

The Desire to Feed or the Desire to Be Fed?:  
The Entangled Relation Between Bloom and the Maternal  
Figure in *Ulysses*<sup>\*</sup>

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Abstract

The question as to whether Leopold Bloom, for all his gentleness and generosity, tends to have a biased conception of "woman" is a controversial one. Instead of charging Bloom with politically incorrect gender assumptions, this paper will argue that Bloom does not see all women through a distortional speculum. Woman's role as a mother, for one thing, is far from being the target of Bloom's disparagement. What significance does Bloom envisage in the maternal figure that prompts him to exempt the mother from the category of the threatening other? Seeking to penetrate into Bloom's complicated relation with the maternal figure, this paper first sketches how Bloom shows his sympathy towards women whenever they are thought of as caretakers or murderers. I proceed to argue that his eagerness to identify with the mother can hardly escape our attention if we track Bloom's desire to feed. Reading Bloom's desire to feed from a psychoanalytic perspective, I demonstrate how this desire is entangled with womb envy and how Bloom's own fantasy of becoming a mother can help him handle the trauma of losing his son.

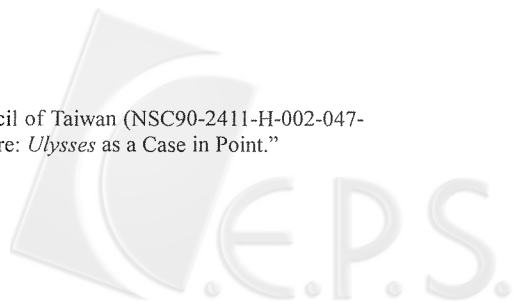
Further, I contend that Bloom's identification with the mother is vindicated by his desire to be fed as well. The desire reveals Bloom's underlying wish to be impregnated by the mother and thereby become a mother himself. I also suggest that the desire to be fed is related to Bloom's wish to be desired by the mother. The fantasy of being desired by the mother, to a certain extent, consolidates his identification with the lost son and thus makes possible the reunion with his wife Molly. Analyzing Bloom's entangled relation with the maternal figure, this paper is intended to counter psychoanalytic studies which, due to their excessive stress on the role of the father, lose sight of the importance the mother plays in subject formation.

Keywords

womb-envy, cloacal theory of birth, interiorization, mourning

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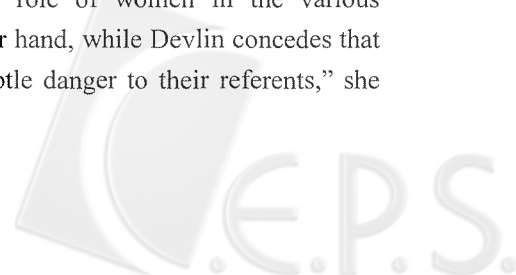


Women are figured in his thoughts as schools of fish or groups of other creatures, individually indistinguishable and driven to pair under animal impulses: "Because they want it themselves. Their natural craving. Shoals of them every evening poured out of offices. [...] Catch em alive. O." (*U* 13.790-92)  
 —John Bishop

"*Tableau!* O, look who it is for the love of God! How are you at all? What have you been doing with yourself? Kiss and delighted to, kiss, to see you. Picking holes in each other's appearance. You're looking splendid. Sister souls. Showing their teeth one another. How many have you left? Wouldn't lend each other a pinch of salt" (*U* 13: 815-20). *Tableau* indeed. [...] Women fawn upon each other, vie with each other for attractive males, are deceitful, selfish, and as free from guilt as cats. Their narcissism is hypnotic. Bloom has no hesitancy in so categorizing them [...].  
 —Philip Weinstein

[H]e [Bloom] sees females as a group as inherently identical shades, as evidenced in his grammatical equation of Molly with her entire sex: "Is there anything more in him that they she sees?" [...] Bloom's thoughts also have distortional tendencies, nowhere more so, perhaps, than in his speculations about the monolithic nature of women: "Extraordinary the interest they take in a corpse. Glad to see us go we give them such trouble coming" (*U* 6.14-15). [...] "Must be careful about women. Catch them once with their pants down. Never forgive you after" (*U* 6.484-85).  
 —Kimberly J. Devlin

It is hard for the Joyceans not to notice Leopold Bloom's "marked inclination" to generalize about women (Levine 133) even though the ways they seek to approach Bloom's gendered optic are not altogether the same. Dissatisfied with the fact that women not only are routinely referred to in Bloom's narrative in the plural but emerge as "inexhaustibly strange for Bloom—other, arousing, disturbing, creaturely," Weinstein, for example, criticizes Bloom for his judging women by instinct without trying to understand the social forces that may have made women behave in the way he sees (118). Likewise, Florence Walzl believes that though Joyce feels sympathy for women caught in restrictive social conditions, "it is a sympathy often tempered by ironic dissection of feminine weakness or hypocrisy or sometimes biased by male ambivalence or even hostility to the smothering role of women in the various developing phases of their lives" (53). On the other hand, while Devlin concedes that "Bloom's representational en-genderings pose a subtle danger to their referents," she



still maintains that some of Bloom's essentializing assumptions "are obviously speculative self-amusements" (*U En-Gendered Perspective* 76). As a sympathizer of Bloom, Richard Pearce further draws our attention to the fact that sometimes Bloom does show his "ability to think of women individually and emphatically" (111). Instead of gauging how serious Bloom is when uttering the apparently sexist remarks, this paper intends to propose that Bloom does not see all women through a distortional speculum. Woman's role as a mother, for one thing, is far from Bloom's target of disparagement. Bloom does not regard the maternal figure as disturbingly alien to him; rather, he seldom hesitates to sympathize with the motherly role. What significance does Bloom envisage in the maternal figure that prompts him to exempt her from the category of the threatening other? Seeking to penetrate into Bloom's complicated relation with the maternal figure, this paper will first sketch how Bloom shows his sympathy towards women whenever they are thought of as a caretaker or a nurturer. I will proceed to argue that his eagerness to identify with the mother can hardly escape our attention if we track Bloom's desire to feed. Reading Bloom's desire to feed from a psychoanalytic perspective, I will demonstrate how this desire is related to womb envy and how Bloom's fantasy of becoming a mother can help him handle the trauma of losing his son.

Further, I want to point out that Bloom's identification with the mother is vindicated no less by his desire to be fed than by the desire to feed, for the desire to be fed reveals the underlying wish to be impregnated by the mother and thereby become a mother himself. Having illustrated how Bloom's desire to be fed and the desire to feed are two sides of the same coin—both can be traced back to his desire to identify with the mother—I will argue that the desire to be fed is also indicative of Bloom's wish to be desired by the mother. The fantasy of being desired by the mother, to a certain extent, consolidates his identification with the lost son and thus makes possible the reunion with his wife Molly.

Psychoanalytic tradition tends to highlight the influence the symbolic father exerts upon the subject. Analyzing how Bloom deals with the traumatic memory of his son as well as the frustrated relationship with his wife via the identification with and desire for the mother, this paper, hopefully, may serve as an alternative for us to grasp the significance the symbolic mother plays in subject formation.



## I. Sympathy for the Motherly Role

Assuming that Bloom's narrative is permeated with some specific gender assumptions, I will take "Nausicaa" as a point of departure to investigate his relation with women. As an episode that "initiates in *Ulysses* a sustained exploration of conventional representations of women" (Bishop 185), "Nausicaa" particularly abounds with biased generalizations about women.<sup>1</sup> As Clara D. McLean notes,

He [Bloom] pointedly distinguishes himself from the "they" of women, usually at women's expense: "that's what they enjoy. Taking a man from another woman. Or even hear of it. Different with me" (*U* 13.874-75). Repeatedly, Gerty and women in general are named "devils": "that little limping devil," "Devil you are," "Devils they are when that's coming on them. Dark devilish appearance" (*U* 13.851-52, 929, 822). (54)

For all the biased assumptions behind Bloom's categorization of Gerty, he feels for her when he "muses on the brevity of a young girl's flowering and on how quickly women must settle down to the female role of washing children, potting babies, laying out corpses, giving birth" (Blamires 135). The ruminations on the heavy burden

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<sup>1</sup> As "the only episode in *Ulysses* with an equally male and female focus" (Pearce 105), "Nausicaa" evokes many discussions on gender issues. Critical responses are so divergent that it will be the task of the individual reader to conclude who is to blame—or whether there is anyone to blame—in Gerty's flirtatious encounter with Bloom. We can tread a conventional path by highlighting Gerty's foolishness (Weinstein 115), or we can see Gerty as a "pathetic victim of social and religious enculturation" (Henke 132). There is still another interpretation which considers Bloom as the one to blame because he not only takes pleasure in watching Gerty but never hesitates to "expose" women: "Bloom leaks the painful secret of Gerty's lameness, then says with uncharacteristic cruelty, 'Glad I didn't know it when she was on show,' calling her a 'curiosity' (*U* 13.771-75). [...] Bloom attaches unpleasant and even evil associations to menstruation, nonetheless a topic of endless fascination in his narrative" (McLean 54). Beside the aforementioned, we can choose to target Joyce rather than accuse either Bloom or Gerty; after all, the romanticizing style of Gerty's monologue is so suspicious that it can be assumed as evidencing Joyce's deliberate denigration of women's sentimentality and vulgarity. Seen thus, it is very likely that Joyce's lampoon of women is intended to cloak the attempt of asserting his power over female figures (Higgins 60). While many critics still construe the relation between Gerty and Bloom "as one of victim and victimizer, symptom and disease, effect and cause" (Bishop 186), some critics cease to consider Gerty as an innocent victim pinned down by Bloom's voyeuristic gaze, or, as product for male consumption. Patrick McGee, for instance, contends that Gerty "is able to manipulate the system of sexual values, to employ its symbols and discursive practices, to achieve her own pleasure" (125). Devlin also argues that Gerty is engaged in voyeurism while being watched by Bloom (*Wandering and Return in FW* 137). Likewise, Bloom is no longer seen as purely a predator: "he did some 'stage setting' to make himself appear, at least in his own eyes, more attractive than he actually thinks he is" (Bishop 311).

which the motherly role will impose on Gerty immediately remind Bloom of Mrs. Purefoy, who has lain in labour for three days in the maternity hospital (*U* 13.959). Obviously, it is Bloom's empathy with the motherly role that makes him associate Gerty, a would-be-mother, with Mrs. Purefoy, a mother-in-pain. Bloom is empathically touched by Mrs. Purefoy's suffering in childbirth as soon as he learns the news from Mrs. Breen in Chapter 8. He asks after Mrs. Purefoy with anxiety in Chapter 14 and feels much relieved once learning that her pain is gone: "his opinion was that one must have a cold constitution and a frigid genius not to be rejoiced by this freshest news of the fruition of her confinement since she had been in such pain *through no fault of hers*" (*U* 14.881-84; emphasis added). Evidently, Bloom's pathos for women surfaces whenever it occurs to him that they have to undergo the labor of giving birth entirely alone.

As for the job of cleaning corpses that Gerty is supposed to do in the future, it directs Bloom's association to Dignam (*U* 13.956), whose funeral he just attended in the morning. Later in the same episode Bloom resumes his meditation upon Dignam's death; he compares the fate of the widow with that of the widower and concludes that Mrs. Dignam may survive with "her widow's mite" (*U* 13.1230). While the association between Gerty and Mrs. Purefoy is not arbitrary, Gerty's predictable maternal burden seems on the surface to have no bearing on Mrs. Dignam's assumed ability to survive well. But I suggest that we see them as serving the same function: they all reveal Bloom's sympathy for women who have to painstakingly mother their children, and often, even their husbands too.

Devlin has found that the widower apparently receives the bulk of Bloom's sympathy when he thinks of the aftermath of the spouse's death (*U En-Gendered Perspective* 84). As Bloom speculates how the surviving wife, like Mrs. Dignam, will live on the insurance settlement when her husband died (*U* 13.1228-31), we are likely to assume that Bloom sympathizes with the widower mainly because of an economic reason, for widowers, unlike widows, often are not assured of receiving an insurance settlement. Nevertheless, it is the emotional deprivation Bloom envisions in the case of the widower, Devlin argues, that evokes his sympathy:

"Widower I hate to see. Looks so forlorn. Poor man O'Connor wife and five children poisoned by mussels here. The sewage. Hopeless. Some good matronly woman in a porkpie hat to mother him. Take him in tow, platter face and a large apron" (*U* 13.1232-35). Bloom's thoughts

here on the fate of the widower—on his need upon the occasion of his spouse's demise—are revealing: the widower rebounds with another woman because he wants not another wife but another mother. The envisioned aftermath of the wife's death betrays her actual status as a parent than a partner and the husband's childlike dependency on her. [...] [T]his wifely role—in fact maternal in its contours—is not physically kind on those who must occupy it. (*U En-Gendered Perspective* 84)

When asked to console a widow in the “Circe” episode, Bloom attempts to cheer her up by claiming that “Absence makes the heart grow younger” (*U* 15.1606). In this phantasmagoria scene, according to Devlin, Bloom brings his conscious thoughts on spousal death to their logical conclusion: “if a husband can function in a family as an adult dependent, as a child who refuses to grow up despite his age, then widowhood can be decidedly nontragic” (*U En-Gendered Perspective* 84). What underlies Bloom's sympathy for the widower, in this light, is actually deeper sympathy for the wife who has to assume the maternal burden all the time.

## II. The Desire to Feed

It would be a partial understanding if we see Bloom's conception of the maternal figure simply in terms of sympathy and lose sight of the fact that he actually goes further to identify with the mother. As Erin Soros points out, “Bloom's empathy for women's experiences of menstruation, pregnancy, labor, and stillbirth does not reflect a static contemplation of an other: it performs an internalization of these experiences until they become Bloom's own” (8). Seen thus, Bloom's exclamation “O, I so want to be a mother” (*U* 15.1817) in the nighttown cannot be hastily dismissed as farcical lines valid only in his fantasy of maternal experience. In waking hours, Bloom's desire to be a mother is no less apparent; he assumes the role of a nurturer all the time and indeed can be seen as “a finished example of the new womanly man” (*U* 15.1798). Actually, when Bloom first appears in the “Calypso” episode, he is preparing breakfast for his wife in the kitchen. That is, he emerges as a character preoccupied with “feeding” his wife. In “Lestrygonians,” Bloom buys two Banbury cakes, breaks them up, and throws them into the Liffey to feed the “hungry famished gull” (*U* 8.62). Also,



he is found to feed his cat by pouring “warmbubbled milk on a saucer” (*U* 4.36). The cat is not the only one that is nurtured by Bloom’s milk; Stephen, likewise, is served with the milk that Bloom used to reserve for Molly. In “Ithaca,” when Bloom prepares Epps’s cocoa for Stephen and himself, he serves “extraordinarily to his guest and, in reduced measure, to himself the viscous cream ordinarily reserved for the breakfast of his wife Marion” (*U* 17.363-65). As John Bormanis construes, “through pouring Stephen Molly’s ‘viscous cream,’ Bloom vicariously breast-feeds Stephen and realizes a desire expressed in ‘Circe’: ‘O, I so want to be a mother’”(597).<sup>2</sup> Tracking Bloom’s desire to feed, we may recognize clearly the identification between Bloom and the motherly role.

Now we can proceed to seek the reason why Bloom appears so eager to identify with the mother. Should we explain Bloom’s desire to feed from a psychoanalytic perspective, claiming that it is related to the womb envy deep inside man’s psyche? Or are there more specific reasons to account for this fictional character’s desire to be a nurturing mother? To answer these questions, we must have an account of the concept of womb envy first.

Noting that womb envy never receives due consideration in Freudian psychoanalysis, critics with a feminist consciousness tend to counter the theory of penis envy by postulating the “archetypal womb envy as constitutive of male identity” (Froula 160). For example, while Sigmund Freud assumes that “the boy’s estimate of its [penis’s] value is logically reflected in his inability to imagine a person like himself who is without this essential constituent” (9: 215-16), Karen Horney contends that what is clearly reflected in the unconscious of the male psyche should be the boy’s intense envy of motherhood (60). According to Horney, as the uncanny, unfamiliar and mysterious nature of woman challenges man’s capability to divine her secret, he is likely to regard woman as dreadful (141). Man’s feeling of woman’s uncanniness, Horney states, “can only relate ultimately to one thing in her: the mystery of motherhood. Everything else is merely the residue of his dread of this” (141). From these statements Horney infers that the boy’s failure to comprehend the mystery of motherhood will result in his envy or even dread of woman in general. It is the residue of his envy or dread that drives man to depreciate motherhood as “a handicap” (60):

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<sup>2</sup> In “Ithaca,” feeling fatherly towards Stephen, Bloom asks Stephen “at what o’clock did you dine” and encourages him to eat “something substantial” (*U* 16.1568-69, 1572). The food Bloom suggests, notably, is “an eggflip made on unadulterated *maternal* nutriment” (*U* 16.1570; emphasis added). Be it Molly’s breakfast cream or the eggflip, the maternal nutriment is a subtle revelation of Bloom’s unconscious wish to mother Stephen.

When one begins, as I did, to analyze men only after a fairly long experience of analyzing women, one receives a most surprising impression of the intensity of this envy of pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood, as well as of the breasts and of the act of suckling. In the light of this impression derived from analysis, one must naturally inquire whether an unconscious masculine tendency to depreciation is not expressing itself intellectually in the above-mentioned view of motherhood. This depreciation would run as follows: In reality woman do simply desire the penis; when all is said and done motherhood is only a burden that makes the struggle for existence harder, and men may be glad that they have not to bear it. (60-61)

Following Horney, we may explain Bloom's biased gender assumptions as resulting from his dread of women, but still we cannot figure out why Bloom not so much depreciates motherhood as embraces it. That Horney's theory cannot fully account for Bloom's relation with the maternal figure makes us suspect that womb envy might assume forms other than aversion against motherhood. For example, the envy may express itself in the desire to feed or even in the fantasy of pregnancy. That is, while some men would defend against woman's "by no means negligible physiological superiority" (Horney 60) by devaluing the capacity for motherhood in order to assert their superiority over woman, others may deal with this envy in a less aggressive way, like what we see in Bloom's case. Bloom's identification with the mother, culminating in the very fantasy of becoming pregnant and giving birth to eight sons, can be attributed to the archetypal womb envy of man. But his identification with the mother has its peculiar significance as well: it is crucial in helping Bloom negotiate the trauma of losing his son.

To begin with, the fantasized identification with the mother can serve as a remedy for the father's biological frailty: "If it's healthy it's from the mother. If not from the man. Better luck next time" (*U* 6.329-30); "I too. Last of my race. Milly young student. Well, my fault perhaps. No son. Rudy. Too late now" (*U* 11.1066-67). The fact that Rudy is too badly deformed to survive weighs heavily on Bloom; therefore, he is found remorse-ridden throughout the novel. Bloom has imagined what could have been but for Rudy's death: "If little Rudy had lived. See him grow up. Hear his voice in the house. Walking beside Molly in an Eton suit. My son.

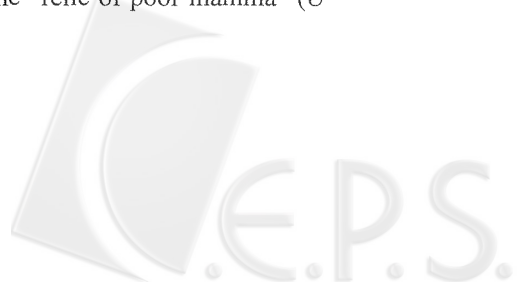


Me in his eyes" (U 6.75-76). Later,

[r]ecalling the Childs murder case (with its implicit verbal overtones of infanticide), Bloom dwells briefly on the superstition about visual fingerprints being left on the retinas of the dead: "The murderer's image in the eye of the murdered" (6.478), he thinks to himself. The thought is patently connected to his earlier fantasy of "Me in his eyes," albeit in phobically inverted form. (Devlin, *U En-Gendered Perspective* 75-76)

According to Devlin, the association between "Me in his eyes" and "the murderer's image in the eye of the murdered" implicitly betrays Bloom's sense of responsibility for his son's failure to survive. That is, this lingering sense of guilt even drives Bloom to regard himself as the murderer of Rudy (*U En-Gendered Perspective* 76). Moreover, Bloom once comments, "[o]nly a mother and child ever buried in the one coffin. I see what it means. I see. *To protect him as long as possible even in the earth*" (U 6.819-21; emphasis added). The latent message suggested in Bloom's statement is that only the mother can play the role of a protector. Under such circumstances, little wonder that Bloom often seeks to step into the shoes of the mother and enjoys feeding or nurturing others. As a father, Bloom fails to safeguard his son. Fantasizing himself as a mother, therefore, turns out to be a compensatory measure that may bring him some sort of consolation.

In fact, Bloom's unwillingness to relinquish the talismanic potato derived from his mother also evidences his identification of protection with motherhood. In "Calpso," Bloom assures himself "Potato I have" (U 4.73) right after leaving home as if he were in need of being blessed by this talisman wherever he is. Holding the belief that a potato talisman such as the one he carries is able "to protect the bearer from rheumatism" (Gifford and Seidman 444), Bloom blames himself for allowing Zoe, the prostitute he meets in the nighttown, to snatch this heirloom from him. "I should not have parted with my talisman. Rain, exposure at dewfall on the searocks, a peccadillo at my time of life" (U 15.2794-95)—he thus confesses to the personified Fan. Later Bloom asks Zoe to return him the potato on the ground that "[t]here is a memory attached to it" (U 15.3520). Evidently, Bloom needs the potato because it is "a killer of pestilence by absorption" (U 15.1357-58) as well as the "relic of poor mamma" (U



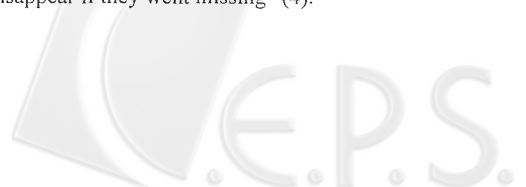
15.3513).<sup>3</sup> To be more precise, the power of protection and the attachment to the mother Bloom thirsts for are actually two sides of the same coin.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, however disinclined the child is, he must separate with the mother to enter the symbolic order. The child thus has to go through “a whole graduation within modalities of separation,” namely, “a real *deprivation* of the breast,” “an imaginary *frustration* of the gift as maternal relation,” and “a symbolic *castration* inscribed in the Oedipus complex” (Kristeva 33-34). Though the process of subjectivization presupposes the primal separation, the subject, from time to time, reveals his nostalgia for the mother-child symbiosis in which maternal protection dominates the whole scene. In this light, Mark Shechner suggests that Bloom keeps the potato all the time because it “serves him as a symbolic and psychological connection with what little remains of the past, and its loss is a symbolic castration and separation from *amor matris*” (109). Seen thus, Bloom’s preservation of his mother’s relic points to not only his identification of protection with motherhood but also his desire to be protected by the mother. However, Bloom’s carrying the potato all day long can be interpreted the other way around. Actually, when Bloom feels his pocket to ascertain the presence of the potato (*U* 15.242-43), he appears like a pregnant woman patting her belly to make sure that the baby is safe there.<sup>4</sup> As the talisman signifies protection, by possessing this maternal symbol, Bloom is endowed with, as it were, the magic power of protection that at the outset he attributes exclusively to the mother. Incorporating the talisman given by the mother, Bloom can fantasize himself as competent enough to protect the son. Bloom’s preservation of the potato thus has these two interrelated motives—to be protected by the mother and to protect like the mother.

As for the climatic fantasy of pregnancy and childbirth—“Bloom embraces her [Mrs. Thornton] tightly and bears eight male yellow and white children” (*U* 15.1821-22), it is not merely enacted to soothe Bloom’s sense of paternal incompetence. This fantasy, involving Bloom’s longing for Rudy as well as his self-inflicted pain of hallucinatory childbirth, “positively effects the ‘mental economics’ of libido detachment from the lost object” (Ramsey 65-67). To complete the process of mourning,

<sup>3</sup> Even in Bloom’s vision, his mother’s image is associated with the talismanic potato. The apparition of his mother, when appearing in the phantasmagoric scene, “ransacks the pouch of her striped blay petticoat” whence “a shriveled potato and a celluloid doll fall out” (*U* 15.288-89).

<sup>4</sup> For Soros, “Bloom in fact has been pregnant throughout *Ulysses*” (8) as she finds that Bloom continues to “express anxiety about the location and presence of the various objects” he keeps in his pocket—the letter, the soap, the potato, etc.—“as if he would disappear if they went missing” (4).



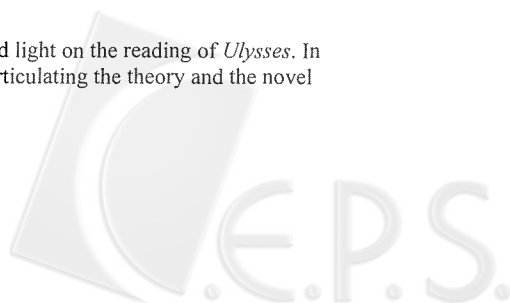
according to Freud, one's memory of his lost object has to be cathected and hypercathected:

Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object. [...] Nevertheless its orders cannot be obeyed at once. They are carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged. Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it. (14: 244-45)

Given that Rudy's death can be seen as given by birth as his life only lasts for eleven days, the birthing fantasy is likely to trigger Bloom's traumatic memory of his dead son and thus may function to help him accomplish libido detachment. Drawing on Freud's theory, Harly Ramsey therefore assures us that Bloom's fantasy will enable him to go through the process of mourning, since "[t]he eight births, in their excess, illustrate Rudy's memory as hypercathected and detached": "Birthing eight sons—all clothes, educated, and employed—Bloom does indeed have 'Better luck next time'" (67).

To further understand how Bloom enacts the fantasy of pregnancy to facilitate the process of energy cathecting and libido detachment, we may take into account the analogy that Jacques Derrida draws between mourning and pregnancy.<sup>5</sup> According to Derrida, when death "comes to the other, and comes to us through the other," he "no longer exists except *in us, between us*," that is, in our memory of him (28). What mourning entails is thus "a movement in which an interiorizing idealization takes in itself or upon itself the body and voice of the other, the other's visage and person" (34). Mourning, in this sense, is comparable to pregnancy since "it makes the other a *part of us, between us*—and then the other no longer quite seems to be the other, because we grieve for him and bear him *in us*, like an unborn child, like a future" (35). Echoing Bloom's inner urge to grieve for Rudy and bear him in his memory, the fantasized maternal experience appears pertinent in facilitating the interiorizing idealization. To

<sup>5</sup> In "Giving Death," Soros elaborates how Derrida's theory may shed light on the reading of *Ulysses*. In appropriating the Derridean analogy, I am indebted to Soros, but in articulating the theory and the novel our resulting interpretations and emphases are different.

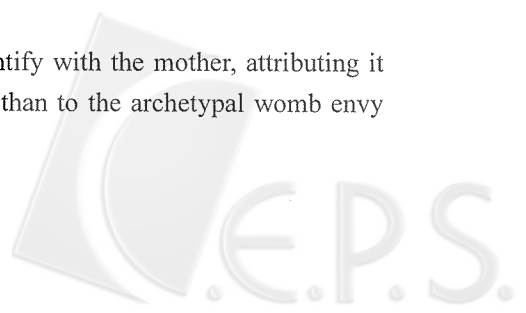


put it in Soros's words, internalizing the birth, Bloom thus has "an opportunity to remember his dead son Rudy, to perform the labor of mourning" (7).

Notably, in the process of attempting to interiorize the other, Bloom the mourning subject will come to realize this interiorization as at most aborted, for the other, as it is in the case of pregnancy, is supposed to be "both *inside* and *beside* the self" (qtd. in Soros 5) and thus can never be interiorized without residues. Bloom gradually finds that, even though he can psychically prolong Rudy's existence by mourning/pregnancy, there is no guarantee that Rudy will gaze into his eyes to bring him some psychological comfort: "gazes, unseeing, into Bloom's eyes" (*U* 15.4964)—Rudy's apparition thus appears in Bloom's vision at the end of "Circe." Nor can Bloom's fantasized pregnancy bring Rudy back to him—as we know, he "bears eight male yellow and white children" instead. This aborted interiorization, which is apparently a failure, should be paradoxically counted a success as it leads to the completion of the work of mourning: "an aborted interiorization is at the same time a respect for the other as other, a sort of tender rejection, a movement of renunciation which leaves the other alone, outside, over there, in his death, outside of us" (Derrida 35). As Freud suggests, "when the work of mourning is completed, the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (14: 245). That is, if the other is eventually left over there, outside of us, then the act of mourning can be said to have succeeded. The fantasized experience of pregnancy, in this light, does not merely function to promise Bloom "better luck next time." More importantly, having experienced the aborted interiorization in fantasy, Bloom is reminded of the impossibility of the faithful interiorizing idealization, and the recognition of this impossibility will prevent him from falling prey to melancholia. In other words, being compelled to recognize that, however sad he is, Rudy is no more and cannot be recovered mimetically in either his memory or fantasy, Bloom avoids the danger of becoming a melancholic, who, according to Freud, will transform an object-loss into an ego-loss and regressively take refuge in narcissistic identification with the lost object (14: 249, 251).

### III. The Desire to Be Fed

So far I have analyzed Bloom's motive to identify with the mother, attributing it more to his wish for resolving a personal dilemma than to the archetypal womb envy



described by Horney. I mention at some length above that womb envy is mainly a concept proposed by feminists to counter Freud's phallogocentric theory. But is Freud sheerly silent on the subject of womb envy? If not, can Freud's concept help us further grasp Bloom's identification with the mother? Consider the following paragraph from Freud's "On the Sexual Theories of Children":

[...] it was only logical that the child should refuse to grant women the painful prerogative of giving birth to children. If babies are born through the anus, then a man can give birth just as well as a woman. It is therefore possible for a boy to imagine that he, too, has children of his own, without there being any need to accuse him on that account of having feminine inclinations. [...] If the cloacal theory of birth is preserved in consciousness during later years of childhood, as occasionally happens, it is accompanied too by a solution—no longer, it is true, a primary one—the problem of the origin of babies. Here it is like being in a fairy story; one eats some particular thing and gets a child from it. (9: 219-20)

As we can see, when trying to put forth the infantile theory of birth, Freud has touched upon the subject of womb envy. Witnessing the swelling belly of his mother but having no idea of either the vagina or the womb, the boy chooses to believe that "the baby must be evacuated like a piece of excrement, like a piece of stool" (9: 219). If babies are imagined to emerge from the anal aperture, the boy can convince himself that he, like his mother, is able to become pregnant and give birth to a baby. This cloacal theory of birth, actually, reveals Freud's recognition of the boy's womb envy—supposing the boy is never envious of motherhood, it is unlikely that he will turn to the cloacal theory of delivery to grant himself the capacity for giving birth.

Instead of discrediting Freud's theory of infantile sexuality altogether, Soros manages to fill in what Freud lacks. Soros finds that Freud's theory, though shedding light on the childhood superstition that eating a seed will make one pregnant, does not explain how the boy copes with the sad discovery that he cannot give birth, and how he mourns the inevitable loss when he learns the correct theory of childbirth in later days (11-12). As Freud "fails to tell us how a boy negotiates his lack of a vagina and womb" (12), Soros decides to theorize the way man deals with his trauma of being de-wombed, in the hope of further illustrating the mechanism of Bloom's fantasy.

According to Soros, one way to ease the pain of being de-wombed is to fantasize

the experience of becoming pregnant not only *like a mother* but also *through the mother*:

He [man] can negotiate his trauma through the fantasy of becoming pregnant through his mother, someone who he can be assured has a uterus. By receiving a fetus from her, he too can have one. But because womb envy develops before the boy has a clear sense of human sexuality, his fantasy is structured by the childhood theory that a fetus is carried in the stomach. And because his primary physical relationship with his mother is one of receiving food either directly or indirectly from her body, he believes insemination—or in this case infetusimation—occurs through the mouth. Just as his mother once passes food from her breast to his lips, now she passes the fetus from her mouth to his. This fantasy lies behind the libidinal attachment of a small boy to his mother and explains his feeling of accomplishment when he produces faeces: if he can be impregnated through the mouth, he can shit a baby. (11-12)

If one seeks to identify with the mother, as Soros's theory suggests, this desire will embody itself not only in the inclination to feed but also in the fantasy of being fed. As we have observed how Bloom shows his desire to feed, let us shift our focus to his desire to be fed. In "Lestrygonians," Bloom reflects on the way old Mrs. Thornton, the midwife, takes care of the babies she delivers. "The spoon of pap in her mouth before she fed them" (*U* 8.395) does not impress Bloom as something nauseous; on the contrary, he says, "O, that's nyummyum" (*U* 8.395). Putting himself in the place of the baby, Bloom seems to vicariously experience how delicious the food tastes when passed from a maternal figure's mouth. More importantly, later in the same episode Bloom recalls how Molly and him make love in the idyllic wilderness when their relationship is not yet traumatized by Rudy's death:

Ravished over her I lay, full lips full open, kissed her mouth. Yum. Softly she gave me in my mouth the seedcake warm and chewed. Mawkish pulp her mouth had mumbled sweetsour of her spittle. Joy: I ate it; joy. Young life, her lips that gave me pouting. Soft warm sticky



gumjelly lips. (U 8.906-10)<sup>6</sup>

In Bloom's memory of making love to Molly, Bloom emerges, notably, as a baby enjoying being fed; and Molly, chewing the seedcake<sup>7</sup> first before she passes it to Bloom's mouth, overlaps the image of Mrs. Thronton, "the jolly old soul" (U 8.394) who plays the role of a nurturer. Also, Bloom's unusual request that it is Molly's turn to prepare breakfast for him the next morning eventually reveals his desire to be fed. Bloom's fantasy of being fed like a baby, at first sight, may seem odd as it contradicts his desire to feed like a mother figure. However, the contradiction is more apparent than real, as the desire to be fed and the desire to feed, in a sense, are mutually generated. To put it in Soros's words, while it is obvious that "Bloom cooks for Molly, prepares burnt offerings, feeds her, bringing a breakfast tray to her bed, pouring cream into her cup," feeding her is actually "a more developed form of his fantasy of being fed and impregnated by his mother. His gift impregnates her through the mouth, a hole she then uses to slip him her fetus as a mother passes her chewed food to an infant" (15). Since the maternal figure has the potential of passing the fetus to man, it stands to reason that Bloom would like to be fed by her so as to become a mother himself.

When analyzing the meaning of girls' playing with dolls, Freud argues that the play is not just an expression of femininity (22: 128). Of course, when playing with dolls, the girl is reenacting the experience of being pampered by her mother, but the play does not simply reflect the girl's wish to be taken care of like a baby. Rather, it serves as "an identification with her mother with the intention of substituting activity for passivity": "*She* was playing the part of her mother and the doll was herself: now she could do with the baby everything that her mother used to do with her" (22: 128). Appealing to Freud's observation of the girl's playing with dolls as an analogy, we can

<sup>6</sup> In Robert Gibb's interpretation of this paragraph, he sees Molly's feeding Bloom as providing him something nourishing and positive, and their mouths here as "mutually giving as well as receiving" (270). However, he does not further pursue the loop between giving and receiving, or the relation between feeding and being fed that Soros endeavors to elucidate. Besides, though Gibb foregrounds the association between food and pregnancy in "Lestrygonians," he does not consider the food as necessarily referring to the fetus passed from the maternal figure, as Soros's theory of womb envy suggests. "Funny sight of them together, their bellies out," Bloom thus comments once he thinks of Molly, pregnant with Rudy, and another pregnant woman, Mrs. Moisel (U 8.391-92). Associating this episode with Bloom's recollection of how Molly's belly also swells after eating cabbage, Gibb simply aims at making the relationship between food and pregnancy emphatic (270).

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, Molly's *seedcake* again reminds us of the childhood superstition that eating a seed will make one pregnant. The seedcake, in this light, serves pertinently to satisfy the fantasy of being fed with a fetus.

better understand Bloom's fantasy of being fed: just like the girl who simultaneously identifies with the mother and the baby when playing with dolls, Bloom plays the motherly role as well as the nurtured baby when recalling the experience of being fed. As the underside of his desire to feed, the fantasy of being fed functions to substitute activity for passivity—though meanwhile he is passively fed with a fetus through the mother, later he can actively play the part of the mother and have a baby of his own. The seemingly contradictory desires, therefore, are both constitutive of his identification with the mother.

#### IV. Appetite for Food or Appetite for the Wife?

Since identification classically operates on the model of *incorporation*, it represents the very antithesis of retreat; it entails ostensibly closing the gap between subject and object, taking the latter within the psyche as the basis of the self. Moreover, as is frequently the case, identification here incorporates a loved other—an other whose attributes continue [...] to elicit admiration and excitement.<sup>8</sup>  
— Kaja Silverman

“Hot I tongued her. She kissed me. I was kissed” (*U* 8.915). Given that Bloom immerses in such erotic reverie right after he recalls the scene of being fed by Molly, it is tenuous to argue that Bloom's desire to be fed merely reflects his wish for identifying with the mother. A more plausible explanation would be that Bloom is oscillating between his identification with the mother and the desire for her when fantasizing being fed like a baby.

Keeping in mind the possibility for the subject to move back and forth between desiring the mother and identifying with her, we may reexamine from a different perspective Bloom's recollection of love making quoted at some length above. As Gibb

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<sup>8</sup> Re-explaining Freud's Leonardo fantasmatic in which a vulture opens the child's mouth and strikes it repeatedly with its tail, Silverman suggests that the fantasy can be seen as revealing both Leonardo's identification with the mother and his desire for her (371). Silverman believes that the desiring subject is indeed “capable of traveling between an active and a passive position” (370). Observing how homosexuals following the Leonardo model continue throughout life to be attracted to women, Silverman contends that while the Leonardo subject tends to occupy the active position of the mother represented by the vulture, he can also move back to identify with his own youth and desire the phallic mother instead. What Silverman seeks to highlight is that identification and desire are entangled rather than opposed to each other in one's libidinal economy.



reminds us, “this interlude took place at the start of their relationship, before Rudy, when sex, for Bloom, was still joyfully possible” (270). In this light, the original scene, supposedly, was filled with erotic desire. If in Bloom’s reflection the scene now turns out to be “full of food and mouths and appetites” instead of overtly appealing to carnality, it is because Bloom has transferred his desire for Molly to culinary appetites (Gibb 269-70). As Christy L. Burns also notes, while Bloom has been consistently aware of his body and sensual needs all day, he is not willing to think openly about sex and has displaced that desire into an interest in food (41). To put it another way, Bloom is apt to use food as a surrogate to sidestep the thoughts of having sex with Molly, because of the apprehension that any other children they might have could suffer Rudy’s fate again. After all, genital sex is a topic that Bloom is not yet ready to talk about since the death of his son, as it entails “the possibility of life (procreation) and the attendant inevitability of death” (Gibb 269).

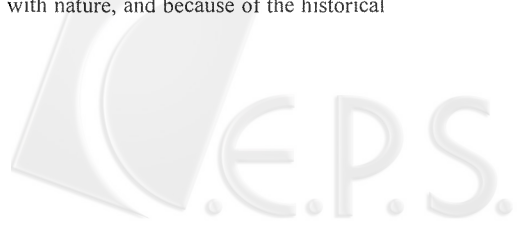
To alleviate the tormenting fear of infanticide by all means, Bloom does not merely transfer his appetite for Molly to the appetite for food. In addition, Bloom channels his desire for the wife into the desire for the mother. In a number of examples, Bloom tends to focus on either Molly’s mouth or her breasts whenever her image strikes him. If the mouth features in Bloom’s reverie of being fed, Molly’s “large soft bubs, sloping within her nightdress like a shegoat’s udder” (*U* 4.304-05) appear no less important in Bloom’s mind: their calming effect “rescues Bloom from the bleak moments of despair and emptiness” (Ziarek 271). Since “the mouth represents a privileged site of maternal care” (Silverman 372) and maternal breasts constitute the original object of desire the child clings to, Bloom’s emphases on the two sites make Molly emerge more as a maternal figure than a wifely one.<sup>9</sup> Molly’s recollection of how Bloom enjoys sucking her breasts like a baby—“I had to get him to suck them they were so hard he said it was sweeter and thicker than cows then he wanted to milk me into the tea” (*U* 18.576-78)—further assures us that her maternal image figures prominently in Bloom’s psyche.

<sup>9</sup> By highlighting Bloom’s inclination to focus on Molly’s breasts and mouth, and his association of her image with the mother figure, I do not mean to suggest that these features signify nothing related to femininity except motherhood. In the photograph Bloom proudly displays to Stephen in “Eumaeus,” for example, Molly is described as “in the full bloom of womanhood in evening dress cut ostentatiously low for the occasion to give a liberal display of bosom, with more than vision of breasts, her full lips parted [...]” (*U* 16.1429-31). The sensuality of Molly’s mouth and breasts, evidently, is not inscribed over by maternity. What I suggest, therefore, is not that Molly has been desexualized as the Mother of God. I simply want to indicate how Bloom chooses to fantasize Molly into the motherly role as her unfaithful wifely role still haunts his psyche.

The displacement of the desire for the wife is particularly significant in the sense that, while Molly's wifely role not only intimidates Bloom because of its association with Rudy's death but reminds Bloom of her infidelity, Molly's motherly role remains, to put it in Ewa Ziarek's phrase, "the only true thing in life": "[s]ecluded in the privacy of home or situated in proximity to nature, Molly's 'bedwarmed' body alone can replenish the humanity of the modern Odysseus—an advertising agent—after his exhausting peregrinations through the modern urban landscape" (270-71).<sup>10</sup> Transferring his sexual desire for the wife to the desire of receiving food from the mother, Bloom is able to experience pleasure at the site of the erotogenic zone without worrying about the attendant possibility of procreation. What he experiences is the oral pleasure that commemorates the child's intense attachment to the mother.

Suffice it to say that Bloom desires Molly as a mother mainly to compensate for his unsatisfied sexual desire. On the other hand, Molly answers his need because she herself also "wants a man-child for a lover" (Langford 36). According to Larry L. Langford, Molly continuously mentions boys and sons in her sexual fantasies: "Because of her strong sexual drive and her intense grief over Rudy's death, Molly has conflated sexual gratification and mothering a son so that in achieving one she can immediately and simultaneously achieve both" (28). To put it more succinctly, since Rudy's death curtails Molly's normal sexual relations with Bloom, Rudy "becomes a symbol of unfulfilled potential, both maternal and sexual" (Langford 32); consequently, the way to compensate for the double loss, in Molly's imagination, is to find a lover who is also a son. Bloom, apparently, is not unaware of Molly's desire for a son-lover. Relishing Stephen's appreciation of Molly's photograph, Bloom reflects upon the topic of matrimonial triangle (*U* 16.1482), and he talks about how Molly "would have the greatest pleasure in making your [Stephen's] acquaintance" (*U* 16. 1801-02) when his proposal to take Stephen home is accepted. Having brought Stephen home, Bloom reserves for Molly the privilege of mending the fissure in Stephen's torn jacket (*U* 17.372-75), a chore generally associated with maternal care. All these reveal Bloom's recognition of Molly's desire for a son-lover. In fact, Bloom even offers Stephen a room for the night, hoping that he will help Molly with her Italian pronunciation, and more importantly, take Molly's mind off Boylan (*U* 17.935-39). As Langford states,

<sup>10</sup> Notably, though Ziarek finds Molly's maternal body as endowed with the capability for salvation, she does not consider the representation as an attempt to empower woman. Rather, she believes that Joyce imagines the maternal body as the last remnant of authenticity in the increasingly technologized social space "because of the sexist ideology linking femininity with nature, and because of the historical exclusion of women from the public life" (270, 280).



“Bloom brings Stephen home as the symbolic son whom he hopes will supplant Boylan as his wife’s lover; and, as we shall see, it is as a son, even as a little boy, that Molly, in her fantasies, accepts him as a lover” (29).<sup>11</sup>

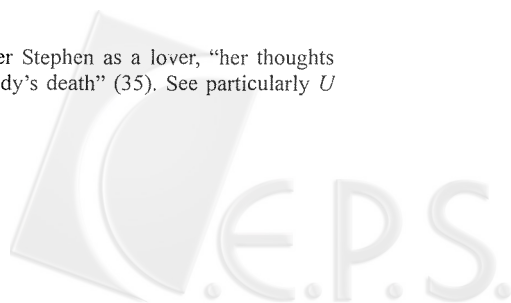
Recognizing that in Molly’s fantasy the image of the lover almost overlaps the image of the son, Bloom is eager to put himself in the position of the child, to be qualified as Molly’s ideal son-lover. Bloom’s desire for the mother and the attendant identification with the son are conspicuous when he is said to slip into bed head-to-heels as “the childman weary, the manchild in the womb” (*U* 17.2317-18) at the end of “Ithaca.” Daniel Dervin plausibly interprets this spectacle as revealing Bloom’s desire “to reclaim his position as a favored son with Molly” (256). As if she would like to respond to Bloom’s desire, when pondering on giving Bloom one more chance, Molly also thinks of the Howth Hill scene in which she appears as both a mother and a lover: “I gave him the bit of seedcake out of my mouth [...] I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts” (*U* 18.1574, 1606-07). Although there is no telling whether Molly’s series of “yes” can promise the consummation between the husband and the wife for good, at least “a tenderness returns for the child-husband who suckled at her breast and who now curls like a fetus on her bed” (Langford 38). “A mother is only brought unlimited satisfaction by her relation to a son; this is altogether the most perfect, the most free from ambivalence of all human relationships” (22: 133), Freud thus asserts in “Femininity.” Freud further suggests that “a marriage is not made secure until the wife has succeeded in making her husband her child as well and in acting as a mother to him” (134). As the novel draws to a close, this Freudian dictum is found applicable to the relation between Molly and Bloom.

### Coda

Tracking Bloom’s desire to feed and his desire to be fed, I have elucidated both Bloom’s identification with the mother and his desire for her. I maintain that his desire to identify with the mother overlaps his desire to be desired by her. Explicating

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<sup>11</sup> Langford reminds us that as soon as Molly begins to consider Stephen as a lover, “her thoughts tellingly revert to a time when she saw him as a boy, just after Rudy’s death” (35). See particularly *U* 18.1305-28.



how the motherly role has exerted considerable influence on Bloom, I do not mean to undermine psychoanalytic theory, whose line of argument mainly revolves around the role of the father. What I seek to do, rather, is spotlight the intricate relation between Bloom and the maternal figure in contrast to the critical attention that has been intensely invested in the father-son relation between Bloom and Stephen. Of course, we can further inquire whether Bloom aligns himself with the mother because he passively accepts the conventional tropes of motherhood, and whether Bloom is reinforcing the stereotype of the maternal figure by conceiving her as both a caretaker and a nurturer. And maybe the inquiry will effect our judgment concerning whether Joyce is a pro-feminist, a sexist, or even a misogynist. Following Stuart Gilbert, we have reasons to believe that Joyce is celebrating the motherly role, since he depicts Molly as “the Great Mother of gods, giants and mankind, a personification of the infinite variety of Nature” (403). But if we keep Ziarek’s caution in mind, then we will probably find Joyce’s affirmation of the female body dubious as it reveals his sexist ideology, his “modernist nostalgia for a more authentic way of being” (270). The “timeless, archaic Gea-Tellus” representation of Molly, seen thus, is simply the myth of the archaic mother Joyce employs to appease the anxiety aroused by the impact of technology and mechanical reproduction (Ziarek 274-75). Or, we can label Joyce as a misogynist if we take his speaking on Molly’s behalf in “Penelope” as the revenge against women, whose “invasiveness” and their “perpetual urge to usurp all the functions of the male” Joyce has complained about to Frank Budgen (qtd. in Boheemen 269).

However, instead of choosing among these stances and judging whether Joyce is feminists’ ally or enemy, I will pause before plunging myself into this feminist controversy, not to belittle such debate but to suggest that we see Bloom in his particularity rather than conflate him with Joyce. Declining to inquire into Joyce’s attitude towards women, we are likely to fail in determining whether Joyce, as Christine van Boheemen suggests, tries to undo the threat of femininity by his “*writing the feminine*” (273). And perhaps we cannot tell if what underlies Stephen’s “[p]aternity may be a legal fiction” (*U* 9.844) is exactly Joyce’s womb envy. Supposing Joyce does have womb envy, we are still not sure if Joyce succeeded in alleviating this envy by giving birth to a brainchild, namely, by writing *Ulysses*. Despite the fact that Joyce’s attitude toward women is shrouded in these unresolved mysteries, at least we are certain that Bloom’s relation with the maternal figure is not incomprehensible, though it is complicated. In conclusion, even though Bloom’s identification with and desire for the mother



cannot possibly resolve his problematic relation with Molly and with women in general once and for all, his ability to switch between different roles may ensure prospects of a “new Bloomsaleum” (*U* 15.1548) for him to inhabit.

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