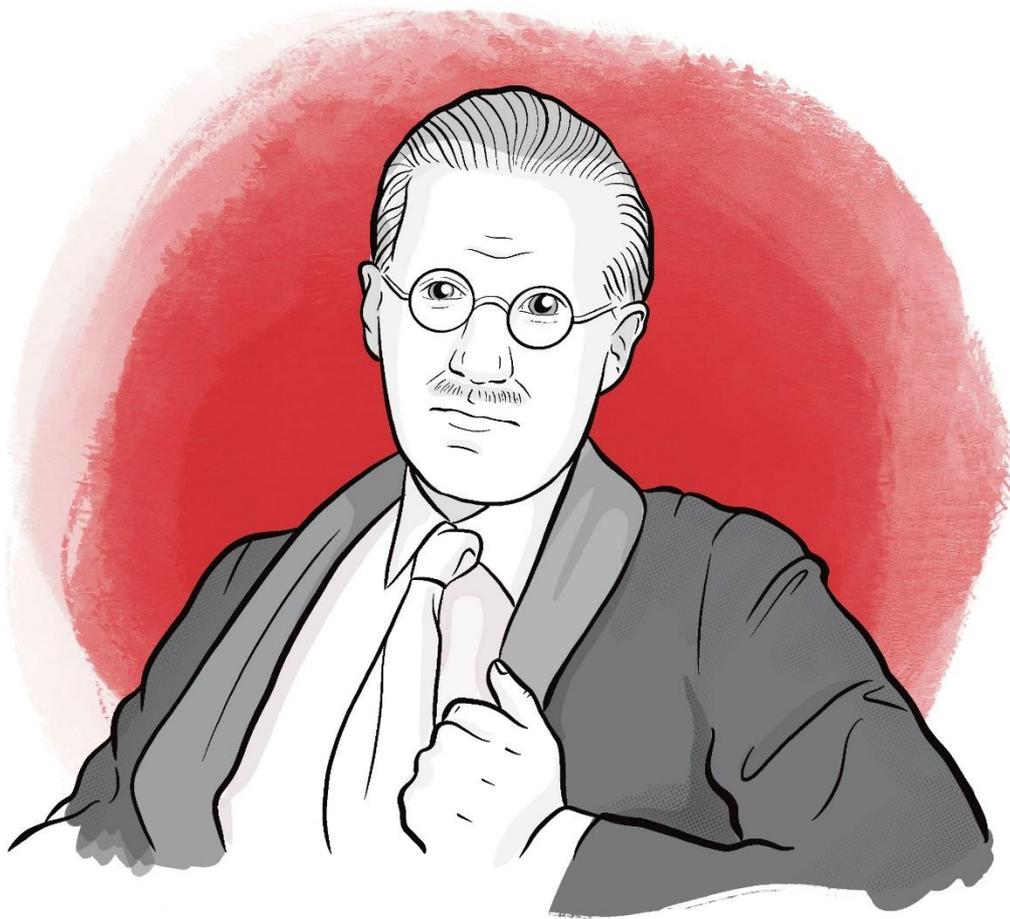


The One Bleeds into the Other:
Menstruation and Dichotomies in James Joyce's
Ulysses



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Abstract

This thesis examines the representation of menstruation in James Joyce's ground-breaking novel *Ulysses* (1922). Turn-of-the-century Irish society was a hostile environment towards women and many patriarchal authorities enabled this atmosphere. This thesis investigates the ways in which religious, medical, and cultural discourses attributed to the subordination of women and how Joyce challenged the narratives of women as inherently inferior with his literature. The powerful social institutions considered the menstruator as a dichotomous being by nature. In turn, Joyce relied on two dichotomies, namely life-death and body-mind, in *Ulysses* to undermine the convictions of these establishments. His personal relationship with Nora Barnacle (and his daughter Lucia) had instilled in him a fascination for the female body and he wrote *Ulysses* to express his adoration. Love for the woman lies at the heart of the novel and in an inherently misogynist society this was a radical act in and of itself.

Introduction

In 1902, a steadfast and ambitious twenty-year-old James Joyce outlined in a letter to Lady Gregory his reasons for wanting to study medicine. He wrote: “I want to get a degree in medicine, for then I can build up my work securely” (Ellmann, “James,” 107). Joyce evidently considered it vital to his writing that he learn about the human body. In order for his texts to be supported structurally, he needed a basic understanding of the complexities of human physiology. Though he attempted to study medicine on three separate occasions (Maddox, 57; Ellmann, “James,” 169), it was not meant to be. He struggled with chemistry and was always plagued by a shortage of money (Lyons, 25). Despite never having acquired a medical degree, many of his works nevertheless impart the reader with faultless medical knowledge – unless the presentation of misinformation is relevant to the story, as it is in *Ulysses* (1922) – and insights into contemporaneous physiological discourses. As a French and Italian language student at University College, he befriended a couple of medical students, namely Oliver St John Gogarty, Vincent Cosgrave and Francis Byrne (Maddox, 38). It is likely that Joyce would have turned to these friends when he wanted to discuss specific medical matters (Lyons, 25). Moreover, medical and cultural texts would have been particularly helpful too (25), especially after his friendships with Gogarty and Cosgrave deteriorated over time.

To borrow Richard Ellmann’s analogy, although Joyce never obtained his license to practice medicine, as a writer, he nevertheless had one specific patient that he would examine and diagnose in his literature, namely Ireland and particularly its constituent the Catholic church (“James,” 97). In the same letter to Lady Gregory, he wrote: “I want to achieve myself – little or great as I may be – for I know that there is no heresy or no philosophy which is so abhorrent to the church as a human being, and accordingly I am going to Paris” (107). Joyce developed an aversion to the Catholic Church during his schooldays at Belvedere College.

Though there was a period, from 1896 to 1897, when Joyce was intensely pious after attending some sermons during a school retreat, which had instilled in him an immense fear for his past sinful behaviour (49), he left Belvedere College as indifferent to Catholic convictions (56). Years later, in 1904, Joyce wrote a letter to Nora Barnacle, his life-long companion, in which he said that his “mind rejects the whole present social order and Christianity – home, the recognised virtues, classes of life, and religious doctrines” (Ellmann, “Letters,” 25). Of particular importance to him was the influence that this social order and Christianity had on the deteriorating quality of his mother’s life. Within the same paragraph in the letter, he mentions that he “understood that [he] was looking on the face of a victim and [that he] cursed the system which had made her a victim” (25). His mother, May Joyce, had been a devout Christian all her life (Maddox, 49), and would have strongly adhered to the Church’s principle that the perfect Christian woman was a “wife/mother [who] was gentle, kind, patient, moral and spiritual” (MacCurtain, O’Dowd & Luddy, 21). This blind adherence had made her acceptant of her harmful living conditions and subordination, meaning she never led a fulfilling life. Consequently, Joyce had no intentions of supporting a system that purported that the subordinate family woman was the embodiment of the perfect Christian. In the letter to Nora, who herself was a loyal Christian, he said: “Now I make open war upon [the Catholic Church] by what I write and say and do” (Ellmann, “Letters,” 26). This conviction established the foundation of *Ulysses*.

Joyce observed that the relationship of the Catholic Church and the medical field to the human body were opposites: the Church considered the natural body as antagonistic to its ideology while medicine saw it as its protagonist. In his efforts to undermine the Church’s authority and combine his passion for literature and medicine, he wrote the novel *Ulysses*, which he himself described as the epic of the human body (Brown, 11). Despite Joyce’s reliance on medical knowledge in his war against the Catholic Church, the medical field did

not fully embody his principles. It seems that the problematic and oppressive system that Joyce mentioned in his letter to Nora could have referred to the medical field, as well. Cultural convictions in late nineteenth-century Ireland mirrored those of the Catholic Church in that it identified the social position of women as exclusive to the private sphere. In her study on menstrual etiquette in early twentieth-century England, Julie-Marie Strange posited that “[t]he belief that maternity was Everywoman’s [sic] destiny pervaded political and social texts on women’s employment, sexuality, and education” (249-250). As the field of medicine emerged as an authoritative institution in late nineteenth-century English and Irish society (Plock, “Medicine,” 253), cultural beliefs and medical knowledge became inextricably connected. In fact, contemporaneous western culture may have had more of an influence on medical interpretations of the body and its functions than the other way around, not least in the context of female physiology (Mullin, 497). In his historical analysis of cultural attitudes towards female reproductive biology, Thomas Laqueur establishes that “[w]hatever one thought about women and their rightful place in the world could, it seemed, be mapped onto their bodies” (30). The medicalisation of female bodies, then, became a crucial strategy within Irish patriarchal society for the reinforcement of women’s subordinate ‘place in the world’ (Plock, “Jack,” 129).

In late nineteenth-century Ireland, the medical practitioner’s opinion was assumed to be legitimate on the basis of his scientific objectivity and rationality. The expert’s words were held in high regard and, consequently, his support of a specific social attitude would enhance its verisimilitude (Plock, “Medicine,” 253). Dr Thomas Claye Shaw, a British physician and lecturer of psychology at St. Bartholomew’s Hospital in London, aptly articulated the value of medical authority in a 1908 publication of *The Lancet*. He wrote: “To speak on [psychology] presupposes that one has, at least to some extent, such a share in the form of mental action as will justify the audacity of criticising what can only partially be

experienced” (1263). He posited that one should only contribute to socio-cultural and medical debates if they had the required scientific background to verify their claims. It was this authoritative position that allowed medical practitioners to become increasingly involved with political issues regarding sexual difference (Jorgensen-Earp & Jorgensen, 139). Since medicine’s ‘protagonist’ is the body, the woman was considered different from the man on the basis of a unique physiological feature, namely her reproductive organs. A woman’s ovaries (and her womb) represented her entire being, as articulated by the French physician Achille Chéreau in 1844, who wrote: “Propter solum ovarium mulier est id quod est,” which translates to “it is only because of the ovary that woman is what she is” (qtd. in Laqueur, 27). Furthermore, menstruation was considered the external proof of the internal power of the ovaries (27-28), and became significant scientific evidence for the cultural ideology that regarded women as “weak, sickly, and therefore politically disadvantaged by virtue of their sex and their bodies” (Newton, 32). Since medical theory posited that womanhood was defined by the female reproductive system, this theory became the scientific justification for the cultural belief that women’s social destiny was confined to motherhood and domesticity, considering their biology confirmed their reproductive role (Al-Khalidi, 69).

While medical knowledge was Joyce’s weapon in his conflict with the Catholic Church, he nevertheless remained critical of the field itself. This thesis asserts that *Ulysses* is a critical study of the medical, religious and socio-political public attitudes towards women in Irish society around the turn-of-the-century. In Katherine Mullin’s article on menstruation in *Ulysses*¹, she argues that, though Joyce may have approved of these misogynist discourses on sexual difference in his youth, *Ulysses* exposes them for their manipulation of menstruation’s significance (505). She posits that Joyce rejected the socio-cultural notion that menstruation

¹ Katherine Mullin’s article “Menstruation in *Ulysses*” (2009) could be considered this thesis’ predecessor (or rather this thesis may be considered her article’s successor) since it touches upon many corresponding topics. It must be acknowledged that this thesis will overlap with her article in some ways, yet will diverge in others, due to its similar topic.

constitutes womanhood on the basis of discursive clichés (505), which implies that he disagreed with the interpretation of womanhood as inherently inferior. This thesis aligns itself with these statements, specifically the latter, and intends to add to the discussion by analysing the dynamic between menstruation and two socially relevant dichotomies, namely the life-death and the body-mind dichotomies. It argues that Joyce recognised how menstruation functioned as a crossroad where these dichotomies intersected. His own personal interest in these dichotomies and their corresponding social discourses directly influenced the representation of menstruation in *Ulysses*. Furthermore, the representation of the menstrual experience in the novel reveals Joyce's opinion that the notions of life, death, the body, and the mind have little to no significance in and of themselves. Instead, these individual concepts become meaningful precisely because they have an opposite and are in balance: life gives meaning to death and the body gives meaning to the mind (and vice versa). Accordingly, this thesis is split up into two sections: i) the historically situated discussion of the life-death dichotomy in relation to the representation of menstruation; ii) the historically situated discussion of the dynamics between the body-mind dichotomy and the representation of menstruation.

Section 1: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly Truth

Joyce understood that the medical and religious interpretations of death were in conflict with each other. The Catholic Church considers death an important spiritual moment since it marks the faithful departed's passage from the active community of professed Christians on earth (Church Visible) to either eternal happiness and the union with God in Heaven (Church Triumphant) (Dowdall, 618), or purgatory (Church Suffering) (Merriam-Webster). While the Church depicts death with a sense of "horror and dread" (623), it is still a development one must go through if they wish to enter the true "land of the living," namely Heaven (622). Since life on earth was difficult and inherently sinful, death promised eternal rest, as is stated in a verse of the Requiem Mass ("*Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine*") (623). This message is repeated in Matthew 11:28: "Come to Me all you that labour and are burdened and I will give you *rest*" (qtd. in Dowdall, 624). To the Church, life is important only because it is one's opportunity for proving their faith by adhering to Catholic doctrine, and death signifies rest and judgment. Joyce himself had been taught these lessons during the previously mentioned school retreat in 1896. The fear that the terrors of Hell-fire had instilled in him had generated a neurotic piety (Ellmann, "James," 49). A pious life would, as he thought at the time, absolve him and spare him from these terrors.

Conversely, medicine approached death objectively and stated that it was an insignificant event in and of itself. It was apparent that a corpse no longer had a purpose other than medical examination. A dead body was the perfect object for medical study, and by the 1830s, anatomy and dissection were perceived as the pillars upon which all scientific knowledge of the human body had been built (Richardson, 50). In confrontation with death, medical practitioners had to distance themselves from their emotions through the process of clinical detachment, i.e. establishing a defensive mental barrier (31). This is echoed in *Ulysses*, when Mulligan reveals that he has become desensitised to death and corpses due to

his training. He says: “I see them pop off every day in the Mater and Richmond and cut up into tripes in the dissectingroom. It’s a beastly thing and nothing else. It simply doesn’t matter” (1.205-7).

Joyce disagreed with the interpretations of the Church and medicine, because he prioritised the balance between life and death. He believed that these two concepts are equal and their interrelationship is what gives them meaning. As Goodspeed argues in his article on death symbolism in *Ulysses*, Joyce believed that “one cannot fully experience life, nor understand the benefits and pleasures of life, without experiencing to some degree the loss and pain of death” (125). Life should be treasured exactly because death could interfere at any moment. Joyce recorded this fascination in his poem 1932 ‘Ecce Puer’, after his grandson Stephen was born only one and a half months after Joyce’s father, John Joyce, had passed away (Ellmann, “James,” 646). This curious balance between death and (new) life has also been captured in *Ulysses*. On several occasions, life and death are mentioned within the same breath, e.g. “Dignam carried off. Mina Purefoy swollen belly on a bed groaning to have a child tugged out of her. One born every second somewhere. Other dying every second. Since I fed the birds five minutes. Three hundred kicked the bucket. Other three hundred born, washing the blood off, all are washed in the blood of the lamb, bawling maaaaaa” (8.479-83). This example, among others, indicates Joyce’s interest in the way life and death are each other’s mirror image. These concepts interweave, they push and pull but are always in balance. One way in which Joyce implicitly relayed this message about life and death, as opposed to the explicit reference as quoted above, was through their association with menstruation.

Molly Bloom in *Ulysses* thinks, “well when Im stretched out dead in my grave I suppose Ill have some sweet peace I want to get up a minute if Im let O jesus wait yes that thing has come on me” (18.1103-5). Before this, she is complaining about the demands and

responsibilities of life. As a Catholic, she sees death as the only time when she can truly rest. This longing for death's peace is followed by Molly's period, which, in this context, becomes a physical reminder that she is indeed alive and lying, not in a grave, but in bed next to Bloom. In 1921, Joyce wrote to his friend Frank Budgen: "[Penelope's] four cardinal points [are] the female breasts, arse, womb and cunt expressed by the words *because, bottom [...], woman, yes*" (Ellmann, "Letters," 285). Consequently, similar to the interpretation of 'yes' in this chapter as life-affirming (Goodspeed, 122), Molly's bloody vaginal discharge becomes a well-timed confirmation of life. Ultimately, this "nuisance of a thing" amplifies her hope that there will be "something better for [her] in the other world" (18.1210-1).

Menstruation has fascinated and terrified societies throughout history, and life as a menstruator has always been defined by and revolved around this (dis)ability. Menstruation, at all times, has been interpreted as a case of either/or, i.e. either it is good or it is bad and, though conflicting ideas may co-exist within a society, the boundaries between the two convictions remain rigid. In the context of reproduction, menstruation can either signal fertility and the possibility for new life, or it symbolises the failure of reproduction and loss of new life. In nineteenth-century Ireland, this idea of menstruation as the equivalent to fertility was based on a medical discourse that posited that the human menstrual experience was comparable to the period of heat in other animals (Laqueur, 27). In 1843, *The Lancet* included an overview of the scientific findings by the French doctor M.A. Raciborski, who claimed that "[t]he spontaneous detachment of the human ovum at the end of the menstrual epoch naturally renders that period the most favourable for impregnation, and readily yields a reason for the fact that conception is most commonly referred to that epoch by pregnant women" (644-5). Though this theory was often contested, it proved rather tenacious since it was still referenced at the end of the nineteenth century, for instance by the English physician Havelock Ellis in 1897 (Mullin, 502). Perhaps Joyce was referring to this theory when Bloom

wonders if his deceased son, Rudy, was conceived when he and Molly had sex after she had seen two dogs “at it” (6.75-81). Conversely, menstruation was seen as the physical confirmation that pregnancy had failed to occur. Since women’s main contribution to society was expected to be in the form of reproduction, menstruation signified the woman’s failure to perform her duty (Strange, 250). As Simone de Beauvoir says in *The Second Sex* (1949): “[E]very month a child is prepared to be born and is aborted in the flow of the crimson tide” (64); as Stephen thinks, the woman had a “womb of sin” (3.44) and resembled an “allwombing tomb” (3.402). Menstruation was simultaneously the promise of procreation and its absence.

Joyce captured this duality through his characterisation of Molly and Milly. These two characters each represent one side of the spectrum in *Ulysses*: the former embodies the bad, the latter embodies the good. All their character differences can be related back to their opposite incarnation of menstrual narratives. However, Joyce is not satisfied with just keeping these boundaries rigid. Instead, he subtly implies that, despite their differences, Molly and Milly are not complete opposites, but are interconnected. Thus, because Molly and Milly interact, by extension then, so too do their corresponding menstrual narratives – death and life, respectively. Enmeshed in this argument is Joyce’s reliance on water symbolism. Water has traditionally been interpreted as a symbol of femininity, as de Beauvoir explains: “She is earth and man seed; she is water, and he is fire [...]; the Sea is one of the most universally widespread maternal symbols” (198). Analogous to menstrual blood, water is a substance that can be excreted from the body and this bodily fluid can similarly represent either death or life. In *Ulysses*, Stephen associates the bile that his dying mother vomited up with the “dull green mass of liquid” of the sea water (1.106-10); on the other hand, pregnancy-related jargon states that the breaking of a woman’s water signifies the start of labour. Within the context of this discussion, the latter category is most relevant, because

when water is placed in opposition to menstruation, it becomes synonymous with only that aspect. In this case, water represents life and menstrual blood represents death.

This dynamic, in turn, corresponds with Milly and Molly's characterisation, respectively. Firstly, Milly and Molly are different in age which corresponds with their menstrual experiences. Molly is thirty-two while Milly turned fifteen the day before. Milly's innocence is highlighted throughout the novel, which is in stark contrast to Molly's insight. In 'Nausicaa', Bloom thinks of a boat trip they took together. Though it is unclear exactly what age Milly was during this trip, Bloom recalls that she had no fear during the boat ride since she did not yet "know what death [was] at that age" (13.1188-9). Immediately after, he says that "their stomachs [were] clean" (13.1189). It is likely that this refers to some women vomiting during the ride due to nausea (13.1186-7), however, the notion that Milly's stomach was 'clean', combined with the fact that she was still young, could indicate that Milly had at that point not yet experienced menarche and her ignorance translated to her obliviousness towards death. On the contrary, it is described that Milly was "[f]rightened [...] when her nature came on her first" (13.1202-3). As Milly saw and felt blood coming out of her body, which in any other context could be fatal, she was confronted with death's power. The fact that Milly felt so scared during her menarche might suggest that her parents had not adequately informed her about its inevitability, which was a common occurrence in the early 1900s, since reticence was the primary cultural attitude towards menstruation (Strange, 251). This same event triggered an emotional moment for Molly, who was reminded of her own menarche experience in Gibraltar (13.1203-4). Molly, at thirty-two years old, was aware of menstruation's destructiveness, having experienced the joy of procreation and the sorrow of the loss of a child.

Consequently, Milly represents fertility and the promise of reproduction while Molly represents infertility and the failure to reproduce. On the one hand, Milly is "ripening"

(4.430); on the other hand, Molly is engaging in “copulation without population” (14.1422). This distinction itself corresponds with the Catholic Church’s virgin-whore dichotomy. It is physically impossible for any mother to procreate without first having intercourse, except in the case of the Virgin Mary, and this too is Milly’s reality. Though, at the time of *Ulysses*’ events, she is still a virgin, it is confirmed that this might soon change since Alec Bannon reveals he plans to have sex with her (14.772-78). In essence, there is every possibility for Milly to conceive; though this means that she can no longer achieve the ideal of the virgin mother, there is no indication that she then automatically would belong to the category of the whore. Molly, on the other hand, does fit this description. She has had sexual intercourse and, despite the probability, has escaped pregnancy. In fact, she interprets her period as the proof that Boylan “didn’t make [her] pregnant” (18.1123). Molly has no qualms with exploiting her sexuality, because “that’s what a woman is supposed to be there for or He wouldn’t have made us the way He did so attractive to men” (18.1519-20). She even facetiously describes her period by using language that invokes the idea of someone’s water breaking at the start of labour: “[the blood is] pouring out of me like the sea” (18.1123); “O how the waters come down at Lahore” (18.1148). The latter is a pun that combines the original word “Lodore” in Robert Southey’s poem with a word that sounds like ‘whore’ (Gifford & Seidman, 627). Thus, Molly, and by extension, Joyce, gladly make a mockery out of this Catholic distinction.

Furthermore, in the context of the water and menstrual blood dichotomy, Milly represents the former and Molly represents the latter. This dichotomy is reflected in their assigned colours in the novel: Milly is often pictured as wearing a blue scarf (13.1188; 15.3167-8), which is the colour of clear water. Molly’s colour, however, is implied to be red when Bloom thinks of her as “the blood of the south” (13.968-9). In colour theory, red and blue are, together with yellow, the primary colours and each represent a different end of the spectrum. However, these primary colours are significant in colour theory precisely because

they can come together and create new colour possibilities. So too can water and blood, and therefore life and death, intertwine and produce new values. This is what Joyce intended to portray when he wrote: “Molly. Milly. Same thing watered down” (6.87). All of these binaries – Molly and Milly, water and blood, life and death – are anything but rigid; instead, they influence and trickle down into each other. Despite their differences, they are one and the same. There is one character who inherently defies any clear categorisation, namely Gerty MacDowell. She is emblematic of both the positive and the negative interpretations of womanhood, and traverses between the categories. Similar to Milly, Gerty is associated with the colour blue (13.179-80), which implies that she too embodies water, fertility and life. However, in ‘Circe’, this categorisation is challenged. In a fantastical scene, Gerty approaches Bloom to show him “her bloodied clout” (15.373). Gerty goes from wearing blue underwear to having a ‘bloodied clout’, or a dirty menstrual rag. Consequently, she moves from one category (water and life) to the other (blood and death), representing the full spectrum.

Joyce experienced this idea of a person embodying both sides of a dichotomy within his own family: Nora herself traversed between these categories, and so did Joyce’s visions of her (Maddox, 132), and his daughter Lucia was going through puberty when he was writing *Ulysses*. As Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove explain in *The Wise Wound* (1978), “[m]any women are prevented from becoming whole by being regarded as two persons: the obedient, good little ovulant mother, and the fiend of menstruation” (31). Nora and Lucia were the living proof, however, that one could be both. In Nora’s case, she symbolized everything that Joyce had longed for throughout his life. He wrote: “You are my only love. You have me completely in your power. I *know* and *feel* that if I am to write anything fine and noble in the future I shall do so only by listening at the doors of your heart” (qtd. in

Maddox, 136). Ultimately, Joyce's radical action of writing female characters who are not just 'this' or 'that' but embody both could be considered quite the noble task.

Section 2: A Bloody Blessing in Disguise

“*Ich bin der [sic] Fleisch der stets bejaht*” (Ellmann, “Letters,” 285). Joyce wrote this statement, which translates to “I am the flesh that always affirms” (Ellmann, “‘Penelope’,” 97), in the previously referenced letter to Frank Budgen in 1921. It was his final remark on ‘Penelope’s’ style. As Maud Ellmann mentions, there are two aspects that stand out about this statement. Firstly, it echoes a line in Goethe’s play *Faust*, namely “*Ich bin der Geist der stets [verneint],*” or in English, “I am the spirit that always denies” (97). Joyce replaced the word ‘Geist/spirit’ with ‘Fleisch/flesh’ and the word ‘verneint/denies’ with ‘bejaht/affirms’. This intentional change suggests Joyce’s familiarity with the Western body-spirit, or body-mind, dichotomy and implies that ‘Penelope’ will somehow reflect this discussion. Furthermore, there is a grammatical error in his version: the German word ‘Fleisch’ is supposed to be neuter, yet Joyce’s grammar made it masculine (97). Though it is possible that this was an honest mistake on Joyce’s part, as Jean-Michel Rabaté points out, his brief but intense correspondence with Martha *Fleischmann* could have motivated him to make this error, since her last name directly reflects the grammatical issue (51).

Joyce’s ‘masculine flesh’ directly references and undermines the gendered notion of the Cartesian body-mind duality. This duality refers to the French philosopher René Descartes’ understanding of the mind and body as separate. As a substance dualist, he believed that the mind (which is interchangeable with the self or the soul) and the physical body are individual substances that nevertheless form a union (Lowe, 6). They are a union because each contributes a feature that is absent in the other, namely the mind contributes thought or consciousness and the body represents “spatial *extension*” (7). Both features can be further split up into several individual manifestations: “the mind has beliefs, desires, and volitions, but no shape, size, or velocity, the body has shape, size, and velocity, but no beliefs, desires, or volitions” (7). This duality implies that the subject’s consciousness, or

their understanding of the world, does not depend on their bodily embeddedness but only on one's ability to think rationally and objectively (Judovitz, 2). In this context, "the body [is dissociated] from both the mind and experiential reality [which] disengages it from the sphere of embodiment," also known as disembodiment (4). Embodiment can be understood as the "conceptual and material realization" of the body (and mind) through "traditions and paradigms" (3). Subsequently, the body is removed from this embodied equation and the subject's acquisition of knowledge now solely hinges on the mind's consciousness. In Descartes' duality, the "disembodiment of the subject, entailed in its definition as a thinking subject, reduces the body to a pure object of knowledge, defined as matter and extension" (7). Conversely, the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty insisted that the subject needed the body for the constitution of knowledge to happen (6). In his influential book *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), he argued that the embodiment of the subject, or the materialisation of the body, reflects this person's position in the world and their corresponding perspectives (Judovitz, 6). Because a person's position is inherently limited by their restricted access to the world, their perspectives will always be incomplete and fragmented (6). In his argument, (self-)consciousness, or awareness of the world, relies on one's embodied biased perception (6), in opposition to Descartes's opinion that consciousness is confined to the realm of the mind.

Joyce echoes Merleau-Ponty's theory, or rather rejects Descartes', since he considered the body as embedded in the world and the individual's perception of their environment as crucial to their constitution as a knowledgeable subject. He wrote to Frank Budgen: "In [*Ulysses*] the body lives and moves through space and is the home of a full personality" (qtd. in Plock, "Bodies," 184). The characters in *Ulysses* all engage in everyday communal practices and their bodies constantly interact with their surroundings. They are moving through turn-of-the-century Dublin with an expertise which could only have been formed

through their physically embedded historical presence (Temple Herr, 164). Since the cultural and material constitution of the body relies on certain traditions and paradigms, a question arises: ‘In what way did Western discursive frameworks – “technical, social, institutional, and pedagogical processes” (Judovitz, 3) – of the early twentieth century influence the embodiment of the menstruating body?’ In order to answer this question, it is important to understand that the western world considers the body-mind duality a gendered hierarchy (Lee & Coen, 15). The Cartesian duality posited that the mind was superior since one could transcend, or surpass corporeal restrictions, through one’s rational autonomy. However, transcendence was considered impossible for women because they were inextricably connected to their anatomy (Butler, 43). Women were thought of as bound to their bodies and closer to nature because of their unique reproductive systems (Lee & Coen, 15), thus their experiences could never be separated from their physicality. They did not possess the capacity for rational autonomy since they were “slaves to sinister bodily impulses and excretions” (15). Consequently, the mind appertained to the world of men and transcendence was possible only for them. In this light, Joyce’s ‘masculine flesh’ seems even more radical. Molly Bloom says, “where [medical practitioners’] great intelligence [comes] from I’d like to know grey matter they have it all in their tail if you ask me” (18.709-10). The idea that these men, whose rationality were supposedly superior to that of the average man, were entirely ruled by their ‘tail’ stands in direct opposition with this gendered hierarchy.

This notion of a gendered body-mind dichotomy was perpetuated by a plethora of nineteenth-century (male) medical practitioners, not least by the Harvard professor Edward H. Clarke and the psychiatrist Henry Maudsley. They ascribed to the popular Victorian theory of the ‘nervous force’, which posited that the nervous system was the link between the body and the mind and that one had a finite supply of “vital energy” which fuelled and enhanced one’s physical and mental performances (Jorgensen-Earp & Jorgensen, 142).

Maudsley asserted, since everyone only had a limited supply of energy which had to be distributed between both the body and the mind, that young women should be careful not to exhaust their energy through mental activity and strain since this would “potentially destroy [their] future capacity to bear healthy children” (Marland, 71). This reflected Clarke’s argument that in order for the young girl’s reproductive organs to mature correctly she should not spend her time and energy on mental stimulation in higher education, unlike boys (Strange, 252). Furthermore, Clarke established that women who had prioritised their mental development failed to develop maternal instincts which were so important to the female sex (Bullough & Voght, 71). The ‘male-formulated’ education that they had received had steered them away from their social duty, thus in order to prevent this from happening, ‘female’ education needed to focus on the duties within the private sphere (73). Both Maudsley and Clarke considered “the growth of healthy ovaries and the establishment of regular menstruation [as] essential for the well-being of women” (Strange, 250), and mental activity should not “interfere with ovulation and menstruation, the necessary physiological processes of being female” (Bullough & Voght, 69-70).

Furthermore, unlike society’s strict separation of life and death, the body and the mind were deemed to converge in the context of menstruation, though it was considered detrimental to the female condition. Menstruation was seen as pathological on two accounts: firstly, the Victorian characteristics of dysmenorrhea (abnormally painful menstruation) were not clearly defined, so even slight discomfort was included in the definition, thereby enabling the belief of menstruation as a disability (Strange, 250); secondly, a widespread notion in medicine postulated that, as the bacteriologist and immunologist Sir Almroth Wright claimed in a 1912 publicised letter, “the mind of woman is always threatened with danger from the reverberations of her physiological emergencies” (qtd. in Jorgensen-Earp & Jorgensen, 136). The early twentieth century saw hormones replace the nervous system as the link between the

body and the mind (142), and since women's hormonal levels were unstable during times of physiological distress, scientific discourses believed that this, in turn, would result in mental instability (142). However, as Strange points out, these scientific discourses were directly connected to cultural definitions of womanhood and "by locating menstrual bleeding in the realm of pathology, medical practitioners identified a fundamental component of femininity – and by implication, femininity itself – with the negative connotations of disease and disorder" (249; Mullin, 499).

Joyce addresses nearly all of these convictions in *Ulysses*.² While he also believes that the body and the mind converge during menstruation, this does not necessarily have to be harmful. Molly's monologue in 'Penelope' reflects these medical discourses, exemplifying how their objects of discussion can internalise their messages. She thinks, "God knows theres always something wrong with us 5 days every 3 or 4 weeks usual monthly auction" (18.1108-9). Evidently, Molly has assumed this idea of menstruation as pathological. However, regular menstruation is a sign of the reproductive system operating normally; it is the opposite of 'something wrong'. Furthermore, her statement "wouldnt that pester the soul out of a body" (18.1107-8), confirms that she considers her physical disposition as a nuisance and that any rational being would want to sever itself from the pathological body. However, as a woman it is impossible for her to escape from the corporeal realm. As Bloom says, "Molly often told me she feels things a ton weight" (13.823); there is no way for her to ignore her physicality, she could not escape it even if she wanted to.

Nevertheless, while Molly thinks menstruation is inconvenient, the episode itself implies otherwise. In *The Wise Wound*, Shuttle and Redgrove discuss the idea of menstruation as an erotic experience, which refers to "the ability of the mind to merge with the body in felt

² Section two of this thesis primarily analyses 'Penelope' in regards to the inclusion of the cultural convictions of menstruation as a disorder. If one wishes to learn more about the integration of these attitudes in *Ulysses*, I redirect the reader to Katherine Mullin's article in which she discusses these issues but in the context of 'Nausicaa'.

experience, when the perceptions of one's own self, the world and of course any partners that might be involved, becomes heightened and, it may be, more meaningful" (83). This idea is reflected in *Ulysses*. As Maud Ellmann suggests, the form of sexual intimacy that satisfies Molly's desire most intensely is the kiss (105). In Molly's words, "nothing like a kiss long and hot down to your soul almost paralyses you" (18.105-6). Since her period is nearing its onset when she thinks this, her mental activity is affected by her bodily changes. In this moment, her idea of pleasure merges with spiritual intimacy. This idea is also echoed in 'Nausicaa': after Bloom and Gerty's onanistic encounter, "[t]heir souls met in a last lingering glance" (13.762). Furthermore, Joyce himself may have been familiar with the erotic dimensions of menstruation. Maddox presents the theory that Nora could have been menstruating when she and Joyce first had sex (70). This is not inconceivable for two reasons: i) Nora had been menstruating when they had departed from Dublin the previous day (70); ii) their epistolary correspondences in 1909 revealed Joyce's cloacal (urinal) obsession which transgressed into sexual adventures involving Nora (139), thus menstruation might have actually aroused Joyce. Molly herself even says that "some men do" enjoy sex while their partner is menstruating (18.1108). Moreover, this kiss that Molly finds most pleasurable could have been planted somewhere other than her mouth; in 1909, Joyce had expressed to Nora "a wish to kiss her somewhere, not on the mouth. He left her to guess where" (Maddox, 133). Perhaps this question of 'where' is solved in *Ulysses*, when Stephen associates "mouth [with] south" (7.713).

Lastly, while Molly's physical discomfort might prove to her that menstruation is a nuisance, there are signs which suggest otherwise: "2 red 8s for new garments look at that and didnt I dream something too yes there was something about poetry in it" (18.1320-1). This short phrase contains two components and each refers to menstruation. Firstly, Molly dreamt about poetry. While this could be associated with her attraction to Stephen, who is a

poet, it might also be linked to something Gerty thinks, namely “and often she wondered why you couldn’t eat something poetical like violets or roses” (13.229-30). In Gerty’s mind, flowers, specifically roses, equate to poetry. The term ‘roses’ was a common euphemism for menstruation in the early twentieth century (Mullin, 498), as exemplified by Bloom (5.285). Therefore, Molly’s earlier dream about poetry could have implicitly predicted the onset of her period, which appeared the next night. Secondly, Molly’s tarot cards had anticipated menstruation, as well. In Gifford and Seidman’s annotated elaboration of *Ulysses*, they clarify that Molly’s “two red eights could be read as forecasting a gift that causes pleasure, but usually a *spiritual* gift (restored health, love, wisdom, peace of mind) rather than a material (garments) gift” (630). The Linati scheme lists the sideways 8, which symbolises eternity and female genitalia, as representative of this episode (610). Molly draws ‘2 red 8s’, and when the eight is interpreted as the symbol for female genitalia, it indicates that these genitals will be coloured red with menstrual blood. If these cards imply that Molly will receive a spiritual gift, then by that logic, menstruation itself will be the gift. Consequently, this idea of menstruation as beneficial is a direct assault on every social institution which has claimed the exact opposite. Joyce did not see menstruation as a burden and disagreed that the woman should be punished for her biology, which his relationship with Nora confirms. Molly recalls a particular letter which Bloom wrote to her: “my Precious one everything connected with your glorious Body everything underlined that comes from it is a thing of beauty and of joy for ever something he got out of some nonsensical book” (18.1176-8). This idea is reflected throughout the novel’s story and perhaps this ‘nonsensical book’ is *Ulysses* itself.

Conclusion

This thesis argued that James Joyce disagreed with the institutional subordination of women in turn-of-the-century Irish society and openly opposed to it in his literature, so too through the representation of menstruation in *Ulysses*. Religiously, medically and culturally, menstruation and the female body in general were regarded in terms of dichotomies, such as life-death and body-mind. While he too recognised that these dichotomies were relevant to the interpretation of menstruation, his attitude was radically different from those of the patriarchal institutions. To Joyce, the significance of the concepts of life and death depended on their interaction. Similarly, Joyce did not approve of the strict differentiation between either menstruation as the potential for reproduction and the woman as the (virgin) mother, or menstruation as the failure of procreation and the woman as the childless whore. Women are ‘whole’ and complete, which is reflected in the characterisation of Molly and Milly Bloom and Gerty MacDowell. While medico-cultural discourses did conflate the body and the mind in the context of menstruation, this was exclusively seen as disadvantageous. Joyce fought this idea of the pathological female body by emphasising menstruation’s beneficial qualities, such as erotic experience and a heightened spiritual connection. Throughout these representations of menstruation, the influence of Nora Barnacle (and Lucia Joyce) on Joyce’s writing is persistent and unmistakable. Joyce loved and appreciated his female family members completely and without judgment. Nora in particular had enchanted his body and soul with her own, and *Ulysses* is as much a love letter to her womanhood as it is an attack on patriarchal authority.

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