Sexual Desire: A Picassoresque Reading of “Penelope” in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*

Li-ping Chang*　Cheng Kao

Department of Applied Foreign Languages, Nanya Institute of Technology

Abstract

The desired pursuit of the female nude is usually posed as an artist’s model. Conventionally, the female nude is always regarded as the object of the gaze. Women are looked and enjoyed by men. Women are sexual objects under male gaze and traditional authority. Traditionally, women’s existence is structured by male framework. Even though Molly in “Penelope” has ability to look at the observers in return like the nude in Picasso’s and Trutat’s painting, she is still constructed within the politics of desire under the patriarchal society. Therefore, Molly is not completely emancipated from the male gaze, which has established a basic power under the patriarchal authority and traditional narrative. This paper aims to employ a Picassoresque reading to analyze “Penelope” which not only manifests the ambiguous relationship between a cavalier/Boylan, nude/Molly, horse/Bloom, old procurer/Joyce, bearded old man/ readers but also reveals the sexual desire.

Key words: sexual desire, gaze, subject/object

性之慾：以畢卡索繪畫觀視喬伊斯《尤里西斯》之「潘娜洛普」

張麗萍* 高正

南亞技術學院應用外語系

摘要

藝術家通常視裸女為其性慾之對象，傳統而言，女性受到男性的觀看及享用，並且成為男性凝視之性對象；同樣地，女性亦僅能於男性所建構之社會中生存。在「潘娜洛普」中，女主角莫莉的反叛與縱慾，企圖解放自我，雖有回看男性凝視之能力，終究無法跳脫男性所建構之慾望政治版圖。本論文旨在運用畢卡索之繪畫，對照探究繪畫及文本，不但觀視「潘娜洛普」中騎士/伯倫、裸女/莫莉、馬/布倫、皮條客/喬伊斯、蓄鬍老人/讀者之間的關係，並解析「潘娜洛普」中所透露錯綜複雜的性之慾望。

關鍵字：性之慾望、凝視、主體/客體

Sexual desire prevails in “Penelope” through Molly’s monologue. The sexual desire concerns male/female desire i.e. Bloom, Boylan, Molly’s lovers, and the writer James Joyce/Molly. Most of Molly’s actions are associated directly or indirectly with sex, and non-sexual activities are scarcely mentioned. Through Molly’s description, we can perceive that the relationships about Bloom-Molly-Boylan triangle love affair, Molly and her lovers. Molly and Joyce are also closely related to the issue of sexual desire. Picasso’s painting (*#191 Suite 347*) can explain the relationship very clearly not only in gaze perspective but also in psychic, cultural, and social analysis. The desire object can never fully account for the drive itself; according to the psychoanalytic model of desire derived from Freud and restated by Jacques Lacan, “desire is the desire for desire” (*Ways of Seeing* 164). Continual deferral and the impossibility of closure are built into the very mechanism of desire, which is predicated on a psychic lack that cannot be fulfilled just like Picasso’s opinion that the desire will go on and on.

Figure 2
#191 Suite 347
1st state, 1968

The desired pursuit of the female nude is usually posed as an artist’s model. Conventionally, the female nude is always regarded as the object of the gaze. A case in point: in the first state of an aquatint print from *Suite 347*, made on the 26th of June,

1968 by Picasso, we see a cavalier ride a horse in the scene; a nude woman wait as if to greet him or seduce him with her eyes, sit with legs boldly spread apart and arms put overhead in a pose that leaves little to the imagination. The hooded form of an old procuress is centered in the background, as if a matchmaker to close the gap between man and woman . With her hag-like features, she makes a sharp contrast to the beautiful, young nude on the right. The aged Picasso, with erotic desire, just like the old procuress and the cavalier, enjoys looking at the nude and consuming her. Comparatively speaking, the writer James Joyce is like the painter Picasso, the cavalier as Boylan, the nude as Molly. The artist Joyce delineates Molly’s body and sexual desire through writing, simultaneously; he, like the procuress, observes the relationship between Molly and Boylan. Through depicting Molly’s beautiful body, the artist Joyce experiences a passionate sexual relationship. In addition, if we personalize the horse ridden by the cavalier, Bloom is like the horse itself. Like the horse, Bloom is also looking at Molly. Their triangle relationship is obviously described in the suite and the suite also represents its politics, in other words, the political implication.

Figure 3

In the second state, Picasso makes some drypoint additions, and now what was

transformed and secret comes clearly out into the open: the vector lines close the gap between man and woman as their gazes cross and lock onto their respective targets. But their gazes are not the only ones to get caught in the crossfire. In particular, the face of an old bearded man as a voyeur now looks on from the background, one eyes opened extra wide to take in the scene. In a sense, the old bearded man casts a somewhat jealous look toward the direction of the cavalier, the play of looks extends far. Little does the cavalier know that as he ogles the body of the young woman, he is being looked at in return, his gaze cut askew by the old man's evil eye. But he is not the only one who unsuspectingly becomes the object of another's gaze. When we turn to the old procuress, we find her look a bit more unsettling this time around. Meanwhile, when we the audience look forward, and we see ourselves being looked at back from the old procuress. In fact, the old bearded man is like us, the readers. We not only appreciate Molly's body but also observe the relationship between Molly and Joyce, and Bloom-Molly-Boylan through Joyce's artistic hands. Moreover, Boylan, like the cavalier, eyes the woman as Molly who also looks at him in return. Bloom, like the horse itself, is forced to be ridden by Boylan and is unable to resist against Molly's adultery. Joyce eyes on Molly-Boylan relationship. We, the readers, like the old bearded man, look at Joyce who is looking at Molly-Bloom-Boylan simultaneously. We both look on and are looked at; we are not all-seeing, and that, as a matter of fact, is what we come to see – our blind spots, or the limits on the horizon of vision itself. We can only look at one point, but we will be looked at from all sides.

Traditionally, women are looked and enjoyed by men. Women are sexual objects under male gaze and traditional authority. Women's existence is structured by male framework. John Berger explicates women's presence displaying in male gaze. He states:

> A woman's presence expresses her own attitude to herself, and defines what can and cannot be done to her. Her presence is manifest in her gestures, voice, opinions, expressions, clothes,

> chosen surroundings, taste –indeed there is nothing she can do which does not contribute to her presence. Presence for a woman is so intrinsic to her person that men tend to think of it as an almost physical emanation, a kind of heat or smell or aura. (46)

Traditional looking act is dominated by man. Men look at women and simultaneously “women watch themselves being looked at” (Berger 47). Women become objects and surveyed by male gaze. Like Trutat’s painting, Molly is like the nude who regards herself as a beauty with beautiful body and uses her fascinating eyes looking at the audiences directly. The man outside the window is like one of Molly’s lovers. Through looking at her body to consume her, in fact, Molly is satisfied with being looked by her lovers. The female body exhibits itself and shows the female desire to have sex through looking. The man outside the window symbolizes various men who take turns looking at Molly. Similarly, we also look at Molly through Molly’s monologue. We can watch the man outside the window looking at Molly’s body. Molly is vivid in front of us and she also looks at us in return just like the nude in Trutat’s painting. Female body here becomes a consuming object for sexual desire. Men can buy the painting to satisfy their desire by looking or stimulating to have masturbation which can make their sexual desire fulfilled. Simultaneously, Molly, like the nude, intends to be enjoyed consuming. If men have money, then they can take the

painting home to satisfy their desire. In some sense, Molly is like a whore becoming the male sexual desire and object. Boylan with much money can take Molly home to consume her with real sexual action. Buyers with much money can take Molly home to consume her with imaginative sexual action.

Molly is a narcissist. She is concerned about her body including her figure, her skin, and her hair. When she was a girl, she liked to look at her own body especially in her breasts. Breasts are the most attractive feature of Molly's sexuality to people other than herself, so "bosom is important to her" (Unkeless 159). Molly tries her best to cultivate her breasts for firmness and fatness for getting man's sexual desire and attraction. She intends to catch everyone's eye. Molly's monologue shows her fantasy with her own body and desire. She muses:

> Yes I think he made a bit firmer sucking them like that so long he made me thirsty titties he calls them I had to laugh yes this one anyhow stiff the nipple gets for the least thing I'll get him to keep that up and I'll take those eggs beaten up with marsala fatten them out for him what are all those veins and things curious the way it's made two the same in case of twins they're supposed to represent beauty placed up there like those statues in the museum one of them pretending to hide it with her hand are they so beautiful of course. (661)

Breasts are an important asset with men, as shown in classical art. Molly as muse gives inspiration to Joyce to write her unique monologue. In other words, she fertilizes the artist Joyce's imagination. According to Lacan's gaze perspective, "the clothes we wear and the things we arrange around us can function as our construction of the benevolent gaze of the Other who can 'see' that we are in fact can only imagine ourselves to be" (Leonard 201). Molly loves to look her own beautiful body and hopes to be looked by men, so she also dresses herself deliberately. She intends to make herself up like a queen and spends much time beautifying herself. Molly's clothes reflect her

characteristics. Her clothes indicate "deficient intellectual capacity, excessive sexuality, narcissism, bourgeois values, interest in appearance as a semi-professional performer, or enactment of an engendered role which requires the veiling of unencoded desires" (Harper 238).

Molly is in conventional confinement to stimulate man's sexual desire, meanwhile; she becomes man's sexual object. However, Molly is also a new woman. Molly is "an active agent [and] she asserts her own view, turns Bloom, Boylan, and other Irishmen into objects of her gaze, directs the course of her thoughts" (Pearce 47). Molly is amoral, unconscious, and libidinous. In traditional painting, women are looked at by men, but they fear to look back at men. Molly has ability to look at men in return, even she wants to have dominating power like men controlling the relationship between man and woman. She thinks that men can experience more enjoyment than women during the intercourse. Ironically, she, with new woman thoughts, is still limited in the conventional feminine conception. She doesn't think that women can get more satisfaction with their female body and feelings.

Molly's sexuality is a driving force in her life. She is a bawdy, sexually alive, uneducated woman intent on her own pleasure but appreciative of her husband's qualities. In terms of Ziarek's view, female desire presents in two spaces including "the public and cultural space" and "the private and natural space" (265). Molly's former desire is associated with Boylan indicating her infidelity and marital breakdown; and the latter one is related to Bloom showing her faithfulness and marital union. Her infidelity indicates her dissatisfaction with Bloom physically, despite "Bloom's intellectual victory over Boylan" (Wright 102). Moreover, infidelity indicates Molly's freedom and escape from marriage with Bloom. Significantly, her unfaithful female desire not only symbolizes the marital breakdown, but also displays "the threatening effects of technology in terms of nonsatisfaction, privation, and finally, death" in material life (Ziarek 266).

Berger points out that "a man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power

which he embodies" and the promised power includes "moral, physical, temperamental, economic, social, sexual" respects (45). Boylan has physical, economic, social and sexual power which fascinates Molly very much. For instance, Molly can be satisfied with Boylan's enormous penis. Her life is void and needs to be filled up. Molly fills up her emptiness through sexuality. In addition, Boylan has much money and she can buy various clothes for herself. Furthermore, Molly can consummate "her first extramarital affair as if she has lost something she longs for" (Mcmichael 186). Boylan represents the presence, similarly; he reflects Molly's consciousness. On the contrary, Bloom symbolizes the absence which Molly desires for and fears to face, meanwhile; he signalizes Molly's unconsciousness. Molly's adultery makes her feel tormented and ambivalent. She, on the one hand, enjoys her extramarital experience, and on the other, she thinks that she feels guilty over her adultery.

> I felt lovely and tired myself and fell asleep as sound as a top the moment I popped straight into bed till that thunder woke me up God be merciful to us I thought the heavens were coming down about us to punish us when I blessed myself and said a Hail Mary like those awful thunderbolts in Gibraltar as if the world was coming to an end. (*Ulysses* 650)

Molly thinks that "adultery is permissible –almost natural—but she feels guilty about committing the 'sin'" (Unkeless 156). Molly wants to free from the limitation under the traditional perspective. She hopes to be a new free woman to look for real emancipation. Simultaneously, she still thinks to have proper behavior based on the conventions in society. She is walking between the new and the old values and trapped within two different rules.

Accordingly, Molly's sexual desire has "both a liberating force and a severely limiting quality, especially in the confines of her culture" (Scott 168). What Molly has woven by day is an affair with Boylan, but her reverie in bed reaffirms her commitment to Bloom. Her spontaneous, sexual, and lyrical voice posits her as an artist who weaves

a pattern of her satisfactions and passion, her frustrations and dislikes, into an affirmation of her position on earth as human being who is entitled by her existence to pleasure and satisfaction. Physically, Molly enjoys keeping relationship with Boylan and gets her sexual desire fulfilled. By having Boylan as her sex partner, she is unfaithful to her husband Bloom. Spiritually, however, Molly still relies on Bloom and faithful to him. She is ambivalent. When she steps out to search for her sexual satisfaction, she keeps Bloom in mind. Thus, her physical body is going out again and again. Similarly, her spiritual soul keeps returning and returning to Bloom. She is in-between-ness. She is on the road between departure and return. When Molly’s consciousness flows to her memory of Bloom’s proposal in the end of “Penelope” mirrors faithfully his fantasy of her body.

> O and the sea the sea crimson sometimes like fire and the glorious sunsets and the fig trees in the Alameda Gardens yes and all the queer little streets and the pink and blue and yellow houses and the rose gardens and the jessamine and geraniums and cactuses and Gibraltar as a girl where I was a Flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used *or shall I wear a red* yes and 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 breast all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will yes. (689-690)

Molly has inner and spiritual need for Bloom, even she is in-between-ness in her step.

Bloom is ambivalent like Molly. Bloom’s desire for Molly is what he wants to remember and forget. He cherishes their wonderful old days physically and spiritually. Paradoxically, he intends to erase the past experience, too. Psychologically, he has

trauma after losing her son Rudy. He fears to re-experience the similar pain about "Rudy's conception, birth, and death," so he avoids to have carnal intercourse with Molly though he loves her (McMichael 174). Fearing the history which will repeat itself, Bloom continues the marriage with Molly without sex. He becomes an impotent person who has no ability to keep his marriage warm. Thus, he is a cuckold, but he will not expose Boylan's affair with Molly. He fears to have complete carnal intercourse with Molly which may bring another child for them. On the one hand, he wants to push Boylan out of their marriage and mend the broken net of marriage. On the other hand, he silently allows Boylan to have sex with his wife that he can free from the fear to have a child. He is ambivalent and actionless to his marriage.

Boylan is active to have carnal intercourse with Molly. He can get physical fulfillment through his enormous penis. He has arranged "sexual as well as choral engagements" (Scott 162). Music is closely related to sex. Molly through singing envisions herself on stage. Singing can inspire men's imagination and arouse men's desire. Singing with Boylan seems to be a way of making love with him. The way of lovemaking is just like Bloom's getting *jouissance* through eating envisioned clearly in "Lestrigonians." Bloom's sexual desire incarnates in eating. Through eating, Bloom gets his metaphorical sexual fulfillment. By contrast, Molly's desires are multiple, arising from "multiple erogenous sites on the woman's body" (Pearce 47). Boylan has physical power and his sexual desire focuses on sight and then his enormous penis through which he can have great satisfaction. Through singing, he can metaphorically make love with Molly.

Since our pleasure in looking depends on the subject and the object. Women are still looked at and regarded as the sexual object by men. Even though Molly has ability to look the observers in return like the nude in Picasso's and Trutat's painting, she is still constructed within the politics of desire under the patriarchal society. Therefore, Molly is not completely emancipated from the male gaze, which has established a basic power under the patriarchal authority and traditional narrative. Molly dresses to please and

puts herself as a performer in her own productions of pleasure. Molly, like the nude painted by Trutat, presents the sexual object embodied in the painting itself to be a display of materials, fashions, and commodities for public consumption by the audience gaze. The act of sex is mixed in a commodity culture which becomes the act of consumption. The outer desire can invoke the inner desire through the concept of consumption. In cultural and social perspective, Bloom-Molly-Boylan triangle affair also represents the modern paralyzed marriage. Psychologically, Molly and Bloom are ambivalent, especially Molly is in-between-ness. However, in the end of “Penelope,” it seems to represent that the possibility of marital union between Molly and Bloom spiritually and physically. By gaze perspective, the Picassoresque reading to analyze “Penelope” not only manifests the ambiguous relationship between a cavalier/Boylan, nude/Molly, horse/Bloom, old procurer/Joyce, bearded old man/ readers but also reveals the sexual desire.

Works Cited

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: British Broadcasting Co. and Penguin Books. 1972.

Harper, Margaret Mills. “’Taken in Drapery’: Dressing the Narrative in the *Odyssey* and ‘Penelope’.” *Molly Blooms: A Polylogue on “Penelope” and Cultural Studies* Ed. Ricahrd Pearce. Madison: Wisconsin UP, 237-57 . 1994.

Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. London: Egoist Press. 1922.

Lemaire, Anika. *Jacques Lacan*. Trans. D. Macey. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982.

Leonard, Garry. “Molly Bloom’s ‘Lifestyle’: The Perfomative as Normative.” *Molly Blooms: A Polylogue on “Penelope” and Cultural Studies*. Ed. Ricahrd Pearce. . Madison: Wisconsin UP, 196-232. 1994.

McMichael, James. *Ulysses and Justice*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1991.

Pearce, Richard. “How does Molly Bloom Look Through the Male Gaze.” *Molly Blooms: A Polylogue on “Penelope” and Cultural Studies*. Ed. Ricahrd Pearce. Madison: Wisconsin UP, 40-57. 1994.

Scott, Bonnie Kime. *Joyce and Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984.

Unkeless, Elaine. “The Conventional Molly.” *Women in Joyce*. New York: The Harvester Press, 150-168. 1987.

Wright, David G. *Characters of Joyce*. Totowa, New Jersey: Gill and Macmillan. 1983.

Ziarek, Ewa. “The Female Body, Technology, and Memory in ‘Penelope’.” *Molly Blooms: A Polylogue on “Penelope” and Cultural Studies* Ed. Ricahrd Pearce. . Madison: Wisconsin UP, 264-82. 1994.