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Passage into Infinity:

An Exploration of Molly Bloom's Escape from Joyce and *Ulysses*

Section One: Introduction:

Ulysses is a modern epic that resists and subverts definitive interpretations. The book rejects the confinement of a specific genre; each chapter slips easily from one style of writing to another. The novel's evolving and shifting nature highlights some of the difficulties and contradictions that arise in its analysis. The novel's scope is impossibly wide: it references the history of the world and encompasses all of the literary tradition. However, the "Penelope" chapter, also known as the clou of the novel, can help us gain greater insight into the novel's main concerns. Throughout the novel, Molly Bloom is referenced by Bloom and other men in their thoughts and speech. She transforms into a symbolic anchor for the novel as she links many disparate entities together by re-examining the characters and events in the book. In this way she encompasses the whole scope of *Ulysses* in her single chapter.

Ulysses is roughly based on *The Odyssey*, an epic about the journey home. Likewise, the novel is generated by Bloom's journey home, back to Molly. In this way the novel constantly moves closer and closer to Molly, and her identity as an anchor or a physically fixed point becomes increasingly important as Bloom progresses towards her. In a way the book depends on Molly as a fixed entity, as a symbol of home, to which Bloom can return. Without her the novel

would not be able to progress towards an ending. The book therefore relies upon Molly's static state, upon her fixedness and pinned position in bed on 7 Eccles Street, for its arc and structure. Molly, however, destabilizes this structure since she is neither fixed nor static in her psychological and imaginative capacities. She is a fluid and accomplished actress who adopts multiple voices and identities throughout the "Penelope" chapter. Her numerous identities suggest that she is indeed not pinned or fixed at all, as some of the male characters who imagine her would like to present. Molly's slippery nature undermines our previous expectations of her fixedness, and complicates the novel by overturning all semblance of stability or ending.

The "Penelope" chapter ends *Ulysses*—or is supposed to—since it symbolizes the return home. Molly undermines the novel by refusing to end her chapter, and instead passes into infinity¹. She begins and ends the chapter with the affirmative "yes," creating a circle reminiscent of Ouroboros², self-generation, and eternity. This circle forms a metaphoric container that holds the rest of the novel, as well as the concept of infinity. Additionally, Molly's mixed heritage, mock ventriloquism, and feminist/chauvinist views further position her as a liminal figure who cannot be fixed or pinned. Her subversive identity and her refusal to end the chapter complicate and destabilize the rest of the novel since she is not a fixed point that patiently waits to be reached, but is an active character who explodes the novel by escaping its structure.

¹ According to *Ulysses Annotated* the Linati schema lists infinity as the symbol of the "Penelope" chapter (610). The symbol of infinity is also a symbol of female genitalia in this instance, perhaps both in terms of shape and function. Life comes out of the female genitalia, and this process of reproduction is a way to ensure a kind of infinite immortality (as seen in works of literature like Shakespeare's *Sonnets*). Thus Molly represents infinity in terms of her womanhood (and her identity as a mother) as well as her circular language.

² The Ouroboros is an ancient symbol of a snake or worm with its tail in its mouth. The symbol represents eternity and circularity. This image is connected to Molly's monologue since she begins and ends with the same word "yes," creating a circle that has no beginning and no end.

Molly is a liminal figure in many ways: she is both eastern and western because of her association with Gibraltar and her residence in Dublin. Molly weaves both perspectives in her monologue and, although she is mostly focused on the events in Dublin, reminisces about her time in Gibraltar throughout the “Penelope” chapter of *Ulysses*: “...I thought the heavens were coming down about us to punish us when I said a Hail Mary like those awful thunderbolts in Gibraltar...” (611). The references to Gibraltar emphasize Molly’s complex identity as both eastern and western. Furthermore, Molly’s liminality extends to her sexuality and her contradictory views on both genders. She seamlessly adopts the voices of both female and male figures in the novel, and swings back and forth between celebrating women and degrading them. She adopts different voices and genders effortlessly: “...I used to go to Father Corrigan he touched me father and what harm if he did where and I said on the canal bank like a fool but whereabouts on your person my child on the leg behind high up was it yes...” (610). She celebrates women: “...nice invention they made for women for him to get all the pleasure,” (611) and simultaneously degrades them: “...of course a woman is so sensitive about everything...” (612) and sometimes sees her own feminine body through a stereotypical male gaze: “God I wouldn’t mind being a man and get up on a lovely woman...” (633). Molly subverts these categories by refusing to identify with a specific outlook, nationality, or sexuality. Additionally, she subverts language through her lack of narrative and punctuation throughout “Penelope” (as seen in the phrases above), which allows her to remove herself from the tyrannical structure of grammar and punctuation. This rejection of correct grammar further emphasizes Molly’s liminality, and portrays her insistence on subverting and denying accepted social structures.

Molly cannot be pinned down to any one stance or opinion, but moves seamlessly through them in the same parodying manner. She parodies men and woman, feminism and anti-

feminism, by performing each of them throughout her monologue. In this way she gives voice to each perspective but also portrays the absurdity of being fixed to a specific viewpoint, and chooses instead to move fluidly from one stance to another. Molly navigates these viewpoints by temporarily adopting these different perspectives and voices, like her portrayal of Father Corrigan. She parodies these various voices by performing each role, as if slipping into a character, but then discards the voice once she has sufficiently examined it. She then moves to a different character, slicing it open to reveal its simplistic interior, while she herself remains aloof and intact—a far more complex being than any of her singular characterizations. In this way Molly is able to contain all these different views and opinions, just as the “Penelope” chapter contains the whole of *Ulysses* through its re-examination of various characters and events.

Molly’s monologue is the grand finale—even epilogue—of Joyce’s modern epic. This thesis will examine the ways in which Molly is the “clou” of the novel as she escapes the text and passes into infinity through her refusal to end the novel, and to participate in the feminist/anti-feminist discourse and the eastern/western binary. It will also examine the way in which Molly refuses to be pinned, and will explore Molly’s identity as an actress, a fundamental characteristic that is at the crux of her liminality.

Section Two: Molly as The “Clou”:

Molly Bloom is at the center of *Ulysses* since she is inextricably tied with Bloom’s journey home. Furthermore, she is referenced by multiple characters in the novel and plays a significant role in Bloom’s thoughts. She becomes a point around which other characters and events orbit. Joyce addresses the importance of Molly and her chapter in one of his letters. He

famously calls the closing chapter of *Ulysses* the “clou” of the novel in his letter of 16 August 1921 to Frank Budgen. He writes:

““Penelope” is the *clou* of the book. The first sentence contains 2,500 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 glass, 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 de Fleisch der stets bejaht.*’ (169-170).

Here Joyce emphasizes the importance of the “Penelope” chapter, which therefore indicates that it is crucial to a sophisticated understanding of *Ulysses*. Joyce’s phrase is deliberately ambiguous since the word “clou” contains various meanings, each pointing in different directions. There is no other mention of the word, or what it might mean. We will therefore explore the intricacies surrounding “clou” in order to gain a better understanding of Joyce’s possible intentions and thoughts surrounding Molly’s uniqueness, but first we must analyze the rest of the passage since it might provide critical insights in our later analysis of “clou.”

Joyce performs a number of tasks in this paragraph that provide insight into his relationship towards Molly as the “clou.” On the one hand, he dissects Molly into fragmented and sexualized female body parts: the breasts, womb, ass, and cunt, and therefore portrays his male anxiety by performing an action that comes from a long tradition in literature to render the female subject helpless³. This portrayal transforms Molly into a sexual object used for men’s pleasure. In this way Joyce is consistent with the way some males in the novel, such as Lenehan, view Molly. Furthermore, Joyce’s insistence on linking woman with what he identifies as the

³ Plutarch’s poetry is filled with images of scattered female body parts. Many critics have identified this disembodiment as a means to control the female subject. By isolating specific body parts to compliment or admire (the eyes, the hands, the feet, etc.) Plutarch renders his female subject into a useless collection of trinkets with no intelligence or authority of her own.

female word “yes” underlines the connection between woman and the affirmative and passive *yes*.

To pin these sexual parts as the main points of the “Penelope” chapter reduces Molly to nothing more than a passive sexual figure. The German sentence “*Ich bin de Fleisch der stets bejaht*” means “I am the flesh that always affirms” and refers to *weib*—which is woman. To Joyce woman is therefore “the flesh that always affirms,” and the flesh that always says yes—a double entendre of passivity and massive sexual appetite. Furthering the Faust reference, woman is therefore also the flesh that seduces, as well as the flesh that subverts male authority. Thus we can begin to see the way in which Joyce possesses some anxiety over Molly, wishing her to be an affirming and passive figure with an almost bestial and undiscerning appetite for sex. However, even while Joyce pins her as a passive sexual figure he also outlines her complex, contradictory, and slippery nature. He references the chapter’s extreme obscenity, but also its perfectly sane, full, amoral, fertilizable, untrustworthy, engaging, limited, prudent, and indifferent nature. In this way Joyce ascribes woman with more authority than is immediately apparent in his writing since words such as “full,” “amoral,” “untrustworthy,” and “engaging” indicate rich mental development as well as an ability to deceive, manipulate, and undermine. Joyce also deliberately contradicts himself by stating that the chapter is both obscene and prudent, engaging and indifferent, limited and full—thus displaying the slippery paradoxical nature of Molly and her chapter. Molly, as we will come to see, simultaneously exceeds and denies each of these definitions ascribed to her.

Throughout the novel the reader sees glimpses of Molly through other characters’ eyes. Some of these representations portray Molly as fragmented sexual object, reminiscent of certain parts in Joyce’s letter. Most of the men in Dublin, with the exception of Bloom, view Molly as a

woman with loose morals and a huge sexual appetite. A good example of men's assumptions regarding Molly occurs when M'Coy and Lenehan talk about Molly in "The Wandering Rocks."

Lenehan recounts:

Bloom and Chris Callinan were on one side of the car and I was with the wife on the other. We started singing glees and duets: *Lo, the early beam of morning*. She was well primed with a good load of Delahunt's port under her bellyband. Every jolt the bloody car gave I had her bumping up against me. Hell's delight! She has a fine pair, God bless her. Like that. He held his caved hands a cubit from him, frowning:
—I was tucking the rug under her and settling her boa all the time. Know what I mean?
His hands moulded ample curves of air. He shut his eyes tight in delight, his body shrinking, and blew a sweet chirp from his lips.
The lad stood to attention anyhow, he said with a sigh. She's a gamey mare and no mistake. (193).

Lenehan's story portrays Molly as tipsy, well primed with port, and sexually inviting. Lenehan lecherously talks about Molly in a way that portrays her as vapid and passive since he says that he had her bumping up against him and that he was tucking the rug under her, etc. These statements strip Molly of any authority, agency, or intelligence since Lenehan perceives that he is clearly in control of the situation and that she is merely his puppet. The phrase "I had her bumping up against me" portrays Lenehan's perceived control because the sentence is structured in a way that implies his complete control over Molly's actions. Additionally, Lenehan portrays Molly as a passive sexual object by stating she has a "nice pair" and by moulding ample curves in the air to represent her body. In this way he reduces her to fragmented sexual body parts—breasts and curves.

Perhaps most obscenely, Lenehan likens Molly to an animal by saying "she's a gamey mare and no mistake." (193). This statement suggests that 1) Molly is as passive and vapid as a mare, 2) she is sexually indiscriminating, like an animal, and invites sexual advances, and 3) she's "gamey" and therefore "game for anything" but also a prey to be hunted and killed by a predator. Although Joyce is not as misogynistic as Lenehan, his implied statement of woman as

affirmation: “woman, yes” fits with Lenehan’s view of Molly as a passive sexual object who invites sexual attentions. However, we can also see the way in which Molly is at the center of the book (and is therefore the “clou”) since she is the object of jokes, judgments, thoughts and fantasies throughout the novel.

There are many men like Lenehan who view Molly as a passive sexual object in *Ulysses*. Bloom, however, possesses a more complicated relationship to his wife. Molly is partly the “clou” of *Ulysses* since she is referenced and referred to constantly throughout the text, and Bloom’s reveries inevitably lead him back to Molly (and to home) more than any other character in the novel. Unlike Lenehan and his peers, Bloom envisions Molly romantically, almost religiously. One of the most touching moments in the novel occurs when Bloom reminisces about Molly on Ben Howth:

Glowing wine on his palate lingered swallowed. Crushing in the winepress grapes of Bergundy. Sun’s heat it is. Seems to a secret touch telling me memory. Touched his sense moistened remembered. Hidden under wild ferns on Howth below us bay sleeping: sky. No sound. The sky. The bay purple by the Lion’s head. Green by Drumleck. Yellowgreen towards Sutton. Fields of undersea, the lines faint brown in grass, buried cities. Pillowed on my coat she had her hair, earwigs in the heather scrub my hand under her nape, you’ll toss me all. O wonder! Coolsoft with ointments her hand touched me, caressed: her eyes upon me did not turn away. Ravished over her I lay, full lips full open, kissed her mouth. Yum. Softly she gave me in my mouth the seedcake warm and chewed. Mawkish pulp her mouth had mumbled sweetsour of her spittle. Joy: I ate it: joy. Young life, her lips that gave me pouting. Soft warm sticky gumjelly lips. Flowers her eyes were, take me, willing eyes. Pebbles fell. She lay still. A goat. No-one. High on Ben Howth rhododendrons a nannygoat walking surefoated, dropping currents. Screened under ferns she laughed warmfolded. Wildly I lay on her, kissed her: eyes, her lips, her stretched neck beating, woman’s breasts full in her blouse of nun’s veiling, fat nipples upright. Hot I tongued her. She kissed me. I was kissed. All yielding she tossed my hair. Kissed, she kissed me. Me. And me now. (144).

As Bloom passes into his daydream we see that the language of the text becomes increasingly romantic and sentimental. The wine “glows” on Bloom’s palate as he imagines it being made in Burgundy under the “sun’s heat.” The “secret touch” of memory then comes to him to touch his

senses, to “moisten” them. These phrases are sensual and delicate, indicating his present emotional state.

Bloom is overcome with ecstasy and joy in this section as Molly feeds him and ravishes him on Ben Howth. He transitions into memory as he recalls the wild ferns, the sleeping bay, the silence, and the wide sky. Bloom artistically remembers the different colors in the scene: the purple bay, green by Drumleck, and “yellowgreen” towards Sutton, and “faint brown” lines that trace buried cities. These colors heighten the scene’s sentimentality and importance since it provides the reader with a detailed analysis of the surroundings. We are then introduced to Molly, her hair strewn around Bloom’s coat, and his hand gently under her neck. Bloom cries: “O wonder!” which indicates not only ecstasy and joy, but also amazement towards the wonderful, almost sacred experience. Molly, unlike in Lenehan’s version, is not simply a passive sexual object in this instance, but an active participant and even the dominant figure in the scene. The language portrays her as an active figure: “her hand touched me, caressed: her eyes upon me did not turn away.” Molly touches and caresses Bloom, and stares brashly “upon” Bloom, as if to challenge him.

Molly is at the center of this memory and, although it is Bloom’s memory that we are witnessing, Molly is at the crux of the beautiful scene. Bloom remembers: “ravished over her I lay,” which puts “her” (Molly) before the “I” (Bloom). Bloom could have simply stated “I lay ravished over her” but the structure of the sentence as it is written favors Molly over Bloom. Bloom is the one who is ravished, and is therefore occupying the traditional female role. Additionally, Molly gives Bloom chewed seedcake from her mouth, as if she is a mother bird feeding her helpless young. However, the fact that she gives him “seedcake” also suggests a strange fertilization since the word “seeds” can imply semen. In this way Molly’s sexual

dominance is highlighted by the way she symbolically fertilizes Bloom by passing him chewed seedcake from her mouth to his. This fertilization can be interpreted sexually and artistically. Molly passes the seedcake into Bloom's mouth and in this way symbolically fertilizes him with semen, but also passes him life and sustenance. It is also through Molly's fertilization that Bloom is able to endow Ben Howth with wonderful colors and textures, like an artist painting a canvas.

The seedcake instance also complicates Molly's sexuality in a way that is not evident in Lenehan's description of her. Here Molly is not only dominant and in control, but also possesses a symbolic hermaphroditic quality where she is able to move seamlessly between a man's dominant role (she symbolically fertilizes Bloom with the "mawkish pulp" of chewed seedcake) and a woman's passive role ("Flowers her eyes were, take me, willing eyes. Pebbles fell. She lay still"). However, even the seemingly yielding phrase "take me" is dominant in nature since it is a command. Bloom waits for her signal to "wildly" lay on her, "tongue" her, etc, which further emphasizes her power over him.

Bloom's final lines of the memory switch between objective and subjective narrations. He remembers: "She kissed me. I was kissed. All yielding she tossed my hair. Kissed, she kissed me. Me. And me now." The switch between objective and subjective narrations indicates Bloom's willingness to comprehend the situation from different perspectives in order to better understand the gap between "me" and "me now." "Me" suggests a fuller version of Bloom when he had a genuine and almost sacred connection with Molly on Ben Howth. "Me now" portrays the present Bloom who no longer possesses an emotional or physical connection to Molly; "me now" is Bloom without Molly. Bloom is therefore a richer and fuller being when he is connected to Molly since her presence brings him joy and wonder. Molly's importance to Bloom further situates her at the core of the novel's concerns.

Molly's centrality in the novel is linked to Joyce's comment that "Penelope" is the clou of the book. In his book *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism*, Joseph Allen Boone explores the complexities and implications of the word "clou." Boone identifies the different meanings of "clou" and the way that they correspond to Joyce's intentions towards Molly. Boone explains:

In its literal meaning of "nail," "spike," or "stud," this French term would seem to summon forth a worst-case scenario of the authorial mastery involved in "pinning down" a woman's consciousness, precisely by affixing Molly to her bed. Taken in its aural sense as a "clue" to *Ulysses*, the term hardly serves Molly any better, ascribing to her monologue a superhuman explanatory power that makes woman's voice the existential truth or key underlying Everyman's quest—an only slightly less pernicious way of pinning Molly to a traditional literary function (166).

This definition of "clou" as a nail, spike, or stud suggests Joyce's intention to nail or pin Molly's consciousness by physically pinning her to the bed on 7 Eccles Street. The fat period at the end of "Ithaca" supports this definition since it isolates the "Penelope" chapter in a world that is definitely removed from the rest of the novel. This period also relates to Joyce's previous intentions towards "Ithaca." At one point Joyce intended to end the novel with "Ithaca" as the final chapter, but chose instead to present Molly with the final word in *Ulysses*. This action heightens "Penelope's" importance as the successful counterpart to "Ithaca's" failed ending. The "Penelope" chapter therefore provides the necessary closure that "Ithaca" could not.

Boone's use of "pinning down" is interesting since the verb "to pin" means: "to hold, fasten, or join (one thing *to* or *on* another, or things or parts of a thing together) with a peg, dowel, rod, nail, etc. to hold down with a nail, spike, etc. Also: to fasten (a door or gate); to latch or lock" (oxforddictionaries.com). This definition of "pin" relates to the "Penelope" chapter since it portrays the way in which Joyce attempts to fasten or hold "Penelope" to the rest of the novel. After the first (unsuccessful) ending of "Ithaca" we see a large period that precedes "Penelope." In this way Joyce attempts to fasten "Penelope" to his book and represents Molly's

uncontainable consciousness within the confines of the novel as his epilogue (and successful finale) of *Ulysses*. Molly is connected to the novel insofar as she is a central figure in *Ulysses*, but the “Penelope” chapter is physically and symbolically removed from the rest of the book, which suggests that the chapter can be understood as a response or counterpoint to the rest of the novel.

Boone proposes two other definitions of “clou.” The second possible definition is the aural sense as a “clue.” This definition pins Molly to a “traditional literary function⁴” since she becomes the incarnation of the eternal feminine. We can draw parallels between sections of Joyce’s letter since he does indeed pin Molly as woman’s essence: “woman, yes,” and therefore establishes her as a symbol for woman. This definition, however, is too simplistic for Joyce’s contradictory notions of Molly and the chapter’s slippery tendencies. Boone explores a third definition that addresses the chapter’s contradictions and theatrical tendencies. He writes:

But *clou* can also mean the “star-turn” or “chief attraction” of a theatrical event, and to see Molly, as Cheryl Herr suggests, as the headline performer, the so-called topper, in *Ulysses*’ novelistic show provides an illuminating context within which to reinterpret the gendered implications of her star performance (166).

This final definition fits the “Penelope” chapter in a number of ways: Molly is a professional singer who is paid to perform in front of audiences. Her role in society as a singer, beauty, and sex icon situate her as a “chief attraction” in Dublin. Throughout *Ulysses* men talk about her, fantasize about her, and generally revolve around her. Not only is Molly the chief attraction in Dublin, but the book itself positions her monologue as the grand finale—or *encore*—since “Penelope” is post *Ulysses* and post “Ithaca” (the original ending). The fact that she is mentioned

⁴ In “Modern Fiction” Virginia Woolf states: “life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end” (160). The “Penelope” chapter corresponds to this understanding of life in the sense that its trajectory is not linear or symmetrical. The chapter, unlike the rest of the novel, does not pretend that life is a series of “gig lamps symmetrically arranged” but follows its own logic in terms of time and coherence. This is perhaps another way in which “Penelope” is the “clou” of the novel, because she represents life genuinely.

throughout the novel many times serves to build anticipation for her performance, in the same way that an opening band builds anticipation for the main attraction. This definition also matches Joyce's intention since he places "Penelope" as the epilogue to the novel, after many deliberate references to her throughout the book. Thus although Boone favors the last definition as a lens through which to view Molly, Joyce's intentions represent all three simultaneously—which explains his use of such a loaded word.

Section Three: Molly and Feminism

In some sections of his letter, Joyce seems to pin Molly very deliberately as the incarnation of woman, passivity, and affirmation, but then portrays her as a figure who exceeds every definition and slips through every confining label. Boone suggests that Joyce loses control of his character, and that she is a representation of his masculine anxieties. He explores the way in which Molly undermines Joyce (her creator) and the way in which she ultimately returns to haunt Joyce in his dreams:

Having dismissed her creator, she is free to exist beyond his text in a realm to which his representational powers can only gesture. On some profound level that is not merely a critic's dream, Molly La Duse⁵ has indeed escaped the bedsteadfastness of Ulysses, moving outside the constraints of her fictional context and making an extratextual appearance, a kind of curtain call, in the role of a consummate actress with the uncanny ability of returning without notice to haunt her creator's subconscious. What is interior and what exterior is hopelessly blurred as Joyce's attempt to represent Molly's "interiority" in "external" form because a manifestation of his own interior anxieties (172).

While Boone does have a point about Joyce's anxieties surrounding Molly, this explanation does not include the reason that Joyce ends with her voice as the "topper" to his masterpiece. Molly

⁵According to Boone's *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism*, Molly appears to Joyce in a dream in masquerade wearing a black opera cloak "that looked like La Duse, the Italian actress who succeeded Rachel, the model of Bronte's Vashti, as the greatest female actress of the European stage" (172). In this way Boone portrays Molly as a figure beyond her creator's grasp, a figure of immense talent and control who is free to haunt his subconscious as she pleases.

does indeed escape Joyce's text in a number of ways which will be explored in depth, but Joyce anticipates her escape in his letter to Budgen when he calls the "Penelope" chapter fertilizable, amoral, untrustworthy, etc. The "Penelope" chapter can therefore be understood as Joyce's "topper" since it comments on the artificiality of endings in novels. The last chapter does not end, but circles upon itself to form a circular representation symbolic of infinity.

The chapter's circularity also refers to a non-traditional way of measuring time since here we see time as a circular entity that revolves around itself. The "Penelope" chapter begins and ends with the same word "yes," which suggests time's circularity within the chapter. The chapter also moves back and forth between the past and the present, which further distorts time. The dominant theory regarding time is that it flows in a straight linear fashion, portrayed in the rest of the novel where we see events take place in a linear way. These two representations of time can correspond to the different sexes since the linear version, portrayed by the male perspective in the rest of the novel suggests a masculine representation through its linear, phallic form of continually moving forward. The circle or hole, on the other hand, is a symbolic representation of a container or a vagina, which suggests that a circular notion of time corresponds to the feminine. Molly's notion of time is another way in which she escapes societal structures and boundaries. Furthermore, the circular structure of "Penelope" (the final chapter or epilogue of the novel) also calls the reader to question the notion of a novel's end as the part where all loose ends are neatly tied and all questions answered since "Penelope" does not attempt to provide any concrete answers regarding the novel's primary plots and preoccupations.

Cixous comments about the end of *Ulysses* in her essay "The Laugh of The Medusa." She also defines the excessiveness of Molly's chapter as a feminist quality that subverts patriarchal structures. Although Molly is neither strictly a feminist nor an anti-feminist in her chapter,

Cixous' argues that "Penelope" is the epitome of woman writing. She indirectly addresses both Joyce's letter and Boone's analysis of Molly's passage into infinity: she represents the affirming (and passive) word "yes" as a celebration of femininity. Cixous seizes this notion of affirmation in Molly's text and uses it as an example of feminine writing, ultimately stating that "yes" carries the novel beyond any other book. In this way Cixous' view of Joyce's "woman, yes" is a celebration of woman's writing. : "the feminine (as the poets suspected) affirms: "...And yes," says Molly, carrying *Ulysses* off beyond any book and toward the new writing: "I said yes, I will Yes.'" (1951). This "new writing" is presumably the new woman writing. Although Joyce and Cixous approach Molly in different ways they both identify her as the essence of woman, thus constraining her to a certain extent. However, Cixous makes an interesting point about woman's writing that is also relevant to the structure of "Penelope": "[woman's writing] can only keep going...she goes and passes into infinity. She alone dares and wishes to know from within, where she, the outcast, has never ceased to hear the resonance of fore-language" (1955). Molly does indeed pass into infinity since her writing "can only keep going" and can only keep circulating around itself. Molly also "wishes to know from within" in the sense that she self-generates her own thoughts from within herself, and does not need external cues to reach her inner thoughts.

Cixous also raises an interesting way to view sexuality in the "Penelope" chapter. She addresses the overflowing nature of the chapter, both in terms of abundant language and sexual desire. She writes about her own experience as a woman and links it to a general feminine experience: "I, too, overflow: my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of-songs" (1943). Furthermore, Cixous observes that women should celebrate their bodies and sexuality, and that this affirmation of womanhood will allow them to gain freedom from their

oppressors: “By writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her... censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time” (1946). Cixous’ argument portrays the way in which Molly’s sexual desire and her presumed masturbation throughout the chapter are ways in which she refuses to be censored or silenced by the men in the novel. Cixous offers the understanding that breath, speech, and body are inextricably linked to one another, and that the rejection of one of these entities leads to the decay of all three. In this way we can understand Molly’s excessiveness in speech and language as a product of her overflowing sexuality, and vice versa. Cixous’ statement that she herself “overflows” with desire, and that her desires spawn new desires is reminiscent of Molly’s self-generative qualities and her abundant sexuality. Her remembrances of past sexual encounters fuel her present desires, and these sexual desires make her view her past encounters more erotically. In this way Molly overflows with desire for herself and her own sexuality which is evident in her implied masturbation throughout the chapter.

Molly rejects the societal structures of language since she refuses to conform to the formalities of grammar and punctuation. Her language is unique and overflows with abundance, and is not necessarily coherent or well-formed. For example, the opening phrases of “Penelope” do not provide the reader with any context or background: “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 to make himself interesting for that old faggot Mrs. Riordan...” (608). From the very beginning of the “Penelope” chapter the reader is bombarded with an excess of language that bubbles and overflows with no periods or commas to provide a pause from the abundance of language. The chapter indicates a certain urgency since the lack of punctuation suggests no pause for breath or rest.

Cixous comments on woman's writing as existing outside the structure of the normal dominant form of language, which is similar to the "Penelope" chapter. She states:

It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence (1947).

Cixous' understanding of woman's writing is that it will confirm women in a space other than silence—a space that is not only silence—which is the consequence of repression and oppression by the phallus. She indicates that women should write about being a woman, and they should refuse to be silent. In this way Molly's abundance and excessiveness in language can be a representation of her refusal to be silenced or contained. Furthermore, Molly's lack of grammar and punctuation challenges the societal structure of language, and in this way challenges the "speech which has been governed by the phallus." Molly not only breaks "the snare of silence," but does so to an excessive extent, and refuses to stop speaking, focusing on taboo subjects such as her desires and sexual encounters. She ends her monologue where it begins ("yes") and therefore forms an infinite loop of speech. Cixous adds that writing has been run by masculine authorities, and in this way women's voices have been repressed over and over again:

I mean it when I speak of male writing. I maintain unequivocally that there is such a thing as *marked* writing; that, until now, far more extensively and repressively than is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural—hence political, typically masculine—economy; that this is the locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously (1945).

Molly is a figure who challenges masculine writing through her language, and in this way she escapes repression. In addition to undermining traditional structures of language and refusing to repress her sexuality Molly also subverts the eastern/western binary since she is a figure who

combines the east (Gibraltar) and the west (Dublin and England)⁶. This refusal to identify with only one culture allows her to challenge both the “libidinal and cultural” economies that are dominant in society.

Molly’s author, however, is a man, which complicates her identity as a rebel against dominant masculine structures and writings. Furthermore, in addition to providing both feminist (“...not satisfied till they have us swollen out like elephants...” (611)), and anti-feminist (“...the cat she rubs up against you for her own sake I wonder has she fleas shes as bad as a woman always licking and lecking...” (628-629)) views in her chapter, Molly performs both male and female voices. For example, she adopts the voice of Bloom on page 612: “I was rolling the potato cakes theres something I want to say to you only for I put him off letting on I was in a temper with my hands and arms full of pasty flour... (612). Here Molly plays both parts in this small scene. She plays the part of Bloom (a male), and the part of herself in the past (a female). She switches between these roles seamlessly and fluidly. This layered effect of a man (Joyce) writing a woman (Molly) who speaks and represents both male and female voices leads to a very complex understanding of performance and theatricality in “Penelope.”

Section Four: Molly the Theatrical Role

Molly is the “headline performer” in a more literal sense since “Penelope” is an elaborate performance of self and others, especially with regards to gender. Molly as an actress raises many crucial insights into “Penelope,” such as Boone’s observation that “an extension of seeing Molly as an actress, taken to its logical extreme, is to read “Penelope” as a *literal script*, a tack

⁶ Molly is considered eastern in Dublin since she is born in Gibraltar and because her mother (Lunita Laredo) is of Spanish and Jewish descent. However, she is considered western in Gibraltar due to her father Major Tweedy’s military post and his Irish nationality. Furthermore, Gibraltar is technically British territory due to colonization and Molly resides in Dublin on 7 Eccles Street. These complicated layers of nationality further identify Molly’s liminality and slipperiness.

which leads Cheryl Herr to argue that the speaking voice in “Penelope” has no mimetic value or fictive existence at all, that “Molly” is only a stage role to be filled by any competent actress—or actor.” (167). Molly as an actress therefore subverts the novel’s expectations of her; her stream of consciousness is supposed to enlighten us to her innermost self, but her performances and parodies actually accumulate levels of separation between Molly and her reader. Herr’s observation that “Penelope” has no “mimetic value or fictive existence at all” further alienates the chapter from the rest of the book, which relies heavily on its mimetic value and fictive existence.

The consequences of Molly as an actress reach beyond an understanding of the chapter as a script. The literal script is meant to entrap the reader into becoming a version of Molly, which frees her from confining stereotypes and analysis. The structure of the chapter—the lack of narrative voice or frame—further emphasizes the script-like qualities of “Penelope” since the chapter is not interrupted by an outside voice. Since the chapter is a script to be filled by any “competent actor or actress” Molly becomes a character that is constantly evaluated and re-evaluated depending on the actor or actress performing the chapter. Molly gains a new identity every time an actress or actor attempts to play her part, and in this way her identity becomes more and more complex as different actors each provide a lens through which to analyze her. This is another way in which Molly escapes the text and passes into infinity; she is a role to be filled by an infinite number of actors and actresses, each providing her with a piece of themselves.

Herr’s observation can perhaps be taken a step further. The “Penelope” chapter not only can be read as a literal script, but it should be in order to fully understand the chapter. “Penelope”

is written in a way that demands to be read orally since the language is void of punctuation. For example:

Id rather die 20 times over than marry another of their sex of course hed never find another woman like me to put up with him the way I do know me come sleep with me yes and he knows that too at the bottom of his heart take that Mrs Maybrick that poisoned her husband for what I wonder in love with another man... (613).

This passage is representative of the whole chapter in terms of grammar and punctuation.

Reading the chapter out loud helps to provide the necessary inflections and absent punctuations, and hearing the chapter read by a competent actor or actress also injects meaning into the phrases. In a sense every reader of “Penelope” becomes an actor who inhabits Molly for a time since every reader has to make his or her own choices of punctuation that may alter the meaning of the text. For example, the phrases above can be read in a number of ways: “I’d rather die 20 times over than marry another of their sex. Of course he’d never find another woman like me to put up with him the way I do. Know me come sleep with me! Yes. And he knows that too—at the bottom of his heart. Take that Mrs. Maybrick that poisoned her husband. For what? I wonder: In love with another man?” and 2) I’d rather die 20 times over than marry another of their sex. Of course he’d never find another woman like me, to put up with him the way I do. Know me come sleep with me, yes? And he knows that too. At the bottom of his heart. Take that Mrs. Maybrick that poisoned her husband. For what I wonder? In love with another man.” Although these are just two examples of the way the text can be altered we can begin to see the different variations contained in “Penelope.” In the first variation Molly does not know whether Mrs. Maybrick is in love with another man, so she questions the possibility: “For what? I wonder: in love with another man?” but in the second variation Molly knows precisely why Mrs. Maybrick poisoned her husband: “For what I wonder? In love with another man.” These versions present

different extents of Molly's knowledge, which—when accumulated—can alter her character significantly. These are just two versions of a very small section of the chapter, which is almost entirely unpunctuated. These seemingly trite differences in variations increase throughout the chapter and the added punctuation help form our notion of Molly.

Every reader who inhabits Molly adds to the complexity of her identity as they each provide a different way to act Molly⁷. In this way Molly is not simply an actress, but a role to be filled. She escapes Joyce's constraints, and even manages to escape his text since she is not simply a character or an actress but a role to be adopted and shaped by others. She also transforms the novel from an ordinary book into a script that needs to be read and heard out loud. Herr's observation that Molly is a role "to be filled" allows Molly to escape the text since she is not the pinned female character that Lenehan portrays in "The Wandering Rocks." We can further understand Herr's views on Molly's theatricality through Kimberly J. Devlin's essay "Pretending in "Penelope"":

Commenting on the theatrical episodes in the "Penelope" episode, Cheryl Herr points out in this volume that Molly's Homeric counterpart is "quintessentially an actress; [Penelope] actualizes her name which translates to 'countenance of webs' or mask." She argues that Molly's episode is an analogous mask/masque: "her monologue-ing, her sartoriocentrism, her stylized gestures, her great sentences sustained as an operatic tour de force—these contribute to my assessment of her as not a character but rather a role to be enacted by this or that major artiste of the era [who Herr points out could be either male or female] (emphasis added)." I would qualify this point by suggesting that Molly's monologue (for temporary lack of a better term) is a concentration of roles, an elaborate series of "star turns" that undermines the notion of womanliness as it displays it" (82).

⁷ We can find many readings and audiotapes of Molly Bloom's soliloquy because, more than any other part of *Ulysses*, her monologue needs to be read and acted in order for the audience to understand the full extent of her rich interior world. There are many examples of Molly's monologue on Youtube and they—to the extent that I have witnessed—all present Molly's thoughts in "first sphere" (meaning they present her monologue as a stream of consciousness that is not meant to be heard by others—unlike many of Shakespeare's soliloquies). This tension between externalizing an interior that is not meant to be heard by others versus the need to actually hear the monologue in order to make sense of it is typically Molly in its paradoxical logic.

The chapter's name—"Penelope" is significant since it references Molly's counterpart in *The Odyssey*. Herr explains that Penelope "actualizes her name which translates to 'countenance of webs' or mask" (82). This analysis is crucial to our understanding of Molly since this "countenance of webs' or mask" relates to her slippery identity. The phrase "countenance of webs' or mask" can refer to Molly's facial expression as "webs" or "mask," which suggests both ambiguity and hidden facets of her identity. Webs signify difficulty since it is impossible to follow a single thread to conclusion, and these different threads jumble to form an inextricable mess. A mask's aim is to protect the interior, and it therefore forms a shield that defends the interior. Both of these similes surrounding Penelope suggest that Molly's true face, or identity, is hidden from us.

Herr continues to identify Molly not as an actress (like Penelope), or a character (as she is formerly portrayed in the novel), but as a role. Devlin then qualifies Molly's monologue as "a concentration of roles, an elaborate series of "star turns" that undermines the notion of womanliness as it displays it" (82). In this way Molly adopts different roles for herself and refuses to be pinned to a feminist or anti-feminist ideology. Instead, Molly is a liminal figure who transforms herself, sometimes to suit various situations and characters. She plays the role of a seductress, an innocent maiden, a lesbian, a man-hater, and a feminist with equal ease and comfort. Boone identifies Molly's role-playing:

Following Herr's cues, Kimberley Devlin has brilliantly argued that "Penelope" not only "foregrounds theatricality" but that "theatricality mediates Molly's visions of self and other." That is, cognizant of the role-playing element in all behavior, of the self-dramatizations underlying any "identity," Molly "dons multiple recognizable masks of womanliness throughout her monologue, as her thoughts sift through the various props, costumes, gestures, appellations, and signifiers at her disposal in order to construct whatever "feminine" image she wishes to project in a given social or personal encounter. (166-167).

As Devlin argues, "Penelope" does not simply "foreground theatricality" but instead "theatricality mediates Molly's visions of self and other." In this way we can understand Molly's

true nature as an actress who shifts from one version of herself to another, without ever revealing her true inner self. Molly the actress trumps any other indicator of identity that she possesses. She “dons multiple recognizable masks of womanliness throughout her monologue” but none of them are any more real or true to her essence than the rest of her roles. Molly’s consumption of romance novels (such as *Sweets of Sin*), lingerie, and new clothes is tied into her identity as an actress since these artifacts become props, costumes, and research material for her various plots and parts.

Molly’s consumption of romance novels, clothes, and objects become artifacts that help her immerse herself in a specific role. Her detailed account of these artifacts suggests that they are important to her identity as an actress. For example, she states: “if its going to go on I want at least two other good chemises for one thing and but I don’t know what kind of drawers he likes” (617) and “one of those kidfitting corsets Id want advertised cheap in the Gentlewoman with elastic gores on the hips” (618). These instances portray her appetite for clothes and the phrase “but I don’t know what kind of drawers he likes” suggests that her interest in drawers stems from her desire to seduce him (in this case Blazes Boylan). She uses these chemises and garters—sexually charged articles of clothing—as costumes or props, as a way to better inhabit her role as a temptress.

Molly also views clothes as a costume that can impact one’s role in society. She states: “Ive no clothes at all the brown costume and the skirt and jacket and the one at the cleaners...the men wont look at you and women try to walk on you” (618) and “sure you cant get on in this world without style” (618). Molly calls her brown clothes a costume, further indicating that she uses them as accessories for her various roles. Her desire for more clothes is directly linked to her ability as an actress, and the number of roles she can play. She also identifies the way clothes

affect people; men don't look at a woman who does not have certain outfits. Molly also uses clothes as a way to manipulate or control men: "I felt rotten simply with the old rubbishy dress that I lost the leads out of the tails with no cut in it but theyre coming into fashion again I bought it simply to please him I knew it was no good" (619). Even though Molly may feel "rotten" in a "rubbishy" dress she wears it to please a man, and in this way temporarily inhabits the role that he wishes her to embody because ultimately she gains pleasure by manipulating and controlling him. By performing these roles Molly becomes the dominant figure in the relationship since she is able to manipulate men into believing that she is a certain kind of woman, when in fact she is merely playing a temporary role.

Although Molly performs for men in several memories, she is an inherent actress in the sense that she performs for herself. Her monologue, and the different voices she adopts within its structure, is an example of such a performance. Additionally, she also plays the role of the designer, director, and audience. We, the readers, are merely voyeurs watching the play from outside the theater. In this way Molly is a self sufficient actress who does not require an audience to generate performances. Boone observes:

"Penelope" also establishes its separateness or autonomy by virtue of its formulation as, in Dorrit Cohn's words, "a self-generated, self-supported, and self-enclosed text." Seen from this perspective, the autonomous status of Molly's self-enclosed interior monologue becomes a vital sign of its formal independence rather than an effect of constriction. For technically speaking, this episode, beginning and ending within a single consciousness, forms, as Cohn wisely points out, "*the only moment of the novel where a figural voice totally obliterates the authorial voice throughout an entire chapter.*" (169).

"Penelope" is isolated in a number of ways. Physically, the chapter follows a huge period at the end of "Ithaca" and ends the novel. It is therefore sandwiched between two "ends" and therefore stands as an isolated entity. Additionally "Penelope" is filled with the pronoun "I" and therefore situates the character (and not the author) as the focal point of the narrative. This "I" also allows the actor or actress playing the role of Molly to inhabit her consciousness. The chapter is "self-

generated, self-supported, and self-enclosed” since Molly generates thoughts by herself and for herself. Molly obliterates the author’s voice in this chapter with her insistence of “I” and her dependence solely on her own generative properties as an actress and a performer.

Metaphorically we can also understand Molly’s masturbation as a self-generated, self-supported, and self-enclosed act that mirrors her monologue since this is a solo act that allows her to give pleasure only to herself, and only for herself. She states: “...pretending to like it till he comes and then finish it off myself anyway...” (610), which indicates that she is the only one who can give herself pleasure, and further emphasizes her independence, as well as her self-generative and self-supported qualities. Joyce’s voice does not interrupt this chapter at all, and the whole monologue asserts its independence from the rest of the novel.

Conclusion:

Joyce chooses to ultimately end his novel with a puzzle and an enigma in the form of Molly Bloom. Her contradictions, parodying manner, slippery nature, and blatant disregard for societal structures and authorities make her an ideal figure to end *Ulysses*—a novel based on intertwining contradictions and slipperiness. The book, like Molly, cannot be pinned to any one interpretation, but flows easily from one to another. Molly’s identity as an actress is especially dangerous since we do not know which parts of her monologue are genuine and which are contrived, and this uncertainty can be applied to *Ulysses* as a whole because it is a novel that evolves with every chapter. The novel slips into a new literary form at the beginning of every chapter, and frequently many times throughout the chapter as well. The epigraph of *Ulysses Annotated* quotes one of Joyce’s most famous statements regarding his book: “I’ve put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I

meant, and that's the only way of insuring one's immortality" (epigraph). Molly insures her immortality in the same way since Joyce makes her his most enigmatic character by choosing her to end the novel.

Despite, or perhaps because of, her incredibly enigmatic nature Molly's chapter is one of the most generous and, as Joyce says, fertilizable, parts of the book. Harry Blamires introduction for the "Penelope" chapter in *The New Bloomsday Book* describes Molly's life-affirming nature: "to enter the mind of Molly Bloom after so much time spent in the minds of Stephen and Leopold is to plunge into a flowing river. If we have hitherto been exploring the waste land, here are the refreshing, life-giving waters that alone can renew it" (233). The repetition of water images (flowing river, life-giving waters) symbolizes life and fertility since all of nature stems from water. Furthermore, Blamires states that the "Penelope" chapter can actually renew the waste land, and breathe new life into the sterile chapters that precede it. The image of the flowing river also suggests Molly's eternal nature since the river circles back onto itself and refreshes its water after every cycle. Molly begins and ends with "yes," mimicking the structure of this water process, and fusing herself with world's natural circles.

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