

“The Fascination of What's Difficult”: The Adaptive Function of Difficulty in *Ulysses*

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## Abstract

This thesis is based on the premise that questions about human affairs, including questions about art, need to be considered in the context of our deep history as a species. Darwinian theories of human existence have given scholars in evolutionary psychology the chance to analyze human cognition, emotions, and behaviour by considering the trajectory of our evolution and how that has shaped our current situation. Taking a Darwinian literary approach, this thesis tries to answer one of the main questions about James Joyce's novel, *Ulysses*: What is the purpose behind a style that many find so difficult in this novel? In order to answer this question, I explore the adaptive purposes of literature (in general) and stylistic experimentation (in particular). I argue that art can be seen as a form of sexual display where stylistic difficulty and originality are ways of indicating fitness for survival. In this way, both the author and readers of *Ulysses* spend their time and energy to produce and consume the difficult style of *Ulysses* because they find pleasure in an activity that is adaptively useful. Furthermore, I suggest that earning social status could have been an evolutionary motive for both the authors and readers of difficult modernist texts, including *Ulysses*. To support this, I show how gaining social status is part of other sexual ornamentation that handicap the displayer by imposing excessive difficulty in terms of the time and energy needed to put on those displays of fitness.

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## **Acknowledgment**

First, I need to acknowledge that the phrase in the title of my thesis, “The Fascination of What’s Difficult,” is taken from a poem by W.B. Yeats.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Stephen Ross, who was so wonderfully supportive throughout the process of writing this thesis. His great and profound insights helped shaped this thesis and his unstinting support made it possible for me to finish this project through real hardships. I also would like to thank my previous supervisor, Dr. Lincoln Shlensky, who remained a great mentor whether he had a supervisory relationship with me or not. Finally, I send my thanks and love to my partner Parisa who read through several drafts of this thesis and always gave me great suggestions and ideas.

**Dedication**

*To Parisa,*

*whose love and support makes everything possible!*

## Introduction

*Ulysses* is a unique novel in many ways. Almost everything about this book, from its shocking content to its complicated and experimental form, stirred controversy around the time of its publication, and today, a century later, it still continues to be seen as an unordinary book. It is one of the well-known<sup>1</sup> literary works of the twentieth century, and yet it is arguably more talked about than read.<sup>2</sup> The history of its publication is replete with scandal, and some of its content has been among the most controversial in literature. Explicit references to aspects of human nature that sounded “immoral” to its early-twentieth-century audience turned *Ulysses* into one of the most notorious literary works in history. The story of *Ulysses*, despite its ostensible mundaneness, reveals things about human nature that many found, and continue to find, shockingly graphic and obscene. However, it is not only the flagrant sexual and bodily references that have made *Ulysses* stand out. Its style, increasingly complicated with distortions, omissions, and sudden shifts, is still considered one of the most difficult among literary works. As subjective as this claim sounds to be, it is supported by a history of annotations, summaries, and guidebooks that have accompanied *Ulysses* to help its intimidated readers “get through” its dense, reference-heavy, and complex style. While some critics see the long tradition of writing guides for *Ulysses* as a way of compounding the problem rather than solving it<sup>3</sup>, most readers’

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Groden (2010) refers to a poll in 1998, in which *Ulysses* was picked as “the English-language novel of the century” (p. 106).

<sup>2</sup> Renowned Joycean scholar, Derek Attridge (2004), makes the same claim in his book, *James Joyce's Ulysses*. In “The Complex Simplicity of *Ulysses*,” Michael Groden talks about the book’s reputation “as a difficult, even unreadable, book” (p. 106). Groden believes that the book was “branded” as inherently difficult from the early years, and quotes the influential Anglo-Irish figure, Shane Leslie, decreeing that “as a whole, the book must remain impossible to read” (p. 107), a status that Groden believes still persists today.

<sup>3</sup> In “How to Read James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (and Why You Should Avoid “How-to” Guides Like This One),” Edwin Turner (2010) argues that summaries, annotations, guides, and lectures that try to explain *Ulysses* actually weigh it down and take the pleasure out of the experience of reading.

experience of reading *Ulysses* corroborates that the need for guides is not completely unjustifiable.

While some consensus exists on the difficulty of *Ulysses*, the various and overlapping sources of this difficulty make it hard to attribute it either to the form or the content of the novel. The Homeric parallels and other allusions, the interior monologue and other narrative techniques, the shifting styles of final episodes, and Joyce's withholding of key information contribute to the novel's difficulty on both structural and conceptual levels. What makes *Ulysses* a unique and difficult novel seems to lie beyond the binary of form and content, which becomes ineffective when it comes to discussing *Ulysses*'s difficulty. Rather than either form or content, it is more of a Joycean *style*, found in both what Joyce says and the way he says it, that has made *Ulysses* unique and difficult. In this way, even the content, or lack thereof, of Joyce's writing is part of his style. The fact that little happens in *Ulysses* plotwise is one factor that influences the shockingness of the book's elaborate form. The concept of a story about nothing was used as a creative strategy by Joyce long before *Seinfeld* – a popular sitcom that joked about being “a show about nothing” – albeit with higher levels of erudition and sophistication. Providing a survey of *Ulysses* criticism over six decades, Sultan (1987) sees "a single continuous tradition" in which the stylistic strategies of the text (what he calls the "idiolectic" elements) are more important than what happens in the story. He refers to Carl Jung and Wolfgang Iser, as representatives of the novel's old and new criticism, as critics who have ruled out the content as "nothing" and "an end to representation"<sup>4</sup> (p. 265). Also, much of the content that Joyce does produce in *Ulysses*, and

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<sup>4</sup> This Joycean quality is not limited to *Ulysses*, as Joyce's other works, which might not share the same formal experimentations as *Ulysses*, still represent the same difficulty mainly due to their lack of a conventional plot. Burgess (1965) notes that Joyce's earlier works share the same "difficulty" as *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*: "The stories in *Dubliners* are different from the stories of O. Henry, Guy de Maupassant, and W. Somerset Maugham: nothing seems to happen in them, there are no plots, they are not really stories at all" (p. 19).

he produces a whole lot of it, from his countless references to ancient and modern history, literary allusions, geographical facts, Dublin characters, etc. eventually constitute the overall style of the book alongside more “formal” techniques like shifting narrative techniques, peculiar use of language, violation of English syntax, use of difficult and coined words, and verbal puzzles. It is all of these qualities that constitute the style of *Ulysses*, and they permeate the whole book whether they are categorized under form or content. This more general quality of Joyce’s writing is what I consider his “style,” and I believe it is the main contributor to *Ulysses*’s difficulty. Therefore, whenever in this thesis I refer to the “style” of *Ulysses*, I am using it as an encompassing term that subsumes both the content and form of the novel. The inclusiveness in the definition of style allows me to untangle my discussion from the false dichotomy, in the case of *Ulysses*, of form and content and instead focus more on the pervading and overlapping qualities that make *Ulysses* a unique and difficult Joycean text.

It is in the context of this broadened definition that I claim *Ulysses* is primarily about style. It is remembered for its stylistic innovations that violate the norms of literary traditions. Not only does Joyce turn his novel into a museum of different literary (and sometimes nonliterary) styles, but he also highlights his own ways of representation and language use throughout the book. The narrative takes a revolutionary approach in telling the story with free and random movements inside and outside the characters’ minds, jumping from thought to thought and only giving a partial account of the happenings. Furthermore, the events that do get narrated are in many cases blurred with a unique syntax that shuffles the order of the words, if not chopping them off mid-sentence and leaving thoughts incomplete. Puns, palindromes, limericks, and other kinds of tireless verbal riddles and wordplays puzzle the reader even more on the sentence-level. In addition to such formal difficulties, the content of *Ulysses* substantially

contributes to its obscurity. It is true that the main plot of *Ulysses* is not that complicated at all; however, the sheer amount of details Joyce injects into this rather thin plot inflates it almost to the point of explosion. Countless inter-/intra-textual references, the flood of facts about science, philosophy, Dublin, June 16, and English literature and language, all further obscure the story.

This has made *Ulysses* an unusually difficult novel, one that is deliberately so, and this calls for explanations. However, *Ulysses* criticism has rarely addressed the issue of difficulty per se over the decades after its publication. The early criticism of *Ulysses* in the years immediately following its publication is mainly *descriptive*, focusing more on decoding the difficulties of the novel rather than analyzing their implications. Stuart Gilbert's *James Joyce's Ulysses* (1930) and Frank Budgen's *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses* (1934) are among the firsts of *Ulysses*'s descriptive criticism. Appearing even before the novel became available in English-speaking countries, such works turned into the classics of *Ulysses* criticism and set the stage for many more similar works, most notably the extremely detailed and encyclopedic annotations of Don Gifford, first published 1974.

As Gillespie and Gillespie note in *Recent Criticism of James Joyce's Ulysses*, the popularity of post-structural and deconstructionist criticism in the 1970s provided more diverse and less conclusive interpretations of *Ulysses*. The introduction of the revolutionary ideas of French thinkers like Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Roland Barthes, heavily influenced the criticism of Joyce's novel, taking it toward the same way of interpreting the world, in which the whole tradition of Western thinking was shattered by Derrida et al. Colin McCabe's *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (1979) is the exemplar of the post-structuralist approach to Joyce, which sees the unconventional aspects of the novel as proof for the lack of a fixed "truth," "centre," "presence," "signified," and "identity." For instance, comparing both *Ulysses* and

Joyce's earlier works with the more traditional writings of George Eliot, McCabe takes Joyce's lack of punctuation to separate speech from narration as a way of refusing to privilege one discourse over another. Referring to "Cyclops" as an example, he contends that "any hope of meta-narrative is constantly destroyed by a counter-text which, far from setting up a position of judgment for the reader, merely proliferates the languages available" (p. 100). Interpretations like this, and later, psycho-sexual and political implications inspired by the works of Foucault and Althusser, set the tone for a sizable portion of *Ulysses* criticism<sup>5</sup>, which while offering inviting and exciting possibilities in many aspects, blocked others. By carefully mapping the revolutionary style of *Ulysses* onto the tenets of post-structuralism's war on representation and meaning, the deconstructionist criticism of *Ulysses* offered mainly progressive motivations for Joyce's experiments as means of defying the conventional modes of representation, thus discouraging criticism that might have wanted to interpret the stylistic innovations of *Ulysses* as more concrete and tangible results of exhibitionism and self-indulgence by a sociobiological being that is the author.

However, both Sultan (1987) and Gillespie and Gillespie (2000) acknowledge a third phase in the criticism of *Ulysses*, in which the novel is interpreted in more concrete terms compared to the post-structural zeal to deconstruct concepts, representation, and sign. Taking a more sociological and reader-based approach, this group of critical works on *Ulysses* turned their attention to issues of gender, religion, and colonialism, among other things; but instead of approaching them from an abstract angle, they regarded these issues as entities of human beings'

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<sup>5</sup> Among the most notable post-structuralist works that followed McCabe's classic are Marilyn French's *The Book as World: James Joyce's Ulysses* (1976), Hugh Kenner's *Joyce's Voices* (1979), *Post-Structuralist Joyce: Essays from the French* (1984) edited by Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer; Karen Lawrence's *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses* (1981), and Roy Gottfried's *Art of Joyce's Syntax* (1980).

life as social and biological entities<sup>6</sup>. Besides some of the biographical works on *Ulysses* and Joyce – like Richard Ellmann’s *James Joyce* (1959) and Kevin Birmingham’s *The Most Dangerous Book: The Battle for James Joyce's Ulysses* (2014) – this group of critical works on *Ulysses* provides the most relevant information on the social and biological context of *Ulysses*’s production and reception.

While *Ulysses*’s criticism does provide a multidimensional understanding of the novel and the mechanics of its style, it rarely drills down to expose the root causes of such stylistic difficulties. Even when it does directly address the issue of difficulty, it remains mainly descriptive in explicating the difficulty itself, rather than interrogating its motives<sup>7</sup>. Why would someone work so hard to engineer such an excessively extravagant style that is so difficult to read? What are the motivations of an author who is so obviously deliberate in compounding his style that, according to his biographers, consulted various sources to insert stylistic “enigmas” in his “monster-novel”?<sup>8</sup> In addition, what are the motivations of the few generations of readers

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<sup>6</sup> Suzette Henke and Elaine Unkeless’s book, *Women in Joyce* (1982), became a pioneering book that started a previously-absent tradition of feminist criticism of *Ulysses*; Richard Brown’s *James Joyce and Sexuality* (1985) reintroduced Joyce as a sexual being and resituated his writing as engaging with the sexual questions of the period and environment in which Joyce lived; *Joyce in America: Cultural Politics and the Trials of Ulysses* (1993) by Jeffery Segall started the discussion of the social and cultural environment in which *Ulysses* was canonized, becoming the flag-bearer of subsequent works like *James Joyce and Censorship: the Trials of Ulysses* (1998) by Paul Vanderham and Kevin Birmingham’s *The Most Dangerous Book: the Battle for James Joyce's Ulysses* (2014).

<sup>7</sup> Starting from the early years after the publication of *Ulysses*, descriptive “keys” (as Valery Larbaud said: *Ulysses* “has a key... it is, I venture to say, in the door, or rather on the cover” (As cited in Sultan, 1987, p. 262) catalogued not just the Homeric parallels, but other allusions, designs, and schemata in the novel. Some of the most important critical works on *Ulysses*, Gilbert’s *James Joyce’s Ulysses* (1930), Harry Blamires’s *The New Bloomsday Book* (1996), and *ReJoyce* (1965) by Anthony Burgess, do the same, remaining at a descriptive level of interpreting the difficulty of *Ulysses*.

<sup>8</sup> Joyce himself calls *Ulysses* a “damned monster-novel” (As cited in Ellmann, 1975, p. 271). Richard Ellmann (1959/1982) has documented some of the letters Joyce wrote to his aunt Josephine while composing *Ulysses*, in which he asks her to collect and send him detailed information about Dublin. Frank Budgen’s *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses* (1934) also offers a vivid account of Joyce’s conscious attempts to elaborate *Ulysses* “like an engineer at work with compass and slide-rule” (p. 123), only with Thom’s directory, Dublin maps, newspapers, and philosophical books by his side while penning *Ulysses*. Most famously, Joyce confessed to the translator of “Penelope” about his intentions to make *Ulysses* difficult: “I’ve put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that’s the only way of insuring one’s immortality” (Ellmann, 1982, p. 521).

who have painstakingly struggled to make sense of this “monster-novel,” resorting to annotations and guidebooks to understand it?

To ask such questions is to step into the ontology of the novel and literature in general; and therefore, one strategy would be to take a step back and investigate the purpose of literature in the first place. Why do humans have literature? And what are the most important theories on the purpose of literature? Most such theories fall on either side of Horace’s binary of “instruct and delight,” covering a range from Plato’s skeptical view of illusory mimesis and his emphasis on moral truth to the modern movements of “*l’art pour l’art*,” with their devotion to imagination and total rejection of any utilitarian function for literature. While these theories do discuss the root causes of literature, they fail to consider one aspect of the root: the deep history of the human mind. How can we explain the purpose of literature – and in particular, the revolutionizing literary styles of works like *Ulysses* – from the perspective of the human mind’s evolution? What are the evolutionary explanations for our tendencies toward imaginative forms in the first place, and our fascination with a stylistically difficult novel like *Ulysses*? As a species, what has driven us along our evolutionary path toward creating and enjoying such complex and challenging modes of literary representation? None of the traditional theories of aesthetics approach literature as the product of an evolving biological being that has developed dispositions through a process of natural selection. According to evolutionary principles, living organisms’ actions are driven by, and therefore are explainable through, the core motives of survival and inclusive fitness. Evolutionary psychology has extended those principles to our emotions and intellectual properties, interpreting them in the context of their adaptive functions. If we accept that our behaviors, emotions, and intellectual products can be accounted for by evolution just like our physiological features, then I would like to ask what the evolutionary

explanations for the difficult style of *Ulysses* would be. The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is to use evolutionary principles to unearth the adaptive purposes of literature (in general) and stylistic experimentation (in particular), in order to provide fresh answers for the reasons behind the difficulty of *Ulysses*.

Since Charles Darwin's (1859) prediction in *The Origin of Species*, where he foresaw "open fields for far more important researches" in which "Psychology will be based on a new foundation" (p. 488), there has been a line of research that has tried to bring the knowledge of biological evolution – or that of sciences in general according to E. O. Wilson<sup>9</sup> – into our understanding of the humanities. The idea of "consilience" has provided many opportunities to use scientific knowledge to provide an alternative understanding of human experience, including literature. As the Darwinian literary critic Joseph Carroll points out in his interview with DiSalvo (2009), "All things human, including the products of the human imagination, simply had to be conceived within the total evolutionary development of all living things" (para. 40), and therefore they should be analyzed with a consideration of that evolutionary development. In *Evolution and Literary Theory*, Joseph Carroll explains that we share some "innate psychological structures – perceptual, rational, and affective – [that] have evolved through an adaptive process of natural selection and that these structures regulate the mental and emotional life of all living organisms, including human beings" (p. 2). This means that all mental activities, including art and imagination, are affected by evolutionary motives and dispositions that we have carried for hundreds of thousands of years. Acknowledging this, according to Carroll, will allow us to "[extend] evolutionary explanations into social and cultural areas" (As cited in DeSalvo, 2009,

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<sup>9</sup> Renowned biologist and the founder of sociobiology, Edward O. Wilson, defines the idea of consilience – linking our knowledge of scientific facts to our understanding of human condition – at length in a book called *Consilience: The unity of knowledge* published in 1998.

para. 5). Evolutionary psychology, in particular, has provided a wealth of knowledge on the origins of mental propensities, including the art instinct. Scholars such as Edward O. Wilson, Steven Pinker, Michelle Sugiyama, and Dennis Dutton with diverse backgrounds ranging from biology, cognitive science, anthropology, and philosophy of art have provided new insights on the origin of aesthetics, which although in their early stages of development, can provide alternative ways of understanding the arts. In addition, literary critics like Joseph Carroll, Brian Boyd, and Jonathan Gottschall have taken aesthetic evolutionary theories one step ahead by adapting them to discuss literary works. In *On the Origin of Stories*, Boyd summarizes the main objective of Literary Darwinians: “to offer an account of fiction (and of art in general) that takes in our widest context for explaining life, evolution” (p. 11). This group of scholars hopes, by approaching cultural phenomena from a new perspective, to offer new explanations for the different aspects of literary works.

Surprisingly, Darwinian literary critics have not been vigorous in using their interdisciplinary theories to read some of the most challenging works in the literary canon. While there are studies that apply evolutionary theories to the works of Matthew Arnold, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and Thomas Hardy, instances of using the evolutionary knowledge to make sense of stylistically challenging works by the likes of William Faulkner, T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce are still lacking. The small handful of studies that try to apply Darwinian notions to the works of Joyce do not tackle the question of stylistic difficulty and the evolutionary motives behind it directly<sup>10</sup>. This is partly because the biocultural critics have not narrowed their explanations to account for style, and even less so for experimental styles. Most

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<sup>10</sup> Some examples of these insufficient applications are: “Joyce, Darwin and Literary Evolution” by John Nash (2013); “‘Variability in Every Tongue’: Joyce and the Darwinian Narrative” by Paul Bowers (1999); “‘The Esthetic Instinct in Action’: Charles Darwin and Mental Science in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*” by Sandra Tropp.

of their theories on the adaptive functions of literature address the phenomenon in its most general and basic forms, in most cases limiting their scope to primitive art. Wilson and Geoffrey Miller are among the Darwinian critics who do offer evolutionary explanations for literary forms, but as I will show in the next chapters, their theories only cover the primitive forms of art and storytelling and retreat when it comes to the more modern stylistic experimentations in literature. Therefore, the main purpose of this thesis is to advance the current evolutionary theories of (literary) aesthetics to go beyond generic concepts of art (and literature) in order to use them to explain the unique style of *Ulysses*. I am interested in seeing if our knowledge of human evolution, particularly in relation to the evolution of aesthetic style, can explain the stylistic experimentations that make *Ulysses* a difficult novel to read. I argue that aesthetic form in general, and experimental styles in particular, have adaptive functions that can be explained by our knowledge of evolution. I believe that taking this fresh perspective will enrich the scholarly criticism of *Ulysses* by employing the explanatory power of evolutionary literary studies, which has been overlooked by other critics.

In the first chapter, I review the most venerable Darwinian theories of art and literature to assess their explanatory power in justifying the style of *Ulysses*. Many evolutionary theorists of art regard narrative as a universal human disposition that has evolved as a way of promoting human *normative values* and therefore consolidating *social order*. They argue that stories have evolved as a way of recording and practicing the normative elements of human nature through offering a *simulated reality*. While showing the inadequacy of such theories in accounting for the putatively disunifying qualities of the novel (in both its unorthodox content and form), I will explain the extents to which they can explain *Ulysses* as a “simulated reality” that helps to consolidate elements of human nature. In one of the few studies that directly address the question

of difficulty in modernism and *Ulysses*, Leonard Diepeveen (2003) notes that "For many of modernism's proponents, difficult art was valuable because it accurately reflected the human mind, particularly the modern human mind" (p. 105). Diepeveen notes that interior monologue, a major contributor to the difficulty of *Ulysses*, was deemed by modernist writers as a very suitable device to accurately represent the working of the human mind. He quotes Edmund Wilson as typical of many who believed that *Ulysses* was "perhaps the most faithful X-ray ever taken of the ordinary human consciousness" (p. 105). In Chapter One, I will consider the biological mimesis of *Ulysses* by drawing on the ideas of the sociobiologist Edward O. Wilson to show how artistic techniques borrow from human nature and are influenced by the evolution of our brain.

In the second chapter, I draw on the theories of the evolutionary psychologist Geoffrey Miller, who sees the evolution of the human mind and its artistic products in the light of sexual selection. In *The Mating Mind*, Miller explains how sexual motives can have initiated our intellectual and artistic tendencies. According to his theories, human art and other animals' ornamentation are *wasteful* displays whose biological rationale can only be accounted for through their advantages in showcasing the displayer's superior genes. Seeing the products of the human mind as sexual displays that indicate the brain's fitness, Miller offers a detailed study of different art forms, including literature, and how they fit this evolutionary model. Among the key concepts of Miller's argument are the issues of "excessiveness" and "cost" as what guarantee the validity of fitness indicators. In *The Difficulties of Modernism*, Diepeveen (2003) identifies "excess" as a defining quality of difficult texts like *Ulysses*. Mostly through narrating the early negative reactions to the excessiveness of *Ulysses* as an unnecessarily dense, extravagant novel, Diepeveen points exactly to the same stylistic features that I will focus on to interpret the novel's complexity through evolutionary theories. Besides excessive complexity, he notes that many of

Joyce's contemporary critics attacked the absurdity and arbitrariness of styles in *Ulysses*, dismissing it as a random combination of words that fails miserably in communicating meaning or representing aesthetic values.<sup>11</sup> In this chapter, I carefully analyze the concepts of *excess*, *uselessness*, *arbitrariness*, and *complexity* to investigate the possibility of understanding the exhibitionist qualities of *Ulysses*'s style in light of Miller's theories of art as sexual displays.

Furthermore, I go beyond Miller's argument by expanding the concept of "cost," which he sees mostly as "excessiveness," to answer potential criticism of this argument that might question the attribution of wasteful displays of extravagance as art's sole defining feature. I show how a widened definition of cost can account for different aesthetic innovations besides excess and elaboration, in this way providing explanations for other challenging stylistic characteristics of *Ulysses*. Most importantly, I expand the concept of cost to include aesthetic experimentations that lead to *originality*. Diepeveen (2003) notes that the technical complexities of a text like *Ulysses* were seen as useful and necessary "experimentations" which led to new "discoveries."<sup>12</sup> I will consider the concept of discovery and *inventiveness* as a major historical manifestation of art and will situate it within Miller's theories of sexual choice as a way of validating fitness indicators. In "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," T. S. Eliot (2005) emphasizes the importance of *Ulysses*'s originality, stating that *Ulysses* made an "advance" and that was "a step toward making the modern world possible for art" (p. 167). My evolutionary argument to account for the artistic

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<sup>11</sup> Diepeveen (2003) quotes an article from the *Time* magazine of 1923 that reviews the publication of *Waste Land* and *Ulysses*, "There is a new kind of literature ... whose only obvious fault is that no one can understand it .... To the uninitiated it appeared that Mr. Joyce had taken some half million assorted words - many such as are not ordinarily heard in reputable circles - shaken them up in a colossal hat, laid them end to end" (As cited in Diepeveen, 2003, p. 14). In addition, Diepeveen quotes "A reviewer of *Ulysses* [who] claimed that 'As a work of art we can compare it with nothing but that picture that provoked laughter in the galleries a few years ago, 'Nude Descending a Staircase,' in which there was neither nude nor staircase and where art was the only thing that was descending'" (p. 18).

<sup>12</sup> T. S. Eliot defended *Ulysses* by claiming that Joyce's use of Homer "has the importance of a scientific discovery" (As cited in Diepeveen, 2003, p. 99). Diepeveen also quotes the novelist, Thomas Wolfe, who referred to *Ulysses*'s style as having "the difficulty which every new and original work creates" (p. 113).

qualities of *Ulysses* focuses on exactly the same feature as the key to understanding the adaptive functions of difficulty in the novel. I show how the complexity of *Ulysses* is a way of deviating from the norm to achieve originality as a historical manifestation of “cost” to validate fitness indicators. Finally, I will consider the affective qualities of *Ulysses* as a novel that despite its wild stylistic experiments remains powerful in creating pathos. As Groden (2010) notes, “Under all the technical virtuosity ... in *Ulysses*, there remains at its heart the poignant story of a couple” (p. 123). Relying on my new definition of cost, I will explain how the novel’s affect can be interpreted within the evolutionary framework of seeing art as fitness-indicating sexual displays.

In my third and last chapter, I build on Miller’s theories of art as sexual display to investigate the possibility of social status motives behind the complexity of *Ulysses*. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu and John Guillory’s theories of “cultural capital,” I simultaneously advance and bring together the evolutionary theories of art that I have developed in the previous chapters to account for the adaptive functions of difficulty in *Ulysses*. Diepeveen (2003) notes that the complex aesthetics that high modernists developed was “self serving, not so much a universal aesthetics as one peculiarly tailored for the kinds of art they produced” (p. 241). Quoting Joyce’s famous claim that his inserting of “so many enigmas and puzzles” into *Ulysses* was “the only way of ensuring [his] immortality,” Diepeveen points to the *value* and *profitability* of such difficulties. In this chapter, I take the concepts of value and profitability in regard to the complexity of *Ulysses*’s style and will interpret them in terms of social status as a closely related concept to the dynamics of sexual selection and indicating fitness discussed in Chapter Two. Sticking to the key concept of “cost” as a defining feature of sexual displays, I demonstrate how the biological give-and-take cycle that starts with displays of excess and expenditure is completed with payback in the form of social status. Surveying Joyce’s life, his oeuvre, and the

aesthetic norms and values of modernism, I will look for evidence that can support the function of difficulty in *Ulysses* as a means of gaining status and cultural capital.

After exploring the social values of stylistic complexity for the author, in the second half of the chapter, I concentrate on the readers of *Ulysses* to question their motives in dealing with the novel's intricacies from an evolutionary perspective. In this section, I consider the *pleasure* gained through understanding and appreciating the stylistic complexities of *Ulysses*. Diepeveen (2003) also talks about the pleasure derived from understanding *Ulysses* and sees this in tandem with the amount of work needed to solve the difficulties of the text. He quotes Oliver Gogarty who believed the reason why America had become the "chief infirmity for Joyceans" was because it was the country "par excellence of the detective story, the crossword puzzle, and the smoke signal," claiming that *Ulysses* is enjoyed because there is a culture of taking delight in the work needed to decipher codes and riddles (p. 158). Herr (2014) looks at the issue of readers' challenge in coping with *Ulysses*'s difficulty from a different perspective. Sampling the anxious responses of her undergraduate students in a course on *Ulysses*, Herr attributes this anxiety to the intimidating demands Joyce places on his readers to deal with a novel in which we are "competing meaning again and again" (p. 162). Herr's discussion of difficulty keeps with the themes of the *value* and *profit* that readers can possibly gain from being challenged by the complexity in *Ulysses*, but her observations lead her to see this from the perspective of angry readers who are frustrated by the unreasonable demands of the text and are "constantly reckoning up the reading gains and interpretive errors that had gone before" (p. 162). Herr's discussion of difficulty in *Ulysses* takes a different turn and does not press on with looking for the reasons why readers still pursue the novel despite the dismay and anxiety she witnessed in her undergraduates. I, however, take the readers' willingness to work through the hindrances of

reading *Ulysses* and attempt to analyze it in light of the evolutionary motives that I have been discussing in the previous chapters. As we shall see, the dynamics of indicating fitness through sexual displays is in no small part responsible for the social status that readers gain from showing comfort with the most challenging works in the literary canon and subsequently in their purportedly confusing attraction toward the obscurity of difficult texts like *Ulysses*.

In order to support my argument for the adaptive functions of *Ulysses*'s style as means of gaining status and cultural capital, I will allude to the history of the book's production and consumption, paying special attention to how it has attracted a following by providing prestigious appeals and a sense of belonging. The concepts of "group identity" and the appeal of belonging to an elite coterie are relevant to *Ulysses* when we consider the exclusivity with which intellectuals and high modernists have received *Ulysses*. Diepeveen (2003) notes that the difficulty of modern texts was defended as "professional," and that this led into a sense of intellectual camaraderie. Ezra Pound believed that *Ulysses* was "a book that every serious writer needs to read, and that he, in our writer's profession, will be constrained to read in order to have a clear idea of the point of development of our art." (As cited in Diepeveen 2003, p. 101). Considering the book's initial reception by a small but ardent group of supporters and its later popularization among a larger community of academics and intellectuals through events like Bloomsday, I conclude my discussion of social status as a biologically relevant motive for the readers of *Ulysses* to willingly welcome the complexities of the novel.

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Art and its bigger context, culture, have not fallen from the sky as fixed entities, nor has their evolution happened separately from our sociobiological evolution. Our deep history as a species and the evolutionary origins of our psychological dispositions have shaped our current

tendencies in art and culture, and this is why I believe we must seriously consider them in interpreting artistic and intellectual concepts. Constructivist approaches to art and culture, which analyze culture within itself, miss out on opportunities to benefit from the insights provided by other disciplines of science, especially evolutionary studies. Revisiting the issue of difficulty in *Ulysses* by considering our knowledge of human evolutionary dispositions offers a fresh reading of this important literary work and can be used to consider its most prominent feature, i.e., stylistic complexities, from a new angle. The extremely vast scholarly literature on *Ulysses* has almost never considered this knowledge in discussing the book's style, despite producing a wide array of critical responses from other perspectives. An evolutionary reading of *Ulysses* will not discard the previous criticisms; instead, it will add to our understanding of the main issues that the previous critics have tried to see from other perspectives. The application of Darwinian theories to *Ulysses* is a win-win decision for both biopoetics and *Ulysses* criticism. This research will give us the opportunity to put the explanatory power of evolutionary literary theories to test by applying them on a text that is both conceptually and stylistically challenging. If this application is even partly successful, we can hope that some of the questions raised by the content and style of *Ulysses* can be answered.

## Chapter One: Adaptive Approaches to Literature

I explained in the introduction that to start with unearthing the evolutionary motives of difficulty in *Ulysses*, we should take a step back and consider the evolutionary theories on the universal motives behind art and literature in general. What do evolutionary theories tell us about the purpose of literature? What new insights can they add to the existing theories of literature? In this section, I review some of the most accepted evolutionary theories of literature and attempt to build on them to explain the complex style of *Ulysses*. The mainstream Darwinian approach to literature sees it as a universal human disposition that makes us more adapted to our environment. In searching for adaptive purposes of literature, many evolutionary scientists have come to the conclusion that stories have evolved as means of creating a *social order* through collecting, recording, and consolidating the important elements of human nature needed for our survival. While retaining some useful aspects of this theory, I will show how insufficient they are to explain the revolutionary nature of *Ulysses* as a novel that seems to violate social order rather than consolidating it. By introducing an opposing theory to the adaptive view of literature, Steven Pinker's view of art as a useless byproduct of the brain circuitry, and discussing its inadequacy as well as its explanatory power, I continue to collect pieces of evolutionary theories that I will later use in my argument to explain the difficulty of *Ulysses*.

### **Appeal of Narrative**

One of the most fundamental observations from a biocultural point of view about the purpose of literature is that narrative is a universal human disposition rooted in our genetic and epigenetic programming. Sugiyama (2001) provides evidence that all known human cultures have independently developed storytelling systems that are universally recognizable as narrative. Moreover, Carroll (2004) recognizes cognition, as the pre-requisite ability for story-telling, as an

autonomous human motive distinct from other motives like reproduction and survival. The mental need for narrative is an irreducible human motive that stems from the need to know the world around us (pp. xviii-xix). A closer look at our personal experiences with narrative confirms these observations. Narrative, especially first-person narrative, has a universal appeal. Even the most complex and abstract ideas, if told like a story, will make more sense. Most examples ask the reader or listener to imagine a story-like scenario as a rhetorical strategy to improve understanding. It seems that our comprehension is enhanced when concepts are channeled through a series of events and characters.

As a species, we are attracted to stories no matter if reading is a pastime for us or not. The appeal of stories goes beyond the medium of literature; movies, songs, dances, and even things like advertisements and news have some story elements woven into them. Moreover, stories are present in most of our daily activities: we learn through stories, imagine potential life scenarios to solve problems or prepare for future, and constantly daydream before going to bed, letting our subconscious take the stage and put on dreamy shows for us. In *The Story Telling Animal*, Jonathan Gottschall (2012) explains that our storytelling habit goes back tens of thousands of years ago and that our “addiction” to stories has not dwindled down ever since (p. xiv). The popularity of stories across human history, in all cultures, and at each corner of this planet speaks volumes to the universality of this tendency among us as a species.

Our instinctual attraction toward stories and their ubiquity in our lives signal this trait’s evolutionary roots. While such roots, in turn, can signify evolutionary functions, the above-mentioned explanations do not specify what those functions might be, even less so when the question is about the specific adaptive functions of specific styles in storytelling. Acknowledging the venerability of storytelling on the evolutionary scale is a very important first step in

discovering the adaptive functions of *Ulysses*'s intricate style; however, it is not nearly enough. Darwinian criticism must go further and propose potential functions for this primeval passion.

### **Social Order**

Evolutionary psychologists have gone that further step ahead to discover the adaptive functions of our storytelling instinct. The strongest consensus exists in the views that can be categorized under *social order theory*. Similar to the anthropological “functionalist” views of Emile Durkheim<sup>13</sup>, there are a group of similar biocultural theories that see art as means of ritualizing and consolidating knowledge that is important to our survival. The adaptive narratologist Sugiyama (2001) argues that narrative has adapted as a tool to increase our chances of survival. Connecting our storytelling tendencies to our species’ struggle for survival as hunter-gatherers, she sees literature as an apparatus of our cognitive capabilities that has allowed us to communicate survivalistically important information. A slight variation of Sugiyama’s theory focuses more on social and moral values that literature reflects. Carroll (2014) calls such values “normative human universals” that are “moral dispositions deeply rooted in human nature” (p.46) and gives the examples of “horror at the murder of kinsfolk, respect for family obligations, and appreciation for honesty in social relations” (p. 45). According to Carroll, literature consolidates such normative values and increases our chances of survival by sustaining a collective consciousness. Similarly, Wilson (1998) argues that art is a way for humans to coherently organize and ritualize their thoughts and emotions. The arts and other imaginative structures like religion are a way of making sense of the abundance of thoughts and emotions,

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<sup>13</sup> Structural functionalism, the idea that norms, traditions, and other collective social values maintain coherence in society, has been adapted by several evolutionary scientists. Starting from Herbert Spencer, who compared social structures to living organisms, other Darwinian theorists have seen the existence of a collective social consciousness integral to the evolution of our species. Another example is the sociobiologist, Edward O. Wilson, whose views will be discussed at length in this chapter.

and therefore, a way of personal development. Boyd (2009) shares Wilson's belief in the need to understand stories in the context of "invented stories that people take as true" i.e., religion. He also believes that storytelling co-evolved with religion and ritual as ways of "enhance[ing] within-group social cohesion" (p. 199). Promoting a shared human ethos through the power of imagination – embodied in magic, rituals, religion, and stories – makes us fitter for survival.

In defining an adaptive role for art, Wilson (1998) argues that the arts are the result of genetic evolution. To do that, he observes primitive societies and determines what gave our species its survival edge to be "extremely high intelligence, language, culture, and reliance on long term social contracts" (p. 245). These distinctive qualities, however, also exerted a price on us. We suddenly became aware of "the shocking recognition of the self, of the finiteness of the personal existence, and of the chaos of the environment" (p.245). Without our cognitive powers, we would survive like other animals, just tuning into what we needed to know about our immediate environment. But high intelligence gave us the possibility to be aware of more dimensions. We suddenly faced the power of endless imagination, and this was while we still didn't have the skills and experience to cope with this level of awareness. It should have been frightening for our ancestors to deal with the new thoughts and images in their heads. The basic animal instincts were no longer enough. There was a gap between our mental power and our mastery over it, so to cope with this, we started compiling what is now known as the "human nature." As Wilson explains, "in the course of evolution the animal instincts of survival and reproduction were transformed into the epigenetic algorithms of human nature" (pp. 245-6). They constitute the universal features of human emotions and behaviours and include humans' common base fears, fascinations, tendencies, etc. These "algorithms" of human nature are units of "prepared learning" that we make around important issues in our lives: The natural instinct of

danger avoidance that helps us stay away from poisonous snakes turns into the cultural significance of snakes; mate guarding transforms into the concept of jealousy; and the value of cooperative breeding where the parents raise their offspring together translates into love. What we see as human nature – and culture – is actually the accumulation of human learned knowledge that has turned into norms and values to make us fitter for survival. It does not have a transcendental source or a fixed nature. It is made out of necessity and can, therefore, change as the circumstances change. The question is how we record, accumulate, teach, practice, and consolidate this knowledge in the form of norms and values? Wilson's theory of arts answers this question.

Our cognition and its offshoots like imagination were developing faster than the rather elementary algorithms of human nature. According to Wilson (1998), our cognitive capacity had created a deep gap between our perception of the world and our ways of coping with it, making us “the only species to suffer psychological exile” (p. 245). This gap was filled with art, which became a way to consolidate and enhance our units of “prepared learning.” What instigated art was “the need to impose order on the confusion caused by intelligence” (p.245). Humans invented the arts so they could practice, remember, and keep the algorithms that had helped them survive. The arts, however, do not only consolidate human nature through preserving and transmitting units of “prepared learning” or “lived experience.” What they do, in a more general sense, is create “social cohesion” through *symbolic representation*, whether this includes aesthetic forms of communicating information and experience (narratives) or more emblematic

and less functional displays (ritual).<sup>14</sup> In both cases, the evolutionary theories of social order, justify arts as symbolic means of consolidating a common social consciousness. Literary Darwinists have built on the same idea and see literature as a way of consolidating a “collective cultural ethos” (J. Carroll, interview, 2009) that is important to our survival, making this theory one that is strongly based on the survival advantages of art in the form of creating social cohesion and stability. These “survival advantages,” in the strictest biological interpretations, mean that the human brain must have gone through genetic mutations to evolve the capacities for imagination and culture. These capacities and the genetic mutations associated with them, in turn, have been sustained through their survival advantages, namely imposing social order and cohesion.

Richard Dawkins rejects this strict interpretation of survival advantage and provides the opportunity of offering a different version of the social order theory by offering a different account of cultural transmission. In *The Selfish Gene*, Dawkins introduces the concept of “memes” as “a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation” (p. 192). Very much like genes that transmit evolutionary information about our body, memes transmit evolutionary information about culture. He sees the evolution of cultural phenomena – ranging from

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<sup>14</sup> The binary of strictly functional versus symbolic (or spiritual) representations – emphasized by functionalist anthropologists like Alfred Radcliffe-Brown and Bronisław Malinowski – is disturbed by the views of the likes of Edmund Leach (2000) who sees the functional and the symbolic on a continuum: “At one extreme we have actions which are entirely profane, entirely functional, technique pure and simple; at the other we have actions which are entirely sacred, strictly aesthetic, technically non-functional. Between these two extremes we have the great majority of social actions which partake partly of the one sphere and partly of the other. From this point of view technique and ritual, profane and sacred, do not denote types of action but aspects of almost any kind of action” (p. 154). According to this view, the narratives whose function is to help navigate the world and the ones with a more ritualistic nature share similar features (symbolic representations) and a common evolutionary purpose (creating and enhancing “social cohesion”). Wilson (1998) holds a similar view about the inseparable nature of artistic and ritualistic symbolic representation. He believes that arts evolved as a way for early humans “to express and control through *magic* [emphasis added] the abundance of the environment, the power of solidarity, and other forces in their lives that mattered most to survival and reproduction. The arts were the means by which these forces could be *ritualized* [emphasis added] and expressed in a new, simulated reality” (p. 225). For more on the similarities between narratives and ritual, also see *Ritual and Narrative*.

technology and fashion to language, religion, customs, and art – “like highly speeded up genetic evolution” but in a way that it “has really nothing to do with genetic evolution” (p. 190). Cultural concepts copy themselves from brain to brain without getting into their genetic structure. They do so based on their “psychological impact,” that is, their advantage to themselves, and not to genes, individuals, groups, or species: “We do not have to look for conventional biological survival values of traits like religion, music, and ritual dancing, though these may also be present.” (p. 200). It is true that Dawkins rejects “conventional biological survival values” for cultural and artistic phenomena; however, the “psychological impact” that he cites as the reason for the copying of memes opens a way to align his theory to those of social order and social cohesion: cultural concepts evolve – whether genetically or “memetically” – because of their compatibility with human nature. The brain has evolved imaginative capacities that match, consolidate, and develop our acquired human nature, and this eventually helps us become fitter for survival.

While I believe that human nature is formed according to circumstances and is therefore inconstant, *social cohesion* theories assume a rather fixed “human nature” and consider it to be the guiding principle of art. Wilson (2010) claims that adherence to human nature has been and continues to be the touchstone for the “true and beautiful” art (p. 246). He believes that since the arts were invented in the first place to secure the algorithms necessary for human survival (i.e., human nature), it just makes sense that they must always reflect and remain “faithful” to that nature. This makes his theory inadequate to explain works of art like *Ulysses* that seem to be against human nature in many aspects. Similar adaptive theories that see literature as a carrier for “universal normative values” share the same inadequacy particularly when applied to a novel like *Ulysses*, which undermines the ethical values of its own time. One might argue that the

precarious psychological conditions of the characters in the novel bespeak the importance of keeping those normative values. Carroll (2014) explains the violence in *King Lear* by arguing that it is what causes the tragedy. Violence, which is against human normative values, dominates *King Lear*, but its disastrous outcome makes it clear that there are consequences to it (pp. 33-52). This might justify the presence of antivalues in literature, especially when they are only there to be discouraged for didactic purposes. However, such justifications are barely adequate to explain a fundamentally nonconformist novel like *Ulysses*.

Although Wilson (1998) evaluates art by its faithfulness to human nature, the arts as we know them do not always reflect human nature. Experimental styles are usually accompanied by contents that seem to oppose norms and traditional values. I believe that the arts do not necessarily need to adhere to human nature to fit the adaptive functions that Wilson outlines. Based on his theory, the arts consolidate the algorithms of human nature. While I agree with this, I don't think that the adaptive function of the arts is limited to that. We also attempt to increase our compatibility with new environments by testing new algorithms and possibilities in the arts. As human life develops, more contingencies appear; our survival depends on more factors, and the whole game becomes more complicated. Every time human life experiences a change (like the introduction of modernity), basic human nature is even less sufficient to cope with the new conditions. This is when the second adaptive function of art becomes useful, i.e., the one that not only *consolidates* but also *expands* human nature by imagining unimaginable, far-fetched scenarios. Art is not only there to consolidate old learning, but a way to create new learning; art is not just remedial; it is inventive.

This fits the adaptive theories of literature that see literary works as simulators to practice "life scenarios." According to this view, stories allow humans to experience a sort of virtual

reality in which they can test out different situations, potential solutions, and consolidate the ones that have proven useful. The biocultural advocates of this theory believe that literature has evolved because such functions make us more adapted. Sugiyama (2001), Pinker (1997), Wilson (1998), and Boyd (2009) all argue for this one way or another. In an interview with DaSilva (2009), Carroll states that "the general function of the arts is to make imaginative sense of the world" (para. 14). Literature records and classifies our lived experiences and reminds us of the possible scenarios we might face. The advantages of this system of simulated practice are its safety and low cost. According to Pinker (1997), humans can enter this simulated world "in the comfort of their cave, couch, or theatre seat" (p. 537). The safety and comfort of stories allow us not only to consolidate existing algorithms of human nature – as Wilson would argue – but also to invent and test new ones.

Our artistic experimentations are an attempt to add new algorithms to a pool of algorithms that becomes less able to cope with the changing environment. We constantly push the limits of our "human nature," and the arts are one of the main ways for us to do so. This is when revolutionary and experimental forms and contents come into play. Carroll's adaptive outlook to literature assumes that since the "universal normative values" have their roots in our evolution, then they are fixed norms that are the same across different periods and peoples. While there might be some levels of consistency in artistic themes and traditions that result from levels of similarity in human nature, we should note that artists constantly invent new themes and traditions. Works of art will present concepts and styles that sound contradictory to human norms and values. Scenarios that do not adhere to human nature become a way of advancing our mental faculties, and form – which is already a deviation from normalcy by foregrounding specific features – follows. The works of art that deviate from human nature perform the same adaptive

functions as those consolidating it: expanding our vision and helping us cope with the ever-growing possibilities of our lives caused by our high intelligence. This adjustment to the existing evolutionary theories of art and literature opens new ways of explaining modernist literature and its experiments with both form and content.

My advancement on the simulated reality theory gives me the opportunity to see *Ulysses* functioning in the same vein that Wilson and other Darwinian theorists envision for literature. Despite its deviations from “normative values” of its time, this novel still recreates familiar life scenarios like losing a child, a marriage falling apart, religious dilemmas, and the psychological challenges of children in relation to their parents. However, the specifics of the environment in which *Ulysses* is written, including the psychological capacities of Joyce himself, the proclivities of its potential readers, and more importantly, the rapidly changing values of the its period, all contribute to changes to what Darwinians might see as “universal normative values.” *Ulysses* is the product of a period that is burgeoning with change. Turn-of-the century Europe might be one of the most rapidly changing periods in human modern history, and the revolutionary nature of *Ulysses* reflects the unique experience of a world that is about to change. The sexual themes of *Ulysses*, for example, reflect the novel sexual consciousness and liberties that were forming in early-twentieth-century Europe and have been normalizing since then despite the strong initial objections they were met with.<sup>15</sup> Allyn (2016) explains that "as Freud's influence on Western culture grew, sexual themes became increasingly prominent in avant-garde literature, and censors found themselves fighting more and more books by authors like D. H. Lawrence, Ernest

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<sup>15</sup> Getting involved in the controversy and including shocking themes can also be analyzed from a social prestige perspective. In *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity*, Mullin (2003) argues that through presenting controversial sexual content, Joyce took on social purists for the publicity and the status he would gain. In Chapter Three, I will discuss prestige as an evolutionarily explicable motive for the peculiarities of *Ulysses*. I will also analyze the connections of this to other evolutionary theories, including the concept of art’s “inventiveness.”

Hemingway, and Henry Miller” (p. 57). If we accept that literature has been a way for our species to cope with the contingencies of its environment, then it makes sense to believe that a radically new environment causes radically different adaptive strategies. Calling the traditional values into question and responding to the new vastness of the modern experience have created new possibilities for artistic imagination. In Chapter Three, I will discuss how the environment in which *Ulysses* was written had an influence on its complexity and uniqueness.

Advancing adaptive literary theories like simulated reality theory allows us to explain the peculiarities of *Ulysses*'s content; however, they do not offer much when it comes to the experimental style of *Ulysses*. Even if we take *Ulysses* to be the result of art evolving as a way of modifying our “collective cultural ethos,” that does not explain the style of the novel. The question remains whether the complex style of *Ulysses* has any significance other than being a vehicle for new life algorithms that help us cope with a new environment. *Ulysses* is more than its themes and motifs; its innovative and complicated style is its most prominent feature, and content-based theories of social cohesion and simulated reality do not help much in the way of explaining that aspect.

What I believe should be added to social cohesion theories is an argument to account for the role of aesthetic form. If literature is just to organize our experience and provide us with instructional scenarios, then what is the significance of the form? Taking Wilson's approach of forming his argument based on primitive human societies can help us in decoding the role of form. Wilson (1998) proposes that our ancestors used art to reinforce the algorithms of human nature, but he does not focus on how they did this. He does mention, however, that early human artists consolidated the algorithms of human nature by “selecting the most evocative words, images, and rhythms” (p.142). This makes good sense, as it interprets artistic form as a way of

maximizing the effectiveness of the consolidation process. Aesthetic forms could have evolved as ways of highlighting the concept that was being consolidated through ritual or other forms of proto-art. This explanation works with the rest of Wilson's theory, which regards art as an adaptive tool that simultaneously draws on and consolidates human nature. Art evolves as a way of recording, remembering, and practicing human nature, and form – words, shapes, sounds, colours, and in general, the ways of representation – are used to enforce the effects of such consolidations.

Wilson's (2010) argument implies that artistic forms evolve because of their strong ties with human nature. For him, works of art are defined by their "faithfulness" to human nature, and they "[achieve] that fidelity by ... conforming to the emotional guides of the epigenetic rules [of human nature]" (p. 142). This means that the form, like content, is strongly connected to (and derived from) the universal features of human nature. This sounds like a provable hypothesis, as the appeal of modern artistic styles is still traceable to ancestral human conditions. Consider the camera movements in a horror movie where the subject is always around the corner or behind a door or a wall. Most of the shots consist of the camera slowly getting closer to the barrier that blocks our view. Why doesn't the camera start from where the action is supposed to be? Obviously, the way the camera slowly gets close heightens our emotions. Now let's consider this from a deep history perspective. Humans have been roaming this planet for hundreds of thousands of years. We have learned to be vigilant all the time, looking out for predators and other natural dangers. Every cave hole or big rock has stimulated our senses, as something dangerous could be inside or behind them. We have been looking out for those places, always alert, always on our toes, waiting to see what jumps out. The survival of our ancestors has depended on their sensitivity to unknown places, and this has entered our brain circuitry through

natural selection. Starting as an adaptive behavioural system (serving the core human motive of danger avoidance, which in turn serves the ultimate cause of survival), this has channeled into emotions like fear and curiosity. We need to know what is behind that rock, and at the same time there are high levels of adrenaline in our blood in case we need to escape. This translates into the artistic technique of suspense in horror movies and stories. This style would be appealing to the audience, because it is based on a strong and undeniable chain of human motives, emotions, and behavioural systems that eventually arrive at the ultimate goal of all life: survival.

The fact that aesthetic forms have roots in our primitive ancestry doesn't mean that there should be records of all those forms throughout the history of art. Some forms and styles are "invented" (or re-invented) at different points in history, inspired by the conditions of that specific period. For example, narrative techniques like interior monologue and stream of consciousness, which *Ulysses* is replete with, were not commonly used before modernism. However, they still have their roots in human cognition, which is of course much older than modernism. We know from neuroscience that our memory is literally made up of millions of images, ideas, and concepts stored in our brain separately.<sup>16</sup> It is like the information on your computer. It is saved in the form of individual files, even though what we see are integrated wholes like videos, documents, etc. When we think coherently, our general intelligence puts the right files next to each other in the right order. To me, stream of consciousness is shuffling those files randomly. We do it when we are tired, or when we are going to sleep, or simply even when we want to be playful with our imagination. We glide from idea to idea, leaping from our childhood town in another continent to a big city where we live now, from our boss whom we

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<sup>16</sup> Karl Lashley (1966) and Wilder Penfield (1954) showed through laboratory experiments, on rats and humans respectively, that memory is stored separately in bits and pieces in different parts of the cortex, and not as whole entities retrievable in their entirety. This meant that our cognitive process has to reconstruct thoughts and memories through putting together or "encoding" these scattered files throughout different parts of the brain.

saw this morning to a strange face we saw on the subway once and never forgot for some reason. It is not the most usual, but still one of the natural ways our brains work. Stream of consciousness is not a modern invention; it is only seen as a revolutionary technique, because the likes of Joyce reintroduced this natural system to an audience that was still used to traditional literary conventions.

Joyce's patience (or his desire to test ours) in following the characters around and reporting each small and trivial thing that goes through their minds makes *Ulysses* more like an objective observation of life rather than a surreal literary experimentation. While this technique with its jumping from idea to idea (usually completely irrelevant ones) might sound unnatural and esoteric, I see it as realistic as it can get; this is how our minds work. Conventionally realist narratives represent similar content to a work like *Ulysses* – they represent the characters' thoughts and emotions; but they usually use literary filters; Joyce, on the other hand, seems to have thrown away all those filters at least in parts of *Ulysses* and has stuck with the more “natural” processes of our brain. One might argue that Joyce is offering a more *realistic* picture of our lived experience compared to the stylistically filtered realism of “realist” novels. This dual conception of *realism* has been discussed by other modernist critics. In his pioneering book, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Erich Auerbach (2003) astutely remarks that modernists “invented their own methods... of making the reality” (p. 545). Castle (2015) notes that conventional realism “assumes a stable and faithful representation of the lived experience of the world” and takes verisimilitude for “representation,” which is only a “medium of the *life narrated* [emphasis added]” (pp. 5-6). The medium of life narrated is only a “mimetic trick of resemblance” (p. 5) and is not necessarily the same as the *lived experience* of life. The

life-like quality of *Ulysses* is emphasized by many, including Joyce himself,<sup>17</sup> and this special mimetic quality can make *Ulysses*'s style more explicable from an evolutionary perspective compared to the mediated mimesis of the realist novel.

This being said, I do not believe that connecting aesthetic forms to human nature or the workings of the mind are the only ways to interpret them from an evolutionary perspective. Aesthetic forms appeal to us not just because they borrow from human nature, but also because they serve an adaptive function. Artistic forms are undeniably used to attract our attention, which makes them a practical adaptation to highlight the experience transmitted through art. This is not a new claim. Formalists saw the arts as a way of “defamiliarization” that resensitizes us to our environment. According to Wilson (1998), the arts help us stabilize our human nature. In doing this, highlighting its features and attracting attention to them would serve an adaptive function. Therefore, the body paintings of primitive peoples might have the same role as literary styles; they both attract the viewer’s attention by creating effects that are different from the usual, i.e., “defamiliarized.” This way of understanding aesthetic form can be advanced in the same way I adapted the content-oriented theories of *social order* to account for less conventional works of art. Just as literary content deviates from the norms due to the environmental changes that call for new coping strategies (i.e., new life scenarios and human nature algorithms), we can see the emergence of revolutionary artistic forms as a way of inventing new means to attract attention. Aesthetic forms start to lose their quality of attracting attention as they become worn out and less unique. Body painting and rhyming poetry stop being attractive after some time, and this is when new forms like fashion and free verse are born. Aesthetic experimentation becomes an adaptive necessity when we need new ways of accentuating human nature. In this way, *Ulysses* is a novel

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<sup>17</sup> Joyce himself said “If *Ulysses* isn't fit to read, life isn't fit to live” (Ellmann, 1982, p. 589), emphasizing the life-like qualities of *Ulysses* despite its purported oddities.

that is trying to spotlight its content at an age when the previous conventions of style were no longer enough.

Almost every episode of the novel starts with a new style that is radically different from the ones set before. Lawrence (1981) describes *Ulysses* “as a book that changes its mind as it progresses” (6). As soon as the reader starts to get used to a style, the book cuts that route and takes a new one. At the end of “Hades,” we are actually told that a change is on the way: “enough of this place,” (p. 111) and then as “Aeolus” opens, we see that the narrative is transformed and caught in boldfaced newspaper headlines aligned in the centre: “**IN THE HEART OF THE HIBERNIAN METROPOLIS**” (p. 112). Not only the abrupt change of style from Bloom’s long interior monologues to windy and choppy conversations, but even the radical typesetting shift from denser paragraphs to the newspaper headlines centred in capital letters work as surprises that jolt the reader out of familiarity and attract their attention.

If used in tandem with *social order* theories, the purpose of attracting attention would be to highlight the aspects of human nature or the life scenarios communicated through works of art; however, as I will show in the next chapters, the adaptive function of aesthetic form does not necessarily have to be limited to this. Seeing artistic form as a way of attracting attention works very well with the argument in the next chapter where I look at aesthetic style as fitness-indicating sexual displays. In that chapter, I will contextualize the role of aesthetic form to attract attention within the framework of sexual selection theories and will explain how artistic form becomes more complicated in an evolutionary competition to indicate more fitness and therefore attract more attention. The complexification of artistic styles through evolutionary competition is also closely relevant to the social and environmental factors and role they play in sexual

selection. I will discuss the issues of social and environmental factors in Chapter Three, where I will analyze how modernity and literary modernism influenced the inventive style of *Ulysses*.

### **Art as Adaptively Useless**

Before starting the next chapter and discussing sexual selection theories in order to explain form, I would like to introduce another evolutionary explanation of art that I believe fits into the argument that I will develop in the next chapters. In this approach, cognitive scientist and evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker (1997) argues that aesthetic pleasure in general has no special adaptive purposes. While confirming the didactic advantages of stories noted by *social order* theorists, Pinker dismisses the pleasurable side of literature as non-adaptive. According to him, the psychology of the arts is obscure, because “they are not adaptive in the biologist’s sense of the word,” and he basically reduces them to “Sunday afternoon projects” compared to “goal states that served biological fitness in ancestral environments, such as food, sex, safety, parenthood, friendship, status, and knowledge” (p. 524). Not every function of the human brain needs to be adaptive; the human brain is like a toolbox that while originally meant to do other things, happens to have the ability to create appealing yet adaptively useless products.

This actually sounds true for some of the stylistic techniques in *Ulysses*. Anyone reading *Ulysses* would probably feel at some point that the difficulty is absurd and meaningless. Even T.S. Eliot, who praised *Ulysses* and was constantly encouraging the less enthusiastic Virginia Woolf to read it, thought that it “showed up the futility of all English styles” (As cited in *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 1978). The alleged uselessness of *Ulysses* is partly because it is hard to explain the purpose of this amount of complexity. Why would someone go out of his way to make a literary work so complicated? It is difficult to pinpoint the significance of many of the stylistic complications like puzzles and wordplay in *Ulysses*, and some seem to be there only

because Joyce *could* do that. Consider this apparently innocent rhyme in “Circe”: “If you see kay / Tell him he may / See you in tea / Tell him from me” (p. 468). One has to read the first and third lines as letters and not words to spell out the dirty words Joyce maliciously and playfully has hidden there. This is amusing, of course if one can discover it, but why does it exist in the first place? One might argue that Joyce has used this verbal trick to conceal the obscenity of the term and avoid controversy, but we know from many other parts of the novel that Joyce did not shy away from being candid about what society deemed inappropriate. Besides, there are many other instances of wordplay in the novel that cannot be justified with the intentions of hiding obscenities. Many resemble the pretentious, apparently clever, and yet frivolous and mostly ignored comments of Lenehan, a poser who constantly resorts to banal jokes, riddles, and wordplay to attract others’ attention. When in “Aeolus” Myles Crawford mentions Dick Adams, the Phoenix Park case lawyer, and praises him as “the besthearted bloody Corkman the Lord ever put the breath of life in,” Joyce has Lenehan immediately “[bow] to a shape of air, announcing: Madam, I'm Adam. And Able was I ere I saw Elba” (p. 132). The absurdity and pretentiousness of Lenehan’s malapropos palindromes seem to signal Joyce’s awareness of the whimsical nature of some of his verbal complexities, especially considering his disapproving characterization of Lenehan as a nonchalant pseud and sponger who just ingratiates himself with others to cultivate attention.

While *Ulysses* is full of formal complexities like these, what really seems superfluous are the innumerable details, facts, connections, and hidden references, which in many cases remain local to Dublin (neighbourhoods, characters, shops), the period’s pop culture (newspapers, tabloids, music, etc.), or Joyce’s own life (his family, friends, and acquaintances). While the significance of some of these facts and details is evident, many remain obscure. They,

nevertheless, add to the complexity of the novel and inflate it to overwhelming proportions. This even confuses the most qualified experts of Joycean references, as even they cannot tease out the relevant from the constant flood of details in *Ulysses*. In the introduction of his classical annotations on *Ulysses*, Don Gifford (1988) notes that the huge amount of "Dublin street furniture" that Joyce includes in *Ulysses* are "[f]or the most part ... detail with no suggestive dimension beyond the factual – streets, bridges, buildings, pubs, and shops" (p. xv). The inflation that the "factual and inert" details cause in *Ulysses* is part of what makes this novel unique, but at the same time no particular use can be cited for the bulk of it.

Not many critics have directly addressed the possible "uselessness" of styles in *Ulysses*, and the arguments of the few who have are not guided by evolutionary principles like those of Pinker. In a Marxist reading, Moretti (1983) criticizes the arbitrariness of styles in *Ulysses*, and takes this as the "uselessness" of the novel, very much like "the useless wealth" in economic terms (pp. 201-2). In opposition to Moretti's critical view of uselessness in *Ulysses*, many modernist scholars see the arbitrariness of styles in *Ulysses* as a pioneering move that revolutionized literature. Encouraged by the likes of Woolf and Eliot, who saw the arbitrariness of style as a way of changing the literary traditions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, modernists believe that *Ulysses*'s style's lack of contribution to meaning reflected the new paradigms of modern life.<sup>18</sup> The dominant argument is that modernism dispensed with style as a way of clarifying meaning and rendered it as a "problematic textual arena" where literary devices are foregrounded only for their own sake, boasting their "lack of utility" in the grandeur of their uselessness (Moorcock & Wall, 2012, p. xxiv). Less enchanted by the magnificence of uselessness, others have seen the arbitrariness of styles in *Ulysses* as a way for Joyce to signify the "futility" of action, meaning, or

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<sup>18</sup> See *Byzantium Endures: The First Volume of the Colonel Pyat Quartet* by Michael Moorcock and Alan Wall (p. xxiv).

life in general.<sup>19</sup> But is this all there is to *Ulysses*'s style? Is the intricate textual embroidery of style in *Ulysses* only a way of showing the lack of meaning? Such explanations sound rather dismissive and certainly unsatisfactory for a style that shook English literature and is still discussed after about a century. While evolutionary theories (due to their strict focus on survival advantages of all human acts) lead us to similar conclusions about the uselessness of style in *Ulysses*, I believe their approach to and interpretation of the concept of uselessness has the potential to be advanced for more convincing explanations for the obscure style of *Ulysses*.

Pinker (1997) proposes an interesting cognitive explanation for the “useless” production of imaginative content in the human mind. He notes that “some parts of the mind register the attainment of increments of fitness by giving us a sensation of pleasure” (p.524). I compare this to the features that you unlock in a video game when you pass a level. The colorful armours and badges that you win when you win a round in a combat video game are not really doing anything other than encouraging you to keep playing and winning. Our mind has the same reward system for successful survivalist achievements in life. Our body needs nighttime rest to rebuild and reenergize, and this is why “enjoy” a good night sleep; having sex is pleasurable as an incentive for pursuing the otherwise hassling act of copulation. Our brain has connected vital functions that are “useful” and “necessary” for our survival to pleasure. Just like fear, pain, and disgust keep us away from dangerous and harmful foods, animals, and acts, pleasure ensures that we take the time and energy to undertake the “useful” and the “necessary”. Pinker argues that the human mind mixes this quality with a knowledge of cause and effect, and we “get a mind that rises to a biologically pointless challenge: figuring out how to get at the pleasure circuits of the brain and deliver little jolts of enjoyment without the inconvenience of wringing bona fide fitness

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<sup>19</sup> See Stephen Sicari (2001) *Joyce's Modernist Allegory: Ulysses and the History of the Novel* (p. 80)

increments from the harsh world” (p. 524). This can be compared to the codes gamers discover to unlock features without actually going through a level. Pinker gives the example of rats with an access to a lever that sends electrical impulses to its pleasure centers in its brain. According to experiments, the rat presses the lever until it “drops of exhaustion, forgoing opportunities to eat, drink, and have sex.” He compares this to people’s ways of stimulating these pleasure centers by things like “recreational drugs” (p. 524). Humans similarly learn to stimulate pleasure circuits and in doing so sometimes push the pleasure button too much. To illustrate this, Pinker has another useful analogy. He notes that our senses (of sight, taste, smell, etc.) stimulate pleasure circuits when they register patterns of images, tastes, smells, etc. that are found in a “fitness-promoting” environment. Our intellectual faculties recognize these patterns, and then the brain can stimulate itself by handpicking and intensifying these “pleasure-giving patterns” (p. 524). In this sense, a strawberry cheesecake would be a “sensual wallop” that has jam-packed several sensual – and adaptively valuable – patterns like the “sweet taste of ripe fruit, the creamy mouth feel of fats and oils from nuts” into a product that is not necessarily adaptive, but that we have nevertheless evolved a taste for (p. 525). For Pinker, these are all pleasure technologies, and in this sense, he does not differentiate between pornography and art. Non-reproductive and virtual sexual experiences are, just like the arts, survivalistically useless technologies that recreate pleasures that one would have had to go through real-life challenging acts to enjoy them.

Are literary styles, then, adaptively useless “technologies” designed to stimulate the pleasure circuits of our minds? And if so, is the style in *Ulysses* the cheesecake of literary styles in its maximization of this technology? I think if we are to find a literary cheesecake, *Ulysses* would unquestionably be one. It combines many different and often nonmatching ingredients, making its literary “taste” particularly strong. Although known as a novel, *Ulysses* includes

genres like poetry, drama, journalism, and scientific writing. Various forms of narrative and almost all styles of English literature from Medieval to the modern period are woven together in a bundle of stylistic excessiveness. Joyce never gets tired of playing with words, creating new compounds, distorting syntax, and making connections between different languages. These all match the concept of foregrounding form, which is the pleasure-giving quality of literature. Joyce has gathered almost all such formal manipulations together, and in this sense, *Ulysses* seems to fit Pinker's theory of the useless maximization of pleasure circuits in the brain.

Applying this theory to *Ulysses*, however, faces two major challenges: Although *Ulysses* does combine many pleasurable stylistic elements, the experience of reading the novel is not immediately pleasing, especially for the beginner reader. The unconventional narrative, alterations in the normal structure of sentences and word use, constant stylistic shifts, and the overwhelming multitude of internal and external references initially render the experience of reading *Ulysses* more like toil rather than pleasure. It takes much effort and patience to discover and enjoy the intricacies of the novel. Furthermore, pleasure-based explanations for style, despite their evolutionary foundations, still do not investigate the ultimate evolutionary motives behind aesthetic form. The reason why Pinker deems art as useless is because evolutionary science has very strict biological criteria to call a mechanism adaptive. For Pinker (1997), an adaptive mechanism is one "that brings about effects that would have increased the number of copies of the genes building that mechanism in the environment in which we evolved" and concludes that "some of the activities we consider most profound are non-adaptive by-products" (p. 526). But does this mean that there are no evolutionary explanations for the stylistic aspects of *Ulysses*, and they are simply useless by-products of bigger mechanisms? This is why I think Pinker's "cheesecake theory" cannot account for *Ulysses* on its own. But I believe that if combined with

other evolutionary insights that approach literary works from their apparent uselessness, it can be advanced to create an encompassing model-solution to explain the adaptive roots of art and the stylistic experimentations of *Ulysses*.

What Pinker says is based on the premise that our brains register pleasure in response to survivalistically beneficial acts. We enjoy the cheesecake because it taps into the brain circuits that react positively to tastes that are found in foods our body needs, and this is regardless of the fact that the cheesecake itself is not necessary for our survival. Similarly, if we accept that the arts are shortcut mechanisms to get the pleasing rewards of survivalistically useful acts, then we have to assume that the arts have a fundamental connection with survival. There should be an original survival benefit attached to pleasure mechanisms to exploit pleasure. Sexual pleasures of all kinds do have a strong connection to the survival advantages of producing offspring, whether they are of a copulatory nature or not. If humans have found a way to go around the survival rationale of sex (having babies) and just enjoy the pleasures (pornography), this does not strip the latter of its connections to the former. The fact that we maximize pleasure does not mean that there are no inherent evolutionary benefits behind the pleasurable act. The reason that most of the evolutionary theories of art have not pinpointed the adaptive function of style is because they have not pushed their arguments to an end. This is why I believe that if we dig deeper, we will find adaptive functions for not just the didactic aspects of art but its formal aesthetics as well.

In the next chapters, I will build on my advancements on Wilson's theories in defining art's *inventive* quality not just with respect to the "algorithms" of human nature, but also regarding *aesthetic form* as a way of attracting attention. In addition, I will come back to Pinker's concept of *uselessness* and will contextualize it within other evolutionary theories that effectively interpret art as a way of attracting attention. Specifically, I will draw on Geoffrey Miller's ideas

on the evolution of the human mind and its products through the process of sexual selection. Eventually, I will employ the insights gained from these theories regarding aesthetic form to make sense of the ostensibly useless intricacies of *Ulysses*'s style. I believe that bringing these theories together and advancing them will provide a path to address the two major issues raised above regarding the evolutionary function of style in *Ulysses* and will allow us to rationalize the readers' attraction to this novel despite its difficulty and obscurity.

## Chapter Two: *Ulysses* as Sexual Display

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the most important evolutionary theories of literature and showed why they cannot sufficiently account for the difficult style of *Ulysses*. In this chapter, I will introduce another evolutionary proposition and will attempt to situate it within the framework of the other adaptive theories and then advance it in order to explain the stylistic complexity of *Ulysses*. In this chapter, I will argue that the excessive highlighting and manipulation of language and style in *Ulysses* can be explained through the evolutionary principles of sexual selection in which certain behaviours and ornamentation function as displays of fitness. To make the leap from strictly biological principles of sexual selection to the cultural and aesthetic characteristics of *Ulysses*, I will draw on various evolutionary and biocultural theories, carefully applying them to the stylistic features of *Ulysses*. In the next chapter, I will extend my biocultural argument to include the social and environmental circumstances in which *Ulysses* came to being and fame.

In his 2001 book, *The Mating Mind*, Geoffrey Miller claims that while the evolution of art is difficult to explain through survival selection, it can be easily explained based on sexual selection. The premise of Miller's argument is that natural selection can only explain those human traits that directly increase our chances of survival. The opposable thumb makes us better tool makers and users, in turn increasing our chances of finding food and defending ourselves. This ultimately makes us more fit to survive in our environment, and therefore, it is a trait that can be explained through natural selection. The arts, and other mental capabilities like language, morality, and humor, on the other hand, are harder to explain through natural selection. There are no obvious survival advantages for someone who appreciates beauty or can use language in an impressive way. How does writing a novel make us more fit to survive? In trying to discover

adaptive functions for art, Miller arrives at the same impasse we saw Pinker come across in the previous chapter. Art takes up a lot of our time and energy, and it apparently does not make us better fit for survival. While Pinker discards art as a useless pleasure mechanism and a side effect of other adaptive functions, it leads Miller to look for other explanations for the development of such mental capabilities. Similarly unable to pinpoint any survival advantages for art, Miller believes that intellectual and imaginative capacities of our mind have evolved through sexual selection rather than natural selection. In other words, sexual motives, instead of survival motives, drove the evolution of our brains toward the beauty-loving machines they are now. Our ancestors evolved a big brain capable of language, ritual, and arts partly because such a brain worked as a form of sexual display<sup>20</sup>. According to Miller, what encouraged the evolution of the human brain, and its products like language and art, were not the benefits they offered for human survival, but simply the preference of our ancestors for those features during mating.

Like Pinker, Miller rejects the role of any survival advantages our mental powers apparently give us in the evolution of those powers. Biocultural explanations that see stories like educational life scenarios, consolidating our “human nature,” teaching us how to live, creating social cohesion, and eventually augmenting our chances of survival are not satisfactory for Miller, as the ostensible survival advantages of the arts only appeared thousands of years after

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<sup>20</sup> There are slightly different interpretations of humans’ bigger brains, arguing for different evolutionary directions. While Miller and many other evolutionary scientists believe that evolving a bigger brain led to the appearance of cognitive capacities like language and art, others, most notably the neuroscientist Terrence Deacon, see it the other way round. In *The Symbolic Species*, Deacon gives an account of this, according to which our capacity for “symbolic reference” initiated the evolution of a bigger brain. Drawing on the concept of “Baldwinian evolution,” Deacon argues that “the first use of symbolic reference by some distant ancestors changed how natural selection processes have affected hominid brain evolution ever since” (p. 322). In other words, our “behavioral flexibility” to use symbols created new selection pressures for subsequent generations, who consequently ended up with bigger brains capable of this capacity. This view is not ultimately very different from its competing view. Even Deacon agrees that in order for the first instances of symbolic reference to appear as a sort of behaviour within niche ancestor groups, we must have had individuals with bigger brains to begin with. The key difference is that according to Deacon, this behaviour could have established in communities *before* any wholesale changes to the human genome regarding brain size. Once the capacity and its selection pressures were formed, however, subsequent generations faced a new environment in which they had to adapt bigger brains.

we developed the necessary mental capacities to produce them. The human brain had almost the same size a hundred thousand years ago, and yet we only started distinguishing ourselves from our ape cousins about ten thousand years ago.

Even if we disagree with Miller and consider adaptive functions for art, and stories in particular, *Ulysses* does not seem like a novel that promotes social cohesion or can “teach” us to live any more successfully. If anything, *Ulysses* is anti-didactic and anti-cohesive. But if we accept that *Ulysses* and its extravagant style do not benefit us in any way, then are we implying that it is a useless novel from an evolutionary perspective? According to Pinker, this can actually be the answer. We saw how Pinker’s “cheesecake theory” regards art as a byproduct of our brain’s pleasure circuits. While Pinker’s narrow definition of adaptiveness stalls at seeing art as a random “side effect” of more fundamentally evolutionary functions, Miller (2001) takes a further step by shifting his attention to the sexual functions of artistic displays. Still seeing art as useless for survival, he resolves that sexual selection has driven our aesthetic tendencies, as “the production of useless ornamentation that looks mysteriously aesthetic is just what sexual selection is good at” (p. 156). Nature is filled with traits that other species have adapted for no reason other than impressing their mates. The peacock tail has no functional value except looking shiny and extravagant. If anything, it makes life harder for the bird, as it demands a lot of energy and resources, and at the same time, it limits the animal’s mobility. The products of the human mind, like literary styles, can be grouped in the same category as the peacock’s tail. They are extravagant displays that are perceived “beautiful” among the members of our species, and yet we cannot identify a particular survival advantage for them. This makes them very much like sexual displays, which despite their beauty, seem unnecessary for their displayer’s survival.

This description of beautiful yet wasteful displays matches the style of *Ulysses* as a novel that is marked by excessiveness in its style. Style in *Ulysses* gets elaborate and inflated just like sexual ornamentation in nature, and it is not only their appearance that bears a resemblance. The apparent uselessness and wastefulness of some of the stylistic complexities in *Ulysses* match the known qualities of sexual displays. As Miller (2001), puts it “every sexual ornament in every sexually reproducing species could be viewed as a different style of waste” (pp. 128-9). The concept of “waste” in nature refers to spending time, energy, and resources on something that does not *apparently* benefit the displayer by increasing their chances of survival. The style in *Ulysses* shares this quality through displaying styles, language, and content that *apparently* do not serve any purpose. What purpose does the lengthy passage in “Ithaca” serve, where water’s journey from Roundwood reservoir to the faucet in Bloom’s house is described in full detail? What is the use of referring to the reservoir’s cubic capacity and its precise subterranean route in an obscure technical language? The sense of useless excess is not limited to the peculiar style of *Ulysses*. As we saw, art in general cannot be justified in the economy of evolution as useful for survival. Wastefulness, extravagant beauty, impracticality, and complexity are some of the most important features that art and most forms of sexual display have in common.

Explaining a trait through sexual selection, however, does not equal stripping it of any “real,” i.e., survival, advantages. “Signaling theory,” argued most famously by evolutionary biologist Amotz Zahavi<sup>21</sup> sees some of the traits that are inexplicable through natural selection as ways of indicating fitness. Extravagant displays and restricting behaviours either promote the quality of the individual’s genes to potential mates or let predators know that the individual is healthy and therefore difficult to hunt. The peacock tail, again, provides the classical example,

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<sup>21</sup> Zahavi, A. (1997). *The Handicap principle*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

but there are many other traits in various species that indicate fitness though extravagance and difficulty. Gazelles and springboks start stotting – jumping vertically into the air, stiffing all four legs – when there is a predator around. The seemingly poorly-timed stotting of these quadrupeds can be justified as their way of showing the predator that they are so healthy that they can even spare a few seconds and some energy and still easily escape, and therefore, the predator probably shouldn't bother to chase them. Showing off its fitness actually benefits the springbok, even though it apparently disadvantages it by wasting energy while jeopardizing its chances to escape.

Biologists know this as “the handicap principle,” which claims that for a signal to be reliable, it should incur a *cost* on the signaller. The cost is not affordable by those who don't have the necessary resources to squander, and this is how a display of extravagance and excess becomes an indicator of fitness. The handicap principle governing fitness indicators in sexual selection justifies the lavish qualities of most sexual displays in different species. The flashy colouring of face and genitalia in monkeys, the long mating songs of humpback whales, the elaborate sex parlors of bowerbirds, and the epic battles of sea elephants are all examples of a species splurging time and energy to signal their fitness.

But how does the colourful backside of a mandrill explain the extravagance of a sophisticated work of art like *Ulysses*? To answer this question, we should first find a way to define the function of the human brain in the same way as the sexual ornamentation of other animals. Miller argues that the brain is the organ in humans that takes the responsibility of putting on displays of affordable waste. Our brain has become much larger in order to run the complicated calculations needed for our complex mental behaviours like language, thinking, and artistic creation. The costs of sporting such a large brain are very high for the humans, as its sheer size requires so much energy to run and maintain. Furthermore, a huge number of genes,

almost half of the human genome, are involved in the brain, leaving it particularly vulnerable to mutations. This makes the brain's fitness highly significant. Having a healthy brain tells a lot about you. It means that you have had the necessary resources to afford this expensive organ. But more importantly, it indicates that your genes are good enough that they have not messed your brain up. Survival in the face of vulnerability is generally associated with fitness, and the human brain is the best indicator of a vulnerable complex organ whose successful maintenance is a strong indicator of the individual's fitness. But how do mating humans see the workings of the brain? We can't open the skull and see if it is working well enough. Even if we could, the appearance of the brain does not tell much about its function. This is when the products of the human brain become important. Anything that is a manifestation of the functionality of our brain becomes a potential fitness indicator. Our ability to use logic, language, and imagination suddenly gain a high significance, and the capacity for artistic creation becomes a reliable indicator that includes them all.

This does not mean that a big brain and its products are *the only* sexual displays humans developed a taste for. Physical strength, body shape, and face symmetry remain important non-intellectual sexual displays that play an important role in human's sexual selection. The mental and physical features at work in humans' sexual selection are not mutually exclusive. However, the focus of this argument is to trace the evolutionary explanations for the intellectual features in sexual selection. It is fitting to focus on mental sexual displays when talking about a form of art that has language as its primary tool. As Miller (2001) explains, language has been the reason that humans sexual selection has narrowed down on the brain. For sexual selection to pick up and evolve a feature through mate choice, the individuals need to be able to identify that feature. For non-speaking species, it is not easy to gauge the brain quality of their peers; for those who

talk, however, words and artistic representations made possible through words become powerful ways to see through the skull of their potential mates. That is why Miller claims that “during human evolution, sexual selection seems to have shifted its primary target from body to mind” (p. 10). This does not mean that ripped abs don’t get picked by sexual selection anymore; it is just that the chubby bespectacled class clown also has a chance now.

However, before extending to modern-day displays of intelligence, taking brain power as a fitness indicator helps us to understand the origins of primitive arts. Our ancestors started painting their bodies, drawing on cave walls, and rhythmically beating on empty tree trunks to show off the complexity and therefore the quality of their brains. But applying these evolutionary explanations to a complex, erudite, modernist novel written hundreds of thousands of years after the evolution of such rudimentary adaptations still seems like a stretch, one that no literary Darwinian has tested yet. Although Miller (2001) does a good job in contextualizing literature within the evolutionary explanations for the arts as forms of sexual display, he still remains within the domain of early forms of literature. He explains rhyme, rhythm, and meter as “poetic handicaps,” as they “make communication harder, not easier” (p. 379), and shows that the ability to show off with language, i.e., literature, is comparable to any other handicapping display that indicates an individual’s fitness. Miller, however, is skeptical whether these explanations can account for more recent literary styles. Thinking that these modern styles are “cultural inventions,” Miller fears that evolutionary theories of art are only good enough to explain the origins of our adaptations for producing and appreciating literary styles and not the more recent literary inventions.

While I believe Miller is right in acknowledging the influence of other factors, such as culture and history, on what we perceive as art today, we should note that culture and history are

not without evolutionary roots themselves. They cannot be exempted from evolutionary principles as alien constructs formed independently from the rest of human evolution. The laws of evolution that have shaped our psyche and govern our emotions and behaviours have consequently influenced our cultural traditions, social norms, and historical patterns. This is why I believe that despite the unquestionable importance of considering historical influences in understanding a novel like *Ulysses*, and despite the fact that the evolutionary theories of the arts just focus on the origins of the arts, there are still ways to push these explanations further into the realm of the modern arts to help us understand *Ulysses* in different and more profound ways.

The main way in which I go beyond the current evolutionary theories of the arts is by extending them to account for modern, elite art. Miller does admit that “elite aesthetics follow the same signaling principles as sexual selection” (p. 284), but he believes that our naturally adapted capacities to produce and enjoy art do not respond well to more recent artistic forms because of their deliberately distorted style. As a result, he concludes that the “fitness display theory of aesthetics works much better for folk aesthetics than for elite aesthetics” (p. 284).

While I agree that folk art is a great starting point to trace the evolutionary origins of the arts, I believe such theories are not limited to more primitive or popular forms of art. In the rest of this chapter, my aim is to show how fitness display theory works just as well in explaining modern and elite ornaments, in particular, *Ulysses*. I am aware, however, that the current social, cultural, and historical factors, themselves influenced by the same evolutionary principles, in turn influence the modern manifestations of the arts. Therefore, I shall explain in this chapter, and more extensively in the chapter on the environment, how these historical influences have shaped some of the modern artistic traditions present in *Ulysses*.

As we saw, the main requirement for a fitness-indicating sexual ornament to be reliable is cost, and in humans, cost-incurring displays are put on by the brain and its products. Language, imagination, and art are the mental products that through their complexity show the quality, and therefore health, of the brain that produces them. Based on this principle, a continuum is formed on which every individual is ranked according to the quality of their mental products. This starts with simply being capable of language, but the competition can soon get more intense. As more individuals possess the basic skills, a need for higher levels of quality and uniqueness is born. Language by itself soon becomes too ordinary to indicate fitness, and therefore, more peculiar uses are invented to differentiate the normally-fit from the highly-fit. The ability to formulate language to tell stories and jokes becomes a significant way of showing off an extra level of skill in the original trait and therefore a way to prove the quality of the brain and its controlling genes. It doesn't stop there. Within every newly-invented trait, there are always ways to distinguish the better from the good, and the best from the better. Literature, itself a prime indication of our capacity for costly mental products, exhibits various degrees and manifestations of cost. The more attractive the use of language in a work of literature, the better it is an indication of the brain's abilities.

### **Difficulty and Virtuosity**

*Ulysses* has attracted the attention of readers and critics for decades because of its difficult style and peculiar use of language. While this has frustrated many readers and even critics and fellow authors, it has also been a major source of the novel's success and durability. It is hard not to praise the intricacy of style and acknowledge Joyce's genius, skill, and hard work in building this massive structure. Before anything else, *Ulysses* is a tour de force of virtuosity in which Joyce has masterfully built a verbal monument of allusions, hidden connotations, riddles, wordplay,

and inter/intra-textual connections. Although the implications of the novel's content have maintained the long-term interest of Joycean critics, the main reason *Ulysses* is still remembered and discussed is because of the complexity and uniqueness of its style. Devoting her entire book to the complex style of *Ulysses*, Lawrence (1981) claims that the novel's "most strikingly original and disorienting aspect [is] its radical stylistic and modal changes" (p. 5). Over three decades later, Hogan (2014) notes that "appreciation of skill is clearly an important part of our response to literary artifacts," and continues that "In the case of *Ulysses*, there is plenty of scope for wonder at Joyce's innovative and expert development of narration, often related to technical innovations" (p. 153). It is true that novel's shocking themes, deemed obscene in the early years after its publication, attracted a lot of attention, but the main reason that *Ulysses* has entered the literary canon is because of the skillful difficulty with which it is composed.

Similarly, many sexually selected features in nature exhibit a form of difficulty. Organisms prefer a sexual display that is not easy to make because it indicates its displayer's fitness. Miller (2001) claims that "beauty equals difficulty and high cost" because "our sense of beauty was shaped by evolution to embody an awareness of what is difficult as opposed to easy, rare as opposed to common, costly as opposed to cheap, skillful as opposed to talentless, and fit as opposed to unfit" (p. 281). Sexual displays require strength, health, talent, time, and expensive materials. This is true for all sexual displays; from the deadly battles sea elephants fight to the glamorous plumages birds put on, from the melodious songs the Siamangs perform to the mesmerizing stories that *Homo sapiens* tell, the difficulty of these displays ensures cost, and cost is what makes sexual ornaments reliable displays of fitness.

The difficulty in *Ulysses*'s style has the same function. It works like a fitness indicator that shows the abilities of not only its author, but also its readers in understanding and

appreciating those difficulties. In “Oxen of the Sun,” Joyce displays his extraordinary adroitness in curating a living exhibit of English styles dating back to pre-English Latinate prose and stretching to contemporary abbreviated utterances and street talk. It requires tremendous mental fitness to portray the stylistic history of Western literature and language in a few pages and still manage to tactfully match each of those styles to the topic of what is being discussed. This also requires the reader to possess considerable intelligence to decipher the connection between the innocent-sounding Anglo-Saxon verse and the blissful pre-birth state – “Before born babe bliss had. Within womb won he worship” (14.7) – or to associate the moral earnestness of nurse Callan’s description of Mina Purefoy’s labour to the style of the morality play, *Everyman*. The virtuosity that such stylistic ornamentation require has been a defining quality of art across different periods and cultures. Anthropologist Franz Boas who studied various cultures found the artist’s skillfulness to be inseparable from aesthetic perception. In *Primitive Art*, Boas identifies the source of aesthetic pleasure to be partly “the pleasure of the virtuoso who overcomes technical difficulties that baffle his cleverness” (p. 350). Both producing and understanding the stylistic complexities of *Ulysses* require a high level of intelligence, and as Miller argues, intelligence, the mark of a healthy brain, is the feature that communicates fitness in humans’ sexual selection. As I mentioned before, the vulnerability of the human brain makes it the perfect organ to indicate fitness, as its proficiency is of considerable significance due to its susceptibility to failure. Different species develop sexual adaptations where there is a cost involved to verify the accuracy of fitness signals, and while this cost is verifiable by an extravagant tail in peacocks, humans seem to have narrowed in on the brain, and the products of the human brain, literature among them, as reliable indicators of that individual’s fitness. The difficulty of style in *Ulysses* makes the fitness signal more reliable through incurring higher costs.

The difficulty of modernist texts has been interpreted as an indicator of fitness in non-evolutionary contexts as well. In *The Difficulties of Modernism*, Diepeveen talks about high modernists' view of difficulty as a feature that both signals and demands a sort of "heroic" and "virile" pleasure, as opposed to conventional pleasure, which they saw as "timid" and "tranquilizing," suggesting that modernist difficulty demanded a higher level of fitness from both the author and the reader compared to more conventional styles. Even closer to the biological definition of fitness indicators is Diepeveen's claim that the defenders of difficulty "overwhelmingly portrayed difficulty as the occasion of a physical struggle" (p. 165) and *health*. According to Diepeveen, the fact that modernist texts require active resistance and engagement "inevitably resulted in *healthy* [emphasis added] art" (p. 166). He then quotes Geoffrey Grigson, who in reviewing Pound's *Cantos*, described it as "*athletic* writing, of a kind which has only been made possible by long severe *training* and *dieting* [emphasis added]" (p. 166). The terminology of "vigor," "virility," "health," and "athleticism," that Diepeveen refers to shows a history of associating the complexity of modernist texts like *Ulysses* to a sort of fitness. Diepeveen notes that "Critics pictured difficult modernism as the triumph of good health that only right living can bring ... For high modernism's proponents, the vigor of difficulty was not the kinetic frenzy of madness, but the strenuousness of good health" (p. 166). Ezra Pound narrows the emphasis on health to the human brain when he notes that the difficulty of modern texts is dependent on a "mind [that] is strong enough" (as cited in Diepeveen, 2003, p. 166). The rationale with which the proponents of modernism defended difficulty is exactly the same one Miller uses to define art as a fitness indicator. They both see the significance of art in testing the brain's fitness through challenging it with complex forms. The elaboration of *Ulysses*'s style can be interpreted in the

same way, as its complex stylistic features test our mental capabilities and through this, function as indicators of fitness.

One of the main features that make the style in *Ulysses* difficult is the way Joyce combines many literary and nonliterary techniques that usually don't appear together, making the novel a melting pot of almost anything. It simultaneously displays interior monologue, nineteenth century sentimental prose, medieval romance, stream of consciousness, journalistic language, purple prose, dream-surreal writing, catechism, drama, allegory, etc. altogether. Such unexpected combinations are also an inseparable feature of sexually selected traits, caused by a biological phenomenon known as the "genetic capture." For a trait to be a reliable fitness indicator, it needs to give the most information about the whole genetic quality of the individual, often more than the genes that only control the sexual display. This is why fitness indicators usually open a bigger window on the genome of the displayer, going beyond the traits and qualities that are immediately related to the fitness indicator. The human brain, because of its involvement with a huge number of genes, also displays a wider set of qualities compared to an organ that is controlled by fewer genes. As Miller explains, when a trait is to provide more information about its displayer, "typically, this might work by a trait evolving a little bit more complexity, recruiting some of the genes that influence growth and development processes already evolved for other adaptations" (p. 130). If we take literature as a form of sexual display presented by an organ (the brain) that offers extended genetic information through genetic capture, then we can argue that the complexity in *Ulysses* has the function of signaling more information than what normal literary works do. As Miller says, "good fitness indicators give sexual choice a panoramic view of a potential mate's genetic quality" (p.131), and the breadth of techniques used in *Ulysses* similarly represents qualities that exceed the limits of literary productions.

Another defining characteristic that makes the style in *Ulysses* difficult is its excessiveness. *Ulysses* is not a unique novel only because of its foregrounding of language; what sets *Ulysses* apart is exceeding the limits of its genre. One of the most conspicuous instances of excessiveness is the flood of the facts in *Ulysses*. As Vincent Sherry (2004) explains, *Ulysses* exaggerates both of the founding elements of novel: the fiction part (the myth, the romance, the allegory) and the facts (journaling, record-keeping) to unrecoverable degrees. “He indulges and multiplies random detail increasingly over the course of the book, straining the sustaining frame of the myth up to and through the breaking point” (p. 3). Professors who assign reading *Ulysses* for their courses often ask their students to ignore all the references and details. Reading *Ulysses* with Gifford’s annotations open side by side or listening to Frank Delany’s weekly podcasts, where you get even more details on all the Dublin references, character backgrounds, and hidden-away connections and running themes, can take months, facing the reader with even a greater amount of excessive detail.

While this excessive expansion of facts seems completely unnecessary even for accompanying the relatively meager plot of *Ulysses*, let alone for serving any evolutionary purpose one can possibly imagine, it does not sound so out of place when you look at it as a sexual adaptation. Sexual selection works based on female choice. It means that traits get chosen that are preferred by the females of the sexually reproducing species. When there is a strong female preference for a trait, both the trait and a taste for it get passed on to the next generation, in which that trait is more strongly represented. As a result, the next generation gets even pickier about that trait, creating a positive feedback cycle that enhances the representation of that trait in each subsequent generation. This is the main reason why sexually selected expressions get

exaggerated over generations, and it is where the term “runaway” in Fisher’s<sup>22</sup> portrayal of sexual selection comes from. If you look at the birds-of-paradise of Indonesia, Australia, and Papua New Guinea, you will be amazed by the extent to which these animals have pushed the boundaries of plumage and ornamentation. Some of their features like their ribbon-like tails and mating dances and songs look and sound so extravagant that one starts questioning if reproduction is even worth so much cost and effort. It is just a reaction caused by astonishment, however. It is not uncommon at all for other species to go at such lengths to increase their chances of reproduction. In fact, humans do the same thing with language and the arts, and a novel like *Ulysses* is a good example of that.

The style in *Ulysses* does seem like the result of a positive-feedback circle where the need for foregrounding language and style has multiplied because of the ordinariness of the present styles in the previous “generations” and a need for new additions that stand out. As I showed before, one of the principles of sexual selection is the virtuosity of the displayer in making something “special.” In addition, “estrangement” and making the language special is a defining quality of literature. Combine this with runaway’s multiplying effect and you end up in a “specialty race” where artists are constantly pushed toward creating novel forms and styles, raising the bar in an escalating bidding war. How can a writer be more “special” than the giant classics like William Shakespeare, Dante Alighieri, Homer, and contemporaries like Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Virginia Woolf? The answer well could be combining elements from all and then intensifying the styles by deliberately compounding the language, burying the plot

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<sup>22</sup> Fisher’s theory of runaway sexual selection – the idea that a female preference for a male ornament, rather than its function, will create a self-reinforcing cycle in which both the male ornament and the female preference will become prevalent – has been both debated and corroborated by scientists in the decades after its proposition. In a review of the recent genetic and quantitative research on the validity of sexual selection theories, Kuijper, Pen, and Weissing (2012) cite studies by Lande (1981) and Kirkpatrick (1982), in which “models from quantitative genetics ... and population genetics ... revealed the efficacy of the Fisher process” (p. 290).

under facts, coining new words, violating syntax, installing word games and puzzles, and interrupting thoughts and sentences with seemingly irrelevant ideas and details. This is exactly what Joyce does in *Ulysses*, and it gets more radical as he advances through his stylistic innovations.

*Ulysses* gets increasingly complicated as it gets closer to the end, as if Joyce had to find a way to surpass himself in each episode. After the collagic style of “The Wandering Rocks,” where Joyce narrates overlapping scenes from different perspectives, he surprises us in “Sirens” with a verbal “overture,” not just complicated by unreadable word/sounds like “eppripfftaph” and “pfrwritt” (p. 246), but carefully coded in a way that each line – apparently haphazard and meaningless – introduces a “motive” that will later appear in the episode. “Cyclopes” and “Nausicaa” start experimenting with changes in narrator and literary styles, and then this reaches a climax in “The Oxen of the Sun” where a complete survey of English styles is mapped onto the human gestation. This extraordinary combination and complication of styles is immediately followed by a total change of genre; in “Circe” Joyce shifts to a dramatic style and then adds to the episode’s obscurity by bringing in elements of dream and hallucination, all the while making internal references to previous episodes and characters in the novel. These attempts to highlight form by introducing “special” elements in each episode and their escalating effect on the complexity and extravagance of style continue in the last three episodes of the novel. Joyce even goes back to some of the earlier episodes and adds “special effects” to maintain the striking quality of style throughout the novel. The headlines that interrupt “Aeolus” with journalistic language were added later by Joyce, perhaps in keeping with the unwritten rule that in *Ulysses* style is constantly threatened by a language that is not its own. Every time a new element is introduced to style, this creates the need for an even more “special” stylistic novelty to keep the

novel's uniqueness and its surprising quality. This matches the mechanism of runaway effect, in which sexual traits snowball in order to remain competitive in attracting attention.

I believe that the runaway effect is rushed even faster when the feature in question is language. Language, and the ability of thinking and imagination that comes with it, opens the way for much faster and more radical expansions in literature. Every verbal skill that is mastered by many writers becomes too common to be a reliable fitness indicator, and therefore needs to be topped by a more extreme form. In the chapter "Cyrano and Scheherazade," where Miller focuses on literature as a form of sexual display, he mentions that if everyone had gained the same level of poetic skills, "then sexual selection would raise its standard again, perhaps favoring only those whose trochaic septameter quatrains were composed of alliterative word-triplets" (p. 381). However, he fails to notice the role of language in amplifying the complexity of aesthetic form.. Generative anthropology<sup>23</sup> considers language to be responsible for the evolution of human culture and art, as it allows for new social organizations dramatically different from those of other animals. While other animals' conflicts are resolved by a pecking order hierarchy, human language, according to the "originary hypothesis", has evolved semantic qualities to defer violence through the creation of concepts and signs. Human language is fundamentally different from other signal systems in that it allows for the creation of unlimited concepts through syntactical combinations. Furthermore, the symbolic quality of human language opens the way for imagination, which in turn leads into countless new possibilities. This is why I believe verbal displays are much more permeable compared to other forms of sexual display, and this makes literary forms extremely fertile for rapid complexification.

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<sup>23</sup> Gans, E. (1993). *Originary thinking: Elements of generative anthropology*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Miller also overlooks the effects of language in altering the manifestations of modern art when he tries to explain the rebelliousness in what he calls “elite” art through the effects of technology. These more recent, elite works of art, in their bizarre, convoluted, and less-than-perfect styles, do not exactly correspond to the principles of sexual display, and this calls for some sort of explanation. Miller maintains that the perfection that we have achieved in creating arts and crafts by using technology has pushed the modern art back to pretechnological crudeness and simplicity. It’s true that sexual displays need to demonstrate skill, virtuosity, and perfection to qualify as reliable fitness indicators, but when machines fabricate the perfection, it loses its signaling value, and this is when “signs of handmade authenticity became more important than representational skill”(p. 287). The perfectly symmetric furniture produced through technology has brought back the “rustic” design, just like photography drove realist painting out of business and gave birth to expressionism and surrealism.<sup>24</sup>

While this explanation might work for some forms of arts and crafts, it does not necessarily explain all forms of modern or “elite” art, and it certainly does not explain *Ulysses*. *Ulysses* is all about complexity, precision, and perfection in style, and I believe this is partly because of its medium. Language is different from other artistic materials and media in that it brings ideas and imagination with it. When you put a linguistic form of sexual display into the runaway machine, it evolves even faster over iterations. The inherent complexity and ambivalence of ideas opens more possibilities for multiplication and alterations. If we take Miller’s approach in accounting for the evolutionary origins of the modern art, then modern literature should go only toward simplicity. Although this is true for some modernist art, it fails

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<sup>24</sup> The German philosopher Walter Benjamin has a series of writings about photography and its influence on modern art and culture. For more, see *On Photography*, a selection of Benjamin’s essays edited by Esther Leslie (2015).

to work for *Ulysses*. This is why I believe we should take a different approach in extending evolutionary explanations to account for more recent forms of art.

One way to do this is to expand the concept of “cost” as what makes fitness indicators reliable. The problem with Miller’s theory is that he defines cost only as waste and extravagance in the end product, i.e., the work of art. The way Miller sees it, to pay the cost of being reliable, fitness indicators should actually present a display of excess, and this makes it hard to account for displays of dearth. While this is an acceptable view of cost for most sexual displays, it is quite narrow when it comes to the arts. For artistic sexual displays, cost is not solely reflected in the extravagance and elaborateness of the work of art (although that is a very typical manifestation of cost). Instead, cost is fundamentally associated with the organ that facilitates artistic creation, i.e., the brain. The costly ornament whose fitness needs to be proved is the brain itself, and any mental product that is *attractive* enough to lure an audience can be a reliable indicator of its fitness. Therefore, any artistic product that *stands out* and *attracts attention* qualifies as a reliable fitness indicator, regardless of the amount of waste in its style. Simple, yet original works as well as unoriginal but affective ones can pass as reliable fitness indicators and hence works of art. It does not matter if they are not extravagant; the organ that produces them is, and that suffices to signal the individual’s fitness. In other words, the job of artistic sexual displays is to attract attention through whatever stunts they can come up with, and not necessarily to be extravagant themselves<sup>25</sup>. This successfully explains the less ornate

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<sup>25</sup> The concept of *attracting attention* as a key feature of art is also emphasized by Boyd (2009). His main argument is that human art evolved as forms of play and imitation (representation), behaviours that allow for and are facilitated by flexibility, a trait that in turn expedites skill development and therefore improves fitness. More interesting for our discussion, however, is Boyd’s emphasis on the notion of attracting attention in art. He sees art as a “strategy” where the author expends costs to attract an audience’s attention and control their response (p. 218). This fits my definition of cost in artistic sexual displays as what the individual pays to attract (originally the mate’s, but ultimately anyone’s) attention as a way of displaying fitness.

architecture, painting, and literature of the modern era without changing the underlying principles of evolutionary aesthetics.

The “quality” that is perceived as attractive – and can be accepted as the cost expended to indicate fitness – is mainly arbitrary. Elaborateness, simplicity, originality, and imitation have all been acceptable qualities of art among different cultures and in different periods. This matches the way other (non-artistic) sexual displays exhibit random qualities among different species, in different geographical locations, and even across the generations of the same species in the same location.<sup>26</sup> Birds from the same family develop radically different plumage,<sup>27</sup> and a look at the species of our order, primates, reveals great diversity among close taxonomical relatives. It can be baffling to pose the black hairless head of the Pied tamarin versus the bushy orange mane of Golden lion tamarin as two members of not just the same order or suborder, but the exact same family. However, sexual selection has the potential to randomly go in unexpected and divergent directions, since those traits are only selected because of the female choice and a random early variation. This is particularly true when sexual selection is explained through the runaway effect, which attributes the development of sexual displays to a strong female choice, and not any survival advantages, for that trait. This renders the form of sexual displays arbitrary and, according to Miller, “very sensitive to initial conditions and random events” (p. 76). If there are heritable ornamental traits among the males in a species and the females show a preference for those traits while mating, the genes that control those traits will become increasingly prevalent in each subsequent generation, regardless of the practicality of those traits. This means that

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<sup>26</sup> The fact that sexual traits have high degrees of variation and that closely related species diverge more dramatically in their sexual features compared to other features is well observed and commonly accepted in evolutionary biology. For example see Civetta & Singh (1998).

<sup>27</sup> For example, the common raven with its simple black look is in the same taxonomical family (Corvidae) as spectacular birds like Plush-crested jay and Tufted jay.

runaway sexual selection can produce any style of sexual display depending on the traits and preferences that happen to exist in a population, and there are no inherent reasons behind sexually selected features. While natural selection depends on real outside situations combined with biological traits, sexual selection is more subjective and biased. There is no need to explain why a species chooses a particular way of sexual selection. It just gets reinforced through positive feedback.

Applied to the human brain and its artistic products, this makes literary styles (as a sexually selected trait of the human brain) similarly dependent on the random biases of those who develop and favour them. The answer to the question “why did Joyce use these myriad styles in *Ulysses*?” would at least partly be “because he happened to have the skill to do so.” While this might sound like a facile theory, it actually corresponds with the sense of randomness felt in the way *Ulysses*’s myriad styles keep shifting shapes. As the reader stumbles upon a new style or language gimmick while reading *Ulysses*, one notices a sense of randomness in the way these features are installed in the novel. Lawrence (1981) notes that “as the narrative norm is abandoned during the course of the book and is replaced by a series of styles, we see the arbitrariness of all styles” (p. 9). One of the main contentions about the styles in *Ulysses* is why Joyce has used so many of them. What are the meaning(s), relevance, and significance of all these stylistic experimentations? Critics have tried to justify Joyce’s unique use of different styles, and more than once they have come to the conclusion that there is no transcendental truth about the stylistic choices in *Ulysses*. Every new style and each different distortion of language is just another possibility, one other way of seeing and experiencing that has no priority over other ways, as opposed to an ultimate way of filtering experience. Lawrence (1981), for examples, believes that “*Ulysses* is deliberately antirevelatory, a book that ultimately subverts the notion of

an ‘ideal reader’ who arrives at a single truth. We do learn something about novels during the course of our reading, but we do not arrive at even a Pisgah sight of meaning” (p. 7). The evolutionary explanations have an advantage here in that they do not just render the stylistic randomness of *Ulysses* as meaningless; they actually provide a viable scientific explanation for them that does not fall far from the conclusions that other Joycean scholars have reached.

More importantly, seeing art as a form of sexual display provides an excellent opportunity to analyze certain literary styles with a focus on the social and environmental factors. As I explained, the preferences within a population heavily influence which traits get chosen by sexual selection. This puts the evolutionary ball in the viewers’ court, who impose their predispositions on the displayers and their works. As a result, fitness indicators constantly shift shapes with changes in the conditions and preferences in each population. For works of art, this translates into stylistic preferences and expectations of each period that lead to various historical manifestations of art. The fact that stylistic conservativeness was once the norm in the classical art does not mean that we cannot interpret Joyce’s experimentations with style as a fitness indicator connected to universal species-specific evolutionary motives. Only the historical representations of cost have changed, while the underlying principles of indicating fitness and expending costs remain the same. This also balances the concept of “randomness.” *Ulysses* does not have its special style only because Joyce “happened” to have those skills, but also because this novel was written within a time that stylistic experimentation was considered a valid indication of fitness. I will extensively discuss the role of social factors in *Ulysses*’s style in the next chapter, but here I will first review some other prevalent manifestations of art (besides complexity) to see if *Ulysses* also employs them as displays of fitness.

In addition to complexity and extravagance, as the main stylistic manifestations of cost in *Ulysses*, I identify *originality* and *affect* as two other major ways in which authors have made literature stand out from ordinary speech. In other words, complexity, originality, and affect are three manifestations of cost that have been prevalent in different periods to reliably indicate fitness through art. So far, I discussed complexity as the feature that more immediately corresponds to the theories of cost in sexual selection, since complex works of art are more obvious displays of excessive cost. In the following paragraphs, I will explain how writers (sexual displayers) can signal cost through originality and affect, without necessarily displaying extravagance in style.

### **Originality**

One way to define art is through its “difference” from normal life. From the primitive forms of body painting to the most classic examples of literature that sound terribly trite today, we know art as being different from the norm. Boyd (2009) explains how Homer’s *Odyssey*, as one of history’s most successful stories, manages to attract the audience’s attention by creating difference against a background of established forms. Modernism has change (“make it new”) and a deviation from the norm as its mantra, and *Ulysses*, as a modernist novel, fulfills this to an extent that makes it even different from other modernist works. Most of the stylistic techniques used in *Ulysses* are unique in the sense that not only Joyce’s predecessors, but even his contemporary modernists did not use them in quite the same way. To make it even more idiosyncratic, *Ulysses* even rebels against its own “norm” by making radical stylistic shifts at two key points in the novel. Lawrence (1981) notes that while the first six episodes of *Ulysses* set a norm that corresponds to those of modernist literature (remember that these “norms” were divergences in their own rights from the previous literary conventions), Joyce changes gear in

“Aeolus” by introducing completely revolutionary styles that are exclusively his. Eventually, Joyce turns the proverbial knob of style up to eleven and experiences the top level of deviation from the norm in the final episodes of the novel.

Deviation from the norm is also a key element of evolution. Known among the biologists as “variation,” it is one of the three cardinal requirements for evolution besides heritability and selection pressure. For a feature to turn into an adaptation, it needs to include a variation that is selected over others either because of its survival advantages (natural selection) or for its reproductive advantages (sexual selection). In other words, “being different” is one of the main conditions for any trait to be adapted. This is true for both our physical features such as the shape of our eyes and for our psychological traits like humour or our tendency for storytelling; a difference from the norm has been necessary for each of these traits to evolve. While in naturally selected traits, the *difference* gets selected because of its practical advantages (the efficiency of our eyes for seeing), sexually selected traits (like storytelling) might have evolved because of their ability to attract mates. The root cause of attractiveness is the displayer’s fitness, proven through their ability to expend costs; however, this cost can be manifested in different ways. It is true that the main manifestation of cost is wasteful extravagance and complexity, but if a displayer invents a display that attracts attention through its striking *differences*, i.e. originality, this sufficiently indicates fitness, even if the invention does not directly represent extravagance.

Understanding the importance of “deviation from norm” in evolution and its role in sexually selected traits illuminates Joyce’s urge to make his stylistic deviations in *Ulysses*. If we accept that the governing mechanism that generates and sustains all human mental and physical features work based on “difference,” then it is easier to understand Joyce’s blatant efforts to write a “different” novel. Neither is it a surprise why hundreds of other novels that are so similar

to each other have died out with their authors. What's more, "variations" that get picked up by sexual selection do not necessarily make survival easier for their displayers. In other words, most sexually selected differences seem like a change for worse, which is why they count as a form of cost. According to Kokko and Brooks (2003), "it is well known that sexual selection can cause male and/or female phenotypes to diverge from naturally selected optima" (p. 12). The peacock tail definitely does not help the peacock in moving around faster or avoiding predators more easily. In fact, it makes it extremely costly for the bird to fly, while it can also attract predators. This resolves the paradox of explaining art, usually associated with useless *cost* and *difficulty*, as an adaptation and therefore can potentially explain the extra difficulty of *Ulysses*. If we take the purported purpose of stories to be understood (or appreciated) by their readers, the stylistic deviations used in *Ulysses* are not making this any easier. *Difference* and *difficulty* are connected features that go hand in hand in *Ulysses*, as they do in nature. The originality of *Ulysses* in combining different styles, altering the syntax of language, and offering novel ways of narration is a way of ensuring that the cost needed to validate the artwork's function as a fitness indicator is paid off. Through "handicapping" their displayers, originality incurs immediate costs and therefore promotes fitness. Exactly like the peacock tail that both endangers the animal and makes him popular, the stylistic experimentations in *Ulysses* both handicap it in connecting with its wider audience, while simultaneously giving it a chance to become one of the most prestigious and talked-about novels in history.

Finally, I'd like to note that an evolutionary view can only explain the *capacity* and the *taste* for originality as biologically transmittable traits, and not the styles that are deemed original at any particular point in this process. The styles are historical artifacts whose originality is relative. What is seen as original in a generation becomes conventional later and vice versa. This

is why the *historical* “originality” emphasized by the Romantics in the nineteenth century seems like a lonely episode rather than an evolutionary principle. Romantic “originality” is just a historical manifestation of an underlying principle, which is a deviation from the established norm. If seen that way, the classical values of simplicity and imitation are “original” in their own way through a deviation from the literary schools preceding them. In addition, when the capacity and the taste for originality become important selection criteria, it is not surprising that artistic styles get chosen that do not represent any complexity or extravagance. Ernest Hemingway’s prose and Pablo Picasso’s paintings are successful indicators of fitness because they are signaling the cost-bearing qualities of their displayers through their originality rather than a blatant display of cost. As long as the underlying principles are working, the different forms of sexual display are just historical, cultural, or technical façades that surface in the artists’ consciousness and the critics’ taste every once in a while.

### **Affect**

The third main way in which I believe artists signal the fitness of a costly brain is through evoking affective responses. Art has to touch its viewers by appealing to their emotions, and this is not necessarily achieved through an explicit display of extravagance. Emotional reactions kindled by art have always been considered one of its defining qualities since Aristotle. To put this in the context of art as sexual displays, we must return to our broader definition of cost. Any work of art that is good enough to stimulate affect can be an indicator of the costly brain that has provided the capacity for emotion in the first place. This frees the works of art from the imperative of displaying wasteful extravagance. Like originality, affect in a work of art can indirectly indicate fitness without necessarily displaying complexity. This being said, there are

works of art that display both features simultaneously, or even more, create affect *through* complexity. *Ulysses* is one of them.

Besides its content, the style in *Ulysses* also has an affective appeal to its readers. The readers of *Ulysses* seem to be attracted to the complicated and extravagant style of the book despite the impediments it causes them. They read, fail, and yet come back again for more. Why is this complexity attractive? What is it about the style in *Ulysses* that touches the readers? An immediate evolutionary response is that readers have a natural tendency to appreciate the virtuosity of the writer. If we agree that “beauty equals difficulty,” then it is not surprising that the difficult style of *Ulysses* stimulates affect in its readers. One should note that this is not a conscious appreciation, but instead an unmediated response. Interpreting the complexity of style in *Ulysses* through sexual selection theories does not mean that readers enjoy the difficult style of *Ulysses* because they consciously connect it to the sexual fitness of its author. Why would they care if Joyce, as an individual, was or was not fit? Difficulty in style has entered our aesthetic taste through sexual selection without our conscious knowledge of it. We are naturally attracted to extravagant, original, and affective works of art that stand out in the ordinariness of the world, and this does not mean that sexual selection even crosses our minds. What I am referring to is different from someone reading *Ulysses*, studiously discovering its intricacies, and then consciously praising Joyce for accomplishing this. In providing evolutionary explanations for literary style, we are not talking about a “rational” or “conscious” appreciation of virtuosity. Instead, we are talking about an unreflective affective response that we discover to have inside ourselves toward displays of fitness. The audience of human art, like the audience for any other form of sexual display, is attracted to aesthetic forms without rationalizing it. Just like the peahen that does not need to possess the conscious power to analyze, critique, and then commend the

peacock's tail, the natural evolutionary response that we give to art is not necessarily mediated through conscious calculation. The fact that evolutionary psychologists rationalize and theorize these responses does not mean that our responses are also consciously rationalized.

What's more, the affective response of readers to the virtuosity of *Ulysses* does not necessarily translate into them being sexually attracted to the artist. Although it makes sense to assume Joyce, like any other artist, gains attention and popularity among those who enjoy or appreciate his style, it is not imperative that this popularity is manifested in the form of sexual attraction. As Steven Pinker (1997) reminds us, the various theories of evolutionary psychology do not claim that modern humans' emotions and behaviours necessarily help us propagate our genes. Instead, they "only [claim] that people try to attain states of affairs that in our evolutionary past correlated with our ancestors' genes being propagated" (p. ix). In other words, we should separate our traits from the evolutionary roots through which we gain them. Physiological and psychological traits evolve under the selection pressures in a specific environment, but they can stay with a species under different circumstances, unless other selection pressures weed them out. We probably have evolved lighter skin tones because of the less exposure to direct sunlight in Northern Europe; however, this does not mean that the white babies born in South Africa have pale skin *because* their current environment is not sunny. Also, traits can continue to exist with (slightly) different functions from the ones they originally evolved for. It is true that we might have evolved a tendency to take pleasure in aesthetic complexity through sexual selection; however, this does not necessitate that the sense of pleasure that we gain must always be sexual. *Ulysses*'s style definitely elicits an affective response from its readers; this response, however, does not have to (only) be from female readers who find Joyce sexually attractive as a result of being attracted to his artistic display.

The style in *Ulysses* can also evoke affective responses from readers through elements that are not purely “literary.” The interior monologue and stream of consciousness, which *Ulysses* is a pioneer of, are “stylistic techniques” that have more to do with the human psyche than with linguistic and literary styles. We find pleasure in reading Bloom’s free flow of thoughts because it is very similar to the way our minds work. Jumping from one thought to another, making far-fetched connections, and expressing them in imperfect syntax are very familiar for humans. I think this is partly explainable through the genic capture principle, in which a larger number of genes, and therefore qualities, are involved in the sexual display, making it a combination of several adapted features, some of which have nothing to do with the sexual display per se. The style in *Ulysses*, too, seems like the result of a “genic capture.” Literary styles are combined with the psychological principles of memory, dreaming, and the natural flow of thinking. Joyce is a pioneer in introducing elements in *Ulysses* that were not considered “literary” before him. This matches the process of genic capture where a fitness indicator draws on a “larger amount of information about an individual's genetic quality” (Miller, 2001, p. 130). This paves the way for other traits to get involved in that particular sexual display. The traits associated with thinking, memory, and human emotions are entangled in the style of *Ulysses*. Some of them, like the interior monologue and stream of consciousness, are so deeply embedded in style that it is hard to separate them from the “literariness” of not only *Ulysses* but many other novels after it.

Just like the affective response of the readers does not have a cognitantly sexual nature, the process of indicating fitness through sexual displays is not necessarily calculated by the authors either. As Miller effectively puts it, “the displayer does not need to keep track of the fact that beautiful displays often lead to successful reproduction. Evolution keeps track for us” (p.

273). Writers do not write in complex, original, and affective styles consciously hoping to better promote their genes to potential mates. Analyzing the evolutionary roots of art as a form fitness-indicating sexual display is not tautologous with saying that every artist in history is consciously (or even uncounsiuosly) driven by sexual motives or even the promise of attracting an audience. Brian Boyd (2009) gives the example of an anonymous graffiti artist who puts on costly displays of art without getting any credit for it. He considers the graffiti artist's "behavior in terms of evolutionary costs and benefits, and it appears to make no sense" (p. xx). However, he believes that "Regardless of how circumscribed the glory that the graffito earned, the effort must have seemed worthwhile to the artist, simply for the pleasure of the idea and the pleasure of an audience, even an anonymous audience who did not know whom to thank" (p. 10). I believe even this level of conscious evaluation by an artist to weigh the costs and benefits is not a necessity. We do not have to rationalize a tendency that we have an urge for. What we deal with, as artists or art's audience, is the pleasure of engaging in its intellectual experience, rather than analyzing its evolutionary benefits. By looking for the evolutionary roots of the universal dispositions that might have led into the unique and complex style of *Ulysses*, this thesis does not suggest that *Ulysses* is nothing but a sexual display exactly like those of other species, and it certainly does not suggest that Joyce wrote *Ulysses* with the deliberate intention of showing his sexual appeal to women (or men for that matter).

The potential misconception of seeing *Ulysses* as a work intended to attract mates, resulting from a crude and reductive comparison between *Ulysses* and sexual displays, raises the question of "why men like Joyce?" When applied to the human brain and its imaginative products, sexual selection at a first glance seems to delegate all mental capacities and artistic talents to men. If

literary styles are forms of sexual display, then men should be the ones that are supposed to display them and women are the ones who have a preference for them. This misconception can get strengthened by the argument that sexual selection works based on *female choice*. If men are the artists, women are the admirer fans of those artists, and this means that they should not have any artistic abilities of their own. Neither should men have any particular preference toward their own artistic products. This can actually be the case in many species who show great sexual dimorphism through sexual selection. Female deer don't have the magnificent antlers of the buck, and Peahens don't have the impressive tail their opposite sex peers boast.

However, there are a couple of points to consider while comparing the mental abilities of humans to the sexual ornamentation in other species. First of all, sexual selection does not need to always develop sexual dimorphism between the two sexes. Miller (2001) explains that a phenomenon called "genetic correlation" keeps the sexes pretty similar in both the traits for *displaying* and those for *preferring* sexual ornamentation. Genetic correlation means that "males and females in every species share almost the same genes" (p. 89). As a result, when in a reproducing couple, the male shows the traits for a form of sexual display and the female shows the trait for choosing it, the genes for both sets of these traits get passed on to their offspring. This means that both the sons and daughters of such couples would inherit the genes for both displaying and preferring the sexual display. Does also sport antlers, albeit small, and peahens do possess a tail that bears a resemblance to the masterpiece their mates boast. As Miller explains, the similarities are greater in the beginning when the sexual selection is underway. After many generations of selection, however, the sexes start to differ more if the choosiness in males leaves them with fewer mates and if possessing the sexual display incurs considerable costs on the females.

This is why Miller discards genetic correlation as a way of explaining the similarities in men and women's mental abilities. But I believe that the genetic correlation need not have become less strong in humans because neither the male's preferences for mental traits, nor the women's possessing of those traits impose significant costs. Males who are judgmental about mental traits, literary styles for example, are still somehow displaying the same trait, i.e., intelligence, and therefore are still benefiting from the same advantages that intelligence would bring them. In addition, women who possess the same mental abilities can benefit from the other advantages of such traits. Even if we accept that the human brain has evolved through sexual selection, this does not mean that we should dismiss its survival advantages for us. Beside their role in sexual selection, our other mental faculties have helped us survive more successfully in our environment by gaining numerous advantages over the other species. The women who inherited intelligence from their parents did not have to lose them, as their benefits have always outweighed the costs.

Miller (2001) also recovers mental similarities between men and women through similar arguments. He argues that because of the overlaps between the traits for displaying human mental products and the appreciation of those products, there is no need for sexual differences in humans when it comes to their mental traits: "The production and appreciation of art probably rely on similar aesthetic capacities. It takes a sense of humor to recognize a sense of humor. Without intelligence, it is hard to appreciate another person's intelligence" (p.92). This can successfully explain women's tendency to create art and men's ability to appreciate it. There is no paradox in explaining Joyce's style through sexual selection (as a man) and the fact that women like Woolf and Barnes were engaging in the same displays of fitness at the same time in

similar ways. Similarly, there is no reason to be surprised why men liked and continue to be attracted to Joyce.

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I would like to emphasize that the purpose of this thesis is not to reduce *Ulysses*, or any other work of art for that matter, to the bare bones of a sexual display. I am, however, tracing the unique style of *Ulysses* to its evolutionary roots, because I believe that the special characteristics of this novel are governed by underlying principles that are initiated in the deep history of our species. While I believe that evolutionary principles have triggered a process in our species' aesthetic capacity that results in the complex style of *Ulysses*, I do not intend to simply equal the characteristics of the novel to those principles. Our aesthetic preferences have traveled an unimaginably long way from deep history and they have been influenced by many other factors along the way, burying the underlying principles under numerous other cultural, social, and environmental layers. I acknowledge those other factors, and in the next chapter, I will focus on the social, environmental, and period-specific factors. But at the same time, I will show how even those factors are also traceable to the same underlying evolutionary principles.

### Chapter Three: Art as Social Status

In *How the Mind Works*, Pinker (1997) argues that the psychology of the arts is partly the psychology of status. He believes that one way to understand art is to look at it from the perspective of social psychology because the usefulness of the arts that seems “so incomprehensible to evolutionary biology” is actually “comprehensible to economics and social psychology” (p. 522). According to this view, people enjoy art because of the status it brings them. Art might be purposeless, but people enjoy it because they “find dignity in the signs of an honorably futile existence removed from all menial necessities” (p. 523). Being cultured is important and can be a way to make one distinct from the others. By “dignity,” Pinker points toward an important selection pressure factor: “social status.” Applied to this thesis’s main question about the reasons behind the appeal of *Ulysses*’s difficult style, Pinker’s theory suggests that gaining social status could have played an important role in this novel’s dynamics of literary production and consumption.

Although Pinker’s theory of art as social status can potentially explain the allure of *Ulysses*’s obscurity, it fails to identify any adaptive functions for it in its current form. In my first chapter, I discussed Pinker’s theory of aesthetic pleasure’s uselessness and showed its limitations in offering adaptive explanations for art. Pinker argues that works of art are pleasure-giving technologies that have no adaptive values. They are the result of humans’ hacking their own brain circuits to get pleasure without actually becoming any fitter for survival. Just like his other attempt, Pinker’s theory of social status refuses to push through toward an evolutionary motive for art. Another limitation of Pinker’s theories is their inability to account for less conventional artistic styles. Sharing Miller’s confinement to primitive art, Pinker excludes what he considers “avant-garde” art from his evolutionary explanations for the arts. He argues that the avant-garde

works of art are even less explicable from a biological point of view because they are “designed for the sophisticated palate” (p. 522). Pinker’s evolutionary perspective, which sees art as an adaptively useless but pleasurable trait, can only account for more primitive and popular forms of art. Unconventional styles of art cannot even be explained as pleasure-giving tools because there is no conceivable pleasure in their distorted forms. Modern and post-modern artists have deliberately mutated their work and deviated from the more “natural” forms in order to stimulate their saturated audience. This makes it difficult (or impossible) to explain rebellious styles within the framework of evolution. Pinker’s strictly adaptive outlook on the evolution of the human mind has trouble explaining “atonal jazz” or “the arch wit of an Oscar Wilde” (p. 523) because they deliberately diverge from the more primitive forms of art with more obvious adaptive features. Based on this, *Ulysses*, attempting to surprise and stimulate its readers, drifts from the evolutionary purposes of more conventional forms of literature and is therefore unexplainable through evolutionary motives.

According to Pinker (1997), works like *Ulysses* make the already-difficult job of explaining art through evolution impossible, because “psychology of status” is involved in their formation and reception. They are for academics and intellectuals – who according to him are “culture vultures” (p. 522) – and the only imaginable reason to produce and consume such stylistic deviants is the prestige attached to them. While Pinker makes this argument to show the lack of any adaptive function for the arts and reduces the arts to a way of gaining prestige, I believe prestige does offer adaptive advantages for humans. We have lived and continue to live in class-based societies, and much of our success in surviving in our environment depends on the social status we gain. Enjoying the arts, especially status-giving, class-distinguishing art, is an indication of two things: First, it shows that the individual is well-fed, safe, and can afford

spending resources on an activity that is not directly serving their physical needs. Of course, there is the starving artist trope, but even they should still have a minimum level of welfare to spend time on the arts. Second, the ability to produce, understand, and enjoy distinctive and original works of art testifies to a person's high intellectual prowess, which is a sign of the brain's fitness. This is perfectly compatible with Miller's (2001) view that considers the brain and its artistic products as fitness-indicating sexual displays. Combined together, these two views – art as sexual displays and art as social status – provide a clear path to identify the adaptive functions of the arts.

Both Pinker (1997) and Miller (2001) have presented their arguments to only explain primitive art and fail to account for more experimental styles. In this chapter, I am going to advance their arguments to arrive at a more comprehensive solution that helps me to explain the unconventional style of *Ulysses* by contextualizing the evolutionary theories related to *social status* within the framework of a modernist novel. To do this, the first step would be to explain how other evolutionary aesthetic theories –in particular Miller's view of art as fitness-indicating sexual displays – are related to social status. The second step is to employ the broadened definition of “cost,” discussed in Chapter Two, to account for less conventional artistic styles. Miller traces the origin of art to sexual displays evolved to indicate the displayer's overall fitness and therefore claim distinction, status, and ultimately mates. Such claims only become valid when the fitness indicator is secured by a sort of *cost* expended by the displayer. By broadening the definition of the fitness indicators' cost, I explained how in each period and culture these displays take different shapes, and therefore arts – and status by extension – are associated with different and sometimes contradictory features. Elite and popular art are not different in their underlying evolutionary mechanisms even though they differ greatly in how they look, i.e., in

how they represent cost. Stylistic features, including both form and content, become historical manifestations, while the evolutionary guiding principles remain the same. This widens the narrow historical definitions of art – the Classicists’ focus on order, the Romantics’ focus on feelings, etc. – and allows me to contextualize the complex style of *Ulysses* within its social and cultural environment and analyze it as a modernist artistic creation and a source of social status through an evolutionary approach.

### **How Is Art as Social Status Relevant to Art as Sexual Display?**

Maybe the most sensible way to situate the social within the biological is to stop seeing them as separate domains in the first place. As Boyd, Carroll, and Gottschall (2010) point out, “Biology is not an alternative to society or culture” (p. 4). They explain that there is a successive dependence among culture, the social, and the biological, in which each cannot exist outside its following, making biology the all-encompassing realm within which everything else eventuates. Cultural phenomena are formed within a society of living beings, and therefore, the biological scene of life is the undisputable prerequisite for any social or cultural entity to exist. This axiomatic observation settles the problem of connecting the social to the biological; however, there are more details involved in explaining the links between social status and seeing aesthetic styles as sexual displays.

Sexual selection can be considered a form of social selection. Humans’ social relations create selection pressures that shape their evolution. Individuals with better social skills have higher survival chances, and they pass on the genes for their superior social intelligence to their offspring. In other words, social intelligence allows the genes associated with it to be selected. But according to Miller (2001), the most important way through which social relations affect evolution is through sexual selection. For Miller, humans’ social life (of course, like everything

else) is defined by their "mating mind": "Sexual selection is the best understood, most powerful, most creative, most direct, and most fundamental form of social selection" (p. 12-3). Sexual dynamics are one of the most important forms of social transaction among the individuals in any human society, and they create very strong selection pressures that directly impact the flow of genes from one generation to the next. There are other social factors that influence human evolution, but sexual factors have the strongest impact due to their immediate influence on the genes, making the relationship between social status and sexual selection a very direct one.

I believe this relationship can also be particularly strong when it comes to the evolution of the human mind and its artistic products. If we accept the theory of art as fitness-indicating sexual displays, then it means that even the social dynamics influencing the evolution of the human mind and its products are at least partly driven by sexual motives. Artistic displays cannot be as fully explained with strictly social motives, such as forming group alliances and creating social cohesion, as they can be with sociosexual motives, such as the urge to be attractive to potential mates. Hypotheses like the gossip theory and Machiavellian intelligence<sup>28</sup> might be able to explain the evolution of other human phenomena (commerce, for example), but social theories are very much involved in – and therefore only work best with – sexual selection when we are talking about the artistic products of the human mind.

After establishing the relationship between the social and the sexual, the next step is to consider the similar evolutionary functions of social status and art as sociosexual phenomena. I discussed how works of art are sexual displays that augment the displayer's chances of

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<sup>28</sup> Robin Dunbar (1998) sees gossip as a form of "social grooming" to facilitate relations with the ever-growing human groups. In other words, the human mind evolved because of the social tensions in human communities and the need to peacefully resolve them. Similarly, De Waal (2007) believes that human intelligence developed through the need to manipulate social and political relations. These theories, and other similar ones, focus solely on social selection as the main reason for the evolution of the human mind.

reproduction though advertising their fitness. Just like artistic displays, social status is an indicator of the individual's fitness for reproduction. If one can claim a high social status – through maintaining conditions that gain popularity and respect in a certain group – this testifies to their overall fitness for survival and reproduction. Being able to secure a favourable social position increases the chances of reproduction both directly (the ability to attract mates give you a high status) and indirectly (high status helps you attract mates). This means that the psychological capacities for creating artistic displays and gaining social status are both selected and passed on through sexual selection. Miller (2001) notes that "from an evolutionary perspective, social competition centers around reproduction" (p. 13). In this sense, high social status becomes another sexual fitness indicator, just like physical power and artistic abilities, whose underlying motive is to advertise the displayer's fitness.

Besides sharing sexual motives, social status and artistic displays also take similar forms, as they are both defined, at least partly, through displays of expenditure. I explained how important the concept of "cost" is in fitness-indicating sexual displays, and although it has different historical manifestations, it is always characterized by a form of *waste*, whether it is the time "wasted" on a plain abstract painting or the excessive extravagance of *Ulysses*. The very fact that an artist must spend time, resources, and energy to create something with no or little practical value shows how integral the concept of waste is for the arts. The audience's recognition of exquisite artistry is directly linked to the amount of mental (and sometimes physical) resources that is *spent* in the creation of the work of art. The difficult style of *Ulysses*, its elaborateness, and the amount of skill, knowledge, and time that Joyce has spent in engineering this display of expenditure is what mainly defines its artistic quality for readers. Similarly, many traits and behaviours that are linked to gaining social status are characterized by

displays of wasteful expenditure. A very good example is the Potlatch, a lavish gift-giving ceremony among the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest. In these feasts, the host families demonstrate extremely extravagant and wasteful displays of their wealth by giving out expensive gifts and even destroying their property. Potlatch was first noticed as a form of “conspicuous consumption” by the sociologist Thorstein Veblen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Originally a socioeconomic concept that explained the urge to display one’s wealth, “Conspicuous consumption” was later adopted by evolutionary biologists like Zahavi to explain the conspicuously wasteful behaviors among animals. Zahavi (1974) explained that in order to advertise their fitness while mating, animals should demonstrate their ability to squander. It is true that by wasting their time, energy, and resources, animals “handicap” themselves; however, this handicapping behaviour becomes a reliable indicator of their fitness and simultaneously increases their social status. Both artistic ornamentation and social displays of expenditure fall under the category of handicapping fitness indicators for sexual purposes. Extravagantly expensive behaviours buy us social status in the same way in which poetic handicaps, like the difficult style of *Ulysses*, make a claim for aesthetic value.

This aesthetic value can, in turn, be a way to achieve social status; however, not every status-gaining social behaviour is artistic. Buying expensive property, making huge charity donations, and giving lavish gifts are ways to acquire a higher social status independently from the arts. Such social behaviours, regardless of their connection to the arts, are fitness indicators selected through sexual selection. This being said, even the non-artistic status-gaining social behaviours have structural similarities to art, and in fact, many share a common origin. Take the social significance of clothing for example. A practical invention for survival at first glance, clothes are more than utilitarian body coverings. Scrutinized against the criteria of survival

practicality, many clothes and accessories are not more than “useless” fashion items intended to make us “look good.” Studying the excessively ostentatious and uncomfortable fashions of the Victorian era, the art historian and Virginia Woolf’s nephew Quentin Bell (1976) came to the same conclusion about clothes, which he saw as “too much a part of us...as though the fabric were ... a natural extension of the body, or even of the soul” (p. 19). Quoting an unnamed “lady,” Bell asserts that “a sense of being perfectly well dressed ... gives a feeling of inward tranquility which religion is powerless to bestow” (p. 19). The social significances of fashion are so profound that it becomes synonymous with morality. Calling this new type of morality “sartorial morality,” Bell notices that “[i]n obeying fashion we undergo discomforts and distress which are, from a strictly economic point of view, needless and futile. We do so for the sake of something which transcends our own immediate interests” (p. 13). Even if we do not want to admit to the aesthetic qualities of such social behaviours, one can still detect the underlying principles of *wasteful expenditure* intended to gain social status, which these social behaviours share with art.

While status can be gained independently from the arts through non-artistic behaviours, in many cases, works of art become the means through which individuals seek social status. Affording to engage in artistic creation is a status-giving fitness indicator in itself. The fact that an individual can afford to “waste” time and energy to create art shows he (or she) is well-off in various aspects, making them appealing mates. Sacrificing time and resources can be intensified by creating artworks that handicap more of the artist’s fitness. *Ulysses* gains more status – for both its author and readers – compared to a simpler verbal display, exactly because its complex style handicaps more of the time, energy, and resources of its author and readers. Moreover, works of art are perfect for gaining high status because they advertise the most important fitness

factor in humans: the genes for a healthy brain. Intelligence is a very appealing feature for humans' sexual selection. It shows that our large, mutation-risky brains have passed evolution's quality control. The more an artist can demonstrate intelligence through their artwork, a better indicator of their fitness their art is.

But if we explain the difficult style of *Ulysses* as a fitness indicator, are we saying that Joyce has written it with the intention of advertising his fitness to potential mates? Are *Ulysses* readers taking its genius style literally as an indicator of Joyce's fitness for sexual reproduction, and this is why they find it appealing? The answer is definitely no. The conscious motive for creating art, being good with words, or sounding sophisticated almost never has anything to do with sexuality, at least not on the surface. It is very important to note that we are not attracted to art and artists consciously, taking their smart artwork as an indicator of their fitness. Humans are not in the business of calculating the fitness of their potential mates through browsing art galleries and reading novels. But there is always an intermediary reason that is the more conscious motive for engaging in intellectual or artistic activities. This is where I believe the concept of social status plays an important role in bridging our surface-level cultural and historical *artistic motives* to our deep-level, deep-historical, and universal *reproductive motives*. In other words, social status is the interface between artistic displays and our core reproductive motives. Artists do not necessarily create art with the conscious intention of displaying their brain quality, plotting to attract mates. Artists, however, have other ostensible motives: following rituals, enjoying beauty, instructing others, and more importantly, gaining social status. The urge to have a high status in society and secure strong social relations are the more conscious motives that replace the underlying reproductive motives in the process of creating and appreciating art.

Having established the connection between the social and sexual motives in works of art within an evolutionary framework, I will now move on to investigate the role of such sociosexual motives in the production and consumption of *Ulysses*'s difficult style. My main objective is to go beyond the current evolutionary explanations of art, which focus on more primitive and/or popular art forms, to account for the unconventional style of *Ulysses*. To do so, I will employ the broadened definition of *cost* or *wasteful expenditure* that I developed in the previous chapters to analyze the stylistic complexities of *Ulysses* from an evolutionary perspective, but still within the context of its own period and environment. I will explore the role of sociosexual factors in the development of certain aesthetic preferences – as the historical manifestations of cost during modernism – for both the artists and the audiences of that period. To narrow my discussion to *Ulysses*, I will consider the formation of these aesthetic preferences by investigating the circumstances of this novel's production and reception and will attempt to interpret them in light of our species' evolutionary motives.

### **3.1 Status for the Artist**

In exploring the sociosexual motives of art, the artist is the first potential party to benefit from the status gained through the artwork. As Miller (2001) explains, “we possess a natural ability to see through the work of art to the artist's skill and intention. Seeing a beautiful work of art naturally leads us to respect the artist” (285-6). The sense of satisfaction and self-importance in anticipation of this respect can be felt even after completing a home art project. The urge to show off artistic creations to others in order to receive praise and respect is a familiar feeling for many. Tying this back to Miller's contention that works of art are a form of sexual display, we can see that the status a work of art brings to the artist is related to how well it indicates fitness. This brings us back to the concept of “cost” as the main way of validating fitness indicators. The

amount of respect and status that artists gain is determined by how considerable the cost they bear is. As the artwork needs more skill and intelligence, the status it procures for its author goes higher. Therefore, the elaborate style of *Ulysses* actuates its readers' "natural ability" to award Joyce a high status, which in turn can be his motive to muster the intellect, accomplish the virtuosity, and lavish the time it takes to choreograph all its references, hidden connections, and verbal displays. One should not forget, however, that the stylistic complexity of *Ulysses* is only a historical manifestation of cost. Difficulty is a hallmark of modernism, and this is why it can be considered a source of social status in its own historical and cultural moment. In the following pages, I will survey not only *Ulysses*, but also Joyce's life, his oeuvre, and the modernist period in general to see if the difficult style of *Ulysses* can be explained as a historical manifestation of the evolutionary *cost* expended to gain social status.

### **In the Period**

Modernist literature is characterized by stylistic difficulty as its main way of claiming distinction and superiority. Modernist writers developed multiple styles with difficulty at the core of their aesthetics, and historical evidence suggests that these styles functioned – at least partly – as means of gaining social status. Despite an array of texts that defend modernism against the accusations of snobbish unintelligibility<sup>29</sup>, the centrality of difficulty within the modernist project is fairly well-established. In *The Difficulties of Modernism*, Diepeveen (2003) offers a comprehensive survey of the period's writings to trace the origin of difficulty to the fin-de-siècle literary wars between the proponents of simplicity versus difficulty in literature and finds out that

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<sup>29</sup> By focusing on Woolf's theories and practices of reading, Melba Cuddy-Keane (2003) refutes assumptions about Woolf's modernist elitism, revealing instead a writer who was pedagogically oriented, publicly engaged and committed to the ideal of classless intellectuals working together in reciprocal exchange.

not only did difficulty end up to be the century's fascination, it also became the source and condition of canonization. These battles over the superiority of one or another literary style are more understandable if we have the evolutionary stakes in mind. Miller (2001) explains that “the imperatives of fitness display allow us to understand the passion with which people debate whether something is or is not an art. A claim that one's work is art is a claim for sexual and social status” (p. 283). Modernists focused their artistic claims on the difficulty of style, including both form and content. Latham (2003) refers to this focus— and the ensuing sense of superiority — and defines it as “blending formal complexity with tendentious subject matter” (p.2). Modernism was fascinated with unconventional forms and shocking content, especially since this made the end result exclusive to a small coterie of sophisticated readers.

The idea of a “divide” between sophisticated, exclusive art and crude, popular art has been one of the recurring themes of modernism. Most famously, Andreas Huyssen explicates the dichotomy between exclusive high art and mass culture in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century as a “great divide” that has continued to deepen even in the face of attempts to reconcile the two extremes. As Huyssen (1986) explains, “Modernism constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other; an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture” (p. vii). Although there are several variations and many nuances involved in the larger dichotomy between low and high, the opposition remains the same for many twentieth-century thinkers. Scholes (2003) notes that the divide remains unbridged across the spectrums of political right and left. From the leftist ideas of Adorno and Georg Lukács — with his contempt for “the entertainment novel” as the evil “caricatural twin” (as cited in Scholes, 2003, p. 246) of the proper artistic novel — to the rightist views of Allen Tate who believed that poets had to invent “private languages” because normal language was “tainted

with mass feeling” (as cited in Scholes, 2003, p. 252), there seems to be a consensus that modernist art was defined by an elitist exclusion from mass culture. It must be noted, however, that the idea of a clear-cut binary continues to be challenged. Melba Cuddy-Keane (2003) highlights Woolf’s contribution to public education, dismissing her reduction to a literary elite, and Latham (2003) claims to interrupt this dichotomy in the case of *Ulysses* by highlighting the limitations of Stephen’s character (as the literary snob) and Bloom’s better aesthetic consciousness (as the representative of pop culture). Even if we acknowledge the blurred boundaries between the high and mass culture and the nuances in the attitudes of modern writers toward this dichotomy, we are still faced with an array of texts that represent the great divide through their obscurity, complexity, and unconventional themes.

Stylistic complexity is evident in most of the canonical texts of the period. From Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood* that Eliot – who himself wrote *The Wasteland*, arguably one of the most challenging modernist works – described as “demanding something of a reader that the ordinary novel-reader is not prepared to give” (p. xviii) to Gertrude Stein’s *The Making of Americans*, modernist texts are known for their obscurity of style and labyrinthine plots. The paradigmatic difficult modernist text, however, is probably written by the topic author of this thesis. Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* has pushed the limits of obscurity and complexity to such extremes that some may find it difficult to call it a novel anymore.<sup>30</sup> Modernist authors, however, did not employ obscure styles for no reason. Stylistic intricacies of modernist texts exalted their creators above the ordinary and brought them a sense of superiority. Latham (2003) notes that “from the very moment of its invention ..., modernism has thrived on a smug sense of cultured superiority. Its

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<sup>30</sup> In a podcast (*Avid Reader*, hosted by Sam Hankin), Kevin Birmingham (2015) says, “I sometimes wonder if people would be less upset with *Finnegans Wake* if we stopped calling it a novel, and we thought of it as a prose poem...the expectations of a novel are not just there; they are not fulfilled by a book like *Finnegans Wake*.”

almost legendary monuments - Ezra Pound's *A Draft of XXX Cantos*, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, and James Joyce's *Ulysses* - all seem to renounce the taste and expectations of the general reading public by appealing only to a highly educated and smartly self-conscious coterie" (p. 2). Difficulty per se, therefore, is not the main objective of modernist texts; their displays of sophistication are ways to lure in elite sophisticated readers, whose interest, in turn, would further accumulate cultural capital. Appealing to an elite audience, however, has a flip side that artists equally benefit from: being disliked by "the rabble."

Only appealing to a small exclusive audience while losing the general public's interest sounds counterintuitive for artists who should normally want to have the widest possible audience; it can, however, have some advantages. Referring to Thorstein Veblen and Quentin Bell's theories of "conspicuous consumption," Pinker (1997) claims that "Most people would lose their taste for a musical recording if they learned it was being sold at supermarket checkout counters or on late-night television" (p. 522). The sociobiological arguments that I have been making support this. Sexual displays in nature are characterized by cost and handicapping, which puts the displayer at a pragmatic disadvantage while enhancing their status in a more symbolic way. Similarly, "handicapping" one's art by deliberately excluding the majority of society from it has social advantages that outweigh its disadvantages. Not having the approval of the public becomes another form of gaining social status in an age when highbrow culture and art are the criteria for inclusion in artistic circles. It connects the artist's work to an elite educated audience whose attention would earn the artist prestige while disconnecting it from the less educated masses whose interest can damage the artist's reputation. Summarizing a whole argument in a title, Bourdieu (1983) argues in "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed" that sophisticated art becomes the very opposite of success in normal economic terms.

In the field of cultural production, being popular among the masses is considered a failure, while their disdain (or rather their lack of understanding) may signal success.

In such a reversed world, the obscurity of *Ulysses* and its (initial) dismissal by the public become marks of success and will earn Joyce cultural (as opposed to economic) capital. Reading *Ulysses*, it is not hard to see Joyce's strenuous efforts to appeal to the sophisticated reader (whose respect would gain him more social status), and his almost mischievous intentions to expose the crudeness of the common reader (whose respect would *cost* him status). If we accept that exclusivity in art can be mainly achieved by producing unorthodox content and creating unconventional styles, then we can argue that *Ulysses* does both to the same end. Much like the nineteenth-century decadents who used "high arts" to surprise the philistine middle class (*épater la bourgeoisie*) and highlight the distinction between the elite and the rabble, Joyce takes delight in taking his readers aback either by the novel's shocking content (including unorthodox sexual themes and referring to "obscene" bodily functions) or by scaring them away with complex stylistic forms. Latham (2001) notices that the scandalous themes and the unconventional style of *Ulysses* "evoked an outrage that won for Joyce the succès d'exécration (prize of revulsion) the nineteenth-century dandies so ardently desired" (p. 774). *Ulysses* was stirring controversy even before its publication by shocking a populace unaccustomed to the liberties Joyce was practicing in this novel. Birmingham (2014) narrates that the obscenity trials of *Ulysses* in the US started by a businessman's complaint that her daughter's mind could be corrupted by the "indecentcies" of this novel, and later the Director of Public Prosecutions, Archibald Bodkin, condemned it as "unmitigated filth and obscenity" (p.253). The shock, however, did not only originate from what society was seeing as obscene. The formal complexities and the myriad erudite references not only intimidate the layman-level reader, but they even challenge the more experienced and

sophisticated.<sup>31</sup> Birmingham provides a detailed account of the artists' and critics' shock and abhorrence of the unconventional style of *Ulysses*. Seeing it as “anarchic,” “literary bolshevism” (220), and an “instrument of chaos” (226), even the more elite readers of *Ulysses* could not come to terms with its disruption of stylistic conventions. Even the likes of Eliot and Woolf did not initially show much comfort with the novel's style, seeing it as an agent of “futility and anarchy” and an “insuperable difficulty.”<sup>32</sup> *Ulysses* possessed all the properties to become unpopular, and Joyce was aware of this. In an article with the revealing title “The Day of the Rabblement,” Joyce (2000) declares that “no man ... can be a lover of the true or the good unless he abhors the multitude” (p. 50). Evading popularity among the masses was a hallmark of Joyce's period<sup>33</sup>, and like many other modernist artists, he was disposed to pay the “cost” of being unpopular as a way of defining his aesthetics and/or displaying his fitness.

It is important to note that the initial revulsion against *Ulysses* has gradually turned into acceptance and eventually warm reception of the novel and its difficulty. This, nonetheless, has not decreased the social status attached to the novel, because despite a wider reception, *Ulysses* still remains fairly inaccessible to the general public. To understand this process better, it is useful to discuss it in terms of non-evolutionary theories about the sociological dynamics of cultural production and consumption. Most notably is Bourdieu's notion of “cultural capital,” which asserts the social status associated with culture and certain cultural products. Analogizing these benefits to economic capital, Bourdieu recognizes the status-giving power of certain

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<sup>31</sup> Joyce himself admits to his intentions to baffle readers by his complexity. More interestingly, he sees this as a way of becoming immortal, a relevant concept to evolutionary motives.

<sup>32</sup> T.S. Eliot in “Ulysses, Order and Myth” (p. 167) and Virginia Woolf in *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 2* (p. 243).

<sup>33</sup> In “The cultural economy of modernism,” Rainey (1999) offers a detailed account of the modernist desire to limit their audience. For example, he refers to a series of lectures that Pound gave, for which he limited the number of attendees, picked a private location with limited access, and charged a very high price, all resulting in a circumscribed chance of finding a wider or more popular audience (p. 36).

cultural phenomena and the “symbolic capital” that exists around them. In *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, Guillory (1993) takes Bourdieu’s idea into the realm of literary production and uses it to address the issue of *access* and exclusivity in that context. Guillory notices that to gain cultural capital, one needs to have “access” to the work of art. It is, in fact, the limitation of access to a cultural product that produces cultural capital around it. In the case of plastic art, this limitation is made primarily through the price of the commodified artistic product; for verbal arts (novels in particular), access is limited through the “modes of consumption,” that is, the ability to *understand* the language and style of writing. Guillory sees himself in agreement with Bourdieu that “the mode of consumption demanded by the products of restricted production offered to the dominant classes a more reliable means of restricting access to the work of art than the mechanism of price itself” (p. 329). This is why the commodification of *Ulysses* in the past decades has not changed the amount of cultural capital invested in it. It is true that with the disappearance of legal bans, smuggling ordeals, and the general public’s fear of the “most dangerous book,” the initial rarity of *Ulysses* waned. With dozens of editions (digital, audio, and movie versions) and hundreds of guidebooks, websites, and annotated summaries, now more and more people have access to *Ulysses* compared to the days of the few 1922 blue-covered copies of the novel. However, *Ulysses* continues to procure cultural capital, because as Guillory agrees with Bourdieu, “the mode of consumption appropriate to the objects of restricted production [assumes] the possession of the cultural capital provided by a particular kind of education” (pp. 329-330). It is true that *Ulysses* is not an obscure, “filthy” book bootlegged by intellectuals anymore, but its gradual transformation into a household name does not mean that it is read and understood much more easily. Owning copies and an unstinting intellectual love for this scandalous book will not help much if you are not able to pay the cost that Joyce and

previous readers expended in the currency of squandering their time, energy, attention, and skills. In other words, *Ulysses* remains inaccessible because of its elaborate style despite its more recent acceptance and popularity, and that will insure its effectiveness as a status-granting indicator of fitness.

### **In the Novel**

Evidence of such appeal to elite culture and education can be abundantly found in the novel itself. Stephen Dedalus, who displays the epitome of intellectual self-righteousness in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, despite appearing a little disillusioned in *Ulysses*, still relies heavily on his higher learning to define his identity as different from those around him.

Throughout the novel, Stephen exhibits the characteristics of an intellectual exile who prefers to be in his own head instead of interacting with the uncultured or otherwise subpar Dubliners that he considers beneath him. In “Proteus,” Stephen spends his morning away from Mulligan and Hanes wandering on the Sandymount strand, thinking about the most profound philosophical issues, weaving together myriad theories, allusions, and other references to mythology and various branches of science. Even when he does interact with others, as Latham (2003) notices, “he maintains a vast chasm between himself and his listeners, commenting on both their limitations and his own brilliance” (p. 160). Despite his internal uncertainties, Stephen remains extremely devoted to what he regards as the superiority of his ideas and intelligence. His stubborn refusal to kneel down and pray for his dying mother is a prime example of Stephen’s sense of superiority to what he sees beneath him, even if this causes him great pain. His inability to love – “pain that was not yet the pain of love” (Joyce, 2008, p. 5) – can be another indicator of the distance Stephen is keeping between him and others. He sees himself, and especially his art, as so sublime that in *A Portrait* he resolves to “forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated

conscience of my race” (Joyce, 2011, p. 185). Stephen’s character, arguably inspired by Joyce himself, seems limited at times exactly because of his arrogant sense of distinction, even if such feelings remain internal for the most part.

Even Bloom – who is for the most part the antithesis of Stephen’s haughty elitism with his more practical and modest approach to the world – shows instances of self-preening based on his knowledge. Like Stephen in “Proteus,” and in fact much more than him, Bloom keeps thinking in his own head, showing a great deal of creativity, albeit in a much more tangible and amusing way. For instance, his thoughts in “Hades” about burying the dead standing and then comparing the image to honeycombs proves, if not noble, extremely imaginative. It’s true that the banality of what goes through his head pales in comparison to Stephen’s philosophical musings; nevertheless, Bloom manages to display a great deal of knowledge through his mental ramblings. He keeps offering advertisement ideas, explanations on how things work, and endless tidbits about the current social and cultural life of Dublin. His lengthy displays of trivial knowledge get so excessive in “Cyclops” that the narrator complains if you show Bloom a straw, “Declare to my aunt he’d talk about it for an hour or so he would and talk steady” (p. 303). The human urge to speak and the relative difficulty of being a good listener, according to Miller (2001), is evidence that speaking has not originally been a means of communication, but instead a form of sexual display intended to indicate fitness by showing off talent and knowledge (pp. 350-1). In turn, the talent and knowledge implicit in long streams of speech can generate symbolic capital.

The text of *Ulysses* even exceeds the pretentiousness of its main characters. Putting aside its exceeding density and countless references to history, literature, and mythology, the text could hardly highlight its stylistic consciousness anymore with its use of language, writing styles, and narrative devices. Even Latham (2001), who emphasizes the role of characters in

balancing the snobbery of the novel, consents that the excessive complexity of the text renders its characters as “empty markers to be moved about by a clever author for the enjoyment of his audience” (p. 787) and believes that *Ulysses*’s structure has “such dazzling complexity that Bloom seems to disappear beneath the sheer spectacle of it” (p. 787). Similarly, Stephen does not stand a better chance when it comes to matching the complexity of *Ulysses*. “The Oxen of the Sun” is the perfect example of the text substantially surpassing the aesthetic aspirations of Stephen. Latham (2001) remarks that “Ridiculing the young poet's meager verse, the novel revels in its own ability to appropriate the entire history of narrative” (p. 788). He sees this as Joyce’s way of showing the limitations of Stephen’s snobbery as a “Boasthard” who is just an “embryo philosopher” (p. 788); however, this does not change the fact that in doing so, Joyce bounteously indulges in displays of his own mastery over language. In fact, it is through showing the limitations of Stephen’s intellectual prowess, himself the most erudite character in the novel and probably much more sophisticated than most readers of *Ulysses*, that the magnitude of the author’s genius becomes apparent in comparison. It is exactly through such displays of knowledge and skill that *Ulysses* builds a unique identity and claims prestigious rewards for its author and readers. The difficult style of *Ulysses* and the status attached to its processes of production and consumption are not only peripheral features; they define *Ulysses* and its place in the literary canon.

Furthermore, *Ulysses*’s grandiosity is not only reified in its use of language; the novel’s claim to universality, patent in its drawing parallels between a mundane Dublin day in 1904 and the decade-long adventures of Homer’s epic, is another sign of its pretentiousness. Even if we ignore the overloading of the plot substructure with countless far-fetched connections, the very fact that Joyce chooses an epic framework to mirror his story of a Dublin canvasser speaks

volumes for the vainglory of an author who claims a superior status through his art. With the Homeric parallels, Joyce is quixotically “transubstantiating the modern city's quotidian surroundings” (p. 54), as Birmingham (2014) puts it. *Ulysses* is the ultimate consummation of Joyce’s youthful ambitions of capturing “the soul of commonest object” (Joyce, 1963, p. 213) in a moment of epiphany. The modernist ideal of mythologizing the ordinary modern life, however, is executed through such alienatingly complex stylistic techniques that according to Taylor (2014) it “merely mythologise[s] the particular modernist on display while leaving the wider audience on the other side of the window” (para. 7). In other words, Joyce’s claim to universality is not an attempt to make *Ulysses* more accessible through domesticating mythology to present the mundaneness of modern life; instead, it seems to move in the other direction: mythologizing even the simplest, basest aspects of ordinary life in a style so self-righteously magnificent that it distends them to epic proportions. *Ulysses*’s claim to universality is a way of compounding its difficulty, and therefore, can become a source of prestige for the author who manages to turn the mundane into the mandarin.

### **In Joyce**

To further investigate the dynamics of social prestige within *Ulysses*, there is other evidence to consider besides the novel itself and the artistic period it was born in. Joyce’s life outside of *Ulysses* – his family, living environment, education, and other literary endeavors – all help illuminate the process in which one can argue for the discourses of social status in the production and reception of this novel. The relevance and significance of Joyce’s own life in understanding the structures of social status in *Ulysses* becomes even more important when the semi-autobiographical nature of *Ulysses* is taken into account. Parallels between Joyce’s fictional

world and his own life are well-established by many critics<sup>34</sup>. A *biocultural* reading of *Ulysses* in itself rationalizes studying Joyce's *biography*, and such connections make a review of Joyce's experience outside *Ulysses* even more significant in understanding the role of social status in the production and reception of this novel. Latham (2003) draws on the details of Joyce's family history to show his class consciousness and the importance of social hierarchies in the environment he grew up in. He refers to Joyce's clinging to his ancestral history and its representation in his fictional works as signs of his special attention to social cachet and concludes that "Joyce in short remains attuned throughout his life to the outward signs of distinction and carefully preserved a public image of gentlemanly refinement" (p. 125). This is evident in the way he acted, dressed, and carried himself; but more importantly, it is evident in the weight he gave to certain elements of social status and key sources of cultural capital.

One such source of cultural capital that Joyce had access to is education. Latham (2003) notes that in the autobiographical account of *A Portrait*, Joyce does not mention that he went to the unprestigious Christian Brothers' school, as according to Ellmann, Joyce "shared his father's view that the Jesuits were the gentleman of Catholic education, and the Christian Brothers its drones" (p. 125). Joyce's emphasis on his more reputable Jesuit education and his desire to distance himself from the socially inferior Christian Brothers is a proof of his attention to key signs of social status. This becomes even more important when we consider Guillory's emphasis on the role of school as a distributor of cultural capital. Guillory (1993) sees school's function as "regulating access to the forms of cultural capital" (p. vii). In other words, a prestigious education is not just a possession that one can take pride in; it provides the individual with access to cultural capital, which in turn facilitates the procurement of more capital. Joyce's

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<sup>34</sup> Most notable are the parallels between Stephen Dedalus and Joyce. For more on such connections see Maddox (2000) and Kimball (1997).

distinguished education is not only a remnant of a glorious past for him to boast about; rather, it is what enabled him to write a conspicuously erudite novel. Joyce owes much of the erudition that he displays in *Ulysses* to his earlier access to canonical texts, language, and culture through his education.

The cultural capital that his Jesuit education provided Joyce with did not stop him from showing contempt toward it. One of the most public manifestations of Joyce's urge for distinction was attempts to distance himself from his culture and society. Joyce's criticism of his Irish and Catholic culture and what he saw as a state of "paralysis" finally led to his self-imposed exile. As Deane (2004) asserts, "Joyce's repudiation of Catholic Ireland and his countering declaration of artistic independence are well-known and integral features of his life-long dedication to writing" (p. 28). However, few have dug deeper beneath this repudiation to find more than the aesthetic and political stances of an intellectual artist. Seeing Joyce's views toward Irish culture and society alongside a pattern of attempts to carve him out a distinct position provide further support for his acute awareness of social status, and therefore some of his motives for the complexity of *Ulysses*. For Joyce, the best way to respond to the annoying structures of social power within a society that he found so much fault in was to create a literary style that separated him from the "trolls."<sup>35</sup> Joyce's artistic style is what gives him the power to endure the absurdity of his environment, and it is where one can trace evidence of a concerted effort toward gaining prestigious distinction.

The theme of using art as a means of breaking free from the banality of the masses is present throughout Joyce's works. In *Dubliners* – a collection that is centred around the theme of the city's paralysis – we see a pattern of characters that have no way of escaping because they

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<sup>35</sup> Inspired by Henrik Ibsen's concept of "trolls," a Scandinavian character denoting the public's lack of consciousness, Joyce develops his theories about the exclusivity of art in "The Day of Rabblement."

have no means of distinction. The fact that these characters are stuck in an inescapable chamber of commonality makes Joyce like a giant “*creator*” presiding over the miniature-size city of Dublin with “malice aforethought,” smirking at these characters’ inability with his “style of scrupulous meanness” (Joyce as cited in Latham, 2003, p. 132). It is not hard to sense Joyce’s self-satisfaction at being the one who not only is not stuck like the helpless paralyzed mass below, but is so self-aware that has elevated above all and is now telling their story of misery.

The character of Stephen reveals a great deal about Joyce’s motivations for gaining social status through art. Developing before *Ulysses* and with greater intensity, Stephen’s sense of superiority realized through aesthetic ideals is central to *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait*. In these semi-autobiographical novels, Stephen develops a god-like concept of art, one which is not only a means of gaining power, but the ultimate evolutionary motive behind the need for power and social status: survival. Latham (2003) notes that in *Stephen Hero*, “the pretensions of the snob are transformed through the crucible of the artistic consciousness into a means of survival and escape” (pp. 128-9). It allows the artist to drag himself upward from the apathy of the masses and be among the elite few that find salvation from the paralysis of the populace. Latham (2003) observes Stephen’s voracity to access more cultural capital through reading non-Irish writers and learning new languages (p. 129). This shows the depth of the connections between Stephen and Joyce. Joyce, like Stephen, saw in Ibsen what he couldn’t see in the likes of Yeats and even taught himself Norwegian to read his works. He was inspired by Ibsen’s concept of “trolls” precisely because it targeted the critical line that would make the distinction between the real artist and the paralyzed mass.

It was not only the masses, however, that the young Joyce was determined to distance himself from; he also needed to elevate himself above his peers, the other students, artists, and

intellectuals of his time. Latham (2003) believes that Joyce “carefully manages this store of cultural capital, distributing it wisely to create an image of himself as an artist and critic whose learning far exceeds that of his friends" (p. 130). This will place the artist in an elite yet small group, which can claim a higher status based on cultural capital that is secured by a unique learning. In *Stephen Hero*, “time and again the protagonist confirms his identity as the member of a timeless - even divine - class of artists who enjoy a natural superiority over a vulgar and demeaning world” (Joyce, 1963, p.37). But what is the source of the artist’s natural superiority, and what does draw the line of distinction between him and the vulgar world?

I believe the use of language and the literary styles are the artist’s main tools in carving out that superior corner. In this view, words, syntax, and the whole logic of language should be suspended to create new structures, by which the artist can make the vital distinction between himself and the world below. Obscurity becomes the goal because it makes art exclusive to the artist’s clan and inaccessible to the trolls and the rabble. For Joyce, the veins of his attention to social status can be found in the exclusive style he theorized in his early works like *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait* and later implemented in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. In *Stephen Hero*, Joyce (1963) admits that “He kept repeating [the words] to himself till they lost all instantaneous meaning for him and became wonderful vocables. He was determined to fight with every energy of soul and body against any possible consignment to what he now regarded as the hell of hells – the region ... wherein everything is found to be obvious” (p. 30). Crafting obscurity is done with an emphasis on tireless virtuosity of the artist – a feature that I discussed at length in the previous chapter as a defining quality of fitness-indicating sexual displays: Stephen’s art was similarly forged “with a deliberate, unflinching step piecing together meaningless words and phrases with deliberate unflinching seriousness" (p. 31). This artist’s language, however, is not only

characterized by exclusiveness; it takes inspiration from those that it intends to leave out: “the plodding public”

As he walked thus through the ways of the city he had his ears and eyes ever prompt to receive impressions. It was not only in Skeat that he found words for his treasure-house, he found them also at haphazard in the shops, on advertisements, in the mouths of the plodding public. (Joyce, 1963, p. 30)

This is what gives Joyce’s language its uniqueness: a paradoxical combination of an exclusively complex style that is at the same time inspired by common words and thoughts, which makes it even harder to make sense of. Joyce’s style, founded on the elite principles of “épater la bourgeoisie,” borrows from the very same populace it finds pleasure in intimidating.

The fact that Joyce’s writing – *Ulysses* in particular – borrows from and interacts with the popular despite its pretentious claims to uniqueness warrants a more careful reading of Joyce’s elite tendencies in his art. Notwithstanding his thorough survey of snobbery in the life and works of James Joyce, Latham (2003) argues for the interstitial position of Joyce’s works on the high and mass culture divide. Seeing *Ulysses* as a text that rejects elitism with one hand and grabs it with the other, Latham (2001) argues that “In this iconographic work of modernist sophistication, Joyce struggles to escape the binary logic of the cultural field by constructing a text that insistently calls attention to both the pleasures and limitations of snobbery” (p. 778). For Latham, the main reason to have such a reading of *Ulysses* is the circumscribed image of snobbish Stephen compared to the quotidian but more aesthetically conscious figure of Bloom. The other characters of Joyce’s works are also mainly the middle and lower-middle class dwellers of “dear, dirty Dublin,” and the events concentrate on the most mundane moments of

their ordinary lives, further supporting the view that Joyce's work occupies an ambivalent space between the high and low culture. Moreover, Latham looks for evidence in Joyce's life and points to the fact that unlike the other English modernists, Joyce "showed little interest in rubbing elbows with upper-crust Mayfair or cultivating a refined aristocratic audience for his work" (p. 122). It is true that Joyce's style was more for the literary elite, but one cannot deny that it took most of its content from the bottom rung.

These are legitimate points and it is important to take them into consideration while looking at Joycean texts as displays of social status. Arguing for the existence of dynamics of social status in *Ulysses* does not mean that Joyce has written *Ulysses* with blind snobbery, or even that claims to distinction and social status are the only motives behind the difficulty of this novel. Nor should it bar the fact that the novel is occasionally critical of Stephen's limitations as an artist. However, to interpret this as Joyce's retraction of his own pretentious claims to distinction is misleading. Latham's contention that Joyce is merely exposing Stephen's "imprisonment within the performance of his own pretension" and criticizing his "performances of distinction" as "pointless displays of erudition" and "empty displays leading nowhere" (p. 788) overlooks the fact that Joyce himself has used the same performances of distinction and displays of erudition in the same novel. Even if we agree that Joyce is critical of Stephen's appeal to distinction, this does not rule out his own appeal to the same structures of social power. Contrasting Stephen and Bloom's ways of attention to detail in "Proteus" and "Calypso" – in which Bloom takes a more inclusive approach – Latham (2001) concludes that Bloom is more aesthetically conscious, while Stephen's inward and exclusive displays of distinction isolate him and disable his art. This will only be true if we assume that Bloom's thoughts are the artistic creations of his own mind. It is Joyce who has skillfully crafted Bloom's nuanced ruminations,

and Latham admits elsewhere that Bloom is probably incapable of reading the novel he is in. If we agree that it is Joyce who has created Bloom's thoughts, and that his art has developed more similarly to his semi-autobiographical figure, Stephen, then we can see that an artist like Joyce – despite bearing the costs and limitations of pretentiousness – is capable of creating such rich and lively streams of thoughts and images as those we witness going through Bloom's head in “Calypso” and “Lotus Eaters.”

It is true that Stephen and Joyce's isolating elitism imposes some costs and limitations on the artist, but these limitations do not necessarily discourage the snob aesthete from his commitment to signs of artistic distinction. They are simply the *cost* that he expends in order to display his exceptional fitness. This perfectly matches the view of art as fitness-indicating sexual displays that I have been developing in Chapters One and Two. Sexual displays work based on the disadvantages (handicaps) that they impose on the displayer, but simultaneously those disadvantages give the displayer a level of distinction that gains him/her social status. Cost, expenditure, and handicapping are not always to be avoided by evolution, as they are the main ways through which living organisms claim distinction and superiority. We can see this in the evolution of features and traits that severely limit the individual, but are nevertheless selected for the status they bring the individual. Handicapping, yet status-giving, features range from the extremely heavy yet majestic antlers of the buck to the sense of pride a young man feels after a fight in front of potential mates despite pain and bruising. Artists similarly have always taken pride in the limitations their uniqueness has caused them. It is true that *Ulysses* shows ambivalence toward the issue of aesthetic snobbery; however, this does not rule out the sense of satisfaction the artist gets from displaying the same feature.

Furthermore, pointing out the limitations of one's own snobbery shows an even higher level of distinction. As we saw in Chapter Two, the key for the success of sexual displays is their ability to indicate the fitness of the individual, and for humans, fitness is largely manifested in intelligence and intellectual powers. Joyce's metacognition that allows him to see and portray the drawbacks of distinction displays – while simultaneously using them – turns those into advantages for him by being indicators of his intelligence. Throughout *Ulysses*, Joyce shows awareness of the vices of excessive elaboration in writing, while he also displays his extraordinary ability to compose in a complex style. In "Aeolus," he has Ned Lambert, Simon Dedalus, and MacHugh mock Dan Dawson's magniloquent speech. Even the usually-accepting Bloom finds the flamboyant speech "high falutin." In the same chapter, Lenehan is characterized as an annoying person because of his forced word plays and limericks. In "Nausicaa," Joyce parodies the sentimental prose of romantic novels at the expense of Gerty, while flaunting his outstanding ability in mastering that style. Displaying his familiarity with various styles and ways of manipulating language, Joyce takes stylistic features and inflates them until they explode, almost as if it pleases him to toy with the tools of whose emptiness he is aware, and this makes his experiments with language sound even more outrageous. When you know that you are reading the convoluted style of a writer who is aware of the extremity of his style, and when you see him play with that, the feeling of being overpowered by a more superior intellect becomes stronger. "Eumaeus" begins with the glad tidings that we are out of the hallucinatory world of "Circe." As the reader, we might feel a bit of comfort by knowing that we might be in for some more conventional narrative like what we saw in "Calypso" or "Lotus-Eaters." However, as Lawrence (1981) notes, the first lines quickly inform us that there is a mischievous intention

behind the apparently tame style, and that Joyce will not go back to the more accessible “initial style” of early episodes, even though he tantalizes us by showing that he could.

When demonstrating his mastery of different styles, Joyce shows awareness by pushing each style to preposterous extremes and thus ridiculing the very same sign of distinction he is demonstrating his powers in. Harry Blamires (1996) notices that the wide array of styles used in “Cyclops” are blown into “inflated caricature[s]” and correctly interprets this as a continuation of Joyce’s criticism toward the issue of one-eyed-ness in the episode because “Each of the interpolations in this episode has a one-eyed quality” due to their extremity (p. 96). Joyce’s claims to aesthetic distinction are not made in blind snobbery; he is fully conscious of the social power dynamics behind displays of knowledge and skill. He uses them nevertheless, but makes sure that he distorts them enough to signal his awareness of the situation, while even amplifying the effects of his distinction displays.

This encompassing consciousness allows Joyce to escape the limitations of snobbery. He is at a level of awareness that he can see both Stephen and Bloom – the ultimate snob and the down-to-earth everyman– from above with all their strengths and weaknesses. Similarly, he is aware of his own art and the way its complexity can work like a double-edged sword. Claiming such omniscience is boastful and elitist in itself, and therefore, it can be a source of status at a higher level. Joyce’s elitism encompasses the pop as well as the high culture, and this makes him totally unique, a sort of *crème de la crème*, or the elite’s elite. Joyce’s claims to distinction cannot be equaled to gaudy signs of outward snobbery circumscribed to class, fashion, and

wealth. This works with Latham's point<sup>36</sup> that Joyce's desire to become the "the consummate aesthetic snob"(p. 128) is a response to the snobbery he was subjected to as an Irish artist.

Joyce's artistic elitism in *Ulysses* sounds like a critique of the higher classes' empty snobbery and the rabble's unconsciousness. By concentrating his efforts toward distinction around his art as well as showing such high levels of consciousness, Joyce takes the discourse of elitism to a higher artistic level and manages to make a final gesture of distinction: He even distinguished himself from other elite artists by his awareness of the limitations of snobbery.

Some might see an argument for the existence of status motives behind *Ulysses* as a way of degrading the novel, modernism, or the whole enterprise of literature. Latham (2003) believes that

snobbery carries with it the charges not only of elitism and pretentiousness but of hypocrisy and insincerity as well. To admit to snobbery is to air in the public the fact that even the most highbrow culture can be deployed in the most vulgar struggles for fame, celebrity, and wealth. (p. 1)

When seen from an evolutionary viewpoint and interpreted as a universal motive, however, the desire for status is not necessarily vulgar; nor is any other evolved desire. Evolutionary perspective is disinterested and equitable in that it does not assign value judgments. It only describes the natural process by which a phenomenon happens. Some might see involving natural motives like status in literature as reducing the more sacred realm of art to vulgar materialism; however, from a scientific perspective, there is nothing sacred or vulgar about the

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<sup>36</sup> Latham (2003) traces Joyce's self-consciousness of his own snobbery through a letter he wrote to his brother in 1905 and admitted to his motives for his exile: "concealed within his arrogant concerns about being 'too ingenuous,' lies the anxious suspicion that his own flight to Europe was motivated primarily by a desire to return eventually to Ireland as a sort of conquering hero, at last able to cast disdainful glances at a literary establishment that once rejected his work. Joyce, in other words, suddenly saw himself as a snob, sensing that his own project had been severely circumscribed by the desire to transform art into an instrument of social power" (p. 135).

evolutionary processes and their influence on the human mind and activities. The purpose is not to judge but to understand *Ulysses* as a novel that imposed a lot of complications on its author. Joyce wrote *Ulysses* under extremely financial, legal, and health-related hardships. Birmingham (2014) gives a very detailed account of his poverty, illness, and risk of prosecution. Asking why Joyce would want to go through such hardship to write a novel that is so stylistically demanding is a valid question, and the evolutionary perspective seems to offer some novel solutions in this regard. In the final section of this thesis, I will investigate the evolutionary motives of one other party who has to overcome hurdles to communicate with *Ulysses*: the readers.

### 3.2 Status for Readers

So far, I have explored the evolutionary motives for art by focusing on the displayer, i.e., the artist. But if this motive is for the artist to *gain* social status, then what is the evolutionary rationale for the efforts of the audience whose involvement helps the artist gain that status? Why would they spend their time and energy to altruistically help someone else get the much-needed social status? I believe that the nature of mental displays of fitness is such that not only *exhibiting* mental abilities indicates the fitness of the displayer, but also *understanding* and *appreciating* the genius of the mental display are indicators of the observer's fitness. This is why sometimes laughing at a witty joke is as important as telling the joke. By quickly and conspicuously laughing at a smart joke, we show that we are intelligent enough to comprehend and appreciate the verbal intricacy or the cultural reference in the joke. In this way, both telling and understanding the joke can gain social status. The audience of artistic creations shows their own fitness by acknowledging the beauty and intelligence of the artwork. And while indicating fitness is the root cause, much like the artist's situation, securing social status becomes the interface between the underlying evolutionary motives and the process of aesthetic appreciation.

Just like the status brought by creating art, the status gained through appreciating it increases based on the *cost* of the artistic creation. Before, I showed how the cost of artistic fitness indicators can be symptomized differently within different cultural and historical environments. The modernist environment valued stylistic dissidence as an important criterion of high culture, and accordingly demanded readers to be able to decipher and appreciate its preferred style. In *Modernism, Mass Culture, and Professionalism*, Strychacz (1993) sees modernist writing as a discourse that is exclusively available to "professionals" who have "marshal[led] specific competences" to understand its dense and difficult style. Strychacz focuses in particular on language, or what he calls "the idiom of modernist writing - arcane allusion, juxtaposition, opaque writing, indeterminacy, and so on" (p. 27). Referring to Fredric Jameson's recognition of "social reasons for the stubborn insistence of modern poetry on the materiality and density of language," Strychacz notes that modernist fiction makes the same demands on its readers: "skill, patience, and competence" (p. 27). Readers of modernist texts, therefore, were in the same boat as the artists of the period. To be able to claim social status, they needed to display certain abilities and comfort with dense and complex writing styles.

*Ulysses* presents the linguistic demand that Jameson and Strychacz emphasize. Syntax and vocabulary impose high demands on the reader's ability to plough through misplaced words, long sentences, and bizarre vocabulary. In the *Art of Joyce's Syntax*, Gottfried (1980) provides a comprehensive study of the way Joyce creates effect through moving parts of speech around in his syntax. From combining prepositional phrases together ("about Ringsend in the morning") to ending sentences abruptly with a verb phrase ("they had a home somewhere beneath or seemed to"), Gottfried believes that Joyce's rearrangement of the normal order of sentences is the most outstanding stylistic feature in *Ulysses*. However, the reader's ability to cope with Joyce's

language is tested with even more radical alterations of language. In the beginning of “Sirens,” language changes into a concert’s overture, starting with unintelligible sounds (“Impertthnthn thnthnthn...Ppprrpffrrppff”), and continues to “stammer” throughout the episode. In addition, the indirect style of narration and constant shifts in the narrative make the reading experience difficult requiring a lot of attention, patience, and intelligence. In “Proteus” and “Nausicaa” for example, the narrative changes form, as it mediates through and then out of Stephen and Gerty’s consciousness respectively. Consider the following excerpt from “Proteus”:

His lips lipped and mouthed fleshless lips of air: mouth to her  
moomb. Oomb, allwombing tomb. His mouth moulded issuing breath,  
unspatched: ooeeehah: roar of cataractic planets, globed, blazing, roaring  
wayawayawayawayaway. (p. 47).

The reader first needs to distinguish the external narrative from Stephen’s internal thoughts, and at the same time realize that the seemingly senseless words “moobm. Oomb, allwombing tomb” are Stephen’s attempts to find his poem’s rhyme.

Besides constant shifts, narrative ellipses also make following *Ulysses* a challenge. The novel is full of internal references and associations that remain mostly unexplained, leaving it up to the reader to discover and fill in the narrative omissions to bridge the related thoughts and ideas. This is particularly evident in the interior monologues of Stephen and Bloom. For example, in “Aeolus,” when Bloom changes the pocket where he keeps the soap he has picked up for Molly earlier, he suddenly remembers a line from his sexual pen pal: “What perfume does your wife use?” The reason why Bloom remembers this line out of a sudden is probably because he has smelled the lemon-scented soap; however, the readers are not told about this connecting detail and must forge the link on their own. *Ulysses* is full of such unmarked shifts and

omissions, and this is what makes the mere reading of this novel an accomplishment. By finding imbedded references and understanding stylistic changes, while successfully maneuvering narrative shifts, the reader of *Ulysses* is in effect displaying a level of aesthetic intelligence that counts as an indicator of fitness on its own. Furthermore, by paying the cost of such displays (exhibiting the intelligence needed to decipher stylistic codes), the reader, much like the author, can claim a status based on the merits of their knowledge and skills.

Besides the skills required to decipher linguistic codes and narrative complexities, readers of *Ulysses* also need to have a vast knowledge in several areas in order to be able to fully appreciate the hard work and meticulousness that Joyce has put into his novel. The prerequisites start with the basics of Greek literature and mythology that *Ulysses* parallels, continues with the need to recognize the background information about theology, philosophy, rhetoric, natural sciences, Irish history, politics, culture, Dublin geography, and eventually goes to a higher level with the required knowledge of various literary and non-literary styles. To get through *Ulysses*, readers must deal with the hurdle of a change in style at least in every chapter, if not several times within the same chapter. The book starts with a rather conventional narrative, but quickly shifts into interior monologue and philosophy in “Proteus,” and makes more changes to journalistic language (“Aeolus”), literary criticism (“Scylla and Charybdis”), music (“Sirens”), drama (“Circe”), and catechism and scientific writing (“Ithaca”), to name a few. If readers are not confused by the constant stylistic shifts throughout the novel, they still have to recognize, understand, and adjust to the parameters of whatever style they are reading and see the connections between the themes and concepts in that section and those stylistic features. In “The Oxen of the Sun,” where the vicissitudes of styles range from Latinate prose to contemporary Dublin slang, the reader would miss a lot if they cannot see how the chapter mediates through

changing styles, allowing Joyce to produce affects according to the known characteristics of each style. To understand “The Oxen,” not only should readers be familiar with different styles of English literature and their main features, but they also should discover how each style influences the subject matter. To connect the consciousness of early Latinate prose with the emphases on procreation, the hopefulness of Irish writers with the birth of Mina Purefoy’s baby, the harsh sarcastic tongue of 18th-century satirist, Junius, to a critique of Bloom's judgmental attitude (389-90), and the exaggerated Dickensian prose to complements to Mina Purefoy’s doctor (400-1), the readers need not only an understanding of themes and characters in the novel at hand, but a knowledge of the history of English literature styles.

This is where the means of access to literary products gain significance in collecting cultural capital. The readers of *Ulysses* will have access to the novel – and the cultural capital it brings them – only if they already have some “capital” to capitalize on. As Guillory (1993) explains, access to literary production is not equal for everyone, because one needs the necessary means of access, and “the ‘means’ in questions are provided by the school, which regulates and thus distributes cultural capital unequally” (ix). *Ulysses* draws extensively on the canon of Western literature and philosophy and expects its readers to recognize, understand, and appreciate how Joyce incorporates the canon to develop his own concepts in the novel. As a reader of *Ulysses*, besides the essentials of Homer and Shakespeare, on which the most important themes of the novel are structured, you need to be familiar with a wide array of Western literature and philosophy to fully appreciate the details of form and content. To recognize the resemblance of “babe born bliss had” with the language of *Beowulf*, you should have read some Old English poetry at school, and to fully understand the roots of antisemitism in *The Child’s Ballad* Stephen sings in “Ithaca,” one requires knowledge of references to “The Prioress’s Tale”

in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. You might barely *survive* "Proteus" without recognizing the references to more obscure philosophers (Dan Occam, Berkley, etc.), but the chapter will be unintelligible ramblings if you don't have some basic knowledge of early Christian philosophy (Thomas Aquinas, Saint Augustine) and the pillars of Western philosophy (Aristotle and Plato). You might still be able to read *Ulysses* without knowing much about its Irish background, but you will remain an outsider unless you recognize the significance of references to Irish political history, in particular the influential figures of the Irish Home Rule movement. In general, you need a certain amount of cultural capital to have access to the novel, while this cultural capital is in turn distributed through one's access to education.

Some might argue that the humanist affect of the story would appeal to the readers even if they miss the vast network of knowledge woven into the story. Even if we ignore the fact that the plot in *Ulysses* is a rather thin element riding on top of an excessively large structure of details and connections, and that the novel's main feature is the underlying structure rather than its meager plot, it is still undeniable that the mere synopsis of *Ulysses* – the affective aspects of Bloom, Molly, and Stephen's lives – does not equal the totality of a novel that is replete with treasure hunts planted by an enthusiastic writer who clearly wants his readers to discover more of the hidden details even if it is going to take them decades and several readings. All the prerequisite knowledge that exists not only in the background, but more often in the foreground of *Ulysses*, means that only readers with certain levels of knowledge and skill have access to the full scope of the novel, making the social implications very similar to those involved in exclusive clubs with limited access and the prestige attached to their membership. The reader of *Ulysses*, if able to claim to be a platinum member of the novel's world, would automatically be granted a status that can be a luring motive. *Ulysses* has survived on people's bookshelves despite its

convoluted style, partly due to the prestige that it brings to the shelf's owner. Students of English literature either brag about having read the "monster-novel" or shamefully admit to not having done so. Pinker (1997) – in a fortunate coincidence for my thesis – claims that it is acceptable to say one knows nothing about science and joke about it, but one can never mention he does not know Joyce (p. 522). Reading *Ulysses* has been and continues to be seen as an indication of a person's eruditeness and exquisite taste for the literary avant-garde. But more importantly, it is an effective way of gaining social status for its readers.

### **Belonging**

The status for the reader is also embedded in the sense of belonging and community that reading *Ulysses* gives its readers. *Ulysses* might be the only novel that has a day dedicated to itself, when its fans celebrate a fictional date out of the novel, performing cult rituals specific to its themes and events. Navigating the dense and universe-like style of the novel provides a shared experience for its readers, and this contributes to the sense of community and the cultural cult following formed around the book. Thanks to the painstaking amount of detail that Joyce has provided, every year, on June 16, thousands of *Ulysses* readers come together and reenact the content of the novel, trekking similar (or for those in Dublin, the same) paths the characters go through, at the same times, eating the same foods, and reciting the same lines. The cult-like status of *Ulysses* is not limited to Bloomsday; with the advent of computers and technology, now there are online interactive texts of *Ulysses*, chapter markings on Google Maps and other digital maps, weekly podcasts, a digital graphic novel adaption, trivia quizzes, and even a project for a video game based on the novel<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> *Infinite Ulysses* project (interactive text and commentary) <http://www.infiniteulysses.com/>; Graphic novel <http://ulyssesseen.com/>

The challenging nature of the book and the elaboration of its style enhance this sense of community through giving the readers the shared goal of understanding it by overcoming its stylistic challenges. Comparing the mere act of reading *Ulysses* to an “Odyssey”, Schwarz (1987) believes that “The Odyssean reader has to make sense of the novel's process of establishing significance” and asserts that through this contribution “[the reader] constitutes the acknowledgment of a community” (p. 67). This also gives readers a shared sense of solidarity and perseverance, as they try to clear the book’s hurdles together. Their collective attempts to “survive” reading *Ulysses* through sharing summaries, notes, and guides, makes them a community. Self-help blog posts that give tips on how to read *Ulysses*, guidebooks providing line-by-line commentaries, and scholarly works and other writings analogizing the act of reading *Ulysses* to an “odyssey” consolidate such discourses around the novel. Schwarz goes as far as claiming that “[f]iguring out the mysteries of the text becomes a kind of heroism” (p. 64). The primary reason for giving the experience of reading *Ulysses* a heroic status is the considerable efforts demanded from the reader to overcome the novel’s difficulty. Readers need to gain new knowledge and skills and exercise hard work and patience in order to read *Ulysses*. This procures status not just through indicating intelligence and mental fitness, but through the ensuing sense of community, which constitutes another evolutionary motive for reading *Ulysses*. The evolutionary roots of the desire for a sense of community and belonging are well-established throughout the fields of evolutionary and cognitive psychology<sup>38</sup>. The experience of reading *Ulysses* provides a communal sense among its readers, which appeals to the evolutionary motive of social inclusion.

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<sup>38</sup> See Fiske (2004 & 2000); Runciman (2000); Baumeister & Leary (1995); Augoustinos et al (2006); Lambert et al (2013); DeWall et al (2011).

The sense of community is not disconnected from the dynamics of fitness indication and prestige discussed earlier. It is true that the density and world-like quality of *Ulysses* provides fertile ground for a body of followers and enthusiasts to form around the novel. But more importantly, it is the cultural capital attached to *Ulysses* that attracts its fandom. Being part of the *Ulysses* community denotes a level of civility and sophistication that many find value in obtaining. Based on what I have discussed so far, it is the evolutionary motive of displaying fitness that is the main incentive for becoming part of a cultural event. Isaiah Sheffer (2004) – the founder of Symphony Space in New York and an organizer of a high-brow version of Bloomsday for over three decades– describes the “puzzle-lover’s joy of figuring out complicated structures” (p. 4) as what is behind the great impetus for Bloomsday Joyceans to come out every year. Shaffer shares his experience of witnessing the excitement of participants of his Symphony’s Bloomsday in Manhattan’s Upper West Side when they finally come to that moment of realization of *Ulysses*’s text through listening to the actors and re-enactors’ recitations of its challenging passages. The pleasure of class-conscious New Yorkers and Broadway enthusiasts at their understanding of *Ulysses* corroborates my theory regarding the status-giving quality of understanding *Ulysses*. The cultural capital accumulated around this novel and the difficulty of its style make merely understanding it a display of human fitness, just like other animals’ sexual displays function as a status-gaining display of fitness. The “sea of attentive and frequently smiling faces” (p. 9) of the UWS elite that Shaffer spots are smiling at the natural pleasure of successfully displaying the critical concept of fitness; they display their fitness through a socially and intellectually prestigious phenomenon: being part of an exclusive club that understands *Ulysses*! Sheffer is dead right in realizing that these higher middle class

men and women, “holding printed copies of the text and following along with the readers,” are “smiling with a look of wild cognition that says clearly, ‘Oh, Now I get it!’” (p. 9).

Aesthetic pleasure, however, has not been consistently championed through history. The thread of regarding art as a deviation, which starts with Plato’s concern about the propinquity of genius and madness, resurfaced strongly in late nineteenth century when the likes of Cesare Lombroso saw aesthetic genius as a sort of genetic insanity<sup>39</sup>. Such views gained momentum around the turn of the century, in particular in opposition to pre-modern movements and their aesthetic preferences, which eventually would culminate in modernism. Artistic movements like Aesthetism and the Decadence movement were under attack from a growing body of scientists and pseudo-scientists who saw these movements’ emphasis on aesthetic pleasure and experimental styles as “degenerative.” The idea of “art for art’s sake” alarmed Victorians with its foregrounding of pleasure instead of morality. It is interesting that degenerationists launched their attacks on art under the pretense of science, particularly biological evolution. Max Nordau (1968), who popularized the term degeneration through a book by the same name, claimed to show the deterioration caused by certain kinds of art through biological explanations. What Nordau – and many other theorists under the larger category of Social Darwinism – did, however, was merely taking the concept of evolution and reversing the idea of evolving forward to what he saw as “devolving” or moving backward.<sup>40</sup> Society, according to Degenerationists, Eugenicists, and other Social Darwinists, was under the threat of being drawn back by what they

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<sup>39</sup> Cesare Lombroso was an Italian doctor who published *The Man of Genius* in 1889. In that book, Lombroso claimed that the root of aesthetic genius is pathological madness.

<sup>40</sup> Burdett (n.d.) explains that “[t]owards the end of the 19th century ... theories of evolution were the basis of fears of social, racial and cultural degeneration and decline. Evolution was countered by frightening examples of ‘devolution’” (para. 15). The main fear of Degenerationists was the erosion of civilization by racial and cultural impurities, which could move society backwards to more “savage” and “primitive” conditions.

perceived as the vices of a culture going through the sea-change of industrial revolution. Excited by the revolutionary ideas of Darwin, they took what they saw as dangerous in society and glued their concern about their presence in human's line of genetics with a pseudo-scientific paste.

Among the notions that Degenerationists saw as dangerous were the same features of aesthetic distinction and pretention that I discussed earlier in this chapter as sources of social status. In Nordau and other Social Darwinists' view, not only were such features not adaptive, but they were in fact causes of *devolution*. The extravagance and excessiveness evident in not just the literary but the life style of artists like Oscar Wilde were seen as sources of debauchery and decadence<sup>41</sup>. The main objections to Aestheticists' experimental style was their useless extravagance and lavishness. According to the evolutionary models developed in this thesis, such artistic features are supposed to bring social status for the displayer; however, it was exactly the elitism and pretentiousness of modernist art that was criticized as empty and immoral. It seems that, at least under certain sociopolitical circumstances, appealing to pretentious artistic uniqueness can *cost* the artist status and social position rather than achieving them.

However, we should note that the concept of "cost" is part of the process of gaining status through sexual displays. Handicapping, despite its disadvantages, validates the indication of fitness in sexual/artistic displays and is a source of status in itself<sup>42</sup>. Therefore, the rejection of pre-modern and modern artists' experiments with style and content can become a source of further distinction and pride within an elite coterie that longs to distance itself from the rabble.

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<sup>41</sup> Characters like Wilde's Dorian Gray and Joris-Karl Huysmans's Des Esseintes in *À Rebours* were condemned exactly because of the obsession with bodily ornaments and sensual pleasures.

<sup>42</sup> Zahavi (1997) offers several examples of handicapping behaviours in nature. Arabian babblers, for example, notify each other when they spot a predator with a "barking" warning call. The notified birds, however, join the early whistle-blowers' barking instead of running for cover. Soon the whole flock joins on trees in an orchestra of loud bird calls, which can potentially put them in danger instead of helping them. In another odd behaviour, the same birds feed the chicks of their rivals. Both behaviours are explained by Zahavi as ways of gaining prestige among the group. The status gained through these risky and irrational behaviours eventually outweighs their disadvantageous.

Bourdieu talks about the reversal of the rules of economic capital within the symbolic field, where failure with the public becomes the mark of success. This is confirmed by how the harsh criticism and ostracization of fin-de-siècle experimentalists worked out for them. The accusations of degeneration and decadence, despite the harm they did, could not deter pre-modern and modern artists from their ideals of aesthetic complexity and pleasure. Of course, many were crushed and disappeared under the heavy load of criticism, but many others embraced the labelling and regarded it as another way to appeal to uniqueness and distinction. Modernists followed the strategy of their nineteenth-century forerunners in embracing the queer status they were accused of. Just like the likes of Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, and Théophile Gautier proudly adopted the epithet “decadent” to refer to their literary and life styles, early twentieth century artists welcomed the accusations of snobbery and elitism, and within a few years, their aesthetic style became a sign of sophistication and distinction.

### **History of reception**

The early reception of *Ulysses* was not a particularly warm one. Joyce was not a popular author<sup>43</sup> when the likes of Dickens and Thackeray were still the main paperback buyer’s choice, particularly because his extravagant style was not a good match for the Victorian values of earnestness and utilitarianism. Birmingham (2014) explains how institutions like London Society for the Suppression of Vice and pieces of legislation like the Obscene Publications Act were strongly fighting artistic liberty in early twentieth century (p. 64). This made it impossible for Joyce to publish *Ulysses* in England or in his home country. Despite this, Joyce, and a small but devoted entourage of admirers and supporters managed to publish *Ulysses* in Paris at a time that, according to Birmingham, did not even have much tolerance for anything that was extravagant,

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<sup>43</sup> Goldman (2011) notes that "in his day, Joyce's fame, like his readership, was not particularly widespread" (p. 55).

wasteful, or excessive, let alone for Joyce's extremely controversial text<sup>44</sup>. The history of writing and publishing *Ulysses* is filled with rejection, financial problems, and fear of prosecution.

However, it seems that the more rejected and isolated Joyce and his supporters got, the more motivated they were to finish and publish *Ulysses*. Joyce, despite pressing poverty, was too comfortably rejecting offers of publication under the condition of censorship.<sup>45</sup> Even the editors of the magazines that serialized *Ulysses* did not seem to care about the legal and financial risks of publishing *Ulysses*<sup>46</sup>. Joyce and his small group of followers were willing to pay the cost of being different. In fact, the dangers and hindrances of their distinction only made that distinction more appealing. When describing the unfavourable circumstance of working with Joyce because of his "reputation for quarrelling with all the world" and the controversial image of an "artist ... defying ... conventions", Birmingham identifies these as "part of the allure" for his supporters (pp. 66-7). The concepts of difficulty, cost, and handicapping as appealing to the artist and his audience become very prominent in the case of Joyce and *Ulysses*. His early elite audience, his publishers, admirers, and patrons, were attracted to Joyce and his work, not so much *in spite of* his difficulties, but more *because of them*<sup>47</sup>. They seemed motivated by the status that the

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<sup>44</sup> To better understand the attitudes of conventional society toward anything impractical, it is worth considering what Birmingham (2014) recounts about the life of Harriet Weaver, *The Egoist's* editor and Joyce's patron: "The Weavers forbade dancing, shunned unnecessary luxuries, banished exotic vegetables like asparagus from their table and considered novels an idle pleasure to be avoided as much as possible" (p. 66).

<sup>45</sup> Birmingham narrates how a potential publisher for *Dubliners* demanded changes to the text and suggested that Joyce would lose money otherwise. He was bitterly retorted to by Joyce, who "impoverished as he was, fired back, 'The appeal to my pocket has not much weight with me' ... [and that] 'I have very little intention of prostituting whatever talent I may have to the public.'" (p. 61).

<sup>46</sup> Birmingham (2014) documents the reaction of Jane Heap, one of the editors of *Little Review*, who wrote to Joyce after the burning of an entire month's issue by the postal department and amidst serious financial problems and, instead of being deterred by their difficulties, shows her solidarity, "We can only suffer with you," but does not fail to show their perseverance: "We live only because we are able to fight like devils" (p.184). Harriet Weaver (according to Birmingham the first thing she heard about Joyce "was that the entire first printing of *Dubliners* had been destroyed for being unprintably obscene") spent significant amounts of money to pay for not just publishing Joyce's work but also his life expenses and even, according to Birmingham, "was willing to risk jail time" (p. 66).

<sup>47</sup> Birmingham observes that "Joyce's publishing woes only enhanced his appeal, for one of the only emotions more powerful to Miss Weaver than her awe of artistic talent was her unbounded empathy for hardship" (p. 67). The same was true for *The Little Review* editors. Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap lost money and reputation, went to court, and risked jail for serializing *Ulysses* in the United States.

controversy around their relationship with Joyce brought them. Not only were Joyce and his followers not discouraged by the isolation and hardships *Ulysses* caused them, but they appeared to take it as signs of their superiority over the mass below who could not understand the beauty of their elite art.

Therefore, if the majority hated *Ulysses* or tried to stop it, to its supporters, it was because they did not have enough sophistication to appreciate the uniqueness of this grand artistic display. The emphasis on the distinction between the genius of the artist and the crudeness of those who cannot appreciate his art is evident in the attitudes of Joyce and his circle.

Birmingham mentions that for Ezra Pound, “if *A Portrait* couldn’t find a publisher, then it was clear beyond all doubt that his primary obstacle was not talent or vision or even money but the rank stupidity of the vermin infesting the publishing industry” (p. 68). T.S. Eliot (2005) similarly blamed the ignorance of readers for not understanding *Ulysses* and exempted Joyce from any responsibilities: “a man of genius is responsible to his peers, not to a studio full of uneducated and undisciplined coxcombs” (p. 166). Anderson, who saw herself as “the killer of the philistine, the favorite enemy of the bourgeoisie,” believed in “a society in which the exceptional would rule over the unexceptional” (Birmingham, 2014, p. 190). This was why when a reader wrote a letter to her magazine complaining about *Ulysses*, Anderson wrote back with conceited fury: “It is not important that you dislike James Joyce. He is not writing for you. He is writing for himself” (Birmingham, 2014, p. 189). Notions of intellectual exclusivity and elitism and a snobbish contempt for popularity are prevalent in the history of *Ulysses*’s creation and production, and they contribute enormously to the status this novel enjoys in the literary canon.

The high status that the early admirers of *Ulysses* like Anderson promoted and preserved has now accumulated to substantial amounts of cultural capital around a novel that was once

considered obscene and meaningless. *Ulysses* has now entered the canon of English literature. Thousands of critical books, articles, and journals have been dedicated to the academic study of *Ulysses*, and every semester, English professors assign a book to their undergraduates that was once considered to be dangerous for the minds of young people<sup>48</sup>. Its style, once considered to be destroying the history of English literature<sup>49</sup>, is commended as a literary masterpiece, and the growing number of paperback editions show that many outside the academia try to come to terms with the “monster novel.” The sheer number of guidebooks, line-by-line annotations, self-help websites, and online editions show the significance of the mere act of getting through *Ulysses*. Being able to understand and appreciate *Ulysses* becomes a sexual display in itself and an indicator of fitness in an environment where the currency of fitness is cultural sophistication and comfort with stylistic complexities.

Despite its more positive reception in the recent decades, *Ulysses* is still not a “popular” work of art, in the sense that it is not widely imitated or considered mainstream by readers or critics. However, this does not refute my argument for interpreting the book’s style as being in line with the evolution of the human mind. Providing evolutionary explanations for *Ulysses*’s stylistic complexities does not mean that I see them as perfect adaptations that are supposed to be followed by other writers based on their evolutionary advantages. Rather, I simply believe that the stylistic complexities of *Ulysses* are in accordance with the structures involved in the evolution of the human mind and its artistic products. Furthermore, a quality does not have to be perfect to be considered adaptive. As long as we can explain the selection pressures behind its

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<sup>48</sup> The US obscenity trials against *Ulysses* were formed based on charges pressed by the head of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice (NYSSV), who saw the novel as “obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, indecent, and disgusting” (Birmingham, 2014, p. 167).

<sup>49</sup> Despite liking the book, T.S. Eliot is quoted in Virginia Woolf’s diaries to have said that *Ulysses* “destroyed the whole of 19th century.” (Woolf, 1987, p. 203). Virginia Woolf, first resisting against the complexity and excessiveness of *Ulysses*, still could not help but praise it with great ambivalence: “‘Ulysses was a memorable catastrophe — immense in daring, terrific in disaster’” (Woolf, 2009, p. 58).

evolution, we can argue for the adaptiveness of a trait, regardless of its efficiency and popularity.<sup>50</sup> If an adaptation becomes too impractical to warrant the costs of a new mutation (and only *if* the mutation actually happens), evolution will amend the trait in a post hoc fashion; and even then, there is no guarantee that the result will be perfect. The stylistic complexities of *Ulysses* are explicable by the selection pressures involved in the evolution of the human brain. If they become too disadvantageous, they will fall out of fashion and will be wiped off of the evolutionary landscape; this has been at least partly the case for *Ulysses*'s style, as it still remains rather obscure. But until then, these stylistic complexities continue to attract the reader who can employ their elitist exclusivity as a fitness indicators and a source of social status. Of course, it is not the conscious intention of readers to indicate their mental or physical fitness by engaging with the difficult modernist texts. The pleasure and prestige of having read *Ulysses* are more immediate motives that mediate between deeper evolutionary motives.

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The difficulty of *Ulysses*'s style and the evolutionary forces of sexual selection and social status have created a discourse in which Joyce is not the sole displayer of his sexual/artistic display. Instead, a circle of displayers is formed around the cultural capital of *Ulysses*, all of whom function on the same dynamics of indicating fitness through sexual/artistic displays and claiming social status. Miller (2001) stresses the fact that all parties involved in the creation,

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<sup>50</sup> There are many traits in nature that are not perfect but are nonetheless the result of evolution. In *The Greatest Show on Earth*, Richard Dawkins (2010) points to a prime example where an adaptation is explained through its "historical legacy" rather than its "intelligent design," meaning that its adaptation is the efflorescence of an evolutionary trajectory that is by no means perfect. The laryngeal nerve in mammals takes an unnecessary detour after exiting the brain, travelling down the neck, into the chest, and around an artery, before going all the way back up to the voice box, just a few centimeters away from its original point of departure. This bizarre detour gets more absurd with the length of the neck (an unnecessary fifteen feet lengthening of the nerve in an adult giraffe); however, it is still explicable as an adaptation through its evolutionary history, despite its clear disadvantages. This concept of explaining adaptations based on "historical legacy" rather than "intelligent design" allows us to understand evolutionary phenomena by considering their origins rather than their practicality.

reproduction, criticism, and retelling of literature are displayers whose sexually selected instincts to create, display, and admire verbal fluency have a role in the construction of literature as a human universal. When demonstrating the mechanism of sexual display as works of art, Miller gives the examples of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, an 1897 play by Edmond Rostand, in which verbal displays are not just intended for the audience but also a way for the characters to woo their beloveds. Miller counts five male displayers involved in that story: the masterful Edmond Rostand, the articulate protagonist, Cyrano, the skilled English translator, Anthony Burgess, and finally himself as the one who is writing about it. Miller sees all five as engaging in verbal display and concludes that “These endless chains of male verbal display constitute most of human literature and science” (p. 378). I see this very similar to the circle of displayers around *Ulysses*. A circle that starts with Joyce and the characters in *Ulysses*, extends to his few early admirers, many later readers, literary critics, university professors, finally ends with me as the writer of this thesis.

## Conclusion

The idea of writing my thesis on *Ulysses* came from my fascination with evolutionary theory and its potential to explain human behaviour and emotions. Not a big fan of hard sciences, or maybe just intimidated by their presentation in high school, I always took refuge in the intelligibility of humanities and particularly in the intimacy and vividness of literature to reflect on and try to understand the human condition. During the summer that I was working on Iranian cinema as the topic of my thesis, I started to take an interest in human evolution, especially the evolution of the human mind and its intellectual products. It occurred to me that if our brain, like the rest of our body, has gone through the process of evolution, this must mean that the current tendencies and abilities of our mind are directly influenced by that process. Our thoughts, emotions, norms, values, and general way of life – the main topics of humanities – must have been shaped by the way our mind has evolved. This meant that a convergence between the knowledge gained from evolutionary biology and humanities could add to our understanding of issues related to human thinking and feelings. Feeling guilty about procrastination, I would spend my time looking for critical works that apply evolutionary principles in the realm of humanities, and although I first failed to find anything beyond studies that would use the concept of evolution as an analogy for the development of culture, I finally came across some articles that analyzed human psychological traits from an evolutionary viewpoint. The field of “evolutionary psychology” – which explains human emotions and behaviours in light of the selective pressures that formed those traits in our Pleistocene ancestors – seemed extremely fascinating and promising. The idea that one can see the gaze of our primitive ancestors in the depths of our eyes and behind our fears, desires, and way of thinking was not just fascinating; it promised the possibility of bringing fresh, and maybe more evidence-based, explanations into the rather subjective

methodologies of humanities. Considering our species' "deep history" – a history that dates back to the evolution of anatomically modern humans rather than the invention of writing – seemed to me like an excellent way to expand our scope of thinking about human issues like philosophy, culture, society, and art.

One of the first articles that I read was Christine Harris's "The Evolution of Jealousy," in which she offers new insights on the process through which sexual jealousy might have been selected in males and females. Reviewing the accepted views on the subject, Harris explains how selection pressures like the need for paternal certainty for men and access to resources for women can have made both sexes "innately predisposed" to jealousy in order to increase their inclusive fitness. Finding this explanation highly ingenious and promising, I immediately started looking for stories that had jealousy as a central theme, hoping to turn this into a topic for a new thesis. After considering literary works as diverse as *Othello*, *Medea*, *Madame Bovary*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, I finally thought of *Ulysses*, the story of Leopold Bloom, who spends a whole day wandering in Dublin avoiding home, where he knows his wife is going to share their matrimonial bed with another man. It seemed like the perfect match to me; not only does Bloom's story pose a great question about a core human emotion – Bloom's curious treatment of sexual jealousy and anxiety – I also had always found myself fascinated with this novel since my first encounter with it as an undergraduate student.

As excited as I was to drop my few months' work on my previous topic and start working on the theme of sexual jealousy in *Ulysses* from an evolutionary perspective, I soon realized that my approach to form my research was not bound to yield the best results. Having started from a theoretical perspective and then searching for a literary work that would suit its theoretical explanations would lead into spurious "research," research in which the questions were already

answered. It was like having a button and then trying to find a matching suit for it. Nevertheless, I had picked my suit, that is, *Ulysses*, and I started reading it and reading about it. The more I read about *Ulysses*, the more I realized my initial outline, consisting of chapters that each discussed a universal human disposition in the novel through an evolutionary “lens,” was insufficient. In order to formulate a significant argument with a strong rationale, I needed to pose significant questions about this novel, and this led me toward its most prominent feature: its difficulty. Having written a seminar paper on the difficulty of *Ulysses* using the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, I was aware of the novel’s status as a stylistically innovative and challenging work. Since the complexity of style in *Ulysses* is its most prominent feature, almost all critical works on *Ulysses* address the question of difficulty in one way or another. Quite surprisingly, however, very few treat this as an independent issue that requires analysis on its own. They consider the mechanisms and implications of this difficulty, but rarely do they ask why this work should be so stylistically complicated in the first place. How is this complexity defined as a feature of literature? And, more importantly, how is it justifiable according to our species-wide tendencies and their evolutionary origins? *Ulysses* was initially supposed to be a short story in *Dubliners* in 1906; a year later, Joyce decided to turn it into a “short book,”<sup>51</sup> and then a novel in 1914. But according to the accounts<sup>52</sup>, it kept growing right until its final year of composition in 1921. Why would Joyce keep inflating this “short story” for 15 years to over 700 pages, and why would he keep elaborating its thin plot with verbal ornaments and extreme sophistication and learnedness? What are the universal origins of his tendencies to experiment with and complicate his style, and how can our knowledge about the evolution of the human

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<sup>51</sup> Ellmann (1982), has an excerpt of the diary of Joyce’s brother, Stanislaus, from 1907, in which he writes that Joyce “is going to expand his short story ‘Ulysses’ into a short book” (p. 265).

<sup>52</sup> Budgen (1972), Groden (1977), and Birmingham (2014) all show in different ways how Joyce took more and more time as he got closer to the final episodes of *Ulysses*.

mind help us in answering these questions? Stylistic difficulty is a hallmark of Joyce and his period, and its climax in *Ulysses* raises legitimate questions about the functions of such stylistic innovations from the perspective of evolutionary psychology and Darwinian theories of literature.

In order to apply the insights gained from evolutionary psychology to these questions about the stylistic complexities of *Ulysses*, I needed to focus more on theories that attempted to explain the adaptive function of literary experimentation. The problem with such theories, though, was that they did not exist. Biocultural critics have talked about the adaptive purposes of literature, but they have never specifically discussed formal complexities. Therefore, I had to survey the existing Darwinian theories of literature and extract bits and pieces that I could put together to form an argument that can explain the difficulty of *Ulysses*'s style. The first relevant piece is the view that sees the adaptive purpose of literature in creating a "simulated reality" in which we can record and transfer the important features of our experience. Evolutionary scientists and literary Darwinists like Steven Pinker and Michelle Sugiyama argue that narrative is a form of "conveying adaptively important information" (Carroll, 2014, p. xix), and the sociobiologist Edward O. Wilson regards art as a way for humans to make sense of the universe by consolidating their learned experience, i.e., the human nature. The *social order* theories are best to explain the content of literature, but they also helped my argument of style indirectly. The essence of these theories is that literature is a way for humans to record and stabilize the learning gained from their lived experience. I advanced this model by arguing that literature can also be a way to simulate new experiences in the safety of an imagined world. This makes literature a hub of invention and experiment, concepts that define the unorthodox aspects of *Ulysses* as well. Furthermore, the inventive and experimental functions of literature become important as our

living environment changes; a new environment requires new forms of simulated reality. This took me to the issue of environment and the importance of considering the social and cultural context in which *Ulysses* was produced and received, topics that I extensively discussed in Chapter Three.

Another useful concept that I took from the mainstream evolutionary theories of art was Pinker's argument that art is an adaptively useless by-product of our brain. Sticking strictly to the principles of natural selection, Pinker denies art any adaptive functions, as it apparently does not increase our chances of survival, and living organisms would not develop a physical or psychological trait unless it makes them more adapted to their environment. This reduces art, and especially stylistically experimental art, to pleasure-making tools that humans have invented by exploiting their brain's pleasure circuitry. Unsatisfied by his final conclusion, I borrowed the concept of *uselessness* and looked for other evolutionary theories that approach art from the angle of its ostensible uselessness for survival. Starting from Darwin, evolutionary scientists have faced the challenge of explaining traits and features that seemingly do not help us survive. Darwin was famously terrorized by the problem that the beautiful but useless peacock tail posed to his theory of natural selection<sup>53</sup>. But he accepted the challenge, and now the theory of sexual selection is the most important amendment to natural selection. Most of the traits whose uselessness makes them inexplicable through natural selection are sexual displays that animals develop to attract mates. Geoffrey Miller approaches the human mind from the same perspective and attempts to analyze our intellectual properties, including art, as sexual displays like other animals' mating ornamentation. The key concepts that I found in Miller's argument proved to be

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<sup>53</sup> Darwin (1892) wrote, "The sight of a feather in a peacock's tail, whenever I gaze at it, makes me sick" (p. 231).

very fitting to explain *Ulysses*'s style. Sexual displays, according to Miller, are fitness indicators that in order to be reliable must demonstrate a sort of wasteful expenditure. In Chapter Two, I analyzed *Ulysses*'s style as a fitness-indicating sexual display and showed how its difficulty can be interpreted as the *cost* associated with displays of fitness. I also expanded the concept of cost beyond difficulty to include anything that is the indicator of intellectual fitness, mainly *originality* and the ability to create *affect*. Not only did this help me to explain the other features of *Ulysses* besides its difficulty, but it also responded to potential criticism that could have referred to works of art that do not display stylistic difficulty. Moreover, the concepts of originality and affect also worked well with the notions of inventiveness and universal human emotions that I had discussed in the previous chapter.

I mentioned earlier that my advancement on social order theories, seeing literature as not just a way to consolidate old experience but a place to simulate new ones, directed me toward paying attention to the changing environment in which literary works are produced and read. The way I advanced Miller's theory of art as sexual display also necessitated considering the social context in which the style of works like *Ulysses* became the main way of indicating intellectual fitness. I found Miller's theory insufficient in that it only focused on more primitive forms of art, as he saw the modern styles as elite "cultural inventions" that do not always exhibit the features of other forms of sexual display. Taking both concepts of "cultural" and "invention," I started to bring together all the bits and pieces in my last chapter, where I showed how the need for *originality* – discussed in chapters One and Two – and the cultural-specific requirements of the modernist period can still work within the same framework of art as sexual displays. Sexual displays are extremely sensitive to the viewer's feedback, and in an environment where a certain feature is viewed highly by the society, the displayers are willing to pay the cost of exhibiting

that feature even if it handicaps them. This helped me to explain the motives of Joyce and his readers in suffering through a dense and obscure text, as showing comfort with the costs of difficulty gifted them prestige and social status. By reviewing the history of the book's publication and reception, I showed how *Ulysses* is associated with elitist prestige and social status, issues that are closely related to the argument of difficulty as fitness-indicating sexual display. The difficult style of *Ulysses* can be a source of pleasure to an elite audience, and this can be the point that unravels the evolutionary reasons behind its creation. Bringing together all the concepts discussed in previous chapters – apparent uselessness, excessive extravagance, inventiveness, and cost – I showed how the handicapping elements of sexual displays can be related to the social prestige and status.

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I consider the application of evolutionary theories on the difficulty of style in *Ulysses* a success, mainly because it helped me to offer an alternative explanation to a significant question about this novel without getting results that are dramatically different from what the history of the book's reception shows or what the long tradition of *Ulysses* criticism has discussed. At the same time, my way of explaining difficulty has exposed new reasons behind this difficulty by taking into consideration evolutionary human motives and universals, making this analysis unique in the perspective it offers. By distancing from the strictly “constructivist” readings of *Ulysses*'s style – purely structuralist and linguistic approaches that analyze the text as a construct within itself completely separate from the biological features of the brain behind it – this approach gave me a chance to present a new understanding of this canonical text through studying the species-typical dispositions that can have played a role in its style and status.

While encouraged by the promises of a fresh perspective, I was well aware of the possible pitfalls of my approach. The evolutionary reading's focus on the deep roots of human motives can make it sound like a "reductive" approach to literature. "Am I oversimplifying the complexity of *Ulysses*?" I would ask myself, as the idea of this research was forming in my mind. But as I read more and kept writing more sections and chapters of my thesis, I realized that an evolutionary reading of *Ulysses* still required meticulous attention to the details and nuances of the book's style, its composition, and the readers' reception of its difficulty. It is true that my methodology required rewinding history and exposing the bare bones of our desires and emotions, but in bringing back these findings to the novel, I found myself constantly referring to the details of the author's life, the period he lived and worked in, and the history of its reception among readers. As Boyd, Carroll, and Gotschall (2010) defend the evolutionary approach, "'Reductiveness' is a fault, but 'reduction' is essential to causal explanation" (p. 7). I needed to "reduce" *Ulysses* to the evolutionary motives of its author and readers, but this did not mean that my approach was "reductivist." I used the universals that I unearthed from scrutinizing the evolutionary principles involved in aesthetic production and consumption to discuss the intricacies of the novel, and in doing so, I did my best in referencing the book's history as well as the wealth of its scholarly criticism.

What I believe is missing from the current study is a more in-depth analysis of *Ulysses*'s text. Due to my focus on the overall difficulty of *Ulysses*'s style and its historical background and implications for the author and readers, my thesis did not have the chance to engage in a closer textual reading of the novel. This is why I think a future continuation of the same evolutionary approach with a stronger emphasis on the specifics of Joyce's narrative techniques and his use of syntax and vocabulary can prove useful in complementing and advancing the insights offered by the current thesis. This, however, does not undermine the outcomes of the present study for me.

Introducing our knowledge of human evolution into one of the most important and challenging texts of English literature gave me the dual opportunity of discovering hidden aspects behind this novel's special status, while at the same time shedding light on the core motives involved in the dynamics of one of our most important human endeavours: art!

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