

**“Turbaned faces going by”:
James Joyce and Irish Orientalism**

Lynne A. Bongiovanni

James Joyce’s examination of advertising in *Ulysses* interrogates Ireland’s conflicted relationship with the Orient. In his 1907 address before a crowd at the Università Popolare in Trieste, Joyce explained to his audience that the Irish “language is oriental in origin, and has been identified by many philologists with the ancient language of the Phoenicians, the originators in trade and navigation” (*Critical Writing* 156). With this statement, Joyce aligns himself with the long-standing but dubious Irish tradition of tracing the original roots of Irish language and civilization to the Orient in an attempt to assert Ireland’s independence from, and even superiority to, England. While Joyce’s desire to sing the praises of his native country before a foreign audience is understandable, it is more difficult to grasp the reasons he espouses what Joseph Leersen describes as “harebrained” (92) and baseless speculation. Indeed, Joyce’s association brings to mind the kind of cultural misappropriation that Edward Said articulates so famously in *Orientalism*.

Considering Joyce’s vast knowledge, it seems unlikely that he could really believe in the suspect theory of what Leersen calls Scytho-Celtism (94), a rather vague and general belief that the Irish were descended from great Oriental civilizations. Adding his voice to the Irish affinity for locating their true ancestry in the Orient, Joyce raises questions about his own attitudes toward nationalism and imperialism. Given the ambiguity with which he depicts images of the Orient in his fiction, at times reinforcing cultural stereotypes of the East and at other times exposing them, Joyce underscores the tantalizing allure of Oriental for the Irish. Just as Joyce seems to recognize his own complicity in yielding to racial and cultural stereotypes, *Ulysses* illustrates why the attractions of the imagined East were irresistible to the Irish middle class. By consuming the European fantasies of the Orient as exotic and voluptuous,

Joyce's *Dubliners* distract themselves not only from oppression by the English, but also from the rigid control of the Catholic Church.

While Joyce's comments about the Oriental roots of the Celts seem to register an admiration of Eastern culture, Said demonstrates the European habit of forming "its strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (3). Thus, while the high esteem with which Joyce and some of his countrymen regard Oriental history appears to suggest an appreciation for Eastern culture, Said argues that this apparent reverence is in fact a type of subjugation, as Europeans are merely using their version of Oriental history to serve their own interests.

According to Said, even apparent tributes to Oriental culture by Europeans are little more than evidence of a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3). Consequently, he charges, every citizen of Europe, no matter who or what he appears to be, is "a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric" (204). While such broad claims have prompted scholars like John MacKenzie, a leading voice in criticizing Said's work, to label his theory of Orientalism as "essentialist" (*Orientalism* 20),¹ it seems almost incontrovertible that perceptions of the Orient are based as much on Europe's attitudes about its own culture and position in the world as any historical reality of the Orient. Late Victorian culture was saturated with images of the Orient, but the East remained for most Europeans a source of great mystery.

Nigel Leask examines the manifestations of Orientalism in nineteenth-century England, when poets like Lord Byron looked to Eastern themes in order to expand their own "creative possibilities" (13). Feeling that they had exhausted the subject matter of the familiar world, Byron recognized the untapped material of the Oriental motif, which provided a new-found wealth of inspiration and introduced many Europeans to the supposed history and customs of the East (Kershner 279).

England's vision of itself and its future, however, was always bound up with a portrayal of the East. Leask points out that writers like Byron read about the decline of the Ottoman Empire without thinking of the seemingly inevitable collapse of England's own sphere of influence, and both

the familiarity and strangeness of the East invested the Orient “with an uncanny power to disturb” (4). Not only did the East supply fodder for the English imagination of the Other, but it also functioned as a receptacle for what Said calls England’s “desires, repressions, investments, and projections” (8). In their view of the East, England and other European powers saw latent manifestations of themselves.

Leask is careful, though, to point out that Orientalism was not just self-reflexive; it was also a strategy by which European nations defined themselves in relation to one another.² He looks, for example, at “the Scot culture,” which turned to Orientalism in order to manifest “its own anxieties of subordination in relation to its more powerful neighbor” (87). Self-conscious about its own vulnerabilities, the Scots projected their feelings of powerlessness and “inferiority” (Leask 87) onto the Oriental Other.

In addition to soothing feelings of inadequacy, Orientalism also functioned as a tool of nationalism or proto-nationalism (Leask 131), whereby competing European interests formulated their own theories of the East that best supported their own national aspirations. Perhaps no country exemplifies this point better than Ireland, which fostered a tradition that vaguely linked the heritage of the Celts to the Scythians, a nomadic tribe from central Asia noted by Herodotus for its riches and large amounts of gold. According to prevailing theories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the original inhabitants of Ireland had migrated from the Caspian Sea by way of Persia, Africa, and finally, Spain (Ballantyne 36). Using an analysis of the Irish language, Irish scholars like Charles Vallancey (1721–1812), outlined the theory that the roots of Irish civilization were not in Europe but rather in the advanced ancient civilization of the Phoenicians.³ Pointing to the supposed similarities between the Phoenician and Irish languages, Vallancey sought to divorce the Irish from their European neighbors and link them instead to a more ancient tradition.

Despite these claims, the historical ancestors of the native Irish people do appear to have been Europeans who arrived in waves of invasions, which began at least 7,000 years before Gaius Julius Caesar set foot in Ireland for the first time in 55 BC. The Roman Empire considered a

full-scale invasion and colonization of the island, but distractions from the resistance of Picts and bands of German mercenaries forced Rome to focus its attentions elsewhere. But while Ireland may have escaped the colonizing force of the Roman army, it had already withstood attacks from at least three encroaching forces, all of them from within Europe. Vallancey and his followers hoped to promote the idea that Ireland had been founded by an advanced Oriental civilization, but Ireland's real origins seem to lie in the groups of Europeans who continually sought to claim the island as their own.

So accustomed were the Irish to the assaults of marauders that the first major chronicle of Irish history is *Lebor Gabála*, or *The Book of Invasions*. While most of its accounts are certainly apocryphal, Sean McMahon believes that it probably does "reflect a folk memory" (6) of the different people who arrived on Ireland's shores. While the island's first Mesolithic inhabitants were hunters in pursuit of prey who used a land bridge to get to what the Romans called Hibernia, or the Winter Island, the *Lebor Gabála* records successive bands of what anthropologists agree were probably mostly Scandinavian, Spanish, and other European explorers who came across the English channel. Once they had conquered Ireland, they seem to have assimilated with the indigenous inhabitants of the island (McMahon 5–6).

Despite the archeological and historical record that located Irish ancestry in Europe, Vallancey's theories about Ireland's Oriental history only grew in popularity. One of Vallancey's greatest proponents during the nineteenth century was the Irish poet Thomas Moore (1779–1852), who not only aggressively advocated Ireland's affinity with the civilizations of the ancient East, but also produced some of the texts that defined Ireland's view of the Orient. Javed Majeed's *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill's The History of British India and Orientalism* describes Moore's depiction of Irish culture as a descendent of Persian civilization. Moore, who was a close friend of Robert Emmet and other members of the United Irishmen, even attempted to establish a connection between the mysterious round towers that dot Ireland's countryside and the Zoroastrian fire-temples of ancient Persia (now Iran) (93).

Almost all of the Scytho-Celtics played fast and loose with the specifics of Celtic heritage, at times looking to central Asia, Phoenicia, Egypt, or Persia for the roots of their culture. But for these Celticists, what they saw as the actual source of the Irish race was largely unimportant; what really mattered was establishing the authenticity of Irish culture as distinct from English civilization. By asserting a lineage with classical roots, the Irish could provide an effective rebuttal to England's claims of Irish barbarism; if the Irish really were descendents of the Phoenicians, their civilization was older and greater than even that of the English.

But as Tony Ballantyne points out, although Irish Orientalism grew out of this desire to undermine the historic pretensions of European imperialism, it simultaneously reinforced the objectives of empire. Ballantyne notes that some of the original proponents of Scytho-Celtism were the Patriots, a group of Irish-born Protestants who resented their lack of representation in imperial trade and administration. By asserting that their Celtic heritage made them superior to the English, the Patriots hoped to garner a greater share of empire's advantages (36–37). This appropriation of the Orient by some members of the Irish middle class, who attempted to use Orientalist myths to increase their stake in the economic exploitation of their own country, further reinforces Said's argument that Orientalism is always a manifestation of imperialism. It also reveals the enormously complicated nature of Irish Orientalism, a concept that purports to assert Ireland's independence from the yoke of imperial power, but in fact only further subjugates the Irish.

Joyce's attitudes toward Orientalism reflect the complexity of Ireland's view of the East. While *Ulysses* exposes the romanticized quality of the landscapes of Moore's fictional East, a place where cities lie "in luxury" and "a fountain murmurs among damask roses" (*Ulysses* 477), Joyce does seem to share many of Moore's Orientalist theories about Irish history. In "Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages," the talk he gave at the university in Trieste, Joyce cites the work of Charles Vallancey, who informed Moore's views of Irish history when he claims that the language of the Phoenicians is "almost the same language that the Irish peasants speak today" (*Critical Writing* 156). In addition to sharing "an alphabet of special characters" with the Phoenicians, Joyce continues, the Irish

language enjoys a “history almost three thousand years old” (*Critical Writing* 155).⁴

Later in his speech Joyce locates the origins of Irish “religion and civilization” (*Critical Writing* 156) in Egypt, but for the most part he remains determined to unite Irish culture with the legacy of the Phoenicians, whom he calls “the originators of trade and navigation” (*Critical Writing* 156). As Carol Schloss points out, linking Ireland and Phoenicia was in keeping with what she calls “the sentiments of Irish patriotism” (“Context” 268). Phoenicia was not only the source of many of the world’s advancements in language and art. It also managed to expand its own civilization while resisting the colonial campaigns of various other great empires, including the Egyptian, Hittite, and Assyrian civilizations, before finally succumbing to an invasion by the Persians. The parallels for the Irish were appealing; by associating themselves with the Phoenicians, they could lay claim to a tradition of almost unprecedented progress in the arts, as well as a legacy that withstood the history of their occupation.

Like Thomas Moore and other Celticists, Joyce insisted to his Triestine audience that Phoenician civilization flourished in Ireland long before England existed, declaring that “this adventurous people, who had a monopoly of the sea, established in Ireland a civilization that decayed and almost disappeared long before the first Greek historian took his pen in hand” (*Critical Writing* 156). Joyce implies that Irish culture was thriving not only before the apex of Greek civilization, but more importantly, before the English built their empire. Joyce takes this opportunity to laud the contributions of pre-colonial Ireland to European civilization, calling it “a true focus of sanctity and intellect, spreading throughout the continent a vitalizing energy” (*Critical Writing* 154), while England was languishing in the Dark Ages.⁵

Joyce not only gives the Irish credit for salvaging Western culture, but also claims they introduced Oriental philosophy to Europe, arguing that Scotus Erigena’s translations of Eastern texts, “presented to Europe for the first time the transcendental philosophy of the Orient, which had as much influence on the course of European thought as later the translations of Plato” (*Critical Writing* 160). By expressing his appreciation for

the figure who was perhaps Europe's first Orientalist, Joyce raises questions about his own perceptions of the racial and cultural stereotypes of the Orient that were so prevalent among his contemporaries.

The representations of the Orient in Joyce's fiction do little to reconcile his educated sophistication with his endorsement of the widely discredited theories of Celticism that located Irish language and culture in the Orient. In fact, Joyce's depiction of the Orient appears even more conflicted, as he seems at times aware of his country's, and his own, objectification of Eastern culture, but at other times blatantly reproduces racial stereotypes of the Oriental Other. In "Joyce in the Context of Irish Orientalism," Schloss attempts to account for these dual impulses in Joyce, who often seems caught between his knowledge of history and his fascination with Oriental stereotypes.⁶ After conceding that Joyce certainly would have seen the Orientalist movement in Ireland as "complicity" with imperialist discourse, Schloss concludes that Joyce employs Orientalist features in his work as an "anti-imperialist strategy" that seeks to associate Ireland with an ancient order of civilizations that remained "beyond the reach of empire" (266).

Schloss's argument is appealing in that it emphasizes the ways Irish Orientalism provided Joyce with an "exotic" and "satisfying" "fable of origin" ("Context" 267), which asserted the validity of Irish culture and his own creativity against English charges of Irish barbarism. But her reading does not adequately take into account the extent to which Joyce reproduces often racist Oriental stereotypes, especially in *Ulysses*, where images of geishas "twisting japanesily" (568) and "the heathen Chinees" (80) proliferate to such a degree that Brandon Kershner calls *Ulysses* "virtually a compendium of Orientalist clichés. . . . complicit" with Orientalist strategies (292–93). Joyce portrays the Orient as a land of "carpet shops" and "dark language" (*Ulysses* 57), images of the Orient that often seem lifted from the adventure tales and comic books of schoolchildren.

While it is possible that Joyce reproduces such stereotypes only to expose them, he also seems genuinely fascinated by images of the Orient, which often serve as escapist fantasies for his characters. Aida Yared observes in her study of the portrayal of Islam in *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce was well versed in Oriental culture, and counted among his book

collections a French translation of the Koran as well as Edith Holland's biography *The Story of Mohammed* (401). This knowledge of Eastern tradition, along with his awareness of the dangers of colonial propaganda, should have made Joyce especially sensitive to the romanticized depictions of the Orient that bolstered imperial expansion. Although he seems to know better, Joyce cannot help himself from participating in the Irish tradition of Orientalism. The stereotypical images of the East offer him and his countrymen what Heyward Ehrlich calls a "utopian alternative" to their own lives, as well as an "epitome of difference" (320) that allows them to envision an existence free from the constraints of both the English occupation and the Catholic church. Joyce may understand his complicity in European imperialism, but *Ulysses* also demonstrates the intense lure of Orientalism, a diversionary fantasy that is difficult for the Irish to resist.

Much of the Orientalism that Joyce employs in *Dubliners* centers upon popular images of Arabia, but in *Ulysses* Joyce also demonstrates the Irish habit of objectifying the inhabitants of the Far East. Bloom, for example, appears to have learned much of what he knows about China from his copy of *Voyages in China* by "Viator," a book that Joyce seems to have invented. *Voyages* repeats the doubtful folklore that Bloom has discovered from such travelogues, but also appears in Circe as a caricature of a stereotypical Chinese figure, complete with pidgin English. With his "tiny mole's eyes" open, Bloom points to the heavens and declares: "Him makee velly muchee fine night" before he begins to sing: "Li li poo lil chile, / Blingee pigfoot evly night. / Payee two shilly" (463). Like the man whom he and Stephen encounter in the cabman's shelter in Eumeaus, who declares his knowledge that the Chinese "Cooks rats in your soup" (628), Bloom has adopted the stereotypes of the Orient that have for so long fueled the expansion of European empires.⁷ Faced so long with charges of Irish barbarism and strangeness within the British Empire, Joyce illustrates the inclination of the middle class to marginalize and exoticize their Oriental counterparts.

Bloom's fantasies are not limited to the Far East; he is also intrigued by the lure of Palestine and the other lands of the Middle East. As he examines the advertisement that he carries in his pocket for "Agendath

Netaim,” the company that offers assistance in purchasing land from Turkey for a Zionist colony, Bloom dreamily imagines the “Orangetrees and immense melonfields north of Jaffa,” a land teeming with “olives, oranges, almonds or citrons” (60). Later, he pictures Jaffa overflowing with “silk webs, silver, rich fruits.... Wealth of the world” (168). Relying on the European custom of depicting the East as a land of plenty, just waiting to be harvested by imperial interests, Bloom imagines the East as a place of overwhelming abundance.

Because Bloom’s notion of Palestine is largely fabricated, it changes according to his whim. Just moments after his reverie about the almost magical land of “silvered powdered olivetrees” (60), Bloom’s mood suddenly changes, and he is gripped by the impression of “a dead sea in a dead land” that bears no fruit at all, “the grey sunken cunt of the world” (61). In this moment, Joyce reminds us of the power of Orientalism, in the words of Said, to “manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively” (3). Because Bloom has the power to create any image of the Orient that he wishes, his vision of it changes according to his own desires and needs.

The tendency toward Orientalism on the part of Irish scholars was certainly born out of a need to rescue what Joyce himself recognized as the national “ego” (*Critical Writing* 154), but it was also bred and fostered by images from the world of popular culture, which frequently choose as its subject matter tales of adventure from the Orient, particularly Arabia.⁸ Irish historians and intellectuals used the work of archeologists and philologists to explore the connections between Ireland and the Orient, but the Irish public amused itself by consuming the popular depictions of Arabian themes that dominated virtually all areas of mass entertainment in turn-of-the-century Dublin.

Zack Bowen demonstrates that the effects of such Orientalist tales, especially the *Thousand and One Nights*, had an impact just about “everywhere” (300) in the United Kingdom, as the tales of flying carpets, harems, and dark-skinned strangers enthralled both children and adults.⁹ Many of the characters in *Ulysses* are preoccupied by thoughts of “black and brown and yellow men” (223), but their favorite diversions

seem to feature Arabic motifs; for example, Bloom, Stephen, and even Molly all dream about Arabia. In Joyce's hands, the characters in *Ulysses* have thoroughly incorporated the Arabian stereotypes in storybooks and other popular entertainment that flourished in Dublin's music halls at the turn of the century.

Joyce seems to suggest that the most powerful origins of the Orientalism that shaped Dublin life were the traveling bazaars that appeared in the city a few times each year, many of which featured Eastern themes. Joyce's reference in *Dubliners* to "Araby," a festival that took place in Dublin May 14–19, 1894 (Ellmann 40), is most evocative in its depiction of the Oriental bazaar and the ways that it contributed to Irish fascination with Oriental entertainments. The effect of such a spectacle, which featured a variety of exotic animals as well as "Eastern Magic" (Ehrlich 143), dancing, orchestras, and fireworks, all in the imitation of Oriental excesses, must have been great on the thirteen-year-old Joyce and his contemporaries, who sought excitement and intrigue in these stylized depictions of the Orient that emphasized the alien extravagance of the East.¹⁰

Joyce stresses in *Ulysses*, though, that such bazaars were not only fodder for childhood entertainment; Bloom is also well aware of the presence of the Mirus bazaar that Joyce places in Dublin on June 16, 1904.¹¹ In *Lestrygonians*, Bloom's eyes are conveniently pulled away from the sight of Blazes Boylan, his wife's paramour, by an advertisement for the event: "Hello, placard. Mirus bazaar" (183). Bloom may be grateful for the distraction, but Joyce makes it clear that such bazaars were not merely diverting entertainment; at times, they took on the air of a state event.

Bloom notes that the Mirus bazaar is intended to raise money for Mercer's hospital, but Joyce is careful to emphasize the connections between such a bazaar and the administration of empire. Bloom observes that "His Excellency the lord lieutenant" (183) is scheduled to open the bazaar, and the vice-regal procession that Joyce depicts in *Wandering Rocks* is on its way "to inaugurate the Mirus bazaar in aid funds for Mercer's hospital" (254). Because Gifford explains that there was no such procession involved in the opening of the actual bazaar, Joyce's in-

vention of it underscores the ways empire promoted these Orientalist entertainments that fashioned the stereotypes of the exoticized East used to justify imperial expansion. Just as the Great Exhibition reinforced the commodity culture that supported English imperialism, the Oriental bazaars captivating Dublin near the turn of the century promoted an objectification of the Orient that encouraged colonial expansion.

Bloom's vision of the Orient seems drawn from just such garish and colorful material that defined the Oriental bazaar, for he imagines the landscape of East as a place replete with "datepalms" and camels that pluck "large mango fruit" (440) from trees to give to their owners. While in Nighttown, Bloom suddenly finds himself among the stock images of the East:

Gazelles are leaping, feeding on the mountains. Near are lakes.
Round their shores file shadows black of cedargroves. Aroma
rises, a strong hairgrowth of resin. It burns, the orient, a sky of
sapphire, cleft by the bronze flight of eagles. (477)

By echoing the ludicrously stylized quality of Thomas Moore's vision of the magical Indian landscape in *Lalla Rookh*, Bloom's imagined Orient underscores his tendency to construct a vision of the East that reflects his own fantasies.

Even more indicative of the Irish impulse to marginalize the East even as they identify with it is Bloom's habit of dehumanizing the people who appear his Oriental fantasies. When he images the Orient, he envisions

[t]urbaned faces going by. Dark caves of carpet shops, big man,
Turko the terrible, seated crosslegged smoking a coiled pipe.
Cries of sellers in the streets. Drink water scented with fennel,
sherbet. Might meet a robber or two. (57)

Because most of Bloom's ideas about the Orient come from the cartoonish characters like Turko the Terrible that filled Dublin's pantomimes, he cannot even imagine what a real Oriental person must be like, and instead resorts to synecdochal images of "faces" and "cries" to represent the real people and real countries he does not know. With the sounds of

“dulcimers” (57) filling his head, providing an imaginary soundtrack to an unreal place, Bloom, the product of a popular culture that exploits caricatures of the foreign Other, reinforces the idea of the Orient as little more than Europe’s invention of Eastern stereotypes.

At the same time that *Ulysses* reinforces the traditions of Irish Orientalism, the text also calls them into question. Shortly after Bloom imagines the East with its “dark language” and the “Night sky moon, violet” (57), he stops his train of thought: “Probably not a bit like it really. Kind of stuff you read: in the track of the sun” (57). Gifford points out that Bloom is probably referring to Frederick Diodati Thompson’s *In the Track of the Sun: Diary of a Globe Trotter* (1893), a popular travelogue that focuses on the author’s wanderings in the Orient and Near East (72). With this thought, Bloom indicates his awareness that his only knowledge of the Orient comes from often far-fetched tales from books and from the observations of fellow Westerners. Bloom understands that no matter what he might think about the Orient, it probably is “not like that” at all (61). As Kershner points out, while books have partially created Bloom’s Orientalist outlook, he actually “vascillates between knowing and not knowing the East” (275).

Although Vincent Cheng is more reluctant than Kershner to identify a blatant Orientalism in Bloom, insisting instead that his more dominant tendency is to avoid labeling others and to accept “cultural relativism and difference” (*Race* 176), even Cheng grapples with Bloom’s sometimes-racist tendencies. But he concludes that while Bloom does exhibit Orientalist attitudes, these convictions are “inevitable” (*Race* 176) given Bloom’s surroundings. According to Cheng, Bloom is “a product/propagator of the dominant (and racist) cultural discourse about otherness,” but he is at the same time “repeatedly skeptical of such images” and the biases that produce them (*Race* 176). Thus, in keeping with Said’s analysis, Bloom’s Orientalism is historically and culturally determined, but unlike many of his countrymen, he retains a distinct awareness of the forces that control individual and social prejudices.

Cheng cautiously extends his analysis of Bloom to account for the competing tendencies of Joyce himself, who often seems trapped between his desire to imagine an Orient that best suits his creative and

historical needs, and his awareness of the dangers of such objectification and subjugation. Ultimately, Cheng suggests, by illustrating how this conflict is at work in Bloom, Joyce reveals how both he and Bloom are “absorbing and problematizing the propagated discourse” of Orientalism (*Race* 175). Joyce indicates the ways he has been indoctrinated into the Orientalist world-view, but he also registers his desire to circumvent the cultural values that shape him.

Cheng’s identification of Orientalism as a “pervasive and unavoidable discursive mind-set” (*Race* 170) goes far in explaining Joyce’s struggle to resolve his Orientalist beliefs about culture and history. But it is also worth considering not just the fact that Orientalist philosophies were ubiquitous in turn-of-the-century Dublin, but also the ways that the Irish embraced them wholeheartedly. Joyce’s characters not only accept the stereotypes of the East; they sometimes take solace and refuge in them. Just as the Orientalist myth of Irish genealogy provides Ireland with a history distinct from that of England and based in an even more glorious Eastern tradition, the images of a romanticized Orient offer the country a glimpse of freedom from its political and religious stagnation.

With his belief in this transformative power of Orientalism MacKenzie takes issue with Said’s claims about the purely harmful consequences of Orientalism. Not satisfied with what he sees as Said’s “oversimplification of the imperial relationship” (20), MacKenzie insists in Orientalism’s “capacity to become a tool of cultural revolution” (10). Beginning with a claim that Orientalism has roots in the quest for mutual understanding, MacKenzie recognizes its power to “challenge western convention” and defy “complacency” (10).

MacKenzie sets out to bolster his argument by asserting that the word “Orientalism” was “relatively value-free” (1–2) until Said transformed it into “one of the most ideologically charged words in modern scholarship” (4). Originally used to describe the attempts of the English East India Company to govern India in accordance with the English perception of Indian custom, the theory of Orientalism used to have a “positive connotation” (3), and it was instrumental in the increased study of Arabic and other Oriental languages at Oxford. Far from being merely

a means of dominating the Orient, MacKenzie writes, the advent of Orientalism signaled Europe's genuine interest in foreign culture.¹²

Responding to Said's insistence that Orientalism reflects nothing more than the desire to laud "European superiority over Oriental backwardness" (7), MacKenzie rejects what he calls Said's "metanarrative" as "single-minded and with an ax to grind" (213). No genuine artistic expression, he counters, "can ever be founded upon a perpetual parade of cultural superiority" (213), but instead synthesizes varying traditions and tendencies. Although Said suggests that Orientalism is a purely European (and later American) phenomena with "no corresponding equivalent in the Orient itself" (204) that seeks to Occidentalize Europe, MacKenzie insists on a reciprocal relationship in which both East and West inform and transform one another. "Dominant political ideologies," he reminds Said, "tend to operate in counterpart rather than conformity" (204). Instead of seeing a flow of influence from West to East whereby Europe seeks solely to dominate the Orient, McKenzie suggests that Europe was radically transformed, usually for the better, by its attempts to master Oriental culture. Any kind of interchange between traditions, he posits, results in some sort of addition to both sides of the equation.

The result of the exchange of influence between Europe and the Orient, MacKenzie concludes, was a cultural renewal that inspired creative development in fields including art, architecture, design, music, and theater. While Said defines the relationship between East and West as one "of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (5), MacKenzie is convinced of a mutual exchange that enhanced both cultures and of a "range of others that constituted at once both threat and potential liberation" (209). He concedes Said's points about Europe's perception of the dangers of the Oriental Other, but he also considers the response to such a catalyst to be ultimately positive in that it questions existing norms.

While Joyce certainly chronicles the damaging consequences of Orientalism in his work, he also seems aware of a liberating promise of the East. At the same time that he records the Irish weakness for resorting to stereotypes of the Oriental Other, Joyce also captures his countrymen's need to imagine the possibilities of freedom inherent in the

Eastern lands, even if they exist only as European inventions. In their fantasies of the East, Joyce and his fellow Irishmen are able to enjoy a kind of independence that is otherwise denied to them.

Joyce demonstrates this dynamic in *Ulysses* with his multiple allusions to “Haroun Al Raschid” (540), the Caliph of Baghdad a principal character in many of Scheherezade’s tales of the *Thousand and One Nights*. But *Ulysses* not only refers to the warrior ruler of Baghdad; near the conclusion of the Circe episode Bloom is transformed into al Raschid as he “draws his caliph’s hood and poncho and hurries down the steps with sideways face” (586).¹³ With this image of Bloom as “Incog Haroun al Raschid” (586), the novel calls attention to the image of al Raschid in the *Thousand and One Nights*, where he is portrayed by Scheherezade as a benevolent ruler who often moved among his subjects in disguise so as to better understand and relate to them. Bowen points out, although the historical al Raschid was a murderous “tyrant” (297), in Scheherezade’s stories he is generous and kind, a patron of the arts and a friendly father figure for the “happy citizens of his city” (297).

By invoking the name of Haroun al Raschid, Joyce not only records the pervasive effect of Orientalist entertainment on the Irish, a cultural presence that informs just about every form of artistic expression, but he also registers the Irish longing for a government with as much caring and concern for its people as al Raschid. Captivated by the idea of an animated city, bustling with life and creativity under the watch of an empathic and just ruler, the residents of Dublin may have looked to al Raschid and the *Thousand and One Nights* as a reminder of everything that Dublin was not during the English occupation.

In *Dubliners* Joyce lays the groundwork for his depiction of the East as a vibrant space for exploration and learning. The young narrator of “The Sisters” is exemplary insofar as he envisions the Orient as place of revelation quite distinct from Dublin’s cloistered atmosphere. Frustrated with his attempts to uncover the truth behind the “unfinished sentences” (11) of the adults around him, the boy finds an ally in Father Flynn, who teaches him to explore “complex and mysterious” (13) problems that most of the other citizens of Dublin would never dare utter, never mind engage.

Although the “sin” (11) that the priest wants to confess to the boy remains undefined, the priest’s “paralysis” (11) seems rooted in the ignorance and complacency of his former congregation, who are more interested in stock responses and mechanical expressions of piety than the “difficult” (13) matters of faith and doubt with which Father Flynn appears to wrestle. Trapped with his sisters in an apartment above an upholstery shop, the very symbol of concealment, the priest struggles with “intricate questions” (13) about which his sisters would never dare utter a word. Father Flynn’s sister, Nannie, whose expressions are limited to pointing and “beckoning” (14), appears to be a deaf mute. The entire collection paints Dublin as a place where no one will communicate anything meaningful, preferring instead to gloss over important but disturbing questions much in the same way as Eliza Flynn “smoothed her dress over her knees” (15) at her brother’s wake.

While this isolation had previously left the priest “alone in his confession-box, wide-awake and laughing-like softly to himself” (*Dubliners* 18) because no one else will really speak or listen, he finds a kindred spirit in the boy, who also seems resolved to “extract meaning” (13) from the world around him. Other adults fill their sentences with ellipses to keep him in the dark and to keep themselves from having to say more than they can face, but the priest is determined to teach the boy “a great deal” (13). Given the fears of the boy’s uncle that Father Flynn will turn the narrator into a “Rosicrucian” (11), it seems evident that part of the boy’s education has been an introduction to, if not actually Eastern mysticism, then to the intellectualism inherent in the quest by the Rosicrucians for wisdom and enlightenment.¹⁴

Because he associates the priest with a “truculent” (14) desire for knowledge that is incompatible with the unthinking compulsion to conceal that characterizes so much of Dublin, the boy subconsciously connects Father Flynn with the Orient. When the boy dreams of the priest and what the man needs to speak, to “confess” (11), he feels as though he has entered “some pleasant and vicious region” (11) filled with the “long velvet curtains and a swinging lamp of antique fashion” (13) that defined the Irish vision of what it must be like in “Persia” (14). As Cheng observes, “the East reflects here a psychic need to escape”

(*Race* 81), and the boy looks to the Orient as a place where one might forge an identity that is not censored by the Irish impulse to exclude the exotic and quell inquiry and individuality.

“The Sisters” touches on the first stirrings of Orientalism in the young narrator, but it is in “Araby” that Joyce offers a more detailed exploration of Irish Orientalism. By invoking the name of the Irish poet James Clarence Mangan (1803–1849), “Araby” calls attention to the Orientalist tradition in Irish literature that encourages the middle class commodification of the East as a location of desire. In doing so, “Araby” underscores the appropriation of the East as a place for Dubliners to escape—if only temporarily and at great expense—from the repressed tedium that the collection of stories makes so apparent.

Joyce was a great admirer of Mangan, and the surname of the girl in “Araby” is surely a tribute to the poet who was the subject of two of Joyce’s public lectures. Joyce admired Mangan for his brooding romanticism and the objective quality of his art (Manganiello 31), but Mangan was perhaps best known for the Oriental motifs in his work. Fascinated by Oriental poetry and the mysticism of the East, in 1837 he began producing a multi-volume work called *Litterae Orientales* that anthologized a number of Persian, Turkish, and Arabic poems (Shannon-Mangan 173). In his introductory remarks, Mangan described the Orient as a “realm to which all states and conditions of mankind are irresistibly attracted,” as no one can escape the appeal of “the land of the sun” (Shannon-Mangan 173).

Working from the example of Thomas Moore, Mangan only intensified the Irish perception of the East as a gorgeous and exotic land filled with “exquisite” (Shannon-Mangan 186) sensuality. In one adaptation of a Turkish poem, Mangan celebrates the shrouded and mysterious nature of the Oriental Other: “My starlight, my moonlight, my midnight, my noonlight, / Unveil not, unveil not, or millions must pine” (Shannon-Mangan 186). This depiction of the East and its inhabitants as a source of mystery, longing, and desire resonated in the minds of adolescent boys like the narrator of “Araby,” for whom Mangan’s Oriental verses reified the East’s reputation as a place of almost unbearable sensual delights.

“Araby” captures the power of the adolescent fantasies generated by the tone of Mangan’s poetry. For the boy in “The Sisters,” the Orient stands for a location of disclosure and erudition set quite apart from the Irish distrust of probative discourse, but the more mature boy in “Araby” feels the full force of the attraction of Orientalism, which for him signals a farewell to “child’s play” (*Dubliners* 32) and an introduction to the sensual world, a place that he learns to associate with Arabia. The Orient functions for the boy as what Cheng calls “the exotic, the mysterious, the lush East: the distant lands of untold wealth and unimaginably sensual entertainments” (91). The younger boys of “An Encounter” find themselves drawn to stories of “the Wild West” (19). As the narrator of “Araby” approaches adolescence, a journey which is revealed by the “apple tree” (29) that stands in his front yard by and the significant “fall” (35) of the coins from his pocket, he is lured by the sexual promise of the Eastern lands he reads about in books.

“Araby” emphasizes the link between the narrator’s coming of age and his fantasies of the Orient, in which the “magical name” of ‘Araby’ worked to “cast an Eastern enchantment” (32) over the boy. But Joyce makes it clear that the narrator is not merely looking forward to the Arabian-themed entertainments at the fair; instead, his whole notion of the bazaar is bound up with the suggestion of a sexual exchange with Mangan’s sister, who flirtatiously asks him to buy her a souvenir during his visit. Moved to distraction by the forbidden sight of her “petticoat” (32) and the sexual suggestion of her hand that “held one of the spikes on the railing” (32), the boy cements in his mind the link between the “splendid bazaar” (31) that drives him to distraction and “wandering thoughts” (32) and the girl who inspires the disguised sexual fantasies in which his “soul luxuriated” (32).¹⁵

Just as the boy in “Araby” admits that Irish stereotypes of the Orient “liberated me” (33), the characters in *Ulysses* look to the East as a place where they might escape the confines of Dublin’s strict moral codes and express their latent sexual desires. Kershner and Said remind us that of all Orientalist attitudes, this perception of the sexualized East was the most pervasive; in Victorian England, the most important characteristic

of the Orient was its role as a place of “licentiousness” and “dangerous sensuality” (281).

Joyce first explores this aspect of Orientalism in *Dubliners*, but it is in *Ulysses* where he most thoroughly identifies the Irish use of Eastern fantasy to express a longing for the sexual freedom that they imagined proliferating in the Orient. As a consequence, the Orient that exists in the Irish imagination is one filled with “fleshpots of Egypt” (41), “whores in Turkish graveyards” (108), and “sidling and bowing” (569) geishas who represent the lure of promiscuity. In this context, the Oriental fantasies depicted in *Ulysses* function as a means of resistance to what Joyce saw as the sexual repression mandated by the Catholic Church.

In “Behind the Veil: James Joyce and the Colonial Harem,” Schloss examines the images of Molly as odalisque that appear in the Circe episode in terms of the Irish need for a place “to indulge in sensual delights” (336). When Bloom’s imagination transforms Molly into a stereotypical Eastern siren, with “Turkish costume” and “jewelled toerings,” he stands “spellbound” before her as

[o]pulent curves fill out her yellow trousers¹⁶ and jacket slashed with gold. A wide yellow cummerbund girdles her. A white yashmak violet in the night, covers her face, leaving free only her large dark eyes and raven hair. (439)

Like Zoe, with “her odalisk lips” (477), Molly comes to represent the manifestation of Oriental sexuality, a symbol that Joyce sets against the Irish need to suppress, at least publicly, their natural eroticism. It was this disparity, Schloss concludes, that created the Irish obsession with the Orient, as they imagined it to be a place of sexual freedom and easy divorce (“Behind” 336) which contrasted starkly with the prohibitions of their own society.

But while Schloss goes on to argue that these visions of the Orient ultimately reified “the basic codes of Christianity” and provided “moral justification to the desires of Empire” (“Behind” 335), Joyce seems to believe just as strongly in their subversive possibilities. For example, even as Molly appears in the guise of a slave, with her feet “linked by a slender fetterchain” (439), it is clear that she has the upper hand as she

admonishes Bloom with “mockery in her eyes” (440). When Bloom tries to recall his dream of the night before, one in which Molly appears once again in “Turkish” dress, he also remembers that Molly wears the pants in their marriage. Bloom tries to see Molly as an object of desire by relegating her to the role of veiled slave, but even in this fantasy she ultimately dominates him: “Wore the breeches. Suppose she does,” he admits (381). So while at first Joyce’s use of the trope of the harem might appear to reproduce the Orientalist fantasies of the subjugated woman, he actually uses this imagery to question the fixed gender roles that were so prevalent in Dublin.¹⁷

As Kershner points out, Bloom’s fantasy of Molly sheds light not only on their relationship, but also offers Joyce’s comment on master-slave relationships in general, all of which “inevitably” subjugate the master “to the relationship’s ideological structure” (282). In doing so, Joyce brings to mind MacKenzie’s theories about cross-cultural influence between the East and West. While it may appear that Europe seeks to master the Orient the West is eventually dominated by the East as it becomes consumed with the need to respond to the stimulus of the encounter with the Oriental Other. But while MacKenzie sees this influence played out in terms of artistic creativity, Joyce hints at the social and political implications of Orientalism, which seems to allow the Irish middle class some glimmer of hope about their own situation. By offering images of Caliphs disguised as beggars and slaves who come to dominate those they serve, Orientalism offered the Irish a fantasy world that played out their own aspirations for political autonomy and personal and religious freedom. Constrained on all sides by “the priest and the king” (*Ulysses* 589), Joyce demonstrates how he and his countrymen were particularly susceptible to these Orientalist images depicting the customs of strange lands that were appealing in their absolute difference from Dublin’s stifling and paralyzing social codes.

So widespread is this sometimes-unconscious desire for what was thought of as Oriental that all three of the principle characters in *Ulysses* share similar dreams about the Orient. Twice in the novel Stephen struggles to recall his dream about a “street of harlots” where he encounters Bloom, whom he identifies as the figure in his dream who offers

him Molly in the form of “the melon he had he held against my face” (47). We later learn from Bloom that he, too, has “dreamt last night” about Molly in Oriental costume “with red slippers on” (381), and in a moment of psychic connection among all three principal characters, Molly discloses in Penelope that she has been dreaming about buying “a nice pair of red slippers like those Turks with the fez used to sell” (780). Everyone in Joyce’s Dublin, it seems, dreams of the Orient.

Numerous scholars have pointed to this collective dream shared by Stephen, Bloom, and Molly as being evidence of what Cheng calls “a luxurious vision of the East that formed the shared fantasy of an entire Western culture” (172–73), or, in the words of V.G. Kiernan, “Europe’s collective daydream of the Orient” (131). But while all Western countries engaged in such dreams of the East, it seems likely that these fantasies satisfied different needs of different countries. Bloom and Molly’s shared Oriental reveries reflect their erotic desires, but Stephen’s dream also reveals his desire to escape Dublin’s grip. When he passes Bloom in front of the National Library and remembers his dream of flight before falling into a street of harlots, he recalls, “Last night I flew. Easily flew” (217). Like Bob Doran, in “The Boarding House,” who yearns to “ascend through the roof and fly away to another country” (*Dubliners* 67) to avoid marrying Polly Mooney, Stephen wants nothing more than the promise of a magical conveyance that will transport him far away from the social and religious pressures that restrain his creative impulses. Molly and Bloom’s fantasies of the East revolve around fetishized red slippers that might rekindle their passion, but Stephen also dreams of the East so he can imagine a flying “red carpet” (217) that will carry him far away from Dublin.

This element of Stephen’s dream perhaps best reveals the complexity of Joyce’s engagement with a distinctively Irish Orientalism, a phenomenon he finds simultaneously attracts and repulses him.¹⁸ While *Ulysses* seems to warn of Orientalism’s dangerously essentialist outlook, a perception that reduces the East to fantasies and stereotypes, which justify the same imperialist expansion Ireland suffered, Joyce is at times unable to avoid its temptations. Orientalist theories about Irish history provide him with a modicum of “self-respect” (*Critical Writing* 171) against the demeaning English portrayals of the sub-human Irishman, while the

fantasies of the East that are encouraged by Orientalism offer him and people like Stephen Dedalus a means to escape, if only in their imagination, from the oppressive control of church and state. Ultimately, however, *Ulysses* seems to underscore that any sense of freedom found in the Oriental entertainments enjoyed by the Irish is as ephemeral as the mirages they depict.

Just as the boy in “Araby” realizes upon hearing the “English accents” (35) of the men at the fair that the romanticized East is merely a tool of colonial power, *Ulysses* presents Orientalism as an appealing but fundamentally unsatisfying fantasy that provides its middle-class characters only temporary relief from the difficulty of their situation. So long as they are consumed by hypnotic images of the Orient, Joyce’s Dubliners participate in a colonial discourse that only increases the imperial power that oppresses them. As tempting as these Oriental fantasies might be, they threaten to distract the Irish from the reality of their own position in empire and dissuade them from enacting the social and economic changes that would result in an Ireland independent not only from England, but also from the tendency to appropriate and marginalize other colonized people.

Notes

- 1 MacKenzie’s diatribes against Said have been vigorous, and he has gone so far as to suggest that “some” might read Said’s work as a “product of rage, the anti-Western and by extension anti-Zionist tract of a dispossessed Palestinian” (*Orientalism* 5).
- 2 Although Leask takes issue with many of Said’s points, his tone is less combative than that of MacKenzie. On one of the many instances when he contradicts Said, he suggests that “perhaps” Said “inadequately stressed” certain issues that give rise to questions concerning his overarching conclusions (103).
- 3 Much of Vallancey’s work was based on the theories of Samuel Borchart (1599–1667), a Frenchman who lived for a time in Roscommon in Ireland. Borchart, who specialized in the study of ancient Eastern civilizations, had a penchant for the Phoenicians and their language, and often made suspect claims about Phoenician influence over areas that were clearly beyond the range of their settlements. Borchart’s ideas about the connections between the Celts and the Phoenicians were largely discredited when it was determined that he had little knowledge about the Irish language and was not qualified to make any assertions about its genealogy.

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- 4 According to Said, this attention to the Eastern ancestry of European languages is one of the distinguishing marks of Orientalism, which fundamentally seeks to demonstrate “the linguistic importance of the Orient to Europe” (98).
- 5 Joyce gives special mention to the contributions of Irish priests, who “were considered very learned” (*Critical Writing* 156) all over the world. By calling attention to the Bollandist fathers, Joyce offers a kind of introduction to the work of Thomas Cahill, whose *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (1995) dominated the *New York Times* bestseller list for so many months. Cahill praises the Bollandists and other Irish monks with preserving Western culture by transcribing ancient Greek and Latin texts even as the original manuscripts were being destroyed during the barbarian invasions of Europe’s Dark Ages. During the Middle Ages, both Joyce and Cahill contend, these same monks reintroduced these classics to continental Europe, along with a renewed spirit of scholarship and intellectualism.
- 6 Joyce’s bifurcated attitude about Ireland’s relationship with the Orient extends to his thoughts about the revival of the Irish language. Although he praised the history of the language and its origins to his audience in Trieste, he often seemed ambivalent about its use, not only parodying members of the Gaelic League both in the figure of Miss Ivors in “The Dead” and the citizen of the Cyclops episode, but also admitting in the very same speech in Trieste that some members of the Irish revival speak Gaelic “perhaps a little more emphatically than is necessary!” (*Critical Writing* 156).
- 7 Bloom’s adoption of Oriental costume not only sheds light on his own prejudices; it also reflects the fact that other European countries considered the Irish to be Oriental or Orientalized, thus further complicating both Bloom’s racial and national identity and the issue of Irish Orientalism. As Kershner puts it, “Bloom is a citizen of the British Empire yet outside it, an Irishman but a Jew, a European but an Oriental both because he is a Jew and because he is Irish” (291).
- 8 Kershner suggests that the Orientalist motifs in *Ulysses* may be in fact a “sign of its modernism,” as he explains that Eastern themes had been a distinguishing feature of modern art before they were superseded by the aesthetic of Picasso and other cubists (292–93).
- 9 Bowen draws convincing parallels between *Ulysses* and the *Thousand and One Nights*, noting that in addition to being associated with one city, both texts offer a vision of popular culture that blends the political, social, profane, irreverent, and irrelevant (299).
- 10 Ehrlich notes the surprise of many Dubliners of Joyce’s age who attended the fair at around the same time of day as the narrator of “Araby.” Although the boy arrives to find an empty building and a pervasive “silence” (*Dubliners* 34), those who arrived even near closing time reported encountering a bustling crowd.
- 11 The Mirus bazaar actually appeared in the Ballsbridge area of Dublin beginning on Tuesday, May 31, 1904 (Gifford 187).
- 12 In his 2002 book entitled *Orientalism*, A.L. Macfie counters MacKenzie’s claims by suggesting that Orientalism “was all too often bound up with the imperial

- project" (59). Even the endowment in 1640 of a chair at Oxford devoted to the study of Arabic was certainly motivated by the interests of the Levant Company, which was beginning to expand the commercial development of the eastern Mediterranean (44). Macfie further supports his theory by pointing out that once colonial interest shifted to the subcontinent, English academics almost immediately began to undertake the study of Indian languages and culture (45).
- 13 Both Bowen and Kershner note that Bloom is also drawn at various times in *Ulysses* as Sinbad the Sailor, another hero from the pages of Orientalist lore; Buck Mulligan even admits to Bloom, "I fear thee, ancient mariner" (217). Kershner reads this connection as a sign that just like Sinbad, Bloom is "an ordinary man on an extraordinary adventure" (279).
- 14 The Rosicrucians were founded by a former monk, Christian Rosenkreuz (1378–1484), as he traveled to Damascus, Jerusalem, and Fez while on pilgrimage during the 15th century. Intrigued by the Arabic emphasis learning and magic, he attempted to incorporate these aspects of the East into his Catholic background, producing a tradition that would eventually inform theosophy.
- 15 The wild permissiveness of Dublin's fairs was so infamous that the one in Donnybrook, which was held every August from the Middle Ages through the nineteenth century, came to epitomize a wild free-for-all. The sexual behavior at some such fairs was just as notorious; as numerous scholars point out, this may well be the reason that Mangan's parents have arranged for their daughter to be out of the city during the Araby festival. It is also worth remembering that the "last long candle" (379) that explodes as Bloom is completing his masturbatory adventure with Gerty MacDowell is from the nearby display of fireworks at the Mirus bazaar.
- 16 Lowe offers an interesting essay on cross-dressing and the feminist movement, focusing particularly on the effect of the vogue for Turkish fashions that many English women brought home with them from their travels in the Orient. Although many of these women thought that their new passion for pants reflected a masculine, and hence more powerful, sensibility, they were actually dressing themselves in the traditional attire of the harem.
- 17 Bowen also makes note of the fact that in casting Bloom if only briefly as Haroun al Raschid, who took all manner of lovers, Joyce once again calls attention to Bloom's ambiguous sexuality (297). By associating this sexual freedom and indeterminacy with the Orient, Joyce reinforces his portrayal of the East as a place of liberated possibilities.
- 18 Joyce depicts the more distasteful expressions of Orientalism in *Dubliners*, not in the opening section that records the role of Orientalism in the socialization of the Irish child, but in "A Little Cloud," where Little Chandler does not recognize the Orientalist prejudices of Ignatius Gallagher and internalizes them to such a degree that they come to color his perceptions of his own life. When Little Chandler returns home after a night of drinking with Gallagher, he looks with

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disdain at a photograph of his own wife and remembers his friend's talk of "Jews, rotten with money" (*Dubliners* 81) and "rich Jewesses" with "dark Oriental eyes" filled with "passion" and "voluptuous longing" (83).

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