

# “The Opposite of Hatred”: Undoing Nationalism in Joyce’s *Ulysses*

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## Abstract

The epitome of chauvinist narrow-mindedness in Joyce’s *Ulysses* is the drunken brawler and anti-Semite depicted in the novel’s twelfth chapter, “Cyclops”. Using his mock-heroic approach as one of the essential stylistic devices in *Ulysses*, Joyce connects this character to the one-eyed giant Polyphemus of the original Homeric epic. As Randall Stevenson suggests in his study *Modernist Fiction*, Joyce uses the allusion to Cyclops to warn his readers of any “one-eyed”, narrow or single-minded view of reality (such as nationalism) and the dangerous patterns of behaviour that might ensue from it. However, Joyce’s intention is not just to repudiate or mock nationalism, but also to offer an alternative, a way of resisting the dangerous mindset embodied in Cyclops. Stevenson argues that Joyce accomplishes this by the very narrative method his novel employs: with its constantly shifting perspectives, its myriad styles and points of view, it successfully fights against any narrowing of vision – and so, by implication, against any tendency towards localism, division, ethnic or religious hatred. In her study *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, Martha Nussbaum likewise focuses on the twelfth chapter of *Ulysses* in order to analyse the novel’s political stance and its repudiation of nationalist and religious bigotry. In Nussbaum’s opinion, however, Joyce’s strategy in dealing with these issues is inseparable from one of the major motifs in the novel, i.e., the author’s celebration of physical love. Using Stevenson’s and Nussbaum’s insights as a starting point, the paper will proceed to explore Joyce’s ethical and political preoccupations in

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*Ulysses* in order to outline the predominant narrative strategies which the author employs in undoing nationalism.<sup>1</sup>

*Key words:* James Joyce, nationalism, narrative strategies, subjectivity, body, Modernism, cosmopolitanism.

### **Presentations of Nationalism in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses***

In his study *James Joyce and Nationalism* (1995), Emer Nolan warns against simplified interpretations of Joyce's works and the authors who praise him as an "uncritical advocate" of modernity, while disregarding the complex interplay between nationalism and internationalism, the provincial and the metropolitan, the traditional and the experimental, which permeated not only his own fiction but the writings of many other Modernists as well (Nolan 2002, 7). Such critics, as Nolan points out, also tend to analyse Joyce's anti-nationalism in universal and generalised terms, without taking into consideration Ireland's cultural and political specificity, and especially the fact that Joyce was at the same time strongly opposed to British colonial rule in Ireland. Nolan writes that one can "distinguish between Joyce's representation of imperialism and nationalism and see how they function in contrasting ways in his texts" (ibid, 19). Terry Eagleton likewise stresses the fact that Joyce was always a sharp critic of British colonialism, who thought that its influence on his country had been villainous. Joyce's opposition to Irish nationalism, as Eagleton argues, certainly did not come from a pro-colonialist, but from a socialist perspective: Joyce supported the Irish anti-colonial resistance but disliked what he saw as the Irish nationalists' "chauvinism, sexism and cultural purism. He rejected their violence, xenophobia and religious bigotry, from his own pluralist, pacifist, cosmopolitan standpoint" (Eagleton 2005, 198–199).

Joyce's negative attitude to both imperialism and nationalism is also discussed by Seamus Heaney, who touches upon the famous novelist's views in a speech entitled "Among Schoolchildren" (1983). As Heaney explains, Joyce was capable of perceiving the danger inherent in any claim of national superiority, the Irish as well as the British, and for that reason deeply suspicious of various nationalist movements, which dominated the Irish political scene in his youth. Heaney also points out that Joyce viewed

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nationalism as one of the “prescriptive myths” of identity, which an artist needs to deconstruct as he strives to find his individual voice and achieve an authentic expression:

Joyce is exemplary in refusing to replace the myth of alien superiority by the myth of native superiority... If he has gone to the trouble of freeing his mind from the net of the English myth, he is also intent on deconstructing the prescriptive myth of Irishness which was burgeoning in his youth and which survives in various forms to this day. (Heaney 1983, 10–11)

In his autobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Joyce states his opposition to nationalism through the words and thoughts of his fictional alter ego, the protagonist Stephen Dedalus. In one of the crucial epiphanic moments in the novel, Stephen comes to understand his surname as a prophecy, alluding to the mythical artificer Daedalus who was imprisoned by king Minos on Crete, but managed to escape by fabricating wings for himself and his son. In Stephen’s interpretation, Daedalus is symbolically an artist, escaping from social restraints on the wings of his imagination and creativity. Stephen likewise sees himself as a winged man who takes flight from a symbolical prison imposed by the social, political, and religious institutions, and the pressure they exert on him to conform (Bulson 2006, 57). In the aftermath of this awakening, he formulates his artistic creed, which also includes his negative attitude to nationalism. Nationalist ideology, along with familial obligations and the church dogma, all present obstacles to a young artist aiming at independence and self-expression. In conversations with his friends Davin and Cranley, Stephen pronounces his famous *Non Serviam* to these structures:

When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets. (Joyce 2001, 157)

I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use – silence, exile, and cunning. (ibid, 191)

In *Ulysses* (1922), Joyce uses a different approach to express his repudiation of nationalism. His mock-heroic method (or mythical method, as T. S. Eliot called it) is not just one of the essential stylistic devices in the novel, but also one of the chief sources of humour. As Eliot points out, it is, generally speaking, “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... [It is] a step towards making the modern world possible for art" (Eliot 1923, 483). It may be argued that, by using this method, Joyce also found a way of representing nationalism – as a phenomenon significantly contributing to the “futility and anarchy” inherent in contemporary history.

The central character in *Ulysses* pertaining to this motif is an unnamed Citizen, an Irish nationalist and anti-Semite whom we encounter in Barney Kiernan’s pub in the episode “Cyclops”. Whereas the Citizen is in reality just a drunken brawler and an estate agent involved in shady deals, Joyce represents him in a grandiloquent style as if he were a mythical hero of an ancient Irish saga. We are told he wears a girdle decorated with sea-stones on which are engraved “the tribal images of Irish heroes and heroines of antiquity” (Joyce 2009, 284). The humorous catalogue of those “Irish heroes and heroines” includes names such as Christopher Columbus, Julius Caesar, Muhammad, Napoleon Bonaparte, Cleopatra, Patrick W. Shakespeare, Brian Confucius, Adam and Eve, Captain Nemo or the Queen of Sheba. It functions as a kind of ironic reversal of the Citizen’s desire for a “pure” national and racial identity, his need to endow his nation with a mythical past and a prominent place in the history of the world. As Eric Bulson points out, it shows us that “the Citizen cannot see Irish history within the broader continuum of human history that includes the constant intermixing of races, cultures, histories, and tongues” (Bulson 2006, 85–86).

The most important mythical parallel, however, is Homeric: The Citizen, wearing an eye patch, is primarily meant to allude to the one-eyed giant Polyphemus – the mythical Cyclops who threatened Odysseus and his men, just like this modern anti-Semitic Cyclops threatens Joyce’s protagonist Leopold Bloom. The allusion to Cyclops and the eye symbolism are of central significance in the chapter: namely, they reveal Joyce’s intention to warn his readers of any “one-eyed”, narrow-minded political perspective (such as nationalism or racism) and the dangerous pattern of behaviour that might ensue from it. His point is to expose and satirise people who view the world with just “one eye”; those who are, in the intellectual sense, partially blind, and operate based on that limited vision (Kopper 1981, 81).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Some critics, such as Terry Eagleton (2005, 199), Marjorie Howes (2004, 259) or Emer Nolan (2002, 99) point out that in spite of being a bigoted nationalist, the Citizen also happens to be an acute critic of colonialism, some of whose views on the matter are accurate and justified, and even coincide with Joyce’s own. Nolan quotes from Joyce’s 1907 essay “Ireland, Isle of Saints and Sages” in order to demonstrate the similarities between Joyce’s thoughts on the damage the British have caused to the Irish industries through history, and the Citizen’s statements on the same issue. He explains it by referring to Bakhtin’s theories on the dialogic imagination, arguing that in this case Joyce wanted to observe his own words in a parodic context of the Citizen’s speech (Nolan 2002, 99–100). While this contributes to the complexity of the Citizen’s presentation, his narrow perspective still stands out as the most important motif in the

In the scenes that follow, Joyce makes further allusions to Homer's original storyline, which contribute to the comic effect of the episode: instead of a fiery stake which Odysseus used to blind and incapacitate Polyphemus, Bloom holds a lit cigar during his conversation with the Citizen; and instead of the huge boulder which Polyphemus threw in an attempt to sink Odysseus' ship, the Citizen throws a tin of biscuits at Bloom. The final oath the Citizen pronounces demonstrates the absurdity of his position, and by implication, of all actions prompted by chauvinist and religious hatred: "By Jesus, says he, I'll brain that bloody jewman... By Jesus, I'll crucify him so I will" (Joyce 2009: 327).

It may be argued, however, that Joyce's intention in *Ulysses* is not just to repudiate or mock nationalism, but also to offer an alternative, a way of resisting the harmful tendency embodied in Cyclops. Such interpretations of the moral effort in *Ulysses* are put forward in Randall Stevenson's study *Modernist Fiction* (1992) and in Martha Nussbaum's *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (2001). While both of these critics focus on the twelfth chapter of *Ulysses* in order to analyse the novel's political stance, they have different approaches and dwell on different aspects of Joyce's text. Stevenson explores the way in which *Ulysses* struggles against chauvinist narrow-mindedness at the stylistic level via the very narrative methods and writing techniques it employs. Nussbaum, on the other hand, considers Joyce's resistance to nationalism in conjunction with his other thematic preoccupations. In her opinion, this issue is inseparable from one of the major motifs in the novel – i.e. its celebration of physical love. In the following sections of this paper, Stevenson's and Nussbaum's arguments will be outlined and juxtaposed, with a view to reaching a more comprehensive understanding of Joyce's novelistic strategies in undoing nationalism.

## Parallax vs. Paralysis

"In its 'Cyclops' chapter," Randall Stevenson points out, "*Ulysses* warns against any narrow, single-minded or, literally, one-eyed view of reality. The novel's own practice works against any such narrowing of vision" (Stevenson 1992, 52). In *Modernist Fiction*, Stevenson discusses various points of view, styles, and techniques the reader encounters in *Ulysses*, arguing that their chief purpose is to counter the dangerous mindset epitomised in Cyclops. By employing a myriad of perspectives, Joyce creates an all-round

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episode. Even when the Citizen's statements are true, his fixation with the nationalist themes and his obsessive monologuing are really in line with his monocular vision. Joyce's condemnation of this one-eyed stance is certainly most obvious and unambiguous in his presentation of the Citizen's anti-Semitism.

account of events and characters in the novel, making it impossible for the reader to embrace just one, simplistic, or biased interpretation of reality. Subjectivity, as one of the key features of Modernist literature in general, also determines to a great degree the method of presentation in *Ulysses*. We are introduced to the subjective perceptions of numerous characters in the novel – such as Leopold Bloom, Stephen Dedalus, Molly Bloom, Dignam Jr. or Gerty McDowell – who all at some point take on the role of the narrator. These characters often have different or even opposing thoughts and opinions on the same issue, so that the reader is constantly invited to reassess his or her understanding. In this way, the novel calls for tolerance and acceptance of divergent views.

Stevenson also discusses a narrative method in *Ulysses* which he calls *the extension of consciousness*. It refers to the imaginative effort some of the characters make to grasp the thoughts and feelings of another person. This is especially characteristic of Bloom, who is motivated by a strong sense of compassion and the desire to see the world as others see it (Bulson 2006, 84). As Stevenson writes, “Bloom’s curious, kindly mind repeatedly extends to encompass the likely thinking of other creatures or people” (Stevenson 1992, 51–52). After leading a blind young man across the street, for instance, Bloom continues to dwell on his possible disposition and the way he perceives his environment:

Mr Bloom walked behind the eyeless feet, a flatcut suit of herringbone tweed. Poor young fellow! How on earth did he know the van was there? Must have felt it. See things in their forehead perhaps. Kind of sense of volume. Weight, would he feel it if something was removed. Feel a gap. Queer idea of Dublin he must have, tapping his way round by the stones. Could he walk in a beeline if he hadn’t that cane?... Sense of smell must be stronger too. Smells on all sides bunched together. Each person too. Then the spring, the summer: smells... And with a woman, for instance... Must be strange not to see her. Kind of a form in his mind’s eye. The voice, temperature when he touches her with his fingers must almost see the lines, the curves. His hands on her hair, for instance. Say it was black, for instance. Good. We call it black. Then passing over her white skin. Different feel perhaps. Feeling of white. (Joyce 2009, 173)

At one point, Bloom even speculates on how his cat perceives the world and wonders about a kind of language it would use – “Prr. Scratch my head. Prr.” (ibid, 53)

Gerty McDowell, a character who appears in the thirteenth chapter of *Ulysses*, “Nausicaa”, likewise makes an effort to understand Bloom’s melancholy upon seeing him for the first time on Sandymount Strand:

[S]he ventured a look at him and the face that met her gaze there in the twilight, wan and strangely drawn, seemed to her the saddest she had ever seen [...] She could see at once by his dark eyes and his pale intellectual face that he was a foreigner... He was in deep mourning, she could see that, and the story of a haunting sorrow was written on his face. She would have given worlds to know what it was. (ibid, 343)

It is interesting to notice that Gerty correctly intuits there is something “foreign” about Bloom, but it does not prevent her from feeling attracted to him; on the contrary, it even increases her curiosity. As opposed to her, the Citizen in the previous chapter was only able to react to Bloom’s foreignness with hostility. And even though Gerty’s day-dreaming is inspired by the cheap romantic fiction she reads, and the fantasy she spins around Bloom – casting him in the role of a “mysterious dark stranger” – is ridiculous and far from reality, it still enables her to sympathize and connect with the Other. Such tendency towards extending one’s consciousness and reaching the Other is in sharp contrast with the mindset of the Citizen, whose xenophobia and hatred of the Jews make it impossible for him to communicate with Bloom and recognize his humanity.

The above-mentioned narrative strategies may also be viewed in connection to the concept of parallax. Parallax is an astronomical term which Bloom, who is always fascinated by science, muses about in “Lestrygonians”, the eighth chapter of *Ulysses*. According to Don Gifford’s annotations for *Ulysses*, parallax is “the apparent displacement or the difference in apparent direction of an object as seen from two different points of view; in astronomy, the difference in direction of a celestial body as seen from some point on the Earth’s surface and from some other conventional point” (Gifford 1989, 160). This scientific theory, the same as Joyce’s novel, points to the fallibility of any single perspective; this is why *Ulysses* constantly invites us to consider further perspectives on various individuals, issues, and events, and to keep revising our judgment. Stevenson argues, furthermore, that *Ulysses* employs *parallax* in order to resist *paralysis* in Dublin – by which he means the paralysis of Dublin’s dull, unimaginative middle class, and their myopic political views, including the burgeoning of nationalism. Joyce has criticized this paralysed state of Dublin’s middle-class life ever since the beginning of his writing career, most notably in his short story collection *Dubliners* (1914). In that early work, he used a naturalistic style to express his views and his criticism; in *Ulysses*, however, he develops new, experimental styles and techniques. These new methods of presentation, according to Randall Stevenson, are at the same time Joyce’s new methods of opposing and transcending paralysis: “However drab or static Dublin life may be in reality, its presentation is made lively by Joyce’s parallax tactics, constantly shifting the narrative through a spectrum of techniques and points of view” (Stevenson 1992, 52).

Terry Eagleton likewise comments on the contrast between the inert, seedy world which is the subject matter of *Ulysses*, and the dynamic and resourceful language which Joyce uses to depict it. According to Eagleton, this contrast also has temporal connotations: the content and the form correspond, respectively, to the present and the future of Ireland, so that Joyce's very language anticipates the changes he would like to see in his native country:

It is as though the content of the novel belongs to the world of the present, while the language which portrays it anticipates the future. It prefigures a world of freedom and plurality, sexual emancipation and shifting identities. If this is so, then the novel is a critique of Irish nationalism as much in its form as in its content. It marks out the limits of the Irish national revolution, which... gave birth to an independent nation which was (among other, more reputable things) philistine, puritanical, patriarchal and chauvinistic. If all this helped drive Joyce into exile, what he wrote in that exile sketches in its very style the kind of Ireland to which he might have felt able to return. (Eagleton 2005, 203)

## The Descent of Love

In her study *Upheavals of Thought*, Martha Nussbaum points out that “above all, *Ulysses* is a book about love”. She stresses the importance of the experience of bodily love in the novel, and the fact that Joyce presents it as a gateway to recognising the reality of the Other. For this reason, as Nussbaum maintains, this kind of love may also become “the great hope for public life” (Nussbaum 2001, 692). In her opinion, it is especially upon reading the episode “Cyclops” that we come to realise that the novel's celebration of erotic love has potential political significance and is in fact inseparable from Joyce's political vision. She focuses in particular on the scene in which Bloom, in response to the Citizen's racist provocations, delivers his short but moving speech against hatred. When the Citizen asks Bloom what his nationality is, Bloom initially replies: “Ireland... I was born here. Ireland” (Joyce 2009, 317). However, when the Citizen reacts to this by contemptuously spitting an oyster he was chewing, Bloom feels compelled to speak out against discrimination and the persecution of the Jews: “And I belong to a race too... that is hated and persecuted. Also now. This very moment. This very instant... Robbed. Plundered. Insulted” (ibid, 318). One of his interlocutors in the pub asks him why the Jews don't oppose discrimination by resorting to violence, but Bloom replies that this



is not how men and women are meant to live. Nussbaum paraphrases his response and comments on it:

“Force, hatred, history, all that,” says Bloom. “That’s not life for men and women, insult and hatred. And everybody knows that it’s the very opposite of that that is really life.” “What?” [...] “Love, says Bloom. I mean the opposite of hatred.” In Bloom’s view, ethnic, religious, and national chauvinisms are a prime source of the “insult and hatred” that oppose love and therefore life [...] Against this politics of division, violence, and hatred, Bloom sets up his own program of nonviolence, of scientific and technological progress, of education, and of compassion for material need, in accordance with a cosmopolitan conception of a common humanity. (Nussbaum 2001, 708)

Love, which Bloom equates with life itself, has to begin with self-acceptance – that is, with the willingness to embrace our human experience in its totality, including its bodily, disorderly, and mundane aspects. Conversely, as Nussbaum argues, our inability to affirm these aspects of being may lead to self-hatred and eventually to the hatred of others. Especially sexuality, as she points out, tends to become metonymic and imply everything in our life which defies conscious control. Accepting only the controllable, rational, and orderly portion of our being may cause us to project the undesirable psychic contents onto the Other, thus making him/her the object of our hatred (ibid, 709).

Such self-hatred – eventually leading to hostile feelings towards the Other – may even be prompted by certain works of art. Those are the works which, according to Nussbaum, constitute the so-called “ascent” tradition. Namely, by analysing the narratives produced by authors such as Plato, Augustine, Dante, Spinoza, Whitman, or Proust, she comes to a conclusion that all of them project a kind of sublimated image of love and life, constructing in the reader’s mind an idealised version of his or her own self. This self appears to be removed from the messiness of our ordinary existence:

[A]ll of these ascents in a real sense repudiate us. Nobody has a menstrual period in Plato. Nobody excretes in Spinoza. Nobody masturbates in Proust [...] Augustine and Dante record such moments, but leave them behind in Hell [...] In Whitman, the body and erotic desire are rehabilitated, but also transfigured, made part of the great march of justice in the world, rather than just being by themselves [...] In none of these texts, then, does love wear a real-life body with its hungers and thirsts and fantasies. (ibid, 681–682)

As a result, Nussbaum argues, these works create a wide gap between the constructed reader and the real-life reader, which may cause us anger and self-disgust when we return from the experience of reading and discover that we are still ourselves. Joyce's *Ulysses*, on the other hand, closes the self-same gap with the narrative method which Nussbaum calls "transfiguration of everyday life" or "the descent of love". She explains it primarily as a descent into the chaos and disorder of erotic love. It is this descent, as she maintains, that enables us to transcend our isolated ego-consciousness and connect with the Other. Joyce's novel, in Nussbaum's opinion, seems to argue "that it is only through love, and bodily love at that, that human beings can find an exit from solipsism and loneliness to the reality of another life" (Nussbaum 2001, 692).

Nussbaum also stresses the fact that bodily needs are universal: therefore, a focus on these needs may become an essential step on the way to repudiating of all kinds of localisms and ethnic hatred, and towards embracing our common humanity and adopting a cosmopolitan view (ibid, 709). Cosmopolitanism is likewise advocated by Joyce's protagonist Leopold Bloom, who argues that "it's a patent absurdity [...] to hate people because they live around the corner and speak another vernacular" (Joyce 2009, 601); and also brings into play a very open-minded and progressive definition of a nation: "A nation? says Bloom. A nation is the same people living in the same place" (ibid, 317).

## Conclusion

The analyses conducted by Randall Stevenson and Martha Nussbaum demonstrate that Joyce's *Ulysses* works against the tendency embodied in *Cyclops* – that is, against nationalist narrow-mindedness and hatred – both at the stylistic and at the semantic level. As Stevenson's discussion shows, stylistic devices such as "parallax", the extension of consciousness or the inclusion of multiple narrative techniques, are not just embellishments in Joyce's text; they are essentially related to his political and moral vision. A similar observation has been made earlier by the Hungarian critic and philosopher Georg Lukács, who points out that the formative principle determining the style of Modernist writers is inseparable from their ideology (Lukács 1996, 143). It is interesting to notice, however, that Lukács generally has a negative view on the politics of Modernism and condemns the works of this period for their lack of social criticism and their failure to provide a progressive social vision. In his well-known essay "The Ideology of Modernism" (1957), Lukács actually begins his discussion of this issue by referring to *Ulysses*, but never seems to acknowledge the progressive effort that Joyce's narrative makes to transcend religious and nationalist bigotry.

Nussbaum's claim – that *Ulysses* proposes acceptance of the body and erotic love as a cure against hatred – may likewise be viewed within a broader context of theories on Modernism. A parallel may be drawn, for instance, with the ideas of Lionel Trilling, who praises the literature of Modernism because it endeavours to gain “a more accurate knowledge about the self” (Trilling 1965, 91). This is similar to the contention of Martha Nussbaum, who claims that the authors who write about “the ascent of love” do not encourage us to embrace and accept our entire being; which is why Joyce's celebration of the body is required as a necessary complement to that previous literary tradition.

It is also the hallmark of all major literary works, as Trilling maintains, that they offer us a more profound understanding of the Other. Citing authors who convey to us the experience of belonging to other social classes, other ethnic or religious groups, he concludes: “[I]n almost every developed society, literature is able to conceive of the self and the selfhood of others, far more intensely than the general culture ever can” (ibid, 90–91). It may be argued that Joyce's narrative strategies have the same objective, i.e. that they aim to provide us with a comprehensive knowledge about the self and the Other; and by arming us with such knowledge, *Ulysses* simultaneously arms us against hatred.

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