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Final Essay
Bloom-Film adaptation of the romance *Ulysses*, by James Joyce, directed by Sean Walsh, 2003.

How many odysseys were there in Leopold Bloom, Molly Bloom, and Stephen Dedalus's lives on the course of an ordinary summer day in Dublin, precisely on June the 16[th]1904?

We will try to answer the question by comparing the film to Joyce's novel. As well as, by identifying the film and novel's intertextuality[1] with the Odyssey, the second epic of Homer. The Canadian author Linda Hutcheon sees intertextuality, which in summary is the connection of one text to other texts, as a method for analyzing the contemporary romance.

The dictionary defines odyssey as an extended adventurous wandering or an epic voyage, whose origin comes from the Greek mythology. Odyssey is the second epic of Homer, recounting the wanderings and adventures of Ithaca's king Odysseus, after the fall of Troy and his eventual return home. This cunning king was a leader of the Greeks in the Trojan War. His return home after the war was for ten years frustrated by the enmity of Poseidon, the Greek deity of the sea. Odysseus was translated into Latin as *Ulysses*, which is also the title of James Joyce's novel. Let us call Odysseus by its Latin name, Ulysses.

The epic tells that in Ulysses's absence, it was assumed that he had died. His wife, Penelope and son Telemachus must deal with a group of unruly suitors, who compete for Penelope's hand in marriage. Ulysses was to wander the sea for ten years, during which he would lose all his crew and would return home through the aid of others. The first four books of the *Odyssey* focus on Telemachus's journeys in search of news about his father, who had yet to return home. In Greek, Telemachus's name means far from the battle, perhaps reflecting his absence from the Trojan War. His journeys seeking information on his father's path gave way to the concept of telematics, today referred as a set of information services provided by a network of telecommunication.

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[1]The semiotic notion of intertextuality introduced by Julia Kristeva is associated primarily with *poststructuralist* theorists. Kristeva referred to texts in terms of two axes: a *horizontal axis* connecting the author and reader of a text, and a *vertical axis*, which connects the text to other texts. Uniting these two axes are shared codes: every text and every reading depends on prior codes (KRISTEVA 1980, *apud* CHANDLER 2014).

While waiting for the final return of her husband, Penelope devises various strategies to delay marrying one of the suitors. On Ulysses return disguised as an old beggar, he found out that Penelope had remained faithful. She had played many tricks to delay her suitors, one of which was to pretend to be weaving a burial shroud for Ulysses's old father Laertes and claiming that she would choose a suitor when she had finished.

The people of Ithaca did not realize that the errant beggar was Ulysses, except for his dog Argos, who dropped dead of joy over his master's homecoming (BEACH, 1959, p.43). Ulysses presented himself to Penelope. She was hesitant, but recognized him when he mentioned that he had made their bed from an olive tree still rooted to the ground. Due to her efforts to put off remarriage, Penelope is often seen as a symbol of connubial fidelity.

The most distinguished element of the Odyssey's text is its non-linear plot and the influence on events of choices made by women and serfs, besides the actions of the fighting men.

In 1922 James Joyce published *Ulysses*, which has remarkable intertextuality with the Odyssey. It is considered one of the most challenging and rewarding works of English literature[2]. It narrows its temporal focus on a single day as it expands its scope to follow three major characters – Stephen Dedalus, who can be identified with Telemachus, and with a young Joyce himself; Leopold Bloom, with Ulysses; and Molly Bloom, with Penelope. Stephen Dedalus was the main character of Joyce's previous novel, *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.* Sylvia Beach, however, who was *Ulysses's* first publisher, commented that there was good deal of Bloom in Joyce (BEACH, 1991, 43).

The novel changes style in every of its eighteen episodes. The narrative "wanders" as it refuses to remain obedient to the story. It takes the reader over the minds of the characters, over their stream of consciousness, which actually is the odyssey.

Bloom, the film adaptation of *Ulysses* by the Irish director Sean Walsh, 2003, is named after its main character, Leopold Bloom. This choice is full of symbolism. Bloom is a Jewish name. There are passages in the film showing the English and Irish anti-Semitism. Bloom also means blossom, come into flower, develop, and flourish. The opposite of deteriorating. Sometimes the characters seem to be blooming, as well as deteriorating. These contradictions are part of the film. It portrays what happens in the so-called ordinary people's extraordinary imagination.

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[2] See Ulysses Plot Summary, Rosenbach Library, https://www.rosenbach.org/ulysses-plot-summary, downloaded on May 14 2016.

Dublin also blooms as a beautiful city in the beginning of the 20th century. The characters wander downtown and through its surroundings in various periods of a day. The long summer twilight, common to regions that are very far from the Equator, is widely explored. Natural colors highlight the scenes and characters' mood, as well as their wandering through the seashore, through bucolic places, through monuments, towers, bridges, streams, and waterfalls. The soft sunlight shines on the city's sober architecture, on its streets, squares, and marketplaces. While crossing a monumental bridge dated 1821, Leopold Bloom daydreams of the good moments he had with his wife when he was 28 and she, 23. He thinks that his son Rudy's death at birth has created a barrier between himself and Molly. While wandering he helps a blind man crossing the street on which carriages move back and forth[3]. Nevertheless, the film looks contemporary. It approaches issues that seem quite familiar to us, such as the representation of anti-Semitism and the reference to foot-and-mouth disease, besides its vigorous, musical and modern language. At the end, after the film has faded to black for the final credits, we can see Bloom stepping out of 1904 into a crowded, present-day Dublin. It happens almost one hundred years later, since the production is dated 2003. There are no more carriages, but two-store-buses, cars, people dressed as today, except for Bloom himself. An invitation to a city that is still blooming.

Back to 1904. The story takes place ten years before the beginning of World War I. There are dialogues showing some English and Irish characters worried about Germany's domination over England. Notice that at this time the Jews were powerful and wealthy in Germany. The Holocaust would happen almost forty years later. The principal of the school where Stephen Dedalus used to work was very proud that Ireland did not easily accept Jews as immigrants. Due to his Jewish origin, a big eyepatch man insults Bloom at a pub. The customers of this unwelcome territory were radical nationalists. The fellow with the eyepatch is Polyphemus to Bloom's odyssey[4]

The film is faithful to Joyce's modernist spirit with the multiple narratives and voices: the everyday language, the fascination with universal themes such as birth, death, sex, masturbation, urination, and defecation. Its opening, however, does not point to Dedalus, or Telemachus, like in the novel. Under the sound of a soft background music, the camera focuses on the beautiful space around Bloom's house, under a long summer twilight, as if it were telling a story "once upon a time, in this house…" Then it approaches the interior of the house towards Molly's bedroom. Her famous

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[3] We found out that the film's director Sean Walsh has worked as ski instructor to the blind

[4] Odysseus could escape from the giant Polyphemus by giving him wine. Drunk and unwary, the giant didn't kill Odysseus

closing and climaxing soliloquy opens the film and frames the action. She is the opposite of Penelope. The spectator is introduced to an adulterous and nymphomaniac wife. Her soliloquy is concluded at the very last scene of the film, when she gets closer to Penelope, as a faithful wife waiting for her husband.

At the Martello Tower, on the shore of Dublin Bay, we get in touch with Stephen Dedalus. He has just come back from his studies in Paris. He shares lodgings with a medical irreverent student, Buck Mulligan. After breakfast, Mulligan asks Stephen to borrow some money and sets an appointment for them to meet at lunchtime. Stephen goes to the school where he teaches history. He is an idealistic young teacher. He feels uncomfortable that Ireland would always be under the British Empire or under the Roman Catholic Church. At his history class, he asks the students what the end of Pyrrhus was. Actually, Pyrrhus was the first king to be against the Roman Republic. The students do not understand his intentions and think Pyrrhus has to do with *pier*. The class took a different path. Nevertheless, we could read the keywords on the board: Pyrrhus, Tarentum, Asculum and Telemachus. In fact, in Joyce's novel, this first chapter is named after Ulysses's son in the Odyssey, Telemachus. In the film, the beginning of Stephen's day is not continuous. It is interchanged with scenes showing Leopold Bloom's first moments on that day.

In Joyce's book, the second part is called The Odyssey (The wanderings of Ulysses). In the film, we meet Ulysses himself in his modern manifestation as Leopold Bloom, an unheroic 38-year-old Dublin-born Jew who canvasses newspapers advertising for a living. We see him first at home and follow him on his domestic morning chores, buying himself a kidney at the butcher's, delivering to his wife breakfast in bed with the morning mail, including a note from her lover and impresario, with whom she would have a rendezvous at the house later in the day. We learn that Molly was also a singer. Bloom reads his 15-year-old daughter's letter. Memories on his daughter are depicted in fragments. Finally, he begins his long day wandering through the city on business, pleasure, respectful attendance at his friend Dignam's funeral, and the pursuit of not being at home when his wife's lover comes. Bloom's interaction with reality is always full of second thoughts, of fantasies and memories. His daydreams occur in fragments, as our daydreams also happen. His past is always present, showing him what he could have been, what it could have happened.

Stephen also daydreams under a different perspective. While walking along the beach, he thinks of his past, his family (especially of his dead mother) and the constant change and uncertainty of life. He knows he is seeking something, something that cannot be found in family life, in intellectual pursuits. He still does not know what that thing is. He sees in the movement of the ocean

and in his own urination that he is part of the cycle of life and death. He is not in good terms with his father, who is one of Bloom's friends. His family link is his sister, whom he meets in the course of the day. He has his own theories on Hamlet and Shakespeare. Stephen sees Shakespeare's work, containing such themes as usurpation, adultery and exile, as an art born from the anguish of impotence, as a reaction to the author's wife unfaithfulness.

Bloom continues his circuitous avoidance of home. He doesn't want to run into Boylan, his wife's lover, although there is a certain fascination with his rival. Wandering at the rocks of Sandymount Strand he is attracted to young Gerty MacDowell. He sits a few meters aside, in a way that he could watch her movements. They do not talk or touch each other. She notices his interest and seduces him by showing her legs and underwear. He masturbates and ejaculates. This scene is played in fragments, interchanged with a mass church service. Back to the streets, Bloom runs into Stephen and friends. They had been discussing and drinking. They got high. Bloom follows them. He associates Stephen with his dead son Rudy. Like the Greek Odyssey, one of the story's theme is the relationship between father and son in search of each other.

Bloom's daydreams become a hallucination. We have the impression of entering one of Fellini's movies. It becomes surrealistic. All the characters are part of his fantasies, even his old father. He interacts with each of his relations. They seem to be watching his flaws. They accuse him of different crimes. Women that he had chased, accuse him of sexual harassment. It seems that the images represent his sense of guilt. He goes through a trial, in which his late father is the judge. The irreverent Mulligan challenges his sexuality. He becomes a pregnant man. He seems to be in hell. Then, in his imagination, he becomes a king standing up and walking out of the toilette.

The intertextuality with the Greek Odyssey is always present. Ulysses should be unreachable and away from home for ten years. The author of the Odyssey took Ulysses out of a well-known world into a fantastic one. The highlight of Ulysses's magic trip, just like Bloom's, was a visit to hell. (CALVINO, 2007)

In Stephen's fantasies, there was also guilt. Although his mother had died of cancer, he felt guilty about her death. She appears like a ghost in his mind

Back to "reality", Bloom finds Stephen drunk, lying in the street. He looks after him. He asks Stephen why he had left his father's house. The young man answers: "to seek misfortune". Bloom suggests that he could go back home. It was past midnight when Bloom took Stephen to his own house and helped him recovering from binge drinking.

Stephen had already left the house, when Bloom went to the couple's bed where Molly was lying. The last chapter of Joyce's novel is named after Penelope. Molly continues the soliloquy of the opening scene. She reviews her childhood on Gibraltar, her marriage and family. She imagined she was seducing the young Stephen, or maybe it was just Bloom's fantasy. She gets closer to Penelope as she remembers knitting a baby coat while expecting her son. Finally, she accepts the man she married or the man he was when she married him.

We started with a question. Apparently, there were not many odysseys in the characters' lives on an ordinary weekday in Dublin. They did not leave the city. They followed their routine under the surveillance of a small and inquisitive community, who seemed to be aware of what was happening behind the curtains.

It is not easy to follow a non-linear stream of thoughts, but we tried to study the plot and characters under the perspective of Homer's epic. We took intertextuality as a method for analyzing this contemporary romance. The three main characters' minds were full of myths, ghosts, monsters, questions, doubt, and guilt. We can answer that the odysseys of their consciences were infinite, endless and countless. Just like our own minds.

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