

Bloom's Middle Path in “Nausicaa” and “Oxen of the Sun”

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I

Ulysses by James Joyce depicts Bloom's one-day journey in Dublin and his return home. The journey throws a variety of questions with regard to adultery, colonialism, and Irish nationalism. In the course of the journey Joyce illuminates Bloom's middle path, using convex and concave mirrors(Dickson 28). The mirrors reflect Bloom's position against nationalist discourse on women, nature, and national identity. He walks through heated nationalist discourses, groping for his own middle path.

It is through imaginary metempsychosis that Bloom takes the middle path, which this paper intends to focus on. His imaginary metempsychosis is well materialized in the two chapters of “Nausicaa” and “Oxen of the Sun.” The two chapters are often interpreted as transition in Bloom's adventures to genuine metempsychosis. Bloom deconstructs ideologies to reintegrate multiple values in these chapters. This paper focuses on the critique of nationalism by means of

Bloom's metempsychosis and on his efforts to reevaluate the values in question in "Nausicaa" and "Oxen of the Sun."

II

As Homer introduced a new type of hero (Stanford 126), Joyce presents us with Bloom as an artistic figure who is sensitive to language and senses. In his artistic perception, he transforms what seems to be negative into positive concepts. For example, he perceives the sexuality of women, the process of wandering, or even disintegration of the modern world as a natural process of life cycle in contrast to their nationalist common perception. Far from the fixed nationalism which emphasized artificial integration, Bloom makes a true journey into the world to reach equilibrium. Of course, the journey includes crossing the boundary of age, gender, and ethnicity for metempsychosis. Metempsychosis in *Ulysses* is a transforming ritual to overcome separation among people. It also helps Bloom to spiritually commune with outsiders so that he can return home safely.

Metempsychosis generally means transmigration of souls. The word haunts Bloom all day. In *Ulysses*, however, metempsychosis has broader meaning, such as becoming other persons or creatures through imagination or transforming dominant viewpoints in the place of the oppressed. (At least this is the definition of the metempsychosis in this paper.) That makes it possible for Bloom to reinterpret Molly's sexuality as well as various values in controversy.

The metempsychosis is realized on a full scale in "Nausicaa," the thirteenth chapter of *Ulysses*. "Nausicaa" is informed by Bloom's artistic imagination to be a woman as if his soul were transmigrated. Running away from the Barney Kiernan's, the male nationalist world, Bloom comes to Sandymount Strand to take a rest. Near the beach a Catholic ritual for Virgin Mary is in progress. There Bloom gazes at girls with special interest. In the description of Gerty, the seemingly objective narrative on Gerty is overlapped with her inner landscape. And her

monologue is in the same line with the observer's perspective.

On the brink of his creating Gerty's inner landscape in detail, Bloom links the images of Virgin Mary and those of Eve. The two irreconcilable images are connected in his imagination. The imagined Gerty is a pure girl with the tender mind, and at the same time a mature woman, frank with her sexual desire. Her physical handicap, which Bloom notices later, is not reflected in her created inner landscape. Later Gerty and Bloom experience communion through imaginary sexual consummation.

In the following chapter Bloom visits the maternity hospital to inquire after Mrs. Purefoy. Joyce parallels biological gestation with literary development. As John Gordon points out, Joyce uses such parallel to demonstrate that "everything which grows does so according to the same organic laws"(158). The literary history proceeds from one archaic sentence to disorder of multiplicity. While sexual consummation reintegrates the multiple chaos into one(159), life naturally goes toward the multiplicity. Gordon considers lack of unity in modern world as negative disorder according to Plotinus' philosophy(160). However, Joyce does not necessarily regard chaos as negative. On the contrary, he reveals that everything circulates in the repetitive disintegration-reintegration cycle. Wandering through chaos is a prerequisite for true integration. In that sense the focus of *Ulysses* is wandering as much as returning home.

III

A burden was placed on colonial Ireland to integrate divided public opinions and get out of the colonial state at the same time. The Irish responded to the reality with nationalism which strengthened solidarity among them and excluded others. However, political nationalism retreated with Parnell's fall, which was compensated for by intensified cultural nationalist movement instead. Irish nationalists counted that women's role was crucial in preserving Irishness.

All would be well-or at least significantly better-if women were pure and modest, if mothers raised their children by Irish catholic standards, that is dressed their children in Irish fashions and insisted that they dance only Irish dances. The moral climate of society would be redeemed and the national culture revitalised. To women then fell the onerous responsibility for the moral and cultural life of the country-leaving men free, not surprisingly, to pursue political and economic power. (Valiulis 173)

According to the cultural nationalists, if Irish women did their part at home, taking care of children rightfully, while maintaining Irish tradition and virtues, the whole society would be restored to the pre-colonial state. The role of women as deliverer and caretaker of children in the traditional Irish way was considered to be the key to the cultural independence of the nation.

The delicately sentimental atmosphere that prevails in the beginning of "Nausicca" is actually nourished by a robust example of the cultural discourse of nationalism, which puts an emphasis on motherhood of women (*U* 13.29-33). Without referring to the real identity of female characters, the narrator conveys who they should be through idealization of desirable female roles. Gerty's criticism of Cissy is also typical of the cultural nationalists.

Gerty MacDowell bent down her head and crimsoned at the idea of Cissy saying an unladylike thing like that out loud ... That was just like Cissycus. O, and will you ever forget her the evening she dressed up in her father's suit and hat and the burned cork moustache and walked down Tritonville road, smoking a cigarette. (*U* 13.264-67)

The viewpoints on womanhood of Irish cultural nationalism are rooted in those of the Victorian Age. British society idealized a house wife as the "angel of the house," an asexual caretaker or a guardian of culture during the Victorian Age. Victorian Ireland under British administration used the same idealization and blamed women for not educating their children properly and not observing their custom. In other words, women were to blame for the disorder of the colonial state

since they did not answer the call of duty.

Its excessive exaggeration of "Nausicaa" (*U* 13.1-25) reminds readers of the gap between national ideology and the reality. The absence of authentic voices of women in these two chapters in some part shows the suppressive social environment of Ireland imitating colonialism's dominance-submission relationship: stronger members control and blame weaker ones. The definition of female roles by males is repeated in "Oxen of the Sun," which starts with the long and verbose sentence on the function and importance of childbirth.

[...] when by general consent they affirm that other circumstances being equal by no exterior splendour is the prosperity of a nation more efficaciously asserted than by the measure of how far forward may have progressed the tribute of its solicitude for that proliferent continuance [...] if an inveterate habit shall have gradually traduced the honourable by ancestors transmitted customs to that thither of profundity [...] (*U* 14.7-32)

Stressing motherhood, the Irish church and nationalists desexualize women modeled on the Virgin Mary who bore Jesus Christ without sex and took a good care of him with endurance, as a result of which the world was believed to be saved.

The dualism of Virgin Mary and Eve echoes in the text of *Ulysses*. Gerty is likened to Virgin Mary while Cissy is described as a temptress (Eve) who wants to attract Bloom's attention. However, Cissy is also idealized as a virtuous caretaker of children in the beginning of the chapter. Cissy Caffrey is "awfully fond of children, so patient with little sufferers" (*U* 13.29-30). She has such a "persuasive power" (*U* 13.33) that the children obey her. When Tommy and Jacky "dressed in sailor suits" (*U* 13.14) (like the soldiers in the British Navy) fight over sand castle, Cissy scolds Jacky for his violent behavior (*U* 13.40-64). The scene strongly suggests that women should fill the role of nurse to liberate the Irish from the British regime.

"Nausicaa" delivers the logic of the cultural nationalists in the very first part of the chapter. The blunt question, "But who is Gerty?" (*U* 13.78) indicates that

there is no Gerty's own voice in "Nausicaa." A nationalist convex mirror reflects Gerty first, then, Bloom's reinterpretation follows. David Cotter also maintains that Gerty's mind is Bloom's creation.

Joyce commented that Gerty is all in Bloom's imagination. By this, Joyce is not suggesting that Gerty is physically absent. She is physically present on the strand, but she may be mentally absent from the page: her thoughts may be Bloom's creation. What is supposed to be Gerty's mind might be conjured by Bloom-she may be a projection of his imagination. (Cotter 138)

The narrative in "Nausicaa" proceeds from the observation of the visitors to Gerty, Bloom's focal interest. Then, her inner landscape is presented along with the scene of communion, finally followed by Bloom's long monologue. This sequence reflects the movements of Bloom's consciousness. Furthermore, the content of her monologue mirrors Bloom's mentality. Gerty sees Bloom the way he expects to be seen by others. Bloom thinks as if he became Gerty. He also perceives Gerty as a combination of the two opposites, Mary and Eve. Motherly love is not incompatible with sexual desire. Emphasizing motherhood by denying sexual desire of females is neither healthy nor real. Jay Dickson rightly notes that Bloom's feminine qualities of sympathy and sorrow give him masculine eroticism(31). Women find masculine attraction in Bloom which are often denied by males. And Bloom emancipates Gerty's sexual desire by expressing her desire in his imaginary metempsychosis.

In contrast to the representation of Gerty as Virgin Mary in "Nausicaa," males in the hospital in "Oxen of the Sun" reject an idealized woman as Christian ideology.

A pregnancy without joy, he said, a birth without pangs, a body without blemish, a belly without bigness. Let the lewd with faith and fervour worship. With will will we withstand, withsay. (*U* 14.309-12)

That does not mean that women are resexualized as agents, nor does it imply that the projection of social problems on them no longer shackles their freedom. Women in the "Oxen of the Sun" are sexual objects, Eve akin to the evil outer power. The Old Testament quoted in the chapter makes a voice to reprimand impurity of the Irish people, specifically Irish women.

Remember, Erin, thy generations and thy days of old, how thou settedst little by me and by my word and broughtdest in a stranger to my gates to commit fornication in my sight and to wax fat and kick like Jeshurum. (*U* 14.367-70)

The voice of God rebukes Ireland for "committing fornication" which reminds readers of the Purity/Impurity and Mary/Eve split in the nationalist discourse. It reinforces the image of Ireland as an unchaste woman. Fornication is depicted as women's intimacy with the English Pope, Nicolas. In the other extreme of nationalism, Irish church and its ideology are regarded as a barrier to independence of Ireland. However, it is interesting to find that they also take the biblical symbolism of Mary/Eve and blame women for their being Eve. The acceptance of the bull in 1155 is caricatured as welcoming of the animal, bull on the part of Irish women (*U* 14.582-99). The caricature reveals the historical diagnosis that British colonialism, united with Christianity, caused Ireland to be a wasteland like the marriage of Irish women to bulls. The fornication ends in barrenness.

Bloom's stance is different from the cultural nationalists' viewpoints on womanhood rooted in Mary/Eve binary division. The narrative focused on Gerty's mental landscape amalgamates dominant nationalistic discourses on womanhood, daydreams, and religious idealization. Joyce willfully exposes the Mary/Eve distinction in the first part of the chapter to overthrow it through Bloom's mixture of the two. Gerty is identified with the Virgin Mary while Bloom's sexual fantasy is paralleled to the "spiritual fantasy" during the nearby Catholic retreat (Ellmann 127). In this way the secular is idealized while the sacred is secularized. The effects of this association is a denial either of the absolute sacred or of complete profanity. Mary is not the split opposite of Eve. Gerty is elevated to Virgin Mary at the very

moment of exhibition of her undergarment. Some scholars point out that Gerty is a fallen “birdgirl” of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Carter 138). However, the “birdgirl” Stephen recognizes as an epiphany to show his way to an artist is the combination of Mary and Eve from the first time.

A girl stood before him in midstream, alone and still, gazing out to sea. She seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful **seabird**. Her long slender **bare legs** were delicate as a crane’s and pure save where an emerald trail of seaweed had fashioned itself as a sign upon the flesh. Her thighs, fuller and soft-hued as **ivory**, were **bared almost to the hips** where the white fringes of her drawers were like featherings of soft white down. Her slate-blue skirts were **kilted boldly about her waist** and **deve-tailed** behind her. Her bosom was as a bird’s soft and slight, slight and soft as the breast of some dark-plumaged **dove**. But her long fair hair was girlish: and girlish, and touched with the wonder of **mortal beauty**, her face. (PA 144, boldface letters mine)

The boldface letters in Stephen’s epiphany scene are the combination of images of Virgin Mary (“ivory”), a temptress (“bare legs,” “bared almost to the hips”), a bird as a symbol of transcendence (“seabird,” “dove”), and at the same time, mortality which is the opposite (“mortal beauty”). The association of opposite images functions as vision-and-revision, as well as rise-and-fall.

The epiphany does not suggest a complete transcendence of the outer world. Rather, the flight foreshadows a fall from the height, sometimes to the sins according to Christian morality. The flight along with the anticipation of falling reinforces the present situation of Ireland binding the male protagonist, making the fetter of history prominent. Although Stephen takes the hero’s position to get out of the shackled circle as an artist, not only is his shaping of women in the mind never free from political or religious conflicts in the society, but also he accepts the inevitable failure of flight in the future. He assumes the romantic self, only to face its overthrow. Still, the epiphany scene seems to imply that an artist is a person who perceives different aspects (even the opposites) in an object.

Bloom also sees the coexistence of opposite traits and goes further to connect the seemingly contradictory. His masturbation is an enactment of both sexes of male and female. Masturbation in Victorian Ireland was more abominated than homosexuality (Cotter 102). Nonetheless, as Richard Ellmann acknowledges, the masturbation in *Ulysses* "for the first time in literature" "becomes heroic" (133). I consider it "heroic" because the act of masturbation leaves room to construe it as an active protest against the society that uniformly pursues dualism of subject/object and purity/impurity. Masturbation, which gives a man a dual position of husband and wife, is a perversion forced "inward" by nationalism, but it is also an active transgression "in a desexualizing environment" (Cotter 105).

Joyce redefines sexuality as artistic productivity, not something to be controlled to keep unrealistic purity. It is similar to Stephen's younger days in *A Portrait* when he visited prostitutes hoping to transgress all the political, religious boundaries putting him under restraints. The remnants of guilty conscience about sexuality in *A Portrait* disappear in "Nausicaa."

Kate Soper illustrates how Western dualism based on Christianity has affected their perspectives on Nature. They call it "nature" when it is "transmitted genetically" and "culture" when it relates what human beings construct (42). There has been a tendency to consider that human mind is superior to nature. The way of defining culture/nature and body/mind is no more than the "subject-object division" which needs each other to define one (41). The use of language has been considered to be a major factor which distinguishes human beings from nature. However, the boundary between nature and culture is blurred in "Oxen of the Sun." The development of fetus and childbirth is compared to "the growth of English prose" (Gordon 159) in the chapter.

Deshil Holles Eamus. Deshil Holles Eamus. Deshil Holles Eamus.

Send us bright one, light one, Horhorn, quickening and wombfruit. Send us bright one, light one, Horhorn, quickening and wombfruit. Send us bright one, light one, Horhorn, quickening and wombfruit. Hoopsa boyaboy hoopsa! Hoopsa boyaboy hoopsa! Hoopsa boyaboy hoopsa! (U 14.1-6)

“Oxen of the Sun” begins with repeated incantations, “Deshil Holles Eamus.” Although “Holles” is a street name, it also represents a part of female body. As old poets invoked inspiration for their literary product in the first part of their poetry, the narrator makes an invocation for the arrival of a “wombfruit,” a baby. With regard to the word formation, “Horhorn, quickening, and wombfruit” are the examples of reduplication, inflection, and complex compounding respectively. A morpheme is combined with other morphemes to produce another word like the childbirth by the union of a male and a female. A child is identified with a fruit which belongs to nature to get analogous to literature, human artifice. The childbirth extends its meaning to broader creative force of Nature (wombfruit), and then to the creation of human spirit (literature). This extension of meaning deepens with the ambivalent use of the “word” in the chapter.

In woman’s womb word is made flesh but in the spirit of the maker all flesh that passes becomes the word that shall not pass away. This is the postcreation.
(U 14.282-83)

The “Word” in the Bible is the Logos, that makes all living things exist: the word of God. When it represents Jesus Christ as in the New Testament, in his hand human spirit becomes the word after they die. The “word” is also a language by which writers create people. So, Nature is connected to literature with the same original force, “word.” The life energy in women’s body circulates within culture too; art is created, developed, and grows like a human embryo in the “Oxen of the Sun.” Traditionally Chinese scholars also saw literature as the product of life energy, “Ki”(Jung 97). What Joyce tries to say is not quite different from this ancient Chinese viewpoint. Bloom is stimulated by Gerty’s body (nature) to create her mental landscape (culture). Accordingly, the source of nature and culture is one, and the seemingly opposite domains vividly interact with each other.

But the discussion should not be limited to the nature/culture discourse. Joyce expands the parallel to show that everything that grows turns into diversity. The history of languages, literature, politics, etc. begins with one(as seen from the

archaic long sentence) and ends with multiplicity. It leads to the insight that disintegration is also a part of the natural process of life as a fetus develops. Plotinus saw "multiplicity represents nature's fall from the One" and thought that "any act of union is a return, and sexual intercourse, the joining of two opposites to create a single new being, is a metaphor for the soul's attempt at reintegration"(Gordon 159). Bloom's uniting opposite traits in the form of imaginary metempsychosis is one type of reintegration.

Then, what does the 'oxen of the sun' imply? Even though the sun is related to procreation, oxen is sterile. It seems that Eliot was greatly influenced by the "Oxen of the Sun" of *Ulysses* when he wrote *The Waste Land*. To interpret this chapter based on Eliot's inspiration, the spiritual sterility of the Irish males causes barrenness of the land. A knight (Bloom) accepts a mission to get the Holy Grail to bring fertility back to the land. The grail is a symbol for female sexual organ. Bloom (the knight) visits the maternity hospital to get the Holy Grail by answering the thunder: "dayadhvam"(sympathize) (*The Waste Land*, ll.400-33). He does sympathize with the suffering mother among drunken people who do not respect life or motherhood. Bloom restores the value of female sexuality in the male-dominant environment. Therefore, the 'oxen of the sun' is not other than Bloom who works for the spiritual procreation in spite of his own physical barrenness. It is also a metaphor for an artist. Artists have an ability to produce life not with sexual relationship but with metempsychosis based on sympathy and imagination.

Likewise, metempsychosis involves reinterpretation of different concepts. The sexuality of women to be reevaluated in the chapter is closely connected to colonialism in the nationalist discourse because a female body commonly stands for a colonized nation or its territory. It is not a coincidence that Bloom's personal trouble (Molly's possible adultery) is frequently overlapped with the public problem of colonialism.

Bloom takes a unique reaction to his problems. The lemon soap metaphorizes Bloom's attitudes well(Kil 87-88). Hye Ryoung Kil observes that the colonizers put

an emphasis on the cleanliness of British Pears' soap or civilization in its advertisement. Bloom's soap, stuck to his body, leaves him scents and memories of love. The lemon soap draws physical and spiritual love altogether. The cleanliness of the soap distinguishes colonizers from the colonized, while the scent of Bloom's soap reminds him of precious memories with Molly, recovering his love toward her. Bloom has powers to shift negative connotation of an object into positive one by recognizing different aspects of the same object. A soap delivers an ethnic prejudice when it is advertised by colonizers since it is regarded that Jews have a unique odor. Bloom overcomes the dissension and changes the meaning of the soap from ethnic prejudice to universal love. He reconsiders various concepts based on humanity in his metempsychosis. By transforming the concept on female sexuality into positive meaning he can keep his love toward Molly, too.

Bloom's hybridity is effective in mirroring the nationwide paralysis of the Irish who do not know that they are alienated by themselves by sticking to unrealistic ideology. The circling bats at the end of "Nausicaa" are the symbols of metempsychosis. Everything circulates through transactions and shares relations with one another. Bloom's metempsychosis provides one-eyed people with the ways to link the seemingly opposite traits, which ultimately lead to their true identity.

Bloom endeavors to overcome the exclusion that nationalism entails by connecting his denied maleness and persecuted femaleness through imaginary metempsychosis into ultimate sublimation. He attacks irrational myths and biased ideologies by using reason to reach the universal truth, which is also true to the particular individuality. Considering he vividly constructs Gerty's girlish dreams as well as even her vanity, Bloom is open toward the oppressed, embracing them with affection in contrast to Stephen who is immersed in his own past trauma incapable of accepting others. He retains awe toward life lodged within a human body.

While looking into the mirror reflecting on the past, he sees himself first. Then, in the "wonder of metempsychosis" (*U* 14.1099), he finds "the everlasting bride, harbinger of the day star, the bride, ever virgin. It is she, Martha, thou lost one, Millicent, the young, the dear, the radiant" (*U* 14.1100-02). There is no binary

distinction of Mary/Eve and man/woman in his inner landscape. His own image is merged with the image of a woman transfigured from a temptress to Virgin Mary. The mirror symbolizes the medium of metempsychosis, which is the function of literature.

IV

Bloom does not create his own works of art in the novel, but he deserves to be called an artistic figure in that he creates his own vision of the world free from dominant discourses at that time. As an artistic figure he sees different aspects of an object as a whole. He combines Mary and Eve in his imagination like Joyce who parallels nature with culture. With his imagination Bloom becomes other creatures by virtue of metempsychosis. Of course his imaginary metempsychosis is incomplete because it still remains to be a projected image. Nevertheless, his warm heart and sympathy toward people compensate for the limitation.

Bloom's imaginary metempsychosis is the result of his flexible thoughts, sympathy, and the identity as a marginal man. He transforms his own perspectives on the sexuality of women which is negatively colored by nationalists. As a result of the transformation he can embrace other oppressed including her wife, Molly. Joyce guides his readers so that they can see the reality in a natural cycle of growth. Readers get to the idea that fixed ideology is unnatural when people follow a dogma blindly as a prescription for the disorder of the world. Between the convex and concave mirrors of nationalist discourse Bloom makes an effort to balance himself. The effort does not guarantee the betterment of the society. But if one does not balance himself, the world cannot achieve true reintegration.

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Abstract

Bloom's Middle Path in "Nausicaa" and "Oxen of the Sun"

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This paper investigates how Joyce mirrors the paralysis of the Irish who stick to the unrealistic ideology rooted in the binary division of Mary and Eve which affects nationalist discourses on women, nature, and their national identity. Cultural nationalists in colonized Ireland tried to fix their national image as the Virgin Mary who carries motherhood and idealized virginity altogether, denying the sexuality of women. However, Joyce reveals that the sexuality of women is the very source of motherhood which also leads to artistic creation. That is deduced in Bloom's creation of Gerty's inner landscape in "Nausicaa" and the analogy of biological gestation to artistic creation in the "Oxen of the Sun." Gerty is perceived by Bloom as the mixture of the two seemingly opposites, and the creative force of nature in female sexuality is described as the same source of artistic creation. Bloom's "metempsychosis" to cross the boundaries of age, sex, and nationality through imagination in *Ulysses* presents us with an epistemological alternative to overcome the byproducts of the traditional Cartesian dualism that constantly reproduces the dominance-submission relationship and ultimately alienates us from ourselves.

■ Key words: cultural nationalism, Virgin Mary, Eve, sexuality, literature, national identity, metempsychosis

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