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Kierkegaardian Irony and the Spheres of Existence in Four Modernist Novels: A Comparative Philosophical-Hermeneutic Study

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Abstract

This article examines the philosophical significance of Søren Kierkegaard's three spheres of existence – the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious – in relation to four major modernist novels: F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. It investigates how these novels represent the individual's struggle with desire, identity, responsibility, alienation, and the search for existential meaning. Drawing upon Kierkegaard's understanding of irony, inwardness, subjectivity, despair, and the development of the self, the study establishes a comparative framework for interpreting the philosophical dimensions of modernist fiction. Gatsby's idealized pursuit of the past, Jake Barnes's disillusionment, Clarissa Dalloway's confrontation with mortality, and Leopold Bloom's everyday experiences provide distinctive contexts for examining the tensions between aesthetic possibility, ethical responsibility, and religious or spiritual inwardness. Rather than imposing Kierkegaard's philosophical categories upon the novels as predetermined classifications, the article demonstrates how they function as interpretive perspectives through which the complexities of modernist consciousness can be explored. It argues that the four novels collectively dramatize the instability of inherited values and the individual's continuing struggle to establish an authentic relationship with the self and the world.

Keywords: Søren Kierkegaard, Kierkegaardian irony, aesthetic sphere, ethical sphere, religious sphere, modernist fiction, existentialism, inwardness, subjectivity, philosophical hermeneutics.

1. Introduction

The relationship between philosophy and literature has long provided a productive field for investigating the complexities of human existence. Literary works do not merely represent external events or social circumstances; they frequently explore fundamental philosophical questions concerning identity, freedom, responsibility, suffering, alienation, and the possibility of meaningful existence. Modernist fiction, in particular, offers an especially significant context for such investigations because its formal and thematic innovations frequently reflect the uncertainties and contradictions of modern consciousness.

The early twentieth century witnessed profound transformations in social structures, cultural values, religious assumptions, and traditional conceptions of individual identity. The First World War, the expansion of urban modernity, the destabilisation of inherited moral systems, and the emergence of new psychological and philosophical perspectives contributed to a growing sense of existential uncertainty.

Modernist writers responded to these transformations by experimenting with narrative structure, temporal organisation, interior monologue, fragmentation, symbolism, and irony. Their works frequently portray individuals attempting to understand themselves within a world in which established sources of meaning have become increasingly unstable.

Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy provides a valuable theoretical framework for examining these concerns. His conception of human existence is fundamentally concerned with the individual's relationship to the self, the world, and God. In *Either/Or*, *Stages on Life's Way*, and *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard explores different modes of existence through which the individual confronts the possibilities and responsibilities of becoming a self. His distinction between the aesthetic, ethical, and religious spheres offers a philosophical vocabulary for understanding the tensions between immediate gratification, responsible commitment, and spiritual inwardness.[1]

The aesthetic sphere is characterised by the pursuit of possibility, pleasure, immediacy, and the avoidance of binding commitments. The ethical sphere emerges through the individual's recognition of responsibility, continuity, and the necessity of making meaningful choices. The religious sphere involves a deeper transformation of inwardness through the individual's relationship with the absolute. These spheres should not be understood merely as successive chronological stages or rigid classifications of personality. They represent qualitatively different orientations towards existence and illuminate the individual's continuing struggle with freedom, responsibility, and selfhood.

Kierkegaard's significance for literary interpretation also rests upon his understanding of irony and indirect communication. Rather than presenting philosophical truth exclusively through systematic exposition, Kierkegaard frequently employs pseudonyms, contrasting voices, narrative situations, and indirect forms of communication. Such strategies compel readers to participate actively in the process of interpretation. His approach is particularly relevant to modernist fiction, in which meaning frequently emerges through ambiguity, narrative distance, fragmented consciousness, and the tension between what characters believe and what their experiences reveal.

This article explores the relevance of Kierkegaard's philosophical categories to four modernist novels: F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Although these works differ considerably in narrative technique, historical setting, and philosophical emphasis, they share a sustained interest in the individual's struggle to establish identity and meaning within an uncertain world.

2. Kierkegaard's Three Spheres as an Interpretive Framework

Kierkegaard's distinction between the aesthetic, ethical, and religious spheres constitutes one of the most influential dimensions of his philosophy of existence. These categories illuminate different ways in which individuals relate to possibility, actuality, responsibility, and inwardness.

The aesthetic sphere is fundamentally associated with immediacy and the pursuit of personal satisfaction. The aesthetic individual seeks fulfilment through pleasure, imagination, novelty, sensual experience, or intellectual stimulation. However, the pursuit of endless possibility may prevent the individual from developing a coherent and responsible relationship with existence. In *Either/Or*, the contrast between aesthetic and ethical modes of life reveals the limitations of an existence organised exclusively around immediate gratification.[2]

The ethical sphere represents a movement towards responsibility and commitment. The ethical individual recognises that existence requires more than the pursuit of pleasurable possibilities. Decisions

acquire significance because they establish continuity and shape the individual's relationship with other people and society. Ethical existence therefore involves self-examination, accountability, and the acceptance of responsibility for one's choices.

The religious sphere introduces a further dimension of existence through the individual's relationship with the absolute. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard investigates the complexity of faith through the figure of Abraham, whose relationship with God cannot be adequately explained through ordinary ethical categories.[3] The religious sphere is therefore concerned with inwardness, faith, and the individual's absolute relation to the absolute.

In *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard's analysis of despair provides an additional foundation for understanding the existential significance of selfhood. The self is described as a relation that relates itself to itself and, in doing so, must recognise its dependence upon the power that established it.[4] Despair emerges when the individual fails to establish a proper relationship with the self, either by refusing to become oneself or by attempting to become oneself independently of the ground of existence.

These philosophical distinctions are especially useful in examining modernist fiction because the protagonists of the selected novels frequently experience conflicts between desire and responsibility, possibility and actuality, external identity and inward self-understanding. The three spheres consequently function as complementary interpretive perspectives rather than predetermined labels for individual characters.

3. The Four Novels: A Comparative Philosophical-Hermeneutic Framework

The selection of *The Great Gatsby*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *Ulysses* establishes a comparative field through which Kierkegaardian concepts can be examined across four distinctive manifestations of modernist fiction. Each novel develops an individual narrative structure and a particular representation of consciousness, identity, and existential conflict. Their differences are as important as their thematic similarities because they demonstrate the variety of ways in which modernist literature negotiates the philosophical problems of human existence.

3.1 *The Great Gatsby*: Desire, Self-Fashioning, and the Impossibility of Recovering the Past

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* provides a compelling literary representation of the tension between aesthetic aspiration and existential actuality. Set against the social and cultural transformations of 1920s America, the novel explores wealth, romantic idealisation, social mobility, class distinction, and the elusive promise of the American Dream. At its centre stands Jay Gatsby, whose carefully constructed identity is sustained by his determination to recover Daisy Buchanan and recreate an idealised past.[5]

Gatsby's self-fashioning can be interpreted through Kierkegaard's conception of aesthetic existence. His identity is organised around an imaginative possibility rather than an acceptance of actuality. Through wealth, extravagant parties, social performance, and the cultivation of an idealised personal history, he attempts to construct a world capable of fulfilling his romantic aspirations. His existence becomes inseparable from the dream that gives meaning to his life.

Nevertheless, Gatsby's aesthetic orientation cannot be reduced to superficial pleasure or material indulgence. His pursuit of Daisy involves an intense imaginative commitment to an ideal that transcends ordinary experience. He does not merely desire Daisy as she exists in the present; he desires the recovery of an idealised relationship that belongs to his memory and imagination. His famous insistence that the

past can be repeated reveals the extent to which his identity depends upon the preservation of an imagined possibility.

The irony of Gatsby's existence emerges from the discrepancy between his idealised vision and the limitations of actuality. His material success cannot overcome the social distinctions that separate him from the established world of the Buchanans. Nor can wealth restore the past or guarantee emotional fulfilment. His dream ultimately exposes the contradictions of a society that associates personal worth with economic achievement while maintaining rigid structures of privilege.

Nick Carraway's retrospective narration further complicates the novel's philosophical significance. Gatsby is presented through a narrative consciousness that combines admiration, uncertainty, moral judgment, and sympathy. The reader must therefore distinguish between Gatsby's self-created identity and the image reconstructed by Nick.[6] This narrative distance creates an interpretive structure in which irony becomes central to the reader's understanding of character and motive.

From a Kierkegaardian perspective, Gatsby's tragedy arises partly from his inability to reconcile possibility with actuality. His imaginative selfhood remains attached to an idealised past, preventing him from fully confronting the present. At the same time, the novel raises ethical questions concerning deception, responsibility, exploitation, and the consequences of privilege. Gatsby's existence thus reveals the limitations of aesthetic aspiration when it remains detached from responsible engagement with reality.

3.2 *The Sun Also Rises*: Disillusionment, Desire, and the Search for Existential Stability

Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* presents a world shaped by the psychological and cultural consequences of the First World War. Its expatriate characters inhabit a social environment characterised by emotional dislocation, unstable relationships, excessive drinking, travel, and the erosion of traditional sources of meaning. The novel's representation of the so-called Lost Generation offers a significant context for examining the relationship between aesthetic experience and existential uncertainty.[7]

Jake Barnes, the novel's narrator and central consciousness, embodies the conflict between personal desire and the limitations imposed by actuality. His relationship with Brett Ashley is marked by emotional intimacy and physical impossibility. Although their mutual attraction remains powerful, their circumstances prevent them from establishing the conventional romantic relationship that Jake desires.

This conflict can be examined through Kierkegaard's conception of aesthetic existence. The characters frequently seek temporary relief through pleasure, alcohol, travel, entertainment, and social interaction. These activities may function as strategies for avoiding unresolved emotional conflicts and the difficult demands of self-examination. However, their behaviour should not be interpreted simply as evidence of moral weakness. It is also a response to historical trauma, psychological vulnerability, and the collapse of familiar cultural expectations.

Jake's narrative voice is particularly important to this interpretation. His understatement and apparent emotional restraint frequently conceal the depth of his suffering. His refusal to express certain emotions directly creates a form of narrative irony through which the reader must interpret the discrepancy between his outward composure and inward experience. The novel's emotional significance therefore emerges as much from silence and omission as from explicit declaration.

The ethical sphere becomes relevant when the novel is examined in terms of personal responsibility, honesty, fidelity, and the capacity to acknowledge the consequences of one's actions. Pedro Romero's professional discipline and dedication to bullfighting provide an alternative model of commitment and

artistic integrity. His relationship with his vocation contrasts with the instability of the expatriate social world.

Nevertheless, Romero should not be regarded as a complete representation of Kierkegaardian ethical existence. His significance lies primarily in the contrast he establishes between disciplined practice and the characters' fragmented patterns of living.

A Kierkegaardian interpretation of *The Sun Also Rises* therefore examines the possibility of establishing an authentic self in circumstances that cannot be repaired through pleasure or escape. Jake's predicament demonstrates that existential responsibility does not necessarily eliminate suffering. Rather, it requires the individual to confront the limitations of existence without allowing those limitations to destroy the possibility of meaningful commitment.

3.3 *Mrs. Dalloway*: Consciousness, Mortality, and the Ethics of Recognition

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* offers a distinctive representation of modernist consciousness through its exploration of a single day in London. Its narrative structure moves between the inner experiences of Clarissa Dalloway, Septimus Warren Smith, and several other characters, revealing the complexity of individual existence beneath the apparent continuity of social life.[8]

Clarissa's position within the established social world coexists with memories, uncertainties, emotional attachments, and reflections on mortality. Her public identity as a society hostess does not fully explain her inward life. The movement between present experience and recollection reveals a self that is continually shaped by earlier choices and unrealised possibilities.

Her reflections upon Sally Seton, Peter Walsh, Richard Dalloway, and her own past reveal the limitations of interpreting identity through conventional social roles. Clarissa's existence is marked by a tension between external conformity and inward freedom. Her participation in social life does not necessarily indicate an absence of existential questioning.

From a Kierkegaardian perspective, Clarissa's experience may be examined through the relationship between aesthetic possibility and ethical commitment. Her past contains possibilities that were never fully realised, while her present existence requires her to negotiate the responsibilities associated with marriage, family, and social identity.

Septimus Warren Smith introduces a more disturbing dimension to the novel's philosophical inquiry. His psychological suffering following the First World War exposes the limitations of the social and medical institutions that claim authority over individual experience. His encounters with Dr Bradshaw and Dr Holmes demonstrate how institutional power may fail to recognise the complexity of personal suffering.

Kierkegaard's analysis of inwardness and despair offers a philosophical vocabulary for investigating the conflict between external identity and inner experience. Nevertheless, Septimus's suffering must be situated within the historical and psychological context of post-war trauma. It would be reductive to interpret his condition merely as a theological illustration of despair.

The ethical implications of the novel become particularly evident in its representation of human vulnerability. Clarissa's response to the news of Septimus's death creates an unexpected connection between two individuals whose lives have never directly intersected. Her inward recognition of his suffering reveals the possibility of an ethical relationship that transcends conventional social boundaries.

The novel therefore invites an examination of the individual's responsibility towards others and the importance of recognising experiences that remain invisible within established social structures. Its representation of mortality also challenges the assumption that identity can be understood exclusively through public achievement or social recognition.

Through its fragmented temporal structure and multiple perspectives, *Mrs. Dalloway* demonstrates that human existence cannot be adequately explained through a single external account. The novel's philosophical significance lies in its exploration of inwardness, vulnerability, and the ethical implications of recognising the lives of others.

3.4 *Ulysses*: Identity, Language, and the Philosophical Significance of Everyday Existence

James Joyce's *Ulysses* transforms an apparently ordinary day in Dublin into an expansive exploration of consciousness, language, bodily experience, memory, and cultural history. Its relationship with Homer's *Odyssey* establishes a complex correspondence between everyday events and mythological structures. The novel's formal experimentation challenges conventional narrative expectations and creates a multiplicity of perspectives through which individual experience can be interpreted.[9]

Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus provide two central contexts for examining the philosophical dimensions of identity and selfhood. Stephen's intellectual and artistic ambitions are shaped by his difficult relationship with religious inheritance, family authority, cultural nationalism, and artistic freedom. His struggle to establish an independent identity reveals the tensions between inherited structures and individual self-determination.

Stephen's refusal to accept certain forms of religious and social authority may be considered in relation to Kierkegaard's discussion of individuality and inwardness. However, his intellectual independence also raises questions about the limitations of aesthetic self-assertion. The desire for artistic freedom does not automatically establish an ethically or existentially integrated self.

Bloom, by contrast, offers a representation of everyday existence characterised by observation, sympathy, memory, and practical engagement with the world. His experiences of social exclusion, marital difficulty, bereavement, and familial longing reveal the complexity of ordinary human relationships. His encounter with Stephen provides an opportunity to examine the significance of empathy and responsibility.

Bloom's character may be approached through the ethical sphere because his actions frequently reveal an awareness of other people's vulnerability. His willingness to extend hospitality and sympathy offers a contrast to the competitive and exclusionary attitudes that shape aspects of the social environment.

Nevertheless, Bloom should not be regarded as a straightforward embodiment of Kierkegaardian ethical existence. His significance lies in the possibilities for examining ethical responsiveness within the ordinary circumstances of modern life.

The novel's formal innovations further enrich its philosophical significance. It’s shifting narrative styles, interior monologues, parodies, and linguistic experiments destabilise the relationship between narrative voice and represented reality. Hugh Kenner and other Joyce scholars have demonstrated the importance of these formal complexities in understanding the novel's narrative achievement.[10]

A Kierkegaardian interpretation of *Ulysses* must therefore consider not only the existential conflicts of Stephen and Bloom but also the novel's distinctive methods of communicating meaning. The reader is required to move beyond immediate impressions and participate in the interpretation of multiple, sometimes contradictory, perspectives.

The novel's religious dimensions also require careful consideration. Stephen's relationship with Catholicism, the symbolic structures of the text, and the presence of religious language do not establish a simple progression towards religious existence. Instead, they reveal the continuing conflict between religious inheritance, intellectual independence, and the search for personal meaning.

Ulysses consequently provides a particularly rich context for examining the relationship between aesthetic experimentation, ethical responsibility, and religious questioning. Its representation of the everyday demonstrates that existential significance may emerge through ordinary human relationships and experiences rather than exclusively through extraordinary actions.

4. Comparative Discussion: The Three Spheres and Modernist Consciousness

The four novels establish different but interconnected contexts for examining Kierkegaard's three spheres of existence. Their protagonists do not represent fixed philosophical categories. Instead, they reveal the instability of individual identity and the continuing movement between desire, responsibility, uncertainty, and the search for meaning.

In *The Great Gatsby*, the aesthetic sphere is particularly visible in Gatsby's idealised pursuit of romantic fulfilment and his attempt to reconstruct the past. His experience reveals the limitations of an existence governed by imagination when it becomes detached from actuality and ethical responsibility.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, aesthetic existence emerges through the characters' pursuit of pleasure and temporary distraction. Yet Jake Barnes's predicament also demonstrates the difficulty of making responsible choices within circumstances shaped by historical suffering and personal limitation.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the distinction between public identity and inward experience becomes central. Clarissa's reflections and Septimus's suffering reveal the importance of recognising the self and acknowledging the vulnerability of others. The novel therefore provides a particularly productive context for examining the ethical dimensions of existence.

In *Ulysses*, the relationship between Stephen and Bloom reveals different possibilities of individual selfhood. Their experiences foreground the conflict between intellectual independence, social belonging, personal responsibility, and religious inheritance.

The religious sphere presents a more complicated interpretive question across the four novels. None of the protagonists can be straightforwardly identified with Kierkegaard's religious individual. Nevertheless, religious language, spiritual uncertainty, questions of transcendence, and the problem of ultimate meaning remain significant elements of their respective narrative worlds.

This distinction is methodologically important. Kierkegaard's religious sphere is not synonymous with general emotional depth, moral goodness, or psychological sincerity. It involves a specific understanding of faith and the individual's relationship with God. Consequently, the novels should be examined in terms of their engagement with religious questions without automatically being interpreted as representations of Kierkegaardian faith.

The comparative framework also reveals the significance of irony. Gatsby's conviction that the past can be repeated, Jake's restrained narration, Woolf's juxtaposition of consciousnesses, and Joyce's multiple narrative styles all create discrepancies between appearance and meaning. These discrepancies require readers to examine the relationship between what characters believe, what they experience, and what the narrative reveals.

Kierkegaard's conception of indirect communication is therefore useful for understanding how literary meaning may emerge without being presented as an explicit philosophical proposition. Modernist fiction frequently requires readers to participate in the discovery of meaning through ambiguity, narrative distance, and interpretive engagement.

5. Conclusion

The comparative examination of *The Great Gatsby*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *Ulysses* demonstrates the interpretive value of Kierkegaard's philosophy of existence for the study of modernist fiction. Although the novels differ in their narrative structures, historical contexts, and representations of individual consciousness, they share a fundamental concern with the individual's struggle to establish an authentic relationship with the self and the world.

Gatsby's romantic idealisation, Jake Barnes's emotional disillusionment, Clarissa Dalloway's reflections on mortality, and Leopold Bloom's everyday acts of empathy reveal different dimensions of the existential problems addressed by Kierkegaard. Their experiences illuminate the tensions between possibility and actuality, pleasure and responsibility, external identity and inwardness.

The three spheres of existence provide a framework for examining these tensions without reducing the novels to illustrations of a philosophical doctrine. Their value lies in their capacity to illuminate the complex relationships between aesthetic desire, ethical responsibility, and religious inwardness.

Ultimately, the comparative study suggests that modernist fiction and Kierkegaardian philosophy converge in their sustained examination of the individual as an unfinished and self-questioning being. The search for authentic existence is neither a simple progression nor a guaranteed achievement. It remains a continuing struggle involving choice, responsibility, self-understanding, and the confrontation with the limitations of human existence.

The four novels thus provide a significant literary field for investigating the philosophical dimensions of modernist consciousness and the continuing relevance of Kierkegaard's thought to the interpretation of modern literature.

ENDNOTES

1. Søren Kierkegaard's account of the spheres of existence is developed particularly through his pseudonymous works *Either/Or*, *Stages on Life's Way*, and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. The aesthetic, ethical, and religious spheres are best understood as qualitative modes of existence rather than as merely chronological stages in an individual's personal development. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 116–18; *Stages on Life's Way*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
2. In *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard explores the limitations of aesthetic existence through the contrast between immediate gratification and ethical commitment. The distinction between the aesthetic and ethical perspectives, articulated through the work's pseudonymous structure, constitutes a central element of its philosophical argument. See Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 71–74.
3. In *Fear and Trembling*, published under the pseudonym Johannes de silentio, Kierkegaard examines Abraham's faith and the paradoxical relationship between religious existence and universal ethical categories. The discussion of the teleological suspension of the ethical should not be interpreted as providing a general justification for arbitrary or morally irresponsible actions. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 56–59.

4. Kierkegaard's *The Sickness unto Death*, published under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus, conceptualises the self through its relationship with itself and with the power that established it. Its analysis of despair provides an important philosophical foundation for examining the tensions between external identity, inwardness, and the individual's struggle to become an authentic self. See Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 91–94.
5. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is particularly significant for its representation of the American Dream, social stratification, class distinction, and romantic idealisation. An influential interpretation of the novel's social and cultural implications is provided by Marius Bewley, whose essay examines Fitzgerald's critique of American ideals and the contradictions underlying the national imagination. See Marius Bewley, "Scott Fitzgerald's Criticism of America," *The Sewanee Review* 62, no. 2 (1954): 223–46.
6. Nick Carraway's retrospective narration establishes a complex relationship between observation, judgment, memory, and sympathy. His representation of Gatsby is therefore not an entirely objective account but a mediated reconstruction shaped by his personal perceptions, moral reflections, and retrospective understanding of events. See F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Scribner, 2020), 112.
7. Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* is frequently interpreted in relation to the Lost Generation and the psychological and cultural consequences of the First World War. The novel's representation of disillusionment, emotional displacement, expatriate identity, and the search for meaning reflects the broader crisis of post-war modernity. For relevant biographical and critical perspectives, see Linda Wagner-Martin, *Ernest Hemingway: A Literary Life* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 67; and James R. Mellow, *Hemingway: A Life Without Consequences* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 11.
8. Virginia Woolf's use of stream of consciousness, shifting narrative perspectives, and temporal fragmentation is central to her representation of modern consciousness in *Mrs Dalloway*. Through the interweaving of individual memories, perceptions, and psychological experiences, Woolf challenges conventional linear narrative structures and explores the relationship between subjective time and external reality. See Gillian Beer, introduction to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Penguin Books, 1996); Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 32; and Alex Zwerdling, *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 20.
9. James Joyce's *Ulysses* employs Homer's *Odyssey* as a structural and thematic framework through which the apparently ordinary experiences of urban life acquire mythic and universal significance. The correspondence between classical epic conventions and the everyday activities of modern Dublin is central to the novel's artistic achievement and its reconfiguration of heroic identity. See James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 91.
10. Hugh Kenner's *Ulysses* offers an influential critical examination of Joyce's narrative techniques, stylistic experimentation, and literary innovations. Don Gifford's *Ulysses Annotated* is an especially valuable reference work for identifying and interpreting the historical, literary, religious, mythological, and cultural allusions embedded in the novel. See Hugh Kenner, *Ulysses* (Baltimore:

Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 89; and Don Gifford, *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce's Ulysses*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 64.

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