

## The Wandering Odysseus\*

ANNE MACCARTHY

Declan Kiberd in his introduction to *Ulysses* claims that in the text there is a danger that "a tracing of the Homeric structure usurps the experience of reading the text." He quotes one critic's insistence that "the object of reading a book is not to reconstruct the *schema*, just as the aim in eating a dinner is not to reconstitute the recipe." Kiberd notes, nevertheless, how many have been given the "extra pleasure of guessing the mystery ingredients of a praised dish, and have ended with pleas for a copy of the formula to take away."<sup>1</sup> It could be tedious to draw unimaginative comparisons between Homer's work and Joyce yet there are some ingredients in Joyce's *Ulysses* which are Homeric. It would be interesting to try to identify a few, something which I am going to do in the Cyclops episode of Joyce's book.

In Homer's *Odyssey*, the Cyclops Polyphemus asks Odysseus his name. Odysseus replies "No-one."<sup>2</sup> When Odysseus puts out his one eye and he calls for help to the other cyclopes they ask him who is attacking him and he replies "No-one." Thus they do not come to his rescue and Odysseus can escape. In the Greek text, for Alfred Heubeck and Arie Hoekstra, it is a play on the pronunciation of his name, Odysseus, that helps him: 'Odysseus gives his names as *outis*, "No-one" (*ou tis*) and thus happens on a means to trick the Cyclops.' They continue that "the invention of this name . . . is explained by the subsequent course of events" especially in the scene when Polyphemus calls for help and says that "No-one" is attacking him. For them the name given is not as Konrat Ziegler supposes "a disguised form of Odysseus' real name."<sup>3</sup> Ziegler holds that the false name, by which Odysseus deceives Polyphemus, is not really a false name at all but a misunderstanding playing with the double meaning of the real names).<sup>4</sup> However, Victor Bérard comments that this passage in *The Odyssey*<sup>5</sup> contains a lot of wordplay, but not misunderstandings.<sup>6</sup> For Heubeck and Hoekstra, what Odysseus tells Polyphemus is not, as Stuart Gilbert writes, the negation contained in Odysseus' Greek form.<sup>7</sup> Ziegler and Gilbert maintain that he is disguising his identity through this ambiguity. Richard Ellmann holds that it is a pun when Odysseus says to Polyphemus that he is *outis*. Joyce, according to Ellmann, worked out his own etymology, *outis* + Zeus, the "divine nobody, at once unique and nondescript."<sup>8</sup> Gilbert holds that this is the correct etymology.<sup>9</sup> He also

\* I would like to thank Dr. Juan Casas Rigall of the Departamento de Literatura Española, Teoría de la Literatura y Lingüística General, University of Santiago de Compostela, for his helpful advice in the writing of this article. Without it this article would not have been possible.

notes that there is a curious characteristic in the last seven pages of the episode. All reference to Leopold Bloom by his name is carefully avoided.<sup>10</sup> The avoidance of naming Bloom is similar to the disguise Odysseus adopts to escape the Cyclops or the negation in his name. It is a denial of the most obvious indications of self, one's name. Joyce may not have believed Odysseus was only playing on words when he told Polyphemus that he was No-one but deliberately disguising his name, just as he later disguises himself with Cyclops' ram to escape from the cave.<sup>11</sup> Both disguises are voluntarily adopted. In addition the denial of identity is advantageous for Odysseus. I would suggest that this voluntarily denial of existence is important in the Cyclops episode of Joyce's book.

There are obvious parallels between the Wandering Jew and Odysseus: both are wanderers, both are solitary (Odysseus at certain moments only), both are victims in one way or another, one voluntarily seeks annihilation and death, the other deliberately calls himself "Nobody." Both seek liberty thus, the Jew from the tediousness of existence and Odysseus a way to escape from divine anger. In addition, Ahasuerus is odious to all humanity because of his refusal to help Christ on the way to Calvary. Pierre Grimal gives another manner of interpreting the name, Odysseus. In Book XIX, lines 405-412 of *The Odyssey*, Odysseus's grandfather, Autolycus, tells his daughter that he would name her child "the one hated by many" as he himself, Autolycus, was hated by a lot of people. So the name Odysseus is like the Greek for "to be hated."<sup>12</sup> In fact Joyce would have been aware of these similarities between Odysseus and the Wandering Jew. He believed in Bérard's theories about the Semitic origins of *The Odyssey*. In addition, Timothy Martin speaks of Joyce's interest in the Flying Dutchman and that some of his favourite music by Wagner was from the opera of the same name. He comments on the fact that Joyce owned and annotated the first volume of Wagner's *Prose Works*. In "A Communication to My Friends," according to him, "Joyce would have read of the association in Wagner's mind between the Dutchman and the Wandering Jew" and of "the relationship of both figures to Odysseus."<sup>13</sup> Ellmann writes that the Wandering Jew was in Joyce's mind in his "Irish" Ulysses: "so was the idea of the oldest people wandering in exile century after century and still maintaining, in spite of oppression, an identity."<sup>14</sup> (However, the Wandering Jew does not want to maintain an identity as such. He has been cursed with existence until the Last Judgement because he refused to help Jesus and give him a chance to rest on the way to the crucifixion). Ellmann mentions, as support for his claim that the Wandering Jew was in Joyce's mind when creating the "Irish Ulysses," the presence in his library at Trieste of Eugène Sue's *Le juif errant*, Hermann Heijermans' *Ahasuer* and Mark Twain's *The New Pilgrim's Progress*.

This denial of self and deliberate seeking of nonentity and non-being may be seen, paradoxically, as "affirmations of the spirit," to quote Joyce's words on the nineteenth-century writer, James Clarence Mangan, even though they involve a negation of a particular existence.<sup>15</sup> They are found in Mangan's work and, according to Ellmann, Joyce had a copy of C. P. Meehan's anthology of Mangan's prose and

poetry, *Essays in Prose and Verse*, in which there is a translation of Schubart's "The Wandering Jew." Mangan translated two different versions of the Wandering Jew from German. The first, in 1837, was based on Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart's "Der ewige Jude" translated as "The Wandering Jew." The second in 1849, is from August Wilhelm Schlegel's "Die Warnung," given the title "The Everlasting Jew." Mangan was aware of August Wilhelm Schlegel's poem when translating the first as his note to it makes clear when he rightly holds that the "narrative of the circumstances differs from Schubart's, and, we believe, is the popular one."<sup>16</sup> However, Schubart's poem was the best-known version of the Wandering Jew theme and was the most influential in Mangan's time. As George Anderson reminds us: "the theme hammered at throughout the poem is the fact that Ahasuerus constantly seeks death and does not find it. Nowhere before has this theme sounded so intensely as in Schubart's lines."<sup>17</sup> Mangan gives a very faithful translation of the poem, as he himself admits, saying it is "a *literal* translation" although there are some eccentricities such as the italics the poet uses for "a few passages in which the sublimity of the entire conception appears to us to be marred by the unconscious admixture of the ludicrous."<sup>18</sup>

Shelley read Schubart's "Der ewige Jude" and used a literal version in the notes to his "Queen Mab." Yet we are given a clue to the fact that it was in all likelihood Mangan's version which Joyce would have had in mind when we look at the following evidence. In one part of Mangan's translation of Schubart's poem the Jew exclaims that "I plunged myself into Mount Aetna's crater/And bellowed with the Cyclops ten long moons/My agony-howl, and with my sighs made swarthy/The sulphur furnace — ha! Through ten long moons!/And in a lava-torrent Aetna vomited/Me back, half-choked with ashes — and I lived!"<sup>19</sup> In Schubart's poem what Mangan calls "Cyclops" are actually "Riesen" that is giants (319).<sup>20</sup> Shelley in the literal translation of Schubart's poem in his notes to "Queen Mab" also uses the term "giants."<sup>21</sup> Mangan, in an otherwise faithful rendering of the German, (I have just mentioned that he himself claims it to be quite literal and I too affirm the truth of this claim) opts for the eccentric translation of "Riesen."<sup>22</sup> It is not out of the question that Joyce had Mangan's translation of the Wandering Jew in mind in his creation of the Cyclops episode in order to enrich his ingredients taken from Book IX of Homer's *Odyssey*. In fact, it is especially relevant to recall that the area where the Cyclops lived is Sicily and that in Mangan's version of Schubart's poem, Ahasuerus falls into Mt. Etna where he "bellowed with the Cyclops ten long moons." Another interesting fact is that Joyce had Meehan's anthology of Mangan's prose and poetry in his possession since 1902, as the book Ellmann mentions was signed by him then. It is not at all extraordinary to suggest that Mangan's version of the Wandering Jew may have been influential in his fusing of features of Ahasuerus with those of Odysseus in Bloom many years later.

As we have seen, Schubart's version of the Wandering Jew in "Der ewige Jude" is looking for death but cannot die because he must wait until the Day of the Last

Judgement. Mangan translates this aspect very faithfully. The Jew in his many attempts to find death runs into forest fires, is present in battles, at the fall of Rome, tigers and lions cannot kill him. After one effort to find eternal rest he cries "And Being's shaft of flame transpierced me afresh!"<sup>23</sup> Being is what annihilates and destroys him and not death. He voluntarily seeks extinction. I think it may not be far-fetched to suggest that Joyce endows his "Irish" Ulysses with some of the aspects he imagined to be part of Mangan himself. In his first essay on Mangan Joyce asserts that "Mangan has been a stranger in his country, a rare and unsympathetic figure in the streets, where he is seen going forward alone like one who does penance for some ancient sin" (CW76). It is possible that Joyce was thinking of the Wandering Jew when writing this, as he too does penance for an "ancient sin." Like Bloom, Mangan is a stranger in his own country. We see in the Cyclops episode how Bloom affirms his Irish nationality when asked by the citizen: "What is your nation," "Ireland, says Bloom. I was born here. Ireland" (U430). Yet he is not accepted as Irish because he is a Jew. Although he says that Ireland is his country he also proclaims his Jewishness in this episode (U431-432).

There is evidence in *Ulysses* of Joyce's mixing of the figure of the Wandering Jew with the identification of Bloom with Odysseus. In the Cyclops episode the citizen says that Bloom is "a wolf in sheep's clothing," "Virag from Hungary! Ahasuerus I call him. Cursed by God" (U439). As I have said, in *The Odyssey* Odysseus and his men escape from Polyphemus' cave disguised by his sheep. Odysseus is a wolf as his physical and nominative disguise are weapons used against Polyphemus. It is implied by the Citizen that Bloom is a "wolf" because he partakes in the endemic shiftiness of his race in hiding his name. So it is significant that the Citizen next speaks of Bloom's real name "Virag." The change of name is like a disguise too. The citizen seems to let fall that even if Bloom changes his name he cannot change his race, he is, like Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, cursed by God. Bloom has some things in common with Ahasuerus and, from the point of view of this essay, one of the most interesting is their voluntary denial of identity in varying degrees: one in his adoption of a more Anglo-Saxon sounding name and the other, Ahasuerus, in his wish for extinction. In fact Gilbert says that from the Semite point of view not having a name is the same as non-existence.<sup>24</sup> Bloom's father in abandoning his original name is in a way denying his existence as a Jew in the same way as Ahasuerus seeks death to escape being the Wandering Jew.

There is a further interesting point in this avoidance of existence: the notion that a name is a weapon. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Book IX, Odysseus tells Polyphemus, the Cyclops, that he is "No-one," so voluntarily denying his identity as a means of escaping from the Cyclops. This denial of identity, as Richard Ellmann remarks, is an indication of the obsession shared by Homer and Joyce "with naming and not naming." He adds that for both Joyce and Homer a name is a "weapon, a brand, an alarm."<sup>25</sup> Ellmann's strange choice of vocabulary is uncanny, as we are reminded

once more of Mangan's translation from the German version of Schubart of the Wandering Jew when the Jew declares that "And Being's shaft of flame transpierced me afresh!" A name is an indication of a particular identity, of existence as that particular person. So the Jew wants to end his existence as the everlasting wanderer. He wants to escape the prison of being Ahasuerus, the one who is cursed with living forever as the same person (the monotony of living for hundreds of years is called, in Mangan's translation, "the yawning monster," that is "Sameness").<sup>26</sup> Mangan too was obsessed by naming or, to be precise, not naming, in his lifelong use of pseudonyms, in his avoidance of a particular identity. Referring to Mangan's "My Bugle, and how I Blow it," David Lloyd has the following to say on the pseudonym he uses for it, "The Man in the Cloak":

The personal identity of the writer is *in* the cloak, not masked by it; to lose the cloak is to cease to be an "ego," a "personal pronoun of the singular number." Identity becomes disguise, and simultaneously elicits and deflects the gaze of the other, which would seek to identify the appearance with the authentic figure of man which should underlie it.<sup>27</sup>

Again this is another aspect of the Wandering Jew in which we find a comparison with Odysseus. The latter escapes from the Cyclops' cave denying his name and opts for the freedom afforded by being Nobody. Bloom too denies his identity as a Jew and continues with the name Bloom instead of his real name, as we have already seen. The avoidance of identity, i.e., existence as a certain person identified with a proper name, is a weapon, a way of defending oneself. It is a survival tactic although this appears to be a contradiction. The Jew wants to avoid an identity which has become a curse for him and Mangan throughout his work refuses and fears himself. In Mangan's work it can be seen in two prose works in the anthology in Joyce's Trieste library, "A Treatise on a Pair of Tongs" and in the essay just referred to, "My Bugle, and how I Blow it," but it is a constant throughout the prose and poetry. This remarkable aspect of the writer is seen in his obsession with metempsychosis. Metempsychosis, the belief that the soul passes to another living creature after death, is both the refusal of being limited to one particular existence and the affirmation of the existence of the spirit. It is a theme which recurs in *Ulysses*. It is revealing to use Bloom's definition of it when explaining the meaning of metempsychosis to Molly: "That we live after death" (U78). A reticence about identity is not a negation of existence, of life, just existence in one particular form. This is probably why Joyce in his essay on Mangan writes that "the time is come wherein a man of timid courage seizes the keys of hell and of death, and flings them far out into the abyss, proclaiming the praise of life, which the abiding splendour of truth may sanctify, and of death, the most beautiful form of life" (CW83). Odysseus voluntarily calls himself "No-one" because it is a way to obtain freedom. Similarly, Mangan looks for different identities, never wanting to be confined to one, escaping the limitations of existence, defending himself from the identities that are imposed on him by others. The Wandering Jew

wants to escape the monotony of his existence as Ahasuerus, trying to kill himself. In Mangan's translation of Schubart's poem the Jew is offered eternal life, a liberation from his monotonous existence, when an angel tells him at the end: "Sleep, Ahasuerus, now! For God doth not incense Himself for ever."<sup>28</sup> The last word in *Ulysses* is an affirmation. Being No-one is to attain a grade of liberty and future possibilities denied to those confined to being a somebody, just as the last word of *Ulysses* "yes" points to an undefined future after one finishes reading it.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Declan Kiberd, Introduction. *Ulysses* by James Joyce (London: Penguin Books, 1992) xxiv. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*. (Book IX: lines 366-67), in ed. Samuel Butler, *The Iliad of Homer and the Odyssey Rendered into English Prose by Samuel Butler* (Chicago and London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952).

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Heubeck and Arie Hoekstra, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey* vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 33. Butler gives an ingenious translation of Odysseus' reply to the Cyclops: "you ask me my name and I will tell it you . . . my name is Noman; this is what my father and mother and my friends have always called me," Butler, ed. 233.

<sup>4</sup> Konrat Ziegler, "Odysseus --- Utuse --- Utis." *Gymnasium* 49 (1962 396-398) 397.

<sup>5</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey* (Book IX, lines 366-414) in Samuel Butler, ed.

<sup>6</sup> Victor Bérard, *L'Odyssee Poésie Homérique* vol 2 (Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres" 1946) 44-45.

<sup>7</sup> Stuart Gilbert, *El "Ulises" de James Joyce* (Madrid: Siglo XXI de España Editores Editores, S. A., 1971) 289.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Ellmann, *Consciousness of Joyce* (London: Faber & Faber, 1977) 13.

<sup>9</sup> Gilbert 289. Pierre Grimal notes that Odysseus was born on a day when the rain came by surprise so that Anticlea, his mother, could not continue her journey. As a consequence, the hero was born on Mount Nérito. This has its origin in wordplay on the name Odysseus which was interpreted as a fragment of a Greek phrase meaning, "Zeus rained on the road." *Diccionario de Mitología Griega y Romana*. 1951. (Barcelona, Buenos Aires and México: Ediciones Paidós, 1965) 528.

<sup>10</sup> Gilbert 293.

<sup>11</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey* (Book IX, lines 430-435) in Samuel Butler, ed.

<sup>12</sup> Grimal 528. Another interpretation of the name in Book XIX, lines 405-412 could be the similarity between the name Odysseus and the verb to be angry (*odyssthai*).

<sup>13</sup> Timothy P. Martin, "Joyce, Wagner, and the Wandering Jew," *Comparative Literature* 42.1 ([1990] 49-72) 56. Joyce also had the score of *The Flying Dutchman* in Trieste, Ellmann 132.

<sup>14</sup> Ellmann 34. George Anderson does not see Bloom as Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, simply seeing him as a Jew who wanders, but without having insulted Christ, and he has not been cursed. *The Legend of the Wandering Jew* (Hanover, NH: Brown University Press, 1965) 391. He makes a point to be cautious but he is perhaps being too prosaic and not taking into account the imagination of Joyce.

<sup>15</sup> James Joyce, "James Clarence Mangan," first published in *St. Stephen's* 1.6 (May 1902) 116-118. Reprinted in eds. Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann, *Critical Writings of James Joyce* (London: Faber & Faber, 1959) 83. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Chuto, et al., eds., *The Collected Works of James Clarence Mangan: Poems 1818-1837* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996) 419.

<sup>17</sup> George Anderson. 172.

<sup>18</sup> Chuto, et al., eds. 419.

<sup>19</sup> C. P. Meehan, ed., *Essays in Prose and Verse by J. Clarence Mangan 1884*. (Dublin: James Duffy and Co., Ltd., 1906) 271. I quote from Meehan's anthology as it was with certainty available to Joyce "The Wandering Jew. [From the German of Schubart.]" Meehan 269-275.

<sup>20</sup> "Der ewige Jude Eine lyrische Rhapsodie" In Christian Friedrich Schubart, *Schubarts Werke in einem Band*. (Aufbau-Verlag: Berlin und Weimar, 1988) 318-321. In the original the giants that Mangan translated as "Cyclops" are mentioned in the following: "Da brüllt ich mit den Riesen zehn Monden lang" (Schubart 319).

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Hutchinson, ed. Notes to "Queen Mab." *Shelley: Poetical Works* (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1905) 819. It is Shelley's literal translation of what he calls a "fragment," the translation of "part of some German work" that he bought "dirty and torn, some years ago, in Lincoln's-Inn Fields." His literal translation is the following: "I leaped into Etna's flaming abyss, and roared with the giants for ten long months" (819). In *The Poems of Shelley*, ed. Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest. Vol. 1: 1814-1817. (London and New York: Longman, 1989) 40. The editors state that this dirty and torn fragment carried a translation of Schubart's "Der ewige Jude."

<sup>22</sup> I would like to thank Prof. Maria Gabriel for her comments and accurate translation of Schubart's "Der ewige Jude" which was vital in helping me to come to some conclusions on Mangan's translation from German, a language of which my knowledge is limited.

<sup>23</sup> Meehan 271.

<sup>24</sup> Gilbert 298.

<sup>25</sup> Ellmann, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Meehan 274.

<sup>27</sup> David Lloyd, *Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 196.

<sup>28</sup> Meehan 275.