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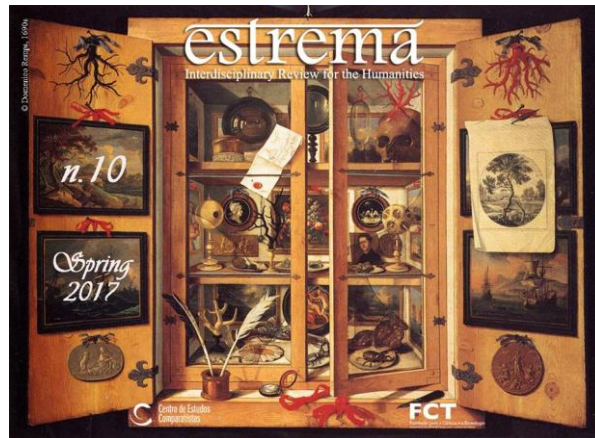
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**Molly's Sexual Quest: Sexuality and Perversity in the 'Penelope'  
Chapter of *Ulysses***

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**Resumo:** Este artigo destina-se a fazer uma análise a fundo acerca do tema da sexualidade no capítulo "Penelope" do romance de James Joyce, *Ulysses*. Analisando o monólogo exaustivo em técnica de "corrente de consciência", vou focar-me no triângulo amoroso estabelecido entre Molly Bloom, Leopold Bloom e Blazes Boylan como um grande exemplo de como a sexualidade é de grande importância para uma melhor compreensão do romance. Para justificar a minha posição, irei usar-me de estudos acerca da sexualidade e estudos psicanalíticos (Sigmund Freud, Kraft-Ebing e Havelock Ellis) para caracterizar esta presença no último capítulo de *Ulysses*. Em última análise, tenho como objetivo mostrar como a sexualidade, no romance, pode ser vista como fundamentalmente perversa e como isto irá afetar a narrativa, olhando, em detalhe, para os impulsos dos três personagens anteriormente referidos.

Ao juntar as ferramentas necessárias para a análise da presença da sexualidade, irei possibilitar uma abordagem interdisciplinar que junta as áreas da psicologia, psicanálise e literatura, criando um caminho para uma análise mais completa do romance de Joyce.

**Palavras-Chave:** Sexualidade; Perversão; Psicanálise; Modernismo; Psicologia; Corrente de consciência.

**Abstract:** This article aims to make a thorough analysis of the theme of sexuality in the "Penelope" chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. By analyzing this last chapter's exhaustive "stream of consciousness" monologue, I'll be looking at the love triangle established between Molly Bloom, Leopold Bloom, and Blazes Boylan as a great example of how sexuality is of great importance to the full comprehension of this novel. To corroborate my point, I shall employ the use psychoanalysis (Sigmund Freud, Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis) and studies on sexuality to fully characterize this presence in the last chapter of *Ulysses*. Ultimately, I aim to show how sexuality in the

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novel can be seen as fundamentally perverse and how this affects the narrative by looking at the previously referred three character's drives.

In bringing together the necessary tools to analyze the presence of sexuality, I will be able to make an interdisciplinary approach that brings together the fields of psychology, psychoanalysis and literature, thus creating a path towards a better interpretation of Joyce's novel.

**Keywords:** Sexuality; Perversion; Psychoanalysis; Modernism; Psychology; Stream of consciousness.

*Everybody knows that Ulysses is the greatest novel  
of the century*

**Anthony Burgess**

## **Introduction**

The plural development of the artistic movements that marked the passage from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century had a massive impact on the way literature and other arts developed. As a consequence, we witness the birth to one of the richest movements of the history of art: Modernism. The year of 1922 is a landmark of this movement in what concerns literature. I

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need only to cite two of the chief achievements of literary modernism: T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Besides enlarging linguistic and formal boundaries, these works also broke with the sexual and social barriers of their time. Written after the publication of Freud's major investigations, these two works explored areas of sexuality that were considered taboo until that moment. James Joyce was a pioneer in the exploration of sexual themes like pornography, homosexuality, transvestism, voyeurism, coprophilia, among others.

The transition from Victorian to modern mentality led to a momentous shift in the understanding of human sexuality. Freud, Krafft-Ebing, and Havelock Ellis are three of the major figures that contributed to this revolutionary change of sexual paradigm. The Victorian repression was replaced with modern toleration, enabling a deeper study into human sexuality and related issues. By debunking the Lockean views on sexuality as a product of nurture, Freud evinces that it is, on the contrary, an instinctive drive, an impulse that cannot be avoided.

Psychoanalysis played a pivotal role in the understanding of the mechanisms of sexuality and sexual drives, by entering into the realm of the human psyche as a way to interpret how these phenomena developed. Freud, in his lecture "The Sexual Life of Man", clearly states: "Outside of psychoanalysis sexuality means only a very limited thing: normal sexual life in the service of reproduction" (Freud 2012, 270). By shedding light on this area, Freud was able to explain the sexual, which, he ironically said, "we must not talk about" (Freud 2012, 257). The practical and pragmatic aim of sexuality, reproduction, was only a fraction of the whole. The so-called

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“perversities” were the acts that fulfilled sexual desires without the aim of reproduction. First of all, homosexuality, or “inversion”, was explained to be a perversity, because of the deviation from what was called “normal sexual life”. In addition, the fetishists, sadist and masochists were also put in this category.

Although it was a shock at the time, Freud explained the origin of numerous “deviations” as the result of the constant socially repression and denial of the sexual life of children, triggering their imagination and resulting in several contortions of reality. Imagination plays a crucial role in sexual drives because, as the popular saying suggests, the forbidden fruit tastes the sweetest. Freud relates simple necessities, such as eating, excreting and urinating, to sexual necessities, by alluding to the first years of the human development. “Libido” is the force through which these desires and instincts are driven. As he says, “Perverse sexuality, in brief, is nothing more than magnified infantile sexuality divided into its separate tendencies” (Freud 2012, 263). According to him, the very first act of sucking on the mother's breast initiates the suckling into his sexual life, since, although he/she initially satisfies his/her hunger instinct, he/she later develops a desire to “repeat the act of taking in food without actually demanding more food” (Freud 2012, 265). Because the mouth and the lips are “erogenous zones”, sucking and sexual desire are connected. Therefore, according to this theory, the mother's breast is, in fact, the first object of sexual fulfillment. As the child grows up, he/she gets to be in touch with the other erogenous zones, demanding for more intense and pleasurable stimulus. He/she goes from sucking to defecating and urinating, until he/she discovers his/her genitals, finding “the way from

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sucking to onanism” (Freud 2012, 266) However, none of these drives are prompted by a need to reproduce. As Freud states,

It is only natural; if the child has sexual life at all, it must necessarily be perverse, because aside from a few hazy illusions, the child does not know how sexuality gives rise to reproduction (Freud 2012, 268)

This proves that sexuality, in the human mind, initially arises from the desire to be satisfied and only later does it relate with reproduction.

Although a lot more could be said about these psychoanalytical theories, I return to my aim: how does this relate with Joyce and his fiction? The development of sexual theories and the explanation of sexual drives and desires are, in fact, crucial to understand a great extent of Joyce's fiction, especially *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. The former novel is considered by many to be one of the major literary achievements, since it deals with an innumerable number of issues and themes, while creating a parallel with Homer's *Odyssey*, and developing a magnificent linguistic study of the English language. Nevertheless, sexuality plays a major role in the understanding of the novel. My aim, in this paper, is to explore the role of sexuality in the last chapter, “Penelope”, and to further explain how it affects the understanding of the novel. More specifically, I will focus upon the sexuality of Molly and the two characters that are sexually engaged with her: Bloom and Blazes Boylan.

**“Penelope”: waiting to be interpreted**

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James Joyce's first experiment into the exploration of female mind was translated through a succession of eight long periods, giving birth to the last chapter of *Ulysses*. The same chapter ends the third part, by common consent called "Nostos", and the novel itself. The *Critical Companion to James Joyce* offers some interesting insight into the chapter:

In a letter to Frank Budgen dated August 16, 1921, Joyce discussed his broad intentions in writing Penelope and explained some of the chapter's structural components. He emphasized that the episode 'begins and ends with the female word yes' - it is the 'clou,' the star turn of the whole novel - and that the words because, bottom, woman, and yes express the chapter's four cardinal points: 'the female breasts, arse, womb and cunt.' (Fargnoli and Gillespie 2006, 213)

Sexuality, therefore, is at the root of this chapter, the emphasis on several parts of the female body acting as a defining structural component. Nonetheless, how do we get here? How does sexuality develop in the novel to reach its "climax" in the final chapter?

Sexuality in *Ulysses* is commonly referred to as fundamentally perverse; this much could be argued about Joyce's works in general. Joyce's treatment of the triad of major characters (Leopold Bloom, Molly Bloom, and Stephen Dedalus) illuminates his views on sexuality. Moreover, the great focus on questions like contraception and masturbation are of major importance to understand the novel as a whole, revealing how Joyce's fiction was coeval with the scientific discoveries and studies regarding the different possibilities of sexual experience in the human being. Leopold Bloom is vital for understanding the role of sexuality in the novel. From his feminine characteristics to his voyeuristic and masochist pleasures, Bloom is a great source to explore some of the theories that were being developed at the time.

Voyeurism, known as “mixoscopy” at the time, a concept developed by Havelock Ellis, is one of the main sources of the protagonist's perversity. Bloom's voyeuristic tendency is first presented to the readers in “Calypso”, where he contemplates a girl in Dlugacz's butcher's shop and subsequently follows her, aroused by her thighs, calling them “moving hams” (*Ulysses*<sup>2</sup> 71). This intermingling of sexual and physiological needs is indeed explained by Freud's concept of “libido” and its analogous relation with hunger. According to Freud, “Libido, analogous to hunger, is the force through which the instinct, here the sex instinct (as in the case of hunger it is the instinct to eat) expresses itself” (Freud 2012, 265). The climax, both metaphorically and literally speaking, of his voyeuristic desires will occur in “Nausicaa”. Here, Bloom adjoins voyeurism with onanism by looking at Gerty MacDowell and masturbating at the same time. This is the true example of an actual act of self-pleasure, a purely solitary and enjoyable sexual act without the need to fulfil any kind of reproductive completion. However, Bloom's voyeurism is even more complex than this, as it extends to other varieties of visual pleasure. The stimulating contemplation of animal intercourse, what Ellis calls “Mixoscopic Zoophilia”, is also shown when Bloom recalls an erotic moment with Molly in Raymond Terrace, “watching the two dogs at it by the wall of the cease to do evil” (*U* 110). In addition to this panoply of perversions, Bloom also has a kind of attraction towards the statues in the National Museum, which Ellis terms “Pygmalionism”.

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<sup>2</sup> From this point onwards I will refer to *Ulysses* as “*U*”.



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Masochism<sup>3</sup> is also very important in the novel, especially in the longest chapter, "Circe". Bloom's femininity is not only shown through his sympathy towards women but also by his admiration for dominating and masculine females. The pleasure aroused in Bloom via being subjugated by women is epitomized in this chapter by his grotesque interactions with Bella Cohen. In "Penelope", we see the full perversity of Bloom. According to Richard Brown,

Bloom's sexuality is perverse. When Bella Cohen summons up the 'sins of the past' in 'Circe', they enumerate a catalogue of outrages, from 'clandestine marriage', to onanistic exposures, coprophilia, masochistic willing cuckoldry and voyeurism (*U* 649-50). Evidently an aesthetic of excess is at work here, but it is nonetheless a pointed or measured excess. The list is a calculated outrage to the principles of casuistic legitimacy. (Brown 1985, 88)

Therefore, we can argue that Bloom's index of perversities is clearly exposed in this very confusing and turbulent chapter.

Homosexuality is also at the center of critical discussion regarding sexuality in *Ulysses*. Collen Lamos connects it persuasively to the aforementioned perversions:

the various sorts of sexual transgression represented in Joyce's work, including flagellation, sadomasochism, masturbation, fetishism, coprophilia, and so forth, are all directly or indirectly linked to the decisive and phobically charged division between heterosexuality and homosexuality. (Lamos 2004, 123)

Although there are no overtly homosexual characters, some readings can demonstrate a deviation in that regard in the novel. Freud initiates his

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<sup>3</sup> As Richard Brown evinces, in his book *James Joyce and Sexuality*, "Masoch was a popular author in the later part of the nineteenth century, particularly in an Austrian corner of Europe, and Joyce knew his works" (Brown 1985, 86).

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studies into perversity by commenting on homosexuality, while referring to a group of patients that “crossed off the difference between the sexes (...). They have to that extent, of course, foregone any participation in reproduction. We call such persons homosexual or inverted” (Freud 2012, 258). The theme of homosexuality is discussed by some characters in the novel. For instance, as Brown demonstrates,

In 'Scylla and Charybdis' the homosexuality in Shakespeare's sonnets is discussed (*U* 259 and 260-1). Mulligan claims, in a resonantly Swinburnean passage, that Bloom is 'Greeker than the Greeks' and when he warns Stephen later in the episode to 'get thee a breechpad', the homosexual joke is unmistakable (*U* 279). (Brown 1985, 79)

This is a reminder of homophobic views, very typical of Joyce's time and age. The trials of Oscar Wilde and all the complications involving his sexuality were very well-known by Joyce, who despised society's attitude towards homosexuality. Indeed, Joyce, in his essay “Oscar Wilde: The Poet of Salome”, addresses Wilde's problems:

Far from being a perverted monster who sprang in some inexplicable way from the civilization of modern England, is the logical and inescapable product of the Anglo-Saxon college and university system, with its secrecy and restrictions. (Joyce 1909, [Web](#))

Despite being only a general view on the issues of sexuality, the previously referred examples are of supreme importance when reflecting upon the issue of sexuality throughout the first seventeen chapters of the novel. In the final chapter, an insight into a woman's mind is presented for the first time. How does this change the novel? What role does sexuality play in this final stance? Does it enable a positive view on the character of Molly, or does it undermine her importance in contrast to the predominantly

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patriarchal organization and structure of all the previous chapters? These are some of the questions that I will, from now on, try to answer, by exploring how sexuality is represented in this chapter.

"Penelope" is considered by many to be Joyce's first sustained attempt at examining the female mind. Although there are endlessly different theories<sup>4</sup> and approaches to the chapter's subject, for the sake of my aim I will read it as the stream of Molly's consciousness. The final chapter of the novel presents to the readers a very honest and sincere, but, at the same time, contradictory, character whose mind flows through a long soliloquy divided into eight sections. While the explicit language and situations described pose a challenge to some critics, I will try to explore them to reach some conclusions. I will mainly base my argument upon the coeval psychoanalytical development, connecting neurosis with an individual's sexuality.

Like the novel itself, this chapter begins *in medias res*. In other words, it begins in the midst of the action or, in this case, in the midst of Molly's thought. From her very first words, we see that she despises women who spend their time ruminating "about politics and earthquakes and the end of the world" (*U* 871). She rather prefers to "have a bit of fun" than being like this "sort" of women (*U* 871). This might be a great way to introduce Molly's sexuality, showing from the very beginning that Molly is indeed an isolated and rather lonely character and possibly explaining her adulterous affair with

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Alyssa J. O'Brien's "The Molly Blooms of 'Penelope': Reading Joyce Archivaly". Here, O'Brien argues that in this chapter we not only have the single character of Molly, but a panoply of characters with multiple identities, each with its own style of language, creating a parallel with the previous chapter, "Oxen of the Sun". Offering another perspective, O'Brien suggests that Molly may be "a pastiche of Joyce's many discursive experiments" (O'Brien 2000, 21).

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her manager, Blazes Boylan. This is just the beginning of the contrast between the idea of Molly that we get out of the voices of the other characters throughout the first seventeen chapters and Molly's account of herself. In this chapter, however, in addition to Molly's sexuality, we can also explore her views on the sexuality of two other characters, due to their sexual relationship with her: her husband (Bloom) and her lover (Boylan). To make a more structured approach, I will divide my study into three smaller sections, where I will explore the sexuality of each one of these characters in the final chapter.

### **Leopold Bloom**

From Molly's first words regarding Leopold Bloom, we know how exaggeratedly he reacts to simple and minor injuries, such as a bleeding nose or a sprained foot. This should be taken into account when establishing a parallel between Leopold Bloom's and Molly's relationship with their bodies: whereas Bloom is very fearful of connecting with his body, Molly establishes a great connection with hers, increasing her awareness of her sexuality and sensations. Indeed, the body is a major trope in the novel. As Declan Kiberd says, in the introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel, "Joyce decided to write a materialist 'epic of the body'" (Kiberd 2000, ix).

Bloom's perversity continues to be explored in this chapter, the fascination he has for his wife's bottom being a notable topic. Molly starts by referring to "the usual kissing my bottom" (*U* 871), which develops into "the

last time he came on my bottom" (*U* 874). The two pornographic photographs that Bloom carries with him are also mentioned by Molly. She firstly refers to "a nun maybe like the smutty photo he has" (*U* 872) and later to "that dirty bitch in that Spanish photo he has" (*U* 892). Bloom's Pygmalionism also seems to be noticed by his wife, given that she says that "he tired me out with statues encouraging him" (*U* 875).

The Freudian interpretation of the act of breastfeeding as the beginning of the suckling's sexual life, owing to the stimulation of the erogenous zone of the lips, can profitably be applied to the character of Bloom, particularly when one considers Molly's account of another of Bloom's perversities, the desire to drink her milk when she was breastfeeding Milly: "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" (*U* 893). This is presently a very common disorder, known as "lactophilia" or "milk fetishism", while the relationship between the individuals who practice it is called "adult nursing relationship" (Forth and Crozier 2005, 133-136).

The last, but certainly not the least, perversion described by his wife is coprophilia, the sexual arousal from feces. Introduced in the chapter "Circe", now it can be seen from Molly's perspective: "another time it was my muddy boots hed like me to walk in all the horses I could find" (*U* 881). Freud refers to this attraction to feces as another development of a child's sexual life, stating that "the functions of excretion, which in the education of the child are hushed away as indecent, still remain capable of drawing complete sexual interest" (Freud 2012, 259), since children do not see excrements as

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unnecessary residues of their bodies; they rather see them as an extension of themselves, which could later develop into a disorder, like coprophilia.

The strange sexual relationship between husband and wife was, in fact, created by the death of their infant son, Rudy, which brought an end to their normal sexual life. In the previous chapter, the reader is told that, after Rudy's death,

there remained a period of 10 years, 5 months and 18 days during which carnal intercourse had been incomplete, without ejaculation of semen within the natural female organ. (*U* 869-9)

The death of his infant led Bloom to an estranged relationship with his wife, so that he could avoid having another child that would die precociously. This could be a possible explanation for his isolation and distance from his wife, allowing the reader to see this character in a different light. The chain of events, namely the detachment between Molly and Bloom, leading to the deterioration of their sexual life, prompted them to seek satisfaction through other methods: Molly started her adulterous affair, while Bloom found gratification in several forms of perversity, not excluding different kinds of infidelity. Adultery is indeed at the center of the major references to sexuality in the novel. As Richard Brown claims,

Joyce, like so many of the great European novelists of the nineteenth century, relies upon the affective power of adulterous situations for many of his most central scenes and most powerful emotional effects (Brown 1985, 17)

This shows how important adultery was not only in *Ulysses* but also in other works. In this regard, this chapter to two different acts of adultery executed by Bloom. Molly refers the letter that he had received from Martha Clifford,

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demonstrating that she was fully acquainted<sup>5</sup> with its sexual innuendo, which impels her to say that "all men get a bit like that at his age especially" (*U* 873). In addition, Molly also alludes to Bloom's usual encounters with prostitutes, when noticing that his deep sleep: "hes sleeping hard had a good time somewhere still she must have given him great value for his money of course he has to pay for it" (*U* 917).

Bloom's femininity, a constant presence throughout the novel, is also explored throughout this chapter. Some critics even regard Bloom as an androgynous individual. According to Kiberd, "Bloom himself is a mixture of both genders, an exponent of the androgyny which Joyce saw as the sexuality of the future" (Kiberd 2000, lix). Molly indeed refers that she found Bloom to be "too beautiful for a man" (*U* 879). However, in the last chapter, Molly ultimately tries to debunk this, saying that Bloom's sympathy and connection towards women is not as great as he himself thinks. She claims that "he thinks he knows a great lot about womans dresses and cooking mathering" (*U* 891), but, in the end, according to her, men "never understand what you say even youd want to print it up on a big poster for them" (*U* 898).

Molly's view on Bloom's sexuality is very well exposed by all of the examples previously given. She calls the innumerable perversities and oddities of her husband "the works of Master Poldy" (*U* 893). She even supposes that "there isnt in all creation another man with the habits he has" (*U* 917), "because hes not natural like the rest of the world" (*U* 881).

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<sup>5</sup> Molly will later on make another comment regarding this letter: "that French letter still in his pocketbook I suppose he thinks I don't know". (*U* 918)

Ultimately, Molly, in a martyr-like lament, says that "of course hed never find another woman like me to put up with him the way I do" (*U* 880).

### **Blazes Boylan**

To counterbalance her feminine, perverse and distant husband, Molly finds refuge in the hands of Blazes Boylan. Described by Molly as having a "hairy chest" (*U* 887) and having the habit of "slapping [her] behind" (*U* 876), Boylan is the true representation of machismo in the novel. Although he is clearly a minor character in the previous chapters, this one offers more details and information, especially concerning his sexuality.

As the relationship between Boylan and Molly is strictly based upon sexual encounters, the majority of references to this character are related to his sexuality. He is Molly's source of sexual pleasure, acting as a compensation for the shortcomings of her husband. Molly, in a very explicit language, remembers one of their sexual encounters, describing his penis as a "big red brute of a thing (...) a thick crowbar standing all the time" (*U* 877). In addition to his large genitalia she evinces his sexual potency, saying that "he must have come 3 or 4 times (...) he must have eaten oysters" (*U* 877). However, in spite of his potency, she states that "he hasn't such a tremendous amount of spunk in him" (*U* 877), comparing it to Bloom: "Bloom has more spunk in him" (*U* 877). Continuing to portray their sexual activity, Molly, as an alternative to the usual sexual position she has with Boylan (which had the



disadvantage of being too heavy for her), thinks about trying the position that Mrs Mastiansky told her to practice with her husband: "Mrs Mastiansky told me her husband made her like the dogs do it and stick out her tongue as far as ever she could and he so quiet and mild with his tingating" (*U* 887).

Although one might say that these passages describe a normal sexual relationship, some allusions to Boylan's queer desires hint that it may be otherwise. Like Bloom, Boylan appears to have some deviations and perversities, albeit dissimilar from the former's. As Molly says, "theyre all so different Boylan talking about the shape of my foot" (*U* 880), which develops into "his eyes on my feet" and later "I made him spend once with my foot" (*U* 881). This is an allusion to a different kind of sexual deviation, which Krafft-Ebbing and Freud classified as a kind of fetishism, what we call today "podophilia". Freud, in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, described these phenomena as perversions that "extend, in an anatomical sense, beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union" (Freud *apud* Lamos 2004, 23).

Molly's sexual life with Boylan, explicitly described throughout this chapter, is a great source for the understanding of Boylan's sexuality, which enables the readers to dig a little deeper into this character. Nevertheless, he proves to have a rather simple and normal sexuality, in comparison to Bloom.

### **Molly Bloom**

All the information gathered until now comes from the voice of Molly Bloom. But what about herself? Molly Bloom's thought, transcribed in this chapter, comes in the form of a very honest, but, at the same time, explicit, discourse. This could be indeed seen as the most successful literary attempt to create what is called as "stream of consciousness", a raw representation of the flow of one's mind. As a consequence, several scatological and sexual elements are prevalent in her soliloquy, thus giving a very precise account of her sexuality. As I previously mentioned, her sexual life with both Bloom and Boylan is explicitly described in this chapter, but her sexuality goes far beyond it. "Penelope" provides minute details of her conscious and unconscious sexuality, given that it explores not only her opinions and thoughts but also her relationship with her body, which enfolds most of her character.

The fact that we are able to acknowledge, through her monologue, not only her sexuality but also the sexuality of other characters shows that Molly is a very sensitive and insightful individual. An excellent way to start the analysis of her sexuality in this chapter is by exploring the way she extensively ruminates about her sexual life, how it began and developed throughout her youth. The allusions to her early life in Gibraltar are connected with her first sexual experience, with the Lieutenant Mulveys. While remembering the intimate moment they shared under the "Moorish Wall", Molly evinces that she "got him excited" (*U* 901) while they were kissing. In the course of the kissing, Molly, out of fear, denied the possibility to proceed with a proper complete "carnal intercourse", as Joyce describes it. However,

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Molly's curiosity and desire led her to masturbate her partner. The language used to describe this encounter is interesting to analyze, since it lacks the explicit and violent vocabulary that she employed to describe the previously referred relationships with both Bloom and Boylan. Here, for example, Molly refers to the male genitalia as "whatyoucallit" (*U* 902), maybe as a way to reproduce the discourse she had at the time the events took place.

Another memory from her youth in Gibraltar shows hints at a possible homosexual love between Molly and a close friend of hers, Hester Stanhope: "I slept in her bed she had her arms around me then we were fighting in the morning with the pillow what fun" (*U* 896). Further on, Molly reflects about the moment when her friend had to leave Gibraltar, referring that "she kissed me six or seven times" (*U* 897). Although we can read these passages as allusions to a possible lesbian relationship between Molly and Hester, it seems that, taking into account the naivety with which she reflects about such events, she did not consider that possibility. As Lamos refers,

Reading lesbianism is, in general, difficult given the historic invisibility or denial of female sexual desire; (...) Molly's relationship with Stanhope might thus be viewed as an intimate friendship whose emotional and erotic energies had not yet been pathologized. (Lamos 2004, 166)

This shows that, thanks to the demystification of these matters, we can now pathologize this as a possible homo-erotic tension. However, Molly's innocence regarding such matters prevented her from recognizing her latent homosexual desires. Although, according to Lamos, this "explicitly poses the issue of female same-sex desire" (Lamos 2004, 165), it is undeniable that Molly has a major attraction towards men.

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As I previously referred, Molly's sexuality is also very comprehensively explored through the connection she has with her own body. In addition, she analyses the female body as a whole, often comparing it to the male body. The very first thoughts transcribed in the chapter present Molly's views regarding Mrs Riordan, to whom, according to her, "no man would look twice I hope Ill never be like her" (*U* 871). This shows the main concern Molly has concerning her body: she wants men to notice her, to look at her twice. This concern is later brought up again when Molly reflects upon the size of her belly, wanting to "reduce flesh" by doing "a few breathing exercises" or taking an "antifat" (*U* 888). The connection with her body is also displayed by the several scatological references made throughout the chapter, from her menstruation to urine, feces and flatulence. Although the majority of her reflections focus on her body, Molly also thinks about the female body in general. This is evident when she bitterly wonders about "whats the idea making us like that with a big hole in the middle of us" (*U* 877). However, Molly finds the female body to be beautiful when compared to that of a man, in a very metaphorical, if explicit, discourse:

what a man looks like with his two bags full and his other thing hanging down out of him or sticking up at you like a hatrack no wonder why they hide it with a cabbageleaf the woman is beauty of course (*U* 892)

However, as previously stated, Molly's soliloquy is full of contradictions, and one can be found in this regard. Her supposed disgust towards the male body is contradicted by her explicit desire to experience the sexual act as a man, which is a way to be able to have the dominant power in the sexual activity. As she states, "I wished I was one myself for a change just to try with that

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thing they have swelling upon you so hard and at the same time so soft when you touch it" (*U* 924). This is, in fact, discussed by Freud when he compares a young boy with a young girl: the latter feels the lack of visible and large genitalia, thus envying the former's possession, ultimately desiring to be a man. This could subsequently lead to a neurotic deviation, which, as Freud states, arises "from some failure in her role as a woman" (Freud 2012, 269).

Molly's connection with her body extends to the possibility of using it as a weapon to manipulate men in order to reach her goals. One may recall that she, after Bloom had been fired, met his boss, Mr. Cuffes, and pleaded for her husband's job back. To achieve her goal, Molly used her body, more specifically her chest: "I could see him looking very hard at my chest (...) I know my chest was out that way at the door when he said Im extremely sorry and Im sure you were" (*U* 891). Likewise, Molly talks about how to seduce "young boys":

a young boy would like me Id confuse him a little alone with him if we were Id let him see my garters the new ones and make him turn red looking at him seduce him I know what boys feel (*U* 874)

An extension of this thought could be seen when Molly reflects upon the possibility of having a sexual encounter with Stephen. She first muses that she was "not too old for him" (*U* 922), a consideration that soon develops into a sexual fantasy:

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 (*U* 923)

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This desire to be with younger men is accompanied by the aforementioned sexual gratification, arising from the erogenous zone of the lips. Molly extensively fantasizes a panoply of different sexual partners and situations, probably as a way to fulfill her loneliness and isolation. However, the last comment she made regarding the situation with Mr. Cuffes ("Im sure you were") is indicative of the way she understands men and their drives.

Molly's remarks about men are present throughout the chapter, demonstrating that she has a deep understanding of the male mind: "I knew more about men and life when I was 15 than theyll all know at 50" (*U* 905). Her depictions of the patriarchal frame of mind are very accurate, saying, for example, that "they always want to see a stain on the bed to know youre a virgin" (*U* 914), a comment that serves as one of her indictments of machismo. Lamos reflects upon this problem, venturing that Joyce's

far more explicit depiction of female sexuality, in contrast to his muted, oblique portrayal of (almost exclusively male) homosexuality, reflects the epistemology of sexuality in our culture in which women, their bodies, and their desires are the object of incessant male investigation, whereas masculine desire, especially for other men, remains for the most part veiled. (Lamos 2004, 119)

This might be seen as Joyce's attempt to create an alternative to the traditional literary patriarchal and religious structures. There are, indeed, several feminist<sup>6</sup> readings of this chapter, which is not surprising, as Molly is a strong and decided woman who looks critically at the patriarchal views on the female otherness.

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<sup>6</sup> Karen R. Lawrence's book, *Who's Afraid of James Joyce*, and Jeri Johnson's article, "Joyce and Feminism", shed some light in this matter by exploring not only Molly but also Gretta Conroy from *Dubliners*, Anna Livia Plurabelle from *Finnegans Wake* and Bertha from *Exiles*.

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Also numerous are complaints regarding male sexual performance, the majority being directed at specific individuals, such as Bloom and Boylan, as we have seen. Molly also makes general observations in this regard, saying that men "want to do everything to quick take all the pleasure out of it" (*U* 883). However, her discourse develops into a raging series of strongly explicit and hyperbolic attacks on men, more specifically Bloom and his queer fetishes. Firstly, she considers Bloom's cowardice for knowing about her adulterous relation with Boylan and not saying or doing anything in the following manner: "Ill let him know if that's what he wanted that his wife is fucked yes and damn well fucked too up to my neck not by him" (*U* 929). The subtle final addition of "not by him" evinces the previously referred lack of normal sexual relations between the two. Blaming her husband, Molly offers one possible explanation for her adulterous affair: "its all his own fault if I am an adultress" (*U* 929). Bloom's queer fetish towards his wife's bottom and his encounters with prostitutes are also under attack:

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 then Ill tell him I want £1 or perhaps 30/- (*U* 929)

This articulates Bloom's coprophilia with his attraction towards her wife's behind, as well as his encounters with prostitutes, as she ironically considered asking for payment for her sexual favours.

These examples show the multiple perspectives regarding sexuality that are presented throughout the final chapter. According to Lamos,

The signs of perversion in 'Penelope' fall into two categories: the lesbian and the phallic. While the former signs are rare and muted, associated

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exclusively with Hester Stanhope, the latter are frequent and emphatic. (Lamos 2004, 166)

However, we should not see Molly nor Bloom as either heterosexual or homosexual, bisexuality, albeit unacknowledged by them, being the most appropriate word for fully describing their sexuality. Furthermore, although Molly is a female character, we have to bear in mind that she was created and developed by a male writer, which could explain this intimate understanding of the male mind. Nevertheless, this last chapter provides a completely different vision of Molly, in contrast to that which was created by the way the other characters referred to her throughout the first seventeen chapters. The final chapter could be seen as the last opportunity to gather most of the loose and unexplained aspects of the life of the Blooms and the novel itself. It also acts as a great way to explore the theme of sexuality, not as in "Circe", but as an attempt to reflect upon the female interpretation of the theme itself.

### **Conclusion**

The graphic language of *Ulysses*, often related to sexuality and perversity, was one of the reasons for the endless problems Joyce had with censorship, delaying the publication of the book. However, as I have shown, through the examples previously given, sexuality is one of the several important themes to explore in the novel. "Penelope", as I referred, encompasses Molly's account of her sexuality, as well as the sexuality of Leopold Bloom and Blazes Boylan, the two male figures sexually linked to her. In addition, this



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chapter, carefully exploring the indissoluble link between mind and body, illuminates the perversities studied at the time by psychoanalysis and psychology, as Joseph Valente argues, in his essay "Joyce and Sexuality":

Bridging the gap between literary adaptation and theoretical invention, Joyce's work succeeded in reshaping the sexological accounts with which he began and from which he never entirely departed. (Valente 2004, 215)

*Ulysses* proves to be very useful in this perspective, owing to the several interior monologues and final perfecting of the "stream of consciousness" technique, thus transmitting a supposedly accurate transcription of the mind into words. By conjoining an overview of sexuality in the novel with a more comprehensive analysis of its presence in the last chapter, I was able to bring together deeper views on the sexuality and perversities of Bloom and Boylan, as well as a very detailed description of Molly's view regarding sexuality as a whole. However, this is merely a starting point for a deeper study of this very interesting and rewarding area.

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