

# PLURABELLE

Selected material from various copyright and open sources.

## Nudity / Nakedness in *Finnegans Wake* and in Opera

### PLURABELLE Nudity and Nakedness

This opera calls for the eight principal chorus members (four women, four men) to be naked for much of the first scene of Act II, as they ritualistically wash their clothes and then exchange them: women to men and men to women. Nudity and nakedness are central interests and fascinations for Joyce throughout *Finnegans Wake* and there are many relevant evocations, allusions, and references. In addition to the multitudinous slang words for all varieties of physical and sexual interests and acts (in many languages), here are a few selected references to nudity and nakedness, with page and line citations to the standard edition:

- 016.24 “Become a bitskin more wiseable” [Ger. “ein bisschen”: a little; bit of skin; visible]  
034.10 “Gob scene you in the narked place” [God sees Adam and Eve naked; in the market place]  
035.04 “his mirthday suit” [birthday suit: bare skin, naked]  
039.32 “he slept in a nude state ... in strange men’s cots”  
067.04 “meet there night, mid their nackt, me there naked” [Ger. “nackt”: naked]  
079.20 “her bare godkin out” [bare buttocks; godkin: deity, idol; bodkin: long pin for fastening hair]  
107.04 “*Tell Naked Truths*” [plain truths; tell truths about nakedness]  
109.10 “passion-pallid nudity or plaguepurple nakedness”  
109.20 “vision her plump and plain in her natural altogether”  
138.08 “git all his flesch nuemaid motts truly prural” [Fr. “nue”: naked (feminine); “mot”: word]  
200.01 “beauties sreeked nith their bearers’ skins!” [sleek; shrieked; beneath; bare skin]  
206.30 “mothernaked, she sampood herself ... from crown to sole”  
229.30 “reading off his fleshskin and writing with his quillbone” [foreskin; Fr. Sl. “quille”: penis]  
248.03 “If you nude her in her prime”  
268.17 “a third person, mascarine, phelinine or nuder” [masculine, feminine, or neuter]  
271.F04 “thine complinment, gymnuflashed” [compline: religious service; Gr. “gymnos”: naked]  
332.01 “Snip snap snoody.” [Danish “Snip snap snude”: formula to end a fairy tale; nude]  
357.33 “contemplating of myself, wiz my naked I” [with my naked eye: in plain sight, honestly]  
366.14 “out of meds-dreams unclouthed” [midstream; my dreams unclothed]  
435.05 “won’t you be an artist’s moral and pose in your nudies” [artist’s model]  
441.02 “that nullity suit. Faminy” [nudity; Latin “femina”: woman]  
461.26 “whesen with other lipth I naked open my thigh” [Ger. “Wesen”: essence, nature; with other lips]  
493.05 “in my nil ensemble” [Fr. Colloquial “tout ensemble”: (of a model) fully naked]  
538.11 “their naktlives” [Dutch “naake lijf”: naked body; “nachtleven”: nightlife; naked lives]  
555.05 “So, nat by night by naught by naked” [night by night by night by naked]  
557.21 “from the above were of a pretty carnation” [carnation (*obsolete*): the colour of naked skin]  
557.22 “some deretane denudation with intent” [It. “deretano”: buttocks; denude: to make naked]  
559.22 “Male partly masking female.” [male part; skin; male masking the female]  
564.34 “snaked’s eyes! Is all? Yet not. Hear one’s.” [naked eye; Dutch “hoor eens!”: listen!]  
582.30 “Female imperfectly masking male.” [skin; female masking the male]  
601.01 “A naked yogpriest ... oakey doaked” [yogi; okey doke]  
603.13 “night-shared nakedshift” [shared nakedness; makeshift; shift dresses were popular in the 1920s]  
624.18 “Before the naked universe.”

## Nudity and Nakedness in Classical and Contemporary Opera

Of course, nudity and nakedness are omnipresent through culture, including in literature, the dramatic arts, the visual arts, film, and in performance. In staged classical and contemporary opera, nudity and nakedness have a significant, compelling, and at times provocative history and presence, including in:



### A Masked Ball

Austrian theater director Johann Kresnik, working in the tradition of German Tanztheater (dance theater), is known for his politically charged productions. In his 2008 interpretation of Verdi's *A Masked Ball*, he deployed three dozen women and men all over the age of 50 (the oldest was 69), naked except for Mickey Mouse masks, on a stage that represented the ruins of the World Trade Center. "The naked stand for people without means, the victims of capitalism, the underclass, who don't have anything anymore," says Kresnik.

### Don Giovanni

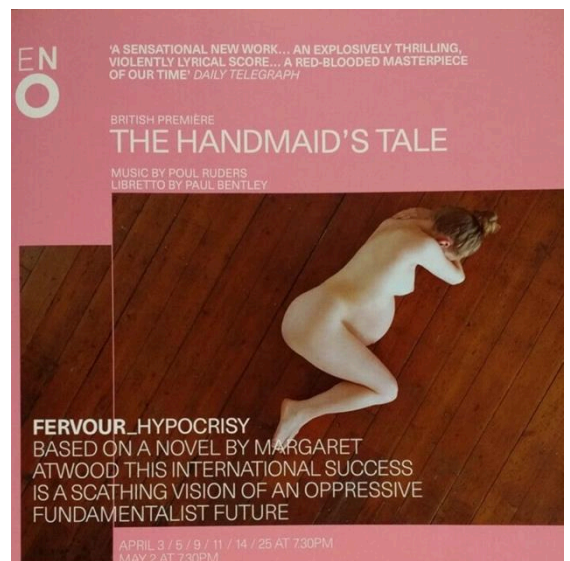
The Opera Queensland's 2018 production of *Don Giovanni* by Mozart, directed by Lindy Hume, included a finale of 50 mostly fully naked women pushing Don Giovanni to hell. As Hume said, "As a female



director and as a feminist and someone who loves Giovanni and the story, I wanted to frame it in a way that the women are on an even playing field and give him what for at the end." Various commentators referenced the familiar notion: "It's not about sex, it's about power."

### The Handmaid's Tale

There are various filmic elements with graphic nudity in some productions of *The Handmaid's Tale*, a 1998 opera by Danish composer Poul Ruders, based on the novel by Margaret Atwood. The dystopian and politically charged opera was first seen at the Royal Danish Opera in 2000. The central character is Offred (Of-Fred), one of the handmaids: women who are forcibly assigned to mate and produce children for the ruling class in the near-future Republic of Gilead. Pictured is a detail from the playbill from a production by the English National Opera.





### **Ercole sul Termodonte**

American tenor Zachary Stains was naked for a good portion of the Spoleto Festival's 2006 production of *Ercole sul Termodonte*, Vivaldi's version of the Hercules story, which first appeared in 1723. In the original myth, the young hero has slain a lion, then wears its skin over his naked body. There was a Papal ban on women appearing on stage in Vivaldi's time and so the opera was sung by seven castrati and a male tenor, the latter singing the title role, Hercules. In this production, the singer is asked to sing at length while naked.



### **Salome**

Various productions of *Salome* by Richard Strauss (first performed in 1905) have portrayed nudity – veiled, filmed, or live on stage – in particular during the “Dance of the Seven Veils.” American soprano Patricia Racette says that when she is onstage during the dance, in that moment, the nudity is not awkward: “I don't feel like Patricia Racette disrobing. I feel like Salome in that moment, and it is driven by the energy of the

character.” She adds: “It still takes a certain level of courage and confidence. But I'm not one to apologize. Go for it. That's what I think.” Finnish soprano Karita Mattila (pictured) sang and danced the role in 2004 at The Metropolitan Opera.



### **The Fly**

Composed by Canadian Howard Shore, *The Fly* was commissioned by the Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris, where it premiered in 2008. The opera is loosely based on David Cronenberg's film of the same name. Bass-baritone Daniel Okulitch sings the role of Seth Brundle. The opera explores the physical and psychological transformation of a brilliant scientist who begins to mutate into a hybrid of man and fly after one of his experiments goes wrong.



## La Traviata

A 2015 production of Verdi's *La Traviata*, by the Swedish opera house Folkoperan, featured ample nudity. "The sexuality of women and their sexual position in society are shown in a very clear way ... it's all about turning her in to a subject and not keeping her as an object," said Paul Slawik, first violinist of this production. First performed in 1853, the opera's focus is on Violetta, the titular "fallen woman."

## Hadrian

The Canadian Opera Company's 2018 *Hadrian*, by Daniel MacIvor and Rufus Wainwright, articulates moments in the life of the Roman emperor Hadrian and his passion for his lover Antinous. Inspired by the book *Memoirs of Hadrian* by Marguerite Yourcenar, the opera includes various depictions of male nudity and male sexuality, including what one critic from *Opera Canada* called "a constant supply of naked male bodies."



## The Ring

Various Wagner operas, including *The Ring*, have portrayed nudity or with singers costumed to appear nude. Andreas Kriegenburg's *Ring Cycle* at the Bavarian State Opera begins with the nearly nude chorus painting each other blue and forming a human river. A massive nude public art performance by Spencer Tunick in 2012 (pictured) opened Munich Opera Festival's production of *The Ring*.

