2015

Defining (Wo)Manhood: Exploring Gender Roles in James Joyce's Ulysses

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Senior Project submitted to

The Division of Languages and Literature

Of Bard College

By

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Annandale on Hudson, New York

May 2015

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I have to thank my advisor Stephen Graham, without whom, I honestly don't know where this project would have ended up. He was an invaluable resource during the writing process and his attention and support are something I am eternally grateful for.

I would also like to thank my wonderful mother, who has supported me and pushed me to be the best woman I can be. And of course I have to thank my brilliant stepdad, Ross, who has dedicated hours of his time to editing and revising my work since I was a freshman here at Bard.

Lastly, I would like to thank my closest friends, Sarah, Serena and Shelby for being the most compassionate and understanding people I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. When things got crazy I always knew I had you guys there to keep me grounded. I love you all!

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Introduction

The question of identity plays a large part within James Joyce's *Ulysses*. It was published in 1922, right as the countries decades-long civil war was beginning. This civil war was largely a conflict based around contested Irish identities. It was the fight between those who remained faithful to the Anglo-Irish Treaty, signed in 1921, and the Irish Republican Army, which demanded total independence from England. What it meant to be "Irish" wasn't an easy answer; it was one fraught with confusion and layers of nationalized hatred. England's long-standing presence in Ireland had only complicated these questions of nationality and 1922 marked the year that civil war would begin in earnest. This is the world that Joyce was observing; however, *Ulysses* is set back in time, in Dublin 1904. Regardless of the years that separate these two dates, though, Irish identity was still a large problem at the onset of the 20th century. Ireland's status as an English colony was a major point of contention. This struggle over national identity parallels Joyce's choice to deal with gender identity within *Ulysses*. With respect to both gender and nationalism we are forced to ask the questions, where do these ideas of the self originate? Who dictates what it means to be Irish, or masculine or feminine? In his essay, "Origins and Legacies of Irish Prudery: Sexuality and Social Control in Modern Ireland," Tom Inglis claims that,

> One of the primary mechanisms of everyday policing was the control of desire and pleasure, especially sexual desire and pleasure. Social order was maintained as long as individuals did not seek to satisfy their pleasures and desires…(11)

This idea becomes central to Inglis' argument, which revolves around the problems that arise when a primarily Catholic country such as Ireland experiences a sexual awakening. He focuses on these same themes of identity, and the contentious issue of defining ones sexuality when society has told you to deny that part of yourself. Each of Joyce's characters is confronted with this type of self-denial as it relates to their sexual expression and gender performance.

Ulysses focuses mainly on the narratives of two male characters, Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus, but as a first time reader I found myself increasingly drawn to the less tangible female presences within the novel. Barmaids, prostitutes, mothers, and most importantly Molly Bloom, are all characters that, while not at the forefront of the plot, seem to dictate the movements of their male counterparts. This relationship, between the female and male characters, was what first led me to look more closely at Molly and Leopold Bloom. I found the "Penelope" episode intriguing, Molly's strong-willed temperament contrasted nicely with the meekness I saw in Leopold. I wanted to look more closely at how Molly influenced Leopold throughout the novel, creating an argument focused solely on her enduring presence throughout the first seventeen episodes. However, as I began my attempt to argue that Molly, as a feminine presence, was the elusive force pushing Leopold throughout his day, I began to notice something else: Leopold complicated the entire concept of a "feminine" presence. I noticed that perhaps it wasn't Molly's femininity that was behind Leopold's actions and thoughts, but his own. As this concept of the "feminine" continued to obscure my initial readings, I began to think about Leopold as a "masculine" presence as well. These gender identifiers—"feminine" and

"masculine"—inhered in my previous idea, except that I realized it wasn't Molly as a female who was pushing Leopold, but rather his own "femininity".

Once I began to question the concept of gender and how it functions within *Ulysses*, my argument changed its focus. If I chose to look at Molly Bloom's constructed gender, I had to give the same attention to Leopold. They each subsist within these social constructs, oscillating between what is comfortably "male" or "female." Observing how Leopold and Molly Bloom put into question these stereotypical concepts of gender, and how they function within the novel, put the Blooms' relationship into perspective. As two people who neither accepted their place as "manly man" or "womanly woman," it was clear that gender was playing a different role than I previously anticipated. I took Suzette Henke's concept of the "womanly man," (106) which she attributes to Leopold Bloom, and applied it to his wife, Molly. In the end, I realized that by creating a space where one could be both "masculine" and "feminine," Joyce, whether inadvertently or by design, had subverted the gender norms of his day. Leopold and Molly Bloom successfully call into question what it meant to be a "man" or a "woman" in twentieth century Dublin.

Joyce's challenge to the social assumptions that go along with gender performance are only highlighted through the ways in which he exemplifies what it *does* mean to be stereotypically "masculine" or "feminine." Leopold Bloom's character is seen in direct contrast to the male presences in Dublin that surrounds him. Men such as Simon Dedalus, Martin Cunningham, Lenehan, and the citizen are all examples of what Joyce saw as the "manly men" of Dublin city. In his biography of Joyce, Richard Ellmann writes, "He [Leopold] achieves this distinction in part by not

belonging in a narrow sense, by ignoring the limits of national life; he is not so much and Irishman as a man" (372). Ellmann emphasizes Bloom's separation from these other Irishmen, concluding that even though their gender connects them, Leopold Bloom remains distinct in his defiance of what it means to be the formulaic "Irish man." By separating himself from these men, Leopold to some extent puts himself into the realm of "other." Even though he identifies as Irish, he does not exemplify the same "masculine" characteristics that his acquaintances do. The distinction between "Irishman" and "man" is interesting because it assumes that Bloom's Irishness, or lack thereof, is indicative of his place outside the realm of stereotypically masculine Dublin. His otherness, as exemplified in his place between the "male" and the "female," is only intensified by the hyper-masculine presence of these "Irishmen." While these men spend most of the novel in pubs, drinking or gossiping about Leopold and Molly, he spends his day wandering the streets, contemplating his place amongst them. Leopold's role as the womanly man allows him to exist in a space where he's safe from the types of societal constraints (being limited geographically to the pub, or a workplace) put upon the manly men of Dublin.

If Leopold finds his freedom in the ability to wander around Dublin as the womanly man, how are we supposed to observe Molly's role as the manly woman when she's remained in the house throughout the entire novel? Their gender experiences are very different. Molly challenges both her "masculine" and "feminine" desires in her monologue ("Penelope") by criticizing the ways in which she's expected to uphold or deny these gender expectations. However, as a woman

she's not given the same access to freedom as Leopold is as a man. Joyce never depicts Molly outside of her home, emphasizing the societal constraints put on women in the twentieth century. A woman had three important roles in Ireland—wife, mother, and homemaker—all of which Molly challenges in the course of her episode. Moreover, unlike most of her female contemporaries she has a profession: she's a singer. This is a detail that comes up in relation to her affair with manager, Hugh "Blazes" Boylan. Even though she's often criticized for this affair, it's provided her with her only means of escape. By embracing her "feminine" and "masculine" traits, she successfully liberates herself from the societal confines of being labeled a "womanly" woman. What does it mean to be this "womanly woman" in Dublin 1904?

The only other prominent female in the novel aside from Molly is Gerty MacDowell, whose brief interaction with Leopold is the focus of the "Nausicaa" episode. Gerty exemplifies a certain ideal of Irish femininity; her youth and beauty are what attract the rapacious Leopold. When Joyce glimpses into the mind of Gerty we see her caught up in her own desires for romance and love, desires she projects onto the mysterious stranger watching her (Leopold). Gerty is characterized by these romantic idealizations, thoughts that could be attributed to her age or the fact that as a woman she's expected to be after one thing, not sex, but a consuming romance. Her musings directly contrast those of Molly, who not only craves romance, but sex, companionship, and freedom. Her desires are much more complicated than the young Gerty's, just as Leopold's desires are more complicated than those of the other men he encounters. Tom Inglis addresses this topic in his essay. He writes, "Sexual transgression may be closely linked to the realization of

self, but it can also constitute a fundamental challenge to civilization and the existing social order" (12). Leopold and Molly exist as two people who have used "sexual transgression" in an attempt to more clearly define themselves. Inglis' point also gives clarify to the question, why Leopold and Molly were so ostracized by their society? Aside from their racial differences, their inability to accept society's rigid gender expectations highlights them as threats to the foundation of Irish society. Their choice not to comply with this "existing social order" is one way in which Joyce successfully separates them from those who have accepted this order.

In his biography *James Joyce*, Richard Ellmann claims that, "To be average in Ireland is to be eccentric" (371). This small, seemingly innocuous line references Leopold Bloom as the hero of Joyce's monumental novel *Ulysses*. These ideas about what it means to be "average" versus "eccentric" are central to Joyce's plot. His main characters, Leopold, Stephen and Molly, each find themselves separated from accepted Dublin society. Although "eccentric" in the eyes of other Dubliners, men like Leopold are characterized by traits such as his avoidance of drinking, and his unusual sex life (voyeurism and epistolary masochism), but he is otherwise ordinary in his temperament and lifestyle. Molly, less your typical woman, withholds her inner, subjective life until the very end of the novel. Ellmann asserts that this atypical depiction of marriage is what makes them so "eccentric." How do these two ideas relate to each other? Even though we're only looking at a singular day in their "normal" life, Joyce quickly undermines any false notion of regularity within this central relationship.

Richard Ellmann stresses that throughout the process of writing, Joyce was reacquainting himself with the image of Dublin he had left in 1904. Ellmann writes,

> Joyce was a traveler by nature as well as necessity. When he had sufficiently complicated his life in one place, he preferred, instead of unraveling it, to move on to another, so that he piled involvement upon involvement. One of the several reasons for his high spirits on leaving Dublin was that he felt he had been forced into doing what he liked. (189)

The desire to travel, mixed with what Ellmann refers to as "complications," all led Joyce to eventually leave his home country with his new partner, Nora Barnacle. This desire to escape informs Joyce's depiction of both Leopold and Molly Bloom. These consistencies between life and work are one reason that people have equated the events and characters of *Ulysses* with the reality that was James Joyce's life. His partnership with Nora has often undergone examination and there have been many attempts to connect this relationship with the focal marriage of his novel. There are no doubt connections between Nora and Molly, their indifference to intellectual life being one. Molly confronts Leopold about his insistency on explaining vocabulary in a convoluted manner ("Calypso"), and not dissimilarly, Nora was well known for having no part in Joyce's intellectual life. She chose to never read the copy of *Ulysses* that Joyce gave her (Ellmann, 387).

Moreover, in keeping with the Blooms' unconventional marriage, Joyce and Nora spent the first portion of their lives together unmarried. While this may not seem like a pertinent detail to the contemporary reader, in early twentieth-century Ireland it was almost unheard of for a young woman to live with, and bear children

to, a man she had not married. Joyce's relationship with Nora, as Ellmann saw it, seemed to shape the way he thought of women:

> Her [Nora's] immediate response to him, however, was not befuddled but self-possessed, and afterwards Joyce liked to think of her as 'sauntering' into his life, a careless acceptance of him which came to seem an essential part of the female temperament. (165)

There are many pieces of this statement that resonate when relating Nora to Joyce's eventual conception of Molly Bloom and her relationship to her husband Leopold. The immediate response Ellmann points the reader to, Nora's self-assuredness, is the outstanding character trait that connects to the persistence seen in Molly. Both women were emotionally stable and aware of what they wanted, when thrust into their respective marriages. The image of Nora 'sauntering' into his life gives her the levelheaded image of a woman who took control of her life instead of letting society dictate that life for her. This "sauntering," "self-possessed" woman who thought of Joyce with "careless acceptance" defined his overall view of women. These traits could easily be applied to the Molly Bloom he created in *Ulysses*. Ellmann argues that these impressions left by Nora upon Joyce seemed to him "an essential part of the female temperament." In other words, Nora did play a major role in shaping the way Joyce thought about and understood what it means to be a self-assured woman.

Joyce's acquired knowledge of the "womanly" is, we find out later in the novel, what Molly found so inherently attractive in the young Leopold. She values him for his ability to "understand and [feel] what a woman is…" (Joyce, 643) and it seems as though Leopold's understanding of women not only stems from his

character as the womanly man, but from his creator's assumptions and attitudes as well. In her essay, "Joyce's Female Voices in *Ulysses*", Heather Cook Callow claims,

> One of Joyce's consistent interests in the novel lies in the voice outside, the alternative voice that testifies to alternative realities coexisting alongside the narrative…[We] see it in the challenge of female voices…to the male voices that have come before. (161)

This "outsider" status that Callow refers to could be attributed to both Leopold and Molly Bloom. Joyce attaches this "otherness" to the "feminine," immediately isolating Molly Bloom's voice from the larger narrative. However, upon closer reading, Bloom's "femininity" pushes him further into this realm of isolation and otherness: he's not only separated by his religion and social choices, but is now deemed "womanly." Joyce's interest in this otherness and how it relates to the "feminine" stems from his own complicated relationships with women, romantic or otherwise. As a man Joyce exiled himself from Ireland; his subsequent travels, one could argue, confirmed his self-identification as "other," being neither French, Italian, Swiss, etc. His embrace of this kind of social separation is clearly seen in the ways both Leopold and Molly Bloom are treated and talked about throughout the novel. Callow's image of these "alternative realities" applies equally to their roles as "womanly man" and "manly woman," In their lives, they not only exist outside of Dublin society as Joyce presents it, they also exist outside of the gender performances inherent within this society, allowing them to fall into these new, previously unidentified states of being.

1

"Beasts and Fowls": Struggling to Define Leopold Bloom's Masculine/Feminine Appetites

Throughout his novel, James Joyce challenges accepted ideas of gender and gender performances. In Suzette Henke's book James Joyce and the Politics of Desire she makes the claim, "Femininity inhabits masculinity, inhabits it as otherness, as its own disruption. Femininity, in other words, is pure difference, a signifier, and so is masculinity" (110). Henke confronts the idea that femininity and masculinity exist as two separate entities, by claiming that instead they exist together and "inhabit" each other. What is deemed "traditional" in Joyce's Dublin, when thinking about gender allocates only two extremes, the "womanly woman" and the "manly man." These are rigid expectations; a woman becomes one who embraces her femininity and socially submissive place beneath the commanding and assertive male. Both Leopold and Molly Bloom contest these traditional ideas of gender performance. Conventional masculine and feminine habits are put into conversation, allowing Leopold and Molly Bloom's "gender" to evolve fluidly throughout the novel.

Leopold Bloom is not a conventional Irish hero. He's not Catholic or Protestant, but Jewish; he doesn't enjoy drinking at the pub with his peers; and his masculine role is often questioned. Joyce creates a space where Bloom lives as the perpetual "other." Suzette Henke acknowledges this role in her book, claiming that Leopold Bloom occupies the space of "womanly man," where he exists in "those marginal spaces on the edge of societal discourse usually reserved for women…"(106). By immediately separating Leopold Bloom from what could be

considered the "expected" Irish hero, Joyce allows Bloom to fall into this space and wholly occupy his otherness. By not assigning him one particular gender role, Henke is in turn recognizing Bloom's place outside society's gender expectations. The function of gender performance begins to define how Bloom relates to the world around him. Leopold Bloom's role as "womanly man" becomes integral when exploring how his masculinity (and femininity) is constructed throughout the novel. Bloom occupies three stereotypically "manly" roles in "Calypso:" the husband, the parent, and the carnal man.

The most prominent of Leopold Bloom's roles, and perhaps the most conflicted, is his function as Molly's husband. When Joyce introduces the Blooms, Leopold has already begun his day. He organizes breakfast and tea for the sleepy, elusive wife, Molly, who remains in bed the entirety of the episode. Consequently, the marital bed becomes the first symbol of their estrangement. Molly exists comfortably in the bed, while Leopold is portrayed looking on from the outside. Joyce doesn't allow Leopold into the bed with Molly because they don't physically or emotionally share that space. Blazes Boylan has usurped Bloom's masculine role, much as he has usurped his wife. Leopold Bloom acknowledges that he has begun to lose this masculine role and feels helpless to prevent it,

> A soft qualm, regret, flowed down his backbone,
> increasing. Will happen, yes. Prevent. Useless: can't
> move. Girl's sweet light lips. Will happen too. He felt the
> flowing qualm spread over him. Useless to move now.
> Lips kissed, kissing, kissed. Full gluey woman's lips.
> ("Calypso", 55)

This moment shows a very real paralysis that Leopold Bloom is experiencing in relation to Molly's affair. The inevitability of her rendezvous with Boylan "Will

happen, yes. Prevent. Useless…" There seems to be two connotations to this idea of uselessness. It's useless for him to prevent the affair, obviously, and perhaps as both husband and lover he feels useless. Another man has commandeered his masculine role and Bloom feels powerless to change it. Another significant detail in this passage is his distinction between "girl's sweet light lips" and "full gluey woman's lips." These two sets of lips are representative of his daughter Milly, and his wife Molly. Joyce briefly introduces Milly in this episode as another female in Bloom's life who is aging into a young woman. Her physical change into this feminine role ("sweet light lips") is juxtaposed with Molly's already warped body ("full gluey…lips"). His relationship to each of these women changes as their bodies change. He has already become paralyzed as a husband, and acknowledges a similar loss as Milly continues to age. His paternal role begins to shift into something more maternal, accounting for Molly's own distracted indifference towards their daughter.

Leopold Bloom's parental role, "father," can be contested later as his desire to exist outside the "masculine" becomes clearer. Joyce begins to explore this fatherhood role, as it exists parallel to a more maternal role within Leopold Bloom. Joyce immediately sets up juxtaposition between Leopold (father) and Molly (mother) when he introduces Milly through her letter correspondence with each parent. It becomes clear that Milly and Leopold have a closer relationship than with Molly. However, this could arise from Molly's personal beliefs in how women relate to each other. Later on in the "Penelope" episode when Molly speaks about other women, including the budding Milly, it's often with contempt. In Carol Shloss' essay,

"Milly, Molly, and the Mullingar Photo Shop" she states, "…since women experience themselves only as markers in male cultural narratives, they measure themselves according to their successes in being chosen…" (Schloss, 48). In other words, they compete with each other to receive and retain validation from men. With this idea in mind, Molly's contempt for these other women can be attributed to this feeling of competitiveness, of being the most desirable. Her fading relationship with Milly seems to be indicative of Milly's growth into a woman, a woman who's now competing in the same world as Molly. Even though she asserts that, "if there was anything wrong it's me shed tell not him" (Joyce, 630), it's clear that as Milly continues to grow into her womanhood, Molly is becoming more aware of her own waning beauty, as seen in small moments where she remarks, "they all look at her like me when I was her age" (631).

With this in mind, when their respective letters come, Leopold reads his immediately while Molly glances at her own card before turning her attention to Boylan's waiting letter. Milly's letter troubles Leopold. He is seen contemplating the passage of time and her hasty transition from girlhood to womanhood. The loss of Molly's affections seems to parallel the loss of Milly's childhood innocence,

> …She knows how to mind herself. But if not? No, nothing has happened. Of course it might. Wait in any case till it does. A wild piece of goods. Her slim legs running up the staircase. Destiny. Ripening now. Vain: very. ("Calypso", 54).

Leopold is directly confronting Milly's movement both physically and emotionally away from him. He is hyperaware of the separation between them; Joyce tells the reader explicitly this is her first birthday away from home that she's "coming out of

her shell." His worry stems from the recognition of the similarities between Molly and Milly. She's a "wild piece of goods," free-spirited like her mother and according to Bloom, very vain. These attributes would be intimidating to any father, but to the already usurped Leopold Bloom, Milly's transition is even more threatening. He's losing both women in his life, complicating his roles as husband and father. However, it's not only losing Milly that complicates these performative gender roles. Molly has alienated herself from the role of mother, therefore Bloom has taken it upon himself to act as both masculine and feminine parental figures.

The last of Leopold Bloom's pivotal characteristics introduced in this episode is his role as the carnal man. The first introduction we have of Bloom is when Joyce writes, "Mr. Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls" (45). This is an important description of Bloom because it asserts his affinity for consuming flesh "with relish." Joyce immediately introduces Bloom as a carnivorous man, who takes pleasure in the consumption of meat. For arguments sake, this meat is not always literal like the kidney he buys but also figurative, such as the meaty legs and behind of the woman in the butcher's shop.

This woman is the first of many intangible strangers Leopold Bloom has lascivious thoughts about. He rushes himself in the butchers shop "To catch up and walk behind her if she went slowly, behind her moving hams…" (49). Bloom equates the woman from the shop with butchered meat, meat that is ready to be consumed. It's small moments like this that keep him moving throughout the day, these brief instances where he is able to walk behind a woman and admire her as a slab of meat. This outlook on women, however, is not reserved for strangers alone; he even

refers to Molly as having "bedwarmed flesh," a parallel, perhaps, to the organs of beasts he enjoys. Joyce's use of the word "flesh" instead of something more mundane like "skin" emphasizes Bloom's animalistic appetite. His physical intake of internal organs directly contrasts his inability to satiate his sexual appetites.

It is important for Joyce to set up Leopold Bloom in these three prominent masculine roles, because in this first episode the space Bloom occupies within the wider society of Dublin has yet to be recognized. In his household we immediately know as a husband he's been usurped. As a father he's losing Milly to age and as a carnal man he consumes only with his mind. None of these masculine roles are fully embraced by Bloom. This is where we return to Henke's idea of the "womanly man," and how Leopold Bloom occupies this vague un-gendered space on the margins of society. Joyce creates a space where Leopold Bloom wanders through Dublin attempting to satiate his "manly" and "womanly" desires as these conventional ideas of gender begin to evolve.

When exploring Leopold Bloom's constructed and contested gender it's imperative to remember that gender isn't only a social construct but a biological one. This may seem like an obvious point to make, but when talking about femininity and masculinity as ideological concepts it's important to recognize that Leopold Bloom is physically male. His sexual desires arise from this body and how Leopold chooses to relate to his male anatomy becomes essential to how he defines his own masculine role within the novel. In "Lotus Eaters," Joyce allows his audience a glimpse at Bloom's life outside the domestic, "feminine space" of his home. Leopold's previously discussed role as "womanly man" becomes hidden as he

performs the societal "male" role that is expected of him. It can be argued that out on the streets, even though he does not wholly exist as "man", he chooses to inhabit this singular gender. This choice creates conflict within Leopold, who ponders the physicality of his masculinity and the pretenses that it creates.

A crucial moment for Bloom occurs at the close of "Lotus Eaters,"

> He foresaw his pale body reclined in it at full, naked, in a womb of warmth… He saw his trunk and limbs riprippled over and sustained, buoyed lightly upward, lemonyellow: his naval, bud of flesh: saw the dark tangled curls of his bush…floating hair of the stream around the limp father of thousands, a languid floating flower. (71)

This small passage creates a number of essential images. The relationship seen here is an intimate one between a man and his body. The image is serene, peaceful; Bloom thinks of himself as back in the womb. It's an interesting combination of images, the femininity of the womb and the masculinity of his genitalia. It shows the melding of these two aspects of Bloom; his gender bent feminine and masculine desires. Bloom's last thought, "the limp father of thousands" is retrospective about where he's been previously in this episode. The limpness evokes an inadequacy, in spite being the (masturbatory) "father of thousands;" his masculine body floats in front of him and remains useless. Lisa Rado analyzes this scene perceptively,

> This…image reflects his own confusion about his sexual and personal identity, as it suggests at the same time both impotence and transcendence… the limpness of the phallus seems to indicate loss of masculinity and male procreative power. However, the fact that the penis resembles a wet "floating flower" –the flower being a traditionally positive metaphor for female genitalia –reworks the initial symbol of impotence into one of potential luxuriant and fertile sexuality and beauty. (Rado, 3)

This short passage reiterates some of the ideas previously stated when looking at this final passage in "Lotus Eaters." It's clear that Leopold Bloom's gender identity is confusing and something he struggles with throughout the novel. The point of this confusion can be traced to his male anatomy, the part of him that Rado claims is lost, his limp phallus a symbol of his absent "procreative power." The contrast between this loss of identity and the security he feels in the feminine space seems to be the pinnacle of his blurring gender roles. He floats between the two, never fully aligned with either gendered performance. As Rado points out, his wavering masculinity becomes overshadowed and changed into a celebration of a flourishing female sexuality. This then becomes a major conflict in Leopold Bloom's search for gender identity. While he attempts to cope with his irresolute masculine roles he must also come to terms with his accessible femininity.

There are two moments in "Lotus Eaters" where Leopold ponders a lack of male genitalia where it should be, in gelded horses and eunuchs. When he looks at the horses he thinks, "Gelded too: a stump of black guttapercha wagging limp between their haunches. Might be happy all the same that way. Good poor brutes they look" (63). This first instance of male genital mutilation occurs in animals, something anatomically different from Bloom but somehow related nonetheless. The image of the "stump" is graphic, the remnants of what used to be masculine and powerful reduced to this thing, "wagging limp between their haunches". The physical impotence of the male horses could mirror a similar feeling of incompetence Bloom feels. While Bloom is not physically incapable of sexual arousal and action, his failures come from the idea that he's no longer the man pleasing his

wife. His physical role has been taken over by Blazes Boylan, a man who perhaps has emotionally gelded Leopold. Leopold doesn't dwell on the animals lack of genitalia; he instead chooses to believe that they're "happy all the same." In Bloom's mind perhaps life can go on without that aspect of one's self, he can become unfettered by those organs and the pretenses they create.

However, this feeling takes a notable turn when he confronts other gelded men, eunuchs. In this instance he thinks about the act of losing one's genitals, "Suppose they wouldn't feel anything after. Kind of placid. No worry…Who knows? Eunuch. One way out of it" (67). He is clearly able to identify more directly towards these men, who like the horses, have been deprived of their physical "manhood". While the horses were "poor old brutes", these eunuchs seem to appeal to Leopold on some emotional level. Their life after is "placid", peaceful and without worry. What stands out most is his assertion at the end that it's "one way out of it." These small moments allow the reader to see Leopold Bloom attempting to come to terms with the role of his male anatomy. When he thinks that losing your testicles can be "one way out of it," he could be talking about the uncertainty of his own sex life. He feels gelded and cuckolded by Blazes Boylan, the man who's taken over providing sexual relief to Molly. He's looking for an emotional escape from the realization that his masculine role is being contested and overpowered.

A prominent part of this chapter deals with a way he's attempted to satiate this desire to escape the confines of his gender and his biology. This is the first episode in which Joyce introduces Martha, Leopold's own "affair" of sorts. We don't know a lot about her except that she answered an ad Leopold put out in the paper

and is generally an enthusiastic pen pal. The immediate difference between Leopold's affair and Molly's is that Leopold Bloom is conversing purely through letters, while Molly's actions are obviously more physical. However, it's clear that the correspondence between Leopold and Martha has become increasingly sexual. In her letter Martha writes,

> …I called you naughty boy because I do not like that other world. Please tell me what is the real meaning of that word? Are you not happy in your home you poor little naughty boy? I do wish I could do something for you…I think of you so often you have no idea. I have never felt myself so much drawn to a man as you…Please write me a long letter …you naughty boy… (63-64)

Before opening the letter Leopold seemed nervous about what could be contained, worrying that she may be "annoyed" or put off somehow by the contents of his last letter. This leads one to believe that these letters have gotten increasingly risqué and Bloom was nervous that he had "gone too far last time." Their correspondence is becoming intimate, making Leopold nervous about Martha's expectations and also pushing Martha's own desires along. She seems to enjoy the playfulness of their relationship, constantly referring to him as a "naughty boy," coy and flirtatious. However, she's also preoccupied with his home life, understanding he has a troubled relationship with his wife. Perhaps Martha's letter is indicative of Shloss' idea that was explored earlier, highlighting these feelings of competitiveness between women. Even though Martha has never met or seen Molly, she's seeking Leopold's validation. Asking about his troubled relationship allows her to gain that confirmation. Martha's preoccupation doesn't seem to offend Bloom in any way, but

his actions after opening the letter and her sentiments contained within it lead the reader to believe their feelings are not mutual.

Martha expresses an unrelenting desire to meet Leopold. Her affections are expressed through her flirtatious use of the word "naughty" and she explicitly says, "I have never felt myself so much drawn to a man as you…" These romanticisms show the simplicity of Martha, an otherwise mysterious woman who we only know through this singular, grammatically incorrect letter. This letter from Martha raises many questions about her and Leopold's relationship. One of the most immediate is why it exists at all? Leopold, as mentioned before, is attempting to find an escape from his cuckolded life. He's found this escape through Martha, but we have no information about how long or how in depth this correspondence has come. The relationship seems to be his own way of asserting his male domination, taking back his masculine power and tempting a new woman. However, Leopold doesn't seem to share Martha's desire that they meet. This leads one to believe that even though Leopold is trying to relate to and embrace his masculinity, he doesn't want to physically copulate with another woman.

The juxtaposition between Leopold's Bloom preoccupation with masculine anatomy and that anatomy's removal and the relief of that removal to provide "one way out of it" all encompass his hesitance to engage physically with Martha or any other woman. As a man he's faced with his very real and present physical desire for women, except he cannot seem to act upon these desires. Whether it's because of Molly or some other reason, we don't see him engage in any physical sexual act until "Nausicaa." However even that act remains very detached and unemotional.

"Nausicaa" is an important chapter when exploring Leopold Bloom's sexuality and gender, because it asserts Bloom's role as a masculine character. This chapter features the only explicit sexual act contained within the entire novel, one that takes place between Leopold and Gerty MacDowell. Due to the fact that we see a very physical sexual release from Leopold, it's important to pay attention to the conditions surrounding his act of masturbation and the unspoken relationship he and Gerty form.

When Gerty is introduced she's depicted as a virginal beauty. Joyce writes, "The waxen pallor of her face was almost spiritual in its ivorylike purity though her rosebud mouth was a genuine Cupid's bow, Greekly perfect" (286). The divine nature of her attractiveness is reiterated here. Joyce uses words like "spiritual" and "purity" to create a sense of innocence that surrounds Gerty. She's later described as wearing a blue blouse, the color the Virgin Mary was most often represented wearing. All of these characteristics evoke the ideal Irish woman, young, pure, and healthy. The fact that Joyce combines this divine quality to her beauty and Bloom's masturbation is a jarring comparison. Leopold Bloom plainly masturbates to the image of the Virgin Mary.

Another essential facet to this episode is that it provides one of the rare glimpses into a biologically female psyche. Aside from Molly's soliloquy at the end of the novel, this is the only place Joyce chooses to again reveal the inner dialogue of an Irish woman. However, unlike the pensive and fiery Molly, Gerty offers a different sort of inner monologue. The innocence Joyce evokes in her appearance is reflected in the way her thoughts meander onto the page. Her concerns revolve around boys,

being liked, being hurt and the company she keeps. As Bloom approaches the scene, Gerty is daydreaming of her ideal man,

> No prince charming is her beau ideal to lay a rare and wondrous love at her feet but rather a manly man with a strong quiet face who had not found his ideal, perhaps his hair slightly flecked with grey, and who would understand, take her in his sheltering arms, strain her to him in all the strength of his deep passionate nature and comfort her with a long long kiss. (288)

In this passage we glimpse at what Gerty desires amongst all else, to be swept off her feet by some mysterious, foreign stranger. Gerty's stereotypically female looks are reflected in her craving for romance, a stereotypically "female" longing. Her desires are not too different than Leopold Bloom's, the yearning for some intimate connection to distract them from otherwise mundane wanderings. In a sense, Bloom reflects this stranger that Gerty thirsts for. He's not a typical "Irishmen", his dark looks reflect his Jewishness, and he's certainly older than she is. When she first notices Bloom watching her she thinks, "by his dark eyes and pale intellectual face…he was a foreigner…He was in deep mourning, she could see that, and the story of a haunting sorrow was written on his face. She would have given worlds to know what it was" (293). As a young romantic she wants to share his misery, she glamorizes his pain, making it something alluring instead of painful. Bloom exists as a temporary figure of her imagination, encompassing everything she desires, which directly parallels the role Gerty plays for Bloom. Like Gerty, Leopold Bloom is performing this "feminine" desire, the desire for a romantic connection.

We already know Gerty exists as a coveted young beauty. However at the end of the episode it's revealed that Gerty is also suffering from an ailment (not

emotional, but physical). Joyce transitions back into Bloom's consciousness and writes,

> Gerty MacDowell was…No! She's lame! O! Mr. Bloom watched her as she limped away. Poor girl! That's why she's left on the shelf…thought something was wrong by the cut of her jib. Jilted beauty! A defect is ten times worse in a woman…Glad I didn't know when she was on show. (301).

This realization of her lameness and Bloom's reaction shows a disturbing difference between the way men and women react towards suffering. In Gerty's mind Bloom's suffering is a window into his troubled, romantic life. She wants to know everything about his pain and share it with him. In this passage we see something quite different. Bloom is actually repelled by her physical disability. His reaction to her "lameness" has humanized her, brought her down from the divine pedestal into the reality that is Joyce's Dublin. Joyce raises an interesting contradiction here between male and female incapacity. Throughout the novel we are confronted with Bloom's physical incapability, revolving around his faltering sex life with his wife. However, as Bloom states, "a defect is ten times worse in a woman," meaning that even though Gerty is clearly not incapacitated because of her foot, she is no longer able to occupy the space of the "ideal Irish woman."

It was easier for Bloom to feel sexually connected to Gerty before this "humanization" due to her lameness because as a coveted object of desire she remained unobtainable. This elusive role she existed in made it easier for Bloom to complete his sexual act because he was able to remain separate from her as a real person. This estrangement relates back to his earlier communications with Martha, who he also refuses to interact with on a personal level. Bloom is obviously trying to

remain apart from any real sexual relationship. He's refusing to meet Martha and only watched Gerty from a distance, romanticizing her role as an intangible sexual partner.

Aside from the fleeting connection both Gerty and Bloom experience, the physical act itself cannot be overlooked. As mentioned before, "Nausicaa" is the only point in the entire novel where there is any sort of physical sex act, in this case, masturbation. Sex is often alluded to and even apart of hallucinations later in "Circe," but nobody actually orgasms as Bloom does here. The masturbatory act itself is described metaphorically through a fireworks show. It's ascribed to how the "rocket sprang and bang shot blind…the Roman candle burst and it was like a sigh of O! …It gushed out of it a stream of rain gold hair threads…"(300). The comparison between Bloom's ejaculation and the fireworks is interesting because of the very public nature of each. Everyone is preoccupied with the grandeur and beauty of the fireworks, and Joyce then connects this grandeur with Bloom's own expulsion of bodily fluids.

The opulence of Bloom's ejaculation can be seen as a "manly" act. In Gerty's mind she views him as this "manly man" that will come to take her into his arms and love her, however, the act of masturbation is another kind of manly act that Bloom occupies in the episode. It shows the more masculine nature of Bloom, something briefly seen in "Lotus Eaters" when he's relating to his own male body. In this episode he not only contemplates what it means to be a man biologically, he participates in an act directly related to that male body. The discomfort he considers in "Lotus Eaters" when he thinks about gelded horses and Eunuchs is literally

expelled from him in these moments. This physical release doesn't deter Bloom from continuing to dwell on Molly's impending affair but there seems to be some sort of consolation he feels towards the end of the episode.

Thinking back on his interaction with Gerty, Bloom thinks, "Chance. We'll never meet again. But it was lovely. Goodbye, dear. Thanks. Made me feel so young" (312). Bloom has resigned himself to the events that have transpired on the beach, knowing this interaction was fleeting but happy it occurred nonetheless. Just like Gerty fantasized about Bloom and enjoyed creating a story around him, Bloom was also able to enjoy the momentary nature of this relationship. For Gerty it gave her hope that her "beau ideal", that dark mysterious stranger, exists somewhere, ready to whisk her away. In Bloom's mind he was able to forget for a moment his troubles and was able to "feel so young." This episode seems to have acted as both a physical and temporarily emotional release for Bloom during his daily wanderings. In a novel where he often exists between manly and womanly desires, this episode emphasizes a more masculine, a more commanding Leopold Bloom. The outside world briefly disappeared, as he was seduced and relieved by the young and innocent Gerty MacDowell.

If "Nausicaa" acts as Joyce's declaration of Leopold Bloom's role as a man within the novel, "Circe" certainly acts as an assertion of his femininity. This movement returns to Suzette Henke's ideas about how masculinity exists within femininity and vice versa. Her idea of the "womanly man" becomes pertinent when exploring Bloom's abrupt transformation from male to female in "Circe." Before delving into the contents of this episode, it's important to recognize the way Joyce

chooses to attack the question of gender that arises within this chapter. The previously discussed idea of gender performance transforms from a concept to something that's actually happening on the page. Joyce chooses to write this episode in the style of a play. Gender performance becomes an actual performance, allowing the "characters" to act out and embrace different sexual and gender roles. It is worth noting that, even though these performances are happening linguistically, everything happening on the page is in Bloom's mind. These hallucinations exist to show us a part of his psyche that has been repressed, his desire to exist in the feminine space he is denied throughout the novel. Joyce begins to experiment with physical and mental gender as he transforms Leopold and Bella.

Bloom's physical gender changes within this episode when he hallucinates about Bella, a Madame. Along with this very physical transformation, Joyce accentuates a change in the social roles that come along with being either male or female. In the beginning of this scene a character only known as "The Fan" states, "…the missus is master. Petticoat government" (430), proclaiming the overarching theme of Bloom's hallucination, the power of a woman. Bloom soon after says, "Exuberant female. Enormously I desiderate your domination. I am exhausted, abandoned, no more young." Before any changes in gender take place, there is a very real moment where we see the underlying desires that drive Bloom's fantasy. This fantasy entails a movement of power from male to female. He longs for domination. His inability to fully embrace his masculinity has left him drained and cuckolded.

While exploring the fluidity of gender by transforming his characters psychologically and physically, Joyce also stresses the extremes of gender, the

"manly man" and "womanly woman". The scene between Bello and Bloom acts as an intersection of these two gender extremes. Bello takes on the hyper-masculine tone while verbally and physically abusing the now "womanly woman" that is Leopold Bloom. Joyce accentuates the role of "man" as a dominating, possessive presence, while the "woman" is objectified and emotionally battered. Joyce writes,

> **Bello:** (*with a hard basilisk stare, in a baritone voice*) Hound of dishonor!
> **Bloom**: (*infatuated*) Empress!
> **Bello**: (*his heavy cheekchops sagging*) Adorer of the adulterous rump... Down! (He taps her on the shoulder with his fan) Incline feet forward! Slide left foot on pace back! You will fall. You are falling. On the hands down!
> **Bloom**: (*her eyes upturned in the sign of admiration, closing, yaps*)…
> **Bello:** (*…his hands stuck deep in his breeches pockets, places his heel on her neck and grinds it in*) Footstool! Feel my entire weight. Bow bondslave, before the throne of your despot's glorious heels so glistening in their proud erectness. (432-433)

This exchange shows the first instance of physical gender transformation. Bella transforms into the domineering and aggressive Bello. Leopold Bloom not only turns into a "her," but also is put on all forms and transformed into a pig. The immediate characterization of these two new characters reiterates the previously mentioned gender extremes. Bello is immediately cast with a "basilisk stare," he takes on the ability to kill in a glance the already weakened Bloom, who is described as nothing but "infatuated" and "admiring." Bello hostilely commands Bloom to get on all fours, turning him into a pig, a piece of meat and her property. Bloom's role as a "womanly woman" is one that stresses the submissive nature of the female and her societal place below the "manly man". The last image seen in this passage is Bello emphasizing his "heels so glistening in their proud erectness", an image that

suggests his domineering male presence. One critic states, "the fact that Bloom-as-woman manifests all the negative connotations of the female role also works to accentuate the unnaturalness of the feminine stereotype" (Joseph Boon, 77). This assertion further complicates the changing gender identities that occur throughout the episode. As Boon claims, the ridiculousness of female stereotypes becomes apparent in this scene, not only in the way Bello speaks to Bloom but also the way in which Bloom submits to Bello. Joyce has created a space where gendered extremes are shown for their ludicrous nature. The brothel has become a place for expression and a change to these highly pigeonholed gender expectations.

The issues this transformation brings up about gender are numerous. Leopold Bloom, as metamorphosed woman, has lost all power over himself. He's become imprisoned in this female body; a body that is no longer his own but belongs to Bello. This emotional imprisonment is then reiterated in a more physical restraint, Bello declares to Bloom,

> …You will be laced with cruel force into vicelike corsets of soft dove coutille with whalebone busk to the diamondtrimmed pelvis, the absolute outside edge, while your figure, plumper than when at large, will be restrained in nettight frocks, pretty two ounce petticoats and fringes and things stamped, of course, with my houseflag… (437)

In this speech we see not only the emotional power the "manly man" holds over a woman but also the specifically constraining nature of gendered clothing. A woman is expected to be controlled by her husband as well as controlled by the clothing she wears. These clothes are also created and adhere to the androcentric ideas of how women should look. Rado expands upon this idea when she claims,

> …the description of women's clothing illustrates the degree to which even women's bodies have been reshaped, commodified, and exposed for what society accepts as a 'normative' male gaze. (Rado, 9)

Rado's ideas here represent a very troubling aspect of societal expectations for women and their bodies. These images and interpretations all reflect a female attitude towards confinement. This otherwise mundane description of female attire is littered with violent overtures; "cruel force" and "vicelike corsets" restate the demanding nature of society's expectations for women. A woman's body becomes one more thing to be bought and sold by male oppressors. This is a notion that becomes important later on when exploring Molly Bloom's relationship to her own "womanhood," and her aversion to being "chained up" by biologically male oppressors.

Joyce continues to explore this correlation between a woman's passivity and a man's tendency toward violence,

> Bello: …Swell the bust. Smile. Droop shoulders. What offers? (*he points*) For that lot. Trained by owner to fetch and carry, basket in mouth. (*He bares his arm and plunges it elbowdeep in Bloom's vulva*) There's fine depth for you! What boys? That give you a hardon? (440)

This last passage revolves around a hallucination where Bello is auctioning off the female Bloom, who becomes not only a physical piece of meat but also just a piece of property. The feminine Bloom is expected to perform the "womanly woman", accentuating his breasts, appearing pleased, and performing "trained" feminine duties. However, while these aspects show the expectations of a woman to perform her "feminine duties", a more disturbing part is the violent action Bello takes against

Bloom. The moment where Joyce writes, "he bares his arm and plunges it elbowdeep in Bloom's vulva," is a moment of extreme sexual violence. It signifies a complete submission to the male audience; Bloom's female body belongs to Bello, who, as the authoritarian man feels entitled to sadistically penetrate her.

The interactions between Bello and Leopold Bloom complicate this idea of gender roles that play a pivotal part throughout the novel. As Joyce obscures the boundaries of gender through Leopold and Molly Bloom, he takes the opportunity in this episode to explore the implications of society's expected "manly man" and "womanly woman." By allowing Bello to turn into a totalitarian, abusive male, he's accentuating the social expectation of what it means to be "masculine." A "man" is supposed to be aggressive and controlling, especially over his female "property." Going along with this he acknowledges the explicitly submissive role women hold, their inability to escape the confining nature of their social and marital status. Leopold Bloom's desire to exist in a separate space from these farcical extremes is highlighted through this hallucination. These rigid gender roles do not appeal to either Leopold or Molly Bloom. They continue to exist independently, acting as both feminine and masculine people. In the end, Leopold loves Molly and her forceful personality. Suzette Henke reiterates this idea when she writes,

> Molly embodies…that figure of totalizing self presence for which he [Bloom] perpetually pines –an unobtainable object of romantic fulfillment…Molly occupies the… "Eternal feminine" that physically centers male libidinal fantasy… (125)

Leopold Bloom, despite his constant fetishizing of women across Dublin, truly only yearns for one. His gender reversal acts as a way for him to briefly satisfy his

unrequited love for Molly. Even though this chapter emphasized the expected subservient place of a woman, Molly remains under no man's control. She should be the most obtainable woman in Leopold's life and yet she subsists as the most elusive. Molly exists throughout the novel in the domestic space of their home, from which he remains exiled from throughout the day. The physical space where she exists and where Bloom separates from can be looked at as the only "safe" place for each of them throughout the novel. Leopold and Molly Bloom each occupy a previously un-gendered space, somewhere they can be both masculine and feminine without being trapped by the duality of "manly man" or "womanly woman".

2

"Womb of Sin": How the Male Gaze Attempts to Marginalize Molly Bloom

With biological sex comes a whole host of gender expectations. These constitute how one is supposed to feel, act, and successfully integrate into society. In his essay "A Little Trouble about Those White Corpuscles", Garry Leonard writes, "In order for 'masculinity' to be culturally intelligible it must be performed, which means all presentations of the 'self', coded as 'masculine', are potentially decodable as 'feminine'" (7). Leonard is expressing how gender binaries are beginning to break down, by understanding that presentation of the "self" can be both masculine and feminine. If the "masculine performance" is challenged, it reveals the need for a feminine counter performance. If we are meant to understand that the masculine self should control the feminine, then we can affirm that any assertion of female sexuality or power is an act of rebellion against this accepted patriarchal authority. Leonard reiterates Suzette Henke's assertion that "Femininity inhabits masculinity", and he understands that if this statement is true then so is its inversion.

There remains a large rejection of this idea. In his essay, "Joyce's Vagina Dentata: Irish Nationalism and the Colonial Dilemma of Manhood," Agata Szczeszak-Brewer uses the myth of vagina dentata (a woman who has teeth in her vagina) to emphasize man's fear of castration as it relates to "the fear of the unknown, mysterious, hidden "territory' and the anxiety that a powerful woman might unman her partner…and leave him weak and impotent" (3). To Brewer, this is boiled down to female sexuality. He claims there is an "unmistakable connection between the feminine and the threat of loss." This fear of female sexuality is why Leopold Bloom

spends his journey fighting against his role as "womanly man." He's been conditioned to fear femininity, to see it as not only weakness but also as a threat. His constant challenge to assert his masculinity and defend it stems from this inability to separate his masculine and feminine attributes. This can be seen in moments such as his hallucinations in the "Circe" episode, where he's directly confronted with powerful images of female sexuality (Bella/Bello). Fear of a woman's sexuality is also the reason Molly is ostracized throughout the novel. She represents a woman (one who exists outside of hallucinations) who's taken control of her own sexual pleasure. This scares the men that surround her because this kind of physical and emotional control gives her back the power that society has denied her. To keep her submissive, Joyce's male characters and critics reading *Ulysses* have labeled her every type of "whore" –someone deviant, that must be controlled by the dominant man.

Critical reception of Molly Bloom has continued to change throughout time. The changes seen in literary criticism are derived from changing social and gender ideals. Kathleen McCormick writes,

> …Reading is an interdiscursive act that occurs within changing determinations that affect both texts and readers. This perspective sees texts not as transcendent, stable, entities with universal signifiers, but as material objects that are both produced and reproduced under changing historical and ideological conditions (McCormick, 19).

This is an important division to make when attempting to talk about gender and its relation to James Joyce and *Ulysses*. McCormick is right to make this distinction; our beliefs about gender highly affect our reading of Joyce, just as they affected critics

writing in the 20th century. The lens through which this paper is written reflects a highly liberal education in a time where gender no longer exists only as "male" and female" but subsists in such denominations as "cisgender", "transgender", "transsexual", etc. This background allows a less rigid definition of what constitutes masculine or feminine performances and why I've stressed that Leopold and Molly Bloom exist as both "womanly man" and "manly woman". Contemporary critics can celebrate Molly as a radical female character, one who takes control of her sexuality and therefore takes back the power that men denied her. However, this trend stems mostly from contemporary female criticism. In the 1930s or even later on with the 50s/60s, literary critics chose to find a way in which Molly could be absolved of this sexual power. This choice stemmed from the idea that this authority she had was destructive and threatening towards traditionally patriarchal societal norms.

Labeling Molly Bloom a "whore" acted as a tactical decision to give a name to something critics couldn't identify, and therefore became threatening. McCormick explores how this branding absolved Molly of her sexual independence and allowed dominant male figures to retain their sexual authority over her. McCormick writes,

> …Exaggerated attacks on the evils of adultery typified criticism of Molly during this [1950s/1960s] period…the 'fact' of one affair automatically 'proves' Molly to be a whore…Molly's guilt is proven simply by what people think of her…(McCormick, 30)

Molly's "guilt," if one believes she's guilty of anything, stems from fact that she is having an affair with Blazes Boylan. All of these ideas arise from the belief, stated above, that American critics in the postwar period linked "evil with the female body" (30). The inability to separate Molly's gender from her choices as a sexually active

agent has led to years of harsh criticism. Richard Pearce, a contemporary male feminist, who has also explored Molly Bloom's sexual role within the novel, and he responds to these ideas McCormick brings up and claims, "…it took scholars half a century of careful reading to discover that Molly was not promiscuous, for Boylan was her first adulteress lover" (Pearce, 45). These scholars that Pearce is referring to are victims of the male dominated assumptions that surround female promiscuity. These expectations about Molly are highlighted by Joyce's other male characters, those who successfully represent the "manly men" of early 20th century Dublin.

Before Joyce shows us the woman Molly Bloom actually is, he focuses on these types of assumptions and how they function within a small community. He spends the first seventeen episodes of *Ulysses* showing his reader what people think about Molly, whether it's Leopold Bloom pining after the young woman he married or one of his friends gossiping about her. His choice to characterize her through the male gaze highlights society's problems when addressing a woman's sexuality. The fear that exists within Leopold Bloom, who struggles with his own femininity and the animosity that comes from his peers, reflect the hyper-masculine society that Molly Bloom has to navigate in 1904 Dublin. A reader of *Ulysses* can't help but be influenced by the ways in which these men think about and justify their opinions on her and the choices they assume she's making. We'll explore this idea by looking at the three major male presences that contextualize Molly throughout the novel, James Joyce, Leopold Bloom, and the miscellaneous male presence (Leopold's friends).

Before there was Leopold, Molly, Stephen, Gerty, or any other of the characters within *Ulysses*, there was only James Joyce. As an author, his influences must be addressed when looking at the impacts some of these characters continue to hold over readers and critics today. We continue to explicate and derive meaning from his writing, as did people in the 60s, 50s, 30s, etc. When we observe the impact of the male gaze on Molly Bloom's characterization, Joyce's role cannot be overlooked. As a male author, what was his role in creating (and perhaps even fetishizing) the Molly Bloom we continue to explore? Even though we can read the "Penelope" episode as something separated from the overarching androcentric narrative that makes up the first seventeen episodes of *Ulysses*, it's more important to see it as a continuation, or a conversation with those seventeen episodes. Molly Bloom is the final voice the reader encounters. She participates in the narrative Joyce has constructed and challenges the male-controlled agenda it put forth.

In her essay "Joyce's Female Voices in *Ulysses,*" Heather Cook Callow claims that,

> Joyce…uses female voices…to overturn the consensus of male Dublin opinion…this idea does not make him a feminist writer, but it does make him a positive ally in the feminist aim of reevaluating a literary canon in which authoritative patriarchal voices prevail. (161)

This is the most accessible explication of Joyce's authorial relationship to the female characters in Dublin, especially Molly Bloom. Even though it might be a stretch to call him a feminist, a woman like Molly wouldn't exist coming from a purely misogynistic author. Her complexity and free-flowing thoughts about life and sex were thought of as "pornographic," causing a major uproar when Joyce's novel was

first published, and later when it became a focus of intense interest within the literary community. However, Callow makes a clear point that Joyce doesn't necessarily have to be a feminist to be a "positive ally in the feminist aim." However, this opinion does not necessarily reflect the ideals of all female critics, who continue to read and explore Molly Bloom's role in *Ulysses*. Diana E. Henderson expresses a more critical viewpoint of Molly in her essay "Joyce's Modernist Woman: Whose Last Word?" She writes,

> …As regards the placement of the feminine voice in "Penelope", formal and linguistic evidence shows *Ulysses* to be inscribed within familiar literary conventions of epic, not liberating but instead containing and objectifying the feminine voice. (520)

This assertion comes from her exploration of Joyce as a patriarchal figure in literature, revealing his inability to separate "feminine voice" from his own sexual fantasies. She bases this idea on a letter Joyce wrote to Frank Budgen in which he writes, "Penelope turns like the huge earth ball slowly surely and evenly round…its four cardinal points being the female breasts, arse, womb and cunt" (520). This type of sexualization is her proof that despite the "sophisticated manner" in which Molly speaks during her episode, Joyce's intentions were not to humanize her. Henderson's argument revolves around the presumption that because Joyce's language is often indicative of his time period's patriarchal values, he is unable to successfully "liberate" Molly through her female voice. However, despite this claim it doesn't give enough credit to the complexity of Molly's thoughts and musings throughout the "Penelope" chapter. She too closely connects the author with the character on the page. Regardless of the emphasis on Molly's sexual nature, Joyce's

ability to adopt this type of radical feminine expression reveals his authorial role as a "feminist ally" (Callow, 161).

Joyce's relationship to Molly Bloom reflects his real life relationship with his wife, Nora Barnacle. When looking at the way he portrays the feminine voice, it's imperative to understand how this relates to the woman with which he spent most of his life. In his biography *James Joyce*, Richard Ellmann writes,

> Joyce attributes to his heroine the character of woman, as Nora had shown it to him, not the character, so often presumed by novelists, of an irresponsible, passionate, romantic creature. (387-388)

This relationship is the reason why opinions such as Diana Henderson's seem too harsh when looking at how Joyce chose to portray his primary female character. Joyce's relationship to Nora was an important part of his life, especially when it came to exploring the depths of Molly Bloom. Nora was well known for being uninterested in Joyce's difficult prose, and for allegedly having never read *Ulysses*. This relates to Molly's own distaste for intellectuals, as can be seen in "Calypso" when she proclaims, "O Rocks! …Tell us in plain words" (Joyce, 52). Joyce clearly shares the same respect for Nora that Bloom later expresses for Molly in the novel. In an early letter Joyce wrote to Nora he writes, "Certain people who know that we are much together often insult me about you. I listen to them calmly, disdaining to answer them but their least word tumbles my heart about…" (*Selected Letter of James Joyce*, 27). It seems that Joyce and Bloom shared a similar problem: disdain for "friends" who insult their partners. This connection between life and fiction is one reason that critics such as Callow can define Joyce as an ally to the feminists cause without having to label him a feminist writer.

"Penelope" should not be taken as a completely separate piece from *Ulysses*. When explored it reveals and undermines many of the ideas that exist previously, allowing the reader to question the male narrative and Joyce's intentions when writing such a narrative. M. Keith Booker asserts,

> By powerfully calling into question such fundamental traditional notions as the very nature of the self, Joyce's fiction acts to subvert any number of patriarchal assumptions upon which gender separations have been historically placed (Booker, 453)

This is why Molly's chapter becomes important to the study of gender as it relates to *Ulysses*. The "self" that Booker speaks of in this essay is the gendered self, or what society has expected of people who identify as "male" and "female." Joyce complicates these ideas throughout his novel, allowing characters such as Leopold or Molly Bloom to occupy both masculine and feminine spaces. He does this successfully by the end of the novel, where it becomes clear that the patriarchal ideas that dominate the first seventeen episodes are immediately challenged when given the final female perspective. These "separations" that history has placed upon gender fall away and allow characters to explore the spaces that exist between what is "masculine" and what is "feminine". It's why Leopold spends his journey fighting against himself, and why in the end, we see Molly having a parallel identity crisis.

Leopold Bloom provides the first, and one of the most important opinions on Molly Bloom within *Ulysses*. The reader first sees them in their home, Molly's asleep in bed while Leopold sets out to get breakfast and begin his day ("Calypso", Joyce). The dynamics that exist within this marriage are revealed during these moments; Joyce highlights the isolation of both Molly and Leopold within their shared home.

An interesting detail is Molly's existence only in the marital bed, a place she occupies throughout the novel and a place from which Leopold has become exiled. He's been rejected from this sacred space, a place where he once (presumably) shared intimate moments with Molly, a place that's now being occupied by another man.

The reader is first introduced to Molly when Leopold Bloom returns with her breakfast,

> She set the brasses jingling as she raised herself briskly, an elbow on the pillow. He looked calmly down on her bulk and between her large soft bubs, sloping within her nightdress like a shegoat's udder. The warmth of her couched body rose on the air, mingling with the fragrances of the tea she poured. (Joyce, 51-52)

From the moment she gets up, her body is "jingling the brasses," as Leopold focuses on her "bulk" or her "large soft bubs." His preoccupation with her as an objectified body becomes overtly apparent in this brief passage. It's the beginning of an entire relationship that will be based around Leopold's incessant desire for Molly's plump, womanly body. As we have observed, the only place Molly is ever plainly seen in the novel is in this bed. Whether Leopold is leaving in the morning, or returning at night, Joyce never allows the reader to see Molly unconfined from this space.

Leopold spends a large portion of his time thinking about Molly in the present day (an adulteress in bed) and remembering her from the past (a loving wife). The disparity that exists between these two women as they occupy his mind determines how Leopold's thoughts influence the reader. Leopold fantasizes about a time when Molly loved him and they were happy. However, when one begins to pay attention to the ways in which he longs for her, it becomes clear that all his thoughts and memories are not focused on Molly as a partner, but on her physical body.

Leopold Bloom is one who "eats with relish," including his appetite for plump female figures, which he follows and fantasizes about throughout the day. Molly Bloom exists as another one of these objects, something he wishes to consume to satiate his exasperated appetite. Richard Pearce writes, "…desire is aroused by what we do not possess, or what is other and therefore threatening to us…we control this threat by repressing, sublimating, or transforming it into a fetish –that is an object…" (41-42). Molly becomes this object in Leopold's mind, a symbol of his ever-present masculine desires for her. What might be interpreted, as endearing moments of a cuckolded husband missing his wife, are actually representative of Leopold Bloom's inability to separate Molly from a sexual object.

A counterargument to this point would be that Leopold does in fact respect Molly as an individual. There's a brief moment in "Lestrygonians" where he mimics her reactionary, "O Rocks!" and continues on thinking,

> Mr. Bloom smiled O Rocks at two windows…She's right after all. Only big words for ordinary things on account of the sound. She's not exactly witty. Can be rude too. Blurt out what I was thinking. Still, I don't know…(Joyce, 126).

The "O Rocks!" he mimics before this passage parallels a moment in "Calypso" where Molly refuses to be talked down to by Leopold and expresses her desire for him to speak "in plain words" so that she will understand him. In this moment her strong-willed exterior elicits a fond memory. Even though he acknowledges that she's "not exactly witty" and "can be rude," he's more impressed with her choices to stand up for herself when faced with affectation. His attempt to reconcile with the present-day Molly is reflected in this brief passage. Leopold spends his day struggling to

disassociate the Molly he wants to remember, the loving, adoring wife, from the adulteress he believes she has become. In Leopold's mind, he's already lost her; she's become the unobtainable sexual partner. Referring back to Pearce's idea, Leopold's sexual desires are being "aroused" by what "he does not possess," and therefore, perhaps unintentionally, he chooses to objectify Molly as a means of regaining his masculine authority.

In *James Joyce and Sexuality*, Richard Brown makes an important observation about the way marriage is portrayed in *Ulysses*. He claims, "love is presented not as a union but as a kind of separation of individuals," a statement he proves by using the Blooms as his prime examples. This idea of isolation in marriage is important when observing how Leopold and Molly Bloom interact (or don't) within the entirety of Joyce's novel. Leopold's fetishizing of Molly stems from this separation. As husband and wife, even though they are legally bound to each other, they each continue living their own sexual lives.

At the end of Leopold's narrative, he has returned to this place, observing Molly in their bed. Joyce writes,

> …An approximate erection: a solicitous adversion: a gradual elevation: a tentative revelation: a silent contemplation…
>
> …He kissed the plump mellow yellow smellow melons of her rump, on each plump melonous hemisphere, in their mellow yellow furrow, with obscure prolonged provocative melonsmellonous osculation…
>
> …A silent contemplation: a tentative velation: a gradual abasement: a solicitous aversion: a proximate erection. (604)

The first thing that's striking about this scene is how Leopold changes from before his physical interaction with Molly and after. His hesitation is clear as he approaches Molly; her physical presence is stressful for the late returned Leopold. This anxiety connects to the patriarchal fear that he's experienced throughout the story. Being near Molly, a sexually open female, continues to threaten Leopold. Everything in this first section gives the impression that Leopold is *not quite* committing to whether or not he should act on his physical desires. The use of words like "approximate," "gradual," and "tentative," give the reader a sense of Leopold's wavering confidence in the company of his willful spouse. After this physical interaction (the only physical moment we see between them that exists outside their respective memories), Leopold's uncertainties seem to have been validated. When Bloom's thoughts begin to evolve, the tone begins to change. Joyce uses words like "abasement," "solicitous aversion," and "proximate erection" to convey a dissatisfied and emasculated Bloom. These feelings constitute his perception of Molly, and his inability to perceive her as a "person." His choice to repress Molly derives from his unrequited desire for her.

This unreciprocated sexual desire is highlighted through the brief physical moment they "share" upon his return to the marital bed. Bloom's choice to kiss her rear is impersonal. Instead of acknowledging her face, he focuses on her body from behind, showing how distant they are intimately, even while occupying the same bed. Leopold's focus lies upon her backside, her "plump melons," which he proceeds to "osculate" in an "obscure prolonged provocative" way. Everything about this passage reflects his inability to connect with Molly as a person. Joyce's choice to

focus Leopold's attention to these details, his body in relation to hers, reflects the deeply rooted isolation that exists between man and wife.

Leopold's physical relationship with Molly, as it exists in this brief scene, is in juxtaposition with his portrayal of her throughout the novel. Before this brief encounter, the only place where he and Molly have any intimate relations is in his memory. When he thinks about their past together it often reflects a happier, less embittered self

> Pillowed on my coat she had her hair, earwigs in the heather scrub my hand under her nape…Ravished over her I lay, full lips full open, kissed her mouth. Yum. Softly she gave me in my mouth the seedcake warm and chewed…Young life…Flowers her eyes were, take me, willing eyes. (144)

The relationship Leopold exposes here is not the relationship seen in the previous passage. Their physical closeness juxtaposes the distance seen at the end of "Ithaca." Instead of Leopold returning and only interacting with her backside, there's a face-to-face connection between them here, her head on his lap, sharing impassioned kisses. Even the brief sharing of the seedcake emphasizes the closeness they once shared. However romantic this appears in Leopold's memory and for the reader, the obvious patriarchal overtones cannot be overlooked. He highlights his previous "masculine" power over her when he thinks, "Ravished over her I lay;" while she's tangibly beneath him with her "take me, willing eyes." The fact that Leopold yearns for this type of physical submission focuses the attention back to his struggle to assert his dominance. Molly's choice to exist freely from Leopold and take control of her sex life threatens his position as the masculine authority. Throughout the novel,

he chooses to remember moments where she was sexually compliant, allowing him to regain a semblance of masculine authority.

In Heather Cook Callow's essay "Joyce's Female Voices in Ulysses," she observes how Joyce's construction of the novel, predominately it's androcentric narrative, reflects certain opinions of principal characters that are often debunked when given a closer reading. She focuses on the masculine presence surrounding Leopold Bloom as he wanders around Dublin, and how his "friends'" often-biased opinions shape the reader's own sentiments towards Leopold. This same argument can be applied to the ways in which Molly Bloom is portrayed throughout the novel. Until her own voice is heard in "Penelope," she's characterized through the musings and conversations of Dublin's masculine community.

We've already observed how Leopold Bloom's relationship to Molly focuses around her as a sexual object. It's also been established that despite this intimate detachment he recognizes her affinity for sharp retorts. Before Joyce illuminates this side of Molly, he keeps his focus on her as an object via his male characters. Similar to Callow's interpretations of Leopold Bloom's relationship to his male friends, Molly's characterization is also framed by the androcentric focus of the first seventeen episodes. We are given less information about Molly through both Leopold and what can only be likened to the "gossip" that his friends share. Whenever Molly becomes the focus of male conversation, it's often focused on their disdain for her actions or their vulgar insinuations.

It's understandable why, for years, critics believed Molly Bloom had a history of promiscuous behavior. Any time Leopold Bloom is confronted by his masculine friends, she becomes a topic of discussion. Just like Leopold, the readers are accosted with these single-minded ideas. In a brief moment with the citizen, one of these characteristically "manly men" from later in the novel, Joyce writes,

> And Bloom letting on to be awfully deeply interested in nothing, a spider's web in the corner behind the barrel, and the citizen scowling after him...when…'A dishonoured wife', says the citizen, 'that's what's the cause of all our misfortunes'. (266)

This moment provides a brief insight to the ways in which Leopold Bloom framed through the misconceptions about Molly's sex life. Due to Leopold's disinterest in the citizen's opinions, to gain back authority in the situation, he confronts Leopold with the one aspect of his life he should have total control over, his wife. He exploits Leopold and Molly's situation by insinuating that she has become the "cause of all [his] misfortunes." By attacking Molly's infidelity, the citizen succeeds in accentuating Leopold's own struggle, navigating a world in which his masculinity has been compromised while also highlighting the popular opinion the men of *Ulysses* share about Molly.

This complete disregard for Leopold's role as husband is a constant topic of conversation amongst his Irish peers. Prior to the scene explored above, we see Leopold Bloom speaking with these same men, who bring up Blazes Boylan and his role in Molly's upcoming concert. It's unclear how intentional this is until Joyce writes,

> Pride of Calpe's rocky mount, the ravenhaired daughter of Tweedy. There grew she to peerless beauty where loquat and almond scent the air. The gardens of Alameda knew her step: the garths of olives knew and bowed. The chaste spouse of Leopold she is. Marion of the bountiful bosoms. (262)

This brief passage from "Cyclops" shows another side to male Dublin's view of Molly Bloom. In it she's absolved of any agency she might have over herself while also pushed further into the realm of "other." By asserting her relationship to Spain, they're asserting her as a foreigner, much as Leopold's Jewishness sets him apart. She's also continually described as belonging to someone, whether it's the "Calpe's rocky mount," "Tweedy," or even "Leopold." The correlation between how these men choose to view Molly and how Leopold views her is clear. Leopold chooses to assert his masculinity by objectifying Molly, something that comes easily to the other men he encounters throughout the day. Joyce also stresses Molly's role as an exotic beauty, something easily fetishized. She's the "Pride of Calpe," a "ravenhaired beauty," and a woman whose body literally affects the nature that surrounds her. This description paints a picture of a dark, mysterious, possibly exotic woman. However striking she remains to be in the eyes of these men, her defining characteristic is highlighted by the last two sentences, "The chaste spouse of Leopold…Marion of the bountiful bosoms." This ending continues to define her by her husband and her body, the two pieces of her that matter to the androcentric community Joyce accentuates throughout the novel. By referring to her as the "chaste spouse," Joyce is not only attacking Leopold, but because of the mocking connotations, he is leading the reader to question her alleged "chastity." This can be

deduced from the final line, acknowledging her "bountiful bosoms," suggesting her body has been enjoyed copiously and reinforcing Molly's role as sexual object.

Oftentimes the blatant sexualization of Molly occurs in passing, as something that can be assumed through male dominated Dublin. Whether these men are chatting on the streets or at the pub, Molly Bloom seems to find her way into their conversations, conveniently when Leopold joins the group. In a passing moment Simon Dedalus claims, "Mrs. Marion Bloom has left off clothes of all descriptions" (221). This isn't the first time these men have implied something sexual about her, thinking back on her "bountiful bosoms." It's safe to assume Dedalus is making a double entendre. This snide remark reveals a darker side to the men Leopold has chosen to surround himself with, these "friends" of his. Their incessant need to degrade Molly's character exposes the fear of female sexuality and how it threatens their own patriarchal power. To slander her is to rob her of this power.

This type of sexual defamation is expected. Simon Dedalus suggests Molly has some history of sexual deviancy; however, he remains rather detached. There's a moment that occurs earlier in the novel, where we see Lenehan, another man from this "friend" group, boast about an interaction he had with Molly. He claims,

> …When we sallied forth it was blue o'clock the morning after the night before. Coming home it was a gorgeous winter's night on the Featherbed Mountain. Bloom and Chris Callinan were on one side of the car and I was with the wife on the other…She was well primed with a good load of Delahunt's port under her…Every jolt the bloody car gave I had her bumping up against me. Hell's

> delights! She has a fine pair, God bless her…
> (192-193)

Lenehan delivers the most explicit example of the Dublin male's disregard for Molly as a person. If you read past all the erotic overtones, Lenehan and Molly were simply seated side by side in a taxi or carriage, and experienced some slight turbulence, which provided him with what seems like a lifetimes worth of stories. However, the way in which he chooses to communicate this story show the complete indifference he has for Molly. His assumptions about her sexually explicit life apart from Leopold are all the proof he needs when thinking back on this occurrence. It doesn't matter that they were in a cramped car; in his mind her body was his for the taking, not physically, but emotionally and visually. At this moment in the novel, we've only been introduced to Molly through stories such as these, or Leopold's memories. We know she's having an affair, but there is no evidence as to whether or not it's her first. Through the eyes of Leopold and his "friends," Joyce chooses to lead the reader to believe that this may not be Molly's first affair. Treating her like a sexual object allows these men to undermine and control her, because the idea of an assertively sexual woman is not appealing.

The masculine presence in Dublin, the one that exists apart from the sexually ambiguous world of the Blooms, is a world that gains its authority from what are popularly known as "gender norms." These "norms" are the stereotypical "man" or "woman," the person who's internalized the societal gender roles they're expected to perform. What these types of performances construct have been explored through Leopold, and will be explored in Molly as well. Outside their home, and

their marriage, there exists a world that revolves around patriarchal authority Treating Molly like a sexual object, while also treating Leopold as a social pariah shows the destructive nature of androcentric Dublin. Molly's controversial place amongst these men shows the changing world that they're fighting so hard to resist.

3

"The Missus is Master": How Molly Bloom Redefines her Sex and Gender

In previous chapters we've explored the implications of gender performance on Joyce's male and female characters. Leopold Bloom spends his entire day struggling to balance the "womanly man" that exists within him with the "masculine man" Dublin expects of him. We've seen the ways in which Joyce constructs femininity (directly connected with Molly) through Leopold, and the miscellaneous Irishmen of *Ulysses*. Joyce meticulously led his readers through these male narratives, suggesting along the way, how we are meant to be thinking about femininity and female sexuality by the time we reach his eighteenth episode, "Penelope."

Molly Bloom spends the entirety of "Penelope" trying to convey her "masculine" and "feminine" traits through gendered performance. Kimberly Devlin explores the implications of Molly's final gendered performance in her essay "Pretending in 'Penelope': Masquerade, Mimicry, and Molly Bloom." She claims that Molly is "a weaver and unweaver of identity itself, [she] dons multiple recognizable masks of womanliness, appropriating femininity in many familiar figurations" (81). A few concepts immediately become important when taking this statement into account, first, that even though Molly is performing, she's performing what is familiar to both male and female readers ("recognizable"). Devlin's use of the word "appropriating," suggests a second concept, that even though Molly is a female, her performance of that gender is something that has to be assumed. In other words, it's unnatural. Throughout her monologue Molly is able to "undermine the notion of

womanliness as [she] displays it" (Devlin, 82). Joyce, via Molly, recognizes the mundaneness of performing the "female" and emphasizes that gender is only a concept.

Gender is a social construct that is immediately bestowed upon you at birth. The moment you enter the world you're either a male or a female. This isn't gender though, it's your sex and once given a sex, society expects you to uphold the performances that correlate (gender). This becomes one major aspect of Molly's monologue, her defiance against the body that first got her labeled as "female." She thinks,

> …Whats the idea making us like that with a big hole in the middle of us or like a Stallion driving up into you because thats all they want out of you with that determined vicious look in his eyes…nice invention they made for women for him to get all the pleasure…("Penelope", 611)

This is the first time she addresses both the female and the male body as they relate to each other. First she addresses the female body, asking the question, why are we left with only a big hole in us? –Focusing the reader on the vulnerability that a woman feels about her sexual body. This is immediately followed by a description of the man, "a Stallion driving up into you because thats all they want." She's highlighting the sexual power dynamics that exist between the male and female bodies. It's important to note that the last man she had sex with was Boylan, and even though she addresses men in general terms, Boylan has had some impact on the way she's thinking about sex. She also takes care to notice the violence that exists when having intercourse. The male takes on the image of the "Stallion," an overbearing animal who's then characterized by the "vicious look in his eyes." This

ambiguous "he" is then juxtaposed with the female image of "a big hole," which seems to be nothing other than an entrance for "him." This entire image evokes a certain amount of disdain coming from a woman who also celebrates her sexuality and her desire for Blazes Boylan. It is also interesting to note how Molly's "Stallion," which seems to reflect the well-endowed Boylan contrasts the gelded horses from "Lestrygonians" which Leopold identified with. The similarity between these metaphors exists to further the isolation that exists between Molly as a lover and Leopold as her impotent husband.

Her exploration of the female anatomy versus the male anatomy continues throughout her musings. Later on she says,

> …Curious the way its made 2 the same in case of twins theyre supposed to represent beauty placed up there like those statues in the museum…are they so beautiful of course compared to what a man looks like with his two bags full and his other thing hanging down out of him or sticking up at you like a hatrack no wonder they hide it with a cabbageleaf that disgusting…
> ("Penelope", 620)

Molly displays a very jarring shift in tone here as opposed to the first time she compares the male/female body. The hypercritical tone she used in the first passage has become more of a mocking voice in this case. An important part of this statement is her acknowledgement of the beauty of a female body versus that of a man's. While pondering the placement of breasts and how they look on statues, she recognizes that they are more visually appealing than male genitalia. The way she talks about male genitals is actually quite emasculating. The image of "two bags full" and his "other thing" aren't exactly appealing images to the reader. Her comparison to the penis "sticking up at you like a hatrack" produces a comical image, which she

then immediately judges as "disgusting." The way in which she judges the male anatomy in this passage reflects the part of her that previously felt vulnerable. She's asserting herself in this passage in a way she couldn't when thinking of man as an overbearing "Stallion."

The juxtaposition between the "hole in the middle" passage and the "hatrack" passage reveal Molly's internal struggle with her female body. She both celebrates and condemns the female anatomy, at once criticizing it for being "a big hole in the middle" (611), while then celebrating "the woman is beauty" (620). This contradictory sequence of thoughts relates to Molly's struggle in accepting her role as "feminine woman." Comparable to Leopold Bloom fighting against his own role as "womanly man," Molly is also trying to find balance between her "masculine" and "feminine" desires. However it's not just these performances that are causing contempt, like Leopold in "Lestrygonians", she's also attempting to come to terms with her female body.

However, her "masculine" cravings materialize as carnal lusting. She contemplates,

> …I suppose its because they were so plump and
> tempting…he couldn't resist they excite myself
> sometimes its well for men all the amount of pleasure
> they get off a womans body were so round and white
> for them always I wish I was one myself for a change
> just to try with that thing they have swelling up on you
> so hard and at the same time so soft… ("Penelope", 638)

In this moment Molly reveals this "masculine" desire, her longing to experience sex from a man's perspective, one she imagines to be better than the woman's. Her reconciliation with man's inability to refrain from sexually objectifying her is

curious in this moment. In previous passages we've seen her denounce men as both "vicious" and "disgusting," and here she longs to be in their position. She maintains her belief that women are used for man's indulgence, first saying "nice invention they made for women for him to get all the pleasure" (611) and then reiterating, "its well for men all the amount of pleasure they get off a womans body"(638). However, the animosity from the earlier moments is missing from her exploration of sex in this passage. Men are no longer those animalistic predators, but someone to be envied. "That thing they have" isn't something she's making fun of anymore, but something she's coveting, illuminating her "masculine" appetite. This appetite is reflected earlier too, when she thinks, "God I wouldn't mind being a man and get up on a lovely woman…"("Penelope", 633).

The power she wishes for in these passages isn't purely sexual in nature. She feels exposed in her female body and craves the authority that is intrinsic in the man's role during sex. In her mind sexual authority is attributed to self-agency. Sex from the male perspective is a chance at freedom, a luxury that she doesn't have as a woman. By criticizing these sexual roles she's successfully pointing out the ridiculousness of both male and female sexual appetites. Even though each of these moments reflects a certain amount of sexual subjection on the woman's part, the fact that she's expressing these "masculine" desires as a woman subverts the "woman as object" idea. As Devlin states, she undermines womanliness as she performs it.

Molly's internal struggle to balance her "masculine" and "feminine" desires stems from the previously mentioned feeling of empowerment she gets from

embracing her "masculine" nature. As a woman she feels confined by the "masculine" presence that surrounds her. She has been contextualized by the first seventeen androcentric chapters and takes "Penelope" as her chance to fight for her freedom to embrace her role as a manly woman. However, this is not an easy task. Despite her internalized gender performances (of both male and female), outwardly she must deal with the consequences of her gender.

Molly feels as though Leopold has robbed her of her freedom. She thinks,

> …All the things he told father he was going to do and me but I saw through him telling me all the lovely places we could go for the honeymoon Venice by moonlight with the gondolas and the lake of Como…O how nice I said whatever I liked he was going to do immediately if not sooner…he ought to get a leather medal with a putty rim for all the plans he invents then leaving us here all day youd never know… (630)

This moment reflects the musings of a woman who's become trapped. When she speaks candidly about how she had a suspicion that these plans were fabricated, it shows the reader a more delicate side to the otherwise fiery woman she fronts in the episode. The way she was able to take notice of Leopold's lies and respond to them shows her own strength when faced with the consequences of being female. She finishes this thought with the muffled complacency of a woman who's been offered no other way out. Later on in this passage she goes on to say, "its worse again being locked up like in a prison or a madhouse" (630). Her anger and resentment towards Bloom seems to stem from these feelings of captivity. It makes her choice to find solace in a man like Boylan more understandable. Not only does he provide companionship, but he's also her liberator. Joyce never shows Molly out of her house but throughout the novel we become aware that she does participate in

a professional life. She's an affluent singer who's being taken on tour by the renowned Hugh Boylan. He not only acts as an outlet for her sexual frustrations, but he's also the key to her escaping the confines of the Bloom household and the expectations she's expected to uphold within her marriage.

Post-famine Ireland has constrained the sexually transgressive Molly Bloom. After the famine, the woman's role in Ireland faced serious setbacks. Most women lost their access to economic independence, increasing the importance of the dowry and forever changing the "marriage market" as it existed (Lee, 38). Molly references this idea of the dowry when reminiscing about Bloom and says, "he hadn't an idea about my mother till we were engaged otherwise hed never have got me so cheap as he did" (Joyce, 614). Apart from the growing significance of the dowry, because families had so little to offer, the way relationships between boys and girls were seen had to be completely reshaped. Families didn't have the means to pay more than one dowry or provide financial support to growing families. Oftentimes young men weren't given the same access to land and wealth that they would have had previously, putting more economic stress on the fathers of both bride and groom. To prevent unwanted pregnancies, there was a larger trend toward debasing sex, even in marriage; "temptation must not be placed in their way…Sex posed a far more subversive threat than the landlord to the security and status of the family" (Lee, 39). Children were no longer seen as a woman's "most precious commodity" (Bitel, 113), but were instead a threat to a family's economic stability. To successfully debase sex, Catholicism continued to strengthen its influence on the Irish people. Tom Inglis writes,

> The long 19th century of Irish Catholicism meant that not only did Catholic sexual attitudes penetrate more deeply and last longer, but that it is difficult to find any traces of resistance or challenges to the existing normative order. (13)

Catholicism has always demonized sex as "sinful", and during the 19th century economic and social factors aided the church in upholding and instilling these values within their younger generations. Religion, and what they taught in the ways of sex and gender, became one more way of policing the people. Inglis goes on to assert that, "maintaining ignorance about sex was central to limiting and controlling pleasure…and…in turn was crucial in maintaining power over women or patriarchy" (19). This connects to an earlier point made about Molly and her desire to escape these constraints. Sex was a way towards some kind of social power that women in the 19th century did not have. Molly chooses to disregard these social norms and define her own relationship to men, women, and sex.

In the 19th century a woman was expected to fulfill three main characteristics

> The first was that she have an overwhelming desire to marry, remain faithful in a life-long union, and remain subordinate and dependent in that relationship. Secondly, the woman's natural sphere was the domestic where she engaged in reproductive and not productive tasks. Mothering became newly defined and confined…Thirdly, and most significantly, women's sexuality was totally contained in marriage. (McLouglin, 266)

As heterosexual relationships began to change, these were the values that women were expected to uphold. This changing dynamic between young men and women contextualizes the world that surrounds Molly Bloom. Regardless of the fact that she was raised outside of Ireland, she says that she and Leopold have been together 16

years, making her around 17 years old when they were married. Though we don't know when she came to Ireland, as a young woman she would have been exposed to some of these ideas prior to her relationship with Leopold. Society can be closely linked to sexuality. Molly reflects the type of woman who does transgress, and therefore confronts this "existing social order," confining her to the realm of "other."

These changing social and economic expectations are reflected in the ways Molly reacts and fights against expected "feminine" gender performances. Even at the beginning of the 20th century she took notice of how contradictory these roles seemed to be. In a brief moment towards the end of her soliloquy she addresses some of the inconsistencies that exist in what men expect of women. She thinks,

> …They always want to see a stain on the bed to know youre a virgin for them all thats troubling them theyre such fools too you could be a widow or divorced 40 times over a daub of red ink would do or blackberry juice…sweets of sin whoever suggested that business for women what between clothes and cooking and children…(Joyce, 633)

Molly focuses her attention in this passage on how she's supposed to act as a "feminine" woman. She starts by expressing her disdain for the anticipation men have when having sex with a new woman that she'll be a virgin, even if they know otherwise. This speaks to how women's bodies were viewed in the early 19th century leading into the 20th century, that they were at once both lustful temptress and virginal prize. She also addresses and ridicules the expectations that exist for her gender once they've become a part of the home. Molly's ability to criticize whoever "suggested that business," the business it seems of being a woman, the

homemaker. Her frustration amounts from all of these gender roles that she's expected to uphold.

Some of this anger we see in Molly also reflects upon on all the empty promises Leopold has made to her throughout their marriage. While she's accustomed to these strict roles, she notices the disparity between what's expected of women versus men. She's reclaiming her gender by feeding into both her manly and womanly needs. When she thinks,

> …Men again all over they can pick and choose what they please a married woman or a fast widow or a girl for their different tastes like those houses round behind Irish street no but were to be always chained up theyre not going to be chaining me up…(Joyce, 639)

These ideas become the basis for how she approaches the male sex through her appropriation of "masculine" gender. This passage reflects her anger at the man's ability to take any woman he pleases while the woman remains something to be "chained up" and used at his discretion. She finishes this bold statement when the declaration that no man is going to be "chaining" her up. The "masculine" sexual power she has been hankering for manifests itself in her ability to speak openly and freely about her sexual desires and experiences.

At the beginning of her monologue Molly addresses her frustrations relating back to this idea of confinement through marriage. She says,

> …Why cant you kiss a man without going and marrying him first you sometimes love to wildly when you feel that way so nice all over you you cant help yourself I wish some man or other would take me sometime when hes there and kiss me in his arms theres nothing like a kiss long and hot down to your soul almost paralyses you…(610)

Molly is openly addressing the double standard that exists between men and women who crave sexual satisfaction. When looking at how men treat women, Molly is very critical. She spoke of "picking" and "choosing," and eventually "chaining" them up. However, in this moment she mimics the same "masculine" desire to be intimate without being "chained up" by one woman. She seems to envy the ease with which a man could kiss freely, but when it comes to a woman they're expected to "marry first." Her "masculine" and "feminine" desires blend seamlessly in this passage. She's craving both sexual freedom (a "masculine" trait) while also craving passion and romance (arguably a more "feminine" characteristic).

We've established that Molly believes sexual power is innate within men, anatomically. She exemplifies this through her own carnal expression. The "Penelope" episode was so controversial, in part, because of these instances where Molly is blunt and desirous. When Molly reclaims her sexuality, it highlights her role as a woman reclaiming her masculinity. The reason Molly's sexuality is so intimidating is that she not only enjoys intimacy in all its forms, she also enjoys being the authority in such situations, a role we've recognized generally goes to the man. When she reflects on one of her earliest sexual encounters, she emphasizes this authority,

> …He wanted to touch mine with his for a moment but I wouldnt let him he was awfully put out at first …O yes I pulled him off into my handkerchief pretending not to be excited but I opened my legs I wouldnt let him touch me inside my petticoat…I tormented the life out of him first tickling him I loved rousing that dog…(Joyce, 626)

In this passage Molly is critical of the man's role during sex while also embodying that role (the authority). There are some very clear parallels between her in this

passage and Bella/o from “Circe.” They each take charge as sexual tormenters, accepting their power over the men they’re with. This particular moment is a memory Molly is exploring from her youth, so the fears she associated with having intercourse could be reflective of her age and less with being “feminine”. However, the authority she takes in this situation is very telling of the woman she has become. Her ability to say no when “he wanted to touch [hers] with [his]” is indicative of the “masculine power” she is presenting to this young lover. Another indication of her influence is the way she pretends not to be excited, remaining coy and uninvolved while the man reaches climax. The enjoyment she got from “tormenting” and “rousing” the boy only further proves that she’s embracing her role as the manly woman.

If Molly Bloom accesses her masculinity by speaking to her sexual desires, it’s important to see the way in which her “feminine” desires are addressed. When exploring Leopold’s “masculine” gender in the “Nausicaa” episode, Joyce juxtaposed this show of “manliness” with an equally as elaborate show of “womanliness” performed by the young Gerty MacDowell. In the context of this episode Gerty’s femininity was defined by her desire for romance, a fantasy it seemed, that she projected onto Leopold Bloom, the mysterious stranger. Despite Molly Bloom’s verbalized contempt for the male gender, she also expresses her own need for romance or courtship.

Throughout “Penelope,” between moments of Molly fantasizing about sex or lamenting about the men she’s encountered, a part of her begins to reconcile with the lack of romance in her life. At first she thinks,

> …I wish somebody would write me a loveletter his
> wasnt much and I told him he could write what he liked
> yours ever Hugh Boylan in old Madrid stuff silly women
> believe love is sighing I am dying still if he wrote it I
> suppose thered be some truth in it true or no it fills up
> your whole day and life always something to think
> about every moment…(623)

The simplicity of what she's asking for here reflects on Molly as a woman who's not the harlot male Dublin makes her out to be. Just as Gerty was unashamed of her "girlish" longings, Molly is coming to terms with her own. Even though she names Boylan in this passage, she begins with the elusive "somebody," alluding to her detachment from Boylan emotionally. Even though this nameless somebody turns into Boylan by the end, she makes him out to be incapable of such an act. The way she finishes this declaration indicates the sadness she feels, associating her sexual relationship with Boylan with a romance that doesn't seem to exist. She acknowledges this when she says, "I suppose thered be some truth in it true or no it fills up your whole day". The fact that she would settle for anything less than a true declaration of love shows that she's searching for something more than just sex. Molly is searching for companionship.

Molly's relationship with Leopold never recovered after the loss of their eleven day old son, Rudy. She's satiated her sexual appetite with Boylan, but is still yearning for something more amorous. Even though she's not experiencing it in her own life, she believes it exists somewhere,

> …It must be real love if a man gives up his life for her
> that way for nothing I suppose there are a few men like
> that left its hard to believe in it though unless it really
> happened to me the majority of them with not a particle
> of love in their natures to find two people like that
> nowadays full up of each other that would feel the same

> way as you do theyre usually a bit foolish in the head…(631)

This moment reveals the piece of Molly that remains hesitant when searching for this all-or-nothing type of romance. Regardless of the fact that she believes "there are a few men like that left," she doubts that those men exist for her. We've talked about the ways in which femininity is seen as weakness. This passage showcases Molly's inability to let herself fully embrace this piece of her femininity in fear that it makes her too vulnerable. So instead, she reconciles with the idea that most men will never feel that way and even if it does happen people who experience it are "a bit foolish in the head." Molly's desire for "real love" becomes very indicative of her "feminine" desires, and this passage reflects how far she's had to separate herself from those desires.

Molly takes her time in "Penelope" attempting to figure out her own sexual and emotional feelings about men in general, and in the end, Leopold. Suzette Henke suggests that these thoughts reflect her fears, "And this pervasive fear –that her husband's sexual indifference is a sign of emotional rejection –dominates her monologue" (Henke, 151). I hesitate to agree that these feelings dominate the "Penelope" episode, however, there does seem to be truth to what Henke believes. Molly wants a relationship based off of more than sex, something she's not getting from her lover or her husband. The "sexual indifference" Henke attributes to Leopold is also reflected in Molly. As a couple, they've chosen to emotionally isolate themselves. However, I do believe there is a piece of Molly that's afraid of being rejected by Leopold. Even though she spends time musing about Boylan and

fantasizing about Stephen, her monologue closes with memories of Leopold. There's a moment where she thinks,

> …The day I got him to propose to me yes first I gave him the bit of seedcake out of my mouth and it was leapyear like now yes 16 years ago my God after that long kiss I near lost my breath yes he said I was a flower of the mountain yes so we are flowers all a womans body yes that was one true thing he said in his life and the sun shines for you today yes that was why I liked him because I saw he understood or felt what a woman is…(Joyce, 643)

This moment reflects upon a woman who hasn't completely isolated herself from her husband. The memory she chooses to return to is the same memory we observed Leopold Bloom experience earlier on in the novel. Even though Joyce chose to separate them throughout the course of the book, it's significant that each of them returned to this moment at some point. It shows that there is a romantic connection that remains intact, even though they're physically and emotionally estranged. She also ruminates on how he made her feel in both body and mind. Despite the way he made her feel after he kissed her, she remembers the way he made her feel, like "a flower of the mountain." Finally, she declares, "that was why I liked him because I saw he understood or felt what a woman is…" This is one of the most important things Molly reveals to the reader about her relationship to Leopold. Even though we've discussed how femininity likens to weakness, it's also something that exists within Molly and Leopold. Leopold's understanding of womanliness, and what it means to be "feminine," is something that was attractive to the strong-willed "masculine" Molly. Their roles as manly woman or womanly man became something that drew them together.

Molly's final statements revolve around her relationship with Leopold Bloom. Everything she's contemplated and divulged reflects the ways in which she's chosen to address her "female" gender performance while also addressing her "masculinity." In the end, Joyce has created a space where the labels "male" or "female" lose all conventional meaning. Kimberly Devlin addresses this paradox

> Writing Molly, Joyce forges a female voice that exposes, in gestures of travestic imitation, the engendered linguistic performances of her culture…only in the act of trying on the female masquerade himself, was Joyce enabled to feel the discomforts of the construct…Putting on "womanliness" that repeatedly puts on "manliness" allowed Joyce to articulate one of his canniest critiques of the ideology that produces the oppressive categories themselves." (100)

Throughout "Penelope", the reader is faced with Molly, as she exists as both a "feminine" and a "masculine" woman, and with the way in which these labels become less tangible throughout. In this brief passage, Devlin approaches gender as a cultural phenomenon, one that Joyce challenges through his characterization of Mrs. Marion Bloom. We've explored the ways in which Molly embodies both traditionally "masculine" and "feminine" qualities. Joyce allowed himself to find the grey area that exists within binary conceptualizations of gender. Joyce's process of putting on the "female" mask encourages the reader to further question the ways in which gender is presented to us throughout the novel. The way men and women are expected to act versus the way they do act, especially when juxtaposed to "traditional" images of masculinity and femininity (think Gerty MacDowell and the various Irishmen throughout the novel), reveals the innate absurdity in these predictable gender performances.

If "Penelope" had some greater purpose in the overall structure of *Ulysses*, what would it be? This isn't meant to be an answerable question. More likely than not, it will remain unanswered and contested. We've discussed the ways in which Molly dons the masks of both "masculine" and "feminine" perspectives, and in the process how she successfully undermines what exactly "masculine" or "feminine" perspectives even are. Throughout the novel Joyce focuses on the male narrative. These male voices are often interactive with each other, conversing, passing by, reflecting on the world around them, etc. However, Molly's episode remains completely isolated. This narrative isolation has led many people to refer to "Penelope" as Molly's monologue or soliloquy. Richard Pearce challenges this idea by bringing into his essay the idea that the "Penelope" episode is actually a dialogue. He asserts that she's speaking to the "ideal listener". He claims,

> …I would argue that Molly's ideal listener is a woman, with whom she can share her restlessness, her physical desires, her fantasies, her cynical views of men, as well as her realistic views of motherhood and menstruation that don't come from the dominant discourses of her society" (Pearce, 46)

Immediately, this idea needs to be complicated. Limiting Molly's character in this manner complicates her role as a "masculine" female. Even though she does disclose traditionally "feminine" problems (i.e. menstruation, motherhood) she does so in a particularly "masculine" way, this "masculinity" is reflected in her vulgar openness about the body and many of its sexual processes. Pearce, whose claims about Molly's gender performance remain pertinent, seems to undermine those thoughts with this generalization. Who's to say Molly can't be speaking to both men and women? The obvious point to make here is that readers of *Ulysses* are often both. It's safe to

assume that male readers don't stop reading the novel once the male narrative has ended. Therefore, it seems unreasonable to believe her predominant audience would be female. However, this reading reflects the writing as Joyce has written it, not taking into account Molly as a character. Perhaps Pearce's ideas are that if Molly were to share these opinions with anyone other than herself, it would probably be with a woman. This idea, too, can be contested. As Pearce notices himself the way Molly speaks "[doesn't] come from the dominant discourses of her society," therefore a female listener, as they exist in "her society," might not be able to relate to Molly's ideas or the way she presents them.

The other argument that can be made against Pearce's claim is the more obvious one; the "Penelope" episode is composed as Molly's personal stream of consciousness. As mentioned before, Joyce chooses to isolate her narrative from the remainder of the novel. In doing this he is able to create the unique and constantly evolving person that his readers know to be Molly Bloom. It's unclear if Molly is addressing anyone in her thoughts. If she were to voice any of these opinions, would she even trust a woman? Her relationships towards other women are characterized through criticism, of their age, their competitiveness, and their looks. She says things such as, "…women try to walk on you because they know you've no man…" (Joyce, 618) or "…God help the world if all the women were her sort…"(Joyce, 608). Her negative views on men are intertwined with equally negative views on women. Therefore one should hesitate before assuming that even though Molly reflects a certain type of woman, she speaks either to, or for, the other women of her society.

Despite these multiple instances of hostility towards her sex, there's one moment where she seems to forget these opinions and voice her true belief. She thinks,

> …I dont care what anybody says itd be much better for the world to be governed by the women in it you wouldnt see women going and killing one another and slaughtering when do you ever see women rolling around drunk like they do or gambling every penny they have and losing it on horses yes because a woman whatever she does she knows where to stop sure they wouldnt be in the world at all only for us they dont know what it is to be a woman…(Joyce, 640)

Regardless of her past opinions and the competiveness she feels with other women, this passage reflects an incredible boldness within Molly. Even after heavily criticizing women and their inferior bodies, or their negative attitudes, she still believes the world would be better off in their hands. Her opinions on men reflect the "hyper masculine" stereotypes we've explored before, the ways in which men are violent and drunks (as reflected in the "manly men" of Dublin, Leopold's friends). These are the men who shouldn't be in charge, the ones who "roll around" and "gamble every penny they have." The affirmation that "a woman whatever she does she knows where to stop," is an interesting piece of this passage. She seems to commend a woman's ability to live with restraint. However, the argument could be made that by declaring her own masculinity throughout the episode, she's also attempting to defy this restraint. She's made more than enough references to being confined and "chained up" for the reader to infer that she's jealous of how society celebrates a man's lack of restraint. However, she remains assertive in her belief that without women, men wouldn't have the opportunities to live such lives. This

passage also reflects the various female identities Molly chooses to take on throughout the episode. Whether she's proclaiming her internal strength as a woman or fighting for her "masculine" sexual desires.

Molly never wears the same mask twice. Her identity is constantly in flux, creating the space for Pearce's "dialogue" interpretation. Pearce's claim about "Penelope" being a dialogue is plausible if taken in a different context. In Kimberly Devlin's essay she confronts the multiplicity of roles Molly takes on within the entirety of her episode. She claims that Molly performs such roles as,

> …The jealous domestic detective, the professional singer, the professional seductress…the unrepentant adulteress, the guilt-ridden adulteress…the exasperated mother, the pining romantic, the cynical scold…the frustrated housewife, the female misogynist…(Devlin, 81).

Each of these performances could represent a different woman, a piece of Molly that exists separately from every other piece. Therefore, maybe Pearce's argument can apply to "Penelope," just not in the way he originally believed. Molly isn't speaking to some outside female audience; she's conversing with the multiple women she's performing. Molly as the adulteress is speaking to the romantic who's confronting the misogynist, etc. When looking at "Penelope" this is actually a helpful way to understand the structure of the narrative. Without punctuation or breaks in the lines, it's these numerous facades that actually direct the movement and evolution of her thoughts. Molly Bloom's narrative style accepts these multiple "feminine" personalities while also challenging them with the incorporation of their "masculine" counterparts. She's able to speak to each of these performances, the "masculine" woman, the "feminine woman," the mother, the wife, all the while

attempting to figure out her own place amongst them. Molly's relationship to womanhood is complicated, and becomes even more so through Joyce's choice to make her the manly woman counterpart to Leopold's womanly man. Perhaps this is her purpose, to continue the conversation about gender and how it will inevitably play a part in Dublin society, her society.

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