

“We’ll simply have to dress the character”: Dressed Bodies Do Matter in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*¹

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Abstract

James Joyce was a man keenly interested in fashion and clothes, to such an extent that the Irish writer can even be said to have developed an almost narcissistic concern for his appearance and a fetishist fascination for clothes in the course of his life. As occurs with most of Joyce’s interests, his attraction towards the world of fashion and clothes also surfaces in his fiction. Relying on fashion studies and the so-called sociology of dress, the present work seeks to unveil the meanings which underlie the plethora of allusions to fashion, garments and dress in Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Ultimately, this essay also intends to vindicate the importance of studying the trope of dress in Joyce’s work, a question which has not received the attention it deserves within literary criticism devoted to Joyce.

Keywords: dress, bodies, *Ulysses*, fashion studies, sociology of dress.

James Joyce's interest in fashion and clothes² is a well-known and well-documented aspect of his personality. Even though as a young man, as Ellmann notes, "His clothes were generally unpressed" (Ellmann 65), later on in life Joyce became an extravagant figure, developing an almost narcissistic concern for his appearance and a fetishist fascination for clothes. Already in Pola we know that "He felt the first stirrings of dandyism" (Ellmann 194) and he refashioned his look accordingly: "He put on weight, grew a moustache, and with Nora's help in curling began to wear his hair *en brosse* [...] He went to the dentist [...] and had some teeth fixed; then he bought a new suit" (Ellmann 194). In line with this, in her own biography of Joyce, Edna O'Brien also alludes to the dandical style of the Irish writer, mentioning his velvet smoking jacket, silk cravat and silk handkerchief amongst the many garments which describe Joyce as certainly interested in fashion (127). This is so much so that, in a letter written to Ezra Pound from Trieste, Joyce even mentions clothes as one of the reasons why he cancelled the meeting that both writers were supposed to have in Lago di Garda: "The second reason is: clothes. I have none and can't buy any. The other members of the family are still provided with decent clothes bought in Switzerland." (Ellmann 477)

Whereas in Trieste Joyce restrained himself from buying clothes due to his difficult financial situation, when he was living in Rome, his pecuniary troubles did not prevent him from putting sartorial extravagances before food. Indeed, his sister Eileen recalls how "James was paid for a lesson and with the money, all there was in the house, was sent to buy food. He returned instead with a handpainted silk scarf for Nora whose appetite at the moment was not for finery" (Ellmann 313).

Although on that occasion Nora threatened Joyce with going back to Galway, years later, when both were living in Paris, she also became a fashionista. Influenced by her daughter-in-law, Nora "began to buy her hats from Agnès, the fashionable

milliner, and her dresses from Helen's skillful dressmaker" (Ellmann 631). Already a mature man, not only was Joyce pleased with Nora's newly-acquired fascination for clothes, but he was also willing to pay for Nora's fashionable designs more than ever before since, as he confessed to Stuart Gilbert, his interest in women's bodies had long vanished and instead he had begun to feel an increasing –almost fetishist– attraction for their clothes. (Ellmann 631)

Joyce's personal concern for fashion and clothes also pervades his whole *oeuvre*, from *Dubliners* (1914) –where dress descriptions are put at the service of Joyce's style of "scrupulous meanness"– to *Finnegans Wake* where in certain passages sartorial allusions are the only clues that the reader has in order to identify a given character.³

The purpose of the present essay is to unveil the hitherto unexplored meanings which underlie the sheer number of allusions to fashion, garments and dress in Joyce's *Ulysses*. While reflecting on the functions of clothes as literary devices which serve to enhance the characters' portrayal and to furnish the setting, the subsequent analysis is primarily aimed at approaching the profusion of references to fashion and dress as a subtext within Joyce's masterpiece, a subtext which does not simply offer the reader a detailed exhibition of early twentieth-century fashions, but also a thorough account of contemporary sartorial debates. Tangentially, this work also intends to contribute to overcoming the prevailing lack of studies on dress in literature, simultaneously highlighting the relevance of such praxis. For, as Clair Hughes has judiciously pointed out, "novelists do not, after all, send their characters naked into the world," although "criticism has often acted as though they do."
(2)

In contradistinction to what occurs in disciplines such as anthropology, art history, sociology or semiotics, the question of dress has largely been anathema to literary criticism, even though writers have often drawn on their

knowledge of fashion to dress their characters, give verisimilitude to the setting and add symbolism to their texts, not to mention specific works where clothes become the engine of the plot –see, for instance, Virginia Woolf’s “The New Dress” (1924), Liam O’Flaherty “A Red Petticoat” (1937), Pauline Melville’s “The Truth is in the Clothes” (1990) or, more recently, Carol Shields’ collection of short stories

Dressing up for the Carnival (2000). Notwithstanding, except for some recent contributions,⁴ the study of dress within literary texts has mostly been obviated or reduced to marginal notes and commentaries in passing, thereby disregarding not only the role of clothes in literature but also the writers’ alleged interest in the topic. This absence of studies on dress in literature has probably much to do with the triviality with which fashion has traditionally been associated; the dichotomizing assumption which associates dressing matters with the feminine and the widespread condemnation of fashion by worldviews such as Feminism or Marxism. As a result of these and other deeply entrenched prejudices, scholars have tended to refrain from engaging with fashion, and those who have resolutely opted for dealing with it have often felt the need to justify their academic interest in a subject which has recurrently been the butt of “pointed neglect, ferocious satire, heavy irony (Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*), and sarcastically exaggerated respect.” (Hollander 450)

If literary criticism presents a generalized void as far as the study of dress is concerned, this void is even more prominent in the case of Joycean studies. So far only a few articles have been devoted to examining the question of dress within Joyce’s work, most of them centering on the Circe episode.⁵ Given the relevance of Joyce as a writer, it is even surprising –if not paradoxical– that none of the existing volumes on dress in fiction dedicate a single page to explore this question in relation to Joyce’s literary production. Thus, in *Styling Texts* (2007), Cynthia Kuhn and Cindy Carlson have

edited a collection of essays where different critics examine the trope of dress in texts ranging from *Beowulf* to Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and, out of the ten articles that conform the volume, none of them is devoted to Joyce; in her seminal work *Dressed in Fiction* (2006), Clair Hughes provides a compelling analysis of the role of dress in works by Daniel Defoe, Jane Austen, William Thackeray, Wilkie Collins, Mary Braddon, George Eliot, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Samuel Richardson or Anita Brookner, and yet Joyce is not even mentioned as also occurs in *Fashion in Fiction* (2009), edited by Peter McNeil, Vicki Karaminas and Catherine Cole; by the same token, in a recent publication entitled *Dress and Identity in British literary culture, 1870-1914* (2010), Rosy Aindow, whilst offering an interesting study of literary representations of dress in relation to debates about class identity, puts an end to her analysis in 1914, precisely the year when Joyce's *Dubliners* was published.

Therefore, it is our purpose to address this subject within the work of James Joyce, not only because, as we have shown in previous paragraphs, Joyce himself was a man aware of and even concerned with fashion and clothes, but also –and perhaps more tellingly– because the profusion of references to fashion and dress in *Ulysses* can be taken as further evidence of modernist writers' delight in the materialist representation of ordinary experiences, something which can be traced back to proto-modernist authors such as Henry James or Oscar Wilde. It is for this reason that, before moving onto our analysis of dress in Joyce's *Ulysses*, it is pertinent to examine –albeit briefly– how other writers, more or less contemporary of or immediately prior to the Irish writer, also paid significant attention to sartorial disquisitions either in their essay writings or in their fictional works. George Gissing, Thomas Hardy, Oscar Wilde and Virginia Woolf constitute some of the most outstanding cases in this respect, and their writings can

rightfully be said to adumbrate part of the role that clothes are to play in Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Sartorial descriptions were employed in both Gissing's and Hardy's works as visual signs of the characters' unstable social status and of their ambiguous –and sometimes deceptive– class consciousness and/or ambitions.⁶ As for Oscar Wilde, he maintained an equivocal relationship to consumer culture in general and to fashion in particular. While defining fashion as “a form of ugliness so intolerable that we have to alter it every six months” (428), Wilde himself took part in contemporary fashions, particularly, in the so-called Aesthetic movement in dress.⁷ Oscar Wilde is arguably one of the writers who best represents the increasing concern for fashion and clothes since the nineteenth century, a concern that he expressed both in his artistic works –*Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892)– as well as in the various pieces of criticism that he published in the magazine *Woman's World*. Wilde assumed the progressive commodification of his society and of mass-produced clothes, but this did not prevent him from elevating fashion to the status of art. According to Paul L. Fortunato, in his article “Willean Philosophy with a Needle and Thread: Consumer Fashion at the Origins of Modernist Aesthetics,”

“Wilde's practice was to participate directly in the popularization of cultivated ideas of art as well as of fashion” (40), an attitude which led him to claim that “the artistic feeling of a nation should find expression in its costume quite as much as in its architecture” (quoted by Fortunato 41). What is more, the critic goes on to suggest that Wilde's incorporation of material and consumer culture in his artistic productions anticipates the concern of later modernist writers for the same questions, although his “consumer-modernism,” like Wilde's figure, “was erased from literary history by the early modernists.” (39)

As far as Virginia Woolf is concerned, the British writer's interest in clothes was highly ambivalent. Her diaries

document her horror of shopping and her problematic relationship with pins and underclothes, but also her increasing fascination with the art of dressing. Like Oscar Wilde, her personal concerns *vis-à-vis* fashion and clothes also surface in both her fictional and non-fictional writing, *Mrs Dalloway* and the precedent short story "A New Dress" being good examples of the writer's incorporation of consumer culture –and by extension fashion– into her fiction. Unlike Wilde, Virginia Woolf evinced a particular preoccupation with the relationship between dress and identity, to such an extent that she even talked about what she called "frock consciousness" (13). Albeit not exclusively, Woolf tended to address fashion and dress in relation to the articulation of identity in general and of gender and class issues in particular. This can easily be detected in her novel *Orlando* where the main character wantonly plays with gender identity through clothes, as well as in *Three Guineas* where she has reflected upon the relationship between clothes and gender, questioning those commonplace assumptions which tend to associate dressing matters with women.

We could certainly go on mentioning other modernist figures who also paid attention to fashion. For Gertrude Stein, for instance, fashion was "the real thing in abstraction" (11), and, in this respect, it is also worth mentioning the significant description of J. Alfred Prufrock's garments in T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock": "My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,/ My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin." (18)

In Joyce's case, through his allusions to clothes and sartorial descriptions, as we are going to see, the author combined the realistic function that garments fulfilled in Gissing's and Hardy's novels, the aesthetic artistic dimension that Wilde conceded them, as well as the identitary relevance that they acquire in Woolf's texts.

That fashion and clothes are profusely present in Joyce's *Ulysses* can already be detected in the first pages of the

narrative. Joyce's novel begins with Buck Mulligan walking down the stairs of the tower Martello with "a yellow dressing-gown, ungirdled, [and] sustained gently behind him by the mild morning air" (*U* 1.3). Only a few lines later, we find allusions to the "loose brown graveclothes" of Stephen Dedalus' dead mother (*U* 1.5) and, immediately afterwards, Stephen's own attire takes central stage as Buck Mulligan mocks his poor garments:

Buck Mulligan wiped again his razorblade

—Ah, poor dogsbody, he said in a kind voice. I must give you a shirt and a few noserags. How are the secondhand breeks?

Buck Mulligan attacked the hollow beneath his underlip.

—The mockery of it, he said contentedly, secondleg they should be. God knows what proxy bowsy left them off. I have a lovely pair with a hair stripe, grey. You'll look spiffing in them. I'm not joking, Kinch. You look damn well when you're dressed.

Thanks, Stephen said. I can't wear them if they are grey.

—He can't wear them, Buck Mulligan told his face in the mirror. Etiquette is etiquette. Kills his mother but he can't wear grey trousers. (*U* 1.115-122)

Already in these first lines, we see how Joyce paid attention to the dressed bodies of his characters, using sartorial descriptions as literary devices which contribute to the process of characterization. What is more, as the above quoted dialogue reveals, in *Ulysses* Joyce makes the characters aware of their own clothes and the clothes of the others, inserting into their discourse the topic of fashion and dress. A glimpse at sartorial allusions throughout the first pages of *Ulysses* also serves to

discover the quasi-documentary character of the work as far as clothes are concerned. Indeed, Joyce's work provides a plethora of details about male and female fashions in the period, something which Bloomsday participants have been keen to appreciate. In *Ulysses*, some male characters wear breeches, whereas others have already upgraded to trousers, combining them with different jackets, coats and even frockcoats as well as with a great array of shoes and hats which, on many occasions –and as occurs in *Dubliners* –, act as visible signs of their social class.⁸ As for women's clothes, the female characters display a wide *spectrum* of sartorial choices, ranging from the intricate S-shaped dresses characteristic of the Edwardian period to other styles much in keeping with the natural line popularized by the designer Paul Poiret in the 1910s.⁹ In *Ulysses* we can even find references to the influence of Eastern styles on British female clothing. Molly herself buys a kimono (*U* 18.404) –probably an allusion to Poiret's popular kimono coat– and she is also said to have a pair of Turkish slippers (*U* 13.1241). Likewise, Joyce's novel also records many sartorial controversies aroused around women's clothing at the time, the use of the so-called bloomers being a prominent example: “that old Bishop that spoke off the altar his long preach about womans higher function about girls now riding the bicycle and wearing peak caps and the new woman bloomers God send him sense and me [Molly] more money.” (*U* 18.837-840)¹⁰

There are so many allusions to fashion and clothes in Joyce's *Ulysses* that, when writing an essay of these characteristics, organizing and choosing some references over others proves to be the most complex task. In order to proceed with our analysis, we have found it useful to recall Elizabeth Wilson's seminal work *Adorned in Dreams. Fashion and Modernity* (1985), where she has judiciously stated the triple ambiguity implied when thinking about fashion and clothes:

We live as far as clothes are concerned a triple ambiguity: the ambiguity of *capitalism* itself with its great wealth and great squalor, its capacity to create and its dreadful wastefulness; the ambiguity of our *identity*, of the relation of self to body and self to the world; and the ambiguity of *art*, its purpose and meaning.

Fashion is one of the most accessible and one of the most flexible means by which we express these ambiguities. Fashion is modernist irony. (14-15, emphasis ours)

This triple ambiguity provides, in our view, a helpful starting point to approach the recurrence of allusions to dress, clothes and fashion in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Therefore, in the following lines, we shall attempt to demonstrate that: 1) the importance of clothes in *Ulysses* is another symptom of the capitalist modern city life the author portrayed; 2) dress serves in Joyce's masterpiece as a further means for reflecting on the characters' identity –both with regards to Joycean focus on the body and in the construction of the character's self in relation to others; and 3) fashion is another item that displays Joyce's subversion of the traditional distinction between high and popular art.

James Joyce's *Ulysses* has been described as the novel that has most successfully depicted the world of modernity to its full extent with its advantages as well as its drawbacks for the modern man and woman. And it was precisely in this context where fashion acquired its privileged position. Elizabeth Wilson has acknowledged that "Fashion, from its origins, [is] urban, metropolitan, essential to the world of modernity, the world of spectacle and mass-communication" (6), and many fashion theorists have dated the democratization and popularization of dress, clothes and fashion in the years between 1890 and 1910, when the mass production of clothes

really took off, both in Britain and America.¹¹ In *Advertising and Commodity Culture in Joyce* (1998), Garry Leonard has studied the extent to which Joyce presented, dramatized and constructed the cultural artifacts generated by advertising, popular culture, and mass production, and even though fashion is not the main focus of the book, clothes, garments and cosmetics are more than occasionally mentioned throughout Leonard's analysis.

It was only to be expected that writers such as Joyce, who paid attention to the materialistic dimension of this modern society, also took into account the world of fashion in his fiction. Consequently, the first and most outstanding function that garments fulfill in his masterpiece is precisely to bear testimony to the consumer culture that prevailed in the new capitalist bourgeois city. Thus, fashionable products (lotions, cosmetics, dresses, underwear, etc.) are advertised and democratically consumed by the middle classes (Molly, Gerty, Bloom, Boylan). And Joyce, profuse in references to garments, cosmetics and accessories, as well as to the magazines and advertisements that recommend them (*The Lady's Pictorial*, *Titbits*, *Princess Novelette*, *Gentlewoman*), and to the new shops where they could be acquired, is quite ambivalent with regard to their effect.

Gerty MacDowell is, undoubtedly, the character who most obviously exemplifies how women were both victimized and benefited by the democratization of fashion and the consumerism of her times. On the one hand, she strives earnestly to fulfill a female ideal by means of clothes, lotions, cosmetics, etc.; but at the same time she can, despite her humble origins, have access to and become part of this new world of fashion (or even art) which, in other periods, would only be available for the well-off:

It was Madame Vera Verity, directress of the
Woman Beautiful page of the Princess

Novelette, who had first advised her to try eyebrowline which gave that haunting expression to the eyes, so becoming in leaders of fashion, and she had never regretted it. Then there was blushing scientifically cured and how to be tall increase your height and you have a beautiful face but your nose? (*U* 13.109-114)

Gerty was dressed simply but with the instinctive taste of a votary of Dame Fashion for she felt that there was just a might that he might be out. A neat blouse of electric blue, selftinted by dolly dyes (because it was expected in the *Lady's Pictorial* that electric blue would be worn), with a smart vee opening down to the division and kerchief pocket (in which she always kept a piece of cottonwool scented with her favourite perfume because the handkerchief spoiled the sit) and a navy threequarter skirt cut to the stride showed off her slim graceful figure to perfection. (*U* 13.148-155)

It is true that Gerty's interest in clothes and adornments is related to the girl's yearning to become an object of male desire and oriented to her matrimonial aspirations, but we also detect the sense of pleasure and self-satisfaction that she finds in the results of her efforts. There is a sense of playfulness and even of power that Gerty undoubtedly enjoys with her ability to project a different image of herself; an idealized image that somehow compensates what fate has denied her, that is, being born a gentlewoman, or having had access to education: "Had kind fate but willed her to be born a gentlewoman of high degree in her own right and had she only received the benefit of a good education Gerty MacDowell might easily have held her own beside any lady in the land and have seen herself

exquisitely gowned with jewels on her brow and patrician suitors at her feet" (*U* 13.99-103). Joyce, in the characterization of Gerty and in her attitude to the world of fashion, displays the whole ambivalence and complexity of the topic.

Molly's attitude towards consumerism, fashion, and dressing is equally or even more complex. As an already married woman, with a more or less successful profession, it is highly relevant to pay attention to her voicing her own dictum on fashion. And what we gather is that, on the one hand, she seems to be uneasy with Bloom's earnest desire that she should accept the latest fashions ("that black closed breeches he made me buy takes you half an hour to let them down wetting all myself" [*U* 18.251-252]), and with the need to follow sartorial dictates:

only I felt rotten simply with the old rubbishy dress that I lost the leads out of the tails with no cut in it but theyre coming into fashion again I bought it simply to please him I knew it was no good by the finish pity I changed my mind of going to Todd and Bums as I said and not Lees it was just like the shop itself rummage sale a lot of trash I hate those rich shops get on your nerves nothing kills me altogether only he thinks he knows a great lot about a womans dress and cooking mathering everything (*U* 18.513-519)

Yet, on the other hand, Molly recurrently muses once and again over the great array of dresses she has or she imagines herself buying:

If I buy a pair of old brogues itself do yo like those new shoes yes how much were they Ive no clothes at all the brown costume and the skirt and jacket and the one at the cleaners 3 whats

that for any woman cutting up this old hat and patching up the other the men wont look at you and women try to walk on you because they know youve no man (*U* 18.469-474)

Molly's varied wardrobe –which comprises, amongst many other garments, a “cream gown,” an “elephantgrey dress,” a “kimono” or a “female suit”– shows her as certainly aware of and interested in fashion. Indeed, on one occasion, she even regrets not taking a photo in a “drapery that [would] never look [...] out of fashion” (*U* 18.1303-1304), for then she would look younger in the picture. Therefore, as for Gerty, for Molly having access to fashion also serves her to minimise some of her most hidden fears and concerns. Thus, if Gerty uses fashionable clothes to disguise her social class and status, Molly's active engagement with fashion answers, on many occasions, to her preoccupation for feeling and looking young.

Notwithstanding, in *Ulysses*, Joyce does not simply associate fashion with women, he also includes men as receptacles of and concerned with the latest vogue in garments. Therefore, not only does Bloom compel Molly to follow the dictates of fashion but, somehow, he also applies them to his own case. Thus, he considers that he needs to begin again with his Sandow exercises. Eugene Sandow, a Prussian subject, born in 1867, was a music hall strongman who became a mass-media phenomenon embodying the celebration of masculine health and male beauty. Eugene Sandow's book *Physical Strength and How to Obtain It* is recurrently mentioned in “Ithaca” as one of the means employed by Bloom so as to improve his physical appearance and recuperate juvenile agility (*U* 17.512-518; *U* 17.1397; *U* 17.1815-1819). Magini and Mulligan are other male characters who also show interest in the topic. Joyce is then questioning the reductive association of fashion with women and their bodies, something on which, as

we have previously mentioned, Virginia Woolf has reflected in *Three Guineas*.

Joyce's incorporation of such a varied array of garments and accessories not only serves the author to reproduce a capitalist modern society, but it should also be interpreted as a further means for subverting the traditional dichotomy high vs. popular art in the novel. As we have already said, this is another of the ambiguities in which, according to Wilson, fashion takes part. In a certainly Wildean style, in Joyce's

Ulysses beauty appears as an end in itself that can be achieved through an aesthetic appropriation of fashion. This idea is exploited to such an extent that James Joyce offers us some descriptions of his characters that recall representations in classic art. This is what happens with the description of Gerty in "Nausicaa":

The Waxen pallor of her face was almost spiritual in its ivorylike purity though her rosebud mouth was a genuine Cupid's bow, Greekly perfect. Her hands were of finely veined alabaster with tapering fingers and as white as lemonjuice and queen of ointments could make them (*U* 13.87-90)

In these lines, Joyce transmits an attractive image of Gerty by resorting to classic ideals of beauty, thus highlighting the association of beauty with classic art which prevails, almost unconsciously, in our minds. Anne Hollander, in her seminal work *Seeing Through Clothes* (1993), has expressed a similar idea when asserting that "the 'natural' beauty of cloth and the 'natural' beauty of bodies have been taught to the eye by art, and the same has been the case with the natural beauty of clothes" (xiii). A similar artistic effect is also detected in certain male figures such as the professor of dancing, Mr Denis J. Maginni, who is presented "in silk hat, slate frockcoat with

silk facings, white kerchief tie, tight lavender trousers, canary gloves and pointed patent boots, walking with grave deportment” (*U* 10.56-58), and even in Blazes Boylan’s fine garments that Molly notices:

He has plenty of money and hes not a marrying man ... lovely stuff in that blue suit he had on and stylish tie and socks with the skyblue silk things on them hes certainly welloff I know by the cut his clothes have and his heavy watch (*U* 18.411-422)

Blazes Boylan, referred to in “Sirens” as “Dandy tan shoe of dandy Boylan socks” (*U* 11.977-978), as well as Denis J. Maginni can be very well related to the aesthetic figure of the Dandy that Elizabeth Wilson describes when she says:

The role of the dandy implied an intense preoccupation with self and self presentation; image was everything, and the dandy a man who often had no family, no calling, apparently no sexual life, no visible means of financial support. He was the very archetype of the new urban man who came from nowhere and for whom appearance *was* reality. His devotion to an ideal of dress that sanctified understatement inaugurated an epoch not of no fashions for men, but of fashions that put cut and fit before ornament, colour and display. The skin-right breeches of the dandy were highly erotic; so was his new, unpainted masculinity. The dandy was a narcissist. He did not abandon the pursuit of beauty; he changed the kind of beauty that was admired. (180)

It seems to us highly significant that the two male characters who, by means of their garments, project the image of the dandy are also linked in one way or another to the world of the arts: dancing in the case of Maginni and music in Boylan's. For these characters, fashion is an art in itself, similarly to how Oscar Wilde conceived it, and therefore we can affirm that, through their equal and even complementary engagement with forms of high art (dance, music) and popular culture (fashion), Joyce is challenging and destabilizing this distinction in the novel. Notwithstanding, Maginni's and Boylan's attires also serve to reinforce their identity as men belonging to the world of the arts. This leads us to the relationship between fashion and identity which, as we have previously seen, Wilson also defines as being ambiguous –“the ambiguity of our identity, of the relation of self to body and self to the world.” As has been acknowledged, this is precisely the most important function that allusions to dress and clothes play in literature, that is, to contribute to the process of characterization. As the editors of the book *Fashion in Fiction* have noted: “What a character wears and how he or she carries his or her clothes speak to the reader in ways that a character's spoken words rarely could [...] they [clothing-fashions] lend tangibility and visibility to character and context, generally simplified and ‘naturalized’ within the construction of an imagined world” (6). The importance of clothes and garments in the process of literary characterization should not be undermined, given that, as Joanne Finkelstein has pointed out in *The Fashioned Self* (1991), “clothing styles and physical appearance, in the absence of any other means [act] as a reliable sign of identity” (128). In fact, in Joyce's *Ulysses* we find a very significant example in this respect, for the identity of the man in the M'Intosh, despite the critics' efforts at fixing it, is reduced to the garment that he is wearing in the novel.

Rosy Aindow has demonstrated how “Integral to our conception of gender, of class and even of nationality, clothing

provides information about its wearer, without the need for other forms of communication” (5). Notwithstanding, the relationship between fashion, dress and identity is also highly ambivalent since, as Entwistle notes, “on the one hand the clothes we choose to wear can be expressive of identity, telling others something about our gender, class, status and so on; on the other, our clothes cannot always be ‘read,’ since they do not straightforwardly ‘speak’ and can therefore be open to misinterpretation” (112). One of the most outstanding ambiguities of fashion in relation to identity has to do with gender since it “dictates rigid rules both for femininity and for masculinity” (Wallenberg xvi), while at the same time “In its fictionality and its playfulness, fashion can also serve to question sexual differences as natural and ‘Real’” (Wallenberg xvi). As Wilson asserts “Fashion is obsessed with gender, defines and redefines the gender boundary” (117), and we would like to add that it also “subverts” or “deconstructs” this boundary. But, first of all, we must recognize the arbitrariness present in our association between clothing and gender. Entwistle has referred to this when she says:

Clothing, as an aspect of culture, is a crucial feature in the production of masculinity and femininity: it turns nature into culture, layering cultural meanings on the body. There is no natural link between an item of clothing and ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’; instead there is an arbitrary set of associations which are culturally specific. Thus the way clothing connotes femininity and masculinity varies from culture to culture; while trousers are commonly associated with men and considered ‘indecent’ for women to wear in the west (until the twentieth century that is) they have been worn

for centuries by women in the Middle East and elsewhere. (144)

In her history of fashion, Wilson explains that until the seventeenth or even the eighteenth century, sexual difference in dress was not strongly marked (117). And we detect that once gender difference was marked by dress in the industrial period, at that very same time, fashion and dress began to be used to unsettle the gender boundaries they were propagating. In *Ulysses* Joyce stages this subversion by theatrically describing the results of cross-dressing and its effect in blurring gender oppositions in the Circe episode where Bella Cohen becomes Bello –“(with bobed hair, purple gills, fat moustache rings round his shaven mouth, in mountaineer's puttees, green silverbuttoned coat, sport skirt and alpine hat with moorcock's feather, his hands stuck deep in his breeches pockets, places his heel on her neck and grinds it in)” (*U* 15.2857-2860)– and where Bello threatens Bloom with turning him into a woman:

BELLO

(Points to his whores) As they are now so will you be, wigged, singed, perfumesprayed, ricepowdered, with smoothshaven armpits. Tape measurements will be taken next your skin. You will be laced with cruel force into vicelike corsets of soft dove coutille with whalebone busk to the diamondtrimmed pelvis, the absolute outside edge, while your figure, plumper than when at large, will be restrained in nettight frocks, pretty two ounce petticoats and fringes and things stamped, of course, with my houseflag, creations of lovely lingerie (*U* 15.2973-2980)

It is in this hallucinatory episode where the characters express their most intimate fantasies, desires and obsessions; and it is here where we discover Bloom's fetishistic attraction towards women's clothes and female lingerie, items that he sometimes goes as far as to try on himself as is revealed here and will be confirmed by Molly Bloom. Bloom's attitude, his interest in fashion, clothes, shopping, and even his intimate ambiguity with regard to women's underwear remark the artificiality of the relationship between fashion and the construction of gendered identities.

Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson, in the "Introduction" to their book *Body Dressing* (2001), assert that "academic interest in the body has not generally focused attention on fashion and dress" (1). Similarly Joyce's interest in the body and in bodily functions have been properly emphasized and even analyzed, but we miss a reflection on the importance of the dressed body in his fiction.

Fashion studies have pointed out that dress enhances sexual attraction since it both reveals and conceals the body (Wilson 91). Entwistle reminds us that "The materials commonly used simultaneously cover and reveal the body, adding sexual meaning to the body that would otherwise not be there. It is often said that nakedness is uninteresting, not 'sexy,' while clothing adds a mystery to the body that makes it all the more provocative" (181). Leopold Bloom seems to agree with this maxim since, on referring to the arousal of sexual desire, he says: "Lingerie does it" (*U* 13.776). Similarly, he observes with admiration how the skirt of a woman moves "The crooked skirt swinging, whack by whack by whack" (*U* 4.164) and he pronounces that "a woman loses a charm with every pin she takes out" (*U* 13.802-803). Notwithstanding, for Bloom male garments are as equally seductive as female clothes, something which is made patently obvious in his description of Boylan's attire: "Us too: the tie he wore, his lovely socks and turnedup trousers. He wore a pair of gaiters the night that first we met.

His lovely shirt was shining beneath his what? Of jet." (*U* 13.800-802)

In *Ulysses*, the male and female characters are equally aware of the sensual potential of clothes. Both Gerty and Molly are very skilful when using their clothes as means of concealing as well as revealing their bodies. Gerty, realizing that Bloom is looking at her, plays with her skirt to the point of making visible her underwear, and Molly announces that she'll "change that lace on my black dress to show off my bubs" (*U* 18.900-901). The same happens with regard to the male characters, who also gain in sexual appeal when properly dressed as Buck Mulligan tells Stephen in the first chapter of the novel, or as we have seen in the case of Blazes Boylan. Bloom is also careful to employ his own clothes as means of both concealing and revealing the body in order to make his appearance more appealing to women: "Were those two buttons of my waistcoat open all the time? Women enjoy it. Annoyed if you don't." (*U* 5.452-453)

We could certainly keep on mentioning instances of the recurrent presence of fashion and garments in Joyce's *Ulysses*, but the already noted ones serve to demonstrate the relevant and different functions that dress plays in the novel, in relation to: the new consumer society and the artistic context of the early twentieth century; the characterization of the characters; and the process of building an identity for them in relation to gender, sexual and social issues. James Joyce was a man of his times, his work is a privileged testimony of the changes brought about by modernity and his emphasis is always on the effect that these novelties impinged on the modern man and woman. In the case of fashion and dress, as the visionary that he certainly was, he foresaw the ambivalent consequences of their democratization in and for the new socio-economic context, their potential as a new popular form of art, and the possibilities as well as the limitations they offered for the average modern man and woman, overcoming in this way the

prejudices of early feminists and leftists. His work, and in particular *Ulysses*, should undoubtedly be seen as a source of inspiration for any specialist in fashion studies or in the sociology of dress applied to literature. It is also very significant that most of the allusions to fashion and dress in modernity and in modernist literature recurrently mention

Virginia Woolf's case and her works, symptomatically forgetting Joyce. Either he is being obviated because he is a difficult author whose work is unknown by these critics or because he is a man and they are perpetuating a prejudice that equates fashion with women when Joyce demonstrated that the revolution brought about by fashion affected women and men alike.

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Notes

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² Even though in the present work the terms "fashion" and "dress" will be used interchangeably, it is worth noting that scholars working under the rubric of Fashion Theory have tended to draw a distinction between these two concepts –see, for instance, Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins' and Joanne H. Eicher's "Dress and Identity" or Joanne Entwistle's *The Fashioned Body*. Literary critics dealing with fashion and dress in literature have also incorporated this distinction into their studies. Thus, in the "Foreword" to the book *Fashion in Fiction: Text and Clothes in Literature, Film and Television*, edited by Peter McNeil, Vicki Karaminas, and Catherine Cole, Louise Wallenberg makes the following precision:

"Fashion's most obvious counterpart is, of course, dress: the very material we put on our bodies, that which we wear next to our skin, [...] Fashion is the 'idea,' the non-real. [...] If fashion is about idealization, striving for a perfection that never can be, then dress is about the actual presenting of the self, which is always a type of constructing the self" (xv). In a similar vein, in the "Introduction" to *Styling Texts: Dress and Fashion in Literature*, Cynthia Kuhn and Cindy Carlson articulate the distinction between fashion and dress by using a literary simile: "dress is to fashion what language is to poetry." (2)

³ This article is part of a series of works in which we intend to analyse the functions of fashion and clothing allusions in Joyce's oeuvre,

following the methodology offered by fashion studies as well as sociological approaches to the study of dress in literature.

⁴ See, for instance, Rosy Aindow's *Dress and Identity in British Literary Culture, 1870-1914*; Jennie Batchelor's *Dress, Distress and Desire: Clothing and the Female Body in Eighteenth-Century Sentimental Literature*; Clair Hughes' *Dressed in Fiction*; Cynthia G. Kuhn's and Cindy L. Carlson's *Styling Texts: Dress and Fashion in Literature*; Peter

McNeil's, Vicki Karaminas' and Cathy Cole's *Fashion in Fiction: Text and Clothing in Literature, Film and Television*; Aileen Ribiero's *Fashion and Fiction: Dress in Art and Literature in Stuart England*; or Catherine Spooner's *Fashioning Gothic Bodies*.

⁵ See, for instance, David Galef's "The Fashion Show in *Ulysses*" or Márcia Lemos' "Trafficking in the Wrong Costume: Cross-dressing in 'Circe.'"

⁶ Rosy Aindow provides a good example in her chapter "Clothing, Class Deception, and Identity in Late Nineteenth-Century Fiction," in Peter McNeil et als., ed., *Fashion in Fiction*, 35-44.

⁷ For a more comprehensive discussion of the Aesthetic movement in dress and of Oscar Wilde's involvement in it, see James Laver's *A Concise History of Costume*.

⁸ Ricardo Navarrete has enlightened us with an analysis of the profusion of shoes and boots that pace the streets of Dublin in *Ulysses* in his study "Así andan en Joyce," a paper delivered at the *XXI Annual Meeting of the Spanish James Joyce Society* that took place in 2010 at the Complutense University of Madrid.

⁹ For more information on early twentieth-century fashions see, for instance, Elizabeth Ewing's *History of 20th Century Fashion*.

¹⁰ In this context, the term "bloomers" refers to a type of female baggy trousers, popularized by the women's rights activist Amelia Bloomer from whom the garment takes its name. In the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, the bloomers were associated with the liberation of women. Yet their wearers were often satirized in different cartoons, and controversies soon aroused as to whether women should or should not wear this type of trousers. See, Tom Greatex's "Bloomer Costume" in Valerie Steele ed., *The Berg Companion to Fashion*, pp. 82-84.

¹¹ See, Joanne Entwistle's *The Fashion Body*; Elizabeth Ewing's *History of 20th Century Fashion* or Elizabeth Wilson's *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*.