

## Potato and Tea: Colonial Commodities in Joyce's Work\*

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Of the merchandises frequently mentioned in Joyce's work, the most distinguished two are potato and tea. While some critics have paid attention to the role of potato in *Ulysses*, perhaps because Bloom carries one in his trousers pocket during his entire odyssey, tea is relatively neglected. Furthermore, most of the discussions of Bloom's potato have focused on its historical memory and talismanic function. But these two commodities are so densely related in terms of historical and political relations between Ireland and England that it is almost impossible to discuss them individually. So we must discuss them in tandem in terms of Joyce's strategic deployment. Tea is scarcely noticeable in comparison with Bloom's potato, since it is related to relatively minor characters, such as Haines and Mr. Kernan. This comparative invisibility ironically signifies the imperceptible pervasiveness of tea in the cultural strata. So Joyce's strategic deployment of these two commodities vivifies the imbalance of colonial empowerment between England and Ireland. It is

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easy to identify these two culinary items as being metonymically representative of the British and Irish economy, respectively. They register not only historically significant events such as the potato famine, but also constitute a kind of economic and cultural grid of colonial empowerment. In addition, commodities are related to fetishism: “Fetishism provides the link between everyday objects and the magical investments of desire” (Lawrence 133). So I will map out the heterogeneous trajectories of these two commodities in the sense that tea was pervasively institutionalized into a tea party while potatoes constituted the staple food in Irish dietary recipe in a distinctive way. In the process of commerce in which two merchandises are circulated as desired commodities, their passage will be charted and mapped out in terms of colonial domination and its trauma.

*Ulysses* begins with Buck Mulligan’s mocked mass, followed by breakfast, composed of bread and tea, metonymic equivalents of the sacramental stuff. Mulligan’s English friend, Haines, participates in this ritual. Since Joyce’s Ireland was under the colonial domination of the British Empire, culinary taste was inevitably not only cultural but also political.

Haines sat down to pour out the tea.

—I’m giving you two lumps each, he said. But, I say, Mulligan, you do make strong tea, don’t you?

Buck Mulligan, hewing thick slices from the loaf, said in an old woman’s wheedling voice:

—When I make tea I make tea, as old mother Grogan said. And when I make water I make water.

—By Jove, it is tea, Haines said. (*U* 1.352-59)

Mulligan’s urinal joke on tea is encountered by Haines’s embarrassment. This joke is a subaltern attempt to undermine the cultural significance of tea as part of English social life. Tea was omnipresent in the Irish culinary culture, not to mention the English counterpart. The English tea culture was already permeated into the social context of the Irish culture. The usage of tea in common phrases

reveals the extent of its immersion in the public sphere: "I confess I'm teapot with curiosity to found out whether some person's something is a little teapot at present" (*U* 15.457-58). In many *Dubliners* stories, tea is frequently mentioned: In "Araby," Mangan's sister calls her brother for tea time; in "Clay" Maria prepares the tea party for the women of *Dublin by the Lamplight* laundry; and in "A Little Cloud" Little Chandler is blamed for forgetting to buy tea.

Mulligan's preference for strong tea shows a difference in taste from Haines's. Differences in taste for tea signify differences in each one's political position toward Ireland. Each character's taste is paradoxically interchanged. In this sense, these two characters serve the same master, the imperial England, in different ways.

He watched her pour into the measure and thence into the jug rich white milk, not hers. Old shrunken paps. She poured again a measureful and a tilly. Old and secret she had entered from a morning world, maybe a messenger. She praised the goodness of the milk, pouring it out. Crouching by a patient cow at daybreak in the lush field, a witch on her toadstool, her wrinkled fingers quick at the squirting dugs. They loved about her whom they knew, dew-silky cattle. Silk of the kine and poor old woman, names given her in old times. A wandering crone, lowly form of an immortal serving her conqueror and her gay betrayer, their common chuckquean, a messenger from the secret morning. To serve or to upbraid, whether he could not tell: but scorned to beg her favour. (*U* 1.398-407)

Here tea is counterbalanced by the Irish milk, which an old woman brings early in the morning. Stephen associates the milk woman with the traditional personification of Ireland as "Shan Van Vocht," Or "Poor Old Woman." For Vincent J. Cheng, the milk woman functions as a figure for the oppressed Irish people, "exploited by the colonizer (Haines) and his shoneen collaborator (Mulligan)" (156-7). Her 'old shrunken paps' symbolize the destitute condition of Irish economy as well as the devastated motherland. Ireland's dairy industry was maintained to meet the demand of milk and dairy stuff from England, as if Ireland were England's backyard dairy farm. This might be why rural Ireland was not

industrialized, but valorized and preserved by nostalgic supporters for romantic Ireland, not to mention the English imperialists. In “the Wandering Rocks,” Mulligan and Haines complacently talk about Stephen, when Haines demands “real Irish cream.” But his patronizing gesture toward the good quality of Irish dairy is merely the reenactment of Stephen’s idea of agenbite of inwit. It also rings true that “Haines’s appropriation of the Irish literary heritage exemplifies England’s usurpation of Irish cultural life” (Osteen 46). As Andrew Gibson points out, Haines also functions as a personification of ‘constructive Unionism,’ which was based on the idea of equalization between England and Ireland (24-25). The old woman as ‘a common cuckquean to her conqueror and her gay betrayer’ is indeed related to the theme of betrayal pervading the Irish history of nationalist politics. Stephen’s remark, “not hers,” obviously means the milk produced not from her paps, but implicitly reveals that Ireland’s economy is mortgaged.

In ‘Proteus,’ when he ponders on a variety of things in his walking on the Sandymount beach, Stephen Dedalus brings up a strangely combined word: “A shut door of a silent tower, entombing their blind bodies, the panthersahib and his pointer” (*U* 3.276-78). Although Vincent J. Cheng easily identifies the panthersahib as a colonizer shooting a panther in India, and so leads to a complacent identification between Ireland and India as colonies (152), yet he does not explain the implicit connection between a sahib and a panther. The word ‘sahib’ is originally from the Arabic language, but its Urdu (a province in India) usage refers to an owner or proprietor. The panther is implicitly related to the planter sahib’s role that was to protect his workers in the tea-growing farms against wild beasts: “The planter’s role as a defender of his workers against wild beasts or dealing with a snake (thousands still die from snake bite every year in India) had not only practical but psychological consequences. His show of courage or cowardice in the face of a predator could be crucial in determining the degree of respect or disdain in which he was held by his workers” (Griffiths 129). So Joyce’s depiction of Haines as the panthersahib paradoxically reveals the colonizer’s fear of the exotic power as well as the colonial domination of the exotic land itself. Stephen positions

Haines into the colonial experience in India, when the English man was raving and shooting about the imaginary panther, an expressionistic visualization of his psychological fear. As Stephen's definition of history shows, Haines's nightmare reveals the colonizer's traumatic fear, the burden of white man. In this sense, Stephen's definition of history can apply not only to Irish history, but also to the British imperialist history.

- He was raving all night about a black panther, Stephen said. Where is his guncase?
- A woeful lunatic! Mulligan said. Were you in a funk?
- I was, Stephen said with energy and growing fear. Out here in the dark with a man I don't know raving and moaning to himself about shooting a black panther. You saved men from drowning. I'm not a hero, however. If he stays on here I am off. (*U* 1.57-63)

The reason has not been pinpointed why Haines carries a gun with him, even when he does not go to India where wild beasts roam and growl. But George Bernard Shaw's play, *John Bull's Other Island*, reveals the English fear about the Wild Irish.

- Broadbent. By the way, pack your own traps too. I shall take you with me this time.
- Hodson (hesitant). Is it a dangerous part you're going to, sir? Should I be expected to carry a revolver, sir?
- Broadbent. Perhaps it might be as well. I'm going to Ireland. (Shaw 5)

Declan Kiberd points to the similarity between Mr. Broadbent and Haines: "The very ambivalence of Broadbent's gestures evokes the common English oscillation between coercion and conciliation, between contempt for and envy of all that the imperialist denies in himself" (52). But Kiberd too omits to explicate the reason why both characters carry a gun with them. This dread originated from the so-called land agitation during the 1880s, when Charles Stewart Parnell led agrarian revolts

in rural Ireland. In a mayoral speech, Bloom makes a passing remark to the possibility of killing peasants, by way of Joyce's unique usage of errors, "the portals of discovery" (*U* 9.229): "The poor man starves while they are grassing their royal mountain stags or shooting peasants and phartridges in their purblind pomp of pelf and power" (*U* 15.1394-97). It is implied that the panicked English sahib might be shooting peasants, not pheasants, if by accident.

—Cracked lookingglass of a servant! Tell that to the oxy chap downstairs and touch him for a guinea. He's stinking with money and thinks you're not a gentleman. His old fellow made his tin by selling jalap to Zulus or some bloody swindle or other. Go, Kinch, if you and I could only work together we might do something for the island. Hellenise it. (*U* 1. 154-58)

Mulligan adroitly insinuates a possibility of selling Irish culture in order to entice Stephen to join Haines's imperialist project of appropriating Irish cultural heritage. As Garry Leonard points out, "[t]he search for the Irish peasant that Haines is conducting is the commercial equivalent of Yeats's and Lady Gregory's more nationalistic project" (144). Haines's father's connection to other colonial countries, South Africa, extends Haines's fear of the black panther to the colonial experience of the exotic power. In this sense, Joyce's abhorrence for romanticized Ireland implied in his essay on James Clarence Mangan, 19<sup>th</sup>-century Irish poet, stands to reason, since potatoes are a consistent reminder of the harsh conditions of rural Ireland, which I will discuss later.

In "Lotus-eaters," Bloom as an ad canvasser naturally pays attention to an advertisement of tea.

In Westland row he halted before the window of the Belfast and Oriental Tea Company and read the legends of leadpapered packets: choice blend, finest quality, family tea. Rather warm. Tea. Must get some from Tom Kernan. Couldn't ask him at a funeral, though. (*U* 5.17-21)

The tea was the major import from the British colonies and became one of the most

important merchandises of the English commerce as well as a social institution of a tea party. The above passage contains some critical points about the function of tea as a colonial commodity. The name of the tea company points to the connection of British imperialism and colonial exploitation. Belfast is the capital city of the Ulster area, characteristic of pro-British, Unionist sentiments. In *Dubliners* too, there are references to the Northern part of Ireland—the land developer from Belfast mentioned in “Araby,” Mr. Allyne’s Northern accent in “Counterparts,” Maria’s present from Belfast in “Clay,” and in “Grace,” one of Mr. Kernan’s sons, who is working as a clerk to the wine merchant in Belfast. In addition, Mr. Deasy’s pro-British sentiment is pronounced through a song about Ulster in “Nestor.”: “*For Ulster will fight / And Ulster will be right*” (U 2.397-98).

Bloom as an ad canvasser notices the copy of the tea advertisement: “choice blend, finest quality, family tea.” The tea advertisement that draws Bloom’s professional attention shows the imbalance between tea and potato in terms of the hegemonic power of advertising commerciality. It was Sir Thomas Lipton who succeeded in establishing a tea company by massively advertising his brand throughout England: “the tremendous advertising of Ceylon tea by Lipton put it firmly on the world map and hugely stimulated demand” (Moxham 167). So his name was synonymous with Ceylon tea, even though he owned only 15 percent of the total tea acreage (Ibid.). Ironically, Joyce includes Sir Thomas Lipton in a mixed-up catalogue of Irish heroes and heroines: “sir Thomas Lipton” (U 12.188-89). The idea of “family tea” underpins the family ideology of prosperity and harmony, but most of the Irish family depicted in Joyce’s work is dysfunctional or almost destroyed. In ‘A Little Cloud,’ Chandler’s wife, Ada, valorizes tea as a necessary prop for her family, even though Chandler is not satisfied with his conjugal life. In ‘The Dead,’ the Morkan sisters include “three-shilling tea” into their list of everything the best, admitting that they do not constitute a “proper” family, since they all are spinsters.

It is natural that famous tea brands remind Bloom of the far east, in which the tea-growing industry prosper.

Then he put on his hat again, relieved: and read again: choice blend, made of the finest Ceylon brands. The far east. Lovely spot it must be: the garden of the world, big lazy leaves to float about on, cactuses, flowery meads, snaky lianas they call them. Wonder is it like that. Those Cinghalese lobbing about in the sun in *dolce far niente*, not doing a hand's turn all day. (*U* 5. 28-33)

Tea advertisements trigger Bloom's imaginary journey into a far-away paradise masqueraded as Ceylon, one of the most famous tea-growing places in the world. The life of those who live in Ceylon, "Cinghalese," is adjacent to what Bloom imagines about a paradise when he reads an advertisement about Agendath Netaim on a wrapping paper in "Calypso." Tea is not only a reminder of the exotic land, an imaginary paradise, but also of the burden of the white man, just as the panthersahib implies.

When he reads the tea advertisement, Bloom is reminded of Mr. Kernan. This means that Mr. Kernan is recognized as an expert in tea.

On the mantelpiece of this little shop a little leaden battalion of canisters was drawn up and on the table before the window stood four or five china bowls which were usually half full of a black liquid. From these bowls Mr Kernan tasted tea. He took a mouthful, drew it up, saturated his palate with it and then spat it forth into the grate. Then he paused to judge. (*D* 139-40)

This description of Mr. Kernan reveals her job as a tea taster. The tea taster's role is "to distinguish between and analyze a whole gamut of intrinsic qualities of each tea" and "to value the tea," and, more importantly, he "will have to have a particular knowledge of the requirements of the broker or merchant on whose behalf he is working at the time, and a general knowledge of wider market trends, the precise conditions in which the tea was grown and transported, and even the politics and economy of the country whence it came" (Griffiths 239). In "the Wandering Rocks," Mr. Kernan sells tea for Pulbrook Robertson, and takes a thimbleful of Crimmins' best gin, which implies that he is no longer a tea taster, because his drinking habit must have marred his gusto for tea. In "Grace," he falls



down on the stairs in a pub, perhaps because of getting drunk.

In 'Hades,' Bloom and Mr Kernan happen to sit aside in the same carriage toward the cemetery. It is not just an accident that Bloom stands beside Mr, Kernan in the funeral, since they are outsiders in terms of religious creed. The apposition of two characters amplifies the contrast of tea and potato in the colonial economy. This encounter is meaningful, not only because two characters represent tea and potato respectively, but also because both characters are outsiders in Ireland in terms of religious belief. Mr. Kernan reveals his preference for his own religious code: "The service of the Irish church used in Mount Jerome is simpler, more impressive I must say" (*U* 6.665-66). In "Grace," he is a religious outsider, a Protestant among Catholics, and reluctantly participates in the retreat for business men. He shows an abhorrence toward the candle ceremony, which functions to confirm one's religious belief. In "Wandering Rocks," what Paul Schwaber calls a chapter of "democratic vistas"(1), Mr. Kernan consistently thinks of "the troubles of the land," when he is walking in the street of Dublin. He checks out his style in the sloping mirror of Peter Kennedy, hairdresser's:

Stylish coat, beyond a doubt. Scott of Dawson street. Well worth the half sovereign I gave Neary for it. Never built under three guineas. Fits me down to the ground. Some Kildare street club toff had it probably. (*U* 10.743-46)

Mr. Kernan feels satisfied to identify himself with the dandy who belongs to the Protestant Ascendancy, exemplified by the membership of the Kildare Club, mentioned in "Two Gallants." By extension, his aspiration for being a Kildare Club gentleman reveals his unconscious wish for participation in imperial expansion:

High colour, of course. Grizzled moustache. Returned Indian officer. Bravely he bore his stumpy body forward on spatted feet, squaring his shoulders. (*U* 10.755-56)

Mr. Kernan's satisfaction with his image as a returned Indian officer reveals the

fact that the English gentlemanship is inevitably connected to British colonialism, since the English gentlemen in the Victorian age actively engaged themselves in the imperialistic project in South Africa as well as India in order to establish their financial foundations.

Of the characters wandering in the “democratic vistas,” Mr. Kernan, who is a Protestant and pro-British, ironically remembers most often the historical events, in particular, related to Irish nationalism.

Down there Emmet was hanged, drawn and quartered. Greasy black rope. Dogs licking the blood off the street when the lord lieutenant’s wife drove by in her noddy. (*U* 10.764-66)

Mr. Kernan’s response does not come from his favorable attitude toward Irish nationalism, but rather shows his Unionist sympathy with the psychological shock which the lord lieutenant’s wife may have experienced. It is also well witnessed when Mr. Kernan regrets having missed the cavalcade. In “Proteus,” it is Mr. Deasy who remembers “the famine in ‘46” (*U* 2.269), even though he is obviously an Orangeman. This irony is already reenacted when Mr. Haines is the only person who can speak Irish, while the old woman, representative of Ireland, can’t.

Before moving on to discuss Bloom’s potato, we must pay attention to the striking connection between these colonial commodities. As Roy Moxham points out, botanical gardens were “a great feature of the British Empire, and were established in most British colonies” (162). The gardens at Kew and Edinburgh relied so much on those colonial ones for specimen and research that the botanical gardens in the colonies purported to find commercially valuable plants. In “Circe,” Mrs. Bellingham appears to blame Bloom for his deceptive behavior:

Subsequently he enclosed a bloom of edelweiss culled on the heights, as he said, in my honour. I had it examined by a botanical expert and elicited the information that it was a blossom of the homegrown potato plant purloined from a forcingcase of the model farm. (*U* 15.1032-35)

According to Gifford, “the model farm was run by the joint enterprise of the Model Training School of the Board of Agriculture and the Botanic Gardens (founded by the Royal Dublin Society in 1790)” (466). In other words, the botanical garden at Glasnevin, the one mentioned in *Ulysses*, must have been schemed as part of colonial expansion. The flower that Bloom gives her is examined by a botanical expert, who finds out that it is a blossom of the homegrown potato plant, not edelweiss. Both blossoms are white, so they can be confused. But here Joyce juxtaposes a specimen flower that the botanical garden researches on, with the ‘homegrown’ potato flower. We will see “the deathflower of the potato blight” on Old Gummy Granny’s bosom, which I will discuss later.

Now we will turn to the other colonial commodity. Potatoes function to delineate the contour of Irish economic conditions dramatically changed during the Irish famine. A demographic map of the Irish population drastically changed during the so-called “Great Hunger.” It is worth noticing an Irish historian’s remark here:

The great potato famine of 1845-9 opened an abyss that swallowed up many hundreds of thousands of impoverished Irish people: the poverty-stricken conditions of rural life in the west and southwest, a set-piece for astounded travel books in the early nineteenth century, apparently climaxed in a Malthusian apocalypse. Traditionally, historians used to interpret the effects of the Famine as equally cataclysmic: it was seen as a watershed in Irish history, creating new conditions of demographic decline, large-scale emigration, altered farming structures and new economic policies, not to mention an institutionalized Anglophobia among the Irish at home and abroad. (Forster 318)

Another remark shows the seriousness of the damage that the Famine did to the Irish condition: “the Famine effected in four years what took over four centuries to achieve on the European mainland, namely, the purging of an unruly premodern culture from a newly constituted bourgeois public sphere” (Gibbon 153). In other words, the Famine dramatically changed the societal constitution of Ireland as well as her demographic transition. It is inevitable that Bloom’s potato functions as a constant reminder of this historical trauma, just as three words are associated in

Stephen's mind: "Famine, plague, and slaughters" (*U* 3.306).

It is important to notice Joyce's strategic deployment of the potato in *Ulysses*. First of all, the potato was the staple food for Irish people. But during the potato famine, so many Irish people died of hunger as a result of the failed economic policy of the British government, at least from the Irish nationalist point of view. The popular sentiment was well revealed in John Mitchel's lament: "the Almighty ... sent the potato-blight, but the English created the Famine" (Connell 23). Even in his article on foot and mouth disease, Mr. Deasy implicitly admits the English policy were responsible for the economic condition of Ireland: "That doctrine of *laissez faire* which so often in our history" (*U* 2.324-25). The only periodical *Illustrated London* was sympathetic for the Irish poverty and suffering, thus criticizing the British government for its policy: "We have not done our duty by Ireland....Neglect, carelessness, and *laissez-faire* do not make a cheap system of government, but a very costly one" (cited from Bartoletti 67). The famine usually refers to the period 1845-49 with a series of potato failures, so the official pronouncement of the end of the famine was made in 1849. Nevertheless, the famine was never over, considering the popular sentiment that "the treatment of the Irish people by the British government during the famine has been described as genocide" (Woodham-Smith 407). As James Wurtz points out, the Famine is evoked in the "Lestrygonians" chapter, whose theme is eating (108). Joyce must have had in mind the contrasting effect since it must be remembered that the memory of the potato famine has been a traumatic history to the Irish people.

Tea and potato represent the opposite conditions in terms of nutrition and hygiene. Each food symbolizes the rich, healthy pro-British and the destitute, poor Irish, respectively: "Mulligan and Haines are equally well fed, their relative wealth setting them apart from families like the Dedaluses and demonstrating their obliviousness to the history of hunger" (Osteen 196).

Good Lord, that poor child's dress is in flitters. Underfed she looks too. Potatoes and marge, marge and potatoes. It's after they feel it. Proof of the pudding. Undermines the construction. (*U* 8.41-43)

The underfed girl functions as a reminder of the destitute and scarcity of food supply and dietary nutrition pervading Ireland at the turn of the century. 'Marge' is margarine, "Byproducts of the slaughterhouses for tanneries, soap, margarine" (*U* 6.396-7). It is noticeable that Bloom's potato is mixed with the soap he also carries with him: "potatosoap" (*U* 15.243). While Bloom witnesses "a veritable orgy of eating and consumption" (Wurtz 109) at Burton's restaurant, he thinks of a possibility of the expression of the underfed people's anger: "Hungry man is an angry man" (*U* 8.663). This expression could be suggestive of the Irish resistance to the oppression of the British forces and of an always latent revolt against the domination of the British Empire. During the Famine, the British government feared so much of a revolutionary uprising that "the British government sent ten thousand troops into Dublin, well supplied with arms and ammunition" (Bartoletti 142). Hence the killings of peasants were actually followed by land agitations in the 1880s. So Haines's shooting the nightmarish black panther does not include only colonial fear, but implies the suppression of the Irish poor's revolts that could have resulted from the potato blight and its consequent higher rents.

The heavy dependence of the Irish poor on potatoes as their staple food was exploited for religious purpose.

They say they used to give pauper children soup to change to protestants in the time of the potato blight. Society over the way papa went to for the conversion of poor jews. Same bait. *Why we left the church of Rome.* (*U* 8.1071-74)

The Protestant institutions used the dietary supply of potatoes to entice poor and starving Catholics to convert to the Church of England. The same strategy is used to convert poor Jews to Christianity. Conversion seems to have been regarded as an act of betrayal, whose theme is pervasive in the Irish political history.

The potato is inevitably reminded of the British domination of the Irish soil, dating back to the Tudor dynasty in the sixteenth century.

Mankind is incorrigible. Sir Walter Raleigh brought from the new world that potato and that weed, the one a killer of pestilence by absorption, the other a poisoner of the ear, eye, heart, memory, will, understanding, all. That is to say he brought the poison a hundred years before another person whose name I forget brought the food. (*U* 15.1356-60)

The legend about who first introduced the potato into Ireland is mentioned here. It is difficult to historically clarify the original introducer of the root, but Joyce seems to have used its popular version, manifested in a popular song:

The brave Walter Raleigh, Queen  
 Bees's own knight  
 Brought here from Virginia  
 The root of delight.  
 By him it was planted  
 At Youghal so gay;  
 An' sure Munster praties  
 Are framed to this day. (reproduced in Salaman, 152)

The potato is not the only food that Walter Raleigh was believed to bring from the new world, since he is believed to have brought the tobacco, too. It must be noted that Walter Raleigh was a politician who actively participated in the British Empire. In "Scylla and Charybdis," in which Stephen explicates his theory about Shakespeare, he associates Shakespeare's prosperity with that of the Tudor dynasty: "Sir Walter Raleigh, when they arrested him, had half a million francs on his back including a pair of fancy stays. The gombeen woman Eliza Tudor had underlinen enough to vie with her of Sheba" (*U* 9.628-31). The epithet 'gombeen,' which means a usurer, signifies the plantation system implemented in Ireland by Queen Elizabeth, along with an emphasis on its usurious rents.

For the Irish people, potatoes are regarded as more than the staple food. In 'Circe,' the daughters of Erin, representative of the Irish women, who appear as a choir of six hundred voices, sing a parody of the litany of the Sacred Heart, in

which a line reveals a common belief in the potato's preventive efficacy: Potato Preservative against Plague and Pestilence, pray for us. (*U* 15.1952).

Many critics have discussed the significance of Bloom's potato mainly as a talisman. Bloom's potato is often referred to as his talisman: "Sir? Spud again the rheumatiz? (*U* 14.1480-81). When Zoe brings out a "hard black shriveled potato" (*U* 15.1309-10) from Bloom's left trouser pocket, Bloom mentions it as "A talisman. Heirloom" (*U* 15.1312). In other places, Bloom refers to his potato as "Poor mamma's panacea" (*U* 15.201-2) as well as "a relic of poor mamma" (*U* 15.3513). It is interesting to know that tea was regarded as a panacea in the early years. Richard Ellmann associates the magic herb, moly, in Homer's *Odyssey*, with Bloom's potato by arguing that "[t]he most literal expression of Moly is Bloom's potato, his grandmother's talisman against disease"(146). In addition, "[a]n updated version of *Odyssey's* moly, the potato is associated with Bloom's mother" (Lawrence 134). Bloom's mother, Ellen Bloom, appears as Aladdin's mother Twankey in pantomime costumes in "Circe," who is associated with Stephen's mother's favorite pantomime, "Turko the Terrible." When she lifts up her skirt, some items drop out from her pouch inside the skirt: "A phial, an *Agnus Dei*, a shriveled potato and a celluloid doll" (*U* 15.289). The shriveled potato that Bloom's mother keeps in her pouch is transposed into Bloom's pocket as a talisman. It is worth noting that "pockets contain objects that contrast with the more official and societal 'secrets' of the drawer" (Lawrence 135). It would be interesting to compare these items with Stephen's mother's secrets: "old featherfans, tasselled dancecards, powdered with musk, a gaud of amber beads in her locked drawer" (*U* 1.255-56). It is very interesting that Bloom's potato is not rotten at all, much less stinky. Why is it still not rotten at all, long after his mother's death? The black shriveled potato is believed to have preservative power against pestilence. The good soil produces healthy and long-enduring foods, especially, potatoes in Ireland, just as the Irish bog preserved Catholic documents intact during the sectarian oppression of the Catholic belief. Two mothers' trinkets show their fantasy about the romantic past, national as well as personal. Of these trivial commodities, the "tasseled dancecards"

are conspicuous.

The dance card is a pre-printed program distributed to women (and to a lesser degree, men) attending a ballroom dance. Sized comfortably for a woman's palm, the dance card is printed with a list of the evening's dances on the left side of the booklet or page; the right side of the card is typically printed with lines or space for gentlemen to "sign up" or "pencil in" their names, so to declare their engagement for a specific dance with an available woman. (See the dance card webpage)

Two mothers' secrets are saturated in the commodity culture, in which every item is circulated in the chain of desire. The juxtaposition of a religious item, a shriveled potato and a personal present reveals that all these commodities are circulated as fetishes of desired objects. In this sense, Bloom's shriveled potato functions as a reminder of a dream of Irish independence that has become only a fantasy under the domination of British colonialism.

In "Circe," just after the execution of the croppy boy, Stephen meets Old Gummy Granny. The milk woman and Old Gummy Granny coalesce into the Irish traditional figure, "Shan Van Vocht."

*(The women's heads coalesce. Old Gummy Granny in sugarloaf hat appears seated on a toadstool, the deathflower of the potato blight on her breast.) (U 15.4578-80)*

Here the milk woman described as "a witch on her toadstool" (*U* 1.401) is transformed into Old Gummy Granny, whose image resembles a Leprechaun in sugarloaf hat. According to the Irish folklore, which Haines tries to collect, only those who have a patriotic heart can see the queen's dignity in her walk. In *Ulysses*, the memory of the potato famine reified in the deathflower incessantly punctuates the colonial domination of the "brutish empire" (*U* 15. 4369-70).

*Finnegans Wake* ends with the definite article, 'the.' Considering Joyce's deployment of pun, 'the' can mean tea in French, *le thé*. Furthermore, the letter that



the hen Bidy Doran finds out in the dung pile is tea-stained: "The stain, and that a teastain (the overcautelousness of the masterbilker here, as usual, signing the page away), marked it off on the spout of the moment as a genuine relique of ancient Irish pleasant pottery of that lydialike languishing class known as a hurry-me-o'er-the lazy" (*FW* 111.20-24). The tea-stain is a signifier of the masterbilker, who is both the master and the bilker (=the cheater), just like one of Stephen's master, the British Empire. In *Finnegans Wake*, potatoes are not entirely positive: "what chronicles is bringing his portemanteau priamed full potatowards" (*FW* 240.36). The last word means 'wards won by bribery.'" Joyce's balanced treatment of tea and potato fits into his strategy of not valorizing one over the other: "Angel were herbered for him poteen and tea and praties" (*FW* 56.26). Now Joyce admits the coexistence of these colonial commodities, tea and potato, in addition to poteen, illicit whiskey in Irish.

In Joyce's work, tea and potato play a respectively different and collectively complementary tune to show the imbalance of colonial empowerment. In contrast to the obviousness of Bloom's potato, tea is pervasively present, but almost imperceptible, and so more powerful in its covered role in implementing colonial discourses. Joyce seems to place two commercial items in a contra posed empowerment of Irish political history. Just as the final word of *Ulysses* is affirmative, the final word of *Finnegans Wake* is pervasive, in a form of the river, Liffey, which means life in Irish. By adroitly juxtaposing these two common foods, Joyce must have been criticizing the imperceptible pervasiveness of colonial discourse as well as showing confidence in life-giving power.

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## Abstract

### Potato and Tea: Colonial Commodities in Joyce's Work

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Of the merchandises frequently mentioned in Joyce's work, the most distinguished two are potato and tea. Much attention has been paid to the role of the potato, since Bloom carries it with him during his odyssey, but tea is relatively neglected, perhaps because it is related to minor characters such as Haines and Mr. Kernan. But we must heed to Joyce's strategic deployment of these commodities.

Tea is a reminder of the British colonialism, in such countries as India and, extensively, South Africa. Haines's nightmare about shooting the black panther can be explained when we understand the role of the planter sahib in tea-growing plantations in India, because there were a lot of possibilities of confronting wild beasts in tea plantations. Haines's fear of the black panther is a reenactment of the fear of the planter sahib about wild beasts. In addition, the reason why Haines carries a gun with him is that the English people were anxious about the Wild Irish, which was also derived from their experience of land agitations as well as the potato famine in Ireland.

Bloom's shriveled potato is an heirloom from his dead mother. It functions as a reminder of the potato famine, as well as a signifier of popular belief in its efficacy as a protection against pestilence. So potatoes are related to the poverty and malnutrition of the Irish underfed family, especially the Dedaluses. By referring to who brought potato into Ireland, Joyce adroitly deploys the history of colonial domination during the Tudor dynasty. He also implicitly emphasizes the responsibility of the British government for the potato famine in Ireland. In addition, by juxtaposing Bloom's mother's trinkets with the potato, Joyce shows his awareness of fetishism in these commodities. So the last word of *Finnegans Wake*

implies tea in French, *le thé*, which is related to the river, Liffey, life in Irish. So Joyce's strategic deployment of these colonial commodities reveals the pervasiveness of colonial discourse as well as the life-giving power of his homeland.

■ Key words : Joyce, *Ulysses*, colonialism, potato, tea, commodity culture, the Irish Famine

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