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The Subversion of Wagnerian Gender Dynamics in James Joyce's *Ulysses*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English from  
The College of William and Mary

by

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To the uninitiated, the works of James Joyce can descend into endless and impenetrable obscurity, but one thinker provides a key to deciphering Joyce's writing: German operatic composer Richard Wagner. Wagner dominated nineteenth-century culture and Joyce could not escape his omnipotent influence. Whereas many artists tried to adopt aspects of Wagner's artistic philosophy as their own, Joyce's works reveal an inherent kinship with the composer. Allusions to Wagner's radical "music dramas" are evident across Joyce's oeuvre. Wagner's influence is not only found in the implicit and explicit allusions in *Ulysses*,—as Timothy Martin and other scholars have noted—but also in Joyce's adoption of Wagner's artistic philosophy and literary techniques.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, Joyce expands on Wagner's aesthetic philosophy and emphasizes drama and myth to explore gender relations in *Ulysses*. The two artists are defining figures in their respective fields as creators of seminal and compelling works; however, they provide a paradox for feminist scholars. These stories that have captured audiences for years are driven by misogynist depictions of women: Joyce with his limited portrayal of women as fickle, materialistic, and inherently unfaithful, and Wagner through the subservient feminine stereotypes he applies to benefit his male characters. Some feminist critics claim Joyce is wholly misogynist, but this stance fails to acknowledge the women of *Ulysses* who defy misogynist archetypes that subjugate women.<sup>2</sup> I explore how Joyce uses Wagnerian

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<sup>1</sup> See Timothy Martin. *Joyce and Wagner: A Study of Influence*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991. Print.; John DiGaetani. *Richard Wagner and the Modern British Novel*. Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh-Dickinson University Press. 1978. Print.; Raymond Furness. *Wagner and Literature*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1982. Print.

<sup>2</sup> See Carolyn Heilbrun's "Afterword" to *Women in Joyce*.

themes and methods to comment on and complicate the gender power dynamics that pervaded Joyce's early twentieth-century Ireland.

Joyce takes advantage of the early twentieth century's idolatry of Wagner and uses the composer's well-known dramatic tropes to comment on gendered social conventions. Joyce's modifications of Wagnerian male and female archetypes are rooted in the relationship between the male artist-hero and the self-sacrificing woman. The male protagonists of Wagner's operas are known as artist-heroes. These heroic tenors—or *Heldentenors* in German—are young virile men who Wagner sets up to be the embodiment of idealized cultural masculinity (Jander). They each embark on a journey towards cultural redemption and personal absolution, which can only be achieved through the love of a woman. Namely, the love of a self-sacrificing woman whose identity wholly hinges on her artist-hero. The imperative success of the artist-heroes relies on the maintenance of this strict and bifurcated gender hierarchy of dominant male and subjugated female.

I argue that in *Ulysses*, Joyce modifies Wagner's artist-hero and self-sacrificing woman to complicate and critique the cultural expectation for the male protagonist's reliance on female love for absolution. Joyce's women—specifically Marion “Molly” Bloom and Gerty MacDowell—undermine the artist-hero's redemption by blending the barrier between the two misogynist feminine archetypes: the Virgin and the Temptress. Whereas Wagner's female characters are either the virginal redeemers, like Elisabeth from *Tannhäuser*, or fatal temptresses, like Kundry from *Parsifal*, Joyce's female characters blur the barrier between the two archetypes. Molly and Gerty inhabit both the

Virgin and Temptress archetypes, thereby wholly fulfilling neither. Thus, they disrupt the fixed gender roles necessary to propel the artist-hero towards salvation.

By playing with Wagnerian gender roles and assigning musical allusions to his characters, Joyce goes beyond the aesthetic philosophy that captured much of nineteenth-century Europe's literary circles. He creates a wholly new examination of the role of woman as men's savior. The first section of this paper provides context for reading Joyce in light of Wagner through a history of "literary Wagnerism," the modernist literary movement that incorporated Wagner's compositional methods, such as leitmotifs, that were adopted to emulate a more complex depiction of human thought. The succeeding sections offer a background on Joyce's personal and literary connection to feminism and a survey of feminist scholarship regarding the depiction of gender in *Ulysses*. Following these contextual sections, I delve into analysis of the characters. The first character explored is Molly Bloom and how she blurs the barrier between the symbolic "earth mother" trope—a sacrificial role akin to the Virgin—and the *femme fatale* Temptress. Joyce's "othering" of her creates a space for her to critique the patriarchal tropes that ostensibly create her. The second female character explored is Gerty MacDowell, the sensual Virgin who has often been depicted as a sexually curious self-sacrificial woman; however, her sexual autonomy has often been glossed over in this process. These women defy the self-sacrificing trope that is expected of them within the Wagnerian world of Joyce's readership, which undermines Joyce's artist-heroes: Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom. These two aspiring artist-heroes fail in their journey to cultural salvation due to the erasing of the self-sacrificial woman.

### Literary Wagnerism and Joyce

Richard Wagner (1813 - 1883) was steeped in many aspects of Western European culture at the turn of the twentieth century. His music, philosophy, ideas about German nationalism, and anti-Semitic writings were consumed through concerts and his widely-read Prose Works. The principal prose writings were produced between 1848 and 1851 (Wagner, Prose Works 13). Most relevant to Joyce, however, was Wagner's influence on the literary world. Wagner's music dramas, what he called his operas, sparked what became known as "literary Wagnerism" across Europe. His crusade to reunify art in the style of the ancient Greeks attracted the attention of the modernist writers of 1850s Paris and peaked with the French Symbolists, whom Joyce greatly admired (Martin, *Joyce and Wagner* 5, 8). French Symbolists who gained fame amongst English literary circles—like Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Proust—were all fond of Wagnerian themes and methods as they felt it embodied the aims of the movement, which favored the linguistic depiction of the mind and imagination (DiGaetani 16). Edouard Dujardin, the French father of stream of consciousness, founded a space for literary Wagnerism with his journal *Revue Wagnérienne*. It was published monthly from February 1885 to 1888 and many of the writers who contributed would later be found in Arthur Symons' collection *Symbolist Movement in Literature* (Martin 8). The complexity and depth of nineteenth-century modernist prose was due to a rejection of plot and a focus on the consciousness of the character, which was made possible by the referential techniques Wagner used in his operas to support his philosophy of art.

Joyce and his predecessors found literary merit in Wagner's artistic philosophy. This philosophy was founded in Arthur Schopenhauer's ultimate reality—the "thing-in-itself" or *Ding an sich*—as the Will. In 1854, Wagner discovered Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Representation*, where the German philosopher identifies the inner world as driven by the Will: "a blind, furious and purposeless striving which may be transcended...by the transformation of the will into an idea, an object of aesthetic contemplation" (Furness 4). Music, Schopenhauer thought, was the direct expression of the Will.<sup>3</sup> The musician has the privilege of representing it through their music, free from the restrictions of external manifestations (Martin 146). Music is not only the means by which one can gain redemption from the senses, but it can be redemption itself by revealing an absolute emotional truth without being held back by reality or purpose. Music as the ultimate representation of Will resonated with Wagner and his personal philosophy that music is the vehicle used to communicate an ineffable truth (Martin 250-51). It is that which means to be communicated—the drama—that gives music reason for its existence.

Drama, and the text associated with it, is integral to Wagner's revolutionary composition style. Opera before Wagner prioritized music over drama, with styles such as bel canto that focused on a coloratura soprano's vocal ornamentation as the main show rather than the story she was telling.<sup>4</sup> "A means of expression (music) has been made the ends, while the end of expression (the Drama) has been made a means," Wagner wrote

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<sup>3</sup> Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation*. Vol. 1. New York, N.Y.: Dover Publ., 1969. Print.

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly enough, Joyce actually preferred bel canto operas to any other style.

(*Prose Works* 17). Refusing to bow to social conventions, Wagner strived to have drama regain its rightful place in a dramatic-musical work by balancing narrative power in both the music and the libretto. The libretto consists of the text, plot, and characters for an opera, which Wagner wrote himself for each of his works. According to Timothy Martin, Wagner's "musical idealism" strove to break the tradition of highlighting the virtuoso soloist at the expense of the holistic work (1). He shed the operatic structures of arias, duets, and virtually any singing in harmony. Within a melodic line, he replaced traditional four-bar phrases with "*vers melodie*,"—the motivic musical prose that allows music to be freely shaped by the rhythm of the words—which later influenced the *vers libre* poetry. Wagner's musical revolution divorced him from the restricting "opera" genre. Instead, he called his works "music dramas" to achieve the ideal unified art: *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The term is first used in *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1849) and refers to a dramatic work where various art forms are combined to restore integrity to art ("Gesamtkunstwerk"). In his pursuit of the classical ideal, Wagner utilized a rich layer of myth and gave the orchestra the narrative power of the classical chorus. So influential was Wagner's innovation that French writer Romain Rolland claimed that the artists of the nineteenth century saw the whole artistic world from this drama oriented "Wagnerian point of view" (qtd. in Martin 4).

It comes as no surprise that Joyce, an accomplished singer who possessed an intimate knowledge of Wagner's work, was influenced by the composer and his followers. Much of his knowledge regarding Wagner was acquired through intermediaries like Shaw, D'Annunzio, Nietzsche, Ibsen, Moore, and Symons (Martin 8-9). Timothy

Martin's *Joyce and Wagner: A study of influence* is one of the most significant texts exploring the composer's influence on Joyce. Martin focuses on the Wagner-centric music culture in which Joyce matured and the literary kinship Joyce found with him. Both artists, according to Martin, would "exploit the resources of myth, emphasize sexual themes, pursue 'totality' of form and subject matter, and represent the 'modern' or 'revolutionary' in art" (xi). The introduction of the French Symbolists into British literary circles brought Wagnerian literary techniques—leitmotifs and gendered archetypes—and themes—drama and myth—to Joyce's attention (8).

The leitmotif was the Wagnerian technique that had the greatest influence in literature and is instrumental to Joyce's deeper themes in *Ulysses* that go beyond what merely happened on June 16th, 1904. In literature, a leitmotif—a term that Wagner actually did not coin or approve of—is "either a repeated group of words or a mere verbal formula" that represents an idea or character (Furness 7). The condensed emotional energy of Wagner's leitmotifs and the freedom of his unstructured melodies inspired the French Symbolists to create written works of ever increasing complexity. Leitmotifs were integral to the exploration of interiority and stream of consciousness, since the brief references to an idea, mood, or character create an interlocking web of references and associations that mime human thought. Dujardin discussed the Wagnerian root of stream of consciousness in his 1931 book studying Joyce, *Le Monologue intérieur: Son apparition, ses origines, sa place dans l'oeuvre de James Joyce*:

I recently pointed out the analogy—which is generally misunderstood—existing between musical motifs and the short, direct phrases of interior

monologue.<sup>5</sup> I am now about to reveal a secret: *Les lauriers song coupés* was begun with the mad intention of transposing Wagnerian procedures into literary devices. I defined the method in this way: the movement of consciousness is expressed by the incessant thrusts of musical motifs, which attempt to approximate, one after the other, indefinitely and successively, to the 'states' of thought, feeling and sensation. (qtd. in Martin 150, translation by Martin)

The use of the literary leitmotif is not only a cooptation of a technique, but it also intensifies an image, symbol, or idea through mutable repetition. Literature adopted the associative and compressed quality of leitmotifs, in which a symbol becomes a “functional idea of the work” and not just a narrative pawn (Furness 8, 17). Joyce was the first to make "interior monologue" famous in *Ulysses*; however, he was always careful to credit Dujardin's *Les lauriers song coupés* as the progenitor of the style (Martin 9). The leitmotif provided a framework in which Joyce could work beyond the simple recount of the events of June 16th, to explore Molly Bloom, Gerty MacDowell, Stephen Daedalus, Leopold Bloom's inner motivations, desires, and thoughts.

Joyce uses Wagner's methods, but not necessarily allusions to his music, when assigning musical leitmotifs. According to Zack Bowen, Joyce uses over 700 allusions to music as a way to develop the “style, characterization, mood, structure, and themes” of *Ulysses*, but “many of the allusions have little bearing on the major themes of the novel” (46). Seeing these allusions through the lens of literary Wagnerism, however,

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<sup>5</sup> “Interior monologue” is the direct French translation of *le monologue intérieur*; the origin of the term stream of consciousness.

exposes them as leitmotifs that carry the emotive narrative of desires. Therefore, many of these musical references are connected to the larger themes of the novel, especially those tied to gender. “Words? Music? No: it’s what’s behind,” Bloom concludes as he listens to Simon Daedalus sing (*U* 11.703). It is drama that is behind it all, driving Schopenhauer’s Will, Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Like Wagner, Joyce makes music the means of expression and drama the end of expression.<sup>6</sup> The musical leitmotif is the means by which the characters’ thoughts are expressed. Much of the dramatic action in *Ulysses* is suspended in the consciousness of a character, with stream of consciousness as a language to explore the interiority, or musicality, of each character’s story.

Joyce preserves the interiority of musical leitmotifs in *Ulysses* by looping the external allusions of music to delve deeper into his own work. For example, he assigns Leopold Bloom arias from *Martha*, Friedrich von Flotow’s opera about misidentification and romantic rejection (Bowen 169). These allusions set the tone of Bloom’s thoughts, serving as a “vehicle of conscious thought association, taking Bloom smoothly from one subject to another” (178). The yearning for a lost love in Flotow’s aria “*M’appari*”

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<sup>6</sup> Referring to Wagner’s quote: “A means of expression (music) has been made the ends, while the end of expression (the Drama) has been made a means” (Wagner, “Opera as Drama”). In Joyce’s address to the University of Dublin’s College Literary and Historical society, titled “Drama and Life,” he defined drama as the following:

By drama I understand the interplay of passions to portray truth; drama is strife, evolution, movement in whatever way unfolded; it exists, before it takes form, independently; it is conditioned but not controlled by its scene. . . . An idyllic portrait, or an environment of haystacks does not constitute a pastoral play, no more than rhodomontade and sermonising build up a tragedy. Neither quiescence nor vulgarity shadow forth drama. However subdued the tone of passions may be, however ordered the action or commonplace the diction, if a play or a work of music or a picture presents the everlasting hopes, desires and hates of us, or deals with a symbolic presentment of our widely related nature, albeit a phase of that nature, then it is drama. I shall not speak here of its many forms. In every form that was fit for it, it made an outburst, as when the first sculptor separated the feet. Morality, mystery, ballet, pantomime, opera, all these it speedily ran through and discarded. Its proper form “the drama” remains intact. (25)

follows Bloom around Dublin. In *Martha*, Lady Harriet begs the heroic tenor, Lyonel, to forgive her for rejecting him; forgiveness that Bloom either wants from Molly or hopes her to ask of him for her infidelity (Cohen). Referencing “The Last Rose of Summer,” Thomas Moore's Irish song used by Flotow in the aria “*Letzte Rose*,” Bloom writes the postscript to his appropriately named pen-pal Martha Clifford: “I feel so sad. P.S. So lonely blooming” (*U* 11.32). The aria hints at loneliness and an understanding that love is the antidote:

I'll not leave thee, thou lone one,  
 To pine on the stem;  
 Since the lovely are sleeping,  
 Go sleep thou with them;  
 'Thus kindly I scatter  
 Thy leaves o'er the bed  
 Where thy mates of the garden  
 Lie scentless and dead. (Moore)

Coming from Bloom's mind, this leitmotif evokes his contradictory psychological relationship with his wife: both needing her for himself and asking for her forgiveness for his impotence, while also assisting in her cuckoldry of him. Both Bloom and Molly can be placed in the role of the lonely rose to support either of Bloom's bifurcated feelings. Joyce's deft references to *Martha* as a leitmotif for Bloom creates the concise and dense associative web of subtexts that Wagner and French Symbolists admired.

According to Martin, Joyce was musically qualified to appreciate Wagner's operas "for he was a more serious and better-trained musician than nearly all the Wagnerites in the literary world," but his opinion of Wagner's music was rarely fully positive (Martin 6). Joyce's feelings that "the least part of Wagner [is] his music" may be due to the inconsistent exposure to actual performances of Wagner's music dramas throughout his life (27). While still living in Ireland, Joyce's second-hand knowledge of the music was limited by notoriously poor productions of Wagner's music dramas. Due to the high production costs of Wagner's operas—lavish scenery, large orchestra, and endurance singers—Joyce and Ireland's other opera devotees heard his works infrequently and only by regional companies (15-16). Many of these performances were unstaged orchestral excerpts or private salon concerts of piano transcriptions. Thus, the Irish predominantly knew of Wagner through his literary influences rather than through his actual music. It was not until Joyce left for Paris in 1904 and lived on the Continent that he saw full professional performances.<sup>7</sup> It is evident from Joyce's letters that he had attended performances of many of Wagner's operas—namely, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, *Götterdämmerung*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Die Meistersinger*—and was familiar with all of his works (Martin, "...Artist-Hero" 132). This contradiction of belittling Wagner's music but being intimately knowledgeable about it creates an interesting space to explore the influence of one artist on the other. Joyce both venerates and disparages Wagner in *Ulysses*, highlighting a critical point when his opinions of Wagner were in flux. This may

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<sup>7</sup> Before Joyce left Ireland in 1904, only *The Flying Dutchman* and *Lohengrin* were produced there. (Martin, "Joyce, Wagner, and the Artist-hero" 67); Alfred Loewenberg, *Annals of Opera: 1597-1940*, 3rd ed. rev. (Rowman and Littlefield, 1978), pp. 826, 885.

also explain Joyce's preference for the dramatic elements of Wagner's works and why he uses the leitmotif as a literary vehicle for exploring the emotional depths of his own characters.

### **Joyce, the Female Myth, and Irish Feminism**

Joyce's stance on gender power dynamics is difficult to pin down due to the contradictory statements in both his personal and public writing. On one hand, he openly supported women's suffrage, mocked machismo behavior, and disdained the Catholic Church's appropriation of the woman's body as a conjugal possession (Henke 2). In his writing he depicts independent women, rejects the notion of the self-sacrificing female, and adopts the feminist themes of writers like Henrik Ibsen, George Moore, and AE (Scott 47). On the other hand, Joyce was against the integration of women into universities,<sup>8</sup> participated in the misogynistic discourse of his androcentric culture, and had a limited depiction of independent women in his writing. Reconciling these contradictions bodes well for further unpacking the relationship between Joyce's female and male characters in his literary Dublin. Before embarking on this analysis, however, it is important to understand the context of gender identities and power dynamics in Joyce's life. One way to see this is by exploring Joyce's use of the feminine myth.

James Joyce's preoccupation with, and revision of, the Wagnerian gender dynamic merits an assessment of the mythical archetypes that Joyce employs. As Bonnie Kime Scott notes in her seminal feminist text *Joyce and Feminism*, Joyce's "eternal feminine" finds its roots in Celtic prehistory (96). Harriet Shaw Weaver's classification of

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<sup>8</sup> As can be seen between Stephen and Emma in *Stephen's Hero*.

Molly Bloom as “prehuman” and Joyce’s subsequent response that Molly is meant to “depict the earth which is prehuman and presumably posthuman,” plays into the Celtic cosmology of powerful earth goddesses (I: 180; Scott 96). Contrary to the oppression of Freudian and Catholic patriarchal systems that ruled Joyce’s Ireland, women of prehistory and myth had considerable power (Scott 9). Earth-oriented cultures were predominantly matriarchal due to the feminine dominance over the agricultural and domestic spheres.<sup>9</sup> Mythical goddesses—including Dana, the White Goddess, and Brigid—served as fertile maternal figures, often depicted as oscillating between the beautiful youth and the old hag, but remaining powerful in both characterizations (10). It was this ancient feminine power that Joyce instilled into his Irish women: Mary Dedalus,<sup>10</sup> Molly Bloom, and Kathleen ni Houlihan,<sup>11</sup> amongst others.

While other authors use contemporary and elegant females as manifestations of Ireland—as William Butler Yeats did with his muse Maude Gonne—Joyce chooses the earthly goddess of Irish myth as a model.<sup>12</sup> In Celtic history, women held spiritual and sexual power, which Joyce valued and infused into some of his female characters. Scott illustrates this mythic power of Joyce’s women by comparing them to the gargoyle-like

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<sup>9</sup> The Milesians, Ireland’s basic Celtic group, worshiped the Tuatha de Danaan or “the people of the goddess Dana,” a pantheon of deities ruled by matriarchy. This cosmology was built upon goddesses that represented “creator and lawmaker of the universe, prophetess, provider of human destinies, inventor, healer and reliant leader in battle” (Scott 10).

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Dedalus’ mother.

<sup>11</sup> The female personification of Ireland, originally named Caitlín Ní hUallacháin. This archetype was made popular by W. B. Yeats’ play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. Despite being described as the Poor Old Woman in the play, the beautiful Maude Gonne played her in 1902, embodying the duality of the simultaneously beautiful and hag-like Irish goddesses (MacKillop, “Caitlín”).

<sup>12</sup> Scott adds François Rabelais as inspiration as well (21).

medieval stone carvings called Sheela-na-gig. Sheela are often depicted with grotesque faces, skeletal breast-less torsos, and crouching to expose their exaggerated genitalia. While the exact meaning of these female depictions are unknown, they are nonetheless symbols of female power.<sup>13</sup> Whether Joyce aims to create a symbolic archetype—as many androcentric scholars argue—or a depiction of realistic sexual women, the anti-Victorian eternal feminine that arises in the women of *Ulysses* provides insight into the society that Joyce is critiquing in his presentation of gender.

The historical power granted to women in early Ireland contrasts greatly with the overbearing patriarchal and Catholic society Joyce knew. By the eighteenth century, English law and plantations had abolished Irish women's rights to own property, creating a newfound political dependence on men and marriage. This shift in gendered power dynamics created a legacy of submissive women, which eventually created the repressive Victorian expectations imposed upon them. Nineteenth-century Dublin's Catholicism, moral standards, and puritanical mindset gave women power only through their sex-role via marriage. The powerful and sexual women of Celtic lore were demonized as the passive Victorian woman became the cultural ideal. In *Ulysses*, Joyce gives this anti-women voice to the Citizen and Mr. Deasey (Scott 13). Joyce abhorred women's alliance with the Catholic Church, calling them the "scullery-maid[s] of Christendom" (qtd. Scott 236). He particularly disliked how the Church preached for women to be submissive and ignorant of their own sexualities. As the twentieth century loomed closer, Irish women began to reclaim the power taken from them by Victorian England through the suffrage

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<sup>13</sup> They have been identified as symbols fertility of associated with the goddess in her hag form, charms against the evil eye, and warnings against temptresses from the church (Scott 12-13).

and Irish nationalist movement. While these movements illustrate a reclamation of female political power, they did not necessarily correlate with the change in personal sexual politics that Joyce advocated for.

Joyce lived in Ireland for twenty-two years before permanently immigrating to continental Europe; therefore, most of his conceptions of Irish sexual politics were formulated in his early life.<sup>14</sup> His social circle was predominantly made up of upper-middle class Catholics, while many were champions of women's rights and feminists—by the modern definition of gender equality—their sexual ideologies were quite tethered to the Victorian past. Scott notes that “reticence and naïveté about sexuality were typical of the young upper-middle class Catholic women of Joyce's acquaintances, whose manner Joyce protested” (34). Joyce came to know some of these young Catholic, nationalist women at the Sheehy family home (Scott 26). Joyce made this connection through his friend and schoolmate Francis Sheehy-Skeffington—the inspiration for McCann in *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*—who married Hanna Sheehy.<sup>15</sup> She and her three sisters—Kathleen, Margaret, and Mary—were ardent Irish nationalists. Kathleen, like Maude Gonne, worked to prevent evictions in Western Ireland. Her activism is fitting to her name, derived from the personification of Ireland Kathleen ni Hoolihan (26). Margaret and Hannah were a performer and playwright respectively. Mary, allegedly, was the object of Joyce's affection and the muse for some of his *Chamber Music* poems (27).

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<sup>14</sup> I adopt Suzette Henke's definition of “sexual politics,” using the term politics to “delineate those struggles and maneuvers involved in the psychosocial construction of gender” (Henke 10).

<sup>15</sup> *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* will henceforth be referred to as *Portrait*.

Joyce's complicated friendship with Sheehy-Skeffington illustrates how Joyce's stance on women's rights and sexuality differed from most of the Irish intelligentsia. Skeffington was an ardent women's right champion who worked with his wife to gain women the parliamentary vote. Contrary to their fictional personas in *Portrait*, Joyce and Sheehy-Skeffington worked together closely on anti-university establishment publications (Scott 31). It was during this time that their ideological differences came to light, which created tension later in life when they each married very different women. Francis and Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington had an aversion to sexual intercourse based on the notion of equality amongst the sexes, and that sex was inherently oppressive to women. Therefore, they had a fairly sex-less marriage save for reproductive purposes. Theirs was not a brand of feminism that Joyce prescribed to, as he needed a more "natural woman," which he found in the hotel maid Nora Barnacle (34). Independent minded and as sexually perverted as Joyce, Nora embodied the sensual, earthly woman that inspired Molly Bloom. Sheehy-Skeffington and Joyce each disapproved of the other's marriage due to their different ideologies on female sexuality. Joyce's fairly radical, and arguably feminist and sex-positive, ideological stance is integral to understanding how he subverts the Wagnerian artist-hero and self-sacrificing woman dynamic.

As a writer, women were integral to Joyce's rise in fame. It was predominantly women who published, read, and shared his works. Scott offers a comprehensive look at the women and feminists that surrounded Joyce during his lifetime. She also provides a reading of his major female characters in light of this social background and his female

audience's critical responses to his works. In this scope, Scott considers the mythology and politics of Irish and Continental feminism, as well as the influence of the women in Joyce's family and professional circle. Robert McAlmon remarked on this relationship between Joyce's work and women: "It is some kind of commentary on the period that Joyce's work and acclaim should have been fostered mainly by high-minded ladies, rather than by men" (42). Joyce owes much of his literary success to these women.

*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* was first published by feminist philosopher Dora Marsden in *The Egoist*, a literary magazine formerly known as *The Free Woman* (1911-1912) and *The New Freewoman* (1913) (Scott 86). Marsden and Joyce shared the same view of gender equality in that they were both concerned with whatever limited the spiritual freedom of individuals, regardless of sex (86). Another woman instrumental to Joyce's success was Harriet Shaw Weaver: benefactress, editor, and family friend. The reticent reformer and quiet Marxist was one of the first to take note of Joyce's writing. Maria Jolas, a mutual friend, said that Joyce "wrote to [Weaver] just as if he were writing to another man, and an intelligent one in whom he had confidence" (93). In her many letters, Weaver offered rich edits and insightful criticism of Joyce's manuscripts. Most notable are her letters on the "Nausicaa," "Oxen of the Sun," and "Penelope" episodes, which Scott points out are those focusing on male-female difference (94). Sylvia Beach, the American founder and owner of the Shakespeare and Company bookstore and press in Paris, had a tempestuous yet important relationship with Joyce. Best known as the intrepid publisher of *Ulysses*, Beach described herself as the "midwife" of the book (222). "It was always women who were publishing Joyce," as

Beach once said, but it was also women who were buying, reading, circulating, and discussing Joyce (*Sylvia Beach Parle De James Joyce*).

All of the personal connections to male and female feminists complicates instances when scholars charge Joyce with blatant “chauvinism” and “misogyny.”<sup>16</sup> These are easy claims to make when reading *Ulysses*, a book ostensibly full of demeaning and frivolous depictions of women like Gerty McDowell and the focus on Molly’s cuckoldry. The same argument could be made for Wagner and his self-sacrificing women. But the contradictory tension between the moments of his appreciation of female sexuality and moments of his misogyny is something worth unravelling. Many feminist readers of both Joyce and Wagner have wrestled with the question: how can we love the works of these artists but reject the misogynist stories they tell? While Wagner is more overtly misogynistic in his pawn-like use of female characters—and my focus is not to reclaim Wagner as a feminist—Joyce’s tinkering with these Wagnerian archetypes leaves a thread left to unravel and discuss in regards to women with agency.

### **Feminist Scholarship on *Ulysses***

Feminist scholarship on Joyce has expanded significantly since Scott published *Joyce and Feminism*, one of the first scholars to engage in a feminist reading of Joyce. My work poses the unique challenge of marrying Scott and other feminist Joyce critics with the feminist critics of Richard Wagner. The two artists share similar sources of inspiration—myth and accepted gender norms—by which their female characters are

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<sup>16</sup> Feminist critics of the 1970 brought feminist ideology to the forefront, such as Carolyn Heilbrun who calls Joyce a “misogynist, a man who hates women for becoming what he has determined they should be” in her “Afterword” to *Women in Joyce*.

shaped. Namely, the women are placed within the androcentric contradictory archetypes of the Virgin and Temptress that differentiate the redeemer of men from the ruiner of men. While some feminist critics reject all archetypes in an effort to erase this male tendency in scholarship to categorize—see Suzette Henke and Elaine Unkeless’ *Women in Joyce*—I choose to use these archetypes as a foundational means of comparison between Joyce and Wagner.<sup>17</sup> Within Joyce scholarship, the two camps, scholars that argue that of the savior Virgin Mary and scholars who argue that of the dangerous sexual woman, have often existed as mutually exclusive; however, I believe that the women in these works inhabit a nuanced place between these two archetypes, depicting naturally complex humans with agency of their own.

Scholars like Scott and Henke argue that the women of *Ulysses* arise from the socially engrained depiction of female sexuality as simultaneously dangerous and empowering for men. Scott opens *Joyce and Feminism* with an introduction to the challenges of writing about Joyce in feminist terms. Writing in 1984, Scott aligns with Sandra M. Gilbert’s challenge to integrate feminist approaches into the more traditional male-centric criticism rather than the isolated feminist criticism, which was solely written for feminists in the 1970s.<sup>18</sup> Due to the predominantly androcentric scholarship of Joyce, Scott argues that there is much to be done in terms of “compensatory work.” She says that male critics often opt for the more archetypal reading of Joyce’s women over the

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<sup>17</sup> For defense of archetypal reading see Annis Pratt’s *Archetypal Patterns in Women’s Fiction*. Pg. 5-7.

<sup>18</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert’s challenge that Scott is responding to: “While it is obviously important for women of letters to talk with passion and condition to and about each other, I think it is just as important for us to talk to—and be heard by—our male colleagues” (Scott 1). Scott further notes Gilbert’s observation that “just as female texts have so far been written mostly in patriarchal contexts, male texts have in some sense always been written about or for women” (2).

more realistic (Scott 3). Scott also asserts that Joyce himself took part in compensatory feminist criticism by portraying the parts of women's lives that were hidden behind closed doors. "He restored strong women to their central roles in mythic literature, searching little-known myths and reinterpreting the classic ones" (4).

Suzette A. Henke similarly explores Joycean feminist literary criticism in *James Joyce and the Politics of Desire*. Like Scott, she opens her discussion by questioning how Joyce can be reclaimed for feminists; however, starting from a more critical view of Joyce. Henke claims him to be "a chauvinist author singularly devoted to projects of male linguistic mastery and to a celebration of what Jacques Lacan calls the primordial 'signifier of signifiers,' the Freudian phallus" (1). She argues that Joyce uses women to serve as both phallic and maternal; loved and loathed; "narcissistic virgin and phallic mother" (2). Joyce's women are often portrayed within the "problematic context of maternity," like Mary Daedalus and Molly Bloom (3). Despite this criticism, Henke argues that Joyce's view of women can be redeemed when viewed as a subversion of contemporary gender roles:

He challenged an authoritarian power structure and satirized patriarchal privilege. By comically deflating sex-role stereotypes of masculine prowess and feminine passivity, Joyce tends to advocate more enlightened principles of androgynous behavior in the complex politics of desire that govern sexual transactions. (4)

It is exactly this exploration of Joyce's subversion of these "sex-role stereotypes" that I wish to extend to the Wagnerian element in *Ulysses*. More specifically, taking Henke's

argument to analyze how Joyce satirizes and subverts Wagner's self-sacrificing woman and the Virgin and Temptress archetypes that hold it up.

Lesley Higgins argues that Joyce not only documents the Virgin and Temptress tropes, but also affirms the misogynist ideas inherently tied to them. In "'Lovely Seaside Girls' or 'Sweet Murderers of Men'?: Fatal Women in *Ulysses*," Higgins identifies the women in *Ulysses* as "paradigmatically fatal women" who are portrayed through the misogynist trope of being doubly destructive and beneficial (47). While these two elements are indeed ingrained into the women of *Ulysses*, Higgins argues that Joyce promotes these archetypes to devalue and dehumanize women. I argue that Joyce's women, although living in this duality, use it to their advantage and move between these roles to gain sexual autonomy, amongst other freedoms. Molly is unapologetically sexual while still providing spiritual comfort to Bloom. Gerty is a sexual Temptress, while embodying the Virgin Mary. These women transcend simple characterization by creating a spectrum between the extreme archetypes of Virgin and Temptress. While scholars like Higgins argue that this subversion is too regionally focused on Irish woman to confidently label *Ulysses* as an all-encompassing feminist text, analyzing the gender power structure through the Germanic and Wagnerian archetypes combats this argument.

### **The Musical Semantics of Gender in Wagner**

Wagner's treatment of gender arises from the Enlightenment ideals of freedom and equality, but with a bourgeois adjustment that removes the threat to the dominant position of men in society. This adjustment results in the self-sacrificing woman. She

willingly steps down from the “equal” position, sacrificing her autonomy, so that the man can assume the more dominant role. In her book *Richard Wagner's Women*, Eva Rieger explores how Wagner used gender, not just in terms of creating his characters, but also in the gendered musical semantics of his operas (4-5). According to Rieger, Wagner expresses gender through linguistic metaphor and the semantic power of his music. Musical semantics is the concept of universal tonal carriers of certain feelings. Generally, slow music written in a minor key conveys sadness or weakness, while fast tempi convey action or movement. These motifs are not strictly bearers of semantic meaning, but they also convey the emotions present in the characters at that moment. In his operas, Wagner’s gendered musical semantics hinge on the emotions he associates with femininity and masculinity.

As related to his treatment of gender, the subservience of women to men can be seen semantically expressed in his music. The tragic sibling motif connecting the incestuous lovers Siegmund and Sieglinde features the two characters: a tragic descending figure signifies Siegmund’s impending failure and a hopeful ascending figure depicts Sieglinde. Rieger argues that the rising phrase signifies the hope and love that Sieglinde gives her brother-lover, thus the music enforces her role as a self-sacrificing source of comfort. Siegmund’s interiority is expressed directly through the music, while Sieglinde is depicted from the androcentric lens of what she brings to him. Wagner’s use of gendered motifs across his works creates a new language as he subtly changes the phrases to suit the context. Like many writers influenced by literary Wagnerianism, Joyce employs these literary leitmotifs throughout *Ulysses* to convey certain contexts or draw

comparisons. Unlike many of these writers, however, Joyce does not simply use motives to carry a static meaning, but his motifs are multifaceted conveyers of emotional context. His references to Wagner's artist-hero and self-sacrificing woman dynamic are an example of such as he subverts this dynamic while employing Wagnerian literary techniques.

### **Rebel Women of *Ulysses*: Transcending Misogynist Archetypes**

The Wagnerian self-sacrificing woman is a cipher, empty and malleable, shaped and used by the artist-hero for his eternal salvation. While the male characters find redemption through this relationship, the women gain no autonomy or comparable personal development of their own. The literary idea of the self-sacrificing woman is held up by the fixed gender dynamic of the dominating man and subjugated woman. A woman's deference or refusal of this dynamic is characterized by two archetypes: the Virgin and the Temptress respectively. The Virgin fulfills the misogynist "ideal of a woman's...fanatic loyalty" to their tormented artist-heroes (Dreyfus 74). In *Der fliegende Holländer*, Senta fits the Virgin trope as her love for the Dutchman is only consummated in a dream and at the end of the opera she commits the ultimate sacrifice, suicide, to save the Dutchman from his immortal curse. This sacrificing Virgin is countered by the *femme fatale* Temptress who leads the artist-hero off his path. Kundry from *Parsifal* is the quintessential Temptress whose alluring sexuality is fatal to men. The Temptress is often negatively portrayed, only becoming a sympathetic character when she switches into the Virgin role. This happens to Kundry at the end of the opera when she helps Parsifal succeed, but this leads to her death. Thus, a depiction of a woman with sexual autonomy

still has no power since her identity is still derived from men. Most, if not all, of Wagner's artist-heroes fulfill their roles on the backs of the self-sacrificial woman. This solidifies the strict gendered power dynamics the Wagnerian cult promoted. Joyce, however, writes his women to blur the lines between these two archetypes by making them independent and sexually autonomous individuals. Jumping in between the Virgin and Temptress archetypes makes them be both, and thus, they are wholly neither.

#### Molly: The Cosmic Mistress of Dublin

Marion "Molly" Bloom has fascinated scholars since her appearance in "Penelope." There has been special attention paid to whether Molly is a realistic or symbolic character, and therefore, whether to exalt or denigrate her. Most scholarship on Molly, according to Mark Shechner, relegates her to one of two camps: "earth mother" or "satanic mistress" (198). These camps align with the two archetypes I employ in this paper: the Virgin and the Temptress. The "earth-mother," like the proverbial Virgin Mary, is a maternal symbol of reconciliation and spiritual comfort. Bloom and early interpreters of Molly see her as "Gea-Tellus, the fertile earth, the compliant body," which fulfills the subordinate and virginal self-sacrificing woman role (198). The latter "satanic mistress" camp was championed by Hugh Kenner in *Dublin's Joyce*, where Dublin is Hell and Molly is the satanic ruler (262). She is a temptress to all men who can be led astray in Ireland's capital. According to scholars of this camp, Molly's sexuality, infidelity, and bitter judgment of others in "Penelope" constitute a significant objection to the "earth mother" argument.

This scholarly effort to classify Molly as solely one trope, however, is inherently a masculine process of devaluing women. To vilify or venerate women is still to objectify them and rob them of their autonomy. Men, specifically male artist-heroes, justify their contradictory obsession and fear of women by defining them as either the benevolent cosmos or dangerous flesh. Both the Virgin and Temptress archetypes, although pitted against each other, are still mythic abstractions of Molly that reduce her to a cypher. I argue that Molly cannot be easily placed into either role since she inhabits a space in between the two. She is the source of cosmic comfort to Bloom while she is simultaneously the cause of his sexual torment. Molly's power and independence comes from this defiance of categorization, just like the Celtic goddesses who were powerful in their dual roles as old hags and beautiful youths. Joyce himself offered contradictory evidence as to which camp he intended Molly to inhabit. In letters to Shaw Weaver, Joyce says she is the cosmic Earth mother, depicted as the "earth which is prehuman and presumably posthuman" (1: 180). But in letters to Frank Budgen—painter, friend, and confidant—Joyce depicts Molly as the bodily "flesh that always affirms" (*Letters* I: 170). Joyce viewed women as both the "untouched and the untouchable," inhabiting a nuanced place between the two extremes (Henke 2). Fritz Senn similarly argues that Molly is a synthesis of the "three archetypal manifestations of the Feminine": the Virgin, the Mother, and the Whore (282). This lack of a clear symbolic classification is a subtle way that Joyce upsets the Wagnerian archetype of the self-sacrificing woman, making her less a mythical trope and more a realistically complex human.

Molly constantly moves across a spectrum of extremes, consciously switching between the Virgin and Temptress archetypes when recalling her sexually active teenage years in Gibraltar. Within the single “Penelope” episode, Molly recalls her major sexual milestones, moving from her first kiss to her most intense erotic memory. These moments are juxtaposed by their mutual rose leitmotif: white rose for innocence and red rose for seduction. Molly reminisces about how she wore a “white rose” when she was going to meet Lieutenant Mulvey, “the first man [that] kissed” her (*U* 18.768-69). White is traditionally associated with virginity and innocence, a fitting color for Molly to mention when she remembered in her naïveté that “it never entered [her] head what kissing meant till he put his tongue in [her] mouth” (*U* 18.770-71). This first sexual revelation recapitulates later in the episode with a modified rose leitmotif, now red instead of white. The switch to red is sparked by Molly’s most fiery erotic memory: her and Bloom’s engagement and consummation on Howth’s Head. Henke argues that it is “a romantic epiphany sufficiently powerful to revive, sixteen years later, the smoldering embers of a moribund marriage” (Henke 149). This memory is the sexual antithesis of Molly’s first kiss, as she and Bloom consummate what was left unconsummated between Molly and Mulvey.

Gibraltar as a girl when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used or shall I wear a red yes and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall...and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes. (*U* 18.1602-9)

The rose in her hair flows into her first kiss and back to her skilled seduction of Bloom. The roses blur the distinctions between Virgin and Temptress while simultaneously acknowledging the differences between the two.

Molly's association with roses ties her to Wagner and his depiction of Venus. Beyond the flower's use as a leitmotif for Molly's melding of archetypes, roses were integral to Wagner's creative process. Wagner's masculinity was constantly in question by the press, not only for the "perverse sexuality" seen in his operas, but also with his fetish for wearing pink silks and smelling rose perfumes (Dreyfus 135). He found it difficult to compose without them, in a letter writing how "I have my bathtub below my 'studio,' as I like to smell the perfumes rising" (Wagner, *Selected Letters* 879). These roses infused themselves into his operas, especially into Venus from *Tannhäuser*. Venus' sexual authority parallels Molly's when she is playing the role of the Temptress. Simply the mention of Venus' name evokes an intoxicating scent of perfumes, which the artist-hero Tannhäuser cannot resist. He wishes to find comfort by laying his head on Venus' "warm breast" and breathing in the "rosy mists" (Dreyfus 90). Venus is a unique woman in Wagner's world: she is the premier seductress with complete independence, but is not vilified as sinfully evil by the artist-hero. In order for the artist-hero to gain this comfort and rest from Venus, however, he must relinquish his masculine dominance. Dreyfus discusses how Tannhäuser desires to submit to her sexual authority: "To you, Lady Venus, I return, in the magic of your holy night, to your court I climb down" (90). This descent into the Venusberg, and in the gender hierarchy, threatens the artist-hero with his potential downfall. But Dreyfus continues that "from a Wagnerian vantage point...the

worst that can be said for his fantasy of female domination is that, after a while, it becomes a bit stifling, and one needs to come up for fresh air,” as Tannhäuser does when he leaves the Venusberg (91). Through Venus, Wagner meant to elevate the erotic out of sin. The 1852 prose program for *Tannhäuser* defined Venus’ role as “the exultation of the Venusberg itself, redeemed from the curse of sinfulness, which we hear amid the holy hymn” (Dreyfus 78; Wagner, *Dichtungen und Schriften* 107). The parallel between Tannhäuser’s desire (laying his head on Venus’ “warm breast” and breathing in the “rosy mists”) and the finale of “Penelope” (“so he could feel my breasts all perfume”) is of particular interest to exploring Joyce’s blending of the Virgin and Temptress archetypes (*U* 18.1607-8). Paralleling Molly to Venus illuminates the similar role she plays in *Ulysses*. Molly’s dominating, yet comforting, sexuality gives her the power to dismantle the self-sacrificing woman trope.

Molly’s comfort with and autonomy over her own thoughts and body allows her to control her life without relying on the sponsorship and authority of a male figure. From her detailed monologue regarding sexual positions, the pros and cons of oral sex, and a description of her orgasms, Molly’s sexual thoughts are never filtered through social conventions, like those of Gerty MacDowell’s, which will be discussed in the next section. Molly’s language is not constrained by the patriarchal rules of punctuation and grammar, what can be referred to as Jacques Derrida’s “phallogocentrism.” (OED). The entire “Penelope” episode is packed into only eight sentences with arbitrary punctuation and separation of thought. If one accepts Lacan’s connection of the phallus as logos, then Molly’s free speech in “Penelope” is “unrestrained by the limits of logocentric authority”

and thus inhabiting a space where she can freely criticize and refuse to cow tow to masculine authority (Henke 130).

Molly's freedom of language translates into the freedom she has with her body. Unlike the sexual naïveté of the Sheehy-Skeffingtons and other such Irish Catholic women, Molly is comfortable with her own body and the sexual pleasures she can gain from it. Molly had a delightful fascination with her female body when she was younger, remembering her young breasts: "I loved looking down at them I was jumping up at the pepper trees" (*U* 18: 850-1). As an adult, she does not relinquish ownership of her body to her husband. Molly goes against the passivity expected of a wife and a self-sacrificing woman by actively addressing her own sexual needs above everyone else's. "I wished he was here or somebody to let myself go with and come again like that I feel all fire inside me" (*U* 18.584-5). She could remain faithful and patiently wait for Bloom to rekindle their sexual relationship, but she does not, and instead pursues Blazes Boylan. While she does decide to "just give [Bloom] one more chance," this is after she has already slept with Boylan and recounts her active role in getting him into her bed (*U* 18.1487-98).

Molly's rejection of marital monogamy and her active, rather than solely passive, pursuit of suitors shows her agency as the lead engineer of all her relationships. Molly's dominance is most evident in the scene where she first meets Bloom before they are nuptially tied. He recalls how "first I saw [Molly] at Mat Dillon's" party where they played musical chairs and she sang a concert (*U* 11.725). Molly has full control of the situation throughout, toying with Bloom to make him chase her. Bloom was "after her" during a game of musical chairs as she prowled "round and round slow" before "down

she sat” (*U* 11.726-28). The short sentences mimic Bloom’s aroused shortness of breath and fixate solely on Molly. The song she chooses, “Waiting,” is about a woman waiting for the arrival of her lover. A deliberate topic as she imposes this anticipation onto Bloom, who she asked to turn the pages of her sheet music as she sang. Standing close to Molly, Bloom recounts her “bosom I saw, both full” and the intoxicating Venus-like perfume that follows him around Dublin. Bloom also comments on how Molly’s “Spanishy eyes” are “luring. Ah, alluring” (*U* 11.731-33). Molly is fully conscious of the power she has over Bloom since she references her breasts, perfume, and eyes at the passionate end of “Penelope.” Molly’s sexual pursuits extend beyond Bloom, however, unshackling her from any self-sacrificing fanatical devotion to one artist-hero.

The leitmotif of Molly’s impending affair is the “jingle jingle jaunted jingling” of agitated “brass quoits,” a noise that slips in and out of Bloom’s mind all day (*U* 4.59; *U* 11.15). The intruder into the Bloom’s mind and bed is Blazes Boylan, a baritone who is to tour singing with Molly. Molly is instantly intrigued by Blazes and his fetish-like fixation on her feet when she was “in the D B C with Poldy” (*U* 18.247). Enticed by the ideal of taking him as her lover, she returns to the place she expects him to be “for tea 2 days after in the hope but he wasn’t [sic]” (*U* 18.258-59). She is actively pursuing someone of her choosing, who is decidedly not her husband, making herself independent from Bloom and not needing him for her identity. Molly thinks that “its [sic] all his own fault if I am an adulteress,” since cuckoldry is “what [Bloom] wanted, that his wife is fucked yes...not by him” (*U* 18.1510-11. 1516). Molly also uses her knowledge of Bloom’s sexual indiscretions as justification for her own infidelity. Even though Molly and Bloom have

not had sex in over ten years, she is aware of Bloom's rampant, yet unconsummated, lust. Molly knows of his correspondence with Martha Clifford and wonders about his pen name Henry Flowers: "what kind of flowers are those they invented like the stars" (*U* 18.1545). Although Molly is a Temptress who disregards monogamy, she still inhabits her role as earth mother through her non-sexual support and comfort of Bloom. She still loves her husband and takes pride in her knowledge of Bloom's idiosyncrasies: "hed [sic] never find another woman like me to put up with him the way I do," "nobody understands his cracked ideas but me" (*U* 19: 232-3.1407). Love cuts through the acerbic complaints as she reminisces about her and Bloom's life as a young couple. This shifting between the two archetypes characterizes Molly's mind in "Penelope," which is unlike any other in *Ulysses* and offers unique insight into Joyce's conception of gender.

Molly is the only first-person female conscious in *Ulysses* and the only depiction of a woman not told from a masculine perspective. This sets "Penelope" and Molly apart from the rest of the novel's episodes and characters. Readings of the stream of consciousness "Penelope" episode range from presenting her as excluded and other-ed, as Henke and Higgins argue, to women entering into and shaking up the male dominated voices of *Ulysses*. Henke states that Molly has been "excluded from male discursively" because her speech is "hysterical" (Henke 127). Higgins argues that Molly is totally excluded from the realm of male discussion as Joyce attaches "Penelope" to the end of the traditional Homeric structure, almost as an afterthought. I argue that Molly's exclusion from the male realm makes her the female "other," which prevents her from partaking in the patriarchal structures that control her. Just like how Venus is separate

from the patriarchal power dynamic—she creates her own pleasure cave separate from society, where she reigns supreme and controls men and gods alike to do her bidding—Molly gets to do the same from her warm bed cave. She is in a position to criticize the patriarchal subjugation of women and thus overturn it.

Molly criticizes the underpinning sexual difference of the artist-hero and self-sacrificing woman, and the double standards that result from it. Henke notes that:

Molly feels dissatisfied with woman's condition of social and cultural powerlessness and, though lacking rhetorical skills to articulate her discontent, decries the violent consequences of male political aggression.

(138)

Molly is frustrated because she is stuck in the confines of a one-dimensional female identity that has been imposed on her by the patriarchal society's expectations, so she spins herself into complexity through her mental loges. From her outside perspective, Molly muses and mocks the artist-hero's dependence on women: "they're so weak and puling when they're sick they want a woman" (*U* 18.23). Despite this supposed weakness, Molly ironically points out the one-sided sexual benefit in the gendered dynamics: "nice invention they made for women for him to get all the pleasure" (*U* 18.157). This double standard implicit in the artist-hero and self-sacrificing relationship is one of the many criticisms Molly spits out. Seeing the flaws of this system, she proposes an alternative matriarchal utopia full of dominant women who do not adhere to the artist-hero's desires:

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. (*U* 18. 1434-39)

This moment directly criticizes the violence and lack of self-accountability promoted by artist-hero masculinity.

Molly's blending of the Virgin and Temptress archetypes collapses the self-sacrificing woman, a concept that relies on the maintenance of these fixed binary gender conventions. The agency she gains from her sexual autonomy negatively impacts the artist-hero aspirations of Leopold Bloom—who will be discussed in greater detail later—and thus subverts the accepted oppressive patriarchal structure of the nineteenth and twentieth century.

#### Gerty: The Virgin's Tempting Fireworks

"Nausicaa," as it precedes "Penelope," is the first episode in which there is an extended narrative of a woman's consciousness. The first half of this bifurcated episode follows Gerty MacDowell's internal narrative as she sits upon Sandymount strand, and moves to Bloom's sexualized reminiscence of her for the latter half. Unlike Molly's first-person flowing speech in "Penelope," Gerty's thoughts are a sentimental pastiche of Victorian romance novels and beauty advertisements, ostensibly creating the idealized twentieth-century girl: proper, young, consumed by impressing men, virginal, and the perfect self-sacrificing woman for an artist-hero. Gerty is the type of girl who "crimsoned at the idea of...saying an unladylike thing" and like the Virgin Mary is a "Refuge of

sinner. Comfortress [sic] of the afflicted. *Ora pro nobis*" (U 13. 264-65. 442).<sup>19</sup> Thus, like Molly, many scholars relegate Gerty to an archetypical role: the Virgin. In this light, Gerty is a vessel of cultural codes without agency, existing as a commodity to be used by men. Thomas Richards and Gerry Leonard describe Gerty as purely a social construct, carefully aligning her personality and looks to fit the script of social norms to win the marriage game. Colin MacCabe argues that she is yet another Joycean example of "female denial of female sexuality" (125-26). According to these scholars, any expression of Gerty's sexuality is a calculated move solely meant to gain a husband and become a subservient wife. Gerty would therefore be the ideal Wagnerian woman. While these are important readings, they deny Gerty sexual agency, or any agency at all. I argue that Gerty subtly evades archetypical labels of either Virgin or Temptress, and the gender conventions that define them, through her personal and sexual agency exhibited and related to each archetype. By being both a Virgin and Temptress, she is wholly neither, but a realistic and complex human exemplifying elements of both. Her sexual agency in particular can be seen when looking through the lens of Wagner's erotic musical semantics. In emulating and undermining Wagner, Joyce creates a space for Gerty to defy the artist-hero's sacrificial command.

Gerty complicates the ideal Wagnerian woman as she inhabits both Virgin and Temptress archetypes, not easily staying within one. She is not Tannhäuser's chaste Elisabeth nor is she sensuous Venus. As Gerty walks away from Bloom post-orgasm, he compares her to a "nun or a negress," describing her as celibate and hyper-sexual in the

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<sup>19</sup> See Senn, Fitz. "Nausicaa." for a detailed textual comparison of Gerty and Mary.

same breath.<sup>20</sup> She is connected to the Virgin Mary through their mutual association with the color blue, her eyes “were of the bluest Irish blue” and she wore “a neat blouse of electric blue” (*U* 13.898). Gerty is also a source of comfort for the sinner just like Mary; “there was an infinite store of mercy in those eyes, for him too a word of pardon even though he had erred and sinned and wandered” (*U* 13.748-49). This virginal description of Gerty, however, seems ironic in light of her fueling Bloom’s voyeuristic sexual desire. She is a highly sexualized virgin; Bloom imagines her saying “I’m all clean come and dirty me” (*U* 13.797). She emulates the pornographic “mutoscope pictures in Capel street” when she was sure “there was no-one to see only him” before she “revealed all her graceful beautifully shaped legs like that, supply soft and delicately rounded” (*U* 13.794. 697-99). This conscious pornographic display seems out of character for a girl who is constantly compared to the Virgin Mary and consumes novels asserting Victorian ideals of innocence. Joyce’s sexual portrayal of the Virgin goes beyond an imposition of male fantasy, as further investigation of Gerty’s motivations reveals a woman of personal and sexual agency.

At first glance Gerty may seem to offer up her body and autonomy for Bloom’s sexual salvation; however, Gerty is really in it for her own gains. She is searching for the financial and emotional security that her alcoholic father denied her. “Had her father only avoided the clutches of the demon drink” she may not be so strategic in her search for an ideal husband to secure a safe future for herself (*U* 13.290). Gerty “was pronounced beautiful by all who knew her” and she is quite aware that Bloom’s hungry gaze “is for

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<sup>20</sup> In “A Crippled Erotic,” Dominika Bednarska discusses how a stereotype of women of African descent was that they were hyper sexual beings.

you, Gertrude MacDowell, and you know it” (*U* 13.81-82. 566-67). These are not merely the narcissistic musings of a materialistic girl, but a woman strategically honing a tool she uses to get what she wants. “Gerty’s crowning glory was her wealth of wonderful hair. It was dark brown with a natural wave in it,” but Gerty works to enhance her natural gifts since “she had [her hair] cut that very morning” (*U* 13.15-17). Knowing that Bloom was watching her on the beach, she swung her feet “thoughtfully” so as to teasingly expose her transparent stockings (*U* 13.425). This is the beginning of her “peep show” for him as she eventually gives him full view of her skirts for his masturbatory aid. This intentional sexual display is not, as some previously mentioned scholars argue, devoid of Gerty’s own sexual desires.<sup>21</sup> The structure and language used by Gerty in “Nausicaa” evoke a woman with sexual desires and capabilities to fulfill it. To acknowledge this is to prove her side-stepping of the sacrificial role needed by Joyce’s Wagnerian artist-heroes. Her sexual autonomy is evident in the crest shape of the episode.

In the Gilbert schema for *Ulysses*, Joyce’s ascribes “Nausicaa” the technic of “tumescence and detumescence” (Gilbert). The narrative voices in the episode gradually climb to a climax and then quickly fall back down to neutrality—linguistically and erotically. Fritz Senn mentions the “upwards tendency” in Gerty’s speech and aspirations and the “sobering down” of Bloom’s thoughts after the climax of the episode (302). Gerty’s introduction is filled with language describing ascension: “a languid queenly hauteur...higharched instep...gentlewoman of high degree...patrician suitors at her feet” (*U* 13.97-103). This upward motion mimics Gerty’s rising aspirations, confidence,

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<sup>21</sup> MacCabe, Richards, Leonard, Higgins also mentions that Gerty desires an a-sexual marriage.

and independence as she looks to a future free of the domestic violence of her childhood. After the climactic fireworks show, Bloom's internal narrative brings the imagery downward and grounds it in everyday reality. His eyes are cast to the ground where he writes "I...AM. A." in the sand (*U* 13.1258. 1264). Senn points out how Bloom's rationality further deflates "Nausicaa" by stifling Gerty's idealistic aspirations and language with "customary objectifying qualifiers": "but," "I suppose," "all the same," "look at it other way round" (Senn 302; *U* 13. 775. 781. 776. 1219). This "tumescence and detumescence" is expressed linguistically throughout the episode, but the overall effect of this is an evocation of the erotic journey to and post orgasm.

This wave movement echoes Wagner's musical motif representing desire, especially in *Tristan und Isolde*. The constant musical and narrative undertones of rising, falling, and renewing Will once again leads to the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer. In addition to being greatly influenced by Schopenhauer's philosophical writings, Wagner aligned with his relation of music to sexual love. Schopenhauer believed that music becomes an analogy that conveys one's inner most desires and the human will. A progression of musical notes can be recognized by the human mind as the cycle of the Will striving, being satisfied, and striving anew. The Will, in this case, is sexual desire. While most composers explore sexual desire in their operas from an "aesthetic distance," an all-consuming erotic undercurrent practically drives all of Richard Wagner's music

dramas.<sup>22</sup> There are elements of eroticism in all of Wagner's operas but it is especially evident in virtually every moment of *Tristan und Isolde*, an opera that is particularly tied to Joyce in that it is based off of a Celtic story and famous for the driving chromatic eroticism that also flows through "Nausicaa." From the music drama's famous Tristan chord to the musically sensual scene of the lovers lying side by side, the overarching theme of the opera conveys unfulfilled desire that leads to the ideal *liebestod* (or love-death) that Tristan and Isolde never experience together, but Bloom and Gerty temporarily find their *liebestod* on the beach.<sup>23</sup>

Wagner began to apply the idea of musically mimicking sexual desire directly to *Tristan und Isolde*. Instead of having his leitmotifs reference the setting or plot, they aimed to convey the experiences of erotic love. He said that "in [my] other works the motives serve the plot, [whereas] here [in *Tristan*] one might say that the plot arises out of the motives" (Wagner, *Die Tagebücher* 728). The most famous motifs arise from the widely discussed Tristan chord. The prelude to *Tristan und Isolde* established several principle motifs that appear throughout the opera. The first four bars contain the descending chromatic phrase, its inverted chromatically rising four-note "desire" motif,

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<sup>22</sup> Dreyfus calls this his "erotics": a musical and personal obsession with sexual acts, desire, fantasies, suffering, and the artistic representation of each (Dreyfus 1). Wagner's fame, and infamy, came from his highly provocative musical and dramatic eroticism. Wagner's predecessors did not intend to arouse the audience with the music, but simply expressed the sexual intentions of their characters. This was not the case for Wagner, whose music evoked erotic feelings amongst those in the audience. Gustave Stoeckel, the first Professor of Music at Yale, wrote how "all that is sensual in human nature is wrought up to its wildest activity by the alluringly tempting music" (Gustave J. Stoeckel, "The Wagner Festival at Bayreuth," *The New Englander* 36 (1877), 276.) He cited the Finale of Act I in *Die Walküre* as an example (Ibid.). There are numerous accounts of listeners' experiencing similar physical responses to Wagner's music.

<sup>23</sup> The closing section of *Tristan und Isolde* is traditionally referred to as the "Liebestod," which translates to love death (Millington, Barry. "Tristan und Isolde." *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. Ed. Stanley Sadie. Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press. Web. 20 Mar. 2017.)

and the famous half-diminished Tristan chord that conjoins the two.<sup>24</sup> A half-diminished chord is traditionally used as a chord of dominant preparation but Wagner strips it of its expected musical convention and replaces the harmonic resolutions with long suspensions, making it lead to a French sixth. The use of suspensions fit into Schopenhauer's philosophy about art and ideas:

[The suspension] is a dissonance delaying the final consonance that is with certainty awaited; in this way the longing for it is strengthened, and its appearance affords the greater satisfaction. This is clearly an analogy of the satisfaction of the will which is enhanced through delay. (455-6)

The French sixth and rising figure are important in creating the erotic rise and it is telling that the Tristan chord is the source of the desire motif. French composer Hector Berlioz described the opening passage of *Tristan* as “a kind of chromatic moan” and recognized the “quintessential emblem of mimetic sexual desire” (Dreyfus 101). Joyce does the same in “Nausicaa,” to not only illustrate Bloom's sexual desire represented by the tumescence and detumescence of the phallus, but the climax—and existence—of Gerty's female sexual desire.

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<sup>24</sup> Wagner did not make this sexual connection to the half-diminished chord early on as it is associated with evil and plotting in *Lohengrin* and *Das Rheingold*. In the second act of *Die Walküre*, however, Wagner renounces the evil connotation and replaces it with unresolved desire. The chord is used when Brünnhilde tells Siegmund that he must forswear love and his soul must become a guardian of Valhalla. This renunciation of love explains why Wagner would associate this chord with the erotic love-drama *Tristan und Isolde* and portray “love as fearful torment,” a sentiment that Joyce's heldentenor, Bloom and Stephen, would echo as they take to the streets of Dublin to seek solace from their destructive love-lives (Dreyfus 99).

The height of the episode not only depicts the beachgoers' reactions to a fireworks show, but also depicts Gerty's sexual climax. While it is assumed that Bloom climaxes simultaneously, the fireworks/orgasm scene only describes what is happening to Gerty:

...she leaned back and the garters were blue to match on account of the transparent and they all saw it and they all shouted to look, look, there it was and she leaned back ever so far to see the fireworks and something queer was flying through the air, a soft thing, to and fro, dark. And she saw a long Roman candle going up over the trees, up, up, and, in the tense hush, they were all breathless with excitement as it went higher and higher and she had to lean back more and more to look up after it, high, high, almost out of sight, and her face was suffused with a divine, an entrancing blush from straining back and he could see her other things too, nainsook knickers, the fabric that caresses the skin, better than those other pettiwidth, the green, four and eleven, on account of being white and she let him and she saw that he saw and then it went so high it went out of sight a moment and she was trembling in every limb from being bent so far back that he had a full view high up above her knee where no-one ever not even on the swing or wading and she wasn't ashamed and he wasn't either to look in that immodest way like that because he couldn't resist the sight of the wondrous revealment half offered like those skirt dancers behaving so immodest before gentlemen looking and he kept on looking, looking. She would fain have cried to him chokingly, held out her snowy

slender arms to him to come, to feel his lips laid on her white brow, the cry of a young girl's love, a little strangled cry, wrung from her, that cry that has rung through the ages. And then a rocket sprang and bang shot blind blank and O! then the Roman candle burst and it was like a sigh of O! and everyone cried O! O! in raptures and it gushed out of it a stream of rain gold hair threads and they shed and ah! they were all greeny dewy stars falling with golden, O so lovely, O, soft, sweet, soft!

Then all melted away dewily in the grey air: all was silent. Ah! (*U* 13.715-41)

This passage is a condensed telling of the episode's erotic arc: the gradual building tension with the repetition of words "look," "up," "high," "looking," and the eventual big "O!" to a melting down into shining silence. Gerty "wasn't ashamed" to get herself to orgasm. Although aware of Bloom's scopophilia, she derives physical pleasure from her teasing erotic performance. It is an episode full of Gerty's blushes: "her face was suffused with a divine" (*U* 13.349).

This excerpt from "Nausicaa" echoes Wagner's prose program written for the *Tristan und Isolde* Paris concerts in 1860 (Dreyfus 103). With the program, he intended to highlight the erotic implications in the prelude, not by describing the movements of the music, but by effectively performing the erotic wave in words. It is not unlike Gerty's narration of the fireworks. Wagner maps out the erotic feelings and begins with the euphemism to sexual climax:

[The musician] therefore caused insatiable yearning to swell upwards in a long articulated breath...until the mightiest blast, the most violent effort to find the rupture which unlocks for the boundlessly craving heart the path into the sea of unending sexual bliss...until, in the final wilting.” (Dreyfus 103)

The climax and result of the erotic prelude are quite evident, and this crescendo and decrescendo occurs three times to take up almost half of the prelude. While the two lovers innocently lie next to each other on stage, the music carries on the image of lovemaking. Two contrasting musical phrases, or bodies, mimic each other’s plunging and rising movements. Although there are no explicit sexual acts occurring on stage, the music tells a much different story. The separation between stage and music is vital to the overarching theme of unfulfilled desire.<sup>25</sup> The program emulates the narrative weight of the music and emphasizes the power that Wagner evoking sexual acts through the

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<sup>25</sup> This overarching theme of sexual desire in both Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* and Joyce’s “*Nausicaa*” episode was said to be the cause of a moral “sickness” amongst the Wagnerian society and the United States. Many people criticized Wagner for making “sensuality itself the subject of his drama,” including the fan-turned-critic Frederic Nietzsche. He believed this eroticism was “not only socially unacceptable but amounted to a sickness that required a pseudo-clinical diagnosis and moral castigation.” Wagner did not see his characters as “sick” but as embodiments of universal moral and sexual dilemmas. The rise of modern and psychiatric music also made people hyper aware of impending diseases, even ones that can be caught from music. Usually the symptoms were sexual thoughts that made the listener more susceptible to succumbing to their weaknesses. Theodor Puschmann, a widely read psychiatrist, analyzed the composer’s personal and professional “moral degeneration” that arose after *Lohengrin*. This makes sense when looking at his later works such as *Tristan und Isolde* where there is adultery and *Die Walküre* where there is incest. Interestingly enough, Stoeckel said that his music somewhat justifies the incestuous relationship between Siegmund and Sieglinde to the listener because of the pure love and emotion that the music portrays. Frederic Nietzsche’s argument that Wagner’s listeners were infected with a moral illness is similar to the obscenity case *United States v. One Book Called Ulysses* when the “*Nausicaa*” episode arrive in America.

orchestra without explicitly conveying them on stage, just as Joyce evokes Gerty's sexual desire and orgasm without plainly stating these events.<sup>26</sup>

Gerty's arousal here is not an isolated incident, as the narrator informs us: "she felt the warm flush, a danger signal always with Gerty MacDowell, surging and flaming into her cheeks" (*U* 13.365-67). Even an internal musing echoes this feeling that "that thing must be coming on" (*U* 13.563). The fact that Gerty is familiar with the feeling of growing sexual tension and proceeds to "thoughtfully swing her legs" in a hands-free masturbatory way is proof of Gerty's acknowledgement of female sexual desire and her autonomy in seeking and achieving sexual climax for herself, not for simple narcissistic pleasure as a product of the patriarchal gaze.<sup>27</sup> Gerty wins through her sexual autonomy, she has achieved sexual satiation and has found "ability in her disability," this disability not only being her limp, but the social disadvantage of being an unwed Irish woman (Bednarska 73). While the young virginal temptress confidently "limped away" towards more romantic possibilities, Bloom is left temporarily sexually relieved, but with an "aftereffect not pleasant" (*U* 13.852). From this point on in *Ulysses*, his journey is

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<sup>26</sup> In Act II, the music tells the erotic story regardless of the fairly innocuous scene on stage. The lovers' greeting at the opening of the act is essentially the sexual climax, Tristan's perfect fourth and Isolde's augmented one harken back to the Tristan chord. The rest of the scene is the blissful aftermath of the climax as they lay side-by-side. "On a flowery bank, [Tristan] sinks on his knee before [Isolde] and rests his head on her arm" and the lovers sing O sink hernieder, Nacht der Liebe [Descend, O night of love] (Dreyfus 108). The soft caressing eroticism is so effective that Wagner added it into the Venusburg theme when editing *Tannhäuser* in 1845. It is important that there is no sexual resolution musically or dramatically. On stage, they never consummate their love despite Merlot telling King Mark that he found Tristan "in the blatant act" and the music suggesting otherwise. Musically, Act II never resolves to a cadence, which denies Tristan a musical resolution to his rising sexual desire. This overarching theme of sexual desire was said to be the cause of a moral "sickness" amongst the Wagnerian society.

<sup>27</sup> See Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" for discussion of her theory on the "male gaze."

homeward bound, back to his indifferent Penelope's bed (*U* 13.772. 852). Gerty walks away from the artist-hero and avoids having to sacrifice herself.

### **The Failed Heldentenors of Dublin**

Joyce employs a two-fold interruption of Wagner's sacrificing women and male artist-heroes: not only do the women defy archetypes that would otherwise restrain their autonomy, but the men also fail to become the artist-hero they aspire to be due to their contradictory desires. Wagner's artist-heroes—like Tannhäuser, Tristan, Siegmund, and Siegfried—are known as *Heldentenors*, or “heroic tenors.”<sup>28</sup> These dramatic tenors are characterized by their powerful middle register that mimic a war trumpet and have exceptional vocal endurance (Jander). Although Wagner never used the term himself, he differentiated his singers from the Italian tenors whose voices were “unmanly, weak and completely lacklustre.”<sup>29</sup> Joyce fits his male characters—namely Stephen Daedalus and Leopold Bloom—into this archetype of the heldentenor artist-hero. In Wagner's music dramas, the overtly masculine heroes yearn for salvation from their psychological troubles by way of a woman's love. This love is multifaceted and can be romantic, sexual, maternal, or a combination of these. While Joyce's men seem to see themselves as examples of this artist-hero archetype, his women spurn their Wagnerian roles as the redeemers of men, jeopardizing the male protagonists' journey to salvation. This ultimately drags the men beyond the mirages of their ideals towards the unburnished ugliness of reality, creating a dissonance that needs to be overcome.

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<sup>28</sup> The male protagonists of Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, *Tristan*, and *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, respectively.

<sup>29</sup> “Unmännlich, weichlich und vollständig energielos” (*Prose Works*; Eng. trans., 1894, iii, 202–3).

## Stephen Dedalus as Siegfried

Joyce was well-versed in Wagner's works, especially his operas featuring the central figure of *Der Ring des Nibelungen's* Siegfried and *Götterdämmerung: Siegfried*. The quintessential artist-hero, Siegfried is one of the Wälsungs—descendants of Wotan—destined to return the all-powerful Ring to the Rhinedaughters and end the Ring's curse on the world ("Siegfried"). Scholars have often cited Siegfried as a source of inspiration for Joyce when developing Stephen Daedalus.<sup>30</sup> This invocation of Wagner's artist-hero comes out of a long literary tradition amongst Irish Wagnerites like Yeats, Moore, and Martyn.<sup>31</sup> In *Prose Works*, which Joyce had a copy of in his Trieste library, Wagner described the artist-hero as "simply a richly-gifted individual, who took up into his solitary self the spirit of community that was absent from our public life [and] evolved within himself this spirit of community which his artist soul had been the first to yearn for" (*Prose Works*). Wagner's description would surely resonate with Stephen's desire to "Hellenise" Ireland through his art, and so Joyce uses Siegfried as the heldentenor model Stephen strives towards.

In order to become the artistic and socio-political savior of Ireland, Stephen must embark on the artist-hero's withdrawal from "public life" in order to birth the "spirit of community" in its highest form (Wagner, *Prose Works* 127).<sup>32</sup> To achieve this, the artist-

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<sup>30</sup> See Timothy Martin, "Joyce, Wagner, and the Artist-Hero"; Zack Bowen, *Musical Allusions in the Works of James Joyce*; John DiGaetani, *Richard Wagner and the Modern British Novel*.

<sup>31</sup> See Blissett, pp. 96-101; Zack Bowen, *Musical Allusions in the Works of James Joyce* (State University of New York Press, 1974), p. 45; Hodgart, p. 63; John DiGaetani, *Richard Wagner and the Modern British Novel* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1978), pp. 136-44.

<sup>32</sup> Both Wagner and Joyce felt this artistic height was the Greeks.

hero must reject many aspects of the culture that restrict artistic expression. As Siegfried rejects an understanding of fear, Stephen rejects the many yokes of Irish identity like the Irish Catholic church and its repressive views on sexuality. In *Portrait*, Stephen says "when the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets" (Joyce 203). In his own mind, Stephen "must kill the priest and the king" to become the artist to forge a new Irish consciousness (*U* 15.4436-37). Joyce felt he was doing the same as an artist: in a letter to Nora, he proclaimed himself to be "one of the writers of this generation who are perhaps creating at last a conscience in the soul of this wretched race" (II: 311). Stephen has all of the philosophical makings of a successful artist-hero, yet he fails to truly become the artist-hero he admires. According to Timothy Martin, Stephen's comparison to Siegfried in *Portrait* gives Stephen an ideal to strive towards, but by the time we see him in *Ulysses* it is clear that Siegfried has become a model he abjectly fails to emulate ("...the Artist-Hero" 81). He moves from youthful artistic optimism at the end of *Portrait* to being physically and creatively stuck in Dublin in *Ulysses*. This artistic rut is ever-present on June 16, 1904.

Stephen's attempt and failure to become the artist-hero is illustrated by his ever present companion throughout the novel: his walking stick. Stephen's "ashplant" serves as a barometer for his heldentenor journey. This is a fairly explicit allusion to Siegmund's—Siegfried's father and uncle—sword, pulled out of an Ash tree. Stephen calls it his "augur's rod of ash," and he calls it a "sword" three times, once explicitly "my ash sword" (*U* 3.410-11; 9.296 .947; 3.16). Martin points out the gradual erection of the ash plant

throughout *Ulysses*, representing Stephen's growing artistic and personal independence: "From his 'trailing' it, 'resting' it, and 'dallying' with it; to his 'swaying' and 'flourishing' it;" and finally to his destruction of Bella Cohen's lamp, and his mother, in "Circe" when he shouts its Wagnerian name "*Nothung!*" (*U* 3.36.284.489; 10.348; 15.73; Martin, "...the Artist-Hero" 79; *U* 15.4242). While this physical rising of Stephen's "sword" is portrayed through the language, I do not believe this represents the rising of his artistic independence. Stephen's poetic ashlant does the opposite: it deflates. Positive parallels between Siegfried and Stephen are frequently surface level. Martin notes how Stephen is more of a brooding, stagnant individual rather than the optimistic artist-hero Wagner makes Siegfried to be. Stephen is not much of a hero. His lack of heroism is enforced by constant comparison to Buck Mulligan, who jumped out into the sea to save a drowning man: "You [Mulligan] saved men from drowning. I'm not a hero, however," thinks Stephen (*U* 1.62). If Stephen has all the ostensible makings of Ireland's new Siegfried, why does he still fail? He is missing an integral part of the formula: the self-sacrificing woman.

Stephen becomes a failed heldentenor due to his unfulfilled relationship with the women in his life. The hero that Stephen wishes to be has something that he does not: a maternal guardian and faithful lover. Siegfried falls in love with his guardian Brünnhilde, who reveals to him his divine purpose and guides him along the way. Born a Valkyrie, Brünnhilde sacrifices her immortality for Siegfried when she defies her father's command and chooses to protect the artist-hero's mother, Sieglinde, thus ensuring that her lover is born. In the final opera of the tetralogy, Brünnhilde enacts the final sacrifice when she

commits suicide by throwing herself onto Siegfried's funeral pyre. Brünnhilde is one of the archetypical female characters in Wagner's mythical world. In Stephen, we find a figure who rejects all the women in his life who could play the receptive role of Brünnhilde and bring him fully into his role as an artist-hero. These two women are his mother, Mary Dedalus, and his first love, Emma Cleary.

Stephen's relationship with his mother, Mary Dedalus, is the root of his anxiety with women. Stephen paradoxically yearns for his mother's love, but her association with death terrifies him and causes him to reject this love. "The Mother" appears in "Circe" as a phantom to remind Stephen of the inextricable connection between maternal love and inescapable death. This relationship haunts Stephen through the phrase "the word known to all men" (*U* 15.4192-93). An exploration of this phrase and its relation to Mary sheds light on Stephen's failure to gain the liberating love of a woman. Mary is the embodiment of "the word known to all men," which Stephen equates to *amor matris*, or maternal love (*U* 15.4192-93). The death of a mother makes finding a lover and procreating paramount to continuing humanity. His guilt-ridden memories of his mother serve as an umbilical cord, tethering him to a desire for her love: "(eagerly) Tell me the word, mother, if you know now. The word known to all men" (*U* 15.4192-93; Higgins 52). While Stephen loves his mother—she is his origin and homeland, like Senta to the Dutchman—he also fears her, because she is a constant reminder of human fragility and death. "With the subtle smile of death's madness," Mary reminds Stephen that "all must go through it... You too. Time will come" (*U* 15.4173. 4182-84). When forced to confront his inescapable death, Stephen jumps away from desiring *amor matris* to declaring his

independence: “*non serivam!*” (*U* 15.4228). Benjamin Boysen argues that Stephen is forced to confront “the self-destructive consequences inherent in his rejection of love,” when his mother’s ghost raises the *liebestod* (love-death) artist-heroes seek (151-52).

The tension between *amor matrix* and *non serviam* leads to his inability to become the poet artist-hero he wants to be, because it creates a paradoxical desire and rejection of romantic interests. Although fearful of love, Stephen does yearn for the love of a woman—other than his mother—and desires a transubstantiation through this love. This transubstantiation of love is akin to what Siegfried experiences through his relationship with Brünnhilde. So desperate is Stephen, when he ponders “how to win a woman’s love. For me this,” he turns to a mystical chant and talisman to win such love: “*se el milo nebrakada femininum! Amor me solo! Sanktus! Amen,*” (*U* 10.849). The act of changing a talisman into “*nebrakada deminunum*”—the eternal feminine—mimics the transubstantiation Stephen wants to experience. However, his inability to accept death’s role in love affects his romantic and sexual relationships, namely with Emma Cleary.

Emma Cleary, or E— C— in her more abstract form, is only briefly mentioned in *Ulysses*, yet she is an important element of Stephen's identity as the only serious romantic interest offered by Joyce. She first appeared in *Stephen Hero*, where she was a fully fleshed out character, but she becomes more abstract in *Portrait* and a mere side note in *Ulysses*. Scott argues that the Emma of *Stephen Hero* is unlike any other of Joyce’s female characters as she is “a central, sustained, individualized portrait of a modern, urban, intelligent young woman who is permitted to some extent to speak her mind and direct her affairs” (133). In *Ulysses*, Stephen sees a flash of Emma as he is leaving the

library with Buck Mulligan: “Is that?... Blueribboned hat... Idly writing... What? Looked? ...” (U 9.1123). In this scene, Emma serves as a leitmotif by referencing to her role in Stephen’s life when he was still on his trajectory towards becoming an artist-hero. It is no coincidence that after Stephen’s failed attempt to impress the Irish literati with his Shakespeare theory, he thinks about sexual failure and the woman who rejected him. Emma, like Gerty, straddles the Virgin/Temptress archetypes; she is an unconventional woman while also adhering to repressive cultural norms. She departs from the feminine norm as a college educated woman with political opinions; however, when Stephen propositions her to a night together out of wedlock—throwing conventional courtship and marriage to the wind—Emma rejects him as such a union would be socially unacceptable. David Cotter argues that Stephen sees this rejection as Emma choosing the Catholic patriarchal society over him, a cultural system that Stephen and Joyce disdain (53). Stephen then sees the abstinent Emma as a Temptress since she is patriarchally “obliged to insist on the forbearance of the male and to despise him for forbearing” (Joyce, *Stephen Hero* 73). In this moment, Joyce is using the subversion of Wagnerian gender roles to highlight the extent of Stephen’s artistic impotence. Emma rejects the Wagnerian role of the self-sacrificing woman by not offering up herself to satiate Stephen’s erotic or intellectual desires. She does not have sex with him nor does she try to fulfill her role as a prototypical bird-girl.<sup>33</sup> Stephen’s contradicting desires of becoming an artist-hero but remaining at an impasse regarding love, hold him in an unfulfilled limbo: reaching towards cultural heroism but too fearful to accept the marriage of *liebested* to get there.

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<sup>33</sup> In Chapter IV of *Portrait*, Stephen experiences an artistic epiphany after witnessing a young woman wading in water. This woman is referred to as the bird-girl.

Stephen is terrified of women; he flees his mother and Emma Cleary. “Terrified of a fantasized temptress and haunted by fears of erotic compulsion, he seeks Freudian mastery over the ‘eternal feminine’ through the ‘spiritual-heroic refrigerating apparatus’ of art” (Henke 5). Stephen fears the *femme fatale*, as Higgins argues, and he feels threatened by them, which prevents him from fully being an artist-hero. Higgins points out the serpent language surrounding women in *Ulysses*, claiming that “all derive from Medusa, the atavistic foremother with serpentine hair” (50). Stephen connects the old milkmaid that visits Martello Tower with “women’s unclean loins, of man’s flesh made not in God’s likeness, the serpent’s prey” (*U* 1.421-23). Even his thoughts are female and serpentine: “in my mind’s darkness...her dragon scaly folds” (*U* 2.71-74). When Henke describes Stephen’s relationship with women as an opportunity for “sublime ecstasy that offers both sensuous and imaginative gratification,” it is reminiscent of how Wagner’s heldentenors see women. This is a stark contrast to Stephen’s Wagnerian parallel, Siegfried. Siegfried also faces serpents as he kills Fafner, a giant turned serpent-dragon. Siegfried kills this serpent, but never out of fear since Siegfried is “the one who does not know fear” (Wagner, *Siegfried Score*). Only after he kills this dragon can he truly begin his heroic journey to learn what fear is. But when he finds Brünnhilde—who he thinks is an armored man—he finds out she is a woman, and the first woman he has ever seen. At this moment, Siegfried understands fear. In this moment of fear, he alleviates this fear with her unconditional love and subsequent sacrifice of her immortality and mortality. If Stephen is to become Siegfried, he should not fear the misogynist serpentine trope of women, and move to experience a *liebestod* with a woman.

### Leopold Bloom and the Phantasmagoric Blurring of Gender

Like Stephen, Bloom is cast into the legacy of a cultural artist-hero. Where Stephen strives to emulate Siegfried, Joyce has Bloom act as Homer's everyman: Odysseus. Wagner was similarly inspired by Homer's hero when creating the Dutchman, the protagonist of his 1843 opera *Der fliegende Holländer* (Millington, "*Fliegende Holländer, Der*"). Bloom's artist-hero ambitions align with Odysseus and the Dutchman. Bloom sees himself as a cultural hero relegated to the fringe of society who constantly moves towards his conjugal homeland at 7 Eccles Street, Dublin where his Penelope (Molly Bloom) lays (*U* 17.71-2). This hyper-masculine casting, however, is poorly acted by Bloom due to his diagnosis as the "new womanly man" (*U* 15.1798-99). Rather than maintaining a strict phallogocentric dominance through the subjugation of a woman, Bloom inhabits an androgynous space where he exhibits characteristics of both the heldentenor and self-sacrificing soprano. Although Bloom wants to create a better Irish culture by being an artist-hero, his taboo sexual fluidity undermines this goal. In the "Circe" episode of *Ulysses*, Joyce uses the Wagnerian elements of dramatic staging and the phantasmagoric release of societal norms to reveal Bloom's desires and how they work against his artist-hero journey. This largely brings attention to the absurdity of society's static and archetypal views of idealized masculinity.

Like a quintessential Wagnerian artist-hero, Bloom aspires to herald in the ideal, modern culture that lives in his "artist soul" (Wagner, *Prose Works* I: 127). He is a man of great sensual, artistic, and intellectual appetite: "a cultured allroundman...there's a touch of the artist about old Bloom" (*U* 10.581-823). His appreciation of "high" culture and art,

albeit bourgeois, separates him from most of the Dubliners encountered in *Ulysses*. This subsequently “others” Bloom from society and sets him up to be a Wagnerian artist-hero. Ever the outsider as an effeminate Hungarian Jew, Bloom uses the phantasmagoric freedom of “Circe” to create “Bloomusalem” (*U* 15.1544). This fantastical city represents the unified community that “is absent from [Ireland’s] public life” and Bloom champions it in his “artist soul” (Wagner, *Prose Works* I: 127).<sup>34</sup> In his “inner world,” as Hugh Kenner calls it, Bloom is “Lord Mayor, Messiah, Martyr” who stands for “the reform of municipal morals and the plain ten commandments. New worlds for old. Union of all, jew, moslem and gentile” (*U* 15.1685-86). Not only does Bloom see cultural unity missing from public life, but artistic culture as well. He calls for the muses to be recast as “Commerce, Operatic Music, Amor, Publicity, Manufacture, Liberty of Speech, Plural Voting, Gastronomy, Private Hygiene, Seaside Concert Entertainments, Painless Obstetrics and Astronomy for the People” (*U* 15.1707-10). By placing the artistic “operatic music” and “concert entertainment” next to the institutional freedoms of “commerce” and “liberty of speech,” Bloom solidifies his identification with both sides of the hyphenated artist-hero. This role, however, necessitates a patriarchal sexual dynamic where the artist-hero justifies his power through the subjugation of the self-sacrificing woman.

Bloom tries to maintain the phallic authority inherent in the artist-hero and self-sacrificing soprano dynamic. The control of female sexual autonomy aligns not only with

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<sup>34</sup> Referring to Wagner’s description of the artist-hero: “Simply a richly-gifted individual, who took up into his solitary self the spirit of community that was absent from our public life [and] evolved within himself this spirit of community which his artist soul had been the first to yearn for” (*Ibid*).

Odyssean heroism, but also with Wagner's artist-hero, the Dutchman. In his autobiography, Wagner describes the Dutchman as a synthesis of Odysseus and the Wandering Jew.<sup>35</sup> Characterized by "Odysseus' longing to return to his homeland, hearth, and wife" and "nurtured on the sufferings of the Wandering Jew," the Dutchman is condemned to sail the sea, but seeks redemption from his curse "through a *woman* who sacrifices herself to him out of love" (qtd. Borchmeyer 94, Wagner's emphasis). For the Dutchman, this woman is Senta. The yearning for a feminine homeland is evident in Bloom as he desires this Senta-like self-sacrificing woman. In fact, Bloom fantasizes that women will "enthusiastically" commit suicide over him:

THE VEILED SYBIL: (*Enthusiastically*) I'm a Bloomite and I glory in it.

I believe in him in spite of all. I'd give my life for him, the funniest man on earth.

.....

THE VEILED SYBYL: (*Stabs herself.*) My hero god! (*She dies.*)

(*Many most attractive and enthusiastic women also commit suicide.*)

(U 15.1736-1751)

According to Martha F. Black, this plays into the passive-aggressive role set up for women in Western literature written as their attempt to escape the misogynist stereotype of the forsaken woman (Black 69). Ostensibly, Bloom wants a woman to be subservient to his phallic dominance, thus playing the roles necessary in the Wagnerian gender dynamic. This dynamic requires the proper performance of these strictly defined gender

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<sup>35</sup> The Wandering Jew is a biblical figure who, after taunting Jesus on His way to the cross, was doomed to wander the earth until the Last Day ("Wandering Jew").

roles; however, Bloom fails to meet the standard of heterosexual masculinity necessary for an artist-hero.

Joyce pulls on Wagner's dramatic influence in "Circe" to explore the dissonance between Bloom's masculine and feminine sexual desires. While Bloom functions as Joyce's Odysseus and Dutchman, mimicking their masculine sexual degradation of women, Bloom is quite different from these hyper-masculine and virile heroes. It is these differences that, according to Black, "are germane to Joyce's send-up of Western sexism" (66). Odysseus is a renowned warrior, great lover, and enactor of devious plans. Bloom, on the other hand, is a pacifist who preaches against war and is no great lover. Molly criticizes his performance of oral stimulation: "he does it all wrong too thinking only of his own pleasure his tongue is too flat" (*U* 18. 1249-50). Unlike the noble Dutchman, who does not yearn for "the wanton pleasures of love," Bloom constantly scans for "a crooked skirt swinging" to catch a glimpse of a woman's plump behind (Dreyfus 76; *U* 4. 164). Where each of Odysseus' episodes accounts each of his triumphant plans, most of Bloom's schemes are imagined. His sexual fantasies are unconsummated, like the postal affair with Martha Clifford and the masturbatory exchange with Gerty; and his political beliefs only live in his mind, like the "schemes for social regeneration" he hopes to enact as the socialist reformer of fictional Bloomusalem (*U* 15.1702-3). Bloom is the ideological opposite of his namesakes and therefore the opposite of the Citizen and all Irish Republicans who uphold the prevailing, yet antiquated, standard of Irish masculinity and heroism.

In the phantasmagoric episode “Circe,” the most dramatic episode both in structure and story, Bloom is finally free to step out of the dominant masculine realm and into the feminine self-sacrificial role that he desires to inhabit himself. Henke elaborates on how Bloom’s sexual desires “inhabit those marginal spaces on the edge of social discourse usually reserved for women and for cultural deviants” (106). By existing in a grey area outside of the static sexual roles established by the Irish and Wagnerian traditions, Bloom challenges society’s fixed gender roles. While most of his interactions in Nighttown are played out in his head, his ability to engage in this way grants him what Henke calls “aesthetic mastery and psychological catharsis” (119). The drug-like trip that makes up “Circe” melts away socially imposed barriers, especially those that hold up the gender hierarchy that Joyce pulls into question. Through the play-script format and constant flow in and out of reality, Bloom can effectively “act out” his androgyny in the safety of a psychological space outside of the expectations of masculinity tied to the artist-hero. Wagner’s characters similarly defy accepted moral behavior in the pursuit of romantic and erotic love through a fantastical or magical event, such as the love potion in *Tristan und Isolde*. The narrative motion of Wagner’s erotics, discussed earlier in relation to Gerty, only comes into existence after Tristan and Isolde ingest a magical potion. In the opera, Tristan is the nephew of the King of Cornwall and brings Isolde to become the King’s wife after killing her betrothed. Isolde swears to take revenge on Tristan for this murder and plans a murder-suicide with poison; however, Isolde’s maid Brangäne switches the deadly concoction with a love potion to prevent the death of his mistress. As a result, Tristan and Isolde drink it and fall madly in love (Millington, “*Tristan und*

*Isolde*”). Wagner used this potion as a way to melt away any social barriers holding the two lovers apart. This technique may have been motivated by Wagner's own love affair with a woman he could not have, Mathilde Wesendonck, as she was married to his benefactor, Otto Wesendonck, and refused to upturn accepted social behavior by leaving her husband for Wagner (Rieger 68). (Not to mention that Wagner was also married to Cosima Liszt at the time) (68). Just as Wagner uses the love potion as a fantastical instrument to reveal his criticism of the social norms Mathilde adhered to, Joyce uses the phantasmagoric in “Circe” to criticize society’s conception of masculine sexuality.

“Circe” is a psychological play where Bloom wrestles with the dissonance between the societal expectations tied to being a man, husband, and artist-hero; and his submissive sexual fantasies and permissiveness in being cuckolded. Hugh Kenner maps the principal fantasies in “Circe” as either in the “outer world” or Bloom’s “inner world” (361-62).<sup>36</sup> In the inner world, Bloom has a space to explore his “sexual guilt” without the restraint of social gender conventions. This guilt transgresses phallic authority due to Bloom's transsexual and sadomasochistic desires. These internal elements are played out externally as Bloom conjures up a version of Molly that is sexually dominating and masculine. Bloom desires to be the dominated self-sacrificing woman in his own marriage, as he imagines his wife as the dominating husband. In the italic stage directions, Molly is presented as “a handsome woman in [a] Turkish costume” of “trousers,” “jacket,” and “cummerbund” (*U* 15.297.310-11). Her masculine appearance excites Bloom—“questions, hopes... desire, spellbound”—and allows Molly

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<sup>36</sup> Although later in *Joyce's Voices*, Kenner argued that is difficult to distinguish between hallucination and truth in “Circe.”

to maintain the upper hand against her subjugated “poor little hubby” (*U* 15.10-11.307). Bloom bows “at [her] service” and Molly “fiercely...slaps his haunch, her goldcurb wristbangles angriling, scolding him in Moorish” (*U* 15.316-17). These hallucinations of physical abuse and humiliation by dominating women continue throughout the episode, most wildly with the bordello mistress Bella Cohen. In the Nighttown brothel, Bloom experiences a transfer of gender with the “massive whoremistress” (*U* 15.2742). Once Bloom engages in his first servile act with her—stooping to tie her shoelaces—she becomes the “baritone” Bello and Bloom becomes the infatuated “she” (*U* 15.2835-37). Henke comments that in this moment the “power relations, culturally inscribed in Edwardian consciousness, remain surprisingly stable, as phallogentric coauthority passed from male to female in a transvestite drama that parodies the psychosexual scripts that dominate 1904 Dublin” (110). Bloom jumps from in between these static gender roles, which, by remaining stable, highlight the absurdity of the artist-hero/self-sacrificing woman dynamic and how it would be impossible for Bloom—or any everyman—to wholly inhabit this masculinity. By playing out this impossibility with Bloom, Joyce overturns the hyper-macho masculinity promoted by the Irish-Catholic church, Victorian ideals, and Western culture at the time.

### **Conclusion**

The Wagnerian artist-hero has been adopted across all generations and genres since his piercing tenor voice first carried the message of artistic and cultural redemption. Dramatists and poets alike lauded the Siegfried model and mimicked him in their works with minimal revision. James Joyce, however, adopted and modified the artist-heroes to

reflect the modernist values he held and criticize those he found problematic. The main point of contention for Joyce was the fixed binary gender identities and power dynamic that is integral to the artist-hero's salvation. The sexually naïve and subservient self-sacrificing women and the men's blind artless reliance on their feminine comforts represented the flaws of Irish-Catholic middle-class ideals that Joyce felt were degrading Ireland.

As if an artist-hero himself, Joyce manifested his ideal subversive gender dynamic into *Ulysses*. He revises the ills of sexual conservatism with his “manly-women” and “womanly-men”: Molly, Gerty, Stephen, and Bloom. Molly and Gerty blur the lines between the patriarchal conceptions of the female Virgin and Temptress. Stephen and Bloom, faced with the dissonance of their non-traditional sexual desires and a lack of self-sacrificing women, are doomed to fail on their journey towards becoming artist-heroes. While Joyce's women do defy the misogynist archetypes that have long dominated their scholarly discourse, I am not proposing a full feminist reclamation of *Ulysses*. I acknowledge that Joyce restrains many of the women in his stories and relegates them to sympathy in working class roles. I acknowledge the fact that the only two women we get to see into the minds of are the two who have sections on them above. But, in light of the massive cultural artifact that *Ulysses* is, it is of vital importance to read the stories in a contemporary light and find the agency of the women and the non-traditionally sexual and gender identities that Joyce created, and read them in light of the many feminist readings of recent Joyce scholarship. By reading Joyce in light of

Wagner's gendered tropes, one can question the prevailing misogynist legacy of the denial of female sexuality and veneration of female virginity.

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