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## "They All Write About Some Woman in Their Poetry": The Heroines of Ulysses and As I Lay Dying

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“They All Write About Some Woman in Their Poetry”:

The Heroines of *Ulysses* and *As I Lay Dying*

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

the Department of English and Foreign Languages

of the University of New Orleans

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts, with University High Honors

and Honors in English

by

Elizabeth O’Malley

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“They All Write About Some Woman in Their Poetry”:

The Heroines of *Ulysses* and *As I Lay Dying*

Though James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* give drastically different portrayals of relationships, both works center around a woman whose first-person narrative ultimately gives the story its meaning. Molly’s final monologue solidifies the central theme of *Ulysses*—though people and relationships are flawed, love and acceptance make the daily minutiae of life worth experiencing. Like Molly, Addie has one chance to express her feelings. In her chapter, she delivers the message of *As I Lay Dying*—life is nothing but hardships that occur as humans wait to die, alienated and misunderstood.

Throughout the seventeen chapters that precede Molly’s monologue in *Ulysses*, she is mentioned countless times—Leopold recounts their conversations and runs errands for her, the people of town gossip about her, and men objectify her. Prior to knowing Molly’s point-of-view, readers are left unsure of where the Blooms’ marriage stands. Leopold is alternatively portrayed as a henpecked husband, a cuckolded fool, a thoughtful partner and a braggart. Since Leopold is the hero of the majority of the novel, readers worry that Molly is an unfeeling serial cheater who is taking advantage of the naïve Leopold. But Molly’s stream-of-consciousness puts to rest all worries and teaches readers how they should view the rest of the novel. Lisa Sternlieb notes similarly that Joyce “gave Molly the last word and the opportunity to ameliorate a reputation damaged by...the previous chapters,” and her section “provides more of an overview of the novel than any other chapter” (759). It is only through both journeys, Leopold’s and Molly’s, that Joyce conveys the philosophy of the novel. Through Leopold’s day, he fantasizes about other women, agonizes over Molly’s infidelity and wonders “what to do” with a wife who has

“deficient mental development” (Joyce 638). But his story still begins with preparing Molly breakfast, and ends with his return to her despite everything.

Before Leopold returns home, countless townspeople comment on Molly, both to him and amongst each other. Most of the gossip is sexual: Molly is seen as “a good armful,” “well nourished,” “well primed with a...fine pair,” “a buxom lassy” and “a nice old phenomenon with a back on her like a ballalley” (Joyce 102, 169, 225, 258, 293). While these men reduce Molly to a sexual object, they don’t know that she thinks just as little of them as they think of her: “where does their great intelligence come in Id like to know grey matter they have it all in their tail if you ask me” (Joyce 709). Furthermore, Molly embraces her sexuality, and would not entirely oppose being ogled. She regards her libido and infidelity casually, and thinks that she would “like a new fellow every year” (Joyce 710). If Molly’s thoughts were excluded from the novel, the town gossip would make readers either pity or harshly judge her. With her thoughts, we see that Molly is a woman capable of confidently handling her sexuality with no regard to her reputation.

Many of the people Leopold runs into are aware of this infidelity and wonder why Molly married Leopold in the first place: “what did she marry a coon like that for? She had plenty of game in her then” (Joyce 102). The men of the town are cruel to Leopold, something Molly has picked up on. Their objectification implies that a woman like Molly needs more of a man than Leopold, but Molly’s chapter tells readers that she married Leopold for his atypical sensitivity to women’s feelings; he “understood or felt what a woman is” (Joyce 731). She defends Leopold against gossips, saying “theyre not going to get my husband again into their clutches if I can help it making fun of him then behind his back...he has sense enough not to squander every penny piece he earns down their gullets and looks after his wife and family goodfornothings” (Joyce

723). Here, Molly shows she appreciates Leopold's uniqueness as it makes him a better partner, emphasizing why she "would rather die 20 times over than marry another of their sex" (Joyce 696).

Yet prior to the glimpse into Molly's mind, readers would not have known she felt so sure of her choice in marrying Leopold. When she is first introduced into the novel, Molly scolds Leopold for taking too long to bring her breakfast: "Hurry up with that tea, she said. I'm parched...Scald the teapot...What a time you were" (Joyce 60-61). The image of Leopold as henpecked occurs again in his subconscious; in Leopold's dream sequence he imagines Molly speaking down to him, saying, "Has poor little hubby cold feet waiting so long?...O Poldy, Poldy, you are a poor old stick in the mud! Go and see life. See the wide world" (Joyce 418). Later still, Leopold imagines that even a palm reading could show Molly's dominance over him: "Short little finger. Henpecked husband" (Joyce 524). Furthermore, Leopold ignores Molly's cheating, never confronting her even as he delivers a letter from Boylan to her and sees her "glance at the letter and tuck it under her pillow" (Joyce 59). Though he puts on a brave face, Leopold continually mulls over Molly's affair with Boylan. He wonders what she could see in the "worst man in Dublin...a type like that" and feels "a warm shock of air heat of mustard haunched" on his heart when Boylan is mentioned (Joyce 89, 164). This affair seems to be what causes Leopold to feel despondence in his marriage, declaring "woman. As easy stop the sea. Yes: all is lost" (Joyce 261). He wonders if "real love, supposing there happens to be another chap in the case, exist between married folk?" (Joyce 605). Molly's chapter answers his question: she tells us that it can.

Despite all her criticism of Leopold and lust for other men, Molly's thoughts always circle back to little things she loves about Leopold: how he is "polite to old women...and waiters

and beggars too,” “knows a lot of mixed up things especially about the body and the insides,” “always wipes his feet on the mat when he comes in wet or shine and always blacks his own boots and he always takes off his hat when he comes up in the street like that” (Joyce 690, 694, 696). Even in her infidelity, Molly wants to include Leopold: “Ill tell him about that some day not now and surprise him ay and Ill take him there and show him the very place too we did it” (Joyce 697). Though this could be seen as a perverse act of revenge, Molly means it as a way to bond, because despite all their bickering, Molly and Leopold are closer to each other than anyone else. Before accepting Leopold’s proposal, Molly says she “was thinking of so many things he didnt know of Mulvey and Mr Stanhope and Hester and father and old Captain Groves and the sailors playing” (Joyce 731). Later, Leopold has knowledge of this time in her life: “lieutenant Mulvey that kissed her under the Moorish wall beside the gardens. Fifteen she told me. But her breasts were developed” (Joyce 354). Leopold comments on this intimacy, saying “curious she an only child, I an only child. So it returns. Think you’re escaping and run into yourself. Longest way round is the shortest way home” (Joyce 360). Though Molly and Leopold seem disconnected at times, Molly’s chapter shows that they are ultimately in complete sympathy to one another.

Even in their arguments, the two come to the same conclusion. Leopold can be condescending towards Molly, saying he “wonders if she pronounces that right: *voglio*” and thinking that she is “not exactly witty” (Joyce 61, 147). Most notably, Leopold thinks of possible ways Molly could fill her days, all patronizing: “Parlour games...embroidery...musical duets...legal scrivenery or envelope addressing...courses of evening instruction specially designed to render liberal instruction agreeable” (Joyce 638). In a similar way, Molly questions Leopold’s abilities, calling him “pigheaded as usual” and saying that “either hes going to be run

into prison over his old lottery tickets that was to be all our salvations or he goes and gives impudence well have him coming home with the sack soon” (Joyce 704, 722). Yet both Molly and Leopold ultimately find each other endlessly interesting. Molly wishes she “could remember one half of the things and write a book out of it the works of Master Poldy,” and Leopold has the same idea about her (705). He says he “used to try jotting down...what she said dressing,” thinking he “might manage a sketch” (Joyce 67). And while Leopold’s long-winded explanations of words cause Molly to cry, “O, rocks!... Tell us in plain words,” she continues to ask him questions about the plots of the books he buys her (Joyce 62). Although some critics suggest that “words mean little or nothing” to Molly, her discussions of language with Leopold prove that she does share this interest with him (Richardson 184). Leopold, too, appreciates Molly’s knowledge: “I. H. S. Molly told me one time I asked her. I have sinned: or no: I have suffered, it is” (Joyce 78).

Though much shorter in length than Leopold’s, the journey through Molly’s thoughts contains the story of her life and marriage. Despite her cheating, Molly would “rather die 20 times over than marry another of their sex” (Joyce 696). Although Molly “remains static, firmly bolted to her bed through her husband’s journey,” she deserves “the same credit for preserving her marriage” (Sternlieb 764). Molly’s section, and therefore the whole novel, ends with Molly retelling the story of Leopold’s proposal. Before she said yes, she thought about all of life: “I wouldnt answer first only looked out over the sea and the sky I was thinking of so many things he didnt know of Mulvey and Mr Stanhope and Hester and father and old captain Groves” (Joyce 731). Joyce similarly considers each aspect of life—from Leopold’s drudgery to Molly’s philosophizing—before confirming to readers that yes, it is all worth it.



Like Joyce, Faulkner chooses the heroine of his novel to deliver a chapter that sets the tone of the whole work. Addie's chapter is set apart from the others in "that she speaks only once, and...she undertakes what no other speaker dares—she gives an account of herself" (Nielsen 33). Before Addie's central narrative, readers may ascribe stereotypical maternal qualities to Addie and assume the Bundren family sets off on an odyssey to bury their beloved mother. When Addie reveals that she requested a burial in Jefferson as revenge against Anse, we should learn to make no assumptions about this family. However, a second shock comes when Anse introduces the new Mrs. Bundren in the final chapter. While Addie's chapter does clarify the rest of the novel, this clarification is far less comforting than that of *Ulysses*—Faulkner's Addie tells us that everyone's private life is so foreign and impenetrable to others that understanding between two people is impossible.

This gap in connection is at times understandable to readers. When Peabody visits Addie on her deathbed, his misguided beliefs are attempts at empathy. When he considers why Addie has been on her last legs for so long, Peabody assumes she and Anse shared a close bond: "I suppose it's having been a part of Anse for so long that she cannot even make that change, if change it be" (Faulkner 43). This assumption will later be refuted by Addie when she claims her solitude is impenetrable, and that her "aloneness...had never been violated until Cash came. Not even by Anse in the nights" (Faulkner 172). Here, Addie acknowledges that though people often think sex fosters intimacy, she has been able to distance herself from even that. Peabody continues ascribing a deep love between Addie and Anse by comparing her to other female patients he's seen over the years. He says he has "seen them drive from the room them coming with sympathy and pity, with actual help, and clinging to some trifling animal to whom they were never more than pack-horses. That's what they mean by the love that passeth

understanding: that pride, that furious desire to hide that abject nakedness which we bring here with us, carry with us into operating rooms, carry stubbornly and furiously with us into the Earth again” (Faulkner 45-46). Peabody is attempting to sympathize with women in his town who he believes are treated unfairly; while this is noble, Addie’s philosophy finds it completely unnecessary, since death is the ultimate goal for everyone.

Just as Peabody misread Addie’s dying moment, others who knew her misread the events following her death. Samson, upon seeing the trials that the trip to Jefferson brings, remarks that “the best way to respect her is to get her in the ground as quick as you can” (Faulkner 116). His wife, Rachel, agrees and faults Anse for the delayed burial: she says Anse and “all the men in the world...torture us alive and flout us dead, drag...us up and down the country” (Faulkner 117). Similarly to Peabody, Samson and Rachel are outraged for what they perceive as disrespect to Addie. Readers have a bit more information, as they know from the beginning that a burial in Jefferson “was her wish” (Faulkner 19). But rather than the familial connection readers assume motivates Addie’s wish for a faraway burial, this too is driven by Addie’s hateful mindset. She fools everyone in her life just as she initially fooled readers: “my revenge would be that he would never know I was taking revenge...I asked Anse to promise to take me back to Jefferson when I died, because I knew that father had been right” (Faulkner 173). With this request, Addie ensures that her contempt for life will live on after her death in the form of causing misery for her family. She is also attempting a sort of connection—she realizes that her father is right in saying that life is waiting to die, and she wants to inadvertently instill this in her family. Instead of passing on the message verbally as her father has, Addie gives them a task. This fits into her idea that “words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and...terribly doing goes along

the earth, clinging to it” (Faulkner 173). Yet this message does not get through to her family, as Addie surely knew it would not.

Through the scope of Addie’s relationships, Faulkner emphasizes that lack in understanding is far-reaching: Addie is not only misunderstood by casual acquaintances such as Peabody and Samson, but also by those supposedly close to her. Cora Tull, who would count as Addie’s best friend if the label were based on amount of time spent together, hasn’t the slightest clue as to how Addie feels. This “lack of understanding seems worse because she too is a woman and might logically have been expected to understand some of the same things Addie felt” (Wagner 80). Thinking that she is doing Addie a favor, Cora tells readers how she has constantly been at Addie’s side during her final weeks, “so that somebody would be with her in her last moments and she would not have to face the Great Unknown without one familiar face to give her courage” (Faulkner 22). But unbeknownst to Cora, Addie has felt that she “could get ready to die” since Jewel’s birth (Faulkner 176). Just as the others, Cora has the story of Addie’s burial wrong: she describes Addie as “a lonely woman, lonely with her pride, trying to make folks believe different, hiding the fact that they just suffered her, because she was not cold in the coffin before they were carting her away forty miles to bury her...refusing to let her lie in the same earth with those Bundrens” (Faulkner 22-23). Not only is Cora’s assumption wrong, her insult would not have touched Addie, who says “fear was invented by someone that had never had the fear, pride, who never had the pride” (Faulkner 172). Addie follows a different set of rules: “in [her] culture, natural instinct is fallen nature; desire is concupiscence; will is willfulness; initiative is disobedience; independence is pride” (Slaughter 17).

Numb to insults about her character, Addie also ignores Cora’s critiques about her parenting. Cora’s nitpicking is what prompts Addie to criticize language in her chapter: “When

Cora Tull would tell me I was not a true mother, I would think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it” (Faulkner 173). These critiques turn religious after Addie prophesizes that Jewel is her savior; Cora says that Addie “had closed her heart to God and set that selfish mortal boy in His place. Kneeling there I prayed for her. I prayed for that poor blind woman as I had never prayed for me and mine” (Faulkner 168). In the following chapter, Addie recalls this incident from her perspective: “She prayed for me because she believed I was blind to sin, because people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too” (Faulkner 176). Addie’s prophesy is based on her relationship with Jewel, a relationship that causes those around her to detect and misconstrue her favoritism.

Oblivious to the special connection Addie and Jewel share, Anse repeatedly criticizes his children for what he views as a lack of respect and love for Addie. After telling them they “got no affection nor gentleness for her” and “never had,” he goes on to speak as if he and Addie were a team in life: “We would be beholden to no man, me and her...She was ever one to clean up after herself” (Faulkner 19). Though Anse uses Addie’s metaphor of cleaning house, his view of his marriage as a partnership cannot be any further from Addie’s interpretation. When thinking back on her father’s adage, Addie claims that “he could not have known what he meant himself, because a man cannot know anything about cleaning up the house afterward” (Faulkner 175-176). In complete opposition to Molly and Leopold, Addie never speaks of her and Anse as a “we” and this quote confirms their lack of unity: their marriage cannot be equal if she looks down on him for being a clueless man. But Anse continues to speak as if he and Addie were a typical loving couple, at one point even giving a seemingly loving speech about the length of their relationship. He tells his children this about his feelings for Addie: “The somebody you was

young with and you growed old in her and she growed old in you, seeing the old coming on and it was the one somebody you could hear say it dont matter and know it was the truth outen the hard world and all a man's grief and trials" (Faulkner 234-235). In Addie's chapter, there are no such romantic passages. In fact, when she describes her feelings towards Anse, Addie tells of a lack of emotion: "He did not know he was dead, then. Sometimes I would lie by him in the dark, hearing the land that was now of my blood and flesh, and I would think: Anse. Why Anse. Why are you Anse" (Faulkner 173). Rather than growing together as a couple, like Anse believes they did, Addie felt that she grew away from Anse while he remained so stagnant that she even viewed him as dead.

Addie's chapter portrays a complete gap in understanding between Anse and Addie. This gap narrows only twice in the novel; the first time occurs when Anse is asking Dewey Dell for her money. After Dewey Dell attempts to thwart Anse, he addresses Addie: "And now they deny me. Addie. It was lucky for you you died, Addie" (Faulkner 257). Here, Anse inadvertently hits the nail on the head: Addie would consider herself lucky for dying. Unbeknownst to Anse, she has been waiting to die since she was a school teacher when she "would hate [her] father for having ever planted" her (Faulkner 170). The second glimmer of understanding between Anse and Addie occurs at the end of the novel. Though Anse and Addie are not aware of it, readers see that the two of them may deserve each other. Addie "revenge herself on Anse by securing his word that he will bury her in Jefferson, knowing that he is bound to the word," and we see that the equally crafty Anse has used the trip for his own gain (Pierce 300). The last page informs readers that while carrying through Addie's vengeful death wish, Anse not only gets new teeth in Jefferson, he also introduces his children to their new stepmother: "Meet Mrs Bundren" (Faulkner 261).

Anse waited until Addie was dead to marry a second time, but Addie has something of a second marriage while she was still married to Anse. Soon after declaring Anse dead, Addie begins an affair with Whitfield, viewing it as a possible antidote to the meaninglessness of life. Part of the appeal for Addie was Whitfield's status as a preacher: "While I waited for him in the woods, waiting for him before he saw me, I would think of him as dressed in sin. I would think of him as thinking of me as also dressed in sin, he the more beautiful since the garment which he had exchanged for sin was sanctified" (Faulkner 174-175). When Whitfield speaks of their relationship, he thinks of it as a "transgression" long past, saying "she had sworn then that she would never tell it," as he worried that she may have confessed on her deathbed (Faulkner 178). Of course Addie did not confess, as she had always been nonchalant about the deception they shared: "I merely took the precautions he thought necessary for his sake, not for my safety, but just as I wore clothes in the world's face" (Faulkner 175).

For Addie, this relationship never truly ended, and it continued to affect her relationship with Anse. She describes how she felt in the aftermath of Whitfield: "For me it was not over...to me there was no beginning nor ending to anything then. I even held Anse refraining still" (Faulkner 175). Whitfield certainly views the affair as over, and when he hears that Addie is dying, he rushes off to settle the score not with Addie herself, but rather with Anse. He describes how he wants to "stop her before she had spoken" and "say to her husband: 'Anse, I have sinned. Do with me as you will'" (Faulkner 178). Yet he does not get the chance, since "He in his infinite wisdom...restrained the tale from her dying lips as she lay surrounded by those who loved and trusted her" (Faulkner 179). All throughout his chapter, Whitfield's thoughts oppose Addie's. His emphasis on religion and the patriarch as the only member of the household worth speaking to completely counter Addie's opinions. To Addie, her husband is dead and people who have

found religion are “like orphans to whom are pointed out in a crowd two faces and told, That is your father, your mother” (Faulkner 174). While Whitfield was likely drawn by the sexual aspect of his affair with Addie, she viewed the sordid notion of his “coming swift and secret to me in the woods dressed in sin like a gallant garment” as another way to dull the pain of life (Faulkner 175). Though Whitfield ended the affair, he did give Addie a new way to deal with life when she “waked to remember to discover” that she was pregnant with Jewel (Faulkner 175). In his chapter, Whitfield shows no hint of knowing that he is Jewel’s father or that he provided anything to Addie aside from secretive sex, but her account tells us that by fathering Jewel, Whitfield gave her a way to cope.

Addie writes that once Jewel was born, being around him helped to prepare her for death: “with Jewel...the wild blood boiled away and the sound of it ceased. Then there was only the milk, warm and calm, and I lying calm in the slow silence, getting ready to clean my house” (Faulkner 176). Here, readers see that even Jewel, the person Addie has the most fondness for, is little more than a tool for her: she loves how being around him makes her feel, rather than loving him for who he is. His birth, as “the result of her greatest struggle with nature and dead words” is somewhat symbolic to her: Jewel is “evidence of the lengths to which she was willing to push her quest for self. In that sense, he represents her grandest moment, as well as grandest failure” (Pierce 304). The only person who may recognize Addie’s use of Jewel is Jewel himself. Like Addie, he has a single chapter in which he expresses desire for quiet. Jewel describes how he would like Addie’s death scene to be different: “It would just be me and her on a high hill and me rolling the rocks down the hill at their faces, picking them up and throwing them down the hill faces and teeth and all by God until she was quiet and not that goddamn adze going One lick less. One lick less and we could be quiet” (Faulkner 15). In this daydream, Jewel seems to

understand his role as protector of Addie, just as Addie outlined to Cora Tull earlier. While Addie and Jewel seem to have a mutual understanding of the nature of their relationship, no one else sees their bond as it truly is—not even Darl, who knows the truth of Jewel’s paternity.

Darl picks up on Addie’s preference for Jewel, and is the only character to realize—or acknowledge—that he is Whitfield’s son. He badgers Jewel about his paternity: “Your mother was a horse, but who was your father, Jewel?” (Faulkner 212). Darl thinks Addie agonizes over her infidelity; he says he “knew that she was hating herself for that deceit and hating Jewel because she had to love him so that she had to act the deceit” (Faulkner 130-131). But as always, Addie is completely numb to her deceit; she says she “hid nothing,” “tried to deceive no one” and “would not have cared” if word got out (Faulkner 175). The tears Darl witnesses are likely those of relief, not self-hatred. Darl also wrongly ascribes religion to Addie when he tries to comfort Vardaman by saying, “She’s talking to God...She’s calling on Him to help her...she wants Him to hide her away from the sight of man...so she can lay down her life” (Faulkner 214-215). But when Addie speaks to readers from the grave, she says the voice of God is “like the cries of geese out of the wild darkness in the old terrible nights” (Faulkner 174). Though Darl seems like an omniscient narrator in many other ways as the “articulate child (poet as well as clairvoyant)” even he cannot fathom Addie’s thoughts (Wagner 74).

Addie’s closing sentiment does not revolve around one of her children, a romantic partner or her father, but rather Cora. She closes her chapter with her belief that to people like Cora, “people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too” (Faulkner 176). Here, Addie contradicts herself and she knows it: if all words are worthless aren’t hers void of meaning as well? Addie is self-aware enough to recognize this contradiction. She’s tried everything else she can think of to bring meaning to life; her job, marriage, children and affair



have all been attempts to find “the duty to the alive, to the terrible blood, the red bitter flood boiling through the land” (Faulkner 174). In the end, Addie alienated herself from everyone, so she “could get ready to die,” which is the way she wanted it (Faulkner 176). Yet by closing her chapter with a mention of Cora, Addie is acknowledging their strange kinship. Cora speaks of her death as well: “I have tried to live right in the sight of God and man...so that when I lay me down in the consciousness of my duty and reward I will be surrounded by loving faces, carrying the farewell kiss of each of my loved ones into my reward” (Faulkner 23). Like Addie, Cora is waiting to die.

Just as Faulkner uses Addie’s chapter as a summation of the whole of *As I Lay Dying*, Joyce writes Molly’s chapter as a condensation of *Ulysses*. The first seventeen chapters of his work follow Leopold and Stephen; through their actions and thoughts, readers see the complexity and beauty of life. As Leopold “wanders around Dublin on his odyssey of experience, Molly remains in bed creating without effort her own odyssey moving inwards instead of outward” (Oded 46). In the eighteenth chapter, Molly’s thoughts in a single hour encompass all the themes that Leopold and Stephen touched on, which is part of “her overall purpose of synthesizing all opposites” (Oded 44). Joyce takes this expansion and contraction one step further: Molly’s final statement squeezes in the whole of life. Her thoughts following Leopold’s proposal begin with her personal life, transition to all of life, then turn to all of nature and finally return to her and Leopold personally. Unlike Addie’s cold conclusion, Molly takes all of life into account and accepts it— “yes I said yes I will yes”—emphatically (Joyce 732).

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