

Sunwise: The Sun in *Ulysses*

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Abstract

Correlating references to sunlight in the daytime episodes of *Ulysses* with data regarding the apparent position of the sun in the sky as seen in Dublin on 16 June 1904, this paper confirms the exactitude of Joyce's evocations. Among the numerous textual moments addressed, the paper explicates those in "Calypso" (when Bloom walks to Dlugacz's shop), in "Lestrygonians" (when Bloom avoids Boylan), and in "Cyclops" (when the citizen is blinded by sunlight, thus saving Bloom from the anticipated harm of a hurled biscuit tin). The paper concludes with an addendum holding references to the moon, a table charting solar angles of incidence on Bloomsday, and maps that correspond to five salient moments addressed.

Along with all other physical details of Dublin on 16 June 1904 which he attempted to represent accurately in *Ulysses*, Joyce was careful to consider the times of sunset on Bloomsday, sunrise the next morning, and the apparent position of the sun in the sky at certain times during the day. For sunrise and sunset he needed only to consult the calendar in *Thom's Directory* (p. 14). For other important moments he may have relied on memory but, if so, we have yet further evidence of the accuracy of that memory with one possible minor exception (see "Approaching the Ormond," below).

The sun has a varying degree of relevance in the daytime episodes of *Ulysses*. Although it is certainly shining in Lotuseaters the sun is mentioned only once in that episode, when the lace on the hat of the wealthy woman from the Grosvenor flickers in the sunlight (*U* 5.139-40); the cemetery in Hades, appropriately bathed in "mild grey air" (*U* 6.635), is sunless; neither the sun nor sunlight is mentioned in Aeolus even when reference is made to events outside the newspaper office; at the end of Scylla and Charybdis Joyce marks the transition from intellectual discussion to the reality of urban life when Stephen is disturbed by the

“shattering daylight” of the Reading Room (*U* 9.1111-12). In none of these episodes is the direction or apparent position of the sun of importance. In episodes 1 and 4, however, as *Ulysses* begins twice, the sun has an important role to play.

We have attempted to relate the meteorological facts to those episodes and events in the book for which the compass angle of the sun and its elevation have some significance (See Table 1).¹ Although for obvious reasons Joyce gives less attention to the moon he is similarly accurate in his handling of the facts for Bloomsday. We include a few notes in an addendum.

In June the clock in Dublin is now set to British Summer Time (that is, GMT+1/alpha time/UTC1). In June 1904, as Bloom reminds us (*U* 8.109), it was, however, set to “Dunsink Time” (= GMT minus 25 minutes/UTC0-25’) which coordinated clock noon and solar noon. The time of an event on Bloomsday 1904 was thus 85 minutes earlier than a modern clock would indicate.

from the high barbacans

Joyce writes of two shafts of daylight from the “barbacans” meeting at the breakfast fire (*U* 1.315-17). It has been several times pointed out that rays of light, if coming directly from the sun, are parallel and thus never meet. Robert Nicholson explains that Joyce was in fact neither in error nor taking liberties with physics:

Surprisingly enough, Joyce's description of the rays of daylight meeting in the centre of the room is, in fact, accurate. When the front door, on the bright side of the tower, is closed, the only light entering the room is through the two window-shafts referred to by Joyce (inaccurately) as “barbacans.” These shafts are angled downwards through the thickness of the wall and are each about 3 metres in length. They are not parallel but convergent. An object placed in the centre of the room casts two divergent shadows, and an experiment with smoke or fumes on a bright day would visibly define the rays of light converging on the object from the two separate windowshafts. Given that any sunlight coming through the openings has already been reflected (since the sun is on the other side of the building) there is no reason why the light has to enter each shaft at the same angle. Any light entering from outside will be reflected off the sides of the shaft and “funnelled” through to the inside end to emerge in the same direction as the length of the shaft, that is, towards a point in the centre of the room. I

doubt that Joyce was careless enough to invent sunshine coming from the north, or devious enough to work out a way of making it appear to do so. It is more likely that he observed the phenomenon during his stay in the tower and recorded it as it appeared.²

back to the sun

When in Proteus Stephen writes his lines on a scrap of paper torn from the bottom of one of Deasy's letters, he turns his back to the sun (*U* 3.506). At about 11.30 the sun is a little north of due east. He has therefore turned to the west, facing towards central Dublin to which he is about to walk. He stands at about 30-45 degrees from the road out to the Poolbeg lighthouse.

the sunny side

On his way from his front door (A) to the butcher's (B) shop Bloom crosses to the sunny side of Eccles Street (*U* 4.77). The sun, shining from about east-south-east (about 100 degrees) at an angle above the horizon of about 45 degrees, would indeed leave Bloom's side of the street in shadow and the opposite side in sunshine. As Bloom is crossing the road the narrator says that the sun was nearing the steeple of George's church (C) (*U* 4.78). When Bloom reaches the other side of the road and is able to notice the sun he would indeed see that it appears to be over the roof of the church and will soon move southwards past the steeple, which is at the front of the building (See Map 1).³ That Dlugacz's shop is on the sunny (western) side of Dorset Street is made clear by the direction in which the servant girl walks, taking her away from Bloom's trajectory (*U* 4.174).

He faced about

At about 1.30 p.m. Bloom stands outside Yeates and Son (D), on the southeast corner of Nassau Street and Grafton Street. He looks towards what he believes to be "a little watch up there on the roof of the bank to test those glasses by" but fails to see it (*U* 8.560-63). The bank in question is probably The Northern Banking Company, Ltd, at 114 Grafton Street (E, on the west side, opposite the Provost's House, F), which Bloom has recently passed on his way south. To look at the roof of the bank Bloom has had to turn from the window of the shop and face in

a northwesterly direction. Immediately thereafter he “faced about and, standing between the awnings, held out his right hand at arm’s length towards the sun” (*U* 8.564-65). In order to face the sun Bloom turns to his left, the sun at that hour being in the southwest, at an elevation of about 55 degrees, appearing over the roofs of the buildings on the western side of Grafton Street (See Map 2).

Light in his eyes

As Bloom turns into Kildare Street on his way to the National Library he suddenly, to his alarm, notices Boylan walking towards him, south along Kildare Street. He hopes not to be noticed because the sun is in Boylan’s eyes (*U* 8.1175). That is physically accurate. At 2.05 p.m. as Bloom turns first to the left from Molesworth Street the sun is at 230 degrees, immediately behind him from the point of view of Boylan, assuming, as is likely, that Boylan is approximately at the Library, on the eastern side of the road. The sun is a little above half way between the horizon and the zenith (See Map 3).

Wheelbarrow sun over arch of bridge

The reference, as Stephen confronts the full daylight on leaving the Library (*U* 9.1213), is in the first place to the elaborate decorative wrought ironwork over the original main gate to the National Library, which was large, imposing, centrally placed opposite Leinster House, and crowned by a circular centre-piece over a filigree archway. It is nevertheless possible that the idea arises because the sun, at about 245 degrees horizontally and at a vertical angle of about 45 degrees, striking Kildare Street at 45 degrees from the southern end, is probably in a straight line projected from Stephen to the gates and beyond.

to give shade to his eyes

Standing in the doorway of the funeral establishment in Wandering Rocks (G), Corny Kelleher tilts his hatbrim to shade his eyes (*U* 10.211). The sun is shining from about 250 degrees, that is, from the direction of central Dublin. The light is falling obliquely on to the front of the establishment, from Kelleher’s left, towards which side he would need to tilt his hat, making it easier for him to observe Conmee, who is walking in the other direction (See Map 4).

The windscreen of that motorcar in the sun there

As he walks just north of west along James's Street, at about 3.28, Mr Kernan notices the windscreen of a car flashing in the sun (*U* 9.759). The sun is behind him, just south of west. The windscreen of the car may be set at almost any vertical angle while the car itself may be either facing him or parked in the other direction. If it has its rear end to him it will be one of the many open-topped cars of the period. It should be remembered that offside parking was both legal and common (as it still is in Britain during daylight hours).

Approaching the Ormond

At 3.50 Bloom approaches the Ormond, meeting Richie Goulding who is walking in the opposite direction; the sun is almost exactly due west, behind Goulding. As Ormond Quay runs slightly south of due west the sun is in Bloom's eyes. Although Joyce makes no explicit comment about this matter, later in the chapter the barmaids are several times related to the light. A few minutes after Bloom's entry into the Ormond Miss Douce, turning from the window blind, is said to have eyes "smitten by sunlight" (*U* 11.461). The sun is now too far to the west to be shining through the windows. The light will have been bright on the structures immediately outside. It is perhaps this that smites Miss Douce's eyes.

the sun was in his eyes

The narrator of Cyclops comments, with amusement, that the Citizen might have hit Bloom with the Jacob's biscuit tin and left him for dead had the sun not been in his eyes (*U* 12.1853-54). The narrator is of course exaggerating since being hit by an empty Jacob's biscuit tin would at most cause a small bruise or abrasion (unless, of course, a corner of the tin happened to strike the eyeball, which might have been ironically appropriate in the context). He is, however, accurate in saying that the sun was in the Citizen's eyes. Bloom's carriage departs from the pub in a westsouthwesterly direction. At that time (about 4.40 p.m.) the sun is at about 270 degrees, that is, due west, nearly straight ahead at a low angle (about 30 degrees), so blinding the Citizen (H) (See Map 5).

Sunset at Sandymount

At the start of Nausikaa the sun is setting “far away in the west” (*U* 13.02). The sun is disappearing behind the buildings and hills to landward and the remaining light is coming from about the northwest, approximately on the line from the sun to Bloom to the girls. The sun is low above the horizon, making it initially difficult for the girls to see Bloom clearly. Nausikaa, during which the sun sets, is the textual midpoint of *Ulysses*.

well soon have the nuns ringing the angelus

Molly’s comment, springing from a feeling of exasperation, is characteristically exaggerated (*U* 18.1541-42). The angelus will not be rung until about 6.00 a.m. Although it is only about 2.15 she is nevertheless aware that dawn is not far off. While the sun will not rise for another hour (at 3.33) the sky is already lightening, as Bloom had noticed half an hour earlier, before he returned from the garden (*U* 17.1266-68).

Addendum: the moon

a new moon out

In distress at the activities of her lunatic husband, Mrs Breen sadly but appropriately comments that there must be a new moon (*U* 8.245). She is right. The new moon appeared on the previous Monday. Three days old, it rose on Bloomsday at 6.40 a.m. and set at 10.17 p.m. Bloom confirms her comment at *U* 8.587 when he remembers that there was a full moon last Sunday fortnight, that is on 29 May when the moon reached plenitude at 8.29 a.m.

virgin moon

The fact that the moon is then in its first quarter is mentioned in Oxen of the Sun (*U* 12.1113) and again in Nausikaa: “on account of the new moon” (*U* 13.117-18, 13.563).

The moon hath raised

An interesting reminder of the chronology of *Ulysses* is implicit in another of Gerty’s thoughts. She remembers that her father and Paddy Dignam had once sung *The moon hath raised* and immediately goes on

by association to think of Dignam's death (*U* 13.314-15). He died, in fact, on the previous Monday (*U* 5.129), the day when the present new moon first raised her lamp above.

TABLE 1: THE SUN ON BLOOMSDAY

Local time (Dunsink time)	Solar angle from North	Angle above horizon
0333 (sunrise)	47.4	-0.5
0335	47.7	-0.4
0435	59.5	6.8
0535	70.8	14.9
0635	82.1	23.6
0735	94.0	32.5
0835	107.3	41.3
0935	123.3	49.4
1035	143.4	55.9
1135	168.4	59.6
1200 (solar noon)	180.0	60.0
1235	195.7	59.3
1335	220.1	55.1
1435	239.4	48.2
1535	254.9	40.0
1635	267.9	31.2
1735	279.6	22.3
1835	290.9	13.6
1935	302.3	5.6
2027 (sunset)	312.7	-0.5

Note: That the sun is shown (rightly) to be below the horizon at sunrise and sunset is due to the program's registering the actual position rather than the observer's view, caused by atmospheric refraction.

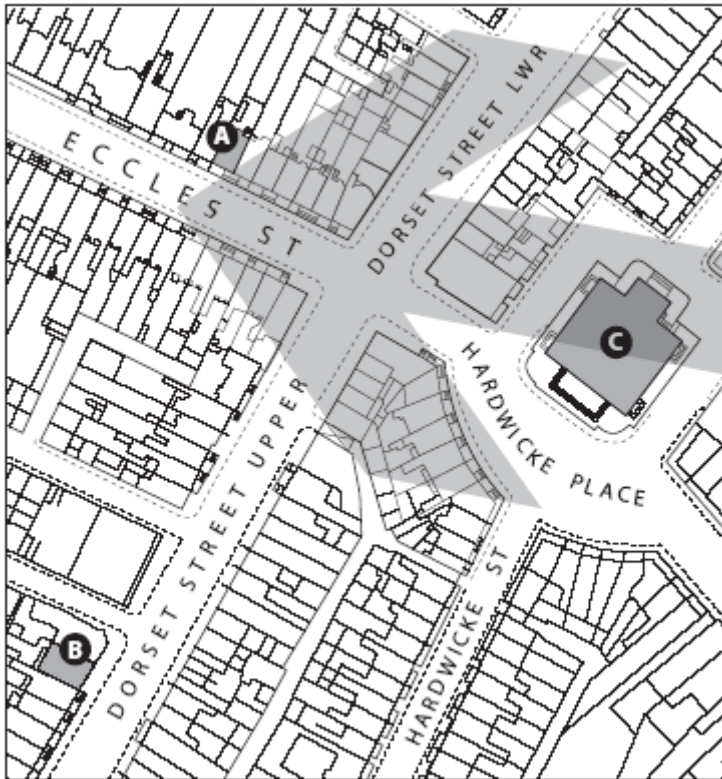
Notes

¹ Information kindly provided by Michael Lloyd-Hart, an astronomer in Tucson, Arizona. It is derived from the virtual planetarium computer program Starry Night.

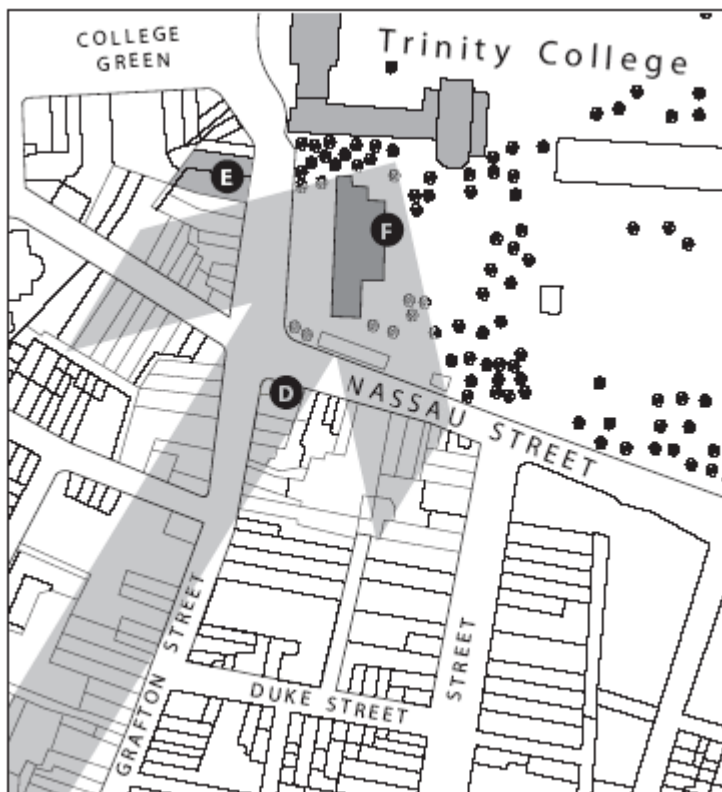
² Robert Nicholson contributed this paragraph, which will be included in our forthcoming book, *Problems in "Ulysses"*.

³ The maps in this article, prepared by Ian Gunn, are all based on those in Ian Gunn and Clive Hart, with Harald Beck, *James Joyce's Dublin: A Topographical Guide to the Dublin of "Ulysses"* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004).

Map 1: Calypso. As Bloom leaves his house.



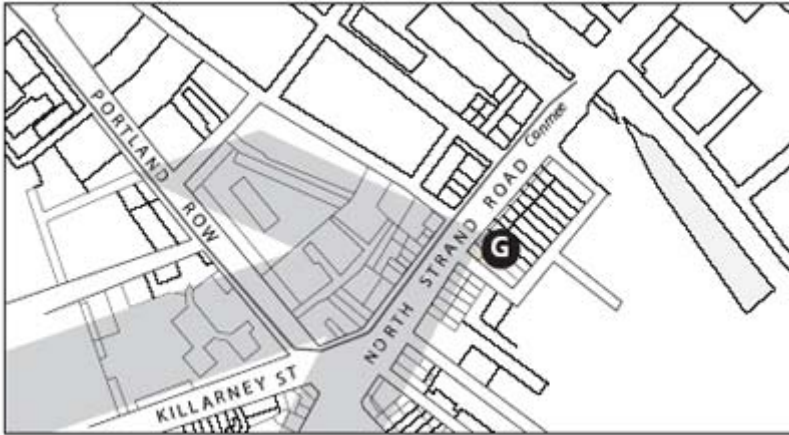
Map 2: Lestrygonians. Bloom outside Yeates and Son.



Map 3: Lestrygonians. Bloom avoiding Boylan.



Map 4: Wandering Rocks. Kelleher outside the funeral establishment.



Map 5: Cyclops. The Citizen blinded by the sun.

