

*Ulysses*  
Explained

How **Homer**, **Dante**,  
and **Shakespeare**  
Inform Joyce's  
Modernist Vision

DAVID WEIR



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INFORM JOYCE'S MODERNIST VISION

David Weir

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In Memory of David Geoffrey Weir



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## PREFACE

The title and subtitle of this book may at first seem paradoxical, even contradictory: "*Ulysses*" *Explained* makes the book sound like an introductory guide to Joyce's novel, while *How Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare Inform Joyce's Modernist Vision* implies a more specialized study. But my hope is that a careful explanation of the ways in which the three authors named in the subtitle function in *Ulysses* will be helpful to the general reader. That said, some parts of the book are less introductory than others, so Joyce specialists might also find something that expands their understanding of *Ulysses*, especially in the Shakespeare and Dante chapters and possibly in parts of the opening chapter on Homer as well. I petition such readers for patience as I explain what must seem to be some fairly elementary material, because, as someone who has taught *Ulysses* to undergraduates with no ambitions for academic careers as well as to adult readers in continuing education classes who just want to enjoy the novel, I try to keep the general reader constantly in mind. For that reason, I have provided a synopsis of the novel as an appendix and I write in what I hope is a clear, accessible style. I do acknowledge a few critical precedents for my approach in the introduction and afterword, but I have tried to keep the main body of the study—the three chapters on Homer, Shakespeare, and Dante—free of the kind of academic jargon and critical name-dropping that often appear in books about *Ulysses*. The specialist will, however, find ample acknowledgement of critical sources in the notes.

Here, I must acknowledge first and foremost Brigitte Shull of Palgrave Macmillan, whose editorial judgment made this book possible. Thanks are also due to her assistant Ryan Jenkins for helping me prepare the manuscript for production and to Susan Eberhart for overseeing the production process itself. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the anonymous peer reviewer Ms. Shull enlisted, who made any number of helpful suggestions and corrections. A less tangible debt is due to Mike Seidel, whose summer seminar at Columbia University on James Joyce sponsored by the National Endowment for the

Humanities back in 1987 continues to resonate with me after all these years. In an earlier book on Joyce, I expressed gratitude to several of my students at the New School, New York University, and Cooper Union. To the honor roll of names that included Eric Rodenbeck, Antonia Fusco, and Michael Malouf, I must now add those of my more memorable students at Cooper Union: Mike Houk, Boshra Al-Saadi, Aimee Genell, Brian Booth, Stephanie Hirsch, Ana Becker, Ian Keliher, and, most memorable of all, Theresa Alba. Finally, I must thank my wife Camille, whom my writing has widowed for months at a time, but who accepted that destiny with grace and good humor.

## ABBREVIATIONS

Parenthetical citations reference the following works by page number unless otherwise noted.

- D Joyce, James. *Dubliners*. New York: Modern Library, 1969.
- DC Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. Trans. Robert M. Durling. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996–2011. References to this edition are by canticle, canto, and line number.
- E Joyce, James. *Exiles*. New York: Penguin, 1973.
- G Gifford, Don. “*Ulysses*” *Annotated: Notes for James Joyce’s “Ulysses.”* With Robert J. Seidman. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988.
- JJII Ellmann, Richard. *James Joyce*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- O Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1998.
- OCP Joyce, James. *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writings*. Ed. Kevin Barry. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- OED *Oxford English Dictionary*. OED Online. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- P Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. New York: Viking, 1964.
- SH Joyce, James. *Stephen Hero*. Eds. John Slocum and Herbert Cahoon. New York: New Directions, 1963.
- SL Joyce, James. *Selected Letters of James Joyce*. Ed. Richard Ellmann. New York: Viking Press, 1975.

References to *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Random House, 1984) are cited parenthetically by chapter and line number with no abbreviation preceding the citation.

References to *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Vintage, 1939) are cited parenthetically by page and line number with no abbreviation preceding the citation.

References to Shakespeare's plays in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. John Jowett, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) are cited parenthetically by act, scene, and line number with no abbreviation preceding the citation.



## INTRODUCTION

Dante and Shakespeare divide the modern world between them;  
there is no third.

—T. S. Eliot, “Dante” (1929)

Yes, Mr. Eliot, there is. James Joyce may now be numbered, along with Dante and Shakespeare, among the giants of Western literature whose stature and status as an artist of the modern world has been confirmed by tradition. But there is another who walks beside them, closer to Dante and Joyce, certainly, though he occasionally brushes up against Shakespeare as well: the ancient poet Homer. These three figures command attention in any reading of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*: Homer because he provides the narrative, Shakespeare because he supplies the plot, and Dante because he inspires the structure. The characters that Joyce both creates and inhabits certainly belong to the modern world, but they go about their lives in the bustling, modern metropolis of Dublin, Ireland, on June 16, 1904, completely unaware that they are following a narrative path set down by Homer. Unlike Dante and Shakespeare, Homer is not part of Eliot’s “modern world,” but he helps us understand, by contrast, just how modern the characters in *Ulysses* really are. Leopold Bloom, the modern Odysseus, seems less concerned with slaying his wife’s suitors than he does with encouraging them, and Stephen Dedalus, the modern Telemachus, is more interested in becoming his father than he is with finding him. In both cases, what modernizes the Homeric character is Shakespearean psychology: Bloom and Stephen both enact a plot that reflects Joyce’s rather unique sense of the kind of man Shakespeare was. The Homeric narrative and the Shakespearean plot are actually in conflict, but the

conflict is held in place—though not resolved—by a structure derived from Dante. *Ulysses* is a modern novel all right, but it is positively medieval in its plan, with all kinds of patterns and parallels, allusions and echoes, designs and schemes. In fact, this dimension of the book is often called schematic, and Joyce went to some lengths to publicize the various schemata he had devised to reveal just how medieval a structure he had created in order to make his modern characters follow a classical narrative with a Renaissance plot.

The relationship of character, narrative, plot, and structure is the main focus of this book, whose central purpose is to explain how Homer, Shakespeare, and Dante inform Joyce's modernist vision in *Ulysses*. The first chapter, "Homeric Narrative," explains the myriad ways in which the so-called classical parallel works, even though there appears to be nothing parallel about it: simple one-to-one correspondences are anything but. Yes, in the "Cyclops" chapter, the "old sheepsface" (12.1906–7) Leopold Bloom "is" Odysseus, but so is the boxer Myler Keogh, "Dublin's pet lamb" (12.962), the ovine epithets in both cases signaling identification with the Homeric hero who escaped the Cyclops's cave by clinging to the belly of a ram. As for the Cyclops himself, his identity is even more widely distributed: sometimes he "is" the citizen, a character based on the muscular Fenian Michael Cusack (*JIII*, 61), but he is also the unnamed narrator of the chapter, the English hangman Rumbold, and the British boxer Bennet. What seems to be the case is that Homeric characters (Bloom's Odysseus, Stephen's Telemachus, and Molly's Penelope) become less important over the course of the book than do Homeric characteristics: Joyce gave the chapters Homeric titles (in the manuscript, anyway) to emphasize particular characteristics of an Odyssean episode that a chapter captures in thematic or stylistic form.

The second chapter of this book, "Shakespearean Plot," shows how the Homeric narrative is complicated, even contradicted, by materials drawn from the life and work of William Shakespeare. The terms *narrative* and *plot* are not being used here in a highly complex, theoretical sense, but they do require some clarification. Aristotle used one word, *mythos*, for both the story and its complication. For example, in the *Poetics*, he presents the basic narrative, story, or *mythos* of the *Odyssey* as follows: "A certain man has been kept away from home for many years, being kept from returning by a god, and is alone. Further, things at home are in such a state that his property is being eaten up by suitors and an ambush is laid against his son. He himself arrives home after a series of hardships, and having recognized certain people mounts his attack, himself survives, and destroys his enemies."<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, the basic narrative of *Ulysses* might be presented like this: “A certain man has been kept away from fully satisfying his wife sexually for many years, being kept from satisfaction by neurosis, and is alone. Further, things at home are in such a state that he seeks suitors for his wife and lays an ambush against a young man who might almost be his son. He himself arrives home after a series of hardships, and having recognized certain realities mounts his rationalizations, himself survives, and enjoys his enemies.” This rather odd summary of the narrative of *Ulysses* reads as it does because of plot complications based on an equally odd interpretation of Shakespeare’s life, one in which the bard’s sexuality is so compromised and conflicted that he cultivates rivals who will betray him. In this reading, Bloom’s Odysseus becomes Shakespeare himself, Molly’s Penelope emerges as a combination of Ann Hathaway (in youth) and the Dark Lady (in middle age), and Stephen’s Telemachus takes on the role of the young lord whom Shakespeare sent to woo the Dark Lady on his behalf.

The story and its complications—the narrative and the plot—are contained within a structure that is the subject of Chapter 3, “Dantesque Design.” This aspect of the novel is usually discussed under the rubric of the schemata that Joyce circulated, both before and after the publication of *Ulysses*.<sup>2</sup> Each schema indicates the Homeric titles of the chapters, their time of day, and the Homeric names of the characters. The earliest schema does not correlate those names with Joyce’s characters, but the later ones do. The schemata also say that each chapter is written in a different technique, that some chapters accord with different arts (whether liberal, fine, or mechanical), and that all but the first three chapters are somehow representative of human organs, making the book a kind of body. This last schematic detail is especially reminiscent of Dante’s *Inferno*, since hell has a mouth that speaks (“Abandon every hope, you who enter”), bowels where most of the sinners are punished, and an anus from whence Dante and Virgil exit, after digesting all the horrors of the abyss. But Dante’s relevance to Joyce is not solely schematic. Dante, like Joyce, gives his poem a Homeric narrative: the pilgrim’s voyage through hell is also an odyssey. In fact, Dante sometimes compares his younger self to Ulysses, just as Joyce likened himself as a young man to Telemachus. So Dante and Joyce both write about an earlier stage of their lives from the perspective of maturity. They also write about their homelands from the perspective of exile—forced in the case of Dante and voluntary in the case of Joyce—and this perspective, combined with the difference between the time of the writing and the time of the action, allows both authors to make political commentary about the past informed by a future that is really the present. With Dante, the difference

between 1300, when the *Inferno* is set, and 1314, when the *Inferno* was completed, means that he can frame historical events subsequent to 1300 as prophecy. By setting his 1922 novel in 1904, Joyce puts himself in a position similar to Dante's and casts the politics of the past in the light of subsequent history. Such positioning is part of the Dantesque design of the novel, no less than the schematic patterning that assigns organs, colors, arts, techniques, and symbols to the various chapters.

So the Dantesque dimension of *Ulysses* is mostly limited to the formal, schematic aspects of the novel but not entirely. The narrative of *Ulysses* is mostly Homeric, but sometimes that narrative is overlaid with an episode from Dante's epic as well. Likewise, the plot of the novel is not entirely derived from Joyce's eccentric reading of Shakespeare, and surely the structure of the novel makes sense as some combination of the Homeric and the Dantesque elements. Indeed, *Ulysses* is really an amalgamation of the three disparate traditions represented by Homer, Shakespeare, and Dante. The purpose here is primarily to explain how Joyce adapts those classical, Renaissance, and medieval traditions and then transforms them, making them advance his own modernist agenda of fragmented narrative, psychosexual complexity, and experimental structure. Homeric narrative, Shakespearean plot, and Dantesque design interrelate to make *Ulysses* "modernist" in a special sense: the three traditions are, in some measure, in conflict with each other and yet their rough reconciliation becomes the means of representing both the political and psychological complexity of the modern world.

Of the three traditions this book means to examine, the Homeric has received far more critical attention than the other two, largely because of Joyce's own efforts to communicate the Homeric dimension of the novel to his readers, chiefly through the mediation of critics such as Valéry Larbaud and Stuart Gilbert. Granted, Joyce ultimately felt some ambivalence about publicizing the Homeric correspondences and refused to allow Bennet Cerf to print the schema in the Random House edition of 1934,<sup>3</sup> but that fact by itself does not gainsay the importance of Homer to the narrative of *Ulysses*. Even before the novel was published, Joyce effectively enlisted Larbaud to promote it and provided him with a schema. The distinguished man of letters presented his insights on *Ulysses* and all Joyce's prior works before an audience at Adrienne Monnier's Paris bookshop, La Maison des Amis des Livres, in December 1921. The talk was later published as an essay in the April 1922 issue of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* and then excerpted, in translation, in the *Criterion* later the same year. In the essay, Larbaud pronounces the Homeric correspondences as indispensable: "The reader who approaches this book without the *Odyssey*

clearly in mind will be thrown into dismay.” Once provided with the Homeric “key” to the book, the reader will see that *Ulysses* is “a parody of the *Odyssey*,” albeit one that is not “told us in narrative form.”<sup>4</sup> After the book was published in 1922, Larbaud’s argument for the indispensability of the Homeric correspondences became a matter of some dispute, the debate centering on whether the schema in general, and the correspondences in particular, existed primarily as an aid to creation or to interpretation. Ezra Pound argued the former and T. S. Eliot the latter, both in the pages of *The Dial*.

In his essay (published the same month as *Ulysses*), Pound claimed that the Homeric correspondences “are part of Joyce’s mediaevalism and are chiefly his own affair, a scaffold, a means of construction, justified by the result, and justifiable by it only.”<sup>5</sup> A year later, Eliot took issue with the idea that “the parallel to the *Odyssey*” was nothing more than “a scaffolding erected by the author for the purpose of disposing his realistic tale, of no interest in the completed structure.” He concludes the essay by proposing that Joyce’s use of myth, of “manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and history,” is “simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.” He calls Joyce’s approach, famously, “the mythical method,” which Eliot imagines as an alternative to “narrative method.”<sup>6</sup> Joyce’s two great contemporaries seem, to me, to have gotten the point of the Homeric correspondences wrong but in different ways. Pound’s notion that the Homeric dimension of *Ulysses* was mainly the author’s “own affair” is belied by Joyce’s publicity campaign to make that dimension more widely known, while Eliot’s idea of paralleling “contemporaneity and history” is thrown into doubt by the differences between the Homeric narrative and the narrative of *Ulysses*.

This last point needs emphasis because Eliot implies that *Ulysses* does not really have a narrative when he says, “Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method” (271). Eliot made these comments after writing *The Waste Land*, and what he says about Joyce’s work seems far more relevant to his own. *The Waste Land* does employ something resembling a mythical rather than a narrative method. For early readers of *Ulysses*, Eliot included, the narrative of the novel must have been far more difficult to detect than it is for readers today because those early readers had to contend with a host of modernist innovations—the fragmentary style of interior monologue, the mixture of historical and literary allusions, the radical shifts in technique, and so on—that more recent readers have come to understand, not so much as innovations, but almost as conventions of the now bygone era of modernism.

Also, because of all the nonnarrative elements in *Ulysses*, the Homeric correspondences become genuinely helpful toward understanding the narrative of the novel that Eliot passed over in search of mythical meanings that might “control” the disorder of the modern world. One might also argue that Joyce, as a colonial subject of an empire he despised, was a bit more welcoming of social and political disorder than was T. S. Eliot. Here too the Homeric correspondences become meaningful, as a way of criticizing the social order of colonial Ireland and its “heroic” efforts to revive the culture of the ancient Gaels.<sup>7</sup>

Critical assessments of the importance of Homer to *Ulysses* since those of Pound and Eliot in the early years of the novel’s reception are too numerous to catalogue in this brief introduction, but a few need to be singled out. One of the more significant of these is Stuart Gilbert’s *James Joyce’s “Ulysses,”* originally published in 1930. Gilbert met Joyce in late 1927 after he had suggested corrections to the French translation of *Ulysses*. Once Joyce got to know Gilbert, he encouraged him to write a study of the novel and provided him with a schema, but the full degree of Joyce’s involvement in Gilbert’s study is hard to gauge. Richard Ellmann surmises that Joyce allowed Gilbert “to formulate his own conclusions” which, “unless Joyce disagreed completely, were allowed to stand.” Hence “Gilbert’s book is [. . .] not an exact formulation of Joyce’s views, but a perceptive interpretation of them” (*JIII*, 601). With respect to the Homeric correspondences, Gilbert interpreted those symbolically, paying scant attention to narrative parallelism. Gilbert’s introductory chapter is titled “The Narrative of *Ulysses*,” and, while he does occasionally use phrases like “the Ulysses of this modern Odyssey” to identify Bloom, his summary of the narrative of *Ulysses* hardly refers to the *Odyssey* at all.<sup>8</sup> Stranger still, another introductory chapter, titled “*Ulysses* and the *Odyssey*,” focuses not on narrative parallelism but on a kind of linguistic similitude between Joyce’s epic and Homer’s. For example, just as “*Ulysses* contains examples of almost every known dialect and patois of the English tongue,” so in the *Odyssey* “we find Ionian, Æolian, Cyprian and even Attic elements” (77, 78).

Gilbert’s close attention to the language of the *Odyssey* is part of the argument that the Homeric epic has Phoenician origins and that the voyages of Odysseus retrace the maritime trade routes of Phoenician merchants. The argument derives from *Les Phéniciens et l’Odyssee* (1902–3) by Victor Bérard, who claimed that many of the place names and other words in the *Odyssey* had Semitic roots—the ancient Phoenicians being of Semitic stock. Thus “Ulysses ceases to be a mythical figure wandering in the mist of legend [. . .]; he is a merchant

adventurer visiting shores familiar to the traders of Sidon" (quoted in Gilbert, 80). Bérard's conception of the classical Odysseus as a Semitic merchant was useful to Joyce's notion of the modern Odysseus as a Jewish businessman, so it makes sense that Joyce would point Gilbert toward Bérard. Gilbert's interest in the topic is consistent with his general tendency to interpret Homeric material symbolically, which makes his approach to the *Odyssey* oddly consonant with Eliot's, insofar as both Eliot and Gilbert, like Larbaud before them, underplay the narrative relevance of the *Odyssey* to *Ulysses*.

This pattern of downplaying the role of Homeric narrative in *Ulysses* continues with Harry Levin's landmark study of 1941, *James Joyce: A Critical Introduction*, written at Joyce's suggestion.<sup>9</sup> Levin follows Pound in his assessment of the Homeric myth, saying that it "may well have served as a scaffolding, while Joyce constructed his work." And, in a way, he also follows Eliot when he says that "the Homeric parallel is a useful contrivance for the reader" because it "help[s] him to control an overwhelming flux of impressions."<sup>10</sup> Of course, Eliot saw the myth as a means of controlling not the modern reader's individual impressions but the disorder of the modern world itself. Although Levin is generally skeptical about the value of the Homeric correspondences and other aspects of the schema ("They are not there for us, but for Joyce" [75]), his skepticism includes some useful insights. He notes, for instance, that "[t]he relation of the *Odyssey* to *Ulysses* is that of parallels that never meet" (71) and observes that "the reader of Joyce who turns back to Homer is more struck by divergences than by analogies" (72). This quality of divergence, in Levin's view, contributes to the irony of the novel and "convert[s] a realistic novel into a mock-epic" (71). Bloom and the other characters "derive their special irony and pathos" from the contrast of their ordinary nature with their heroic prototypes (68). With some exceptions, Levin's treatment of Homer set the pattern for subsequent introductions to *Ulysses*—the myth is more important for Joyce than for the reader—but the reader might do well to remember the myth anyway in order to better appreciate the ironic and sometimes comic dimensions of the characters.

William York Tindall mostly repeated Levin's position on Homer in *A Reader's Guide to James Joyce* (1959). "Each of Joyce's major characters parodies one of Homer's," he says, but like Levin, he cautions that, while Bloom suggests Ulysses, he is "not that hero; for parallel is not identity. [. . .] *Ulysses* parodies *The Odyssey* only in the sense of using it to enlarge by resemblance and difference the actions and people of a Dublin day." Tindall parts company with Levin when he claims that the Homeric correspondences do not always make *Ulysses*

mock-heroic: “Joyce’s parody is serious, intended to show man in our time forth.”<sup>11</sup> Tindall’s notion of a “serious parody” makes his idea of the role of the *Odyssey* in *Ulysses* quite similar to that of Richard Ellmann, whose authoritative biography of Joyce appeared in the same year as Tindall’s guide. Comparing Odysseus’s confrontation with the Cyclops to Bloom’s altercation with the citizen, Ellmann says “[t]he first aim is the mock-heroic, the mighty spear juxtaposed with the two-penny cigar. The second, a more subtle one, is what might be called the ennoblement of the mock-heroic. This demonstrates that the world of cigars is devoid of heroism only to those who don’t understand that Ulysses’s spear was merely a sharpened stick, as homely an instrument in its way, and that Bloom can demonstrate the qualities of man by word of mouth as effectively as Ulysses by thrust of spear.”<sup>12</sup> This view of the Homeric parallel as both mock-heroic and ennobling persists for some time in Joyce criticism. For example, in *James Joyce: The Citizen and the Artist* (1977), C. H. Peake says that “Joyce’s ironic comparisons elevate Bloom as often as they ridicule him, and often do both at the same time, mocking some aspects of a situation but discerning in it qualities of courageous and even lofty motive and behavior.” He illustrates the point, as Ellmann does, with the episode of Bloom and the citizen.<sup>13</sup> This episode is one of the few that occasions narrative commentary, no doubt because the cigar/stake detail cries out for a comparison of Bloom’s actions with Odysseus’s. But in general, the topic of Homeric narrative is a bit of a problem in Joyce criticism.

The problem of relating the narrative of the *Odyssey* to the narrative of *Ulysses* can be illustrated by a glance at some of the many introductions to Joyce that have appeared over the years. One of the better known of these types of books is Harry Blamires’s *The Bloomsday Book*, a bestseller first published in 1966 and essentially unchanged through subsequent editions. Blamires underplays the importance of the *Odyssey* in the preface to the book, calling the Homeric parallel “primarily structural: it provided Joyce with a convenient framework, and it provides his critics and his readers with a convenient nomenclature.”<sup>14</sup> In the book proper, Blamires usually explains the action of the Homeric episode before summarizing the action of the Joycean equivalent, but the connection between the two receives only cursory mention. No real attempt is made to show how the Homeric narrative plays out in Joyce’s novel. This approach is typical of a number of other introductory guides,<sup>15</sup> although more recent approaches tend to ignore the Homeric parallel altogether or, at least, to minimize its importance.<sup>16</sup>

An exception to the recent tendency of introductory guides to minimize Homeric meanings is Michael Seidel’s *James Joyce: A Short*

*Introduction* (2002). Seidel makes two points about the Homeric nature of *Ulysses* that are consistent with my approach. First, he points out that the *Odyssey* parallels help establish a sense of modernity by transposing meanings and values from the classical era to our own: “Part of the task of a writer whose scope projects as far and wide as Joyce’s is to reflect the transmigration of values from one age to another, one culture to another.” Second, he writes that the narrative of the *Odyssey* has a bearing not only on the narrative of *Ulysses* but also on “Joyce’s larger conception of his career as an exiled artist representing the best hope for his moribund land.” In this connection, it is important to remember that the hero of the *Odyssey* possessed considerable “powers of narration” himself: “Odysseus, after all, narrates nine of the ten years of his story; he crafts the tale he is in.”<sup>17</sup> One of Seidel’s earlier books, *Epic Geography: James Joyce’s “Ulysses”* (1976), returns to the topic of Bérard’s argument that the *Odyssey* maps the wanderings of Odysseus over the Mediterranean trade routes of the ancient Phoenicians. Seidel offers the most detailed reading of the relevance of Homer to Joyce by showing that, just as Homer mapped the movements of his hero over the Phoenician trade routes, Joyce layers the maritime space of the Mediterranean over the urban space of the city of Dublin such that Joyce’s characters actually move in the same general directions as their Homeric counterparts. “Joyce’s geographical superimpositions in *Ulysses*,” Seidel says, reveals “an epic pattern in an encyclopedic, comic narrative.”<sup>18</sup>

One of the paradoxes in the history of Joyce criticism is that the Homeric myth is considered essential to an introduction to *Ulysses*, yet there does not appear to be a single full-length study exclusively devoted to the topic of Homer and Joyce (with the partial exception of Seidel’s rather specialized *Epic Geography*) as there is of Joyce and Shakespeare and Joyce and Dante. In 1957, William M. Schutte revised his Yale PhD dissertation into *Joyce and Shakespeare: A Study in the Meaning of “Ulysses,”* a highly scholarly analysis of Joyce’s allusions to Shakespeare, mostly in *Ulysses*, though a useful appendix lists a few Shakespearean references in *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as well. A second appendix details the sources of Stephen’s Shakespeare theory in the work of such turn-of-the-century critics as Georg Brandes, Frank Harris, Sidney Lee, and a few others. Schutte often treats Stephen as if he himself were such a critic and faults the character for “making inferences from established facts” or for “giving a biographical significance to events in the plays and poems.” Schutte understands that the Shakespeare theory is an impromptu performance, but he treats it more as a lecture

or a monograph, finally saying of Stephen that “his work lacks the scholar’s fairness and impartiality.”<sup>19</sup> As Mary T. Reynolds points out, Schutte was holding Stephen to the standards of the New Criticism of the 1950s, judging him guilty of the “intentional fallacy” that attends biographical approaches.<sup>20</sup> Schutte’s study appeared before Ellmann’s 1959 biography, which brought about a sea change in Joyce scholarship and effectively gave permission to critics to interpret Joyce’s work biographically, just as Stephen had interpreted Shakespeare’s.

A major study of Shakespeare and Joyce by Vincent Cheng focuses on *Finnegans Wake* but takes as its point of departure the expression of anxiety over the linear nature of history that Stephen voices in *Ulysses*: “History [. . .] is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake” (2.377). According to Cheng, the Shakespeare theory in chapter 9 of *Ulysses* shows us a Stephen who “tries to break away from the nightmare of history.” The paucity of hard facts about Shakespeare’s life makes the bard the ideal basis for “Stephen’s exercises in the artistic imagination and the exploration of possibilities.” Cheng sees Stephen’s efforts in the “Scylla and Charybdis” chapter coming to fruition in *Finnegans Wake*: “Shakespeare’s little known life, with its still possible possibilities, allows for the universalization and fecundity of Viconian history”—that is, of the cyclical theory of historical recurrence so important to the novel. Cheng’s larger argument is that “Joyce conceived the *Wake* essentially as a drama, specifically a Shakespearean drama, performed on the ‘worldstage’ by a Shakespearean stock company,” a “theme that underlies all the ‘action’ of *Finnegans Wake*.”<sup>21</sup> My own argument claims something similar for *Ulysses*—namely, that the plot complications of the novel derive from Joyce’s sense of Shakespeare, although the notion of universal history is remote from my purposes. In this respect, what I have to say about the Shakespeare theory in *Ulysses* is closer to the claim Andrew Gibson makes in *Joyce’s Revenge* (2002): specifically, that Stephen’s theory represents “a political critique of Shakespeare [. . .] as a purveyor of colonial ideology.”<sup>22</sup>

Possibly the best overall analysis of Joyce’s relationship to Shakespeare is Maud Ellmann’s recent essay in volume 12 of the *Great Shakespeareans* series (2012). Like Gibson, Ellmann recognizes the colonialist context of the Shakespeare theory in “Scylla and Charybdis,” as Stephen attempts to steer “between the many-headed monster of British imperialism and the devouring whirlpool of Irish nationalism.” She also recognizes the importance of Stephen’s theory for the plot of *Ulysses*, noting, for example, that “Bloom’s life coincides with Shakespeare’s in significant details,” including the bard’s encouragement of his wife’s infidelity: “Like Shakespeare, Bloom colludes in

his wife's adultery, acting as 'the hornmad Iago ceaselessly willing that the Moor in him shall suffer' (*U* 9.1021–24).<sup>23</sup> In contrast to Ellmann, Declan Kiberd takes a more traditional approach in "Shakespeare and Company: Hamlet in Kildare Street," an essay included in *Shakespeare and the Irish Writer* (2010), which focuses mainly on comparisons of character. Kiberd discusses "the problem of the neurotic modern intellectual, in whom the balance between inner and outer worlds has been lost," with Hamlet as the original of the condition and Stephen as "an epitome of the same syndrome, for he was one in whom intellectual ability was so great as finally to immobilize him." Strangely, Kiberd extends the Hamlet comparison to Bloom, "whose marital condition seems to repeat Hamlet's sexual difficulties with Ophelia." Kiberd hardly touches on Stephen's "[c]razy and monomaniacal [. . .] theory of Shakespeare," though he acknowledges that "it does contain the shape of his own destiny." That destiny, conventionally enough, lies with Bloom, "who offers a way of reconciling thought and deed."<sup>24</sup> Kiberd's reading hardly acknowledges what Maud Ellmann calls "the Shakespearean family plot," with its "cast of characters—the unfaithful wife, the warring brothers, the seductive daughter and the cuckolded father, who is always threatening to come back as a ghost." Indeed, Ellmann provides a sense of just how pervasive the psychosexual dynamic is in *Ulysses* when she says that "Shakespeare serves as Virgil to Joyce's Dante, the precursor conducting the ephebe into an inferno of sexual betrayal" (12).

As for Dante himself, his importance to Joyce does not lie in that "inferno of sexual betrayal" Ellmann identifies with Shakespeare but rather in the inferno of political betrayal and upheaval that medieval Italy has in common with modern Ireland. Political meanings certainly inform my treatment of Dante in relation to Joyce, although my principal argument concerns Joyce's use of the same kind of medieval devices that Dante employs in *The Divine Comedy* to give his epic such a remarkable degree of structural integrity. Much of the basic work of detecting such devices and ferreting out references to Dante in Joyce's fiction was performed by Mary T. Reynolds in 1981. Her *Joyce and Dante: The Shaping Imagination* is a kind of cognate to Schutte's *Joyce and Shakespeare*, doing for Dante what Schutte did for Shakespeare: establishing beyond any doubt the pervasive influence of a major world author on Joyce's fiction. Reynolds comes close to my argument when she says that "Joyce announced that Homer was his model and Shakespeare his illustration, [y]et along with these, Joyce had a covert relation to another writer, whose place in the book was intimated by quotation. This third presence was Dante." Reynolds

approach to Joyce and Dante is mostly thematic: she deals first with the two authors' shared interest in paternal figures, then with the theme of love, and finally with "the representation of the imagination in action," defined as "illustration patterns, small discrete mechanisms of representation that use metaphorically the ritual aspect of myth."<sup>25</sup> In this regard, Reynolds's approach perhaps reflects the archetypal criticism of the 1970s, with its emphasis on myth and ritual, just as Schutte's approach reflected the New Criticism of the 1950s.

Some of the more recent approaches to Joyce and Dante seem to exist almost exclusively for the purpose of exemplifying some contemporary critical or theoretical position. Moreover, most such studies put the focus on *Finnegans Wake* rather than *Ulysses*. The trend owes its origins to Samuel Beckett's comments on Dante and Joyce in the lead essay to *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incarnation of Work in Progress* (1929), the collection written at Joyce's prompting to promote his as-yet unnamed magnum opus, known at the time as *Work in Progress*. Beckett claims that what Joyce has in common with Dante is an ideal "synthetic language." Dante's *Commedia*, Beckett says, is written in a vulgar idiom "that *could* have been spoken by an ideal Italian who had assimilated what was best in all the dialects of his country." He is at pains to dispose of the central objection to the "attractive parallel between Dante and Mr. Joyce in the question of language"—that is, that Dante's language was actually spoken, "whereas no creature in heaven or earth ever spoke the language of *Work in Progress*." Nonetheless, "an international phenomenon might be capable of speaking it, just as in 1300 none but an inter-regional phenomenon could have spoken the language of the *Divine Comedy*."<sup>26</sup> Although Beckett's claim that the language of the *Commedia* is an ideal assemblage of all the dialects of Italian is demonstrably spurious,<sup>27</sup> the larger point here is that Beckett initiates the tradition in Joyce criticism of using Dante for high theoretical purposes in discussions of *Finnegans Wake*.

The tradition is very much alive in Sam Slote's *The Silence in Progress of Dante, Mallarmé, and Joyce* (1999), which argues the deconstructive notion that the three authors named in the title each succeed in writing "the Book, but only by silencing it." Slote follows Maurice Blanchot "concerning silence and accomplishment," whereby "the possibility of writing [. . .] the complete Book (such as, for example, Dante's *Paradiso*, Mallarmé's *Grand Œuvre*, and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*), is marked by an inachievement which can be termed *silence*."<sup>28</sup> Likewise, in *Rite of Passage in the Narrative of Dante and Joyce* (2002), Jennifer Fraser subordinates Dante and Joyce to a deconstructive claim about

authorship and intertextuality. The point seems to be that, just as Vergil “functions initially as the author of the *Commedia* and therefore must be silenced in order to allow the poetic voice of Dante to emerge,” so the author of any work must ultimately give way to the reader’s own creative response. As Dante is to Vergil, so is Joyce to Dante. And just as Joyce’s reading of the prior author ultimately led to his own writing, so the modern reader finds in Joyce a generative impetus to his or her own creativity. Fraser identifies this dynamic as a feature of “initiatory literature,” which “inscribes intertextual origins and yet buries or erases these signs.”<sup>29</sup> The tendency toward employing Dante to some recondite theoretical examination of Joyce’s work continues with Gian Balsamo’s *Joyce’s Messianism: Dante, Negative Existence, and the Messianic Self* (2004). As the title of this book implies, the combination of poetic mission and poetic limitation in Dante—near the end of the *Paradiso*, the only way the poet can describe the beatific vision of divinity is by acknowledging that it cannot be described—was an important influence on Joyce, or rather, on Joyce’s representation of Stephen Dedalus. Stephen, along with Augustine, Dante, and Mallarmé, belongs to “an illustrious tradition” in which “silence signals [. . .] supreme poetic performance.”<sup>30</sup>

This survey of criticism is far from exhaustive, but, already, certain patterns have become apparent. The earliest book on Joyce and Dante focuses on thematics, while the later ones advance a particular theoretical construct. None seems to see the medieval structure of Dante’s poem as a precedent for the schematic nature of *Ulysses*, although a few—like Lucia Boldrini’s *Joyce, Dante, and the Poetics of Literary Relations* (2001)—relate the structure of *The Divine Comedy* to the structure of *Finnegans Wake*.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the earliest analysis of Joyce and Shakespeare does the necessary scholarly work of establishing sources, while later ones treat either the bard or one of his characters as some kind of poetic exemplar whose influence Stephen or Bloom needs to either emulate or resist, depending on the critic’s interpretation. Few critics emphasize the Shakespeare theory as a pattern for the plot of *Ulysses*. Finally, the long tradition of criticism regarding Joyce and Homer is mostly concerned with symbolic correspondences and mythic meanings, with little attention paid to narrative: a tradition that runs from Larbaud through Pound and Eliot down to our own time. A few commentators name Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare as the three authors whose combined influence on Joyce was somehow critical to the creation of *Ulysses*, but only one, as near as I can tell, comes up with a formulation to link the three. In an essay originally published in 1929, the Blake scholar S. Foster Damon identifies

“three elements” in *Ulysses*: “the symbolic narrative of the *Odyssey*, the spiritual planes of the *Divine Comedy*, and the psychological problem of *Hamlet*. Homer furnishes the plot, Dante the setting, and Shakespeare the motivation.”<sup>32</sup> As the reference to “spiritual planes” suggests, Damon’s reading of *Ulysses* is deeply Christian, and deeply mistaken (in my view), but at least the critic tries to show how Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare function in relation to one another. Damon’s antiquated effort aside, no one has made the attempt that I make here: to show how Joyce combines Homeric narrative, Shakespearean plot, and Dantesque design in the pages of *Ulysses* for the purpose of transforming them into a new, modernist form of expression. Indeed, *Ulysses* emerges as specifically modernist primarily because of its relation to classical, Renaissance, and medieval traditions.

What this means is that *Ulysses* is modernist as a result of being what one of the other traditions is not. Much of the meaning of *Ulysses* inheres in the contrast of the characters and their actions with those of their classical counterparts. For example, the “modernist sexuality” on display in *Ulysses* only appears so when it is set against the “classical sexuality” of the *Odyssey*. Penelope is the archetype of marital fidelity, so making Molly a modern avatar of this figure is obviously ironic, but irony alone is not adequate to explain just how modern the psychosexual action of *Ulysses* is. After all, Molly is faithful to her husband insofar as she is complicit with his schemes to introduce a third party into their marriage to satisfy his strange desires: “Ill let him know if thats what he wanted that his wife is fucked yes and damn well fucked too” (18.1510–11). By being faithfully adulterous, Molly emerges as a truly modern Penelope. In the same way, the modernity of the other principals, Bloom and Stephen, emerges most clearly when they are compared to their Homeric counterparts. For this reason, the first chapter of this book examines the Homeric parallel in some detail, looking at each chapter of *Ulysses* in order so that the reader can get an overall sense of the narrative of the novel in relation to the *Odyssey*. The second chapter does not follow the narrative of the novel but takes up particular Shakespearean topics that are most relevant to the plot of *Ulysses*, such as its relationship to *Hamlet* and other plays (*Cymbeline* and *Troilus and Cressida*, mainly). The final chapter describes how *Ulysses* looks to Dante to marshal its multiple systems in the service of both narrative and plot. The Dantesque design of the novel is best considered last so that the structure of the novel can be appreciated as a retrospective arrangement of both the personal history of James Joyce and the political history of Ireland. And the book begins to tell both those histories by means of Homer.