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"Nausicaa": A Question of Duality

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> Masturbation is not only an expression of self-regard: it is also the natural emotional outlet of those who . . . have already accepted as inevitable the wide gulf between their real futures and the expectations of their fantasies.
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> Quentin Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant* (1968)

> Joyce is a poet and also an elephantine pedant.
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> George Orwell, "Inside the Whale" (1940)

The thought of James Joyce brings to mind censorship, conflict, audacity, humor, and in-your-face intellect. Who better then, to introduce into Joyce studies than Camille Paglia, the controversial feminist writer and renowned pop-shock critic. If Joyce is the English language expert at manipulating words for effect, one might then argue that Paglia does the same in terms of literary criticism.

The connections between Paglia and Joyce are numerous, but a standout is the question of the nature of art. In *Sexual Personae* Paglia writes:

> [A]rt is our message from the beyond, telling us what nature is up to. Not sex but cruelty is the great neglected or suppressed item on the modern humanistic agenda. We must honor the chthonian but not necessarily yield to it. In the *Rape of the Lock*, Pope counsels good humor as the only solution to sex war. So with our enslavement by chthonian nature. We must accept our pain, change what we can, and laugh at the rest. But let us see art for what it is. From remotest antiquity, western art has been a parade of sexual personae, emanations of absolutist western mind. Western art is a cinema of sex and dreaming. Art is form struggling to wake from the nightmare of nature.[1]

Paglia's argument is valid: to read Joyce is to analyze not only the X-ray of Irish society, but also to examine human relations in nature, which may or may not be incubi. Joyce's art interprets the "dark night of the soul," bringing the reader to a new perspective of reality. We are asked to work for our understanding, and as Paglia suggests, "change what we can and laugh at the rest."

Since sexual personae represent the center which binds Paglia's work,

then perhaps it is fitting to focus our attention on Joyce's sexually laden, *Ulysses*.

Duality runs as an undercurrent throughout novel. Comparisons are a constant. They are made between the real and the imaginary, Jews and Catholics, Ireland and England, and the body and mind; but perhaps more importantly for the discussion of "Nausicaa" are the considerations presented between men and women.[2] As a first example, one may safely divide the "Nausicaa" narrative into two: Gerty's discourse told in the third person coupled with Bloom's interior monologue. Yet as occurs when one has sex with oneself, their relationship is asymmetric: Gerty serves as an object by which Bloom is able to achieve orgasm. He masturbates; she on the other hand, remains sexually unfulfilled, vowing only to keep "their secret" and, ending her scenario, pathetically limps away.[3] In one way, in as much as Bloom may represent "Everyman" (*U* 679), the reader may be tempted to define Gerty as the unreproachable, idealized *everywoman*; she could be Nausicaa on the shores of Phaecia, attending to Odysseus's physical needs. Yet upon closer examination it becomes evident that Gerty's personage is much more complex than what it appears; not unlike *Ulysses* itself. I will treat "Nausicaa," then, as Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn"—it serves as the lovers' "spot-in-time."

As Homer who creates his female subject to serve as the virginal guide by which Odysseus may find his way home, Joyce invents his "girlwoman" (*U* 342) in order to serve his masculine subject's needs. Yet Gerty is more than that, and as exemplified in the discourse of "Nausicaa," a duality in her being is ever-present. The narrative of this chapter divides neatly into two: the subjugated, slave-to-their-bodies-and-our-own, feminine; and the dominant, power-wielding, yet slave-to-the-slave masculine. In this way Joyce lays the groundwork for the emotionally starved yet sexually satisfied male figure, and the emotionally fulfilled yet sexually unsatisfied female. It is this duality, juxtaposing, and presentation of need and fulfillment which becomes a motif throughout "Nausicaa," and the novel as a whole.

Sexual release is the climax of this chapter. Joyce balances Bloom's one-sided act with Gerty's emotionally passionate view of their encounter. As previously stated, Gerty's voice is delegated to a third person narrative. She does not speak for herself. Gerty thus becomes Joyce's romantic literary object to be juxtaposed with Bloom's libidinous interior monologue. Her story begins at sunset, "the world in its mysterious embrace" (*U* 331). A gynecomorphous world of motherhood and female companionship are portrayed, and while satirizing sentimental romance fiction and other "feminine" literature, at once Joyce emphasizes women's need for more than just romance.

This calling for equality and balance comes to its fruition in "Penelope." On several occasions Molly contemplates her desire to be like a man, "just to try with that thing they have swelling upon you so hard and at the same

time so soft" (*U* 726). This appears to be a request for some sort of balance within the duality between men and women. Through Molly Joyce seems to say that, while accepting their roles as vestal virgins and caretakers imposed upon them by a domineering, patriarchal society, women may also be in need of something more: sexual power and prowess. To their own misfortune, the reality of Gerty and Molly's circumstances is one of subjugation, leaving them to act upon that which is left to them: the man they wish to possess may look, but not touch. In other words, the women gain control and power over the suppressor through denial; the man becomes the-slave-to-the-slave. Joyce, in this way, delegates males and females to their traditional roles: men and women confined to the limits of their physical bodies.

Although "Nausicaa" may center itself upon the Gerty MacDowell/ Leopold Bloom encounter, we gain a more complete view of Gerty's wants, lacks, and fulfillments through Joyce's descriptions of her female companions: Cissy Caffrey and Edy Boardman.

Cissy Caffrey is "a girl lovable in the extreme" (*U* 332) whose maternal nature is exalted by displaying her "quick motherwit" (*U* 333) with the infant child and twin boys, Master Tommy and Master Jacky. It would seem her force in the chapter comes not only from her maternal instincts but also from her playfulness. Notably, Cissy cross-dresses for amusement, described by the narrator as, "dressed up in her father's suit and hat and the burned cork moustache . . . smoking a cigarette" (*U* 338). From this we might conclude that Cissy doesn't take her maternal role, nor her exclusively female libido too seriously, in as much as she recognizes and manifests the masculine-side of her being. Perhaps Cissy is meant to represent for the reader an example of a more evolved, balanced, and emancipated, as well as a less patriarchally-imposed, archetypally rigid female figure. Joyce describes a woman comfortable with herself and her roles; "she is [was] sincerity itself, one of the bravest and truest hearts heaven ever made, not one of your twofaced things, too sweet to be wholesome" (*U* 338). Unlike Gerty, Cissy is not saccharine-like; sweet only for the effect/affect, that is to say, only as a means to an end. It would seem that Cissy found her balance between the masculine and feminine without resorting to her female book of tricks; the manifestation of which we will see in Gerty MacDowell.

As a second example of the female figure, Joyce introduces Edy Boardman. Not a likeable character, the narrator says she is "like an old maid" (*U* 344), and "[i]rritable little gnat she was and always would be and that was why no-one could get on with her, poking her nose into what was no concern of hers" (*U* 344). Unlike Gerty and Cissy, Edy lives "apart in another sphere" (*U* 346), seemingly embittered by her circumstance. The narrator describes Gerty's view of Edy's sentiments towards her as "a towering rage though she hids [*sic*] it" (*U* 346). Perhaps Joyce pits woman

against woman in this way to show the reader the multi-faceted experiences and reactions of being a woman in a male-dominated world. Each female acts upon her situation in a way which later affects their relationships with both men and other women. In Edy's case, the "petty jealousy" (*U* 346) Gerty believes she feels makes her "something aloof" (*U* 346). In fact, she displays a holier-than-thou attitude; one which causes internal brooding and pent-up anger. Insinuating this, the narrator allows the reader to see the maternal Cissy soothing the young male-child's ego "to make him forget" (*U* 338) after losing a battle for a ball, while "Edy got as cross as two sticks about hin [*sic*] getting him [*sic*] own way like that from everyone always petting him" (*U* 338); Edy's answer to the hurt infant-male ego would be "to give him something . . . where she [I] won't say" (*U* 338). Cissy reacts to the situation in a positive way, while Edy denies any reconciliatory inclination, thus causing friction among the female companions. It may be that Edy represents the homophobic facet of women forced into a man's world, resulting in self-imposed isolation. Gerty MacDowell on the other hand, plunges herself willing into the brewing, bubbling world of male/female relations.

Gerty, as earlier stated, becomes the object of Bloom's fantasy. Her inclinations towards men in general are reconciliatory; like "the Virgin most powerful, Virgin most merciful" (*U* 339). Her ability to forgive her father exemplifies this, even though she feels he "deserves to be branded as the lowest of the low" (*U* 339). The narrator describes Gerty as "a ministering angel" (*U* 339), and while comparisons of her to the virgin-maternal run rampant throughout the chapter, she does not entirely submit herself to such a role. In one exemplary scene Joyce presents on the one hand, the ever-maternal Cissy soothing "his infant majesty" (*U* 341) by giving the child "the teat of the suckingbottle" (*U* 341), while on the other we see Gerty, more concerned with her possible affair with "the gentleman in black" (*U* 340); she "wished to goodness they would take their squalling baby home out of that and not get on her nerves no hour to be out and the little brats of twins" (*U* 341). Clearly Gerty wants a man, and is willing to forget about her maternal obligations in order to get him. In order to do that she must learn and practice the rules of the game; then play it.

The rules referred to consist of the use of one's feminine attractions to entice a man; that is, using the powers at hand to get what one wants. Like preparing for a battle, this might be considered a peculiarly masculine thing to do. Gerty employs a battery of tricks, described—as previously stated—in a third person narrative imitating romance fiction and "feminine literature" styles. We are told Gerty "used to wear kid gloves in bed" (*U* 333) to soften and whiten her hands; she employed "eyebrowleine which gave that haunting expression to the eyes" (*U* 334); and she cut her hair and nails on the new moon in order that they may grow thicker and more "luxuriant" (*U* 334). In short, Gerty consciously prepares herself for her

sacrificial game. She has learned how to dress and how to cook, in preparation for the snatching of her would-be "dreamhusband" (*U* 342). And so the game begins; a flirtatious encounter on the beaches of Dublin at twilight.

As their spot-in-time develops to its climax, Bloom is described as a snake eyeing its prey (*U* 344). Meanwhile Gerty acknowledges her circumstance: "Her woman's instinct told her that she had raised the devil in him" (*U* 344). She makes herself the Madonna to be worshipped by Bloom "at her shrine" (*U* 346); that is, a rock on the beach. Gerty plays the game willing, but with conditions; because after all, "there was absolution so long as you didn't do the '*other thing*'" (*U* 349, emphasis added). So yes, Gerty is a Madonna, but she is also a temptress. Our virgin willingly sacrifices herself to her master's physical needs in order that she may continue on in her dreamy twilight fantasy where "their souls met in a last lingering glance" (*U* 351). Gerty is spiritually fulfilled in her dream-world, yet is left physically "lame" (*U* 351).

Ironically, at this point Bloom's interior monologue continues the narrative. He has yet to reach orgasm, and while it is Gerty's exhibitionism which excites him, it is actually the thought of Molly with Blazes Boylan which brings him to a climax. Bloom thinks of their sex act as he considers, "O, he did. Into her. She did. Done. Ah!"—at last, he achieves orgasm (*U* 353). Joyce's introduction of a fourth female character—albeit one which is only psychologically present—allows the reader to see Bloom's emotional lack. While thinking of his cuckolding wife, Bloom shows himself to be a sort of love-slave to Molly, achieving orgasm only when he thinks of her with another man. One may conclude that while it is true Bloom satisfies himself, it is also clear that he, like Gerty, is left only half-fulfilled.

The motif of duality, shown through the juxtaposing of the male and female mind and body, allows the reader to better understand the delicate balance necessary for both men and women to feel whole. A man may see his reflection in a woman, and a woman's in a man. One might then perceive life as a journey; an odyssey in search of finding one's lack in the opposite sex. As Bloom tells us, the "[l]ongest way round is the shortest way home" (*U* 360). Our journeys to find ourselves—our personal Ithacas—may lead to discovering fulfillment for the emptiness in opposite sex. Perhaps, like Bloom, we may "run into" (*U* 360) our "otherselves" if we dare to look. And so, as it is with "Nausicaa," and *Ulysses* as a whole, male/female relations will irresolutely come to a close. Both men and women may, or may not experience fulfilling emotions and physical desires. What is left is a twilight world where nothing is quite clear, and all is shrouded in a veil of mystery: *Ulysses* and the mystery of the duality between man and woman.

Notes

1. Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New York: Vintage, 1991) 39.

2. Joyce was controversial in the extreme: the polemic chapter 13 of *Ulysses*, "Nausicaa," was seized by the US postal authorities and denounced as pornographic by the Society for the Suppression of Vice in December of 1920.

3. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) 350; henceforth parenthetically cited in the text.