

## **More Than a throwaway? Sporting Parodies in the Novels of James Joyce**

### **Introduction and theoretical framework**

Given the abundance of thematic content in Joyce's novels, most notably his engagement with religion, language, music, politics, and literature, it is unsurprising that sport also features in his work. Partly this is due to Joyce's commitment to realism and an understanding that sport played a significant role in the cultural lives of the Dubliners he wrote about. Fiercely opposed to British imperialism, Joyce nevertheless took a keen interest in many of the team sports first developed in Britain. Despite his own physical unsuitability to the game, rugby became one of his main sporting interests in later life. When he was living in Paris, Joyce regularly attended international matches featuring Ireland and was reputed to have an extensive knowledge of professional rugby players (Fallon 52-53). A clue as to how Joyce obtained this knowledge of sport is provided by Levin, who reports that Joyce "subscribed to Dublin sporting papers" (32) while living abroad. Joyce's knowledge of sport is very much an everyman's knowledge, garnered from the press and no doubt developed in discussions in the bars he frequented in Paris, Trieste, Zurich, and elsewhere.

As a native of Dublin, Joyce would have been aware of the contradictions involved in embracing British sports to the extent he did. As he poured so much of himself into his novels, the parodies that are a primary mode of his writing also take the form of knowing self-deprecation. This article examines some of the sports that Joyce included in his texts, especially cricket, hockey, and horseracing, all of which were introduced by the British into Ireland. It asks the questions, to what purpose does Joyce use sport in his texts and how is that purpose fulfilled? To furnish an answer, the theoretical orientation of the paper is derived from Phiddian's contention that "parody and deconstruction are secretly the same thing" (673). Joyce was a supreme parodist whose texts not only (under)mined the archive of English literature but also the cultural heritages of Ireland, from its ancient myths through to

obsession with the nationalist “revival.” Through his novels, Joyce was aiming to force the Irish people to see themselves in his “nicely polished looking-glass” (Gilbert 64). But Joyce’s looking-glass was a fractured one, providing a multi-faceted reflection in which he hoped his readers would see their shattered reality. It is not an exaggeration to say that parody for the purpose of “spiritual liberation” (62-3) was the vaulting ambition for Joyce’s novels, his city, country, and its people.

The basis of Phiddian’s argument that parody and deconstruction occupy the same ground rests on the claim that deconstruction is a “thoroughgoing rhetoric of traces and absences in language, a theory of textuality, and a powerful ... way of reading” (674). His objective is to reclaim deconstruction from the abstract aridity into which much Derridean-inspired criticism has fallen and to rescue the playfulness that allows it to expose the “gaps, blindnesses, contradictions, and aporias in texts that make naïve claims to truth, beauty, reason, structures, progresses, mimesis, and the like” (674). Deconstruction has been put to political use to expose the latent vectors of power that inhabit texts, critiquing authority and the ideological structures that support it. Advocates of deconstructive strategies insist that critique can never be made from a position of externality, but, by necessity, must be mounted from within the same formations of language and power that it is seeking to undermine. Deconstructive reading exposes the contingency of all claims to truth and asserts that all texts are “caught up in a tissue of echo, allusion, appropriation, and misprision” (680). In other words, it sounds a lot like a James Joyce novel. Likewise, parody inhabits the texts from which it purports to take reference. Indeed, parody only works if the reader recognizes the texts that sit behind it. As Phiddian notes, “parodies *deconstruct* the discourses they invade; they do not blankly *destroy* the discourses on which, parasitically and critically, they live” (682). Parody works intertextually, forever deforming, deferring, and distorting its models in a play of difference, but the parodist remains aware that language also connects to the world albeit in ways that are

never on firm or certain ground. For the reader, a parody incites a perpetual oscillation between signifier and referent, neither of which can be grasped whole, each being warped through mutual interaction. The gaps, aporias, contradictions and incongruities that are exposed through playful parodic interpretations provide the fragments of Joyce's fractured looking-glass that reflect images of the perpetually deferred space between text and materiality. As Phiddian perceptively observes, "Dublin is textualized in *Ulysses*, but its sounds and smells and the people continue to exist even as they become mythopoetic wraiths, infinitely deferred in the parody" (692).

In this article, I will examine how Joyce deploys sport as part of his mission to raise a mirror to the people of his home city and its country. Following a review of a selection of existing literature on Joyce and sport, I will examine how Joyce deploys cricket and rugby in the opening chapter of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, arguing that the episode should be read as a parody of the classic English *Bildungsroman*, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. Joyce subverts the tropes of the genre while acknowledging the influence of the text, its sporting pursuits, and the cultural ideologies that it exemplifies. Joyce may be "writing back" against British cultural hegemony in Ireland but he does so by parodying its culture so that neither Britain nor Ireland remain stable as national identities. *Ulysses* provides much more sporting material through which Joyce's parodies work to expose the double standards of the British while also rejecting the mission of the Irish nationalist revival to recreate an Ireland on a mythical imagined past. Through his use of the sport of hockey in the opening episodes of the text, and especially the central narrative feature of the Royal Ascot Gold Cup, he exposes the contradictions in colonial and nationalist discourses. A primary vehicle for his biting parodies in *Ulysses* comes in the shape of Leopold Bloom, a character of shattered subjectivities, who helps to unravel the fictions that sustain those discourses.

### **Joyce and sport in the literature**

A small literature dedicated to the analysis of sport in Joyce can be found in the thickets of academic output on Joyce. Among the most notable contributions, Sultan identified the central importance to *Ulysses*' narrative structure of the Gold Cup that was run on 16 June 1904, the day that Joyce set the novel.<sup>1</sup> Sultan draws parallels between the horse race, won by 20-1 outsider *Throwaway*, with the race being reluctantly run by Bloom on the same day in his contest with Hugh "Blazes" Boylan, his rival for the sexual affections of Bloom's wife, Molly. Building on Sultan's argument for the importance of the Gold Cup to the novel, Slack contends that the rituals surrounding the race, especially those of betting on the result, locate the novel within wider social practices that help bind together the characters of *Ulysses*. Shea also highlights the role of gambling in *Ulysses*, uncovering the politics and precarious economics that sustain gambling as a cultural force in early twentieth-century Dublin. Taking the perspective of the way the race is recounted in the novel, Loveridge notes that the daily newspapers that report the race offer startlingly different accounts, thereby questioning the reliability not just of those specific texts, but of all such narratives.

With respect to the multiple references to boxing in *Ulysses*, Mitchell comments on the reference to the "Great Fight" of 1860 between British boxer Sayers, and Heenan, his Irish counterpart. The fight ended in a draw after forty-two rounds although the British press "saw it as a victory for their man, by dint of his accurate punching" (22). Joyce also introduces a fictional fight between Keogh and Bennett, another contest between Irish and British fighters. On this occasion, Joyce ensures that the Irish fighter wins the bout. However, the parodic mode of the passage immediately undermines any notion that Joyce was making a simplistic nationalist point: in parody there are no final winners or losers, and everyone gets to fight another day. Davison continues the theme by noticing that Joyce has smuggled in a third boxing reference to a British-Irish "grudge match" when, in the "Ithaca" chapter of the novel, Bloom mentions the name of Daniel Mendoza, an English-Jewish fighter. Mendoza had

defeated an Irish amateur boxer in 1791 as part of a boxing tour. It is noticeable that each of the boxing references in *Ulysses* is united by the theme of nationalistic contest between Ireland and Britain, but, critically, with no clear overall winner that can be identified. Brown perceptively seeks to locate boxing in Joyce, especially the fictional Keogh-Bennett fight, with what Sayers describes as the “nationalism, anglo- and xenophobia, and cultural isolation” (283) of protagonists of the so-called “Irish revival” of the late nineteenth century. Joyce especially had in mind Michael Cusack, founder of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), whom he ridiculed as the short-sighted and cantankerous citizen in the “Cyclops” episode of *Ulysses*.

Continuing the premise of sport in Joyce’s novels as a code for national antagonisms, Pierce argues that in his deployment of cricket in his texts, Joyce refuses to succumb to the simple idea of sport as national jingoism. Pierce notes that Joyce’s use of cricket “constitutes an act of refusal and defiance; a refusal to toe the nationalistic line and an act of defiance against the English imperialist who sought to wrap a flag around the game” (167). McGarrity extends Pierce’s argument that, in its export to its former colonies and adoption in those countries by indigenous populations, cricket embodies a “complexity of cultural identity” (577) that cannot be reduced to national chauvinism. Bateman also notes that, “in the work of James Joyce, the appearance of cricket suggests that the cultural baggage of colonialism had a more ambiguous role in the context of colonial and immediately postcolonial Ireland” (84). In his analysis of cricket in *Finnegans Wake* (1992), Atherton observes that “Joyce seems to have resented the almost religious respect which many English people have for the game and associated this aspect of it with those platitudes about ‘keeping a straight bat’ and ‘playing the game’ which are sometimes regarded as the most unpleasantly hypocritical parts of the English character” (55). There is little doubt that Joyce was fully aware of the dissonance between the value of fair play that the English proclaimed for cricket and themselves, and the

lived reality of English imperialism, which was often brutal and murderous, not least in Ireland.

### **Cricket in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man***

Although brief mention of cricket is made in *Dubliners* in “An Encounter,” where Mahoney, the companion in the schoolboy truancy adventure, wears a cricket badge, the quintessentially English sport features most prominently in the opening chapter of *Portrait*. The game appears initially as the sign of summer, with football giving way to cricket (41), and again at the end of the chapter where Stephen can “hear the bump of the balls: and from here and from there through the quiet air the sound of the cricket bats: pick, pack, pock: like drops of water in a fountain falling softly in the brimming bowl” (61). McGarrity argues that in these representations of the game, Joyce “uses the game as a marker of both isolation and belonging” (576). It is significant that Stephen does not actually see a game or participate in one, but only hears the familiar sounds of willow on leather, which “insist on their being heard or noticed” (Pierce 163).

It is this insistence on sport that intrudes into the life of Stephen that is critical. Both Pierce and Ryan note the similarities between *Portrait* and the classic *Bildungsroman*, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. Thomas Hughes' ode to the English public schools helped to enshrine modern sports and their attendant ideologies in late nineteenth-century British public imagination (Bateman; Boddice; Gathorne-Hardy; Harvey, “*Tom Brown's*”). The first chapter of *Portrait* can be read productively as a parody of *Tom Brown*. Both Tom and Stephen, at the tender age of six, are keen to start their public-school career: Tom at Rugby; Stephen, like Joyce, at Clongowes Wood. Both boys are sent off with words of fatherly advice. Whereas Tom internalizes and follows the paternal words, Stephen, in defiance of his father's injunction “never to peach on a fellow” (6), reports Father Dolan, the prefect of studies, to Father Conmee, the rector, for an unfair beating he had received. While Tom took such beatings in

his stride as a “character-building” fact of public-school life, Stephen was filled with humiliating shame as well as corporal pain. Stephen’s own understanding that he had been heroic in going to see the rector is brutally crushed when he later finds out from his father that Fathers Conmee and Dolan had found his intervention to be merely comical. Further, in a theme that recurs in public-school life throughout the Victorian and Edwardian eras, and to reinforce the point that Joyce parodically excavates the same cultural terrain as Hughes, rumors of illicit schoolboy same-sex desire permeate *Tom Brown* as well as *Portrait*’s first chapter.

The parodic parallels between the texts can be seen in sharp relief in the respective treatment of sport. Both boys are introduced to a form of rugby in their early days at school, but while physically robust Tom helps his side to win with a piece of individual bravery, fragile Stephen spends his time trying to avoid both the ball and other players. Whereas in the alternative semi-autobiographical text, *Stephen Hero*, Stephen is seen playing handball, Joyce removed this scene from *Portrait*, thus ensuring, in the words of Ryan, that “the hero’s aversion to sport for either union or nation, first signalled in his representation of the young Stephen’s indifference to rugby at Clongowes, is underscored” (119). The first chapter of *Portrait* ends with Stephen hearing a game of cricket being played in the distance, while Tom concludes his schooldays as captain of the first eleven. Whereas Tom unblinkingly takes his place at the heart of English culture, Stephen is semi-detached from it even as it calls to him.

Joyce understood that “cricket was like the language he used, the language of the oppressor, but also the vehicle of self-expression, the weapon for writing back” (Pierce 168). The irony, of which Joyce was fully aware, was that he was also a product of the colonizer’s culture. In his parodic allusions to *Tom Brown*, Joyce reiterates the insistent intrusion of British ethos in Irish society and of English literature into his own text. As a schoolboy, Joyce was an able cricketer at Clongowes, who “promised to be an able bat. He still took an interest in the game

when he was at Belvedere, and eagerly studied the feats of Ranji and Fry, Trumper and Spofforth” (S. Joyce 41). He continued to take an interest in cricket and other sports throughout his life. “Forging the uncreated conscience of his race” (*Portrait*, 276) which was the stated aim of Stephen (and Joyce), could only take place through a politics in which the colonialist’s influence - its culture and sports - welcome or not, would always be a constituent part of Ireland and the Irish. “Writing back” would necessarily be in the language of the colonizer, especially when taking the form of parody which relies for its deconstructive force through an occupation of its host’s texts. An irony that would not have been lost on Joyce was that his high literary text inhabits the same genre as Hughes’ execrably ingenuous writing. Nor that Hughes’ novel, which had sold over 600,000 copies by the end of the century (and has never been out of print since), was a staple of middle-class households and arguably helped create the conscience of *his* race in way that Joyce could only imagine (Harvey, “Teamwork” 136-7).

### **Hockey and cricket in *Ulysses***

References to multiple sports can be found in *Ulysses*, flashing up in the text with remarkable, if intermittent, insistence. Joyce alludes to over twenty different sports or games, including hockey, cricket, cycling, bowls, horseracing, billiards, boxing, Gaelic sports, hurling, shot putting, tennis, fives, rugby, football, fox hunting, boat racing, motor racing, gymnastics, bodybuilding, calisthenics, parlor games, ‘flop’ wrestling, fishing, swimming, bullfighting, and trotting matches. Sport first makes an intrusion into the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> June 1904 early in “Nestor.” Stephen is teaching at Mr. Deasy’s school and his young charges remind him that Thursday is a half day with “hockey at ten, sir” (25). Sport finally bows out of the novel deep into Molly Bloom’s oceanic concluding interior monologue, where she opines (at least to herself) that, unlike men, you never see women “gambling every penny they have and losing it on horses” (678). And the purported winning and losing on



horses, notably the Royal Ascot Gold Cup, won in the “real world” that day by *Throwaway*, provides a central theme that takes in major and minor characters, most notably her husband, Leopold Bloom.

Stephen Dedalus, whose early encounters with sport in *Portrait* are described above, returns two years older in *Ulysses*. The intervening period between *Portrait* and *Ulysses* does not seem to have changed Stephen’s attitude toward sport to any great degree as he recalls his dislike for sport at school. Yet, the text insists that he is not wholly immune to the persistent call of sport. In the episode, Stephen dismisses his students to go play hockey and their game continues within earshot of Stephen and the headteacher, Mr. Deasy, and intrudes itself into his consciousness:

Shouts rang shrill from the boy’s playfield and a whirring whistle.

Again: a goal. I am among them, among their battling bodies in a medley,  
the joust of life. You mean that knockkneed mother’s darling who seems to  
be slightly crawsick? (29)

In this passage, Stephen seems to regret the physical frailties that make him unsuited to vigorous sporting pursuits. Here we can draw parallels to Joyce’s own early life as it is reported by one of his friends that Joyce would often start a game of football only to withdraw from the game due to his unsuitability to such robust pursuits but he would stay to watch from the touchline, clearly still interested in the game (Fallon 46).

Later in the same chapter, Stephen appears to acknowledge the emerging cultural importance of sport, to the extent that when he is debating the “ways of the Creator” with Mr. Deasy he says, jerking a thumb toward the window:

-That is God.

Hooray! Ay! Whrrwhee!

-What? Mr Deasy asked.

-A shout in the street, Stephen answered, shrugging his shoulders (32).

Of course, it was a shout from the playing field which he must have known all too well, having referred to it by jerking his thumb toward the window. Nevertheless, he seems to be indicating that history is flowing inexorably away from the British Protestant elite and toward the era of ordinary people in the street, and that sport will inevitably play its part in that move.

While Stephen is in Mr. Deasy's office, Joyce introduces, albeit obliquely, a second sport, and one that will feature prominently throughout *Ulysses*. Stephen notices that the headteacher has pictures of racehorses on the wall and, imagining himself at the races, "he saw their speeds, backing king's colours, and shouted with the shouts of vanished crowds" (29). Here Joyce asserts the intimate association between horseracing and English royalty that will be a critical theme throughout the novel. It also seems from the same passage that Stephen was not averse to gambling on the horses himself, a trait he shares with many other characters. The juxtaposition in this early chapter of hockey and horseracing is clearly not arbitrary as Joyce unites them again in the long "Circe" chapter of dramatic fantasies and illusions. Set in Night Town, Stephen comically imagines Mr. Deasy, dressed up in racing colors, "gripping the reins of his mount and brandishing his hockey stick as his nag lopes by at a schooling gallop" (495). Joyce's antipathy toward English cultural imperialism in Ireland is here given expression through his depiction of Deasy as an amusingly absurd character. The episode is also an example of how Joyce cannibalizes his own text, returning to earlier scenes to deconstruct them through parody. Deasy is an archetypal West Briton, an Irish citizen that supports British rule in Ireland. His school is a Protestant school that plays the

British game of hockey rather than Gaelic sport. Stephen is teaching in the school and, as Cheng notes, the syllabus he is teaching is one that might commonly be found in British schools. Although Stephen believes that “history is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake,” he “is himself engaged in training the boys to accept the hegemonic perspectives and English versions of Western history” (Cheng 165). The parodies of *Ulysses* might help to unfasten those perspectives but can never untie them completely, as Deasy and hockey come back to haunt Stephen in his imagination while he is out drinking at night.

Cricket also features in *Ulysses*, notably in the “Lotus Eaters” chapter, the episode in which Bloom is fated to give his unintentional horseracing “tip” that will cause him problems later in the day. Bloom thinks to himself that the weather is agreeable for cricket and recalls a prodigious shot whereby “Captain Buller broke a window with a slog to square leg” (77). Simpson notes that there is some debate as to which Captain Buller Joyce might be referring or even whether any Captain Buller in fact broke the window. In one account, Pierce suggests that Joyce might be referring to the most famous of nineteenth century English cricketers, none other than W. G. Grace. Pierce describes Grace as “like a character out of *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* . . . . Among the stories told about him, one concerns the window in the Kildare Street Club, which he is said to have broken while batting across the road at Trinity College Dublin” (159 – 60). Clements maintains that the tale is likely to be apocryphal but that “it is possible that Joyce could have seen Grace performing in Ireland, perhaps in 1890, 1897, or on his last visit in 1903” (31). It is quite probable that Joyce was aware of the story and its symbolism for British occupation: in this case, “W.G.’s” legendary (and often volcanic) occupation of the batting crease.

In Joyce’s 1921 schema for *Ulysses* that he gave to selected friends to help them understand the structure of the novel, “watchers of cricket” is listed as a “correspondence” for the “Lotus

Eaters” chapter.<sup>1</sup> It is only possible to speculate what Joyce meant by this, and it may be little more than a wry reflection on the alleged soporific qualities of the game upon spectators in a chapter that is both dreamy and hypnotic. It should be recalled that in the Homeric parallel, eaters of the addictive lotus leaves lose all will to do anything else. However, Joyce may also be making a more subversive comment as watching of cricket was to be forbidden in 1905 by the GAA. Joyce is undoubtedly underscoring the fact that simply banning the colonizer’s game would not make it magically disappear. Brief references to cricket paraphernalia and terminology recur throughout the text (385, 386, 506, 567, 596, 669), thereby flashing up in the Irish social imaginary as insistent reminders of a colonial history that may not be welcomed, but neither can it be erased.

Cricket is the characteristically English sport that was exported to British colonies not just as a pastime for the colonizer but as a marker of their own sense of moral superiority. Cricket did not only display the supposed ethical values, *inter alia*, of “fair play,” “honest competition” and “sportsmanship,” but was also meant to instil them in those who played the game. The phrase “it’s not cricket” entered discourse as an admonishment to anyone who did not live up to those fabled high standards in their daily and business lives. In *Beyond a Boundary*, C.L.R. James identified the gaping chasm between the ethical values that the British advocated, and the brutal reality of their colonization of the West Indies. Through a political awakening in which the cricket field was a significant site, they came to realize that beating the colonial master at his own game would be much more than a symbolic victory. It would also be a way of using the master’s own tools to build their own national consciousness and ultimately gain their political independence. As noted above, Joyce had identified the same hypocrisies many years earlier. In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce devotes two pages (583-4) to reeling off names of cricketers and cricketing terms, but in doing so he

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.michaelgroden.com/notes/schema05.html>

associates them with robust sexual appetites. As Atherton smartly notes, “the joke is . . . that the popular English conception of a cricketer is that of a clean-living, upright gentleman. Joyce chose cricket as the game to which, according to the Freudian theory, the principal act of copulation in the *Wake* was to be sublimated” (56). Joyce’s intuitively brilliant insight is that it is precisely in the gap between the imagined ethical values of the British, as exemplified in cricket, and the sordid reality of the colonizer’s actual moral compass that a politics of Irish liberation might be forged.

### **Bloom, the Gold Cup and the citizen**

Leopold Bloom, the other male protagonist of *Ulysses*, is a character who is in tune with his body and its needs. The reader first meets Bloom at the start of the “Calypso” chapter at his home in Eccles Street at about 8:00 o’clock in the morning as he is about to make his way out to buy some kidneys for his breakfast. Bloom is Jewish, Irish, a son of a Hungarian migrant, a husband, a father, a cuckold, and a bit of a sports enthusiast. On his way back from the butchers, his thoughts turn to a sporting Jewish heritage as thinks to himself, “must begin again those Sandow’s exercises” (54). He is referring to the famous German-Jewish bodybuilder and showman, Eugen Sandow, who organized the world’s first bodybuilding show in London in 1901 and published a series of bodybuilding books between 1897 and 1904 (Chapman; Waller). Sandow explicitly built his body according to the ancient Greek ideal of manhood but he also fitted into a *fin-de-siècle* cultural notion of muscular Judaism, a term coined in 1898 by the Hungarian cultural critic and Jewish Zionist Max Nordau (Plock; Presner). However, unlike Nordau, Bloom is a secular Hungarian Jew and a man of moderation; we find in the penultimate “Ithaca” chapter that the “indoor exercises” that Bloom “formerly intermittently practised, subsequently abandoned, prescribed in Eugen Sandow’s *Physical Strength and How to Obtain It*”, were pursued by him for solely the purpose of “the most pleasant re-juvenation of juvenile agility” (587). After a deferral of over

five hundred pages, the reader finally discovers that Bloom's morning longing is simply to feel a bit younger, but he does not have the will power to persist with his exercises. As with the modern multitudes that have bikes and "abs crunchers" gathering dust in the corner of a room, his regimen remained an unfulfilled aspiration. Joyce may be parodying the absurdity of obsessive bodybuilding, but he is also sharply critiquing the disturbing cultural hegemonic writings of Nordau. In particular, Joyce may have had in mind the racialized pseudoscience of eugenics: both Nordau and Sandow bore some responsibility for its dispersion into Western culture during the first half of the twentieth century (Daley; Burgers).

Continuing the theme that Bloom values nimbleness over brute strength, Joyce reveals in the "Ithaca" chapter that Bloom had some "special agility" in gymnastics, excelling in "his stable and protracted execution of the half lever movement on the parallel bars" (587). Here, Bloom is mirroring Joyce's own life, as Fallon reports that, as a schoolboy, Joyce enjoyed fooling about on the horizontal bar in gymnastics classes to the delight of his fellow students (45). Also in "Ithaca," we learn that if Bloom came into a lot of money, something he can only really imagine with a good win on the horses, he fantasizes about retiring to a large country home where he would have tennis and fives courts and where his "lighter recreations" would include cycling, swimming, river boating and horseriding (618-9). It is hard to imagine a character with so little in common with Sandow or Nordau's muscular Jews, even as Bloom toyed with bodybuilding exercises, thus forestalling any absolute identity that might be pinned upon him.

While the reader discovers Bloom's sporting desires only toward the end of the book, Joyce has laid the breadcrumb trail throughout the text. Much earlier in the novel, in "Hades," set at Paddy Dignam's funeral, Bloom reveals that he plays, or at least used to play, bowls. On an earlier date he had beaten, by his own admission through a fluke of the bias, a minor character, John Henry Menton, who consequently took an instant dislike to him (103). As

discussed earlier, Bloom takes an interest in sports as he wanders through the city streets, noticing the College sports and cycling as well as remarking on the cricket weather and reminiscing about the game. In the critical “Cyclops” chapter, discussed in more detail below, Bloom reveals that he is unimpressed with boxing as a sport, but much in favor of tennis for its “agility and training of the eye” (287), perhaps explaining why, in his “Ithaca” fantasy later that day, he would build a tennis court at his imagined country home.

The most sustained discussion of sport in *Ulysses* takes place in the venue where sport has always been vociferously discussed - the public house - and Bloom’s encounter in Barney Kiernan’s establishment with the citizen, a character largely based on an aging Michael Cusack, the founder of the Gaelic Athletic Association. In “Cyclops,” Joyce lampoons Cusack’s role in reviving allegedly ancient Gaelic sports as part of the Irish nationalist revival, thus reflecting Joyce’s own opposition to a romanticized form of nationalism that harked back to an imagined past rather than creating a new future, something that he took upon himself to do with his own writing. The episode’s title is a reference to the one-eyed giant that Odysseus blinds with a burning stake to make his escape from captivity. The chapter works as a caustic satire on what Joyce perceives as the myopia of a narrow nationalism and especially the role of Cusack’s Gaelic sports in helping to foster an insular and backward-looking culture.

In addition to parodic discussions of Gaelic sports and boxing, it is in this chapter that the storyline of the Ascot Gold Cup comes to a head. Earlier in the text, in “The Lotus Eaters,” as Bloom commences his wanderings for the day, he picks up a free newsheet, rolling it up and tucking it under his armpit. He is soon accosted by Bantam Lyons, who takes Bloom’s paper from him to look at the racing pages. Bloom, seemingly to avoid any confrontation, says, “You can keep it ... I was just going to throw it away” (76).

Bantam Lyons raised his eyes suddenly and leered weakly.

-What's that? His sharp voice said.

- I say you can keep it, Mr Bloom answered. I was just going to throw it away that moment.

Bantam Lyons doubted an instant, leering: then thrust the outspread sheets back on Mr Bloom's arms.

-I'll risk it he said. Here, thanks (76).

At this stage, the reader is unaware, as is Bloom, that a horse called *Throwaway*, a 20-1 outsider, is due to run in the Cup that day and that Bloom has unwittingly provided Lyons with a tip for the race. Bloom's inadvertent recommendation soon becomes a topic of conversation in Davy Byrne's bar where Lyons tells Lenehan about the horse, who promptly dissuades him from backing it. When Bloom says he has to leave Kiernan's to go to the courthouse, Lenehan, who has joined the company of drinkers, assumes that this is a lie and he tells the assembled drinkers, in an anti-semitic trope, that "he [Bloom] had a few bob on *Throwaway* and he's gone to gather in the shekels ... he's the only man in Dublin has it" (303). Now, all the denizens of Barney Kiernan's, most of all the citizen, presume quite wrongly that Bloom has collected some significant winnings. When Bloom returns from the courthouse but fails to buy a round of drinks, thus reinforcing in their minds the racist stereotype of the money-pinching Jew, the scene turns increasingly ugly. Bloom is forced to flee the pub and jump into a horse-drawn carriage to make his escape as the citizen, stumbling blindly out of the door, hurls a biscuit tin at him. The irony of the chapter rests on the idea that the citizen waxes lyrical about the importance of Irish national identity yet he, and his boozy acolytes, remain fixated upon the result of a horse race run over the water at



the very heart of the British sporting royal establishment. In the *Dubliners*' chapter "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," Joyce recounts a debate held among political activists as to whether the King should be welcomed on his impending visit to Ireland. The answer Joyce gives in *Ulysses* is that the King, in the guise of the Royal Ascot Gold Cup, is already fully installed symbolically within the cultural lives of Dublin's nationalist fraternity.

The Gold Cup, the showpiece event of Royal Ascot, the grandest and most regal week in the British racing calendar, touches upon the lives of almost every character in *Ulysses*, showing how closely tethered they are to British cultural institutions. As Bloom unwittingly discovers, its hold does not require a conscious attachment, thus acting as a powerful metaphor for British imperialism in Ireland. But Joyce is convinced that breaking this bond will not be achieved through the revival of an imagined past, not least in respect of sport. Joyce's approach to confronting British colonialism in Ireland stood in contrast to that of the GAA and Michael Cusack in particular. Joyce's deconstructive parodies underscore what he sees as the absurdities of their nationalist posturing. The GAA wished to reclaim supposedly distinctive and historic Gaelic sports, notably hurling (which really is an ancient sport) and Gaelic football (which is not), and to promote these as alternatives to the colonial sports of the British (Cronin; Rouse).

Ryan observes that the ideologies said to be invested in ancient Gaelic sports were indistinguishable from those of the British sports they claimed to despise. These included notions of national identity, manliness, the amateur ideal, and a "healthy mind in a healthy body." In his encounter with the drunk and violent citizen, Bloom reveals those ideologies as fictions. Nevertheless, Gaelic revivalist sports have come to exert a quite astonishing grip on the public imagination in Ireland and further afield. Today, Dublin's Croke Park welcomes 90,000 and more fans to showpiece finals of hurling and Gaelic football. There is no doubt that Joyce would have wryly noticed that Gaelic sport occupies the same commercial ground

of broadcasting rights and sponsorship as football, cricket or rugby. An irony that would certainly not be lost on Joyce is that the amateur ideal, which British sport discarded many years ago, is still a vital part of Gaelic sports culture. The constitution of a distinctive Irish sporting culture contains significant traces of British colonial ideologies.

### **Conclusion**

In this essay, I have argued that sport is a recurring and important thread in the major works of James Joyce. Not only does it add realistic touches to his narratives of everyday Dubliners, but also works to underscore Joyce's political theme of the tensions between discourses of British colonialism and Irish nationalism. By thinking of his parodies as serving the same objective as deconstructive strategies to expose the contradictions and incongruities of those discourses, Joyce displays a playful intertextuality while acknowledging that British influence in Ireland could not be simply erased. His texts expose the hypocrisies of the British while resisting the siren calls of an imagined mythical Gaelic past. Through his depiction of sport in his major novels, Joyce deconstructs the colonial/nationalist binary through parodic interventions that destabilize the ideological discourses upon which they are built. He took upon himself to write a new chapter in Ireland's complex and difficult history but did so knowingly from within the language and culture that was handed down to him. Throughout his novels he subverts the colonial and nationalist narratives that surround sport in an endless play of language that distorts, deforms, and defers, opening up new ways of thinking about his texts and their representations of sporting cultural practices. Sport may only be a minor theme in Joyce's novels, but nevertheless it provides an additional layer of meaning to those texts that help to contextualize them within the political and historic juncture of their production.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Many authoritative commentaries on *Ulysses*, including Ellmann's seminal biography of Joyce, claim that Joyce set his novel on June 16, 1904 as it was the day he first stepped out with his lifelong partner, Nora Barnacle. However, if Joyce had courted Nora on the 15<sup>th</sup> or the 17<sup>th</sup> of June, the whole storyline of the Gold Cup that underpins the novel in such fundamental ways would have disappeared without trace. For Joyce to have so much fun with the Gold Cup, the novel had to take place on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June and Bloomsday is most likely set on that day because of the Ascot Gold Cup rather than for personal romantic reasons.

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