



## ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Education

### OMENS AND DELPHIC ORACLES OF MODERNISM: PSYCHOANALYTIC NETWORKS AND MYTHIC REINSCRIPTIONS

**KEY WORDS:** Modernism, Psychoanalysis, Omphalos, Oracles, Joyce, Freud, Myth, Networks

**Dr. Karunakaran B. Shaji**

Associate Professor, Regional Institute of Education, Mysuru – 570006, India

#### ABSTRACT

Modernist literature abounds with oracular imagery, prophetic symbols, and mythic allusions that reveal the psychic and cultural anxieties of the twentieth century. Drawing upon Freudian psychoanalysis, Joyce's *Ulysses*, and the broader modernist corpus, this study investigates how motifs of rats, vampires, and the omphalos (navel) function as archetypal signs of disintegration and reconnection in a world governed by urban alienation and technological intrusion. Through a psycho-mythic reading, the paper argues that modernism's fascination with decay, fragmentation, and return reflects the human struggle to reconcile origin and estrangement—symbolized by the Freudian navel and the Delphic oracle. The study situates these recurring metaphors within the discursive networks of sexuality, language, and modern urban life, thereby contributing to the psychoanalytic and mythopoetic understanding of modernist fiction.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The interplay between prophecy, desire, and decay constitutes a defining preoccupation of modernist literature. Writers such as James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf reimagined mythic and archetypal symbols to articulate the fragmented consciousness of modern civilization. The prophetic tone of *The Waste Land* and the labyrinthine patterns of *Ulysses* dramatize a civilization at its dusk, haunted by what Freud identified as the "navel of the dream"—the unplumbable point linking the conscious to the unknown (Freud, 1900/1953).

This paper reinterprets these recurring images—rats, vampires, and the omphalos—as emblematic omens of modernism. Through psychoanalytic and mythocritical frameworks, it examines how modernist fiction internalizes ancient oracular structures, particularly the Delphic omphalos, as a metaphor for both rupture and reconnection.

#### 2. Theoretical Framework

##### 2.1 Psychoanalysis and the Mythic Signifier

Freud's notions of repression, repetition, and the unconscious profoundly shaped modernist aesthetics. The "navel of the dream," as Freud (1900/1953) defines it, symbolizes a psychic knot connecting dream-thoughts to the unrepresentable. In Joyce's *Ulysses*, this becomes the "omphalos," a central yet elusive image linking personal history with collective mythology.

Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud situates this navel within the symbolic order—where the act of naming and linguistic play (e.g., *gnomon*, *simony*) construct the subject's identity (Lacan, 1973). Derrida's notion of *brisure* (1967/1997) similarly frames the navel as a site of paradox—simultaneously a rupture and a link, unity and separation.

##### 2.2 Modernist Networks and Archetypal Reinscription

Modernism's fascination with systems—sewers, telegraph lines, urban infrastructures—reflects what Foucault calls the ambivalence of networks: they "empower and disempower" (Foucault, 1980). Rats and vampires, recurrent symbols of infiltration, function as metaphors for the unconscious disruptions within the apparent order of civilization.

The study thus employs an interdisciplinary framework combining psychoanalysis, myth criticism, and cultural semiotics to decode modernism's prophetic imagery.

#### 3. Oracles of Decay: Rats, Vampires, and Urban Corruption

Rats in *The Waste Land*'s "rat's alley" and *Ulysses*'s cemetery scenes symbolize both contagion and revelation—marking the moments when civilization confronts its own mortality. The "Rat Man" case in Freud's psychoanalytic writings mirrors this

symbolism, presenting the rat as a figure of compulsive return and subliminal dread.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) introduces a vampiric continuum: both rats and vampires penetrate the boundaries of the body and the city, violating the sanctity of enclosure. Stoker's image of *Dracula* transforming into a swarm of rats encapsulates the Freudian theme of infiltration—the return of the repressed through eroticized violation. Vampirism thus becomes a metaphor for modernist anxieties over technological intrusion, sexual transgression, and psychic contagion.

#### 4. The Omphalos: Navel, Oracle, and the Networks of Return

In Greek mythology, the Delphic omphalos marked the "navel of the earth," the sacred center where the priestess inhaled mephitic vapors and uttered ambiguous prophecies. Joyce appropriates this motif to explore the psychic geography of modern man—Stephen Dedalus's quest for origin and autonomy in *Ulysses* becomes a negotiation between rupture and return.

Stephen's observation of the "midwife's bag" in the "Proteus" episode evokes the umbilical cord and telephonic wire—symbols of connectivity and ensnarement. This web of linguistic and familial connections parallels Freud's *fort/da* game (1920), where the child's play reenacts the primal separation from the mother, converting absence into signification. Joyce transforms this psychological drama into a narrative of exile and artistic creation: the artist severed from home yet bound by invisible threads of origin.

#### 5. The Myth of Return and the Modernist Odyssey

Modernist protagonists—from Stephen and Bloom to Woolf's Ramsay and James's Strether—re-enact Odyssean journeys without the promise of homecoming. Unlike Homer's hero, they traverse fragmented spaces and uncertain identities. Bloom's marked coin in *Ulysses*, launched "for circulation on the waters of civic finance," never returns, symbolizing the futility of the modern quest.

The "navel-scar," recalling both Odysseus's recognition mark and Freud's "primal sundering," embodies the trauma of birth into language and culture. The modernist Odysseus no longer seeks Ithaca; his voyage is toward estrangement. In this respect, the road itself becomes the destination—the hallmark of modernist existentialism (Jameson, 2002).

#### 6. Dream Navels and Rhizomatic Modernism

Freud's metaphor of the dream-navel as "a tangle of thought" prefigures Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic model of signification (1972). Joyce's vision of "anastomosing navel cords" evokes a non-hierarchical web of meanings, resisting

the patriarchal "family tree." The matrilineal networks of Ulysses—umbilical, linguistic, and erotic—thus anticipate poststructuralist ideas of textual proliferation and indeterminacy.

### 7. Psychoanalysis, Language, and the Anxiety of Influence

Although Joyce and Woolf never wrote "psychoanalytic fiction," both were profoundly shaped by the psychoanalytic imagination. Woolf's ambivalence toward Freud reflects her fear that analysis might "outmanoeuvre" the creative act itself. Joyce, though distrustful of psychoanalysis, saw in it a mirror of his own phantasmagoria. His correspondence and library holdings confirm his familiarity with Freud, Jung, and Ernest Jones (Ellmann & Reizbaum, forthcoming).

As Felman (1982) observes, the literary text often anticipates its own theory—the critic's task is not to impose psychoanalysis on literature but to recognize how literature performs it.

### 8. Forgetting and Narcotic Modernity: The Lotus Motif

In Homer's *Odyssey*, the lotus-eaters symbolize oblivion and the refusal of return. Modernist narratives—from Ulysses to *The Ambassadors*—reinterpret this myth as the condition of modern consciousness. Bloom's forgetfulness—his lost latchkey, misplaced lotion recipe, and pseudonymous correspondence as "Henry Flower"—signifies the narcotic amnesia of modernity.

The "flower" thus becomes the emblem of self-erasure within the circulatory systems of letters, commodities, and desires. Bloom, unlike Odysseus, forgets not merely Ithaca but the very desire to return.

### 9. CONCLUSION

Modernist literature transforms mythic prophecy into psychological allegory. The omphalos, the vampire, and the rat become metaphors for a civilization ensnared in its own unconscious networks. Through endless replays of archetypal images, modernism constructs alternate myths of exile and return—journeys without destinations, oracles without gods.

The prophetic voices of modernism—its Delphic oracles—foretell not redemption but perpetual circulation, where language, desire, and history intertwine in an infinite loop of loss and return.

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