MODERN REINTERPRETATIONS OF THE CUCKOLD

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by
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ABSTRACT

The cuckold has been a neglected character in Western literary history, subject to derision and often cruel comic effects. Yet three major modern novelists portrayed the cuckold as a protagonist: Gustave Flaubert in *Madame Bovary*, Henry James in *The Golden Bowl*, and James Joyce in *Ulysses*. This study compares their portrayal of the cuckold with medieval storytellers' portrayal of him in the *fabliau* tales. The comparison shows that modern writers used the cuckold to critique Enlightenment modes of knowing, such as setting up territorial boundaries for emerging disciplines and professions. Modern writers also attributed a greater value than medieval writers did to the cuckold's position as a non-phallic man, because he allowed his wife sexual freedom. Finally, they saw the cuckold as the other side of the artist; through him, they explore the possibility that the Everyman can be a vehicle for reflected action, rather than heroic action. This study combines Lacanian psychoanalysis with narratology to analyze the cuckold as a subject and as a compositional resource for modern novelists.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: MODERN REINTERPRETATIONS OF THE CUCKOLD

In current critical/literary history, the cuckold is best known as a figure out of medieval comic tales or Restoration drama, and is associated with the horns that crowned his head as a public sign of his failed masculinity. The historical process that produced him goes back to the medieval *fabliau*, which is known for its bawdy and often derisive humor.[1] And the historical process that unraveled his significance is also lengthy. This extended history points to a persistent thematic conjunction in Western literature: the link between a man's sexual betrayal and his lack of instrumental intelligence. I connect this link to a narratological question highlighted by many critics' responses to modern novels: how do we find the protagonist? The conventional wisdom of storytelling implies that for a protagonist to be a protagonist, for this category to make sense, he or she must have a clearly defined desire. The cuckold doesn't fit this pattern, and yet he is still given the characteristics of a protagonist by several important modern novelists, because they find his subject position to be significant. I focus on the figure of the cuckold in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857), Henry James's *The Golden Bowl* (1904) and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922).[2]

In *The Deceived Husband*, Alison Sinclair argues that this character's portrayal in literary history has followed two basic models: the man of honor and the cuckold.[3] According to Sinclair, seventeenth century Spanish plays present the clearest version of the man of honor, who is the protagonist in a revenge plot: "the man of honor takes bloody revenge to restore both his honour and his name."[4] Such a man is ruthless and competent in handling his wife's infidelity. The cuckold is a stock character in the *fabliau*, a genre that

emphasizes his failure and ineptitude when it comes to dealing with his wife's infidelity. Unlike the man of honor, he has a marginal position in the narrative: "He has not been considered in the establishment of the adulterous relationship, and his destiny, indeed his identity as a cuckold, is that he will continue to be the person not considered . . . to be cast off, the man who has lost power."[5] In these tales, cuckolds were subjected to derision and often cruel comic effects, such as beating and scatological humor.[6] They were commonly represented by an older man who had married a younger woman.[7] But even if a man did not make an age-inappropriate marriage, he may simply have given his wife the opportunity to cheat by travelling long distances, or working too much, thus leaving her alone for extended periods of time.[8] Many *fabliaux* present us with the assumption that wives will cheat. The *fabliau* has therefore been seen as a misogynist genre.[9] Yet these stories celebrated women's wit and ingenuity.[10] The genre frequently punishes foolish men.

For centuries, the betrayed husband has been associated with shame in European literature. However, Sinclair argues that stories of cuckolds, despite their derisory attitude towards these men, have been more progressive than those that dramatize men who avenge and reclaim their honor as husbands.[11] The literature of cuckoldry enabled masculine fears to be approached with "the containing function" of humor.[12] And especially through the works of major writers such as Boccaccio and Chaucer, it represented a range of emotional reactions to the inevitable facts of life—ageing, loss of potency and status, death—in a sophisticated and urbane manner that implied masculine failure could be tolerated.[13] Yet if we don't take such a long view of the patriarchal tradition, the medieval portrayal of the cuckold hardly seems tolerant by our standards. Medieval tales' comic spirit allowed a man whose honor as a husband had been slighted a representational space (his failure was not

hidden), but this space was marked by derision; this literature rejected his personal dignity, and thus his claim to any subjective development. The cuckold was an excremental figure; he was mocked, insulted, disregarded, and he became fit for public consumption, not as a subject, but as a ritual scapegoat. Sinclair argues that, as a figure of fun, he "joins the fool, the clown, [and] the master beaten by the valet."[14] Medieval society needed him to "lay a ghost," and this ghost was a man's weakness and fragility, which was both present and absent in the figure of the cuckold.[15] The French *fabliau* tales represent the clearest version of the cuckold as a comic scapegoat, and therefore form a good contrast with the modern versions of the cuckold's story that I will analyze here; modern writers are more sensitive to the cuckold's lack of expressiveness, his inability to find a voice and a distinct identity; they also connect him to a world view dominated by the Enlightenment, and its forms of mapping human experience, rather than to a Christian world view; the cuckold therefore begins to serve distinctly modern themes: the secularization of knowledge structures, and the proliferation of disciplinary knowledge and of the professional classes.[16]

Yet the *fabliau*'s derision of the cuckold still communicates to us a historically important cultural ethos. Medieval scholar Charles Muscatine calls it a "hedonistic materialism,"[17] and his description of this ethos is worth quoting in some detail:

> The force and integrity of the fabliau ethos comes in part from the fact that its traits seem mutually to reinforce each other and to create a plausible and stable system. I need not linger long on the affinities of various forms of appetite to the general espousal of physical pleasure, nor of this philosophy in turn to a view that values money highly and sees the universe in terms mainly of material goods. This congeries of traits is particularly receptive to the high valuation of cleverness and wit, since cleverness in the fabliaux is . . . a powerful instrument in the procurement of goods and pleasure. Cleverness turns a face the other way, linking the materialism of the fabliaux with what we might call its 'political' philosophy, a kind of individualism, if not egalitarianism, in which wit levels distinctions of station and gender, and opens the prospect of pleasure to whoever can manage it. . . . It is penetrated by, and sits

> comfortably with, an irony and cynicism . . . and hedge[s] against instability and defeat with traditional formulations of practical wisdom and with laughter.[18]

Intelligence in the *fabliau* tales is defined by cleverness, a practical quality that is well suited to procuring material pleasures. As Muscatine points out, this quality has two sides; the cleverness that promoted individualism was not exactly egalitarian. Cleverness excluded those who were naïve, and liable to be tricked, the "slow learners." This ethos is also evident in the very structure of these tales, in which the maneuvers of a particular character are mirrored by the narrator's manipulations of the story.[19] These manipulations are strategic, and as Norris J. Lacey points out, this genre makes no attempt to hide its strategic moves: "the fabliau cosmos is the creature of a highly selective literary consciousness . . . one of their conventions is the freedom claimed by the author and narrator to choose the questions that may not be asked and those that must remain unsolved."[20] Naïve characters, who do not think in strategic terms, are therefore frequent targets in *fabliau* tales.

Fabliaux do not invite readers to think about characters' past or future. John Hines points out that "characterization rarely goes further than the creation of characters sufficient for the roles they play in the fabliau; there is very rarely the slightest pretense at verisimilitude in the form of feigning that the characters have experiences beyond or after those of the narrative given. There is nothing to encourage [such] speculation."[21] If we are not invited to think about the larger implications of trickery, this is interesting not just in the moral sense, but in the sense of analyzing the subjective positions of the trickster and his or her unwitting victim. These tales are told from the perspective of the trickster. The contrast with modern fiction is significant: modern novels include the point of view of those who are betrayed, and examine it subjectively. Thus sexual naïveté was seen as a persistent error in the earlier tales featuring cuckolds, and the circumstances were not there to produce a

literature that investigated a failure of cognition as more than just an error, but as an existential theme that could encompass the scope of an individual life.[22] Modern novels took up the problem of masculine failure, and individualized the man who represented it through the figure of the cuckold.

The *fabliau's* practical wisdom often appears in stories of sexual naiveté. This was a punishable vice because it was seen as a common form of blindness. It was also represented as a prelude to being cheated, not only of one's wife, but of one's money. A typical *fabliau* explores this connection between money, cleverness or wit, and sexual pleasure.[23] A good example of this intersection is Chaucer's "Shipman's Tale" in which the husband is not only cuckolded, but also ends up paying for his wife's new clothes. The plot: A merchant's wife responds to the sexual overtures of a monk, who is also her husband's friend; she then tells him that her husband doesn't give her enough money for clothes. The story becomes comical when the monk borrows money from the husband to give to her. After the husband returns from a business trip (giving his wife and his friend the opportunity to cuckold him), he asks for the borrowed sum. The monk then completes his part in the trick by telling him that he has already returned it to his wife. And in confronting his wife, the merchant finds that the money is gone: she has already spent it. The final irony is that the merchant's wife asserts that she will pay *her husband* back in sexual favors. The joke, then, is that the husband's money, like his wife, has circulated twice within the same household economy.[24]

The novel's psychological turn muted this type of comedy, which made the betrayed husband a target for ridicule and bawdy tricks; he became a more sympathetic character.[25] Sinclair points out that "Novels of adultery are notable . . . for the degree to which they articulate the reactions of husbands to infidelity . . . and of the relationship with emotion."[26] I

have already mentioned the cuckold's connection, for Flaubert, James, and Joyce, to Enlightenment values, and I will develop this theme in greater detail. I only want to indicate now that, thematically, they concerned themselves with what a man could no longer pretend to grasp: the other sex and knowledge as a unified domain.[27] The cuckold is also significant for this group of modern novelists because, through him, they pose the question of their own authority as authors. Philosopher Avital Ronell points out that there has been, from as far back as Greek literature, a link between the poets and cognitive failure: "The poets know from stupidity, the essential dulling or weakening that forms the precondition of utterance . . . the failure of cognition is the province of literary language."[28] Yet although this is not an entirely original theme, it is new to the novel, which was not considered a high genre, and had to assert itself as a literary upstart[29]; it found itself concerned with an emerging bourgeois ethic, "the intelligence of doing."[30] And Flaubert gives the theme of the writer's difficulty, which could be called stupidity in bourgeois circles, a new urgency and inflection because of his opposition to bourgeois culture. This culture was heir to the Enlightenment faith in human intellect as the key to progress.

Flaubert's attack on the Enlightenment is evident at the level of his literary style. Tony Tanner has argued that, when the direct voice of the narrator disappears in *Madame Bovary*, this indicates a profound rift in the implied contract between reader and writer:

> . . . it is . . . appropriate that Flaubert should drop the traditional *nous* . . . In doing this, he is implying that there is no longer any true community and that the illusory contracts between people and between the writer and the reader have all failed. . . . I would regard this as the most significant shift in narrative technique in the history of the novel, for its implications effectively influenced the whole subsequent development of the novel and are still with us today. . . . If you cannot say "we," you cannot locate "I" and "you."[31]

Tanner's claim is made in the midst of a long analysis of the opening chapter of the novel, which centers on Charles Bovary, a future cuckold and, in this scene, a young boy labeled by his classmates and his teacher as the class dunce. The "community" here is an all-male classroom. Tanner does not fully develop what it means to turn from the *nous* to Charles Bovary in the opening chapter of *Madame Bovary*. Yet he does suggest the general direction in which his portrayal may become significant. My task here is to develop these implications.

Bill Overton notes a connection between the adultery plot, the trend towards impersonal narration, and male authorship:

> In the latter part of the nineteenth century, a type of novel centered on wifely adultery flourished in Continental Europe. . . . [It is] based on a plot which, with minor variations, a married woman from the upper and middle classes is seduced by an unmarried man of the same class and comes to grief. They are further alike in that each is told in an impersonal narrative voice, and each was written by a man. . . . this type of fiction demands critical investigation [because] . . . of [its] literary value, because nearly all the examples . . . are recognized as classics.[32]

Overton does not link the narrative of adultery, and the exploration of its sexual dynamics in the nineteenth century, to the cuckold's position; he focuses instead on the adulterous wife. Yet he does, along with Tony Tanner, point out that these novels' literary value is bound up with their use of the impersonal narrative voice, or what we call free indirect discourse.

Modern novels subjectivize the cuckold with the help of free indirect discourse. This technique de-centered the authorial voice in novels, whose controlling and selecting presence had been much more prominent in the history of narrative fiction up until the nineteenth century; it reduced narrative "telling" to managing characters' thoughts linguistically.[33] Gérard Genette outlines the following general consensus about its literary effects: it is a mode of representing consciousness; it tends to blur the boundaries between narrator and character; it is "better suited to expressing innermost thoughts than to quoting spoken

words."[34] Free indirect discourse can be used to represent the thought content of any class of character, but it was used by Flaubert, James, and Joyce for marginalized characters, such as the cuckold, who cannot verbalize their experiences for an audience; this technique renders the private thoughts of characters that make little or no claim to having public voices. To be marginalized, for these novelists, means to experience language as outside oneself, as other. This position towards language fits the cuckold, since the literature of cuckoldry shows us that such a man is manipulated verbally, in conjunction with being manipulated sexually.

Blurring the boundaries between narrator and character through the technique of free indirect discourse also reflects back the other way—back on the narrator—marginalizing *his* position (since male identity is at stake in these novels). The modern version of the cuckold, expressed most paradigmatically through Charles Bovary, dramatizes a man who is invaded by others; sexual invasion is a palpable metaphor for linguistic invasion, and the combination of the two offers up a critique of masculine agency, in the sense that masculine agency attempts to maintain territorial boundaries. These writers had to contend with the longstanding link between intelligence and the maintenance of boundaries, whether these are sexual, linguistic/discursive, or disciplinary. To control the space of language is analogous to the way the space of sexuality has been controlled (in its extreme form, to sleep with another man's wife was to declare an open war on his entire household).[35] As Avital Ronnell points out, knowledge is a way of "wag[ing] war" by "circumscribing an object."[36] Yet modern writers are committed to exploring, instead, liminal and latent spaces between men and women, between narrator and character, and between fields of knowledge. In so far as modern writers are suspicious about their own ability to create territorial boundaries, they validate some form of lack in knowledge. And free indirect discourse enacts this narrative

process by representing both narrator and character (the cuckold in the case that I am considering) being moved by discursive structures that are outside a man's control. I am proposing the idea that the cuckold is the other side of the artist, his marginalized double in bourgeois society.

Flaubert's Cuckold: Questioning Wisdom Narratives

Verbal manipulation was one of the most common comic devices in the *fabliau's* plots. So another effect of the medieval cuckold's stupidity is that he was the catalyst for much of the characteristic word play that accompanied the infidelity plot; he is a character who believes—literally—what he is told. A number of tales feature the following plot: a man comes home and catches his wife in bed with another man; the wife and her lover then manage to convince him that this is in fact not what really happened.[37] In one case, the wife persuades her husband that he has actually died.[38] In another, the adulterous couple freely makes love in the husband's presence by constructing an ingenious scenario: the lover dresses up as a female doctor and, in the guise of giving the wife a bloodletting, gives her instead a "marvelous pain in the loins."[39] These stories highlight the following pattern: the husband's bewilderment is followed by his acquiescence. The moral or *exemplum* that often ends a typical *fabliau* stresses how important it is to be able to act quickly and efficaciously in a compromising situation, that is, not to get tangled up in rhetoric and be confused by what others say.

The *fabliau* implies that the husband who cannot accede to the wisdom of these simple proverbial rules for men is undoubtedly a failure. The connection here is between the proverbial expression of wisdom (the *exemplum*) and the character's quickness in

understanding it. Instead, in the novel, the betrayed husband highlights for readers the problem of such wisdom, and questions these seemingly simple statements that cover so much ground. Walter Benjamin has captured this tendency of the novel to ignore proverbial wisdom in his famous meditation “The Storyteller”: “The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others . . . the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living.”[40]

This tendency is especially clear, for example, in Flaubert’s obsession with clichés. Many of his characters exist simply to test out the statements made by common proverbial wisdom, and in this way bring about their own downfall. Yet it is precisely because his characters live up to the clichés that circumscribe them that they are so poignant; this is in fact all the expressive power that their living testament, their drama as characters, amounts to.[41] Leo Bersani indicates that we can discern in Flaubert’s work a reversal of the typical snobbery that is attached to clichés; it is we who are being “snobbish” when we laugh at his characters and at the “inferior” quality of their wishes and how they express them.[42] Bersani argues that this is because clichés have a narrative function: “all of the books which Emma has read collaborate to form a satisfyingly consistent love story, a highly intelligible cliché which imposes order on experience.”[43]

Jonathan Culler, like Leo Bersani, points out Flaubert’s concern for storytelling, even as he extended the boundaries of conventional narrative. Thus his fatalistic perspective on human activity is paradoxically channeled into a *narrative* of ignorance: “He would write novels, tell stories that unfolded in time, but he would avoid the nostalgic retrospective structure which transforms time into intelligible history as viewed by one who has lived

through it and would deflect the possible transitions from action to knowledge."[44] Thus Flaubert's narratives resist the positivist thrust of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, its assumption that wisdom is the outcome of experience.[45] His characters still move in time, but the idea that time is progressive becomes an open question.

Cuckoldry offered Flaubert certain dramatic possibilities for dramatizing existential themes; it had been around for a long time as an image for male anxiety about authority and competence; it also showed a man's inability to use language instrumentally. Flaubert added to this the larger question of language's limits, its contact with inexpressive desire, something which is very difficult to get moving, but which can be encompassed by a narrative of failure. Claire McEachern argues that cuckoldry has been a very fertile ground for artistic and cultural displacements; it serves as a metaphor that "absorb[s] various causes."[46]

Yet Flaubert did not radically reverse the *fabliau's* cultural biases regarding masculinity; in *Madame Bovary* the thematics of cuckoldry is still very close to the derision of the *fabliau* tradition. He did, nevertheless, add a level of poignancy to the characterization of this otherwise stigmatized male figure. For example, *Madame Bovary* presents readers with an extension of the cuckold's story; it includes an entire life cycle. This is significant because an extended narrative personalizes the experience of failure, forces readers to encounter it. The encounter evokes questions about the subject of failure that the *fabliau* did not tackle. What else would be the purpose of extending this narrative? Whether the effect is derision or sympathy is left up the reader to decide. Joyce thought it was sympathy,[47] and through Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses*, developed a narrative in which the cuckold embodies a truly sympathetic comedy.

Understanding the Literature of Cuckoldry: Psychoanalytic Models

The cuckold's story, especially when Flaubert reinterprets it, focuses on this character's entire life cycle, not just on his functional significance in the plot of adultery. To understand this subjective narrative we need a psychoanalytic model because psychoanalysis is currently the only theory that helps to explain narratives of failure. As Peter Brooks puts it, "mental health is a coherent life story, neurosis is a faulty narrative."[48] Currently, Alison Sinclair's *The Deceived Husband: A Kleinian Approach to the Literature of Infidelity* (1993) is the only book that treats the character of the cuckold in detail. She combines psychoanalytic insights with a historical perspective. Yet although her project has a broadly historical aim, she admits that "it is tempting—but risky—to advance the notion that there is in fact a progression in the attitudes of Western Europe to the painful experience of the deceived husband."[49]

In his book *Nature, Culture, Psychoanalysis* (2000), theorist Charles Shepherdson tackles, philosophically, the difficult question Sinclair is left with in her analysis of the betrayed husband's relationship to masculinity: the risky speculation that painful experiences dealing with gender identity can be assimilated to a general historical/cultural analysis.[50] Shepherdson argues that psychoanalysis is engaged with historical processes, but that it starts from a conception of the subject that is very different from the currently accepted model in the humanities—cultural construction. He points out, for example, that the psychoanalytic definition of the subject eschews the idea of self-determination. Instead, the subject "is not originally given in an autonomous form, but begins in the symbolic."[51]

Shepherdson points out that the term *symbolic* has a specific meaning in psychoanalysis.[52] It is linked up with the subject (as defined by psychoanalysis) as a non-autonomous being, dependent, not only on material and physiological constraints, but on the constraints of representation. The point is: we don't have control over our representations. They have a life of their own, before us (in both personal and social histories) and after us (as they are reinterpreted). But the substratum of what is human, according to Lacan, is therefore contained in the failure to represent oneself. Since the progression of Lacan's thought has already been well-documented,[53] I only want to indicate that his theory attempted to take the subject of failure seriously by investigating it as a paradox and not as a simple error; in Lacan's system the term symbolic is associated with coherent but *closed* systems.[54] He is therefore interested in failure as a disruption in the coherence and consistency that we normally attribute to the highest forms of academic thought. As a psychoanalyst, Lacan specifically addresses failure in the following realms of human experience: sexuality, the body, and knowledge.[55] But his theory is important because it gives us a body of thinking on the subject of failure, which can potentially move us away from stigmatizing it.

In James's and Joyce's novels, the cuckold represents the paradoxes of two of the problematic fields that Lacan identifies—sexuality and knowledge—and in Flaubert's case, all three. Thus the reason why I find that Lacan's theory is more useful than Klein's for understanding the cuckold springs from his sustained investigation of failure as a form of paradox. Sinclair's book examines this subject, but it does not develop all its implications. Finally, although the novels that I discuss here are more analytical than they are ideological, they do seriously investigate the paradox of historical progress by questioning masculine agency, which tends to close off the possibility of failure. As Shepherdson argues, we "do not

take history seriously enough"[56]; that is, we cannot simply will a positive future for ourselves in certain difficult areas of human inquiry and experience. Therefore we need psychoanalysis to supplement historical accounts because it tackles this difficult process.

The Protagonist's Desire

The first part of my thesis outlines a historical shift in the cuckold's presentation. The nineteenth century novel of adultery made it possible to feel pathos for the betrayed husband. Novels from this period began to see him more subjectively, and his presentation included secondary qualities that were not developed in the *fabliau*: a man's concern for his children and for the family structure (rather than for himself alone), and a man's ability to give expression to the experience of loss and vulnerability.[57] Thus we find a sentimental narrative introducing tension into the *fabliau's* attitude of open laughter. Finally, modern writers presented the betrayed husband's blindness and self-deception more analytically, and their subjective presentations uncovered his connection to another existential theme: a man's relationship to the proliferation of encyclopedic and disciplinary knowledge.

The second part of my thesis focuses on the cuckold's narratological significance. For the cuckold to become a subjective presence, and not just a victim, he must have a desire. The modern writers that I analyze here uncover in his position a vicarious and sympathetic imagination (mostly unconscious), which has narrative potential. And I see these three writers using it to fill out the cuckold's functional significance in the adultery plot, which remained undeveloped in the *fabliau*, in the sense that he was a necessary but negated figure. Although his ignorance supported the plot of infidelity, helped it to unfold, it also made him a functional character, and not a subjectivity, appearing in the narrative only to be

dismissed.[58] The cuckold is, after all, a passive figure; he doesn't have a clear positive goal, but is only reacting to a situation that *happens to him*, not one that he initiates. The modernists reinterpreted him and developed his former role as a blinded authority (whose place can be usurped) into the more positive quality of sympathetic identification.

Most narrative theory acknowledges the following premise: all narratives are initiated by a positive, and by implication, knowable desire. Mieke Bal explains: "Taking as a basis the presupposition that human thinking and action are oriented towards an aim . . . the model [narratology] starts from a teleological relation . . . The actors have an intention; they aspire towards an aim."[59] Yet the cuckold cannot be incorporated into this dominant narratological pattern. Lacan's analysis of ignorance is useful because explores the realm of inexpressive desire. And my claim is that the modernists' concern with ignorance runs parallel to this analysis. Lacan's theory stresses the significance of unconscious agency. In fact, ignorance is a recurrent theme in his seminars.[60] Modern writers portray the cuckold as a man that unconsciously catches others' desires, and he therefore serves as a good reflector. Flaubert, James and Joyce have chosen to focalize this formerly neglected character in some of their most important novels, because they have detected this storytelling function in him.

Reflection is an indirect form of storytelling and presents us with the tail end of an activity—a fragment of a much larger process—not its initiation; it emphasizes effects rather than causes. But it has the advantage of enabling a mimetic presentation; that is, readers can become immersed in a process that gives a consistent illusion of life in flux and without clear causality. In this case mimesis obviously means, thematically, the emphasis on a lack of completion and thus a lack of narrative control. According to narratologist Franz K. Stanzel, modern novels achieve their characteristic impressionistic effect when the main character

“remains passive and the narrator prefers to stay in the background.”[61] A Kantian interpretation of passivity as an aesthetic value is that it connotes disinterestedness. But such an interpretation has long been discredited. Mieke Bal asserts: “[The] slanted, or why not say the word, subjective nature of storytelling is inevitable, and denying it constitutes in my mind a dubious political act.”[62] But we are still far from completely understanding all the possibilities of an indirect action. Stanzel points out that reflector-characters should not be judged by the standards of reliability that we attribute to characters that are “tellers,” who posit themselves as arbiters of wisdom or knowledge: “Reflector-characters . . . have to be distinguished according to their idiosyncrasies, particularly the different types of clarity or turbidity of their minds, but never according to their reliability.”[63] Thus the testimony of a reflecting character may be sincere even if it is flawed from an epistemological perspective. My claim is that the ability of the cuckold as a reflector to share in and tolerate the illusions of others contributes to the unfolding of a narrative (though not directly his own).

Although the reflector remains, from the point of view of traditional narrative agency, a case of unrealized action and indirect expression, modern novelists move away from the standards of classical narrative when they choose to make a reflector, especially a passive reflector such as the cuckold, an important male character in their novels. And Lacan’s analyses regarding reflected action bring out an important point that has narratological significance. If he highlights that seeking recognition for oneself is not something that comes easily, then it is possible to argue that one common human drama is represented by the character that ends up as a reflector for others, without developing a distinct sense of self. This does not happen consciously; the narrative is retroactive, although retroaction does not emphasize knowledge gained in retrospect but, instead, surprise or bewilderment. Thus I see

Lacan's work suggesting to us that formative identifications, though unconscious, have dramatic narrative possibilities. As he says in his first published seminar, "Before I became an analyst, I had, thanks to what little psychological gifts I have – taken a formula as the principle of the little compass with which I appraised situations. I was quite happy to say to myself – *Feelings are always reciprocated*. . . in a relationship as intimate as that which exists between analysand and analyst, he [the analysand] is sufficiently aware of the analyst's feelings to be induced into something symmetrical. "[64] Lacan therefore formalizes what modern writers had already anticipated, that intimate relationships often involve a level of unconscious representation.

Changing Metaphors: From the Cuckold as an Existential Character to the Cuckold as a Narrative "Helper"

Alison Sinclair points out that the cuckold has been used, historically, to reflect not only on male anxieties about sexual possession and potency, but also fears about death and aging.[65] This figure has been a metaphor for some of Western culture's most distressing fears.[66] He not only bears infidelity but also suggests a more general malaise, one that is existential: "the literary portrayal of cuckoldry operates, then, on these two levels: the reader is faced with an image of simple sexual betrayal . . . and of the process of ageing and death, to which we are all subject."[67] Sinclair's analysis here is mainly derived from medieval literature, especially from the major European writers that were influenced by the French *fabliau* tradition, Chaucer and Boccaccio. Modern writers are somewhat less concerned with death and more with another quasi-existential theme, one that Philip Weinstein calls "unknowing."[68] Weinstein argues that modernism destabilizes readers' sense of identity,

space, and time, categories that, according to Enlightenment theories of human cognition, give us a minimal orientation in the world.[69] Flaubert, James, and Joyce use the cuckold precisely in this sense: he helps them to destabilize an Enlightenment conception of individual human development as a narrative of self-mastery.

I am adding Lacan's theory because it synthesizes the following existential questions, which apply to the cuckold: Do I have a body? Am I a man or a woman? Who is the subject that is supposed to know? Of the three writers that I am examining here, Flaubert is the one who turns all three of these questions into a narrative borne by the cuckold, Charles Bovary. His version of the cuckold is emasculated, rendered senseless, and killed off. When he dies of heartbreak shortly after his wife's suicide, the following existential statement caps off the meaning of his life: "at the apothecary's request, Monsieur Canivet arrived. He opened him up and found nothing."[70] The final joke here is that Homais the pharmacist, the "man of science," wants to know the cause of Charles Bovary's death. But Charles's grief has left no physiological traces, nothing to suggest that his death has a physical cause. Bovary is a transferential creature: the meaning of his life is "housed" in other people, rather than in himself.

James and Joyce interpret the betrayed husband's transferential dimension in a more positive light. We can see this change in the stage metaphors that they use to develop his narratological significance, which create some level of distance. This moves the betrayed husband away from an existential narrative and suggests a dignified social function for him. In *The Golden Bowl*, a telling description of Adam Verver indicates his ancillary position. Yet, although it evokes his uncertainty as a subject, this description does not negate or stigmatize him:

> There was something in him that made his position, on any occasion, made his relation to any scene or group, a matter of the back of the stage, of an almost visibly conscious want of affinity with the footlights. . . . he might be at the best the financial 'backer,' watching his interests from the wing, but in a rather confessed ignorance of the mysteries of mimicry."[71]

James develops Adam Verver's secondary characteristics in *The Golden Bowl*, such as the tendency to delegate activities to others, especially to the women in his life. When he first proposes marriage to his wife, she asks him why he would wish to marry someone as poor as she is (hinting that she is marrying him for money). His answer to her is: "'Take it then, . . . I'm simply putting [it] . . . all together for you . . . It rests with you to make [it] beautiful and pleasant.'"[72] Readers can interpret this as blindness or generosity. If it is generosity, then it includes the interest that he takes in her self-development and in her unfolding narrative, which he aids as her "financial backer," an important, though enigmatic, ancillary position.

In Joyce's *Ulysses*, Bloom is Molly's business manager. The "Circe" episode comically stages Bloom's sexual submission to Molly in terms of his role as her manager, by mixing up the word manager with the word menagerer, which is associated with a novel Molly has been reading, *Ruby: Pride of the Ring*, by Paul de Kock. The content of this novel is rather ambiguous,[73] but when Bloom looks at the cover, he sees a "Fierce Italian with carriagewhip."[74] This immediately has erotic connotations for him: "Must be Ruby pride of on the floor naked."[75] But when fragments of this scene return in "Circe," we can see a role reversal; instead of seeing himself as a cruel task master, Bloom stages his sexual submission to Molly. When Bloom stammers to her "I can give you . . . I mean as your business menagerer . . Mrs. Marion," she answers him: "O Poldy, Poldy, you are a poor stick in the mud! Go and see life. See the wide world."[76]

Yet as with Adam Verver's portrait, Bloom's "backstage" position has its advantages. First, it is the substance of his sexual fantasies; Bloom's stream-of-consciousness is filled with scenarios that rehearse a fantasy situation in which a woman is "for another."[77] This level of self-awareness (in a cuckold) is a departure from the classic connection between betrayal and stupidity in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Second, cuckoldry for Joyce is an existential category, but one that is comic. Joyce elevates Bloom's plight as a cuckold to a universal; to be part of a series of men in a woman's sexual history is the condition of all men. Sexual betrayal is not death, but it does suggest a comic version of death—replaceability. Joyce highlights this by listing Molly's series of lovers in the "Ithaca" chapter.[78] Bloom's sense of his subordination is also presented by Joyce as a kind of wisdom; adultery is "less reprehensible than theft, highway robbery, cruelty to children and animals, obtaining money under false pretenses . . ."[79]

Finally, Molly's adultery is part of a series in Joyce's *Ulysses* and cannot be understood by itself, as is the case in all three narratives that I am investigating. The other components of this series include an investigation of the limits of instrumental intelligence, which Joyce shares with Flaubert and James, and the cuckold's sympathetic identification with others, especially women. I would like to pick up on the latter point. Bloom is Molly's "menagerer" because he engages in a fantasy in which she can be free to express herself sexually, without shame; he even imagines himself chaperoning her to "masculine brothels, state inspected and medically controlled."[80] Thus Bloom wants Molly to be satisfied and this satisfies him as well (even if he only facilitates the satisfaction). By focalizing Bloom, Joyce highlights his facilitating role, but also, as in the case of his attitude towards perverse sexuality, approaches it without shame and in a comical spirit.

I return to the contrast between the medieval and the modern versions of the cuckold-model for the betrayed husband: in the *fabliau*, the cuckold's narratological position was ironic. He should be an "opponent" in the fabula but instead ends up facilitating it, being its "helper."[81] This irony is exploited for its comic potential; but when the husband's ignorance is repeatedly and openly ridiculed, it reflects the limitations of the *fabliau's* ethos, which depends upon the fortuitous deceptions that can be made out of word play: "[the] ironic celebration of the human propensity for error, of the power of words to deceive, to protect assault, to shift shapes and manipulate fortune."[82] In the honor plays in seventeenth century Spain, the betrayed husband is an opponent in the infidelity plot, and does defend his name; these plays dramatize men who, although they are active and self-possessed, attempt to take back their honor as husbands through "wife-murder."[83] The novelists who extend the implications of the cuckold's portrayal in Western narratives are interested instead in the possibilities of passivity as a way of avoiding violence against women, and violence in general.

If we note the novel's shift from heroic action to reflected action, we can see that, historically, the character that bears the burden of individual formation in the typical Western realist narrative, the *Bildungsroman*, is a "pliant" character.[84] About his hero Wilhelm Meister, Goethe argued that "The hero of a novel must be suffering, or at least he must not be in a high degree active."[85] Schiller responded to this idea in a letter to Goethe, and the following are some of his remarks about Goethe's "new" type of novelistic hero:

> Wilhelm Meister is the most necessary character, but not the most important; one of the peculiarities of your novel is that it neither has nor needs a hero. Everything takes place around him, but not because of him: precisely because the things which surround him represent and express energies, and he instead pliability, his relationships with other characters had to be different from those of the heroes of other novels.[86]

Goethe's novel already demonstrates a greater flexibility in the main protagonist. Schiller's contrast between energy and pliability is important; the suggestion seems to be that that Wilhelm Meister is responsive rather than active, but Schiller retains a positive sense for his responsiveness; it is not simple passivity. The *Bildung* protagonist eschews conflict through flexibility.

When flexibility becomes passivity, however, we are witnessing the tail end of a historical cycle. Northrop Frye's well-known typology outlines five modes of Western fiction in terms of the hero's power of action; Frye argues that Western narratives have steadily moved their "center of gravity" towards scenes of "bondage, frustration, and absurdity."[87] To validate a passive hero, if we agree with Frye's criteria (that the hero is defined by his power of action) would be to destroy the meaning of the category altogether. Mieke Bal argues that the hero is primarily an ideological category and should be studied as such.[88] Philip Weinsten has focused on the figure of the hero and how he is connected to a long-standing Western narrative of how we come to know ourselves. He argues that the Western subject "comes to know by learning . . . to recognize and exploit the arrangements of the external world (nature or culture, objects or others) in which he or she moves."[89] Thus modernism's extreme reduction of the figure of the hero critiques the connection between knowledge and self-mastery.

Yet ideological concerns are not sufficient to create a compelling narrative. In narrative art, the main goal is to tell a story, and storytelling thrives insofar as it can unfold and develop itself. As Franco Moretti remarks:

> Beginning and end are, certainly, decisive moments of any narration: they frame it, give it perspective, circumscribe its field of possibility. But they circumscribe that field—they do not populate it. If the ultimate assumptions of a work are generally

> found at its margins—its fascination, as with any true journey, seems instead to lie 'in the middle.[90]

Moretti shifts the grounds of narrative from ideological concerns to narrative development. How to "populate" a narrative is distinguished from the problem of how to ensure its conditions of possibility, which he suggests is ultimately ideological. Beginnings, initiations, are produced by conflict and this is where we see a writer's ideological stance most clearly. Here the cuckold can be seen as weak; he cannot initiate a conflict and therefore the narrative possibilities do not belong to him. A passive male could easily be reduced to Stephen Dedalus's image of failed masculinity in *Ulysses*; Sargent, a slow student in Stephen's class (possibly a reference to Charles Bovary) is described as a "a squashed boneless snail . . . but for her [his mother] the race of the world would have trampled him underfoot."[91] But this brutal image, which seems to bar any narrative development, is perhaps also an opening. If the figure of the mother is negated here by Stephen, she is affirmed by Bloom, who spends a good portion of his evening in a maternity hospital waiting on the news of Mina Purefoy, a woman having a difficult labor. This chapter in the maternity hospital, "Oxen of the Sun," also contains a telling statement about the narrative power of Bloom's sympathetic identification: "Ruth [compassion] red [advised] him, love led on with will to wander, loth to leave."[92] Bloom's compassion and love continue the narrative here.

The uses to which the cuckold is put are in the service of narrative development. He helps to "populate the world," the narrative world that is, by unfolding other characters' possibilities (and especially the sexual possibilities of his wife). At the end of "Lotus Eaters" Joyce presents readers with an image of paternity (the phallus) in the most counterintuitive way. Bloom is "the limp father of thousands, a languid floating flower."[93] Bloom's limp penis is not only the "father of thousands" but is also associated with an image of beauty, a

flower. So for Bloom, populating the world has nothing to do with doing the deed, but instead with substituting another man for himself, i.e. allowing other men to encroach upon his paternity. This suggests that paternity is perhaps elsewhere, that it is not in the body, or even in the physical act of sex. But this kind of attitude entails a risk, the risk of self-effacement. And because self-effacement is the main cost of the cuckold's permissiveness and his role in narrative unfolding (rather than narrative initiation) it is a prominent theme that we can see at the limits of this particular stage in Western literature.

Chapter Outline

My first chapter will argue that Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is a precursor in the movement towards developing a storytelling function for the betrayed husband. It is an existential narrative, and Charles Bovary demonstrates, with a particular poignancy, the problem of characterizing masculine identity in the form of self-effacement. He literally disappears behind his wife. When she dies, we find that he simply imitates her behavior. The ending to his story shows us that this imitation is his only form of speech. He has no other, and it is clearly inadequate. One poignant effect for the reader is that we see a shy and family-oriented young man becoming suddenly extravagant, buying expensive clothes and taking out loans to pay the bills: "She was corrupting him from beyond the grave."[94] The uncanny surprise in this reversal is what Lacan calls a change of place[95]; identity is "housed" in the other. Such mimicry is significant because it reveals the character's struggle for expression through the vehicle of another person. It is also a doubled representation of Emma's behavior.

James's *The Golden Bowl* complicates the cuckold model in which the husband is used, by suggesting that the cuckold's position can be manipulated so that his very ignorance effects a trick on the deliberate trickster. *The Golden Bowl's* drama centers around the fact that, not only does the betrayed husband misunderstand himself, but he baffles others. Adam Verver's wife Charlotte Stant thinks she is pulling off a simple plot of deception. But then she finds that she must "work" for her position by trying to guess her husband's and her daughter-in-law's motivations. So the trick is on Charlotte. Then is Adam Verver the ultimate trickster in the novel? My reading is that whether one gets used such a situation, or uses others, matters less than the struggle for expression that is represented by Adam Verver's ambiguous *Bildung* project in the novel—his collection of art objects, which he plans to turn into a museum called American City. This could be seen as an act of crass materialism, but readers are positioned to see it as an attempt at self-expression. Yet Adam Verver is still not differentiated enough to hold center stage; his daughter's betrayal holds precedence over his.

Bloom's characterization in *Ulysses* goes directly to the connection between cuckoldry and authorship. This displacement from sexual ignorance to the problem of authorship is clear in the "Calypso" chapter that first introduces Bloom. At the end of this episode, Bloom reads a story in the daily paper; he then thinks of writing a story himself and sending it to the paper. But this project never materializes except in the form of his uncompleted "sketch."[96] Yet this is not the end of the story; it is only the beginning. Because despite the suggestions of a stifled desire in this scene, the real theme that Joyce is moving towards is the power of Bloom's sympathetic identification, which will only become clear as the narrative develops.

Alongside Bloom's incipient cuckoldry, which, by the end of the day, clearly indicates to readers his vicarious fantasies about his wife with another man, Bloom's has another quest; this involves Stephen Dedalus, whose development as a writer Bloom would like to facilitate. With Stephen, as with Molly, Bloom takes on an ancillary position. He has great hopes for Stephen, in whom he sees "the predestination of a future."[97] But the best he can do to get close to him, and to spin out his vicarious plans for the young man's development, is to offer himself as a host for a few days. Towards the end of "Ithaca," he offers Stephen the empty bedroom in his house so that he can have "seclusion of study."[98] At this point, if it is not clear to readers that Bloom's position as an agent is an ancillary one, when Stephen and Bloom are about to exchange stories in "Ithaca" we get the following telling description of Bloom: "He preferred himself to see another's face and listen to another's words by which potential narration was realized and kinetic temperament relieved."[99] Because these words don't come from Bloom directly, the extent to which he is conscious of this tendency in himself is open to interpretation. But we cannot say this is ignorance. In psychoanalytic terms, it represents a non-revealed unconscious. But that does not make it merely negative, or even unproductive. The tone of the passage is serious and suggests that his ancillary status has both a subjective and narratological potential. That is, Bloom is taken as an important character in his own right and as a compositional resource.

In Bloom's world experience ultimately serves storytelling, which is the use value to which he would like to put the events of his life. Yet we are presented with storytelling as a wish realized vicariously through the image of another. This is a paradoxical failure that, in the end, is not a failure. Bloom's vicarious fantasies are presented with such intensity and sympathy that they have made him an endearingly comic character.[100] The failure of his own

expressive power is made up for in a refracted image of another's imagined success, which is in turn also his. This is, indeed, a constant pattern of his thought process. And its relationship to the literature of cuckoldry is clear: if the cuckold has always been viewed as a man who is superseded/replaced by both men and women in mind and body then Bloom, the supreme cuckold, shows readers that this is not stupidity but a vicarious pleasure. The cuckold is the basic component of a storytelling function in the form of a wish that has, neurotically, changed places—it is "housed" somewhere other than in oneself. Joyce shows it to us, without shame, and with poignancy, as a form of unrealized potential that is tied to a desire for self-expression through others.

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[1] Norris J. Lacey, "The Humor of the Fabliaux," *Reading Fabliaux* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993) 113-130.

[2] *Madame Bovary* was first published serially from 1856-1857. I am using the Penguin edition of *Madame Bovary*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (New York: Penguin, 2003). *The Golden Bowl* was first published in 1904; I am using the Penguin edition of *The Golden Bowl* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1987); *Ulysses* was first published in 1922; I am using the edition edited by Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Vintage Books, 1986).

[3] *The Deceived Husband: A Kleinian Approach to the Literature of Infidelity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 2.

[4] *The Deceived Husband* 100.

[5] *The Deceived Husband* 98.

[6] John Hines, *The Fabliaux in English* (New York: Longman, 1993).

[7] This is the case with Chaucer's "Miller's Tale." Sinclair uses Chaucer's tale as a typical example of the literature of cuckoldry: "the prerequisites for the cuckold story are . . . The husband is elderly, and his young wife shows all the commitment to a young woman's need of a young man shown by Chaucer's May and Alisoun" (*The Deceived Husband* 255).

[8] This is the opening for infidelity in Chaucer's "Shipman's Tale"; Norris J. Lacey remarks that "The most obvious and perhaps most frequent instance [of conventionalized situations] is the woman's intention to welcome her lover after her husband leaves (generally on business)" (*Reading Fabliaux* 154).

[9] Lacey argues that "a great many fabliaux are not anti-feminist . . . or even essentially about women. . . . We should thus generalize with care" (*Reading Fabliaux* 76).

[10] Notable examples are: "The Three Hunchbacks," in which a woman cleverly disposes of her hunchbacked, old and jealous husband, by having him thrown into the river with three other hunchbacks who happen to come for Christmas dinner; *La Bourgoise d'Orliens* tells of a cuckold who suspects his wife of having a lover and

tries to test her by disguising himself as the lover. The joke is that the wife outwits him; after she has her disguised husband beaten by the servants and thrown out of the house, he returns home thoroughly convinced of her fidelity.

[11] *The Deceived Husband* 28.

[12] *The Deceived Husband* 58.

[13] *The Deceived Husband* 25, 53.

[14] *The Deceived Husband* 59.

[15] *The Deceived Husband* 57, 65.

[16] It is a commonplace that medieval literature was concerned with the themes of death and aging, which resonated with members of all classes because of famine, plague, and political instability in early European society. Its intellectual life, represented by the scholastic philosophers of the era, who came before the break between analytic philosophy and Christian philosophy, was influenced by St. Augustine's attempt to reconcile human reason with faith. See *A Short History of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) by Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins.

[17] Charles Muscatine, *The Old French Fabliaux* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 153-154.

[18] *The Old French Fabliaux* 153-154.

[19] Lacey explains that, in many *fabliau* tales, "we are dealing with an obvious narrative collaboration: the character arranges what can be arranged, and the narrator takes care of the rest" (*Reading Fabliaux* 153).

[20] *Reading Fabliaux* 135.

[21] *The Fabliaux in English* 10.

[22] Philosopher Avital Ronell points out that "For the most part, stupidity has been assimilated to error . . . [but] it needs to be sought elsewhere, among figures other than those subsumable by error" (20). See *Stupidity* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

[23] Muscatine 95.

[24] Hines, "Chaucer's Shipman's Tale," *The Fabliaux in English* 71-104.

[25] Sinclair, *The Deceived Husband* 173-252.

[26] *The Deceived Husband* 174.

[27] Postmodern philosophy has promoted the idea that the domain of knowledge cannot be unified completely. Contemporary theorist Charles Shepherdson sums this view up well in his book *Vital Signs: Nature, Culture, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 2000): "Knowledge . . . is simply far too diverse and too lacking in theoretical unity for . . . absolute claims to be made" (7). But this idea can be traced back to modernism.

[28] *Stupidity* 5-6.

[29] This is Mikhail Bakhtin's argument in his essay "Epic and Novel." See *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, tran. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 3-40.

[30] *Stupidity* 6. Ronell is referring to the hero, broadly conceived. But the specific period in the emergence of the novel in which "the intelligence of doing" was particularly important is associated with the picaresque novel of he 16th century, in which "the youth without prospects . . . makes his way by his wits, and as he goes sheds light on human relations as they are, not as convention supposes them to be" (112). See Jacques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000).

[31] *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) 252.

[32] *Fictions of Female Adultery, 1684-1890: Theories and Circumtexts* (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 3. Overton also wrote another book on the novel of adultery, *The Novel of Female Adultery: Love and Gender in Continental European Fiction, 1830-1900* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

[33] Dorrit Cohn's book, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), has been one of the most influential books on this topic.

[34] *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, tran. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press) 52-55.

[35] Sinclair explains: "The man of honor retains his social identity intact only so long as all facets of it (including the honour and honorable behavior of both his wife and dependents) remain beyond reproach" (*The Deceived Husband* 100).

[36] *Stupidity* 3.

[37] Muscatine 98.

[38] Muscatine 98.

[39] Quoted in Lisa Perfetti's "The Lewd and the Ludic: Female Pleasure in the Fabliaux," *Comic Provocations: Exposing the Corpus of Old French Fabliaux*, Ed. Holly A. Crocker (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

[40] Michael McKeon ed., *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) 80.

[41] Jonathan Culler argues that Flaubert's characters are expressions of "the adventures of reading"; their lives are not transparent, especially not to themselves, and the clichés that they live are nonetheless attempts to give meaning to their lives—they are "an allegory of interpretation and understanding" in a linguistically "refractory" universe (230). See *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).

[42] *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976).

[43] *A Future for Astyanax* 95.

[44] *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* 31.

[45] *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* 28.

[46] "Why Do Cuckolds Have Horns?" *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 71. 4 (2008): 2.

[47] Notes by the Author, *Exiles* (London: Granada Publishing, 1979) 149.

[48] Peter Brooks, *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), 49.

[49] Sinclair 29.

[50] *Vital Signs: Nature, Culture, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

[51] *Vital Signs* 36.

[52] *Vital Signs* 35-36.

[53] See Philippe Julien's *Jacques Lacan's Return to Freud: The Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary* (New York: New York University Press, 1994). See also Charles Shepherdson's essay "Lacan and Philosophy," *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, Ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 116-152.

[54] For Lacan's discussion of this defintion, see "The Symbolic Universe" in *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1991) 27-39.

[55] These three themes are developed in Lacan's twentieth seminar*, On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, tran. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1988).

[56] *Vital Signs* 47.

[57] Sinclair 245-246.

[58] Sinclair 25-26.

[59] *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press) 202.

[60] See Lacan's first two published seminars: *Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954* and *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1991). Lacan expanded on his ideas about ignorance in later seminars: *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis 1969-1970* (New York: Norton, 2007) and *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, (New York: Norton, 1999).

[61] Stanzel *Narrative Situations in the Novel*, tran. James P. Pusack (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971) 102. Stanzel is actually referring to Henry James's *The Ambassadors*.

[62] *Narratology* 145.

[63] "Teller-Characters and Reflector-Characters in Narrative Theory," *Poetics Today* 2.2 (1981): 9.

[64] *Freud's Papers on Technique* 33. Lacan is discussing a specific case here.

[65] *The Deceived Husband* 65.

[66] *The Deceived Husband* 65.

[67] *The Deceived Husband* 65.

[68] *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[69] *Unknowing* 2.

[70] Flaubert 327; part 3, ch. 2.

[71] James 160; bk. 2, ch. 4.

[72] James 196, 198; bk. 2, ch. 6.

[73] Don Gifford's annotations explain that Paul de Kock was a French novelist writing in the nineteenth century; his works were characterized as "'vulgar but not immoral'" (78). Molly's dialogue in "Calypso" seems to corroborate this: "There's nothing smutty in it" (355). But this admission also begs the question, because she assumes (rightly) that Bloom will think she is reading an erotic novel; there is also her comment to Bloom about the sexual connotations of the author's name: "Get me another of Paul de Kock's. Nice name he has" (358).

[74] 52; ch. 4, lines 346-347.

[75] 52; ch. 4, line 347.

[76] 359; ch. 15, lines 326-330.

[77] 49; ch. 4, line 177.

[78] 601-602; lines 2132-2142.

[79] 603; ch. 17, lines 2182-2183.

[80] 562; ch. 17, lines 668-669.

[81] Bal 206-208.

[82] Muscatine 101.

[83] Sinclair 120.

[84] Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The* Bildungsroman *in European Culture* (London: Verso, 2000) 20.

[85] Quoted in Moretti 20.

[86] Quoted in Moretti 20.

[87] *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) 34.

[88] *Narratology* 133.

[89] *Unknowing* 24.

[90] *The Way of the World* 28.

[91] 23; ch. 2, lines 139-142.

[92] 318; ch. 14, line 201.

[93] 71; ch. 5, lines 570-572.

[94] Flaubert 320; part 3, ch. 2.

[95] Julien 77-82.

[96] 56; line 518.

[97] 565; ch. 17, line 780.

[98] 570; line 937.

[99] 561; lines 637-638.

[100] Leo Bersani, "Against Ulysses," *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) 155-178. Bersani points out that a sophisticated and ironic reading of Joyce's *Ulysses* does not preclude a "naïve" approach to character; he argues that Bloom is a successful creation precisely because he affirms nineteenth century values about "personality," values which insist on creating a knowable self.

CHAPTER 2

THE INCALCULABLE COST OF CUCKOLDRY IN *MADAME BOVARY*

Madame Bovary presents readers with a succession of character portraits. Their trajectory can roughly be described as moving from constraint to action; the most passive character is the one we meet first, and we gradually move towards the character most likely to obtain what he desires. Yet this novel is much more about searching out desire, when the aim of desire is unclear, and thus the success of obtaining what one wants is less important. The portrait of Homais, which dominates the second half of the novel, shows us a small but willful man apotheosized to success and establishes him as a comic hero in the tradition of Aristophanes.[1] Emma's story of adultery occupies the middle of the narrative. As Graham Falconer points out, Emma is a woman constrained by various kinds of male neglect; she is awake and alive in a male society that is mostly asleep.[2] But readers must first meet Charles, a young boy in a provincial classroom who cannot even say his name clearly in front of the students and the teacher. And his adult goals (much more modest than those of his wife's and neighbor's), such as being able to dispose of himself and his money with some measure of freedom and looking after the health and welfare of his wife and child, are not even capable of clear and conscious articulation, much less of success.[3]

Since my reading of Flaubert's novel focuses on Charles Bovary, my claim is that it is important to interpret the narrative trajectory of Flaubert's character portraits in reverse order; that is, I see passivity as the thematic crux of Flaubert's vision.[4] A reverse reading of the novel's trajectory moves the narrative in a direction of greater pathos. If this were a more traditional novel, the movement from constraint to action would also have a more positive

meaning. But given *Madame Bovary's* upside down world where so many of our expectations are reversed, readers must see that ending with Homais' comic rise to power makes light of any attempts at actively realizing one's desire. Emma's story, compared to Homais,' is poignant because of its lack of success.[5] Although adultery is a solution for her, an attempt to remedy the boredom and constraint of bourgeois marriage, she pays much more for it than she has to (just as it seems unfair for Homais to pay so little for his follies). Thus Charles Bovary's story, amid this cast of characters, and despite his failure of action and expression, inspires the most pathos.

The novel's existential theme must be understood from the outset. In his famous reading, Erich Auerbach asserts that *Madame Bovary* "is the representation of an entire human existence which has no issue," and he extends this thesis to all of the novel's characters.[6] All activity is futile and all satisfactions are presented, in the novel's social context (its subtitle is *Provincial Lives*), as mean and petty. Given these premises, the reader's position is to try to maneuver one's judgments within a hopelessly flawed novelistic universe. But then readers are asked to suspend sweeping judgments that would put all failures on the same level and to enter into a minute investigation of *types* of failure. Homais, in the tradition of the Aristophanic comic hero, is a certain kind of failure[7]; he is a an imposter, a man who is trying to be something that he is not. Emma's dreams of romance, as Leo Bersani argues, are simply too demanding; she cannot accept that sensuality and love may not be connected.[8] Charles Bovary's failure is also very specific: his childlike incomprehension leads him to idealize everything and everyone around him; the world is full of mysteries that he cannot penetrate, and what he doesn't understand, he elevates. Flaubert dissects his unreflective goodwill and presents him as walking straight into a series of traps.

Auerbach has argued that Flaubert's attitude towards his characters in *Madame Bovary* is very hard to pin down and that traditional categories such as tragic pity or comic derision (satire) are not adequate descriptive terms for his artistic achievement.[9] In fact he insists that there are no elegant terms for the novel's vision:

> He has found an attitude toward the reality of contemporary life which is entirely different from earlier attitudes and stylistic levels . . . It could be called, quite simply, 'objective seriousness.' This sounds strange as a designation of the style of a literary work. Objective seriousness seeks to penetrate the depths of the passions and entanglements of human life, but without itself being moved, or at least without betraying that it is moved—this is an attitude which one expects from a priest, a teacher, and a psychologist rather than from an artist. But the priest, teacher, and psychologist wish to accomplish something practical—which is far from Flaubert's mind. He wishes, by his attitude . . . to force language to render the truth concerning the subjects of his observation.[10]

I would like to add to Auerbach's insights regarding the problems of using the terms comic and tragic. My claim is that Flaubert's subject-matter is his analytical approach to failure, and Lacan's theory helps us recognize that failure is bound up with self-representation.

Compared to Flaubert's analytical treatment of failure, the *fabliau* presented a man's sexual failure (the cuckold's) as comic, and this tended to diffuse the audience's discomfort at witnessing its representation. Alison Sinclair argues that this genre reflects the "containing function of humor," allowing failure to be represented and even tolerated, but only so long as it crystallizes around a figure of fun, someone who is not one of us.[11] But Flaubert's novel gives us no traditional comic relief. We do not have the luxury of dismissal, even comic dismissal, because it is the nature of the whole world that he has created to be dismissed. A book about nothing, as he famously put it, is still a book that asks to be read.[12] So the paradox is that we must pay attention to this nothing. And for the duration of the narrative, we are asked to be tolerant and, in many instances, to suspend humor as well as judgment. Bersani points out that readers who complain about the quality of the novels Emma reads are

descending to snobbery, and it is this kind of observation that captures the spirit of the novel's premises: there are no high and low subjects in literature.[13]

Despite Charles Bovary's neglect in most discussions of Flaubert's novel, the reader is put into a very complex position with regard to him. Flaubert presents his story in a series of contrasts that evoke both derision and sympathy. He is first labeled as a simpleton in school, but it is unclear whether he deserves this label. For example, certain facts contradict it: "on one occasion, he nearly won a prize for natural history."[14] Yet he never manages to find friendship among his peers. He then becomes a cuckolded husband, but his ignorance of his wife's adulteries leads to tragic rather than comic effects; not only does she leave him bankrupt, but she commits suicide rather than suffer his forgiveness. He grieves for her only to finally confront her adulteries. When he dies, still grieving but forgiving her (and also her lovers), the doctor performs an autopsy. Readers are then confronted with the worst statement yet to cap off the meaning of his life: "He opened him up and found nothing."[15]

It should be clear from the above plot summary that the recurring themes associated with Charles Bovary's characterization are stupidity and pathos, which are reflected in the two genres that make up his portrait—the *fabliau* and the *Bildungsroman*. The uneasy conjunction of these two genres is figured in the strangely composite image of the cap he wears in the novel's opening schoolroom scene. It serves both as a dunce's cap and as an intimation of his future cuckoldry, thus emphasizing the various levels of failure that await him. But the cap's description also indicates a *Bildingsroman* in reverse. Tony Tanner argues that it represents a "grotesque parody of initiation into the prevailing culture"[16]; it suggests, instead of a story of formation, one of disintegration and confusion. As I read it, the cap's figuration of confusion is precisely what evokes the pathos of modernity.

Flaubert takes a risk by fusing these two genres together, one which evokes stupidity and the other cultural formation. These two registers are very difficult to reconcile. In using the word stupidity I don't mean that this is a label for a particular individual; it is the confusion that is an effect of Flaubert's larger insight that knowledge is not whole. The *Bildung* tradition implies that synthesis is possible, and Flaubert ironized this tradition by evoking the earlier bourgeois tradition of the *fabliau*. If we take the novel's premise of analyzing stupidity, and therefore breaking it down, we do experience pathos for the suffering character; yet it is not a comfortable pathos, in which we can be assured that the victim is entirely innocent, but one of the effects of the choice between bad and worse which makes sweeping perspectives on the flawed nature of this upside down world impossible. Northrop Frye has called pathos a "queer ghoulish emotion" and observes that "some failure of expression, real or simulated, seems to be peculiar to it."[17] My larger argument here is that stupidity, when it is expressed in a dialectic with pathos, helps us to untangle the problem of existential expression; that is, when a character's identity is threatened, not by life or limb, but the high cost of representation to which the human animal must be subjected. The narrative that is produced through this focus on untangling the conjunction of pathos and stupidity has long been misunderstood.

Madame Bovary from the Husband's Point of View: Bakhtinian Insights

If our task as readers is to differentiate types of failure in *Madame Bovary*, then focusing on Charles Bovary's story reveals a marked attention to the problem of expression. Unlike the situations of Homais and Emma, the novel's two other main figures, the hallmark of Charles's characterization is that he is unable to make any conscious connection to a

particular discourse. Graham Falconer, who is one of the few critics to focus exclusively on Charles Bovary's role in the novel, observes that what unifies almost all the major character portraits in *Madame Bovary* (except for Charles Bovary's) is that each believes that he or she has found the right medium, the proper discourse for expressing desire and intentionality; Homais always has a ready phrase and Emma a dream.[18] Thus the portrayals of Emma and Homais are satirical; each targets one type of discourse: romance novels and scientific positivism.

From this perspective, when we turn to Charles, it is clear from the first three chapters of *Madame Bovary* that he faces a conflict of a different order; we could say that it is a Bakhtinian conflict, that of choosing a discourse. To shift the focus of interpretation in his direction is to recognize the significance of this conflict, which is a mark of modernity. Bakhtin writes:

> Consciousness finds itself inevitably facing the necessity of *having to choose a language*. . . . As soon as a critical interanimation of languages began to occur . . . as soon as it became clear that there were not only different languages but even internally variegated languages, that the ideological systems and approaches to the world that were indissolubly connected with these languages contradicted each other and in no way could live in peace and quiet with one another . . . the necessity of actively choosing one's orientation among them began.[19]

Charles Bovary reflects this choice in the negative; he is one of modernity's lost souls, its symptom. And he is the only character in the novel that dramatizes the difficulty of this modern dilemma.

In the context of Charles's marriage, his problematic relationship to discourse is presented as a serious flaw. One of Emma's complaints about him is that "[his] conversation was as flat as a pavement, everyone's ideas trudging along in it in their weekaday clothes,

rousing no emotion, no laughter, no reverie."[20] To her, Charles is merely dull. And she wishes for a husband who can expand her discursive universe, not muddle it:

> He couldn't swim, or fence, or shoot, and he wasn't able to explain, one day, a riding term which she had come across in a novel. A man surely, ought to know everything, ought to excel in a host of activities, ought to initiate you into the energies of passion . . . But this man knew nothing, taught nothing, desired nothing.[21]

Activity here is associated with a specific discursive context (the romance novels Emma reads) and legitimated by this context; but since Charles cannot understand the context itself, nor its terms, he is himself *uninitiated*. But we must note the fact that initiation is a matter of words and their explanations as much as it is of actions.

From the standpoint of analyzing the different levels of failure in *Madame Bovary*, which do not directly connect to each other, Emma's criticisms, though valid from her perspective, only present a one-sided view of the problem in this marriage. What is the proper response to his passivity? We see that he has difficulty managing the circulation common knowledge. Charles's reflection of a mental space that is so crowded and trampled by other people's ideas and words, "trudging along it in their weekaday clothes," shows us an anguished passivity, the passivity of one that searches in vain for self-expression. This question is addressed in the opening chapters of the novel, before Emma even appears. We witness his years as a medical student, and his genuine bewilderment in the face of medical terminology, whose basic typology he struggles to grasp:

> The lecture list, when he read it on the noticeboard, made him feel dizzy: anatomy lectures, pathology lectures, physiology lectures, pharmacy lectures, chemistry and botany lectures, clinical practice and therapeutics, not to mention hygiene and material medica, names with mysterious etymologies, like so many temple-doors guarding a sacred gloom within.[22]

To Charles, this multiplicity of terms has no other organizing principle than the "sacred"; he is barred from logic by his confusion, and the only unity he sees is an obscure God. And this

presents us with a very modern dilemma: the problem of how to make the proliferation and encyclopedic organization of new knowledge into a coherent narrative, one that is not religious, but that can still be synthetic. This is a question that permeates the entire novel, but Charles Bovary's story most clearly allegorizes it.

Thus Emma's experience of modernity is not the same as Charles's, because he is subject to this necessity of choosing a profession and making his way through its typological intricacy. At what level then can his wife even begin to address him? While all the other characters make discursive choices about where to fit themselves, and are represented as identifying with a particular expressive medium (artistic, scientific and so on), the clarity of this initial choice is lacking in Charles Bovary's presentation. But if Flaubert can be said to validate this lack of clarity (especially since Charles Bovary is singled out in this respect) we can say that he is investigating narrative clarity and asserting that it is problematic. This may be the main reason for the stress on Charles' education in the first three chapters of the novel; placing him in a direct relationship to a university discourse that has a typological and not a narrative structure emphasizes this investigative approach to narrative.

In *Madame Bovary* the principle targets are discourses. We can then say that Emma and Homais are involved in discursive choices that have already been turned into narratives; they are seduced by compelling storylines and their dramas already begin with this satiric view of discourse; they are both creatures of a chosen ideology, which offers them a ready-made interpretation of a large mass of facts. Jonathan Culler has argued that since Flaubert's position is that language is simply an inadequate medium to express intentionality, "those characters are treated best who are least committed to language."[23] Thus if we read the novel backwards, we see that Charles's relationship to discourse, because it is problematic and

unclear, puts him in a special relationship to Flaubert's thematic attack on discursive/ideological simplifications. Because he is the least articulate of the three main characters in the novel, he dramatizes the pathos of the human relationship to discourse.

The usefulness of Bakhtin's conception of discourse for understanding Charles Bovary's character is in its connection to hybridity, to the circulation, within a character's verbal/linguistic field, of a variety of expressive media that are fluid and in the process of being tested against each other. And it is precisely those characters that cannot choose a medium of self-expression without some difficulty that lend themselves to such hybridity. Often, their complexity lies not in the richness of the personality but precisely in the opposite, in the difficulty of finding a verbal/expressive medium that will "place" the character, as Leo Bersani has argued.[24]

The *Fabliau* and the *Bildungsroman*: Two Bourgeois Genres

Combining the *Bildungsroman* with the *fabliau* in the characterization of Charles Bovary is an unusual move. The *Bildungsroman* hinges on character development and especially on the fact that the protagonist is educatable. Franco Moretti, in his study of the genre, *The Way of the World*, defines the *Bildung* protagonist as a "pliable" character.[25] This figure's compositional significance is a socially synthetic one, to be a "well-cut prism in which countless nuances of the social context blend together in a harmonious 'personality.'"[26] Such a protagonist is not at odds with society, but seeks only to find his or her proper place within it.[27] According to Moretti, the *Bildung* protagonist emerges as a synthetic solution to novelists' attempts to deal with the contradictions of a dominant of bourgeois culture (its connection to the French Revolution and its impending modernity).[28]

This figure is not a favorable type when there are historical crises, but emerges precisely during a time of "ordinary administration," when maintaining the status quo is important; his or her goal is a modest one: personal happiness within the context of a "reasonable" life.[29]

In contrast, the ethos of the *fabliau* is part of the bourgeoisie's inglorious past; it has come to be accepted as a bourgeois genre, and is the first known vernacular literature of the "burghers."[30] According to Charles Muscatine, the trickery plots in these stories focus on the values of wit and ingenuity, the weapons of those who seek to rise in the world by any available means; the *fabliau's* protagonists are the figures of the servant, the woman, and the poor scholar.[31] But the link-point in *Madame Bovary's* hybrid mixture of these two genres is not just their common bourgeois origin (however contradictorily imagined and assessed)[32]; it is education. Charles Bovary is presented as an average young man with the goodwill of the *Bildung* hero towards others and towards the social network that is entrusted with his education. The schoolmate who introduces him to readers in the opening scene of the novel notes that he looks "sensible" and that he shows great "willingness" as a student.[33] Yet these characteristics are presented in a derisive context which marks him as pliable in the worst sense: "he carried out his little daily task just like a mill horse, plodding his circle in the dark, grinding away in perfect ignorance."[34] In this world the traditional *Bildung* synthesis is doomed to failure. It is a world in which much more seems to be asked of the *Bilding* protagonist than ever before; his pliancy leads only to the wrong kind of education, the assimilation of rules but not the development of an active sense of judgment.

But the derisive context of the above description (Charles figured as a "mill horse") is reminiscent of the *fabliau*, which could be seen as the *Bildungsroman's* shadow double, emphasizing a different kind of work ethic and a different relationship to learning. It presents

formal education as something merely official; the clerks or “wandering scholars” who recited these tales for money had to turn their Latin literary training into a form of vernacular entertainment.[35] Thus a rearticulation of the meaning of their official education was necessary. The genre reflects this by validating transgression against the rules of composition; simply learning and following rules was a sign of dullness and especially of vulnerability. In the opening chapter of *Madame Bovary*, when the schoolmate states that “though he [Charles] just about knew his [Latin] rules. . . his style was rather lacking in elegance,” something of this logic comes through.[36] Elegance is not exactly trickery but the connection between them is that simply learning the rules is not enough. Thus Charles Bovary reflects the ugliness of the *new* bourgeois culture. As Peter Brooks argues, Flaubert’s is an aesthetic (along with the other Realists) that validates ugliness and clumsiness.[37]

In the novel’s opening scene, there is another connection to *fabliau* trickery and its attitude of derision. We witness Charles Bovary’s subjection to so many of those common but cruel adolescent rituals: a boy knocks his cap off his head; he is asked to say his name in front of the class, but is so nervous that he cannot pronounce it properly (this sets off a roar of laughter from the class and even the teacher cannot resist poking fun at him); spitballs are thrown at his face when he tries to work on his lessons. Cuckoldry has shifted its context; it is linked to adolescence and transposed to the schoolroom and the schoolyard. One sign of this is that imagery associated with the schoolyard reappears later in the novel. When Emma’s first lover, Rodolphe, decides to leave her, there is the following commentary: “pleasures, like boys in a school playground, had so trampled across his heart that nothing green now sprouted there, and whatever passed that way, more heedless than children, left – unlike them – no name carved upon the wall.”[38] The derision which, in a medieval context,

would be placed in an adult context, now appears in the form of adolescent cruelty. I am suggesting that this imagery is not random but part of the hybrid mixture in *Madame Bovary* between the *fabliau* and the *Bildungsroman*. The fact that the images of the schoolyard reappear when the story of adultery is unfolding (just as the echoes of cuckoldry can be found in the image of Charles Bovary's hat) indicates that the connection between the two genres in the novel is not incidental or misleading, as some critics have argued.[39]

The *fabliau* is necessary for Flaubert's thematic purposes and is incorporated by him into a larger genre structure because it highlights an education in desire and not simply in the assimilation of knowledge; its protagonists know how to get what they want sexually and this is the prerequisite, in the genre's particular ethos, for a more general outlook on intelligence. But the *fabliau* isn't equipped by itself to handle the complex relationship between education as learning to "beat the system," and education as an attempt to create rules that can establish clear guidelines for what is average or "normal" socially and intellectually; this is its limitation. The nineteenth century's expanding proliferation of complex discourses that codified knowledge (a product of the new professionalized and industrious middle classes) would require an encounter with a less practical form of intelligence.

According to John Hines, the *fabliau* presents readers with a world "from which the worst things can be excluded, leaving only a range of offenses that can be trivialized, ridiculed or dismissed."[40] Hines calls this the "moral weakness of the *fabliau* myth."[41] It remains unconcerned with larger questions about faith and morality, leaving these to the "high" genre of the Romance. Thus we see the *fabliau's* practical realism, its focus on a narrow form of intelligence and the fulfillment of simple desire where cause and effect operates fairly smoothly. This makes questions about what one or another person deserves a

practical issue as well. If you do not get pleasure out of life it is your fault. The "moral weakness" here is the allocation of blame on those who do not understand how to please themselves or their partners; it is assumed that this is not an issue that deserves the grand treatment of tragic themes, such as the cruelty of nature and war, or the place of human beings in the universe. Hines observes that the cuckold only loses face as a man and not life or limb.[42]

Sinclair demonstrates that this urbane and essentially comic view of desire continues in Boccaccio's *Decameron* in the fourteenth century, which contains numerous tales featuring cuckolds.[43] In literary history, the problem of cuckoldry is therefore solidified into the question of what a man has by right and what he can earn. A cuckold is ridiculed because, by not giving his wife pleasure, he has not earned her affection and therefore, by extension, her fidelity. This is equated with the same type of intelligence outlined in the *fabliau*; the rigid patriarchal code, in which the husband's right to fidelity is protected, yields to a sub-code in which characters are judged on how well they can exercise their wits in action: "there is a robust and dramatic exposure of the possible ways that life can turn out, according to whether or not men and women have the guts, willpower, and initiative to say what they want, and to grab for it."[44]

But Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (and the modern novels that follow its lead) leads in the opposite direction: it attempts to rearticulate the moral weakness of an early bourgeois ethos (which is the *fabliau* ethos) and its later, more urbane, manifestations by understanding and even by validating the position of the betrayed husband, of the ignorant dupe. But in doing so, it takes on the risk of intellectual weakness, at least when it comes to practical intelligence. *Madame Bovary* takes this position by validating failure and stupidity as

genuine subjects of serious artistic representation. Flaubert has famously demonstrated that there are no high and low subjects in literature. This is a scientific attitude in the sense that it puts doubt about the significance of even the smallest events at the forefront of human experience; such doubt cannot be accommodated by the categories of comedy and tragedy because these genres assure their audiences of a clear perspective on which subjects are significant and which are not. But, in *Madame Bovary*, to be cuckolded by one's wife (or to commit adultery) is no longer just a small matter, something common wisdom could have predicted and dismissed with an anecdote; the adultery committed and endured by unexceptional people in everyday circumstances is rearticulated by Flaubert's acute observational skills as he undertakes the analysis of small matters with a new, diagnostic style.

The Flaubertian Cuckold: From the Cuckold's Horns to the Dunce's Cap

Historically, the cuckold is a figure that appears in a topsy-turvy literary world and he has his origin, like the fool, in carnivals and other public festivals of misrule.[45] The horns of the cuckold are traditionally offered up as a form of public ridicule, the clear sign of a man's status, of his weakened position as a husband and as a man among other men.[46] Although cuckoldry has been associated with horns, some cultures also substituted caps as signs for the betrayed husband.[47] Thus the cap that Charles wears in the opening scene reflects the formerly public nature of the betrayed husband's position. Yet Alison Sinclair observes that, in the portrayal of men in Western literature, the cuckold crosses the boundary between the public and the private spheres; the betrayed husband's sad tale, though not particularly

subjectivized in the literary tradition of cuckoldry, at least puts a "potentially rejected area [of male subjectivity] into public view."[48]

Since the difference between Flaubert's version of the cuckold and previous presentations of this figure turns on the problem of assessing the limitations of instrumental intelligence, a subjective presentation is necessary; this type of failure has to be understood as a personal struggle. And although Charles Bovary's ridiculous hat, which conflates the cuckold's horns with a dunce's cap, introduces the theme of stupidity as a public stigma right from the outset, it also registers, on another level, mere confusion. The cognitive effect of confusion is dramatized by the description of this hat, which deserves to be quoted in full:

> It was one of those hats of a Composite order, in which we find features of the military bear skin, the Polish chapska, the bowler hat, the beaver and the cotton nightcap, one those pathetic things, in fact, whose mute ugliness has a profundity of expression like the face of an imbecile. Ovoid and stiffened with whalebone, it began with three big circular sausages; then, separated by a red band, there alternated diamonds of velours and rabbit-fur; after that came a sort of bag terminating in a cardboard polygon, embroidered all over with complicated braid, and, hanging down at the end of a long cord that was too thin, a little cluster of gold threads, like a tassel. It looked new; the peak was gleaming.[49]

The clearly exaggerated nature of the cap's composite description, the explosion of the function of the sign that it represents, presents a stark contrast to any easy accessibility of meaning. Tony Tanner points out that this cap cannot be visualized but only read.[50] To make any sense of this image, the audience must take it in word by word. But in the end the words do not add up to a coherent representation. The butt of the joke seems to be the reading process itself, as a way of assimilating the world of objects. Readers have to laugh at this impossible object whose three big circular sausages, diamonds of velours, rabbit-fur, a cardboard polygon with complicated braid, a long cord and so on, cannot represent a simple cap. The cap thus also mimics an epistemological problem. We are faced with the limits of a

naïve empiricism. This is reflected, on an affective level, by readers' exhaustion and senselessness in the face of so much detail to be accounted for.

But this cap is also meant, metonymically, to represent Charles Bovary's dilemma. And this adds another level of meaning, one in which a derisive humor rebounds on the reader, who is also implicated. With Charles Bovary we are, after all, offered a human image. The cap's dramatization of a lack of conceptual resources in the face of a simple object is turned not into a subject/object problem but into a subject/subject dilemma; derision is mixed with pathos. The cap's connection with "the face of an imbecile" reminds us of this because what is immediately added to this derisive label is a qualification, the statement that an imbecile's face can also have a "profundity of expression"[51] (one translation gives "depths of expression"[52]). The suggestion here is that the limits of human intelligence can be found in the following type of failure: instead of a structural complexity we are faced, or struck dumb by, a visual intricacy. Tony Tanner's analysis of Charles's cap, although it is very good at bringing out its multiple contexts, its structural complexity as "a mélange of processed nature and produced material, of architecture and embroidery," doesn't take into account that the effect of the image is also visual; we are faced with a very stubborn phenomenal object and can only retroactively establish a structure for it.[53] The description first has to be read blindly because it mimics a form of ignorance, and this is the subjective position that is emphasized through Charles Bovary's characterization—an ignorance of structural complexity that is displaced into a fascination with the object as Thing.

Flaubert's dramatization of Charles Bovary brings out the limits of instrumental intelligence, an instrumental intelligence which is focused on *human objects*, and takes people mainly in their use and exchange value. From this perspective, the cuckold is an ideal

target: he has a use value, and his obvious blindness lessens any concern for an intrinsic value to which the other characters have to pay attention. If he puts himself in a vulnerable position, he loses his claim to be a man among other men; he can be used as a thing (with a small t) without much guilt. The *fabliau* ethos excludes any subjective understanding of the dupe; you get what you deserve.

But Flaubert highlights the cuckold's role as an absent but functional character. Sinclair argues that cuckolds are "neglected but real and functional literary characters."[54] That is, they appear only to disappear; these men are necessary for the plot of infidelity to unfold but expendable once their part in the trick is done. And Falconer's analysis of Charles Bovary's role in the novel asks the following important question: why do readers lose track of his interior life after he marries Emma?[55] Precisely because he is the catalyst for her adulterous affairs. The purpose of subjectivizing the cuckold, in Flaubert's portrait, is to explore the drama of a character that is functional for others but not, ultimately, for his own practical good. Such a portrait, in both its pathos and its derision, explores the displaced desire as well as the subjective cost of an unconscious good nature.

Reading the Cuckold's Miscalculated Desire

When Flaubert tries to answer the question—what does the cuckold want?—we are faced with the complication of a vicarious identification. The cuckold's purely functional role in the adultery plot, as a figure in absentia, can be linked to an excessive narcissistic identification with the love object: one loves the other as the very image of oneself. That is why Charles Bovary fades into the background in relation to the object of his love: self and other are the same, indistinguishable.

It is very difficult to separate narcissism from the stigma of selfishness, but the opposition between generosity and selfishness seems to break down precisely in Freud's own definition of the concept. In his paper "On Narcissism" he defines it as a transposed and complicated "selfishness," and says that its vicissitudes are a sign that the human being has something of his or her identity to recover in the other even as he or she displays a radical overvaluation of this same other.[56] Its logical end is some kind of symbolic reclamation; the return of one's identity through the vehicle of the other. This is "narcissism born again . . . transformed into object-love."[57] Thus it is clear that the other person is being used for a purpose, despite the fact that this purpose escapes the subject, who has no sense of moving towards an instrumental goal. Freud finds this complication of selfishness moving and silly, and the paper is written in part as a response to the question of what "measure" of egoism "may justifiably be attributed to every living creature."[58]

On this point Lacan clarifies and even modifies Freud.[59] Narcissism is very far from being self-serving; it is defined by ignorance and impotence. In examining the narratological problems of subjectivizing the cuckold, what is significant is Lacan's thesis that the ego, although commonly understood as being synonymous with personality or "identity," is in fact characterized by a misrecognition of the self.[60] And instead of positing the ego as an abstract psychic agency (as Freud did), Lacan stresses that the ego is outside the individual and that it is locatable in the figures of the subject's personal history (mother, father, lover, spouse etc.); the ego is an object of transference and can change its place.[61] The cuckold's desire effects such a change of place, which is similar to the hysteric's: the goal is to become the object of narcissistic identification, to become one with it, rather than to have it. Thus his narcissism needs to be understood as a question of being rather than of possession; we are

dealing with a desire that does not aim at possession for its satisfaction but at self-effacement.

Possession, at least from a practical point of view, already implies a subject/object division, while identification does not. One weighs one's chances: is the cost of procuring the object that satisfies one worth the risk? The cuckold makes this calculation easy for the adulterous couple—his blindness eliminates the riskiness involved in their transgression. But this same blindness also suggests that he doesn't at all calculate *his* chances; the traditional cuckold figure is an older man who marries a younger woman and thus takes on the risk that she will inevitably look for a younger, more virile man. But narcissism implies that one doesn't see oneself accurately in the structure of a given intersubjective situation; the investment involved in identity formation is elsewhere than in the individual. The ego that is supposed to protect one's integrity and dignity as an individual is turned towards another and merged with the other.

If narcissism is a form of vicarious identification, we can say that its characteristic ignorance presents us with an afflicted, neurotic form of voyeurism. This change of the "place" of one's identity from the self to the other is a costly lure, a fiction with consequences: the other person is substituted for oneself in an existential sense and without the other one is nothing. Thus Charles Bovary's autopsy report shows that the doctor "found nothing" when he was opened up.[62] This nothingness implies the death of the de-centered ego and not of the body. One has symbolically lost one's physical place. Lacan calls this a "second death" in order to distinguish the order of the ego from that of the body.[63]

Such nothingness is also the harbinger of representation, even if it is a representation stuck in an existential impasse. But an existential narrative leaves little room for the play of

representation. Comedy, for example, plays around with human images and their death and disappearance with much more ease. In his later work, *A Simple Heart*,[64] Flaubert solved this problem by having his heroine, Félicité, a typical Flaubertian version of peasant virtue, kind-hearted and used by others, identify with a stuffed parrot. This inanimate object, this toy, is her personalized symbol of the Holy Ghost. Flaubert's final gesture in terms of representing pathos in a literary form involved lowering the stakes of identification, by allowing Félicité to lavish her affection on a toy; the goal is to find the most harmless object as the vehicle of the ego's transit. But in *Madame Bovary* pathos is still tied to identification with all of its risks and confusions. Charles Bovary's ego is tied to a bodily offering that is given to a real person. Yet although the cost of such identification may be excessive, it is not entirely senseless. The cuckold aims at self-representation but simply misses the mark. Instead of treating the other person as a tool towards this goal, he swaps places with the other and risks representing himself as a nothingness, as a man without a personality. The testimony of Charles's story implies that identification as a form of vicarious self-expression involves more of a loss than it does a gain. But his story also suggests that weighing one's choice, in such a case, is not possible. It is difficult to calculate the cost of self-representation through the other.

The cuckold is someone who immensely miscalculates his position, but it is clear from Flaubert's portrayal of him that there is more than one way of looking at such a miscalculation. We see this in the conclusion to Charles's story, when he finally learns of Emma's adulteries. Two events are presented to readers: Charles's reaction after he finds letters from Emma's former lovers, and his meeting with one of these lovers, Rodolphe, during which he attempts to express his forgiveness to him. When Charles finds the love

letters and has to confront the possibility of his wife's actions and his own jealousy, readers are presented with the following statement: "Charles was not one of those men who like to get to the bottom of things: he shied away from evidence, and his faltering jealousy was lost in an immensity of sadness."[65] It is clear here, at least from a subjective point of view, that the attempt to weigh his jealousy and his grief against each other proves futile. Calculation shades off into meaninglessness. His grief is an "immensity" in which he is simply lost; it is impossible to analyze it because it has no component parts; much less is he able to compare his grief with another element (jealousy). His grief, like his love, and like his relationship to his own ego, has only one, mute and indelible signifier—his wife. Charles Bovary stupidity is really a matter of this first analysis, of disentangling one's self image from this grand "immensity" that is identification with the other. This is not a general view of stupidity, but an analysis of Bovary's situation and an attempt understand it. Such understanding may help us to re-think the stigma associated with cognitive failure.

As a foil to Charles's inability to weigh even his own emotional responses we are presented with Rodolphe, the "shrewd" philanderer, who calculates the cost of his amusements.[66] Meeting Charles in the street after Emma's death, he gauges the stakes of inviting the bereaved husband for a drink: "Rodolphe, who had only ever sent a card after the funeral, at first muttered an apology, and then he grew bolder and even had the aplomb to (it was a very hot day, in the month of August) to invite Charles into the tavern."[67] So after Rodolphe finds this gesture a harmless expense of energy on a hot day, the two face each other in a final confrontation between husband and lover. Charles musters up the courage to bring up his grievance against Rodolphe, and at the same time to announce his decision to forgive him: "I don't hold it against you . . . No, I don't hold it against you any more!"[68] The

difficulty of these words and the complexity of the sentiment (jealousy is mixed with forgiveness and resignation) is, of course, lost on Rodolphe, for whom a fusion of contradictory emotions is unthinkable. His response: "Rodolphe . . . thought the man rather soft-hearted for someone in his position, comical even, and slightly despicable."[69]

At this point the confrontation between these two men has to be read in light of the earlier subjective *Bildung* frame which subjectivized Charles Bovary's story. Although it is clear that neither man's response is an accurate assessment of the other's position, the husband's effort at expressing his grief is given more space and its subjective complication is stressed: "Charles went into a dream as he looked at the face she had loved. He felt as if he were seeing something of her. It was miraculous. He so wanted to have been this other man."[70] How is one to measure the value of this transposition from Emma to Rodolphe? For Charles, Rodolphe brings back the image of his dead wife and of her experience of love with another, vicariously. This is an interesting complication, but it is clear that Rodolphe's derisiveness can give us no access to it. Charles's vicarious desire to understand his wife's moments of happiness, even if they were with another man, presents us with the outlines of an imaginative potential. But instead of using the vehicle (Rodolphe) to understand Emma, he wants instead to become one with it, to merge with it. The tool (the signifier) is confused with a state of being. A form of mute pointing displaces active understanding; this is a pointing that leads us towards the signifying function of a human image that at the same time signals Charles's own disappearance behind it, behind what could have been a useful tool. His desire is therefore represented by a special kind of signifier, one that "in spite of its dumbness, speaks."[71]

Lacan emphasizes the figural qualities of this “dumbness.”[72] The temporal movement which would be initiated by analyzing what Lacan calls our “capture” by another human image is suspended.[73] Our relationship to Charles Bovary in *Madame Bovary* depends on this suspension, a suspension that puts the reader in the position of interpreting the figural form of an inarticulate expressiveness. Although this encounter with Rodolphe stresses the fact that Charles’s desire remains inert, stuck in this figural expression that is both ignorance and imaginative potential, it does not eliminate the emphasis on the dynamic value of his inarticulateness, its prefiguration of expression and thus its intentionality. But the cost of this fusion of being and signification is that, in relation to himself, Flaubert’s cuckold is a man whose words and acts defy the clear measurement of gain and loss as he seeks to represent himself through the image of another.

Storytelling and the Cuckold: Existential Self-Representation as the Limit of the *Bildung* Protagonist

Flaubert’s existential probing puts Charles Bovary under the sign of cruelty primarily because it is a probing of the cuckold’s position in relation to himself and to his own good. This is a cautionary tale: the cuckold pays too much, in the form of an existential self-representation, for the unconscious displacements of narcissism, the return of self-love in the form of object-love; he is not only dispossessed of the object of his love, but ultimately, of himself, of his own ego, which is an object of transit and destined to be there where it isn’t; that is, the ego doesn’t have a permanent bodily “home” but can change its place.

In Flaubert’s novel, this existential theme is contrasted with the traditional function of the *Bildung* protagonist, who is the socially synthetic center of the classic nineteenth-century

novel of formation, a novel-type that Franco Moretti stresses is dedicated to the ego's centrality, in the more traditional sense of the ego as a synthesis of the personality.[74] Moretti's description of the *Bildung* protagonist as a pliant figure, one that is not at odds with his or her social environment, but is its harmonious representative, does not suggest an "insipid hero" but "an internally articulated, interesting and lively normality."[75] This is very far from Flaubert's version of this same figure in the cuckold, who does indeed evoke the sense of the insipid, if only because he is more absent than he is present in *Madame Bovary*.

I would like to end here with one particular implication of the cuckold's position that will become important in the following chapters on James and Joyce: the position of ignorance. With Flaubert's creation of the *Bildung*/cuckold hybrid through Charles Bovary, character is obviously showing its seams. But the fact that there is no wholeness in character is also connected, in *Madame Bovary*, to the lack of wholeness in knowledge, that is, to a university discourse and the challenges it poses to traditional narrative. Flaubert represents it, through Charles Bovary, as a sprawling typology that can only be memorized; it cannot be absorbed. In order even to begin to be understood, this new approach to narrative has to be experienced, self-consciously, as a kind of complex circuit to which we keep adding new knowledge. So it is obvious that character as a socially synthetic vehicle reflects a narrative simplification. Knowledge cannot be contained within the story of individual formation. But Flaubert still presents us with a life trajectory, from childhood to death, in his *Bildung*/cuckold figure; this life trajectory, in its representation of ignorance, reflects the primitive but crucial process of identification, which is very far from the mappings of sophisticated social networks and discourses that are at a macro level. Identification serves a poetic function in Flaubert's novel, and the fact that it has to be untangled and interpreted as

the beginnings of an intentional form of communication suggests that it poses a challenge to the kind of cognitive processes that are demanded of character as synthetic vehicle, a form that was taken for granted the *Bildungsroman*. Ignorance has a dynamic value in Flaubert's novel, and it suggests that we still have some way to go in order to understand the most basic of human stories—betrayal—on a cognitive level.

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[1] Robert M. Torrance, *The Comic Hero*, "Jackanapes in the Highest: The Aristophanic Hero" (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1978) 37-59.

[2] "Flaubert Assasin de Charles . . .," *Langages de Flaubert* (Paris: Minard 1976) 117.

[3] Charles's goal to dispose of himself and of his money (after he marries his first wife) remains unspoken, and registered only by the narrator: "Charles had pictured marriage as the advent of a better life, thinking he would be more free, and able to dispose of his own person and his own money. But his wife was master; in company he had to say this, not say that, eat fish every Friday, wear what she wanted him to . . ." (11). Given Charles's passivity, this rare glimpse of a desire to have some measure of personal freedom is significant, despite the fact that it is so quickly quashed.

[4] See Charles du Bos on Flaubert's fascination with passivity: "On the 'Inner Environment' in the Work of Flaubert," *Madame Bovary: Backgrounds and Sources, Essays in Criticism*, ed. and trans. Paul de Man (New York: Norton 1965) 360-371.

[5] When Emma's first lover, Rodolphe, attempts to break up their affair because he fails to distinguish Emma from all of his other mistresses, there is the following commentary: "He did not distinguish, this man of great expertise, the differences of sentiment beneath the sameness of their expressions . . . as though the soul's abundance does not sometimes spill over in the most decrepit metaphors, since no one can give the exact measure of their needs, their ideas, their afflictions, and since human speech is like a cracked cauldron in which we knock out tunes for dancing-bears, when we wish to conjure pity from the stars" (177; part 2, ch. 12).

[6] *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) 488.

[7] In *Stupidity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), Avital Ronell also suggests that the three main characters' follies in *Madame Bovary* should be judged by different standards: "Flaubert famously bounces Charles Bovary's hopeless hebetude against his wife's destructive jouissance . . . whereas the dumbest, including the calculating pharmacist, survive. Charles Bovary begins by flunking out, but unlike Emma, whose aptitude has earned her higher, if different, scores, he doesn't bail out: slow and stupid, he shows lasting power" (38).

[8] *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1976) 90-93.

[9] *Mimesis* 489.

[10] *Mimesis* 490.

[11] *The Deceived Husband: A Kleinian Approach to the Literature of Infidelity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993) 28.

[12] Flaubert made this statement in a letter to Louise Colet, during the composition of *Madame Bovary*, on January 16, 1852. He wrote: "What seems beautiful to me, what I should like to write, is a book about nothing, a book dependent on nothing external, which would be held together by the strength of its style, just as the earth, suspended in the void, depends on nothing external for its support, a book which would have almost no subject, or at least in which the subject would be almost invisible, if such a thing is possible. . . . I believe that the future of Art lies in this direction" (quoted in de Man, *Madame Bovary Backgrounds and Sources* 309-310).

[13] *A Future for Astyanax* 95.

[14] 9; part 1, ch. 1.

[15] 327; part 3, ch. 11.

[16] *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins 1979) 239.

[17] *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1957) 39.

[18] "Flaubert Assasin de Charles . . ." 117.

[19] "Discourse in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press 1981) 295-296. The italics are Bakhtin's.

[20] 38; part 1, ch. 7.

[21] 38-39; part 1, ch. 7.

[22] 9; part 1, ch. 1.

[23] *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974) 208.

[24] *A Future for Astyanax* 66.

[25] *The Way of the World: The* Bildungsroman *in European Culture*, new edition (London: Verso, 2000) 21.

[26] *The Way of the World* 21.

[27] *The Way of the World* 21.

[28] *The Way of the World* 76.

[29] *The Way of the World* 35.

[30] Muscatine, *The Old French Fabliaux* 26.

[31] *The Old French Fabliaux* 93. It should be noted that two of these character types—the servant and the poor scholar— appear in *Madame Bovary*. Leon, one of Emma's lovers, is a much more complex version of the *fabliau's* poor scholar (and his characterization is also obviously influenced by the *Bildungsroman*); Félicité, Emma's maid, clearly reflects the servant who will rob her mistress without remorse or sentimentality (she takes all of Emma's clothing after she dies).

[32] See Michael McKeon's *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press , 1987) for a discussion of the problems of virtue that the rising bourgeois class had to overcome in stabilizing its ethos in opposition to an aristocratic ethos.

[33] 3, 5; part 1, ch. 1. The original French expression describing Charles in this opening scene—*l'air raisonnable* —does not seem to have one satisfactory translation and has been interpreted differently by different translators. Geoffrey Wall's translation of *raisonable* as "sensible" is pretty close to the literal meaning of the word. But other translators (Bair 1959, De Man 1965) have leaned in an interpretive direction: gentle, reliable. The following are possible connotations of *raisonable*: normal, acceptable, moderate, rational (Larousse). It seems clear at least that some synthesis between normality and compromise is intended. The Blair translation probably goes too far with the word gentle, although it does render, more than the others, the sense of Charles Bovary's passivity.

[34] 9; part 1, ch. 1.

[35] Muscatine 10.

[36] 5; part 1, ch. 1.

[37] Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2005) 8. This transgression against a traditional aesthetic concern with beauty is a central aspect of nineteenth century Realism. Brooks' argument that Realism validates ugliness tries to make a case for the revolutionary nature of the movement in the nineteenth century. This is something he insists that we have forgotten in the wake of criticisms of a naïve Realism: "Realist fictions labor under the burden that they are lies and don't know it, lies that naïvely and mendaciously claim to believe that they are truths" (6). Yet Brooks argues that the ugly, which displaces the beautiful as something "full of interest" also "transgresses the bounds of the acceptable and the representable" (8). This is aesthetic is therefore not a naïve form of simple mimesis since by validating ugliness it questions the boundaries of representation.

[38] 187; part 2, ch. 13.

[39] Alison Sinclair refers to *Madame Bovary's* opening section a "deceptive trailer for a *Bildungsroman* protagonist" (*The Deceived Husband* 181).

[40] John Hines, *The Fabliau in English* (New York: Longman, 1993) 280.

[41] *The Fabliau in English* 280.

[42] *The Fabliau in English* 280.

[43] *The Deceived Husband* 80.

[44] *The Deceived Husband* 90.

[45] Sinclair 58.

[46] Sinclair 38.

[47] Sinclair 40.

[48] *The Deceived Husband* 17.

[49] 4; part 1, ch. 1.

[50] *Adultery in the Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) 238.

[51] 4; part 1, ch. 1.

[52] *Madame Bovary*, trans. Lowell Bair, ed. Leo Bersani (New York: Bantam Books, 1989) 2.

[53] *Adultery in the Novel* 239.

[54] *The Deceived Husband* 26.

[55] "Flaubert Assasin de Charles . . ." 119.

[56] Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. XIV (London: Vintage, 1957).

[57] Freud 91.

[58] "On Narcissism" 74.

[59] Philippe Julien, *Lacan's Return to Freud: The Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary* (New York: New York University Press, 1994) 29.

[60] See *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, tran. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: Norton, 1988). Most of this seminar is devoted to critiquing the concept of the ego.

[61] In *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis* Lacan begins by insisting "the Freudian discovery has exactly the same implication of decentering as that brought about by the Copernican discovery. It is quite well expressed by Rimbaud's fleeting formula . . . *I is an other*" (7).

[62] 327; part 3, ch. 11.

[63] "The death drive," *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton 1992) 205-217.

[64] First published in 1877.

[65] 320; part 3, ch. 11.

[66] 121; part 2, ch. 7. When Rodolphe first meets Emma and decides to risk an affair, he makes the following judgments about the risks and the pleasures involved: "I think he [Charles] is very stupid. She is certainly tired of him . . . Three words of gallantry and she'd adore you . . . Yes, but how do we get rid of her afterwards? . . . Madame Bovary, he thought, is much prettier and somewhat fresher [than] Virginie . . . Oh! I shall have her!"

[67] 326; part 3, ch. 11.

[68] 326; part 3, ch. 11.

[69] 326; part 3, ch. 11.

[70] 326; part 3, ch. 11.

[71] Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 297.

[72] *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 297.

[73] *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 297.

[74] *The Way of the World* 11.

[75] *The Way of the World* 11.

CHAPTER 3

ADAM VERVER AS A NARRATIVE HELPER IN *THE GOLDEN BOWL*

When we transition from Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* to James's *The Golden Bowl*, sexual betrayal becomes an ominous threat, which is suffered privately, rather than a comically brutal fact on public display. We no longer see the harshness of the *fabliau's* low comic attitude in dealing with the betrayed husband, an attitude which promoted quick wit and taught its audience not to suffer fools. Flaubert's novel tempered this attitude with existential/nihilistic doubts, which implicated readers and diminished their sense of superiority. This complicated but did not eliminate a practical, early bourgeois ethos, whose sensibility Flaubert still evoked.[1] *Madame Bovary's* combination of derision and doubt has a pitiless edge, which James himself criticized when he reviewed it: "How can art be so genuine and yet so unconsoled, so unhumorous, so unsociable?"[2] The transition from Flaubert to James, however, is subtle. James's reaction to Flaubert's work is clearly mixed; although he criticized Flaubert for his unredeeming plots and characters, he also greatly admired him as an artist.[3]

Graham Falconer points out that many critics have classed the two writers together because they share a common strategy—putting the reader into a position of uncertainty.[4] But others emphasize their different sensibilities: Flaubert was a nihilist and James was a moralist.[5] Although the nihilism/moralism opposition has been a convenient critical dividing line between the two writers, I am interested in comparing them narratologically. And if we view Flaubert and James in their relationship to narrative unfolding, this opposition between them does not close off dialogue but raises productive questions. The two authors were contemporaries who both contributed to the development of free indirect discourse in the

novel and dramatized the problems of subjectivity in a modern age. Philip Horne observes: "he [James] retains his moral objection to the tenor of French fiction, and in this case his edge of disappointment seems particularly sharp because Flaubert . . . has come so close to James's own ethic and aesthetic."[6]

The most obvious difference between them is in the presentation of character. James was still committed to working with the model of the character-protagonist, even though he chose, as centers of consciousness, limited characters. Jonathan Culler finds it significant that the two writers "took the same line," by rejecting narrative commentary and narrowing the distance between narrator and character in their novels, because their interpretations of this technique are obviously different.[7] Free indirect discourse places readers squarely within the complexities of cognitive processes. But while James elevated such complexity to sensibility, Flaubert "deliberately and brutally missed" this opportunity.[8] Darshan Singh Maini points out that, in James's world, experiential density leads to the growth of a discriminating mind: "We shall see later how rich and responsive consciences under pressure develop into fine consciences."[9] Thus bewilderment does not have to end as it did in *Madame Bovary*, with meaninglessness and its emotional and intellectual equivalents—a senseless death and a nihilistic impasse. In "The Art of the Novel," James asserts: "if we were never bewildered there would never be a story to tell about us."[10] So I agree with James critics, such as Dorothea Krook and Peter Brooks, who find in his work some form of a redemptive vision.[11]

Yet Flaubert's existential narratives are, paradoxically, still narratives. He had to find a way to unfold the story. Ignorance took on value for him, just as it did for James, because it is a method of unfolding. For both writers, the cuckold actually contributes to narrative development. But James attempted to sustain this position, rather than destroy the vessel that carries its meaning, by aiming for a high comic resolution to the betrayal plot in *The Golden*

Bowl. The betrayed spouses in this novel have a cushion—their wealth—which protects them not only from material suffering but gives them some leverage so that they avoid humiliation. This salvages his protagonists' dignity even while the focus of the narrative is on confusion and bewilderment, which can all too easily fall to low comedy.

Ellen Douglass Leyburn points out that during his late phase, James developed a comic vision alongside his tragic sense of life, his "imagination of disaster."[12] In James's rather loose sense of the terms comedy and tragedy, comedy was a matter of dramatizing perspective; thus his late novels show us characters gaining "the ability to take things in more than one way at a time."[13] This double vision is salutary and contributes to his protagonists' formation in a modern world where a multiplicity of personal fictions had come to take shape as a new personal and political order. James's "innocent" characters learn to negotiate with ambiguous situations in which other people's personal fictions put pressure on their sensitive consciences. And although negotiation implies complicity, it also carves out a space for identity formation. It must be made clear that James's concept of selfhood represents the kinds of characters whose potential he had chosen to unfold. His protagonists face a moral trial, but one that is an inverted version of the typical moral trial (in which one gives up one's individuality for a larger goal). They have to answer for themselves a question that is analogous, in narrative terms, to the theoretical question that Freud posed in his introduction to the concept of narcissism: what "measure" of egoism "may justifiably be attributed to every living creature."[14] In a novel where there are few narrative interventions,[15] we can find the following authorial commentary in *The Golden Bowl*: "We have each our own way of making up for our unselfishness."[16] So ignorance, for James, is associated with not knowing the measure of one's own egoism. *The Golden Bowl's* plot demonstrates that this type of ignorance is not, however, stupidity. Because of the slippage in meaning that James intuits

here—that to have difficulty gauging one's own self-interest is not stupidity—he creates a comic narrative based on misunderstanding. This misunderstanding also turns the tables on the adulterous spouses who depend upon the Ververs' ignorance.

The adultery plot in *The Golden Bowl* is complex because it dovetails with the plot that I have been emphasizing, the protagonists' quest to find the measure of their own egoism. This layering of plots can be partially illuminated by Vladimir Propp's classic analysis in *Morphology of the Folktale*, which lists two ways in which a tale is initiated: one is villainy and the other is lack; from villainy there follows an agon and a restoration of order; and from lack there follows a quest narrative; the hero or heroine sets forth to acquire what he or she desires but doesn't have.[17] James's *The Golden Bowl* ambiguously combines both of these narrative motivators. This ambiguity is necessary because the quest narrative, the lack that sparks a search, cannot be represented directly, by a goal that would be socially validated and visible; it is complicated by the problem of finding the measure of one's own egoism, which is associated with failure and shame.

How does one find the measure of one's egoism? Only by having it tested. If we emphasize Maggie Verver's story, this Freudian question is a useful touchstone. She becomes the heroine of a villainy plot and must enter into an agon with her mother-in-law to restore order and re-engage her husband; but she also has to admit to, and take possession of, her own jealousy, which is the measure of her own self-interest, and her underlying quest. She becomes involved in a straightforward power struggle, although it is supplemented by her understanding that she must wake up to her own possessive feelings and act on them (rather than defend herself against them). Her father's story is more obscure, because it is not easy to see what the measure of his egoism is. Unlike, his daughter, he does not suffer from a latent form of jealousy.

After his daughter's marriage to Amerigo, an Italian prince, Adam Verver finds himself with an empty nest and (for late Victorian society) in a socially awkward position. As "ravening women" pursue him, he is suddenly struck with his "unfortunate lack of a wife."[18] Although he does not personally see his bachelorhood as a deficiency, it begins to register for him as a social lack. At first, he refuses the social pressure; in fact, he tells his daughter that he would rather "hold out" on marriage.[19] His lack therefore sparks no immediate quest and no decisive action, but only an anxiety. Yet he eventually recognizes the need to "put his child at peace . . . by marriage, by a marriage as good . . . as hers had been."[20]

The solution to this dilemma conveniently falls into his lap when Charlotte Stant, the Prince's former lover and his daughter's former schoolmate, comes to visit the Ververs. Not only is she is impoverished and beautiful but, more importantly, she is socially accomplished. Fanny Assingham, who functions as a kind of chorus in the novel, explains the situation: "Charlotte was a person who could keep off ravening women – without being one herself, either, in the vulgar way of the others; and . . . this service to Mr. Verver would be a sweet employment for her future."[21] If we follow out the implications of the inverted reading that I have suggested, the question then is, what is the measure of Adam Verver's egoism? Is there anything for him in this marriage? It seems that he marries for his daughter, and for the sake of social propriety. But there is another factor that enters into this combination of motives. He does have a genuine interest in Charlotte, in her talents, and in her development. My claim is that this interest has been reduced, by critics, to possessiveness, and that it is important to interpret it accurately in order to understand Adam Verver's narratological role as a "helper" in *The Golden Bowl*, to use Mieke Bal's term.[22] That is, he is a character who fosters narrative unfolding, and promotes what, in James's world, is a high function: other people's development.

In a telling description of Adam Verver, the narrator refers to him, in relation to any drama, as taking a position in “the back of the stage,” and as having “an almost visibly conscious want of affinity with the footlights.”[23] In the same passage, this position is associated with patronage. In James’s economy, modern patronage is meant to be subordinate to the efforts of artistry: “he might be at the best the financial ‘backer’, watching his interests from the wing, but in rather confessed ignorance of the mysteries of mimicry.”[24] Adam Verver’s ignorance, whether we label it shyness or idealization, is salutary because it indicates that there are some processes (like the artistic one) should not to be micromanaged by an outsider. That is, even if you pay for something, you don’t necessarily own it completely because you cannot own the process behind its development. Behind this highly subjective portrait of Adam Verver, we find a political structure; he is someone who enjoys delegating; such delegation is, in fact, a way to foster other people’s development. But to do this, you have to be able relinquish control.

A recent reading of *The Golden Bowl* has corroborated this view. Anat Pick points out that contemporary critical interpretations of the Ververs, and especially of Adam Verver as an example of “capitalist patriarchy” and commoditization, have been misleading. She argues “[The Ververs’] radical objectification of persons . . . signif[ies] a particular way of thinking about others as wholly Other. The other person remains closed-up, hermetically sealed to one’s cognition, like an object that cannot be penetrated and therefore cannot be dominated.”[25] In other words, the measure of ignorance that the Ververs’ cultivate (alongside the measure of selfishness that they seem to avoid) may have an ethical value.

Situating an Arrested Social Development

In *The Golden Bowl*, Adam Verver and his daughter Maggie find themselves estranged from both their wealth and their American heritage. The familiar combination of American innocence and great wealth, which is a Jamesian trope, produces social awkwardness. To compensate for their lack of polish, the Ververs have spent much time in Europe buying up art treasures, authorizing their quest for beauty by appropriating signs of Old World culture. Maggie's marriage to the Prince, which is announced in book one, could easily represent the crowning achievement of such a want-to-be quest; the two can be classed as vulgar Americans who have no culture except for what they can buy from elsewhere. But *The Golden Bowl* is not a comedy of manners. The Ververs' marriages don't fit neatly at all into a plot that would turn this novel into a clash among national differences, even if it does engage this "international theme" that is a hallmark of James's early work. And the convenient labels that can be attributed to the father and daughter—sexual naiveté and stupidity—although they lend themselves to cultural stereotypes about Americans, are examined at a level that is much more penetrating than we would find in a comedy of manners. James highlights the Ververs' want-to-be quest, the lack that sparks a search, in its relationship to failure, or to a narrative of formation; it is a trial run. So although their European adventure produces social awkwardness, which seems to relegate the Ververs to social comedy, even to low comedy, James attempts to dignify this want-to-be position; he doesn't want to give it the existential dimension that Flaubert did, a dimension that highlighted social isolation as a life or death matter. His characters can only become social within this failed space.

In his twentieth seminar, Lacan explores the idea that a derisory attitude towards failure is a phallic narrative.[26] That is, to deny the possibility of failure is to make a statement

about masculinity, a statement that is also connected to self-knowledge. Not knowing and not deserving to exist, or to be recognized as existing among others, are ambiguously knotted together in a phallic narrative. In her essay, "Transference: Letters and the Unknown Woman" (1984) Joan Copjec reads Lacan's twentieth seminar as a critique of masculine knowledge structures from within the phallic tradition.[27] This critique from within constitutes the efficacy of Lacan's connection between the lack of totality in knowledge and the problem (for men) of the other sex, of feminine sexuality. Copjec picks up on the same point again in a later essay, "Sex and Euthanasia of Reason" (1994) where she explains that, according to Lacan, male sexual identity has succeeded in making itself appear, outlined its conditions of possibility, "by means of a negative judgment [of Woman]."[28] I read this negative judgment as also applying to the cuckold, who is a non-phallic, feminized man, that is, a man who represents the failure of masculinity.

In *The Golden Bowl*, James attempts to avoid the existential implications of such a negative judgment but without reducing this narrative of failure to inconsequence, as if, in the scheme of things, we shouldn't pay too much attention to it. He does pay attention to it; the question is how to give it the right representation. This leads to a definitional problem in the novel; if the Ververs' failure cannot be reduced, it has to be structured and contained. So compositionally, the greatest difference between Flaubert and James in the portrayal of betrayed characters is that for James they become a center of inquiry. Other characters are placed in the position of having to figure them out; as the adulterous spouses attempt to understand the man they have to deal with (because their source of wealth goes back to the father) they expose their confusion. For example, the Prince feels that he must educate himself about his father-in-law: "Little by little thus from month to month the Prince was learning what his wife's father had been brought up to; and now it could be checked off – he

been brought up to the romantic view of the *principini*. Who would have thought it, and where would it all stop?"[29] But after all his work, he finally tells Charlotte, his lover, "I, on my side, have more and more failed. . . . I can't help seeing it – I'm decidedly too different."[30] After this announcement, the Prince and Charlotte decide to take the Ververs as a "case,"[31] to see them in their particularity, rather than as part of a general class. Thus their attempts to understand the Ververs indicate a shift in the ignorance/knowledge dynamic that I am exploring here. The adulterous spouses, who are supposed to be involved in an erotic narrative in which the betrayed spouses are the dupes, are drawn instead into a narrative of ignorance.

The Ververs, by returning ignorance back to their adulterous spouses, allow themselves a space to test out the measure of their own egoism. Clearly the protagonists of *The Golden Bowl* do not escape power structures, but they have their own particular way of dealing with them. As their story develops, the Ververs become more conscious of, and also begin to articulate, their complicity in the power dynamic that structures their marriages. Great wealth makes the Ververs' culpable but it also prevents them from seeing themselves as victims (and therefore becoming victims) in a melodramatic plot. The Ververs' story unfolds in this hybrid space between melodrama, with its elemental victimage plot, and the more socially sophisticated comedy of manners tradition.[32]

What is Ordinary Adultery Compared to Incest?

If we stick with a psychoanalytic model, and lean towards melodrama as a form for psychosexual development, the melodrama in *The Golden Bowl* seems to be in the wrong place. Is the problem adultery or incest? The novel's suggestions of an incestuous connection between Maggie and her father have generated a long critical history. One version of such a

reading is Martha Nussbaum's analysis of Maggie Verver's movement from daughter to woman in her famous essay "Flawed Crystals: James's *The Golden Bowl* and Literature as Moral Philosophy."[33] Nussbaum argues: "To become a 'real lady' is, then, [for Maggie] to abandon her father, to wound him by ceasing to be his companion in all things."[34] So is *The Golden Bowl*, as Nussbaum presents it, Maggie's *Bildung*-melodrama, the drama of how she tries to break free from her father's attempts to preserve her in a state of childhood, his "suppression of her womanliness"[35]? Slavoj Žižek has recently attempted to work out this oedipal drama into a perverse hypothesis. He argues that incest in the novel is more significant than adultery: "*which* affair are we talking about here? Adultery or incest? What is ordinary adultery compared to incest?"[36] He even suggests that Adam Verver could be *The Golden Bowl's* real villain: "What if . . the father's protective attitude masks (and thereby symbolizes) the reality of brutal capitalist exploitation and family rape? What if the ultimate protector is a rapist?"[37]

Žižek's point in presenting the incest theme so bluntly is to underscore *The Golden Bowl's* suggestiveness. So many developments are just narrowly missed by the gaps opened up when, as is characteristic in this novel, there is a hiatus between intention and act, cause and effect. *The Golden Bowl* hints at many possibilities, but we have no way of clearly verifying their actual developments: we don't know if there is an incestuous attachment or not, at least in act; we don't know what Adam Verver knows about his wife's adultery with his son-in-law; and we cannot be sure who is more selfish, and perhaps even more devious, the Ververs or their spouses. As Ruth Bernard Yeazell has pointed out, critics and readers must "acknowledge how epistemologically unsettling the actual experience of reading James's late fiction can be."[38]

To deal with the incest theme in *The Golden Bowl* we must, however, see that James presents us with a particular twist on it, which is connected to the following problem: the close relationship between the father and the daughter has stunted their social life. This shift takes the edge off the incest theme considerably. The Ververs' incestuous relationship, for all its ominous suggestiveness, is transformed into mere social awkwardness, and a narrative develops that emphasizes how homely they are. Maggie begins to fear that they are being reduced to low comic characters and that she is boring her grand husband. She tells her father:

> 'I don't think we lead, as regards other people, any life at all. We don't at any rate, it seems to me, lead half the life we might. And so it seems, I think, to Amerigo. . . . He *could* be a hero – he *will* be one if it's ever necessary. But it will be about something better than our dreariness.'[39]

The key in this passage is the lack of narrative movement in their lives, and Maggie's growing awareness that she is not giving her husband a chance to develop himself in the "heroic" plot that she thinks he is worthy of.

To come back to Nussbaum's argument, she focuses on the fact that sexual love is a selfish love, in the sense that to be a couple inevitably narrows other interests.[40] Philosopher Daniel Brudney has written a compelling critique/revision of Nussbaum's argument and it is worthwhile to outline it here. He argues that Nussbaum's focus on interpreting *The Golden Bowl* as the story of Maggie's arrested psycho-sexual development is not the only way to read her narrative. Brudney claims that one of the main themes in *The Golden Bowl* is the avoidance of "disfigurement."[41] And it is Maggie who helps the other characters (and especially her father) to save face."[42] In fact, he points out that what complicates Maggie's narrative of formation in *The Golden Bowl* is this other significant activity—to preserve her father's dignity.

Nussbaum's and Brudney's analyses help to bring out the following point: Oedipal conflicts (incest) and monogamous marriage aren't very sociable structures. Marriage may be socially and legally sanctioned, but, like incest, it fails to protect its own limits. Both philosophers read the novel as being closer to tragedy than to comedy; that is, they read it through the tragic lens of the character that must live with the knowledge that family structures are fractured. Brudney emphasizes the parallels between *The Golden Bowl* and *Antigone*: "As in *The Golden Bowl*, a daughter's agonized silence (a hidden, internal suffering for "love") must protect her father's honor and keep the community from disaster."[43] The tragic heroine is isolated and silent, bearing upon herself what cannot be shared with the rest of the community (or a family in this case). Yet a community develops, in *The Golden Bowl*, based on silence, on what is left unsaid. Brudney brings out this crucial distinction:

> Antigone's goal is to forestall *knowledge* . . . [her] silence is a function of the facts, not the persons; knowledge, not articulation, is her enemy. . . . Articulation more than knowledge is the enemy here [in *The Golden Bowl*]: while Antigone must keep certain things even from being thought . . . Maggie only needs to keep one question from being *asked*. . . . What Maggie's silence protects is persons.[44]

Protecting persons, by avoiding articulation rather than avoiding knowledge, is Maggie's way, according to Brudney, of avoiding tragedy: "she will try to defeat tragedy by denying it articulation."[45] What is protecting persons, then, if it isn't a deeply social wish? It is certainly more sociable than tragedy, because it tries to imagine coexistence amidst the possibilities of conflict, even if it uses silence as a tool.

In the second half of the novel, Maggie asks Fanny Assingham to help her solidify a strategy of negation and deceit in order to regain her husband's interest.

She solicits Fanny as a helper, so that her own ambiguous strategy of negation (she won't tell her husband what she wants from him and she won't lie to him directly) can be supplemented

by Fanny's lies. Maggie also asks her husband to her helper. Instead of confronting his lover directly, instead of telling her *my wife knows about us and it's time to break off our relationship*, he follows Maggie's lead by "letting alone"[46] and keeping Charlotte in the dark about the specific change in their relationship. The benefit of this strategy is that it builds solidarity with his wife; it is actually a process whereby Maggie and Amerigo work together, and learn to think together; this is simply because what Maggie leaves unsaid forces her husband to, as she puts it, "find out the rest,"[47] which means to find out how she thinks. If she had laid it all out for him, given him rules and ultimatums, made a melodramatic scene emphasizing her rights, this would obviously have broken any connection between them; it would have reduced their marriage to a series of obligations. Equally, if she had borne his adultery as a tragic heroine, never speaking up at all and perhaps, suffering silently until her death, this would inspire only pity, not community. So what is unsaid has to be a shared unsaid, because only this type of prevarication leaves room for a narrative to develop, a narrative that is minimally social, that doesn't demand tragic isolation.

If *The Golden Bowl* holds up, structurally, as a comedy, it is because Maggie is not alone. She has various helpers. And one of her main helpers is her father. In James's late work, we are constantly left wondering which character is the protagonist and which is the helper. And this is the case with Maggie and her father, who must be grouped together if the novel is to be understood in all its complexity; this is because the helper and protagonist must be taken as a unit in James's fiction and the two often exchange roles. According to Mieke Bal, a helper is a character that, consciously or unconsciously, aids the protagonist in achieving his or her desired goal.[48] But so many of James's characters fit into this category; these are the characters that he calls his "compositional resources" or "registers."[49] Whole books have been devoted to the subject; *The Lucid Reflector* by Ora Segal and *Henry James:*

The Indirect Vision by Darshan Singh Maini are two examples.[50] As I pointed out earlier, James departs from Flaubert in trying to fully develop his reflectors by giving them the possibility of occupying a real subjective position. At the same time, his readers often have trouble making out who is the protagonist in a given novel. This uncertainty is proportional to the proliferation of helpers in his fiction.

Bal explains that helpers are narratologically important because they extend the narrative and make it more suspenseful. They may not give a protagonist exactly what he or she wants, but they do give enough aid to "determine the various adventures of the subject."[51] Bal likens helpers to "adverbial adjuncts"; that is, they indirectly connect the subject with an object, the actor with the intention.[52] In James's novels, characters such as Maria Gostrey in *The Ambassadors*, Susan Stringham in *The Wings of the Dove*, and Fanny Assignham in *The Golden Bowl*, fulfill this role. Helpers in his late novels are generally specialized; they are assigned to a particular protagonist and fulfill a supporting or mediating role in the self-development of the protagonist. So they extend a specific character's narrative.

In the history of narrative, such supporting characters are generally undeveloped, if they are not expendable; we are not invited to go too deeply into their internal conflicts, or their personal lives. If James begins to expand their role, to complicate them as characters, and if I am correct in my assessment that most Jamesian characters are helpers, then he is analyzing the function itself and its narrative contribution, from the point of view of its subjectivity. In a reading of *The Golden Bowl* that shares a perspective which is similar to my own, Anat Pick argues: "characters in *The Golden Bowl* think of themselves through other characters. It is as if consciousness were 'located' at the level of relation between characters, as that relation itself."[53] Adam Verver is a helper in *The Golden Bowl*, but he is also a

protagonist. I see his position in terms of the way it aids other characters' narrative unfolding rather than hinders it. Yet as a protagonist, he must develop his own measure of self-interest. To see how he negotiates this dilemma, we have to take a closer look at his relationship to discourse.

The Spirit of the Connoisseur

Many critics who have attempted to interpret Adam Verver's role in the novel have been struck by his project to build the ironically named "American City," a cultural space whose center will be a European-style museum, displaying the art objects that he has collected during his travels to Europe with his daughter. Most critics have either not taken it seriously as an artistic choice, dismissing it as a purely symbolic or fable-like abstraction, or have seen it as an ironic commentary on the American spirit of acquisition; Adam Verver imagines himself a connoisseur but is really nothing but a philistine.[54] The fact that critical readings have been polarized around these two oppositions (neither side being very convincing) indicates that his role in the novel has been misunderstood.[55] And since the discourse of connoisseurship permeates the entire the novel, including its title and central symbol, the fact that it is ultimately Adam Verver's discourse makes him all the more significant.

In *The Golden Bowl*, connoisseurship, as well as the passion for collecting fine objects, gives both Maggie and her father a set of metaphors that organize their life.[56] Connoisseurship is a shared language and a shared adventure for them. On the eve of her marriage, Maggie explains to the Prince that she and her father have stored their "treasures" in "wonderful secret places"; she elaborates: "We've been like a pair of pirates – positively stage pirates, the sort who wink at each other and say 'Ha-Ha' when they come to where their

treasure is buried."[57] Looking for art treasures and learning about the history of art is therefore a form of bonding. Many critics have missed the specificity of the Verver's connection to connoisseurship, reading it simply as a testament to their acquisitiveness.[58] To counter this assumption, first, we can see that the two are "stage pirates"; piracy is associated more with children's adventures than it is with the adult's desire to possess. In fact, the Ververs are associated with children in the novel, both by their spouses and through metaphors that are used when they are directly focalized. One of the first images that readers receive of Adam Verver is that of an "adult [playing with] one of childhood's toys."[59] The toys associated with this image are examples of boyish aggression: "sticking on the head of a broken soldier or trying the lock of a wooden gun."[60] We are presented with an adult who wishes to behave as a child who is allowed to play out aggressions in certain ritualized games: "thus had shaped itself the innocent trick of occasionally making believe that he had no conscience . . . It was essentially in him the *imitation* of depravity . . . in spite of practice he was still imperfect."[61]

Is connoisseurship just such a ritualized game? If it is, its meaning is ambiguous. Is it a form of aggression? Of frustration? Does it have a social function? When we first meet Adam Verver, the dilemma that confronts him is that a group of American women, among them the vulgar Mrs. Rance, are encroaching upon his personal space. The obvious move for someone in his position is to snub them. Snobbery would be a practical application of his newly acquired connoisseurship. But he is unable to snub Mrs. Rance. One reason for this is that Adam Verver's relationship to connoisseurship, as the narrator frequently comments, is a rather awkward one; it is still "imperfect" for all his "practice." This discourse of connoisseurship is, for him, a change in world-view; it represents a significant turning point in his life, after the death of his wife, when he shifts gears and decides to dedicate his life to

being a "Patron of Art."[62] This shift in world view is not mere protectiveness; it implies risks, being out of one's element. So how can he criticize Mrs. Rance for being out her element when he is so much out of his?

I would like to suggest that Adam Verver is dealing with a conflict similar to the one that I have argued Charles Bovary faces in *Madame Bovary*, that of choosing a discourse for one's relation to oneself; such a discourse is one's way of negotiating between what is private and what is public and it is very often a failure because it is a trial run, a form of discursive *Bildung*. And we can tell just how difficult it is to express by its idiosyncratic hybridity. Bakhtin has come close to theorizing it in his discussion of the unique relationship, in the novel, between narrator and character:

> [The] zone surrounding the important characters of the novel is stylistically profoundly idiosyncratic and the most varied hybrid constructions hold sway in it . . . inside this area a dialogue is played out between the author and his characters . . . the potential for such a dialogue is one of the most fundamental privileges of novelistic prose.[63]

Perhaps we can say that this privilege is connected with the representation of awkwardness, which is difficult to dignify. The following passage will serve as an illustration:

> . . . Rome and Naples three years after his wife's death. *It was the hushed daybreak of the Roman revelation in particular that he could best recover – the way that there above all, where the princes and popes had been before him, his divination of his faculty had gone to his head*. He was a plain American citizen staying at an hotel where sometimes for days together there were twenty others like him; *but no pope, no prince of them all had read a richer meaning, he believed, into the character of the Patron of Art*. He was ashamed of them really, if he wasn't afraid, and he had on the whole never so climbed to the tip-top as in judging . . . Going to our friend's head, moreover, some of the results of such comparisons may doubtless be described as having stayed there. His freedom to see – of which the comparisons were part – what could it do but steadily grow and grow?[64] (my emphasis)

This is a typical example of free indirect discourse; the narration, although rendered in the third person and in the past tense, nonetheless retains certain marks of Adam's Verver's subjectivity, notably his tendency towards overstatement in the passages that I have

highlighted.[65] And in two places, this tendency appears through the colloquial expression "gone to his head." The first time we see this expression, the reader can plausibly assume that it is Adam Verver's; but then, at the end of the paragraph, the narrator intervenes to give a final ironic touch to the phrase: "Going to our friend's head . . . some of the results of such comparisons may doubtless be described as having stayed there." This ironic commentary, however, is tempered by the fact that the narrator quotes the character; character and narrator are so tightly imbricated that the narrator participates in the character's own discourse. This clearly establishes more sympathy than irony. So the rather gentle irony at the end of the paragraph suggests that the language Adam Verver uses, although it may be adequate for his mood at the moment, is not quite adequate from an outside view. But we simultaneously see his excitement at being able to use the discourse of connoisseurship in order to make judgments (having been afraid of making judgments before, especially against his fellow Americans). Connoisseurship certainly helps him to do this. Is it the only discourse that could fulfill this function? Could he have found a better one? The point is that we don't need to ask such questions. We are presented with an ill-fitting discursive hybrid and it must be taken as the character's best attempt at self-expression. So the alternating highs and lows here, Adam Verver's feelings of heroism and humbleness, are symptomatic, not of some possessive desire, but of an extremely uncertain self-representation. The passage is calculated to catch the spirit of this ill-fitting combination that Adam Verver has chosen, and not to disparage it.

The collector is a hybrid figure that moves between two activities that would seem to be very far apart from each other, reflecting different world views—that of the capitalist and that of the benevolent patron of the arts. This character type was already being synthesized in the American popular imagination around the time that James was writing. F. O. Matthiessen writes that "by picking a character like Adam Verver James obligated himself to some

knowledge of the types of men who were making the great American fortunes."[66] Matthiessen didn't find Adam Verver's portrayal authentic because James left the money making process that would make a capitalist a capitalist offstage. But James used American popular mythology for his own purposes.

Matthiessen's reservations about James's portrayal are only valid if we take awkwardness out of our aesthetic repertoire. But awkwardness is precisely the point: "*His* [Adam Verver's] real friend . . . was to have been his own mind, with which nobody had put him in relation. He had knocked at the door of that essentially private house, and his call, in truth, had not been immediately answered."[67] Ironically, his plan to build a public museum is an attempt to solve the private issue that this example highlights: his relationship to his own mind. The ambiguity between what is private and what is public, in this house imagery, suggests that, if one cannot yet find the boundaries of one's proper measure of "selfishness," the self is a rather porous object, without a home.

Maggie therefore ends up protecting her father's project just as much as she is protecting his honor as a husband, because it is his private self that is involved in this public project; and, in a strange reversal, his marriage takes on the character of a public mask because it protects him from the empty nest that his daughter has left him with. So marriage becomes something public for him at this stage in his life, while the project seems to complement, perhaps even to supplant, intimacy with a woman. In one of their last conversations, he brings out this paradox:

> [Maggie] 'Of course you've been my victim. What have you done, ever done, that hasn't been *for* me?'
> [Adam] 'Many things; more than I can tell you – things you've only to think of for yourself. What do you make of all that I've done for myself?'
> 'Yourself?' – she brightened out with derision.
> 'What do you make of what I've done for American City?'
> It took her but a moment to say. 'I'm not talking of you as a public character – I'm talking of you on your personal side.'

> Well, American City – if 'personalities' can do it – has given me a pretty personal side.'[68]

In this conversation Adam Verver therefore brings out something that Maggie herself didn't know about him, that he is not attached to the idea of marriage. In fact, it is her during this conversation that he confesses to never having felt jealousy.[69]

Adam Verver's sexuality is strikingly vague and James represents it to us through the specific metaphor of an aesthetic project. The question is what this metaphor accomplishes. Because the father and the daughter take different paths in this respect even though the metaphor encompasses both of them. Maggie's story moves towards taking possession of her feelings of jealousy once she finds out that her husband and her mother-in-law have been having an affair; she must grope her way towards the passion of jealousy. But Adam Verver must take possession of his own brand of "selfishness"—the cultivation of an aesthetic detachment. His story therefore moves towards abandoning a blind selection for taste; taste, for Adam Verver, is the road to judgment. But judgment requires something selfish as well—enough distance to separate oneself from the insistent claims of others, which requires that one judge people as one would judge objects. Contemporary readings of Adam Verver's role in the novel have generally vilified the way he combines aesthetics and personal relationships. This reading can be supported by the novel with statements such as Adam Verver "car[es] for precious vases only less than for precious daughters."[70] But such statements require closer examination and need to be read in context.

When we first meet Adam Verver, he is presented to us as a man who "bethought himself of his personal advantage, in general, only when it might appear to him that other advantages, those of other persons, had successfully put in their claim."[71] So how can readers reconcile this very solicitous attitude with an acquisitive instinct? I would like to suggest, along the lines of my reading here (the problem of finding a measure of one's own egoism)

that if Adam Verver didn't have connoisseurship, which introduces to him the concept of aesthetic distance, he would be in danger of being swallowed up by other people's personal fictions. So if we read him in this way, it seems rather presumptuous to disparage a discourse that has a useful function: to establish psychic boundaries.

Two Cuckolds

To Adam Verver's story, when readers first meet him in book two, he is ripe for a "mid-life crisis"; he is a retired businessman with a great fortune, his wife has been long dead, his daughter has married, and he has no other intimate ties. In the following words, Colonel Assingham, although he his talking about the Prince, sums up, in effect, Mr. Verver's dilemma as well: "The man's in a position in which he has nothing in life to do."[72] From a narratological perspective, there is an opening here, and the most obvious way for it to be filled, at the time that James was writing, is with a wife. He does have his plans for American City; but as I have argued, these plans are still uncertain and, in fact, less of a real project than a "pet project," a way of working through his relationship with himself.

From a traditional narrative perspective, a marriage can insert itself at this point in the narrative in two ways: either through "villainy" (a woman insinuates herself in his life to marry him for money) or a through a quest narrative in which he goes out in search for the kind of wife that would suit him. But they don't fit Adam Verver's case quite so neatly. Charlotte does need the money, but in some ways she also suits him. Yet he doesn't search for her, and this is James's narratological variation; his daughter introduces to him the idea of Charlotte as a possible wife. In fact, Maggie initially proposes that both of them should occupy themselves with finding Charlotte a husband.[73] From the beginning, it is unclear who exactly Charlotte is destined to marry and what Adam Verver's role is in helping to get her

out of poverty and in developing her social talents. He could be in the position of procuring another man for her; he could be in the position of marrying her himself. He seems destined to be on the sidelines, but, as I have tried to show, he cultivates this position. And I believe it is fair to argue that, because Maggie introduces Charlotte to her father as a case of wasted potential, and suggests that they should both try to find Charlotte a husband, *some other man*, Adam Verver does begin to develop an interest in her. If she had presented Charlotte to him as a potential wife, the effect would have been quite different. The following passage serves as an illustration:

> It was moreover as if, thus unprecedentedly positive, his child had an effect upon him that Mr. Verver really felt as a new thing.
> 'Why then haven't you told me about her before?'
> 'Well, haven't we always known – ?'
> 'I should have thought,' he submitted, 'that we had already pretty well sized her up.'
> 'Certainly – we long ago took her quite for granted. But things change with time, and I seem to know after this interval I'm going to like her better than ever. . . . Yes, I'm going to see in Charlotte,' said the Princess – and speaking now with high and free expectation – 'more than I've ever seen.'
> 'Then I'll try to do so too.'[74]

What Maggie does with her father here is similar to what she will do later with her husband: she invites him to think with her about the fate of someone else. There is, of course, the irony that, in this case, she wants to build Charlotte up, to develop her; later, it will be a question of having to bring her down (but with the least amount of harm). Also, her father is an amused participant in her game even as he suspects that he is being tugged along: " 'What do you want to do to me?' . . . You've got something on your mind. . . . You've got something up your sleeve.' "[75] Thus he is playing the role of a helper.

The dialogue here between Maggie and her father is very distinctive. Ruth Bernard Yeazell, in "Talking in James," argues that, in James's later novels, dialogue between characters is often collaborative.[76] This collaboration usually involves "thinking out loud" but in a way that is "divided up between two speakers"; it mimics "a like process within a

single mind."[77] But this dramatic trick isn't simply a convenient technique for James. He endows it with developments and consequences. Characters are eventually subject to the law of asymmetry that is common to everyday life; one character in this dialogue becomes an "extractor"[78] of the other's value, and is reduced, in the end, to a functional purpose; the intimate relationship comes to parting of ways. According Yeazell, Maria Gostrey, in *The Ambassadors*, has a significance that is not just moral (as existing for someone else) but also "ontological": "as the 'lively extractor' of Stether's 'value' . . . she almost loses her own."[79] This is another way of expressing the narratological and the subjective significance of the helper.

Every supporting character has a background, a personal story, and James is aware of the costs of this position. One of them is that such characters do not initiate a narrative, or do so with great difficulty. It is as if, as in the example of Adam Verver above, someone else's desire has to intervene, in order to stimulate such a character to act. This certainly doesn't fit the heroic model; and it fits with difficulty, as we have seen with Flaubert, the model of the protagonist. In the long history of patriarchal culture, the heroic model dominated, and a man in such a supporting position was simply not acknowledged. Men who are not stimulated to action of their accord, even when there is an outside threat, have for a long time been emasculated figures in literature, and only fit for low comedy.

There are actually two cuckolds in *The Golden Bowl*. In the section of the novel that first focalizes Adam Verver, James dramatizes an interesting parallel between Adam Verver and Mr. Rance, the "formidable" Mrs. Rance's absent husband. So far, the threat of cuckoldry affects only Mr. Rance, and this couple's marital status is presented as a form of comic relief. Mrs. Rance's unnamed husband clearly fits the cuckold model. He is absent while his wife has taken a trip to Europe and thus gives her the opportunity to be unfaithful;

in fact, he is presented as such an "off-stage" figure (a sure sign of cuckoldry) that the joke is that no one is even sure what he looks like any more: "She had him . . . in remembrance so imperfect as to barely assert itself . . . the Miss Lutches had seen him in the flesh . . . though when they were separately questioned their descriptions failed to tally."[80] And the narrator also expresses some sympathy for him: "She [Mrs. Rance] had him in bondage, poor man, had him in contempt."[81]

There is in this comic sub-plot an emphasis on the smallness, the pettiness of the Rances, who come from somewhere in the mid-West, "the great alkali desert of cheap Divorce."[82] Indeed, the threat of infidelity, barring divorce, and thus the comedy of cuckoldry, which never goes so far as divorce, is the lowest form of comedy that James will admit into his novel. Adam Verver imagines Mrs. Rance just missing divorce by her obvious hints at infidelity: "I'm restrained, you see, because of Mr. Rance, and also because I'm proud and refined; but if it wasn't for Mr. Rance and for my refinement and my pride!'"[83] The public shame of divorce would be, in a Jamesian universe, an even more vulgar form of comedy than cuckoldry. Thus we see played out the Ververs' connection to low comedy, something which James is trying to avoid.

Adam Verver doesn't so much escape cuckoldry as he sidesteps it. The possibility of seeing him as a cuckold belongs only his daughter, who is the very person entrusted with protecting it. And she refers to it, not in the context of his marriage, but of his project for American City. Thus the problem of Adam Verver's cuckoldry culminates when he asks his daughter: "What do you make of what I've done for American City?"[84] And she answers him "You've given it up to them, the awful people, for less than nothing; you've given it up to them to tear to pieces, to make their horrible vulgar jokes against you with . . . Everything that touches you, everything that surrounds you, goes, on – by your splendid indifference and

your incredible permission – at your expense."[85] This is the only reference to him as a cuckold that ever appears in the novel.

In the end, we do have to ask what cuckoldry means for James, if he expends such elaborate means to avoid it. I have agued that the cuckold has a narrative function and is a proto-helper in terms of developing other characters' narratives. In other words, James is suggesting that this function is important and that it should not only be relegated to women. A non-phallic man can be represented with dignity. So James's dilemma is: how is it possible to represent a diffuse form of male sexuality? By the end of the novel, if Adam Verver is a cuckold, it is only to the degree that the term ceases to applicable, on the grand scale of a public life that he has tried to cultivate. This means, not a personal betrayal, but the larger sense that the greater the workings of one's life's projects, the more one has to rely on other people's expertise, something out of the control of individual judgment (one risks what cannot be understood by one individual alone). When he returns to American City to complete his museum, he is attempting to make his diffuse tendency to amiability work for him in the realm public life. Thus there are two movements in Adam Verver's story – the movement towards a conventional private life that characterizes his attempt mirror his daughter's marriage, and the movement back to a public life in which he accepts his position and moves beyond the ideal of marriage, which limits the diffuseness of self that he represents. That there is an authorial function involved in this type of personality will become clearer in Joyce's *Ulysses*.

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[1] In *The Fabliau in English* (New York: Longman, 1993), John Hines explains that modern literature may share the *fabliau's* tendency towards trickery and abuse, but that the *fabliau* does not normally intend to abuse the audience: "The sort of rebounding abuse, the trickster tricked, the reader (ironically) laughing at an image he does not realize is his own . . . is indeed a pattern found in *some* fabliaux. . . . [but] we shall find an argument

that this sort of 'measure for measure' reading has sometimes been imputed by modern critics to texts in a way that is neither strongly supported by the text itself nor an enhancement of the reading of the text" (13).

[2] *Henry James: Literary Criticism* (New York: The Library of America, 1984) 208. James's introduction to *Madame Bovary* was first published in 1902.

[3] *Henry James: Literary Criticism* 208.

[4] "Flaubert, James and the Problem of Undecidability," *Comparative Literature* 39.1 (1987) 1.

[5] See David A. Cook, "James and Flaubert: The Evolution of Perception," *Comparative Literature*, 25.4 (Autumn, 1973), 289-307. See also Jonathan Culler's *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).

[6] "The Lessons of Flaubert: James and *L'Education Sentimentale*" *The Yearbook of English Studies* 26 (1996) 158.

[7] *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* 124.

[8] *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* 124.

[9] *Henry James: The Indirect Vision* (Bombay: Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing, 1973) 163.

[10] Quoted in Paul B. Armstrong's *The Challenge of Bewilderment: Understanding and Representation in James, Conrad, and Ford* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987) 2.

[11] See Krook's *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1963). and Brooks's *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

[12] *Strange Alloy: The Relation of Comedy to Tragedy in the Fiction of Henry James* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968) xvii.

[13] *Strange Alloy* 172.

[14] "On Narcissism: An Introduction," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychoanalytical Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, vol. 14 (London: Vintage, 2001) 74.

[15] In his preface to *The Golden Bowl*, James explains that he had tried to stay as closely as possible to his centers of consciousness, and that he believes he has gone beyond "the mere muffled majesty of authorship" (*Literary Criticism* 1323).

[16] 395; bk. 4. ch. 6.

[17] *Morphology of the Folktale*, 30-36.

[18] 147; bk. 2, ch. 2.

[19] 160; bk. 2, ch. 4.

[20] 186; bk. 2, ch. 5.

[21] 313; bk. 3, ch. 11.

[22] *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd ed., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009) 206-208.

[23] 160; bk. 2, ch. 4.

[24] 160; bk. 2, ch. 4.

[25] "Miracles of Arrangement: Structures of Multiplicity and the Birth of Justice in Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*," *The Henry James Review* 21 (2000): 124-125.

[26] Lacan argues that "there is a male way of botching . . . the sexual relationship, and then another" (58). His subsequent analysis analyzes the "male way," and he insists that when a man thinks that his sexual relations are successful, "does not stop us from saying 'not-everything succeeds'" (58). The formula "not-everything" means that phallic sexuality is not whole. In this seminar, Lacan also associates the "not-whole" with knowledge. This conjunction between feminine sexuality and the "not-whole" is clear from the title of the seminar, *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge*.

[27] *October* 28 (1984). 61-90.

[28] *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994) 226-228.

[29] 152; bk. 2, ch. 3.

[30] 258; bk. 3, ch. 6.

[31] 281; bk. 3, ch. 8.

[32] On Henry James's relationship to melodrama, see Peter Brooks's *The Melodramatic Imagination*.

[33] *New Literary History* 15.1 (1983) 25-50.

[34] "Flawed Crystals: James's *The Golden Bowl* and Literature as Moral Philosophy" 29.

[35] "Flawed Crystals" 29.

[36] *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006) 142.

[37] *The Parallax View* 142.

[38] *Language and Knowledge in the Late Novels of Henry James* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976) 2.

[39] 164; bk. 2. ch. 4.

[40] Daniel Brudney's synopsis of Nussbaum's argument is very lucid: "Some commitments will have to fail if others are met. . . . This is no doubt right. Love is exclusive, so it can be perfect only in Eden. Outside we are sinners, however unoriginal. You can't be all in all two people at once" (401). See "Knowledge and Silence: *The Golden Bowl* and Moral Philosophy," *Critical Inquiry* 16.2 (1990).

[41] "Knowledge and Silence" 409.

[42] "Knowledge and Silence" 409.

[43] "Knowledge and Silence" 412.

[44] "Knowledge and Silence" 412-413.

[45] “Knowledge and Silence” 416.

[46] 474; bk. 5; ch. 1.

[47] 464; bk. 4, ch. 10.

[48] *Narratology* 207.

[49] The phrase “compositional resource” can be found in James’s preface to *The Golden Bowl* (*Literary Criticism* 1323). The term “register” can be found in James’s preface to *What Maisie Knew* (*Literary Criticism* 1157).

[50] Ora Segal, *The Observer in Henry James’ Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969); *Henry James: The Indirect Vision, A Study in Themes and Techniques* (Bombay: Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing, 1973). Another example is Sallie Sears’s *The Negative Imagination: Form and Perspective in the Novels of Henry James* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968).

[51] *Narratology* 207.

[52] *Narratology* 207.

[53] “Miracles of Arrangement” 122.

[54] For a summary of these views, see Caroline G. Mercer’s “Adam Verver, Yankee Businessman” *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 22.3 (1967): 251.

[55] For these two opposing views see Christof Wegelin, “The Internationalism of *The Golden Bowl*,” *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 11.3 (1956): 161-181 and Quentin Anderson, “Why R.P. Blackmur Found James’s *Golden Bowl* Inhuman” *ELH* (2001): 725-743.

[56] There is, for example, Adam Verver’s reflection that “their decent little old-time union, Maggie’s and his own, had resembled a good deal some pleasant public square, in the heart of an old city, into which a great Palladian church, say – something with a grand architectural front – had suddenly been dropped” (135; bk. 2, ch. 1). Adam Verver thus represents to himself his relationship with his daughter and her husband by using metaphors that he has picked up from his occupation as a collector. But this is not an isolated instance. Maggie talks to her husband about him being a “*morceau de musée*”: “You’re not perhaps absolutely unique, but you’re so curious and eminent that there are very few others like you – you belong to a class about which everything is known” (49; bk. 1, ch. 1). This is not stated maliciously but rather unconsciously, and it is with expressions such as this one that Maggie habitually communicates.

[57] 50; bk. 1, ch. 1.

[58] For one such reading, see Michael Meeuwis, “Living the Dream: Benjamin’s Arcades Project and *The Golden Bowl*,” *The Henry James Review* 27.1 (2006): 61-75. But this reading is so common that Gore Vidal invokes it in his introduction to the Penguin edition of *The Golden Bowl*: “I bared noticed Adam Verver the first time I read the book. . . . But now . . . I regard him with new interest – not to mention suspicion. What is he up to? He is plainly sly; and greedy . . . my God, how this father and daughter manage to both keep and devour the whole great world itself!” (12).

[59] 130; bk. 2., ch. 1.

[60] 130; bk. 2., ch. 1.

[61] 130; bk. 2., ch. 1.

[62] 146; bk. 2, ch. 2.

[63] "Discourse in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 320.

[64] 146; bk. 2; ch. 2.

[65] Dorrit Cohn defines free indirect discourse as "the technique for rendering a character's thought in his own idiom whole maintaining the third-person reference and the basic tense of narration [past]" (quoted in McKeon 493). See *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

[66] Quoted in Caroline Gordon's "Mr. Verver: Our National Hero," *The Sewanee Review* 63.1 (1955) 35.

[67] 145; bk. 2, ch. 2.

[68] 509; bk. 5, ch. 3.

[69] 507; bk. 5, ch. 3.

[70] 172; bk. 2, ch. 4.

[71] 129; bk. 2, ch. 1.

[72] 235; bk. 3, ch. 3.

[73] 174; bk. 2, ch. 4.

[74] 169; bk. 2; ch. 4.

[75] 169; bk. 2; ch. 4.

[76] *Language and Knowledge* 68.

[77] *Language and Knowledge* 70.

[78] *Language and Knowledge* 70.

[79] *Language and Knowledge* 70.

[80] 134; bk. 2, ch. 1.

[81] 134; bk. 2, ch. 1.

[82] 134; bk. 2, ch. 1.

[83] 147; bk. 2. ch. 2.

[84] 509; bk. 5, ch. 3.

[85] 509; bk. 5, ch. 3.

CHAPTER 4

BLOOM AS CUCKOLD-HERO: PHALLIC REVERSALS

The "Calypso" episode of *Ulysses* contains a well known scene between Leopold and Molly Bloom; Molly asks her husband to explain the meaning of a word that she has come upon while reading a novel—*metempsychosis*. This possibly alludes to a passage in which Emma Bovary laments that her husband wasn't able to explain the meaning of a riding term in a novel she had been reading. Emma's disappointment registers a telling expectation: "A man, surely, ought to know everything."[1] A man should have the keys to knowledge—Flaubert's novel takes this ideal seriously, and Emma's words tell us much about how a nineteenth century, bourgeois man would like to see himself. Although the wife is the mask through which this male ideal is verbalized, Emma's inept and incompetent husband, Charles, is its complement; through him we see its inevitable failure, its impossibility. Flaubert clearly recognized that knowledge, as a category, does not form a whole. But the components of this modern phallic ideal—sexual possession and the possession of knowledge—form a consistent series in Flaubert's work and also in Joyce's.[2]

For both writers, the cuckold reflects not only the fact that a man cannot possess a woman completely, but also that he cannot possess knowledge. So although marriage and disciplinary learning are seemingly unconnected, Flaubert and Joyce have linked them together, dovetailing their presentations of masculinity with the earlier conception of the cuckold. The medieval cuckold was not associated with disciplinary learning, but with common knowledge; he was a man consistently outwitted by others in everyday social situations. By extending the cuckold's metaphorical connection with learning, and

connecting him to the proliferation disciplinary knowledge (rather than common knowledge) Flaubert and Joyce used him to target Enlightenment models of cognition.

In the notes for his play *Exiles* (1918), which centers on infidelity, Joyce made a reference to Charles Bovary's role in Flaubert's novel, observing that "the center of sympathy appears to have been aesthetically shifted from the lover or fancyman to the husband or cuckold."[3] He therefore acknowledged that Flaubert had complicated the image of this neglected and derided male figure. Michael Mason, who has focused his attention on Bloom's cuckold-hood in *Ulysses*, insists that the unlikely combination of cuckoldry and heroism was not incompatible for Joyce.[4] In fact, Mason suggests Joyce believed he was creating a new kind of hero in European literature; that is, not only did Joyce register a shift in sympathy towards the position of the betrayed husband, which is what he noticed in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, but he planned to expand on this position. Mason explains: "Joyce claims with confidence around 1915 that he is pressing beyond previous writers in his 'profiting' from the sympathetic cuckold."[5] Mason points out that Joyce's approach to the subject of cuckoldry was wide-ranging and based on his own intuition; although he found some precedents for a more sympathetic attitude towards cuckolds in the great literary works of predecessors such as Flaubert and Ibsen, he also looked for paradigms in obscurer places, such as nineteenth century Italian realist drama.[6] Thus Joyce approached cuckoldry as an important subject-position, and he was ready to make a value-claim for it; his sources were eclectic because the position itself, with the positive value Joyce wanted to give it, had not been consolidated by other writers in any systematic way.

Two pages into his notes for *Exiles*, Joyce indicates that Richard Rowan, the betrayed husband and protagonist, is a "technical shield for the protection of a delicate, strange, and highly sensitive conscience."[7] He begins his meditations on Richard's position in the play by

defining love, which he believes is "the desire of good for another."[8] He asserts that such a desire is "unnatural" because it is difficult to repeat, "the soul . . . not having enough energy to cast itself out again into the ocean of another's soul."[9] So he associates love with a significant expenditure of energy in another human being and with the sense of self-loss that results from this.

His subsequent discussion of Richard deals with Richard's jealousy. Joyce implies that, instead of fueling hatred, jealousy can serve love, as he defines it, because it can be used to examine a man's need for possession: "Richard's jealousy is carried one step nearer to its own heart. Separated from hatred and . . . converted into an erotic stimulus and moreover holding its own power in abeyance, the difficulty which excited it must reveal itself as the very immolation of the pleasure of possession on the altar of love."[10] By the time Joyce proposes that Richard represents a "sensitive conscience" it is possible to put together some of the thematic strands that make the betrayed husband an important figure for him: he represents a casting away of identity; for Joyce, this implies receptiveness to others and the ability to risk the loss of boundaries to the self. As I have emphasized, Flaubert, James, and Joyce faced the difficulty of making the cuckold into a protagonist because of his lack of a personal identity; the cuckold's destiny to become someone else's "helper," without knowing it, marked him with a secondary status. How could a protagonist remain a protagonist while at the same time giving his desire over to someone else? But Joyce, of the writers that I have been analyzing here, sees the most potential in the cuckold's marginality and tries to establish it as a viable subject-position.

Several generations of critics have observed that Bloom reflects an ethic of tolerance.[11] Mason argues that Bloom's cuckold-hood is connected to Joyce's long-term preoccupation with how a sensitive person deals with acts against the self and the question of

which acts can be tolerated and which cannot.[12] Mason asks why Joyce chose cuckoldry to express the theme of tolerance in *Exiles* and *Ulysses*. Why not the plot of theft and dispossession, or other modes of betrayal which are not necessarily sexual?[13] His answers deserve a detailed summary: First, critics should acknowledge Joyce's "habits of mind"; he was inclined to deal with concrete rather than general behavior.[14] This may imply that he had a personal bias in favor of cuckoldry, but it should not, according to Mason, diminish our sense of his artistry.[15] Second, Joyce did believe that cuckoldry was "a truth about European family life," and therefore he wanted generalize it through his characterization of Bloom.[16] Finally, the "new moral freedom" inaugurated by Freud—the discovery that unconscious wishes are a part of human behavior—also contributed to his choice of a cuckold-protagonist.[17]

Mason's arguments highlight how Joyce reverses masculine values in *Ulysses*. It is clear that Bloom is no suffering martyr. Readers can see that if he tolerates his wife's infidelity, he also enjoys it; he even facilitates it by staying away from home so that Molly can receive her lover, Blazes Boylan. But the conflict in *Ulysses* is between the threat of indignity and the revelation of unconscious satisfaction. Joyce minimizes the claims of dignity and gives much more space in his narrative to the unconscious or semi-conscious behaviors in men that threaten dignity: masochism, homosexuality, and the desire for power through self-abnegation.[18] Mason points out that Joyce "shows great thoughtfulness," for his time, because he emphasizes Bloom's unconscious motives.[19] To add to Mason's list of masculine indignities that Joyce exposes, we don't need to look further than Freud's theory of the unconscious. Like Freud, Joyce was interested in mental functions that we cannot fully control, such as the play of associations in the mind, which are difficult to assemble into a coherent narrative.

Ulysses presents cuckoldry as a paradox that involves asking whether we are responsible for unconscious desires and, if so, to what extent. But this sexual theme in *Ulysses* is explicitly tied to a broader concern with the limits of human cognition, that is, with other subjects that also touch on unconscious processes, such as education and creative work. Joyce clearly makes such connections in *Ulysses* and these connections are developments of a series that had already been taken up by Flaubert. For example, Flaubert's characterization of Charles Bovary is a case in which the husband who doesn't know that his wife is cheating on him, who displays sexual ignorance, is at the same time "castrated" by a broader system of discursive knowledge—the university discourse that he encounters as a medical student, and as a country doctor. Flaubert's cuckold is a bad student, but being a bad student is presented to us as a response to a labyrinthine system of learning that cannot be mastered. The cuckold and his failed education (rather than just his failed social skills) is also linked up with a vision of the artist/narrator as absent. This is an ambiguous position, suggesting both control over the narrative and a lack of control.

Bloom is clearly a foil for Stephen in *Ulysses*, and the interplay between Stephen the artist and Bloom the cuckold is crucial part of the storyline, whereas Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, contains no artist figures. And although Flaubert treated artistic sensibility as a subject in *Sentimental Education* (1869), he did not develop the encounter between these two narratives (the cuckold's story and the artist's story) in the focused way that Joyce does in *Ulysses*.[20] As Joyce stages the encounter between the cuckold and the artist, he develops the idea that the underside of the male artist may be the position of the cuckold, which *Madame Bovary* only implies.

Ulysses opens with Stephen's story of artistic struggle in "Telemachus," and this struggle, which readers had followed in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), is a

traditional *Bildung* narrative: the story of how the individual artist finds his place and his status in society. But when readers meet Stephen once again in *Ulysses*, he is still struggling with his artistic identity[21]; he strives to find a position in which "You will not be master of others or their slave."[22] Master and slave are the inescapable and paradigmatic subject positions of the marginalized, and Stephen, as an artist, does not escape this binary. Yet if Stephen can formulate the conflict, he should be in a better position than Bloom. Bloom lives this struggle in his relationship to Molly, without being able to articulate it clearly. Traditionally, the ability to formulate a problem has been associated with keenness and intelligence, the beginnings of a solution to the problem.[23] But *Ulysses* reverses this hierarchy by privileging Bloom's story over Stephen's, because Bloom's narrative has compositional priority. Henry Staten has argued that *Ulysses* does not privilege form-making (traditionally the artist's vocation) over the formlessness of life.[24] Joyce stages a decompositional narrative process in the novel, and he thus questions the traditional opposition between the artist and the common man (who relies on form-giving processes like art to give clarity to his experience).[25] But Staten doesn't develop the idea that the cuckold may be the other side of the artist, and that his subject position may have value for Joyce (although he does suggest Joyce has a "hysterical" insight).[26]

If Stephen is able to formulate Bloom's dilemma (and his own), he still identifies with the terms of the artist's *Bildung*; he is ashamed and defensive that he has not yet achieved success. In "Oxen of the Sun," Stephen is at his most defensive, posturing to his former schoolmates that "I, Bous Stephanoumenos . . . am lord and giver of . . . life."[27] One of his interlocutors remarks incisively: "All wish you well and hope this for you. All desire to see you bring forth the work you meditate, to acclaim you Stephaneforos."[28] Yet this work still seems far off for Stephen because he spends much of his time either drunk, or worried

about how to defend his vocation. And many encounters between Bloom and Stephen in the latter half of *Ulysses* emphasize Bloom as the cracked mirror of this ideal; because Bloom's unabashed admiration for Stephen is the other side of Stephen's struggle for artistic freedom. He has faith in Stephen's potential, his predestination of a future,"[29] but this undermines the dignity associated with self-testing. Bloom's fatherly feelings unleash Stephen's anxiety in "Ithaca," where he sings an anti-Semitic song to Bloom.[30] Yet such feelings also have the salutary effect of distinguishing an ideal from its realization. If Stephen thinks of himself as a real artist, perhaps he can deride Bloom's desire to see him succeed (from the sidelines, as an admirer). But Joyce presents Bloom's ancillary position as a strength, releasing love from contempt in the figure of a man. It is clear that Stephen associates unconditional love with women, and especially with mothers. His image of a mother's love in "Nestor" is mixed with doubt: "She [the mother] had loved his weak watery blood drained from her own. Was that then real? The only true thing in life?"[31] So making Bloom a foil for Stephen succeeds in tempering the myth that artistic creation is an enterprise of mastery.

Bloom's position as a cuckold-hero also takes him beyond just functioning as a foil for Stephen. Joyce develops his position and it has its own weight. Part of this development is an investigation of unconscious knowledge, which does not fit very well with the paradigm of disciplinary knowledge that dominated Western culture. To take the cuckold's position seriously was to engage in the following subjective difficulty, as Alison Sinclair outlines in her book on the betrayed husband: "The meaning of the cuckold entails a paradox. The cuckold in works of literature is characterized by a denial of what goes on, and his inability to cope. The reader, on the other hand, exposed to this image of denial and ineptitude, is forced to absorb it, and come to terms with it."[32] Denial in the cuckold's case is not lying, at least not lying in order to manipulate others. We are faced with a subject in an uncomfortable

relationship with himself. In terms of how the audience deals with such an image, Aristotle on comedy is an obvious touchstone:

> As for Comedy, it is . . . an imitation of men worse than the average; worse, however, not as regards any and every sort of fault, but only as regards one particular kind, the Ridiculous, which is a species of the Ugly. The Ridiculous may be defined as a mistake or deformity not productive of pain or harm to others; the mask, for instance, that excites laughter, is something ugly and distorted without causing pain.[33]

Aristotle granted comedy a sphere of human activity whose status carried much less weight than tragedy or epic. As Robert Torrance points out in *The Comic Hero*, "Aristotle's indelible contribution . . . his penetrating analysis of tragedy in the *Poetics*, was to associate the comic with the trivial."[34] By this model, the cuckold is harmless but distorted, which makes him less than fully human. Yet, as we saw in *The Golden Bowl*, James associates such distortions and disfigurements with the tragic. So, historically, we are obviously looking at a change in attitude towards what is comic and what is tragic, and it is around this problem of distortion that the terms shift.

There is also a shift in the kind of knowledge that we associate with comedy and tragedy. Critics who have taken Aristotle as a touchstone have, historically, connected tragedy to knowledge, and comedy to what is too trivial to qualify as knowledge. As Martha Nussbaum argues, "through 'pity and dread' inspired by tragic events, we learn what matters to us, and we are clarified."[35] But in both Flaubert and Joyce, this pattern is reversed. The cuckold is associated with images that explode all sense of proportion, and he doesn't inspire clarity. Charles Bovary's cap in the opening scene of *Madame Bovary* is an obvious example. But in the "Ithaca" chapter of *Ulysses*, for example, Bloom contemplates (but obviously cannot solve) various scientific and mathematical enigmas that are beyond the proportions of human intelligence, such as the problem of how to square a circle. So what Aristotle calls distortion becomes linked up in Joyce with a more serious investigation of how comedy may

have an intellectual value; it can make us see all the things that lack the social proprieties, or social proportions, because we don't yet have the tools to understand them. To validate clarity is to validate knowledge that has been circumscribed, exfoliated from the inessential; to validate what we don't yet understand is to leave some room open for the surprises that are involved in generating new knowledge. Joyce suggests these issues relate to, not just scientific speculation, but to speculation about social mores. Kant expressed paradox in what he called antinomies,[36] which take the form of irresolvable oppositions that look like clear contradictions but that are actually conflicts in our accepted ways of thinking about difficult problems. Thus if a heroic cuckold was unthinkable for Flaubert (despite the modicum of sympathy he accords to Charles Bovary) it was because the historical attitude towards male failure in his time was not very thoughtful.

Along these lines, perhaps the most significant gift that Joyce gave Bloom is his curiosity; curiosity is not necessarily enough to solve the most difficult human problems, but it is a thoughtful attitude towards experience in general. So we can look at Bloom's intellectual speculations in *Ulysses*, which are introduced in "Calypso" and reappear in "Ithaca," as a series of vague and rather impotent thoughts or as the workings of a mind that keeps itself alive and alert by wondering. This paradox in which failure and yearning combine without tragedy, and yet nonetheless carry weight, is Bloom's position as a heroic cuckold and as a heroic experiential learner. This position's salutary effects are woven throughout the fabric of *Ulysses*, as Joyce slowly modifies readers' likely perception of Bloom as an excremental object, fit only for derision. We begin "Calypso," the first of the Bloom chapters in *Ulysses*, with the image of Bloom thinking of eating "grilled mutton kidneys which gave to his palate a fine tang of faintly scented urine."[37] But this nauseating image is then used playfully as we see Bloom going about his morning chores: "Kidneys

were in his mind as he moved about the kitchen softly . . . Gelid light and air were in the kitchen but out of doors gentle summer morning everywhere."[38] As we become accustomed to images of beauty and disgust presented so closely together, this should spark our curiosity, which should also mimic Bloom's, about all things derisory.

In "Calypso," Joyce tries to accustom his readers to think about what it means to negate something as contemptible, whether it is Bloom's taste for cuts of meat that are not "prime," his pleasure in "the sting of disregard"[39] from a woman in the street, or his wish to publish a story in *Titbits* magazine. So, for example, in Joyce's characterization of Bloom, the senses of the words impotence and vigor are inflected differently, losing their negative connotations. In looking carefully at the various indications of Bloom's impotence (sexual and intellectual) we are faced with, not the inability to find a solution to a problem, but the end of desire, the completion of a process. And by vigor Joyce means not desire bent on its end, but desire that can remain unsatisfied. In a comical and literalizing version of this theme, one of the reasons that Molly gives for preferring Bloom to Boylan is because he has "more spunk in him" (more semen).[40] She therefore suggests, paradoxically, that Bloom may be more passionate than Boylan, even though he makes love less often.[41] In his notes for *Exiles*, Joyce notes that there is a state of "virginity" that can be associated with both sexual and emotional passion for another person.[42] It is difficult to repeat. So perhaps Boylan's sexual prowess suggests a lack of love, in the sense that this original "virginity" is lost, and all that is left is repetition.

So when Joyce repeatedly associates Bloom's lack of force with a positive quality, this implies that it is only an apparent weakness. In "Lotus Eaters," the chapter that best expresses this unusual conjunction, we have the quintessential Bloomian position of "weak joy."[43] Weak joy could mean that his happiness is not strong, but it could also mean joy in his

position of weakness, of passivity. And this reversal of the common assumptions associated with strength and weakness in a man applies to Bloom's various intellectual and money-making schemes as well. One of Bloom's ad ideas (rejected by his employer) expresses his position of retaining his desire as unsatisfied, in the form of curiosity. It is the creation of "some one sole unique advertisement to cause passers to stop and wonder."[44]

Although all of the details that outline Bloom's cuckoldry—his complaisance, his passivity, his fantasy life—can and may have derisory connotations, Joyce takes Bloom very seriously as a protagonist and positions readers to take him seriously as well. Cuckolds in literature have been, as Alison Sinclair points out, "functional literary characters."[45] They have enabled a narrative of infidelity to develop because of their complaisance, which had productive narrative possibilities, but was also derided. Joyce has fully unfolded this position of complaisance into the investigation of a real subjective position.

The Destiny of a Word

Molly's *metempsychosis* question in "Calypso" is a figure for two fantasies that Bloom expresses during his day; it directly refers to his desire to educate Molly and indirectly alludes to his cuckoldry. When Molly asks Bloom to define *metempsychosis*, she is playing to Bloom's desire to educate her. But when she hears his somewhat rambling explanation, she brings out her famous dismissal: "O, rocks! Tell us in plain words."[46] This dismissal can be linked to Bloom's cuckoldry in the sense that a shrewish wife, who mocks her husband, is also associated with infidelity.[47] But readers don't have a direct indication of the link between this question and Molly's infidelity until later in the day (and hundreds of pages later). "Penelope" reveals that Molly asked Bloom two questions in the earlier scene.[48] The one we didn't hear in "Calypso" concerned her preparations for Boylan's visit: "would I

be like that bath of the nymph with my hair down yes only shes younger . . . nymphs used they to go about like that I asked him I asked him about her and that word met something with hoses in it."[49] Thus these two questions dovetail; her worries about her age and beauty are displaced onto the image of nymphs in the painting hanging in their bedroom and have, in turn, been displaced into her half mocking play on Bloom's desire to educate her.

During the course of his day, Bloom also returns to this exchange in the morning over *metempsychosis*. The first allusion occurs in an early episode, "Lestrygonians," but only in the context of his "professor" fantasy, not his fantasy of being cuckolded. Bloom mulls over Molly's words—"O rocks!"—and thinks to himself, "She's right after all. Only big words for ordinary things on account of the sound."[50] But although he concedes to her common sense, he still has some doubts about her judgment: "She's not exactly witty. Can be rude too."[51] His criticism returns with greater force in "Ithaca," where we witness a full-blown critique of Molly's "deficient intellectual development."[52] Among his criticisms of her lack of knowledge and her lack of patience, especially under his instruction, readers find again a reference to the offending word: "Unusual polysyllables of foreign origin she interpreted phonetically or by false analogy or both: metempsychosis (met him pike hoses), alias (a mendacious person mentioned in sacred scripture)."[53] So if Bloom enjoys playing the pedagogue, we see that Molly has not satisfied his wish.

The educative theme around which Bloom's thoughts turn is expressed most fully in "Ithaca." Yet Bloom's attempts to educate Molly, even his mental revenge on her in "Ithaca," with his list of her intellectual "crimes," do not necessarily put him in a superior position to her. They become, instead, part of his cuckold fantasy, because this fantasy includes his wish that Molly will develop herself sexually *and* intellectually. Also in "Ithaca," Bloom entertains the idea that Stephen will become Molly's lover and instructor. He yields to

Stephen (if only in thought), passing on to the younger man the authority to educate his wife. The way these fantasies come together implies that Bloom cuckolds himself in more than one way: first through Boylan (sexually) and next through Stephen (intellectually).

Bloom does have certain class stereotypes about education.[54] He points out Molly's mispronunciation of *metempsychosis*, as well as other foreign words, and this leads, in part, to his idea that Stephen should give her Italian lessons. One reason for Bloom's wish to replace Stephen with Boylan could be that Stephen's education will associate Molly with a higher class.[55] At one point he even accuses Molly of self-interest, by pointing out that she will only learn something if it has practical value for her (the sign of a plebian mind).[56] Yet on this same point, Bloom finds Molly's strength. Right after his list of complaints against her, readers find the following question: "What compensated in the false balance of her intelligence for these and such deficiencies of judgment regarding persons, places and things?"[57] The answer: "The counterbalance of her proficiency of judgment regarding one person . . ."[58] Who else could this "one person" be but him?

Although the previous passage doesn't explain the context for Molly's sound judgment, we don't really have to look far to find it. The same educative theme comes back in a few pages, only this time in relation to their daughter Milly. We learn of Bloom's attempts to "interest and instruct her" in her early years and of the satisfying result (for him) of this relationship: "She admired: a natural phenomenon having been explained by him to her she expressed the immediate desire to possess without gradual acquisition a fraction of his science, the moiety, the quarter, a thousandth part."[59] Bloom teaches Milly how to seduce a man by admiring his superior intelligence. Molly, the mature and canny wife, is more suspicious, and more practical; knowledge for her has mainly an instrumental value. But she detects in Bloom the detours of its narcissistic ego-value, which is why she is impatient with

his professor fantasy. Perhaps Molly brings Bloom back to his class position, which reminds him that knowledge also implicates self-interest.

Clearly Bloom takes a more roundabout path to his own self-interest than Molly does, as is clear from his tendency to substitute other men for himself in crucial areas of his life. So we have to take up Molly's point that *metempsychosis* could be explained in "plain words," that is, by a shorter path. Her complaint thus takes on a sexual meaning, and I would like to try and generalize Molly's charge against Bloom—that his satisfactions are too indirect. To do this, we have to go back to Freud's concept of narcissism.

In his early seminars, Lacan spends a lot of time analyzing this concept; he asks why, if the goal of narcissism is self-love, we go through the detours of loving another when it is only the guise of a return to the self: "if anything can make this monad [the ego] throb to the slightest degree . . . [it] is very difficult to see what could condition this enormous detour which, at the very least, constitutes all the same a complex and rich structuration."[60] If we follow this logic of the ego as a monad, then the detour from self to other is a very roundabout and inefficient path of self-love. Yet to question what motivates the complexity of the narcissistic detour is therefore to admit that there is some complexity; the narcissist is not a monad and Lacan brings out the very ambiguity of Freud's concept.

Narcissism for Lacan becomes a concept that is not inflected with the popular sense of selfishness, because this would imply knowing what one wants, and also an instrumental value towards an object of love that involves clear knowledge. He characterizes narcissism as a detour, a detour whose return to the self is actually quite questionable. Neither is narcissism, in the realm of thought, and as a form of desire, thought's self-identity. One of Lacan's points is that narcissism is knotted to the dialectic between ignorance and knowledge. He insists: "desire does not present itself in a simple subjective relationship to

the object – even a reflexive one – the subject 'thinking himself' in a relationship of knowledge to the object. The theory of desire is constructed to put in question again this theory of knowledge and the Cartesian 'I think, therefore I am . . . '"[61]

Therefore, the cuckold's ignorance is something that should be investigated in terms of Freud's conception of the "economic" problem of pleasure; what has been stigmatized as stupidity is a pleasure that doesn't directly reach its aim of returning to the ego, or even the enclosure of the body. What Freud called the libidinal component of self-preservation—some form of instinct that enables us to attend to our own self-regard—is a rather shaky proposition given the detours of narcissism.[62] We are far more capable of attaining narcissistic satisfaction *outside* of our own bodies. Joyce, by juxtaposing this paradox to other paradoxes of knowledge, such as those relating to the scientific investigation of very small or very large phenomena (which we cannot see directly) presents the cuckold's inefficient path to pleasure in a different light.

Two Series: Infidelity and Money Making Schemes

Hugh Kenner has called Bloom the "hidden hero" of *Ulysses* and argues that "Bloom has been victimized by cliché."[63] Along with the anti-Semitism that he encounters during his day's wanderings, and his cuckoldry, Bloom is an advertising salesman (a vulgar occupation at the time)[64] and there is the suggestion that his intelligence is "common" because his interior monologue is woven out of a variety of commonplaces. Joyce's early readers responded to the negative connotation of these labels. Wyndham Lewis proclaimed him a "walking cliché."[65] Ezra Pound labeled him "*l'homme moyen sensuel*" and in his discussion of the novel as a whole, implied that Joyce had created an unintelligent hero: "[*Ulysses* is] a summary of pre-war Europe, [of] the blackness and mess of civilization led by disguised

forces and a bought press, the general sloppiness, the plight of the individual intelligence in that! Bloom very much *is* the mess."[66] Thus Kenner observes in the 1980s: "*Ulysses* will let us suppose in the first Bloom pages that a commonplace man is getting breakfast for his wife, and will proceed to modify this impression of ordinariness so imperceptibly we may need to combine exceptional attention with various inside knowledges . . . to perceive anything out of the way at all."[67] It is clear that the destiny of the "common" hero in literature is still burdened, even in late twentieth century criticism, by ambiguity. As Franco Moretti points out: "'Common' is a term with a long and complex history [meaning] . . . 'widespread,' 'ordinary,' 'normal' . . . 'not worthy of notice,' 'banal,' vulgar,' even 'contemptible.'"[68]

Critics' assessment of Bloom has shifted in a positive direction as the snobbery and sexual prudishness of audiences and critics has disappeared.[69] Leo Bersani argues that Joyce's labor has undoubtedly been a success: "For hordes of aficiandoes, June 16 will always be celebrated as Bloomsday."[70] So, as the historical trajectory of responses to Bloom shows, many readers now celebrate him. In this sense Joyce was more progressive than Flaubert, because he pushed Flaubert's thematics of cliché far enough to definitively reverse its effects. Critic Robert M. Torrance had begun to register this historical shift in the 1970s by readily extolling Bloom's mental powers: "[his] interior monologue exhibits not a lifeless collection of isolated banalities, as many early readers assumed, but an incessant mental activity striving with intense curiosity after the elusive connection and secret meaning of things apparently insignificant and unrelated."[71] And Thomas Jackson Rice points out that, despite Joyce's presentation of Bloom as someone with a "limited familiarity with science and mathematics," he has a more well-rounded approach to knowledge than Stephen, the subjectively oriented artist.[72]

If we look closely at the very first Bloom episode, “Calypso,” intelligence, in Bloom’s own mind, is often associated with cleverness and even trickery. This seems to place Bloom within a lower-middle class context, among petty officers, politicians and small-businessmen. So along with intimations of Molly’s adultery, readers witness Bloom’s series of thoughts relating to various money-making schemes. These schemes include his father-in-law’s “corner in stamps,”[73] the manipulation of wholesale prices on drinks in pubs,[74] and a planter’s company in Palestine (a “Zionist colony”).[75] There are obviously class stereotypes embedded in these schemes (the Jews, the Irish, and military men are all relegated to the intelligence associated with trickery and corruption). But Bloom is not exactly one of these schemers, despite the fact that he is taken for one throughout the day because of his Jewish background and appearance. He is presented here as someone who only admires a good trick. Such a derisory assessment of Bloom privileges a man’s need for possession rather than the indirect path of appreciation. Joyce invites such a reading of Bloom, even as he modifies readers’ perceptions in order to go beyond it.

One way of reading Bloom’s appreciation, especially in the context of these money-making schemes, is as a sign of impotence. He can only admire a trick, not perform it. In “Calypso’s” money-making series, success is always attributed to someone else in Bloom’s thoughts. Major Tweedy made that “corner in stamps” and it was, according to Bloom, “farseeing”[76]; it’s the “Adam Findlaters” and “Dan Tallons”[77] who manage to make enough money from small businesses to gain social standing in the community; and finally, at the end of this episode, Bloom reads a story in the paper which he calls “smart”; it ends with a conventional device, “something quick and neat.”[78] Because this story has managed to be published, the writer receiving “payment of three pounds, thirteen and six”, he “envied kindly Mr. Beaufoy who had written it.”[79] Thus we end this series with an explicit link

between Bloom's critical faculty and the theme of dispossession: the trick has already been done—someone beat him to it. Following this phallic reading, Bloom's admiration for other men's schemes is oddly (and comically) misplaced. His critical faculty of appreciation can only express itself through what we can call a "low comic" mode or those "quick and neat" tricks that are associated, historically, with the lower middle class. But given Joyce's presentation, Bloom's position is to reflect other men's strategic moves, appreciatively, in his thoughts. Therefore Bloom's cuckoldry is mirrored in this episode by this other form of dispossession: he understands and appreciates, but he doesn't act for his own gain. That this is not stupidity is what Joyce attempts to demonstrate in later episodes.

After Bloom reads this published story, he attempts to construct one himself: "Might manage a sketch. By Mr and Mrs L. M. Bloom. Invent a story for some proverb. Which?"[80] Here we witness a compositional process in its early, uncertain stages. Bloom's story begins with the dense details of his memories during a night when Molly was dancing with Boylan; but the story doesn't find any organizing proverb. Following this attempt at composition, there is a well-known scene in *Ulysses* when Bloom defecates, and we watch him tearing off a piece of Mr. Beaufoy's "prize story" and wiping himself off with it.

The richness of this chapter's ending revolves around the following ambiguity: we have to ask whose storytelling Joyce exposes to judgment, Bloom's or Mr. Beaufoy's? Seemingly, it is Mr. Beaufoy's. The only complication to this answer is that Bloom himself identifies with Mr. Beaufoy, who is a paid writer, which Bloom envies. So Mr. Beaufoy functions as vehicle for Bloom's envy. Yet his envy is not unmixed, as we can see from the ambiguous phrase—"he envied kindly Mr. Beaufoy." Who is being kind? The placement of the adverb suggests that Bloom is attributing kindness to Mr. Beaufoy (who returns in a hallucination in the "Circe" episode and is far from kind). The ambiguous question of whose

kindness we are dealing with is typical of Joyce's strategy in attributing to Bloom the quality of sympathetic identification that makes it difficult to tell who is being referred to.

The unusual connection between the two men also suggests the uneasy relationship between literary culture and popular writing. And Bloom's contradictory emotions make him a good mediating figure. Mr. Beaufoy's writing is low quality magazine fluff, but he does manage to get paid; and Bloom's compositional effort is a genuine attempt at expression—it is the process and not the product that Joyce is emphasizing in his case. Although Bloom fails to compose a coherent story, through this dramatized process analysis, Joyce frankly shows us the desire of someone who yearns to write, in response to another man's success with writing. As Henry Staten has pointed out, such moments in *Ulysses* give us "a witty and profound allegory of literature touching reality."[81]

In the end, it is clear that Joyce does not diminish Bloom. The derisory reading that could have been attached to his failed attempt at composing a story is given over to Mr. Beaufoy; the joke is on the latter. But we have to take into account how Bloom incorporates this man into his own fantasy. It would be nice to get paid for writing too. That is why Bloom is also "kind" in his envy. And if this is Bloom's wish, Joyce certainly presents it as a reasonable one. As Samuel Johnson famously remarked, "No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money."[82]

In "Ithaca" Bloom is also stimulated by financial rewards, only in the context of science, a topic that I will take up in the next section. But in "Calypso's" ending, we have to see Stephen's artistic *bildung* narrative in the background; Joyce, like James, counts the cost of a seemingly selfless endeavor, such as producing a work of art. We could ask: what is the measure of Stephen's self-interest? But Joyce inserts Bloom into the picture in order to ask this question, because Bloom obviously sees the limit point more clearly than Stephen. In

"Ithaca," which brings Bloom and Stephen together, the question of the cost involved in an original effort of thought comes up again; Bloom tries to warn Stephen that "originality, though producing its own reward, does not invariably conduce to success."[83] So if literature touches life, Joyce is telling us that we should not deride Bloom for thinking that it is important to be able to make a living, that is, to know the limits of your own self-interest. Bloom only evokes *fabliau* cleverness, and helps us mediate the tendency towards self-sacrifice that we see in the highest human thought endeavors (such as art and science) and the "low comic" ethic initially proposed by the *fabliau* and other tales of trickery.

Overloaded Thinking in "Calypso" and "Ithaca"

In "Ithaca" Joyce raises the stakes of a derisory reading of Bloom's intelligence, from another point of view—specialized scientific knowledge. This chapter also exaggerates what "Calypso" had only implied: Bloom's hodge-podge approach to learning. "Ithaca" emphasizes Bloom's knowledge as its primary theme and ostensibly, is set up to dissect it. For example, the various intellectual forays that we have witnessed him make during the day are subjected to our scrutiny by the list of books "Ithaca" provides; we are invited to inspect Bloom's sources and perhaps to judge the man by the books he reads. But especially at the level of style, readers are asked to submit to a science-based discourse in which many terms need to be verified in order to even begin the reading process. Once verified, we will find that Bloom is off the mark on many things. Leo Bersani has dubbed such revelations of faulty information in *Ulysses* as an invitation to a "paranoid" reading, an indication that the reader should be rather nervous about approaching the book innocently.[84]

Since Bloom is the most direct target of this paranoid reading, what happens when we apply it to him, especially in light of his relationship to the discourse of science? It can give

the embarrassing impression that he is out of his league. We can gauge this reading by Stephen's response to him. When Bloom presents Stephen with his lecture on water in this episode, Stephen's ironic reply—clearly a nod to Bloom—is that he "dislike[s] aquacities of thought."[85] Critics have picked up on these cues and in a recent book, Allen Thiher, analyzing Bloom as an Everyman character, describes his relationship to science in a similarly disparaging way: "[scientific laws are] bouncing around in consciousness as it were, but often offering little more than filler for consciousness, or, at best, a disparate source of aesthetic meditation."[86]

Joyce had already alluded to Bloom's limited scholastic competence in "Calypso." One example in particular serves as a good illustration. When he tries figure out how a scheme to make extra money in Dublin's pub scene might work, he is blocked by the details:

> On the wholesale orders perhaps. . . . How much would that tot to off the porter in the month? Say ten barrels of stuff. Say he got ten per cent off. O more. Fifteen. . . . Fifteen multiplied by. The figures whitened in his mind, unsolved: displeased, he let them fade.[87]

We are faced here with a frank depiction of a complex calculation. I will lay out the arguments "for" and "against" Bloom: We can hardly fault Bloom for his muddle; he is in the middle of the street, which is not a good place for solving a complex math problem. If we follow through with this train of thought then we can also put a positive spin on the fact that his desire wanes when the details become too complex. This is a subtle but important indication of Bloom's character. He doesn't dwell on his failure to complete the task; it is simply one among many thought processes that go through his mind.

The negatives: readers can interpret Bloom's decision to let the solution to the problem go as complacency or even as a lack of intelligence. If we define intelligence by the measurement of scholastic competence, in other words, by some virtuoso performance of a

complex calculation, Bloom of course comes up short. But complacency is probably the more plausible of the two connotations. It is suggested by the movement from the word "unsolved" to the words "he let them fade." The latter words imply that Bloom takes the route of least resistance. We can add to this suggestion of complacency, how, in the lines that follow, hunger takes over; Bloom's thoughts wander away from the math problem to the butcher shop's "shiny links, packed with forcemeat."[88] There are other, more enticing, activities to distract Bloom from the solution to this problem. But this reading can be undermined by the word "displeased," which doesn't suggest complacency at all, but mild frustration.

Bloom's complacence, like his passivity, is rather ambiguous. Joyce tracks the subtleties of his thought process, which is enmeshed in the concrete details of an everyday situation (perhaps not conducive to concentrated thought) to show us how the mind works in fragmented ways. This is not necessarily stupid, but merely shows that he is responsive to a variety of circumstances, such as hunger, his milieu, frustration etc. Dramatizing such recognitions is important because it brings about the decentralizing of thought processes from Enlightenment models that stressed concentration and the sense that solutions to problems have a clear narrative logic. As Joyce portrays Bloom's thought process, we become more aware that thinking is affected by a variety of factors. We know that Joyce's process of composition, although it was fairly methodical, could also tend towards the most random associations, scrawled at disparate moments. Much of it depended on writing things down when he was in public places, on "envelopes, shirt cuffs, pocket pads, menus, small notebooks—anything available for receiving the rapid scrawl of his pencil, any place, any time."[89] Peter Francis Mackey argues that this process expressed Joyce's understanding of trivial and chance events, which make up the subjective realm of the average person.[90]

Bloom's choice to let the solution go can be seen as either a prudent or a dismissive approach to a complex problem. The cuckold has historically been associated with complaisance, and commenting on Joyce's interest in using the cuckold, Michael Mason argues that Joyce was attracted to the ambiguity of complaisance as an affect.[91] The psychological gains of looking at complaisance in a positive way is something that Joyce will dramatize more clearly in "Ithaca." But even in this first episode, we see that Bloom's latent sense of judgment typically operates, "in accordance with the law of the conservation of energy."[92] Complacence in this case is a version of the Freudian pleasure-principle, a lowering of tension, and this is far from stupid. Joyce's non-phallic version of intelligence stresses the circumstances surrounding thinking processes: mental strain in "Calypso" or, in "Ithaca," paradoxes that requiring years of specialized training to understand.

Bloom's efforts at calculation return in "Ithaca" where the theme of "mental gymnastics" is taken up again. This late chapter reveals facts that shift the reader's (possible) interpretation of Bloom as a complacent thinker. With Stephen as his audience, Bloom meditates on immensely large and infinite phenomena such as the distances of stars from the earth, a number so long that writing it out would take up "33 closely printed volumes of 1000 pages each," and the "infinitesimal brevity" of human life in the "eons" of passing time.[93] In the context of these meditations, we come upon a telling question: "Why did he not elaborate these calculations to a more precise result?"[94] We learn here, and in "Circe," that Bloom had once busied himself with the ambitious task of the squaring the circle,[95] which offered a monetary reward. In "Ithaca" we receive the full story about his battle with this geometrical conundrum: it ended when he heard about another, equally unsolvable problem, the longest known number whose "complete tale" baffled human computation.[96] This new information indicates that Bloom's complacence does not signify a lack of initiative. The pattern Joyce

presents us with, in Bloom's attempts to solve various mathematical puzzles, is an increase in tension, followed by a flagging energy.

This is a case in which intellectual bravado is remedied by the specter of mental exhaustion. The one man who can square the circle is a phallic metaphor, the intellectual equivalent of the father of the primal horde or alpha male who, Freud argued, was the mythical representative of an ideal (and impossible) masculinity. Bloom, like other men, was teased by the promise that mental activity can lead to the solutions of difficult problems and to monetary rewards. Joyce comically presents him to us as one among many who thought they could, with "fresh-eyed determination,"[97] find a solution to a problem that had stumped professional mathematicians. But in "Ithaca" this idea that we can be rewarded for our mental efforts is juxtaposed with an equally important mental trap—exhaustion. The experience of exhaustion in "Ithaca" is presented to us as an inevitable and sobering fact of mental life. So, no, Bloom will never find the solution of how to square a circle because pi is an irrational number.

The references to science in "Ithaca" are various and many books have already been written about Joyce's use of science.[98] But my focus here is on pointing out that one of the effects of the scientific references in this episode is not that of edification but of mental overload. Although readers can certainly look up many of the references and therefore be stimulated to learn more, aesthetically, Joyce presents us with the theme of mental exhaustion. This is the Kantian idea that, in some cases, reason can do nothing more than try.[99] By reflecting the futility of this trying, Joyce is not evoking stupidity but simply one of the paradoxes of reason—that its boundaries are very often subjectively unclear. We don't know when to stop thinking; that is, we don't know when thinking becomes mere thinking and, in turn, becomes susceptible to bravado. So the fact that Bloom retreats from the

solution of one unsolvable problem (how to square a circle) when he hears about the possibility of another unsolvable problem (an extremely long number) is only a testament to his mature understanding that it is necessary to conserve one's mental resources. This is a Freudian interpretation of Kant, but it also fits with Joyce's presentation of Bloom's mental habits. To focus on the dangers of mere thinking is clearly to steer away from a heroic model of human cognition. This is what makes Bloom a modern comic hero in a post-Enlightenment world.

The Paradox of Infidelity

Joyce's *Exiles* (1915) explores the paradox of infidelity, and he claimed that Bloom was "of the same family" as the husband in this play.[100] The play dramatizes a husband's desire to give his wife sexual freedom, which is expressed in a "free love" experiment. The protagonist, Richard Rowan, orchestrates his wife's adultery with his friend Robert Hand. The experiment, however, ends ambiguously, with the other man leaving Ireland to escape the situation and Richard and his wife unsure about their feelings for each other.

The problem is that *Exiles* is an experiment with *controlled* infidelity, and Richard Rowan is caught in a phallic narrative even as he tries to break away from it. As Slavoj Žižek has pointed out, the Western idea of free choice is often only the illusion of choice; it is very difficult to escape from the modality of the terms to which one is bound.[101] James's protagonist recognizes the logic of compulsion that he has evoked in his "gift" of freedom, and is horrified by this return of possessiveness in a new and more insidious form. To orchestrate one's wife's infidelity, which is what Richard Rowan does in the play, is a highly conservative gesture—it should actually make the bond between husband and wife stronger.

Exiles illustrates this when Richard's wife comes back to him with assurances of her commitment.

Yet the play's ending suggests that Richard wants to break the terms of this circle. He tells his wife that he desires to know nothing of her affair and that his desire is now fueled by doubt. And doubt for him has an illuminating quality, while belief does not: "It is not in the darkness of belief that I desire you. But in restless living wounding doubt."[102] So the corollary to a narrative of compulsion is a narrative of doubt; and if he asked her to abdicate her freedom, he now desires to abdicate his knowledge. Thus Joyce's view is that the punishment for a jealous passion is not to know; because living in a state of uncertainty seems to be the only way to avoid coercion. This solution reflects a counter-phallic narrative in which the masculine ideal for possession does not present us with a dramatic form of closure, such as death. The husband's conflict in *Exiles* ends with a flagging of energy, because the paradox in which Richard Rowan is caught has tired him out: "And now I am tired for a while, Bertha. My wound tires me."[103]

Bloom's story, as Joyce himself indicated, has some significant parallels with Richard Rowan's. We see the workings of the same conflict; Bloom is also torn between allowing his wife freedom and asking for her compulsion. But *Ulysses* also takes this position a bit further. Richard Rowan's drama is almost entirely contained within a narrative of a false freedom. On what basis can this couple go on living together once everything is out in the open? We don't know because Richard Rowan's invocation of ignorance at the end of the play is still very abstract.

Bloom and Molly's story begins with this paradox, investigating how the plot of infidelity, which is dramatized as an impasse between the husband and the wife in *Exiles*, could possibly keep a marriage going. Readers encounter Bloom and Molly at a point in their

life where they are confronted with each other without the mediation of children. Their teenage daughter is away for the summer and is clearly growing up; they have had one tragic disappointment—a son who only lived eleven days after his birth. From facts that are finally revealed in "Ithaca," the couple has not had complete sexual intercourse since the birth (and death) of their son, and they have not had "complete mental intercourse"[104] since their daughter began menstruating a year before the novel begins. We can speculate that their mutual conversations dried up because their daughter's menstruation signaled the end of her childhood. Clearly their connection to each other has been centered on the common responsibilities of child-rearing and household management; the Blooms are a quintessential middle-aged married couple, a case of flagging desire. A passage in "Ithaca" corroborates Bloom's sense of the futility of their marriage:

> The parties concerned, uniting, had increased and multiplied, which being done, offspring produced and educed to maturity, the parties, if not disunited were obliged to reunite for increase and multiplication, which was absurd, to form by reunion the original couple of uniting parties, which was impossible.[105]

In "Ithaca" Bloom has a sequence of thoughts that follow up on this empty nest theme. His thoughts begin with the question: "What to do with our wives."[106] The list of answers begins, comically, with a trivial and mundane series of occupations: "Parlour games," various kinds of busywork, and side jobs such as "legal scrivenery or envelope addressing."[107] As it continues, however, Molly begins to play greater roles: "commercial activity as pleasingly commanding and pleasingly obeyed mistress proprietress in a cool dairy shop or warm cigar divan."[108] The entire series ends with Molly going to brothels "state inspected and medically controlled" and obtaining "liberal instruction."[109]

This list moves towards the familiar "Bloomian" connection between promiscuity and learning: to rejuvenate his marriage, Bloom imagines Molly both as an adulteress who goes

to male brothels and as embarking on a course of liberal education. And in this transitional phase of their relationship, he imagines a future in which he comes dangerously close to being eliminated from the narrative. Because in the list of activities he comes up with, Bloom reduces himself to nothing more than her chauffer, proffering, "superintendence,"[110] but participating neither in her sexual activities nor in her instruction; in this fantasy scenario, he is not directly her lover and he is not directly her teacher.

The pattern here is similar to the series of money-making schemes in "Calypso," where appreciation rather than possession is the motive for Bloom's reflections. So although he seems to be in control of this list, strategically placing himself in a position to account for Molly's movements as he plans out her future occupations, it is at the same time a tribute to her. This list contains a sequence of musical activities (a nod to Molly's singing career), and the fantasy of Molly as "pleasantly commanding and pleasingly obeyed" suggests that he would like to give up his control to her. The paradox here is that every attempt that Bloom makes to control Molly is at the same time a gesture that evokes his lack of control over her; and of the two impulses—control or lack of control—each item on this list suggests that he chooses to relinquish his control. This is not a narrative of false freedom (at least not for Molly). Bloom wants to build up Molly through various schemes that will place her in positions of greater autonomy. His motive is undoubtedly narcissistic, but it is a narcissism which flirts dangerously with loss because, unlike Bertha in *Exiles* (where it is left unclear if she really did sleep with the other man) Molly does commit adultery. She confirms his fantasy of loss rather than the impulse to control the possibility of loss: "serve him right its all his own fault if I am an adulteress."[111] Bloom's ambiguous fantasy is returned back to him and he is forced to confront the loss as his own perverse pleasure. This seems to be the hidden cost of Bloom's appreciation.

The Cost of Unconscious Knowledge

I have been arguing that Bloom consistently places himself in the paradoxical position of someone rooting for his wife from the sidelines, rarely getting direct satisfaction from her. Although we see that he gains some narcissistic satisfaction from building her up, this has the ironic effect of also giving Molly what she wants—sexual independence. But does Bloom want it? All we have to go on to answer this question is that he enables the continuation of their marriage through the "figure" of adultery. The only point of contention for him is who the other man will be—a womanizer like Boylan or an intellectual like Stephen. We have seen Bloom attempt to shift this figure from Boylan to Stephen during the course of his day.

The betrayed husband is within his rights, as Joyce himself puts it, to use social conventions and morals to remedy the situation.[112] And in "Ithaca" Bloom contemplates the various retributions that have historically been associated with his position: murder, dueling, divorce, public shaming of the woman and her lover etc.[113] He dismisses some of these solutions right away; and others, he retains in fantasy or for future contemplation (such as divorce and "moral influence"). And the relatively small significance of these contemplations is revealed only by his subsequent actions: kissing Molly's bottom and presenting Stephen in a way that would encourage her to think of pursuing an intellectual type of man. So Bloom chooses to keep his marriage going on the basis of cuckoldry, which is exactly the measure of what threatens his marriage. This implies a personal rather than a public accounting of gain and loss, pleasure and pain. Joan Copjec has argued that psychoanalysis tells us something about the very specific efficacy in which particular sexual arrangements are

worked out in private life.[114] Bloom's cuckoldry is such a personal domestic arrangement, and his trial in *Ulysses* takes its measure.

But Bloom also has the capacity to absorb other themes that are connected to cuckoldry. In connecting cuckoldry with the problem of self-knowledge, Joyce (like Flaubert) gives us a new inflection on a very old theme—the presentation of the Everyman is linked up with the question of what he knows. In *Ulysses* this theme revolves around the cost of knowledge and to understand it we have to reverse all of our assumptions about the gains that can be extracted from knowledge. Lacan, like Joyce, reverses the position of knowledge viewed from an instrumental point of view, knowledge as a means towards an end. In *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, he argues that we have to take a closer look at how knowledge is produced; it isn't produced self-consciously, but by something he calls "know-how" (*savoir-faire*).[115] Know-how is the product of a non-revealed unconscious. Lacan is working here with two kinds of knowledge and the distinction that he makes is important:

> I will begin by distinguishing . . . the two aspects of knowledge, the articulated aspect and this know-how that is so akin to animal knowledge, but which in the slave is not totally devoid of the apparatus that transforms it into one of the most articulated networks of language. The point is this, the second layer, the articulated apparatus, can be transmitted, which means that it can be transmitted from the slave's pocket to the master's—assuming they had pockets in those days.[116]

His interpretation of Hegel's master/slave dialectic is tied to his linguistic framework and the slave for him represents not necessarily a literal slave, but a non-revealed unconscious; this is someone who has placed him or herself in the position of serving a "master" through the narcissistic detour that I have been outlining, which means seeking one's limits through someone else's body (and paradoxically exceeding the limits of the self). Lacan argues that the origins of slavery cannot be explained by the myth that Hegel refers to—that the risk of death establishes who the master is and who the slave is.[117] His version of the dialectic

between the master and slave focuses on the problem of situating the body-ego, which is the slave's problem. The slave is someone "who only knows himself through having lost this body, this very body he supports himself with."[118] In arguing that "the slave's own field is knowledge" he is therefore pointing out that this knowledge is not only written out over the history of the slave's work, the products of work, but that the slave's body itself has lost its consistency in the process. The slave has become a "dumb" artifact that can only be read and interpreted by someone else. This means that the slave does not have intellectual ownership over the products of labor. These products have been offered to an obscure god for interpretation and whatever knack we see on the part of the slave is the product of experience over time but not of the "articulated" or symbolic layer that passes on experience. Thus in *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* Lacan elaborates upon a schema where the cost of unconscious knowledge, on the side of the slave (a non-revealed unconscious) can be represented as a factor or element in the equation. Much of what we do is unattributed, even by ourselves. That is, as history shows, "The proletarian is not simply exploited, he has been stripped of the function of his knowledge."[119]

Bloom's sexual position, in which he allows himself to be dispossessed of his body in his wife's bed, is only one part of this series in *Ulysses*, which explores the idea that much of what we do remains unsigned and unattributed. The other part is dramatized through Bloom's relationship with Stephen. The best example of this occurs in "Ithaca" when Bloom is engaged in the process of bringing Stephen out of his drunken, self-destructive revelry, hoping to offer him a place to stay and a safe haven for developing his ambitions to become a well-known, published writer. The narration moves in the direction of a possible exchange of stories between Stephen and Bloom and the possibility of recognition for Bloom; but Bloom doesn't take the opportunity. Instead we witness the following telling analysis: "He preferred

himself to see another's face and listen to another's words by which potential narration was realized and kinetic temperament relieved."[120] Kinetic is a term that Stephen had used disparagingly in *A Portrait* to describe "improper arts"; that is, the "kinetic poet" is someone who is urged towards or away from an object, from possession to abandonment.[121] The contrast here is with what is a properly aesthetic emotion, which is above "desire and loathing."[122] James Maddox suggests that the word kinetic takes on a more positive meaning in "Ithaca"; it does not necessarily mean a discharge of energy leading to loss or abandonment, but a sense of active fulfillment, of development: "the artistic passage from potential poet to kinetic poet is the human passage from self-enclosure to love."[123] I would suggest that we need to retain both senses of the term here; however, the cost to Bloom, the loss, is that he can only realize himself through "another's face" and "another's words." He has the know-how but not the discursive power to turn his knowledge into something for his own gain (and his own name), that is, something that can be transmitted from labor to production. Bloom does need someone else through which he can tell his own story, but this displacement, in Joyce's world, is not shameful or stupid because it shows an awareness of other people.

Creation and Instrumental Intelligence

I would like to end by comparing Bloom to Richard Rowan in *Exiles* and to propose some reasons why he is a more successful creation than the protagonist of Joyce's play (Gabriel Conroy can also be added to this list of Joyce's betrayed husbands). What is striking about Bloom, in comparison to characters like Richard Rowan and Gabriel Conroy, is that Joyce did not make him into another professional intellectual, either tied to a university discourse or an aesthetic vocation. To make Bloom somewhat confused and misinformed, to

make him a non-specialist, is a strategic move that enables Joyce to loosen up a definition of intelligence that would depend upon a limited mastery within a bounded field. Thus he is critiquing a certain kind of instrumentality when it comes to the products of the mind.

The cost of such an approach to intelligence is the risk of unclear or blurry boundaries, and Bloom is presented to us in light of this cost. This also means that what looks like an inability to use his mind in instrumental ways, which has been stigmatized as stupidity, has really been confused with another sort of problem: to make oneself a name, to seek recognition, is this the same thing as brute possession? Lacan's analysis of the slave's non-revealed unconscious suggests that these are not the same; and Bloom's story suggests the difficulty of disentangling the notion of an instrumental intelligence that seeks to possess an object from the problem of recognition. We have to ask whether the need for recognition is about possession. Joyce starts from the point of view that it is very difficult to take possession of oneself and especially of one's own work in the world; Lacan suggests that it may perhaps be easier to offer it up to someone else. As he points out, one ethical choice that is often overlooked is whether or not to satisfy the desire of a tyrant.[124] But in Joyce's conception of Bloom, which is comic, the danger is not his displaced wish for tyranny but his loss of identity, something which he ultimately has to find bearable if he is to continue his marriage. And the narratological question he poses for storytelling is: can a character who is destined to be someone's "helper," to develop someone else's narrative and not his own, be sustained as a protagonist? Since the term protagonist includes the idea of conscious action, it doesn't quite fit Joyce's characterization of Bloom. Joyce's *Ulysses* suggests that we need a new term, one that must validate another quality—receptivity.

As a last point, I would like to suggest that Bloom himself has trouble distinguishing his need to be recognized by Molly from a brute demand. "Penelope," the last chapter of

Ulysses, which is Molly's monologue, begins with a telling piece of information: "Yes because he never did a thing like that before as ask to get his breakfast in bed."[125] Why don't we hear this demand directly? Joyce leaves it out of earshot because of Bloom's ethical dilemma: Can he wish the best for Molly, wish for her good, without unconsciously coercing her with his own standards? What is the measure of his self-interest in wishing for her good? Bloom is a successful creation because he sensitively experiences this conflict. In his notes on *Exiles* Joyce remarks rather obliquely that to displace the "fancyman" with the cuckold is an outgrowth of realism, a "collective practical realism due to changed economic conditions in the mass of people who are called upon to hear and feel a work of art relating to their lives."[126] I interpret these words to mean, for Bloom especially, that the cuckold is a man who labors to tread this very fine line of masculinity in a modern world where phallic heroism no longer expresses the average man's relationship to his wife or to the products of his thought and work. Yet Bloom expresses a willingness to risk such uncertainty and anxiety about one's place in the world, because that willingness can keep relations alive.

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[1] Flaubert 38; part 1, ch. 7.

[2] In "The Decomposing Form of Joyce's *Ulysses*" Henry Staten picks up on this connection between infidelity and the Western philosophical tradition. See *PMLA* 112.3 (1997): 380-392.

[3] Notes by the Author, *Exiles*, (New York: Panther Books, 1979) 149.

[4] "Why is Leopold Bloom a Cuckold," *ELH* 44.1 (1977) 171.

[5] "Why is Leopold Bloom a Cuckold" 176.

[6] "Why is Leopold Bloom a Cuckold" 172, 174.

[7] Notes by the Author 149.

[8] Notes by the Author 147.

[9] Notes by the Author 147.

[10] Notes by the Author 147-148.

[11] For an early argument along these lines see Richard M. Kain's *Fabulous Voyager: A Study of James Joyce's* Ulysses (New York: Viking, 1959). For a later version of this argument, see Stanley Sultan's *Eliot, Joyce and Company* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987).

[12] "Why is Leopold Bloom a Cuckold" 185.

[13] "Why is Leopold Bloom a Cuckold" 183.

[14] "Why is Leopold Bloom a Cuckold" 184.

[15] Mason explains: "objections to Joyce's using cuckoldry in the way he [Joyce] does cannot be refuted. The only answer to be made to them is that they are inappropriate, or irrelevant . . . This answer may sound unsatisfactory, but its grounds are not some arbitrary dogma of literary aesthetics—rather Joyce's own habits of mind in relating moral principles to the concrete details of behaviour" (184).

[16] "Why is Leopold Bloom a Cuckold" 187.

[17] "Why is Leopold Bloom a Cuckold" 185.

[18] "Why is Leopold Bloom a Cuckold" 181.

[19] "Why is Leopold Bloom a Cuckold" 182.

[20] Cuckoldry appears in *Sentimental Education* when the protagonist, Frédéric, falls in love with a married woman. This woman's husband, however, doesn't have the features of the traditional cuckold; he is worldly (he uses his wife to get money from Frédéric); also the novel takes place mainly in Paris, and stories of cuckoldry are usually associated with a provincial setting.

[21] Philip Herring addresses this topic in *Joyce's Uncertainty Principle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987): "The story of Stephen is the story of the artist's growth, but the harder he struggles to fulfill his vocation the more resistance he meets, the goal being continually beyond his reach . . . he is little celebrated in Joyce's final work [*Finnegans Wake*]. Stephen's struggle for mastery was no longer the author's subject" (159-160).

[22] 37; ch. 3, lines 295-296.

[23] In his analysis of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Erich Auerbach makes this very assumption about the difference between narrator and character: "Here it is not Emma who speaks, but the writer . . . Emma sees and feels, but she would not be able to sum it all up in this way . . . she has neither the intelligence nor the cold candor of self-accounting necessary for such a formulation . . . Flaubert does nothing but bestow the power of mature expression upon the material which she affords, in its complete subjectivity. If Emma could do this herself, she would have outgrown herself and thereby saved herself" (*Mimesis* 484).

[24] "The Decomposing Form of Joyce's *Ulysses*" 381.

[25] "The Decomposing Form of Joyce's *Ulysses*" 381.

[26] "The Decomposing Form of Joyce's *Ulysses*" 381.

[27] 339; lines 1115-1116.

[28] 339; lines 1119-1121.

[29] 565; ch. 17, line 780.

[30] I am indebted to Shelly Brivic for this interpretation of Stephen's song in "Ithaca"; he presented this interpretation in a paper, "Ithaca: The Questions in the Answers," given at the North American Joyce Conference (June 2009).

[31] 23; ch. 2, lines 143-144.

[32] *The Deceived Husband* 51.

[33] *Poetics*, 229; ch. 4, par. 35. I am using a Modern Library edition of *The Rhetoric and the Poetics of Aristotle*, tran. Rhys Roberts and Ingram Bywater (New York: Modern Library, 1954).

[34] Torrance, Robert M., *The Comic Hero* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978) 2.

[35] "Flawed Crystals: James's *The Golden Bowl* and Literature as Moral Philosophy," *New Literary History* 15.1 (1983): 38.

[36] Kant elaborated on this idea of antinomies in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. For a good discussion of Kantian antinomies, see Joan Copjec's "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason," *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994) 201-236.

[37] 45; lines 4-5.
[38] 45; lines 6-8.

[39] 49; lines 176-177.

[40] 611; ch. 18, line 168.

[41] In praising Bloom for having more "spunk" (semen) Molly may not realize the other side of this equation; this also means that Boylan has probably slept with more than one woman recently (thus producing less semen) and that, as she praises Bloom, she lowers her own value as a sexual partner for Boylan.

[42] Notes by the Author 147. For this interpretation, I am indebted to Shelly Brivic's analysis of the material in Joyce's notes.

[43] 64; line 268.

[44] 592; ch. 17, line 1770.

[45] *The Deceived Husband* 16.

[46] 52; line 343.

[47] Alison Sinclair makes this link in her book on the deceived husband: "the man beaten and dominated by his wife (who is presumably capable of deceiving him)" (*The Deceived Husband* 59). *Fabliau* tales clearly present a man who is mocked by his wife both verbally and sexually.

[48] Hugh Kenner has written about this narrative skip in "Calypso" but he does not allude to Molly's second question. See "The Hidden Hero," *Ulysses* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987) 43-54.

[49] 620; ch. 18, lines 562-565.

[50] 126; lines 114-115.

[51] 126; line 116.

[52] 562; line 674.

[53] 562; lines 685-687.

[54] My reading here is informed by Shelly Brivic's analysis of Bloom's shame in *Ulysses* as a function of his social class. See "*Ulysses'* 'Circe': Dealing in Shame," *Joyce Through Lacan and Žižek* (New York: Palgrave, 2008) 143-160.

[55] Molly picks up on this class distinction in her references to Stephen and to Boylan in her monologue: "itll be a change [with Stephen] the Lord knows to have an intelligent person to talk to . . . has he [Boylan] no manners nor no refinement nor no nothing in his nature slapping us behind like that on my bottom because I didn't call him Hugh the ignoramus that doesn't know poetry from a cabbage . . . pulling off his shoes and trousers there on the chair before me so barefaced without even asking permission and standing out that vulgar way . . . you might as well be in bed with what with a Lion" (638; lines 1341-1342, 1368-1378).

[56] 563; line 704.

[57] 562; lines 688-689.

[58] 562; lines 690-692.

[59] 569-570; ch. 17, lines 910, 925-928.

[60] *Transference 1960-1961*, trans. Cormac Gallagher (from unedited French manuscripts), session 31.5.1961, 10. The latter seminar is not an official translation, but it is the only one that is currently available.

[61] *Transference*, session 6.14.1961, 2.

[62] "On Narcissism: An Introduction," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. XIV (London: Vintage, 2001) 73-102.

[63] "The Hidden Hero," *Ulysses* 43-44.

[64] In the 1950s, Erich Auerbach writes: "James Joyce's tremendous novel . . . has for its frame the externally insignificant course of a day in the lives of a schoolteacher and an advertising broker" (*Mimesis* 547).

[65] David Trotter, "The Modernist Novel," *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (Cambridge UP, 1999) 70-99.

[66] Quoted in *The Ezra Pound Encyclopedia*, eds. Demetres P. Tryphonopoulous and Stephen J. Adams (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005) 169.

[67] "The Hidden Hero," *Ulysses* 45.

[68] *The Way of the World: The Bildingsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 2000)190.

[69] For a summary analysis of Bloom's success as a character, especially with critics in the 1990s, see Leo Bersani's *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

[70] "Against *Ulysses*," *The Culture of Redemption* 157.

[71] *The Comic Hero* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978) 243.

[72] *Joyce, Chaos, and Complexity* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997) 9.

[73] 46; lines 66-67.

[74] 48; lines 130-134.

[75] 49; lines 191-192.

[76] 46; line 65.

[77] 48; line 128.

[78] 56; lines 511-512.

[79] 56; lines 516-517.

[80] 56; lines 518-519.

[81] "The Decomposing Form of Joyce's *Ulysses*" 380.

[82] This quote is from James Boswell's biography, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*. It can also be found on the following site: Jack Lynch, *Samuel Johnson*, Rutgers University, 26 July 2005.

[83] 560; ch. 17, lines 606-607.

[84] "Against *Ulysses*" *The Culture of Redemption* 155-178.

[85] 550; line 240.

[86] *Fiction Refracts Science: Modernist Writers from Proust to Borges* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005) 181.

[87] 48; ch. 4, lines 133-142.

[88] 48 ch. 4, lines 142-143.

[89] Quoted in Peter Francis Mackey's, *Chaos Theory and James Joyce's Everyman* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999) 62.

[90] Mackey 63-66.

[91] "Why is Leopold Bloom a Cuckold?" 175.

[92] 567; ch. 17, line 842.

[93] 573; lines 1075, 1054-1055.

[94] 574; line 1070.

[95] For a discussion of the history of this problem see Appendix 3 in Hugh Kenner's *Ulysses*.

[96] 574; line 1077.

[97] Kenner 166.

[98] There have been two books on Joyce and chaos theory: Thomas Jackson Rice, *Joyce, Chaos, Complexity* (1997); Peter Francis Mackey, *Chaos Theory and Joyce's Everyman* (1999). See also Alan Thither, *Fiction Refracts Science: Modernist Writers from Proust to Borges* (2005); Philip Herring, *Joyce's Uncertainty Principle* (1987).

[99] See the translator's introduction Kant's *Critique of Judgment* by Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987) xxiii-cix.

[100] Quoted in Mason 176.

[101] *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006) 331-332.

[102] Notes by the Author 145.

[103] *Exiles* 144.

[104] 605; line 2285.

[105] 597; lines 1963-1967.
[106] 561; line 659.

[107] 561; lines 660-665.

[108] 561-562; lines 666-668.

[109] 562; lines 668-673.

[110] 562 line 670.

[111] 641; ch. 18, line 1516.

[112] "Notes by the Author," *Exiles* 147.

[113] 603; lines 2200-2209.

[114] Quoted in Shepherson 89.

[115] This seminar was given from 1969-1970; ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 2007).

[116] *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* 22.

[117] *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* 29.

[118] *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* 89.

[119] *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* 149.

[120] 561; lines 638-639.

[121] See *Ulysses Annotated* 571.

[122] *Ulysses Annotated* 571.

[123] *Joyce's Ulysses and the Assault Upon Character* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1978) 191.

[124] *Identification*, trans. Cormac Gallagher, session 3.3.1962, 11.

[125] 608; lines 1-2.

[126] Notes by the Author 149.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: THE NARRATOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CUCKOLDRY

The most obvious theme associated with cuckoldry is the problem of masculine sexual identity. The cuckold is a non-phallic man, a sexual failure. In medieval literature, he was a man who had either entered into an age-inappropriate marriage or was oblivious to his wife's sexual needs. He had therefore forfeited his right to manhood. Medieval works portray him not only as a sexual failure, but as a man lacking in instrumental intelligence. In the medieval *fabliau*, the cuckold is most often portrayed as deluded and happy.[1] The classic tale, *La Bourgoise d'Orliens*, tells of a cuckold who suspects his wife of having a lover and tests her by disguising himself as the lover. The joke is that the wife outwits him; after she has her disguised husband beaten by the servants and thrown out of the house, he returns home thoroughly convinced of her fidelity.[2] The cuckold is therefore the butt not only of a sexual joke, but of a play on wit in which he is consistently the dummy.

These two themes—sexual betrayal and stupidity—are persistently knotted together in this character's representation in Western narratives. This second component of his portrayal, his destiny to be the fool, deserves further investigation because modern works that subjectivize the cuckold reinterpret its significance. In the modern novel, when the cuckold becomes a focalizer/reflecting character (a subjectivity), his susceptibility to deception, his gullibility and alleged stupidity, becomes a subject of inquiry. This move towards portraying the cuckold as a subjectivity also has narratological implications. The novelists who use this character are concerned with the theme of masculine agency, and when they flesh him out

into a character portrait they put him at the center of a narratological dilemma: the basic problem of how a narrative is initiated.

The commonplace about narrative is that where there is conflict, there is narrative movement (this is why transgressive characters are productive for narrative). But the cuckold is no transgressor; he only helps the adultery plot by his blindness. He therefore doesn't initiate a narrative, but only facilitates it; and the fact that he happens to be dumb-witted is a very useful plot convention in the *fabliau* tales because it becomes easy for his wife to replace him with another sexual partner. Thus the "adventure" of infidelity begins. This was a comical and thoroughly conventionalized adventure; it didn't take the characters very far from home and also didn't develop much complexity until the nineteenth century novel of adultery.

The adultery plot obviously needs the cuckold's ignorance. He can be classed under the category of what Mieke Bal calls a "helper" in this plot.[3] Following Bal's narrative topoi, we can distinguish the classic cuckold as a character that helps the adultery plot incidentally (he is not self-aware and doesn't do this consciously) and is a numerous and replaceable character rather than a synthetic or complex one.[4] Thus his ignorance and credulity are not only psychological categories but also structural ones. He is part of the conventional repertoire of elements in these tales, whose practical view of the world highlights the fact that fools can always be found (regardless of why this is so). The result is that he is not a fully developed literary character but merely what Bal calls a functional "actor."[5] Bal distinguishes between the specific and the abstract representation of the human image in literature: "a character resembles a human being and an actor need not necessarily do so. . . . an actor in a fabula is a structural position, while a character is a complex semantic unit."[6] And from this

structural/narratological point of view, the cuckold doesn't fulfill the minimum criteria for a character because his desire isn't strong enough to initiate an action. Yet if the cuckold is subjectivized, his value would have to be calculated from the indirect perspective of the unconscious helper who plays a supporting role in the action without fully knowing it. This kind of "character" is favored, as a reflector, by Flaubert, James, and Joyce.

Thus when these novelists took up his portrayal and subjectivized him, they no longer placed the man who initiated the action in the infidelity plot at the center of their narratives. Instead, they began to foreground the man who found himself in the refracted position, who caught the action at its reflected moment. For example, at the end of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Charles Bovary, instead of succumbing to jealousy over his wife's infidelity (and seeking revenge), "looked at the face that she had loved [and] felt as if he was seeing something of her."[7] He catches his wife's desire through the action of the other man and this is his function, a reflecting function. In Flaubert and James's novels, this reflected action is not represented as a conscious action; but in Joyce's *Ulysses*, it is more explicit and on the surface (as Bloom's desire). As we get closer to the twentieth century, there is a movement towards what could be labeled a perversion: this character exhibits a greater awareness that he seeks a sexual substitute and a mediated, even voyeuristic relationship with others. But I am arguing that the cuckold also becomes a compositional resource for these novelists precisely because he plays a supporting role in the narrative. He becomes a vehicle for reflected action. For this to become a possibility, the historical connection between gender, betrayal and stupidity had to be unraveled.

Gender and Reflected Action

It can be argued that to treat the cuckold subjectively is to produce a theme of rather limited interest, and psychoanalytic criticism that diagnoses characters (such as the cuckold) would only seem to emphasize the narrowness of the enterprise. To diagnose is to reduce. But my project is staked on the premise that the reinterpretation of this figure by modern writers has a much larger significance; we can connect this character to the basic problem of narrative development (how a narrative is initiated) and also to what I see as the major theme of modernism: a critique of the Enlightenment's conception of transparent knowledge. I see the presentation of this character moving in a productive direction, expanding rather than contracting our understanding of the possibilities of reflected action. Flaubert, James and Joyce found their artistic method in the reflection of an action rather than a direct representation of it. And they made use of various other characters that critics are more familiar with (children, artists, servants, women) in an attempt to develop this theme. We can class the cuckold among these characters. However, insofar as these other characters do not directly reflect the problem of masculine identity in both its sexual and cognitive aspects, this list of reflectors remains incomplete. The technique of reflected action was developed by male novelists, and if we miss the fact that it reflects masculine anxieties about both sexuality and knowledge, we also miss an important context in the development of this technique in the history of the novel.

Perhaps critics have paid little attention to the cuckold in this time period because reflected action that depends on a character's ignorance has often been dramatized, much more agreeably, through children. Gérard Genette and Mieke Bal, in their narratological studies (introducing the concept of focalization) have used the example of Henry James's

What Maisie Knew, the story of young girl caught between her parents' sexual intrigues.[8] When it comes to children as figural characters, readers are generally more likely to forgive their ignorance and to go along with their restriction of knowledge. But the cuckold, as Alison Sinclair has observed, has a long history of being treated without compassion: "Cuckolds . . . are censured because their behaviour . . . does not earn them minimum respect. Husbands who fall below the mark of respectable, sensible, vital men are treated without compassion for the results of folly or stupidity, or simply for their lack of physical resources."[9] Thus although it seems realistic and natural, true to general experience, that readers can accept a child as a focalizer and suspend judgment, to put an adult male in this place (especially for the time period that I am investigating) is rather unsettling.

Yet when Flaubert, James and Joyce were faced with having to portray adult male characters in this mode of reflection, characters that do not have the special vocation of the artist, they portrayed cuckolds. The artist is sheltered from the harshest reproaches when it comes to representing oneself as other than oneself; stories are told about others, and the storyteller's world can be peopled with invented characters. It is taken for granted that such invention is a part of storytelling. Yet the artist is parallel to the cuckold in that he doesn't act in the world—he substitutes other images for his own. Flaubert, James, and Joyce chose the cuckold because, for them, he represents the other side of the male artist. Joyce made Bloom the cuckold the center of his great novel, and not Stephen the artist; I see this choice as a culmination and synthesis of James's and Flaubert's portrayals of masculinity.

Telling a story through a drifting consciousness, rather than a sharply organized one, marks the shift between the nineteenth century and the modern tradition in the novel. This shift has generally been perceived in the technique of free indirect discourse, which begins

with the realist novel and which makes the author's voice disappear (or least reduces the author's appearances). This technique began to unraveling the traditional principles of storytelling, and the first two generations of modern critics had serious questions about such narratives and their authors' understanding of their audiences. For example, Wayne Booth's classic book, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, is firmly rooted in a rhetorical mode that addresses the question: what effect is the author striving for and how can it best be achieved? And for him, James often gives the impression that he doesn't know what he wants to express because he has drowned himself in life's complexity: "We are lost in wonder at the complexity of life—and this is part of what James undoubtedly intends. But it is at the same time clear that a story can hold together only if such perplexities are kept within certain boundaries—wide as those boundaries may be. Our very recognition of complexity depends upon the clarity of our vision of the elements which go to make it up."[10] My argument is that the position of being "lost in wonder at the complexity of life" was either considered a feminine position or, if attributed to a male, a characteristic of the cuckold as a type of passive male. And Flaubert, James and Joyce, even as they engage in the project of disentangling themselves from this instrumental view of knowledge, also deal with these psycho-sexual implications.

Narrative Risks

Earlier critics were more judgmental about the risks that writers such as Flaubert took in dramatizing the theme of reflected action, and it is instructive to attend to their criticisms. Although Percy Lubbock calls *Madame Bovary* a "beautifully finished piece of work," he insists that "It is not a fertile subject—it is not."[11] Post-structuralist critics have tended to find value in Flaubert's subversion and critique of the meaning-making process.[12] However, this

theme has not been explicitly connected to the basic problem of narrative agency and how a narrative is initiated. Earlier critics, who tended to be more skeptical of Flaubert's subject matter (though impressed by his technique), may have been closer to this problem of narrative agency than subsequent generations of Flaubertians. When Lubbock asserts that *Madame Bovary* is not a "fertile subject," he also elaborates on a fundamental narrative principle, that readers respond to characters that actively struggle to find a shape to their existence. He reads the novel as a technical triumph for the power of its storytelling, because Flaubert tried to give narrative form to a difficult subject.[13] But the experience it attempts to express is not a drama; we don't see a clash of forces that would clarify a life story, but a mere portrait of existence.[14] Thus he observes that Flaubert's novel presents us with a story that "does not strain and struggle for development, it only submits to it."[15] And before the concept of free indirect discourse was canonized by critics, they were concerned with the problem of how to justify the lack of narrative agency when reflecting characters are mainly used to tell a story.

Among post-structuralist critics, Leo Bersani perhaps articulates this effect in James most clearly: "An unmappable and fierce marginal force coerces and finally paralyzes a highly conscious, highly civilized 'central' text . . . the result [is] that the novel is itself made nearly unworkable."[16] Bersani uses James's *The Golden Bowl* as an example of this paralytic effect; he argues that the Ververs' strategy to get their spouses to return to them should make "the novel's plot more lively"; yet it "essentially brings the novel to a halt."[17] Everything in *The Golden Bowl* moves towards the Verver's "winning" the battle of adultery; this is the comic plot which readers have to be prepared to accept (with sympathy on the side of the betrayed spouses). But for this to be interesting, Bersani argues, we must come to see the

Ververs as agents in the drama, and agency requires movement. Yet their strategy is to do nothing, to allow the adultery plot to develop. And their spouses, expecting some form of retribution if they are caught, are faced with a bewildering and unnerving mildness; but there is no genre that can express this form of retaliation *and* admiration. The father and daughter may win by this "slightly cretinous strategy" but they do not, according to Bersani, "make literature."[18] The one character that knows what she wants and knows how to get it, Charlotte Stant, does not come out well at the end of the novel. However, the Ververs appreciate her highly, and place themselves in the awkward position of being more her audience than her enemy. Their inaction, their decision to watch Charlotte's story unfold rather than to halt it, both delimits and develops her role. The Ververs greatly admire Charlotte Stant's ability to take a chance, to begin a plot; and their power of inaction effects a very strange reversal of literary values, suggesting that the critical appreciation of an action is just as interesting as its realization. For James, criticism is the highest form of voyeurism.

Yet James was well aware of the risks of such a literary enterprise. He was very worried about making an "ado" about many of his characters because they did not have significant power of action.[19] In his prefaces, he often complained that he is not the kind of storyteller that begins with a plot, but instead with "the sense of a single character . . . to which the usual elements of a 'subject' . . . were to need to be superadded."[20] The commonplace opposition between character-oriented fiction and plot-oriented fiction perhaps emerges with more theoretical clarity at this historical juncture, the moment James begins to try to justify "the stray figure, the unattached character,"[21] by which he means the character that doesn't know what he or she wants, that cannot access his or her desire directly. As we know from James's novels, such a character is usually subject to the adventure of adultery or

to some form of sexual betrayal. This is also a character that has the most trouble manipulating a narrative. James's novels always return to the narrative effects of sexual betrayal on characters that are only marginally connected with the sexual act. The effect of James's late novels is bound up with the paralysis of the central action.

The power of the Ververs' appreciation lies partly in the freedom of their wealth, which gives them time for the kind of stalled central action that James wants to dramatize; but it is characteristic of James, in this novel, to exploit the paradox of the "self-made man" and reflected action. Adam Verver's years of money-making are over when the novel begins and he is presented as someone who needs to "feign" aggression.[22] The terms in which masculinity was understood are still the old terms in James, even though they are highly subtilized. So although he is a retired businessman and no longer active in this "masculine" field, Verver still finds himself faced with a sexual dilemma which is very unwelcome and indeed a tortuous care for him: he has to prove his worth as a man to society (if only for his daughter's comfort) by finding himself a wife. And when the potential wives start getting in line once his daughter gets married, the pressure increases, producing the comical effect of having to fend them off. In fact, when we first meet him in *The Golden Bowl*, he is tortured over having to say "no" to woman who is chasing him around a billiard table. But finally, in relation to him, we can also see James grappling with intelligence in the old phallic terms of canniness vs. stupidity. Other characters in the novel argue frequently over whether or not Adam Verver is dim-witted or a super-subtle manipulator (without being able to figure it out).

Bloom: The Cuckold as an Epic Character

In *Madame Bovary* and in *The Golden Bowl*, the betrayed husband is not focalized enough to be considered the actual subject of each of these novels, at least not explicitly. In this sense, *Madame Bovary* is compositionally deceptive. Although the title indicates that the wife is the subject, her story is framed by her husband; it begins and ends with him, which suggests that he is important.[23] Yet the opposite effect has been his fate for readers and critics. Graham Falconer asks why Flaubert, having placed Charles Bovary in a position of importance, makes him, instead, the neglected protagonist of the novel.[24] In *The Golden Bowl*, Adam Verver shares the betrayal plot with his daughter and is focalized in only one section of the novel. He can also be seen as a neglected protagonist. Descriptions of him bear out this persistent theme of the betrayed husband as a "backstage" type of character.[25] His daughter's betrayal takes center stage in this novel, while his own is obscured. When these novels are examined closely, the betrayed husband is revealed to be structurally significant within each work. Yet despite such an analysis, it is still as if not only the subject matter, but the form of these works hangs somewhere between the husband as a focalizer and the others that he is meant to reflect for the reader. The role of the betrayed husband as a narrative mediator in his own right (with the attendant privileges that such a role entails, such as readers' full attention and sympathy) is brought into the foreground in Joyce's *Ulysses*, with Leopold Bloom.

In *Ulysses* Bloom the cuckold is framed by Stephen the artist and by Molly, Bloom's adulterous wife. This mimics Homer's *Odyssey*, which begins with the story of a young man's formation, but it also reverses *Madame Bovary's* strategy of using the husband as a frame, a prelude to his wife's story of infidelity. And since Joyce referred to *Madame*

Bovary in his notes on *Exiles*, when he was contemplating a cuckold-protagonist, this comparison seems plausible; Joyce reverses the pattern of *Madame Bovary* by putting the husband's story in the middle (as Flaubert did with Emma) and making him the title's namesake. Placing Bloom's point of view in the middle of the narrative establishes his significance as the subject of the narrative, and therefore announces to the reader that the cuckold is no longer a marginal character for Joyce. Bloom as cuckold takes on epic proportions; the bulk of *Ulysses'* eighteen chapters are devoted to him. And this is despite the fact that Bloom does shows us only a reflected action; that is, cuckoldry is his action, it connotes an indirect form of agency.

If at least three generations of critics have been right in arguing that *Ulysses* makes mainly parodic use of epic conventions, they are accurate when it comes to one particular point—that the hero of an epic is meant to have a direct power of action. And if Joyce's modern masterpiece does take on epic proportion and seriousness, it does so even as it renounces the epic hero's goal of making a name for himself and distinguishing himself among other men. Most obviously, in relation to his wife, Bloom is just one of a series of men; we see this with Molly's famous remark about his proposal to marry her: "as well him as another."[26] We also have to take into consideration his function as a foil for Stephen Dedalus, the character in *Ulysses* who does take seriously the male quest to make a name for oneself. The novel opens with Stephen's angst over his vocation as a writer and he spends much of his day in rather futile attempts to prove its worth. But with Bloom readers can clearly see that Joyce is moving away from this theme of the "great man" altogether; the artist's production of a great work that lives on as a concrete artifact *would have been* the

logical conclusion to Stephen's story from *A Portrait*, that is, if we did not have Bloom's story.

In *Ulysses* the infidelity plot that gives structure to Bloom's wanderings during the day is a strategic choice; it forms part of a series that involves intellectual as well as sexual betrayal. For example, we witness the following alternating narratological pattern in one of the key Bloom chapters, "Calypso": Molly and Bloom's unspoken agreement about her rendezvous with Blazes Boylan is juxtaposed alongside Bloom's various entrepreneurial fantasies—to build a better tramline in Dublin, to increase the profits of pubs, to write a popular novel and so on. These fantasies (and various others like them) reappear in later Bloom chapters in a comical form; we know that they will never be realized. Bloom's stream of consciousness is unearthed for readers as a storehouse of mixed-up facts and, occasionally, useful and insightful observations; but he is clearly limited in his power of conscious action. Yet as each Bloom chapter works on readers by allowing us to accumulate more and more information about the minutiae of his life, past and present, the effect that Joyce achieves is one of great intimacy and affection. So the main orientation of the Bloom chapters is to establish Bloom as an epic character but without the epic connection to great and powerful deeds.

The epic character in Joyce's work is a reflecting character and not a direct agent. Such a character reveals the unconscious, where action and agent are not directly aligned and cannot be collapsed. In favoring and even celebrating this type of male character, Joyce obviously registers a psychological and philosophical shift in values. But this change also has figural advantages; Joyce's version of the epic character is someone whose sub-consciousness is rich in possibilities for representation, not necessarily of a completed

activity, but of all the artifacts that constitute the scene of culture. Culture for Joyce is not a finished product; from the point of view of the human subject, it is a rather messy conglomeration of mental echoes coming from a great variety of competing sources. As Molly says of Bloom: “he knows a lot of mixup things.”[27] The point here is that knowledge as it was understood in the nineteenth century—knowledge as encyclopedic in the sense of being contained by the form of the book and by writing and, on a subjective level, the absorption of information from books—is an inadequate conception of knowledge. For Joyce, knowledge is not a synthetic category. So from a nineteenth century standpoint Bloom may be only a parodic version of the “man of letters,” an embodiment of the average man in his attempt to synthesize an encyclopedic approach to knowledge. But from Joyce’s modern perspective such a category as the man of letters has already been imploded. What we know, the “contents” of our mental activity, is not something we own; and for the average person it cannot be put to use directly for immediate gain but only refracted. So the connection between knowledge and action is definitively and unapologetically loosened in Joyce’s work.

Sexual betrayal is a powerful metaphor for the theme of masculine failure, specifically for the sub-themes of failed action and failed ownership. In her book on the betrayed husband, Alison Sinclair argues that the cuckold both contains and embodies anxieties about masculine failure: “In portraying him . . . It [patriarchal society] is enabled to face . . . infidelities, failures, and, at the very heart, a weakness and fragility which is for the moment ascribed to men.”[28] But her book doesn’t develop the link between sexual betrayal and a lack of instrumental intelligence, the two themes that make up this character’s portrayal in the *fabliau* and that are reinterpreted by the modern writers whose works I have analyzed here. In these modern works, cuckoldry enacts this same double metaphor in a much more

profound way than in the *fabliau* tales. If medieval literature represented the cuckold as a man who cannot possess his wife *because* he is lacking in instrumental intelligence, modern novels investigate this cause and effect relationship with much more skepticism. First of all, they reverse the terms of the problem: the man who cannot completely possess his wife and who cannot completely possess/synthesize knowledge is not stupid; he is the subject of a paradox. Woman and knowledge (as general categories) are out of his direct control.

But the solution to this philosophical conundrum (for the man to give up control) also has a narratological component, especially in the portrayal of Leopold Bloom. By presenting Bloom as a man who gives his wife the freedom to establish her position, Joyce also attempts to position him as a helper and as a protagonist, two categories traditional narratives keep separate. To go back to Mieke Bal's narratological categories, the "helper" is someone that gives the protagonist incidental aid in reaching a particular goal.[29] She explains: "at first sight they [helpers] do not appear necessary to the action. In practice, however, they are often rather numerous. They determine the various adventures of the subject . . ."[30] That is, not only the length but the complexity of the narrative is determined, not by the central subject/object couple (the subject who has a goal and who seeks an object), but by the various accidental people that expand the process of reaching this goal by either delaying or facilitating it. An adventure that keeps itself going multiplies such characters. Bal doesn't have a category for the type of character that I am trying to specify here in the role of Joyce's modern cuckold: Bloom gives his wife up to another man, not because he is blind, but so that she can have a sexual "adventure."

The cuckold is a borderline figure that, comically, does function as a key component in the realization of the sexual fantasy in the *fabliau* tales, but also constitutes a potential

threat to this same fantasy. The *fabliau* is itself rather ambiguous about the cuckold as the fool; a fool can always be found but, in the background, there is the danger that he may realize what is going on. This danger is part of the suspense and the complexity of the *fabliaux*, which are not just about sexual fulfillment, but also dramatize how far a trick on someone can possibly go. Thus we can see the narratological complexity of the cuckold's ignorance. Will it always be sufficient for the end of the *fabliau's* plot to gain sexual fulfillment? As John Hines argues, as soon as the husband ceases to be a functional target figure in this genre, as soon as he begins to gain some serious sympathy, we can see the comedy of the *fabliau* beginning to lose its balance.[31]

In her narratological mapping of helpers in fictional narratives, Mieke Bal doesn't distinguish such characters as synthetic persons because they only give incidental aid to a protagonist; the are not very powerful. That is, to give incidental aid is to give help that is not sufficient to reach a goal. To give accidental aid could mean giving useful help unknowingly. She does indicate that characters who are not conscious of helping a protagonist's goal may represent the sense of "crossing paths"; that is, when characters don't completely align with each other, which is the case when we encounter ignorance, we have the potential of developing a significant sub-plot.[32] Perhaps this is what the cuckold represented at first: the potential for a sub-plot. However, these remarks are not very clearly developed in Bal's account of such character crossings.

So we can see that the cuckold is a split subject and that his presentation cannot easily be collapsed into one particular category; that is, it has the potential to be expanded, to move from a purely functional role to one that is subjectivized. Bloom is clearly somewhere in between these narratological categories. He is what Henry James designated as both a

compositional resource and a “value intrinsic.”[33] That is, we are at the historical juncture where the concept of ignorance is being investigated thematically and thus the cuckold’s ignorance cannot be disentangled from his compositional purpose in the narrative as a whole. Joyce himself wanted to profit from the cuckold’s ambiguity as a literary character.[34] He wanted to find some way to turn his position around, not just personally and politically, but also artistically. When he was writing *Exiles*, Joyce looked to the betrayed husband as “a technical shield for the protection of a delicate and highly sensitive conscience.”[35] These are usually qualities attributed to an artist, not to a cuckold. So the only way to interpret Bloom’s characterization is to attribute to him, not a perversion, but an author function. Yet this is an author function that is very specific to Joyce’s conception of authorship. Bloom supports another character’s intention with the goal, not of a desire that is bent on its end (complete fulfillment between subject and object), but of a desire that can keep unfolding itself. I am assuming that the author function would be the meta-narrative wish to keep, not just the particular story going, but the function of storytelling itself as it is embodied, for example, in such personal qualities as love, kindness, and curiosity. That is, Bloom dramatizes that the ownership of a narrative and its plotting is open to negotiation. This is a non-phallic mode of narrative organization and that is why Joyce chose Bloom the cuckold to embody it.

The details of *Ulysses* point to a complex negotiation between Bloom and Molly, not only about the fact of her adultery, but also about what kinds of men she will possibly sleep with (even in fantasy). There is, for example, Bloom’s wish to substitute a more educated man into Molly’s repertoire of lovers (real or imagined). This is one of the reasons that he brings Stephen home with him at the end of the day. And Molly has thoughts along these lines; in her monologue, she declares that Boylan is vulgar and that she could perhaps do

better with a more educated man (although this does not take back the fact that her experience with Boylan was highly pleasurable). Thus although Bloom can be said to participate in Molly's adultery, he doesn't necessarily control it as much as he tries to negotiate with it; he only makes innuendoes, by bringing Stephen home, about how a different man could contribute to Molly's self-development. Bloom gives Molly incidental rather than direct aid towards a possible (imagined) erotic/intellectual adventure; we don't know whether such a plan with Stephen will ever materialize (most likely it will not) but we see that Bloom's intention is to keep the erotic plot going.

What I would like to suggest as a last point is that Bloom's cuckoldry serves as a means of discovery for Joyce and that he uses this otherwise stigmatized male subjective position ironically in *Ulysses*. He does this in order to investigate the ways in which phallic masculinity places a burden on the creative process; and Joyce took very seriously the process of "making" itself, perhaps more seriously than the product, the artistic artifact. A number of critics have argued that Joyce dramatizes the artistic process in *Ulysses*, mainly by initiating a collaborative form of reading in which the reader is placed in a more active position than ever before, having to take responsibility for researching an entire cultural context without the help of a narrator.[36] Stanzel argues that "Unlike any author before him Joyce revealed with *Ulysses* the immense demands made on the intellect and imagination of an author in the act of conception and composition."[37] To thematize the artistic process (over and above the completed artifact presented more or less ready-made for audiences) involves a wager: can writing a novel be an actual method of investigation, rather than a descriptive or a rhetorical mode? This also means that the author gives up the attempt to have full control over the reader. So we see that there are limits to a man's possession of a woman, of

knowledge, and of a text, three terms that are knotted together in Joyce's critique (from the inside) of the Western narrative tradition.

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[1] John Hines, *The Fabliau in English* (London: Longman, 1993) 11.

[2] Hines 11.

[3] *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, third edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009) 207.

[4] *Narratology* 207.

[5] *Narratology* 201.

[6] *Narratology* 112-113.

[7] 326; part 3, ch. 2.

[8] Joacquín Martínez Lorente reviews this pattern in "Blurring Focalization: Psychological Expansions of Point of View and Modality" *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Inglesses* 9 (1996):68-70.

[9] *The Deceived Husband: A Kleinian Approach to the Literature of Infidelity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) 87.

[10] *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) 353.

[11] From *The Craft of Fiction* (1921). Reprinted in *Madame Bovary Backgrounds and Sources*, ed. and tran. Paul de Man (New York: Norton, 1965) 349-357.

[12] See Jonathan Culler's *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).

[13] Lubbock ends his chapter with the following remarks: "Flaubert vilified his subject while he was at work on it . . . as the years went by and he fought his way from one chapter to another, did he begin to feel that it was not much of a subject after all, even of its kind? It is not clear; but after re-reading of the book one wonders afresh. . . . But that that aspect is not my subject, and *Madame Bovary*, a beautifully finished piece of work, is for my purpose singularly fertile (349).

[14] Lubbock points out: "*Madame Bovary* has the look of a drama. . . . But then again—that is not exactly the question in this book. . . . Who, in recalling this book, thinks of the chain of incident that runs through it, compared with the long and living impression of a few people in it and of the place in which they are set? None of the events matter for their own sake; they might have happened differently [Emma] would have found others of these had not been at hand. . . . there was not the stuff in Emma, more especially, that could make her the main figure of a drama . . . But for a picture, where the interest only depends on what she is—that is quite different"(352-353).

[15] *The Craft of Fiction* 353.

[16] *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986) 86.

[17] *The Freudian Body* 84.

[18] *The Freudian Body* 84.

[19] See James's prefaces to *The Portrait of a Lady* and *What Maisie Knew*.

[20] Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, *Henry James: Literary Criticism* (New York: Library of America, 1984) 1071.

[21] Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* 1073.

[22] 131; bk. 2, ch. 1.

[23] Mieke Bal argues that, in narratological terms, if a character is placed in the position of focalizing the first and last chapter of a novel, this is a clue that we should give this character our attention and sympathy (*Narratology* 152). *Madame Bovary* actually ends with Homais. But Since Charles Bovary frames the beginning and ending of Emma's story, this does place him in important position in the narrative of her life.

[24] "Flaubert Assasin de Charles . . ." 121.

[25] 160; bk. 2, ch. 4.

[26] 643-644; ch. 18, lines 1604-1605.

[27] 612; ch. 18, lines 179-180.

[28] *The Deceived Husband* 65.

[29] *Narratology* 207.

[30] *Narratology* 207.

[31] *The Fabliaux in English* 280.

[32] *Narratology* 209.

[33] Preface to *The Golden Bowl*, *Henry James: Literary Criticism* 1324.

[34] Michael Mason, "Why is Leopold Bloom a Cuckold," *ELH* 44.1 (1977): 174.

[35] Quoted in Mason 174.

[36] See Morton P. Levitt's *The Rhetoric of Modernist Fiction: From a New Point of View* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2006). See also Vicki Mahaffey's *Modernist Literature: Challenging Fictions* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007). For an earlier take on Joyce's creative enterprise in *Ulysses*, see Franz K. Stanzel's *Narrative Situations in the Novel*, trans. James P. Pusack (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971).

[37] *Narrative Situations in the Novel* 144.

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[1] This seminar is translated from unedited French manuscripts; it has not been officially published.

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