Hades: The Construction of a Graphic Novel
Bethany Christiansen

“Hades” is a short graphic novel that reinterprets the sixth chapter of James Joyce’s Ulysses in light of Dante’s Inferno. Descent into a pit, animal symbolism, guilt and condemnation, and the implications of death form a few of the themes I address in the booklet. The sixth chapter of Ulysses details the journey of the protagonist, Leopold Bloom, and three other men as they ride in the funeral procession of their mutual acquaintance, Paddy Dignam. As they travel, Bloom’s convoluted internal narrative touches on subjects such as suicide, the death of his infant son, his estranged wife, and the many forms and consequences of death.

I chose to do “Hades” as a graphic novel because the medium multiplies interpretive possibilities, rather than limiting them. The author can intentionally place visual clues to interpretation when the narrative requires silence. Conversely, the author can allow the literal narrative to take a leading role when the story moves into a realm not easily pictorialized. In “Hades,” I tried to recreate the disorienting experience of reading Ulysses. Joyce never allows the reader to get “comfortable” with the text, preferring that the reader be buffeted about, as it were, just as Odysseus himself is.

Although graphic novels representing Ulysses have been created before, “Hades” breaks away from a straightforward retelling: it is a unique artistic creation in itself. As such, I hope to inspire my audience to discover, perhaps for the first time, Ulysses and Inferno.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


HADES

story and art
by Bethany Christiansen
based on James Joyce's
Ulysses

B. Christiansen
"Who is this who dares to go without death through Death's Kingdom?"

Mr. Power
Simon Dedalus
Martin Cunningham
Leopold Bloom

Behold the beast with the barbed tail,

...that flies over mountains and breaks weapons and walls. Behold that which corrupts the entire world."
Paperwrapped lump. Lemon-scented. Not lemon-scented when we go. Certain conditions underground, the body turns by saponification.

Waxlike. Only the fat though. Wonder if it sanitizes. Keeps the maggots out.

They say many famous people have committed suicide. The mark of a great artist.

That kind of temporary insanity.

Great weakness you mean. Unforgiveable.

Do you suppose they become bushes or trees perhaps in the afterlife? Given a different sort of body. Didn't like the one they had... or they disappear, no body at all anymore, no resurrection. Hmm...

No body to come back to.

Murder of oneself no less a crime, but the thing is, that it's not punishable.

Just twigs and branches and leaves. Bleed if you break them. Scream too. Met him pike hoses.
Wretched lot of crumbs in this carriage. Do you suppose...?

Someone's been eating a thing or two in here.

Metamorphosis. Transformation of the body. A different kind of life. Like making love in among the headstones. Turns them on, you know...

Then life sprouts in the belly. Death to life to life.

A tree sprouts from the ground. Suicides become trees in death perhaps. Like my father:

My little one who never made it to wear the Eton suit. Only eleven days old.

Come into the world screaming bloody wizened and purplish, toothless mouth gasping first time, sucking in air just to protest.
No easy way out. Suffering from Mother and child just breathe clear that's it. In through your nose out through your mouth.

Then once the thing is over and there you have it the mauve little protester hiccuping in the shoebox.

The little white coffin just the size of a shoebox too.

Molly didn't sleep much then. Cried for a few days. Breasts shrunk again because the milk was extra. Still beautiful though, great full bulbs beneath the towel as she walked from the bath.

Firm limbed fertile full breasted.

Strong legs too.

Prize heffer.
Why the hell have we stopped?!

It seems they’re driving cattle across the road...

Cattle? I wonder that they’re like a kind of lost children.

Tribe of helpless.

But to take them out to feed them wandering, herded, rather hope they don’t fall into chasms.

Unfortunate Exiles.

From Africa, I suppose down south, the heat makes their hair short can go so long without water then store it up in their backs as do camels.

Taken in docile, staggering bob.
Mothers like shepherds of necessity and necessity takes them to slaughter.

Economic exchange the needful slaughter of innocence.

Ruminate from at least four stomachs and to chew their cud mouthfuls and churn it like we do thoughts.

Should improve the good absorption of nutrients into the linings of the colon or or the that takes vitamins and such?

They say that growth of fingernails and hair continues after death. Digestion too, if food was in the guts.

I wonder what makes it keep growing...
I had not thought death had undone so many.
We fear the descent.

Drowning not a pretty death: purple, a bloated floatsam. Heart bursts in the chest. Shudder to think that’s the way I go in the end.

Wonder what it is we see once the light of the eyes dims—tunnels like under trains or perhaps...

...like staring down into the nine-layered abyss. Final descent of the spirit.
The pain gone. Like stumbling down a long crooked crumbling road alone or maybe with the thousands others gone that day too. Thick-legged stumping one by one down the chute, the bright gleaming light towards God knows what.

Body fades.
A release.

Or just darkness, the end of the line.

Last train.

PATRICK
R.
DIGNUM
And look at the jolly fellow!

? Squeak!!

Quite content to waddle down in broad day and wriggle under the plinth...

Good deal for him - the old hand knows what to do.

Just free meat to him,

Crumbling maggot-infested cold and oozing thick coated with slime.

Circle of Life, my friend.