Chapter 7

Narrative Bread Pudding: "The Boarding House"

"She made Mary collect the crusts and pieces of broken bread to help to make Tuesday's bread-pudding" (64), we learn of Mrs. Mooney, the butcher's daughter, in "The Boarding House." The passage goes on to enact the servant's gesture of boarding house thrift by serving us the twice-baked crusts, as it were, of the previous evening's events. The form this narrative bread pudding takes is the redaction of a trimmed and hard account of Mrs. Mooney's and Polly's confrontation the night before, from which the interesting substance or "meat"—the juicy sexual and transgressive content—has already been extracted and consumed in advance. Why would Joyce, at the advent of his career in 1905, leave the opulent novelistic and dramatic possibilities of nineteenth-century literature behind, and feed us this bland and tasteless bread pudding of a story? The austerity of the narration makes it clear that Joyce is here "modernising himself," as William Johnsen puts it (6). But the story of this story is not over, as we are surprised to discover that in *Ulysses* the ongoing scandal of the Mooneys and the Dorans is served up again, in "Cyclops," this time in an unsavory glut of succulent detail. The stylistic disparity between the two accounts—one cold and spare, the other hot and excessive—draws attention to the story's rhetoric and makes it clear why Joyce declared himself "uncommonly well pleased" (*SL* 63) with it. He clearly knew exactly what he was doing with this experiment in styles of narration.[1] His retrospective revisitation of this family in *Ulysses* does more than sate our narrative hunger by giving us the story's ending and moral: that young people united in shotgun weddings tend not to live happily ever after. By supplementing with prurient gossip the insubstantial bread pudding of the *Dubliners* story, a point about the function of narrative language and composition seems added as well. Joyce uses *Ulysses*, I would suggest, to critique the modernistic prose of "The Boarding House" as a replication of and collusion with the hypocritical moralism that is the story's donnée.

In offering an anatomy of a shotgun wedding, Joyce has "The Boarding House" implicitly critique Christian morality's vulnerability to serve immoral

purposes, following a modern philosophical tradition inaugurated by Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*. This double transgression of sexual despoliation "remedied" by union enforced with threats of social, economic, and physical violence exposes the hypocrisies of a bourgeois morality that is sanctioned and buttressed by the institution of the Church. Bob Doran is made vulnerable to Mrs. Mooney's coercions by his sacramental confession prior to their confrontation—"the priest had drawn out every ridiculous detail of the affair and in the end had so magnified his sin that he was almost thankful at being afforded a loophole of reparation" (65). The weight of force in the story resides in institutions, and although they are never represented as such in the story, this force is tacitly vested in forms of language and communication: the confession, the legal case, the threat, blackmail, the negotiation, the bargain, the marriage proposal. Joyce anticipates in "The Boarding House" Michel Foucault's elucidation of the role of institutional discourse in the service of social domination.[2] This point is quite overt and accessible in the story. What is less accessible to the reader is the prospect that art or fiction might itself represent one of these institutional discourses bent on social domination, and that the narration of "The Boarding House" is itself suspect and must be interrogated for misdirection[3] and provocation to misprision.

What initially exempts the art of "The Boarding House" from skepticism by a readership accustomed (since the eighteenth century, at least) to unreliable narration, is precisely the Flaubertian purity of its modernistic style. The story's narrator has the impersonality and objectivity promoted in Stephen Dedalus's aesthetic theory, and therefore invites no resistance to judgments that appear to emerge from facts that seem to be speaking for themselves. Yet there are two possible explanations why the composition of this story (as well as the others in the collection) was so significant to Joyce that he fought for it with great urgency. In defending the integrity of the stories' language to Grant Richards in 1906, Joyce pleaded that the "points on which I have not yielded are the points which rivet the book together. . . . I fight to retain them because I believe that in composing my chapter of moral history in exactly the way I have composed it I have taken the first step toward the spiritual liberation of my country" (*SL* 88). In the absence of narrational commentary and opinion, the "composition" of the story would bear the burden of providing the informational wherewithal for interpretation and readerly judgment. But beyond that, the "composition"—presumably encompassing the selection and arrangement of scenes as well as the rhetoric and epistemology of the narration—would make it possible to see the extent to which the seemingly formalistic and disinterested narration nonetheless manipulates the material in ways that create opportunities for misguided interpretation. Modernistic prose, with its spare and lean language and

the seemingly narcissistic self-reflection that appears to give it purely formalistic and aesthetic self-interest, is revealed, in Joyce's stories, to be by no means innocent.

The exposure of the ideological complicity of the narration in the very hypocrisies and coercions it purports to critique depends precisely on those elements of composition that make the text behave performatively. The narrative voice that begins by telling us of Mrs. Mooney—"She was a woman who was quite able to keep things to herself" (61)—quickly demonstrates that it too, no less than Mrs. Mooney, Bob Doran, or Polly Mooney, knows how to keep things to itself. The narration frequently gives us only redactions—synopses or summaries—of characters' thoughts and memories that are themselves already redacted, already edited and trimmed for a leaner and harder presentation. These redactions can aptly be troped as narrative crusts or rinds because they are rational and literary forms for thoughts whose content is omitted. The story is structured according to virtually classical unities.[4] A double set of confessions on Saturday night (Polly confessing to Mrs. Mooney and Bob Doran confessing to the priest) is followed by a double meditation (Mrs. Mooney's calculation of her strategy and Bob Doran's terrified anticipation of its consequences) on Sunday morning precisely between 11:17 and 11:30. The story's climax is an implicit pairing of double sacrificial rites: the "short twelve" Mrs. Mooney will attend at the pro-cathedral on Marlborough Street after the off-stage slaughter of Bob Doran as her sacrificial lamb ("She dealt with moral problems as a cleaver deals with meat" [63]). But the confessions, the actual affair of Bob and Polly, the painful confrontation between Mrs. Mooney and Bob Doran, and the farcical marriage proposal it produces, are all *unrepresented*[5] except through the cold redactions Joyce referred to, in a letter to Stanislaus, as "the frigidities of 'The Boarding-House' " [*SL* 69]. Joyce—whose titles in *Dubliners* often serve as rhetorical euphemisms for the text—deliberately makes of the story a textual boarding house in which the reader is served narrative bread pudding.[6]

As a story composed of the rhetorical crusts of redactions, "The Boarding House" raises the issue of authority that the impersonality of modernistic writing simultaneously affirms and subverts. The narrative redaction gives us fragments of information that imply that the narrative voice knows more than it tells. This allows the narration to project or adumbrate a totalized understanding of the whole affair, of which it tells us little and shows us less. At the same time, the fragmentariness of the redactions renders the narrative account incomplete and singular enough to admit the possibility of other versions and other accounts. The product of this double-sided hermeneutical effect is not only the misprision of the story's moral issues, but also the misjudgment of the moral neutrality of modernism's style of "scrupulous meanness." The most

troublesome of the narration's hermeneutically misleading fragments occur at the end of the story, when Polly Mooney's thoughts are indicated but not represented—"She rested the nape of her neck against the cool iron bedrail and fell into a revery. There was no longer any perturbation visible on her face" (68). We are told the occurrence and the effect of the reverie—that is, its form or crust—but not its content or substance.[7] While producing a stylistic effect of simplicity and an affect of peace and calm, the narrator has promoted an interpretation of Polly Mooney's role in her lover's institutional predation without having ventured an opinion or made a statement. But the implicit interpretation produced by the narrative—that Polly is a cool player in her mother's game—preempts alternative and different interpretations that could make this story far more heteroglossic and complex than it seems. Once we factor in the silent discourses with which the story is fraught, its interpretation begins to dissolve into a series of "phrases in dispute" that are extremely difficult to adjudicate. Eventually the story obliges us to take sides in a moral case, and to choose between the prosecution arguments of Mrs. Mooney ("He had simply taken advantage of Polly's youth and inexperience: that was evident. The question was: What reparation would he make?" [64]) and Bob Doran's statement of defense ("He had a notion that he was being had" [66]; "It was not altogether his fault that it had happened" [67]). The narration leads or misleads the reader into positions from which an objective adjudication becomes virtually impossible. The text of "The Boarding House" produces the undecidability of phrases in dispute that Jean-François Lyotard names the *differend* (Valente, *James Joyce and the Problem of Justice* 8–9).

This *differend* relates not only to meaning but to problems of aesthetic form and class as well, for by the end of the story (and its sequel in *Ulysses*) the reader is obliged to adjudicate forms of art and their moral and social responsibilities as well. Joyce's language, in his defense of his stories to Grant Richards, points resolutely toward their ideological, if not directly didactic, aims. Calling *Dubliners* "my chapter of moral history," and promising with it to make progress toward "the spiritual liberation of my country" (*SL* 88), Joyce claims for his fiction extra-aesthetic functions motivated by his need to defend "The Boarding House," among others, against charges of vulgarity. We see in this maneuver the ironic tensions of a Modernism driven by anxiety about its own Arnoldian elitism to embed idiomatic slang and obscenity in its formal discourse in order to target it for critique, only to be indicted for the impropriety of these very citations. The narration of "The Boarding House" works overtime to ally itself with the proper diction of a Bob Doran against the "soldiers' obscenities" (62) of a Jack Mooney, only to have the word "bloody" nearly cost Joyce its publication. But Joyce held firm, and defended the fidelity of Jack

Mooney's violent speech ("Jack kept shouting at him that if any fellow tried that sort of a game on with *his* sister he'd bloody well put his teeth down his throat, so he would" (68). He told Grant Richards, "I shall delete the word 'bloody' wherever it occurs except in one passage in 'The Boarding House'." (*SL* 89). The 'bloody' does not itself belong to the "style of scrupulous meanness" (*SL* 83) that makes the story's narration the rhetorical antonym of the cultural texts cited within the story itself: the music hall song ("*I'm a . . . naughty girl*") Polly Mooney sings and *Reynolds's Newspaper*, Bob Doran's favorite tabloid. Indeed, the irony of Joyce's publishing problems is that the narration of "The Boarding House"—like that of many *Dubliners* stories—makes a strenuous effort to maintain itself as high art. The narrator of "A Boarding House," unlike his counterpart in *Ulysses*, produces a disciplined and formal discourse of moral seriousness in resistance to the low art that he fears pressing against it from within the story.

The narration of "The Boarding House" can be construed as attempting to resist, more successfully than Bob Doran, both the moral and cultural degradations of the boarding house's denizens. The narrative rhetoric clearly aims to set itself in sober and credible opposition to alternative versions of the affair of which it is aware—for example, the scandal-mongering of the boarders. Through Mrs. Mooney's free indirect discourse, it tells us discreetly, "All the lodgers in the house knew something of the affair; details had been invented by some" (65).[8] But the narrative version ultimately fails as badly as Bob Doran does in holding malicious defamations harmless and at bay. Later, in "Cyclops," the scandals crowded out in "The Boarding House" triumph as the sole surviving account of the Mooney-Doran marriage. In *Ulysses* the calumnies of Bantam Lyons and Paddy Leonard and the unnamed narrator are permitted to flourish unchallenged. We detect at least one discrepancy: the implied threat Bob Doran senses in Jack Mooney's truculent glance on the boarding house stair is literalized in "Cyclops" into a verbal threat—"Gob, Jack made him toe the line. Told him if he didn't patch up the pot, Jesus, he'd kick the shite out of him" (12: 815). It is impossible for the reader to adjudicate the reliability of the competing versions, or to elude the embarrassment of enjoying *Ulysses*'s vulgar, scandal-mongering account—with its juicy substance—more than the frigid redactions of the "Boarding House" narrator. The two versions put high art and low art, Modernism and the tabloid mentality of *Reynolds's Newspaper*, into conflict as Lyotardian "phrases in dispute." Our choice between them, as readers, also becomes a moral choice with a twist, because it mirrors the hypocrisies of a Bob Doran who speaks like a monk and acts like a libertine.

Against secret enjoyment, the reader of "The Boarding House" is prodded to side with the high art of the story's narration against the rhetoric of slander

in "Cyclops." By treating "The Boarding House" as the morally correct version of the Mooney-Doran affair, the reader sanctions a mode of narration and discourse that, in its modernistic disinterest and probity, sets itself against "Cyclops" 's discourse of aggression. Indeed, the commitment to form over content in "The Boarding House" expresses itself as an attitude toward violence that itself becomes part of the moral stance of this narration about violence. Joyce lets the narration of "The Boarding House" draw attention to the metaphorical uses of its content. When the text tells us that Mrs. Mooney "dealt with moral problems as a cleaver deals with meat" (63), the reader is invited to interpret the text through a tropology of social practices that—like the butcher's trade—provide a civilized concealment to hidden violence and brutality. The figure of the butcher's trade thus sets up the problem of the story's rhetoric as one of maintaining a concept of violence with a separable outside and inside—a clean, sanitary public shop on the outside and a hidden bloody *abattoir* where animals are slaughtered on the inside. But the violence in this story refuses to let neither narrative nor rhetoric demarcate it into clean and dirty, external and internal, language and meaning. Mrs. Mooney's metaphorical meat cleaver[9] is also her husband's literal weapon of choice for domestic violence—"One night he went for his wife with the cleaver" (61)—and "The Boarding House" cannot contain its thematic violence with its trimmed, swabbed, and packaged narrative redactions. "Why do you not object to the theme of 'The Boarding-House'?" Joyce asked Grant Richards, baffled at the objection to the expletive "bloody" in the text. Joyce asks why violent language is more troubling than the story's violent content. It is an excellent question, given that the common intensifier ("Is it not ridiculous that my book cannot be published because it contains this one word which is neither indecent nor blasphemous?" [*SL* 85]) is literalized by its context because Jack Mooney is capable of making his rhetorical threat to "bloody well put his teeth down his throat" come true for the young English *artiste*. In Mooney's mouth, "bloody" signifies bloodthirstiness. Yet Jack Mooney's vulgarism and violence is twice removed in the narration—embedded as a citation in the redaction of Bob Doran's memory. Through such multiple indirections *Dubliners* attempts to hold at bay the violence that "Cyclops"—that most violent of *Ulysses* chapters—happily releases. The flat, hard, dry crustiness of the narration of "The Boarding House" attempts to conceal and contain a violent tale of threatened murder, assault, tacit prostitution, blackmail, culminating in the social and sexual coercions of the shotgun wedding. The story is bread pudding with a nasty center of blood pudding.

The narrator's opening account of the Mooney marriage is riddled with gaps and contradictions that foreground the incomplete and impoverished information produced by the exercise of redaction:

She had married her father's foreman and opened a butcher's shop near Spring Gardens. But as soon as his father-in-law was dead Mr Mooney began to go to the devil. He drank, plundered the till, ran headlong into debt. It was no use making him take the pledge: he was sure to break out again a few days after. By fighting his wife in the presence of customers and by buying bad meat he ruined his business. One night he went for his wife with the cleaver and she had to sleep in a neighbour's house. (61)

Ostensibly, this is an explanatory preface to the events about to be narrated, an illuminating prehistory that will (retrospectively) help us understand Mrs. Mooney's behavior in the moral travesty that will transpire in her boarding house. But the redacted form makes the information ambiguous, if not deliberately misleading. The substance that is missing from the account is causal explanation. Is Mrs. Mooney the victim of a bad marriage and a bad husband, as the trimmed and clean account implies, or is there another version implicit in the timing and the events of the plot? Did Mooney go to the devil after his father-in-law's death because some constraint or coercion—governing both his work as foreman in his trade and as husband to the butcher's daughter—was lifted by that event? What constraint? Was it a physical threat by the butcher whose physiognomy can be reconstructed genetically from that of daughter and grandson, the "big imposing woman" (62) and her son with a thick bulldog face and short thick arms ("He was also handy with the mits" [62])? Or was it the moral force of a "reparation" and a forced wedding? If so, then the shotgun wedding about to transpire in the story belongs to a family genealogy that gives it an even more significant and disturbing historical dimension. Is "The Boarding House" the story of an isolated scandal, a social anomaly and a moral transgression? Or does it imply that entrapment was a conventionalized and regularized way for parents "who could not get their daughters off their hands" (65) to arrange marriages in the social climate of an Irish historical period in which celibacy and delayed families were crucial forms of population control. Florence Walzl writes, "for over a century following 1841, Ireland had the lowest marriage and birth rates in the civilized world. As a natural concomitant, it also had the highest rate of unmarried men and women in the world" ("Women in Irish Society" 33). The skepticism and cynicism that is invited by making the reader speculate on what the redaction leaves out inevitably turns on the redaction itself, and on its seeming collusion in concealing a wider moral and historical problem. Like Mr. Mooney, the narration may have packaged bad meat as good meat, as it were, and thereby produced a story that itself becomes a ruined (fictional) business.

The synoptic, incomplete, and edited family history lacks the explanatory "meat" it implicitly promises because it gives no precise etiology for the failure

of the Mooney marriage. What did Mooney fight his wife about in front of their shop customers? Why did he go after her with the cleaver one day? What enraged and perturbed this shabby little man (who is himself described as looking like bad pork [McLean 520–21] with his "pink-veined and raw" little eyes) into assaulting the large, imposing, determined woman he had married? The question is undecidable, although it seems to have to do with one or the other side of the issue of providence. Either Mooney—unlike Bob Doran—was simply improvident, in which case his double retention by the butcher is curious. Or he fought Mrs. Mooney because his labor earned him the right to none of the family resources, and he was forced to pilfer his own business—or rather her business, since he seems to have had no claim on the shop—for his needs. Once separated from his wife, he appears to have absolutely nothing, and the reader is informed that she "would give him neither money nor food nor house-room; and so he was obliged to enlist himself as a sheriff's man" (61). The marriage compact, whatever its initial terms, clearly failed Mooney sufficiently that he ruined both aspects of his business, the butcher shop and the marriage itself. Both the marriage and the narration seem to have reduced Mr. Mooney to a cipher or a signifier of lack—that is, a human crust or rind. The narration—giving us Mooney's violent and worthless outside without giving us his inside, his motives or subjective feelings—formally replicates his thematic emptying and negation. The marital separation extrudes Mr. Mooney from the family as well as from the narration. The only subsequent reference to him treats him as a mock-stranger—"a disreputable sheriff's man" (63)—whose last access to his daughter is severed by Mrs. Mooney's extreme measure of withdrawing her from the workforce and keeping her home. Mr. Mooney is cut off from the family and from the story as though by a rhetorical cleaver.

The story's narration changes with the marital separation of the Mooneys and assumes forms that disturbingly replicate the management of the boarding house. Once the narrator begins telling us about Mrs. Mooney's new business, the rigid, synoptic redaction of the prehistory is replaced by a kind of narrative license—a far more relaxed and liberal story-telling whose gratuitous details and needless indulgences are a welcome relief from the earlier informational dearth. The narrator gives us enough innuendo about the rowdy clientele from Liverpool and the Isle of Man (Gifford 63), and the music hall *artistes* who lodge there, to corroborate Bob Doran's concern about the "certain fame" (66) Mrs. Mooney's boarding house is acquiring. Further, the narrative voice is as voluble and indiscreet about the second generation of Mooneys as it was terse and buttoned about the first. We learn the specific vices (swearing, gambling, womanizing, and lewd gossip) that make Jack Mooney a "hard case" (62), and are given an unconvincing description of Polly's putative combination of a naughty out-

side and an innocent inside. The narrator's chatty gossip with the reader in this section seems to betray the determined reserve of the opening. This contradiction raises the possibility that the narrator manages us as Mrs. Mooney manages her lodgers—"She governed her house cunningly and firmly, knew when to give credit, when to be stern and when to let things pass" (62). The narrator, having begun sternly, gives us a few passages of readerly "credit" or indulgence, for which (like Bob Doran) we shall have to pay later. The textual boarding house of the story subjects us to certain moral economies and discursive disciplines that—like Mrs. Mooney's practice with her lodgers—are calculated to make us unwilling victims of the story's thematic and narrative hypocrisies. By subjecting us at story's end to the laconic deprivation of narrative crusts—telling us little and showing us less—the text seems to take revenge on the reader for having desired (like Bob Doran) a sweeter, tastier, more entertaining fictional or poetic fare than that offered us by Modernism's scrupulous meanness. Readerly desire—for the moral liberties and discursive delights of, say, the adultery novel—are punished in "The Boarding House" by the thematic and narrative hypocrisies of story crusts: tales of 'reparation,' justice, and the outside of stern action, masking the sinister calculations and cynical subornings of pleasure on the inside.

Mrs. Mooney's nickname *The Madam* makes explicit the continuities of her various businesses. The boarding house is analogous to the bordello and the butcher shop because in each a profit is made out of the body and its necessities: the home is turned into a business, the sexual body is turned into a business, the animal body is turned into a business, and shelter, sex, and food are transformed from natural necessities into commodities. But Mrs. Mooney clearly carries on more than one business at a time, and if her boarding house is a prix fixe affair ("fifteen shillings a week for board and lodgings [beer or stout at dinner excluded]" [62]), she carries on, like her son, a little gambling on the side. The narration explicitly tropes her endgame on Sunday morning as a game of chance: "She counted all her cards before sending Mary up to Mr Doran's room" (65). But even before this, Mrs. Mooney has been moving Polly around like a pawn in a game of chess. Polly is clearly her ante, her stake or investment, in a venture with a possible jackpot. Her son acts as her enforcer or muscle, the narrator of "Cyclops" seems to imply—"Gob, Jack made him toe the line. Told him if he didn't patch up the pot, Jesus, he'd kick the shite out of him" (12: 815). Mrs. Mooney's ambiguous intentions with her daughter are betrayed around the nice pivot of the word "business." When the narrator tells us, "Polly, of course, flirted with the young men but Mrs Mooney, who was a shrewd judge, knew that the young men were only passing the time away: none of them meant business" (63), we are led to think that Mrs. Mooney is reassured and relieved.

But the very next sentence betrays her disappointment—"Things went on so for a long time and Mrs. Mooney began to think of sending Polly back to typewriting when she noticed that something was going on between Polly and one of the young men" (63). Clearly Mrs. Mooney wanted a young man to mean "business." Polly as ante conflates with the more lurid function of bait for prey.[10]

But the overt allusions to prostitution made by the narrator of "Cyclops" ("And the old prostitute of a mother procuring rooms to street couples" [12: 814]) fail to register the complex and bogus role respectability and morality play in Mrs. Mooney's game. As the narrator shows us Mrs. Mooney rehearsing her case on Sunday morning, it becomes clear that her transaction with Mr. Doran will suppress all reference to money except as a disavowal. Mrs. Mooney tries out a rhetoric of self-righteousness in her mind by claiming a disinterest in money—"Some mothers would be content to patch up such an affair for a sum of money; she had known cases of it. But she would not do so" (65). She further elides the commercial character of her boarding house in order to be able to pose as a despoiled hostess when she thinks, "She had allowed him to live beneath her roof, assuming that he was a man of honour, and he had simply abused her hospitality" (64). Doran's fifteen shillings per week are simply suppressed. Her open refusal to patch up the affair for a sum of money lets her disavow her secret fiscal calculations, whose vulgarity the normally circumspect narrator cannot disavow. Mrs. Mooney's financial predation is figured in extremely coarse commercial slang—"She knew he had a good screw for one thing and she suspected he had a bit of stuff put by" (65)—an uncommon descent into low idiom that makes the respectable front of the narrative language conspicuously visible. Mrs. Mooney may be a metaphoric type of "Circe" who turns men into swine, as Barbara McLean suggests in her clever note in the Winter 1991 issue of *James Joyce Quarterly* (520–22), but she is, simultaneously, a butcher's daughter for whom (unlike Circe) swine are a source of profit. But her cleaver, it must be remembered, is respectability and its power of blackmail—the very same sword Bloom raises against Bella Cohen when he intimates that a scandal could hurt her son at Oxford.

When the narration of "The Boarding House" switches to Bob Doran upstairs, the narrative voice returns to a prim and formal diction ("Mr Doran was very anxious indeed this Sunday morning" [65]). It seems to corroborate Mrs. Mooney's own judgment that she would *win* because "He was a serious young man, not rakish or loud-voiced like the others" [65]). The substance of his thought further seems to confirm the shrewdness of her strategy in exploiting the young man's bourgeois respectability by cloaking her own vulgarity in it. "But his family would look down on her. . . . She *was* a little vulgar" (66), he worries. But there are troublesome inconsistencies and gaps in the narration

whose significance become clear only retroactively as the jokers in Mrs. Mooney's deck: the mistakes in her calculations. The first symptom is the curious discrepancy between the putative control and rationality of Bob Doran's thoughts and the extraordinary physical agitation exhibited by his body. His hand trembles too much for him to shave, and the continual misting and fogging of his glasses suggest that he is either in a hot sweat or weeping. There are clearly two Bob Dorans here—the sober and respectable bachelor clerk and the highly unstable weakling, prone, we later learn, to periodic collapses. The two are recognized and reconciled neither in Mrs. Mooney's nor in the narrator's conceptualization of him. The joke on Mrs. Mooney is that Bob Doran, too, knows how to keep things to himself. And what he has kept to himself is that he is neither as good a catch as he appears to be, nor immune to moral hypocrisy. Mrs. Mooney has been fooled by the separation of outer and inner, which shapes an extreme contradiction in Bob Doran's case. He sustains the contradictions in his character by means of a temporal compartmentalization that confines his periods of drunkenness, lewdness, and blasphemy to a monthly bender: "for nine-tenths of the year he lived a regular life" (66). Mrs. Mooney wins only *because of* Doran's weakness and instability. His public character, so embarrassingly in evidence in "Cyclops," will rob her daughter both of the respectability and of the money the forced marriage was meant to provide. By the time of *Ulysses*, the "Cyclops" narrator retells Paddy Leonard's story of saving Bob Doran from arrest for "fornicating with two shawls and a bully on guard, drinking porter out of teacups" (12: 803) in an after-hours "shebeen." Leonard, and the narrator who repeats it, clearly find the spectacle of Doran's humiliation hilarious—"And the two shawls killed with the laughing, picking his pockets, the bloody fool and he spilling porter all over the bed and the two shawls screeching laughing at one another" (12:807). Since Doran is frankly described as being "rolled" by two prostitutes, the "Boarding House" is clearly not the only time he is "had" by unscrupulous women.

This *Ulysses* story about Bob Doran and the two "shawls" in bed—which may or may not be true—nonetheless fills a discursive gap in Bob Doran's self-justification in "The Boarding House." We are told that "As a young man he had sown his wild oats, of course; he had boasted of his free-thinking and denied the existence of God to his companions in public-houses. But that was all passed and done with . . . nearly" (66). The ellipsis amends and qualifies the rehabilitation, and the later story of the two shawls contradicts the narrative syntax that tries to make the "wild oats" chiefly heretical rather than sexual. Clearly the narrator presenting to us Bob Doran's thoughts in free indirect discourse is giving him the sort of "credit" denied him by Mrs. Mooney, when she rehearses her case. She is in no mood to cut him any slack: "He was thirty-four or thirty-five

years of age, so that youth could not be pleaded as his excuse; nor could ignorance be his excuse since he was a man who had seen something of the world" (64). Doran's indirect "nearly," which corrects a near lie and retracts the total rehabilitation of the wild oats, is never elaborated by the narrator. Instead, the narrative voice goes to some pains to reinforce the monkish image of Bob Doran by referring to him twice as a "celibate." The narrative "credit" takes the form of giving Doran credibility in spite of the qualifications, gaps, and discrepancies in his account. As a result we are vulnerable to being moved by Doran's rather synecdochic memory of his romantic seduction. The memory is produced for the explicit purpose of exoneration: "It was not altogether his fault that it had happened" (66). The evidence conjured for this purpose gives a domestic and *light* version of a delicate and metonymic eroticism. He remembers Polly's appeal in fragments ("the first casual caresses her dress, her breath, her fingers had given him" [67]) and in displacements ("From her hands and wrists too as she lit and steadied her candle a faint perfume arose" [67]). His memory highlights details whose fetishistic features as foot and fur ("Her white instep shone in the opening of her furry slippers" [67]) are not immediately apparent. The boarding house of Doran's romantic memory is one of stillness and warmth ("He scarcely knew what he was eating, feeling her beside him alone, at night, in the sleeping house" [67]). How do we reconcile this sweet, domestic place with the site of the raucous "reunions" at which Polly sang naughty songs and flirted with the men, and the men made free allusions to her? Bob Doran's memory totally extracts Polly from the marginally respectable boarding house and its rather rough clientele, and gives her a tender wifely role ("And her thoughtfulness! If the night was anyway cold or wet or windy there was sure to be a little tumbler of punch ready for him" [67]). This account implies that Bob Doran was seduced by the domestic solace sorely missed in his bachelor living, rather than by the free and racy gaiety of Polly's entertainment and coquetry in the house. What was Bob Doran's participation in the noisy reunions? And where did Polly fit into one of his monthly benders? Without the later correction of the story of Bob Doran and the two shawls in bed—which reminds us of the putatively abandoned wild oats—the decent narrative account of Bob's sweet romantic memory might well seduce us into exonerating him altogether.

Once it begins to represent Bob Doran's thoughts, the narrative voice of "The Boarding House" shifts sympathy and takes sides with him against the Mooneys. It thereby implicates itself in the moral hypocrisies of the story. The narrational sympathy with Doran seems to take as its moral premise that the Mooney entrapment and implied violence is more transgressive than Doran's lust.[11] But a stronger interpretive inference is that the narrative prejudice in abandoning Mrs. Mooney and shifting to Doran's side is motivated by class,

and specifically by language. Bob Doran's general superiority is grounded in philology. Against the discursive transgressions of the Mooneys—Jack's obscenities, Mrs. Mooney's low slang, and Polly's solecisms—Bob Doran upholds critical standards of proper usage and grammar, "sometimes she said *I seen* and *If I had've known*" (66). His rhetorical question—"But what would grammar matter if he really loved her?"—answers itself in the posing with an imbricated set of functions. The question establishes Doran's superiority twice over: confirming taste and distinction precisely by having grammar matter, and heart and sentiment by offering that it may not. But the credit Doran accrues through his defense of linguistic correctness—a credit both extended and retracted by its extension to matters of biblical philology in the "shawls" anecdote in *Ulysses*—must be qualified and questioned, like his putative romanticism, for self-serving disingenuity. "The Boarding House" tells us only that his rehabilitation notwithstanding, he "still bought a copy of *Reynolds's Newspaper* every week but attended to his religious duties and for nine-tenths of the year lived a regular life" (66). *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper*, Gifford tells us, was a "fourpenny record of social and political scandals" (66), a forerunner of modern tabloid journalism. Doran's skepticism toward religion—"he had boasted of his free-thinking and denied the existence of God" (66)—does not seem to extend to the tabloid press, suggesting that his own prurient curiosities and credulities give him good reason to fear scandal. Doran's heresies take a specifically philological form in "Cyclops," when he questions biblical authority on the ground of historical authorship. He is reported as "talking against the Catholic religion, and he serving mass in Adam and Eve's when he was young with his eyes shut, who wrote the new testament, and the old testament, and hugging and smugging" (12:805). Doran's scholarly interests are discredited by his forum, the two prostitutes who transform his question into a dirty joke, "*How is your testament Have you got an old testament?* (12:810), that, Gifford and Seidman suggest, puns on "fundament" (340). The curious narrative concatenation of wild oats and heresy in the moral account of Doran is dramatized in this scenario. The "Cyclops" version of Bob Doran's transgressions is the *Reynolds's Newspaper* reportage of his doings—that is, the version that would most interest himself if he were reading about someone else. The *Dubliners* version, on the other hand, is the sober, self-justifying account that would be cloaked in his own genteel idiom and shaped by the gaps and omissions of his own hypocrisies.

The story ends by describing Polly Mooney sitting on the bed in Bob Doran's room, waiting for a marriage proposal. Yet curiously, this closure to the story's donnée—namely the intricate history of this proposal—takes the form of a virtual blank, or—to return to my earlier metaphor—the thinnest of crusts. Not only is the dramatic meat of the upcoming proposal with its ghastly pretenses

and ironies withheld from us, but the tight-lipped narrative style tells us nothing of Polly's version of the affair, and very little of what she is feeling. Either Polly resists narrative penetration, giving her simile of "a little perverse madonna" new meaning, or the narrator, like Bob Doran, is not interested in Polly's subjectivity and makes no attempt to see or represent what goes on in her mind or in her heart. The narrator tells us that the sight of the pillows "awakened in her mind secret amiable memories" (68), but doesn't tell us what they are. We are told that her memories give place to hopes and visions of the future—"Her hopes and visions were so intricate that she no longer saw the white pillows" (68)—but they are not shared with us. The narrator makes it clear that Polly Mooney has not only an inner life of the body ("the blood glowed warmly behind her perfumed skin" [67]) but also an inner emotional and mental life. But either the narrator has no access to it, or chooses not to give the reader access to it. The third possibility is that the narrator sees Polly Mooney precisely as Bob Doran does, entirely as configured by a surrounding texture of metonymies (flannel, fur, perfume, candle, punch, pillows, and, later, in the "Cyclops" narrator's account, patent leather boots and violets) that please the senses. Bob Doran's account, in retrospect, gives indication only of the comfort Polly provided for him, without evidence that he "knows" her at all.

Furthermore, all of the narrative information about Polly—and particularly her own words, leave open the question whether she is always acting and performing, as in the little song she sings when she is introduced into the story—"*I'm a . . . naughty girl. / You needn't sham: You know I am*" (62). Do her signs or gestures—such as "the agitation of her bosom" Bob Doran feels through his shirt—represent "her" own feelings or nature, or do they belong to a calculated performance? Polly's shift from aching distress with Bob Doran to solitary composure in the bedroom after he leaves is particularly suspect. Suzette Henke says she "doffs her mask of distress" (28) and even Garry Leonard, who treats her performance sympathetically as an unconsciously internalized feminine role, sees her "moving unconsciously from the role of imperiled maiden to that of the offstage actress preparing herself for a new role" (141). Polly's words, when they are strung together—"I'm a naughty girl . . ."; "What am I to do?"; "O my God!"; "Yes, mamma?"—constitute a little melodrama whose most dramatic moment—"She would put an end to herself, she said" (66)—sounds patently false.[12] Her actions, too, are inconclusive. She weeps a little, alone, after Bob leaves, but her restorative gestures, "refreshing" her eyes and adjusting her hairpin in profile, appear to have all the calculation that would make her her mother's daughter. The relationship of her outer and inner self that the question of performance raises, remains undecidable—although not to the scandal-mongering Dubliners. The "Cyclops" narrator firmly resolves the in-

consistencies of Polly's public appearances against her—citing as evidence her self-display when she attends church with her husband. "Then see him of a Sunday with his little concubine of a wife, and she wagging her tail up the aisle of the chapel with her patent boots on her, no less, and her violets, nice as pie, doing the little lady" (12: 811), he reports. If Polly looks proper, she is "doing the little lady," whereas if she looks improper, she is thought to be genuine. "Bantam Lyons told me that was stopping there at two in the morning without a stitch on her, exposing her person, open to all comers, fair field and no favour" (12: 400), the narrator reports.

Polly is more absolutely bared and publicly exposed than any other Joycean female, but without being narratively "penetrated," as though, indeed like a little perverse Madonna, she remains inviolate. But the resolute exteriorization of Polly Mooney raises disturbing possibilities of misprision. By being an enigma, a mystery, Polly continues to invite narrative penetration at the same time that clues persist that there may be something *wrong* with this young girl who has "a habit of glancing upwards when she spoke with anyone" (62). The "Cyclops" narrator's description of her as a "little sleepwalking bitch" (12: 398) gives us pause to consider if Polly might be mentally or emotionally impaired in some way. Could her putative promiscuity be less a vice than the pathology of a disturbed young woman or the abused innocence of a mentally deficient girl? Then, again, perhaps she is a young Molly Bloom, taking charge of her sexual life as she pleases even in the face of scandal. These possibilities, too, are undecidable, but they remind us that all interpretations of this enigmatic figure will function as narrative violations, and put us as speculative readers on the side of the more unsavory clients of the boarding house and Barney Kiernan's pub. We are left with the possibility that Polly Mooney's exteriorization makes her a narrative crust or rind with an inviolable center that may be an absent or missing center, no center at all, an unlocatable—a "sleepwalking"—subject. That may be too why her subjectivity remains irretrievable in the later texts[13]—unlike such other mysterious Joycean women as the bird girl of *Portrait,* who may be given an imaginable interior in the thoughts of Gerty MacDowell. Any attempt at exonerating Polly Mooney, however, crosses sharply with the narrative agenda of "The Boarding House" teller. The narrative agenda presses the point that unlike the weak and scrupulous Bob Doran, the Mooneys have "crust," that is, a bold and vulgar audacity in the way they play their games and in the way they use bourgeois morality for their own purposes and designs.

Among *Dubliners* stories, "The Boarding House" arouses relatively little critical interest, perhaps for two reasons. The "case" we are asked to decide seems pretty open-and-shut, and the mode of narration is dull and uninteresting. The result, I have tried to suggest, is narration as bread pudding—that is, a

story in which there is little for readers or critics to get their teeth into, by way of interpretation. Unlike "The Sisters," "Araby," and "The Dead," where the narrative language draws a great deal of attention to itself, the "Boarding House" narration is unobtrusive and impartial. It needs the contrasting wedge of the "Cyclops" sequel to dilate its seemingly homogeneous mass and restore a sense of multiple meanings and internal contradiction to its bland discursive texture. But once considered as tacitly self-interrogating and self-incriminating, "The Boarding House" can be restored to its historical moment in modern literature as an example of modernistic writing problematizing itself in its genesis. The story complicates the overturn of Victorian pieties blind to the violence of social control by betraying misogynistic and class biases in its seemingly progressive agenda. The predations of the lower-class Mooneys may not, after all, exonerate the less blatant predations of bourgeois self-righteousness and cultural superiority. And the formalistic control of language may silence less disciplined discourses that could complicate the truth, and thereby have Joyce's style of "scrupulous meanness" contribute its own measure of violence to its censure of violence. "The Boarding House" may indict its own frigidities as clearly as "A Painful Case" indicts celibacy when it turns the adultery novel on its head by making abstention from adultery the equivalent of murder. Narrative bread pudding—as spare and thrifty as modernism itself—may (Joyce seems to have been telling us all along) not be blameless.