

# LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

## Reading Homelessness in Roskilde through James Joyce's *Ulysses*

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### Abstract:

Can a reading of James Joyce's *Ulysses* contribute to understanding contemporary social geography issues in relation to social policy? Dealing with problems of homelessness in the city of Roskilde, Denmark, this article investigates the extent to which a reading of *Ulysses* - with a primary focus on the Calypso chapter - could make us wiser in our understanding of contemporary social problems. Could a reading of Joyce help us increase our empathic capacities in our interactions with homeless people and therefore increase our capacities for offering them assistance and care? The article answers this with the 'Yes' from Joyce's famous novel. Homelessness is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon caused by risk factors ranging from structural to institutional, interpersonal, and individual. We should carefully look at the various components structuring homelessness, such as the discourses surrounding homeless people and the framing of their experiences or their concrete encounters with the things (objects and settings) and codes at play in the spaces they (temporarily) inhabit and move through. Literature is important for understanding such phenomena and experiences not only because it reflects on them at the thematic level, but also because it stages and enacts them stylistically from an 'inside', subjective perspective. The reading of the theme of homelessness in relation to Joyce's character Leopold Bloom has made it clear that homelessness should not only be seen in economic or sociological terms, but also in psychological and philosophical terms, as an existential feeling structuring one's way of being in the world.

**Keywords:** James Joyce; homelessness; social geography; loss; coping; empathy; literature; poetry of existence.

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Towards the end of *Ulysses*' first chapter, *Telemachus*, Stephen Dedalus, in contrast with his usual abstract philosophical musings, painfully ponders upon the dire, concrete aspects of his current existence: 'I will not sleep here tonight. Home also I cannot go' (1986: 1.739-40). Tormented by his failure as an artist and thinker, Stephen opens up a theme which will be relentlessly explored in its myriad aspects throughout the entire novel – that of homelessness. His guilt for letting down his mother on her deathbed, his incapacity to connect with his father and his increasingly tense relations with his housemates, the 'usurpers' Mulligan and Haines, all tie into the question of home and homing.

Stephen is not the only character struggling with homelessness though. The experiences of the other main character, Leopold Bloom, are similarly structured by his relationship with home losing, home seeking, homecoming and home making. As Eric Bulson argues, 'the movements of Stephen and Bloom [...] emphasize themes central to [Joyce's] and Homer's epic: migration, exile, and homecoming' (2006: 74). In this article I will explore the theme of homelessness in relation to the character Bloom. The questions underlying my investigations will be the following: could a reading of *Calypto* (with proper references to other parts of *Ulysses*) in terms of this theme shed more light on the problem of homelessness in Roskilde (and perhaps Denmark at large)? Could Bloom's experiences of ethnic and personal dislocation and his strategies of dealing with them not only increase our understanding of pressing issues contemporary Roskilde faces but also point towards possible ways of solving them?

In order to find answers to these questions, I will juxtapose two texts, two discourses - one fictional and one 'real': *Ulysses*' fourth chapter in particular and an interview conducted with the director of *Kirkens Korshær*, Roskilde's homeless shelter, named 'Gitte'. *Kirkens Korshær* ('The Church Army of the Cross'), functional since 1939, is a day-shelter, offering homeless people a place to spend their days and interact both with other homeless people and the shelter's personnel. As well as this, it offers a variety of other services, including assistance in searching for housing and jobs, in dealing with bureaucracy, and there are possibilities to attend church and go on field trips etc.

Can these two highly different discursive forms be put into a constructive dialogue, which could impact on our understanding of homelessness in the city of Roskilde and open new paths for dealing with it? And could a classical fictional work (a 'modern classic') address contemporary social problems, adding knowledge to fields such as sociology, economics and social policy? I certainly hope that the answer to these questions will be similar to Molly Bloom's at the end of *Ulysses* in terms of its intensity and conviction: 'Yes'.

But first we should ask ourselves why examining an early-twentieth-century Irish novel could help us understand the current problems affecting homelessness in Roskilde? I think there are two interrelated answer to this: The first has to do with Joyce insisting on the use-value of art. According to Kiberd (2009) the answer to such questions lies in the fact that *Ulysses* offers a humane vision of a more tolerant and decent life under the pressures of the modern world. The second answer has to do with why we read literature at all. The Danish literature critic, George Brandes - whose writings on Shakespeare/Hamlet Joyce was familiar with and used in the library (*Aeolus*) scene in

*Ulysses* - expressed it in the following way: 'When we read in such a way that we personally appropriate what is read, we feel here the innermost point in the course of events, the beginning of everything, the character point, the point of commitment, of passion, the Archimedean centre, from which the world is moved - the events and the nerve of history is exposed to our eyes. Why should we therefore read? To increase our insight, lay aside our prejudices and increasingly become personalities.' (George Brandes: *Om læsning*, 1908:3, my translation). As Kiberd argues: *Ulysses* has much to teach us about the world - advice on how to cope with grief, how to deal with death, with sexual desires and with the dignity of everyday living (2009).

Before we embark on our journey a few words of caution: A reader looking for a deep insight into the many socio-structural causes of homelessness would probably be disappointed. This is not an ethnographic study of homelessness - for such see Megan Ravenhills' brilliant study *The Culture of Homelessness* (2008). This article also does not pretend to master the vast scientific literature on marginality and homelessness. The intention is not to claim insight into the harsh day-to-day experience of marginality facing homeless people. A number of good accounts of this already exist - for an overview see Klinker et. al. (2000), but also Ravenhill (2008) for a critical review of the many different approaches to homelessness. Unlike these previous studies this article looks at homelessness through a pair of spectacles made from a reading of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and it should be regarded as an experiment. My article is an exploration of the possibilities of using literature as a way of becoming wiser about contemporary social problems.

According to Esping-Anderson's seminal classification of European welfare states into social democratic, corporatist, liberal, southern European/Mediterranean, conservative post-socialist and liberal post-socialist regimes (1990, 1999), Denmark can be classified as a social democratic welfare state. A state which, as Eoin O'Sullivan claims, is (or at least should be) characterized by a 'high level of employment flexibility [...] combined with high security in the form of generous social welfare and unemployment benefits to guarantee adequate economic resources independent of market or family reliance' (2010: 68).

However, as O'Sullivan argues in the same article, a certain paradox seems to emerge: although within extensive, encompassing welfare regimes, homelessness is 'the fate of only a minority', for those who are homeless, policies and practices are sadly restrictive and clear solutions are impossible to find (65). Indeed, as Benjaminsen and Dyb claim (2008), in 2007 there were 5,253 homeless people in Denmark out of a total population of 5,447,000. Although this number is much lower than in many other countries, it is still something to ponder, considering the various claims regarding the effectiveness of Danish social policies.

In another article (2013), Benjaminsen discusses the main Danish Homelessness Strategy. This is a 'housing first' strategy to solve the problem of homelessness, and aims to offer immediate assistance to homeless people to secure independent housing, regardless of the various other problems they are facing. According to Benjaminsen, this is the only European example of a large-scale housing first programme, involving more than a thousand participants and helping more than 90% of the targeted homeless people

to obtain and maintain independent housing (2013: 109). However, Benjaminsen claims that despite the largely positive outcomes of this initiative, there has been a paradoxical increase in homelessness in Denmark after 2009, particularly in the case of the youth population (123-7), which he explains as being caused by ‘an increasing lack of affordable housing available for allocation to people with a relatively low income’ (128) and for people with ‘certain psychiatric diagnoses’ (129). For a discussion of the various causes underlying youth homelessness, see also Jones (1995).

In my opinion though, such an explanation is reductive, failing to take into consideration and do justice to the full range of causes underlying this increase in homelessness and consequently also failing to properly address possible solutions. In fact, Benjaminsen himself writes at the beginning of his article that homeless people in Denmark are ‘characterized by a number of other pernicious problems, in addition to homelessness, such as substance misuse, mental ill-health, physical ill-health, low incomes, poor social and family networks, etc.’ and that, therefore, they have ‘complex support needs’ (2013: 109). Similarly, in their national survey from 2007, *Homelessness in Denmark*, Benjaminsen and Christensen also acknowledge that homelessness is a multidimensional phenomenon caused by risk factors ranging from structural to institutional, interpersonal, and private (cf. Nordfeldt 2008: 323-4).

Moreover, stepping beyond the ‘complex causality between structural and individual factors that may lie behind a situation of homelessness’ (Nordfeldt 2008: 325) and heading towards possible strategies to combat homelessness, Benjaminsen states in the conclusion of his 2013 article that ‘with the *right combination* of housing and targeted support most homeless people can exit homelessness’ (130; my emphasis). In my view, these acknowledgements of the multi-dimensional aspects of both the underlying causality of and the needed response to homelessness is the first step towards not only a better understanding of this phenomenon<sup>1</sup> but also towards the construction of feasible strategies of dealing with it.

This is the starting point of the analyses of a contemporary scholar of homelessness, Michele Lancione. In one ‘think piece’ (2013a) Lancione argues that one of the most important drawbacks of a large number of recent studies dealing with the ‘economy of homelessness’ is that they frame *a-priori* the phenomenon of homelessness both in terms of canonical, taken-for-granted definitions of what it is and by means of rigid theoretical frameworks that classify, compartmentalize and reify it. (Lancione 2013a: 237). In his view, such framings are problematic not only because there are reductive, side-stepping the many aspects of the phenomena in need of explanation, but also because there are normative and prescriptive rather than descriptive, shaping thus (most of the times negatively) the ways in which policies aiming to deal with these phenomena are conceived and enacted (237-9). And, as he puts it, since such policies are ‘constructed around frames that reduce, rather than unfold, complexity, they are not usually able to deal with the specificity of each case’ (238).

In order to solve these problems, Lancione advocates an approach towards the phenomenon of homelessness which, instead of asking *what* homelessness is should rather ask the question *how*. ‘Instead of re-naming, or better defining what [homeless people] are,’ Lancione argues, ‘we should look at how they are: How they do what they

do; how they speak about what they do; how they think what they think; etc.’ (2013a: 239). In other words, *prior* to any definitions or attempts to formulate and enact theoretical frameworks and policies, we should carefully look at the various components structuring homelessness. That includes the discourses surrounding homeless people and framing their experiences and their concrete encounters with the things (objects and settings) and codes at play in the spaces they (temporarily) inhabit and move through (245-6) or, as Lancione puts it, to ‘the practices, performances and affects involved in homeless people’s lives’ (2013b: 358). Thus, full attention should be given to their complex ‘experience of homelessness,’ i.e. ‘a process built sharply out of cultural, historical, political and pragmatic forces’ (cf. Desjarlais 1997: 10).

Furthermore, instead of dealing with abstract generalities (in terms of both explanations of homelessness and possible solutions for combating it), we should pay attention to the specificity of each particular case. We should, thus, through careful and systematic analyses of specific cases, try to build bottom-up instead of top-down classifications of homeless people, causes of homelessness and ways of combating homelessness. Finally, Lancione’s methodology in the context of his ethnographic studies of the homeless population from Turin, Italy (e.g. Lancione 2013b, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2016) points towards another crucial aspect: in studying the phenomenon of homelessness, we should not limit ourselves to an observational, distant perspective. We should rather try to interact directly and conduct dialogues with the homeless people themselves in order to shed more light on the many dimensions of their experiences.

The interview conducted with Gitte, the director of Roskilde’s homeless shelter, *Kirkens Korshær*, clearly shows that this establishment’s approach to the problem of homelessness is strikingly similar to Lancione’s. Firstly, homeless people are not seen as a homogeneous group, but rather as a mixture of heterogeneous individuals, each coming from different backgrounds and having different needs. Although *Kirkens Korshær*’s ‘users’ have been mostly men over 40 years of age, recently younger people have also started using the shelter. As Gitte makes clear, these people have various problems: some are alcoholics, drug addicts, or gambling addicts, some are mentally ill, some had their own business and recently went bankrupt, some lost members of their families, some are incapable of competing with the stress and demands of daily life, some are war veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, some are old people whose pension cannot cover their necessary living costs, and some have families with small children and insufficient funds to provide for them.

Aware of the multiple causes underlying homelessness, Gitte strongly criticizes a widespread attitude among the Danish people and certain politicians – their tendency to blame the homeless themselves for reaching such a precarious situation. ‘Everybody can get in trouble in one way or another and become depressed,’ Gitte claims. ‘None of us can feel secure. I have been here a long time and there are so many stories in which people are not to blame about what happened.’ Thus, instead of calling the homeless ‘weak,’ as many Danish people do, Gitte argues that they should better be seen and treated as survivors and consequently shown a high degree of not only compassion but also respect. ‘You have to meet them at the same level,’ Gitte stresses, ‘from human to human,’ and try to earn their trust, as well as offer them sufficient freedom. And (to

paraphrase Lancione) instead of framing them in terms of pre-conceptions and stereotypes and consequently judging and blaming them, we should better try to understand the huge variety of problems these people face and offer them all the possible help in overcoming their difficulties.

The acknowledgement of the intricate causality underlying *Kirkens Korshær*'s users' situations and of the specificity of each particular case makes Gitte, and the shelter's personnel, keenly aware that in order to help them they should not apply a single, monolithic method. But rather test a variety of different approaches according to the specific case at hand. A pertinent example Gitte describes is the problem of helping homeless people find jobs. Although many social policy makers consider this a perfect method for helping them overcome their poverty and homelessness, Gitte makes clear that offering jobs to homeless people is often not a solution. 'Most of the people here are not ready for working,' she argues. 'They have resources but they are not stable. They could maybe come two or three days, but then they will stay away again. If you could find a job where they can come whenever they are ready or able to, it would be amazing. But it is not possible in today's workplace.' In such cases, *Kirkens Korshær* applies different methods: 'For example, we ask them: Is there anybody willing to help move some furniture around? This works. But if you ask them to help next Tuesday it will not work. They simply don't have a time-feeling anymore...' Thus, instead of using rigid methods to help its users, *Kirkens Korshær* applies various methods, each of them tuned to the specific case it must solve.

A similar example concerns the problem of housing. Although Gitte admits that there is 'a basic need for everybody to have his or her own privacy and home,' she is nevertheless conscious that the 'housing first' approach discussed earlier cannot always be a solution. What is perhaps even more important for our discussion is the fact that she did not see the limitations of such an approach through abstract analysis but rather from *dialogues* with the homeless themselves. In interviews the Roskilde Kommune conducted with 50 homeless people regarding their housing preferences, *none* of them claimed to want to live in a 'normal apartment,' but rather in communal shelters. This foregrounds not only the limitations of current 'universalistic' homelessness strategies, but also the crucial importance of treating homeless people as interlocutors rather than just objects of study.

To summarize, theoretical analyses such as Lancione's and cases such as Roskilde's *Kirkens Korshær* point towards some limitations of current approaches to homelessness from disciplines such as economics, sociology, urban studies, and social policy. An awareness of the tortuous path of both the experience of homelessness and the causality underlying this phenomenon may open pathways towards better strategies of intervention and more coherent and comprehensive attempts to find solutions. It is beyond the scope of this article however to suggest concrete ways of doing so - I confine myself to reflect on the productive potential in combining literary and social science perspectives.

Where does Joyce's novel stand here? Can a reading of this novel productively contribute to these debates? The fact that *Ulysses* could better be read as a novel dealing with the particularity and specificity of everyday experience rather than with general

philosophical issues has indeed been increasingly stressed in contemporary Joycean criticism (cf. e.g. Kiberd 2009; Killeen 2012). This is pointing towards a possible entry into our discussion of the way it deals with the theme of homelessness. Thus, my approach in the following pages will not be to extract a general theory of homelessness from the novel's pages but rather to immerse myself into particular and specific descriptions of homelessness and ways of dealing with it that the novel stages. As I hope to show, although such an attempt might not offer clear solutions, it will at least help us pose important questions and open new avenues for thought which could prove relevant to ongoing discussions of homelessness. In my view, Irit Rogoff's description of art in general is pertinent to Joyce's novel too. 'Art,' she claims, 'is my interlocutor rather than the object of my study, it is the entity that chases me around and forces me to think things differently, at another register or through the permissions provided by another angle' (Rogoff 2000: 10).

A careful reading of *Ulysses*' fourth chapter, *Calypso*, can show that Leopold Bloom's experiences of homelessness as well as his strategies of dealing with such experiences are much more complex than many economic or sociological discussions of these phenomena claim them to be. When addressing the parallels with Homer's *Odyssey* this episode is (partly) structured, Joycean scholars usually agree, by the fact that Bloom's wife, Molly, should be seen as built in the image of Calypso, the nymph who keeps Ulysses prisoner on the island of Ogygia for several years and forbids him to go home.

In his famous study *Ulysses on the Liffey*, Richard Ellmann, for example, argues that 'Calypso represents one aspect of Molly, her physical presence; she is someone to be thought about, written to, explained to, observed, fed' (1974 [1972]: 34), hence someone to be obeyed and served (the figure of Penelope could be seen as the other aspect of Molly). All this is true, indeed, and Bloom, like Ulysses, definitely appears to be in a rather servile position towards his wife, preparing her food, bringing her correspondence (including a letter from Blazes Boylan with whom she will betray Bloom later in the afternoon), tidying her dirty linen and dutifully explaining to her what the term 'metempsychosis,' which she encountered in a book, means.

However, the parallels with Homer's character seem to stop here. Whereas Ulysses has to satisfy daily the nymph's sexual urges, we find out soon enough that Bloom and Molly have not had sex in over a decade, since their son, Rudy, died. More precisely the Blooms have not had consummated sex in approx. 11 years (10 years, 5 months, and 18 days). And while Ulysses yearns to leave Calypso's island to return home to Ithaca, Bloom is presented a bit later in the chapter, after going out to buy some kidneys for breakfast, as 'hurrying homeward [...] To smell the gentle smoke of tea, fume of the pan, sizzling butter. Be near her ample bedwarmed flesh' (4.230-9).

So how is Bloom's experience of homelessness constructed then in this episode? The first, obvious observation is that, of course, Bloom is not *literally* homeless. He is a middle class citizen, working as an advertisement agent, and residing at 7 Eccles Street with his wife. But as Kiberd so poignantly describes the situation, an 'irreparable sadness has caused this couple to divide the home between them, so that they may share a house, if not a life' (2009: 85). Thus, although Bloom is the owner of a house, he is not feeling at home there anymore or, as Patrick Colm Hogan puts it, 'he feels alienated from his own

home – specifically, with the attachment bonds that link him with Molly and with the house’ (Hogan 2014: 57).

Whether Bloom is ‘homeless’ or not, is therefore open to discussion. In the legal sense he is not. But analogue to his sexual problems, he is never just a ‘victim’, but always also part of the solution. Thus, he might in a sense be ‘homeless’ (in fact “Hus Forbi”), but also the one who provides shelter. “Hus Forbi” (literary ‘House Past / Lost’) is a newsletter sold in the streets of Roskilde and other Danish towns by homeless people to raise funds for the homeless. Bloom is not only a client but he is also ‘Gitte’. He is almost literally the ‘Church Army’ - we remember that Eccles in Greek means church. It is here he invites Stephen in the *Ithaca* chapter and gives him care and *caritas*. And a supper meal. Bloom demonstrates the ability to empathize with others’ sufferings on several occasions in the novel (the blind stripling he helps across the street, Mina Purefoy’s “hard labour,” etc.), and he frequently uses his compassion towards others to consider social solutions to the problems he sees people facing (i.e., he empathizes over Mrs. Purefoy’s pain, and then considers methods to alleviate the pain women feel during childbirth). The solutions he comes up with admittedly aren’t great, but he frequently demonstrates the empathy + action combination that is at the heart of why we need literary examinations of homelessness. That Stephen did not make use of Bloom’s shelter is another story. Probably no one would like to stay at a homeless shelter more than is necessary. The Christian dimension in both Ulysses and the ‘Church Army’ is worth reflecting upon.

Does *Ulysses* end by a successful homecoming? This is I think also open to debate. The homeless Stephen disappears into the night, and although we are rather confident that he will make it in the end, we can’t be sure. Different people relate to homelessness in different ways. Bloom returns to his house and the marital bed, but does he in fact return to a home? The fact that he is going to sleep ‘upside down’ - with his head facing Molly’s bottom - indicate that something has changed. Even Molly in her vortex of thoughts - ending with a ‘yes’ to continue her relationship with Bloom, but also to her actual and future lovers - leaves the reader with a sense of doubt regarding the possibility of home. Several of Gitte’s users actually own a flat, some even a house, but they are not able to live there, not able ‘to home’.

This points to an important aspect of how one should conceptualize homelessness. Instead of always understanding the phenomenon in literal (and perhaps even economical) terms, we should take into consideration the fact that homelessness sometimes is a state of mind. In Matthew Ratcliffe’s terms, it is a ‘feeling of being’ or ‘existential feeling,’ an affectively charged way of being in the world, or as Ratcliffe describes it, a ‘way of finding oneself in the world’ [...] a sense of reality of self and of world, which is inextricable from a changeable *feeling* of relatedness between body and world’ (2008: 2; emphasis in original).

As with some of Gitte’s users, Bloom also experienced the loss of a child, his son Rudy, who died eleven days after birth. Bloom presents, in a strikingly poetic way, this tragic event: Molly ‘had borne him an only manchild which on his eleventh day on live had died and no man of art could save so dark is destiny. And she was wondrous stricken of heart for that evil hap and for his burial did him on a fair corselet of lamb’s wool, the



flower of the flock, lest he might perish utterly and lie akeled (for it was then about the midst of the winter)' (1986: 14.268-71). Since then, as already mentioned, Bloom and his wife grew apart and, since Bloom refused to engage in sexual intercourse with her after this tragic event, she appeared to be forced to seek sensual gratification elsewhere. At the moment we meet Bloom though, he is haunted not only by the loss of his son and his feeling of uprootedness from his own home caused by his wife's coldness towards him and imminent adultery (for a discussion of the theme of adultery in Joyce's works, see Utell 2010), but also by his fifteen-year-old daughter, Milly's, recent departure from home to work as an assistant for a photographer.

Bloom's ruminations after reading Milly's letter during breakfast show how closely connected in his affective life are Milly's departure and his son's death: 'Fifteen yesterday. Curious, fifteenth of the month too. Her first birthday away from home. Separation. Remember the summer morning she was born, running to knock up Mrs. Thornton in Denzille Street. Jolly old woman. Lots of babies she must have helped into the world. She knew from the first poor little Rudy wouldn't live. Well, God is good, sir. She knew at once. He would be eleven now if he had lived' (1986: 4.415-20). However, for Bloom, Milly's departure is not only connected to his son's death but also to his wife's infidelity. His fears that Milly might have engaged in a sexual relationship with the young student she mentions in her letter ('A wild piece of goods. Her slim legs running up the staircase. Destiny. Ripening now. Vain: very.' 1986: 4.429-30) almost immediately bring to his mind his wife reading in bed a letter from Boylan and waiting for him to come in the afternoon: 'Milly too. Young kisses: the first. Far away now past. Mrs Marion [Molly's full name]. Reading, lying back now, counting the strands of her hair, smiling, braiding. A soft qualm, regret, flowed down his backbone, increasing. Will happen, yes' (1986: 4.444-8).

Thus, Bloom's feeling of homelessness is structured by his entangled, tripartite experience of loss: the death of his infant son, the departure of his teenage daughter and his wife's remoteness and infidelity. As should be obvious from my discussion above, these three causes of Bloom's homelessness are strongly intertwined, pointing once more to the many causes underlying this phenomenon. Bloom owns a house, as do some of Gitte's users, but is unable 'to home' because of this experience of loss. It may be that a focus on existential feelings of loss would enable us to better understand the problems of homeless people.

However, Bloom's feeling of homelessness extends beyond the sense of personal dislocation caused by loss. In *Cahypso* and in other parts of the novel (particularly in the episode *Cyclops*), Joyce also stages another type of homelessness, having to do this time with ethnic and racial dislocation. After all, Bloom is a Jew living in Ireland and although, as Hogan argues in his discussion of *Cahypso*, 'he sincerely affirms his Irishness later in the novel, it is clear most Irish people do not fully accept him,' and thus, he is 'in a way, nationless' (Hogan 2014: 57). As Sheehan claims, 'Bloom's plight' is that although 'he thinks of himself as Irish he is also Jewish; the result is that he is not fully at home in either race' (Sheehan 2009: 34). The themes of nationalism, racism and anti-Semitism are prefigured in the second chapter (*Nestor*), through the character Deasy. Deasy is the director of the school where Stephen Dedalus works and bitterly claims that Jews

“sinned against the light [...] and that is why they are wanderers on the earth to this day” (1986: 2.361-3). These themes reach their climax in the *Cyclops* chapter, where an anonymous, fanatical nationalist ‘Citizen’ physically assaults in a pub the ever-wandering Bloom. But Bloom copes with that. He is kind, clever, humble and compassionate, or as Patrick Parrinder (1984: 121) says: ‘Bloom is Sinbad the Sailor, the Good Samaritan and the Wandering Jew’.

Bloom’s relation with his ethnic and racial origins is ambiguous<sup>2</sup>. Wandering through the streets of Dublin in order to get food for his breakfast and prompted by seeing an advertisement to Agendath Netaim, a planter’s company from Palestine, he starts daydreaming of ‘orange groves and immense melon fields north of Jaffa,’ offering ‘cool waxen fruit’ with ‘heavy, sweet, wild perfume’ (1986: 4.194-208). As Hogan argues, this imaginary escapism is also closely connected to his personal problems related to Molly’s infidelity. His sense of personal dislocation ‘motivates a simulation of a different home [...] He is not considering some particular act, but rather a large alternative to his current life’ (Hogan 2014: 57). This is what Hogan calls ‘mood repair,’ a mechanism of coping with negative affective states in which an individual is seeking ‘distraction from the eliciting conditions of the aversive emotion’ (70).

However, Bloom’s attempts at mood repair do not succeed. Soon after, his nostalgic imaginings turn darker and gloomier: ‘A barren land, bare waste. Volcanic lake, the dead sea: no fish, wheelies, sunk deep in the earth. No wind would lift those waves, grey metal, poisonous foggy waters. Brimstone they called it raining down: the cities of the plain: Sodom, Gomorrah, Edom. All dead names. A dead sea in a dead land, grey and old’ (4.219-23). As Ellmann reflects, for Bloom, as well as for some Jews, the ‘promise of a promised land has long since been broken’ (1974 [1972]: 36). Although he does not feel at home in Ireland, he realizes that Palestine is far from being a solution, as for a long time it has not been a home for Jews either. Thus, Bloom falls into an intricate trap: his use of imagination to escape from his personal dislocation ultimately strengthens his sense of ethnic dislocation. In Bernard Benstock’s words, ‘neither the home that he does not rule nor the streets that he cannot safely navigate offer sanctuary’ (Benstock 1991: 49).

These themes from *Ulysses* are especially topical and relevant to our discussion of homelessness in Roskilde. As Gitte makes clear in her interview, racism is a significant problem homeless people must cope with. ‘What freaks me out’, she claims ‘is racism. It is a big issue in Denmark. Some of the Danish people (middle class and lower middle class) are having racist thoughts and see immigrants and homeless people as a threat for the Danish society.’ As Lancione (2014a) also argues, a comprehensive understanding of the condition of homelessness should not fail to take into consideration and carefully analyze the negative affects afflicting homeless people. Thus, an in-depth reading of the ways in which Joyce stages and reflects upon this theme could strengthen our understanding of the intricate connections between racism and homelessness and perhaps open pathways for dealing with such pressing problems (for a discussion of race and homelessness, see also Lancione 2016). A recent initiative in Roskilde points towards on the one hand the difficulties of finding ways of dealing with homelessness and, on the other hand, the ambiguity of the project: Roskilde’s famous restaurant ‘Snekken’, located

next to the Viking playground and museum on the harbour, invited “100 homeless to dinner” on a cold January day in 2017. The local news media reported:

100 homeless people were invited to a gourmet dinner at Snekken for both a good dinner and a break from worries, stress and pain. The people were picked up by bus in “Café Klaus” (*kb: at the homeless shelter*) in Roskilde and at the “Morning Cafe” in Copenhagen. And they were driven back again. During dinner in the cosy restaurant at the harbour they could listen to the music group *Zididada*, who helped to keep the mood elevated. The three-course menu consisted of salmon with raw cream and crisp salad. Calf with parsnip puree and baked potato. Gateaux Marcel with sea urchin cream. It was a very good evening, the mood was loud and the worries were gone for a while.” (my translation, *Roskilde Avis*, January 24 2017).

Without overstating this example, it could point towards a rupture of the widespread notion of homeless people as dangerous others. This is in line with other minorities recently becoming public ‘darlings’ (blacks, homosexuals, transvestites a.o.) in Denmark. On the other hand, the example could also illustrate the continuous need of different parts of society to ‘take care’, to ‘do something about the situation’, to ‘solve the problem’ - regarding homeless people as victims, not as capable agents of their own life.

Furthermore, another important aspect of Bloom’s sense of both ethnic and personal dislocation concerns the negative emotions his homelessness engenders, particularly those of shame and guilt. Shame is a universal feeling. As Hogan argues (2014: 34), Bloom not only blames himself for Rudy’s death (‘Our. Little. Beggar. Baby. Meant nothing. Mistake of nature. If it’s healthy it’s from the mother. If not from the man,’ 6.328-9) and for his wife’s infidelity as caused by the decade-long sexual abstinence he himself initiated and sustained, but also feels shame, in the *Nausicaa* chapter, for his physical appearance as a big-nosed Jew: ‘Didn’t let her see me in profile’ (13.836-7).<sup>3</sup> In the interview Gitte mentions several aspects of shame and guilt that she observes among the users of the shelter related to marital breakdowns, forsaken homes, families abandoned or betrayed, but also failures with respect to jobs or studies. Gitte is therefore trying to persuade the users not to blame themselves for every blow they encounter in life.

But if imagination fails to help Bloom overcome his sense of personal and ethnic homelessness, is he using other more successful strategies or coping mechanisms to solve his problems? The very first paragraph of *Cahypso* points to an answer: ‘Mr Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls. He liked thick giblet soup, nutty gizzards, a stuffed roast heart, liver slices fried with crust crumbs, friend hencods’ roes. Most of all he liked grilled mutton kidneys which gave to his palate a fine tang of faintly scented urine’ (4.1-5).

This focus on embodied processes in all their dimensions repeatedly occurs throughout the chapter. As Ellmann argues, the ‘whole sensory world is mustered for this episode [and] Bloom is all eyes and ears, tastebuds, nostrils, fingers, as he starts the day.’ As he brilliantly summarizes it, ‘his brain is full of body’ (1974 [1972]: 32). Over and over again Bloom is ‘bending his senses’ (Joyce 1986: 4.163), relentlessly exploring the

world through sight ('Quick warm sunlight came running from Berkeley Road, swiftly, in slim sandals, along the brightening footpath,' *ibid.* 4.240-242), hearing ('Mrknao! the cat said loudly,' 4.32; 'A creak and a dark whirr in the air high up. The bells of George's church. They tolled the hour: loud dark iron,' 4.544-5), smell ('Through the open doorway the bar squirted out whiffs of ginger, teadust, biscuitmush,' 4.106-7; 'he breathed in tranquilly the lukewarm breath of cooked spicy pig's blood,' 4. 143-4), touch ('Nice to hold, cool waxen fruit, hold in the hand,' 4. 207-8) and especially taste: 'he put a forkful into his mouth, chewing with discernment the toothsome pliant meat. Done to a turn. A mouthful of tea. Then he cut away dies of bread, sopped one in the gravy and put it in his mouth' (4.390-3).

Quite shockingly for its initial audience (see Arnold 1991), Bloom finds pleasure not only in eating but also in the subsequent movement of his bowels: 'Quietly he read, restraining himself, the first column and, yielding but resisting, began the second. Midway, his last resistance yielding, he allowed his bowels to ease themselves quietly as he read, reading still patiently that slight constipation of yesterday quite gone. Hope it's not too big on the piles again. No, just right. So. Ah! [...] He read on, seated calm above his own rising smell' (4.506-13). As Kiberd forcefully argues though, 'Bloom is shown shitting, not in order to shock the reader but rather to dramatise a man who – quite unlike Stephen – *feels utterly at home* with the workings of his own body' (2009: 87; my emphasis).

Through masterfully building up a poetics of the senses, Joyce shows a way of escaping the sickening feelings of homelessness haunting Bloom. This reinforces Lancione's passionate urge from his think piece (2013a) that one should also keep a keen eye on the poetry of existence characterizing homeless experience in order to better understand it. We should build a comprehensive phenomenology of homelessness as well as help homeless people fulfil their (mostly unacknowledged and stifled) capabilities. 'The city is filled by poetry,' Lancione claims. 'Sometimes it's good, most of the time it's cold, harsh, and vicious [...] Poetry is what you don't expect. It is the unknown that emerges, on a daily basis. It's the thing that lets you down when you are almost there. It's the thing that boosts you up when you are fucking done [...] And the amazing thing is that you learn how to deal with it [i.e. with the homelessness]. You know how to turn it to your advantage [...] Poetry is there, in the objects and the codes, and in being so entangled with them you learn how to deal with it. Poetry is bad, poetry is death. It is not the posh, bright, naïve thing people think about. But it's also hope, it's how you cope with things and how you reveal capabilities, in doing so, that nobody has noticed' (244).

Attaching importance to the poetry of existence characterizing homeless experience, should not override the hardship and struggles related to homelessness. But there is a parallel between Bloom's poetry of the senses and the poetry of homeless experience. Gitte mentions that one of the users, who spends the nights in an open shed at the seaside next to Roskilde Harbour, writes poems celebrating God and nature. Joyce frames Bloom's seaside experience in the *Nausica* chapter (the moment where Bloom is geographically remotest from his home) through a slightly exaggerated poetic form: 'The summer evening had begun to fold the world in its mysterious embrace. Far away in the west the sun was setting and the last glow of all too fleeting day lingered lovingly on sea

and strand, on the proud promontory of dear old Howth guarding as ever the waters of the bay, on the weedgrown rocks along Sandymount shore and, last but not least, on the quiet church whence there streamed forth at times upon the stillness the voice of prayer to her who is in her pure radiance a beacon ever to the stormtossed heart of man, Mary, star of the sea.' (Joyce 1986: 13.258). This is the setting of Blooms small sexual climax and turning point. From here the journey home begins.

Bloom's 'reintegration into daily life' (to quote again Gitte) does not only occur through a descent in the poetry of the senses. He also manages to achieve it through an immersion into domesticity. Bloom is the 'soft man' *par excellence*, an 'unmanly' man found in many instances shopping, cooking, serving his wife her breakfast, tidying up her room and dirty linen and also, as we will come to know later in the book, engaging in submissive sexual behaviour often verging towards masochism.<sup>4</sup>

As we saw from the interview with Gitte, Danish society often criticizes homeless people for being weak, submissive, soft and thus, according to widespread gender stereotypes, feminine. However, although discussions of correlations between homelessness and gender proliferate, they tend to focus mostly on quantitative comparisons between the numbers of homeless men versus that of homeless women or the causality underlying male versus female homelessness (e.g. Ritchey et.al. 1991; Tessler et.al. 2001). No systematic studies have yet been conducted to explore for example, the 'gender trouble' (cf. Butler 1990) homeless *men* might experience. According to Gitte, some of the users feel alienated in relation to social norms of gender roles ('being a man') and at the same time refuse the ('feminine') espousment by the local authorities. Gitte is highly aware of this ambivalent feelings and she tries to balance her own approach accordingly.

Joyce's portrayal of Leopold Bloom points towards the need for further investigations of these issues which might shed light not only on how societies conceptualize homeless people but also on the latter's personal experience of gender. The welfare state itself has often been conceptualized (metaphorically) in terms of a 'feminization' of the state (due to its focus on providing care and sustenance.) and a consequent 'feminization' of society itself (see e.g. Sainsbury 1999; Dale and Foster 2012; Gordon 2012). Analyses of the relationship between homelessness and gender could clarify (although perhaps in an indirect manner) the highly debated nature of the relation between homelessness and the welfare state.

So, are the problems of an Irishman in 1904 applicable to the twenty-first-century struggles of Danish people struggling with homelessness? In many ways, yes. Leopold Bloom teaches both the young Stephen and us as readers how to bloom and mature as human beings. The common experiences of loss between Bloom and the homeless in Roskilde, point towards central human experiences. As the backpage of Kiberd's book (2009) informs us: 'Bloom has learned to live with contradictions, with anxiety and sexual jealousy, and with the rudeness and racism of the people he encounters in the city streets; in his apparently banal way he sees deeper than any of them.' He embodies an intensely ordinary kind of wisdom, Kiberd argues, and in this manner offers us a model for living and acting. Without exaggerating the ability of Joyce's novel to address the problems of

homelessness in Roskilde, literature is not only entertainment, but also an important site of conveying wisdom as well as *caritas* from generation to generation.

To conclude, what the reading of the theme of homelessness in relation to Joyce's character Leopold Bloom has made clear is that homelessness should not only be seen in economic or sociological terms, but also in psychological and philosophical terms, as an existential feeling structuring one's way of being in the world. In my opinion, such a finding is highly important for future research on homelessness since it shows that this phenomenon cannot always be clearly measured quantitatively. Rather, the subjective, felt experience of this phenomenon and of ways of coping with it should be taken into consideration before attempting to devise theories or policies. Such a view of homelessness could have a significant impact on our understanding and ways of dealing with conditions such as, for example, 'intentional homelessness' (cf. e.g. Wharne 2015). Literature contains a great potential for combining socio-economic approaches with psychological approaches to homelessness.

Moreover, literature is important for understanding such phenomena and experiences not only because it reflects on them at the thematic level, but also because it stages and enacts them stylistically from an 'inside,' subjective perspective. As Dorrit Cohn argued in her seminal work from 1978, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*, literature is important because it offers us direct access to characters' consciousness, to their qualia, the 'what it is like' of their experiences (cf. Nagel 1974), which is something 'real life' cannot give us. Joyce's innovative and extensive use of stream-of-consciousness techniques (see Humphrey 1962; Wiley 2006) transforms us from mere observers of Bloom's struggles with homelessness to actual participants in his plights. Thus, reading *Ulysses* could help us increase our empathic capacities in our interactions with homeless people and therefore increase our capacities for offering them assistance and care. This said, *Ulysses* should not be seen as a manual to solve the problems of homelessness as such. That would not make any sense - neither with respect to the thinking of Joyce, nor to the dire problems of marginality and social problems connected with this phenomenon. Reading *Ulysses* specifically would not in itself put policymakers and/or other actors in a better position to combat the problems of homelessness in Roskilde effectively. What Joyce provides is a kind of template, a language and a vocabulary to talk about life in all its troubled, dirty, messy and tangled dimensions. Further research is needed to apply such templates to concrete policy instruments.

To give the final word to Gitte, here is an anecdote she recounted during the interview: 'Four years ago Roskilde Commune thought not to give us money anymore in the future. But then the "users" went crazy. We collected signatures and we held a meeting here where we invited politicians. And then the users told their stories about what happened to them and how much *Kirkens Korshær* helped them. At that time the mayor of Roskilde was a big, strong man. One of the users told him: Well, it looks like you eat everyday. He said, yea, that's my wife - she makes such good food! And then the user said: What would you say if you only ate twice a week or so?' Just like this user's invitation for the mayor to empathize, a novel like *Ulysses* invites us to step out of our preconceptions and 'ready-made' worldviews and open ourselves to different experiences

in order to strengthen our understanding of, as well as connection to, alterity. It is however merely an invitation to reflect, just as the aim of this article has been to argue for the potential in combining highly different discursive forms into a constructive dialogue.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In a recent study by Philipsen (2013) it is argued that the sense of feeling at home is distinctive by: absence of stress, decreased attention, control over the nearby surroundings, freedom from other people's rules, recognition of one's presence, the possibility of withdrawal and finally the use of personal items.

<sup>2</sup> Morton Levitt (2005) examines both anti-Semitism and the Jewishness of Bloom in his article "The Greatest Jew of All" and locate this Jewishness at the very heart of Bloom's identity, bemused as it is by legal dismissals of authenticity, riled by the citizen's bigotry and influenced by both the suicide of his father and the loss of his son. Since my article focuses on "Calypso" I have chosen not to go more into this - and only briefly mention Mr. Deasy's anti-Semitism in "Nestor" and Bloom's persecution at Barney Kiernan's pub in "Cyclops".

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the connection between shame and sexuality, see Hogan 2014: 16-8, and between shame and national identity, 20-21. See Arnold 1991, for a history of the many other controversies surrounding *Ulysses*.

<sup>4</sup> For an in-depth discussion of sexuality in its various aspects in Joyce's works see Brown 1985 and for an analysis of 'perverted' sexual behaviour (including masochism) see Cotter 2003.

## Acknowledgements

Without the advice and help from Kristine Juul, Dario Ortle, Steen Klitgård Poulsen, Andrei Ionescu and the anonymous reviewers, this article would have been a very different one.

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