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A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

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Ulysses and the End of Gender

It is easiest to begin a discussion of Joyce's gender politics in *Ulysses* by identifying the positions he does not adopt: his is not an activist stance, nor is he an advocate for disenfranchised groups—whether women or the Irish. Joyce disavows that he is a feminist; as he playfully employs the term in the "Circe" episode of *Ulysses*, feminism is concerned primarily with action (as opposed to thought) and with a desire to appropriate (rather than redistribute) male privilege. When Bloom is being hailed as the world's greatest reformer, a group of women whisper his praises in such a way as to highlight not his but their own attributes: a millionaress appreciates him "richly," a

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noblewoman lauds him "nobly," and a feminist commends his numerous accomplishments "masculinely" (*U* 15.1461-66). Joyce here presents feminism as a paradoxically masculine, action-oriented position, from which he implicitly differentiates his own practices.

To say, however, that Joyce dissociates himself from the feminist movements of his time does not mean that Joyce was unconcerned with the social construction of gender and its subtle ramifications. On the contrary, he repeatedly traces many apparently different failures of communication—between Irish and English, between men and men, between women and men, between women and women, between parents and children—to the fault line of sexuality as it has been socially and historically defined. His characters discover again and again that there is no sexual, textual, or parental relation;¹ that the call of desire evokes only fantasy and despair. As early as *Dubliners* Joyce links the paralysis of desire to society's insistence on the commodification of the beloved, which he associates with the sin of simony, and on the rigidly heterosexual imperatives that turn characters such as Father Flynn of "The Sisters" and the stranger in "An Encounter" into "gnomons," geometrical figures of spiritual and sexual incompleteness. As Mr. Duffy writes after breaking off his relation with Mrs. Sinico in "A Painful Case," "Love between man and man is impossible because there must not be sexual intercourse and friendship between man and woman is impossible because there must be sexual intercourse" (*D*112).

If *Dubliners* records the longing of isolated individuals for meaningful connection, counterpointing their poignant but futile yearning against the rules of a social system that effectively (if not intentionally) prohibits relation in favor of idealized admiration, manipulation, and competition, *Ulysses* takes a lighter attitude towards the impossibility of communication. If *Dubliners* aims to expose the vision of human connection as a mirage, precluded by the very social mechanisms that promote it, *Ulysses* begins with the literally utopian conviction that there is no place (*u-topia*) where such connection can happen because there is no discursive or conceptual space free from the implied rules of gendered (non)relation. Writing is an address, a letter from writer to reader, and from one time and place to another; one writer alone cannot rewrite the play of social interaction and communication because he or she is always writing against a background of expectation and de-

¹ I am echoing Jacques Lacan's famous assertion that there is no sexual relation. He first makes this argument in Seminar XX, *Encore* (1972-1973); see *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1982), 138. He then repeats the claim several times in his seminars.

sire that is socially programmed and often unconscious. Even if the writer's own intentions are revisionary, those intentions can be defrauded by the reader's wishes, which may not cooperate to produce the intended meaning. In designing *Ulysses*, Joyce first identified what the socially conditioned reader is most likely to want and expect from male and female characters of different ages, and then he provides his readers with characters who frustrate and implicitly challenge that desire. The bewildering friction that results is designed to expose the gender system itself as an arbitrary and inadequate fiction, to measure its isolating mechanisms against the urgent complexity of personal desire. Joyce turns the threnody of nonrelation in *Dubliners* into the stuff of comedy in *Ulysses* by composing characters who violate popular preconceptions of what makes men and women admirable.²

Joyce begins his dialogue with the acculturated reader by offering an anti-portrait of the young male "hero." Even a cursory review of the epic tradition confirms that the young male hero is defined by courage and physical strength; Joyce counters that expectation with Stephen Dedalus, who fears dogs, thunderstorms, and drowning and is easily felled by a drunken British soldier. If the frame were mythological instead of epic, the hero would be a fearless, brawny, handsome prince, heir to a just and well-managed kingdom. Joyce evokes the dream of the charming prince through the twin shadows of

² Compare the project proposed by Lieutenant Puddock and Captain Devereux in Sheridan Le Fanu's *The House by the Churchyard*, which Joyce would later use as a point of reference in *Finnegans Wake*. Puddock suggests that he and Devereux devise an Irish variation upon the plays of Shakespeare:

Seriously, by sometimes changing an old person to a young, sometimes a comical to a melancholy, or the reverse, sometimes a male for a female, or a female for a male—I assure you, you can so entirely disguise the piece, and yet produce situations so new and surprising—

Devereux responds by proposing a new version of *Othello*, in which

[a] gay young Venetian nobleman, of singular beauty, charmed by her tales of "anthropophagites and men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders," is seduced from his father's house and married by a middle-aged, somewhat hard-featured black woman, Juno, or Dido.

Sheridan Le Fanu, *The House by the Churchyard*, intro. by Thomas Kilroy (Bellast: Appletree, 1992), 135.

Joyce's project in *Ulysses*, although it is a variation on not one but two literary works (the *Odyssey* and *Hamlet*), resembles that of Puddock and Devereux in its comic design to expose the hero as a gendered construction, defined not only by sex but also by age, race, and class. The different roles in a Shakespeare play or in a Homeric epic are not reversible without dramatic alterations in meaning, for the simple reason that the meanings of sex, age, and class inhere in the culture; the text merely plays against them.

us with "twin" heroes at the beginning of *Ulysses* in the characters of Stephen and Buck Mulligan, he uses them to make just such a point. Buck is the conventional hero—not only does he have the sunny disposition, good health, and financial solvency of the hero, but he is also clean, well-groomed, and has saved a man from drowning. Stephen uncertainly tries to determine whether he could do what Buck did:

He saved men from drowning and you shake at a cur's yelping.
But the courtiers who mocked Guido in Or san Michele were in their own house. House of . . . We don't want any of your medieval abstrusities. Would you do what he did? A boat would be near, a lifebuoy. *Naturlich*, put there for you. Would you or would you not? . . . The truth, spit it out. I would want to. I would try. I am not a strong swimmer . . . If I had land under my feet. I want his life still to be his, mine to be mine. A drowning man. His human eyes scream to me out of horror of his death.
I . . . With him together down. . . . I could not save her. Waters: bitter death: lost. (U3.317–30).

Set against Buck's animal health, Stephen's honest interrogation of his strengths ("I am not a strong swimmer") and his memory of failure at saving others, especially his mother ("I could not save her"), emerge as thoughtful and realistic. His values are less competitive than egalitarian ("I want his life still to be his, mine to be mine"). Instead of idealizing the feat of salvation, Stephen tries to focus on the reality of support ("A boat would be near, a lifebuoy"). Very gradually, as Joyce explained to Frank Budgen, the reader should begin to appreciate the slow discipline of Stephen's ethics, contrasting it to the easier panache of Buck's.

The next model of male heroism that Joyce proceeds to display and partly dismantle is that of the mature man, epitomized by Ulysses. The heroism of an older man is more complex than that of a younger one, but ultimately it still depends on the exercise of ruthless physical strength. The *Odyssey* suggests that the mature male hero is cunning, patient, and adept at lying and disguise. He has the capacity to sustain hardships for a very long time, but ultimately he too gathers his resources for a violent, merciless confrontation in which he slaughters

cial criticism, that his actions were perpetrated in the name of the same principle that his accusers evoke in putting him to death, "justice, which means only the collective selfishness of my fellow-creatures" (412). The book builds to the climactic and significant revelation that the much-admired Paul Dangerfield and the villainous Charles Archer are the same man.

Telemachus and Hamlet, only to puncture it by presenting his readers with a scrawny intellectual who is poor, physically dirty, periodically infested with vermin, and a coward. Even Stephen's disposition violates generic expectations; instead of being optimistic, confident, and determined, he is morose and riddled with guilt. Unlike Telemachus in the *Odyssey*, who resolves to perform whatever feats are necessary to gain information about his father, confronting Nestor and appealing to Menelaus in his determined effort to gain control of his home, Stephen, depressed by the crass "wisdom" of Mr. Deasy, struggles blindly with the sea-changes of language and philosophy, only to drink himself into a stupor and go berserk in a whorehouse. As a troubled protagonist, Stephen is most temperamentally akin to Shakespeare's Hamlet, who is a prince, but a prince who disdains the corruption he is heir to. Joyce darkens the portrait of disaffected youth still further in his portrayal of Stephen, whose indulgence in obscure thought is more oblique than Hamlet's affected madness, and who—as a freethinking Irish Catholic youth in a poor, colonized country—occupies a dramatically reduced economic and social position.

The portrait of Stephen, offered as a replacement for that of the conventional young male hero, is not a narcissistic celebration of Joyce's own vulgarity, as some early readers charged. On the contrary, its function is to provoke a reappraisal of the criteria for heroism in Western culture. Why admire young men whose courage is due partly to the accident of age and health and partly to a rash refusal to assess danger realistically? Why privilege the accident of class and social position, which insulates young "heroes" from more lethal dangers that spring from need, hopelessness, and deprivation? Why is the avoidance of humiliation and degradation (through birth, appearance, and youth) valued more highly than the experience and survival of injustice? Joyce's depiction of Stephen against a grain of expectation makes him an ugly duckling from the perspective of what we were prepared to admire, but at the same time it exposes the hidden basis of our admiration. It becomes clear in retrospect that what makes a young male hero in the popular sense is not bravery, but luck. The hero does not *earn* admiration at all; he merely makes use of the blessings of strength and riches. Moreover, valuing luck gives us no way of differentiating between heroes and villains, since a successful—or lucky—villain is indistinguishable from a hero.³ When Joyce presents

³In Le Fanu's *The House by the Churchyard*, the villain, whom everyone had taken for a powerful and successful man, declares his "heroic" faith when he is unmasked: "I believe in luck, Sir, and there's the sum of my creed." He argues, with coldly logical so-

his opponents and reclaims his possessions (which include his wife). Joyce endows Bloom with Odysseus' more unconventional characteristics—his adaptability, his taste for disguise, and above all his capacity for survival—but he translates Odysseus' bloody slaughter of the suitors into Bloom's rational dismissal of his scruples in "Ithaca."⁴ Moreover, he stretches Odysseus' talent for deception to include a tendency toward self-deception.

In a powerful critique of the ethos of manly heroism (in *Finnegans Wake* Joyce renames the hero a "zero," or "belowes hero," *FW* 343.17), Joyce intimates that it is the powerful and subtle temptation to deceive oneself, to which everyone is susceptible, that renders self-righteous confrontation and retribution suspect rather than heroic. By building his complex verbal structure around a protagonist who tries to avoid the knowledge that his wife has a sexual assignation with another man on that very day, Joyce implicitly challenges two of the most common assumptions about heroism: that the hero is fully aware of his motives for acting, and that those motives are simple, unconflicted, and completely endorsed by the society he epitomizes. In contrast to the stock hero, Bloom is as suspicious of himself as he is of others. Bloom's caution, his propensity to delay action, and his distrust of reprisal make him a different kind of hero, one who will never be guilty of violent abuse. Like Stephen, Bloom aims not to "be master of others or their slave" (*U* 3.295-96), a goal that prods him to question—half unconsciously—his own complicity in his wife's desire for other men. Bloom's bipartisan refusal of mastery and enslavement prevents him from becoming like Farrington in "Counterparts," driven to deny his sociopolitical impotence by ignobly beating a child. Moreover, Bloom's half-conscious preoccupation with the painful knowledge he is trying to disown also signals his refusal to detach himself from Molly by employing the easy, self-congratulatory mechanisms of contempt. His rejection of detachment as a solution to the problems of relation is what differentiates him from cold and haunted characters such as Mr. Duffy in "A Painful Case."

Defying the traditions of epic and romance, Joyce redefines a male hero as neither brave nor vengeful, but as cautious, realistic, and slowly willing to contemplate the possibility that his relation to those he loves

⁴In the schema he gave Stuart Gilbert, Joyce suggests that instead of violently slaughtering Molly's suitors, like Odysseus, Bloom uses reason to destroy his scruples. Under "Correspondences" for the "Ithaca" episode, Joyce identifies the suitors as "scruples" and the bow with which Ulysses slaughters them as "reason." See Don Gifford, with Robert J. Seidman, "Ulysses." *Annotated: Notes for James Joyce's "Ulysses,"* rev. ed. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988), 566.

has inadvertently been hurtful. Joyce's most sympathetic male characters see themselves, painfully, as fallible; their heroism grows not out of boundless confidence in the rightness of physical might, but out of what might be called the moral courage to imagine freshly the perspectives of people they have wronged. Although Stephen is unable to change his relations with his dead mother and unwilling to show gratitude to Bloom for Bloom's tactful solicitude, his appreciation of Jewish merchants as patient and knowing (*U* 2.364-73), and his vision of Muslim and Jewish intellectuals as "dark men in mien and movement, flashing in their mocking mirrors the obscure soul of the world, a darkness shining in brightness which brightness could not comprehend (*U* 2.158-60)," suggest that he feels an empathy with other races and other times that he is not yet capable of experiencing in the present at the level of individual relations. Stephen's view of woman is also sympathetic, if abstract. Stephen sees her as irresistible, lonely, overburdened, and weary; he calls her the handmaid of the moon, journeying ever westward, "followed by the sun's flaming sword" (*U* 3.391-92), pulling the tide in her wake. Stephen also sees tides within woman—blood, "a winedark sea"—a red flood that attracts man, in his role of vampire, toward her (*U* 3.397-98). As the moon, she wearily gathers and releases the waves in splendid isolation; in her perpetual toil, she (like the harp in "Two Gallants") cares nothing for her lovers: "Weary too in sight of lovers, lascivious men, a naked woman shining in her courts, she draws a toil of waters" (*U* 3.468-69).

Although Stephen romanticizes and denigrates woman by turns,⁵ he is also able to picture to himself her loneliness, toil, pain, and even indifference. Bloom, too, is led by "ruth": "Woman's woe with wonder pondering" (*U* 14.186); "Ruth red him, love led on with will to wander, loth to leave" (*U* 14.201). Bloom is sensitive not only to the travail of woman in childbirth, but also to the deprivation and creeping despair of Josie Breen, caring for a crazed husband: Bloom notes with compassion her worn clothes, the lines around her mouth, the cruel eye of a passing woman upon her (*U* 8.265-69). He is also quick to sympathize with Gerry MacDowell when he realizes she is lame, "Poor girl!" (*U* 13.772), and he even imagines how difficult rejection must be for whores-in-training: "Aho! If you don't answer when they solicit must be horrible for them till they harden" (*U* 13.869-70). Most important, Bloom is able to sympathize with woman's hardships

⁵He expresses disgust at "woman's unclean loins, of man's flesh made not in God's likeness, the serpent's prey" (*U* 1.421-22).

without sentimentalizing them; he stops short of condescending to woman as an innocent (and therefore childlike) victim of brutal male desire. He knows, for example, that Gerty solicits his gaze, that she is driven by powerful yearnings that she cannot identify to herself as sexual. Bloom is quick to adopt the woman's perspective in a variety of situations, but in his awareness of the manifold compromises of relation, he is wary of delivering definitive judgments. He imagines the feelings of a woman who is married to a drunk:

Husband rolling in drunk, stink of pub off him like a polecat.
Have that in your nose in the dark, whiff of stale booze. Then ask
in the morning: was I drunk last night? Bad policy however to fault
the husband. Chickens come home to roost. They stick by one
another like glue. Maybe the women's fault also. (*U* 13.964-68)

Bloom sees woman as capable and possibly culpable, but his reluctance to judge never prevents him from imagining himself vividly in her place: "Have that in your nose in the dark, whiff of stale booze."

The image of male heroism embedded in Western culture is emphatically physical; as the male hero ages, his courage is supplemented by cunning, but the basis of his appeal is the power of brute force and a willingness to use that force to protect (and simultaneously to restrict) women in particular and the community in general. In *Ulysses*, Joyce constructs a verbal edifice that promises to house popular epic heroes, but what the reader finds within it instead are thinking, caring men who—like most people—are prone to self-deception and error. The only men in the novel who pride themselves on their physical prowess are an adulterer and a bigot: the exaggeratedly hot Blazes Boylan and the hypocritical Citizen. The reader's expectation clashes loudly with the actual experience of reading *Ulysses*, and the cacophony that results brings the currency of our cultural definition of gender categories comically into question.

Given the premium placed on physical strength in men, it is perhaps surprising that cultural prescriptions for women demand an erasure or concealment of the body and of sexual power. If male heroes should be strong and active, female heroes must be aesthetically pleasing and passive; moreover, they should be immature, the innocent cause and reward of man's desire. The ideal role of the female heroine is to serve as an inspirational icon who is also the prize in a patriarchal contest, as Joyce suggests in *Finnegans Wake* by rendering "beauty" as "booty" (*FW* 560.20). In a typically compressed fashion, Joyce suggests that romantic love, in the popular imagination, is epitomized by

the story of "booty with the bedst" (Beauty and the Beast), a tale of rapine in which the brawny man—simultaneously identified as "best" and "beast"—aims to land his "booty" in bed.⁶

Joyce's critique of popular culture's objectification of the young "heroine"—who learns to see herself from the outside and to advertise herself even in her thoughts as a desirable commodity on the marriage market—is perhaps his most trenchant exposé of the ludicrous cultural prescriptions for women. (As Issy notes in *Finnegans Wake*, in partial response to her name: "I sold/Isolde"—"One must sell it to some one, the sacred name of love," *FW* 268 n. 1.) In "Nausicaa," Joyce introduces us to the thoughts of Gerty MacDowell, who is so thoroughly indoctrinated by the image of the culturally desirable young woman that she cannot own or realize her own desires, revealing them by indirection, cloaking them with narrative fantasies, burying them in the sand on which she sits. From Gerty we learn that a heroine should be an inanimate *objet d'art*, "ivorylike . . . Greekly perfect . . . hands were of finely veined alabaster" (*U* 13.88-89), and that she resembles a fairy-tale heroine. Like Cinderella, she has small feet: "Edy Boardman prided herself that she was very *petite* but she never had a foot like Gerty MacDowell, a five, and never would ash, oak or elm" (*U* 13.165-67).⁷ Also like Cinderella, her inborn qualities reveal her as belonging to a more privileged class from which an unkind fate has exiled her:

There was an innate refinement, a languid queenly *hautecouture* about Gerty which was unmistakably evidenced in her delicate hands and higharched instep. Had kind fate but willed her to be born a gentlewoman of high degree in her own right and had she only received the benefit of a good education Gerty MacDowell might easily have held her own beside any lady in the land. (*U* 13.96-102)

Most poignantly, we observe that although Gerty is careful to deck her body for constant display, she herself is discouraged from inhabiting it: she cannot refer to bodily functions or even the place where they occur. She is uncomfortable both with eating ("she didn't like the eating part when there were any people that made her shy and often

⁶"Booty" is also a boot, or a glass slipper, a fetish that represents the hero's desire for her to contain his foot (or *fourre*), while remaining inert.

⁷In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce stresses the relation between Cinderella and her ashes, which signify the mortality her story denies, more emphatically than he does here by issuing a warning to Cinderella in language that echoes that of the Ash Wednesday service: "Remember, maid, thou dust art powder but Cinderella thou must return" (*FW* 440.26-27).

she wondered why you couldn't eat something poetical like violets or roses," *U* 13.228-30) and with elimination. When Cissy refers to a part of the body, "the becotectom," Gerry "bent down her head and crimsoned at the idea of Cissy saying an unladylike thing like that out loud she'd be ashamed of her life to say" (*U* 13.263-66). And when she goes to "that place where she never forgot every fortnight the chlorate of lime" (*U* 13.332-33), she distracts herself from what she is doing by gazing at a

picture of halcyon days where a young gentleman in the costume they used to wear then with a threecornered hat was offering a bunch of flowers to his lady/love with oldtime chivalry . . . She often looked at them dreamily when she went there for a certain purpose and felt her own arms that were white and soft just like hers. (*U* 13.334-41)

Although Gerry is physically mature, she is unable to realize that maturity and accept the complexity of physical being because she must constantly identify herself in her own mind with beauty. Even in the outhouse she must block out her surroundings by staring at a picture of old-fashioned gallantry. Gerry relentlessly censors her thoughts and perceptions, vigilantly replacing them with sentimental pictures: of herself as a model in a fashion magazine decked out in "a neat blouse of electric blue . . . and a navy threequarter skirt cut to the stride" (*U* 13.150-55); of herself as rescued by "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" (*U* 13.210-14). She paints a highly touched-up picture of marriage, complete with "a beautifully appointed drawingroom with pictures and engravings" and "that silver toastrack in Clery's summer jumble sales" (*U* 13.231-34), where her tall husband with broad shoulders and "glistening white teeth under his carefully trimmed sweeping moustache" (*U* 13.236-37) has "brekky" with her every morning, "simple but perfectly served." "[B]efore he went out to business he would give his dear little wifey a good hearty hug and gaze for a moment deep down into her eyes" (*U* 13.240-42).

In accordance with what Joyce identified as the meaning of this episode, "The Projected Mirage,"⁸ Gerry has replaced herself with a

⁸According to the Linati schema, the "Sense (Meaning)" of the episode is "The Projected Mirage," and its Symbol is "Onanism: Female: Hypocrisy." See Gifford *Ulysses Annotated* 384.

series of aesthetically pleasing pictures, or mirages, that serve the function of advertisements (and that are in fact modeled on advertisements). Gerry has read the signs of popular culture accurately, and she has done as directed by turning herself into something to be seen, like a painting (the "Art" of the episode is "painting"). Gerry has fashioned herself quite literally into a heroine, "as fair a specimen of winning some Irish girlhood as one could wish to see" (*U* 13.80-81), and she seems to epitomize the most admirable aspects of her age and gender: virginity, innocence, a deep longing to minister to the needs of men, aesthetic appeal enhanced by the judicious and thrifty use of clothes and cosmetics, religious faith, and "sweet girlish shyness" (*U* 13.121). One of her favorite poems is called "Art thou real, my ideal?" by Louis J. Walsh, Magherafelt (*U* 13.645-46), and she has constructed herself as an answer to that question. Gerry represents the Irish feminine ideal that Irish audiences so hotly defended in their protests against W. B. Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* (1899) and J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907),⁹ but Joyce examines the implications of this ideal more carefully than did the nationalist protesters; he exposes its pathetic limitations, reducing a real, potentially complex woman into a lonely caricature and common cliché, although one that is tremendously exciting to men at a distance.

Moreover, Joyce uses Gerry to show that an icon of purity carries within it the seeds of a necessary defilement; this is what Joyce somewhat imprecisely refers to in his schema as the hypocrisy equivalent to female onanism: "Onanism: Female: Hypocrisy." What is hypocritical is not women but the feminine ideal, which in "Circe" is represented by the immortal nymph (*U* 15.3232). The nymph advertises

⁹The *Playboy* riots erupted after Christy Mahon, the playboy, tells the Widow Quin, "It's Pegeen I'm seeking only, and what'd I care if you brought me a drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts itself, maybe, from this place to the Eastern World?" J. M. Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World*, act 3, *Modern Irish Drama*, ed. John P. Harrington (New York: Norton, 1991), 115. Joseph Holloway, in a theater journal entry for Thursday, January 31, 1907, refers to this as fifth and libel of the Irish peasant girl on the stage. *Modern Irish Drama*, 459. In a letter to the *Freeman's Journal* on January 28, 1907, an Irishwoman writes,

in no part of Ireland are the women so wanting in modesty as to make advances to a total stranger, much less to a criminal.

Cited in James Kilroy, *The Playboy Riots* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1971), 10. Interestingly, *The Playboy of the Western World* takes as its subject the difference between the image of heroism and its ugly realities. The townspeople in Synge's play celebrate Christy's heroic pose as a man who killed his father but revile him when they see actual evidence of the attempt, much as a reader might expect Gerry to remain a picture but express shock when she is actually looked at with desire.

herself as "stonecold and pure" (*U* 15.3393) as she castigates Bloom for his furtive indecencies, but then she begins to undergo a transformation. She first turns into an eyeless nun, intoning "No more desire . . . Only the ethereal" (*U* 15.3436-37), then she starts showing stains, and finally "her plaster cast" cracks, emitting a cloud of stench (*U* 15.3457, 3469-70). The ideal is itself corrupt, and it cannot hide that corruption indefinitely.

Like the nymph-nun in "Circe," Gerty, by constructing herself as pure and by censoring any indelicate thoughts, renders herself defenseless against the pressure of natural desires. As the ideal female, Gerty is a "sleeping beauty," which Joyce translates in *Finnegans Wake* as a "slipping beauty" (*FW* 477.23); Gerty's unawareness of her own desires is precisely what makes her vulnerable to the penetration of Bloom's gaze.¹⁰ What Joyce shows, by having Gerty swing her shoe buckle and then her leg for Bloom, leaning far back until "he had a full view high up above her knee where no-one ever not even on the swing or wading and she wasn't ashamed and he wasn't either to look in that immodest way" (*U* 13.728-30), is that her behavior is totally consistent with her cultural definition as something to be looked at. Although "from everything in the least indelicate her finebred nature instinctively recoiled" (*U* 13.660-61), Gerty can picture her self-display as a romantic dream-encounter:

She had to go but they would meet again, there, and she would dream of that till then, tomorrow, of her dream of yester eve . . . Their souls met in a last lingering glance and the eyes that reached her heart, full of a strange shining, hung enraptured on her sweet flowerlike face. She half smiled at him wanly, a sweet forgiving smile, a smile that verged on tears, and then they parted. (*U* 13.760-65)

Even her image of physical perfection is unveiled as a mirage, when she is revealed as lame.

The attitude that *Ulysses* takes toward female beauty is exuberantly unconventional. Joyce depicts beauty as a sleight-of-hand, a trick of

¹⁰Joyce's insistence on the interdependence of "sleeping" and "slipping" is reinforced by different variants of the "Sleeping Beauty" tale that portray sleeping as an end to innocence. In an Irish version, "The Queen of Tubber Timtyc," or "The King of Erin and the Queen of the Lonesome Island," the queen is not only impregnated but also gives birth while sleeping (she awakens when her son is six years old). And in the version from *The Pentamerone of Giambattista Basile*, "Sole, Luna, e Talia," Sleeping Beauty is again raped while sleeping, whereupon she gives birth to two children, Sun and Moon. See P. L. Travers, *About the Sleeping Beauty* (London: Collins, 1975), 96-123.

costume, an accident of lighting, a byproduct of style, designed to make women feel less ordinary and to provoke sexual desire in men. The language of beauty is rooted in the language of magic; as Gerty amply demonstrates, the desired transformation is risibly, poignantly transitory. However, those who counsel women in the deception of beauty do so, unethically, in the name of truth:

Time was when those brows were not so silkily seductive. It was Madame Vera Verity [true truth], directress of the Woman Beautiful page of the Princess Novlette, who had first advised her to try eyebrowline which gave that haunting expression to the eyes, so becoming in leaders of fashion. (*U* 13.108-12)

Beauty traffics in the illusion that a woman's body may transcend "those discharges she used to get and that tired feeling" (*U* 13.86-87), that she may be transformed into a spiritual, young, and virginal vision of unstained perfection, a lady whose "innate refinement" refutes the indignities of her present station (*U* 13.97).

By humorously dissecting the magic of cosmetic transformation and by exposing the purposes that the cult of beauty serves for men and women, Joyce derails the reader's desire for a beautiful, faithful heroine and spotlights its implied misogyny. If what we want is a heroine with a "waxen pallor . . . almost spiritual in its ivorylike purity" (*U* 13.87-88), then we are simultaneously expressing a distaste for real women, with the physical afflictions and imperfections that make them long for the magical transformations promised by cosmetics.

Joyce's exposure of the ideal that Gerty worships and imitates as both false and blind (her "litttle strangled cry" aligns her with the blind bat that flies out at dusk "with a tiny lost cry," *U* 13.735, 13.626-27) helps to contextualize his decision to design his mature female heroine along radically unpopular lines. Joyce rejects "beauty parlous" (beauty parlors, parlous beauty, *FW* 454.19-20) as the source of Molly Bloom's attractiveness. Molly is not beautiful in the cosmetic sense, although she is powerfully attractive in the gravitational sense. Moreover, part of what makes her attractive is precisely what prevents her from being conventionally beautiful in fairytale terms: her large mass. Attractive not beautiful, Molly exercises considerable sexual power instead of becoming "booty."

Molly was never designed to "represent" Joyce's idea of womanhood, which would indeed make her a problematic character,¹¹

¹¹See, for example, Karen Lawrence's discussion of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's attack on Joyce's "misogyny" in "Joyce and Feminism," *The Cambridge*

instead, her character is a supplement, an antiphonal answer to the popular (and risibly anemic) idea of a heroine. She is, in a sense, an anti-Gerty, if Gerty is understood to typify someone who, under strong cultural pressure, has replaced herself as she is in biological reality with a picture of what a young woman should be. If Gerty's introjected ideal image is feminine, Joyce has Molly project herself as aggressive and even masculine ("the missus is master," *U* 15.2759). If Gerty airbrushes her body out of consciousness, clothing her body parts in a conscientious effort to deny and replace them,¹² Molly takes pleasure in her ample flesh and consciously registers all aspects of her physical existence—from sexual arousal and climax to urination and menstruation ("wait O Jesus wait yes that thing has come on me yes now wouldnt that afflict you of course all the poking and rooting and ploughing he had up in me," *U* 18.1104–06). If Gerty is defined by the clothes she uses simultaneously to reveal and conceal herself, Molly is either minimally clothed or nude, like the picture of *The Bath of the Nymphs* over the bed that reminds Bloom of her: "Not unlike her with her hair down: slimmer . . . Naked nymphs" (*U* 4.371–73). Instead of looking at her clothes, Bloom looks through Molly's clothes to appreciate her "ample bedwarmed flesh" (*U* 4.238–39): "He looked calmly down on her bulk and between her large soft bubs, sloping within her nightdress like a shegoat's udder" (*U* 4.304–05). All we see

¹²*Companion to James Joyce*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Cambridge UP, 1990), 237–58. Gilbert and Gubar object that Joyce identifies woman too completely with "matter"; Lawrence lends some credence to this view by pointing out Joyce's expressions of guilt over his treatment of women in his fiction and his dreams, but then she goes on to argue that "a catalogue of misogynistic images or female stereotypes in Joyce's work fails to account for his undermining of the grounds of representation" (240). She suggests that "woman in writing is beyond [Joyce's] control and might stand for a play of language that always exceeds the writer's intention" (240), and that woman "becomes the figure for illegitimacy, errancy, and forgery rather than patriarchal signa-ple of excess than as an embodiment of physical realities that are conspicuously missing from what might be called the compound cultural self-image that all women are called on to measure themselves against."

¹³Interestingly, what Gerty "reveals" to Bloom is not her body but her underclothing, the feminized substitute for her body that corresponds to the picture she has substituted for herself. To allow the reader a glimpse of what Gerty fears about the body, the narrator (speaking in Gerty's idiom) refers to underwear as "undies," thereby highlighting not only Gerty's taste for common diminutives but also underscoring the fact that clothes, unlike the body, don't die. "As for undies they were Gerty's chief care and who that knows the fluttering hopes and fears of sweet seventeen (though Gerty would never see seventeen again) can find it in his heart to blame her?" (*U* 13.171–73). Gerty is exceptionally conscious of the passing of time, since she has passed the most marriageable age. "Then they could talk about her till they went blue in the face, Bertha Supple too, and Edy, little spitfire, because she would be twentytwo in November" (*U* 13.220–22).

of Molly in "Wandering Rocks" is "a plump bare generous arm" shining "from a white petticoatbodice and taut shiftstraps" (*U* 10.251–52). Molly is presented in a shift, that item of clothing that it was controversial for actors even to name in *The Playboy of the Western World*; an Irish woman in a letter to the *Freeman's Journal* declared that the word used to indicate this "essential item of female attire" was one that a "lady would probably never utter in ordinary circumstances, even to herself."¹³

Unlike Gerty, Molly is triumphantly, painfully presented as "a nature full and volatile in its free state" that is naturally the agent and reagent of attraction (*U* 17.2163–64). In sharp contrast to Gerty's self-advertising picture of feminine underwear, the last image we are given of Molly before she begins to speak is an unprecedentedly alluring image of her nude breasts and rump,

adipose anterior and posterior female hemispheres, redolent of milk and honey and of excretory sanguine and seminal warmth, reminiscent of secular families of curves of amplitude, insusceptible of moods of impression or of contrarities of expression, expressive of mute immutable mature animality. (*U* 17.2232–36)

Joyce refuses to reduce Molly to the fat tissue of her rump, but where else in literature or culture can we find a comparable instance of appreciation for female corporeality? To a culture that protested raucously against the use of the *word* shift as a libel upon womanhood, Joyce offers an image of Bloom kissing "the plump mellow yellow smellow melons of [a woman's] rump, on each plump melonous hemisphere, in their mellow yellow furrow" (*U* 17.2241–42). Which is the more misogynist stance, the one that celebrates the full experience of female flesh, or the one that censors even the mention of intimate articles of female clothing? In a culture in which thousands of anorectic young women are trying to melt the flesh off their bodies, amenorrheal from the attempt to eat nothing but "violets and roses," how can a representation of ample female flesh as something more beautiful than any work of art, something as vital as the earth itself, be considered misogynist? And when Molly starts to speak, the reader learns that she is far more than the "2 lumps of lard" to which she fears Bloom has reduced her (*U* 18.1404): she is full of memory and desire, sensation and longing, poetry and dross. Unlike so many women who think of themselves even in the third person, she speaks for herself—powerfully, lyrically, sometimes crudely, and without inhibition. Unlike

¹³Kitroy, *The Playboy Riots* 10.

Gerty, who has so pitifully suppressed hers, Molly has a voracious appetite for life, and as a result she sometimes cannot find "this mortal world enough."¹⁴ But her famous affirmation with which the book ends expresses her willed acceptance of life *and* loss, her resistance to attenuation and despair, to being turned to stone by a realistic sight of the world as it is, and not in the romantic world of fairy.

Even Nora, Joyce's wife, was not immune to the shock of being asked to read against the grain of glossy fashion images by seeing Molly as a female hero. When asked if she was a model for Molly Bloom, Nora denied it, claiming with some vanity that Molly was fatter than she was.¹⁵ Although men have long appreciated the proportional relation of size and power (a relation that made small men like Napoleon famously anxious), women as a rule do not interrogate the possible correlation of a petite figure and powerlessness. Although Joyce certainly could have made Molly more intellectual (more like her namesake Molly Ivors in "The Dead"), the role of resistant intellectual had already been assigned to Stephen as a way of countering the expectation that heroes *must be* physical. The characters of Stephen and Molly were designed to violate cultural prescriptions insisting that men must be physical and women may not be physical, a prescription that seems to preclude any meaningful heterosexual connection. But neither Stephen nor Molly is presented as a counter-ideal; Joyce's attack is on the unreality and counterproductiveness of ideals in general, as well as on specific, mutually exclusive ideals for men and women, in particular.

Joyce sees woman as powerful; where he differs radically from the culture at large is that he does not brand female sexual power as evil.¹⁶ *Ulysses* is shot through with references to powerful female figures: Ann Hathaway, Helen of Troy, Kitty O'Shea, "naked Eve": "She had no navel. Gaze. Belly without blemish, bulging big, a buckler of taut velum, no, whiteheaped corn, orient and immortal, standing from ever-

¹⁴W. H. Auden, "Lullaby." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. 4th Edition. Vol. 2. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1979), 2397.

¹⁵Brenda Maddox, *Nora: A Biography of Nora Joyce* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1988), 198.

¹⁶There are very few representations of nature female sexual power that are not demonized as evil. Shakespeare's portrait of Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra* may be one, although Cleopatra is far from triumphant at the end; Queen Elizabeth consolidated her political power by refusing to allow it to be interpreted as sexual, billing herself as "The Virgin Queen." The notion of the female fatale sums up the prevailing sense that female sexual power is dangerous, at best, and fatal, at worst, and there are almost no examples of good-intentioned, successful women who are physically strong and resistant to oppression (even Joan of Arc was martyred).

lasting to everlasting" (U 3.41-44). Although men like Garrett Deasy blame women for our "many errors and many sins" (U 2.389-90), Joyce dismisses such bigotry as an insidiously disguised personal complaint (Deasy's wife is an unpredictably alcoholic), focusing instead on women's loneliness, a loneliness enhanced by a legacy of shame. Although *Ulysses* is built around a single decisive event, Molly's adultery, Joyce refuses to categorize Molly as an evil or corrupt woman; like Thomas Hardy, who controversially described Tess of the d'Urbervilles as "A Pure Woman," Joyce levels his criticism not at the individual but at the institutions that ravage her, reminding the reader that "from outrage (matrimony) to outrage (adultery) there arose not but outrage (copulation)" (U 17.2196-97). Joyce makes it clear that the "debility of the female" has been "fallaciously inferred" (U 17.2215-16) and, along with Bloom, he asserts "the futility of triumph or protest or vindication," spurning "the inanity of extolled virtue" (U 17.2224-25).

Ulysses is unusual in that it expresses neither fear nor denigration nor denial of the power of female sexuality. The burden of Stephen's theory of Shakespeare is that Shakespeare's productivity grew out of his encounter with a sexually powerful woman, a woman whose capacity for desire—like that of Queen Gertrude in *Hamlet*—is read by others as faithlessness.¹⁷ Stephen tells his listeners that Ann Hathaway was no mere mistake of Shakespeare's youth; she was the portal of discovery through which he passed without ever really learning the significance of what his writing everywhere reveals, the central importance of his early receptivity to an older, assured woman: "he passes on towards eternity in undiminished personality, untaught by the wisdom he has written or by the laws he has revealed" (U 9.476-79). The "events which cast their shadow over the hell of time of *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*," are the events that surrounded Shakespeare's seduction by Ann Hathaway, who tumbled "in a cornfield a lover younger than herself" (U 9.260). What his experience of a sexually powerful, physically alive woman produces in Shakespeare is—crucially—ambivalence, an ambivalence that makes him "Ravisher and ravished," pursuing "what he would but would not" (U 9.472-73); "Belief in himself has been untimely killed" (U 9.455-56), and his ego is splintered in painfully productive ways. He has lost the assured ease of judgmental condemnation but gained the capacity to find himself in

¹⁷Compare Virginia Woolf's famous imaginary account of Shakespeare's "sister" in *A Room of One's Own* (1929; New York and London: Harcourt, 1957).

all his characters, finding "in the world without as actual what was in his world within as possible" (*U* 9.1041-42). It is not Ann Hathaway's beauty that produces such a harvest (as "beautifulinadness Best" says to "ugling Eglinton," "The sense of beauty leads us astray," *U* 9.735), but her vivid reality, the physical and erotic strength that society would debar to women.

Cultural stereotypes, ideals, even gender differences themselves (insofar as they prescribe differences in thought and behavior) are attempts to contain and sterilize the contaminating power of a reality that, like mortality itself, ultimately destroys all categories. Joyce's war with convention in *Ulysses* highlights the vitality of eschewing judgment and embracing the catalytic force of change. Perhaps Joyce is mistaken in his view that woman, having been sharply forbidden fleshly indulgence for at least a millennium, has a capacity to experience physical life exceeding that of men. Virginia Woolf certainly thought that Joyce underestimated the effects on women of centuries of repression. But what Joyce systematically attacks throughout *Ulysses* are those compound cultural images that crowd out individual apprehension, experimentation, and thought, the products and prescriptions of what Gerty calls "Society with a big ess" (*U* 13.666). Gender difference is one such debilitating mirage; boundaries, as Joyce describes them, are heuristic borders designed to be surpassed—not lightly, but at the appropriate time, to initiate new stages of cognitive and emotional development. *Ulysses* is designed to inculcate "heterodox resistance" to simplistic cultural constructions (*U* 17.23); it both protests and mourns the increasing "restriction of the . . . domain of interindividual relations" (*U* 17.64-65). Instead of feminine young women and masculine young men, it offers its readers the fuller, surer touch of a "firm full masculine feminine passive active hand" (*U* 17.289-90). Its categories are mixed, controversial, changing, and alive; its stance is a feminist one in the sense that it prefers "sins of excess" to "sins of denial."¹⁸ Like Bloom, Joyce expresses in *Ulysses* a desire "to amend many social conditions, the product of inequality and avarice and international animosity" (*U* 17.990-92), and in *Ulysses*, he commits himself fully to the "convulsions of metamorphosis, from infancy through maturity to decay" (*U* 17.1005-06). *Ulysses* affirms "the fact of vital growth" (*U* 17.1005), not artificial categories such as gender, a word with an "end" in it.

¹⁸Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (New York: Random-Vintage, 1989), 70.

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