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Joyce, Campbell's Dark Glass and a Tourney of Critiques**

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At caelum certe patet; ibimus illac —Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VIII, 186

Abstract Archetypal criticism has fallen out of fashion, perhaps because of its association with the highly structuralist approach of Northrop Frye. However it does have something to offer the critic. In this paper, James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is explored from the perspective of myth, and this approach compared and contrasted with critiques of writers employing other approaches. From a re-evaluation of archetypal criticism taking into account post-modern developments, the paper explores the presence of mythic patterns in Joyce's work, and how they relate to the aesthetic theory presented therein. Before moving on to comparisons with psychoanalytical, feminist, new historicist, reader-response and deconstructionist readings of the text, the paper considers the damage done to the intellectual standing of archetypal criticism by Joseph Campbell, whose brushing aside of difference in a desire to unify human myth systems undermines so much of the 'archaeological' value of what he unearthed.

Key words : Archetypal criticism, James Joyce, Joseph Campbell, post-modernism

Literary criticism is mostly concerned with finding patterns. Yet the particular forms of patterns that we search for seem to be dictated by the fashions of the age. One day we look for patterns displaying the peculiarities of the author; the next, the place of the work in history. The post-modern theories which swept over the Western academic world in the latter half of the twentieth century looked for patterns in a work akin to cracks on an ancient building: signs of contradiction and collapse. Such theories direct us to 'a radical undecidability at the heart of meaning or value' (Wolfreys 19).

The denial of the 'Grand Narrative' is a valuable enterprise, not least if it represents a struggle against a repetition of the great conflicts committed in the name of one or another -ism, conflicts which claimed so many lives in the twentieth century. But we should not let this turn us away from patterns. Humanity is a pattern-making species. We make sense of our surroundings using patterns, and while we may be deluded in imagining that those patterns have any real existence outside of our own understanding, they have an

undeniable, and important, existence within our psyches. The term ‘myth’ is often used to describe such patterns, especially where they are claimed to be shared by a group of people, or, indeed, by all of humanity. We should not, therefore, be surprised at the existence of a form of criticism based on the concept of myth. This form of criticism is usually referred to as ‘archetypal criticism’, and was championed by Northrop Frye in the third section of his *Anatomy of Criticism*. Frye, it has to be said, was attempting to construct a Grand Narrative of criticism in his book, and it may be this, more than any inherent weakness in his ideas, that led to his style of criticism falling out of favor. Nevertheless, in an age when we are constantly exhorted to recycle, it is surely valuable to look at archetypal criticism, to reappraise, and to compare with some other pattern-making methods. To do so, it will be useful to choose an object of criticism, and what better object than one which addresses the very issues of aesthetic theory with which criticism is so often concerned?

So let us take a mythic leap into James Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and see what patterns we find. Motifs rush up to meet us from before the very first line of the book. The epigraph refers to protagonist Stephen’s mythical namesake Daedalus, referring to his decision to escape imprisonment by King Minos of Crete by means of the one route Minos does not control: the air. Minos rules the land and the sea, but Daedalus identifies a third way, turns his mind to ‘arts unknown’ and ‘changes nature’. So, we are led to expect from the beginning, will Stephen. Yet Daedalus’s cleverness is not sufficient to avert disaster, and his son Icarus, in a display of hubris, flies too close to the sun, falls, and perishes beneath the waves. Thus we are primed for Stephen’s faltering attempts at flight, and from the first we are aware that triumph may not be complete, that tragedy may attend the escape.

The invention of human flight in the service of escape was not Daedalus’s only claim to fame, however. He was also the designer of the Labyrinth, in which was imprisoned the fearsome bull-headed Minotaur, progeny of a union between Minos’s Queen Pasiphaë and a replicant bull devised, inevitably, by Daedalus.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is, as many have pointed out, a labyrinth itself. This should not surprise us, as it, too, was made by Daedalus (being the story of Stephen Dedalus/James Joyce). It is a labyrinth that contains other labyrinths such as that of Dublin, ‘a maze of narrow and dirty streets’ (Joyce 95). More than this, it is an irregular labyrinth, with passages of different sizes and textures. At the start, it is simple, childlike, but by the end its plurabillituous interfogulations strain our unraveling instincts and point towards Joyce’s linguistic escapes in *Ulysses* and *Finnegan’s Wake*.

Once we have passed through its mazy byways, however, the structure of the labyrinth becomes clear. It consists of five concentric rings, each of which we must traverse in order to proceed to the next ring. The transition from one ring to the next is immediately preceded by what Joyce calls an ‘epiphany’. This term

is one that has been appropriated by Joseph Campbell, a modern Daedalus of myth criticism, to refer to the state of 'aesthetic arrest' achieved in an artistic climax (*Power of Myth* 220). In doing so, he is actually appropriating Stephen Dedalus's rendition of the aesthetic theory of Thomas Aquinas; it is by no means clear that Joyce himself subscribed to this theory unequivocally. Such an 'aesthetic arrest' implies that the ultimate goal of art is a moment of stasis, of timelessness. This attitude fits perfectly with an understanding of myth as something with two components: one eternal and inexpressible, the other dynamic and displaced (Hughes 6). The eternal 'truth' of the myth lies in the eternal component; it finds expression in the dynamic component.

Joseph Campbell is to literary criticism what Stephen Hawking is to physics: a unifier. Both are looking for a Grand Unified Field Theory that will enable the entire universe of discourse to be understood. Campbell's desire for unity is nowhere more evident than in his impassioned attack on Émile Durkheim ('Bios' 16). Another term from Joyce appropriated by Joseph Campbell is the *monomyth*, which may be seen as a provisional attempt by Campbell to define, if not a Grand Unified Field Theory, then at least a Unified Field Theory. It is a narrative structure based on the quest of a 'Hero With a Thousand Faces', which Campbell argues can be discerned, albeit in displaced form, in the majority of narratives, whether literary or mythic. 'Now if we wish to see this central myth as a pattern of meaning also, we have to start with the workings of the subconscious where the epiphany originates, in other words in the dream' (Frye, 'The Archetypes of Literature' 107). The stream of consciousness technique used by Joyce in *Portrait* is a device expressly designed to tap, or at least simulate, the subconscious, the origin of the epiphany.

The five-ringed labyrinth of *Portrait* conforms to the pattern of the monomyth. Better still, like a fractal pattern, one can discern within it smaller versions of the overall pattern. One can thus understand Campbell's adoration for Joyce, along with that other highly structured user of myth, Thomas Mann, whose *Tonio Kröger* parallels *Portrait* in many ways. Each of the five rings constitutes a miniature monomyth (the pattern has been simplified, such that several elements in the monomyth are subsumed into each of three sections):

I. *Call*: commencement of consciousness as an individual; childish awareness of distinctions and hierarchies (red/green)

Night-sea journey: the school, tests and helpers. The 'battle' over Christmas dinner, the absence of justice.

Struggle and return: pandied by Dolan. Protest to rector. Return with the boon of justice.

II. *Call*: lure of romance, *Count of Monte Cristo*. Attraction to Emma.

Night-sea journey: deterioration of family, failure to meet Emma after play, visit to Cork

Struggle and return: acquisition of 'treasure' (exhibition money). Resolution of sexual frustration

through prostitute.

III. *Call*: summons to Retreat.

Night-sea journey: Hell and its torment.

Struggle and return: confession and repentance. Peace through absolution. Reconciliation with God through Communion.

IV. *Call*: religious life and discipline: priestly vocation.

Night-sea journey: interview with director. Choice between Law or Chaos, Conformity or Freedom, Religion or Art.

Struggle and return: chooses Art. Freedom through university. Reward of the vision of the crane-girl.

V. *Call*: aesthetic theory.

Night-sea journey: dissatisfaction with university, more sexual tension involving Emma

Struggle and return: flight to Paris, new life as 'artist'.

Several things become apparent in this structure. Firstly, because the narrative is divided into five separate cycles, which form part of a single cycle alluded to in the title (the progress of a young man towards the state of being an artist), we are directed to view the work as a cycle in a sequence. This is true even in the absence of knowledge of Stephen's reappearance in *Ulysses*. At the end of the story, our sense of completion is one that points forward to the next set of concentric rings.

Secondly, it is clear that although each of the five sections follows a romantic pattern, in which Stephen strives towards a goal, and ultimately achieves it (in an 'epiphany'), each begins with an ironic dismissal of the preceding victory. This is especially evident in the transition between I and II, where Stephen's classical romantic victory for truth, justice and the Roman way, presented in I in entirely romantic terms, is ironically dismissed near the start of II as no more than a joke.

The 'pointing beyond itself' implied by a cyclic structure, combined with the title of the work, and the ironic overthrow of each romantic victory, suggests that Joseph Campbell is mistaken in interpreting the work literally, and that Stephen's aesthetic theory is as subject to later ironic dismissal or modification (whether it appears in the work or not) as any other part of the story. It is evident that *Portrait* is presenting a set of dilemmas in the life of Stephen Dedalus. These dilemmas can be interpreted in many ways, depending on one's social and political biases and preferences. They certainly admit of feminist and psychoanalytic interpretations, in addition to the surface aesthetic dilemma between the ideal and the real.

The mistake Campbell appears to make might derive from an assumption that Joyce's conscious use of mythic forms will inevitably lead to the same meaning as the original myths. Thus Stephen's aesthetic theory must be 'true' and his final flight must be interpreted in terms of 'following his bliss', representing

an apotheosis of sorts. It is equally possible, however, to suggest that Joyce's deliberate ironic displacement of the myths he used alters their meaning. The idea that Joyce was at least partly involved in a process of 'remythologizing' has been taken up by some feminist critics, who have noted the way in which he modified certain mythic motifs (Scott).

Campbell was clearly a convert to Stephen Dedalus's aesthetic theory, and fully accepted his concept that the artistic epiphany was the moment of 'luminous silent stasis', when 'You see that it is that thing which it is and no other thing' (Joyce 185). The question presents itself, therefore, that when Campbell experienced such artistic epiphanies from literature, what was the thing which he was perceiving: was it the inexpressible mythic archetype, or was it the specific, displaced, expression of the mythic archetype? The impression given by his work is that it is the former. Yet surely it is meaningless to apply traditional Western philosophical concepts of logic, grounded as they are in language, to a realm which is by definition linguistically inexpressible?

Campbell approvingly quotes Ananda K. Coorasmay: "'Myth is the penultimate truth, of which all experience is the temporal reflection. The mythical narrative is of timeless and placeless validity, true nowhere and everywhere.'" (quoted 'Bios' 19). Philip Rahv attacks this notion of timelessness: 'For my part, what I perceive ... are not the workings of the mythic imagination but an aesthetic simulacrum of it, a learned illusion of timelessness.' (115).

It is evident that Campbell saw the use of myth as a form of psychological alchemy: a means of breaking down the barrier between subject and object (*Creative Mythology* 659). Thus his stress on a cyclical pattern by which the hero first suffers dissociation, and is later restored in some purified form to the world, can be understood. It is a belief in a psychological dimension of human experience which can only be attained in a timeless realm through the extinction of the individual ego. Here, we can see the origin of the objections of those such as Rahv who instead glorify the Individual, and the concept of historical progress: 'Individuality is in truth foreign to myth, which objectifies collective rather than personal experience. Its splendor is that of the original totality, the pristine unity of thought and action, word and deed' (114).

Campbell argued that to downplay mythic archetypes was to deny an essential component of our psychology. The modern world, in which the word 'myth' had become synonymous with 'falsehood', had already destroyed many of the rituals and other means by which this component was expressed. Campbell's solution was to advocate that you 'Follow your bliss', and in the rites of passage of the young Stephen Dedalus he saw a clear expression of this mythical progress, in one of the few areas in which myth still exists: art.

Whether or not Campbell was right to interpret *Portrait* quite as literally as he did, it is immediately

evident that the work operates according to a mythic structure, and that in performing an autobiographical fiction in such terms, Joyce was explicitly undertaking an attempt at universalizing the particular. That he should have been so lauded is surely testimony to his success in that venture.

The conscious use of myth in Joyce's work makes an archetypal approach of particular use in its criticism. Nowhere is this demonstrated more clearly than in the critical analyses presented in Kershner's edition of the text. All make use of myth to some extent in their analyses. It is instructive to examine the use to which they put it, and to compare approaches.

The acid test of a piece of criticism may perhaps be labeled the 'So what?' test. What does the criticism add to our understanding of the work or, for that matter, the world? In this respect it may be worth considering the above discussion of Campbell in new terms. In focusing on the archetype (the monomyth) itself rather than on the means of expression (the displacement), there is a danger of taking a *reductionist* view of a work. If this is the case, then at the end of the critique we have gained nothing but the confirmation of the ideas with which we started.

A similar accusation can potentially be leveled at psychoanalytic and feminist critiques. To go through *Portrait*, as does Sheldon Brivic, and explain how the work, from its overall structure, through its use of myth, and right down to individual words, is an enactment of the same Freudian developmental theories that we have heard so many times, is not something which enlarges our experience of the work, or our experience of the world. At best, it confirms the validity of Freud's analysis. At worst, it becomes a laughable game of innuendo in which a sexual meaning is ascribed to ever more 'innocent' words.

A feminist analysis which merely explained how the characters and events in the book were symptomatic of a patriarchal hierarchy would not add very much to our knowledge, and only generate pleasure in those who enjoy the restatement of what is already known. Luckily Suzette Henke is cannier than this, and it is instructive that she makes skilful use of both psychoanalytic and mythic analyses in order to open up the psychological struggle at the heart of the work from the female perspective. Myth has received considerable attention from some feminists, especially as it serves to illuminate the way in which a female, mother-goddess paradigm may have been supplanted by a patriarchal, solar approach, the influence of which is still felt in our society.

Another problem which psychoanalytic criticism shares with archetypal criticism is the ambiguity involved in the lack of discrimination between those symbols/archetypes which are consciously used by the author, and those which are unconscious. This is most evident in the question of exactly *who* is being analyzed in psychoanalytic criticism: the author, characters in the work, or the work itself (in some arcane, reified way). This is a problem which should be confronted by the archetypal critic.

Reader-response criticism also shares certain points of reference with archetypal criticism. Here,

attention is drawn to the 'gaps' in a work, suggesting that reading is an active process involving the creative resources of the reader. This is especially noticeable in a text as disjointed as *Portrait*. Such an analysis is entirely compatible with Frye's explication of narrative patterns. It is precisely because we have certain expectations about a text, derived from parts of the text that hint at archetypal patterns, that we are able to 'fill' the 'gaps'. In other words, the response of the reader is made possible by archetypes, and it is in part the process whereby the reader's constructions are challenged, modified and confirmed that leads to the satisfaction to be derived from a text.

Seen in this respect, archetypal criticism can be seen as complementary to reader-response criticism. It also fills the 'gap' identified in reader-response criticism by its critics: if the 'meaning' of a text is constructed actively by the reader, then why do so many texts have 'meanings' that are so widely accepted and agreed on? The answer is provided by archetypes, which are the mechanism by which the highly subjective nature of reader-response criticism can be linked to a more collective understanding of the human psyche.

Archetypal criticism can also co-exist to a certain extent with the New Historicism. Differences arise, however, in the latter's stress on history as a web of forces playing about the work, both without and within. It is a view of human psychology which focuses on interactions, relating them to specific external situations. Archetypal criticism is more likely to locate interactions in a more universal psychological discourse; the shadow of Jung hangs heavy over the field.

Finally, in deconstruction we might expect to find a bitter opponent of archetypal criticism. Since the project of deconstruction is to explode artificial polarities and unities, it would appear that Joseph Campbell is a sitting duck in the cross-hairs of Derrida's canon. It is therefore instructive that Cheryl Herr makes such extensive use of myth in her deconstruction of *Portrait*.

It is possible to reconcile the approaches in an unusual way. Certain branches of post-structuralism are interested in deconstructing the 'Self', that icon of Humanism, demonstrating that it is as fractured and self-contradictory as any literary text. Despite Philip Rahv's worries, there is a strong cheerleading movement for the Individual among archetypal critics, yet if the universality for which Campbell strove is fully accepted, with perhaps a leavening of non-Western religious belief (the Buddhist concept of the *skandhas*, for example), the archetypal approach can also shatter the sovereign Self. That, as they say, is a whole different story.

The use made of myth concepts by critics of other approaches demonstrates both the continued relevance of archetypal criticism (at least for works such as *Portrait*, with its conscious use of myth), and its capacity for co-existence. Whether it becomes nothing more than a tool to be used by critics of other persuasions, or perhaps dies only to be later resurrected in new form (like the historical approach), may

depend to an extent on critics' willingness to accept its highly structuralist precepts. Perhaps there is room for a radical shake-up of the approach incorporating deconstructionist and feminist concepts? Or even, to take that crucial step beyond post-modernism, critical realism (Tew).

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