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Martha Clifford's Letter: Joyce's Concept of Language As Both Content and Process

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I

Martha Clifford's letter, repeatedly quoted or alluded to throughout the novel *Ulysses*, figures as more than a mere motif. Rather, given emphasis by repetition and allusion of words such "word," "world," "perfume," "naughty," and "letter" as shown in the letter, along with "the yellow flower" attached to it, the letter comes to be as substantial as any character in the novel. My contention concerning Martha Clifford's letter is that the continual sense of the reiteration of such words may be designed by James Joyce to usher in the concept of language as both content and process, which "language of flowers" (5.261) and "language of flow" (11.298) may represent.

Indeed, relating these words to a cluster of "static" and "kinetic" cross-references (i.e., "flowers," "a stream" [8.95, 96], "waters" [8.415, 17.183-228], "flow," "mirror," "music," the growth of human foetus and childbirth, "woman's womb" [14.92], and typos), Joyce succeeds in constructing

language (or life) as content and process in which a word as both a semantic and a semiotic unit not only reflects a fixed and unified meaning, but also metamorphoses or even destructs itself into multiple meanings in various relations with different events and various characters' consciousness.

My primary concern is to suggest that while Joyce's concept of language capitulates the essence of the Modernist language philosophy, it provides readers a clue to a better understanding of his "word" of "worlds" (or "world" of "words") in *Ulysses*. However, the following discussion will focus on the evolution of the flower as a symbol and show how the meaning of the flower, initially a fixed ready-made symbol derived from religion, myth, and popular works, going through various points of view and, in turn, various artistic transformations, develops itself into complex and multiple meanings.

II

In the "Lotus Eaters," associated with "tulips," "manflowers," "cactus," "forgetmenot," "violets," "roses," "anemone," (5.264-6), the flower attached to the letter initially represents a woman's desire for a secret love. But, Bloom, suffering his personal problems in terms of marriage, race, religion, and politics, transforms the flower into a lotus which, like "Lollipop" and "Lourdes" (5.360, 365), functions to "Lull[s] all pain" (5.367), thus endowing the flower with paganism from ancient Egypt and Buddhism. Furthermore, this flower of pagan codes transforms itself into a flower of an ambiguous mix of christianity and mythology, virgin Mary and prostitute, and feminine sexuality and phallism: "This is my body . . . naked, in womb of warmth, . . . around the limp father of thousands, a lanquid floating flower" (5.566-72). What we see here is Joyce's endowment of the power of language to destruct

theological metaphysics which is as radical as Stephen's aesthetic theory of temporality. Joyce's excessive interest in the power of language allows us to assume that such destruction and transformation are actually products of the conscious selection by Bloom (or Joyce) of opposites and contradictory ideologies in his particular historical situation. Thus, moving from the conventional meaning of the secret love derived from the Edwardian floral genre to the destructive meaning of the pagan and even profane rituals, the flower comes to contain "the language of the outlaw," the Modernist voice that "sets itself in opposition to the dominant voice of the culture" (Kershner 20). What we also observe here is the Saussurean concept of language as "signs" which manifests a particular socio-cultural phenomenon of binary oppositions in terms of sex and religion at Joyce's time.

However, Joyce's concept is more than Saussurean. In "Hades," reading snippily the obituaries in the newspaper, Bloom recalls a typical snippets of obituary-column prose: "Mr Bloom's glane travelled down the edge of the paper, scanning the death: Callan, Coleman, ... Thanks to the Little Flower. Sadly missed. To the inexpressible grief of his" (6. 157-161). Gifford annotates "the Little Flower" as "a popular name for St. Teresa of Lisieux, . . . , whose cultus grew with such rapidity and intensity after her death" as to be called "the most impressive and significant religious phenomenon of contemporary times" (107). No pure quotations exit because transformation and transmission of the original meaning in the original text is made in the receiving text (Zacchi 104). A phenomenological reading of Bloom's reading of the snippets reveals that what he does here not only recalls Martha's letter by linking "Little Flower" with "dear Henry" (6.161, 164), but he also adds a significant religious implication of the salvation to his pseudonym, "Henry Flower" which was simply referred as a "beautiful name" (5.248).

Joyce's concept of the language as "diachronic" and simultaneously

"synchronic" lies in this synthesis. While "Flower," carrying the same sound of "flower," delivers the same meaning in different situations, "Flower," bearing a different semantic meaning from "flower," conveys a different meaning in the same discourse. By that synthesis, Bloom may intend to replace the guilty over his secret-love-keeping behavior for a privilege of a religious ritual for knowing "what God and man is" (Gifford 107).

Bloom's such excessive self-admiration, a way of denying circumstances given to him, places him into a deadlock between reality and illusion, which is exemplified in the language of paradox between myth and fact in "the flowers of sleep" (6.769) and the language of tension between realism and symbolism in "the flower are more poetical" (6.947):

> More room if they buried them standing. Sitting or kneeling you couldn't. Standing? His head might come up some day above ground in a landslip with his hand pointing. All honeycombed the ground must be: . . . . Ought to be flowers of sleep. (6.764-69)

> Marriage ads they never try to beautify. Rusty wreaths hung on knobs, garlands of bronzefoil. Better value that for the money. Still, the flowers are more poetrical. The other gets rather tiresome, never withering. Expresses nothing. Immmortelles. (6.945-48)

Thus, what we see here is a context-dependent and simultaneously detextualized language. Decoding Bloom's use of the term "poetical" reveals that Bloom, reading inscriptions on the tombstones, may recall symbols, not typical euphemisms he is reading now, at the head of tombstones in Jewish cemeteries (Caspel 97-98). It is not the idea of death ("sleep") and decay but an attack on all conventions the typical euphemisms represent that the "poetical" flower epitomizes. In this way, by reducing realism which

Balzacian description of the absolute discontinuity between tombstones and flowers might have evoked to symbolism, Joyce may intend to create the language of what Spears calls "rhetorical discontinuity" (23-8), destroying the principle of continuity which traditional philologists advocate.

The language of the tension between realism and symbolism is intensified in "Lestrygonians." The analogy between "Expresses nothing" (6.948) and "Not saying a word" (8.531) and the repetition of the word "poetical" (6.947, 8.545) allows us to assume that a synesthesia is made when the flowers transmorphose into "kind of food" (8.544) and the inscriptions into Lizzie Twigg's "stockings" (8.542) in the scene where Bloom expands his version of "poetical" (6.947) symbolism into another "poetical" pseudo-"symbolism" (8.530, 545). What Joyce intends in doing so may be to reveal that he cherishes neither realism (or naturalism), which employs language as a mere reproduction or representation of reality, nor pseudo- symbolism in which reality is stripped of details and reduced to a mere language of abstraction. Indeed, Joyce may imagine the language of "Immortelles" (6.948), one which transcends the limitations of the language of realism and symbolism.

In "Sirens" we see the confluence of Joycean and Saussurean concept of language. The flower, identified as "a daisy" by Bloom, symbolizes "innocence" (11.298) rather than "beauty"--"unless it is colored, in which case it means beauty" (Gifford 298):

> Two sheets cream vellum paper one reserve two envelopes when I was in Wisdom Hely's wise Bloom in Daly's Henry Flower bought. Are you not happy in your home? Flower to console me and a pin cuts lo. Means something, language of flow. Was it a daisy? Innocence that is. (11.295-98)

This language of "signs" expresses the axiology and psychology of Bloom

who has been haunted by adulteries his wife committed. The innocent image of the daisy (Day's eye) also reflects Bloom's double standard. On the one hand, it is adopted by Bloom to contrast with not only the image of "Nightstock" (13.1090) but also Molly's adultery--the night blooming flower revervarates a woman of "a bat-like soul walking to the consciousness of itself in darkness and secrecy and loneliness and, through the eyes and voice and gesture of a woman without guile, calling the stranger to her bed" (*A Portrait* 183). On the other hand, Bloom may intend to escape from the feeling of guilt over the secret love which is in his religious context equivalent to his wife's actual adultery. In this way, the flower, representing the archetypal conception of a woman as a virgin/temptress, comes to be the language of "signs" (codes or systems) whose meaning is established by the interplay between Bloom's subjectivity and the social context (partriarchism) rather than by intrinsic significance of the language.

Significantly, the flower in "Increase their flow. Throw flowers at his feet"(11.686-7) implicitly magnifies Joyce's concept of the interrelational nature of language. A careful look at the relation between the "flowers" and Bloom reveals that Bloom makes a bitter mock at his wife's adultery, for the superstition that a singer's vocal capacity is influenced by his/her intense sexual desire (Gifford 302) reminds him of Molly, a singer: "Last look at mirror before she answers the door [for Boylan]" (11.689-90):

> Tenors get women by the score. Increase their flow. Throw flower at his feet. When will we meet? My head is simply. Jingle all delighted. . . . Perfumed for him. What perfume does your wife? I want to know. (my italics; 11.686-69)

Here, equally significant is a possible synthesis of "flow" and "-er (a suffix used to form agent nouns) in the sentences as if "flowers"

symbolically means an agent for sexual activities--the interplay between "flow" and "flowers" is was already insinuated by the repetition and juxtaposition of "flow" and "flower," typos ("word" and "world" in Martha's letter, liver as "liv" [11.569], and Bloom as "L. Boom"), and fragmented words ("situa. Tight trou. Brilliant ide." [11.484]). While ignoring the Aristotelian concept of the relationship between each element of language ("fragment") and language itself ("totality"), this suggests that the meaning of language is contextual rather than phonetic or morphological. Such concept of the language as contextual, in turn, is an attack on an aesthetic formalist view of language as a purely linguistic unity preemptive of context--the fact that "flow," "flower," "music," "stream," "life," and "womb" prove to be synonymous supports this assertion.

Joyce's concept of language comes to be more sociological and contextual in "Nausicaa," where Joyce creates Bahktinian language as "event": "the situation enters into the utterance as an essential constitutive part of the structure of its import" (397). The male-dominant idealogies in the patriarchal society of Ireland at Joyce's time and struggles between Catholics and Protestants may contribute to contraries the flower forms in this chapter. At first, it means a woman's virginity or fertility. This line, "the memory of the past" (13.438-9) from a song "There Is a Flower That Bloometh," may remind Bloom of the line "Oh, pluck it [a flower] ere it wither, / 'Tis the memory of the past! // It wafted perfume o'er us, / Of sweet, though sad regret" (qtd. in Gifford 390). Secondly, it also implies woman's guilefulness, "a poison-flow'r," which may implicitly attack Molly's infidelity: "For then, a poison-flow'r / Is-the memory of the past !" (emphasis is mine;qtd. in Gifford 390). However, the flower is soon associated by the narrator with the glory of God, contrasted to the "flowers" at the bar "tables": "Clean tables, flowers, mitres of napkins. Pat to and pro. Bald Pat" (11. 570-71):

> Gerty could picture the whole scene in the church, the stained glass windows lighted up, the candles, the flowers and the blue banners of the blessed Virgin's solidarity and Father Conroy as helping Canon O'Hanlon at the altar, carrying things in and out with his eyes cast down. (13.446-9)

In addition, the narrator reads "a forgiving smile" in "her sweet flowerlike face" (3.764-5), thus adding the image of calculated innocence to the flower. Bloom intensifies the narrator's perception of the flower as a symbol of fertility ("if the flower withers she wears she's a flirt" [13.827]), and as that of female sensuality ("Open like flowers, know their hours, sunflowers, Jerusalem artichokes, in ballrooms, chandeliers, avenues under the lamps [13.1089-90]). Thus, the meaning of the flower as an archetypal woman as mother/whore, virgin/temptress, does not develop in isolation; it integrates, overlays, and parallels the historical situation.

The language as "event" is also embodied in "Oxen of the sun" which is filled with "a pregnant word" (14.259) and, in turn, gives birth to "word(s)" thirty times as to predict that the archetypal perception of woman as mother/temptress is most magnified in this episode. The "moonflower" (14.245) reveals Dedalus's consciousness that women and moon share essential traits. To moon, equated with "month" by Hebrews, are ascribed an admonishment of the millennium and a fertilizing power over and above the gift of light in the Scripture (Hastings 630). A menstruating woman was believed to have a power to cure barrenness in other women (Gifford 413). Thus, "moonflower" in its synthesis of moon, flower, and woman not only symbolizes, but also actualizes regeneration as if the flower in "moonflower" transubstantiates the natural forces of the moon and a woman into its body. This parallel between the moon and a woman was already prepared in the "Nausicaa" and is well explained in 17.1157-70:

> I [Martha] have such a bad headache to day. . . . How many women in Dublin have it to day? Martha, she. Something in the air. That's the moon. But then why don't women menstruate at the same time with the same moon, I mean? (13.778-784)

> What special affinities appeared to him to exist between the moon and woman? Her antiquity in preceding and surviving successive tellurian generations: her nocturnal predominance: her satellitic dependence: her luminary reflection: her constancy under all her phases, rising and setting by her appointed time, waxing and waning: the forced invariability of her aspect: her indeterminate response to inaffirmative interrogation: her potency over effluent and refluent waters: her power to enamour, to mortify, to invest with beauty, to render insane, to incite to and aid delinquency: the tranquil inscrutability of her visage: the terribility of her isolated dominant implacable resplendent propinquity: her omens of tempest and of calm: the stimulation of her light, her motion and her presence: the admonition of her craters, her arid seas, her silence: her splendour, when visible: her attraction, when invisible. (17.1157-70)

It is in "I was a Flower of mountain" (18.1602) that the paradoxical union of contraries assigned to the meaning of the flower is made: whore/ mother, virgin/temptress, the sacred/ the profane, the cardinal/the spiritual, the moral/the amoral, and the fixed/the uncertain. The capitalized "Flower," equivalent to "nature" (18.1558), functions, like Bruno's sacred and profane Nature, as "a paradoxical entity" in which "all differences are "realized," all modes come into being" and which "brings forth the separate forms or existences out of the formless, indeterminate, undifferentiated unity of being, or God" (qtd. in Voelker 39). Like "waters," "moon," "stream," "flow," "rivers," and "music," the "Flower" is at once fixed and in constant flux.

Such paradoxical union of contraries is also manifested in the comparison of Molly's menstruation to "the sea crimson," which implies 1) that the ultimate destination of "the stream of life" (8.95, 176) is "woman's womb" in which "word [or world] is made flesh" (14.292) and 2) that when "in the beginning was the word, in the end the world without end" (15.2236), there was woman's womb, too. As a result of the transmorphosis of woman's body into God's or the Virgin Mary's (the mother of Word of God), the flower which is identified with "all a womans body" (18.1577) comes to be a sacrilegious metaphor for "Word-made-flesh" (Gifford 47). However, the language of flowers is no less complex than God's. Like the various metamorphoses of God into "Florry Christ, Stephen Christ, Zoe Christ, Bloom Christ, Kitty Christ, Lynch Christ" (15.2196-7), the language of flowers, associated with the flow, the stream, and the sea, the river, and music, is essentially Promethean, forming the language of flow in which we "could hear, of course, all kinds of words changing colour" (16.1143). Indeed, the language of flowers turns into the language of "water," "a language so encyclopaedic" (14.1203), which elaborates Bloom's thought about the relationship between "word" and "world" in terms of characteristic features of water (17.183-228). In the language of flow (or water) there is no distinction between fragments and a whole, between word and world, between "flower" and "flow," and between "Bloom" and "Boom" (16.1260).

III

It is through the configurative aspects of the meaning of flowers that Joyce explores all forms of the twentieth-century language philosophy. As we have seen, the evolution of the flower as a symbol illustrates the

complex relations of language's two modes (the content and the process) to its context. Various points of view and various contexts in *Ulysses* invite readers to trace the Protean process in which the meaning of flowers, moving from one character's thoughts to another's and charged with new meanings, comes to have fixed and simultaneously multiplied meanings. Indeed, the language as both content and process requires readers to read not only the content of flower's meanings but also the ways the meanings are fabricated. In this way, the language as both content and process epitomizes Joyce's new linguistic encoding of "word of worlds" (or world of words) in which "word" and "world" can not be separated. This is the picture of an artist-god who creates the world through words.

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