

**Joyce's Merrimanic Heroine: Molly vs.
Bloom in Midnight Court**

James Joyce Quarterly 41: 4 (Summer 2004): 745-65

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In 1921, just one year before *Ulysses* first appeared, T.S. Eliot wrote the prescription for the kind of writer--Eliot's word was "poet"--who would be required to produce it. He--male of course-- must bring to his work a "historical sense," a capacity to integrate the life and literature of "his own generation" and "his own country" with "the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer" onward.¹² *Ulysses* manifests Joyce's command of that tradition on almost every page. Besides initiating a radically modern retelling of *The Odyssey* in a language that includes scraps of Greek, Latin, and French (with bits of German and Italian to come), the very first chapter of the novel spouts Homeric epithets, references to ancient Greek history and rhetoric, Latin passages from the Mass and Prayers for the Dying, allusions to Dante's *Commedia* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and quotations from *Hamlet* and Yeats's *Countess Cathleen*.

Yet conspicuous by its absence from this multi-cultural stew is anything explicitly Gaelic, anciently Irish.³ Standing by the parapet of a tower built by the English in the late eighteenth century to keep the French from liberating Ireland, Stephen hears Mulligan's proposal to "Hellenise" the island now (1.158) with something less than nationalistic fervor or Gaelic fever running through his head. "To ourselves . . . new paganism . . . *omphalos*," he thinks (*U* 1.176). With "to ourselves" he alludes to Sinn Fein, meaning "We Ourselves," the Gaelic motto of a movement that was founded in the 1890s to revive Irish language and culture and that became about 1905 the name of a political movement which remains alive and resolutely--if not militantly--nationalistic to this very day. But Stephen

alludes to this emphatically Irish movement by means of an English phrase, and for all its multi-linguistic texture, the chapter grants admission to Gaelic nowhere--not even when Haines is said to be speaking it to the old milkwoman. In mistaking Haines's Gaelic for French (U 1. 425), the old woman unwittingly but vividly demonstrates just how thoroughly the English have extirpated the ancient language of Ireland. In the world of *Ulysses*, at least, it has become a language they alone can speak, and thus one more sign of their usurpation.

Since the provinciality of the Irish language would also sink the ambition of any writer aiming to reach the entire world with his art, Gaelic is one of the nets that Stephen Dedalus yearns to escape, to fly past. He abandons it for English. If *Ulysses* is the book that forges the uncreated conscience of Stephen's race, it seems to burn away in doing so the original language of that race. While making ample room for Latin, Italian, and French, Joyce gives us only about ten words of readily identifiable Gaelic, and they seem to have been plucked from a schoolbook to show how irredeemably pedestrian the language is.⁴ Forty years ago, Percy Ussher roundly declared that "of the Irish language and the forces that were shaping the Ireland of today, [Joyce] knew nothing--had never, in his impatient youth, wished to know anything."⁵

Ussher's damning comment makes a curious point of departure for this essay. For I wish to argue not only that Joyce knew Gaelic well enough to read it, but also that he may have known before finishing *Ulysses* a Gaelic poem not fully Englished until 1926, when Ussher himself published the first complete translation of it.⁶ The poem in question is Brian Merriman's 1026-line *Midnight Court* (1780), the comic story of a dream-vision in which a court of women meeting at midnight and ruled by a fairy queen find men guilty of neglecting women--above all of failing to gratify their sexual needs.⁷ Whether or not Joyce actually knew the poem, its provocative defense of the sexual rights of women--

including the right of a neglected wife to take a lover--strikingly anticipates the final chapter of *Ulysses* and furnishes a new lens through which to read it.

I

Let us consider first of all whether or not a Gaelic poem not readily available in English until 1926 could in any way have touched the making of *Ulysses*, which first appeared in 1922. Thanks to the work of Maria Tymoczko and other scholars who have followed her lead, we have recently begun to see how much Joyce knew and used both Irish myth and the Irish language in his work--and not just in *Finnegans Wake*.⁸ He could probably read Gaelic by the time he starting writing *Ulysses* in 1914. Though Stephen Dedalus drops Gaelic after a single session, Joyce studied it--albeit sporadically--for two years. "With Joyce's linguistic flair," notes Brendan O'Hehir, "even a desultory attention for so long would have given him at least a modest competence in Irish."⁹ He certainly learned enough to distinguish briefly between the Irish and English languages in 1907, when he lectured on Ireland in Trieste.¹⁰ O'Hehir also reminds us that when Joyce was a student at the National University in Dublin, the Professor of Irish was the Reverend Patrick Dinneen, who "published in 1904 the first edition of what has since been recognized . . . as the standard modern dictionary of Irish" and who "arrives offstage" in Chapter 9 of *Ulysses*" (O'Hehir vii).¹¹ More tellingly, O'Hehir finds in Joyce's work far more Gaelic than other critics have spotted. He lists over two hundred points in *Ulysses* at which Joyce uses or alludes to Irish words and expressions, including ten in "Penelope" alone, and for *Finnegans Wake* the list of Irishisms exceeds five thousand items. Joyce knew Irish far better than he would have us believe.¹² If the comparatively immature Stephen Dedalus considers Irish nothing but a net to be bypassed, his

creator grew up to weave that net more and more densely into the texture of his work.

None of this guarantees that Joyce knew or even knew of *Midnight Court* by the time he wrote *Ulysses*. To my knowledge, he nowhere mentions either the poem or its author, and while he salutes “the old Celtic bards” in his lecture on Ireland, the only Irishmen of letters that he cites by name--figures such as Congreve, Swift, Goldsmith, and James Clarence Mangan--wrote in English (*CW*, pp. 174, 73, 170). But Merriman’s name and work could easily have swum into his ken. Tributes to Merriman’s poem, which had been kept alive in the oral tradition as well as in small editions, had begun to appear in print--and in English--well before Joyce started writing *Ulysses* in 1914. In his *Literary History of Ireland* (1899), Douglas Hyde, whose *Story of Early Gaelic Literature* (1894) is quoted in “Scylla and Charybdis” (*U* 9.96-99), briefly summarizes the poem, quotes another Gaelic scholar’s estimate of it as “perhaps the most tasteful poem in the language,” and calls it “a wonderful example of sustained rhythm and vowel rhyme.”¹³ More notice and more tributes soon followed. In the February 1905 issue of *Dana*, which Joyce had acquired by 1920, a new German translation of *Midnight Court* was reviewed and extensively summarized by W.K. Magee, the librarian and essayist whom Joyce had come to know by 1903 and who appears as John Eglinton in Chapter 9 of *Ulysses*.¹⁴ In 1912, Riseárd Ó Foglú’s new edition of *Midnight Court* was introduced in English by Pieras Béaslaí, a journalist whom Joyce had by then known for several years and who saluted the poem for the freedom of its language and for its enduring appeal to all classes.¹⁵ Ó Foglú himself declared Merriman the most original figure in all of modern Gaelic literature.¹⁶ In 1926, Yeats introduced Ussher’s translation of Merriman’s poem by calling it “vital, extravagant, immoral, [and] preposterous.”¹⁷ And in our own time, Seamus Heaney has found *The Midnight*

Court “one of the most original and unexpected achievements of the eighteenth century.”¹⁸

Could such a poem have failed to catch the eye of James Joyce? It seems unlikely. But whatever he knew of *The Midnight Court*, it anticipates some notable features of *Ulysses*. Just as Leopold Bloom evokes Homer’s wandering warrior, the dramatized speaker of Merriman’s poem--the poet himself--evokes another classical figure who makes his way to the underworld: Ovid’s Orpheus.¹⁹ Just as Joyce parodies--especially in “Cyclops”--the sort of Irish epic that the Gaelic league sought to revive, Merriman parodies the *aisling* or vision poetry that had developed in Ireland during the period just before his own. In *aisling* poetry, a beautiful woman who personifies a subjugated Ireland typically tells the poet of her thralldom and prophecizes her eventual liberation.²⁰ Exploding this fantasy with ridicule, as Heaney says (“Orpheus,” p. 48), Merriman begins by telling how a bony, gigantic, and terrifying hallion of a bailiff summons the poet-dreamer to be judged by a court of women for his sins of sexual omission. As a bachelor of thirty-one who did not marry until 1797, when he was 48, Merriman knows all too well the charges that may be flung at him and his ilk in 1780:

The youth has failed, declined, gone fallow--

 . . . it’s you and your spunkless generation--
 You’re a source blocked off that won’t refill.
 You have failed your women, one and all.²¹

Merriman's bailiff here anticipates the case against Bloom in *Ulysses*. Though he is hardly a childless bachelor like Merriman, he is roundly accused of failing to inseminate his wife and then of impotence. In "Oxen of the Sun," when Bloom dares to criticize Punch Costello for disrespectfully receiving the news of Mina Purefoy's long-awaited child-bearing, the Junius-voiced narrator tartly exposes Bloom as a hypocritical masturbator: "It ill becomes him to preach that gospel. Has he not nearer home a seedfield that lies fallow for the want of the ploughshare? A habit reprehensible at puberty is second nature and an opprobrium in middle life" (*U* 14.928-31). In "Circe" Bella Cohen makes a further charge. Auctioning Bloom off as if he were a cow or a slave girl, she scornfully says:

What else are you good for, an impotent thing like you? . . .Up! Up! Manx cat! What

have we here? Where's your curly teapot gone to or who docked it on you, cockyolly?

Sing, birdy, sing. It's as limp as a boy of six's doing his pooly behind a cart. Buy a bucket

or sell your pump. (*loudly*) Can you do a man's job? (*U* 15.3127-32).²²

Like Bloom, the dramatized poet of *The Midnight Court* is tried, humiliated, and punished. At the end of the poem, after Aoibheall--the fairy president of the court--has decreed whipping for all single males of twenty-one and over, the young single woman whose testimony has dominated the poem up to now delivers her particular verdict on the poet:

I hereby claim

A woman's right to punish him.

And you, dear women, you must assist.

So rope him, Una, and all the rest--

Anna, Maura--take hold and bind him.

Double twist his arms behind him.

.....

Let Mr. Brian take what we give,

Let him have it. Flay him alive

And don't draw back when you're drawing blood.

Test all of your whips against his manhood.

Cut deep. No mercy. Make him squeal. (Heaney, p. 59)

If this passage recalls the dismembering of Orpheus by the frenzied maenads in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as Heaney suggests (pp. 59-61), it also anticipates the "Circe" episode in *Ulysses*. During Bloom's trial, three women charge that he urged them not only to misbehave but to "give him a most vicious horsewhipping" (*U* 15.1072-73), and Mrs. Talboys threatens to "flay him alive" (*U* 1082-83). Bloom is not a poet, like Orpheus or Brian Merriman, and he is hardly being punished for his virginity. He subconsciously *seeks* whipping to gratify his masochistic needs, and Mrs. Talboys aims to punish him for the lewdness of his overtures to her. But when Bella later turns Bloom into a pig and makes him squeal (*U* 15.2901-02), just as Merriman is to be made to squeal, she is clearly chastising him for his sexual inadequacy.

II

"Circe" thus seems to furnish the clearest evidence of Merriman's influence on *Ulysses*. But no less striking is the way in which Molly's monologue recalls the lengthy speech of Merriman's young single woman. Speaking for

herself and all other Irish women who are “unhusbanded” and sexually “untouched,” she seems hardly comparable to Joyce’s long-married adulteress. Yet if this nominally Penelopean adulteress can somehow evoke Homer’s paradigm of marital fidelity, we may also discern what she shares with Merriman’s outspokenly sex-deprived, husband-craving virgin.

To start with incidentals, Molly’s methods of attracting men resemble the steps taken--in vain--by Merriman’s young woman. Merriman’s heroine tells us that she “washed and combed and powdered” her hair; that she wore “a little white hood with ribbon and ruff” with a handsomely faced dress and a wine-colored cloak; that her cambric apron was adorned with “fruit and birds and trees and flowers,” and that she often spread her cards (Heaney, pp. 44-45). Likewise, thinking of her girlhood in Gibraltar, Molly remembers learning from Hester Stanhope “how to settle [her hair] at the back when [she] put it up” (*U* 18.639) and wondering whether or not she should wear a white rose on her first date with Mulvey (18.768). She also remembers donning her gloves and hat at the window of her father’s house in Holles Street in a vain effort to draw the eye of a medical student across the way (*U* 18.703-06). She deplores the paucity of her wardrobe because she thinks “men wont look” at a badly dressed woman (*U* 18.470-74). And on Bloomsday itself, she has laid out the cards to see what sort of a man might come into her life (*U* 18.1313-15).

Beyond these incidental parallels, Merriman’s heroine anticipates Molly most of all in her second speech, which vigorously defends the sexual rights of a married woman. When a fierce old man named Snarlygob springs up to denounce his wife for promiscuity and to accuse the young woman herself of selling her sexual favors, she retaliates with “an indignant and marvelously specific list of his inadequacies as a lover and of his wife’s attempts to overcome them” (Heaney, p. 47). This speech wins the day--or rather the

night. In the end, Aoibheall not only orders that bachelors of twenty-one and over be whipped. “She also decrees that the worn-out, sexually incapable husbands of sexually vigorous women should connive in the action when their wives take younger lovers” (Heaney, pp. 58-59).

Though Bloom’s masturbation in “Nausicaa” proves that he is definitely not impotent, connivance at his wife’s adultery is precisely the punishment he inflicts on himself throughout *Bloomsday*, above all in “Circe.” There he becomes in one of his trances--or staged trances-- an antlered flunkey greeting the very man who has come to cuckold him.²³ Announcing his plan to conduct “a little private business with” Molly, Boylan tells Bloom: “You can apply your eye to the keyhole and play with yourself while I just go through her a few times” (*U* 15.3763-64, 3788-89).

To compare Bloom with the lethargic bachelors and sexually negligent husbands denounced in *Midnight Court*, however, is to see that Joyce offers a fundamentally different perspective on the breakdown of sexual relations within marriage. While Merriman makes us see neglected women, negligent males, and cuckolded husbands almost exclusively from the women’s point of view, Joyce thrusts us deep into the consciousness of the cuckolded and sexually negligent male before we enter the mind of his wife. By the time we come to Molly’s monologue, we have come to know Bloom as far more sinned against than sinning. We have come to feel what he suffers as the father of a son who died in infancy, as the target of anti-Semitic contempt, and as the cruelly ridiculed husband of a woman widely known to be having an affair with Blazes Boylan. In “Cyclops,” contempt and ridicule for Bloom’s supposed impotence reinforce disdain for his Jewishness and his pacifism. When Bloom for the first time openly identifies himself with a race “that is hated and persecuted” and denounces

injustice even while abjuring force and hatred, the narrator can see only an effeminate “lardyface” twisting around “as limp as a wet rag” (*U* 12.1467-80). “Do you call that a man?” asks the citizen later, to which Joe replies, “I wonder did he ever put it out of sight” (*U* 12.1654-55).

In thus identifying contempt for Bloom’s would-be impotence with the virulent anti-Semitism and militant nationalism of the citizen, the novel draws our sympathy to him. Only to the myopic gaze of men like the citizen does he seem a contemptible cuckold. To us he seems an “unconquered hero” (*U* 11.342) of patience and pacifism, long-suffering victim of a grief that has indefinitely drained him not of potency but of the urge to inseminate his wife. “Could never like it again after Rudy,” he says to himself about noon (*U* 8.610), and the catechist later confirms that not since Rudy’s death over ten years ago has Bloom ejaculated within Molly’s “natural female organ” (*U* 17.2281-84).

III

To see Bloom only as victim, however, is to place Molly among his chief victimizers, a “thirty shilling whore”--as Darcy O’Brien once called her--who knows just how to exploit his particular sexual needs:

if he wants to kiss my bottom Ill drag open my
drawers and bulge it right out in his face as large
as life he can stick his tongue 7 miles up my hole
as hes there my brown part then Ill tell him I want
£1 or perhaps 30- Ill tell him I want to buy underclothes
then if he gives me that well he wont be too bad

(*U* 18.1520-24)

Apparently bent on humiliating Bloom as well as exploiting him, Molly wants him to know that Boylan has bedded her:

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 theres the mark of
 his spunk on the clean sheet I wouldnt bother to even
 iron it out that ought to satisfy him if you dont
 believe me feel my belly unless I made him stand there
 and put him into me Ive a mind to tell him every scrap and make
 him do it out in front of me serve him right its all his own fault if I
 am an adulteress as the thing in the gallery said (*U* 18.1510-17)

Here Molly sounds ruthless. She seems heartlessly bent on crushing a man already abused, unappreciated, and exhausted by the pressures of his day, a man who has already borne far more than his share of indifference and contempt from nearly everyone he has met. Yet to see Molly as a Merrimanic heroine is to see that in spite of all Bloom has endured from others, we cannot ignore what she has endured from him, what justification she has for adultery after more than ten years of no complete sexual intercourse at all.²⁴

Knowing full well that Bloom can ejaculate, rightly guessing that he “came somewhere” on Bloomsday itself (*U* 18.34), and knowing too that he typically ejaculates on her own backside (*U* 18.1527-28), Molly cannot understand his prolonged abstention from complete sexual intercourse with her. She cannot

fathom what has been called his “secondary impotence.”²⁵ Consequently, she cannot understand why she has been sexually deserted for so long:

what else were we given all those desires for Id like to know
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 not knowing I suppose who he has any man thatd kiss
a womans bottom Id throw my hat at him after that hed kiss
anything unnatural where we havent 1 atom of any kind of
expression in us all of us the same 2 lumps of lard

(*U* 18.1397-1404)

Bloom loves kissing Molly’s bottom--“the plump mellow yellow smellow melons of her rump” (*U* 17.2241)--for the same reason that he loves sucking on her breasts, as he did at least once “like some kind of big infant” when she was weaning Milly and needed mammary relief (*U* 18.575-82). Above or below, he loves losing himself in her soft round maternal warmth. But if Bloom can play infant to Molly’s indulgent mothering, he can also mother her. One of the very first things he does in the novel is to bring her breakfast in bed, including the cream reserved especially for her.²⁶ Molly craves this kind of mothering because she never had a mother of her own (*U* 18.1441-42), never knew more of Lunita Laredo than her name and her “jewess” ethnicity (*U* 18.848,1184). Nor has she has ever found any other woman who could serve as a mother surrogate. Even Hester Stanhope, her best friend on the island of Gibraltar, decamped to Paris with her “wogger” of a husband--probably because she perceived that he was “awfully fond” of Molly (*U* 18.624-25).²⁷ Consequently, as Henke has argued,

Molly takes Bloom not only as her husband and lover but also--unconsciously--as her true mother surrogate. Glossing Molly's rhapsodic recollection of their very first lovemaking on Howth Head, Henke writes:

In the androgynous Leopold Bloom / Henry Flower, Molly finds a sympathetic love-object whose nurturant qualities provide a psychological surrogate for the absent mother of childhood abjection. On an unconscious, latent and symbolic level, the man-womanly Bloom satisfies Molly's repressed longing for pre-Oedipal (comm)union. His penis metaphorically "flowers" as phallic signifier in a substitution and reversal of the lost maternal breast, in accordance with Freud's formulation that "when sucking has come to an end, the penis also becomes the heir of the mother's nipple."²⁸

If Henke is right, we can understand why Molly feels profoundly deserted by a man who treats her with what seems to be lavishly maternal solicitude. What she remembers at the end of her monologue is a moment of lovemaking so intense that it gratified both of her urges at once--infantile and sexual--with the line between the two virtually erased. Yet for more than ten years, Bloom has incomprehensibly failed to satisfy Molly's sexual needs, and has thus re-enacted--again and again--her mother's abandonment of her in infancy.²⁹ To see that this

ineradicable memory of pre-Oedipal desertion underlies her present yearning for Bloom is to see why she lacerates him in her monologue, and also why her complaint swerves so sharply from what it evokes: the second speech of Merriman's young woman, and behind it the medieval *chanson* of the unhappy wife.³⁰

Three things distinguish Molly's monologue from this sort of plaint. The first is that Molly has no wish to beget more children or to see Irish birthrates rise. She upholds the value of maternal care (*U* 18.1441-42) and just before her monologue she has assumed the pose of the earth mother Gea-Tellus, "fulfilled, recumbent, big with seed" (*U* 17.2313-14). But she has no desire for another child and is clearly relieved when her menstruation reveals that Boylan "didn't make [her] pregnant" (*U* 18.1123).³¹ Furthermore, while Merriman's bailiff castigates the poet's "spunkless generation" for the fall in birthrates (Heaney, p. 50), Molly deplores just the opposite: the relentlessly fecundating energy of Mina Purefoy's husband (*U* 18.159-60).³²

Molly's critique of fecundity could be read as evidence that she is an up-to-date feminist version of Merriman's heroine, a woman who declines to play the archetypal role of the earth mother or define herself in terms of her reproductive functions.³³ She can also speak of male genitalia with a fine irreverence: "what a man looks like with his two bags full and his other thing hanging down out of him or sticking up at you like a hatrack no wonder they hide it with a cabbageleaf" (*U* 18. 542-44).³⁴ In general, as Charles Peake notes, "she asserts the physical and moral superiority of women, and, even in her most outspoken attack on the behavior of her own sex, explains it as due to all that women have to put up with."³⁵

Nevertheless, close scrutiny of her most explicitly feminist language reveals a black hole in Molly's championing of womankind. Even as she imagines

something very like Merriman's court of women, she lets us see how treacherous they can be:

I dont care what anybody says itd be much better for the world to be governed by the women in it you wouldnt see women going and killing one another and slaughtering when do you ever see women rolling around drunk like they do or gambling every penny they have and losing it on horses yes because a woman whatever she does she knows where to stop sure they wouldnt be in the world at all only for us they dont know what it is to be a woman and a mother how could they where would they all of them be if they hadnt a mother to look after them what I never had (*U* 18.1434-42)

Though it is risky to claim that any part of Molly's monologue has a beginning and an end, I venture to claim that the ending of this passage detonates--or at the very least deconstructs--its beginning. After first proclaiming the moral superiority of women, Molly ends by recalling that she was abandoned by her own mother. "Where would they all of them be if they hadnt a mother to look after them?" she asks. Molly herself personifies the answer to this question, which turns out to be more than rhetorical. Motherless from birth, nursing for life a sense of betrayal, she lives in a state of irremediable bitterness against all other women. While often called subversive, she is nowhere more so than in rejecting at least two fundamental tenets of what might be called mainstream feminism: faith in the sisterhood of women and in their openness to any other woman's voice.³⁶

We have lately been told that Molly's "ideal listener" is "a woman with whom she can share her restlessness, her physical desires, her fantasies, her cynical views of men, as well as her realistic views of motherhood and menstruation that don't come from the dominant discourses of society" (Pearce, "How Does Molly Bloom Look," p. 46). But where does Molly posit or imagine a sympathetic female auditor? Where does she identify her kindred spirit as female? Just a few lines after envisioning the peace and order of a world run by women, she tells herself that men

have friends they can talk to weve none either he
wants what he wont get or its some woman ready to stick her
knife in you I hate that in women no wonder they treat us the
way they do we are a dreadful lot of bitches I suppose its
all the troubles we have make us so snappy Im not like that

(U 18.1456-60)

Molly's critique of women as bitches can indeed be read as part of an appeal for sympathy on their behalf--in view of all the troubles that *make* them bitch, as Molly is even now doing. Yet no sooner does Molly indict "we" women for bitchiness (however excusable) than she exempts herself from their company: "Im not like that." Is this really one oppressed sister talking to another? The we/they opposition may imply that Molly is addressing another woman, but if "weve" not a single friend, "we" disintegrates, and in any case, this is hardly the voice of a woman seeking common cause with other women against the male oppressor. Instead of distrusting men, the unmothered Molly distrusts most women. Ever since Hester Stanhope left her behind in Gibraltar to nearly die of boredom (U 18.676), she has never had a single female friend,

and she sees almost every other woman as a rival for male attention, an object of contempt, or at best an object of pity.³⁷

Not even Molly's own daughter-- her only surviving child--enjoys her love. She remembers caring for Milly "when she was down with the mumps" (*U* 18.1049), but resents her now for her impudence (*U* 18.1072) and nascent sex appeal, which has begun to make Molly feel "finished" and supplanted in the eyes of Bloom (*U* 18.1017-36). Since the catechist of "Ithaca" implies that Milly's menarche has forged a bond of sympathy between mother and daughter, "a preestablished natural comprehension in incomprehension" (*U* 17.2289-90), Henke sees "a new-found emotional communion" between them (Henke, p. 155). But Molly has little more than spite for her daughter. Nothing she thinks or feels about Milly can match Bloom's heartfelt memory of her menarche: "Her growing pains at night, calling, wakening me. Frightened she was when her nature came on her first. Poor child! Strange moment for the mother too. Brings back her own girlhood" (*U* 18.1201-04). To what end, though? While Molly can see that Milly is re-living her mother's youth, including her sexy exhibitionism (*U* 18.1035-36), she has no sympathy for a girl who simply reminds her that her own girlhood is long gone.

Gone too is the capacity to love any child at all. The death of little Rudy "disheartened [her] altogether" and left her feeling that "Id never have another our 1st death too we were never the same since" (*U* 18.1447-50). But if the pain of her loss suggests that she once felt maternal love for Rudy, she feels it no more. The closest she comes is a stirring of sympathy for Stephen:

I suppose hes running wild now out at night away from his books
and studies and not living at home on account of the usual rowy house
I suppose well its a poor case that those that have a fine son like that

theyre not satisfied and I none was he not able to make one it wasnt my fault (*U* 18.1442-46).

Henke argues that in Molly's fantasies, Stephen first supplants Bloom as a potential lover and then awakens her maternal longing. "Like Bloom," writes Henke, "Molly desperately longs for a surrogate son to replace little Rudy; and, like her husband, she mentally adopts Stephen and imagines him as a full-fledged member of the household" (Henke, pp. 156, 159). But Molly can't sustain the role of Stephen's mother. Whatever maternal solicitude she may feel, lust trumps it.

Take the passage in which she worries that Stephen might be "ruining himself for life" in the company of "nightwalkers and pickpockets" (*U* 18. 1453-55). Here she thinks just like a mother--except when she goes on to speculate that he might have declined to sleep on the Blooms' sofa because "he was shy as a boy he being so young hardly 20 of me in the next room hed have heard me on the chamber arrah what harm" (*U* 18.1460-63). In Molly's scenario, a boyish Stephen shy of her seductive powers plays a reluctant young Shakespeare to her shameless Ann Hathaway. But obviously she plans to overcome his shyness, and when she goes on to plot their courses of mutual instruction ("I can tell him the Spanish and he tell me the Italian"), she also imagines that "hell see Im not so ignorant" (*U* 18.1476-77), which is exactly what she wanted him to see earlier, when she cast him as her lover.³⁸ If Molly plans to feed Stephen breakfast in bed every day (*U* 18.1491-92) and thus to make him "a pampered guest" (Henke, p. 159) just after foreseeing a torrid affair with him (*U* 18.1363-65), can we be sure that her motives end up strictly maternal, or that they are genuinely maternal at all? How many mothers--no matter how maternal--regularly serve their healthy children breakfast in bed?

A fairly safe answer is none. Molly's stirrings of maternal solicitude are overwhelmed by her desire for sexual satisfaction, which springs in part--as Henke says--from her pre-Oedipal need to *be* mothered. It is precisely this need that goads her to rail at Bloom when he fails to satisfy it. He is the good mother whose peculiar kind of unresponsiveness makes "hrim" (*U* 15.3102) look bad to an emotionally voracious child.

Yet for all her resentment of Bloom, Molly is mature enough to recognize that he is her best friend. All of the qualities she ascribes to women at their best--sobriety, good money management, self-restraint, peace-making, and even mothering--can be found in Bloom, who is among many other things a tenderly solicitous parent and who says in "Circe" that he yearns to be a mother (*U* 15.1818). Molly salutes his sense of responsibility. In a city filled with drunken goodfornothings she appreciates his thriftiness and concern for his family (*U* 1277-79). She also likes his general politeness (*U* 18.16-17), his habitual good manners, such as in wiping his feet and tipping his hat (*U* 18.226-28), and his consideration for her sleep (*U* 18.927-28). By comparison, Boylan is a boor:

no thats no way for him has he no manners nor no refinement
 no nothing in his nature slapping us behind like that on my
 bottom because I didnt call him Hugh the ignoramus that
 doesnt know poetry from a cabbage thats what you get for not
 keeping them in their proper place pulling off his shoes and
 trousers there on the chair before me so barefaced without
 even asking permission and standing out that vulgar way in
 the half of a shirt they wear to be admired like a priest
 or a butcher . . . sure you might as well be in bed with

what with a lion (*U* 18.1368-77)

Launching the final “sentence” of the chapter, the hammer beats of *no* in the opening line of this passage anticipate by contrast the resounding repetition of *yes* at the end, where Molly remembers passionately affirming her desire for Bloom.³⁹ For all her eagerness to see Boylan again--”O Lord I cant wait till Monday” (*U* 18.595)--Molly’s words for Boylan and Bloom are respectively *no* and *yes*. In Molly’s eyes, Bloom is not just more refined than Boylan; he is somehow more potent. Even while celebrating Boylan’s capacity to “come” with ever-growing frequency (“3 or 4 times” [*U* 18.143], “4 or 5 times” [*U* 18.894], “5 or 6 times” [*U* 18.1511-12]), Molly insists that “Poldy has more spunk in him” (*U* 18.168). Here again she differs fundamentally from Merriman’s young woman, whose opinion of Irish bachelors and husbands is relentlessly negative. For what Molly wants in the end is not to castigate or punish Bloom for neglecting her but to win him back.⁴⁰

That alone underscores the point that Molly’s autobiography is chiefly the story of her relation to a succession of men: her father, Lieutenant “Jack Joe Harry” Mulvey, Lieutenant Stanley G. Gardner, Leopold Bloom, and Blazes Boylan.⁴¹ If a continuing quest for heterosexual gratification is conventional, Molly is conventional, as Elaine Unkeless has argued.⁴² But she is not at all conventional in the audacity and self-possession with which she manages her lovers. At fifteen she knew exactly how to rouse her first lover and “pull him off into [her] handkerchief” without revealing her own excitement or letting “him touch [her] inside [her] petticoat” (*U* 18.810-11). At present--even after more than ten years of sexual neglect--she will take all possible steps to revive Bloom’s desire for her:

Ill just give him one more chance Ill get up early in the morning . . . I know what Ill do Ill go about rather gay and not too much singing a bit now and then mi fa pieta Masetto then Ill start dressing myself to go out presto non son piu forte Ill put on my best shift and drawers let him have a good eyeful out of that to make his micky stand for him . . . Ill let him do it off on me behind provided he doesnt smear all my good drawers O I suppose that cant be helped . . . then Ill wipe him off me just like a business his omission then Ill go out Ill have him eying up at the ceiling where is she gone now make him want me thats the only way (U 18.1497-1540)

“Make him want me.” Molly’s urge to punish and humiliate Bloom cannot finally be split from her desire for him, more precisely from her will to rouse his desire for her. Just as Merriman’s young woman dresses up to attract male attention, Molly will don her best shift and drawers to make Bloom’s “micky stand for him.” She will then let him ejaculate on her buttocks and wipe off his “omission” as if it were a “business”--so much shit. Molly has already misspelled or mispronounced “emissions” in recalling the doctor who asked if she had “frequent omissions” (U 1169-70). But the slip is telling, for Bloom’s emissions have indeed missed or omitted Molly, who will now retaliate by making Bloom miss her in a different sense: feel her absence when she goes out, *want her*.

The phrases she plans to sing from *Don Giovanni* bristle with ambiguity, suggesting at once her surrender to Boylan and her attachment to Bloom. The phrases come from Zerlina’s duet with the Don (*La ci darem*), which Molly will sing in the concert tour that Boylan is promoting. Ostensibly, Zerlina’s words imply surrender to the Don and betrayal of her fiancé Masetto, whom she pities

("mi fa pieta Masetto") even as she admits that her strength is failing ("presto non son piu forte"). But in spite of these words, Zerlina resists the seductive power of the Don and returns to Masetto.⁴³ Molly puts her own twist on this scenario. Not at all seduced by Boylan, whose boorishness repels her, she takes him as a lover in order to precipitate Bloom's full return to her. Though all Dublin seems to know of her affair, adultery is an act she performs for Bloom as her only audience.⁴⁴

* * *

Carol Shloss has recently argued that Irish marriage in 1904 was very much like the Unionist subjugation rule of Ireland, in which England used material aid to buy off nationalist aspirations and perpetuate its own rule. As a married woman in the Ireland of 1904, Molly had very few rights. She could not vote, get a separation order, gain custody of Milly if divorce were possible, keep the money she made from her concerts, invest money or hold property in her name.⁴⁵ How then can she express her resistance to the marriage union? "She can withhold consent," writes Shloss; "she can complain, and she can engage in acts of subterfuge that undermine the structures of authority that bind her in life. She does all three" (p. 115).

But does she in fact? Aside from complaining about Bloom, sometimes bitterly, how does she withhold consent? Her monologue opens by mentioning an unprecedented request that Bloom has made for breakfast in bed, but by the end of the monologue it is evident that she will comply, however grudgingly ("then Ill throw him up his eggs and tea" [*U* 18.1504-5]). If Bloom's habitual practice of serving *her* in the morning has up to now undermined the structures of patriarchal authority in the Bloom household, does her willingness to serve *him* on the morning after Bloomsday reinstate those structures, or exemplify

the spirit of reciprocity that animates their love at its most intense?⁴⁶ And is her affair with Boylan a “‘speech act’ against marriage, a refusal of its bonds,” as Shloss says (p. 115), or a daring way of eliciting *Bloom’s* consent to her, since he has long denied her the chance to withhold *her* consent from him? The problem with reading their marriage as an allegory of Ireland’s demeaning union with England is that for all Bloom’s failings, Molly has no desire for complete autonomy. She has no wish to leave the only man she has ever known who “understood or felt what a woman is” (*U* 18.1579).

To read “Penelope” through the lens of *Midnight Court* is to see more clearly what Molly wants. Merriman’s outspoken young woman attacks the men of eighteenth-century Ireland to overthrow not so much their authority as their complacency, to rouse them from their “spunkless” lethargy, to goad them into marriage, sexual vitality, and fatherhood. Molly attacks Bloom to rouse him, to reanimate the man she married sixteen years ago, to recover the mother surrogate who once gratified both her pre-Oedipal needs and her sexual desires, to reactivate the lover who has long been returning each night to her bed but not to the depths of her body. In “Penelope,” Molly testifies against the very man she yearns to win back.

In “Risky Reading of Risky Writing,” her plenary lecture at the Eighteenth International James Joyce Symposium in Trieste on June 19, 2002, Margot Norris provocatively argued that Molly’s early, powerful, vividly remembered intimacy with Hester Stanhope could well imply lesbian tendencies. After Margot’s lecture a young Czechoslovakian scholar named Zsuzsa Csikai reminded me that Molly at one point thinks she “wouldn’t mind being a man and get up on a lovely woman” (*U* 18.1146-47). So we have good reason to believe that Molly is bisexual--which is one of the many reasons for which she loves

Bloom. As Molly herself says, Bloom knows--or at the very least once knew--
“what a woman is.” He is woman enough as well as man enough for her--if only
he can bring himself to give her again what she so desperately wants.

Notes

¹“Tradition and the Individual Talent.” In *The Norton Anthology of Literature*, ed. M.H. Abrams et al., 7th ed. (New York, 2000), p. 2396.

³According to Maria Tymoczko, the word “Gaelic” should be reserved for Modern Irish, while “Irish” may be used to signify “literature in the various stages of the Irish language.” *The Irish Ulysses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 19.

⁴In chapter 9, Stephen’s thoughts include the words “*Ta an bad ar an tir. Taim in mo shagart*” (9.366-67): “The boat is on the land. I am a priest.”

⁵Percy Arland Ussher, *Three Great Irishmen: Shaw, Yeats, Joyce* (New York: Mentor, 1957), pp. 117-18. Ussher’s comment sounds extreme, but it sits comfortably with what could be called the mainstream view of Joyce’s response to Irish folk culture: “The ‘folk’ whom Yeats celebrated, the ‘people’ to whom his art was dedicated, were for Joyce the dark, bitter bog of the past. In 1901, he believed that he had discovered in the forms and energies of modern European art the courage and liberality of spirit which he required to liberate himself from that past.” Thomas Flanagan, “Yeats, Joyce, and the Matter of Ireland,” *Critical Inquiry* 2 (1975), p. 59. See also Willard Potts: “Joyce battled the popular Revival notion that Irish writers must take their inspiration from Irish literature.” *Joyce and the Two Irelands* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), p. 24.

⁶Percy Arland Ussher, trans. *The Midnight Court*, [by Brian Merriman]. Preface by W. B. Yeats. London: Jonathan Cape, 1926. Earlier translations include those of Denis Woulfe (c. 1813-20) and Liam P. O Murchu (1820s, reprinted Baile Atha Cliath, An Clochomhar, 1982), but I have seen no evidence that Joyce knew either of them. In the essay on Joyce cited above, Ussher calls *Ulysses* “a very Irish bravura-performance” and “one of the great comic books of the world, worthy to rank with Gargantua, Gulliver, or Tristram Shandy” (*Three Great Irishmen*, p. 117). But he nowhere compares Joyce to Merriman.

⁷The most readily available translation of the poem now is on the World Wide Web: Noel J. Fahey, trans. and int. *The Midnight Court*, Irish text with facing translation and glossary [<http://www.homesteader.com/merriman/>]. Published translations include Frank O'Connor, trans. and int. *The Midnight Court* (1945), reprinted with biographical notes on Merriman and O'Connor by Henry Boylan (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 1989) and Seamus Heaney, trans. *The Midnight Verdict* (Loughcrew: The Gallery Press, 1993).

⁸“It must be remembered,” Tymoszko writes, “that although Joyce did not foster a critical introduction to the Irish myth in *Ulysses* as he did with the Homeric myth, he has in fact left clues embedded internally in the narrative to the Irish mythic structuring of *Ulysses* as well as to sources of his own knowledge of the myth.” (p.11).

⁹ *A Gaelic Lexicon for Finnegans Wake and Glossary for Joyce's Other Works* (Berkeley:

University of California Press, 1967), p. vii.

¹⁰“The Irish language, although of the Indo-European family, differs from English almost as much as the language spoken in Rome differs from that spoken in Teheran.” “Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages” [lecture delivered in Italian at the Università Popolare in Trieste, April 27, 1907], in *Critical Writings*, ed. Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellman (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 155.

¹¹O’Hehir, p. vii. By the time Joyce left his Paris apartment in 1939, he had acquired the abridged version of Dinneen’s work--*A Smaller Irish-English Dictionary for the Use of Schools*, ed. Rev. Patrick S. Dinneen (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1923)--as well as Edmund E. Fournier d’Albe, *An English-Irish Dictionary and Phrase Book with Synonyms, Idioms, and the Genders and Declensions of Nouns* (Dublin: M.H. Gill, n.d.). See Thomas Connolly, *The Personal Library of James Joyce* (Buffalo: The City of Buffalo, 1955), rpt. in Connolly, *James*

Joyce's Books, Portraits, Manuscripts, Notebooks, Typescripts, Page Proofs
(Mellen, 1998).

¹²Though not “a profound Gaelic scholar,” writes O’Hehir, he occasionally “attains authentic Joycean virtuosity exclusively within the medium of Irish.” (O’Hehir, p. ix).

¹³ *A Literary History of Ireland from Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London: Unwin, 1899), p. 602. Hyde quotes Standish Hayes O’Grady in *Ossianic Society*, vol. iii, p. 36 (a reference I have been unable to confirm). This is evidently the comment paraphrased by Yeats when he says that O’Grady “has described the *Midnight Court* as the best poem written in Gaelic” (qtd. Ussher, p. 12).

¹⁴Tymoczko, p. 196; Richard Ellmann, *The Consciousness of Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 105.

¹⁵“The poem,” writes Béaslai, “at once attained popularity. Its freedom from stilted language and archaism, its welding of the spoken speech into musical lines made it appeal to the educated and illiterate alike. Many manuscript copies were made, many people memorized it.” See “Merriman’s

Secret: An Interpretation,” in Riseárd Ó Foghlú, ed. *Cúirt an Mheán-Oíche* (1912). On Joyce’s knowledge of Béaslai, see *JJI*, p. 289n.

¹⁶“In the history of modern Gaelic literature two strikingly original figures stand out--Keating and Merriman--and the the latter was the more original of the two.” Riseárd Ó Foghlú, ed. *Cúirt an Mheadhan Oidhche* (1912), qtd. Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland* (Dublin: M.H. Gill, 1925), p. 248-49.

¹⁷ “Preface” in Ussher, trans. *The Midnight Court*, p. 5.

¹⁸ “Orpheus in Ireland: On Brian Merriman’s *The Midnight Court*” in *The Redress of Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1995), p. 40. “Even in translation,” writes Heaney, “it is easy to appreciate the fact that [*Midnight Court*] has a totally invigorating way with language. In some places, to be sure, there is a copiousness that amounts to overload and parody in the Irish vocabulary; but elsewhere it exhibits an abundance which is the fine surprising excess of poetic genius in full flight” (p. 48).

¹⁹For more on Merriman’s evocation of Orpheus, see Heaney, pp. 57-62.

²⁰Declan Kiberd writes: “*The aisling poets of the eighteenth century . . . always imagined woman not as an autonomous person but as a site of contest: the wilting spéirbhean or skywoman lay back and languished until deliverance came from abroad in the person of a gallant national saviour.*” *Inventing Ireland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 362. But as Gearóid Ó Cruaí observe, Merriman makes a “truly revolutionary” use of this myth by invoking “its characters, its images and its power not in the cause of tribal or national sovereignty but in the cause of the civil and psychological liberation of the individual at the personal level.” See “The Vision of Liberation in *Cuirt an Mheán Oíche*,” *Folia Gadelica* (Cork, 1983): 98. My thanks to Anne Nolan for drawing my attention to this essay.

²¹Heaney, “Orpheus,” p. 50. Unless otherwise noted, I quote from Seamus Heaney, trans. *The Midnight Verdict* (Loughcrew: The Gallery Press, 1993), as quoted by Heaney himself in “Orpheus.” *The Midnight Verdict* itself is very hard to obtain.

²²Passages like this lead Maria Tymoczko to suggest--quite plausibly, I think--that Merriman’s poem is a “subtext for Bella/ Bello’s humiliating accusations. . . .” (p. 197).

²³I use “staged trances” for lack of a more precise term. Marilyn French proposes that “Bloom and Stephen are not hallucinating. The hallucinations are hypostatizations of their hidden feelings . . . production numbers staged by the

author for the audience *The Book as World: James Joyce's "Ulysses"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 187. French is right about Bloom but wrong, I believe, about Stephen. The fast-forward masque in which Bloom becomes king of the new Bloomusalem, for instance, originates from Zoe's response to his animadversions on smoking: "Go on. Make a stump speech out of it" (*U* 15. 1352). The purely atemporal character of what follows becomes clear when we "return" to a time present that has simply been suspended by the masque. As if no time at all had passed after her last comment, Zoe says, "Talk away till you're black in the face" (*U* 15. 1959). Though Bloom has indeed just been carbonized in the masque, she effectively confirms that nothing objectively discernible has happened--not even to Bloom--in the split second between her first remark and her second. By contrast, Stephen's encounter with the ghost of his mother could most definitely be a hallucination. She looms up before this drunken, dizzy, tottering young man just as he stops whirling "giddily" about the parlor of the brothel with a trio of whores (*U* 15.4120-51). With stars swimming before his eyes, he is--I believe--actually struck in time present by the spectre of his dead mother, and though he alone sees and hears her, her effect upon him is repeatedly witnessed by non-hallucinating others both during and after the episode. "Look! He's white," says Florry; "Giddy," says Bloom (*U* 15.4209-10). And immediately after he strikes out at the spectre with his *Nothung* of an ashplant, Bella demands to be paid for the lamp he has broken (*U* 15.4268-69). Everything about the staging of this particular episode suggests that Stephen has actually experienced a

hallucination in time present with immediate consequences in the fictionally real world of the brothel.

²⁴There is no reason not to believe that Molly's adventure with Boylan on Bloomsday is her very first fling at adultery. As Hugh Kenner observes, the long list of Molly's would-be lovers near the end of "Ithaca" is just "a list of past occasions for twinges of Bloomian jealousy." *Ulysses* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 143. See also Suzette A. Henke, *James Joyce and the Politics of Desire* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 150-51.

²⁵As Henke notes, this is "the inability to complete sexual intercourse for reasons of anxiety or trauma--evidently, in this case, from the trauma precipitated by the death of his infant son Rudy" (Henke, p. 254, note 35).

²⁶Note the climactic position of the cream in Bloom's inventory of the items on her tray just before he carries it upstairs: "Bread and butter, four, sugar, spoon, her cream" (*U* 4.298). The cream is distinctively hers, "ordinarily reserved" for her alone, as we learn later (*U* 17.365).

²⁷See Henke, pp. 145-46. Yet if, as Henke plausibly suggests, Hester took her husband from Gibraltar to remove him "from the scene of incipient temptation" (Henke, p. 146), it seems singularly ironic that she takes him to the very capital of coquetterie.

²⁸Henke, pp. 160-61; Sigmund Freud, "Anxiety and the Instinctual Life," in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (1933; New York: Norton, 1965), p. 101. While there is no evidence that Molly ever fellated Bloom himself, Henke's application of Freud's dictum gains further credence when we recall that Molly would happily kiss and suck the cock of the "lovely little statue" of Narcissus bought by Bloom, and would swallow its "dew"-like semen just as readily as Bloom ingested her own milk (*U* 18.1349-56). Also, as Molly sees plainly, sexual intercourse synecdochically returns a man to the womb, with the private part standing (in all senses) for the whole. Men, she says, are "all mad to get in there where they came out of . . . yes because there's a wonderful feeling there so tender all the time" (*U* 18.806-09). Of this Henke writes: "Longing for the maternal flesh / sanctuary / nurturance prematurely denied her, Molly understandably envies a univocal phallic presence that can penetrate the body of the mother and engender feelings of security and tenderness associated with pre-Oedipal bonding" (Henke, p. 141).

²⁹"Molly's psychosexual quest," writes Henke, "is obviously problematic: while searching for the lost mother of childhood fantasy, she is simultaneously compelled to re-enact the family romance of Oedipal attraction. She suffers from a proverbial Freudian separation of emotional and erotic satisfactions and wants both maternal solicitude from a womanly spouse and the thrill of aggressively heterosexual coition" (Henke, p. 135).

³⁰What Sean O’Tuama says of the young woman’s speech also applies to much of Molly’s monologue, for it too “is a kind of *chanson de la malmariee*, a form of lover’s complaint which turns up all over the place ‘in French, Italian, Scottish and indeed Irish popular literature.’ ” See Heaney, p. 51, and Sean O’Tuama, “Brian Merriman and his Court,” *Irish University Review*, 11:2 (Autumn 1981), p. 154.

³¹Later she recalls that Rudy’s death “disheartened me altogether . . . I knew well I’d never have another our 1st death too it was we were never the same since (18.1447-50). These points do not support the familiar claim that Molly speaks “in her symbolical character as fruitful mother earth.” Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of ‘Ulysses.’* (1934. Bloomington: University of Illinois Press, 1960), p. 263.

³²Bloom takes a comparably dim view of Irish Catholic fecundity, blaming priests for compelling women to have more children than they can feed while the priests themselves live “on the fat of the land” (*U* 8.31-35). Ironically, Merriman’s young woman predicts in her second speech that Rome will eventually allow Catholic clergy to marry as a means of reviving Irish birthrates (Heaney, p. 59).

³³See Eva Feder Kittay, “Womb Envy: An Explanatory Concept,” in *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory*, ed. Joyce Trebilcot (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), p. 107. Kathleen McCormick sees the earth mother

interpretation of Molly as evidence of “the need to neutralize the threat of [her] sexuality.” “Reproducing Molly Bloom,” in Richard Pearce, ed. *Molly Blooms: A Polylogue on ‘Penelope’ and Cultural Studies* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), p. 27.

³⁴Passages such as this one do not readily support the claim that “the contours of Molly’s monologue are fearfully phallic, determined by the pervasive presence of a male register of desire.” (Henke, p. 130). As Richard Pearce shows, Molly not only “looks the way men want her to look” but also critically and unflatteringly “looks back at the men who author-ize her” (“How Does Molly Bloom Look Through the Male Gaze?” in Pearce, *Molly Blooms*, p. 48.)

³⁵*James Joyce: The Citizen and the Artist* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), pp. 303-04. On the link between Molly’s “troubles” and Irish political history, see Bonnie Scott, *Joyce and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 174-76.

³⁶Some critics now judge Molly by a kind of radicalometer. Brian Shaffer writes, for instance, “I hope to clarify how conformist or subversive we should take Molly Bloom to be with respect to the culture which defines and is defined by her.” “Negotiating Self and Culture: Narcissism, Competing Discourses, and Ideological Becoming in ‘Penelope,’” in Pearce, *Molly Blooms*, p. 146.

³⁷Joyce himself said that Molly “hates women.” *Joyce’s “Ulysses” Notebooks in the British Museum*, ed. Philip Herring (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1977), p. 498. Henke writes: “If Bloom-Ulysses slaughters Molly’s suitors, real or imaginary, in his head, Joyce’s modern-day Penelope is engaged in an analogous project to disarm her ostensible competitors. She mentally demolishes, one by one, those women she believes have caught Bloom’s attention or have expressed the least sign of interest in his masculine regard” (Henke, p. 143).

³⁸“Ill read and study all I can find . . . so he wont think me stupid” (*U* 18.1361-62).

³⁹“Given the limited political choices that she faced in 1904,” writes Carol Shloss, “we can see that ‘struggle’--the ability to say ‘no’--was as important to Molly as the ability to say ‘yes’” (“Molly’s Resistance to the Union,” in Pearce, ed. *Molly Blooms*, p. 116). I agree, but as I indicate below, Shloss overlooks the point that Molly aims her “no” at Boylan.

⁴⁰I fully agree with Henke here: “The suitor whose interest Molly most avidly courts is, finally, neither Blazes Boylan nor Stephen Dedalus, but Leopold Paula Bloom” (Henke, p. 142).

⁴¹Of these Boylan is the only man besides Bloom who has bedded her, so Bloom was her first sexual partner. In her totally uninhibited monologue, she refers to nothing more than heavy petting with any man she met before him.

⁴²“Delineating Molly mainly as a sexual being, Joyce confines her character to a conventional mold. Molly recognizes that she can attract a man exclusively by her physicality, and, like the Wife of Bath or Madame Bovary, Molly Bloom believes that she can be fulfilled only by engaging a man’s attention” Elaine Unkeless, “The Conventional Molly Bloom,” in *Women in Joyce*, ed. Suzette Henke and Elaine Unkeless (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), p. 153.

⁴³Likewise, as Cheryl Herr notes, Molly identifies with the adulterous heroine of *The Wife of Scarli* (18.1117-18), J.A. Greene’s English version of an Italian play, first performed in Dublin in 1897. Both are adulterous wives who decide to remain with their husbands.

⁴⁴Cheryl Herr argues that Molly is not a character but a consistently theatrical role written to be acted in drag by “a male or gender-indeterminate actor” (“‘Penelope’ as Period Piece,” in Pearce, ed. *Molly Blooms*, pp. 63-79.) I would argue that Molly is a character who knows how to perform to get what she wants. As Kimberly Devlin observes, she is “frequently conscious of her own theatricality, shrewdly aware of the assumed nature of her own gender acts.”

(“Pretending in ‘Penelope’: Masquerade, Mimicry, and Molly Bloom,” in Pearce,

ed. *Molly Blooms*, p. 87.) Note also Molly's wish that "some man or other would take me sometime when hes there and kiss me in his arms" (*U* 18.104-06). "The focus of this fantasy," writes Henke, "is not sensuous pleasure but the excitation of conjugal jealousy: it is important that Bloom be present as voyeuristic witness to the deed" (Henke, p. 151).

⁴⁵Carol Shloss, "Molly's Resistance to the Union," in Pearce, ed. *Molly Blooms*, p. 113.

⁴⁶Both of them use the language of reciprocity to describe the birth of their desire for one another on Ben Howth. At lunchtime Bloom thinks: "Hot I tongued her. She kissed me. I was kissed. All yielding she tossed my hair. Kissed, she kissed me" (*U* 8.915-16). Near the end of her monologue Molly recalls how she got Bloom to propose to her: "he said I was a flower of the mountain yes so we are flowers all a womans body yes . . . that was why I liked him because I saw he understood or felt what a woman is and I knew I could always get round him and I gave him all the pleasure I could leading him on till he asked me to say yes" (*U* 18.1576-81). Just as Bloom remembers giving and receiving kisses, Molly remembers giving and getting pleasure from Bloom, leading him to propose and then consenting. Given Bloom's ten-year neglect of her sexual needs, Molly's original conviction that she could "always get round" Bloom may look deeply ironic, but it is clear that even now she believes she eventually *will* get round him.