

Róbert Orbán

## **TO APPEAR TO BE BLOOM**

-The 'relations' of the hero of Ulysses in Szombathely -

The author of the essay began to assemble a list of all the places where June 16 is celebrated; the date on which James Joyce's Ulysses takes place. It may seem unbelievable, but within a couple of weeks, with the help of the internet, the number exceeded 200. Most of the 'Bloomsdays' are celebrated within the English language zone, but all inhabited places on Earth are represented.

10 ) The programmes are very varied - it must be said. Most frequently, cultural festivals or scientific conferences are organised, during which passages from Ulysses are read. This is also the day when, for some unknown reason, the New York 'Bloomsdayrun' is organised. It is a strange irony that while Beijing organised its first 'Bloomsday' in 2000, in Szombathely, where Leopold Bloom was born, the local authorities deemed it fit to remove it from their events calendar (although despite this Bloomsdays are still celebrated). On Bloomsdays, especially during literary events, the name of Szombathely crops up fairly frequently, as James Joyce chose the Szombathely-born Jewish-Hungarian Virág Lipot (Leopold Bloom) as the hero for his novel.

Before we set out to find traces of Leopold Bloom in Szombathely we must bear in mind that the hero in Ulysses is but a fictional character. Just how many different people, apart from himself, Joyce used to form Leopold Bloom's character a vast amount of literature is devoted to. The basic fact is that the Irish Joyce wrote the novel while living in Trieste, a town which, apart from its Italian inhabitants, had a significant population of Germans, Slavs and Hungarians. Also the Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Jewish faiths are equally represented. The story of the novel takes place on June 16 1904 in Dublin, the city where Joyce was born but which the writer had already left and to where - except from two short visits - he never returned.

We can approach the connection between Leopold Bloom and Szombathely in two ways: first, we can map out Joyce's Hungarian connections and knowledge at the time or prior to writing Ulysses; secondly, considering that the novel is a mesh of complex

associations, and not entirely technically correct, we can try to find Bloom's connections with Szombathely.

On the basis of this, I shall try to approach Joyce from the viewpoint of Leopold Bloom -or Blum in Germanized form, the hero of the novel.

Let us look at just what he tells us about the origin and 'previous life' of the main character of his novel:

"... Vingtetunieme begat Szombathely and Szombathely begat Virag and Virag begat Bloom..."

"My name is Virag Lipoti, of Szombathely."

"Rudolph Bloom (deceased) narrated to his son Leopold Bloom (aged 6) a retrospective arrangement of migrations and settlements in and between Dublin, London, Florence, Milan, Vienna, Budapest, Szombathely with statements of satisfaction, (his grandfather having seen Maria Theresia, Empress of Austria, Queen of Hungary)..."

"Quote the textual terms of this notice.

I, Rudolph Virag, now resident at no 52 Clanbrassil Street, Dublin, formerly of Szombathely in the kingdom of Hungary, hereby give notice that I have assumed and intend henceforth upon all the times to be known by the name of Rudolph Bloom."

"Bloom (three times)..." [been baptised].

"To Master Percy Apjohn at High School in 1880 he had divulged his disbelief in the tenets of the Irish (protestant) church (to which his father Rudolf Virag, later Rudolph Bloom, had been converted from the Israelitic faith and communion in 1865 by the Society for promoting Christianity among the jews) subsequently abjured by him in favour of Roman catholicism at the epoch of and with a view to his matrimony in 1888."

"The Queen's Hotel, Ennis, County Clare where Rudolph Bloom (Rudolf Virag) died on the evening of the 27 June 1886, at some hour unstated, in consequence of an overdose of monkshood (aconite) self-administered ..."

"Bloom, only born male transubstantial heir of Rudolf Virag (subsequently Rudolf Bloom) Szombathely, Vienna, Budapest, Milan, London and Dublin, and of Ellen Higgins, second daughter of Julius Higgins (born Karoly) and Fanny Higgins (born Hegarty)."

Ulysses tells the story of Leopold Bloom's day-long wanderings in

Dublin on June 16, 1904. In the nearly thousand-page long novel he briefly makes mention of the extensive travels of Rudolf, father of Leopold, who had started his journey from Szombathely via Budapest, Vienna, Milan, Florence and London, and after many years finally arrived in Dublin. During this time however, not only his places of residence had changed. From a Jew he first became an Irish protestant and later a Roman Catholic. Leopold Bloom is already Irish and a catholic, but still his roots in Judaism and Hungarian ancestry trouble him.

12 ) Both his family name and his personal name are typical and common amongst Hungarian Jews in the 19th century. Apart from confirming his Jewish origin, it does not mean anything more than if someone - for argument's sake - is called Joseph Smith. During the 19th century a number of Jewish families called Blum lived in Szombathely, but none by the name of Virag, which is not surprising as Jews had to use German names during the 18th century. However, by the end of the 19th century, when the Hungarian linguistic revival gathered speed, we see a period of Hungarification of family names too. Prior to 1840 jews in Szombathely could not own real estate. In spite of this, they nevertheless were still present in the town, mainly in the adjoining Szentmárton, which retained its administrative independence from Szombathely. A local aristocratic family, the Batthyány's also took in jews on their Szőkeföld estate. Amongst the first jews to settle in Szombathely were Márton (Martin) Blum and his family. They originated from Lakompak in Sopron county and moved to nearby Tana, and when the opportunity arose, into Szombathely. In the town they rented szűr-maker Mihály Bossányi's house in Gyöngyös utca 36 [Gyöngyös Street] (today Fo ter 40). Their son, Sándor (Alexander) Blum had been born around 1835, while still living in Tana. In 1857 Sándor married Juli Lázár (Lazarus) of Rohonc, by whom six daughters (Josephine-Pauline, Henriette, Rózsa, Gizella, Friderika, Teresa) and two boys (Lazar and Henrik) were born. Their eldest daughter, Josephine-Pauline, in later documents appears as Blum Paula only. Here we must point out that Joyce mentions the hero of his novel by the name of Leopold Paula Bloom. In addition, one of the son's name, Henrik, appears in the alterego of Leopold Bloom as Henrik Blum - Henry Flower.

Another sister - or possibly cousin - of Márton Blum was Rozália Blum (Sally), who around 1839 became the wife of Salamon Altmann.

They had eight children (József, Jákob, Rozi, Ignác, Amália, Móric, Sándor and Gyula). Initially he is described as a merchant, later more precisely as merchant of pelts and hides - that is to say he carried on the trade of his landlord, Mihály Bossányi.

The frequent occurrence of the name Blum is typified by the fact, that in nearby Rohonc a number of families also shared that name. The most interesting of these being Juli Blum, wife of Nathan Blumschein, ragman of Rohonc. In the 1850's they had lived in Szentmarton, at one time sharing a roof with Márton Blum and his family. One of their children was called Leopold Blumschein, which can loosely be translated as Lipót Virágszál [Flower-stem, or Flower-appearing]. Leopold Blumschein took Lotti Franck to be his wife. Four sons are known from their marriage, two born in Rohonc, and two in Szombathely. The family later left Szombathely.

The 1889 Jewish Marriage Registers for Szombathely record the marriage between 23 year-old sculptor, Mór ("vulgo Mar") Blum, born in Győr, now residing in Vienna and Maria Rogendorfer from Sárovar at Szombathely. It would be interesting to devote further research to establish the identity of Mór (Mar) Blum, as one of Joyce's acquaintances in Trieste was called Marino de Szombathely.

Mention should also be made of the other two families who moved from Lakompak to Szombathely. The Petschauer family had arrived together with Márton Blum and his family first to Tana, and from there to Szombathely. However, by the end of the 19th century or in the early 20th, they had left the town. It may be that Attila Petschauer fencing champion [1928 Amsterdam and 1932 Los Angeles Olympics] was a descendant. The other family, the Weiners, moved to Szombathely between 1850 and 1860. In 1906, Jakob Weiner, together with his 15 year-old son Manó had changed their name to Vályi. Manó Vályi's son, Péter Vályi, was Hungary's Finance Minister, a position he held for four years between 1967 and 1971, when he became Deputy Prime-Minister until 1973. The first two decades of the 20th century, at which time the novel had been created, was the great period of Magyarization of surnames by the Szombathely Jewry. This is when, amongst others, Deutsch became Dallos, Pollák became Polgár, Schonfeld became Székely and so on. A typical example of Jewish family history is shown

by the author with the Virág-Bloom-Flower name-changes, when within a few generations, the same family changed its name from Hebrew to German, and from German to Hungarian (which process continued further as the family emigrated from Hungary).

Apart from Szombathely and Budapest, the name of Székesfehérvár is also present in Ulyssees. "What other objects relative to Rudolph Bloom (born Virág) were in the 2nd drawer?

An indistinct daguerrotype of Rudolph Virag and his father Leopold Virág executed in the year 1852 in the portrait atelier of their (respectively) 1st and 2nd cousin, Stefan Virág Székesfehérvár, Hungary."

The jews of Székesfehérvár and Szombathely were in roughly similar circumstances. They could settle in both cities only after 1840, even then with gradual relaxation of the restrictions placed upon them. The fact that in both cities persons by the name of Márton Blum were amongst the first to settle, can only be attributed to coincidence. As to the possible connection between the two families at present, we have no data.

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However, we know that Mayer (Meir) Zipser, rabbi of Székesfehérvár between 1844 and 1858, and later, until his death in 1869 of Rohonc had been acquainted with both families: entries in the registers show he had been present at their major family events. Both Rabbi Mayer Zipser and his brother Márkus Zipser, "independent scientist", had been well known in jewish public life. Mayer Zipser was considered a reformer within the Jewish faith and it was due to a religious dispute that he had to leave his rabbinate at Szekesfehervar. Although Rabbi Zipser is not mentioned in the records of the dispute, two wellknown rabbis, Guggenheim and Hirsch, are. Guggenheim(er) had been Zipser's adversary in the aforementioned dispute, and became Rabbi of Székesfehérvár following Zipser's departure. Guggenheim's father-in-law, Hirsch, the Talmudist Rabbi of Frankfurt also became involved in the controversy, siding with his son-in-law. The debate provoked interest and publicity amongst Jewish circles even outside Hungary.

Although there were a number of photographers amongst the Székesfehérvár Jewry during the second half of the nineteenth century, there were none by the name of István Virág. It is probable that Joyce came across the name of Sándor Virág, a photographer working in

Székesfehérvár at the time of writing his novel during the period between 1907 and 1920.

It is possible, albeit by a very slim chance, that the author may have seen a photograph taken around 1852 (although that too could not have been by a photographer called Virág). During the 1860's, or possibly even earlier, in the time of Rabbi Zipser, there had been photographs taken of Jewish families and the recording of religious events in Székesfehérvár. One such photograph depicts Ignác Goldziher on the occasion of his bar mitzvah.

The west-Dunántúl region and Triest (and its environs) - apart from Joyce's novel - merits in-depth research, as at the end of the 1800's there had been intensive and multifold connections between them. We know very little of these. At this time, Italian journeymen, stonemasons among them, were working in the region around Szombathely. In some villages, entire streets were built by them. Two colourful contemporary news reports aptly illustrate their presence: In 1892 an illegitimate child was born to Teréz Weiner by Luigi Brotto, a stonemason from Bassano. The child died two months later. During late autumn in 1898, on receiving news of the assassination of Queen Elizabeth of Hungary, an angered crowd nearly lynched an Italian workman, who was thought to be an anarchist, due to his dishevelled appearance.

At the beginning of the 20th century the Hungarian Circle (Circolo dei Magiari) existed in Triest under the leadership of Nidia Frigyessy Castelbolognese. One of Joyces' acquaintances was Marino de Szombathely, who in the 1910's had been engaged in translating the *Odyssey* into Italian, and later published essays on classical Italian literature. It begs the question: where from this unusual name and from where did he originate?

Joyce had also known Teodor Mayer, the Jewish-Hungarian proprietor of the two-page journal 'Il Piccolo'. John McCourt's study, 'The Years of Bloom' describing Joyce's years in Triest was published in 2000. According to McCourt, Mayer, who had been a supporter of the Italian nationalists, was a major influence on Joyce in forming the character of Leopold Bloom (not forgetting that Leopold Bloom himself had been an advertising agent in the novel). McCourt also analyses in depth the parallels in Hungarian and Irish political history. Translation of his work into

Hungarian would prove useful.

At the time of the writing of the novel, Lajos Villani, diplomat and literary historian, also lived in Trieste for a while. It is not known if they actually met, but Joyce at least must have heard of him, as he refers to Dublin's 'tall Hungarian' as Villona.

It was in 1994 when - on the suggestion of József Raspberger - the first Bloomsday contemporary arts festival was organised in Szombathely. From 1995 the 'Leopold Bloom Mappa' contemporary arts publication, has been edited by Ákos Székely. Since then Joyce and Leopold Bloom have been commemorated by conferences and readings organised by László W. Farkas and Balázs Barták at the Berzsenyi Dániel High School.

16 ) Despite the modest attendances at the Bloomsday programmes organised in Szombathely, they nevertheless stimulate wide interest. The Irish Times published a lengthy interview with David Norris, senator and Member of the Upper House of the Doil, and also Chairman of the Joyce Centre, in which he states "Joyce of course is a Dubliner, but his father arrived from Szombathely. It is marvellous that Szombathely in Hungary every year celebrates with the Bloomsday festival that Leopold's father - in Joyce's imagination - was born there."