

“The Appetite as Voice”: Gerty, Food, and Anorexia

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Abstract

One's dietary habits are never simply an individual behavior, but rather a reflection of the interaction between self and sociocultural forces. In this respect, one's dietary practices serve as a language to express one's relationship with the outer world. A woman's appetite is thus an important expression of her identity, which had been strictly regulated and controlled in the Victorian era. In *Ulysses*, Gerty's attitudes toward food represent the pathological relationship between women and eating within the anorexic milieu of Victorian culture, a culture which associated femininity with parsimonious appetite, debility, and spirituality, hence contributing to the prevalence of anorexia nervosa as a female disorder in Victorian times. Gerty may not be a confirmed case of anorexia, but her dietary behavior reveals several symptoms of the disorder, which was related to both gender and class identity. Shaped by Victorian bourgeois culture, Gerty's appetite suggests the widespread impact of anorexia nervosa on females.

Keywords

Ulysses, Gerty MacDowell, appetite, anorexia nervosa, fasting, femininity

Food, which Roland Barthes calls “an immediate reality” (22), is indispensable to human life and history. Once being deprived of food, human beings are denied a fundamental element for survival, and the evolution of human history would be impossible. In her influential book, *Food in History*, Reay Tannahill argues emphatically: “For 50,000 years and more, humanity’s quest for food has helped to shape the development of society. It has profoundly influenced population growth and urban expansion, dictated economic and political theory, expanded the horizons of commerce, inspired wars of dominion and precipitated the discovery of new worlds” (xv). “Without food,” Tannahill stresses, “there would be no human race, and no history” (xv). Tannahill’s argument suggests that the import of food is not merely biological: it is also sociocultural. Indeed, despite the divergence in their disciplines and approaches, food scholars—whether anthropologists, sociologists, or historians—generally agree upon the significance of the sociocultural context in which food is produced and consumed. Sidney W. Mintz, for example, declares that eating is saturated with the “histories” of the foodstuffs and those who have eaten them (7); Pat Caplan states that food, “intimately bound up with social relations,” is never nutritionally significant only (3). Food habits, as a matter of fact, are largely constructed, packed with social and cultural meanings. Eating practices involve the discipline of the body within a sociocultural milieu, in which one’s dietary taste and behavior are shaped and regulated, and rules and such classifications as gender, class, and ethnicity are created. Food, in other words, serves as a means for social stratification, differentiating between “us” and “them,” “self” and “other,” “inside” and “outside”; it is closely related to one’s identity. One’s dietary behavior may indicate to a considerable extent his/her social status and cultural identity. It is in this respect that Caplan considers food to be “a marker of difference” (9). Seeing “meaning” beyond food’s “survival function,” Linda Civitello maintains that “[i]dentity—religious, national, ethnic—is intensely bound up with food” (xiii-xiv). Tobias Döring, Markus Heide, and Susanne Mühleisen argue that by offering “powerful ways to make and communicate cultural meanings,” food and dietary behavior “define group and gender identities, celebrate social cohesion and perform rituals of cultural belonging” (2). Carole M. Counihan’s comment can be read as a summary of the recent attempts to define the significance and implications of food: “Class, caste, race, and gender hierarchies are maintained, in part, through differential control over and access to food. One’s place in the social system is revealed by what, how much, and with whom one eats” (8). To be brief, food studies may differ in methodologies and interpretations, and yet the interrelationships between food and

sociocultural forces have been generally acknowledged by scholars who have sought to investigate meanings behind food and dietary behavior.

The emergence and development of food studies have shed light on literary criticism in recent decades: critics have taken interest in exploring the representation and signification of food in literary texts. In *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction*, for example, Sarah Sceats examines the imagery of food and eating represented in contemporary women writers' texts, investigating food images and eating practices in relation to issues of love, desire, maternity, identity, and social behavior. Sceats concludes the account of her research by emphasizing the impact of sociocultural forces on individuals' dietary behavior (186).

James Joyce and Food

As the quintessential modern epic of the body, James Joyce's *Ulysses* has inevitably inspired a great number of studies of its handling of the corporeal theme, especially as this theme relates to gender politics, consumption culture, and the issue of identity.¹ In spite of its significance to the body, food receives little attention in these researches—a blank that sits strangely beside the numerous representations of food and eating in Joyce. Joyce himself, in fact, was a gourmet: both Ira B. Nadel and Vike Martina Plock note Joyce's fondness for and detailed descriptions of food in his letters (Nadel 213; Plock 31). Joyce's concern, Nadel suggests, "was with eating as an event, a ritual gathering of family and others," and "an opportunity to display Irish hospitality" (221). This personal fondness is reflected in his texts: not only does Joyce carefully represent images of food in his works, but the text of *Ulysses* begins and ends with the eating practice of the main characters. In "Telemachus," Stephen Dedalus has breakfast with Mulligan and Haines, and meanwhile the milkwoman's service and attitude induce his reflection on nationalist problems. For the rest of the day, Stephen goes on a fast, consuming nothing but liquid substance such as alcohol and cocoa. As eating signifies the literal incorporation of the outer world into the human body, Stephen's refusal of solid food is symbolic enough to insinuate his problematic relation to the outside world. Like Stephen, Leopold Bloom begins his day with food. In "Calypso," we see Bloom busy himself in the kitchen—a household space traditionally regarded as women's—preparing breakfast for Molly, himself, and the cat. In the following

¹ See, for example, Froula; Devlin and Reizbaum; Wawrzycka and Corcoran; Leonard; and Davison.

episode, “Lotus-Eaters,” Bloom witnesses the observance of Holy Communion in the church and muses upon the connotations of the Eucharist. Then, with the approach of lunchtime, Bloom’s mind is occupied with food images and associations: in the episode “Lestrygonians,” we see his choice of the dining place, his association of eating with cannibalism, and his ambivalent speculation about food as the sources of pleasure and disgust. In “Sirens,” music may be an important seduction that stirs Bloom’s longings and desires, but so is food. Later that day, Bloom buys a pig’s crubeen and a sheep’s trotter, takes Stephen to the cabman’s shelter for some refreshment, and invites him home and serves him cocoa—as shown in the episodes “Circe,” “Eumaeus,” and “Ithaca,” respectively. Bloom’s day on 16 June 1904, in short, is filled with food. His transgression into woman’s space, his food preference and associations, his service to other people, and his solitary eating are all socioculturally meaningful, revealing his adulterous inclination and suggesting his alienation from the Dublin community. Molly Bloom’s interior monologue in “Penelope” ends Joyce’s epic of the body. This final episode begins with Molly’s mistaken complaint that Bloom orders her to prepare breakfast the next day, and ends with her recollection of mouthfeeding Bloom with the seedcake and accepting his marriage proposal. Her thoughts, though rambling and chaotic, center mainly on food and sex, and thus suggest the interconnection between food, sex, the body, and the self. Food is also represented in notable ways in Joyce’s earlier texts; instances include the Christmas dinner scene and the description of food items after Stephen’s confession in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the forgotten apple in “A Painful Case,” and the feast in “The Dead.” Food in Joyce is, in summary, always socioculturally significant and inseparable from the issues of sex, power, and identity.

Despite the numerous depictions of food and eating in Joyce’s texts, researches into this theme have been in short supply: though there have been some journal and book articles on the subject, only *two* books on this topic have so far appeared, Alison Armstrong’s *The Joyce of Cooking: Food and Drink from James Joyce’s Dublin* (1986) and Lindsey Tucker’s *Stephen and Bloom at Life’s Feast: Alimentary Symbolism and the Creative Process in James Joyce’s Ulysses* (1984). The former is not even a work of academic research but, rather, a cookbook inspired by Joyce’s works, which makes Tucker’s the sole academic work focused on the subject of Joyce and eating. In her study, Tucker explores “the function of the digestive processes as they relate to the creativity and language” (2). With Stephen and Bloom as her targets, Tucker examines the male protagonists’ dietary behaviors, which reveal on the one hand Stephen’s fear of being devoured and his tendency to

project upon Dubliners “threatening aspects involving eating as well as the mouth and teeth” (22), and on the other hand “Bloom’s ability to incorporate, to ingest his experience,” and hence to create (46). In addition to Tucker’s book, some articles do tackle the issue of eating.² All of these articles center on Joyce the writer or the three main characters, and few of them pay attention to the sociocultural forces which shape a person’s dietary behavior. In this paper, I will investigate Joyce’s canonical novel as part of a consideration of the sociocultural contexts that become significant for an individual’s dietary practices. My main focus will not be upon the book’s much-written-about main characters but a comparatively minor one: Gerty MacDowell, from the “Nausicaa” episode.

Although Gerty’s dietary behavior is referred to only briefly in *Ulysses* and so easy to ignore, her attitudes and reactions to food can be shown to represent the pathological relationship between women and eating within the anorexic milieu of Victorian culture. Plock considers Gerty’s a case of “latent anorexia” (39). To see Gerty as an anorexic patient might seem to be to exaggerate her symptoms, but her dietary behavior does in fact reveal some characteristics of anorexia nervosa, which, according to Joan Jacobs Brumberg, “had a great deal to do with gender and class identity” (8).

Anorexia Nervosa in the Victorian Era

“In the late Victorian era, arguably for the first time in the West, those who

² Nadel, in “Molly’s Mediterranean Meals and Other Joycean Cuisines: An Essay with Recipes,” argues for Joyce’s fondness for Mediterranean cuisines as they symbolize the intermingling of cultures (210-22). In “Modernism’s Feast on Science: Nutrition and Diet in Joyce’s *Ulysses*,” Plock maintains that Joyce incorporates into *Ulysses* nineteenth-century scientific discourses about nutrition and diet, and thus disposes of the distinction between science and literature (30-42). Robert Gibb, in “Cloacal Obsession: Food, Sex, and Death in ‘Lestrygonians,’” contends that, to Bloom’s mind, food acts as a surrogate for sex and Molly, and that he associates food with death and fears to have sexual intercourse with Molly on account of his obsession with the death of Rudy and the probability of another birth/death (268-73). Also placing the focus on Bloom, Jaye Berman Montresor, in “Joyce’s Jewish Stew: The Alimentary Lists in *Ulysses*,” analyzes the food lists pertaining to Bloom and suggests that they reveal his problematic Jewish identity (194-203). In the article “Breakfast at 7 Eccles Street,” Austin Briggs examines the uncertainties surrounding the Blooms’ breakfast on 17 June 1904 as they relate to the uncertainties regarding the Blooms’ future (195-209). Miriam O’Kane Mara’s attention falls on Stephen in the article “James Joyce and the Politics of Food.” Somewhat in the manner of Tucker, Mara remarks that Stephen dreads ingesting food for the reason that food seems to threaten his bodily borders and therefore represents a threat to his troubled, colonized, and feminized identity (94-110).

could afford to eat well began systematically to deny themselves food in pursuit of an aesthetic ideal” (Bordo 185). Susan Bordo makes this statement in her influential book, *Unbearable Weight*, in which she examines the connections between contemporary Western culture and women’s relation to food. Bordo’s words suggest that food control is not the “privilege” of present-day women: Victorian women had started to limit their food intake in order to achieve “an aesthetic ideal,” that is, the ideal of femininity. Food and femininity were so closely linked that “restrictive eating” was actually promoted in Victorian society (Brumberg 174). The promotion of restrictive eating contributed to women’s systematic denial of food ingestion, which manifested the Victorian cultural milieu of anorexia. Anorexia nervosa, as Brumberg declares, “is a historically specific disease that emerged from the distinctive economic and social environment of the late nineteenth century” (6). It was a disease exclusively diagnosed among “affluent young Victorians” (8)—that is, among the middle and upper classes—for those who were at the bottom of social hierarchy like the Dedalus daughters would do their best to feed rather than to starve themselves. Simply put, anorexia refers to the lack of appetite. But more accurately, anorectics did not necessarily resent food or really lose their appetites, but rather controlled their food intake in the extreme to achieve their purpose. Hilde Bruch observes: “Though food intake is sharply curtailed, this is not because of poor appetite or lagging interest in food. On the contrary, [anorectics] are frantically preoccupied with food and eating but consider self-denial and discipline the highest virtue and condemn satisfying their needs and desires as shameful self-indulgence” (xxi-xxii). In other words, food was denied for the pursuit of an ideal.

The emergence of anorexia nervosa in the nineteenth century had a great deal to do with the cultural presuppositions of the era, “when the prevailing ideal of femininity was the delicate, affluent lady, unequipped for anything but the most sheltered domestic life” (Bordo 157). To achieve this feminine ideal, young Victorian women had to watch out for their body size and appetite. This explains why the disorder was fundamentally a female one: ninety percent of anorectics were young women (140). It has to be emphasized that although all women dwelt in this cultural milieu, not all women were anorectics by definition: a modern woman then as now could be obsessed with her weight without necessarily suffering from the disease. Anorexia nervosa is “a multidetermined disorder” (Brumberg 161); its onset could be attributed to both individual factors and environmental influences, and frustrations play a major role in triggering the disease, including “inappropriate romantic expectations, blocked educational or social opportunities, struggles with parents” (127). Symptomatic of anorexia or not, a woman’s appetite is “an

important voice” in her identity (184), as Brumberg puts it in “The Appetite as Voice,” a chapter in the highly acclaimed study of eating disorders, *Fasting Girls*. That a woman’s appetite functions as “voice” resides not only in the sense that it offers her an opportunity to be heard, but also in the sense that it provides sufficient messages for us to decode the working of sociocultural forces on the construction of her identity. Her appetite could signify a gesture of self-expression, but it could also serve as clues to the operation of public forces. Whichever it is, the “voice” of appetite had been strictly regulated and controlled in the Victorian era—a cultural milieu whose impact was palpable in the early twentieth century. It is within such an anorexic milieu that Gerty strives to achieve the ideal of femininity by means of eating and food control.

Gerty, Food, and Femininity

“[A]s fair a specimen of winsome Irish girlhood as one could wish to see” (*U* 13.80-81),³ Gerty MacDowell acts as a representative of Irish womanhood at the turn of the twentieth century—constructed largely by public discourses and commodity culture. If the free indirect discourse in the first half of “Nausicaa” tells us about the impact of public culture on Gerty in particular and Irish women in general, it also informs us of the relationship between women and food within the Victorian and Edwardian social milieu. Admittedly, Gerty embodies the Victorian bourgeois ideology of the angel in the house: “[a] sterling good daughter . . . just like a second mother in the house, a ministering angel too with a little heart worth its weight in gold” (*U* 13.325-26). Such a ministering angel has to create the “feeling of hominess” (*U* 13.224), which is closely linked with cooking:

She would care for [her manly man] with creature comforts too for Gerty was womanly wise and knew that a mere man liked that feeling of hominess. Her griddlecakes done to a goldenbrown hue and queen Ann’s pudding of delightful creaminess had won golden opinions from all because she had a lucky hand also for lighting a fire, dredge in the fine selfraising flour and always stir in the same direction, then cream the milk and sugar and whisk well the white of eggs though she didn’t like the eating part when there were any people that made her shy. . . . (*U* 13.222-29)

³ All references to Joyce’s *Ulysses* are to the chapter and line numbers of the 1986 Vintage edition and will be preceded by the abbreviation *U*.

For Gerty, to care for a husband is equivalent to be an excellent cook, or, to be more precisely, a first-rate baker. This fits the traditional role of woman as food preparer or feeder: by preparing food and feeding her family, a woman expresses her love for them. As Brumberg explains, “[F]ood was used to express love in the bourgeois household. Offering attractive and ample food was the particular *responsibility and pleasure* of middle-class wives and mothers” (136; emphasis added). It is noteworthy that to offer food was both a woman’s “responsibility” and “pleasure.” In other words, women delighted in feeding others, not themselves. Gerty is not the only feeder described in the “Nausicaa” episode. “Tommy Caffrey could never be got to take his castor oil unless it was Cissy Caffrey that held his nose and promised him the scatty heel of the loaf or brown bread with golden syrup on. What a persuasive power that girl had!” (*U* 13.30-33). The top priority of Cissy as a woman is to feed her brother with what he is unwilling to take—this is her gratification, her “power.” As a matter of fact, a dominant notion concerning women and food in Victorian society was that women took immense pleasure “by feeding and nourishing *others*, not themselves” (Bordo 118; emphasis in original). Bordo makes this clear: “Denial of self and the feeding of others are hopelessly enmeshed in this construction of the ideal mother, as they are in the nineteenth-century version of the ideal wife. . . . [I]t is here, in the care and feeding of others, that woman experiences the one form of desire that is appropriately hers . . .” (118). Consequently and unsurprisingly, it delights Gerty to prepare delicious food, and pleases Cissy to feed her brother.

If women felt immensely gratified in denying themselves and feeding others, women did not need to eat, as the logic goes. Caroline Walker Bynum observes that cookbooks in the West did “suggest that women—who prepared the meals—hardly needed to eat at all” (*Holy Feast* 191). Such an assumption “actually produced dietary deficiencies in women” by the nineteenth century and impacted on “the twentieth-century Western craze for female dieting” (191). In “Nausicaa,” we see Gerty and Cissy as food preparer and feeder, but hardly as eater—the role of eater belongs to men, not to women. Indeed, we are told how Gerty bakes delicious cakes and puddings, and what an outstanding baker she is, but we do not see her eating the cake or pudding she bakes. Gerty herself admits that she prefers cooking to eating, and that eating in front of other people embarrasses her. Deborah Lupton points out that etiquette manuals published in Victorian times “ruled against eating in public,” for it could violate “the dictates of bourgeois manners” if the eater failed to perform the ritual with required elegance (22). What was ruled against, in

actuality, was not merely “eating in public,” but rather “eating” itself, for the regulation of women’s appetite topped the dictates of bourgeois manners. However, preparing food without eating it, as mentioned earlier, could lead to “dietary deficiencies in women” (Bynum, *Holy Feast* 191), which could be symptomatic of anorexia when deficiencies go to extremes. Bruch declares that an anorexic girl might “show an increased interest in cooking”: she prepares meals for the family, bakes exquisite cakes and cookies, even force-feeds other people, but makes it a secret as to how little she eats (75). This does not suggest that Gerty *is* an anorectic—which would be an overstatement. Although the preference for cooking to eating could indicate anorexia nervosa, Gerty’s attitude toward food intake bespeaks rather the Victorian cultural assumption of woman as food preparer and feeder, not as eater—an assumption which is not unrelated to the onset of the eating disorder.

But human beings need to eat to survive. Except for confirmed cases of anorectics who literally refused food, Victorian women did eat—scantly, though. Their scanty appetite might contribute to the symptom of malnutrition pervasive among young Victorian women, which, ironically, was an indispensable element of feminine beauty. Plock regards Gerty as an exemplar of “the apparent lack of nutritional material,” a case with “a significant absence of nutriments” (39). Gerty has a “slim graceful figure” (*U* 13.155); she is pale and delicate, often feeling fatigued and taking iron pills:

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 and she was much better of those discharges she used to get and that tired feeling. The waxen pallor of her face was almost spiritual. . . . There was an innate refinement, a languid queenly *hauteur* about Gerty. . . . (*U* 13.83-97)

Slight, fragile, tired, and pale, Gerty obviously suffers from anemia, which could be attributed to either menstruation or malnutrition. Yet menstruation alone fails to justify Gerty’s role as “a specimen of winsome Irish girlhood” (*U* 13.80-81). Slimness and languishment, in actual fact, constituted an essential part of femininity in Victorian times and the period immediately following the Victorian era. To be thin and languid was required for ideal womanhood, and the easiest way to achieve a slender body was the control of one’s appetite, though this could lead to eating



disorders and damage a woman's health. Among women who were after the fashion of slimmness and languidness, therefore, scanty eating and the ensuing malnutrition often kept them company. Brumberg explains this peculiar "fashion": "The health of young women was definitely influenced by a general female fashion for sickness and debility. . . . Because the most prevalent diseases in this period were those that involved 'wasting,' it is no wonder that becoming thin, through noneating, became a focal symptom. Wasting was in style" (168). Explicating the view of Susie Orbach, who investigates societal control over women's body, Lupton observes that "women in western societies are subject to continuing social pressures to limit their food intake for the sake of conforming to norms of appropriate feminine body size, and thus develop a pathological relationship with food" (11). Lupton's observation, as well as Orbach's, focuses on contemporary women, and yet this observation is applicable to Victorian and Edwardian women, whose appetite was regulated by dominant social ideology of feminine beauty.

Fragile and languid, Gerty limps away from Bloom in "Nausicaa." It is uncertain whether or not the cause of her lameness is related to anemia or malnutrition; she only refers to it as "an accident coming down Dalkey hill" (*U* 13.651). Gerty maintains that her lameness is simply "one shortcoming" (*U* 13.650); as Bloom asserts, nevertheless, "[a] defect is ten times worse in a woman" (*U* 13.774-75), especially when the woman is unmarried and longs for marriage. Gerty desires a husband, but the low marriage rates in post-Famine Ireland make it extremely difficult for girls to secure a man. Gerty knows her lameness is anything but a "shortcoming," which seriously undermines her value in the marriage market, otherwise she need not "always [try] to conceal it" (*U* 13.651). To be competitive, she has to fit better into the standard of feminine beauty, to be more "fashionable" than other young women. In this way, the "appearance of [her] body" could be "a source of great pride and a sense of accomplishment" because "it conforms to the accepted norms of attractiveness and social acceptability" (Lupton 16). Controlling her appetite, Gerty disciplines her body to achieve required standards of beauty in the hope of romantic fulfillment. However, as Brumberg reminds us, "the subject of marriage" could be "a source of emotional stress" among young women, and this stress could sometimes trigger the onset of anorexia nervosa (133). In spite of her efforts to be attractive, Gerty, with her "shortcoming," is destined to confront frustrations in romance and marriage: Bloom is "glad" that he "didn't know [her lameness] when she was on show" (*U* 13.775-76). Whether continual frustrations will ultimately lead her to the full onset of anorexia nervosa must remain a textual uncertainty, but from the perspective of late Victorian and early Edwardian

medicine it was never a clinical impossibility.

A woman's scanty appetite, along with her slim and frail body, was not merely a barometer for her stylishness; it could also signify her social status. A thin woman, by the last decades of the nineteenth century, implied "the idle idyll of the leisured classes" (Brumberg 182): only the privileged classes could afford the idleness of an invalid daughter or wife who did not perform domestic duties. As Brumberg argues, "By the turn of the twentieth century, elite society already preferred its women thin and frail as a symbol of their social distance from the working classes" (182). Bordo also suggests that "a frail frame and lack of appetite" symbolized in Victorian society "*social* transcendence of the laboring, striving 'economic' body" (117; emphasis in original). But the trend was not only prevalent among the upper classes. Lower classes tended to emulate the practices of upper classes. Felipe Fernández-Armesto points out that in Western society people of the lower classes have at all times aspired to be in possession of the food associated with the classes above them: "People eat the best food they can afford: the preferred food of the rich therefore becomes a signifier of social aspirations, pretensions or affectations . . ." (140). A person who ate the "wrong" food might result in social derogation (Mennell 302). If the rich inclined to noneating, lower classes followed suit. As a consequence, women with status consciousness or social aspirations espoused the tenet of slenderness and adopted the rule of parsimonious eating. This "'tenacious and all-pervasive' ideal of the perfect lady" affected both working and middle classes (Bordo 163). Among the bourgeoisie, in particular, it became obligatory for women to limit their food intake "in order to encode their body with the correct social messages" inasmuch as their appetite functioned as "a social and emotional instrument" rather than "a biological drive" (Brumberg 182). Under such a cultural milieu that associated parsimonious appetite and ill health with "vehicles to elevated womanhood" (183), to insinuate or say that a woman was robust or sturdy constituted not a compliment but an insult, for good health in women suggested "low status, a lack of gentility, and even vulgarity" (182).

Gerty belongs to the lower-middle class. Not an aristocratic lady, but she obviously aspires to be one: "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 . . ." (*U* 13.99-102). Born into a family with an alcoholic father, Gerty can only try her best to imitate or look like a lady. Thus, she utilizes commodities to enhance her attractiveness, and probably reduces her food intake to be slender, fragile, and ladylike. The "languid queenly *hauteur* about Gerty" which is "unmistakably



evidenced in her delicate hands” (*U* 13.97-98) comes not only from the magic of “queen of ointments” (*U* 13.90), but more likely from her deliberate control of appetite. Gerty also resents vulgarity: “From everything in the least indelicate her finebred nature instinctively recoiled” (*U* 13.660-61). As vulgarity is linked up with lower status, Gerty’s resentment of it betrays her aspiration for higher social status, her longing for a refined, elegant, and stylish life in the upper class. In “The Wandering Rocks,” when Dubliners pay homage to the viceregal precession on the streets, Gerty is curious to “see what Her Excellency had on” (*U* 10.1208-09). In “Sirens,” the barmaids Misses Kennedy and Douce also take interest in the Lady Lieutenant’s dress of “pearl grey and *eau de Nil*,” the “[e]xquisite contrast” winning the acclaim of Miss Kennedy (*U* 11.67-68). Girls of lower classes, whether the middle or the working, try to model themselves upon the upper-class lady—her dress, her appearance, and probably her figure. A young woman with status consciousness and fashion awareness like Gerty is unlikely to know nothing about what is in style in the upper class.

As a matter of fact, the food a person ate was believed to be directly related to one’s looks. A famous maxim in nineteenth-century Europe was “you are what you eat,” coined in 1850 by the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach, who theorized about the interrelationship between nutrition’s specific qualities and the eater’s constitution (Plock 37-38). According to the theory, the values of food were transmitted to the eater in the act of consumption, contributing to his/her physical as well as mental makeup. The choice of food thus suggested “to oneself and others how individuals perceive[d] themselves, or would like to be perceived” (Lupton 23). In other words, food determined one’s character and represented one’s identity—and one’s character and identity could be reflected on his/her appearance. The “Circe” episode, as Plock observes, depicts the way Bloom turns into a pig to be slaughtered by Bello in the nighttown after his “excessive carnivorous banquet” of kidney, liver, and bacon that day (37-38). Indulging himself in the feast of pork, Bloom literally becomes a pig; his gluttony is manifested in his physical appearance. If excessive or indulgent eating revealed a person’s unsightly character and resulted in one’s physical transformation, great caution should be exercised when one consumed food. This was especially essential for young women, who felt repulsion for eating precisely by reason of food’s common association with gluttony and the effects gluttony had on physical attraction. Brumberg articulates this view:

Careful, abstemious eating was presented as insurance against ugliness and loss of love. Girls in particular were told: “Keep a great



watch over your appetite. Don't always take the nicest things you see, but be frugal and plain in your tastes." Young women were told directly that "gross eaters" not only developed thick skin but had prominent blemishes and broken blood vessels on the nose. Gluttony also rubbed the eyes of their intensity and caused the lips to thicken, crack, and lose their red color. "The glutton's mouth may remind us of cod-fish—never of kisses." A woman with a rosebud mouth was expected to have an "ethereal appetite." . . . Women . . . who indulged in the pleasures of the appetite . . . were said to develop "a certain unspiritual or superanimal expression" that conveyed their base instincts. (176)

To have attractive and delicate looks, women had to watch out for their appetite, otherwise physical ugliness would haunt them as a punishment for their indulgence. A woman conscious of her appearance would not run such a risk. After all, "you are what you eat."

Gerty is apparently an advocate of the maxim "you are what you eat." As mentioned earlier, she bakes excellent cakes and puddings but dislikes the eating part—which would probably render her gluttonous and unladylike. Instead of real foods, she wants to eat something different: "often she wondered why you couldn't eat something poetical like violets or roses . . ." (*U* 13.229-30). Eating "poetical" foods like violets and roses, in the light of the nutritional transmission theory, would endow Gerty with the attributes of flowers: romantic, decorative, fragile, elegant, and feminine—the ideals attributed to females in the Victorian era. Her careful and abstemious eating, furthermore, ensures her physical attractiveness and delicacy: her face is of "waxen pallor" and "ivorylike purity," her "rosebud mouth" is "a genuine Cupid's bow," her eyes are "of the bluest Irish blue, set off by lustrous lashes and dark expressive brows," and "her wealth of wonderful hair . . . nestled about her pretty head in a profusion of luxuriant clusters" (*U* 13.87-119). Gerty's delicate looks mirror her refined feminine nature, which is manifested in her control of appetite. In the second half of "Nausicaa," in fact, Bloom notices Gerty's beautiful eyes and makes this comment: "Fine eyes she had, clear. It's the white of the eye brings that out not so much the pupil" (*U* 13.906-08). Were she a glutton, Gerty would not have possessed a pair of clear and fine eyes. Therefore, appetite plays a crucial part in determining one's appearance, and Gerty's supposedly ethereal appetite is rewarded with physical attraction: her good-looking face, eyes, mouth, and hair are weapons for her to vie with other commodities and win her a



husband in the competitive marriage market, echoing Brumberg's argument that abstemious eating worked as "insurance against ugliness and loss of love" (176) to a considerable degree.

The effects food had on one's looks might dismay young women; however, the physiological needs following eating were similarly disturbing: Victorian women limited their food intake also for the fear of bodily functions. Eating is necessarily accompanied by processes of digestion and defecation. Food enters the human body through the mouth; it is processed in the digestive system, partly absorbed and incorporated into the body, partly discarded by and discharged from it. While food's entering into the threshold of the upper end of human body might be embarrassing, its discharge through the lower end could be even more awkward and disconcerting. This fear of bodily functions was especially evident among "upwardly mobile, middle-class women who were preoccupied with establishing their own good taste" (Brumberg 175). For these women, the "naturalness of eating" (175) was problematic and difficult because of its connection with such bodily indelicacies as digestion and defecation, which violated their "good taste." So fearful were they of physiological processes that constipation—"almost always a symptom in anorexia nervosa"—corresponded to "the ideal of Victorian femininity" (175). Marion Harland mentions that some women "boasted" of the few "calls of Nature upon them," which "averaged but one or two demands per week" (qtd. in Brumberg 175). Bynum, in her study of women's fasting practices in the Middle Ages, confirms that fasting females were "admired" for "suppressing excretory functions" (*Holy Feast* 213). The fear of bodily indelicacies was so deep-rooted that Victorian women would not hesitate to reduce their food intake in order to acquire the virtue of constipation. It is noteworthy that bodily indelicacies include not merely defecation; the aspects of the digestive processes to be avoided also included flatulence and gaseous emissions. The dread of "gaseous emissions from the other end of the alimentary canal," Mennell suggests, contributed to the fussiness of many nineteenth-century eaters about certain foods (301)—and surely to the scantiness of many women's appetite.

In "Nausicaa," the bodily function of excretion remains a taboo by reason of its connection with vulgarity and indelicacy. Cissy's mentioning of "the beeoetetom" (*U* 13.263) embarrasses Gerty: "Gerty MacDowell bent down her head and crimsoned at the idea of Cissy saying an unladylike thing like that out loud she'd be ashamed of her life to say, flushing a deep rosy red . . ." (*U* 13.264-66). The mention of the bottom discomferts Gerty because it is associated not only with sexuality but also with excretory functions. The lavatory in the episode is never



indicated clearly, but is referred to as “where you know” (*U* 13.274), “the Miss White” (*U* 13.275), “that place” (*U* 13.332), or “there” (*U* 13.340). To decorate the lavatory, or, more correctly, to reduce the embarrassment induced by it, Gerty “tacked up on the wall of that place . . . the picture of halcyon days where a young gentleman in the costume they used to wear then with a threecornered hat was offering a bunch of flowers to his ladylove with oldtime chivalry through her lattice window” (*U* 13.332-37). Looking at the couple “dreamily when she went there for a certain purpose” (*U* 13.340), Gerty, it seems, could turn her attention from the vulgarity of bodily functions to romantic aspirations: she “felt her own arms that were white and soft just like [the lady’s] with the sleeves back and thought about those times . . .” (*U* 341-42), the times of being a lady and being offered a marriage proposal by “a thorough aristocrat” (*U* 13.339). Another indelicate bodily function euphemistically mentioned in “Nausicaa” is baby Boardman’s disgorgement, which also disconcerts Gerty. The baby’s vomit is described as “[sending] up his compliments to all and sundry” (*U* 13.611). Seeing that, “Gerty stifled a smothered exclamation and gave a nervous cough” (*U* 13.616). When “Edy asked what,” Gerty “simply passed it off with consummate tact” because “she was ever ladylike in her deportment” (*U* 13.617-19). The incident is “stifled” by Gerty, who is made “nervous” by it rather than “set[s] that little matter to rights” as Cissy does (*U* 13.614-15). The role of ministering angel seems ironic here. While the intake of food through the mouth could be embarrassing, the disgorging of food from it is even more disconcerting—not to mention the discharge of alimentary waste from the lower end of the body.

Gerty, Food, and Sexuality

However, despite all the reasons mentioned previously, food had to be limited because it was ultimately related to sexuality. Alimentary appetite, after all, was often analogous with sexual appetite. “Eating can acquire association with other forms of sensuality, and food can be sexually suggestive,” Fernández-Armesto tells us (60). Gigantic appetite used to be “a sign of prowess” and “wealth,” “an act of heroism and justice” in the Middle Ages (118), but even then it was men who feasted and women who served—corresponding to the polarization of traditional gender roles. In Victorian and post-Victorian times, gigantic appetite was not in style; self-discipline led the trend, and eating habits were acquired to “establish and symbolize control over one’s body” (Lupton 1)—the control of dietary as well as sexual practices. Women, in particular, had to regulate their conduct according to



dominant ideology. As Bordo explains, Western culture has long been preoccupied with “the fear of woman as ‘too much’—which almost always revolve[s] around her sexuality,” and expressions concerning woman’s excessiveness “are strikingly full of eating and hungering metaphors” (161). The tight corsets, Bordo continues, were therefore applied to women as an “exercise of self-constraint and control” (162). Indeed, young women tended to present “unusual eating and diminished appetite more often than any other group in the population” (Brumberg 171) because they were demanded more often than other groups to control their appetite, whether alimentary or sexual, in the phase of sexual burgeoning and maturity. As appetite was seen as “a barometer of sexuality,” and “an active appetite” as “a trope for dangerous sexuality,” women had to be “concerned about its expression and its control” (172). Brumberg clarifies women’s uneasy relationship with food and sexuality: “Displays of appetite were particularly difficult for young women who understood appetite to be both a sign of sexuality and an indication of lack of self-restraint. Eating was important because food was an analogue of the self” (175). The intake of food expressed and represented the eater. In a society which valued moderation and respectability, women were encouraged to beware the expressions of their dietary habits and conform to sociocultural expectations by performing the practice of restrictive eating. Victorians, Bordo reminds us, “did have conduct manuals, which warned elite women of the dangers of indulgent and over-stimulating eating and advised how to consume in a feminine way (as little as possible and with the utmost precaution against unseemly show of *desire*)” (112; emphasis added). What was “unseemly,” in reality, was not simply the act of eating, but rather the implication behind alimentary appetite—i.e., sexual appetite. Controlling their food intake, women exercised control over their body as well as sexuality. Food and sexuality were so tightly connected that medieval holy women actually abstained from food to subvert lust and restrain sexuality (Bynum, *Holy Feast* 214-15).

Nevertheless, the effects of foods on the body could vary greatly; some foods were thought to be more stimulating than others. Bordo points out that Victorian conduct manuals “offered comparisons of the erotic and cooling effects of various foods, often with specific prescriptions for each sex” (114). Women, presumably, should keep away from foods with “erotic” effects. Brumberg enumerates the foods adolescent girls were cautioned against: “coffee, tea, and chocolate; salted meats and spices; warm bread and pastry; confectionery; nuts and raisins; and, of course, alcohol” (172). These foods should be avoided on account of their stimulation of girls’ sensual rather than moral nature (172). To bridle their sensual nature, and to

come up to the Victorian expectations of feminine ideal as composed, untainted, and delicate, young women were demanded to be more than prudent in choosing what to eat.

Among the foods to be kept away from women, red meat undoubtedly came at the top if alcohol was excluded. Long considered “the most highly prized of food” (Twigg 21), meat was traditionally connected with elite classes. In medieval times, Mennel informs us, while “the secular and ecclesiastical upper classes” enjoyed “the prodigious consumption of meat,” the peasantry based their diet mainly “on cereals and vegetables” by contrast (41). Lupton also explains that historically meat functioned as “a signifier of social class,” for the consumption of meat reflected one’s prestige and wealth (28). Eating involves the literal incorporation of food into the body; in the act of eating meat, the qualities of the consumed animal are passed on to the person and constitute the person’s character—or so nineteenth-century nutritional science suggested (Plock 37). This animal “power” centers around “the qualities of strength, aggression, passion, sexuality—all that culture has traditionally designated humankind’s animal nature” (Twigg 22). The ambiguity of meat could be detected here. On the one hand, meat symbolized power, prestige, and virility. As the flesh of animals, meat also embodied humanity’s domination over the natural world (Lupton 28). But on the other hand, being derived from the killing of animals, meat signified violence, rivalry, and impulse. All these attributes, Lupton argues, could be “coded as masculine” (107).⁴ Therefore, meat, specifically red meat, with its bloody color and its association with animal power and masculinity, was considered to be men’s food, whereas vegetables, with the connotations of “purity, passiveness, cleanliness, femininity, weakness and idealism” (Lupton 28), were thought to suit women better. The polarization of masculine and feminine foods was established as a consequence. As Julia Twigg maintains, “The patterning of food has a sexual dimension. Thus red meat and men, white and women” (24). White meat agreed with women because, pale and bloodless in color, it lacked many of the masculine attributes associated with red meat. In other words, men should feel comfortable with the consumption of red meat, and women should dine on vegetables and white meat. This polarization could also be ascribed to the assumption of the different mechanisms of digestion between men and women. While a man’s stomach could easily digest rough materials of heavy foods like red meat, the same materials simply “ruined” the delicate stomach of a woman, whose “digestive apparatus required foods that were soft, light, and liquid” (Brumberg 171).

⁴ For a more detailed discussion of meat’s positive and negative attributes, see Fiddes.

However it was coded, red meat represented such a taboo to women precisely owing to its connection with sexuality. Suggestive of carnality and fleshliness, meat was believed to stimulate lust (Twigg 24). “No food (other than alcohol),” Brumberg asserts, “caused Victorian women and girls greater moral anxiety than meat,” which was thought to be “a heat-producing food that stimulated production of blood and fat as well as passion,” responsible for “sexual development and activity” (173). Not only did meat rouse sexual appetite, but excessive meat eating could cause adolescent insanity and nymphomania (173). These connotations of meat contributed to the fact that girls ate very little meat: they stayed away from this horrifying and repulsive food as much as they could unless it became necessary to endure it—for example, when prescribed by a doctor (173). This deficient intake of meat could lead to anemia, a symptom popular among young Victorian women and one, as has been shown, also exhibited by Gerty MacDowell. Brumberg succinctly summarizes the cultural significance of repugnance toward meat:

Meat avoidance was tied to cultural notions of sexuality and decorum as well as to medical ideas about the digestive delicacy of the female stomach. Carnality at table was avoided by many who made sexual purity an axiom. Proper women, especially sexually maturing girls, adopted this orientation with the result that meat became taboo. (174)

Young unmarried women were, however, not the only group upon whom a limitation on meat intake was imposed. According to health manuals of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, pregnant and lactating women, due to their “delicate ‘feminine’ condition,” were advised to reduce meat consumption, so as to avoid “any of the stimulation of those qualities of redbloodness that seemed inappropriate to those fulfilling the nurturing role” (Twigg 24). To combat masturbation, adolescent boys were often recommended “a low meat diet” to ease sexual impulse (24). If even boys had to cut down on their ingestion of animal flesh to preclude the enticement of lust, it was no wonder that meat represented a taboo for girls.

As a supposed paragon of Irish womanhood, Gerty is expected to be pure, innocent, untainted, without the knowledge of sexuality. Despite the many enumerations of commodities in the first half of “Nausicaa,” the mention of food is remarkably slight by comparison. Only four items are recollected by Gerty: griddlecakes (*U* 13.224), queen Ann’s pudding (*U* 13.225), stewed cockles (*U* 13.313), and lettuce (*U* 13.314). As Plock asserts, however, Irish dietary habits



notably changed after the Great Famine; a diet with a greater variety of foodstuffs replaced the pre-Famine diet based on a single crop, the potato (32). In spite of this, food items in the episode are scarcely mentioned, and dietary practices are depicted only twice: in the descriptions of Gerty as a first-rate baker and her wish to eat breakfast with a husband (*U* 13.224-42), and in the reference to her mother's birthday (*U* 13.313-18). If warm bread and pastry as well as confectionery are thought to be stimulating, it is unsurprising that Gerty dislikes eating the griddlecakes and puddings she bakes—it is “unladylike” to show an alimentary appetite, let alone sexual appetite, in front of people. She prepares food, but she does not and is forbidden to *enjoy* it. Her relation to food forms a striking contrast to Bloom's in “Calypso.” At the very beginning of the episode, we are told that “Mr Leopold Bloom ate *with relish* the inner organs of beasts and fowls” (*U* 4.1-2; emphasis added). Then, we see Bloom buy, cook, and enjoy the pork kidney: “he put a forkful into his mouth, chewing with discernment the toothsome pliant meat. Done to a turn” (*U* 4.390-92). Feminized though he is in the preparation of food, Bloom consumes food as other masculine men do. In other words, Bloom the unconventionally womanly man prepares *and* enjoys food, while the stereotypically feminine Gerty acts as a mere preparer. In a society anxious about and prohibiting women's sexuality, women are not allowed to show appetite for food, though men can eat with relish.

For Gerty, the preparation of food functions as a prelude to marriage: “a mere man liked that feeling of hominess” (*U* 13.223-24); by preparing delicious food, a woman creates the feeling of hominess and thus wins herself a husband. Gerty dreams of having “brekky” with her hubby: “every morning they would both have brekky, simple but perfectly served, for their own two selves . . .” (*U* 13.239-41). Yet what is to be eaten remains a textual mystery. Interestingly, as Tracey Teets Schwarze reminds us, the only couple eating breakfast in *Ulysses* is the Blooms (139). But ironically, it is Bloom, the husband, who cooks and serves Molly, the wife, and more ironically, they do not eat together—an act insinuating of the lack of sexual intercourse between them. They do not enjoy food together as they do not have sexual intercourse with each other. The absence of sexual intimacy may not be an issue to Gerty, though: she envisages that she and her husband “would be just good friends like a big brother and sister without all that other” (*U* 13.665-66). A feminine ideal, Gerty seems to imply, should be impervious to sexuality even in wedlock.

Gerty also recalls a special occasion in which her family and the Dignams gathered: “Her mother's birthday that was” and “they had stewed cockles and



lettuce with Lazenby's salad dressing for supper" (*U* 13.313-16). On such a special occasion—so special that they even had a group photograph taken (*U* 13.318)—food should have played a central role, but only two courses are mentioned here, without any indication of meat at all. In fact, throughout the first half of "Nausicaa," red meat is never mentioned. Suggestive of lust and sexuality, red meat is improper for Gerty, the exemplar of femininity; therefore, it has disappeared from the MacDowells' dining table, or rather from Gerty's recollection.⁵ On the other hand, the bloodless cockles and lettuce, less "stimulating," are safe and acceptable—and hence mentionable. In the second half of "Nausicaa," Bloom also supposes that Gerty goes home "to nicey bread and milky" (*U* 13.854), not to meat. Meat, in a nutshell, is not for young women, while Bloom himself eats kidney for breakfast (*U* 4.390-92) and liver and bacon for dinner (*U* 11.499). A counterpart to Leopold, Molly also eats red meat: she shares the Plumtree's potted meat with Boylan after her sexual liaison with him (*U* 18.131-32). The connection between meat and sexuality cannot be more obvious. Canned or tinned food, Plock declares, was "a luxury" at the turn of the twentieth century, and was cautioned against to "the uninformed public" for its "potential adulteration"—for different sources of meats could be mixed together in the can. "The foodstuff that is in all probability adulterated thus comically alludes to the adulterous nature of Molly and Boylan's relationship" (38). Molly's relationship with Boylan is indeed both luxurious and adulterous—luxurious because she has led a sexless life with Bloom since Rudy's death ten years ago, and adulterous because the liaison is out of wedlock. While Molly, Joyce's new model for unrestrained Irish womanhood, enjoys meat and sexuality with a good appetite on 16 June 1904, Gerty, the idealized specimen of Victorian girlhood, has to control her appetite for food and sexuality. Ironically, although she is not supposed to reveal any knowledge of sexuality, Gerty actually reveals something more: "she revealed all her graceful beautifully shaped legs like that, supply soft and delicately rounded" (*U* 13.698-99),

⁵ As Gerty belongs to the lower-middle class and has an alcoholic father, it is not entirely impossible that her family could not afford sufficient food, let alone meat. Alcoholic though he is, Gerty's father has a job in an "office" (*U* 13.322), which makes him different from the jobless Simon Dedalus. Judging from the facts that Gerty could purchase commodities to enhance her attractiveness and the family could invite friends home to supper and take a group photograph, to argue that the MacDowells are as short of food as the Dedalus daughters would seem problematic. The MacDowells might not be well-to-do, but meat should be affordable to them, as certain kinds of meat—pigs' cheeks, for instance—are affordable to even the impoverished working class (Barisonzi 518). Therefore, Gerty's reticence about meat more likely results from its being a taboo than from the family's financial condition. Its disappearance from her recollection does not necessarily imply its absence from the MacDowells' dining table.

so that Bloom can have “a full view high up above her knee” (*U* 13.728-29), masturbate, and take pleasure in erection and ejaculation. The ideal of femininity, encoded with the attributes of purity and asexuality, is shattered by the eroticism of the scene. With the supposed carnality and materialism traditionally associated with Jewishness, Bloom violates the *appearance* of purity created by bourgeois culture on the body of Gerty. The contradiction of Victorian femininity is detectable here: the doctrines restrain women’s sexuality, and yet women’s corporeality is commodified to satisfy men’s carnal desire.

Gerty, Food, and Spirituality

To suppress female sexuality, Victorians had directed their attention to the aspect of spirituality, which had long been accentuated in Christian ethics—especially in a land as pious as Catholic Ireland. In “Nausicaa,” the seashore scene is juxtaposed with the church scene in a remarkable way. When Gerty and her companions linger on Sandymount Strand, “enjoying the evening scene and the air which was fresh but not too chilly” (*U* 13.9-10), a religious ceremony is in progress in the nearby Church of Mary, Star of the Sea: “It was the men’s temperance retreat conducted by the missionary, the reverend John Hughes S. J., rosary, sermon and benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament” (*U* 13.282-84). The insertion of the retreat into this episode holds great significance. While women have to attend to the food they consume to fulfill sociocultural expectations, men also have to give heed to the ingestion of alcohol to avoid the vice of intemperance. The ritual of benediction exempts men from their vice. Bynum, maintaining the importance of food practices in Christian tradition, emphasizes that the Eucharist “was the central Christian ritual, the most direct way of encountering God” (“Fast” 139). Receiving the Eucharist in the rite of Sacrament, Christians receive divine grace and spiritual cleansing. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that whereas the retreat presumably helps alcoholic men to turn over a new leaf—with a dubious result, as Joyce’s depictions in “Grace” show (*Dubliners* 172-74)—the stigma of “too much” on women does not seem to be cleansed so easily. More importantly, the juxtaposition of the seashore scene and the church scene underscores the association of Gerty with the Virgin Mary. Notwithstanding her erotic “show” (*U* 13.776) at the beach, Gerty, admittedly, possesses numerous attributes of the Virgin: her “spiritual” face of “ivorylike purity” (*U* 13.87-88), her “queenly *hauteur*” (*U* 13.97), the flush as delicate as the “rosebloom” (*U* 13.120), the color of her face as “a glorious rose” (*U* 13.519-20), her being “worship[ped]” by Bloom’s dark eyes “at her shrine” (*U*



13.563-64), and the “infinite store of mercy” in her eyes (*U* 13.748). “Tower of Ivory,” “Mystical Rose,” and “Mother of Mercy” are all epithets for the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is addressed as Queen in the Litany of Our Lady, as Don Gifford and Robert J. Seidman annotate (385-86, 394). When Bloom worships Gerty at her shrine on the seashore, the congregation prays to Mary in the church simultaneously. Acting as “Refuge of sinners” and “Comfortress of the afflicted” (*U* 13.442), the Virgin represents “a beacon ever to the stormtossed heart of man” (*U* 13.7-8), and thus epitomizes the ultimate ideal of femininity and the paradigm of womanhood for the Irish. This veneration of the Virgin reflects something crucial at the very heart of Catholic tradition: the exaltation of spirituality and degradation of physicality.

Indeed, Christianity is characterized by the dichotomy of spirituality and physicality. In her review of Kim Chernin’s *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness*, Counihan remarks that women’s obsession with a slender body, or the “tyranny of slenderness,” is “a product of the mind/body dichotomy fundamental to Western culture in which men hold power and are identified with the exalted mind, and women serve men and are likened to the denigrated body” (77). This mind/body dichotomy has rooted in Christian tradition for centuries, highlighting the chastisement of the corporeal body for the sublimation of the spiritual entity. “Disdain for the body, the conception of it as an alien force and impediment to the soul,” Bordo comments, “is very old in our Greco-Christian traditions . . .” (149). To approach the state of spiritual sublimation, women, as the embodiment of physicality, have to discipline their disparaged physical body—or to reduce their corporeal existence, so to speak. The control of food ingestion and the resulting obtainment of a thin body, accordingly, could symbolize spiritual exaltation. Bordo pronounces that in the Victorian era “a frail frame and lack of appetite” signified the “spiritual transcendence of the desires of the flesh” (117). Similarly, Burmberg proclaims that the ideal of Victorian femininity was attributed to the women who put soul over body: “One of the most convincing demonstrations of a spiritual orientation was a thin body—that is, a physique that symbolized rejection of all carnal appetites. . . . Denial became a form of moral certitude and refusal of attractive foods a means for advancing in the moral hierarchy” (179). Appetite, therefore, became “a barometer of a woman’s moral state” (179). The more a woman exercised control over her appetite and body, the higher her moral and spiritual state was. To fulfill the “central tenet of Victorian Spiritualism,” and to demonstrate “the independence of the spirit from the flesh,” or the exaltation of mind over body, pious Catholic women would hence discipline their physique by



limiting food intake or even embrace the cause of fasting (64).

Female fasting has, in fact, a long history traceable to the Middle Ages. In her account of the history of “fasting girls,” Brumberg states that although “anorexia nervosa is a relatively modern disease,” female fasting is rather an ancient practice “dating back, at least, to the medieval world” (5). What prevailed in the medieval world, apart from poverty, diseases, and famines, was of course Christianity, in which food practices played significant parts. Food conveyed many symbolic meanings to medieval Christians, but the most essential Christian food practices were fasting and the Eucharist (Bynum, *Holy Feast* 31). While the Eucharist provided “the most direct way” for medieval Christians to encounter the Almighty God (Bynum, “Fast” 139), fasting represented an approach to self-discipline. Lupton argues for the importance of eating and fasting in Christian ethics:

In western societies Judeo-Christian ethics underlie the practices of eating and fasting, which themselves are built upon the tenets of discipline and hygiene evident in ancient writings on dietary regimes. Control of the diet, particularly involving paring it down to the bare essentials, eschewing luxury foodstuffs such as meat and sweet foods and reducing heightened flavours or spices, are typical ascetic practices indulged in by religious devotees anxious to prove their ability to override the temptations of the flesh, including both appetite and sexual desire. (131)

To fast, in short, was to discipline oneself, to exercise control over one’s appetite and desire, to overrule the enticement of the body, so as to achieve bodily cleansing and approach spiritual sublimation. What underpinned the fasting practice, Lupton emphasizes, was “the discourse of self-control”: “it is individuals’ awareness of their hunger and desire for food, and their subsequent conquering of this, that is the main objective of self-starvation as a technology of self-control and purification . . .” (133). Therefore, medieval Christians, especially the pietists, fasted to show their control over the physicality and their devotion to the higher cause of spirituality, and, in so doing, illustrate their piety and dedication to God. Both men and women fasted, but fasting in men’s piety was never as vital as it was in women’s (Bynum, *Holy Feast* 4, 112). In other words, fasting played a more essential part in female holiness than in male. Men did not fast the way women did—not for such a long duration and great persistence, for instance.⁶ Identified

⁶ For details of the differences between male and female piety, see Bynum, *Holy Feast and*

with the body as they were, women had to discipline their physicality to transcend the corporeal existence more than men had to. It is for this difference in the practice of fasting that Brumberg claims that there were only “fasting girls” and no “fasting boys” in Western history (99).

But fasting for medieval holy women was more than a means of self-control and spiritual transcendence. It meant something more profound and altruistic. Although food gave sin to the world when a woman, Eve, ate something she should not have eaten, food brought salvation to humankind when Christians consumed their God, the Eucharist, in the ritual of Holy Communion (Bynum, “Fast” 138). In other words, Christ was food, and Christ as food redeemed human beings. Denying themselves ordinary food and feasting only on the body of Christ or almost nothing, some medieval holy women became food for other people. As Bynum argues, “In renouncing ordinary food and directing their being toward the food that is Christ, women moved to God not merely by abandoning their flawed physicality but also by becoming the suffering and feeding humanity of the body on the cross, the food on the altar” (*Holy Feast* 5). Fasting women became food because, according to hagiographical accounts, their bodies gave off sweet odor or exuded liquids with healing power (122).⁷ In becoming food to other people, they redeemed themselves and others simultaneously. Bynum stresses that fasting was “part of suffering,” and suffering was “an effective activity” which “redeemed both individual and cosmos” (207)—as the suffering Christ on the cross brought redemption to the universe. Fasting transfigured holy women into food, and suffering allowed them to be nearer to God. The practice of fasting, or “holy eating,” thus functioned as a means for women to obtain power otherwise unobtainable to them. Brumberg makes it clear that “power and service to others, through ‘holy eating,’ was the ultimate goal” of the medieval fasting women (47)—power to resist marriage and childbearing, and service to Almighty God and other people. This also explains why there were only fasting girls and no fasting boys: men need not resort to extreme fasting to obtain power.

Although cases of female fasting were less frequent after medieval times, the practice never completely faded away. Victorian women “attuned to the higher senses” actually found “inspiration for their abstemious eating in the austerities of medieval Catholics,” whose practices illustrated “how selfhood could be lost to a

Holy Fast, especially the chapter, “Food as a Female Concern: The Complexity of the Evidence,” pp. 73-112.

⁷ For details of female saints’ bodies as food and the miracles they performed with their fasting bodies, see Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, particularly the chapter, “Food in the Lives of Women Saints,” pp. 113-49.

higher moral or spiritual purpose” (Brumberg 180). Pious Catholics might even embrace the cause of a particular fasting girl to demonstrate their spiritual transcendence (64). However, there is a difference between medieval holy fasting and Victorian anorexia. While medieval women strove for holiness through asceticism to obtain power and dedicate their service, Victorian women, except for religious pietists, controlled their appetite for more secular reasons: to achieve social and moral superiority through wasting and debility (Counihan 98, 102). Religious purposes had given way to secular ones. The burden was similarly heavy, though. As Counihan comments, “In a culture that postulates dominance of mind over sense and associates women with the body and its appetite, the burden of control falls particularly strongly on women” (103). Indeed, whether in the Middle Ages or in the Victorian era, women were demanded more often than men to exercise self-control and self-discipline for the achievement of idealness.

Following the long-lasting tradition of the mind/body dichotomy, Gerty regulates her ingestion of food in order to be spiritually beautiful and ideally feminine. To be the exemplar of Irish womanhood is to be Virgin-like, and to be Virgin-like is to be spiritual and thus to be thin. Gerty’s delicate body fits in the feminine ideal required of females. In spite of her likeness to the Virgin, however, her “spiritual” beauty (*U* 13.87) should be seen in a secular rather than a religious sense: she controls her appetite for sociocultural approval instead of religious dedication. To argue that she fasts to obtain power and give service as medieval fasting girls would seem to overestimate her motives. Whatever their motives, women need to exercise control over their appetite to near the state of spirituality; men, on the other hand, have greater freedom in the way that they consume. In “Nausicaa,” when Gerty shuns eating to be spiritually ideal, the priests indulge themselves in their feast rather than perform asceticism to show their piety. After conducting the men’s temperance retreat, the missionary John Hughes enjoys a dainty repast at home with two other priests—a generous meal with plenty of foodstuffs in lieu of a spiritual, intangible, and sublimating feast: “Canon O’Hanlon and Father Conroy and the reverend John Hughes S. J. were taking tea and sodabread and butter and *fried mutton chops* with catsup . . .” (*U* 13.1292-94; emphasis added). The red meat unmentionable to Gerty is displayed on the priests’ dining table right after the ritual of the Blessed Sacrament. Women’s fasting versus men’s gluttony, religious rite and spiritual purification versus secular feast and corporeal pleasure: the contrast cannot be more striking, and the irony cannot be more obvious.

“The Appetite as Voice”

From holy fasting to anorexia nervosa, women have long combated with their appetite and body. For different reasons, they have controlled or even limited their food intake in order to achieve the state of idealness—religious, spiritual, social, or bodily. As Brumberg rightly claims, appetite serves as a “language” to express the self’s relationship with the outer world (5). One’s dietary practices are never simply an individual behavior, but rather a reflection of the impact of sociocultural forces on the self and the self’s reaction to them. As mentioned earlier, the notion that a woman’s appetite functions as “voice” or “language” rests not only in the sense that appetite offers her an opportunity to be heard, but also in the sense that it provides sufficient messages for us to decode the working of sociocultural forces on the construction of her identity. For medieval fasting girls, their appetite allowed them to voice themselves and obtain power; by means of controlling her appetite, Gerty also intends to be “powerful” and express herself as the feminine ideal. Nevertheless, the more she strives to limit her food intake, the more she traps herself into the Victorian presuppositions of ideal femininity. As dominant ideology suggests, a ministering angel provides food for her family, while she herself eats little; the delicate and invalid upper-class lady represents the ideal of feminine beauty, thus an icon to be emulated; women as physicality are obliged to regulate their flawed body to approach spirituality—a belief rooted in Christian tradition. Under the working of gender, class, and religious forces, Gerty’s appetite is shaped, as her identity is constructed: the “voice” of her appetite signifies the operation of public forces—the “expressions” of Victorian bourgeois ideology—rather than her own agency (or *say*). Strictly regulated and controlled, Gerty’s dietary practices reveal symptoms of anorexia nervosa, or at least reflect the widespread impact of anorexic symptoms on females. She is by no means a rare case, but a representative of the prevalent disorder, a specimen of Irish womanhood shaped by the anorexic trend. To some degree, seeing Gerty in the light of anorexia runs the risk of pathologizing her with the medical discourse which, as numerous critics have argued, functions to curtail women’s subjectivity. Gerty’s subjectivity, however, is curtailed not so much by the medical discourse as by the espousal of Victorian femininity, which renders women objectified and commodified.

Examined in a British context, Gerty’s relationship with food may not be unusual, yet it is undoubtedly ironic in the Irish colonial context. For centuries, Ireland had been haunted by the ghosts of famines and starvation, and Irish people had suffered from the lethal Great Famine only half a century before 1904, its



devastating impact having persisted up to the early twentieth century, as evidenced by the extremely low marriage rates and high levels of emigration.⁸ Gerty's lower-middle-class family might be able to afford food; and yet many poverty-stricken Irish—the Dedalus girls, for instance—were starved involuntarily. Meanwhile, some of those who could afford to eat starved themselves deliberately. The Irish, in fact, had laid the blame of the Famine on the ruler's inactivity when dealing with the disaster, claiming that the British were happy enough to reduce the over-crowded Irish population by starving them to death. But now Gerty actively participates in the practice of parsimonious eating to imitate the stylishness of the ruler. In other words, the Irish did not need the British to starve them; some of them were more than willing to starve themselves in order to achieve the ideal of femininity designated by the ruler. Gerty, in this sense, is victimized by Victorian bourgeois ideology—doubly victimized for being a colonized female.

To contrast with the debilitated and distorted feminine ideal, Molly is represented by Joyce as a bodily existence who has the last word of *Ulysses*. Undeniably, sociocultural regulations have control over Molly to a certain extent, as she recalls “the Glencree dinner”: “I wished I could have picked every morsel of that chicken out of my fingers it was so tasty and browned and as tender as anything only for I didnt want to eat everything on my plate” (*U* 18.427-32). Molly had to leave something on her plate because she had to abide by social decorum. Nevertheless, she enjoys various foodstuffs, as demonstrated by the numerous recollections of foods in her interior monologue: “2 teas and plain bread and butter” (*U* 18.249), “boiling old stew” (18.337), “the port and the peaches” (18.341), “boiling soup” (18.358), “nuts” (18.430), “chicken” (18.431), “the stout at dinner” (18.450), and “a cottage cake and a bottle of hogwash” (18.453), to name just a few. She may think that her “belly is a bit too big” and that she will “have to knock off the stout at dinner,” but she also admits that she is “getting too fond of it” (*U* 18.450-51). Therefore, it remains a question whether she will limit her food intake to reduce her body size. Molly's body is anything but slim, frail, and delicate, but she seems to be proud of it, asserting that “the thin ones are not so much the fashion now” (*U* 18.456-47). She, along with her counterpart Leopold Bloom, represents a new paradigm for the new Ireland Joyce reconstructs—a hearty eater with a robust and healthy body, savoring the palatability of food and unshackling the constraints

⁸ Ireland had a population of eight million before the Great Famine; one million died of starvation and related diseases during the Famine years, and another million emigrated. For a study of the mid-nineteenth-century Irish Famine, see Kinealy. For details of low marriage rates and high levels of emigration, see Hill 30-35.

on the body and sexuality. Considering its adulterous nature and her sexless life with Bloom after the death of Rudy, Molly's liaison with Boylan on 16 June 1904 seems to be even more transgressive, subversive, and symbolic: it signifies her emancipation from long-term asceticism, suggestive of women's release from restrictions imposed on their appetite, whether dietary or sexual.

In summary, Gerty's relationship with food betrays the anorexic culture in Victorian/Edwardian bourgeois society, a culture which equates femininity with parsimonious appetite, debility, and spirituality, thus contributing to the prevalence of anorexia nervosa as a female disorder. This culture seems to be questioned, if not subverted, by Joyce's depiction of Molly. Her good appetite, her fondness for her body, and her emphasis on the corporeal exemplify a new paradigm of womanhood distinct from Victorian femininity. She demands not only what "a *body* can understand" (*U* 18.567; emphasis added), but also what a body can enjoy, a body turning away from fasting and wasting and savoring the delight brought about by food.

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