STUDIA UBB PHILOLOGIA, LXIII, 4, 2018, p. 177 - 190
(RECOMMENDED CITATION)
DOI:10.24193/subbphilo.2018.4.14

SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES: LEOPOLD BLOOM, HOSPITALITY, AND THE OTHER IN JAMES JOYCE'S *ULYSSES*[1]

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ABSTRACT. ***Shifting Perspectives: Leopold Bloom, Hospitality, and the other in James Joyce's "Ulysses"***. The present paper interprets the character of Leopold Bloom in light of his incorporation of the ethical necessity to "see ourselves as others see us", as well as the meaning acquired by the character when read against the context of the Great War. We propose that Bloom the redeemer, as he is portrayed on several occasions throughout the day, is not a single Messianic figure, but rather a type of human being with a distinctive attitude to the experience of the Other. The protagonist, himself an exile, is perpetually prone to shed his own point of view in favour of that of alterity, in other words, to see the world as others might see it. His acts of kindness, his generous, gentle nature, and his interactions with Stephen and Molly can all be viewed, as I will argue, as consequences of this almost in-built shift of perspective.

Keywords: *Leopold Bloom, perspective, hospitality, love, ethics of alterity, Levinas, Derrida.*

REZUMAT. ***Schimb de Perspectivă: Despre Leopold Bloom, Ospitalitate şi Alteritate în "Ulise"***. Lucrarea de faţă propune o interpretare a personajului Leopold Bloom plecând de la felul în care acesta reiterează versul lui Robert Burns, „să ne vedem cum ne văd alţii," şi având în vedere faptul că James Joyce scrie *Ulise* în timpul primului război mondial. În acest sens, Bloom salvatorul, aşa cum el este descris pe parcursul romanului, nu este propriu-zis o figură mesianică, ci, mai degrabă, exponentul unei tipologii umane cu a atitudine deosebită faţă de experienţa alterităţii. El însuşi exilat din orice comunitate, protagonistul tinde întotdeauna să renunţe la propriul punct de vedere în favoarea Celuilalt. Cu alte cuvinte, Bloom vede lumea aşa cum o văd alţii.

Cuvinte cheie: *Leopold Bloom, perspectivă, ospitalitate, iubire, etica alterităţii, Levinas, Derrida.*

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Throughout *Ulysses*, Bloom remembers a verse from Robert Burns' 1786 poem, "To a Louse," which describes the indignation of a churchgoer who witnesses the parasitic insect as it settles in a lady's sophisticated hat. There is, of course, a didactic purpose to the poem. Although the lady initially seems superior to others in the eyes of the lyrical voice, they soon realise that to a louse, all people must look the same, irrespective of their "airs in dress an' gait"; furthermore, if we only had the power to "see ourselves as others see us," we would likely be disabused of our pretensions, our pride, and our vain self-love. These ideas are intimately linked to the fact that *Ulysses* was written between 1914 and 1921, in "Trieste-Zurich-Paris" (644), against the backdrop of violence-torn, early 20th century Europe. The narrative itself deliberately takes place prior to the events erupting in 1914, while its protagonists are ostentatiously pacifist, concerned with the mere facts of everyday existence. This does not, however, indicate that the novel is completely remote from its context of writing and publication, but rather suggests that Joyce went against the expectations of his contemporary audience in order to propose an alternative to the war or, more likely, a way to move forward from it. In this light, I argue, we might better understand why Leopold Bloom is sometimes viewed as a Messianic figure. Against the backdrop of the war, which framed the publication of the novel, he maintains a unique approach to alterity, as well as the tendency to see everything from the Other's point of view. Using Emmanuel Levinas' and Jacques Derrida's ethics of alterity, I propose to interpret Bloom's interaction with non-human alterity, with his so-called "neighbours" and with Stephen, and finally, with the other sex and Molly in particular.

Although, like *Ulysses*, much of Levinas's work might initially appear to be divorced from its historical context, the philosopher paid close attention to the events unfolding in early 20th century Europe, which he viewed as "a time of human abandonment, injustice of vast scope, inhumanity and suffering" (Morgan, 2). Levinas himself suffered the horrors of Nazism throughout the nearly five years he spent in a prisoners-of-war camp; he lost members of his family in death camps, and in France, his wife and children were forced into hiding during his captivity. His ethics or "first philosophy" is grounded in such realities, his writing revealing war as an attempt to dominate that which it ignores, to annihilate an opposing force, without "seeing the face in the other" (Levinas 1987, 19). The philosopher's on-going comments on Vasily Grossman's 1960 *Life and Fate*, a novel which depicts the Stalinist regime with gruesome realism, are particularly illustrative in this regard:

> Grossman's eight hundred pages offer a complete spectacle of desolation and dehumanization (…). Yet within that decomposition of human relations, within that sociology of misery, goodness persists. In the relation of one man to an other, goodness is possible. (…) Every attempt

> to organize humanity fails. The only thing that remains undying is the goodness of everyday, ongoing life. Ikonnikov calls that 'the little act of goodness' (…) [I]t is a goodness outside of every system, every religion, every social organization. (Levinas 2001, 217-8)

In other words, in picking up on several acts of gratuitous kindness described by Grossman against the dehumanising context of a totalitarian regime, Levinas is interested not in a system or higher organisation of morality, but in the particular ethical relationship occurring between human beings, between the self and the other. He believed that "in place of systems and totalities, we need an acknowledgment and realisation of the utterly particular. This would be a 'redemption of the everyday,' in a sense" (Morgan, 33). With this in mind, we might better understand Levinas's project in his 1961 *Totality and Infinity*, which seeks to describe the primacy of such moments of "senseless kindness" through the pre-rational encounter of the self and the other.

According to Levinas, in one's encounter with the Other, the self's solitary, self-sufficient state of being is interrupted, even shattered. As an immediate effect, the Other paralyses possession, as well as enjoyment, to which it opposes "his epiphany of the face" (Levinas 1979, 170-71). The face of the Other is a breach in totality, it reveals itself by itself and therefore it escapes "the self's powers of constitution" (Moati, 37). Against the self's state of enjoyment, the face of the Other opposes a form of "ethical resistance" (Levinas 1979, 199); the self can exercise no power over the face, "not because it opposes me with a greater power, but because it transcends the register of power in general" (Moati, 149). In other words, the face does not confront the self with some kind of "counterpower," but rather suspends "my ability for power" (Levinas 1979, 198).

One of Levinas's essential contributions to the understanding of ethics remains the fact that from within the experience of the face, the self cannot escape responsibility. Levinas defines responsibility as one's response to the call of the face, so that regardless of what this response might be, it exists in any face-to-face event. In later works and particularly in *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas's earlier language is gradually replaced by a disturbing, aggressive registry, with terms such as *obsession*, *persecution*, *accusation*, or *hostage* reminding us "of what we originally are – accused before we have done anything, obsessed before we have chosen at all and in a sense overcome, persecuted by the demand made of us before we have accepted it" (Morgan, 82). Responsibility becomes a deluge of responsibility, and is therefore subtracted from the domain of subjectivity, freedom, will, or power, where it had been placed by Western philosophical tradition.

Yet Levinas also understood philosophy as "the wisdom of love" (Levinas 1981, 162): the ethical, personal, and political relations between the self and the Other "are founded on or conditioned by love" (Secomb, 67). Though referring predominantly to Agape, or "love without Eros," erotic love is

itself essential for Levinas because it implies "a transcending of self in reaching toward the other and caring for the other," even though it remains a fulfilment of pleasure and a satisfaction of desire (Secomb, 63). Desire is "the ontological state through which one experiences alterity" (Utell, 10); thus in the simultaneous experience of one's desire to reach the Other and an unbridgeable distance thereof, the self may grasp the infinite. The caress embodies this reality, as it "consists in seizing upon nothing (…) it expresses love, but suffers from an inability to tell it. It is hungry for this very expression, in an unremitting increase of hunger" (Levinas 1979, 257). The self's responsibility for the other may be, therefore, best explained through Agape, but it is through erotic love also that the self attains a glimpse of the infinite face of Other.

Indebted to Levinas in much of his thinking, Derrida was committed to the former's project, "not as Levinas himself conceived it, but as Derrida rewrote it," to the extent that what "Derrida called fidelity to Levinas was often indistinguishable from betrayal" (Hammerschlag, x), a subversion and occasional misinterpretation of the latter. Nevertheless, and even though Derrida himself never refers to it as such, his writing does propose an ethics of alterity, while acknowledging the impossibility of Levinas's pure *neighbourly love*. In a 1992 essay, "The Other Heading," Derrida defines responsibility as follows:

> The condition of possibility of this thing called responsibility is a certain *experience and experiment of the possibility of the impossible: the testing of the aporia* from which one may invent the only *possible invention, the impossible invention*. (41)

Responsibility, therefore ethics, can only be experienced as an aporia, an insoluble contradiction internal to the event itself. This is not merely to say that ethics is impossible, but rather to indicate that it becomes possible only as a result of its own impossibility. The premises for such a statement are similar to those of Levinas's work, in the sense that both thinkers write at a time when an overwhelming philosophical tradition had already inscribed responsibility in the sphere of "accountability, that is (…) of will, causality, freedom or free-will, subjectivity, and agency." In other words, responsibility had been understood by means of a subject, an initiator and perpetrator of the act, as well as the ground for imputation, thereby inevitably leading to a "semantics of power and appropriation," wherein to be responsible designated "the capacity by a sovereign subject to appropriate itself entirely in an ideal of self-legislation and transparency" (Raffoul, 413). For Derrida, on the other hand, responsibility no longer implies intentionality, freedom, or autonomy, but is the encounter of an event as inappropriable, an experience of the impossible (Raffoul, 414).

We arrive, in this manner, at the definition of responsibility and of ethics as *aporia*. In the essay "Force of Law," Derrida first explains this through the

unstable relation between law and justice. Thus, in order to be just, to avoid arbitrariness, the judge must follow the law, in other words, a rule. Yet if the judge merely follows a rule programmatically, he or she is nothing more than a calculating machine: so "not only must a judge follow a rule but also he or she must 're-institute' it in a new judgment." Since each case is different, marked by specific circumstances, each decision must be "an absolutely unique interpretation which no existing coded rule can or ought to guarantee" (Lawlor, 125). The result, ultimately, is a form of violence, because no decision can conform perfectly to institutional codes. What the judge experiences or ought to experience, therefore, is the *undecidable*, which occurs not only in a court of law, but with any ethical decision. No mere oscillation between two or more possibilities or outcomes, the *undecidable* represents the experience that "the case, being unique and singular, does not fit the established codes and therefore a decision about it seems to be impossible" (Lawlor, 125). Consequently, a decision can never be presently and fully just, yet is necessary and urgent (Derrida 1992, 24-5). It is made in an instant, a finite moment, and in the absence of unlimited knowledge, which could justify it. This is why Derrida concludes elsewhere that "a decision is unconscious – insane as that may seem, it involves the unconscious and nevertheless remains responsible" (Derrida 1997, 69). It is, paradoxically, a "passive decision" for which I am nevertheless responsible (Raffoul, 425).

The issue of *hospitality*, which occupies a significant space especially in Derrida's later works, is understood in a similar manner. In "A Word of Welcome," a speech delivered one year after Levinas's death, the philosopher proposed that, according to Levinas,

> intentionality opens, from its own threshold, in its most general structure, as hospitality, as welcoming of the face, as an ethics of hospitality, and, thus, as ethics in general. For hospitality is not simply some region of ethics, let alone (…) the name of a problem in law or politics: it is ethicity itself, the whole and the principle of ethics. (50)

As such, the ethics of alterity, to which both Levinas and Derrida subscribed in different ways, can be described as an ethics of hospitality, of the absolute openness for the arrival of the Other. Derrida further notes that, like responsibility and ethics, hospitality itself presents us with an aporia. On the one hand, the law of unconditional hospitality "requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (…) but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I give place to them, (…) without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names" (Derrida 2000, 25). On the other hand, there are conditional laws of hospitality, which establish a right to and a duty in hospitality, but function by imposing terms and conditions, political, juridical, or moral, upon the unconditional law. From the point of view

of such conditional laws of hospitality, where the other has rights, but also restrictions, conditions to fulfil, and obligations, "the guest, even when he or she is well received, is mainly a foreigner" (Kakoliris, 146). Furthermore, pure hospitality is impossible because it cannot exist without "the sovereignty of the person who offers hospitality in his or her house" (Kakoliris, 148). There is, in other words, a discourse of power, as well as a certain hostility in every act of hospitality, for which Derrida coins the term "hostipitality." Thus, if for Levinas pure hospitality is the ought-to of every encounter between the self and the Other, for Derrida, hospitality can only be a continuous negotiation between the universal law and conditional laws, each of which appears to be the opposite of the other, but cannot exist without it.

Written several decades before Levinas or Derrida published their work, *Ulysses*, a novel open in its very form to the voice and the experience of the Other, remarkably anticipates the ethics proposed by the two philosophers. While Levinas formulated his ethics against the context of the Second World War, James Joyce wrote *Ulysses* while exiled due to the consequences of the First, yet their responses are, in many ways, similar. To begin with, Joyce's novel is "an extended hymn to the dignity of everyday living, when cast against the backdrop of a world war" (Kiberd, 288), which foreshadows Levinas's preference for a "redemption of the everyday." Leopold Bloom is a character seemingly built around a form of Levinasian ethics, as he repeatedly demonstrates, throughout the day, the value of both love and small, gratuitous acts of kindness in face-to-face interactions. Yet he also escapes the "deluge of responsibility" described by Levinas. He is certainly not a perfect individual, while the motivation of his deeds is often twofold or ambiguous. In this regard, the character embodies Levinasian ethics, not necessarily as the philosopher prescribed it, but rather as Derrida later amended it. This is evident is all of Bloom's interactions, both with the human and the non-human other.

For instance, while Levinas believed that the face of the Other is necessarily a human face, in "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," Derrida argues, through the notion of *animots*, that the human/non-human distinction is artificial, while animals are what the human being and its language make of them. That we have created a category, *the animals*, which can seemingly encompass all non-human species, has, at least partly, engendered the violence that these creatures have suffered at our hand. Derrida begins this essay by confessing a startling event: he refers to those moments when, naked, he meets the gaze of the cat, and feels ashamed, though faced only with an animal. He is prompted to acknowledge that the animal not only offers itself to view, but has a gaze of its own, or is the subject of a gaze whose object is Derrida. This is the source of much of Derrida's thinking about alterity, for what is the cat if not the fundamental Other.

It is surprising to note how well such notions are intuited in *Ulysses*, beginning with Bloom's own encounter with his cat. It is significant that this

encounter takes place before we learn much else about the character. In the opening lines of "Calypso," as Bloom prepares breakfast for Molly, several aspects of this first of Bloom's interactions are noteworthy. First, we notice that, throughout his "dialogue" with the animal, Bloom considers a number of things that "they say" about cats, for instance, that "they call them stupid" or that cats do not mouse "if you clip" their whiskers (46). This issue with the manner in which cats are described, alongside the fact that Bloom considers the possibility that the animal actually understands more than it is given credit for, is intuitive of Derrida's notion of *animot*, the creation of the animal, in a sense, through language. Secondly, Bloom's ability to empathise with the cat is perhaps not as impressive as the fact that, for a moment, he shifts the perspective from his point of view to that of the animal. He wonders what he might look like to the cat, acknowledging its gaze, at least instinctively. This process is essential to describing Bloom's behaviour throughout the day, as he constantly wonders how others might see him, not necessarily as a matter of vanity, but in order to understand the perspective of others. The entire exchange is illustrative for Bloom's frequent shift between his own perspective and that of others, a tendency that rests at the foundation of his different approach to alterity.

Later in the day, in "Lestrygonians," the same occurs when Bloom notices a few birds "looking for grub" along the river. When he is drawn to the shiny peels of glazed apples sold by a woman nearby, he thinks: "Wait. Those poor birds" (125). In a display of characteristic generosity, he buys a couple of cakes instead of the apples and proceeds to feed them to the hungry birds. Yet when the birds seem to ask for more, "flapping weakly," he contemplates: "I'm not going to throw them any more. Penny quite enough. Lots of thanks I get. Not even a caw. They spread foot and mouth disease too" (126). Interestingly, here and in other instances, although he constantly feels the desire to help the less fortunate, Bloom seems to negotiate his position at a healthy distance from ideas such as that of infinite responsibility for the non-human other, while at the same time maintaining a caring and generous attitude towards the latter.

In "Lestrygonians," we see this happening not only in Bloom's encounter with the birds, but also in his thoughts on vegetarianism. Early in the chapter, when the character notices the poet George Russell walking down the street, he immediately thinks of just how silly the vegetarian diet is: "Only weggebobbles and fruit. Don't eat a beefsteak. If you do the eyes of that cow will pursue you through all eternity. They say it's healthier. Windandwatery though" (136). Given these thoughts, perhaps it comes as a surprise when Bloom is nauseated at the sight of men eating at Burton's. If he had earlier contemplated the "model farm at Kinnereth on the lakeshore of Tiberias" and described the cattlemarket as an ideal, rustic slice of heaven (48), a different view takes shape in his mind after leaving Burton's:

> Pain to the animal too. Pluck and draw fowl. Wretched brutes there at the cattlemarket waiting for the poleaxe to split their skulls open. Moo. Poor

> trembling calves. Meh. Staggering bob. Bubble and squeak. Butchers' buckets wobbly lights. Give us that brisket off the hook. Pulp. Rawhead and bloody bones. Flayed glasseyed sheep hung from their haunches, sheepsnouts bloodypapered snivelling nosejam on sawdust. (140)

Following a chilling picture of the cattlemarket, described as if from the perspective of animals slaughtered there, Bloom settles for a vegetarian meal at David Byrne. It is impossible to tell for sure why he decides to do so, especially since the idea of Plumtree's potted meat had been bothering him since the morning, when he first saw its ad in the papers and inadvertently associated it with his situation at home. We might assume with more or less certainty, however, that Bloom will not henceforth switch to a vegetarian diet. He does, after all, eat "with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls" (45). Thus, he is a man who "has taught himself to question every cosy consensus and to adopt the less obvious, less popular viewpoint"; furthermore, "it is part of Bloom's equilibrium that he often proceeds to embrace a code which he has just appeared to reject" (Kiberd 80, 131). In other words, there is a certain balance to the character's thoughts and attitudes regarding the world around him. This extends to his perception of alterity, be it human or non-human, so that he often takes up the point of view of the other and allows himself to be guided by the impressions resulting thereof. At the same time, his mind is almost "guarded" by certain healthy mechanisms of self-defence, which prevent him from falling into the pits of theory divorced from practice.

Similarly, in his rapport with other people, Bloom offers several examples of generosity and gratuitous kindness which are profoundly intuitive of Levinas' neighbourly love. The manifestation of his unconditionally kind heart seems to be most obvious in his encounter with Stephen, whom he literally saves by the end of "Circe." In "Eumaeus" and "Ithaca," this translates into hospitality in a Levinasian sense, as Bloom opens his home to Stephen, in spite of having little knowledge about him and notwithstanding the possibility of Molly's angry reproach. Yet this brief interaction must be understood in light of Bloom's memory of Rudy and of the pain caused by the child's death. When Bloom first sees Stephen, he ostensibly refers to him as Simon Dedalus' "son and heir," which immediately contrasts with his own lack of a son. His thoughts drift to Rudy, as he considers if he "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" (73). There is no doubt that Bloom's behaviour with Stephen is not only neighbourly, but somewhat paternal. Though the protagonist does not assimilate the two with one another, perhaps on a subconscious level, his feelings for them are mixed. This is most overtly suggested in the conclusion to "Circe," where, having saved Stephen from disaster, Bloom is rewarded with a 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" (497). Certainly, one cannot assume that Bloom's kindness towards Stephen results simply from the former's desire to find a substitute son. After all, the possibility of a paternal link between the two characters is dispelled abruptly when the young man rejects his host's invitation to stay overnight and leaves the house with an unknown, possibly inexistent direction in mind.

Rather, Bloom's interactions with Stephen throughout the day illustrate both the idea of pure neighbourly love and the impossibility of the latter, a mix that Derrida would undoubtedly commend. It is uncertain why Bloom chooses to follow Stephen into Nighttown and to protect him upon arriving there. It may be because the young man stirred in Bloom an unfulfilled paternal instinct. Or perhaps it is simply because the latter is characterised by a gentle nature, which we have seen him display in many instances, with other people and with non-human beings. More likely, Bloom is motivated by both of the above. This suggests that, as Derrida would put it, pure neighbourly love and hospitality are never to be found in reality. In any attempt to offer something to someone, the gesture is repaid in kind, either by the other person or by means of some interior mechanism. For Bloom, his rescue of Stephen is followed by a serene, touching vision of his son, aged eleven, and continuing the father's admittedly confusing cultural heritage. Yet this does not, in any way, detract from the significance of Bloom's acts of kindness. Ultimately, this type of aporia is one essential lesson of Derrida's ethics of alterity, masterfully foreshadowed in *Ulysses* decades before its formulation proper.

Finally, one of the most discernible shifts in perspective occurs in Leopold Bloom's interaction with women. If Joyce's readers in the early 20th century may have appreciated the protagonist's tact with other men and even his openness towards the non-human, it is far less likely that they would have tolerated what must have seemed like the character's peculiar conduct with the other sex. Indeed, we first see Bloom as he prepares breakfast for Molly, which he then serves for her in bed; throughout the day, he empathises with the "plight" of womanhood. He seems to understand the misery of prostitutes better than anyone else, while his thoughts rest for some time with Mrs Purefoy and her excruciating delivery. In addition, Bloom assimilates certain behavioural patterns that would have undoubtedly been ascribed to the female sex at the time. He is thus not an ordinary, heteronormative man, but rather Joyce's attempt to "reinstate the womanly man as protagonist" (Kiberd, 92). Bloom himself is to some extent aware of this, as becomes readily observable in "Circe," where he dramatically "experiences" not only the travails of birth, but also the humiliation of prostitution.

However, it is still Bloom, the womanly man, who engages in some uncharacteristic misogyny just hours earlier, in "Nausicaa." Following Gerty

MacDowell's limping away from the scene, Bloom muses on her "[j]ilted beauty. A defect is ten times worse in a woman. But makes them polite. Glad I didn't know it when she was on show" (301). When he is once again reminded of Molly's adultery, he considers: "Suppose he gave her money. Why not? All a prejudice. She's worth ten, fifteen, more, a pound. What? I think so" (303). It is uncertain why in these and several other thoughts throughout the chapter, Bloom loses his gentle nature, as well as his ability to empathise with the other sex. It could be that he is masking his self-disgust (Kiberd, 202), but it could also be that, after his encounter with the other men in Kiernan's pub and during a particularly stressful and humiliating day on account of Molly's behaviour, Bloom feels the need to reassert his stereotypical masculinity. At any rate, it becomes obvious that the protagonist's understanding of women and his attachment to free, non-possessive love do not come easily to him. Bloom is pressured by the social norm in terms of manhood, as is suggested in "Nausicaa" and made overt in "Circe."

Bloom's relationship with Molly is equally problematic. From early in the morning, when he delivers Blazes Boylan's letter to his wife, the protagonist is aware of the purpose of the two meeting in the afternoon. As he more or less unwillingly contemplates the matter, his thoughts of Molly's adultery mix with the possibility of Milly's first sexual encounter and "[a] soft qualm, regret, flowed down his backbone, increasing. Will happen, yes. Prevent. Useless: can't move" (55). Throughout the day, his knowledge of the affair, as well as his refusal to stop it create some of the most painfully awkward situations. Of course, the mere state of being cuckolded warranted, at the time, mockery from other men around Dublin, who very obviously bring up the topic when Bloom is around. Everybody seems to know about Molly's infidelity and feels justified or even satisfied to rub this fact in Bloom's face whenever given the opportunity. What makes the latter's situation even worse is his refusal to behave as a "normal" husband would with his adulterous wife, or differently put, his belief in the idea of "free love." Bloom does not resort to physical or even verbal violence when encountering Boylan, even though the community entitles and, indeed, expects him to do so. He does not attempt to catch Molly in the act, but rather avoids being home at all costs during the time of her meeting with her lover. Finally, he never truly intends to punish Molly, either privately or publicly. His reproach goes only as far as asking her to bring him breakfast in bed for a change.

Yet Bloom exists in a society whose norms dictate a very different behaviour for a man, and this reality does not go without consequence upon his innermost thoughts. His more feminine behaviour results in his picturing himself, at least subconsciously, as a mother-to-be or as an abused prostitute in "Circe." Throughout his hallucinatory encounter with Bello, the latter constantly puts him down by making him out to be an effeminate, impotent man or a homosexual, all of which is obviously rooted in Bloom's own doubts about his gender identity.

More than this, at one point during "Circe" Bloom imagines himself cheering for Boylan as the latter carries Molly "round the room doing it" (462): we might infer from this that Bloom, on some level, enjoys the idea of Molly having intercourse with another man. On the other hand, it might also be that Bloom's pacifist response to the situation, together with the humiliation that he has endured throughout the day and the pressure to behave like an actual "man," are tormenting the protagonist to the point where he sees himself as an accomplice to his wife's adultery. Indeed, in the eyes of the male Dublin community, to not attempt to stop Molly, to not even punish her after the fact may just as well mean to encourage her infidelity. The episode in "Circe" suggests that Bloom is poignantly aware of this perspective and that his gentle behaviour with Molly does not necessarily come easily to him. Like many of his acts of kindness throughout the day, this, too, is a choice, and perhaps the most agonising to uphold.

It is, furthermore, a choice that sends back to Bloom first meeting Molly, as well as her decision to marry him, of all people: "Why me? Because you were so foreign from the others" (311). Seemingly straightforward, Molly's words imply more than her husband's appearance or cultural background. Bloom is "foreign from the others," first and foremost, in his gentle, kind nature, and through his openness to alterity. Throughout the day, he is treated as an outsider by almost every other person he encounters, and he is more or less overtly mocked for his beliefs, but at the same time, he is distinctive in his non-aggressiveness, constant tactfulness and empathy, which allows him to appreciate the experience of the other sex. In his marriage with Molly, he manifests the same understanding. His idea of "free love" is a model of, or at least an attempt at ethical love, a relationship based on the impossibility of possession and the acknowledgement of the other's independence. In Levinasian terms, Bloom's interaction with Molly anticipates the ideas that the philosopher would later attach to the "caress," that simultaneity of the desire to reach the Other and the unbridgeable distance thereof, wherein one might experience the infinite. For Levinas, erotic love and its most poignant expression, the caress, consist "in seizing upon nothing" (Levinas 1979, 257), but they offer the moment when the self might attain a glimpse of the face of the Other. Bloom's feelings for Molly and his numerous thoughts of winning her back through little presents or surprises are set against his desire to ensure the possibility that his wife act freely. Thus Bloom functions in virtue of the Levinasian "caress," and it is no accident that his distinctive approach to the Other is most overtly expressed in the way of his love.

Bloom is a distinctive character partly because he appears as a "foreigner" in relation to all the communities he comes in contact with. He is a Jew in Ireland, who has been baptised a Protestant and a Catholic: he is therefore "an outsider even more than a Jew" (Kiberd, 82), with a confused cultural heritage that nevertheless seems to exclude him from the companionship of others. Most

importantly, his distinguishing feature is his openness to the experience of the Other: as we are told in "Ithaca," the protagonist "preferred himself to see another's face and listen to another's words" (561). He demonstrates time and again that he is able to pick up the perspective of another being, whether human or non-human, to question his own beliefs from this vantage point of view, and at least partially assimilate the conclusions resulting thereof. He is, in this regard, a "waterlover, drawer of water, watercarrier" (549), a character with a fluid identity and often democratic ideals.

Unlike many of the characters populating *Ulysses*, Bloom is a pacifist and a proponent of non-violence who holds that "it's a patent absurdity on the face of it to hate people because they live round the corner and speak another vernacular, in the next house so to speak" (525). Undoubtedly, neither a heated Irish nationalist, nor any unionist can empathise with the protagonist's point of view: for these two opposing camps, the justification for the violent struggle in Ireland is deeply rooted in hundreds of years of conflict and loss. How could Bloom convince the men in Kiernan's pub, for instance, that discipline is "the same everywhere" (270), that "all the history of the world is full of" persecution, and that the latter does little more than fuel "national hatred among nations" (271)? As soon as he suggests the futility of a hate-ridden worldview, he exposes himself to a tirade of mockery, to which he can never respond in kind. It is not that the other men possess a more accurate definition of the nation that gives them the upper hand over Bloom, but rather that the latter refuses to behave in a similarly belligerent manner. His flustered description of the nation as "the same people living in the same place" or "also living in different places" (272) is easily subjected to parody and insult, even though it actually draws attention to a concept so abstract and removed that it can hold little meaning in the mouths of those nationalists present, who use it merely as an excuse to rant about their various dissatisfactions.

As Bloom soon states, his view on the matter takes a different approach:

> — But it's no use, says he. Force, hatred, history, all that. 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? says Alf.
> — Love, says Bloom. I mean the opposite of hatred. (273)

Not even Bloom can escape the parodic undercurrent of *Ulysses*, however. His theory of love is immediately undermined by the narrator of "Cyclops" in the notorious "love loves to love love. (…) You love a certain person. And this person loves that other person because everybody loves somebody but God loves everybody" (273). Just earlier, the same narrator had picked on the protagonist's tendency to explain everything in minute detail, an aspect of

Bloom's thought which the reader had come to appreciate: "I declare to my antimacassar if you took up a straw from the bloody floor and if you said to Bloom: Look at, Bloom. Do you see that straw? That's a straw. Declare to my aunt he'd talk about it for an hour so he would and talk steady" (260).

We might think that the above is merely a reflection of the innate rudeness of the narrator of "Cyclops," but this is not the only occasion when Bloom's quasi-scientific approach to the world is criticised. In "Penelope," for instance, Molly herself comments on an earlier episode in "Calypso," when she had asked her husband to explain the meaning of metempsychosis: "I asked him about her and that word met something with hoses in it and he came out with some jawbreakers about the incarnation he never can explain a thing simply the way a body can understand" (620). In spite of what the reader may have gathered about Bloom from his own thoughts during the day, these perspectives belonging to other characters severely undermine one of the protagonist's most characteristic features, namely his formulation of theories by means of which he understands the world.

Like everything in *Ulysses*, Bloom is flawed. Yet he is assimilated to the name "Elijah" on several occasions, and in the conclusion of "Cyclops," having undergone some of the most violent interactions in the day, he is literally portrayed as a Messianic figure:

> When, lo, there came about them all a great brightness and they beheld the chariot wherein He stood ascend to heaven. And they beheld Him in the chariot, clothed upon in the glory of the brightness, having raiment as of the sun, fair as the moon and terrible that for awe they durst not look upon Him. And there came a voice out of heaven, calling: Elijah! Elijah! (282-3)

The moment is both serious and jocular, as is the notion of Bloom the redeemer. Indeed, Bloom the liminal person "disrupts the complacencies of all the settled codes with which he comes into contact" (Kiberd, 189). His otherness and especially his pacifist, kind nature makes those around him become aware of their own shortcomings and insecurities; in this and in his constant openness to the Other, the protagonist is Messianic. Against the context of the writing of *Ulysses*, a world of violence and war that had, as Levinas argued, hidden the face of the Other in order to be able to dominate it, Bloom is painstakingly attentive to the experience of everything around him, whether animal or person. His acts of gratuitous kindness, his non-violent nature, and his beliefs are all intrinsically linked to his ability to perceive from the Other's point of view. However, as history has shown time and time again, there is nothing more dangerous, more ethically precarious, than an absolute, which is why it is essential that Bloom himself is actively undermined throughout *Ulysses*. He remains overtly imperfect and his scope, though universal, is limited to the small practices of everyday life.

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