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James Joyce's *Ulysses*: A Post-Colonial Text

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Emerging out of Joyce's ambivalence as an expatriate artist who never leaves his homeland imaginatively, *Ulysses* best reflects his post-colonial stance. This paper attempts to fill in the gap in Joyce criticism by reinscribing him in his quasi-colonial Irish context. The theoretical framework develops out of the post-colonial theories of Linda Hutcheon, Homi K. Bhabha, and Bill Ashcroft et al. The paper argues in *Ulysses* Joyce "writes back" to the empire and thus de-stabilizes the colonial culture. The dominant ambivalence of the work is because Joyce "incorporates" and simultaneously "abrogates" the colonial epic framework on which *Ulysses* is modelled. This parody accords the Joycean text an ironical tone which puts under question the colonial claim to authority and superiority. Besides, the paper briefly refers to different colonial styles which the Ulyssean text hybridizes and thus de-totalizes.

Introduction

Ulysses is the world's famous twentieth century novel written by James Joyce, an Irish writer. Ireland, a British quasi-colony, is no more regarded as a colonized country due to her cooperation with Britain in the expansion of her imperial borders. Postcolonial nation-states do not take Ireland as a postcolonial country; on the other hand, colonialists like Britain still have claims of superiority over the Irish. Therefore, Ireland suffers an ambivalent political state, belonging neither to the colonialists nor to the anti-colonial party. This political phenomenon, however, does not eradicate the cultural influence of the imperial over the country. Irish literary figures have responded differently to the political conditions of their context. Some Dubliners like George Bernard Shaw tended to introduce themselves as Londoners, whereas others like Yeats and Literary Revivalists turned out to be nativists, returning to their Celtic origins and reviving their Gaelic culture. In this colonial landscape, Joyce occupies an in-between position. Joyce's work has emerged out of, and manifests, this in-betweenness.

Joyce is widely compared, both in life and writing, to Dante, the political expatriate whose works hover around his homeland. Similarly, Joyce is usually described as the self-exiled artist who always remains at home imaginatively. This justifies Joyce's choice of Dublin as his fictional setting all through the body of his work, while he lived a life of permanent exile on his own volition. This marks Joyce's fiction with ambivalence: his state of self-exile signifies his repudiation of the country which paradoxically remained integral to his works. Such ambivalence renders Joyce's fiction responsive to a wide variety of approaches, one of them being postcolonialism.

Joyce has been canonized as a modernist or a high modernist, as Joyce criticism is mostly centered on his experimentations with language, styles, and narrative strategies. In *Ulysses* Joyce utilizes most of chief modernist styles like Symbolism, Decadence, Cubism, Surrealism, Expressionism, and Impressionism. Like a modernist, Joyce draws on the mythic time in order to escape Hegelian, progressive History, hence his remodelling of *Odyssey* to universalize his Dubliners. As analyzed critically, the main characters, Stephen Dedalus and Harold Bloom, are epitomes of modernist anti-heroes. Lacking physical activity of epic, Joyce's text is a novel of psychological heroism. This

heroism best manifests modernist self-scrutiny which accounts for Joyce's weaving most of his text out of his characters' stream of consciousness.

Ihab Hassan's critical views on *Finnegans Wake* (1939) gave Joyce criticism a postmodern turn. Brian McHale distinguishes early from late Joyce in his book entitled *Constructing Postmodernism* (1992). Investigating Joyce's stylistic experiments, McHale separates postmodern episodes in *Ulysses* from the modernist ones. Derrida explicitly acknowledges his debt to Joyce's linguistic innovations and word plays which contributed a lot to his philosophy of deconstruction. He refers to Joyce as "one of the powerful preconditions of deconstruction" (Booker 20). Similarly, Jean-Francois Lyotard in his essay, "What is Postmodernism?", praises Joyce's form-free work and argues Joyce's playful act of writing can make perceptible the unrepresentable (45). All these thinkers along with such critics as Margot Norris, Christopher Butler, Richard Brown, and Derek Attridge concern themselves mainly with the text of Joyce's fiction and its stylistic features.

Contra responsive to reductive textual analyses of Joyce's fiction, this paper relocates Joyce in his socio-political context stricken by modernity, colonization, and consumerism. It is argued that cultural and psychological colonization is one of the major themes with which Joyce has engaged himself. He has treated the effect of this politico-historical incident as one of the manifestations of the epidemic 'paralysis' of Dubliners throughout his fictional world. *Ulysses* (1923), the continuation of *Dubliners* (1914), is Joyce's masterpiece in which the sensitive writer has problematized the intruding imperial culture. Restoring Joyce to his historical context, with the advent of postmodernism and its zoom on the historical, cultural and political background of literary artifacts, provides the post-colonial angle from which this article would deconstructively approach *Ulysses*. Here *Ulysses* is viewed as a post-colonial reaction of an artist whose artworks smack of his dissatisfaction with the conditions of his country. Through an examination of Joyce's modernist strategy in "writing back" to the colonial literature and his experimentations with the imperial language, this article will delineate how *Ulysses* deconstructs and defamiliarizes the English culture.

Theoretical Framework

The postmodern motto "Hail to the Edges!" as a strategy against the falling apart of the center has given the fullest expression to the post-colonial discourse. Such post-colonial theorists as Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin and Gareth Griffiths vouch for the dual policy of interpolation which both appropriates, and concurrently, abrogates the colonial discourse. Hence interpolation is a procedure of "writing back the imperial history" and as a "counter-discourse," is "not a separate discourse, but a tactic that operates from the fractures and contradictions of discourse itself" (Ashcroft 102). Ashcroft et al. approach all post-colonial literatures as cross-cultural, written out of the tension between the abrogation of the imposed culture, speaking from the center, and the act of appropriation that modifies the imperial culture through interjecting the marginalized cultural elements. In post-colonial theorists' terms, the post-colonial literatures "negotiate a gap between worlds" (Ashcroft et al. 29), which are the worlds of the colonizer and the colonized. Homi Bhabha very aptly coins this gap as "the third space," or "in-between space," and calls this feature "liminality" that arises out of the "hybridity" of the two essentially different worlds. To these traits Ashcroft et al. add syncretism, which is "the process by which previously distinct cultural formations, merge into a single new form" (15). Due to

such characteristics the colonized's literatures can properly be dubbed as "post-colonial", with the duplicity that Linda Hutcheon has ascribed to the prefix "post": "on the one hand, it is taken to mean "after", "because of" and even unavoidably "inclusive of" the colonial; on the other, it signifies more explicit resistance and opposition and anti-colonial" (10).

Analysis

Ashcroft et al. explain that English has developed as a privileged academic subject in the nineteenth century due to the attempt of Britain to "replace the classics at the heart of the intellectual enterprise of the nineteenth century humanistic studies" (3). The classics, hence, has become the point from which Joyce creeps stealthily into the colonial culture and from thence problematizes its discipline. Modeling his grand novel after Homer's epic, *Odyssey*, Joyce has actually hybridized and syncretized his Ulyssean text. Here Joyce appropriates the classical discourse, and then parodies the Homeric framework in order to make his novel a suitable account of/for the modernists; Joyce's technique of parodic "othering" the classical text stands for his policy of abrogation or what Homi Bhabha calls "mimicry" that aims at distorting the classical and thereafter the colonial basis. In other words, the parodic Ulyssean text becomes Bhabhaian in-between space where the two essentially different literary genres, epic and novel, and the two diverse literary eras, the classical and the modern, converge and counteract. Joyce's *Ulysses*, thus, becomes the syncretized version of Homer's epic that cherishes all the attributes of post-colonial literary artifacts. A glance over Joyce's policy to achieve such traits in his *Ulysses* would be pertinent for an understanding of how Joyce utilizes parody at the service of his deconstructing objectives.

In Joyce criticism, the political implications of his mythic time have not been attended to. Mostly critics regard this as his modernist feature, while there is some other side to the coin. For Hegel, "the History of the World travels from East to West" (qtd. in Lamming 15). Describing History as a line which reaches its development in the West manifests Hegel's Eurocentrism. In this light, Joyce's epical framework could be taken as his deconstruction of the Hegelian Eurocentric notion of History which myopically gives priority to the West.

Like its Homeric parallel, *Ulysses* is composed of eighteen episodes which are connected to one another through the sub-theme of son-seeking father and/or father-seeking son. Throughout the modern text, all gods, goddesses and mythological figures and places of the classical subtext, become "contemporized", in Bakhtinian terms. (Pearce 58). By "contemporization, Bakhtin means bringing low, representing "on a plane equal with contemporary life, in an everyday environment, in the low language of contemporaneity" (Bakhtin 21). Accordingly, in the modernist text the epical elements change into pictures, ordinary people and common places that never go beyond the borders of Dublin, a modernized city and Joyce's hometown. Joyce does not simply rewrite Homer's *Odyssey*; rather like Wagner (Reichert 75), he reshapes the classical and hence colonial subtext to make his own myth for Irish audience in 1904.

In "Telemachus", Penelope's usurping suitors find their parallel in the character of the irresponsible Buck Mulligan, the student of medicine, who resides in Stephen's room without any payment. In the second chapter Mr. Deasy, the dean of Stephen's school stands for Nestor the oldest of the Greek heroes who has a reputation for wisdom. Like Nestor who is a famous breeder of horses, Mr. Deasy is in favor of horse-racing and

delivers to Stephen a letter on the subject of foot and mouth disease in cattle. The story of “Proteus” is a small part of the long interview with Menelas who tells Telemachus how on the voyage home he has extracted news of Odysseus from slippery Proteus, an Egyptian god of the sea. In the “Proteus” Stephen is shown walking on the beach, trying to fix the fluidity of time in his constantly shifting interior monologue. In *Ulysses* Homeric “Calypso”, the amatory goddess who has detained Odysseus for more than seven years is presented in the picture of the Greek nymph from Photo bids. This photo is on the wall over Molly’s bed and Bloom’s amatory fantasies about the nymph are one reason for his being away from Molly. The “laughing witch” of Philip Beauloy’s story that Bloom reads during breakfast is another reminiscence of Calypso. In *Ulysses* the post office to which Bloom goes to collect a letter from his unseen pen pal, the church which is the center of religion as the opium for masses, and the baths in which Bloom gets attracted in a narcissist way to his own body are all the flowers of idleness that stand in parallel with Homeric “Lotus eaters”. Odysseus’s visit to Hades, the abode of the dead, takes Bloom to the cemetery to participate in his friend’s funeral in “Hades” episode. The action of “Aeolus” in *Ulysses* is an imitation of its Homeric parallel that is located in the newspaper office where, like the god of the wind, is full of goings and comings, movings in and out, back and forth. Homer’s “Lystrygonians” who pounce from their Heights upon Odysseus’ ships and eat his sailors change to the gulls which Bloom feeds. The action of the chapter is eating and it is at lunch time that Bloom settles for a simple cheese sandwich and a glass of burgundy. Homeric Charybdis is the whirlpool and Scylla is a monster on a rock. Bloom, Joyce’s displaced Ulysses in the library, passes between Mulligan, The Charybdis, and steers toward Stephen whose incessant yapping as he sticks his neck out resembles him to the Scylla.

Joyce’s tenth chapter, “The Wandering Rocks”, has not Homeric equivalent as an episode. In *Odyssey* there are no wandering rocks except by allusion. Odysseus is just warned against the danger of these rocks. In *Ulysses* the moving people in Dublin streets, going, coming and colliding are the wandering rocks. In Ulyssesean “Sirens” Homer’s singing, man-eating Sirens turn into the two flirting barmaids and their isle is the bar, a place of danger where many Dubliners ruin their health. Bloom tries to avoid their enticement by answering his pen pal’s letter. In “Calypso” the one-eyed giants who do not obey the laws of the gods of men find their parallels in the Dubliners gathered in Kiernan’s pub where their aggressiveness, especially that of the Citizen, targets Bloom, who has come there on an errand of mercy. Joyce’s “Nausicaa” is an incomplete version of its Homeric parallel. Bloom and Gerty MacDowell voyeur each other from a distance. Their gazes lure the other but unlike Homer’s story they do not get near each other. Gerty leaves the beach limping and Bloom stays there and after masturbating dozes off.

In “The Oxen of the Sun” Odysseus’s crew who have disrespected the Sun’s cow and hence have committed crime against fertility are reflected, in *Ulysses*, the rioters in the maternity Hospital. Similarly by mocking child birth these rioters disrespect fertility. Like Odysseus, Bloom is the only one who remains humane, reverent and compassionate. The witch Circe who transforms some of Odysseus’s men into pigs is the prostitute in Bella Cohen’s brothel. Bloom’s Odyssean “moly” to protect him against the magic of the Circe is his potato. In “Eumaeus” Bloom shares his mythological roles with the drunken sailor in the cab shelter. The sailor’s stories about his adventures are mostly lies, and hence, he becomes a pseudo-Odysseus who is advised by the goddess Athena to disguise

himself as an old man and seek Eumaeus' hospitality. The Homeric counterpart of "Ithaca" takes place in Bloom's house in 7 Eccles Street. Odysseus's slaughtering of the usurping suitors arouses Joyce's hatred of violence. The only bloodshed that occurs in *Ulysses* is Molly's menstruation at midnight on her bed. After the occurrence of this bloody event, Molly's mind in the last episode, "Penelope", turns back towards her husband. In this way in Molly's mind, Bloom appears as the victor in the battlefield with Boylan.

Joyce, thus, both absorbs or appropriates the epical framework, and simultaneously, distorts the classical mold of *Odyssey*. Likewise, the modern text de-centers the epical subtext when Odysseus's twenty-year homeseeing gets minimized to Bloom's eighteen-hour wanderings in Dublin. Spatially also the mythological subtext is problematized when odysseus's wanderings are delimited to the streets of Dublin.

Furthermore, in characterization Joyce subverts all the classical features. The courageous and heroic figure of Odysseus who quests for home and his loyal Penelope is mimicked parodically in the self-resigned henpecked and cuckold Bloom who cowardly vacates the house for his wife's adulterous affair with Blazes Boylan. Similarly, the epical wife who waits twenty years for her husband, changes to the modern counter character, Molly Bloom, the ordinary woman who seeks her husband's absence from the house to carry out her adultery. Such drastic subversions in the Ulyssean text are in line of the drastic change that Joyce brings in the very heroism of his novel. The epical heroism of deeds changes to *Ulysses*' psychological heroism. The modernist heroism of consciousness accounts for the psychological and mental conflicts that abound in *Ulysses* as in contrast to *Odyssey*'s heroic actions that appear in the form of bloodsheds, murderings, killings, lootings, etc.

Besides Joyce's attempts to hybridize and syncreticize his liminal *Ulysses* through parody that targets obliquely the imperial literature, his innovative experimentations with the colonial literary styles and techniques are conducive to achieve his de-centering aims. In each one of his eighteen chapters, Joyce appropriates a specific literary style, some of which run encounter to one another. The 'narrative (young) of "Telemachus", for instance, contradicts the mature narrative in "Calypso" and both of these techniques reach the old narrative of "Ithaca", the penultimate episode.; or the male monologue of "Proteus", as another case, opposes the female monologue of "Penelope". The personal "catechism" of Nestor runs encounter to the seventeenth chapter's technique of "catechism-mature" or impersonal catechism. In "Nestor" the plot emerges out of the questions and answers between Mr. Deasy and Stephen in the school. However, Stephen's interior monologue at times interrupts the dialogue, reflecting his comments on Mr. Deasy's speech. This personal method that gives Stephen the chance to comment, deride, or despise is contrasted with the completely impersonal catechism of "Ithaca" which closes all the doors to the comments of even the author himself. The cold, scientific style of the narrative method of the episode is conveyed through mere questions and answers.

Joyce's mastery over a wide variety of narrative techniques sets up such inter-episodic links. One can confer that in each one of the eighteen episodes of *Ulysses* that narrates the story of/to the modern man, Joyce installs a literary technique which is subverted in the next episode where another technique is applied. This constant strategy of installation and subversion that resembles Penelopian weaving and unweaving of her

shroud, constitutes the texture of the Ulyssean text, and simultaneously, hints at the limitations of each single technique throughout the course of the narrative. The same deficiency of English literary styles has been Joyce's post-colonial purpose in his most parodic episode, "The Oxen of the Sun". In this highly artificed chapter Joyce straightforwardly earmarks English literature and its different literary eras. "The Oxen" narrates the events that happen to Stephen and Bloom in the maternal hospital by using different English literary styles, beginning significantly from Middle Ages up to his present time and following an embryonic development. This parody of various styles reveals not only Joyce's mastery over the colonial literature but also pinpoints the inefficiency of each style in the narrative line.

Accordingly in a post-colonial discourse, *Ulysses* becomes the Bhabhaian third space or what Bakhtin calls "a zone of crude contact," (Pearce 58) where the modern and the classical, or the colonizer and the colonized, converge. Yet in the liminal world of *Ulysses*, Joycean parodic treatment of both the classical epic and English literature avoids the destruction and reconstruction of any kind of hierarchy among the various literary techniques or between the two diverse discourses of the imperial and the colony. This feature makes *Ulysses* a cross-cultural artifact that is governed by Hutcheonian logic of both/neither. The syncretized Ulyssean text is a hybrid of epic and novel, the classical and the modern, the colony and the empire, and concurrently, it is neither. *Ulysses* owes its in-betweenness or liminality to Joyce's dual policy of appropriation and abrogation; Joyce achieves this characteristic through his parodic treatment or Bhabha's policy of "mimicry."

The very first effect of Joyce's interpolation of the classical discourse is the irony of *Ulysses* that is double-edged. Some critics have viewed the Homeric subtext as an ironical look over the modern man with whose passivity and timidity stands in stark contrast to the self-determined epical Odyssey. Whereas there are some other critics that have taken the other way around and argue that Joyce's treatment of the modern man and his psychological heroism dispenses with the absurdity and authoritarianism of Odyssey's heroic deeds. As a matter of fact, however, the liminal *Ulysses* covers both of these contradictory standpoints, and simultaneously, is neither. In other words, Joyce's mimicry of Odysseyan subtext, on the one hand, ironies the modern man and his entrapped plight; on the other, with its tongue in cheek, the modernist text problematizes the totalitarianism of the epical world, and via introducing psychological heroism, the text defamiliarizes the heroic action of the classical and/or colonial subtext.

The in-betweenness of *Ulysses* with its double-edged irony arouses an ambivalent laughter. Richard Pearce quotes Bakhtin that "ambivalent laughter arises out of bringing low and representing the classical grandeur nobility on a plane equal with contemporary life, in everyday environment, in the low language of contemporaneity" (58). From a post-colonial perspective, Joyce's mimicry or his dual policy of interpolation is responsible for the double-edged irony of *Ulysses* which itself, in turn, arouses Bakhtinian ambivalent laughter. Thus through the flexible framework of *Ulysses*, Joyce deconstructs the authoritarianism of the epical subtext, draws it into "a zone of crude contact" or Bhabhaian third space and defamiliarizes the colonial (British) totalitarianism which rests on the classical nobility. Joyce accomplishes this de-centering end not only via his parodic treatment or his policy of mimicry, but also through his other post-colonial technique of interjection. Ashcroft defines this procedure of interjection as the

insertion of the native (colonized) culture and language so that the marginalized culture is brought vis-a-vis that of the imperial, and thus, its authority over the text is problematized. (103) In the Odysseyan counter-discourse, Joyce interjects the Irish culture especially its music. The insertion of Irish songs, popular ballads and national tones becomes Joyce's other strategy to revive his Irish culture and art in the face of the British Empire, and thus, obliquely distorts the visage of the colonial culture. Hence as a cross-cultural fiction, *Ulysses* wavers between the British and the Irish cultures.

Conclusion

In the classical framework, characterization, literary styles and even in the cultural facets that Joyce has introduced in his liminal, hybridized and syncretized modernist text, he has actually entered into the imperial discourse (appropriation) and then deconstructed its discursive features; utilizing the power of parody or mimicry, Joyce's *Ulysses* reveals the limitations of the colonial discourse itself, and hence, defamiliarizes the imperial through his problematizing experimentations (abrogation). The distortion of the colonial countenance, achieved through the subversion and deconstruction of the classical base of the imperial English, reveals Joyce's post-colonial outlook towards the imperialism that has made the governing atmosphere of his country intolerable to live in. *Ulysses*, therefore, can be approached as Joyce's effort to "write back" the colonial literature and culture.

The Bakhtinian laughter that Joyce's parody evokes re-echoes Bhabha's de-totalizing mimicry. A comparison between Joyce and such nativists as W. B. Yeats would reveal that Joyce's post-colonial strategies of appropriation and abrogation are more influential than their Irish occultism, since nativism foregrounds the alterity of Irishness more in the face of its colonial counterpart, Englishness. This alterity reiterates the colonizer/colonized dichotomy, whereas Joyce's syncretism exerts a more powerful force against the segregational policies of the colonial.

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