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FORGING, MILKING, DELIVERING: THE FEMALE AND MATERNAL AS LINKS BETWEEN *A PORTRAIT*... AND *ULYSSES*

Abstract
This paper will try to point out that readings of James Joyce's *Ulysses* as a son's quest for his father and a father's quest for a lost son overlooks a very strong and important element of femaleness in the novel. In fact, the ties between *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* are built upon motifs of femaleness and the mother. The mother figure is inscribed in both novels in various symbol nets, from the first sentence of *A Portrait* all the way to Molly's ecstatic inner monologue. Other female figures appear merged one into another in *A Portrait* and this technique of blurring meaning and shapes remains very important in *Ulysses*. This paper will take into account a number of "gendered" readings of both novels.

Key words: Femaleness, mother, Joyce

> Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race. (26 April)

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These are the famous words of Stephen Daedalus at the end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, right before he, in the final entry of the diary, envokes the "old father, old artificer". Let us look at the beginning of the entry for April 26:

> Mother is putting my new secondhand clothes in order. She prays now, she says, that I may learn in my own life and away from home and friends what the heart is and what it feels. Amen. So be it. Welcome, O life... (Joyce 1981: 228).

The realms of mother and father seem to be strictly divided here – the mother belongs not only to the private realm, but also to the practical and emotional one, as she packs Stephen and teaches him simple truths of independent life, whereas the father appears as a father–figure, a mythological force to whom the grand promise is addressed. For the same young man who had sometime earlier decidedly said to his friend Cranly: "I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church" (Joyce 1981:222), undertaking this hard task seems a logical outcome. The mechanical metaphor even more so – to forge something not created yet is quite appropriate for a son of an artificer. Thus the wordings of these two final entries reveal the tension of creativity and generativity, as much as they hide the mythological undercurrent of the mother figure. Because, as we see towards the end of the novel, Stephen is resolute in turning away from patriarchal institutions, while the only mystery unresolved remains the mother, as Cranly warns: "What do we know about what she feels? But whatever she feels, it, at least, must be real! It must be." (Joyce 1981:218). Even as a figure, the mother is tightly connected to reality, she either cannot afford to be "an artificer" or is connected to some other sources of creation. Milking, rather than forging.

Cows, Birds and Girls

There are critics who warn us that Joyce was young in the time when the history of sexuality was going through a turbulent period. It is the time of Oscar Wilde's trials and the rise of the New Woman, Freud's discoveries about human sexuality. All that has found its place in Joyce's characters whose sexuality is often confusingly volatile in its stereotypical

understanding of male/female roles. In that view, the readings of James Joyce's *Ulysses* as a son's quest for his father and a father's quest for a lost son clearly overlook a very strong and important element of femaleness, as well as the fact that the ties between *A Portrait...* and *Ulysses* are built upon the motives of femaleness and the mother.

Most of the symbolic networks of the novel are established at the fairy-tale like opening of *A Portrait*:

> Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo...

The scene, graphically and through sound, points to the multiplicity of female/mother roles in the novel. Joyce has been among the major male writers read as an example of *l'ecriture feminine*, also known as *French feminist theory*, a postructralist concept of writing from 1970s. It includes literary production as well as theoretical writings about that production, which amalgamate philosophy, psychology and poetry. Hélène Cixous, one of the most important representatives of the approach, sees writing as perpetual production of difference and *jouissance*. Writings that emphasize the pleasure of text are closer to the rhythms of the female body and therefore are the poetics of jouisannce named *l'ecriture feminine* or, in the closest English translation, *writing the body*. Hélène Cixous points to the very beginning of *A Portrait*, where she discovers the importance of orality on both the auditive and graphic levels, as much as in the very content, through the perpetual appearance of the letter O. "I insist on the graphic and phonic *o*'s because the text tells me to do so", writes Cixous, still pointing to the apparent paradox that "with all its italics and its typography, the text asks the reader to listen" (Cixous 1991: 4). The rhythm and meaning of the scene take us back to the still undisturbed unity with the mother and, for Cixous, point to the basic conflict of the story – between the mother who is "a great soul but a slave", and who "asks slavery of him" (Cixous 1991: 7).

In her praise of writing as permanent production of differences, Cixous calls women to write, because they, writing through and their bodies, "write in white ink". And this white ink, this writing by milk, is present as a subject in Joyce's novels, within a wide net of symbols */bovinet/*, also established in the opening lines of *A Portrait*. The moo/cow from the

beginning is metonymically connected to milk, breasts, femaleness and mother. It takes us, for instance, all the way to the image of the half-naked peasant woman who offers Davin milk and invites him to her house in the middle of the nowhere[1]. Woman is, we then see clearly, a secret, dangerous other, a creature at the door to life and death, pleasure and doom.

This bovine imaginery, however, has both male and female sides. Suzette Henke investigates the influence of women in *A Portrait…* in the manner of French feminist theory and argues that female characters are present everywhere and nowhere in this novel, and never in the foreground. In this way, Henke reveals a couple of important motifs that will be continued in *Ulysses* in essentially the same manner. Emma, the girl to whom the vilanelle is dedicated is given only the initials (E.C), not a full name as in *Stephen Hero*. Her first appearance in the novel is almost indistinguishable from Eileen, as if a confusion of identities was aimed at. It takes a while to shape out this character and make it visible, although it remains dispersed and never really solid. Her traits are not only shared with the young girl from the Stephen's childhood, but also with another symbolic female creature, the girl on the beach.[2]

The famous scene of epiphany at the beach, as well as the preceding scenes, constructs the mythical image which locates the whole novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* on an archetypal map. Young Stephen has turned down the offer to enter the Jesuit order. He has declined it wordlessly, with a simple gesture of removing his hand from the rector's hand, at the moment when he recognizes the older man's inability to rejoice. But then, Stephen himself is not so joyous, either. Some time later, he passes a group of priests, invoking the memory of the offer he declined

[1] Davin declines – he perceives her as somebody else's house, an already taken territory. Upon hearing the story, Stephen thinks of her as of a symbol of Ireland, offering herself blindly, without thinking. But, these are both male projections. None of the two young men see her as a lonely young woman, left alone in the night. They don't perceive her even as a well of milk, a nurturer, or maybe only a future one, as Davin remarks "I thought by her figure and by something in the look of her eyes that she must be carrying a child." (Joyce 1981:165) To both of the friends she is rather a secret, an unknown *other*, and an *other* cannot help but being dirty and dangerous in some way.

[2] Henke says, for instance, that Stephen desires Emma, but fears he would be tangled into the cobweb of domesticity and that Emma and all the women are secret for Stephen the mysterious, dangerous Other. This, we have seen, also stands in the case of the young woman Davin told Stephen about.

and reaches the beach where his friends play in the water. He looks upward, toward the clouds which

> ... were voyaging across the deserts of the sky, a host of nomads on the march, voyaging high over Ireland, westward bound. The Europe they had come from lay out there beyond the Irish Sea, Europe of strange tongues... (Joyce 1981: 152).

As soon as he steps on the beach, the idea of Europe begins literally to hover above him. His friends underline the mythical reading of his own situation. They hail him shouting: "Stephanos Dedalos! Bous Stephanoumenos! Bous Stephaneforos!" In the word play of his colleagues, Stephen assumes a new, archetypal identity. He is designated as a sacred bull, a sacred animal of the European origin, as well as kin of Daedalus, famous builder and runaway from the Cretan labyrinth he himself has made. There is even a cry of drowning[3], as a parodic reminder of the Deadalus/ Icarus story. Stephen, however, does take their game quite seriously and reads their word play in a non-parodic way. The net of associations takes us straight to the heart of the craddle of Europe – Crete, reviving the story of Europa's rape by Zeus, disguised as a white bull.

The white bull was the sacred animal at Crete, and when Pasiphaea felt lust toward it Deadalus made a wooden cow for her to mate with it. Both *techne* by which nature can be imitated to the point of making an artificial animal and the generativity by which Pasiphaea gives birth to the Minotaur, the monster, seem to be implied in the shouts of Stephen's colleagues. Geopolitically, Stephen's position is at the end of the location named Europe. If Crete, the place where Europe was taken to, is the beginning, is Ireland here an ending, the edge, the new beginning of the continent?[4] Crete reversed, its mirror image? It surely is all that for Stephen. Being on a social and geographical margin, Stephen looks upward, looks toward Europe, longing for it as the continent of his own archetypal and artistic identity. The geography of this novel underlining the complex relation toward location as the main issue of presenting identity as dynamic is not

[3] "-O, cripes, I'm drowned," cries one of the boys.

[4] Compare it to Rilke's lines about the distorted sky in the Underground world (Orpheus. Euridyce. Hermes.)
"...around the other earth, a sun
And a silent star-filled heaven turned,
a grief-heaven with distorted stars".

so much "Who am I?", as "Where am I?". Where am I on a (some, this) map... And, what does the map depict? As Stephen himself says in the opening chapter of *Ulysses*, thinking of himself as a boy years earlier: "I am the another now, and yet the same" , noting that being one is a process, not a state.

For Henke, the girl Stephen sees on the beach is anima, the female part of Stephen's identity. She amalgamates the traits of the Christian, Celtic and pagan iconography – she is mortal and angelic, sensual and serene. Her ivory tights evoke Eileen's hands as well as the Ivory tower, and her bird-like breasts remind him of the Holy Spirit. Vicki Mahaffey notes that the encounter with the girl on the beach breaks the essentialist division between active men who make mistakes and passive, receptive women. In a way, she agrees with Henke saying that the bird/girl is not only a fantasy of what Stephen would wish to have, but what he would wish to be. She a is male – female creature because she has the male ability to transcend the environment, and the female ability to escape, to fly away. Only through the perspective of the girl, can he come to terms with the world.

However, neither Henke nor Mahaffey point to the echo of mermaids in the girl. She could be a bird, an angel, but still, she is the female danger, a seductive mermaid, a beauty and the beast at the same time. A Minotaur reversed?

This symbolic net is continued throughout *Ulysses* as well – at the very beginning, the old woman bringing milk becomes a focus of metaphoric and metonymic variations in Stephen's mind; not to mention Bloom's/ the narrator's comments on the young woman he meets at the butcher's store. The culmination of this motif is the chapter "Oxen of the Sun", where various styles of chronological stages in the development of English are presented as the nine months of human gestation[5]. The chapter has similarities with one of the Joyce's letters to Nora, in which he compares the writing of the book, his labor of an author, to Nora's pregnancy and labor (Friedman 1989: 79)[6]. However, Susan Friedman's notion that "Joyce's women produce infants through the channel of flesh, while his

[5] Susan Friedman points out that "Joyce's extensive plans for the chapter highlight his continuing separation" of mind and body, word and deed, man and woman. (Friedman 1989: 79).

[6] "…thinking of the book I have written, the child which I have carried for years and years in the womb of the imagination as you carried in your womb the children you love, and of how I had fed it day after day out of my brain and my memory" (August 21, 1912).

men produce a brain child through the agency of language" (Friedman 1989: 79) does not catch the dynamic and non-essentalist sense of sexual identity that permeates both *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*.

Although it is true that the chapter depicts the profaning of the sacred – young men drink and talk too loud in the hospital where women do this natural but nonetheless mysterious task of giving birth, and as a parallel to bovines belonging to the Sun god being slaughtered and eaten by starving men, we cannot stop at the either/or polarization[7]. Joyce's heroes at least try to be both/and – both male and female in this case, to have both male and female experience. So, if there are young men who in one moment talk about Ceaserian section, which is one of those 'appropriations' of woman's childbirthing abilities by medical authorities, there is also 'our Bloom', whose interest in that subject is initated by hearing about Mrs. Purefoy's trials, and will have his/her share in the "Circe" episode. There is also another Bloom, Molly Bloom, who will at the end of the book deliver exactly what in such a binary reading would belong exclusively to men – words[8].

"O Jamesy let me up out of this"

For Dorritt Cohn, "Penelope" is a paradigm, *locus classicus* in the limited corpus of the autonomous interior monologue. In *Ulysses*, it is the only moment when the figurative voice totally obliterates authorial narrative. Cohn notes that Joyce himself said that 'Ithaca' was an end, while "Penelope" has no end, middle, nor beginning. It begins and ends with the word *Yes* and revolves around itself. The time is hour none, infinity... This, according to Cohn's analysis, seems to be just one of Joyce's numerous mystifications of

[7] The very idea that men create what is sublime – words, or the word which can even become god is derrided by the parodic tone of the chapter. On the other hand, the fact that woman gives birth to body, that *habeat corpus* is almost a curse, that Bloom himself senses and expresses at least twice that women stand at the gates of this world, bringing men and seeing men off, again underlines the mystery of history as the opposite to the misery of history – from a male perspective. All these nuances culminate in the closing chapter of *Ulysses* – "Penelope".

[8] Suzette Henke points to the fact that throughout *Ulysses* gender identities are undecidable, polymorphic and mobile, they oscilate. In her view, the atmosphere in the Eccles street no. 7 is so much like a carnival that there can be no solid, firm voice of the authoritarian male subject.

his work. Critics tended to literally understand what Joyce said on circling in his letter to Frank Budgen, so that they read "Penelope as permanent repetition, revolving of the same". In such a reading Molly has been often seen as a great lump of lust, as Mahaffey claims. Such readings have completely neglected the fact that what she speaks is marked by a linear flow of time, unrolling into time through the sequences. The circularity of Molly's arguments, including her first and last words, is decisevely contrasted by the elements which underline her temporal sequences. Primary is the fact that the monologue does describe an event – the onset of her period. This event changes the flow of Molly's thoughts, separating it clearly to 'before' and 'later'. Molly enters into her 'New moon', new cycle in the course of her monologue, and this is a decisevely temporal event, no matter how mythical are its undertones.

In her linguistic analysis of the chapter "Penelope", Dorrit Cohn points to the fact that the only pronoun which always has the same referent is 'I', while the most unstable are the male pronouns in the third person – it is assumed that Molly always knows who 'he' is in her monologue, but it is not always clear to the reader.

Thus, we may note both the fact that this is the only chapter of the novel where there is no trace of a narrator, and that the stability of the pronoun 'I' points to Molly as subject is not a usual woman's position. Neither is she a usual subject – a solid, unmoving center. Not only does everything flow out of her, from her insides, she herself is everywhere, emanating the world which we witness /pretend to hear. So much of her monologue concerns other characters that she becomes dissipated and disseminated through her own speech. Therefore, the circling Joyce had mentioned need not refer to the concept of time but to the subject/object dynamics of the chapter.

As Cohn also points out, Molly makes very little movement. Most of the time she is lying down in bed, which makes her flow of thoughts technically more easy. She is lying down and delivering her speech delivering it in the posture (on the bed) which has been much more convenient for male doctors, in opposition to squatting, which is the only other position she takes throughout the whole chapter. It turns out that lying down is more convenient for the author, too, who happens to be a former student of medicine. So, what we have here can be read as an extension, an implicit comment on the "Oxen of the Sun" chapter – we have a woman delivering, giving birth to words.

Finally, there is one metaphor of femaleness inherent in the very name *Penelope* – weaving. Penelope's weaving is a seductive practice, her way to thread away from the usurpers, the monsters, to keep her identity secure. It is her way of seemingly saying *Yes*, whereas it means a resolute *No*. Weaving is also a mechanical thing, it is in this way similar to forging, and like forging, it is both a highly gendered activity and a metaphor for doing things with words, language, consciousness. Weaving, texture making, so, as Mahafey warns, it is no wonder Penelope has a pen in her very name.

But, there is a crack in the coverage of words/thoughts which obliterates the voice of the narrator in 'Penelope' – there is a moment when Molly thinks: "O Jamesy let me up out of this", meaning Jesus, but meaning also– Jamesy. Molly's outward passivity is both necessary to make her inward activity easer to present, and is in collission with it. Her apostrophe is a cry for deliverance and a cry in delivery, to be saved from the confinment. She pleads for help – let me up out of this! But, what is *this*? A sexual web of being an object of a gaze, or a textual /textural web she is herself weaving and has been woven into, at the same time? As anywhere in Joyce, there are no definite answers, just a multiplication of questions.

Mahaffey finds analogy between Joyce's words and his life:

> Joyce's fictions certainly grew out to meet the coincidences of his own life: the Fates, those original spinners, gave Joyce as his most faithful and consistent, benefactress, a feminist woman of letters named Weaver. *(Mahaffey 1997: 133).

In a similar vein, I would add that for the author playing so much across male/female sides, it seems remarkable that he was first christened as James Augusta Joyce, which was later changed to James Aloysius Joyce. The white ink of Augusta/Aloysius writings create a fictional world where maleness and femaleness are in a permanent play of differences, identitities, *Yes* saying, *jouissance*, that is - re/joycing...

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КОВАТИ, СНОВАТИ, РАЂАТИ... ЖЕНСКО И МАТЕРИНСКО У *ПОРТРЕТУ*... И *УЛИКСУ*

Сажетак

У овом тексту се указује на то да читање *Уликса* Џејмса Џојса као синовљеве потраге за оцем и очеве потраге за изгубљеним сином превиђају веома снажан елемент женског у роману. Заправо, везе између романа *Портрет уметника у младости* и *Уликса* изграђене су на мотиву мајчиног лика и женскости. Лик мајке је присутан унутар различитих мрежа симбола, и то од прве реченице *Портрета* до Молиног екстатичног унутрашњег монолога. Остали женски ликови стапају се у *Портрету* један у други и ова техника замагљивања значења и облика остаје битна у *Уликсу*. У раду се разматра и неколико родних читања ова два романа.

Кључне речи: Женскост, мајка, Џојс