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James Joyce: I. AM. A. Discover Dublin by Reading and Running

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Abstract

You are walking through it howsomever. I am, a stride at a time. A very short space of time through very short times of space.

James Joyce (*Ulysses*, p.31).

In *Ulysses*, on the morning of the 16th June 1904, Stephen Dedalus is striding on Sandymount strand, thinking about time and place as he moves. Later in the day, Leopold Bloom writes *I. AM. A.* with a stick in the sand on the same Sandymount strand. His scrubbed words will wash away with the tide but remain forever in the novel.

Using geotracking, I recreated the same ephemeral *I. AM. A.* in the same space, though in a different time. Like Bloom's script, my words cannot be read in Sandymount, but they can be found on the internet, thanks to Runkeeper and MapBox. Have I run into eternity along Sandymount strand?

Cities are not just economic engines, and we all use them in different ways. Joyce was playing with the city of Dublin, while in exile, using it differently and for a different purpose to most of its citizens. He was having fun with it, and he was having fun with us. Maybe it's time we had some fun with him.

This paper develops on from the pieces in my running blog, www.jj21k.com, Discover Dublin by Reading and Running. In his writings, Joyce created a version of Dublin. In my reading, my running, and in my writing, I compare Joyce's Dublin to the Dublin of today noting the similarities, the differences and the developments. This paper examines what we can find out in the comparisons.

Introduction

This paper is primarily about the city of Dublin, but we will not start there. Instead, we begin in Istanbul, a distance to the east. And we begin not with James Joyce but with Orhan Pamuk,

At the top of the steep alley, on rainy days, cars would skid on the wet cobblestones, and trucks had to struggle to get to the top; on sunny days, a minibus would appear from nowhere, and actors, lighting men and 'film crews' would pile out; after filming a love scene in ten minutes flat, they would disappear again. It was only years later, when I happened to see one of these black-and-white films on television, that I realised the true subject was not the love affair raging in the foreground but the Bosphorus in the glittering in the distance.

Orhan Pamuk, (*Istanbul, Memories and the City*, p.77).

Pamuk puts the Bosphorus and Istanbul at the centre of the image, in the way Joyce did with Dublin. The city is not the background, it is one of the characters. The movie, *Sex and the City 2*, was widely criticized, not just for the plot and for the acting, but because, being set in Abu Dhabi and filmed in Morocco, it left one of the main characters, New York, at home. Chris Noth, who played the role of Mr Big in *Sex and the City*, interviewed by news.com.au notes,

It was originally intended as a romp between these friends, but I think it was a mistake to leave New York City, because New York is an integral part of that show.

Chris Noth. Mr Big. (news.com.au. 2014).

Is Dublin an integral part of Joyce's writing, or can it be ignored and left behind?

Dublin

In 1980 I started studying architecture in Bolton Street in Dublin. Years later in 2014, I was struck by a quote in the story *A Little Cloud* in Joyce's collection of short stories, *Dubliners*,

Little Chandler quickened his pace. For the first time in his life he felt himself superior to the people he passed. For the first time his soul revolted against the dull inelegance of Capel Street.

James Joyce (*A Little Cloud, Dubliners*, p.59).

Little Chandler leaves his desk in the King's Inns, walks swiftly down Henrietta Street and turns right. He walks along Bolton Street quickening his pace as he meets Capel Street.

Joyce left Dublin in 1904 and the story *A Little Cloud*, was written in early 1906. Capel Street still seems dull and inelegant and not to have changed much since the story was written, nor since when I attended College around the corner in 1980. As a student of architecture, I thought that cities changed quickly, but is this true, or at least true of Dublin? How could you measure the change in Dublin? One way would be to take Joyce's Dublin, primarily written about the city in the years around 1904 and compare that city with the Dublin of today.

www.jj21k.com

In 2014 I started writing a blog, www.jj21k.com, *Discover Dublin by Reading and Running*.

The first aspect of the blog is reading the works of Joyce and what has been written about them. The second aspect is running, physically getting out and around the city. The third is making comparisons between what I read and what I see, comparing the Dublin of today with the Dublin in Joyce's writings, with each blog post based around a particular theme.

In the blog I have written about Dublin and Joyce, covering subjects such as the smells of Dublin, the Dublin Zoo, crossing Dublin without passing a pub, crossing Dublin by passing every pub mentioned in *Ulysses* that still exists, as well as creating 21k runs directly related to the major works of Joyce such as 21k runs of *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*.

Ulysses 21k

On Bloomsday 2014 I ran the first of several 21k curated runs. I designed a route from the tower in Sandycove where *Ulysses* opens and ran to Glasnevin Cemetery, where Paddy Dignam is buried. The route goes north from Sandycove along the seafront to Dun Laoghaire,

through Blackrock Park, crosses over the railway line at Booterstown to the shoreline and then along Sandymount Strand to Dromard Terrace, Leahy's Terrace, Newbridge Avenue, Shelbourne Road, Sir John Rogerson's Quay, crosses the River Liffey to the North Circular Road, Fitzgibbon Street, Mountjoy Square, past Belvedere College, Hardwicke Street, Eccles Street, Fontenoy Street, and through Blessington Basin ending at the gates of Glasnevin Cemetery.

The route was deliberately chosen to pass through significant areas that Joyce lived in, as well as places that feature strongly in the novel. The run was designed to have content from *Ulysses* and Joyce's life, but also to pass through visually interesting parts of the city itself, that a runner and a Joyce novice would find stimulating.

The route can be accessed here: <https://jj21k.com/2014/06/>

Gamification

In each of the runs, I try to develop a theme. In the case of the *Ulysses 21k*, I was interested in gamifying the run. I decided to make the run a handicapped race. The idea was that the runner would complete the race and get an official time. Then they would answer a quiz. There would be 21 questions, one for each kilometre of the run. The runner could choose easy questions or hard questions. For every easy question, you could answer you would get one minute off your time and for every hard question that you could answer you would get three minutes off your time. This means that you could reduce your finishing time from anywhere between 1 and 63 minutes. By way of example, an easy question would be what was Bloom's first name, and a difficult question would be what his middle name was. Leopold and Paula are the answers, but you knew that.

The idea is that the winner of this race would not necessarily be a Joyce expert who spent all their time in the library or a runner who spent all their time outside, but preferably someone more balanced, someone who could read and run, someone like me.

I ran the *Ulysses 21k* in 2014 and I ran a 21k in Windsor England in 1990. I had the finishing time for both of these runs. I estimated that I could probably answer about half the easy questions in 1990, having read *Ulysses* once. In 2014, having set them, I could answer all of

the hard questions. Putting the various figures into the handicap calculator, I discovered that my younger self was quicker than my older self by one minute.

Ulysses plays the older Bloom against the younger Stephen, and at least in part they can be read as older and younger versions of the same person, Joyce going as far as blending them as Stoom and Blephen in the *Ithaca* episode. The comparison between my two handicapped 21k runs plays my older self against my younger self, and although my body is slowing, I compensate by gaining knowledge as I get older. Joyce wrote,

Every life is many days, day after day. We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love, but always meeting ourselves.

James Joyce (*Ulysses*, p. 175).

Star Flights

Jeremy Wood is an artist that draws with GPS. Our mobile phones can track us and can leave a digital trace of the routes we take. Jeremy Wood uses these traces to create digital artworks. In *Star Flights* he flies across Europe on five Ryanair flights, creating a pattern of a star, a distance of 5414 miles in 68 hours for £74. (Jeremy Wood, 2008)

Using *Star Flights* as an inspiration, I decided to create a digital artwork, writing the word *Joyce* using GPS tracking. Initially this sounded easy but became logistically harder as I wondered how exactly I would do it. If I used cursive script then I might get dizzy as I ran around the O, and how exactly would I know where I was going? I tried to write the word *Joyce* using only straight lines. How would I do this? I could make the O into a diamond, but I would still need to figure out when to turn and at what angle. You can see preparatory sketches from my notebook in Figure 1.0. I decided to select a different piece of text to run, perhaps something Joyce had written.



Figure 1.0: Joyce Script

I. AM. A.

In the *Nausikaa* episode in *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom is on Sandymount Strand.

Mr Bloom with his stick gently vexed the thick sand at his foot. Write a message for her. Might remain. What?

I.

Some flatfoot tramp on it in the morning. Useless. Washed away. Tide comes here. Saw a pool near her foot. Bend, see my face there, dark mirror, breathe on it, stirs. All these rocks with lines and scars and letters. O, those transparent! Besides they don't know. What is the meaning of that other world. I called you naughty boy because I do not like.

AM. A.

No room. Let it go.

Mr Bloom effaced the letters with his slow boot. Hopeless thing sand. Nothing grows in it. All fades.

James Joyce (*Ulysses*, p. 312).

I could run I. AM. A. Typographically this is quite straightforward. You can run simple straight lines. The early development sketches from my notebook can be seen in Figure 2.0.

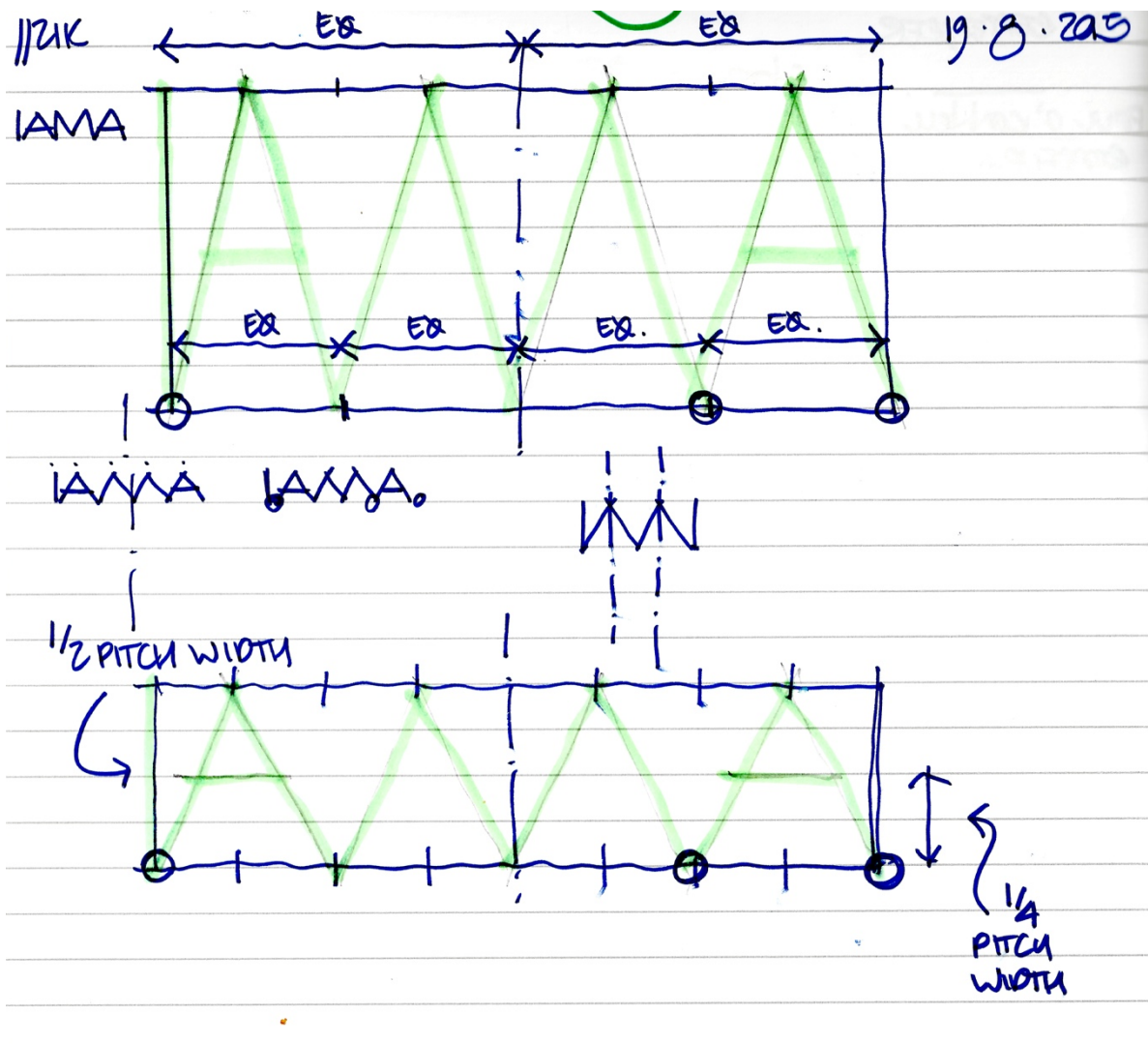


Figure 2.0: I. AM. A. Typography

The *Nausikaa* episode in *Ulysses* takes place to the rear of the Star of the Sea Church in Sandymount. In the mid-twentieth century, this area of land was reclaimed from the sea and is now the Seán Moore Park and grounds for the Clanna Gael Fontenoy Gaelic Athletic Association. The land has free public access, which offered me the opportunity to run in the same location that Bloom wrote his letters, albeit my letters would be at a much larger scale.

I spent a considerable amount of time wondering how I would know where and when to turn. I considered laying out cones in advance, but this seemed logistically complicated. What I needed were existing visual clues.

The grounds are floodlit, with a line of floodlights evenly spaced on either side of the football fields. The uprights of the floodlights would act as regularly spaced markers. Running the letter I would be easy. Just run across the pitch from one floodlight to the other, running parallel to the goal line. To create the first leg of the A, run diagonally across the field to the next floodlight. To create the horizontal bar in letter A, when running diagonally across the field, you can use the goals to estimate the halfway mark and run across to make the horizontal line. It is easy to create the M, as it is essentially two A's without the horizontal bars. A little practice and I was ready.

On November 15th 2015, I started the run in front of the Star of the Sea Church in Sandymount. I ran down Leahy's Terrace to the park to create the centrepiece, I. AM. A, and then continued to run into Sandymount village, passing the house in Dromard Terrace where James Joyce spent the night of 16th June 1904, the day on which *Ulysses* is set.



Figure 3.0: The Digital Trace from Runkeeper.

All fades.

When Leopold Bloom traces I.AM.A in the sand he rubs most of it out with his boot, and the tide takes the rest. Of course, Bloom's I. AM. A., is in a work of fiction, the novel *Ulysses*. Is my I. AM. A. any more real? People saw me running in the park, but none of my observers could read my I. AM. A., yet my trace remains on the internet as ephemeral as Bloom's. You can see it here; <https://runkeeper.com/user/BarrySheehan/route/4967842>

Have I run into eternity along Sandymount strand?

Did Joyce Run?

The question should be asked as to whether Joyce ran and whether it is relevant to his writing. We know that Joyce walked and swam.

He was a good walker. I would always go by tram to the Bull Wall to swim, Joyce would walk there and back (about 4 miles). It may surprise many to know that he was an expert swimmer. He was accomplished not only at the breast stroke, but the trudge as well.

William G. Fallon (*The Joyce We Knew; Memoirs of Joyce*, p. 46).

We know from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* that Stephen Dedalus ran in Blackrock Park.

When the order list had been booked the two would go on to the park where an old friend of Stephen's father, Mike Flynn, would be found seated on a bench, waiting for them. Then would begin Stephen's run round the park. Mike Flynn would stand at the gate near the railway station, watch in hand, while Stephen ran round the track in the style Mike Flynn favoured, his head high lifted, his knees well lifted and his hands held straight down by his sides.

James Joyce (*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 53).

Stephen Dedalus is not James Joyce, and it is by no means certain that because Stephen Dedalus ran in Blackrock Park, James Joyce did, but as he lived near to the park in his youth

and was homeschooled while he was there, it seems likely that he did run in Blackrock Park. His brother Stanislaus says that James ran,

In running he had a turn for both speed and endurance. Pat Harding, a friend of my father's, who was Irish champion for the 110-yard hurdles at the time when the American Kranzlein was champion of the world, offered to train my brother for the hurdles when he was in his last year at Belvedere, but my brother already had other fish to fry.

Stanislaus Joyce (*My Brother's Keeper, James Joyce's Early Years*, p. 41).

Interestingly Joyce himself says that he ran, which he did in Belgium, the location of this conference. Joyce wrote to his patron Harriet Shaw Weaver, when on holiday in Ostende on the 18th August in 1926, at the age of 44,

I am by no means ascetic here for I have developed a most Flemish appetite which I trust will not always abide with me. Yesterday I ran from Middelkerke to Mariakerke, a distance of about 6 or 7 kilometres. I could walk forever along a strand.

James Joyce (*Letters of James Joyce Volume One*, p. 243, 244).

This stretch of coastline would have brought back memories to Joyce. Separated from the sea by a railway line it is reminiscent of the Blackrock Park of his youth. The sense of place perhaps stimulated Joyce to start running, or maybe just to think he was running. It is hard to define what particular effect if any, running had on his writing. He certainly walked all over Dublin. This directly influences his writing in terms of the city as being central to his stories.

I am not alone in mining the connection between running and writing. The Japanese writer Haruki Murakami links them, believing his start as a novelist was when he became a runner.

At any rate, that's how I started running. Thirty-three—that's how old I was then. Still young enough, though no longer a young man. The age when Jesus Christ died. The age that Scott Fitzgerald started to go downhill. That age might be a kind of crossroads in life. That was the age when I began my life as a runner, and it was my belated, but real, starting point as a novelist.

Haruki Murakami (*What I talk about when I talk about running*, p.47).

It is my contention that place matters, not just to the city's occupants and its artists but to the relationships between all of its residents and their art.

I could tell you how many steps make up the streets rising like stairways, and the degree of the arcades' curves, and what kind of zinc scales cover the roofs; but I already know this would be the same as telling you nothing. The city does not consist of this, but of relationships between the measurements of its space and the events of its past: the height of a lamppost and the distance from the ground of a hanged usurper's swaying feet; the line strung from the lamppost of the railing opposite and the festoons that decorate the course of the queen's nuptial procession; the height of that railing and the leap of the adulterer who climbed over it at dawn

Italo Calvino (*Invisible Cities*, p. 13).

Italo Calvino writes of cities, noting that they are about relationships between the measurements of space and the events of the past. I am writing about links between the city that James Joyce was born in and wrote about, the city that I live in, the same city developed over time.

I am discovering this Dublin by reading and running.

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