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## Bloom's CV: Mimesis, Intertextuality and the Overdetermination of Character in *Ulysses*

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### ABSTRACT

"Bloom's CV" analyses James Joyce's representation of Bloom's early career as a commercial traveller in *Ulysses*. Reading Bloom's various jobs—from cattle sales to insurance—in their historical context, the article presents a clearer understanding of Joyce's mimesis, and shows that he presents a strikingly realistic career path for a second-generation Hungarian-Jewish immigrant in 1904 Ireland. While the recent historicist turn in Joyce studies has tended to suppress the text's other narrative dimensions, the article proceeds to identify unsettling intertextual connections to anti-Semitic discourses that were contemporary in the Irish nationalist press. Explaining these connections as part of Joyce's broader reimagining of Odysseus as a Semitic traveller, the article positions Joyce's overdetermined characterisation of Bloom as a crucial transitional moment between the naturalistic aesthetic the author inherited and developed in *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and his complete transcendence of the realist mode in *Finnegans Wake*.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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It goes without saying that *Ulysses* is an intertextual novel; the very title directs the reader away from the text. The centrality of the *Odyssey* to the narrative may be disputed, even by Joyce himself. He explained to Carlo Linati his "intention to transpose the myth *sub specie temporis nostri*", and actively encouraged Stuart Gilbert to tabulate detailed correspondences in his 1930 study *James Joyce's "Ulysses"*, helping to foster the idea that the novel was fundamentally structured upon Homer's epic.<sup>1</sup> Yet within a decade, according to Vladimir Nabokov, he was describing the employment of Homer as a "whim", and denying the integrity of his collaboration with Gilbert: "A terrible mistake," said Joyce, "an advertisement for the book. I regret it very much".<sup>2</sup>

Whim or otherwise, it seems beyond question that Leopold Bloom was at some level conceived as an Odysseus-figure. As early as 1906, Joyce was writing to his brother Stanislaus of ideas for a "new story for Dubliners" that "deals with Mr Hunter", Bloom's Dublin original.<sup>3</sup> As straightforward as this sounds, the subject was already as much intertextual

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<sup>1</sup>Joyce, *Letters*, vol. 1, 146–7.

<sup>2</sup>Qtd in Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 616 n.

<sup>3</sup>Joyce, *Letters*, vol. 2, 168. Various correspondences between Bloom and Alfred H. Hunter have been asserted—and challenged—since Ellmann's introduction of the figure in the first edition of his biography (Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 238). For a balanced overview that makes use of the 1911 census to clarify the historical picture, see Killeen.

as mimetic. The story was to be called “Ulysses”, and Joyce emphasised the allusion of the title in subsequent letters even as he let the idea go: “How do you like the name for the story about Hunter?”; “*Ulysses* never got any forrader than the title”.<sup>4</sup> Of course, the character would become infinitely more complex in the decade that followed. But Bloom’s dually mimetic and intertextual genesis would endure the long gestation of the novel *Ulysses*. In 1921, just weeks before the novel’s completion, Joyce was writing letters to Dublin with questions about Hunter, while the Homeric identification was so strengthened that he could refer simply to his character as “Ulysses (Bloom)”.<sup>5</sup>

The Homeric identification hinges upon a journey and a homecoming, and early critics, eager to get a handle on the novel, drew out the classical underpinning of Bloom’s Dublin odyssey in considerable detail; Michael Seidel perfected the approach in the mid-1970s, mapping Bloom’s route precisely against Odysseus’ voyage through the Mediterranean.<sup>6</sup> Yet as the theoretical drive of the 80s and 90s and the historicising drive of the 2000s trampled out the mythological totems, the Homeric approach was left behind. So despite a brief spate of interest in Bloom as *flâneur*, recent critics have for the most part failed to identify in Bloom’s journeying any element that suitably answers the critical imperatives of the day.<sup>7</sup> In this particular respect, “the traveller Leopold” has lost something of his significance.<sup>8</sup>

This article does not return to Homer. However, it does argue that failing to account for Bloom as a corresponding traveller ignores a foundational element of Joyce’s text—an element that has wider significance for understanding the development of Joyce’s characterisation in his writing of *Ulysses*. William C. Mottolese has recently attempted to revive interest in Bloom as a “real ... traveler” by interpreting him as an ethnographer who “travels along a culture’s margin, registering ethnographic observations from a perspective like that of the anthropological participant-observer”.<sup>9</sup> As the simile betrays, it is questionable whether Bloom can exactly be considered a “real ... traveler” in these terms, having “consistently remained a landlubber except you call going to Holyhead which was his longest” (16.503–4). But there is a very literal sense in which Joyce establishes the travelling parallel: through Bloom’s career. He has worked as a “traveller” (a travelling salesman; 6.700–7), and though he is currently employed as an advertisement canvasser, this too is a pedestrian employment. It is true that he meets only one client on 16 June 1904. Yet if this seems to justify Molly’s belief that he is only “pretending to be mooching about for advertisements” (18.509), it has to be said that Bloom’s negotiations between client and employer require a considerable amount of mooching. He sets out first “in a hurry” from the *Evening Telegraph* office, “running round to Bachelor’s walk” (7.419, 430). He returns “breathless” to present his client’s terms, meeting prompt dismissal. And after lunch he walks undaunted to the National Library to consult an old newspaper for the image for his advertisement. Not such an adventurous voyage, to be sure, but Bloom’s job is nevertheless one that keeps him on the move.

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<sup>4</sup>Joyce, *Letters*, vol. 2, 190, 193, 209.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 1, 174, 152.

<sup>6</sup>Seidel.

<sup>7</sup>Duffy, especially chapter 2.

<sup>8</sup>Joyce, *Ulysses*, 14.126. Subsequent citations will be made parenthetically, by episode and line number.

<sup>9</sup>Mottolese, 94, 95.

While the reevaluation of the relationship between so-called “popular culture” and modernist literature continues to bring critical attention to Bloom’s job as an advertisement canvasser, the mythical significance of Bloom’s earlier career has been disregarded, and its mimetic component has been all but ignored. In part, this critical reticence may reflect the peculiarity of Joyce’s characterisation. Bloom’s jobs are portrayed by turns through his own reflections, the passing comments of other characters, and the various parodies and distortions of the later chapters. Taken individually these references appear insignificant; together they present such a confusing picture that even John Henry Raleigh, who set out to compile a chronological list, was in certain details misled.<sup>10</sup> The first part of this article, then, focuses on Joyce’s representation of Bloom’s career, and a little historical exposure turns out to produce a strikingly mimetic picture.

In this respect Joyce’s characterisation seems to extend the realism of the nineteenth century into which he was born. Yet there remains the mythical dimension of Bloom’s career as a traveller. Joyce’s employment of the *Odyssey* has often been seen as a hallmark of his modernism, famously described by Eliot as an attempt to make sense of the “immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history”.<sup>11</sup> Of course, the use of classical allusion was nothing new in itself; Joyce had already taken steps in this direction in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In *Portrait*, however, the classical element could still be explained naturalistically, as part of Stephen’s self-mythologising consciousness. In *Ulysses* this is no longer the case: the two modes function simultaneously, and neither can be subsumed by the other.

Yet the situation is even more complex, for Joyce adds another, more unsettlingly intertextual dimension to Bloom’s travelling career. Tracing Bloom the traveller away from his historical analogue leads us not only back into the well-trodden paths of Homeric myth, but also into a less bounded intertextual realm, in which even such forgettable texts as the daily newspaper are made to function, often without signal or attribution. As the second part of this article shows, Joyce overlays Bloom’s mimetic and mythical nodes with material drawn from other contemporary discourses, here stereotypes of the Jewish immigrant pedlar current in the Irish nationalist press. The critical inability to make sense of Bloom’s career as a traveller stems not only from the oblique nature of Joyce’s mimesis, but from this radical overdetermination of character, which takes *Ulysses* away from its realist antecedents, and even a step past its modernist contemporaries. Seen in this light, Bloom stands—or, rather, travels—in the borderlands between Joyce’s earlier naturalism, and his complete transcendence of that mode in *Finnegans Wake*.

## Bloom’s CV

In the Ormond Hotel, Bloom tells Richie Goulding that he is applying for a position as a “[t]own traveller” (11.887). He is lying, to conceal his epistolary affair with Martha Clifford. But the lie is plausible because Bloom has spent most of his professional life doing such work—although his diverse range of employers makes this hard for the reader to see. He has held positions with Hely’s the stationer and printer; Thom’s the bookseller and publisher; Cuffe’s the cattle dealer; and Drimmie’s the insurance company. He

<sup>10</sup>Raleigh, appendix B, *Chronicle*.

<sup>11</sup>Eliot, 269–70.

worked door-to-door selling goods for his father, and perhaps for a time on “the mail order line for Kellett’s” (a prominent Dublin drapers; 15.2805), though this last should be treated with caution since it appears only amid the fantastic scenes of the “Circe” episode.<sup>12</sup>

If there is a note of uncertainty in the list of Bloom’s employers, the role he held for each is even harder to determine. Ned Lambert tells John Henry Menton that Bloom’s role at Hely’s was “[a] traveller for blotting paper” (6.703). The specification of “blotting paper” seems a deliberate trivialisation, but there is no reason to suspect his general description of Bloom as a travelling salesman. Bloom’s lengthiest recollection of his time at Hely’s occurs in “Lestrygonians”, where he remembers advertisement ideas that he had unsuccessfully proposed to his employer (8.131–70). This passage has led at least one influential critic to suppose that Bloom “worked in advertising for Hely’s”.<sup>13</sup> But the only duty mentioned by Bloom is the “[d]evil of a job” he had “collecting accounts of those convents” (8.143), and this does not suggest an advertising role. Religious institutions at this time were not necessarily averse to the “modern art of advertisement” (17.580–81); on 16 June 1904, for example, the Poor Clare Colettines advertised in the *Freeman’s Journal* that they would “feel most grateful for donations of Wax Candles: wanted for daily expositions of the Most Holy Sacrament”.<sup>14</sup> Given their proposed terms—“[t]he Nuns will, in return, pray for the donors by day and night”—such enterprising institutions might well be expected to drive the “hard ... bargain” (8.146) that Bloom recalls of his transactions with the Tranquilla convent. But Hely’s business involved the sale of stationery; the company did advertise their stationery to convents at this time, describing it in one *Irish Catholic Directory* advertisement as “ABSOLUTELY THE CHEAPEST in THE THREE KINGDOMS”,<sup>15</sup> but it would have no business with a convent’s advertising campaigns. Bloom’s account collection would surely have been for products that he sold to the convent as a travelling salesman. With this role understood, Wisdom Hely’s rejection of his employee’s suggested advertisements is unsurprising. Bloom explains it to himself haughtily: “wouldn’t have it of course because he didn’t think of it himself first” (8.136–7). But in 1904, the owner of one of Dublin’s largest stationers might well object to a “Mister Knowall” (12.838) travelling salesman telling him how to improve his business, however innovative these ideas may have been.

It is harder to make sense of Bloom’s other positions, even when they are more explicitly stated. His job at Cuffe’s is laid out formally in the impersonal style of the “Ithaca” episode: “a clerk in the employment of Joseph Cuffe of 5 Smithfield for the superintendence of sales in the adjacent Dublin Cattle market on the North Circular road” (17.484–6). As clerk, Bloom would have been responsible for keeping the accounts, recording items sold in the market—“[w]alking about with his book and pencil” in the “knacker’s yard” as the “Cyclops” narrator recalls, before he was sacked for “giving lip

<sup>12</sup>Raleigh assumes that Bloom also worked in politics (Raleigh, 49), but the textual evidence seems only to be the description in “Ithaca” of “an embalmed owl, matrimonial gift of Alderman John Hooper” (17.1338–9). Raleigh’s detection of “a suggestion that he worked for Valentine Dillon, an attorney and politician” (274) apparently follows Bloom’s naming of that man in a list of referees in the trial scene of “Circe” (15.1008). The fact that Bloom also names “Messrs Callan, Coleman” (15.1007)—names he recalls from the obituaries column of the day’s *Freeman’s Journal*—should amply indicate the fantastic nature of this list.

<sup>13</sup>Richards, 222.

<sup>14</sup>*Freeman’s Journal*, 16 June 1904, 3.

<sup>15</sup>O’Neill, 873.

to a grazier” (12.835–7)—and this was presumably how Bloom gained the knowledge of pricing demonstrated in the reflections of “Hades”: “Springers. Cuffe sold them about twentyseven quid each” (6.392–3). There is nothing to suggest that this clerical job involved salesmanship.<sup>16</sup>

Bloom’s jobs with Thom’s and Drimmie’s have the faintest narrative presence in *Ulysses*. Bloom reflects several times on his employment at Thom’s (7.224–5, 8.157, 13.1125–6), and one of the mock accounts of “Cyclops” refers to him as “late of Messrs Alexander Thom’s, printers to His Majesty” (12.1816–17), but these do not point to any specific role. The only clue is Bloom’s reflection upon an apparent error that he made in “the valuation” (13.1125). Mark Osteen interprets the role as the management of “sales accounts”, but “valuation” is not the usual term for the simple reckoning of sales.<sup>17</sup> Don Gifford seems closer to the mark in surmising that this refers to a property valuation: *Thom’s Dublin Directory* included in its list of street addresses a valuation of each property, and Bloom was perhaps supposed to be responsible for collecting or verifying some of these details ready for publication.<sup>18</sup> It does seem a pleasing Joycean touch for Bloom to be made responsible for the kind of publication errors in *Thom’s* that the author repeated in *Ulysses*, at least in some cases knowingly.<sup>19</sup>

Bloom’s recollection of his time at Drimmie’s is slighter still, with him only once recalling a day when he accidentally “went to Drimmie’s without a necktie” (13.844–5). In the earlier exchange between Davy Byrne and Nosey Flynn it is reported that Bloom was once “in the insurance line” (though “[h]e’s out of that long ago”; 8.939–40), and Molly fills out the connection in “Penelope” when she remembers “something he did about insurance” for Michael Gunn while “in Drimmies” (18.1112–13). This information is not much to go on. But it is clear that Bloom is supposed to have some understanding of insurance policies, hence his involvement with “this insurance of poor Dignam’s” (12.761).<sup>20</sup> Jaya Savige has recently discussed the relevance of Bloom’s insurance connection to the plot and themes of *Ulysses*, though he does not explicitly consider the role Bloom is likely to have played, referring to him as an “old insurance man”, “a former insurance agent” and an “exemplary actuary” with an “expert approach to risk”.<sup>21</sup> Certainly it is beyond all likelihood that Bloom was an underwriter at Drimmie’s: this was and is a professional role and would not have been available to a man whose experience consisted of door-to-door sales. Given his experience at Cuffe’s, Bloom would perhaps have qualified for a low clerical role, but this would not likely afford him the contact with clients that Molly recalls him to have had. With his experience as a traveller in mind, the likeliest role for Bloom at

<sup>16</sup>Joyce took detailed notes regarding the legal grounds for summary dismissal of clerks in the “Clerical Work” section of his “Notes on Business and Commerce”, held in the Cornell Joyce Collection and reproduced in the third volume of the *James Joyce Archive*. With “Gross Mischief (seduction)” an unlikely misdemeanour in a cattle market, Joyce perhaps justified Bloom’s sacking under “Injury to Employer’s Business” (Cornell MS 38:107; Joyce, *James Joyce Archive*, 528).

<sup>17</sup>Osteen, 91.

<sup>18</sup>Gifford, 401.

<sup>19</sup>For a detailed discussion of the types of error, volitional and otherwise, that arise from Joyce’s use of *Thom’s*, see Gunn and Hart, 15–25.

<sup>20</sup>Bloom argues that Dignam “didn’t serve any notice of the assignment on the company of the time and nominally under the act the mortgagee can’t recover on the policy” (12.761–4). This comment reflects Joyce’s research for the “Notes on Business and Commerce”. Joyce kept an entire section under the heading “Insurance”, annotating J. A. Eke’s popular guidebook *The Elements of Insurance*. However, the Dignam detail was taken from a passage in his “Banking” section, annotated from Gandy, 123. For a discussion of the sources for Joyce’s representation of various business practices, see Hayward.

<sup>21</sup>Savige, 79, 84, 85, 89.

Drimmie's would surely have been as an insurance canvasser, giving him at least a superficial knowledge of the intricacies of insurance policy and the opportunity to do "something" for a potential customer.

While it is Bloom's current job as an advertisement canvasser that has attracted critical notice, there lie in the background a number of other trades. Molly suggests that her husband's career has not been especially successful: "God here we are as bad as ever after 16 years ... every time were just getting on right something happens or he puts his big foot in it Thoms and Helys and Mr Cuffes and Drimmies" (18.1215–24). Yet if Bloom's career has followed a haphazard path, there is a consistency between his previous and current jobs that has been overlooked. With the exception of Cuffe's his jobs have all been travelling roles, as either salesman or canvasser. His career thus follows the trajectory he was launched upon by his father, as pictured in the "Oxen of the Sun" episode: "it is the same figure ... already on the road, a fullfledged traveller for the family firm" (14.1048–50).

That Joyce saw a connection between past and present roles is indicated by the similar list of jobs given to M'Coy in the *Dubliners* story "Grace": "a canvasser for advertisements for *The Irish Times* and for *The Freeman's Journal*, a town traveller for a coal firm on commission".<sup>22</sup> The connection between travelling and canvassing is not arbitrary. The influential advertising theorist Claude C. Hopkins observed in 1923 that the most successful advertising men started as commercial travellers; more recent studies have confirmed the crossover between these sales practices in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.<sup>23</sup> At a time when the advertising industry had not yet established conventions for recruitment or training, Bloom was pretty well qualified for his job. He had experience in printing and stationery as a travelling salesman, and his role as an insurance canvasser marks an intermediate step from his Hely's travelling job to his Freeman's job as an advertisement canvasser. (The cattle trade is a deviation, but since his role was clerical and related to sales, it is not wildly incompatible.) Indeed, Bloom's employments with Thom's and Hely's are not only consistent with his later career as an advertising canvasser, they are eminently suitable preparations for the role. The advertising industry grew as a corollary of a number of other industries in the nineteenth century, particularly printing and stationery.<sup>24</sup> W. H. Smith & Son, which played a crucial part in the Dublin advertising industry in the mid-nineteenth century, is exemplary: the company started out as a news vendor and moved into news agency and stationery before becoming heavily involved with railway advertising.<sup>25</sup> Eason & Son, still described in the 1904 *Thom's* as "late W. H. Smith and Son", is listed under "Agents, Commission", but also under various other headings, including "Booksellers and Publishers" and "Stationers". Bloom's employers emerged from the same nexus of connected trades. Thom's is listed under "Agents, Commission", "Bookbinders", "Booksellers and Publishers" and "Stationers"; Hely's is listed under "Bookbinders" and "Stationers". In his construction of Bloom's CV, Joyce gives his protagonist a career path that has led naturally if not inevitably to a role in advertising.

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<sup>22</sup>Joyce, *Dubliners*, 178.

<sup>23</sup>Hopkins, 12; French, 367; Church, 703.

<sup>24</sup>Hindley and Hindley, 16; Pope, 119. For a discussion of the "simultaneous heterogeneity and unity" of Dublin's early advertising firms, see Strachan.

<sup>25</sup>Pocklington, 10.

## “Wheedling at doors”: figures of the Jewish Pedlar

If this is not an unrealistic career path, neither is Bloom an implausible participant. As the son of a Hungarian-Jewish immigrant his early experience may well have been with “prospective purchasers on doorsteps, in front parlours, in third railway carriages of suburban lines” (17.54–5), as recalled in the “Ithaca” episode. Cormac Ó Gráda has studied 1891 census figures to show that thirty-six per cent of Russian-born males in Ireland aged between ten and seventy-nine—“most of whom would have been Jewish immigrants”—described themselves as pedlars, with a further six per cent listed as commercial travellers. A decade later, with a massive growth in the total Russian-born population, the percentage of pedlars had dropped to twenty per cent, though the real figure had remained almost the same, and the number of commercial travellers had more than doubled from thirty-nine to eighty-eight (now representing eight per cent of the total).<sup>26</sup> In this respect, Joyce’s depiction of his 1904 Jewish protagonist as an erstwhile commercial traveller appears strikingly realistic.

Given the current ascendancy of historicist approaches to Joyce studies, this may seem to be enough. Yet there are other, non-mimetic dimensions at play here. Bloom’s career is clearly an important part of Joyce’s mythic parallelism, with its trivialisation not only of the journeying Odysseus but also of that other ancient figure the “wandering jew” (9.1209)—“Ahasuerus I call him”, says the citizen of Bloom (12.1667). Studies of the composition of *Ulysses* have confirmed Joyce’s detailed if partial research into a number of Homeric resources, notably Victor Bérard’s *Les Phéniciens et l’Odyssée* (1902–03).<sup>27</sup> Most important to Joyce was Bérard’s argument that the story of Odysseus had Phoenician origins: as he later wrote to Louis Gillet, “his study of Homer confirmed my theory of the Semitism of the *Odyssey* when I had already written three quarters of the book”.<sup>28</sup> The significance of the find to Joyce, who had made his Odysseus-figure Jewish, is brought out by Gilbert, who quotes a passage from Bérard stating that “[t]he poem is obviously the work of a Hellene, while the ‘log’ is clearly the record of a Semitic traveller”. Gilbert extrapolates: “The author of *Ulysses* ... is an Irishman; his wandering hero ... is a Jew”.<sup>29</sup> Joyce’s excitement at Bérard’s thesis is easy to understand. As his friend Padraic Colum put it, “Odysseus and the Wandering Jew were different versions of the same character”.<sup>30</sup>

It is a short step from myth to stereotype. Hugh Kenner has argued that Bloom’s involvement with Dignam’s insurance case reflects conventional images of the Jew as a “technician of hereditary skills”.<sup>31</sup> More specific still is the figure of the Jewish pedlar, employed by Joyce in his representation of Bloom’s early career. This stereotypical figure is invoked in general terms by the “Cyclops” narrator in his description of Bloom’s father, “perpetrating frauds, old Methusalem Bloom, the robbing bagman ... swamping the country with his baubles and his penny diamonds” (12.1580–3). Bloom too conceives of his travelling job as an outsider’s role, comparing himself with an Italian immigrant: “Nannetti’s father hawked those things about, wheedling at doors as I” (11.186–7). The implied cultural

<sup>26</sup>Ó Gráda, 48–9.

<sup>27</sup>Seidel; Joyce, *Joyce’s Notes*, 3–33; Groden, 76–91.

<sup>28</sup>Joyce, *Letters*, vol. 1, 401. Translated from the French.

<sup>29</sup>Gilbert, 82.

<sup>30</sup>Colum and Colum, 111.

<sup>31</sup>Kenner, 389.

exclusion is externalised in “Oxen of the Sun” through the identification of Bloom with his father:

[I]t is the same figure ... in his first hard hat (ah, that was a day!), already on the road, a full-fledged traveller for the family firm, equipped with an orderbook, a scented handkerchief ... his case of bright trinketware ... and a quiverful of compliant smiles for this or that halfwon housewife ... . The scent, the smile, but, more than these, the dark eyes and oleaginous address, brought home at duskfall many a commission to the head of the firm, seated with Jacob’s pipe after like labours in the paternal ingle (a meal of noodles, you may be sure, is aheating), reading through round horned spectacles. (14.1048–59)

Crude signifiers of Jewishness abound, from the stock “noodles” and “Jacob’s pipe” to the “horned spectacles” that reappear in the even more excessive description of Bloom’s father in the “Circe” episode: “A stooped bearded figure appears garbed in the long caftan of an elder in Zion and a smokingcap with magenta tassels. Horned spectacles hang down at the wings of the nose” (15.247–50).

The intensification of anti-Semitism in Western Europe in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries is well documented; the general relevance of this context to *Ulysses* has been discussed in some detail.<sup>32</sup> Central to both is the figure of the Jewish trader, invoked in the “Oxen” passage. In a recent article Amy Feinstein discusses the representation of Jewish mercantilism in *Ulysses* (though not in connection with Bloom), relating it to a late-nineteenth century discourse that asserted an essential kinship between the “disempowered majority of poor immigrants”, the “small but established Jewish middle-class” and “a powerful minority of Jewish financiers”.<sup>33</sup> Prominent in England in the last decades of the nineteenth century, this discourse also found its way to Ireland. Five years before Joyce joined University College in 1898, its monthly journal *The Lyceum* printed two articles warning against the Jewish immigrant who “becomes a hawker and trader first, then a money-lender, and finally, a lord of the Money Market and Stock Exchange, where he holds the destinies of nations in his hand”.<sup>34</sup>

The similar sentiments Joyce gives to Haines and Deasy in *Ulysses* demonstrate his awareness of this discourse, if not these specific articles. For Bloom, however, Joyce turned to the more recent writing of William Bulfin (“Che Buono”), whose popular *Rambles in Eirinn* (1907) contained an ugly anti-Semitic account entitled “A Jewish Pedlar”.<sup>35</sup> We do not know if Joyce read Bulfin in book form, though it is quite likely, since the author had met Joyce at the Martello tower in 1904 and included an account of the meeting in *Rambles in Eirinn*. But Bulfin also published extracts in the Irish nationalist newspaper *Sinn Féin* in 1906 and 1907, and we can be quite certain that Joyce read these, given his references to Bulfin by name and pseudonym in his letters to Stanislaus at this time—just when he was describing ideas for the short story “Ulysses”.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Joyce paid close attention to the issue containing a version of “A Jewish Pedlar” (headed simply “The Jew”), marking passages of the issue and sending it on to Stanislaus.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup>E.g. Davison. Andrew Gibson makes the important point that early discussions of the Jewish context of *Ulysses* suffered from a lack of historical and geographical specificity (Gibson, 42–59). The complaint was amply answered by Ó Gráda.

<sup>33</sup>Feinstein, 42.

<sup>34</sup>Qtd in *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>35</sup>Bulfin, 307–9.

<sup>36</sup>Joyce, *Letters*, vol. 2, 191, 209.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 147.

There are numerous correspondences between Bloom and “The Jew”. Here the narrator interrogates the Jewish traveller on his nationality:

You are Irish, then?  
 Irish, yes, from Dublin.  
 God help us! And were you born in Dublin?  
 With der help of Gott, sar.<sup>38</sup>

The citizen, of course, puts a very similar question to Bloom in “Cyclops”—“What is your nation if I may ask? says the citizen”—and Bloom replies in similar terms, though without the damning accent: “Ireland, says Bloom. I was born here. Ireland” (12.1430–1). Bulfin goes on to describe another Jewish salesman using the Irish name “O’Hara”, encountered in a shop in Ballymahon:

“He’s descended from Solomon, if you ask me,” said the first local personage.  
 “I don’t agree with you,” said the other observer. “I don’t think this man can trace his descent back any further than the Impenitent thief.”

The pedlar has no direct speech in *Rambles in Eirinn*, where Bulfin contents himself with descriptions of “the abject vileness of the renegade who is false to his blood”.<sup>39</sup> In the *Sinn Féin* piece, however, he is given a part: “The Jew joined heartily in the laugh, and said: ‘Thaz goot, begob; but keep it for them damn Jewmans when they come around. I’m Irish mineself’”. This again indicates that Joyce was familiar with the *Sinn Féin* version, as the speech is echoed in the cab scene of “Hades” where Bloom’s fellow passengers recount with anti-Semitic relish the attempted drowning of a Jewish merchant’s son. With references to “the tribe of Reuben” and “Barabbas”, Bloom is explicitly excluded from the conversation, even by the generally sympathetic Martin Cunningham:

—We have all been there, Martin Cunningham said broadly.  
 His eyes met Mr Bloom’s eyes. He caressed his beard, adding:  
 —Well, nearly all of us. (6.259–61)

And like O’Hara, who had “joined heartily in the laugh” and attempted to include himself in the appreciation of the joke (“Thaz goot”), Bloom attempts to counter his exclusion with enthusiastic participation: “Isn’t it awfully good? Mr Bloom said eagerly” (6.289–90).

Such is the stock from which Bloom’s early travelling career is drawn. The “compliant smiles ... dark eyes and oleaginous address” described in the “family firm” passage are only a less extremely pejorative version of Bulfin’s description of his traveller: “He smiled an oily, cross-eyed, subtle smile of self-apology and insinuating humility”.<sup>40</sup> To this extent Bloom the traveller is also an intertextual figure, drawn from contemporary representations of the Jewish pedlar in the Irish press. An 1892 *Freeman’s Journal* article, headed “THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN DUBLIN / ... A TRIBUTE TO IRISH TOLERANCE”, quoted the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire’s now-famous pronouncement that “Ireland was the only country in the world which could not be charged with persecuting the Jews”.<sup>41</sup> Belying both the historical claim and Deasy’s fictional quip that this is “[b]ecause she never let them in” (2.442), an 1886 letter from one “J. B.” sought

<sup>38</sup>*Sinn Féin*, 4 August 1906, 4.

<sup>39</sup>Bulfin, 308.

<sup>40</sup>*Sinn Féin*, 4 August 1906, 4.

<sup>41</sup>*Freeman’s Journal*, 5 December 1892, 5.

to “call the attention of the public to the large number of Polish Jews who have set up trading within the last few years in Dublin”. Claiming that they were “trading nominally as commission agents” but “really as pedlars”, J. B. complained in the following terms:

Their headquarters are in the neighbourhood of the South Circular road, and so numerous are they that a large section of the locality is known as the “New Jerusalem.” These foreigners trade as hawkers or pedlars, and sell almost every class of goods, which they hawk from door to door, many of them employing two or three horses and a dozen assistants for this purpose. Their principal customers are struggling artisans’ wives, whom they induce to take goods by accepting payment by instalments; but when default is made in any of these no mercy is shown towards their customers.<sup>42</sup>

The language is obviously heavily loaded. J. B. represents the Jewish trade as more organised than was really the case (“headquarters”), more remunerative (“two or three horses and a dozen assistants”), more exploitative (“struggling artisans’ wives”) and more wicked (“no mercy”). These are elements that recur in the contemporary attacks documented by Dermot Keogh in *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (1998). Father John Creagh’s infamous 1904 sermon, which instigated the so-called Limerick pogrom, included alongside references to the old blood libel denunciations of both the instalment system and the alleged targeting of housewives.<sup>43</sup> The *Lyceum* articles present the figure of the Jewish traveller in very similar terms:

We may notice him traversing the lanes of our cities, or visiting our country farm-houses when the “good man” is abroad and only the woman has to be dealt with . . . . The Jew will be content to take his payment in weekly instalments.<sup>44</sup>

Ó Gráda agrees that Jewish pedlars in Ireland “confined their business mainly to the woman of the house”, with the payment arrangement being almost solely by credit.<sup>45</sup> Yet when Bloom is pictured securing “many a commission” from “this or that halfwon housewife reckoning it out upon her fingertips” (14.1053–4)—still more when he is described by Lenehan as “[d]efrauding widows and orphans” (12.1622)—Joyce is dealing less with a historical situation than with a semiotics of the Jewish merchant that was well established in the Irish press at this time. The fact that Jewish traders may have actually dealt with women or in instalments is beside the point; the “Oxen” scene isolates these deliberately emotive elements of an existing discourse and attaches them to the “figure” of Bloom.

### “He has travelled”: determining the Dublin Traveller

Clearly we are not meant to identify Bloom with the figure of the Jewish pedlar in any detailed, realistic sense. He does seem to have started his career in door-to-door sales: this period is recalled across several episodes and in various contexts. But the phantasmagoric nature of the “Oxen” passage is made explicit at the start—“There, as in a retrospective arrangement, a mirror within a mirror (hey, presto!), he beholdeth himself”—and again at the end: “hey, presto, the mirror is breathed on and the young knighterrant recedes” (14.1044–5, 14.1060–1). Of course the hostility Bloom experiences on 16 June

<sup>42</sup>Freeman’s Journal, 8 October 1886, 6.

<sup>43</sup>Keogh, 21.

<sup>44</sup>Qtd in *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>45</sup>Ó Gráda, 51, 54.

1904 reflects the same anti-Semitic elements that gave rise to accounts such as Bulfin's; in this respect, the figure of the Jewish pedlar is mimetically relevant. But born in Ireland, educated at the Dublin High School and married to an Irish Catholic, Bloom has little in common either with this stock figure or with the newly arrived Jewish immigrants it satirises, despite his loosely comparable early activities for the "family firm".

Neither is Bloom part of the established Jewish community that Ó Gráda documents so fully in *Jewish Ireland in the Age of Joyce*. The historian concludes from Bloom's peculiar status that he is an "implausible" character:

although Joyce's ear for accents and conversational nuances and his sense of place make *Ulysses* a very useful source for the historian of Dublin in the 1890s and 1900s, the same cannot be said for its portrait of Dublin Jewry.<sup>46</sup>

Be that as it may, Bloom—assimilated through two generations of mixed marriage—is closer in class and career to the lower-middle-class Dubliners with whom he associates, however marginally. While parodic descriptions of Bloom's early activities align him with the poor Jewish pedlar, and while he is unfairly associated with the successful Reuben J. Dodd—"[s]windling the peasants, says the citizen, and the poor of Ireland" (12.1150)—the majority of his adult career has been spent in more-or-less respectable travelling roles, working for Irish employers.

A fairer comparison for Bloom would be C. P. M'Coy, the erstwhile traveller and advertisement canvasser with whom he is directly identified in *Ulysses*. Although Bloom resents M'Coy's familiarity—"You and me don't you know: in the same boat" (5.185–6)—he acknowledges M'Coy's precedence as a *Freeman's* canvasser, from which post the man "[I]evanted with the cash of a few ads" (6.887–8). M'Coy's role is slight but significant, and his resemblance to Bloom apparently has a biographical basis. Ellmann suggests that Joyce based Bloom's career upon M'Coy's Dublin original Charles Chance, whose identity is "neatly concealed" in *Ulysses* by the maintenance of M'Coy as a separate character.<sup>47</sup> If Ellmann is correct, then the M'Coy of "Grace" is a prototype of Bloom, and the earlier story about these "business men" indeed presents an array of characteristics from which Joyce drew for Bloom.<sup>48</sup> Mr Harford also prefigures Bloom, the similarity of their social situations perhaps explaining why Harford is one of the few *Dubliners* characters not to make it into *Ulysses*. We are told that "his fellow-travellers had never consented to overlook his origin", and while "he had never embraced more than the Jewish ethical code, his fellow-Catholics ... spoke of him bitterly as an Irish Jew".<sup>49</sup> And Bloom is also foreshadowed by Tom Kernan, who too is presented as something of an outsider, married into Catholicism but of "Protestant stock".<sup>50</sup>

The connection with Joyce's earlier, realist fiction may seem to revive the predominantly mimetic conception of character that this article set out to argue against. But a careful comparison with Bloom in fact brings into relief the radical development of Joyce's characterisation in his later work. When Kernan reappears in *Ulysses*, "agent for Pulbrook Robertson and Co, 2 Mincing Lane, London, E. C." (17.1980–1), his career as

<sup>46</sup>Ó Gráda, 204.

<sup>47</sup>Ellmann, *James Joyce: New and Revised Edition*, 375.

<sup>48</sup>Joyce, *Dubliners*, 177.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 180.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 177.

a travelling salesman is elaborated with a small number of defining characteristics developed from “Grace”: alcoholism, dressiness and social pretension. In the earlier story he has drunk so much that he has fallen down the stairs and bitten off part of his tongue. He is at least standing when we see him in *Ulysses*, but clearly still enjoys a “thimbleful” (10.724): “Hot spirit of juniper juice warmed his vitals and his breath. Good drop of gin, that was” (10.762); “Damn good gin that was” (10.787). The tea salesman’s preoccupation with dress is evident in his reflections on a meeting with a customer: “Saw him looking at my frock-coat. Dress does it. Nothing like a dressy appearance” (10.738–9). And his adulation of the gentry, expressed in “Grace” through his “feeling” for the Jesuits who “cater for the upper classes”, is evinced anew in *Ulysses* through his desperate run to meet the approval of the viceregal cavalcade: “His Excellency! Too bad! Just missed that by a hair. Damn it! What a pity!” (10.796–8).<sup>51</sup>

Crucially, these defining characteristics are also drawn from conventional stock, having long been associated with travelling salesmen. Michael French and Andrew Popp have shown that travelling salesmen were considered heavy drinkers as early as the eighteenth century; by the mid-nineteenth century they were singled out by temperance speakers for their “bitter beer drinking in the morning, wine at dinner and grog in the evening”.<sup>52</sup> French and Popp also suggest that “a taste for finery was a stereotype of travelers held by observers, a concern for the superficialities of appearance perhaps standing in for their essential shallowness”. One mid-nineteenth-century account satirised the salesman’s “tendency to inspect his appearance in mirrors”, a trait given to Kernan in *Ulysses*: “Mr Kernan halted and preened himself before the sloping mirror of Peter Kennedy, hairdresser. Stylish coat, beyond a doubt . . . Fits me down to the ground” (10.742–5).<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the association of this characteristic with the trade is explicit even in “Grace”:

Mr Kernan was a commercial traveller of the old school which believed in the dignity of its calling. He had never been seen in the city without a silk hat of some decency and a pair of gaiters . . . . He carried on the tradition of his Napoleon, the great Blackwhite, whose memory he evoked at times by legend and mimicry.<sup>54</sup>

The attention to dress belies the traveller’s aspirations towards gentility, as described by Christopher P. Hosgood in his study of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century salesmen: “Commercial travellers, as their favorite sobriquet, ‘knights of the road,’ might suggest, generally held a high opinion of their position within the business community”; they “wanted to be seen as gentlemen, men of honor”.<sup>55</sup> Tom Kernan sees himself in like terms: “Knight of the road. Gentleman” (10.748–9).

For the Irish travelling salesman Kernan then Joyce again draws upon a well-established repertoire. Yet again, as with most of Bloom’s associates, Kernan’s origins were local. As Ellmann established and others have confirmed, Joyce developed Kernan from a Dubliner called Thornton (named by biographers variously as Ned, Richard John, and Dick).<sup>56</sup> We do not know how much of Thornton Joyce put into Kernan: he does seem to have been a tea agent for Pulbrook, Robertson & Co., and as a friend of Joyce’s father it is not unlikely

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 185.

<sup>52</sup>Qtd in French and Popp, 796.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 794, 796.

<sup>54</sup>Joyce, *Dubliners*, 173.

<sup>55</sup>Hosgood, 525, 527.

<sup>56</sup>Ellmann, *James Joyce: New and Revised Edition*, 43; Jackson and Costello, 181.

that he drank. But upon this biographical basis Joyce elaborates a set range of stock images in his construction of Tom Kernan, “[k]night of the road”. Joyce starts with a figure known from childhood, himself no doubt already part-fictionalised in the Joyce family mythology. He then overlays this figure with established stereotypes, drawing Kernan into the fictional worlds of “Grace” and *Ulysses*.

However, we must again beware of the easy conclusion, for it does not follow that Joyce’s characterisation of Bloom is analogous, with a difference only in the degree of detail. Kernan begins mimetically and more or less remains so; his intertextual accruals are incidental and go no further. The same is true for all the characters carried over from Joyce’s earlier fiction, even Stephen. For all of Joyce’s plans to “Hellenise” him as Tel-emachus (1.158), Stephen remains stubborn, and leaves the novel much as he entered it, as Joyce complained to Budgen: “Stephen no longer interests me . . . . He has a shape that can’t be changed”.<sup>57</sup> Bloom, by contrast, is of more truly mixed heritage. The mimetic aspects of his character have been established: his career reflects the lives of real Dublin canvassers, Charlie Chance perchance, and Alfred H. Hunter, as the recent identification of that man as an advertisement canvasser has confirmed.<sup>58</sup> Yet from the start, when the character was but an “idea” for a short story, its mimetic root was grafted with the mythical figure of Odysseus. And when Joyce adds intertextual details to Bloom, from the mythically rich figure of Ahasuerus to the poor caricature of the Jewish Pedlar, he does not accrue so much as splice. These are no longer mere details: they are structuring elements that translate Bloom further and further into the intertextual realm of discourse.

Through Bloom, Joyce freed himself from the naturalistic aesthetic he inherited and developed in *Dubliners* and *Portrait*, and stepped towards a more challenging mode in which characters function simultaneously in both particular and paradigmatic dimensions. Isolating the specific narrative detail of Bloom’s career, this article has necessarily focused more on the particular dimensions of Joyce’s characterisation. But even here, submerged intertextual connections to contemporary anti-Semitic discourses—themselves part of Joyce’s broader reimagining of Odysseus as a Semitic traveller—block a straightforward historical reading. The perfection of this overdetermining method was to come in *Finnegans Wake*, where all manner of texts, in myriad languages, are woven around a small number of ciphers without even the pretence of naturalistic rationalisation. But it began with Bloom, and the character had come a long way by the time Joyce put the “full-fledged traveller” to bed at the end of the “Ithaca” episode. With or without the notorious full stop to close that chapter, Bloom’s true epitaph comes a few lines earlier: “He rests. He has travelled” (17.2320).

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<sup>57</sup>Budgen, 107.

<sup>58</sup>Hunter is listed as an “Advertising Agent” in the 1911 census, and a “Canvasser” on his death certificate (Killeen, 52–3).

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