

Metaphoricity in James Joyce's Ulysses

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Abstract: Joyce's innovative experimentation in *Ulysses* has brought him into line with such important writers of the Modernist Movement as Ezra Pound, Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence. As a modernist writer, James Joyce was greatly influenced by the Symbolist writing techniques. By probing into his use of metaphors, one of the Symbolist techniques in *Ulysses*, the readers may have a better understanding of the connotations and implied meanings created by James Joyce.

1. Introduction

James Joyce (1882-1941) was the most international of writers in the first half of the twentieth century. As a master of modernist literature, James Joyce's novels are said to be absurd and obscure. According to Weiping Li, Joyce's novels are a Daedalus Maze [1]. *Ulysses* is Joyce's representative work. Joyce used a Greek hero's name as the title of the novel and lays a paralleled structure with a hero's story in Homer's epic *Odyssey*. It shows Joyce's high technical proficiency in using symbols. But because of the complete use of stream of consciousness, the novel seems incomprehensible to most readers. Joyce might have realized this. He said that the readers should spend their whole lives studying his work.

In fact, James Joyce was greatly influenced by the Symbolist Movement and his contemporaries such as Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and then developed his unique Symbolist writing methods. For a long time, many readers think that *Ulysses* is hard to understand because of its connotations and implications. Actually *Ulysses* can be named after Clive Bell's "meaningful form" because James Joyce directly alluded to the reality with meaningful forms, thus obtaining epoch-making innovative significance [2]. So *Ulysses* does not just provide a complex representation of the external world, but also make people feel its essence, aiming to explore the deep emotional life of the unconsciousness by using metaphor, one of the most important Symbolist writing skills.

2. Symbols and Symbolic Reference

2.1. Symbol

The creation and use of symbols is closely related to the Symbolist movement, which originated in 1880s. Symbol is a typical example of abstraction. R. G Haggard defined the term "symbol" as the following:

"It is a recognizable equivalent or type of some person, object, or abstract idea by means of

features associated in the popular mind with that person, object, or abstract idea. It is also the expression of abstract ideas in terms of abstract or spiritual ideas by means of natural objects” [3].

This definition considers a symbol as a shorthand sign which has a wider and more profound meaning. In fact, it is a kind of condensation or an abstraction of a concrete thing.

2.2. Symbolic Reference

The Symbolist movement evolved in the 1880s. At first, it saw as its task the creation of a poetry which should express something through the instrumentality of sensible forms, such as words, pictures and metaphor, etc. What we can sense is the signs which express deep meanings. The signs used in poetry or the instruments of symbolization in the most general sense are actually words. The meaning which the word symbol expresses is the “idea”, the sign’s symbolic reference [4].

In fact, the human mind is functioning symbolically when some components of its experience call forth consciousness, beliefs, emotions or usages, which remind people of other components of experience. The former set of components is actually the symbols, and the latter set constitutes is the meaning of the symbols. There exists a transition from the symbol to the meaning that is the symbolic reference [4].

The symbolic reference is a way in which a symbol relates to its profound meaning. The reference of one kind of symbol admits of reasonable and unambiguous comprehension, while the reference of another kind admits only of intuitive discovery, and the meaning of these symbols is a matter of speculation. However, they are traceable.

2.3. Joyce’s Purpose of Using Symbols

Joyce’s use of symbols cannot be considered as a theory in the sense of the word. He never pronounced a complete or consistent Symbolist theory, but he was profoundly interested in and consequently dealt with various aspects of the Symbolist theory. If Joyce was to be defined as a Symbolist writer, it must be on his own terms. *Ulysses* is the ingenious combination of myth and reality, symbol and realistic writing. The truth which Joyce felt that he should express forced him to overcome the conventional barriers between Symbolism and reality, and it has also forced the readers after him to undertake all unprecedented dialogue if we are to understand the full context of *Ulysses*. This dialogue is a translation from the language of one medium into the language of the other. Therefore, it is original in the sense that it creates something that is existing deep under the surface of the literary work. In fact, *Ulysses* has various symbolic interpretations. According to T. Eagleton, Joyce has developed his own closed symbolic system [5]. Decoding the connotations of them can help the readers understand the meaning of life and achieve order and harmony. Joyce used some cryptic language, especially metaphors in *Ulysses*, which not only endowed the novel with deep meanings, but also served as a means to convey the main ideas of the novel.

3. Metaphoricity

One of the frequently used methods in the Symbolist Movement is metaphoricity. The objects of vision can be transformed into a kind of writing. Besides, the activity of reading can become an activity of the intellectual apprehension. The appearance of the visible world does not provide immediate access to the realm of truth. It needs an act of interpretation and a certain deciphering of signs. It is in this transformation of epistemology into semiology that the linguistic metaphor is introduced [6]. This would identify the literary process as one of recognition of connotations and implications because it relates to knowledge and articulation and it refers to a mastery of signs as well.

3.1. Metaphor

Metaphor is the use of words to tell the readers a resemblance between something that is part of the writer's focus of attention, or part of his real or imagined world and something that is not actually a part of the phenomenon that is engaging his mind.

In the school of cognitive linguistics, metaphor is regarded as a cognitive mode. The essence of metaphorical thinking is the mapping process of cross-domain concepts in the conceptual system. Mapping is a way of metaphorical thinking, which is based on abstract schemata or cognitive structure to realize the integration of different life experiences.

3.2. Joyce's Concept of Metaphor

Joyce's concept of metaphor defines the fundamental relationship between words and reality in *Ulysses*. In other words, Joyce laid emphasis on the relationship between the writing techniques and meanings or what was said and signified. *Ulysses* puts emphasis on the linguistic patterns and de-emphasis on the traditional plot, so it requires serious discussion in terms of its language and internal verbal relationships. In *Ulysses* Joyce enquired into how language signifies and the readers have to explore into the creation of metaphors and their importance as a means of understanding the novel as well as the world in the early years of 1900s.

Joyce would have understood why Derrida, master of the contemporary French deconstruction, quotes Nietzsche, a famous German philosopher and linguist, on metaphor. "Language has within it an illogical element, the metaphor. Its principal force brings about an identification of the nonidentical; it is thus an operation of the imagination. It is on this that the existence of concepts, forms, etc. rests" [7]. Joyce was extremely interested in the process or operation of the imagination in which something absent and nonidentical was summoned into the present so as to enrich and be enriched by the present.

3.2.1. Modern Incardination of Odyssey

With the title of the novel *Ulysses*, Joyce announced the metaphoricity. It implies that in the novel Bloom, not Odyssey, is the main character, but Bloom is considered to be the modern incardination of Odyssey although he is just an antihero. Joyce thought that the world Bloom lived in is the reappearance of the Homer's world, and he compared the activities of Bloom in one day with the ten years' wandering of Odyssey.

Although Bloom looks to be vulgar, he is a person who is keeping forging ahead. By using "Ulysses" to be the title of the novel, Joyce suggested that every man living in the modern world is destined to suffer like the ancient Greek hero Odyssey. Only by wisdom, courage and firm willpower can he satisfy his wish. Indeed, we can define the major action of the novel as being endowed with the imagination of the possibilities of symbolism.

In *Ulysses*, after reading the novel the readers may establish how Bloom and Stephen become metaphors or signifiers for each other. Joyce let Bloom and Stephen be signified by historical heroes, Odyssey and Telmachus who are father and son. In the course of Bloom's searching for a son and Stephen's searching for a farther, both of them are looking for someone who will give them a sense of wholeness.

In Chapter Seventeen, Stephen is about to leave Bloom's home, when the bell in the church of Saint George gives the time, "The sound of the peal of the hour of the night by the chime of the bells in the church of Saint George" [8]. It symbolizes the fusion of two tunes, or the reunion of Stephen and Bloom. The use of metaphoricity to create the meaning of their lives anticipates and signifies their union. This is not only a narrow self-perception of the individual character, but also

has a broad symbolic significance [9]. Therefore, the adoption and skillful use of metaphors and symbols contribute to the originality and power of *Ulysses*.

3.2.2. Metaphoric Word Substitutions

With the implied use of the present tense of the verb “to be”, metaphor summons what is absent from the literal world, to be specific, it implies what that the present world lacks, and in the case of *Ulysses*, it refers to the historical figures and heroes of the past; And they in turn calls for the cultural values of the historical era to which they should properly belong. For the readers, the relationship between the past and present is constantly variable; what metaphors mean will be to some extent alterable by changing its context. And every chapter of *Ulysses* provides different mixtures of historical and literary allusions and places stress on different resemblances between the contemporary and the prior eras. In fact, Joyce’s concept of metaphor not only includes historical allusions that evoke the values and personalities of past eras, but also the styles he parodies to evoke a variety of past and present perspectives. By demonstrating his power of making whatever metaphoric word substitutions, Joyce showed himself to be the “lord and giver” of language in his unique imagined world, as Stephen puts it in Chapter Fourteen.

3.2.3. Figurative Usage

Metaphor in *Ulysses* depends not just on words substituting for each other, but on the “syntagmatic relationship” or “the contiguity of words to each other [10]. Therefore, Joyce has eliminated the traditional distinction between metaphor and metonymy, a distinction that differentiates metaphor that depends on the necessary substitution of the figurative usage and metonymy that depends on the contiguity of two elements in a represented sequence.

Metaphoricity which focuses on the making of comparison is a way of bringing together apparently dissimilar entities for the purpose of revealing resemblances and differences. It is a resource of the individual imagination, which is developed more intensely and subtly. Joyce’s search for recurring cultural and human experiences and for language to describe those experiences is characteristic of the search in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These methods would identify the process as one of recognition in so far as it relates to knowledge and a mastery of signs.

In Chapter Six, Joyce described the hell in Bloom’s consciousness, which makes Bloom feel frightened in that smothered atmosphere. It is the several gates leading to the human world that make him a little relieved. Here, Bloom regards “the gate of the prospects cemetery” [8] as the gate of the nether world. After getting off the carriage, Bloom follows the funeral workers and goes through the gates. Seeing the heaviness of the dead body, Bloom “felt heavier myself stepping out of that bath” [8]. The descriptive text seems to be prosaic, but they are significative. In the following description, Bloom “lay comfortably in a womb of warmth” [8]. It is obvious that the word “womb” has the same characteristic as the “bath”, and “a womb of warmth” is just the “bath” that Bloom reminds of when he “came out through the gate”. It is interesting for the readers to find out that the word “womb” refers to the source of life. That is to say, he is born when he steps out of the “bath”. When Bloom “felt heavier myself stepping out of that bath”, it shows that he is on the way to death when he is born. Although he is alive, he “felt heavier”.

As a matter of fact, before Bloom gets off the carriage, he has the feeling that he gets to the edge of the Hades. When he catches sight of the high rails near the cemetery, he seems to see “Dark poplars, rare white forms” (Joyce, 1992). “Poplars” is described in Homer’s *Odyssey*, and they act as a mark leading to the nether world. When telling *Odyssey* the way to the nether world, the fairy Circe asks him to anchor his boat to the shore where tall and dark poplars are grown after he crosses the sea. Circe does not mention the “white forms”, but she does mention the “rock” [11], which can

be engraved into the white forms. In *Odyssey*, the souls of *Odyssey*'s rivals in love are guided to cross the ocean, and then they see the White Rock. Later they arrive at the nether world through the Gate of the Sun and the Dreamland. Therefore, the two marks to the entrance of the hell, that is, poplars and the white forms are already in Bloom's mind. Meanwhile, they pave the way for the epiphany of the metaphorical connotation of the word "gates".

4. Conclusions

Metaphor is the means by which Joyce obtains the transformational effect help to universalize Joyce's motifs. Joyce believes in the significance of trivial things, and wants to convey the significance to the readers. He also believes that language has the potential to discover the value of the trivial things. Furthermore, sounds, variety, experimentation, energy and ingenuity of the language in *Ulysses* demonstrate the validity of the belief.

There are a lot of metaphors in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The metaphorical system urges the readers to understand that they must read not only literary texts but also within the context of the interpretive framework. The metaphoricity of the novel not only reveals what is present, but also whatever might be present in a world which seems to have purpose and meaning. It would necessarily require something more out of metaphors. Through the proper symbolist techniques and his own contribution to Symbolism, Joyce succeeds in reflecting the panorama of Ireland and the whole world.

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