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Brigham Young University

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“God’s fair land of Ireland did not hold her equal”

Disgust as an Anti-Eugenics tool

in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*

Lizzie Belnap

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Jarica Watts, Chair
Brian Price
Aaron Eastley

Department of English
Brigham Young University

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ABSTRACT

“God’s fair land of Ireland did not hold her equal”
Disgust as an Anti-Eugenics Tool
in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*

Lizzie Belnap
Department of English, BYU
Master of Arts

While many modernist authors exhibited eugenicist tendencies which I will detail in this paper, James Joyce wrote, implicitly and explicitly, against it. Joyce’s anti-eugenics aesthetic, expressed almost in passing by Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man* (1916), becomes entangled in questions of bodies and national identity in *Ulysses*. I intend to identify a series of moments in which disgust and bodily difference in *Ulysses* counter the eugenics trends in elitist modernism while simultaneously criticizing racism in Irish nationalism that, in some ways, drove the movement for Irish independence.

It would be impossible to provide an exhaustive exploration of all the anti-eugenics imagery in *Ulysses*. This project attempts to differentiate Joyce more thoroughly from his contemporaries through readings of Gerty MacDowell and Molly Bloom. Gerty is the disabled granddaughter of a racist nationalist, and she functions as an articulation of Joyce’s search for an Ireland that rejects simplistic, narrow-minded nationalism. Molly, *Ulysses*’ ultimate heroine, takes ownership of her sexuality, thereby countering the eugenics project. I read both women as counter-eugenics icons who personify an anti-hegemonic ideal through their relationships with their own bodies.

Keywords: James Joyce, disability studies, *Ulysses*, modernism, eugenics, disgust, fat studies, female sexuality, Irish studies

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“God’s fair land of Ireland did not hold her equal”
Disgust as an Anti-Eugenics Tool in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*

Introduction

When James Joyce’s *Ulysses* was published in 1922, the popularity of eugenics was on the rise, including among modernist authors. Eugenics is a brand of scientific inquiry that seeks to create a genetically “pure” population by targeting the mentally and physically disabled, the economically oppressed, and people of color. Eugenics usually manifests in one of two ways: positive eugenics is additive, seeking to promote fertility among demographics deemed to be worthy of reproduction, including the white, the able-bodied, and the middle class. This can take the form of financial incentives for parents, easier access to fertility treatments, and better healthcare. Negative eugenics, which is subtractive, aims at preventing reproduction by people deemed unworthy (Wilson). The latter approach employs means such as birth control, segregation, forced sterilization, or, in extreme cases, mass killings like the Holocaust.

While many modernist authors exhibited eugenicist tendencies which I will detail later in this paper, Joyce wrote, implicitly and explicitly, against it. Joyce’s anti-eugenics aesthetic, expressed almost in passing by Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), becomes entangled in questions of bodies and national identity in *Ulysses*. Donald Childs has explored pro-eugenics leanings among modernist authors, and while I draw on Childs’s book *Modernism and Eugenics* frequently in this paper, little work has been done to elucidate the anti-eugenics tilt of Joyce’s work work¹. I intend to identify a series of moments in which disgust and bodily difference in *Ulysses* counter the eugenics trends in elitist modernism while

¹ Vike Martina Plock, in *Joyce, Medicine, and Modernity*, discusses allusions to eugenics in the “Ithaca” episode of *Ulysses* and how Joyce uses the body to characterize Bloom. Plock’s reading does not engage with eugenics as an ideology in the way mine does.

simultaneously criticizing racism in Irish nationalism that, in some ways, drove the movement for Irish independence.

While it would be impossible to provide an exhaustive exploration of all the anti-eugenics imagery in *Ulysses*, this project attempts to differentiate Joyce more thoroughly from his contemporaries through readings of Gerty MacDowell and Molly Bloom. Gerty is the disabled granddaughter of a racist nationalist, and she functions as an articulation of Joyce's search for an Ireland that rejects simplistic, narrow-minded nationalism. Molly, *Ulysses*' ultimate heroine, takes ownership of her sexuality, thereby countering the eugenics project. I read both women as counter-eugenics icons who personify an anti-hegemonic ideal through their relationships with their own bodies.

Eugenics and the Twentieth Century

Statistician Francis Galton invented the term “eugenics” in 1883, but the sentiments that drove eugenics existed much earlier. Its inception is often linked to “increasing urbanization [that] confronted the middle class with an apparently permanent underclass of poor people—beggars, thieves, prostitutes—often in poor health, apparently indolent and lazy” (Childs 1). Industrialization led to a surge in Europe's urban population. Abroad, imperialism brought Europeans greater awareness of people of color around the world. Both these developments led to concerns about the place of middle-class white people in the world. Eugenics seemed to redress these widespread insecurities by advocating for maintaining the racist, ableist status quo.

Two scientific developments in particular stoked eugenicist fears. The first was the concept of “the norm” as both a statistical and linguistic notion. Lennard J. Davis has tracked the way the word “normal,” to mean “average” or “regular,” started to be used around 1840. At this

same period, the concept of a bodily or social norm emerged, and people were measured against their adherence to it (2). This sense of “the norm” was seminal in eugenics because those identified as outliers became data to be normed rather than people with different bodies². The idea of a statistical norm thus contributed to the social construction of disability: the industrializing world was being mass-manufactured for “normal” bodies, and outliers became disabled because of their inability to perform at that level.

The second development that influenced the growth of eugenics was the rise of theories of evolution and “survival of the fittest” in the work of Charles Darwin (who happened to be Galton’s cousin). Darwin’s book *On the Origin of Species*, positing that traits of species change over time in order to become more “fit,” was foundational to modern eugenics. Eugenicists came to see generational change as a method of refining populations. They hoped to eradicate undesirable hereditary traits from the gene pool. These attitudes manifested in negative eugenicist policies such as “institutionalization (chronic human warehousing), marriage prohibitions, involuntary sterilization, confinement within one’s home, inaccessibility of shared public space, segregated education, and intensified immigration restrictions” (Mitchell et al, 7). Just as statistical norms had created the impression that bodies should be “normal,” evolution suggested the means by which populations could be normed.

Thus, the combination of evolution and statistics led to modern eugenics. Increasing urban populations, decreasing quality of life, and awareness of the scope of globalization gave rise to the belief that the world was overpopulated and quickly degenerating. Eugenics responded to those concerns. While it may seem that race, disability, and moral degeneration are unrelated, eugenicist ideology targeted them because of their overlapping features. The “beggars, thieves,

² Of course, disabled people faced ableism before the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the emergence of statistics lent legitimacy to cultural and systemic ableism.

[and] prostitutes” that Childs mentions were grouped together. The poor and the sick were understood as parts of a single pattern of moral and physical decay. The overlaps were often cyclical: people became poor because they were too sick to work, so they resorted to theft. Alternately, poverty led some people to sex work, where they got permanently hurt or ill. This cycle kept people trapped in poverty and crime, unable to access healthcare or safe living conditions; eugenics pointed to this pattern to unite moral and physical degradation under the umbrella of “degeneration.”

As ruling classes took note of these worrying trends, eugenicist attitudes quickly spread. *Human Heredity*, a biology textbook published in 1927, cites “racial factors and hereditary mental factors” as most influential in determining a nation’s success and overall health (Baur, et al. 183). “Eugenics Societies” cropped up in America and Europe, advancing legislation that increased tax benefits for middle class families with many children and explicitly advocating for forced sterilization (Mazumdar). They distributed flyers calling to “release the stranglehold of hereditary disease and unfitness” and claiming that “only healthy seed must be sown” (Eugenics Society). This ideology, in implicit and explicit forms, was adopted widely throughout Western society.

Such ideas also impacted the conceptualization of Ireland, for both British and Irish people. Ireland exemplified British colonial eugenics. Britain’s oldest and nearest colony, it housed both the urban development and ethnic difference that eugenicists feared. The Mental Deficiency Act was passed in Britain in 1913, and the Belfast Eugenics Society advocated loudly for the government to institutionalize or segregate people at will to prevent their reproduction (Jones 85). Because of the influence of Catholic teachings, Irish sympathies departed from eugenicist aims regarding sterilization and birth control. Nevertheless, eugenicist ideologies

endured in what Juliana Adelman calls “more subtle forms.” She cites campaigns aimed at discouraging people with tuberculosis from reproducing and “bonny baby” competitions³ interested in protecting the “health of the nation.”

The trends identified here, in Ireland and beyond, shaped the eugenicist thinking of many modernists. Since eugenics was a form of “medicalization of social problems,” modernists viewed it as a modern way of solving those problems (Jones 85). They were searching for a better world, but also, more importantly, for the role art would play in imagining and documenting that world. As Childs argues, many modernist writers gravitated towards eugenics as a response to the increasing godlessness and industry of the twentieth century. They were seeking a new organizing principle for life. In T.S. Eliot’s personal writings, the poet expressed enthusiasm for “segregation and sterilization” of the “defective element of the population” (Eliot 274, qtd in Childs 13). Childs also reads “Mr. Eliot’s Sunday Morning Service” as an investigation of Eliot’s marriage, suggesting that “Eliot betrays...eugenicists’ general fear that the Anglo-Saxon race is about to be swamped by Irish Catholics and Jews” (Childs 110). Eugenics appears frequently in Virginia Woolf’s journals as well as in her published works. In a 1915 journal entry, she encounters a group of people on a walk from a mental institution and concludes that “they should certainly be killed” (Woolf 13, qtd in Childs 23). In *Three Guineas*, she worries about the decline in European birth rates, and in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Sir William Bradshaw “made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalized despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views,” (Woolf 138, qtd in Childs 30). Though Woolf does not explicitly endorse Bradshaw here, Childs is right to point out that she at least avoids condemning him.

³ Healthy baby competitions existed all over the world. They were part of movements to promote large settler populations to replace colonized peoples (Pallister 24).

The modernist tendency towards eugenics was not isolated to British authors. Prominent Irish modernists gravitated in the same direction. George Bernard Shaw wrote about creating a race of human “organisms that have achieved and realized God,” and *Pygmalion* illustrates eugenicist sentiments about the working class and degeneration (Shaw 345, qtd in Childs 7). William Butler Yeats, too, displayed eugenicist leanings; in the twenties, he was a member of the Eugenics Society in Ireland (Jones 83). In “On The Boiler”, Yeats mourns the wastefulness of educating the lower classes, and by the thirties, he was a “full-blown eugenicist” (Childs 149). One might expect Irish writers of this period to display a compassionate stance on ethnic minorities and others targeted by eugenicists. However, that stance was not always evident. The tendency towards eugenics was far-reaching among modernists and was not unique to British writers with colonial privilege.

Joyce and Eugenics

In the crowd of writers mentioned above, Joyce stands out for his rejection of eugenics. Scholars investigating modernism and eugenics often mention Stephen Dedalus’s famous discourse on beauty. Angela Lea Nemecek mentions it briefly in her extended reading of the encounter between Leopold Bloom and Gerty. Donald Childs investigates the discourse in more detail, examining the moment where Stephen says,

For my part I dislike that way out. It leads to eugenics rather than to esthetic. It leads you out of the maze into a new gaudy lecture room where MacCann, with one hand on *The Origin of the Species* and the other hand on the new testament, tells you that you admired the great flanks of Venus because you felt that she would bear you burly offspring and admired her great breasts because you felt that she would give good milk to her children and yours. (Joyce, *Portrait* 244, qtd in Childs 13).

Joyce, here, becomes one of few modernists including anti-eugenics rhetoric in their published work. Stephen (often, though not always, read as a mouthpiece for Joyce himself) rejects the idea that sexual attraction has “direct connexion with the manifold functions of women for the propagation of the species,” indicating Joyce’s working understanding of eugenics when he rejected it here (Joyce, *Portrait* 244). Stephen asserts that attributing attraction⁴ to a biological drive rooted in a person’s reproductive capacity relies on a eugenicist premise, and his reference to *On the Origin of Species* also indicates a working understanding of the scientific element of eugenics.

Though Joyce makes no further explicit mention of eugenics in his published works⁵, I maintain that anti-eugenicist patterns are frequent in *Ulysses*. The novel counters the eugenicist hierarchy evident in the works and journals of his contemporaries through anti-eugenics imagery latent throughout the novel. In the “Cyclops” episode, Bloom, the Jewish protagonist, finds himself in a pub with a group of drunken men. The group’s leader, called “old Giltrap”, or “the citizen,” spouts racist and xenophobic ideals while revering Irish traditions of old. Joyce underpins this entire episode with irony to emphasize that the pure Irishness the citizen claims for himself, and wants for Ireland, is a myth. This irony is apparent in the citizen’s dog Garryowen, a “famous old Irish red setter wolfdog,” later revealed to be a mongrel [U.256; XII.715]); in the citizen’s catalogues of Irish heroes, which includes Benjamin Franklin, Cleopatra, and Beethoven; and in the way the citizen claims pure Irish ancestry, even though “the citizen” denotes nationality based on paperwork, not heritage (U.244; XII.177-197). Though

⁴ Of course, Stephen is only discussing this in terms of straight male attraction to women; this heterosexist angle is shared by many eugenicists because of the nature of eugenics, which interrogates only the potential for parenthood. This attitude revokes agency from all involved, but especially from women, since it carries the latent expectation that all women will be reproducing in all marriages. I will return to this issue later.

⁵ In the opening passages of “Cyclops,” Joyce does list “the eugenic eucalyptus” among a catalogue of trees, but this phrase seems to rely more on the alliteration than on any relationship to eugenics (U.241; XII.77).

Bloom's Irishness, masculinity, and virility are called into question in this episode, and his cheating wife is jokingly referenced ("the chaste spouse of Leopold is she: Marion of the bountiful bosoms" [U.262; XII.106-107]), Bloom responds by declaring that "Mendelssohn was a jew, and Karl Marx, and Mercadante, and Spinoza. And the savior was a jew" (U.280; XII.1804). The final moments of "Cyclops," preparing the way for "Nausicaa," demonstrate that the novel defines a culture's success by artistic and intellectual contributions, not by genetic endurance.

This thread throughout "Cyclops" underscores that Joyce's denunciation of eugenics is rooted in artistic and intellectual philosophies rather than in any activist impulse. Biographer Richard Ellmann writes that Joyce "had considerable sympathy for large ideas, so long as they could be subsumed under art" (Ellmann, "The Politics of Joyce"). In other words, Joyce gravitated towards political ideas less for their own sake; rather, he was attracted by the artistic freedom they provided. He preferred "adjectives rather than nouns, the term they modified being 'artist'" (Ellmann, "The Politics of Joyce"). Joyce's feeling that political and social movements should exist mostly to uphold artistic movements is evident in *Portrait of the Artist* in the way Stephen rejects Lynch's theory of art because it leads not to beauty, but to eugenics (Joyce, *Portrait* 244). Joyce, evidently, was not so much concerned with anti-eugenicist policies; he did not reject eugenics in favor of a sentimental dream for the future of Ireland. Rather, he rejected a social order that limited people's abilities to live as they wanted: "the whole conception of sin became repugnant to him," Ellmann writes ("The Politics of Joyce").

Ulysses is often read as a tour of the human body, and the novel's intricate explorations of bodily functions is foundational to its position as an anti-eugenics text. It has a long history of being off-putting to readers with its frank discussion of bowel movements ("he felt heavy, full;

then a gentle loosening of his bowels” [U.55; IV.460]), menstruation (“it’s pouring out of me like the sea” [U.633; XVII.1123]), and masturbation (“his hands and face were working and a tremor went over her” [U.299; XII.694-695]). Richard Brown calls it “an ‘epic’ of the body” (15). Stuart Gilbert’s famous schema of *Ulysses*, created by Joyce himself, outlines how each episode mirrors different organs. The foregrounding of bodily functions—even (or perhaps especially) the unrefined ones—is central to the work’s anti-eugenicist aesthetic. By demanding that readers become comfortable with the human body, Joyce neutralizes the bodies he depicts. Viewing bodies—be they disabled, deformed, non-white, or overtly sexual—as neutral, rather than inherently wrong or degenerate, is the foundation of Joyce’s anti-eugenics.

However, I would not argue that Joyce’s almost aggressive normalization of the body is explicitly or intentionally anti-eugenics. In fact, the very concept of “normalizing” bodies is eugenicist and ableist, because it establishes a standard not inherent in human bodies to which people are expected to conform (Davis 3). Still, Joyce’s frankness and apparent comfort with the body in all its forms stands contrary to the eugenicist ideals that see those bodies as unworthy of the space, time, and resources they occupy. As Ellmann notes, Joyce’s work “claims importance by claiming nothing; it seeks a presentation so sharp that comment by the author would be interference” (James Joyce 88). The tendency to “claim nothing” is evident in Joyce’s rejection of eugenics. The author presents an abundance of counter-eugenics imagery but leaves it up to the reader to understand them as part of one motif. Joyce spends seven-hundred pages writing about non-normative bodies, forcing readers to encounter what other modernists rejected. Unlike the nationalist citizen, or Joyce’s contemporaries, Joyce provides a passive but definite stance against his era’s simplistic nationalism as well as against the elitist eugenicist patterns in other modernist works.

Nowhere is Joyce's rejection of eugenics more apparent than in the "Nausicaa" episode. Building on the groundwork paved by discussions of race and nationality in "Cyclops," "Nausicaa" highlights the intersection of disability and gender, which is essential to the push back against eugenics. Much of this episode takes place from the point of view of Gerty, the citizen's granddaughter, whom Bloom watches from afar, masturbating, despite never having spoken to her. She notices his attention and becomes aroused as well. After they each achieve orgasm, Bloom learns that Gerty has a limp, and says to himself that he is "glad [he] didn't know it when she was on show" (U.301; XIII.775-776). Considered in light of today's #MeToo movement, this episode is disturbing. Nevertheless, this sexual encounter involving Bloom and Gerty is central to my reading of *Ulysses* as essentially anti-eugenics because of its "stigmaphillic" nature; it is an encounter between two stigmatized people (Nemecek). Nemecek claims that the "stigmaphillic space of Joyce's novel...provides an opportunity for re-imagining social relations that do not require, or even tacitly affirm, normative bodies" (177). The encounter of Bloom and Gerty is one of few in the novel where the force of "normative bodies" is not overshadowing the entire interaction. In fact, Bloom's assumption that Gerty's body is normative turns out to be false. By creating a space separate from the discriminatory gaze of Dublin, Joyce places this scene in an anti-eugenicist setting. Furthermore, though most scholarship on Gerty treats her as a pathetic punching bag or an ironic commentary on Ireland⁶, I argue that Joyce treats her with empathy and admiration, however problematically. Readings of Gerty as satire, which do nothing but treat her sexuality and sentimentality as a joke, are misogynist as well as ableist: they suppose not only that Gerty's body is less valuable than

⁶ Almost all criticism treats Gerty as a punchline in some way. She is criticized by Thomas Karr Richards for her frivolity; Plock treats her disability as a "defect [that] singles her out for a different future than the one she so desperately desires"; even more recent criticism meant to rehabilitate the ableism evident in past readings of Gerty often reads her as a negative metaphor for greater Ireland (733; 129).

others, but also that any failure in a woman's body is an absolute personal failure. I aim to valorize Gerty's disability and her gender, as Joyce does, by examining her through an anti-eugenicist lens.

Gerty and a Trinity of Mythological Women

"Nausicaa" is rife with both obvious and latent mythological parallels (as is most of *Ulysses*). These parallels characterize Gerty as a woman who should be celebrated, not ridiculed. Even the most preliminary investigation into Homeric parallels reveals Gerty and Bloom as heroic characters. In *The Odyssey*, this section finds Odysseus washed up on the beach, discovered by Phaeacian princess Nausicaa, and honored as a guest:

Since you have arrived here in our land,
You will not lack for clothes or anything
a person needs in times of desperation.
I will show you the town. The people here
are called Phaeacians, and I am the daughter
of the great king Alcinous (6.191-196).

Just as Odysseus washes up on the beach and meets Nausicaa, who proclaims her noble heritage, "Nausicaa" has Bloom arriving on the beach and encountering Gerty. This parallel, alone, makes it impossible to view this scene as unnuanced mocking and belittling. To go even further, a parallel to Nausicaa isn't the only Homeric comparison. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus asks Nausicaa "Are you divine or human? / If you are some great goddess from the sky, / you look like Zeus' daughter Artemis" (6.149-151). Gerty's own parallels to divine women are, in themselves, references to *The Odyssey*, and like Homer, Joyce uses those parallels to characterize and uplift, not to degrade.

Though Joyce tends to juxtapose the Homeric with the modern, the irony in these comparisons is not always a criticism. The comparison to Nausicaa, a classical beauty, is often

seen as a criticism of Gerty's makeup obsession and her disability, but recent readings treat it as a celebration of her own femininity. Deborah Susan McLeod writes, "Joyce rejects the idealized forms of feminine beauty depicted in both mythology and popular culture in favor of an imperfect beauty who struggles for identity amid the contradictory paradigms of modern culture" (114). In other words, Gerty's equivalence to Nausicaa is designed to highlight her uniquely modern femininity rather than to belittle her for falling short of the classical beauty to whom Joyce compares her.

Beyond Homeric parallels, Joyce delves into Irish mythology to characterize Gerty. Yet again, he undermines the anti-Irish racism that so often underpins European eugenics (and European modernism). Plock reads Gerty as an image of Cathleen ni Houlihan, an Irish mythological character most famously depicted in an eponymous play by Yeats and Lady Gregory. Yeats and Gregory depict Cathleen as an old crone in search of young men to help her fight for her land that was stolen. At the end of the play, she finally convinces a man to follow her and then appears to have transformed into a beautiful young woman. The play ends with cheers that the French have landed, here to help throw off British colonizers (which did not happen, historically, though there were hopes that it would). The play premiered in Dublin in 1902 and became popular quickly; though the myth preceded the play, the play would have been the most recent depiction of Cathleen in public consciousness, and thus be the reigning image of her character. It came out twenty years before *Ulysses* did, and, in conjunction with Joyce's ideological clash with Yeats over eugenics, Joyce's version of Cathleen, who rejects nationalist and eugenicist values, redirects Irish mythos towards a new conception of national identity instead.

Rather than alluding more literally to the myth of Cathleen ni Houlihan, Joyce evokes her image through body-centered language. His allusions to Cathleen are subtle; while Cathleen has “the walk of a queen,” Gerty has “graceful beautifully shaped legs” and a head of hair that Joyce calls her “crowning glory” (Yeats 53; U.199; XIII.698; U.286; XIII.116). Joyce’s focus on Gerty’s legs and “crown” transforms her desirable body into a symbol of an alternative, anti-eugenics Ireland.

Like Cathleen, Gerty undergoes a transformation, though hers is the reverse of Cathleen’s. She begins as a beautiful young woman and, over the course of the chapter, transforms into a girl with a limp. Plock reads the relationship between Gerty and Cathleen as one that condemns Ireland, saying, “Joyce’s nationalist symbol [Gerty] appears like a Cathleen who has lost her ability to change but instead is condemned to take on a haglike shape” (129). I find the parallels to be much more ennobling. The transformation from beautiful and alluring to disabled is not a transformation at all, nor are the two mutually exclusive. The change is all in Bloom’s head. Watching Gerty, he observes, “she walked with a certain quiet dignity characteristic of her but with care and very slowly because—because Gerty MacDowell was...Tight boots? No. She’s lame!” (U.301; XIII.769-771). Gerty has been disabled for the entirety of the episode. Furthermore, she shows herself to be perfectly capable. She walks, though slowly, unaided, and does not appear to be incapable of doing anything for herself (Henke). This transformation is not transformative, and Gerty’s limp is not the condemnation, personal or national, that Plock interprets it to be.

Cathleen is a commentary on Gerty and not the other way around. Cathleen is an embodiment of the Irish struggle for independence. The narrative she tells of a fight to regain her land speaks of claiming a home for the future rather than simply mourning the past. Cathleen’s

aging body and her disability are commentaries on the Irish ability to self-govern or fight for themselves (Quirici, “Cathleen” 78). While the audience leaves Yeats’s play with the knowledge that the French never arrived, the ahistorical ending wherein they do arrive reinforces the ever-present hope for a different future in Ireland. By depicting Gerty as this ever-future-facing Cathleen, Joyce casts Gerty, too, as an image of the future.

With Gerty filling the role of Cathleen, Bloom becomes the viscerally Irish young man called to fight for national freedom. Bloom is well established among Joyce scholars as a heroic, tenderly flawed modern depiction of Odysseus, and his position in this Irish myth also paints him as a crucial part of Ireland’s future. Together, Bloom and Gerty—a disabled young woman in touch with her sexuality and a Jewish man who has not successfully had sex with his wife in a decade—represent the hope for Irish independence. This characterization is not ironic; Joyce places them at the center of Ireland’s future, rejecting the forces of colonialism and racist nationalism, both of which prioritize birth rates among normative bodies and enforce eugenicist standards of beauty and success.

The final mythological woman Joyce weaves into this episode is the Virgin Mary. “Nausicaa” begins with an invocation: “there streamed forth at times upon the stillness the voice of Prayer to her who is her pure radiance a beacon ever to the stormtossed heart of many, Mary” (U.284; XIV.608). Continuing the episode in the same vein, Joyce alludes several times to Mary throughout the rest of “Nausicaa.” This happens both in Gerty’s own internal discourse (“of course Gerty knew Who came first and after Him the Blessed Virgin” [U.287; XIII.139-14]), and in the frequent reminders of the choir nearby singing “in supplication to the Virgin most powerful, Virgin most merciful” (U.291; XIII.303-304). Joyce juxtaposes Gerty’s blatant enjoyment of sex with Mary’s sexual purity, which he mentions throughout this episode: Gerty

calls Mary the “virgin of Virgins,” Joyce alludes to Mary’s “pure radiance,” and she is called “the virgin” more times than she is called “Mary” in this episode⁷ (U.284; XIII.6-8). Unlike Cathleen and Nausicaa, Gerty is not characterized as an image of Mary herself. Rather, Mary, whose imagery in this episode is scattered and largely rhetorical, takes the place of Athena, who is ever-present in the background of this section of *The Odyssey*. Homer’s Athena guides Nausicaa and Odysseus to each other, encouraging Nausicaa “to help Odysseus’ journey home” (6.12-13). As her replacement, Mary acts as the overseer of this episode, but rather than assisting, as Athena does, Mary is emblematic of the hegemony against which Gerty and Bloom stand out.

Mary is the ultimate eugenicist mother because she produces the ultimate eugenicist goal: a perfect baby. Jesus, free from original sin and all other impurities, is the eugenicist ideal. The parallels between original sin and hereditary illness are strong. Both are impurities present at birth, transmitted by sexual reproduction. Medieval Catholicism espoused the “religio-moral” understanding of disability, teaching that disability was a punishment for sin (Cross). Thomas Aquinas refined this belief, teaching that birth defects were specific punishment for original sin (Cross). These readings of disability and deformity provide a clear connection between Gerty and Mary; reigning ideals in Joyce’s Ireland aimed for bodies to be purified of both original sin and illness.

Furthermore, original sin echoes the moral degeneracy that eugenicists saw in working class populations, identifying moral impurity hand in hand with bodily impurity. Mary, in her role as mother, embodies the relationship between moral purity and bodily purity; she was immaculately conceived, in Catholicism, so she could be free from original sin in order to give

⁷ Of course, “The Virgin” is a standard way of referring to Mary in Catholicism, but it seems unlikely that Joyce was not meticulous in his word choice here, as with anywhere else.

birth to a child free from it. By underpinning this graphically sexual episode with imagery of Mary, Joyce subverts the popularly held image of the Virgin as “pure.” Gerty is technically a virgin, and yet impure, and that impurity is not only sexual, but bodily. And yet Joyce attaches no value judgement to either Gerty’s sexuality or her disability. As with Cathleen and Nausicaa, the contrast exists not to belittle Gerty but to ennoble her. Rather than embodying Mary, an icon who defies original sin and bodily defects, Gerty embodies both moral and bodily “degeneration.” While Irish Catholics (the citizen’s brand of Irish nationalism among them) subscribed to a eugenicist-adjacent ideology that rejects the value of the human body from birth, Joyce offers an alternative that suggests human bodies are not in need of purification.

Gerty, Bloom, and Sex

Perhaps the most memorable feature of the “Nausicaa” episode is Bloom’s and Gerty’s erotic exchange, which is central to the anti-eugenic aesthetic. Gerty’s indulging her own sexuality (and Bloom’s), as well as Bloom’s own masturbatory fantasies, are exactly the kind of behavior that stirred up eugenicist thinking in the nineteenth century. The public sexuality foregrounded in this episode highlights Joyce’s disregard for the structures which condemn sex for pleasure—structures that are eugenicist in nature. Childs points to Foucault’s discussion of the trends in sexual strictures of the nineteenth century. The state, says Childs, [s]et itself up as a supreme authority of hygienic necessity, taking up the old fears of venereal affliction, and combining them with the new themes of asepsis, and the great evolutionist myth in the recent institutions of public health; it claimed to ensure the physical rigor and moral cleanliness of the social body; it promised to eliminate defective individuals, degenerate and bastardized population. In the name of biological and historical urgency, it justified the racisms of the state (Foucault 138, qtd in Childs 13).

The trends Foucault describes here, especially those of the nineteenth century aversions to sex, may be attributed solely to Victorian prudishness. Certainly the popular conception of Galton's theories of eugenics were not entirely enthusiastic. Emel Aileen Gökyigit argues that Victorians often objected to Galton's work on religious grounds, saying "it was seen as part of the new scientific faith initiated by Darwin, his predecessors, and his followers, and it was judged largely by its role in this scientific movement" (238). Galton's work, like Darwin's, appeared to be a rejection of the religious norms that, in many ways, ruled Victorian morals. Nevertheless, even if Victorians didn't completely consciously espouse Galton's ideas, Victorian attitudes were eugenicist in effect, if not in origin. As Foucault describes, many Victorian practices and attitudes were attempts to safeguard the "physical vigor and moral cleanliness" of the population" (Foucault 138, qtd in Childs 13). This attitude towards sex, and general moral degeneracy, is clearly eugenicist.

This prudish attitude manifested especially clearly in a taboo against sexual activity that was not reproduction, which included homosexuality and masturbation. For example, a 1914 handbook on family planning called *The Science of Eugenics and Sex Life: The Regeneration of the Human Race*, says that "human life, the most sacred of all life, depends on the proper teaching of personal purity, sex-hygiene, and the science of eugenics; therefore, as moral instruction is the dominant educational need of the present generation, so the solving of sex problems transcend all others in importance" (Melendy i). The book goes on to warn against "refusing to be fruitful," that "there are very few children who have reached the age of ten or twelve years who do not know the uses to which the members of their body may be put," and giving guidance to parents on how to teach their children the appropriate use of sex (which is child bearing) (Melendy 71, 75). The brand of eugenics described by this book, which

encouraged sex, but only within marriage as a form of reproduction of healthy children, is a prime example of positive eugenics. Bloom, who has not completed a sexual encounter of the sort that might produce children in years, has fallen short of the eugenicist standard of fertility long before this scene (U.54; III.419). In this episode, Bloom's encounter with Gerty and public masturbation constitute yet another instance of Joyce's rejection of the eugenicist purity aesthetics of the Victorian period⁸.

Beyond the general sexual tones of "Nausicaa," its details exemplify specific anti-eugenics moves which are not solely aesthetic in nature. Gerty, in addition to Bloom, masturbates and achieves orgasm:

[A] little strangled cry, wrung from her, a cry that has rung through the ages. And then a rocket sprang and bang shot blind and O! then a roman candle burst and it was like a sign of O! and everyone cried O! O! in raptures and it gushed out of it (U.198; XIII.735-739)

In depicting female orgasm so explicitly, Joyce highlights the version of sex which eugenicists discard. By masturbating, Gerty is asserting agency over her own body and her sexuality, and by explicitly enjoying it, evident in the repetition of her short and bursting moans—"O!"—Joyce's use of the word "rapture," and the double entendre in the phrase "it gushed out," Gerty uses agency that is traditionally denied both to women and to the disabled under eugenics. Eugenics can often involve a removal of agency, both from the desired element of the population, who face pressure to reproduce, and from the undesired, who often face more than pressure—violence, segregation, and so on. By asserting sexual agency, Gerty rebels against eugenics not just ideologically, but materially. Victorian eugenicist sexual codes which dictated that sex was

⁸ Of course, reactions against Victorianism are apparent throughout Modernism, including in the work of writers who believed in eugenics. In Joyce's case, his anti-eugenics aesthetics were a huge part of his reaction against Victorianism.

only for reproduction of desired traits (a code which also often denied women sexual agency even in marriage), as Foucault illustrates, would have no use for the female orgasm; Joyce does.

Gerty's hinted-at relationship to the citizen is central to my navigation of Bloom's and Gerty's encounter. She remembers "grandpa Giltrap's lovely dog Garryowen that almost talked it was so human" (U.289; XIII.232-233). Furthermore, she is, as Joyce tells us, "more Giltrap than MacDowell," referring, ostensibly, to the characteristics she has inherited from her mother's side—the citizen's side. Positioned thus as a descendent the citizen, and carrying many of his physical traits, Gerty becomes an image of the very thing macho nationalism seeks to protect: young women's bodies, particularly their sexual purity. Her sexual encounter with Bloom is all the more significant, then, because she is transgressing the boundaries her grandfather so staunchly defends. Moreover, her transgression happens not just in the abstract, but with the specific man that the citizen has, just hours ago, gotten into a conflict with about Irish purity. As the unwitting bearer of her grandfather's national pride, she holds—and exerts—the power to reject that pride and embrace a new kind of Irishness and a new kind of femininity, both characterized by her own agency over her body rather than by external factors that dictate her identity without her consent. The irony that we see heavily underscoring "Cyclops" is also at play here: Gerty, the vessel of Irish purity, rejects the symbolic purity that is forced upon her. Beyond Gerty's own experience and perception of the world as a disabled person, Bloom's perception of her enriches and complicates the contra-eugenics arc of this episode. After they achieve orgasm, when Bloom notices that Gerty is lame, he reacts with a series of different responses:

Poor girl! That's why she's left on the shelf and the others did a sprint. Thought something was wrong with the cut of her jib. Jilted beauty. A defect is ten times worse in

a woman. But makes them polite. Glad I didn't know that when she was on show. Hot little devil all the same. I wouldn't mind. Curiosity like a nun or a negress or a girl with glasses (U.301; XIII.772-776)

Though his initial reactions devalue Gerty's body⁹ in a surprisingly eugenicist way ("A defect is ten times worse in a woman" echoes eugenicist ideals that women carry the majority of the reproductive responsibility [U.301; XIII.774-775]), Joyce shows us, through Bloom's internal monologue and progressing opinion of Gerty, how quickly he transforms his stance. Though the opinion he arrives at finally is not necessarily feminist, or even less ableist, it does subtly highlight the intersections between sex and eugenics. By comparing her sexual appeal to the appeal of "a nun or a negress or a girl with glasses"—in other words, a woman who is (allegedly¹⁰) voluntarily abstinent, a black woman, or a disabled woman—Bloom calls to mind the mores that dictate traditional sexual attraction, and the taboos against things like sexual contact between the races (U.301; XIII.776). Though Bloom first reacts to Gerty's disability with distaste, he does, eventually, identify sexual appeal in the taboo of their encounter, rather than in the potentially healthy children Gerty might bear him (which eugenicists would identify as the root of attraction, as Stephen Dedalus says). Thus, Bloom subverts the eugenicist ideals of sexual contact, and instead valorizes a sexual relationship rooted only in pleasure.

It is difficult to address this episode without acknowledging that Bloom violates Gerty through the non-consensual voyeurism of his own sex act. Though it is true that Gerty, eventually, becomes aware that Bloom is watching her, and enjoys his attention, Bloom is not aware of Gerty's internal monologue that appreciates his gaze. Bloom begins masturbating

⁹ Of course, sexual attraction is not actually a deciding factor in value or validation.

¹⁰ In fact, forced seclusion in nunneries is one way that negative eugenics was enforced, unwittingly, against women thought to be unworthy of reproduction.

without consent, and would have continued whether or not Gerty noticed him. Her enjoyment of his attention¹¹ does not preclude the fact that Bloom directly sexualizes her without permission; arousal does not equal consent, to say nothing of the other people present on the beach who might have felt threatened by his actions.

While I maintain that Joyce prescribes Bloom as the modern Irish hero, I do not argue that it then follows that he is a moral example that Joyce wants readers to glorify, nor do I argue that Gerty is empowered by the sexual attention she gets from Bloom, though her use of her own sexual agency may be personally empowering. Layne Parish Graig, in her article “#DisabilityToo: Bringing Disability into a Modernist #MeToo Moment,” encourages readers to “deviat[e] from the binary position of desexualized disabled body vs empowered disabled body.” Power is not a feeling, but a material reality, and while Gerty may grow in personal confidence from this encounter, she is also disempowering herself by playing into the sexualization that patriarchy expects of young women. Just as we do not have to choose between interpreting Gerty as absolutely oppressed by her disability or being absolutely empowered by her sexuality, Bloom is not entirely one thing nor the other; he is not entirely a glorified hero, nor a morally bankrupt man Joyce rejects entirely. Rather, his heroism rests on his humanity and his flaws. Joyce paints a picture of a Dublin that pushes against boundaries of propriety and taboo, rejecting the good-evil binary. Joyce’s characters do not dictate the moral landscape he hopes to see; rather, they function to resist the intrusions of church and state that impose eugenicist ideologies on people’s bodies and minds.

¹¹ To say nothing of the dubiousness of the “consent” a young woman conditioned to value male attention above all else can give, especially when she understands her body as her only source of power.

Joyce's version of Ireland, which he models in part in this episode, is not a utopia founded on "universal love" and populated by perfect people¹². A study of Joyce's work shows us that a vast body of his other characters are celebrated because of the challenges and flaws they face. Joyce valorizes Bloom and Gerty not by putting them on pedestals, but by humanizing them. He gives them not only real challenges (apparent in their bodily and ethnic difference as well as elsewhere), but also real flaws. Thus, Joyce allows his marginalized characters to become images of real people. He holds them up as depictions of Ireland's real future—not an idealized, fantasy version free from all impurity, as eugenics aims for, but an honest one. He advances an anti-eugenicist politics that offers independence (political, artistic, and social) to all—not just the kind of freedom that eugenicists hope to achieve for the privileged by stamping out the disabled, the poor, and the foreign.

Molly Bloom, Sex, and Motherhood

In many ways, "Nausicaa" lays the groundwork for the reader to encounter Molly Bloom in "Penelope," the final episode of *Ulysses*. Like Gerty, Molly is very sexual and in tune with her body¹³. Gerty fantasizes about keeping house with Bloom, while Molly lives the reality of it. Gerty imagines a home where Bloom "was so kindly and holy and often she thought and thought could she work a ruched teacosy with embroidered floral design for him as a present or a clock but they had a clock she noticed on the mantelpiece white and gold with a canarybird that came out of a little house to tell the time of day," while Molly reflects on the practicality of living with

¹² The utopia Bloom hallucinates in the "Circe" episode is reminiscent of a fascist, dictatorial society. Though thoroughly exploring this moment is beyond the scope of this paper, it bears noting that the New Bloomusalem does include the "[u]nion of all, jew, moslem, and gentile," and free love (U.399; XV.1686). Though other elements certainly suggest a eugenics tilt, it is not a black or white distinction, to say nothing of the fact that it is, indeed, a hallucination.

¹³ The agency Molly and Gerty are granted is admittedly dubious, since it is granted only when they are being overtly sexualized by Joyce (and the men in the novel).

him: “Poldy anyhow whatever he does always wipes his feet on the mat when he comes in wet or shine and always blacks his own boots and he always takes off his hat when he comes up in the street like that” (U.294; XIII.459-463; U.613; XVIII.226-227). Gerty and Molly also both worry about their looks and consider the beauty products they use. Again, Gerty’s thoughts on the subject are romantic and sentimental: “It was Madame Vera Verity, directress of the Woman Beautiful page of the Princess Novelette, who had first advised her to try eyebrowline which gave that haunting expression to the eyes, so becoming the leaders of fashion, and she had never regretted it” (U.286; XIII.109-113). On the other hand, Molly again primarily considers the practicality of the question at hand, pondering how much it costs to tend to her appearance, the question of aging, and remembering “the face lotion I finished the last of yesterday that made my skin like new” (U.618-XVIII.458-459). Perhaps most importantly for my purposes, Gerty and Bloom complete a sexual encounter, both achieving orgasm, whereas Molly and Bloom have not had sex in eleven years, since the birth and death of their son Rudy. The comparison between Gerty’s fantasies and Molly’s reality is crucial; Joyce weaponizes anti-eugenics mythology and fantasy through Gerty but finally uses the reality of Molly’s life to draw together the anti-eugenics aesthetics that underlies the entire novel.

Motherhood and wifehood have obvious ties to eugenics discourse: sex, pregnancy, and childbearing are all essential components to the genetic purification of humanity. Molly, as the mother and wife at the center of *Ulysses*, wields her womanhood against eugenics at almost every turn. The “Penelope” episode showcases Molly’s courtship and engagement to Bloom, and the process of choosing a husband and mate. While Joyce leads us to believe that Molly could have had her pick of men, listing a litany of her past lovers, ultimately she chooses Bloom. Her choice of Bloom is important to my reading not only because of his own status as an anti-

eugenics hero, but also because of her rejection of the other men in her life. Molly is almost universally lusted after by Dublin's men (which I will discuss in more detail later in this paper), and Bloom spends the day haunted by the specter of her affair. The "Sirens" episode in particular is full of reminders to Bloom that Molly will meet Blazes Boylan, the man with whom she is having an affair, at four o'clock; Bloom is tormented by this, repeatedly remembering that "at four she...". Yet despite her promiscuity, Molly decides to marry and procreate with Bloom, a dorky, artistic Jewish man, rather than with a more traditionally masculine white man who might have given her more "ideal" reproductive opportunities. Joyce walks readers through their courtship, and while Molly barely admits to a grand passion for Bloom, she does think to herself at the moment of his proposal: "as well him as any other" (U.643-644; XVIII.1603-1605). While this line may be easily read as the ironic re-telling of a very romantic moment, the specific wording matters: Joyce literally means that Bloom is just as good as any other man when it comes to being an Irish woman's partner and father to her children. Molly does not sacrifice anything in choosing Bloom over the other men she might have married.

As part of the extreme bodily detail in the "Penelope" episode, Molly describes a lot of her extra-marital sexual encounters and fantasies. She focuses most on her date that very afternoon with Boylan, her colleague, and a lot of the comparison between Bloom and Boylan highlights Bloom's superiority, though subtly. Like the citizen in "Cyclops," Boylan serves as a narrative foil to Bloom; Molly tells us that Boylan has a "tremendous big red brute of a thing," whereas Bloom, as we know, has been sexually inadequate for over a decade. Further comparing the two, Molly remarks, "I'm sure [Boylan would] have a fine strong child but I don't know Poldy has more spunk in him" (U.611; XVIII.168). Semen, here, is simultaneously a symbol of sex for pleasure and of genetic material, also evident in Molly's description of washing semen

out of herself the last time she slept with Boylan (U.611; XVIII.156). Molly is straddling the line between two versions of sex, demonstrating awareness and agency that are not traditionally allowed women under eugenicist ideologies. Furthermore, her comparison between the amount of ejaculate Bloom and Boylan produce is a moment of reflection on the (incidentally) eugenicist notion that men with “superior” genetic material perform better sexually. Molly is illustrating that the concept of sexual pleasure and the concept of sexual reproduction are separate. Moreover, while the idea that producing more semen is a macho marker of manliness, the subtle way in which Bloom bests Boylan highlights that men excluded by eugenics can easily be better fathers, have better potential for fatherhood, or perform better in any number of ways that eugenicists often attribute to the genetically “superior.”

Though Molly is sexualized by most of the men Bloom meets throughout the day, “Penelope” gives her a chance to do some sexualizing of her own. Joyce illustrates, quite clearly, how much Molly enjoys sex. She talks with anticipation about seducing young men, saying “I’d let him see my garters the new ones and make him turn red looking at him seduce him I know what boys feel” and remembering pleasurable past sexual encounters (U.610; XVIII.86-87). Molly is very confident in her use of sex to assert agency over her own body and power over men. In fact, her behavior and attitude towards sex align in a certain way with a brand of eugenics that promotes free love as a method of increasing reproduction of “desirable” traits (Robb 589). However, there is one crucial factor of Molly’s sex life that counters that model of eugenics. As Robb points out, “The higher morality of free love usually meant freedom to have babies when and with whom one liked. Freedom from babies was unthinkable” (602). Molly, on the other hand, is glad she is not pregnant. She thinks, “I made [Boylan] pull it out and do it on me considering how big it is so much the better in case any of it wasn’t washed out properly the

last time I let him finish it in” (U.611; XVII.154-157). While a certain reading of the anti-eugenicist framework might understand Rudy’s death as a eugenicist move as well as a personal tragedy, it seems unlikely that Molly still wants more children, and her agency is the truly anti-eugenicist occurrence. The free love brand of eugenics, which Irish modernists such as George Bernard Shaw ascribed to, treated sex as a means to a desirable end, whereas, for Molly, sex is the end unto itself (Robb 590).

Molly’s dominion over her body, over her sexuality, and over her marriage is crucial to this reading. As Gisela Block says, “Most of the scientific and pseudoscientific racism, especially its mythology of hereditary traits, is concerned with the supposedly ‘natural’ or ‘biological’ domains in which women are prominent—body, sexuality, procreation, [and] education” (402). Eugenics is necessarily interested in the behavior and health of women at childbearing age (Molly is thirty-two) because of the essential role they play in both the promotion and prevention of reproduction; eugenicist projects of various types tend to encourage reproduction and motherhood, often going so far as to offer financial incentives to women who have more children (Block 402). As a white, able-bodied woman of appropriate age, Molly would be considered ideal for eugenicist purposes. By taking ownership of her sexuality and indeed engaging in behaviors that are likely to lead to reproduction, but then avoiding pregnancy and further motherhood, Molly stands in contrast to the eugenicist backdrop that dictates that female sexuality is only for the propagation of healthy children.

Furthermore, Molly’s active sex life and her broad sexual appeal are especially central to the anti-eugenics reading because she is fat. As with many other kinds of bodily difference, people even before the nineteenth century often “saw fatness as a largely hereditary defect...and, for the good of the race, discouraged marrying fat people without first checking their family

history” (Forth 262-263). The emergence of eugenics as an actual field did nothing to change this attitude; Louis Dublin created “ideal weight” charts, originally for MetLife Insurance in the early twentieth century, which later became popularized and evolved into what we know today as BMI charts (Strings 196). Dublin was a statistician hired to save money for MetLife, and a eugenicist—but not a doctor or anatomist (Strings 197). These anti-fat trends are, of course, central to modern beauty standards, which demand thinness from all women.

In contrast to today’s standards, Molly is both undeniably fat and undeniably sexy to the men of Dublin. In “Penelope,” she thinks “my belly is a bit too big,” and talks about her need to slim down: “I wonder is that antifat any good” (U.617; XVIII.450). Heather Cook Callow suggests that this fat version of Molly is a recent development, and that when men express lust for her, they are remembering a younger, thinner, version of her. Callow cites evidence that Molly has recently gained weight, and says she is “beginning to exceed the limits of voluptuousness” (466). This reading of Molly’s body and her sex appeal is erroneous; the process that Callow describes as “our sense of her beauty dim[ming]” is the process of Molly gaining weight, and assumes that weight gain precludes attractiveness, though the text has little evidence that the men who lust after Molly are not attracted to her anymore¹⁴ (467). On the contrary, almost every man that lusts after Molly mentions her size. In “Hades,” John Henry Menton fondly remembers dancing with her, calling her “a good armful” (U.87; VI.697-698). In “Sirens,” Simon Dedalus and Boylan discuss her beauty and call her “a buxom lassy,” and in “Wandering Rocks,” McCoy remembers with glee being pressed up against her in a carriage, saying “every jolt the bloody car gave I had her bumping up against me. Hell’s delights! She has

¹⁴ Callow points to the narrator of “Cyclops,” who calls Molly a “fat heap,” as evidence that Molly is now unattractive. However, that same narrator is malicious towards Bloom, too, and hardly a reliable narrator. We may trust him on the size of Molly’s body, but that does not prove that she is absolutely ugly to everybody else.

a fine pair, God bless her. Like that,” gesturing with his hands to show the size of her breasts (U.193; X.557-560). It seems that neither Joyce nor the men in Dublin treat “fat” as the antithesis of “attractive.”

While lusting after a fat woman does not necessarily signal respect or validation, the sexual attraction that Joyce highlights is central to the anti-eugenicist glorification of Molly because of the central part sex plays in eugenicist ideology. Her sexual appeal doesn’t validate her personhood, but it is another example of Joyce’s depiction of sex as a personal choice, and an act of pleasure, rather than a function of perpetuating eugenicist ideals. As a fat woman, Molly would be the target of eugenicist rhetoric that says she is not an ideal mate; Joyce counters that rhetoric by showing her as woman with broad sexual appeal, sexual agency, and a marriage that fails to fulfill the eugenicist prime directive (which is to reproduce and make as many healthy, white babies as possible). While Molly and Bloom do, of course, have children, after the death of Rudy they notably did not have any more children. Rudy and Milly are both the mixed-ethnicity children of half-breed parents, and though some might read Rudy’s death as a rather pro-eugenicist move—killing off the sickly Jewish child¹⁵. Nevertheless, even that notion works within the eugenicist framework that views birthrates and survival rates as the ultimate marker of success. To define anti-eugenics as a movement to promote the birth rates among disabled (etc.) people would simply be to reinforce eugenics with a new definition of genetic desirability. An anti-eugenicist understanding of this family understands Molly and Bloom as individuals, allowed to exist only as themselves, rather than as machines of reproduction.

“Penelope” illustrates and reinforces the anti-eugenics that “Nausicaa” sets in motion.

Ulysses is set on June 16, 1904, the day on which Joyce went on a first date with his future wife

¹⁵ Rudy’s poor health is another point of contrast between Bloom and Boylan, whom Molly conjectures would make a “fine strong child” (U.611; XVII.168).

Nora Barnacle; Ellmann wrote, in Joyce's biography, that "[t]o set *Ulysses* on this date was Joyce's most eloquent if indirect tribute to Nora." Molly's place at the center of this episode makes her the culmination of this ultimate love letter. "Penelope" reinscribes many of the anti-eugenicist elements I've already discussed, but primarily in terms of sexuality. By characteristically refusing to sanitize his depiction of the ultimate woman, who, in Homer's *Odyssey*, is exemplary through her chastity and fidelity, Joyce glorifies the "impure" reality of humanity rather than a fictionalized eugenicist ideal.

Conclusion

Many modernists' responses to *Ulysses*, from fans and critics alike, put their eugenicist impulses on display. Woolf disliked Joyce's "masculine approach to the physical and sexual aspects of life¹⁶" (Briggs 133). In a letter to Sylvia Beech, Shaw called *Ulysses* "a revolting record of a disgusting phase of civilization" and compared its depiction of Dublin to "trying to make a cat clean by rubbing its nose in its own filth." These reactions are clear indicators of the disgust at sex, the human body, and urban "degeneration" that often acted as a dog whistle for underlying eugenics.

Even modernists who were fans of both Joyce and *Ulysses* betrayed their eugenicist leanings in their own reactions to the text. Ezra Pound was a friend and mentor to Joyce, and had a great deal of influence over *Ulysses*; he urged Joyce to leave out some of the more explicit moments of the novel, explaining that "excrement will prevent people from noticing the quality of things contrasted" and that Joyce "waste[d] the violence" (Piepenbring). Pound's nudges towards subtlety and away from frankness about the body bely his eugenicist attitudes towards

¹⁶ This attitude may appear to be merely the reaction of an upper class, sheltered white woman, but considering Woolf's penchant for eugenics in her work, it's hard to separate her reaction to *Ulysses* from her related ideologies.

art, and the knowledge that Pound ended his life as a full-blown fascist hardly lets us discount the eugenicist tones of this feedback.

Beyond the modernists' response to *Ulysses*, the popular response was also rife with eugenicist undertones. As with Pound, popular reactions consisted mainly of disgust. It was "Nausicaa" which led to the termination of the serialization of *Ulysses* in *The Little Review*, under a law that prohibited the distribution of obscene content through the mail (Ellmann, James Joyce 502). As Quirici points out, much of the public outrage that Joyce faced, including the *Ulysses* obscenity trial, was rooted in ableism¹⁷. People were offended by Joyce's suggestion that bodies were not to be hidden, purified, or shamed, but might merely exist, in all their human grossness. Though it is true that Molly and Gerty are both women being sexualized and used as pawns by Joyce, rather than granted true agency, the fact remains that Joyce implemented their characterization as part of an anti-eugenics motif.

I do not claim that every explicit discussion of the human body is an instance of Joyce purposefully taunting eugenicist ideologies. Neither do I expect that all criticism of *Ulysses* was primarily or fundamentally eugenicist in nature—not even all the distaste for excrement, sex, or menstruation. But the kind of handwringing over the moral implications of depicting bodies on the page, which Joyce experienced as early as his first publications of some of the stories in the *Dubliners* collection, were deeply rooted in misguided eugenicist concerns about moral degeneration in Europe's cities. The emerging fear of a morally degenerate population and the growing working class was thinly disguised disgust for the poor, the sick, and people of color, and that disgust is, indeed, eugenicist.

¹⁷ Quirici also argues that Joyce responded to this particular brand of ableism by putting even more obscenity and bodily functions in *Finnegan's Wake*.

The end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries changed the course of history. Industrialization and the emerging middle class mitigated a lot of the power that the church and the British empire had; the ruling classes were no longer as influential as they had been. Many modernists turned to eugenics as the new authority for how to organize the world: “Eugenics was positioned by writers from the 1880s to the 1930s to assume responsibility for a creation recently orphaned by the death of God,” Childs writes (4). While some other modernists were reacting against Victorianism with approval of eugenics, Joyce reacted with almost radical filth. As the Empire and the Church, the two great masters that Stephen Dedalus serves, lost power, Joyce rejected the eugenics that reinscribed the totalitarian model of colonizers in favor of a humanistic ideal that treated ordinary, flawed people as the new ideal.

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