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22

JOYSPACE
JAMES JOYCE AND SPACE

Edited by
Roberto Baronti Marchiò

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AN IVORY TOWER WITHIN AN IVORY TOWER –
INVENTED SPACE IN JAMES JOYCE'S *ULYSSES*

Abstract: The Ivory Tower, an imaginary space, a haven, existing in one's dreams rather than physically, has been a reoccurring literary symbol throughout history. This paper deals with the modern-day metaphoric use of the Ivory Tower as a literary symbol in *Ulysses*. James Joyce employs the Ivory Tower metaphor in order to construct a space within a space for his characters in *Ulysses*. The aim of this article is to establish a connection between Molly Bloom's mental state in 'Penelope' and the life events that led to her escapism, arguing that she resorts to self-isolation as a mechanism of defense. In her daydreams, Molly builds an Ivory Tower, to which she retreats whenever she needs protection from the real world. Additionally, the paper determines the whole 'Penelope' episode, the house in 7 Eccles Street and the bed in the Bloom bedroom with Molly in it as another Ivory Tower to which Bloom refuges when it becomes too demanding to deal with reality. Hence, in 'Penelope' a Tower is constructed within a Tower, an imaginary space within an imaginary space limited by real-life boundaries.

Keywords: Molly Bloom, Leopold Bloom, Ivory tower, Imaginary space, *Ulysses*

Introduction

The first reference to the Ivory Tower is found in the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament (Bull 1999, Skowronek and Lewis 2010). Although the first usages have a descriptive and comparative character, its metaphorical meaning later on became an allusion for Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus (Bull 1999). The Ivory Tower (*turris eburnea*), pure, strong, withstanding, converted into a symbol for Virgin Mary who stood next to the cross, tall as a tower, graceful, pristine, while her son was tortured to death (Shapin 2012).

Shapin (2012) argues that ivory, in all probability, has always been connected to the imaginary world as in Greek ivory is *elephas*, whereas to cheat or deceive is *elephairo* which gives room to wordplay, through which “[t]he artist deceives you, takes you away from the real” (2012: 2). An example of daydreaming and ivory together is found in Homer’s *Odyssey* where Penelope aches for her husband’s return, connecting it to passing through ivory gates. However, in a nineteenth-century poem, Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve first employed the Ivory Tower metaphor to denote an imaginary place where someone is happily isolated from the rest of the world (Shapin 2012). From then onwards, the Ivory Tower has often been used as a modern-day metaphor for a fantasy retreat.

James Joyce first mentions the Ivory Tower in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), referring to the Virgin Mary, “Tower of Ivory, they used to say, House of Gold” (1916: 36) (Shapin 2012). Parting from the assumption that Joyce is a master of deception, this paper deals with the modern-day metaphoric use of the Ivory Tower as a literary symbol in *Ulysses*, according to which the Tower represents an imaginary space in one’s mind. Underlining the parallels between Molly Bloom and Virgin Mary and pointing out to the differences in the composition of the ‘Penelope’ episode when compared to the rest of the novel, the paper intends to establish Molly Bloom as the Ivory Tower. Molly Bloom, the Bloom household at 7 Eccles Street and the old bed in their bedroom represent a safe haven for Leopold Bloom, his place of retreat, but at the same time a place from which he tries to escape. In addition, Molly, through self-isolation, time-travel and daydreaming, builds a space of her own, her own Tower. Nevertheless, Molly’s Ivory Tower is less tangible than Bloom’s as it consists of memories and dreams.

Mr. Bloom’s Ivory Tower

The Blooms are first introduced in an episode ironically called ‘Calypso’, from which it is gathered that Bloom is possessed by his wife in the same way Odysseus is trapped by Calypso, “[h]e dots upon every aspect and attends to every whim of his wife” (Fargnoli and Gillespie 2006: 172). The old jingly bed, which Molly contemplates in, is mentioned for the first time

in 'Calypso' and it travels "[a]ll the way from Gibraltar" (*U* 4.60) like Molly. The bed seems to be a vessel which takes both characters to their Ivory Towers.

It is impossible to talk about Bloom without mentioning Molly since his thoughts are constantly about her. Throughout the day as Bloom runs errands, in his mind, he constantly goes back to Molly, obsessed with the letter she receives in the morning which confirms his suspicion that she has a lover. Stone (1965) suggests that the situation for Bloom is humiliating and exciting at the same time. From Bloom's thoughts it is gathered that Molly is from Gibraltar, that she knows a little bit of Spanish, if any, that she sings, that she will go on a tour with her lover and that they have lost their son. The way Molly is introduced through the eyes of others, chained to her bed and banished to her house (Raleigh 1977, Quick 1990), makes her untouchable and secluded. And although there are hints that Molly has had 26 lovers, in reality there is evidence only for one, Bloom (Callow 1990). The only person who has access to Molly is Bloom, he even "controls the money in the household" (Callow 1990: 468) and she depends on him. Bloom grants access to others like Boylan for example, as he is aware of the extramarital relationships his wife has, therefore he plays the role of Molly's dungeon keeper.

Molly becomes Bloom's Ivory Tower as he constantly resorts to her in times of need and sorrow (Schwaber 1983). Bloom idealizes Molly and is fascinated by her (Schwaber 1983) and every thought he dedicates to her is a fond memory. We see Molly only through Bloom's eyes, therefore she is only his. Cut off from the rest of the world she stays at home (Callow 1990: 468) and represents a safe space to which Bloom retreats when the reality becomes too harsh, she is his Ivory Tower. Nonetheless, he intends to break free from his Ivory Tower by twice forgetting the key to the Bloom household, "cheating on" Molly with Martha, observing other women voyeuristically, pleasing himself on the beach while watching Gerty or visiting the brothel. None of these help as he ends up comparing Martha, Gerty, Bella Cohen and all the others to Molly, and each time Molly wins. Eventually, Bloom returns to his sanctuary, to Molly, to the Ivory Tower, drawn by its charms, without the key, he jumps over the gates and occupies his designated place in the old jingly bed.

Molly Bloom's Ivory Tower

Plot-wise, *Ulysses* finishes with 'Ithaca', the style drastically changes in 'Penelope' and the main characters are no longer Bloom and Stephen Dedalus, but Molly Bloom. In some editions, there is even a large dot after 'Ithaca' (Aliyev 2020). The story line, which moves in space across Dublin from 'Telemachus' to 'Ithaca', statically stands in 'Penelope', confined to 7 Eccles Street, the Bloom bedroom and the old jingly bed, which Molly leaves only once during her soliloquy (Raleigh 1977, Quick 1990). Quintelli-Neary (2009: 158) points out that "Molly, in contrast [to Bloom and Stephen], is a static creature rooted in the natural world rather than the intellectual one". Therefore, the Bloom household with Molly in it, becomes an enchanted place, the Ivory Tower, to which Bloom is driven and from which he tries to escape through his indiscretions, perversions and wanderings.

According to Attridge (1989: 546), Joyce employs "a very different set of conventions to represent Molly's thoughts from that utilized earlier for Stephen, Leopold, and [...] other characters". The first 17 episodes mostly follow the timeline of 16 June 1904, while episode 18 embarks on a time travel into past and future. It could be argued that based on the way Joyce structured the last episode he meant for it to stand apart as if it were a tower, thereby contrasting it to the Martello Tower which appears in the first episode of *Ulysses*. However, unlike the Martello Tower which stands at Sandycove Point in Dublin where Joyce spent six nights in 1904 (Bowker 2012), the Ivory Tower exists in a purely metaphorical sense.

In order to locate Molly's Ivory Tower, we need to take a look at her origins. Allegedly, Marion (Molly) Bloom is a daughter of Major Brian Cooper Tweedy and Lunita Laredo. She was born on 8 September 1870 and she shares her name (French diminutive for Mary) and date of birth with Virgin Mary (Herring 1978, Boyle 1997, Aliyev 2020). Lunita Laredo is presumably a Spanish Jew of Sephardic origin, although there are indications that Molly's mother is of Moorish origin coming from Morocco (Herring 1978, Stewart 1991). Quick (1990) indicates that Carmen, a gypsy smuggler might be Molly's mother. Bella Cohen, the brothel's Madam, who Bloom sees as an older version of Molly and whose surname coincides with the surname of the previous owner of Molly's bed, might be another

possibility for Molly's mother (Raleigh 1977, Quick 1990). Molly learns about her mother from her father who is not a trustworthy person, thus Molly herself is unsure of her lineage, "my mother whoever she was" (*U* 18.846-7) and tends to invent facts which she cannot know for certain, "I've my mothers eyes and figure" (*U* 18.890-1), making her personal identity fluctuate. Not knowing her mother's origins, she does not know her own either – hints of being Jewish, Catholic, Muslim. Molly believes Bloom is first drawn to her "on account of [her] being jew looking after [her] mother" (*U* 18.1184-5). However, she hides the possibility of being Jewish from him, "he hadnt an idea about my mother till we were engaged otherwise hed never have got me so cheap as he did" (*U* 18.282-4).

Although the Virgin Mary references (e.g. date of birth and name) could take us directly to the Ivory Tower metaphor, probably a better connection represents Molly's seclusion. Growing up as an illegitimate daughter of an Irish officer serving at a military base in Gibraltar in the 19th century, Molly is stigmatized and isolated from an early age, which contradicts her idyllic childhood memories of "the Alameda gardens yes and all the queer little streets and the pink and blue and yellow houses and the rosegardens and the jessamine and geraniums and cactuses and Gibraltar as a girl where [she] was a Flower of the mountain" (*U* 18.1602-3). She neither belongs to the garrison where the story of her mother must be known, nor the Spanish village, where she is surely seen as a foreigner of Irish origins. Apart from being motherless, Molly lacks fatherly love and presence as the Major is often away on duty. At the age of 16, she moves to Dublin with her father, probably in order to have a better chance of getting married. Dublin is yet another place where she might feel isolated and out of place, as she is a foreigner of exotic origins. Even her profession (an opera singer) is uncommon for a woman at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Molly does not fit in anywhere, which makes her shut herself up in her fictional world, in her Ivory Tower. Desperately looking for love, at the age of 18 she marries an older and somewhat strange Bloom, who himself is an outcast – a Jew who gets christened.

Life circumstances make Molly have a distorted, idealized opinion about love. She accepts the incomplete and strange Bloom for her husband in search of love and attention. Her great desire for attention and love

makes her write love letters to herself, “I wish somebody would write me a love letter” (*U* 18.735-6). Not receiving the attention she seeks for from Bloom, she resorts to promiscuity (openly flirting, seducing, taking men to bed, changing partners, dreaming of new partners), “I gave my eyes that look with my hair a bit loose from the tumbling and my tongue between my lips up to him the savage brute” (*U* 18.592-4). The moment she realizes that her lover Boylan is not treating her as someone he loves but as an object of pure pleasure, in her thoughts she returns to Bloom and their strange relationship.

‘Penelope’ begins *in media res* (Cohn 1978) as if the readers are already familiar with Molly’s past and present (through Bloom they partially are) to the point that everything she states in her soliloquy is a mere reminder of what is already known. Molly’s soliloquy begins and ends with a “yes”, thereby it is circular, rounded (McBride 1979), like a base of a tower. It stands apart from the rest of the novel, isolated, with the rhythmic, smooth, unpunctuated water-like flow of thoughts (French 1976, Bolt 1981, Hayman 1982, Henke 1978). Additionally, it is spiral, and built from the bottom (the past), upwards (to the future).

The flow (the structure of the Ivory Tower) is entered on ground level (the present), whereas the past is placed in an underground, basement space (subconscious and memories) and the future appears in the form of dreams and daydreams, extending towards the clouds, the sky, placed in the attic. As the door of the Ivory Tower opens, we become familiar not only with the space inside Molly’s house but also with the space cherished in her heart and mind. Molly’s mind works in random circles (Henke 1988), waving the texture of the Tower, as she opens door by door, each time she embarks on a journey full of memories. Hints and clues are scattered around; her past is barely grasped when she closes the door. No one is truly let inside to explore on their own and find the hidden skeletons in Molly’s wardrobes, not even Bloom from whom she hides numerous facts (e.g., the true story of her bed). According to Schwaber (1983: 773) “Molly Bloom remains at least and always a structure of words”. Thus, Molly remains a mythological creature, a nymph, untouchable, even for Bloom, who is obsessed with her and drawn to her habitat, the Ivory Tower, where he feels safe and in a strange way loved.

The bed, which travels with Molly from Gibraltar, as we first hear from Bloom in 'Calypso', is her only connection to her origins since it hides the truth, "the bed of conception and of birth, of consummation of marriage and breach of marriage, of sleep and of death" (*U* 17.2119-21). Allegedly, Major Tweedy buys the old bed for Molly at an auction of the property of Lord Napier, the Governor of Gibraltar, which is the version Bloom knows. However, Molly knows that it is not true and that the bed belonged to old Cohen, who she evidently knew well. For some reason or other she hides the true story of the bed from Bloom, "the lumpy old jingly bed always reminds me of old Cohen I suppose he scratched himself in it often enough and he thinks father bought it from Lord Napier [...] because I told him" (*U* 18.1212-15) (Raleigh 1977, Quick 1990).

The only time Molly leaves her bed throughout the 'Penelope' episode is when she uses the chamber pot (Sternlieb 1998). She eats her breakfast in bed, which is brought to her by Bloom, who additionally opens the window blinds and brings her mail to bed and runs errands around town for her (e.g., looks for a book she wants). Hence, Bloom represents Molly's connection to reality, her bridge to the rest of the world.

The mechanisms of psychological defense force Molly to flee into her own world, each new disappointment leading further to escapism and narcissism (McBride 1979, Henke 1988). The lack of a mother, departure of her best friend Hester, moving to Dublin, loss of a child make her isolate herself even more (Henke 1988). Molly longs for love and when she does not find it, through daydreaming, she escapes into her own world and closes the door behind her, builds a wall and cuts all ties with reality. She exists exclusively in the realm of her home at 7 Eccles Street, where she is tied to her maiden bed with unbreakable and invisible bonds. The realm of her world and her household represent her Ivory Tower, her safe retreat, a place Joyce built for her. As Molly opts for self-seclusion and a make-believe world in which she retreats to her Ivory Tower, Bloom becomes her connection with the real world and in return she becomes his Ivory Tower.

Mutual Ivory Tower

Ellmann (1982: 501) argues that ‘Penelope’ is the center of *Ulysses*, “the clou”, while Callow (1992: 160) believes that Bloom is “the clou” a “center of attraction”. Molly and Leopold Bloom are mutually connected, representing each other’s central focus and as Ferrara (1972: 57) suggests, “Molly dreams and is dreamt”. Molly’s soliloquy begins and ends with thoughts about Bloom. She compares her lover Boylan to Bloom only to decide that her husband is a better choice. Similarly, Molly never leaves Bloom’s mind throughout the day. He obsessively ponders upon their relationship as he wonders around Dublin. For Bloom, Molly is a shelter from reality, whereas for Molly, Bloom is the only connection with the real world.

Mutual (inter)connection of the Blooms is expressed through several quirky bodily functions and thoughts which underline the possibility of their mutually created world in the form of an Ivory Tower. As Molly meets with Boylan and reaches a sexual climax Bloom’s watch stops, “[w]as that just when he, she? O, he did. Into her. She did. Done” (*U* 13.849). Both Bloom and Molly masturbate or think about masturbation, he on the beach, voyeuristically, she while remembering a past experience with a banana. He reaches a climax as he watches Gerty, she thinks that Boylan could satisfy her. According to Lang (1993), Bloom concentrates on the male sexual organ while urinating in ‘Ithaca’, whereas Molly does the same in ‘Penelope’, concentrating on the female organ while on the chamber pot (Henke 1988). Additionally, both Molly and Bloom focus on the beauties of the female body, she believes it is “plump”, “tempting” (*U* 18.1378), “all perfume” (*U* 18.1608), “so round and white” (*U* 18.1380), he finds it “plump mellow yellow smellow” (*U* 17.2241). The smell of menstrual blood for him is “[p]otted herrings gone stale” (*U* 13.1031), for her it is “such a mixture of plum and apple” (*U* 18.1535).

Moreover, they both menstruate, she gets her period while urinating and Rice (1997) suggests that Bloom too menstruates and is hence “a finished example of the new womanly man” (*U* 15.45). If Bloom truly menstruates, he is unique, and through his period he is connected to Molly, together they are one of a kind. Furthermore, as Molly’s cycle begins a week earlier it may be implied that she and Bloom are experiencing a

period of better understanding as their menstrual cycles synchronize. Although it has not been fully proven or disproven that women who live together and/or are socially close tend to go through menstrual synchrony (McClintock 1971, Wilson, Kiefhaber and Gravel 1991, McClintock 1998, Strassmann 1999, Harris and Vitzthum 2013), it may be hinted that the Blooms are experiencing menstrual synchrony as Bloom is aware of the synchrony.

How many women in Dublin have it today? Martha, she. Something in the air. That's the moon. But then why don't all women menstruate at the same time with the same moon, I mean? Depends on the time they were born I suppose. Or all start scratch then get out of step. Sometimes Molly and Milly together. (*U* 13.781-5)

Perhaps the culmination is reached when Bloom gives birth to 8 children in 'Circe', thereby becoming completely connected to Molly, as the only man that can feel what she felt with Milly and Rudy. Additionally, the number of children being 8 links to Molly's birthday on 8 September. Furthermore, the 'Penelope' episode consists of 8 long sentences, and finally number 8 from a different perspective is the infinity sign ∞ , suggesting an infinite overlapping between the two. On 8 October 1904 Joyce and Nora embarked on a journey to Europe, hence this number might even indicate that *Ulysses* is Joyce's Ivory Tower, a world he builds for himself to escape reality, filled with real-life characters and events.

Attridge (2000: 115) suggests that "the marriage of Molly and Leopold is also cemented by that which divides them". She has a lover, but he is excited by the thought of her having a lover. Thus, her "betrayal is [ironically] an act of loyalty" (Hall 1990: 582). According to Aliyev (2020), Molly is with Boylan in order to make Bloom jealous. Shechner (1974: 207) describes Molly as "Booms betrayer and his avenger", "an adulteress and a 'fair tyrant'". Parrinder (1984) believes that the emotional estrangement between the Blooms has led them to unorthodox sexual behaviour, she seeks lovers, whereas he masturbates, enjoys in perversions (voyeurism, coprophilia, sexual fantasy). The odd relationship of the Blooms depicts a strange reality in which they live, their household, their minds and hearts represent spaces where they both feel safe and escape from reality. They seem to be society outcasts and as such, they can only

find comfort within the space of their Ivory Towers, an imaginary place they build for themselves separately and together.

Conclusion

Throughout *Ulysses*, Leopold and Molly Bloom are seen as two peculiar individuals. On the one hand, Bloom is a Jew who converts to Christianity, hence he is a social outcast with a series of quirks. On the other hand, Molly, uncertain who her mother was suffers the lack of parental love. Bloom has lived on the margins of Dublin society because of his religion until socially much more popular Molly comes along. At the same time, Molly has been isolated because of her origins, until Bloom accepts her by marrying her without questioning her roots. The Blooms have found safety and love in each other's arms, no matter how complicated and entangled their relationship is. She tolerates his perversions, while he overlooks her unfaithfulness. It appears that they find mutual understanding above all, knowing that the other one has experienced seclusion and discrimination, so together they rise above it all. Life events have made the Blooms depend on each other – by building defense mechanisms they cope with reality. Their strange sexual relationship and the perversions and fetishes they foster have provided an outlet, a clandestine secret they share. However, through mechanisms of defense they escape into their imaginary worlds in which they feel safe and where they build Ivory Towers, enchanted spaces, their mysterious refuges. For Bloom, Molly, their household and the old jingly bed is a safe haven, an Ivory Tower, when attacked, sad or worried he runs in his mind to his wife and the days when their relationship was happier. Molly, on the other hand, escapes into a space built in her mind, a space full of memories and dreams, where she idealizes her youth and her life with Bloom before losing her second child. The way Joyce constructs the 'Penelope' episode, stylistically, plot-wise and structurally, he makes it clear that 'Penelope' is an isolated space which holds an imaginary place within its boundaries. The way the Blooms live, it becomes clear that their relationship and household represent a mutual Ivory Tower to which they can escape together when the reality becomes too harsh.

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