

## Joyce's Aesthetics of Triviality<sup>\*</sup>

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### I

James Joyce once said, “To me an Irish safety pin is more important than an English epic” (Ellmann 1965, 436). This remark is the springboard from which I will explore the uncharted territory of the significance of trivial things in Joyce’s aesthetics. It is a well-known axiom that *Ulysses* is structured as an epic, the frame of which has been borrowed from Homer’s epic, *The Odyssey*, even though the framework, for example, each chapter’s title, is removed later. By adopting the epic form, Joyce brings up two themes related to the epic tradition: construction of national identity and conservation of literary heritage, because it inevitably presupposes a state nation with its cultural heritage including language. As Andras Ungar points out, “*Ulysses* construes the writing of history on the model of the epic’s traditional concern

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with the establishment of legitimacy” (2). Many critics also regard *Ulysses* as a mock-epic, whose popular example was Samuel Butler’s *Hudibras* (1684). So Joyce must have been aware of the necessity of constructing a national epic, but in a different sense of the word. I believe that Joyce puts triviality and epic grandeur on either dish of the scale of his aesthetics, thus competing with each other, so if any part is disregarded, it would tip the balance of his aesthetics. In this paper, I will put more emphasis on “an Irish safety pin” than a national epic, on which I will briefly touch for the purpose of keeping the balance.

In the “Scylla and Charybdis” chapter, the issue of Irish national epic is brought up by one of the literati who gather in the National library:

Our national epic has yet to be written, Dr Sigerson says. Moore is the man for it. A knight of the rueful countenance here in Dublin. With a saffron kilt? O’Neill Russell? O, yes, he must speak the grand old tongue.  
(*U* 9.309-11)

Just before this passage, they talk about George Moore and Edward Martyn as Don Quixote and Sancho, main characters of the Spanish epic. The discussion goes on to the issue of language. In turn-of-the-century Ireland, speaking in Irish, “the grand old tongue,” was a litmus paper to testify whether one is a nationalist or not. Joyce must have been keenly aware of the issue of the revival of the Gaelic. George Moore’s work is mentioned as a candidate for the national epic, because he contributed to the Irish revival movement, but another candidate could be O’Neill Russell, who contributed to the constitution of the Feis Ceoil, the annual music festival. (Joyce himself got the bronze medal in the 1904 singing contest.) But its feature was “Anglo-Irish and genteel” (Gibson 104). But Joyce’s alter ego Stephen Dedalus is out of concern among Irish literati, so his work could be no candidate for the Irish

national epic. My point is that Joyce denounces both the English epic tradition and the Irish Literary revival, the latter of which inherits or imitates the former, by rather emphasizing the significance of Irish triviality.

So I will focus on triviality, which constitutes Joyce's aesthetic strategy. Joyce's encyclopedic desire is reified in his comprehensive inclusion of even small things such as safety pins, badges, hairpins, brooches, etc. By delineating the characteristics of chaos theory, Peter Francis MacKey refers to four ideas, out of which I put an emphasis on the following two: "(1) A trivial decision alter life's course. (2) A chance encounter can dramatically alter life's course" (1). I argue that these items register ideological operations in the strata of commodity culture, since they cannot be apolitical in the ideological context of Ireland under the British occupation. I will deal with how these trivial things operate as reified ideological commodities in the political context. Joyce's habit of notetaking for *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* provides many Joyce scholars with the justification of genetic criticism, which deals with the process of Joyce's creative writing. Joyce's voracious inclusiveness makes most readers feel overwhelmed by too much information and obsessively detailed items, and, as a result, his *Ulysses* is regarded as too difficult a literary text. Joyce's "style of scrupulous meanness" (*L* II 134) is problematic, since its meaning escapes being accurately defined. But I think that Joyce's own remark is grounded on his own pride in meticulous documenting life and reality in *Ulysses*: "If [Dublin] one day suddenly disappeared from the Earth it could be reconstructed out of my book [*Ulysses*]" (Budgen 67). While including Joyce's *Ulysses* in a list of "encyclopedic narrative," Edward Mendelson emphasizes that "[e]ncyclopedic narratives occupy a special historical position in their cultures, a fulcrum, often between periods that later readers consider national pre-history and national history" (1267-68). Again he points to the relation between epic and encyclopedic narrative: "Encyclopedic

narrative evolves out of epic and often uses epic structure as its organizing skeleton, but the subjects of epic have become increasingly vestigial to the encyclopedic form” (1269). A Walton Litz also speaks of the technique of “Ithaca” as following: “an accumulation of details which has no inherent ‘aesthetic’ limits but relies on the epic impact of overmastering fact” (388). So this paper will explore how Joyce deploys trivial items or trivia in order to constitute his aesthetics of modern epic.

## II

In “The Dead,” Gabriel Conroy is confronted with an Irish nationalist, Miss Ivors, when they participate in the lancers in the Morkan family party.

Lancers were arranged. Gabriel found himself partnered with Miss Ivors. She was a frank-mannered talkative young lady, with a freckled face and prominent brown eyes. She did not wear a low-cut bodice and the large brooch which was fixed in the front of her collar bore on it an Irish device and motto. (*D* 168)

This brooch could be “a deluxe version of the badge of *Cumann na nGaedheal* [Society of the Gaels]” or “a Tara brooch” [figure 1] (*DA* 168), but the features of the brooch with an Irish device and motto attest that this device could be a badge of the Gaelic League, which was founded in 1893, in order to restore the Irish language.



[figure 1]



[figure 2]

The Irish expression on the badge can be read as *Conradh na Gaeilge* (the Gaelic League) and *Tir agus Teanga* (For country and tongue), as can be seen in the above figure [figure 2]. While dancing, Miss Ivors scolds Gabriel for contributing a literary review to *Daily Express*, which took a Unionist stance, and so she denounces him as a “West Briton,” a pejorative term for an Irish Catholic supporting for the British cause. Later she suggests visiting the Aran Islands, in whose areas the Irish language survived among ordinary people. In response to this request, Gabriel reveals his plan to travel to Europe “partly to keep in touch with the languages and partly for a change” (*D* 169). In response to this answer, Miss Ivors taunts him for never trying to learn the Irish language. It is probable that writing in the colonizer’s language, English, could be a lifelong unsolved problem to the writer situated in the colonial conditions. Joyce himself remarks on the Irish writer’s destiny: “Writing in English is the most ingenious torture ever devised for sins committed in previous lives. The English reading public explains the reason why” (*L* I 120). In this sense, *Finnegans Wake* may be a strategic solution for Joyce, who disowns the supremacy of the colonizer’s language by making it just ‘one of them [languages].’<sup>1)</sup>

Even playing which sports games could be a hallmark of national identity

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1) See for further detailed discussion of Joyce’s concern with Irish language and nationalism, Kiheon Nam, “‘nat language’: Joyce, Language, and Irish Nationalism.”

in Ireland. In “An Encounter,” Mahony is attacked by “two ragged boys” since he wears a cricket club badge.

I objected that the boys were too small and so we walked on, the ragged troop screaming after us *Swaddlers! Swaddlers!*, thinking that we were protestants because Mahony, who was dark complexioned, wore the silver badge of a cricket club in his cap. (*D* 15)

I think Mahony’s skin color could be misunderstood as Jackson and McGinley annotates: “Joyce seems to link dark skin with Protestantism,” based on the description of Mr Browne as swarthy. But another possibility is that Mahony’s dark complexion indicates Irishness in contrast to “pale faces” from London. In “Nausicaa,” Gerty thinks of Bloom as a foreigner because of his “dark eyes and pale intellectual face” (*U* 13.415-16). Stephen’s villanelle of “pale vampire” (*U* 3.397) and Mulligan’s epithet for Bloom as “pale Galilean eyes” (*U* 9.615) can corroborate the national identity of skin color. More importantly, he was mistaken as a Protestant, since the badge he wears functions as an indicator of religious sect and nationalist politics. In *Ulysses*, the prohibition of playing a Gaelic sports game, hurley, in the Phoenix Park is debated, which implies that sports also operate in terms of political binarism. So the cricket badge is regarded as a signature of being a Protestant-Unionist in turn-of-the-century Ireland.

Which badge to wear functions as an indicator of nationalist politics in Ireland. In “Ivy Day in the Committee Room,” Mr Hynes points to a leaf-shaped badge [figure 3]: “—If this man was alive, he said, pointing to the leaf, we’d have no talk of an address of welcome”— (*D* 109).



[figure 3]

Parnell was one of the most crucial political figures on which the dynamics of Irish politics, especially in the 1880-90s, operated. Ivy Day is a commemoration day for Charles Stewart Parnell, who represented a version of the Irish nationalist movement through parliamentary solutions such as the Bill of Home Rule. A year after he died on October 6, 1879, Parnell's newspaper, *Irish Independent*, organized the anniversary ceremony for their "Uncrowned King" (D 134), whose demise triggers the split among Parnellites, and frustrates the Irish hope for Home Rule, and, ultimately, Irish independence. The issue of King Edward VII's state visit to Dublin, which was realized in summer 1903, became the main agenda for the 1902 municipal election (Fairhall 93). The reason why Joyce altered the election day to the commemoration day for Parnell is that he must have had in mind an aesthetic strategy of anachronism in order to enhance the effect of superimposed association just like a palimpsest. The historical fact about the Edward VII's state visit to Ireland was described as following:

When King Edward VII arrived in Dublin in 1903, the Corporation had voted by forty to thirty-seven against an official welcoming speech, and

none was given. However, a typical ‘Irish solution’ was found: a welcome was given outside the city boundary by officials from suburban Councils instead, particularly those of Kingstown and the Ballsbridge area. It is doubtful whether the King noticed the difference. (*DA* 109)

Joyce must have known this ‘Irish solution’ to the issue of welcoming the British sovereign, a tactic that tried both to keep the Irish pride intact and to gain a practical engagement, but Joyce criticizes this cunning only as the attitude of “the gratefully oppressed” (*D* 35).

In “The Dead,” the two aunts and Gretta talk about goloshes (usually spelled as galoshes):

—And what are goloshes, Gabriel?—

—Goloshes, Julia! exclaimed her sister. Goodness me, don’t you know what goloshes are? You wear them over your … over your boots, Gretta, isn’t it?—

—Yes, said Mrs Conroy. Guttapercha things. We both have a pair now. Gabriel says everyone wears them on the continent—

—O, on the continent, murmured Aunt Julia, nodding her head slowly— Gabriel knitted his brows and said, as if he were slightly angered:

—It’s nothing very wonderful, but Gretta thinks it very funny because she says the word reminds her of Christy Minstrels— (*D* 162-63)

It is puzzling how Gretta associates goloshes with Christy Minstrels, who were vaudeville entertainers with black faces. As Jackson and McGinley explains, “Gretta’s dactylic Galway pronunciation is close to ‘golly shoes.’ The word ‘golliwog’ first appeared in 1895, and rapidly became popular” (*DA* 163). Most readers miss to notice Gabriel’s memory about Lily: “Gabriel had known her when she was a child and used to sit on the lowest step nursing a rag doll” (*D* 159-60, my emphasis). The golliwog was created by Florence Kate



Upton, being based on the blackface minstrel tradition, and was commodified as a rag doll, which was so popular that it became one of the household dolls in turn-of-the-century Europe [figure 4]. In the 1920s, a confectionary company, Trebor Bassett, manufactured Black Jacks and the wrapper [figure 5] showed golliwogs on it. Although I had no way to identify what Lily's doll looks like, I guess that a golliwog doll can be a candidate for it. In a sense, racism was consumed in forms of commodities, which unwittingly reinforced the racial discrimination on ordinary people's minds. So Gretta's seemingly ridiculous response is sensible.



[figure 4]



[figure 5]

In “Nestor,” Stephen Dedalus looks at the two objects spread out on Mr Deasy’s table:

On the sideboard the tray of Stuart coins, base treasure of a bog: and ever shall be. And snug in their spooncase of purple plush, faded, the twelve apostles having preached to all the gentiles: world without end.” (*U* 2.201-04)

The two things on Deasy’s tray symbolize what Stephen has in mind: “a servant to two masters—the British Empire and the Irish Catholic.” It is worth noting that the Stuarts were the first kings of the United Kingdom, because

James VI of Scotland became James I of England. This means a starting point of the tremendous project of establishing United Kingdom of Britain. During the Stuart dynasty, an age of intense religious debate and radical politics, Ireland was actually colonized, even though the Act of Union was proclaimed in 1800. The civil war between Crown and Parliament resulted in a parliamentary victory for Oliver Cromwell and the dramatic execution of Charles I. The spooncase of the twelve apostles signifies Deasy's Protestant fervor, not Catholic.

In *Ulysses*, references to the Irish popular song from Ingram's "The Memory of the Dead," are scattered. The year that Joyce had entered University College was the centenary of '98, and the issue was the subject of much publication and a great deal of discussion during the next few years. This badge [figure 6] was distributed in 1898 as a promotional item to commemorate the centenary celebration of Wolfe Tone's revolt.



[figure 6]

Wearing this badge signifies the active participation in the justification of the 1798 revolution. The centenary celebrations commemorating the 1798 rebellion provided a means of "the construction of a coalition of interests—class, church, republicans and constitutional nationalist" (Johnson 80). But as Lyons

describes, “[t]he recent celebration of the centenary of the 1798 rising, with their ineffectual harking back to Wolfe Tone, struck him as a obscene mockery” (59). No critics have never paid attention to the reference to this song whose title Joyce twists: “Ireland comes now. My country above the king. She listens. Who fears to speak of *nineteen four*?” (*U* 11.1072-73, my emphasis). The year 1904 is the historical setting for *Ulysses*, so this slight alteration makes his own work a formidable one for the coming generation. In other words, Joyce may have had in mind his *Ulysses* as a candidate for a national epic.

In the “Nausicaa” episode, Gerty keeps her treasure things in the drawer of her toiletable:

It was there she kept her girlish treasure trove, the tortoiseshell combs, her child of Mary badge, the whiterose scent, the eyebrowline, her alabaster pouncetbox and the ribbons to change when her things came home from the wash and there were some beautiful thoughts written in it in violet ink that she bought in Hely's of Dame Street for she felt that she too could write poetry if she could only express herself like that poem that appealed to her so deeply that she had copied out of the newspaper she found one evening round the potherbs. (*U* 13.638-45)

Gerty's child of Mary badge is a signifier of religious creed, Catholic. Her expectation to make good relation with W. E. Wylie is not likely to materialize, because of the discrepancy between them, Catholic and Protestant, especially in a country like Ireland that suffers sectarian conflicts. Like Little Chandler in “A Little Cloud,” Gerty also keeps her dream of becoming a poet in her toiletable, which signifies her seemingly unattainable dream. It is worth noting that Gerty's poetic sensibility derives from popular newspapers she reads. This does not guarantee her dreams come true, since popular journalism

also engaged itself in the promotional operation for the expansion of imperialistic ideology.

In “Ithaca,” cataloguing is a literary device to reify Joyce’s encyclopedic desire, whose good example is Bloom’s unlocking of the desk drawers, in which so many memorable items are kept. There must be special reasons for keeping these items for Bloom. So it would be interesting to look at the meanings underlying this collection. This attempt has never been made in the Joyce industry, even though these items are regarded as meaningful in terms of constituting Bloom’s experience and identity. When Bloom opens one of the drawers, a few items show his sexual obsession:

. . . a press cutting from an English weekly periodical *Modern Society*, subject corporal chastisement in girls’ schools: . . . two partly uncoiled rubber preservatives with reserve pockets, purchased by post from Box 32, P.O., Charing Cross, London, W.C.: . . . 2 erotic photocards showing a) buccal coition between nude senorita (rere presentation, superior position) and nude torero (fore presentation, inferior position) b) anal violation by male religious (fully clothed, eyes abject) of female religious (partly clothed, eyes direct), purchased by post from Box 32, P.O., Charing Cross, London, W.C.: (U 17.1801-13)

First, Bloom keeps a press cutting from an English weekly periodical *Modern Society* that deals with the issue of corporal chastisement in girls’ schools. As Colleen Lamos points out, Britain’s highest educational institutions suffered a crisis of the homo/heterosexual definition, and Joyce’s texts “manifest the contradictions and anxieties of this crisis” (19). The Victorian ethos about corporal chastisement is carried on with a famous phrase: “Spare the rod and spoil the child.” Although usually attributed by the Victorian people to Solomon, this phrase originally comes from Samuel Butler’s satirical poem *Hudibras*, published in 1664, as I have already associated it with Joyce’s

*Ulysses* in the introductory remark of this paper (Cotter 63). But those who were against beating were concerned about “the sexual nature of beating for both the beater and the beaten” (Cotter 64). Later in “Circe” whipping is corroborated as a way of acting out sadomasochistic desire when the Honourable Mrs Mervyn Talboys complains: “He implored me to soil his letter in an unspeakable manner, to chastise him as he richly deserves, to bestride and ride him, to give him a most vicious horsewhipping” (*U* 15.1070-73).

The second item drawing our attention is a contraceptive device, condom. In late-19<sup>th</sup>-century England, condoms were distributed through barbershops, adopted as a way to prevent venereal diseases among British soldiers while in the Republic of Ireland condoms were outlawed according to the religious creed. Charles Goodyear revolutionized the usage of condoms with his invention of rubber vulcanization in 1829. So Bloom bought an ‘illegal’ item from a London-based company, and keeps it secretly in the drawers: “rubber preservatives in sealed envelopes tied with gold thread” (*U* 15.1571). Despite Bloom’s attempted secrecy, Molly knows her husband’s habit:

Ill see if he has that French letter still in his pockets arent enough for their lies then why should we tell them even if its the truth they dont believe (*U* 18.1235-37)

When Bloom secretly puts Martha’s letter and his name card into his sidepocket, his clandestine action operates as an alibi for “his deflowering of Martha’s letter”: “a kind of prophylactic (or French letter); the penetration of the envelope in the pocket is safe and prudent sex, a honeymoon in the hidden hand” (Lawrence 169-70). In “The Ballad of Persse O’Reilly,” Joyce distorts the Catholic event of Immaculate Conception into a new phrase, “immaculate contraceptives for the populace” (*FW* 45.16).

As Carol Schloss argues, these erotic photocards offer “a glimpse of some of the master texts that have buttressed Bloom’s fantasies” (103). Molly denounces her husband for keeping erotic photos. Although we agree on her argument that Bloom’s sexual fantasies are related to late nineteenth-century misconception about the Orient, a more interesting fact comes up that some wrappers of condoms contained Oriental images at that time, thus reinforcing the typical images of the Orient with their sexual innuendos. These photocards are obvious fetishes, which are invested with sexual desire. As Karen Lawrence points out, “[t]hrough Marx and Freud, the older anthropological discourse came to highlight the investments of desire in objects that circulate and are exchanged in modern society, with Marx focusing on the collectively valued commodity and Freud on the more personal and idiosyncratic projections of desire” (166). In “Penelope,” Molly is aware of her husband’s erotic taste: “like the smutty photo he has” (*U* 18.22). Later she identifies herself as “a little like that dirty bitch in that Spanish photo he has” (*U* 18.563-64).

The other items also register the colonial situation of Ireland: one is the postage stamp describing the profile of Queen Victoria: “A 1d adhesive stamp, lavender, of the reign of Queen Victoria” (*U* 17.1814-15). This postage stamp represents the colonial reign of the British queen. The following items register the imperial presence of commodities underpinning the British economy:

A chart of the measurements of Leopold Bloom compiled before, during and after 2 months’ consecutive use of Sandow-Whiteley’s pulley exerciser (men’s 15/1, athlete’s 20/-) viz., chest 28 in. and 29 1/2 in., biceps 9 in. and 10 in., forearm 8 1/2 and 9 in., thigh 10 in. and 12 in., calf 11 in. and 12 in.: 1 prospectus of the Wonderworker, the world’s greatest remedy for rectal complaints, direct from Wonderworker, Coventry House, South Place, London E. C., addressed to Mrs L. Bloom with brief accompanying

note commencing: Dear Madam. (*U* 17.1815-23)

Earlier in the “Calypso” episode, Bloom thinks of “Sandow’s exercise” as a kind of cure for depression: “Got up wrong side of the bed. Must begin again those Sandow’s exercises” (*U* 4.233-34). Eugen Sandow was an epitome of physical culture pervaded into the popular imagination during the British Empire. The chart Bloom keeps in his drawer is a supplement from Eugen Sandow’s book, *Strength and How to Obtain It*, one of the books which Bloom has on his bookshelves in “Ithaca.” The Prussian-born bodybuilder promoted physical culture “not simply as entertainment, but as moral crusader, racial necessity, and also business opening” (Scott 79). In order to build up physical strength, Bloom bought the Sandow-Whiteley’s pulley exerciser [figure 7]. According to Barbara Kruger, who claims that “I shop, therefore I am,” the item Bloom purchased operates to constitute his social identity, since this device employs the cultural emphasis on masculinity and physicality, underpinning the imperial ideology. By emphasizing the lack of proper physical education, Sandow recommended his system of physical training (Chapman 126). It would be more interesting to give heed to Bloom’s wrongfully addressed gender: “Dear Madam.” This erroneous interpellation of Bloom as feminine makes him excluded from the ideological operations of the dominant imperial discourse, thus becoming a floating signifier not contained in the patriarchal imperialism. Fae Brauer points to another problematic of valorizing homoeroticism by connecting Sandow’s physical culture to Wilde’s trials.<sup>2)</sup>

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2) See for a discussion of the interrelationship between Sandow’s physical culture and the trials of Oscar Wilde, Fae Brauer.

**Be Your Own Sandow.  
The Whitely Exerciser.**

A complete home gymnasium, made of elastic cord, passing over noiseless cone bearing pulleys. The most popular means for developing

**Health & Strength.**

Agents Wanted. Illustrated Book Free.  
Price, enamel finish, \$3.00  
Price, nickel finish, \$4.00

For sale by A. G. Spaulding & Bros.  
Address correspondence to sole mfrs.,  
The Independent Electric Co.,  
39th Street and Stewart Ave., CHICAGO.



[figure 7] 1895 advertisement

Another item is a pseudo-medical appliance for curing piles: “1 prospectus of The Wonderworker, the world’s greatest remedy for rectal complaints, direct from Wonderworker, Coventry House, South Place, London E C, addressed (erroneously) to Mrs L. Bloom with brief accompanying note commencing (erroneously): Dear Madam” (*U* 17.1819-23). The item is circulated in the metonymic chain of phallic substitutions. In the additional catechism, the list of customers who reported their testimonials reveals that this item is a reminder of the Boer War:

Were there testimonials?

Numerous. From clergyman, British naval officer, wellknown author, city man, hospital nurse, lady, mother of five, absentminded beggar (*U* 17.1834-36)

The item links three testimonials from British naval officer, wellknown author, and absentminded beggar to Rudyard Kipling’s jingoistic poem, “The Absentminded Beggar,” which was used to fund-raise for the Boer War.<sup>3)</sup> The

3) See for further detailed discussion of the significance of the Boer War in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Kiheon Nam, “‘Khaki Hamlets’ and ‘The Absent Minded Beggar’: The



absent minded beggar's complaint is reverberating with its imperialistic engagement in commodity culture: "What a pity the government did not supply our men with wonderworkers during the South African campaign! What a relief it would have been!" (*U* 17.1838-39).

In "Penelope," Molly confesses that she was teased by pro-British people, "on account of father being in the army and my singing the absentminded beggar and wearing a brooch of Lord Roberts" (*U* 18.376-78). In addition to the other two reasons, wearing a brooch of Lord Roberts [figure 8] works as a sign of political attitude towards the Boer War.



[figure 8]

Field Marshal Lord Roberts was a key person in the Boer War, since he turned the war into the British victory. So this badge was sold to glorify his heroic success in the Boer War. He appears in an advertisement of Pears' Soap, whose copy was as such: "The first step towards lightening / The White Man's Burden / is through teaching the virtues of cleanliness." In addition to the soap, the famous beef tea, branded as Bovril, was also employed to promote the Boer war campaign: "In the South African War / BOVRIL / gave

Vigor in the Fighter, strength to the Wounded, / and Sustenance to the Enteric.” We have to notice the fact that Molly’s love Mulvey died of enteric fever, not in military action.

In Bloom’s second drawer, which contains a variety of documents, two things are drawing our attention:

Documents: the birth certificate of Leopold Paula Bloom: an endowment assurance policy of £500 in the Scottish Widows’ Assurance Society, intestated Millicent (Milly) Bloom, coming into force at 25 years as with profit policy of £430, £462-10-0 and £500 at 60 years or death, 65 years or death and death, respectively, or with profit policy (paidup) of £299-10-0 together with cash payment of £133-10-0, at option …: a local press cutting concerning change of name by deedpoll.” (*U* 17.1835-60)

Along with his being wrongfully addressed as “Dear Madam” when Bloom purchased the Wonderworker, his birth certificate brings up the problematics of gender identity, since the feminine feature of his Christian name incessantly interrogates the fixed nature of gender identity. The last document brings up the issue of Jewish name change.

I, Rudolph Virag, now resident at no 52 Clanbrassil street, Dublin, formerly of Szombathely in the kingdom of Hungary, hereby give notice that I have assumed and intend henceforth upon all occasions and at all times to be known by the name of Rudolph Bloom. (*U* 17.1869-72)

The name change must be understood as a tactic of survival in terms of the Jewish history of diaspora. Bloom seems to understand the significance of this change by keeping the newspaper announcement of his father’s legal change of name. Interestingly, Bloom adopts his pseudonym as Flower, an English

translation of the Hungarian word, *Virag*. While pointing to the meaning of the name change on Bloom's mother's side, Ira Nadel emphasizes that "at that time Jews were forced to give up their names and pay for new ones" (144).

Up to this moment, I have dealt with trivial but significant items that reveal Joyce's aesthetic interest. Now I will focus on one item: a pin. When he peeps into Mrs Breen's bag, Bloom contemplates on the danger of women's hatpins in the public area [figure 8]: "Hatpin: ought to have a guard on those things. Stick it in a chap's eye in the tram." (*U* 8.239-40). The [figure 9] shows the growing danger of being accidentally stabbed by a hat pin among the urban crowd. Hatpins were originally used to fix women's hats to their hairs. The hatpin was fashionable in the Edwardian era, but many reports of possible danger in the public area appeared in the newspapers, while it gained a position of a self-defense device. Such stories as of a schoolteacher's beating of a "masher" with her hatpin were notable "not only for their frequency but also for their laudatory tone" (Abbot).



[figure 9 from Abbot's article]

In "Proteus," Stephen thinks of women's skirts pinned up: "A woman and a

man. I see her skirties. Pinned up, I bet” (*U* 3.331). But Joyce’s obsession with pins and hairpins is shown in many variations through the character of Leopold Bloom. The first example of this variation can be found when Bloom observes Molly’s habit:

She [Molly] swallowed a draught of tea from her cup held by nothandle and, having swiped her fingertips smartly on the blanket, began to search the text with the *hairpin* till she reached the word. (*U* 4.333-35, my emphasis)

In “Lotus-eaters,” when Bloom thinks of the provocative phrase “a naughty boy” in Martha’s letter, he contemplates on the association of pins with women’s underwear:

Fingering still the letter in his pocket he drew the pin out of it. Common pin, eh? He threw it on the road. Out of her clothes somewhere: pinned together. Queer the number of pins they always have. No roses without thorns. (*U* 5.275-78)

Here Bloom threw the pin away, the references of which gain ever-increasing significance in the repetitive usages of that word throughout Joyce’s work. Bloom is reminded of the song two prostitutes sang in the rainy night:

Flat Dublin voices bawled in his head. Those two sluts that night in the Coombe, linked together in the rain.

*O, Mairy lost the pin of her drawers.  
She didn’t know what to do  
To keep it up,  
To keep it up.* (*U* 5.275-84)

The pin reminds Bloom of a bawdy song, whose source is unknown. In his associative mind-set, Bloom mistakes the sisters of Bethany, Mary and Martha, for prostitutes. Probably in Bloom's association, Mary is confused with Mary Magdalene, the prostitute in the Bible. Bloom also contemplates on the meaning of picking up pins in terms of popular superstition: "Women won't pick up pins. Say it cuts lo" (*U* 8.630). As Gifford annotates, it refers to "the superstition that if a girl picks up a pin, she will make a staunch new boyfriend; therefore, a woman avoids picking up pins because it would divide her affections—it would 'cut love.'" (177). In "Nausicaa," Bloom concludes that losing a pin means losing a womanly charm: "Say a woman loses a charm with every pin she takes out. Pinned together. O, Mairy lost the pin of her" (*U* 13.802-03). Bloom associates even the priest's lace affair with the bawdy rhyme that we have discussed above:

He [Bloom] saw the priest stow the communion cup away, well in, and kneel an instant before it, showing a large grey bootsole from under the lace affair he had on. Suppose he lost the pin of his. He wouldn't know what to do to. (*U* 5.369-72)

In "Circe," a fantasized drama, Bloom himself is identified with the girl who lost the pins: "O Leopold lost the pin of his drawers..." (*U* 15.3444). Insignificant items such as a pin could carry the heavy significance in Joyce's work.

In *Finnegans Wake*, a polemic against all kinds of identities and a debunking of universality, Joyce's interest in trivial things is moderated into what he himself calls "the revolution of the word." Joyce's notetaking habit produces a lot of note sheets that are either used for *Ulysses* or later used in *Finnegans Wake*. I will show some examples of Joyce's use of trivial items with their immense reverberations of association:

“I wouldn’t pay three hairpins for them. Peppit!” (*FW* 144.17)

The phrase “three hairpins” can be replaced by “three halfpenny,” whose meaning is trivial in value. I have to waive my agreement on Anderson’s explication of the pins’ usage: “pin their rectal hairs aside” (266), because I couldn’t find any reference or example. But the last shortened phrase promulgates the significance of trivial things. Jonathan Swift’s term of endearment for Esther Johnson a.k.a Stella was “ppt,” which could be short for poppet or puppet. As Jarrell points out well, “Joyce’s play with ppt is the major chorus of the novel” (280). The variations of “ppt” such as a puppet (*FW* 14.8) or poupée (doll in French), reoccurs throughout *Finnegans Wake*, thus associating Swift’s problematic relationship with two Esthers with other adulterous cases, for example, Swift’s friend, Matthew Pilkington’s debauchery: “the rubberend Mr Polkingtone, the quonian fleshmonger” (*FW* 144.30). In this way, Joyce’s reference to a small item promulgates other larger related themes. I will look at another example of Joyce’s alteration effect. The phrase, “on pins and needles,” is transformed into the twisted one, “on punns and reedles” (*FW* 239.35-36). In another place, Joyce calls himself “Illstarred Punster” (*FW* 467.29), and brings up the god of punning, Calembour as appears as “Saint Calembraunus” (*FW* 240.21). So Joyce’s aesthetic strategy of deploying small items also operates in the larger context of culture.

### III

In conclusion, Joyce seems to trivialize the English epic tradition, which anchors the superiority of the British over other nations, by referring to the

small items that register political and historical weight on the balance scale. This juxtaposition of big and small is not a static balance between them, but an ongoing tipping of that balance. Joyce secures his immortality as an artist in this way: "I've put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that's the only way of insuring one's immortality." By deploying too many trivial things throughout *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce keeps professors and scholars like me busy finding clues to obscure allusions or references, thus realizing his immortality. Declan Kiberd summarizes Joyce's aesthetic braveness: "[Joyce] acted on the brazen assumption that his book would not defer to the current taste of the public but serve to invent a new sort of reader, someone who after that experience might choose to live in a different way. He wanted to free people from all kinds of constriction, among them the curse of passive readership" (17).

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**Abstract**

## Joyce's Aesthetics of Triviality

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Joyce's remark, "To me an Irish safety pin is more important than an English epic," reveals his inclusive interest in trivial things, which constitutes his aesthetics. Many critics and readers have paid more attention to epic grandeur than trivial things referred to in *Ulysses*. Most of them tend to feel overwhelmed by immense references to trivial things, especially in "Ithaca." In addition, they feel themselves satisfied by arguing that Joyce's meticulous descriptions of these trivial things help construct the verisimilitude of reality. I will show how Joyce deploys these trivial items strategically in order to keep the balance between epic grandeur and aesthetic inclusiveness of trivial things, which is related to the tradition of encyclopedic narratives.

Joyce's voracious inclusive tendency to catalogue trivial items in "Ithaca," a chapter of accumulation of knowledge, suggests scientific and taxonomical approach to human experience. Joyce's encyclopedic desire culminates in the penultimate chapter of *Ulysses*. In particular, I discuss the significance of the things kept in Bloom's drawers that operate to constitute his racial, sexual, and political identities. For example, the exercise device, an epitome of Sandow's physical culture, is employed in the promotion of the imperialistic ideology, along with the Wonderworker, a device for curing piles.

In conclusion, Joyce's encyclopedic desire is reified in trivial items in the circuit of commodity culture and imperialistic economy. So the discussion of trivial things leads to political implications in a country under the British imperial occupation.

■ **Key words** : James Joyce, epic, triviality, encyclopedic desire, Irish history  
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