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Waiting on the Threshold in Ulysses

> Under the upswelling tide he saw the writhing weeds lift languidly and sway reluctant arms, hising up their petticoats, in whispering water swaying and upturning coy silver fronds. Day by day: night by night: lifted, flooded and let fall. Lord, they are weary; and, whispered to, they sigh. Saint Ambrose heard it, sigh of leaves and waves, waiting, awaiting the fullness of their times[.][1]

Waiting is part of the substance of *Ulysses*. Leopold Bloom spends his day waiting to know what will happen when he returns home to a wife who sang Ellen H. Flagg and Harrison Millard's song "Waiting" on the first night they met (11.730), a song whose narrator asks the nightingale "to guide [her lover] to me, waiting."[2] Molly uses this lyric to lament the remoteness of Gibraltar and the waiting for excitement that comes with that (18.678–79), while the other woman whose consciousness we enter for an extended period of time, Gerty MacDowell, is described as "waiting, always waiting to be asked" to marry (13.208). Stephen, for his part, is haunted by memories of waiting by his mother's deathbed (1.248–69). Waiting extends beyond the personal, becoming a concrete activity in the socio-economic life of Dublin, whether this is Pat the waiter in the Ormond Hotel who "waits while you wait" (11.916) or children and wives waiting for fathers to return home from the pub (5.8–9; 11.1103–04; 18.1282). The latter is reformulated in a mock-Homeric register when the sailor Murphy's wife waits for him to come home (16.420). Perhaps the most symbolic form of waiting in the novel is the waiting

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[1] James Joyce, *Ulysses: The Corrected Text*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (Bodley Head, 1986), 3.461–65. Subsequent references to this edition, citing chapter and line number, are made parenthetically.

[2] Lyrics as quoted in Zack Bowen, *Musical Allusions in the Works of James Joyce* (State University of New York Press, 1975), 334.

for political or religious redemption which connects the two peoples at the centre of the novel, the Irish and the Jewish: "they're still waiting for their redeemer, says Martin. For that matter so are we" (12.1644–45).[3]

Waiting is also part of how we read the novel. Hugh Kenner identifies an "aesthetic of delay" which only reveals the significance of events many pages after they occur, by which time we may have forgotten the original event, requiring us to wait until a future rereading for the full significance to be revealed.[4] Seeing Dilly Dedalus in "Lestrygonians," Bloom thinks "Dedalus' daughter there still outside Dillon's auctionrooms" (8.28). The reader may well be too distracted by concern for the state of the Dedalus family ("Must be selling off some old furniture. […] Home always breaks up when the mother goes" [8.28–31]) to ask how Bloom knows she's "still" waiting. The word implies, however, that Bloom must have seen her when he went to Dillon's to find Alexander Keyes in the previous episode, "Aeolus" (7.430–41). Her tenure ends only in the middle of the "Wandering Rocks" episode, when her father at last appears from around the corner (10.654–55). At this point, the reader may have forgotten this not particularly important paragraph in "Lestrygonians." So, they may have to await a future rereading, on which they return to "Lestrygonians" having read "Wandering Rocks" and having reread "Aeolus," to realise how long Dilly has been waiting. From the times provided in the schemata Joyce distributed in the 1920s, Dilly must have been waiting from before one o'clock in the afternoon, since in "Aeolus" Bloom goes to Dillon's sometime between twelve and one, to after three o'clock, since "Wandering Rocks" finishes around four.[5] Should the reader have great patience, they may place this even more precisely in time by correlating the lacquey's bell during the section with Dilly and Simon (10.650; 10.689) with its appearance as an interpolation (Joyce's device for synchronising the sections) during other sections of the episode, which may themselves be timed through estimations using Dublin maps, walking speeds, and talking speeds. One such patient reader, Clive Hart, placed Dilly and Simon's meeting between 3:22

[3] Joyce called *Ulysses* "an epic of two races (Israelite—Irish)". James Joyce, *Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Richard Ellmann and Stuart Gilbert, 3 vols. (Viking, 1966), 1:146.

[4] Hugh Kenner, *Ulysses*, rev. edn. (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 72–83.

[5] For the schemata, see Richard Ellmann, Ulysses *on the Liffey* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 192–95.

and 3:26.[6] Learning how long Dilly has been waiting—possibly more than three hours—requires a good deal more than moving our eyes across the page. It may well require multiple readings and labours of investigation, between which we wait for this disclosure.

Despite the range of valences waiting takes in the novel—a form of labour, a sign of patriarchal social organisation, a feature of our reading, and a symbolic connection between Bloom's religion and his nationality—it has yet to be substantially theorised by Joyce scholars. Doing so promises to shed new light on an old theme in Joyce studies, the way in which his Dubliners experience time and history through the mediation of colonialism. Postcolonial scholars like Dipesh Chakrabarty, Jennifer Wenzel, and Amanda Lagji have explored how the temporality of waiting takes on conflicting valences in colonised states—imperialist ideology tells colonial subjects to wait, yet waiting can also create resistant futurity.[7] This essay elaborates the colonial and postcolonial valences of waiting in *Ulysses* by drawing on postcolonial studies and Walter Benjamin's remarks about the relationship between waiting and thresholds. While limiting his perspective to the imperial metropolis, Benjamin explores how waiting on thresholds can be transformative or an expression of the "eversame" bloodshed of colonialism.[8] This connection between waiting and thresholds is pertinent to *Ulysses* due to the significance of thresholds in *Ulysses*'s penultimate episode "Ithaca," in which waiting with Bloom and Stephen on the various thresholds of 7 Eccles Street allows the reader to transform the past into a recognition of the ways it might be redeemed in the future.

This work builds on the range of colonial and postcolonial temporalities scholars have identified in *Ulysses*. Enda Duffy and Declan Kiberd identify hints at the

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[6] Clive Hart, "Wandering Rocks," in Ulysses*: Critical Essays*, ed. Clive Hart and David Hayman (University of California Press, 1974), Appendix B.

[7] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, reissue with a new preface (Princeton University Press, 2007); Jennifer Wenzel, *Bulletproof: Afterlives of Anticolonial Prophecy in South Africa and Beyond* (The University of Chicago Press, 2009); Amanda Lagji, *Postcolonial Fiction and Colonial Time: Waiting for Now* (Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

[8] The term "eversame" occurs throughout Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin MacLaughlin (Belknap, 1999), e.g., J56a,10.

future independent Irish republic, which they read Joyce as revealing to be latent in the conditions of 1904 Dublin.[9] Recent works by Paul K. Saint-Amour and Luke Gibbons have offered alternative readings in which the novel hints not only at the future which *did* come to pass, but also at futures which didn't.[10] Gibbons and Ellen Carol Jones point out the persistence of failed dreams of political independence, as well as how forms of attention to the death of such dreams can open up new postcolonial futures.[11] The previous study that comes closest to exploring waiting in *Ulysses* is Saikat Majumdar's reading of how Benjaminian boredom affords an openness to the new for the novel's characters, who are otherwise paralysed.[12] Majumdar's focus on boredom means his study is centred on an affect, and he doesn't examine the plural and conflicting temporalities associated with the activity of waiting. My study does so, building off postcolonial and Joyce scholarship to elaborate how *Ulysses* explores waiting as both an imperial cudgel and a path to a new future.

The Stasis of Empire

Thresholds play a key role in Benjamin's *Arcades Project*. They are "zone[s]" of "Transformation, passage, flight." They don't *mark* the difference between two states; they *create* that difference in those who cross them.[13] It is tempting to think of thresholds as exclusively spatial. One example of a threshold Benjamin himself uses is the Roman imperial gateway which "transforms whoever passes under its

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[9] Enda Duffy, "Setting: Dublin 1904/1922," in *The Cambridge Companion to* Ulysses, ed. Sean Latham (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 92–93; Enda Duffy, *The Subaltern* Ulysses (University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 123–25; Declan Kiberd, Ulysses *and Us: A Guide to Everyday Living in Joyce's Masterpiece* (Faber and Faber, 2009), 166.

[10] Paul K. Saint-Amour, "Rising Timely and Untimely: On Joycean Anachronism," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Irish Modernism*, ed. Maud Ellmann, Sian White, and Vicki Mahaffey (Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 47; Luke Gibbons, *James Joyce and the Irish Revolution: The Easter Rising as Modern Event* (The University of Chicago Press, 2023), 15, 78. See also Paul K. Saint-Amour, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form* (Oxford University Press, 2015), chap. 5.

[11] Luke Gibbons, *Joyce's Ghosts: Ireland, Modernism, and Memory* (The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 222; Ellen Carol Jones, "Memorial Dublin," in *Joyce, Benjamin, and Magical Urbanism*, ed. Maurizia Boscagli and Enda Duffy (Brill, 2011), 114–115.

[12] Saikat Majumdar, *Prose of the World: Modernism and the Banality of Empire* (Columbia University Press, 2013), 68–69.

[13] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ⟨M°,26⟩.

arch," turning "the returning general" into "a conquering hero."[14] Yet thresholds may be more spatially distributed, and their central property is not spatial but temporal:

> The threshold must be carefully distinguished from the boundary. A *Schwelle* ⟨threshold⟩ is a zone. Transformation, passage, wave action are in the word *schwellen*, swell, and etymology ought not to overlook these senses.[15]

The threshold within the Parisian arcades—those places that occupied Benjamin more than any others—is not purely psychological nor purely physical:

> These gateways—the entrances to the arcades—are thresholds. No stone step serves to mark them. But this marking is accomplished by the expectant posture of the handful of people. Tightly measured paces reflect the fact, altogether unknowingly, that a decision lies ahead.[16]

Decades after the heyday of the arcades under the reign of Louis Phillipe, Mr. Bloom sits on Sandymount Strand, and his decision about whether to return home to his wife appears through his despondency and stasis rather than through expectancy and footsteps, as we see in the temporal and syntactic diminutions between his erotic dream about Molly and the ensuing free-indirect narration:

> showed me her next year in drawers return next in her next her next.
>
> A bat flew. Here. There. Far in the grey a bell chimed. Mr Bloom with open mouth, his left boot sanded sideways, leaned, breathed. (13.1284–87)

Little does Bloom know, he is not just on the threshold of Ireland and the sea, his home and a world of exile, but also of his meeting Stephen in the next episode. This threshold is marked by the parallels between Bloom's activity on Sandymount and Stephen's in "Proteus": both indulge in erotic fantasy (13.1279–

[14] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, C2a,3.

[15] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, O2a,1. The translators note that Benjamin is wrong about the etymology here (*The Arcades Project*, 991n4).

[16] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, C3,6.

85, 3.434–38) and write a message which they despair of others finding (13.1256–66, 3.397–99, 3.414–15), increasing the anticipation and significance the reader accords to the moment when at last this father without a son and son without a (desirable) father meet. Readers are also on a threshold of the novel's prose style, as the free-indirect rendering of Bloom's thoughts in the second half of "Nausicaa" is our last moment of realist innocence. The sentimental distortions of the first half of "Nausicaa" were part of how we came to question the "objectivity" of realist style, and they return here with "Gerty MacDowell noticed the time she was there because she was as quick as anything about a thing like that, was Gerty MacDowell" (13.1300–1301). "Nausicaa" thus ends with a "zone of transition" towards the novel's second half, where radical prose experiments leave behind realist narration entirely.[17]

A threshold is the zone before a categorical shift, the point in the "rite of passage" where a youth is on the precipice of maturity, where the general transforms into the conquering hero, where the fact of having a "decision" to make (rather than the making of a decision) becomes a reality.[18] One scandal of the early twentieth century for Benjamin was that public life had "grown very poor in threshold experiences," confining them to individualised sleep and interpersonal love.[19] He claims that "it is necessary to keep in mind the immediate tectonic and ceremonial context which has brought the word [*Schwelle*, or 'threshold'] to its current meaning." [20] That is, threshold experiences must have some grounding in collective life to be politically potent, making the disappearance of public thresholds politically stifling. Imperialist modernisation was one force leading to such disappearance, in its diminishment of spaces caught between the past and the future: the arcades which blended precapitalist and capitalist forms of life were replaced, to Benjamin's disappointment, by department stores with their mass-produced commodities and the boulevards on which they lay, "long straight streets opening onto broad perspectives."[21] For all its rush for space and production of

[17] The classic studies of the novel's dismantling of realist style are Kenner, *Ulysses*, and Karen R. Lawrence, *The Odyssey of Style in* Ulysses (Princeton University Press, 1987).

[18] See Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, O2a,1 for rites of passage.

[19] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, O2a,1

[20] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, O2a,1

[21] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 24, A3,5, O2a,1.

goods, imperial modernity was fundamentally *static* for Benjamin, a world which inhibited newness and engendered bad waiting. Benjamin associates bad waiting with "the exhibition of imperial panoramas."[22] The panorama was a circular painting people looked at from a raised platform, and the imperial panoramas were scenes of battles. Benjamin quotes Max Brod finding "inactive officers" who, in viewing these panoramas, search "for suitable battlefields to wage their imaginary colonial wars."[23] Such waiting is static because, in its concreteness of expectations, it reaches no threshold, no zone of transformation, but only repeats the bloodshed of the past. Colonists wait for the opportunity to brutalise territories, and when they can't realise this, they fill the void of their concrete expectation with the panorama's sensorily engulfing paintings of past imperial bloodshed. Benjamin extends this to the imperial metropolis as a whole, figuring it as an inactive officer who can see no way of progressing through history other than territorial expansion in space. This brings it, however, to no transformative threshold, no new political arrangement, only the static Arc de Triomphe which, in a "classicist misunderstanding," has a "relief on the inner wall of the arch." Benjamin frames the misunderstanding here in terms of the glory being *within* the threshold, rather than *across* it, as in the Roman arches.[24] Such a structure is a shell of ceremony, creating no transformation.[25]

"Awaiting the fullness of their times": Servitude and Stasis in the Telemachiad

Benjamin did not explore how such waiting manifested outside the imperial core, but in *Ulysses* we see the range of valences this activity could take in a subjugated peripheral capital. In the novel's opening, Irish subjects are told to wait as a justification for British colonial violence. This is established in the opening episode's servant motif. The primary definition of *servant* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is a "person who is engaged to attend or wait upon, or to obey the

[22] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Q1,4.

[23] Max Brod, *Uber die Schonheit hiisslicher Bilder* (Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1913), 66, quoted in Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Q1,5.

[24] This does not valorise Roman imperialism but highlights a unique feature of nineteenth- and twentieth-century imperialism.

[25] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, C2a,3.

directions and meet the needs of, a particular person."[26] This sense of "waiting upon" is given a temporal valence by Bloom's puns in "Sirens," where he thinks "Pat is a waiter who waits while you wait" (11.916). Stephen's symbol of Irish art as "the cracked lookingglass of a servant" positions all of Ireland as a servant, and he describes the milkwoman using two epithets for Ireland, "Silk of the kine and poor old woman," before referring to her "serving her conqueror and her gay betrayer," these being the Englishman Haines and the Irishman Buck Mulligan (1.154, 1.403, 1.105). Stephen himself is "a servant of two masters […] an English and an Italian" (1.638), the British empire and the Catholic church. Thus, earlier in the chapter, standing by the shaving bowl Mulligan has used to parody Christian liturgy, Stephen thinks:

> So I carried the boat of incense then at Clongowes. I am another now and yet the same. A servant too. A server of a servant. (1.310–12)

He is a "server of a servant" because a servant to an Irishman, Mulligan. It is here that the status of servant is most clearly linked with the temporal dynamics of waiting. Specifically, it is the countersign of Benjamin's picture of colonisers waiting for bloodshed: waiting with an expectation *of nothing*. The power dynamics that make the milkwoman and Stephen wait on imperialists and their allies paralyse them, leaving no hope of change: "another now and yet the same." Such pessimism brings to explicit consciousness the static temporality implicit in the imperialist's concrete expectations. Stephen also has a third master, "who wants me for odd jobs" (1.641), and we see him waiting on this employer, Mr. Deasy, in the next episode, "Nestor."

Deasy, an Ulster Unionist, sees all events as unfolding "towards one great goal"—he calls it "the manifestation of God" but from his perspective God seems to be manifested for the Irish by their becoming more like the English (2.381). Deasy thus tells Stephen to take up English habits of money saving and surrounds himself with paintings of the English aristocracy on horseback. This minimises colonial injustice: Deasy thinks "the pride of the English" is not, as Stephen plausibly suggests, "That on his empire […] the sun never sets," but the achievement of

[26] *Oxford English Dictionary*, "servant (*n.*)," June 2026, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/-2577046531. *Attend* itself has its roots in the French verb *attendre*, "to wait."

economic modernisation, being able to say, "*I paid my way*" (2.244–51). On this model, Ireland is simply further behind on the journey to that "one great goal," and must wait under colonial rule for that to be achieved. This is a teleology of progressive modernisation which Dipesh Chakrabarty calls a "waiting room" model of history, and by which the colonised were told that freedom and independence had to wait until they had progressed far enough to modernisation—that is, towards becoming like the imperial metropolis.[27] The metropolis is the fixed interior of the Arc de Triomphe, lying along the fixed path of linear history, what Benjamin calls "the beads of a rosary" in "homogeneous empty time."[28] This imagery reflects Priya Satia's point that eschatology served imperialism as a model for "endow[ing] morally questionable events with purpose and meaning revealed in the narrative end of history."[29] The Arc is a bead which the periphery must reach if it is to "succeed," and must reach it by counting down the same beads the metropolis did—"first in England, and then elsewhere" to paraphrase Chakrabarty.[30]

Such an ideology is grounded in imperial capitalism. This is brought out when Stephen is made to wait on Deasy. Standing next to a game of hockey in which the boys have gotten into a dispute about team sizes, Mr. Deasy asks Stephen to "wait in my study for a moment […] till I restore order here" (2.191–92). Stephen thinks the following while waiting for this ally of the coloniser to bring order to Ireland:

> As on the first day he bargained with me here. As it was in the beginning, is now. On the sideboard the tray of Stuart coins, base treasure of a bog: and ever shall be. And snug in their spooncase of purple plush, faded, the twelve apostles having preached to all the gentiles: world without end. (2.199–204)

[27] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 7–8.

[28] Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, 4 vols., trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. (Belknap, 2006), 4:395–97.

[29] Priya Satia, *Time's Monster: How History Makes Us* (Belknap, 2020), 27.

[30] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 6. The original quotation is "first in the West, and then elsewhere" (7).

The liturgical phrase "as it was in the beginning, is now" reinscribes Stephen's temporal stasis, repeating the crucial word "now" to recall the stasis of "I am another now and yet the same." Here, however, the future tense is introduced to reinforce the temporal stasis created in colonised subjects being told to wait: "and ever shall be." This temporality is grounded in an economic relationship, as Stephen is waiting to "bargain," an ironic word given the clearly unequal economic relations between colonisers, their allies, and the colonised. We see this in a complex chain of associations surrounding money. Deasy's display coins were minted by Catholic Stuarts, and the bogs from which they come are a central part of the Irish countryside. English money is contrastingly represented by Deasy's "shells heaped in the cold stone mortar: whelks and money cowries and leopard shells: […] An old pilgrim's hoard, dead treasure, hollow shells" (2.203–206). The patterning of financial imagery around these shells takes on significance when we consider Stephen's description of Haines, Mulligan's English acquaintance, as "the sea's ruler" (1.574). The narrator then describes Haines holding "the flaming spunk" of a cigarette "towards Stephen in the shell of his hands" (1.629–21). Both the Irish bog money of "base treasure" and the British sea money of "dead treasure" are ultimately hollow, but one has greater power and reach than the other, "and ever shall." Thus, when Deasy pays Stephen, the final monetary units are "A sovereign […] bright and new," then "two crowns and two shillings" (2.217–21). After Stephen puts this money in his pocket, he contrasts the shells, "Symbols too of beauty and of power," and the "lump in [his] pocket: symbols soiled by greed and misery" (2.226–28). The shells, however "hollow," are "bright and new" symbols of "beauty and power," becoming "soiled" in "greed and misery" through contact with the Irish, rulers of dirty bog water rather than the clean, rolling waves of the sea. In making such a symbolic transmutation, Stephen sees through the waiting room model: the periphery will not reach the modernisation of the metropolis, and what is "bright and new" is perpetually out of reach.

In addition to Deasy's progressivist historiography, we see in the early episodes of *Ulysses* a different cluster of colonial attitudes which tell colonial subjects to wait: the fetishism of a culture conceived as "premodern," and the belief that colonialism is the result of inevitable historical forces. Haines studies Irish folklore and thinks the Irish should speak Irish. He treats them as anthropological case studies, wanting to collect Stephen's sayings in the same way he collects stories of "the fishgods of Dundrum" (1.366). Stephen is "wild Irish" (1.731) to

Haines, but this fetishism doesn't create a sense of responsibility for the imperial projects that stunted Ireland's economic growth. Haines is taken aback when Stephen asks if he will pay Stephen for those sayings, and when Stephen brings up that he is ruled by an English master Haines alternates between evasion and understatement in claiming that "it seems history is to blame" for England's "unfair" treatment of Ireland (1.648–49). That is, to be Irish is to be "wild," precapitalist, and the tragedies of Irish history have come from a clash of this innately premodern culture and England's forces of modernity. This is a version of the imperialist absolution of moral responsibility. It might seem to conflict with Deasy's valorisation of the British character, yet Satia has studied how they were mutually reinforcing. British imperialism depended on having "liberal imperialists" like Thomas Paine, who advocated "heroically remak[ing] other places in the world in service to historical progress," and an opposed model embodied in figures like Edmund Burke, who critiqued such pretensions to agency, arguing instead that imperialists were "unwitting instruments of providence or esoteric natural laws," a convenient picture to adopt when you have a conscience that needs absolving.[31]

On both these models—call them heroic imperialism and pessimistic imperialism—the Irish are to wait, either on an imaginary threshold of the fixed future of imperialist modernisation which Deasy imagines for them or in the static realm of Celtic myth which Haines wishes to preserve until it is swept off by the tides of history. This binary is reinforced in the prose styles of "Nestor" and "Telemachus." Duffy points out these episodes make it seem like *Ulysses* will continue Stephen's *Bildungsroman* begun in *Portrait*, centring on his consciousness and his alienation from the world around him.[32] Set off against this is the portrayal of the nation in which the subject is to grow, the representation of colonial power relations I have sketched and which Duffy points out to be clichéd. It is made up of

> stereotypical narratives of the oppression of Ireland as a colony—the kitsch symbolism of the old milkwoman, […] the schoolmaster Deasy's Unionist Irishness, […] Haines's condescension and expertise in Gaelic culture […]

[31] Satia, *Time's Monster*, 43.

[32] Duffy, *The Subaltern* Ulysses, 31.

> each imitative of hackneyed tropes of "Saxon greed," the glorification of a medieval Irish chieftaincy, a new respect for folk life, and so on, from the various nineteenth-century Irish nationalist revivals.[33]

This "most hackneyed nationalism […] expressed less the possibilities of a future nation than a shrill resentment of Britain."[34] Through Haines taking up the position of a Revival-adjacent Irish fetishist, we see how that British-hating discourse was the countersign of imperial jingoism, accepting its stereotypes of "British" and "Irish" but reversing their moral valence—a similar mutual reinforcement to that which holds between heroic and pessimistic imperialism.[35] Duffy focuses on how the prose styles figure national subject and community, but just as striking is their conformity to these two imperial temporalities, as already demonstrated in how well the readily digestible clichés fit into Haines' pessimistic imperialism. The other side to the prose styles of "Telemachus" and "Nestor", *Bildung*, was according to Jed Esty deeply tied to a homology between an individual's development and the achievement of national self-determination through modernisation. Esty argues this means such a narrative gets distorted yet nonetheless preserved when it is applied in Joyce's Dublin, and *Portrait*'s *Bildung* is a mirror image of imperial *Bildung*.[36] Stephen figures his soul as a "smithy" for forging the "conscience" of his "race," as a way of imagining his aesthetic development as national development, so that a national "conscience" may replace economic development. This enacts the homology between these forms of progress implied by Deasy.[37]

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[33] Duffy, *The Subaltern* Ulysses, 27.

[34] Duffy, *The Subaltern* Ulysses, 31.

[35] Duffy, *The Subaltern* Ulysses, 51–52.

[36] Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 129, 155.

[37] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford University Press, 2000), 213; Esty, *Unseasonable Youth*, 155. Moreover, Esty suggests that clichés of Ireland facilitate Stephen's fashioning his soul as such a "smithy." For a historically informed discussion of the meanings of "race" in this quotation, see Vincent J. Cheng, "Catching the Conscience of a Race," in *Joyce, Race, and Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 15–74.

The styles of the first two episodes thereby reinforce the mimetic critique of imperial temporalities of waiting, yet this renders them inadequate to make a full critique of imperial waiting.[38] Just as these chapters, for Duffy, do not propose the positive vision of a national community that we get in later episodes, they do not create alternative temporalities that make readers engage in transformative waiting, something that happens most completely in "Ithaca." At the level of readerly experience, we either know what we wait for—the *Bildung* of the artist within a national community—or we do not have to wait at all, fed on readily comprehensible clichés.

"Waiting she sang": "Sirens," Sentimentality, and Prophecy

Another node in the text's discourse of waiting arises in the temporality of sentimental national myths in "Sirens." Haines's sentimental myths are perpetuated by the Irish themselves, and we come to recognise a closer alliance between these myths and the forward march of imperial capitalism. We also see how the fossilised commodity could resist these temporalities through a distinctive form of prophecy that hints at, without fully achieving, the resistant waiting that occurs in "Ithaca."

"Sirens" depicts Bloom's struggle to escape sentimentalising myths of the past and attain a genuine futurity. At first, this is framed in terms of his personal emotions. He is in the Ormond Hotel so he can spy on Blazes Boylan, since it is four o'clock and Bloom knows that that is the hour of Boylan's rendezvous with Molly. He is waiting to see if Boylan leaves, then waits some more in the ruins of his marriage, reflecting on their past to try to convince himself they are made for each other, "First night when first I saw her at Mat Dillon's in Terenure. Yellow, black lace she wore. Musical chairs. We two the last. Fate" (11.725–26). When Ben Dollard sings "The Croppy Boy," the sentimental mourning of a lost past transfers from the personal to the collective past. The song tells the story of the titular boy being killed by a British "yeoman" pretending to be a priest.[39] The song is chosen for its nationalist resonance, Tom Kernan calling it "Our native Doric"

[38] For Duffy, "Proteus" inaugurates Stephen's ability to concretely imagine the lives of his compatriots (*The Subaltern* Ulysses, 52).

[39] See Bowen, *Musical Allusions*, 195–211, for full lyrics and comparison between these and how they appear in *Ulysses*.

(11.991). The singers are on one level mourning Ireland's political failures, as reflected in this rendition of the song's closing lines by the third-person narrator:

> Pray for him, prayed the bass of Dollard. You who hear in peace. Breathe a prayer, drop a tear, good men, good people. He was the croppy boy. (11.1139–41)

Bloom initially identifies himself with the croppy boy ("Last of" their "race" due to Bloom's having "no son") and relates his own son's death to the croppy boy's (11.1064–67). Yet he gets fed up with the singers' sentimental fixation on a lost past. He asks "who fears to speak of nineteen four? Time to be shoving. Looked enough" (11.1072–73). This is an ironic modulation of what the citizen will say in the next episode, "who fears to speak of ninetyeight," referring to the 1798 rebellion in which "The Croppy Boy" is set (12.481).[40] Bloom therefore questions why they take comfort in going back to the sentimental myths of the past and fear to speak of the present. Thereat, Bloom leaves:

> —*Bless me, father*, Dollard the croppy cried. *Bless me and let me go*.
> Tap.
> Bloom looked, unblessed to go. (11.1074–76)

These are the only lyrics of the song rendered in direct speech, underscoring the material colocation of Dollard's words and Bloom's actions, and how those words blind the pubgoers to the world around them: they will "pray for" and bless the croppy boy of 1798, but not Bloom who, in the next chapter, suffers due to his compatriots' nationalist ideology. The irony is furthered by the many parallels between Bloom and the croppy boy: both are the last of their race, and the croppy boy is told by the faux priest "I hold this house" (11.1120) in a chapter where Boylan's role as usurper of Bloom's house is completed.

The pubgoers' sentimentality appears as an anxious return to the past which shores up concrete expectations for what they will experience, blunting recognition of the future's uncertainty. The listeners "know it all by heart. The thrill they itch for" (11.1082–83). Their sentimental reminiscence therefore mourns the past as

[40] Bowen, *Musical Allusions*, 199.

inevitable, conforming to the historical ideology of pessimistic imperialism. It is also tied to the commercial ideology which, as we saw with Deasy, is part and parcel of imperialism's historical ideologies. This is especially brought out in the episode's prose style, whose constantly shifting verbal games blend density of reference and the somewhat arbitrary intrusion of syllables, some of the most frequent being "Tap," "Yes," and "Hee" (11.939, 11.229, 11.1004). Several commentators have argued this makes the prose feel like an array of commodities, the goods with which English producers flooded the Irish market.[41] Duffy calls "Sirens" a "commodity-text delighted to show off the most puerile compensations of a reified culture: structures of feeling as cheap thrills."[42] We are back at the easily digestible clichés we saw in "Telemachus," the operative ones here being what Kenner lists as "music's sweet charms, life's sadness, the valor of dead patriots, sounding brass that is gold no more."[43] The difference, however, is that the backward-looking references are seamlessly integrated with an arbitrary play of syllables, emphasising their shared role in a chintzy surface. Here is a description of Lydia Douce pulling beer:

> All lost in pity for croppy. Fro, to: to, fro: over the polished knob […]
> With a cock with a carra.
> Tap. Tap. Tap.
> I hold this house. (11.1113–20)

"All lost" references a Bellini aria Richie Goulding whistled earlier (11.629–36), brought to bear on "The Croppy Boy," one of whose lyrics occurs in "I hold this house."[44] Between these, we have the arbitrary chiasmus of "Fro, to: to, fro," the too-literal punchline of "with a cock" for what hardly needs explanation ("polished knob"), and the oft-repeated "Tap" of the blind piano tuner's cane, itself a pun on beer taps. The free-floating nature of these syllables mirrors the free-floating nature of exchange value, an abstract value divorced from the

[41] Duffy, *The Subaltern* Ulysses, 72–73.

[42] Duffy, *The Subaltern* Ulysses, 83. See also Mark Osteen, *The Economy of* Ulysses*: Making Both Ends Meet* (Syracuse University Press, 1995), 281–84; Kenner, *Ulysses*, 84–89; Hugh Kenner, *Joyce's Voices* (Faber & Faber, 1978), 77, 104.

[43] Kenner, *Joyce's Voices*, 104.

[44] Bowen, *Musical Allusions*, 202. The original lyric, quoted in Bowen, is "We hold his house."

concrete history of a commodity's production. Such syllables are of course an exercise in sonic aestheticism, a foregrounding of the "pure sound" of syllables. Yet this itself registers what Fredric Jameson calls the "semi-autonomy" of the senses under capitalism.[45] Modernist exercises in abstract colour and sound are enabled by a world in which ordinary activity is subsumed to a non-sensory, abstract exchange value, leaving the senses all revved up with no place to go. Such a reading allows us to see that what is backward-looking in "Sirens" is indistinguishable from the abstracting dance of commodity production—consider how the anaphora and consonance in "with a cock with a carra" make it sound like a song lyric or a nursery rhyme, even though it is not.[46]

This ambiguity between allusion and commodity expresses the fossilised, past-looking nature of the commodities in the Ormond Quay where "Sirens" occurs, like those in Lionel Marks's antique shop: "battered candlesticks melodeon oozing maggoty blowbags" (11.1263). The Parisian arcades, founded at the incipient stage of consumer capitalism, are for Benjamin full of objects (discarded dolls and fashions, specialty goods resisting the allure of mass production) that are "the fossil remains of […] the consumer of the pre-imperial era of capitalism."[47] Susan Buck-Morss claims Benjamin found in fossilised commodities "historical nature" itself, "an expression of truth's essential transitoriness in its contradictory extremes—as extinction and death, on the one hand, and as creative potential and the possibility for change, on the other."[48] Fossilisation brings Benjamin into contact with the arcades' status as thresholds between precapitalist and capitalist modes of production: the fossilised commodities "are on the point of entering the market as commodities. But they linger on the threshold."[49] The commodities in the Ormond Quay and the commodified allusive syllables of "Sirens" reflect a

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[45] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Cornell University Press), 228–29.

[46] For an alternative analysis of the relationship between waiting and consumption in this episode, see Duffy, *The Subaltern* Ulysses, 87.

[47] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, R2,3. Given the heyday of the arcades was under the July Monarchy, this is only a *less* imperial capitalism.

[48] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (The MIT Press, 1989), 86.

[49] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 13. For specialty goods in arcades, see A4,2; for dolls, see Convolute Z; for fashions, see Convolute B.

different kind of fossilisation, explained by a different kind of economic threshold. Joyce's Dublin was flooded with the goods of imperial commodity production and yet did not have an industrial base that would create the consumers for these commodities. "Course everything is dear if you don't want it" (11.1264–65), thinks Bloom, standing before Lionel Marks's antique store. Commodities thereby become dead on arrival, torn between the profit-maximising consumer economy they are designed for and the subsistence-oriented population of that economy.[50] Benjamin's analysis suggests that while there are atrophying, static aspects to such imperial economic relations—aspects which Stephen experiences in Deasy's office—there might be what Buck-Morss calls "creative potential and the possibility for change."

Consider, in light of this, Bloom's actions upon seeing the last words of Irish revolutionary Robert Emmet beneath a picture in Lionel Marks's. Emmet's last words request to not have an epitaph:

> *When my country takes her place among*.
> Prrprr.
> Must be the bur.
> Fff! Oo. Rrpr.

[50] This claim parallels Joseph Valente's position that Joyce's Dublin is "metrocolonial," not fully an imperial metropole or colonial periphery. This term would introduce unnecessary complexity into my study, focused as it is on the diachronic rather than the synchronic. See Joseph Valente, "Between Resistance and Complicity: Metro-Colonial Tactics in Joyce's *Dubliners*," *Narrative* 6, no. 3 (1998): 327, as well as similar analyses in Marjorie Howes, "Joyce, Colonialism, and Nationalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, ed. Derek Attridge (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 254–71, and Fredric Jameson, "Modernism and Imperialism," in *The Modernist Papers* (Verso, 2007), 152–169. The 1990s witnessed a protracted debate, in which Joyce scholars were often participants, about whether Ireland was meaningfully a colony in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: see Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1996); and Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (Jonathan Cape, 1995). Stephen Howe claims this debate is now seen less in terms of ideological binaries, and more in terms of fleshing out the ambiguous dynamics of Ireland-Britain relations in their specificity. Stephen Howe, "Colonized and Colonizers: Ireland in the British Empire," in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish History*, ed. Alvin Jackson (Oxford University Press, 2014), 66–67.

> *Nations of the earth*. No-one behind. She's passed. *Then and not till then*. Tram kran kran kran. Good oppor. Coming. Krandlkrankran. I'm sure it's the burgund. Yes. One, two. *Let my epitaph be.* Kraaaaaa. *Written. I have.*
>
> Pprrpffrrppffff.
>
> *Done.* (11.1284–94)

This gives us what are purported to be Robert Emmet's words, interspersed with Bloom's fart.[51] Emmet's denial of an epitaph seems to resist sentimental remembrance, yet his very denial of epitaphic memory led to its being sentimentally paraded in places like Lionel Marks's. Equally, by desiring that "my memory be left in oblivion" until his dream had been accomplished, Emmet invoked an explicitly eschatological imaginary to tie his personal rebirth to that of an Irish nation.[52] This parallels the eschatologically informed heroic imperialism described above. As Saint-Amour points out, the construction of "x will not happen until y transpires" is the literary syntax of prophecy, as in, "Macbeth shall never vanquished be until / Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane hill / Shall come against him."[53] Such concrete expectation for what will be eschatologically unveiled in homogeneous empty time does not, finally, escape imperialism's historical ideologies.

When Bloom thinks "Robert Emmet's last words. Seven last words. Of Meyerbeer that is," he is misattributing Giuseppe Mercadante's oratorio *The Seven Last Words of Christ* to Giacomo Meyerbeer.[54] This might seem to accord with Emmet's self-monumentalisation as a Christ-like figure, yet, as Howes points out, Bloom refuses monumentalisation by farting throughout Emmet's last words.[55]

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[51] For an account of the historiography of Emmet's last words, see R. N. C. Vance, "Text and Tradition: Robert Emmet's Speech from the Dock," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 71, no. 282 (1982): 185–191.

[52] Patrick M. Geoghegan, *Robert Emmet: A Life* (Gill & Macmillan, 2002), 254.

[53] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 4.1.90–92, in *The New Oxford Shakespeare: Modern Critical Edition*, ed. Gary Taylor, John Jowett, Terri Bourus, and Gabriel Egan (Oxford University Press, 2016); Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 237–38.

[54] Sam Slote, Marc A. Mamigonian, and John Turner, eds., *Annotations to James Joyce's* Ulysses (Oxford University Press, 2022), 11.1275.

[55] Marjorie Howes, "Sirens," in Latham, *The Cambridge Companion to* Ulysses, 137–39.

Bowen interprets this as "degrading," but I agree with Howes that it is a way of reformulating the past in the present that nevertheless honours that past.[56] Wondering about historical counterfactuals ("Had Pyrrhus not fallen by a beldam's hand in Argos or Julius Caesar not been knifed to death" [2.48–49]), Stephen thinks, "They are not to be thought away. […] can those have been possible seeing that they never were? […] Weave, weaver of the wind" (2.48–53). To imagine our duty to the past as a matter of creative regeneration of forgotten possibilities rather than mourning historical necessity is to resist imperialism's historical inevitability. When Emmet's eschatologically inflected prophecy comes to Bloom as another commodity displayed in an overstuffed antique shop, Bloom becomes a curiously literal "weaver of the wind," refusing to reduce Irish political dreams to the rigidity of either commodified sentimental remembrance of his death or eschatological salvation in his person. Emmet's genuine hopes for independence are connected to daily bodily functions, reflecting their persistence as an unredeemed hope in 1904. Yet this is not to naively think that the past lives in the present—rather, it recognises that under imperial capitalism the past is a fossilised commodity, dead with its hopes tragically unredeemed, and that it therefore stands in need of reformulation, rather than repetition, in the present. This resists imperial history's rigid inevitability, reflecting the multiple potentialities of the present, how it might still honour the past anew.

Bloom's glimpse of resistant waiting, which we shall see more fully actualised in "Ithaca," is enabled through the colocation of past and present which enables transformative thresholds between past and future. The Ormond Quay's fossilised commodities in which Emmet's last words are subsumed are one of the ways in which Dublin blended the past and present of a capitalist consumer society.[57] Benjamin describes the transformative waiting such colocation can create as a form of bored waiting. In contrast to a gambler who "kills" or "expels" time and a flaneur who "stores time like a battery," waiting on a threshold between time past and a future expected creates "synthetic time," the waiter "taking in the time and rendering it up in altered form—that of expectation."[58] Such waiting gives us

[56] Bowen, *Musical Allusions*, 210.

[57] For other examples of past-present colocation in Joyce's Dublin, see Gibbons, *Joyce's Ghosts*, 3–9.

[58] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, D3,4, ⟨O°,78⟩.

the opportunity to cross into a new future, yet in the waiting which Benjamin valorises this future is not imagined concretely, as we have seen in the futurity of imperialism and sentimental nationalism, but is hazily sketched in a bored daydream: "we are bored when we don't know what we are waiting for. That we do know, or think we know, is nearly always the expression of our superficiality or inattention."[59] It is this bored waiting that Benjamin calls "the threshold to great deeds." Similarly, Lagji has traced a resistant "nonintentional waiting" across fictions of the Haitian revolution and apartheid South Africa, a waiting which creates an "openness to the future without explicitly anticipating how the future will become manifest."[60] Of course, this "synthetic time" requires not only an attitude towards the future but also one toward the past. Benjamin annotates a previously quoted passage about the threshold character of the arcades with the label "Dream House," registering how their character as thresholds between modes of production makes them "the residues of a dream world."[61] This is a dream for a world beyond commodification, from which no awakening has yet occurred, and which specifically "waits secretly for the awakening" provided by the "children" of "the dreaming collective" of arcade dwellers.[62] This gives us what Benjamin calls our "*weak* messianic power" to realise the dreams of this earlier generation, weak because it is their "claim" on us that we do so.[63] Thus Bloom, in a limited way, refuses the fixity of Ireland's future that Emmet's prophecy implies and imagines instead that the past's claims upon the present could be realised in something as unexpected as a fart which refuses imperial monumentalisation.

The reason such resistant waiting must occur on thresholds is that the messianic, revolutionary redemption of previous generations' claims requires the colocation of past and present, a zone where the past may make its claims on the present

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[59] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, D2,7. Amit Chaudhuri's reading of the "slowness" of the Jewish Benjamin and the Bengali *bhadralok*, on account of their relationship to imperial and non-imperial history, is consonant with the foregoing. Amit Chaudhuri, "A Strange Likeness: Walter Benjamin," in *Telling Tales: Selected Writings, 1993–2013* (Union Books, 2013), 301–308.

[60] Lagji, *Postcolonial Fiction and Colonial Time*, 119.

[61] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 13. The passage annotated is C3,6.

[62] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, K1a,2.

[63] Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 4:395 (emphasis in original).

through "a breath of the air that pervaded earlier days caress[ing] us as well."[64] To paraphrase Immanuel Kant, waiting without temporal thresholds is empty, even if thresholds without waiting are not *always* blind.[65] Waiting is empty, that is, when it is unconnected to zones of transformation, to the breaths of the past which a revolution would redeem, and, in addition, to the social conditions which *could* create a future that realises its aims, even if, as the catastrophe that is human history unfailingly demonstrates, they so rarely do. Think of this as the difference between what Bloch calls "concrete utopia," which realises the futurity inhering in the present, and "abstract utopianizing."[66] Yet we have already mentioned how the fast-spreading spaces of imperialist modernisation displaced zones like the arcades where such colocation of breath occurred. In such a context, dream states chafe, yet chafe inertly, against the absence of transition in social life. Catherine Flynn has used Benjamin to analyse the ways in which "Circe" may be understood as a threshold experience on the border between sleep and waking, yet she acknowledges that a literal ghost, Rudy, is "the only kind of new life that is possible in Nighttown, one that is not compromised by exchange."[67] Yet "Circe" only represents some of the dreams generated by Joyce's Dublin. This is a city with a wealth of spaces where the breaths of the dead still appear among the breaths of the living. We may now add the pertinent example of the breath of song transmuting figures like Bloom and the piano tuner (11.1273) into the croppy boy, unbeknownst to the singers. This colocation of breath does not imply the past's continued survival—that is the error of sentimentalism—but recognises what is dead as persisting into the present as a claim upon the present. This gives the opportunity to weave it into new configurations, unfixing the future as well.

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[64] Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 4:390.

[65] For example, as Chaudhuri has analysed in a colonial context, the slow, bristling movement of Benjamin's flaneur creates an intermediate zone between interior and exterior. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, L1,5; Amit Chaudhuri "Arun Kolatkar and the Tradition of Loitering," in *Clearing a Space: Reflections on India, Literature and Culture* (Peter Lang, 2008), 230–34.

[66] Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 3 vols., trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Basil Blackwell, 1986), 1:145–46, 1:157.

[67] Catherine Flynn, *James Joyce and the Matter of Paris* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 200.

In the episode after "Sirens," quoted earlier, we are reminded of the fundamental forms of waiting which unite Jewish and Irish subjects. Demonstrated in nostalgic nationalist songs and Bloom's dream of Rudy, these forms of waiting are given an ambiguous messianic figuration through Rudy's links to Torah reading ("*He reads from right to left*" [15.4959]) and Christ ("*A white lambkin peeps out of his waistcoat pocket*" [15.4967]). This latter dream fades with the words "Preparatory to anything else," which open "Eumaeus" (16.1). The dream fades, that is, with actions that exist in a realm of concrete expectation—of knowing what you wait for—bound up with the episode's great theme of suspicion. The question we ask throughout "Eumaeus" and continue to ask in response to its recycled clichés and barely believable rumours of Parnell's rebirth, is whether the novel's Judeo-Irish waiting will find its threshold or, as Benjamin puts it, will exit the empty homogeneous time of imperial history and begin to inhabit "the present as now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time."[68]

"Graven in the Language of Prediction": "Ithaca" and Boredom

Despite Bloom's efforts at refiguring the past, "Sirens" is unable to give us thresholds at which to wait. Its inability to escape the concretising of expectation in Emmet's prophecy might be due to the fact that its prose rings chintzy changes on nostalgic reference and commodified syllables, hardly a strategy for the waiting valorised by Benjamin: "taking in the time and rendering it up in altered form—that of expectation."[69] A prose style more conducive to this emerges in "Cyclops," with its interpolations that take on outsized proportions to the main scene at Barney Kiernan's. But there, the effect is an emphasis on the sentimental myths of the past, developing elaborate mock-mythologies. The pubgoers in Barney Kiernan's cannot take in time and render it up in altered form: they are stuck in arbitrarily limited imaginations for the future, excluding Bloom from their dreamed-of Irish nation. The citizen makes a rapid conflation between Jewish "strangers in our house" (12.1151) and "Saxon robbers":

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[68] Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 4:395–97. For "Eumaeus" and cliché, see Osteen, *The Economy of* Ulysses, 362–63.

[69] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ⟨O°,78⟩.

> The strangers, says the citizen. Our own fault. We let them come in. We brought them in. The adulteress and her paramour brought the Saxon robbers here. (12.1156–59)

Andrew Gibson points out that this conflation registers the assimilation of "the invader's pitiless refusal to imagine otherness […] The capacity for any imaginative leap has been swallowed up by the polarized antagonisms of the colonial context."[70] That "imaginative leap" of genuine futurity outside empire's fixed rosary beads is glimpsed in the more resistant form of waiting in "Ithaca," which transcends empire's pathways, even while it continues to remind us of how we sometimes fail to do so.

"Ithaca" occurs on several thresholds, as Stephen and Bloom arrive at the latter's home, 7 Eccles Street, before taking leave of one another in the garden. In the style of a catechism, the answerer often gives painfully long answers to simple questions, lengthening the time the characters spend on the episode's thresholds. When Bloom first enters the house by the area door below street level, the answerer says that he "allowed his body to move freely in space by separating himself from the railings and crouching in preparation for the impact of the fall" (17.88–89). Not satisfied, the questioner asks, "Did he fall?" (17.90), in response to which the answerer tells us his weight and when he measured it in several different date systems:

> By his body's known weight of eleven stone and four pounds in avoirdupois measure, as certified by the graduated machine for periodical selfweighing in the premises of Francis Froedman, pharmaceutical chemist of 19 Frederick street, north, on the last feast of the Ascension, to wit, the twelfth day of May of the bissextile year one thousand nine hundred and four of the christian era (jewish era five thousand six hundred and sixtyfour, mohammadan era one thousand three hundred and twentytwo), golden number 5, epact 13, solar cycle 9, dominical letters C B, Roman indiction 2, Julian period 6617, MCMIV. (17.90–99)

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[70] Andrew Gibson, *Joyce's Revenge: History, Politics, and Aesthetics in* Ulysses (Oxford University Press, 2002), 53.

It is ironic that only one weight system is given, when that seems more relevant to Bloom's actual fall. The date systems also place us away from the action of falling, taking us back in time to when Bloom's weight was measured. Moreover, Joyce plays with reader expectations of significance here. "Last feast of the Ascension" at least puns on the fact that Bloom is falling, while "jewish era" might promise some kind of religious destiny for Bloom, before this is undermined by conflicting religious calendars. Destiny and teleology, even relevance, are undermined in the pursuit of comprehensiveness. Periphrasis therefore makes the reader wait on the threshold of an action's completion, a recurrent technique in this episode. These devices also spatialise the prose, due to the lack of temporal connections between the items listed. By the fifth date system, the reader might be bored: Fredric Jameson calls "Ithaca" one of the novel's two most boring episodes. But could this bored waiting be a threshold to something transformative, an awakening of the past's dreams?[71] For that to happen, the past's breaths must intermingle with the present, something the episode's overdetailed, matter-of-fact style miraculously achieves, as in the description of how the water flows after Bloom turns the tap on:

> From Roundwood reservoir in county Wicklow of a cubic capacity of 2400 million gallons, percolating through a subterranean aqueduct of filter mains of single and double pipeage constructed at an initial plant cost of £5 per linear yard by way of the Dargle, Rathdown, Glen of the Downs and Callowhill to the 26 acre reservoir at Stillorgan, a distance of 22 statute miles, and thence, through a system of relieving tanks, by a gradient of 250 feet to the city boundary at Eustace bridge, upper Leeson street[.] (17.164–70)

Jameson calls this a movement of "dereification," a return to "the transformation of Nature by human and collective praxis deconcealed."[72] This contact with praxis, with labour that has previously been alienated under exchange value ("£5 per linear yard"), upsets the temporality of the commodity fetish in which material

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[71] Fredric Jameson, "*Ulysses* in History," in *James Joyce and Modern Literature*, ed. W. J. McCormack and Alistair Stead (Routledge, 1982), 126. Its only competition, for Jameson, is "Eumaeus."

[72] Jameson, "*Ulysses* in History," 151.

labour is forgotten, thereby allowing the past upon which the present depends to emerge. Read from the vantage point of 16 June 1904 or 1922 or 2026, this praxis connects us with the Utopian hopes implicit within it—hopes for a world in which it is not alienated. The prose style's periphrasis allows us to consider these dreams: overspecification interrupts a smooth reading process and forces us to remain at the point of praxis. I am inclined to say that here the past is not "objectified," but rather takes on the same solidity as any object in your present. The passage goes on to tell us that "the water had fallen below the sill of the overflow weir" and cites as a reason for this that

> the South Dublin Guardians, notwithstanding their ration of 15 gallons per day per pauper supplied through a 6 inch meter, had been convicted of a wastage of 20,000 gallons per night by a reading of their meter on the affirmation of the law agent of the corporation, Mr Ignatius Rice, solicitor, thereby acting to the detriment of another section of the public, selfsupporting taxpayers, solvent, sound. (17.177–82)

With some knowledge of Dublin geography, a reader of *Ulysses* and *Portrait* may know by now that southern "townships" like Dalkey (where Stephen teaches) and Pembroke (one of the last places the viceregal cavalcade passes [10.795]) tend to be wealthy and Unionist. Dublin's semi-autonomous legal administration (the Corporation) convicting the South Dublin guardians of diverting water from "selfsupporting taxpayers, solvent, sound" on the pretence of supporting Dublin's starving "paupers" suggests a city divided. This is a symptom of colonial tensions, and Anne Marie D'Arcy shows that this issue was interpreted as such.[73] The minute description of the water's path presents the capacities of human activity latent in Dublin, only to have these juxtaposed with a reminder of the extent to which this activity's dreams were not realised and, we may meditate as we are stopped by or choose to stop within this spatialised prose style, still unrealised.

We are therefore brought to wait within the past's persistence into the present, giving us the opportunity to connect this past to a new future that may realise its dreams. In sketching out a "politics of anticipation," Gary Wilder has connected

[73] Anne Marie D'Arcy, "'Vartryville': Dublin's Water Supply and Joyce's Sublation of Local Government," *Joyce Studies Annual* (2013): 271.

Benjamin's weak messianism to Fred Moten's articulation of the practice of "lingering" in black improvisation, lingering within the

> shattering tremble of the improvising ensemble's music. […] Not in the interest of an understanding or adequate representation of the action whose performance would occur in this lingering, but in the interest of an enactive invocation, a material prayer, the dissemination of the conditions of possibility of […] action.[74]

Ornette Coleman is seldom boring, but the same logic applies to the bored waiting we engage in in "Ithaca." Moten allows us to see that when we take up Benjamin's and Lagji's call for abandoning concrete expectation, what should replace it is the transcendental conditions for action, a connection to the past which may feed into some new future.

We may see this process of arriving at the conditions of action in Bloom's "drawer unlocked," which contains items such as

> 2 fading photographs of queen Alexandra of England and of Maud Branscombe, actress and professional beauty: a Yuletide card, bearing on it a pictorial representation of a parasitic plant, the legend *Mizpah*, the date Xmas 1892, the name of the senders: from Mr+Mrs M. Comerford, the versicle: *May this Yuletide bring to thee, Joy and peace and welcome glee* […] a sealed prophecy (never unsealed) written by Leopold Bloom in 1886 concerning the consequences of the passing into law of William Ewart Gladstone's Home Rule Bill of 1886 (never passed into law)[.] (17.1778–90)

By having the political potentials of the past sit alongside these concretions of human belongings—kitschy celebrity worship, imperial fetishism, and the simplest of wishes—we are allowed, especially due to the spatialised prose, to meditate on the connections and disconnections between these. The objects in this

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[74] Fred Moten, *In the Break*: *The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 125. I first encountered Moten's passage in Gary Wilder, "Anticipation," *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon* 3 (2017), https://www.political-concepts.org/anticipation-gary-wilder/.

drawer have a threshold character between precapitalist and imperial capitalist society.[75] On the one hand, they reflect Dublin's world of consumer goods, and the photograph of Alexandra is especially marked as a mass-produced imperial commodity. Nonetheless, just as the overabundant goods in the Ormond Quay reflected the colocation of consumer-based and subsistence-based economies, here we have the marks of time and human use sitting within the reified commodity: the photos fade, the card is marked. This threshold character gives these objects affordances for transformative waiting. The photograph of queen Alexandra reminds us of the complexities of political wishes, how the dreams of the past lie in a complex life not assimilable to something as simple as "Britain is bad, Ireland is good." The 1892 wish reminds us of the recurrence of hopes for happiness, given a political valence due to the fact that it is wishing for "Joy and peace and welcome glee" in a year where there will be another failed home rule bill (1893). Again, we come to see how all action, perhaps especially those expressions of Milly's love for her father lying in the drawer ("drawings, marked *Papli*, which showed a large globular head with 5 hairs erect, 2 eyes in profile, the trunk full front with 3 large buttons, 1 triangular foot" [17.1776–78]), are forms of concrete activity gesturing towards a redemptive political future—what Moten calls "material prayers" with which we can wait.

We then stand before Bloom's "never unsealed" prophecy about the consequences of the 1886 home rule bill. As Saint-Amour has pointed out, this and other seeming prophecies in the novel (such as the passages in "Circe" which Duffy and Kiberd read as presaging the Easter Rising) shouldn't be read solely as gesturing toward the future which *did* come to pass, but also toward futures which didn't.[76] Bloom's prophecy simultaneously gestures towards the future Bloom foresaw in 1886 and the future denied by successive failures of Home Rule bills (1893, 1914, and the 1920 bill that only took effect in Northern Ireland due to the treaty that was settled on instead in the South).[77] The other objects in the drawer lead us to figure this

[75] For an insightful reading of the relationship between the prose of "Ithaca" and commodification, see Matthew Hayward, "Plumtree's Potted Meat: The Productive Error of the Commodity in *Ulysses*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 59, no. 1 (2017): 67–72.

[76] Saint-Amour, "Rising Timely and Untimely," 46. See Duffy, *The Subaltern* Ulysses, 144; Kiberd, Ulysses *and Us*, 156.

[77] Saint-Amour, "Rising Timely and Untimely," 46.

bill not as an isolated action, but as an expression and outcome of concrete actions embodying hopes of redemption. By dwelling on this we come to recognise the futures for Ireland that were in fact possible across its history. This is what Jennifer Wenzel calls a "dilatory" approach to anticolonial prophecies made in the past, temporarily minimising our knowledge of whether they were achieved or not in order to wait with them at the threshold of their possibility.[78] We can also, in line with the different approach I have associated with Bloom in "Sirens," focus on the present. This allows us to recognise that the past persists as death, as failed dreams, and it is the present world system's responsibility to realise those dreams. The recognition of the contingency of what happened, of missed opportunities for redemption across history, is achieved through Joyce making the threshold between what does and does not come to pass a mere prefix, lying between "sealed" and "unsealed," encouraging us to imagine what the latter would mean in its own terms. And yet we can expand the prophecy's modal complexity further, for Bloom is prophesying the *consequences* of the Home Rule Bill's coming to pass, which might have been wrong if it did come to pass. Furthermore, we don't know what Bloom's prophecy was. All of this creates an array of eddying futures for Ireland: Would it be in the Commonwealth in the twenty-first century, or fully independent of Britain? Would it be an Ireland that welcomed the Jewish Bloom, or one that conformed to the citizen's Catholic nationalism? Would it be as deliberately anti-imperialist as the modern Irish Republic's actions towards the genocide in Gaza have demonstrated? And as we trace these out, we realise that Bloom might not have known what he was waiting for—that perhaps, given his sympathy with Arthur Griffith (18.383–86), he might have become a *Sinn Fein* supporter (despite Griffith's anti-Semitism) rather than a Home Ruler, when the former was founded eighteen months after the novel's events.[79] The concrete detail in which the past has been rendered in this drawer transmits its claim to the waiting reader, while the plurality of futures stemming out of that past makes us abandon any one as ultimate and instead leave us with a sense of the contingency of the past and the present—of the fact that we stand on a threshold between the past and a future that may redeem it.

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[78] Wenzel, *Bulletproof*, 183.

[79] Michael Laffan, "Griffith, Arthur Joseph" (2009), in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, https://doi.org/10.3318/dib.003644.v1.

"Ithaca" does not wait, however, at this redemptive waiting, for it also gives us the opportunity to explore further how waiting, even explicitly Utopian waiting, may go awry. Bloom imagines a shared life together, Stephen teaching Molly Italian and having intellectual discussions with Bloom. This is symbolic of a new Irish nation that would incorporate Bloom's Judaism, as they share "fragments of verse from the ancient Hebrew and ancient Irish languages" (17.724–25). But then Stephen sings his anti-Semitic song about "Little Harry Hughes" which, in a grotesque parallel of "The Croppy Boy," tells of a "jew's daughter" murdering a boy (17.813). Bloom has a tragically vivid experience of the song's lyrics: "he heard and saw with wonder a jew's daughter, all dressed in green," and he mentally rehearses how he could be such a killer, how his daughter Milly could (17.830–31). Duffy reads this as parodying the ability of these men to establish a decolonised Ireland, stuck in the racial essentialism we have traced to imperialism's closed-off attitude to otherness.[80] Stephen's horizon for Ireland's future is limited by the same anti-Semitism we saw in Barney Kiernan's, while Bloom's reduction of Stephen to his "ancient Irish" letters engages in just the sort of sentimentalising of the past which we saw in "Sirens," resting easy in the familiar rather than casting itself out on the "void of incertitude" (17.2210–11). No decolonised nation, Duffy claims, can be formed through racial essentialism of the sort the characters engage in here: in the terms of this essay, the characters know exactly what they wait for, stuck imagining the future on the models prescribed by imperial history.[81]

The closest these characters come to a resistant waiting is at the threshold of the garden gate, where they "take leave […] in separation" by "Standing perpendicular at the same door and on different sides of its base, the lines of their valedictory arms, meeting at any point and forming any angle less than the sum of two right angles" (17.1220–23). It takes us a long time to work out that they're shaking hands. The next question is "What sound accompanied the union of their tangent, the disunion of their (respectively) centrifugal and centripetal hands," this indicating that Stephen is moving away, "centrifugal," while Bloom wants to draw Stephen back, "centripetal" (17.1224–25). This stretches out both the characters' already-undermined reconciliation and their valediction, which further crushes

[80] Duffy, *The Subaltern* Ulysses, 172.

[81] Duffy, *The Subaltern* Ulysses, 172–82.

Bloom's dreams of a shared life. "Alone," however, Bloom hears Stephen's feet make the "double reverberation of retreating feet on the heavenborn earth, the double vibration of a jew's harp in the resonant lane" (17.1243–44). This is seemingly a genuine integration, a Jewish version of the symbol of Ireland, born of the failed reconciliations which we and Bloom have lingered on at the garden gate, the harp now ringing independent from the pavingstones of Dublin. Nonetheless, we might see it as an overly abstract form of redemption, akin to what Bloch is speaking of when he claims that products of

> developed and also future-orientated art, science and philosophy […] always denote something more than the false consciousness which each society, bound to its position, had of itself and used for its own development. Rather, these blossoms definitely can be removed from their first socio-historical soil, since they themselves, in essence, are not bound to it.[82]

Bloch is claiming that ruling-class culture is redeemed by being removed from the soil of history—removed from what Benjamin calls the "the anonymous toil of others who lived in the same period," toil which is the true source of "cultural treasures."[83] The jew's harp is not ruling-class culture, but it has the same abstract redemptive power which Bloch praised in such culture and which Benjamin criticised as "barbarism."[84] This is why, for Benjamin, we must return to that "anonymous toil" in seeing the breath of earlier days that pervade our own, and thereby recognise that the unrealised dreams implicit in that toil make claims upon us.

This waiting at the garden gate is unable to connect to the past in its concreteness, continuing the abstraction that characterised Bloom's and Stephen's racial stereotyping. Notably, the mathematical language of Stephen's and Bloom's departure does not preserve the past in the way that other forms of Ithacan periphrasis do. Despite glimpses of resistant waiting in the characters' lives in *Ulysses*, like Bloom at the end of "Sirens" and Stephen meditating on historical

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[82] Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 1:154–55.

[83] Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 4:391–92.

[84] Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 4:392.

possibility, they do not finally depart from fixed imaginings of an Irish future. It is therefore up to the reader to wait with the concretions of the past we do experience in "Ithaca" and in *Ulysses* as a whole, and, recognising their contingency, feel their claims to create a new, redemptive future.