

## Metempsychotic Textuality of *Ulysses*\*

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### I.

In his novel *Ulysses*, James Joyce deploys a variety of narrative methods which go through repeated processes of being used, abandoned, and reused. This aspect conforms with his idea of ‘metempsychosis’ as the pattern of a soul’s persistence through wanderings in different bodies. The meaning of metempsychosis, or reincarnation, is put by Bloom the protagonist as “transmigration of souls”:

—Some people believe...that we go on living in another body after death, that we lived before. They call it reincarnation. That we all lived before on the earth thousands of years ago or some other planet. They say we have forgotten it. Some say they remember their past lives. (*U* 4.362-65)

In the novel, indeed, the principle of metempsychosis informs diverse modes of narrative method in which the same element recurs in varied forms and contexts

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\* This essay is an abstract, with some corrections, from my Ph.D thesis, “Order and Disorder in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*.”

through the progress of the text. The existence of the metempsychotic soul of *Ulysses*' textuality, or the creatively functioning authorial spirit, is consistently demonstrated in its control of a great variety of heterogeneous factors. The author's artistic identity inherent throughout the book serves as a powerful memory for helping the novel overcome the ordeal of formal vicissitudes. By virtue of "the same consciousness," as Robert H. Bell observes, "Virtually nothing narrated is lost, and... nearly everything returns" (196). The textual metempsychosis is embodied on diverse levels such as the technical heterogeneity of chapter, involving stylistic odyssey and narrative discontinuity in particular, motif development, and linguistic transformation.

## II.

The apparent discrepancy between heterogeneous chapters is perhaps the most conspicuous of *Ulysses*' formal features. The chapters differ not only in length, graphic appearance, readability, place and time of the day but also in almost all the formal elements such as style, mood, point of view, and tone. For example, the "Aeolus" chapter with headlines is an imitation of journalism; "Circe" is disguised in a dramatic form; "Ithaca" assumes a catechetical scientific document; and "Penelope" is a rambling miscellany of a half-illiterate woman's reveries. Besides, according to Joyce's schema, each chapter has its own art, colour, symbol, and Homeric correspondence. Joyce's famous letter to Linati dated September 21, 1920 shows that it was his intention to make *Ulysses* a new kind of literary form that imparts a different, unique technical character to each chapter, or adventure as he calls it:

It is...a kind of encyclopaedia. My intent is...to allow each adventure (that is, every hour, every organ, every art being interconnected and interrelated in the somatic scheme of the whole) to condition and even to create its own

technique. Each adventure is so to speak one person although it is composed of persons.... (SL 1975)

The Odyssean mode of the novel's adventurous wanderings through different chapter has led to a prevalent current of criticism which denies it any kind of essential identity. In deconstruction theory, what characterises the novel is nothing other than the protean transformation of the decentred, disunified self of the teller of the text, as John Paul Riquelme asserts:

... the book's style as allotropic forms reinforce the notion of identity as chameleonic. The teller has no centered self and no proper style suggesting a unified ego. Rather, he constructs an image of himself as variable, as shifting, out of the multitude of styles he could choose for his narration. (182)

From a similar point of view, "*Ulysses* as a contrived and doctored offshoot of the *Odyssey*" resembles a palimpsest operating "in a criss-cross of mutually disruptive patterns." (Senn 1984, 206)

The apparently heterogeneous chapter, however, are not totally discrete. On closer examination, the deceptively different, but covertly "interconnected and interrelated," structural factors in each adventure are again "interconnected and interrelated" with those in the other adventures so that they may form a coherent unity in the overall scheme of the whole text. All the elements of difference collaborate beyond the confines of each chapter in developing something inherent in the novel, its fictional attribute. On the plane of overall contextuality, each chapter is, so to speak in terms of metempsychosis, a "body," or a "person," which the "soul" of the novel transits in its metempsychotic stream of existence. That stream involves, along with surface ripples of transformation, the ongoing undercurrent of the novelistic self. That self has an ultimate structural unity, complex and multi-dimensional as it may be. The novel's identity persists on diverse levels such as theme, action, setting, characters, situations, technique, and style. The persistence of the novel's identity is characterised by the metempsychotic

mode of “contonation through regeneration of the urutteration of the word in progress.” (*FW* 284.20-22) With the same substance shared by all the chapters, or “persons,” taking “a step and a step and a step and then a step,” as Frank Budgen puts it, “His work is all of a piece”:

The form changes but the substance remains the same—the fixed vision of the world as a whole, the hard, cool logic, the humour, boisterous or impish, the personal experiences, become for him symbolic, the preoccupation with the mystery of the word. (309)

It is in its style that the chaotic factor in *Ulysses* manifests itself in the most striking manner. The stylistic odyssey of the novel, in close relation to the chapter difference, is another paradigmatic incarnation of its metempsychotic character. Joyce threads a basically identical stylistic characteristic through the two halves and the eighteen chapters of the book, both of which are often considered discrete and disruptive. The whole text is pervaded with what might be called a linguistic facet of Joycean free, flexible, playful, and original personality, that uses pun, coins new words, breaks grammatical rules, varies tones, and changes syntactic structures. In this regard, a critical tendency to give too much weight to the discrepancy between the mimetic, so called “initial style” and the diegetic, “later style” (Grodén 15-17, Riquelme 183, Maddox 147-48, and Thornton 244-52) can be misleading. Weldon Thornton, for example, bases his thesis on the assumption that “the ‘initial style’ of *Ulysses* is the normative, authorial style of the novel, the style that expresses the stance of Joyce himself and the underlying values of the novel most clearly and directly, and that the voices of the later episodes represent styles that Joyce wishes to expose as somehow incomplete or mistaken” (244). In this regard, Senn has shown a well balanced sense in his cogent statement, “On a modest scale, most of the prominent stylistic excess of the latter part of the novel have been subtly prepared for” (Senn 1982, 11). Taking on its own mind and life pervading the numerous details in its artistic world, to quote a critic, “*Ulysses* itself becomes one great ‘character’” (Grodén 55). The whole text with all its stylistic heterogeneity is,

as it were, contextualised by the mediation of the same metempsychotic soul, or the ‘Arranger,’ “a figure or a presence that can be identified neither with the author nor with his narrators, but that exercises an increasing degree of overt control over increasingly challenging materials” (Hayman 84). It is a textual ghost who works with a structural principle thoroughly representing the author’s creative vision. The stylistic odyssey is less Joyce’s gratuitous indulgence in word play than a deliberate strategy to illuminate the ongoing action and theme from multiple points of view and to emphasises the novel’s drive to escape from any stylistic stereotype threatening to stagnate its life.

From such a perspective of metempsychosis, style is not a neutral accessory but a signifier of, or a metaphor for, values of its time:

Style—the soul of language—is mitempsychotic; while it always imposes its order and perspective, it changes shape in response to the values and cultural conventions of its time. While it is true that style manipulates and distorts, it also discovers and intensifies. (Schwartz 198)

Thus, style is, as it were, spirit of evolutionary history incarnate. This aspect is exemplified *par excellence* in the “Oxen of the Sun” chapter. The chapter, comprised of a series of parodies of different period styles, constitutes a miniature equivalent of the whole book in terms of style. Nevertheless, not only in sustaining implicitly the thematic soul of the chapter as well as of the whole book but also in maintaining Joyce’s unique linguistic spirit, the highlighted stylistic odyssey of the chapter follows the metempsychotic pattern. In the dynamic process of style as a metempsychotic soul, a death of a period style is not full stop but a preparatory stage for a new birth of an eternal soul. The style returns from an adventure in a period to the starting point for an adventure in the next period. This mode of cyclic return after wandering is analogous to that of metempsychosis in a soul’s rebirth into a new body. This mode is reinforced, on the overall plane of the chapter, by the movement from the undisciplined, confused pre-English(chaos of birth or antecreation) through the series of proper period English(chaos of labour pains for

the next birth or before the Second Coming). The progress follows the metempsychotic pattern of cyclic return: A-B-A.

The metempsychotic pattern of cyclic return applies to another remarkable aspect of chapter difference: narrative discontinuity. The continuity of the action throughout *Ulysses* may often appear to be fatally damaged by temporal and spatial gaps between contiguous chapters. In terms of metempsychosis, however, the gaps between chapters may be seen as blanks happening in the course of a soul's transition from body to body, which involves radical changes of death and birth. Even here, Joyce's ingenuity is such that, as if referring to the karmic influence on the shaping of the soul's ensuing body, he embedded auxiliary devices: links that bridge two adjacent chapters over the gap around their borderline, that is, at the end of the preceding chapter and at the beginning of, or throughout, the next. This method is employed more saliently in the second half of the novel, where formal changes occur more drastically. The chapter links consist of diverse elements: motifs of sun and religion ("Cyclops"—"Nausicaa"), the syntactic pattern of 3x3 and the semen-birth connection ("Nausicaa"—"Oxen of the Sun"), the motif of sin against the light in chaos ("Oxen of the Sun"—"Circe"), Stephen's hat and ashplant ("Circe"—"Eumaeus"), distanced point of view ("Eumaeus"—"Ithaca"), and motifs of egg and bed ("Ithaca"—"Penelope").

### III.

The author's contextualising treatment of narrative methods often entails still another metempsychotic mode: developing motifs in varied contexts. Many motifs reappear in different situations and contexts and with different forms and meanings: the problematic situation in married life, Bloom's helping other people with their hats, and moving of furniture. Ideas, events, and expressions are echoed and foreshadowed: "Coming events cast their shadows before" (*U* 8.526). In so doing, they not only evolve themselves but also contribute to renew the organic structures

and meanings of the whole novel. Such a Joycean technique, making use of association and allusion, might be named the “aesthetic of mediation,” but not, as some critics maintain, in the sense that “we never get the thing as such; we get versions of it.” (Whittaker and Jordan 31) On the contrary, as Bell rightly maintains, “As an echo requires us to hear words twice, to double services, retaining their original identity and becoming something new.” (177) In comparing echoes and allusions to pun, Bell adds, “when a term in pun carries no particular primary meaning or association, the pun deteriorates into weak wit.” (177n)

“Wandering,” with metempsychotic overtones in itself, is a pertinent example of those motifs treated in a metempsychotic way. For Joyce, one might think, all the world is led by the wandering urge. Apart from the itinerant aspects of the formal features, the wandering nature is attributed to diverse characters and objects. Bloom’s all-day drift through Dublin’s streets is characteristic of the Jews who are doomed, according to Deasy, to be “wanders on the earth” because they “sinned against the light.” (*U* 2.361-63) Stephen is what Mulligan calls the “wandering Aengus of the birds” because in Stephen, with his wits driven “astray by visions of hell,” “The moral idea seems lacking, the sense of destiny, of retribution.” (*U* 10.1066-85) Molly is a psychological wanderer, free from any kind of rigid standard, moral or emotional. To this category of wander belong other figures: cab drivers, the sandwichmen of “H. E. L. Y. S.,” the man in the mackintosh, the blind stripling, the crippled sailor, Murphy, and Rudolph Bloom who went through migrations and settlements in and between various cities of Europe. In particular, Bloom the primal wanderer carries with him apparently trivial belongings: soap, card, Martha’s letter, and above all, the newspaper as one version of “throwaway.” They not only wander with him through Dublin’s streets but also are even displaced several times about his body. Thus, all wanders are social outsiders, deviating from an absolute dogma or marginalised in status. Incarnated in these different wandering bodies, the soul of the odyssey, ultimately the soul of Odysseus and *Ulysses*, remains enriching and vitalising the structures and atmosphere of the text.

The wandering motif applies to the linguistic level as well. One of the most

striking examples of linguistic metamorphosis is graphically presented at the end of “Ithaca” in the form of a list of the names of the Odyssean persons with whom Bloom has travelled:

Sinbad the Sailor and Tinbad the Tailor and Jinbad the Jailer and Whinbad the Whaler and Ninbad the Nailer and Finbad the Failer and Bibad the Bailer and Pinbad the Pailer and Minbad the Mailer and Hinbad the Hailer and Rinbad the Railer and Dinbad the Kailer and Vinbad the Quailer and Linbad the Yailer and Xinbad the Phthailer. (*U* 17.2322-26)

The three attributes of metempsychosis are reified in the formula of the quoted passage: the enduring identity represented by the same pronunciation of the vowels, along with the same numbers of syllables, the wandering through “horrible adventures” (*U* 16.858) represented by the changes of the consonantal sounds, and the break, or death, between two consecutive lives represented by the conjunction “and.”

It is significant, however, that the list of the travellers, beginning with “Sinbad the Sailor,” ends with names having different initial consonants such as “Dinbad the Kailer” and “Xinbad the Phthailer.” The next catechism shows that the variation in the stream of names ultimately leads to “Darkinbad the Brightdayler,” which, though still retaining the larger basic pattern, contains such radical changes as the difference in the number of syllables and even a paradoxical juxtaposition of opposite words “dark” and “bright.” This chaotic divergence in the last stage, along with the slight difference between the first two names—with the vowel “o” in “Sailor” and “Tailor,” and the succeeding names with the vowel “e”—, refers to the chaos between two consecutive lives, the chaos out of which a new order is created. In this sense, paradoxically, the big linguistic vicissitude at the end can be deciphered as the prelude to a new beginning after a return from wandering. Could the Brunonian coincidence of opposite “dark” and “bright” be analogised to the two opposite sexual images “pike” and “hoses” which are to be combined for a new birth or generation of life?



The metempsychotic principle of continuity through modifications works on another level of language: proper nouns. Bloom's name, in particular, shows an exemplary mode of this feature. On the phonetic and grammatical level, as Senn explains, "Bloom is also a part of speech. In purely grammatical terms, he is an all-round man" (1984, 126) in undergoing grammatical transformations in the nominative case as regards the part of speech, tense, voice, and mood. Bloom suffers transformations on the level of namecalling too. Particularly in the "Eumaeus" chapter, where the motifs of deceit, guise, and suspicion as well as the untrustworthiness of linguistic convention are prevalent, there is a striking variation in the way in which Bloom is named. It is as if he were unknowingly anticipating the impending metamorphoses of his name when he says, "Our name was changed too," in response to Stephen's saying, "Sounds are impostures like names. What's in a name?" (*U* 16.362-66). He has consistently been referred to by the narrator as "Mr Bloom" only, until he is called "Mr B." as if "in the spirit of *where ignorance is bliss*" because of the violent atmosphere of the talk in the cabman's shelter (*U* 16.593-94). After three shifts between "Mr B." and "Mr Bloom," he is named almost capriciously: "The irrepressible Bloom" (line 929), "Mr Bloom" (lines 973, 1029, 1106, 1163, 1166, 1172, 1270), "B." (lines 1049, 1765), "Bloom" (lines 1092, 1295, 1307, 1349, 1359, 1418, 1437, 1510, 1514, 1524, 1575, 1578, 1691, 1734), "Mr B" (line 1177), "L. Boom" (lines 1260, 1262, 1265), "Boom" (line 1274), "B"(lines 1495, 1652), and "the neverfailing Bloom" (1711). In the later part of the chapter and throughout the next chapter, "Ithaca," he is consistently called "Bloom," only to be referred to simply as the indefinite pronoun "he" by Molly in "Penelope."

Such a nomenclatural fluidity tends to be interpreted by some critics as lack of identity: "even names turn out to be tropes, providing metaphors but not identities" (Thomas 124); "It is in her ecstatic surge of floral imagery that Molly finally relinquishes Bloom's presence for his name, and thus bequeathes him with his ghostdom and his passport to eternity" (Ellmann 216); and "The variability of roles and lack of unity in the self are matched by a corresponding fluidity of names."

(Seed 48) But one might here note the significant fact that, largely speaking, the “Eumaeus” chapter, more precisely, the report on the funeral in the evening *Telegraph* that has misprinted Bloom’s name as “L. Boom,” marks the turning point of the fundamental change in the naming of Bloom. The main theme of “Eumaeus” is wandering and homecoming. This chapter is the very locus where Bloom finishes his wandering, physical, psychological, and nomenclatural, and prepares for his return for the day. In this regard, the deletion of the prefixed title “Mr” before “Bloom” signifies his return to his own self from his tentative and outward status associated with the title. Furthermore, much is suggested by the deletion, or displacement, of the letter “l” in his name. Deprived of the stick, the phallic symbol, Bloom is “no man,” as implied in another way by his mutability. In this respect, Bloom corresponds to his epic equivalent even on the nomenclatural level, for the name “Odysseus” may be understood as a combination of “odys (no one)” and “Zeus (god).” Most importantly, in the context of metempsychosis, the displacement of “L” from Bloom’s name to Martha’s letter, turning “word” into “world,” deviously indicates Bloom’s return from diverse nominal roles as a “word” conceptualised by others to his real self as “somebody” in the flesh with a unique identity. When completely back home, he is not called by any name by Molly, who sees in him his original identity, flower. The visual “Bloom,” coinciding with the auditory “Boom” in the recuperative, looming image, metaphorises his resilient rebirth through return after wandering.

What all these aspects hereto postulated refer to is not simply that there certainly exist some basic structural principles that function on the general level. It also means that, with all the multitude of apparently chaotic elements which have incurred the tendency to find in *Ulysses* only disruptive and heterogeneous rage, Joyce’s characteristic spirit never disappears entirely. In accordance with the concept of metempsychosis which entails the pattern of ‘birth-wandering-death,’ the identical authorial creativity, if with some difference, never fails to return.

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*Abstract*Metempsychotic Textuality of *Ulysses*

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In James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the concept of metempsychosis, that is, the pattern of a soul's persistence through wanderings in different bodies, functions as one of major generating principles. On the level of the novel's textuality, the principle of metempsychosis informs diverse modes of narrative method in which the same element recurs in varied forms contexts through the progress of the text. In so doing, the author's artistic identity, or the metempsychotic soul of the textuality, is consistently demonstrated in its control of a great variety of heterogeneous factors. The textual metempsychosis is embodied on such levels as chapter difference – involving stylistic changes and narrative discontinuity –, motif development, and linguistic transformation.

Each of the different chapters is a “body” which the “soul” of the novel, that is the artistic identity of the author, transits in its metempsychotic stream of narrative existence. The stylistic odyssey follows the metempsychotic pattern of “birth-wandering-death-rebirth” not only in sustaining implicitly the thematic soul but also in maintaining Joyce's unique linguistic spirit. The narrative discontinuity between adjacent chapters is bridged by chapter links consisting of common motifs. Numberless motifs reappear, evolving themselves and contributing to renew the organic structures and meanings of the whole novel. The motif of “wandering,” involving enduring of identity and intermission of death is saliently incarnated on the levels of language and Bloom's name.

■ Key words: *Ulysses*, metempsychosis, wandering, chapter difference,

stylistic odyssey, motif, linguistic transformation

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