

The Eyes Have It: Ocular Imagery and Allusions in James Joyce's *Ulysses*

Senior Paper

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For a Degree Bachelor of Arts with  
A Major in Literature at  
The University of North Carolina at Asheville  
Fall 2009

By *WILLIAM FISHER*

---

Thesis Director  
Dr. Blake Hobby

---

Thesis Advisor  
Dr. Merritt Moseley

Countless themes, motifs and patterns emerge in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, but the sheer abundance of eyes in the novel (approximately 514 unique appearances) betrays both Joyce's ocular obsession and also his fascination as a modernist writer with perception. Joyce's depiction of eyes both adopts and expands upon the fascination with subjectivity and perception synonymous with modernist literature of the early twentieth century; a tendency, as Leopold Bloom, the novel's protagonist states, to "[s]ee ourselves as others see us" (8.662). A deliberate analysis of eyes in *Ulysses* reveals their tendency to take on an active role in the narrative, working autonomously to create meaning and demonstrating a characteristically modernist separation between the body and the senses. In this context, active descriptions of eyes in *Ulysses* help to inform our understanding of these modernist obsessions. In the famous Linati schema Joyce provided to Valery Larbaud, in which he delineated the parallels between *Ulysses* and the *Odyssey*, Joyce assigned an organ of the body to each chapter. Thus, examining one of the body's organs can help to understand not only the Homeric elements of Joyce's text, but also the modernist obsession with perception and interiority. An analysis of Joyce's text lends validity to both the Homeric and modernist influences, while also revealing the gendered voyeuristic tendencies of its characters, tendencies characterized by those who have read and criticized the text.

*Ulysses*'s radical form of expression comes from its stylistic elements—its narrative perspectives and techniques, its fusion of low and high culture, its subjective emphasis—that help define literary modernism. Several other modernist works (Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, Nathaniel West's *The Day of the Locust* to list a diversity of examples) display an equal fascination with eyes and perception, and these similarities are not coincidental. Critics suggest that modernist works tend to pay particular attention to the eyes of

its characters for a variety of reasons. Bradbury suggests that modernism may be interpreted in its broadest terms as “the literature of technology” (27)—a technology, as both Jacobs and Danius argue, that is focused most directly toward the visual organ. Danius explains that the advent of inventions such as the photograph, commercial advertisement and cinema culminated during the era of literary modernism; as such, this “technology is in a specific sense *constitutive* of high-modernist aesthetics” (3), forcefully insisting that modernism is inherently connected with visual culture. Conversely, DiBattista argues that there is no inherent connection with the visual in *Ulysses*, stating that, unlike the cinema of the time, “[*Ulysses*] narrative captures no idiosyncratic, star-making gesture. . .no signature trait like Bette Davis’s eyes” (219). We may argue that the sheer number of eyes in *Ulysses*, along with the consistently vivid and realistic narrative style, counters DiBattista’s claim. The novel’s graphic content led to a ban on *Ulysses*’ publication in the United States at a time when American cinema could hardly be characterized as anything but wholesome by comparison.

As Jacobs argues, the modernist obsession with the visual underscores the separation between the body and its sensory organs: “[t]he modernist period is remarkable for its increasing cognizance of the body, itself grasped as an image, behind the neutral lens of the observer” (2). Danius substantiates Jacob’s argument, offering a modernist interpretation of eyes in Joyce’s text: “[in *Ulysses*], each sensory organ, particularly the eye, tends to perform according to its own autonomous rationality. . .the trivial act of looking is rewritten as an event in itself. . .[the eye] operates independently, with an agency all its own” (151). Gottfried goes so far as to suggest that Joyce’s eye troubles during the composition of *Ulysses* led him to insert language that would be physically challenging for a reader to decipher: “these [visual] tricks concern visual letters; they are like eye charts for improving the reader’s perception—and how many eye charts must Joyce

have peered at that time?” (467). While Gottfried makes no definitive claim, he begins from a reasonable assertion, noting that Joyce’s ocular disease made a clear impression on the text (an impression that would become one of Joyce’s obsessions in *Finnegans Wake*).

Perhaps the clearest indication of a Homeric influence on Joyce’s use of eyes is found in the collection of Joyce’s notebooks, *Scribbledehobble*, where he copied out two lines from the *Odyssey* in Greek. To the side of these lines he wrote “Pallas Athena—her eyes are shaded by a peak (*glaukopsis*) iridectomy” (86, Greek text Latinized). Joyce no doubt identified with Athena’s usual epithet, *glaukopsis*, grey eyed, the word from which glaucoma is derived. As Schork suggests, “the epithet of the goddess-patron of Odysseus may have had a special poignancy for Joyce as he struggled with continually worsening eye problems (86-7). As Fronimopoulos and Lascaratos suggest, the name Homer may be derived from a Greek term meaning “to not see,” corresponding with the poet’s supposed blindness (125). This distinct connection between Homer and Joyce on the ocular level allows for the possibility that Joyce’s use of eyes in *Ulysses* is at least partially influenced by Homeric tendencies.

While the Homeric and modernist uses of the eye is clear, Joyce’s use of eyes functions most directly on the sensual level, as Amm argues:

The eye is one of the most expressive organs of nonverbal communication, an eloquent gauge of our feelings and emotions. We regard the unmistakable expression of the eyes as a more reliable communicator than any mutable word. They radiate wrath and antipathy, hate, rage and, above all love. . . .the Eros of the eye. . .caresses, bewitches, seduces. A glance from eye to eye is the elemental, existential *sine qua non* at all levels of interpersonal contacts. (227)

Eyes in Joyce’s text are often described with a similar expressive force; while all of Amm’s

characteristics are prevalent in *Ulysses*, it is the “Eros of the eye” that articulates itself the most clearly—the characters rely on their eyes to communicate their deepest sexual wants and needs. Moreover, as John Berger explains in his essential work on human perception, *Ways of Seeing*, men and women follow a standard voyeuristic paradigm. While several critics, including Danius, Devlin and Jacobs, rely on Berger for many of their fundamental starting points about the gaze in modernist literature, Berger’s work has never been directly applied to *Ulysses*. Berger also notes, for example, how the motion picture camera changed the nature of human perception: “The camera isolated momentary appearances and in so doing destroyed the idea that images were timeless. . . .The invention of the camera changed the way men saw. The visible came to mean something different to them” (18). Just as modernist critics, Berger argues that these emerging visual technologies affected art how it was perceived. As with many modernist critics, Berger also makes many claims about masculine and feminine perspective, themes that are especially prevalent in Joyce’s text. By offering an analysis of Berger’s theories and applying his critical suppositions to the text, we may see how the characters in *Ulysses* interact and communicate with their eyes according to their genders.

Berger’s argument depends on several assumptions about the gender roles of men and women, assumptions that we will need to understand in order to view *Ulysses* through his critical lens. He begins by suggesting that a sharp contrast exists between the social position of men and women: “A man’s presence is dependent upon the promise of the power which he embodies. . . . [t]he promised power may be moral, physical, temperamental, economic, social, sexual—but its object is always exterior to the man” (45). Here Berger establishes the male figure in the dominant role—the man controls his own appearance and thus his own person. By contrast, “a woman’s presence expresses her attitude to herself, and defines what can and cannot be done to

her. . . .To be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men” (46). Men then objectify women because their nature is perceived to be fundamentally weaker. Extending this argument, Berger suggests that while men exercise control by viewing women, women further cement this voyeuristic relationship by viewing themselves as well:

*[M]en act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (47)*

As we will see throughout the text, the characters of *Ulysses* interact according to Berger’s standards—while men objectify women with their eyes, women both recognize and participate in their own objectification.

*Ulysses* has a reputation for intimidating readers with its obscure use of style, though this complexity stands in strong contrast with the underlying simplicity of the novel’s narrative. The action of the novel is confined to just one day, 16 June 1904, detailing the lives of the characters’ day in Dublin. The courses of Stephen Dedalus, an autobiographical approximation of Joyce, Leopold Bloom, an ad-salesman for a newspaper, and Molly, Bloom’s strong-willed and recently adulterous wife, intersect as the day progresses. Stephen wanders the city after his roommates kick him out of the Martello Tower; Bloom delays returning home after a friend’s funeral to avoid seeing his wife with her lover, Blazes Boylan, who (Bloom knows) has a four o’clock appointment with Molly; Stephen and Bloom meet up toward the end of the day, venturing to a bar, a hospital and a brothel before returning to Bloom’s house; the novel closes with Molly’s

interior monologue and accompanying masturbation, presented entirely by Molly's stream of consciousness without the assistance of a narrator. Joyce endows these characters with a strong sense of humanity, describing the most intimate details of their fictional lives—thinking, eating, urinating, defecating, masturbating and copulating. But the text's relatively simple plot is deepened by the fact that *Ulysses*, as its title suggests, is also a modern retelling of Homer's *Odyssey* with Stephen, Bloom and Molly taking the respective roles of Telemachus, Odysseus and Penelope. As the Homeric undertones of the book reveal, *Ulysses* allows for many different levels of interpretative analysis.

The first section of *Ulysses*, the *Telemachiad*, provides a detailed look into the consciousness of Stephen Dedalus while also affording insight into the Homeric and optical themes of the novel. We read, for example, how Buck Mulligan, Stephen's jolly roommate and unyielding foil, chides Stephen for not reading Homer in its original language; he then "turned abruptly his grey searching eyes from the sea to Stephen's face" (1.86-7). The description draws obvious Homeric parallels to the "grey-eyed goddess" Athena, but it also frames the scene in a modernist tone. Joyce could have written that Mulligan turned his *face* toward Stephen. Instead, he chooses to focus our attention on Mulligan's gaze, piercing Stephen with his disappointment. The narrator also comments on Mulligan's tendency to blink, creating another Homeric parallel with the epithet "lively-eyed." While the first appearance (1.379) is descriptive, the second takes on a more active significance: "He looked at them...his eyes, from which he had suddenly withdrawn all shrewd sense, blinking with mad gaiety" (1.581-2). Before singing his infamous "ballad of joking Jesus" (1.607), Mulligan casts out any glimmer of rationality from his eyes in order to better assume his role as the blasphemous singer. His action implies that emotions—prudence or cheerfulness, in this case—can be communicated with an look of the eyes.

While Mulligan's eyes are described with a degree of playfulness, the depiction of Stephen's eyes reveals the mechanisms of his mind. We read that Stephen has "silver points of anxiety in his eyes" (1.188) and "[p]ulses...beating in his eyes, veiling their sight" (1.224). Whereas Mulligan's eyes convey his sense of liveliness, Stephen's are indicative of his depressed condition. While his own eyes reveal his condition, Stephen remains far more focused on other's eyes as the chapter develops. Like Hamlet, Stephen is haunted by visions of a dead parent, though her eyes stand out her most striking feature: "Her glazing eyes, staring out of death, to shake and bend my soul....Her eyes on me to strike me down" (1.274-7). His mother's eyes take on an active role—they alone twist and tear at his soul, still vividly impressed in Stephen's memory more than a year after her death. Stephen remains sensitive to emotions conveyed through the eye of the other; looking toward Haynes, a roommate who desires to kick him out of their flat, thinking, "[g]ive him the key too. All. He will ask for it. That was in his eyes" (1.631-2). Stephen recognizes the inherent action implied by Haynes' expression, yet he cannot stop the usurpation of the Martello Tower. Stephen's conception of the visual is further complicated as the *Telemachiad* continues.

"Proteus," the third chapter of *Ulysses*, explains Stephen's aesthetic theory, which is based on sight. Stephen's interior monologue at the chapter's opening provides the clearest example: "Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if not more, thought through my eyes. Signatures of all things I am here to read....Shut your eyes and see"(3.1-9). Stephen's combination of Aristotelian and modern philosophy produces this abstract notion—he believes that sight functions primarily through thought and sound, that he will be able to see more clearly with his eyes closed than open. Berger expands on the necessity of sight to experience reality: "To touch something is to situate oneself in relation to it. (Close your eyes, move around the



room and notice how the faculty of touch is like a static, limited form of sight)” (9)—here Stephen hopes to move beyond this paradigm. Duncan suggests that the visual also provides links to audible perception: “There are numerous transitions in the stream of consciousness from visual perception, reasoning, memory, and imagination to associated sound patterns” (293). In true Aristotelian fashion, the audible and visual are inherently connected, suggesting the broader sensory fascinations of *Ulysses*. Gabler traces Stephen’s longstanding connection to the visual back to his first epiphany in *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*. Stephen’s aunt Dante threatens the boy indirectly, stating that “Stephen will apologise.... O, if not, the eagles will come and pull out his eyes, / Pull out his eyes, / Apologise” (2). That his first epiphany should be connected with the loss of his vision gains more significance in the context of his aesthetic theory.

The theory stands in strong opposition to Stephen’s subsequent action, moving from the abstract to the concrete as he fantasizes about a woman on the beach: “She trusts me, her hand gentle, the longlashed eyes. Now where the blue hell am I bringing her beyond the veil? Into the ineluctable modality of the ineluctable visuality...Touch me. Soft eyes” (3.424-434). Here Stephen desires to experience real contact with the visual world he only theorized about. He stares at her, hoping to find something in her eyes he can connect with. He has a similar exchange in one of the final epiphanies of *A Portrait*, peering into a woman’s eyes on the same Sandymount Strand: “She was alone and still, gazing out to sea; and when she felt his presence and the worship of his eyes her eyes turned to him in quiet sufferance of his gaze, without shame or wantonness” (186). Both novels illustrate Stephen’s tendency to search for such eyes, eyes that can endure a gaze that means to objectify women. Berger might well argue that the scenes follow to the stereotype of the male viewer and female subject. Stephen desires to objectify these

women, to assert his masculine authority by viewing them. In turn, the viewed women reciprocate his gaze; not only does his objectified woman in *A Portrait* return his gazing eyes with “sufferance,” implying her submission, but she also returns a look without shame, suggesting acceptance of her position. Stephen is equally concerned, however, as Devlin argues, with how he is seen by others: “Stephen [has]... an obsessive self-consciousness, even when, as in “Proteus,” there is no one present to do the watching. Bloom, too, is preoccupied with the eye of the other, wondering . . . ‘Am I like that? See ourselves as others see us’” (“Eye of the Other” 882). Devlin’s assertion allows for another level of interpretation when analyzing eyes in *Ulysses*—Stephen and Bloom are equally concerned with how others perceive them.

As the novel moves into its second section, the *Odyssey*, the narration focuses on Leopold Bloom, the Odysseus figure of Joyce’s text. Bloom proves equally responsive to eyes throughout the novel, though he does not think in Stephen’s over-intellectualized terms; Bloom’s occupation as an ad salesman demands a straightforward attention to visual detail. Standing on a street corner, “his eyes wandering over the multicolored hoardings” (5.192), Bloom casts his eyes over the advertisements strewn across the city. As Berger asserts, advertisements reveal an inherent economic reality tangible for both Joyce and contemporary society: “[A]dvertisement or [p]ublicity is the life of this culture—in so far as without publicity, capitalism could not survive” (154). Gunn further suggests that the advertisements in *Ulysses* serve as a sort of metacommentary, emphasizing the comic and perceptory themes of the novel: “Beware of imitations,’ Stephen warns [just as Plumtree’s potted meat does throughout the text]—but *Ulysses* is everywhere an imitation of material” (489). If Gunn’s argument holds, we may view *Ulysses* itself as a sort of personal advertisement presented by Joyce for us, the reader, to view.

Bloom is equally obsessed with creating ads that produce an exciting visual sensation for

the viewer: “Something to catch the eye” (5.554) as he states. Bloom’s relationship with the visual world affects his interpretation of events within the novel. The first eyes mentioned in the “Calypso” episode are those of Bloom’s cat—“green flashing eyes” (4.23), another Homeric parallel. Bloom is so drawn to his cat’s eyes that he cannot help but stare into them: “She blinked out of her avid shameclosing eyes...he watched the dark eye slits narrowly with greed till her eyes were green stones. Then he went to the dresser, took the jug...poured warmbubbled milk and set it slowly on the floor” (4.33-7). Bloom is captivated by his cat’s eyes—they draw him mysteriously, convincing him to obey her secret desire. Similarly, Bloom’s butcher is first marked as “ferretheaded” (4.152), though this epithet shifts as Bloom leaves the shop: “A speck of eager fire from foxeyes thanked him. He withdrew his gaze after an instant” (4.186-7). Bloom’s search for understanding within the eyes of these minor characters reveals how intently Bloom looks for meaning in the eyes of others.

Bloom displays a particular sensitivity to Molly’s eyes: “He smiled, glancing askance at her mocking eyes. The same young eyes. The first night after the charades. Dolphin’s barn” (4.344-5). Here Bloom notices the same expression in Molly’s eyes as on the night of their first meeting, suggesting their power in both the past and present. Bloom recalls seeing rather different expression on Molly’s face the previous evening at a dance hall when they met Blazes Boylan: “She rubbed her handglass briskly on her woolen vest against her full wagging bub. Peering into it. Lines in her eyes. It wouldn’t pan out somehow” (4. 531-3). Here the narrator describes Molly’s self-concerned glance into a pocket-sized vanity mirror. We might also recall that Joyce chose the same word when Mulligan “brought the mirror away from Stephen’s peering eyes” (1.141)—both characters *peer* into the mirror to search for some sort of enlightenment. Yet while Stephen searches for meaning, Molly looks only for objectification. Berger notes that often

“[t]he real function of the mirror is to make the woman connive in treat herself as, first and foremost, a sight” (51). In this sense, Molly objectifies herself just as often as the men in her life, further cementing the gender roles of the characters in *Ulysses*. The “lines” in her eyes are suggestive of several possible themes—Bloom himself only comments on this feature, failing to elaborate on its meaning. They may suggest the guilt Molly experiences from her infidelity, an expression neither Bloom nor the reader would be expected to anticipate before the “Penelope” episode. Bloom continues to think about Molly’s eyes as the day continues. He imagines returning home that evening and telling her about his day: “She listens with big dark soft eyes” (5.298). Buying soap at the pharmacist’s, Bloom recalls that the right makeup “Brings out the darkness of her eyes. Looking at me, the sheet up to her eyes” (5.494-5). Bloom communicates most intimately with Molly by reading the expressions of her eyes.

While Bloom is susceptible to others’ eyes, his eyes are also capable of taking on an active role, observing others as they have observed him. As he waits in line behind a young woman at the butcher’s, “[h]is eyes rested on her vigorous hips” (1.148). These eyes function not only with their own authority but also with complete independence from Bloom’s body—taken literally, the sentence would imply that the pair of eyes was placed on top of the woman’s hips. The reader understands the meaning as the description falls in line with the action given to eyes already in the text. As Danius reasons, “Bloom moves through an urban space which, throughout the novel, is represented as overflowing with retinal stimuli...Bloom himself displays such a striking penchant for visual activity, especially of a voyeuristic and libidinally inflected kind” (175). Like Stephen, Bloom is drawn to the sexual message communicated by eyes, both others’ and his own; like Stephen, Bloom asserts his masculine gaze throughout the text, though most noticeably in his exchange with Gerty McDowell (see below). Bloom’s eyes gain a further agency when he

brings Molly breakfast in bed: “Entering the bedroom he halfclosed his eyes and walked through the warm yellow twilight....Letting the blind up by gentle tugs halfway his backward eye saw her glance at the letter and tuck it under her pillow” (4.247-57). Joyce’s enjambed words and absent punctuation allow for the possibility that “halfway his backward eye saw her,” calling attention to Bloom’s “halfclosed eyes” and implying that Bloom is only partially aware of Molly’s affair with Blazes Boylan. Fügler agrees, stating that “Bloom’s letting the blind up halfway reveals itself as a suggestive hint at his halfhearted wish for enlightenment, especially since the description of this act includes the conspicuous information about his ‘backward eye’” (210). We might instead read “halfway” as an adjective, and the raising of the blinds would then represent Bloom’s partial awareness of the affair.

The most extended instance reflecting the modernist and gendered use of eyes in *Ulysses* occurs in the “Nausicaa” episode—in fact, Joyce identifies the eye to be one of two primary ‘organs’ working within the chapter in the Linati schema. Indeed, eyes stimulate the episode’s action as Bloom ogles Gerty MacDowell on the Sandymount Strand while masturbating. Danius suggests, along the same lines of Berger, that the scene fits neatly into a standard modernist and gendered paradigm: “It is no coincidence in...Joyce that the gazer is male and the gazed-upon female. In modernism at large, this alienating and reifying gaze is usually associated with masculinity” (160). But while Gerty is objectified in Bloom’s eyes, she too derives pleasure from his gaze, simultaneously reflecting a fascination with eyes in her half of the narrative; eyes are mentioned only ten times in Bloom’s half of the narrative while appearing thirty seven times in Gerty’s. Some of her optical fascination may be grounded in the source material (popular ladies’ periodicals of the time) which Joyce referenced heavily when composing the episode: “Her very soul is in her eyes” (3.189, she notes. Here Gerty expresses an overly romanticized cliché, the sort

that might be found in the novels and women's journals she reads. Danuis further adds that "the episode mocks not only the melodramatic forms of literature which are Gerty's favorite reading, but also a certain mode of visual activity" (176-7). Insulted by her friends, Gerty expresses her displeasure through her eyes: "A brief cold blaze shone from her eyes that spoke volumes of scorn immeasurable" (13.578-9) Gerty's eyes takes on this same sense of agency and expression, denoting her emotions by their own action. Still, Gerty is caught up in the idealisms of her narrative. As she gradually exposes herself to Bloom over the course of the episode, she imagines herself as a seductress, understanding her eyes to be her most powerful and alluring feature. The first mention of Gerty's eyes is found in her early catalogue of "beautiful" features: "Why have women such eyes of witchery? Gerty's were of the bluest Irish blue, set off by lustrous lashes and dark expressive brows" (13.107-8). These eyes are imbued with a strong sense of agency. Gerty's question best captures her understanding of the power of the feminine eye. She laments the curse of womankind; endowed with such enticing eyes, they seem to bewitch whomever they might meet. The additional detail of her "expressive" brows further suggests the communicative power of Gerty's eyes. Within this same catalog, the narrator conspicuously forgets to note Gerty's lameness, the first descriptive note Bloom offers as his narration reclaims the episode: "Tight boots? No. She's lame! O!" (13.771). Such an oversight forces the reader to question the reliability of Gerty's narrative.

The text leaves little ambiguity about Bloom's effect on Gerty. She pays particular attention to Bloom's staring eyes: "His eyes burned into her as though they would search her through and through, read her very soul. Wonderful eyes they were, superbly expressive" (13.412-4). Gerty is equally capable of perceiving the expressive qualities of other's eyes as well as her own. Moreover, she exposes herself both physically and emotionally, allowing Bloom to stare

into her soul. Devlin notes that Gerty would have felt a certain amount of pride in Bloom's selection: "it is with his gaze that Bloom will signify which woman he finds most attractive, most appealing...relegat[ing the rest] to the realm of sexual negligibility" ("Eye of the Other" 891), allowing Bloom to communicate an entire range of sexual emotions with only his sight. The pair's separated intercourse continues as Gerty continues to find meaning in Bloom's glances: "She could almost see the swift answering flash of admiration in his eyes that set her tingling in every nerve. She put on her hat so that she could see from underneath the brim ...she caught the expression in his eyes. He was eyeing her as a snake eyes his prey" (13.513-6). Here Joyce may be expanding upon the original story of Nausicaa found in the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus meets the young princess Nausicaa on a beach playing with a ball. In Joyce's story, they toss glances instead. Gerty identifies an exact message in Bloom's eyes, granting her definite sexual arousal, a "tingling" sensation: "The eyes that were fastened upon her set her pulses tingling" (13.689-90). Gerty has an autonomous self, separate from her literary models, capable of deriving pleasure from the very idea of being observed by others. As with Stephen and Bloom, Gerty's conception of visual expression is innately connected with the sensual. Both achieve a level of sexual gratification engendered by Bloom's desire to observe and Gerty's desire to be observed and objectified. Once again, the characters fall neatly in Berger's categories, performing their customary gender roles as observer and observed. As Devlin further suggests, the desire to be watched, to be objectified, reveals the characters' underlying "thoughts...[about] voyeurism...[and] visual pleasure" ("Bloom and the Police" 46).

Eyes take on an unusual significance in "Ithaca," the second chapter of the novel's final section, the *Nostos*, or homecoming. The word appears only four times in the episode, the least occurrences in any chapter of the novel; all four uses are confined to a single response to one of

the narrator's questions. Moreover, the word is never applied to any direct action, but instead in descriptions of drawings, letters and photographs, which Bloom finds in a drawer. As all seventeen other chapters of *Ulysses* contain more than ten independent uses of the word "eye," the lack of eyes in "Ithaca" draws particular attention to their few appearances in the episode. Though there is no description of any living eyes within the chapter, the reader is almost painfully aware of what has happened in the episode. As Lawrence explains, "[t]here is a curious sense of displacement about the writing...Instead of human feelings, we are given a scientific record of phenomena" (560). This extreme detachment accounts for the lack of real eyes within the episode, perhaps suggesting that the readers must watch the chapter with their own eyes.

By most immediate contrast, the word is used thirty five times in "Penelope" and twenty three times in "Eumaeus." Still, the basic concept of perception is noticeable. We learn that Dante, Stephen's aunt, had once remained with Bloom "for a certain time scanning through his onelensed binocular fieldglasses" (17.491-2). The "onelensed" glasses are reminiscent of the Citizen/Polyphemus cyclops Bloom encounters earlier in Dublin odyssey, though it is unclear why he has binoculars with only one lens. The narrator later asks, "What is Bloom's visual sensation? He saw in a quick young familiar form the predestination of a future" (17.779-80). If the narrator of another chapter guided the episode, the reader might have expected to read: "Bloom eyed Stephen, seeing in him a reflection of his younger self." But the extreme structure of the catechism does not allow for such informality, instead phrasing its questions in heightened rhetoric.

The word eye only appears in the chapter when answering the question, "What did the first drawer unlocked contain?" (17.1774). The word first appears in a description of a drawing of Bloom, which his daughter Milly drew in her childhood. Bloom observes a "drawing, marked



Papli, which showed a large globular head with 5 erect hairs, 2 eyes in profile, the trunk full front with three large buttons, 1 triangular foot” (17.1776-8). This rather cubist depiction of Bloom evokes comparisons with modernist art. As Berger explains, in Cubist structure, “the visible was no longer what confronted the single eye, but the totality of possible views from points all round the object (or person) being depicted” (18). That Milly’s drawing should fit so neatly into Cubist style draws particular attention to the description. The placement of Bloom’s eyes is especially significant. In a realistic portrait, both of Bloom’s eyes could obviously not both be shown in profile, but this possibility exists in Milly’s artistic creation. The word “eye” next appears as the narrator describes the content of a letter from Milly: “How are you *note of interrogation capital eye* I am very well *full stop*” (17.1793, italics mine). Here the narrator describes Bloom’s consciousness as he reads through the letter; the adjacent placement of eye and I is the easier way to convey this thoroughly visual pun to the reader.

Finally, eyes appear in the erotic postcard, which Bloom finds depicts “anal violation by male religious (fully clothed, eyes avert) of female religious (partly clothed, eyes direct)” (17.1811-12). The image of the woman’s eyes looking directly at the viewer is especially striking, as a priest (to use Joyce’s words) fucks her arseways. Berger adds a further point about the subjective power of photographs for the viewer: “[P]hotographs are not, as is often assumed, a mechanical record. Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights. . . . The photographer’s way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject” (10). That Joyce chose to present an example of blatant pornography draws attention to the submissive, objectified role that women fulfill throughout the text. Moreover, the woman’s pose in the photograph, staring directly at the viewer, reveals a further level of female objectification. Describing a portrait of a

nude woman with her eyes similarly direct, Berger suggests that “her passively looking at the spectator. . . .is not, however, an expression of her own feelings; it is a sign of her submission to the owner’s feelings and demands” (52). The nun’s dress also implies a great deal about her objectified position; whereas the priest remains “fully clothed,” his counterpart is noticeably lacking certain articles of clothing, though the specifics are left to the reader’s imagination. Berger stresses the importance of nudity in objectifying the feminine: if we were to reverse the nudity of the image, we would “notice the violence which that transformation does. Not to the image, but to the assumptions of a likely viewer” (64). As elsewhere, Joyce has followed Berger’s pattern of female objectification. While eyes are otherwise absent from “Ithaca,” Joyce imbues their few appearances with especially powerful connotations related to the male viewer and female subject, gendered undertones that resonate throughout the text.

“Penelope,” the final episode of *Ulysses*, is narrated directly from Molly Bloom’s consciousness, offering an otherwise unknown (and unpunctuated) perspective on the events of the novel. Her seemingly unconnected thoughts often return to themes presented earlier in the text. The chapter also reveals her understanding of the agency endowed to eyes throughout the novel—she alludes to Bloom’s eyes frequently, suggesting that his eyes are equally attractive and expressive in her mind. Bloom has “boiled eyes” (18.44) after returning home, and she remembers that “still his eyes were red when his father died” (18.117). These plain descriptions demonstrate Molly’s shared tendency to observe the eyes of the other. Molly also grants a sense of agency to Bloom’s eyes, recalling that “I could feel him coming along skulking after me his eyes on my neck” (18.300-1). Like the other characters of the novel, Molly’s own eyes are not lacking in expressive force.

Molly’s estranged relationship with her mother also informs her ocular perspective: “I’ve my

mothers eyes” (18.890) she explains. While she feels confident in her own eyes’ ability to act, they also represent the only tangible connection she shares with her long departed mother. Regardless of their origin, Molly’s eyes display a strong sense of agency; remembering a moment with Boylan during their earlier rendezvous, she notes “[he was] like a Stallion driving up it into you because thats all they want out of you with that determined vicious look in his eyes I had to halfshut my eyes” (18.152-4). Here Molly perceives an expression in another’s eyes while also communicating with hers. She does feel at least partially abused by Boylan—his voracious sexual appetite and attitude are evident even in this limited description. Molly’s response is also significant, expressing displeasure with Boylan and perhaps guilt by shutting her eyes halfway, not bearing to maintain eye contact. This response harkens back to Bloom’s similarly “halfclosed” eyes, forcing the reader to connect Molly’s and Bloom’s shared expression. Molly understands the powerful force of unspoken language and thought communicated through eyes, particularly her own. Recalling her first meeting with Bloom at a dance in Gibraltar, she notes that “our eyes met and I felt something go through me like all needles my eyes were dancing” (18.647-8). Like Bloom, she too distinctly remembers their eyes at the dance—this shared memory forms an unconscious connection between them. Describing her intercourse with Boylan in the afternoon, “I was coming for about 5 minutes” (18.586), she also remembers that “I gave my eyes that look with my hair a bit loose from the tumbling” (18.592-3). Molly eyes are imbued with an expressive quality by which she can convey emotion or demand action.

But perhaps nowhere in her soliloquy is this feature more evident and palpable than her conclusion. As she reaches the climax of her chapter-long masturbation, her thoughts turn suddenly to Bloom’s marriage proposal:

I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I say yes to

say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him and drew him down  
to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad  
and yes I said yes I will Yes. (18.1605-9)

Joyce's specific choice of this moment to end his epic novel demands further attention. Rather than express her feelings verbally, she asks him to marry her "with her eyes." The agency of Molly's eyes produces closure for the novel. Molly's eyes create an immediate sense of union between the two at the dance and unite them in marriage. Moreover, their mutual but disjointed recollections of that moment continue to hold their marriage together, despite their reciprocal infidelity. Bloom also remembers the look in Molly's eyes during his proposal: "her eyes upon me did not turn away....Flowers her eyes were, take me, willing eyes" (8.905-10). In this instant, Bloom understands the implicit action behind Molly's eyes, realizing that they are "willing eyes," asking to be taken. This shared memory preserves their relationship—it is the final thought in Molly's mind as she reaches an orgasm, a joyful second of recollection for Bloom in his otherwise despondent wandering.

Eyes then function on a variety of meaningful levels in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. While the Homeric parallels are clear and notable in a structural sense, the active use of eyes throughout the novel demonstrates Joyce's modernist affinity for the division between the body and its independent senses. Endowed with their own autonomy, eyes create both action and meaning within the text. This consistent textual feature allows the reader to encounter the eyes in the text from a new, modernist angle; *Ulysses* reveals more about its characters' lives through its diverse subjective perspectives than previous narrative styles would have afforded. In this sense, the modernist features of the text force readers to engage *Ulysses* with fresh eyes of their own. Through Berger's argument, we can see how Joyce's characters correspond to customary

gendered positions of viewer and subject. These paradigms further reveal the entirely conventional roles of men and women throughout the text, a considerable issue in Joycean criticism that has received little attention.

But beyond these notable critical ramifications, just as Gunn suggests the self-reflexive function of advertisements in the text, Peters speculates that the obsession with visual perception in *Ulysses* acts as a sort of metacommentary for the act of reading the novel itself. Peters gleans this assertion from Stephen's interior monologue in "Proteus":

Open your eyes now. I will. One moment. Has all vanished since? If I am open and am for ever in the black adiphane. *Basta!* I will see if I can see. See now.

There all the time without you: and ever shall be, world without end. (3.24-8)

As Peters argues, "[i]f the reader refers the address to himself, i.e. if we were asked to reflect upon the meaning of 'world', our question would be whether this novel exists without being read" (51). Peters's suggestion affords the obsessions of sight and perception in *Ulysses* an even broader significance, allowing the reader to wonder if they too are experiencing a fundamentally voyeuristic relationship with the text. The text's mass-production further underscores the notion. As Berger argues, the act of mass-production has changed the fundamental nature of art: "What the modern means of reproduction have done is to destroy the authority of art....for the first time ever...[art has] become ephemeral, ubiquitous, insubstantial, available, valueless, free" (32). By implicating his readers in the voyeuristic act of reading his text, Joyce suggests both the value and the worthlessness of *Ulysses*, forcing his readers to question both the purpose and the pursuit of literature.

#### Works Cited

Amm, Marita. "Might and Magic, Lust and Language—The Eye as a Metaphor in Literature."

- Documenta Ophthalmologica* 101 (2000): 223-232.
- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. New York: Viking, 1972.
- Bradbury, Michael and James McFarlane. "The Name and Nature of Modernism." *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature—1890-1930*. Ed. Malcom Bradbury and James McFarlane. New York: Penguin, 1991. 19-55.
- Devlin, Kimberly J. "Bloom and the Police: Regulatory Vision and Visions in *Ulysses*." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 29.1 (1995): 45-62.
- . "'See Ourselves as Others See Us': Joyce's Look at the Eye of the Other." *PMLA* 104.5 (1989): 882-93.
- DiBattista, Maria. "This is Not a Movie: *Ulysses* and Cinema." *Modernism/Modernity* 13.2 (2006): 219-35.
- Duncan, Joseph. "The Modality of the Audible in Joyce's *Ulysses*." *PMLA* 72.1 (1957) 286-95.
- Fronimopoulos, J. and J. Lascaratos. "Eye References in the Homeric Epics." *Documenta Ophthalmologica* 74 (1990): 125-33.
- Füger, Wilhelm. "Bloom's Other Eye." *James Joyce Quarterly* 23.2 (1986): 209-17.
- Gabler, Hans Walter. "'Pull Out His Eyes, Apologise'." *James Joyce Quarterly* 11.2 (1974): 167-9.
- Gottfried, Roy. "Reading Figafather: Tricks of the Eye in *Ulysses*." *James Joyce Quarterly* 25.4 (1988): 465-74.
- Gunn, Daniel P. "Beware of Imitators: Advertisement as Reflexive Commentary in *Ulysses*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 42.4 (1996):481-93.
- Jacobs, Karen. *The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2001.

Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. New York: Penguin, 1992.

———. “Scribbledehobble”: The Ur-Workbook for ‘Finnegans Wake.’ Ed. Thomas E. Connolly.

Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1961.

———. *Ulysses*. Ed. Hans Walter Gabler. New York: Vintage, 1993.

Kenner, Hugh. *Ulysses*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1980.

Lawrence, Karen R. “Style and Narrative in the ‘Ithaca’ Chapter of Joyce’s *Ulysses*.” *ELH* 47.3

(1980): 559-74.

Peters, Susanne. “‘Shut Your Eyes and See’: Training Perceptory Powers in the Works of James

Joyce.” *Anglia* 119.1 (2001): 39-57.

Schork, R.J. *Greek and Hellenic Culture in Joyce*. Miami: University of Florida Press, 1998.