



METAFOR

Boğaziçi Üniversitesi
Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü
&
Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü
Ortak Yayını
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The Department of Western Languages and Literatures and the Department of Turkish Language and Literature at Boğaziçi University are pleased to announce the launching of a new journal: *METAFOR: The Boğaziçi University Journal of Literary Studies*.

Our mission is to issue an academic periodical of the highest standards, one that provides a forum for innovative discussions in the field of literary studies and literary criticism. The journal accepts submissions of original essays, book reviews, interviews and short commentaries.

We especially welcome contributions that take an interdisciplinary and comparative approach. *METAFOR* will be a semi-annual journal, accepting submissions in Turkish and English. All submissions will be peer-reviewed by referees assigned by the editorial board.

*We thank Burak Şuşut and FİKA
for our cover design...*

*Kapak tasarımımız için Burak Şuşut ve
FİKA'ya teşekkür ederiz...*

METAFOR

Table of Contents

1. Eda Dedebaş Dünder, “Narratives of Rights and the Travel of Stories in J.M Coetzee’s <i>Elizabeth Costello</i> ” / “J. M. Coetzee’nin <i>Elizabeth Costello</i> Adlı Romanında Hakların Anlatıları ve Öykülerin Seyahati”	1
2. Gülfer Göze, “Is a <i>Bildungswoman</i> Possible? The Making of a West Indian Heroine in Jamaica Kinkaid’s <i>Annie John</i> ” / “Kendine Ait Bir Bildungsroman: <i>Annie John</i> ”	15
3. Burcu Kayışçı Akkoyun, “Autobiography as (E)utopia: <i>Reveries</i> of the Solitary Writer” / “Bir Ütopya olarak Otobiyografi: Yalnız Gezen Yazarın Düşleri”	32
4. Başak Demirhan, ““Are You Real My Ideal?”: Embodiment and Popular Culture in the ‘Nausicaa’ Episode of James Joyce’s <i>Ulysses</i> ” / ““Gerçek Misin İdealim?” James Joyce’un <i>Ulysses</i> Romanının ‘Nausicaa’ Bölümünde Beden ve Popüler Kültür.....	45
5. Azer Banu Kemaloğlu, “Fictional History Writing of Gelibolu Campaign: An Interview with Stephen Daisley on <i>Traitor</i> ” / “Çanakkale Muharebeleri Kurmaca Tarih Yazımı: Stephen Daisley ile <i>Traitor</i> Romanı Üzerine Bir Söyleşi”	63
6. Aişe Handan Konar, “Divan Edebiyatında Etkilenme Endişesi: Tâci-zâde Cafer Çelebi Üzerine Bir Örneklendirme Denemesi” / “Anxiety Influence in Ottoman Literature: An Exemplary Attempt with the Case of Tâci-zâde Cafer Çelebi”	70
7. Çiğdem Kurt Williams & Semiha Şentürk, ““Abdullah Efendi’nin Rüyaları’nda Metinlerarasılık” / “Intertextuality in ‘Abdullah Efendi’nin Rüyaları””	88
8. About the Authors.....	102

Başak Demirhan, Boğaziçi University

**“ARE YOU REAL, MY IDEAL?”: EMBODIMENT AND POPULAR
CULTURE IN THE “NAUSICAA” EPISODE OF JAMES JOYCE’S
*ULYSSES***

Abstract

The “Nausicaa” episode of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* is about a young woman named Gerty MacDowell, who constantly imagines herself like an idealized heroine of a romance novel. She has a limp which is carefully hidden in her narrative. The repression of the body in the narrative is made possible by narrative conventions of commodity culture and popular literature. Gerty is constructed by the standards of the marriage market and the heroines of sentimental and sensational novels. Many critics have demonstrated the impact of advertising culture in this chapter and focused on how Gerty tries to transform her defective body into a commodity by successfully packaging it with beauty products. Despite all the acts of erasure of the body, the critical moments of ellipses in the episode reveal more genuine experiences of embodiment such as disability, sexuality, and motherhood.

Keywords: James Joyce, “Nausicaa”, Gerty, body, sexuality, objectification, ellipses, sentimental novel and sensation fiction, advertising, pornography.

“GERÇEK MİSİN, İDEALİM?”: JAMES JOYCE’UN *ULYSSES* ROMANININ “NAUSICAA” BÖLÜMÜNDE BEDEN VE POPÜLER KÜLTÜR

Öz

James Joyce’un *Ulysses* romanının “Nausicaa” başlıklı on üçüncü bölümü kendini bir pembe roman kahramanı gibi hayal eden Gerty MacDowell adlı genç bir kadına odaklanır. Gerty’nin çolaklığı anlatıda özellikle gizlenir. Meta kültürü ile popüler kültürün ürettiği anlatı gelenekleri bedenin bastırılmasında rol oynar. Gerty evlilik kurumunun dayattığı ve duygusal ve sansasyonel romanların yeniden ürettiği standartlara göre kendini yeniden üretir. Pek çok eleştirmen bu bölümde reklamların romanın anlatısındaki rolünü incelemiş ve Gerty’nin güzellik ürünleri kullanarak sakat bedenini adeta bir reklam nesnesi haline getirmesine dikkat çekmişlerdir. Karakterin bedenini anlatıdan silmeye yönelik olan bütün bu unsurlara rağmen anlatıdaki kritik boşluklar sayesinde Gerty’nin sakatlık, cinsellik ve annelik gibi bedensel deneyimlere yaklaşımını ve süslenmemiş, idealize edilmemiş, gerçek algısını görmek mümkündür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: James Joyce, “Nausicaa”, Gerty, beden, cinsellik, nesneleşme, metinlerdeki boşluklar, duygusal edebiyat ve sansasyonel romanlar, reklamlar, pornografik imgeler.

The thirteenth chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, titled "Nausicaa," is about an erotic encounter between Leopold Bloom and a young woman named Gerty MacDowell, who is spending the summer evening on the beach with her two friends, Cissy Caffrey and Edy Boardman, and their baby brothers. Most of the chapter is narrated as the interior monologue of the young woman whose vision of herself and her life is strongly shaped by sentimental romance novels and the commercial rhetoric of the beauty advice sections in women's magazines. Gerty has a limp, as Bloom discovers at the end of the chapter. The chapter ends with the mental flux of Bloom, who feels embarrassed, a little nervous, and perplexed after discretely masturbating to an erotic spectacle offered by a girl on the beach.

There are so many ways in which Gerty, mentally as well as textually, renders her defected body invisible in the "Nausicaa" episode. This episode's irony relies on the fact that her ethereal, elusive, spiritual beauty is maintained with a plethora of beauty products. She also imagines a highly idealized and desexualized romance with the dark stranger, while rhythmically swinging her legs and flashing part of her underwear in order to arouse him. These examples of subversion make Joyce's modernist narrative a parody of the traditional forms, which exert a powerful control over the textual reconstructions of the body. Joyce's narrative is full of deliberately constructed failures to represent embodiment, through which Gerty's body can be revealed.

The erasure of the female body is not only mandated by the sexually conservative culture, but it is also cultivated by the ambitious protagonist herself, who does not want to face her physical defect or other romantic disappointments such as her crush Reggy Wylie. Her defective body, which could potentially hinder her from competing in the marriage market, is replaced with idealized images borrowed from sentimental fiction, sensation fiction, and religious iconography. In *Joyce and the Victorians*, Tracey Teets Schwarze writes about the social and cultural constructions that nourish these feminine fantasies of herself: "Gerty becomes the signifier of a culturally constructed and contested femininity, a surface that draws attention to itself by continually gesturing toward its constructedness, a facade that is constantly threatened by contentious disruptions ('little monkeys common as ditchwater' [U 13.467-68]) or contradictions within its sources themselves."¹

Gerty MacDowell's body is the nexus of the visual and the material in the chapter. Sentimental fiction, sensation fiction, pornography, and advertising are different genres of popular culture, which all eroticize the female body in different ways. All these traditions of

¹ Tracey Teets Schwarze, "'Do you call that a man?': The Discourse of Anxious Masculinity in *Ulysses*," in *Joyce and the Victorians* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 71.

representation rely on the tension between disembodied representation and embodied existence. Sentimental and sensational fiction directly effects the bodies of the readers, resulting in physical responses like crying or increase in heart rate. Pornographic mutoscope films, which Gerty brings to Bloom's mind, rely on strategic acts of concealing and revealing bodies. And, finally, advertisements of products in the magazines and newspapers constantly offer idealized images of physical bodies together with commodities that will replace ugly, aging, unhealthy, or otherwise defective body parts.

John Bishop analyzes the "Nausicaa" episode in "A Metaphysics of Coitus in 'Nausicaa'" in terms of the thematic coupling and the coupled themes of "femininity and masculinity, youth and old age, culture and nature, conventionality and idiosyncrasy, idealism and practicality, fate and chance" in "an immense field of tensions and contrasts."² The visual and the material is another important thematic pair that is explored in context of popular culture, advertising, religion, pornography, and the relationship between texts and bodies. Despite all the packaging and advertising, her deformed body subverts the conventions of sentimental tradition and brings out her individuality. Gerty's body makes its presence felt in the ellipses of the narrative. In this chapter, instead of repression or erasure of embodied existence, the narrative ellipses privilege female body over the male gaze, idiosyncrasy over conventionality, practicality over idealism, and chance over fate.

Gerty's body is allowed to be visible only within the linguistic and imagistic vocabulary of the social codes, popular culture, and commodification. She constantly constructs and reconstructs her body through a sentimental discourse. Just like her disability, her existence as a sexual being is equally elusive in the text. This is not because her sexuality is repressed but because it is in constant change. Ambivalent or partially concealed sexuality is substantiated with the discourse of sentimental fiction and its vague physical descriptions of its heroines. The location of virtue and sentiment in the sentimental tradition can be ambivalent and in its ambivalence, indicative of the political view of the novel. In a typical Victorian marriage plot novel, the heroines are not beautiful but somehow very attractive. Their physical traits are scrupulously described but this only serves the novel's emphasis of desexualized femininity. The following passage from the beginning of the episode is representative of the cliché language used in the protagonist's inner monologues which mimic the language of nineteenth-century sentimentalism. "But who was Gerty?" asks the narrator before transitioning into free indirect speech:

2 John Bishop, "A Metaphysics of Coitus in 'Nausicaa'," in *Ulysses: En-Gendered Perspectives*, eds. Kimberly Devlin and Marilyn Reizbaum (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 209.

There was an innate refinement, a languid queenly hauteur about Gerty which was unmistakably evidenced in her delicate hands and higharched instep. 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. Mayhap it was this, the love that might have been, that lent to her softly featured face at times a look, tense with suppressed meaning, that imparted a strange yearning tendency to the beautiful eyes a charm few could resist.³

Deprived of a high birth and education, the heroine's only asset is her body on which markers of gentility and class can be inscribed. Even though the description seems to contain details of her body such as the high instep, delicate hands, and enigmatic eyes, these are generic descriptions that can belong to any heroine of Victorian fiction. In this passage, as in many others, narrative conventions displace the corporeality of the female protagonist. In the rare occasions when she manifests genuine emotions, the emotional experience is quickly eclipsed by aesthetic and social conventions:

That strained look on her face! A gnawing sorrow is there all the time. Her very soul is in her eyes and she would give worlds to be in the privacy of her own familiar chamber where, giving way to tears, she could have a good cry and relieve her pentup feelings. Though not too much because she knew how to cry nicely before the mirror.⁴

In *Gestural Politics: Stereotype and Parody in Joyce*, Christy Burns comments on how popular culture, as the mirror of social codes, dictates the imitation of stereotypes. Gerty uses her mirror to train herself "to cry nicely." Burns writes that "the mirror instructs her as to *how* she should present her grief, if ever she should express it before the eyes of a potential suitor. The mirror is not radically other than Gerty's mind, but her own mind is not in the least divorced from social directives that tell her to pose for the male gaze."⁵

The mawkish passages of sentimentalism and gentility are interrupted by the physical failures of her body and the strong emotions of fear, envy, and anger. One of the moments in the narrative, where she suddenly finds herself on stage facing the danger of revealing her

3 Joyce, *Ulysses*, (London: Vintage Books, 1986), 13.80.

4 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 13.82.

5 Christy Burns, *Gestural Politics: Stereotype and Parody in Joyce* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 71-72.

deformity to the “gentleman” by falling, is significant in illustrating how she diverts both her and the reader’s attention from her body with the help of spectacle. In the perhaps most critical scene of the episode, one of the little boys throws a ball toward Gerty, which she has to kick toward her friend under the gaze of strangers on the beach. It is difficult to sustain the constant replacement of her body with objects and fantasies because there is an undeniable contrast between her and the athletic and free Cissy Caffrey, who is a “good runner.” Not only does Cissy have a healthy body, but she also has control of the male body. Cissy is constantly busy with the needs of her baby brothers, which are miniature and caricaturized versions of masculinity. Bloom throws the boys’ ball back to Cissy, but it falls in front of Gerty and she has to kick it back.

Cissy told her to kick it away and let them fight for it so Gerty drew back her foot but she wished their stupid ball hadn’t come rolling down to her and she gave a kick but she missed and Edy and Cissy laughed.

-- If you fail try again, Edy Boardman said.

Gerty smiled assent and bit her lip. A delicate pink crept into her pretty cheek but she was determined to let them see so she just lifted her skirt a little but just enough and took good aim and gave the ball a jolly good kick.⁶

This scene suddenly acquires subtly malicious and violent tones. Cissy, who has so far been intent on making the brothers play nicely, wants to see them fight each other. Edy slyly pokes into Gerty’s wound by pretending to be encouraging. Gerty swallows her bitterness and later on takes pleasure from imagining Cissy falling down while running after the boys. There is a possibility that Edy *is* well intended in her encouraging words and that Cissy is just a fun-loving woman. The malice and violence in the scene can be read as indicative of the emotional tension within Gerty, who is afraid of not being able to kick the ball, and even of falling down under the gaze of the other girls and of Bloom. This is the scene in which her “shortcoming” is almost revealed, therefore the girls’ laughter does not carry the same significance for their exasperated friend. The body remains concealed in this passage and Gerty’s potential humiliation is replaced with her unexplained anger at the girls. This passage, where her body comes to the brink of display is not surprisingly also one of the passages where she displays genuine emotions instead of the stereotypical angelic demeanor.

6 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 13.356-363.

The heroine's emotional responses fluctuate from grand saintliness to bitter suspicion and malice throughout the episode. It is equally difficult to determine her sexual status because it also constantly changes. She describes herself as an innocent girl, seductive femme fatal, loving wife, loving wifie, little girlie, "girlwoman," and "womanly woman" within the same page. This ambiguity is partly a symptom of the ambivalent Victorian perception of young female bodies which oscillated between asexual and sexually mature, thus eligible for marriage. Our savvy heroine sometime uses this ambivalence to her own advantage. The sexually "innocent" status allows her to imagine that she is still not too old, even though she knows that she will never be seventeen again. Furthermore, the forms of popular culture that feed her intellect and imagination do not offer legitimate vocabulary to express sexual desire. Sex remains outside her language or it is expressed with non-words. For example, when she fantasizes about being married to the mysterious dark stranger, she imagines living as brother and sister "without all that other." The sentimental fiction heroines after whom she constructs herself, have "ambiguously described or non-existent bodies" in Richard Bishop's words.⁷ Consequently, even in her imagined marriage she is the "little wifie" or "girlie" of her older and mature husband. The distortion in the word "wife" suggests that Gerty is not imagining a consummated marriage but one in which she will remain "a girl."

Oxymoronic epithets like "girl woman" signify the effects of sexual repression but sexuality is not completely or obscured from the narrative. Her carefully selected lacey underwear, the erotic spectacle she choreographs for Bloom evince at a woman who is in touch with her sexuality. In fact, it is the driving force behind her imaginative mind and fantasies. I believe that the most apt descriptions of sexual status are being in constant flux. She wants to remain a "girlwoman" and in the same sentence she changes into a "womanly woman." These fluctuations of her self-perception can be read as the existence of her sexual energy, rather than stifled desire.

Commodities offer constant pleasure and gratification to Gerty, for whom sex may be unavailable because of her disability or intimidating because of her young age and inexperience. She tries to maintain an acceptable image of her body in her own gaze with the help of beauty products and fashionable articles of clothing. April Pelt and Daniel P. Gunn have examined the gendered implications of advertisements in this episode.⁸ Advertising is a

⁷ Bishop, "A Metaphysics," 188.

⁸ April Pelt, "Advertising Agency: Print Culture and Female Sexuality in 'Nausicaa'," *James Joyce Quarterly* 48.1 (2010): 41-53, and Daniel P. Gunn, "Beware of Imitations: Advertisement as Reflexive Commentary in *Ulysses*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 42.4 (1996): 481-493.

mode of representation that relies on the erasure of the body from narrative. It is a medium of popular culture, which uses sexuality without making it visible. In “Joyce's ‘Nausicaa’: The Paradox of Advertising Narcissism” Peggy Ochoa argues that the narcissism involved in advertising empowers its receivers to a certain extent, in fashioning themselves.⁹ As she successfully uses commodities to adorn her body to compensate for the “shortcoming,” she erases the body or replaces it with these commodities. In “Gerty MacDowell and the Irish Common Reader,” Thomas Karr Richards notes the replacement of the body with commodified objects: “For several pages the narrative couples physical attributes with material objects until one feature of the style finally overwhelms the reader: the sheer abundance of manufactured objects present in her voice.”¹⁰ The sentimental descriptions are littered with products such as “iron jelloids,” “eyebrowleine,” “the Woman Beautiful page of the Princess novelette” in which “blushing [is] scientifically cured.” Her fantasy of marriage to Reggy is almost like a fashion set for the “sumptuous confection of grey trimmed with expensive blue fox” she will wear at her wedding. Later on in the episode, she imagines various delicious dished she would prepare for her “dreamhusband,” but she does not “like the eating of it.” Her imagination produces images of food ready to be consumed but not the bodily activity that goes along with them. She often wonders “why you couldn't eat something poetical like violets or roses.”¹¹

The obscuring and distracting attention to detail and the abundance of objects marks Gerty's speech. Her “energy is dissipated by her concentration on the ‘minor differences’ within the restricted world of what Joyce calls ‘matters feminine’ (*U* 13.12)” according to Ochoa.¹² Her voice is cluttered with commodified objects that attach themselves to everything she thinks of. These commodities obscure the body, when they are attached to it. The “transparent” stockings, which she trusts, do not highlight her ankles but their own expensive transparency; when she lifts her skirts up, she is showing her silver buckle rather than her legs. Even taking off her hat to show her abundant hair is read through the hat rather than the hair, as it resonates with the visual lexicon of pornographic films. Transparent stockings, the

9 Peggy Ochoa, “Joyce's ‘Nausicaa’: The Paradox of Advertising Narcissism,” *James Joyce Quarterly* 30.4 (1993).

10 Thomas Karr Richards, “Gerty MacDowell and the Irish Common Reader,” *ELH* 52.3 (1985): 759.

11 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 13. 368.

12 Ochoa, “Joyce's ‘Nausicaa’,” 787.

buckles of her shoes, and the hat replace her legs, the high inner arches of her elegant feet, and her hair.

Pornography is an unexpected form of popular culture that enables Gerty to fashion herself, given her general tendency to suppress sexuality in her fantasies. However, it is in fact parallel to her attempts to divert the attention towards visuality of the body rather than to its materiality. In the ball-kicking scene, she lifts up her skirt to show her ankles to the enigmatic stranger. She diverts Bloom's gaze from her lameness, by replacing her body with the more attractive image of skirt dancers who also lift their skirts and kick. While her language is borrowed from popular romantic novels and advertising, her poses and gestures are borrowed from pornographic films. In "Making a Spectacle of Herself: Gerty MacDowell through the Mutoscope" Katherine Mullin argues that Gerty's gestures and the dynamics of gazing within the narrative structure of the episode heavily rely on the vocabulary, gestures, and conventions of the pornographic mutoscope films. "By placing her image rather than her body on the market," Mullin writes, "by imitating successful strategies of the mutoscope display, Gerty reproduces modernity's commodification of the visible and shrewdly allies herself with the perfect product."¹³ Her gestures indeed imitate the mutoscope films and there is certainly shrewdness in her use of visual display of the body to seduce "the mysterious gentleman" and outperform her friends. Her use of her hat reminds Bloom of the mutoscope film, *What the Girls Did with Willie's Hat*. It would not be possible for her to deliberately imitate these films, as she would not have access to them. She wouldn't have access to these films to imitate them consciously. Instead of claiming that Gerty is consciously imitating pornographic films, I would argue that these films are likely to be drawing from the everyday, familiar gestures such as taking off one's hat.¹⁴ They place the pornographic and the prohibited into a quotidian setting in order to heighten the suspense of being caught in the act of gazing. Gerty's complicity in this episode has been the concern of many critics, who took sides in a debate about whether she is innocent or complicit in this scene. "Complicity" and "innocence" are outdated moral judgment categories of the sexually repressive, patriarchal ideology. The female protagonist of this episode of the novel, simply wanders through the modern world of material, sentimental, and sexual pleasures. The narrative thwarts attempts to make such moral judgments. This ambivalence is one of the qualities that pulls the

13 Katherine Mullin, "Making a Spectacle of Herself: Gerty MacDowell through the Mutoscope," in *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 165.

14 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 13. 261-2.

character out of the cloud of literary and cultural clichés that clutter the narrative and allow her to become an authentic individual.

Gerty's body is represented with techniques of objectification, erasure, and revelation in advertising and pornography. A third mode of objectification happens in her inner monologues and constant self-fashioning as a stereotypical heroine of sentimental fiction. This form of objectification proves to be even riskier than commodification or pornographication of her body because the sympathizing gaze of sentimentalism can be a cruel form of kindness. With Gerty MacDowell, Joyce parodies Gerty Flint, the heroine of the very popular nineteenth-century sentimental novel *The Lamplighter*. He completely subverts the conventions of the sentimental tradition. In "Gerty MacDowell: Joyce's Sentimental Heroine" Suzette Henke claims that Gerty is already showing signs of spinsterhood with her moments of quirky behavior, her lack of compassion for the children, and her cynicism toward her girlfriends.¹⁵ Annoyance with children and malicious thoughts indeed do not fit in with the sentimental literature's conventions such as the cult of the cute and the ever-loving and kind heroine. Gerty's narrative at times "falls short of the ideal of proper female conduct presented by" *The Lamplighter's* heroine Gerty Flint and at times subverts it with ironic realism. "After many trials from unsuitable admirers and vindictive female rivals, her [Gerty Flint's] virtues are rewarded by marriage to her childhood sweetheart, who through a final plot twist is suddenly endowed with riches from an unexpected bequest."¹⁶ Gerty MacDowell does not persevere through "many trials from unsuitable admirers." On the contrary, she is ready to fall for a random stranger she notices on the beach and fantasizes about accepting him as her husband despite his, also imaginary, dark past. Her female rivals "who are hissing at each other" as Bloom observes, appear to be healthy and fit for marriage, while she is inferior to them because of her physical defect. "She's left on the shelf and the others [do] a sprint" as Bloom notices.¹⁷ She upstages her rivals not with her superior virtues but by successfully advertising her body, particularly using conventions of the suggestive mutoscope films. At the end of the episode, Bloom remembers her as "a hot little devil" rather than as a paragon of feminine virtues. And most importantly, she seems to be jilted by her childhood sweetheart, Reggy Wylie, who has already disappointed her as a lover.

The objectifying gaze generated by sentimentalism is also problematized in this episode. Her body does not generate the reverent sympathy that is appropriate for an

15 Suzette Henke, "Gerty MacDowell: Joyce's Sentimental Heroine," in *Women in Joyce*, ed. Suzette Henke and Elaine Unkeless (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 140.

16 Mullin, "Making a Spectacle of Herself," 142.

17 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 13.773.

inherently superior, albeit impoverished, heroine. On the contrary, this is a cruel sympathy reserved for the deformed bodies of “spinsters” and “cripples” in nineteenth-century sentimental fiction. “Nausicaa” has several instances where the already delicate distinction between cruelty and kindness is lost. Gerty’s body reveals the tensions and proximity between cruelty and kindness, fear and pleasure in her friends’ cruel sympathy for her lame and jilted body and in her fantasies of the mysterious, dark gentleman. When Gerty fails to kick the ball, Edy Boardman says, “Try again if you fail” in fake kindness, which embarrasses her in front of the dark gentleman. Again the two friends’ kind inquiries after Reggy Wylie, who does not show up as he promised, torture her further. “Their eyes were probing her mercilessly but with a brave effort she sparkled back in sympathy as she glanced at her new conquest for them to see.”¹⁸ The cruelty of the kind friends who are looking for a body to pity is expressed in terms of physical torture. The girls’ eyes probe at Gerty’s lame body and wounded soul and “sparkle” her.

Sentimental fiction is not the only genre of popular literature that forms Gerty’s dream world. She draws from sensation fiction as well to feed her imagination and more importantly to express her sexual desires. When becoming an object of sympathy brings the pain of being an object of gaze, her mind wanders toward a different kind of fiction that involves acts of cruelty performed “in the way of kindness” and dangers that can be titillating. She starts fashioning Bloom as one of the dark, brooding, and attractive heroes, which were introduced to English literature by the Brontë sisters. The erotic pleasures of sensation fiction villains allow Gerty to express her sexuality as well as her fears of it.

As several critics have notes, the dark stranger replaced her abusive father in her imagination as a pleasurable authority figure. Gerty remembers her father’s alcoholism and domestic violence, which must have contributed to her difficulty in seeing herself as a sexual being. Henke observes: “The young girl witnesses her father’s acts of household violence and recoils at the spectacle of masculine brutality.”¹⁹ She does not excuse his alcoholism, but strangely steers away from condemning domestic violence by a phrase that obscures cruelty:

Nay, she had even witnessed in the home circle deeds of violence caused by intemperance and had seen her own father, a prey to the fumes of intoxication, forget himself completely for if there was one thing of all things that Gerty knew it was that

18 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 13. 586-588.

19 Henke, “Gerty MacDowell,” 144.

the man who lift a hand to a woman save in the way of kindness, deserves to be branded as the lowest of the low.²⁰

The desperate phrase “save in the way of kindness” makes one wonder what kind of kindness can excuse domestic violence except for Gerty’s kindness for her father. A similar cruelty “in the way of kindness” is seen in her fantasies about the dark, foreign-looking stranger. Gerty feels that she is ready to do anything for this stranger even if he is “a widower who has lost his wife or some tragedy like the nobleman with the foreign name from the land of song had to have her put in a madhouse, cruel only to be kind.”²¹ Don Gifford claims that the alluded tragedy of the nobleman from “the land of song” or Italy, is unknown.²² However, Victorian sensation and gothic novels are replete with such attractive villains. Gerty’s fantasy is reminiscent of the gothic, female, Bildungsroman *Jane Eyre*, whose titular heroine finds herself in the grip of the opposing forces of self-preservation and her passion for the dark and handsome bigamist Rochester. Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White* was a well-known sensation novel in which the villainous Sir Percival, with the help of his accomplice Italian Count Fosco, has his wife replaced with her mad foster sister and incarcerated in an asylum. Gerty sensationalizes her body by imagining herself as a sensation novel heroine, which enables her to be aroused by the alluring and dangerous gaze of the dark stranger. The foreign looking gentleman’s gaze has physical effects on Gerty like blushing, flushing, and tingling in her flesh. Her body is completely sensationalized by Bloom’s gaze: “She felt a kind of sensation rushing all over her and she knew by the feel of her scalp and that irritation against her stays.”²³ John Bishop interprets Gerty’s flushing as a displaced tumescence which parallels Bloom’s arousal.²⁴ The tingling, tickling sensations Gerty feels, do parallel Bloom’s sexual arousal, but the language used in their description is much more similar to Victorian criticism of sensation novels and their disquieting effects on young women readers. Victorians were deeply concerned with the sensational text’s conquest of young female bodies. The coexistence of cruelty and kindness in the dream husband “from the land of song,” highlights the pleasure taken from the terrors in the sensation novels.

Sensation fiction conventions also allow Gerty to transform her father’s traumatizing cruelty into the fantasy of a romantic thriller. The kind cruelty of the imagined husband

20 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 13.299-302.

21 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 13.57-659.

22 Donald Gifford, *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce’s Ulysses*, (University of California Press, 1988), 578.

23 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 13.560-561.

24 Bishop, “A Metaphysics,” 194.

replaces the oppressive father figure. The fantasy is broken by an ellipsis, however, when Gerty recoils from something “indelicate.” “But even if- what then?” she says to herself. “[E]ven if” refers to premarital sex and “what then” refers to the social death that might follow an affair. She starts thinking of fallen women in the middle of the romance she conjures and shudders.²⁵ The ellipsis causes the leap from the asexual romantic fantasies about the stranger “with a past” to the catastrophic fallen woman narrative. Fear of extramarital sex leads to a naïve and irrational insistence on keeping her chastity even after marriage. “No, no: not that. They would just be good friends like a big brother and sister without all that other in spite of the conventions of Society with a big ess.”²⁶ Neither sentimental fiction nor sensation novel provides the vocabulary to acknowledge and legitimize female sexuality. The desire in the ellipsis can also be an incestuous desire, felt not only for the kindly cruel husband but also for the kindly cruel father. Incestuous feelings erupt at this moment in the text disrupting the fabric of popular fiction.

The narrative reaches a crisis in this section because none of the modes of representation of the female body are able to acknowledge female sexuality. The narrative crisis is resolved with the visual and auditory spectacle of the firework show which begins on the beach. The cadence of the fireworks represents the building up sexual energy of the characters as well as Bloom’s climax. Several critics, such as Philip Sicker in “Unveiling Desire: Pleasure, Power and Masquerade in Joyce’s ‘Nausicaa’ Episode” and Dominika Bednarska in “A Crippled Erotic: Gender and Disability in James Joyce’s ‘Nausicaa’” have argued that what is concealed in Gerty’s imagination and representation of her body, is not the “shortcoming” but sexuality.²⁷ The body surfaces with its repressed and irrepressible desires and its shortcomings, which cannot be concealed especially in juxtaposition to Cissy’s free, athletic, and probably fertile body. Suzette Henke writes that “[e]rotic desire smolders just beneath the surface of her romantic musings and finally explodes in pyrotechnic fury.”²⁸ Clara McLean analyzes how bodies are represented in the episode, in “Wasted Words: The Body Language of Joyce’s ‘Nausicaa,’” and argues that the body is present beneath the text, with its indelicate or repulsive features.

25 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 13.659.

26 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 13.664-666.

27Dominika Bednarska, “A Crippled Erotic: Gender and Disability in James Joyce’s ‘Nausicaa,’” *James Joyce Quarterly* 49.1 (2011): 73-89 and Philip Sicker, “Unveiling Desire: Pleasure, Power and Masquerade in Joyce’s ‘Nausicaa’ Episode,” *Joyce Studies Annual* 14 (Summer 2003): 92-131.

28 Henke, “Gerty MacDowell,” 137.

[U]ltimately, the dirty secret that the narrative and the characters strive so hard to conceal is precisely this troubling property of the body... By calling attention to itself as the cover, decked with stylistic frills and euphemisms, the language distracts from, and even attempts to replace, the unspeakable body beneath, much as Cissy's "puddeny pie" replaced the filth of the baby's soiling body... The sentimental language of 'Nausicaa' thus does more than parody a popular genre; it also, through Gerty, exposes the dirty reality behind the pristine dream of the romance heroine, the corporeality behind the cliché... In 'Nausicaa,' Joyce reveals the filth that lies behind the drive to art, behind the need to fictionalize.²⁹

McLean argues that Bloom's voice spills into the text which was trying to cover Gerty's body and his ejaculation erupts as the representative of the concealed corporeality. I argue that it is Gerty's limping that brings her body back into the text and lifts it out of the layers of vague sentimental description and artful packaging. Bloom is still under the influence of this packaging during the ejaculation and it is only when he realizes her "shortcoming" that he can see beyond the constructed façade and really sympathize with her. Besides, other exiled and erased aspects of her body, like sexuality and maternity, are inseparable from the physical defect. The absence of sexuality and maternity constantly bring the defective body back into the text and into Gerty's consciousness.

Erasure of sexuality and the virginal power created by this vacuum of sexual status is manifested in Gerty's self-identification with Virgin Mary. The obsession with the color blue in Gerty's clothes is not done only to match and foreground her blue eyes. The blue color of her cherished underwear ironically and irreverently resonates with the blue banner of the Virgin. Gerty's sensory perception alternates between the scenes on the beach and the nearby church where an evening service is held for Mother Mary. The most erotic parts of the narrative consist of the constant alternation between the sounds of prayer coming from the evening service and Gerty's seductively swinging her leg. She turns her attention to the Litany sung for "the Virgin most powerful, Virgin most merciful" to get moral strength from the Virgin Mary.³⁰ Ambiguous transitions in her thoughts confuse and conflate her with Mary,

29 Clara McLean, "Wasted Words: The Body Language of Joyce's 'Nausicaa,'" in *Joycean Cultures/Culturing Joyces*, ed. Vincent Cheng et. al, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998), 45-50.

30 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 13.303-304.

enhancing and sublimating her reluctance to encounter sexuality as discussed in John Bishop and Garry Leonard's works.³¹

Mary is not only present in this scene as a Virgin but, more importantly, as a mother figure. Importance of motherhood is evinced by its absence from the narrative. Earlier in the same paragraph there is another ellipsis, this time in Gerty's memory rather than in her narrative. The missing line contains the missing image of Gerty as a mother, completing her curtailed identification with Mary as Virgin *and* Mother. As she thinks of "girlish treasure trove" and the confession book, which contains some "beautiful thoughts" written in "violent ink, bought from Hely's of Dame Street," she remembers a poem she read in the newspaper, but she forgets one line. As usual, objects and detail clot the narrative space, erase thought, and inhibit authentic expression. In other words, materiality and material circumstances shape or rather encumber the "beautiful thoughts" as well as Gerty's dreams. The relation between the objects in Gerty's treasure trove and her thoughts is analogous to the relationship between the physicality of her body and her dreams. Her enjoyment of poetry is interrupted by sadness: "...oft times the beauty of poetry, so sad in its transient loveliness, had misted her eyes with silent tears for she felt that the years were slipping by for her, one by one, and but for that one shortcoming she knew she need fear no competition."³² Gerty's transient beauty is the origin of her sadness. "The transient loveliness" of her body is displaced onto poetry, which is as ephemeral and fragile as corporeality. There is a gap in her memory of the poem: "The poem that appealed to her so deeply... *Art thou real, my ideal?* it was called by Louis J. Walsh, Magherafelt, and after that there was something about *twilight, wilt thought ever?*"³³ The missing part of Louis Walsh's poem addresses the beloved, perhaps Mary, who arrives with her baby. This is the original poem:

Art thou real, my ideal?
Wilt thou ever come to me
In the soft and gentle twilight
With your baby on your knee?³⁴

The ellipsis in Gerty's memory contains the image of Mary, with whom Gerty ardently and desperately identifies all evening. But the Mary she identifies with, by the help of the Litany,

31 Bishop, "A Metaphysics," and Garry Leonard, "The Virgin Mary and the Urge in Gerty: Praying, Buying, and the Packaging of Desire," in *Advertising and Commodity Culture* (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1998), 98-141.

32 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 13.647-650.

33 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 13.64-647.

34 Walsh, quoted in Gifford, *Ulysses Annotated*, 568.

is Virgin Mary and not Mother Mary. Sexuality and motherhood are two difficult subjects in this extremely self-conscious narrative. Baby Boardman and the noisy twins annoy the obsessively neat, delicate, and “aristocratic” Gerty. The image of the mother is painful because it reminds her of the possibility of never becoming a mother. British and Irish society in 1904 prescribes motherhood as the ultimate goal and identity for women but the competitive marriage market excludes Gerty because of her “shortcoming.” “[A]ll the opiates her society has to offer: religion, and poetry, eyebrowline and romantic myth,” in Henke’s words, fail to compensate for the shortcomings of the body.³⁵ “Popular culture and popular religion both offer ‘one way out’ for a society that demands narcotic forgetfulness,” Henke states.³⁶ But even these are based on the domestic ideology so “the forgetfulness” they generate does not numb the pain but just hides the wound. Consequently, Gerty has to conceal this image in the ellipses of her memory, just as she conceals sexuality in the ellipses of her language because the same society and social code also prescribes young women to see “fallen women” and their overt, promiscuous sexuality with horror. Fantasizing about a morally flawed foreigner who might have incarcerated his wife in a madhouse might have its own pleasures, but the second ellipsis following the one in the poem writes sexuality as the dangerous, demonized sexuality of fallen women and prostitutes and erases sex altogether from the imaginary marriage with the foreigner.

In “Nausicaa” Joyce experiments with the female voice, moreover the voice of a female figure who is at once very stereotypical and very unique. Gerty MacDowell is indeed a fair “specimen of winsome Irish girlhood as one could wish to see” with her unique and at the same time very common language constructed out of various forms of popular culture.³⁷ She constructs herself and the image of her body out of these sources in her imagination as well as in the narrative. But her construction involves hiding her body as well as displaying it in particular ways. The rhetorical and visual codes of advertising, sentimental fiction, sensation novels, pornography, and religious iconography reveal her body the way advertisements reveal their products; as an image without material reality. It is, however, this material reality that lies at the basis of these images and allows Gerty’s authentic emotions and experiences to be disclosed.

35 Henke, “Gerty MacDowell,” 137.

36 Ibid.

37 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 13.80.

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