novel to be as subversive of these ideologies.

'Il se promène, lisant au livre de lui même'⁶: The Stream of Consciousness Technique and the Interior Monologue

Much has been said about Joyce's use of the stream-of-consciousness technique and the interior monologue in *Ulysses*. It is not our intention, therefore, to bring any original analysis to these techniques, nor is it my intention to re-write previous interpretations of them. Rather, we shall read these narrative devices as responses to the colonial cultural hegemony so as to show their subversive nature.

As we agreed in Chapter I, the stream-of-consciousness technique captures the thoughts that pass through the minds of characters and supposedly renders them at the very moment of their conception. Let us have an example on how this device actually works: in Episode Six, 'Hades', Bloom is travelling in a carriage with Martin Cunningham, Jack Power and Simon Dedalus to attend Dignam's funeral when the carriage passes Blazes Boylan, Bloom's wife's lover, Molly:

-Blazes Boylan, Mr Power said. There he is airing his quaff.

Just that moment I was thinking.

Mr Dedalus bent across to salute. From the door of the Red Bank the white disc of a straw that flashed reply: passed

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. They sometimes feel what a person is. Instinct. But a type like that. My nails. I am just looking at them: well pared. And after thinking alone. Body getting a bit softy. I would notice that from remembering. What causes that I suppose the skin can't contract quickly enough when the flesh falls off. But the shape is there. The shape is there still. Shoulders. Hips. Plump. Night of the dance dressing. Shift struck between the cheeks behind.⁷

⁶ 'He walks around reading the book of himself'. We are told in Episode Nine that this statement was made by Mallarmé in describing Hamlet. James Joyce, *Ulysses*. New York : Vintage Books, 1990, p187.

⁷ Ibid, p92.

The second line, after Mr Power's speech, is Bloom's mind 'speaking'. The sentence is not introduced by the narrator; such phrases as 'he thought' are inexistent when the stream-of-consciousness technique is employed. After the sight of Boylan, the narrator describes Bloom's action, that of checking his nails. Then, without any introductory phrase or word and within the same paragraph, we are directly thrown into Bloom's thoughts.

Some of the sentences are, as we notice, grammatically incorrect; the sentences are constituted of half words and incomplete thoughts. Notice for example the successive combination of two personal pronouns in 'Is there anything more in him that they she sees?'. The agreement of the verb 'see' with the subject 'she' complicates the sentence in a sense that it gives it two possible meanings: either in the sense of 'Is there anything more interesting she sees in him than they do?' or 'what does she and they see in him?'. Joyce was obsessed with compact meaning and style, a strong affinity with Soyinka as we shall see later.

To come back to the passage quoted, it is interesting to note how Bloom reacts to the sudden appearance of his wife's lover: he thoroughly checks his nails, and his mind ponders between the state of his nails and Boylan. In other words he tries to distract himself from the panic, frustration and embarrassment caused by the appearance of Boylan. In a more classical prose style and language, it would have taken the writer a full page to describe this moment of panic and attempt at diversion. In employing the stream-of-consciousness technique, therefore, the writer resigns from his 'duty' to comment, analyse, judge and elucidate the text, the character and

the reader. In this sense, a text written in the stream-of-consciousness technique becomes an impressionistic text, a text in which the writer supplies the ‘raw material of experience’⁸ and acts like a stage director, indicating the appearance of a character, his manners, movements and gives details of location. As Stephen declares in *A Portrait*:

The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.⁹

It is important to note here that such characteristics of the stream-of-consciousness device (and of much of the techniques and narrative devices that we shall analyse) were not established conventions, but personal experiments. While these experiments represent a break away from the 19th century mode of representation, they do not simply emerge from an urge to ‘make it new’ in Ezra Pound’s words.

In fact, Ezra Pound’s support for Joyce throughout the composition of *Ulysses*, his connections with Eliot and many other young modernist artists and his status as the leading cosmopolitan ideologue of Modernism, have all contributed to generate misinterpretations of Joyce’s works and of Modernism in general; witness for example Malcolm Bradbury’s oversimplified statements about the relationship Pound had with modernists and Modernism:

Sometime in the 1930s, the American poet Ezra Pound issued to his cotemporaries the most famous diktats of modern literature –Make it New, he declared...the task of Making it New meant the need to go ahead, finding a new way through modern experience...His desire to Make It New was a quarrel with modernity –the cultural bankruptcy of the modern state, the broken language of the modern age...he was also one of the great entrepreneurs of change, an organizer, friend, guide and promoter for many of the radical new writers painters and musicians who emerged in

⁸ Paul Poplawsk ed., *Encyclopedia of Literary Modernism*. London : Greenwood Press, 2003, p256.

⁹ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. London : Penguin, p

remarkable numbers in Britain, expatriate Paris and the United States over the years of war...the two major works that dominated the new arts in the English language largely owe their existence to Pound. He helped T.S. Eliot, a fellow American expatriate in London, working in a London bank and writing *The Waste Land*, which was dedicated to Pound. He also organised assistance to James Joyce, teaching in a language school in Trieste, and bringing to birth his great book *Ulysses*.¹⁰

Such conceptions can be highly misleading since they put together artists that have very little in common ideologically. Joyce himself declared in 1928 that:

...the more I hear of the political, philosophical, ethical zeal and labours of the brilliant members of Pound's big brass band the more I wonder why I was ever let into it 'with my magic flute'...¹¹

The politics of Eliot's and Pound's Modernism, in other words, is not the same as Joyce's. For if for instance it is well known that Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Joyce's *Ulysses* (both published in 1922) show striking similarities in their formal aspects; the intentions and motivations of each writer behind the employment and experimentations with techniques may not be the same. For one thing, the technical innovations that we find in (most) modernist poems by Eliot and Pound are essentially anti-realist (one only thinks of the highly metaphoric and symbolic language of *The Waste Land* here); their experimentation with form (as Lukács observed) tend to estrange their writing from material reality, while, on the contrary, Joyce's technical innovations emerge essentially from realism and naturalism, which for Eagleton is one of the main sources from which *Ulysses* gains its power, since it allows readers to develop traditional expectations that they have experienced with the naturalistic novel.

¹⁰ Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern World. Ten Great Writers*. London: Penguin Books, 1989, p1-6.

¹¹ Stuart Gilbert ed., *Letters of James Joyce*. New York: Viking Press, 1957, p277.

The stream-of-consciousness technique for example can be said to be the very last word in naturalistic prose. The huge amount of details that Bloom's mind's eye records of what goes around him show Joyce's deep concern with the physical world, with historical time. The radical change in representing the exterior reality that Joyce proposes through the stream-of-consciousness technique is meant to highlight the flaws of the precedent modes of representation in English literature, subsequently questioning the 'greatness' and claims of supremacy of this literature, which seems to me to be Joyce's major aim in writing *Ulysses* given the huge amount of parodies that the book encompasses. To take but one example, Bloom's 'encounter' with the young girl Gerty MacDowel in episode thirteen, 'Nausikka', is narrated through two different narrative devices: the first part is narrated through a third-person narrative, and the second through the stream-of-consciousness device; the following passage is taken from the first half of the episode:

For Gerty had her dreams that no-one knew of. She loved to read poetry and when she got a keepsake from Bertha Supple of that lovely confession album with the coralpink cover to write her thoughts in she laid it in the drawer of her toiletable which, though it did not err on the side of luxury, was scrupulously neat and clean. It was there she kept her girlish treasure trove, the tortoiseshell combs, her child of Mary badge, the whiterose scent, the eyebrowline, her alabaster pouncetbox and the ribbons to change when her things came home from the wash and there were some beautiful thoughts written in it in violet ink that she bought in Hely's of Dame Street for she felt that she too could write poetry if she could only express herself like that poem that appealed to her so deeply that she had copied out of the newspaper she found one evening round the potherbs.¹²

The second half of the episode begins as follows:

Tight boots? No. She's lame! O!
Mr Bloom watched her as she limped away. Poor girl! That's why she's left on the shelf and the others did a sprint. Thought something was wrong by the cut of her jib. Jilted beauty. A defect is ten times worse in a woman. But makes them polite. Glad I didn't know it when she was on show. Hot little devil all the same. I wouldn't mind. Curiosity like a nun or a negress or a girl with glasses. That squinty one is delicate. Near her monthlies, I expect, makes them

¹² *Ulysses*, p363-64.

feel ticklish. I have such a bad headache today. Where did I put the letter? Yes, all right. All kinds of crazy longings.¹³

The style of the first narrative is a clear imitation of sentimental and moralizing bourgeois literature that was widespread by the end of the 19th century especially in magazines dedicated to women. Contrasting the first text with the second shows clearly that Joyce's intention is essentially parodist. The 'writer' of the first text is sympathetic with Gerty, a fact that would affect the ways in which he portrays her, not to say moulds her. The narrator is so mawkish that he does not, at any time, allude to the fact that Gerty is lame, an information given to us, significantly, by the first line of Bloom's stream-of-consciousness narrative device. Bakhtin noted that heteroglossia in the comic novel is marked by two distinctive features:

- (1) Incorporated into the novel is a multiplicity of 'languages' and verbal-ideological belief systems –generic, professional, class-and-interest group...tendentious, everyday...
- (2) The incorporated languages and socio-ideological belief systems, while of course utilized to refract the author's intentions, are unmasked and destroyed as something false, hypocritical, greedy, limited, narrowly rationalistic, inadequate to reality.¹⁴

Thus, the different literary styles that are parodied in *Ulysses* are essentially considered as 'inadequate to reality' thus subverting claims of cultural supremacy by the conquering power; Joyce himself declared: 'it is my revolt against the English conventions, literary and otherwise, that is the main source of my talent. I don't write in English.'

Moreover, as the stream-of-consciousness device unveils a character's mind, Joyce is also able to parody the very discourse of his characters thus subverting the different

¹³ Ibid, p367-68.

¹⁴ M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*. Austin University Press, 1981, p311-12.

kinds of discourses circulating in turn-of-the-century Dublin; Simon Dentith in his

Parody writes:

Initially, we can see a kind of parody at work in the way that Joyce represents the so-called 'stream of consciousness' of Leopold Bloom. Unlike the very different techniques of other Modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf or May Sinclair, Joyce assembles the consciousness of Bloom out of scraps of discourse, random phrases and tags of contemporary idiom, which are held together partly by an associative 'psychological' logic, but are also partly arbitrary. Thus as Bloom makes his way around Dublin, his mind is filled with the phrases, slogans, and sounds that he meets...

In other words, it is essentially the everyday language which is parodied with its redundancies, clichés and inaccuracies. But it is important to note that Dentith's comment confuses two different techniques, the stream of consciousness device with the interior monologue. The latter is different from the former in that it maintains a kind of correct syntactic arrangement, grammatical structure and logic; this passage from Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* gives a clear idea about such a technique and its characteristics:

She looked up - what demon possessed him, her youngest, her cherished? and saw the room, saw the chairs, thought them fearfully shabby. Their entrails, as Andrew said the other day, were all over the floor; but then what was the point, she asked herself of buying good chairs to let them spoil up here all through the winter when the house, with only one old woman to see to it, positively dripped with wet?¹⁵

In this interior monologue, the narrator is present at all levels of narration; he maintains logical and grammatical organization by reporting to us what the character thinks, feels and acts. There is no use of the first-person pronoun as with Joyce's stream-of-consciousness technique and the tense of the narration is in the simple past.

¹⁵ Virginia Olf, *To the Lighthouse*. London : Harvest Books, 1989, p

Such kind of interior monologue does not exist in *Ulysses*. This caused commentators of *Ulysses* to use the two terms ‘stream-of-consciousness’ and ‘interior monologue’ interchangeably when talking about any rendering of the character’s thoughts in the novel.

The interior monologue in *Ulysses*, I would like to suggest, is one of the subcategories of the stream-of-consciousness technique (the flashback being the other as we shall see later). The interior monologue happens *within* the stream-of-consciousness technique; the two levels of narration are maintained: the narrator, who describes the movement of the character, and the character’s mind voice in the first person point of view. But if the stream-of-consciousness technique is characterized by constant topic jumps, illogical shifts and irregular sentences, the interior monologue, on the other hand, is characterized by its unity, logical continuity and a more or less grammatical accuracy:

His smile faded as he walked, a heavy cloud hiding the sun slowly, shadowing Trinity's surly front. Trams passed one another, ingoing, outgoing, clanging. Useless words. Things go on same, day after day: squads of police marching out, back: trams in, out. Those two loonies mooching about. Dignam carted off. Mina Purefoy swollen belly on a bed groaning to have a child tugged out of her. One born every second somewhere. Other dying every second. Since I fed the birds five minutes. Three hundred kicked the bucket. Other three hundred born, washing the blood off, all are washed in the blood of the lamb, bawling maaaaaaa. Cityful passing away, other cityful coming, passing away too: other coming on, passing on. Houses, lines of houses, streets, miles of pavements, piledup bricks, stones. Changing hands. This owner, that. Landlord never dies they say. Other steps into his shoes when he gets his notice to quit. They buy the place up with gold and still they have all the gold. Swindle in it somewhere. Piled up in cities, worn away age after age. Pyramids in sand. Built on bread and onions. Slaves Chinese wall. Babylon. Big stones left. Round towers. Rest rubble, sprawling suburbs, jerrybuilt. Kerwan's mushroom houses built of breeze. Shelter, for the night.
No-one is anything.¹⁶

¹⁶ *Ulysses*, opcit, p164

This is an interior monologue and not a stream-of-consciousness device in so far as it has a thematic unity. The passing cloud that hides the sun shadows Bloom's way and apparently his mood. From the beginning to the end of the passage then, Bloom broods over the routinization of things. There are no sudden topic-shifts or irrelevant sentences; every sentence and example he gives is in support of this idea. As with the dramatic monologue or the soliloquy, Bloom's interior monologue ends with self realization: 'No one is anything'.

How different is this passage from one of Hamlet soliloquies –say 'to be or not to be'? We get the same sense of absurdity, futility, endlessness and routine from both *units of thought*. Both are private moments of meditation over the state of the world and the way the universe goes about, over life and death, over the passing of time.

'A very short space of time through very short times of space'¹⁷: Time Treatment

The action of *Ulysses* happens approximately within 18 hours: from 8 am in the morning to about 3 am of the next. Each episode happens within a lapse of two hours and has its own setting, depending on the errands Bloom and Stephen have to run for the day. The third person narrator does not at any time break the narrative continuity. At first glance then, the novel seems to respect the realist linearity, both temporal and spatial.

¹⁷ Ibid, p37.

The chronological progression of the actual events of June 16, 1904, is maintained. Instead, the time-shifts operate as part of the functioning of the memory of the protagonists; they are part of the stream-of-consciousness technique narrative device.

In episode eight, 'Lestrygonians', Bloom is in a pub having a snack, when he suddenly perceives two flies stuck on a windowpane:

Stuck on the pane two flies buzzed, stuck.
Glowing wine on his palate lingered swallowed. Crushing in the winepress grapes of Burgundy. Sun's heat it is. Seems to a secret touch telling me memory. Touched his sense moistened remembered. Hidden under wild ferns on Howth below us bay sleeping: sky. No sound. The sky. The bay purple by the Lion's head. Green by Drumleck. Yellowgreen towards Sutton. Fields of undersea, the lines faint brown in grass, buried cities. Pillowed on my coat she had her hair, earwigs in the heather scrub my hand under her nape, you'll toss me all. O wonder! Coolsoft with ointments her hand touched me, caressed: her eyes upon me did not turn away. Ravished over her I lay, full lips full open, kissed her mouth. Yum. Softly she gave me in my mouth the seedcake warm and chewed. Mawkish pulp her mouth had mumbled sweetsour of her spittle. Joy: I ate it: joy. Young life, her lips that gave me pouting. Soft warm sticky gumjelly lips. Flowers her eyes were, take me, willing eyes. Pebbles fell. She lay still. A goat. No-one. High on Ben Howth rhododendrons a nannygoat walking surefooted, dropping currants. Screened under ferns she laughed warmfolded. Wildly I lay on her, kissed her: eyes, her lips, her stretched neck beating, woman's breasts full in her blouse of nun's veiling, fat nipples upright. Hot I tongued her. She kissed me. I was kissed. All yielding she tossed my hair. Kissed, she kissed me.
Me. And me now.
Stuck, the flies buzzed.¹⁸

The sight of two flies, apparently copulating, triggers a flashback in Bloom's mind when he and Molly laid side by side on a hill on Howth and made love. In contrast to Soyinka's use of flashbacks as we shall see in the next chapter, this flashback is not reported to us by the narrator but by the character himself and is similar to an interior monologue in its tight thematic unity.

For Luckas, such formal fragmentation (non-linear narratives, among others) in modernist texts parallel the fragmentation of social life under capitalism and thus suggests a complicity with capitalism, which is not necessarily true for Joyce given

¹⁸ Ibid, p175-176.

recent developments in post-colonial theory. In his *Ulysses, Capitalism and Colonialism*, M. Keith Booker rightly argues that ‘the consistently parodic orientation of Joyce’s texts suggests that his fragmented forms potentially enact a critique of the structures of capitalism and imperialism.’¹⁹ In fact, since, as we have seen in the ‘stream-of-consciousness’ section, Joyce’s subversive writing practice challenges literary convention and therefore challenges (cultural) imperialism, it may not be farfetched at all to assume that his style bears a critique to the capitalism that lies behind imperialism.

The assault on fragmentation in *Ulysses* lies essentially in showing that a segment cannot stand alone; textual fragments, however autonomous as they may appear, work necessarily together in the Joycean text. One may mention here for example the fifteen short stories that constitute *Dubliners*, which of course are meant to be read separately but which also illuminate each other at the level of both style and meaning. From this perspective, Joycean texts may be seen as embodying the kind of totalization that we find in bourgeois realist novels much praised by Luckas.

Formal fragmentation is of course one of the most famous characteristic of *Ulysses* since it is constituted of numerous anecdotes, often biographical, skilfully dispersed and integrated within the main narrative. The whole process of reading the novel then enviably requires a ‘spatial’ reading. To read *Ulysses* ‘spatially’ is to take an elevated position by which the network of moments (memories, remembrances, and flashbacks) can be perceived as a whole to subsequently form an organic unity that

¹⁹ M.Keith Booker, *Ulysses, Capitalism, and Colonialism. Reading Joyce after the Cold War*, p68.

goes directly in the face of fragmentation. Thus, Bloom's flashback that we have quoted earlier for example is both paralleled and complemented by Molly's flashback at the end of the novel, in which we know that Bloom proposed her to marry him on that same hill probably that same day:

I was a Flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used or shall I wear a red yes and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and L thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes.²⁰

A more relevant potential critique of fragmentation (through time treatment) is the 'Wandering Rocks' episode which marks the beginning of the 'breakdown of narrative' in the novel. This episode occurs between 3:00 and 4:00 p.m. and depicts seventeen characters circulating through the streets of Dublin. Each character is attributed a short section in which what goes around him is reported to us by the narrator and sometimes through the stream-of-consciousness device, along with a very short interpolation in each section that describes another action happening elsewhere at the same time which makes of this episode an 'exercise' in textual fragmentation; the following example is taken from John Conmee's section:

On Newcomen bridge the very reverend John Conmee S.J. of saint Francis Xavier's church, Upper Gardiner Street, stepped on an outward bound tram
Off an inward bound tram stepped the reverend Nicholas Dudley C.C of saint Agath's church, north William street, on to Newcomen bridge.²¹

First time readers of this chapter may consider it as the kind of annoying and gratuitous formal play since no apparent logical link can be drawn between the two sentences, which points to the damaging impact of fragmentation. It is only after

²⁰ *Ulysses*, opcit, p783.

²¹ *Ulysses*, opcit, p220.

reading the whole chapter that the reader realises that the various arbitrary actions are not unified by any plot development but merely by time and space: the episode is narrated through synchronizing the movement of his characters in space and time, so that if we imagine that we are looking at the whole scene from above we can see seventeen characters moving around in perfect harmony at the same time, which can be read as one of the most direct critique of fragmentation since it points to the necessity of relating the part to the whole.

We shall see in the next two sections that fragmentation is further resisted by the use of myth and archetypes as structural devices that reinforce the unity of the novel.

‘My intention is...to render the myth subspecie temporis nostri’²²: The Use of Myth

If Joyce’s *Ulysses* is plotless, it is not, however, unstructured. Each of the eighteen episodes of the novel corresponds to an adventure from Homer’s narrative *Odyssey*. In the analysis that follows of Joyce’s use of myth then, we will give a very brief overview of Homer’s epic, then look at the general relationship between the *Odyssey* and *Ulysses*, and last but not least take an episode from the *Odyssey* and compare it to its relevant counterpart in *Ulysses* in order to see exactly how Joyce uses the ‘mythic method’ and the purpose for which he does.

Homer (whether he really existed or not), his *Odyssey* and his *Iliad* have been hailed as the most important icons of Western civilization, culture and literature; they form a very important part of Western hegemony. They surely are the primary sources of our knowledge of ancient Greek civilization, but most important of all (at

²² ‘in the light of our own times’. <http://caxton.stockton.edu/ulysses/stories/>

least in the context of this study) is that they have been used as vehicles for affirming the white man's superiority.

The plot of the *Odyssey* involves three main parts: the first centres on Telemachus' quest for his father Ulysses; the second focuses on the wanderings and adventures of Ulysses; the third part depicts Ulysses' return to his kingdom and wife. The story recounts the attempt of king Ulysses to reach his island Ithaca after the war of Troy. As a prey to Poseidon's hatred, he wanders at sea for ten years during which he undergoes several 'trials' before finding his way back home.

The main structure of *Ulysses* is taken from that of the *Odyssey*: the three first episodes, named the 'Telmachia' after Homer's first part, centre on Stephen Dedalus and his search for a substitute father; the next twelve episodes called the 'Odyssey', centre on Bloom's 'adventures' in various parts of Dublin; the third part called the 'Nastos', recounts Bloom's return to his home and to his wife Molly.

Homer's epic is based on a variety of Greek myth narratives. The myth of the Sirens, the Laestrygonians, the Cyclops or of Scylla and Charybdis are adapted by Homer or rather re-told. The notion of intertextuality, in fact, has been present ever since Antiquity. Like any classical epic, the *Odyssey* is a long narrative poem incorporating myth narratives (among other sources); in this sense, Homer's use of myth is of the narrative kind.

By writing a pastiche of Homer's epic, Joyce had full access to a wide range of Greek myths which provided him with readymade symbols, images and themes

which eventually favour a spatial reading. In a letter to his friend Carlo Linati, Joyce wrote:

My intention is not only to render the myth *sub specie temporis nostri* [in the light of our own times] but also to allow each adventure (that is, every hour, every organ, every art being interconnected and interrelated in the somatic scheme of the whole) to condition and even to create its own technique.²³

As with reading flashbacks, one has to take an elevated position by which the different images taken from myth can be visible so as to form an organic unity.

The twelfth episode of *Ulysses* parallels Odysseus' adventure with his men in the cave of the Cyclops. In Greek mythology, the Cyclops is a one-eyed giant who inhabits caverns. They are also known to be savage and cannibalistic.

In Homer's narrative, Odysseus and his men are trapped on the island of the Cyclops, in Polyphemus' cave. Odysseus tells the giant that his name is 'No-man' and succeeds in making him drunk to distract him and let his men run out of the cave. Meanwhile, Odysseus blinds Polyphemus by a burning pike in his sole eye. The blinded monster, running in pursuit of the evaders, cries for help to his fellow Cyclops telling them that 'No-man' injured him and they naturally mock and ignore him. While Odysseus and his men escape in their ship, Polyphemus succeeds in throwing a big boulder at the ship nearly causing it to sink and causing an earthquake.

The dark cave that the Cyclops inhabits becomes in *Ulysses* Barney Kiernan's tavern, a tavern in which Bloom finds himself surrounded by a group of hostile, pro-nationalists and anti-Semitic individuals. The most notable among them is the

²³ [http://caxton.stockton.edu/ulysses/stories/storyReader\\$4](http://caxton.stockton.edu/ulysses/stories/storyReader$4).

Citizen, a modern version of the mythological Cyclops Polyphemus. The 'I' of the first person view through which the episode is narrated symbolizes the Cyclops' single eye. The eye of the Cyclops then becomes an important symbol. The word 'eye' is repeated at least twelve times in the episode subsequently becoming a leitmotif. It is for example used twice to re-write the blinding of Polyphemus by Odysseus:

I was just passing the time of day with old Troy of the D. M. P. at the corner of Arbour hill there and be damned but a bloody sweep came along and he near drove his gear into my eye.²⁴

And in:

Begob he drew his hand and made a swipe and let fly. Mercy of God the sun was in his eyes or he'd have left him for dead.²⁵

Moreover, the gigantic appearance of the Cyclops is used to create the technique of 'gigantism' in which the whole episode is written; the Citizen for example is described thus by the narrator:

The figure seated on a large boulder at the foot of a round tower was that of a broadshouldered deepchested stronglimbed frankeyed redhaired freelyfreckled shaggybearded widemouthed largenosed longheaded deepvoiced barekneed brawnyhanded hairylegged ruddyfaced sinewyarmed hero. From shoulder to shoulder he measured several ells and his rocklike mountainous knees were covered, as was likewise the rest of his body wherever visible, with a strong growth of tawny prickly hair in hue and toughness similar to the mountain gorse.²⁶

Every feature of the Citizen's body is exaggerated and magnified, to create a comic version of a Cyclops. In the same manner, this episode features, next to the first person narrative, a number of interpolations that exaggerate, magnify and parody the prose style of journalism, Irish mythology and scientific language among others. The

²⁴ James Joyce, *Ulysses*. p292.

²⁵ Ibid, p343.

²⁶ Ibid, p296.

following passage that parodies Biblical prose by describing Bloom's escape from the 'cave of the Cyclops' as that of the prophet Elijah carried to heaven is quite illustrative:

When, lo, there came about them all a great brightness and they beheld the chariot wherein He stood ascend to heaven. And they beheld Him in the chariot, clothed upon in the glory of the brightness, having raiment as of the sun, fair as the moon and terrible that for awe they durst not look upon Him. And there came a voice out of heaven, calling: Elijah! Elijah! And He answered with a main cry: Abba! Adonai! And they beheld Him even Him, ben Bloom Elijah, amid clouds of angels ascend to the glory of the brightness at an angle of fortyfive degrees over Donohoe's in Little Green street like a shot off a shovel.²⁷

All these elements must be detected by the reader and apprehended as a whole to re-construct the fragmented parts of novel; which brings us back to the idea that Joyce's texts work against the fragmentation of life under modern industrial capitalism. From this perspective, Eliot's idea that the use of myth in *Ulysses* is 'a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history' seems quite accurate here since it is well known that Eliot, like Pound²⁸, blames capitalism (and essentially World War I) for the fallen state of the world. It is very important however to note that Eliot's comment involves an attempt at appropriating *Ulysses* for his project of cultural nostalgia: firm medieval hierarchy and feudalism were completely wiped away by World War I, which made some modernists like Eliot and Pound attack modernity and yearn through their poetry for a better pastoral past. Thus, the fragmentation that we find in *The Waste Land* is essentially a cry for the restoration of conventional structures of authority, while *Ulysses*, on the contrary,

²⁷ Ibid, p345.

²⁸ In 1922 Pound suggested that, in *Ulysses*, Joyce 'presented Ireland under British domination...By extension he has presented the whole occident under the domination of capital.'

does not appeal to any sort of nostalgia be it through form or content, which highlights major differences between the ‘socialist’ and antiauthoritarian Joyce and the conservative Eliot. Moreover, myth in *Ulysses* is essentially used to raise laughter. Parody, Simon Dentith tells us, ‘includes any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice.’²⁹ If the cultural superiority of the West has been carried out through its myths and epic narratives like the *Odyssey*, and if this cultural superiority has been used as pretexts to dominate ‘inferior’ races and cultures, then Joyce’s parody aims at disturbing and putting in question the authority of these myths so as to counter the colonial discourse.

**‘We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, oldmen, youngmen, wives, widows, brothers-in-love. But always meeting ourselves.’³⁰:
The use of Archetypes**

The three main archetypal figures that can be distinguished in *Ulysses* are of course Odysseus (Bloom), Telemachus (Stephen) and Penelope (Molly). There is nothing divine about these three figures; they are just human characters with a mock heroic status. Odysseus, for instance, must rely on the assistance of the god Zeus and the goddess Athena to overcome the various difficulties he encounters. Odysseus, however, is a god-like figure in so far as his deeds are heroic and his strength nearly super-natural. He is also a hero as he carries the attributes of virtue and honour. Joyce considered that Odysseus was the most all-round character in literature; in

²⁹ Simon Dentith, *Parody*. London: Routledge, 2000, p9.

³⁰ *Ulysses*, *opcit*, p213.

conversation with Frank Budgen he explained why he favoured Homer's hero over other archetypal figures of world literature:

No-age Faust isn't a man. But you mentioned Hamlet. Hamlet is a human being, but he is a son only. Ulysses is son to Laertes, but he is father to Telemachus, husband to Penelope, lover of Calypso, companion in arms of the Greek warriors around Troy and King of Ithaca. He was subjected to many trials, but with wisdom and courage came through them all.³¹

In the same way, Bloom is (a substitute) father to Stephen, husband to Molly and lover to Martha Clifford his erotic penpal. He, as Odysseus, must go through several trials before he can make his way back home. A home usurped to Odysseus by Penelope's suitors, and usurped to Bloom by his wife's lover Blazes Boylan.

Such symbolic situations represent what Jung terms the 'collective unconscious': a person can unconsciously repeat myth patterns in his everyday life through trivial, non-heroic situations.

It may happen however that a character is made conscious of his archetypal counterpart as he identifies himself with this figure in nearly every aspect. In the first episode a parallel is made between Hamlet and Stephen through a re-writing of the ghost-scene of Shakespeare's play:

Stephen, an elbow rested on the jagged granite, leaned his palm against his brow and gazed at the fraying edge of his shiny black coatsleeve. Pain, that was not yet the pain of love, fretted his heart. Silently, in a dream she had come to him after her death, her wasted body within its loose brown graveclothes giving off an odour of wax and rosewood, her breath, that had bent upon him, mute, reproachful, a faint odour of wetted ashes. Across the threadbare cuffedge he saw the sea hailed as a great sweet mother by the wellfed voice beside him. The ring of bay and skyline held a dull green mass of liquid. A bowl of white china had stood beside her deathbed holding the green sluggish bile which she had torn up from her rotting liver by fits of loud groaning vomiting.³²

³¹ David Norris and Carl Flint, quoted in *Introducing Joyce*. p108.

³² *Ulysses*, opcit, p5.

The correspondence, while evident, is not exact, for while Hamlet is haunted by his father's ghost, Stephen is haunted by his mother's. Moreover Stephen's brooding is self-conscious; he deliberately associates his situation to Hamlet's as when he says later in the novel: 'A side eye at my Hamlet hat.'³³ Stephen's self-association with Hamlet has many explanations: first it marks his arrogance, for by identifying with such a famous fictional character, Stephen displays intellectual and poetic sophistication; second it marks his aloofness from the material world, for as we have seen in the stream of consciousness section, Stephen's thoughts are always remote from whatever is physical to concentrate on what is abstract, poetic and philosophical; third, his identification with Hamlet shows that Stephen has not yet reached maturity as he is still in the process of 'forging' his personality and identity, a theme central to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

In this respect, it is significant that while Stephen identifies with Hamlet, he is unconsciously the archetype of Telemachus. In my own view, it is precisely such kind of insular self-identification that Joyce condemns. As we will see with the milkwoman and the Celtic Revival in the next section, self-identification can only lead to sentimentality and idealization: through associating himself with Hamlet, Stephen can freely dramatize his own life and find excuses to his deeds as his refusal to kneel at his mother's deathbed, which is the reason why he thinks she haunts him.

The idea behind using an archetype then is not to find a perfect paradigm, for it would be wrong to assume that Joyce idealizes Bloom or Odysseus in *Ulysses*. In

³³ Ibid, p37.

fact, if Ulysses' deeds are heroic, Bloom's are far from those of an epic hero; everything about him is ordinary if not decadent: his actions are banal, his job as an advertisement canvasser has nothing special (except perhaps for revealing his artistic potential and his bourgeois and capitalist mindset); he is often excluded from any kind of public relation and is sometimes the centre of gossip, mockery and hatred. Moreover, if Ulysses in the *Odyssey* slays the suitors of his wife and is apparently ready to slay her if she betrayed him; Bloom turns out to be a cuckold who is fully aware of his wife's cheating and cowardly accepts it.

Such ironies put emphasis on the anti-heroic and mock-heroic nature of Bloom's character although it is often said that Bloom's heroism lies in his capacity for compassion:

It is only Bloom's extraordinary capacity for sympathy and compassion that allows him an unironic heroism in the course of the novel. Bloom's fluid ability to empathize with such a wide variety of beings—cats, birds, dogs, dead men, vicious men, blind men, old ladies, a woman in labor, the poor, and so on—is the modern-day equivalent to Odysseus's capacity to adapt to a wide variety of challenges.³⁴

But even then, Bloom's capacity for empathy is treated with irony by Joyce as it conveys more often than not bourgeois sentimentality. As we shall show in our second part, Bloom's bourgeois sentimentality is subject to Joyce's critique and mockery, for above all Joyce's mock-heroic Bloom is part of his subversive and parodist project: as in his use of myth, Joyce's translation of Homer's hero, that great archetype of Western heroism, virtue and literature, into the ordinary Bloom is meant to question the supposed greatness of the Western civilization just as the famous

³⁴ www.sparknotes.com

'Oxen of the Sun' episode parodies the history of English prose through a series of successive imitation by exaggeration of medieval Latin, early modern English, seventeenth-, eighteenth –and nineteenth century prose, and contemporary English, while in the process parodying those who represent these styles, writers such as Bunyan, Daniel Defoe, Lawrence Sterne, Oliver Goldsmith, Charles Dickens to name but a few. In a similar vein, a variety of styles and discourses are parodied in nearly every episode: episode thirteen parodies sentimental and moralizing literature through a third person narrator that recounts Bloom's 'adventure' with Gerty MacDowell; episode fifteen parodies the play script form with dialogue and stage-directions; episode sixteen for its part is written in a nineteenth-century bourgeois prose with all its moralistic and 'well-mannered' tone; last but not least episode seventeen is narrated in a catechistic style, through a series of question-answer method that parodies both the scientific style and Sunday school. The list of parodies is not exhaustive; in sum, the whole novel is a perfect exemplar of what Said calls 'the voyage in'³⁵, making of Joyce the precursor *par excellence* of those post-colonial writers who were to parody Shakespeare and Defoe. Actually, *Ulysses* is meant to put in question each and every achievement and assumption of Western literature, culture and civilization; a so-called great civilization that would make an English

³⁵ 'Certainly, as the title of a fascinating book has it, writing back to the metropolitan cultures, disrupting the European narratives of the Orient and Africa, replacing them with either a more playful or a more powerful new narrative style is a major component in the process [of resistance]... The conscious effort to enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories...I call this *the voyage in*.' Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. New York : Vintage Books, 1993, p216.

imperialist sing his own praises and say to the Irish (and to other colonized and 'inferior' races) what the Egyptians said to their captive Jews:

Why will you Jews not accept our culture, our religion and our language? You are a tribe of nomad herdsmen: we are a mighty people. You have no cities nor no wealth: our cities are hives of humanity and our galleys, trireme and quadrireme, laden with all manner of merchandise furrow the waters of the known globe. You have but emerged from primitive conditions: *we have a literature, a priesthood, an age-long history and a polity*. . . . You pray to a local and obscure idol: our temples, majestic and mysterious, are the abodes of Isis and Osiris, of Horus and Ammon Ra. Yours serfdom, awe and humbleness: ours thunder and the seas. Israel is weak and few are her children: Egypt is an host and terrible are her arms. Vagrants and daylabourers are you called: the world trembles at our name.³⁶

If we consider Joyce's form and his excessive use of technique from this perspective, then the novel ceases to be a mere puzzle of 'match and join' symbols, and the different styles and sources Joyce borrowed and modified in addition to his innovative techniques, become all subsumed within a specific ideology at the time he was writing his novel: anti-imperialism; Terry Eagleton tells us:

In selecting a form, then, the writer finds his choice already ideologically circumscribed. He may combine and transmute forms available to him from a literary tradition, but these forms themselves, as well as his permutation of them, are ideologically significant. The languages and devices a writer finds to hand are already saturated with certain ideological modes of perception, certain codified ways of interpreting reality; and the extent to which he can modify or remake those languages depends on more than his personal genius. It depends on whether at that point in history, 'ideology' is such that they must and can be changed.³⁷

³⁶ *Ulysses*, opcit, p142-143.

³⁷ Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. p25.

Chapter IV

Ulysses: The Content

Commenting over the difficulty he had in publishing *Ulysses*, Joyce once wrote to a friend of his:

No English printer wanted to print a word of it. In America the review was suppressed four times. Now, as I hear, a great movement is being prepared against the publication, initiated by puritans, English Imperialists, Irish Republicans, Catholics –what an alliance!¹

If these institutions formed an alliance against *Ulysses*, it is because each and every one of them felt prey to Joyce's attack in his novel. It is not just because of obscenity, as always believed, that *Ulysses* was banned –it is because it challenges, ridicules, mocks and undermines well-established institutions.

Through a pertinent analysis of characters and characterization, dialogues and plot, we shall attempt to show in this chapter the ways in which Joyce's *Ulysses* interacts with history and politics through its 'dialogues' with imperialism, capitalism, the Catholic Church and bourgeois ideology. We argue that Joyce's flight from Ireland and his assault on the institutions that form the structure of the pre-independence Irish society is not so much a rejection of his Irish roots in favour of a Poundian cosmopolitanism, but rather an attempt at escaping a suffocating milieu, a need 'to free his mind from his mind's bondage'² in Stephen's words, and consequently at providing the Irish with views about themselves other than those imposed by Nationalism, British imperialism and the Catholic church. On the latter for instance Joyce wrote to Nora Barnacle on 29 August 1904:

Six years ago [at sixteen] I left the Catholic Church, hating it most fervently. I found it impossible for me to remain in it on account of the impulses of my nature. I made secret war upon it when I was a student and declined to accept the positions it

¹ Steven Lud, *James Joyce : Letters, Manuscripts and Photographs at Southern Illinois University*.

² James Joyce, *Ulysses*, p212.

offered me. By doing this I made myself a beggar but I retained my pride. Now I make open war upon it by what I write and say and do.³

‘I must kill the priest and the king’⁴: Stephen, Violence, Colonialism and the Catholic Church

Much of the traditional accounts of the first three episodes concerned with Stephen’s affairs, tend to consider them a ‘bridge’ between *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*. In this respect, critics have been preoccupied with tracking the reasons behind Stephen’s unfulfilled vocation as an artist since his decision to exile himself at the end of *A Portrait*. Much of this critical tradition (mainly Leavistec/New Humanist) has focused on the outcome of the relationship between Stephen and Bloom. As Charles Peake argues, Stephen the artist emerges in the Telemachia, followed by Bloom the citizen in later chapters; the encounter frees Stephen artistically as his fulfilment needed ‘contact with the ordinary world of Bloom.’⁵ In recent years, however, there has been a serious move from this long tradition to a post-colonial Stephen Dedalus ‘whose project –and whose problem- is precisely independence.’⁶

Direct confrontation and resistance is the first form through which colonialism is dealt with; Joyce puts Stephen in opposition to four British-centred figures: Haines, an English folklore student at Oxford; Buck Mulligan, an Irish medical student living with Stephen in the Martello Tower, Mr Deasy, the Protestant northern Irish headmaster of the school where Stephen teaches, and Private Carr, the British Army soldier.

³ Heyward Ehrlich, quoted in *Light Rays: James Joyce and Modernism*. New York: New Horizon Press, 1984, p2.

⁴ Ibid, p589.

⁵ Charles Peake, *James Joyce : The Citizen and the Artist*. London: Edward Arnold, 1977.

⁶ Andrew Gibson, *Joyce’s Revenge : History, Politics, and Aesthetics in Ulysses*. London : Oxford University Press, 2002, p28.

The first and most notable confrontation is between Haines and Stephen. While having a conversation on free thought, Haines declares to Stephen:

- After all, I should think you are able to free yourself. You are your own master, it seems to me.
- I am a servant of two masters, Stephen said, an English and an Italian.
- Italian? Haines said. A crazy queen, old and jealous. Kneel down before me.
- And a third, Stephen said, there is who wants me for odd jobs.
- Italian? Haines said again. What do you mean?
- The imperial British state, Stephen answered, his colour rising, and the holy Roman catholic and apostolic church. Haines detached from his underlip some fibres of tobacco before he spoke.
- I can quite understand that, he said calmly. An Irishman must think like that, I daresay. We feel in England that we have treated you rather unfairly. It seems history is to blame.⁷

Putting the Roman Catholic Church in the same category as the British Empire must have been a blasphemy (to the Irish) at the time the novel was published. Officially the Church played a major role in supporting the independence of Ireland and the different nationalist movements and fractions and in the preservation of Irish identity. Moreover, regarding the fact that the Irish were primarily ‘othered’ and persecuted for their religious belonging, the idea of the Catholic Church as an enemy of Ireland or as supporter of the colonial hegemony is normally irrelevant. In addition, it is difficult for a critic to find an example in Irish history that may demonstrate clearly a complicity between the Empire and the Church; such a task is difficult and controversial even for a historian; Edmund Curtis the Irish historian wrote:

Politics and religion take up a disproportionate space in our history, but these questions, the unfortunate heritage of the past, have left a deeper mark here than elsewhere in Europe, and though they have been dissolved in the light of modern reasonableness their importance in our history and on the shaping of the national character cannot be minimized. When we add to them the Land question and the agrarian fight, we have a union of passionate forces on which Irish nationality has been reared.

On the matter of our religious differences, one treads on sacred and dangerous ground, and the historian can only treat conscientious religious belief with the respect it deserves and view the Churches of the past in the light of their own day.⁸

⁷ *Ulysses*, opcit, p20.

⁸ Edmund Curtis, *A History of Ireland. From Earliest Times to 1922*. New York : Retledge, 2002, p.xv.

Parnell's fall, as we have shown in the previous chapter, remains the only obvious evidence of a possible complicity between the Catholic Church and the British Empire. Parnell, whom the whole British Parliament could not prevent from obtaining a Home Rule, was brought to his knees by the moralizing power of the Catholic Church. In this context, one can but only trust Father Dignam when he tells in the intense dinner scene of *A Portrait*, that the confession box of the church was used to induce people to denounce the active members of the Fenian movement to the government.

This power-relation is denied by both the colonizer and the Church. When Stephen for example points out to the English Haines his two masters, Haines ignores this relation and passively blames history.

For Stephen, and for Joyce, being a servant to the imperialist power and to the Catholic Church does not automatically mean being in favour of the Nationalists. Stephen in fact, adds a third master that he assumes wants him for 'odd jobs' – Ireland. The jobs Stephen refers to are most probably nationalist activism, by which Stephen will be part of the Irish masses that advocate and hail their given Nationalism, and part of the Irish elite represented by the Cultural Revivalists.

The rejection of this third master and of the Revivalists and their 'odd jobs' is conveyed through Joyce's portrayal of the milkwoman who comes to the tower a moment after the quoted conversation between Stephen and Haines; she is described thus by the narrator and Stephen's train of thought:

He watched her pour into the measure and thence into the jug rich white milk, not hers. Old shrunken paps. She poured again a measureful and a tilly. Old and secret she had entered from a morning world, maybe a messenger. She praised the goodness of the milk, pouring it out. Crouching by a patient cow at daybreak in the lush field, a witch on her toadstool, her wrinkled fingers quick at the squirting dugs. They lowed about her whom they knew, dew-silky cattle. Silk of the kine and poor old woman, names given her in old times. A wandering crone, lowly form of an immortal serving her conqueror and her gay betrayer, their common cuckquean, a messenger from the secret morning. To serve or to upbraid, whether he could not tell: but scorned to beg her favour.⁹

It can be easily noted that this milkwoman represents Ireland from the Revivalists' point of view, but Joyce mocks this kind of self-identification and idealization by representing this so-called symbol of Ireland as serving Haines and Buck Mulligan, 'her conqueror and her gay betrayer'. Moreover, when the English Haines, an adept and student of Irish culture and history, speaks Irish to her, she fails to recognize in what language he is speaking:

- Do you understand what he says? Stephen asked her.
- Is it French you are talking, sir? the old woman said to Haines.
- Haines spoke to her again a longer speech, confidently.
- Irish, Buck Mulligan said. Is there Gaelic on you?
- I thought it was Irish, she said, by the sound of it. Are you from the west, sir?
- I am an Englishman, Haines answered.
- He's English, Buck Mulligan said, and he thinks we ought to speak Irish in Ireland.
- Sure we ought to, the old woman said, and I'm ashamed I don't speak the language myself. I'm told it's a grand language by them that knows.¹⁰

The figure that normally forms the symbol of Irish identity is distorted if not degraded. By portraying this milkwoman as barren and ignorant of the Gaelic language, Joyce refuses to succumb and sustain stereotypes of Irish identity produced by the Irish themselves. The iconoclast quality of Joyce's writing then takes an opposite direction to that of the Revivalists: instead of idealizing the self and demonizing the other through two opposed images (the same method used by the

⁹ *Ulysses*, opcit, p13-14.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p14.

imperialist manichaen discourse) Joyce proposes to have a more complex critique of imperialism first through style as we have shown in the previous section, and second through impressionistic scenes that render the complex effects of colonialism as the various scenes that we have quoted show. Idealization of the self can only lead to bourgeois sentimentality, which is *the* central reproach behind Joyce's critique of Irish Nationalism; in one of his correspondences to his brother, Joyce wrote:

If the Irish programme did not insist on the Irish language I suppose I could call myself a nationalist. As it is, I am content to recognise myself an exile: and, prophetically, a repudiated one.¹¹

For Joyce, reviving the Gaelic language and the Irish myths is irrelevant as it encourages escapism and exaggerated sentimentality among the Irish, a move which Fanon diagnosed as one of the most important 'pitfalls of national consciousness' in (post)colonial African countries:

The politicians who make speeches and who write in the nationalist newspapers make the people dream dreams. They avoid the actual overthrowing of the state, but in fact they introduce into their readers' or hearers' consciousness the terrible ferment of subversion. The national or tribal language is often used. Here, once again, dreams are encouraged, and the imagination is let loose outside the bounds of the colonial order; and sometimes these politicians speak of "We Negroes, we Arabs," and these terms which are so profoundly ambivalent take on during the colonial epoch a sacramental signification. The nationalist politicians are playing with fire: for, as an African leader recently warned a group of young intellectuals, "Think well before you speak to the masses, for they flare up quickly." This is one of the terrible tricks that destiny plays in the colonies.¹²

To come back to Stephen, his aggressive attitudes towards the 'invader' and the 'gay betrayer' will culminate in his fight -towards the end of the novel- with the member of the British Army, Private Carr.

¹¹ Steven Lud, *James Joyce : Letters, Manuscripts and Photographs at Southern Illinois University*. p62.

¹² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p 68.

For Marxists of course, the use of violence against capitalism, the bourgeoisie and imperialism becomes necessary when these ideologies become overwhelming. Thus Lenin in his address on the 4th of July 1920 to the Second Congress of the Communist International, considered that violence was the only way by which these ideologies could be fought:

In this concrete situation created by militarism, imperialism, in the whole world, and before all in the most advanced capitalist countries, the most powerful, the most enlightened and the freest, by the stranglehold over the colonies and weak countries, by the global imperialist slaughter and by the Versailles 'Peace'; the idea of a pacifist subordination of the capitalist to the will of the exploited majority, or of a passage to socialism in a pacifist and reformist way, is not only of an extreme stupidity, but also a downright deception of the working class...and an act of truth disguising. The truth is that the bourgeoisie, even the most enlightened and the most democratic, does not hesitate now to resort to any imposture or crime to massacre millions of workers and peasants in its attempt to save the private means of production. It is only through the overthrowing of the bourgeoisie by violence, the confiscation of its possessions, the destruction of the whole bourgeois State...including the deportation or incarceration of the most obstinate exploiters, by putting them under close surveillance to prevent their inevitable attempts to resist or restore the enslaving capitalism –only through these measures can a true subordination of the whole class of exploiters be granted.¹³

Fanon, probably drawing from Lenin, in his classical chapter 'Concerning Violence', argues that violence is a necessary step in the process of decolonization and in restoring dignity:

National liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth: whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon...The violence which has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world, which has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms and broken up without reserve the systems of reference of the economy, the customs of dress and external life, that same violence will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into the forbidden quarters...After centuries of unreality, after having wallowed in the most outlandish phantoms, at long last the native, gun in hand, stands face to face with the only forces which contend for his life--the forces of colonialism. And the youth of a colonized country, growing up in an atmosphere of shot and fire, may well make a mock of, and does not hesitate to pour scorn upon the zombies of his ancestors, the horses with two

¹³ Lenin, 'Thèse sur les taches fondamentales du IIe Congrès de l'Internationale communiste', in Lénine, *Sur la Lutte contre le révisionnisme*, Paris : Edition Git-le Cœur, 1968. (my translation)

heads, the dead who rise again, and the djinns who rush into your body while you yawn. The native discovers reality and transforms it into the pattern of his customs, into the practice of violence and into his plan for freedom.¹⁴

Accordingly, Stephen in episode fifteen provokes Private Carr into a fight. Stephen first berates Private Carr about the presence of the British army in Ireland when he tells him: ‘You are my guests. Uninvited. By virtue of the fifth of George and seventh of Edward. History to blame.’ Then he takes the provocation a step further when he tells him that he will (mentally) subvert the Empire and the Church:

STEPHEN

(laughs emptily) My centre of gravity is displaced. I have forgotten the trick. Let us sit down somewhere and discuss. Struggle for life is the law of existence but but human philirenists, notably the tsar and the king of England, have invented arbitration. (he taps his brow) But in here it is I must kill the priest and the king.

PRIVATE CARR

(pulls himself free and comes forward) What's that you're saying about my king?

STEPHEN

Kings and unicorns! (he falls back apace) Come somewhere and we'll...

BLOOM

(to the privates, softly) He doesn't know what he's saying. Taken a little more than is good for him. Absinthe. Greeneyed monster. I know him. He's a gentleman, a poet. It's all right.

STEPHEN

(nods, smiling and laughing) Gentleman, patriot, scholar and judge of impostors.

[...]

BLOOM

(to Stephen) Come home. You'll get into trouble.

STEPHEN

(swaying) I don't avoid it. He provokes my intelligence.

[...]

THE CITIZEN

(with a huge emerald muffler and shillelagh, calls)

May the God above

Send down a dove

With teeth as sharp as razors

To slit the throats

Of the English dogs

That hanged our Irish leaders.

PRIVATE CARR

¹⁴ *The Wretched of the Earth*, Opcit, p35-36.

Here. What are you saying about my king?

STEPHEN

(throws up his hands) O, this is too monotonous! Nothing. He wants my money and my life, though want must be his master, for some brutish empire of his.

[...]

BLOOM

(terrified) He said nothing. Not a word. A pure misunderstanding.

PRIVATE COMPTON

Go it, Harry. Do him one in the eye. He's a proBoer.

STEPHEN

Did I? When?

BLOOM

(to the redcoats) We fought for you in South Africa, Irish missile troops. Isn't that history? Royal Dublin Fusiliers. Honoured by our monarch.¹⁵

The whole situation will then degenerate into a fight when Private Carr knocks Stephen down. The apparition of the Citizen into the text is meant to inflame and encourage the opponents. Bloom on the other hand, is distasteful of violence and protective towards Stephen. When Private Compton tells Carr that Stephen is a 'proBoer', he is making reference to the Boer War between the British and the Boers in South Africa, and Keith Booker, in his *Ulysses Capitalism and Colonialism*, has shown that the motif of the Boer War in *Ulysses* is one of the proofs that Joyce's novel can be a 'historical novel' in the Lukasian sense.¹⁶ It also shows that Joyce's critique of imperialism goes beyond Ireland, and precisely to colonized Africa. The important thing to note also in Stephen's argument with Private Carr, is the moment when Stephen links imperialism to capitalism in 'He wants my money and my life...for some brutish [British] empire of his.'

¹⁵ *Ulysses*, Opcit, pp590-592.

¹⁶ M.Keith Booker, *Ulysses, Capitalism, and Colonialism. Reading Joyce after the Cold War*, pp 85-103.

‘Put but money in thy purse’¹⁷: Colonialism and Capitalism

It would be wrong to assume that Joyce had any Marxist leaning while writing *Ulysses* or any other work of his. Joyce shows a total indifference to the masses, to the poor, to the ‘wretched of the earth’ and to the peasants (the latter are even subject to mockery as we have seen with the milkwoman). It is not that these social categories did not exist in Ireland, but that Joyce proudly set himself apart from them. Coming from a bourgeois, or petty-bourgeois to be more exact, background, Joyce did not experience the poverty and starvation that ravaged the slums of Dublin. Moreover, to lose touch with the daily difficulties of the masses was the cost Joyce had to pay for choosing a lifetime exile.

No wonder then if the majority of Marxist critics showed hostility to Joyce’s novel. But in the light of the recent post-colonial readings of *Ulysses* and in the increasing association of post-colonial theory with Marxist theory, the anti-capitalist potential of the novel begins to be appreciated.

Imperialism and capitalism are two faces of the same coin. Marx for example constantly stressed the fact that the capitalist ideology is based on expanding its markets, although the term ‘imperialism’ does not appear in his works as the term (nor the ideology) was not yet coined in his lifetime. Lenin, the godfather of communism and the personification *par excellence* of the Marxist ideology, had severely criticized imperialism on many occasions: he considered it part of the

¹⁷ *Ulysses*, Opcit, p30.

capitalist ideology as the title of his book *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) shows:

Imperialism emerged as the development and direct continuation of the fundamental characteristics of capitalism in general. But capitalism only became capitalist imperialism at a definite and very high stage of its development, when certain of its fundamental characteristics began to change into their opposites, when the features of the epoch of transition from capitalism to a higher social and economic system had taken shape and revealed themselves in all spheres. Economically, the main thing in this process is the displacement of capitalist free competition by capitalist monopoly.¹⁸

There are many examples in *Ulysses* that relate Imperialism to Capitalism. The first notable one is in the Nestor Episode, in which we see Stephen at school giving a history lesson then gets paid by Mr. Deasy the headmaster of the school. The latter lectures Stephen on the necessity to save and value money:

— Because you don't save, Mr Deasy said, pointing his finger. You don't know yet what money is. Money is power. When you have lived as long as I have. I know, I know. If youth but knew. But what does Shakespeare say? Put but money in thy purse.
— Iago, Stephen murmured.
He lifted his gaze from the idle shells to the old man's stare.
— He knew what money was, Mr Deasy said. He made money. A poet, yes, but an Englishman too. Do you know what is the pride of the English? Do you know what is the proudest word you will ever hear from an Englishman's mouth?
The seas' ruler. His seacold eyes looked on the empty bay: it seems history is to blame: on me and on my words, unhating.
— That on his empire, Stephen said, the sun never sets.
— Ba! Mr Deasy cried. That's not English. A French Celt said that.
He tapped his savingsbox against his thumbnail.
— I will tell you, he said solemnly, what is his proudest boast. I paid my way.
Good man, good man.
— I paid my way. I never borrowed a shilling in my life. Can you feel that? I owe nothing. Can you?¹⁹

While Stephen associates the Englishman with imperialism, Mr Deasy associates him with capitalism. As a Northern-Irish Protestant, Mr Deasy is loyal to the Crown and in favour of the Union. Mr Deasy's insistence that money represents the pride of the Englishman becomes comprehensible when we know that Ulster largely benefited in

¹⁸ Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. 'Marxist internet archive', www.marxism.org/archive/lenin.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p30.

terms of wealth from the union with Britain as its capitalist industries flourished. Southern Ireland, on the other hand saw its economy destroyed. After the 1800 Act of Union, Ireland was supposed to be part of the United Kingdom; it was supposed, in other words, to have a free trade with Britain, its colonies and any other nation. Eventually, however, it turned out that Ireland was just another colony of the British Empire as the Irish foreign trade was restricted to Britain and as the Irish saw their resources exploited; the Citizen in the ‘Cyclops’ episode tells us about what particularly attracted the British capitalist/colonists to Ireland:

—Raimeis, says the citizen. There's no-one as blind as the fellow that won't see, if you know what that means. Where are our missing twenty millions of Irish should be here today instead of four, our lost tribes? And our potteries and textiles, the finest in the whole world! And our wool that was sold in Rome in the time of Juvenal and our flax and our damask from the looms of Antrim and our Limerick lace, our tanneries and our white flint glass down there by Ballybough and our Huguenot poplin that we have since Jacquard de Lyon and our woven silk and our Foxford tweeds and ivory raised point from the Carmelite convent in New Ross, nothing like it in the whole wide world. Where are the Greek merchants that came through the pillars of Hercules, the Gibraltar now grabbed by the foe of mankind, with gold and Tyrian purple to sell in Wexford at the fair of Carmen? Read Tacitus and Ptolemy, even Giraldus Cambrensis. Wine, peltries, Connemara marble, silver from Tipperary, second to none, our farfamed horses even today, the Irish hobbies, with king Philip of Spain offering to pay customs duties for the right to fish in our waters. What do the yellowjohns of Anglia owe us for our ruined trade and our ruined hearths? And the beds of the Barrow and Shannon they won't deepen with millions of acres of marsh and bog to make us all die of consumption?²⁰

I have quoted this passage at length because much of what the Citizen says (with the exaggeration and enthusiasm characteristics of a nationalist) is historically accurate and important. The growing economic crisis that Ireland witnessed just after the Union was primary caused by the domination of the British over its different industries. The Irish were forced then to find an alternative in agriculture. The latter was unfortunately underdeveloped as well, and the population growth from under

²⁰ Ibid, p326.

five million in 1830 to over 8 million by 1841 made things worse. The whole crisis culminated in the famous ‘Great Famine’ or ‘Potato Famine’ that struck Ireland in 1845 and reduced the 8 million population to 6 million.

As the Irish blamed the British for it, the Famine changed Ireland dramatically. The most relevant change for our purpose is its ‘modernization’. Dublin, in fact, became another metropolitan city in which many ‘modern’ attributes became part of the Irish daily life. As we will see later, capitalism and materialism overwhelmed Dublin.

To come back to the conversation between Mr. Deasy and Stephen, it is important to note that Mr. Deasy quotes Shakespeare, and then tells Stephen that he (Shakespeare) knew what money was because he was ‘an Englishman’; later in the novel Stephen describes Shakespeare (dismissively) in the same vein:

—He was a rich country gentleman, Stephen said, with a coat of arms and landed estate at Stratford and a house in Ireland yard, a capitalist shareholder, a bill promoter, a tithefarmer. Why did he not leave her his best bed if he wished her to snore away the rest of her nights in peace?²¹

‘A poet’, ‘an Englishman’, ‘a capitalist’ but an imperialist too, for it is known that Shakespeare amassed a great fortune from putting money in the first mercantile companies that sailed to the New World.

We have hinted elsewhere that the motif of the Boer War relates to imperialism in Africa; equally capitalism is also related to the colonialist presence of the British in Africa and this through a newspaper article that the Citizen reads (while interspersing the text with his own mocking titles):

—A delegation of the chief cotton magnates of Manchester was presented yesterday to His Majesty the Alaki of Abeakuta by Gold Stick in Waiting, Lord Walkup of Walkup on Eggs,

²¹ Ibid, p214.

to tender to His Majesty the heartfelt thanks of British traders for the facilities afforded them in his dominions. The delegation partook of luncheon at the conclusion of which the dusky potentate, in the course of a happy speech, freely translated by the British chaplain, the reverend Ananias Praise-god Barebones, tendered his best thanks to Massa Walkup and emphasised the cordial relations existing between Abeakuta and the British empire, stating that he treasured as one of his dearest possessions an illuminated bible, the volume of the word of God and the secret of England's greatness, graciously presented to him by the white chief woman, the great squaw Victoria, with a personal dedication from the august hand of the Royal Donor.²²

The Citizen identifies this African leader as a 'Zulu chief', while in fact he is not Zulu but a Yoruba chief, who actually visited England in 1904; thus Booker rightly notes that 'there is also a clear suggestion in the confusion between Yorubas and Zulus that, to the racist Citizen, all black Africans look alike.'²³ But the passage also gives a clear idea about the capitalist motives of imperialism, and a suggestive parallel between imperialism in Africa and imperialism in Ireland.

'Love ...the opposite of hatred'²⁴: Bloom, Peaceful Resistance and Bourgeois Sentimentality:

In opposition to Stephen's rather violent and extremist ways and ideas, Bloom can be easily identified as the personification of peace and moderation; he tells Stephen in the 'Eumeus' episode:

I resent violence and intolerance in any shape or form. It never reaches anything or stops anything. A revolution must come on the due instalments plan. It's a patent absurdity on the face of it to hate people because they live round the corner and speak another vernacular, in the next house so to speak.²⁵

Joyce has been labelled with the same attributes of 'peace and non-violence' as his character Bloom. What reinforced this assumption is Joyce's critique of Irish Nationalism; thus Harry Blamires assumes: 'His sense of the wastefulness and

²² Ibid, p321.

²³ M.Keith Booker, *Ulysses, Capitalism, and Colonialism. Reading Joyce after the Cold War*, p99.

²⁴ *Ulysses*, Opcit, Ibid, p333.

²⁵ Ibid, p643.

crudity of violence made the mentality of the extreme nationalists repellent to him.’²⁶

But when it comes to real facts, Joyce never really expressed himself clearly on the question of violence or on those who practise it, as the Fenians did. As a young man, Joyce seemed quite sympathetic with the Sein Fein as this 1906 letter to his brother shows:

You ask me what I would substitute for parliamentary agitation in Ireland. I think the Sein Fein policy would be more effective...For either Sein Fein or Imperialism will conquer the present Ireland.²⁷

Moreover, assuming that Bloom is Joyce’s mouthpiece for universal peace and love is simplistic and risks ignoring the detached and ironic tone Joyce usually holds towards his characters.

Traditionally Bloom is thought to be a likeable character; he is in other words, thought to be Joyce’s *protégé* and we are meant to sympathize with him. As we have seen in the archetype section, for critics Bloom’s capacity for compassion and his rejection by society as a Jew is what makes him a hero and make the reader sympathize with him. As Malcolm Bradbury notes:

We suffer with Bloom’s persecution as a victimized Jew, with his feelings as a cuckold, laughed at by his fellow-Dubliners...We can even sympathize with the suspicion that he has permitted the tryst to occur, and that his wanderings are to let it happen...We recognize his feelings for his dead son Rudy, his kindness to Stephen, his complex Jewish heritage and its meaning for him.²⁸

But as Joyce’s relationship towards his ‘alter-ego’, Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait*, changed significantly from sympathy to irony over the last decades; it is also time to re-consider our views on Bloom and Joyce’s attitude towards him.

²⁶ Harry Blamires, *James Joyce: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Beirut : York Pres, 1984, p.9.

²⁷ Steven Lud, *James Joyce : Letters, Manuscripts and Photographs at Southern Illinois University*. p27.

²⁸ Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern World. Ten Great Writers*. p172.

There are many indicators in the novel which imply that Joyce mocks Bloom's sentimentality. In the 'Cyclops' episode for example, the Citizen's xenophobic and belligerent attitudes along with his hailing of the Sein Fein puts him on the side of violence, while Bloom's 'peace and love' attitude puts him on the side of non-violence. Classical readings of the episode focus on the Polyphemus correspondence and on Joyce's critique of nationalism and look at the episode as an ultimate rejection of violence on the part of Joyce; as G.S. Fraser wrote:

Again and again, as in the episode modeled on that of the Cyclops' Cave in Homer, where Bloom just escapes from being beaten up by a bigoted Irish nationalist, we see that Bloom stands in Joyce's mind for a civilized and rational cosmopolitan attitude in contrast to native Irish barbarism. For Joyce, if he was not a naïve liberal progressive himself, was far from being an Irish nationalist either.²⁹

Emer Nolan along with Booker, however, have recently shown that this episode is not to be read as depicting the Irish nationalists only in negative ways. Violence for example is never condemned or ridiculed as Bloom's conception of 'peace and love' is; he tells John Wyse when the latter asks him to stand for his persecution as a Jew:

—But it's no use, says he. Force, hatred, history, all that. That's not life for men and women, insult and hatred. And everybody knows that it's the very opposite of that that is really life.
—What? says Alf.
—Love, says Bloom. I mean the opposite of hatred. I must go now, says he to John Wyse. Just round to the court a moment to see if Martin is there. If he comes just say I'll be back in a second. Just a moment.
Who's hindering you? And off he pops like greased lightning.
—A new apostle to the gentiles, says the citizen. Universal love.
—Well, says John Wyse. Isn't that what we're told. Love your neighbour.
—That chap? says the Citizen. Beggar my neighbour is his motto. Love, moya! He's a nice pattern of a Romeo and Juliet.³⁰

The citizen's mockery of Bloom is then followed by an interpolation that parodies Bloom's discourse:

²⁹ G.S. Fraser, *The Modern Writer and his World*. London : Penguin Books, 1953, p98.

³⁰ *Ulysses*, opcit, p333.

Love loves to love love. Nurse loves the new chemist. Constable 14 A loves Mary Kelly. Gerty MacDowell loves the boy that has the bicycle. M. B. loves a fair gentleman. Li Chi Han lovey up kissy Cha Pu Chow. Jumbo, the elephant, loves Alice, the elephant. Old Mr Verschoyle with the ear trumpet loves old Mrs Verschoyle with the turnedin eye. The man in the brown macintosh loves a lady who is dead. His Majesty the King loves Her Majesty the Queen. Mrs Norman W. Tupper loves Officer Taylor. You love a certain person. And this person loves that other person because everybody loves somebody but God loves everybody.³¹

Moreover, as Booker has eloquently shown, Bloom's compassion to women, children and animals are all supplemented by bourgeois stereotypes and easy sentimentality:

[...] Kindness to women and children is a bourgeois stereotype, the inclusion of both in the same category indicating a consistent condescending attitude toward women as not only weak and helpless, but also childish and immature...Moreover, sentimental kindness to animals is a typical English characteristic as well, often noted as remarkable by British colonial subjects, who do not seem to receive the same level of consideration. Thus, the West Indian emigrants who come to London seeking opportunity in Samuel Selvon's 1956 novel, *The Lonely Londoners*, find to their surprise that "in this country, people prefer to see man starve than a cat or dog want something to eat"³²

In this regard, a parallel can be made between Bloom's sentimentality and that of Eveline the heroine of the short story 'Eveline' in *Dubliners*. In both cases, sentimentality is identified as one of the causes of paralysis and sterility in Dublin.

As many characters of Joyce's *Dubliners*, Eveline dreams of escape from Ireland to 'a distant unknown country'³³:

Escape! She must escape! Frank would save her. He would give her life, perhaps love too. But she wanted to live. Why should she be unhappy? She had a right to happiness. Frank would take her in his arms, fold her in his arms. He would save her.³⁴

Joyce significantly chose Buenos Ayres as the place where she and Frank would escape, with all the exotic and romantic connotations (Buenos Ayres as good air) that destination is charged for an inexperienced and sentimental girl like Eveline:

³¹ Ibid, p333.

³² M.Keith Booker, *Ulysses, Capitalism, and Colonialism. Reading Joyce after the Cold War*, p 153

³³ James Joyce, *Dubliners*. London : Penguin Classics, 1993, p38.

³⁴ Ibid, p41.

He had tales of distant countries. He told her the names of the ships he had been on the names of the different services. He had sailed through the straits of Magellan and he told her stories of the terrible Patagonians. He had fallen on his feet in Buenos Ayres, he said, and had come over to the old country just for a holiday.³⁵

The motif of escaping to exotic places, especially to the East (Italy, 'Araby' as Arabia) is central in the fifteen short stories that constitute *Dubliners*. Eveline's romantic fantasies are also supplemented by light opera, as the narrator tells us that Frank took her to see *The Bohemian Girl*, a song in which a girl is saved by an exiled gentleman. Finally, it is her sentimentality in particular that paralyzes her both physically and emotionally at the end of the story as she stands 'passive, like a helpless animal' and refuses to escape with Frank.

In similar ways, Bloom's sentimentality is rendered through his recurrent imaginative escaping to exotic places, through masturbation and through his consumption of genteel literature and music.

In the 'Lotus Eaters' episode for example Joyce sets a dense imagery of the East in the settings and in Bloom's mind. After reading an add on The Belfast and Oriental Tea Company, Bloom imagines what the East would look like:

The far east. Lovely spot it must be: the garden of the world, big lazy leaves to float about on, cactuses, flowery meads, snaky lianas they call them. Wonder is it like that. Those Cinghalese lolling about in the sun in dolce farniente, not doing a hand's turn all day. Sleep six months out of twelve. Too hot to quarrel. Influence of the climate. Lethargy. Flowers of idleness. The air feeds most. Azotes. Hothouse in Botanic gardens. Sensitive plants. Waterlilies. Petals too tired to. Sleeping sickness in the air. Walk on roseleaves. Imagine trying to eat tripe and cowheel.³⁶

It is such sort of exoticism that Edward Said termed 'Orientalism', the process by which the 'Orient' is perceived and constructed in the Western imagination. For

³⁵ Ibid, p40

³⁶ James Joyce, *Ulysses*. p71-27

Bloom (and for an average Western man) the East can be an Eden-like garden; a place of exoticism to which the mind can escape to construct all sort of fantasies and in which all sorts of romantic hopes can be realized. The ‘Lotus Eaters’ episode parallels Odysseus’ adventure in the island of the lotus eaters, thus the different allusions Bloom makes to narcotics and intoxication matches his association of the East with laziness and dizziness (Flowers of idleness). Bloom also associates the East with eroticism through his fantasies about his wife Molly. We are told in the novel that Molly was born in Gibraltar (Spain), and this place for Bloom is charged with exotic and erotic meanings; he tells Stephen in the Emamus episode:

—Spaniards, for instance, he continued, passionate temperaments like that, impetuous as Old Nick, are given to taking the law into their own hands and give you your quietus doublequick with those poignards they carry in the abdomen. It comes from the great heat, climate generally. My wife is, so to speak, Spanish, half that is. Point of fact she could actually claim Spanish nationality if she wanted, having been born in (technically) Spain, i.e. Gibraltar. She has the Spanish type. Quite dark, regular brunette, black. I for one certainly believe climate accounts for character.³⁷

No wonder then that whenever Bloom thinks of the East, his mind ponders on Molly then on sex or vice versa. Masturbation is in fact recurrent in *Ulysses*. It provides Bloom a moment of fantasy and relief. It is, as his recurrent thoughts about the East, an escape from the realities of life, such as his wife’s infidelity with Boylan or the fact that he and Molly did not have a normal sexual intercourse in ten years now. Consequently, like Eveline, it is sentimentality that paralyses Bloom and makes him ignore his wife’s affair; he refuses to act because his wife’s infidelity for him is a source of sentimental sexual fantasies as he recurrently imagines during the day what Molly and Boylan are doing, and he even at a certain point imagines himself peeping

³⁷ Ibid, p636.

through the keyhole of his own bed room while his wife and her lover are having sexual intercourse. In sum, Bloom's sentimentality, like Eveline's, is a petty-bourgeois one; it is the direct consequence of an ideology brought to Ireland by British imperialism. Bloom's case then is a perfect example of what is known as post-colonial theory and criticism as mimicry:

When the colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to 'mimic' the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a 'blurred copy' of the colonizer that can be quite threatening. This is because mimicry is never very far from mockery, since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics. Mimicry therefore locates a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance, an uncertainty in its colonial control of the behavior of the colonized.³⁸

To say that Bloom mimics his British masters to mock them is farfetched because he seems totally absorbed in bourgeois ideology, and totally unconscious that his behaviour is so, but to say that Joyce consciously depicts him as trapped within and alienated by bourgeois ideology and that his mimicry is meant to mock the colonizer *and* Irish society, is very probable considering Joyce's passion for parody.

'Could have made oceans of money'³⁹: Bloom, Alienation, Petty-Bourgeois Ideology and Capitalism

For Terry Eagleton, Bloom's sentimentality has two facets: on the one hand the 'vague humanitarian creed of universal brotherhood that Bloom shows can convey 'the good' side of international capitalism' and on the other hand his superficial sentiments make him a 'striking instance of what Walter Benjamin would call the

³⁸ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. New York: Routledge, 2000, p139.

³⁹ *Ulysses*, opcit, p275.

impoverishment of experience in urban industrialism.⁴⁰ Both propositions are highly suggestive because both link bourgeois sentimentality to capitalism and show the extent to which Bloom is alienated.

For if for example the East and the Orient evoke exoticism and fantasy, they also evoke domination; Said tells us that the process of 'Orientalism' involves:

...dealing with [the orient] by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, reconstructing, and having authority over the Orient.⁴¹

Accordingly, when the thoroughly bourgeois Bloom thinks of the East, it is not without some capitalist projects of his. In the fourth episode for example, while reading his newspaper, Bloom's attention is particularly caught by an ad on fruit plantations in Palestine:

He walked back along Dorset street, reading gravely. Agendath Netaim: planters' company. To purchase waste sandy tracts from Turkish government and plant with eucalyptus trees. Excellent for shade, fuel and construction. Orangegroves and immense melonfields north of Jaffa. You pay eighty marks and they plant a dunam of land for you with olives, oranges, almonds or citrons. Olives cheaper: oranges need artificial irrigation. Every year you get a sending of the crop. Your name entered for life as owner in the book of the union. Can pay ten down and the balance in yearly instalments.⁴²

If Said's concept of domination includes direct primary colonization, it may also include commercial or capitalist domination, as the two are allies. For Bloom the East is synonymous with the exotic and the fantastic unknown; but it is also synonymous with unexplored markets and fertile territory for capitalist projects.

⁴⁰ Terry Eagleton, "Joyce and Mythology". in Susan Dick ed., *Essays for Richard Ellmann: Omnium Gatherum*. Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989, p316.

⁴¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*. New York : Vintage Books, 1979, p3.

⁴² *Ulysses*, opcit, p60.

If Bloom is a bourgeois capitalist, this is due to the fact that he lives within a petty-bourgeois/capitalist society. As we have mentioned before, the ‘Great Famine’ induced the British (by a so-called guilt) to change its policy towards Ireland. In fact, a movement toward the modernization and industrialization of Ireland characterized the post-Famine era which made of Dublin (in less obvious ways) a capital as overwhelmed by commodities and modern industrialization as London or Paris. This fact resonates in Joyce’s declaration that: ‘If I can get to the heart of Dublin, I can get to the heart of every city in the world. In the particular is contained the universal.’⁴³ Moreover, for critics (mainly New Critics and New Humanists) the fact that Modernism came as a reaction to Modernity is an established orthodoxy; as Malcolm Bradbury and James MacFarlane argue in their *Modernism*:

The half-century before the First World War was the most remarkable period of economic growth in history...Overlapping with this great industrial expansion was a technological revolution which, in the 1890s and 1900s produced a series of key development that remain the foundation of technology of the 20th century...Industrialization had been accompanied by a great increase in urban population...Society was urbanized, industrialized and mechanized.⁴⁴

But in order to stay safely away from any Marxist perspective, such dramatic changes in Western societies are never treated by these critics as direct consequences of the expansion of capitalist and decadent bourgeois ideology. For if we consider that the Modernists reacted negatively to such dramatic changes, and if the Marxists have seen these changes as direct consequences of capitalist and bourgeois ideology, then the traditional polar opposition between Marxism and Modernism begins to be

⁴³ Steven Lud, *James Joyce : Letters, Manuscripts and Photographs at Southern Illinois University*. p125.

⁴⁴ Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane eds *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature: 1890-1930*, p26.

swept away and reading *Ulysses* as a critique of Modernity *and* Capitalism becomes a possible and worthy pursuit.

For one thing, Bloom's job as an advertising canvasser functions as an exemplar of a bourgeois/capitalist type. After all, advertisement is the first step in any capitalist enterprise (as with the ad on fruit plantations); it is the way by which people are *persuaded* to buy a commodity. Thus during the day Bloom's thoughts are busy on how to make better advertisements to get people to buy more in order to make more profits. When he passes Larry O'Rourke's pub for example, he assumes that there is 'no use canvassing him for an ad' since he has a 'good house' and 'he knows his own business best'⁴⁵. Proceeding within his capitalist mentality of financial calculations, he wonders how O'Rourke can make such money out of his small pub, since pubs are everywhere in Dublin:

Where do they get the money? Coming up redheaded curates from the county Leitrim, rinsing empties and old man in the cellar. Then, lo and behold, they blossom out as Adam Findlaters or Dan Tallons. Then think of the competition. General thirst. Good puzzle would be cross Dublin without passing a pub. Save it they can't. Off the drunks perhaps. Put down three and carry five. What is that, a bob here and there, dribs and drabs. On the wholesale orders perhaps. Doing a double shuffle with the town travellers. Square it you with the boss and we'll split the job, see? How much would that tot to off the porter in the month? Say ten barrels of stuff. Say he got ten per cent off. O more. Fifteen.⁴⁶

Such pragmatism on Bloom's part extends to his conception of literature. As we have seen before, Bloom is a consumer of bourgeois literature; he therefore assumes that literature must have a didactic purpose and must have an instantaneous effect on people's feelings. But literature is also a source of money-making in Bloom's view.

⁴⁵ *Ulysses*, opcit, p58.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

In the fourth episode for example, after reading a story in a popular magazine, Bloom considers writing a story to make some money out of it:

Mateham's Masterstroke. Written by Mr Philip. Beaufoy, Playgoers' Club, London. Payment at the rate of one guinea a column has been made to the writer. Three and a half. Three pounds three. Three pounds, thirteen and six.

Quietly he read...*It did not move or touch him but it was something quick and neat...Begins and ends morally.* Hand in hand. Smart. He glanced back through what he had read and, while feeling his water flow quietly, *he envied kindly Mr Beaufoy who had written it and received payment of three pounds, thirteen and six.*

Might manage a sketch. By Mr and Mrs L. M. Bloom. Invent a story for some proverb. Which? Time I used to try jotting down on my cuff what she said dressing.⁴⁷ (italics mine)

Bloom here is contrasted with the real artist Stephen, who in episode seven is indifferent to the propositions made to him by the newspapermen at Freeman's newspaper office --where Bloom works-- to write 'quick and neat' literature for popular consumption and get paid for it.

My point in enlisting all these examples is not so much to prove that Bloom is a bourgeois capitalist, as is to show the extent to which Bloom is assimilated and alienated by the ideology (capitalism/bourgeoisie) brought to Ireland by the British Empire. The 'I paid my way' motto, the 'proudest boast of the Englishman' in Deasy's words, is simply mimed by Bloom both in his mentality and in his behavior. Thus when he gets home at the end of the novel and prepares to go to bed, we see him 'compile the budget for 16 June 1904', in a detailed list of the expense and loans he made during the day as if checking if he paid his way or not.

In this sense, capitalism and imperialism may be far more central as a political focus of Joyce's writing than critics have generally appreciated until very recently. Capitalism and imperialism are, as we have seen, present within the form of the

⁴⁷ Ibid, p69.

novel, which indicates a close kinship between the two and ultimately indicate that Joyce's techniques go beyond mere formal play to suggest social and political implications. In our discussion of the content of the novel, we have tried to align the conclusions that we have drawn from our analysis of the politics of style in *Ulysses* with the often neglected political 'literal' level of the text. The Marxist and post-colonial approaches to the text that we have followed provide a rich context within which to read the role of history and politics in the work of Joyce and other modernist writers, and demonstrate the extreme poverty of earlier formalist readings of Joyce (and subsequently other modernists) that sought to dismiss history altogether. Such conclusions and arguments will be further sustained by comparing Joyce's novel with the African postcolonial novel *The Interpreters* in the next chapter given that 'history [is] the 'hero' of the African novel.'⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Lewis Nkosi, *Tasks and Masks. Themes and Styles of African Literature*, p30.

Chapter V

The Interpreters: The Form

In his *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, Emmanuel Obiechina tells us about the importance of the social and political context in the West African novel:

Because the West African novel has risen at a time when large-scale social and economic changes are taking place, the writers show an almost obsessive preoccupation with the influence of these conditions. This is the condition of life; those are the ways in which people feel its pressure; these pressures demand expression.¹

Similarly, in his *Politics and the Novel in Africa*, S.A Arab repeatedly stresses the ‘intense awareness of the political significance and didactic function’² of African literature. He argues that colonialism remains the prime mover of such political and social commitment:

The emergence of modern African literature is a response to the colonial situation, a response which is both cultural by the fact that it interprets its world in European terms and political as it is informed, in the main, by a nationalist stance. It is the permanent and fundamental antagonism between colonialism and the African revolution (in their various constituents and manifestations) which forms the source and driving force of modern literary creation in Africa.³

In this Chapter we shall see that these observations apply perfectly to Soyinka’s *The Interpreters*, which flies directly in the face of some critics’ belief that Soyinka’s ‘Euromodernist’ style cuts his texts off from historical reality, undermines African nationalism or trapped within the colonial discourse of the West.⁴

¹ Emmanuel Obiechina, *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1975, p35.

² S.A. Arab, *Politics and the Novel in Africa*. Algiers: Office des Publication Universitaire, 1982, p6.

³ Ibid, p5.

⁴ Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike, *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*. London: Howard University Press, 1983, p196-208.

In many ways Soyinka's *The Interpreters* can be regarded as a revolutionary work in African literature just as Joyce's *Ulysses* was to European literature when it was first published. Its form represents the first significant 'rupture from the bourgeois and colonialist ideologies frequently associated with Realism'⁵ in African literature; while its content can be regarded as the first attempt to demonstrate that the social issues in independent Nigeria and Africa come not only from 'without' but also from 'within'.

In our consideration of form, we shall show that Soyinka's style is certainly modernist but not Western or English, as it, in Lewis Nkosi's words on the modernist movement in Africa, 'faces forward to the latest innovations in fiction as well as backward to the roots of African tradition.'⁶ Moreover, we shall show that Soyinka's appropriation of modernist techniques matches the state of alienation and fragmentation that characterize the Nigerian society under capitalism, bourgeois ideology and neo-colonialism.

There was no evidence that Soyinka admired or was aware of the modernist techniques of Joyce's *Ulysses* until 1972, the year of publication of *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, which comprises seven thematic groups of poems written during Soyinka's incarceration.⁷ One of these groups is entitled "Four Archetypes", which contains four poems: "Joseph", "Hamlet", "Gulliver, and "Ulysses". The latter, alludes to both Homer's *Odyssey* and Joyce's *Ulysses*. In fact the full title of the poem is "*Ulysses – Notes from here to my Joyce class*". The poem depicts a wandering man who has

⁵ *Politics and the Novel in Africa*, opcit, p373.

⁶ Lewis Nkosi, *Tasks and Masks. Themes and Styles of African Literature*, p54.

⁷ It is important to note here that Soyinka was imprisoned in 1967, just two years after the publication of *The Interpreters*.

become separated from his home and past, as reference to the archetypal figures Ulysses and Bloom. Moreover, Soyinka employs in his poem a first-person narrative that seems to stress the loneliness of the character, and which strongly echoes Joyce's employing of the stream-of-consciousness technique in fiction.

‘If I talk, I shall surely burst’⁸: The stream-of-consciousness technique and the interior monologue

Critics who have examined *The Interpreters* so far have simply ignored or gave very little importance to the use of the stream-of-consciousness technique and the interior monologue in their analysis of the text. David I. Ker in his *The African Novel and the Modernist Tradition* for instance, compares *The Interpreters* to Henry James's *The Tragic Muse* under the heading ‘The Dramatized Perspective’ and assumes that ‘both James and Soyinka push their novels as far toward the spoken and dramatic’⁹ through ‘a skillful use of scene and action and by the use of dialogue’¹⁰.

If it is totally true that *The Interpreters* is marked by long and recurrent passages of dialogues and various scenes of action similar to the play form, it is also strongly marked by the ‘inward perspective’ through the use of the stream-of-consciousness device, interior monologue and flashbacks.

⁸ Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters*. London: Heinemann, 1965, p59.

⁹ David I. Ker, *The African Novel and the Modernist Tradition*, p16.

¹⁰ Ibid, p17.

By ignoring his interest in ‘interiority’, critics simply miss a very important feature of Soyinka’s style that shows both the influence of European Modernist literature on him and his originality.

In chapter 3 of the novel, we see Egbo in a bar trying to invite the beautiful temptress Simi to dance, while other men try to push him away from her:

Flat of feet sectioned to her ground, and he knew suddenly that he was trying to pull her chair, insistent, ‘But I have something to tell you.’

‘Can’t you say it here?’ She was very mild, not patient, simply not patient.

Egbo, unable to move...Is it not a miracle? Your face is so smooth, the even silt of tidewash but no crab has thought to walk on it, no wanton child has thought to scrawl on the daughter of the rivers when she bathes...’

‘Look, young man, go back. You hear the lady does not want to dance.’

A stranger, a man he did not know, who meant nothing to him, stood up to answer for her. I will never be this green again...never...against all these men, wealthy and important, what did I think...? But to be caught out this way, against all balance, and hanger-on speaks for her, and a rough hand wet with whisky, on his wrist, removing it, pushing him back...¹¹

After the phrase ‘Egbo unable to move...’, we are given a direct account of what Egbo is thinking about at that particular moment without any introductory tags as ‘he thought’ for example. As with Joyce’s use of the stream-of-consciousness technique, the thoughts of a character are rendered in the simple present tense and through the first person pronoun and are directly integrated within the third person narrative of the narrator.

The language of Egbo’s thoughts is close to Stephen’s language rather than to any other main character of *Ulysses*. Indeed Egbo’s language is, as we notice, poetic; note for example the metaphoric language with which Simi’s softness and beauty is

¹¹ *The Interpreters*. opcit, p57.

conveyed: 'Your face is so smooth, the even silt of tidewash but no crab has thought to walk on it.'

The comparison with Stephen can even be taken further: just moments after meeting Simi at the bar, Egbo goes off with her to her home where he will have his first sexual experience:

Simi had entered again and he checked his rising delirium.

...God, God, if this is sinful...God, may I never lift head another year, but this night, this one night let me worship here, let me never see light again but in the revelation of her woven lights...

'You are not undressed. No, leave it. I'll do it for you.' And at first he felt nothing, for his jaws were clamped in a vice. 'You are young.' She said, and she was kneeling then, so she raised her face to him standing above her...

'Your heart is pounding. You must not be anxious',¹²

The whole scene (Egbo's first sexual experience), the tone, and the language with which it is portrayed are all nearly identical to the scene of Stephen's first sexual experience with a prostitute at the end of the second chapter of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

Her room was warm and lightsome. A huge doll sat with her legs apart in the copious easy-chair beside the bed. He tried to bid his tongue speak that he might seem at ease, watching her as she undid her gown, noting the proud conscious movements of her perfumed head.

As he stood silent in the middle of the room she came over to him and embraced him gaily and gravely...Tears of joy and relief shone in his delighted eyes and his lips parted though they would not speak.

...He closed his eyes, surrendering himself to her, body and mind, conscious of nothing in the world but the dark pressure of her softly parting lips. They pressed upon his brain as upon his lips as though they were the vehicle of a vague speech; and between them he felt an unknown and timid pressure, darker than the swoon of sin, softer than sound or odour.¹³

¹² Ibid, p59.

¹³ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. London: Penguin Books, 1993, p63.

Both Egbo and Stephen are tempted by prostitutes, and both are portrayed as inexperienced young men tackling their first sexual act. Importantly, both writers render this crucial moment in the life of these characters in a poetic language oriented towards the ‘inward perspective’; Joyce through paralleling each physical action to its mental and emotional effect on Stephen, and Soyinka through the use of the stream-of-consciousness technique.

The striking resemblance both in form and content of these two passages is a clear example of a probability of influence of Joyce over Soyinka. As we will see later, such instances of intertextuality, go beyond *A Portrait* to cover *Ulysses* and other Modernist texts.

Intertextuality in Soyinka’s *The Interpreters* however does not seem to suggest parody as is the case in *Ulysses*. We have seen in the preceding chapters that subversion in *Ulysses* is achieved through borrowing and parodying the various styles of the English literary tradition; in *The Interpreters*, Soyinka’s borrowing of modernist techniques is not an act of dismissive mockery but an act of appropriation. In post-colonial theory, appropriation is often used in conjunction with the term abrogation and both terms have strong political and cultural implications that suggest subversion of the imperial cultural dominance since

post-colonial theory focuses [...] on an exploration of the ways in which the dominated or colonized culture can use the tools of the dominant discourse to resist its political or cultural control.¹⁴

¹⁴ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, p5.

We can find a suggestive example of appropriation and abrogation of modernist narrative devices in Chapter Five of the novel when the thoughts of the corrupted Chief Winsala are rendered thus:

Agba n'tara...it is no matter for rejoicing when a child sees his father naked, l'ogolonto. Agba n't'ara. The wise eunuch keeps from women; the hungry clerk dons coat over his narrow belt and who will say his belly is flat? But when elegungun is unmasked in the market, can he then ask egbe to snatch him into the safety of igbale? Won't they tell him the grove is meant only for keepers of mystery? Agba n't'ara. When the Bale borrows a horse-tail he sends a menial; so when the servant comes back empty-handed he can say. Did I send you? The adulterer who makes assignations in a room with one exit, is he not asking to feed his scrotum to the fishes of Ogun? Agba n't'ra...¹⁵

For a Western reader, accustomed to modernist texts by Joyce and Woolf, this is hardly an interior monologue as it does not adhere to their conventional expectations: the glibness of Chief Winsala is not rendered through a direct classical reproduction of what his mind 'says', but through incorporating elements from the oral tradition: a series of Yoruba proverbs in English and in the Yoruba language (Agba n't'ara;¹⁶). Such fusion of Yoruba tradition with European modernist techniques (one which becomes more important with the use of myth and archetypes as we shall see later) puts emphasis on the radical originality of Soyinka's writing and offers an important statement about the force of the politics of style in liberating Africa from the legacy of European Imperialism. In his article '*Influence and Originality in African Writing*' Bu-Buakei Jabbi insists that:

¹⁵ Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p91-2.

¹⁶ 'Respect to an elderly body'.

[...] the influences that have been or that might be brought to bear upon modern African writing emanate from both traditional indigenous and from non-African sources as well. A greater awareness of influence as a valid critical concept may thus be necessary. In fact, influence may be such a valid critical concept precisely because it is also a dynamic principle of creativity [...] A writer of integrity seldom remains replicatively faithful to his sources, even in discernible cases of literary influence. He may, for example, conceive of a common theme in accordance with his own particular sensibility or vision, which would be completely different from those in his source. Or he may adapt a borrowed element to the exigencies and requirements of a specific context in his work.¹⁷

‘Hours and hours later, or perhaps only a few minutes’¹⁸: The Handling of Time

Next to his use of myth, the way in which Soyinka manipulates time in *The Interpreters* has received much attention from critics. Eldred Jones, one of the first critics who have commented on the treatment of time in the novel, wrote:

Depth is produced by a technique of rubbing through external manifestations back into preceding histories and backgrounds; to other times and other places. The technique of broken chronology particularly enhances this deepening and widening of the scope of the novel as the author dives below the tip of the iceberg and goes under and around it.¹⁹

While admitting that the chronological jumps in time that happen in the novel are ‘essential and illuminating’²⁰, Eldred Jones assumes that these shifts in time are ‘capricious’²¹, consequently suggesting that the whole novel has a ‘shaky’ structure. In the same vein, Lewis Nkosi, in his comments on what he considers irrelevant scenes, considers that the structure of *The Interpreters* is flawed:

...I fail to see what the ‘interpreters’ could learn either about themselves or about the mysteries of existence from the kind of gibberish nonsense spoken by Lazarus in his

¹⁷ Bu-Buakei Jabbi, ‘Influence and Originality in African Writing’ in Eldred Durosimi Jones ed. *African literature Today. A Review*. London: Heinemann, 1979, p120.

¹⁸ *The Interpreters*. opcit, p58.

¹⁹ Eldred Jones, *The Writings of Wole Soyinka*. London: Heinemann, 1973, p155.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

apostolic church. These scenes are simply tableaux which add nothing revelatory except a spurious drama *to a novel already structurally a mess.*²²

What Nkosi means by 'already structurally a mess', is certainly the series of sudden flashbacks integrated within the narrative, which give to the text a seemingly chaotic and arbitrary structure.

Gerald Moore for his part considers the use of flashbacks as tightly linked to characterization:

...the use of multiple flashbacks, which jump to and fro within the biography of each character, slows the process of bringing them to any decisive confrontation with one another in anything which we can identify as 'the present'; by which I mean any event clearly following the night-club scene when we first encounter them.²³

In *The African Novel and the Modernist Tradition*, David I. Ker argues that in *The Interpreters* Soyinka 'employs the Greek philosophies of cyclic time'²⁴ in a sense that 'Chapter One of the book contains the novel's story and structure, all that happens afterwards is mere repetition; recurrence.'²⁵

Obviously, the unifying characteristic about these comments is the consideration of Soyinka's handling of time in terms of isolated formal strategies. Such analysis not only tends to divorce his text from social reality but also make the leftist critics' charges against Soyinka's works seem legitimate and valid; F. Odun Balogun tells us about the ways in which Soyinka is generally perceived and depicted by Marxist critics:

²² Lewis Nkosi, *Tasks and Masks*. Themes and Styles of African Literature, p70.

²³ Gerald Moore, *Wole Soyinka*. London: Evans, 1971, p79.

²⁴ David I. Ker, *The African Novel and The Modernist Tradition*, p37.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p37.

His is feudalist mentality upholding a hegemonic, reactionary view of African history; in him we have a romantic idealist who promotes a reactionary world view with metaphysical mystification and befogging mythology; he is a bourgeois intellectual whose social analysis is uninformed by scientific materialist dialectics; he is a cyclic individualist that sees the heroic acts of lonely messianic individuals; *he is a socially irrelevant writer who alienates his would be audience by consciously cultivating linguistic obscurantism.*²⁶

In this particular section we shall try to by-pass both the formalist and Marxist depiction of Soyinka's writing by showing that the formal structure of *The Interpreters* may have social and political implications.

We have seen earlier that the formal fragmentation in *Ulysses* mirrors and criticizes the social fragmentation under 'imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism'; the formal fragmentation in *The Interpreters* seems to be a response to a new, third historical form of capitalism (after the classical capitalism as exposed by Marx and imperialist capitalism as exposed by Lenin) –'late capitalism'. Broadly, 'late capitalism', as delineated by Ernest Mandel in his *Late Capitalism* and by Jameson's *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (largely based on Mandel's book), is essentially multinational; 'a prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas'²⁷ without direct political control which suggest a continuation of earlier European colonialism. In fact, 'late capitalism' may be considered as a variant of the term neo-colonialism which Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of independent

²⁶ F. Odun Balogun, 'Wole Soyinka and the Literary Aesthetic of African Socialism' in *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol. 22, No. 3, (Autumn, 1988), p. 503. (Italics mine)

²⁷ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 1991. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/us/jameson.htm>

Ghana, defined in his *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism* as a situation in which

the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside... The result of neo-colonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world. Investment under neo-colonialism increases rather than decreases the gap between the rich and the poor...²⁸

Of course in order to gain control over the ex-colonies, neo-colonialism needs to ally with the national bourgeoisie or the elite in power. As many other African countries, independent Nigeria was largely caught into the system of 'late capitalism' largely inherited by the colonial power; in *The History of Nigeria* Toyin Falola writes:

Since the 1940s the country had ordered its capital expenditure in a number of development plans. A ten-year plan was drawn up for 1945/1955. In 1955 the federal and regional governments drew up a five-year plan, later extended for two years. In 1962 the first post-independence plan was formulated. The plans before 1962 were very much concerned with the interest of the colonial power. The 1962 plan also failed to remove foreign interest in the sense that the strategy was still the same -- a capitalist option with emphasis on foreign investments, personnel, capital, and loans. Throughout the First Republic, the country could not resolve the contradictions in a neo-colonial economy that was foreign oriented and affected by changes in the international economic system. The country inherited a backward economy. The state was the predominant agency of change with the primary role of supervising exports to Western countries.²⁹

An illustrative example of this post-independence situation, exemplified through form and content, in *The Interpreters* is Sekoni's story, at the end of Chapter One.

Sekoni's frustration and agony caused by some manifestations of 'late capitalism' and corruption is paralleled with the broken chronology device with which his story is

²⁸ Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism*, 1965. www.marxist.org/reference/subject/Africa/nkrumah/neo-colonialism/introduction.htm

²⁹ Toyin Falola, *The History of Nigeria*. London: Greenwood Press Westport, 1999, p110.

narrated: from the ‘present’ scene of the night club we are suddenly ushered into the past where we see Sekoni, qualified engineer, returning home from abroad aboard a ship dreaming of how he is going to take part in the reconstruction of his country. Suddenly again, the narrative jumps to another period of time in which we are shown how Sekoni’s dreams, enthusiasm and optimism are met by the soul-destroying routinization of the office he works in shortly after he returns home. He is made to sign ‘vouchers and letters and bicycle allowances’, which is far from his competences and ambitions. Qualified a ‘too-know’, in a negative sense, by his superiors, he is sent to a remote village to silence and get rid of him. Sekoni, far from giving up his dreams, ‘invents’ a power station to supply the village with electricity, but his superiors call for an ‘expatriate expert’ to evaluate it; the latter receives the following orders from Sekoni’s chairman:

‘Constitute yourself into a one-man commission of enquiry and probe the construction of our power station at Ijioha which was built without estimates approved expenditure.’
‘Is it unsafe for operation?’ and he winked, a truly expert expat. Expert’s wink.
‘That’s the safest idea. You put it in technical language.’
And the expatriate expert came to Ijioha, saw, and condemned.³⁰

Sekoni however insists on testing it, but even the villagers refuse to let him do so as the

Head of the village tells him:

‘If you want to test it, my friend, just uproot your funny thing and carry it with you. Go and test it in the bush, or in your home town. Electricity is government thing, we all know that. The white men know about it, and one came here and told us. They know what they are talking about.’³¹

³⁰ Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p28.

³¹ *Ibid*, p30.

Shortly after, the police arrest Sekoni and he ends up in a mental hospital. Sekoni then is deceived by his society: his dreams will not come through because of bureaucracy and neo-colonialism. Indeed, the fact that the Head of the village prevented Sekoni from testing his power plant assuming that a white man decided so, suggest that independence led to a new form of colonialism; independence has not freed African societies from the shackles of inferiority. The chairman's call for foreign assistance is not aimed to evaluate and sustain a local investment, but to legitimize a robbery: by 'condemning' the power plant, Sekoni's boss can get more money out of it. Sekoni's chairman then may be identified as a representative of a compradore class; a local bourgeoisie that find in its alliance with the (neo)colonialist power a stepping-stone for privileges and making profits. In other words, such a corrupted bourgeoisie has a 'black skin' but wears a 'white mask'.

The broken and chaotic narrative with which Sekoni's story is recounted is a metaphoric recapitulation of the causes of his agony. In this sense, Soyinka calls attention to the fragmentation of his texts in ways that seem to parallel the social fragmentation and chaos under 'late capitalism' and corruption.

'How long will the jealous dead remain among us!'³²: The Use of Myth and Archetypes

The critical corpus on Soyinka's use of myth and archetypes in *The Interpreters* tends to dismiss or ignore the essential influence of Friedrich Nietzsche. Soyinka uses myth

³² Ibid, p120.

according to the theory of the Yoruba tragedy, initiated by Soyinka himself in his article *'The Fourth Stage: From the Mysteries of Ogun to the Origin of Yoruba Tragedy'*. In this article Soyinka tells us much about Ogun, and formulates a theory of Yoruba tragedy which is heavily influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*. In what follows we shall have a brief overview of Soyinka's article and Nietzsche's book and its influence on Soyinka, then give examples from the novel in order to see how Soyinka uses myth and archetypes.

From the very beginning of his article *'The Fourth Stage'*, Soyinka makes it clear that his conception of Yoruba tragedy is drawn from Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*:

Our course to the heart of the Yoruba Mysteries leads by its own ironic truths through the light of Nietzsche and the Phrygian; but there are inevitable key departures.³³

In his cryptic and even puzzling *The Birth of Tragedy*³⁴, Nietzsche makes the claim that Greek Tragedy was born when the Apollonian worldview met the Dionysian. Apollo, in Greek mythology, is the god of the sun and poetry, while Dionysus is the god of wine, ecstasy and drunkenness. According to Nietzsche, before tragedy was born, the Apollonian view of the world was to be found through plastic arts in the form of sculpture, while the Dionysian worldview was to be found in music, and fertility festivals; when these elements were combined, according to him, they gave birth to

³³ Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p140.

³⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

tragedy. The Apollonian element was represented in the dialogue and the Dionysian element was represented by the music of the chorus.

Nietzsche's aesthetic theory of the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy is appropriated by Soyinka in his development of an aesthetic based on traditional Yoruba metaphysics. In the '*Fourth Stage*' Soyinka formulates a theory of tragedy through Yoruba-izing Dionysus and Apollo in Ogun and Obatala respectively which gives us another example of how post-colonial writers appropriate and abrogate Western modes of thought and mythology.

As we have mentioned in our second chapter, Ogun is the god of war, iron and creativity, while Obatala is the god of creation, 'the essence of the serene art'³⁵, he is a sculptor in a sense that he is the moulder of human bodies; thus, his 'art is essentially plastic and formal'³⁶. Soyinka explains the dichotomy between Ogun and Obatala and the influence of Nietzsche on his theory of Yoruba tragedy in this particular passage:

'Blessed Greeks!' signs our mad votary in his recessional rapture, 'how great must be your Dionysos, if the Delphic god thinks such enchantments necessary to cure you of your Dithyrambic madness.' Such is Appollo's resemblance to the serene art of Obatala the pure unsullied one, to the 'essence' idiom of his virtuals, that it is tempting to place him at the end of a creative axis with Ogun, in a parallel evolutionary relationship to Nietzsche's Dionysos-Appollo brotherhood. But Obatala the sculptural god is not the artist of Appollonian illusion but of inner essence...Ogun, for his part, is best understood in the Hellenic values as a totality of the Dionysian, Apollonian and Promethean virtues...The artist and technician of the forge, he evokes like Nietzsche's Apollonian spirit, a 'massive impact of image, concept, ethical doctrine and sympathy.' Obatala is the placid essence of creation; Ogun the creative urge and instinct, the essence of creativity.³⁷

³⁵ *Myth, Literature and the African World*, opcit, p141.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p141.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p140-41.

Soyinka then tells us that ‘the first actor -for he led the others- was Ogun, first suffering deity, first creative energy, the first challenger, and conqueror of transition. And his, the first art, was tragic art.’³⁸ According to Soyinka, Ogun was the first to have crossed what he calls ‘the transitional gulf’; a realm that separates humans from the gods, the ancestors and the unborn. ‘Only after such testing could the harmonious Yoruba world be born’³⁹, Soyinka tells us.

The use of myth in *The Interpreters* draws heavily on this theory of Yoruba tragedy born out of mythic and archetypal elements. Soyinka, in contrast to Joyce, does not re-write myth narratives nor does he parody them; as Okpewho notes:

The durability of tradition, for him, does not necessarily lie in retailing the same tales over and over even in the chosen fictional experience...the tales in their old forms had to go; but Soyinka is conscious that they contain some timeless virtues which would give future generations a true sense of earthing in their search for selfhood in a difficult and ever changing world.⁴⁰

Accordingly each of the five protagonists of the novel represents the ‘essence’ of a specific god in the Yoruba Pantheon. Sekoni for example is represented as the calmest and most serene character in the novel, as his fellow ‘interpreters’ declares to him after watching him ‘sitting motionless by the record-player’⁴¹ at a party: ‘You know, sheikh, sometimes you are the most non-existent person in the world.’⁴² Sekoni’s hospitality and peaceful character are much reminiscent of the saintly character of Obatala.

³⁸ Ibid, p145.

³⁹ Ibid, p146.

⁴⁰ Isidore Okpewho, *Myth in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p188.

⁴¹ Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p121.

⁴² Ibid.

Significantly, Sekoni is a sculptor, which gives him a direct connection with Obatala the sculptor, the moulder of human bodies and his 'serene art':

Sekoni began sculpting almost as soon as he returned. His first carving, a frenzied act of wood, he called 'The Wrestler'. He had not asked Bandele or anyone to sit for him, but the face and the form of the central figure, a protagonist in pilgrim's robes, was unmistakably Bandele. Taut sinews, nearly agonizing in excess tension a bunched python caught at the instant of easing out, the ballence of strangulation before release, it was all elasticity and strain. And the rest, like the act of his creation which took him an entire month and over, was frenzy and desperation, as if time stood in his way. Kola had an extension shed erected for him against his own studio, and watched with growing respect Sekoni turn the wood into some willful spirit whose taming was a magic locked in energy.⁴³

Nouréini Tidjani-Serpos tells us about Obatala:

He was supposed to mould human forms with the earth which he could not create, that is, produce perfect human bodies. But this aesthetic perfection is an academic beauty, a lifeless beauty. Certainly, Obatala is a creator of pure form, the guardian of Art for Art's sake, guardian of an aesthetic quality without vital breath. Herein lies the whole richness and complexity of the Obatala essence: he represents INCOMPLETION at all levels.⁴⁴

Indeed, it is precisely the fact that Obatala is the god of creation, but of an incomplete and fragmentary creation that Soyinka has retained from the Obatala myth and essence; for by the beginning of the second part of the novel, Sekoni dies and leaves his sculpture, his creation, barely complete. Sekoni's death represents the culminanting point of tragedy in the novel. Yoruba tragedy, according to Soyinka, does not end necessarily with a protagonist's death, for the greater challenge is to stay alive and endure the 'transitional gulfs' in order to bring new knowledge from that experience to the community; Sekoni's death is significant for it fulfills the outcome of tragic drama,

⁴³ Ibid, p99.

⁴⁴ Nouréini Tidjani-Serpos, *The Postcolonial Condition: The Archeology of African Knowledge: From the Feat of Ogun and Sango to the Postcolonial Creativity of Obatala*. *Researches in African Literatures*, Vol.27, 1996, p10.

that is, communal benefit and a new knowledge for the onlookers on and off stage. Thus

Okpewho in his *Myth in Africa* notes that:

Sekoni's death is indeed far from being an irredeemable loss, for it helps to galvanize his friends into a more determined and purposeful critique of the society, filling them as it were, with a good measure of creative anger.⁴⁵

The saintly calmness of Obatala (and Apollo) that Sekoni embodies, is counter-balanced by the destructive impulse and violence of Ogun (Dionysus) in Egbo. After clearing a way to earth, the gods offered Ogun a crown, inviting him to be king over them but he refused. Ogun then went to a town named Ife where he was well received and was offered the crown of Ife after helping the population against an enemy, but he declined the offer. Eventually he was made to accept the offer after insistence from the elders of Ife. He led his men to many victories, until the day when the trickster god Esu left a gourd of palm wine on the battlefield; Ogun drunk it all and became intoxicated to such an extent that he slaughtered friend and foe alike. The bloodthirsty god had then to resign his crown and settle in the mountains.

In the canvas of the Yoruba Pantheon, Egbo serves Kola as a model for Ogun. Kola's representation of Egbo is of a reproduction of the Ogun myth slaughtering his men; which stresses his violent and destructive essence. Such a fact annoys Egbo who explains to Joe Golder:

'My friend has very uneven talents. Look at that thing he has made of me for instance, a damned bloodthirsty maniac from some maximum security zoo. Is that supposed to be me? Or even Ogun, which I presume it represents?'

⁴⁵ Isidore Okpewho, *Myth in Africa*, p201.

‘What is wrong with it?’

‘It is an uninspired distortion, that is what is wrong with it. He has taken one single myth, Ogun at his drunkest, losing his sense of recognition and slaughtering his own men in battle; and he has frozen him at the height of carnage.’

‘Well surely you must concede him the right to select.’

‘It is his selectiveness I quarrel with. Even the moment of Ogun’s belated awareness would have been...at least that does contain poetic possibilities. This blood-spattered fiend is merely melodramatic. And then there is Ogun of the forge, Ogun as the primal artisan...but he leaves all that to record me as this bestial gore-blinded thug!’⁴⁶

Okepewho argues that Egbo is right and that ‘a true Ogun personality must have the due balance in him of the destructive and creative elements’⁴⁷; he adds that we do not see Egbo in the novel ‘endowed with any skill in the representative or plastic arts.’⁴⁸ To my mind the aesthetic creativity of Ogun/Egbo is substituted by the art of Sekoni/Obatala to match the Apollonian/Dionysian balance that Nietzsche proposes as vital to the birth of tragedy. *The Interpreters* is in fact the first work in which Soyinka ‘invites’ other gods besides Ogun. As Kola’s canvas shows, the only aspect that emerges out of Ogun through Egbo in the novel is his destructive and violent essence. Note for example the language with which Egbo’s deflowering of the undergraduate girl is conveyed:

Egbo drew her to him. The hardness was only outside crust, only stubborn skin on her self-preservation and it gave in his eager hands. The centre pure ran raw red blood, spilling on the toes of the god, and afterwards he washed this for her, protesting shamefacedly, in the river. And Egbo confessed, not since that night of Simi, have I been so nervous, so fearful of venturing.⁴⁹

Through such scenes and diction (eager hands, blood), the creative and artistic aspects of Ogun are put to the foreground so as to shed light on his destructive but also daring

⁴⁶ *The Interpreters*, opcit, p233.

⁴⁷ *Myth in Africa*, opcit, p197.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ *The Interpreters*, opcit, p134.

nature. In fact, Egbo's audacious and 'venturing' act of deflowering the girl is much reminiscent of Ogun's venturing in the transitional gulf in order to pierce a way out to earth. Egbo's act and venturing will have, as in Ogun's case, tragic consequences as the girl will get pregnant by the end of the novel. But besides its destructive outcome, Egbo's daring gesture will reveal itself of extreme importance to unveiling, to him and to his friends, the social hypocrisy, hollowness and glibness that characterize the rising bourgeois class in Nigerian society; note for example the slick satirical touches that characterize the closing conversation between 'the interpreters' and a group of doctors and university lecturers about the unnamed girl case:

And Oguazor, yielding some paternal room for him in the crowded circle, said, 'Oh do cem and jein us. We were just discersing wen of your students.'

'Oh, is she yours?' Caroline asked of the intrusion, but Bandlele hardly heard her.

'I was asking, Professor, what would you do exactly if you knew the father?' Leaving no room at all for mistake.

Egbo had caught it from the start and his whole manner resented Bandlele's interference. Quickly he looked again at Lumoye hoping that the man would open his eyes once quikly so that he might seal them in raw swellings before the new danger robbed him of his right to anger. The tone of voice reached Dr Lumoye and he knew he had been saved.

'If you mean the boy responsible for that girl's condition...'

'I do.'

'Well, see that he is expelled of course. He deserves nothing less.'

'I see.'

Angrily, feeling somehow challenged and his challenger impertinent, Oguazor was near shouting, 'The college cannot afford to herve its name dragged down by the meral turpitude of irresponsible young men. The younger generation is too meraly corrupt.'

Lumoye jerked up his head, recovered, and bolder for being well away from Egbo. 'Yes, I agree. They dishonor their family name for nothing, that is the saddest part of it.'

'As a doctor of course,' Bandlele said, 'you would prescribe death before dishonor.'

'Look here..' Oguazor began.

'I was asking the doctor. Death before dishonor, isn't that the idea? Quack abortionists because they-know their way about?'

'I don't know what you are talking about.'

‘Don’t you? But you are familiar with these problems. Even among those who first come to you for help.’

‘I hope Bandele doesn’t think that a university is a social welfare centre.’

Bandele looked at him then thoughtful, and he looked round the circle, calm, his body lax again. He was looking at them with pity, only his pity was more terrible than his hardness, inexorable. Bandele, old and immutable as the royal mothers of Benin throne, old and cruel as the ogboni in conclave pronouncing the Word.

‘I hope you all live to bury your daughters.’⁵⁰

Dr. Lumoye and Professor Oguazor are obviously portrayed as callous and phoney (‘moral tergiversation’, ‘morally corrupt’), and Bandele’s satirical remarks to them, show that he has realized their hypocrisy.

Like Sekoni’s death, Egbo’s act and its tragic consequences are of communal benefit as they bring new knowledge and realization to the ‘interpreters’ and to the reader which is inscribed within the mythic/archetypal essence of Ogun :

Ogun’s action did not take place in a vacuum, this venture was, necessarily a drama of individual stress, yet even his moment of individuation was communicant, one...whose end-in-view was no less than a strengthening of the communal psyche. This is a different dimension from Obatala’s internalised saintly passage or Sango’s destructive egotism.⁵¹

It may have become obvious by now that there are many fundamental similarities and differences between the way in which Joyce and Soyinka use myth: to begin with the similarities, myth and archetypes in both *Ulysses* and *The Interpreters* reveal themselves as the main structural device of the text: plot, characters, action and symbolism depend on myth in giving them significance and order. Through associating their texts with mythology, both Joyce and Soyinka give their readers a set of readymade recurring

⁵⁰ Ibid, p250-51.

⁵¹ Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*

symbolic situations, themes, characters, colors and images in which to draw in order to overcome the text's fragmentation.

Now to the differences. While, as we have seen in the previous chapter, Joyce's use of myth is narrative and comic, Soyinka's use of myth is rather dramatic and tragic. Moreover, while Joyce refused to draw upon his country's myths and opted for mocking Greeks myths through a skilful use of parody that implies imitation with exaggeration and distortion, Soyinka draws upon national myths and archetypes which he considers paradigmatic; C.L Innes tells us:

In Nigeria, writers like Achebe and Soyinka have also seen the recovery of the past and celebration of the nation's traditional culture as a necessary phase which must give way to other demands as the political situation changes.⁵²

Soyinka, however, does not mourn in a nostalgic way the loss of traditional values. In fact, he has described the past as "a fleshpot for escapist indulgence"⁵³, which matches his opposition to the Negritudists' glorification of the past which he has labeled romantic and sentimental, just in the same way as Joyce opposed the Irish Nationalists' and Revivalists' veneration of the past, a comparison to which we shall come back later in this Chapter in more detail.

Importantly however, what unifies Joyce's use of myth with Soyinka's and the Revivalists' is politics. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, Joyce's use of myth is loaded with political intentions that aim at undermining the hegemony of the Catholic

⁵² C.L Innes, *Through the Looking Glass: Irish and African Nationalist Writing*, p19.

⁵³ Wole Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage. Essays on Literature and Culture*. Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1988, p20.

Church and the British State in pre-independence Ireland; in the same manner Soyinka's use of myth is a response to the Nigerian political and social scene of 1965. In his essay '*Contextualizing Myth in postcolonial Novels*', Eriks Uskalis has shown how in post colonial African novels, myth functions as a counter-discourse to the dominant ideology:

The paradigmatic, resonant and symbolic quality of myths means that they cannot be easily contained and condensed, hence they encode resistance to the hegemonic drives found in the narratives of the state. State narratives interpellate the subject as intimately connected to it in an effort to ease out potential dissent from the social formation. Their monologic forms do not easily offer the subject any space to articulate dissent in the form of dialogue. Myth then offers a counter to this monologic form and encodes dissent particularly when located in novels produced in the context of entrenched power formations. Historical context then makes myth an appropriate form at specific times.⁵⁴

Soyinka himself reminds us that 'one of the social functions of literature is the visionary reconstruction of the past for the purpose of a social direction'⁵⁵. In this sense, the form of the novel, as we have seen, mostly reflects and refracts the social-political events in his society and engages a dialogue with the colonial cultural and literary legacy. The post-independence disillusionment in Nigeria is imaginatively captured with adequate modernist narrative devices. The fragmented form of the novel, whether it involves the use of non-linear narratives, fractured syntax, or jumbled bits and pieces of the thought process of characters, enacts a critique of the different manifestations of 'late capitalism', neo-colonialism and the chaotic social state. Thus Soyinka appropriates these techniques in order to express specific local social and political needs and visions.

⁵⁴ Eriks Uskalis, '*Contextualizing Myth in Postcolonial Novels: Figures of Disruption and Dissent*'. [Http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v5i1/uskal.htm](http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v5i1/uskal.htm)

⁵⁵ Wole Soyinka, *Myth Literature and the African World*, p106.

Such practice inevitably involves and requires an abrogation of these European techniques: the technical advances of the present are grafted onto the stock of indigenous traditions, language and myths so as to escape the colonial past and assert personal originality and cultural difference.

Chapter VI

The Interpreters: The Content

Since *The Interpreters* is a postcolonial novel, i.e. published five years after the independence of Nigeria and set in post-colonial times, we do not find in it a preoccupation with colonialism as we do in *Ulysses*. *The Interpreters* in fact depicts the post-independence reality in Nigeria; it gives a truthful glimpse over the immense state of corruption, paralysis, decay and dissolution that characterize the post-colonial African societies in general and the Nigerian in particular; in S.A Arab's words:

Despite the laborious efforts made by these countries to give meaningful content to their political emancipation, most of them are still dependent on foreign assistance as regards technology, capital investment and cadres for the development of their economies. Whether the orientation followed is 'liberal' or 'non-capitalist', they have to cope with two major politico-economic handicaps. One is the resurgence of colonialism under various guises; the other is the anti-economic mentality of the ruling élites, that is of those who hold positions of power in the armed forces, the civil service, the party machinery and the government. These elites, allied with the commercial bourgeoisie, combine the acquisitiveness of the Western middle-class with the squandering habits linked with tribal ethics and economics. The outcome is, more often than not, widespread corruption, an appalling mismanagement of the affairs of the State and an ever-widening gap between the leaders and the led.¹

Much of our discussion of the content of the novel will elaborate on the context of the novel of what Arab states in this quotation. In addition, we shall of course follow the same 'Eagletonian', Fanonian and postcolonial approach to the text that we have used in our analysis of Joyce's *Ulysses* in the preceding chapter. In sum, we shall see the ways in which Soyinka holds the emergent bourgeois ideology and 'late capitalism' responsible for the failure of post-independent Nigerian society to live up to the utopian expectations it set itself on the eve of independence.

¹ S.A. Arab, *Politics and the Novel in Africa*, p176.

‘We are all civilized creatures here’²: The Decadent African Bourgeoisie

In his classical ‘The Pitfalls of National Consciousness’, Fanon warns the independent African countries of the danger of encouraging the growth of national bourgeoisie. The experience of the Latin American countries and of the Malian and Congolese post-colonial ‘misadventures’, brings Fanon to conclude that:

In underdeveloped countries, we have seen that no true bourgeoisie exists; there is only a sort of little greedy caste, avid and voracious, with the mind of a buckster, only too glad to accept the dividends that the former colonial power hands out to it. This get-rich-quick middle class shows itself incapable of great ideas of inventiveness. It remembers what it has read in European textbooks and imperceptibly becomes not even the replica of Europe, but its caricature.³

What we see in *The Interpreters* is a post-colonial Nigerian society that gave birth to exactly the same kind of bourgeoisie that Fanon warned against. It is a bourgeoisie whose ideology is inherited from the colonial power but which lacks vitality; in sum, the same kind of decadent bourgeoisie as that which characterizes the ‘colonial’ Irish society of *Ulysses* as we have come to conclude in the previous Chapter.

Many characters in *The Interpreters* are shown to be imitating British manners and attending luxurious parties. In Part Three of the novel for example, Monica is contrasted with her husband Ayo. She is natural in her reactions (though British- born) while Ayo is pretentious and over-conscious of protocol:

Monica Faseyi was always in disgrace. And so at the entrance to the embassy reception her husband stopped and inspected her thoroughly. Satisfied, he nodded and quickly checked the line of his own bow-tie. He smiled then and kissed her formally on the forehead.

² Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p143.

³ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p175.

‘You might as well put on your gloves now.’
 ‘What gloves? I didn’t bring any.’
 Faseyi thought she was teasing, and out of character though it was, Monica was certain that her husband was teasing.
 ‘Come on now, put on the gloves.’
 ‘You stop teasing, now. Who do you see wearing gloves in Nigeria?’
 Faseyi was no longer joking. He had snatched the handbag from her and found that there were no gloves inside. ‘Do you mean you didn’t bring them?’
 ‘Bring what Ayo?’
 ‘The gloves, of course. What else?’
 ‘But I haven’t any gloves. I gave the ones I had away soon after I came.’ [to Nigeria]
 ‘I am not talking about two years ago. I mean the gloves you’ve bought for tonight.’
 ‘I didn’t buy any. Ayo, what’s all this?’
 ‘What’s all this? I should ask you what’s all this! Didn’t I give you an invitation over a week ago?’
 ‘Yes you did, but...’
 ‘Darling, I gave you a cheque for fifteen pounds to get yourself all you needed.’
 ‘I thought you wanted me to have a new dress.’
 ‘For heaven’s sake what about the gloves!’
 [...]
 ‘Darling, I am surprised at you. These are simple requirements of society which any intelligent person would know.’⁴

Such an example of mimicry shows the extent to which the post-independence Nigerian middle class is tempted by bourgeois etiquette. Obviously, Faseyi married Monica not out of love but only because she is white and British, which would enable him to use her as a stepping-stone to a higher social rank; his mother describes him thus:

‘...He has as much imagination as his father. You should have thought it was obvious, that he would be calling her Moni already –we haven’t a more beautiful name I can think of. But oh no, he calls her darling. And he calls me Mummy.’
 Bandele said, ‘Well you can’t blame him for a childhood habit.’
 ‘Childhood? But he didn’t as child. No, that Mummy habit he picked up in England. And what annoys me is that he does it only in front of people. Why? You tell me why?’⁵

His marriage to Monica is the ultimate attempt to embrace bourgeois ideology. To his misfortune, Monica turned out to be an authentic woman, respectful of the new milieu in

⁴ Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p39-40-41.

⁵ *Ibid*, p213.

which she lived and of the African mores and traditions. The fact that she gave away her gloves when she came to Nigeria, shows that she made a break with her British bourgeois manners, if she had any, expecting that living in an African country would be necessarily (culturally) different. Monica is even ready to adopt African traditions, for which she has great respect and admiration; she, for example, asks repeatedly Kola to show her the canvas of the Yoruba Pantheon, and at the party she drinks palm wine instead of champagne; which annoys her husband:

The ambassador was hospitably incredulous. 'But don't you drink at all, Mrs Faseyi?' 'NO, only the occasional palm wine when our steward feels kindly towards us.' The ambassador laughed and gestured regretfully. 'I am so sorry, I really wish we had palm wine.'

One of the waiters was passing with more champagne and overheard. Faseyi had wandered off to seek the Master of Presentations; when he returned, Monica had a glass of palm wine in her hand, and a colleague of Faseyi was asking. 'What have you got there, Monica? Mist alba?'

'Where did you get that?' Faseyi shouted.

'One of the stewards brought it. He overheard us talk about palm wine and went to fetch it from his house. Wasn't that sweet of him?'

Faseyi went scrambling towards Bandele. 'You see, she has begun again.'

[...]

'If she were a bush-girl from some London slum I could understand. But she is educated. She has moved in society. Why does she have to come and disgrace me by drinking palm wine?'⁶

The reader should not see in Monica's love for palm wine a sign of exoticism, but rather of subversion and satire: while Faseyi and his circle proclaim their 'westernization', Monica does not shout about 'Africanness' but simply lives it. Monica acts as an iconoclast in face of the Nigerian pseudo-bourgeoisie. The fact that she once belonged

⁶ Ibid, p42.

to an authentic bourgeois society puts her in the best position to unmask the pretentiousness of the Nigerian middle-class.

More iconoclastic still is the attitude of the troublesome Sagoe. In Kola's Pantheon Sagoe is meant to represent Esu, the trickster god; thus his reaction to superficial bourgeois manners goes beyond the critical statements of the other 'interpreters'. In Chapter 10 we see the five friends in Professor Oguazor's house attending a party. Part of his house is described thus by Soyinka:

From the ceiling hung citrous clusters on invisible wires. A glaze for the warmth of life and succulence told the story, they were the same as the artificial apples. There were fancy beach-hat flowerpots on the wall, ivy clung from these along a picture rail, all plastic, and the ceiling was carved in plastic lichen. Sagoe passed, he now noticed, under a special exhibition group of one orange, two pears, and a fan of bananas straight from European wax-works.

'I feel let loose in the Petrified Forest. What's the matter with those who live in it?'⁷

The plastic fruits are here obvious symbols of artificiality; the artificiality of the bourgeois manners that some of the guests have adopted. The 'fan of bananas' that came 'straight from European wax-works', can be read as a metaphor for neocolonialism: the white rulers left Nigeria but not before implanting its bourgeois ideology, enthusiastically adopted by the emerging national middle class.

The rising atmosphere of artificiality in 'the house of death' will eventually suffocate Sagoe who is then moved to concrete action:

...Sagoe gathered his senses back to the immediate and understood why. In his hand was another of the apples and his hand was pulled back to send it after its brother...before he straightened the apple was through the window and Sagoe picked up a pear from the

⁷ Ibid, p140.

next wall fruit-bowl. Pinkshore reeled, drunk on astonishment as Sagoe from whisky and euphoria.

‘What...what the devil do you think you are doing?’

‘Feeding the dog.’⁸

The act of throwing the plastic fruits to the dog is the ultimate rejection of bourgeois falsehood. The situation becomes even more hilarious, carnivalesque and subversive when Sagoe bows to kiss the artificial fruit that decorates Mrs. Oguazor’s navel:

...he bent with a speed which surprised himself, sniffed the plastic rose which decorated Mrs. Oguazor at the navel and sprang up again holding his nose to heaven in aromatic bliss.

‘Like real. Caro. Like real.’ And he shot from the room like mad.⁹

But despite their iconoclastic attitude towards the Nigerian petty-bourgeois, ‘the interpreters’ seem to be fascinated by the luxurious and privileged milieu they live in. I agree with Msiska when he argues that:

...one is never certain why the interpreters frequent such parties...it all suggests that the interpreters are not as different from what they regard as corrupt society as they imagine themselves to be, thus implying that they suffer from the same delusion of absolute difference as the Oguazor’s social group. They might be described as occupying a ‘false margin’, since they are fascinated by and derive enormous pleasure from mixing with the rich and famous, and such occasions afford them refreshing change from the humdrum routine of their usual haunt...If the interpreters are the redeemers that society had been waiting for, it is not clear in what direction they would lead it...¹⁰

Thus, the ‘interpreters’ are portrayed as being helplessly trapped within and alienated by a bourgeois society just as Bloom is in *Ulysses*. For one thing, most of their everyday language is bourgeois; witness for example how Egbo reacts to the collapse of a houeroof on its residents in the stormy weather that characterize the opening chapter:

⁸ Ibid, p149.

⁹ Ibid, p151.

¹⁰ Mpalive-Hangson Msiska, *Wole Soyinka*. Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998, p36-37.

It was very near and they strained over the courtyard towards the sound. But Sekoni's were the cat's eyes. 'Th-there, it is over th-th-there.' And immediately the crash came, a dump thud of bricks, and later the higher pitched collapse of rusted sheets. 'One tooth', Egbo announced. 'The sky-line has lost one tooth from its long rooted gums'¹¹

By describing the incident in an abstract and mytho-poetic language, Egbo simply deprives the tragic situation of its human and social dimensions. His statement has the bourgeois and intellectual eloquence that calls for pity, but which has no concrete consequences. His metaphoric language shows not only the remarkable distance between him and the event, but also between the elite, which he belongs to, and 'the wretched of the earth'.

Through their highly sophisticated disquisitions, the 'interpreters' seem to be striving to distinguish themselves from other 'inferior' classes; as Erikas Uskalis notes:

To some extent Soyinka's *The Interpreters* represents the worldview of the middle-class Nigerian African elite, an ideology which is unstable and fragmentary given that this elite is distinctly separate from the working class as a whole yet is without its own power base, given its dependence on foreign capital and investment. As this elite has no position from which to exert a campaign of hegemony, it does not feel any linkage to the working class in the classic sense in which we see the bourgeoisie having to necessarily link itself to the working class in its attempt to exert hegemony through the condensing of its ideology.¹²

'Oh damn your American acquisitiveness'¹³: Capitalism and Social Alienation

Soyinka, like Joyce, has no Marxist leaning. For one thing, the voice of ordinary people is totally absent in *The Interpreters* As Ngugi Wa'Thiongo notes:

¹¹ *The Interpreters*, opcit, p16.

¹² Erikas Uskalis, 'Contextualizing Myth in Postcolonial Novels: Figures of dissent and disruption'

¹³ *The Interpreters*, opcit, p100.

Soyinka's good man is the uncorrupted individual: his liberal humanism leads him to admire an individual's lone act of courage, and thus often he ignores the creative struggles of the masses. The ordinary people, workers and peasants [...] remain passive watchers on the road.¹⁴

From a Marxist perspective this constitutes a major flaw in the novel. Soyinka's interest in the individual is certainly influenced by the Western modernist tradition: his work bears the marks of the Existentialist and Absurdist theories that we find in Conrad, Beckett and Camus. Thus, if we want to read the novel as a critique of capitalism we shall resort to the Marxist concept of alienation which Luckas considers as central to any 'revolutionary critique of capitalism.'¹⁵

If *The Interpreters* shows a total disregard for the masses, it is primarily because of its setting, the city. Biodun Jeyifo writes:

The Interpreters is [...] very much a novel of place, of a specific milieu. Concretely, and like the extended portraits of cities like Paris and Dublin in canonical works of Western modernist fiction, Soyinka's first work of fiction is a novel of Lagos, and to a lesser extent, of Ibadan, the city and the university, in the early 1960s. Not only are well-known suburbs, streets and thoroughfares of Lagos named and evoked in a manner that Soyinka would later reprise in writing of the city of his birth, Abeokuta, in *Aké*, his autobiographical memoir, but *The Interpreters* also alludes to famous or notorious events and personalities of the period... There is also the narrator's love-hate attitude to Lagos: the filth and squalor of the cityscapes, as well as the casual brutalities of the city's populace are registered with scatological piquancy only a few steps behind the scale of Ayi Kwei Armah's depiction of Accra and its environs in *The Beautiful Ones Are not Yet Born*. At the same time, the novel also celebrates the vitality of the city's street culture and night life.¹⁶

I have quoted this passage at length because what Jeyifo proposes is important to our comparative purposes: Soyinka's depiction of Lagos is identical to Joyce's depiction of

¹⁴ Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming*. New York: Lawrence Hill, 1973, p. 65

¹⁵ George Luckacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, London: Routledge Classics, 1997, p.xxii

¹⁶ Biodun Jeyifo, *Wole Soyinka*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p173.

the emergent, modern metropolitan and capitalist city of Dublin at the turn of the century. What we find in *The Interpreters* then is the same ‘dear dirty’ Lagos that obtains in *Ulysses* and other Joycean texts.

First, there is, as in *Ulysses*, a celebration of modern life: cars, bridges, trains, night-lights and night clubs are recurrent images in the course of the novel. Nowhere is this more obvious than is Soyinka’s depiction of Sir Derinola’s (the corrupted judge) funeral. In this scene, we follow Sagoe through the streets of the city making his way to the funeral. In the process, we get a high sense of place and setting since we are given the names of streets, shops, buildings, offices and bridges that Sagoe passes through which is highly evocative of Joyce’s depiction of Bloom’s wanderings through the city of Dublin:

Round the corner of the Renascent High School it lay, some yards from the first bus stop entering Abule Ijeha...Through the side-streets of Yaba the night-soil men continue to pad on a gentle rot around the little windows set low in the walls of back-houses, faceless janitors, pailsurmounted silences, short-broomed swathing flitting dusk to dawn, the cherished emblems of a vintage air...Round the corner was the cabinet shop which was just beside the disused cemetery of Alagomeji...Sagoe had walked the entire length of Carter Bridge before he knew it, his tiredness completely gone.¹⁷

The resemblance with *Ulysses* becomes even more striking when Sagoe joins Sir Derinola’s funeral *cortège*: the scene is identical to Bloom’s attending of Dignam’s funeral, aboard a carriage, in the Hades Episode. At a certain moment, the two *cortèges* (Bloom’s and Sagoe’s), cross a bridge and are stopped at its middle, Bloom’s carriage to let cattle pass, and Sagoe’s *cortège* to let another funeral procession pass. The narrator

¹⁷ Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreter*, p108-110

even tells us that it is ‘a near-symbolic bridge because of its situation, separating the living from the dead.’ Indeed, what Soyinka explores by paralleling this scene to Joyce’s episode is a symbolic frame that not only puts emphasis on the theme of death, but also on the theme of isolation and alienation.

Ulysses, and the Hades Episode in particular, is concerned with Bloom’s relative isolation within a social group; likewise Sagoe wanders through the city of Lagos alone and we note that at the cemetery he addresses nobody:

Sagoe gave the wreaths to the nearest of them saying nothing...He stayed on only a few minutes later and then, filled with a sudden revulsion for his role –for only now did it leap consciously to his mind that he hung around them because he saw a story in this for his page—he turned and left them...¹⁸

Sagoe’s reaction here is a literal example of the reification of social relations in capitalist Nigeria. In his *‘Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat’*, Luckas tells us that the basis of the “commodity-structure”

is that a relation between people take on the character of a thing and thus acquires a “phantom objectivity”, an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people.¹⁹

Reification of course often goes hand in hand with commodification and alienation; it is in fact a “‘special’ case of alienation, its most radical and widespread form characteristic of modern capitalist society.”²⁰

Hence, when Sagoe thinks of the people present in the ceremony only as material for a newspaper article, he is in fact proceeding into a commodification of these individuals.

¹⁸ Ibid, p113.

¹⁹ George Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, p83.

²⁰ Gajo Petrović, *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983, p413.

His isolation at the funeral then can be comprehended as an outcome of reification; the conversion of human beings into commodities and objects, thus making impossible genuine communication which can only occur between subjects.

Another ‘interpreter’, Sekoni, is depicted thus by Soyinka after his power plant was discarded by his ‘bosses’ in the Civil Service:

Sekoni, obscuring himself in the streets of Ibadan, plodding among the easels in Kola’s art classes, moving around without a sense of intrusion, without comment, waiting for a decision to be taken on his fate by the next meeting of the governing board. Hearing often the whirr of motors that he had built, the assemblage of a million parts that he had scavenged touring the various stations under his command more like a junk - cart than as a Senior Civil Engineer in charge prodding crumpled heaps of motor cars and lorries, tractor, railways yards...²¹

Here Sekoni’s alienation is of a different kind: the fact that Sekoni awaits ‘the next meeting of the governing board’ to approve his power plant and that he thinks of himself ‘more like a junk-cart’ rather ‘than as a Senior Civil Engineer in charge’, shows the extent to which he is alienated from the product of his labor. Marx wrote about this particular phenomenon in capitalist societies thus:

The object produced by labor, its product, now stands opposed to it as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer...The more the worker expends himself in work the more powerful becomes the world of objects which he creates in face of himself, the poorer he becomes in his inner life, and the less he belongs to himself.²²

Throughout the novel, alienation seems central to Soyinka’s exploration of the experience of his main characters in post-colonial Nigeria. The social and institutional

²¹ Ibid, p28.

²² Judy Cox, quoted in *An Introduction To Marx's Theory Of Alienation*.
<http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj79/cox.htm>

structure of post-colonial Nigeria estranges the ‘interpreters’ from everything around them: they often remain mere watchers and commentators of events (as we have seen with the falling roof scene in the previous section) refusing to act. Each of them asserts his personal isolation and detachment by relating to something personal: Sagoe has his philosophy of Voidancy, Sekoni his sculpture, Bandele his Shrine, and Kola his pantheon. Seen collectively, the alienation of each ‘interpreter’ points to the isolation of their class from the rest of society. It also points to the feelings of uprootedness and despair typical of many intellectuals mainly caused by the state of corruption they found around them in the wake of the Nigerian national independence.

**‘Next to death...shit is the most vernacular atmosphere of our beloved country’²³:
Post-independence Disillusion**

In 1967, two years after the publication of *The Interpreters*, Soyinka presented a paper at the African-Scandinavian Writers Conference in Stockholm, titled ‘*The Writer in Modern in Modern Africa*’, in which he assumed that:

The stage at which we find ourselves is a stage of disillusionment, and it is this which prompts an honest examination of what has been the failure of the African writer, as a writer. And this is not to say that, if the African writer had truly responded to the political moment of his society, he would not still be faced with disillusionment. For the situation in Africa is the same as in the rest of the world; it is not one of the tragedies which come out of isolated human failures, but the very collapse of humanity. Nevertheless the African writer has done nothing to vindicate his existence, nothing to indicate that he is even aware that this awful collapse has taken place. For he has been generally without vision.²⁴

²³ Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p101.

²⁴ Emmanuel N. Obiechina, *Language And Theme. Essays on African Literature*. Washington: Howard University Press, 1990, p122.

Hence, a study of the theme of disillusionment in *The Interpreters* is indispensable in discerning Soyinka's political and social vision and commitment. The state of disillusionment in Africa was primarily caused by the awkward leadership of the elite in power: as they stepped into the place vacated by the former imperialists, the majority of the members of the elite proved to be as disdainful to the interest of their nation and people as the imperialists. Many modern African writers use the uncorrupted minority of the elite as protagonists as to voice their views.

Accordingly, the five friends that constitute the collective protagonist of the novel are meant to represent a sample of the postcolonial intellectual elite and its fate in independent Nigeria. All of them have witnessed the colonial era and its disastrous effects, and all of them have returned from abroad, where they had received their higher education, with intentions to take part in the reconstruction of the country. Their dreams however are met by the immense blanket of corruption that has spread over the country.

A pertinent example of this situation in the novel is Sagoe's story at *The Independent Viewpoint* newspaper. The members of the board, Sir Derin, Chief Winsala and the Managing Director, are all vehicles for satire on the corruption of the officials and the elite.

First, Soyinka proceeds with a description of the strategic location of *The Independent Viewpoint* building in the slums:

Sagoe, awaiting the arrival of the full complement of the Board of Interview, made his first tour of the premises. The area had been chosen, according to Mathias, for reasons

of pure political strategy. Every loud city has its slums, and Isale-Eko symbolised the victory of the modern African capital over European nations in this one aspect of civilisation. A few foreigners seeking off-beat local colour found it always in Isale-Eko; daring its dark maze they admitted that their experience was unique, there was hop-scotch to be played among garbage heaps, and the faint-hearted found their retreat cut off by the shop from housewives' basins. *Independent Viewpoint* owned a large building in the slum; the paper itself was a party organ, its location meant easy patronage of local thugs, and Isale-Eko was rich spawning ground.²⁵

Obviously, this description contrasts with the state of opulence in which the elite live and the poverty of the masses. The fact that the officials see in the location of the building a contrast between the 'modern' and the 'traditional' that impresses the foreigners shows their overt disregard for the filth and squalor in which the poor live. Inside the building, another contrast is made between the polished world of the elite and the filthy world of the common people through Sagoe's visit to two toilets: while the one for the junior staff had a 'cracked and unflushed' cistern 'and its walls matched the radio station in suspicious smears'²⁶; the one for the senior staff had 'automatic purifier device imported by the Managing Director on his seventh Economic Mission to Sweden'²⁷. The epitome of the elite's materialism and 'private self-communion' is the board-room described thus by the narrator:

The boardroom, a different world, contradicted all evidence of other offices. To it belonged the only air-conditioner in the building, and the walls were wood-panelled; hidden behind the paneling was powdering mortar, and there were small curtains to match the wall which screened the cooling machines when they were not in use.

Each seat was a swiveling tilt-back armchair, the table was the best mahogany; a pin scratch on it would have shown up like a bleach mark. A gold-edged pad lay at each

²⁵ Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreter*, p72.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p76.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p78.

place, at scrupulous angles to the table edge. In one corner, an apoplectic radiogram, but no records, only the radio was ever used, and that just for the news.²⁸

Such images of social inequalities are highly telling statements on the state of post-independence disillusionment: they suggest that the former colonial inegalitarian economic and social structure had not vanished as the new national bourgeoisie and the emergent elite adopted the living standards and administrative legacy of the colonialists; as Teacher, the alienated intellectual character in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful ones are not Yet Born*, puts it:

Life has not changed. Only some people have been growing, becoming different, that is all. After a youth spent fighting the whiteman, why should not the president discover as he grows older that his real desire has been to be like the white governor himself, to live above all blackness in the big old slave castle?²⁹

The ruling elite practise capitalism in its most basic ideology: individualism and acquisitiveness. And since this class has neither real means of production nor a capital of its own, it amasses capital simply through bribery and the conversion of public funds to a source of personal enrichment.

Hence, the 'Compensation Members' that constitute the board of *The Independent Viewpoint* make it plain to Sagoe that 'the job is there, but you have to secure it.'³⁰ These bribe-seekers simply 'get rid of the best people.'³¹ Such practices endorse the social inequalities, to which the masses are the first victims.

²⁸ Ibid, p75.

²⁹ Ayi Kwei Armah, , *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. London: Heinemann 1968, p92.

³⁰ *The Interpreters*, opcit, p84.

³¹ Ibid, p81.

The masses, however, are also responsible for the degradation of their own state as Soyinka seems to suggest in the hunting of a petty thief, Barabbas, by a mob. The masses are guilty of oppressing those inferior to them, while ‘big shots’ like Sir Derin and the Managing Director get scot-free:

Run, you little thief or the bigger thieves will pass a law against your existence as a menace to society,...run, Barabbas from the same crowd which will reform tomorrow and cheer the larger thief returning from his twentieth Economic Mission and pluck his train from the mud, dog-wise, in their teeth [...] Like the casual barbarism of such a crowd, their treachery against those who were momentarily below them in daily debasement.³²

As Emanuel Obiechina notes, ‘the view of the mob has nothing in common with the Coriolanus-like, aristocratic contempt for the common people, but ‘is rooted in precise observation of human nature.’³³ In fact, in a society that cultivated corruption and social injustice as a normal way of life, the common people can also be as tyrannical as the compradore bourgeoisie.

The novel then seems to disqualify all social classes from redemption: the national bourgeoisie and the elite in power are too corrupt; the intellectual elite (‘the interpreters’) is too isolated and alienated; and the masses are too powerless and confused.

Through his overt critique of the intellectual elite’s aloofness however, Soyinka seems to suggest that the ultimate hope for a better future lies in the engagement of these

³² Ibid, pp 114-15.

³³ Emmanuel Obiechina, *Language and Theme: Essays on African Literature*, p144.

intellectuals with the everyday life of the people; to convert their ‘interpretations’ into concrete action. As Fanon warned:

The more the intellectual imbibes the atmosphere of the people the more completely he abandons the habits of calculation, of unwonted silence, of mental reservation, and shakes the spirit of concealment. And it is true that already at that level we can say that the community triumphs, and that it spreads its own light and its own reason.³⁴

‘Black is something I like to be’³⁵: Negritude and Colonial Discourse:

As developed by Leopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire in their different writings, the concept of Negritude sought to assert a set of distinctive qualities of black culture and identity: they claimed for example that while the Western culture was rational and analytical; Black culture was essentially emotional, intuitive and based on integration and wholeness. In sum, the Negritudinists appropriated for themselves those stereotypes previously labeled on the black man and turned them into signs of disassociation from the white man’s cultural values and to symbols of pride and self-valorization.

Senghor believed that ‘emotion was negro just as reason was Greek’. From this perspective, Black poetry, he claimed, was based on rhythm; ‘rhythm, the very navel of the poem, is born of emotion, and, in its turn, engenders emotion.’³⁶ Of course, such claims had led to numerous protests. Soyinka’s own position is well-known: he saw in Negritude a racist movement that adopted the same colonial ideology, that of ‘othering’. For him, the fact that the Negritude sought to give the African a totally different identity

³⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p48.

³⁵ *The Interpreters*, opcit, p195.

³⁶ C.L. Innes, quoted in , ‘*Through the Looking Glass: Irish and African Nationalist Writing*’, p15.

from the European would only confirm the Eurocentrist stereotypes. Soyinka's rejection of the Negritudists can also be accounted by the prominence of emotion in their writings. In fact, by its emphasis on nature, its repudiation of technology and modernity, its celebration of and longing for the past and the ancestors, Negritude poetry is marked by strong romantic overtones. Moreover, it is essentially the assertion of the 'self' in Negritude writings which endorses this romantic dimension. Soyinka tells us:

Poets feed first on the self (anyway); it is the extension of the "self" into history and mythology, into society and even into contemporary responsibility which is a conspicuous development in the self-consciousness of most African writers, since it does not appear to correspond to the degree of creative processing. Narcissism begins when the writer fails to distinguish between self-exploration and self-manipulation. The latter, overburdened with metaphors usually of thinly disguised precepts, is indeed a work of love, motivated by external responsibility. But self-love is self-love and is far more superficial than the bereavement, the curiosity, or the revelation.³⁷

In the *The Interpreters*, Joe Golder, the 'three-quarter White' American homosexual, can be considered as the foil for Soyinka's critique of Negritude. Dissatisfied with the colour of his skin, he tries desperately to become blacker by exposing himself to the burning afternoon sun. As he poses for Kola's canvas, he even tells the latter: 'For God's sake, blacken me. Make me the blackest blackness in your pantheon.'³⁸ He adopts exactly the same Negritudist discourse when he declares to Sagoe:

I have tried to help people –lots of times, especially when I was in Paris where the world's bums are gathered. Not anybody, mind you. Only people of my colour. I like black people, I really do. Black people are exciting, their colour has such vitality, I mean it is something really beautiful, distinctive...³⁹

Golder's narcissism is met by bitter distaste from Sagoe's part:

³⁷ Biodun Jeyifo, quoted in *Wole Soyinka*, p51.

³⁸ *The Interpreters*, opcit, p217.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p195.

‘Look, the truth is that I get rather sick of self-love. Even nationalism is a kind of self-love but that can be defended. It is this cult of black beauty which sickens me. Are albinos supposed to go and drawn themselves, for instance?’⁴⁰

Quite evidently, Sogoe here associates Negritude with a form of romanticism (‘self-love’) and with racism. Earlier in the novel, in what can be described as a scene of Rabelaisian carnivalesque, Soyinka proceeds into a jagged satire of Golder’s romantic quest to become blacker through depicting the state of his skin after frying his face in the sun:

The following days were filled with near-despair; Joe Golder’s face appeared to flake rapidly, a sudden breeze through the studio and a fragment of skin would gently disengage float mockingly above the easels and after several triple turns in air, float gently through an open window while Golder looked on amused and Kola watched helplessly. Until a greedily large piece almost vital to the facial collage, a large piece frizzled sepia and Turkish slipper shaped freed itself from the cheekbone, then Kola lost control and attacked it, caught it on a brush point and flattened it on the painting...⁴¹

The target of Soyinka’s satire here is not only the Negritude but all those (Orientalists for example) who take the skin colour as a fundamental criterion in valorizing the ‘self’ and demonizing the ‘other’: the exponents of Manicheanism. Hence, when asked if he finds his color beautiful Sogoe responds:

‘I have never given it a thought. I saw a white girl at a party the other night and I considered her beautiful. That is an aesthetic judgment. I cannot remember much about her colour. When you talk of this black vitality I can almost hear you salivating and since I happen to be black –neither fault nor credit to me—I find it all nauseating.’

It is easy to see here that Joyce’s rejection of the Irish Literary Revival was informed by quite the same reasons. C.L Innes writes on some of the affinities between the Irish Revivalists and the Negritudunists:

⁴⁰ Ibid, p196

⁴¹ Ibid, pp 102-3.

[...] what is striking and paradoxical about the antithesis proclaimed by nationalist intellectuals is the degree to which it derives from and affirms the antithetical images already developed by the colonizer in order to justify his presence. Rather than deny those distinctions and insist the Celt and African is as capable of reason as the Anglo-Saxon or Gaul, these intellectuals celebrate the very attributes for which their race was disparaged –emotionalism, irrationality, primitiveness.⁴²

For Joyce, the Victorian visions of the Irish as a race of sentimental dreamers was endorsed and confirmed by the methods of the Revivalists. In fact, Joyce's distaste for exaggerated emotionalism and romanticism was essentially informed by objections to certain escapist elements in the aesthetics of the Irish Literary Revival which seems to parallel Soyinka's own position vis-à-vis the escapist poetic landscape of Negritude.

Again, such readings are telling testimonials on the propensity for social and political commitment on Soyinka's part. The content of *The Interpreters* shows a thoroughgoing concern with the historical context: it captures the birth of the decadent post-colonial bourgeoisie; the ironies that face the intellectual elite and their alienation amidst a state of widespread corruption; and the negative influence of capitalism on the social life of Nigeria. More often than not, Soyinka treats his subject matter with wit and irony in contrast to the pessimistic mood that we usually find in other African novels of the 'literature of disillusionment' especially Armah's. In fact, satire is the overriding tone in *The Interpreters*: corrupted individuals are depicted as buffoons; posh parties are turned into carnivals; promoters of the 'black is beautiful' doctrine portrayed as grotesque; and the discourse of hypocritical and shallow characters like Dr. Lumoye, is ridiculed

⁴² C.L. Innes, 'Through the Looking Glass: Irish and African Nationalist Writing', p15.

through linguistic deviations. Such derision then implies much social criticism and is rooted in a precise political practice: subversion.

CONCLUSION

It has long been fashionable to view European Modernism as a movement dependent on the aesthetics of autonomy and therefore dismissive of historical, social and political attachments. As inherently apolitical, the Modernist movement in Africa has been viewed by ‘Afrocritics’ and Luckacsian critics as irrelevant to the African post-colonial situation and as an example of cultural colonization.

The attempt along this study was to bypass these received readings of European and African Modernism by comparing and locating the works of James Joyce and Wole Soyinka in their specific historical context. To this end, we have followed a neo-Marxist (Eagleton) and post-colonial approach; an approach that has revealed the commitment of both *Ulysses* and *The Interpreters* through form and content.

At the level of form, we have seen that the radical experimental and parodic nature of Joyce’s writing has a powerful subversive political force. Such narrative devices as the stream-of-consciousness technique and the interior monologue are essentially meant to challenge the conventions of English literature and therefore challenge the cultural and political status quo. By parodying Homer’s *Odyssey* and Greek myths for instance, *Ulysses* attacks the emblems of Western culture; ones which have been used as icons of cultural superiority and justifications for (British) imperialism. As it challenges (cultural) imperialism, Joyce’s writing practice, we have argued, enacts a critique to the capitalism that lies behind it through its

fragmented form. We have read the fragmented narrative structure of *Ulysses* as a commentary on the shattering effects of imperialism and capitalism on Ireland, a commentary further strengthened by Joyce's linguistic parody.

While equally subversive, parody is not so much central to Soyinka's writing practice. In fact as many other African writers, Soyinka's use of modernist formal strategies such as the stream of consciousness technique, interior monologue and myth shows the influence of Joyce and other modernists on his style. Witness Ngugi's indebtedness to Conrad:

[...] the shifting points of view in time and space; the multiplicity of narrative voices; the narrative-within-a-narration; the delayed information that helps the revision of previous judgment so that only at the end with the full assemblage of evidence, information and points of view, can the reader make full judgment – *these techniques impressed me.*¹ (my italics)

Through altering these techniques to suit local needs, by injecting indigenous forms, Soyinka calls attention to the originality of his style and therefore resists formal 'colonizability'. Actually, we have argued that the modernist mode of writing in *The Interpreters* expresses the state of disillusionment and disruption in post-independence Nigeria caused by neo-colonialism and 'late capitalism' just in the same way that the formal fragmentation in *Ulysses* performs a linguistic subversion of imperialism and capitalism in Ireland.

At the level of content, we have seen that the major forces in Irish politics, namely British imperialism, the Catholic Church and Irish nationalism, remain

¹ Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming*, p. 76.

strongly present and crucial throughout *Ulysses* and are identified as the main sources of oppression in Ireland. We have seen that Stephen stands as an opponent force in face of British imperialism in the novel, from his early intellectual confrontation with the Englishman Haines, to his later and more violent encounter with the guardsman Private Carr. The Catholic Church is identified as the primary source of sterility and paralysis in Dublin. These three antithetical forces suggest a paradoxical complicity contributing to the fragmentation of Irish society. We have also pointed to the kinship between imperialism and capitalism through discerning some important elements in Joyce's criticism of Irish pre-independence society. Capitalism, we have argued, was imposed by British imperialism and was responsible for the alienation of individuals in Dublin. As for Bloom, we have tried to represent him not so much as a victim and outsider in Dublin because of his Jewish inheritance, but as the embodiment of a decadent (post)colonial petty-bourgeoisie as characterized by Fanon. Bloom's alienation by bourgeois ideology is mainly manifested by his sentimentality and mimicry of his British masters sardonically satirized by Joyce.

In *The Interpreters* we find the same satirical thrust towards the Nigerian post-colonial bourgeoisie. The Nigerian society is represented as trapped within the ways 'of a traditional bourgeoisie, of a bourgeoisie which is stupidly, contemptibly,

cynically bourgeois.’² Soyinka pits the ‘interpreters against this emergent decadent bourgeois class. Their attitude is iconoclastic and they provide an effective social critique of the attempts of the Nigerian bourgeoisie to mimic, rather than oppose, their former English masters. We have also seen that the ‘interpreters’ remain equally trapped, in the same way as Bloom, in a bourgeois ideology they outwardly oppose. Soyinka’s ‘interpreters’ also resemble Joyce’s characters in their alienation: as with Bloom, theirs is a direct consequence of the reification of social relations and the fetishization of commodities in the neo-capitalist Nigeria; they are as alienated as Stephen because disillusioned intellectuals, they feel no linkage to any other social group, they are unredeemable misfits.

In fact, both Joyce and Soyinka show little interest in other social groups (peasants, lumpenproletariat, the working class) other than their own (petty bourgeoisie and the intellectual elite respectively). Their inability to represent the lives of ‘the wretched of the earth’ can be regarded as a shortcoming indeed. They are strong in their criticism and subversion of the existing order, but weak on suggestions for possible changes. Even worse, their intense aestheticism alienates them from the majority of the people: the ordinary reader lacks the sophistication of a Jameson or an Eagleton and is, as a result, ill-equipped to discern the political

² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 150.

implications of modernist literature. The Modernist mode of writing, therefore, seems to suffer from serious (didactic) shortcomings in its political dimension.

Nevertheless the historical, social and political implications of Modernist texts should constantly be emphasized by critics because they are highly valuable and can have an impact on people's daily lives: the protest strain that characterizes these novels is even more powerful than the one we may find in the realist novel. If the Modernist text appeals so little to 'lowbrow readers', it is not so much because of its difficulty but because of the way in which critics have perceived and stereotyped it: 'the well wrought urn', 'the verbal icon' and 'art for art's sake' have done nothing but discourage the ordinary reader. If Modernist literature is so unpopular, it is because it has been conceived as the fulfillment of an old Flaubertian dream: 'What I would like to create', he wrote 'is a book about nothing, a book without external attachments held aloft by the internal force of its style.'³

Such an orthodox conception may make of Modernist literature an aimless literature; while on the contrary it is a literature which can evince, through an alert reading, a more complex and sophisticated commitment than its Realist counterpart. It is the task of the critic then to 'democratize' these texts not by

³ http://audubonpark.blogspot.com/2006_03_01_archive.html

solving their technical riddles in order to presumably make them easy⁴, but by relating their form and content to the dominant ideology under which they were produced in order to make them accessible to the ordinary reader. The fact that Joyce has been named ‘Most Influential Irishman Ever’⁵ in a recently conducted survey by an English tabloid may be an indication of a move in that direction.

⁴ The attempt at explaining how technique works and its dynamics within a text, makes the latter, more often than not, look more complicated and obscure.

⁵ Neil Michael, ‘*Joyce Is Named Most Influential Irishman Ever*’ in *The Mirror*. London, England : August 31, 2004, p9.

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