

# “From the Periphery of the Metropolis”: On Joyce’s Modern/ist Irish Peripher realities

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When one thinks of the notion of “peripheral modernisms” in the context of Western literatures, James Joyce’s work and particularly *Ulysses* stand out as a key, though ambivalent case. Born and grown up in Ireland, the colonial *unicum* as the first colony of the British Empire, though a domestic and ‘metropolitan’ one, that was also part of North Western Europe, Joyce, like Kafka, was “writing from outside of capitalism’s centres” and was later “assimilated by a literati enchanted or disturbed” by his innovative work.<sup>1</sup> As the towering figure of Anglophone modernism, a writer who became a voluntary exile from his insular Ireland to insert himself in the peripheral multiculturalism of Trieste, and later in the cosmopolitanism of Paris, Joyce is perhaps the most significant author to have celebrated the complex interconnectedness of modernity and peripherality. Joyce’s Dublin represents, in fact, one of the centres (i.e. capitals) of modernist literature, while still being connoted, at the time of its celebration in *Ulysses* and throughout Joyce’s writing career, by

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<sup>1</sup> See Benita Parry, “Aspects of Peripheral Modernism”, *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* Vol. 40, No. 1 (2009): 27–55, 34.

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a position of economic and industrial peripherality. Ireland's tormented history of emancipation was to award Dublin a political prominence that problematically projected it onto the contested discourse of colonial modernity, while its cultural position in the controlling British centre-margin ideology was a source of inspiration for all its modernist writers.<sup>2</sup> This allowed Joyce to imbue his whole work with what may be defined as a poetics of the margin—the provenance from the margin/periphery and the thematization of the margin—not simply as a political and cultural condition but as an existential one. Within the formidable, challenging inclusiveness of his work, marginality and peripherality have been claimed as critical tropes along with the more disputed ones of internal colonialism, semi-colonialism, “metrocolonialism” (J. Valente, D. Kiberd)<sup>3</sup>; but, in any case, cosmopolitanism for all that, always intrinsically linked to the idea of modernity.

Joyce's work foregrounds the relevance of the peripheral and the modern in their problematic coexistence on several possible levels: the geopolitical and historical, the existential (in the figure of Bloom who is doomed to marginality and yet qualified by a profession that is representative of modern capitalist consumer society); the intertextual, with the combination of recondite, antiquarian cultural allusiveness and countless references to local topics and minutiae, and the identitarian, starting from

<sup>2</sup> The peripherality of Dublin can thus best be situated in an expanded historical context, as reasserted by the recent study *Literature and the Peripheral City*, Lieven Ameel, Jason Finch and Markku Salmela eds, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025, 2: “Cities such as Dublin and Prague, as well as cities that function as regional metropolises (e.g. Stockholm, Santiago de Chile, Johannesburg), and capitals of countries that are not the largest or most culturally prominent from a Western perspective, can all be understood as peripheral in a global context. Yet to think of them in this way is always to think in relation to a perceived centre which is elsewhere: it is always only a way of metaphorizing spatial relations. Such cities are not peripheral in any absolute or factual sense”.

<sup>3</sup> The term *metrocolonial* was coined by Joseph Valente in a study of Joyce's *Dubliners*, then further developed in his *Dracula's Crypt. Bram Stoker, Irishness and the Question of Blood* (Urbana and Chicago: Chicago UP, 2002), but also analysed by Declan Kiberd in *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1994), as he specifies in *DC*, footnote 9, page 147. This refers to the unique conditions and characters of the colonial and postcolonial history of Ireland, which, “with the act of Union in 1800 (...) ceased to be a distinct if colonized geopolitical entity and assumed the unique and contradictory position of a domestic or ‘metropolitan’ colony (...). (*Dracula's Crypt*, 3). The metrocolonial condition, of which Valente considers Bram Stoker's “an exemplary case “names an uneasy social and psychic space between authority, agency, and legitimacy on one side and abjection, heteronomy, and hybridity on the other” (*Dracula's Crypt*, 4).

Bloom's and Molly's ethnic and national origins. From a biographical point of view, Joyce's two cities—Dublin and Trieste—were both peripheral, outside the centres of capitalism, although the former was a capital and a provincial city at one and the same time, the largest in the British Empire after London, though about twenty times smaller than London, and the latter was the largest maritime port of the Habsburg Empire. Recent criticism, notably by J. McCourt, has brought to the fore the fundamental influence of Trieste's imperial peripheral identity in many thematic and linguistic respects, for example as the very source of Joyce's textualization of "Tarry East" and part of his treatment of Orientalism and the European exotic. The (auto)biographical background of Joyce's spatial politics, in fact, has been widely investigated over recent decades, generally pointing to "a spatial complexity" that cannot be reduced to either imperialist complicity or postcolonial nationalist resistance.<sup>4</sup>

### THE MODERNITY OF THE PERIPHERAL

It is in *Ulysses* that we find one of the most complex and thorough textualizations of a spatially connoted idea of modernity that hinges on the dialectics of centre and margin, urban and suburban civilization, the metropolitan, the cosmopolitan, the peripheral, the metro/semi/postcolonial. Leopold Bloom's cultural and artistic positioning has been variously examined as being concerned with the issues of displacement and community, spatial peripherality, social marginality and equality.

This enumeration of socio-spatial questions, a "happy hunting-ground" for any scholar interested in the cultural phenomena of modernity, should be integrated by the fact that in Bloom's character Joyce makes use of fantasy and utopianism as an impulse, a penchant rather than a cultural expression as such, in keeping with the "minor utopias" of modernism, which were on the whole sceptical rather than assertive.<sup>5</sup> More specifically, *Ulysses* foregrounds an idea of modernity which becomes encoded in relation to the peripheral and to what can be best defined as utopian modes of idealization which are grounded

<sup>4</sup> Jon Heggglund, "Ulysses and the Rhetoric of Cartography", *Twentieth Century Literature* Vol. 42, No. 2 (Summer 2003): 164–192, 189.

<sup>5</sup> See Benjamin Kohlman, "Introduction", in Rosalyn Gregory and Benjamin Kohlmann, eds. *Utopian Spaces of Modernism. Literature and Culture 1885–1925* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1–18 passim and 2–3.

in subjective desires, and which challenge political, ideological and social discourses.<sup>6</sup> In addition to a pervasive textual presence, this cultural nexus of the modern, the peripheral and the utopian, can be analysed firstly in the “new Bloomusalem” in “Circe”, Bloom’s fantasmagoric, multicultural and multireligious utopian Ireland, and, secondly (and more interestingly for the purposes of this analysis) in the fancy, blissful, hypermodern fashioning of ‘Flowerville’, in “Ithaca”. As an imaginative projection included in the most overtly materialist and expository of all the episodes, this piece of utopian digression presents a narrative fantasy that engages with different aspects of a peripheral, suburban, capitalistic modernity, on the mutually exclusive, incompatible planes of subjective and private desires and social and political realities.

Since the concept of periphery has come to the fore of critical discussion largely owing to early postcolonial theory (notably since the publication of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin’s *The Empire Writes Back*), the fact that Ireland stands as a much disputed case of colonial and post-colonial status, a case history which calls for a necessary set of historical and critical specifications, is worth mentioning at this stage. Among the many current definitions, the relationship between Britain and Ireland was identified by Michael Hechter as one of internal colonialism,<sup>7</sup> an unequal relationship between a modernized core and an underdeveloped periphery in the same State. Core and periphery can be geographically distinct within the space of the same state, then, although the very understanding of state (and nation) appears problematic in the context of the British Isles, including Ireland, and in the Empire.

A parallel and preliminary reference to the controversial, ambivalent relationship between Ireland and modernity—or, better, Ireland’s controversial attitude towards the cultural discourses of modernity between, roughly, 1880 and 1939—is necessary. To focus on a narrower and more specific timeline, one should refer to John Wilson Foster’s reminder that

<sup>6</sup> The most extensive study to date on utopianism in *Ulysses* remains Wolfgang Wicht’s *Utopianism in James Joyce’s Ulysses*, Anglistisches Forschungen 278 (Heidelberg, C. Winter, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536–1966* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

the Celtic Revival and High Modernism basically share the same chronological span: 1880–1925.<sup>8</sup> While on the one hand, the Celtic Revival dictated the cultural agenda of nationalist Ireland with a distinct anti-modern bias, on the other it also showed a great interest in certain tropes such as mythological lore, the mythical past and primitivism which were also cultivated by high modernism. The two poles are not thus radically at odds, as conventional literary history has long considered them, despite the ardent localism and nationalism of the revivalists. Issues of nationality and elective or necessary cosmopolitanism are central to the identity of Irish modernism: as Quigley aptly puts it, “To be modern is to leave Ireland and Irish things behind (...) Simultaneously, nothing is more modern than the Irish condition because in their state of alienation, emigration, and internationalism, Irish writers incarnate the globalism of modernity”.<sup>9</sup>

Figures like Yeats, in particular, turn out to be somewhat difficult to accommodate in any dichotomic characterization of Ireland’s literary history: torn between the traditionalism of the Celtic Revival and modernist experimentalism, they enrich the complexity of Ireland’s peripheral modernism as also constitutive of European core modernism.

### “ITHACA” AND THE CULTURAL DISCOURSES OF IRISH MODERNITY

The seventeenth episode of *Ulysses* is probably the most relevant, and one of the most important of Joyce’s whole work with regard to the literary representation and critique of Irish modernity as a *peripheral* modernity. Very little happens in the chapter: Bloom and Stephen, finally reunited, reach Eccles Street, where Bloom takes care of his younger guest, offers him a bed for the night, to no avail; the two urinate together under the canopy of stars, enjoying a moment of bonding, and a long trail of elucubrations and reflections begins and continues after Stephen’s leaving, when Bloom meditates on his own predicament, life story, fantasizes and eventually longs for his reunion with Molly.

<sup>8</sup> John Wilson Foster, *Colonial Consequences. Essays in Irish Literature and Culture* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1991), 44. See also Megan Quigley, “Ireland”, in *The Cambridge Companion to European Modernisms*, ed. Pericles Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 170–190 (178).

<sup>9</sup> Quigley, 171.

The very title of “Ithaca” evokes the notion of the return home after long, troubled meanderings, but, significantly, in the context of the Homeric parallel, it also implicitly evokes an idea of the *peripheral* as coincidental with the return to the *real*. In a study on colonization and ethnicity in ancient Greek civilization, Irad Malkin states that “The Odyssey’s Ithaca is the limit, or periphery, of Homeric geography” [...]

“Above Ithaca lies the great Beyond, whence the Phaiakians bring Odysseus back home.

In the Odyssey it is the transition from Phaiakia to Ithaca that marks the return to the real world”.<sup>10</sup>

This reference to a detail of the Homeric framework both introduces and validates the suggestion that the idea of periphery and peripheral is inherent and embedded in that exploration of modernity that is a structural feature of the seventeenth chapter of *Ulysses*, “Ithaca”, which has its Homeric correspondence in the theme of a return home and of the returning hero.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, there is another suggestion worth mentioning in Malkin’s fascinating study, which focusses on the function of *nostoi* as myths and stories of the returning heroes. This regards the “intriguing fringe category” of the “rather consistent pattern of a ‘peripheral’ superimposition of myths onto peoples and territories”.<sup>12</sup> I would thus argue that Joyce’s “Ithaca” seems to re-enact this cultural dynamic *sub specie* of that myth of modernization both superimposed on Ireland and there resisted.<sup>13</sup>

The chapter engages with the dominant discourses of revivalist ideology, imperial science and economy, and is pervasively dominated by the issue of modernity and modernization. It mirrors, or rather mocks, the presumption of absolute authority of materialist scientism through the narrative technique of catechistical analysis, “a mathematical catechism”

<sup>10</sup> Irad Malkin, *The Returns of Odysseus: Colonization and Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 15.

<sup>11</sup> As Malkin reminds, the word *nostos* holds three different meanings in ancient Greek as the returning hero/es from the Trojan war (*nostoi*), the action of return (*nostos*) and the story or myth about the returning hero.

<sup>12</sup> Malkin, 15.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Gibson’s edited *Joyce’s “Ithaca” European Joyce Studies series* (Amsterdam-Atlanta, 1996), offers an in-depth examination of this issue.

in which “all events are resolved into their cosmic physical, psychical etc. equivalents”.<sup>14</sup> The question-and-answer pattern which strives to provide hyper detailed responses to highly specific but mostly abstruse questions, eventually produces an accumulation of mostly irrelevant information, which provide some essential background to the preceding chapters but also supplement it with otherwise unnecessary data. Facts are proffered in abundance, but no hierarchical set of principles of value and meaning are invoked to organize them, and the surfeit produces a flattening of meaning and a cumulative parodic effect, which Jon Hegglund has read as a subversion of the “Imperial Archive”<sup>15</sup>. Len Platt epitomizes this process stating that “narrative itself is usurped by the voice and the process of materialist scientism”.<sup>15</sup> Yet the narrating voice has much in common with Bloom’s: an unswerving faith in the scientific approach and in the positive applications of science and technique to the improvement of civilization.

Civilization as the “precise and unequivocal locus of *Ulysses* 17”,<sup>16</sup> is, in fact, a keyword to any analysis of the chapter, and specifically to its relevance to literary configurations of a notion of peripheral modernism. The importance of “Ithaca” in this regard lies mainly in the complexity of the components at work—thematic, ideological and rhetorical—which build up a deflatory and essentially comic critique of modern middle-class urban civilization, while simultaneously rescuing the utopic and affirmative element. They do so—among other things—through a very subtle, multifaceted articulation of the condition of peripherality.

This is best seen when considering how the allegiance between science, scientism and materialist capitalistic ideology, the emptiness and degeneration of modern urban life, which is exactly the kind of scenario that emerges in “Ithaca”, was basically the polemical target of the Revival. The revivalist literary politics were based on a set of oppositional tropes (science vs art, urban vs rural, middle class vs peasantry, modernity vs tradition) and middle-class urbanism was its main critical object. As

<sup>14</sup> J. Joyce, Letter to Frank Budgen, end February 1921, *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. I, ed. Stuart Gilbert, 159–160.

<sup>15</sup> See note 24.

<sup>16</sup> Len H. Platt, “If Brian Boru Could But Come Back and See Old Dublin Now”: Materialism, The National Culture and *Ulysses* 17”. In Andrew Gibson, ed. *Joyce’s “Ithaca”*, *European Joyce Studies series* (Amsterdam: Atlanta, 1996): 105–132 (107).

Len Platt epitomizes, “The Ithaca landscape is the revivalist nightmare turned reality”,<sup>17</sup> and the chief aspects of science and scientism with which it engages are actually their utility and the ensuing material improvements of civilization.

“Ithaca” is seen by Andrew Gibson as “a massive and sustained assault on science as an English and Anglo-Irish preserve. At the same time, it attempts hugely to supplement the theoretical nature of the Nationalist commitment to science”.<sup>18</sup> It attempts to counteract the English and Anglo-Irish Protestant conception of Protestant culture as practical and worldly and of Gaelic culture as ineffectual and abstract, by outdoing—once again—the former’s command of scientific and technological knowledge, only to lay bare its pretensions and ultimate ineffectuality. In “Ithaca”, “scientific discourse becomes a parody of itself, or collapses under its own weight”.<sup>19</sup> Joyce’s surfeit of facts, references and terminology—technical, scientific, economic and objectual, on which the chapter is erected, is thus targeted at both the detractors and the champions of an anti-materialist, anti-modernist Ireland.

The focus on the modernity of Ireland, even though it is presented through an impassibly deflatory lens, is, nonetheless, evident: Joyce’s attitude to Irish modernity is famously complex, ambivalent and challenging, but this episode reveals his critical awareness of its inherently ridiculous aspects and his satirical exposing of the cultural trope of degeneracy in an anti-revivalist perspective. The modernity which was conceived as a threat to both the Irish nation and Irish art is the very matter which Joyce exploits to expose its limits and its ineluctability, turning it into “an epic demarcation of urban modernity as the Joycean estate”.<sup>20</sup> Along these lines, Joyce’s literary modernism could also be interpreted, according to Emer Nolan, as a response to the modernizing process of Ireland, in that both Irish modernism and Irish nationalism are connoted by an ambivalence towards modernization, sharing a crucial interest in the issue of

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Gibson, “‘An Aberration of the Light of Reason’: Science and Cultural Politics in “Ithaca”, in Andrew Gibson, ed., *Joyce’s “Ithaca”, European Joyce Studies series* (Amsterdam: Atlanta, 1996), 133–176 (158).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>20</sup> Platt, 132.



cultural change and regeneration, language and popular culture, the realm of the aesthetic and the role of the artist.<sup>21</sup>

On the whole, then, “Ithaca” can be said to foreground a self-conscious, disorienting version of that basic trait of modernist art that is its ambivalent treatment of modernization, as epitomized by Marshall Berman: “All forms of Modernist art and thought have a dual character: they are at once expressions and protests against the process of Modernization”.<sup>22</sup> As usual in Joyce, contrasting and often mutually exclusive versions of the same theme can coexist, by means of formal strategies which undermine what they purport to foreground and represent. “Ithaca” is a case in point, under many respects, as the specific narrative of Flowerville will attest.

### SPATIAL COMPLEXITY

Framed in this perspective, the idea of the periphery/al, of the fringe, of the external or marginal, necessarily figures in the taxonomic, normative and controlling discourse of imperial power.<sup>23</sup> Jon Heggglund reading of “Ithaca” as a parodic subversion of the structure of the “Imperial Archive”<sup>24</sup> goes so far as to argue that Joyce, exploring the connection “between represented narrative space and ‘real historical space’”, imagined an Irish identity through a re-inscription of imperial survey and cartography into the novel.<sup>25</sup> In Heggglund’s analysis, Joyce used cartography not as a modernist model of detailed and objective precision, but rather as one of the two terms of an oscillation in form, productive tension between the two equally partial perspectives of the abstract space of the

<sup>21</sup> Emer Nolan, *Joyce and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>22</sup> Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* (London: Penguin, 1988), 235.

<sup>23</sup> In this regard, a growing degree of attention has been directed, in the last decades, to mapping and cartography (notably by Eric Bulson and Jon Heggglund) with Joyce’s *Ulysses* as an extraordinary case history, a rich repository of challenging and sophisticated textualizations of the cartographic model.

<sup>24</sup> Heggglund refers to Thomas Richard’s notion of the Imperial Archive as the imaginary representation of an ideal repository of knowledge through which all sorts of different data about the Empire could be ordered and systematized, and considers it as ultimately a “utopian fiction” whose “existence was impossible to conceive without reference to a real-world geography”. Jon Heggglund, *World Views: Metageographies of Modernist Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 61.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

map and the specifically placed knowledge of the narrative. This tension is thus one where space is “placed”, emerges and exists between geography and literature, a condition that is well suited to the inner colony.<sup>26</sup>

This conceptualization of the oscillating, composite complexity of spatiality in *Ulysses* could be productively applied to the eccentric, escapist fantasy of Flowerville, set as a kind of enclave in the hyper-taxonomic, orderly, catechistical context of the seventeenth episode, which, as will be seen, further complicates this spatial complexity by an intrinsically deconstructive, and yet paradoxically liberating, utopian modernist fancy.<sup>27</sup>

If, on first reading, it appears simply as an escapist, utopian but all-material personal fantasy, on closer scrutiny Flowerville also turns out to be a reminder of the problematic but fruitful coexistence of different, subjective forms of spatial identification and subjective desires. Bloom’s *Dasein*, his being in the world as a provincial though ideally cosmopolitan urban colonial subject, unhomed and peripatetic, perpetually displaced, is eventually inscribed in Flowerville as a *narrative*, hence legitimated in its implausibility and its absurdity, within the framework of an all-inclusive irony underscoring the ‘catechistical’ method of the episode. This occurs precisely within the larger narrative of a chapter evoking the trope of *nostos*, set in the carefully described—i.e. topographic—mapped spaces of his 7 Eccles Street Dublin row house.

The imaginative, fancy and architecturally eclectic Flowerville thus gains a metonymic and synecdochic, and hence highly representative, value in its infringement on the topographic precision of the chapter. It achieves all this by articulating the coexistence and the integration of a utopian projection with the detached objectivity of its catechistical method that invokes a modernist style.

## UTOPIANISM, ECLECTICISM, THE IRONY OF STYLE

Though a proper discussion of utopian modes in *Ulysses* would exceed the scope of this article, it is worth mentioning Wolfgang Wicht’s mapping of the topic in order to put into perspective the relevance of the Flowerville section to my argument. Wicht identifies four “essential varieties

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>27</sup> I am using the term enclave in a denotative sense, without reference to the definition of “the utopian enclave” by Fredric Jameson in *Archaeologies of the Future. The Desire for the Future and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005).

of utopianism” at work in the novel: “the messianic religious or political design of an idealized place or society” (see “Circe”), an idealized independent national state legitimized by memories of Ireland’s Golden Past, biblical messianic messages and messengers, and “the subjective desire of owning an affluence of commodities, and of devising public ameliorations”.<sup>28</sup> Yet these varieties are not organically interrelated and often prove self-deconstructive, as Joyce’s “fictional discourse establishes a place of heterotopia, negating both utopian promise and social practice”.<sup>29</sup> Leaving aside the concept of heterotopia which would not be pertinent to Flowerville, and, focussing instead on Wicht’s last variety of “subjective desires”, it is worth referring to the link between modernism and utopianism as defined by Kohlman, whereby “The becoming-minor of literary utopias during the modernist period signals a shift of social dreaming into less dogmatic and less confident registers”.<sup>30</sup> The notion of *social dreaming* can be deemed as central to Bloom’s character and hence to the whole textual structure, as will be illustrated. It brings to mind the well-known imaginative power of conjuring the nation out of existence in Benedict Anderson’s notion of “imagined communities”, and it is something unmistakably present in “Circe”’s idealistic, utopian and messianic fantasy of Bloomusalem, which, as we have seen, can be considered as somehow proleptic of the subsequent materialistic and private version of “Flowerville” in chapter seventeen:

BLOOM I stand for the reform of municipal morals and the plain ten commandments. New worlds for old. Union of all, jew, moslem and gentile. Three acres and a cow for all children of nature. Saloon motor hearses. Compulsory manual labour for all. All parks open to the public day and night. Electric dish scrubbers. Tuberculosis, lunacy, war and mendicancy must now cease. General amnesty, weekly carnival, with masked licence, bonuses for all, esperanto the universal brotherhood. No more patriotism of barspongers and dropsical impostors. Free money, free love and a free lay church in a free lay state.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Wolfgang Wicht, *Utopianism in James Joyce’s Ulysses*, Anglistisches Forschungen 278, (Heidelberg: C.Winter, 2000), 8.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>30</sup> Kohlman, 6.

<sup>31</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses*, The Gabler Edition. Edited by H.W. Gabler (New York: Random House –Vintage, 1986), 399; 1685–93.

This progressive marginalization of the utopian projects in modernist literature, as a result, stands as a cultural background to the idea that the utopian “impulse” is often located within the dimensions of the margin, of the peripheral, as well as within a host of subjective desires hinged on an apparently all-materialist, factual idea of modernity which takes shape through Bloom’s incessant wool-gathering.

The essentially utopian nature of Bloom as a dreamer and an idealist has been emphasized—among others—by Patrick Parrinder, who brings this side of his personality to light against the business-like, practical and finance-concerned one: “But Joyce’s archetypal petty-bourgeois is neither a moneygrubber nor a frightened litter clerk. Rather, like Wells’s Mr Polly and Dickens’ Mr Wemmick, he is a dreamer”.<sup>32</sup> Bloom’s fantasies are wide-ranging and far-reaching, mostly targeted at ways of making money. It should be reminded, however, that in the context of the competing and conflating treatments of economics, science and cultural ideology at work in “Ithaca”, he “fantasizes about being a gentleman pursuing literary work”. His unswerving materialism, is “a robust and resilient doctrine”,<sup>33</sup> his political utopianism is one in which Western bourgeois civilization can be sweetened by a dose of international socialism, his private utopia (in Flowerville) is based on the fetishization of capital and the landed property,<sup>34</sup> yet there is never any doubt as to Bloom’s preserving his humanity and empathy despite his secular pragmatism, his fundamental endorsement of a materialistic, enthusiastically modern, urban middle-class identity.

While, first in “Cyclops” and later in “Circe”, especially in the utopian fantasy of Bloomusalem, Bloom’s stance towards the inherent violence of nationalism could partly be ascribed to a form of escapism, in “Ithaca” this distancing from the hard core of social reality, from the ineluctability of imperial and capitalist politics remains safely lodged within an analytic, dry, thoroughly referential prose that allows only limited glimpses of poetical outlets, such as the famous “heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit” seen by Bloom and Stephen.

<sup>32</sup> Patrick Parrinder, *James Joyce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 144.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 144; 149.

<sup>34</sup> Wicht, 224.

## FLOWERVILLE

In the incommensurably proliferating bulk of Joycean criticism, this section of chapter seventeen has received comparatively little attention in terms of an in-depth analysis.<sup>35</sup> Yet, this piece of utopian fantasy, embedded as an imaginative projection in the most overtly materialist and expository of all the episodes, actually comprises some of the most decisive aspects of a notion of a peripheral, urban, capitalistic modernity. But it also preserves a transnational dimension of identitarian and social fluidity which represents a form of creativeness, semi-comically pulling different strains together. It is a self-satisfactory, graphic transposition of modernity at its most gratifying combination with the class system and a sense of tradition, both bourgeois and gentrified, luxurious and generous, egotistical and ultimately revealing of a need for the human connectedness of the city. When tackling a textual analysis of Bloom's fantasy of Flowerville, its inception starts under the rubric of Bloom's "ultimate ambition "to which "all concurrent and consecutive ambitions had coalesced",

Not to inherit by right of primogeniture, gavelkind or borough English, or possess in perpetuity an extensive demesne of a sufficient number of acres, roods and perches, statute land measure (valuation #42), of grazing turbary surrounding a baronial hall with gatelodge and carriage drive nor, on the other hand, a terracehouse or semidetached villa, described as *Rus in Urbe* or *Qui si Sana*, but to purchase by private treaty in fee simple a thatched bungalowshaped 2 storey dwellinghouse of southerly aspect, surmounted by vane and lightning conductor, connected with the earth, with porch covered by parasitic plants (ivy or Virginia creeper), halldoor, olive green, with smart carriage finish and neat doorbrasses, stucco front with gilt tracery at eaves and gable, rising, if possible, upon a gentle eminence with agreeable prospect from balcony with stone pillar parapet over unoccupied and unoccupyable interjacent pastures and standing in 5 or 6 acres of its own ground, at such a distance from the nearest public thoroughfare as to render its houselights visible at night above

<sup>35</sup> Two recent readings of Flowerville have rather tangentially considered the question of peripherality and modernism in *Ulysses* 17. See William J. Kupinse's environmental perspective in "Private Property, Public Interest: Bloom's Ecological Fantasy in "Ithaca", *James Joyce Quarterly* Vol. 52, No. 3/4 (Spring-Summer 2015): 593-621 and Kiron Ward' analysis of the androcentric and totalising visions contained in the two fantasies in "Paradise and the Periphery: The New Bloomusalem and Bloom Cottage." *James Joyce Quarterly* Vol. 55, No. 1 (2017): 115-133.

and through a quickset hornbeam hedge of topiary cutting, *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 5 minutes from tram or train line (e.g., Dundrum, south, or Sutton, north, both localities equally reported by trial to resemble the terrestrial poles in being favourable climates for phthisical subjects), the premises to be held under feefarm-grant, lease 999 years, the message to consist of 1 drawingroom with baywindow (2 lancets), thermometer affixed, 1 sittingroom, 4 bedrooms, 2 servants rooms, tiled kitchen with close range and scullery, lounge hall fitted with linen wallpresses, fumed oak sectional bookcase containing the Encyclopaedia Britannica and New century Dictionary, transverse obsolete medieval and oriental weapons, dinner gong, alabaster lamp, bowl pendant, vulcanite automatic telephone receiver with adjacent directory, handtufted Axminster carpet with cream ground and trellis border, loo table with pillar and claw legs, hearth with massive firebrasses and ormolu mantel chronometer clock, guaranteed timekeeper with cathedral chime, barometer with hygrographic chart, comfortable lounge settees and corner fitments, upholstered in ruby plush with good springing and sunk centre, three banner Japanese screen and cuspidors (club style, rich wine-coloured leather, gloss renewable with a minimum of labour by use of linseed oil and vinegar) and pyramidically prismatic central chandelier lustre, bentwood perch with a fingertame parrot (expurgated language), embossed mural paper at 10/-per dozen with transverse swags of carmine floral design and top crown frieze, staircase, three continuous flights at successive right angles, of varnished cleargrained oak, treads and risers, newel, balusters and handrail, with stepped-up panel dado, dressed with camphorated wax, bathroom, hot and cold supply, reclining and shower: water closet on mezzanine provided with opaque singlepane oblong window, tipup seat, bracket lamp, brass tierrod brace, armrests, footstool and artistic oleograph on inner face of door: ditto, plain: servant's apartments with separate sanitary and hygienic necessaries for cook, general and betweenmaid (salary, rising by biennial unearned increments of #2, with comprehensive fidelity insurance annual bonus (#1), and retiring allowance (based on the 65 system) after 30 years service), pantry, buttery, larder, refrigerator, outoffices, coal and wood cellarage with winebin (still and sparkling vintages) for distinguished guests, if entertained to dinner (evening dress), carbon monoxide gas supply throughout. (...) <sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, cit, 585; 1497–1550 (my emphasis).

This latter-day, Anglo-Irish, hypermodern Dublin suburban Strawberry Field, replete with luxurious *dernier-cri* commodities, foregrounds some significant standards: an economic and social class status (the purchase of a lordly mansion); hybridity of context and fashion (a distinctly English-styled Irish estate); the combined allusion to the urban and the rural, and to the parodic implication of a pastoral tradition as a trope of the Celtic Revival and cultural nationalism. In particular, the first part of the descriptive fantasy ends with the topography that comically epitomizes the various cultural strains with which the whole chapter is polemically concerned:

*What might be the name of this eligible or erected residence?  
Bloom Cottage, Saint Leopold's. Flowerville.*<sup>37</sup>

Wolfgang Wicht reads this toponomastic emphasis, progressing from the unpretentious “Bloom’s cottage” to the “exaggeration of Flowerville”, as symbolizing “Bloom’s fantasy of upward mobility”.<sup>38</sup> Although this is partly reinforced by the fact that Bloom desires to buy into the gentry and “purchase” his own dream mansion, I would rather argue that this is a case where Bloom’s mind typically proceeds by accumulation and combination, and that the syntagm does condensate an ideal progression, but also, and significantly, one unitary and imaginary combination of the different Irish geographical and spatial identities: rural, sacred, (sub)urban. The rural tradition is in fact established within the religious topography of an urban bourgeois *periphery*. A consideration of the cultural implications of this materialistic fantasy thus brings forth the issue of *location*: Flowerville is built “rising, if possible, upon a gentle eminence...at such a distance from the nearest public thoroughfare as to render its houselights at night ...situate at a given point no 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”.<sup>39</sup>

As the Edenic, utopian dream mansion and ideal dwelling place, Flowerville is safely positioned not in the heart of the Hibernian metropolis

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 587;1579–80.

<sup>38</sup> Wicht, 223.

<sup>39</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 585, 1509–1516. (emphasis mine).

but on its fringe, the periphery of today's middle-class suburban neighbourhoods. While proclaiming its unique distinctiveness as a parodic version of the patrician Anglo-Irish big house, its "Lord" wisely administering justice and intellectual pursuits, unlike the absentee landlords of the Protestant Ascendancy, Flowerville is in fact a sort of *reductio ad absurdum* of both the pretensions and the aspirations of the urban, materialist, metrocolonial middle class of which Bloom can be considered a member. Yet the peripheral is here firmly established as a privileged, even natural location, as the elective dwelling place of the modern *and* the traditional, the rural *and* the urban, the aristocratic *and* the average man, the entrepreneur *and* the dreamer, the technophile *and* deviser of improbable schemes for earning money. Bloom, in fact, is keen on devising new, appropriate, innovative and highly remunerative systems of connections, and transportation systems that would pay for his dream house by linking Dublin's productive activities such as cattle marketing throughout Ireland, Britain and the Continent:

A scheme for the repristination of passenger and goods traffics over Irish waterways, when freed from weedbeds. A scheme to connect by tramline the Cattle Market (North Circular road and Prussia street) with the quays (Sheriff street, lower, and East Wall), parallel with the Link line railway laid (in conjunction with the Great Southern and Western railway line) between the cattle park, Liffey junction, and terminus of Midland Great Western railway 43 to 45 North Wall, in proximity to the terminal stations or Dublin branches of Great Central Railway, Midland Railway of England, City of Dublin Steam Packet Company, Lancashire Yorkshire Railway Company, Dublin and Glasgow Steam Packet Company, Glasgow Dublin and Londonderry Steam Packet Company (Laird line), British and Irish Steam Packet Company, Dublin and Morecambe Steamers, London and North Western Railway Company, Dublin Port and Docks Board Landing Sheds and transit sheds of Palgrave, Murphy and Company, steamship owners, agents for steamers from Mediterranean, Spain, Portugal, France, Belgium and Holland and for animal transport and of additional mileage operated by the Dublin United Tramways Company, limited, to be covered by graziers' fees.<sup>40</sup>

Transposed from fantasy to metaphor, this is a crucial aspect of the relevance of this utopian fantasy to the complexity of Joyce's vision of the

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 590–1; 1724–1743.



Empire as essentially structured and connoted by mobility and circulation (notably of goods and commodities). Despite the limited extension of Dublin as a (peripheral) capital, less than a twentieth of London at that time, there is a strong sense in *Ulysses* of a constant buzz of activity that generates moments of what Richard Alter calls “pure mimesis of urban life”,<sup>41</sup> and which proclaims the centrality of Bloom’s urban mind’s concern with dynamism and mobility. While Bloom’s fantasy about new transportation networks also reveals how money lies “at the back of Bloom’s utopian plans”,<sup>42</sup> this aspect extensively reveals Joyce’s concern with the themes of urban and metropolitan mobility and his critique of Ireland’s isolation within the wider European scene. It reveals his conception of the periphery as both potentially and fittingly modern, in so far as intrinsically dynamic and open, connected, porous, separate but also part of that “metropolitan shuttle” that Alter considers as central to Joyce’s “celebratory sense of urban life”.<sup>43</sup>

Overall, the peripheral private enclave of the Anglo-Irish Bloom, the idealist–pragmatist cosmopolitan of Jewish blood, who hosts the helleno-hibernian Dedalus in the privacy of the (real) home, is a fantasy sustained by the capacity to devise a network, a connectedness between the margin, the core, and an imagined open world-picture. It is, thus, not a self-secluded, solipsistic fantasy of isolation and compensation, remote from the “Cityful passing away, other cityful coming”<sup>44</sup> of the Hibernian metropolis, but, among other things, an implicitly comic exposure of the “actual poverty belying the claims and enthusiasms of the Nationalist ‘modernizers’ around the turn of the century.”<sup>45</sup>

The amusing side of this fantasy reads, in fact, in the context of Ithaca’s cultural critique of late nineteenth-, early twentieth-century Ireland and the discourse of imperial science and nationalist rhetoric, which is repeatedly evoked, implied, and engaged with through Bloom’s amateur, resourceful, but muddling inventiveness. Pairing up with the more direct and violent indictment of nationalist rhetoric in “Cyclops”,

<sup>41</sup> Richard Alter, “Joyce. Metropolitan Shuttle” in R. Alter, *Imagined Cities. Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel* (Yale: Yale UP, 2005), 124.

<sup>42</sup> Osteen, *Ibid.*, 415.

<sup>43</sup> Alter, 125.

<sup>44</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 153.

<sup>45</sup> Gibson, “An Aberration”, 157.

“Ithaca” tackles nationalist modernizing rhetoric. This is exposed in its inconsistency through the enumerative tour de force of Bloom’s long list of improbabilities and incongruities and the narrative technique of the catechistical method of questions and answers.

As the embedded fantasy in the gigantic piling up of facts and detailed exposition of the chapter, Flowerville, that is, the apotheosis of Bloom’s appetites as a socially elevated consumer—a champion of early twentieth-century consumer culture—is described in the language and modes of an advertisement for real estate. The descriptive mode of the eclectically styled mansion is basically that of the estate agent advertising: Bloom’s is a dream house, a material “utopian fantasy in the genre of the ‘lifestyles’ sold by the modern advertising industry”,<sup>46</sup> the one we are all familiar with from magazines’ columns and websites.

The *architecture* of Flowerville is, in fact, significant and illuminating. It is an amalgam of styles, largely based on the tenets of nineteenth-century architectural eclecticism. It combines and conflates the bungalow and the cottage, the townhouse and the English country mansion, though evidently located in an Irish peripheral context. It also displays something of the aesthetic excess which Parrinder rubrics under the grotesque, in that “it is a dream house in the double sense that it would be both impossible to build as such and not affordable by Bloom”.<sup>47</sup> Grotesque is, perhaps, too complex a cultural notion, but there is no doubt that Bloom’s description often becomes comical and constantly verges on the parodic. One of the highlights would be the “bentwood perch with finger tame parrot (expurgated language)”, which, by evoking another “lord of the mansion”’s pet (Robinson Crusoe’s), implicitly recalls both the notion of mimicry that could be extensively debated in the Anglo-Irish context and the fantasy of accumulation and isolation shared by Robinson and Bloom. The farcical edge of this “Crusoe-like narrative of bourgeois-like proprietorship”<sup>48</sup> is also reinforced by the echoing of the immense New Bloomusalem building with crystal roofs—itself clearly a parody of the Crystal Palace as an imperial symbol of the metropolitan convergence of all the wonders from the remote and peripheral parts of the empire.

<sup>46</sup> Parrinder, *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Austin Briggs analyses other intertextual connections between Ulysses and Robinson Crusoe in “Bloom’s Dream Cottage and Crusoe’s Island: Man Caves”, *European Joyce Studies* Vol. 24 (2016): 63–75.

To some extent, this architectural eclecticism of Flowerville as a private residence both reflects Bloom's own encyclopaedic, heterogeneous, random tastes and competences—and metonymically announces the eclecticism and composite, multifaceted nature of this construct on the level of cultural critique. Architectural eclecticism signals utopian implausibility and reflects Bloom's political and religious moderation and his own inbetweenness. Significantly, the architectural absurdism of Flowerville reveals a parodic and ironic critique of the nineteenth-century bourgeois conception of the residence as an expression and container of the subject, replete with all sorts of commodities and ornaments, according to the Victorian cult of domesticity. It targets that “traditionally idealized concept of dwelling” “as a false promise, one that modern art forms reject in order to strive for a more authentic definition of human existence in its spatial dimension”<sup>49</sup>. David Spurr thus sees Flowerville as a “deconstruction” and “as a merciless parody of the traditional myth of dwelling, exposing it as something that can only be realized in a banal and commodified form”, aiming at “the frantic pursuit of middle-class leisure activities”,<sup>50</sup> which, nonetheless, ultimately results in an affirmative need for the sense of connection that is still afforded by the city.

In this parodic gentrifying fantasy, Bloom—the middle class, urban Catholic Irishman of Jewish origin—fancies himself as the Anglo-Irish lord of the manor, thus implicitly recalling the historically forfeited ideals of loyalty and concern, which are directly referred to,<sup>51</sup> in a role culminating in “his civic function(s) and social status among the county families and landed gentry” as resident magistrate or justice of the peace with a family crest and coat of arms and appropriate classical motto (*Semper paratus*). The fact that Bloom imagines himself as the Lord of Flowerville in his “capacity” as Magistrate, administering justice, is a significant addendum to the hermeneutics of this specific part of the chapter as a piece of cultural critique, nestled in what would otherwise read as a kind of private escapist and utopian fantasy:

<sup>49</sup> David Spurr, *Architecture and Modern Literature* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 53.

<sup>50</sup> Spurr, *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>51</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 17 588; 1606–11.

the dispensation in a heterogeneous society of arbitrary classes, incessantly rearranged in terms of greater and lesser social inequality, of unbiased homogeneous indisputable justice.<sup>52</sup>

Loyal to the highest constituted power in the land, actuated by an innate love of rectitude his aims would be the strict maintainance of public order, the repression of many abuses though not of all simultaneously (...) the upholding of the letter of the law (common, statute and law merchant) against all ...orotund instigators of international persecution, all perpetrators of international animosities, all menial molesters of domestic conviviality, all recalcitrant violators of domestic connubiality.<sup>53</sup>

Gentrified Bloom is basically loyal to the Crown, and his anglophile allegiance is clearly a crucial aspect of the contradictory and complex character of this construct: it implies his compliance to the established class system in a typical case of (incoherent) divergence from his utopian vision of a classless society proclaimed by the New Bloomusalem of “Circe”. As Mark Osteen noted, the Flowerville fantasy thus fulfills Bloom’s desire for “home rule”,<sup>54</sup> in a typically idiosyncratic way. In it, he plays his political part in his imaginary contribution to the common welfare through the repression of abuses, although ineffectually, with no real bearing. It has been argued that his public persona as a magistrate and his activities “turn into imaginative nonsense” as the legal jargon uncovers absurdities of sorts<sup>55</sup> in his mentioned “social dreaming”. It should be noted, though, that this legal side of the Flowerville fantasy is no exception to the rule of Joyce’s deconstructive techniques, the undermining of discourse through the accumulation of inconsistencies, absurdities and linguistic inconclusiveness, i.e. the ironic display of a host of conceptual and discursive nonsequiturs. It is, as Osteen remarks, “another of Bloom’s ‘counterfactuals’, a ‘what if’ story designed both to project him into the future”<sup>56</sup> and to celebrate him. Once again, irony is the inclusive discursive strategy that pulls the strings together, even in the Flowerville section. Not only is

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 588; 1617–209.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 588; 1633.

<sup>54</sup> Mark Osteen, *The Economy of Ulysses. Making Both Ends Meet*, Syracuse University Press (Syracuse, NY: 1995), 415.

<sup>55</sup> See Wicht, *ibid.*, 227.

<sup>56</sup> Osteen, *Ibid.*, 415.

it “an attribute both of the representation and the critique of individual utopian desires”,<sup>57</sup> but notably of Joyce’s problematization of the utopian modes of idealization regarding modernity. This also applies to the role played by the aspiration to epistemological totality and the encyclopedism suggested by a copy of the Britannica on the shelf. In a way, while Bloom’s Anglo-Irish gentrification and his idealistic—or unconscious—collusion with the hegemonic colonial system casts a dubious light on the political value of the ‘modernity’ of Flowerville, it also challenges any reductively nationalist, all-Irish agenda, and projects on the brittle screen of private utopian fantasy a form of inclusiveness which embraces the Anglo-Irish “Other” of Gaelic Ireland, and the reverse, rather than reading as mere delusional gentrification.

Still, the fact that Flowerville is also a private, domestic fantasy, is recalled by the closing reference to the violations of domestic harmony; while Parrinder argues that “this is a clear signal that Flowerville, the fantasy retreat, represents a utopian opposite to the actual conditions of his life”,<sup>58</sup> the characteristic inconclusiveness of this episode also allows for a milder interpretation. It reads not as an absolute, private utopian elsewhere, perhaps, but as an ideal alternative to the repeated frustrations of the more common—and affecting—“international persecutions” and “animosities”, to which Bloom bears witness and which figure prominently in the anti-nationalist critique of “Cyclops”, only to mention the most relevant episode. Despite his fantasy refuge, Bloom never really desires seclusion, but connection, as the final *nostos*, returns home and to Molly, attests.

The Flowerville section of the seventeenth chapter thus narrows the cosmic, wandering focus of “Ithaca” to a utopian, subjective projection which still features significantly in Joyce’s concern with those geographical visions that interrogate the limits of the nation-state, a strategy that begins with Stephen’s hierarchy of self and world at the beginning of *A Portrait*.<sup>59</sup> As Joyce “stretches the ‘local’ scale of the novel to the

<sup>57</sup> Wicht, *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>58</sup> Parrinder, *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>59</sup> “Stephen Dedalus/Class of elements/ Clongowes Wood College/Sallins/County Kildare/Ireland/Europe/ The World/ The Universe (...) Stephen Dedalus is my name,/Ireland is my Nation./Clongowes is my dwelling place/and heaven my expectation”. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man*, ed. Jeri Johnston (Oxford: Oxford Classics, OUP, 2008), 12. See J.Hegglund, “Scale Bending”, in Rosalyn Gregory, and

point where it can encompass many other scales, ranging from the urban all the way to the cosmological”,<sup>60</sup> to the very minimum symbolism of the concluding typographical globe of the dot at the end of the chapter, Flowerville ironically projects yet another version of the individual and the modern nation. This is a private narrative of spatial, utopian imagining, which reasserts, through and despite its paradoxes and irony, that the nation is also constructed (and exposed in its aporias) by individual representations of the many spaces, borders and margins that gravitate around a challenging and challenged centre. Thus, as Hegglund puts it, “Joyce suggests that the nation-state, while a necessity of history, need not limit the bounds of spatial imagination”.<sup>61</sup> Flowerville is then much more than a parenthesis in a complex chapter, but an important signifier of Joyce’s inventive and provocative reflection on the modernity of Ireland as metrocolonial and peripheral.

On the whole, that dominant feature of *Ulysses* which is the coexistence between ironic distance, intellectual sophistication and critical detachment and the characters’ full, imperfect but ultimately affirmative humanity, would appear to be a fruitful interpretive key to the cultural discourses which sustain the (peripheral) modernism of “Ithaca”. Ironic parody and the prolonged oscillation between conclusiveness and inconclusiveness, dry scientific and technical explicatory obsessions and escapist fantasies are ultimately accommodated within the challenging construction of a periphery that is both modern and modernist. A periphery that hinges on a problematic, complicated im/possible idea of a modern home and nation which, from the real, urban and middle-class prosaic materiality of Eccles Street, extends to encompass—and perhaps to integrate—the deceptively abstruse Flowerville, only a mile off.

Benjamin Kohlmann, eds. *Utopian Spaces of Modernism. Literature and culture 1885–1925* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 180.

<sup>60</sup> Hegglund, *ibid.*, 182.

<sup>61</sup> Hegglund, *Ibid.*, 191.