

Emily Thibodeau

Thomas Simone

James Joyce

May 9, 2016

Beneficiary, thy Name is Woman<sup>1</sup>

Although there is much to be said about James Joyce's *Ulysses* as a feminist book, or at least as including feminist aspects, it remains a very masculine space. At times, it feels so stiflingly male that, as a female reader, I<sup>2</sup> felt strangled by the male presence, the male gaze, and the male experience of a patriarchal Dublin. But this is definitely an intentional goal of the book, and is somewhat lightened by the intricate attention given to the relationship between female autonomy, metempsychosis, and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.<sup>3</sup>

*Hamlet's* women, Ophelia and Gertrude, are remarkable examples of women being criticized for their decisions, both in the text and in critical explorations of it, because of how they affect the men of the play. Ophelia is famously interpreted as a coward because she obeys her father's orders. In her book *Women of Will*, Tina Packer has a narrow view of Ophelia. In "Living Underground or Dying to tell the

---

<sup>1</sup> Always include a title.

<sup>2</sup> Note use of I: in college, professors teaching English encourage using I when talking about personal experiences or opinions. Beware of phrases like "I think," which may hinder your persuasiveness, but using first person pronouns to take ownership of your ideas can empower your essay.

<sup>3</sup> Thesis (only underlined for the sake of this annotation): introduces my argument, but does not go into extensive detail. It is a statement that uses vocabulary relevant to the class and must be proved with evidence and explanations.

Truth,” an essay about Ophelia, Desdemona, and Cordelia, she comments: “XXX” (Packer 190)<sup>4</sup>. Later, in “Chaos is Come Again: The Lion Eats the Wolf,” Packer repeats: “XXX” (228). Packer’s statements on Ophelia are bold and broad, but lacking awareness of Ophelia’s character.<sup>5</sup>

Packer’s treatment of Polonius’s demand that she leave Hamlet as the only factor that plays into Ophelia’s eventual compliance grossly ignores Ophelia’s relationship with her brother Laertes. <sup>6</sup> Laertes suggests (not orders) before Polonius that Ophelia should not trust Hamlet. He warns: “XXX” (1.3.23-32)<sup>7</sup>. Laertes, with unfortunate accuracy, prophesizes that Hamlet’s responsibility as the Prince of Denmark will eventually harm or end their relationship. He warns her, in true concern for her safety and happiness, that Hamlet’s affections cannot hold the bent. And Ophelia returns the advice, mirroring his “XXX” (32)<sup>8</sup> with “XXX” (45) to show affection and connection. Ophelia and Laertes are close and friendly siblings, and accept each other’s advice. To say that Ophelia only follows her father's demands, and therefore lacks courage, is to disregard her relationship with her brother, and do her character a great disservice. Ophelia makes the decision to end

---

<sup>4</sup> (Author page#)—no comma between the author and page number, no “pp” or “pg” before the number. You do not need to include the author in the parenthetical citation when the author is made clear before the quotation.

<sup>5</sup> This paper was unusual, in that my first body paragraph dealt with the interpretation of a secondary source. This was intentional here, especially since the primary texts are well known to the intended audience, but in most cases, I would encourage students to start with their own interpretations of the primary text(s).

<sup>6</sup> Here, I use the secondary source to strengthen and guide my interpretation of the primary source. Students must agree, disagree, or add to scholarly sources that they choose to include in their paper.

<sup>7</sup> ([Author implied in text] Act.Scene.Starting line-Ending line)

<sup>8</sup> ([Act and scene implied in text] line)

her relationship with Hamlet, although it pains her to do so, just as consciously as she would have made the decision to stay with him. As a reward for her loyalty to her family, she is punished by Hamlet's abusive remarks, madness, death, and endless accusations of cowardice and passivity.

...

The leading women of *Ulysses* function differently in their text. The late Mrs. Dedalus begins the action of the book by dying, much in the same way that King Hamlet begins the action of the play by dying: Stephen comes home for his mother's funeral, just as Prince Hamlet comes home for his father's. Mrs. Dedalus, idealized by her mourning son, seems to embody the perfectly autonomous and in-autonomous woman. Stephen describes a locked drawer of her possessions<sup>9</sup>: "XXX" (1.255-256). The items locked away represent the life of a girl who goes out, a girl who dresses up to go dancing, a girl who is making decisions about her sexuality and relationships. But that part of her past is locked away—not discarded, but not acknowledged either, until now. But Mrs. Dedalus is dead before the start of the book, effectively erasing any chance of her reclaiming these now unlocked items.<sup>10</sup>

... In Chapter Four, Leopold and Molly Bloom establish the foundation of *Ulysses* as a book about reincarnation through their discussion of the word metempsychosis, or,

---

<sup>9</sup> Note that the words leading up to the quote includes the character speaking/narrating/etc., and a description of the context. Introducing your quotes in this manner will show that you understand the context and helps prepare the reader to understand what they are reading.

<sup>10</sup> After a quotation, you must unpack it. Here, I focused on the fact that they are locked away, and the metaphorical implications thereof. Unpacking quotes (working specifically with the language to explain your ideas), as opposed to putting them in with no explanation, is vital to a successful paper.

as Bloom describes it to Molly, “XXX” (4.342). So who inherits the autonomy—the specifically feminine freedom, that Mrs. Dedalus had locked away and has now been set loose? Now that the drawer has been unlocked and opened, who will inherit its contents?

...

Joyce is able to break that cycle with Molly. When Bloom and Stephen are asleep, the narration is as unmanaged as Denmark. Literary critic C. David Bertolini<sup>11</sup> even defends that Leopold Bloom dies at the end of *Ulysses* in an essay that integrates the events in Ithaca and the pair’s original conversation about metempsychosis: “XXX” (Bertolini 50). Bloom’s death may be a more farfetched theory, but Bertolini’s analysis thereof is not.<sup>12</sup> His conclusion makes a strong statement about what metempsychosis means in regards to the form of the text—the way it seems to inherit every style it can. *Ulysses* is not a cohesive or unified story, but it has inherited life.

Bertolini understands that a story about metempsychosis is inherently a story about inheritance—inheritance of the soul—and one where Molly is the beneficiary.<sup>13</sup> Whether Bloom dies (literally or metaphorically), Molly inherits all. She inherits Bloom, she inherits the narration, and most importantly, she inherits Stephen’s mother’s locked drawer. She inherits that autonomy, and she is not

---

<sup>11</sup> Introducing a scholar can add validity to your use of their paper, and makes you appear more aware of the conversation you are contributing to.

<sup>12</sup> Again- always work in a conversation with the texts you cite. In this case, I chose to agree with the scholar’s work, in a way that shows conscious thought about the article as a whole, while still focusing on the points that apply to my paper.

<sup>13</sup> Notice that my discussion of the secondary text is not contained to one paragraph, but continues to apply to my argument.

locking it away. In that way, *Ulysses* breaks the cycle of powerlessness, of a woman growing into independence, and shutting it back down. Therefore, it is imperative that Molly fills the role of Fortinbras, because it allows *Ulysses* to progress in a way that *Hamlet* could not. *Ulysses* gives a power to women that *Hamlet* does not, because Molly lives.

*Ulysses* walks the streets of Dublin as a man; it looks through the glasses of men; it hears with the ears of men. It takes us to the masculine realms of the newspaper office and the eating houses, and at the end of a long day of work, it takes us out to drinks with the guys. But that is not to say that *Ulysses* ignores women; rather, it seems to fill itself up with men, and then hand itself over to the feminine hands of Molly Bloom. In this way, by allowing Molly to inherit the narrative, *Ulysses* does what *Hamlet* could not.<sup>14</sup> *Hamlet* perpetuates in cyclical, obsessive, male hunger for power and vengeance, while the women are shamed to a cowardly, flighty oblivion. The women of *Hamlet* and the women of *Ulysses* are forces to be reckoned with, but Joyce makes a point to acknowledge that the women of *Ulysses* are living in a world where their lives can change.

---

<sup>14</sup> A conclusion should always restate the thesis. In this paper, my thesis happened to take three sentences (underlined), but I still restated the main points of my argument. A thesis does not always have to be contained to one sentence, but your conclusion should always start with the actual argument of your paper before moving on to a broader conversation.