"Eumaeus" and "Ithaca": Nostos

After the experiences of Nighttown, Stephen and Bloom accompany one another first to a cabman’s shelter, then to 7 Eccles Street. The significance of their encounter and the question of Bloom’s fatherhood have long been debated by readers of Ulysses. Are the two men destined to become lifetime companions, solacing one another in exile? Will Stephen return to give Molly Italian lessons and win her affections? Or do the characters separate, never to meet again? These are questions that Joyce refuses to answer, and to which no reading of Ulysses will supply a clue. The author defeats our expectations of a traditional denouement: the knot is wound up, but never unraveled. Joyce deflates our assumptions of progressive linear development. He will not model his book on a priori structures of realism or observe the traditional novel plot. Rather than speculating beyond the novel or fabricating extraliterary lives for its characters, we must concentrate on what does occur in the
Nostos section of Ulysses. We are forced to turn our gaze directly toward the aesthetic object presented to us by the author.

In "Eumaeus," Bloom leads his inebriate charge to a cabman’s shelter, buys him coffee, tries to engage him in conversation, and finally invites him home. The entire episode is characterized by confusion, incertitude, ambiguity, and coincidence. Events are unpredictable, appearances unreliable. Things may not be what they seem: the conflict between appearance and reality is central to the chapter. W. B. Murphy speaks of "Simon Dedalus," a marksman in Hengler's circus. Bloom unconsciously identifies with Murphy, the Pseudangelos who will return home to discover "his better half, wrecked in his affections" (p. 624). Tales of Murphy, Enoch Arden, Ben Bolt, and Rip van Winkle reinforce Bloom's "hesitency" to recover his beleaguered domicile. "Bow to the inevitable," he muses. "Grin and bear it. I remain with much love your brokenhearted husband" (p. 625).

Bloom is preoccupied and despondent; Stephen is lost in a drunken stupor. Little communication occurs between the two men, who seem to talk at cross purposes whenever they speak. Bloom defines the soul as "brainpower," "convolutions of the grey matter" (p. 633). Stephen retorts with a cynical parody of Aristotle, Aquinas, and Thomas Hardy; he insists that the soul is "simple" and incorruptible, but subject to the whimsical caprice of a dio boia. The two characters are "poles apart"—or so it would seem. Bloom stumbles toward the articulation of an agnostic philosophy, a gospel of humanism, and a Marxist view of political economy. Although Stephen mockingly expounds Catholic dogma, he shares the older man's perspective: his apparent disclaimer is actually a skeptical mode of agreement.

Similarly, Bloom feels rebuked when Stephen insists that Ireland "belongs to him" as an aesthetic subject. The younger man refuses to join Bloom's socialist utopia. He repudiates Irish "propaganda literature" and the Celtic Renaissance. Stephen declines to play the role of Gaelic "bard" to Ireland, though he will function as her cynical and Socratic conscience, emulating
the Renaissance fool who tattoos tales of wisdom on the foolscap of his body and speaks to humanity through stories of comic import.

Like Antonio, the artist who emblazons his face onto Murphy's tattoo, Joyce is writing himself into the novel through satirical involution. The figure "sixteen" appears on the sailor's chest: "And what's the number for?" (p. 632). Murphy never responds, and neither does Joyce. Sixteen is associated with homosexuality in erotic numerology. Bloom thinks of the number when he meditates on the Criminal Law Amendment Act (though not on the section that prohibits the "love that dare not speak its name"). And the reader is aware that this is the sixteenth chapter of the novel. The number may be a clue to secret mysteries, or it may simply function as a red herring. There may not be "one vestige of truth in it" (p. 621). As Stephen warns: "Sounds are impostures.... Like names" (p. 622).

"Eumaeus" unfolds in a style of clichéd, inscrutable, and exasperating prose. What is the figure in Joyce's intricate carpet? After the verbal experiments of "Sirens," "Oxen of the Sun," and "Circe," Joyce returns to "narrative, old." He gives us a parodic rendition of nineteenth-century fiction, full of circumlocution, inflated bombast, and fustian elegance. Joyce titillates our hopes and our curiosity. At precisely the moment of heightened expectation, he refuses to allow us the satisfaction of emotional release.

When Stephen and Bloom come together, they are locked in separate, private worlds. Bloom is procrastinating and Stephen is confused. One man must "act" by returning to conjugal disappointment; the other must determine to set out on a path of artistic exile. The prose of the chapter is not imitative, but descriptive. Despite emotional preoccupation and drunken stupefaction, the two men are attempting to get acquainted. Each makes brief forays out of solipsistic reverie toward some kind of friendly exchange. The style of the episode forces us to recognize the difficulties involved in communication. Stephen and Bloom must wade through an abyss of fortune and of
temperament, using the only tools their society has to offer—a cumbersome vocabulary, restrictive cliché, political opinion, and vacuous rhetoric. The process is tedious, often labyrinthine—yet a necessary prelude to understanding.

The excess baggage of "Eumaeus" suggests the kind of impediments that hinder genuine fellowship. The words at our disposal are usually inadequate; the "language of gestures" gives hope, but not assurance. We traverse the formidable gulf between private consciousness and public communication with tremendous vicissitude. Like the builders of Babel, we all murmur in different tongues. We talk at cross-purposes, and usually to ourselves. Each person alludes to universals that actually depend on a private vocabulary; language is conditioned by previous experience and by present state of mind. We ascribe diverse connotations to the same words or use different words as synonyms for analogous apprehensions. We may argue rhetorically with someone whose feelings we share; or we may attach entirely incongruous referents to identical linguistic symbols. Personal relationship is never facile: it is demanding, even improbable. We must grope through the disorderly muddle of human life toward sympathy, understanding, and compassion. The quest for "interindividual relations" is arduous indeed. And Joyce will not spare us any of the tedium or irritation involved.

In "Eumaeus," Stephen is "not yet perfectly sober" (p. 614), and Bloom feels apprehensive about returning to his wife. Nevertheless, something significant does happen: the two men recognize their mutual concern for humanism and the similarity of their day's experiences. Bloom recounts his heroic action in the face of the bigoted Citizen and proposes a philosophy of universal tolerance:

—Of course, Mr. Bloom proceeded to stipulate, you must look at both sides of the question. It is hard to lay down any hard and fast rules as to right and wrong but room for improvement all round there certainly is. . . . It's all very fine to boast of mutual superiority but what about mutual equality? I resent violence or intolerance in any shape or form. It never reaches anything or stops anything.
A revolution must come on the due instalments plan. It's a patent absurdity on the face of it to hate people because they live round the corner and speak another vernacular, so to speak.

—Memorable bloody bridge battle and seven minutes' war, Stephen assented, between Skinner's alley and Ormond market.

—Yes, Mr. Bloom thoroughly agreed, entirely endorsing the remark...

All those wretched quarrels, in his humble opinion, stirring up bad blood... were very largely a question of the money question which was at the back of everything, greed and jealousy, people never knowing when to stop. (P. 643)

As usual, Bloom is the "allround man" with stereoscopic vision. He insists on looking at "both sides of the question" and defends the philosophy that he earlier elaborated before the mob in Kiernan's pub. Remembering the unfavorable reception of his afternoon speech, Bloom is hesitant to mention love, "the opposite of hatred." He cloaks his argument in circumlocutions such as "on the face of it" and "so to speak." But he continues to defend an ethic of humanistic inclusion: those who are alien must be brought within the circle of compassion. Barriers of race, language, religion, and geography are senseless. It is absurd to hate one's fellows on the basis of arbitrary contingencies, "because they live round the corner" (p. 643).

Despite his inebriation, Stephen responds to Bloom's speech with a shock of recognition. He recalls his own experience in "Nestor" and murmurs assent: "Memorable bloody bridge battle and seven minutes' war" (p. 643). Bloom is preaching the same gospel that Stephen proposed to Garrett Deasy. All history is a "disappointed bridge," a series of Pyrrhic victories that only perpetuate violence. Bloom waged his "seven minutes' war" with the Citizen to defy a nightmare history composed of "bloody bridge battles."

In a moment of drunken connection, Stephen identifies Bloom as a "comrade in arms" who challenges Irish nationalism, chauvinism, and blind intolerance. Bloom's boast of his Odyssean victory over the Citizen functions as an epiphany for Stephen, who remarks: "Christus or Bloom his name is, or, after all, any other, secundum carnem" (p. 643). Bloom is
shown forth as a messianic figure, the new "lamb of God": "People could put up with being bitten by a wolf but what properly riled them was a bite from a sheep" (p. 658).

Amid tales of wonder and infamy, Stephen and Bloom begin to establish a rapport based on mutual trust and sympathetic good will. As Bloom grows more candid with Stephen, he becomes increasingly honest with himself. Bloom contemplates adultery, but he avoids the pain of direct confrontation. He twice recounts to himself the story of Parnell's affair with Kitty O'Shea; and in so doing, he moves from public condemnation to private understanding. As a kinetic poet, Bloom considers the political scandal in terms of emotional compulsion. He tries to rationalize the motives for conjugal infidelity and to comprehend the forces of extramarital attraction. By confronting the "unknown" dimensions of Parnell's adultery, Bloom is desperately attempting to resign himself to the "known" case of Molly's infidelity. History functions as a thinly veiled metaphor for introspective analysis.

Cloaking his own grief in a tribute to Parnell, Bloom concludes that adultery should be considered "a case for the two parties themselves" (p. 655). He wants to be "honest and aboveboard about the whole business" and to avoid "the same old matrimonial tangle alleging misconduct" (p. 654). ("Why can't we all remain friends over it instead of quarrelling," Molly asks [p. 777]). Bloom has little patience with the melodrama of Victorian sex scandals. He offers a searing "naturalistic" account of the affair: "Whereas the simple fact of the case was it was simply a case of the husband not being up to the scratch with nothing in common between them beyond the name and then a real man arriving on the scene... The eternal question of the life connubial, needless to say, cropped up. Can real love, supposing there happens to be another chap in the case, exist between married folk?" (p. 651). It is precisely this "connubial question" that haunts Bloom throughout "Eumaeus."

By way of Parnell and the nightmare of history, the "cuckolded" husband circuitously rearrives at a tolerant understanding of human frailty. Bloom knows that beauty and power are
tenuous, that political and romantic heroes do have mundane roots. He champions Parnell against the Irish populace and vilifies the fickle crowd for dehumanizing its leader: "they discovered to their vast discomfiture that their idol had feet of clay, after placing him upon a pedestal" (p. 654). Bloom refuses to make the same mistake with Molly. He does not place his wife "on a pedestal" or insist that she be "stonecold" and dispassionate, like the Junonian statues in the National Museum. In fact, he admires her Mediterranean temperament: "it was just the wellknown case of hot passion, pure and simple, . . . she also was Spanish or half so, types that wouldn't do things by halves, passionate abandon of the south" (p. 652).

Bloom shows Stephen Molly's photo, hoping it will "speak for itself" (p. 653). But what does Bloom want the picture to say? Critics have suggested that he is "pimping" for Molly, offering her to Stephen in a covert homosexual liaison. Like the number sixteen and old Antonio, the hint is a false clue. Joyce is playing with our expectations, manipulating the traditional sentiments we associate with male friendship.

Molly is so conspicuously a part of Bloom's identity that he must allude to her in order to establish intimacy with Stephen. Bloom is proud of his wife's beauty and accomplishments. He hopes that the younger man will respect him for winning this "Oriental prize of Dublin." But more importantly, Bloom wants to share with Stephen his own passionate admiration for the "mother-wife" and "earth-goddess" at the focal point of his consciousness. This is the one gift that Bloom can offer his newfound son.

Molly later thinks: "what is he driving at now showing him my photo . . . I wonder he didnt make him a present of it altogether and me too after all why not . . . they all write about some woman in their poetry well I suppose he wont find many like me . . . then hell write about me lover and mistress" (pp. 774–76). Molly might serve Stephen as a muse of beauty and inspiration; and she might introduce him to the "warm, fullblooded life" of human affection. Presenting Molly's graven image, Bloom offers her for public worship.
By the end of "Eumaeus," the two protagonists are locked in a familiar "tête-à-tête." Stephen, unused to physical contact of any kind, is leaning on his companion and touching the "strange kind of flesh of a different man" (p. 660). Throughout the chapter, Joyce has strewn prolific allusions to "six sixteen," "old Antonio," and the Criminal Law Amendment Act. By interpolating lines from "The Low-Backed Car" in the episode's concluding paragraph, he portrays the two men on their way "to be married by Father Maher" (p. 665). Joyce is deliberately challenging archaic responses to the range of human relationship. The friendship between Stephen and Bloom is based on agape rather than on Eros. The cabman or the narrator may see something queer about the homophiliac embrace, which calls to mind the unrequited sexual desire celebrated in an Irish ballad. Such a perspective, however, adheres to the fabric of Victorian melodrama. It implies a traditional resolution of plot through erotic union, marital intrigue, or the discovery of blood relationship. In actuality, Stephen and Bloom have done little more than "get acquainted." They have initiated a humane connection based on sympathy and genuine good will.

Bloom is about to face the dilemma of conjugal displacement. He hopes that Stephen will provide him with distraction, consolation, and support in the impending crisis. In the "Ithaca" episode, Stephen and Bloom proceed to 7 Eccles Street and partake of cocoa and cream as part of a eucharistic communion. The event acknowledges a bond between the two men, who share a nocturnal feast in celebration of their fortuitous meeting. The potation of "god-food" (theobroma) is a love-offering. Bloom relinquishes the symposiarchal right to his moustache cup and drinks from a mug similar to Stephen's. He serves "extraordinarily to his guest and, in reduced measure, to himself the viscous cream ordinarily reserved for the breakfast of his wife Marion" (p. 677). The communion is momentary, without promise of future significance. But in a world of ever changing phenomena, only the "instant" can point to the minor victories of human life.
During their conversation, Stephen and Bloom discover other "common factors of similarity between their respective like and unlike reactions to experience": "Both were sensitive to artistic impressions musical in preference to plastic or pictorial. Both preferred a continental to an insular manner of life, a cisatlantic to a transatlantic place of residence. Both indurated by early domestic training and an inherited tenacity of heterodox resistance professed their disbelief in many orthodox religious, national, social and ethical doctrines. Both admitted the alternately stimulating and obtunding influence of heterosexual magnetism" (p. 666). As Helmut Bonheim notes, the two men rebel against the "crooked ess" of society and abjure "the power of the family at the personal level, the church at the religious, and the state at the political level." 3

Leopold Bloom feels "recurrent frustration" at his inability to "amend many social conditions, the product of inequality and avarice and international animosity" (p. 696). Nevertheless, he recognizes the limitations of the human situation. Life is not "infinitely perfectible." One must deal with "the generic conditions imposed by natural, as distinct from human law, as integral parts of the human whole: . . . the painful character of the ultimate functions of separate existence, the agonies of birth and death: . . . catastrophic cataclysms which make terror the basis of human mentality: . . . the fact of vital growth, through convulsions of metamorphosis from infancy through maturity to decay" (p. 697). Bloom's all-encompassing sympathy stems from his observation of the temporal-spatial conditions that circumscribe freedom. Each person is born, lives, and dies in isolation: he cannot alter the functions of separate existence, nor can he change the course of a generative process that hurls him toward annihilation. Bloom acknowledges that "from inexistence to existence he came to many and was as one received: . . . from existence to nonexistence gone he would be by all as none perceived" (pp. 667–68). As a "scientific observer," Bloom cannot modify the absurdity of the human situation. He is helpless to "substitute other more acceptable phenomena in place of the less acceptable phenomena to be removed" (p.
697). His only recourse is a stoic attitude in the face of inexorable circumstance.

Through meditations "increasingly vaster," Bloom moves toward a cosmic perspective. He contemplates "the parallax or parallactic drift of so-called fixed stars, in reality evermoving from immeasurably remote eons to infinitely remote futures in comparison with which the years, threescore and ten, of allotted human life formed a parenthesis of infinitesimal brevity" (p. 698). Bloom thinks of the infinite spaces surrounding the world and of an eternity devouring the life-span of each individual. Like Pascal, he is fascinated by the "two infinites" defining existence. The universe is bounded by endless space, yet the void penetrates into the center of every particle of matter. In "obverse meditations of involution increasingly less vast." Bloom thinks "of the incalculable trillions of billions of millions of imperceptible molecules contained by cohesion of molecular affinity in a single pinhead: of the universe of human serum constellated with red and white bodies, themselves universes of void space constellated with other bodies," all divisible until, "if the progress were carried far enough, nought nowhere was never reached" (p. 699).

It seems probable that Bloom's philosophical musings have been inspired by the *Penseés* of Pascal, who writes:

> The whole visible world is only an imperceptible atom in the ample bosom of nature. No idea approaches it. We may enlarge our conceptions beyond all imaginable space; we only produce atoms in comparison with the reality of things. It is an infinite sphere, the centre of which is everywhere, the circumference nowhere...
>
> Returning to himself, let man consider what he is in comparison with all existence; let him regard himself as lost in this remote corner of nature... What is man in the Infinite?
>
> But to show him another prodigy equally astonishing, let him examine the most delicate things he knows. Let a mite be given him, with its minute body and parts incomparably more minute, ... blood in the veins, humours in the blood, drops in the humours, vapours in the drops. Dividing these last things again, let him exhaust his powers of conception... I will let him see therein a new abyss. I will paint for him not only the visible

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universe, but all that he can conceive of nature’s immensity in the womb of this abridged atom. . . .

For in fact what is man in nature? A Nothing in comparison with the Infinite, an All in comparison with the Nothing, a mean between nothing and everything. 

Pascal offers a theological solution to the terrors of the void: “These extremes meet and reunite by force of distance, and find each other in God, and in God alone.” 

The seventeenth-century philosopher appeals to a metaphysical noumenon to unite the two infinites. 

Leopold Bloom leaves no room for a deity in his cosmic speculations. He looks only to the phenomena of the visible world, and he rejects traditional metaphors that describe the expansive “heavens.” For Bloom, the sky is “not a heaven-tree, not a heavensrot, not a heavenbeast, not a heavenman” (p. 701). Alone in an unconscious and indifferent universe, the individual must confront the terrors of finite existence. Bloom is willing to acknowledge the “parenthesis of infinitesimal brevity” that punctuates human life:

Alone, what did Bloom feel?

The cold of interstellar space, thousands of degrees below freezing point on the absolute zero of Fahrenheit, Centigrade or Réaumur: the incipient intimations of proximate dawn. (P. 704)

Unlike Stephen Dedalus, Bloom cannot affirm “his significance as a conscious rational animal proceeding syllogistically from the known to the unknown and a conscious rational reagent between a micro and a macrocosm ineluctably constructed upon the incertitude of the void” (p. 697). The micro and the macrocosm refer to the two infinites in Bloom’s meditation. As Pascal explains:

The nature of our existence hides from us the knowledge of first beginnings which are born of the Nothing; and the littleness of our being conceals from us the sight of the Infinite.

This is our true state; this is what makes us incapable of certain knowledge and of absolute ignorance. We sail within a vast sphere, ever drifting in uncertainty, driven from end to end.

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Both extremes are constructed on the "incertitude of the void," with the human individual as sole mediator between two worlds he cannot fully understand.

Stephen Dedalus is aware of his own importance as a thinker who can proceed syllogistically from observed phenomena to the contemplation of abstract truths. He is satisfied with his role as philosopher and artist. In contrast, Leopold Bloom, the "competent keyless citizen," proceeds "energetically from the unknown to the known through the incertitude of the void" (p. 697). A man of action, Bloom goes from the abstract to the concrete. From the two extremes that define human existence, he contemplates the unalterable phenomena of the "known" world around him. He regards birth, love, and death from a cosmic perspective that evokes universal compassion for mankind. Scientific speculation leads him back to sympathy for his fellowmen, who must endure the cold of interstellar space without possible reprieve.

From the point of view of eternity, no human victories are permanent, no relationships complete. Nevertheless, the individual must proceed energetically through incertitude to creative action. He cannot "cease to strive," as Stephen is tempted to do at the end of "Scylla and Charybdis." Within the ephemeral "instant," the human being is obliged to act and to develop the full potentials of existence. He must work toward self-creation, as well as toward an intersubjective understanding of his fellowmen.

In "Ithaca," Stephen and Bloom eat together, chat, and urinate in the garden. The events of the episode appear to be inconsequential, until we consider Bloom's recollection of other "nocturnal perambulations in the past." He realizes that this is the first time he has enjoyed "interindividual relations" with anyone since Rudy's death:

What reflection concerning the irregular sequence of dates 1884, 1885, 1886, 1888, 1892, 1893, 1904 did Bloom make before their arrival at their destination?

He reflected that the progressive extension of the field of individual development and experience was regressively accompanied
Bloom’s conversation with Stephen marks the first genuine “communication” he has enjoyed since 1893. For the past eleven years, he has inhabited a shell of neurotic isolation. His meeting with Stephen constitutes a significant change in his mode of existence. Bloom overcomes a decade of mourning for his consubstantial infant son by establishing a transsubstantial relationship of paternity with Stephen. Bloom conquers emotional impotence and is able to bring his “adopted son” in contact with the active world of social understanding. He is satisfied: “To have sustained no positive loss. To have brought a positive gain to others. Light to the gentiles” (p. 676). Bloom’s newly discovered paternity will later give him the courage to realize that he has “sustained no positive loss,” either in the Gold Cup race, or in the case of Molly’s adultery.

As Stephen and Bloom emerge “silently, doubly dark, from obscurity” (p. 698), they make a liturgical exodus, with Stephen as deacon and Bloom as acolyte. The “doubly dark” figures eschew the evangelical light and turn to the glimmer of the stars. Earlier, when Bloom chanted phrases from the Jewish anthem, Stephen heard in the “profound ancient male unfamiliar melody the accumulation of the past” (p. 689). Bloom puts Stephen in touch with Hebraic and with Celtic history: he shares with his guest the burden of racial identity, now celebrated in the context of transcendence. Stephen clings to the role of aesthetic priest and Irish exile; and Bloom sees in his companion’s “quick young male familiar form the predestination of a future” (p. 689).

The obscure catechetical style of “Ithaca” locates Stephen and Bloom in a rapidly expanding context of cosmic awareness. It provides a vast frame for their sacramental meeting. Joyce filters the events of the evening through an abstract mathematical perspective that diffuses sentimental and emotional resonances. Surrounded by the infinite spaces of the universe, the protagonists are transformed into “heavenly bodies, wanderers
like the stars at which they gaze.”” Suspended between two infinites, they nevertheless affirm the dignity of human consciousness.

Despite the debris of scientific and technical detail in “Ithaca,” Stephen and Bloom manage to utter the “good word” of fellowship that resounds through interstellar space. They symbolically merge in the shared identity of “Stephen Blephen” and “Bloom Stoom” (p. 682), each projecting his subjective consciousness into the foreign “life-world” of the other. They stand “silent, each contemplating the other in both mirrors of the reciprocal flesh of theirhisnotthis fellowfaces” (p. 702). Through momentary “Adamic” fusion, they transcend the limits of the isolated ego and escape the solipsistic prison of the self. Each is aware that the “fellowface” into which he stares is at once “his” and “not his.” Both men are united in their common humanity, in their “mutable (aliorelative)” (p. 708) relations with each other and with the rest of society. Yet each is forever bound to a “solitary (ipsorelative)” (p. 708) physiological microcosm.

Stephen has apparently been immolated, consenting, in the Jew’s “secret infidel apartment” (p. 692). Like Little Harry Hughes, he experiences ritual annihilation of the ego and escapes from the intellectual bondage of his own head. He proves receptive to matters of the heart, to the intimate friendship and affection offered him by Leopold Bloom. Physically diminished in an overwhelming universe, Stephen and Bloom nevertheless appear heroic, aggrandized by a consciousness that apprehends the need for universal sympathy, the “inanity of extolled virtue,” the limitations of egocentric desire, and the “apathy of the stars” (p. 734).

In the “creative” act of urination, both men pay homage to the mystical light of benediction that emanates from Molly’s window. Bloom elucidates “the mystery of an invisible person, his wife Marion (Molly) Bloom, denoted by a visible splendid sign, a lamp”: “With indirect and direct verbal allusions or affirmations: with subdued affection and admiration: with description: with impediment: with suggestion” (p. 702). In an
aspect of meditation, the two men behold the symbol of an unseen muse presiding over their nocturnal encounter: "their gazes, first Bloom's, then Stephen's, elevated to the projected luminous and semi-luminous shadow" (p. 702). As they stand in an attitude of worship, a "celestial sign" confirms the sacramental nature of their momentary communion: "A star precipitated with great apparent velocity across the firmament from Vega in the Lyre above the zenith beyond the stargroup of the Tress of Berenice towards the zodiacal sign of Leo" (p. 703). The auspicious omen would seem to predict future good fortune for both men in the realms of love and lyrical creation. Yet we realize that the stars are apathetic and that the illusory "heaven-tree" is a utopia of nescient matter, "there being no known method from the known to the unknown" (p. 701).

After Stephen leaves, Bloom continues to contemplate his personal insignificance in the material universe. Like the Stoics, he looks at human life from a detached perspective. He smiles amusedly at the fact that each man believes himself to be a woman's first lover, when in reality "he is neither first nor last nor only nor alone in a series originating in and repeated to infinity" (p. 731). Adultery becomes a single term in a mathematical series, and marital intercourse takes its place alongside pre- and post-conjugal relations. Bloom describes the act of sex in scientific, mechanical terms, as "energetic human copulation and energetic piston and cylinder movement necessary for the complete satisfaction of a constant but not acute concupiscence" (p. 732).

Bloom refuses to adopt the categorical response of marital outrage at his wife's infidelity. He examines his cuckoldry as a "natural phenomenon": "As natural as any and every act of a nature expressed or understood executed in natured nature by natural creatures. . . . As not as calamitous as a cataclysmic annihilation of the planet in consequence of collision with a dark sun. As less reprehensible than theft, highway robbery, cruelty to children and animals, . . . manslaughter, wilful and premeditated murder. As not more abnormal than all . . . processes of adaptation to altered conditions of existence. . . . As
more than inevitable, irreparable” (p. 733). Bloom reasons that adultery is a natural act; not criminal or socially harmful; and, as an event belonging to the past, irreparable. The “cuckold” decides that what’s done is done, and that perhaps it was not so reprehensible after all. Ironically, Bloom’s mental arguments are precisely those that Molly will use to justify her affair with Boylan. Molly later thinks: “they’re not going to be chaining me up . . . for stupid husbands jealousy . . . her husband found it out what they did together well naturally and if he did can he undo it hes coronado anyway whatever he does” (p. 777). She tells herself that sex is “only natural”; that her husband’s lack of erotic interest has forced her into adultery; and “if that’s all the harm we did in our lives,” the world would be a much more habitable place.

Neither Molly nor Leopold can speak of “adultery” directly. Molly uses a demonstrative pronoun, “that,” to designate her infidelity. And Bloom cloaks the deep structure of the sentences “He fucked her” and “She was fucked by him” in elaborate verbal rhetoric:

By what reflections did he, a conscious reactor against the void incertitude, justify to himself his sentiments?

The preordained frangibility of the hymen, the presupposed intangibility of the thing in itself: . . . the variations of ethical codes: the natural grammatical transition by inversion involving no alteration of sense of an aorist preterite proposition (parsed as masculine subject, monosyllabic onomatopoeic transitive verb with direct feminine object [He fucked her]) from the active voice into its correlative aorist preterite proposition (parsed as feminine subject, auxiliary verb and quasimonosyllabic onomatopoeic past participle with complementary masculine agent [She was fucked by him]) in the passive voice: . . . the futility of triumph or protest or vindication: the inanity of extolled virtue: the lethargy of nescient matter: the apathy of the stars. (P. 734)

In a materialistic universe, the astrological deities are apathetic. Man, the most conscious being in the cosmos, finds himself powerless to change the condition of nonthinking matter. Nor can he alter the stasis of the past. In “Ithaca,” Bloom is
surrounded by a world of things—events and data enumerated with scientific exactitude. He regards the facts of his past life clearly, from a realistic and detached perspective. Heroically transcending his situation, Bloom reaches a state of emotional equanimity. In an absurd world, he performs an existential act of mind that liberates him from psychological imprisonment. Bloom consciously chooses himself and his destiny, despite the limitations imposed by past history and by his present situation.

Molly’s infidelity is a fait accompli. Ulysses-Bloom exercises the liberty of deciding “at each moment the bearing of the past” on present experience. He mentally slays his wife’s suitors through an act of conscious acceptance. He draws the lens of his perception so far back that he attains a “god’s-eye” view. By considering his cuckoldry in a cosmic frame of reference, he methodically dismisses “antagonistic sentiments” and achieves a state of emotional balance consisting of “more abnegation than jealousy, less envy that equanimity” (p. 733). Bloom exercises a “negative capability” that allows him to feel compassion and tolerance for his spouse. Reconciled to her adultery, he seeks animal security in the sensual warmth of Molly’s buttocks:

In what final satisfaction did these antagonistic sentiments and reflections, reduced to their simplest forms, converge? Satisfaction at the ubiquity in eastern and western terrestrial hemispheres . . . of adipose posterior female hemispheres, redolent of milk and honey and of excretory sanguine and seminal warmth, reminiscent of secular families of curves of amplitude, insusceptible of moods of impression or of contrarieties of expression, expressive of mute immutable mature animality. (P. 734)

Bloom goes to sleep, drifting into the night world of unconscious dream that Joyce portrays in Finnegans Wake: “Going to a dark bed there was a square round Sinbad the Sailor roc’s auk’s egg in the night of the bed of all the auks of the rocs of Darkinbad the Brightdayler” (p. 737). We are left with nothing but a large black dot on the page, an instant that culminates our vicarious participation in Leopold’s consciousness.
Bloom has reached a promised land "redolent of milk and honey," the land of dream and mythic imagination. Joyce refuses to tell us whether or not he has won the impossible "auk’s egg" of conjugal harmony. The author frustrates our hopes that Bloom and Molly will resume normal intercourse and end the novel as a "happily married couple."

Despite the propensity of critics to interpret the eggs that Bloom demands from Molly on the morning of 17 June as ovular archetypes, the text of "Ithaca" would seem to contradict such optimistic speculations. Bloom realizes that at this point in time, it would be "absurd" for him and Molly "to reunite for increase and multiplication." And he knows that it is impossible to "form by reunion the original couple of uniting parties" (p. 726). Furthermore, Bloom recognizes the futility of his dreams of departure in search of fame and fortune. Though intellectually he may wander "selfcompelled, to the extreme limit of his cometary orbit, beyond the fixed stars" (p. 727), advancing age cuts him off from fantastic physical adventures in the macrocosm. He is forced to acknowledge an "unsatisfactory equation between an exodus and return in time through reversible space and an exodus and return in space through irreversible time" (p. 728).

At the end of "Ithaca," readers are apt to feel that Joyce has left them "in the dark" concerning the Bloom ménage. Critics speculate relentlessly as to the outcome of events on 17 June 1904. Such conjecture is futile. As we know from our Joycean catechism, the past is irreparable and the future unpredictable: the circus clown was not Bloom’s father; the notched florin never came back. "Ithaca," that lame duck of a chapter, deals a coup de grâce to the traditional reader eager to "know everything and know it in the baldest, coldest way."

Leopold Bloom is one of those rare literary heroes whom we have recently learned to admire as androgynous. He has a "touch of the poet" about him and a "touch of the woman," as well. In "Circe," Bloom is described as the "new womanly man" who will redeem the wasteland of twentieth-century society. He exhibits such "female" characteristics as compas-
sion, empathy, and nurturance. He appears at times to suffer from a conspicuous dearth of masculine libido, and he finds himself attracted to forceful women who complement his vulnerability.

With some "hesitency," Joyce stutters the theme of sexual fall throughout his fiction. Leopold-Ulysses is both the man that Joyce was and the husband that he feared to be. From Joyce's 1909 correspondence with Nora, we know that the author was capable of unfounded, irrational jealousy. He was terrified of being cuckolded; and subconsciously, at least, he feared giving his wife cause for adultery through impotence. The key is there; we have never discovered it. "His loss is our gain." James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence both conceal beneath prodigious literary creation a masculine terror of sexual failure. They use art to compensate for their own "man-womanliness," to "hide themselves from themselves." Lawrence creates sexual dynamos; Joyce retreats into the Rabelaisian refuge of comedy.

Most critics declare Leopold Bloom heroic in his psychic slaughter of the suitors and magnanimous in his equanimity. They assume that Molly's affair with Boylan is both reprehensible and forgivable. Yet Joyce may have had in mind still another possibility: Molly Bloom's adultery, like Leopold's onanism, could have an affirmative, liberating, and redemptive function in the novel. Intercourse with a virile lover frees Molly from erotic frustration and conjugal resentment. It allows her to relate to her husband as an individual whom she loves and wants to protect. As if in emulation of her spouse, Molly will achieve equanimity by the end of the "Penelope" episode.

Molly is indeed a Gea-Tellus, a primordial earth-mother, "fulfilled, recumbent, big with seed" (p. 737). And since the death of Rudy, Bloom has served as all of Molly's "daughters, sons," her "manchild in the womb." She offers her husband enough maternal warmth of breast and buttocks to satisfy the most perverse of polymorphous desires. And in so doing, she rewards him with satisfactions that make heterosexual copulation superfluous. Bloom may well harbor an "incest taboo" against intercourse with mother Molly. Such a psychological
fixation would explain his apparent castration complex, a fear of putting the phallus “out of sight” in the vagina lest it be destroyed. Since the death of his son, Bloom has been unwilling or unable to engage in “complete carnal intercourse”; he confesses that he “could never like it again after Rudy” (p. 168). Not only does he fear disappointed procreation, but he seems to have relinquished his phallic role in order to become a surrogate for Rudy, arrested in infantile sexuality. Bloom is fascinated by his wife’s “large soft bubs, sloping within her nightdress like a shegoat’s udder” (p. 63); and he nightly worships at the “altar of the adulterous rump,” kissing “the plump mellow yellow smellow melons . . . on each plump melonous hemisphere, . . . with obscure prolonged provocative melonsmellonous osculation” (pp. 734–35). He ends his day “reclined laterally” in embryonic position, his head at Molly’s feet. He rests in a peace that re-creates uterine security for “the childman weary, the manchild in the womb” (p. 737).

Even Freudian critics have neglected to explore the full implications of Bloom’s Oedipal attachment. Leopold demands of his spouse a primordial “mother’s love”: “Amor matris, subjective and objective genitive, may be the only true thing in life” (p. 207). As a surrogate son-husband, he can freely bestow on his wife the unmitigated devotion of filial attachment. Beyond the jealousy of Eros lies the fertile terrain of agape. Loss of erotic obsession allows Bloom to achieve a higher, more liberated sympathy for his spouse. Molly is the “earth-mother” fertilized by the “blazin’ and boilin’ heat of the sun”—a heat that Bloom has learned to “fear no more.” She treats Leopold with protective care and maternal solicitude, resolving that “theyre not going to get my husband again into their clutches if I can help it” (p. 773). “Amor matris” is the “only true thing in life” because of its utter gratuity. It resembles neither the reward of patriarchal approval nor the prize of amorous devotion. Mother-love is unconditional: it implies a deep, unshakable, personal faith, independent of performance or activity. Like the humanistic agape, the ideal of Christian charity, maternal affection is soul-directed and non-judgmen-
tal. It concerns being rather than doing; and as such, it is the closest thing on earth to divine beneficence.

Once Molly has committed adultery, she frees Bloom to pursue the path of agape, leaving Eros to lesser lights. Bloom rests in the assurance that his satisfied spouse can now fully delight in the physical and spiritual attentions of her impotent son-husband. Proof of sexual performance is no longer essential to marital harmony. Disarmed of a lover's conjugal demands, Molly can accept her husband with full respect for his humanity, his uniqueness, and even his kinkiness.

Molly is "true" to Leopold despite herself. She enjoys playing sexual games with Boylan; but ultimately, she returns to the "big memory" of Howth for spiritual sustenance. Her personal affection survives adultery. She recognizes that from the first moment of consummation, Bloom "understood or felt what a woman is" (p. 782).

Take thou no scorn to wear the horn;
It was a crest ere thou wast born.

As You Like It 4.2

Whatever his private fears of sexual betrayal, Joyce was enough of an artist and enough of a genius to recognize the absurdity of sexual obsession. His comic vision outguessed and out-prophesied the lyrical fiction of D. H. Lawrence: one need only compare the two "unfaithful women," Constance Chatterley and Molly Bloom. Garrett Deasy may blame adulterous females for the sins of mankind, from Eve and Pandora to Kitty O'Shea. But Joyce knows better, and he tells us so. Despite the greed and jealousy of human nature, men and women must strive for equanimity in their love relationships. This is the truth that Joyce envisioned in Exiles and finally realized in Ulysses.

Joyce was at once fascinated and repelled by the Catholic doctrine of conjugal possession. The sacrosanct Irish family, with its assumptions of domestic ownership and female chastity, conspired with the church to stultify individual creativity. Joyce so despised the "trap" of bourgeois marriage that he and
Nora postponed their wedding ceremony until 1931. The author put his own opinions about love and marriage into the mouth of his protagonist in *Stephen Hero*: "The Roman Catholic notion that a man should be unswervingly continent from his boyhood and then be permitted to achieve his male nature, having first satisfied the Church as to his orthodoxy, financial condition, [and] prospects and general intentions, and having sworn before witnesses to love his wife for ever whether he loved her or not and to beget children for the kingdom of heaven in such manner as the Church approved of—this notion seemed to him by no means satisfactory" (*SH* 203–4). Stephen Dedalus declares to Lynch:

I like a woman to give herself. . . . These people count it a sin to sell holy things for money. But surely what they call the temple of the Holy Ghost should not be bargained for! Isn't that simony?

. . . A woman’s body is a corporal asset of the State: if she traffic with it she must sell it either as a harlot or as a married woman or as a working celibate or as a mistress. But a woman is (incidentally) a human being: and a human being’s love and freedom is not a spiritual asset of the State. . . . A human being can exert freedom to produce or to accept, or love to procreate or to satisfy. Love gives and freedom takes. (*SH* 202–3)

Rationally, Joyce shared with Lawrence the ideal of man and woman "being free together." He was convinced that twentieth-century society must grow beyond the infantile demands of sexual ownership. Yet he knew the visceral compulsions of jealousy, the conviction of betrayal, and the emotional need for marital fidelity. Only by transcending the desire for possession can human beings get beyond the ever-present threat of amorous betrayal. Hence Shakespeare’s mature wisdom in "Scylla and Charybdis," Richard Rowan’s acceptance of conjugal ambiguity in *Exiles*, and Leopold Bloom’s cosmic equanimity in "Ithaca." By conquering the "pain of loss," Joyce’s cuckold achieves the freedom of non-possession.\(^{13}\)

James Joyce, for the first time in the history of English literature, has given us a portrait of an "open marriage" that
works. No longer dependent on sexual union, the conjugal bond has shed its erotic compulsion. Molly and Bloom have escaped the limits of sexual obsession and are free to relate as full, self-actualizing human beings. Despite masturbatory and adulterous activities, they remain faithful to one another in their fashion.

Molly enjoys the company of the well-endowed red-haired gentleman who plows and pleases her amid crumbs of Plumtree’s Potted Meat. But her love affair is largely *jeu d’esprit*, a game that brings her closer to her husband. Molly gives little heed to concealing her afternoon frolic from Bloom. She energetically moves furniture, but she fails to change the sheets soiled with Boylan’s “‘spunk’” (p. 780). Molly never takes her adultery too seriously. She feels that “‘if that’s all the harm ever we did in this vale of tears God knows its not much doesn’t everybody only they hide it I suppose’” (p. 780). There will always be stallion-studs around to oblige a willing lady. But Bloom is something special. He understands and feels what a woman is. And when all the Blazes have burned themselves out, Bloom will still be there to kindle the flame of love. Why should we assume, after all, that impotence makes him less of a “‘man’” in any sense of the word?

At the end of “‘Ithaca,’” Bloom becomes a semi-mythic figure, a “‘heavenly body’” who wanders in the track of the sun and the paths of the stars. The chapter conquers the limits of time and space: it plunges into the atemporal realm of the unconscious, that “‘Utopia’” which is “‘not a heaventree, not a heavensgrot’” (p. 701), but a “‘nowhere.’”

The question of “‘When?’ is answered by a mythic allusion to Sinbad the Sailor and Darkinbad the Brightdayler—imaginary figures associated with the “‘auk’s egg’” that symbolizes the impossible. The narrative defies linear history and culminates in a timeless dream world, a world that embodies the collective consciousness of the race. Our location, “‘Where,’” is designated by a large black dot, an isolated point independent of surrounding space. We are “‘everywhere’” and “‘nowhere.’” Just as the “‘moment’” transcends chronological time, the “‘point’” suggests disembodied matter. The single, round geo-
metrical figure is free-floating and unlimited: it offers a "trans-spatial" connection with the infinite.

By the end of "Ithaca," we have discovered the cosmic freedom of conscious detachment and the liberated utopia of unconscious dream. We embrace that timeless, non-spatial world of myth and collective fantasy that Joyce alludes to in "Penelope" and fully explores in *Finnegans Wake*.

1. As Richard Ellmann observes in *Ulysses on the Liffey*, Joyce scholars frequently attempt to supply the novel with an "ending." "What then does happen to Bloom and Stephen? One critic declares that Stephen goes out into the night and writes— *Ulysses*. But *Ulysses* is not the work of Stephen,... it issues from that mind of which Stephen, Bloom, Molly, and even Mulligan and Boylan are only aspects. ... William Empson remembers that Stephen ... agrees to exchange with Mrs. Bloom Italian for singing lessons, and proposes that Stephen returns on 17 June. ... The mutual instruction then takes a predictable turn. ... The other theory for 17 June is exactly opposite. According to it, Bloom, instead of relaxing further his marriage tie, tightens it and becomes a proper husband. Edmund Wilson proposed this idea some years ago in an uncharacteristic burst of optimism." Ellmann notes that all these critics "suffer from a desire, vestigial even among modern readers of novels, to detain the characters a little longer in their fictional lives" (pp. 159–61).

2. Ellmann suggests that in the *Nostos* section of *Ulysses*: "The 'fusion' that Joyce spoke of now occurs between Stephen and Bloom—not atomic but Adamic fusion: together they must form between them the new Adam and convey intimations of a terrestrial paradise" (ibid., p. 150).


4. Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, trans. W. F. Trotter, pp. 16–17. Since the original composition of this text, several other critics have noted the similarity between Bloom's meditation and Pascal's philosophical writing. I chose to quote extensively from the *Pensees*, however, because Pascal's influence on Bloom is so germane to my argument.


6. Ibid.


8. As Sartre explains in *Being and Nothingness*, "the formula 'to be free' does not mean 'to obtain what one has wished' but rather 'by oneself to determine oneself to wish' (in the broad sense of choosing). In other words success is not important to freedom. ... Now the meaning of the past is strictly dependent on my present project. ... I alone in fact can decide at each moment the *bearing* of the past" (pp. 483, 498).
9. According to Robert Scholes, "the final lesson of the 'Ithaca' chapter is one of the most deeply imbedded meanings in the entire book. At the end of the chapter, after a day of anxiety, Bloom arrives at an equilibrium which is not merely that of a body at rest but that of a self-regulated system operating in harmony with other systems larger than itself" (Scholes, Structuralism in Literature, p. 190). Throughout Ulysses, Joyce seems to indicate that Bloom is responsible for "hearing in his arms the secret of the race, graven in the language of prediction" (p. 676).

10. Cf. Finnegans Wake: "Lead, kindly fowl! . . . What bird has done yesterday man may do next year, be it fly, be it moult, be it hatch, be it agreement in the nest" (p. 112). The "auk's egg" may be the last item in the catalogue.

11. Joyce, Letters, 1:159–60. The following discussion of "Ithaca" was first published under the title of "Joyce's Bloom: Beyond Sexual Possessiveness," American Imago, vol. 32, no. 4 (1975), pp. 329–34; reprinted by permission of American Imago and Wayne State University Press. Several months later, Marilyn French's study The Book as World again stressed the importance of curiaus and of Joyce's philosophy of conjugal non-possession. Working separately, and without knowledge of each other's writing, French and I both devised similar theories concerning the "Ithaca" chapter. I suspect that the apparent confluence of ideas may be the result of a shared "androgyneus" perspective applied to the interpretation of Ulysses.

12. The quotations are paraphrased from Stephen's portrait of Shakespeare in the "Scylla and Charybdis" episode and from Joyce's description of Bloom as the "new womanly man" in "Circe."

13. The stoic repudiation of sexual ownership may be compensatory, but it is nevertheless valid. I am by no means suggesting that Joyce had "feminist" sympathies in his rejection of patriarchal privilege and conjugal appropriation. In fact, he tended to ridicule Francis Sheehy-Skeffington's commitment to the cause of women's rights. Joyce's rebellion against the bourgeois, commercial exchange of sexual favors had other roots. It was part of his attempt to cast off the paralytic "enslavement" to priest and king sanctioned by Irish religious and political authorities. In Stephen Hero, Joyce describes marriage as "a mark of ordinariness" (p. 201). Echoing Thomas Hardy's Jude the Obscure, he insists that "a man who swears before the world to love a woman till death part him and her is sane neither in the opinion of the philosopher who understands what mutability is nor in the opinion of the man of the world" (p. 201). He declares that the modern poet must treat love ironically because "we cannot swear or expect fealty" in an age in which "we recognise too accurately the limits of every human energy" (p. 174). Joyce disdained Irish Catholic puritanism, which he took to be the "cause of all the moral suicide in the island" (p. 200). He embraced his own interpretation of Ibsen's spirit of "free love" and explored the theory of sexual "non-possession" in Stephen Hero, in Exiles, in Ulysses, and in Finnegans Wake.