

18 · “PENELOPE”

Catherine Flynn

Ulysses ends in the middle of the night in the bedroom of 7 Eccles Street in the thoughts and memories of Molly Bloom. As she lies next to a sleeping Bloom, her long stream of words creates an unprecedented sense of intimacy with the reader, as well as a sense of her own isolation. This ending is quite a departure from the *Odyssey*, which closes in a display of patriarchal strength: Odysseus, flanked by his father and his son, fighting off the Ithacans who rise up against him for killing the hundred local lords who courted his wife and squandered his wealth; only divine intervention ends the conflict. Joyce chooses to end his novel in a domestic space and with a female voice. Why?

Does anything even happen in “Penelope”? Yes and no. Molly thinks and remembers. She hears a train go by. She discovers that her menstrual period has begun. She gets up to use the chamber pot, finds a sanitary napkin, and gets back into bed, all the while thinking and remembering. We might ask, as critics have done, whether the episode is feminist or sexist. Is “Penelope” an unprecedented platform for female consciousness, a groundbreaking representation of the personal, or a representation of a female character on the margins of the action, with a focus on the limits of her woman’s body? The episode is all of these things and its achievement, Molly’s achievement, is made through them. “Penelope,” in the quiet margins of *Ulysses*, is the novel’s culmination.

Richard Ellmann gives us a brief and undocumented account of Joyce’s intentions for the episode: “At first he thought of constructing

the chapter out of a series of letters written by Molly Bloom, but he soon saw that it must be a female monologue to balance Stephen’s male monologue earlier in the book” (77 501). This prompts us to ask if Molly, lying awake in the middle of the night, also offers an answer to the problems articulated by Stephen Dedalus at the beginning of the novel. As we know well by now, Stephen sees himself as oppressed by two institutions, the Catholic Church and the British Empire, and as in service to a third entity that he never names. Throughout *Ulysses*, we witness his struggle for autonomy, which reaches a dramatic and futile climax in his smashing of the lamp in Bella Cohen’s brothel, and which finds further, somewhat disheartening expression in his refusal of Bloom’s offer of shelter for the night. But we find an answer to his problems in Molly’s idiosyncratic expression in a life that has been thoroughly determined for her, in the episode’s play and constraint.

The daughter of Royal Dublin Fusiliers drum-major Brian Cooper Tweedy, Molly has an intimate knowledge of the British Empire. She grew up on the island of Gibraltar, a key colonial holding at the mouth of the Mediterranean, “the center of the military life of England.”¹ In her girlhood, Molly was surrounded by imperial ideology, lighting the pipes

1 Susan Bazargan, “Mapping Gibraltar: Colonialism, Time, and Narrative in ‘Penelope,’” in *Molly Blooms: A Polylogue on “Penelope” and Cultural Studies*, ed. Richard Pearce (Madison and London, University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 119–38.



30 Lancers and spectators attend the Queen's visit to Dublin, Merrion Square

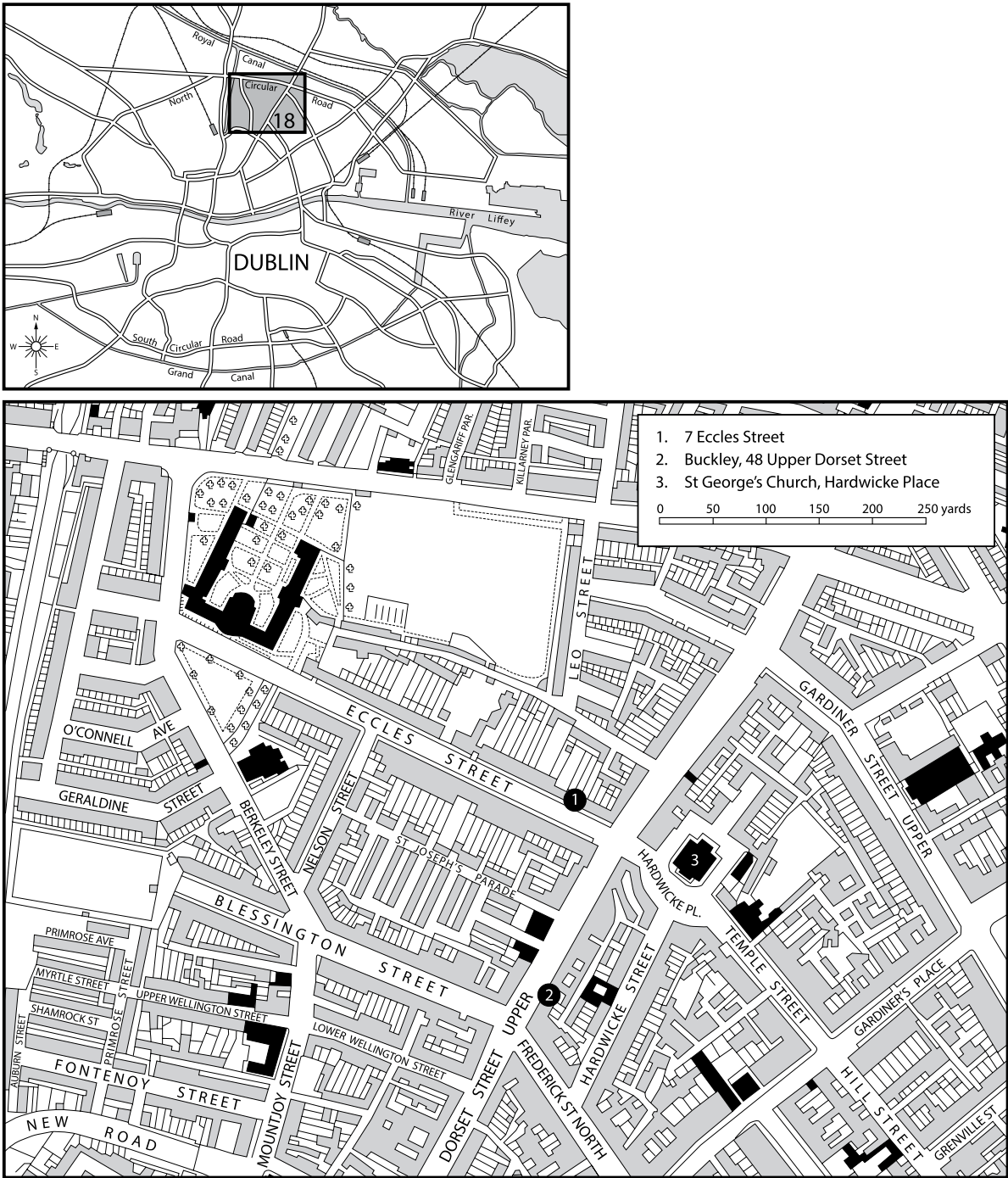
of her father and his friend Captain Groves as they talked about "Rorkes drift and Plevna and sir Garnet Wolseley and Gordon at Khartoum" (708; 18:690–91). She exchanged one British colony for another in moving from Gibraltar to Dublin.² As a grown woman in Dublin, she signals support for the British in the Boer War (1899–1902) by singing Rudyard Kipling's "The Absentminded Beggar" and wearing a brooch for commander-in-chief Lord Roberts, actions which cause her to be dropped from future performances at St Teresa's Hall in favor of singers of an Irish nationalist cast. In addition to imperial rule, Dublin is also subject to the

rule of the Catholic Church. Whereas Stephen refused to pray with his dying mother, visits brothels, and quotes the atheist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, Molly goes to confession, is married, and sometimes, perhaps unthinkingly, prays. Her third master is the condition of being a woman in lower middle-class 1904 Dublin.

In "Penelope," Molly thinks as a person thrust into a female body, trying to make sense of it. She laments the constraints of her body and her gender: "God knows theres always something wrong with us 5 days every 3 or 4 weeks usual monthly auction isnt it simply sickening" (719; 18:1108–10). She remembers the labor of birth and breastfeeding, "what I went through with Milly nobody would believe" (694; 18:158–59), and wonders why women have the bodies that they do: "whats the idea making us like that with a big hole in the middle of us" (694; 18:151–52). She remembers the friendships she enjoyed with

² For discussions of Ireland's colonial status, see works listed under "History, Politics, Nationalism, and Postcolonialism" in the Further Reading section, including Vincent J. Cheng's *Joyce, Race, and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes, eds., *Semicolonial Joyce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

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18 Eccles Street

Josie Breen and Hester Stanhope before the pressures of courtship and marriage separated them. She thinks of the loneliness of married women’s lives, envying men’s social freedom, “they have friends they can talk to weve none” (728; 18:1456–57). She doesn’t identify entirely with the female parts of her body but looks appreciatively on her soft skin, her plump breasts and buttocks. She thinks of the pleasure men take in women and envies them, “God I wouldnt mind being a man and get up on a lovely woman” (720; 18:1146–47).

Many readers have in fact defined Molly entirely in terms of her body and her adulterous affair with Hugh “Blazes” Boylan. While more recent critics have seen the long list of her lovers in “Ithaca” as a product of Bloom’s paranoid jealousy and of that episode’s hyperbole, some early critics reasoned “If to one, why not to all” and called her “a dirty joke ... a whore”; Kathleen McCormick argues that it was to contain such subversive female sexuality and to sanitize *Ulysses* so that it might circulate as high literature that critics subsequently abstracted Molly into an

archetypal everywoman and an earth goddess.³ This more positive focus on her physical and sexual nature has also featured in feminist readings of "Penelope." Recently, for example, Vike Martina Plock has argued that Molly's "sexual adventure blatantly violates the image of domestic bliss and motherhood" that restricted women in the Victorian period; her shrewd reflections on doctors points to coercive and violent medical practices regarding women.⁴

Most strikingly, Luce Irigaray sees the episode's long, unpunctuated sentences and unclear pronouns as mimicking the maternal body in a kind of language that transgresses the syntax and grammar of patriarchal speech; "Penelope" is an *écriture féminine*, or feminine writing, that involves "nearness, proximity, but in such an extreme form that it would preclude any distinction of identities, any establishment of ownership, thus any form of appropriation."⁵ Derek Attridge places this reading in a long tradition of reading "Penelope" as "loose and flowing language," as "a flowering river," "an incredible torrent of reminiscence," and so on.⁶ Yet, as he points out, the language in "Penelope" is relatively conventional (although, we might add, in a particular Dublin register); Molly's sentences actually display "greater syntactic correctness and explicitness" than Bloom's stream of consciousness; any sense of flow is a result of the visual effect of a lack of punctuation and of Molly's "free mental energy moving rapidly from topic to topic."⁷

Molly's free association might indicate her independence from standardized thinking. It

might also, as some critics have argued, associate her with sexist stereotypes of female muddle-headedness. What's more, such a drift might also signify a passive acquiescence. Yet the key aspect of the "Penelope" episode is Molly's particular energy, her idiosyncratic voice. This can be hard to hear at first in the eight long, almost entirely unpunctuated sentences. As we become accustomed to the episode, however, we start to hear the characteristic rhythms of her phrasing in the visually unbroken succession of words. While Molly speaks in conventional language, the way that she speaks that language is unique in its rhythms, associations, and variations.

Take, for example, a passage in which Molly remembers the onset of another particularly heavy menses, as she sat with Bloom in an opera box during a performance of *The Wife of Scarli* at the Gaiety Theatre:

I was fit to be tied though I wouldnt give in with that gentleman of fashion staring down at me with his glasses and him the other side of me talking about Spinoza and his soul thats dead I suppose millions of years ago I smiled the best I could all in a swamp leaning forward as if I was interested having to sit it out then to the last tag I won't forget that wife of Scarli in a hurry supposed to be a fast play about adultery that idiot in the gallery hissing the woman adulteress he shouted I suppose he went and had a woman in the next lane running round all the back ways after to make up for it I wish he had what I had then hed boo. (719; 18:1113–21)

It's no coincidence that after sleeping with Boylan, Molly remembers a public scene of hostility towards an adulteress, even during a play that represents her sympathetically. This moment might support the worst image of Molly: as amoral, as vainly concerned with self-display, relentlessly unintellectual, encumbered by her body. Yet Molly bears her physical suffering silently, under the strain of maintaining an attractive exterior for an insistent male gaze. In bed now, she reimagines the moment: if the heckling man has the luxury of a body that is free from burdensome reproductive functions, she pictures an alternative scenario in which he shouts out in temper at the onset of a heavy

³ Kathleen McCormick, "Reproducing Molly Bloom: A Revisionist History of the Reception of 'Penelope'," 1922–1970," in *Molly Blooms*, ed. Pearce, 17, at 30.

⁴ Vike Martina Plock, "Jack the Ripper and the Family Physician: Gynaecology and Domestic Medicine in 'Penelope,'" in *Joyce, "Penelope" and the Body*, ed. Richard Brown (Amsterdam and New York: Brill Rodopi, 2006), 129–43.

⁵ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 134.

⁶ Derek Attridge, "Molly's Flow: The Writing of 'Penelope' and the Question of Women's Language," *Modern Fiction Studies* 35:3 (Fall 1989), 543–65.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 545.

menstrual period, “I wish he had what I had then hed boo.” There is a playful rhythm to her humorous fantasy, a joyful variation on the given. The passage has the rhythmic energy we can hear throughout the episode, a rhythm which distinguishes Molly.

This moment in the Gaiety Theatre is one of the occasions that both Molly and Bloom remember, and while their memories usually overlap, Bloom is mistaken about Molly’s experience. In “Sirens,” he thinks:

She looked fine. Her crocus dress she wore,
 lowcut, belongings on show. Clove her breath
 was always in theatre when she bent to ask a
 question. Told her what Spinoza says in that
 book of poor papa’s. Hypnotised, listening.
 Eyes like that. She bent. Chap in dresscircle,
 staring down into her with his operaglass for all
 he was worth. Beauty of music you must hear
 twice. Nature woman half a look. God made
 the country man the tune. Met him pike hoses.
 Philosophy. O rocks! (273; 11:1056–62)

Bloom amusedly thinks here of Molly’s dismissal of philosophy, repeating her exasperated exclamation from that morning. In the theater, he perseveres in telling her about Spinoza, a seventeenth-century Dutch philosopher who is especially meaningful to him: sitting on a shelf in their bedroom is *Thoughts from Spinoza*, his father’s copy (661; 17:1372). Spinoza, too, was Jewish, as Bloom declared to the increasingly irate citizen at the end of “Cyclops,” although he was excommunicated from the Jewish community because of “abominable heresies.”

Spinoza’s heretical philosophy is of key significance for *Ulysses* and for “Penelope” especially. It can be summed up in his emblematic phrase *Deus, sive Natura*, “God, or Nature.” God, in Spinoza’s view, is not transcendent or supernatural; God *is* nature. There is, accordingly, no transcendent, immortal soul. Molly indeed remembers Bloom telling her: “you have no soul only grey matter” (695; 18:141–42). According to Spinoza, we each have an essence: a “ratio of motion and rest.”⁸ This

ratio characterizes both the mind and the body, which operate in parallel with one another. This parity of the mental and the physical is especially appealing for Bloom, with his sense of the fundamental importance of the body, and his awareness of his thoughts flowing alongside his sensations. We are each a kind of living pattern, Spinoza thinks, and we constantly strive to preserve that pattern, to act upon the world according to our essence rather than to be acted upon by it.⁹ The more our actions express our nature, the more we’re free, and the more joy we feel.

Joyce indicates the parallel action of the mental and the physical in “Penelope” when he outlines his intentions for the episode to Budgen: “I am going to leave the last word with Molly Bloom – the final episode *Penelope* being *written through her thoughts and body* Poldy being then asleep” (italics added).¹⁰ Spinoza’s idea of a characteristic parallel action suggests an answer to a persistent question about the episode: what, in fact, are we reading? Some critics have focused on the episode’s orality, arguing that it is a dramatic soliloquy or an interior monologue. However, others have pointed to the many signs that it is a piece of writing: the spelling errors, the crossings out, the eccentric capitalization, the use of numerals, and so on. John Smurthwaite proposes an intriguing form: “a piece of writing that Molly’s visual imagination may be said to read as part of the very process by which she writes it.”¹¹ This might indeed be so, although it is difficult to imagine. The episode can be more clearly understood as a representation of Molly’s distinctive proportion of motion and rest. Our struggle to hear this ratio in the episode is a version of Molly’s challenge to enact it within the determining factors of her life.

⁹ “Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its own being,” E3p6; Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader*, 159. See also Steven Nadler, “Eternity and Immortality in Spinoza’s *Ethics*,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 26 (2002), 224–44, at 233.

¹⁰ Letter to Frank Budgen, December 10, 1920, *L I*, 151–52, *SL*, 274.

¹¹ John Smurthwaite, “Verbal or Visual?: ‘Penelope’ and Contemporary Psychology,” in *Joyce, “Penelope” and the Body*, ed. Brown, 75–83, at 83.

⁸ E2p1315; Benedictus de Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, ed. E. M. Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 127.

So what is Molly's, and the episode's, ratio of rest and motion? Although Spinoza resorted to mathematical formulae to represent these proportions, Joyce was never a slavish follower of philosophy, preferring to use the concepts that inspired him in his own way. Most obviously, in "Penelope" we encounter an active mind in a passive body. But more specifically, we can think of Molly as a degree of movement in relation to the constraints of her environment, one that we might characterize as moderate rebellion. She commits adultery, but remains with Bloom. She thinks about sex with women, but makes love only with men. She doubts in the sanctity of the Church, but prays to God. She flouts rules, but is not revolutionary. We might describe her position as conservative – and it is, in contrast to figures such as the politically active Miss Ivors in the *Dubliners* story "The Dead" or the sexually and economically dominant Bella Cohen in the "Circe" episode – were it not for the radical pleasures she generates through her moderate rebellions. Her creative resistance within the determining elements of her existence is exemplified by her understanding of her adultery as an expression of her nature: "what else were we given all those desires for Id like to know" (726–27; 18:1397–98). In this joyful expression of her nature, she is free.

Molly's skills as a singer exemplify her creativity within the given: her ability to animate a musical score, to interpret and reinterpret the notes on the page. Molly thinks carefully about emphasis, praising Simon Dedalus's care in phrasing: "sweetheart he always sang it not like Bartell D'Arcy sweet *tart*" (724; 18:1295–96). Bloom admires her skill in expressing the fluttering of Zerlina's heart in *Don Giovanni*: "*Mi trema un poco il*. Beautiful on that *tre* her voice is: weeping tone" (90; 6:239–40). We can see her expressive ability in her use of the word "yes." Ellmann tells us that Joyce was inspired to use the word repeatedly in the episode when he overheard a female friend in conversation with a young painter repeat "the word 'yes' over and over in different tones of voice" (77 516). Indeed, the word features ninety-two times in the first edition, climaxing in the famously rhapsodic

final passage. As Molly repeats the word, it marks a rhythm in her long sentences. She gives it many different inflections, often complex in tone: convinced contradiction, "what do they ask us to marry them for if were so bad as all that comes to yes because they cant get on without us" (696; 18:238–40); surprised realization, "wait by God yes wait yes hold on he was on the cards this morning" (724; 18:1313–14); and, perhaps most complex of all, defiant cooperation, "let him know if thats what he wanted that his wife is fucked yes and damn well fucked too" (729–30; 18:1510–11). This multiply modulated "yes" is her creative affirmation of the given.

That Molly reshapes the matter of her existence might help us understand what Joyce means when he writes of "yes" as a female word, in a description of the workings of the episode that might seem bluntly sexist:

Penelope is the *clou* of the book. The first sentence contains 2500 words. There are eight sentences in the episode. It begins and ends with the female word *yes*. It turns like the huge earth ball slowly surely and evenly round and round spinning, its four cardinal points being the female breasts, arse, womb and cunt expressed by the words *because*, *bottom* (in all senses bottom button, bottom of the class, bottom of the sea, bottom of his heart), *woman*, *yes*. Though probably more obscene than any preceding episode it seems to me to be perfectly sane full amoral fertilisable untrustworthy engaging shrewd limited prudent indifferent *Weib. Ich bin der Fleisch der stets bejaht*.¹²

Joyce's German sentence is his reworking of a threatening declaration made by Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust*: *Ich bin der Geist der stets verneint*, "I am the spirit that constantly denies." In contrast to this devilish negation, Joyce's *Weib*, or woman, might sound

¹² Letter to Frank Budgen, August 16, 1921, *L I*, 170, *SL*, 285. A less essentialist framework is suggested by Joyce's idea of structuring the episode according to a similar but less well-known group of words which he called the episode's "wobbling points": "woman," "bottom," "he," and "man." Qtd. Richard Brown, "Body Words," in *Joyce, "Penelope" and the Body*, 26.

problematically consenting: “I am the flesh that constantly affirms.” The infinity symbol that Joyce used to define the time of the episode in the Linati schema has suggested to some readers that the episode caricatures a female body, with breasts or buttocks, or both, and that the period in the center of the episode, after the fourth sentence, is an anus (although by a similar logic it might be a navel). Yet if “Penelope” suggests the form of a woman’s body, it is not an object but an inhabited form. Molly’s fleshly affirmation is not blank acquiescence or uniform agreement but an affirmation made *through* the flesh, despite its many determining conditions. Molly herself forces us to complicate Joyce’s words when she comments on Bloom’s attraction to her bottom: “hed kiss anything unnatural where we havent 1 atom of any kind of expression in us all of us the same two lumps of lard” (727; 18:1402–4). “Penelope” is all about Molly’s idiosyncratic expression, her bending of verbal material into distinctive phrases. There is a joy to her use of language, a lip-smacking pleasure in her verbiage even when she describes her woes. Here she is complaining about being surprised by unexpected callers: “answer the door you think its the vegetables then its somebody and you all undressed or the door of the filthy sloppy kitchen blows open” (699; 18:333–35). Piling up redundant adjectives and using nouns in nonstandard ways, she makes language her own. Whereas Stephen expresses his sense of captivity in the language of the master, Molly’s complaints are creative and pleasurable.

Molly’s capacity to recast the given offers her a different view of the institutions that dominated Stephen’s consciousness. Instead of the abstract concept of the British Empire, she thinks of handsome soldiers: “the lancers O the lancers theyre grand” (700; 18:402; see Figure 30, p. 885). This appreciation is based on the pleasures she has experienced with her first boyfriend, Mulvey, and her more recent beau, Lieutenant Gardner. It is free of jingoism: the death of Gardner of enteric fever in South Africa deepened her dislike of war and of politics (700; 18:396–97). She feels sympathy for the soldiers in the hot sun of Gibraltar and for Mulvey’s isolation in imperial service, “the Spanish girls he didnt like I suppose one

of them wouldnt have him” (710; 18:776–77). In a related manner, she erotically recasts the Catholic Church, fantasizing about having a sexual encounter with a priest dressed in his vestments and smelling of incense; in this fantasy she bends or even travesties the Church’s rules and traditions, “then give something to H H the pope for a penance” (693; 18:121).

Whereas Stephen finds no place in a world whose limits he theorizes so accurately, Molly participates idiosyncratically in the limited world in which she finds herself. She is not a reformer: not a nationalist nor an atheist nor a women’s rights activist. She questions but doesn’t resist her biologically and socially given role: “whats the idea making us like that with a big hole in the middle of us like a Stallion driving it up into you because thats all they want out of you with that determined vicious look in his eye” (694; 18:151–53). If this is a potentially alarming description of heteronormative intercourse with Boylan, her subsequent comment transforms his masculinist ways into an enjoyable spectacle: “you might as well be in bed with what with a lion” (726; 18:1376–77). If Molly observes that in her world women bear greater physical demands and greater social constraints, her capacity to pleasurably inhabit that world nonetheless is the sign of her strength, even her heroism. This is the novel’s culminating achievement: to show how to be a full person within the challenges into which one is born, through a determined performance of oneself that brings pleasure.

That “Penelope” is a *human* affirmation suggests an answer to the question often raised of the episode: is it the fantastical performance of a woman by a male author? Karen Lawrence articulates the danger this way, “Perhaps one can say that Molly represents the problem of woman represented by the male pen, a staging of alterity that reveals itself as a masquerade.”¹³ One might conclude that the experience of being a woman can only be given expression *by* a woman. Yet this would imply that being a woman is an essential and uniform experience, rather than an engagement with a changing

¹³ Karen Lawrence, “Joyce and Feminism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, ed. Derek Attridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 253.

set of conditions and array of roles. As we have seen, Molly reflects, with some distance, on the various phases her body has passed through. She knows herself as a ratio of motion and rest persisting through all sorts of bodily changes and experiences. Kimberly Devlin lists the various personae she takes on over the course of the episode: "She stages herself as Venus in furs, the indignant protective spouse, the jealous domestic detective, the professional singer, the professional seductress or femme fatale, the teenage flirt, the teenage naif, the unrepentant adulteress, the guilt-ridden adulteress, the narcissistic child, the exasperated mother, the pining romantic, the cynical scold, the female seer/fortuneteller [...] the frustrated housewife, the female confidante and adviser, the female misogynist, et cetera, et cetera."¹⁴ In discussing the variety of this performance, Devlin distinguishes between masquerade, the inhabitation of a role, and mimicry, a form of ironic and critical imitation. Molly slips between the two, according to Devlin: "Her vacillation between the two positions supports the theoretical claim that there is no permanent critical vantage outside ideology."¹⁵ Like Stephen, Molly finds no outside to the given world; her response is to perform within it, creatively reworking the roles it affords with the same gusto that she brings to conventional figures of speech.

In her shifting and contradictory role-play, Molly echoes Homer's heroine. Penelope's name is often understood as *pene-ops*, or weft-face, an etymology that evokes the ruse for which she is celebrated at the end of the *Odyssey*: her promise to the suitors that she would only marry again once she had finished weaving a shroud for her father-in-law, a work in progress which she unraveled each night. Odysseus, too, adopted a series of aliases and ruses in his long journey home: old man, Noman, beggar, and god. Classicists use the term *homophrosyne* to discuss their like-mindedness; while earlier scholars dismissed this as a possibility – when do husbands and

wives ever agree? – more recently, scholars have come to recognize their shared qualities of self-sufficiency and self-possession.¹⁶

"Penelope" reveals that Molly and Bloom display a similar *homophrosyne*. While Bloom displays a lack of possessiveness, Molly tolerates the possibility of his adultery, as long as she knows about it (691; 18:53–55). Her admiration for him is largely based on characteristics she too possesses: his composure, his resistance to manipulation, and his capacity to determine his responses to events. In a surprising new angle on Bloom's status as cuckold, Molly suspects that he sent Milly away to make possible her affair with Boylan, "thats why he did it Im certain the way he plots and plans everything out" (716; 18:1008–9). This suspicion casts new light on Bloom's thought in "Sirens" that sexual activity is necessary for a woman's flourishing, an idea that Molly herself voices (727; 18:1407–8). Penelope tests Odysseus's sincerity by suggesting she do the impossible: move their bed, which he built around a living olive tree, something that only he knows. While Molly, on the other hand, misleads Bloom about the origins of their bed, "he thinks father bought it from Lord Napier" (722; 18:1213–14), we can see her sleeping in it with Boylan as a similar provocation.

Readers sometimes wonder if Molly's concluding affirmation is specific to Bloom and to the present as the episode ends in her thoughts of their past erotic experiences on Howth Head, mixed with memories of Mulvey in Gibraltar, and anticipations of Stephen in Dublin "shall I wear a red yes" (732; 18:1603); moreover, the passage closes with many unspecific references to "he" and "his." The episode's unusual form answers this question in a different way. Although Molly's thoughts progress in some way, "Penelope" is not structured around a plot, in the traditional sense of a series of causally related events that culminate in the resolution of a central problem. As each quasi-sentence springs from and displaces the one before it, in a characteristic ratio of rest and motion, the events of Molly's life are assembled

¹⁴ Kimberly J. Devlin, "Pretending in 'Penelope': Masquerade, Mimicry, and Molly Bloom," in *Molly Blooms*, ed. Pearce, 81.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁶ Thomas Van Nortwick, *The Unknown Odysseus: Alternate Worlds in Homer's "Odyssey"* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 17.

free of linear narration. Accordingly, this unusual form signals importance not through trajectory but proportion: we can judge Molly’s love for Bloom by how much and how often she thinks of him. Her thoughts constantly returning to him, she mirrors his own thinking of her throughout the day. Molly herself offers us an account of such a bond: “to find two people like that nowadays full up of each other that would feel the same way as you do theyre usually a bit foolish in the head” (718; 18:1059–61). What we might call Molly’s mobile fidelity to Bloom is part of her ongoing expression of her being.

Molly has often been linked to Joyce’s life-long partner and wife, Nora Barnacle. Brenda Maddox observes that Galway, the western harbor city in which Nora spent her girlhood was like Gibraltar, a gateway to a wider world and one at which British soldiers were stationed. Joyce drew in “Penelope” on Nora’s sexual experiences, her unpunctuated writing style, and

even, Maddox conjectures, the obscene letters she wrote to him in 1909. But Maddox also points to other women in whom Joyce found inspiration for Molly: in Dublin, Trieste, and Paris. Ellmann reports that Joyce used to tease two young American artists in Paris by saying “that Molly Bloom was sitting at another table in the restaurant, and they would try to guess which woman she was, always without success. This game he continued for years” (77 516). This riddle suggests another model for Molly: Joyce himself, writing the “Penelope” episode in Paris, stretched out almost flat, until three or later in the mornings.¹⁷ Living in the rhythms of her roles and turns of phrase, Molly is allied to Joyce’s reworking in *Ulysses* of a massive repertoire of discourses and literary forms, to his commitment to represent the world as it is, but in doing so to transform it.

17 Derek Attridge, “Joyce’s Composition of Penelope,” in Joyce, *“Penelope” and the Body*, ed. Brown, 58.