

Joyce's Naughty Nausicaa: Gerty MacDowell Refashioned

SUZETTE HENKE

Abstract

This paper extends and significantly reshapes the author's previous study "Gerty MacDowell: Joyce's Sentimental Heroine," published in *Women in Joyce* (1982). The present paper impugns the portrayal of Gerty as a male-constructed vision of female desire, one enacting the strictures of prevailing ideologies and silencing her first through a dominant male narrative voice and after through the interior voice of Bloom. Drawing on related scholarship and copious evidence in "Nausicaa," the paper ultimately sees Joyce unmask consummate fakery on both sides of the gender divide.

As Richard Brown would remind us, James Joyce was writing at a time when the issue of "free love" was a topic of passionate debate among theologians, philosophers, anthropologists, novelists, and political scientists. In 1857, juridical divorce became possible in England and, by the end of the century, the monogamous ideal of Christian marriage was everywhere being questioned. In *James Joyce and Sexuality*, Brown cites a compendium of texts, both literary and political, that must have influenced Joyce's obsessive preoccupation with reforming the notion of modern love. There were such obvious literary sources as Shakespeare's *Othello*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, the dramas of Ibsen, Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, George Moore's *A Modern Lover*, Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*, and Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did*. But Joyce also consulted more arcane texts like M.M. Matharan's book of matrimonial casuistry, *Casus de Matrimonio*, and Dr. Paul Garnier's work on *Onanisme* (Brown 45, 55, 177n.). Both Garnier and Matharan classify all non-reproductive sexuality as perverse and onanistic and condemn, on both moral and theological grounds, the "ejaculation of the semen outside

the vagina . . . to impede reproduction" (56). Joyce's bold celebration of sex for the sake of personal gratification rather than reproduction challenges traditional Judeo-Christian mores and highlights the conjunction of two technically onanistic acts—Bloom's masturbation in "Nausicaa" and Molly's intoxicating intercourse with Boylan during their afternoon tryst on 16 June 1904 (Henke, *Sindbook* 172).¹ An advocate of "free love" in his fashion, Joyce also insisted that love, either conjugal or profane, should be imbued with emotional tenderness. Stripped of saccharine romanticism and sentimentality, love, the "opposite of hatred" (*U* 12.1485), entails the moral responsibility of care and compassion, or the sincere desire "to wish [another] well" (*E* 88). Joyce was indeed a rebel and an iconoclastic artist who, in defiantly asserting intellectual marginality, paradoxically revised modernism's aesthetic representation of the sexual practices of everyday life.

In exploring the kind of radical, polymorphously pluralistic critique of "Nausicaa" that I think possible, I would like to take yet another look at that much gazed upon, highly specularized figure of Joyce's "Nausicaa," Gerty MacDowell. My analysis is framed by the speculum of Luce Irigaray's *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Julia Kristeva's "Stabat Mater," and Jacques Lacan's *Seminar XX, Encore*. This revised version of Gerty constitutes my own attempt to re-frame and re-conceptualize (*encore* and *en corps*) the portrait of "Joyce's Sentimental Heroine" earlier delineated in my essay on "Nausicaa" in *Women in Joyce*.²

In defining the sexual *jouissance* of the woman who does not exist as a universal category, who is not-all (*pas-tout*), Jacques Lacan insists that "there must be a *jouissance* which goes beyond" the phallic function—an ecstasy embodied in the Spanish mystic Saint Theresa and replicated by an Italian male sculptor. "[Y]ou only have to go and look at Bernini's statue in Rome," Lacan tells us, "to understand immediately that she's coming, there is no doubt about it" (147). To this enthusiastic exhortation, Luce Irigaray responds with a series of incredulous questions: "In Rome? So far away? To look? At a statue? Of a saint? Sculpted by a man? What pleasure are we talking about? Whose pleasure?" (*This Sex* 91). For Lacan, Irigaray charges, woman "has to remain a body without organs" (90), a statue whose model is indisputably phallic. "This model, a *phallic* one, shares the values promulgated by patriarchal society and culture, values inscribed in the philosophical corpus: property, production, order, form, unity, visibility . . . and erection" (86). But who will erect the statue of woman? And who will

appropriate the product of its phallogocentric replication?

Joyce's Gerty MacDowell—like Ceppi's virgins, or like those goddesses who graced the entrance to the National Library in Bloom's day—is a statue, with ivory skin and alabaster arms: "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 finely veined alabaster with tapering fingers" (*U* 13.87-90). The product of a cultural masquerade, she is the fantasized icon of male desire projecting a phallic image of female desirability onto a sculpted figure of virginal lack. "Virgins go mad in the end," Bloom hypothesizes (*U* 13.781). "Did she know what I? Course. Like a cat sitting beyond a dog's jump" (*U* 13.908-9). "Still it was a kind of language between us" (*U* 13.944). But, one might ask, *whose* language? Do Gerty's lips (vaginal or vulval) speak together? Or are they silenced by the manipulative overlay of male desire that ascribes mutuality to a specular image mirroring a culturally constructed vision of feminine fantasy?³

As a Bloomian projection of [the] "woman," Gerty McDowell is inscribed in Joyce's parodic text as a male-sculpted figure of female desire, a cracked looking-glass of phallic sexuality. She functions as a mirror, a *tabula rasa* or blank screen for the inscription of male masturbatory titillation. When Bloom recalls seeing those "[m]utoscope pictures in Capel street: for men only," he wonders: "Do they snapshot those girls or is it all a fake?" (*U* 13.794-96). Not only has Gerty been shot (even lamed); she has been psychologically cut up into a panoply of fetishistic images, then re-assembled as a bizarre simulacrum of female desire mimicking the mutoscope temptress—a body without organs, a statue, a fake. In *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity*, Katherine Mullin shrewdly analyzes the "intimate intertextual relationship between mutoscope erotica and 'Nausicaa'" and shows how Joyce's ostensibly innocent protagonist self-consciously "imitates the mutoscope's unique mechanics of viewing, striking poses which dissect her gradual gestures of disclosure to provide opportunities for uninterrupted scrutiny" (151-53).⁴

Gerty has been interpellated (*à la* Althusser) into the ideological state apparatuses of reproduction—marriage, home, and happy family, bolstered by a battery of tawdry clichés. She acts "just like a second mother in the house, a ministering angel" (*U* 13.325-26). Replicating the womanstory of her own mother, whose life has degenerated into splitting headaches eased by an addiction to snuff, Gerty aspires to an altruistic ideal of domestic service steeped in the British economy of sterling and

“worth its weight in gold” (*U* 13.326). A woman’s gentle ways will be rewarded in the marketplace, where the female heart can be cut out and weighed (like Shylock’s pound of flesh), rewarded with its weight in gold, but murdered in the process of dissection.

Gerty tentatively constructs a filial subject position by subjugating herself to the rhetoric of her culture’s dominant ideologies.⁵ The dutiful daughter, claims Irigaray, “remains forever fixated on the desire for the father, remains subject to the father and to his law, for fear of losing his love, which is the only thing capable of giving her any value at all” (*This Sex* 87). “Poor father!” thinks Gerty. “With all his faults she loved him still” (*U* 13.311-312). To love her father, Gerty must see him as a still photograph, a specular projection of the name and law of the Father, detached from his inebriate, aggressive activities and cut off from those “deeds of violence caused by intemperance” (*U* 13.298). She has remained a mute witness to scenes which she visualizes in still photographic frames blurred by the evasive rhetoric of deictic dislocation, the confusion of mixed metaphors whose vehicles have conveniently misplaced their tenors. Wracked by the clutches of demon drink, the *paterfamilias* of the MacDowell clan succumbs to olfactory disorientation and, “a prey to the fumes of intoxication,” is liable to “forget himself completely” (*U* 13.299-300). He becomes vertiginous, and, while not-himself, “lifts his hand to a woman” in a way that, euphemistically, transgresses the ethics of kindness.

Loath to brand her father as the “lowest of the low,” Gerty cannot directly name his practice of wife-battering, which she wraps in a veil of clichés that protect the phallic law and the word of the un-named progenitor. Gazing at a phantom, she remains transfixed by the idealized image of a father not-there, a man who has “forgotten himself” when clutched by a demon who robs him of self-control. Gerty cloaks paternal violence in a mask of forgetfulness, using a strategy of rhetorical evasion that defends her from acknowledging the father’s stiff phallic fist, the hard/on reality of domestic aggression that smothers Gerty’s mother and stifles her own autonomy. In opposition to the demon who inhabits her father, Gerty must act as a self-effacing Victorian angel of mercy and altruism. She forgives Dad his inebriate brutality and Bloom his masturbatory display, even as she invokes the Catholic Virgin Mary: “Refuge of sinners. Comfortress [*sic*] of the afflicted. *Ora pro nobis*” (*U* 13.294). Gerty’s use of malapropisms and lower-class discursive formations everywhere betrays the pathos of her illusory spiritual and aristocratic pretensions. As Garry Leonard points out, Gerty, “by virtue

of long and intensive labor, is trying to increase her market value beyond what her economic status can easily maintain” (“Market” 56). About the chivalric aspirations of courtly love, Luce Irigaray queries:

How, then, can there be love, or pleasure of the other? Except by speaking to oneself about it? Circumscribing the abyss of negative theology in order to become ritualized in a style—of courtly love? Brushing against the Other as limit, but reappropriating him/her to oneself in the figures, the carvings, the signifiers, the letters of letters of love. Surrounding, adorning, engulfing, interpellating oneself with the Other, in order to speak oneself: the language of love. (*This Sex* 103)

As an isolated and bereft subject, Gerty longs to conjugate with an amorphous, beloved sexual object cast in the image (the photographic negative) of a father/lover who has spiritually abandoned her. Romantic love becomes the magic copula that promises a holy healing, a transubstantiation of disabling physical impairment into romantic and fetishistic value. “Love laughs at locksmiths” (*U* 13.653)—at the material vicissitudes of chastity belts and deformed limbs or extremities. “She would follow, her dream of love, the dictates of her heart that told her he was the master guide” (*U* 13.670-73). Oedipus, after all, was club-footed, inscribed with the mark of his father’s fear annealed on an infant body and brutally exposed on a Greek hillside. Gerty, like a female Oedipus, seeks the father figure who will heal her wounded spirit by erasing the traces of limping inadequacy. “Then mayhap he would embrace her gently, like a real man, crushing her soft body to him, and love her, his ownest girlie, for herself alone” (*U* 13.439-41).⁶

In analyzing the “idealization of primary narcissism,” the adult fantasy of a lost female corporeality embedded in the *Stabat Mater* of Christianity, Julia Kristeva sets out to anatomize the “Indo-European fascination . . . with the virgin daughter as guardian of paternal power” (161, 163). The Virgin Mother of Catholicism frames “that ideal totality that no individual woman could possibly embody” (171). She is the measure of all things feminine in western culture because the figure of the Virgin, in thirteenth-century France, “explicitly became the focus of courtly love, thus gathering the attributes of the desired woman and of the holy mother in a totality as accomplished as it was inaccessible. Enough to make any woman suffer, any man dream” (171). Courtly love, says Jacques Lacan, “is an altogether refined way of making up for the absence of sexual relation by pretending that it is we who put an obstacle

to it. . . . For the man, whose lady was entirely, in the most servile sense of the term, his female subject, courtly love is the only way of coming off elegantly from the absence of sexual relation" (141).

Bloom dreams, and Gerty suffers the role of *objet petit a*, that fetishized surplus or bodily remainder that reflects the fantasmatic (m)other of masculine desire. A virgin and no mother, Gerty sublimates her own sexual drives in the service of the phallic fantasy of courtly love. She becomes the aesthetic mirror-image of sexual conjugation, a body without organs, a malleable object of scopophilic projection whose fictitious self-presence valorizes the male construction of a fictional subject position. As Garry Leonard explains in another Joycean context, the chivalric lover who worships the virgin/temptress as unattainable icon is actually worshipping his own image—a "mirror reflection of fusion and wholeness outside and previous to the Symbolic Order" ("Question" 466). Elucidating Lacan, Leonard continues: "Femininity is not an essence; it is a representation. As such, it is a constructed identity—constructed by the male subject—and the representation does not contain or account for female desire. He desires *it*—the representation—rather than *her*, because the masquerade of femininity appears to him as a lack-in-being that he gratefully defines as not masculine" ("Question" 470). Paradoxically, a woman "is not 'real' . . . until she learns to masquerade convincingly as a male-defined fantasy" ("Market" 38).

The courtly love ideal so evident in "Nausicaa" subverts physicality and nourishes a dream image of woman's always-already veiled genitalia. *Le sexe*, the virginal (w)hole invaginated in a frightening frame of fantasized castration, the "nothing-to-see," is hidden beneath a protective (fore)skin of Platonic idealism, sutured by the phallic power to deny the contiguity (and cunt-iguity) of masked procreative possibility. The virgin who cannot be touched or penetrated reifies an infinitely deferred *différance* between male and female, an idealized potency untested on the stage of female need and reproductive demand.

Gerty's dysfunctional foot and limping inadequacy signifies her Freudian and fetishistic impotence as a "'marked down' virgin" who is "both an aging beauty and a damaged commodity" (Leonard, "Market" 52). Reduced to a male-generated fetish of the fantasmatic virginal other, she virtually (and virtuously) revels in the safety of sexual alienation by resolutely refusing either to name or to imagine the unmentionable, invaginated space of her own genitalia. Courtly love and sentimentality have psychologically sutured her sex and immobilized erotic drives.

Love, for Gerty (as for the parodist in “Cyclops”), is statically represented in a “grocer’s christmas almanac . . . picture of halcyon days where a young gentleman . . . was offering a bunch of flowers to his ladylove with oldtime chivalry through her lattice window” (*U* 13.334-47). Romance has become an article of consumption in a consumer-oriented society where everything must be seductively packaged, attractively marketed, and successfully sold.⁷ But what is offered in this grocery-store version of antiquated courtship is a still photographic replica of “oldtime chivalry” devoid of sexual turbulence, erotic passion, or the pain of hymeneal defloration. Safely tucked behind a figurative lattice of amorous fantasy, Gerty delights in this sanitized simulacrum of unconsummated desire and uses it to elevate the bodily process of fecal elimination when she goes to the watercloset “for a certain purpose” (*U* 13.340). If music be the food of love, then *kitsch* art becomes (for Gerty, as for Leopold Bloom) the laxative of visceral expulsion. Popular art has a use value insofar as it sanitizes (i.e. de-odorizes) the stench of defecation. The mellifluous, marmalady style of Gerty’s narcissistic meditation subtly disguises the young woman’s terror of what Luce Irigaray would identify as a “mechanics of solids” associated with both the stiff fecal column and the ithyphallic male member.

In Gerty’s sentimental discourse, feces are unmentionable (as is “that place,” the water-closet, where defecation occurs). Menstruation has similarly been sealed in cultural euphemisms, evasively alluded to as “the voice of nature” or “that other thing coming on” (*U* 13.455, 713-14). And the bloody ruptures of defloration and parturition have been fantasmatically expunged from Gerty’s “daydream of a marriage,” with “weddingbells ringing for Mrs Reggy Wylie T. C. D.” (*U* 13.195-6). Gerty fosters a perpetual dream of some future “beau ideal”; but no babies, diapers, swollen mammary glands, or screaming toddlers invade the sanctuary of her “nice snug and cosy little homely house” (*U* 13.239). (Bloom later envisions the reality that Gerty refuses to consider: “Sad however because it lasts only a few years till they settle down to potwalloping and papa’s pants will soon fit Willy and fuller’s earth for the baby when they hold him out to do ah ah. No soft job” [*U* 13.952-55]). Gerty’s naïve, idyllic images of conjugal happiness erase the corporeal demands of compulsory heterosexuality in favor of the prepubescent pleasures of a “good hearty hug” from the father/lover of her dreams, who worships his “dear little wifey” (*U* 13.241-2) through a profound Platonic gaze.

With sex sutured and voice silenced by the specular demands of

courtly love, Gerty cannot speak: she can only gaze. Even the mock, marmalady style of her romantic reverie is framed by a male narrative voice that translates her incipient monologue through a “little cloud of idioms” that Hugh Kenner identifies as the “Uncle Charles Principle” (17), and that Kimberly Devlin associates with the more elaborate “Benstock Principle” (“Romance Heroine” 396). Trapped in the frame of masculine narrative, Gerty is never allowed to speak for herself. Even her discourse is a passive reflection of the thoughts and feelings that permeate her consciousness on 16 June 1904. When the second half of the chapter returns to Joyce’s “initial style” of third-person narrative punctuated by “detumescent” interior monologue, Leopold Bloom reclaims his masculine voice and subject position, even as the attenuated figure of Gerty MacDowell disappears from the scene. Gerty herself is never allowed to articulate a female subject position within the space of this male-constructed monologue.

With her thoughts framed and interpreted by a male master narrative constructed on a satirical pastiche of Maria Susanna Cummins’ *The Lamplighter*, Gerty is as much a statue (i.e., a molded and modeled specular object) as Pygmalion’s Galatea or Bernini’s Saint Theresa. Gagged by the impossible dream of capitalist culture’s prolific representations of female desire, Gerty exhibits herself as a speechless mannequin seductively exposing fetishistic body-parts—the flash of silk stockings on a perfectly formed, though dysfunctional, leg; the curl of her nut-brown hair; the alabaster skin of a painted porcelain doll. She enticingly swings her foot in mechanical rapture, unaware that the disabled limb seals her silence and veils her sexual impotence. Like a cleverly choreographed advertisement for the female body (painted, shot, cut-up and fetishized), she implicitly invites the spectator to “Buy from us. And buy from us” (*U* 13.1124). “See her as she is spoil all,” Bloom observes. “Must have the stage setting, the rouge, costume, position, music” (*U* 13.855-6). Like the mannequin she resembles, Gerty cannot deliver the goods. Her desire has been appropriated by the male gaze, her sexual drives diverted into the safely delimited channels of romantic ritual and courtly love. Like those mutoscope pictures interrogated by Bloom, she is a phony—the artificial construct of a consumer culture that knows how successfully to market convincing simulacra of feminine desire. As Mullin observes, Gerty’s “impersonation of the mutoscope heroine in the ‘cinema of attraction’ through her self-conscious glances to camera hints at her mastery of her role, indicating that her masquerade is the pragmatic response of a skilled performer and her final glance of

desirous collusion her masterstroke" (165).

"Still it was a kind of language between us" (*U* 13.944), thinks Bloom. What kind of language? And whose? The language of gestures? Of mutual illusion?⁸ In cinematic fashion, the couple speak to each other only with their eyes, conversing in a discourse of visual signifiers that depend on a perplexed semiosis of contradictory referents. For Gerty, romantic gratification is always-already deferred by virtue of its exclusive investment in the valorizing male gaze. Looking at Bloom, she feels convinced that his "dark eyes fixed themselves on her again, drinking in her every contour, literally worshipping at her shrine. If ever there was undisguised admiration in a man's passionate gaze it was there plain to be seen on that man's face" (*U* 13.563-66). In contrast to the "nothing to be seen" of female sexuality, male passion allegedly manifests itself as "plain to be seen," transparently inscribed and openly demonstrative. What can clearly be seen is nevertheless subject to obfuscation and misrecognition. The language of gesture must be read and interpreted by the spectator who attributes symbolic meaning to ambiguous appearances that ostensibly present themselves plainly to view. "The eyes that were fastened upon her set her pulses tingling. She looked at him a moment, meeting his glance, and a light broke in upon her. Whitehot passion was in that face, passion silent as the grave, and it had made her his" (*U* 13.689-92).

Bloom's dark, inscrutable visage magically emits pulsions that spark the fireworks of Gerty's repressed sexual drives.⁹ Suddenly blinded (like Saul) by an epiphanic light, Gerty/Eve responds to the devilish temptation of her seducer's piercing glance: "He was eying her as a snake eyes its prey. Her woman's instinct told her that she had raised the devil [of an erection] in him" (*U* 13.517-18). Blushing a "glorious rose," Gerty deliberately avoids looking at or consciously acknowledging Bloom's tumescence. She averts her eyes from the rising phallus and mentally represents male passion in a euphemistic language applicable to the "naughty boy" that Bloom (along with his pen-pal Martha Clifford) believes himself to be. Gerty self-consciously displays her most enticing bodily part, "her graceful beautifully shaped legs . . . supple soft and delicately rounded" (*U* 13.698-99). After all, if sin depends on visual exposure, then the seductive pantomime remains innocuous because "there was no-one to see only him and her" (*U* 13.697). Only after the "hotblooded" suitor has shot his rising bolt (or Roman candle) does he (along with the reader) realize that the fetishistic commodities Gerty has so tantalizingly displayed are "damaged goods": "Tight boots? No. She's

lame! O!" (*U* 13.771). At this moment of mock epiphany, Bloom feels smugly triumphant in terms of market exchange: "Anyhow I got the best of that. . . . Thankful for small mercies. Cheap too. Yours for the asking" (*U* 13.789-90). "Did me good all the same," he muses, punctuating his meditation with a profane orison: "For this relief much thanks" (*U* 13.939-40).

Does Gerty, for her part, experience the *jouissance* of orgasm? Her pleasure seems limited to the visual gratifications of specular arousal: "she let him and she saw that he saw and . . . he couldn't resist the sight of the wondrous revealment half offered" (*U* 13.731-2). As Bloom looks, masturbates, and ejaculates, Gerty takes pleasure from the phallic arousal of her captivated suitor. It is clear, however, that she has entered into a male-defined, scopoc economy that consigns her to sexual passivity.¹⁰ Gerty is, in the words of Luce Irigaray, a woman destined to remain a "beautiful object of contemplation. While her body finds itself thus eroticized, and called to a double movement of exhibition and of chaste retreat in order to stimulate the drives of the 'subject,' her sexual organ represents *the horror of the nothing to see*. A defect in this systematics of representation and desire" (*This Sex* 26). As Irigaray remarks, "Woman's desire would not be expected to speak the same language as man's." In the sexual imaginary of western culture, the female "is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man's fantasies. That she may find pleasure there in that role, by proxy, is possible, even certain. But such pleasure is above all masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own" (*This Sex* 25).

Like Jacques Lacan, the Joycean narrator of "Nausicaa" could implicitly ejaculate, with voyeuristic delight: "[S]he's coming, there is no doubt about it" (Lacan 147). And Bloom, thinking about the scent of Gerty's heliotrope perfume, muses: "Took its time in coming like herself, slow but sure" (*U* 13.1016). Joyce, Bloom, and the narrator all connive in creating the illusion that Gerty has experienced sexual orgasm, and that the sheer excitement of erotic titillation has (re)activated the fuse of female ecstasy. To some readers, however, this orgasmic attribution might seem a frivolous projection of the male authorial imagination. Gerty's climactic outcry emerges from a narrative construct linguistically feigned by male mediation (perhaps an unprincipled Uncle Charles): "She would fain have cried to him chokingly . . . the cry that has rung through the ages" (*U* 13.735-6). As Bloom's "rocket sprang and bang shot blind blank and O! . . . and it gushed out of it a stream of rain gold hair threads" (*U* 13.736-9), Gerty is left high and dry on the rocks, pining on

the strand for an illusory dream of romantic consummation, as well as financial and conjugal rescue. Her imaginary cry is muffled, not in orgasmic rapture, but in the painful moans of unsatisfied desire. Speaking through a fog of disappointment and a masquerade of innocent self-exoneration, she casts “a pathetic little glance of piteous protest, of shy reproach” (*U* 13.742-3). After a “sweet forgiving” half-smile, Gerty fades from the text in the guise of a “jilted beauty” and goes forth bravely to face a bleak future that bodes little more than spinsterhood, rejection, barrenness and emotional frustration. As either style or character, Gerty hardly seems a satisfied woman in any sense of the word.¹¹

The ideology of courtly love fosters a panoply of illusions doomed to remain frustrated in a mocking ritual of (mis)recognition. Bloom’s phallus rises and explodes; but the detritus of his emission signifies the onanistic infertility of a libidinal non-exchange. Bloom has achieved a sexual satisfaction that temporarily valorizes his manhood. Projecting his voyeuristic desire onto the specular image of a virginal icon, he constructs an attractive picture of his own sexual desirability through the mirrored and mimicked excitement evidently expressed by Gerty. His “manhood”—along with a (mis)construed bourgeois sexual identity—is a fiction contingent on the fabulated construction of an admiring, subservient female who desires him to desire her and who, in turn, arouses an economy of demand and satisfaction that allows Bloom to believe he has gotten the best of an illicit and morally suspect transaction. He appropriates Gerty’s malleable sexuality as a visual stimulus that can be used, abused, and discarded. Outside the carnivalesque stage of fictional representation, such male masturbatory exploitation of a woman as scopophilic object is usually experienced by the objectified female as psychologically demeaning—or, at worst, as an aggressive act of exhibitionism tantamount to symbolic rape.

Gerty willingly colludes in her own victimization because she has already been seduced by a mass-market economy that defines her body as a vendable commodity. She remains for Bloom, as for the reader, a sexual/textual icon of filial docility and female castration. According to Jane Gallop, the castrated woman, reduced to “phallic measures,” functions as “the guarantee against man’s castration anxiety. She has no desires that don’t complement his, so she can mirror him, provide him with a representation of himself which calms his fears and phobias about (his own potential) otherness and difference, about some ‘other view’ which might not support his narcissistic overinvestment in his penis” (Gallop 70). Having bought into the male-constructed ideology of female

desire, Gerty sells herself cheap on an open sexual market. Forever seeking a beau ideal, an elusive father/lover who will love her for herself alone and overlook as inconsequential the physical defect of her lameness, Gerty knows that “the Father, possessor of the phallus, must desire the daughter in order to give her value” (Gallop 70).

“Contrary to phallic veiling,” writes Gallop, “feminine discourse reveals the sex organ” (31). Feminine sexuality, she tells us, is immediate, olfactory, and concentric, in contrast to the mediated, sublimated, and phallogocentric sexuality of the male. Analyzing the “smelly footnotes” of *Civilization and its Discontents*, in which Freud celebrates the triumph of eye over nose, of visual stimuli over olfactory excitation, Gallop concludes that the “‘odor di femina’ becomes odious, nauseous, because it threatens to undo the achievements of repression and sublimation, threatens to return the subject to the powerlessness, intensity and anxiety of an immediate, unmediated connection with the body of the mother” (27). Ironically, it is Leopold Bloom who, in the second half of “Nausicaa,” adopts the primitive (female) role of naming *le sexe* that remains veiled through the gestures of courtly love. He retreats from the visual, oculo-centric economy dominant in the first section of the episode and, stimulated by the scent of Gerty’s cheap heliotrope perfume, meditates on the sensuous pleasures of olfactory seduction. It is he who articulates the *odor di femina* that Gerty disguises and that Freud denigrates as a sign of atavistic attraction.¹²

As if awakened from a scopophilic dream, Bloom re-envisioned Gerty from the parallax perspective of postorgasmic calm. “Poor girl!” he thinks sympathetically. “That’s why she’s left on the shelf and the others did a sprint” (*U* 13.772-73). He wonders if Gerty is “near her monthlies” and recapitulates a string of old wives’ tales about menstruation: “Turns milk, makes fiddlestrings snap. Something about withering plants” (*U* 13.826). The smell emitted by a menstruating woman reminds him of “[p]otted herrings gone stale” (*U* 13.1033). Like Freud, Bloom realizes that animals are attracted to one another by olfactory stimuli—the language of sniffs and smells, as opposed to the visual economy of gestures and glances. Despite his apparent distaste for menstrual blood, he identifies with a feminine “mechanics of fluids” and seems fascinated by the possibility of olfactory communication. Like the family cat, he can recognize his wife Molly’s “smell in a thousand. Bathwater too. Reminds me of strawberries and cream” (*U* 13.1025-26). (This olfactory attraction, like so much else, is later perverted in the expressionistic drama of “Circe,” when Boylan’s sexual advances are

welcomed by Madame Marion Bloom in her bath). Curious about his own “mansmell,” Bloom inserts his nose into his shirt and sniffs until he gets a whiff of lemon soap. He evidently revels in the male and female secretions that Freud puritanically expunged from his version of the civilized sexual economy purportedly characteristic of modernity.

Although Bloom momentarily constructs an idealized female figure in the image of male desire, he returns the text to a more balanced, concentric mode of sexuality when he freely acknowledges Gerty’s (and implicitly, Molly’s) genital (w)hole. Having exploited Gerty for the satisfaction of his own tumescent drives, he nonetheless longs for the primitive, polymorphously perverse sensations associated with the fantasy of a phallic (m)other whose virginity has been ruptured, whose body flows with mammary fluids and sensual excretions that reek of that prohibited *odor di femina* ousted by Freud from his catalogue of legitimate bodily pleasures. Bloom’s own repressed desires have been articulated to a feminine register of sensual pleasure and semiotic pulsions, of concentric longings for preoedipal gratification. His adult fantasies must be re-inscribed on the body of the phallic (m)other; and his sensuous needs are such that they will never fully be satisfied by a fabulated *femme* modeled on pornographic mutoscope pictures or the romanticized protagonist of the *Princess* novelette, Gerty MacDowell.

As either style or character, Gerty definitely gets short shrift in a male epic narrative that erases her subject position and dismantles her dreams through the sentimental fragmentation of a diffuse, parodic, and paranomasic discourse that conceals more than it ever reveals. What is startling, however, is Joyce’s skillful manipulation of a “jammy, marmalady” prose style towards the revelation of a surprisingly sympathetic character drowning in a welter of commodity fetishes and consumer-culture myths. Like most young women in contemporary society, Gerty falls short of the ideal standards of illusory physical perfection demanded by the phallomorphic erections of masculine desire. Satirizing the societal fantasies and fairytale illusions that have generated Gerty’s adolescent romanticism, Joyce playfully deconstructs sexual myths and erotic stereotypes produced on both sides of the gender divide. Subtly inscribed in his own pastiche of sentimental fiction is a counter-ideology that assumes we are all unwitting commodities of exchange in a market economy contingent on lies, fakery, Oedipal illusion, and sexual exploitation.¹³ If the ideological state apparatuses that construct contemporary notions of gender and romantic love spare neither sex, then at least one can laugh at the monstrous cultural effects of female

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narcissism and make fun of male phallocratic authority through the powerful and subversive lens of Joyce's carnivalesque comedy.

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Notes

¹ “Both couplings are onanistic in Garnier’s sense,” argues Brown (62). As Henke earlier observed in *Joyce’s Moraculous Sindbook*, “Molly’s coition with Boylan has been just as infertile as Leopold’s voyeurism. . . . Bloom empties his seed on the sand; Boylan expels his on the bed sheet. Both men are technically guilty of onanism, for in both cases, the spilled seed is wasted for procreation” (172). Although Molly allows Boylan to ejaculate within the “natural female organ” the last of the three, four, or five times they make love, she quickly takes contraceptive precautions via a douche designed to “wash out” semen from the womb.

² See Suzette Henke, “Gerty MacDowell: Joyce’s Sentimental Heroine,” in *Women in Joyce*, eds. Henke and Unkeless.

³ As Margot Norris reminds us in *Joyce’s Web*, the voice that describes Gerty in “Nausicaa” might well be construed as a “phantom narrator constructed by Gerty’s imagination to produce the language of her desire, . . . and that she equates with art. Her narration therefore represents Gerty not as she is, . . . but as she would like to be,” and as she might wish an author “to write about her” in a work of romantic literature (169). In “Women on the Market,” Garry Leonard notes that in “Nausicaa,” Joyce’s women reflect the desperate social and economic constraints of 1904 Dublin insofar as they “become the equivalent of mass-produced commodities” and “must learn to exhibit themselves to the male observer/consumer” (28). “Gerty’s extraordinary attention to dressing in the style dictated by fashion magazines . . . is a strategy of increasingly desperate shrewdness” in what must be understood as a “ruthless sexual marketplace” (29) that inaugurates a “complex scenario of voyeurism and exhibitionism” (31).

⁴ Norris observes that Gerty “overdetermines her roles by playing, albeit in reverse, the parts of both Pygmalion and Galatea, transforming her living desiring self into a beautiful frozen sculpture” (*Joyce’s Web* 178). “Any woman,” says Garry Leonard, “who ignores advertising is not . . . a ‘real’ ‘woman.’ In this disempowering equation, a woman is not ‘real’ . . . until she learns to masquerade convincingly as a male-defined fantasy” (“Market” 38). See also Joan Rivière, “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” and Mullin’s provocative chapter entitled “Making a spectacle of herself: Gerty MacDowell through the mutoscope” (140-170). Mullin makes a convincing case that “Bloom’s erotic reverie is inspired by a contemporary motion picture device containing a sequential series of photographs mounted on a cylinder” (145). “By displacing [Cummins’] *The Lamplighter* with the mutoscope,” she suggests, “‘Nausicaa’ argues for the belatedness and obsolescence of social purity’s imagined ‘young person’” (144). “Its way of seeing provides a remarkably acute and culturally loaded model for the onanistic, voyeuristic exchange” Joyce

imitates through tongue-in-cheek pastiche.

⁵ As critics like Garry Leonard, Jennifer Wicke, and Margot Norris have pointed out, these ideologies are as much constructed by consumer fetishism as they are imbricated in the cultural capital of religion and mythology. Leonard describes the lady's magazine of 1904 as the "relentlessly real 'owner's manual' that an Irish woman in Joyce's time must scrupulously consult if she hopes to maximize her limited opportunities in the overcrowded sexual marketplace" ("Market" 37). Norris explains that the "myths of 'Nausicaa' explore mythological allegories that wed sexuality to aesthetics ('The Trial of Paris,' for example) that naturalize an intrinsic connection between conventionalized notions of 'beauty' and sexual desire into gender and class ideologies shaping social institutions (courtship, romance, marriage, prostitution) as well as artistic institutions" (167). "Nausicaa," in fact, "is the spectacle of pulp fiction wanting to be a classic, because 'high' art sets standards and aspirations that are internalized by 'low art', and that condemn its consumers to a perpetual cultural frustration" (168).

⁶ For more about Gerty's idealized paternal fantasies and the figure of Philip Amory from Cummins' *The Lamplighter*, see Kimberly J. Devlin, *Joyce's "Fraudstuff"* (67-81) and "The Romance Heroine Exposed," as well as Henke, "Gerty MacDowell."

⁷ Leonard situates Gerty in the context of "a commodity culture where countless articles began to be manufactured and advertised with reference to the human body" ("Market" 44). "The commercial equation is clear: a female must become a consumer in order to package herself as a 'woman'—in order to appear as 'real' and 'valuable' to a male consumer" (39). "Gerty's limp is the one physical attribute she has which mars the syntax of her conversation as a commodity" (49).

⁸ Wendy Steiner remarks: "Bloom watches Gerty seated on the beach; Gerty watches Bloom watching her. . . . Each creates the other by creating the other's response, inducing him or her to display and to desire. . . . Each character projects a fantasy of the other in the course of this subject-object interplay—Gerty through the fallen romance clichés of ladies' journals, Bloom through the primordial symbolism of femininity and the homely wisdom of his own experience. . . . Gerty and Bloom here demonstrate the problem of intersubjectivity through the model of vision common to painting and romance—the temporary appropriation of another solely by looking" (98).

⁹ According to Kimberly Devlin, Gerty "may try desperately to suppress her erotic impulses, but she is ultimately unsuccessful. She recognizes with pleased composure the pleasure Bloom gains from his voyeurism; she is more hesitant to acknowledge the voyeuristic titillation *she* derives from surreptitiously watching Bloom watch her. Her visual arousal becomes clear, however, when

she boldly and directly confronts his interested gaze” (“Romance Heroine” 392). “She pretends not to notice the male gaze fixed upon her, . . . feigning romantic reflection and feminine unself-consciousness. . . . [Her] devious concealment of the viewing self masks its actual voyeurism, the covert visual pleasure Gerty derives from watching Bloom watch her” (“Female Eye” 135-36).

¹⁰ “Trying to hide her own pleasure,” says Devlin, “Gerty attempts to turn herself into a sex object, an entity that excites desire but has no desire of its own . . . [as] a pleasing visual image” (“Romance Heroine” 393). Devlin accuses Gerty of “casting a veil, so to speak, over her own watching eye. Even when she later exposes her drawers, . . . she is . . . ostensibly watching the pyrotechnic show, pretending not to notice the more proximate human fireworks just down the strand. The duplicitous young woman turns herself into an invisible eye” (“The Female Eye” 135-36). “Gerty’s eye/I is aimed—however obliquely—at sexual stimulation, surveillantly waiting for her friends to exit so that she and Bloom can get on with their mutual seduction. . . . It is this prurient and finally compromising female eye that Bloom does not see.” In this respect, Bloom is ironically blindsighted by a “delusory site of sight (a deceptive subject, her vision in itself, the voyeuristic eye/I that Gerty hides)” (137). Bloom is so thoroughly imbricated in the voyeuristic role of lascivious male subject that he cannot envisage Gerty as a complicitous “voyeur or recognize the full extent of her own visual pleasure, refusing to see her as the pruriently viewing subject, himself as the exhibitionistic object” (138). In Devlin’s judgment, Bloom acknowledges “the scopophilic dimension of Gerty’s gaze only in the unconscious fantasies of ‘Circe,’ where he suddenly sees the young temptress as a voyeur” (138).

¹¹ In *Paperspace*, Patrick McGee insists that “any critical reading of this episode will have to decide on whether to treat Gerty MacDowell as a character or a style” (86). In a letter dated 8 July 1983, Richard Ellmann, reacting to my essay on “Nausicaa” in *Women in Joyce*, queried: “Will you really deprive Gerty of her orgasm? . . . I think it would be wrong to say that she doesn’t show signs of being postorgasmic.”

¹² Brown notes that Joyce’s library contained a French text entitled *Le Parfum de la femme*. Its author, a physician named Galopin, offers “a loosely psychosexual account of the importance of the sense of smell” and compares the odor of onanism to “rancid butter,” in contrast to Bloom’s analogy between his own spilled semen and the smell of “celery sauce” (53)

¹³ For more on Joyce and consumerism, see Jennifer Wicke, *Advertising Fictions*, and Garry Leonard, *Advertising and Commodity Culture in Joyce*.