“Penelope”: The Flesh Made Word

While Joyce was composing the final episode of *Ulysses*, he wrote to Frank Budgen that Molly’s soliloquy would be “the indispensable countersign to Bloom’s passport to eternity.” *Penelope* is the clou of the book. The first sentence contains 2500 words. There are eight sentences in the episode. It begins and ends with the female word yes. It turns like the huge earth ball slowly surely and evenly round and round spinning, its four cardinal points being the female breasts, arse, womb and [cunt] . . . expressed by the words *because, bottom* (in all senses bottom button, bottom of the class, bottom of the sea, bottom of his heart), *woman, yes.*"¹

In 1922, when *Ulysses* was published, most readers were scandalized by Joyce’s “*Penelope.*” A few intellectuals viewed the episode as the final liberation of literature from Victorian prudery. And students of Freud applauded Molly for her outspoken frankness, her earthiness, and her unprecedented
attitude toward sex. Carl Jung congratulated Joyce on the verisimilitude of his description of the female psyche: "I suppose the devil's grandmother knows so much about the real psychology of a woman. I didn't." In contrast, a number of critics, from Nora Joyce to the present, have skeptically observed that the author knew "nothing at all about women." 

Whether Molly Bloom is a convincing mimetic representation of woman remains to be seen. As Philip Toynbee explains, "Within the limits of the judgment we are making we need not decide whether this is the female mind or not; it is, in any case, the anima, the female image in the mind of the male, sensual, intuitive, submarine." For Joyce, Molly seems to be Woman writ large, imbued with all the mythic qualities of Goethe's eternal feminine.

Critics eager to defend Molly as "true to life" often forget that she exists as a female projection of the male psyche, encumbered with a "farraginous" cargo of sexual fantasy and erotic illusion. She is the life-giver mysteriously in touch with the waters of fertility and the soil of excrement, the one muck from which both artist and lover take their creative powers. James Joyce, with his sentimental, artistic yearning for fulfillment by and through an extraordinary woman, wanted for Leopold Bloom nothing less than a "mother's love" — a gratuitous affection that could transcend all tragedy, even the marital affliction of chronic impotence.

Molly Bloom was made to fit Joyce's psychological model: she was preconceived and brought forth under the aegis of Nora Joyce. If Stephen Dedalus is all "head," then Molly is the concupiscent body — a fluid form that embraces the flowers and the mud of existence, that gives birth to the poetry of reverie and the song of experience. Molly is mythically fertile, in touch with the amorphous, Heraclitean reality that so eluded Stephen in his quest for the Protean mysteries. The young philosopher might ponder the thoughts of Aristotle and Aquinas; but his bit of a poem, plagiarized from Douglas Hyde, is little better than Bloom's "dreamy, creamy gull" or Garryowen's Celtic doggerel. Molly, by the poetry of her consciousness, mocks
Stephen's scholarly pride and the infamy of his sterile meditation. Ironically and inadvertently, she informs Joyce's Hamlet that there is more to life than he dreams of in his philosophy.

Molly Bloom is such an anti-Stephen—so much a corrective to literary erudition—that her formal knowledge is limited to the emanations of popular culture. Like Gerty MacDowell and Leopold Bloom, she has been fed a steady diet of pornography and penny papers. She interprets even the classics in terms of kinetic sensation. Molly believes, for instance, that Aristotle was the author of an obscene picture-book on embryology; that Daniel Defoe created a lascivious namesake quite unlike our present Moll; and that Rabelais was a French hack writer who specialized in grotesque accounts of gestation. She paradoxically sits in moral judgment of these scandalous authors who offend her sense of decency. Molly surely would have been one of the readers shocked by Joyce's fictional sinbook: she may well have censored her own titillating ruminations as unfit for public consumption.

James Joyce never gives Molly Bloom the scope or the breadth he attributes to his male characters. Her monologue is fascinating, but limited to the libidinous preoccupations that men have traditionally projected onto women to the exclusion of all else. Joyce remarked to Frank Budgen that he considered Molly "to be perfectly sane full amoral fertilisable untrustworthy engaging shrewd limited prudent indifferent Weib. Ich bin der Fleisch der stets bejaht." Ultimately, Molly Bloom is far more interesting as an abstraction than as a mimetic character. The subject of observation in "Penelope" becomes the stream of human consciousness rooted in the flesh, poetically transforming the phenomena of the external world.

The "Penelope" episode is impelled by the cyclical rhythms of Molly's mind. Her thoughts move like the tide—flowing forward, breaking, rolling back upon one another. In the words of Frank Budgen, her "monologue snakes its way through the last forty pages of Ulysses like a river winding through a plain, finding its true course by the compelling logic of its own fluidity
and weight." Leopold Bloom is appropriately a "waterlover, drawer of water, watercarrier" (p. 671), who exalts both the element and his spouse as "paradigm and paragon" (p. 672). In contrast, Stephen is a hydrophobe who distrusts "aquacities of thought and language" (p. 673), despite his Aquarian birth sign.

In choosing an unpunctuated style for "Penelope," Joyce selected a literary form closest to the "stream of consciousness" described by William James. Molly is the precursor of Anna Livia Plurabelle, a mythic embodiment of the river Liffey in *Finnegans Wake*. Emulating time's moving stream, Molly's thought flows perpetually onward: it never stops to reflect on itself, to qualify, or to rationalize. Hence Molly's pervasive illogic. She frequently makes a statement, then contradicts herself. She suggests that if women were involved in politics, there would be no more wars: "it'd be much better for the world to be governed by the women in it you wouldn't see women going and killing one another and slaughtering... because a woman whatever she does she knows where to stop" (p. 778). A few moments later, Molly claims that women are so catty they are always fighting with one another: "its some woman ready to stick her knife in you I hate that in women no wonder they treat us the way they do we are a dreadful lot of bitches" (pp. 778—79). Molly scoffs at the idea of sadomasochistic arousal: "flagellate sure there's nothing for a woman in that all invention" (p. 752). But she later admits to having entertained a desire to "flagellate" her husband publicly after a boating accident (p. 765). Penelope complains of her spouse's prolonged absence from home, despite its obvious convenience: "then leaving us here all day you never know what old beggar... might be a tramp and put his foot in" (p. 765). Molly is never concerned with the inconsistency of her remarks. Like Walt Whitman and Buck Mulligan, she feels that if she contradicts herself, well then, she contradicts herself. She contains multitudes.

We might compare the "Penelope" soliloquy to a Cubist painting: the blotches of thought appear to be incompatible, but...
together they constitute a perceptual whole. Joyce gives us in "Penelope" the associative stirrings of a mind as it takes in the "stuff of life." If Molly dwells on phenomenal appearances, it is because no interior distance separates objects of perception from her perceiving ego. Her consciousness consists of a "turning toward" intentional objects. Molly embraces the reality of vital sensation. She clings to the moment, holding "to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past" (p. 186). Her consciousness turns in a continuous, all-embracing present, like the huge earth ball itself, round and round spinning. The episode is, in effect, "timeless." Joyce refused to assign the chapter an hour of the day.

Molly draws the past into the present in the mode of creative memory. She frequently thinks about past events, but her mind manipulates duration and suppresses distance. She never differentiates past from present: the contiguous images of her life appear simultaneously before her gaze. All three modes of time flow together and are contained in a spatial continuum. Gibraltar and Dublin, Mulvey and Bloom, are present contemporaneously as objects of mental perception. Molly's memories are localized, connected to a system of places. Her recollection of Mulvey, for example, is always fused with thoughts of Gibraltar. "I was thinking," she says, "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 and I say stoop . . . and the Spanish girls laughing in their shawls and their tall combs" (p. 782).

Molly recalls "how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes" (p. 783). The first "he" refers to Mulvey ("Jack Joe Harry Mulvey was it" [p. 761]), the third to Leopold, and the second both to Mulvey on the occasion of Molly's first kiss and to Bloom just before his "seduction" and marriage proposal. Molly is saying "yes" to the kiss, to sex, and to matrimony—all at once. Adverbs of time, such as "then" and "again," give the illusion of temporal progression. The sequence of events actually occurs entirely in the present.
Molly shifts her focus from one area of the canvas to another, but the whole, expansive “painting” never escapes her gaze. The speaker wants to look at everything simultaneously—at all past events coexisting in a present, spatial medium.

Molly Bloom is so eager to embrace the whole of experience that she has no time for punctuation. The comma indicates a pause; the period, a full stop. Both are signs of a mental sequence that differentiates past from present, a completed thought from thought in process. Molly fails to recognize such a distinction. For her, life is continually in process, but always in the present. Like a spider weaving its web, she moves in circles without losing sight of the egoic unity informing consciousness. Grammatical punctuation acknowledges the temporal nature of literature as “nacheinander,” one thing coming after another according to the “ineluctable modality of the audible” (p. 37). In defiance of Gotthold Lessing and of Stephen Dedalus, Molly wants to convert the sequential nature of both time and literature into a unified spatial continuum—things existing nebeneinder, one beside the other, in the “ineluctable modality of the visible” (p. 37). Because her soliloquy is without punctuation, our ultimate impression of the “Penelope” episode is spatial rather than temporal. We see the words side by side on the page, without periods and with few capital letters. Numbers are represented photographically: Molly thinks about what she did at “⅓ after 3” (p. 747) and remembers that “Milly is 15” (p. 775). The entire chapter is a visual tour de force, an attempt to spatialize the temporal medium of language.

Joyce depicts in “Penelope” a pre-intellectual, poetic consciousness that delights in naming. Molly Bloom celebrates the wonders of physical experience; and in the final pages of her monologue, she recites a paean to Nature that might well be transcribed as poetry:

God of heaven  
there’s nothing like nature  
the wild mountains  
then the sea  
and the waves rushing
then the beautiful country
with fields of oats and wheat
and all kinds of things
and all the fine cattle going about
that would do your heart good to see
rivers and lakes and flowers
all sorts of shapes and smells and colours
springing up even out of the ditches
primroses and violets
nature . . .
the sun shines for you he said
the day we were lying
among the rhododendrons
on Howth head . . .
the 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
yes
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
yes . . .
and O that awful deepdown torrent
O and the sea
the sea crimson sometimes like fire
and the glorious sunsets
and the figtrees in the Alameda gardens
yes
and all the queer little streets
and pink and blue and yellow houses
and the rosegardens
and the jessamine and geraniums and cactuses
and Gibraltar as a girl
where I was a Flower of the mountain
yes 
when I put the rose in my hair 
like the Andalusian girls used 
or shall I wear a red 
yes 
and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall 
and I thought 
well 
as well him as another 
and then I asked him with my eyes 
to ask again 
yes 
and then he asked me 
would I 
yes 
to say yes 
my mountain flower 
and first I put my arms around him 
yes 
and drew him down to me 
so he could feel my breasts all perfume 
yes 
and his heart was going like mad 
and yes 
I said yes 
I will 
Yes.

(Pp. 781–83)

The soliloquy moves with passionate vitality toward a lyrical crescendo. Molly associates the word "yes" with her husband's proposal and love-making "among the rhododendrons on Howth head." Her recollection of the scene is suffused with nostalgia for Gibraltar and her youth. But in the last few lines of the monologue, she focuses exclusively on Bloom and on her first experience of sexual consummation. The interval between "yeses" grows shorter until Molly is panting with excitement. Her staccato repetition of "yes" gathers momentum, linguistically simulating erotic agitation. The orgasmic rhythms come to a climax with Molly's sexual surrender to Bloom; and the
language explodes in a burst of pleasure, joy, and amorous intensity at Penelope's final "Yes." Our last impression of Molly is that of consenting, "fertilisable . . . Weib."

In discussing Molly Bloom, Joyce told his friend Harriet Weaver: "I tried to depict the earth which is prehuman and presumably posthuman"—but always superhuman and superwomanly. Frank Budgen notes that Molly "dwells in a region where there are no incertitudes to torture the mind and no Agenbite of Inwit to lacerate the soul, where there are no regrets, no reproaches, no conscience and consequently no sin." "

When Bloom tells his wife about Stephen, Molly begins to invent a capricious affair with the young poet. In her imagination, Stephen has already become her lover; she sees herself as his muse and inspiration, even though the two may actually never meet as adults. True to form, Molly pictures Stephen in terms of narcissistic desire, thinking it would be nice "to have an intelligent person to talk to about yourself" (p. 775). She tries to imagine Stephen's "young body," and her attention quickly shifts to other examples of the male figure:

besides hes young those fine young men I could see down in Margate strand bathing place from the side of the rock standing up in the sun naked like a God or something and then plunging into the sea with them why arent all men like that thered be some consolation for a woman like that lovely little statue he bought . . . theres real beauty and poetry for you I often felt I wanted to kiss him all over also his lovely young cock there so simply I wouldnt mind taking him in my mouth if nobody was looking as if it was asking you to suck it so clean and white he looked with his boyish face I would too in half a minute even if some of it went down what its only like gruel or the dew theres no danger besides hed be so clean (Pp. 775-76)

Molly conflates Stephen with Narcissus, and both with the "fine young men" on the strand: all are part of a single, abstract maleness. She longs to "suck" their "lovely young cocks," and at the same time, to suck all men into herself. The words "gruel," "dew," and "suck" suggest images of viscosity. For
Joyce, the female represents a principle of fecundity and natural creation. But like the ocean, she is also dangerous, a figure of the “agony of water” that “draws me . . . sucks at me.”

In “Proteus,” Stephen compared the flow of the ocean’s tide with female menstruation. Here Joyce puts the same analogy into the mouth of Molly Bloom: “O Jesus wait yes that thing has come on me yes . . . have we too much blood up in us or what O patience above its pouring out of me like the sea anyhow he didn’t make me pregnant as big as he is . . . O Jamesy let me up out of this pooh sweets of sin” (p. 769). Molly feels disgruntled, but nevertheless relieved, by the onset of her menstrual period. She has enjoyed the “sweets of sin” this time, without paying the bittersweet price of pregnancy.

Toward the end of the episode, Molly’s fantasies become wilder and more unselective: “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 pin whose I was only to do it off up in a gate somewhere or one of those wildlooking gipsies in Rathfarnham . . . that blackguardlooking fellow with the fine eyes peeling a switch attack me in the dark and ride me up against the wall without a word or a murderer anybody” (p. 777). In her erotic musings, Molly associates sex with violence and feels titillated by images of punishment at the hands of a “wild gipsy” or a “murderer,” though she is aware that “half of those sailors are rotten again with disease” (p. 778).

One of Molly’s favorite words is “up,” the message on Denis Breen’s insulting postcard. Among her strongest instincts is the desire to feel “full up” with the phallus of the male—to contain, nurse, and assimilate her lovers. Joyce declared that he wanted to portray women as more “whole” than men; and since he was so fond of puns, he probably intended an allusion to the homonym “hole,” as well. Thus Molly observes: “no I never in all my life felt anyone had one the size of that to make you feel full up . . . whats the idea making us like that with a big hole in the middle of us like a Stallion driving it up into you because thats all they want out of you with that
determined vicious look in his eye . . . nice invention they made for women for him to get all the pleasure” (p. 742); “your vagina he called it” (p. 770); “then if he wants to kiss my bottom Ill drag open my drawers and bulge it right out in his face as large as life he can stick his tongue 7 miles up my hole as hes there my brown part” (p. 780). Molly seems to be obsessed with holes. For her, sexual intercourse consists in “filling up” the “big hole in the middle of us.”

Although Joyce denied being influenced by Freudianism, “the new Viennese school Mr Magee spoke of” (p. 205), he appears to have set out in “Penelope” to disprove Freud’s assertion that the “libido is invariably and necessarily of a masculine nature.” The stream of consciousness in “Penelope” reveals a bold feminine ego, stripped of the responsibilities imposed by a superego, and strongly controlled by the instinctual desires of the id. Molly Bloom is all woman and all libido, impelled by the passionate forces of concupiscent desire.

Molly is wholly “Flesh,” sometimes to the point of comic absurdity. She strips words of their spiritual and emotional connotations and interprets them in a literal, physical way. She declares that her daughter Milly “can’t feel anything deep yet,” then adds, “I never came properly till I was what 22 or so it went into the wrong place always only the usual girls nonsense and giggling” (p. 767). Molly tells us that “Poldy has more spunk in him” than Boylan, but we later discover that by “spunk” she means “semen”: Boylan’s “spunk” has left a stain on the bed sheet. Molly uses the word “tongue” figuratively when she complains that Milly’s “tongue is a bit too long for my taste” (p. 767); but she believes that Bloom’s tongue is literally “too flat” (p. 773) for the proper performance of cunnilingus. “Soul” has the connotation of “passion,” as does “heart”: Molly feels glad that Boylan “put some heart up” into her (p. 758). And “sensitivity” apparently refers to the need for amorous approval. “Of course a woman is so sensitive,” Molly remarks, as she devises a plan for “sticking” Boylan for expensive presents, “after what I gave” (p. 749).
Molly has little patience with maudlin, sentimental notions of romance: “in Old Madrid silly women believe love is sighing I am dying” (p. 758). Yet her own desire for a “loveletter,” one that “fills up your whole day and life,” indicates her need for sexual affirmation beyond animal friction. “Fleshly” Molly is contradictory even in her longing for spiritual renewal and intellectual companionship. She wants love to be “like a new world” (p. 758). And with a Beckettian sense of resignation, she observes: “were never easy where we are . . . waiting always waiting” (p. 757).

Molly Bloom is Joyce’s portrait of the sensuous woman: she looms larger than life, invested with all the mythic qualities of female Weib. Ultimately, she fails as a mimetic character because she represents Joyce’s abstract concept of femina sensualis. As Frank Budgen remarked, “Perhaps she is so superwomanly because a man created her out of feminine elements only. Nature is rarely so exclusive.”

Critics of Ulysses have inveterately applied nineteenth-century values to the novel—first condemning Molly as immoral, then liberally forgiving her sexual prodigality. They judge Molly as a latter-day Emma Bovary; and they tend to ignore the fact that both James Joyce and Leopold Bloom not only forgive but genuinely admire Molly’s insatiability. Bloom paradoxically boasts of his wife’s allurements and numbers among her suitors all those men who have ever glanced lasciviously at Molly’s voluptuous bottom.

Molly Bloom is Joyce’s “darling.” She is positive, yeasaying, and life-affirming. She is psychologically rich and poetically fertile, in touch with the “awful deepdown torrent” of universal vitality. Predecessor to Anna Livia Plurabelle, Molly exhibits what D. H. Lawrence would have called the pure “desire-stream.” She wants to feel “full up” with an infinite variety of imaginary lovers. And it is precisely the catholicity of her appetites that Joyce finds so appealing. Molly offers her sexual dynamism to all the men who come within the circle of her opulent curves. In the lush terrain of her psyche, the earth mother mythically energizes
her suitors and unites them with the waking dreams of the collective unconscious.

Molly dissolves her *enamorata* in a torrent of cosmic eroticism. By embracing their racially common “maleness,” she elevates her lovers to the level of archetypal significance: “each one who enters imagines himself to be the first to enter whereas he is always the last term of a preceding series even if the first term of a succeeding one” (p. 731). It is Molly who finally unites Stephen and Bloom in their shared humanity: she brings hero and antihero together in the lyrical fluidity of romantic meditation. Molly will flow, quite naturally, into her sister and mother, ALP, who offers to all men the warmth and security of *amor matris*: “where would they all of them be if they hadnt all a mother to look after them” (p. 778).

Although Molly contemplates Stephen with erotic interest, her reverie goes beyond physical desire to an expression of maternal solicitude. Thinking of the young man as a possible lover, she assures herself: “I’m not too old for him if hes 23 or 24” (p. 775). But she later muses, with parental fondness, “I suppose he was as shy as a boy he being so young hardly 20” (p. 779). Molly attributes Stephen’s homelessness to his mother’s death: “thats why I suppose hes running wild now out at night away from his books and studies and not living at home” (p. 778). She longs for “a fine son like that,” for she felt instinctively after Rudy’s death that she would “never have another . . . we were never the same since” (p. 778). For both the Blooms, Stephen functions symbolically as the lost son who reunites the couple. He differs so radically from Boylan that his visit to 7 Eccles Street prompts “for the hostess” a “disintegration of obsession” (p. 695)—Molly’s rejection of “Hugh the ignoramus that doesn’t know poetry from a cabbage . . . sure you might as well be in bed with what with a lion” (p. 776). Stephen basks in the light of Molly’s affection and joins her son-husband Leopold in womb-weary adoration of Venus-Gea-Tellus.

Leopold Bloom takes a certain pride in enumerating the long line of male worshipers who have paid homage to Molly’s
sexuality. By composing the impressive list of fictitious lovers at the end of “Ithaca,” he attempts to put his wife’s afternoon adventure into the context of earlier masculine attraction. Molly’s affair with Boylan appears to be her first “technical” experience of adultery. She speculates that “its only the first time after that its just the ordinary do it and think no more about it” (p. 740). Molly has evidently dallied flirtatiously with a number of male admirers. She engaged in extensive “petting” with Mulvey before her marriage, and possibly with Gardner and others in her sixteen years of wedlock. But despite lascivious desires, her intrigue with Boylan on 16 June 1904 seems to mark her first extramarital affair completed with “ejaculation of semen within the natural female organ” (p. 736). Hence her extreme turbulence and agitation in “Penelope.”

Molly’s ultimate return, like Bloom’s, is to Ithaca and to the mythic moment of consummated love among the rhododendrons of Howth. In the fullness of imaginative reverie, Molly comes back to the “masculine feminine passive active” (p. 674) figure of Bloom. She believes that the majority of males consider the phallus “1 of the 7 wonders of the world” (p. 753) and harbor “not a particle of love in their natures” (p. 767). But Molly respects her husband and appreciates his uniqueness. He “knew the way to take a woman” during courtship (“I liked the way he made love then” [p. 747]); and he still does. He “takes” Molly by not taking her—by allowing her to gyrate in liberated equilibrium around a central core of passionate affection. Bloom refuses to emulate “that idiot in the gallery hissing the woman adulteress” (p. 769). He knows that Gea-Tellus, the great earth mother, will spin round and round perpetually; but that she has chosen him as axis and focal point, the center of affection around which her thoughts eternally circulate.

At the end of “Penelope,” Molly comes back to her son-husband as “flower of the mountain” and nurturant mother, giving him “the bit of seedcake” out of her mouth and feeling again “that awful deepdown torrent” (pp. 782–83). In the realm of the psyche, all experience exists simultaneously, as a dimension of present consciousness. Molly imaginatively im-
bues her husband with mythic and heroic stature. Her monologue celebrates his timeless act of potency, an act inundating and fertilizing the amorous memory of Gea-Tellus. The theme of lovemaking on Howth recurs like a musical motif throughout *Ulysses*. The final paragraph of the novel achieves, both literally and figuratively, the effect of a symphonic climax.

Against the perils of the void, Molly thrusts an affirming challenge of hope and belief. She, too, exhibits a “touch of the artist.” Out of the stuff of daily life, she weaves and unweaves the material of myth: she elevates quotidian experience to the plane of poetry. Molly’s “day-mare,” the waking dream that precedes night sleep, is a Janus image of the historical nightmare that threatens Stephen and Bloom. Her mind is free to roam through a landscape peopled by all the men and women she has ever encountered. A thin thread of consciousness asserts the “miraculous” power of the imagination to associate and to recombine—to delight, exult, and fantasize on the sensual pleasures of human existence.

For Joyce, the concupiscent senses are doors to perception. They stimulate the mind to multiply fictional images of itself in joy and pain, in suffering and contentment. Molly creates “worlds” of fantasy captured only in shadow by the words that reach the linguistic surface of meditation. In contrast to Bloom’s staccato monologue, Molly’s thoughts are characterized by verbal opulence. Her soliloquy is full and voluptuous. As soon as Molly calls up a photographic image, a three-dimensional, spiraling reality develops from the single point of her recollection. The “unstoppable” prose of “Penelope” suggests a life energized by unquenchable passion.

Of all the characters in *Ulysses*, Molly Bloom most clearly exhibits a genuine talent for *being*—for existing in the present, as the moment takes shape and creates itself from the temporal interface between sensuous perception and transcendental consciousness. Molly dismisses the “nightmare past” and, with a spirit of desire and adventure, she turns her gaze toward the seductive horizons of an unknown future.

Molly’s consciousness unfolds with amazing fertility, and
her prodigious discourse is truly open-ended. She dallies with the idea of seducing Stephen and of becoming his poetic muse. She momentarily thinks about eloping with Boylan, but she quickly rejects the proposal because “he’s not a marrying man” (p. 749). (Molly takes care to select lovers who are not the marrying kind: Gardner was about to be shipped to South Africa, and Boylan is a perennial bachelor). Molly’s projects include a startling list of outrageous and unladylike acts. She considers hiring a young boy as a gigolo and teaching him *ars amoris*. She entertains masochistic fantasies of thrilling coition with a sailor, a gipsy, or a dangerous criminal. She contemplates the pleasures of *fellatio* with the fine young men on the strand, the statue of Narcissus, and the unwashed body of Stephen Dedalus. She speculates about erotic experiences with a black lover. And she wonders what ever happened to a railway worker she met on the trip to Howth sixteen years ago. Molly thinks about cutting her pubic hair, both to startle Boylan and to cool her body in the summer heat. She contemplates rising early and going to the vegetable market. And she even considers preparing breakfast for Poldy, while he sits in bed like a “king of the country” (p. 764).

“Why does Molly Bloom menstruate?” critics ask quizically. The answer is obvious: Joyce wants to assure us that Molly is not pregnant, despite the prophecies of Bella Cohen (“Wait for nine months, my lad! Holy ginger, it’s kicking and coughing up and down in her guts already! That makes you wild, don’t it? Touches the spot?” [p. 541]). Molly’s frolic with Boylan has been infertile, and Bloom’s worst fears have not been substantiated. At the end of *Ulysses*, we at least know that the Bloom ménage is still intact. Molly maps out a plan for rekindling her husband’s sexual interests by appealing to fetishes of gloves and drawers, to jealousy, and to erotic titillation. “Ill just give him one more chance” (p. 780). She contemplates arousing his coprophiliac obsession by spouting lascivious obscenities: “Ill tighten my bottom well and let out a few smutty words . . . or the first mad thing comes into my head . . . now make him want me” (p. 781). And who can say
which, if any, of these colorful projects Molly-Penelope-Gea-Tellus will execute on 17 June 1904?

Molly's approach to life is that of a wondrous child. By filtering the present through a dense net of past experience and future possibility, she arrives at a new, exciting, parallactic perspective that eludes the more intellectual penseur. Lying in the bed of birth, conception, and death, Molly becomes the female equivalent of Rodin's symbolic "thinker." To cerebral meditation, she adds the "warm, fullblooded life" of sensuous and emotional perception. An artist of her own imaginings, she manipulates reality by embellishing and re-creating actual events. Hence her infamous multiplication of the number of times that she and Boylan "did it" from "3 or 4 times" (p. 742), to "4 or 5 times locked in each others arms" (p. 763), to "5 or 6 times handrunning" (p. 780). Whereas the fictional craftsman organizes material toward an aesthetic ideal of stasis, the artist of life alters experience according to the dictates of kinetic desire. Desire kindles passion, and passion makes art.

Molly defies the nightmare of history by drawing the past into the present in a transcendent moment of ecstasy. Like the poet Wordsworth, she creates from recollection, but in a moment of agitation rather than of tranquility. Dreams, associations, and fantasies allow her to construct the fascinating world of "Penelope"—a world of words usually articulated for an audience of one in somnolent, solipsistic splendor. The "post-human" Molly proves to embody the "post-creation" of the artist-god.

In the final episode of Ulysses, Joyce reminds us that we all possess the magical capacity to transform flesh into word, life into Logos. As the lights of the day-world are nightly extinguished, we enter the dark underside of consciousness, to join the mythic company of Moses and Sinbad. We fashion our lives anew, re-creating ourselves in terms accessible to post-diurnal, pre-nocturnal fantasy.

Like Shem the Penman, we give symbolic meaning to the quotidian surface of life, writing the mysteries of ourselves with the furniture of words in the haunted inkbattlehouse of the
psyche. We fictionalize personal history by scratching parables over the malleable integument of private consciousness. By inflating the content of our own experience, by exalting joy and compensating for pain, we become artists of the imagination, creating a private legend that gives us the strength to endure.

The mind, reflecting on itself, fashions poetic myths of happiness or despair, of glory or opprobrium. In the moments before sleep, we describe ourselves to ourselves with the fictional trappings of ecstatic desire. The eternal imagination, that “feminine” dimension of the psyche, draws us forward into the future with visions of meaning and self-transcendence. We create myths of identity from a collective racial consciousness, elevating an otherwise mundane personal history to the level of the sublime. The anima puts us in touch with a Jungian substratum of image and symbol that gives us faith in the heroic potential of our own existence.

Of all the characters in *Ulysses*, Molly Bloom alone perceives the cyclical nature of recurrent personal history. Her soliloquy presages *Finnegans Wake*, a work in which Joyce moves toward a broader mythic perspective. In both “Penelope” and the *Wake*, Joyce posits the simultaneity of human experience. He conquers time and space by making all events contemporaneous aspects of consciousness, accessible to the mind through impassioned perception. Molly Bloom may have been conceived as wholly “flesh”; but through her poetic fantasy life, she embodies the flesh made word—the Logos that arises from sensuous experience and perpetually affirms existence in a yea-saying moment of transcendent ekstasis.


7. Phillip Herring notes that Molly Bloom “is more complex than her classic ancestor and fickle in many more ways. . . . On a ‘Penelope’ notesheet Joyce wrote ‘MB jealous of men, hates women’. . . . This essential ambiguity (in two senses), like the circular imagery in the episode, contributes to the universality of Molly as female principle in *Ulysses*” (“The Bedsteadfastness of Molly Bloom,” p. 56). For further discussion of Molly’s contradictions, see Marilyn French, *The Book as World*, chap. 7; and James Van Dyck Card, “‘Contradicting’: The Word for ‘Penelope,’” pp. 17-26.

8. As Everett Knight explains in *Literature Considered as Philosophy*: “Modern art since Cézanne, like literature since the symbolists, has been a return to things in themselves. . . . Perception is not guided by the intelligence, it is warped by it. This is the insight upon which the vision of Cézanne is based. His whole endeavour is to capture objects before his intelligence has organized them into something quite different from what they really are” (p. 73).

9. Georges Poulet, in *L’Espace Proustien*, makes a number of similar observations about the work of Marcel Proust.

10. Joyce wrote to Carlo Linati that in “Penelope,” “the past sleeps.” And in the Gorman-Gilbert schema, Joyce cites “web” and “movement” as correspondences for the “Penelope” episode (Ellmann, *Ulysses on the Liffey*, Appendix). Phillip Herring tells us that “phrases in the *Ulysses* notesheets in the British Museum which reflect Joyce’s view of Penelope are these: ‘Penelope—her body possessed’; ‘learn-unlearn, build-destroy, Penelope’. . . . Other phrases indicate that he saw a parallel between Penelope as weaver/enchantress and the nursery rhyme about the spider and the fly” (“The Bedsteadfastness of Molly Bloom,” 56 n).

11. Joyce, *Letters*, 1:180. We might compare Joyce’s description of Molly Bloom to Stephen’s earlier admiration for the “monk-errants, Ahern and Michael Robartes,” encountered in Yeats’s *Tables of the Law*. Stephen declares that “their morality was infrahuman or superhuman,” and he feels that “they live beyond the region of mortality, having chosen to fulfill the law of their being” (SH 178). Certainly Molly Bloom, like the Nietzschean superman, fulfills the “law of her own being.”


13. Molly inadvertently hints at Stephen’s growth when she says: “I hope hes not that stuck up university student sort no otherwise he wouldnt go sitting down in the old kitchen with him taking Eppss cocoa’’ (p. 775). In the early episodes of *Ulysses*, Stephen appeared to be an intellectual prig, the “stuck up university student sort.” Now Joyce seems to indicate, through Molly, that Stephen’s friendly associations with Bloom signify a definite change in character.

15. While writing "Penelope," Joyce asked Frank Budgen to send him "Fanny Hill Memoirs (unexpurgated)" (Letters, 1:171). Here Joyce seems to be drawing on an incident from John Cleland's Fanny Hill. Fanny, tired of being a "kept woman" to an impotent gentleman, finds excitement by "picking up a sailor off the sea."

16. Cf. Leopold Bloom's remark in "Circe": "Man and woman, love, what is it? A cork and bottle" (p. 499). In Finnegans Wake, Joyce frequently puns on the "whole"-"hole" homonym in referring to Anna Livia Plurabelle.

17. Sartre writes in Being and Nothingness that the female sex "is an appeal to being as all holes are. In herself a woman appeals to a strange flesh which is to transform her into a fullness of being by penetration and dissolution" (pp. 613–14).


19. Joyce claims in Finnegans Wake to have been "jung and easily freudened"; and two of the Wake commandments advise: "Sell not to freund. . . . Let earwigger's wivable teach you the dance!" (FW 579).


21. Like David Hayman and Marilyn French, I subscribe to the "single lover" theory of "Penelope" and assume that Molly's comment refers to the first time that she has ever committed adultery. See David Hayman, "The Empirical Molly," in Approaches to "Ulysses": Ten Essays, ed. Staley and Benstock; and Marilyn French, The Book as World, chap. 7.