

“The Greatest Jew of All”: James Joyce, Leopold Bloom and the Modernist Archetype

MORTON P. LEVITT

Abstract

Holding a veteran scholar’s reflection on the experience of rereading *Ulysses* over more than four decades, this paper examines the Jewishness of Leopold Bloom. The paper locates this Jewishness at the very heart of Bloom’s identity, bemused as it is by legal dismissals of authenticity, mildly riled by the citizen’s bigotry, troubled by the suicide of his father, and pained by the loss of his son. Among the paper’s lines of argument are error-prone evocations of Jewishness, the meeting of Stephen and Bloom, and the strains of pro- and anti-Semitic thought in prominent Modernist writers.

Of the many critical clichés engendered by the readers and critics of Joyce, the most useful, it seems to me, is Joseph Frank’s advisory that we cannot read *Ulysses*, but can only re-read it. This perception perfectly captured my own experience, first as an undergraduate reading what at the time seemed this most intimidating book; I later found it useful advice to share with my students, whom I wanted to be aware of Joyce’s challenge but free of intimidation; and now I find—in retirement from full-time teaching and thus free to work as I will—that it has become a useful sort of self-injunction. For I not only feel the continuing need to read *Ulysses* as I have for many years, opening it often at random, reminding myself of old textual pleasures and continuing to discover new ones; I also now find myself re-reading and re-thinking my own writing over the years on this greatest and most influential novel of the great Modernist age of the novel, hoping in the process to re-affirm and expand old insights and searching always for new ones.

I’ve written quite a bit about Joyce since my first published article in 1967 and my first talk at an International Symposium in 1969. I’ve long

recognized that I, like many of us, have had only a few truly original, large ideas about Joyce, ideas that I’ve explored from both ends, turned inside out, built upon and under-mined, ideas with more weight and staying power than, say, simply a new way to read a familiar line. Most recently, I’ve been writing about Joyce’s narrative technique, which in my view is both more consistent and more radical—more prototypically Modernist—than many critics have realized. (See my most recent book, *The Rhetoric of Modernist Fiction*, published in January 2006 by the University Press of New England.) I’ve also offered new readings of Joyce’s use of myth and of his place in literary history that are not entirely in tune with traditional interpretations. (If, for instance, the *Odyssey* is indeed the foundational myth for *Ulysses*, how can we account for the fact that very few of those listed on Joyce’s catalogues of Homeric characters actually function as analogues in his own fiction and that the few parallels which do exist are generally quite trivial?)

But the most persistent of my critical interests in Joyce remains the first of them, one which I fell upon—very nearly fell over—during my first re-reading of *Ulysses*, in a graduate seminar with that insightful and controversial early Joycean (and great stylist), J. Mitchell Morse. Just beginning to learn to know Bloom, I had been delighted to discover one of those errors of his that may prove so revealing about his character. Bloom misremembers a childhood Passover song, and he does so in a way that proves not the irrelevance of his Jewish background, but, paradoxically, its significance for him: as the primary clue to his identity. Morse liked the essay which I produced for his seminar—I called it “The Family of Bloom,” in emulation of a then popular book of photographs, *The Family of Man*—but he warned me nonetheless that this subject was likely to prove a dead end, for it seemed to him that everything that might be written about Jewish motifs in Joyce had already been written. On this point, however, the usually astute professor was certainly mistaken, as shown by the important work that continues to appear on the subject of Joyce and the Jews.¹

Younger Joyceans may not always recognize today how uncertain Joyce’s reputation was in 1960, when I began my teaching career. I will never forget the older colleague who urged me not to waste my career by writing about—even by reading—Joyce, who was, in his words, “demonstrably a fraud.” There seemed little prospect throughout that decade that Joyce would emerge as the most influential novelist of the century, or that Leopold Bloom might be recognized as the most influential of fictional characters, with many more “sons” than just poor, long-dead Rudy. Nor was it quite so clear then that at the core of Bloom’s identity—perhaps even at

the core of the Modernist novel as a whole—was his Jewishness. For it wasn't even certain that Bloom was a Jew. And if anyone saw him as a hero, it was likely only as a comic hero, an ironic inversion of earlier and nobler literary conceptions of heroism. It would have seemed inconceivable to suggest at that time that, in fashioning Bloom and his alien world, Joyce himself was functioning as a Jewish novelist (far more so, I would now contend, than many novelists born Jewish: think of Joyce's contemporary Gertrude Stein in this regard, or our own contemporary, Norman Mailer). But one writer had already grasped that possibility, for as Joyce's countryman the fine short story writer Frank O'Connor declared, shortly before his death in 1966,

Jewish literature is the literature of townsmen, and the greatest Jew of all was James Joyce.²

I have come to see it as my responsibility to plumb the possibilities of O'Connor's paradox.

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Perhaps *Ulysses*'s greatest surprise—as it was to me in that early seminar essay—is that Jewish images are not tangential in the novel but central, providing its most prevalent and, arguably, its most important pattern: it is not the myth and metaphor of Homer that provide the key to *Ulysses*, but those of Jewishness, as Joyce understood their relevance in the modern world. There are more than two hundred Jewish references in *Ulysses* (approximately double the number of Catholic images), virtually all of them connected to Bloom³ (as are, surprisingly, many of the Catholic images). But where he tends to think of Catholics as “them,” they invariably think of him as a Jew. There is an evident immediacy about Bloom's Jewish references, many of which go back to his childhood as the son of an immigrant Jewish father from Szombathely, Hungary. Yet, strikingly, every one of these references is either incorrect or incomplete, or, in some cases, both incorrect and incomplete. If we need a representative illustration, we might look at the scene in “Circe” in which Bloom reads solemnly from a scroll the list of his knowledge of Jewishness:

Aleph Beth Ghimel Daleth Hagadah Tephilim Kosher Yom
Kippur Hanukah Roschaschana Beni Brith Mitzvah Mazzoth
Askenazim Meshuggah Talith. (397: 1623-25)⁴

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This idiosyncratic combination—of letters of the alphabet, religious holidays and practices, fraternal orders, dietary customs and cultural groupings, pejorative slang, misspellings and mispronunciations—seems all of the Yiddishkeit that Bloom has managed to retain in his life among the Gentiles. It is, in his own word, just a bit crazy (*meshuggah*).⁵

Bloom is clearly not a very good Jew; indeed, legally (halachically) speaking, he is not a Jew at all, since his mother was not Jewish and he was never circumcised. There is some suggestion, however, that his mother may herself have been half-Jewish, that her father was another Jewish immigrant from Hungary. But even if this is true, and Bloom is three-quarters Jewish, he still lacks the necessary connection to the direct maternal line (*i.e.*, if the mother of his mother was not Jewish, then neither is he. This legal requirement, however, may provide surprising results for future members of the Bloom family).⁶ As Leopold responds to a direct anti-Semitic attack by the Citizen, in the “Cyclops” episode,

He called me a jew and in a heated fashion offensively. So I without deviating from plain facts in the least told him his God, I mean Christ, was a jew too and all his family like me though in reality I'm not. That was one for him. A soft answer turns away wrath. (525: 1082-86)

His response is characteristically Bloomian: rational, defensive, unintentionally comic, somewhat selective in its recreation,⁷ at once honest and with unspoken emotion: “though in reality I’m not.” “Though in legal reality I’m not,” he might have said, for in every way that matters in his life (and as literary model), Bloom surely is a Jew, and to his creator, this is the key to his identity and, indeed, to ours as well. James Joyce was the greatest Jew of them all, in the words of Frank O’Connor, not because of his lifelong friendly relations with many individual Jews, or because of the sense of identification that he seems to have felt with Jews as an entity, or even because he, too, was a dweller in cities; it is because in Bloom he created the archetypal Modernist figure, the man whose history, attitude, condition come to represent all of humanity in the twentieth century. No character in modern literature—and only Don Quixote, Falstaff and the Wife of Bath, I would argue, in earlier literature—so delight us through their comic diminishment, so powerfully engage our sense of our own humanity through the tragedy and dignity which underscore that comedy, so perfectly in the process represent and yet supercede their times. Joyce, I am confident, did not miss or mind the irony that as his representative Modernist hero he had

chosen the ancient, ultimate outsider in Western life.

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Bloom is kindly, decent, principled, interested in others and in ideas, even an idealist: profoundly humane. There was a time—and it lasted for centuries—when to label him and his creator “humanistic” would have seemed the ultimate compliment. For some post-Modernist academics, however, that time has passed. In 1986, at the Tenth International James Joyce Symposium, in Copenhagen, I gave a talk which concluded that Joyce and the other Modernist Masters in the novel—despite their earlier reputation and some of their own comments—were indeed part of the humanistic tradition which had characterized Western life at least since the Renaissance. When someone in the audience protested that I was doing the great Joyce a disservice, I innocently explained—assuming that he had simply misunderstood my meaning (since he was not a native speaker of English)—“No, no, he *was* a humanist,” I affirmed; “he really was.” I was bewildered when the fellow nonetheless appeared to grow angrier and angrier. Only later did I learn that not everyone understood the designation “humanist” to be a compliment. “Humanist” a pejorative? This was and remains for me one of the stranger manifestations of contemporary intellectual dialectics. I believe that Joyce, too, would have been disturbed by the new practice; I know that poor Poldy would as well.⁸

Not a philosopher myself, I still feel free to believe—despite the evidence of the most self-destructive century in human history, so recently completed—that the only life worth living, no matter how intently we may examine it, is the one which continues to honor the old, familiar human-centered values. But I would add to Tzvetan Todorov’s saving equation an aspect of humanism that is allied alike to Camusian Existentialism and to three thousand years of Jewish experience: at the very core of humanism is the ability of individuals—their need—to accept responsibility for their acts, for their lives, for the lives of those around them. It is this ability, I believe, that most makes us human: not our reversible thumbs or our ability to walk upright or even the extraordinary leaps enabled by the human brain.⁹ Where Heidegger condemns humanism, humanist values as I understand them (and as Leopold Bloom lives them) would surely condemn him; neither in his philosophy nor in his life (post-Modernist philosophers aside) can he provide a model worth emulating, any more than Robbe-Grillet can in his fiction. But quotidian Leopold Bloom does. For all his prescience, Joyce never could have predicted Heidegger or the attack against humanism, not to mention the Holocaust; but his decision to make his hero a partly

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deracinated, wholly humanistic Jew appears, in retrospect, a direct repudiation of the anti-humanist assault.

Jews are by no means uniquely humanistic, of course, nor is the development of Humanism in the Renaissance as the worthiest of life's goals—the basic curriculum devoted to its study and achievement—connected significantly with Jews. Yet humanism remains for me and, more importantly, for many of the Modernists, linked pivotally to the Jewish experience in Europe. For anti-Semites such as Eliot and Pound, this was a skewed connection and led in their verse to a presentation of the Jews as metaphor for what had gone wrong in modern society. For Joyce, Proust, Kafka and Mann, albeit in very different ways, Jewish perseverance through centuries of persecution serves far more positively, as metaphor for a continuing potential, a persistent reach toward humanistic goals.

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Merely surviving, to be sure, is one of the Jews' principal accomplishments, as Joyce views it: as a member himself of a once great and now, during his lifetime, long despised people, Joyce understands the difficulty and significance of that feat. In this respect, he accepts almost in its entirety the Irish Nationalist identification with the Jews. As the Jews escaped from Egyptian bondage into nationhood, the argument went, so would the Irish eventually escape English bondage into freedom. When J. J. O'Molloy recites from memory the famous speech of John F. Taylor to the Trinity College Historical Society, in the “Aeolus” chapter of *Ulysses*, the parallel is made explicit:

It seemed to me that . . . I stood in ancient Egypt and that I was listening to the speech of some highpriest of that land addressed to the youthful Moses. . . .

—Why will you jews not accept our culture, our religion and our language? You are a tribe of nomad herdsmen: we are a mighty people. You have no cities nor no wealth; . . . You have but emerged from primitive conditions: we have a literature, a priesthood, an agelong history and a polity. . . .

— . . . Israel is weak and few are her children: Egypt is an host and terrible are her arms. . . .

— . . . had the youthful Moses listened to and accepted that view of life, . . . he would never have brought the chosen people out of their house of bondage. . . . (116: 830-117: 865)

As with virtually everything in Joyce, the speech is susceptible to irony: we need only look at the Irish condition, as displayed so prominently in his novel, to recognize the disjunction between the powerful (if inflated) words and the unlikelihood that their goal will soon be realized. (The episode was completed some time after the Easter Rebellion of 1916; although Eire is today a free and prosperous state, one glance at the state of Northern Ireland will reveal that the Irish Mosaic heritage has not yet been realized.) It is not coincidental, I would think, that Joyce nevertheless chose to record only this speech from all of *Ulysses*. He understood that it was inflated, and yet he valued it and its sentiment. (He reads it, incidentally, with no hint of irony.) Not coincidentally also, Bloom—who is not one of O’Molloy’s listeners but who will in a moment return to the scene—has already undercut its message by unintended comedy: as he recalls the Passover story, a few moments earlier, it is “All that long business about that brought us out of the land of Egypt and into the house of bondage. . .” (101: 208-09). Inadvertently, trusting to his “defective mnemotechnic” (564: 766) rather than to the words’ meaning, Bloom manages to reverse the significance of the story of Exodus (“and *into* the house of bondage”). An Irish parallel may similarly be inferred.

Later in the day, as Bloom identifies (in the preconscious state) with Charles Stewart Parnell as the political redeemer of the Irish, he will, of course, like Parnell, be betrayed and brought down: “THE MOB: Lynch him! Roast him! He’s as bad as Parnell was” (402: 1761). His political program, at once serious and comic, is, in spirit at least, not entirely unlike those offered by various reformers of the time, including such Jewish Socialist politicians as Léon Blum.¹⁰

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. . . . All parks open to the public day and night. Electric dishscrubbers. Tuberculosis, lunacy, war and mendicancy must now cease. General amnesty, weekly carnival with masked license, bonuses for all, esperanto the universal language with universal brotherhood. . . . Free money, free rent, free love and a free lay church in a free lay state. (399: 1685-93)

The humor, the irony, the idealism manage to co-exist here quite easily. We come to respect Bloom even as we laugh at him.

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In *Ulysses*, the familiar (if not always happily so) nineteenth-century world is altering irrevocably, and the new world replacing it has yet to be formed. We are on the cusp, that is, of the modern. Joyce began work on *Ulysses* in 1914, as intimations of war became increasingly evident; the novel's publication in 1922 was long enough after the Treaty of Versailles that anyone with some foresight might have predicted another European war. But he sets the novel's events a decade earlier, during that seemingly comfortable time—after a century of almost complete Continental peace—when the placid, predictable Victorian world appeared certain to go on forever. Edward VII had recently come to the throne of England, and the Empire was at its apogee. The perigees of the Somme and Versailles—not to mention Guernica, Hiroshima and Auschwitz—were beyond imagination. Joyce studiously avoids all reference in the novel to the future that he already knew. Passing references to Edward VII and to Roger Casement may pique the reader's interest but are realistically in keeping with the events of the day. But it is impossible for the reader to be unaware of looming events, not to look backward to 1904 as practically the last moment when the world seemed coherent and whole. This is the atmosphere within which Modernism developed, and we cannot understand and appreciate the Modernist novel unless we have some sense of this tension.

Not all of the Modernists, of course, respond in the same way in their art to this situation. For T. S. Eliot, for example, the new era represents the virtual end of civilization as he knew it—of Western, Christian civilization, that is. Everything else is chaos for Eliot, and all that art can do is point out that fact and offer, perhaps, some temporary solace. (Thus, while the picture of modern life in *The Waste Land* is horrific, much of the verse is quite beautiful.) The role of art, as Eliot said in a famous passage, is to provide “a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.” He is speaking here ostensibly about *Ulysses*, but it is apparent to any alert reader that such a bleak vision of life emerges not from *Ulysses* but from *The Waste Land*.¹¹

The difference between the visions of Eliot and of Joyce can be summed up in their differing attitudes towards the Jews. Was it because Eliot was anti-Semitic that he blamed the Jews, above all others, for this failure of civilization, or did he become an anti-Semite because he blamed the Jews? The question is best left rhetorical, I suspect, for what matters is not the cause and effect but the confluence: there is no hope for humanity in the modern condition, says Eliot repeatedly; our only hope is to reject modernity and turn back to the past.

One prime and obvious difference between past and present is the position of the Jews, once carefully restricted throughout most of Europe, now surprisingly important, even in some fields—as in the novel, perhaps—pre-eminent. This change, as the anti-Semitic imagery of several of Eliot's poems makes quite clear, may well account for—or, at least represent—the current degradation of the Christian West. Eliot's vision (largely shared by his friend and sometime mentor, Ezra Pound) has come to characterize, for some critics at least, the reactionary cast of Modernist poetry. (Reactionary in his politics and radical in his poetics, Eliot, ironically, seems rather Romantic in the trust that he places in the values of the past.)

For Joyce, on the other hand, the Jews, who had for so long been reviled outsiders but who had managed somehow to retain their traditions and beliefs, served as the perfect, positive metaphor for the modern condition, offering an ongoing promise that humanity might not just endure but could even prevail in a time when everyone might seem an outsider. (Were it not for his bias, it might also have worked as well for Eliot, except, of course, that he hated the traditions which he associated with the Jews, especially those monetary ones into which they had been forced by Christian Europe.) Surprisingly perhaps, this positive vision of the Jews and of Jewish experience has proven the dominant position of the Modernist novelists as a group. It may even serve as one of the defining conditions of the Modernist novel. (For Proust, for example, the Dreyfus Affair is the most important recurring image of *A la recherche du temps perdu* and provides the ultimate measure of his characters' worth; for Mann, writing as the Nazis' threat to civilization became increasingly evident, the Jews' own story of their survival and regeneration in Biblical times served as the basis for his most ambitious and, I believe, most important, work, the tetralogy *Joseph and his Brothers*; for Kafka, the human condition, in all its grotesqueness and outrageous humor, was everywhere manifest in the daily life of the Jews—as was the sense of responsibility for one's acts that gave some dignity to what may seem the most undignified behavior.) It is, however, from Joyce—although his ties to the Jews of Europe were less strong and direct than were those of these contemporaries—that the Jewish metaphor in the Modernist novel develops. We may make excuses for Eliot and Pound; we may find it more or less natural in Proust, Mann and, especially, Kafka; but it is nominally Catholic Joyce, at once so wary of his Irish homeland that he could not possibly live and work in it and yet so enmeshed in it that he could write of nothing else—although I once heard his friend Maria Jolas say that he had been so inspired by the Greek [Cretan] resistance to the Axis invasion that he thought of writing his next book about it—Joyce

who found in the ancient metaphor of the (geographically) rootless yet somehow rooted Jews (rooted in their beliefs and traditions) inspiration for modernity’s most powerful and influential metaphor. I find it most compelling that he found in them—made of them—an essentially positive vision of modern life.

For Leopold Bloom has without question been the most powerful and influential character in twentieth-century fiction. As viewed from Stephen Dedalus’ perspective, the theme of *Ulysses* is the artist’s discovery not just of his subject matter but of a mature worldview deserving of attention and respect. We can suppose that at the end of his long and tiring and finally fruitful day, at 2:00 o’clock in the morning of 17 June 1904, Stephen, having discovered at last his subject in Bloom, will go off somewhere to write a novel built around Bloom—perhaps even the one that we know as *Ulysses*—espousing the humanistic values that (beyond the obvious comedy of the situation) he has learned through his encounter with Bloom. By providing his subject matter and, in the process, his worldview—by affirming in the specifics of his life the broad humanistic values that Stephen has learned in the schoolroom—Bloom offers Stephen, at last, the opportunity to fulfill his potential. But *Ulysses* does not end with Stephen. It is not, after all, his book; and Bloom is not merely a means to his fulfillment, as if this, too, like *A Portrait*, were a traditional *künstlerroman*, concerned solely with the young artist’s development.

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As Bloom lives the events of his representative day, 16 June 1904, from early in the morning to very late at night, his path covering much of the then still-beautiful colonial city of Dublin, he measures his progress in terms of Jewish images. Typically, even when they are occasioned by present events, these images are derived from memories and values of the past, when he was a boy and his father was still living. For it is from Rudolph Bloom that Leopold has gathered these images and learned these values. Broiling his morning pork kidney, for example, Bloom notices his orthodox cat. “Say they won’t eat pork,” he observes. “Kosher” (51: 276-77). Later that night, in Nighttown, during his hallucinatory dreamlike (preconscious) sequence, he visualizes himself hiding a pig’s crubeen and trotter from his father (to whose somewhat broken English he responds with a snatch of Yiddish [357: 253-57]). He is guilty about the deception but manages, even in dream, to rationalize it. And when he misremembers a Passover folk song—not entirely coincidentally, perhaps—he strikes a similar note, butchering the

moral by replacing the judgment of God as the final arbiter of life with the ax of the butcher. The image of his father reading from a Passover hagadah is one of Bloom's most telling memories. But it would seem that he himself has never conducted a seder; he has no son of his own to whom he can pass on the tradition.¹²

Alone in his home late at night in "Ithaca," as he turns through the artifacts of his family life, Bloom sees the hagadah from which his father read to him ("in which a pair of hornrimmed convex spectacles inserted marked the passage of thanksgiving in the ritual prayers for Pessach [Passover]—" [594: 1877-80]) and next to it his father's suicide note, whose words he knows by heart. He "experience[s] a sentiment of remorse." Why? "Because in immature impatience he had treated with disrespect certain beliefs and practices" (595: 1893-95), among them the laws of Kashruth [kosher food], the divine origin of the Torah, the unity and supremacy of Jehovah and the universal brotherhood of the Jews. Such beliefs seem no more rational to him now than when he was young, but he is filled with regret nonetheless.

The regret is not for his own lost heritage; Bloom seems more or less content with what he has retained, with his identity as a Jew, such as it is. His regret—and it is profound—is for his inability to pass on that heritage, since, imperfect as it is (in its "beliefs and practices" and in his memory of them), he understands well that whatever lasting meaning there is to his life resides in his Jewishness.

The fact that it is imperfect makes it all the more significant as a metaphor for Joyce. While few of his characters are able to acknowledge it, they are all cast adrift on a sea of shifting and uncertain values. Some of them cynically assault the old and familiar and offer nothing in their place; some, sentimentalists, affirm the old values in their words yet belie them in their acts. Joyce's irony powerfully indicts the Irish—institutions and individuals alike—for the dichotomy between their alleged beliefs and the truths made manifest in their lives. Even Stephen Dedalus, loosely based on Joyce himself as a young man and familiar to readers as the eponymous hero of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, is not immune from Joyce's irony. For all his education and intellect, his promise, Stephen has accomplished nothing of note in his life—no lasting relationships and no art worth the word: the contrast between his potential and accomplishment is held up constantly before him, by no one more bitterly than himself.

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After Stephen's departure, in the middle of "Ithaca," Bloom sums up his day

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and restates the values by which he has lived his own life, in what may well be the most quietly moving scene in all of modern literature. It is here that we learn for certain what we may long have suspected: that *Ulysses* is Bloom’s novel, not Stephen’s—and not Molly Bloom’s either, even though it closes with her extraordinary soliloquy. The second half of “Ithaca” offers the novel’s true denouement, and it does so in explicitly Jewish terms, in revealing Jewish images and values, as Joyce understands Jewishness.

“Ithaca” opens with Stephen and Bloom searching for means to communicate and to establish links. Bloom has already saved the young man from a beating in Nighttown, sobered him up and taken him home. Together, they try out various subjects to compare their interests—among them science, literature, religion, music, personal experience. In one effort to identify himself to his guest, Bloom sings (incompletely, of course) “Hatikvah,” the Zionist anthem; Stephen responds by singing to his host the anti-Semitic Popular Ballad, “Little Harry Hughes,” with its vicious tale of ritual murder of a Christian boy by a Jewish girl. (It is an old story, with several variants, responsible over the centuries for the deaths of thousands of European Jews at Passover/Easter time.) Bloom avoids the direct assault by deflecting the stereotype:

How did the father of Millicent receive this second part?

With mixed feelings. Unsmiling, he heard and saw with wonder a
jew’s daughter, all dressed in green. (567: 829-31)

We have earlier seen, however, that Stephen rejects the anti-Semitic stereotypes of some other Dubliners; he has not suddenly become a bigot: he must simply be warning Bloom off. There can be nothing permanent about this connection, he seems to be saying—except, to be sure, the permanence of art. Stephen is frequently said by critics (a bit simplistically, I think) to be searching for a surrogate father. Simon Dedalus is surely a failure as father, and Stephen may well be emotionally immature still. But he indicates in this scene that it is not another father figure that he desires—not even one as potentially loving and supportive as Bloom.

But Bloom himself desperately does need a son of his own, and while he may not actively be searching for one, it may well be—although this is never made explicit in his thoughts—that he senses an opportunity with homeless (and functionally fatherless) Stephen. Perhaps Stephen recognizes this even before we do—something in Bloom’s body language, perhaps? Does Bloom inside the house perhaps hover too closely, too expectantly, to

the young man?¹³ If not, perhaps it is his own inclination that Stephen is rejecting as he sings to the Jew of the little Christian boy said to have been murdered by Jews: we do know from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* that Stephen's vision of the artist is the Romantic one of the artist as isolated and suffering for his art. In the security and comfort of the Blooms' lower-middle-class Dublin home, he would not likely find a venue for the production of great art. And so he leaves Eccles Street behind him.

But he does find his inspiration there, and one of his most powerful themes will be his surprising hero's need for a son to whom he can pass on what remains of his own, unique heritage—the Jewishness that offers him identity and that singles him out in the only place in which he has ever lived. Alone after Stephen's departure, Bloom is again—as he has been during the eleven years since Rudy's death in infancy—"Last of my race" (234: 1066).¹⁴

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If there is a single Jewish image in *Ulysses* that encapsulates Joyce's conception of Jewish values, it derives from the ultimate Jewish political expression in the modern age—perhaps the first such expression in two millennia—the Zionist dream of returning to Palestine. (Remember that this is 1904, eight years after Theodor Herzl issued his Zionist manifesto, *Der Judenstaat*.) In his morning trip to the pork butcher (his name, Dlugacz, suggesting that he may be yet another Hungarian Jew), Bloom picks up and scans an ad for a Zionist reclamation project in Galilee, in what is today northern Israel: "the model farm at Kinnereth on the lakeshore of Tiberias. Can become ideal winter sanatorium. Moses Montefiore. I thought he was. Farmhouse, wall round it, blurred cropping cattle. . ." (48: 154-58). Leaving the shop, his pork kidney safely in his side pocket, Bloom reads more carefully:

Agendath Netaim: planters' company. To purchase waste sandy tracts from Turkish government and plant with eucalyptus trees. . . . Orangegroves and immense melonfields north of Jaffa. You pay eighty marks and they plant a dunam of land for you with olives, oranges, almonds or citrons. . . . Every year you get a sending of the crop. Your name entered for life as owner in the book of the union. . . . (49: 190-98)

"Nothing doing," he concludes. "Still an idea behind it" (49: 200).

His reading, in what seems the most natural way imaginable yet, at the same time, was revolutionary in its narrative technique, leads Leopold to

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a string of associations: to imagine the harvest, to recall times with a (Jewish) friend of his youth named Citron, to think of Gibraltar where, we will soon learn, Molly Bloom spent her youth. And then a dark cloud covers the sun, and his mood and images alter:

No, not like that. A barren land, bare waste. Vulcanic lake, the dead sea: no fish, weedless, sunk deep in the earth. . . . Brimstone they called it raining down: the cities of the plain: Sodom, Gomorrah, Edom. All dead names. A dead sea in a dead land, grey and old. Old now. It bore the oldest, the first race. A bent hag crossed from Cassidy's, clutching a naggin bottle by the neck. The oldest people. Wandered far away over all the earth, captivity to captivity, multiplying, dying: being born everywhere. It lay there now. Now it could bear no more. Dead: an old woman's: the grey sunken cunt of the world.

Desolation.

Grey horror seared his flesh. (50: 219-30)

This may be the most rending of all of the images of the novel, and it quickly becomes linked to Bloom's own most profound, most personal loss, the death of his son, Rudy, in infancy and thus the end of his line. "No son of thy loins is by thee. There is none now to be for Leopold, what Leopold was for Rudolph" (338: 1076-77). Bloom is preparing to visit the grave of his father in Ennis on the twenty-seventh of June (93: 933-34), to observe as a good Jew would the anniversary of old Rudolph's death. But in a very real sense, he is constantly mourning his death: his death and Rudy's death: death and life, the death of tradition and its continuance, linked irretrievably together.

Waiting at the lying-in hospital, in the "Oxen of the Sun" episode, for the birth of Mina Purefoy's child, Bloom returns to the image of the failed (in his mind) Zionist settlement: "Agendath [*sic*] is a waste land, a home of screechows and the sandblind upupa. Netaim, the golden, is no more" (338: 1086-87). The imagined sterility of Palestine invokes the functional impotency of Bloom; as the Jewish fatherland can bear no fruit, so Leopold Bloom can father no son. He pursues the theme, unconsciously it seems, in "Circe," as a Papal Nuncio announces the "generation of Leopold," extending from Moses and Noah through Eunuch, O'Halloran and Guggenheim and ending when Szombathely begets Virag and Virag begets Bloom, "whose name shall be called Emmanuel" (404: 1055-69). Like the Deliverer of that name prophesied by Isaiah and adopted by Matthew,¹⁵ immanent Bloom, bearing with him all of our hopes and our sorrows, will

have no son of his own; there will be no generation of Rudy.

Bloom's first thoughts of Rudy, early in the day, in "Hades" (11:00 a.m., on the way to Dignam's funeral), are in response to the parental boasts of "Noisy selfwilled" Simon Dedalus, so "Full of his son." And Bloom thinks, "He is right. Something to hand on. If little Rudy had lived. See him grow up. Hear his voice in the house. Walking beside Molly in an Eton suit. My son. Me in his eyes. Strange feeling it would be. From me" (73: 74-77).

The theme of Bloom's Jewishness climaxes much later in the day (near 1:00 a.m., at the very end of "Circe"), when he would appear to be fully conscious, in his stunning vision of Rudy, "a fairy boy of eleven, a changeling, kidnapped, dressed in an Eton suit with glass shoes and a little bronze helmet, holding a book in his hand. He reads from right to left inaudibly, smiling, kissing the page" (497: 4957-61). Reading Hebrew, praying, perhaps in early preparation for his Bar Mitzvah (for what would be his official entry into the congregation of the Jews), Rudy prepares to follow in the path of his father, to fulfill in imagination all of the dreams that in reality will remain unfulfilled.

Bloom's encounter with Stephen—it will be another hour or more before he brings the young man home to Eccles Street—must be understood in this context. The connection is made evident in typical Joycean fashion, that is, indirectly, in this case through Molly. Shortly before falling asleep, she recalls their meeting the five-year-old Stephen, looking strikingly like Bloom's imagined Rudy: "he was an innocent boy then and a darling little fellow in his lord Fauntleroy suit and curly hair like a prince on the stage" (637: 1311-12). Realistically, of course, Bloom cannot know his wife's thoughts, and, in any event, he is asleep at the time. But he can hardly have missed the connection that seems so obvious to us.

If Bloom should hope for an instant to find in Stephen a surrogate for Rudy, we can hardly be surprised; that he fails might have been predicted. But Bloom will never know fully his impact on Stephen. Inspired by his young guest's presence, Bloom contemplates his day's events:

His mood?

He had not risked, he did not expect, he had not been disappointed, he was satisfied.

What satisfied him?

To have sustained no positive loss. To have brought a positive gain to others. Light to the gentiles. (553: 348-53)¹⁶

His expectation is simple enough, even a bit humorous. But it should be taken seriously. For Bloom, by one of those small miracles that may occur in great art, does provide a model of sorts to others, both in Dublin (although few natives may be willing to acknowledge it) and in the wider world of the Modernist novel. “—He’s a cultured allroundman, Bloom is,” M’Coy says. “He’s not one of your common or garden . . . you know. . . . There’s a touch of the artist about old Bloom” (193: 581-84), and Martin Cunningham notes his generosity. But others are more likely to laugh at or condescend to or simply scorn old Bloom. Joyce and Stephen know better, or so we can assume from the portrait of Bloom in *Ulysses*. It will in time come to prove a seminal characterization—the dominant one in all of modern fiction: his presence can be felt far beyond Dublin. With Rudy long dead and Stephen absent, Bloom’s true sons are all of those characters, in all of those different national literatures, whom the Modernist novelists based upon him. Their values, like his, are necessarily Jewish—at least in the sense that these novelists (many of whom, like Joyce, were non-Jews) understood Jewishness and interpreted Joyce’s central metaphor. And many of them will explicitly be Jewish; because of James Joyce and Leopold Bloom, the nineteenth-century pattern, in which Jewish characters appeared in novels largely as stereotypes, has emphatically and productively changed. In the Modernist novel, the Jew has become the primary figure of possibility. And in every cultural sense that matters—if not legalistically—James Joyce in *Ulysses* is surely a Jewish writer.

Notes

¹ In addition to the many articles which have appeared on the subject, there have been significant books by Ira Nadel (*Joyce and the Jews*, 1989), Neil Davison (*James Joyce, “Ulysses,” and the Construction of Jewish Identity*, 1996), Marilyn Reizbaum (*James Joyce’s Judaic Other*, 1999) and Bryan Cheyette (*Constructions of the Jew in English and American Literature*, 1995). Among my own articles dealing with Jewish themes in Joyce are “The Family of Bloom” (Fritz Senn, ed., *New Light on Joyce*, 1972); “A Hero for Our Time: Leopold Bloom and the Myth of *Ulysses*” (*JJQ*, 1972, and Thomas F. Staley, ed., *Ulysses: Fifty Years*, 1974); and “The New Midrash: *Finnegans Wake*” (*JSA*, 1992). As for J. Mitchell Morse, he is best known among Joyceans for his book on a rather different, if related subject, *The Sympathetic Alien: James Joyce and Catholicism* (1959).

² Frank O’Connor, *A Short History of Irish Literature: A Backward Glance* (New York, 1967).

³ Even before encountering Bloom, Stephen remembers with sympathy the Jewish businessmen whom he had encountered in Paris; the schoolmaster Mr. Deasy has just offered an anti-Semitic slur:

—A merchant, Stephen said, is one who buys cheap and sells dear, jew or gentile, is he not?

—They sinned against the light, Mr Deasy said gravely. And you can see the darkness in their eyes. And that is why they are wanderers on the earth to this day.

On the steps of the Paris stock exchange the goldskinned men quoting prices on their gemmed fingers. Gabble of geese. They swarmed loud, uncouth, about the temple, their heads thickplotting under maladroit silk hats. Not theirs: these clothes, this speech, these gestures. Their full slow eyes belied the words, the gestures eager and unoffending, but knew the rancours massed about them and knew their zeal was vain. Vain patience to heap and hoard. Time surely would scatter all. . . . Their eyes knew their years of wandering and, patient, knew the dishonours of their flesh.” (28: 359-72)

While not necessarily predisposed to like Bloom, Stephen clearly brings with him none of the stereotypical anti-Semitism that characterized many Europeans in 1904, in the first generation following the Emancipation of most of European Jewry.

⁴ The citation of *Ulysses* here and to follow indicates parenthetically page and line numbers in James Joyce, *Ulysses*, eds. Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior (New York: Vintage, 1986).

⁵ In *The Joys of Yiddish*, Leo Rosten defines *meshugge* as “Crazy, nuts, wildly extravagant, absurd” (New York: McGraw Hill, 1968) 237.

⁶ “Bloom, only born male transubstantial heir of Rudolf Virag (subsequently Rudolph Bloom) of Szombathély, Vienna, Budapest, Milan, London and Dublin and of Ellen Higgins, second daughter of Julius Higgins (born Karoly) and of Fanny Higgins (born Hegarty) . . .” (558: 534-37).

It is part of Joyce’s acute, sometimes playful, sometimes possibly perverse irony that, where Leopold Bloom may be three-quarters Jewish (but lacking the legally essential one-quarter) through his grandmother, Molly Bloom is indisputably Jewish, since her mother, Lunita Laredo, was descended from an ancient Sephardic family in Gibraltar. Raised by her Catholic father, sergeant major Tweedy, Molly expresses no particular interest in either Catholicism or Judaism. Nonetheless, her halachic Jewishness means that the Blooms’ daughter, Milly, is also Jewish (there is no indication that she has any knowledge of that fact), and so would their son, Rudy, had he survived infancy. The great tragedy of the Blooms’ life is that Rudy lives only in memory, that “There is none now to be for Leopold, what Leopold was for Rudolph” (338: 1076-77). Bloom regrets deeply the fact that he has no son to whom to pass on his (confused but significant) heritage, but it does not appear to occur to him that he may well some day have a grandson who will legally be more Jewish even than he is.

⁷ Bloom’s full response to the Citizen includes not just Christ but a litany of famous Jews, whose heritage is as clouded as his own: Mendelssohn (who converted to Christianity in order to be able to hear his works played), Marx (whose parents were converts and who was himself anti-Semitic), Spinoza (excommunicated by the Jewish community of Amsterdam) and Mercadante (with no known Jewish connections at all). With characteristic Joycean irony, only Jesus in this litany was born and died as a Jew (280: 1804-05).

⁸ For a condensed, coherent view of this disturbing phenomenon, see Charles Larmore’s review of Tzvetan Todorov’s *The Legacy of Humanism*, in *The New Republic* (10 February 2003) 36-41. Although the campaign against humanism attracted many on the political left, it seems to me inherently reactionary; not explicitly political, its political implications would nonetheless appear undeniable. Its starting point is Martin Heidegger’s “Letter on Humanism” (1947)—a rejoinder to Jean-Paul Sartre’s essay, “Existentialism Is a Humanism” (1946)—as amplified by Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. “In the Paris of the 1960s and 1970s,” Larmore writes, “to be an anti-humanist became a matter of honor” (37). Perhaps my questioner felt that it was his honor also, and not only Joyce’s, that was threatened by my naive insistence.

Todorov’s effort in this book is “to break the spell of Heidegger and to formulate a new humanist ethic” (37). His equation contra the anti-humanists considers the roles played by religion, science, social relationships and the striving for freedom in modern life—subjects also of concern to those non-philosophers Leopold Bloom and James Joyce. It is ironic that the followers of Heidegger cite the success of modern totalitarian ideologies as proof of humanism’s failure, while Heidegger himself was revealed in the 1980’s to have had an active Nazi past. This does not seem to have intimidated the “neo-Heideggerians” (38), however.

While Larmore’s review does not mention post-Modernist literary constructs opposed to humanism, it is worth noting that their foremost practitioner is the novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet; his essay, “Nature, Humanism, Tragedy” (1958), in the collection *For A New Novel*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1965), is an accessible argument for the turn against humanism—accessible, but not to my mind acceptable. It closes with the strange accusation, “the humanist outlook is pre-eminently a pledge of solidarity” (53).

⁹ In a 20 March 2003 *New York Times* article reporting a lawsuit against the French national railways for transporting Jews to Nazi death camps in 1944, the plaintiff, Kurt Schaechter, both of whose parents died in the process, is quoted as saying, “What distinguishes us from animals is our memory. Humanity cannot forget its history” (A 3). His suit asks for one euro in damages and for an acknowledgement by the S.N.C.F. of its moral responsibility.

¹⁰ Other Dubliners, we discover, believe that Bloom had been instrumental in the Hungarian movement for autonomy within the Austro-Hungarian Empire (“—He’s a perverted jew, says Martin [Cunningham], from a place in Hungary and it was he drew up all the plans according to the Hungarian system. We know that in

the castle”—276: 1635-37) and that he has accordingly advised the nationalist leader Arthur Griffith (“John Wyse [Nolan] saying it was Bloom gave the ideas for Sinn Fein to Griffith to put in his paper all kinds of jerrymandering, packed juries and swindling the taxes off of the government and appointing consuls all over the world to walk about selling Irish industries” (275: 1573-77). These admiring comments, however, do not prevent them from subjecting the absent Bloom to anti-Semitic stereotyping:

—And after all, says John Wyse, why can’t a jew love his country like the next fellow?

—Why not? says J. J., when he’s quite sure which country it is. (276: 1628-30)

Hardly the worst form of such stereotyping, this is nonetheless a clear sign of Bloom’s rather ambiguous status within the only society that he knows at first hand.

¹¹ T. S. Eliot, “Ulysses, Order and Myth,” in *James Joyce: Two Decades of Criticism*, ed. Seon Givens (New York: Vanguard Press, 1963) 201; orig. pub. in *The Dial* (November 1923). Eliot purports to be speaking here about the function of myth in Joyce’s art, but it seems rather obvious that his real concern is his own art and not Joyce’s. Writing in 1922, the year in which both *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* were published, Eliot seems clearly to have been attempting to capitalize on the reputation of the former in order to give some cachet to the latter.

¹²

AND IT WAS THE FEAST OF THE PASSOVER

... Poor papa with his hagadah book, reading backwards with his finger to me. Pessach. Next year in Jerusalem. Dear, O dear! All that long business about that brought us out of the land of Egypt and into the house of bondage *alleluia*. *Shema Israel Adonai Elohenu*. No, that’s the other. Then the twelve brothers, Jacob’s sons. And then the lamb and the cat and the dog and the stick and the water and the butcher. And then the angel of death kills the butcher and he kills the ox and the dog kills the cat. Sounds a bit silly till you come to look into it well. Justice it means but it’s everybody eating everyone else. That’s what life is after all. (101: 203-14)

The song is *Chad Gadya*, “One Only Kid,” and this is the error of Bloom that first attracted me to the study of Jewish imagery in *Ulysses*. Re-reading it today, what surprises me is not Bloom’s confusion but the fact that he very nearly gets it right. Of course, he also gets wrong the most pivotal prayer in Judaism (“that’s the other”) and, indeed, for monotheistic Christianity and Islam as well, omitting the key phrase, *Adonai Echad*, “The Lord Is One.”

¹³ There is little direct indication of their body language while they are together at 7 Eccles Street. It is only just before Stephen departs, as he and Bloom urinate together in the backyard, under Molly’s window, in a paean to the moon goddess above them, that Joyce gives us a sense of that body language, suggesting that they are, at once, together and separate:

At Stephen’s suggestion, at Bloom’s instigation both, first Stephen, then Bloom, in penumbra urinated, their sides contiguous, their organs of micturition reciprocally rendered invisible by manual circumposition, their gazes, first Bloom’s, then Stephen’s, elevated to the projected luminous and semiluminous shadow.

Similarly?

The trajectories of their, first sequent, then simultaneous, urinations were dissimilar: Bloom’s longer. . . . (577: 1146-53)

A symbol hunter might well look here for further meaning.

¹⁴ Bloom does not seem to consider the possibility that he might pass on his Jewish inheritance to his daughter; he may not even realize that she is legally Jewish, as Jewish as Rudy would have been had he lived. Is this because her legally Jewish mother was raised as a Catholic by her father? (She seems to have little knowledge of or interest in either religion.) Perhaps Bloom intuitively that his is a patriarchal—if matrilinear—tradition, to be handed on actively only to sons. Perhaps he desires simply to reproduce his own experience with his father. If he ever considers such questions, it is not on 16 June 1904, the only day on which we are permitted egress to his thoughts. While there may be no character in literature whom we know more completely than we know Bloom, the omissions—the gaps in our knowledge—are a central aspect of Joyce’s vision of modern humanity. If Freud taught us anything, it is that we know so little about ourselves; how, then, can we know all there is about others?

¹⁵ “Behold the Virgin shall conceive and bear a child and shall call his name Immanuel.” Isaiah 7:14. See also Matthew 1:23.

¹⁶ The phrase “light to the Gentiles” is from Second Isaiah 49:6. As for the question-and-answer format of “Ithaca,” it is usually spoken of as derived from the Catholic catechism. I have suggested elsewhere that it might equally be derived from the older Jewish interpretive tradition known as Midrash, as practiced, for example, in the discussion among the rabbis that is preserved in the Passover Hagadah. See my article, “The New Midrash: *Finnegans Wake*,” *Joyce Studies Annual* (1992) 57-76; rpt. Morton P. Levitt, *James Joyce and Modernism: Beyond Dublin* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000) 183-207.