

Article

Flower Power: Desire, Gender, and Folk Belief in the Joycean Mary Garden

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Abstract: Robert Brazeau and Derek Gladwin's *Eco-Joyce* (2014) largely overlooks a historical basis for ecocritical thought. The absence of a historicist view requires consideration not only of the natural world but folk botany, such as the Mary Garden that is a phantom presence in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as well as in "Nausicaa" and "Penelope" in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. The undergrowth of the garden reconfigures human action and subtly predicts it with its compendium of theological and devotional meanings for the burgeoning sexuality expressed by Gerty MacDowell and Issy Earwicker as well as the mature longing of Molly Bloom. This essay will establish a fresh Deleuzian paradigm of Becoming-Flower to demonstrate how the Mary Garden blooms to present new perspectives on Catholicism, *eros*, and gender identity in Joyce's major works.

Keywords: James Joyce; ecocriticism; Mary garden; sexuality; theology; gender; *Ulysses*; *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; *Finnegans Wake*; Gilles Deleuze

1. Introduction

Much recent ecocritical thought on Joyce's works, such as Robert Brazeau and Derek Gladwin's edited volume *Eco-Joyce* (2014) fails to consider the contexts of environmental thought circulating at the turn of the twentieth century and even before, preferring instead to focus on contemporary paradigms to demonstrate that Joyce is not merely an urban writer, with which I concur. Nevertheless, I contend that both my work and their collection can see both the forest and the trees, or rather, the flowers and the garden, bringing later theoretical concepts to bear on botanical practices common in Joyce's time whether in an urban or a rural environment. I eschew ecocritical terminology, choosing instead to place an emphasis primarily on the understudied intersection of folk gardening and theological practice in Joyce's works, as well as contemporary interpretations of philosophers that would, for the most part, have been familiar to Joyce. In my view, Mariology circulates and grows not merely in terms of the more readily apparent benedictions, supplications, offertories, and apostasies that have previously been addressed in work by Mary Lowe-Evans (Lowe-Evans 1997), Geert Lernout (Lernout 2010), and Chrissie Van Mierlo (Van Mierlo 2017), but also as a supplement to Andrew Gibson (Gibson 2002), R. Brandon Kershner (Kershner 2010), Katherine Mullin (Mullin 2010), and Vike Plock's (Plock 2010) respective attention to women's print, beauty, or medical culture, to which I will add the Victorian fascination with the language of flowers.

Furthermore, there is a whole range of literary as well as extra-literary sociopolitical and theological floriography from the Medieval period forward throughout Europe regarding the Mary Garden, which I will demonstrate emerge rhizomatically from these texts, in both an historical and a Deleuzian context, as both Deleuze and Guattari use Joyce in defining their concept of the "rhizome" as a literary work founded on "multiple roots" (quoted in (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, p. 6)) rather than the linear/arborescent structure of the "root-book" (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, p. 5). This makes both Deleuze and his writing partnership with Guattari, in their emphasis across their respective oeuvres

on the environmental poetics of composition as well as theories of multiplicity and Becoming versus static Being, ideal to discuss the characters of Gerty MacDowell, Molly Bloom, and Issy Earwicker, as well as Stephen's vision of the Blessed Mother herself, because these figures are not singular but multiple, blossoming like the Mary garden.

The Virgin herself having lived a full life and then been Assumed body and soul into heaven while continuing to appear as well as intercede on earth vacillates between the mortal or human and the non-human or divine, as do her emblems, most especially her gardens with their decorative and medicinal properties. Thus, Joyce's personages necessitate the formulation of a third term beyond Deleuze and Guattari's Becoming-Woman and Becoming-Animal: Becoming-Flower. My essay presents the Joycean invocation of the Blessed Mother as one that endeavors to rearrange the Virgin Mary's representational forces, backchannel them via "a commodius vicus of recirculation" or particular historical subversion through international botanical and religious historiographies to become what I believe Deleuze and Guattari would describe as "*assemblages*" that move from the quotidian to the divine and back again, creating new rhizomatic-growth in *A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake* (FW 1.2¹; Deleuze and Guattari 1988). In considering the significance of Mary gardens in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century folk botany and theology, grown with varieties of her sacred plants to facilitate religious contemplation and prayer to Our Lady initially in Medieval monasteries and later in public worship spaces and private homes, I will resituate discussions of the ecocritical and how, through nonhuman environments, including a re-staging of the Biblical Great Flood, flowers, as well as statuary and other iconography, Joyce unexpectedly secularizes the spiritual as well as provides depth, scope, and context to human characters' motivations and desires in the twentieth century.

The year in which Joyce set *Ulysses*, 1904, was liturgically designated as a Marian year by Pope Pius X in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (Lowe-Evans 1997, pp. 101–2). As Molly Bloom herself notes, it was part of a period in which there was a widespread cultural focus on the Blessed Virgin as a paragon of virtuous womanhood from the pulpit and in devotional literature as well as daily practices of Catholicism. This focus is emphasized in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, when Stephen Dedalus imagines a beneficent Marian apparition similar to the one at Knock in 1879, in which the Blessed Mother addresses Stephen himself and Emma Cleary amidst an initially Edenic pathetic fallacy, "In a wide land under a tender lucid evening sky, a cloud drifting westward amidst a pale green sea of heaven, they stood together, children that had erred. Their error . . . had not offended her whose beauty is *not like earthly beauty, dangerous to look upon, but like the morning star, which is its emblem, bright and musical*" (*Portrait*² p. 102; italics original). Stephen initially believes that Mary's beauty is matched by her mercy as she "speak[s] to their hearts" (*Portrait* p. 102), joining their hands and entreating them to love one another, as he next fantasizes the world washed away in the detritus of a second Great Flood which would consume "the monuments and the mountaintops. All life would be choked off, noiselessly" and gruesomely drown everything, including raising the dead. Stephen ruminates, "It might be. Why not?" (*Portrait* p. 102).

Then, as Stephen's vision of the Virgin progresses throughout the novel from gentle, glorious, and loving intercessor to the moment when he casts aspersions by looking on her figure coldly, implicitly foretelling her replacement by the bird-girl as the Virgin's shrine stands amidst the cottages "fowl-wise" up the pole—in both senses—as it were (*Portrait* p. 125). The immaculate, elevated, and safe is ostensibly rejected in favor of the visceral and earthy "faint sour stink of rotten cabbages" from his family's kitchen garden (*Portrait* p. 125). While looking above, Stephen doubts that Mary is Assumed into heaven, and yet the *Mater Amabilis* is still able to appear and dwell amiably on the Earth

¹ The reference (Joyce 1999) will be cited throughout in-text using the standard convention for *Finnegans Wake* (FW) including the corresponding page and line numbers.

² The reference (Joyce et al. 2007) will be cited throughout in-text using the standard convention for *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or the abbreviation (*Portrait*) with corresponding pages.

as well as being made of it, not transcendent of nor distant from, but inscribed in and through the landscape, its perfection flowering before him, even in those garden cabbages.

I contend that the aforementioned “Why not?” is a proleptic invitation to reconsider the cabbage and the garden, for the cabbage rose was also called “the Virgin’s Rose” and “the Rose of Jericho”—a reminder that the Mary garden itself developed as part of much older, minor folk traditions regarding local devotional and medicinal appellations and applications gathered in various compendia of folklore and botany compiled during the Renaissance through the nineteenth century throughout Europe as additions or para-texts to Linnaean classifications and later secular common plant taxonomies after the Reformation (Krymow 1999; Stokes 2017a, 2017b, 2017c).³ In Catholicism, amongst Mary’s innumerable honorifics, she is simultaneously “flower of flowers”, “flower of the field”—lauded by anything that grows—and the fulfillment of “the garden enclosed” (Krymow 1999, p. 3–6), Eden re-sanctified, as the unblemished handmaid and bride whose beauty is detailed throughout the *Song of Solomon* (4:12). In the characters of Molly and Gerty, Joyce reconsiders Mary and the Garden. What might happen if it were thrown open and exposed—as Gerty MacDowell imagines herself, “wild, untrammelled, free” (*U* 13.673)⁴, not exclusively at the knock of the chosen bridegroom or the Marian apparition at Knock, but to the eyes of Leopold Bloom and thus the secular reader?

2. The Virgin in Bloom and The Virgin’s Blooms

Scholars of the Mary Garden attribute the first to the Irish St. Fiacre of Breuil. It should be noted that there are three distinct Irish St. Fiacres; this one was a hermit from Kilkenny who in the midst of great popularity fled to France and built an oratory Garden to the Virgin in the seventh century, from which he banned all women, thus becoming the patron saint of both gardening, particularly medicinal gardening, and those who suffer from venereal diseases and haemorrhoids, known as “Fiacre’s Figs” (Newton 2017). He preferred the chaste divine woman to the lascivious ones of flesh and blood, a point on which he and Joyce differ. It is from Fiacre and St. Benedict in the fourth century that Catholics invoke the term “rosary” from which the numerical meditation based on the Little Psalter or “fifties” common in Irish monasteries in which the Psalms were replaced by “Ave, Marias” in the twelfth century, blending with other practices until its present variations. In addition to the rosary itself, Marian devotionals in general were often known as the “*rosarium*,” which coincided with songs, hymns, and prayers to the paradisiacal holy “*hortus deliciarum* (garden of delights)” in honor of the “*hortulus animae* (little garden of the soul)” (Krymow 1999, pp. 22–26).

Vincenzina Krymow observes the emphasis on Mary’s flowers that occur throughout New Testament apocrypha, including the *Protoevangelium of James*, the *Golden Legend* of Dominican friar Jacobus de Voragine, and the teachings of St. Francis of Assisi, as well as references to them in the work of Chaucer and Shakespeare. Throughout Medieval and later visual art, Our Lady frequently appeared in her colors of white and blue, and flora feature throughout life of Christ and his mother, specifically lilies which represent chastity, violets for humility, and roses of “martyrdom, love, and heavenly joy” (Krymow 1999, pp. 12–16). With regard to Molly Bloom and Gerty MacDowell, the textual absence of the lily and the presence of the latter two: violets and roses, are essential to Joyce’s engagement with the Mary Garden in *Ulysses*; also worthy of note are the dendrological wedding announcements of “Cyclops”, which include the grafting or marriage of various species of flora.

Like a garden in which everything has its season, structural leitmotifs of the “Nausicaa” episode of *Ulysses* are intertwined and turn from the immediately Marianized setting of Sandymount at

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Marian plant names are drawn from the University of Dayton’s International Marian Research Center’s John Stokes and Mary’s Garden Collection and the index of Vincenzina Krymow’s *Mary’s Flowers*, all cited below as (Stokes 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). Stokes’s exhaustive taxonomies are compiled from a variety of sources that include Linnaean, common, and religious names for various Mary garden herbs and flowers throughout Europe. His collection has been digitized and continues to evolve as part of the Research Center’s promotion of Marian topics.

⁴ The reference (Joyce et al. 1986) will be cited in-text throughout with (*U*) for *Ulysses* with the corresponding episode and line numbers according to the conventions of the Gabler edition.

twilight with the invocation of “the “Star of the sea”, to the practicalities of the *contretemps* among “the girlwom[e]n” and their young charges who are naturally imperfect and far from divine (U 13.340), unlike the Christ child, to Gerty’s cherished romantic fancies and back again. The male supplicants’ religious fervor to a chaste Virgin at the nearby church’s temperance retreat and Gerty’s interest in the familiar rhythms of their recitation are transplanted sonically to sense-memories of her father serenading the family with sentimental ballads including George Hodson’s “Tell me, Mary, how to woo thee” (U 13.312), the lyrics of which conflate the romantic and the spiritual by describing the singer’s adoration as a tree fortified by the creeping ivy of affection for the beloved—which, depending on the plant’s genus, is also known as “the tears of Mary” or “Mary’s herb” (Stokes 2017c). The song emphasizes the unburdening of his “sweet sorrow” and “lov[ing] thee to the last” (Bowen 1974, p. 228). Gerty subsequently considers the even more private intimacies of “oldtime chivalry” and being wooed with unspecified flowers in the tradition of floriography in the image from the grocer’s Christmas almanac she has tacked up in the privy as she fantasizes about bygone “halcyon days” that were apparently never hers to begin with (U 13.336, 13.334).

From this progression, the religious and the secular valences of Marian flower symbology converge without paradox in Gerty’s mind and her body of times “when she went there for a certain purpose” to relieve and/or touch herself in privacy, including the tactile pleasures of feeling her own arms as “white and soft” as the woman from the illustration. She does so in order to “dreamily” transport herself at least temporarily via that iconography into a more desirable sociocultural as well as economic milieu (U 13.330–342)—one that is vastly different than the one she endures with her typically drunken, alternately maudlin and violent father and distraught mother who self-medicates with snuff. While slyly observing Leopold Bloom from under the brim of her hat, the spiritual recurs, as the Marian model representing both the universal Mother, “mystical rose” and her Holy Family (Krymow 1999, p. 8; U 13.374), enshrined in Catholic theology, are established as a much preferable, ideal alternative to her biological family.

For Gerty, the Virgin represents the performance of again, non-paradoxically, chaste and therefore supposedly safe, largely asexual seduction and plant-like reproduction, which simultaneously remains suffused with longing and coincides with the fantasy of converting Bloom. Then, after picturing their union as a single, gentle embrace, she next considers becoming a Dominican nun, the logical extension of the *eros-agape* conversion disorder that Gerty undergoes throughout the episode, such as recalling her embarrassing confessions implicitly regarding masturbation to Canon O’Hanlon. The priest reassures her by citing the Virgin Mary as an example of submitting to God’s will, prompting MacDowell to want to make a gift for him of a florally-embroidered tea-cosy in conjunction with her efforts to arrange the flowers for the forty hours’ sacramental adoration. Botanical, devotional, and the proverbial anatomical flower of a woman’s maidenhood continue to overlap, as Gerty imagines the penetrative gaze of Bloom’s “dark eyes” as “literally worshipping at her shrine” (U 13.563–4) culminating in the orgasmic exposition of herself to him as the fireworks blossom overhead and her sense of his final “lingering glance . . . enraptured on her sweet flowerlike face” when he departs (U 13.765). In Gerty’s view, such longings and actions resulting in “that other thing coming on the way it did” or Bloom’s own euphemism for the “roses” of women’s menstruation (U 13.714).

For Bloom, this relates to women’s fashion, specifically the pleasures of lingerie and the mysteries of sexual desire around a woman’s “monthlies” with regard to “dressing one another for the sacrifice” of virginity (U 13.798) with Marian overtones, including his recall of Molly’s violet garters (U 13.800), and Gerty’s focus on folk traditions concerning her lucky “undies” and garters of Virgin blue (Ibid), in addition to the notion that toxic menstrual blood “[t]urns milk, makes fiddlestrings snap. Something about withering plants I read in a garden” (U 13.826–7). Bloom wishes to be the rock Gerty sits upon and further observes that women “[o]pen like flowers, know their hours, sunflowers, Jerusalem artichokes . . . ” as his thoughts shift to his wife in the presence of the flowering of “Notre Dame’s Violet” also known as *Hesperis matronalis* or “nightstock in Mat Dillon’s garden where [he] kissed her shoulder” (U 13.1091; Stokes 2017c).

3. The Past Blooms or The Blooms in the Past

In *Bergsonism* (1988), Gilles Deleuze claims that for French philosopher and Joyce's contemporary Henri Bergson, the "real" is a backward projection of the possible, emphasizing the relevance of the nonhuman, locational, or object triggers in constructing this projection (Deleuze 1988, p. 33). For my purposes in discussing *Ulysses*, the "real" is the fictional reality of Leopold and Molly's past. That ecstatic satisfaction or realization Molly attains at the conclusion of the novel only occurs retroactively based on what was, a fantasy that is reactivated in such a way that nothing new is produced because the reality of her memory is always already, using Bergson and Deleuze's terms, identical to what is possible, contained with and constrained by its limits. She orients and locates herself to the past, to reanimate it and consequently, herself. Deleuze writes of Bergson's "paradox of the leap", insisting one moves psychologically from the present into a chosen moment (Deleuze 1988, p. 61). Bergson explicitly links this to language, immersion, and a cognitive or physical pause or delay that permits shifting to a prior point or moment based on the necessities of the present. The past is a seed preserved in time, from which a memory becomes actualized in the form one desires. As such, Molly and Poldy's past recurs and functions as a nonhuman entity; it accumulates and transfers itself again linguistically, temporally, and emotionally, its shoots extending in various directions—which is why we are given multiple perspectives on, re-inseminations, and conflicting or partial disseminations and mnemonic re-plantings or graftings of the same event. The past grows and blooms because Molly, like her husband, repeatedly pauses in the unfurling of her thoughts to return, to tend and nourish it. As her body dilates in menstruation and she presumably touches herself, time contracts into her physical form, into the habit of muscle memory, to dislocate and dissociate from the claustrophobic space of her bed, her bedroom, her house, to plant herself instead in Gibraltar and ultimately Howth Head. Her mind blossoms, embodying what Anne Fogarty follows Timothy Morton and other ecocritics in calling an "'ambient poetics' in which the writing self [or in her case, the imagining self] and the environment [her memories] fuse" (quoted in (Brazeau and Gladwin 2014, p. xvi)). Molly is the past, in bloom.

She and Gerty are metonyms of the Virgin Mary, who moves between human and divine, not merely the mediatrix as myth as Mary Lowe-Evans claims, but the mediatrix made manageable, as an Earthen and earthly vessel whose powers of intervention are thus reduced, resituated, and co-opted, no longer as an intercessor but interceded upon. Scholars from Vicki Mahaffey (Mahaffey 1988) to Heidi Scott (Scott 2008) have aptly characterized Molly, like her foremother Penelope, as a word-weaver, also renowned for her vocal talents and repertoire, from "Love's Old Sweet Song" to "The Young May Moon," the latter especially rich with both Marian and pre-Christian associations with fertility and the sacred feminine (Cf. (Bowen 1974, 1995)). Scott in particular traces the prolific scholarly focus on Molly's other foremothers in the Western canon, with special attention to Milton's Eve, cast out of the garden in disgrace, progenitor of women's troubles and troubled lot. The parts that stand for the whole are tainted for Molly, because as she laments in aggravation and disgust at the start of her own cycle, "its pouring out of me like the sea" (*U* 18.1123). Gerty, too, is presented as naturally defective, for when Bloom sees her walk she is suddenly transformed into an aberration of the human, a "curiosity like a nun or a negress or a girl with glasses. The squinty one is delicate" (*U* 13.776-777). The flowering of the feminine thereby serves as a form of creative dissipation or weakness, fragmentation or wilting, a squeamish misdirection of gendered bodies and women's power, rendering them almost nonhuman.

Rather than attempt to develop what Deleuze and Guattari would later refer to in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988) as Becoming-Woman or next proceed to Becoming-Animal, via Gerty and Molly, Joyce briefly allows us to consider an alternative flow, form, or *assemblage*: Becoming-Flower, if you will, that nevertheless withers on the vine. As I have suggested elsewhere, *pace* Joseph Valente's contention in *James Joyce and the Problem of Justice* (Valente 1995), Molly's body and most certainly Gerty's body are still Freudian and Oedipalized. The former's Gaea-Tellic, *spéirbhean*-esque, and especially Marian forms of abundance are immediately circumscribed and determined by lacks and deficiencies—in Gerty's case, her petty, vituperative internal and external disputes with and isolation from the other

girls and her disability; Molly also experiences isolation from Bloom and repeatedly fails to gain pleasure from either her singing or her sexual encounters.

Gerty's most precious treasures further accentuate her vanity, her perhaps false piety, and her unfulfilled artistic ambitions: tortoiseshell combs, a child of Mary badge, make-up including whiterose scent, ribbons, and poetry inscribed in precious violet ink "copied out of the newspaper she found one evening round the potherbs" (*U* 13.644-5), that might include rosemary or "Our Lady's Nosegay", parsley or "Our Lady's little vine", marjoram or "Our Lady's Bedstraw", in addition to over two dozen other common household garden herbs with Marian names (Stokes 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). In her own words, Molly's disappointments and deficiencies involve various efforts at disciplining and controlling her desire through arboreal lineages—in the Deleuzian sense—of patriarchal values, disseminated by men from her father to her priest and her "dry old stick" gynecologist "Dr Collins" (*U* 18.1153), not to mention the lack of erotic fulfillment she experiences from lovers and her husband. As such, both Molly and Gerty as women function more as "empty" bodies without organs whose various competing wills, "intensities," or organs coalesce around specific needs and are only able to form certain delimited and repetitive connections that do not open them up entirely but ultimately restrict their capacities (Cf. (Deleuze and Guattari 1977; Deleuze and Guattari 1988, pp. 149–66)). Contra Deleuze, who concurs with Spinoza in *Expressionism in Philosophy* that "we do not know what a body can do is practically a war cry," Joyce suggests that we as readers always already *do* know precisely what Gerty and Molly's respective bodies can, and more importantly cannot do (Deleuze 1990, p. 255). For women, and for Gerty in particular as a disabled woman, the question is out of the question, at least until the *Wake*.

In turn, patriarchal romance, in this instance, addicts like a drug and is predicated on certain psycho-geographic and cultural signposts or landscapes, without a form that might acknowledge the minor or the marginal that could be achieved in fluid devotional practices like the Mary garden, depending on what is allowed to take root or, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, spread to become "a line of flight" (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, pp. 88–89). Molly and Gerty are women with subjectivities that cannot yet fully conceive of what it might mean to cultivate non-identitarian, non-Hegelian affiliations or notions that could ripen through verbal and symbolic rhizomatic *assemblages* existing apart from the dream ever-deferred (in Gerty's case) and referred back to (in Molly's case) not of Becoming-Flower burgeoning beyond these bounds and labels, but *being* a wife. Bloom's silent commending of Gerty's erotic display in aiding his satisfaction as he kept watch over her like *Hamlet's* Francisco in asserting "for this relief, much thanks" (*U* 13.939-40), notwithstanding, Molly's actions in what Hamlet himself calls the "rank and unweeded garden" of adultery (Shakespeare 1974, *Hamlet* I.ii.135), similar to her virginal counterpart, show that she still dreams of being a "Flower of the mountain" that is ultimately plucked by the right hands (*U* 18.1602), of the hope that springs eternal in memories of Poldy's proffered domestication.

4. Flowering Girls

Molly and Gerty's fantasy blossoms are a bricolage, a metaphorical floral reconfiguration and Marian re-seeding of the rocks of the sea wall at Howth or the Moorish Wall in Gibraltar and of the women themselves as they open before Bloom, but alas, neither of the women can see or apprehend the flowers, even the "primroses and violets" that are "springing up even out of ditches" (*U* 18.1563), for and because of the garden—that is, the Garden of Eden. They share an issue of differential Knowledge as well as self-knowledge, not only in the intellectual sense but also in the Biblical sense, from which each in her own way remains walled off and by which they are perpetually enclosed, their desires a priori foreclosed as a result of the contrarian ways in which their gardens grow.

Indeed, in spite Bloom's insistence to the contrary that the so-called "squinty one is delicate" (*U* 13.777), something astonishing has already grown in the sand for Gerty. When she once more makes note of the chirping of the hours from the rectory clock, the "cuckoo" does not simply refer to a madcap bird, birdcall, or individual, but it echoes the episode's Marian beginnings through the names of

flowers, either the “cuckoo flower”—“the smock or garment of Mary” or the “cuckoo pint”—“fingers of Our Lady” (Stokes 2017b, 2017c)—Gerty’s own fingers having so recently opened her garment to expose herself in a blasphemous dis- or re-embodiment and transfiguration of the sacrament before “the foreign gentleman that was sitting on the rocks” (U 13.1288–1305).

Whereas Gerty has perhaps discovered and accessed her desires in refusing to remain a garden enclosed like Christ and his Blessed Mother, despite Bloom’s view that she is suddenly undesirable and somehow less than human in light of her deformity, Molly, despite comparable efforts over many more years, still feels herself unable to inherit Stephen’s Enlightenment tradition because she is neither perceived nor comprehends herself as an artist in her own right, as a woman who weaves, sings, but more importantly here, from whom, like her namesake the Virgin Mary, concepts and material practices arose, still arise, and can flourish. In the “Penelope” episode, Molly reflects in frustration, “I wouldnt give a snap of my two fingers for all their learning why dont they go and create something” (U 18.1564–5), without ever understanding that she herself, like Gerty and her performance on Sandymount, already has and can yet come into bloom. Regardless of the depth of her vision, in contrast to the Virgin Mary, Molly and Gerty too—who, for the first time feels her sexual prowess, although as I’ve already shown, Bloom ultimately denies it—are both delimited and held in place by human and not divine bodies and narrative voices that retreat into the past and cannot finally imagine a hopeful future for themselves. For Joyce, such prohibitions bind still, and the women’s beatific imaginary Marian gardens can only grow so far.

It is only in *Finnegans Wake* that Joyce can achieve the beatific vision of Becoming-Flower through the figure of Issy in their children’s game of “Colors” or “Angels & Devils” in II.1, as she herself becomes a stand-in not only for the Our Lady but blossoms surrounded by the Maggys, the twenty-nine “Rainbow Girls” or “Floras” with whom she represents a woman’s month-long menstrual cycle and displays the colors of their underwear⁵. Unlike the Holy Virgin, Issy’s inviolate status is in question, but the flowers and funereal herbs enable her to transform and instantiate her ethereal grace—not death but immortality, a saucy faux Assumption: “Bring tansy, throw myrtle, strew rue, rue, rue. She is fading out like Journee’s clothes so you can’t see her nowAnd among the shades that Eve’s now wearing she’ll meet anew fiancy tryst and trow. Mammy was, Mimmy is, Minuseuoline’s to be” (FW 226.10–15). Issy briefly takes on Marian qualities that explore the icon with a fresh angle—in all senses, in terms of fresh as in new, in terms of fresh as in growing, as in plants or pubescent girls, and most significantly for Joyce, in terms of a provocativeness that flowers and challenges received notions of what constitutes the previously chaste images of the once thirteen-year-old Blessed Mother. In Issy/Mammy/Mimmy/Minuseuoline, a trinity of derivatives of Mary with varying vowel-sounds, Joyce creates a figure on the cusp of womanhood who is both sexual *and* sanctified, who recognizes her erotic strength that is in no way diminished or wilting: “The same renew” (FW 226.17).

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⁵ For a thorough and engaging discussion of Mariology in *Finnegans Wake* and its relation to the figure of Gerty MacDowell, see Chrissie Van Mierlo’s chapter, “The Wake’s Womanly Devotions” in *James Joyce and Catholicism: The Apostate’s Wake* (Van Mierlo 2017).

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