

# Virgin and Veteran Readings of Ulysses

Margot Norris

palgrave  
macmillan  
New York 2011

## Chapter Twelve

### The Worlds of "Penelope"

#### In Her Own Voice

In her groundbreaking *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes of Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*, Dorrit Cohn gives "Penelope" a singular place of honor. She writes, "Within the limited corpus of autonomous interior monologues the 'Penelope' section of *Ulysses* may be regarded as a *locus classicus*, the most famous and most perfectly executed specimen of its species" (217). But she immediately raises several interesting questions, beginning with "Would it be even comprehensible to a reader unfamiliar with the preceding sections of the novel?" I would like to begin my discussion of "Penelope" by turning this question around, and asking what does a hypothetical virgin reader of *Ulysses*, who has just worked his or her way through seventeen increasingly difficult and stylistic experimental episodes, confront when reading the first lines and pages of "Penelope"? The episode has no title, of course, and as Dorrit Cohn points out, it begins, as it were, in media res (221), without introduction or even identification of the speaker, the place, the time, or other indicators of precisely where we are in the fictional world of the novel. But to an observant virgin reader who has kept track of the details of earlier conversations and events, the orientation comes fairly quickly, although it requires considerable inference. "Yes because he never did a thing like that before as ask to get his breakfast in bed with a couple of eggs since the City Arms hotel when he used to be pretending to be laid up with a sick voice doing his highness" (18.1) the voice begins, without identifying itself or the "he" to whom it refers. But there have been sufficient references to the Blooms living at the City Arms hotel so that we can infer that the "he" is Bloom, and the detail of his being laid up and the ensuing allusion to Mrs. Riordan's living there quickly connect to earlier information, including the dun's report of Pisser Burke's City Arms stories about Bloom's monthly headaches and his mollycoddling of Mrs. Riordan "to come in for a bit of the wampum in her will" (12.507). Once we get that the "he" is Bloom, the startling request for breakfast in bed quickly narrows the speaker down to Bloom's wife, whom we saw being served breakfast in bed in the morning in "Calypso." Bloom's requested breakfast in bed is in all likelihood set for the coming morning, although we will need further corroboration that Molly is speaking

to herself after Bloom falls asleep, and that her narration indeed follows the closing events of "Ithaca." We can therefore determine the speaker, place, and time of the narration relatively quickly. However, Molly's voice itself—its idiom, tone, attitude, and spirit—are in total contrast to the terse and laconic one we've seen and heard of her before. Her first speech act is a volley of withering criticism of Bloom, Mrs. Riordan, that "big babby-face" John Henry Menton and "that slut that Mary" (Driscoll, we remember from "Circe") before we have even read two pages. This is only the second all first-person narration we've encountered in the text, and for a few moments it has a disturbing resemblance to the first one, the dun's in "Cyclops," which also heaps mountains of criticism on everything in sight. No one has made Molly out to be a sweet-talker, but nothing has quite prepared us for her perfectly eloquent, if colloquial, sharp tongue. And so a novel attribute is added to Molly's character that should indeed surprise us: a sharp, critical intelligence that sees "through" people's exteriors and into *their* attributes—as Bloom remembers her doing once.<sup>1</sup> "When I said to Molly the man at the corner of Cuffe street was goodlooking, thought she might like, twigged at once he had a false arm. Had, too. Where do they get that?" (13.914). Many of the self-righteous, critical, mean-spirited fellows Bloom encounters in the course of his day will get their come-uppance from the no-nonsense judgment of Molly Bloom. However, from a narratological perspective, Molly's judgments of others have no more factuality than others' judgments of her—unless they receive corroboration by fictional facts elsewhere in the novel.

Given that the hypothetical virgin reader had no reason to expect to encounter Molly Bloom's mind at all, her sharp tongue and critical intellect will be the first of many surprises offered in the last episode of the novel. In order to track further surprises, I will follow Molly's thoughts in linear fashion, while grouping her preoccupations in a way that parallel, and contrast, the perceptions of her we have previously received in the text from others. At the same time, I will use Marie-Laure Ryan's notion of the human mind functioning as a world-constructing operator in the realm of fiction to try to penetrate more deeply into Molly Bloom's knowledge-, wish-, and obligation worlds. As with Bloom, these categories may not account neatly for all of her ideas and emotions in "Penelope," but they nonetheless help us identify Molly's own specific conflicts and the way they have affected and determined the plot of *Ulysses*. So, for example, Molly's opening criticisms of Bloom and Mrs. Riordan address her obligation world in the sense that she here considers their actions as "credits (acquisition of merit), debts (acquisition of demerit), and neutral," to use Ryan's analysis (117). Molly indicts Bloom "for pretending to be laid up with a sick voice" to get sympathy from Mrs. Riordan, making it clear that she dislikes pretense, lying, and hypocrisy. Her complaint about Mrs. Riordan is more complicated, and more self-serving, since the old woman is scorned for ingratitude ("never left us a farthing all for masses for herself and her soul" [18.5]) and censoriousness. But while excoriating them for these demerits, Molly

quickly turns around and makes concessions to Bloom ("still I like that in him polite to old women" [18.16]) and grants excuses to Mrs. Riordan ("I suppose she was pious" [18.10])—gestures that Marilyn French considered as a propensity for contradiction (247). But they could also signify a sense of justice, Molly's willingness to qualify and temper her condemnations by also acknowledging virtues.<sup>2</sup> Molly soon frames her opening thoughts differently, however, when she decides "yes he came somewhere I'm sure by his appetite anyway love its not or hed be off his feed thinking of her so either it was one of those night women if it was down there he was really and the hotel story he made up a pack of lies to hide it" (18.34). We see here again her ability to penetrate character, this time her husband's, since she is of course right about the fact that he "came somewhere," that he was with prostitutes, and that he lied about being in Nighttown—even though her incomplete knowledge leads her to connect these terms in a faulty way.

To our surprise our first encounter with Molly Bloom's thoughts reveals her to be quite jealous when it comes to her husband. She angrily ticks off several women in the course of her monologue, including Miss Stack bringing Bloom flowers when he was laid up ("anything at all to get into a mans bedroom" [18.28]) and Mary Driscoll "padding out her false bottom to excite him" (18.56). Molly has reason to be concerned because "the day before yesterday he was scribbling something a letter when I came into the front room" and, she remembers, "he covered it up with blottingpaper pretending to be thinking about business" (18.46). For the hypothetical virgin reader who has followed Bloom's anxieties and suspicions of Boylan all day, this unexpectedly similar display of jealousy on the part of Molly is surprising, and leads to an initial hope that Bloom has been dead wrong, and that Molly, like the mythical Penelope, is indeed the patient and faithful wife waiting for her husband's return. That hope is shaken when she concedes, first, that she squeezed Boylan's hand back during their nighttime walk by the Tolka, and then announces that "its done now once and for all" (18.100), hinting that her afternoon meeting with him did indeed culminate in an affair. This will be the beginning of an emotional roller-coaster for the reader trying to figure out all through "Penelope" if sleeping with Boylan is significant to Molly. Is it a love affair or a grand passion or not, and does it threaten the marriage or not? Molly offers her first allusions to it in the most oblique and casual way imaginable. "God knows hes a change in a way not to be always and ever wearing the same old hat unless I paid some nicelooking boy to do it since I cant do it myself" (18.83), she thinks. Even if Molly is joking here, equating Boylan with either a new hat or a young gigolo does not augur a passionate love affair. And her judgment that "anyhow its done now once and for all with all of the talk of the world about it people make its only the first time after that its just the ordinary do it and think no more about it" (18.100) is so dismissive that we wonder if she is even referring to a sexual experience with Boylan at all. There is a contradiction in Molly's generalizations about her affair and her later descriptive details of the afternoon's events that is difficult to reconcile.

### Thoughts of Boylan

If we ask how the affair with Boylan reflects the intricacies of Molly's Wish-world, a complicated explanation of its status in her overall condition emerges. Her first reference to its having happened comes right after her complaint about Bloom's interminable erotic game-playing—"that frigging drawing out the thing by the hour question and answer" (18.88)—that makes her feel degraded ("trying to make a whore of me"), frustrated ("no satisfaction in it") and hypocritical ("pretending to like it till he comes and then finish it off myself anyway"). After years of sexual frustration, Molly Bloom has taken an action—what Marie-Laure Ryan calls a "conflict-solving move" with a high priority and a high risk of failure (130). We encounter in Molly's decision to inaugurate an affair a momentous action in the plot of *Ulysses*, commensurate with Stephen's action to offer a Shakespeare lecture in the library in the hope of turning his fortune around. What precisely does Molly hope to accomplish with her action, and how does she intend to have it solve her marital conflict with Bloom? The early ruminative context of her move qualifies its function within Molly's Wish-world. Her thought that satisfaction could have come from either Boylan or a paid young boy sets up the notion of substitutability with respect to a lover, suggesting that she needs sexual satisfaction from *someone* although it is relatively arbitrary *who* can satisfy her need. And that need is not without complexity. "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" (18.104). Making Bloom the mental witness of such a kiss suggests that she wants both amatory fulfillment and the opportunity to let her husband know how much she needs it, to make him sufficiently jealous that he will want to satisfy her himself. It sounds here as though Boylan is both a means and an end for her: a place-holder who will give her the satisfaction she craves for until she can get it again from her husband. This is indeed initially reassuring to the reader concerned about Bloom and his future.

Sandwiched between Molly's thoughts about the men in her life during the opening pages of her monologue, we find a curious foray into Molly's thoughts about religion. These thoughts indicate that she has, at least in the past, adhered to the Catholic stricture on premarital and extramarital sex by confessing such experiences to a priest. After wishing for that "kiss long and hot down to your soul" she goes on to say, "then I hate that confession when I used to go to Father Corrigan" (18.106). Still, Molly's internalization of Catholic doctrine with respect to sin is conflicted, as she mocks the priestly interrogation of sexual acts at the same time she admits that "I already confessed it to God" (18.113). Lacking Bloom's more formal intellectual rigor, she clearly has not sorted out for herself a meaningful stance in relation to Catholicism. Father Robert Boyle described Molly's religion as "a mixture of poorly digested doctrine and superstition" (422). When the thunder

wakes her after Boylan has gone, she prays in fright—"God be merciful to us I thought the heavens were coming down about us to punish us when I blessed myself and said a Hail Mary" (18.134). But curiously, her religion may serve Molly better than Bloom's atheism serves him. While an inappropriate sexual act in the past makes Bloom virtually impotent with guilt,<sup>3</sup> Molly is able to confess her own sexual transgressions to God and priest and achieve absolution. "[H]e never goes to church mass or meeting he says your soul you have no soul inside only grey matter because he doesnt know what it is to have one" (18.141), she complains of her husband—suggesting that Bloom did not tell her about attending Mass that morning. Her weakness on doctrine notwithstanding, Molly may ironically be one of the most pious individuals we encounter in *Ulysses*, and her piety is not mere cant. She vividly remembers an early argument when Bloom made her cry with his blasphemous secularization of Christ as a socialist: "when he said about Our Lord being a carpenter at last he made me cry of course a woman is so sensitive about everything" (18.175). Is this why Bloom did not tell Molly about his heated exchange with the citizen in Barney Kiernan's: because she might have construed his calling God "a jew like me" as another offensive secularization of Christ? But although Molly thinks of herself as having a soul and embraces faith with it, she has little more respect for religious authority than for any other kind of authority. She thinks of Father Corrigan not as a symbolic father ("I always think of the real father" [18.112]) but as a paternal human man with a body ("a nice fat hand the palm moist always I wouldnt mind feeling it") and with feelings—"his eyes were red when his father died theyre lost for a woman of course must be terrible when a man cries let alone them" (18.117). However, her surprising tenderness thinking of a man crying over the loss of his father also signals a telling omission, her failure to consider how Bloom reacted after learning of his father's suicide. At the same time, her indecent wish "to be embraced by one in his vestments and the smell of incense off him" (18.118) can arguably be blamed on Bloom and his role-playing games. Bloom has actively stimulated Molly to imagine herself with substitute lovers and then tell him about it—"who is in your mind now tell me who are you thinking of who is it tell me his name who tell me who the german Emperor is it yes" (18.94). Since Bloom once asked her "would you do this that and the other with the coalman yes with a bishop yes" (18.89) he could be held responsible for her imagining herself with a priest.

Ironically, right after thinking of her terrified prayer after the thunder woke her up, Molly produces her shocking exposé of the sex, complete with the number of penetrations, the size, color, and throbbing of his penis and its sensational effect inside her. Nothing is held back since the recollection is utterly private, and the explicitness and vividness of the conjured scene now destroys her earlier dismissive implication that the affair was no big deal. The virgin reader's suspense throughout the novel, when for seventeen episodes the outcome of the afternoon tryst was withheld, here culminates in the climax of a multiple climax, as it were. The reader's shock comes

not only from the startling close-up of the penetration, but also from its emotional implications. While her description by Bloom and others have done little to endear Molly to us, we have become deeply and irrevocably invested in Bloom and his feelings and his welfare. If sex with Boylan was this good, what does this mean for Bloom and his future? And so the suspense is instantly renewed on a much more urgent level. The reader will now be obliged to scrutinize Molly's thoughts for signs that her early jealousy of Bloom and other women will hold, and that she will not jeopardize her marriage even if Boylan's attractions become amplified in the course of the monologue. We were able to surmise from the oblique and not entirely reliable narration in "Ithaca" that Bloom will not jettison the marriage right away even if his worst fears are realized: "Divorce, not now" (17.2202). Our assessment of the chance that the marriage will survive now depends critically on Molly's thoughts about Bloom in relation to Boylan. The cleverness of Joyce's stratagem in having the upcoming Belfast tour coincide with Bloom's need to go to Ennis to commemorate his father's death now becomes clear. Its function is to prevent the resolution of the suspense altogether, because one way or another Molly and Boylan are going to be thrust together in privacy for a period of time—a situation that intensifies the threat of the adultery to Bloom. Molly's resolution of one conflict has created a much larger and more serious conflict whose resolution is in sight neither at the beginning of "Penelope," nor—we will find—at the end.

### Thoughts of Bloom

The early indicators are promising, however, as Molly makes it clear that she would not want a child with Boylan but that she could imagine having another one with the spunky Bloom.<sup>4</sup> And surprisingly, the intense erotic scenario with Boylan is followed by another bout of jealousy, with Molly this time turning a much more specific focus on the identity of Bloom's possible amour. She puts two and two together (wrongly, it turns out) and imagines that "I suppose it was meeting Josie Powell and the funeral and thinking about me and Boylan set him off" (18.168). Molly once again tries to see "through" people, including her husband, and her errors in judgment are produced not by faulty instincts but by limitations of information. Zeroing in on Josie Breen, she worries that Bloom might be planning on "going out to see her somewhere" (18.188). Molly is here in the same anxious situation that tormented Bloom all day, but she is much quicker, more overt, and more forceful in confronting the problem. In narratological terms, Molly's jealousy reflects that in her wish-world, in what she considers good or bad with respect to her desires, losing her husband to another woman is decidedly bad. But unlike her husband, who deals with jealousy and suspicion only with passive moves, Molly plans a highly active course should her suspicions about Bloom and Josie Breen turn out to be founded. She plots strategies for determining if he was planning to see her ("Id know

if he refused to eat the onions" [18.188]) and decides what she would do if she were right. "Id just go to her and ask her do you love him and look her square in the eyes she couldnt fool me" (18.193). Bloom could, of course, do just that with Boylan: go to him and look him in the eye and ask him if he loves Molly and what he plans to do about it. It is intriguing to speculate how Boylan would respond to such a confrontation. But Bloom has not yet even confronted Molly with his suspicions, let alone Boylan, and has no plan to do so. Thinking about Josie Powell also reminds Molly of the young Bloom's appeal to women, "I dont wonder in the least because he was very handsome at that time" (18.208). The contrast between Josie Powell's early promise and her present situation "living with that dotty husband" strikes Molly forcibly, and brings Bloom's virtues as a husband dramatically to the fore: "Poldy anyhow whatever he does always wipes his feet on the mat when he comes in wet or shine and always blacks his own boots too" (18.226). The "whatever he does" points to flaws in her husband, but the realism of marriage is in the details, Molly seems to suggest, and even if Bloom sleeps with his feet to her head, he at least doesn't wear his muddy boots in bed.

A feature of both Molly's Knowledge- and Wish-worlds should be registered here: namely that she has a clear-eyed vision of the reality of the actual world (unlike Gerty MacDowell, say) and that her assessment of what is desirable and undesirable in her Wish-world is conditioned by her realism. When it comes to marriage, she is no romantic.<sup>5</sup> Thinking of Breen's disgusting ways, she blurts out "Id rather die 20 times over than marry another of their sex," a proclamation that, if it were serious, would bode well for her having no such designs on Boylan. Molly has unaccountably switched from praising Bloom's virtues as a husband to praising her own as a wife, "of course hed never find another woman like me to put up with him the way I do," and, she adds, "he knows that too at the bottom of his heart" (18.231). This may sound like vain self-flattery, but the variety of Bloom's fetishes and sexual quirks she lists suggests that she may be right—even though Bloom actually gives her relatively little credit for indulging him. Breen's muddy boots stick in Molly's mind and trigger a series of free associations of foot fetishes. These include Boylan looking at her waggling foot the first time he saw her in the D.B.C., and the time she made Bloom "spend once with my foot the night after Goodwins botchup of a concert" (18.263). She also remembers that the tidy Bloom who assiduously wipes his feet on the doormat had his own thing for muddy boots at one time: "hed like me to walk in all the horses dung I could find but of course hes not natural like the rest of the world" (18.267). This fills in the unsavory details of the "whatever else" Poldy does, that convince Molly that he'd never find another woman to put up with him the way she does. In a moment Molly will remember that Bloom made no secret of his fetishes before marriage ("begging me to give him a tiny bit cut off my drawers" [18.284]), making it clear that "hes mad on the subject of drawers." Mixed in with memories of her husband are Molly's memories of

other men, including “the man with the curly hair in the Lucan Dairy thats so polite” (18.271) and Bartell d’Arcy kissing her on the choir stairs. Bloom apparently made fun of d’Arcy (“Conceited fellow with his waxedup moustache” [8.182]) which may be why Molly never told him about the kiss. But she is evidently saving the anecdote as a secret weapon in a future jealousy show-down with Bloom, “Ill tell him about that some day not now and surprise him ay and Ill take him there and show him the very place too we did it so now there you are like it or lump it” (18.279). Clearly the Blooms, husband and wife, have secrets from each other. At the same time they intensely scrutinize each other in the hopes of getting the upper-hand with respect to knowledge about the other’s life. “[T]hey can go and get whatever they like from anything at all with a skirt on it and were not to ask any questions but they want to know where were you where are you going” (18.297). Molly is reminded now of another moment in their courtship when she saw Bloom, who “had been keeping away from the house he felt it was getting too warm for him,” inexplicably follow her on a rainy day, “skulking after me his eyes on my neck” (18.300) to put urgent amatory moves on her. And she reveals that Bloom’s habit of epistolary molestation began long before his Martha Clifford correspondence. “[T]hen he wrote me that letter with all those words in it how could he have the face to any woman after his company manners making it so awkward after when we met asking me have I offended you with my eyelids down” (18.318). Her earlier claim, that not many women would put up with Bloom the way she does, seems to have some merit, given this testimony to a decidedly quirky courtship on Bloom’s part, followed by an equally quirky sex life infused with his “freaks” and fetishes in their conjugal relations. In retrospect, Bloom’s thoughts about the relationship display a largely rosy and romantic glow, while Molly’s thoughts and memories of courtship and marriage are infused with realism, albeit a generous realism. Bloom may be quirky in some corners of his personality, but given his general emotional solidity he basically doesn’t faze her and she knows how to value him. His dirty letter may have made for an awkward conversation but although Bloom asks if she was offended, “of course he saw I wasnt he had a few brains not like that other fool Henny Doyle he was always breaking or tearing something in the charades” (18.321).

### More Secrets

We have already seen that Molly keeps secrets, like Bartell d’Arcy’s kiss, from Bloom. Bloom also has a secret life, of course—John Henry Raleigh offers a whole section titled “The Secret Life of Leopold Bloom” in his book (154–158)—although Molly knows Bloom well enough to have a pretty good idea of the sort of activities it might involve. But Molly’s secrets are more serious and therefore more startling and disconcerting to the reader. The first involves her background. “[H]e thinks nothing can

happen without him knowing he hadnt an idea about my mother till we were engaged otherwise hed never have got me so cheap” (18.281). What about her mother? We have heard absolutely nothing about her and therefore have no idea what to expect. In narratological terms, this is another example of *implicature*, which leads us to ask what Molly is implying when she suggests that there is something about her mother—perhaps some disgrace—that gave Bloom an advantage in courting her because it limited her options to be choosy about a mate. The nature of monologue does not require Molly to give us information that she herself knows, and entails no obligation to make her implication explicit. Molly’s Gibraltar background has been alluded to by Bloom and mentioned by Dedalus and is therefore no secret. But this allusion to her mother will pique our curiosity without assurance that we will learn much more about her curious atypical past. In contrast to Bloom, Molly seemed to know about Bloom’s Jewish background even during their courtship, when, trying to control his passionate urgency she touched “his trousers outside the way I used to Gardner after with my ring hand to keep him from doing worse where it was too public I was dying to find out was he circumcised” (18.312). And here she drops another small bombshell, when she reveals an intimacy with someone named Gardner who has not previously been mentioned in the novel, and certainly not by Bloom, and who has therefore also been kept secret from him. This abrupt revelation is a powerful reminder to readers about the inherently incomplete nature of fictional persons. The attributes assigned to Molly by Bloom and other characters in earlier episodes are revealed to be radically incomplete. Molly has a secret life as well that we learn about only thanks to our status as witness or voyeur to her utterly private thoughts and ruminations in “Penelope.” So now we know that Molly has once touched someone named Gardner on the outside of his drawers with her ring finger, “after” her similar touch of Bloom.<sup>6</sup> We also learn that that Gardner embraced her more romantically than Bloom did. But once again, Bloom, for all of his quirks, holds up well in Molly’s romantic imagination. Notwithstanding the dirty letter, he seems also to have sent a barrage of wonderful letters, “writing every morning a letter sometimes twice a day,” and sending her the “8 big poppies because mine was the 8<sup>th</sup>” for her birthday (18.327). And it wasn’t only letters and gifts that won Molly’s heart: “I liked the way he made love then he knew the way to take a woman.” Molly apparently tried and failed to write about “the night he kissed my heart at Dolphins barn I couldnt describe it simply makes you feel like nothing on earth” (18.330). However, she has no trouble conveying what she felt, and conveying it wonderfully, in her thoughts.

But the readerly roller-coaster continues. After these lovely tributes to the success of Bloom’s romantic overtures, Molly returns to thoughts of domestic realism, on the one hand, and visions of a future that bodes domestic danger, on the other. Her monologue revealed earlier that the timing of Bloom’s glorious proposal on Howth was no accident, but required some deft logistical engineering on her part. “I had the devils own job to

get it out of him" (18.196) she remembers, and when she did, it threatened to come at a totally unpropitious moment when she was rolling potato cakes in the kitchen. Seeing that Bloom "was on the pop of asking me," she pretended to be in a temper, and got him to back off. Molly hates being caught off guard, annoyed that Goodwin once came by about a concert when she was flushed from boiling stew. This may be why she makes sure Boylan confirmed his arrival time on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Molly is a performer by profession, after all, so it is not surprising that she brings an aesthetic sensibility to the staging of romantic scenes in her life. She now turns her thoughts to the upcoming Belfast concert, thankful Bloom won't be joining her and Boylan on this journey. This reminds her of various train travel experiences with Bloom—some of them funny, like the time he pigheadedly insisted on taking hot soup on the train, and some amatory, as when a "common workman" considerably "left us alone in the carriage that day going to Howth" (18.369). But she also thinks about doing it with Boylan on the train, and, more ominously, about possibly not coming back. "[S]uppose I never came back what would they say eloped with him that gets you on the stage" (18.373). This sounds more like an idle fantasy than a plan, but it reminds us that anything can happen on a concert tour to another city, with a man who has sexually excited her on this day. Thoughts of concerts remind her of Bloom's efforts to land singing engagements for her, a train of thoughts that leads her to ruminations on her husband's interest in politics—for which she has little respect, characterizing it as "talking his usual trash and nonsense" (18.384).<sup>7</sup> Her dislike of politics is strongly influenced by her dismay at the Boer War, and she reveals the reason: "I hate the mention of their politics after the war that Pretoria and Ladysmith and Bloemfontein where Gardner lieut Stanley G. 8<sup>th</sup> Bn 2<sup>nd</sup> East Lancs Rgt of enteric fever" (18.387). Kimberly Devlin cites this as an example of Molly's virtually photographic memory ("she remembers not only the wording of texts but also typography" ["Pretending in 'Penelope'" 95]), and it suggests that an obituary Molly must have seen imprinted itself indelibly in her mind. Molly has now identified the mysterious Gardner whom she touched outside the trousers and who embraced so well: a soldier sent to fight in the Boer War who died of enteric fever there. Since he called her "my Irish beauty" he was presumably British—"he was a lovely fellow in khaki and just the right height over me Im sure he was brave too he said I was lovely the evening we kissed goodbye at the canal lock" (18.389). So Molly has had a relatively recent romantic fling curtailed by a mundane death that deprived him of heroism, "if he was even decently shot it wouldnt have been so bad" (18.397). She displays here an unusual desire for idealization, wanting to turn Gardner into a war hero to make his wasteful loss a meaningful sacrifice. The Gardner revelation suggests that Molly has made an earlier attempt to deal actively with the sexual dilemma of her marriage, albeit with a man in a transitional situation unlikely to offer a permanent solution. Had Molly been open with Bloom about Gardner, the crisis in their marriage could have been confronted earlier—suggesting that some

of her carelessness about Boylan might be motivated precisely by a veiled hope of precipitating it now.

## Discontents

A circuitous series of linkages now take Molly's thoughts from Gardner and the Boer War to the Spanish cavalry and military parades she has seen, back to Boylan, by way of horses and the story about his father who "made his money over selling the horses for the cavalry" (18.403). Thoughts of money trigger a series of wishes for things Boylan might buy her in Belfast, and others she can 'get out of him' in the relationship. This section deflates Boylan's significance to her at the cost of deflating our esteem for Molly herself, since we now see her at her most calculating, mercenary, and shallow—with a closer resemblance to Gerty MacDowell than we will find elsewhere in her monologue. She states flatly that "hes not a marrying man" (18.411), making it clear that her earlier elopement fantasy was indeed an idle fantasy. She now also surprises us with complaints about discomfort in the sex with Boylan, "scrooching down on me like that all the time with his big hipbones hes heavy too with his hairy chest for this heat" (18.415) and perversely touts the greater comfort of the form of sex Mrs Mastiansky reported to her, "like the dogs do it" (18.417). This suggests that when the mating dogs excited Molly on Raymond Terrace, it may have been this story, rather than bestiality, that triggered her excitation. But Molly remains indulgent of the quirks of men, "can you ever be up to men the way it takes them" (18.420) she thinks, before returning to Boylan, his clothes, the Glenree dinner, and an inventory of her own underclothing and wardrobe. Because these preoccupations of Molly's have such interesting cultural and gender implications, they receive an extraordinary amount of attention in Richard Pearce's 1994 collection of essays called *Molly Blooms: A Polylogue on 'Penelope' and Cultural Studies*. These critical analyses are generally supportive of Molly, for example, when Joseph Heininger points out that "in her thoughts of fashionable dresses, corsets, and 'anti-fat' pills, Molly partakes in this culture's symbolic imaging of the middle-class woman's body as a visible public property" (161). And Jennifer Wicke exonerates Molly from vulgar greed when she writes that her calculation has "nothing predatory or wanton about it, merely an acknowledgment that the conditions of sexual relations are entirely predicated on the world of style it is possible to carve out, producing the maximum erotic effects with the minimum of means" (185). Molly certainly bemoans her household's current state of penny-pinching near-poverty. "Ive no clothes at all" (18.470) she thinks as she counts only three outfits, including the brown costume Bloom's frowny whore noticed her wearing.. The urgency that infuses her thoughts about style and clothing has also to do with her anxiety about making the most of the "4 years more I have of life up to 35 no Im what am I at all Ill be 33 in September will I" (18.474). This moment in her ruminations brings

Molly's own stakes in the Boylan affair into sharper relief, since little time remains before "the men wont look at you and the women try to walk on you because they know youve no man then with all the things getting dearer every day" (18.472). Given how Bloom disparaged Josie Breen for her poverty-stricken appearance, Molly's anxiety may not be as ill-founded as it sounds, nor her insistence on a connection between physical attractiveness, money, and social esteem.

Molly has been giving the reader an extensive look at her Wish-world, her sense of what she desires for herself: to remain as appealing to men as long as possible, and thereby retain the respect and envy of women. A different vocabulary would describe these thoughts as a delineation of her sense of a symbolic social order, which leads her to identify possible role models such as Mrs. Galbraith, and the non-Parnell Kitty O'Shea, as well as "Mrs Langtry the jersey lily" (18.481). The thought of royal celebrities is quickly deflated by a bit of apocrypha she remembers involving the husband's chastity device that the Prince of Wales tried to unlock with an oyster knife. But sensible as always, Molly doesn't believe it, "cant be true a thing like that like some of those books he brings me" (18.487). And so her thoughts return to Bloom and his quirks although not before finishing with Lily Langtry and the Prince of Wales. "HRH he was in Gibraltar the year I was born I bet he found lilies there too" (18.500), she thinks, and speculates that with some rearrangement of fate, the Prince might have been her father, "he might have planted me too if hed come a bit sooner then I wouldnt be here as I am" (18.502). Molly here plays with the fantasy Freud called the "family romance," which has children dream they are adopted and that their true parentage is noble or royal—the plot of such operas as Michael Balfe's *The Bohemian Girl*. This allusion of course once again piques the reader's curiosity about Molly's actual Gibraltar background, but brings no revelations at this time, since her thoughts have been triggered to return to Bloom. Thinking of the apocryphal story of Lily Langtry and her chastity belt reminds her of the questionable books Bloom brings her to read—"that Ruby and Fair Tyrants he brought me that twice I remember when I came to page 50 the part about where she hangs him up out of a hook with a cord flagellate sure theres nothing for a woman in that all invention made up" (18.492). Two interesting observations merge here. The first is that Molly's dislike of pretense and pretending ("I hate that pretending of all things" [18.491]), speaks to her commitment to realism not only in real life, but also in fiction, it seems. The second is that she is clearly familiar with Bloom's interest in masochistic fantasy from the books he brings her, but doesn't share his taste. She therefore returns to thoughts of royalty and the privileged life such a background would bring her, which underlines her frustrations with Bloom's inability to hold down a well-paying job, "he ought to chuck that Freeman with the paltry few shillings he knocks out of it and go into an office or something where hed get regular pay" (18.503). Molly now also launches into a criticism of Bloom's interference in her own realms. "[H]e thinks he knows a great

lot about womans dress and cooking mathering everything he can scour off the shelves into it" (18.519), she complains, unhappy about unsuitable clothes and ridiculous hats he has urged her to buy. We are reminded here of Pisser Burke's telling the dun about Molly supposedly crying her eyes out to Mrs. O'Dowd at the City Arms Hotel because she couldn't "loosen her farting strings but old cod's eye was waltzing around her showing her how to do it" (12.841). Although it is still hard to imagine Molly in rivers of tears, she does complain here of her husband's micro-management, as we would now call it. But given that Bloom reports few if any of Molly's complaints, he either has a very tough skin and her objections just roll off him—or she does not voice them to him, but only to herself. If it is the latter, it would reveal an extraordinary degree of self-control and surprising tact for someone so sharply critical in her thoughts.

This section of Molly's thoughts in general voices her lament at the economic limitations of the Blooms' middle-class existence, obliging them to economize in ways that keep Molly from indulging her relatively modest taste for a few of the finer things in life. One of Boylan's attractions is therefore his ability to supplement her limited luxuries. However, Bloom's loss of a good job with Cuffe's cattle market raises a troublesome issue that Joyce may have introduced into "Penelope" as a gloss on Ibsen's *A Doll's House*—namely the extent to which marriage entails a form of domestic prostitution for women. Why did Bloom send Molly to "try to patch it up" with Mr. Cuffe? Molly clearly thinks she was meant to use her charm to influence him to reverse his decision—a tactic that failed perhaps because she was obliged to wear that "old rubbishy dress" that made her feel rotten (18.514). Cuffe politely declines to help, even as he stares at Molly's chest, and she notes: "I could have got him promoted there to be the manager" (18.511). What is Molly implying here? Does she think that had she offered herself more aggressively to Bloom's former boss, she might have engineered advantages and advancements for her husband? The memory of Cuffe's eyes on her chest returns her thoughts to the way a man's pleasure (Boylan's presumably) with her breasts produced an endearing moment—"titties he calls them I had to laugh" (18.536). Molly is back to thinking about sex and she now promotes female erotic beauty over male sexual attributes, citing her repulsion by male exhibitionists "trying to catch my eye as if it was 1 of the 7 wonders of the world" (18.551). Thoughts of exhibitionism remind her of another quasi-prostitution proposal of Bloom's, "he said I could pose for a picture naked to some rich fellow in Holles street when he lost the job at Helys and I was selling the clothes and strumming in the coffee palace" (18.560). As it happened Bloom sold only Molly's hair—not her body—while they were living on the rocks in Holles street, but her thoughts add an unpleasant edge to Bloom's "Nausicaa" speculation: "Suppose he gave her money? Why not? All a prejudice" (13.841). This innuendo, that a physically alluring wife can be used to supplement a husband's deficient income, would cast Bloom's jealousy into a sharply hypocritical light. But it is presumably all fantasy and not something Bloom would countenance in real life. Molly,

at any rate, quickly restores honor, if we can call it that, to her adultery by offering evidence of the acute pleasure Boylan gave her in bed ("I was coming for about 5 minutes with my legs round him" [18.587]) as proof that she is in it for the satisfaction and not for the kimono or the aquamarine ring she hopes to get out of him. She still seems to think of Boylan as a placeholder—"I wished he was here or somebody to let myself go with and come again" (18.584)—but he has clearly given her sufficient pleasure, even if he is a "savagely brute," that she happily ticks off the days until Monday when he will come again: "O Lord I cant wait till Monday" (18.595).

## Gibraltar

We now get a rare intrusion from the actual world into Molly's thoughts—the sound of a train whistle that arouses her sympathy for "the poor men that have to be out all night from their wives and families in those roasting engines" (18.598). She remembers how "stifling it was today" and recounts her chores to clear and lighten up her home by getting rid of newspapers and bundling away overcoats—a reminder that Molly is, after all, a housewife busy with housework. Thoughts of the heat send her mind back to Gibraltar, as memory of the thunderbolts did earlier.<sup>8</sup> We now enter an extended, vivid, and poetic rumination by Molly on her youth in Gibraltar. What is the narratological function of Molly's foray into memories of Gibraltar with respect to the story and plot of the novel? This activity on Molly's part appears unrelated to any action or possible action in her present situation, and therefore belongs to the category of mental operations on the part of a fictional character that Doležel describes as "the 'inward-looking' workings of the contemplative mind" (72). John Paul Riquelme notes, "By means of memory, Molly stands simultaneously in more than one location" ("Joyce's Styles as Forms of Memory" 31). In another sense, Molly is engaging in something akin to the world-constructing activity of fiction itself, creating an imagined world that can nonetheless be tested for traces of what Marie-Laure Ryan calls "historical coherence" (45). This has allowed critical readings of "Penelope" to enlarge the text's parameters with respect to its political and ideological implications. Susan Bazargan notes that "Placing Molly Bloom's beginnings in Gibraltar enabled Joyce to offer us an intricately drawn portrait of the modern female colonial identity in which complications of race and religion are compounded by those of nationality, language, and gender" (119). Given my focus on plot, and on the stakes of Molly's thoughts, feelings, desires, and plans for the future, I wish to relate Molly's recreation of her life in Gibraltar as much as possible to the dilemmas of her present moment. The evocation of Gibraltar instantly expands Molly's cultural and personal horizon, from that of the housebound housewife on Eccles street to that of a young woman immersed in a vital natural and cultural landscape. She first conjures its most distinct feature, "the glare of the rock standing up on it like a big giant compared with their 3 Rock mountain they think is

so great" (18.608). Her background makes Molly less provincial than other Dubliners, having exposed her to different climates and a more cosmopolitan life. The broiling sun that fades the colors of clothes reminds her of "that lovely frock fathers friend Mrs Stanhope sent me from the B Marche paris" (18.612) and her photographic memory now fastens on the postcard, recalled verbatim, sent by the mysterious figure she knew intimately enough to be addressed by a pet name, "dearest Doggerina." I have discussed Molly's relationship with the Stanhopes in considerable detail elsewhere,<sup>9</sup> and will here mainly summarize its implications for Molly's present state.

The young Molly's relationship to Mrs. Stanhope was clearly one of intimacy on several levels, with the young married woman ("she didnt look a bit married just like a girl" [18.623]) nurturing Molly, encouraging her to read and supporting her singing. She showed Molly how to do her hair, and shared "lovely teas" and playful times. "[W]e were like cousins what age was I then the night of the storm I slept in her bed she had her arms round me then we were fighting in the morning with her pillow what fun" (18.640). The deeper implications of this relationship are available only by inference, for example, that the young wife appears not to have shared a bed with her husband, and that her attachment to the young Molly may have been tinged with a touch of attraction or romance. Molly's response to the slightly balding husband rather than to Hester has about it some of the curious displacement that characterizes the dynamic interactions of a couple with a young girl in Freud's "Dora" case.<sup>10</sup> But clearly this early relationship, conjured up in the same vivid detail as her courtship with Bloom, did Molly no harm and may have given her the "mothering" missing from her mysteriously absent biological mother. Given Molly's social isolation from other women in her later life, her early relationship with Mrs. Stanhope, followed by her later close friendship with some of the daughters of Mat Dillon in Dublin, seems to have been crucial for grounding herself comfortably in her female identity while possibly also making her comfortable with a "womanly man" like Bloom. Gibraltar saw the beginning of Molly's love of music and of her musical career. Hester Stanhope writes in her postcard "wd give anything to be back in Gib and hear you sing Waiting and in old Madrid" (18.616). Other experiences utterly remote from her Dublin life also predict linkages. Bloom may be the greater animal lover in the marriage, but Molly detests cruelty to animals just as much as he does, horrified by Gibraltar bullfights with the bulls "ripping all the whole insides out of those poor horses I never heard of such a thing in all my life" (18.633). Molly's youthful life in exotic and colorful Gibraltar is first presented as rich in excitement, pleasure, and intimate friendship until her grief at the departure and loss of the Stanhopes puts an abrupt end to it—"it got as dull as the devil after they went I was almost planning to run away mad out of it somewhere" (18.676). Her subsequent thoughts deglamorize Gibraltar, as she remembers the incessant noise of bagpipes and bugles sounding reveille in the morning and "their damn guns bursting and booming all over the shop" (18.679). Memories of her home life with her father and his friend



captain Grove now include the “galloping drink” of Bushmills whiskey and grog and lit pipes, and Grove “picking his nose trying to think of some other dirty story to tell” (18.693) after the young Molly is sent out of the room on a pretext. This phase of her Gibraltar life, marked by crushing boredom, was not even relieved by letters—“not a letter from a living soul except the odd few I posted to myself with bits of paper in them so bored sometimes I could fight with my nails” (18.698)—a confession that explains why she remembers the lively and intimate postcard from Hester Stanhope in photographic detail so many years later. And, indeed, it is a letter that saves her from her depressive *ennui* in Gibraltar: a letter from Mulvey that serves as prototype of another reviving letter from a man on the morning of July 16, 1904.

The beginning of Molly’s Mulvey story has an almost uncanny prophetic quality to it, as though it predicted the morning of the novel. The young Molly was in bed drinking her coffee in Gibraltar when a letter was delivered to her—albeit by an unattractive housekeeper rather than an uxorious husband. Her description of the pious Mrs. Rubio closely parallels her later disapproval of the pious Mrs. Riordan. Unlike the letter from Boylan with its stiff and formal signature, this letter was different in at least one respect—“an admirer he signed it I near jumped out of my skin” (18.762). But it too makes an appointment. Molly had tried to flirt with the young man and is surprised that she succeeded—“I never thought hed write making an appointment”—and she hides the letter and its outcome from her father. She has therefore had practice managing a clandestine affair. Mulvey kissed her under the Moorish wall and kissed her sensuously with his tongue in her mouth, a kiss that prefigured her comfort with transferring seedcake from her mouth to Bloom’s years later, “his mouth was sweetlike young” (18.771). Uncannily, her first lovemaking with Mulvey also has features of the fabled lovemaking with Bloom on Howth Head, a similar outdoor setting as “we lay over the firtree cove a wild place” (18.789). Its upshot, prompted by contraceptive concerns, was not so different from sex with Bloom in the post-Rudy marital years, “how did we finish it off O yes I pulled him off into my handkerchief” (18.809). Flowers also played a role—“he crushed all the flowers on my bosom he brought me” (18.778)—and she remembers his endearments, “Molly darling he called me” (18.817). Molly clearly felt comfortable enough with the shy young man to be a little wild, to startle birds by banging an air-filled paper bag or asking to fire his pistol, or telling him she was engaged to a Spanish nobleman with a name uncannily like Bloom’s—“theres many a true word spoken in jest” (18.775). Her spontaneity and wildness with Mulvey served to set up Molly’s game appeal for years to come. Curiously also, the Mulvey romance blossoms in May, the month she met Bloom, the month Bloom later proposes on Howth Head, and the month the Boylan flirtation begins. “[Y]es it was May the same month when the infant king of Spain was born Im always like that in the spring Id like a new fellow every year” (18.781). Mulvey leaves in May after a fling that was “too brief” and

these many years later she can no longer remember his first name—“Jack Joe Harry Mulvey was it yes I think a lieutenant he was” (18.818). But clearly his loss was painful for Molly, and for “weeks and weeks I kept the handkerchief under my pillow for the smell of him” (18.863). The function of this romance as a prototype for later romances may also play a role in Molly’s tendency to think of lovers as substitutable, as though May always holds promise for other loves. But at least one of Molly’s loves was ill fated. She passed Mulvey’s gift of a Claddagh ring, given to her “for luck,” on to Gardner. Yet he died from enteric fever in the Boer War “as if it brought its bad luck with it” (18.868).

Molly’s Gibraltar memories function to reveal some of the foundations of her Wish World: a desire to be considered desirable, to inspire romance, to enjoy playfulness and indulge her high spirits, to experience sensuality, in other words, to feel fully alive. However, the “weeping tone” of the train now interrupts her thoughts and veers them to music and concerts and her present-day insecurities. The likes of Kathleen Kearney and her “lot of squealers” and “sparrowfarts” have made Molly feel as though they looked down on her as a “soldiers daughter am I ay and whose are you bootmakers” (18.881).<sup>11</sup> Molly is here defiantly defensive, making her most powerful claim for a successful life well lived even from her youth. She flaunts her youthful glamour and experience, “theyd die down dead off their feet if ever they got a chance of walking down the Alameda on an officers arm like me on the bandnight my eyes flash my bust that they havent passion God help their poor head I knew more about men and life when I was 15 then theyll all know at 50” (18.883). And she equally flaunts her present blessings—“let them get a husband first thats fit to be looked at and a daughter like mine or see if they can excite a swell with money that can pick and choose whoever he wants like Boylan to do it 4 or 5 times locked in each others arms or the voice either I could have been a prima donna only I married him” (18.892). What prompts Molly to vindicate herself with such a boast at this moment? Her subsequent thoughts about her daughter Milly suggest that Molly feels the beginnings of a younger generation crowding her off the stage to the sidelines in terms of cultural and erotic appeal, and it is significant that her first evidence of success is a handsome family in addition to a dashing lover and a career derailed by marriage rather than lack of talent. She still has some fight left in her. Feeling a bit of bloating coming on, she ultimately responds to the imagined derision of the young “sparrowfarts” by farting to the accompanying music of the weeping train.

## Children

As Molly returns from memories of Gibraltar to her present life, she confirms that her domestic situation is fundamentally pleasant even if money is tight and her husband is no Odysseus, unable to manage a rowboat

safely and turning white as a sheet when obliged to investigate the noise of a possible burglar in the house. Molly's Wish World remains underwritten by norms of realism that "see through" unrealistic dreams and promises—such as Poldy's visions of their honeymoon, "Venice by moonlight with the gondolas and the lake of Como" (18.984)—and remain untroubled by them. Molly certainly does not idealize her husband and is quite capable of mocking his failed plans of setting up a musical academy on the first floor drawingroom or opening "Blooms private hotel" (18.981). She can nonetheless look forward to cooking a nice fish dinner that evening ("Ill get a bit of fish tomorrow or today is it Friday yes I will with some blanc-mange with black currant jam" [18.939]<sup>12</sup> or think of planning a picnic at the "furry glen or the strawberry beds" (18.948). Molly's conflict is finally limited to the specific complaints of social and sexual boredom in her present situation, with her husband "leaving us here all day," when the house is especially empty with her daughter now gone. Molly's thoughts veer to Milly at this point—a moment that deserves a close look—and after this to Stephen Dedalus, brought home by her husband like another of his rescued strays. Oddly, the link between Molly's thoughts of the two "children"—her own and Simon Dedalus's—is housekeeping, with regret about the slovenly kitchen being in poor shape for entertaining. Molly's domestic vanity has her frustrated about getting adequate help to maintain a tidy and attractive home. These thoughts offer a class perspective on the difficulties of women less fortunate. Molly is about to lose the inept Mrs. Fleming—"the stupid old bundle" who burned an ironmark on Molly's drawers hanging on the line—that a visitor like Stephen might interpret as "something else" (18.1097). But Molly is less than sympathetic to poor Mrs. Fleming leaving "on account of her paralysed husband getting worse theres always something wrong with them disease or they have to go under an operation or if its not that he beats her" (18.1099). Instead of giving thanks for her comparatively golden life, Molly melodramatically laments her need to look for a new servant. "Ill have to hunt around again for someone every day I get up theres some new thing on sweet God sweet God well when Im stretched out dead in my grave I suppose Ill have some peace" (18.1101). Mrs. Fleming is more entitled to this sort of outburst than the seemingly healthy thirty-three year old Molly plagued only by annoying monthlies that are messy, inconvenient and embarrassing. Molly's opera experience watching *The Wife of Scarli* in the box from Michael Gunn was ruined by menstrual flooding. Now her period has come upon her, and while grateful that she is at least not pregnant, she worries how this will affect her Monday tryst with Boylan. More immediately, she has to negotiate a sanitary napkin while sitting on the unsteady chamber pot—"damn it damn it" (18.1125). And she worries "is there anything the matter with my insides or have I something growing in me getting that thing like that every week"—reminding her of "that dry old stick Dr Collins" (18.1149) whose clinical language and intrusive questions annoyed and exasperated her on an earlier visit.<sup>13</sup>

Molly now fills in the details of her earlier boast about "a daughter like mine" (18.893), and she now brings the same sense of unsentimental judgment to Milly as she does to Bloom. Clearly Milly is bright, "getting all 1s at school" (18.1007) and pretty ("shes restless knowing shes pretty with her lips so red" [18.1065]) with Molly's forwardness and high spirits, which inevitably puts her into some conflict with her mother. Milly fails to respect Molly's privacy, intruding on her while she is washing. She balks at chores like buying or peeling potatoes—once answering her mother with such impudence that Molly, exasperated, "gave her 2 damn fine cracks across the ear for herself take that now for answering me like that" (18.1070). Mother and daughter also trade barbs about slutty dress and behavior, even as Milly appears to want to emulate her mother's style and grooming ("wanting to put her hair up at 15 my powder too only ruin her skin" [18.1063]). More ominous signs of Milly's "getting out of bounds" include going to the skating rink and smoking cigarettes. But even as she criticizes her daughter's behavior, Molly repeatedly makes it clear she understands what drives it and both empathizes and identifies with her ("I was just like that myself they darent order me about" [18.1077]). She also protects and nurtures Milly, arranging to have the "little gimcrack statue" Milly broke in her carelessness mended before Bloom finds out, sewing buttons on her jacket, and taking care of her when she is ill. "I hope shell get someone to dance attendance on her the way I did when she was down with the mumps and her glands swollen" (18.1048). In return, Milly seems to trust and rely on her mother—"if there was anything wrong with her its me shed tell not him" (18.1021). Milly may be Papli's little girl, but Molly is the mother to her daughter that she herself never had. It is interesting to speculate that if Milly were to end up pregnant and abandoned by Alec Bannon, it may be Molly as much as Bloom who comes to her rescue and looks after her in her distress. As Molly's thoughts return to Bloom—after her mental detour to the office of the gynecologist Dr. Collins many years ago—she now for the first time reveals the crucial information about her own mother that allows us, with difficulty, to infer the reason for her absence from Molly's life. She recalls "the first night ever we met when I was living in Rehoboth terrace we stood staring at one another for about 10 minutes as if we met somewhere I suppose on account of my being jewess looking after my mother" (18.1182). The implications of this information could not be properly assessed until Phillip Herring's research in his 1987 *Joyce's Uncertainty Principle* explained the impossibility of marriage between an Irish major and a Spanish Jewess, and the probable illegitimacy and scandal of Molly's birth.<sup>14</sup> Molly and Bloom, both somewhat exotic looking young Irish people, seem to have been struck at first sight by an impalpable kinship in their looks and, it would turn out, in their parentage. The result was an instant romantic and emotional chord.

But after remembering her young excitement at meeting Bloom, Molly returns to her present situation and first offers a critical and negative view of his husbandry followed by corrective praise as soon as she compares him

with the lot of other husbands out there. "God here we are as bad as ever after 16 years how many houses were we in at all Raymond terrace and Ontario terrace and Lombard street and Holles street" (18.1215). The City Arms, with only a quasi-public restroom they were obliged to share with other guests, was clearly the worst of the domiciles they frequented "on the run." Molly blames this unstable life on Bloom's penchant for getting himself fired, "every time were just getting on right something happens or he puts his big foot in it Thoms and Helys and Mr Cuffes and Drimmies." (18.1222). And she wouldn't be surprised if it happened again, "well have him coming home with the sack soon out of the Freeman too." The Georges Street church bell's ringing reminds her of the late hour, and launches another speculation about Bloom's whereabouts that night—"yes its some little bitch hes got in with" (18.1256). But thinking of Josie Breen as a possible attraction for Bloom reminds her of Denis—"that forlornlooking spectacle you couldnt call him a husband" (18.1255)—and causes her thoughts to pivot instantly back to Bloom's husbandly virtues. Surveying the men at the funeral as they were listed in the paper Boylan brought back after going out to get the racing results, she dismisses them as "goodfornothings" and vows "well theyre not going to get my husband again into their clutches if I can help it making fun of him then behind his back I know well when he goes on with his idiotics because he has sense enough not to squander every penny piece he earns down their gullets and looks after his wife and family" (18.1275). Molly's acuity and realism is once again in evidence here, and we see how her Knowledge-world is constituted by a sharp social vision that penetrates appearances and carefully measures pros and cons to produce balanced judgments. She sees more clearly something Bloom fails to see, namely that his pedantry makes him the butt of jokes, but she defends him nonetheless. Her judgments are remarkably sensible when it comes to her husband. But in a moment her Wish-world surfaces again, as thinking of Simon Dedalus and his "delicious glorious voice" arouses her aesthetic desires for art and poetry in her life. It clearly isn't only sex she needs and wants, and turning now to Dedalus's son, we see an expansion of her Wish-world that measures Boylan less favorably than before and shifts her romantic and erotic perspective to a higher plane.

## Stephen

Given that Molly's mental link to Stephen will be via the music of his father, it helps to remember that music is also her link to Boylan. It is easy to forget that Molly is an artist, even though that is how the Dublin community generally thinks of her. Here we see that music is not only a social factor for Molly, but also an aesthetic one as she comments on Dedalus—"he had the gift of the voice so there was no art in it all over you like a warm showerbath" when they sang *Maritana* together—"we sang splendidly though it was a bit too high for my register even transposed" (18.1296). Bloom's

intervention would link Stephen to Molly via music—"he says hes an author and going to be a university professor of Italian and Im to take lessons" (18.1301). Molly has not yet seen Stephen and her efforts to remember him take her back to a painful moment when she was herself in mourning for her lost son. And we now accompany her thoughts on a complicated emotional ride with curious detours that will link a number of dramatic issues in her life together: Stephen, Rudy, Rudy's traumatic conception and the role it played in her marital life with Bloom, and Boylan. Molly last saw Stephen when he was about eleven—the age her son would be now—though the memory of this loss is at first shockingly dismissive. "[W]hat was the good in going into mourning for what was neither one thing nor the other the first cry was enough for me [...] of course he insisted hed go into mourning for the cat" (18.1307). Yet this brutal brushing away of Rudy as not quite human is immediately followed by a tender memory of Stephen as a little boy, "he was an innocent boy then and a darling little fellow in his lord Faunteroy suit and curly hair like a prince on the stage" (18.1311). Molly remembers that little Stephen liked her too—"they all do"—and now suddenly remembers that he might have appeared in her cards that morning, as a possible suitor. This is a startling Oedipal shift in reverse, Molly now turning on the child as possible lover—complete with a calculation of his age to see "is he too young" and concluding that if "hes 20 or more Im not too old for him" (18.1328). Having not yet laid eyes on the adult Stephen, Molly now fantasizes him as a lover, sizing him up as a professor and poet to whom she will serve as muse—even though Stephen has seen nothing of her apart from the photo in the cabman's shelter, showing her singing *In Old Madrid*. The melody of that song envelops her thoughts—"Ill sing that for him" (18.1339)—as she imagines the pleasure of an "intelligent person to talk to about yourself," rather than listening to her husband talk about advertisement. Picturing Stephen as young, like "those fine young men I could see down in Margate strand bathingplace," conjures the image of naked forms like the "lovely little statue" Bloom bought—"theres real beauty and poetry for you" (18.1345). Molly now makes oral love to that effigy of young male beauty in her imagination. She thinks of the figure as, above all, *clean*—"compared with those pigs of men I suppose never dream of washing it from 1 years end to the other" (18.1356). The reader can supply an irony here, knowing that Stephen rarely bathes and therefore fits her description of those "pigs of men." If Molly knew this about Stephen, another of Bloom's virtues—the cleanliness confirmed by his bath that morning—would counterbalance Stephen's hypothetical attraction.

"Im sure itll be grand if I can only get in with a handsome young poet at my age" (18.1358), Molly thinks and, in a delirious flight of fancy, has Stephen "write about me lover and mistress publicly too with our 2 photographs in all the papers when he becomes famous" (18.1364). Boylan comes off badly in comparison to this fantasy. He is now called "the igno-ramus that doesnt know poetry from a cabbage" (18.1370) and Molly's thoughts now launch a new series of significant revelations and feelings.

The first is that Boylan's slap was a reprimand and that in retrospect she finds him rude and vulgar. "[H]as he no manners nor no refinement nor no nothing in his nature slapping us behind like that on my bottom because I didnt call him Hugh" (18.1368). This information is troubling because, given Boylan's flaring temper, it raises the possibility that he might become abusive if crossed—an alarming prospect if the saucy Molly continues her affair with him. But this does not cross her mind and she quickly exonerates Boylan with a vast compliment to her own irresistibility. Molly needs this reassurance because her age is making her feel vulnerable and her husband's seeming lack of passion for her has made her insecure. Not only does Bloom follow other husbands in scouting around for shady women, but "were to be always chained up theyre not going to be chaining me up no damn fear" (18.1390). Clearly she needs Boylan, or even a young Stephen, to keep herself from feeling old and unloved. "I cant help it if Im young still can I its a wonder Im not an old shrivelled hag before my time living with him so cold never embracing me except sometimes when hes asleep the wrong end of me" (18.1398). Bloom's desire for Molly expresses itself unconsciously, it seems, while blocked in their waking life by his still-traumatized condition. His unwillingness to satisfy her makes Molly especially angry about his breakfast-in-bed demand—"Im to be slooching around down in the kitchen to get his lordship his breakfast while hes rolled up like a mummy" (18.1431)—whose consequences further worry her—"show them attention and they treat you like dirt" (18.1433). This moment of discontent erupts into a full-blown feminist diatribe, "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" (13.1434), with Molly forgetting that her husband isn't big on men killing one another and slaughtering in war either. Nor does Bloom roll around drunk (something Stephen had done more than once) or gamble every penny that he has on the horses (something Boylan might do if he was ever down to his last penny). Bloom must have told her about Stephen, though, because Molly now takes an entirely different approach to him, blaming his "running wild now" on his no longer having a mother, "where would they all of them be if they hadnt all a mother to look after them what I never had" (18.1441). Molly has shifted from thinking of herself as Stephen's lover to thinking of him in relation to a mother—and how significant mothers are. This in turn takes her back to that curious conjunction arising some pages ago, when she remembered seeing Stephen as a little boy at the time of Rudy's death.

And now we get Molly's most significant revelation in "Penelope." Thinking of Stephen homeless after his mother's death, she deplores "its a poor case that those that have a fine son like that theyre not satisfied and I none" (18.1444). Her earlier callous thought about the infant that she described as not worth mourning because it was "neither one thing nor the other" is here exposed as a denial of much deeper feelings of complex, painful grief. "[W]as he not able to make one it wasnt my fault we came together

when I was watching the two dogs up in her behind in the middle of the naked street" (18.1445). This suggests that after the death of Rudy, Bloom blamed Molly for the perverse circumstances of Rudy's conception and revealed his belief that they doomed the baby.<sup>15</sup> Molly has therefore borne a cloud of shame and guilt that she still tries to deflect by trying to blame Bloom in turn, "was he not able to make one," and denying that the bold and playful lovemaking was her fault. Does she mean that it was not her fault that she was excited by the scene in the street, or that she challenges as unjust Bloom's notion that her lust in effect killed Rudy? Clearly the whole business hurt her deeply. "[T]hat disheartened me altogether," she remembers, leaving it unclear whether it was the loss of the baby that devastated her, or Bloom's blaming her for it. And now the earlier signs of her callous response to Rudy's death are reversed, as she reveals that she knitted a "little woolly jacket" for the dead infant while crying. Not only did she mourn the dead baby, but she knit him a little jacket, in tears, for his burial. Molly, in her realism concedes this might not have made much sense—"I suppose I oughtnt to have buried him in that little woolly jacket I knitted crying as I was but give it to some poor child" (18.1448). But her baby—which unlike Bloom, she does not name—deserved to be kept warm, and was therefore completely human to her after all. Molly now also reveals that the experience was devastating not only for Bloom, but also for her, and, of course, for what was otherwise a loving and successful marriage. "[O]ur 1<sup>st</sup> death too it was we were never the same since O Im not going to think myself into the glooms about that any more" (18.1450). So Molly understands perfectly what caused Bloom to become sexually dysfunctional. Yet it is difficult for her to contend with his arguably faulty logic of cause and effect, and to bear the suffering produced by the loss of the baby and by Bloom's unjust blame. From this perspective, her instigation of an affair—first attempted with Gardner (producing another loss) and now with Boylan—appears far less frivolous and selfish than courageous. Instead of harboring bitterness toward her husband for his unjust construction of her fault in the baby's death, she bravely and sensibly refuses to internalize it, and proceeds to remedy the situation for herself as best she can.

Molly's thoughts about Stephen now remain in maternal rather than in lover mode. Thinking of Bloom picking him up off city streets full of "nightwalkers and pickpockets," she notes that "his mother wouldnt like that if she were alive ruining himself for life" (18.1453). Bloom must have mentioned that he offered Stephen a place to spend the night, and in speculating why he refused Molly now pictures him not as a grand poet lover but as a boy—"I suppose he was as shy as a boy he being so young hardly 20 of me in the next room hed have heard me on the chamber" (18.1461). But she clearly looks forward to his return to give her Italian lessons, and prepares for them by reviewing her Spanish—"I can tell him the Spanish and he tell me the Italian then hell see Im not so ignorant what a pity he didnt stay" (18.1476). She loves the idea of Stephen returning to stay with them. "[I]td be great fun supposing he stayed with us why not theres

the room upstairs empty and Millys bed in the back room" (18.1488). He could write and study in the morning while Bloom slaved in the kitchen preparing breakfast, "he can make it for 2" (18.1492). Molly now considers her costume in these scenarios and dreams of new lounge wear including red slippers, a "nice semitransparent morning gown" and a "peachblossom dressing jacket" (18.1495). These thoughts of Stephen greatly rejuvenate her, making her feel as young as in her Spanish-speaking days, "I declare to God I dont feel a day older than then" (18.1470). And her new buoyancy translates into an energized resolution with respect to her husband and her plans for the coming day. "Ill just give him one more chance Ill get up early in the morning" (18.1497) she resolves, and she'll go to market to look over all the vegetables and the "splendid fruits all coming in lovely and fresh." And although she's still not prepared to be gracious about it, she'll "throw him up his eggs and tea in the moustachecup" (18.1504) and serve him a seductive "eyeful" of herself in her best shift and drawers along with his breakfast. Only now, thinking of herself erotically with Bloom again, her anger returns at the way he has botched their romantic and sexual life—"Ill let him know if thats what he wanted that his wife is fucked yes and damn well fucked too up to my neck nearly not by him 5 or 6 times handrunning" (18.1510). At last she levies blame on Bloom for her affair with Boylan, "serve him right its all his own fault if I am an adulteress" (18.1516).

### Back to Bloom

Molly now lays plans for arousing Bloom to make love to her, not on her romantic terms but in his own perverse way, accommodating all of his quirks and fetishes. "[I]f he wants to kiss my bottom Ill drag open my drawers and bulge it right out in his face" (18.1520). Knowing that Bloom likes buying garters and lingerie for women, she'll ask for some new underclothes—although we learn here that Bloom keeps the checkbook locked up and obliges Molly to ask for money for things, even though she claims she wouldn't "soak it all out of him like other women do." Bloom likes question games, so she'll ask him one or two questions, "Ill know by the answers when hes like that he cant keep a thing back I know every turn in him" (18.1529). The degree of marital intimacy revealed here between the couple is extraordinary. She'll indulge both Bloom's scatophilia and his pleasure in hearing dirty words from women, "Ill tighten my bottom well and let out a few dirty words smellrump or lick my shit" (18.1530). While the erotic role of dominatrix is not really her style, she is willing to play a mild version of it to gratify Bloom—"Ill go out Ill have him eyeing up at the ceiling where is she gone now make him want me thats the only way" (18.1538). But when she hears the clock strike quarter after the hour, she realizes that it's dawn and she had better get herself back to sleep if she's going to fulfill all her plans for the next day. These include not only getting Bloom his breakfast in bed and getting him to make love, but also

preparing the house in case Bloom brings Stephen back. "Ill go to Lambes there beside Findlaters and get them so send us some flowers to put about the place in case he brings him home tomorrow today I mean" (18.1548). She already imagines a musical evening with Stephen and Bloom, "we can have music and cigarettes I can accompany him first I must clean the keys of the piano with milk" (18.1552). She apparently didn't bother to clean them for Boylan's visit on Thursday. The thought of flowers now turns her thoughts to nature in a lyrical outburst that also surprises us, given that we think of Molly as entirely house-bound on Bloomsday and see her chiefly in the confines of her bedroom. She pictures to herself a pastoral landscape teeming with "flowers all sorts of shapes and smells and colours springing up even out of the ditches primroses and violets nature it is" (18.1562). In another surprise, her Edenic vision turns her thoughts to its creator in an outburst of religious affirmation. "[A]s for them saying theres no God I wouldnt give a snap of my two fingers for all their learning why dont they go and create something" (18.1563). She certainly has no patience with atheists—"I know them well who was the first person in the universe before there was anybody that made it all who ah that they dont know neither do I so there you are" (18.1569). As noted before, Molly may actually be the most healthily pious character in the novel, although faith is here produced less by her Obligation-world or her Knowledge-world, than by the gratification of her Wish-world desire for the bounty of created life.

"[T]hey might as well stop the sun from rising tomorrow," Molly thinks of the impotence of the goddess to contravene the workings of the Creator. The thought of the sun now brings back the young Bloom's romantic tribute to her sixteen years ago, "the sun shines for you he said the day we were lying among the rhododendrons on Howth head" (18.1571). And we now receive that amazing moment of communion that finds a husband and wife, troubled in various ways after sixteen years of marriage, sharing on the same day, the day of the wife's first adultery, a moment of intense pleasure at the memory of their proposal to marry. Bloom may have asked her, but Molly takes credit for getting him to propose and making it happen not in the kitchen when she was messy from baking, but on a beautiful day in a heavenly setting when both are in a romantic mood. "Ravished over her I lay," Bloom remembers in "Lestrygonians" (8.906), and for both of them the moment of oral transfer of the seedcake was clearly magical: "Joy: I ate it: joy" (8.908). It is as though Bloom's ecstatic memory of that moment has now been transferred back into Molly's mind at dawn, so that as she goes back to sleep, she too eats Joy again. "[Y]es he said I was a flower of the mountain," she remembers, and although Bloom doesn't recall those precise words, the trope continues to express his feelings, "Flowers her eyes were" (8.910). But before Molly said "Yes" to Bloom's proposal, she takes another detour into her own young life, a life prior to Bloom and apart from him, her life in Gibraltar and the men and women she knew and loved there, "Mulvey and Mr Stanhope and Hester and father and old captain Groves" (18.1582). Joyce deftly inserts into the moment of emotional and

spiritual communion between Molly and Bloom a reminder that married couples are both one and not one, and that Molly even at her most intense moment of connection to Bloom is also still her own self and was a flower of the mountain amid the flowers of Gibraltar before Bloom deemed her as one on Howth Head. And so it is with her response to Bloom's proposal that Molly goes back to sleep and leaves *Ulysses*. At this moment, when Molly utters her final "yes I said yes I will Yes," the virgin reader of *Ulysses* becomes the veteran reader of the novel and the two identities fuse.

### Coda

How has "Penelope" functioned to conclude a hypothetical virgin reading of *Ulysses*? In simple terms, the worlds of Molly Bloom as traversed in her thoughts have amplified, clarified, and complicated our insights into a variety of situations built up for the reader over the course of many episodes. As Marianna Torgovnick writes of fictional endings, they "create the illusion of life halted and poised for analysis" (5). In narratological terms, Molly's thoughts have greatly enhanced the work of fictional world-construction that has been going on throughout the novel. In particular, she has added a new perspective to one of the conflicts that has propelled the plot. Like Bloom and Stephen, Molly suffers wrenching conflicts, most of them complementary to and reciprocal with her husband's. For the virgin reader whose sympathies for Bloom have been carefully orchestrated over many pages, Molly's adultery could have polarized a response to the couple with a demonization of the unfaithful wife. But "Penelope" gives us a greater understanding of the extent to which the couple's problems are soluble. The reader is transformed into a hypothetical marriage counselor keen to sit the Blooms down together to oblige them to confront their anguish over the death of Rudy.<sup>16</sup> They need once and for all to separate the events of his conception from his death, and then deal with the blame game that has crippled them. Molly must let Bloom know how much his blame has hurt her, and he needs to acknowledge the irrationality of his blame. And as difficult as it is, they must talk about Boylan. Bloom needs to appreciate the depth of a frustration that is not only sexual but also emotional and romantic, and learn to express his pleasure in his wife's attractiveness in ways more satisfying to her. And although it is difficult to imagine how Molly could ease Bloom's jealousy and sense of betrayal, she could stress the shallowness of her connection to Boylan and her much greater appreciation of Bloom's virtues as a man, a husband, and a lover. The marital conflict of the Blooms is, of course, not the only conflict in the work. Because Bloom has not confided the attack at Barney Kiernan's to her, Molly is as oblivious as Bloom himself to the damage that anti-Semitic Dublin gossip fueled by the dun's false account of the Gold cup business might yet inflict on Bloom. Already treated badly by the irascible Myles Crawford, his work with the *Freeman*

could indeed be in peril. The already isolated Blooms could be turned from merely marginalized figures into pariahs once again "on the rocks," unless such "friends" as Martin Cunningham or J. J. O'Molloy or Stephen Dedalus come to Bloom's defense. Yet this is another giant gap at the end of *Ulysses*. We have absolutely no idea what Stephen has been thinking of his good Samaritan friend, or whether he has been thinking about him at all. Even if he were inclined to be grateful, what human resources remain to a young man now at odds with Mulligan, Haines, Lynch, his patrons in the Irish revival, and his father and family? Readers might wish to devise scenarios for remedying these problematic situations, perhaps imagining a Stephen who tells everyone about Bloom's generosity and kindness to him, while Bloom and Molly indeed give Stephen a room of his own to pursue writing and creativity. But such readerly wishes are idle in the face of the absolute incompleteness or gap that seals a work of fiction after the last word. Such critical works as Margaret McBride's, rendering the whole of *Ulysses* as the product of Stephen's writing, attempt to fill that gap—as does Peter Costello's arid and depressing vision of Bloom's fictional post-1904 life. These critical and creative efforts reflect the logical outcome of "Penelope": the ignition of the reader's desire to continue the authorial work of world-construction. In my own case, I would wish my speculations on the outcome of the novel to transform *Ulysses* at the last into the best of all possible worlds for its figures.

contrast to Lenehan's contention that "[s]he was well primed with a good load of Delahunt's port under her bellyband" (10.557).

14. See Phillip Herring's discussion of Brian Tweedy in *Joyce's Uncertainty Principle* (135).
15. See Marilyn Reizbaum's discussion of the stereotype of the effeminate Jew as grounded in the work of Otto Weininger (101).

## Twelve The Worlds of "Penelope"

1. Kimberly Devlin ascribes theatricality and a penchant for mimicry to Molly Bloom, but at the same time credits her with "x-ray vision": "Molly is consistently accorded a sort of X-ray vision that enables her to recognize artifice, various simulacra of the real immediately" ("Pretending in 'Penelope'" 91). Fritz Senn concurs, crediting Molly with "having generally a good sense of what is spurious about others" (*Dislocutions* 178).
2. Paul Schwaber writes of Molly's "ambivalence": "Molly gives and takes back, asserts and lightens, expresses distaste only to find something admirable" (213).
3. Morris Beja reminds us "that Bloom is a victim not of primary or physical impotence but of secondary impotence" ("The Joy of Sex" 256) produced by psychological rather than physiological causes.
4. Father Robert Boyle speculates that it is Molly who does not want another child, presumably because she does not want "to go through the horrors of pregnancy, birth, and upbringing again" (417). He finds in this the source of Bloom's unhappiness and therefore judges "that Molly has been the dominant force in the unhappy sexual relationship which had existed for so long at 7 Eccles street" (418). I find little evidence for this claim, however.
5. However, Molly does resort to poetic tropes when describing appealing men. Jean-Michel Rabaté notes "she likes to imagine that Bloom when young looked like Byron, and some of her fantasies revolve around Stephen Dedalus, whom she sees as a Romantic poet" (106).
6. Raleigh dates Molly's relationship with Gardner as occurring during the Boer War years from 1899-1902 (173).
7. Carol Shloss argues that Molly Bloom is certainly aware of Irish political life, but it is "often dislike of what she knows that leads her to turn back to the private sphere" (106).
8. Susan Barzagan writes "The first mention of Gibraltar in her internal dialogue occurs at a rare moment of contemplation on fear, punishment, and sin, when she recalls awakening to the sound of thunder" (121). She then contrasts the initial apocalyptic description of Viconian thunder over Gibraltar with its evocation at the end of the episode, "the euphoric, exotic image of Gibraltar as it appears in the climactic scene of her narrative" (122).
9. See Margot Norris, "Risky Reading of Risky Writing" in *Joyce in Trieste: An Album of Risky Readings*, 43-49.
10. See Sigmund Freud, "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" (1905) in *Sigmund Freud: Collected Papers*, Vol. 3, 13-146.
11. Molly is right, that Kathleen Kearney is indeed the daughter of a bootmaker, as we learn in the story "A Mother" in *Dubliners*. One could consider the story of "A Mother" as the anemic counterpart of Molly's story with respect to the challenges of mounting and maintaining a female singing career in Dublin.

12. Molly's plan to cook fish on a Friday indicates her adherence to Catholic practice which designated Friday as a meatless day in her time.
13. Peter Costello's fictionalized aftermath of Bloom's post-1904 life has Molly Bloom indeed die of the cancer she thinks of fleetingly at this point in "Penelope." "Her periods never became regular again and she suffered from occasional bouts of mysterious pain, which seemed to her to increase in frequency as the years passed" (106).
14. Herring writes, "Molly could well have been rejected by all but the most tolerant in Gibraltar: by the Jews as an outcast (though legally Jewish) like her mother; by local society as a daughter of the regiment (*U* 11.507); by the garrison as the product of a scandalous union" (133). Herring goes on to call the seeming consequence of Molly's parentage a "historical absurdity," since we are asked to believe that Brian Tweedy "fathered a child on a local girl and raised her as his daughter as if this were perfectly customary in military society" (135).
15. Morris Beja writes of the Blooms' marital dilemma, "The question of responsibility no doubt matters to us as well, but ultimately laying blame is less enlightening than finding causes" (257).
16. See James McMichael's insightful discussion of the Blooms' marital conflict in *'Ulysses' and Justice* (172-194).