



Title	The Sense of Parody in Ulysses
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Citation	Osaka Literary Review. 19 P.92-P.103
Issue Date	1980-11-30
Text Version	publisher
URL	https://doi.org/10.18910/25614
DOI	10.18910/25614
rights	

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The Sense of Parody in *Ulysses*

Keiko Oshio

Stephen Dedalus makes his declaration of an artist near the end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence only arms I allow myself to use – silence, exile and cunning.¹⁾

However paradoxical his attitude toward Stephen might be, James Joyce kept true to his declaration till the end of his life. While his contemporary writers turned to their beliefs and isms, as Yeats to his mysticism, D. H. Lawrence to Freudianism, or T. S. Eliot to the Anglican Church, only Joyce remained as he was, ambiguous and a little sceptical, without any authoritative support but few doctrines of theology he had learned from Catholicism. Nevertheless, he was not indifferent to the ideas and beliefs of his time. Though he read little of the modern novels, he was always curious about the ideas of his contemporary world. His interests were of large scope. They include music, drama, movie, philosophy, theosophy, Freudian and Jungian psychology, and even socialism. And yet Joyce, unlike other writers who sought them for the ideological supports for their art, rummaged in these ideas for more details and materials of his composition.

Certainly, *Ulysses* is encyclopedic in nature, with its so many allusions, multiple strata of symbolic patterns, and factual details Joyce gathered from the real Dublin life.²⁾ But somehow, these details and symbolic patterns fail to give a single answer to the most basic questions like these: “Do Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom unite at last in the mythological father-son relationship of Ulysses and Telemachus?” “Where will the married life of the Blooms go?” Or, “Is the parallel between *Ulysses* and

Homer's *Odyssey* satirical or affirmative?" Joyce collected and organized all kinds of ideas, symbols and factual details in *Ulysses* with the obstinacy of an encyclopedist. He seems more interested in collecting various ideas and symbols than each of the collected items which sometimes allows varied or even contradictory interpretations to his work.

Stephen mutters in "Telemachus", quoting Walt Whitman: "Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself." (p. 17)³⁾ In spite of the difference in their poetical qualities, Joyce's imagination resembles Whitman's with respect to his fascination in cataloguing and itemizing his materials. There are the recurrent images of procession and pageant in *Ulysses*, like the passing viceregal cavalcade which links the fragmentary scenes of "Wandering Rocks". Besides "Wandering Rocks", most of all those images are found in the parodied and the hallucinatory scenes of "Cyclops" and "Circe"; they are the descriptions of the execution ceremony, the marriage, the religious pageant, the meetings of the court of justice and the parliament, or the coronation of Bloom, in which Joyce enumerates a multitude of names, both realistic and fantastic, in the assemblies. The passage below is from "Circe":

He [Bloom] walks, runs, zigzags, gallops, lugs laid back. He is pelted with gravel, cabbagestumps, biscuitboxes, eggs, potatoes, dead codfish, woman's slipperslappers. After him, freshfound, the hue and cry zigzag gallops in hot pursuit of follow my leader: 65 C 66 C night watch, John Henry Menton, Wisdom Hely, V. B. Dillon, Councillor Nanneetti, Alexander Keyes, Larry O'Rourke, Joe Cuffe, Mrs O'Dowd, Pisser Burke, The Nameless One. . . . (p. 586)

Thus, the list of the names follow more than a half page.

Whitman, by cataloguing and itemizing the sights and the people in America, mysteriously reaches the ultimate truth and reality of the universe: "It is not chaos or death. . . it is form and union and plan. . . it is eternal life. . . it is happiness."⁴⁾ On the other hand, Joyce's encyclopedic lists of names and details remain as they are, getting at nowhere beyond themselves. Joyce is not a romantic poet who unites himself with the truth through his imagination. His art is always conscious, and he is in perfect control of his materials and techniques. It is the hand of this conscious

artisan that resists to yield the absolute answer in *Ulysses*.

Parody is the intrinsic technique to his art for such a writer as Joyce; for the technique implies a certain attitude of the writer to his world. Once Joyce said to his brother Stanislaus, "Don't talk to me about politics. I'm only interested in style."⁵⁾ Yet the problem of style, like politics, is related to the evaluation of the reality; a style is not only a manner of saying things but also its particular way of seeing them. In *Ulysses*, Joyce dealt with this problem of the reality, the question of what is the truth in reality. *Ulysses*, beginning as a realistic novel with its representation of the characters through their interior monologues, ends as a collection of the parodies on various styles in the later episodes. We will examine some of these later episodes of the book – "Cyclops", "Nausicaa", "Oxen of the Sun", "Circe", "Eumaeus" and "Ithaca" – so as to understand the nature of Joyce's stylistic experiments in these episodes of *Ulysses*.

A torrent of confident talk breaks forth at the beginning of the "Cyclops" episode after the chaos of clamouring sounds in "Sirens":

I was just passing the time of day with Old Troy of the D. M. P. at the corner of Arbut hill there and be damned but a bloody sweep came along and he near drove his gear into my eye. I turned around to let him have the weight of my tongue when who I should see dodging along Stony Batter only Joe Hynes.

– O, Joe, says I. How are you blowing? (p. 292)

The technique of this passage is what Robert Humphrey calls "soliloquy". The soliloquy differs from the interior monologue in the point that it assumes a formal and immediate audience; it has a greater coherence than the interior monologue since its purpose is to communicate emotions and ideas which are related to plot and actions.⁶⁾ The story is told in the first person "I" and its basic tense is present. This speaker is a narrator-agent of the story, chosen to report Bloom's encounter at Berney Kernan's pub with a man called "the citizen". The citizen represents the one-eyed giant Cyclops in Homer's *Odyssey* and his short-sighted patriotism is aggressive against Jewish Bloom. The speaker is a foul-mouthed bill-collector, one of the citizen's hangers-on at the pub.

It is a curious fact that the speaker of "Cyclops" is without a name as the citizen's real name is unknown. Though there are the monologues of some length by Father Conmee, Mr. Kernan, or Patrick Dignam in "Wandering Rocks", and Bloom's rumours are heard in several of the earlier episodes, his is the voice of the first character that gives a thorough account of Bloom. However, the speaker is hostile toward Bloom, for he misunderstands that Bloom has got a sum of money at the Gold Cup horse race. In consequence, Bloom's figure in the episode is considerably dwindled before the citizen's rant and the hostile description of the bill-collector. He says about Bloom:

Bloom was talking and talking with John Wyse and he quite excited with his dunduckey mudcoloured mug on him and his old plumeyes rolling about. (p. 331)

Old lardyface standing up to the business end of a gun. Gob, he's adorn a sweepingbrush, so he would, if he only had a nurse's apron on him. (p. 333)

Are they the true pictures of what Bloom is?

The speaker of the "Cyclops" episode is the first of the unreliable informants on Bloom in the following episodes. In the former episodes, there has been the constant presence of the reliable, omniscient narrator in the story whether he is invisible behind the characters' interior monologues or sarcastic toward them; then, the reader has been able to see the infallible images of the characters through the narrator's eyes. On the contrary, when the point of view is narrowed down to this slanderous character in "Cyclops", the reader becomes uncertain about his description of Bloom. Moreover, the omniscient narrator of the episode is a parodist on all sorts of styles whose words are apparently unreliable:

And lo, as they quaffed their cup of joy, a godlike messenger came swiftly in. . . and behind him there passed an elder of noble gait and countenance, bearing the sacred scrolls of law, and with him his lady wife, a dame of peerless lineage, fairest of her race. (p. 298)

It becomes clear from the following talk of the bill-collector that this "elder of noble gait" is impoverished and crazy Denis Breen who works in

a lawyer's office, and also that the "lady" is his careworn wife of fading beauty. The style is a parody of some medieval romance, and it foretells the historical pastiches of "Oxen of the Sun".

The past-tense narration of "Cyclops" contains the pastiches on the special languages used in any possible cultural and technical fields of the society. It is written in the languages of an I.O.U., the newspaper articles, the medical magazines, philology, spiritual science, the chivalrous romance and other novels, the nursery rhymes or the Lord's prayer. As the narration changes its style, the described events are transformed into fantastic occurrences in order to fit in their styles. Thus, the crazy Breen becomes the "elder of noble gait", and his wife "a dame of peerless lineage". The violent action of the citizen causes "the catastrophe" (p. 344) all over the city; or at the end of the episode, runaway Bloom in the car is transfigured into "ben Bloom Elijah" (p. 345) who ascends to heaven on the chariot. The description of "the catastrophe" is in the style of the sensational newspaper article, and Bloom's ascension is written in the Biblical style. In the narrative passages of "Cyclops", each parodied style defines the nature of its story and not the story its style. While the garrulous soliloquy of the speaker is undermined by the parodist narrator, the parodied styles in the narration contradict one another. There are as many stories told as their styles, and the image of Bloom as the Saviour of peace is not more reliable than the bill-collector's portrayal of him as a white-livered prattler on love.

The soliloquy disappears in the next "Nausicaa" episode where the traditional third-person narrative takes over the story: "The summer evening had begun to fold the world in its mysterious embrace." (p. 346) The narration seems as objective and reliable as that of the realistic novel; but, the omniscient narrator of "Nausicaa" is deceitful. Hugh Kenner points out in his analysis of the narrational voice in *Ulysses* that Joyce's narrative stance toward his characters is essentially unstable, and that his narration often takes on the words and syntaxes of the characters: "What is the first half of 'Nausicaa', for instance, but Gerty Macdowell's very self and voice, caught up into the narrative machinery?"⁷⁾ When the story of her meeting Bloom on the strand is told from Gerty's point of view, the

narration inadvertently becomes a pastiche on the second-rate love stories, like Gerty's favourite novels written by "Miss Cummins". (p. 363) The tone of the narration is sentimental and priggish with proverbial sayings scattered among: "A sterling good daughter was Gerty like a second mother in the house, a ministering angel too with a little heart worth its weight in gold." (p. 355) Gerty plays a good girl, the heroine of her own story, though she has her naughty times, too: "Gerty wished to goodness they would take their squalling baby home out of that and not get on her nerves no hour to be out and the little brats of twins." (p. 357) In her imagination, Bloom is endowed with every trait of a romantic lover: "She could see at once by his dark eyes and his pale intellectual face that he was a foreigner, . . . He was in deep mourning, she could see that, and the story of a haunting sorrow was written on his face." (p. 357)

Thus, Joyce devised the most effective way of delineating Gerty's character in the omniscient narration. Since the style represents the character, the limit of her style is the limitation of her comprehension. Joyce in "Nausicaa" counters Gerty's narration with a few pages of Bloom's interior monologue at the end of the story. As Gerty and Bloom look at each other on the strand, the styles of the two characters describe each other in the episode. It is Bloom's monologue which breaks the spell of Gerty's sentimental narration by saying, "Tight boots? No. She's lame! O!" (p. 367) And yet it is Gerty at the end of the episode who hints at the word Bloom should never say, as "cuckoo". (p. 382)

After Gerty has disappeared from the strand, Bloom in "Oxen of the Sun" goes to Doctor Horne's maternal hospital in order to inquire after Mina Beaufoy. The technical device of the episode is the omniscient narration which then takes Bloom's side in the story. The major theme of "Oxen of the Sun" is fertility, and Joyce named his technique the "embryonic development".⁸⁾ Actually, the narration of "Oxen of the Sun" is a celebration of fertility in language, tracing in pastiche the historical development of English styles. Since Joyce makes the episodes following "Cyclops" an encyclopedia of the styles, the diachronic technique of "Oxen of the Sun" is a counterpart to the synchronic pastiches in "Cyclops" and the other episodes. The story of "Oxen of the

Sun” is written in the successive styles of Old English, Mandeville and Thomas Malory, Sir Thomas Brown, the Authorized Version, Bunyan and the Pepys-Evelyn diaries of the seventeenth century, the novelists, the journalists and the historians of the eighteenth century, the writers and the critics of the nineteenth century from Charles Dickens to Ruskin, and in a jabber of the language of future.⁹) While the parodied styles in “Cyclops” multiply a single event – Bloom’s encounter with the citizen – into a variety of fantastic occurrences, the pastiches of “Oxen of the Sun” enlarge the events in the story into a historic scale. As the styles change, Bloom changes his name, too, and becomes “the traveller Leopold”, (p. 386) “childe Leopold”, (p. 387.) “Sir Leopold”, (*Loc. cit.*) “Master Bloom”. (p. 385) or “Mr. Canvasser Bloom” (p. 410); but the table of the drinking bout is spread through the centuries, and the birth of a child comes to bear a historic importance.

The transfiguration of Bloom similar to “Oxen of the Sun” occurs also in “Circe”. “Circe” is the episode of delusion where the hallucinations of Stephen and Bloom are set on the stage of Nighttown. The stream of consciousness technique is completely discarded now and the episode is written in the style of drama; the narration becomes the stage directions, and both of the interior monologue and the talk of the characters are taken out as the speeches on the stage. The Nighttown of “Circe” is the place where illusions become the reality. Here, Bloom actually transfigures his appearance according to his words or to the other characters’ definitions of him. Thus, when his dead father Rudolph appears and scolds him, Bloom’s clothes are changed and he turns back to his youth:

BLOOM

(In youth’s smart blue Oxford suit with white vestslips, narrow-shouldered, in brown Alpine hat, wearing gent’s sterling silver waterbury keyless watch and double curb Albert with seal attached, one side of his coated with stiffening mud.)

Harriers, father. Only that once. (p. 438)

He becomes a youth in his misconduct then. Through the hallucinatory scenes, Bloom changes into “Dr. Bloom, Leopold, dental surgeon”, (p.

455) “Henry Flower”, (*Loc. cit.*) “Author-journalist”, (p. 458) “Lord mayor of Dublin”, (p. 478) “Leopold the first”, (p. 482) or even changes his sex.

In *Ulysses*, a style represents a way of looking at the world. As each person has his conception of himself and his world, he has his own individual style. And not only an individual character or writer, but also each group in the society, each field of literature and other learnings, or even each age has its own style and its concept of what the world is. Everybody and everything have their style, and yet each style has its own limitation. In the episodes from “Cyclops” to “Ithaca”, each character or each style in the narration describes Bloom and represents his version of reality, which is limited but valid in its own way. Then, if every style is true in representing an aspect of the reality but false in contradicting others, what is the ultimate reality? The fictional world of these episodes is like a Copernican universe without the center, without any reliable narrator in the story. The former image of Bloom in his interior monologue is blurred with the divergent descriptions in various styles, and the reader is uncertain as to what real Bloom is. But if everything is merely a matter of style, the style rules the reality. And if every style is valid in its own way, every description of Bloom is true; so he can be anything and anyone. The result is the nightmare of the “Circe” episode where Bloom can be transfigured into anyone, where each style becomes the reality. Such method of transfiguration is, however, also Joyce’s means to solve the problem of the universal and the particular. If Bloom can become anyone, then he is everyone. Bloom remains as he is in spite of all his transfigurations in “Circe” or through the history in “Oxen of the Sun”. Such idea of Bloom’s universality leads to the delineation of the characters and the main theme in *Finnegans Wake*.¹⁰⁾

While “Oxen of the Sun” can be compared with “Cyclops” for their use of the pastiche, the first of the episodes in the third section, “Eumaeus”, counters to “Nausicaa”. Like “Nausicaa”, the technical device of “Eumaeus” is the omniscient narration, which this time is in Bloom’s diction. Anthony Burgess in his book on Joyce’s language analyzes Bloom’s spoken words differentiated from his interior monologue. There

he quotes Bloom's spoken passage from "Cyclops" and notes thus: "[Bloom] is argumentative and full of big words like 'phenomenon'. It is in the reports and memories of others that he talks learnedly and, as Lenehan puts it, has a touch of the artist."¹¹) As Burgess noticed in his analysis, Bloom's spoken language is in curious contrast with the spontaneous, unaffected flow of his interior monologue. His style is polite but rather awkward and bookish when he speaks to the other characters. The passage below is from the same place with Burgess' quotation:

— Thank you, no, says Bloom. As a matter of fact I just wanted to meet Martin Cunningham, don't you see, about this insurance of poor Dignam's. . . . You see, he, Dignam, I mean, didn't serve any notice of the assignment on the company at the time and nominally under the act the mortgagee can't recover on the policy. (p. 313)

The phrase like "as a matter of fact" does not fit into the conversational style; and the latter part of his words is too awkward to become a learned style. Also the reader of "Eumaeus" will notice that among the conversations only Bloom's words are in the same style with the narration. Therefore, when the narration is at last passed on to Bloom, the narrator takes on this learned manner of Bloom's spoken language, which is exaggerated to absurdity:

En route, to his taciturn, . . . not yet perfectly sober companion, Mr. Bloom, who at all events, was in complete possession of his faculties, never more so, in fact disgustingly sober, spoke a word of caution *re* the danger of nighttown, women of ill fame and swell mobsmen, . . . (p. 614)

In "Nausicaa", describing herself in the style of the love story, Gerty plays the role of a sentimental heroine. Like Gerty, in "Eumaeus", Bloom plays his role, too, as describing it in his own language. The role he has dreamed to play is that of a good guardian father to helpless Stephen; preaching about the evil of Nighttown and walking with him, Bloom even hopes to help Stephen to be a fashionable tenor singer. The former episodes have shown the portrayals of Bloom by other characters and styles; "Eumaeus" is the presentation of Bloom in his own language. Joyce's trick is perfect in using Bloom's spoken style instead of his interior

monologue, so that Bloom in “Eumaeus” becomes another of the unreliable informants on himself.

“Ithaca” is the last episode to represent Stephen and Bloom since the eighteenth episode, “Penelope”, is allotted to Bloom’s wife, Molly. After he has helped Stephen in “Circe”, Bloom takes him home, serves cocoa, and asks him to come again to teach his wife Italian. The “Ithaca” episode is not even in a novel form but in the style Joyce called “Catechism”, in the form of questions and answers:¹²⁾

How did they take leave, one of the other, in separation?

Standing perpendicular at the same door and on different sides of its base, the lines of their valedictory arms, meeting at any point and forming any angle less than the sum of two right angles. (pp. 703-04)

This is the description of Stephen and Bloom shaking their hands. While the “Circe” episode deals with the delusion as reality, “Ithaca” is only interested in the actuality of facts. The narration explains in meticulous detail about Stephen and Bloom’s actions, feelings, and conversations, from the position of the furniture in the room to the stars in the universe. But again, the detailed facts lead the reader to nowhere in accumulation, for there is no interpretation without style and its point of view. The episode ends with this question when Bloom’s consciousness fades into sleep:

Where?



(p. 737)

Although the whole story of Stephen and Bloom depends on the question, the future is incomprehensible to the narrator of “Ithaca”.

The realism of the nineteenth century fiction was based on the writer’s conviction that he was representing the absolute reality of the society. In *Ulysses*, such solid world of fiction is in the process of dissolution. Though it has begun with the traditional novel form, the episodes in the latter part of the book are like the collection of styles, told directly by the character as the nameless speaker in “Cyclops”, by the narration in a character’s style and point of view like “Nausicaa” and “Oxen of the Sun”, or by the parodist narrator in social and historical pastiches in the narrational parts

of “Cyclops” and “Oxen of the Sun”. And each style in turn tells its version of reality, its interpretation of what the world is. On the level of the story, the problem of style centers on the question of who Bloom is. The fictional world of these episodes is the relativistic universe described from the multiple points of view. Since all the informants on Bloom are unreliable and limited in their views, including Bloom himself in “Eumaeus”, the images of Bloom described by them do not coalesce into one. The result is the endless transfiguration of Bloom in the hallucinatory scenes of “Circe”, of the accumulation of facts without interpretation in “Ithaca”. However, Joyce is not a cynical artist. Relativistic as it is, the fictional world of *Ulysses* is not nihilistic but polysemous. For Joyce, a parody is a method of serious criticism and not a mere game of cynicism; for each style is an unsufficient but valuable tool to work out the enigma of the reality. The parodied styles in “Cyclops”, “Nausicaa”, “Oxen of the Sun” and “Eumaeus” present the multiple images of Bloom which contradict but complement one another. The reader’s sympathy toward Bloom in the book is not due to any mythological prototype his character embodies but to the fact that his figure, inclusive of all these types and images, transcends them at last to the reality of the human being.

Notes

- 1) James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968), p. 251.
- 2) James Joyce, *Ulysses* (2nd ed.; New York: Knopf and Random House, 1961). Subsequent references are to the same edition and the numbers of the pages are given.
- 3) Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, Malcolm Cowley, ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 85.
- 4) *Loc. cit.*
- 5) Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 184, quoting Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper* (London, 1958), p. 23.
- 6) Robert Humphrey, *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), pp. 35–36.
- 7) Hugh Kenner, *Joyce's Voices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 16–17.

- 8) Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce's Ulysses* (Vintage Books ed.; New York: Random House, 1955), p. 30.
- 9) *Ibid.*, pp. 298–312.
- 10) James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: The Viking Press, 1939).
- 11) Anthony Burgess, *Joyceprick: An Introduction to the Language of James Joyce* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1973), p. 43.
- 12) Gilbert, p. 30.