

The Problematic Countersign: On Love and *Sinthomatic* Eroticism in “Penelope”

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Abstract

Situated at the intersection of Lacan, Badiou, and Joyce, this essay interprets Joyce’s modern version of “Penelope” as a *sinthomatic* writing, finding this female countersign to be problematic by way of an ethical evaluation of the *sinthome* as a (singularized) sexual relation and an investigation of Joyce’s belief in his *sinthome*. Firstly, I fully acknowledge the merit of *sinthomatic* eroticism as a repairment of the non-existence of sexual relation in its capacity of maintaining the recognition of the non-existence of the Other and of authoring and forging one’s own sexual rapport through the self-invented *savoir-faire* of one’s jouissance. Molly as Bloom’s *sinthome*-partner is indispensable in offering her participation in the construction of (*inter*)*sinthomatic* eroticism. However, upon closer scrutiny, the merits of this version of eroticism appear quite limited, for Joyce’s conservative presentation stays near to the cultural symptoms of his time, and, moreover, Joyce’s belief in his *sinthome* functions similarly with normal neurotics’ symptoms and lacks truly intersubjective reciprocity. Secondly, my ethical reading takes account of the productive tension between “*sinthomatic* eroticism” and love. I invoke both Lacan’s idea of love as “compensation” of the non-existence of sexual relationship, and (beyond Lacan) Badiou’s work on love as a way of creatively carving out what I term “the ethical space of love” as a space (not entirely disengaged from but) distinct from the psychoanalytic domain of sexual desires or eros. By doing so, I explore the relatively uncharted ground of the theorization of true love.

Keywords

love, *sinthomatic* eroticism, ethics, “Penelope,” Jacques Lacan, James Joyce, Alain Badiou

To know what your partner will do is not a proof of love.

—Jacques Lacan

Encore

What makes up for the sexual relationship is, quite precisely, love.

—Jacques Lacan

Encore

Introduction

It is well-known that Lacan claims in *Seminar XXIII* that the Name-of-the-Father is nothing more than a symptom, and the end of psychoanalysis should be reconceptualized as an identification with one's symptom/*sinthome*. However, less critical attention has been given to the fact that, in the same seminar, Lacan also extends his in/famous aphorism “there is no such thing as a sexual relationship” (*Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*) with a supplement proposition—“To the extent that there is a *sinthome* . . . , there is [sexual] relation” (101/84).¹ This fruitful theoretical development stems from Lacan's attentive reading of Joyce's peculiar relationship with Nora within his own *oeuvre*. Rather than providing an application of Lacan's theory to Joyce, this essay attempts first to explore the sexual relation in *sinthome*, and secondly to conduct a critical reflection on the ethical evaluation of *sinthome* and *sinthomatic* eroticism's tension/relation with love through concrete textual analysis and the mutual illumination between Joyce's text and Lacan's theory.

It is a commonplace in Joycean criticism that Joyce intends the final chapter of *Ulysses* to be “the indispensable countersign to Bloom's passport to eternity” (*Letters I* 160). In this essay, I provide an ethical evaluation of Joyce's famous, or notorious, rendition of the countersign by his modern Penelope, Molly Bloom, by situating the episode in the ethical problematic cast through the prism of Lacan's theorization of *sinthome*, sexuality, and love in the later period of his career. It is not the aim of this essay to engage in a thoroughgoing manner with the broad terrain of ethics in general, but to address the ethical problematic from the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalytic ethics.² Given the limited space available here, I have no intention to

¹ For quotes from *Seminar XXIII*, two page numbers will be given. The first is for the page number from the original French text, the second for that from the English translation.

² I therefore acknowledge that Joyce scholars may take interest in Joyce's criticism on ethics, such as Marian Eide's *Ethical Joyce*, Janine Utell's *James Joyce and the Revolt of Love: Marriage, Adultery, Desire*, and Christopher DeVault's *Joyce's Love Stories*, and situate the present essay among them. Owing to limited space and consideration of critical integrity, my current ethical investigation is a rather focused one, offering an original reading of “Penelope” through the specific

critically review and evaluate Lacan's theorization of the ethical models at different stages from *Seminar VII* on Antigone to the end of his career.³ Instead, I propose to build my ensuing project on the concise conclusion that the subject's ethical task resides fundamentally in his/her recognition of the non-existence of the Other and his/her full assumption of this recognition as an ethical responsibility. The various Lacanian aphorisms such as "The big Other does not exist," "There is no such a thing as sexual relationship," "There is no Other of the Other" and so on point to the fact that there is no guarantee of the meaning or natural law or formula of one's life and the world but merely the symbolic construction and subjective structuration of the drives. Lacan's theory of *sinthome* is intricately connected with such line of thinking. *Sinthome* is "how the word is spelled in the incunabula, the earliest printed books that appeared around the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th" and gradually replaced by the modern form of *symptom* (Harari 23). *Sinthome*, which resembles but differs from "symptom," is Lacan's newly-invented term to encapsulate his revision of the end/aim of psychoanalysis by shifting his emphasis from working through Other-filtered symptoms and traversing fundamental fantasies to identifying with self-invented *sinthome*. Consequently, ethically speaking, the subject is left to take full responsibility for the organization of his/her *jouissance*, his/her libidinal working, his/her own voluntary symptom/*sinthome* without the illusory reliance on the authority of an Other. The following evaluation of the ethical efficacy of *sinthomatic* eroticism and love is tested on this ground of the fundamentals of Lacanian psychoanalytic ethics.

I take the case of Joyce's rendition of this female countersign to be an opportunity not merely to show the ethical efficacy and limits of Joyce but also to investigate the theoretical issues inherent in Lacan's conception of love, ethics, and *sinthome*. Seen through a Lacanian lens, if we accept the truth-value of the aphorism

lens of the ethics of Lacanian psychoanalysis without any intention to venture into critical engagement with the above-listed works.

³ For an extensive critical account of Lacan's theorization of ethical models from (1) the ethical paradigm of pure desire as exemplified by Antigone, through (2) the conceptualization of the psychoanalytic act and the traversal of fantasy, (3) the Not-All logic of the Other and sexuation informed by set theory, to (4) the topological thinking and the notion of *sinthome* and so on, please see Ching-ying Hsu, *Love and the Ethics of Subaltern Subjectivity in James Joyce's Ulysses* (12-124). The present paper engages with the third and fourth moments outlined above, attempting to conduct an ethical evaluation of the ethical paradigms provided by Lacan himself. As to what will be shown in this paper, through a mutual illumination of theory and literary text, the conceptualization of true love and its ethical import will shed light not merely on the merits and limits of Joyce's work but also on the merits and limits of sexual relation and *sinthome*. This marks the original contribution this paper proposes to make to both Joyce studies and Lacanian psychoanalysis.

“there is no such thing as a sexual relationship” (*Il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel*), a theoretical issue that immediately follows would be this: what ethical consequences can be drawn from the non-existence of a sexual relationship? In the meantime, given that Lacan’s ontology of sexual difference is a world away from the pre-modern cosmology of the complementary masculine and feminine principles, a critical question thus emerges. Why does Joyce find it necessary to construct a female “clou” as a countersign to Bloom’s passage to eternity (170)?⁴ Since Molly’s extended soliloquy cannot be said to contribute substantially to the plot of *Ulysses*, what made this construction or appropriation of the female voice appear indispensable to Joyce as he wrote the novel’s final section? On the way to an answer to this question, I propose that, with the assertion of the non-existence of a sexual relationship, the ethics of the Real can be pursued in terms of an ethics of *sinthomatic* eroticism and in the direction of love.

The ethically problematic status of the female countersign will be explored firstly by way of an ethical evaluation of the *sinthome* as a (singularized) sexual relation and an investigation of Joyce’s belief in his *sinthome*. Secondly, my reading will be made from the perspective of the tension between what I name as *sinthomatic* eroticism and love as it is manifested in theory and in the specific text of “Penelope.” I will invoke both Lacan’s idea of love as “compensation” of the non-existence of a sexual relationship, and Alain Badiou’s work on love as a way of creatively carving out what I term “the ethical space of love” as a space (not entirely disengaged from but) distinct from the psychoanalytic domain of sexual desires or eros.

“There Is Both Sexual Relation and No Relation”

Lacan’s maxim of the non-existence of a sexual relation can be explored in various ways. To facilitate the ensuing discussion, I offer a brief summary as follows, which might itself risk oversimplification owing to the limited space available at this juncture. To put it succinctly, it can mean at least the disjunction between a man and a woman with regard to the Real of sexual difference, with regard to a structural void, which is the fundamental deadlock and the origin of sexuation and subjectivization, as the upper part of the chart of sexuation indicates (Fig. 1).⁵ It also designates the disparate ways of approaching and organizing *jouissance* between those who take the

⁴ In a letter to Frank Budgen dated August 16, 1921, Joyce made it clear that “Ithaca” ended the book, and that “Penelope,” with no beginning, middle, or end, was the coda, while Molly was the “clou” of the book.

⁵ This figure comes from Lacan’s *Seminar XX* (78).

feminine and masculine positions, as the lower part of the formula of sexuation shows (*Seminar XX* 78). The masculine logic is deployed through the dialectic between totality and exception. That there exists at least one figure that is not subjected to the phallic function sets the limit of completeness, constituting a universe, a totality of a set of men who are subjected to the phallic function. On the side of the feminine logic, the fact that there is no figure existent without submitting to the phallic function lifts the boundary setting and renders the set of women not-all, pointing to the direction of infinity.

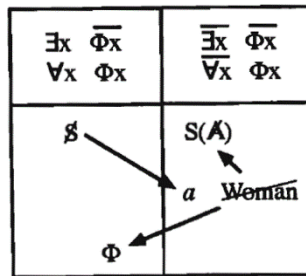


Fig. 1

Lacan further represents the masculine subject by \S , propped by Φ as a signifier, also incarnated in $S1$. How does this barred subject \S desire? The male subject is “unable to attain his sexual partner, who is the Other, except inasmuch as his partner is the cause of this desire” (80), through fantasy $\S \diamond a$. Rather than a meeting between two subjects, the relationship between the self and the Other is deployed in the loop of the fantasy on the part of one party. This closed circuit of fantasy in the phallic *jouissance* on the side of man leads Lacan to describe the mechanism of male desire as “the impotence of masturbation” and “the *jouissance* of the idiot” (81). It is dubbed idiotic because “[t]he man enjoys through the organ and at the same time the organ enjoys all by itself,” which makes “the *jouissance* of the One” and poses “an obstacle for access to the Other” (Naveau 174). This reflects one of the reasons why Lacan proposes the famous dictum that “there is no sexual relation(ship).”

On the other hand, the feminine subjects are “twice” coupled through the Other via the phallus and “tripled” via S (the barred A), the signifier of the lack of the Other (Bernard 172). To put it otherwise, “the feminine subject’s ‘other’ relation to the Other correlates with a *jouissance* ‘beyond’ the phallus, a *jouissance* that belongs to that part of the Other that is not covered by the fantasy of the ‘One’—that is, the fantasy sustained by the positing of the phallic exception” (172). This triple coupling

to the Other on the female part betrays another reason underpinning the sexual non-relation since a man becomes “the means for a woman to reach this Other jouissance, the jouissance beyond [the phallus], the one which separates her from him, which makes her not-all his, which means that she ends up being alone” (Naveau 173). In other words, the existential and desiring positions of the female and male subjects are different without making a complementary pair and there is no formula for their sexual relationship.

I will pursue Joyce’s writing of *sinthomatic* eroticism in the direction of Lacan’s further reflection on the non-existence of the sexual relation, which is encapsulated in another of Lacan’s famous proverb, namely, “There is such a thing as One (*Y a d’l’Un*)” (XX 5). As Bruce Fink and Slavoj Žižek point out, *Y a d’l’Un* and *il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel* must be juxtaposed.⁶ In the context of *Seminar XX*, the One may designate the fissuring/functioning of the (master) signifier (the Phallus or the Father) at the origin of subjectivity and sexuation.⁷ In the direction of *sinthome*, Roberto Harari creatively interprets Lacan’s formulation of “there is One” as “an intransitive psychical constellation,” which means that “the One is all alone,” not in the sense that it would be “a subjective or empirical solitude,” but “One as a psychical formation broken off from the Other” (224-25). Moreover, “One” does not signal some “mythical encompassing One,” but the One as “a ‘*sinthome*,’ a kind of ‘atom of enjoyment,’ the minimal synthesis of language and enjoyment, a unit of signs permeated with enjoyment (like a tic we compulsively repeat)” (Žižek 58).

In alignment with the aphorism, “there is no sexual relation” (*il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel*), in *Seminar XXIII*, Lacan proposes a new conception of the sexual relation through the conceptualization of *sinthome*. A key passage in *Seminar XXIII* deserves full quotation and careful unpacking, for I consider it to lay the ground for what I have termed *sinthomatic* eroticism:

To the extent that there is a *sinthome*, there is no sexual equivalence, that is to say, there is a relation . . . Therefore, there is both sexual relation and no relation. *Where there is relation, it is to the extent that there is sinthome*, that is to say, *to the extent that the other sex is supported by the sinthome*. . . . If a woman is a *sinthome* for any man, it’s quite clear that another name needs to be found for what’s involved

⁶ Fink’s note 19 in his translation of *Seminar XX* (5). Žižek’s explanation appears in Žižek (57).

⁷ Lorenzo Chiesa provides an extended account of the functioning of the One [in terms of the phallus] that allows for sexual identification of man, hysteria, and woman. Please see the chapter “The Logic of Sexuation” in *The Not-Two: Logic and God in Lacan* (105-59).

in man for a woman; since the *sinthome* is characterized precisely by non-equivalence. One can say that man is anything you please, specifically an affliction that is worse than a *sinthome*. A ravage even. If there is no equivalence, you're forced to specify what's involved in the *sinthome*. (101/84; emphasis added)

The basic tenets of Lacan's position at this moment can be interpreted as follows. First, there is sexual relation only if there is *sinthome*, and the *sinthome* creates not merely a new subject but also the Other sex. It has been a fundamental thesis of Lacan's return to Freud that Lacan rewrites the Oedipal scenario with the functioning of the Name of the Father as a paternal metaphor. The Name of the Father designates the Desire of the Mother. Joyce is disinvested from the Unconscious, which means that he can dispense with the Name of the Father on condition that he knows how to invent his own. Harari interprets this insight as an invention of a Name of the Father "unconditioned" by the Desire of the Mother through the mechanism of suppletion (Harari 239). I take it to mean that the Name of the Father is dislodged from the attempt for a substitution of the Desire of the Mother. The newly invented names are designed to name the void and nothing more, which is the establishment of the fourth ring as a suppletion to bind together the three registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. *Without the support of the traditional regulation of sexual difference mediated by the authority of the Name of the Father, how would the non-rapport of sexual relation be (re)instituted or negotiated privately by the involved parties?* This is precisely Joyce's question,⁸ which he answers by his *sinthome*, exploring the existential and ethical questions by the experiment and construction with the woman in his life. Together with this experiment is his investigation and representation of manhood, femininity, women's images, women's sexuality, and so on. This is why, although "Penelope" does not contribute further to the development of the plot, it is indispensable for the inter-*sinthomatic* eroticism under construction in *Ulysses*.

Sinthome has "creative effects": "the jouissance of one's own drives creates the 'Other gender'" (Verhaeghe and Declercq 74). In my opinion, this conceptualization of partner-*sinthome*, or *sinthomic*-partner, marks out *both the ethical merit and limit*

⁸ Of course, Joyce never literally phrases his problem in this way. The point is that if we follow Lacan's reading of Joyce and his claim that Joyce as a subject unsubscribed from the unconscious rejects the authority of the paternal metaphor and the traditional regulation of sexual (non-)relation by it, then, Joyce as a subject necessarily faces the problem of how to deal with the sexual (non-)relation by himself in the following ways—by inventing new terms to organize sexuality and by experimenting with *sinthome* or *sinthomatic eroticism* through his real life experience/experiment with the woman and through his writing.

of *sinthome*. The self-invented *sinthome* deserves the credit for maintaining the recognition of the non-existence of the Other and for authoring one's own sexual rapport by way of the creative *savoir-faire* of one's *jouissance*. Verhaeghe and Declercq explain this point as follows: "this [sexual] Other is a fiction, but it is a fiction that does not turn the subject into a dupe because he has created it by himself, based on his particular way of *jouissance* . . . [, in which] a particular signifier . . . knots the three registers of the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary into a particular sexual rapport" (74).

However, assessed from the viewpoint of intersubjectivity, this could also signify that "there is both sexual relation and non-relation" (Harari 207). The non-reciprocity can be understood to be directly derived from the sexual non-equivalence. The lack of equivalence of sexual positions necessarily entails *the lack of interchangeability* between a man and a woman with respect to the *sinthomatic* sexual relation. Although Lacan is comfortable in asserting that, for every man, his woman can function as his *sinthome*, the asymmetry of sexual positions and libidinal organization as outlined in the formula of sexuation leads Lacan to coin feminine *jouissance* in different terms, such as "ravage" or "devastation," rather than her man as her *sinthome* (207). Nevertheless, as Harari traces the development of Lacan's thinking, it is evident that Lacan soon altered his position. While presenting a talk on July 9, 1978, Lacan demonstrates a clear discrepancy: "So much so that I consider you all out there, insofar as you are, you have every Jack as *sinthome* his Jill. There is a he-*sinthome* and a she-*sinthome*" (qtd. in Harari 209). On the basis of the structural non-existence of a sexual relation or the sexual non-relation, Lacan has proposed that *sinthome* is all that is left for sexual rapport. This "repaired" sexual relation should be "an *intersinthomic* relation"; "in other words, each individual supports the 'remaining,' bound sexual relation in accordance with whatever one's *sinthome* incarnates" (209).

Upon closer scrutiny, there is ambiguity in the above-mentioned "*intersinthomic*" sexual relations. On the most optimistic level, the *intersinthomic* sexual relation can signify that there is a corroboration of *sinthomatic* working between joint parties and hence an *intersinthomatic* relation points to the direction of an intersubjective relation at work, which is an operation deemed as a recognition of the subjectivity of the Other. However, it can also mean that despite the he-*sinthome* and the she-*sinthome* being equally feasible, the involved parties may indulge in constructing his/her own *sinthome*, living in/as his/her own *sinthome* in their *intersinthomic* sexual relations without truly recognizing the subjectivity of the Other. In the following analysis of Joyce's case, an ethical evaluation of Joyce's particular

sinthome will necessarily lead to an examination of whether or not the *sinthome* allows room for the subjectivity of the Other.

The Problematic *Sinthomatic* Eroticism

That we are able to evaluate Joyce's *sinthomatic* eroticism as a singularized sexual relation through *Ulysses* is precisely because, as an artificer of his *jouissance*, his writing and *sinthome*-making are intrinsically connected. The writing of sexual relation in/by Joyce must be read in parallel to Joyce's writing as his *sinthome*. Joyce's construction of *sinthome* through writing does not follow the reflection/imitation model between life and work. The conflation between Joyce, real-life persons, and main characters in Lacan's theorization should not be taken as an expression of naïve intentional fallacy. Instead, as Lacan himself claims, he does not approach Joyce's work as a literary critic, but as a psychoanalyst, to see how at certain moments his literary endeavor corroborates his existential writing of *sinthome*.⁹ Lacan unwittingly provides a new theory for literature, while devising an innovation in psychoanalytic theorization on *sinthome* and the pluralization of the Name(s) of the Father. My Lacanian reading is still a literary critical effort and certainly does not try to psychoanalyze Joyce through *Ulysses*, but to observe and explore "Penelope" as part of his *sinthomatic* work and to evaluate the ethical limit and consequences from such a *sinthomatic* elaboration. In a similar vein, Parveen Adams points out that Joyce "relate[s] to Nora through his *écriture*," "lov[ing] Nora with his *sinthome*" (139-40).

Lacan himself draws attention to the peculiar intimate relationship between Joyce and Nora as it is displayed in the Nora letters:

[W]hat is Joyce's relationship to Nora? Oddly enough, I would say it's a sexual relation, even though I say such a thing doesn't exist, but it's a funny old relation. . . . The inside-out glove is Nora. It's his way of considering that she fits him like a glove. . . . For Joyce, there is but one woman. . . . Not only must she fit him like a glove, she must grip him tightly as a glove. She is absolutely pointless. . . . whenever she drops a sprog (chaque fois que ce raboule un gosse)—I really am obliged to speak in these terms—it causes a scene. It wasn't part of the programme. (XXIII 83-84/68)

⁹ Lacan says, "Je ne suis pas un universitaire, contrairement à ce qu'on me donne du professeur, du maître, et autres badinages. Je suis un analyste" (*Le Séminaire XXIII* 163).

Nora sustains an essential function in Joyce's construction of a curious, singular sexual relation with her. Joyce does not endow his relation with Nora with the *sinthome* as predicate; instead, *sinthomatic* eroticism *is* his writing of the sexual relation. The soliloquy of "Penelope" bears remarkable resemblances to Nora's style of letter writing (Adams 140). Brenda Maddox carefully examines the similarities and discrepancies between the fictional character and the real-life figure.¹⁰ That the parallel or correlation between the textual analysis and biographical facts has long drawn strong interest in Joyce scholarship seems to prove that Lacan's insight into the intricate relationship between literary writing and ontological construction stands soundly.

In her comments on the Nora letters, Christine Van Boheemen-Saaf gives an illustration of how the writings of *sinthomatic* eroticism work. The topological knotting of subjectivity and literary working are interwoven, and the *jouissance* of writing and the writing of *jouissance* are correlative in Joyce's experimentation of sexual relation. The correspondence between literary masochism and real-life masochism can be traced in *Ulysses* and the obscene letters.¹¹ Joyce also launched erotic experimentation with Nora. The performative characteristic should be highlighted, for these letters are not representations of sexual desire but an exploration and construction of *sinthomatic* eroticism, which has been proved to be "transformative," in that these writings filter and reshape drive, sexuality, and subjectivity (Van Boheemen-Saaf 477). The letters can be viewed as Joyce's way of littering his *jouissance* through letters. Arguably, this can be taken to exemplify how *sinthomatic* eroticism is constructed through writing and how writing is Joyce's *sinthome*.

¹⁰ As Maddox points out, Joyce never said that Nora is Molly Bloom, and the birthplace and physical figures are not quite the same between Nora and Molly. Joyce also derives the features of Molly from other females in his life. For instance, the dark hair comes from Amalia Popper, his Trieste pupil and the famous "Yes" is derived from Nora's friend Lilian Wallace. In the meantime, Nora is present in female characters other than Molly, such as Bella Cohen, Anna Livia Plurabelle, and so on (Maddox 198-210).

¹¹ Frances Restuccia in *Joyce and the Law of the Father* traces the correspondences between perversion in real life and literature, pointing out the parallel perverse practice of drawer, glove, and fur fetishism, flagellation in sexual practices, and so on. For instance, following in Severin's footsteps, Joyce attempted to transform Nora into a Venus in Furs (Joyce, *Selected Letters* 172, 176). In "Circe," fetishism and flagellation are vividly transplanted from literature and real-life masochism (Restuccia 133). In the case of Joyce, the writings he reads, writes, and practices are intimately connected.

Sinthomatic eroticism may take various forms. The *intersinthomatic* relation manifest in Joyce's text centers on the issue of in/fidelity.¹² Lacan suggests that *Exiles* exemplifies the in/fidelity complex in Joycean *sinthomatic* eroticism:

Exiles is really an approach to something that for him is the core symptom, which is formed from the specific shortcoming of sexual relation. . . . Non-relation is the fact that there is really no reason to hold one-woman-among-others to be *one's* woman. One-woman-among-others is also she who has a relationship with just any old other man. And it is indeed this *any old other man* that is at issue in the character Joyce conjures up, and for whom, at this point in his life, he knows how to open up the choice of the one-woman in question, who is none other than Nora. (XXIII 70/56; emphasis in original)

The sexual non-relation points to the matter that "there is no science of love, no formula of it" (Copjec 122). There is no sexual relation; however, there is the writing of *sinthomatic* eroticism as a substitute, as a newly-invented, individualized *sinthome*-partner. The central question of the lack of sexual relation is encapsulated in a staging of a possible adultery between Bertha (wife) and Robert (friend) when Richard (husband) deliberately puts Robert in front of his wife to ask his wife to free herself for possible adultery. In "Notes sur les ex-ils," Jean-Michel Rabaté studies the play *Exiles* and Joyce's working notes, arguing that Robert's suffering stems largely from his knowing that he does not want to know, from his intentional maintenance of persistent doubt, from his using this doubt in overcoming jealousy (102-03). Furthermore, Rabaté also points out this knowledge of not wanting to know and doubt structurally circles around a central void from which all literatures and naming are derived, a central void that is clearly related to the Lacanian notion of "il n'y a pas

¹² Of course, the scope and complexity of Joyce's *sinthomatic* eroticism far exceed the issue of infidelity and venture into the representation of women's image, women's sexuality, the construction of body, and so on, as the large bulk of Joyce criticism has revealed. A large amount of criticism on "Penelope" can be taken to show how the individualized *sinthome* has provoked collective reflection and evaluation on how reactionary and progressive Joyce's peculiar construction of eroticism is. The list is long. For a summary of earlier reception of Molly, see Scott; Shechner; and Unkeless. More recent criticism draws inspiration from cultural criticism or contemporary theories to investigate how Molly's self is determined by the reproduction, negotiation, partial success, and resistance toward the dominant discourses of gender, class, patriarchy, colonialism, and consumption of her time. See Pearce. Critics well-versed in contemporary theories of Derrida, Deleuze, and others explore how the construction of the body in "Penelope" illustrates modernism's exploration of bodily representations. See Brown.

rapport” (104). I entirely endorse Rabaté’s insightful analysis here on *Exiles*. However, the doubt or uncertainty in *Exiles* may be interpreted in another light when the attempt at sustaining doubt makes adultery a possibility and the script of adultery is written and acted, ultimately, in *Ulysses*. That is to say, it is arguable that Joyce’s maneuver is less a social critique advocating free love than a writing of *sinthomatic* eroticism (Ragland-Sullivan 56), an attempt at prescribing a script for a possible adultery, a symptomatic dramatization of infidelity, to render the lack of harmonious sexual relation less disruptive, less traumatic, and less unpredictable. By devising a contrived scenario of adultery, Joyce creates a play of infidelity that turns a possibility into an imagined reality, even necessity and duty to betray. With an artistic sleight of hand, Joyce attempts to confront the anxiety over the partner’s freedom to choose love objects by turning this possible condition for infidelity into a command for adultery.

In “Scylla and Charybdis,” Stephen’s private theory of Shakespeare has been deployed as “a French triangle,” as the character John Eglinton mockingly puts it (*Ulysses* 9.1065). Stephen’s theory is centered on the notion of paternity as “a legal fiction” (*U* 9.84). Recognizing the fictional status of the Father’s name, Stephen’s theory gestures toward self-naming in the direction of positing a peculiar singular universal, which is an idiosyncratic writing of (the non-existence) of sexual relation. The motifs of usurpation and adultery resonate throughout Shakespeare’s life, in the adultery of his wife Anne Hathaway and his daughter Susanna, and in his works, including *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Cymbeline*, and so on.

Through this peculiar theory of Shakespeare, Joyce deploys “the sexual dialectic” (Froula 106), which is operative between the “immateriality” of paternity posited “as an intrinsic wound/void/loss” and the masculine cultural imagination that “casts all women as *potential ‘whore’* by virtue of their material connection to children” and the suspicion of potential infidelity (Froula 108-10; emphasis in original). In the face of the non-existence of sexual relation and the potential inadequacy of naming by the paternal authority, masculine culture has rendered fathers as potential cuckolds and mothers as possible whores. The term “whore” is less about prostitution than about adultery since whore is paired with cuckold. Joycean artists, including Shakespeare, Richard, Stephen, and, of course, Joyce himself, “actively court a wound,” which is “inflicted by an adulterous woman,” scheming to “dramatize” wound by way of “contrivance” (Froula 111). Hence, the melodrama of infidelity of Richard/Bertha/Robert repeats itself in *Ulysses* as that of Bloom/Molly/Boylan. The symptom manifested in these texts is a self-willing suffering, a writing of *sinthomatic* eroticism. This reading should throw light on the

nature and the necessity of a female countersign to “Bloom’s passport to eternity.” If, in “Circe,” Bloom enacts his cuckoldry fantasy, in “Penelope,” Molly is designed to stage her own version of whoredom as adulterous wife to complete the Joycean sexual script of *sinthomatic* eroticism, in which a curious marriage and an odd sexual relation is manufactured and sustained despite the staging of adultery.

Molly is clearly aware of the position she has been put into by her husband’s clandestine desire and practical design when she says, “can you feel him trying to make a whore of me what he never will” (*U* 18.96-97). She is proud of her knowledge of the perverse desires and idiosyncratic preferences of her husband when she boasts, “what a madman nobody understands his cracked ideas but me” (*U* 18.1406-07). The cuckold/whore fantasy certainly is prominent in the peculiarity of their marriage. Molly is aware that the affair with Boylan is not merely a product of her own pursuit of desire and sexual gratification, and that Bloom clandestinely plays a role in this adultery script, which in turn serves Bloom’s own desire mechanism. Bloom has helped to facilitate Molly’s affair with Boylan; Molly suspects that this is the reason why Milly was sent away to study photography: “all the same on account of me and Boylan that’s why he did it I’m certain the way he plots and plans everything out” (*U* 18.1007-09). Molly also surmises that her adultery with Boylan functions to fulfil the scenario of Bloom’s fantasy of having an affair with a married woman which he dares not commit (*U* 18.1253-54), and this melodrama of adultery serves Bloom’s desire as Molly notices (*U* 18.168-71).

Joyce’s ambition for a peculiar *sinthomatic* eroticism intrudes into the private recess of his modern Penelope’s fantasies. Instead of suppressing female desire and lust outside marriage by presenting a virgin/wife image that serves the dominant patriarchy, Joyce’s endeavor is to imagine and to accommodate possible scenarios of female fantasy and desires in Molly’s sexual relations with other men. If the moral codes of ancient Greek patriarchy necessarily require the impeccable chastity and impervious fidelity of the wife, any potential female deviation can only be repressed into denied fantasies or violently suppressed in reality by the slaughters in Homer’s version. In stark contrast, Joyce’s modern rendition allows room for female desire even in the form of adultery and makes it culturally imaginable and representable. To put it another way, Joyce at the very least deserves our praise for the extent to which *Ulysses* problematizes the issue of infidelity. By way of making a cuckold the mock-hero of his modern epic, Joyce attempts to “subjectify” what normally is reduced to a derided, degenerated object and endows a cuckold with the status of hero in novelistic endeavor, establishing it “as a viable subject-position” (Levin 93).

Cuckoldry and heroism are not incompatible in the eyes of Joyce, and Joyce creates a new type of hero in European Literature (Mason 171-88).

The subject-position of Bloom's version of cuckoldry is further problematized by Joyce when ostensible masochism is involved. Bloom is hardly a "suffering martyr," for "if he tolerates his wife's infidelity, he also enjoys it; he even facilitates it by staying away from home" (Levin 94). This reveals the subject's responsibility at the level of libidinal economy. Joyce also attempts to "subjectify" the wife/whore as the counterpart of the husband/cuckold. Despite the debate over Joyce's appropriation of a female voice, "Penelope" apparently gives room for Molly to invoke and select her own suitors within a limited scope, and endows her with the right to kill them in her own fantasies. By taking into consideration female subjectivity in terms of desires and fantasies, and by representing the libidinal economy that is operative both in the pair husband/cuckold and wife/whore, Joyce renders explicit what had previously been severely stigmatized and repressed.

However, the merits of Joyce's representation of *sinthomatic* eroticism may appear limited and the celebration of the autonomy of female desires and female subjectivity may be seriously undermined. This female countersign is rather problematic for Molly's desires, enjoyment, and fantasies, and choices are socio-culturally and libidinal-economically conditioned. Bloom's simultaneous presence and absence is encrypted in Molly's sexual fantasy of adulterous lust. For instance, Molly says to herself, "I wish some man or other would take me sometime *when he is there* and kiss me in his arms" (*U* 18.104-05; emphasis added). This fantasy is staged for the gaze to provoke the jealousy and desire of an estranged husband. In her wild sailor fantasy, Bloom is paradoxically felt through his absence:

of course a woman wants to be embraced 20 times a day almost to make her look young no matter by who so long as to be in love or loved by somebody *if the fellow you want isnt there* sometimes by the Lord God I was thinking would I go around by the quays there some dark evening where nobodyd know me and pick up a sailor off the sea thatd be hot on for it and not care a spin whose I was only do it off up in a gate somewhere. (*U* 18.1407-13; emphasis added)

This fantasy can be taken as direct evidence of Molly's lust-desire as a counterpart to her reflection just a few lines earlier on the male freedom for casual sex, which enjoys more tolerance in society and culture (*U* 18.1388-91). However, readers should not celebrate this wild fantasy as recognition of women's freedom for free love/sex, and

so on. Molly's boredom and desperation are vivid and she clearly longs for someone that she really wants but who is not there.

What is even more remarkable is that Bloom's interference with the adultery of his wife/whore takes into consideration the arrangement of a selective distraction for the post-adultery wife/whore. It is of course Stephen who is selected to fulfil this task. The husband's selection successfully arouses Molly's interests, which are made obvious in her fantasy about playing a role in Stephen's life by exchanging language lessons (*U* 18.1476) and fantasizing an affair with the would-be young poet (*U* 18.1363-67). Furthermore, the *sinthomatic* erotic script of cuckold/whore is carefully completed with an imagined procedure for reunion. The adultery with Boylan is rendered much less threatening to their marriage when it seems to function as a backdrop for Molly to arouse the sexual interest of her husband again. Underneath Molly's sexual confidence lies her desperate attempt to win Bloom back sexually:

Ill just give him one more chance . . . Ill put on my best shift and drawers let him have a good eyeful out of that to make his micky stand for him Ill let him know if that's what he wanted that his wife is fucked yes and damn well fucked too up to my neck nearly not by him 5 or 6 times . . . its all his own fault if I am an adulteress . . . Ill tell him I want to buy underclothes then if he gives me that well he wont be too bad . . . Ill go out Ill have him eying up at the ceiling where is she gone now make him want me that's the only way. (*U* 18.1497-1540)

It is arguable that Molly remains a faithful wife while she busies herself with playing the whore for Bloom. For a woman who cannot even afford to buy underclothes by herself, and who schemes for her husband's favor through sex, what Molly does is "neither free nor play but a highly determined (socioemotionally as well as socioeconomically) form of sexual labor" (Froula 177). While contemporary critics detect Molly's boredom, her despair as a lower-middle class wife with limited choices and her playacting of an imposed erotic script (Froula 177; Henke 138-49; Unkeless 150-68), it is unclear whether Joyce intends this description of Molly to be a socio-cultural criticism or if the portrayal is merely a peculiar eroticism that Joyce draws from culture and real-life experiences. In my opinion, Joyce certainly forges a highly idiosyncratic *sinthomatic* eroticism. But, however individualized this representation of *sinthome* may appear, it still draws inspiration from the time and culture of the author, and, to a large extent, it does *not* go very far from his culture. This discloses one of the limits of Joyce's *sinthomatic* eroticism. On the one hand,

Molly's narrowness and pettiness may be taken as a social critique in which Joyce attempts to portray how women under such conditions might enjoy and negotiate their desires. On the other hand, Joyce seems to enjoy his *sinthomatic* eroticism through writing such women who fall prey to and collaborate with the confining social, economic, and emotional conditions. That is to say, Joyce comes near to the social symptoms while he constructs his *sinthomatic* eroticism.

Lacan famously titled *Seminar XXIII* as *Joyce le sinthome* to emphasize the singularity of the being of Joyce. Joyce does not have his *sinthome* as a predicate or trait, Joyce *is* his *sinthome*; his *sinthome* is his signature, his name and being. Joyce *as* his *sinthome* is the product of his know-how to organize his *jouissance* in the face of the consequence of his unsubscription from the Unconscious, of his foreclosure of the Name of the Father. One of the key features of *sinthome* as an outcome of the foreclosure of the Name of the Father is that repression and the return of the repressed do not work. Joyce's writing as direct working on *jouissance* is the process of constructing law and subjectivity. Law does not function with its excluded, repressed underside enjoyment. The intrinsic connection and concoction of law and enjoyment is *sinthomatic* working itself. There is no hidden secret to be unearthed and worked through. On the contrary, there is law, subjectivity, and sexual relation under construction in an individualized *sinthomatic* fabrication. Joyce tries to symbolize the Real through the making of his *sinthomatic* eroticism. He *enjoys* through his writing for he is in the process of writing the script of his enjoyment, his sexual relation. Moreover, just as the neurotic believes in his/her symptom and stakes his/her being, Lacan argues that, although Joyce does not know what he is doing with his *sinthome*, he believes it and lives with/in it. This leads to the fact that his enterprise of *sinthome* does not go very far (*XXIII* 69).¹³ This betrays another limit of Joyce's *sinthome*. Not merely does the content of *sinthomatic* eroticism not go very far from the repressed fantasy of the traditional patriarchy, the structural function of *sinthome* and Joyce's belief in it is not very far from the role played by neurotic symptoms. In commenting on what Joyce does in/with *Exiles*, Harari remarks that Joyce commits "the act of imagining—and why not: desiring—that his wife Nora is betraying him" (135). By way of such a maneuver, "Joyce's desire to decipher his own enigmas does not take him very far . . . because he believes in his *sinthome*; and due to this belief, he is not greatly interested in resolving the enigmas" (Harari 135).¹⁴

¹³ As Lacan puts it, "Il est évident que ça ne va pas loin."

¹⁴ This also marks a difference between Joyce and the normal neurotics. Although both believe in *sinthome* and symptoms, the neurotic searches for an answer from the Other as the authority for the meaning of the enigmatic troubling symptoms.

One of the consequences of this “not very far” is the repetitious and constricting characteristic that can be detected in the specific version of Joyce’s *sinthome*. Paraphrasing Lacan’s ideas, Harari says, “it [*sinthome*] cannot be situated in the unconscious, but the subject remains unconscious of it . . . a man of *savoir-faire* did not know that he was making the *sinthome*” (211). There is a compulsive, repetitive quality characterized Joyce’s recurrent motif of in/fidelity. Joyce’s writing of sexual relation through his *sinthome* does not constitute a truly *intersinthomatic* construction. Adams even claims that it is the non-reciprocity of Joyce’s *sinthome* in his relationship with Nora that once blinded Lacan to insist on the non-symmetry between man and woman in *sinthome* and to fail to conceive inter-*sinthome* for some time (141). This sexual relation is simply Joyce’s *sinthome*, but not vice versa. The *sinthomatic* sexual relation that Joyce builds up with his wife makes him extremely dependent on Nora, but Nora maintains her own “independent spirit” (Maddox 374). While in the *sinthomatic* erotic script, Molly corroborates the cuckold/whore fantasy by committing adultery, Nora, in reality, complains and refuses it.¹⁵ Joyce himself seems to be aware that his writing is after all his own partner-*sinthome*, and that his partner may not share the same *sinthomatic* construction and find the imposition of his *sinthome* a prison house from which the female subject desires to break free. In the female countersign, Joyce inserted a line to express Molly’s protest: “O Jamesy let me up out of this pooh sweets of sin” (*U* 18.1128-29).

Nora’s defiance and Molly’s protest betray that, although *sinthomatic* working bears the ethical merit of establishing a sexual relation on the basis of the inconsistency or non-existence of the Other, Joyce’s version of *sinthome* risks being equally masturbatory and self-serving, which is incapable of recognizing the subjectivity of the Other, failing to establish a truly subject-to-subject relationship. As Véronique Voruz brilliantly puts it, “cancelling one’s subscription to the unconscious is not a sign of love”; “if, following the example of Joyce, to reduce the symptom to its core articulation is the way to learn how to live without the Other, it is nonetheless only the starting point of knowing how to live with the other” (Voruz 128, 132). Strictly speaking, Voruz proffers this insight in a different context other than the discussion of sexual relation, but her perceptive viewpoint still applies to the non-reciprocal *sinthomatic* eroticism in Joyce. Joyce’s *sinthomatic* writing, or better, Joyce’s writing as his *sinthome*, has become a self-engendering, self-propelling, self-serving writing machine, which serves the artist’s existential purpose in an endless

¹⁵ Joyce once attempted to “manipulate the disobliging historical Nora into becoming the nightmare-woman of his dreams, while she [Nora] . . . complained to Frank Budgen, ‘Jim wants me to go with other men so that he will have something to write about’” (Froula 111).

circular fashion. The same solipsistic tendency is observable in Joyce's relation with women, as Lacan accurately detects,

[Joyce] knew very well that his relations with women were merely his own song. He tried to situate the human being in a way that has the sole merit of differing from what has been asserted about it previously. But in the end, all that, it's the same old story, it's the symptom. . . . That's why I spoke of holy Joyce-the symptom [Joyce-le-sinthôme], like that in a single trait.¹⁶

Sinthomatic eroticism in terms of a cuckoldry/whore dialectic, which has been respectively named by Shelly Brivic and Christine Froula,¹⁷ is clearly Joyce's symptom and not Nora's, who is secondarily enlisted to offer her countersign like Molly in *Ulysses*. Lacan had first been startled by Joyce's artifice of *sinthome* by way of his knowing how to do with *jouissance* without the support of the Other. This shares one of the basic tenets of the ethical act of psychoanalysis in terms of the recognition of the inconsistency of the Other. However, Lacan also gradually realizes the ethical limitation of *sinthome* for it does not constitute a true recognition of the Other (sex). What would be the ethical paradigm that can work to exceed the confinement of *sinthome* and gesture toward a true subject-to-subject relationship in psychoanalysis? The answer that psychoanalysis can offer is love.¹⁸ I will turn to the theorization of love by Lacan and Alain Badiou and explore an inherent tension between *sinthomatic* eroticism and love in Joyce in the ensuing sections.

Works of Love: When Lacan Meets Badiou

At the risk of oversimplification, the core essence of Lacan's *Encore* Seminar can be viewed as encapsulated in the two related aphorisms, "there is no sexual relation" (*il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*), and "what makes up for the sexual relationship is, quite precisely, love" (*XX 45*). Joyce's *sinthomatic* eroticism comes close to a similar danger in the operation of desire and fantasy in that it risks being non-reciprocal and constricting, stifling the wide range of possibilities as well as the

¹⁶ Lacan, "Geneva Lecture on the Symptom," (qtd. in Voruz 133). I also follow Voruz's modified translation.

¹⁷ Brivic devotes two chapters to *Ulysses*, discussing the thematics of shame and cuckoldry (121-62).

¹⁸ Voruz comes to a similar insight when she argues for a move "from the impasse of the symptom to love."

subjectivity of the Other. Although *sinthomatic* eroticism excels in forging the knowledge of the partner, “[t]o know what your partner will do is not a proof of love” (XX 146). If the compensation that Lacan aims at is not the illusory imaginary love of union or fusion as a covering up of the non-existence of sexual relation, then how would a genuine love appear? My intention here is *to foreground the ethical space of love*. Situated at the impossibility of the sexual relationship, a genuine love worthy of its name must emerge from this negativity of the Real impasse as something positive and affirmative, while simultaneously transcending the representation of the Imaginary/Symbolic coordinates. That is to say, I propose a genuine love must be *a Real act and an intersubjective relationship*. Lacan himself gestures toward this direction of reasoning.

The non-existence of sexual relation, the lack of ratio or formula for sexual relation, necessarily suggests that love might be understood in the direction of contingency and encounter. The chance encounter of pure contingency inaugurates the process of love, which turns into necessity, into incessant writing (XX 145). Lacan also ventures concepts such as “courage,” “recognition,” and truly intersubjective relation, which betrays not merely the fragile nature of love but also opens up for the ethical dimension in love. As Lacan puts it,

There is no such thing as a sexual relationship because one’s jouissance of the Other taken as a body is always inadequate—perverse, on the one hand, insofar as the Other is reduced to object *a*, and crazy and enigmatic, on the other. Isn’t it on the basis of the confrontation of this impasse, with this impossibility by which the real is defined, that love is put to the test? Regarding one’s partner, love can only actualize what, in a sort of poetic flight, in order to make myself understood. I called courage—courage with respect to this fatal destiny. But *is it courage that is at stake or pathways of recognition? That recognition is nothing other than the way in which the relationship said to be sexual—that has now become a subject-to-subject relationship*, the subject being but the effect of unconscious knowledge—stops not being written. (XX 144; emphasis added)

I take Lacan to mean that there is a *surplus* in the very contingency of an encounter itself, which exceeds the work of fantasy although it is not entirely independent of it. This contingency of the Real encounter enlists courage as a stake in love, which simultaneously discloses that love without the underlying Symbolic

formulation, without the guarantee of the Other, is built solely upon this very fragility of the subject's courageous undertaking. Moreover, *when Lacan shifts emphasis from courage to recognition, he transforms an ethical question of subjective courage into an ontological recognition of intersubjective relations.* In the meantime, the subject-to-subject relation as the outcome of ontological recognition bears undeniable ethical significance because the subject no longer reduces the other to *objet a*, transcending the mechanism of desire that Lacan names as “masturbatory” or “perverse” throughout the seminar.

This condensed passage is of vital importance to interpret Lacan's dictum of love as compensation for the lack of sexual relation. Badiou establishes his theorization of love on Lacan's conception of the non-existence of sexual relation and the concomitant compensation of love. His proposition of love as a generic process of truth and the conception of love as a scene of Two clearly bear witness to the influence of Lacan. In my interpretation of Badiou, the eventual happening of love can be regarded as a philosophical variation of Lacan's notion of the contingency of love as an encounter; the idea of love as the scene of Two resonates with Lacan's proposal of a “subject-to-subject relationship.”

Mathematical ontology and an ethic that is derived from and congruent with such a rigorous ontology have been two principle pillars of Badiou's philosophical edifices, although his writings encompass a much more complex medley. In a terse essay titled “What is Love?” Badiou proffers “an axiomatics of love” (266),¹⁹ aiming at formulating the structure of love rather than describing the ethos and passion of a loving subject. Like the rest of other truth-procedures, art, politics, and science, love as one of the four truth-procedures is deployed by Badiou through the dichotomy of being and event. Badiouian truth is always *subtractive truth*. With his uncompromising proclamation of atheism, the point of departure is a system not authorized by God. Ontologically speaking, this means, at the most fundamental, “the One is not” (*Ethics* 25). As Badiou puts it, “[t]he multiple ‘without one’—every multiple being in its turn nothing other than a multiple of multiples—is the law of being” (*Ethics* 25). On the ontological level, there are myriad “presented multiplic[it]ies,” each of which can be counted as a “situation,” a “place of taking place” (*B & E* 24). Badiou furnishes one of his chapters in his *Ethics* with the title, “the *Ethic* of Truths,” with its emphasis on singular truths rather than truth in general (*Ethics* 40-57; emphasis added). In Badiou's conception, the void or hole is situated, and the event is a break incalculable and irreducible to the site of the event. The truth

¹⁹ For a more detailed account of the reasons underlying Badiou's de-psychologization of love by way of mathematization of love, see Gómez Camarena.

and the subject are singular and event-induced. For a truth-procedure to be initiated and developed, “something extra” must happen (41). This “something extra,” “this supplement” is what Badiou designates as “event” (41). Along with the dichotomy of being and event is that of knowledge and truth. Concomitantly, a further dichotomy is operative in Badiou’s distinction between what he calls “some-one,” “an animal of the human species,” a kind of “particular multiple” within the designation of the power of established knowledge and the “composition” of the “subject” as “a point of truth” (44). Through the evental happening and the truth construction around the naming of the event, a transforming agenda is inaugurated, and wholly new arrangements, permutations, and restructurations are set in motion.

In the case of love, “knowledge is the present condition” of each person, while love as a chance encounter “pierces a hole within the certainty of the present life conditions” (Gómez Camarena 165). Buttressed by Lacan’s theory of the lack of sexual relation, the being or the situation whose void will function as the evental site for love to emerge is the disjunction of two sexuated positions, “man” and “woman” (167).²⁰ An encounter supplements the void of the situation, inaugurates a generic truth-procedure. The declaration of the truth through the announcement of “I love you” names this evental happening, “induces the subjective activation,” the enactment of the fidelity of this truth. The truth of love for Badiou is the construction of the Two, the scene of Two, “the possibility of the immanent two in the corrosive exteriority of sexual non-rapport” (“Scene” 45). The notion of “the immanent two” is of utter importance to Badiou when he strives to distinguish love from the couple. The couple is what appears to the third party, and therefore “completely exterior to the Two of disjunction,” which establishes itself solely on the courageous commitment and fidelity to the truth of the evental encounter of love (“What” 271). Badiou further explains,

This stage of the Two is not a being of the Two, which would suppose three. This stage of the Two is a work, a process. . . . [T]he event-encounter occurs only in the form of its disappearance or eclipse. It is fixed only by a nomination, and this nomination is a declaration, the declaration of love. The name which declares is drawn from the void of the site from which the encounter draws the bit-of-being [*peu*

²⁰ To save Badiou from the possible charges that his model shows preference for mainstream heterosexuality, Gómez Camarena adds a bit of sophistication to the disjunct positions between the two sexes by saying that “[t]his Two is the precise split between man and woman—the sexed couple that is *not* necessarily hetero-sexed; that is to say, the disjunction between two subjects” (167; emphasis in original).

d'être]. . . . Love is interminable fidelity to the first nomination. ("What" 272)

That love, as the construction of the scene of Two, marks out its emergence from the *nomination* of the encounter-event, which itself supplements the sexual non-rapport and discloses the "dis-relation [*dé-rapport*]" between desire and love ("What" 273). However, the dis-relation between desire and love does not mean that love can disregard the dimension of desire, of sexuality, totally, for "the disjunction is simultaneously its material and its obstacle." ("Scene" 45). While sexuality deployed through the mechanism of desire and fantasy is "narcissistic," "love reaches out toward the ontological"; "love focuses on the being of the other, on the other as it has erupted, fully armed with its being, into my life thus disrupted and re-fashioned" (*Praise* 21). The construction of Two is an outcome of ontological recognition of the other as well as a new ontological construction, which alters, restructures the life and world of the two subjects. This ontological construction of love *supplements ethically* the non-reciprocity of the fantasy/desire mechanism as well as *sinthomatic* eroticism, which, as my analysis in the previous section has shown, becomes non-reciprocal.

At this point, I would like to take the opportunity to respond to one of the valuable points raised by this article's anonymous reviewers so as to clarify my position and terminology regarding "subject-to-subject relationship" and sexual (non-)relation, and argue for my proposition that love supplements ethically the (non-)sexual relation and *sinthome*. The reviewer wrote, "My only concern is that Badiou has made it clear in 'What is Love?' that [quoting the following]":

Lacan occasionally skirts this idea [that love is merely an ornamental semblance through which passes the real of sex], for example, when he says that love is what fills in [*supplée*] the failure of the sexual relation. But he also says the opposite when he accords to love an ontological vocation, that of the "edge [*abord*] of being." But love, I believe, does not take the place of anything [*supplée*]. It supplements, which is completely different. It is only messed up under the fallacious supposition that it is a relation. But it is not. It is a production of truth. (265-66)

Badiou, who questions the supposition that love is a relation, seems to rather overthrow than supplement the Lacanian concept of *sinthome*. I would like to first interpret the passage from Badiou quoted by the reviewer by differentiating two

usages of the term “love” by Lacan. When love functions to “fill in” or “take place of [supplée] the failure of the sexual relation,” it is merely “an ornamental semblance.” That is to say, it is love that functions as an illusory operation similar to the mechanism of covering-up or fantasy. In this regard, no ethical weight can be derived from this notion of love. But Badiou also says that Lacan proposes “the opposite when he accords to love an ontological vocation, that of the ‘edge [abord] of being.’” So, there is another kind of love which carries ontological and ethical weight. Badiou’s philosophical proposition of love in “What is Love?” and also in “The Scene of Two” and *The Praise of Love*, certainly attempts to oppose this illusory semblance of love with an ethical conception of love. This love with ethical import as Badiou outlines takes as its point of departure the eventual happening of love encounter and develops with the ensuing subjective fidelity to the event as a truth-procedure. It is only through this truth-procedure of love that Badiou’s “scene of Two”—similar to Lacan’s “subject-to-subject relationship” produced by courage and recognition—is constituted. For Badiou, through the truth-procedure, the subject of love comes into being and the “scene of Two” love subjects thus appears. For Lacan, the subject’s courageous undertaking inaugurates the existence of love and through this action, she/he recognizes him/herself and the other as subjects of love, not merely as an object of desire. This courageous procedure is similar to the fidelity to an event in Badiou’s parlance. As I have argued, Lacan’s “subject-to-subject relationship” carries ontological weight—(when Lacan shifts emphasis from courage to recognition, he transforms an ethical question of subjective courage into an ontological recognition of intersubjective relations, as I argued on page 208). Badiou’s scene of Two is of equal ontological import as well. In this regard, true love (in Badiou and in Lacan) undoubtedly opposes love as “ornamental semblance.” I would also like to emphasize that my position and proposition of true love here *supplements* ethically the sexual (non-)relation and *sinthome*, for it does not cancel out sexuality or *sinthomatic* eroticism but builds on the disjunction of sexual positions and sexual non-relation. It institutes the true intersubjective relationship and creates the platform for *sinthomatic* eroticism to be explored, challenged, questioned, and experimented with. The complexity and delicacy of this dis-relation between love and sexuality is the worthy focus of this article. I propose to name this dis-relation as *a tension between love and sinthomatic eroticism*, which I analyze in the ensuing paragraphs as the conclusion to this paper.

A Productive Tension between Love and *Sinthomatic* Eroticism

Although it remains unclear what happened on June 16, 1904,²¹ Joyce transcribes the personal and the private into the public and the Symbolic by making the events of his masterpiece unfold on this day, marking it on the territory of world literature. By doing so, I argue, Joyce raises the singular to the universal while in the meantime *embarking on a work of love, inaugurating the writing of a work of art incited by the pure accident of the love encounter*. Ample space has been devoted to exploring the idiosyncratic content and peculiar construction of *sinthomatic* eroticism between Bloom and Molly. Joyce's *sinthomatic* work is a corroboration of life and writing; the real life relationship between Joyce and Nora is reflected in the literary text; striking similarities and parallels between the literary text and real-life incidents can be readily detected.

In contrast to the overflowing enjoyment and *sinthomatic* eroticism evidenced by the monologue of the loquacious modern Penelope, a glaring absence of love shines through darkly in this episode. Phrased otherwise, in the midst of a garrulous soliloquy about mundane details, egregious boredom and confinement in the household, and ubiquitous references to past and present erotic fantasies and sexuality, love makes itself present by its blatant absence. Love marks a void in this marriage in Molly's countersign, except that from this very conspicuous void arises an image of utopian plenitude and vividly remembered youthful love. It may appear like a longing for an irrevocable loss, thereby signaling some form of escapism. Such a noticeable contrast can certainly lend solid support for a realistic or naturalist interpretation of a marriage bleakly besieged by various troubles. The dreary situation in this marriage, the rarity of fragments of love, and the persistent, if not desperate, longing for the ecstasy of an affirmative past marks out an ostensible oscillation, or to use Andrew Gibson's words in the context of his discussion of Badiou and Beckett, "a pathos of intermittency."²² Although both Badiou and Beckett acknowledge the operation of the event and the residue or the remainder, the essential difference lies in their diverse foci of emphasis. With his "pathophobia" (Gibson 262) and atheistic "axiomatic" tendency, Badiou concentrates on the event and its concomitant truth-procedures. However, the scarcity of the event and the difficulty in sustaining the

²¹ It is usually supposed that Nora and Joyce met on this day. However, the nature and details of their meeting remain unclear. Maddox records a dialogue between Herbert Gorman and Joyce, "Q: Why did you pitch on June 16, 1905 for Bloomsday? Was it the day you met Nora? A: Reply later" (27).

²² The phrase is from the title of Gibson's book, *Beckett and Badiou: The Pathos of Intermittency*.

truth in the aftermath of the event make “the pathos of intermittency” the very texture of life and the form and content of Beckett’s art. In “Penelope,” the contrast between the debris of the shining past and the failure and dreariness of the present clearly echoes what Gibson terms as “the pathos of intermittency,” which reflects a dimension in Joyce’s description of the marriage of Bloom and Molly. However, I would like to interpret the tension between *sinthomatic* eroticism and love in the light of Badiou for, after all, “Penelope” and *Ulysses* terminate with Molly’s affirmative “yes” and Joyce makes June 16, 1904 monumental by manufacturing Bloom’s day through writing *Ulysses*. Joyce’s writing of *Ulysses* is a prolonged truth-procedure to sustain and celebrate his fidelity to the event of his encounter with Nora.

There is no doubt that Joyce puts weighty emphasis on the representation of the fragment of love. In “Lestrygonians,” triggered by the taste of “glowing wine” and its connection with the “[s]un’s heat,” Bloom recalled a secret memory of love, which, to put it humorously, figures as a primal scene between Bloom and Molly. The monumental status of this memory merits quotation at length:

Hidden under wild ferns on Howth below us bay sleeping: sky.
No sound. . . . Pillowed on my coat she had her hair, earwigs in the
heather scrub my hand under her nape, you’ll toss me all. . . . Ravished
over her I lay, full lips full open, kissed her mouth . . . Joy: I ate it,
joy. . . . Flowers her eyes were, take me, willing eyes. Pebble fell. She
lay still. . . . Wildly I lay on her, kissed her: eyes, her lips, her stretched
neck beating, woman’s breasts full in her blouse of nun’s veiling, fat
nipples upright. Hot I tongued her. She kissed me. I was kissed. All
yielding she tossed my hair. Kissed, she kissed me.

Me. And me now.

Stuck. The flies, buzzed. (*U* 8.899-918)

“Penelope” terminates with Molly’s reminiscence, which echoes the passion, sensuality, sexuality, and love in Bloom’s memory, yet answers Bloom’s pensive retrospection on the sharp contrast between the dreary humdrum of the present and the bright past with a life-asserting, love-confirming, sorrow-comforting “yes” in her female countersign. The passage is of pivotal significance:

[T]he sun shines for you he said the day we were lying among the
rhododendrons on Howth head. . . . [T]he day I got him to propose to
me yes first I gave him the bit of seedcake out of my mouth and it was

leapyear like now 16 years ago my God after that long kiss I near lost my breath yes he said I was a flower of the mountain yes so we are flowers all a womans body . . . and I gave him all the pleasure I could leading him on till he asked me to say yes and I wouldnt answer first only looked over the sea and the sky I was thinking of so many things he didn't know of Mulvey and Mr. Stanhope and Hester and father and old captain Groves and the sailors playing all birds fly . . . then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will yes. (*U* 18.1571-1659)

Vivid, colorful images from that particular date and the specific locus of Howth are evoked with equal emphasis on the memorable kiss, proposal, and commitment. What has been described as “all yielding” in Bloom’s version is further certified and substantiated by Molly’s approving, corroborating, myriad “yes.” Most important of all, this is *the* moment, *the* hidden memory and intimate ritual that declares the truth of the *evental* happening of love and that acknowledges the creation of the scene of *the Two*, à la Badiou. This is one of the essential indispensable pillars of Molly’s countersign, not merely in terms of participating in the construction of *sinthomatic* erotic practices but also with regard to the assertion of her subjectivity. To repeat Lacan’s comment in the *Encore* Seminar, “to know what your partner will do is not a proof of love” (*XX* 146). Lacan correctly assigns love to the domain of intersubjectivity while enjoyment is always potentially masturbatory, advocating a subject-to-subject relationship in love. Although it is arguable that *intersinthomatic* practices may open avenues for intersubjective engagement and investment in *sinthomatic* eroticism, love points to another form of intersubjectivity than sexuality that can hardly be ignored, diluted, or neutralized.

If we take into consideration Badiou’s theory of love as a truth process and the construction of two out of the impasse or impossibility of the sexual non-relation, it is arguable that the mutual faithfulness toward the memory of bountiful affirmation, passion, and commitment may amount to the possibility of renewing the relationship rather than a covering up of the impasse of a dying marriage. In a similar vein, I argue that nostalgic, ephemeral, and utopian as this fragment of memory may appear, it actually marks out and embodies the eternity of the *Real* idea of love. This episode from the past with unabashedly phantasmatic coloring is a fragment of truth, a Platonic Idea of the Real. It is of ultimate irony, if not blatant oxymoron, to claim an

Idea to be of the Real register, granted that, from a Lacanian perspective, the incongruity between the Symbolic and the Real is a basic premise.

In what sense would an Idea, which is apparently a naming process, a Symbolic construction, be designated as Real? As the thoroughgoing Lacanian we know him to be, Žižek naturally intends the idea to belong to or to derive from the register of the Lacanian Real. Žižek invokes Lacan's double characterization of the Real. Žižek summarizes the two Real(s) of Lacan as follows: "the Real in its most terrifying imaginary dimension, the primordial abyss which swallows up everything, dissolving all identities" must be opposed to "the Real of pure virtual surface, the 'incorporeal' Real," "the Real of pure appearance which is the truth of the Platonic Idea" (61-62).²³ It is in the context of attempting an interpretation of some fragments with strong phantasmatic quality in cinematic renderings that clearly encapsulate "the eternal Real" that Žižek first invokes this idea of the Real. The *Real* Idea designates "nothing but the very form of appearance, this form as such," "the supra-sensible" of "appearance as appearance" (31). It is the Real as minimal difference, as pure difference, as incorporeal, supra-sensible nothingness on the surface that is the true locus of the production of the Idea as the Real, as the naming of the True-Event, as the forcing of something new into the Symbolic at its most fundamental level.

I want to argue that the phantasmatic episode that both Bloom and Molly recall and invoke as a proof of their bind, their being a subject of love in the scene of Two, is precisely "the eternal Real" that Žižek has strived to expound. From the perspective of outsiders, this episode may be nothing, but from this nothing, this void, emerges a truth for the engaged subjects who embark on the truth process of love. The phantasmatic quality with affective intensity in Joyce's characters' memories betrays the fact that it is not just a speck from the distant past, but a truth embodied in eternity. If the declaration of truth names the eventual happening of a love encounter and announces the constitution, not of the couple as two physical entities but the singular subject of love comprised of the Two, there must be a certain supra-sensible Real Idea of eternity in the declaration that the subject of love can return to carry out the fidelity as works of love. The Howth episode is squarely such an eternal idea of the Real as the Truth-declaration of the eventual happening of love.

It is this monumental point of the eternal truth-declaration that constitutes the scene of Two, and this creates the platform for the sexual difference to manifest itself and for the possibility of exploration and fabrication of *sinthomatic* eroticism. It is through this eventual truth of eternity that the subject of love enacts his/her fidelity.

²³ In this context, Žižek's conception of a Real Idea is a result of the convergence of Lacan, Badiou, and Deleuze. For a detailed account, see Žižek (23-78).

The truth-declaration of the Real idea is “eternal” in the sense of immanent transcendence. Love is such a “subjectively powerful experience” that “you attempt a declaration of eternity” (Badiou, *Praise* 48). Chance/contingency is transformed into eternity/necessity through the declaration. This is what love is: “a declaration of eternity to be fulfilled and or unfurled as the best it can be within time: eternity descending into time” (47). The Howth memory is the point of eternity of immanent transcendence, a nomination of the eventual happening of the love encounter, which calls for fidelity to the declaration and construction of the scene of Two. Love is essentially “atheist” in the sense that “the Two never pre-exists its process” and that love demands to “redeploy” life arrangements from the angle of the two and to re-address itself time and again in the face of challenges in life from the points of Two (50-52). This is why love is a process, a duration, a work of love in Badiou’s edifice.

In “Penelope,” there is a tension between love as an eternal idea of the Real, as a point of truth-declaration, and the gradually reified *sinthomatic* eroticism. In the female countersign, Joyce’s endeavor is mostly channelled to contrive a female collaboration at the level of sexuality through drawing a representation of concrete actions and fantasies of his modern Penelope to render *sinthomatic* eroticism complete. This *sinthomatic* eroticism has considerable ethical limits when it becomes non-reciprocal and fails to sustain fully a subject-to-subject relationship, or to maintain a scene of Two properly. However, Joyce also inserted in passing the flickering of the semblance of hope to breach the reification of *sinthomatic* eroticism that still exists at the moment of Molly’s protest: “O Jamesy let me up out of this pooh sweets of sin” (*U* 18.1128-29). By invoking the declaration of the eventual truth, which turns the contingency of the love encounter into a necessity, Joyce signals that what is truly at stake in the female countersign lies somewhere other than the construction of a complementary view of *sinthomatic* eroticism and instead gestures toward love as a construction of the scene of Two. The invocation of the declaration of eternity, which inaugurates the truth-procedures of love, resuscitates the subject-to-subject relationship and recalls the life-alternating moment at the existential level. The recollection does not dwell on nostalgic indulgence but demands a re-invention of love, which is itself “a re-invention of life” (Badiou, *Praise* 33). What is fundamentally demanded of in the female countersign is not merely the female “yes” toward the *sinthomatic* erotic writings, but the “yes” as the assertion of subjectivity, which is indispensable for the construction of love as a scene of Two in the first place. “Bloom’s passport to eternity” is countersigned by Molly’s participation in these two senses.

I argue that returning to the point of the nomination of love when the scene of Two has first been constructed also *enlivens* the tension between *sinthomatic* eroticism and love in a productive way. In Badiou's edifice, the truth-procedures inaugurated by the evental happening do not merely restructure the co-ordinates of life but also enact the process of "*forcing*," which is originally a concept derived from Paul Cohen's set-theory. As Badiou puts it, "[f]orcing is the point at which a truth, although incomplete, authorizes anticipation of knowledge concerning not what is but what will have been if truth attains completion" (*Theoretical* 130). Love's capability of re-deploying various aspects of life could be regarded as a kind of "forcing" of the truth. However, Badiou warns readers of the limit of forcing, arguing that "[t]here is a point that is unforceable . . . unnameable," which, in psychoanalysis, is the domain of enjoyment (132).

Badiou calls for respect to be accorded to the Real in the face of the forcing of naming with regard to sexual difference. He articulates this ethical respect for the Real by way of curbing the power of forcing and further portrays an ethical movement deployed through the oscillation between the power of truth and its powerlessness in the face of the Real, the unnameable, signalling an ethical effect achieved not merely by the love of generic truth, but also by the love of the unforceable, of the unnameable. As Badiou puts it,

No matter how powerful a truth is, no matter how capable of veridicality it proves to be, this power comes to falter upon a single term, which at a stroke effects the swing from all-powerfulness to powerlessness and displaces our love of truth from its appearance, the love of the generic, to its essence, the love of the unnameable. . . . [T]he love of the unnameable lies beyond even the generic, and it alone allows the love of truth to be maintained without disaster or dissolution coming to affect the veridical in its entirety. For where truth is concerned, only by undergoing the ordeal of its powerlessness do we discover the ethic required for assuming its power. (134-35)

Badiou seems to argue that the forcing of the truth necessarily reaches an impasse, an unforcible point of the unnameable. However, this powerlessness should not be taken as failure of the truth-procedures, but a structural point that can save the truth-procedure from its "disastrous desire for complete constructability" (135). In Badiou's passage, I find *a theory of an ethical effect*, which is accomplished *through a productive tension between the true and the Real*, between the naming of the truth

and the unnameable, between the forcing of the power and the powerlessness of the unforcible. However, it remains unclear *how* this productive tension may operate in reality. Is there a general formulation for the working of the tension between the truth and the unnameable? Or should the way the tension may unfold be situated and case-specific? I leave the answers *open for future reflection*. At this juncture, my attempt is to analyze the case of “Penelope” and see *how the tension operates and achieves an ethical effect*. My critical endeavor in this project is not merely an application of theory to textual analysis, but a fruitful encounter between theory and literature. Badiou’s theory may shed light on my interpretation of Joyce, and at the same time the particular case of “Penelope” may also add a subtle novelty to the theoretical conception of the tension between truth and the unnameable.

In the case of love, the unnameable is the Real of sexual difference. Peter Hallward attempts to interpret the danger of extreme forcing in the following way: “love is threatened by a terrible danger or ‘evil’— the conversion of its own axiomatic subjectivity into a definitive objectivity. The danger threatening every love is that the medium of disjunction might itself be named and objectified, defined and thus turned into a force of fusion . . . the subjects of love must not attempt to *know* their disjunction. A unity of fusion, ‘the romantic idea of full, fusional love, under the purified sign of the One, is exactly the Evil of love” (Hallward 190-91).

Although Joyce does not fall prey to the romantic illusion of the One, his writing of *sinthomatic* eroticism forces into the Real of sexual difference in the attempt to construct the sexual knowledge of the Other to the extent of risking life-constricting non-reciprocity, which is an imposition that stifles the subjectivity of the Other. The truth-procedure inaugurated by the declaration of love embodied in the Howth memory constructs the scene of Two and opens space for the experimentation of *sinthomatic* eroticism, which, I argue, can be taken as a concretization of truth, or in Hallward’s words, a “conversion” of an “axiomatic subjectivity into a definitive objectivity.” The forcing of truth takes the detour of *sinthomatic* eroticism in its operation. *Sinthomatic* eroticism becomes suffocating when it becomes non-reciprocal and effaces the subjectivity of the Other. The closure of reified *sinthomatic* eroticism demands to be breached and renewed again. It is in this regard that Badiou proposes that “sexual pleasure is the unnameable of love. Love as a subjective or generic procedure may eventually rename everything in its shared situation—except its unnameable medium itself” (Hallward 191). It is love as the construction of the scene of Two that makes possible the forcing and the writing of (*inter*)*sinthomatic* eroticism. However, this forcing itself reaches an ethical limit, a structural impasse. In “Penelope,” this impasse of the unforcible, the resistance of the unnameable finds

expression in Molly's protest against this closure of *sinthomatic* eroticism—"O Jamesy let me up out of this pooh sweets of sin" (*U* 18.1128-29). Molly's defiance signals that her sexuality and the Real of sexual difference exceeds the confinement of *sinthomatic* eroticism and her concomitant subjectivity cannot be merely reduced to a *sinthomatic*-partner. This incident provides an example of the productive tension between (the truth concretized in the form of) *sinthomatic* eroticism and the (unforcible/unnameable) Real.

Moreover, in the case of "Penelope," the productive tension between truth and the unnameable finds another expression in the tension between *sinthomatic* eroticism and love. This adds a *nuanced twist* to Badiou's theorization of the relationship between truth, forcing, and the unnameable. To breach the closure of *sinthomatic* eroticism, love plays a crucial role here. The invocation of the memory of the declaration of love and the construction of Two, which is itself the reminder of love as the subject-to-subject relationship, may function to revive such an ethical respect for the Real as well as a re-invention of *sinthomatic* eroticism in the direction of exploring new possibilities of collective *sinthome*. The tension between *sinthomatic* eroticism and love thus poses an ethical question regarding the way in which the human subject can tarry ethically with the negative with regard to subjective and intersubjective responsibility. In this light, Badiou's proposal for the respect for the unnameable should be appreciated in correlation with the respect and construction of the subject-to-subject relationship. The Real in excess of the *sinthomatic* manufacturing and the recognition of the Other's ontological being is intimately intertwined. *The respect for the Real and the maintenance of a subject-to-subject relationship is ultimately reciprocated.* In "Penelope," in spite of the flickering invocation of the distant memory of the declaration of love, love's ethical import and impact on the possible re-invention of the writing of *sinthomatic* eroticism can be profound.

The productive tension between the unnameable Real and the forcing of truth is enacted through the truth of love's capacity to re-energize the reified *sinthomatic* eroticism. Between love and *sinthomatic* eroticism, the ethical potential of the Real apparently lies on the side of the truth of love. I think the reason is located in the fact that love as a truth-procedure has already contained a respect for the Real of the Other, a respect for the subjectivity of the Other in its construction of a subject-to-subject relation, in the establishment of a scene of Two. *When it manifests ethically, love is a Real act as well as an intersubjective relationship.* This is the truth of love. In my analysis of "Penelope," by identifying a productive tension between love and *sinthomatic* eroticism, I slightly modify Badiou's theorization of truth, forcing, and

the unnameable, re-deploying the tension between truth and the unnameable in terms of the tension between the Real of the inaugural truth of love and *sinthomatic* eroticism as a reified form of truth.

In conclusion, I interpret “Penelope” as a female countersign to “Bloom’s passport to eternity” in two senses. First, based on Lacan’s theorization of the non-existence of a sexual relation and the concomitant conception of the *sinthome*, I have argued that “Penelope” can be viewed as Joyce’s experimentation with an idiosyncratic (*inter*)*sinthomatic* eroticism. Molly as Bloom’s *sinthome*-partner is indispensable in offering her participation in the construction of the (*inter*)*sinthomatic* eroticism. However, this female countersign in terms of sexuality and *sinthomatic* eroticism appears problematic because its ethical merits are limited. Although *sinthomatic* eroticism is ethical in the sense that it recognizes the inconsistency of the Other, Joyce’s rendition of *sinthomatic* eroticism remains problematic in that the presentation of women and sexuality appear quite conventional and that *sinthomatic* eroticism is non-reciprocal and stifles the subjectivity of the Other.

Secondly, by way of Badiou’s account of love as a truth-procedure and a construction of a scene of Two, I have contended that the female countersign is necessary in that Molly’s “yes” is an assertion of subjectivity, which is indispensable for the construction of love as an intersubjective relationship. Finally, I have also argued that there is a productive tension between love and *sinthomatic* eroticism in that love is capable of breaking through the closure of reified *sinthomatic* construction, re-inventing *sinthome* and restructuring life and intersubjective relationship.

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[Received 24 July 2018; accepted 7 December 2018]