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On the Opposite Shore: Challenging Male Heroism and Reinstating the
Female Voice in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Hilda Doolittle’s *Helen in Egypt*

Student’s Name: Nikolaos Pantazis

I.D. Number: 219033

Supervisor: Evangelia Sakelliou

Committee: Evangelia Sakelliou, Stamatina Dimakopoulou, Konstantinos
Blatanis

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Signature: Nikolaos Pantazis

ABSTRACT

James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) deconstructs and refashions the Homeric epic in a manner that challenges the established conventions of traditional myth; as Katherine Mullin notes, "Joyce's appropriation of classical heritage is loose and irreverent." More importantly, Joyce's opus vividly questions the androcentric heroic narrative of the ancient Homeric tale, replacing it with a modern narrative that implicitly comments on the established patriarchal western tradition and considers woman's position and self-determination in contemporary society. Similarly, Hilda Doolittle's *Helen in Egypt* (1961) revises an ancient Greek myth "in an attempt to transform the old patriarchal myths to novel definitions of feminine identity, female discourse, female experience, female vision, and a female quest, which are all antithetical to the androcentric myths of the western world" (Nisa 6). Both works recreate ancient myths in modernist terms, ultimately engaging the reader in a self-reflection on male hegemony and women's suppressed role in mythology and human society for centuries.

In this dissertation, I explore how the two modernist texts challenge the dominant element of male heroism embedded in the source myths, and how they rebuild and redefine the female figure while contrasting the traditional patriarchal stereotypes and mythical superstitions. Therefore, my research concentrates on two main axes: the structural revision of each myth in non-patriarchal terms, and how the two authors deploy language to subvert the gender stereotypes and to re-establish the role of the two genders in the modern epic. I focus primarily on the central male characters of the two stories (Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom on one hand, and Achilles, Paris, and Theseus on the other) to argue that both authors imply the inadequacy of traditional male heroism. Subsequently, I examine the central female characters (Molly Bloom and Helen) to trace the reconstruction of female identity and the abandonment of male-centered narrative. An additional look on a small number of secondary characters is also offered at the end of the first two chapters. Finally, a juxtaposition of the two literary styles—Joyce's experimental, deconstructive, and parodic stream of consciousness, and H.D.'s revisionist mythmaking—is provided to highlight the similarities and the differences between the two modernist epics in terms of female subjectivity, imaginative language, and each author's proposition as an alternative to the androcentric heroic narrative of the original myths.

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INTRODUCTION

In Homer's *Iliad* and *The Odyssey*—the quintessential literary epics of the ancient world—we are introduced to some of the most essential components and themes of mythological storytelling. Since then, many myths, like the ones embedded in the Homeric epics, have been employed by poets, novelists, playwrights, critics, psychoanalysts, and others to explore and respond to their own cultural framework: the ancient Greek tragedians used myth as a versatile tool to 'unmask' their heroes and to address contemporary social issues; medieval writers utilized myths to camouflage and disguise their own messages behind their creative efforts; the Romantic poets and novelists found in myths a medium through which they could express their discontent about humanity's detachment from the natural world and the glory of the past; the beginning of the twentieth century marked an era where an explosion of modern rewrites of classical myths took place capitalizing on the idea that myths "provided a universal and timeless realm which stood against the fragmentation of modernity and the chaos of history" (Uzunoğlu 9). Updated manifestations of ancient myths are so frequent simply because the firm narrative and the archetypal nature of the latter provide the right materials for writers and artists of all kinds to recreate diachronic plots on a modern basis.

Perhaps the most dominant element in the two classical Homeric epics is the archetype of the heroic male figure who transcends certain inner or outer obstacles on his way to achieve a fulfilling task. On the other hand, the tragic side of human fate is also explicitly highlighted, stating the common incapability of the human being to confront the consequences of his or her own actions and deal with physical, spiritual, or moral decline. However, in both cases, what is mostly stressed is the apparent superiority of male subjects in contrast to the female ones, and the prevailing gender stereotypes that dominate the narrative rendering it notably androcentric. Homeric Odysseus travels for ten years after the end of the Trojan War while his "mind and wit overrun many obstacles set by both gods and men" (Uzunoğlu 72), and finally returns to Ithaca reuniting with his devoted wife and son. As Meltem Uzunoğlu poignantly notes, in *The Odyssey* "the gender roles are distinctive and firmly set by the patriarchal world of epic" (91). James Joyce's *Ulysses* 'revives' Homer's epic in a totally

innovative, experimental, and subversive manner in this context; the modernist author debunks the classical epic tale and narrative not only in an anti-heroic sense (a point that has been stressed well enough in numerous discourses since the publication of the novel) but also in an anti-patriarchal sense, opposing the main androcentric conventions and stereotypes of traditional myth by challenging the image of the self-governed male hero in both Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, and by giving a distinct voice not only to his central female character—Molly Bloom, his modern Penelope—but to other female figures as well throughout the plot. In my research, I aim to explore how, “in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity” (Eliot 483), Joyce manages to deconstruct the established androcentric associations and to construct a modern literary epic beyond the patriarchal confines of traditional mythmaking, reflecting on the complexities of the modern world from the point of view of both genders.

In a similar method—yet in a totally different style and content—, Hilda Doolittle’s *Helen In Egypt* recreates an ancient Greek myth to render the poet’s version of the story surrounding Helen and Achilles, a narrative filled with manifestations of modern femininity and anti-patriarchal connotations. H.D.’s intentions are quite evident in this direction: the modernist author, “whose poetry and prose was an endless struggle to liberate the notion of femininity from patriarchal binary oppositions” (Katsigianni 1), chooses to follow deliberately the ancient Greek poet Stesichorus’ *Palinode*—a version of the events according to which the victimized mythical Helen, “hated of all Greece” (H.D. 2), was never really in Troy but was mysteriously “transposed or translated from Greece into Egypt” (H.D. 1). Euripides’ drama *Helen* was also based on this alternate plot. By structurally and linguistically transforming the patriarchal narrative into an epic poem of feminine rebirth, H.D. attempts to subvert the male-oriented language of the myth and the preconceived distance between the two genders in the original narrative. In this context, the central male characters of the myth of Helen of Troy, Achilles and Paris, are highly challenged as traditional Homeric male heroes, in contrast to the female figures whose voice is reinstated by the author’s revisionist approach; capitalizing on the principle that, as Alicia Ostriker assesses, “revisionist mythmaking in women’s poetry may offer . . . significant means of redefining ourselves and consequently our culture” (71), H.D. challenges “a male-generated illusion” (Ostriker 79) that has been built upon the victimized persona of ‘hated’ Helen, and

redefines the female identity in a subversive yet constructive manner that takes into consideration the healing forces of memory, empathy, and compassion for both genders. My intention is to highlight the structural and linguistic tools that H.D. utilizes to implement this transcendental re-enactment.

This dissertation consists of three chapters that reflect upon the structural and linguistic revision that takes place in the two modernist epics concerning the subversion of the androcentric narrative of the source myths. The first chapter focuses primarily on how each author deconstructs the central male characters, and subsequently on how several secondary male characters are portrayed in comparison to their Homeric counterparts, ultimately indicating that both rewrites attempt to challenge the dominant element of male heroism and the established patriarchal stereotypes embedded in the mythical conception of these characters. The second chapter concentrates on the fundamentally subversive depictions of the two central female characters, Molly and Helen, in relation to their mythical counterparts, and additionally examines the portrayal of other female characters from both texts that further supports the line of argumentation in regard to how the female figure is substantially redefined in both contexts. Finally, the third chapter refers specifically to the deployment of language in the sense of explaining how each literary style enables the author to subvert the male-centered heroic narrative of the ancient myth and to reinstate the female voice in each story. A brief juxtaposition of the two literary styles—Joyce's deconstructive stream of consciousness and H.D.'s revisionist mythmaking—follows to delve into their similarities and differences in this particular discourse. The two modernist epics are considerably different in terms of content and writing style, hence the juxtaposition intends to contrast their authors' writing techniques only in relation to the topic of this research. By making use of the theoretical work of critics such as Aris Maragopoulos, Susan Stanford Friedman, Alicia Ostriker, and Rachel Blau DuPlessis, among others, I intend to demonstrate that, despite the obvious structural, stylistic, and linguistic differences between them, both texts end up challenging the gender stereotypes and the androcentric conventions of the Homeric epics.

1. DECONSTRUCTING THE MALE HERO IN *ULYSSES* AND *HELEN IN EGYPT*

1.1 Introduction

In both modernist epics, what is strikingly evident is the image of the central male heroes being fundamentally flawed. The male protagonists from each story do not reflect the heroic qualities of their Homeric namesakes or counterparts, and they certainly do not fulfil any modern heroic standards; unlike their mythical predecessors, they are not depicted as wise, brave, or autonomous male figures, in physical or psychological terms. Instead, they are portrayed as subjects out of place whose relationship and interaction with women affect them profoundly in ways they cannot control or fully comprehend. *Ulysses*' Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom wander in Dublin in search of identity and meaning, both followed by the 'ghosts' of influential women in their lives, failing to function in their expected patriarchal roles, while H.D.'s Achilles, Paris, and Theseus reflect the male-generated narrative of the established ancient myth and at the same time a potential breakaway from its imposed patriarchal norms. In this sense, both modernist stories seem to imply the inadequacy of traditional male heroism, challenging the myth-driven perspective of the self-governed male hero and highlighting the flawed masculinity of the characters rather than their patriarchal privileges. Ultimately, the male hero in each text is structurally modified in a fashion that engages the reader in a reflective discourse on male hegemony and the need to question the androcentric stereotypes of the source myths.

In this chapter, I examine how the two authors deconstruct the central male characters of their epics by questioning the dominant patriarchal attributes of their Homeric counterparts. By mainly utilizing the critical arguments of Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis which relate to male repression of the maternal figure in Joyce's *Ulysses* and H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, and of Aris Maragopoulos' in relation to the absence of paternal guidance in Joyce's *Ulysses*, I focus on how the male protagonists of each story are fundamentally challenged as male subjects, contrasting the androcentric heroic characteristics that defined their Homeric counterparts or namesakes. Subsequently, an additional critical look on a number of secondary male characters from both stories examines how the mythological patriarchal narrative is

further weakened, followed by a conclusion that sums up the chapter's most important points about how the two modernist authors ultimately manage to challenge the element of male heroism in their epics.

1.2 Challenging Male Heroism in *Ulysses*: Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom

The two central male characters of Joyce's *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus, function as malleable modern counterparts of Homer's Odysseus and Telemachus, respectively. They are not biological father and son, yet their common disengagement from their social environment and the rejection they experience inside their own familial circles make them a fitting pair. Moreover, their masculine attributes are presented problematic due to certain structural choices that Joyce chooses to implement: Stephen suffers from a guilty conscience caused by his denial to fulfil his dying mother's final religious request. In addition, unlike Homer's Telemachus whose father remains a pivotal influence throughout the ancient epic despite his long absence (and possible demise), Stephen has completely lost trust in his real father who is alive, healthy, and living in the same city as him.¹ Both the absence of an appropriate paternal figure and the repression of the maternal element are well stressed in Stephen's case. On the other hand, Bloom is a married man, tormented by the thoughts of his wife's infidelity and the loss of his infant son Rudy years ago. As Mullin notes, "if Stephen is a son without a satisfactory father, then Bloom is a father always aware of the loss of his son."² However, the deconstruction of mythological androcentric heroism in both cases derives primarily from the central characters' profound self-awareness; Vicki Mahaffey states that "Stephen and Bloom are dark men, men who have sinned—Stephen through insensitivity to his mother, Bloom through insensitivity to his wife—and who are conscious of their strong sense of separation and loss" (95). Indeed, through this definitive structural departure from the masculine, autonomous, and independent heroic male hero of the Homeric *Odyssey*, both characters tend to reflect how in modernity the lives and identities of men and women are substantially intertwined and not detached.

Stephen Dedalus—Joyce's literary alter ego—is presented as a cultivated young artist working as a history teacher who struggles to come to terms with who he really

is, haunted by the phantom of his deceased mother and the absence of paternal guidance. Unlike the Homeric Telemachus who functions as the stereotypical model of the male heir, faithful and devoted to both his parents, “the story of the son in *Ulysses* is the narrative of the son’s guilt” (Friedman, “(Self)Censorship” 50). In the fitting words of Stuart Gilbert, “he has not lost a father, like Telemachus, but he can never find one” (66). This schema makes Stephen’s lack of a father figure an unsolvable issue and not just a matter of circumstance; even after Bloom’s efforts to become Stephen’s surrogate father in the end of the novel, the latter chooses to kindly refuse to spend the night at the Blooms’ house denying the possibility of adapting as the surrogate son. In addition, the repression of the maternal element in Stephen’s character is immensely stressed by the mockery he receives from “his irreverent and heretical” friend Buck Mulligan who “initiates the chain of accusations that centrally occupy Stephen’s thoughts throughout the day and night” (Friedman, “(Self)Censorship” 51), vividly depicted in the first episode of the novel: “the aunt thinks you killed your mother, he said. That’s why she won’t let me have anything to do with you . . . to think of your mother begging you with her last breath to kneel down and pray for her. And you refused. There is something sinister in you” (Joyce 5). Besides the obvious allusion to *Hamlet* regarding his absent ‘ghost’-father, Stephen’s character also alludes to the Aeschylean Orestes who is pursued by the Furies for the killing of his mother Clytemnestra.³ However, the young artist’s self-reflection ultimately subverts the traditional patriarchal narrative: “A father, Stephen said, battling against hopelessness, is a necessary evil . . . Amor matris, subjective and objective genitive, may be the only true thing in life. Paternity may be a legal fiction” (Joyce 186). By rejecting the traditional patriarchal norms and conventions (Stephen questions the authority of his father, his own nation, and the Catholic Church, while in the end he does not substitute his real father for another [Bloom]), and by affirming the significance of the maternal figure, Stephen’s character ultimately aligns with an anti-patriarchal stance contrasting the mythological androcentric viewpoint of Homer’s epic.

In this direction, we can also examine *Ulysses*’ main male protagonist, Leopold Bloom, as an indicative example of how the element of male heroism is structurally challenged. Bloom is a Jewish newspaper advertising salesman, married to a well-known opera singer—Marion Tweedy (Molly)—with whom he has a daughter—Milly—who recently left home to study and work outside Dublin. Throughout the story

he is haunted by inner thoughts and visions revolving around his Jewish immigrant father who committed suicide, his detachment from his daughter, the unfortunate passing of his infant son Rudy, and, most importantly, his long disengagement from his wife Molly. Apart from his familial affairs, he is also ridiculed by his work associates and social acquaintances. As Morton P. Levitt argues, “Bloom fails as businessman, fails as husband and father” (141). Contrary to his ancient counterpart, Joyce’s character is not in a rush to come back to his ‘Ithaca,’ and he certainly does not reflect the virility that epitomizes the classical triumphant male hero. Instead of being a self-governed man in exile who aspires to return home, Bloom “does not heroically resist the temptations of women . . . he is no displaced traveller, desperate for return, [and] his Penelope is simultaneously his Calypso and his home the prison from which he initially ‘escapes’” (Platt 519). Unlike the stereotypical gender associations in Homer’s *Odyssey*, Bloom serves his wife breakfast in bed, he runs errands for her like ordering her face-lotion from a local chemist or purchasing a salacious novel for her (meaningfully called *Sweets of Sin*), and he tries to come up with any possible excuse to delay his return home, where his unfaithful Penelope awaits. Additionally, the platonic flirtation he maintains via mail with a woman named Martha Clifford is yet another reflection of his inadequate and ambivalent masculinity, especially when contrasted with his wife’s actual infidelity.

In contrast to Homer’s Odysseus who is “son to Laertes . . . father to Telemachus, husband to Penelope, lover of Calypso” (Budgen 16), Leopold Bloom remains a ghost-son, a ghost-father,⁴ a ghost-husband, and a ghost-lover; through the manifestations of his deepest thoughts and emotions in the novel we are reminded of the impact the suicide of his “poor papa” had on him, his inner grief regarding the sad demise of his infant son Rudy,⁵ his distress about Molly’s infidelity, and a series of reflections and personal desires that he is unable to materialize.⁶ Unlike Odysseus, he has no male progeny, thus no male heir, his attempts to revitalize his paternal role by taking Stephen under his wing stay unfulfilled, and finally he seems unable to reconnect with his wife. The image of his flawed masculinity is vividly depicted at the end of the ‘Lestrygonians’ episode where Mr. Bloom suddenly becomes aware of the presence of Blazes Boylan—Molly’s forthcoming lover—near him:

Straw hat in sunlight. Tan shoes. Turnedup trousers. It is. It is.

His heart quipped softly. To the right. Museum. Goddesses. He swerved to the right.

Is it? Almost certain. Won't look. Wine in my face. Why did I? Too heady. Yes, it is. The walk. Not see. Not see. Get on.

Making for the museum gate with long windy strides he lifted his eyes. Handsome building. Sir Thomas Deane designed. Not following me?

Didn't see me perhaps. Light in his eyes. (Joyce 163-164)

In this excerpt, the dense structure of Mr. Bloom's interior monologue highlights the character's intense emotions and consequent humiliation caused by his wife's affair. As Gilbert emphatically stresses, "each time he encounters Boylan or hears his name mentioned, the comfortable flow of his silent monologue is checked; he tries to concentrate his attention on the first object that meets his eye but can never wholly rid himself of his obsession" (17). Boylan is the usurper in Bloom's marital relationship, but, unlike Odysseus who returns to Ithaca and slays all the suitors that covet his wife and his title, Joyce's hero "is a cuckold who is ashamed of his wife's promiscuity but is too weak to do anything about it" (Kuehn 210). The incident where Mr. Bloom realizes that his watch has frozen at exactly a quarter past four—the time of the day when Boylan's visit to Molly occurs—in the 'Nausicaa' episode is yet another sign of the crucial impact his wife's extramarital affair has on *Ulysses'* central male protagonist.⁷

The deconstruction of the element of androcentric heroism in *Ulysses'* central male characters climaxes in the last two episodes of the novel before Molly's concluding monologue. After their delusional experiences in the night town, Bloom and Stephen find a temporary refuge in a place called "the cabman's shelter" (Joyce 523). Subsequently, they return together to Bloom's house in the 'Ithaca' episode, drinking coco and confabulating, before they are separated. During this time, Bloom engages Stephen in conversation and finally invites him to spend the night at his house, trying to regenerate their 'wounded' masculine identities as father and son. However, despite the intimate bond that has been patiently built between them, Stephen ultimately declines Bloom's offer and departs, leaving the patriarchal order of the epic unrestored. Opposite to his Homeric counterpart's return, Bloom's homecoming is contradictory; in comparison to the triumphant return of Odysseus who reunites with his son and restores the patriarchal order in his family and his kingdom, Bloom's character remains

melancholic and unfulfilled in this context: his paternal role is not re-established, he's overwhelmed by thoughts of imaginary escapes from his 'Ithaca' and, most importantly, in the end he finds himself in bed next to his disloyal wife, all structural alterations that directly challenge the androcentric narrative of the original Homeric tale.

1.3 Challenging Male Heroism in *Helen in Egypt*: Achilles, Paris, and Theseus

In *Helen in Egypt*'s epic revision of the myth of 'hated' Helen of Troy, H.D. foregrounds the roles of three mythical male figures that defined Helen's life: the great warrior Achilles, her famous Trojan lover Paris, and her first kidnapper—the ancient hero of Athens Theseus. Their portrayal in H.D.'s epic poem is foremost employed to challenge the established patriarchal narrative of the myth and to offer a conscious breakaway from the traditional stereotypical image of the male hero: Achilles is depicted as the epitome of the bellicose, rigid warrior who represents “an accurate model of the psychological economy of patriarchal power” (Twitchell-Waas 466), but his character also functions as Helen's fated lover, incorporating the potential for a 'New Mortal' liberated from patriarchal constraints; Paris appears as the seductive personification of Eros for Helen, and as Achilles' fatal adversary who “feels rivalry, jealousy, and the old enmity of male versus male” (DuPlessis, “Romantic Thralldom” 194), mirroring male antagonism and its binding polarizing nature; Theseus reflects yet another example of male influence on the victimized persona of Helen but mainly functions as a healing, equalizing force in the female protagonist's mind, aiding her to “avoid the polarized roles which the two lovers give her” (DuPlessis, “Romantic Thralldom” 195). Their respective encounters with Helen, in spiritual or physical form, denote a poignant departure from the androcentric mythological narrative and ultimately highlight the inadequacy of traditional male heroism, and the redefinition of their own role in Helen's story.

Achilles—the great hero of the Trojan War—represents the rigidity of the war-fed male heroic figure, his aggressive and self-absorbing instincts, but gradually transforms into the token of male rebirth as a 'New Mortal' through the possibility of reconciliation with the repressed maternal element and the neglected female voice. As

Ostriker points out, “Achilles, the great protagonist of the *Iliad*, is H.D.’s paradigmatic patriarchal male as Helen is the paradigmatic female. Heroic, male-centered, immortality-seeking, Achilles ruthlessly leads a group of ‘elect’ warriors dedicated to discipline and control, called (punningly) ‘The Command’” (80). Following the alternate story of the ‘Palinode,’ which H.D. chooses to use as a thematic background for the first part of her epic, Achilles and Helen meet on the shores of Egypt, “on the coast in the dark” (H.D. 11), where, unlike Helen who “questions but expects no answers” (Wagner 529), the male character appears confused, misplaced, unaware of his whereabouts: “where are we? who are you? / where is this desolate coast? / who am I? am I a ghost?” (H.D. 16) His initial unawareness and questioning turn into accusations and fierce anger towards the victimized woman: “Helena, cursed of Greece, / I have seen you upon the ramparts, / no art is beneath your power, / you stole the chosen, the flower / of all-time, of all-history, / my children, my legions; / for you were the ships burnt” (16-17). The section ends with Helen trying to assure Achilles that “all this phantasmagoria of Troy” was nothing but “dream and a phantasy” (17), while the male hero, unconvinced, attempts to strangle her “with his fingers’ remorseless steel” (17). H.D. ties the roots of masculine aggression with the repression of the maternal element, which is represented by Achilles’ mother, Thetis; in this sense, the flawed character of the male hero relates to “the cultivation of an ethos of egocentric strength that requires the repression of the maternal. In Achilles’ case, this means the sea, Thetis, the flowing, unbounded, vulnerable realm of experience that would undermine the iron discipline of the warrior” (Twitchell-Wass 466).⁸ The male indifference and “the theme of passion restrained to the point of coldness” (527), as Wagner states, is further stressed by the reference to Achilles’ involvement in the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, as he stood silent and indifferent in front of the crime committed in the name of patriarchal war: “Achilles was the false bridegroom, / Achilles was the hero promised / to my sister’s child / . . . promised to Iphigeneia; / it was Achilles who stood by the altar / and did not interfere / with the treacherous plan, / . . . it was Achilles, Achilles / who sanctioned the sacrifice, / the gift of his bride to Death” (83-84).

However, in contrast to the Homeric image of the resolute, brave, and autonomous mythological male hero, H.D.’s Achilles shows signs of vulnerability and internal struggle: his weakness on the heel is connected to “Love’s arrow” (86) and not plainly to a mythologically constructed physical flaw, while his encounter with Helen

on the shores of Egypt initiates a process of self-questioning which contrasts the rigid virility of the hero. As Wagner emphasizes, “images of Achilles’ vulnerability run through the poem—his assertion, ‘I am no more immortal, / I am man among the millions’; Achilles limping on the sand; Helen, a source of comfort, withdrawing the arrow” (527-528). Achilles is initially depicted as the bellicose alpha male but gradually, over the course of the epic, his repressed self also encapsulates the capacity for Love and reconciliation with the forgotten maternal voice. His character reflects the dualism of the male hero: on one hand, he is presented as the allegiant warrior who “followed the lure of war, / and there was never a braver, / a better among the heroes” (297), and on the other hand he is described as a troubled, self-reflective figure who “stared and stared / through the smoke and the glowing embers, / and wondered why he forgot” (297), a two-fold image which profoundly highlights that “for Achilles, mortally wounded with ‘love’s arrow,’ and thus symbolically castrated, limping like Oedipus, his love for his mother is central to his sense of himself” (Emmitt 143). Ultimately, through his revitalizing encounter with Helen in Egypt and his subsequent “retrospective meditations,” as DuPlessis points out, “Achilles breaks with conventional, cultural patterns of maleness” (“Romantic Thralldom” 193) and becomes “a postheroic man, vulnerable and questing” (“Romantic Thralldom” 194), signalling the beginning of a possible reconciliation with the repressed memory of his mother, and cutting himself off from the established patriarchal constraints that defined his Homeric namesake.

The characters of Paris and Theseus are introduced in the second part of H.D.’s epic, entitled ‘Leuké’ after the white island where Helen and Achilles were said to have wed and lived after the events of the Trojan War. Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas states that “the overall structure of ‘Leuké’ is determined by Helen’s revisitations of past selves with past men, first Paris and then Theseus, [and that] she recognizes the limits of those past selves as defined by those men” (477). Paris appears as the self-indulgent Trojan prince who “would set the Towers a-flame” (H.D. 116) by causing the war, and as a seductive man who “views Helen as his possession, and wants to seduce her once again” (DuPlessis, “Romantic Thralldom” 194) by reminding her of “their defiance of ‘Achilles and the thousand spears’” (H.D. 146) and by trying to convince her that Achilles’ feelings for her have been untrue: “you say it is I, I defeated even upon Leuké, / you feel in me even now, the shadow, the prescience, / envy, hatred, fear of the Greeks;

. . . / you say you did not die on the stairs, / that the love of Achilles sustained you; / I say he never loved you” (148-149). In this sense, Paris functions as Achilles’ Trojan counterpart in the context of war-driven male heroism, representing male antagonism and its binary contradictions, while also being the personification of seduction, trying to trap Helen into the unchangeable events of the established patriarchal past by “simply repeat[ing] without transformation his role in the traditional myth” (DuPlessis, “Romantic Thralldom” 194). Theseus, on the other hand, becomes the female protagonist’s reflective advisor who helps her overcome the polarization caused by the conflict between Achilles and Paris, and who triggers her empathetic reminiscing by “using his wisdom to show her examples from history of women in her own situation” (Wagner 531). Unlike his mythological image as the abandoner of women, in H.D.’s epic Theseus understands and instructs Helen, contrasting his established patriarchal attributes. What ultimately determines Theseus’ role in *Helen in Egypt* is his active agency in Helen’s endeavours to remember and contemplate how Achilles and Paris “challenged and contradicted each other in her fantasy” (H.D. 234).

The roles of the central male characters in *Helen in Egypt* have a profound impact on H.D.’s female protagonist: Paris’ antagonistic masculinity and seductive attitude drive Helen to a new liberating perspective when she consciously chooses to reject him, “escaping from the old myth which Paris persists in believing” (DuPlessis, “Romantic Thralldom” 194);⁹ Theseus’ parental intervention helps her transcend the polarity of male antagonism represented by Achilles and Paris, “acting as both mother and father and healing the divisions found in the traditional nuclear family” (DuPlessis, “Romantic Thralldom” 195); Achilles, whose offensive and war-hungry masculinity is vividly sketched in the beginning of the epic, progressively comes to terms with the repressed memory of his mother, and, as Friedman points out, “ultimately renounce[s] his male privilege and reabsorb[s] into his conscious self the capacity for love traditionally projected onto woman” (“Gender and Genre Anxiety” 220). In short, the way H.D. has deconstructed and substantially refashioned the three mythical male characters not only opposes the established androcentric conventions of the old myth but also enables both genders to transcend the stereotypical barriers between them and to engage each other in a completely new discourse. As DuPlessis notes, “all the males in *Helen in Egypt*—Achilles, Paris, and Theseus (the figure of Freud¹⁰)—have begun to form a postheroic personality, and all give Helen permission to make her quest, which

must include understanding herself as a postromantic woman” (“Romantic Thralldom” 195). Through the structural redefinition of their respected roles, H.D. manages to challenge the dominant element of male heroism embedded in the established version of Helen’s story, and to contrast the stereotypical image of the male heroes by presenting them as fundamentally flawed, disengaged, or at times sympathetic towards a woman disregarded in the past.

1.4 Deconstruction of Secondary Male Characters

Apart from the male protagonists of the two modernist epics there are several secondary male characters depicted as substantially problematic and flawed, contrasting the heroic attributes of their Homeric counterparts and implicitly challenging the traditional patriarchal narrative of the Homeric myth. Since both works are quite lengthy, and there are many characters in both texts, I am only focusing on the most indicative examples of this development. In Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom encounter many men from their social circle; Mr. Deasy, the Citizen, and Fitzharris (alias Skin-the-Goat) are representative paradigms of ambivalent male individuals who display an extremely disruptive androcentric perspective, exposed by their racist and misogynist views. The characters of Mr. Deasy and Fitzharris, in contrast to the heroic and virtuous attributes of their respective Homeric counterparts—the wise king Nestor and Odysseus’ trustworthy swineherd Eumaeus—, do not function as helpful ‘allies’ for *Ulysses’* protagonists; instead, they reflect an incompatible, disruptive viewpoint in comparison. Similarly, the offensive and grotesque character of the Citizen in the ‘Cyclops’ episode of the novel not only does he stand for nationalist and anti-Semite views, but he also uses sexist language, conflating racism and misogyny; overall, he functions as a disruptive agent of patriarchal force.

Mr. Deasy, the headmaster of the school where Stephen works as a history teacher, is presented as an old, prejudiced male who outlines his patriarchal standpoint during his confabulation with young Stephen at the second chapter of the novel: “A woman brought sin into the world. For a woman who was no better than she should be, Helen, the runaway wife of Menelaus, ten years the Greeks made war on Troy. A faithless wife first brought strangers to our shore here” (Joyce 32). Mr. Deasy typically

reproduces the established patriarchal stereotypes of myth, while reflecting on the contemporary political situation of modern Ireland. Yet, his androcentric, biased perspective is widely ignored by the cultivated Stephen. Subsequently, following his final racist joke about Ireland denying access to Jews, “the revolting description of Deasy’s ‘coughball of laughter leap[ing] from his throat dragging after it a rattling chain of phlegm’ (2.443-44) emphasizes the novel’s rejection of prejudice” (Hastings),¹¹ condemning the character’s misogynist leaning as well. Fitzharris, the owner of the cabman’s shelter where Bloom and Stephen find a temporary refuge during the ‘Eumaeus’ episode of the novel, also unleashes similar allegations when, in a discussion about Katherine O’Shea, Irish politician Parnell’s lover, he refers to her as “that English whore . . . [who] put the first nail in his coffin” (558), followed by a remark about how “she loosened many a man’s thighs” (558), a phrase which poignantly alludes to the Homeric Eumaeus who accused Helen of causing the misfortunes of men during the Trojan War.¹² Lastly, the grotesque male figure of the Citizen in the ‘Cyclops’ episode represents in the same manner a disruptive agent of patriarchal force: “The strangers, says the citizen. Our own fault. We let them come in. We brought them. The adulteress and her paramour brought the Saxon robbers here . . . A dishonoured wife, says the citizen, that’s what’s the cause of all our misfortunes” (292).¹³ Unlike the one-eyed Cyclop Polyphemus, who is depicted as a man-eating giant, aggressive towards all human beings, the Joycean Citizen is parodied by being given specific political attributes that expose his patriarchal, prejudiced stance; he is not vaguely a monstrous threat to a wise, courageous hero, but he is himself the agent of patriarchal force which reproduces racism and misogyny.

In H.D.’s *Helen in Egypt*, the female protagonist also encounters many additional male figures throughout her quest. H.D. seems to utilize the paradigms of those mythical male characters to reinforce Helen’s sense of empathy and self-recognition, as well as to further challenge the androcentric narrative of the Homeric myth. Agamemnon and Odysseus are repeatedly presented as indicative agents of patriarchal force, “encased in the[ir] iron-armour” (H.D. 87), serving unquestionably the purposes of war, and standing accountable for crimes against women, such as Iphigeneia’s sacrifice: “the plot they said, of Odysseus; / it was Agamemnon who commanded / her mother to bring her to Aulis” (84). However, as in the case of the central male heroes, instead of simplistically demonizing them for their established

patriarchal role, Helen empathizes and contemplates their fate: “could they have chosen / another way, another Fate? / each could—Agamemnon, Achilles, / but would they?” (103) Similarly, the female protagonist recalls Orestes’ revengeful act against his own mother in question: “is it all a story? / a legend of murder and lust, / the revenge of Orestes . . . what of Orestes, / . . . pursued by the Furies? / has he found his mother? / will he ever find her?” (91, 94)¹⁴ Moreover, in contrast to his heroic role in Homer’s *Iliad*, the character of Hector is emphatically depicted as yet another victim of patriarchal war, mourned by his mother Hecuba just like Achilles is mourned by his own mother Thetis, with Helen poignantly wondering: “was Hector born to be conquered[?]” (244). Instead of retelling their story in the traditional heroic fashion, H.D. chooses to deliberately challenge the androcentric stereotypes embedded in the mythical conception of these characters by interrogating male superiority and by highlighting the hero’s flawed masculinity rather than his established patriarchal privileges.

1.5 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I focused on the deconstruction of the male hero and the subversion of the traditional androcentric stereotypes by the two modernist authors. By primarily examining the central male characters of the two epics, I attempted to demonstrate that in each story the male protagonists are presented either as disengaged, misplaced, or problematic individuals with flawed masculine attributes, or as fundamentally redefined male figures that contrast their Homeric counterparts in the sense of encapsulating a conscious breakaway from the imposed patriarchal norms of ancient myth. Joyce’s depiction of Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus denotes a departure from the androcentric associations of the Homeric myth since both characters fail to function in their expected patriarchal roles, in contrast to their Homeric counterparts, as it has been argued in the context of this chapter’s discourse: in *Ulysses*, the patriarchal order is not restored in the end, Stephen’s character openly questions patriarchal tradition but at the same time he is deeply affected by the absence of paternal guidance and the repression of motherhood in his life, and finally Molly’s adultery has a profound impact on Mr. Bloom’s character whose manhood is already challenged to

a great degree by being an unsatisfying husband and a failed father. Correspondingly, H.D.'s depiction of Achilles, Paris, and Theseus reflects the inadequacy of the traditional male hero and foregrounds the need for his fundamental reconstruction: unlike their Homeric namesakes whose virility is emphatically noted, H.D.'s central male characters are vulnerable, doubtful and certainly much more conscious of women's misfortunes; by centering on the deconstruction of their established male privileges, the author attempts to challenge the male-generated narrative of the Homeric myth and to substantially redefine their respected roles in Helen's story. An additional look on several secondary male characters from both epics intended to demonstrate representative examples of flawed maleness which further weaken the patriarchal narrative of the source myths. Lastly, it can be argued that an interesting, common element in both modernist texts is the employment of empathy by both authors, which leads the reader not to dismiss but to empathize with the central male characters to a considerable degree; in this sense, paradoxically enough, despite the flawed masculinity of their male protagonists, both modernist epics succeed in setting the ground for, as DuPlessis puts it, "the imaginative reconstruction of the hero" ("Romantic Thralldom" 193).

Notes

¹ Aris Maragopoulos explains in his *Reader's Guide to Ulysses* how Stephen's parents operate as 'ghosts' in Stephen's mind, mirroring Prince Hamlet's ghost father in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (see Aris Maragopoulos, *Ulysses: Οδηγός Ανάγνωσης*, pp. 177-80).

² For more on the subject see Katherine Mullin, "An Introduction to *Ulysses*," *Literature 1900-1950*, 2016. *BRITISH LIBRARY*, <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/an-introduction-to-ulysses#footnote4>

³ For more details on possible allusions regarding Stephen's character see Aris Maragopoulos, *Ulysses: Οδηγός Ανάγνωσης*, pp. 41-42.

⁴ According to Maragopoulos, Mr. Bloom is the ghost-father of a son that he lost, and of a daughter who, growing up, abandoned him (see Aris Maragopoulos, *Ulysses: Οδηγός Ανάγνωσης*, p. 181).

⁵ The concluding image of the 'Circe' episode where the phantom of his son Rudy stares at him is perhaps the most striking example of Bloom's internal pain regarding the loss of his son, and one of the novel's most powerful scenes.

⁶ An indicative example, among others, can be the Kafkaesque trial of Mr. Bloom in the 'Circe' episode: as Maragopoulos points out in his analysis, Bloom hallucinates visions of sexual crimes that he did not commit but he would have liked to have committed (see Aris Maragopoulos, *Ulysses: Οδηγός Ανάγνωσης*, p. 335).

⁷ For more on the subject see Aris Maragopoulos, *Ulysses: Οδηγός Ανάγνωσης*, p. 272, and note 1 on p. 285.

⁸ Adding to this, Emmitt also argues in favour of the idea that Achilles' aggressive masculinity depends on the repression of his mother Thetis, stating that "the great warrior cuts himself off from his youthful love for his mother, transferring his love for her into love for his ship" (143).

⁹ However, DuPlessis also highlights the fact that despite his seductive and sensuous characteristics, Paris' character identifies, in part, with some of the female victims of male force, boosting Helen's feminine awareness (see Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "Romantic Thralldom in H.D.," p. 195).

¹⁰ According to many critics, the character of Theseus alludes to Freud and his psychoanalytical method; H.D., who had a close and mutually respectful relationship with the Austrian psychoanalyst, seems to symbolically make use of his mentorship through Theseus' role to comment on the traditional patriarchal conventions of ancient myth and the manifestations of male envy.

¹¹ For more details about Mr. Deasy's allusion to Homer's Nestor see Aris Maragopoulos, *Ulysses: Οδηγός Ανάγνωσης*, pp. 59-60.

¹² For more on the subject see Aris Maragopoulos, *Ulysses: Οδηγός Ανάγνωσης*, p. 375.

¹³ Maragopoulos notes that this phrase refers to Prince O'Rourke's adulterous wife, characterizing her as the 'Irish Helen,' see Aris Maragopoulos, *Ulysses: Οδηγός Ανάγνωσης*, p. 248.

¹⁴ The reference to Orestes' matricide aligns with DuPlessis' main argument in regard to how the central theme of H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* is the repression and the recovery of motherhood.

2. REDEFINING THE FEMALE FIGURE IN *ULYSSES* AND *HELEN IN EGYPT*

2.1 Introduction

The structural revision which triggers the departure from the Homeric patriarchal narrative culminates through the fundamentally subversive terms in which the central female characters are presented in both modernist epics. While the male characters reflect an ambivalent and highly ambiguous sense of masculinity, the female protagonists are given a clear, distinct feminine voice, in contrast to the oppressed and restricted role of their mythological counterparts in the Homeric story. Molly Bloom is depicted as an emancipated, self-assured female and “as a sexually liberated woman with freely expressed desires and the agency to speak and do as she wishes” (Hastings),¹ as her long unpunctuated interior monologue indicates at the end of the novel. On the other hand, Helen is the primary voice of H.D.’s epic throughout its course, initiating and concluding the story; in this sense, the author “recreates Helen’s myth by making her the speaker of her own poem” (Nisa 8), and attempts to replace the traditional patriarchal narrative with a revisionist tale which prioritizes the female perspective, contrasting the established androcentric perspective of the Homeric myth. In both cases, the role of the central female character has been substantially redefined in comparison to that of her Homeric predecessor, reinstating the previously undervalued female voice and creating a modern female figure beyond the patriarchal confines of traditional mythmaking.

In this chapter, I will explore how both authors reconstruct and redefine the female figure by distinguishing the female perspective from the male line of thought. By making use of relevant critical arguments about each text, I intend to demonstrate that the subversive portrayal of the central female characters ultimately reinstates the female subjectivity which was repressed in the traditional androcentric narrative of Homer’s epics. Subsequently, a brief examination of several secondary female characters provides additional arguments which further support the main thesis, followed by the chapter’s concluding points regarding how the depiction of women in the two modernist epics contrasts the stereotypical image of their Homeric predecessors.

2.2 Reinstating the Female Voice in *Ulysses*: Molly Bloom

Molly Bloom is *Ulysses*' central female character and the modern counterpart of Homer's Penelope; she is married to the male protagonist, she is both wife and mother, and throughout the novel's plot she remains in a domestic environment waiting for her husband's return just like her ancient counterpart. However, opposite to the Homeric Penelope who functions as "the mythical representative of the faithful wife sublimated by the western tradition" (Uzunoğlu 90), Joyce's character differentiates substantially in a threefold manner: she does not remain faithful to her wandering husband, she is not a dependent housewife, and she's given a distinct, personal female voice which reflects the psychological complexity of a modern woman and her vital sexuality. Apart from the obvious analogy between Joyce's 'Penelope' and Homer's Penelope, the former is structurally redefined in a specific manner that challenges her ancient counterpart's established image and detaches her character from the dominant androcentric associations of the source myth. To begin with, Molly's adultery is one of the epic's most pivotal themes, bending the morale of her husband, Leopold Bloom, who is well-aware of her promiscuous affair, and ostensibly undermining her character rather than flattering her image.² As Richard Brown notes, "Joyce redefines the classic image of a faithful 'Penelope' to present a self-possessed, adulterous Molly Bloom" (102). Indeed, Molly's unfaithfulness becomes a central issue for *Ulysses*' male protagonist throughout the plot,³ and in the end during her monologue it becomes clear that she does not feel remorse for committing adultery. However, a closer examination of her character's stream of consciousness indicates her line of thought behind her not guilty conscience,⁴ highlighting that "her role as wife and lover has been gradually subverted, [as] it is probably because of Leopold's physical neglect of her that Molly seeks sexual fulfilment with other men in the first place" (Lyman 196). Instead of presenting only the main male character's standpoint, the author considers the perspective of the female figure as well, provoking the reader to identify with her character and her side of the story.

In addition, Joyce's female protagonist is not a dependent housewife in the conventional standards of the Homeric myth; unlike Homer's Penelope, who is depicted

as a domestic wife “who weaves and unweaves a tangled web at home” (Gilbert 339) while waiting for her husband’s return, Molly Bloom is a renowned professional opera singer. Whilst she is not in her prime anymore, she still works and enjoys local recognition, as her husband is reminded during the bar discussion in the ‘Cyclops’ episode: “Mrs. B. is the bright particular star, isn’t she? Says Joe” (Joyce 288). Moreover, in numerous occasions throughout the story it is mentioned that she is planning a forthcoming musical tour, that being the reason for meeting with her lover and tour manager Blazes Boylan in the afternoon, a rendezvous on the pretence of professional affairs. In this sense, Molly’s social status reflects an emancipated modern woman who is not restricted in the domestic environment as a stereotypical housewife. This image is strengthened by the unconventional role she retains in her marriage, having her husband “bringing her breakfast in bed, running errands for her, following her commands, and resigning himself to her impending adultery” (Hastings).⁵ Therefore, the stereotypical model of a subservient married woman is subverted, and the role of the female figure is essentially redefined through the acquisition of a professional career which is not associated with the husband’s own affairs. Adding on that, it can be argued that Molly’s lasting approval of her husband in spite of his many flaws, and the fact that marrying him was her own conscious choice in the first place, as it is vividly stated during her reminiscing interior monologue at the end of the novel, introduce a significant deviation from the Homeric Penelope who simply never had a say in whom to marry despite the established image of her as the quintessential reliable and blissful wife.

Yet what decisively distinguishes *Ulysses*’ female protagonist from her ancient counterpart is that she is given a personal, distinct voice which vividly reflects her female identity and her vital sexuality. In contrast to Penelope whose voice and actions in Homer’s epic align with Odysseus’ course of action, and who functions as a resourceful ally to his efforts to restore the patriarchal order that was disrupted during his absence,⁶ Joyce’s central female character differentiates from the male line of thought, representing in this sense the inner thoughts and psychology of a modern woman that contrasts the established Homeric image of the devoted, reliant wife. Molly contemplates “the way he [Mr. Bloom] plots and plans everything out” (667), she freely reflects on men and remains quite sceptical of them, believing that “theyre so weak and puling when theyre sick they want a woman to get well” (641), or that “one woman is

not enough for them” (642), until she poignantly stresses her subversive feminist viewpoint: “I dont care what anybody says itd be much better for the world to be governed by the women in it you wouldnt see women going and killing one another . . . they don’t know what it is to be a woman and a mother how could they where would they all of them be if they hadnt all a mother to look after them” (678). In this excerpt of explicit feminist language, Molly’s thoughts are indicative of a modern, subversive female viewpoint that opposes male hegemony and traditional androcentric heroism by considering and foregrounding woman’s position and self-determination in contemporary society. Overall, the emphasis on this subversive female voice becomes quite obvious by Molly’s frequent use of the words ‘woman’ and ‘he’ “which, whenever they recur, seem to shift the trend of her musings” (Gilbert 341) and to highlight the antithetical tensions between women and men.⁷ Furthermore, Molly’s explicit account of her sexual encounter with Boylan, as well as the revelation of various other personal details from her marital life with Bloom, manifest a highly expressive modern female personality who transcends the limitations of conventional discourses about sexual matters—an area that had been traditionally a taboo for both genders. As Laura Doyle states, “the text represents Molly's sexuality as capable of overriding conventional boundaries of sex” (187). In this sense, Molly’s unconventional sexual expression and the way she “celebrates sensuality among and between women and men, delighting in its polymorphous flux” (Doyle 182), become a profoundly liberating act of self-expression for the female character, contrasting the restricted role of her mythological counterpart.

Lastly, another element that substantially redefines *Ulysses*’ modern ‘Penelope’ is Molly’s symbolic association with the attributes of Gaea. Joyce uses certain themes, images, and literary styles as conceptual components of his epic; in this direction, each episode of the story is matched with a specific symbol, such as ‘heir’ for the ‘Telemachus’ episode, ‘nymph’ for ‘Calypso,’ or ‘virgin’ for ‘Nausicaa.’⁸ In ‘Penelope,’ where the symbol is ‘Earth,’ Molly functions as the personification of “Gaea-Tellus, the Great Mother . . . the Earth, [who] was, according to the Greeks, the first being that sprang from Chaos” (Gilbert 339); Joyce’s character reflects on the grandeur of nature and represents its delicate beauty. As Gilbert points out, “in the course of her long monologue there are many passages where, positively geotropic, full of the spirit of nature, she speaks with the voice of Genetrix, the Earth” (340), such as

this characteristic passage near the end of the novel where she contemplates in admiration: “I love flowers I’d love to have the whole place swimming in roses God of heaven there’s nothing like nature the wild mountains then the sea and the waves rushing then the beautiful country . . . would do your heart good to see rivers and lakes and flowers all sorts of shapes and smells and colours” (681). By associating the female figure with the beauty of the natural world the author ultimately manages to create an image of the woman as an irreplaceable part of life, implying that, just like Earth, “the greatness of woman lies in her absolute necessity, in the impossibility of imagining the world without her” (Budgen 286-287). It is not incidental that Joyce chooses to end his epic with the positive, dynamic tone of female affirmation: Molly’s climactic repetition of the word ‘yes’ (the word which initiates and concludes her monologue) signifies a feminine affirmation of life itself and reflects the self-confident voice of a modern female figure who breaks free from the confines of traditional androcentric myth.

2.3 Reinstating the Female Voice in *Helen in Egypt*: Helen

In H.D.’s revisionist epic, the central female character embarks on a self-reflective quest of remembrance, empathy, and feminine rebirth. The author builds upon post-Homeric sources to recreate Helen’s story in her own terms, questioning “the dominant tradition concerning Helen as an object—of Paris, of the gods, of her own passions” (Holmberg 25). In contrast to the Homeric epics, where her character is objectified, being positioned in a male-constructed narrative without a voice of her own, in H.D.’s epic Helen becomes the primary voice of the story, functioning as the main link between all other characters or events throughout its course. The structural revision of the myth is primarily based on the author’s conscious choice not only to reconstruct the tale of victimized Helen as a reflection of the diachronic repression of female subjectivity, but also to place the female character’s own perspective in the center of her poetic narration. As Friedman stresses, “as a consequence of having a woman serve as the center of consciousness, the heroic [is] redefined in female terms . . . her choice of Helen as hero directly confronts the denial of power and speech to women, not only in the conventional epic, but also in patriarchal culture in general” (“Gender and Genre Anxiety” 217). Indeed, H.D.’s Helen seems to reinstate the voice of “female

subjectivity which is repressed in the Homeric epics” (Holmberg 21),⁹ while implicitly commenting on woman’s suppressed role in a male-dominated society; H.D. elaborates on Stesichorus’ and Euripides’ variant tradition of Helen’s story in an attempt to subvert the “most negative possible interpretation of Homer” (Holmberg 19) and to depict her protagonist’s spiritual quest “as an empowering re-possession of a female role” (Glaser 106). What decisively redefines Helen’s character in the direction of representing a self-determined female figure who contrasts the limited role of her mythical namesake is her association with the elements of memory, empathy, and motherhood.

The author initiates her defence of the female character by stating that “Helen was never actually abducted by Paris but that she was transported to Egypt while a body-double [an eidolon] was sent to walk the Trojan walls in her place” (Glaser 99), to emphatically signify how “the Greeks and the Trojans alike fought for an illusion” (H.D. 1). The whereabouts of the central female character suggest the first sign of her differentiation from her mythical namesake; as Wagner points out, “Helen, by being located here in Egypt, escapes some of the guilt of the Trojan War. She cannot, however, escape her own search for identity” (524). Helen’s search for identity is enabled by the meditative act of remembrance: over the course of her epic journey, Helen encounters various male and female figures from her past and relives events that marked her story, such as her abduction by Paris and the subsequent outburst of the Trojan War, her marriage to Achilles in Leuké and the birth of their child Euphorion, or her childhood in Sparta, among others, while trying to decipher the hieroglyphs in the Amer-Temple in Egypt. In this chain of palimpsestic memories, her insistence to question the ‘objectivity’ of her established myth, along with her attempts to come to terms with the past, suggest that “her thinking is a method of sorting through the past” (Wagner 529) and that her fundamental “ideal [is] to remember and understand, to learn from ‘everlasting memory’” (Wagner 533). As Helen tries to confront the images from the past, she decodes the hieroglyph in the temple by seeing how “she herself is the writing” (H.D. 23).¹⁰ As Emmitt stresses, by “making Helen both reader and writing, both ‘phantom and reality’ (3), H.D. does not accept the premise of the myth . . . instead, she questions where, what, and whom Helen was and is” (142). Opposite to the male heroes who “fought, forgetting women . . . and cursing Helen through eternity” (H.D. 4), H.D.’s protagonist chooses to remember and have access to the past so that she can reclaim her mythical namesake’s repressed subjectivity.

Furthermore, the author employs the element of empathy to reinforce the character's capability to recognize and challenge the unjust foundations on which her established myth was built. Throughout her spiritual journey Helen feels empathy towards other female victims of patriarchal force, such as Clytaemnestra, Iphigeneia, Polyxena, and Chryseis, conveying "her grief for other women sacrificed to the masculine 'warrior cult'" (DuPlessis, "The Career of That Struggle" 113). Unlike her repressed Homeric namesake whose conception was based on androcentric myth, H.D.'s central female character asserts female subjectivity by emphatically contemplating: "the law is different; / if a woman fights, / she must fight by stealth, / with invisible gear; / no sword, no dagger, no spear" (H.D. 101). In this excerpt, Helen's words poignantly convey a double meaning: on one hand, it is implied that women are not granted equal 'weaponry' with men, thus not equal power, and, on the other hand, it is pointed out that, unlike a man's fight, a woman's fight is not warlike by its nature. Interestingly enough, Helen's thoughts resemble Molly's previously examined contemplation in *Ulysses*,¹¹ foregrounding women's suppressed social role. However, in the former's case, it is well stressed that the female character's compassion extends towards the male heroes as well. Instead of simplistically demonizing the male heroes, Helen understands their fate as being manipulated by the dominant force of patriarchy—war; this sense of empathy towards men is quite powerful when Helen "recalls the scene of [Achilles'] boyhood and his childhood's secret idol, the first Thetis-eidolon" (294), and, subsequently, when she reflects how, "with 'the lure of war,' the hero forgot 'the magic of little things,' and his mother's 'simple wish'" (296).¹² H.D.'s employment of empathy enables her protagonist to subvert the traditional androcentric myth, and ultimately allows both genders to transcend the stereotypical barriers between them.

Finally, the eidolon of Thetis and its pivotal role in H.D.'s epic connect the central female character with the element of motherhood. While for the male hero Achilles Thetis represents the repressed maternal figure and the neglected female voice,¹³ for Helen the female Goddess epitomizes the redemptive, positive force of womanhood, triggering "her revisionary understanding of the feminine in its associations with fertility, peace, order" (DuPlessis, "The Career of That Struggle" 113). H.D., who frequently throughout her career "returned to the subject of war and directly connected violence with patriarchy" (Friedman, "I Go Where I Love" 232),

makes use of the element of motherhood (through Thetis' myth) to empower the concept of feminine rebirth and to imply in the poem's closing lines that only the memory of maternal love can put an end to patriarchal violence: "only Achilles could break his heart / and the world for a token, / a memory forgotten" (315). Additionally, the reference to "the 'sea mother,' whether we call her Thetis, Isis or Aphrodite" (H.D. 310), conflates Greek and Egyptian myth to create the transcultural image of a woman's religion where patriarchal force is replaced by matriarchal love.¹⁴ Helen's 'healing identification' with the female deities redefines the character's womanhood in the direction of overcoming the objectification of her mythological namesake, as Friedman explains:

For Helen, th[e] confrontation with the Mother comes in the form of her gradual identification with the three phases of the Mother Goddess, the white, the red, and the black, or Aphrodite, Isis, and Kore. Adapting Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*, H.D. has Helen learn to see her various selves not as evil fragments, but as embodiments of different aspects of the matriarchal Goddess: Helen in springtime love with Paris in Troy was Aphrodite; Helen in summer passion with Achilles in Egypt was Thetis and Isis, the mothers of Achilles and Horus; Helen in Leuké with Achilles was Kore, the goddess of death and divination. This healing identification with the Goddess in her sexual, procreative, and priestly forms allows Helen finally to approach Achilles without shame, her womanhood redefined. Helen accomplishes a revision of her own womanhood through her relationships with women. ("Gender and Genre Anxiety" 222)

In the end Helen's association with motherhood materializes through the birth of "the promised Euphorion [who] is not one child but two" (H.D. 299): the androgynous progeny of Helen and Achilles that "incorporates both the archetypal polarity of mother and father and the dualities within each of them" (Emmitt 144).

2.4 Depiction of Secondary Female Characters

Both stories contain several additional female characters whose depiction redefines woman's role in the modern epic and distinguishes the female perspective

from the traditional androcentric line of thought. In *Ulysses*, the most indicative examples of this development are the two barmaids from the ‘Sirens’ episode, Gerty MacDowell from ‘Nausicaa,’ and Mrs. Purefoy from the ‘Oxen of the Sun’ episode. The two barmaids—Miss Douce (bronze) and Miss Kennedy (gold)—function as modern counterparts of the Homeric Sirens, the “two birdwomen whose beautiful singing tempts sailors off course, luring their ships to wreck on a craggy island” (Hastings). Joyce gives them a prominent role during the ‘musical’ episode of his epic, as he often interrupts narration from Mr. Bloom’s point of view to focus on the two women; these interpolations empower woman’s role in the narrative. The author even uses ‘barmaids’ as the symbol for the episode and describes their physical appearance as if it resembles bronze and gold, while deploying their sensuality to show their influence on the male company in the Ormond Hotel bar: “she let free sudden in rebound her nipped elastic garter smackwarm against her smackable woman’s warm-hosed thigh” (240). Subsequently, in the ‘Nausicaa’ episode, Joyce highlights once more the female perspective by structuring the first half of narration in the form of a Victorian romance novel, reflecting in this way young Gerty’s thoughts and emotions as she spends some time on the Sandymount strand. Consequently, the reader gains access to the female character’s romanticizing, rose-tinted perspective which differentiates to a large extent from the male line of thought (Bloom’s more mature and ironic voice) that characterizes the second half of the episode. Besides its usefulness in order to simulate the voice of a young girl, it can also be argued that the author employs the overemotional tone of narrative in the first half of the episode “to demonstrate the limitations placed on women in this society while simultaneously exposing some readers’ patriarchal readiness to dismiss Gerty and, indeed, all women” (Hastings).¹⁵

However, the most positive example of a secondary female role in the novel comes from the ‘Oxen of the Sun’ episode and the symbolic association of Mrs. Purefoy’s character with the sacredness of fertility and procreation. In contrast to Molly, Gerty, and the two barmaids, Mrs. Purefoy is not given a distinct, personal voice in the text, but the specific qualities that her character represents ultimately define the theme and the overall vibe of the episode. Mrs. Purefoy’s long excruciating labour evokes Mr. Bloom’s empathy as he listens to the nurse’s report about the pregnant woman’s difficult delivery: “the man hearkened to her words for he felt with wonder women’s woe in the travail that they have of motherhood” (349). Through Bloom’s compassion

towards the female character the novel celebrates woman's power to procreate and condemns the irreverent and irresponsible behaviour of the rest of the men in the waiting room of the hospital who, unable to adjust to the sacredness of the place, keep carousing while ignoring multiple warnings made by the nurses.¹⁶ As it is vividly depicted by the author, "the young men gathered in the Maternity Hospital, through their raucous and bawdy behaviour, commit a sacrilege against the women birthing new life upstairs. The novel holds these mothers aloft as sacred symbols of fertility, like the oxen of the sun god Helios" (Hastings). In this sense, just like Odysseus' crewmates who sinned by killing the sacred oxen of the sun god, the group of Irish men in Joyce's epic also commit blasphemy against a sacred symbol, only this time the sacrilege is not committed against a god but against a woman, Mrs. Purefoy, who represents the life-affirming sacredness of procreation and motherhood.

In *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. employs several secondary female characters to trigger Helen's empathy and to subvert the androcentric narrative of the Homeric myth. Among them, the author mostly focuses on Clytaemnestra, Iphigeneia, Polyxena, Chryseis, Briseis, Deidamia, and Hecuba to foreground the diachronic repression of female subjectivity in patriarchal western tradition. Helen recurrently reflects on her sister Clytaemnestra, "shadow of us all" (71), and her tragic story, being "slain by her own son" (72), as she wonders in grief: "do I myself invent / this tale of my sister's fate?" (72) Similarly, she contemplates Iphigeneia's unjust treatment, sacrificed by her father Agamemnon for the purposes of patriarchal war, and relates her to the Trojan princess Polyxena "that Achilles desired . . . and the ghost of Achilles / demanded her sacrifice" (179). Paris' intervention helps Helen remember the story of his sister's sacrifice: "remember Polyxena, golden by the altar, / remember Pyrrhus, his son slew her; / where did she wander? / O golden sister, / are you still subjugated? enchanted?" (227) In addition, through Theseus' meditative interference Helen recalls the stories of Chryseis, Briseis, and Achilles' deserted wife Deidamia who, like Polyxena and Iphigeneia, "were all sacrificed in one way or another" (180), being mistreated by the heroes of the Trojan War: "name them, / Briseis, Chryseis, Polyxena; name again / Deidamia, the king's daughter, / he married in Scyros; / did any of them matter? / did they count at all, / or were they mere members of a chorus / in a drama that had but one other player?" (250) Furthermore, Hecuba's mourning for the loss of her children—Hector, Paris, and Polyxena—reflects Thetis' mourning for her deceased son Achilles, an image that

highlights once again how the life-affirming nature of motherhood contradicts “the lure of war” (296) and overcomes its polarizations. H.D. utilizes the examples of all these female characters to expose the patriarchal stereotypes behind their conception, and to condemn the continuous instrumentalization of victimized women by androcentric myth and patriarchal culture, as it is vividly reflected in the poem’s recurring line: “there was always another and another and another” (227).

2.5 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I explored the reconstruction of the female figure as it takes place in the two modernist epics. By centering on the central female characters, I argued that, in contrast to the restricted roles of their mythical counterparts who were “both defined by others” (Holmberg 33), both female protagonists are given specific attributes that redefine them, and a distinct, personal voice in each text, distinguishing in this sense the female perspective from the androcentric line of thought and reinstating woman’s repressed subjectivity. Molly differentiates from her mythological counterpart in three ways: she is not a housewife but an emancipated modern woman with a professional career as an opera singer, she enjoys a free love life, and has a distinctive female voice that does not align with patriarchal order, as she questions male hegemony, she contemplates woman’s self-determination, and she explicitly conveys her sexual desires. On the other hand, H.D.’s Helen challenges the male-generated narrative of the Homeric myth by becoming the speaker of her own story and by searching for a new identity. Moreover, by associating her protagonist with the healing elements of memory, empathy, and motherhood, H.D. manages to reinforce the concept of feminine rebirth in her revisionist epic, and to subvert the objectification of the mythical female character. Finally, an additional look on several secondary female characters was provided to demonstrate how their depiction further empowers the female perspective in the modern epic and contradicts the stereotypical image of women in traditional androcentric myth.

Notes

¹ For an introductory look on Molly Bloom see Patrick Hastings, *Ulysses Guide*, Episode 18: Penelope. <http://www.ulyssesguide.com/18-penelope>

² According to Maragopoulos, Joyce's conception of an adulterous Molly probably derives from post-Homeric tradition and a version of the story where Penelope had promiscuous affairs with the suitors giving birth to the ancient God Pan, explaining in this sense the 'earthly' attributes that her modern counterpart is symbolically associated with in Joyce's schema (see Aris Maragopoulos, *Ulysses: Οδηγός Ανάγνωσης*, p. 431).

³ For more details see chapter 1, pp. 7-9.

⁴ Maragopoulos points out that Molly is convinced her unfaithfulness is justified by her husband's own faults in the marriage, while she also contemplates their deceased infant son and the way his tragic death affected their relationship (see Aris Maragopoulos, *Ulysses: Οδηγός Ανάγνωσης*, p. 430).

⁵ For more on the subject see Patrick Hastings, *Ulysses Guide*, Episode 4: Calypso. <http://www.ulyssesguide.com/4-calypso>

⁶ See Penelope's crafty plan to delay the suitors' attempts to marry her by weaving and unweaving the shroud for her father-in-law Laertes, or challenging the suitors with the contest of the stringing of Odysseus' bow, both strategies that resemble Odysseus' wittiness.

⁷ See Aris Maragopoulos, *Ulysses: Οδηγός Ανάγνωσης*, pp. 436-438.

⁸ See Joyce's schema in Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce's Ulysses*, p. 38, or in Patrick Hastings, *Ulysses Guide*, *Ulysses Schema*. <http://www.ulyssesguide.com/schema>

⁹ Holmberg defines subjectivity as "a character's position within a narrative," in the sense of being either a passive position or an active one (See Ingrid E. Holmberg, "Euripides' *Helen*: Most Noble and Most Chaste," p. 21).

¹⁰ DuPlessis argues that Helen's understanding of herself being the writing lets her discover her own identity since it "encapsulates the situation of women writers who begin to review and reinterpret the culturally sanctioned stories that contain them. Helen

is at once the old story that must be displaced and the hidden story that must be recovered” (“Romantic Thralldom in H.D.” 196).

¹¹ See subchapter 2.2, p. 22.

¹² Also see how other male heroes trigger Helen’s empathy in chapter 1, pp. 14-15.

¹³ See chapter 1, pp. 10-11.

¹⁴ See Liana Sakelliou, et al, *Εισαγωγή στην Τριλογία της Η.Δ.*, pp. 60-61.

¹⁵ For more details see Patrick Hastings, *Ulysses Guide*, Episode 13: Nausicaa.

<http://www.ulyssesguide.com/13-nausicaa>

¹⁶ See Aris Maragopoulos, *Ulysses: Οδηγός Ανάγνωσης*, p. 294.

3. SUBVERTING THE PATRIARCHAL NARRATIVE THROUGH MODERNIST LANGUAGE

3.1 Introduction

Apart from deconstructing and redefining the roles of male and female characters in relation to their Homeric counterparts, each author deploys language in a specific style that enables the subversion of traditional patriarchal myth. Joyce's experimental stream of consciousness sets the ground for the dismissal of the androcentric heroic narrative of the Homeric myth by delving into the personal thoughts and emotions of different characters throughout the course of the story. Instead of presenting only a single, 'objective' narrative voice, the novel permits variant layers of subjectivity to emerge, as the author employs the medium of interior monologue to develop a new form of interaction between the characters. Therefore, by displaying a diversity of different perspectives, this method ultimately challenges the monolithic androcentric viewpoint of traditional myth and it re-establishes the previously disregarded female subjectivity. On the other hand, H.D.'s revisionist use of myth allows the feminist author to utilize the epic format and the archetypal nature of mythological characters so that she can recreate Helen's tale in her own terms, in a conscious attempt to revise its language and to question traditional gender stereotypes. Both modernist texts refashion not only the main structure but also the language of the Homeric narrative to 'make it new.'

In this chapter, I explore how the distinctive literary style that each author uses challenges the element of male heroism and reinstates the female voice in both texts. By making use of relevant critical arguments about Joyce's stream of consciousness and H.D.'s revisionist mythmaking, I aim to demonstrate that the linguistic revision that takes place in both epics manages to subvert the patriarchal stereotypes of the Homeric myth by exposing the flawed masculinity of the male characters and by empowering the female perspective within the story. A brief juxtaposition of the two literary styles is also offered to draw wider conclusions about the similarities and differences of the two texts in terms of their response to male heroism and female subjectivity, followed by the chapter's concluding remarks.

3.2 Deployment of Language in *Ulysses*

It may not be too far-fetched to say that *Ulysses*' "true protagonist is neither Mr. Bloom nor Stephen [nor Molly] but the language" (Gilbert 76). Joyce's deconstructive, experimental writing style seems to assume a specific role that evolves as the story progresses, functioning as the medium that allows the characters to reflect on their own ideas, desires, and frustrations. As a technique, the stream of consciousness is employed by the author to imitate the thought process of the human mind, and its variant interpretations, introducing a variety of different voices throughout the epic. In this sense, Joyce's technique reinforces the notion of subjectivity, as Kuehn explains:

The artist who adopts the stream-of-consciousness technique is obliged to remove himself from the narrative, to eschew the prerogative of the omniscient narrator to comment directly upon the events and characters he renders. In addition, in order to insure the authenticity of this illusion of "authorless" narration, he must be scrupulously faithful to each individual consciousness to whom he surrenders the narrative—he must, in all honesty, record the pettiness and dirtiness of the human mind as well as its subtlety and decency. (210)

Opposite to Homer's epic, where the omniscient, 'objective' narrator follows and aligns with the male hero's quest—Odysseus' and Telemachus' parallel stories and attempts to restore patriarchal order—, Joyce capitalizes on the technique of interior monologue to introduce polyphony and diversity, allowing the reader to follow the characters even during their most private contemplations, and to find out not only what they think about each other, but also how they feel about themselves; this inner monologue technique often triggers a character's self-criticism, or it reflects specific ideas and personal complexes that contrast the androcentric narrative of the source myth. The density of Joyce's text facilitates such developments, as it enables the constant flow of thoughts in a rapid rhythm and an impulsive manner.

An indicative example of how the element of male heroism is challenged through the author's distinctive writing style is Stephen's meditative walk along Sandymount Strand in the 'Proteus' episode. Written entirely in the form of interior monologue from a male perspective (with only occasional interventions of a third-person narrator), the episode makes use of the Protean theme of physical

metamorphosis to describe the young character's continuous shifts of thought. As Hastings argues, "in 'Proteus,' Stephen constantly changes his focus and his attitude, shifting between intellectual playfulness and bitter despair, modulating between contemplation, imagination, and memory."¹ Among the young man's reflections, the memory of his mother seems to dominate his thoughts throughout this episode, highlighting the absence of the maternal figure in his life: "Mother dying come home father . . . a tide westering, moon drawn, in her wake . . . Bridebed, childbed, bed of death . . . pale vampire . . . mouth to her mouth's kiss . . . his lips lipped and mouthed fleshless lips of air: mouth to her womb. Oomb, allwombing tomb" (Joyce 39, 44). The way Stephen's monologue conflates exterior stimuli (the sea, the tide) and interior stimuli (his mother's passing and his memories of her) forms a symbolic association between the image of the sea and the element of motherhood, as Friedman insightfully points out:

As Stephen wanders on Sandycove in the third episode ('Proteus'), he borders the sea, the maternal body. The sight of a drowned dog reminds him of a drowned man who is like a projection of himself, a man drowned in the snotgreen sea of a great sweet mother. In Stephen's Protean thoughts, the womb/tomb of the 'unspeached' maternal body calls him to kiss—forever fusing love and death, desire and loathing, in a mother-son knot that bonds and binds. ("(Self)Censorship" 52)

Interestingly, the symbolic connection between the sea and the mother is an image also encountered in H.D.'s epic where Achilles's mother, the sea Goddess Thetis, represents the healing aspect of motherhood.

In a similar manner in subsequent chapters, by manipulating language Joyce textualizes certain thoughts, emotions, or plot developments that directly or implicitly challenge the androcentric narrative of the Homeric epic: in 'Sirens' the musicality of the text emphasizes Mr. Bloom's internal distress about his wife's imminent infidelity and his realization that he may be the last of his race;² in 'Nausicaa' half of the episode is written in the style of a Victorian romance novel, containing a "first person access to Gerty's thoughts" (Hastings);³ in 'Oxen of the Sun' the author employs the technique of embryonic development to capture the evolutionary course of language in English Literature and to highlight the central theme of the episode, the sacredness of mothers giving birth.⁴ However, the most radical example of how *Ulysses'* language

deconstructs the male hero is the 'Circe' episode which, "written in the form of a hallucinatory play or film-script, reveals the phantasmagorical fears and fantasies besetting Bloom's subconscious self" (Mullin). The author builds upon the logic of the stream of consciousness technique but ostensibly abandons it, changing the text's format to externalize the protagonist's subconscious or unconscious traumas and fears. As Joseph Boone stresses, "to represent these unconscious and subconscious processes . . . Joyce must resort to a radically different narrative technique. Hence the shift, in 'Circe,' from third-person narration, with its intermittent internal monologues, to the genre of dramatic script" (194). Yet, Joyce employs the structure of dramatic script but incorporates the main logic of the stream of consciousness technique into it, depicting Mr. Bloom's interior struggles as external experiences, blending reality with hallucination, truth with imagination. Throughout this episode, Bloom's masculinity is often ridiculed and debunked, an image that contrasts the virile heroic attributes that defined his Homeric counterpart.

Finally, the linguistic construction of Molly's monologue which concludes the story functions in a redemptive manner for Penelope's modern counterpart. By delivering an unfiltered, unpunctuated, uninterrupted female monologue which is "fluidly organized and freely associative" (Hastings), the author directly opposes the repression of female subjectivity in the traditional Homeric narrative, and he methodically reinstates the female voice in his modern epic. Unlike the previous implementations of the stream of consciousness technique in the novel, in the final episode the intermediary role of the third-person narrator has been completely abolished, leaving only the unfiltered flow of the female character's thoughts. In addition, Joyce's writing style deliberately attempts to imitate female language;⁵ as Boone assesses, Joyce offers "a convincing mimesis of the thoughts and erotic reveries coursing through [Molly's] mind as she drifts toward sleep" (206). What further differentiates Molly's monologue from previous applications of the technique is the absence of punctuation and an even looser syntax, which can lead to the impression that female expression is rather simplistic and shallow in comparison. However, instead of rejecting the simplicity and straight-forwardness of Molly's monologue on the pretence of its lack of a more austere, intellectual form in the standards of Mr. Bloom's and Stephen's interior monologues, one can assess this particular choice on the basis of a deliberate opposition to patriarchal culture: if the organized formal language is a

product of patriarchal authority, then the effacement of its grammatical and syntactical rules represents woman's defiance of the androcentric linguistic norms and, by extension, of the rules of patriarchy.⁶ In this sense, through the unrestricted nature of Molly's monologue, Joyce proposes the renewal of female speech and celebrates the free, fluid, and vivacious voice of a modern woman.

3.3 Deployment of Language in *Helen in Egypt*

In *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. employs the epic format to recreate Helen's myth and to rewrite its language in her own revisionist terms. However, instead of simplistically replicating the established norms of the epic genre, the modernist author "self-consciously reformulate[s] epic conventions to suit [her] female vision and voice" (Friedman, "Gender and Genre Anxiety" 203). H.D.'s transcendental re-enactment of Helen's story updates the form and language of epic narrative, introducing a distinctive feminine discourse that contrasts the androcentric associations of the source myth. As Raffaella Baccolini argues, the modernist poet "breaks all barriers, revises the epic genre, but also revises and rescues Helen's figure from tradition" (150). H.D. makes use of both lyrics and prose, as every section of the epic consists of free-verse stanzas that come "with prose sections preceding and discussing the lyrics" (Baccolini 159). This combination of lyricism and prose enables the author to build upon the technique of precise, accurate imagery which defined her poetic writing style throughout her career, while taking advantage of narrative patterns taken from the modernist novel, as Friedman explains:

Her narrative technique in *Helen in Egypt* borrows more from the modernist prose she was reading and writing . . . she retained the language of her lyric—particularly the concentrated, image-centered poetic discourse of Imagism. But she set her Imagist craft within a narrative context based in the modernist novel. ("Gender and Genre Anxiety" 215)

Capitalizing on this stylistic approach, H.D. sets the ground for the renewal of the epic genre's language, forming two different layers of narrative: a concise, elliptical one in prose that introduces each section's general framework, and a lyrical one that develops the plot through the visual or emotional perspective of the characters involved.⁷

In order to rewrite the old narrative's language and erase its patriarchal stereotypes, H.D. turns to the revisionist use of myth. By "choosing a subject and a theme that are not only of enduring interest but also exceptionally well suited to her means of expression" (Cohen 75-76), the modernist poet utilizes the archetypal foundations of Helen's story to highlight the diachronic repression of female subjectivity not only in myth and literature but in social culture in general. As Julie Goodspeed-Chadwick emphasizes, "in keeping with a feminist poetics, H.D. revisits the Helen story in order to dismantle our expectations of what we know about gender and the myths that undergird our understanding of cultural expectations of femininity, sexuality, and female subjectivity" (208-209). The revisionist use of myth enables the author to build upon a culturally established framework to address contemporary concerns, as Ostriker eloquently notes:

Whenever a poet employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet is using myth, and the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible. (72)

The established image of Helen in cultural memory as "the universal [female] subject-victim" (Goodspeed-Chadwick 214) allows H.D. to employ the mythical character's paradigm in a conscious attempt to expose our stereotypical perception of femininity, as well as to "mold, reshape, and form perspectives that counter or supplement existing narratives about Helen and female subjectivity in modernist lyric or epic poetry" (Goodspeed-Chadwick 214). The process of transforming the old patriarchal myth into an epic narrative poem conceived and presented from a woman's perspective becomes a therapeutic creative act; as Ostriker points out, "since the core of revisionist mythmaking for women poets lies in the challenge to and correction of gender stereotypes embodied in myth, revisionism in its simplest form consists of hit-and-run attacks on familiar images and the social and literary conventions supporting them" (73-74).

In this revisionist discourse in H.D.'s epic, the female voice is placed in the center of the narrative, not detached or distanced from the story's events but an active, primary force within the linguistic construct of the poem. In this sense, the author subverts the androcentric language of the established myth and reinstates the female

speech “by moving woman from the symbolic margins of the epic to its very center of action” (Friedman, “Gender and Genre Anxiety” 217).⁸ This development engages the reader in a reworking of Helen’s story from her own point of view and through her own emotional involvement:

I fight my way through the crowd,
 but the gates are barred;
 . . . I am an enemy in a beleaguered city;
 I find my way to the Tower,
 to the Tower-stairs,
 do I run? do I fly?
 . . . I would leap from the Walls,
 but a sentry snatches my sleeve,
 dragging me back—what curse
 . . . I stood at the stair-head,
 the famous spiral-stair,
 and heard their shouting
 . . . how did they force the gate?
 how did they fire the Towers?
 that was nothing to me
 who had waited the endless years,
 was it seven years?
 was it a day? (H.D. 243, 245)

By employing this technique, H.D. manages to rewrite epic language in female terms but she also succeeds in incorporating her own feminist vision in the text without running the risk of seeming too provocative yet conveying her message. In other words, the author capitalizes on the resourceful ability to use Helen’s voice in the context of recreating the old myth so that she can disguise her own feminist agenda behind the female character’s words in the poem.

In addition, the frequent use of interrogative language throughout the epic challenges the long-established patriarchal mythical superstitions and implicitly suggests an alternate reading of the events or the characters involved in them; the poet invests on asking questions rather than offering the same old answers: “Was Troy lost for a kiss, / or a run of notes on a lyre? / . . . who set the scene? / . . . was Helen daemon

or goddess? / . . . is she a slave or a queen? / . . . could a woman ever / know what the heroes felt, / what spurred them to war and battle, / what fire charged them with fever?" (H.D. 239, 240, 242, 304). Finally, the heroine's attempts to redefine her victimized identity by deciphering the hieroglyphs, whose "pictorial representation . . . seems direct and universal" (Cohen 79), reflects H.D.'s own creative intentions to reinstate the female voice by renewing epic language. As Goodspeed-Chadwick argues, "there is a kind of beauty or celebration in releasing Helen from the position of known entity and transferring the qualities of a hieroglyph, a riddle, or an unreadable, abstract symbol to her" (216). Ultimately, the author's linguistic recreation of Helen's myth revises the language of the epic genre and "provides us with a narrative that stages a feminist intervention in literary discursive formulations about Helen and traditional femininity" (Goodspeed-Chadwick 220).

3.4 A Brief Juxtaposition in Non-Patriarchal Terms

The distinct literary styles which characterize the two modernist texts present certain similarities and differences in the way they challenge male heroism and they redefine female subjectivity. A brief comparative examination reveals several fruitful points in this particular discourse. Since both texts are founded on the principle of utilizing the archetypal dynamics of myth to construct a retelling of the Homeric stories in modern terms, their fundamental similarity is that they are both inspired by and based upon mythological frameworks, confirming in this sense "the continued functioning of mythic archetypes and of their relation to modern society and to the whole of human history" (Levitt 133). However, Joyce sets his narrative in the modern world in the beginning of the twentieth century, while H.D. reengages the reader in Helen's myth in an attempt to reformulate and rewrite it in subversive terms; the former makes use of the parallel connections between archetypal myth and contemporary life (in a narrative set in the modern framework), and the latter revises the mythological framework of Helen's story to disguise her own messages behind it. Despite the differences in content and language, the way each text manages to refashion the Homeric myth structurally and linguistically ultimately questions the dominant patriarchal associations of the ancient epics. As it has been argued above, Joyce's stream of consciousness introduces

a variety of distinct, individual perspectives throughout the course of the novel, and, most importantly, it exposes the psyche of these characters which on several occasions contrasts and challenges the androcentric heroic elements in Homer's narrative. Similarly, H.D.'s revisionist mythmaking triggers an imaginative, alternative, reassessing view of the myths surrounding Helen's character by situating a woman in the center of storytelling and by including multiple voices in the text. As Ostriker stresses, in H.D.'s epic "[t]he most significant large-scale technique is the use of multiple intertwined voices within [a] highly composed extensive structure . . . there is the alternating prose and verse of *Helen in Egypt*, with occasional interludes when one of Helen's lovers speaks, or she imagines him speaking" (88). Both writing styles promote the diversity of voices in each storyline, allowing the reader to contemplate and reflect on the lives and the identities of male and female characters in equal terms.

In contrast to the repressed state of female subjectivity in the Homeric context, the female perspective is highlighted and defended in both modernist epics: Joyce chooses to emphatically conclude his story with Molly's unconventional torrent of thoughts and emotions, and H.D. redefines the female figure not only through the leading voice of her protagonist but also through the stories of other victimized mythical personas,⁹ since "the women 'characters' who exist in Helen's reflections and visions are the agents of change that lead her to abandon the guilt-ridden image of 'hated' Helen" (Friedman, "Gender and Genre Anxiety" 221). Yet, a substantial dissimilarity between them is that, while in H.D.'s epic the female point of view stands out as the principal voice of the story throughout the course of the poem, in *Ulysses* Molly's monologue represents a relatively small segment of the overall plot which is mostly shaped from Mr. Bloom's and Stephen's point of view. Nonetheless, this does not preclude implicit defences of women, such as Mr. Bloom's perceptive remark in response to the misogynist, racist views of the Citizen in the 'Cyclops' episode: "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" (Joyce 301).¹⁰ Similarly to how H.D. comments on the predicament of patriarchal war and of hostile, antagonistic masculinity in *Helen in Egypt*, Joyce also challenges traditional androcentric stereotypes by foregrounding love and empathy as the answer to the dangers of prevailing patriarchal culture that, instead of unifying, segregates and divides people. As Mahaffey argues, "[t]his is the definition of love that Joyce would

take with him when he turned to *Ulysses*: love is the careful creation and preservation of an artful, precarious balance between freedom and limits, generosity and principle, engagement and detachment, open-handedness and justice” (104). In H.D.’s epic, which “is first of all personal, one woman’s quest epitomizing the struggle of Everywoman,” these elements become even more pronounced as “[i]ts interior life comes to include and transcend the external historical world represented and inhabited by males” (Ostriker 82). The author prioritizes the female voice in order to reinstate the diachronically repressed female subjectivity, but simultaneously she does not reject the opposite gender—instead, she proposes compassion and empathy towards one another as an alternative to the predicament of polarization.

The fluidity of language is another common aspect of the two literary styles; in *Ulysses*, the text reflects the constant shifts of thought that take place into the mind of the main characters, while *Helen in Egypt*’s alternating prose and verse sections create a palimpsest of images and visions that change according to the stream of thoughts of the characters involved. In this sense, the flow of language mirrors in both cases the multi-layered identities of male and female subjects, differentiating from the static, patriarchal language of the Homeric myth which reproduces the dominant gender stereotypes of the ancient world. However, perhaps the most obvious difference between the two modernist texts is that Joyce’s writing style is largely based upon and defined by the element of parody, which is often employed “to demonstrate the inversion of mythic values in modern times” (Levitt 134). Inevitably, parody generates a somewhat ambiguous tone in the narrative, as it is not always clear who get mocked because of their erroneous standpoint, and who deliberately get mocked to trigger compassion in the mind of the reader. Still, it is safe to assume that “Joyce mainly employs parody in order to subvert widely accepted myths of the imperial, religious and patriarchal powers, and aspires to prove that all myths are questionable and replaceable rather than representing absolute truth” (Uzunoğlu 3). On the other hand, H.D. deconstructs patriarchal language and eliminates the mythological androcentric stereotypes through revision, by addressing the reader with direct questions, and by directly promoting her feminist and pacifist aesthetics. Overall, it can be argued that each modern epic rewrites the language of the Homeric myth in its own distinct style: Joyce debunks the established gender conventions of traditional myth, but he does not openly suggest an alternative to the androcentric heroic narrative of the latter—his

writing style is parodic, ironic, and widely deconstructive; H.D. on the other hand self-consciously delivers a profound, feminist retelling of Helen's myth in the sense of emphatically asking for the reader's active engagement in the matter.

3.5 Concluding Remarks

By exploring the stylistic associations between the two modernist epics, I attempted to demonstrate that, despite operating in different contexts, they both challenge the patriarchal preoccupations that dominate the narrative of the Homeric myth. Joyce's stream of consciousness encourages the diversity of voices in the text, eventually reflecting the fluctuating manifestations of human consciousness from the point of view of both genders. By delving into the personal musings of the central male characters, the author deconstructs the monolithic androcentric notions of traditional myth. At the same time, the uninterrupted flow of Molly's monologue and its uncommon linguistic framework emphasize the unrestricted nature of female speech, reinstating the female voice in the modern epic. H.D.'s revisionist mythmaking capitalizes on the archetypal foundations of Helen's myth to address the diachronic issue of repressed female subjectivity in social culture; in this respect, the author renews the language of the epic genre by employing both verse and prose, by presenting her story mainly from a woman's perspective, and by using rhetorical questions to implicitly suggest an alternate reading of the events surrounding Helen's tale. To define the basic similarities and differences of the two literary styles in terms of their common antithesis to male heroism and repressed female subjectivity, I argued that both authors employ the archetypal associations of myth, they both highlight and defend the female perspective, and they both engage the reader in an anti-patriarchal discourse through a fluid, freely associative text. Yet, what substantially differentiates them is that Joyce's writing style questions patriarchy in a parodic and deconstructive manner, while H.D. reformulates Helen's myth in a direct and conscious attempt to suggest an alternative to the androcentric narrative of the Homeric myth.

Notes

¹ For more on the subject see Patrick Hastings, *Ulysses Guide*, Episode 3: Proteus. <http://www.ulyssesguide.com/3-proteus>

² A representative example is the intensity and the fast pace of Mr. Bloom's interior monologue towards the end of the episode: "I too, last my race. Milly young student. Well, my fault perhaps. No son. Rudy. Too late now . . . Soon I am old" (Joyce 257).

³ See Patrick Hastings, *Ulysses Guide*, Episode 13: Nausicaa. <http://www.ulyssesguide.com/13-nausicaa>

⁴ See Joyce's schema in Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce's Ulysses*, p. 38, or in Patrick Hastings, *Ulysses Guide*, *Ulysses Schema*. <http://www.ulyssesguide.com/schema>

⁵ See Aris Maragopoulos, *Ulysses: Οδηγός Ανάγνωσης*, p. 446.

⁶ For more on the subject see Aris Maragopoulos, *Ulysses: Οδηγός Ανάγνωσης*, pp. 446-448.

⁷ The dual form of narrative also creates the impression of a constant dialogue between the old myth and the revised story, reflecting in a sense Twitchell-Waas' argument that "*Helen in Egypt* does not so much reject the Homeric narrative for a preferable alternative as it sets the two in dialogue" (466).

⁸ Also see prior reference in chapter 2, p. 23.

⁹ For more details see chapter 2, pp. 28-29.

¹⁰ Additionally, another example is Bloom's compassion for Mrs. Purefoy (see chapter 2, pp. 27-28).

CONCLUSION

James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Hilda Doolittle's *Helen in Egypt* reformulate epic conventions in modernist terms, ultimately subverting the androcentric heroic narrative of Homeric myth. By implementing structural and linguistic alterations that shake the patriarchal foundations of classical myth, each author revises the gender roles that defined the established framework of Homeric storytelling in antiquity and rewrites epic language in an innovative, distinctive, and subversive style. In *Ulysses*, the flawed masculinity of the two central male characters deconstructs the conventional image of the self-governed, virile, triumphant male hero. Stephen's personal crisis is largely built upon the absence of paternal guidance and the repression of motherhood which both recur in his mind on numerous occasions throughout the story. Meanwhile, Leopold Bloom remains a ghost-father, a ghost-husband, and a ghost-lover; his return to his 'Ithaca' does not bring a closure in the standards of Homer's tale, as patriarchal order is not restored at the end of Joyce's novel. In H.D.'s epic, the three main male characters contrast their Homeric predecessors in the sense that they are depicted as vulnerable, ambiguous individuals whose interaction with Helen challenges the undisputed, in Homeric terms, superiority of the male subject-hero and triggers the heroine's progressive self-awareness. On the other hand, the female protagonists of the two modernist epics are given dynamic roles and a distinct feminine voice that opposes the diachronic repression of female subjectivity in ancient myth and social culture in general. Through a freely associative language, both authors employ a variety of different voices in their narratives, a technique that creates polyphony and diversity in each text, ultimately exposing and subverting the patriarchal stereotypes of the old myths, since the reader has access to the point of view of both genders.

Despite the obvious thematic and linguistic differences, the two epics share certain interesting semiotic similarities; for instance, in both contexts, the sea is associated with the elements of memory and motherhood, as it invokes repressed memories of the maternal figure in both Stephen's case and Achilles' case. Additionally, apart from being the epicenter of H.D.'s revisionist poem, Helen's archetypal image is poignantly employed by Joyce on several occasions—mainly through explicit or implicit references made by secondary characters, as it has been

mentioned above—to expose the prejudiced, misogynist vocabulary that dominates the public sphere in western patriarchal society. It could be also argued that, even if they occur in completely different thematic frameworks and formats, the contemplations of the characters in the two modernist texts resemble each other in the sense that they both directly reproduce the internal thoughts and emotions of these characters; therefore, both authors seem to employ the technique of interior monologue, Joyce through experimental prose, and H.D. through revisionary lyricism. Lastly, the element of empathy is used in similar terms in the two epics to highlight the determination of the two protagonists—Leopold Bloom and Helen—to move past conventional gender roles: the way Bloom thinks about, understands, or shows compassion towards women contrasts the stereotypical image of the male hero from the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* whose attitude towards women was indifferent at best. Correspondingly, by making Helen empathize not only with female victims of patriarchal culture but with male heroes as well, H.D. overcomes the problem of polarization and re-establishes a feminist discourse on fundamentally subversive grounds.

The two modernist authors consciously opposed patriarchal norms both in their art and in their actual life. Joyce lived and had children with Nora Barnacle but remained unmarried for years by choice, while H.D. gave birth after an extramarital affair and explored her sexuality through relationships with both men and women. They also remained in self-exile for most of their lifetime, and they both passed away in Zurich, away from their respective homelands. Given the fact that both writers openly questioned widely accepted patriarchal conventions in their creative work, I believe that a parallel study of their grand-scale opuses in this context has been greatly overlooked. After all, it is not purely coincidental that both of them used the archetypal images and stories of Odysseus and Helen; by re-enacting their tales in modern terms, the two authors reflect on their own exiles, but they also aspire to highlight and correct diachronic social stereotypes. In this dissertation, I attempted to explore how both modernist texts respond to traditional mythological definitions of male heroism and female subjectivity. Overall, it can be assessed that, although their literary styles differ, both authors manage to challenge the male-centered narrative of the old myths and to reinstate the female voice in the modern epic, operating in a sense, just like their respective protagonists, on the opposite shore.

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Σύνοψη Διπλωματικής Εργασίας

Ο *Οδυσσέας* (1922) του James Joyce αποδομεί και αναπλάθει το Ομηρικό έπος κατά έναν τρόπο που αμφισβητεί τις καθιερωμένες συμβάσεις του παραδοσιακού μύθου· όπως αναφέρει η Katherine Mullin, «η ιδιοποίηση της κλασσικής παράδοσης από τον Joyce είναι ασαφής και ασεβής». Επιπλέον, το έργο του αμφισβητεί ανοιχτά την ανδροκεντρική ηρωική αφήγηση της αρχαίας Ομηρικής ιστορίας, αντικαθιστώντας την με μία μοντέρνα αφήγηση που σχολιάζει έμμεσα την καθιερωμένη πατριαρχική δυτική παράδοση, και που λαμβάνει υπόψη της τη θέση και την αυτοδιάθεση της γυναίκας στην σύγχρονη κοινωνία. Παρομοίως, η *Ελένη στην Αίγυπτο* (1961) της Hilda Doolittle αναθεωρεί έναν αρχαίο Ελληνικό μύθο «σε μια προσπάθεια να μεταμορφώσει τους παλιούς πατριαρχικούς μύθους σε νέες ερμηνείες θηλυκής ταυτότητας, θηλυκής ομιλίας, θηλυκής εμπειρίας, θηλυκού οράματος και θηλυκής αναζήτησης, οι οποίες είναι όλες αντιθετικές ως προς τους ανδροκεντρικούς μύθους του δυτικού κόσμου» (Nisa 6). Αμφότερα ανασυνθέτουν αρχαίους μύθους με νεωτερικούς όρους, εμπλέκοντας τελικά τον αναγνώστη σε έναν αναστοχασμό στην ανδρική ηγεμονία και τον καταπιεσμένο ρόλο των γυναικών στη μυθολογία και την ανθρώπινη κοινωνία εδώ και αιώνες.

Σε αυτή την διπλωματική εργασία, εξετάζω πώς τα δύο νεωτερικά κείμενα αμφισβητούν το κυρίαρχο στοιχείο του ανδρικού ηρωισμού που είναι ενσωματωμένο στους αρχικούς μύθους, και πώς ανασκευάζουν και αναπροσδιορίζουν τη γυναικεία φιγούρα σε αντιδιαστολή με τα παραδοσιακά πατριαρχικά στερεότυπα και τις μυθικές προκαταλήψεις. Συνεπώς, η έρευνά μου επικεντρώνεται σε δύο βασικούς άξονες: τη δομική αναθεώρηση κάθε μύθου με μη-πατριαρχικούς όρους, και τον τρόπο με τον οποίο οι δύο συγγραφείς μεταχειρίζονται την γλώσσα ώστε να ανατρέψουν τα στερεότυπα του φύλου και να αποκαταστήσουν τον ρόλο των δύο φύλων στο μοντέρνο έπος. Εστιάζω πρωτίστως στους κεντρικούς ανδρικούς χαρακτήρες των δύο ιστοριών (αφενός τον Στέφανο Δαίδαλο και τον Λεοπόλδο Μπλουμ, και αφετέρου τον Αχιλλέα, τον Πάρι, και τον Θησέα) για να επιχειρηματολογήσω πως και οι δύο συγγραφείς υπαινίσσονται την ανεπάρκεια του παραδοσιακού ανδρικού ηρωισμού. Ακολούθως, εξετάζω τους κεντρικούς γυναικείους χαρακτήρες (την Μόλλυ Μπλουμ και την Ελένη) ώστε να ακολουθήσω την κατασκευή εκ νέου της γυναικείας ταυτότητας και την εγκατάλειψη της ανδροκεντρικής αφήγησης. Μια επιπλέον ματιά σε έναν μικρό αριθμό

δευτερευόντων χαρακτήρων προσφέρεται επίσης στο τέλος των δύο πρώτων κεφαλαίων. Τέλος, παρέχεται μια σύγκριση των δύο λογοτεχνικών τεχνοτροπιών—του πειραματικού, αποδομητικού, και παρωδιακού ρεύματος της συνείδησης του Joyce, και της αναθεωρητικής μυθοποιίας της H.D.—προκειμένου να αναδείξω τις ομοιότητες και τις διαφορές ανάμεσα στα δύο νεωτερικά έπη σε ό,τι αφορά στη γυναικεία υποκειμενικότητα, την ευρηματική γλώσσα, και την εναλλακτική πρόταση κάθε συγγραφέα στην ανδροκεντρική ηρωική αφήγηση των πρωτότυπων μύθων.