

**Reclaiming Myths of Femininity:
Molly Bloom's Response to Modernity**

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In his Modernist novel *Ulysses*, James Joyce responds to his cultural and literary predecessors, ironically recreating the literary work of those who came before him in his attempt to create something original, asserting the power of his own creativity. Constantly struggling with his anxiety over his own literary influences, Joyce attempts to transcend the stories and myths of others in his writing, usually through the use of irony, as Joyce demonstrates the superiority of his fiction by mastering and then rejecting the work of others. Joyce's depiction of the Modern world, specifically examined through the world of Dublin in his fiction, exposes the paralysis and alienation of the individual in Modern society by revealing the failure of social and cultural institutions--including the church, the family, and the government--to create meaningful connections between individuals, leaving them isolated and maimed. In his characterization of individuals, Joyce ultimately likens the individual's attempt to create personal meaning out of the cultural confusion created by Modernity with his own attempt to escape his literary and cultural influences. Through the elevation of his own writing, Joyce ultimately exposes the insufficiency of literary models for the creative author while illustrating the insufficiency of cultural models for the individual.

In his novel of maturity, Joyce responds to the isolation and creative anxiety created by Modernity through his construction of several semi-autobiographical characters. In his evolution as a writer, Joyce moved into a new mode of fiction with *Ulysses*. Stephen Dedalus, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, exemplifies Joyce's autobiographical and literary attempt to escape the influence of literary, familial, and cultural fathers. As Joyce presents Stephen in *Ulysses*, he remains unable to create despite his rejection of his past; instead, he remains obsessed with the intellectual and literary work of the past. Stephen, the hero of Joyce's first novel, becomes a too limited, indeed a too immature character in *Ulysses*, mostly because of his inability to express himself to others. Indeed, it is Stephen's inability to love that leaves him

unable to create. Through his characterization of Gerty MacDowell, Joyce presents Stephen's female counterpart, who is perhaps more socially limited, and indeed, more socially determined, because of her gender and her physical deformity. Autobiographically, Gerty functions, much like Stephen, as the young person attempting to escape an abusive family. Furthermore, her uncreative rehashing of myths to describe herself perhaps present Joyce's anxiety over the retelling of myths in his own fiction. Like Stephen, Gerty is unable to escape from the limitations of myth, although she believes in a different type of myth. Indeed, both Stephen and Gerty are obsessed with myths that are characteristically gendered--Stephen attempts to overcome the stories of his literary predecessors, while Gerty attempts to embody idealistic femininity and beauty.

Ulysses, written in Joyce's maturity and intended as a personal response to the conditions of Modernity, expresses a desire to surpass the limitations of immaturity, as Joyce attempts to move beyond the immobility of both Gerty and Stephen, demonstrated by their fixation with myths. Joyce finds a solution to these limitations by presenting his ordinary Modern heroine and hero, Molly and Leopold Bloom, who complexly exemplify the ability to escape the restrictions of Gerty and Stephen. Joyce frames his story of Molly and Bloom with the story of *The Odyssey*, presenting Bloom as the wandering hero and Molly as the faithful wife, but his rendering of this myth is deeply ironic, as he reveals Molly's adultery, exposing the disparity between myth and Modern reality. However, Joyce ends this novel with an expression of the natural love between Molly and Bloom, perhaps suggesting the possibility of a sexual reunion between Molly and Bloom. Indeed, Joyce distinguishes Molly and Bloom from their mythic counterparts to demonstrate the specifically Modern limitations upon individuals, but he also refigures this epic to express new possibilities for the ordinary Modern hero and heroine.

It is, however, only through the voice of Molly that Joyce expresses the creativity inherent in the union of Molly and Bloom. As Joyce represents his problematic Penelope figure, his characterization of Molly defies culturally determined definitions of femininity. Molly's autonomy, vulgarity, delight in sexuality, and infidelity radically defy Molly's expected gender roles. However, Joyce uses these things to define her power as a woman independent from cultural definition: "Joyce sees woman as powerful; where he differs radically from the culture at large is that he does not brand female sexual power as evil . . . although *Ulysses* is built around a single decisive event, Molly's adultery, Joyce refuses to categorize Molly as an evil or corrupt woman" (Mahaffey 166-7). As she uses her voice to defy cultural prescriptions of femininity, she expresses an autonomy and power well beyond other representations of females in literature. In contrast to Gerty's veiled and romanticized expressions of romantic fantasy, Molly's voice literally denies her femininity as Joyce demonstrates the cultural determinations of gender:

the role of resistant intellectual had already been assigned to Stephen as a way of countering the expectation that heroes *must be* physical. The characters of Stephen and Molly were designed to violate cultural prescriptions insisting that men must be physical and women may not be physical, a prescription that seems to preclude any meaningful heterosexual connection. But neither Stephen nor Molly is presented as a counter-ideal; Joyce's attack is on the unreality and counterproductiveness of ideals in general, as well as on specific, mutually exclusive ideals for men and women, in particular. (Mahaffey 166)

Indeed, Joyce uses his novel to demonstrate the limitations of socially prescribed gender roles, and he uses Molly's voice as the most vocal, creative, and independent response to the cultural limitations of gender.

Although much criticism has focused upon the artistic theories of Stephen, the father/son relationships between Bloom and Stephen and Joyce and Shakespeare, Joyce's autobiographical attempts to escape from his literary influences through the creation of a female voice have been largely ignored. As Joyce exposes the limitations of culturally determined gender roles, he creates two episodes that speak with specifically female voices-- "Nausicaa" and "Penelope." As he uses Molly's voice to counter the forces which determine Gerty's voice, he also uses these female voices to express something that he cannot express otherwise, perhaps because the kind of discourse in both "Nausicaa" and "Penelope" is usually associated with the "feminine." I would like to focus, then, on two things: the ways in which Joyce uses the narrative voices of Gerty and Molly as a pair to expose and defy the restrictions of cultural gender myth, and Joyce's use of the female voice to refigure literary myths, ultimately escaping his literary influences through the Molly's natural expression of personal love.

Joyce ultimately makes a powerful connection between these two ideas: Idealistic definitions of gender preclude meaningful heterosexual connection, just as an abundance of myth precludes personal creativity. As Joyce characterizes Gerty, he demonstrates the influence of language and cultural myth to define her self-image and her perception, ultimately depicting her as a determined character. Although Gerty never breaks from her romantic fantasy, Joyce portrays her as a sympathetic character as he illustrates the impossibility of her fantasies. Indeed, it is the very distance between Gerty's dismal reality and her idealistic fantasy that makes her pitiful, but Joyce suggests through his complex characterization of Gerty that she is forced to retreat into cultural myth because she has no viable means to change her social situation. However, in both "Nausicaa" and "Penelope," Joyce demonstrates the counterproductive nature of culturally defined gender roles as he refigures myths of gender, and does not suggest that Gerty is better off because she believes her romantic fantasies. Although Gerty would indeed

remain a sympathetic character at the end of "Nausicaa" without "Penelope," Molly's narrative suggests another possible response, different from Gerty's, to the culturally imposed limitations of femininity as she acts with personal freedom and defiance of cultural restrictions upon her.

Gerty MacDowell's Constructed Perception

In "Nausicaa," Joyce presents the character of Gerty MacDowell, a young woman who perceives of her early twentieth-century world through the sentimental language of Victorian culture, but is also a transitional figure into the Modern period lamented by Joyce. In the midst of the Dublin culture, which has become inculcated with commerce and advertisements, Gerty internalizes the images of this commodity culture and uses them to construct her notion of self. To attract a man, Gerty feels that she must display her femininity, which she thinks can be created out of the images of popular culture that surround her. Although Joyce criticizes the materiality of modern culture that defines individuals through appearance, he also examines the complex role of cultural myth upon individual perception through his characterization of Gerty. In Joyce's exaggerated conception of this culturally constructed individual, he demonstrates the ways in which culturally prevalent advertising and economic conditions influence perception and form the basis for self-esteem and identity. As some critics argue, Gerty has so internalized the world constructed by advertisement that she has no identity outside of the images she constructs from the fragments of idealized femininity portrayed in popular culture, including ancient myths, fairy tales, Victorian literature, and the advertisements of her consumer culture. Indeed, Modernity seems to have commodified Gerty herself. Gerty's character is undoubtedly the product of Dublin's popular culture, but Joyce's deeply ironic and complex characterization of Gerty questions her very awareness of the ways in which her culture has dictated her perceptions. Although Gerty is undoubtedly presented as a flat, pathetic, and superficial character, Joyce questions this view as he reveals the material and personal limitations upon her life as well as the convoluted jumble of fragments of cultural myths which Gerty has learned. Throughout the episode, Joyce creates a tension between Gerty's will and her determined characteristics, ultimately questioning Gerty's autonomy. Joyce anatomizes and criticizes myths of gender

through his parody, but also sympathetically demonstrates the difficulty for the individual, with the background of fragmented and meaningless myth informing social identity, to respond to the challenges of Modernity.

As Joyce presents Gerty's difficulty in escaping from the myths of Modern culture, he explores the disparity between Gerty's perception and reality. Although he satirizes her gullibility, Joyce also demonstrates Gerty's inability to access and understand the cultural myths she pursues, ultimately revealing these myths as powerless to help her escape from the cultural alienation she faces. As Gerty pursues romance through the construction of her physical appearance based on the idealistic myths of beauty she believes, Joyce illustrates that Gerty's belief in these cultural myths actually prevent her attaining her desire. Indeed, Joyce illustrates the ways in which the cultural myths of Modernity maim Gerty socially, as her culture fools her into believing that she is a commodity.

Gerty's Desire: A "specimen of winsome Irish girlhood"

In the "Nausicaa" episode, Joyce examines cultural myths as they inform modern femininity. Indeed, although Joyce devotes most of this episode to the characterization of Gerty and her interaction with Leopold Bloom, he frames the episode with references to his two paradigmatic female models, Molly Bloom and the Virgin Mary. Interweaved in this episode is a narrative of adoration of Mary, and this is described before Gerty is introduced: "Far away in the west the sun was setting and the last glow of all too fleeting day lingered lovingly on sea and strand, on the proud promontory of dear old Howth . . . on the quiet church whence there streamed forth at times upon the stillness the voice of prayer to her who is in her pure radiance a beacon ever to the stormtossed heart of man, Mary, star of the sea" (284). Joyce immediately establishes a narrative of adoration and worship, as well as a maudlin tone reminiscent of a fairy tale. As Joyce describes the church in the background where Mary is being worshiped, he

sentimentally relates her traditional religious role in both visual and emotional terms. Her role is that of a beacon, a relief and visual locus of radiance and stillness. As he initially refers both to Molly (with the reference to Howth Hill, where Bloom and Molly first made love), hitherto described mostly as an adulteress in the novel, and the Virgin Mary in his chapter devoted to Gerty, he links his concerns of feminine sexuality and narration with his sentimental language and tone. After his critique of the nihilistic, masculine voice of "Cyclops," Joyce presents the feminine language of Gerty as deeply tied to cultural definitions of femininity. Marilyn French, who asserts that "Cyclops" is "essentially antilife" because of its overwhelming masculinity and lack of females, argues that "Nausicaa" is

the feminine complement to that environment. It contains a world in which every action and emotion is coated in a frilly, concealing cloak of seeming gentleness, gentility, and love. It is pervaded by the worst stereotypes of femaleness: euphemistic language, coyness, romantically idealizing attitudes toward everything, and interest only in self-image. It too is essentially antilife, because it disguises and denies reality. (French 214)

As he presents the myths which inform modern femininity, Joyce also depicts through his restrictive feminine narrative the concealment of reality and the restrictions upon life that this environment creates. As French suggests, this feminine narrative conceals the truth as it idealizes and prevents the possibility of regeneration.

As he presents the mock-heroine of "Nausicaa," Joyce uses narration itself to examine Gerty's historically and culturally influenced perception of herself within society. Joyce's new narrative style in "Nausicaa" parodies the 1854 popular Victorian novel *The Lamplighter* by Maria Susanna Cummins to reflect Gerty's popular and characteristically feminine sentimentality. As Joyce uses this narrative technique of feminine sentimentality, he parodies the

protagonist, also named Gerty, of the novel: "Like Cummins's protagonist, Gerty MacDowell feels emotionally orphaned and socially ostracized. She rationalizes her alienation by fantasizing a myth of secret aristocratic origins . . . The archaic language of Gerty's meditation heightens the fairy-tale quality of her fantasies" (Henke 133). The narrator of the episode describes Gerty MacDowell as a fairy-tale heroine, calling her "as fair a specimen of winsome Irish girlhood as one could wish to see. She was pronounced beautiful by all who knew her" (285-6). This sentimentalized and visual description of Gerty, conspicuously melodramatic and unrealistic, defines Gerty as her fantasy, that of a perfected image, representative of her Irish society, rather than as a real person. Although the episode begins with a third-person narrator, it soon becomes clear that this narrator is not objective, but reflects the views of Gerty, as Joyce characteristically orchestrates his complex narration, leaving the identity of the narrator unclear. Joyce's shifting narration and his parody of the sentimentalized narrative allows him to examine the myths of Western and specifically Irish conceptions of femininity.

The narrative of the episode refers specifically to the various cultural messages about femininity that Gerty uses to define her physical appearance. Almost immediately following the initial description of Gerty's physical appearance, it is defined in terms of commercial products referred to by name: "Her figure was slight and graceful, inclining even to fragility, but 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" (286). An immediate and personal connection is made between Gerty's figure and the pills she takes, implying causality between the current state of her figure and the commercialized supplements she takes. The reference to "Widow Welch" demonstrates Gerty's reliance upon the testimonials of advertisements recommending products and her language echoes the language of advertising. Although she expresses dislike for Widow Welch's product, her association between the product and the advertising voice seems more important

than the product itself. As Gerty uses several beauty products specifically named in the narrative, she uses these products to make herself beautiful in response to the messages of advertising. It seems as though Gerty's appearance and identity are not only enhanced, but created, by these advertised products. Indeed, the narrator's specific references to particular beauty products suggest that Gerty becomes merely an assemblage of popular images of femininity as she constructs her appearance from the advice and products extolled in advertisement.

Gerty's idealization of femininity results from a compilation of cultural conceptions of women and beauty. She asserts her identity through the visual presentation of appearance, attempting to achieve an ideal created by her own perceptions of the standards of popular culture. Her idealized features are described with terms that might be used to describe a Greek statue, and the self-conscious narrator purposefully evokes this image to describe Gerty: "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" (286). This idealistic portrayal of Gerty's physical features emphasizes her identity merely as an object for display, implicitly referring to a created work of art as it reveals her reliance upon the physical characterization of the "beautiful" by her culture. The references to the lemon juice and the "queen of ointments" indicate Gerty's efforts to make herself into this visually appealing image through beauty products and the advice of magazines, but the Greek reference suggests that she attempts to reach another standard of beauty, that of Greek statuary. However, the narrative itself, which attempts to describe eloquently Gerty's beauty, is awkward in its syntax and diction—"Greekly" is incorrect and "almost spiritual" lacks the grace of an artistic narrator. As she focuses upon her physical appearance, Gerty hopes to make herself *appear* as though she is

“almost spiritual” in her “ivorylike purity, ” revealing another cultural ideal she attempts to attain, that of spiritual purity. She is further described as an idealistic female figure: “There was an innate refinement, a languid queenly *hauteur* about Gerty which was unmistakably evidenced in her delicate hands and higharched instep” (286). As Gerty is further described as “queenly,” it becomes clear that the narrator fleetingly refers to a wide assortment of cultural standards of beauty and femininity. While the term probably refers, like much of the narrative, to the Virgin Mary, it becomes clear that Gerty attempts to attain spirituality through constructing her personal appearance. Her use of the French word “*hauteur*” seems out of place and pretentious, suggesting that Gerty has adopted a language which is not her own. Gerty relies upon these descriptions of physical beauty, which could describe a work of art, to define herself, creating her own image of spirituality. In effect, Gerty seems to substitute the spiritual for the physical even as she seeks the appearance of spirituality.

Gerty attempts to attain spirituality and purity through the pursuit of beauty, but only through the construction of her physical appearance and the clumsy rhetoric with which she describes it does she pursue these qualities. Joyce uses Gerty's narrative throughout the episode to evaluate the tension between free will and individual choice, depicting the cultural constructions which determine Gerty's perception and sense of identity. Joyce evaluates, through his characterization of Gerty, the ways in which culture effaces personal choice and identity. Joyce evaluates this substitution of cultural messages for the individual, demonstrating the tension between the goals that society pursues (represented through Gerty's desire for spirituality and marriage) and the methods (construction of appearance based upon cultural ideals of femininity) recommended by the incomplete messages of popular culture. He uses this evaluation to explain the discrepancy between appearance and reality; Gerty will not attain marriage or spirituality through the construction of appearance. Instead, Gerty becomes trapped

by the ideals of femininity expressed by her culture even as she uses them to escape from her homelife. Joyce's characterization of Gerty exposes the insidious and pervasive nature of cultural ideals used by individuals to create personal identity. Joyce ultimately exposes the images of beauty and femininity through which Gerty constructs her appearance as vacant substitutes for personal identity and beauty.

Gerty uses the images presented through advertising as her standard of beauty as she attempts to improve herself through the use of the products espoused by the same advertisements. As she examines her own appearance, she thinks about the ways in which the use of cosmetics has increased her beauty, which she links to her power of seduction:

Why have women such eyes of witchery? Gerty's were of the bluest Irish blue, set off by lustrous lashes and dark expressive brows. Time was when those eyes were not so silkily seductive. It was Madame Vera Verity, directress of the Woman Beautiful page of the Princess Novelette, who had first advised her to try the eyebrowline which gave that haunting expression to their 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? (286)

The use of a third-person narrative in this case confirms Gerty's view of herself as seductress, as the narrator asks in a melodramatic tone "why have women such eyes of witchery?" This association with "witchery," implies that these eyes can enchant with a "charm that few could resist" (286). With this association and its connection to Madame Vera Verity's product, it becomes clear that Gerty thinks the use of this product has created the "haunting expression" in her eyes. Gerty's goal through her use of cosmetics is to create an image that is both seductive and haunting, which she thinks will make her more expressive and attractive. As Gerty's self-

descriptions move from beauty to seduction, she reveals that she attempts to create this image of herself to attract a man. Gerty's use of cosmetics, however, seems to replace any personal interaction with a man with an appearance which will attract and seduce.

Gerty acknowledges her belief that she was not always the seductress that she has become; the use of the eyebrowline has imparted to her this power of seduction. The flirtatious narrator identifies Gerty's eyes as "of the bluest Irish blue," but this image is qualified because it seems that Gerty has constructed this image and the language which describes it herself. Gerty's self-construction, created in order to attract the male gaze, is neither individualized nor original, but is the response she has learned. She constructs her standards of beauty entirely upon the advertisements she reads as she adopts the generic and sensational language of the beauty expert. Indeed, as she prescribes help for other women, Gerty reveals her belief that these advertisements are not just suggestive, but authoritative, on the subject of beauty. As Fritz Senn argues, "Make-up is her medium. Gerty's plumes are borrowed ones, so much so that some readers deny her any individual character. She is composed of traits assembled in a technique of collage and montage, in keeping with the chapter's art, painting" (Senn 196). Indeed, Joyce uses the cosmetic imagery to illustrate the effacement of Gerty's identity, or what Senn calls "individual character." In this case, Madame Vera Verity becomes the expert on the subject of beauty, as Gerty gives her own testimonial with her claim that she "never regretted" using the eyebrowline suggested by Madame Vera Verity. Gerty's newly created eyes, seductive, haunting, and of the "bluest Irish blue" are associated with seduction and Irishness, although she reveals that these qualities are fabricated through the use of beauty products. Gerty's references to the color blue, prevalent in the chapter, implicitly compare her to the Virgin Mary, the nearby object of worship, as Joyce reveals the cloud of cultural images, perceived and bundled together

in her narrative, which replace Gerty's personality. Indeed, Joyce uses Gerty to demonstrate the replacement of personal thought and perception by the materialism of modern culture.

Through his parody, Joyce demonstrates the disparity between Gerty's appearance and her internal qualities, which he links to the emptiness of the promises of advertisement and cultural ideals of beauty. Although it may appear as though Gerty's purity is spiritual, her internal dialogue proves otherwise. In effect, Gerty paints her own image as she attempts to fashion herself into an ideal:

In details like these, as in his schema, Joyce calls such elaborate attention to 'painting' and they eye, surely, because the eye is the organ of idealization; 'ideas,' along with their more perfect forms ('ideals,' 'idols,' 'eidolons,' and 'idealizations'), all derive from the Greek *eido* ('to see'), in part because the process of looking enables one to 'know' an object or person in the absence of any real contact with it at all. This is Gerty's (like most adolescents') experience of the world in the first half of 'Nausicaa': in the absence of any real contact with Bloom, she draws her romantic and sexual speculations about men from literary and pictorial idealizations; the romanticizing style of her monologue, complementarily, presents her not as she is, but as she would like to see herself and as she would like Bloom to see her. (Bishop 188-9)

Her focus on materiality and appearance demonstrates her shallowness and her actual lack of the spirituality that she appears to possess as she attempts to attain the idealism she associates with the Virgin Mary and other icons of femininity. As she works to assemble her physical appearance through the use of beauty products, Gerty attempts to attain the status of a visual icon of femininity rather than the grace typically associated with the visual image. The attention upon eyes throughout this section of the episode seems to underscore the distance between sight, or

perception, and reality. Through his ironic comparison of Gerty MacDowell and the Virgin Mary, Joyce discredits the correlation between physical appearance and spirituality even as he depicts the psychological effects of culture upon Gerty; Gerty is deluded into thinking that her physical beauty will lead to spirituality and marriage. As he interweaves the narratives describing Gerty's internal thoughts about beauty and the visual nature of the adoration of the Virgin Mary, Joyce reveals the emptiness of the visual icon of feminine grace, at least as it informs Gerty's identity, effectively reducing it to a construction of a visual image devoid of spirituality. Through his characterization of Gerty and her adoption of the materialism of her culture, Joyce demonstrates both the disparity between appearance and reality and the power of cultural messages to form and even replace personal perception.

As Gerty's narrative becomes more fully developed, it becomes clear that she sentimentalizes not only her appearance, but also her past and her future, using social class and romance as determining characteristics. She fantasizes about how different her life would be had she been born to aristocracy: "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 vying with one another to pay their devoirs to her" (286). The desire for aristocracy, social status, and adoration reveals Gerty's aspirations to superficial romance, with herself cast as the beautiful and adored heroine. For Gerty, her fantasies of aristocratic origin are tied to the attention of men, and Gerty's narrative reveals Gerty's own lack of education. Although it seems odd that Gerty would pair her lack of gentility with her lack of education, Gerty seems to pinpoint the very shortcomings in her life that limit her in her modern culture and prevent her from getting what

she wants. Norris suggests that Joyce ties this limitation upon Gerty to explain her lack of understanding of the cultural myths to which she aspires:

It is to give her language of desire the authority, eloquence, and prestige that will make it credible that Gerty endows it with imagined erudition. But merely imagined erudition produces merely highfalutin prose. The myth of Nausicaa would be useful as a measure of Gerty's desire, for she would like to be a princess, or at least to be thought as beautiful as a princess. But in elevating her status as a metaphorical aristocrat, her narration identifies her as aristocrate manqué, and itself as hopelessly archaic and artificial . . . (Norris 39)

Gerty's fantasy undoubtedly demonstrates the lack of opportunity she has had in life thus far, as the narrator reveals her lack of education through the misplaced fragments of culture, incomplete and out-of-place allusions, and misuse of words throughout the narrative. Joyce constructs the narrative to betray its own lack of education, as it "betrays its own lacks when it produces not classical allusions but what we might call classicisms, tags that sound vaguely classical, and that in place of the erudition they would parade, display deficient education" (Norris 40). The nostalgic, romantic tone of the narrative mocks Gerty's aspirations to romantic aristocracy, but the construction of her fantasy reveals, through its conspicuous absence, Gerty's unpleasant reality. As an uneducated, unmarried young female of the little social standing, Gerty remains a very socially and economically limited character blocked from the intellectual and romantic freedom she imagines in her fantasies. As Gerty attempts to escape this reality, she uses the frame of cultural myths to create her fantasy. However, as the sometimes pathetic, vague, and ignorant narrative of Gerty makes clear, Gerty does not even fully understand or know about the myths she uses to describe herself. In this way, Joyce constructs Gerty's character to reveal her alienation from the culture she desires despite her lack of educational opportunity. In this way, it

seems that Gerty is a determined figure; her lack of social opportunity creates her desire and thus determines her perception.

"A Cosy Little Homely House"

Gerty's fantasies of aristocracy and marriage contrast sharply with the reality of her social situation; Gerty is an unmarried and lonely young woman who probably faces a future of economic destitution as an unmarried female. At the age of twenty-two, "In Dublin of 1904, Gerty MacDowell is fast on the decline toward old maidenhood. Despite elaborate dreams of matrimony, she is still unkissed (or half so), unwedded, and unbedded" (Henke 140). Several critics point to Gerty's preoccupation with her age and the passage of time that is subtly revealed in the narrative. Norris calls time Gerty's "great enemy" (46), and Gerty's retreat into fantasy reflects her anxiety over the passage of time as she attempts to escape the reality that she will probably not be married. The marriage rate in Ireland around the turn of the century, despite Gerty's belief that she will marry, remained extremely low. As Florence Walzl indicates, "economic opportunities for young women were extremely limited, and marriages were few and late" (33). Furthermore, during this time, Ireland had "the lowest marriage and birth rates in the civilized world" and the "highest rate of unmarried men and women in the world" (Walzl 33). By 1911, over seventy percent of Irish males between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five were unmarried (Walzl 33). Given Gerty's obvious lack of marital opportunity in Dublin at the time and Gerty's advancing age, her fantasies begin to appear more like fantasies of desperation.

As Joyce depicts the temperance retreat and the worshiping of the Virgin Mary, he uses this narrative to reveal the reality of Gerty's home life, illuminating the reasons behind Gerty's desperation. As the men pray to the Virgin, she thinks about her own father:

How sad to poor Gerty's ears! Had her father only avoided the clutches of the demon drink, by taking the pledge or those powders the drink habit cured in

Pearson's Weekly, she might now be rolling in her carriage, second to none. Over and over she had told herself that as she mused by the dying embers in a brown study without the lamp because she hated two lights or oftentimes gazing out of the window dreamily by the hour at the rain falling on the rusty bucket, thinking. But that vile decoction which has ruined so many hearths and homes had cast its shadow over her childhood days. Nay, she had even witnessed in the home circle deeds of violence caused by intemperance and had seen her own father, prey to the fumes of intoxication, forget himself completely for if there was one thing Gerty knew it was that the man who lifts his hand to a woman save in a way of kindness, deserves to be branded as the lowest of the low. (290)

Gerty reveals, albeit in her sentimentalized narrative, the violence and abuse that has occurred in her own home. As she feels sadness about her father's alcoholism and abuse, she characteristically returns to her faith in advertised products. Where her real family has failed her, Gerty finds hope in the promises of advertisements to solve her problems. In response to her dismal homelife and abusive alcoholic father, Gerty retreats into fantasy as she imagines an escape from her current situation. Her fantasies are not only fantasies for the future, but also fantasies of escape; for Gerty to marry means to escape from her dark home and the physical abuse of her alcoholic father, veiled by Gerty's evasive sentimental description. The products Gerty uses hold the promise of attractiveness, bringing male attention and subsequent marriage, and thus an escape from her home and the discovery of the idealized domestic bliss she lacks in reality.

As Gerty chooses fantasy over her reality she, like Stephen in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, chooses her own imagination and fantasy over the reality that her culture and her family have given her. Although Joyce mocks Gerty's gullibility and her sentimentality, he

sensitively portrays the plight of the young Dublin female who lacks independence. Seen perhaps as Stephen's female counterpart, Gerty's narrative seems to contain some autobiographical elements, particularly Gerty's alcoholic father and her creative, and indeed literary, imagination. Perhaps because she is a female and must depend much more strongly upon males, Gerty is a more determined figure. Joyce, parodying the sentimental "feminine" narrative, uses "feminine" emotions and language to reflect his own childhood home. It seems, then, that Joyce portrays Gerty sympathetically by depicting the culturally determined material conditions of Gerty's life, but also demonstrates the falseness of the marital fantasy she creates.

Gerty's narrowing focus upon marriage as she fantasizes about her ideal husband make it increasingly clear that her fantasies of feminine perfection are engendered by her desire to marry: "No prince charming is her beau ideal to lay a rare and wondrous love at her feet but rather a manly man with a strong quiet face who had not found his ideal, perhaps his hair slightly flecked with grey, and who would understand, take her in his sheltering arms, strain her to him in all the strength of his deep passionate nature and comfort her with a long kiss. It would be like heaven" (288). Although Gerty rejects the idea of the fairy tale for someone with a "deep passionate nature," her romanticized and physically ideal version of a husband seems to value appearance and comfort more than passion. Gerty desires to recreate a safe and secure domestic home, revealed through her language of sheltering and comfort. Gerty longs for affection, but her immature conceptions of marriage remain fairly general, and fall back into idealism with the idea that it "would be like heaven." As Gerty continues her fantasy, she constructs her husband as the embodiment of masculinity:

He would be tall with broad shoulders (she had always admired tall men for a husband) with glistening white teeth under his carefully trimmed sweeping moustache and they would go on the continent for their honeymoon (three

wonderful weeks!) And then, when they settled down in a nice snug and cosy little homely house . . . and before he went out for business he 'would give his dear little wifey a good hearty hug and gaze for a moment deep down into her eyes. (289)

Gerty's dream husband would fulfill the fantasy of masculinity, with his height, broad shoulders, and carefully trimmed moustache. Because of these physical characteristics, Gerty imagines, he will fulfill her dream of love, which Gerty identifies as "a woman's birthright" (288). As Gerty's language degrades into purely sentimental, sickly romantic speech. Gerty's construction of her dream husband is pathetically idealistic, as she defines him in general, culturally defined norms, but her idealistic fantasy of marriage heightens the reader's awareness of her desire to escape her current situation. Perhaps Gerty is most limited because she can imagine no other escape for herself than marriage, and indeed, society offers no other. However, her imagined scenario is not original or personalized as she adopts the language and marital fantasies of others, demonstrating the way in which Gerty has been determined by her culture.

As Gerty continues to fantasize about her future with her imagined husband, it becomes increasingly clear that the assortment of cultural messages upon which Gerty has constructed her idealistic fantasy yields a generic, impersonal, and vague description of Gerty's ideal. Gerty constructs her role as wife as flatly as she has imagined her husband. She imagines that she will fulfill the role of female within her idealistic marriage: "She would care for him with creature comforts too for Gerty was womanly wise and knew that a mere man liked that feeling of hominess" (289). As she constructs her ideal husband and domestic life through her imagination, Gerty associates her role with the female comfort that she can give to her husband, but her language diminishes to basic ideas about the male, the female, and the home. As Garry Leonard indicates, "what authenticates this fantasy match is not anything unique or interpersonal in the

relationship, but simply the fact that her dream breakfast partner is authenticated as a 'manly man' and she is authenticated as 'womanly wise'" (102-3). He further asserts that "Gerty subscribes to . . . [the]myth of absolute gender complementarity" (103). In her dream, Gerty's femininity is the perfect complement to her husband's masculinity, and she can attain this simplistic relationship through her constructed femininity. Her simplistic language mirrors the simplicity of her fantasy, as she imagines the simple perfection of marriage. Although Gerty asserts that she does not want a "Prince Charming," her fantasy reveals that she desires only the generalized, culturally expected male/female relationship, for which she has very limited language to even describe. In this way, Joyce demonstrates Gerty's imaginative limitations which are created by her social limitations and inscribed with the language she has learned in society.

The simplicity and idealism of Gerty's fantasies allow a solution to her inexperience with men. Perhaps because Gerty is romantically inexperienced with men—she has only been kissed once, on the nose—she is susceptible to the promising simplicity of femininity and masculinity promised in popular culture. She is drawn and convinced by these images that romantic love is attainable:

The primary myth of the advertising jargon surrounding Gerty is that masculinity and femininity are innate qualities in the male and female, which, when properly accentuated and brought together, perfectly complement each other to form a partnership in which the private fantasies of each person, however different from each other, will be perfectly and completely satisfied. (Leonard 101)

Gerty believes, because of the advertising that surrounds her, that if she fulfills the definition of femininity, then she will perfectly complement any male who fulfills the cultural definition of masculinity. Her fantasies are devoid of personality; she does not imagine intellectual or

emotional characteristics of her dream spouse. Indeed, these details seem completely unimportant to her compared to the manufactured objects with which she will fill her home.

Gerty's fantasies, which initially aspire to personal spirituality, gentility, Greek perfection of physical form, ultimately degrade to the material objects with which she defines her fantasy. Paired with her imagined marriage, Gerty constructs domestic fantasies as well, filled with objects that create an ideal home. As she imagines making breakfast for her husband, she describes her home: "they would have a beautifully appointed drawingroom with pictures and engravings and the photograph of grandpapa Giltrap's lovely dog Garryowen that almost talked it was so human and chintz covers for the chairs and that silver toastrack in Clery's summer jumble sales like they have in rich houses" (289). In the same sentence, Gerty personifies her grandfather's dog and elevates the material objects that she will have, describing them in greater detail than she describes her future spouse. Again, Gerty's emphasis upon the home implies her desire to escape. Gerty's belief that silver toastracks are what "they have in rich houses" pathetically displays her belief in advertising and her simplistic, extremely limited conceptions of wealth which complement her notions of domestic happiness, as she hopes that she can create her fantasy with a toastrack. Her overwhelming sentimentality and her superficiality combine in this fantasy to illustrate Gerty's attempt to order her future around the material objects she uses to define her fantasy of domestic life. Joyce's increasingly ironic parody of femininity illustrates the absurdity and limitations of the abundance of myths Gerty believes. The myth of gender complementarity, as Leonard coins it, and the newly modern myth that material things bring happiness, indeed that life is based upon commercialized material objects, emphasize Joyce's critique of modern culture as he illustrates the ways in which Gerty has been deceived by her society. As she fantasizes about the material things that she believes will mark her happiness, the

narration sardonically reflects the disparity between Gerty's domestic fantasy and domestic reality which parallels Gerty's confusion between myth and substance.

Gerty's Competition: "the apple of discord"

Margot Norris closely examines Joyce's use of myth in the chapter as it informs Gerty's characterization and narration. She argues that Gerty's misuse of language and feigned erudition parallel her attempt to mask her fear of sexuality and the unlikelihood of marriage:

Joyce puts the failed erudition of "Nausicaa" in the service of thwarted romantic desire, for the display of Gerty's beauty produced by the inflated and pretentious narrative rhetoric is a dramatization not of vanity, but of vanity masking profound sexual insecurity. Gerty's narration is not a paean to her beauty but the fantasy of how such a paean might sound could someone be found to utter it . . . the voice that speaks of Gerty in 'Nausicaa' therefore makes best sense as a phantom narrator constructed by Gerty's imagination to produce the language of her desire, the hypothetical discourse of her praises that she fears no one will ever utter. The narration therefore represents Gerty not as she is, nor even as she is not, but as she would like people to think about her, and indeed, to write about her, given the conspicuous and emphatic literariness of her narration. (38)

As Norris indicates, the narrative voice in "Nausicaa" is the language of Gerty's desire, both for escape and for marriage. Because she believes the myths of culture, she expresses her desire for everything in her life through material descriptions. Norris argues that this hypothetical voice figures Gerty as that which she desires to be, but fears she will never become. Gerty, through the "literariness" of the narration, which indeed mirrors the narrative of *The Lamplighter* and other stories presented through myth, undoubtedly dramatizes Gerty's insecurities, which are expressed through her desire for the materialism of modern culture. Gerty fails to understand the

myths she imitates through this voice, however, demonstrating her poignant distance from the cultural ideals she pursues:

Joyce displays in "Nausicaa" a deprivation of erudition that is not simple ignorance but the ardent, yet unsuccessful, desire for erudition. He dramatizes faulty learning not as stupidity but as the thwarted, yet eager, desire for learnedness. The difference between these two kinds of cultural lacks is precisely desire, and in this desire lies the pathos of a modern age suffering not from spiritual bankruptcy but from cultural disqualification. (Norris 39)

In this way, as Norris argues, Joyce underscores the inaccessibility of erudite knowledge for Gerty, and for others like her who face the modern age. Gerty does not have access to the cultural myths she pursues, which results in Gerty's fragmented perception. Her understanding of the myths does not result from a lack of effort; rather, Joyce seems to attack the overwhelming conglomeration of incomplete cultural messages given to Gerty. Although she attempts to understand the myths to which she aspires, she cannot possibly acquire the knowledge she needs:

It is as though "Nausicaa," both text and woman, are haunted by a cultural ideal they do not know but whose prestige they covet. It is as though the language of the text—limited, as Hugh Kenner claims Joyce himself was, to translations and popularizations—knows there are great classics out there in the culture somewhere, but deprived, like Gerty herself, of the "benefit of a good education," has access to them only in mediated, secondary, and often corrupted form. (Norris 40)

Gerty's limited access to cultural texts, as Norris argues, is highly ironized by Joyce, as he mimics the modern individual's limited understanding and misunderstanding of myth. Norris dissects Joyce's complex parody of myth in the episode, as she explains that Joyce uses the classical myth of the Trial of Paris within the episode. Norris intricately delineates the

references in "Nausicaa" to the myth, and she identifies Cissy as Hera, Edy as Athena, and Gerty as Aphrodite, all competing for the attention of Bloom as Paris with the sandcastle humorously figured as the "apple of discord." As he layers this myth throughout the episode, Joyce uses the idea of feminine competition to ironize Gerty's focus upon appearance and materiality.

As Bloom enters the narrative of "Nausicaa," his attitude toward and interaction with Gerty allows Joyce to reveal the gap between Gerty's perceptions and the external world. As Bloom's voice forms the latter part of the narrative in "Nausicaa," he reveals the disparity between Gerty's fantasy and her reality. Gerty becomes aware of Bloom on the strand, realizing that she must compete with her companions for his attention. Because Gerty knows she must compete with other women to attract a husband, she expresses contempt for visually appealing characteristics in her companions. Gerty's friend Cissy is described through Gerty's critical eyes (all in reference to Bloom, the dark stranger who watches them):

she ran down the slope past him, tossing her hair behind her which had a good enough color if there had been more of it but with all the thingamerry she was always rubbing into it she couldn't get it to grow long because it wasn't natural so she could just go and throw her hat at it. She ran with long gaudy strides it was a wonder she didn't rip up her skirt at the side that was too tight on her because there was a lot of the tomboy about Cissy Caffrey and she was a forward piece whenever she thought she had a good opportunity to show off and just because she was a good runner she ran like that so that he could see all the end of her petticoat running and her skinny shanks up as far as possible. It would have served her right if she had tripped up over something accidentally on purpose with her high crooked French heels on her to make her look tall and got a fine tumble.

Tableau! That would have been a very charming exposé for a gentleman like that to witness. (294-5)

Gerty, expressing jealousy of Cissy, reveals her awareness that femininity is constructed as she criticizes Cissy for not successfully conceding to the cultural image of what a woman should be like. Gerty criticizes Cissy's hair (and the product she uses to enhance it), her too-tight skirt, her visible petticoat, and her running. Furthermore, as she identifies Cissy's attempts to appear feminine, including her use of the "thingamerry" she put in her hair and her "high crooked French heels," Gerty reveals that she is aware of the construction of femininity in other females. As she criticizes Cissy, she examines Cissy's ability or inability to appeal to Bloom through her use of fashionable accessories and beauty products. Gerty reduces Cissy's presentation of femininity to the material methods through which she constructs her appearance and the resulting image she presents to Bloom. As Gerty criticizes Cissy, she hopes for an "exposé" of Cissy's false image of femininity—Gerty hopes that the high heels which Cissy wears to make her look tall will make her fall, embarrassing her and exposing the falseness of her presentation of femininity.

Gerty's itemized criticism of Cissy's methods of appearing feminine leads to her assertion that Cissy is a "tomboy," and thus will not be able to attract a man. As Gerty criticizes her friend, she neutralizes her competition with the conclusion that Cissy is a "tomboy." Although Gerty attempts to assert her superiority over her competition, she does so also in hopes of slowing down the time that she knows is her enemy:

Like Cissy Caffrey, who hopes to reverse time by becoming a little girl or tomboy again, and who regresses to infantile language and infantile art, Gerty MacDowell tried to catch time while it is flying by regressing. But she retreats culturally and historically to the venerable art of the past, to classical or neo-classical forms, the

marble stature, the icon of Madonna, the aristocratic arts of the eighteenth century. In composing herself into a classical pose, Gerty tries to assimilate to herself the excess significance that accrues to representation, and to multiply her injured personal worth by making herself abstracted and representative, an idealized type, a 'specimen of winsome Irish girlhood.' (Norris 46-7)

Gerty criticizes about Cissy the features that make Gerty "feminine" as she attempts to assert the superiority of her "classical" sculpture-like beauty. Cissy's flat hair contrasts directly to Gerty's "daintier head of nutbrown tresses," the like of which "was never seen on a girl's shoulders" (295). Gerty uses Cissy's appearance to establish her own as the idealistic, perfect appearance of femininity. Gerty thinks that her own beauty, constructed by closely following the advice of advertisements, is superior to her female competitors. Although she is aware of these constructions in others, Gerty attempts to construct her own femininity are not described in the same way because she veils her own methods of self-improvement with the language of advertising and sentiment. Perhaps, as Norris suggests, Gerty uses her constructive devices to deceive herself and to veil her fear that she will never be the perfect ideal she pursues.

Through his depiction of Bloom in the episode, Joyce reveals another source of anxiety for Gerty that seems to inform her fantasy and her desire to create a perfect appearance; Bloom discovers that Gerty walks with a limp. Gerty's lameness, which remains undisclosed until the end of the episode, is the most apparent flaw in her construction of femininity, and it is probably the major defect Gerty attempts to conceal. Gerty's contempt and jealousy of Cissy's running become understandable and pitiable as Bloom sees her walk away with a limp. When Gerty sees Cissy running, she hopes that she will fall, revealing Cissy's imperfection (not unlike her own). As she hopes that Cissy will fall, Gerty reveals her own insecurity with her physical imperfection. Because Cissy is, in this case, a competitor for Bloom's gaze, Gerty hopes that she

will fail in the one physical aspect in which Gerty is not superior (or that she cannot correct even through her fantasy). In her examination of Cissy's visual representation of femininity toward the male spectator, Gerty reduces both her own femininity and that of other females to the merely visual, always in reference to the image seen by a male.

Gerty's fantasies, constructed to efface the reality of her life, concede to the logic attested to in advertisements. As a flawed embodiment of femininity, Gerty attempts to compensate, doing so in response to the promises of perfection contained in popular culture:

Although the beauty columns make a token attempt to praise what is already there, they only do so as a justification for urging extensive (and expensive) improvements . . . "You already have a beautiful face," runs the logic of the beauty column, 'but all is lost if you fail to do something about your nose. The body is always defective, but this is presented by the advertisement as being its source of endless potential; unlike one's emotional state, all the flaws and lacks of physical appearance, however numerous, can be corrected given products enough and time. (Leonard 107)

Gerty undoubtedly attempts to compensate for her physical defect of lameness through the advertisements that promise potential for perfection: "Intuitively, Gerty knows that no cosmetic will ever sufficiently compensate for her lameness or give her an equal chance on the marriage market" (Henke 140). Because she believes that she must present an image of perfect femininity, she looks for methods of improvement that will allow her to be the visually appealing, seductive female that can attract a man despite her physical defect. Gerty desperately attempts to somehow counterbalance her lameness with her otherwise perfect femininity as she pursues her dream of marriage, using language to deceive herself into believing that she is

otherwise perfect. In this way, Joyce illustrates the power of language to reframe Gerty's perception.

The unrealistic quality of Gerty's fantasies seem similar to her constructed, purely visual notion of femininity:

Her fantasies may be pathetic and futile, but they appear to be crucial to her mental well-being. To shield her wounded sensibilities, Gerty has withdrawn to the comforting shelter of romantic myth. She is desperately trying to like herself; and in an effort to mold a positive self-image, she compensates for bodily deformity by heightened pride in physical attractiveness. What initially appears to be narcissism may also be interpreted as a bold defiance of isolation. Once we learn of Gerty's lameness, we have to admire the bravado of her self-assertion in the competitive sexual market of 1904. (Henke 134)

Gerty relies heavily upon the "comforting shelter of romantic myth" in her attempts to convince herself that she is attractive to the opposite sex, and confirm her ability to attract a husband. Her attempts to overcome her physical limitation may be admirable, as Henke asserts, or merely pitiful. Gerty may act out of defiance, but given her circumstances at home, it seems more likely that Gerty acts out of fear of the future and utter desperation to escape her situation. Gerty, who has constructed fantasies of marriage and domestic bliss, refuses to face the possibility that she may not marry, possibly because she will not be able to deal with this reality. However, as several critics indicate, it seems highly unlikely that Gerty will find a husband. Garry Leonard argues that Joyce presents reality as a social construction in "Nausicaa," and also argues that Joyce's characterization of Gerty reveals a common desperation among Irish females at the turn of the century:

It would be comforting to dismiss Madame Vera Verity's precious

pronouncements as so much fluff because then we could reassure ourselves that Gerty's fear concerning her own future is just so much adolescent melodrama, and she won't really come to any harm. Gerty makes this point of view an easy one to maintain because she describes her future in high-blown phrases and hyperbolic daydreams. But I would like to suggest that the information in women's magazines is presented in an aggressively trivial style precisely because the actual economic message the magazines contain is so grim: 'throughout the first third of the twentieth century, the marriage rate in Ireland ran less than half that of England and Wales and of Denmark, a country of comparable size and type on the continent.' Gerty's superficially absurd obsession with her appearance is in fact a crucial 'self'-defense in which she seeks to over-dramatize serious events to such an extent that she will not have to take them seriously. (Leonard 120)

Through her fantasies of marriage, Gerty escapes the reality that she will probably not be able to find a husband. Through Gerty's narrative, Joyce seems to suggest that Gerty is a socially-determined character, as Leonard and other critics assert. Indeed, cultural myth seems to be Gerty's only possibility of escape from her situation. As she accedes to the logic presented through popular media, Gerty can suspend the truth that she is fast approaching spinsterhood. The medium of fairy tale and the attainable images of femininity that print media offer allow Gerty to believe that she will be married in the future, even though her society has probably determined that she will not.

Even though Joyce seems to suggest that myth is the only possible shelter for Gerty, he decidedly demonstrates the limitations of myth to offer positive alternatives. As Gerty and Bloom remain physically separated, Joyce demonstrates that retreat into myth does not offer

physical contact or a new life. Similarly, Joyce's complex use of the Trial of Paris myth reveals Gerty's ironic use of myth to structure her narrative:

The contest on Sandymount is fought, like the mythical contest, not on its merits but with bribes that in 'Nausicaa' take the form of artistic presentations or performances. The outcome will be paradoxical and, in its own way, perverse. Bloom will choose Gerty's failed attempts to trick herself out in the forms of high art over Cissy . . . but he makes this choice for essentially pornographic reasons. . . . 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. (Norris 43-44)

Gerty's adherence to myth is highly ironic and self-defeating, and richly contributes to Joyce's construction of Gerty as a sympathetic character because she, like many modern individuals, has been deceived by the sheltering and comforting language of myth. Even though she attempts to escape from her life through her self-constructing narrative, Gerty remains unable to attain a husband; she merely becomes an image of sexuality and cannot use myth to recreate a new story for her own life. Through this use of myth in the chapter, Joyce illustrates with the disparity between Bloom and Gerty the disjunction between appearance and reality and the emptiness of the promises contained in myth. Joyce demonstrates, through Gerty's fragmented interpretation and imposition of cultural myth upon her own life, the limitations of myth to prescribe personal meaning for the modern individual, instead illustrating the personal reduction that results through the use of myth.

Gerty's susceptibility to the standards and promises of cultural myths and advertisement reflects, like many of Joyce's characters, the decline of quality of life in Dublin and the

increasing culture of commercialization that occurred with the onset of modernity at the transition into the twentieth century. Joyce demonstrates the pervasion of advertisement into the consciousness of the Irish through his characterization of Gerty, who has internalized the language and standards established in advertisements. As she has assimilated the images of beauty and perfection and used them as the standard by which she judges herself, she illustrates the ways in which the marketing of economically exchanged objects creates a new basis for personal identity.

Gerty's Commodification: "A votary of Dame Fashion"

Thomas Richards, in *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, discusses Gerty's use of the rhetoric of advertising as evidence of the change in linguistic consciousness that occurs within a modern commodity culture. Richards discusses Joyce's depiction of the female consumer, in the midst of the messages sent by a commodity culture: "For the first time a writer confronted the lived reality of the advertised spectacle—not just as a social space for displaying commodities but as a coercive agent for invading and structuring human consciousness" (Richards 207). Gerty's perceptions of femininity, masculinity, and beauty are undoubtedly the same as those presented to her through advertisements. Not only does she agree with the standards of beauty espoused through the material of popular culture, but she also adopts the same standards and rhetoric as her own. Gerty remains all the more pitiable because she seems to truly believe the promises of advertisements. Her standards of beauty, demonstrated through her critique of Cissy Caffrey and her own identification with the ideals stressed through advertising, are framed using the language which she has learned through the inundation of images and phrases of popular culture.

Richards argues that Joyce "stresses not only Gerty's immersion in a prefabricated language but the ability of that language to fulfill diverse and even contradictory social and

psychological needs” (Richards 212). This language, which stresses the importance of objects to form the social identity of individuals, is the rhetoric with which Gerty defines her social role and that of other individuals, but it also serves as a coping mechanism for Gerty to deal with her dismal life. Richards argues that the inundation of physical objects within the narrative demonstrates Gerty’s consumer view: “Multiplied examples soon convince us that Gerty understands her world as a consumer not only of novels like *The Lamplighter* but of magazines like *Pearson’s*, which consistently link the moral style of the domestic storyteller with a variety of commodities presented in advertisements between the same covers” (215). The literature of popular culture, which sets the cultural standards of beauty and femininity, sell the same objects which create the images they praise. As these consumer texts define the standards of beauty, they recast the identity of individuals in terms of consumer products, in effect attempting to create an alternate reality to the one Gerty lives. Richards points to the description of Gerty’s appearance, focused upon her clothing:

Gerty was dressed simply but with the instinctive taste of a votary of Dame Fashion . . . 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 favorite perfume because the handkerchief spoiled the sit) and a navy threequarter skirt cut to the stride showed off her slim graceful figure to perfection. She wore a coquettish little love of a hat of wideleaved nigger straw contrast trimmed with an underbrim of eggblue chenille and at the side a butterfly bow of silk to tone. (287)

At this point in the narrative, as Richards indicates, manufactured objects enter the narrative, as Gerty’s adopted rhetoric of fashion becomes the means by which she is described: “the idiom of

the domestic novelist is steeped in a commodity language that we had formerly associated only with the narrative voice of Gerty's interior monologue. It is the hallmark of her narrative, which both calls up droves of commodities by naming them and alters language, making it into a commodity" (Richards 216). Richards traces the shifts in narrative voice, indicating the points at which the narrative becomes Gerty's voice. In the paragraph above, which he identifies as Gerty's voice, her image is cast in the rhetoric of the fashion magazines she reads. She uses the language of advertising and the specific marketing jargon of advertising to define her graceful appearance. Gerty chooses the color of her blouse, "electric blue," not because it is recommended, but because it is "expected" by a magazine. As Gerty follows the advice of the magazine, she accedes to the authority of its fashion expertise. As she describes herself in the terms learned through advertising, Gerty sells her own appearance, using the rhetoric of updated fashion to authorize her description. Her reference to the expectations of *The Lady's Pictorial*, which she has followed exactly, validates her choice of clothing, and indeed, her entire appearance.

Joyce arranges the narrative to present the ways in which commodity culture pervades language, and thus the framework for perceptions of identity. About the syntax of the chapter, Richards argues that

The narrative geometry of 'Nausicaa' is not static. The chapter frequently lacks coherent syntax; by leaving out conjunctions (or by using the wrong ones), the narrative tends to place juxtaposed elements in a suspension. Against the background of what is often hastily called a unitary narrative, manufactured objects—pills, cosmetics, and clothing—hover free, mediating Gerty's relationship to her world via a veil of commodities with which she finally lives in symbiosis. Absolved from the shifts in narrative voice that so frequently depend on and are

signaled by syntax, the narrative becomes a climatized display of the docile coexistence of commodities which Gerty has invested with human energy.

(Richards 217)

As Richards indicates, intermixed with Gerty's thoughts are material objects. She relates entirely to the world around her through her material possessions and cultural ideals expressed through advertisements and sentimental novels. Manufactured products and the images she associates with them become invested with innate human characteristics to which Gerty aspires. She thinks that these products, more than any innate quality she might possess, can give her attractiveness and femininity, ultimately creating the human fantasies she desires.

Gerty reflects a social phenomenon through which her perceptions are shaped by the material objects she values. The inundation of material objects into Gerty's language and consciousness reflects, as Richards argues, the cultural pervasiveness and persuasion that occurs in a society which is dominated by the images and rhetoric of advertisement. As Richards deduces, the prevalence of objects in Gerty's dialogue demonstrates "the filtration into language of the commodity in its ubiquitous and liquid modern form, and in a broader sense the experimentation with a new syntax by which to convey a new order of *things* through an old order of words" (Richards 217). Joyce's use of shifting narrative exemplifies the new linguistic arrangement of things as mediators between the individual and her sense of identity. This new social relevance given to things becomes so pervasive that it structures her personality, values, and identity. Other than the dismal glimpses of Gerty's real life, veiled within her sentimental narrative, Gerty's fantasies and appearance are centered upon objects as they form the basis for Gerty's identity:

In bringing the novelist of *The Lamplighter* and the romances of popular magazines within the expanding universe of commodity culture, "Nausicaa"

marks the capacity of manufactured objects to become dominant images for the self, to take on, as we say, 'personality.' This bringing together of the linguistic components of the commodity creates a web of connection from which Gerty MacDowell cannot be freed. (Richards 217-218)

Joyce's entire portrait of Gerty is based upon her culturally constructed consciousness, as Joyce seems to cast doubt upon the possibility of the individual maintaining her integrity within the panoply of modern culture. Although she may be unaware of the things that master her thoughts, Gerty's personality and identity become inseparable from material objects within her narrative. This inseparability undoubtedly demonstrates the effects of the language of advertising within Gerty's mind to shape her perception, ultimately leading her to believe that this construction of herself through these material objects represents reality.

As Bloom encounters Gerty, he encourages Gerty's self-construction as a visual image in very complex ways as Joyce depicts their interaction. In their encounter, Bloom enforces Gerty's construction of character as based upon appearance designed to entice and please the male gaze. Even as he encourages her, however, he reveals the emptiness of the fantasy she creates. As he stares at her, he enforces the idea that she must be attractive and that her value as a female lies in her physical appearance. Her value to Bloom is merely visual; he does not attempt to speak with her or approach her. Her image, which she has purposefully constructed to attract male attention, has successfully attracted Bloom's gaze. As Mahaffey says, "Gerty has replaced herself with a series of aesthetically pleasing pictures, or mirages, that serve the function of advertisements (and that are in fact modeled on advertisements). Gerty has read the signs of popular culture accurately, and she has done as directed by turning herself into something to be seen, like a painting (the 'Art' of the episode is 'painting')" (161). Gerty, responding to the visual images of femininity that she views in the literature of popular culture,

has emulated these images, and Bloom's masturbation as he watches her demonstrates her value as a sexual image, but not as a physical partner. Because the advertisements depict women as visual objects designed to appeal to the male gaze, Gerty succeeds in making herself an aesthetically pleasing image of sexuality, but she does not attain her fantasy of domesticity or even physical contact through her encounter with Bloom. Bloom, who watches and admires her from a distance, reinforces the idea that she has successfully turned herself into a work of art, as Mahaffey and other critics argue.

Bloom's Gaze Upon Gerty: "a dream of wellfilled hose"

The second part of the "Nausicaa" chapter, which is told through Bloom's thoughts, reveals the complex construction of gender roles as it informs Gerty's narrative. In addition to Gerty's fantasies of aristocracy and domesticity, Joyce presents her as a visual object of adoration as he implicitly compares her to the Virgin Mary through his interwoven narrative, and Bloom's views of religion in this episode reveal Gerty's practice of self-construction. As he listens to the Mass, Bloom realizes that the connection between the repetition of the litany mirrors the repetition of the phrases of advertisement: "Mass seems to be over. Could hear them all at it. Pray for us. And pray for us. And pray for us. Good idea with the repetition. Same thing with the ads" (309). Bloom makes a connection about the Mass which also relates to the advertising rhetoric Gerty uses to create her beauty. As Joyce likens the adoration of Mary and the repetition used in advertising, he reveals Gerty's reliance upon and combining of these cultural standards:

Many commodities have the appearance of floating benignly in and out of the foreground of Gerty's narrative. Under scrutiny, however, the membership of the 'Queen of Ointments' in allied orbits of connotation grows both more intensive and more extensive. In remembering the slogan Gerty undoubtedly rehearses her

experience of possessing and using the commodity; but she also remembers because it recapitulates the Litany of Our Lady, which she repeats later in the chapter and which reads in part: 'Queen of angels, Queen of patriarchs, Queen of prophets, queen of apostles, Queen of martyrs, Queen of confessors, Queen of virgins . . .' Queen of Ointments: if for Gerty this advertisement evokes and satisfies a religious impulse, in its dependence on a litany it also takes on an implied anaphoric repetition through which it becomes a jingle. Just as importantly, it promises her an earthly satisfaction in a simulacrum of both the white skin and the 'languid queenly *hauteur*' of sheltered royalty. In each of these ways Gerty's body has itself become a field for advertisements. (Richards 225)

As Gerty's body becomes a "field for advertisements," Joyce demonstrates the psychological effects of advertising upon the individual, which he relates, through Bloom, to the repetition of the Litany. Joyce demonstrates through Gerty's thoughts the ensuing comfort and numbing that such repetition bring to the individual, and Gerty's language of advertising and her construction of appearance to resemble the virgin illustrates her desire for escape into the purity and happiness promised through language. Just as the alcoholic men find solace in the litany of the Virgin Mary, Gerty finds comfort in the sentimentalized femininity, royalty, and attractiveness promised through the rhetoric of advertising.

Several specific images of femininity prevalent in Gerty's mind probably relate to a popular contemporary advertising image and contemporary cultural myth, that of the "seaside girl." As Bloom voyeuristically watches Gerty at the shore, Joyce ironizes the popularity of the seaside resort that had become a prevalent cultural ideal in England. As Richards defines this place in which the commodity, he relates the sexuality associated with the seaside resort:

The seaside resort not only promoted the diversification of sexual practices such as nude bathing, but it also refined the forms that sexual desire and gratification took . . . at the beach the body of the adolescent or prepubescent girl became a cultural ideal . . . the sumptuous seaside resorts of Victorian England had become . . . places where the male consumer could become . . . a connoisseur of nymphets.

The space of leisure had been sexualized. (Richards 228-229)

As Bloom watches Gerty, who is herself a culturally constructed ideal of femininity, he acts out the fantasy associated with the seaside resort. In a deeply ironic portrayal of the Irish “seaside resort,” Joyce creates a space in which Bloom becomes the sexual consumer of Gerty, who is herself a commodified individual. Gerty becomes the advertised, visually displayed product as Bloom watches her: “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. It is for you, Gertrude MacDowell, and you know it” (296). Combining the imagery of the shrine with the passionate gaze of the adoring male, Joyce creates Gerty’s image as the commodified combination of the Virgin Mary and the seaside girl.

Through his use of the repeated phrases of the song “Those Seaside Girls” and the scene in which Bloom “consumes” Gerty, Joyce comments upon the Irish sexualized marketplace, which reflected the same integration that occurred at the seaside resort: “seaside resorts successfully integrated sexual practice into the practice of consumption. They pioneered a volatile mixture: material comfort, sexual excitation, and hard selling” (Richards 228). Bloom and Gerty enact these cultural practices, as Gerty constructs herself upon the image of the seaside girl and Bloom consumes what she sells, confirming her attractiveness. Richards explains Joyce’s parody of Gerty as a seaside girl:

The seaside girl displays an all-purpose allegiance that accommodates a violation of a sexual taboo just as easily as it promotes a white skin befitting the modest and the chaste. Here Gerty and the seaside girl meet. For the contradictions folded into the seaside girl are, in the final analysis, virtually identical with those of the world disclosed in the narrative of Gerty MacDowell, a world constructed by and for a commodity culture, a world in which language exists only to advertise. It is an imagined world—in part because commodities had become not so much material objects as their fantastic representations—but one in which the imagination has been appropriated to a new end. (Richards 234)

Richards explains that Gerty, like the popular image of the seaside girl, creates for Bloom a visual representation of the idealized female. As she composes herself with the products of her commodity culture, she becomes, like a seaside girl, a flat image reflecting the creation of advertising. Gerty emulates the image of the seaside girl: Well-dressed and annealed with the latest ointments for the protection from the sea-side sun, Gerty is not only an object of advertising but its carrier and practitioner” (Richards 224). She becomes herself a commodity because she has believed the myth of the seaside girl as part of her quest for a husband. She undoubtedly presents herself to Bloom as the embodiment of the seaside girl, constructed through her use of the products which create this image.

Bloom, although he seems to be a more complex character than Gerty, acts as a consumer in the sexualized marketplace of the strand, fulfilling the masculine role of the seaside male. As he admires Gerty and masturbates, Bloom ironically approves of Gerty’s construction as a visual image. As Richards explains, “Women and men had different domains of response mapped out for them. Women were taught to identify with the seaside girl image while men were encouraged to desire it. These gendered variants are illustrated simply and directly in ‘Nausicaa,’

where Gerty consumes the seaside girl while Bloom consumes Gerty. These two labors are interdependent”(Richards 246). Bloom values Gerty merely for the image she presents and fills the role of Gerty’s fantasy construction, even though he seems to recognize that it is not reality. However, he also fulfills Gerty’s fantasy of a perfect male, as she imagines that he is “steadfast, a sterling man, a man of inflexible honour to his fingertips” (299). Even though he uses her merely for visual stimulation, Bloom completes the masculine role as the male in the seaside scenario through his voyeurism and as the worshiper of Gerty as the Virgin Mary. Because Gerty has fulfilled her construction of femininity based upon the popular images of the seaside girl in advertising, she appeals to the masculine counterpart and receives affirmation of her physical appearance, which she herself has constructed.

As Bloom realizes that Gerty is lame, he reaffirms the idea that Gerty is useful only for the image she presents. Although he feels pity, her lameness detracts from her appeal as a visual embodiment of femininity:

Mr Bloom watched her as she limped away. Poor girl! That’s why she’s left on the shelf and the others did a sprint. Thought something was wrong by the cut of her jib. Jilted beauty. A defect is ten times worse in a woman. But makes them polite. Glad I didn’t know it when she was on show. Hot little devil all the same.

I wouldn’t mind. (301)

Bloom simply confirms the idea that Gerty’s femininity is inadequate, at least within the context of their encounter. As he realizes that she has been “left on the shelf,” Bloom enforces the idea that Gerty is merely a commodity, an object designed for male pleasure, and also suggests that she will not find a husband. Bloom’s evaluation of Gerty as “polite” because of her deformity seems to affirm the idea that Gerty should be a submissive, stereotypical female (not unlike Gerty’s domestic fantasies). His observation that “a defect is ten times worse in a woman”

suggests that the physical characteristics of females are much more important than those on males, and Bloom seems to reflect the reality that she will not be able to find a husband, or even a sexual partner, because of her defect. Even though Bloom asserts that he “wouldn’t mind,” he does not approach Gerty, but leaves her on the strand.

Bloom undoubtedly reinforces Gerty’s emphasis on appearance as he gazes upon her and refuses to interact with her. Indeed, he participates in the reduction of her image of grace and spirituality (which Gerty desires) to a merely pornographic image. Although Gerty seems to willingly participate in this fantasy, Joyce emphasizes the differences between Gerty’s fantasy and Bloom’s fantasy, but Joyce mediates this with the idea that Gerty is to a large degree a socially determined individual because of her limp, her fragmented home, and her dependence because of her lack of opportunity. Joyce uses Bloom’s character to illustrate the discourses that dictate sexual communication between the genders that results from the socially determining products of Modernity. Joyce also deconstructs the cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity as Bloom thinks, after his encounter with Gerty, that he is “Thankful for small mercies. Cheap too. Yours for the asking. Because they want it themselves. Their natural craving. Shoals of them every evening poured out of offices. Reserve better. Don’t want it they throw it at you. Catch em alive, O. Pity they can’t see themselves. A dream of wellfilled hose” (301). Bloom discounts cultural definitions of femininity like the seaside girl, debunking this image as a “dream of wellfilled hose.” He realizes that women try to live up to the cultural ideal of femininity, but also demonstrates the limitations to such empty conceptions. His observation that there are “shoals” of similar women demonstrates the similarity between females that advertising produces, as well as the competitive sexual market of Dublin. Bloom realizes that the image of women, produced by mass culture, is constructed: “Say a woman loses a charm with every pin she takes out. Pinned together . . . Fashion part of their charm” (302).

Furthermore, Bloom identifies the emptiness of Gerty's fantasies of domesticity, mocking her sentimental language and construction of appearance: "Go home to nicey bread and milky and say night prayers with the kiddies. Well, aren't they? Must have the stage setting, the rouge, costume, position, music" (303). Bloom, an advertiser, recognizes Gerty's construction of appearance, and seems to know that she wants marriage and children as the result of her preparation. Although he demonstrates a cynical and distrustful view of women, Bloom also recognizes the images that construct notions of femininity.

Interestingly, Joyce uses Bloom's career in Dublin as a means to illustrate the inconsistency between the fantasy of modern advertising and reality. Bloom, as an advertising canvasser in Dublin, represents the commodification of the Dublin culture in "Nausicaa" as he reveals the manipulation of language involved in his own career. Bloom says that "When she leaned back, felt an ache at the butt of my tongue. Your head it simply swirls . . . Still it was a kind of language between us" (305). As Bloom remembers a line from the song about the seaside girls and claims that there was a "language" between the two of them, he confirms the seaside girl construction of Gerty as a commodity, and seems to illustrate the communication, through the medium of the fantasy espoused by the seaside girl motif, that has occurred between the two of them. In the seaside scenario, Bloom confirms Gerty's role as a seaside girl even as he reveals its construction through advertising rhetoric and images.

Through the encounter between Bloom and Gerty, Joyce seems to question the circumstances which surround Gerty and Bloom in their interaction. As he uses the language and images of cultural myths to examine this scenario, Joyce demonstrates the influence of language upon perception as well as the different ways that the rhetoric of cultural myth influence men and women. As Richards argues,

Joyce does not give us a glimpse by which habitual representations such as the seaside girl become entangled with commodities, resulting in habits of mind such as we observe in Gerty; instead he shows several reified forms of language tangled up with one another. Joyce has not confined his inquiry in 'Nausicaa' to social class and the relations of exchange, but to the broader question of the shifting economic relationship of human beings to language. It is not economic but linguistic determinism that captivates Joyce. Seeing in Gerty's voice the substance and temporal solidity of a predetermined—indeed, overdetermined—language, we can affirm the limitation of what can appear an endless process of narrative causality. (Richards 238)

Joyce's depiction of the fantasies in which Gerty and Bloom participate ultimately demonstrate the influence of the language of cultural myth to influence personal perception of reality. As Joyce demonstrates Gerty's use of fabricated language and fantasy as a prism through which she views reality, he also uses Bloom's character to reveal the ways in which language can be manipulated. Through Bloom's participation in the seaside scene and the worshiping of a visual icon of femininity, Joyce demonstrates the different gendered discourses of religious imagery and advertisement in popular culture. Through his examination of the disparity between perception and reality for Gerty, Joyce also illustrates the emptiness of cultural myths to prescribe identity for the modern individual. Bloom's interpretation of Gerty's sexualized image, that of the seaside girl, differs greatly from Gerty's fantasies of domestic bliss. As he combines these ideas with the sentimental narrative of Victorian culture, Joyce demonstrates the various cultural constructions of sentimentalized and unrealistic gender roles that form the identities and conceptions of gender within sexual communication and individual perception. However, even as Bloom illuminates these constructions, his rejection of Gerty's type of sexual construction

entails a rejection of this interaction. Bloom sees his interaction with Gerty as the construction of culturally inscribed fantasies and rejects this paralyzed notion of sexuality.

John Bishop discusses the two sections of the “Nausicaa” chapter—that of Gerty’s narrative and that of Bloom’s—as complementary halves, describing the two gendered responses to sexuality. He argues that Bloom’s response can be seen as:

the male equivalent to the kinds of sentimental and romantic fiction in which Gerty finds compensatory relief for her own real-world deficiencies is pornography. If Gerty frames Bloom in such a way as to staticize him and enhance his resemblance to a culturally produced image of the ideally desirable male . . . it cannot be surprising that Bloom complementarily seems to have staticized and framed Gerty in such a way as to minimize her ordinariness and to enhance her resemblance to a pornographically yielding pinup girl. (Bishop 190)

Bishop points to Bloom’s reaction to Gerty, as he thinks “I’m all clean come and dirty me” (302). Bloom’s interaction to Gerty’s “show,” as Bloom calls it, can be seen as the male counterpart, that of a visual static sexual image of the female, to Gerty’s linguistic, sentimental idealization of the male. Bishop discusses Joyce’s pairing of the two sections of the episode, that of tumescence and detumescence, and of Gerty and Bloom, as an “exploration of the singularity of pairing—of why and how couples come together, and mating comes about . . . the chapter itself highlights its thematic interest in pairing and doubling by focusing on twins in its opening pages” (Bishop 186). Indeed, Joyce seems to use the frame of myth and differences in sexuality to demonstrate the disparity between appearance and reality, but also between masculine and feminine perceptions of sexuality.

In his description of the interaction between Gerty and Bloom, Joyce ironizes the lack of communication between the two as he pairs their disparate fantasies. Their stunted and

somewhat perverse sexual encounter reflects their individual paralysis, which Joyce describes through their differing fantasies. Bishop, as he discusses Bloom's passivity and desire to be dominated sexually, says that "it is finally hard to see Bloom simply as the predatory male in 'Nausicaa'; in some ways, he emerges from the chapter as the familiarly disempowered male known to us through other parts of the novel, a disabled twin to Gerty" (Bishop 191). Although, as some critics argue, Bloom perpetuates Gerty's fantasies, he too suffers from sexual paralysis which prevents him from normal sexual interaction. As Bishop argues, Joyce pairs these characters in "Nausicaa" through their defects: "Joyce's decision to give the wishfully 'perfect' Gerty a 'defect,' a 'shortcoming'-- a limp--becomes, from this perspective, more strategic than malicious, since the word 'limp,' after all, is applied more than once--and more than to Gerty--to Bloom throughout *Ulysses*" (Bishop 191). He points out as one example that "Bloom thinks of Gerty's limp in a way that reflects ambiguously on his own: as he rearranges his wetted clothing, he thinks, 'O Lord, that little limping devil,' in a context that makes it not entirely clear whether the phrase refers to Gerty or his own exhausted member" (Bishop 192). Bishop further argues that Joyce ironizes this idea of a limp to illustrate the limitations upon both Gerty and Bloom:

The distinct kinds of 'limp' borne by Gerty and the profoundly emasculated Bloom, furthermore, tend to equalize them as victims . . . Bloom and Gerty, we realize, both severely disempowered, have real-world shortcomings for which they seek compensation through fantasy--Gerty in a fantasy of sentimental love and domestic romance made available to her through romantic fiction, Bloom in a fantasy of unproblematized virility and sexual conquest made available to him through pornographic fiction. Pornography, from this perspective, serves much the same function for the disempowered male as romantic fiction does for the

disempowered female, supplying him with the illusion of unproblematic masculinity. (Bishop 192)

Although Bloom astutely evaluates Gerty's construction of femininity, he also uses the fantasy of pornography as a sexual crutch. Bishop points to Bloom's lack of a sexual relationship with Molly as evidence of his sexual paralysis, and Bloom's interaction with Gerty certainly seems to illustrate an attempt to escape through sexual fantasy for both Gerty and Bloom. Bloom does not seem to make the connection that Joyce does through this interaction: the cultural constructions and expectations of femininity and masculinity, be it the male-based fantasy of the voyeuristic seaside scenario or the over-sentimentalization of the Victorian ideals of romantic love, create distrust and incongruous expectations of sexuality and love between the sexes. As ideals of gender are constructed by popular culture, they reduce complex individuals to merely sexual or gendered beings and substitute physical sexual contact for the empty allure of fantasy, disregarding the complexity and connection of physical interaction between two individuals.

Conclusion

Joyce, in his characterization of Gerty, demonstrates the absurdity of culturally prevalent myths of femininity by revealing the meaninglessness these myths have for the individual; Gerty's social situation does not change merely because she imagines that it will through the use of myth. Through his critique of Gerty's fantasy, Joyce discredits myths of gender by illustrating Gerty's actual distance from the ideals she pursues by emphasizing the disparity between appearance and reality and the disparity between opposing gendered perceptions of sexuality. Joyce decidedly criticizes the increasing commercialization of Ireland as he dissects several cultural ideals of gender identity, portraying the ways in which language shapes Gerty's perception. Through his critique of the limited language that defines religion, sexuality, and identity, Joyce demonstrates the limitations of the disjointed and inconsistent sexual discourses

through which individuals are defined, and ultimately uses Gerty to demonstrate the debilitation and lack of creativity that these myths create. As Joyce demonstrates the absurdity of Gerty's construction of appearance, he reveals the impossibility of myths of beauty and femininity:

By humorously dissecting the magic of cosmetic transformation and by exposing the purposes that the cult of beauty serves for men and women, Joyce derails the reader's desire for a beautiful, faithful heroine and spotlights its implied misogyny . . . if what we want is a heroine with 'a waxen pallor . . . almost spiritual in its ivorylike purity,' then we are simultaneously expressing a distaste for real women, with the physical afflictions and imperfections that make them long for the magical transformations promised by cosmetics" (Mahaffey 163).

Although Joyce laments the reduction of the individual to culturally constructed ideals, he also demonstrates, through the characterization of Bloom in "Nausicaa," the absurdity of cultural myths that prescribe unattainable goals. Indeed, Gerty's adherence to cultural myth only serves to limit her further by making her believe that she can attract a husband through her construction of appearance, which objectifies her for Bloom's sexual gaze. In this way, Gerty's self-construction becomes more pitiful. Even as Joyce demonstrates the reduction of Gerty's identity to a mere image that takes place because of the cultural idealizations of gender, he presents Modernity as a social structure that enforces these ideals, restricting creativity and freedom for the individual.

Molly Bloom's Creative Freedom

In contrast to his depiction of Gerty as a character who has been reduced to a visual image and as a person who has sacrificed individuality to culturally determined models of femininity, Joyce presents Molly Bloom as an individual grounded in the physical world and fairly aware of the cultural forces which shape her. Molly has been influenced by the cultural myths prevalent in Modern society, but unlike Gerty, Molly has not been determined or reduced by Modernity. Her thoughts are highly personalized and indeed, creative and original, especially when compared to Gerty's imitative, simplistic, and reductive thoughts. If Gerty MacDowell serves as an example of an individual, who however pitiable, has been defeated and reduced by the isolation of Modernity, Joyce creates Molly to demonstrate the possibility of maintaining individuality despite the cultural confusion created through Modernity. Molly reflects the various cultural messages about femininity and sexuality that she receives, but she remains Joyce's paradigmatic female figure, and indeed, represents the final voice in this book crowded with voices because she is not pathetically reduced by the insignificance of language; she uses language to assert her own original, often culturally defiant, and complex voice.

Joyce uses distinctive narrative voices to compare Gerty and Molly. As both characters present their own perceptions in "Nausicaa" and "Penelope," they reveal disparate visions of reality framed by their differing use of language. Although the two women are exposed to similar aspects of early twentieth-century Dublin life, the perceptions of Molly and Gerty seem antithetical, because Molly retains her agency while Gerty, although more complexly figured than she appears at first glance, seems to be a determined figure. Upon close examination of each character, it becomes clear that Molly and Gerty react to the same cultural phenomena in different ways. As Joyce presents the differences between these two characters, he subtly

explores the cultural basis for perception through contrasting character constructions. Joyce's critical satire of Gerty's voice seems more ironic as he presents the possibility of female independence through Molly's narrative. Molly's voice, to which Joyce entirely devotes the final chapter of his novel, maintains its integrity because of Molly's individuality and recognition of the failure of cultural images to define her identity. Molly's narrative is much more distinct, aware of social expectations, and defiant of cultural codes than is Gerty's, which appears as a mere extension of commercialism framed by sentimental idealizations of femininity. Although Joyce does not make Molly a traditional or straightforward heroine in "Penelope," he reveals her varied and rich responses to Modernity, conveying a sense of triumph of the individual in her attempts to avoid the effacement of personal identity and choice.

Ironically, Joyce's depiction of Gerty's narrative seems to be even more implausible in comparison to Molly's rich, complex narrative. Gerty becomes less convincing as a character in light of Molly's rebellious voice, as she relentlessly asserts independence of thought and perception. Indeed, although Molly may not enjoy every aspect of personal freedom because she, like Gerty, experiences the sadness and isolation of Modernity, Molly's perceptions, thoughts, and memories remain independent and personal. Molly seems to defy every cultural prescription; she commits adultery and she delights in her own body and sexuality, unlike Gerty's voice which expresses utter repression and veiling of her sexuality. Although Joyce presents Gerty's narrative as an outgrowth of Irish Modernity, it seems ironically reductive and even more ridiculous to assume that Gerty is as simple as she seems in "Nausicaa," after Joyce demonstrates the rich possibilities of character through his depiction of Molly. Joyce seems to make it clear that an external simplistic view of Gerty is as limiting as her own self-image because he expresses sympathy for her cultural limitations, but Joyce's depiction of Molly's

reaction to cultural images and her self-image seems more plausible and certainly more admirable than Gerty's socially-determined voice. As Gerty lacks an individual voice, Molly's voice is extremely individualistic, multi-faceted, complex, and often self-contradictory. Although Gerty demonstrates an exaggerated depiction of the personal effacement and distorted perception that Modernity precipitates, Joyce presents through Molly the possibility of personal independence from reductive cultural definitions of identity, thereby criticizing Gerty's dependence upon myth. It seems more difficult to entertain the sentimental train of thought in Gerty's narrative than it is to entertain Molly's stream of consciousness, which follows no linear progression and no pre-determined story line. Just as Bloom cannot be reduced to mere victim of Modernity nor indisputably elevated to the status of a Modern hero, neither can Molly. Instead, through Molly, Joyce demonstrates the hazards of Modernity while commemorating feminine individuality and personal agency.

Molly's Rejection of Fabricated Femininity: "they dont know how to sing a song"

Molly's narrative in "Penelope" pairs with Gerty's narrative in "Nausicaa" to demonstrate the ways in which commercialism informs the feminine self-image of Joyce's female characters. As Joseph Heininger says, "By frequent repetition, advertising texts and other texts about commodities in *Ulysses* become icons, symbols, and totems—rich sources for the narrative's exploration of states of consciousness" (157). If these advertising texts become the basis for exploring consciousness, Joyce demonstrates very different personal reactions to Modernity through the interactions Molly and Gerty have with material objects. As Joyce establishes these symbols through the narrative voices of both Gerty and Molly, he examines the effects of the materiality upon the individual Irish female. As they are informed by various social prescriptions for femininity, the females in *Ulysses* must grapple with their own images of

personal identity. The ideals set forth in advertising, according to Heininger, serve a social function which informs the individual's self-image: "Beginning in the 1910s, and entrenched as standard industry practice by the 1920s, modern advertising in Britain and America no longer sold commodities only, but social goods and cultural models as well" (Heininger 159). These cultural models serve as exemplars of fashion, beauty, and femininity to both Gerty and Molly, but their differing levels of acceptance of these ideas distinguish the two female characters. As Heininger aptly argues, "Gerty never escapes the mentality or the social place of her assigned part in the colonial hierarchy. She is not empowered by the commodity system's promise of personal transformation, but remains one of its victims" (169). Molly's reaction to the commodity system which reduces Gerty demonstrates an alternate possibility for the effects of Modernity upon the individual, as Molly recognizes, utilizes, and rejects cultural expectations throughout her own life.

Although Molly's consumption of commodity culture influences her personality and identity, she is not nearly as controlled by popular culture as Gerty seems to be. Instead, Molly determines her identity through a wider range of experience; she is not reducible as Gerty is. However, Molly's complexity can probably best be examined through comparison to other female characters in the novel, as Molly's integrity is not straightforward as a reader may wish it to be because Molly does not seem to rebel consciously against all of the reductive cultural forces that Joyce exposes in his fiction; Joyce refuses to reduce Molly to an easy categorization of cultural rebel or even adulteress. Jennifer Wicke claims that contemporary criticism of Modernity often entails a one-sided view of consumption, which "crystallizes in the valorizing of a more authentic, original, or folk culture now eradicated by consumption, or of a working-class culture thought to have more authenticity, or by extolling avant-garde practices precisely for

their repudiation of consumptive strategies, in the quite stereotyped vision of what those ought to be” (177). While Joyce undoubtedly criticizes the commodity culture wrought by English oppression, he does not advocate a return to the simple life of Irish folktales, but instead criticizes the Irish folk literature of the Celtic Revival and attacks Irish sentimentalism because it is wrought with harmful cultural myth. Accordingly, Joyce mocks Gerty’s subscription to English notions of femininity and commercialism as well as her retreat into Irish sentimentality. His hope for redemption from the Modern condition does not stem from a return to Irish history; he does not extol the Irish peasantry. As Wicke states, critics also depict the characters of Modern literature as rebelling against mass culture: “Even more ironically there is an attempt to recuperate aspects of mass culture as sites of resistance or struggle, with the hidden assumption that those participating in the first place are entirely victimized by their contact with a hegemonic cultural industry enforcing its hierarchies in and through mass cultural schemes” (177). Molly, much more than Gerty, defies this simplistic model of adhesion and rebellion to the messages of English-created advertising. She does not rebel definitively against every cultural force that influences her social identity, but she maneuvers her way through them in a complex but never fully determined (and hence, independent) fashion. Because Joyce does not give his readers the ease of retreat into perfect heroism, it is perhaps only through comparison to a character like Gerty that Molly becomes a Modern heroine. Molly, grounded in the physical realm, does not aspire to cultural rebellion but to personal freedom. On a much smaller and personal scale, however, she reacts to manifestations of Modernity which affect her directly. Although it is important to consider Molly’s rejection of certain aspects associated with Modernity, which provides an important and informative reading of the text, it has, as Wicke warns, the danger of

being too reductive and simplistic, classifications which Joyce's complexity characteristically avoids.

Molly's self-image is strongly tied to the messages of mass culture, as material objects, fashion, and cultural expectations enter her thoughts. As Gerty does in "Nausicaa," Molly thinks about the material items which hold the promise of artificially acquired beauty:

the second pair of silkette stockings is laddered after one days wear I could have brought them back to Lewers this morning and kicked up a row and made that one change them only not to upset myself and run the risk of walking into him and ruining the whole thing and one of those kidfitting corsets Id want advertised cheap in the Gentlewoman with elastic gores on the hips he saved the one I have but thats no good what did they say give a delightful figure line 11/6 obviating that unsightly broad appearance across the lower back to reduce flesh my belly is a bit too big Ill have to knock off the stout at dinner or am I getting too fond of it
(618)

Molly internalizes and uses as her own the language of *The Gentlewoman*, an English women's magazine which, according to Heininger, parallels Gerty's use of the language from the *Lady's Pictorial*. As she uses the language of the advertisement to describe her own body, Molly, like Gerty, uses the language of others to describe herself. Her voice, however, does not blend with and adopt the language, as Molly marks the distinctions between her own voice and that of the advertisement, asking the question "what did they say?" The effect demonstrates a distinction between Molly's perception and Gerty's, as Molly does not adopt the language of this advertisement as her own. In the "Penelope" episode, Molly's voice remains distinct. On a narrative level, Joyce distinguishes "Penelope" from "Nausicaa" and Molly from Gerty by

representing Molly's episode as her own; the reader never wonders whose voice speaks in "Penelope." Several critics point to the Irishness of the Stout beer as an affirmation of the sole commercialized product of Ireland, claiming that Molly affirms Ireland's product over those of England and arguing that she resists English oppression. Undoubtedly, Molly resists outside control of her body even as she worries about some of the concerns which occupy Gerty, but she is not categorized easily as a political rebel (despite her taste for Guinness). Molly wonders about her appearance, and seems to find some promise in the possibility of improvements through the use of an advertised beauty aid.

As Molly expresses anxiety about her appearance, it is always in context of advertisements promising improvements. She worries about her weight and her clothing in terms of the standards illustrated in advertisements: "I wonder is that antifat any good might overdo it the thin ones are not so much the fashion now garters that much I have the violet pair I wore today thats all he bought me out of the cheque he got on the first O no there was the face lotion I finished the last of yesterday that made my skin like new" (618). Molly worries, as does Gerty, about the ways that she defines herself through her choice of clothing and beauty products, and the advertising voice (which urges potential for perfection through commercialized products) seems to create some anxiety for Molly. She wonders whether the advertised products she discovers in magazines will help her lose weight and keep her in the current fashion of thinness. However, Molly's concern with her self-image in relation to beauty trends differs conspicuously from Gerty's, and her voluptuous, abundant figure counters Gerty's thin, meager figure which fits the cultural model (although Molly asserts that that the thin body type is going out of fashion). Molly's concern is fleeting, and her use of marketing language does not define all of her perceptions. Although Molly briefly echoes the language of *The Gentlewoman*, she does not

permanently adopt the rhetoric of advertising as her own, nor does she assert her unconditional faith in these products.

Despite the separation between Molly's own voice and the language of advertising, Molly recognizes the importance of her social image. She worries about her own adherence to fashion:

the four paltry handkerchiefs about 6/- in all sure you cant get on in this world without style all going in food and rent when I get it Ill lash it around I tell you in fine style I always want to throw a handful of tea into the pot measuring and mincing if I buy a pair of old brogues itself do you like those new shoes yes how much were they I've no clothes at all the brown costume and the skirt and jacket and the one at the cleaners 3 thats what 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 then with all the things getting dearer every day for the 4 years more I have of life up to 35 no Im what am I at all Ill be 33 in September will I what O well look at that Mrs Galbraith shes much older than me I saw her when I was out last week her beautys on the wane she was a lovely woman magnificent head of hair on her down to her waist tossing it back like that like Kitty O Shea (618)

Through her account of fashion, Molly reveals several of her personal concerns, which respond strongly to the personal limitations imposed by her material conditions. Molly remains frustrated over her limited supply of money and expresses anxiety over the passage of time as she evaluates her appearance. As she reveals her belief that "you cant get on in this world without style," she acknowledges the necessity of adherence to fashion, although "style" seems more personalized

than fashion, which enslaves Gerty. Molly does not use this realization to define her self-image, but she uses it as a guideline for social living because she knows it is necessary. Molly also reveals the strain of limited economic resources that she and Bloom face as she regrets her lack of clothing. She realizes that without acceptable clothing, "men wont look at you and women try to walk on you because they know youve no man," revealing the social necessity of attractive and updated clothing and also responding with insight to the fact that appearance strongly influences her social identity. According to Molly, a woman's clothing is a reflection of her relationship with a man. Although Molly is married, she fears that her worn-out clothing will prevent her from attracting men and from gaining respect from other women. She realizes that her attractiveness and social status are largely influenced by physical appearance, but this realization seems to keep her independent from the voices of advertising rather than allowing these voices to determine her own. Through this valid concern shared by Gerty and Molly, Joyce demonstrates one of the obstacles inherent in Modern life. In social spheres and especially in interactions with men, clothing and appearance influence the identities of both women. However, Molly does not seem to confuse personal worth with social status. Molly does not associate appearance with virtue, as Gerty does in her extended fantasy. Molly also demonstrates anxiety over the passing of youth, which the reader knows is also a concern for Gerty. As she compares herself to other women with a characteristically Gerty-like idea, Molly expresses anxiety over several of the material limitations she faces.

Appearance and fashion function slightly differently for Molly than they do for Gerty. Fashion and culturally defined beauty play important economic roles in Molly's life, as they do in Gerty's. Although her appearance undoubtedly functions in a personal social sphere for Molly, it plays another role. As an entertainer, Molly must attend to her appearance in order to

gain status and earn money through her singing career. Molly, as a lower/middle-class female, worries about some of the same issues that Gerty attempts to escape through fantasy, and she has the added concern of her appearance as an entertainer. Molly uses fashion to augment her natural talent as a singer, while Gerty uses these tools to hide her physical deformity. Molly, describing the way that she will improve her performance, says “yes Ill sing Winds that blow from the south that he gave after the choirstairs performance Ill change that lace on my black dress to show off my bubs and Ill yes by God Ill get that big fan mended make them burst with envy” (628). Molly uses fashion as a tool for professional advancement and economic gain. Furthermore, Molly uses clothing to accentuate her “bubs,” as an enhancement of her natural body, rather than as a means to conceal or compensate for defects. Although Gerty and Molly both use commercialized clothing and cosmetics to improve their appearances for performances, Molly maintains the integrity of her voice, which remains the focus of her show, unlike Gerty’s merely visual display for Bloom. Indeed, it is the language itself in Molly’s narrative that distinguishes her from Gerty-
-Gerty responds to the conditions of Modernity through a retreat into myth and attempts to adopt the language of others in order to create order and meaning in her life, while Molly responds with candor and unmasked emotion. Indeed, although Molly, as a singer, sings the language written by others, she retains her own voice which is only mediated but not controlled by the various cultural discourses she encounters.

Molly’s distinctive response to the conditions of Modernity is revealed not only in her self-image, but also in the way she relates to the males in her life. In contrast to Gerty’s imaginations of romantic relationships which attempt to escape reality through the comfort and shelter of romanticized myth, Molly’s contrary accounts of her sexual experience are often critical, vulgar, and disparaging, and they offer a range of emotions about men. They could

hardly be described as idealistic, and her crude descriptions defy the idea that women should avoid thinking about sexuality in physical, bodily terms. Molly's descriptions of men, unlike Gerty's descriptions, entail harsh criticism and negative physical appraisal, and she often depicts her impressions of masculinity in both fragmented and complex terms instead of through the simplistic and pathetically sentimental language of Gerty's fantasy. Molly's often comical and practical frustration with men contrasts directly with Gerty's idealization of the relationships between men and women. Molly discloses "Id rather die 20 times over than marry another of their sex" (613), revealing her frustration with her husband and with men in general. Molly's perceptions of men, like her own self-descriptions, evade idealization because they do not romanticize. She evaluates the men in her life in relative rather than reductive terms:

for all the talk of the world about it people make its only the first time after that its just the ordinary do it and think no more about it why cant you kiss a man without going and marrying him first you sometimes love to wildly when you feel that way so nice all over you you cant help yourself I wish some man or other would take me sometime when hes there and kiss me in his arms theres nothing like a kiss long and hot down to your soul almost paralyses you (610)

Molly's views about sex are seemingly contradictory, as she claims that "its just the ordinary do it and think no more about it." However, Molly's thoughts in "Penelope" often center upon sex. Although she claims that her sexual experience is "ordinary," her passionate imagination does not support this claim. As Molly fantasizes about "some man," she imagines the excitement and satisfaction that sexuality entails for her. Molly's often contradictory perceptions of sexuality reveal her ambivalence as she displays wide range of emotions about sexuality and men, but her delight in the physical act remains apparent even as she refuses to idealize her sexual partners.

Molly's views on her physical relationships with men demonstrate the complexity of her sexual attitudes as she directly responds to the socially structured manifestations of sexuality (which Joyce illustrates through Bloom's interaction with Gerty). As she discusses the sexual relationship between men and women, she thinks "yes imagine Im him think of him can you feel him trying to make a whore of me what he never will he ought to give it up now at this age of his life simply ruination for any woman and no satisfaction in it pretending to like it till he comes and then finish it off myself anyway" (610). Molly reveals the female degradation that sex can entail for her, but does not confine herself to this image as she asserts her own sexual freedom. She asserts independence and self-assurance, rejecting the image of "whore" and asserting that she "will finish it off" on her own. Molly demonstrates her own sexual independence, asserting her ability to please herself (as Bloom does in "Nausicaa"). Gerty, who probably masturbates and undoubtedly responds to Bloom's sexual gaze in "Nausicaa," refuses to unveil her sexuality in her narrative. As Heininger says, "Molly explicitly rejects the inculturated attitudes of female timidity and shame that Gerty has internalized" (169). Furthermore, Molly realizes the theatricality of the sexual act, and is aware that this places her in danger of becoming a "whore." Just as she is aware of the sexual, visual nature of her career as an entertainer, Molly is aware that as a female, she faces objectification and debasement in her sexual exchanges. Molly expresses concern over this in relation to her experience with Boylan as well, but she uses her voice to deny these limiting cultural definitions of gender and female sexuality. Molly's impressions of sexual activity are mediated through particular memories and perceptions; sex is not reduced to restrictive definitions. It is both degrading and fulfilling, and Molly expresses contempt for sexual reduction or degradation. For Molly, sex is not merely disappointing nor simply satisfying, but both.

In comparing Gerty's fantasies of marriage and domesticity to Molly's perceptions of her own married life and sexual experience, it becomes clear that Molly rejects the fairy-tale fantasies that Gerty accepts. In her criticism of other women, Molly discredits these ideas about sexuality:

Gardner yes I can see his face cleanshaven . . . that train again weeping tone once
in the dear deaead days beyondre call close my eyes breath my lips forward kiss
sad look eyes open piano ere oer the world the mists began I ate that istsbeg
comes loves sweet soooooooooong Ill let that out full when I get in front of the
footlights again Kathleen Kearney and her lot of squealers Miss This Miss That
Miss Theother lot of sparrowfarts skitting around talking about politics they know
as much about as my backside anything in the world to make themselves
someway interesting Irish homemade beauties soldiers daughter am I ay and
whose are you bootmakers and publicans I beg your pardon . . . my eyes flash my
bust that they havent passion God help their poor head I knew more about men
and life when I was 15 then theyll all know at 50 they don't know how to sing a
song (627)

Molly asserts her experience with men and her knowledge of physical, sensual connection between a man and a woman in this passage. Although Molly remembers her past with Gardner in very romantic language, she connects this memory with her stage performance, which she also ultimately links to her voice. Molly can, unlike the youthful, stereotypical Gerty-like females she criticizes, use her voice as a mode for self-expression. Although Gerty and others may be able to create the empty visual representation of seduction, Molly points to her passion as something that distinguishes her from the fabricators who attempt to appeal to men through pretense. Molly

asserts her subjectivity in sexual exchange as she refuses to become merely the object for male sexual gratification. Molly harshly criticizes the young females who, like Gerty, can be classified as "Irish homemade beauties." This type of female, according to Molly, lacks passion and attempts to fit the sentimental ideal of Irish beauty by pretending to understand Irish politics, but these inexperienced females lack the insight of experience which Molly has gained. Molly, through her age and experience, can identify the individual females who attempt to mold themselves into popular idealistic images of femininity. Although Molly, like Gerty, criticizes other females for their constructed appearances and identities, she can support this examination with her real experiences with men, and asserts that her real knowledge of men exists because she embraces her own passion and does not attempt to fit into those ideals. Interestingly, at the same time, Molly says that those girls "don't know how to sing a song." Taken in contrast to Gerty's enactment of the "seaside girl," Molly retains her own voice even as she sings "love's song," and relates this to the idea that she knows about "men and life." Although she sings the songs she learns through popular culture, Molly seems to keep her own voice and intentions separate from this performance. She does not permanently adopt the song of seduction as her own, but she knows how to use this language. Unlike Gerty, who does not understand the language she uses, Molly is very aware of its effect, at least upon men. Molly's own critique of other women, then, distinguishes her as superior to females like Gerty because of her passion (as opposed to Gerty's sentimentality), her experience, and the integrity of her own voice as she sings.

Molly's awareness of the interactions between men and women extend to Bloom's desire for other women, as she describes her former maid's attempts to attract Bloom. Molly criticizes the maid's efforts to fool her: "she pretending to understand sly of course that comes from his

side of the house he cant say I pretend things can he Im too honest as a matter of fact and helping her into suppose he thinks Im finished out and laid on the shelf well Im not no nor anything like it well see well see now shes well on for flirting too” (630). Molly, critical of the woman who flirts with her husband, displays a self-awareness which characterizes her as much more mature and candid than the other woman she describes. As Molly asserts her honesty, Joyce writes into her narrative an explicit comparison between Molly and other stereotypical women who use pretense in their relationships with men. Unlike the maid, according to Molly, she is much more aware of herself: "Molly, though attached to her own sentimentality, would not, however, be caught in Gerty's artificialities, having generally a good sense of what is spurious about others. She makes fun of euphemisms, prefers 'a few simple words' to phrases from the 'ladies letterwriter' . . . She has a sharp eye for pretence, circumlocution, and evasive euphemisms" (Senn 178). Using the same language as Bloom's in his description of Gerty, Molly asserts that she is not "laid on the shelf." Molly is no commodity; she is full of life and refuses to be forced onto the shelf, the place of the unwed, commodified spinsters like Gerty. Through her criticisms of the theatricality of other females in their interactions with men, Molly reveals her distaste for the empty image of feminine sexuality which many other women pursue.

Molly refuses to reduce herself to either the idealistic images through which Gerty defines herself or to complete rejections of femininity. She considers the cultural definitions and messages about femininity, but not without personal evaluation. As Heininger argues,

There are many loyal subjects of commodity colonialism, 'votaries of dame fashion' such as Gerty, who consume what they can acquire of the desired objects, and who define themselves by such acquired images. However, there are also those who resist, rebellious colonials such as Molly Bloom, who first accept

and later reject the imperial culture's images, products, and social goods, in order to create cultures of resistance. (161)

Heininger, in his analysis of the effects of Irish colonialism and advertising, delineates Molly's "resistance" to popular culture. This is a valid and effective tool for analyzing Molly's character insofar as examining her independence from the ideas which define Gerty, but Heininger possibly pushes this analysis too far, as he seems to imply that Molly recognizes the ramifications of her rejection of commercialism (and indeed, even British imperialism). Molly's resistance seems more passive than active and more personal than political. Although her rejection of the commodities of English culture and the emptiness of advertising implies an affirmation of her individual identity, she does not purposefully "create" a "culture of resistance." Rather, Molly chooses a personal mode of affirmation over the prevalent images of femininity presented through the cultural texts she reads. As she rejects the falseness with which other women present themselves, she rejects the emptiness of the cultural images of femininity around her. She undoubtedly rejects the emptiness of this symbolization, but her cognizance of the scope of her own resistance remains personal and not consistently or actively political. Although Molly rejects many of the cultural messages Gerty accepts, she is not defined by her resistance to her culture.

Molly's complicated views of sexuality demonstrate the personal, social, and economic spheres in which her sexuality functions. She discusses her economic status as it relates to her husband and his sexual conception of her body, revealing the relationship between commercialism and sexuality which is so apparent in "Nausicaa." Molly relates the ideas of sexuality and money as they influence her personal relationship with her husband:

the woman is beauty of course that's admitted when he said I could pose for a picture naked to some rich fellow in Holles street when he lost the job in Helys and I was selling the clothes and strumming in the coffee palace would I be like that bath of the nymph with my hair down yes only she's younger or I'm a little like that dirty bitch in that Spanish photo he has nymphs used they go about like that I asked him about her (620)

In response to his unemployment, Bloom asks Molly to sell the sexualized image of her own body, asking her to reduce herself to commodified sexuality. Molly expresses several concerns of modern femininity initially raised in "Nausicaa" as she reveals that her husband has asked for her to flatten herself to an image for economic gain. With her own reference to the "bath of the nymph," Molly relates the recurring image of the seaside girl to the cheap pandering of her own image. Bloom's response to his own failure to provide for his family has been to ask for the exploitation of his wife, and Joyce uses Molly's voice to expose some of Bloom's limitations as a husband while revealing Molly's independence. As Molly expresses contempt for the request for this picture, she explicitly rejects the commercialized, static image of herself. Molly, in contrast to Gerty, refuses to be reduced to an objectified sexual image.

Before Molly gets a chance to speak in "Penelope" without the mediation of an outside narrator, her identity is limited to the descriptions of other male characters, who usually represent her as a "sexual and musical commodity" (Heininger 163). This depiction of Molly, espoused by male characters in the novel, serves perhaps to illuminate male perceptions of Molly, but is incongruous with the self-image Molly demonstrates in her narrative. Although Molly's reaction to this idea demonstrates her frustration and disgust with her husband's proposal, her thoughts also reveal her independence from this image of herself: "Before 'Penelope,' Molly is often figured in Dublin's male public discourse as a sexual commodity, as well as a colonized site for

male activity and fantasy. Dramatized as a woman speaking in 'Penelope,' however, Molly first participates in, then resists defining her self-image in terms of the system of commodities that mass consumer culture offers her" (Heininger 161). Through her explicit refusal of this cheapened image of herself which mirrors the terms with which men describe Molly, she refuses to accept the role of sexual object, retaining her own sexual subjectivity. Because she has obviously refused Bloom's proposal, Molly also retains some autonomy as she refuses to pose for the picture, which she relates to her ability to earn money in other ways. Molly discloses that she has been working two jobs while Bloom has lost his. Her ability to earn money through these jobs as well as her singing career distinguish Molly as a woman with much greater sexual and financial independence than Gerty and other comparable women as she rejects the flattened, commodified, sexual image of herself.

Although Molly never explicitly expresses her justification for infidelity, it becomes more clear as she evaluates her relationships with Bloom and with Boylan. Interestingly, it seems that through her affair with Boylan, Molly attempts to deny that she is only a sexual object. As she imagines being with Bloom after she has been unfaithful, she thinks "I'll put on my best shift and drawers let him have a good eyeful . . . Ill let him know if thats what he wanted that his wife is fucked and damn well fucked too . . . not by him" (641). Molly claims that she has been unfaithful in response to Bloom's desire to make her into a mere sexual image or object. Molly's adultery seems to be influenced by a rejection of her current sexual relationship with Bloom, as he as attempted to make her into a sexual image but has not made love to her for ten years. Molly's intercourse with Boylan, then, becomes an assertion of her own active sexual participation and choice. Unlike Gerty, Molly rejects sexuality without physical contact. Furthermore, Molly says "Serve him right its all his own fault if I am an adulteress as the thing gallery said O much about it if thats all the harm ever we did in this vale of tears God knows its

not much doesn't everybody only they hide it I suppose that's what a woman is supposed to be there for or He wouldn't have made us the way He did so attractive to men" (642). Molly laments the aspect of her relationship with her husband that reduces her to a sexual object, but asserts her own sexuality. She relates this to the idea that a woman becomes a sexual object because of her attractiveness to men but she does not want a sexual relationship in which she does not participate. Although she seems to acknowledge that men are naturally attracted to the sexual appearance of women, she seems to criticize this in Bloom and relates this to her own adultery. Molly laments this relationship between men and women, and strongly expresses her desire to escape from this cheapened sexual interaction with her husband, and she responds through infidelity. In this way, Molly explains that through her infidelity, she rejects her reduction from an active sexual participant to a mere sexual image.

Molly's Sexual Desire: "there's nothing like nature"

Molly seeks something beyond sexuality in her infidelity, although it seems clear throughout "Penelope" that she is likely to be disappointed. As Molly thinks of her next meeting with Boylan, she wonders:

what'll I wear shall I wear a white rose or those fairy cakes in Liptons I love the smell of a rich big shop at 7 ½d a lb or the other ones with the cherries in them and the pinky sugar 11d a couple of lbs of those a nice plant for the middle of the table I'd get that cheaper in wait where's this I saw them not long ago I love flowers I'd love to have the whole place swimming in roses God of heaven there's nothing like nature the wild mountains then the sea and the waves rushing then the beautiful country with the fields of oats and wheat and all kinds of things and all the fine cattle going about that would do your heart good to see rivers and

lakes and flowers all sorts of shapes and smells and colours springing up even out of the ditches primroses and violets nature it is as (642-3)

As Molly worries about her appearance and clothing for her meeting with her lover, she progresses from personal and sexual appearance to a brand name and thoughts of bargain shopping. She abandons this fantasy to thoughts and images of nature. It seems that Molly rejects the commercialization of sex as she reveals that she literally seeks nature. The images of flowers express Molly's desire to return to something more natural than the commercialized, dehumanizing sexual atmosphere she rejects. The image of the flower, not surprisingly, is the means through which she reconnects to her natural sexual relationship with Bloom.

Earlier in the episode, Molly has remembered her early relationship with Bloom. As she recalls this time, she connects her sexual satisfaction with the flowers Bloom gave to her as well as with his written expression of love: "writing every morning a letter sometimes twice a day I liked the way he made love then he knew the way to take a woman when he sent me the 8 big poppies because mine was the 8th then I wrote the night he kissed my heart at Dolphins barn I couldnt describe it simply makes you feel like nothing on earth but he never knew how to embrace well like Gardner" (615). Molly extols Bloom's love and his physical treatment of her as she remembers the flowers he gives to her. As she compares Bloom to another man, Molly rejects an absolute idealization of Bloom, realizing that he does not, and did not then, represent perfection or even irrefutable masculinity for Molly. She sees him within the context of her experience with other men as she considers Bloom's role in her life, expressing for the reader the idea that she did (and does, as evidenced by her relationship with Boylan) have a choice between men. Molly chooses Bloom despite his inadequacies, and not because she imagines that he is perfect. Unlike Gerty, who attempts to place Bloom into her romantic conception of a male suitor even though she has never spoken with him, Molly acknowledges Bloom's flaws. Indeed,

the power to choose distinguishes Molly from Gerty, who cannot choose or see any male as an individual because of her romantic fantasies. Molly's affirmation of Bloom is her choice; she chooses him over all of her other past experiences. The flowers that Molly remembers, then, are linked to her affirmation of Bloom above her other suitors.

As Molly remembers her sexual consummation with Bloom, she chooses the natural image of the flower to describe their union, returning to his personal expression of love. She chooses the symbol which she associates with her husband, rather than with an idealized heroic male figure:

the day I got him to propose to me yes first I gave him the bit of seedcake out of my mouth and it was leapyear like now yes 16 years ago my God after that long kiss I near lost my breath yes he said I was a flower of the mountain yes so we are flowers all a womans body yes that was one true thing he said in his life and the sun shines for you today yes that was why I liked him because I saw he understood or felt what a woman is and I knew I could always get round him and I gave him all the pleasure I could leading him on till he asked me to say yes
(643)

Molly associates her memory of herself as a flower with the nourishment and affirmation of her sexual consummation with Bloom. Molly accepts not the sexual image of herself in a shift and drawers as a sexualized image, but as a flower. She accepts a sexual relationship that is nourishing, wholesome, affirmative, and natural. This final affirmation of her husband and the moment in which she first said "yes" reflects Molly's rejection of the commodified symbols which popularly determine beauty and feminine sexuality, and indeed determine the sexual interaction between men and women, as she chooses nature and Bloom over other lovers and other versions of femininity.

Heininger argues that as Molly chooses to reaffirm her former "yes," she makes a significant choice with her symbolization of the flower: "With her rhetorical turn to the flower trope, Molly makes a significant political and aesthetic gesture. She asserts the value of the individually created image over the value of the mass-produced advertising image, which always denies the past and the future to feature the static and glamorized present" (Heininger 171). Molly's choice of a natural and personal self-representation undoubtedly demonstrates her rejection of the debased sexuality which reduces her to a sexual image and object. However, this symbol is also an affirmation of an important personal interaction with her husband, and if she rejects the political structure which reduces women to sexual images, she does so only in the context of affirming her personal memory with Bloom. Molly first rejects the static image of herself as a sexual commodity and then affirms the natural image of the flower which she connects with her past, so her affirmation of her sexual relationship with Bloom responds to a past in which she was an active sexual partner with him. As Molly reaffirms her past with Bloom, she again makes the decision to love and accept Bloom, but not within the context of debased sexual gratification without the sexual act itself. Instead, she chooses the natural consummation of their love, associating it with his image of her as a flower.

Although the flower is, as some critics argue, a culturally inscribed symbol, Molly's choice of the flower does not self-consciously avoid the symbolism of culture, but she makes this historical symbol personal by associating it with an actual experience of love. Indeed, Molly serves to refigure cultural models, just as she "demystifies" other cultural myths in "Penelope:"

Like gender, like language, the 'natural' origin of flowers is already culturally inscribed; the nature they belong to is an idea we inherit from a long cultural history. Molly Bloom is not one to strive after a nature from which culture has been evacuated . . . Her attitude to her own 'female flow,' for instance, is scarcely

Romantic; although for some readers it seems to reinforce the mythic quality of the chapter . . . Joyce allows us to read the event of menstruation as a literalizing and demystifying of the myth. (Attridge 561)

Molly does not respond to the cultural myths which surround her by believing them wholeheartedly, nor does she attempt to disprove them. Instead, the flower serves as a reminder of her personal natural memory of sexual love as she inscribes this cultural symbol with personal significance, creating her own poetic image through a memory of sexual love surrounded by the nature she praises. Perhaps Molly does make her own myth as she is inscribed in Joyce's novel, but she does not attempt to describe herself in terms of other myths as she chooses the "one true thing" that Bloom has ever said. Molly, throughout her chapter, seems to participate in what Attridge terms "literalizing" of myth. Perhaps, as she serves as counterpart to her Homeric counterpart Penelope, Molly reinterprets (and indeed, demands that the reader reinterpret) the paradigm of the ever-faithful wife. Although she is not literally sexually faithful to her questing husband, Molly affirms the consummation of her sexual relationship with her husband and ultimately chooses him despite his flaws. As Bloom himself is an ironic hero, Molly accepts his flaws and ultimately returns to his love through her narrative. In this way, Molly both affirms and subverts her mythical model; she is not literally faithful, but she refigures her damaged marriage and loneliness to affirm her husband over other suitors. Indeed, Joyce does not bind Molly by the title of her episode, but allows her to reinterpret personally her role as wife.

Although it may be claimed that the image of the flower, perhaps like the mythical model of Penelope, is merely another idealized empty image of femininity, Molly chooses it because it signifies a particular memory of affirmation for her. Heininger argues that:

Of course, in her thoughts of fashionable dresses, corsets, and 'anti-fat' pills, Molly partakes in this culture's symbolic imaging of the middle-class woman's

body as visible public property. But in the last section of 'Penelope,' she chooses to associate herself and her body with an image which invites interpretation as both completely 'natural' and highly 'artificial': the image of a flower, specifically a 'flower of the mountain' on Howth Head. (Heininger 161)

Although, as Heininger argues, Molly partakes in the "symbolic imaging of the middle-class woman's body as visible public property," it seems that she rejects this limitation in her final affirmation of Bloom. In her personal relationship with her husband, she desires to be free from the limitations of the reduction of the sexualized image. Heininger claims that "Molly's flower is a personal image retrieved from the stock poetic and popular images of women, and a political image with which she clearly rejects the commodification of woman's bodies promoted by the ideology of the *Gentlewoman* magazine" (Heininger 171). Unlike the images of femininity which reduce her to mere sexuality, the image of the flower complicates, rather than reduces Molly.

Molly's choice to affirm that she is a mountain flower cannot be reduced to the historical and literary implications of flower symbolism. Molly, associating her own sexuality with nature, defies the reduction that as a flower, she is a simplistic symbol of fertility. As several critics point out, she uses her narrative to criticize the idealization of femininity. Using her depiction of menstruation, Derek Attridge argues that Molly's narrative refigures myths of femininity: "Through Molly's thoughts Joyce both alerts us to the myth ('like the sea') and reduces it to a messy and inconvenient reality, for the introduction of the which the author himself seems to accept some blame ('Oh Jamesy let me up out of this'). Molly's only consolation is that her flow demonstrates that she's not pregnant: not what any self-respecting fertility symbol would be expected to feel" (Attridge 561). Instead of affirming that her choice of the flower to describe herself affirms the historical symbolism of the flower as a fertility symbol, Molly seems to offer

a different notion of what her flower means. Molly's choice is personal and creative; she chooses this symbol through her own memory of sexuality and affirmation of love without giving a cultural source; instead, she says that this was the one "true" description that Bloom gave to her.

Molly's symbol, unlike the image of the seaside girl, the Virgin Mary, or Penelope, does not reduce her to a merely sexual being, a sexless virgin, or a chaste and suffering wife. Indeed, Molly implicitly rejects any simplification of herself. As Joyce has shown that cultural myths about gender and sexuality are reductive and oversimplifying, Molly demonstrates the abundance and complexity of someone who does not fit into any one category of femininity or sexuality but creates her own individual notion of femininity. Critics have trouble reducing Molly to any defined characterization, as does Joyce: "Molly Bloom, like Cleopatra and like the Wife of Bath and like Hester Prynne, is not determined to univocal meaning, but enjoys the mystery of autonomy. As humans in reality may choose to love or to hate, so Molly does, and the ultimate reasons for her doing so are not spelled out. They are not clear, even to her" (Boyle 408). Boyle points out perhaps the most important characteristic of Molly's narrative--she is autonomous. Molly is not bound by the cultural definitions that Gerty chooses to accept for herself, and she is not bound by her marriage to fidelity, as she has shown through her affair with Boylan. Instead, Molly seems to break away from the myths of femininity which prescribe action for females in society (including the myths that Gerty adheres to) and from the Odyssean myth with which James Joyce inscribes her voice.

Several critics argue that as Molly affirms her husband's voice, she affirms the patriarchal language of the men that oppress her, including that of her husband and that of her creator, James Joyce. Because she is figured as an earth mother and utters the most affirmative word in the language at the end of her narrative, some critics her narrative as affirming the patriarchal voice with which the novel is written: "The epic concludes not with Leopold Bloom's

voice, but with Joyce as his own epic hero (or at least the most successful suitor), reclaiming his territorial authority over language and representation. He 'usurps' the meaning of the words he puts in Molly's mouth, just as he 'usurps' her female body to put her in his linguistic sexplay" (Henderson 522). Similarly, female critics have argued that Joyce reclaims the female voice through his very attempt to represent feminine writing, subverting her own subjectivity by making her the object of his writing. Henderson, among others, asserts that Molly becomes a mythic, superhuman figure in her chapter: "For the reader, in fact, she moves outside the human realm entirely; these mythic associations, unbeknownst to Molly, place her in the world of myth and divinity. Even as he mocks her language, then, Joyce also places this chapter in a tradition beyond his own creation" (Henderson 523). Joyce, however, seems to commemorate what is personal and what is natural about Molly, as she rejects the classifications of others through the use of her own voice. As Ellmann suggests, Joyce's depiction of Molly does not elevate her to such an extent: "There is no reason to exalt her, because she is earthy, into an earth goddess. She has had two children, a boy and a girl, but the boy died shortly after birth. Her motherhood was only an aspect of that femininity which Joyce was trying to report" (*Joyce*, 377). Furthermore, Molly may be unaware of the Odyssean myth which Joyce uses, but her narrative demonstrates clear understanding and rejection of other cultural myths. Although Molly would never describe herself as Penelope (as she rejects other representations of herself), she is fully aware that wives are supposed to be sexually faithful according to her society's standards. Some critics claim that Joyce pushes Molly's narrative too far, denying her humanity through his mythic representation of Molly:

If Molly transcends her daily existence, she does so as a symbol, not as an individual. In magnifying her significance, Joyce dehumanizes her . . . Joyce depicts Molly's transcendence more by making her become a life force or

woman's essence than by creating her to be analogous to Mary, Eve, or Penelope.

She is not a hero, but a power beyond the realm of human experience. (Unkeless 164)

Joyce, aware that he, by necessity, creates the voice of Molly in his narrative, attempts to give Molly a personal voice through which she can represent herself and deny other representations of her. As many critics argue, Joyce seems to demonstrate his awareness his own dictation, leading Molly to ask, as Attridge points out, "Oh Jamesy let me up out of this." However, Joyce undoubtedly establishes Molly's voice as distinctive and uses her narrative to defy and refigure myths of gender identity, especially in contrast to Gerty. It is through this contrast that Joyce gives Molly her own voice despite the necessity of her representation in his novel.

Molly's intellectual power and literary knowledge are often examined as part of an analysis of Joyce's use of irony in the episode. Because of her anti-intellectual perceptions and her often faulty logic, some critics question whether Joyce used Molly's narrative to criticize the female mind:

It is not . . . the writing of someone who wields the pen with ease and confidence but rather of someone without the training and practice necessary for perfect clarity and correctness on paper. If for Joyce writing of this kind was associated with women, as it clearly was, we need not ascribe the association to a deeply-rooted sexism, as it was an accurate reflection of a social and economic inequality that still exists in other, related, forms today. The reader can choose whether to take from this an acceptance of the exclusion of women from the advantages of education or an impetus toward political action to change this situation; neither is obviously implied by Joyce's text. (Attridge 550-51)

Although Joyce associated Molly's manner of dialogue with women (and specifically with his wife Nora), by giving the final chapter to Molly, Joyce seems to celebrate Molly's natural and individual freedom rather than to restrict her to his authorial dictatorship. He has already demonstrated, through his novel, that Molly is a strong-willed, capable person who can act freely. Although Joyce presents her in a complex manner, Joyce does not deride Molly for her lack of education; Gerty lacks an education, but does not act creatively or freely--her images belong to others, and she loses her identity through her adherence to cultural myth.

Although Molly's use of language is often offered as evidence that Joyce derides the female voice, satirizing the illogical language of the female voice, Molly speaks without the trappings of the education, and indeed without the traditional literariness of the authorial voice. Critics often argue that Joyce's elevation of Molly in the final episode is highly ironic as he criticizes Molly's illiteracy, criticizing the female mind in its failure to reason: "Molly's failure to understand her own words and her illogical logic provide Joyce with sources for authorial superiority; he would hardly cap his hyperliterary epic with an uncritical paean to illiterate intuition" (Henderson 524). Molly, however, rejects the language of others in place of her own voice, using language to express something personal rather than to express something idealistic or mythical. It is the very freedom from the language of others that allows Molly to create her own narrative, very unlike that of Gerty. Although Henderson argues that Joyce would not end his "hyperliterary" epic with a tribute to a woman without an education, it seems that the opposite is true, given Joyce's evaluation of cultural myth in both "Nausicaa" and "Penelope," as Joyce seems to illustrate the limitations of existing myths to create the voice of the individual. Instead, as Attridge argues, it seems that Molly "literalizes" the myths which describe her, refiguring them into a more personalized expression of herself. Joyce commemorates the personal creation of ideas to inscribe meaning and the voice for the individual, and it seems that

Molly rejects the myths which inform notions of gender, creating a personal definition of her own gender and sexuality:

Although the narrative is located firmly within the context of early twentieth-century linguistic and mental habits and is largely a parodic recycling of contemporary cliches, it manages to point beyond the strongly patriarchal structures of our world--to the possibility that gender might be less rigid, less oppositional, less determined by a political and economic system. Paradoxically, perhaps, this might mean giving biology more of a say rather than less, as it is the crude abstractions of a dual and oppositional gender system (linked to the economies of fashion, glamour, pornography, and so on) that prevent the multiplicity of human physical traits from providing a basis--one of the many possible bases--for an equivalent multiplicity of interpersonal relations. (Attridge 562)

By returning to nature, figured as sexual love, Molly's narrative suggests that the structures and definitions of sexuality imposed by culture are too reductive and restraining as she asserts her own creative voice in her narrative. As Joyce elevates sexual love, Molly expresses a creativity unfettered by the cultural language and myth which have so influenced Gerty's narrative:

"Unlike so many women who think of themselves even in the third person, she speaks for herself--powerfully, lyrically, sometimes crudely, without inhibition" (Mahaffey 165). Molly's voice, although female, speaks in a manner that denies that her femininity has been culturally determined as she asserts her own creativity. Although her language necessarily uses modern vocabulary, what Attridge deems a "parodic recycling of contemporary cliches," Molly uses this language to deny that she can be simplified or reduced completely into an image or a symbol. Indeed, her return to the flower at the end of her narrative must be informed and mediated by her

narrative which asserts autonomy. Accordingly, the flower complicates rather than reduces Molly.

Molly's rejection of myth and cultural definitions seems to characterize her language, as she demystifies the myths of femininity throughout the episode. Her narrative advocates a return to the natural, undefiled sense of self: "The seeming (though not real) inability to differentiate finely is characteristic of Molly, who falls into calling the various men she has known by the pronoun 'he,' without much further identification . . . Against Stephen's effort to make women mythical, 'handmaidens of the moon,' 'wombs of sin,' and the like, Molly regards men as either natural or unnatural" (Ellmann, *Liffey* 166). Molly's views of people, unlike the immature and idealistic conceptions of both Gerty and Stephen, do not attempt to impose myth upon people. There are no idealistic models for Molly. Although Stephen asserts that he rejects his literary predecessors, he cannot escape his obsession with myth and his anxiety over his literary predecessors. In her chapter, however, Molly transcends this obstacle to creativity as she finds inspiration in nature.

Joyce undoubtedly infuses Molly's narrative with nature to demonstrate a return to the natural freedom of creativity unbound by the myths that have preceded Molly's story; unlike Stephen, Molly does not need to attempt to transcend any literary predecessor: "Her language does not seek metaphysical presence and represents the beauty of temporality. She disdains a representation of herself . . . preferring her own self to a possible identification between her and a character in a book" (Battaglia 46). Just as she rejects the mythical definitions of men, her own identity defies the myths surrounding women as she refuses to be limited by restricting images of femininity. Molly's narrative in "Penelope," Ellmann explains, is "less an addition than a correction" and he further explains that in this episode "Bloomsday becomes everymansday, and everywomansday, in that all necessary elements of the desirable life have been gathered together.

None of the principal figures is complete in himself, but together they sum up what is affirmable. At the end we are brought back to the earth, to spring, to vegetation, and to sexual love" (*Liffey* 167). Molly's narrative is comic, in the sense that it returns to a memory of life and regeneration; the moment she recalls is her first act of physical love with Bloom, but it remains inscribed with her personal story rather than the myths of others. However, Molly's narrative undeniably affirms the universal act of regeneration. The sexual love of Bloom and Molly, associated with the earthly bounty of nature, affirms their life-yielding choice to love, expressed through the recollection of Molly's memory. This regeneration, however, only seems possible through acts of personal freedom: Molly's choice to affirm Bloom is significant because she chooses sexual love with Bloom over her other sexual experiences, indeed, over her sexual experience with Boylan earlier in the same day.

Perhaps most important to Joyce's celebration of the female voice are the autobiographical aspects of the chapter, and indeed, the novel. The language Joyce attempts to capture in Molly's narrative is that of his wife, Nora, who also famously denied that Molly Bloom did not represent her. Joyce remains, as his ironic depictions of myth demonstrate throughout the novel, constantly aware of the problems of representation, and this seems implicit in his decision to give Molly her own voice in "Penelope." Even though some critics argue that he places Molly beyond the human realm, making her an impossible figure, Joyce seems aware that this problem exists. This is, perhaps, why Joyce uses his schema to affirm the physical body of Molly and she is figured as a natural, sensual being, as he roots her narrative in her physical body:

Joyce outflanks the individual lives of his characters by these ultimate implications. But he outflanks them also by making each episode a part of the

human body. It seemed at first that this slow accretion of a human form was gratuitous, but it must now be seen to be essential. Stephen says that literature is the eternal affirmation of the spirit of man, but pure spirit is something never endorsed in this book. But the body of man must be affirmed with his spirit.

(Ellmann, *Liffey* 175)

Joyce purposefully ends his narrative with the natural female body, through which the return to natural, sexual love defies the definitions of gender that are expressed through language. As she speaks with her own voice, Molly affirms her personal, and indeed physical, love with Bloom and defies fixed notions of gender:

To read Joyce's works as a questioning of the boundaries that structure the dominant Western conception of language, including the boundary between speech and writing, is to glimpse that other possibility: not because grammar is patriarchal and must be overflowed by female torrents, but because the linguistic ideology that those rigid boundaries serve is continuous with the gender ideology that gives us, over and over again, two sexes in fixed and unproductive opposition. (Attridge 562)

This ending seems wholly affirmative of Molly's natural femininity, and her explicit rejections of external representations of herself place her own individual voice and body over other attempts to limit her. By placing this feminine body, and indeed this feminine narrative, at the end of his novel, Joyce rejects the fabricated spirituality of Gerty and her limiting notions of Platonic love, which Joyce has already shown to be unfulfilling, empty idealizations in "Nausicaa." As Ellmann argues, Joyce elevates sexual love above every other form with his flower imagery: "Yeats, Dante, and Joyce all agree, though Joyce corrects Dante (and Plato) by placing sexual love above all other kinds of love. Red-rosed Molly and Bloom, himself a flower, fertilize the terrestrial

paradise. Their youth and age, their innocence and experience, blend" (*Liffey* 174). As Ellmann suggests, the love of Molly and Bloom is rooted in the natural, and it is also rooted in something that has actually occurred--the physical consummation of their love--rather than in a fantasy of sexuality. Indeed, Joyce elevates the natural body over the spiritual realm, and affirms the sexual relationship between Molly and Bloom, perhaps asserting that it will be restored through Molly's re-creation of their first sexual encounter.

Molly's Song: "as well him as another"

Maria DiBattista discusses Molly's creative impulse as similar to Joyce's rejection of his cultural past, and she argues that Molly's narrative celebrates personal creation. She claims that "The last word of *Ulysses*, *Yes*, is Joyce's greeting to that new era, one born out of the belief that the order of the world is not 'ineluctable' but, on the contrary, subject to a perpetual creation" (DiBattista 167). Molly's narrative, which recalls her past memory of her first sexual experience with Bloom, uses this memory as a means to create a new possibility for her damaged marriage, as DiBattista argues that Joyce could believe that "modern history was a nightmare from which we might eventually awake. Molly's insomnia . . . testifies that the night might once again become the time of creative reveries. As the rest of the modern world sleeps, Molly-Penelope is at work on her web, interweaving passional reminiscences into a tapestry" (DiBattista 168). Indeed, Molly's narrative seems to transcend the boundaries of time, as she blends the past with the present. Penelope, as Ellmann points out, is the only episode without a specific time - "it is the number of eternity and infinity. It might be more exact to say that the ruins of time and space and the mansions of eternity here coexist, at least until the very end" (*Liffey* 163). At the end of her narrative, Molly seems to use her memory for the possibility of personal creation, as she creates and affirms the personal symbol of her identity. Through the creation of what DiBattista calls Molly's tapestry of "passional reminiscences," Molly overcomes her anxiety over the

passage of time by commemorating a past affirmation of Bloom, combining her image of the past with the present. Furthermore, Molly, as DiBattista suggests, reworks the Penelope paradigmatic model of the faithful wife to demonstrate a personal, regenerative, and fulfilling love which is not prescribed by myth.

Through Molly's narration, Joyce responds to the emptiness of Modernity with the affirmation of personal creation. Even as Molly expresses sadness and despair over her damaged marriage, she chooses to affirm her sexual experience as a solution to her sadness: "Molly's apocalypticism is projected in her vision of a redeemed Nature that can as effortlessly coax primroses and violets from rank ditches as it can adorn the earth with flowers of the mountain, of which the most spectacular specimen and prototype is Molly herself" (DeBattista 168). Through her explanations of the Modernist use of the idea of a "First Love," DiBattista asserts that "First Love is a modern invention, an imaginative and emotional solution to the crisis of belatedness, by which originality is recuperated by re-presenting the feelings of the first time" (DeBattista 174). In response to the myths which surround her, then, Molly returns to love as the basic inspiration for creativity, in order to respond with her own original story. DiBattista further argues that the representation of "First Love" "provides us with the extraordinary occasion on which it is possible for freedom to be wrested out of necessity. Or, failing that, the novel will set to work in showing us how necessity, *what is to be expected*, can be seen as the ordinary, the appropriate and designated, domain in which our freedom is to be found" (DiBattista 177-8). Molly becomes an independent creator as she affirms her freedom to love and to affirm her husband despite the fragmentation of their marriage. Indeed, despite the material limitations which define her every day life, Molly does not choose to retreat into the myths of others, but chooses to reaffirm what is positive about her relationship with Bloom. Joyce, as he was writing *Ulysses*, commented upon Penelope, presenting his own idea that "she is trying to recollect what

Ulysses looks like. You see, he has been away for many years . . ." (Ellmann, *Joyce* 430).

Indeed, Joyce's Penelope attempts to recollect the image of her first love with her husband, the image of their first sexual encounter. Molly demonstrates her own personal agency as she celebrates her ability to create love out of her memory of first love despite the current unhappiness of her marriage.

Molly's final expression of love, through which she transcends time through memory, is a celebration of the natural regenerative quality of love. As she responds to the sadness of her fragmented marriage, she reaffirms, choosing love and joy over this sadness: "I thought as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes" (643-44). Molly's lyrical language and her repetition of the word "yes" create a song in which she affirms her life with Bloom and her ability to love despite her despair: "Her famous affirmation with which the book ends expresses her willed acceptance of life *and* loss, her resistance to attenuation and despair, to being turned to stone by a realistic sight of the world as it is, and not in the romantic world of faery" (Mahaffey 166). Molly's creative voice in the last pages of "Penelope" expresses a love and creative power which surpasses the limitations which have been imposed upon her. Indeed, through the voice of Molly, Joyce finally surpasses his ironic representation of Modernity as he creates through Molly a creative voice which is not bound by cultural definitions:

Molly's incantatory coda invokes the same transcendent bliss *beyond the reach of irony* in which essence and phenomenon inhere and 'the fire and the rose are one.' Molly's affirmations are almost inconceivable after the savage ironies of *Ulysses*, which is why, I suspect, critics have been embarrassed by her effusions. Yet I

believe it is indisputable that her triumph represents the most heartening victory of nonironic narration in modern literature" (DiBattista 197).

Indeed, as Molly creates her story out of sadness, she transcends the physical limitations upon her own creativity, and her narrative, strongly rooted in her body, is not ironic but affirmative of her own sexuality, love, and ability to create. She refuses to surrender to the despair of Modernity, created at least in part by the empty cultural myths which surround her, and instead chooses to create a new image of herself. Through her return to her memory of sexual love, Molly celebrates her ability to create:

Molly, like Gerty MacDowell, like Bloom, like Stephen, has a touch of the artist about her, but that is because art is a natural process, which begins and ends with impure substance, and bids the dead to rise. There is sadness too, since Molly's present is so bleak in comparison with that lost paradise . . . the sadness is muted, however. Time and space are, at least for an instant, mere ghosts beside eternity and infinity. (Ellmann, *Liffey* 173)

If what distinguishes Molly from the other characters in Joyce's novel is her freedom and independence, then her choice becomes extremely important. She is able to surpass the sadness of Modernity, embodied in the other characters and most savagely in Gerty, because she frees herself from the myths of others. Ultimately, as Molly creates her song at the end of "Penelope," she escapes the confines of isolation and paralysis which the other characters cannot. It is through their union and their final choice to love on a personal rather than idealistic manner, then, that Joyce elevates Molly and Bloom to Modern heroine and hero.

Although Joyce suggests the possibility of sexual reconciliation between Molly and Bloom, he does not affirm this possibility. Because he commemorates Molly's freedom of choice, her narrative is not deterministic like the fictions of Gerty and other characters in the

novel. Instead, the novel ends with possibility--Molly may not choose either Boylan or Bloom; Joyce leaves the possibilities open for the personal agency he commemorates, although he suggests that Molly's association with nature will lead her to Bloom. Ellmann explains:

The narrative level of the book has by this time become less important, and Joyce will not pursue his characters literally because he has negotiated their symbolic reconciliation . . . On the historical level, the characters have awakened from the Circean nightmare of history by drawing the past into the present (a timeless present) and making it an expression of love instead of hatred, of fondness rather than remorse. Art has been shown to be a part of nature, and in all its processes an imitation of natural ones. These processes gave their summit in love, of which the highest form is sexual love. (*Liffey* 174-5)

By celebrating sexual love, Joyce demonstrates Molly's ability to go beyond the cultural limitations of Modernity. Because she uses the memory of personal sexual love, Molly uses her symbol of the flower to escape the rigid definitions of gender, expressed through cultural myth, and expresses her freedom from the society and the definitions which have entrapped many other figures in Joyce's Dublin. Her expression of this freedom, then is the act of creation, which is as Ellmann suggests, an imitation of nature. What distinguishes Molly's voice, then, is her natural expression of personal love and her freedom from the myths which prescribe the creation of others.

Conclusion

Joyce constructs Molly's narrative to embody the female rejection of the myths of femininity, as Molly expresses her autonomy from cultural restriction. As Joyce presents Molly as a problematic heroine and complicates her with her adultery, he questions the ideals of femininity and romantic, which he has already shown to be incredibly limiting and destructive in

"Nausicaa." Indeed, Joyce responds to Gerty's characterization as a determined character with Molly's assertion of her creative voice and free will, as he suggests the primacy of individual agency. Indeed, although he has shown cultural myths of femininity to be extremely powerful through his characterization of Gerty, Joyce demonstrates the possibility of female autonomy through Molly's narrative, effectively freeing Molly from the cultural myth, and indeed, the Odyssean myth, with which outsiders attempt to define her. Even as Joyce refrains from determining Molly's future relationship with her husband, he allows her to retain her freedom.

Although Joyce allows Molly to retain her freedom, Joyce commemorates her union with Bloom as a his rich use of myth loses some irony as Molly affirms her sexual union with Bloom. Ultimately affirmative of their marriage, Molly's narrative mirrors the mature love story of Odysseus and Penelope, but it is only through Molly's unbound narrative that she asserts her love for her husband. Indeed, through her natural sexual memory, Molly becomes a creator of something which is not bound by the myths of others. Indeed, she expresses a love that is deeply personalized and natural, ultimately transcending the isolation and confinement which have been imposed upon her by cultural myths of gender. Through the affirmation of her natural sexual union with Bloom, then, Molly responds to the dehumanizing constriction of Modernity with love, expressed through her freedom of creative thought. Joyce, after his exposure of the absurdity of cultural myth through his ironic characterization of his females in *Ulysses*, finally escapes this irony, expressing the "one true thing" that allows him to evade the influence of his culture--the personal and creative memory of his first love commemorated through his own novel.

Conclusion

Joyce's depiction of the voices of Molly and Gerty allow him to push the cultural boundaries of femininity, ultimately creating an avenue for expression that is unbound by cultural myth. Joyce characterizes Gerty to expose the absurdity and insidiousness of cultural myth, demonstrating the restriction that the web of myths inherent in Modernity creates. As he exposes myths of femininity which prescribe rigid gender identities and ultimately lead to damaged relationships, he also demonstrates through Molly the ability of the individual to transcend cultural limitations through natural love. Indeed, in a novel that, I believe, is all about love, Joyce, in his novel of maturity, creates Molly's voice to commemorate his literary creation, which is made possible through his own personal love for his wife, Nora. Through characterization of the female characters in his novel, Joyce has exposed the myths which determine the Modern individual, but he uses Molly's freedom and creation as a means to counter the cultural restriction imposed upon his characters and upon himself, effectively escaping his literary influences through the use of a female voice.

Very concerned with the language and perception of the female mind, Joyce infuses Gerty's narrative with his own commentary, but leaves it out of Molly's narrative, Joyce demonstrates the possibility of creating freedom out of the necessity engendered by Modernity. A closer examination of Gerty's character would perhaps illuminate the tension between Gerty's determined characteristics and her freedom. Joyce's depiction of literary creation, especially as he figures it in "Oxen of the Sun," would help to illuminate Joyce's association between birth and literary creation, through which he ultimately gestures back to the creative ability of the female. Indeed, as Molly expresses a love for nature, Joyce suggests that a return to nature without the confinement of cultural myth finally engenders both meaningful sexual connection and literary creation.

Although Joyce portrays an extremely sexually alienated couple through his depiction of Bloom and Molly, he ultimately refigures them as his Modern heroic couple due to the expressions of love that both of them affirm. Indeed, through Molly's final affirmation of her own creativity and her sexual bond with Bloom, Joyce demonstrates his rejection of the alienation of Modernity through personal acts of love. A study of Bloom's acts of love, including his charitable acts, as well as his affirmations of Molly, would undoubtedly reveal Joyce's hope for the isolation of Modernity, as these characters create meaning out of the personal choice to love. The autobiographical function of Gerty, Stephen, Bloom, and Molly in *Ulysses* works to demonstrate the limitations upon the artist and upon every individual to find meaning out of the web of cultural myth created through the onset of Modernity. Joyce celebrates the joining together of man and woman despite the obstacles of Modern life, making the roles of Molly and Bloom more fluid and less fixed by social gender roles as he celebrates their natural sexual love. In the final pages of his fiercely ironic but ultimately comic novel, Joyce finds the ability to create without irony as he expresses, through Molly's voice, the triumph of personal love and freedom of creation. Joyce, in his novel which celebrates every kind of love, finally triumphs over Modernity through examining the story of two people joined in love, ultimately linking this love to his own original creation.

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