

Twentieth-Century Fiction
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Lecture - 48
Ulysses - Part 9

So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Twentieth Century Fiction, we were looking at James Joyce's novel Ulysses. So, this particular lecture will be the concluding lecture on Ulysses, where I will talk about the various aspects which we have covered already and also the final section of the novel which is about Molly Bloom's soliloquy - the huge, you know section which has like 8 sentences.

And almost like more than almost 100 pages and in terms of looking at the final stream of consciousness with which Ulysses the novel ends. And I am going to talk about that in some respect; we will not look at it specifically, we will talk about these stylistic features that Joyce uses while describing Molly Bloom's final soliloquy and situate that in relation to the other streams of consciousness which we see in the novel.

And what we see immediately, I mean when you take a look at the soliloquy by Molly Bloom this is about her reminiscing, about her experiences, her childhood in Gibraltar where she grew up where she was a daughter of you know she come from mixed parentage, so she is the daughter of an Irish, military person and a local woman of Spanish origin.

So, she has an adulation quality to it as well and then you know she her childhood was in Gibraltar, which is obviously, again a very symbolic setting; because that situates in very close proximity to the seafaring quality about the you know the original myth, the original epic which is Ulysses you know Odysseus by Homer, where you know obviously, she is the counterpart of Penelope over here.

With the very interesting difference of being that Penelope was the quote unquote "faithful" wife to Odysseus when he came back from years of travelling overseas; whereas, we see Molly Bloom has already had an affair and this hidden affair with someone called Hugh Boylan, who happens to work in the same place as a manager of this opera company where she works in, in Dublin.

So, you know that the idea of having an affair outside of a marriage gives her very interesting location in terms of the original character out of which she is presumably based, that of Penelope in Homer's *Odysseus*. Now the setting of Gibraltar I have already mentioned this once in one of my the previous lectures on *Ulysses*, a setting of Gibraltar is interesting, because that situates the novel's seafaring quality more prominently and more sort of visually speaking as well; because Gibraltar being this very important seafaring point in terms of all voyages.

Now, if you take a look at the final soliloquy in Molly Bloom which is this long huge section which comprises eight sentences as I just mentioned and just a very few punctuations - the final bit, the final punctuation been bit the yes, what she says in the end. Now, if we compare that with the some of the characters in the novel and we just saw just before this in the previous lecture; we saw the conversation between this dialogue as it were between Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom. We find that the male characters in the novel are often they speak in dialogues which are very dry, which are very very over intellectualized, which is to say that takes away a large part of the attention from the reality of life.

So, there is this long discourse of art and aesthetics and politics and literature and painting, about the crisis in Dublin and about Ireland in general and that discourse on very dry dialogues, which has done nothing in terms of its relation to reality. Whereas, Molly Bloom's final soliloquy is obviously, very very different, is more visual, it is also more visceral, it is more experiential, it is more embodied and it actually foregrounds the body, it foregrounds the sentient body the sexualized human body. And it sort of celebrates it; there are lots of allusions to the sexuality, but also other kinds of bodily behaviour which are prominently foregrounded throughout the entire soliloquy.

And what that foregrounding does obviously; it does a very political thing, it foregrounds the female body, the female desire, the female gaze, the female subject as someone who has a last voice, the last speaking voice in a novel, quite literally the novel ends with Molly Bloom's soliloquy.

So, the closing of the novel, the closing of Molly Bloom's soliloquy are synchronous events; but equally it actually tells us that the entire idea of *Ulysses*, the entire experience

of Ulysses, the novel reading experience of Ulysses is to be located in the visceral, in the embodied, in the corporeal quality which it celebrates by foregrounding the same, right.

So, then we have this idea of intellectualization which is the discourse Stephen Dedalus has with many of his you know colleagues in university, many of his arty friends in Dublin which is quite dry a discourse as far as discourse as it goes. And then we have Molly Bloom's very amazing soliloquy which is very moving, very fluid and that becomes part of the shift part of the linguistic shift in the novel.

Now, the fluidity of Molly Bloom's Soliloquy is obviously, very experiential in quality, it is about the entire experience of sexuality, the entire experience of pleasure, the entire experience of memory, the entire experience of childhood and how that is all remembered in different degrees of remembrance and how the Soliloquy becomes in a way a large narrative of memory, a large narrative of remembrance when he she remembers her first kiss, he remembers her first proposing, how Leopold Bloom had proposed her and also she keeps talking about Hugh Boylan in very interesting ways, you know the person that she is having an affair with at this present moment of time.

So, what the last Soliloquy does among other things, it also brings in different orders of temporality in very interesting tension with each other, right. So, we have this whole idyllic childhood temporality in Gibraltar, which is where she was growing up; it is very, Andalusian quality, Spanish quality, about her childhood, her being from mixed parentage and also this very exotic this extensive and expansive landscape of Gibraltar, which is contrasted with a very dry and claustrophobic quality of Dublin. The city with blocks, city which blocks the vision the city which so represses her sexually, spiritually, existentially and emotionally, right and only the only liberation that she gets over here is from being an opera singer, right.

Now; obviously, as you know that Leopold Bloom and Molly Bloom they had two children. So, one is Milly Bloom, the daughter who is selling photography now; but more interestingly, there is also the son called Rudy Bloom, who died at age of eleven. So, I have already seen, we discussed in some details how Stephen Dedalus can be seen as the proxy son of Leopold Bloom and Molly Bloom, the son they never had and obviously, the parentless quality of Stephen Dedalus actually accentuates this reading. The fact that you know her parents his parents were absent, conspicuously absent in lights of

substance, in this reading of him being the proxy son, the spiritual son as it were to Leopold Bloom and Molly Bloom.

So, the entire kinship quality of the novel is interesting, because so in one hand we have these different kinds of kinship systems which are established. On the other hand, the kinship is also established through narratives, how narratives crisscross each other, there is a Bloom narrative which is extending in one direction, the Dedalus narrative which is extended in another direction and how they crisscross each other in different interesting intersections and these interesting intersections generate qualities of kinship in the novel.

So, this is very interesting relationship to be had between kinship and narrative, between storytelling and being situated in someone else's stories; if you are inside someone's story, that gives you a sense of kinship with that other person with that particular narrative. So, narrativity and kinship are very interestingly entangled with each other in this particular novel.

Now, just coming back to the final bit about Molly Bloom's you know very very interestingly embodied and corporeal last epiphany, a last stream of consciousness; where she talks about the final bit obviously, is being of her saying yes, with a proposal of marriage by Leopold Bloom. And obviously, some biographers of Joyce would say that you know Molly Bloom was loosely based over Nora, Joyce's wife you know not to get too detailed in such biographical readings; it is still possible to find out how the entire voice given to the woman at the end of *Ulysses* is something which obviously, makes it quite radical in quality given that particular setting of time.

But also, equally interesting is to see how the linguistic register changes completely. So, language becomes as I mentioned more fluid, more promiscuous, more mixed, more heterogeneous, more heteroglossic and obviously, it cuts across different points of time and completely becomes anti-intellectual and completely becomes anti-rational. So, the anti-rationality, the anti-intellectual quality about the last soliloquy of *Ulysses* which is what gives us magnificently promiscuous quality, which is about the real promiscuity of Molly Bloom as well; but how the promiscuity is represented in the language.

So, language becomes a very very sort of centerless, you know centerless quality of the language; it is obviously, reflected in the lack of punctuation and, it is reflected in the literally the stream like quality in the language, how it just goes on from one direction to

another direction, it has a series of digressions, it builds on the early anecdotes and it keeps offering more and more anecdotes while also cutting back in the present while going back and transporting itself to different points of time in the past and also looking forward in the future, right.

So, this multiple temporalities about the last bit in *Ulysses* is interesting is what gives the novel, it brings the novel into very fitting conclusion which is not really a conclusion at all, it is a very open ended novel in that sense; it is obviously, you know something that Joyce does later with *Finnegan's wake*, where the final sentence goes back to the earlier sentence in the that makes the novel cyclic in quality *Finnegan's wake*. But even at the end of *Ulysses* we have this experience of bliss with which the novel ends and quite literally I want to situate this experience of bliss into a more postmodern understanding of the text.

So, for instance if we talk about the Roland Barthes' understanding of the text of bliss, you know as opposed to text of pleasure. So, the text of pleasure, the text of bliss are two different categories; you know that Roland Barthes talks about and the text of bliss is something that opens up into different kinds of interpretation, it opens up into pure possibilities, it is quite literally a celebration of centerlessness. And the celebration of centerlessness is what we see at the end of *Ulysses* with this female voice, the female body foregrounding its position, foregrounding its location, foregrounding a situatedness as a subject and how that foregrounding comes with the sort of centerless quality which celebrates the centerlessness with which the novel ends.

So, in that embodied centerless, visceral, corporeal quality of the last stream of consciousness is what gives *Ulysses* such a radical conclusion, which is not a conclusion at all, it opens up to a yes. And obviously, if you do a readerly reading of this novel which is also Roland Barthesian way of looking at it and he differentiates from two kinds of texts; the writerly text and readerly text, the readerly text obviously, is the text which you can read and you know open up for further interpretations.

So, the readerly reading of *Ulysses*, it opens up it ends with yes, which is also an invitation for opening, is an invitation for acceptance, an invitation for further acceptance for just go on forever - an endless series of acceptance, the endless acknowledgement. And that acknowledgement that acceptance that invitation to interpret that gives *Ulysses*

the more flowery feeling in the end, it just opens up into this endless flowery readerly quality with which the novel literally ends.

So, we will connect this last bit about Ulysses; how this fluid readerly blissful quality at the end which cuts back and across time, which foregrounds bodily functions, some disgusting bodily functions, some erotic bodily functions, some pleasurable bodily functions and how the body literally becomes a speaking, the voice at the end of the novel, how the body foregrounds this voice and the bodily functions and the sounds of the bodily functions, then those become the voices at the end of Ulysses.

So, that gives it a very heteroglossic, a very polyphonic quality; and by polyphonic and heteroglossic I mean the many voices at the end of Ulysses, which just keeps proliferating different kinds of voices through the body, from the body, you know about the body.

So, the body becomes very much foregrounded, it becomes a center stage; the corporeality of the character becomes a center stage at the end of the novel which produces different sounds, which produces different kind of images, which produces different kinds of experiences. And the experientiality of the body, this grounding in the body is what gives Ulysses, the final bit of Ulysses this magnificently mutable, this magnificently messy quality with which the novel ends. And the messiness and the mutability of the novel gives it, give it a very very human condition.

Now, I just mentioned at the beginning of the novel, how this novel is a magnificent you know you know encyclopedia of time; while also being quite literally and superficially just about one day in Dublin, it is about one calendar day. But you know notice the way in which this calendar day in Dublin, it just cuts and back across so many different points of time and that is something which you see in the final Soliloquy as well.

It is the end of the calendar day, it is you know Leopold Bloom and Molly Bloom going to sleep the calendar day is coming to an end, the historical day is coming to an end; but then what the ending also does it opens up, the different orders of temporality it goes back in time, it digs up things that happened in Gibraltar when Molly Bloom was a child, it cuts back in the present when she is having an affair with Hugh Boylan and obviously, it also brings up different kinds of you know different reminiscences and anecdotes about how she was first proposed, how she was the first proposal of marriage is given to her.

So, that obviously, what that does, is that it cuts the calendar day in different segments of time, in different slices of time which are very magnificently mutable and very magnificently messed up.

And the messiness and mutability as I just mentioned is part of the corporeality; it is like the body cannot contain itself, the body cannot contain its functions, the excretory functions, its reproductive functions, its pleasurable functions, its blissful functions, its gastronomic functions, its nervous functions all the functions of the body are put together. So, the text, the Ulysses the text in a way quite literally becomes a human body, the organic human body and that is the last bit I want to spend some time with the organicity and immediacy in the novel.

So, these are the two qualities with which the novel ends, the organicity, the very organic quality - how the body becomes the speaking voice, how the body becomes the articulator so to speak as well as the organicity bit. The immediacy bit is obviously, captured in the present; how the body inhabits the presence, how the only way you can inhabit the presence is through embodiment.

So, what it does is that, it gives a very corporeal quality to time. So, the only way you can contain time, the only way you can occupy time is through corporeality, is through your body; you can occupy time through your body and the point of occupation produces the images, produces the voices with which the novel ends. So, the final soliloquy of Molly Bloom can be seen as an act of corporeality on time, it is a corporeality mapped into temporality so to speak. So, how the time becomes fleshed out in quality, because the body occupies it and you know the soliloquy becomes something which is generated out of the occupation, out of the inhabitation of the body into time.

So, temporality and corporeality are mingled together, they all become part of one flesh in network which produces its own narrative with which the novel ends. And this is obviously, undercutting as I mentioned at the very beginning, undercutting some of the dry intellectual discursive quality the novel deliberately parodies. So, we can see a constant parody over and over again of dry discourses about art, about intellect, about culture, about nationalism, about Christianity, etcetera about history; and that is also all brushed aside in the end and the final voice belongs to the woman, the final voice belongs to the body, the final voice belongs to the corporeality.

So, it becomes quite literally as I mentioned a celebration of centerless-ness and the centerless-ness is mapped onto the corporeality; the body cannot contain itself, the body cannot contain its center, it has an orgasmic quality about it which is also part of the blissful quality.

So, the text becomes a text of bliss, because the text assumes the body, the text assumes the corporeal quality which opens it up non-syntactically through a complete release from punctuations into those emancipated order of representation. And lack of punctuation, the absence of punctuation of course is quite symbolic; it is part of the emancipation, it is part of the liberation that is experienced through the body.

So, the liberation, the emancipation, the lack of punctuation all these are done through a sense of transcending the body; though actual transcendence of course, is not really a body-less transcendence, it becomes a very embodied activity of transcendence, transcendence can only be occupied through the body, can only be experienced through the body. And also look at the way in which you know despite the slightly transcendental quality in terms of escaping from reality, it actually brings us back to reality.

So, a true escape of reality, a true experience of reality can only come through a living and through reality, right. So, it is not really a complete departure from reality at all; it becomes a very more complex engagement with reality, a complex engagement which takes us back and across time. Reality, temporality, corporeality they all come together to give you a sense of you know a very visceral engagement with time, a very visceral engagement with a now, the present; you know of course, this very famous line in Ulysses which happens some to someone between the novel in between in the middle of novel where you know the character, the Stephen Dedalus says, hold on to the now through which all future plunges into the past.

So, now is the capsule that you are holding, now is the capsule that you are sort of you know the only thing available to you so to speak as a human subject, as a sentient subject. And the sentience of the subject is dependent on how you hold the now through which all future plunges into the past. So, this plunging of future into the past becomes interesting and the body becomes a vehicle through which this flow of time takes place.

So, quite literally at the end of Ulysses we find Molly Bloom's body becomes a vehicle of temporality, which is also to say it becomes a vehicle of corporeality, the body

becomes obviously, is hyper-corporealized in quality. And the hyper-corporeal quality obviously, gives him a sense of transcendence through the body.

So, he talks about memory, he talks about remembering, he digs up things from the past and that bringing in all the memories from the past from Gibraltar different kinds of political locations, different geopolitical locations all comes in together to create this messy magnificent mutability with which the text assumes the status of the text of bliss with which the novel ends.

So, you know that makes *Ulysses* obviously, not just a modernist work of literature; but also quite postmodernist in terms of its aspiration towards the centerless-ness, right. And that aspiration towards centerless-ness, the desire for centerless-ness is a desire that can only occupy, that can only happen through the body. So, the foregrounding of the body, the foregrounding of corporeality is part of the aspiration towards the centerless-ness with which the novel ends.

And the language the linguistic register, the linguistic landscape in *Ulysses* quite quickly become centerless in quality at the end; where he moves away from the tyranny of syntax, the tyranny of rationality, the tyranny of reason and instead it aspires for the bliss, it aspires for the experience of bliss, right. And the experience of bliss is which is quite literally mentioned at the end, where you know Molly Bloom pulls Leopold Bloom in through this reverie in her body and then says yes and yes and yes.

So, again it is an affirmation of the body, it is an affirmation through the body and that affirmation also brings an idea an experience of liberation, an experience of emancipation which is part of the centerless-ness, which the novel ends up celebrating. So, on the one hand we find you know *Ulysses* being a very modernist – it is obviously, one of the cult modernist texts, it is one of the high-modernist texts, everyone talks about *Ulysses* as being the modernist novel, the one novel which cuts back and across time, which is full of epiphanies, which is full of streams of consciousness.

But equally it is a very very interesting post-modernist text as well; because the way it plays with temporality, the way it plays with syntax, the way it plays with language and the way it foregrounds the body as part of the narrative technique that becomes a very very postmodern thing. So, it is a very difficult novel to place in that sense. Stylistically I

consider it to be very very postmodern in quality – it is somewhere in this bridge between modernism and postmodernism.

And unlike let us say the *Wasteland* unlike Mrs. Dalloway the centerless-ness in *Ulysses* is not really mourned; there is no nostalgia for a more centered existence, which is a very modernist kind of a nostalgia. Instead we have this looking forward towards centerless-ness which becomes a desirable condition, it becomes a desirable state of being and the desirability of centerless-ness is what gives it, at least sentimentally speaking or affectively speaking a very post-modernist quality.

So, my argument, my concluding argument about this novel is the novel is situated historically obviously, at a time of high modernism 1922 that is when the big novels, the big works in modernism are being done into the second decade of twentieth century; 1925 is where Mrs. Dalloway is being written 1922 is also a year in which the *Wasteland* gets published and *Ulysses* comes in at the same time as well.

So, historically it is a very very modernist text; but stylistically it tends to anticipate much of postmodernism in terms of its linguistic technique, in terms of its semantic adventures and in terms of its semantic centerless-ness so to speak and how the corporeality is very much foregrounded within a text. So, the text becomes quite literally you know an embodied quality, an embodied function. So, the end of the text and the end of the bodily sensation of Molly Bloom are synchronous in quality, are simultaneous events.

So, the ending of *Ulysses* or the ending of Molly Bloom's quasi-orgasmic reverie are synchronous events. And the synchronicity is interesting, because that quite literally connects textuality and corporeality and it maps textuality onto corporeality and corporeality into textuality. So, the body becomes the text, the text becomes the body; which obviously, becomes a very very postmodernist way of looking at gender.

As well those of you interested in postmodernism would know that people like Judith Butler, people like you know Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Helen Cixous, so all the French novelists, the French feminists later, they talk about textualizing the body, textualizing the gender; and obviously, textualizing the gender entails a sense of centerless-ness with which *Ulysses* the great novel ends.

So, I hope you enjoyed reading *Ulysses* with me and this is a phenomenal text; obviously, we have not done justice to it fully, because we have done the selected sections of it. For the purpose of expediency we cannot do it line by line which is something I would have done in an ideal world; but it would require an entire course just on *Ulysses*. It is one of greatest achievements in the history of fiction, history of literature in my mind, in human history; not just in English language not just in modernist times.

But, also across history I think it is one of greatest novels perhaps it is the greatest novel ever written - it is definitely very very experimental, it is definitely very very aspirational, it is a very very ambitious project. And of course, some of you would know Joyce fan such as myself you know, James Joyce was once asked very sarcastically that you know; what did you do in the first world war, why did not you fight in the first world war to which he replied in a very Joycean way, Well during the First World War I wrote *Ulysses*, what did you do, right?

So obviously, that becomes a very interesting statement, because you know in one hand we have this war collapsing everything, collapsing everything we know about culture, civilization, architecture, town, cities, human relationships. On the other hand, we have this novel as a fantastic recreation of human relationships, a fantastic recreation of the architecture of Dublin; because as I mentioned in one of my earlier lectures on the novel that it is so realistic in quality as well, because if you I mean if you take a walk across Dublin and there are lots of *Ulysses* walks in Dublin.

The point that the time taken to go from point a to point b which happens in the in the novel is exactly the same time it will take you to go from point a to point b if you actually take a walk in real Dublin; it is that realistic in quality, it is that precise in quality in terms of realism. And despite that you know it is fiercely modernist in quality, it is fiercely experimental in quality and like I just mentioned, it ends with this invitation and celebration of centerless-ness which makes it one of the first postmodernist works in fiction as well.

So, I stop at this point today, I conclude with *Ulysses* with this point with this lecture and I hope you enjoyed reading it with me and do read it entirely if you can; it is a phenomenal treat to the human senses, to the human intellect and to the fictional loving

imagination. So, with that we bring to an end to Ulysses by James Joyce and move forward to new text in the subsequent lectures.

Thank you for your attention.