

## **The Gift that Always Reaches Its Destination?: The Economy of Gift in *Ulysses***

Tsung-huei Huang 黃宗慧

Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, NTU

### **ABSTRACT**

---

The motif of generosity appears at various points in James Joyce's "The Dead" but is not dealt with in a laudatory way. The main character Gabriel Conroy not only seeks to seduce his wife by a deceptive tale of generosity but tips the maid a gift of gold to patronize her after she frustrates his efforts to charm. Instead of celebrating generosity, Joyce thus seems to poke fun at such a concept by laying bare the circular structure of the gift. The path of giving-in-order-to-get-back indicated in "The Dead," to a certain extent, substantiates Jacques Derrida's comments on gifts: the simple intention to give suffices to annul the very concept of the gift, for the donor's intention "to pay himself with symbolic recognition, to praise himself, to approve of himself, to gratify himself" has already defied the spirit of the gift, which is displayed in giving with no strings attached.

Though Joyce appears skeptical about Gabriel's generosity, in *Ulysses*, however, he characterizes Leopold Bloom as one who generously offers gifts to the needy. While the gift is "the impossible" for Derrida as it always returns something to the donor rather than reaches the donee in a unilateral way, does Joyce's gift economy come down to the same thing? To put it another way, if the circular structure of economy necessitates the return of the gift to its donor, in Joyce's text, does the gift always reach this destination and thus nullify itself? Taking as a point of departure Gabriel's gold coin that is given to return to himself, this paper will seek to explore the gift economy in *Ulysses* and reconsider the concepts of calculation and generosity. Instead of using Joyce's text to demonstrate the cogency of Derrida's deconstruction, this paper draws on various theories of the gift postulated by Lewis Hyde, Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Lacan, etc., to probe into the gift economy in *Ulysses*.

As I find in Bloom's acts of giving the calculative dimension as well as the spirit of generosity, I argue that Joyce has not dismissed reciprocity altogether by comparing

gift-giving to spiritual usury. Though gift-giving inevitably appears calculated, it is not tantamount to usurious calculation of advantage. It is because the act of giving is always invested with the donor's desire that gifts can hardly be exempt from calculation. Reducing the differences between calculation and generosity, I want to question the polarization between economic exchange and pure charity without thereby conflating them as completely homogeneous. Further, interpreting Bloom's acts of giving from a Lacanian perspective, I contend that Bloom is not unaware of the pitfall of imaginary captivation inherent in giving. Through the depiction of Bloom's gift-giving, Joyce's *Ulysses* provides more profound insights into the structure of gift economy without simply negating the concept of generosity.

---



臺灣大學學術  
期刊資料庫

## I. Prelude: The Gift that Always Returns to Gabriel Conroy

Now the gift, *if there is any*, would no doubt be related to economy. One cannot treat the gift, this goes without saying, without treating this relation to economy, even to the money economy. But is not the gift, if there is any, also that which interrupts economy? That which, in suspending economic calculation, no longer gives rise to exchange? That which opens the circle so as to defy reciprocity or symmetry, the common measure, and so as to turn aside the return in view of the no-return? If there is gift, the *given* of the gift must not come back to the giving. It must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift, by the process of exchange, by the movement of circulation of the circle in the form of return to the point of departure. If the figure of the circle is essential to economics, the gift must remain *aneconomic*. [. . .] It is perhaps in this sense that the gift is the impossible.

—Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I, Counterfeit Money*

In James Joyce's "The Dead," the axis around which Gabriel Conroy's after-dinner speech turns is the hospitality of the hostesses; in Gabriel's words, "the Three Graces of the Dublin musical world" exemplify "the tradition of genuine warm-hearted courteous Irish hospitality" (43-44). But the real reason for this annual party, as Daniel R. Schwarz points out, is that "it is a way for his aunts, Julia and Kate, and their niece, Mary Jane, to advertise their music school" (107). The hospitality Gabriel celebrates in his speech is thus tainted by this ulterior motive. In fact, even though the motif of generosity appears at various points in "The Dead," it is seldom dealt with in a laudatory way. The attitude toward hospitality invoked by Gabriel's speech, as Vincent P. Pecora states, is "nothing more than the codified expression of the myth of self-sacrifice, of grateful expression, lying at the heart of Joyce's Dublin" (243). As for the compliment Gretta pays to her husband—"You are a very generous person" ("The Dead" 54), it is not so much Joyce's genuine depiction of Gabriel's personality as an irony contrived to ridicule him. Failing to face his sexual urge and to speak the language of desire directly—"To take her as she was would be brutal. No, he must see some ardour in her eyes first. He longed to

be the master of her strange mood” (“The Dead” 54)—Gabriel plans to attract his wife by a “deceptive tale of generosity” (Pecora 250). Gretta is therefore informed that Gabriel lent a pound to “that poor fellow Malins” and was surprised by the repayment insofar as he “didn’t expect it really” (“The Dead” 54). But when Joyce reveals to his readers how little Gabriel cares about Malins—“Gabriel strove to restrain himself from breaking out into brutal language about the sottish Malins and his pound” (“The Dead” 54)—the concept of generosity, no doubt, is forcefully undermined.

Actually, “The Dead” discloses that Gabriel’s generosity is blatantly self-serving from the outset. At the opening of the story, upon arriving the party, Gabriel is led by the servant girl Lily to the pantry to take off his overcoat. Then he asks Lily about her possible wedding plans only to be embarrassed by the bitter retort: “The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you” (“The Dead” 23). Almost right after Lily’s rebuke, Gabriel tips her a gold coin as a Christmas gift. “Is Gabriel’s gold coin a gratuitous generosity to a rude and nervous servant or practiced hush money to stop her agitation?” (Norris 200). While Margot Norris answers the question she poses by claiming that the issue is undecidable (200), quite a few critics believe Gabriel’s generosity can hardly withstand thorough investigation. In fact, the coin Gabriel gives to Lily is less a gratuitous gift than an instrument serving the purpose of patronization. As Schwarz notes, after Lily distances Gabriel’s efforts to charm, he reduces her to “the girl in the pantry” (105-6). Here Gabriel’s strong consciousness of class distinction appears outrageous because he not only misconstrues the gift of gold as compensation for the gaffe but also pigeonholes Lily as a petty servant. John Paul Riquelme further unmasks Gabriel’s gift-giving as a defense mechanism he employs to reinforce social hierarchy: “With the help of gold, Gabriel survives his skirmish with the representative of a lower class. He is injured but not disabled for the task of maintaining his place at the top of the social pyramid” (128).

Since what immediately follows Lily’s rebuke is a description of Gabriel, Pecora believes the description is not so much “a simple, unmediated mirror image” as a reflection of “what Gabriel sees, or wants others to see, in the mirror of those glistening shoes” (245):

[I]t performs a particular psychological function in Joyce’s narrative, for it reinscribes Gabriel’s equanimity, reclothing him in the princely attitude he

celebrates later. And the reaffirmation prepares the way for the princely failing of generosity with which he buys back his psychological and social superiority. Shouting “Christmas-time! Christmas time,” as if these magical words guaranteed his sincerity, Gabriel thwarts Lily’s attempt to reject his condescending gifts and quickly escapes to seal his success. (246)

Probing Gabriel’s defenses, critics find out how Gabriel contrives to use the gold coin as a gift to patronize Lily and to restore his self-image. Later when Gabriel is lampooned by Molly Ivors, he likewise plans to “generously” praise Ireland’s and his aunts’ hospitality to counter her criticism. “His manipulated generosity,” as Pecora rightly puts it, “has become the avenue of his escape” (248).

Be it to mute the sexual insult (Higdon 181), to make up for the social blunder, or to restore Gabriel’s self-image, the gold coin Gabriel gives to Lily is anything but a gift. Given that Gabriel’s “gift” is self-serving, Jacques Derrida’s admonition concerning the poisonous attribute of the gift particularly seems justifiable:

[I]f giving is spontaneously evaluated as *good*, it remains the case that this “good” can easily be reversed. We know that as good, it can also be bad, poisonous (*Gift, gift*), and this from the moment the gift puts the other in debt, with the result that giving amounts to hurting, to doing harm. (12)

Gabriel does not care if his giving of the gold coin is against the etiquette of his class and period—actually “[n]o houseguest would tip his or her hostess’s servant unless remaining in the house overnight, and never on the guest’s arrival” (Higdon 181-82). And when Lily declines the gift, he insists on masking his act as one of generosity authorized by the season (Higdon 182). To a certain extent, Gabriel’s gift has turned to be poison for Lily because beneath the facade of generosity lies “an unmistakable rudeness and insensitiveness” (Higdon 182).

For Derrida, the intention to give suffices to make a return payment to oneself because the simple consciousness of the gift “right away sends itself back the gratifying image of goodness or generosity, of the giving-being who, knowing itself to be such, recognizes itself in a circular, specular fashion, in a sort of auto-recognition, self-approval, and narcissistic gratitude” (23). Given

that Gabriel constantly takes refuge in his self-congratulatory generosity, it is tenable to suppose that Joyce's treatment of the motif of generosity in "The Dead" is in tune with Derrida's deconstructive reconsideration of the gift. Gabriel's gift of gold, in effect, is directed to himself rather than Lily. To interpret Gabriel's acts in Derrida's words, whenever Gabriel intends to give, he actually intends "to pay himself with 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 to himself" (14). Far from enshrining "the tradition of genuine warm-hearted courteous Irish hospitality," through the depiction of Gabriel, "The Dead" actually lays bare how the gift, never pure of self-interest, is to a great extent self-dislocating.

However, can we infer from Gabriel's suspicious generosity that Joyce's conception of the gift is consistent with Derrida's all the time? While Derrida conceives the gift as "the impossible" on the ground that it returns something to the donor rather than reaches the donee in a unilateral way, does Joyce's gift economy come down to the same thing? To put it another way, if the circular structure of economy necessitates the return of the gift to the donor, in Joyce's text, does the gift always reach this destination and thus nullify itself? Since Joyce characterizes Leopold Bloom, the protagonist of *Ulysses*, as one who generously "spends the majority of his money—£1 0s 7 d out of his total Bloomsday expenditures of £1 6s 11d—on gifts" (Osteen 1995: 411),<sup>1</sup> we have reasons to surmise that in *Ulysses* the concept of generosity is not demolished at a stroke. Taking as a point of departure Gabriel's gold coin that is given to return to himself, this paper will seek to investigate the gift economy in *Ulysses* and reconsider the concepts of calculation and generosity. Instead of using Joyce's text to demonstrate the cogency of Derrida's deconstruction, I will read various critical theories of the gift into *Ulysses* so as to explore the gift economy in Joyce's textual universe.

---

<sup>1</sup> According to Mark Osteen, on Bloomsday, Bloom spends a total of 11s 5d on Stephen and only a little more for everything else: "Even of the latter total, however, 9s 2d are gifts: 5s to the Dignams, 1d for Banbury cakes, 1s for *Sweets of Sin* (a gift to Molly), 2s 6d on the present to Martha (admittedly, given in expectation of a counter-gift), and 7d on the pig's foot and trotter that he gives to the dog in 'Circe'" (1995: 411).

## II. Gift versus Commodity?

It is useless to seek goodness and happiness in distant places. It is there already . . . in the mutual respect and reciprocating generosity [. . .].

—Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*

It is the cardinal difference between gift and commodity exchange that a gift establishes a feeling-bond between two people, while the sale of a commodity leaves no necessary connection.

—Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and The Erotic Life of Property*

The “exaggeration and reification of the contrast between gift and commodity,” as Arjun Appadurai points out, has many sources in anthropological writing. Appadurai notes that gifts and “the spirit of reciprocity, sociability, and spontaneity in which they are typically exchanged, usually are starkly opposed to the profit-oriented, self-centered, and calculated spirit that fires the circulation of commodities” (11). Although many recent attempts have tried to mute the exaggerated contrast between gift and commodity, “the tendency to see these two modalities of exchange as fundamentally opposed remains a marked feature of anthropological discourse” (Appadurai 11).<sup>2</sup> Disagreeing with those who link the German word *Gift* (poison) to gift exchange, Hyde, for example, insists that “[t]he connection is more accidental than significant” (43). While the Maussian theory postulates gift exchange as “a constant exchange of spiritual matter” without thereby ignoring that the principle of rivalry and hostility prevails in some of these practices (Mauss 6-7, 14), Hyde’s study of the gift valorizes the positive aspect of the spiritual mechanisms of giving. Hyde puts a special emphasis on how gift exchange may serve as “a companion to transformation, a sort of guardian or marker or catalyst” that awakens a part of our souls (45, 51). Going-away presents given at the time of separation, for instance, may overcome the physical departure rather than facilitate it: “‘My spirit goes with you,’ they say.

---

<sup>2</sup> Though Mauss’s theory of the gift is often faulted for its tendency to romanticize non-capitalist societies, Appadurai cautions us against oversimplifying the contrast between Mauss and Marx (11). Likewise, John Forrester seeks to explore “the virtues of Maussian theory” (155) for all his “concern with the inadequacies of the Maussian model” (153). In short, Forrester maintains that Mauss distinguishes social exchange founded on gifts from monetary exchange without dismissing the possibility for this very distinction to be eroded (150-51).

Going-away presents are gifts of spiritual incorporation” (Hyde 41). “Threshold gifts” attending times of passage or moments of great change (birthday, initiation and graduation ceremonies, etc.) are also in the service of spiritual transformation: “some older person—the donor who is leaving that stage of life—dis-invests himself of an old identity by bestowing these same gifts upon the young” and both parties are thus transformed (Hyde 43-44).

For Hyde, the most prominent feature of the gift which distinguishes it from commodity is its function of establishing social bonds: “Spacial proximity becomes social life through an exchange of gifts” (57); that is, if commerce, the “*logos*-trade,” necessarily draws the boundary between people, gift-exchange, the “*eros*-trade,” erases it by establishing social bonds (Hyde 61). If we take into account how Bloom has managed throughout *Ulysses* to overcome the barrier among people by offering gifts to the needy, it is justified to assume that the gift is less “impossible” in *Ulysses* than it appears in “The Dead.” In other words, while Joyce lays bare the calculative aspect of the gift through his portrayal of Gabriel’s self-gratifying generosity, Bloom’s acts of generosity are much less suspicious. We are informed that Bloom contributes five shillings to the Dignams’ children’s fund (*U* 10.974). We also note how Bloom helps a blind stripling across the street and considerably reminds himself that he had “[b]etter not do the condescending” (*U* 8.1092), not to mention how willingly he has offered Stephen either literal or figurative gifts. In *Ulysses*, generosity therefore “seems to well up with a natural ease, grace, and spontaneity” (Vincent 34). Notably, Bloom is not merely described as a beneficent man who is willing to help the needy; he is simultaneously characterized as one who does not fare so well in the mercenary world. In Bloom’s history of employment from 1881 to 1904, he has been engaged in demeaning jobs and even dismissed several times.<sup>3</sup> His chronic joblessness evidences his being “financially vulnerable” (Ahearn 88). Bloom’s current occupation—an advertising canvasser for the *Freeman’s Journal*—does not lead to prosperity either. In “Aelous,” Bloom comes to Myles Crawford, the editor of the daily newspaper, to do a little deal on behalf of Alexander Keyes. Instead of accomplishing his mission, Bloom is rudely retorted by Crawford, who asks him to convey an indecent reply to Keyes—“Will you tell him he can kiss my arse?” (*U* 7.981).

Depicting Bloom as a generous and “industrious but perpetually

---

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B of *The Chronicle of Leopold and Molly Bloom* for a detailed account of Bloom’s jobs (Raleigh 274-75).

unsuccessful provider of middle-class comfort” (Theoharis 160), Joyce seems to reveal an air of nostalgia for the society where the value of generosity takes precedence over profit-seeking. In this light, Bloom’s prestige and generosity can even be seen as a model Joyce sets for other Dubliners to follow (Osteen 1995: 163). On the surface, it is thus tenable to argue that Joyce gives priority to gift-giving in order to vent his discontent with the “confusion between systems of commerce and gift exchange,” which often leads to sadness (Herring 88).<sup>4</sup> However, the stark contrast between the eros-trade and the logos-trade, to quote Hyde’s phrases again, is more apparent than real in *Ulysses*, for Joyce does not celebrate generosity at the cost of underplaying the circular structure of the gift economy. A thorough exploration of the gift economy exhibited in *Ulysses* will show how Joyce departs from the romantic tradition which conceives the gift as pure of any ulterior motives. Take Bloom’s gift to the “poor birds” (*U* 8.73)—the two Banbury cakes which cost him a penny—for example. “Penny quite enough. Lots of thanks I get. Not even a caw” (*U* 8.84)—Bloom’s complaint, though slightly tongue-in-cheek, still illustrates that “the gift is annulled in the economic odyssey of the circle as soon as it appears as gift” (Derrida 24). As Derrida asserts, the gift is circular in the sense that the very moment the donor recognizes it as a gift, it sends back a “symbolic equivalent” to satisfy his self-gratifying image:

If he recognizes it as gift, if the gift *appears to him as such*, if the present is present to him as *present*, this simple recognition suffices to annul the gift. Why? Because it gives back, in the place, let us say, of the thing itself, a symbolic equivalent. [. . .] *At the limit, the gift as gift ought not appear as gift: either to the donee or to the donor.* (13-14)

In Bloom’s case, the gulls can hardly recognize the gift as such, but the

---

<sup>4</sup> For Phillip F. Herring, there is “a persistent advocacy of the gift exchange cycles of love, trust, hospitality, and friendship” in Joyce’s work (88). The gift exchange system depicted by Joyce would appear suspicious, Herring suggests, only when it is sullied by “the corrupting influence of commerce” (88). Although Herring’s assumption that Joyce prefers gift exchange to commerce is mainly drawn from his reading of *Dubliners*, he suggests that the precedence of gift exchange system “over one where everything has a price” (91) is also revealed in *Ulysses*. To put it another way, Herring gathers that there are striking similarities between *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* concerning Joyce’s attitude toward gifts, since *Ulysses* still advocates the system which fosters humane feeling and mutual trust rather than encourages profit and exploitation (89).

cakes obviously *appear as gift* to Bloom the donor.<sup>5</sup> Even though what the gulls can afford to pay back is at most a caw, with this caw Bloom, at least, can satisfy himself by imagining it as a counter-gift, as a token of their sense of gratitude. Frustrated by the gulls' ingratitude, Bloom thus decides he will not spend more money on feeding them. Uncovering how Bloom's gift to the birds is hardly gratuitous as it requires an answer, Joyce substantiates what Derrida has said on gifts rather than foregrounds the concept of generosity in a romantic way.

To a certain extent, the gift economy laid bare by Joyce reinforces Pierre Bourdieu's theory of gift exchange as well. For Bourdieu, "practice never ceases to conform to economic calculation even when it gives every appearance of disinterestedness by departing from the logic of interested calculation and playing for stakes that are non-material and not easily quantified" (177). Gift exchange appears to be disinterested simply because its operation presupposes deliberate oversight of its mechanism. Observing that in every society the pattern of gift exchange requires the counter-gift to be "*deferred and different*" to ensure that it does not amount to an insult (Bourdieu 5), Bourdieu asserts that "the lapse of time interposed" is what enables the gift or counter-gift "to be seen and experienced as an inaugural act of generosity, without any past or future, i.e. without calculation" (171).<sup>6</sup> To be more specific, since the immediate or hasty return of a counter-gift runs the risk of denouncing the initial gift "retrospectively as motivated by the intention of obliging one" (Bourdieu 6), participants of gift exchange tend to delay and make obvious alternations in the counter-gift so that the acts of giving and returning will both appear voluntary and disinterested. The reason why gift exchange does not seem forced and interested, therefore, is not so much because it is far from a transaction as because the interval between gift and counter-gift makes possible our "collectively maintained and approved self-deception without which symbolic

---

<sup>5</sup> Notably, in the nighttown, when two watching policemen approach Bloom to check if he is doing anything against the law, Bloom also recalls the scene in which "[a] convey of gulls, storm petrels, rises hungrily from Liffey slime with Banbury cakes in their beaks" (*U* 15. 683-84). This episode indicates that Bloom assumes his feeding the gulls as charitable enough to validate his self-defense "I am doing good to others" (*U* 15. 682).

<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Derrida notes that for "those who participate in the experience of gift and counter-gift, the requirement of restitution 'at term,' at the delayed 'due date,' the requirement of the circulatory difference *is inscribed* in the thing itself that is given or exhausted" (40). That is, for donors and donees who romantically posit gift exchange as based upon reciprocity, the circulatory difference is neutralized as a property immanent to the gift instead of evidencing its calculative aspect.

exchange, a fake circulation of fake coin, could not operate” (Bourdieu 6).

Gifts are not pure of self-interest; they forge bonds of obligations and demand either material or incorporeal counter-gifts. If gift exchange is liable to strike us as based on reciprocity, it is because we share collective oversight of the gift economy: “If the system is to work, the agents must not be entirely unaware of the truth of their exchanges [. . .] while at the same time they must refuse to know and above all to recognize it” (Bourdieu 6). In this sense, Joyce’s representation of the gift economy is unusual since it does not glamorize gift exchange as a gesture of selfless generosity to perpetuate the concerted make-believe. Note how Joyce presents the exchange between Bloom and M’Coy. Instead of considering it necessary to defer the timing of demanding the recipient’s restitution, Bloom regrets for forgetting to exact a counter-gift from M’Coy right after he was asked to put down M’Coy’s name at Dignam’s funeral: “Damn it. I might have tried to work M’Coy for a pass to Mullingar” (*U* 5.320-21). Later in “Hades,” having discharged his duty, Bloom ponders on how the favor is supposed to put M’Coy in debt: “I saw to that, M’Coy. Thanks, old chap: much obliged. Leave him under an obligation: costs nothing” (*U* 6.889-90). Endeavoring to put in a good word for Bloom, Osteen argues that though Bloom has contemplated some repayment from M’Coy, after all he forgets to demand any counter-gift. Further, Osteen suggests,

Bloom will now be able to use M’Coy’s small indebtedness to him as a “capital of willing compliance” he can call in whenever he wants. But despite his mercenary interpretation of the favor, Bloom seems unlikely to call in the debt anytime soon: his moral economy is generally gracious, and he is usually above such mean cost accounting. (1995: 163)

Reading Bourdieu’s theory into Joyce’s depiction of Bloom’s gift, however, we may find this defense somewhat superfluous. Bloom’s mercantile interpretation of his own generous act reveals his recognition of how gifts necessarily bind the recipient to the giver. Moreover, just because Bloom does not disavow the circular nature of the gift, to a great extent, he perceives the truth of gift exchange which donors and donees deluded by collective oversight of the gift cannot possibly apprehend.

In fact, even when Bloom is shown to be generously spending time<sup>7</sup> and

---

<sup>7</sup> According to Bourdieu, giving or squandering time is “one of the most precious of gifts” (180), and

money on helping Stephen out, still his charity is not pure of self-interest:

For which and further reasons he felt it was his interest and duty even to wait on and profit by the unlookedfor occasion though why he could not exactly tell being as it was already several shillings to the bad having in fact let himself in for it. Still to cultivate the acquaintances of someone of no uncommon caliber who could provide food for reflection would amply repay any small. (*U* 16.1216-21)

As Osteen recognizes, Bloom's paternal aid, instead of being extended to Stephen exclusively, is intended to address his own needs as well. In addition to the intention of "breeding financial offspring from fatherly feeling," Bloom expects that "Stephen will pay a 'duty' on his importation into the Bloom household; like a garden vegetable, Stephen is to be 'cultivated' strictly to 'provide food' for the Blooms" (1995: 388).

Notably, though Osteen finds that in "Eumaeus" Joyce poses the possibility that "the underside of gift exchange is the establishment of bonds that may be as oppressive as more obviously exploitive commercial ones" (1995: 382), he seems to be hesitant about uncovering the calculative dimension of Bloom's acts of giving. Therefore, Osteen suggests that we distinguish Bloom from the narrator of "Eumaeus," who is at most "a counterfeit or forgery of Bloom—a Mr. Boom (*U* 16. 1260) perhaps—a near copy who nevertheless departs from the original in small but noticeable ways" (1995: 388). He argues that "it is less Bloom's acts than the narrator's mercantile interpretation of them that seems crass," and it is the narrator's ideology that makes Bloom's charity tainted by ulterior motives (1995: 381, 391). However, is the calculative aspect involved in Bloom's acts of giving so outrageous that we have to explain it away by all means lest the protagonist should impress us as despicably mercenary? In a sense, Osteen's attempt to excuse Bloom helps us grasp the apprehension typical of anti-deconstructionists, namely, the fear that once the gift economy is shown to be circular rather than disinterested, the concept of generosity might be demolished altogether:

---

thus the man who gives others no more than the time he owes them, who hurries in his work without giving others the care and time, is constantly reproached (234).

Would not everything in deconstruction then go up in smoke or turn to ash? [. . .] Accordingly, the gift implies a double risk, of illusion and of hypocrisy: on the one end, the risk of entertaining a transcendental illusion; on the other end, the risk of “entering the destructive circle,” of getting ground up in the wheels of giving-in-order-to-get-back, the hypocrisy of taking under the guise of giving. (Caputo 170)

Is there any way to negotiate the double risk entailed by deconstruction? Are we simply “grasping a specter or a ghost” when we desire the gift (Caputo 170)? To answer these questions, I will investigate the calculative aspect of the gift economy more thoroughly to re-formulate the concept of generosity, which is presumed to be practically negated in the wake of deconstruction.

### III. Calculation Reconsidered

If we continuously explore the calculative aspect of Bloom’s generosity, almost all of his gifts can be considered sullied by ulterior motives. Take Bloom’s gift to Molly for example. For Sherry Vincent, Bloom’s gift is a sharp contrast to Boylan’s. Boylan’s purchase of Molly’s present at Thornton’s is by no means out of generosity; rather, “it is wrapped in the dark necessity of his own mechanical character; it is impatient, importunate, urging, coercive.” Bloom’s gift, *Sweets of Sin* he chooses for Molly, partakes suggestively of gratuitousness by contrast (34). Nevertheless, as Osteen points out, both of their gifts carry accompanying obligations: “Boylan expects, and gets, Molly’s flesh in return for his meat, and Bloom, in spite of her infidelity, expects a deeper loyalty and bond” (1997: 191). Likewise, when Bloom “utilised gifts (1) an owl, 2) a clock), given as matrimonial auguries, to interest and to instruct” Milly (*U* 17.909-10), his teaching, as a kind of transformative gift,<sup>8</sup> demands something in return: Bloom contentedly recalls how Milly reciprocated by remembering to give him a breakfast moustache cup “on the 27<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth” and “showed herself attentive to his necessities, anticipating his desires.” He seems further satisfied when Milly appeared to admire his

---

<sup>8</sup> Hyde defines teachings as transformative gifts because he finds that they are capable of spiritual conversion: “the Word is received, the soul suffers a change (or is released, or born again), and the convert feels moved to testify, to give the Word away again” (46). Though Hyde overemphasizes the positive function of gift-giving and thus his theory smacks of romanticism, his ethnographical models offer interesting perspectives on gift exchange paradigms.

knowledge because of the instruction (*U* 17.920-28).

Exposing how Bloom's acts of giving can hardly be disinterested, I do not mean to negate the concept of generosity or simply justify what Derrida and Bourdieu have said on gifts. Rather, I would like to inquire into the reasons why generous acts fail to be as genuine as they appear. To a certain extent, Bloom's gifts to Molly and Milly may help us reappraise the concept of calculation. Notably, Bloom's "calculation" in gift-giving does not so much aim to gain material interests as to answer his inner desire. The donor's *investment* of desire, which presupposes expectations of returns, accounts for the ineluctable link between gift-giving and calculation. To be more specific, as the donor invests his desire in the gift given, he is likely to expect something in return, and it is the expectation of some sort of counter-gift that makes the act of giving appear calculated. Calculation, seen thus, is less outrageous and usurious, for the investment of our desire is central to the operation of the gift economy. Tracing back to the infant's "first gift," we will be astonished to find that even the first gift, in a sense, is invested with desire:

[. . .] [F]aeces are the infant's first gift, a part of his body which he will give up only on persuasion by someone he loves, to whom indeed, he will make a spontaneous gift of it as a token of affection; for, as a rule, infants do not dirty strangers. Defaecation affords the first occasion on which the child must decide between a narcissistic and an object-loving attitude. He either parts obediently with his faeces, "sacrifices" them to his love, or else retains them for purposes of auto-erotic satisfaction and later as a means of asserting his own will. (Freud 130)

According to Sigmund Freud, for the child to part with his stools, he has to give up the anal-eroticism that he narcissistically clung to. As if his faeces were the gift that strangers do not deserve, the child will not defaecate unless accompanied by someone he loves. In other words, by giving someone his first gift, the child is claiming, as it were, "I sacrifice my anal eroticism for your sake." The excremental gift, as a token which evidences the child's affection, actually comprises his demand for the other's love. To put it simply, the gift is given in exchange for love. On the child's first gift the primary object-loving attitude is inscribed.

Gifts come to be invested with complicated desire during the process of

our socialization. As Osteen observes, in selecting and giving a gift, “the donor projects both his or her sense of the recipient and his or her self-image onto the gift” (1997: 29). On the one hand, the donor projects his image onto the gift in the hope that this encoded identity will be sanctioned by the recipient (Osteen 1997: 32). On the other hand, the gift “reveals the idea that the recipient evokes in the giver’s imagination” (Osteen 1997: 34) as the recipient’s imagined image is also encoded in the gift.<sup>9</sup> The act of giving, in this sense, is a symbolic ritual which enables the giver to (re)define his relationship with the recipient and their identities as well. Seen thus, Bloom’s verbal gift to Milly is to define himself as a learned father worth being admired by his “darling” (U 4.287). As for the gift book Bloom obtains for Molly, his idea of her as a “purchasable commodity” (Osteen 1997: 36) and his own image as a cuckolded husband desiring for sexual gratification are both encoded in the book.<sup>10</sup> Clearly, it is the desire Bloom invests to define his relation with the loved ones that makes his act of giving riddled with the sense of calculation.

Analyzing the mechanism of verbal exchange, Jacques Lacan suggests that the way we address someone is actually a way of “hooking the other,” “hooking him in discourse,” and “fastening meaning to him”(1993: 299). If in verbal exchange the “speech that gives itself” is the “speech that commits *you*,” the addressee (Lacan 1993: 37), then in gift exchange, the donor’s gift is the gift that commits the donee. As the economy of gift, to a certain extent, parallels the structure of verbal exchange, Lacan’s analysis serves pertinently to further illustrate the mechanism of giving.<sup>11</sup> According to Lacan,

---

<sup>9</sup> While Osteen’s study of the yoking of gift exchange and identity in *Ulysses* is illuminating, I have reservation about his overemphasis on the reciprocal model which, he believes, necessarily benefits both givers and recipients. For example, he contends that “[s]ince gifts are invested with the essence of the persons giving and receiving them, their exchange actually flows in two directions at once: both to the donee, who now possesses the gift, and back to the donor, who now possesses what might be called a ‘spirit’ of the gift, a kind of incorporeal interest” (1995: 93). Taking into account the conflicting desire and intricate intersubjective relation involved in gift exchange, we will find Osteen’s assertion concerning how the spirit of the true gift always “returns to its source, renewed” (1995: 108), appears somewhat naive.

<sup>10</sup> Wondering what kind of books may please Molly, Bloom finally selects *Sweets of Sin* for her, in which “All the dollarbills her husband gave her were spent in the store on wondrous gowns and costliest frillies. [. . .] Her mouth glued on his in luscious voluptuous kiss while his hands felt for the opulent curves inside her deshabelle [. . .]” (U 10.608-09, 611-12). The female protagonist in the obscene book evidently echoes Bloom’s idea of Molly. On the other hand, the fact that Bloom gets excited upon reading these passages is indicative of his own sexual urge as well.

<sup>11</sup> The verbal exchange discussed here is what Lacan defines as “founding speech” or “full speech.” Empty speech proceeded along the imaginary axis, on the other hand, “remains restricted to

In saying to someone, *You are my woman*, you are implicitly saying to her, *I am your man*, but you are saying to her first, *You are my woman*, that is, you are establishing her in the position of being recognized by you, by means of which she will be able to recognize you. (1993: 55)

Here what Lacan means by commitment is precisely the goal that full speech intends to attain: the *You are my woman* or the *You are my master*, as Lacan explains, means “*You are what is still within my speech, and this I can only affirm by speaking in your place*” (1993: 36-37). Having thus pledged, *I* thereby commits *you* in speech.

However, even though we tend to commit the addressee to the extent that in speech “the *you* is the other such as I cause him to be seen by means of my discourse” (Lacan 1993: 301), Lacan reminds us that we must manage to elevate this *you* to subjectivity, to develop the subject-to-subject relation in speech. The elevation is not possible unless we recognize that the *you* in our discourse, as a matter of fact, “isn’t so much what designates the other as what enables us to act upon him” (1993: 299). To put it another way, if we ignore the fact that the *you* in our speech is invested with our desire, during the so-called communication we will be no more than guiding “one another in our reciprocal identification towards our desire” and reducing them as captured objects on the imaginary plane (1993: 302). “*You are my woman*—after all, what do you know about it? *You are my master*—in point of fact, are you so sure?” (Lacan 1993: 38). By posing the question, Lacan suggests, it is just because the addresser cannot possibly vindicate statements like *You are my woman*—“*This comes from you to find the certainty of what I pledge*” (Lacan 1993: 37)—that he should utter the message to hook the addressee in discourse, to commit the other in his speech act. However, since the other we encounter in speech is also a desiring subject, what he says and does, consequently, “can be supposed

---

exchanging one object for another, identical object” (Forrester 143). Many critics have pointed out the similarities between the founding speech and Austin’s theories of performatives. Forrester, for example, asserts that for Lacan and Austin, “the exemplary performatives, the acts of full speech, are ritual acts of naming, of binding one person to another [. . .]. This is the pure performative, a speech act which is its own guarantee, a pure commitment to the other and to the common future of subject and other” (142). As gift-giving is also a ritual act of binding the subject to the other, I draw the analogy between gift-giving and Lacan’s modality of full speech in the hope of employing Lacan’s concept of commitment to shed light on the mechanism of the act of giving.

to have been said and done to deceive you, with all the dialectic that that comprises, up to and including that he should tell the truth so that you believe the contrary” (Lacan 1993: 37). Under such circumstances, even though we can give a speech to commit the other, ultimately we cannot know how he receives the speech and whether his response is “a feint or not” (Lacan 1993: 38). As our absolute Other,<sup>12</sup> the addressee actually challenges us by stating “*You can never see me from the place from which I see you*” (Lacan 1981: 103). Eventually we have to acknowledge that the “unknown in the otherness of the Other” is what characterizes the speech relation (Lacan 1993: 38), lest we fall prey to the symptom of paranoid, receiving our own message from the other in an inverted way.<sup>13</sup>

The gift, imbued with the donor’s identity and his imagination of the donee, in a sense utters messages like “You are my woman” on the donor’s behalf. But gift exchange, palpably, has more twists and turns than verbal exchange as the message conveyed by the gift is language of indirection that “no one can hear.”<sup>14</sup> At the outset, the donor may take advantage of this indirection to convey his otherwise inexpressible desire. For example, though Bloom cannot openly flirt with his servant Mary Driscoll, his unsatisfied desire can be surreptitiously encoded in the gift of emerald garters, which obviously abounds

---

<sup>12</sup> Lacan contends that for the subject-to-subject relation to occur, we have to recognize “the other is there as absolute Other”: “Absolute, that is to say that he is recognized but that he isn’t known” (1993: 38).

<sup>13</sup> To illustrate the mechanism of delusional speech, Lacan gives an example of a female patient who suffers from paranoia. One day the patient confided to Lacan that as she was leaving her home, she had a run-in in the hallway with an ill-mannered man, who called her “Sow!” when she said “I’ve just been to the butcher’s” in passing. The message she heard, according to Lacan, is actually “her message to herself” (1993: 49): since there is a reference to pigs in her statement, it is very likely that, the patient, indulging in self-pity, projects her message onto the other and receives it in an inverted way. See “I’ve just been to the butcher’s” (Lacan 1993: 44-56) for detailed analysis.

<sup>14</sup> In “Lotus-Eaters,” Bloom opens Martha’s letter when walking alone. Tearing the enclosed flower that has “almost no smell,” Bloom thinks, “[l]anguage of flowers. They like it because no-one can hear” (*U* 5.261-62). Ramón Saldívar notices that Bloom’s own speech also follows the pattern of “language of flowers” as it always remains to be deciphered. The reason why Bloom’s language takes on the flowery style, according to Saldívar, is because the elusive language serves best to express Bloom’s unspeakable or even perverse desire: “When unspeakable thoughts do emerge into the light of language, metaphor too of necessity arises, for it is precisely the work of metaphor to disguise the impropriety of the literal signified behind the transforming mask of the figural signifier. So Bloom’s expressions of sexual desire, of love for a departed son, of nostalgia for a past time of sensual wholeness can only be spoken through an indirection which names something else as a preoccupation of the mind” (124). I would like to add that, besides speaking “language of flowers,” gift-giving is also an outlet for Bloom’s ineffable desire.

with erotic overtones.<sup>15</sup> However, it is also because the language of the gift is inaudible that the donor cannot ascertain if the message deciphered by the donee will be of a piece with the encoded one. Thus, while Bloom's gift of garters, as well as his figurative gift of taking Mary's part when she is accused of pilfering (*U* 15.878), are attempts to show that Mary means more than a servant to him, his gift-giving is liable to make him exposed to the accusation of sexual harassment. In the nightmarish trial, Bloom defends himself against Mary's charge by claiming that "I treated you white. I gave you mementos, smart emerald garters far above your station" (*U* 15.876-77). Bloom's eagerness to defend himself in the unconscious scene does not suggest that he assumes his gift as genuinely generous. On the contrary, it points to his worry that the gift may not reach its destination. In this light, if the gift is to be "directed, beyond imaginary captivation, towards the being of the loved subject," its language also has to be constituted "on the symbolic plane" (Lacan 1991: 276). That is, the giver has to realize that his self-image or his sense of the recipient encoded in the gift is not guaranteed to be sanctioned even when the gift is accepted.

#### IV. Incomplete Reciprocation

Subtly portraying how giving is invested with the donor's desire to project certain images onto the gift, does Joyce, as Osteen asserts, mean to exemplify that "in giving and receiving gifts, one receives his or her image reborn or regenerated through economic intercourse with the loved ones" (1997: 31)? Without hastily refuting Osteen, I nevertheless would like to raise doubts.

Hyde has suggested that "gifts carry an identity with them, and to accept the gift amounts to incorporating the new identity" (45). Osteen's reading of Joyce's gift economy, as he concedes, is indebted to Hyde's theory.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, Osteen does not give due consideration to the fact that the

<sup>15</sup> When Molly finds the garters in Mary Driscoll's room, she also senses the erotic implication right away and considers the gift proof positive of Bloom's desire for making advances to Mary (*U* 18.66-69).

<sup>16</sup> Osteen admits that Hyde has provided a "highly suggestive exploration of gift exchange" but at the same time criticizes him for overemphasizing gift-giving as an "altruistic and positive social phenomenon" (1997: 43). However, Osteen also alleges true gifts to be capable of solidifying friendliness and love, of creating entirely new phenomenon out of the relationship between donors and donees (1995: 402-3). In this sense, it seems that Osteen himself also prefers to consider gift-giving a positive social phenomenon.

recipient will not necessarily reciprocate by sanctioning images encoded in the gift. In fact, *Ulysses* brings abortive reciprocation to light rather than celebrates how the gift “weds donor and recipient” (Osteen 1997: 39). As the aforementioned case of Bloom’s gift to Mary Driscoll indicates, the gift can give no guarantee that the giver will succeed in hooking the recipient in the economy of his desire. We are thus told again when Joyce presents how Molly misinterprets Boylan’s motive of sending her pears and peaches before the impending sexual discourse: “like the messengerboy today I thought it was a putoff first him sending the port and the peaches first” (*U* 18.340-41). It is likely that Boylan intends to impress Molly as a lover who, generously spending a lot of money on buying presents for his beloved, appreciates and desires her peach-like flesh. The encoded message, however, escapes Molly; her interior monologue runs as follows: “I was just beginning to yawn with nerves thinking he was trying to make a fool of me” (*U* 18.342). Later Molly realizes that Boylan is not going to postpone the date, but the acceptance of the food is not identical to her appreciation of the gift. Since food is supposed to satisfy culinary appetites and associated with carnal desire, in Boylan’s eyes it may serve as a proper gift to express his view of their relationship. But what Molly expects to obtain from Boylan is actually “a ring with the stone for my month,” “a gold bracelet” (*U* 18. 261-62), or even “a nice present up in Belfast after what I gave him” (*U* 18. 404). Here it is the discrepancy rather than the bond that characterizes the relation between the donor and the donee.

Of course, we may surmise that Boylan’s gift necessarily fails to promise reciprocity since Joyce portrays him as a materialistic and self-centered man by design. But if we dwell on Bloom’s encounter with the blind boy, which is ostensibly typical of what Osteen calls the truly reciprocal social exchange (1995: 403), we will find that Joyce indeed has reservation about advocating reciprocation based on mutual trust. According to Harry Blamires, Bloom’s impulse to help is “that of the compassionate Jesus-Bloom, and also of the outsider-Bloom, hungry for companionship and sympathetic towards a fellow-outsider” (69). Further, as “the stripling’s hand ‘like a child’s hand’ becomes momentarily the hand of the son he has lost, the son he is seeking” (Blamires 69), Bloom is enabled to act out his paternal instincts which finally will bring him to Stephen, his surrogate son. In other words, when offering the blind stripling a helping hand, Bloom indeed encodes in his figurative gift the forlorn image they share, and he even momentarily projects his paternal identity

onto the gift:

Wonder would he feel it if something was removed. Feel a gap. *Queer idea of Dublin he must have*, tapping his way round by the stones. [. . .] Poor fellow! *Quite a boy*. Terrible. Really terrible. What dreams would he have, not seeing? Life a dream for him. What is the justice being born that way? (U 8.1109-11, 1144-45; italics mine).

Imagining the blind stripling as alienated from Dublin as he is, Bloom the Irish Jew tries hard to identify the boy as his companion. But finally he realizes that “somehow you can’t cotton on to them someway” (U 8. 1149-50). The blind boy’s detached attitude compels Bloom to notice that even though he does not decline Bloom’s figurative gift of help, his acceptance of the gift does not promise reciprocity. Bloom’s recognition of the abortive reciprocation between the blind stripling and him, more or less, reveals Joyce’s suspicion of the gift exchange founded on mutual benefit.

Likewise, even in Bloom’s momentary alliance with Stephen in “Ithaca,” he finds it impossible to bridge the gap between the donor and the donee by generous gifts. In “Eumaeus,” Bloom plans to give Stephen the gift of “a cup of Epps’s cocoa and a shakedown for the night plus the use of a rug or two” (U 16.1621-22) and finally fulfills his wish of taking Stephen home with him. Since Bloom is eager to identify Stephen as his surrogate son, the desire he invests in the gift is so abundant that he cannot help deliberately reminding Stephen of his hospitality. Thus, after Bloom makes two cups of Epps’s cocoa, he tries to show “supererogatory marks of special hospitality” (U 17.359), first by choosing for himself a cup identical to his guest’s instead of using the moustache cup he favors and second, by adding plenty of Molly’s breakfast cream to Stephen’s cocoa and only a little to his own. Then, for fear that the guest does not “acknowledge these marks of hospitality,” Bloom is said to direct Stephen’s attention to them “jocosely” (U 17.366-69). Evidently, Bloom’s gifts are not completely gratuitous. But as John D. Caputo suggests, to let the gift be given, “we need to know everything that undermines giving and draws it back into the circle of exchange, but still be engaged in and by giving. We need to appreciate what is going on with gifts, but still give” (171). Bloom cannot possibly refrain from demanding Stephen’s gratitude as some sort of restitution, but at least he knows well what is going on with gifts and what

undermines giving. For example, recognizing that gifts sometimes impose oppressive bonds of obligations on the recipient, Bloom decides to suppress other marks of hospitality although at first he contemplates presenting Stephen with a handkerchief and reserving for Molly the opportunity of mending Stephen's torn jacket (*U* 17.371-76). While helping Stephen will certainly "afford him very great personal pleasure" (*U* 16.1618), Bloom is not going to satisfy his self-interest at the cost of compulsively binding Stephen to his gifts.

As we know, finally Stephen declines Bloom's offer of a room for the night but they somehow reach an agreement upon a counterproposal—Stephen will give Molly Italian lessons and she should instruct him singing at Bloom's house; Bloom and Stephen therefore can meet from time to time for intellectual discussion. Nevertheless, instead of being delighted by the agreement or celebrating their exchange as reciprocal, Bloom appears skeptical about "the realization of these mutually selfexcluding propositions" (*U* 17.973-74). Right after that, what occurs to Bloom's mind is how a clown once jokingly declares Bloom to be his father at a performance of Albert Hengler's circus. Besides, he thinks of how he once marks a florin to see if it can circulate back to him only to ascertain that the coin will never return. Bloom's doubts "about ever finding a 'son' or experiencing a long-wished 'return'" (Blamires 216) are not likely to arise unless he has insights into "the unknown in the otherness of the Other" that we expounded at some length above. That is, despite that Stephen does not reject the counterproposal, Bloom recognizes how futile it will be if he seeks to grasp the way Stephen conceives of their gift exchange. For all Bloom's efforts to avow his symbolic fatherhood, he cannot ensure that the image of the surrogate son, thus projected onto the gift, will be sanctioned by Stephen. Like the marked florin that will not return to Bloom once circulating in the market exchange system, the counter-gift, as the currency in symbolic commerce, is no less liable to go astray on its way home.

## **V. Coda: Giving the Other Some Slack**

To welcome the other, to be as hospitable as possible, still involves remaining master of one's house. When I love the good of the other, I am doing what I love—and I will not brook interference. It is never a question of simply stepping outside the circle, but of keeping the circle as loose as possible so as to let the impossible come.

Giving means giving the other some slack, with more and more hospitality. Uninterrupted narcissism, on the other hand, draws the circle of the self ever tighter, turning the gift to poison.

—John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*

Explicating how *Ulysses* has laid bare the calculative dimension of gift exchange, this paper does not mean to claim that the concept of the gift should be annulled on the ground that in some cases gift-giving simply serves the giver's purpose of accruing mercantile profits. Nor will I radically conclude that Joyce has dismissed reciprocity by comparing gift-giving to spiritual usury as he finds how gifts necessarily put the recipient in debt. Even though gift-giving is inevitably invested with the donor's desire, it is not tantamount to usurious calculation of advantage. Reducing the differences between generosity and calculation, I suggest that we question the polarization between pure charity and economic exchange without thereby conflating them as completely homogeneous. The reason why this paper has managed to "contaminate" pure gifts is primarily because, as Mary Douglas suggests, if we "persist in thinking that gifts ought to be free and pure, we will always fail to recognize our own grand cycles of exchanges, which categories get to be included and which get to be excluded from our hospitality" (xv). In this light, the way to retain generosity, paradoxically, is to destabilize gift-giving first. In fact, even Derrida, endeavoring to show how the gift is logically impossible, does not mean to demolish the gift economy. He suggests that we should

*[k]now still what giving wants to say, know how to give, know what you want and want to say when you give, know what you intend to give, know how the gift annuls itself, commit yourself even if commitment is the destruction of the gift by the gift, give economy its chance. (30)*

To put it simply, if we do not want to lump gift exchange and economic exploitation together, what we have to do is not embrace the concept of reciprocity unconditionally or disavow the calculative aspect involved in giving. Rather, as Caputo succinctly states, we need to know the trap that giving sets lest we walk into it straightaway (171). It is in this sense that Joyce's portrayal still makes Bloom's acts of giving appear more beneficent than usurious. That Bloom's gifts are more or less loaded with his interest and desire should not

invalidate the assertion that he is willing to offer gifts to the needy and his generosity is not hypocritical. On the contrary, given that in a number of examples Bloom commits himself to giving even though he knows well the gift will not necessarily reach its destination, he “opens a universe of sympathy to challenge a chaos of self-interest” (qtd. in Hamalian 28).

Actually, even in his spiritual communion with Stephen, Bloom is reminded that what is reflected in the “mirrors of the reciprocal flesh” is “theirhisnothis fellowfaces” (*U* 17.1183-84). As the term “theirhisnothis” indicates, reciprocation is after all incomplete if not totally failed. Osteen contends that “the reciprocal gaze affirms that other’s face is at once ‘theirhis’ (both) and ‘nothis’ (neither)” (1995: 406). James McMichael further sees in this compound the irreducible differences between self and other:

“No,” it is not an image of my own face I am seeing in the other: and though it is more his than mine, it is not so much “his” as “this,” this one face in front of me, a face that neither atones with my concepts nor opposes them but rather disrupts what would otherwise be the sovereignty of my thoughts. [. . .] He is always other than the person my thoughts would have caught up with. *I am left with only my interest in him, an interest that directs me to do the catching up he keeps reminding me I cannot.* (135; italics mine)

Instead of annulling the gift altogether, the awareness of the impossibility of penetrating the donee’s desire is the key factor that opens up the possibility of the active gift of love: frustrated by the futile attempt to hook the donee in the economy of his desire, the giver may eventually recognize the Lacanian active gift of love as what enables him to transcend the impasse of this endless pursuit. The active gift of love “directed at the other” (Lacan 1991: 276), as Kaja Silverman glosses it, “implies both idealizing beyond the parameters of the ‘self,’ and doing so with a full understanding of one’s own creative participation with respect to the end result. It means to *confer* ideality, not to *find* it” (78).<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> As Silverman states, the active gift of love, designated in *Seminar I*, is never fully theorized by Lacan. But as some of Lacan’s later *Seminars* “specify some of the parameters within which such a theorization should take place” (73), in Silverman’s extended interpretation she links the active gift of love to Lacan’s concept of sublimation and distinguishes it from passive idealization, which involves misrecognizing the ideality one has conferred upon the other as the other’s essence: the active gift of love somehow “prevents the congealing of ideality into an intrinsic quality of the beloved. [. . .] He

That is, instead of tricking us into searching for someone who deserves our gift, the active gift of love prompts us to sublimate our beloved and content ourselves with the fact that our feelings and desire can never be completely reciprocated. Accepting that the other is actually “deprived of that which he gives” (Lacan 1982: 85), the giver will be less likely to obsess about taking back from the recipient some sort of symbolic counter-gift to recoup his losses. Moreover, the giver may acknowledge that if he is rewarded with reciprocation of affections, it is all thanks to his active gift of love rather than the recipient’s counter-gift. Given that Bloom confers ideality upon Stephen as his symbolic son but does not thus obsessively pigeonhole him or deny the limitation of their reciprocal relation, Bloom can be lauded, at least in terms of his gift exchange with Stephen, for hospitably “giving the other some slack” (Caputo 161). Concerning the concept of generosity, what Joyce teaches us through his depiction of Bloom is how we, while facing up to the fact that it is impossible for generosity to be uncontaminated, can still strive to be alert to all kinds of pitfalls inherent in giving.



臺灣大學學術  
期刊資料庫

---

[Lacan] thereby encourages us to think of the luster which the subject confers upon an other through the active gift of love as something which does not seamlessly adhere to the other, but—unlike that which illuminates the ideal-ego or ego-ideal—retains a borrowed and provisional quality” (77).

## Works Cited

- Ahearn, Edward J. *Marx and Modern Fiction*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1989.
- Appadurai, Arjun. "Commodities and the Politics of Value." Introduction. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Ed. Arjun Appadurai. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986. 3-63.
- Blamires, Harry. *The Bloomsday Book: A Guide through Joyce's Ulysses*. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Bosinelli, Rosa M. Bollettieri, and Harold F. Mosher Jr., eds. *ReJoycing: New Readings of Dubliners*. Kentucky: UP of Kentucky, 1998.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977.
- Caputo, John D. *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Given Time: I, Counterfeit Money*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992.
- Douglas, Mary. Foreword. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. By Marcel Mauss. Trans. W.D. Halls. New York: Norton, 1990. vii-xviii.
- Forrester, John. *Truth Games: Lies, Money, and Psychoanalysis*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997.
- Freud, Sigmund. "On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Eroticism." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Trans. Ed. James Strachey et al. Vol. 17. London: Hogarth P, 1981. 24 vols. 1917. 125-33.
- Hamalian, Leo. "The 'Gift of Guilt' in *Ulysses*." *Renascence* 19 (1966): 21-29.
- Herring, Phillip F. "James Joyce and Gift Exchange." *Literature-Interpretation- Theory* 1 (1989): 85-97.
- Higdon, David Leon. "Gendered Discourse and the Structure of Joyce's 'The Dead.'" Bosinelli and Mosher 170-91.
- Hyde, Lewis. *The Gift: Imagination and The Erotic Life of Property*. London: Vintage, 1999.
- Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. New York: Vintage, 1986.

- . “‘The Dead.’” Schwarz 21-59.
- Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1981.
- . “The Meaning of the Phallus.” *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*. Ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose. Trans. Jacqueline Rose. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1982. 74-85.
- . *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud’s Papers on Technique (1953-1954)*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. John Forrester. New York: Norton, 1991.
- . *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses (1955-1956)*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Russell Grigg. New York: Norton, 1993.
- Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Trans. W. D. Halls. New York: Norton, 1990.
- McMichael, James. *Ulysses and Justice*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991.
- Norris, Margot. “Not the Girl She Was at All: Women in ‘The Dead.’” Schwarz 190-205.
- Osteen, Mark. *The Economy of Ulysses: Making Both Ends Meet*. New York: Syracuse UP, 1995.
- . “Female Property: Women and Gift Exchange in *Ulysses*.” *Gender in Joyce*. Ed. Jolanta W. Wawrzycka and Marlena G. Corcoran. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1997. 29-46.
- Pecora, Vicent P. *Self and Form in Modern Narrative*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989.
- Raleigh, John Henry. *The Chronicle of Leopold and Molly Bloom: Ulysses as Narrative*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1977.
- Riquelme, John Paul. “Joyce’s ‘The Dead’: The Dissolution of the Self and the Police.” Bosinelli and Mosher 123-41.
- Saldívar, Ramón. “Bloom’s Metaphors and the Language of Flowers.” *James Joyce’s Ulysses*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987. 123-32.
- Schwarz, Daniel R, ed. *The Dead: Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*. Boston: St. Martin’s, 1994.
- . “Gabriel Conroy’s Psyche: Character as Concept in Joyce’s ‘The Dead.’”

Schwarz 102-24.

Silverman, Kaja. *The Threshold of the Visible World*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Theoharis, Constantine Theoharis. *Joyce's Ulysses: An Anatomy of the Soul*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1988.

Vincent, Sherry. "Distant Music: 'Wandering Rocks' and the Art of Gratitude." *James Joyce Quarterly* 31.2 (1994): 30-40.

\*The paper was funded by a grant from National Science Council of Taiwan (NSC91-2411-H-002-045-B13); the project title is "Body Politics and the Economy of Desire: *Ulysses* as a Case in Point" (II-II).

### **About the Author**

**Tsung-huei Huang** is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Taiwan University. Her research project focuses on psychoanalysis, James Joyce, and feminism.  
E-mail: soeko@ntu.edu.tw



臺灣大學學術  
期刊資料庫