In case we should forget that the creative process is grounded in the body, we are reminded brilliantly of that fact by Joyce in the last episode of *Ulysses*. The questions that still engage critics in regard to "Penelope"—Molly’s morality or lack of it, her actual lovers, the meaning of her *yes*—are all fascinating, but I wish to focus this discussion on Molly as body, and I wish to examine the personal and archetypal aspects of her in order to suggest that she is finally a function of the book, that her relation to Bloom and Stephen, although important, is not as important as is her relation to the work *Ulysses* itself. For Molly is a vessel, a kind of transducer, an energizing force, who reestablishes the connection between body and the creation of art. In so doing, she becomes, for the novel, both food and word.

One key to the formation of her character and role can be found in Joyce’s interest in the ideas of Giordano Bruno. Both Gose and Voelker have provided insightful explorations into this area of Joycean influences. To summarize briefly, Joyce seems to have been keenly interested in Bruno’s dissatisfaction with the Aristotelian categorizing of nature, which he saw to be both fixed and in flux, and therefore difficult to establish with rigid rules, since for Bruno (and also for Joyce), matter was predominant over the form through which it moved. Bruno’s doctrine of immanence, his principle of the coincidence of contraries, and his concept of learned ignorance are also of
prime importance for the understanding of Joyce's creation of Molly. About Bruno's doctrine of immanence, Voelker has this to say:

Bruno's doctrine of immanence has sweeping implications for the conclusion of *Ulysses*. Since the senses perceive the real while the intellect manipulates only useful fictions, Molly's sensuality accords with Bruno's irrationalism—especially since she proves herself able to leap from sensory to intuitive modes of perception—it is not surprising to find Bruno attributing a higher intelligence to animals (who possess only the vegetative and sensitive faculties) than to men (who also possess the intellective).  

It is these philosophical premises that also allow us to better see that Molly's references to food and the digestive processes are linked to Joyce's ideas about creation.

Thus this final episode opens with a reference to a meal—that important breakfast that Molly has been ordered to serve Bloom on the coming day. Whether she does, in fact, get Bloom's breakfast, and whether this possible change in their early morning behavior patterns reflects a significant change in their relationship is perhaps impossible to establish. Nevertheless, we have begun Bloom's day with a breakfast and have ended his day with another one. Furthermore, there are associations in the opening lines of "Penelope" with the Christmas dinner scene in *A Portrait*. The thoughts of breakfast cause Molly to remember a past breakfast Bloom has eaten in the *City Arms* (the only other time Bloom has ordered breakfast from Molly). That time is connected to Dante Riordan who lived below the Blooms at the *City Arms*, and Molly's comments on Dante—"her soul greatest miser ever. . . . God help the world if all the women were her sort down on bathing suits and lownecks" (738)—link body denial with a deficient soul and underscore Dante's failings and their effects on that Christmas day in Stephen's past.

Furthermore, breakfast, the breaking of the fast, signifies in ritual terms the end of a period of sterility, the reestablishment of rites of *plerosis*, a dynamic that is carried into the artistic realm as well. After the wordiness of "Eumaeus," where language draws attention to itself and disguises things, and after the dessicated, fragmentizing prose of "Ithaca," where language becomes separated from connotative meanings, "Penelope" seems to offer both us and the language new life.

One strong impression we get about Molly is that she is, in her way, as great an ingester/assimilator of life as Bloom is. This is true on
both the literal and metaphoric levels. She is, for example, overweight: "My belly is a bit too big I'll have to knock off the stout at dinner" (750). But her love of food is clearly evidenced by the fact that food is almost always recalled in connection with some male encounter or flirtation. Beyond the obvious use of such details and realistic touches as the inevitability of meals and pub life, Molly's association of food and eating with interesting men seems to suggest that the taking in of food is associated with the taking in of love and of life.

Examples are numerous. In her recollections of old Gibraltar days with the Stanhopes, she thinks of "lovely teas" and "scrumptious current scones with raspberry waters I adore" (755). Also, her memories of Mulvey begin with her being served breakfast in bed (Mrs. Rubio brings her coffee). Another meal that foreshadows Bloom's advent involves Molly's kissing of Mulvey. She recalls: "He put his tongue in my mouth his mouth was sweet like young" (759). The ingestion of sweetness is thus important not only to Bloom but to her. She remembers Val Dillon as "that big heathen I first noticed him at dessert when I was cracking the nuts with my teeth I wished I could have picked every morsel of that chicken out of my fingers it was so tasty and browned and as tender as anything only for I didn't want to eat everything on my plate" (750). Boylan is also recalled in terms of food. She relates an early flirtation where he admired her feet while they "both ordered 2 teas and plain bread and butter" (745). And her most impersonal flirtation associated with food is perhaps with a "man with the curly hair in the Lucan dairy" (745) where she was tasting butter.

But most of her recollections involving food also involve Bloom. The Glencree dinner is particularly mentioned (750, 774) and seems important in view of the fact that Bloom also mentions it in "Les-trygonians." Another dinner is mostly recalled in terms of the coldness of the evening, the warmth of the house, and the "rum in the house to mull" when she is with Bloom. Her memories of Bloom and food range from the cosmic—Bloom carrying his paid-for soup that he is determined to finish before the concert at Mallow recommences, "with the soup splashing about taking spoonfuls of it hadn't he the nerve" (748)—to the half-romantic vision of Molly as pastry-covered grain goddess: "He was on the pop of asking me too the night in the kitchen I was rolling the potato cake there's something I want to say to
you only for I put him off letting on I was in a temper and with my hands and arms full of pasty flour" (743).

Molly also seems to share with Bloom the assumption that you are what you eat, but for her this idea is much more strongly related to her own sexuality. As she wonders about Bloom’s infidelity, for example, we can see that she views both sex and love as related to food: “He came somewhere Im sure by his appetite anyway love its not or hed be off his feed thinking of her so either its was one of those night women if it was down there” (738-39).

Molly makes similar assumptions about Boylan. They have apparently supped that day on “port and potted meat” (741)—the potted meat being the famous Plumtree’s potted meat of Bloom’s musings—and she says, “It had a fine salty taste yes because I felt lovely and tired myself and fell asleep as sound as a top” (741). Molly is also convinced that oysters are aphrodisiacs, and says of Boylan’s abilities, “He must have come 3 or 4 times,” concluding, “He must have eaten oysters I think a few dozen” (742). And, in accordance with her assumptions about appetite and sexual activity, she adds, “He must have eaten a whole sheep after” (742). Plumtree’s potted meat would seem to have evolved from being a comment on Bloom’s fertility to being a comment on Boylan’s. Consumed by Boylan and Molly it suggests fertility, but Molly has not been fertilized and she later notes, “Poldy has more spunk in him” (742). Furthermore, the fertility suggested here is as symbolic as the relationship between Stephen and Bloom is. The meat droppings, like Bloom’s plum pits (“He gets the plums and I the plumstones,” Bloom has mused on the beach in “Nausikaa,” [377]), still suggest seeds of rejuvenation despite Bloom’s despairing tone and contrast with Stephen’s plum seeds of sterility.

Besides Plumtree’s potted meat, two other foods seem to be of significance in “Penelope,” and, not surprisingly, they are associated with the female, namely, eggs and milk. Bloom is to get eggs—“a couple of eggs” (738) for breakfast; Stephen, in Molly’s Spanish fantasy, is to have “dos Huevos” (779). These references are straightforward enough, but eggs obviously blend fertility with nurturing. They are also vessels, and in some cosmogonies the egg is seen as the earliest container of the world. Gose links up the numerous egg references to the auk’s egg from the Sinbad story to the Golden Egg of Madame Blavatsky’s theosophic system, to the Great Circle, the “O” that de-
Milk is mainly associated with Molly’s amplitudinous breasts, which are in turn associated with her sexual attractiveness, and she is constantly thinking of them. “Ill change that lace on my black dress,” she thinks, “to show off my buds” (763). She remembers how her breasts appealed to Mulvey: “They were just beginning to be plump . . . he caressed them outside they love doing that its the roundness there I was leaning over him” (760). When she speaks of Milly’s breasts it is only in reference to her own. She thinks of herself as a young girl when her breasts “were shaking and dancing about in my blouse like Milly’s little ones now when she runs up the stairs” (761).

But these natural, if rather vain, expressions of pride in her body do not convey everything about her breasts, for her breasts do represent nurturing also, and especially when connected with Boylan or Bloom. About Boylan Molly thinks, “I think he made them a bit firmer sucking them like that so long he made me thirsty” (753), and “Theres the mark of his teeth still where he tried to bite the nipple” (754). Although these references still reflect more sexuality than maternity, Molly does go on to say, “Much an hour he was at them Im sure by the clock like some kind of a big infant” (754). In her memories of Bloom, the connection between nurturing and her own body are even more in evidence. Thinking of her nursing of Milly she says: “I had a great breast of milk with Milly enough for two what was the reason of that he said I could have got a pound a week as wet nurse all swelled out . . . I had to get him to suck them they were so hard he said it was sweeter and thicker than cows then he wanted to milk me into the tea well hes beyond everything” (754). Again we have the reference to sweetness that seems so important to Bloom, too, and is always associated with their relationship.

Also, we cannot avoid being reminded of the old milkwoman with the shrivelled breasts that offers cows’ milk to the students in the Martello tower that morning. William P. Fitzpatrick notes: “For Stephen, Ireland is a mother with old shrunken paps, while Molly is frequently associated with cream and her breasts are of legendary proportions . . . In the sterility of modern Ireland Molly as the principle of creativity and fertility is sorely needed.”

Thus Molly is nurturer in a number of ways, although she seems
somewhat less than typically maternal. Her feeding is basically positive. However, there is one instance where, as we might expect, given her contradictory nature, she gives us an example of negative nurturing. She is fascinated with the poisoning of a husband by a wife. The incident seems to produce several changing, even contradictory, responses in her. First she is appalled: "Wasn't she a downright villain to go and do a thing like that"; then she qualifies her disapproval: "Of course some men can be dreadfully aggravating drive you mad"; this comment is followed by a calmer reflection: "White Arsenic she put in his tea off flypaper wasn't it." Finally she accepts the whole affair with a typical rationale: "She must have been madly in love with the other fellow to run the chance of being hanged O she didn't care if that was her nature what could she do" (744). For Molly, of course, moral questions based on religious or legal precepts are seen as meaningless when set against the forces of nature. If the figure of the Terrible Mother rises momentarily to the surface here, her ferocious aspect is somewhat mitigated by Molly's acceptance of Her and women's totality. Ironically, Dante Riordan is often likened to the figure of the Terrible Mother, yet she is an embodiment of patriarchal attitudes, an animus-ridden woman, more threatening than Molly at any time.

Although a number of critics have doubted Molly's ability to nurture, and although she may not strike us as typically maternal, she is archetypically so. For example, in spite of her indignity over Bloom's demand for service the next morning, Molly still envisions rather happily a meal for Bloom. First she recalls his demand: "Then he starts giving us his orders for eggs and tea Findon haddy and hot buttered toast I suppose" (764). Then she adds her own embellishments: "I think I'll get a bit offish tomorrow or today is it Friday yes I will with some blancmange with black currant jam like long ago not those 2 lb pots of mixed plum and apple from the London and Newcastle Williams and Woods ... I hate those eels cod yes I'll get a nice piece of cod" (764). (Perhaps her preference for currants is associated with the "Circe" vision of Howth where the nanny goat, her totem animal, drops currants.)

In any case, she also envisions serving breakfast to Stephen. Delighted to envision having a "long talk" with this "intelligent well educated person" and thinking also of Stephen's state of exhaustion, Molly allows as how "I could have brought him in his breakfast in bed with a bit of toast. . . . Or if the woman was going her rounds with
the watercress and something nice and tasty there are a few olives in
the kitchen he might like" (779). And she concludes, perhaps signifi-
cantly, "I suppose he'd like my nice cream too" (780). This thought
comes immediately after a reference to Bloom: "I'll throw him up his
eggs and tea in the moustachecup she gave him to make his mouth
bigger," and the blending of pronouns suggests that the recipient of
the cream might just as easily be Bloom. Nevertheless, the softening
of tone suggests that she means the recipient to be Stephen. Then she
imagines waking him up in Spain where she will bring him breakfast:
"Dos huevos estrellados, señor" (779). Yet as her fantasy develops, her
images of Stephen seem to blend with those of Bloom. "I'll just give
him one more chance," she thinks, "I'll get up early in the morn-
ing. . . . I might go over to the markets to see all the vegetables and
cabbages and tomatoes and carrots and all kinds of splendid fruits all
coming in lovely and fresh" (780). These words are followed by "who
knows who'd be the 1st man I'd meet" (780). Because of the pronoun
confusion generated by her flow of words, we cannot be sure if
Stephen or Bloom is the recipient of these "splendid fruits," but surely
these references point to Molly as some kind of nourishing figure.

If we have any doubts about this function, they can be resolved by a
reminder that the most poetic rendering of a meal occurs in the final
pages of the episode, and it is a meal we have had recounted to us
before. It is the eating of the seedcake by Bloom. We have seen how,
in "Lestrygonians" the memory of Howth, Bloom's "cud of
reminiscence" (413), is the image that revives him at his lowest point
of the day. Here we see that it is no less important an event for Molly.
In this chapter of ends, it appears at the end of her monologue and
deserves to be quoted in full: "The sun shines for you he said the day
we were lying among the rhododendrons on Howth head in the grey
tweed suit and his straw hat 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" (782). Bloom's taking of the seedcake
is not a symptom of infantile regression, but indicates instead an
acceptance of the archetypal realities. Molly's supposed dominance,
evident in the next phrase, "I knew I could always get round him," is
countered, as usual, by her very next words, "and I gave him all the
pleasure I could" (782). That this final passage involves a conflation of
Bloom's and Molly's Howth experience with her Gibraltar days with Mulvey is not important, because the act itself is timeless and impersonal, or rather, transpersonal. Nor is Bloom's importance diminished, because he understands.

Molly, so hungry for love and life, also makes many references to being filled. Whether she is filled in sexual terms—"to make you feel full up"(742), or in terms of love—"it fills up your whole day and life"(758), or in terms of the female body—"what's the idea of making us like that with a big hole in the middle of us"(742), she is a personification of rites ofplerosis. While menstruating she speaks of having "too much blood up in us"(769). There is also her rather comical sexual experiment: "After I tried with the Banana but I was afraid it might break and get lost up in me somewhere"(760).

Again, this state of being filled is not in any way static, for Molly's eliminative functions are also given a lot of attention. One important "eliminative" function is, of course, her menstruation. It has received a variety of readings ranging from the sweeping and associative to the pragmatic and realistic. Richard Ellmann says: "In allowing Molly to menstruate at the end Joyce consecrates the blood in the chamberpot rather than the blood in the chalice, mentioned by Mulligan at the beginning of the book. For this blood is substance... The great human potentiality is substantiation, not transubstantiation... It is this quality which the artist has too."5 Henke thinks, rather, that "Joyce wants to assure us that Molly is not pregnant."6 Both interpretations are useful, but I think Ellmann makes an important connection between menstruation and the creative process. Menstrual blood is not only the first female transformation mystery, but is also food, food that nourishes the embryo. Although her passing of blood indicates the absence of a literal, physical embryo, the blood that fills the chamberpot is symbolically the substance that nourishes the embryonic artist. It is the stuff of life on which the artist must feed. Molly herself seems to elevate the blood to archetypal meaning when she proclaims "It's pouring out of me like the sea" (769).

The chamberpot may make a comical chalice too, but the humorous aspect of it does not undercut the relationship of the pot to the creative process. Ellmann contends that Joyce first establishes Molly as a Gea-Tellus figure only to demythologize her by "bringing her down with a thump onto the orangkeyed chamberpot at 7 Eccles street."7 But the primal goddesses were often associated with vessels. Neumann tells us
"It is the vessel that preserves and holds fast. But in addition it is the nourishing vessel that provides the unborn as well as the born with food and drink."\(^8\)

Certainly Joyce is having fun with Molly’s urination and its association with music. Still perched on her pot, Molly’s tuneful flow below is matched by a tuneful flow above. She says, "O Lord what a row youre making like the jersey lily easy O how the waters come down at Lahore" (770). Gifford notes that the Jersey Lily was Mrs. Langtry, the lover of the Prince of Wales, and Molly seems to have transformed her into a kind of anima figure. Gifford also observes that the "waters of Lahore" reference is from a poem of Southeys's.\(^9\)

Besides the body functions just discussed, there is the last, and perhaps the most important function, elimination, and especially the part of the body associated with it, the rump. In this regard, Joyce’s description of the "Penelope" episode and its function is most revealing. The full passage reads as follows: "Penelope is the clou of the book. . . . It begins and ends with the female word Yes. It turns like the huge earthball 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."\(^10\) Although Joyce establishes four points, the dominant one would seem to be the "arse." His emphasis on its importance is, of course, in evidence throughout Ulysses, but his letters to Nora are also suggestive. In one, for example, he says, "I prefer your arse, darling, to your bubbies because it does such a dirty thing,"\(^11\) That for Joyce, the female rear is the cardinal point seems suggested by letters to Nora, but when he transfers this devotion to Bloom, he is doing so for artistic reasons.

In "Penelope" Molly has some comments to make on Bloom's near-fixation. She refers to the "last time he came on my bottom" (740) and to the "usual kissing my bottom" (739), both of which hint at Bloom’s reverence for those famous "female hemispheres." She also mentions his underwear fetish: "He’s mad on the subject of drawers" (746). Although Molly fails to understand his preference for this part of the anatomy ("we haven’t 1 atom of any kind of expression in us all of us the same 2 lumps of lard" [777]), it is not her idea of expression, but Bloom’s (and Joyce’s) that counts.

Certainly "Penelope" is more than the character of Molly Bloom.
The whole area of language seems called into discussion in this episode. Critics have concerned themselves with such elements as Joyce's use of eight sentences as a structuring device, having its origins in Vico's conception of completeness and recurrence; they have also been aware of the importance of the element of contradiction in Molly's monologue, contradiction that seems intentionally placed there by the author. Indeed, it would almost seem that Molly, in her use of language, is intent on undermining it. In any event, what we have in "Penelope" is a language characterized by any absence of beginning, middle, or end (an absence of linear time), a language characterized by fluidity, amplitude, earthiness, song, and contradictions that do not cancel but include, that do not nullify meaning but rather enhance it. For the "form" of the language serves as Joyce's statement about matter, substance, art, beginnings, and endings.

Again, Joyce supplies us with some hints as to his purpose in his letters. He tells Frank Budgen, "I am going to leave the last word with Molly Bloom—the final episode Penelope being written through her thoughts and body." Later he elaborates further to Budgen, "The last word (human, all too human) is left to Penelope." In both statements, the word is emphasized. It is grounded in humanity, in body, and Joyce means what he says. Molly Bloom is his word, his last word on language and the creative process.

Going back to Stephen's attitude toward women and language, we recall that in both A Portrait, and Ulysses Stephen has associated women with nonlanguage or with a mysterious language, a language that they alone seem to possess. For example, the lips of the prostitute he kisses project a "vague speech." The image of the bat woman and the girl on the beach are visual, silent. His dead mother is always envisioned as mute, as speaking "mute secret words" (10). The ghost of May Dedalus is also mute, urged by Stephen in "Circe" to "speak the word known to all men" (581). There is, however, no utterance forthcoming.

However, Joyce understood more fully the nature of the word, and it is Molly and the structure of language in the final episode that render a part of his meaning. Another clue is provided by Molly's name: Joyce says, "Moly is the gift of Hermes, a god of public ways, and is the invisible influence (prayer, chance, agility, presence of mind, power of recuperation) which saves in case of accident. . . . In this special case his plant may be said to have many leaves, indifference due to
masturbation, pessimism congenital, a sense of the ridiculous sudden fastidiousness in some detail, experience." With his eye on the personal, the mythic, the organic all at once, Joyce is still working with the alimentary process, for moly is food. It is something that must be ingested in order to be beneficial. In symbolic terms then, Molly has been the food of the book called *Ulysses*. And since Joyce is not about to render process static, she is also excrement, the end product of the work, and like all such end products bears the seeds of a new beginning.

Here is the coming together of all things. The associations of language with excrement and food, the characters' various ingestions on both a literal and metaphoric level, the physical and artistic transformations. According to Joyce, the "end" of *Ulysses* is "Ithaca." The last word of "Ithaca" is "Where?" but the last mark on the page is a period, a smudge that is both end and answer: home, Molly, Molly's end.

As he lies at her end, at the end of the day, at the end of his consciousness, Bloom is also lying at the beginning. Day is about to dawn; Molly’s consciousness—intuitive, energizing consciousness based on ingestion, assimilation, and excretion—is awake. Molly’s rump, the center of the world, is both object and symbol of the cyclical nature of life. This lump of lard, as Molly calls it, is not unlike Stephen’s lump of earth, out of which will be fashioned art. Bloom, on the other hand, will continue to fashion his life around the worship of this lump by intuitively recognizing the sacred energies it represents, the important kinesis of the body, the presence of process, of emptying and filling, living, declining, and dying.

The priest’s chalice, by which Stephen hopes to transmute the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life, the chalice that Mulligan mocks in the opening pages of the book, is only an objective vessel. Molly, asquat her chamberpot is the living vessel. She is subject and object, the source of all transformation mysteries for her creator, and it is she who represents communion, not as ritual but simply as being.