

MOLLY BLOOM : THE INTERNAL CONSTRUCTION OF A CHARACTER WITH MULTIPLE VALENCES

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The complexity of the literary genome of Joyce's work has constantly demanded the attention of literary critics, involved in actions to identify the artistic resources that formed the basis of the creation of one of the most powerful voices of twentieth-century literature. The critical work of Mircea Mihăieș, *O noapte cu Molly Bloom. Romanul unei femei*, enhances the touches of a female character whose internal construction offers the living image of the human being, who embodies a new way of interpreting the social sphere.

With a definite construction along fourteen chapters, the work of the exegete reconstructs the image of Molly Bloom, a character from the novel *Ulysses*, which depicts an individual force, able to reconfigure the textual matrix. This structure in which multiple angles are embedded, becomes not only a particular mark of the critique made by Mircea Mihăieș but also of the way in which the Joycean character is depicted, like a mirror where distinct touches of reality converge to define a singular female image. Moving from a child to a teenager and later, to a married woman, Molly will appear to the readers as an exotic entity, dominated by the force of consciousness from which will emerge a whole series of hypostases and inner departures. Although her voice can be found in the hybrid form of a monologue, without having a pure construction like the one found in an open conversational act, the presence of this woman incites every man's mind from the Irish epic. The construction of each chapter in Mircea Mihăieș's work is designed to reveal a new facet under which the image of Molly Bloom's femininity is transposed at the narrative level, the critical act slipping between symbolic representations, linguistic innovations, and social morals to define this book which has the role "to understand the way a woman's mind works" (Mihăieș, 2019 : 9).

Placed under the modernist impulses of remodeling, Joyce's novel transposes the elements of the Homeric *Odyssey*, and, implicitly, the nature of the characters, into an unfolding narrative that loses the solemnity of the ancient text, the high qualities being

now derided. The individuality of the female character created by Joyce derives precisely from the impressive force of the monologue she initiates ; a space in which seemingly volatile sequences intersect and allow the character a self-identification. Mircea Mihăieș finds in this capacity to encapsulate a succession of images and sounds a distinctive mark for Molly Bloom, because, as the critic emphasizes, the character initiates the transmission of messages in a sound form, placing her consciousness in a semi-asleep state. The critic speaks in this context of an impressive capacity to reconfigure the literary material as a product of the transposition of these individual forms of perception, in which the auditory and visual senses are replaced by the imagination that allows the “connection of the reader with her *mind*. Or more precisely, with the *voice* of the character’s *mind*.” (Mihăieș, 2019 : 16). It has often been argued that the origin of the internal construction of Molly’s specific stream of consciousness was the correspondence between Joyce and his wife, Nora Barnacle, whose form of writing appeared to have a “direct, disarticulated, disregarded grammatical style, interested only to communicate, in an uninterrupted flow, what she wanted to communicate” (Mihăieș, 2019 : 11)

This new linguistic reality of a hybrid textual pattern, of visual-sound type, allows a probing of the levels under which Molly’s subconscious operates, in which conscious and unconscious thoughts are subject to personal expressiveness. The mixture of distinctive elements and the constant combination of deep structures with the surface ones that are generated by this chaotic construction, without punctuation, the deficient syntax, or the insertions of physiological or psychological elements become representative marks of the stream of consciousness. This structure that seems to be subject to collapse becomes precisely a form of active involvement of the reader in the act of reading. The construction of the character in a form dispersed between notations and glimpses of memory determines a correlation of all textual notations to outline a full, complete image of a feminine perspective. Her inclination towards language marks make up the personal, intimate universe, being a form through which it can define her internal universe, allowing the identification of a new language, with feminine relaxation, created to serve the female model imposed by modernizing society.

Unlike the community where she lives, Molly Bloom starts to move away from the patriarchal regime, where the social mechanism is rudimentary, a closed world where people accept their faith, without looking for answers. The flow of the character’s consciousness presents us a first prototype of the liberated woman, an authoritative being, dominated by initiatives that accept her thoughts and expose them consciously. Although limited in terms of social behavior, Molly does not remain passive, and transposes mentally a whole series of elements that lead to an independent state of femininity in relation to the levels of a world in which the male has the dominant force. The appearance in James Joyce’s work of a character with the impressive force that Molly Bloom projects on a textual level will not be a simple element, towards which the critic Mircea Mihăieș shows a passive attitude, but will materialize in a vein that undergoes an interpretive analysis, in which sequences from the biography of the Irish writer will be intertwined with the archaic space of Celtic mythology. Situated at the confluence of mythological references whose features are subject to compositional metamorphoses, Molly retains this dual structure, in which divine nature takes over the image of Irish prehistoric “uninhibited warrior women, for whom sexual activity was a natural way of living and expressing themselves”(Mihăieș, 2019 : 46) and intersects this image with the human behavior specific to Nora Barnacle-Joyce, against whom the Irish writer continued to maintain the memory of an uninhibited

erotic instinctually and the one of a supposed “pseudo-infidelity”. The biography of the character itself maintains this exotic personal history, in which the Jewish origin combines with the Gypsy and Irish ones, crossing various cultural spaces, from the sunny area of Gibraltar to the cold and gloomy Dublin.

Endowed with a special voluptuousness, the character slips towards its definition as a promoter of an Eros mask, an original force and a presence that wants to annihilate the art of modesty generated by social conduct, because, surprisingly, the obscene and erotic give a specific dimension to humankind. Deeply unfaithful in thought, but quite faithful in actions, Molly does not show an amplitude of the recurring element that gives her this image of moral decay identified in the so-called love affairs. The extramarital actions seem just simple projections in the female imagination, a fact supported by the clear lack of evidence that can denote adulterous acts, the introspections that Molly makes in her own memory being inconclusive regarding her behavioral slippage. The only name whose existence can be confirmed is the one present at the end of the list, Hugh E. (Blazes) Bayron, “whose sexual performance is amply documented by the most credible of witnesses : Molly Bloom herself” (Mihăieș, 2019 : 106). And, if the perspective from which the construction of the female image is presented can determine the moral decay, Leopold Bloom’s image does not lose the touches of a disarticulated, opaque, often ridiculous character, focused on primary needs related to the food register, thus eliminating any possible connection with the heroic correspondent. One of the qualities of Joyce’s writing arises precisely from the way in which it allows the perspective between the two characters of the Bloom couple to slide. Although they seem, at first, to provide information about the female part, they invoke, in fact, a definition of Leopold’s character. In this way can be interpreted one of the first sequences that bring together the two characters, in which the husband’s introspective gaze indicates that Molly is the product of a cultural model based on reading and bending to literature. Poldy’s penetration into the perimeter of the bedroom determines the identification of the most unexpected object, a book. Thus, the image of the sensual woman, built to seduce, is joined by that of a cultural standard. But this is a false representation of high literary values, as Molly indulges in the low category of decadent love letters, while Leopold prefers the prose of *Titbits*. This bookish side that is offered of the two characters marks the needs they feel, their senses being dominated by carnal passion. Perhaps it is a coincidence that the pronunciation of the word *metempsychosis* will generate so much denial in the mind of the female character, because its appearance inevitably refers to the primordial state, to that Homeric pair and to the perpetual repetition of the myth, but presented now in a degrading form. As Mihăieș points out, Molly has the necessary resources to generate the elements of a portrait marked by power and seduction, but which is meant to exist “not in the known geography, but in the twisted empire of a subconscious made up of dreams, desires, and confessions almost impossible to accept” (Mihăieș, 2019 : 154).

In the fifth chapter of his work, the attention of the literary critic returns to the linguistic level of the monologue given by Molly Bloom from which he extracts the relationship that is established between the level of lexical constructions and the one of the corporeality manifestations. The small domestic universes recompose the image of a sexuality that seems to have become the exclusive prerogative of emotional and sentimental forces, but which descends to an exclusively erotic slope that allows the character a form of self-identification from which emerges that dual appearance of Molly : “She is also herself and different : temperamental and melancholic, resigned and revolted,

contemptuous and delicate, cynical and forgiving, attracted equally by the life's brutality and romance”(Mihăieș, 2019 : 156). This inner force with which the female imago is endowed marks a division of the domestic universe to which she is limited, nourishing, like the characters of the Homeric epic, a path to liberation from the straps of a domestic status, imposed by the femininity condition. At the nocturnal level, the two female characters evoke the necessary plan to escape, which is constantly marked by the gestures' feverishness, manifested by the loosening of the veil, specific to Penelope, and the annihilation of any form of punctuation in Molly's case. Regarding the Joycean character, Mihăieș mentions a form of writing that indicates the *reverse of disintegration*, which gives the literary material expressiveness, that internal force enhancing the shades of the alert tone. This flow of thought is doubled by a careful involvement of *body language* as a primary form of expression. As the textual level shows, Molly does not reveal herself, but gives the opportunity to be discovered, the maintenance of a controlled mimicry and gesture indicating the extent to which she has assumed the role she was given to play.

Possessing an impressive ability to transfigure herself into multiple feminine poses, Molly Bloom goes from the status of “young lover, happy wife, disappointed wife, frustrated woman » to finally the one of “resentful matron” (Mihăieș, 2019 : 301). These positions are generated by the presence of her husband, who continues to give the false impression that she has no details about his secret life. The investigation of Poldy's actions comes not as a confirmation of some primary forms of jealousy, but as a continuation of maintaining absolute power over the matrimonial territory she already masters, because the nature of the female character she embodies intuitively the fine lines that the supremacy can offer : identifying and dominating male weaknesses that oscillate between erotic fulfillment and the calm of neuroses.

James Joyce shows through the multiple images of his female character his conceptions regarding femininity and the erotic side attached to it. Internally, Molly remains an open character, in which prejudices and social limitations are points she seeks to annihilate and to allow the subconscious to generate feelings and thoughts outside of censorship. Thus, as Mircea Mihăieș says, Molly's monologue can be seen as “a search for her body language” (Mihăieș, 2019 : 446), defining herself as a dialogue between corporality and society. This perspective of analysis touches the image of the female character as a human being, whose construction allows the slide towards cultural references, literary games, and the specific elements of the unconscious. The analysis model proposed by Mircea Mihăieș reveals the existing subtext of the Irish writer's novel, which he probes on different levels of interpretation, allowing the reader multiple possibilities to understand and integrate the imagination generated by the female image created by James Joyce.

Mircea MIHĂIEȘ, (2019),
O noapte cu Molly Bloom. Romanul unei femei,
Iași, Polirom, 508 p.