Bloom in Dublin; Dublin in Bloom

DAVID CLARK

If James Joyce regarded Leopold Bloom as the "hero" of *Ulysses*, it is also necessary to stress the prominence given to the physical space in which the drama is enacted; that is, the city of Dublin. It is significant to remember that Joyce had originally conceived of *Ulysses* as a short story for inclusion in *Dubliners*. Dublin is a constant factor within the novel, a factor that seeps through every page and exerts a continuous influence on all its characters. Despite this importance, we are never given any real pictorial description of the city. In the words of Frank Budgen,

> it is not by way of description that Dublin is created in *Ulysses*. There is a wealth of delicate pictorial evocation in *Dubliners*, but there is little or none in *Ulysses*. Houses and interiors are shown us, but as if we entered them as familiars, not as strangers come to take stock of the occupants and inventory of their furniture. [1]

The same is true of the streets of the city, its waterways and monuments, all of which are named constantly, but never described. This naming process gives the reader an implied familiarity with the city. The lack of pictorial descriptions in no way hinders the reader's ability to, paradoxically, "depict" the city. The information given enables him to "experience" Dublin in a way that would be impossible with any simple, one-dimensional description. Joyce's biographer, Richard Ellmann, commented on this:

> Joyce attended so carefully to such minute particulars that he claimed, if Dublin were destroyed, the city could be reconstructed from his books. Its immortality would be assured through his. Other novelists are, however, much more likely to present a city in reconstructable form. Joyce offers no architectural information, only places to bump elbows, or to lean them. To see out of the corner of an eye, to recognise by a familiar smell. The city rises in bits, not in masses. Anything else would be travelogue. [2]

The reader is basically conscious of the details of the city of Dublin through its inhabitants, and it is through the consciousness of the Dubliners that we are able to piece together the reconstruction of the city. As such, these Dubliners can be regarded as an important part of the physical geography of their home town.

In order to assess the relationship between Leopold Bloom and Dublin, it is first necessary to discuss the various facets of the city. Dublin can be seen as a twentieth-century city, as the capital of Ireland, as one of the most important centres

of the British Empire, still in its prime in 1904, and as a representative model of western culture. All of these facets are relevant to Bloom's relationship with the city.

Although in 1904 Dublin was far from being the sprawling metropolis we might associate with a capital city at the end of the century, it was relatively cosmopolitan. The administrative centre of the eighteenth century had been augmented throughout the nineteenth by a steady flow of immigrants from the rural areas, seeking work in the newly-developed factories. Towards the end of the century, these had been joined by a not inconsiderable number of foreign immigrants, often political refugees. These are represented in *Ulysses* by Dlugacz the Polish butcher, by Stephen's music teacher, by the group of Italians talking beside the ice-cream cart and, of course, by Bloom's family.

As capital of Ireland, the position of Dublin was perhaps somewhat contradictory. The capital of a colony, it can be argued, is not a real capital, subject as it is to the rulings of the metropolis. Dublin as national capital must be juxtaposed with Dublin as provincial centre. The paradoxes of this situation are manifold. In *Ulysses*, we are constantly reminded that Dublin is part of the British Empire (the references to Nelson's Column, the Lord Lieutenant's cavalcade, Molly's imperial background), but we are continuously brought into contact with its Irishness. Frank Budgen, a close friend of Joyce, claims that "Joyce is more a Dubliner than an Irishman."[3] The apparent contradiction behind such a statement is in fact highly illuminating with reference to the position of the city of Dublin in the novel. Dublin is both part of and apart from the reality of the Irish nation, and this factor provokes an identity crisis which is regularly apparent in the discourse of its inhabitants.

Connected in many respects with the "Irishness" of Dublin is the religious question. Up until about the end of the eighteenth century, Dublin had been a predominantly Protestant city. As an island of Protestantism surrounded by the staunchly Catholic rural areas, confrontation between the capital and the rest of the island had been constant. The influx of immigrants in the eighteenth century had been the main factor contributing to the fact that Dublin was to become the predominantly Catholic city we find by the time of the novel. Now Dublin had become, with rural Ireland, a focal point of Catholicism in an Empire which was constitutionally sworn to the defence of the Protestant faith. Irish nationalism and the religious question provide many of the contradictions apparent in the conversations of the inhabitants of the city.

Within the physical space of Dublin, the twentieth-century city, Bloom would seem to be at ease. He walks its streets with unfailing self-confidence. He freely enters the shops, library, baths, bars and other public buildings. In "Calypso," "The Lotus Eaters" and "The Lestrygonians," Bloom seems as at home in the city as any of its other citizens. Even his daydreams of the East lack force, he himself scoffs their unreality, "Probably not a bit like it really. Kind of stuff you read..." (*U* 4. 99). It would even seem fair to say that, when we first see Bloom, he appears to be more

integrated into Dublin life than either Molly or Stephen. His short, conventional conversation with the rural-born shop-keeper, Mr. O'Rourke bears out such a view:

> Turning freshly into Dorset Street he said freshly in greeting through the doorway:
> — Good day, Mr. O'Rourke.
> — Good day to you.
> — Lovely weather, sir.
> — 'tis all that. (*U* 4. 120-125)

Such apparent integration is, however, largely illusory. In the presence of his fellow Dubliners, Bloom is an "outsider," the "dark horse" so often alluded to in the novel. As a Jew, Bloom is subject to their anti-Semitic views. At this stage, it is perhaps necessary to discuss Bloom's situation as a Jew. The "Jewishness" of Bloom has been one of the areas of *Ulysses* which has given rise to regular critical debate. According to Jewish Canonical Law, the son of a Gentile mother is not a Jew. As Bloom's father was Jewish but his mother Gentile, he can be seen as a "character who 'in reality' both is and is not a Jew."[4] This ambiguity is fully exploited by Joyce, who makes use of Bloom's Jewishness/non-Jewishness on several levels. Most basically this is used to reflect the very real anti-Semitism which existed in Ireland at the time.

The truth was quite distinct from that which the bombastic Mr. Deasy tells Stephen in "Nestor":

> —I just wanted to say, he said. Ireland, they say, has the honour of being the only country which never persecuted the jews. (*U* 2. 437-438)

In fact, there had been a considerable history of anti-Semitism in Ireland: as a consequence of immigration, the Jewish population of Ireland increased more than tenfold in the thirty days before the day of *Ulysses*. And from early in that year, 1904, until shortly before Joyce emigrated to the Continent in the autumn, there was a dramatic outbreak of anti-Semitism in Ireland, including an organised boycott of Jewish businesses in Limerick.

This was used by Joyce to make an ironic commentary on the hypocrisy of his fellow Irishmen. In many respects the situation of the Irish was similar to that of the Jews, a parallelism which is constantly alluded to. The speech made by John F. Taylor which Professor MacHugh reads to his fellow Dubliners in the newspaper office provides a good example of this. The Jews are asked to forsake their language and religion in order to adopt those of the Egyptians, their powerful neighbours and conquerors, in much the same way as the Irish are under constant pressure to sacrifice their culture and religion for those of the British Empire. The theme is continued in "Ithaca," where Bloom and Stephen discuss corresponding aspects of the Irish and Hebrew languages. Judaism invokes the twin concepts of religion and nationalism which are central to Joyce's designs in *Ulysses*.

Apart from the socio-historical aspects of anti-Semitism in Ireland, or the parallels drawn between Irish and Hebrew culture, Joyce also employs the ambiguous nature of Bloom's racial background as a means of endowing his character with a degree of spiritual and political independence. As he has attempted to embrace other religions (as well as having undergone a youthful flirtation with nationalist politics), Bloom is given the ability to compare and to contrast. This also means that he is effectively alien from all cultures, and as such can view them with a reasonable amount of objectivity. Bloom is in many ways an outsider, but this is based not only on the fact that he is or is not a Jew.

The anti-Semitism of the inhabitants of Dublin is rife throughout the novel. From the first chapter, "Telemachus," with Mulligan and Haines, we are introduced briefly to the theme. This is continued with the declarations of Mr. Deasy in "Nestor" who, after denying the presence of anti-Semitic feelings in Ireland, goes on, ironically, to crack an anti-Semitic joke. It must be remembered that Deasy is a Unionist, he favours the union of Ireland with England. Ironically, anti-Semitism would seem to unite Dubliners of all persuasions.

Throughout the novel, Bloom comes into constant contact with anti-Semitic feeling, usually when he is in the company of groups of Dublin men. In "Hades," this is hinted at, and it later comes to a head in "Aeolus" in the newspaper office and later in the National Library in "Scylla and Charybdis." In "The Cyclops," the nameless narrator makes great use of all the stock clichés about Jews: "and the old dog smelling him all the time I'm told these jewies does have a sort of queer odour coming off them" (*U* 12.452-453). The underlying current is often brought to the surface, reflecting widespread contemporary views, rejected strongly by Joyce. Frank Budgen could be accused of providing an explanation for these views which itself totters on the edge of racist thought:

> there exists also a physical chemical repulsion, and this is felt only by the Gentile for the Jewish man, and is experienced by neither kind of menfolk for Gentile or Jewish women, nor, it seems, by the Jew man for his Gentile opposite number, nor by Gentile or Jew women for the males of the other race. This physical incapability must explain in some measure the curious isolation of Bloom among the men of Dublin. [5]

One can't help but feel that such a pseudo-scientific "explanation" would be instantly rejected by Joyce.

Taken on a purely religious level, Bloom shows a remarkable degree of independence. Born into the Jewish faith, baptised as a Catholic, the Bloom we see in 1904 has rejected all formal religion. The first time he appears to us as a real outsider in the novel is when he enters All Hallows church in "The Lotus Eaters." He is puzzled by the funeral mass for Paddy Dignam and mistakes the Catholic idea of the Virgin, believing her to be considered as a deity: "God they believe she is: or goddess." (*U* 11.150)

When he is given the evangelist pamphlet, he reads it and then throws it away, into the Liffey. This act has been seen by many critics as symbolising Bloom's rejection by Dublin. He, like the pamphlet, the newspaper or the name of the horse, has been "thrown away," outcast, from the mainstream of society. [6] It can also be argued, however, that the act of throwing away the religious pamphlet is a rejection by Bloom of the imposition of another religion. In this case, Bloom is not rejected; rather it is he who rejects. By throwing away the pamphlet, Bloom once again asserts his freedom.

Joyce also uses the image of the Jews metaphorically, stressing through their constant movement and statelessness (reflected on a mundane level by Bloom's wanderings around Dublin on the 16th June, 1904 and by his movement from job to job, house to house, religion to religion) the situation of modern man. Bloom would thus encompass the alienation of twentieth-century Everyman. The nationalism professed by the patriotic Dubliners is often placed in ironic juxtaposition with Bloom's Jewishness. As Blamires says: "That these Irishmen are too excitedly romanticising their own past sufferings to pay any attention to the needs of the living stranger in their midst is one of Joyce's telling ironies." [7]

Bloom is rejected from the circle of Irish nationalism, a circle often revealed as false and insubstantial. His idea of a nation is based on the humanist concept of peaceful coexistence. He considers himself to be just as Irish as his fellow Dubliners. His views are mocked in "The Cyclops":

> —But do you know what a nation means? says John Wise.
> —Yes, says Bloom
> —What is it? says John Wise.
> —A nation? Says Bloom. A nation is the same people living in the same place.
> —By God, then, says Ned, laughing, if that's so I'm a nation for I'm living in the same place for the last five years.
> So of course everyone had the laugh at Bloom and says he, trying to muck out of it:
> —Or also living in different places.
> —That covers my case, says Joe.
> —What is your nation if I may ask? says the citizen.
> —Ireland, says Bloom. I was born here. Ireland. (*U* 12.1419-1431)

The stark simplicity of Bloom's views is directly contrasted with the more irrational claims of his interlocutors. He is willing to accept the facts behind the reality of the exploitation of Ireland by England, but, as is typical in him, he makes an effort to look at the matter from two sides. His approach is two-eyed, not the narrow, one-eyed outlook of the citizen and the other Dubliners. This is again stressed in "Eumaeus" where, in conversation with the sailor, he gives his opinion that: "it was highly advisable in the interim to try to make the most of both countries even though poles apart" (*U* 16.1039-1040).

Bloom can see through the lack of substance in a large part of the nationalism professed by the Dubliners. This was suggested at the beginning of the novel, when the milk-woman was unable to understand the questions put to her in Irish by the Englishman Haines. Similarly, in "The Cyclops," the citizen defends the use of the Irish Language. The irony of this defence is that it is made in English. Bloom realises the importance of possessing a national heritage, but he is also aware that the difficulties implicit in living in a modern city like Dublin cannot be overcome by simple romantic allusion to the apparent splendours of a misty Celtic past.

Although Bloom's political views can be seen as Utopian, they can be considered as being what we can, somewhat paradoxically, term a practical utopianism—that is, he holds Utopian ideas which are aimed at solving practical problems. Thus his ideas are based on the improvement of the city of Dublin; the tramline taking cattle directly to the docks, the funeral trams like the ones in Milan etc. Such pragmatic ideas are contrasted with the romantic, nationalistic daydreaming of his fellow Dubliners.

It is possible that the parable told by Stephen echoes Joyce's criticism of the Irish nationalism we can find in the characters of *Ulysses*. The two old women represent, perhaps, the people of Dublin who, unable to look up at the one-eyed face of British Imperialism, represented by the figure of Lord Nelson, are equally incapable of looking down at the city of Dublin below them, that is, of facing their day-to-day reality. Instead, they throw the pips down on the city, almost like defecating on themselves. The attitude is one of self-abnegation, of rejecting the unacceptable but also of damaging their own interests. On the contrary, Bloom would like to do something useful for his city—it is significant that one of his fantasies in "Circe" involves his becoming an Alderman of the city of Dublin—a dream of acceptation through popularity and also of obtaining the power to allow him to bring his plans to effect.

As we have seen, Bloom's relationship with the city of Dublin can be perceived largely in terms of his relationship with its inhabitants. Joyce recreates Dublin, but:

> It must grow upon us not through our eye and memory, but through the minds of the Dubliners we overhear talking to each other. They must make us guests or adopted citizens of their city . . . Here and there we get a clue to the shape and colour of this place or that, but in the main Dublin exists for us as the essential element in which Dubliners live.[8]

Bloom is also isolated to some extent from his fellow citizens through the language he uses. One of the many beauties of *Ulysses* is the fidelity with which Joyce recreates the nuances of colloquial Dublin speech. Anthony Burgess points out that this is not just represented by one simple, unitary form which would offer little more than a caricature of the way the residents of Dublin speak. Rather the variety represented in the novel reflects the complex range of speech styles to be found in any modern

city, be it New York, New Delhi or Seville. In *Ulysses*, we are able to find: "the whole spectrum of Dublin speech, and it would be amusing to sketch out a cline with the speech of drabs and jarveys near the bottom and that of characters like J. J. O'Molloy and Professor MacHugh somewhere at the top."[9]

Bloom's language often appears to us as being incredibly neutral, and this is another way of emphasising the gap that exists between him and his fellow citizens:

> It is intriguing to consider how Leopold Bloom's speech would fit into the spectrum. His idiom, either in dialogue or interior monologue, is lacking in the broader Dublin features: it approaches the emancipated or "Londonised" language. (Burgess 50)

The theory Burgess proposes would seem to be reasonable, although perhaps a more rigorous scientific analysis is necessary. Such an analysis would have to be undertaken at a morpho-syntactical level. Although Joyce gives few clues to the accents used by his characters (a few stray examples can be found, i.e. the citizen's use of /u:/ when he says "Prooshians" for "Prussians" in *U* 12.1390), it can safely be assumed that Bloom, born and bred in the city, speaks with at least a mild Dublin accent. It is apparent that Bloom would not speak with the false, stereotyped, adenoidal Jewish accent popular in bad comedy films.

What we can detect in the text is that, like Stephen, Bloom makes less use of idiomatic English and Dublin syntactical patterns than the majority of the other characters. This linguistic factor is one of the elements which link Bloom and Stephen. The nameless narrator in "The Cyclops" mocks Bloom's use of "long words" like "phenomenon":

> —That can be explained by science, says Bloom. It's only a natural phenomenon, don't you see, because on account of the . . .
> And then he starts with his jawbreakers about phenomenon and science and this phenomenon and the other phenomenon. (*U* 12. 464-467)

Although Bloom's language is another element which isolates him from the mainstream of Dublin life, he is always willing to be drawn into conversation. His love of explaining things, of trying to make himself understood reflects his intrinsic desire of being fully accepted. For the same reason, he also attempts to take part in the gossip which is such an integral part of Dublin life. For the Marxist critic Fredric Jameson, gossip is the type of discourse which is defined by the experience of living in a city, it is the linguistic means of defining collective experience. He states that:

> The classical city is not a collection of buildings, nor even a collection of people living on top of one another; nor is it even mainly or primarily a collection of pathways, of the trajectories of people through these buildings or that urban space, although that gets us a little closer to it. . . . No, the classical city is defined essentially by the nodal points at which all those pathways and trajectories meet, or which they traverse; points of totalisation we

may call them, which make shared experience possible . . . (which) will have to define a kind of speech. . . . That discourse is called gossip.[10]

If Dublin is made real through its discourse pattern, that is, through its gossip, Bloom fits into Dublin life. The form of his linguistic use alienates him from the mainstream, but its substance connects him to it. His acceptance of gossip as social discourse reveals his desire to be fully integrated.

Bloom's sense of frustrated isolation is felt throughout the novel. He wants to be accepted by his fellow citizens, but is not prepared to sacrifice his own ideals in order to gain such acceptance. He realises that he is different. After committing the blunder of pointing out the dent in Menton's hat, he later admits to himself that he has lacked the aplomb that the other Dubliners would have shown: "I should have said when he clapped on his topper. Thank you. I ought to have said something about an old hat or something. No. I could have said. Looks as good as new now. See his phiz then" (*U* 7.171-173).

One of the main impressions that the reader receives of Bloom is that of his immense loneliness. Apart from his wife, who uses the diminutive form "Poldy," nobody calls him by his first name in the entire novel. Some of the Dubliners recognise his inherent goodness, however. Lenehan tells M'Coy that he (Bloom) is "a cultured allroundman" (*U* 10. 581), and when Bloom puts his name down on the subscription list to raise funds for Paddy Dignam's widow and children, Nolan, echoing Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*, is forced to admit that "there is much kindness in the jew" (*U* 10. 950). Despite this, however, we see Bloom as a lonely figure, who wanders through the streets of Dublin much as he wanders through life, uncomfortable in the cliquish male groups. Frank Budgen comments that: "Nothing brings people nearer to one another than community in fearing, loving and hating, and Bloom has a scale of valus different from that of his fellow Dubliners. He feels and thinks differently."[11]

Budgen makes an attempt to relate Bloom's loneliness to a desire to be accepted, and believes that Molly is used as a vehicle towards such acceptance:

He is surrounded with acquaintances, yet he is a lonely man, condemned never to experience the warmth of male fellowship—incapable, perhaps, of accepting it were it offered to him. That his wife is possessed by other males gives him a physical contact with them at second hand. It is an underground substitute for noisy back-slapping, arm-gripping comradeship.[12]

Such a view may seem somewhat naïve, especially in the wake of late twentieth-century views of sexuality, but it does focus on Bloom's underlying desire for acceptance.

Bloom can be seen, as we have suggested earlier, both as being a part of but at the same time apart from, the city of Dublin. Like Stephen Dedalus, he lacks the keys which would gain his admittance to the society of his fellow Dubliners. The keys that jingle in the pockets of Blazes Boylan as he makes his way to Molly's jingling

bed-quoits. Dublin represents a closed circle from which Bloom is largely excluded. In the episode "The Wandering Rocks," it is perhaps significant that the eyes of all the various participants, all, apparently, wanderers in the streets of Dublin like Bloom himself, finally converge on the unifying focal point of the Lord-Lieutenant's cavalcade. Bloom, excluded even from chance, does not see this cavalcade.

As Leopold Bloom wanders through the streets of Dublin, so he wanders through life, looking for a physical space in which he can assert his own identity. He even met Molly for the first time while playing the parlour game of musical chairs, a game in which the participants have to compete against one another for an ever-more limited piece of territory—a fitting metaphor for Bloom's life. Despite this, however, he neither desires nor seeks any home other than his native Dublin. He recognises that his pipe-dreams of the Orient are little more than sheer escapism and, significantly, his idea of true domestic happiness is limited to

a thatched bungalowshaped 2 storey dwellinghouse of southerly aspect ... situate at a given point not less than 1 statute mile from the periphery of the metropolis, within a time limit of not more than 15 minutes from tram or train line (e.g., Dundrum, south, or Sutton, north . . .) (*U* 17. 1504-1517)

Again the metaphor is striking. Bloom believes true happiness can be found in a simple suburban house. The suburbs, like Bloom himself both form a part of, but at the same time, maintain a suitable distance from, the city of Dublin.

Notes

[1] F. Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of* Ulysses *and Other Writings* (Oxford: OUP, 1972) 69.

[2] R. Ellmann, *James Joyce* (Oxford: OUP, 1982) 56.

[3] Budgen 154.

[4] S. Sultan, *Eliot, Joyce and Company* (New York: OUP, 1987) 79.

[5] Budgen 261.

[6] See, for example, H. Blamires, *The New Bloomsday Book* (London: Routledge, 1988) 121.

[7] Blamires 49.

[8] Budgen 71.

[9] A. Burgess, "The Dublin Sound," *Modern Critical Views: James Joyce*, ed. H. Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1982) 49.

[10] F. Jameson, "Ulysses in History," *Modern Critical Views: James Joyce*, ed. H. Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1982) 180-181.

[11] Budgen 280.

[12] Budgen 149.