

**MUSICAL ALLUSIONS IN JAMES JOYCE'S DUBLINERS  
AND THE PROBLEM OF THEIR TRANSLATION**

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**Abstract:** The importance of music in the works of James Joyce has long been acknowledged by Joycean scholars, and systematic attempts have been made to deal with musical allusions. A tenor singer in his youth, Joyce fills his writings with musical references and allusions used for certain purposes in his own style. No matter how music is applied, one thing is certain - musical allusions always add a further dimension to his stories, provide a deeper understanding to a piece of literature making it unique and revealing the unknown.

Translation of allusive texts has always been of great interest to linguists, professional translators and literary critics. It requires some strategic and problem-solving competence, as well as cross-cultural awareness, as allusions are closely interconnected with the cultural SL content.

**Key words:** allusion, music, biculturalisation, double allusions, allusive meaning

## 1. Introduction

While reading a piece of literature we frequently come across various types of allusions demanding identification and function recognition. Moreover, translators all over the world face the challenge of allusion translation, as being culture-bound elements they are considered potential problems that need to be dealt with. Inaccurate translation can lead to culture gaps, literal translations, puzzling wordings, misinterpretation of the whole text, etc.

In the present article, we would like to focus on the music in Joyce's early volume of short stories, "Dubliners." The books of Zack Bowen (Bowen 1974) and of Gerry Smith (Smith 2000) have traced how deeply the role of music is felt throughout his narrative. We will attempt to highlight the strategies of translating allusions, difficulties and cultural peculiarities of allusion translation, specifically allusions referring to music theme in James Joyce's works.

The choice of Joyce's "Dubliners" can be explained by the fact that it is a vivid proof of the impact music had on the author's writing career. It is interesting and

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illuminating, though, to consider the richness and depth that the musical message has already attained in Joyce's earliest and most naturalistic fiction, "Dubliners" (Haas 1992: 19).

The article provides a succinct overview of linguistic and extra-linguistic peculiarities of translating allusions referring to music in "Dubliners." It is also to clarify whether the chosen strategies are applicable and to find out the best and the most appropriate alternatives to translate allusions from the source text into the target text, as well as to focus on the immense role of music and its expression in these short stories. The contrastive analysis enables us to reveal the peculiarities and nuances in translation from English into Armenian and vice versa.

## 2. "Dubliners": The Study of Musical Allusions in the Theoretical Context

The etymology of the word "allusion" is rather interesting; it derives from Latin word *alludere* (*al* (to) + *ludere* (play)). Although humor is one of its functions, however, not all uses of allusion are playful. More interestingly, allusion is not only a literary phenomenon. We can also find them in non-fictional writing, in music, painting, film, etc. Even Freud made use of the term; he considered dreams as containing allusions to the dreamer's experiences when awake.

Allusion is a figure of speech that makes a reference to an event, place, literary work, myth, or work of art, either by implication or directly. As Ritva Leppihalme explains in her book "Culture Bumps: An Empirical Approach to the Translation of Allusions" some translation problems are caused by small stretches of other texts embedded in the text at hand, which interact with and color it, but may be meaningless or puzzling in translation. Some such embedded texts or "in-texts" are known as allusions (Leppihalme 1997: 87). In fact, one of the most important aspects of alluding is to create new literature out of old, that is, to involve the reader in a recreation by hinting at half-hidden meanings, which the reader is expected to recover and then use for a deeper understanding of the work.

A useful distinction might be drawn between allusions operating mainly on the micro-level of the text and those operating on the macro-level. Simply put, the macro-level involves the internal structure of the text and its interpretation, dramatic intrigue and authorial comment, its narrative and poetic structure. On the other hand, the micro-level is the lexico-semantic and stylistic level (Leppihalme 1997: 56).

Allusions are employed for different purposes: to teach the readers, to produce an aesthetic experience about the text, and connect the reader with a tradition by activating motifs, themes and symbols. In general, allusions are used because of the extra effect or meaning they bring to the text by their associations or connotations. A good translator often notices and analyzes functions of allusions in SL text before deciding how to treat it. Allusions enrich the texts in which they are used and at the same time, they create ambiguity especially when it is not possible to speak directly because of social or political considerations.

Michael Wheeler states that the allusions function mainly within three areas of references: cultural, generic, and textual. Cultural allusions help to identify or define

national, regional, or class cultures. Generic allusions indicate the relationship between an adoptive text and a literary convention or tradition. Textual allusions are by far the most common kind in Victorian fiction, establishing links between specific adopted and adoptive texts. They fulfill one or more of four different types of local function, which often complement each other (Wheeler 1979: 67).

One of the functions of allusion is challenging the reader to solve the puzzle. In a sense, any allusion is a puzzle for readers who notice it without recognizing it. It can be inferred that allusion plays an important role in persuading its readers to accept what the author says, especially when they quote parts from religious texts or literary works. Allusions may also be used ironically to detract from the importance of a situation or character. Allusions attempt to communicate, so audience comprehension is important whatever the purpose may be. They may tend to be unsuccessful if they are not understood by the individuals for whom they are intended.

Andrey Kirillov (Technical Translator at Bureau Veritas, Kazakhstan) has categorized allusions into five groups:

- Historical allusion (such as people, places, events)
- Literary allusion (such as characters, settings, plot)
- Biblical allusion (including texts from Old Testament, New Testament)
- Popular culture (related to contemporary people, places, events, literary works, works of art)
- The arts (related to music, works of art, theatre/film) (Kirillov 2003: 102).

Naturally, allusions are culture-bound elements in a context. They are expected to convey meaning that goes beyond that of the mere words used. Culture-bound concepts, even when the two cultures are not too distant, can be more problematic for the translator than the semantic or syntactic difficulties of a text. Translators are required to have good cross-cultural awareness; this is because words that have different connotations in one language might not have the same emotive associations in another language.

Translating allusions seems to be one of the most challenging tasks to be performed by a translator; in other words, allusions are potential problems of the translation process due to the fact that allusions have particular connotations and implications in the source language and the foreign culture but not necessarily in the TL and the domestic culture. Translating allusions requires a high degree of biculturalisation of receivers in order to be understood across a cultural barrier. A translator should take into consideration the fact that every TT receiver will be different from the ST receiver in at least one aspect: they are members of another cultural and linguistic community. It is quite obvious that target text readers, who have educated in a different culture, will usually be rather incapable of recognizing the names or phrases used and to make the necessary connection in order to make sense of target text passages in which source-cultural allusions take place.

Ritva Leppihalme suggests the term "culture bump" for a situation where the reader of a TT has a problem understanding a source-cultural allusion (Leppihalme 1997: 87). Such an allusion may well fail to function in the TT, as it is not part of the TL reader's culture. Instead of conveying a coherent meaning to TT readers, the allusion may remain unclear and puzzling.

Much of the work that is currently being done in the Translation Studies foregrounds cultural and social aspects of translation, with the emphasis on the macro context of the texts. Culturally oriented translation Studies, then, do not see the ST and the TT simply as samples of linguistic material. The texts occur in a given situation in a given culture of the world and each has a specific function and an audience of its own (Leppihalme 1997: 88). Instead of simply pondering the translatability of STs, there is concern with the functioning of the TT in the TL and its cultural context. The emphasis tends to be on how well a translation functions in the receiving language culture.

Music and literature have always been influencing each other and quite often music plays an important role in literature. Sometimes it contributes an entertaining or even humoristic factor, occasionally it pushes the action and at times it serves as a mirror of the culture to emphasize emotions and environment of the characters.

Music played an essential role in Joyce's life. This can be seen by his immense theoretical knowledge as well as by his practical experience. His biography reveals much of the background of the songs he used in his works. More than a thousand musical incidents, episodes, and allusions can be observed in the great novels of his maturity, such as "Ulysses" and "Finnegans Wake." In "Dubliners" the author applies music in three distinct ways, each of them being very important. First of all, with the help of music he defines the real world in which his characters live. Whether music is a social activity or profession, it forms a vital part of their everyday lives: when, they are not talking it is often because they are singing, playing the piano, or listening to someone else sing. Music, thus, helps to form the framework, the background, and the texture of their lives. More than this, music is essential since the characters of "Dubliners" reveal themselves through it, by playing an instrument, singing, listening to it or simply making comments about it. Over and over again in these stories, the telling incident, the crucial episode, or the moment when the character is revealed, happens in response to music (Haas 1992: 20).

Music formed quite a natural language for Joyce, a language which he managed to use with considerable and practiced skill. He has even applied music in situations other than purely musical performance. The reason is that Joyce was already applying language beyond its limits, making extraordinary demands of language, and music, of course, helped him fulfill these demands.

It was, of course, only later, in "Ulysses" and "Finnegans Wake", that Joyce made bold innovations in terms of using language. Among the so-called techniques he applied to enrich the meaning of his stories, and to push it beyond its limits we can mention his stream-of-consciousness technique, the contact with the subconscious dreams, half-wakefulness, drunkenness, and myth, the puns, and, of course, allusiveness. However, if analyzed closely, the tendencies towards the mentioned directions were undoubtedly present in the writer, and on a more attentive look it becomes obvious that Joyce was already an experimenter.

After reading Joyce's writings it becomes obvious, that music can indeed serve these purposes. In its undeniable power of direct emotional expressiveness, its allusiveness, its connection with the past by means of folk songs, and so on, music, as such, can even challenge or surpass language. Joyce, by including music in his short stories, enhances their power. That Mozart can reach the frozen soul of Mr. Duffy, a

character of "A Painful Case", or that Maria, the protagonist of "Clay", raises her quavering voice in a song, says a great deal about these characters.

The city and people of Dublin are presented to the readers in these short stories. Music formed an important part of both the geographic and the human scene. The streets of Dublin were filled with music that reverberates through these stories: the ballads and "nasal chanting of street singers" are heard in "Araby", the street organs play in "Eveline", etc.

Music also plays a fundamental role in the social world recorded in "Dubliners." It is a natural part of the characters' everyday life, one of their favorite pastimes, a means to escape their dull reality. Thus, it is not surprising to see Little Chandler in "A Little Cloud" invite his good old friend Gallaher to his house so that they could just sit and enjoy music; it is a natural thing for Mr. Duffy in "A Painful Case" to spend his evenings playing music before his landlady's piano. A stressed love for music can be seen when the daughter of Mrs. Sinico leaves the latter alone so much in "A Painful Case" and goes out to give music lessons. That public concerts and operas in general were also a desired way to spend time could be seen in "A Painful Case", since Mr. Duffy and Mrs. Sinico could meet two or three times by chance simply attending concerts, or in "Eveline", when sailor Frank takes her to the opera.

In his short stories, Joyce makes musical allusions quite frequently. In certain cases, they are direct references to characters singing or playing instruments, on others indirect quotes of songs. Joyce expects from his readers not only to simply nod along but also think about the allusions. How Joyce applies music significantly differs from how other authors apply it. Authors may use music for various purposes such as creating humor, depicting cultural peculiarities, etc. Joyce, however, combined literature and music in a very particular way having a subtler approach to the music. Joyce skillfully mastered applying music in all its beauty and power on the unconscious and, consequently, brings music into his text to make it more complex and multifaceted. Studies show that there are nearly 1500 references to musical titles, among which some appear only once, while others as many as 20 times. Music gradually became so important for Joyce that in "Dubliners" we can find about 18 musical references. The songs are seen as a possibility to escape the dull and grey everyday life. Music and singing also serve as a loophole for emotional energies.

### **3. Strategies of Allusion Translation**

In spite of the fact that it is more or less easy to identify the musical references applied by James Joyce, the main difficulties are arisen by their interpretation. The first and most common difficulty occurs when a song, which has been rather famous for Joyce and his contemporary audience, is not directly mentioned in the story but simply lingers in the background.

Another problem in identifying the allusion, and consequently translating it properly, is that double allusions can also be found in the stories. This makes it rather difficult to decide what the author has intended to allude to: a particular music, his work or both. After identification of the allusion, the translator should decipher its

intended function in the SL and source culture so that s/he may try to convey the same function in the TL and target culture. However, both allusion identification and its function recognition cannot be achieved without prior and background knowledge.

Translation strategies are ways of solving translation problems. Various strategies opted for by translators in rendering allusions play a crucial role for achieving equivalence in translation. In order to make decisions on appropriate translation strategies the translator should consider the type of the allusion, its allusive meaning and associations, its intended function in the ST and the linguistic and extra-linguistic peculiarities of the TT. The omission of allusions in the TT is not encouraged, as allusions are an exceptional source of information, key to deeper understanding of the work. In case of omissions we may assume that the whole translation becomes ineffective.

“Eveline” is the first portrait of a female in “Dubliners.” It depicts the contrast between a domestic life in early twentieth-century Dublin rooted in the past and the possibility of a new married life, new experiences abroad.

The main themes are again the failed quest and paralysis: The final destination of the boy in “An Encounter” is the Pigeon House, which he never reaches; the main character in “Araby” seeks the bazaar, closing down by the time he gets there; Eveline seeks Buenos Ayres, a place where she hopes to avoid the threat of her father’s violence. However, she is gripped by fear of the unknown. She also desires to escape the repetition of her dead mother’s “life of commonplace sacrifices closing in final craziness.”

The theme of death pervades “Eveline” too: the deaths of her mother and her brother Ernest, and of a girlhood friend named Tizzie Dunn. Other themes are Irish social conditions and emigration, imprisonment, doubt, etc. We assume that the title “Eveline” is an allusion too, like the title “Araby.” However, we may address two different explanations for it. Perhaps James Joyce alludes to Eve in the Garden of Eden, as she enjoyed her childhood, but, eventually, she had to leave the garden and enter the world of tribulations and hardships. From another standpoint, the name Eveline is derived from the Gaelic equivalent of Helen. Hence, perhaps the author alludes to Helen of Troy. Like Helen, Eveline wants to run away with a man. Nevertheless, as opposed to Helen, Eveline’s motivation is not love, but it is her escape from her mother’s fate and to find her freedom.

Music makes a prominent part of the story depicted both as allusion and as ‘playing in the background’, i.e. there is no reference to a particular song as such. In “Eveline” the musical allusions create a musical pattern throughout the whole story. The combination of various allusions provides the reader with an auditory experience which gives him/her the impression of not only reading the story but being inside it, listening to what the characters hear and how they feel. The implicit auditory experience is further accentuated by a complex system of figures of speech, which help convey feeling, mood and character. This story can be read as a confrontation between realistic and falsely romantic worldviews. This can be seen by the characters striving for a higher, better world that never was and never will be.

He took her to see The Bohemian Girl and she felt elated as she sat in an unaccustomed part of the theatre with him. (Joyce 2012: 27)

Ֆրանկը տարավ նրան դիտելու ‘Գնչուհին’ և նա, նստելով  
տղայի կողքին, իր համար անսովոր տեղում, իրեն զգում էր  
յութերորդ երկնքում: (Joyce 1978: 34)

“The Bohemian Girl” is a well-known nineteenth-century ballad opera composed by Dublin musician Michael William Balfe. Significantly, characters throughout *Dubliners* refer to songs from this opera. The reference to “The Bohemian Girl” is subtle but important. In this opera, the character Arline, who is Count Arnheim’s daughter, has been abducted by gypsies as a child and raised by them. She falls in love with Thaddeus, a Polish nobleman in exile who has joined the gypsy band. He saves Arline from being killed by a deer. When she sings ‘I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls’, she is describing the splendors of a dimly remembered childhood. There is some similarity between Arline and Eveline. The difference is that Arline’s dream is mainly about an opulent past, while Eveline’s dream is focused on the exotic future.

The allusion “The Bohemian Girl” has been replaced with a performed TL item, which is ‘Գնչուհին’. We believe that the translator has been guided by the fact that the main character of the opera was raised by gypsies.

People knew that they were courting and, when he sang about the  
lass that loves a sailor, she always felt pleasantly confused. (Joyce  
2012: 29)

Մարդիկ գիտեին նրանց փոխադարձ համակրանքի մասին,  
և երբ Ֆրանկը երգում էր նավաստու և աղջկա սիրո երգը,  
ինքը միշտ հաճելի շփոթմունք էր զգում: (Joyce 1978: 35)

“The Lass that Loves a Sailor” is a song about how faithless sailors can be, and the fact that Frank sings it to her seems pretty uncool. It also just reveals how naïve and young Eveline can be.

“The Lass that Loves a Sailor” was composed in 1811 by Charles Dibdin for “The Round Robin.” It is also the subtitle of a comic opera in two acts, which opened at the Opera Comique in London on May 25, 1878. In the opera it is associated with love and romance not to be, whereas Dibdin’s song is a very gentlemanly ballad about sailors tippling and offering toasts and hence adds an ironic touch to the story. “People knew that they were courting and, when he sang about the lass that loves a sailor, she always felt pleasantly confused.” The lyrics of the refrain fit closely to Eveline’s story. The ‘pleasantly confused’ feeling is mirrored in the lyrics as ‘pleased the most’. When they get to the boat, which is supposed to bring them to Buenos Aires they are on ‘the ship that goes’ and ‘the lass that loves a sailor’ is, of course, Eveline. Nevertheless, the song presents a conflict between reality and imagination, even though it is this time more of a foreshadowing. We can listen to the sailors, presenting their toasts on a Saturday night, each wishing to hail ‘some sweetheart or wife’. Obviously, the sweethearts or wives are not present at this moment. Therefore, even if Frank really married her, she would still be alone, only in a different city this time. For her sailor she would be

exchangeable, it is indifferent for them if they hail ‘some Poll or Bess’. In the end, she would be dependent again, waiting for a salvation, which is not sure to come.

The allusion “The Lass that Loves a Sailor” is translated as ‘Նավաստու և սաղկա սիրո երգը’. No matter how loyal the translation is to the original text, certain changes should occur to make it smoother for the TL audience.

Music, in general, goes almost constantly throughout his fiction. “The Dead” is known as the culmination of “Dubliners.” Music plays a prominent role in this story. We can find traces of music almost everywhere, i.e. it is present in the plot, in the theme, and in the lives of the characters. In this story music functions in all of its three primary roles, that is, as a social and professional activity, as a symbol of romance, and as a means for the revelation of the characters (Haas 1992: 29).

It’s nothing very wonderful, but Gretta thinks it very funny because she says the word reminds her of Christy Minstrels. (Joyce 2012: 7)

Զարմանալի ոչինչ չկա, բայց Գրետային դա զավեշտական է թվում, որովհետև այդ խոսքը հիշեցնում է տոնավաճառի երգիչներին: (Joyce 1978: 5)

Christy Minstrels was a group formed by Edwin Pearce Christy, a well-known ballad singer, in 1843. They were white performers “blacked up” as African-Americans in a show consisting of comedy, dancing and singing. Some years after its foundation, the name came to be used for any type of black minstrel show.

To sum up, the reality in this story is present in the musical elements like the street organ. The romantic element is exemplified in the “Bohemian Girl.” The final revelation becomes apparent in the song “The Lass that Loves a Sailor” which shows that Eveline cannot feel enough love for Frank to go to Buenos Aires with him. She is tied so closely to her past that she cannot believe in his promise as much as she wants it to be true and to experience a romance like Arline does.

Translation of allusive texts has always been of great interest not only to linguists and professional translators and interpreters, but also to literary critics, translation theorists and all educated people. In spite of the fact that it is more or less easy to identify the musical references applied by J. Joyce, the main difficulties are arisen by their interpretation. The first and most common difficulty occurs when a song, which has been rather famous for Joyce and his contemporary audience, is not directly mentioned in the story but simply lingers in the background. Another problem in identifying the allusion, and consequently translating it properly, is that double allusions can also be found in the stories. This makes it rather difficult to decide what the author has intended to allude to: a particular music, his work or both.

Joyce’s use of language gives rise to another problem concerning the interpretation of allusions. After all, it remains uncertain whether an allusion has been intended or not, because the author uses phrases that were part of popular speech back then and, consequently, quite frequently appeared in popular music. Therefore, the use of allusions can be obvious if the author mentions an exact quotation; repeats a key word



from a certain song; involves evident parody in his piece of writing and so on. After identification of the allusion, the translator should decipher its intended function in the SL and source culture so that s/he may try to convey the same function in the TL and target culture, at the same time taking into account the expectations of potential TL readers and peculiarities of the cultural context of TL. Both allusion identification and its function recognition cannot be achieved without prior and background knowledge.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Translation strategies are ways of solving translation problems. Various strategies opted for by translators in rendering allusions play a crucial role for achieving equivalence in translation. In order to make decisions on appropriate translation strategies the translator should consider the type of the allusion, its allusive meaning and associations, its intended function in the ST and the linguistic and extra-linguistic peculiarities of the TT. The omission of allusions in the TT is not encouraged, as allusions are an exceptional source of information, key to deeper understanding of the work. In case of omissions we assume that the whole translation becomes ineffective.

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Any story in 'Dubliners' abounds with religious, mythological, literary, cultural and historical allusions. By means of these allusions the author expresses his attitude towards the Catholic Church, England and the history of Dublin. A scrupulous reader and translator may figure out the themes and motifs of the stories, become closely acquainted with cultural, national, and regional peculiarities of Dublin life.

As literary translation tightens the connections between representatives of different language communities it is important to emphasize the connection between language, culture and translation. To conclude, it must be mentioned that on the one hand allusions are potential problems for a translator, on the other hand they provide a deeper understanding to a piece of literature making it unique and revealing the unknown.

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