

Molly's Gifts

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Abstract

The article focuses on the concept of gift as unbelievable, unforeseeable emanation of Eros and focuses on Joyce's Penelope in an eternal give-and-take. It is precisely that situation of givenness which cannot be quantified that I am interested in, when no thing (nothing) is given, as the gifts of life, the gifts of names, the gifts of time are gifts of nothing.

Keywords: *gift, names, time, beauty, kiss*

The everyday act of giving, no matter that we offer a present to somebody on a certain occasion or we give our advice or we give our time to somebody does not escape the “idea of exchange, of circulation, of return.” [7, 6] There are always a donor and a donee and the one who receives the gift is indebted to the one who gives it. Derrida thinks that in this case the gift becomes impossible.

Taken out of this economic circle, “everything that is given to us in perception, in memory, in a phenomenological perception, is finally a gift to a finite creature, and it is finally a gift of God.” [4, 66] Therefore we cannot “know” the gift, and subsequently, we cannot think of what we cannot know.

Not knowing her own gifts, Molly Bloom, the feminine protagonist of Joyce's *Ulysses*, gives us the possibility to investigate her world when she is eventually given the time and the space to speak by Joyce, at the end of the novel. Here she weaves and unweaves her life, she constructs and deconstructs her lovers in order to kill them all in the end as a real Penelope.

Ellmann noted that Joyce himself said that

this episode had no art, but his book is consummated by the principle that art is nature's self. Molly, like Gerty MacDowell, like Bloom, like Stephen, has a touch of the artist about her, but that is because art is a natural process, which begins and ends with impure substance, and bids the dead to rise. There is sadness too, since Molly's present is so bleak in comparison with that lost paradise where, as Yeats said, all was ‘blossoming and dancing’. The sadness is muted, however. Time and space are, at least for an instant, mere ghosts beside eternity and infinity. [8, 173]

It is hard to dissociate Molly's gift of name from Molly's gift of time. The chapter is according to Joyce himself timeless, all the other chapters correspond to an hour, this is the only chapter which does not. Molly has no time, even if she tries hard to (« I remember shall I wear a white rose and I wanted to put on the old stupid clock to near the time »- 900). Should her house

be full of clocks, which is not the case, Molly would still have the very same problem, she never knows the time, therefore living in a continuous present.

Present/present in both English and French and *don/non/nom* (gift/ no/name) in Derrida's language are at play. For Jacques Derrida the gift is as impossible as the present; present is an instant of time squeezed between past and present:

But the one who gives it must not see it or know it either; otherwise he begins, at the threshold, as soon as he intends to give, to pay himself with a symbolic recognition, to praise himself, to approve of himself, to gratify himself, to congratulate himself, to give back to himself symbolically the value of what he thinks he has given or what he is preparing to give. The temporalization of time (memory, present, anticipation; retention, protention, imminence of the future; "ecstases," and so forth) always sets in motion the process of a destruction of the gift: through keeping, restitution, reproduction, the anticipatory expectation or apprehension that grasps or comprehends in advance. [7, 14]

At the same time, for Derrida,

the name seems produced, one time only, by an act without a past. There is no purer present, no generosity more inaugural. But a gift of nothing, of no thing, such a thing appropriates itself violently, harpoons, "arraigns" [*arraisonne*] what it seems to engender, penetrates and paralyzes with one stroke [*coup*] the recipient thus consecrated. Magnified, the recipient becomes somewhat the thing of the one who names or surnames him, above all if this is done with a name of a thing. [6, 6, column B]

The thing that lies beyond the name of the character is a plant that was supposed to cure men syphilis, as Joyce himself explained to Frank Budgen in 1920: "Molly is the gift of Hermes, god of public ways, and is the invisible influence (prayer, chance, agility, presence of mind, power of recuperation) which saves in case of accident." [3, 237]

A gift herself, Molly does not like the gift of her name, quite on the contrary, she hates "books with a Molly in them" (896), since she never liked Daniel Defoe's character: "the one from Flanders a whore always shoplifting anything she could cloth and stuff and yards" (896). In spite of this, Molly herself admits that in the past, at the Glenree dinner she would not have minded lifting the cutlery from the table: "those forks and fishslicers were hallmarked silver too I wish I had some I could easily have slipped a couple into my muff when I was playing with them." (888) Again, in spite of her dislike for fallen women and prostitutes, Molly waits for her lover to appear, is relieved when her daughter is no longer in the house so that the mother could consume her love affair with Boylan and more than very often, her mind takes her to sex from "Id like a new fellow every year"(901) to hoping to be raped by a sailor at night or telling Bloom of Boylan's much better performance in bed.

Molly's full name as a soprano is Marion Tweedy, a name which is far from being her favourite as she does not find it proper for an artist's calling card: "my mother whoever she was might have given me a nicer name the Lord knows after the lovely one she had Lunita Laredo" (904). At the same time, whenever Molly becomes Marion, her current affair with Blazes Boylan is always inferred.

The name behind Marion, that of Virgin Mary is the name that is practically close to Molly who is not only born on the eight of September like Virgin Mary, but who also has the cult of Virgin Mary. Being afraid of God, from time to time she asks Him to be merciful to her ("and said a Hail Mary like those awful thunderbolts"- 876), sings Gounod's *Ave Maria* (881-882), exclaims *O Maria Santissima* (883).

Joyce wrote a whole chapter containing lists of names (Cyclops), and he let Molly's intelligent counterpart (Stephen) comment on names:

He is nowhere: but an Edmund and a Richard are recorded in the works of sweet William

Mageeglinjohn: Names! What's in a name?

Best: That is my name, Richard, don't you know. I hope you are going to say a good word for Richard, don't you know, for my sake. (268)

To Stephen's bright comments on Shakespeare's names, Molly opposes her own list of names: she comments continuously, looking down on other women's names: "they had the devils queer names there father Vilaplana of Santa Maria that gave me the rosary Rosales y O'Reilly in the Calle las Siete Revueltas and Pisimbo and Mrs Opisso in Governor street O what a name Id go and drown myself in the first river if I had a name like her" (927) or names on which Molly has her own idiosyncratic conception, breaking any rule of etymology; thus she parses Stephen's Hellenic name as one of Spanish descent: "Dedalus I wonder its like those names in Gibraltar Delapaz Delagracia" (927). After all, the blooming name she was given by her husband is not that hard to digest for the equally blooming imagination of the character who thinks further:

I never thought that would be my name Bloom when I used to write it in print to see how it looked on a visiting card or practicing for the butcher and oblige M Bloom youre looking blooming Josie used to say after I married him well its better than Breen or Briggs does brig or those awful names with bottom in them Mrs Ramsbottom or some other kind of a bottom Mulvey I wouldn't go mad about either or suppose I divorced him Mrs Boylan (903).

For Molly only names can be nouns. Her theory on names does not stop at persons' names, but she continues from this ramp/rump association to give us names of streets "and all bits of streets Paradise ramp and Bedlam ramp and Rodgers ramp and Crutchetts ramps" (927) and as she considers that she is a "harumscarum", yet still young. She tries to deny the harumscarum theory by exercising a few phrases in her mother's tongue: "como esta usted muy bien gracias y usted see I haven't forgotten it all I thought I had only for the grammar a noun is the name of any person place or thing" (927-928) Indeed, Molly Bloom's twisting of the Shakespearean's question of "What's in a name?" and her theory on nouns/ names should be given a different entry in dictionaries.

Molly contemplates the possibility of giving up her name, and becoming Mrs. Boylan, yet at the end of the novel she returns with the same passion and emotion to her encounter with Bloom when he popped up the question and she said "yes". Molly's kisses in the last sentence of *Ulysses* are those impossible, unimaginable, unforeseeable, unbelievable gifts of the woman who constructs and deconstructs her own image an innumerable number of times, who hides herself in the novel and reappears in the end behind her fan that she twirls according to the "now you see me, now you don't" principle, asserting life by her numerous 'yesses' and 'nos', her 'ups' and 'downs', her 'heres' and 'theres', her 'ins' and 'outs', her laughs and moans, her continuous 'voglios e non vorrei':

how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes. (933)

Even if the Moorish wall is the place where she was with Mulvey, her lover before Bloom, in the end she puts under the Moorish wall Leopold who in fact had proposed to her among the rhododendrons on Howth head. For Jean-Michel Rabaté

this shows that she shares with Bloom an awareness of bearing a modified or borrowed name: the rather exotic names Virag¹ and Laredo² have managed to be tied up together in their flowering substitutes. After all, *bloom* is etymologically linked with *blow* in the basic sense of 'inflate, swell', which in its turn is close to *phallos*, a phallus which is described at the end of 'Lotus Eaters' as Bloom's 'languid floating flower.' [17, 108]

Having killed all her suitors past and future at the end of the novel like her Homeric counterpart, Molly will remain a Bloom and will return to the moment when she said 'yes' to him. Molly's gesture of returning to her initial gift of name from her husband is for Rabaté tantamount to letting her husband sign her text:

In a sense he [Bloom] signs Molly's text, dominating in imaginary world not by bringing into play the power of the conquering male, like Boylan, but by acting parasitically upon the flowers of her rhetoric through the bloom of his name: his name is diffracted and disseminated into a multiplicity of signifiers. [17, 109]

A woman's gift from God is beauty. She was made to help man and to be admired by man. Beauty and grace are givens from God. By God's Divine Grace, according to Saint Augustine, people can convert and are elected to go to heaven. Grace is the attribute of God with which Saint Augustine sees himself healed: "Is not thy hand, O Almighty God, able to heal all the diseases of my soul and, by thy more and more abundant grace, to quench even the lascivious motions of my sleep? Thou wilt increase thy gifts in me more and more, O Lord [...]" [2, Book 10, chap. XXX, 42]

That Molly was a beautiful woman and still is we hear not only from Bloom but from many other Dubliners³. Bloom recalls Molly's hair, eyes and lips as the main elements of her 'full' beauty:

Pillowed on my coat Pillowed on my coat she had her hair, earwigs in the heather scrub my hand under her nape, you'll toss me all. O wonder! Coolsoft with ointments her hand touched me, caressed: her eyes upon me did not turn away. Ravished over her I lay, full lips full open, kissed her mouth. Yum. Softly she gave me in my mouth the seedcake warm and chewed. Mawkish pulp her mouth had mumbled sweetsour of her spittle. Joy: I ate it: joy. Young life, her lips that gave me pouting. Soft warm sticky gumjelly lips. Flowers her eyes were, take me, willing eyes. (224)

Lesley Higgins noted that Molly's entrance into the novel brings the three signs of the fatal woman: hair, rocks, and musicality: she enters the text, so to speak, "lying back now, combing the strands of her hair, smiling, braiding, lying recumbent on a special bed that was

¹ *Virag* means *flower* in Hungarian and it was Leopold Bloom's father's name.

² Laredo is a town in the Northern Spanish province of Cantabria famous for the festivity in August entitled *la batalla de flores* (the battle of the flowers), during which large floats entirely covered with flowers and petals are paraded along the central streets.

³ I analyzed the tri-dimensional image of Molly in a previous article, *Molly Bloom's Deconstructed Image in 'Ulysses'*, published in *Buletinul Universitatii din Ploiesti*, see Bibliography

brought all the way from Gibraltar.” [19, 53] Young she no longer is, yet in spite of her age and generous forms, Molly appears in Bloom’s photo as a beautiful woman,

a large sized lady, with her fleshy charms on evidence in an open fashion, as she was in the full bloom of womanhood, in evening dress cut ostentatiously low for the occasion to give a liberal display of bosom, with more than vision of breasts, her full lips parted, and some perfect teeth, standing near, ostensibly with gravity, a piano, on the rest of which was *In Old Madrid*, a ballad, pretty in its way, which was then all the vogue. (758)

Bloom defines beauty by ‘curves’ when visiting the National Museum when he wishes to view statues, especially Galatea, the one who was created with a kiss:

His downcast eyes followed the silent veining of the oaken slab. Beauty: it curves, curves are beauty. Shapely goddesses, Venus, Juno: curves the world admires. Can see them library museum standing in the round hall, naked goddesses. Aids to digestion. (224)

There is no better word than ‘curves’ to define Molly’s body, thing reconfirmed by Bloom in ‘Wandering Rocks’ when he buys the book for his wife entitled *Sweets of Sin*. The protagonist of this book is nameless in the fragments Bloom reads at random; all we hear about her is that she has “opulent curves inside her deshabilité”, and displays “her queenly shoulders and heaving embonpoint” and “perfect lips” (303). Opulent curves, queenly shoulders and heaving embonpoint are generous forms which may make us think of a different meaning of the word *grace*, grace seen as fleshy opulence and beauty, reminding us of Rubens’s paintings. As God spreads his Divine grace with generosity (“Is not thy hand, O Almighty God, able to heal all the diseases of my soul and, by thy more and more abundant grace, to quench even the lascivious motions of my sleep?” [2, Book 10, chap. XXX, 42]), so does Molly spread her gifts of beauty and abundance to the ones who are ready to take them, as Lenehan explains to M’Coy:

She was well primed with a good load of Delahunt’s port under her bellyband. Every jolt the bloody car gave I had her bumping up against me. Hell’s delights! She has a fine pair, God bless her. Like that. He held his caved hands a cubit from him, frowning: -I was tucking the rug under her and settling her boa all the time. Know what I mean? His hands moulded ample curves of air. He shut his eyes tight in delight, his body shrinking, and blew a sweet chirp from his lips. (301)

Quite interestingly Lenehan mixes “Hell’s delights” with “God’s blesses” in order to portray the beauty of Molly. He is not a painter like Rubens, so he paints her beauty in words and gestures. A beauty which Molly herself is so much aware of that she knows how to emphasize it: “I gave my eyes that look with my hair a bit loose from the tumbling and my tongue between my lips up to him” (894), as we find out from her that her father’s friend, Gardner described her as a sexual bomb: “Gardner said no man could look at my mouth and teeth smiling like that and not think of it” (905)

In spite of the marital problems with Bloom, in spite of the fact that she lost her son eleven years ago, Molly still has hope and her final ‘yes’, the last word of the novel is only a possible gift of a new life.

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Darurile lui Molly

Rezumat

Articolul se concentrează pe conceptul de dar ca emanație a erosului, luând în discuție protagonistă lui Joyce din romanul 'Ulise', Molly Bloom în eternul ei exercițiu de a da/ a lua. M-am ocupat în prezentul articol de acele situații care nu pot fi cuantificate în termeni economici, când practic nici un lucru real (nimic) nu se oferă, adică darul vieții, darul numelui, darul timpului.