

CHAPTER EIGHT

Modernism, Myth, and Desire in "Nausicaa"

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF both its content and its form, Joyce's "Nausicaa," his pulp fiction narrative of erotic titillation between strangers, could emblemize the most characteristic moral and poetic features of the modernist nightmare. The sterility of its meretricious sexuality could be inserted into Eliot's "Waste Land" and the cheapness of its meretricious art into Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley," to serve as the double exemplar of a modern age of debased passion and debased form—a parable in which the Fisher King has become lost in the Five and Dime. "Nausicaa" therefore has a special relevance for determining Joyce's relationship to the way high modernism institutionalized a particularly elevated and disciplined form of aesthetics as the moral project of the early twentieth century. If "Nausicaa"'s grace, its redemptive maneuver, is what Eliot in his essay "Ulysses, Order, and Myth" called "the mythical method," then this *Ulysses* chapter would indeed function as an exemplary high modernist text. "Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method," Eliot writes. "It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art" (178). "Nausicaa" would then function as aesthetic analogue to "The Waste Land," and share with that poem Eliot's ideological assumptions underlying the transcendentalizing potential of myth. Myth for Eliot appears highly overdetermined, but functionally unified—serving as a template of ordered form that brings timeless aesthetic tradition to modernity's artistic proliferations, as a moral norm to bring timeless values to modernity's spiritual disintegrations, and as a critical norm to stabilize modernity's uncontrollable perspectivism. The extent to which Eliot inscribes the foreseen failure of these aims into his poem ("Poetry separates itself from life by feigning wholeness, by declaring itself a *sign* of wholeness. It is nostalgic for the old order" [Riddel 267]) determines his implication in postmodernism.

But the failures to recenter and stabilize itself that modernist poetry may figure as its nascent postmodernity, I will ascribe in Joyce's text to an avant-garde gesture of a historically self-conscious, and a socially self-critical, kind. To Joyce's "mythical method," especially, I will impute a particularly devious procedure: a Penelopean gesture of weaving one myth into the text only to unravel it with another, in order that the logic of the mythic effect in modernism's aesthetic ideology may be interrogated. Specifically, Joyce uses the Homeric narrative of Nausicaa to enact the repression of one of its own causal myths: the "Trial of Paris," the beauty contest whose outcome leads to the Trojan War. The story of frustrated romance between Nausicaa and Odysseus is thus disrupted as a formal template in Joyce's text by the countermythology of an allegory of aesthetic response that implicates artistic genres and their various social functions in a political problematic relevant to questions of modern aesthetic desire. If this formulation resonates to Stephen's aesthetic theory in *Portrait*, with its focus on genre and aesthetic response (static, kinetic, etc.), then it may be precisely because "Nausicaa" offers a dramatic or gestural counter-text, a pantomime from the popular arts, to just that problematized set of issues. Although I will limit my parameter to the *Ulysses* chapter, the spectacle of mythic displacement that I find in Joyce's "Nausicaa," the unraveling of one myth with another, could be widened into larger questions of modern mythopoeia and their negotiations between the empirical historicizing impulse of such nineteenth century figures as Samuel Butler and David Strauss, on the one hand, and the political refuncting of mythology in radically different ways in the works of Richard Wagner and Friedrich Nietzsche, on the other. Joyce's project in "Nausicaa," I will contend, glosses modernism's own privileging of classicism not only as a consolidation of its aestheticism for metaphysical ends (Eliot) or their deconstruction (see Riddel's discussion of William Carlos Williams' use of the Cloisters tapestries in *Paterson* [274–288]), but also as an extension (if against the grain of Eliot's criticism of Arnold) of liberalism's use of classicism as a cultural commodity used to defend against mass education and mass culture.

In Eliot, especially, a double and paradoxical gesture toward liberalism is enacted, which gives it metaphysical resistance at the same time that it appeals to its project of cultural retrieval. In spite of his refusal, in "What is a Classic?," to situate himself in the classicism-romanticism controversy, his position in his later attacks on Arnold makes clear his protest against the forms of supplementarity to which a range of cultural secularisms (including T. E. Hulme's figu-

ration of romanticism) were prone. "Eliot denounces Bergson and Matthew Arnold with equal vehemence for instigating modern heresy," Maud Ellmann writes. "Both supplanted true religion with a glittering sham, and the substitutes have pululated ever since" (48). Against this protest, classicism becomes itself a form of supplementarity—a nostalgia for the metaphysical presence that once was God. The transcendental aura of Eliot's modernism is thus produced by the hidden metaphysics of its desire—"Eliot's interpretation, that is, reconstructs the 'structure' of an historical *episteme* in terms of an aesthetic, of an image that is, in his term, autotelic, but which by its very formal wholeness acknowledges itself as art, or ritual. This 'form' is the symbol of an otherwise imperfectly known perfection, and thus a shadow representation of desire" (Riddel 267).

But if the modernist project in the 1910's and 1920's takes form as abstract or pure desire to preserve *value-as-such*, the formal and thematic enactment of that desire in the poetry nonetheless betrays an instrumentality or use. Aimed against the tide of modern insignificance that threatens to level the entire social and cultural order, religious hierarchy and aesthetic judgment, political stability and economic control, intellectual precision and emotional discrimination, the classic as code of pure desire becomes inserted into Arnoldian distinctions between "high" and "low" art that reinstate classicism in aesthetic discourse as a cultural commodity. Eliot may decry the degradation of Philomel's tragedy as ornamental home decor in "The Waste-Land"—"Above the antique mantel was displayed . . . The change of Philomel"—but the allusion itself contributes to the therapeutic recuperation of formal virtuosity and classical erudition needed to expunge the vulgarity. A poetry like Pound's "Mauberley" laments the usurpation of the classical lyre by the pianola in a language of poetic virtuosity that reinstates the lyre. But Joyce's parodic form in "Nausicaa" problematizes the mythical method and its classical instrumentality at the outset. To be sure, the parodic form appears to denigrate popular culture's colonization of the female mind with vulgar desire. But the narration's simultaneous impregnation with a failed classical erudition could, as surely, parody the text's self-consciousness of its own modernistic colonization. In its reflexive complexity, the play of desire in "Nausicaa" seems to rebuke Arnoldian liberalism's snobbishness by reproducing in its Philistinism desires identical to those that animate high art. The critique produced by "Nausicaa"'s ironic doubling of desires deflates its metaphysical pretensions at the same time that it exposes modernism's scholarly exhibitionism.

Under the influence of the structuralist anthropology that was just

becoming available to the American academy in the early seventies, I tried to argue, in *The Decentered Universe*, that the function of myth in *Finnegans Wake* was meta-mythopoetic—Joyce's effort to have the text raise questions about the nature, structure, and function of myth, mythology, and mythic language. The aim of this interrogation, I argued, was to destabilize the transcendentalizing effect of myth by decentering its structure in a Lévi-Straussian assortment of deprivileged variants and versions, and decentering its meaning by shifting it from the transparencies of a Jungian collective unconscious or a Campbellian monomyth, to the problematized structural encodings that made Lévi-Straussian mythology homologous to the rebus of the Freudian dream-text. But the meta-mythopoia of "Nausicaa" strikes me as addressing a different set of issues arising from the problem of how society historically refunctions the role of mythology in its culture. "Nausicaa" explores the way myth's service as an instrument of desire in the symbolic order assimilates to the power of institutions, and becomes, in effect, a condition of institutional formation. "Nausicaa" interrogates the function of mythology in the institutionalization of art, both "high" and "low." More specifically, the myths of "Nausicaa" explore mythological allegories that wed sexuality to aesthetics ("The Trial of Paris," for example) that naturalize an intrinsic connection between conventionalized notions of "beauty" and sexual desire into gender and class ideologies shaping social institutions (courtship, romance, marriage, prostitution) as well as artistic institutions (literary and popular genres and entertainments, standards of erudition and taste, etc.). Myth in "Nausicaa" demythifies itself as a social construct capable of being unmasked by the particularities of history.

Modernism's special contribution to refunctioning mythology in the early twentieth century was to make it the guarantor of cultural value, and the connector to cultural tradition. "Nausicaa"'s demystification of this conservative function takes the form of exposing the way this abstract valorization conceals its class reference by appealing to forms of erudition and taste that are ultimately determined by class, and that therefore depend on specific class exclusions and disqualifications. This process of problematizing the relation of myth and class becomes apparent even in the question of how to assess the function of the mythic structure, the Homeric narrative, giving shape to the narrative of the chapter. The function of the classical myth in "Nausicaa" is paradoxical, because by the same gesture with which it performs its implicit transcendentalizing function, to inflate and enhance Joyce's text, making the chapter seem larger and more significant in its assimilation to an ancient

classical tradition, it also makes the restrictions and barrenness of the chapter's language and values painfully palpable. This results in a strange dissonance of both generic and aesthetic register. Without the Homeric parallel, *Ulysses* becomes merely "Mr. Bloom's Day in Dublin," and "Nausicaa" becomes merely "Miss MacDowell's Evening on the Beach," fictions stripped of their classical aura at the same time that they are seemingly stripped of their self-critical apparatus. The status and function of this mythic doubling has been the source of some of the critical controversy surrounding the chapter, which might be formulated as the difference implicit in two questions: Is "Nausicaa" pulp fiction tricked out as a classic, or is "Nausicaa" a classic tricked out as pulp fiction? My own meditation of this controversy is to argue that "Nausicaa" is the spectacle of pulp fiction wanting to be a classic, because "high" art sets standards and aspirations that are internalized by "low art," and that condemn its consumers to a perpetual cultural frustration. The Gerty MacDowells and Leopold Blooms of the world have the same cultural and spiritual aspirations that are set forth by high art, and their constraints in pursuing and achieving them are produced not by innate limitations (stupidity or indifference) but by historical constraints. Gerty's narrator tells us "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" (U 13:99). Such sentences work perversely, creating in their fatuity effects opposite from those intended—suggesting that Gerty is a hopeless scrub, whom no amount of money or education could have improved. But the sentence performs its own truth of a sentiment lacking the poetic tradition and expressive means (breeding and erudition) to achieve the elevation it desires. Like Gerty, the language suffers the pathos of thwarted poetic desire—too low bred and poorly educated to escape the deformations of archaism and artificiality produced by its lack of taste, discipline, and experience.

Joyce implements his indictment of the social effects of the idealizations at the heart of learning and taste with a strategy that is the obverse of the high modernist display of classical and international erudition. Joyce conspicuously displays in "Nausicaa" a depotional (not an absence) of education and culture, a lack of taste and erudition that is not simple dullness or ignorance but an ardent, yet doomed desire, for high culture. The narrator's faulty learning is not stupidity, but the thwarted, yet eager, desire for learnedness. Joyce marks in the poetic desire of the language a crucial difference

between two kinds of cultural lack—a Philistinism that is contemptuous of culture versus a Philistinism that is enslaved by desire for a culture from which it is debarred—in order to re-diagnose the cultural malaise of modernity not as spiritual bankruptcy, but as social disqualification. The spiritual condition of Joyce's Philistines is like that of heathens in Catholic theology who would believe in God if someone taught and enlightened them, but who cannot invent their own conversion. They are held to experience what the Catholic Church calls "a baptism of desire."

Furthermore, Joyce puts the failed erudition of "Nausicaa" in the service of thwarted romantic desire, for reasons that the chapter's mythological undertow, the competing currents of the tales of Nausicaa and the Trial of Paris, eventually bring to the surface. Gerty MacDowell appears, like Nausicaa, a winner in the arena of regal beauty, only to have her victory retracted by a logic that eventually questions the role of myth, art, and culture, in the consolidation of an ego whose friability they simultaneously insure. The display of Gerty's beauty produced by the inflated and pretentious narrative rhetoric is a dramatization not of vanity, but of vanity masking profound sexual insecurity. Gerty's narration is not a paeon to her beauty but the fantasy of how such a paeon might sound, could someone be found to utter it. The nexus of beauty and sexual desirability, narrativized in the Trial of Paris, is shown in the "Nausicaa" chapter to depend for its vehicle on modes of expression whose model is found in art and poetry. The problem of finding articulation for the erotic power of her beauty is therefore critical to Gerty's social ontology—whose cruel truth is that there is no plausible speaker in her real world who could or would offer an adequate or convincing testimonial to her beauty, virtue, and desirability. The voice that speaks of Gerty in "Nausicaa" therefore makes best sense as a phantom narrator constructed by Gerty's imagination to produce the language of her desire, that is, to produce the hypothetical praises that she fears no one will ever offer, and that she equates with art. Her narration therefore represents Gerty not as she is, nor even as she is not, but as she would like to be, as she would like people to think about her, and indeed, to write about her, given the conspicuous and emphatic literariness of her narration. Art's mission in the chapter's tacit philosophy is to create models of idealization into which the modern self may pitch its desires, and hope for validation of their possible realization.

Gerty's narrative voice inscribes a grasp of erudition's force in producing the cultural prestige of "high" art, and therefore endows Gerty's hypothetical praise, her language of desire, with what it

imagines to be erudition. But merely imagined erudition is doomed to produce merely "highfalutin'" prose that condemns "Nausicaa"'s narration to self-betraying excesses, slips, and solecisms. As a result the chapter's prose is riven by a yawning gap between its poetic teach and its poetic grasp—a cultural failure whose abuse of the classics may especially be laid at modernism's door. The myth of Nausicaa promotes its desires throughout Gerty's narration. She would like to be a princess, or at least to be thought as beautiful as a princess, but in giving her a metaphorical aristocracy, her narration merely succeeds in making her an aristocrat manque, less queen than "queenly" (U 13:97). The narration's metaphorical exigencies doom Gerty to occupy the lack inherent in adverbial displacements, and in classicisms that are not quite classical allusions but tags that sound vaguely classical. In the discrepancy between Homeric poetic diction and the narration's allusive adverbial forms, its ignorance of Homer is inscribed. The sentence "her rosebud mouth was a genuine Cupid's bow, Greekly perfect" (U 13:88) pretends to know something of classical perfection, but Greek harmony of proportions and relations is to be found, probably neither in the shape of Gerty's mouth, nor, certainly, in the shape of the phrase "Greekly perfect."

The classic, ancient and modern, expressed in its twin form by Ezra Pound's wonderful double metaphor, "His true Penelope was Flaubert," haunts "Nausicaa" as an impossible model of desire. It is as though "Nausicaa," both text and woman, are haunted by a cultural ideal they do not know, but whose prestige they covet. It is as though the language of the text—limited, as Hugh Kenner claims Joyce himself was, to translations and popularizations—knows there are great classics out there in the culture somewhere, but deprived, like Gerty herself, of "the benefit of a good education," has access to them only in mediated, secondary, and often corrupted form. Even the scholarly or quasi-scholarly studies Joyce consulted, like Victor Berard's *Les Phéniciens et l'Odyssee*, and Samuel Butler's *The Authoress of the Odyssey*, argue for the classical text's primordial revisions, displacements, and dislocations. Similarly, it is as though Gerty, knowing there is a French romance tradition in the culture, aspires to be not the Flaubertian heroine who is destroyed by that tradition (and who, in turn, destroys it) but a bizarre elevation of the very role Emma Bovary found unbearable and humiliating, the role as Charles' *petit-bourgeois* "dear little wifey" (Lawrence 121). In Gerty's world, aristocracy has been reduced to a code of hyperbolic prestige, like her father's linoleum ad, "Catesby's cork lino, artistic, standard designs, fit for a palace" (U 13:323). The French romance

tradition survives merely as a verbal residue of desire, as francophonie affectation, "a languid queenly *hauteur*," or "patrician suitors at her feet vying with one another to pay their devoirs to her" (U 13:97–104). In the narration of "Nausicaa," the Greek classic and French romance traditions announce their modern functions as instruments of pretension, as vehicles of a mimic erudition that can reap merely specious prestige.

But the object of Joyce's critique in this representation, is less, I believe, the abuse of the classic than it is the consequence of its internalization by figures whose desires are simultaneously inspired and frustrated by it, and who are barred from recognizing little more in the classic beyond its cachet. Joyce, whose Penelope was not only Flaubert but Ibsen as well, learned from his modern masters to recognize ordinary behavior as a *mise en scene* with a logocentric script. It makes a significant difference whether Joyce deploys his figures as mere puppets blindly enacting self-indicting Homeric gestures, or whether he constructs them as actively desirous and idealizing figures who acquire their amorous and aesthetic models from a classical culture that has passed through extensive linguistic and generic deformations. Joyce deplores, I believe, not the disregard of high art by ordinary people, but rather the way their desire for it, and for the prestige they hope to achieve from it, is doomed to frustration by their inescapable detours through popular culture. Joyce has, I believe, more pity and liking for Bloom's attempts to spruce up his home's decor with pictures of a nymph from the slick magazine *Photo Bits* or a plaster statue of Narcissus, than Eliot does for mythological scenes on the walls of the boudoir, or Pound for his "two gross of broken statues" and "a few thousand battered books." Joyce recognizes that ordinary Dubliners were bound to acquire their myths, legends, and folklore mainly through the Pantomime, in forms that often give their fantasies and dreams the exotic shapes of a strange orientalism. But I believe he also recognized that the Dubliners' access to Homer in the deformed and truncated fragments that managed to survive as tropes in their language and as plots in their entertainment was different in degree, rather than in kind, from his own displaced acquisition of the *Odyssey* in Butcher and Lang's translation or Charles Lamb's tales. What Joyce makes of these de-based internalizations of the classics is a psychological anatomy of desire for high culture that, in turn, critiques the modernist temper.

The Trial of Paris serves a useful function as a counter-myth to "Nausicaa" because it harbors beneath its romantic surface, the judgment of the fairest goddess and the winning of Helen, the parable of an unscrupulous critical act that compromises both beauty's

formalistic integrity and criticism's power to pledge it a disinterested evaluation. The Trial of Paris thus challenges Stephen's aesthetic theory. The myth begins with the exclusion of Eris, the goddess of Discord, from the marriage feast of Peleus and Thetis. In revenge, Eris throws a golden apple labeled "For the Fairest" among the wedding guests, and three goddesses, Athena, Hera, and Aphrodite, fight for its possession. They submit their dispute to Paris of Troy for judgment, and each goddess offers a bribe to win his favor. Paris awards the golden apple, and his judgment of superior beauty, to Aphrodite, who promised him in return the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen, wife of Menelaus. The Trial of Paris problematizes both the notion of Platonic or intrinsic beauty and the possibility of its independent and objective judgment by inserting desire and relativity (the "fairest" as always a possible another) into its determination. By subordinating beauty to the mediations and manipulations of desire, The Trial of Paris dramatizes the irony of modernism's adulation of the classical myth for exemplary parables of truth and beauty. As classical philologist, Joyce is a disciple of Nietzsche rather than T. E. Hulme.

Gerty MacDowell's narrator alludes to the Trial of Paris by referring to the disputed sand castle of the twins as "the apple of discord." "But just then there was a slight altercation between Master Tommy and Master Jacky. Boys will be boys and our two twins were no exception to this golden rule. The apple of discord was a certain castle of sand which Master Jacky had built . . ." (U 13:40). This allusion raises once again the question of the status of narrative knowledge and narrative erudition. Does the narrator of "Nausicaa" know the Trial of Paris and understand its applicability to the events about to be narrated, the flirtation on Sandymount strand between the three girls and Leopold Bloom? Or is the narrative voice ignorant of Euripides' plays, ignorant of mythology, retaining the metaphor of "the apple of discord" only as a proverbial saying, its mythical origins forgotten or repressed, in order to inflate the infantile quarrel over a sand castle to mock-epic proportions, and thereby display its own rhetorical powers to produce an inflated discourse?

Joyce introduces the Trial of Paris into an earlier fiction with just this motive, albeit by an educated and knowledgeable speaker. Gabriel Conroy in "The Dead," uses the myth in his after-dinner speech, "He ran over the headings of his speech: Irish hospitality, sad memories, the Three Graces, Paris, the quotation from Browning" (D 192). Gabriel intends to flatter his spinster relatives with a hyperbolic and inappropriate analogy, whose insincerity he patently admits to himself ("What did he care that his aunts were only two ignorant old

women?" [D 192]) and whose function is clearly to parade his erudition:

—I will not attempt to play to-night the part that Paris played on another occasion. I will not attempt to choose between them. The task would be an invidious one and one beyond my poor powers. (D 204)

The classical allusion merely abets pretension, and its victims in the story "The Dead," as in "Nausicaa," are the three spinsters who are never serious contenders for the prize, but are offered vain and empty homage in order that their judge may flatter himself as a producer of honeyed prose inflected by classical erudition. Paris really chooses Helen, Gabriel really chooses Gretta, and Bloom really chooses Molly—"That's where Molly can knock spots off them" (U 13:968) is his true judgment.

The layering of myth in "Nausicaa" takes the form of rhetorically foregrounding the Homeric myth of the Phaeacian maiden, Nausicaa, while relegating the Trial of Paris to reduced and miniaturized allusions on the periphery of the narrative. This produces the effect of repression, and, indeed, the narrator who works hard to award the palm of beauty to Gerty MacDowell, pronouncing her at the very outset "as fair a specimen of winsome Irish girlhood as one could wish to see" (U 13:80) and claiming that "of a surety God's fair land of Ireland did not hold her equal" (U 13:121), has good reason to suppress the spectacle of Gerty's vigorous and indecent competition for the prize. To this effect, the Trial of Paris is presented in infantile miniature in the interrogation of four-year-old Tommy Caffrey:

—Tell us who is your sweetheart, spoke Edy Boardman. Is Cissy your sweetheart?

—Nao, tearful Tommy said.

—Is Edy Boardman your sweetheart? Cissy queried.

—Nao, Tommy said.

—I know, Edy Boardman said none too amiably with an arch glance from her shortsighted eyes. I know who is Tommy's sweetheart. Gerty is Tommy's sweetheart. (U 13:66)

The "apple of discord," identified ostensibly as the disputed sand castle, is more pointedly the baby's rubber ball, whose trajectory between the girls and Bloom outlines the choreography of a perfect ballet of desire. The ball, like the sand castle, is disputed by the twins and is intercepted by Bloom. Bloom, confronted by identical

twins, must choose where to throw it. When Cissy asks Bloom to throw the ball to her, she shifts the semiotic power of his gesture onto the women, thereby establishing him as Paris, who will award his attentions and his favor along with the ball. Bloom's decision is a curve ball as symbolically devious as it is literally crooked: Bloom tosses the ball to Cissy, but it veers, rolls down the strand, and comes to rest at Gerty MacDowell's feet. Bloom's action is as ambiguous to himself as to the reader, as he cannot really say whether it resulted from athletic ineptitude ("Course I never could throw anything straight at school. Crooked as a ram's horn" [U 13:951]) or from the workings of romantic fate ("But the ball rolled down to her as if it understood. Every bullet has its billet" [U 13:950]).

Why does Bloom award "the apple of discord" to the passive and silent Gerty rather than to the vividly capering Cissy? Why is Edy Boardman, the only person who never touches the ball, so thoroughly extruded from the competition? In their competition to win the attention of the exotic stranger on the beach, Cissy, I would argue, takes the part of Hera, Gerty, the part of Aphrodite, and Edy Boardman, the girl with the glasses and the probing questions, the critical gaze that sees through the whole game, plays the part of Athena. The contest on Sandymount strand is fought, like the mythic athletic contest, not on its merits but with bribes that in "Nausicaa" take the form of artistic presentations or performances. The outcome will be paradoxical and, in its own way, perverse. Bloom will choose Gerty's failed attempts to trick herself out in the forms of high art over Cissy's burlesque-like minstrel show performance, but he makes this choice for essentially pornographic reasons. Bloom is the most literal of art lovers, exhibiting in his approach to classical figures the kinetic approach that Stephen Dedalus denounces as improper in his aesthetic theory. Bloom is much like Stephen's friend Lynch, who writes his name on the backside of the Venus of Praxiteles, or Molly Bloom who falls in love with a plaster statue of Narcissus—"that lovely little statue . . . theres real beauty and poetry for you I often felt I wanted to kiss him all over also his lovely young cock" (U 18:1349). Bloom has already played Paris earlier in the day when he examined the statues of goddesses in the museum for recital orifices. Like Lynch, he too is a graffiti artist, privileging the erogenous zones of art. "Unseen, one summer eve, you kissed me in four places," the nymph in the picture from *Photo Bits* accuses him in "Circe," "And with loving pencil you shaded my eyes, my bosom and my shame" (U 15:3264). Bloom, as Paris, will choose Gerty because she impersonates classical statuary but offers him, unlike the

unyielding museum goddesses, a peek at her bottom. But as a figure of "high art" she remains for him a masturbatory fetish, an object of libidinal rather than metaphysical desire. Bloom, who happily sees modern nakedness in classical nudity, and who, Judge Woolsey notwithstanding, enjoys art as an aphrodisiac, is, at any rate, not a modernist.

Cissy Caffrey's strategy for winning Bloom's attention is pure theater, drawn from the popular and low comedic forms of her day, the Pantomime and the minstrel show. Her namesake may be a Pantomime character from the production of *Babes in the Woods*, a giant baby girl named Cissy, usually played by a man in baby clothes. Cissy is implicated in various displacements of age, race, and gender, of the sort that constitute the fracture of personality at the heart of this particular genre of comedy. In her physical appearance, with her "golliwog curls" that Gerty claims won't grow longer, she physically resembles her four-year-old twin brothers, and she does not hesitate to use them and the baby as props ("Cissy took off the twins' caps and tidied their hair to make herself attractive of course" [U 13:571])—a stratagem penetrated not only by Gerty, but by Bloom himself, "Caressing the little boy too. Onlookers see most of the game" (U 13:902). The infantile is a major trope of the Pantomime whose intertexts are drawn from fairy tales and nursery rhymes, like the famous *Mother Goose* production, and whose baby talk, games, and play—"O my! Puddeny pie!" (U 13:613) or "What's your name? Butter and cream?" (U 13:65)—Cissy produces to amuse the baby. Her discourse on the strand ultimately consists entirely of this play language, and we learn from the narrator that Cissy has habitually formalized her lovability into a series of comic turns that have earned her a reputation as an entertainer. The narrator's precious rhetoric gives us both an inventory and a favorable review of Cissy's repertoire:

Madcap Ciss with her golliwog curls. You had to laugh at her sometimes. For instance when she asked you would you have some more Chinese tea and jaspberry ram and when she drew the jugs too and the men's faces on her nails with red ink make you split your sides or when she wanted to go where you know she said she wanted to run and pay a visit to the Miss White. That was just like Cissyums. O, and will you ever forget her the evening she dressed up in her father's suit and hat and the burned cork moustache and walked down Tritonville road, smoking a cigarette? (U 13:270)

Cissy's performances owe their conventions to the popular comic theatrical forms of her day, the cross-dressing like that of the "principal boy" of the Panto, her miniaturizing and multiplying herself in her finger play like the clown turns of the circus, and her jokes echoing those of interlocutors and endmen in the minstrel show—"Edy asked her the time and Miss Cissy, as glib as you like, said it was half past kissing time, time to kiss again" (U 13:531). But these displacements of age, dress, scale, and race are dangerous strategies with respect to the kind of attention or estimation they provoke, earning laughter at the price of derision. These comic incongruities and discordances, being at the same time artificially male and female, young and old, black and white, too large and too small, act like a fragmentation or mutilation of personality, a castration of the ego, as it were, that snuffs the very desire it is intended to provoke and thereby creates the doomed pathos of the clown. The popular theatrical forms of the turn of the century, Pantomimes, minstrel shows, variety acts, tended to force to the cultural surface—though generally without address—the problematic of social divisions, differences, marginalizations, and exclusions in art and representation that high culture, too, embodied and repressed (Herr, Kershner).

Cissy's third displacement of race, her transition in the chapter's discourses from romantic gypsy to bufoonish "black-face," becomes one of the critical implements that turns the Trial of Paris in this chapter inside out and lets us judge the judge. Bloom transforms, in his imagination, many of the cute narrative descriptions of Cissy by Gerty's narrator into crude racial stereotypes. Her "golliwog curls" become a "mop head" in his language, and he changes her "cherryripe red lips" into "fat lips" and "nigger mouth" (U 13:897). Bloom will see in the performances of the girls on the strand versions of several current Dublin plays, and in Cissy's performance he sees Eugene Stratton's minstrel show. In spite of the sexual glamour their racial exoticism gives the Blooms, the Semitic foreignness that makes him so attractive to the girls on the strand, and the Moorish voluptuousness he himself finds so exciting in Molly ("That's where Molly can knock spots off them. It's the blood of the south. Moorish" [U 13:968])—Bloom is quite capable of treating race as a sexual freak. "Curiosity like a nun or a negress or a girl with glasses" (U 13:776) he thinks, reflecting on the erotic value of Gerty's lameness. Bloom's embedding of race in this series of three (nun, negress, and girl with glasses) identifies, however unconsciously, all three spinners on the beach as marred or disfigured: lame, celibate Gerty, dark, negroid Cissy, and lilliputian, bespectacled Edy), like "The Three Spinners" (*Die drei Spinnerinnen*) in Grimms' fairy tales, who are

uglified by an exaggerated feature: a huge foot, lip, or thumb. Bloom's titillation by such special markings in women is, alas, not liberalism, but its perverse double: a difference desired perversely for its undesirability. He expresses this sentiment in his "Circe" fantasy of Molly's slumming:

She often said she'd like to visit Slumming. The exotic, you see. Negro servants in livery too if she had money. Othello black brute. Eugene Stratton. Even the bones and cornerman at the Livermore christies. Bohee brothers. Sweep for that matter. (U 15:408)

By treating race not as real but as an imago, blackness as a marking or code that can be painted on or detached, like the black of a chimney sweep, Bloom makes it clear that the desire for the black signals not the courage to flout or defy prejudice, but its intensified reentment. "Slumming" becomes the censoring of the desire for the undesirable. Bloom's titillation by the putative sexual mark makes his desire not a compliment but an insult, and thereby subverts the highly conventional aesthetic ideology that governs the rules of The Trial of Paris. "Nausicaa" thus re-addresses in a more culturally and historically specific form the problematic Stephen raises, and neutralizes, when he gives himself only two alternatives—biologism or formalism—for explaining the conundrum of aesthetic relativism, "The Greek, the Turk, the Chinese, the Copt, the Hottentot, said Stephen, all admire a different type of female beauty" (P 208). "Nausicaa" goes much farther in exploring the role of ethnocentrism, social construction, and gender politics in shaping aesthetic ideology.

Gerty fares better than Cissy in claiming Bloom's attention, for she imitates high art rather than low art, gives a static rather than a kinetic performance, and portrays an idealized and romanticized figure rather than, like Cissy, a fragmented and multiplicitous human type. She thereby exploits and creates the illusion that beauty is ideal, singular, and timeless, rather than socially constructed, historically conventionalized, and consequently culturally relative and multiple. Gerty chooses a static performance not only to conceal her lameness, but also to defeat her great enemy, time—"the years were slipping by for her, one by one" (U 13:649). Gerty's preoccupation with the passing of time, youth, and opportunity is betrayed by the inadvertent, but persistent, reference to time in all her scant speech, "I was only wondering was it late" (U 13:527), or "I can throw my cap at who I like because it's leap year" (U 13:590), or her unspoken

and startling cry, "she was just going to tell her to catch it while it was flying" (U 13:617) in reference to the clot of milk Baby Boardman spits up. Like Cissy Caffrey, who hopes to reverse time by becoming a little girl or a tomboy again, and who regresses to infantile language and infantile art, Gerty MacDowell too tries to catch time while it is flying by regressing. But she retreats culturally and historically to the venerable art of the past, to classical or neo-classical forms, the marble statue, the icon of the Madonna, the aristocratic arts of the eighteenth century. In composing herself into a classical pose, Gerty tries to assimilate to herself the excess significance that accrues to representation, and to multiply her injured personal worth by making herself abstracted and representative, an idealized type, "a specimen of winsome Irish girlhood." She overdetermines her roles by playing, albeit in reverse, the parts of both Pygmalion and Galatea, transforming her living desiring self into a beautiful frozen sculpture, the "waxen pallor of her face" (U 13:87), her "hands . . . of finely veined alabaster" (U 13:89), "her throat, so slim, so flawless, so beautifully moulded it seemed one an artist might have dreamed of" (U 13:582).

But Gerty's aim is undermined because her access to concepts of classical form are already mediated by popular, ephemeral art that will lend her beauty neither the permanence of marble or oil, nor its prestige. She cannot imitate classical statuary except by way of another reversion, by imitating the imitation of the classical figure in the *tableau vivant*, the transient representation of mythological, classical, or Biblical subjects by living figures, who enacted them as a sort of parlor entertainment in the aristocratic homes of the eighteenth century. But the *tableau vivant*, when not itself embedded in a classic like Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, is vulnerable to ridicule as pretentious kitsch. Even so, the *tableau vivant* retains some cultural distinction precisely because it is both expensive and ephemeral, and the spectacle of living figures dressed and posed to represent a classic work of art cannot be mass produced. But Gerty's cultural model for the picture of romance she wants to compose, of herself with Reggy Wylie, or Leopold Bloom, or any man who who can be enlisted as a prop in an adoring attitude ("drinking in her every contour, literally worshipping at her shrine" [U 13:564]), is a mass produced picture presumably called "Halcyon Days," whose archaism so eludes Gerty that she has to look up "halcyon" in Walker's pronouncing dictionary. The picture is a temporal anachronism, with its aristocratic subject, a "ladylove" in "studied attitude" receiving flowers and homage from a young man in a tricornered hat, attached to an almanac that is already out of date, and that repre-

sents a bogus past, a golden age existing only in the insipid conventions of calendar art (U 13:334-344). And Gerty has hung this picture of "Halcyon Days" in her privy, where it functions much as her narration does in "Nausicaa"—to mask and neutralize the squalor of her life, like the chlorate of lime she remembers to apply every fortnight. Gerty's notions on how to idealize or aestheticize her life appear to be either ephemeral, like trying to fix in her imagination a scene of Dublin at twilight in pastels, "like the paintings that man used to do on the pavement with all the coloured chalks and such a pity too leaving them there to be all blotted out" (U 13:406), or vulnerable to disruption by time and mortality. Even the photograph, that seemingly permanent mode of fixing the self aesthetically, can be preempted by death. The happy family portrait the MacDowells and the Dignams were to have made ("they were to have had a group taken. No-one would have thought the end was so near" [U 13:318]) is overtaken by Dignam's alcoholic death. Its idealization would have been fraudulent in any case, eliding drunkenness, penury, and domestic violence.

Joyce writes "Nausicaa" with the technique of Penelope, weaving texts only to unravel them again, reversing genres into their opposites, and shifting perspectives and values until his text, like Bloom's women, have "Eyes all over them" (U 13:912). Gerty's "namby-pamby- jammy marmalady drawers" style (*Letters I*, 135) is only a failed imitation of ambitious and thwarted writing that aspires to be significant and admired, to be treated as high art. In its failure other failures are inscribed, and we may read between the lines and in the evasions and circumlocutions of the prose, a naturalistic version of Gerty's life in which she is not the Princess Nausicaa, but a poor crippled spinster whose mother suffers migraines and takes snuff and whose father probably beats both women when he is drunk. But this melodramatic naturalism itself offers only a half-truth, unless it is linked to the strivings of Gerty's desire, and to our recognition that because of this squalor, not in spite of it, Gerty dreams the dream of art as steadfastly as any modernist. Joyce argues in "Nausicaa," I believe, that modern squalor produces not the Philistine, the ignorant lout contemptuous of culture, but the crippled connoisseur and the castrated idealist, men and women who long for beauty and significance forever outside their ken. For Gerty MacDowell classical art may be only the hearsay of her culture, yet she is determined to imitate that which she cannot know and to body it forth.

Joyce embeds the tragedy of Gerty's desire in a subversive reading of his own mythical method. He appears to offer us the classics and myth in order to gratify our own aspirations to high art but gives us

instead mainly the inscription of their absence. He elicits our homage to the Homeric superstructure of this episode while entertaining and titillating us with the stunts and antics of figures whose taste we are allowed to ridicule and whose sexual desires we are permitted to censure. At the same time, Joyce undermines his own mythical intertext with a hidden mythical countertext, Homer's "Nausicaa" reinterpreted by the Trial of Paris. In the end, Joyce's "Nausicaa" itself serves as a modern countertext to this mythical countertext, prompting us to reexamine the great mythic beauty contest that is the prototype for some of the most resistant sexist rituals in our own contemporary society. The point is not that modern culture has lost its aesthetic compass. The invocation of the repressed Trial of Paris rather dramatizes that the internalization of the myth's desires by modern women and the men who install themselves as judges of their desirability is tragically ironic because it is served by a primarily corrupt model of the judgment of beauty. Joyce indicts the psychological power of myth rather more than he indicts its absence in the modern consciousness. And by earning from his contemporaries praise for his use of myth, Joyce further dramatizes modernism's blind eye to the cruelties of its own elitism, the libidinal impulses behind its attack on what is poor, mean, squalid, and cheap in the culture, and the dishonesties of its own pretensions. In the spectacle of the multiple criticisms and censures that we ourselves bring from modernism to "Nausicaa" is reflected the spectacle of modernism's denial of its slumming.

PART III *The Children*

CHAPTER NINE

The Politics of Childhood in "The Mime of Mick, Nick, and the Maggies"

"THE MIME OF MICK, NICK, AND THE MAGGIES," Book II, Chapter I of *Finnegans Wake*, stages an infantile failure of knowledge, the inability to guess a children's riddle, that disrupts the progress of *Bildung* and makes itself, in its regressive generic forms, an *anti-Bildungsroman*. The concept of *Bildung* coincided with the Enlightenment, which made the child as educable creature the focus of pedagogy and socialization (Pelzer-Knoll 45). But the "Mime"'s extensive children's play of magic, superstition, and animism, resists the disenchantment that the Enlightenment hoped would free humankind from irrational enslavement to nature, and thereby disrupts *Portrait's* collusion with its project. To argue that the "Mime" functions as an anti-*Portrait* is, of course, to reduce that work's own self-ironizations and internal subversions to an ideological simplicity it does not possess.¹ But as I have noted earlier, I see in *Portrait's* critical tradition a privileging of artistic individualism that seems to me to have survived as a putative liberalism even in contemporary Althusserian readings of the novel. Indeed, the heroicizing of the artist that is the *donnée* of the *Kuenstlerroman* can be found in a naturalized form even in fine Marxist readings like Trevor Williams' analysis of Stephen's social construction. The critical tradition has resisted the destabilizing effects of an ironized Stephen, and as a result an Enlightenment narrative has been produced as the fiction of the Joycean fiction, that celebrates the apotheosis of the artist—the individual's rational self-liberation from the mythologizings of religion, state, and home.

But I hope to show that in another children's fiction in *Finnegans Wake*, in "The Mime of Mick, Nick, and the Maggies," the Enlightenment ideal in which childhood, education, and maturation is implicated, is subjected to an artistic self-critique. The "Mime" follows *Ulysses* in revisiting and re-exploring some of the more glaring opening gaps and dissonances in *Portrait* with the result that it criti-