

## *Fulgens, Singularis, Sacra: The Many Facets of Beauty in “Nausicaa”*

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### *Abstract*

Tommy Caffrey’s “fancy” bib may stand as a metaphor for the decorative, recycled kind of beauty of the first part of the 13<sup>th</sup> episode. After the Joycean digestion of much sentimental literature, it suggests the author’s “aesthetics of nausea” although beauty also unexpectedly appears as judgmental, sacred and unique. After re-evaluating Gerty as a commodity, we reach the conclusion that her excessive embellishment and the staging of her high “persona” is her career. Being born lame and in the context of a ruthless marriage “marketplace,” her survival as a woman depends on the richness of her displays, as beauty can not only be life-saving, but the eventual, propelling force that leads to a much dreamt of, future home.

**A**lthough many aspects concerning beauty are visible in the lexicon, style and techniques in the thirteenth episode, beauty, as traditionally depicted by sculptors and painters throughout the centuries, also emerges from human bodies. It has become a legend, for example, the way Leonardo da Vinci used to walk around the streets of Florence, in a frenzied state, chasing beautiful eyes and neat

profiles in order to depict them as angels' and Madonnas' features. Beauty induces us to repeat and multiply the object perceived, as Gerty MacDowell senses in "Nausicaa": "How moving the scene there in the gathering twilight...she could see far away the lights of the lighthouses so picturesque *she would have loved to do with a box of paints...*" (U 363; my emphasis). When the eye sees something beautiful the hand wants to draw it; or take pictures of it, as the thousands of photographs taken daily of the Taj Mahal, the *Mona Lisa*, or the Niagara Falls attest. It is precisely the attractiveness of beauty as a natural device that is used for reproducing the species. The bee is attracted to the strikingly beautiful yellow pistils of the wild poppy in order to pollinate it; the female peacock is attracted by the multicoloured feathers of the proud male; or men, by the female's sinuous curves or an alluring face. As Elaine Scarry observed: "Beauty, as both Plato's *Symposium* and everyday life confirm, prompts the begetting of children: when the eye sees someone beautiful, the whole body wants to reproduce the person" (4).<sup>1</sup> Thus, trendy hairstyles, colourful and appealing clothes, perfumes and cosmetics may, deep down, correspond to the human need to reproduce. Beauty, then, inevitably leads to cupidity and the possession of the appetising being, albeit in order to repeat it in another body. Therefore, the aim of this essay is to examine the unexpected patterns and nuances that beauty creates in Joyce's "Nausicaa": from the compulsive need to mimic to the need to assert body and life; since beauty can also be life-affirming.

Among the many features traditionally ascribed to beauty, there is a less obvious one which is its capacity to incite debate, comparison, judgement or selection. The most famous examples are the beauty contests that take place all over the world, the debates on aesthetics and art criticism in magazines and TV shows or, in the case of *Ulysses*, when a mirror imaginatively comforts a much upset Gerty MacDowell: "You are lovely, it said" (U 351). But beauty

also demands classifications, ranks, positions and top places; such as when Snow White's stepmother asks: "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, / Who's the fairest of them all?" (Gifford 1989: 387).<sup>2</sup> Examples abound in the ancient legends and mythologies of the world of judgements of beauty. A well known example in Greek mythology is the story of the judgement of Paris between three goddesses. Beauty not only instigates public debate, but also creates an intimate one in our own minds. We can stop admiring things that we once considered beautiful and striking just as we can suddenly begin to notice the beauty in a painting or poem that we once considered ugly or without appeal.

Aesthetic judgement, then, will be one of the most obvious aspects related to beauty that the reader has to face in the first section of "Nausicaa." The adjective 'beautiful' and all its synonyms, such as 'lovely,' 'charming,' 'nice,' 'fancy' or 'pretty' are constantly applied to beings, objects and processes since they appear frequently in the sentimental literature that Joyce mimics. This happens especially with reference to Gerty MacDowell: "She was pronounced beautiful by all who knew her..." (*U* 348). She also had: "beautiful eyes, a charm few could resist" (*U* 348). Or in the grip of a strong emotion her throat became: "...so flawless, so beautifully moulded it seemed one an artist might have dreamed of" (*U* 362). Even her future family home had to possess: "a beautifully appointed drawingroom..." (*U* 352). Furthermore, one of the "exasperating spoilt brats," Tommy Caffrey, cried beautiful, big tears and he had a "fancy bib." And "fancy" is, probably, also in a negative sense, the most appropriate adjective to describe the way beauty is represented to excess in this first section.<sup>3</sup> However, its application to a bib, used, amongst other things, to catch a child's food, dribble or vomit, suggests "the aesthetics of nausea" as a metaphor for the writer's procedures in the first part of the chapter, which go from "the digestion" of much of the female sentimental literature to Joyce's own personal recreation of it. The adjective "fancy" can also be applied in

the sense of ‘ornate,’ ‘decorative,’ or ‘embellished,’ with a suggestion, therefore, of something redundant, an unnecessary addition, a certain excrescence. It is the kind of beauty produced by amateur writers, many of whom write novelettes or sentimental trash. The beautiful, gathering twilight, the lovely chants, Gerty’s exquisite clothes and buckled shoes all have the superficial and conventional quality of a picturesque seaside resort in a flashy watercolour, which is intended to appeal and be sold quickly. It is a cheap, unoriginal, clichéd form of representation that bears a fleeting, chocolate-box beauty which is doomed –unlike the enduring work of art– to be forgotten and to disappear.

There is another aspect of beauty which we often apply to an object that is different from others of its kind or class. We tend to consider as beautiful something that is special and unique. Odysseus, for example, in Homer’s narrative, finds Princess Nausicaa unique when he meets her on the beach. Thus, beauty is something which is recognised through the senses due to its individuality, precision and tangible detail. As Vladimir Nabokov used to say when referring to fiction: “The details, the divine details.” The most enduring literature, from ancient times onwards, has celebrated the beauty of form and colour precisely through its details. A good example is when, in the epic by Homer, Odysseus is astonished to discover Princess Nausicaa on the seashore and addresses her:

If you are one of earth’s inhabitants,  
how bless you father, and your gentle mother,

.....

Never have I laid eyes on equal beauty  
in man or woman. I am hushed indeed.  
So fair, one time, I thought a young palm tree  
at Delos near the altar of Apollo

—I had troops under me when I was there  
on the sea route that later brought me grief—  
but that slim palm tree filled my heart with  
wonder:  
never came shoot from earth so beautiful.  
So now, my lady, I stand in awe so great  
I cannot take your knees. And yet my case is  
desperate.  
(*Odyssey*, VI, 165-166 and 172-181)<sup>4</sup>

The phrase, “never came shoot from earth so beautiful” tells us of a beautiful object which is concrete and detailed, and also unique. Because it is unique there are no precedents. A person looking upon true beauty, something which is brighter and more perfect than he is, may evoke, as did a character in D’Annunzio’s *Il Piacere*, the unbearable loneliness one feels before true beauty. Like the exhausted Odysseus before Nausicaa, our thoughts are paralysed, suspended. We remain mute in contemplation; we try to murmur words which seem inadequate, clumsy superlatives, torn, broken phrases. Even if the mind is absorbed in contemplation, we look for something to compare it with, a similar item buried in our memory or seen somewhere else a long time ago. But, probably, there will be nothing to compare it with as the object we face is one of a kind. We feel that a particular piece of the world has just been renewed, that an unprecedented and arresting luminosity has emerged suddenly out of the background (like Nausicaa before Odysseus) to greet us. It is like a gleaming gold nugget found in the dark, muddy earth of a dump. Nevertheless, in Homer’s scene, Odysseus manages to find an unusual object with which to compare Nausicaa: “that slim palm tree filled my heart with wonder: / never came shoot from earth so beautiful” (VI, 178–179). So, even though beauty is original and peerless, Odysseus retrieves a past experience that awoke similar aesthetic feelings, a mute wonder, a proper precedent for the beauty of Nausicaa: a

young palm tree he saw in Delos. This precedent is used not to belittle her by the comparison, but to enhance and even magnify, Nausicaa's radiance. What is more, he adds the simile of the shoot to clarify the precise quality of the princess' beauty: green (connoting fertility and naturalness), light and graceful, and associates her with the sacredness of Delos.

Sacredness, according to Elaine Scarry, is one of the key features of beauty (23ff.). Nausicaa, who appears radiant in the Mediterranean light, is compared to a young palm tree growing in the numinous soil of Delos' sanctuary, the birthplace of Artemis and Apollo. Odysseus compares the aesthetic emotion at discovering Nausicaa with the unforgettable feeling he had experienced next to Apollo's shrine, when he saw the unique shoot of a new palm tree. At that time, Odysseus had been involved in a religious pilgrimage before returning to the perilous sea. Gerty MacDowell's beauty is similarly associated with sacredness since it springs from two religious sources. Through the link with Homer's Nausicaa, she is linked to the Greek goddess Artemis. This goddess remained both a virgin and eternally young all her life. She was the prototypical disdainful maiden whose only pleasure was hunting. For the ancients, Artemis personified the moon wandering through the distant mountains (Grimal 1991: 53-54).<sup>5</sup> Joyce's counterpart, Gerty, is also, like Artemis, a virgin and a huntress, whose weapons are cosmetics, a coquettish hat, a blue dress and seductive ways. But she is an unlucky huntress as she sits near the church of Mary Star of the Sea in Sandymount where men are gathered in an abstinent retirement. Her prey, the males that she aims to hunt down and capture, appear symbolically "kidnapped" within the walls of the church, their eyes fixed on the unattainable evanescent figure of the Virgin Mary, the second religious source for Gerty. The association of Gerty, however ironically, with the Virgin Mary makes her too seem unattainable, while her Artemisian quiver, bow and arrows

seem ineffective. This relationship with Mary and Artemis is partly brought out by the introductory description of her:

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 and as white as lemon juice and queen of ointments could make them though... (*U* 321)

First, the adjectives “spiritual,” “ivorylike purity,” “rosebud mouth” would easily bring to mind the Virgin Mary as “tower of ivory” and “mystical rose” are among her attributes in the Litany. “Spiritual” and “purity” are other key features of Mary. On the other hand, “Cupid's bow,” “veined alabaster” combined with “Greekly perfect” allude to the beauty of the classical goddesses. In the crucial scene of her introduction as a character in the narrative, Gerty appears to be a figurative extension of those goddesses that Bloom had seen early on in the National Museum. At the beginning of the chapter, and before Bloom had contemplated Gerty's figure, the female body, to his mind, was still like a cold, marble sculpture of Olympian perfection. However, the urgency of his sexual desire transforms Gerty from a marble statue (a Dublin Galatea partly constructed of consumer items), into a living, seductive woman capable of desire. In the same process, Bloom's mental image of the feminine as marble becomes, like Galatea in the passionate embrace of Pygmalion, a warm woman of flesh and blood.

In this episode, Gerty is also linked to Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty, through allusions to the Greek myth of the Judgement of Paris. This well-known myth tells how Eris, the goddess of discord, threw a golden apple, “the apple of discord,” inscribed with “For the fairest one,” on the table of the lady guests at the wedding of Thetis and Peleus. Hera, Aphrodite and Athena all claimed the apple and Paris was

called upon to judge the beauty contest. He finally awarded Aphrodite the apple, and she, in return, rewarded him with the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen of Sparta, Menelaus' wife, a decision that led to the Trojan War. Weldon Thornton suggested in *Allusions in Ulysses* (1968: 307), that there were several situational similarities between the Judgement of Paris and the narrative of the thirteenth episode.<sup>6</sup>

However, as Margot Norris reminds us, the true "apple of discord" at the centre of the myth is not the disputed sandcastle on the beach, as stated in the text, but the baby's rubber ball that is disputed by the twins Tommy and Jacky. The ball of discord is eventually intercepted by the mysterious man in mourning, but Bloom, now established as Paris in front of the ladies, throws the ball to Gerty, the seated "goddess" who finally receives the apple, as the goddess of beauty, Aphrodite. The ball ends up –in a sexually suggestive way– under Gerty's skirt. So, Bloom, who has already shown a preference for Greek goddesses, also shows his preference for a Venus in disguise. As Margot Norris observes:

Bloom is much like Stephen's friend Lynch, who writes his name on the backside of the Venus of Plaxiteles, or Molly Bloom who falls in love with a plaster statue of Narcissus –"that lovely little statue...theres real beauty and poetry for you I often felt I wanted to kiss him all over also his lovely young cock" (*U* 18. 1349, 1351-52). Bloom has already played Paris earlier in the day when he examined the statues of the goddesses in the museum for rectal orifices. [...] Bloom as Paris, will choose Gerty because she impersonates classical statuary but offers him, unlike the unyielding museum goddesses, a peek at her bottom. But as a figure



of ‘high art’ she remains for him a masturbatory fetish, an object of libidinal rather than metaphysical desire. (44)<sup>7</sup>

The next aspect of beauty is as a greeting. As Elaine Scarry wrote: “At the moment one comes into the presence of something beautiful, it greets you. It lifts away from the neutral background as though coming forward to welcome you –as though the object were designed to ‘fit’ your perception” (25). As though it were also designed to brighten things, to fill them with new colours and mould them with previously uncreated shapes in order to enrich one’s perceptual and emotional field. Princess Nausicaa greets Odysseus, making him hope that he too will be greeted by the Phaeacian people, as he will be by Athena. This idea of beauty as greeting appears in many literary works from the Middle Ages to the present day. In Dante’s *Vita Nuova*, for example –where the idea of beauty as greeting is even a structural principle of the work– and in Joyce’s *Ulysses*. When Lynch announces that he is devoted to beauty, Stephen Dedalus responds by lifting his cap in greeting (*U* 416). But to do so also means to step forward, to partially unveil oneself, to make one’s presence felt to a strange, newly-arrived audience, as with Homer’s Nausicaa. Yet, all the conventions governing the Romantic novel went against the heroine’s intentions to assert and disclose her own beauty. As Kimberly Devlin observed of the heroine of Maria Cummins’ *The Lamplighter* (1854):

When the author describes Gertrude’s appearance, she can establish her “apersonal” distance from her object in order to stress her heroine’s total unawareness of her attractions: ‘Whatever charms these attractions might give her, –and there were those who estimated it highly –it was undoubtedly greatly enhanced by

an utter unconsciousness, on her part, of possessing any attractions at all.' (387)<sup>8</sup>

In "Nausicaa," the narrative fails to keep the traditional distance that the novelette employed with its heroine, even to the point of creating the opposite effect. The descriptions concerning Gerty offer us the impression that she is highly-conscious of her pretty looks. Joyce once again subverts the tradition by making his heroine boldly display herself and offer her charms to the viewers:

Gerty just took off her hat for a moment to settle her hair and a prettier, daintier head of nutbrown tresses was never seen on a girl's shoulders, a radiant little vision, in sooth, almost maddening in its sweetness. You would have to travel many a long mile before you found a head of hair the like of that. (*U* 360)

Even the narrator, in the second part of the passage, contributes ironically to Gerty's showing off. And further on in the novel, Gerty's guile is fully revealed: "Took off her hat to show her hair" (*U* 369). Thus, Gerty, a reader of fashion magazines and beauty columns, who buys beauty products and is very choosy with clothes and personal items (contrary to what Maria Cummins had preached) is highly self-conscious of her well-enhanced physical charms. Furthermore, the episode progresses to reveal Gerty's private frustrations and unfounded compensation fantasies, culminating in physical disclosure, an unexpected sexual exhibition, which reveals the bold, crude heroine behind the paraphernalia of Romantic beauty and the gilded clichés of the novelette.

### **Gerty as a commodity: A re-evaluation**

However, one of the attributes of beauty, namely, that the beautiful object is unique and without precedent (hence the source of originality in a work of art) cannot be applied to Gerty. This young woman, by consuming the products that thousands of other women consume, is similar to all of them and, therefore, utterly unoriginal. Homer's seaside girls are not so far removed from *Ulysses*': "those girls, dear girls, those lovely seaside girls /...their way to the board they make" (Gifford 1989: 76). But as this music hall song goes on: "You fall in love of course upon the spot, / But not with one girl, always with the / lot" (Gifford 1989: 76). Beauty does not appear as an unprecedented attribute, but as something commonplace and manufactured. In this era (whether in 1904 or nowadays) of frantic mechanical reproduction, for a woman to be beautiful may mean that she easily loses her uniqueness and becomes just another consumer product among thousands. A woman in the "Dublin marriage market," therefore, had to develop a marketable ego, had to become another commodity.

Only famous products which improve a woman's minor flaws can provide the necessary femininity and lustre to make them desirable enough to attract the male gaze. Both advertisements and magazine articles advise women to construct a superior, ideal ego that has partly, and already, been created for them. A certain standard of beauty, for example, is attained because a woman uses certain highly-advertised products. Just as the Virgin Mary's image is composed of a constellation of divine attributes, so Gerty's "higher ego" and "higher, ideal position in life" is made up of consumer products such as the one that "the queen of ointments" (*U*286) alludes to.

Gerty MacDowell's ideal ego must be constantly fed by beauty products. Her body, for example, finally regains its strength since "those iron jelloids she had been taking of late

had done her a world of good much better than the Widow Welch's female pills..." (U 286). Also, the young girl has fine, pretty hands which are as white as lemon juice (U 286) due to Beetham's Larola. The young lady's eyes are more mysterious and seductive now with the help of "eyebrowleine," a product recommended on the Woman Beautiful page of *The Princess Novelette*. Moreover, *The Lady Pictorial* magazine advised its readers to wear the electric blue colour that makes Gerty more gorgeous and appealing against the seascape. But, paradoxically enough, that "glamorous" colour was produced via a cheap process, "selfinted by dolly dyes" (U 287). Gerty's beautification process also evokes the restricted budget of the young woman in the early stages of determining her own style.

The slogans and images of the products that help to create the ideal ego of a woman are constantly being received through the "voices" of advertising and magazines, creating a true iconophagy. The constant devouring of icons and slogans colonises and pollutes the mind in a surge of promotions, emotions and language. Even the narrator (U 362) describes the physical support of Gerty's emotions using the sickly, mannered language of publicity to evaluate and praise the perfection of a commodity aimed at dazzling a female audience. Gerty (like Alonso Quijano, who wanted to be a traditional knight, the most prestigious specimen of the literature he used to read) wants to become the most appreciated woman by the standards of the literature she so often consumes. She aspires to become a lady of fashion herself, impeccably dressed, extremely refined and bejewelled. She yearns to become the female highlighted in flashy advertisements, beauty-magazine columns, tender novelettes and other sentimental trash as the most exquisite and valuable specimen of Dublin femininity. However, in order to reach that lofty ideal, she has to limit her purchases and consumption to certain specific commodities, paradoxically becoming similar to thousands of other

women. She does this in order to appear desirable to her future (ideal) husband, the lucky chooser of that flawless and peerless fetish.

The list of beauty products such as “eyebrowleine,” dolly dyes, hand cream from Beetham’s Larola, chenille from Clery’s, the coquettish hat and alluring perfume, the shoes with smart buckles or “finespun” stockings, all contribute to construct Gerty’s beautiful “persona” concerning men. And these consumer products play a crucial part in the “vieux jeu,” the old game of male titillation or, in a wider social frame, the risqué and exciting sport of “fishing for husbands” in Ireland. The most obvious example is the crucial part that Gerty’s stockings play in Bloom’s sexual arousal: “Lord, I am wet. Devil you are. Smell of her calf. Transparent stockings, stretched to breaking point” (*U* 372). Thus, not only does Gerty’s consumer ego or seductive clothing play an important part in the game, so does her cunning manipulation of them. As Gary Leonard observes:

When Bloom reflects that his encounter with Gerty featured ‘a kind of language between us’ (*U* 13.305), he is displaying a vague awareness of the extent to which his ‘simple’ sexual climax has been mediated by such erotic catalogues as advertisements, ‘pornographic’ flicks like “A Dream of Wellfilled Hose,” the bargain bin of Clery’s department store, and popular songs such as ‘Those Lovely Seaside Girls.’ (129)<sup>9</sup>

The crucial role that the stockings play in Bloom’s arousal is strongly underlined by Joyce reproducing the item in triplicate in the narrative. First of all, the item is duplicated in the intellectual lady who rides a bicycle in “Lestrygonians”: “her stockings are loose over her ankles” (*U* 166). Secondly, in the same episode, the opaque stockings covering the fat legs of a lady in Grafton Street appear as a sharp contrast. Thus, the white, opaque stockings related to

obesity and the loose ones related to an ethereal and dreamy lifestyle, establish –from a previous episode– the necessary contrast with the tight, erotic, transparent stockings that provide a full view of Gerty's seductive flesh. As Gary Leonard makes clear:

Joyce modernises the Romantic heroine by showing her as a self-conscious image manipulator who views herself as a commodity that must be carefully packaged and advertised, in accordance with a media representation of what is feminine, in order to attract a male consumer.... [Gerty] has done everything that has been required of her by the advertising copy and beauty columns of the magazines. (99)

Women, like the characters in the song "Those Lovely Seaside Girls" learn to exhibit themselves with any article they can get hold of so that they become objects on display in "a shop window," ready to be pointed out at any moment by a customer. As Fritz Senn observed, Gerty shows herself "at the proper distance, with just the right degree of illumination to increase her glamour" (1974: 223). The soft, seductive twilight and the indirect illumination of a shop window not only enhance the article's gilded presence, but also subtly hide possible minor flaws. However, Gerty's excessive attention to clothes, the combination of tones and even minor touches of personal adornment, the well-studied poses, the careful staging of her "persona" on an almost empty beach are not due to any personal fault such as a shallow personality, vanity or lust. Her excessive attention to the construction and embellishment of an attractive presence is *her* career. She was born in the context of a ruthless sexual "marketplace" and her survival as a woman depends precisely on the quality of her appearance and the richness and seductiveness of her display.

### **The uncertain way home**

The key to Gerty's performance is that she has, in fact, very few possibilities of marrying. Nearly half of all Irish women in 1904 were destined to remain single; they either went into a convent or carried on living with their families while doing menial jobs such as shop assistants, seamstresses, cleaners or bakers. Very few had relatively decent jobs such as typists or governesses in a well-to-do household. Gerty had even fewer chances of finding a husband due to the fact that she was lame. If, as psychologists claim, an inferiority complex breeds an interior complex of superiority in order to compensate it, Gerty's lameness is counter-balanced by a series of well-wrought fantasies that lead to the re-creation of herself as a higher "persona": as a *grande dame* of fashion or a refined princess who thinks herself, in consequence, as superior to her girlfriends.

Gerty's high, almost aristocratic self-image demands an ideal husband and a comfortable home. But unfortunately, these compensation fantasies seem as ephemeral as Gerty's visual example of chalk pictures on the pavement. The velvety twilight may well prefigure Gerty's fading youth (poignantly, she is made even older than twenty-two in Joseph Strick's 1967 film) as everything points to the long night of spinsterhood to come. Amid fantasies and castles in the air, the devastating truth is dropped with nonchalant ease into the text:

How moving the scene there in the gathering twilight, the last glimpse of Erin ...And she could see far away the lights of the lighthouses so picturesque she would have loved to do with a box of paints *because it was easier than to make a man...* (my emphasis; *U* 363)

Beauty incites one to repeat, to draw, as the twilight over Sandymount prompts Gerty to duplicate it with a box of paints. To project her compensation dreams daily onto the Dublin seascape is much easier than to "draw" a man, much easier than finding a boyfriend with whom to replicate, later on, the husband's body in the form of a son. Like Don Quijote, who, in games of chivalry, occasionally glimpsed the cruel, fictional reality in which he was immersed, so Gerty MacDowell, through her own words "it was easier than to make a man," senses the unbearable reality, the near impossibility of a lame woman ever finding a husband in the already difficult "marriage market" in 1904 Dublin.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, and illustrative of the above phenomenon, the beach has been symbolically established as the site of male masturbation, both rhetorical and physical, a site where seduction exists only in the form of fantasies that lead to the waste of seed.

Homer, once again, provides us with some clues for understanding this hidden aspect of the episode. In the *Odyssey*, the beautification process is part of a rite of passage that signals the return of men to civilisation. For example, after Circe lifts the spell on Odysseus' men, she beautifies them (*Odyssey*, X, 388-397). Once in Ithaca, after being carefully washed by Eurynome, Penelope's servant, Odysseus is beautified, signalling the return of "the lion" to the civilised community. But even before that, Odysseus had been beautified after meeting Nausicaa.

However, the beautification process may acquire other meanings. In book XVIII, for example, Pallas Athena makes Penelope experience a sudden desire to show herself before her suitors, since Odysseus, secretly returned after twenty years of absence, is among them. Even though she is tear-stained and her hair is untidy, the faithful wife does not want to be beautified. So Pallas Athena has to devise a stratagem. At night, while Penelope is fast asleep and oblivious of what is happening around her, the goddess carefully begins to



embellish her. She makes Penelope look taller and plumper; her face is cleansed with ambrosia and her skin is, like Gerty's, made whiter than ivory (*Odyssey*, XX, 200-250). But why doesn't Penelope want to be embellished before seeing the suitors? Apart from the fact that she has no desire to marry any of them, there are too many men around her. The opposite motivation may well explain why Gerty McDowell, a fairly young woman, exhibits herself in such a theatrically seductive and obscene manner before a complete stranger who is also a much older man. The obvious reason is that for many years, and for many miles around, there had been no suitors or admirers at all. In real life, Gerty was, in a way, "trapped" between two men, her alcoholic father and the practically non-existent, phantom love, Reggy Wylie. In the 13<sup>th</sup> episode, she is positioned between two male sides: on the one hand, the twins –who are not yet real or proper men–, and on the other, a married man who wastes his seminal fluids and will soon disappear from her life. Finally, we must remember something very important: beauty is not only reproductive, sacred, unprecedented and involving greeting, but also life-affirming and, above all, life-saving.

After being streaked with brine, all torn and swollen, Odysseus meets Princess Nausicaa. He washes himself and anoints his limbs, and is later secretly beautified by Pallas Athena. The goddess makes him appear taller and more muscular, giving him curls as graceful as young hyacinth petals, and pours abundant beauty over his head and shoulders, thus infusing him with an unexpected radiance (*Odyssey*, VI, 243-252). As P. and J. Choza explain:

Once clean, Odysseus dresses and perfumes himself. Then, the goddess Athena awards him the grace of *Charys* to make him appear more physically beautiful. In the Homeric world, physical beauty was highly appreciated as it made a man seem like a god...The experience of beauty, of being captivated by it, is an

experience of happiness that is considered a form of grace since men could not grant it to themselves. (49)<sup>11</sup>

The reason for the former process is that, for Odysseus, his beauty is a question of survival. He is beautified by Pallas Athena to appear attractive, likeable, godlike and trustworthy enough to be taken by princess Nausicaa to her father's palace. Once there, his new divine beauty will help him gain the sympathies of the Phaeacian assembly and make King Alcinous offer him a new ship and the best rowers to take him back to Ithaca. Beauty, then, is not only life-giving and life-saving, but also the impetus that makes the hero finally set off on his journey home.

However, beauty is also character, and character, as Heraclitus stated, is fate. For women, particularly at the beginning of the twentieth century, to be beautiful, and beautified, meant having many more opportunities of finding a husband, and the possibility, though this was not fully guaranteed, of certain happiness. To be lame, like Gerty, or ugly, or deformed in any way, tended to mean a life devoted to a menial job, under the harsh rule of nieces and nephews, a certain route to a long and embittered spinsterhood. Like Maria in "Clay," it could also mean devoting an entire life to painful repetition, to dullness and oblivion, to a form of living death. Beauty, particularly for a woman in 1904 Dublin, was more than ever a crucial question of survival. But it also meant returning home, to her own home, created to live in with a husband and the affection of her own children, to finally reach that much dreamt of, longed for Ithaca.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine, Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Don Gifford and Robert. J. Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce's Ulysses* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> According to the web page "Ulysses: Concordance", 25<sup>th</sup> - March-08.

<<http://www.doc.ic.ac.uk/rac101/concord/texts/ulysses/ulysses.cgi?word-Ulysses>>, the adverb "beautifully" appears four times in *Ulysses*, and three of the times take place in "Nausicaa." Also, in this episode, "nice" appears six times, "pretty," five times, and "lovely," only surpassed by its use in "Penelope," appears 13 times. "Nausicaa" is the episode where the adjective "beautiful" appears most times in *Ulysses*, per number of pages; six times, the same as in "Circe"; both episodes being where it appears most in Joyce's novel. However, words related to beauty appear the most in "Penelope," probably because female speech is heard all the time; and then, in "Oxen of the Sun," probably due to the "recreation" of literary styles of the past centuries, where the former concept and its synonyms were very important in literary writing.

<sup>4</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York and London: Everyman's Library, Alfred A. Knopf, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Grimal, *Diccionario de mitología griega y romana* (Barcelona: Paidós, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Weldon Thornton, *Allusions in 'Ulysses': An Annotated List* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968).

<sup>7</sup> Margot Norris, "Modernism, Myth, and Desire in 'Nausicaa,'" *James Joyce Quarterly* V. 26.1 (1988): 44.

<sup>8</sup> Kimberly Devlin, "The Romance Heroine Exposed: 'Nausicaa' and 'The Lamplighter'" *James Joyce Quarterly*, V. 22. 4 (Summer 1985).

<sup>9</sup> Gary Leonard, *Advertising and Commodity Culture in Joyce* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> The crucial problem of finding a decent husband in Ireland was that men were kept in poverty by their landlords and colonisers who deliberately kept industry underdeveloped and who were responsible for the unfair distribution of agricultural land. As a result, many men could not get married because they did not have the means to support a family, and those who did marry, did so when they were 35 or 40. Many women, therefore, remained single all their life. Many men used to live with their parents well into their thirties. They often got drunk in pubs and in the streets. As we see in *Ulysses*, street brawls often occurred, fighting, along with alcohol, being

the national sport of a frustrated male population. In consequence, it has been estimated that Ireland in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> was the country with the lowest ratio of sexual activity and lowest birth rate in the Western world.

11 This is my translation from the Spanish: "Una vez limpio, Ulises se viste y se perfuma. Atenea le infunde entonces una gracia, *charis*, para que aparezca con más hermosura física. En el mundo homérico la hermosura física es algo de enorme valor, pues es lo que hace a un hombre semejante a un dios...la experiencia de la hermosura, del quedar prendado, es una experiencia de felicidad que se considera una gracia, porque es algo que el hombre no puede darse a sí mismo." (49)