

Off the Mark: The Thematic Dispersion of “Hamarte”

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Both in the *Odyssey* and in *Ulysses* objects are thrown at persons or other targets, in the Homeric epics naturally much more than in Joyce's selective sampling of a Dublin day and night. Objects thrown either hit their aim or miss it, and the expansive concept of missing one's target is one profitable way to characterise the two works in question.

It is to be expected that in the numerous martial scenes of the *Iliad* hitting or missing play a significant part. Diomedes, at one point, names the alternatives: “*hembrotēs oud' etyche*,” “you have missed, not hit” (II.5: 272).¹ The verb for hitting, built around a form *ty(n)ch-*, could also signify a lucky hit, one brought about by chance; a related noun, *tyche*, was later used for Chance or Fate; to hit one's aim is also to be successful. The Greeks were very much aware, it appears, of the arbitrariness of success. Bloom remembers how he once, long ago, beat John Henry Menton “on the bowlinggreen” because he “sailed inside him. Pure fluke of mine: the bias” (*U* 6.1011), which turned his rival into a kind of resentful Ajax.

In the second half of the *Odyssey* a lot depends on the disguised hero maneuvering himself into a position of momentary advantage against numerical odds when more than a hundred suitors have to be faced with only a handful of assistants. The somewhat assertive beggar who has been spoiling the suitor's festivity quite a bit already has to get hold of the old renowned bow for the trial set up by Penelope. She promises her hand to the suitor who can string it and shoot an arrow through twelve axes that are lined up. None of the suitors who attempt it can even string the bow. It is then that Odysseus asks to have a go at it himself, to find out if he still has any strength left in his hands, and by some complex machination he succeeds, and not only does he string his own bow but takes aim and does “not miss the end of the handle of one of the axes, but clean through and out at the end” (*Od.* 21: 421-22). He did not miss, or “*ouk' hembrote*,” it is the verb for missing, built around a root *ham(b)*, that will be singled out for semantic particulars.

At this point Odysseus turns to Telemachos and points out that he, a stranger, did not miss the mark (“*oude . . . tou skopou hembroton*”). He makes the appointed sign to his son and we are ready for the epic's climax at the beginning of book 22. Odysseus jumps on the threshold and reveals himself, bow in hand, and deftly puts the arrows at his feet before he addresses the wooers. “This decisive contest is now ended,” he announces—other translations say things like “terrible trial” (Butcher and Lang), or “the match that was to seal your fate” (Rieu); one can almost hear the menacing undertones in the original “*aethlos aatos ektetelesthai*” (where each vowel is a syllable in itself). He now goes “for another mark [*skopon*].” He lets fly that first arrow at Antinoos in a masterful scene where Homer catches the swiftness of the arrow in a few purposeful words which are set off against

an almost leisurely description of unsuspecting Antinoos who is about to lift a cup to his lips when the arrow hits him in the throat (22: 1-19). The suitors come to realise that this was no accidental shot and the count-down now takes its course in which more arrows hit their mark whereas the wooers will have no luck with their spears because Athene steps in and diverts their missiles (22: 255-60, again 22: 272). As so often in adventure stories, the bad guys miss and the good ones are sure of their aim, otherwise justice would not be reestablished.

The exchange of missiles has been prepared. Before the final account the suitors already threw a few objects at the spoil-sport beggar. A footstool struck him on the right shoulder, a second one hit a cup-bearer on the right hand; in a third attempt the hoof of an ox was avoided by a quick turn of the head (*Od.* 17: 462, 18: 394, 20: 299-331). More indications that all adventures, of course, are hit or miss, chancy, hazardous.

Odysseus survives, naturally, by hitting his mark at the crucial moments as well as by not being hit when he himself is the target. This happens, again significantly, when Polyphemos hurls a rock at his ship and overshoots so that the escaping Greeks are driven towards the shore (*Od.* 9: 481-85). Once the ship has been rowed to a greater distance from the shore and Odysseus boastfully reveals his name, the Kyklops lifts an even heavier stone and this time barely misses the steering oar (*Od.* 9: 537-40). So Odysseus can make his escape which, after many toils and seven years on the isle of Kalypso, brings him, shipwrecked and alone, to the shore of the Phaiakians where he sleeps exhausted in the bushes. When cunning Athene dispatches Nausikaa and her companions to the same location to do their laundry and when afterwards they play ball, "the princess tossed the ball to one of her maidens; the maiden indeed she missed [*amphipolon men hamarte*], but cast it to the deep eddy, and thereat they cried aloud" (*Od.* 6: 115-17). This awakes Odysseus from his deep sleep and, emerging from the underwater, he approaches, with suitable makeshift decorum—"the first gentleman of Europe," as Joyce called him—and addresses the princess so that he is invited to the palace and ultimately sent home in a safe ship. In this way Athene devised the missed ball to become another turning point.

Such consequential misses are easily carried into *Ulysses* in those surface correspondences to which Homeric analogies have often been relegated. A subsidiary Odysseus (naming himself Murphy) relates the story of a marksman in Stockholm, apparently a namesake of Stephen's versatile (*polytropos*) father and survivor, Simon Dedalus:

I seen him shoot two eggs off two bottles at fifty yards over his shoulder. The lefthand dead shot . . . Cocks his gun over his shoulder. Aims. (*U* 16.389-402)

The two eggs thus disposed of in the sailor's yarn provide a facile link to Odysseus in books 21 and 22. In the Cyclops episode the Citizen, one "champion of all Ireland at putting the sixteen pound shot" (*U* 12.881), uses an empty biscuit as his rock: he "let fly" and "near sent it into the county Longford" (*U* 12.1853). The subsequent seismic catastrophe caused by the "old tinbox clattering along the street" in a parodic insert echoes Polyphemos' appeal to his father Poseidon, the shaker of the earth. Joyce also provides a Homeric ball for his Nausicaa chapter, a ball that is kicked by Master Jacky "towards the seaweedy rocks," and Bloom is requested to throw it back. He "aimed the ball once or twice and threw it up the strand towards Cissey Caffrey but it rolled down the slope and stopped right under Gerty's skirt" (*U* 13.346-55). Bloom does not command the skills of his

prototype: "Course I never could throw anything straight at school"; yet Fate, he seems to imagine, or Tyche intervenes: "Every bullet has its billet" (U 13.951). It is then Gerty MacDowell's turn to kick the ball, she misses it to the amusement of her rivals and another attempt is required. The mishap however is the exact point at which we as readers become first aware of "the gentleman" who is looking at Gerty.

For what it's worth, Bloom, like Odysseus, is pelted with objects, not in reality but in recurring Circean fantasies, so when Mother Grogan "removes her boot to throw it at" him, and soon again "throws her boot at Bloom. Several shopkeepers from upper and lower Dorset street throw objects of little or no commercial value, hambones, condensed mulch tins, unsaleable cabbage, stale bread, sheep's tails, odd pieces of fat"; he is also (in part an echo of the Cyclops adventure), "pelted with gravel, cabbagestumps, biscuitboxes, eggs, potatoes, dead codfish, woman's slipperslappers" (U 15.1763, 1717, 4333). No wonder then that among the imaginable indignities to which an "aged . . . pauper" (reminiscent of Odysseus in the shape of a beggar) might be subjected we find "the infantile discharge of decomposed vegetable missiles" (17.1952). Less drastically, but more real, in the newspaper office, a "doorknob hit Mr. Bloom in the small of the back" (U 7.280).

Further peripheral correspondences, no doubt, might be unearthed, but the focus here is on the metaphorical range of missing, as in the Greek notion of a group of words that turn on the verb *hamartanein* (as already exemplified) and the related nouns *hamarte* or *hamartia*. The literal sense of missing one's aim was extended: Odysseus praises Neoptolemos who was always the first to speak and made no miss of words ("ouch' hemartane mython" *Od.* 11.511). In fact Homer has terms like *hamartoepes* or *aphamartoepes* for someone erring or stumbling in speech. Needless to say, Odysseus usually hits on the right expression or design, markedly different from Bloom. In similar transition, missing the mark (which Odysseus used literally before he aimed his arrows towards the suitors), can be used figuratively, as in a remark about queen Arete, that she has not spoken "far off the mark [*apo skopou*] or of our own thought" (*Od.* 11: 344). Words, as is signalled here, often miss their mark, a major feature in both epics.

Hamarte relates to failure in general and to errors of deed or judgment, or to mistakes: when Antinoos cannot string the bow he says sententiously that it is "better far to die than to live and fail [*hamartein*]" (*Od.* 21: 155). In the tussle with the suitors Telemachos takes the blame for having failed to shut a strategic door: "I myself have erred" ("*autos ego tode g'hembroton*" *Od.* 22: 154), perhaps not an accidental use in the midst of an exchange of missiles. The term could convey a loss, as when a soothsayer predicted that Polyphemos would be deprived of his sight by the hands of Odysseus (*Od.* 9: 512). In some uses we are not far from the committal of wrongs, from moral mistakes, over which Zeus may be watching: "he punished those that offend" (*hamartei*, *Od.* 13: 214).

The *Odyssey* moreover contains a very frequent adjective which negates *hamartein*, "*nemertes*," for someone hitting the mark, that is to say, who does not err, who speaks the truth; its corresponding adverb indicates clarity, that no mistake has been made. Its substantive form, "*nemertea*" means the truth. Proteus is "*nemertes*" — "the unerring old man of the sea" (*Od.* 4: 349). The terms appear in repeated formulas that enjoin one to speak in accordance with facts; its prevalence in the epic is an indication of Homer's awareness of how human (and, for that matter, divine) speech is tied up with error or deception.

When the Christians needed a term for failures to act right or for moral and spiritual deviations, *hamartia* and *hamartein* were suitable candidates.

Sin is conceived as the missing of a divine mark, that is to say, aims like obedience or service, as it was already seen in the Hebrew term *chattah*, a word family which also hinged on missing the mark or failing, analogous to *hamartain*. So the ancient Greek terms were refurbished for an extensive career in theology. Coincidentally perhaps, the first occurrence of the word "sin" in *Ulysses*, "sheltered from the sin of Paris" (2.70), may squint at Jewish as well as Hellenic roots: it refers primarily to a city known for its temptations but, in an episode devoted to History, it associatively conjures up aberrant Paris of Troy, whose elopement with Helen had such dire consequences.

Joyce may never have looked at these Greek words and certainly did not transfer them to his works, though the Greek tragedians applied "*hamartia*" to failure, fault, error of judgment or sin, along with some other derivations, the term was also used by Aristotle. The point of this probe is that semantic field of *hamartia* would serve well to describe major features of the works under discussion. The *Iliad*, after all, was a consequence of the apple of discord which led to a divine beauty contest and this in turn to the abduction of Helen. Mr. Deasy would agree, he offers a catalogue of deviating women as a key to historical misfortunes: "A woman brought sin into the world . . . Helen, the runaway wife of Menelaus. . ." (*U* 2.390). Action in the *Iliad* is determined by an abundance of pride or wrath. Zeus sets off the *Odyssey* with a remark that humans often blame the gods for what is basically their own "recklessness" of "blind folly" (the term is not *hamartia* but *atasthalie*). After the war the retiring Greeks offended Pallas Athene by some transgression. The companions of Odysseus brought disaster upon themselves by eating the sacred cows of Helios; one subtext in the *Odyssey* is the atrocious behaviour of Aigisthos as a counterpoint; the sins of the suitors in the palace of Penelope are displayed throughout, they cause and justify their death. If Odysseus had not missed his turn at Cape Malea (when the North Wind deflected him from his course, *Od.* 9: 80), the adventures might not have happened. It was a mistake to blurt out his name to Polyphemos so as to incur the wrathful opposition of Poseidon; on the other hand Odysseus *polymetis* is supremely skilled at leading his opponents into errors of judgment, his *metis* (design, cunning) consists in setting up false signals. Back in Ithaka he concocts a number of para-biographies that serve their purpose and explain his presence, they are off the mark and in some sense strategic, alternative, twisted veracity.

Of course all plots pivot around some kind of *hamartia*. If everything went right and there were no errors or transgressions there would be little to report. Plots often consist in rectification of whatever is amiss. Joyce conforms, if at all, only in part, at least according to some of us readers, in constantly withholding ultimate reparation: some new misses are built into all successes.

A case could be made for Odysseus being characterised by things taking the wrong turn. Zeus reiterated that mortals suffer pain beyond that which is ordained "*hyper moron*," and his case in point is Aigisthos, who, again, "*hyper moron*," misbehaved badly and had to pay for it accordingly (*Od.* 1: 34-35). That is all very well, Athene replies, "but my heart is torn for wise Odysseus, hapless man," or:

alla moi amph' Odysei daiphroni daietai etor,/dysmoro

We can feel a certain emphasis in the phonemic repetitions: "*daiphroni daietai*" and "*Odysei . . . dysmoro*." Odysseus has not suffered because he acted *hyper moron*, she implies in pointed contrast: he is *dys-moros*, ill-fated,

something has gone wrong (*dys*) with his fate, he is ill-starred, unlucky. He has suffered a lot and is now kept back on an island where a nymph keeps him back, “wretched and sorrowing”:

dystenon odyromenon (*Od.* 1: 55)

Again the name seems to be echoed (*dys ... odur-*) for phonetic emphasis, as it is in her conclusion, “why do you have such wrath against him, Zeus,” where final words (“*odysaō, Zeu,*” 1: 62) clearly refer to the naming that derives *Odysseus* from the same verb, in the form “*odyssamenos*” (*Od.* 19: xxx). In his fate, and the adjectives *dysmoros* or *dystenos* usually refer to him. A Homeric alternative is “*kammoros*” (from *kata-moros*, subject to destiny, ill-fated), this is how *Odysseus* is referred to by *Telemachos* (*Od.* 2: 351) and how he is frequently addressed in the vocative. The very first word spoken to him in the poem is “*Kammore,*” uttered by *Kalipso* (and repeated by the goddess *Ino*—“unhappy man,” and later by his mother in the underworld, and again by *Pallas Athene* (*Od.* 5: 160, 339; 11: 216, 20: 33). He is “ill-fated above all men.”

When *Penelope* decides on the trial of the bow for the next day she laments that “this dawn of evil name shall come that will make me leave the house of *Odysseus*”—and the Greek again makes the sounds tell their own story: “*ede de eos eisi dysonymos, he m’ Odysseos/ oikou aposchesei*” (*Od.* 19: 571): *dysonymos* (of evil name, a name that turns wrong *-dys*) somehow matches the form *Odysseos*. When, after swimming in the sea for two days and reaching the *Phaikian* shore, he is flung violently on a rock, then, but for the intervention of *Athene*, “would hapless [*dysonymos*] *Odysseus* have perished beyond his fate [*hyper moron*]” (*Od.* 5: 436). *Odysseus* indeed, time after time, is *o-dys-seus*, which is not an original etymology,² but something highlighted in the poem for various occasions. If there were no *dys*, there would be no epic for the bard to sing. For *Bloom* too, “that muchinjured but on the whole eventempered man,” a number of things are characterised by *dys*, otherwise he wouldn’t be sitting in the cabmen’s shelter right now so late at night (16.1081), delaying his *nostos* even further, keeping company with an equally hapless young man.

A *Hamartian* reading of *Joyce* would start with *Dubliners* and the stories’ general lack of fortuitous conclusions. *Paralysis* or *simony* have been authorial labels for many of these themes and features. The *Portrait* depicts wayward evolutions of setting up new aims and missing them; whether the one that finally emerges, the forging of an “uncreated conscience,” will ever be achieved is left in abeyance: the *Stephen Dedalus* in the sequel offers little proof of it. In the earlier and shorter novel *Sin* itself is unfolded much more than later in *Ulysses*. We first come across “sin” when *Dante Riordan* charges *Parnell* as a “public sinner” (*P* 32.14); most senses of *hamartia* apply to his political mission and his personal life. One whole section is practically devoted to sin and its consequence, *Hell*, set up in loving detail for *Christians* who have missed their goal.

The notion of missing became shortened into the English prefix *mis-*. One might call it typical for *Ulysses*, not only because of many instances it contains (such as “misconduct, misdeeds, misdemeanour, misfortunes, misapprehension, misconception, misadventure, misnomer”), but because of its implementation of things that go wrong. Aims are missed. History may or may not move “towards one great goal,” but it appears to be slow in getting there and, anyway, *Mr. Deasy’s* goal may be but a “shout in the street” (2.381). *Ireland* is a sorry state, *Dublin* shabby and poor, the *Church* does not seem to live up to its goals, nor *Stephen* to his euphoric promises

at the end of *Portrait*, he has no home to go to, he does not find Georgina Johnson in nighttown (who may have been his motive in for his late visit). Bloom's marriage is less than complete (not even his name appears correct in the newspaper), and what, anyway, is home without Plumtree's potted meat or Catesby's cork lino? Bloom—who “had erred and sinned and wandered” (*U* 13.749)—can hardly ever find an audience, himself often misses the register, he cannot get Boylan out of his mind, Keyes's ad still remains a possibility only, he is—with one major exception—visually frustrated, etc. The Catholic Church would speak of sins and find their malicious work at every corner, and Alexander John Dowie would concur.

In particular; *Ulysses* is the book of errors and misunderstanding on every one of its many levels. It defies final redemption or neat conclusions. Its variable episodes foreground different types of *hamartia*. Circe, above all, is an orgy of misconnected events, fantasies, memories. Eumaeus sentences are hardly ever on target: some are fabulous misconstructions characterised by erring syntax. Many Ithacan answers stray from their originating questions, and facts in no matter how scientific a guise are may not hold up under inspection. One Ithacan item consists in the enumeration of the “imperfections,” with several notable failures remembered out of many others (17.2070).

The Cyclops narrator is anything but *nemertes*, but a great storyteller. Talk is often at cross purposes. The newspaper reports are untrustworthy: they put Stephen Dedalus or M'Coy to a gravesite they never visited. Such reports tend to be “fabled by the daughters of memory” and so become history. The paragraphs that make up Oxen of the Sun are manifest counterfeits, doing justice neither to the events in the present nor the periods they are supposed to call up. A telegramme seems to have said “Nother dying” (at least in Joyce's earlier intentions, *U* 3.199).

The device of the interior monologue approximates reality in the mind's constant fumbles and attempt to hit a mark. Such a mark may be reached with delay—“A girl playing on one of those instruments what do you call them: dulcimers” or not at all—“Black conducts, reflects, (refracts is it?), the heat” (*U* 4.98, 79). Bloom misses many such marks: “Would birds then come and peck like the boy with the basket of fruit but they said no because they ought to have been afraid of the boy. Apollo that was” (*U* 6.957). We find Stephen on the track of the *mot juste*: “she trudges, schlepps, trains, drags, trascines her load” (*U* 3.393). Martha Clifford, mock-irate correspondent, does not “like that other world” (*U* 5.245). Foreign or difficult words are assimilated by ignorance or in playful aberration: “met him pike hoses, Base barreltone, newpew,” etc. Molly's “Sinner Fein” (*U* 18.383, 1227) have nothing to do with sin, except that, once more, a lexical mark is being missed. Many Eumaeian periods are exquisite misfits.

The Throwaway configuration is one of many instances that come to mind without effort. Bloom's “I was going to throw it away,” its intention missed, is misconstrued by a racing fanatic who translates it into a tip on a horse race Bloom is ignorant of. Even so he has unknowingly hit on a name and, as it turns out, even a winner, from which alleged tip, however, the betting man is deflected by an expert, Lenehan, who then later, again mistakenly, attributes sneaky motives to Bloom. So a legend is created which will potentially be used against its unconscious perpetrator: this is one of Bloom's “*dys*” — adventures. Appropriately perhaps, the name of that real winner of the 1904 Gold Cup is connected with throwing. When Bloom flings, not throws, however, a stick away on the strand, it falls into the silted and “stuck. Now if you were trying to do that for a week on end you couldn't. Chance” (*U* 13.1270). In other words, Bloom hits on something he

never even intended, this is fateful inversion of his (and the book's) habitual misses. This is where the Greek verb *tynchano*, introduced at the beginning, could be applied.

Insofar as *Ulysses* is supposed to be based on the *Odyssey*, it is often wide of the mark, so-called parallels are practically non existing, relations are often in reverse or thematically dispersed. Bloom—to give just one instance—is a character, *not* rhetorically gifted, who spends most of his day *delaying* his nostos and very little seems to get resolved once he does reach his home. When the book appeared in 1922 it was a scandal right away, it was not conforming, considered sinful, blasphemous, a libel on humankind, it clearly went “*hyper moron*” and was taken off the market. It may be oddly fitting that we cannot even agree on the exact nature of multiple details in its text. In the complex gestation and transmission its basic wording went wrong, into next to irremediable corruption. Charges of editorial *hamartia* have been bandied about, and even the author may at times have become a fallible scribe. The very wording of *Ulysses* has been notably ill-fated and the ideal of a text that is *nemertes* has been virtually abandoned in the controversies of recent years. No safe nostos seems in sight.

Almost any *Ulysses* chapter could illustrate instances of dispersed *hamartia*. Wandering Rocks may do as well as any other, partly because it contains many literal misses. People fail to meet each other, the viceroy is missed by Tom Kernan, a tram by Artifoni, Gerty MacDowell cannot see “what her Excellency had on,” Denis Breen fails to find a lawyer (and would have little success with his libel suit even if he were to enlist one), he also salutes the second carriage of the cavalcade. Dignam junior finds a boxing match out of date. More consequentially Bantam Lyons forfeits his great opportunity to win money on an outsider. On the other hand there are chance encounters and unwanted collisions. Joyce's selection of sections (why this person in this place at that moment?) has all the appearance of being random, hit or miss.

People and actions are misidentified: the viceroy becomes “a gent with the topper” or “the lord mayor and lady mayoress without his golden chain,” Bloom is *not* poring over a book on astrology (though once on a jaunt the when someone called a star that Bloom couldn't identify “only . . . a pinprick,” he “wasn't far of the mark” 10.571). Bloom is actually engaged a book on the *Sweets of Hamartia*. In a chapter of failed purposes, Dilly Dedalus does not get enough to keep the home going.

Conmee's section tips the themes off in profusion: a onelegged sailor is palmed off with a blessing, if Cardinal Wolsey had served his God as he did his king things would have taken a better turn, the conversation is full of polite inexactitudes (he “was very glad indeed to hear that”), Conmee is insincere about Father Vaughan, condescending about the Free Church (“Invincible Ignorance”), thinks that “the ticket inspector usually made his visits when one had carelessly thrown away the ticket” (10.117). “Aged and virtuous females” are sometimes “badtempered.” A schoolboy is admonished “mind you don't post yourself into the box.” The General Slocum catastrophe is due to a collision, unfortunate however, for the victims who die “unprepared” (or else partly due to “Palm oil” 10.731). Massgoers may be a bit troublesome too, souls without baptism miss salvation, “a wate, if one might say.” A bride once was “maid, wife and widow in one day,” a countess of Belvedere may or may not have committed adultery fully (“if she had not all sinned as women did”). That “tyrannous incontinence” is needed for man's race on earth. Father Conmee is behind the appointed time for his breviary. Hardly a first reader, moreover, will face the array of misleading names—Dignam court, Dennis

J. Maginni, lady Maxwell and Mrs. M'Guinness—with anything but confusion and will have a tough time spelling out unaided just where they are located in the story. One word towards the end of the section, “Sin” (10.204) combines multiple facets of *hamartia*: readers who take it at face value are wide of the mark, it is not the English word but a Hebrew letter and numeral, as in the Psalm which Father Conmee is reading, a psalm that is sub-divided into small sections not unlike the chapter at hand. But the non-meaning of theological sin is hard to ban from one's mind, especially when Conmee has just come across a young couple whose recent activities might well be covered by the term.

What distinguishes Joyce's works essentially from most of his predecessors—who, as was indicated, could not avoid writing about aspects of *hamartia*—is in his emphasis on missing variegated marks and, in particular, his involvement of us readers. For we of course do a lot of missing and groping in the labyrinthine dark. Misreading is part of the experience. Ordinary readers make mistakes and *Ulysses* turns us all into ordinary readers. It may be the century's most misunderstood work of fiction (second, naturally, to *Finnegans Wake*) so that a scholar found it profitable to write a study which mainly assembles erroneous readings of *Ulysses*, Paul van Caspel's *Bloomers on the Liffey*—in 260 pages it details errors, mind you, committed by scholars or translators, including numerous factual mistakes. The readers of *Ulysses* find themselves often on unfamiliar territory, not the least one being Joyce's Dublin of 1904. It is disheartening even for seasoned experts of the book in many instances still to fail on the lexical level or on that of simple surface interpretation. While certain problems are solved by collective effort, new uncertainties can also emerge: is Bloom really a freemason, or his father-in-law a British major, who pays the rent of the tower, what about the Hungarian lottery, what is a number sixteen doing on a sailor's chest? To say nothing of the genealogies of D. B. Murphy, Corley, A. Boudin, or a Stockholm avatar of Simon Dedalus.

It is the Aeolus episode which seems to demand new adaptive skills from those readers who have just come to found their bearings in the subjective presentation of the first six chapters. Perspective and angles seem to have shifted, there is confusion, coming and going, disrupted conversations and intruding lines of text. One limerick ends in an anticlimax: “*I can't see the Joe Miller: Can you?*” (7.582). Indeed neither the characters nor we can see Joe Miller, and most of us will learn through referential aids that “Joe Miller” was once slang for a joke (that cannot be seen). So Joe Miller cannot *doubly* be seen by innocent readers, and the author has intricated us in a game of not reaching our goal, this again in tune with the Homeric theme of Odysseus being close to his native island after sailing away from Aiolia but not arriving at it.

It need hardly be detailed that *Finnegans Wake* is polytropically hamartanous and happily faulty, not only dealing with sin and error and misunderstanding but by literally transgressing at almost each single turn. It cannot even spell the key term of this commentary, “miss”: “playing catcher and mythed” (197.22) could lexically be described as a congregation of miscarriages: neither “cat,” “mouse,” “caught,” nor “messed” are caught. But for “Fillagain's chrissormiss wake” there is no more need to phrase old wine in new conceptual bottles.

By now we have strayed far afield from the point of departure, in fact facets of Homeric and Joycean features could have been described quite differently from various other starting points. Everything said could have been derived from the *Odyssey*, from Joyce, the Old Testament or any other tale—the same anew. *Hamartia* served as a catalyst: it allowed one particular

ball to be bounced off the works in question. Missing one's aim is part of the human condition, one recognised by Homer and profusely modulated by Joyce, who may differ from most of his predecessors by not concentrating on reports of success, without, however, making failure necessarily tragic.

Notes

1. In transliterations from the Greek accents are omitted; vowel lengths are not indicated, so that *e* = epsilon or eta, *o* = omikron or omega.

2. Yet scholars who looked into the possible meaning of the name Odysseus have also thought the initial *o-* to be prosthetic before a word whose Sanskrit equivalent, *dvīs*, means hatred, and cognate with Greek *dys*.