‘Mn’: Transgressive ‘Penelope’

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Perhaps no other novel in the English canon has been so notorious in its association with obscenity to the degree that James Joyce's 1922 novel, *Ulysses*, has. For a time after its publication it 'lay stacked like dynamite in a revolutionary cellar' in Shakespeare and Company in Paris, the bookshop owned by publisher Sylvia Beach.[1] In an academic journal featuring the theme of "Transgressive Textualities", no other text is arguably as textually transgressive. A paradigm of stylistic experimentation, *Ulysses* at once challenges and frustrates novelistic conventions and expectations of what a novel should be like. It is revolutionary in its style as it toys with shifting narrative voices and exploits the stream-of-consciousness technique, taking this to its logical extreme in the concluding chapter of the novel. It is for these reasons that *Ulysses* has become an emblem of Modernism.

Close to a century has elapsed since its initial publication, and yet to this day the very mention of *Ulysses* still makes people somewhat uneasy. Indeed, Joyce's world-famous novel almost invariably connotes that which is scandalous, salacious, and risqué, and despite the fact that its complexity is seldom underestimated or underplayed, the belief that there is a great deal in it which is lewd tends to turn people away. Obscenity there is, that we cannot gainsay, but it is not as extensive and ubiquitous as some twentieth-century reviewers and critics might have us think. Nothing is gratuitous about such passages because Joyce's intention was never to sensationalise or capitalise on the more provocative parts. Indeed, the sheer strain of *Ulysses*'s chequered publication history took its toll on Joyce and greatly affected his physical health, which is proof enough that his intention was never simply to entertain. On the contrary, Joyce was very much attuned to how society and culture had defined sexuality, and was concerned with how 'rigidly heterosexual imperatives' are ruinous to society.[2] In addition to this, medical science held a great fascination for Joyce who left for Paris in 1902 to study medicine. He rejected Irish Catholicism in favour of science which, he believed, would provide him with a better understanding of human beings.[3] I do not wish to be deceptive and cheat you into thinking I will be steering clear of the novel's more unrestrained, no-holds-barred passages. For the purpose of this article I must tread on what has been perceived as rather obscene terrain. What follows is an analysis of 'Penelope' which is the final episode of *Ulysses*, better known as Molly Bloom's interior monologue, and how it lends itself to 'transgressive textualities'.

Turning now to the following quote about *Ulysses*:

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[1] Kevin Birmingham, *The Most Dangerous Book: The Battle for James Joyce's* Ulysses (New York, NY: Penguin, 2014), p. 9.

[2] Vicki Mahaffey, '*Ulysses* and the End of Gender', in *A Companion to James Joyce's Ulysses*, ed. by Margot Norris (Boston and New York, NY: Bedford Books, 1998), pp. 151-168, p. 152.

[3] Richard Brown, *James Joyce and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 15.

> [It] appears to have been written by a perverted lunatic who has made a speciality of the literature of the latrine […] I have no stomach for *Ulysses* […] James Joyce is a writer of talent but in *Ulysses* he has ruled out all the elementary decencies of life and dwells appreciatively on things that sniggering louts of schoolboys guffaw about. In addition to this stupid glorification of mere filth […] there are whole chapters of it without any punctuation or other guide to what the writer is really getting at. Two-thirds of it is incoherent, and the passages that are plainly written are devoid of wit, displaying a coarse salacrity [sic] intended for humour.[4]

A blistering and unforgiving piece, indeed, yet there is some truth in it. The author's comment on *Ulysses* being 'literature of the latrine' is not wholly inaccurate. Joyce *is* after all concerned with the minutiae of everyday life, which he in turn conveys to us in the shape of a single unremarkable and arbitrary day in the life of his subjects, protracted over 732 pages. With painstaking detail, Joyce chronicles:

> the motions of the body, the motions of the mind, the motions of the feelings in all their shades, from conscious feelings to those which rise up in the throat like a spasm. He cinematographs the life of his subject with the maximum of minuteness, omitting nothing.[5]

Indeed, the scatological functions of the body are given the highest literary treatment in *Ulysses*. Karl Radek offers a striking description that stresses Joyce's novelistic exactitude: 'a heap of dung, crawling with worms, photographed by a cinema apparatus through a microscope—such is Joyce's work'.[6]

The Sporting Times reviewer also said of *Ulysses* that it is 'supremely nauseous' and another newspaper simply commented 'most disgusting'.[7] Let us now apply this brand of public repudiation to 'Penelope' in our consideration and analysis of the eighteenth and final chapter of Joyce's tour de force. 'Penelope' *is* in fact 'supremely nauseous' and at times even 'disgusting' in its close-to-emetic detailing of bodily functions. The crudity of Joyce's writing was no novelty, of course, to those readers who had been following his serialised contributions to England via *The Egoist* and America via *The Little Review*. That said, nothing—not even the infamous 'Nausicaa' passage which led to its publishers' prosecution for obscenity and the cessation of publication of all further passages from *Ulysses*—could have prepared them for the coarse candour of Mrs Marion (Molly) Bloom, and the general maelstrom that is 'Penelope'. What had brought about the obscenity trial and the suppression of *Ulysses* to begin with was the discovery, by the father of a young female reader, of the following passage from 'Nausicaa' in one of the girl's magazines, detailing Gerty McDowell pointedly showing of her legs for Bloom's gratification.[8] It was believed that a text such as this is offensive to the modesty of female readers, and might also deprave and corrupt them.

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[4] Anon., 'The Scandal of *Ulysses*', *The Sporting Times*, 1922.

[5] Karl Radek on Joyce's Realism (1934), in *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Robert H. Deming (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), VII (1928-1941), p. 624.

[6] ibid., p. 625.

[7] As quoted in Christine van Boheemen, 'Molly's Heavenly Body and the Economy of the Sign: The Invention of Gender in "Penelope"', in *Ulysses-En-Gendered Perspectives: Eighteen New Essays on the Episodes*, ed. by Kimberly J. Devlin & Marilyn Reizbaum (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 267-281, p. 267.

[8] See James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 350.

If this fairly innocuous passage could have elicited such a reaction from the reading public, it brings us to wonder what the reception of 'Penelope' must have been like. The most often-cited review of 'Penelope', and a terribly scathing one at that, came from none other than Joyce's brother, Stanislaus. Stanislaus dismissed the literary masterminding of his brother's concluding chapter as an 'obscene ignorant scrawl'.[9] As twenty-first-century readers, nothing much about 'Penelope' will faze us and our reaction to it is fairly muted. Instead, we tend to approach it with what Christine van Boheemen has called 'polite acceptance'.[10] For us, the initial shock of that first reading cannot be anything but fleeting. For an early-twentieth-century society that was slowly limbering up to a gradual extrication from the ivy-like clutches of '"Victorian" sexual repression and ignorance', modern enlightenment and toleration were still at an embryonic stage.[11] In other words, most were unable to read 'Penelope' beyond Stanislaus's description of it.

What is it about Molly's monologue, then, that made it a target for the London and New York societies for the suppression of vice? What is it about its contents that created such furore and outrage? What is it about 'Penelope' that makes it an ideal candidate for an issue on transgression? The final chapter of *Ulysses* is written from the point of view of Bloom's wife, and this is arguably the most controversial of Joyce's decisions. Critics and reviewers would have questioned Joyce's audacity in devoting an entire chapter to a woman's ''voice''. It is replete with Molly's memories, her opinion of Dubliners, particularly women, and her sexual exploits. Some might consider it transgressive in its detailing of female desire by a woman, particularly given the time in which it is set. After all, this is a character who has come to us rather vicariously. Our perception of Molly and our expectations are at once formed and coloured by what has already been said about her in the course of our reading and by the reputation that precedes her. By the time we come to her interior monologue, Molly is a puzzle pieced by the reader, no more objective than our opinion of her. The seven hundred or so pages that precede the reader's introduction to Molly are the build-up to a grand finale that is long overdue. This article, then, will task itself with exploring the notion that 'Penelope' is transgressive to a degree, given its extensive detailing of female desire by an otherwise voiceless woman in twentieth-century Dublin, whilst also considering the scope of this supposed transgression and entertaining the idea that it is not as revolutionary as we might have come to believe.

The most obvious place to start is its textual representation on the page. It is subversive in that it is 'a[n] [*almost*] unbroken block of text' constituted of eight leviathan mostly unpunctuated sentences; it is essentially a forty-page-long flow of unstoppered thought.[12] It is a catalogue of *female* sexuality and desire by a *female* character, remarkable in its frankness and coarseness of language. The language did prove problematic, of course, but what appears to have been the primary cause of agitation was a patriarchal unease about the articulator of these perceived obscenities. They originate from the mouth—or mind, rather—of a woman, and therein lies the rub. The episode is the locus of woman-centred

[9] Stanislaus Joyce, as cited in van Boheemen, p. 267.
[10] ibid.
[11] Brown, p. 4.
[12] Birmingham, p. 199.

"discourse" in a male-dominated novel. The source of malaise, then, seems to reside in the granular detailing of desire of the Other coupled with anxiety about possible repercussions on the patriarchal systems in place at the time. Joyce seems to have succeeded in doing the unthinkable: he had bestowed upon a member of a subjugated minority the power of self-expression by making her representative of women in general, a "voice" unto omnipresent female voicelessness. What riled Joyce's contemporaries about this was that a woman had dared be "vocal" about her desires—had dared to have them in the first place—and be utterly unapologetic for them.

Joyce did not emerge from this unscathed, however, and he came under fire for his interest in and fascination with all matters somatic which were soon perceived as being prurient. Indeed, Richard Brown argues that Joyce's critics 'rarely had a clear distinction in their minds between [his] treatment of sexuality and what they considered to be his exaggerated interest in all the workings of the body'.[13] What most failed to grasp was that Joyce never intended to sensationalise. It was medical science, as opposed to the Irish Catholicism he so vehemently rejected, that could 'offer him a more satisfactory way of understanding human nature than the Church'.[14] Indeed, testament to his lifelong fascination with science—and the body in particular—Joyce assigned a part of the body (what he called an 'organ' in his working outline) to each episode.[15] The organ for 'Penelope' is "flesh" which captures both the sheer density of the episode, and the palpability of Molly's materiality and her corporeality. As a result, analyses of Molly have divided opinion and polarised critics into two camps: those who view her as a mere reduction to fleshliness and a textbook case of male objectification, versus those who discuss her in terms of agency and feminism.[16] As we journey with her through the labyrinth of her thoughts and recollections, we discover, in a paradox typical of Molly herself, that she is a bizarre conflation of both. She seems to embody the virgin/whore dichotomy which Suzette A. Henke argues has become 'a truism' of Joyce studies.[17] Molly herself invites an indirect reflection on this dichotomy when she thinks 'I dont like books with a Molly in them like that one he brought me about the one from Flanders a whore'.[18] In so doing, she attempts at once to set herself apart from Daniel Defoe's adulteress while simultaneously aligning herself directly with her, securing her status as fellow *femme fatale*, and inviting us to read this as an oblique admission of guilt. Later on, this obliqueness gives way to a confessional 'its all his own fault if I am an

[13] Brown, p. 1.
[14] ibid., p. 52.
[15] See 'The Gilbert Schemata' in *Ulysses*, Appendix A, p. 734-735.
[16] Critics who analyse women in Joyce tend to veer towards Joyce's own attitudes towards women both within and without the text. Therefore, criticism on Joyce's female characters almost inevitably transmutes into an attack on Joyce's decisions when it comes to his representation of women in fiction. As a result, Joyce's somewhat ambivalent attitudes have generated a wealth of critical works on the author's feminist or misogynist leanings. See Suzette A. Henke, *Joyce's* Moraculous Sindbook*: A Study of* Ulysses (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1978); Colin MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (London: Harper & Row, 1979); Suzette A. Henke and Elaine Unkeless, *Women in Joyce* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1982); Heather Cook Callow, '"Marion of the Bountiful Bosoms": Molly Bloom and the Nightmare of History', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 36 (1990), 464-476.
[17] Suzette A. Henke, 'Feminist Perspectives on James Joyce', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 6 (1980), 14-22, p. 14.
[18] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 707.

adulteress', thus displacing her guilt onto her husband, Leopold Bloom, and his emotional neglect of her.[19]

This split between two extremes inevitably invites at once feminist readings of Molly or misogynist readings of the text in relation to Joyce. Brown writes that Molly is often discussed in terms of either 'an affirming life-force and symbolic Gea Tellus figure or else as wanton and immoral', that is, Earth Mother versus Eve.[20] While she is certainly no Madonna, critics have shown a tendency towards the other extreme, homing in instead on Molly's 'loose sexuality',[21] which in turn has facilitated dismissals of her as 'indiscreet […] and simple-mindedly sex-obsessed'.[22] What these analyses of Molly's seemingly unbridled sexuality generally overlook is that this is a single day in her life that we have been presented with, and we know of only a single consummated affair, that which occurs on 'Bloomsday' with the dandified Blazes Boylan.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar are not so easily appeased, however. According to Karen Lawrence, they 'regard Woman in Joyce as confined to her body, excluded from the production of culture'.[23] As a result, they are uneasy with feminist readings of the text and 'refuse to be Mollified' by 'feminologist re-Joycings'.[24] They fail to find in Joyce's interrogation of socio-cultural norms what they call 'a natural alliance with feminism'.[25] Indeed, the ethos of "feminism" in relation to Joyce is a rather tenuous one. Lawrence thinks of Joyce and feminism as

> a difficult conjunction, a seemingly forced connection between a man who is quoted as saying, "I hate women who know anything" and a movement that applauds women's intellects and rights. Perhaps the "and" conjoins opposites, such as black and white?[26]

While Joyce was well aware of how damaging culturally inscribed norms could be to communication between the sexes, there is nothing to indicate that he championed feminism. Vicki Mahaffey argues that Joyce's is not 'an activist stance, nor is he an advocate for disenfranchised groups—whether women or the Irish'.[27] Instead, as we shall have cause to see later, Joyce was rather uneasy about women's role. This brings us to question what motivated Joyce's decision to end his literary masterpiece with a woman, who lies in that liminal space between wakefulness and sleep, her thoughts and her perspective. Why would he choose a female figure as the cynosure of his concluding chapter when so much that has gone before it is male-dominated discourse, introspection, and interiority?

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[19] *Ulysses*, p. 730.
[20] Brown, p. 3.
[21] Irina Rasmussen Goloubeva, 'Molly Bloom: A Re-Immersion in the Concrete', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 47 (2010), 395-415, p. 409.
[22] Mariah Sondergard, 'Identity in *Ulysses*: Sexuality of Gerty McDowell and Molly Bloom', *BU Arts & Sciences Writing Program*, Boston University, 1 (2008-9) 97-103, p. 97.
[23] As cited in Karen R. Lawrence, *Who's Afraid of James Joyce?* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2012), p. 71.
[24] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 'Sexual Linguistics: Gender, Language, Sexuality', *New Literary History*, 16 (1985), 515-543, p. 519.
[25] Lawrence, p. 71.
[26] ibid.
[27] Mahaffey, p. 151.

For Joyce, women were something of an enigma, at once captivating and threatening. As a result, his fictional treatment of them is almost invariably ambivalent and his true opinion of them rather difficult to pin down because he tends to sway between extremes. Within the figure of Molly, for instance, is inculcated the threat of finitude and the fear of death. By finitude, I mean to refer to Joyce's anxiety about how best to end the novel. In a letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver, he says that the real ending to *Ulysses* is in actual fact the penultimate episode, 'Ithaca', because 'Penelope' has no real beginning, middle, or end.[28]

Moreover, Molly is inextricably yoked with death in Joyce's unconscious. In an oft-cited dream, Joyce is haunted by Molly who 'picked up a tiny snuffbox, in the form of a little black coffin, and tossed it towards me saying, "And I have done with you, too, Mr. Joyce."'[29] Death is figured here in the *snuff*box which bears associations with extinction and extinguishment, and in the shape of the box itself. In another letter, Joyce relates another version of the dream in which Molly accuses him of interfering. He writes: '"Molly herself came calling on me and said, 'What are you meddling with my old business for?"'.[30] Joyce had also complained to Frank Budgen about what he perceived as women's '"perpetual urge to usurp all the functions of the male"'.[31] This is rather cheeky and unfair of Joyce to say, given that he expresses distaste for a practice he himself engages in. Perhaps we can impute his attitude to 'a natural, culturally accepted habit of colonialism, which treated women as occupied countries', thus licensing him with the authority to think of women as the usurping Other.[32]

As I have had cause to mention earlier, Molly is sometimes discussed in terms of her perceived agency and modernity. In many ways she is a rather peculiarly androgynous figure—not in any physical sense, of course—but more in the way she conducts herself as she steers us through her monologue, and in her subversion of socio-cultural inscriptions of femininity and womanhood. She is, therefore, characteristically "unfeminine" in her undermining of the patriarchal society within which she is trapped and which transforms her into a figure reminiscent of Madame Bovary. Arguably, she is riddled with ennui and has to resort to an affair and to dwelling on her childhood, the antics and lovers of her youth, and a mental critique of the state of affairs in her life and in Dublin. She acts of her own volition in effectively marshalling an afternoon tryst with the less-than-sympathetic Boylan, who she feels treated her too 'familiarly'.[33] She does not fear castigation either from Bloom or the rest of society, and in conducting the affair, she overturns the cultural mores of her time and also those of Ireland's rigid Catholicism which posited the sanctity of chastity and decried adultery. Meanwhile, Bloom is fully aware of his wife's assignation with Boylan, as is Molly of her husband's own wandering eye, and although they both obsess over each other's affairs, they do not appear too fazed by the situation. They seem to have

[28] Van Boheemen, p. 270.
[29] Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce: New and Revised Edition* (Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 549.
[30] Lawrence, p. 72.
[31] Van Boheemen, p. 269.
[32] ibid., p. 267.
[33] *Ulysses*, p. 693.

some kind of tacit understanding about the state of affairs in their household and refrain from questioning each other's choices, which is arguably the root of their marital strife. Moreover, Molly is presented as being assertive and headstrong, qualities which are very easily misconstrued. Indeed, some might be tempted to translate such traits as Molly being domineering and bullish.[34] It should come as no surprise then that she takes umbrage at Bloom's request for breakfast in bed, but we should not make the mistake of chalking this down to Molly being unreasonable. It is this, in fact, that sets off her ramblings. The tone of her thoughts—if we may such a thing—is pre-eminently unapologetic and unabashed, although at times she does betray hints of guilt and trepidation. 'Nature it is' and 'thats what a woman is supposed to be there for or He wouldnt have made us the way He did so attractive to men then' she thinks, defending her need to be sexually satisfied.[35] In so doing, Molly challenges the **'**conventional barriers of propriety and morality in her society'.[36] Moreover, the language of her thoughts has been likened to that 'reserved for the meanest of male figures─the Irish pubster: both are censorious, vulgar, and arrogant', which tips her on the masculine side of the androgynous scales.[37] Viewed thus, then, Molly is the paragon of the anti-Gerty: the modern, empowered woman who steers clear of the genteel Victorian 'namby-pamby marmalady drawsery style' of 'Nausicaa'.[38]

Seen from the other side of the spectrum, however, Molly is often bogged down by stereotypes. In contradistinction to those critics who see in her perceived agency a modern woman, she is also often considered passive by others. We invariably encounter her in bed or half-asleep, as in 'Calypso'. She is also given to changeability and leaps from one contradiction to the next. For instance, she mulls over the benefits of a world run by women, but soon after changes tack and sympathises with men. Her mutability must have only served to further entrench the stereotype of women's fickle nature into the mind of Joyce's contemporary reader. Moreover, Molly is not in any conceivable sense intellectual in her thoughts, or at least not in the way Stephen is. That is not to say she is ignorant, but simply that she gives the impression that she belongs to one of the lower rungs of the social ladder, and is somewhat uneducated. She is also given to pettiness, betrays her envy of women by being disparaging, and is jealously protective of Bloom. Furthermore, she reinforces the conventional link between femininity and flowers in her own association with them. She aligns herself directly with nature when she thinks 'I love flowers Id love to have the whole place swimming in roses God of heaven theres nothing like nature'.[39] Brenda Maddox ventures a rather unsavoury description of Molly as 'lethargic, illogical, unreasonable, vain, self-preoccupied, passive, and always in bed'.[40] The ugly truth is that, to some degree, Molly is all of these things. She is also arguably one of the least likeable of Joyce's characters in *Ulysses* and that is taking into consideration Buck Mulligan, Blazes

[34] See 'Calypso', *Ulysses*, pp. 53-67.
[35] *Ulysses*, p. 698.
[36] Keri Elizabeth Ames, 'The Oxymoron of Fidelity in Homer's Odyssey and Joyce's Ulysses', *Joyce Studies Annual*, 14 (2003), 132-174, p. 144.
[37] Mark Shechner, *Joyce in Nighttown: A Psychoanalytic Inquiry into Ulysses* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA, and London: University of California Press, 1974), p. 222.
[38] *Letters of James Joyce*, ed. by Stuart Gilbert (New York, NY: Viking, 1957), p. 135.
[39] *Ulysses*, p. 731.
[40] Brenda Maddox, *Nora: The Real Life of Molly Bloom* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), p. 208.

Boylan, and the xenophobic Citizen. In lieu of a figure of faultless female empowerment and the archetype for the early-twentieth-century modern woman, Joyce conjures up a rather problematic figure. Despite a concerted effort to find in her the exemplification of female emancipation, we cannot help but think her rather despicable. Molly is certainly 'true to the type of a "new woman,"' in that she 'exhibits the stereotypically unfeminine traits of verbal assertiveness and aggressive expression', but she can also be easily pigeonholed as a distasteful amalgamation of all the unpalatable stereotypes generally associated with women.[41]

We have already seen that 'Penelope' was not very well-received. Joyce's own wife, Nora, dismissed his understanding of women, telling Samuel Beckett: 'He knows nothing at all about women'.[42] Carl Jung, on the other hand, was particularly taken in by Molly's interior monologue and deemed it an expert piece of psychology. He famously wrote a letter to Joyce saying: 'The 40 pages of nonstop run in the end is a string of veritable psychological peaches. I suppose the devil's grandmother knows so much about the real psychology of a woman, I didn't'.[43]

Brown writes that Molly's monologue was sure to impress psychoanalysts and students of Freud and Jung because it 'seem[ed] to answer the question that psychoanalysis could not', that is: 'What does a woman want?'.[44] Joyce seemed to them to have filled this lacuna by 'lift[ing] the hem of the secret of femininity' and 'fill[ing] in the map of the "dark continent" of female sexuality'.[45] In spite of Jung's glowing review, we must not forget that Molly's monologue can never be an accurate representation of female desire. In spite of Joyce's friend, Stuart Gilbert, making a case for the universality of the monologue, Molly's candid thoughts and outspoken frankness can never be taken as objective reality. Put simply, they are the projection of Joyce's preconceived and culturally-conditioned notions of what a woman is and desires. Molly is ultimately a fiction engendered by a male writer presumptuous enough to venture into a woman's mind, a writer who had the audacity to peer through the veil of femininity in the hopes of making out a more clearly-defined outline, although an outline it must ineluctably remain. In truth, then, Joyce merely 'ventriloquizes his own notion of what femininity is' by putting words into the mouth (or mind, we should say) of his chief female protagonist.[46] Molly is the composite of Joyce's observations about women in his *Scribbledehobble* notebook that '"*W* go in twos"' and '"*W* not know her serv's name"'.[47] He tried to create 'a constructed woman as a naturalistic Everywoman' and passed it off as *écriture feminine*.[48]

In a letter to Frank Budgen, Joyce refers to 'Penelope' in pun as the '*clou* of the book'. "Clou" is derived from the French *clouer* which means '"to fix with a pointed instrument,"' such as a dagger (or a pen), and to reduce to silence'. This may remind us of

[41] Goloubeva, p. 398.
[42] Ellmann, p. 642.
[43] ibid.
[44] Carl Jung, as cited in Brown, p. 117.
[45] Van Boheemen, p. 268.
[46] ibid., p. 269.
[47] Brown, p. 97.
[48] Lawrence, p. 73.

the threat of death and finitude associated with Molly in revealing Joyce's ambivalent attitude towards her. For Joyce, Molly is both castrating female, not unlike the other destructive female figures in *Ulysses*, such as a Calypso, a Siren, a Scylla, a Charybdis, or a Circe, and his 'instrument of escape from this threat of finitude' which so plagued him. Molly's monologue, then, becomes an assurance for its author of his 'writerly immortality' and in pun also his 'moly', the herb Odysseus gave his men to shield themselves from Circe's spells and 'guaranteeing [their] survival'. According to van Boheemen, the threat of death implied in the figure of Molly 'is—and can be—undone (in Joyce's psychodynamic) by his *writing the feminine*'.[49]

In his final, but no less exasperating, novel *Finnegans Wake* (1939), Joyce makes an intertextual reference to 'Penelope': 'the penelopean patience of its last paraphe, a colophon of no fewer than seven hundred and thirtytwo strokes'.[50] The irony of the word 'colophon', which signifies "last word", is not so easily lost on us. Molly's supposedly *last word* is forty pages long, and, in truth, is not much of a word at all. Van Boheemen offers a number of definitions for 'colophon', starting with the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition as 'tail- piece… often ornamental', later adding that the word can also be read as 'culo-phone', 'cul' being French for 'backside'. She argues that these two definitions 'conflate the last part of a book (added as supplementary afterword and ornamental flourish) with the nether part of the body'.[51] Furthermore, Joyce's favourite go-to etymological dictionary, *Skeat's*, gives the derivation of 'colophon' as the Greek 'kolophoon' which is in turn defined as 'pinnacle' or 'crown', thus suggesting the very opposite. It is here that Joyce appears at his most ambivalent as Molly's interior monologue becomes at once the 'obscene afterpiece' *and* the 'crowning highlight of the text'.[52]

Re-appropriating the words of a French writer about Jonathan Swift and applying them instead to 'Penelope', Stuart Gilbert writes that Molly has 'une sérénité dans l'indécence', that is, she exhibits a kind of ease with that which is or appears to be indecent.[53] While we have established that she exhibits traits of the modern, emancipated woman who is driven by sexual desires she also seems to fall deeper into the rut of stereotypical comportment and thought.[54] And while we may be tempted, as some critics have, to applaud Joyce for being so magnanimous as to vouchsafe his only female protagonist a "voice", we must not forget that this can only be spurious: Molly has no true voice. In the entirety of the novel, the only time we ever hear her "speak" is a 'sleepy soft grunt', a paltry '"Mn"' (the '"Mn"' of the title of this paper) in response to Bloom's question about whether she wants breakfast.[55] Therefore, Molly is altogether deprived of linguistic authority because her voice in the novel is circumscribed to a mere grunt. The rest is a protracted thought-process and all interior. Instead, linguistic authority is parcelled out to the male faction of the novel. Kevin

[49] Von Boheeman, pp. 272-4.
[50] James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 123.
[51] Van Boheeemen, p. 273.
[52] ibid.
[53] Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce's Ulysses: A Study* (New York: Vintage, 1955), p. 400.
[54] Goloubeva, p. 401.
[55] *Ulysses*, p. 54.

Birmingham claims that 'nothing, in *Ulysses*, is unspeakable'.[56] We might be inclined to disagree with him. Ultimately, the text of 'Penelope', lambasted as scandalous and offensive to the delicate sensibilities of female readers, is never spoken aloud. It appears as though, in begrudging her the spoken word, Joyce tries to make up for this lack by allowing Molly to have the last thought, so to speak. Perhaps, then, the 'last paraphe' of *Ulysses* is not that transgressive at all.

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[56] Birmingham, p. 9.

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