

Beyond Grammars of Utopia

Crisis of Imagination and Utopianism by Negation or Affirmation in James Joyce's *Ulysses*

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ABSTRACT

Do utopias emerge from envisioning where we want to live or where we do not want to live? According to Theodor Adorno, polarity, i.e. the grammatical distinction between affirmation and negation, is central to utopian thinking and showcases a crisis of imagination, as we can only conceive a utopian world by negating a given reality (Adorno in Bloch 1975, 68-70). My paper negotiates this idea through a grammatical-conceptual reading of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). Specifically, it argues that *Ulysses* first lays out a negative utopianism following Homer's *Odyssey* but in the course of the narrative tests out the logical necessity that precludes affirmative utopian thinking.

Starting from episode 12, 'Cyclops,' the Homeric utopianism 'by negation' (De Jong 2001, 233-35) seems inadequate to erect a utopian project, for a negative dystopia need not amount to a utopia; the Joycean Ireland negates the Homeric dystopia without being a utopia either. Utopianism by negation proves exclusionary too, for a negative utopia is dystopian for the ones negated, like nationalistic Ireland is a dystopia for a Jew like the protagonist, Leopold Bloom. Bloom offers an alternative to negative thinking by envisioning a utopian state that affirms everyone. Climactically, in episode 18 'Penelope', Molly Bloom answers 'yes' to the query 'where'. This unsyntactical, absurd affirmation exposes the limits of imagination, as delineated by Adorno, since we cannot understand possible worlds that are 'yes' as a response to 'where'. However, it also prefigures conceptual structures yet to come, structures that may build utopian worlds based on the affirmation 'where one does want to live'. These conceptual mechanisms that underlie utopian world-making and are captured through grammatical structures are identified as 'grammars of utopia' and constitute the overarching theoretical project in which this paper is inscribed.

KEYWORDS

Polarity, negative, affirmative, anti-anti-utopia, syntax, Adorno, Homer, Cyclops, modernism.

INTRODUCTION

a step in the required direction it was, beyond yea or nay...

– James Joyce, *Ulysses* 774.8-9.

Does utopia derive from thinking about where we want to live or where we do not want to live? This question is essentially a question of grammar, particularly of polarity, which is the linguistic distinction between affirmation and negation (Israel 2011, 1-2). Is utopia a place where we would

like to live, that is an affirmative project, or a space that does not have the characteristics of a place where we would not like to live, that is a proposal by negation of a given society?¹

Theodor Adorno transformed the grammatical notion of negation into a tool of thinking, especially of thinking Western philosophy as a process of dialectics that is far from affirmative but builds on infinite negations of concepts (primordially, the concept of identity, which is inescapably conceived through the concept of non-identity or otherness). The work that systematizes this is his *Negative Dialektik* (1966), which gave the relevant theory its name ('Negative Dialectics'). In his 1964 radio debate with Ernst Bloch, he already addresses utopian thinking in particular as helplessly negative: 'one can actually talk about utopia only in a negative way...utopia is essentially in the determined negation, in the determined negation of that which merely is' (Adorno qtd in Bloch 1975, 68-70).² Adorno maintains that human thought inevitably negates a given society to envision a future one – and when it comes to the ideal society, the conceptional foundation is the non-ideal society (e.g. an unequal society) that is reversed/negated and thus fashions a utopia (e.g. an equal society).

Nevertheless, literature – as usual – comes to unsettle theory. In his epic-sized, modernist novel *Ulysses* (serialized from 1918 to 1920 and published as a book in 1922), the Irish author James Joyce (1882-1941) tackled the same question (before Adorno did) about what I call 'utopianism by negation' referring to the Adornian conceptualization of utopia only by negation of a given reality. Joyce's 'endlessly open book of utopian epiphanies' (Kiberd 1992, lxxx) narrates the one-day 'odyssey' of Mr. Leopold Bloom in Dublin on 16 June 1904. At 5:00 pm, Bloom pays a visit to a pub, where his pacifistic utopianism and his Jewish origin will clash with the nationalism of the Irish Catholic clientele, associated with the Homeric Cyclops (hence, the name 'Cyclops' of episode 12). By reading *Ulysses* episodes 12, 17, and 18 against the narrative and conceptual backdrop of *Odyssey* 7 and 9, I argue that Bloom's confrontation with the 'Cyclops' of the pub challenges the Homeric-Adornian logic of negation (part 1, 2 sections) and suggests alternative 'grammars of utopia' by means of affirmation (part 2), grammars that will be contextualized as 'anti-anti-utopian' (part 3). The purpose of this study is both theoretical and critical.

Theoretically, the conceptualization of 'grammars of utopia' constitutes a first grammatical 'study of Utopian fantasy mechanics', as proposed by Fredric Jameson in his *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005, xiii). So far, genre studies have mapped utopian mechanics in semantic terms of (e)utopia (positive utopia), dystopia (negative utopia), and anti-utopia (failure of (e)utopia) (indicatively, Sargent 1994; Balasopoulos 2011; Braga 2018). The basis of the typological debate is a string of polarities: negations (the prefixes (o)u-, dys-, anti-) and affirmations (eu-). Remaining in the field

of comparative literature, I pick up the thread from the linguistics-inspired approach of Corin Braga in his *Pour une morphologie du genre utopique* (2018), but I suggest zooming in on the concept of polarity, dislodging it as a heuristic, and exploring unaddressed perspectives that have to do with the language and grammar of utopian narratives but are not fully covered by morphology or semantics. Specifically, I coin the term ‘grammars of utopia’ as a follow-up on ‘grammars of crisis’, a methodological framework of cultural analysis aiming to map the conceptual tools that underpin crisis narratives and rest on grammatical structures (Boletsi et al. 2021, 23-49). What I identify as grammars of utopia refers to the conceptual mechanisms that underlie utopian world-making and are captured through grammatical categories.

In terms of criticism, I suggest a grammatical reading that adds to Wicht’s (2000) and Charles’ (2012) analyses of Joyce’s utopianism in episode 12 by focusing on its (polar) utopian logic rather than the specific ideal places and conditions it envisions. Besides, from a broader-than-this-episode perspective, Wicht’s work has established four manifestations of utopianism in *Ulysses* that have predominated the scholarly debate on Joyce’s utopian thinking: the Irish past, Biblical messianism, and the projects of ‘Bloomusalem’ and ‘Flowerville’. However, episode 18 ‘Penelope’ perhaps because it does not tap into any of these four utopias, has been underexplored in utopian studies of *Ulysses*, something my article aims to redress by uncovering its utopian logic.

TWO PROBLEMS OF UTOPIANISM BY NEGATION

1. Negation is inadequate: a negative dystopia need not be a utopia

As each episode of *Ulysses*, the ‘Cyclops’ hints at the Homeric *Odyssey* in multiple, multilevel, and very sophisticated ways. In *Odyssey* 9, the land of the Cyclops is depicted as dystopian based on two deficiencies that are incompatible with the ideal society: the lack of material and institutional culture. Starting from material culture:

οὐτ’ ἄρα ποίμνησιν καταΐσχεται οὐτ’ ἀρότοισιν,

ἀλλ’ ἢ γ’ ἄσπαρτος καὶ ἀνήροτος ἥματα πάντα

ἀνδρῶν χηρεύει...

οὐ γὰρ Κυκλώπεσσι νέες πάρα μυλοπάρηι,

οὐδ' ἄνδρες νηῶν ἔνι τέκτονες, οἳ κε κάμοιεν

νηῆας ἐνυσσέλμους, αἳ κεν τελέοιεν ἕκαστα

ἄστε' ἐπ' ἀνθρώπων ἰκνεύμεναι, (Homer 9.122-28)³

Neither with flocks is it occupied, nor with plowed lands, but unsown and untilled all its days it is bereft of mankind...For the Cyclopes have at hand no ships with vermilion cheeks, nor are there shipwrights in their land who might build them well-benched ships, which could perform all their wants, passing to the cities of other men, as men often cross the sea in ships to visit one another...

Grammatically, the dystopian land of the Cyclops is presented in negative terms. The narrative, rather than describing what does exist, foregrounds what does not: flocks (οὐτ'...ποίμνησιν), ploughlands (οὐτ' ἀρότοισιν), sowing and tilling (ἄσπαρτος καὶ ἀνήροτος), humans (ἀνδρῶν χηρεύει), ships (οὐ...νέες). Notably, this description constitutes the longest description 'by negation' in the whole Homeric corpus, according to De Jong (2001, 233-35), hence my term 'utopianism by negation'.

Here it is useful to juxtapose Joyce's Ireland as portrayed in episode 12, for he seems to have discerned the Homeric negative logic and then played with it creatively:

In Inisfail the fair there lies a land, the land of holy Michan...And there rises a shining palace whose crystal glittering roof is seen by mariners who traverse the extensive sea in barks built expressly for that purpose and thither come all herds and fatlings and first fruits of that land for O'Connell Fitzsimon takes toll of them, a chieftain descended from chieftains.

...with superabundance of milk and butts of butter and rennets of cheese and farmer's firkins and targets of lamb and crannocks of corn and oblong eggs, in great hundreds, various in size... (Joyce 378.31-32; 379.22-27; 380.24-27)⁴

Ireland is pictured in arcadian terms, as a place of material 'superabundance'. The Joycean 'land of the Cyclops' includes all those things that the Homeric one does not: cropping (corns, fruits), farming (milk, butter, cheese, etc.), and seafaring (barks, mariners). Based on Gifford's intertextual reading, this – epic-styled – catalogue makes Ireland approach idyllic topoi of legendary places (1988, *ad loc.*). The first utopian land of Greek literature, Scheria, is recalled:

ὥς τε γὰρ ἡελίου αἴγλη πέλεν ἡὲ σελήνης

δῶμα καθ' ὑπερεφὲς μεγαλήτορος Ἀλκινόοιο. (Homer 7.84-85)

for there was a gleam as of sun or moon over the high-roofed house of great-hearted Alcinous.

Much like in Homer, Joyce's land centers on a 'shining palace' with a 'crystal glittering roof', and it is even described through the perspective of 'mariners who traverse the extensive sea', like the palace of Alcinous, which is spectated by the archetypical sailor, Odysseus.⁵ Against the backdrop of these references, readers who are familiar with the *Odyssey* face a challenging border-crossing. The land of the Cyclops and the land of the Phaeacians are situated at the edges of Homeric utopianism and have been received as paradigms of dystopian and utopian places, respectively. Although Ireland is announced to reanimate the dystopian land of the Cyclops in the episode's title, it ends up advancing what the Homeric Cyclops lacked, thus evoking a utopian instead of a dystopian topos. That is conveyed through a description by 'over-affirmation', to paraphrase De Jong's 'description by negation' (2001, 234). Joyce follows Homer regarding the dystopian characteristics of the land of the Cyclops, yet he presents Ireland as reversing them affirmatively and emphatically.

After material culture, the lack of institutional culture is the second pillar that carries the dystopian weight of the land of the Cyclops in Homer:

τοῖσιν δ' οὐτ' ἀγοραὶ βουλευφόροι οὔτε θέμιστες, (Homer 9.112)

Neither assemblies for council have they, nor appointed laws,

The description by negation persists, and the Homeric verdict is clear: no ideal society exists without assemblies with political and legislative power, so a society that does not have these is regarded as far from utopian. What about the Irish 'land of the Cyclops'?

In contrast to the Homeric land of the Cyclops, the court culture in Ireland seems so advanced that it even permeates the narration. The 'Cyclops' episode narrativizes mundane events among the characters in the style of legalese, as Senn illuminated (436-37), showing that the legal language constitutes a way of making sense of and narrating reality in its own right:

For nonperishable goods bought of Moses Herzog, of 13 Saint Kevin's parade, Wood quay ward, merchant, hereinafter called the vendor....

...the said amount shall have been duly paid by the said purchaser to the said vendor in the manner herein set forth as this day hereby agreed between the said vendor, his

heirs, succ of essors, trustees and assigns of the one part and the said purchaser, his heirs, successors, trustees and assigns of the other part. (Joyce 377.17-19; 378.1-7)

The ‘said’ characters are captured within their legal identification credentials (full name, addresses, profession, titles, etc.), and a mere transaction between them is described as legally binding to ‘heirs, successors, trustees and assigns of the other part’ (Senn 433-37). Again, Joyce’s ‘peripheral vision’ turns to Homer, for he describes Dublin as exaggerating in domains in which the Homeric land of the Cyclops fails: in this case, legal culture.

An advanced political culture coexists with the juridical one. While the legal jargon permeates the narration, the civic advancement infiltrates characterology, baptizing Bloom’s coprotagonist in this episode ‘the Citizen.’ This name is a par excellence (κατ’ ἐξοχήν) device as if the Citizen is the exemplary civic figure of the work. Thus, this character proves a nodal figure between Homer and Joyce, for he seems to personify the Irish ‘excellence’ of what does not exist in the Homeric land of the Cyclops, namely the concept of citizenship. As such, he takes part in Joyce’s description of Ireland by ‘over-affirmation’, according to which everything negated in the Homeric dystopia proliferates in Ireland.

Finally, Ireland even possesses its own metaphorical assembly that is absent in Homer (cf. ἀγοραί 9.112):

A large and appreciative gathering of friends and acquaintances from the metropolis and greater Dublin assembled in their thousands... (Joyce 445.13-15)

However, the way the episode develops brings the presumed utopia in Joyce’s novel unexpectedly close to a dystopia. Despite that the Homeric conditions of material and institutional progress are all met, despite the bright civilization of outstanding agricultural, maritime, legal, and civic advancements, the assembly is to be drowned with an earthquake that will bury them ‘all...alive’ (Joyce 447.15):

The catastrophe was terrific and instantaneous in its effect...From the reports of eyewitnesses it transpires that the seismic waves were accompanied by a violent atmospheric perturbation of cyclonic character. (Joyce 447.1-2; 15-18)

Cracking a pun on the ‘cyclonic’ within a ‘cyclopic’ episode, Joyce pushes his narrative universe to catastrophe. This catastrophe, according to Flack, ‘echoes [Joyce’s] well-known designation of Dublin as a “centre of paralysis”’ (2011, 439). What to make of this plot twist? How to interpret

the fact that, despite having everything that the archetypal Homeric dystopia had not, Ireland falls into pieces in the end?

This world was not utopian, not even in the first place. The natural violence of the earthquake only succeeds the human violence diffused all around Dublin, a colonized city, where everyone is under threat. The English target the Irish, the Irish target the English, and both target the Jews (more on that in the next part). The motivating force of this violence is nationalism, which is shared between the Irish and the English. The figure that embodies Irish nationalism is precisely the Citizen, who is – ironically – the uncivilized character par excellence, envisioning the extermination of anyone non-Irish. Hence, Ireland in *Ulysses* 12 deflates and transforms into a dystopian place. What does this mean for Joyce's emulation of Homer, especially Homer's utopianism by negation?

Joyce gets to grips with Homer's description by negation and reverses it with a corresponding description by over-affirmation, for the material and institutional Irish culture is described as exceedingly advanced, contrary to Homer's land of the Cyclops. Nevertheless, this over-affirmation does not seem adequate to secure a utopian ground, for dystopian violence is far from lacking in Ireland of the 1900s. Hence, it becomes apparent that a negative dystopia need not amount to a utopia. Utopia seems to be something more or different than just the reversal of all the bad things that one can imagine (e.g. no citizenship, no laws, no crops); one has all of them in abundance in the Ireland of *Ulysses*, but they are just not enough to elevate a utopia.⁶ Apparently, to the question 'what is a utopia', in Homer '[t]he answer is in the negative', to follow a pub client's phrasing (Joyce 409.24). However, as I argued, *Ulysses* negotiates the idea that the answer to 'what is not utopian', suggested in the Homeric land of the Cyclops, does not necessarily entail an answer to the question 'what is utopian'.

2. Negation is exclusionary: a negative utopia is dystopia for the ones negated

Ulysses not only revitalizes Homeric utopianism by negation and transmutes it through 'over-affirmative' references to the *Odyssey*, but it also fabricates its own utopia by negation. The Citizen shoulders such a project:

— We'll put force against force, says the citizen. We have our greater Ireland beyond the sea...But those that came to the land of the free remember the land of bondage.

And they will come again and with a vengeance, no cravens... (Joyce 427.33-34; 428.10-13)

The Citizen's vision maps two places: the utopian 'land of the free', indicating the United States of America, which hosted millions of Irish emigrants, and the dystopian 'land of bondage', which refers to colonial Ireland. The dualism between these two spaces (freedom versus bondage) is to be transcended by means of violence ('force'). Vengeance will come to create a third spatial possibility, for it will transform the dystopian 'land of bondage' into a utopian 'land of the free'.⁷

The targets of this violence are – at least – two: the English and the Jews. As for the former, in episode 15 'Circe', the Citizen's utopianism is conveyed through a – rather dystopian – song:

May the God above

Send down a dove

With teeth as sharp as razors

To slit the throats

Of the English dogs

That hanged our Irish leaders. (Joyce 691.3-8)

In an 'apocalyptic and infernal nightmare' (Charles 2012, 486-87), force will be put against force through God-sent, revengeful violence against the English, who will be tortured and slaughtered for oppressing the Irish people for centuries. As for the Jews, back in episode 12, the Citizen's 'utopianism' is channeled into a first act of resistance against one of them, his violent outburst against Bloom:

— By Jesus, says he, I'll brain that bloody jewman for using the holy name. By Jesus, I'll crucify him so I will. (Joyce 445.9-10)

Therefore, the Citizen's 'utopia' is negative much like the Homeric one: his ideal Ireland is ideal because it is non-English and non-Jewish. This 'utopian' proposal builds on the negation of certain populations, of anyone non-Irish.⁸

Hence, through the personification of Irish nationalism, *Ulysses* offers a second case study of utopianism by negation after the Homeric one and thereby expands the critique towards this logic. The negative ideation of utopia proves not only inadequate, as analyzed in the previous section,

but also dangerous. The reason is that negation inevitably excludes, and in fact negative utopias are utopias only for the ones included. For the ones negated, they can even be dystopias, like how nationalistic Ireland constitutes a dystopia for a Jew like Bloom. So, in addition to not providing an adequate response to the question ‘where one wants to live’, utopianism by negation suffers from relativity, for it is utopian for some, dystopian for others.⁹ Once again, utopia is to be sought elsewhere, away from negation, hopefully.

TOWARDS AN AFFIRMATIVE UTOPIA

What does Bloom suggest instead? Is there any alternative to the inadequate and exclusionary nature of utopianism by negation? Bloom situates his utopia on the other side of the Citizen’s logic – or the other ‘pole’ in grammatical terms:

That's not life for men and women, insult and hatred. And everybody knows that it's the very opposite of that that is really life.

— What? says Alf.

— Love, says Bloom. I mean the opposite of hatred. (Joyce 432.21-25)

Instead of erecting his utopian project on the basis of those excluded/negated (the ones hated), Bloom decides to foreground the ones who are included/affirmed (the ones loved). And who are they exactly? He even specifies this, highlighting his affirmative rather than negative logic:

Nurse loves the new chemist. Constable 14A loves Mary Kelly...You love a certain person. And this person loves that other person because everybody loves somebody but God loves everybody. (Joyce 433. 4-5; 13-15)

On the one hand, the phrase ‘everybody loves somebody’ builds on the two possible negations of the negative pronoun ‘nobody’, namely ‘everybody’ and ‘somebody’. Then, it interrelates them by revolving them as arguments (complementing syntactic entities) of the verb ‘to love’. Hence, it construes the phrase ‘everybody loves somebody’, also meaning that everybody does not love somebody. According to Hsu, ‘love, in these textual moments, implies...negativity’ (2014, 22), and indeed human love seems inseparable from the negation of those who are not loved. On the other hand, the phrase ‘God loves everybody’ construes the absolute affirmation – or the supreme negation of the negation – meaning that God does not hate or negate anybody but affirms

everybody.¹⁰ For Bloom, the point to which we should all tend as individuals and societies is God, and the reason is almost grammatical: it is God's ability *not* to negate.¹¹

Therefore, Bloom's ideal society is essentially different from Homer's and the Citizen's projects. It abandons the question 'where one does not want to live', which includes the land of the Cyclops in Homer and an Ireland full of non-Irish in the pub, and it shifts to 'where one does want to live', limning a peaceful state based on inclusion/affirmation rather than exclusion/negation. Bloom's definition of nation comes to seal this ideal state:

A nation is the same people living in the same place. (Joyce 430.9-10)

As such, Bloom disregards any sort of religious, linguistic, cultural, or other differentiating features as a national credential. His suggested state loses the ability to negate people based on the idea of the nation since all residents are automatically included/affirmed in it based solely on their residency. His project champions inclusivity:

New worlds for old. Union of all, jew, moslem and gentile. (Joyce 610.24-25)

GRAMMARS IN CONTEXT: POLARITY AND ANTI-ANTI-UTOPIANISM

How does Bloom's affirmative utopianism fit the novel as a whole? In this final part, I integrate his grammatical shift from negation to affirmation into its context, textual and historical.

Bloom's affirmation participates in Joyce's epic modernist project that aspired to include/affirm all genres and heroic figures that were available in his time. Episode 12 includes, and thus makes an affirmative gesture towards, thirty-two interpolations that fall beyond the scope of the novel in terms of genre. For instance: legalese, which was analyzed in the first part, Irish bucolic prose, cited in 'In Inisfail the fair...' (Joyce 378.31) but also medieval romance, theosophist catechism, sports journalism, biblical prose, among other genres (Gifford 1988, *ad loc.*).¹² Even more, Joyce's protagonist was intended to be the modernist Odysseus and thus the 'complete all-round' – or all-affirming – 'man in literature', to quote Joyce's friend, the English painter Frank Budgen (1960, 15-16). Joyce, in his conversations with Budgen, juxtaposed Odysseus and Bloom with other major heroic figures, like Christ and Hamlet, whom Joyce regarded as inferior to Bloom owing to the way they negated others. Christ negated the sexual experience with a woman (186),

Hamlet negated the experience of fatherhood, while Odysseus, and even more ostentatiously Bloom, affirmed them all (15-16).

This pronounced, affirmative embedding of genres and heroic figures in Joyce's modernist project partakes in a broader shift from negation to affirmation in *Ulysses*. Most relevant to my discussion of utopianism is the affirmative spatiality with which the novel concludes in episodes 17 'Ithaca' and 18 Penelope'. Specifically, the last question posed by the narrative voice is '[w]here?' (Joyce 871.13) – and to this, the answer of Molly Bloom, Leopold's wife, is:

Yes (Joyce 871.14)

Subsequently, the whole last episode of *Ulysses* unravels a triumph of 91 'yeses' positioned as a response to the question 'where?' (passim 871.14-933.9). Answering a wh-question with a yes/no answer is overtly absurd and does not make any grammatical sense. Yet two things are certain: the suggested grammar is different from what we already know, and the suggested place ('where') is affirmative ('yes').

Timewise, Molly's orgasmic 'yeses' bookend *Ulysses* within two diametrically opposite grammars. Her waking on 16 June 1904 starts with a negation, as her very first words are: 'Mn. No. She did not want anything'. (67.5-6). The next day, the day after *Ulysses*' one-day odyssey took place, she ends on a most affirmative affirmation, with 91 'yeses'. By inscribing Molly's affirmative spatiality into the larger polar perspective in which Leopold's story is being told, the logic of affirmation proves – as most elements in *Ulysses* – systematic. Joyce fashions a consistent, ever-expanding 'poetics of affirmation', and through this he turns the tables on the Homeric and the Citizen's negative configurations by suggesting elsewhere that are affirmative, alternative places that are...yes.¹³

Therefore, Molly can be seen as negating in her own way the negation as a means without which configurations of other spaces are unthinkable. The negation of utopia is defined as 'anti-utopianism' (Balasopoulos 2011, 60). The negation of the negation of utopia, namely of anti-utopia, is conceptualized by Fredric Jameson as 'anti-anti-utopia' (2005, xvi), and here *Ulysses* approximates that – it negates the negation, indeed. Jameson, it should be noted here, does not endorse a total affirmation of utopianism, though. His anti-anti-utopianism recognizes the need to keep utopian thinking alive so as to energize reflexes of better world-making yet not without a constant critical impulse that detects '[u]topia's structural ambiguities' (2005, xvi) – especially after the experience of Stalinism and other alleged utopias that showcased the anti-utopian, totalitarian tendencies of utopianism. Molly's affirmative response similarly rejects the negation

but seems reluctant to offer any new truth about the suggested place, for her answer ‘yes’ to the query ‘where’ does not give way to any graspable narrative but fades into absurdity.¹⁴ Through an anacoluthon, i.e. a syntactical discontinuity, Molly twists the rules of conventional grammar that prescribe answering wh-questions with a definite answer that inevitably negates; for instance, the answer ‘there’ to ‘where’ negates ‘here’. Instead, she answers the question ‘where’ with a reply that does not succumb to negating anything we can make sense of.¹⁵ That is the difference from Leopold, who goes as far as erecting his utopian state, a state that inescapably negates nationalism: that Molly – like Leopold’s God – does not negate anything but the negation itself and, even more, by not being translatable into any concrete utopian program, her answer does not affirm any utopianism but the affirmation itself.¹⁶

By now, Molly has reached the limits of our polar imagination. Any affirmation proves to be a negation of what is not affirmed, in the final analysis. The moment Molly tries to escape this and cross the conceptual frontier of polarity by suggesting an alternative grammar that does not negate anything concrete and intelligible, she challenges Adorno’s thesis that utopias are inevitably negative. The moment we realize that even the one affirmation that does not make any sense is negative too in that it negates the very idea of negation, Adorno’s thesis becomes relevant again. On that account, Molly’s answer does not dethrone the negation entirely, only as the primordial conceptual basis of world-making. Anything else, essentially and radically different from negation, lies beyond what we can conceive for the moment, yet by trying to imagine it, we are thinking towards needful conceptual grammars that are yet to come.

How does this affirmative genre, characterology, and spatiality fit the historical context of *Ulysses*? *Ulysses*’ narrative time is late colonial, pre-revolutionary Dublin of 1904. It was written between 1914 and 1922, parts of it were serialized from 1918 to 1920 in the American literary magazine *The Little Review*, framed within the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921), and the entire book was released in 1922, which was the first year of the Irish Free State. The Irish War of Independence was – like all wars – based upon polarity: colonized Ireland versus the non-Irish colonizers, namely the English. History thereby provided the most palpable revelation of the inadequacies and the dangers of negation. The available utopianisms were based on exclusion, initially of the non-Irish (the English), then of certain Irish (e.g. the Jews in Dublin). Meanwhile, dystopian violence remained firm throughout the first decades of the 20th century, and thus negative utopias materialized into actual dystopias for the ones negated (the non-Irish, the non-Christians, etc.). For the record, two months before the publication of *Ulysses* in February 1922, the polarity above was legally resolved with the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921 that founded the Irish Free State. However, a new polarity was emerging at the same time: the pro-treaty Provisional

Government versus the anti-treaty Irish Republican Army. That resulted in the Irish Civil War (1922-1923) (Platt 2011, 45-93). The Adornian crisis of imagination, i.e. the lack of any fully affirmative way to deliver a utopian proposal, and the subsequent dystopian violence were still there. Still there, the Cyclops.

CONCLUSION

Joyce's *Ulysses* subverts utopianism by negation as exemplified by the Homeric land of the Cyclops and the novel's character called the Citizen and tests out the logical necessity that precludes affirmative utopian thinking. I argued that the reason is that negative logic proves inadequate to erect a utopian project and is necessarily exclusionary. On the one hand, a negative dystopia need not amount to a utopia, as Ireland of the 1900s negates all the dystopian Homeric elements yet remains dystopian. On the other hand, a negative utopia is dystopian for the ones negated, like nationalistic Ireland seems dystopian for a Jew like Leopold Bloom. Instead, the utopia that Joyce's novel puts forward is based on inclusion and tends to the divine ability not to negate but to affirm. Leopold ideates a utopian state that does not negate people but only affirms, while Molly suggests alternative spaces that are 'yes'. By negating the negation as the only strategy to articulate elsewhere, Leopold and Molly 'hol[d] the mirror up to the colonial capital that was Dublin, 16 June 1904', full of polarities and subsequent violence, 'but [they] also offe[r] redemptive glimpses of a future world which might be made over in terms of those utopian moments' (Charles 2012, 483). The basis of this is a non-negative way of delivering proposals, no matter how absurd or unsyntactical this might sound – at least with the grammars of utopia that are available to us for the moment.

On a meta-critical note, I suggest going beyond 'bracketing' Joyce's utopianism within solely spatial terms or terms of utopian programs, and aim to distill an underlying utopian impulse and chart its logic.¹⁷ As a detector, I propose the framework of grammars of utopia in an attempt to expand beyond topography and program-making and embrace the utopian mechanics of thinking about the present world and delivering proposals about the future, following Jameson's call to set out a 'study of Utopian fantasy mechanics' (2005, xiii). To bring this to Joyce's very own words, perhaps the purpose of solidifying grammars of utopia, no matter how utopian itself, is charting the known borders of imagination, exposing its uncharted waters, and then remapping human imagination anew by inviting alternative grammars:

That it was a Utopia, there being no known method from the known to the unknown
(Joyce 823.6-7)

Whereas the gesture of mapping is valuable in that it delineates areas of our imagination by transforming them from unknown into known, there is also a reverse engineering in the process: it also makes the remapping tempting – and literature and theory steadily perform such remapping of grammars and prefigure conceptual territories that extend beyond the known and towards the unknown, territories yet to be travelled, beyond these grammars and grammars in general. To this end, *Ulysses*' grammars of utopia serve to develop a 'method from the known', that includes proposing by negation, 'to the unknown', that is proposing by affirmation, in our odyssey away from our polar logic and any grammatical crisis of imagination. In this light, literature and theory may unlock conceptual grammars of utopia that are yet to come, grammars *beyond* – to paraphrase the paper's epigraph – *yea or nay*.

¹ A recent example of this polar logic: the World Happiness Report. If one looks at the ranking factors that determine the happiest and the unhappiest countries, they seem to follow a negative logic. All countries are measured based on their distance from a hypothetical country called 'Dystopia' that ranks the lowest in the six agreed variables of 'happiness', having 'the world's lowest incomes, lowest life expectancy, lowest generosity, most corruption, least freedom, and least social support' (Helliwell et al. 2023, n.p.). Poverty, illness, corruption, and the rest can make someone unhappy, but is their negation enough to make someone happy? Or is happiness something more than just the negation of the negative things in life? As I argue in part 1, Joyce's utopianism in episode 12 opts for the latter.

² I follow Zipes and Mecklenburg's translation of the conversation (1988, 10-12).

³ The text and translation of the *Odyssey* are cited from Murray and Dimock.

⁴ The text of *Ulysses* is cited from Kiberd.

⁵ Crystal is also the roof of the utopian 'Bloomusalem' (Joyce 606.28).

⁶ Cf. Ott's spot-on phrasing in a different context, regarding Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*: 'the dialectical negation of the negative does not automatically create or naturally unfold the positive' (2015, n.p.).

⁷ Following the thread from the previous section and the passage from *Odyssey* 9.122-28, it is remarkable that the Joycean utopia is feasible by means that were also emphatically in shortage in the Homeric land of the Cyclops, that is seafaring.

⁸ For Joyce's anti-nationalistic views see, among many, Howes 2004, 254-71 and Deane 2004, 29-34. Nolan 1995 and Cheng 1995 remain reference works.

⁹ Cf. 'Better never means better for everyone...It always means worse, for some.' (Atwood [1985] 2010, 222).

¹⁰ Whether this is possible for human beings is implied in the conclusion of the episode, when Bloom ascends to the sky like Christ (Joyce 449.1-12). Joyce's anti-hero makes humanly possible what is essentially divine.

¹¹ Notably, Bloom does not negate any God here, Christian (Protestant, Catholic, or other), Jewish, or else, but he remains appropriately inclusive/affirmative to all of them. There are options that are not considered though, such as atheism or agnosticism, thus exposing the inevitable negation that lurks in Bloom's attempt to over-affirm. This will be discussed in the third part of the article.

¹² Similarly, episode 14, 'Oxen of the Sun', includes (and disintegrates, according to Kiberd) 'all major literary styles of the English language, from Anglo-Saxon to the present' (1100).

¹³ In the 'Cyclops', Bloom's identity is affirmed: 'His name was Virag. The father's name that poisoned himself.' (438.24-25). By contrast, in Homer, Odysseus negates his name and origin when he meets the Cyclops: 'Cyclops, thou askest me of my glorious name, and I will tell it thee...Noman is my name, Noman do they call me.' (9.364-66; trans. Murray 1919). *Ulysses* again turns previous negations into affirmations. We know that Joyce is aware of and interested in this identity negation by Odysseus, for this will inspire

the creation of another ‘negative’ character, Nayman of Noland, in *Finnegans Wake* (1939). ‘Nay-man’ seems to be the reincarnation of the Odyssean ‘noman’ (οὐ-τις), interestingly originating from a ‘No-land’ (οὐ-τόπος) (Charles 2012, 476-77, with an interesting parallel to utopia’s etymology as a no-place). For the time being, in *Ulysses*, this namelessness is assumed by the anonymous narrator of the episode, the ‘Nameless One’ (595.15), whose name insinuates the Odyssean archetype of negative identity (Kiberd 1992, 1058-59).

¹⁴ The perceived absurdity of the 91 ‘yeses’ as a reply to ‘where’ can be explained with the aid of cognitive syntax. Generally, the tendency of order to fall into disarray and not make sense anymore, i.e. entropy, “is minimal when the answer to every yes/no question is entirely predictable, i.e. when nothing is learnt and there is no information gained” (Solms 2021, 157). However, here we have a yes/no answer when it is least predictable, that is after a wh-question, thus reaching the maximum level of entropy in terms of predictability. Moreover, nothing is learnt. No information is gained about the suggested place, for no wh-question is finally answered. Hence, we have the maximum degree of entropy regarding the informative output too. Therefore, the unpredictability and counter-informativity of Molly’s syntax account for its incomprehensibility.

¹⁵ In Joyce’s correspondence with Budgen, Molly is presented to say: ‘Ich bin das Fleisch das stets bejaht!’ (‘I am the flesh that always affirms’) (Budgen 1960, 266). *Contra*: for a consideration of ‘yes’ as ‘no’ and the feminist criticism that considered Molly’s command of grammar to be sexist on behalf of Joyce see indicatively Kiberd 1992, 1180-85. For a consideration of Molly’s answer ‘yes’ as a question see Olk 2013, 333.

¹⁶ Whether the non-negative equals the affirmative falls beyond the scope of this article, yet it foreshadows future endeavors of the typological debate. In logical terms, it is interesting that even the very concept of affirmation is understood in negative terms, supposing that affirmation is the negation of the negation, while the other way around is not valid: the negation is not the affirmation of the affirmation.

¹⁷ For the distinction between utopian program and utopian impulse see Jameson 1-9.

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