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Canonical Heroes Redefined for Postmodern Readership

The “hero” has figured as an important archetypal construction throughout literary history that has evolved over centuries. Instead of tracing the evolution of the hero chronologically, this essay will present a postmodern reading of the hero in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Homer’s *Iliad* by rereading those texts through James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Through this retrospective reading, heroic construction comes to mean something different than it does to classicists or Romanticists. In his construction of Leopold Bloom as the everyman, modern hero, Joyce is unconcerned with physical strength, youth, honor, virtue, lineage, or glory. Rather, Joyce constructs Bloom as a hero with psychological and emotional depth, intellectual strength, and an identity in the domestic sphere; Bloom is constructed as Other from dominant culture and as a self-defined individual. This list of qualities, which implies that the hero is a man who functions in multiple, simultaneous roles, provides the definition of “hero” that will be utilized throughout this paper.

Of the three texts treated here, there is the least, if any, critical disagreement regarding the hero of *Ulysses*. Perhaps this critical agreement results from the certainty with which we read the hero of the novel’s classical antecedent; Odysseus is clearly the hero of the *Odyssey*. The critical consensus on Bloom as hero of *Ulysses* provides the

postmodern reader with a solid critical foundation on which to argue for Satan as hero of *Paradise Lost* and Hector as hero of the *Iliad* through Bloom's heroic construction.

The relevant critical and philosophical thought of Barthes, Said, and Nietzsche provides the theoretical framework to understand from the outset aspects of the three texts and their heroes from a specifically postmodern perspective. The analysis presented here seeks to discuss heroic construction without considering authorial intent that might be gleaned from authors' biographies or ideologies. Authorial intent cannot factor into this argument, as it utilizes a postmodern critical approach, relying on a retrospective reading of the poems through Joyce's novel. As such, this essay proposes, like poststructuralist critic Barthes:

It is language which speaks, not the author: to write is to reach, through a preexisting impersonality (never to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realistic novelist [or poet]), to reach that point where language alone acts, 'performs,' and not 'me'. (147)

It is perhaps a much easier proposition to read the *Iliad* in this Barthesian manner, as Homer's biography remains largely mysterious, and as such the poet's ideologies can hardly affect interpretation. However, it is now essential to dismiss Joyce's Nationalist politics and Stephen Dedalus as his personal analog in order to effectively utilize *Ulysses* as the basis of this argument; and likewise, perhaps even more so, it is essential to dismiss Milton's Puritan politics, his support of regicide, and his zealous Protestantism in order to read Satan as the primary heroic figure of *Paradise Lost*.

In addition to dismissing the authors' intents and biographies, understanding Said's concept of "Other" is paramount for this analysis, because the heroes' Otherness is

crucial to their heroic constructions. Though Said, of course, writes on the Orientalist discourse, his discussion is useful for defining “Other” as it will be used here. Said writes:

... the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment...Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or...taken over.
(Said 207)

At first, it might seem a stretch to argue that heroes of western canonical texts could possibly be treated or defined as such; however, through their religions and or nationalities, Bloom, Satan, and Hector each come to represent populations who are viewed as inferior and problematic within their societies.

The differing ways that *Paradise Lost* and *Ulysses* draw on Biblical and classical texts helps illuminate both the existence of Satan’s and Bloom’s Otherness and its importance to their respective heroic constructions. *Paradise Lost* is interested in telling a religious story and utilizes a formally classical structure in which to do so. Conversely, *Ulysses* is interested in re-imagining a classical hero in a more contemporary context, and then complicating him by creating him as Other through Judeo-Christian religion. Joyce inverts Milton’s approach to the classical epic, calling attention to Bloom’s Judaism in such a way that makes him inferior to and different from his peers. Therefore, Bloom requires that the postmodern reader examine the ways in which Satan and Hector are constructed as Other and persevere in spite of their Otherness. In contrast to Satan and Bloom, Hector’s Otherness does not manifest in religious difference, but rather through

the threat of colonization; as Hector represents the Trojans, he leads the group whom the Achaeans undoubtedly view as “problems to be solved...or taken over”. The importance of Bloom’s, Satan’s, and Hector’s self-determination in the face of their status as Other will become evident through extended discussion of their constructions.

Finally, while not a postmodern thinker, Nietzsche provides some useful discussion in *The Gay Science* (1882) regarding the emerging need for a new kind of man and a new kind of heroism. It is important to note here that Nietzsche’s book predates *Ulysses* (1921), suggesting that Joyce’s re-imagined hero is written with existential consideration; the very nature of the stream of consciousness prose style, not to mention Bloom’s primary psychological, emotional struggle supports this contention¹. Nietzsche writes, “For this age shall prepare the way for one yet higher, and it shall gather the strength which this higher age will need one day – this age which is to carry heroism into the pursuit of knowledge and *wage wars* for the sake of thoughts and their consequences” (127). While there is more to the construction of Bloom, Satan, and Hector, than the pursuit of knowledge, intellect is one of the heroic elements necessary for a postmodern understanding of the hero. Further, Nietzsche makes clear that leading into the 20th century, the nature of the heroic, what a reader looks for and values in a hero, is changing – or must change. As this paper moves through discussion of each text, it is imperative to acknowledge, now nearly 130 years later, that the hero has changed. Although Leopold Bloom on some level is constructed in the Odyssean tradition, as a modern hero, he also has many of the qualities anticipated by Nietzsche. Barthes, Said, and Nietzsche each

¹ See Erich Kahler, “The Transformations of Modern Fiction” for more on Nietzsche and stream of consciousness prose style
See Sam Slote, *Joyce’s Nietzschean Ethics* for a recent, book-length treatment of Joyce’s oeuvre

provide an important piece of the postmodern framework through which to view Bloom's heroic construction and subsequently Satan's and Hector's as well.

As a Modern epic text, *Ulysses* structurally deviates from its poetic predecessors; however, critics generally agree that the novel's Odysseus-analog, Leopold Bloom, is the everyman, modern hero of the novel. While Bloom and Odysseus share many classical heroic qualities, Bloom's early 20th century, Irish context insists on certain crucial differences between their constructions. Stanford sums up their similarities in generalizations; he writes that they share:

Courage in action, wisdom in council, eloquence and tact in negotiation, a willingness to serve the common good, boldness and adroitness in leadership, resourcefulness and endurance in trouble, a desire for adventure conflicting with a love of home, and an all-pervading cleverness and versatility. (127)

However, Odysseus's "action" differs significantly from Bloom's, as do many of the other parallels identified here. Stanford is not wrong per se, but Bloom's context requires a more nuanced reading of his heroic construction, especially in regard to his action, wisdom, cleverness, willingness to serve, and love of home. The discussion that follows parses these differences in an effort to illustrate how rereading Hector and Satan through Bloom's modern heroism casts them as the heroes of their epics.

The most fundamental similarity between Odysseus and Bloom is that they both undertake journeys to find family; their most fundamental difference is their attitude and behavior as they attempt to find and ultimately rediscover those families, particularly in

the treatment of their wives. This difference stems from Bloom's cultivated intellect, his empathy, and his kindness, which are notably more traditionally feminine qualities than are typically ascribed to a hero. Unlike Odysseus, Bloom is not a man of impulsive action; rather, he is an average middle class man living in Dublin with his unfaithful wife, Molly. Eleven years before the novel takes place, Molly and Bloom's son, Rudy, dies; this tragedy parallels Odysseus's Trojan war as the impetus of separation between man and family. Before Bloom leaves the house for the day, he reads a letter from his daughter Milly, which prompts recollections of his son. Bloom muses:

Fifteen yesterday...Her first birthday away from home. Separation.
Remember the summer morning she was born, running to knock up Mrs.
Thornton in Denzille street...Lots of babies she must have helped into the
world. She knew from the first Rudy wouldn't live. Well, God is good,
sir...He would be eleven now, if he had lived. (Joyce 66)

This recollection precipitates Bloom's metaphoric journey home to domestic stability, before he even sets out on his literal journey through Dublin. These lines are the first of many references to Rudy in the text, and they appear in the Calypso episode, which functions as the reader's introduction to Bloom and Molly (Blamires 22). As Bloom wanders through Dublin in the course of the novel, his thoughts return to Rudy and his death, a primary emotional struggle that Bloom must navigate in order to return domestic stability. Bloom's journey is precipitated by familial tragedy and centers on familial recovery, whereas Odysseus's journey is precipitated by war and concludes violently; these differences serve to highlight Bloom's role in the domestic sphere and a way in which Bloom's complicated love of home is more emotionally wrought than Odysseus's.

Much of the action in the novel is psychological as dictated by the stream of consciousness prose style; however, when the reader does have access to Bloom's actual, physical actions, many of them are domestic and caretaking in nature. Bloom's typically feminine qualities at first seem to undermine his construction as hero, because a hero is often understood as an archetype that is conflated with masculinity. This is one way in which Joyce constructs Bloom as Other. The first time Bloom appears in the text, he is "righting her breakfast things on the humpty tray"; "her" refers here to Molly (Joyce 55). Rather than entering the text with "rage" like Achilles or returning home from war like Odysseus, Bloom is bringing his wife breakfast in bed. This portrays him as a feminized, servile caretaker. In addition, some of his first errands of the day are for Molly, while she remains in bed. Bloom goes to the chemist to get lotion made for her, but he fails to remember the prescription and leaves with bar soap instead. As Bloom leaves the chemist's, Joyce writes, "He strolled out of the shop, the newspaper baton under his armpit, the coolwrapped soap in his left hand" (85). Blamires asserts that these items take on symbolic meaning: "Joyce's hero is now equipped with the shield as well as the sword of modern man" (33). The newspaper as a sword provides support for the contention that Bloom's heroic construction depends on his intellect. Further, the noteworthy attentiveness to his wife and the modern man's battle gear are not dissonant characterizations of heroic as they might appear; rather, they demonstrate different approaches to achieve the same ends, overcoming grief and guilt and finally being reunited with family.

Several critics identify guilt as one of Bloom's primary emotional obstacles that he must navigate in order to return home, both literally and metaphorically; therefore, this

guilt can be read as inextricably linked with his “love of home” (Stanford 127). Alter writes that Bloom “...is forced to wrestle with debilitating guilt over...betrayals: he is alienated from Molly; he has strayed from natural sexuality (including reproduction); and he has neglected his own art of ‘husbandry’” (405). Implicit here is a comparison of Bloom’s art to Stephen’s, as they are both failing to fully realize themselves as husband and artist-intellectual respectively. However, this guilt also prompts Bloom to compensate for the lack of sexual intimacy in his marriage by caring for Molly in ways that are traditionally feminine.

Bloom’s guilt over his estrangement from his wife is complicated by his version of infidelity. Bloom’s “verbal” relationship with Martha and his “visual” encounter with Gerty MacDowell affect his heroic construction (Blamires 143). Stanford discusses Bloom’s “eroticism and amorousness” as reaching “far beyond anything in the classical tradition” (131). He goes on to argue that there is not a direct parallel between Bloom’s interactions with these women and Odysseus’s liaisons with Circe and Calypso, because the latter two women are divine; Odysseus never cheats on Penelope with a mortal woman (Stanford 132). However, the divine does not play the same role in Bloom’s life as it does in Odysseus’s, because Bloom is an everyman, modern hero. Further, Bloom does not actually have sex with either Martha or Gerty. Blamires writes, “The disintegration represented in Bloom’s partial relationships with Molly, Martha, and Gerty seems to reflect a Joycean judgment on modern life” (143). These physically and emotionally partial relationships also aid in the construction of the modern hero, revealing Bloom’s conflicted, complicated feelings about home; additionally, they function metaphorically for the multiplicity of roles required of the modern hero.

These are not the only partial relationships in which Bloom engages; he also substitutes Stephen for Rudy as his Telemachus (son-figure). At first, this substitution causes bifurcation of attention and affection in Bloom, which contrasts with Odysseus's perceived singularity of purpose. For instance, at the end of the Circe episode, Stephen gets hit by a car; Bloom rushes to help him, and calls out "Rudy" (Joyce 609). This scene demonstrates "paternal longing" which is again a crucial aspect of Bloom's heroic construction (Blamires 196). In both of these familial relationships, Bloom experiences discontinuity that disturbs him. In this way, it is again apparent that his wandering is in large part a search for domestic unity.

The nonlinear, dialogic structure and the dream-like tone of the Circe episode mark it as separate from the rest of the novel; the style makes the reader feel as though she is, like Odysseus's men, under Circe's spell. While at once surreal and avant-garde, the Circe episode is perhaps the most explicit and raw expression of Bloom's guilt (Flynn 123). The fact that the episode takes the form of stage directions suggests a lack of control on Bloom's part. By this point in the novel Stephen is extremely intoxicated, but Bloom has had less to drink. Therefore, this lack of control in Bloom is as much metaphoric and emotional as it is a literal representation of an altered state. When Bloom enters this episode, he is confronted first by his father, Rudolph; he says, "Second halfcrown waste money today. I told you never to go with drunken goy ever" and "What you making down in this place? Have you no soul...Are you not my son Leopold, the grandson of Leopold? Are you not my dear son Leopold who left the house of his father and left the god of his fathers Abraham and Jacob?" (Joyce 437). This attack is followed by one from his mother, which contains Catholic religious allusion; she says, "O blessed

redeemer, what have they done to him...Sacred Heart of Mary, where were you at all, at all?" (Joyce 438). Molly then appears to taunt Bloom; she says, "Mrs. Marion from this out, my dear man, when you speak to me. (*Satirically.*) Has poor little hubby cold feet waiting so long?" (Joyce 439). Bloom continues to be put on a sort of moral trial by many people from his past and present; however, the three that open the episode indicate that Bloom feels like he has failed those closest to him throughout his life. Their accusations show that guilt affects the way that Bloom views home, coloring his love of it.

Catherine Flynn reads the Circe episode as not so much a reflection of Bloom's personal conception of home, but rather as economic and political commentary on Ireland (a homeland). She argues that the Circe episode is not simply "the manifestation of an individual unconscious or of a universal experience of sexuality but of a subjective space that is intimately bound up with an economic situation" (Flynn 123). It does not appear, however, that it must be one or the other; it can be, and arguably is, both individual and universal. Flynn provides a useful definition of "surrealism" to support her contention: "...A releasing of the utopian energies invested in the commodity by the collective. In surrealist texts and artworks, everyday objects appear uncanny and irrational, forcing viewers to question bourgeois conventions" (125). She focuses on Bloom's many "fantastic" outfit changes as evidence that this episode is a surrealist, economic and socio-political critique (Flynn 126). The classical and the modern hero are undoubtedly political figures, adding an additional layer of complexity to their constructions. In considering Flynn's argument, "home" takes on a second meaning: Ireland. Bloom's political interest and aspirations are crucial components of his heroic construction, which

are tied to his love of home(s) and his “willingness to serve” both his family and his country (Stanford 127). An important difference between Bloom’s and Odysseus’s political engagement also emerges here; Bloom is *willing* to serve politically in Ireland, but his community neither expects nor desires him to do so, whereas Odysseus’s status as king of Ithaca requires his political engagement and service to fellow Greek King, Menelaus. Therefore Bloom’s interest in politics develops as a result of free will and self-definition, while Odysseus’s is predetermined by his lineage and social status.

Bloom’s interest in Irish politics, demonstrated through musings on Charles Stewart Parnell, emphasizes intellect as a crucial component of his heroic construction and connects him to Stephen intellectually, even psychically. In terms of social class and profession, Bloom is an everyman, and so his political views, which are controversial, are another way in which he is portrayed as Other among his peers. Duffy writes, “Bolstering this myth of betrayal, Parnell represented vividly the type, in Irish political life, of the betrayed hero” (181). It stands to reason that both Stephen and Bloom are drawn to Parnell as a political figure, because both are able to personally identify with the betrayed hero archetype. Joyce cleverly connects Stephen’s lesson on Pyrrhus (who parallels Parnell) in the Nestor episode with the later, explicit references to Parnell, which take place in Bloom’s stream of consciousness (Duffy 186). As Parnell figures into Bloom’s stream of consciousness, Bloom clearly becomes an intellectual figure. This is evident in the Circe episode; John Howard Parnell, Charles Stewart Parnell’s brother and “ghost,” says, “Illustrious Bloom! Successor to my famous brother!” (Joyce 483). Bloom responds, “We thank you from our heart, John, for this right royal welcome to green Erin, the promised land of our common ancestors” (Joyce 483). Duffy argues, “Parnell, as an

actor in Bloom's subconscious, becomes a type for Bloom himself" (189). The very fact that Bloom's subconscious draws on Parnell's legacy shows active engagement with the Irish political climate; in this moment, Bloom fancies himself a powerful actor in the Irish War of Independence. His interest in Parnell and Irish politics intellectually connects him to Stephen and demonstrates an important aspect of heroic construction. His political engagement has implications for his love of Ireland as homeland and for his intellectual identity.

Bloom's use of the phrase "promised land" in the above quotation also provides one of many examples that indicate his Jewish heritage; Bloom's Jewish identity functions as a significant component of his heroic construction (Joyce 483). In addition, Joyce's characterization of Bloom as half Jewish in a Catholic country provides yet another way in which he renders Bloom as Other. However, the literary implications of this characterization are of equal importance in the discussion of heroic construction.

Alter writes:

What complicates Joyce's version of Ulysses and...produces a shift in thematic implications and tonalities of the figure as he represents him, is that he grafts onto the Homeric hero a cluster of allusions to that other set of Mediterranean texts that has been foundational for the Western tradition – the Hebrew Bible. (452)

Perhaps the most salient thematic shift that occurs as a result of both Bloom's Jewish, messianic characterization and his everyman status is a conflation of home and homeland. Odysseus is the king of Ithaca, and his identity as a man is not only religiously congruous with his birthplace, as Athena is the primary divine force that

guides him home, but also it is implicitly and fundamentally bound up in its politics. However, Bloom is religiously an outsider in his homeland (though not a practicing Jew) and emotionally isolated from his home. In this way, Bloom can neither rely on religious faith/figures nor on familial love in order to find his place in his country or his house; he can only rely on himself. As Bloom tries to navigate through this thematic conflation of home and homeland, the necessity of his individualism becomes apparent.

The conflation between home and homeland becomes evident in Alter's and Blamires's analyses of the scene in Barney Kiernan's pub (Cyclops episode). In the pub, Bloom faces a consistent barrage of criticism about his views on justice and persecution within the Irish national context. Bloom reveals his Jewish identity in discussion of "injustice" when he says, "And I belong to a race too...that is hated and persecuted. Also now. This very moment" (Joyce 332). Later in the conversation, the citizen says to Bloom, "That's the new Messiah for Ireland...Island of saints and sages!" (Joyce 337). Of this exchange, Alter writes, "Bloom as Messiah is a talker rather than doer, a preacher of truth to the gentiles (Hardly a Homeric role) who touchingly trips through confusions as he argues for the necessity to escape the terrible cycle of slaughter" (454). This analysis views the exchange as indicating a macro notion of homeland; Bloom becomes a messiah figure and is positioned again (even if ironically) as an Irish political figure. In contrast, Blamires writes, "...the Bloom-Messiah correspondence sticks...The light-hearted talk of Jewish fathers-to-be hoping for a messiah son reminds us that Leopold himself is in search of a son" (132). This reading presents a more individualized understanding of the messiah, actually superimposing the figure onto Stephen rather than presuming Bloom as Ireland's savior. Clearly Joyce draws from both the Homeric and

Biblical tradition to construct Bloom as hero, and in doing so he again problematizes the notion of home for which Bloom is searching.

In addition to Bloom's journey, the most obvious similarity to the *Odyssey* in Joyce's novel is the importance of the father-son relationship. In the Ithaca episode, the substitution of Stephen for Rudy is completed, even if it is ephemeral, with significant implications for Bloom finding home and completing his heroic journey. Throughout the novel, Stephen is signified as the artist-intellectual and Bloom as the everyman, family man; however, as noted above, their connection is intellectual as much as it is familial. Joyce writes:

Of what did the duumvirate deliberate during their itinerary? Music, literature, Ireland, Dublin, Paris, friendship, woman, prostitution, diet, the influence of gaslight...the Roman catholic church, ecclesiastical celibacy, the Irish nation, Jesuit education, careers, the study of medicine... (666)

The use of the word "duumvirate" in connection with this catalogue of their conversations suggests that these men are equal not in military strength, but in intellectual strength.

Joyce also catalogues points on which Bloom and Stephen agree and disagree; these are not only the typical points which a father and son might debate, but points that are markedly intellectual. For instance:

Bloom dissented tacitly from Stephen's views on the eternal affirmation on the spirit of man in literature. Bloom assented covertly to Stephen's rectification of the anachronism involved in assigning the date of the conversion of the Irish nation to Christianity from druidism... (Joyce 666)

The intellectual connection that Stephen makes with Bloom allows Stephen to assume the role of son-figure, which in turn allows Bloom to nearly complete his heroic journey home to familial unity. While Stephen “Promptly, inexplicably, with amicability, gratefully...decline[s]” Bloom’s “proposal of asylum,” Bloom brings Stephen into his home at 7 Eccles Street, feeds him, tries to wash him, and gives him money, all clearly care-giving acts (Joyce 695). These interactions leave Bloom feeling paternally fulfilled and introspective as his thoughts shift to Molly. Blamires asserts that when Stephen leaves the house, “The scene is set for the Ascension into Heaven” (225). Blamires provides evidence that this scene comes as a result of making Stephen into a Christ-figure; however, the “Ascension into Heaven” may also metaphorically signify that Bloom is ready to return to a sexual relationship with Molly.

Several critics discuss the divergences in Joyce’s Ithaca episode from the scene that unfolds when Odysseus returns home with Telemachus; the lack of violence in Bloom’s return is in keeping with his emotional temperament, his domestic, feminized nature, and his intellectual, cultural cultivation. A mass slaughter of Boylan and Molly’s past lovers would not make narrative or contextual sense here; however, this appears as one of the ways in which Bloom’s “action” is significantly different than Odysseus’s “action” (Stanford 127). Sicari argues the Ithaca episode, summarizing as it does the events of the day, functions structurally as allegory, instructing readers on how to read the text that precedes it. This argument is rooted in the biblical exegesis, which “occurs within the Bible itself, when Saint Paul explains how a Christian is to read certain events in Hebrew Scriptures” (Sicari 265). Sicari’s thesis depends on the contention that the naturalist prose style had reached its limit for Joyce, explaining the need for a shift in

narrative mode. However, the exegesis reading of the Ithaca episode also emphasizes that Bloom's heroism does not include violence or military conquest.

The importance of the biblical tradition to Bloom's heroic construction notwithstanding, Blamires offers a more useful insight into how the events in the Ithaca episode effectively substitute for Odysseus's slaughter of the suitors. He writes:

Ithaca then gives us a new revelation; environment and experience transfigured in the light of an intellectual clarity bred of the communion between Stephen-Christ and Everyman-Bloom. It is a twentieth-century revelation...All is illuminated in the light of a humour, a clarity, a charity, and above all an omniscience, which give...a climactic vision. (Blamires 214)

These two critical arguments are not mutually exclusive, as Sicari asserts that the omniscient narrator of this episode is contributing to a literary, intellectual transfiguration as well. However, Blamires' argument confirms the climactic, albeit nonviolent nature of the event within its modern, twentieth century context. Further, Bloom's generally genial nature and his desire for national peace as expressed in conversation with the citizen insist on Bloom peacefully returning home.

Bloom's heroic construction is extremely complex, as it draws on both the Homeric and Biblical traditions, while simultaneously privileging characteristics that are not typically privileged by those same traditions; among them are Bloom's domesticity, his emotional disposition, his intellectual strength, his identity as Other, and his individualism. Through his literal and psychological journeys in the text, Bloom confronts many of his vulnerabilities, weaknesses, failures, and desires. As he wrestles

with his personal guilt, his complicated understanding of home and love of home are protracted to reflect the complicated notion of nation and the political unrest in Ireland; as such, his heroic construction becomes implicitly political. Throughout the course of the novel, Bloom reveals himself as hero because he uses his personal, self-defined strengths to navigate through psychological and emotional difficulty to find domestic unity and peace. While the success of Bloom's heroic journey is tempered by Stephen's refusal to stay and by the lack of sexual reunion with Molly, Molly's final "Yes" suggests that they will have sex after the novel concludes (Joyce 783). Bloom's incomplete success also contributes to his heroic construction, because it renders him as a fallible human. In these ways, Bloom produces a new set of heroic criteria for the postmodern epic audience.

In general, critics agree on Bloom as hero of *Ulysses* because of his connection to Odysseus as well as Modern adaptations of that trope. Similarly, many critics agree that Milton draws on traditional epic tropes in both his poetic conventions and his heroic construction in *Paradise Lost*; however, there is a long history of critical disagreement over the identity of the hero of the poem. Some critics follow tradition and convention, contending that Milton presents the Son as hero and constructs Satan as an heroic parody or anti-hero²; others argue for Adam as exemplar of the mortally flawed but ultimately sympathetic hero³; still others assert that Satan exemplifies the classical epic hero, simply thrust into an explicitly Biblical context. Rereading *Paradise Lost* through Joyce's Modern epic allows the postmodern reader to understand Satan as the primary heroic

² See Schiffhorst, *Satan's False Heroism in Paradise Lost As a Perversion of Patience* & See Dobranski, "Pondering Satan's Shield in Milton's *Paradise Lost*"

³ See Bond, *Spencer, Milton and the Redemption of the Epic Hero*, for an interesting and in depth comparison of Redcrosse and Adam as mortal, Christian heroes.

figure of the poem. Satan and Bloom have important similarities in their construction, which signify Satan's heroism through a retrospective reading. Like Joyce, Milton draws on both classical and Biblical traditions in his heroic construction; however, Milton emphasizes Judeo-Christian texts within a conventionally classical poem. *Paradise Lost* privileges Satan's self-defined individuality, emotional disposition, intellect, leadership skills, and domesticity (albeit a perverted domesticity as it relates to his own "family"). As is Bloom, Satan is constructed as Other to the dominant culture of his text; he is literally cast out of Heaven for his dissent, a crucial component of his heroic identity. However, Satan, like Hector, is much more charismatic military figure than Bloom; those characterizations are part of heroism as well.

Milton's use of Christian doctrine in a pre-Christian narrative deserves brief attention before we can fully dismiss the import of his biography, including his spirituality and Puritan politics, from this analysis. Milton's earlier poems, such as, "Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity," demonstrate his "ambition to rival the Greek and Latin Poets of antiquity by applying what he had learned from them to the Christian vision of history"; Milton attempts the same process in *Paradise Lost* (Teskey xvi-ii). Much of the action of *Paradise Lost* occurs before "Man's first disobedience and the fruit/Of that forbidden tree," which, of course, relies heavily on the Book of Genesis (Milton I 1-2). While these are the opening lines of the poem, which in the tradition of the classical epic indicate its primary subject, the fall does not occur until Book IX. Milton also revises the battle in heaven from the Book of Revelation, turning it into a war that precedes Satan's fall from heaven rather than a predictive, eschatological event. Further, while the fact that Milton was a Puritan "political controversialist, as a

disestablishmentarian” might be useful for the argument against the Son as the hero of the poem, it does not directly support Satan as the *intended* hero (Teskey xxvii); unlike Blake, this paper does not contend that Milton wrote “In fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell...because he was a true Poet and of the Devil’s Party without knowing it” (Blake 389). Rather, it argues that the postmodern reader will reevaluate the heroic construction of Satan through that of Bloom, and the ways in which Milton’s poem, like Joyce’s novel utilizes and innovates classical conventions.

Milton’s adherence to classical epic conventions in terms of structure, literary devices, and themes lays the foundation for reading Satan as hero of the text; these similarities are crucial, because they signify for the reader that she is inside of a conventionally classical poem. Within these conventions, Satan demonstrates numerous classical heroic qualities in addition to the modern-man heroism of Bloom. Mueller argues that there are “important structural affinities between *Paradise Lost* and the *Iliad* – affinities which not only illuminate the principles of organization of *Paradise Lost* but also invite us to reconsider the nature of Milton’s attitude towards the Epic” (293). Milton, like Homer, invokes a Muse – a non-Christian divinity – in order to begin the poem. In Book VII he attempts to revise Urania, one of the classical nine muses, into a Christian figure. He writes:

Descend from Heav’n, Urania, by that name
 If rightly thou art called, whose voice divine
 Following above th’ Olympian hill I soar,
 Above the flight of Pegasean wing.

The meaning not the name I call for thou

Nor Muses nine nor on the top

Of old Olympus dwell'st but Heavenly born. (Milton VII 1-7)

These lines reintroduce the classical figure Urania, the muse of astronomy, as a Christian figure from Heaven rather than Olympus. The lines that follow shortly after,

“...Muse.../fail not thou who thee implores,/For thou art Heav'nly, she an empty dream”

indicate a questioning of the reality or efficacy of the Muse herself (Milton VII 37-9).

Milton reconstructs a classical Muse as a Christian Muse, and then subsequently questions the reliability of Muses in general; this progression suggests equating of the classical and Christian mythologies. The specific choice of the Muse of astronomy, perhaps chosen for her explicit relationship to the heavens, creates a compelling tension between religion and science that is reminiscent of Bloom's contemplation of the universe in the Ithaca episode; as Bloom looks up at the night sky, he substitutes all the celestial bodies for people he has interacted with during the day (Blamires 225-6). Bloom seems unsure if he can trust those celestial bodies as signifying anything beyond earth, while the poetic speaker of those lines in *Paradise Lost* seems unsure if he can trust divine inspiration.

Milton also employs the Homeric simile and the catalogue, which are clearly classical epic tropes. Homeric similes such as, “...As bees/In spring time when the sun with Taurus rides/...Their state affairs, so thick the airy crowd/swarmed were straitened, till the signal giv'n” also use classical mythology within the comparison (Milton I 768-776). As noted above, the opening line of the poem identifies “disobedience” as the subject of the poem rather than a person or hero (Milton I 1). Mueller points out that this

parallels the beginning of the *Iliad*, which focuses on “wrath” (“rage” in the Fagles translation) (293). These similarities in opening lines contribute to the critical disagreement regarding the hero of both poems, because unlike the Homer in the *Odyssey* and Vergil in the *Aeneid*, Milton “takes an action, not a man as the subject of his epic” (Mueller 193). While this quotation does not prove direct connection to all Hellenic epics, it does illuminate an important point of connection between two of the works treated here. Further, it clearly shows *Paradise Lost* in structural and thematic dialogue with the *Iliad*; that the hero of the latter poem also remains a question of critical interest indicates the importance of heroic ambiguity in *Paradise Lost*. Mueller’s argument supports the contention that *Paradise Lost* is written in the classical epic tradition, and therefore the argument that the construction of the hero ought to conform in certain ways to that tradition as well.

The critical disagreement regarding the identity of hero of this poem stems in large part from the literary or cultural tradition through which the critic reads the text. Those reading from a primarily Christian, Biblical perspective cannot seriously entertain the notion of Satan as the hero, while those reading from a classical, Romantic, or postmodern point of view can understand and appreciate Satan’s heroic characterization. Herman explains the differences between these perspectives. He writes, “With the Hellenic hero we associate those qualities of individuality, self-determination, and physical courage that endure alone against ineluctable odds” (Herman 13). Emotional disposition, intellect, charismatic leadership, and domesticity are perhaps more specific qualities that demonstrate a postmodern sensibility that fall within these generalizations. However, Herman asserts that the Biblical hero

is not to be identified by any of these characteristics, although he may possess them, or some of them. His main characteristic is not physical strength, but moral strength, permitting him to be obedient to God when all others reject God or the need to be obedient. (13)

Milton's poem, in many ways, is complicated by the ways in which he weaves together the classical tropes with Biblical allusion and context; and yet, this poem is not a sacred Christian text, but a work of literature. As such, it is not necessary that its hero be morally perfect as defined by Christian doctrine, but rather that his construction and characterization remain in dialogue with his literary predecessors and descendants.

Through the primary plot events, grandiose battle, arduous journey, and impossible odds, the poem presents a pastiche of the classical epic. However, time is not treated with consistent chronology, a structural deviation from the treatment of time in *Iliad*. The battle in heaven is described in Books V and VI, functioning as a flashback that anticipates Satan's expulsion from Heaven. As Raphael recounts the battle to Adam and Eve, he frames it thus:

...[Satan] of the first
 If not the first archangel great in pow'r,
 In favor, and preeminence, yet fraught
 With envy against the Son of God that day
 Honored by His great Father and proclaimed
 Messiah, King Anointed, could not bear
 Through pride that sight and thought himself impaired. (Milton V 659-65)

The motives that Raphael presents in these lines show the revision of the Biblical story; the battle is framed in the poem as a power struggle between power granted by divine right (to the Son) versus power as reward for intrinsic characteristics, such as strength and the ability to gain favor. Also, the postmodern reader views Raphael's role as poet in recounting the events of the battle in Book V and IV as a metafictional device; therefore, she must be cautious in accepting Raphael's descriptions of Satan at face value, because he is clearly a biased speaker.

Raphael's bias against Satan notwithstanding, his recounting of the battle provides other compelling evidence for Satan's construction as hero through descriptions, which evoke characteristics of both Bloom and Hector. Raphael uses Satan's epithet, "Th' Apostate" (Milton VI 100), which is shortened from "Th' Apostate Angel" (Milton I 125). The Norton Critical Edition provides a footnote definition of "Apostate": "Satan, 'he who stands apart'" (Teskey fn 135). The OED lists an adjectival definition, which seems appropriate as a modifier of Angel: "Unfaithful to religious principles or creed, or to moral allegiance; renegade, infidel; rebellious" (OED). This epithet, then, according to both definitions, casts Satan as Other. Like Bloom, Satan is religiously Other, and he is made inferior, because of his unwillingness to serve the Christian God.

In addition, Abdiel's speech as he meets Satan in battle (mediated through Raphael) makes clear that Satan can no longer call Heaven his home, again resonating with Bloom's domestic displacement. Abdiel says, "'O Heav'n! That such resemblance of the Highest/Should yet remain where faith and fealty/Remain not!'" (Milton VI 114-6). In these lines, Abdiel makes clear that Satan's place at home in Heaven is threatened because of his refusal to serve God. While Satan is ultimately defeated in the battle in

Heaven, the devils show Satan loyalty similar to that displayed by the Trojans to Hector.

After Michael injures Satan, Raphael narrates:

Forthwith on all side to his aid was run
 By angels many and strong who interposed
 Defense while others bore him on their shields
 Back to his chariot where it stood retired... (Milton VI 335-8)

This scene shows a clear parallel to the scene in Book XV of the *Iliad* in which Ajax injures Hector and the Trojans rally around him. In an argument for Abdiel's heroic virtue as an extension of the Son's Christian heroism, Fish writes, "...true heroism is a psychic (willful) action – the decision, continually made in a variety of physical situations to maintain that loyalty" (164-5). However, due to the postmodern reader's interest in individuality and leadership, the hero's loyalty to another is not important. Rather, Satan's ability to gain the loyalty of others while fighting for his self-defined true cause contributes to his heroic construction.

The first book of *Paradise Lost* provides physical and emotional descriptions of Satan that situate him as a classical hero of poem rooted in the conventions of that tradition. Milton writes:

...Thus far these beyond
 Compare of mortal prowess yet observed
 Their dread commander. He above the rest
 In shape and gesture proudly eminent
 Stood like a tower... (I 587-91)

In these lines, just one example of many, Milton demonstrates Satan's physical superiority and strength; these qualities are a crucial aspect of the Hellenic hero's construction. Further, using phrases such as "Far beyond these" and "Above them all" is a simple, straightforward way in which Milton renders Satan as superior to the masses (Milton I 589-600). In this same description, Milton writes, "Deep scars of thunder had entrenched and care/Sat on his faded cheek, but under brows/Of dauntless courage and consid'rate pride/Waiting revenge" (I 601-4). These lines indicate that Satan has been through battle, a classical heroic necessity, as are the qualities of "courage" and "pride".

Revenge is equated with evil and sin within Christian discourse; however, the classical hero must seek revenge if he has been wronged. Consider that the Trojan War began in effort to seek revenge on Paris and the Trojans for abducting Helen; consider that Achilles, while not the primary hero of the *Iliad*, must kill Hector to avenge Patroclus's death. Similarly for Satan, seeking revenge for being cast out of Heaven is nonnegotiable. Satan says, "For this infernal pit shall never hold/Celestial spirits in bondage, nor th' abyss...Peace is despaired/For who can think submission? War then, war" (Milton I 657-661). This speech, a rallying call to battle, directly states that Satan has no intention of submitting to the will of God; however, this refusal of submission is not at all problematic within the classical tradition or from a postmodern perspective.

In the first book, Satan also establishes himself as a charismatic leader. Forsyth describes Satan's first speech as using "language" that "is splendidly heroic" (81). In reference to that same first speech, Fish argues that Satan's heroic rhetoric is intentionally seductive to the reader as a temptation in itself. Fish writes:

Its intricacy will engage the reader's attention and lead him into an error of omission. That is to say, in the attempt to follow and analyse Satan's soliloquy, the larger contexts in which it exists will be forgotten. The immediate experience of the poetry will not be qualified by the perspective of the poem's doctrinal assumptions. (9)

As the postmodern reader remains unconcerned with Milton's Protestant agenda, the poet's "doctrinal assumptions" become less important than the ways in which individual characters are defined. Certainly, Satan is a seductive rhetorician, captivating the Devils, Eve, and the reader. Satan's superior rhetorical skills, in this case, illuminate his self-defined strengths. That same grandiose language also appears in later speeches, revealing Satan's charisma and leadership. After the devils agree to seek revenge on God through Man, Satan says:

But I should ill become this throne, O peers,
 With splendor, armed with pow'r, if aught proposed
 And judged of public moment in the shape
 Of difficulty or danger could deter
 Me from attempting. (Milton II 445-50)

These lines demonstrate Satan's grandiosity, charisma, and leadership, as he volunteers to make the journey to the new universe of Mankind. These lines also reveal Satan's desire to maintain his leadership position through the cleverness of his plan and the strength of his own actions.

Another supposed problem implicit in Satan's heroic speeches and his characterization as hero arises from the disparity between Satan's hopeful, strong attitude

and the poetic speaker's descriptions of hell (Forsyth 82). Descriptions such as, "Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace/And rest can never dwell, hope never comes/that comes to all but torture without end," imply that hope cannot exist in hell despite Satan's insistence on it (Milton I 65-7). Forsyth notes that this discrepancy in Book I has also been the subject of much critical debate; however, it seems useful to return to Herman's words: "Self-determination...endure[s] alone against ineluctable odds" (13). Satan makes his self-determination clear in the oft-quoted lines:

The mind is its own place and in itself
 Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven

Here we may reign secure, and in my choice
 To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:

Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven! (Milton I 254-263)

These lines also provide evidence of that Satan is not only a self-defined individual in the Joycean sense, but also that he is aware of his free will. For the classically rendered hero, the inescapable nature of the challenge makes it all the more crucial that he display his hope for revenge and ultimately exact that revenge. In Satan's case, the hopelessness of hell and the supremacy of God make it impossible for him to overthrow God, take back heaven, and completely destroy Mankind; in the Christian discourse, the Son will redeem fallen Man. However, Satan does achieve limited success in accomplishing his heroic feat, as he successfully causes the fall, gives Man knowledge of good and evil, and releases Sin and Death into the world. Satan's limited success reaffirms his heroism to the postmodern reader, because it underscores the impossibility of perfection.

A comparison between the ways in which the Son and Satan come to be in leadership roles helps support the argument for Satan as a classically defined hero with Modern characteristics. Milton introduces the Son into the poem at the right hand of his father, God; after the Son agrees to die for the sin of man, God praises him and says, “Adore Him who to compass all this dies/Adore the Son and honor him as me” (Milton III 342-3). Walum argues that an individual or group’s power manifests from either “authority” or “prestige” (575). The Son’s “authority” is granted to him “from [his] association with a supra-individual power,” which in this case is God (Walum 575). In contrast, Satan’s ability to gather a following and perform as the charismatic leader and military figure situates him in contrast to the Son as a “prestige” leader. As such, Satan must rely on his charisma, his intellect, his rhetorical appeals, and his ability to manipulate in order to guide his “followers” to remain “loyal to the *person* and...not draw upon normative truth for their submission” (Walum 575). Satan’s successful maintenance of this following reflects his leadership and rhetorical skills in a way that the Son’s authority does not. As is typical of the classical heroic tradition, Satan must work hard to overcome challenges in order to effectively lead and exact his revenge, whereas the Son is literally given his power by divine right. And through a postmodern lens, Satan’s superiority to the Son in intellectual and rhetorical skills, and his complex emotional and domestic characterizations become more important than the Son’s ultimately superior military acumen. Further, Satan’s ability to understand and rely on his own strengths, whether morally right in terms of Christian doctrine or not, demonstrates that his self-defined individualism allows him to succeed in his effort to corrupt man.

Physical descriptions of Hell at the beginning of the poem underscore Satan's self-defined individualism. Hell is compared to Heaven in the lines: "Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,/Said then the lost archangel, this the seat/That we must change for Heav'n, this mournful gloom/For that celestial light" (Milton I 241-5). Through this juxtaposition, and the physical description that precedes it, the Otherness of Hell itself becomes apparent. This Otherness affords Satan the literal space and subsequently the ability to emerge as hero. Anderson proposes, "In order to create a legitimately questionable but ultimately beneficent God, Milton employs various representations of otherness – elements that are literally and figuratively outside of the rule of God" (198). This argument suggests that the poem presents readers with a moral choice: to align with God and the Son and all that those figures represent, or align with Satan and Chaos. It also presents an analytical choice in terms of which character is read as hero. As the hero's perseverance in the face of his Otherness is a primary concern of the postmodern reader, Satan's leadership of this Other space, in addition to his actions that oppose the will of God, Satan's construction as hero becomes clearer.

Satan's intellectual and manipulative strengths become clear as he plots and exacts his revenge on God. His rhetorical skills throughout the poem are remarkable in comparison to other characters', most notably God's; his second speech to persuade Eve to eat the fruit in the Garden provides a poignant example of his ability to manipulate through rhetorical skill. Satan says, "O sacred, wise, and wisdom-giving plant,/Mother of science, now I feel thy pow'r," (Milton IX 679-81). Forsyth argues that this personification of the tree as "mother" draws Eve to emotionally align herself with it (223). Satan's subsequent, parallel address directly to Eve, "Queen of this Universe,"

suggests that he is intentionally trying to get Eve to see herself as connected to the tree of knowledge (Milton IX 684). This parallel between Eve and “mother” or Mother Nature directly relies on classical, pagan allusion. Wickenheiser argues that this comparison indicates Milton’s attempt to qualify pagan as evil and move away from the classical hero toward establishing a “pattern of Christian Hero” (1); however, this poem relies so heavily on classical conventions as outlined above that it is impossible to dismiss the text’s clear reverence for them and by extension the culture that developed them.

Satan’s ability to disguise himself is a crucial component of his intellect and his self-presentation, which contribute both to his ability to carry out his revenge and subsequently to his heroic construction. When Satan delivers this speech in the Garden, he has disguised himself as a serpent, the “Tempter” (Milton IX 686). Milton writes:

...Thus the orb he roamed
 With narrow search and with inspection deep
 Considered every creature: which of all
 Most opportune might serve his wiles and found
 The serpent subtlest beast of all the field. (IX 82-6)

These lines illuminate the care and consideration Satan gives to this choice. His search for the “subtlest” creature rather than the “fiercest” also suggests that he intends to rely on his intellect and rhetorical skills to trick Eve rather than on strength or physical intimidation. Sarkar explains, “These disguises are but instances of cunning and expediency. Satan’s self-fashioning is proactive and he uses disguise for the purpose of negotiation and control” (121). Guile and cunning, of course, are revered traits in the classically rendered hero, namely Odysseus; but those traits are re-imagined in Bloom as

a more cultivated intellect than outright trickery. Satan's guile and cunning fall in between the classical characterization and Bloom's. Satan does use the disguise to blatantly trick Eve into eating the fruit, but his contemplation of his disguise shows a discerning intelligence.

Further, there is a clear connection between Satan's preferred self-presentation in this scene and his success in convincing Eve to eat the fruit, demonstrating how his intelligence leads to his victory. Satan's disguise as a serpent again literally renders him as Other; however, this representation is complicated by the fact that the disguise is a result of intelligent thought. The postmodern reading of the heroic values intellect and intelligence; this instance of Otherness, resulting from intelligence, creates tension between intelligence and religious servitude that again shows Satan's self-definition.

This premeditated attempt to manipulate Eve through the serpent disguise becomes even more effective through its ability to talk, because it piques Eve's interest and alludes to the knowledge she has yet to attain. Eve replies to the speaking serpent:

Language of man pronounced

By tongue of brute and human sense expressed?

The first at least of these I thought denied

To beasts whom God on their creation-day

Created mute to all articulate sound,

The latter I demur for in their looks

Much reason and in their actions oft appears

Thee, Serpent, subtlest beast of all the field

I knew, but not with human voice endued. (Milton IX 553-70)

This response makes clear that Eve is first struck by the serpent's ability to speak rather than the substance of the speech itself. In addition, the diction here fixates on "thinking" and "knowing," which obviously indicates that Eve is surprised and troubled by her lack of knowledge. She even references God's creations explicitly, suggesting that this interaction immediately causes Eve to speculate on how honest God has been with her, even if she is not conscious of it. Eve's response to Satan's disguise thus indicates a cleverly manipulative choice on Satan's part, allowing him the opportunity to use his eloquent speech to convince Eve to eat the fruit.

Satan's presence in the Garden is not the first time the serpent image appears in the poem; the recurrence of the serpent image suggests a connection between Satan's ultimate heroic feat and his construction as a perverted domestic figure. As Satan sets out on his epic journey from Hell to the new universe of Mankind, he meets his daughter, "Sin," who is described as half serpent and half woman (Milton II 760). Sin explains to Satan, "Out of thy head I sprung!" alluding to Athena's birth out of Zeus's head (Milton II 758). Collett cites such moments in the poem to argue that Milton uses classical allusion to reaffirm the evil of Satan and his followers; he proposes, "For a Puritan poet the most natural application of classical myth is in descriptions of the fallen angels" (Collett 89). However, though the reference to Athena is pagan, it cannot be ignored that she is the Goddess of wisdom and war, and she is generally revered as a figure of good. In addition, the poet also asks that readers see a parallel here to Eve's birth from Adam's rib. Eve explicitly says to Adam, "from whom I was formed flesh of thy flesh" (Milton IV 441). This parallel between the births of Sin and Eve suggests the recognition that Biblical stories are also mythologies; through reliance on similar classical and Biblical

mythologies it becomes clear that neither tradition is privileged over the other as more representative of truth.

Satan's interaction with his daughter, Sin, and his son by her, Death, also contributes to his heroic construction, because it presents the troubled or disrupted father-child dynamic also present in the other two epics under discussion. Of course, the more obvious examples of the father-son dynamic in this text are either God and the Son or God and Adam; however, the former relationship is perfect and one-dimensional and the latter switches the power from son to father, which does not allow for direct comparison. Similarly to Bloom and Hector, Satan's familial relationships are complicated, imperfect, and play a role in his heroic success. The representation of Satan's family as the unholy trinity most obviously complicates his familial dynamics. This representation is evident in Sin's lines, "...where I shall reign/At thy right hand voluptuous as beseems/Thy daughter and thy darling without end" (Milton II 868-70). Like Bloom, Satan needs something from his children in order to make progress in his heroic journey; he needs the key to the gates of Hell from his daughter and permission to pass from his son in order to set out for the new universe and cause the fall of Man. Forsyth supports this reading:

We must recall these human qualities of the ancient models...in the figure of Satan...Not only is his military leadership amply praised, his courage and inventiveness, but Satan, like Hector, has an encounter with his wife and son just as he is about to set off on his adventures through Chaos.

(Forsyth 29)

It is important to note that this heroic father-child interaction cannot be easy or idealized in order to situate the father-figure as hero; the domestic characterization of the hero must

be disrupted, troubled *and* affect the hero's ability succeed. Satan's familial interaction in Book II presents him with another challenge he must negotiate and overcome on his way to Eden, revenge, and success (albeit limited success) in heroic quest.

By acknowledging that *Paradise Lost* is conventionally a classical poem, and by viewing its hero both in that tradition and through the modern heroic lens, it becomes clearer that Satan is constructed as the hero of the text for a postmodern reader. Obviously, he is not morally perfect as Christian doctrine defines that term; moral perfection is not a necessary component of heroism, however, as Bloom and Hector indicate. As demonstrated, Satan's emotional nature, intellect, domesticity, in addition to his charisma and military acumen, work together to contribute to his heroic construction. Further, like Bloom's, Satan's heroic construction relies on a combination of classical and Biblical allusion. Through close readings of descriptions of Satan, his own speeches, and others' reactions to him, Satan emerges as a complex, seductive hero who must rely on his own strengths to exact his revenge on God. Finally, Satan achieves only limited success in his heroic feat, giving Mankind knowledge of good and evil and releasing Sin and Death into the world. In these ways, he meets many of the heroic criteria set forth by Bloom.

Just as with *Paradise Lost*, critics continue to disagree about the identity of the hero in the *Iliad*. Many critics follow tradition, arguing for Achilles as the original epic hero; others argue for multiple, simultaneous heroes, contending that Homer constructs both Achilles and Hector as different, but related heroic archetypes. Rereading the poem through Joyce allows the postmodern reader to understand Hector as the primary heroic

figure of the poem. Publically, Hector is simultaneously a warrior, a leader, and a protector. In the domestic sphere, Hector is also a son, a brother, a husband, and a father. As in Bloom's construction, emphasis is placed on Hector's individuality, his emotional depth, his intelligence, his leadership and his domesticity. And like Satan, Hector is a strong, charismatic military figure and skilled rhetorician, though he is ultimately defeated. Further, Hector can be understood as Other, because he is trying to fight off potential "colonization" by the Achaeans. Although Achilles and Hector are both fated to die, Achilles is still alive at the end of the poem, and Hector's fated death proves of greater consequence, because it prefigures Trojan defeat. In these ways, Hector's characterization reaches beyond classical, archetypal heroism; he has some of those qualities, but he also has a more complex psychological construction that renders him as hero to the postmodern readership.

As the *Iliad* is ostensibly the beginning of western literature, and Achilles purported as the original epic heroic archetype, this section of the paper not only seeks to analyze Hector's heroism through Bloom's, but also to deconstruct Achilles's heroism. Through both postmodern approaches to the poem, rereading through Bloom and deconstruction, Hector emerges as the primary heroic figure. Although Bloom does achieve some success in his heroic endeavor, it is undoubtedly a personal success, and it is tempered by the lack of explicit, sexual reconciliation with Molly. Similarly, Hector succeeds in using his self-defined strengths to try to protect Troy and his family and dying on his own terms, however he ultimately is unable to succeed as "city-defender" (Donlan 266). As such, it is clear that Hector and Bloom share the complicated, conflated experience of yearning for home and homeland, as well as limited success in

their heroic pursuits. These two men, along with Satan, appear as “men who are bent on seeking for that aspect in all things which must be *overcome*” (Nietzsche 127). Unlike Achilles or the Son, Hector, Satan, and Bloom are not situated as intrinsically or biologically superior to others in their societies, but rather they rely on their individual strengths in order to overcome the challenges with which they are presented.

Hector’s self-sacrifices contribute to the development of his individuality, and allow him to transcend epic-stock characterization; he reveals himself through the informed choices he makes to deny himself his personal desires for the sake of his city. When Hector returns to Troy in Book VI, he speaks with Andromache about his probable death. He says:

All this weighs on my mind too, dear woman.

But I would die of shame to face the men of Troy

and the Trojan women trailing their long robes

if I would shrink from battle now, a coward.

....

it is less the pain of the Trojans still to come

that weighs me down, not even Hecuba herself

or King Priam, or the thought that my own brothers

in all their numbers, all their gallant courage,

may tumble in the dust, crushed by enemies –

That is nothing, nothing beside your agony

when some brazen Argive hales you off in tears. (Homer VI 522-40)

Here, Hector directly states his multiple roles and responsibilities. The first line in this speech suggests that Hector is ruminating on the consequences to his family for his engagement in the war. This emotional depth reveals the value he places on his role as husband and father, and he makes clear that while he feels most emotionally responsible to his family, he cannot shy away from battle. Donlan argues that Hector, “is constantly forced to subordinate his own desires to the common good” (267). However, in this speech, Hector states that he wants both to protect his family and to protect his city; he *wants* to fight and loathes the idea of cowardice. At this point in the poem, Achilles remains absent from battle, which Hector thinks gives the Trojans a real possibility for victory. As such, Hector feels internally conflicted over what might happen to his wife and child, but he also realizes that the threat of the Achaeans to the Trojans includes his family. Even more than for Bloom, Hector’s notion of city and family (home and homeland) cannot be separated. Bloom is intellectually engaged in politics and imagines himself a political actor in his own mind so that Bloom’s psychological and emotional understanding of home and homeland become confused. However, Hector’s home is literally inseparable from his homeland, because he is the Prince of Troy. The Trojans call Hector’s son, “Astyanax,” meaning the “The Lord of the City” (Homer XXII 595). This nickname clearly shows the way in which Hector’s home and homeland are inextricably linked. He wants to protect them both, however this desire is complicated by the fact that they cannot be separated from one another.

The connection between Hector’s home and homeland, and his self-defined individuality also become apparent through comparison to his brother, Paris. Hector feels a great deal of responsibility to defend his city, while Paris, who “in all his madness

launched the war,” is continually characterized as a coward (Homer XXIV 33). Hector says:

You...

curse to your father, your city and all your people,

a joy to our enemies, rank disgrace to yourself!

So, you can't stand up to the battling Menelaus? (Homer III 58-61)

Hector's accusation here makes clear the difference between not only the brothers' drives to protect Troy, but also their ability to do so. Hector's civic duty is then complicated by his familial duty, because his brother caused this deadly war, but Paris cannot or will not contribute to its efforts in any meaningful way. As discussed in the Joyce section, Bloom's conflation of home and homeland is symbolic and thematic, alerting the postmodern reader to the importance of his psychological and emotional journey. While Hector's condition is similar, it is also more literal; and within this condition, Hector's individuality as a character emerges through diametric opposition to his brother.

Paris's retreat from battle at the beginning of the poem suggests a parallel between him and Achilles; that parallel accentuates Achilles's non-heroic qualities. Of course, there are important differences between Paris and Achilles, not the least of which is Achilles's demonstrated military prowess preceding the text and at the end of the poem; this is apparent in his demigod status and his eventual defeat of Hector, as well as his epithets: “swift runner” (Homer I 143); “godlike Achilles” (Homer I 154). In contrast, Paris is described as a coward during battle:

Backing into his friendly ranks,

he cringed from death

as one trips on a snake in a hilltop hollow

recoils, suddenly, trembling grips his knees... (Homer III 36-39)

Clearly, Paris and Achilles are constructed differently; however, they do both withdraw from battle while Hector faces and even seeks it.

The differences between Achilles and Paris notwithstanding, their parallel retreats from battle strengthen the argument against Achilles as hero. While the motivations of Achilles and of Paris for withdrawing from battle differ, both do so for reasons inextricably linked with their relationships with women; this too distinguishes Hector from them as he has the most stable romantic, domestic relationship. Aphrodite intervenes on Paris's behalf, similarly to the ways in which Athena and Thetis intervene for Achilles during his initial displays of rage. Aphrodite "snatched Paris away.../and set him down in his bedroom filled with scent./Then off she went herself to summon Helen" (Homer III 439-442). Here, it becomes clear that Paris retreats from battle because of a woman. It must be noted that Paris's retreat is instigated by Aphrodite rather than of his own explicit volition, but he does not resist her intervention. This obviously renders Paris as militarily dishonorable, and as a parallel to Achilles it becomes ironic; as Achilles attempts to protect his honor as a great warrior, he removes himself from battle. Champagne takes this reading a step further; he argues:

The ultimate irony is that Homer portrays Paris as being so guided by Aphrodite's erotic forces that he tried to escape battle with Menelaus by going to make love with Helen. This same Paris will be the one to slay mighty Achilles. (76)

Though Achilles's death occurs outside the scope of the poem's text, it provides additional evidence of the important connection between him and Paris, which ultimately deconstructs Achilles as hero. Further, their retreats from the war directly contrast Hector's decision to defend Troy rather than protect himself in the interest of his wife and son.

Achilles also retreats from battle because of a woman; Agamemnon takes away Achilles's war prize, Briseis, wounding Achilles's pride. Farred argues that Achilles's absence from battle for the majority of the poem launches him into celebrity, which contributes to his heroic construction and as such reconciles him as hero despite his prolonged absence (1104). However, Achilles's behavior and attitude as he "strode off to his trim ships and shelters" is anything but heroic (Homer I 359). Unlike Hector, Achilles does not put the needs of his king and his people before his personal desires. Instead, when Agamemnon tells Achilles to give Briseis back to him, Achilles throws a temper tantrum. Farred concedes that Achilles's behavior is "ripe for mockery, redolent with puerile imagery, conjuring up scenarios in which spoiled children, obstreperous adolescents and over-indulged celebrities behave badly because they cannot get their way" (1102); and yet, he proposes that his absence makes his return all the more heroic, that it affords him celebrity status, as "a mode of public adoration, historical recognition, and literary inscription, [which] becomes indistinguishable from legend, myth, military lore, and enduring fame (Farred 1106). Heroism, as understood through Joyce, does not require this celebrity status, especially as it is displayed through such petty, whiny, selfish behavior. The postmodern reader is concerned with Bloom's everyman heroism, and therefore enduring in collective memory is not a requirement.

Though Hector is lamented in the classical heroic tradition, his memory does not endure with the same import or cache as Achilles's memory. Bloom's heroic journey is so deeply rooted in an intimately personal struggle that his feats are not intended to be sung of by Muses into perpetuity; Bloom's heroism is quiet and understated. There is no "Achilles Heel" equivalent for Hector in the American English vernacular. And yet, ironically, that phrase points to Achilles's one physical weakness. And while Hector's heroism is in some ways connected to his military activity, it is combined with his individual attributes, in what makes him a complex man and father.

Hector expresses conflicted feelings about protecting his family or protecting his city, though he realizes that in reality these are not separate choices. Of course, Hector chooses to remain engaged in battle. However, the scene in Book VI at the "Scaean Gates" reveals Hector's willingness to make himself vulnerable for his son (Homer VI 464). As demonstrated in *Ulysses* and *Paradise Lost*, the father-son relationship is a crucial component of the postmodern reader's definition of heroic construction, because it reveals the heroes' humanity. Bloom's heroic journey centers on becoming reunited with a son-figure so that he might overcome his familial guilt and reestablish domestic unity. Similarly, Satan needs help from his daughter and son to open the gates of Hell. Hector's interaction with Astyanax provides the most poignant instance of Hector's humanity and complex characterization. The classical epic continually calls attention to patrilineage, constantly referring to both Trojan and Greek men as "the son of" (Homer). One of Hector's epithets is "the son of Priam," but the salient features of Hector's domesticity, his emotional vulnerability and humanity, are revealed through his interaction as father with his son, Astyanax (Homer VII 53). The poet writes:

In the same breath, shining Hector reached down
 for his son – but the boy recoiled,
 cringing against his nurse’s full breast,
 screaming out at the sight of his own father,
 terrified by the flashing bronze, the horsehair crest,
 the great ridge of the helmet nodding, bristling terror –
 so it struck his eyes. And his loving father laughed,
 his mother laughed as well, and glorious Hector,
 quickly lifting the helmet from his head,
 set it down on the ground, fiery in the sunlight,
 and raising his son he kissed him, tossed him in his arms. (Homer VI 557-566)

Here, the poet provides a poignant image, combining Hector as warrior and as father. It is noteworthy that Fagles uses the same word – “recoiled”⁴ – to describe Astyanax’s infant fear of his father when dressed in his helmet, as he does to describe Paris’s cowardice. Of course, Hector is much more forgiving of his young son, and literally removes his heroic garb in order to hold Astyanax. However, even in this intimate act Hector remains “glorious” in the complex portrayal of the hero as both father and warrior.

Hector’s characterization as father and as warrior are not conflicting features of his construction, but rather they reveal the complexity of his character, the roles he has to juggle; they complicate his challenge of having to choose between his home/family and his city/homeland. Traill argues that despite Homer’s sympathetic treatment of Hector in

⁴ Thanks to Dr. Wills of the Episcopal Divinity School for providing translation of the ancient Greek. In ancient Greek these verbs are different, so clearly Fagles made a choice to translate both verbs as forms of “recoil”.

the domestic sphere, Homer does not portray Hector as capably on the battlefield as Hector ostensibly deserves given the plot of the poem. He writes:

Though most modern readers readily admire...Hector for his love and concern for Andromache and Astyanax...they experience a certain sense of disappointment when Hector fares so poorly in his single combat with Ajax and in his fighting with other Greek heroes. (299)

He proposes this “unfair” treatment of Hector in battle results from Homeric “philhellenism” (Traill 299). Looking at Hector through a postmodern lens allows us to disregard Homer’s Greek nationalism or allegiance, while simultaneously examining those moments when Hector does demonstrate military success.

Hector’s greatest explicit military success occurs in Book XVI, when he kills Patroclus; however, Hector’s defining characteristic as a warrior is his ability to lead his troops and earn their love, respect, and loyalty. In book VIII, Hector gives a long speech to his troops after they have gained ground on the Achaeans; he says:

My hopes are rising now –
I pray to Zeus and the great array of deathless gods
that we will whip the Achaeans howling out of Troy

...

as surely as this day will bring the Argives death. (Homer VIII 612-29)

After this speech, the poet confirms, “The Trojans roared assent” (Homer VIII 630) and “So their spirits soared” (Homer VIII 638). Clearly, then, Hector’s rhetorical and leadership skills successfully rally the Trojans around him and spur them on in battle. Further, there is a clear connection here to Satan’s strength as a military leader; as

discussed previously, Satan also gains the love and loyalty of his troop of devils through his rhetorical skills.

Hector's ability to gain the loyalty of his men and act as their leader also points to differences between Hector's and Achilles's characterizations; Achilles questions the war and his role in it after he perceives that Agamemnon personally dishonors him. In Book IX, Achilles rebukes and ignores the appeals made by his friends and fellow countrymen, Odysseus and Ajax, intended to persuade him to return to battle. Achilles is not a leader or a follower, but a warrior whose demigod status allows him to outperform mortals in isolation. Further, Traill's point regarding Ajax's defeat of Hector does not threaten Hector's heroic characterization, because while Hector is down "his comrades [are] kneeling round him as he panted" (Homer XV 11). This shows that he has earned their love and loyalty, and it again displays his humanity. In a detailed explanation of the type(s) of fighting that occur in the poem, Van Wees concludes that there is actually only one style of combat: "the hit-and-run tactics...described from two angles: one offering close-ups of individual warriors, and one offering a panorama of battle" (12). And yet, Van Wees points out the one crucial deviation from this structure: Hector and Achilles chase and fight each other alone in Book XXII (12). This fight shows the poet's privileging of these two men as it deviates from the identified pattern; however, Achilles is also privileged by his demigod status, which arguably allows him to kill Hector. And although Hector knows his fate, he cannot be persuaded by his parents to go back inside the city walls to escape Achilles. Though Hector knows he will die, he feels he must do so defending Troy.

The unique position of Hector as a hero with intertwined familial and civic responsibilities makes his death in Book XXII, and the subsequent laments of his death, doubly important to his heroic construction. In his death speech, Hector says to Achilles, “I know you well – I see my fate before me./Never a chance that I could win over you/...Iron inside your chest, that heart of yours” (XXII 419-21). These lines reveal explicitly that even though Hector understands he was never capable of beating Achilles, he had to try anyway. Donlan states:

This is his tragedy: knowing that his best is not good enough, and realizing that the force of external events impels him in one direction. As a universal symbol he is the man who tries, the man who finds himself caught in a web not of his own making, who knows he is doomed to failure, yet perseveres. (267)

While this reading largely supports Hector as a heroic type, the word “failure” is problematic. First, it is problematic to characterize his death as a failure, because the death of the young man in his physical prime is undoubtedly an archetypal heroic trope. Additionally, it is problematic because Hector chooses to fight, despite knowing that he will die without any of the immortal glory promised to Achilles, and that he will leave his family and city to the Achaeans’ mercy. Therefore, his death cannot be read explicitly as failure, but rather as the exhaustion of the limits of his individual strengths. The postmodern reader considers Hector’s choice to die on his own terms his limited heroic success.

The speech quoted above, which likens Achilles’s heart to iron, also suggests a compelling parallel and point of contrast between him and Hector. In Book III, Paris

says to Hector, “The heart inside you is always tempered hard,/like an ax that goes through wood when a shipwright/cuts through timbers with every ounce of skill” (Homer III 713). Here, in a familial moment, Hector is also described as having a hard heart as it relates to battle; and yet, as we have seen, and as his mourners show, Hector is not driven by bloodlust or revenge, he is driven by the need to protect Troy. Rood writes, “it is not unheard of to find men’s hearts compared to some hard material, but the elaboration of this simile into an image of shipbuilding is striking” (31). She goes on to argue that shipbuilding similes are indications of intelligence, and in this case characterize Hector as “a model of focus, skill and accomplishment free from the foibles of human frailty” (Rood 33). Of course, Hector is not invulnerable to human frailty; but accepting Rood’s reading of this simile shows a contrast between the ways in which Hector and Achilles are hardhearted, highlighting essential aspects of Hector’s heroism. Further, as a more fully wrought “city-defender” archetype, the notion that Hector has both the destructive “axe” and constructive “building” of the simile within him reaffirms the complexity of characterization and of his situation.

Hecuba, Andromache, Helen (and Priam) all lament Hector’s death, and these laments support Hector’s multifaceted heroic construction. Foley explains the importance of the Homeric “word” or typical scenes, phrases, and epithets, which recur in Homer’s poetry. Foley categorizes “the lament” as one of these Homeric “words,” which is characterized by:

a woman somehow related or close to a fallen hero mourn[ing] his demise.

A series of three actions constitutes this ‘word’: an address to the slain hero indicating ‘you have fallen’; a narrative of their shared personal

history and the future consequences for the mourners and others; and a readdress of the hero. (11)

Pantelia also connects the lament to a character's situation as hero. She writes, "Death and mourning in Homer are unavoidably connected to the concept of heroic...the glory that epic poetry grants to its greatest heroes" (23). In Andromache's lament, the second and third action described by Foley give insight into Hector's heroism as a domestic figure and as the last line of defense before Achaean "colonization" of Troy.

Andromache cries:

Astyanax!
The Lord of the City, so the Trojans called him,
because it was you, Hector, you and you alone
who shielded the gates and the long walls of Troy. (Homer XXII 594-97)

These lines of Andromache's lament suggest that the consequences of Hector's death will be tragic for her and her son as much as for the fate of Troy, because they call attention to Hector's importance to the city and to his family and explicate the connection between the two.

Helen's lament, which appears two books later and essentially concludes the poem, focuses on how Hector lived a heroic life rather than on the future consequences of his death. Unlike Andromache, Helen focuses on Hector's "gentle temper" and "gentle words" (Homer XXIV 908). If the lament is a structural underpinning of heroic characterization, the fact that Helen focuses on Hector's personality, on his "greatness [as] a human being" in this lament, suggests that Hector is the epitome of the everyman hero (Pantelia 25). Further, the epic's end with this lament and Hector's burial indicates

the importance of his position in the poem. Like Bloom and Satan, Hector only achieves limited success; however, leaving the reader with Hector at the end, as opposed to Achean victory, suggests that though Hector's success is limited by his death, his self-defined individualism, his person, is worthy of heroic status.

Hector's multifaceted roles and responsibilities in the *Iliad* as warrior, leader, city-defender, brother, son, husband, and father render him a complex hero. By examining the ways in which Hector functions in each of these roles through a postmodern lens, his heroism emerges in his individuality, emotional disposition, intelligence, and domesticity. His heroic construction is aided by his adherence to more classical concerns, namely the way he figures as a warrior, rhetorician, and military leader. However, Hector and Achilles are revered for different strengths as warriors. Hector's ability to lead and relate to his men, to use his intelligence, and ward off the potential colonization that threatens his family as well as his people prove more important to a postmodern understanding of his heroism than his individual strength in battle with Achilles or other Greeks.

Through this in-depth discussion of the salient features of Bloom's, Satan's, and Hector's heroic constructions, it becomes clear that the postmodern reader's definition of hero has changed from classicist's or Romanticist's definitions. The postmodern reader is unconcerned with some of classical and Romantic criteria for heroism: lineage, virtue, youth, honor, physical perfection, and even ultimate, unqualified success. Rather, Joyce, Barthes, and Nietzsche have given permission to redefine epic hero for the postmodern world. Similarly, Said's concept of "Other" allows the postmodern reader to reenter

these texts with a new point of view on those characters that have been traditionally pushed to the margins by the more critically accepted heroes. It is crucial for the postmodern reader that Bloom, Satan, and Hector are not completely successful; the self-defined, complex person is never completely successful, and therefore those representations resonate with the new archetype, Bloom's everyman heroism.

As Nietzsche predicted, the qualities that readers look for in heroes have changed and evolved since ancient Greece was a thriving civilization and since Milton was writing in early modern England. Through identifying similarities between Bloom, the critically accepted Modern hero, and Satan and Hector, figures fraught with critical debate, this rereading proves a useful means by which to identify the primary heroic figures of their respective poems through a new definition of the heroic that makes more sense to a postmodern readership.

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