

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Hannah R. Tracy for the degree of Master of Arts in English presented on May 10, 2002

Title: Breeding the New Woman: The Eugenic Discourse of Motherhood in Shaw, Yeats, and Lawless.

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The popularity and pervasiveness of eugenic discourse during the modernist period in England and Ireland raised many questions about race, class, and gender. While Hitler's Nazi "experiment" ultimately demonstrated the consequences of implementing eugenic ideas, forcing eugenicists to abandon, or at least mask, their theories, the eugenics movement before World War II attracted scholars, scientists, and literary figures with disparate political and social agendas. One of the most significant impacts of eugenic thought was the position in which it placed women who, as a result of the various women's movements, were beginning to forego marriage in favor of education and careers. Eugenicists reconfigured motherhood as a tool for preserving and improving the race, seeking to return educated bourgeois women to the home and forcing them to choose between enjoying their newly won emancipation and "saving" the human race. This project examines the works of G.B. Shaw, W.B. Yeats, and Emily Lawless, who all participated in the discourse of motherhood and eugenics, though from very different political perspectives, each infusing their literature with eugenic language that reflects both the larger eugenic ideas of their era and their own separate social visions.

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**Breeding the New Woman:  
The Eugenic Discourse of Motherhood in Shaw, Yeats, and Lawless**

**by  
Hannah R. Tracy**

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Hannah R. Tracy, Author

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Breeding the New Woman:  
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INTRODUCTION

In the 1901 preface to Man and Superman, George Bernard Shaw offers his version of a political plan for eugenic reform in English society:

If a woman can, by careful selection of a father, and nourishment of herself, produce a citizen with efficient senses, sound organs, and a good digestion, she should clearly be secured a sufficient reward for that natural service to make her willing to undertake and repeat it. Whether she be financed in the undertaking by herself, or by the father, or by a speculative capitalist, or by a new department of, say, the Royal Dublin Society, or (as at present) by the War Office maintaining her “on the strength” and authorizing a particular soldier to marry her, or by a local authority under by-law directing that women may under certain circumstances have a year’s leave of absence on full salary, or by the central government, does not matter provided the result be satisfactory. (Prefaces 186)

By advocating state involvement in the institution of childbirth and motherhood, Shaw demonstrated membership in the group of London intellectuals who sought to improve the English “race” through various types of eugenic programs. The political leanings of such *fin de siècle* British and Irish eugenicists were diverse—ranging from Shaw’s liberal socialism to W.B. Yeats’s right-wing, often fascist politics—yet the goal was always the same: improve the “race” by either discouraging childbirth among the working and peasant classes or mandating motherhood for upper-class, educated women, and often some combination thereof. Inspired by Sir Francis Galton’s Inquiry into Human Faculty (1883), a host of disciple scientists, political

thinkers and social theorists throughout England and Ireland attempted to answer Galton's call for an improved race through interference in Darwin's process of natural selection. In his 1922 book The New Decalogue of Science, Albert Edward Wiggam, biologist and self-proclaimed "neo-Darwinist," traced the history of eugenics in order to establish its legitimacy as both a scientific principle and an essential social program:

Three thousand years after the Hebrew statesmen incorporated eugenics into their civil and cannon law; twenty-four hundred years after Plato gave the science of eugenics its formulation in political philosophy; two thousand years after Jesus reinforced its moral and religious sanctions; sixty years after Darwin discovered its organizing principle in natural law; fifty years after Sir Francis Galton placed it clearly and finally among the analytical sciences; thirty years after Weismann proved that it was the only secure hope of human improvement; twenty years after Mendel gave it its biological mechanics and experimental method, I seem still to hear you inquiring in vague, mystified wonder, "What is eugenics?" (99)

And, indeed, that question is still valid. For, regardless of its far-reaching effect on public policy and racial genocide throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the impact of eugenic thought on both modernist literature and the modernist ideology has largely been ignored by postmodern critics. Even Michel Foucault, in The History of Sexuality, devotes only four pages to a discussion of eugenics as an important factor in the historical discourse of sex, identifying this period's triad of "perversion-heredity-degenerescence" (118) as the driving force behind the eugenic trend of carrying "the exhaustive analysis of sex over into the mechanisms of the old power of sovereignty and endow[ing] it with the ancient but fully maintained prestige of blood" (148). This "knowledge-power" structure, as Foucault would

label it, indeed allowed the dominant groups of British society (and elsewhere) to preach their own genetic superiority to the lower classes with the added assurance of “scientific” support. According to Gillian Beer, Victorian anthropology was already headed in this direction, establishing “the white, middle-class, European male as the crowned personage towards whom the past of the world [had] been striving” (qtd. in Gates 16-17). Eugenics merely offered a means by which to speed up the process. In England, this meant that upperclass, white males finally had a scientifically sanctioned outlet for expressing their innate prejudices. According to Shaw, in his 1933 preface to On the Rocks,

The extermination of what the exterminators call inferior races is as old as history. ‘Stone dead hath no fellow’ said Cromwell when he tried to exterminate the Irish. ‘The only good nigger is a dead nigger’ say the Americans of the Ku-Klux temperament. . . . But we white men, as we absurdly call ourselves in spite of the testimony of our looking glasses, regard all differently colored folk as inferior species. (Prefaces 354)

Shaw does not place himself in this category but, by 1933, he had already witnessed many negative implementations of eugenic thought. By that era, several Western powers had begun forced sterilization practices for the “mentally deficient” and Hitler’s “German experiment” was well underway:

Adolf Hitler, who is not a stockbreeder, has, by using his brains, arrived at the same conclusion as to his own species. But being a Nationalist German he assumes that the destiny of the human species is to be conquered and ruled by its Nordics, who should subjugate the Slavs and the Latins, and incidentally exterminate the Jews, the Poles, and any other strains that may prove implacably recalcitrant. (Shaw, Everybody’s Political What’s What? 248)

A younger Shaw, however, while not in favor of extermination, also did not have the advantage of knowing the most Draconian uses of eugenics. This naiveté allowed Shaw and his contemporaries to advocate state-controlled breeding in order achieve Shaw's aesthetic vision of a utopian socialism, led by a race of artist-philosophers.

The field of eugenics emerged in the 1880s in response to concern about the declining birth rate in England and the tendency for working class women to have large numbers of children. Simultaneously, educated, upper class women often chose to, as Sir Francis Galton noted, "delay or even to abstain from marriage" because they "dislike[d] the sacrifice of freedom and leisure of opportunities for study and of cultured companionship" (26). Galton, Charles Darwin's first cousin, coined the term "eugenics" in 1883 and in 1904 defined it as "the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally" (qtd. in Bradshaw 190). In his 1891 "Presidential Address" to the International Congress of Hygiene and Demography, Galton established the parameters for future eugenic research:

The question to be solved relates to hereditary permanence of the several classes. What proportion of each class is descended from parents who belong to each of the other classes? Do those persons who have honourably succeeded in life, and who are presumably on the whole, the most valuable portion of our human stock, contribute their fair share of posterity to the next generation? . . . Taken altogether, on any responsible principle, are the natural gifts of the most productive class, bodily, intellectually and moral, above or below the line of national mediocrity? If above that line, then the existing conditions are favourable to the improvement of the race. If they are below that line, they must work towards its degradation. (qtd. in Mazumdar 40)

Indeed, Galton's prejudices had already determined that "line" (Tucker 39). In the 1892 edition of his 1869 seminal work Hereditary Genius, Galton defined the term "natural ability," which he used to describe the traits that should be eugenically selected for, as those qualities "a modern European possesses in a much greater average share than men of the lower races" (qtd. in Tucker 42). He also established the racial range across which such abilities occur as between "the highest Caucasian and the lowest savage" (qtd. in Tucker 42). Thus, for Galton, the science of eugenics would ultimately produce a race of upper class Caucasian people, ultimately eliminating the "less desirable" races and classes. Although he recognized the "good points" of socialism as aiming toward this same goal, he ultimately rejected this political philosophy because of the "moral and intellectual incompetence of the average citizen" (qtd. in Parrinder 4). Instead, he called for a "'Jehad,' or Holy War against customs and prejudices that impair the physical and moral qualities of our race" (qtd. in Parrinder 4). Thus, Galton believed that his goal of improving the race could only be achieved through a battle, one side of which would utilize the implementation of eugenics as its weapon.

One important aspect of eugenic thought, especially as it relates to literature that arose out of the British eugenics movement, is the emergence of two major strains of inquiry and application within the field of eugenics which, though opposite in motive, were not necessarily mutually exclusive for eugenicists. In his article "Eugenics and Class," G.R. Searle defines these two terms and their importance:

Eugenicists were concerned . . . to stimulate the fertility of the better stocks ('positive eugenics') and to take whatever steps were feasible

and politically acceptable to slow down the rate of reproduction at the bottom end of the social scale ('negative eugenics'). (Searle 217)

Both eugenic philosophies took women as their primary tools for theorization, but positive eugenics allowed women more freedom and trusted them more freely with decisions regarding motherhood, while negative eugenics focused on such practices as sterilization of "unfit" mothers (and indeed fathers as well) to prevent degeneration of the race (Greenslade 206). Although Galton's writings speak little about the role of women in the project of "race improvement," motherhood was, as Barbara Gates points out, the key issue at the center of eugenic discourse (qtd. in Greenslade 207). This "positivist" emphasis on motherhood posed a problem for bourgeois women, who were just beginning to establish themselves as valuable contributors to intellectual circles as well as significant members of the workforce, and yet were simultaneously being told that the race depended on their reproduction (Gates 21). For many British middle class women at the turn of the century, this discrepancy between the goals of the various feminist movements and the goals of eugenicists, both male and female, made it difficult to agree on the degree of importance of a woman's role as mother. Gates notes that eugenicists attempted to counter the claims and goals of the women's movement by "promoting the idea of 'race motherhood,'" in which the "fittest classes" of women were encouraged to reproduce prolifically and for which "the educated woman [needed to] come to understand the importance of self-sacrifice for the good of the breed" (21). However, attempts by eugenicists to persuade women into motherhood were met by a wide range

of responses from the assortment of philosophically and politically disparate, and often competing, groups of feminists.

In early twentieth century England, the women's movement had many faces and several, often conflicting causes, ranging from labor issues to suffrage. Feminist socialists, feminist anarchists, and suffragettes contributed to a diverse group of feminisms which were, according to Sheila Rowbotham, "diffuse, inchoate and contradictory. It was not a clearly worked out ideology, but was rather a rebellion against the norms of bourgeois Victorian femininity" (90). Often at the center of many debates among groups of feminists was the issue of reproductive rights. The birth control movement sought reproductive control for women, allowing them to opt out of motherhood. This issue was especially significant for working class women, for whom motherhood was an overwhelming prospect when combined with the necessity of earning a living (Rowbotham 92). However, reproductive rights were not easily obtained because "fear about the separation of sexual pleasure from procreation was entangled with male authority over women, and class power over the working class" (Rowbotham 75). Further complicating the issue was the fear, among both men and women, of a "birth strike" which would contribute to race degeneration, a fear which complicated many of the issues presented by the women's movement with the more overarching concerns of eugenicists, many of whom were also women (Rowbotham 106).

One of the most critical ironies of the simultaneous occurrence of the eugenics and women's movements was the inherent hypocrisy this combination

invoked in the many women who were active in both. As women began to forego motherhood, and often marriage, in order to enter the workforce, many prominent intellectuals observed the disturbing trend of a decrease in the numbers of children of intelligent, educated women. Thus, this “New Woman,” who eschewed domestic life in order to join previously male-dominated workplaces and who, through great effort, became involved in intellectual circles, drew criticism for her reproductive choices from the very men who supported her decisions in other capacities. Such women were also encouraged to become mothers by some of their most prominent “New Woman” predecessors who, in light of the burgeoning eugenic discourse, saw too late their lost opportunity to contribute children to the desirable classes. For example, Beatrice Webb, prominent Fabian socialist and committed feminist, writes in a diary entry:

First and foremost I should wish a woman I loved to be a mother. To this end I would educate her, preserving her health and vigour at all hazards, training her to self-control and to capacity for sustained intellectual work so far as health permitted and no further. From the first I would impress on her the holiness of motherhood, its infinite superiority over any other occupation that a woman may take to. But for the sake of that very motherhood I would teach her that she must be an intellectual being, that without a strong deliberate mind she is only capable of the animal office of bearing children, not of rearing them. It pains me to see a fine, intelligent girl, directly she marries, putting aside intellectual things as no longer pertinent to her daily life. And yet the other alternative, so often nowadays chosen by intellectual women, of deliberately forgoing motherhood, seems to me to thwart all the purposes of their nature. (52)

Webb herself never had children, but her hypocrisy was in good company.

As Webb’s pro-motherhood position makes clear, many early twentieth century feminists were also staunch supporters of eugenic ideals and resulting

national policy proposals. In her 1910 book Modern Woman: Her Intentions,

Florence Farr, Fabian, actress, and part-time lover of Yeats, writes:

I do not think that we shall ever get mankind to carry out the eugenic ideal of careful breeding, but I do think we might come to a time when the natural instinct of a woman for the fit father of her child will be a very important factor in the arrangements made for the existence and benefit of future generations. (qtd. in Bradshaw 200)

Although she is not optimistic about eugenicists' chances for convincing the general public that they should take part in actual breeding programs, Farr does not claim to disagree with the "eugenic ideal" and even hopes for a day when relaxed marriage laws would allow women to select their ideal eugenic mates. These early feminists were often attracted to eugenic philosophy and eugenic societies because of what Penny Boumelha calls a "sense of social mission" coupled with only a vague understanding of the process of heredity (21). As women became more aware of the importance of their role in the "fate of the race," many embraced the opportunity to return to motherhood and its newly revered status. Although this "sense of social mission" was important to early feminists who were just beginning to join politically and socially minded intellectual circles, a more likely reason for feminist involvement in the eugenics movement was the possibility of increased interest in women's issues, such as birth control and sexually transmitted diseases. In her 1913 diatribe against prostitution and male venereal disease, The Great Scourge and How to End it, Christabel Pankhurst warned of the societal implications of sexually transmitted diseases:

A very large number of married women are infected by their husbands with gonorrhoea. The common result is sterility, which prevents the

birth of any child, or may prevent the birth of more than one child. Race Suicide! . . . the female ailments which are urged by some ignoble men as a reason against the enfranchisement of women are not due to weakness, but—to gonorrhoea. (qtd. in Greenslade 208)

By punctuating her rhetoric with eugenic language, Pankhurst capitalizes on the presence of a new audience that will care about female sterility for eugenic reasons. Similarly, two years later, Emma Goldman argued to an American audience that the prohibition of birth control for women would “legally encourage the increase of paupers, syphilitics, epileptics, dipsomaniacs, cripples, criminals, and degenerates” (qtd. in Greenslade 208). As both of these examples demonstrate, the eugenics movement provided feminists with a new audience that might appreciate issues surrounding the once taboo subject of female sexuality. Citing Daniel Kevles, Donald Childs notes in Modernism and Eugenics that “certain feminists found in the eugenics movement a legitimate public platform for engagement in social activism and involvement with the world of science—a platform not otherwise easy for women to come by” (8). Through appropriation of the language of eugenics, feminists increased their odds of gaining sympathizers and therefore joined eugenic circles both to become involved in social change and to air their concerns about women’s reproductive rights.

The men of this period were equally conflicted about the tension between encouraging bourgeois women to join the workforce and eschew marriage, and yet desiring intelligent women to become mothers—an impossible combination in light of pervasive Victorian morality. Many male eugenicists had no such misgivings, and their interest in eugenics went hand in hand with their desire to see women remain

bound to domesticity. However, numerous male socialists who were interested in eugenics and supported the women's movement also advocated motherhood for intelligent, educated women, a philosophical contradiction which most did not feel the need to reconcile. In his 1921 essay "The Higher Education of Women and Race Betterment," Louis I. Dublin, a prominent member of the London Eugenics Society, discussed the difficult position in which eugenic programs placed women. Although seemingly sympathetic to the women's movement, Dublin ultimately comes down on the side of the social and scientific doctrine of eugenics, viewing childbirth by upperclass, educated women as essential to any breeding program:

As liberal persons, we must surely rejoice over the growing emancipation of women and their greater opportunities for personal enlightenment and social usefulness which education has made possible. As eugenicists, however, we are not satisfied with the improvement of individuals alone, but must look for the effect of broad movements upon the race as expressed in terms of national tendencies. From this point of view, we cannot fail to be alarmed over the simple fact, now generally known, that educated women are being largely eliminated from parenthood. (qtd. in Howes 172)

Although seemingly extreme, Dublin's insistence upon eugenic reform of the human population reflects a widespread attitude among early twentieth century intellectuals about the apparent degeneration of mankind and the need to reverse the trend of decline in order to curb the population of, as H.G. Wells called them, the "vicious, helpless, and pauper masses" (qtd. in Childs 9). As Rowbotham notes, "The confusion between socialism and social engineering, between workers' control and state control, which existed in the socialist movement at the time, thus appears also in the debate on the woman's control over her reproductive capacity" (107). The

issue of state reproductive control was also complicated by its “origins which came to seem very sinister after the fascists had begun to utilize them in a new political context” (Rowbotham 107). Thus, neither men nor women could agree among themselves, let alone with each other, about the way in which motherhood should be reconfigured. Women who chose not to have children were often vilified as the cause of racial degeneration, but were also encouraged in their intellectual and career pursuits. Consequently, the more subversive effect of eugenic thought was the seeming glorification of women as instinctive Darwinian mothers for whom motherhood was the “supreme role, a role prescribed by Nature as utterly fulfilling for all women” (Gates 21).

Because women in early twentieth century London and Dublin were both becoming emancipated and returning to the home to contribute children to the eugenic cause, the idea of the “New Woman” was primarily a critical construct used in early modernist literature to represent a gender category that defied Victorian mores and assumptions of Victorian nature. Thus, the scientific assertion that emancipated women must become the breeders of a new, superior stock of humans can also be seen, in its literary translation from the scientific and political realms, as a means for implementing a new gender construct within modernist literature. When the subject of gender as a critical category within modernism is viewed from this perspective, the complexities of the treatment of women, both politically and literarily, begin to surface. Some of the most striking examples of the literary manifestation of eugenics are, perhaps not surprisingly, found in the works of

traditionally canonical figures such as G.B. Shaw and W.B. Yeats. However, eugenic language is also evident in the works of lesser-known writers like Emily Lawless. Shaw and Yeats were heavily involved in the eugenics movement, and their non-fiction treatment of the subject of racial decline and the promising solution of race-regeneration techniques influenced their drama and poetry in both overt and subtle ways. Lawless, an Anglo-Irish, Dublin-born aristocrat, was interested in the intersection of science and gender and, as an early feminist, serves as an example of a woman who inscribed eugenic issues in her writing by emphasizing the worth of characters with the good eugenic qualities of height, strength, and intellect. Because of their differing political philosophies and priorities, these three authors provide an accurate representation of the range and complexity of literary eugenics.

Though a prominent Fabian socialist and feminist, Shaw himself ultimately wished to see intelligent women rear children rather than join the workforce. Although he was a formidable opponent of Victorian gender assumptions and of the marriage laws, his ultimate goal was for men and women to have the freedom to choose the most eugenically suitable mate for the purpose of producing genetically improved children, even if those pairings would not result in marriage:

Nature may point out a woman's mate to her by making her fall in love at first sight with the man who would be the best mate for her; but unless that man happens to have about the same income as her father, he is out of her class and out of her reach, whether above her or below her. She finds she must marry, not the man she likes, but the man she can get; and he is not often the same man. (Shaw, The Intelligent Woman's Guide 54-5)

Shaw believed that some women possessed an innate sense of the Life Force's meaning and direction, dubbing them "vital geniuses" (Man and Superman 530) who possessed an instinctual ability to select the best possible mate. Thus, his argument that women should be given the opportunity to freely choose a mate stemmed from a more urgent desire to see the observed trend of human degeneration reversed and replaced by a more positive trend toward producing a eugenically superior

Superman:

I believe that if we can drive into the heads of men the full consciousness of moral responsibility that comes to men with the knowledge that there never will be a God unless we make one—that we are instruments through which that ideal is trying to make itself reality—we can work towards that ideal until we get to be supermen, and then super-supermen, and then a world of organisms who have achieved and realized God. (qtd. in Childs 7)

As evidenced by his contributions to the London Eugenics Society and his arguments in Man and Superman, Shaw's interest in eugenics infiltrated and was influenced by nearly every aspect of his professional life and aesthetic vision. Although his Fabian politics promoted the emancipation of women from the role of reluctant wife, his eugenics philosophy encouraged intelligent, educated women to become reluctant mothers. Both Shaw's politics and drama demonstrate the contradiction inherent in supporting the educational and intellectual pursuits of women while at the same time encouraging these same women to become the mothers of a future generation of Shavian Supermen. Shaw viewed both issues as important social questions, but ultimately gave the future of the race priority in his prose and drama. Thus, though Shaw's advocacy for the rights of women would suggest a different stance on the

necessity of motherhood, his concern with preserving and promoting superior intelligence and Darwinian fitness within English and Irish populations colored all of his socio-political philosophies.

Yeats's interest in eugenics arose out of his passionate relationship with Irish Nationalism and Celticism and a desire to save the Irish Catholic peasantry from themselves. Although he valued the peasantry for their connection to what he deemed an ancient, pagan, heroic sense of "Irishness," he felt that, as a group, they had degenerated genetically to a point where they had become incapable of ruling themselves and instead needed the guidance of an educated, intellectual aristocracy (Howes 167). In his 1924 essay "From Democracy to Authority," Yeats proclaimed a desire to see "a steady movement towards the creation of a nation controlled by highly trained intellectuals" (qtd. in Howes 167). Due to his authoritarian politics, Yeats's eugenic ideas tended toward a negative trend, discouraging the peasant class from having children and promoting the careful breeding of an elite ruling class. In the section of his Explorations entitled "Tomorrow's Revolution," Yeats claimed, "Sooner or later we must limit the families of the unintelligent classes, and if our Government cannot send them doctor and clinic it must, till it gets tired of it, send monk and confession-box" (426). Thus, for Yeats, the "unintelligent classes" were synonymous with the peasantry, demonstrating his ability to unapologetically associate economic status with mental competence.

In terms of late Victorian racist ideology, Yeats was not alone in his assumptions about the inferiority of the Irish peasantry. Eugenists generally agreed

that the Irish represented the lower portion of the evolutionary scale, making the “Irish question” an important one in eugenic discourse. Galton noted that those Irish who had survived the potato famine “were more generally of a low and coarse organization,” implying that the better Irish stock had died out (qtd. in Tucker 47). Comparisons were also made between African-Americans and the Irish, allowing the British to empathize with the Americans. In 1881, Oxford professor Edward A. Freeman remarked that “the best remedy for whatever is amiss in America would be if every Irishman would kill a negro and be hanged for it” and claimed that those offended by this comment were only concerned because “if there were no Irish and no Negroes, they would not be able to get any domestic servants” (qtd. in Tucker 34). Since many agreed that the “lower races [were] already doomed by the laws of nature” (qtd. in Tucker 34) and since the Irish were considered to be the “lowest Caucasian variety” (Tucker 35), the Irish and the Negroes were seen as perfect experimental material for eugenic theories. One prominent biologist, American Joseph LeConte, suggested a “judicious crossing” of the “marginal varieties of different races,” implying that a mix between black and Irish might produce a slightly better specimen than either alone (qtd. in Tucker 34-5). Given his Anglo-Irish background and politics, then, Yeats’s interest in the Irish as eugenic subjects can come as no surprise, although as a nationalist, his ideas at first blush seem self-defeating. Not only was Yeats, as an Irishman himself, concerned with the fate of his country, but he was supported by a precedent set by a generation of British and American scientists.

As evidenced by plays such as Countess Cathleen (1898) and Cathleen ni Houlihan (1902), Yeats, like Shaw, revered women for their role as the potential saviors of the human race. However, this portrayal once again becomes problematic when coupled with the simultaneous trend among women toward having careers, engaging in intellectual pursuits, marrying late (if at all) and often abstaining from motherhood. The unavoidable hypocrisy of this stance did not seem to bother Yeats, as Dorothy Wellesley recalls of a conversation she had with him:

Speaking to W.B. Yeats of the difficulties confronting women who were creative artists, I said: "No woman of genius should be expected to bear and bring up children." He, raising his hand and speaking like the prophets of old, replied: "No, we urgently need the children of women of genius!" (qtd. in Howes 171)

Although Yeats recognized the female capacity for genius, he did not see this observation as an argument for relieving intelligent women of maternal responsibilities; rather, he saw such women as excellent breeding stock for a new generation of improved Irish men and women. Ironically, given their dramatically opposed politics, Yeats's eugenic philosophy was much like Shaw's in that it revolved around the intellectual, educated woman's ability to produce large numbers of eugenically sound children.

Even though Yeats joined the London Eugenics Society late in his career (1936), and his most blatantly eugenic works were not written until the late 1930s, Donald Childs has recently provided evidence that Yeats was both familiar with and interested in eugenics at least as early as 1914 and most likely earlier (Childs 229). This earlier date allows for a reading of Yeats's early poetry in the context of

eugenic thought and also allows a progression to be established from the allusions to eugenic ideals in In the Seven Woods (1904) to the blatant eugenic and even fascist rhetoric of On the Boiler, his 1939 collection of essays. In On the Boiler, Yeats details the fear of degeneration behind his brand of eugenics:

Since about 1900 the better stocks have not been replacing their numbers, while the stupider and less healthy have been more than replacing theirs. Unless there is a change in the public mind every rank above the lowest must degenerate, and, as inferior men push up into its gaps, degenerate more and more quickly. (423)

He goes on to detail his solution to the problem of degeneration, which combines eugenics with a governmental system of elite rule:

If some financial reorganization . . . enable everybody without effort to procure all necessities of life and so remove the last check upon the multiplication of the uneducatable masses, it will become the duty of the educated classes to seize and control one or more of those necessities. The drilled and docile masses may submit, but a prolonged civil war seems more likely, with the victory of the skilful, riding their machines as did the feudal knights their armoured horses. (425)

Although it would be easy to dismiss Yeats's comments here as the fanaticism of an old, frustrated man, the fact that Yeats began reading eugenic texts possibly as early as 1900 (Childs 170) makes such an apology difficult. Also, if read with the pervasive eugenic language in mind, Yeats's early poems often have a eugenic ring that suggests he was at least thinking about eugenics at the time he wrote them. In "Red Hanrahan's Song about Ireland" (1904), for instance, Yeats expresses his concern with the pollution of the Irish blood by setting it in contrast with the purity of Cathleen ni Houlihan:

The yellow pool has overflowed high up on Clooth-na-Bare,

For the wet winds are blowing out of the clinging air;  
 Like heavy flooded waters our bodies and our blood;  
 But purer than a tall candle before the Holy Rood  
 Is Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan. (Collected Poems 82)

Thus, the Irish genetic “pool” has become “yellow” with decay and disease, causing genetic degeneration in the “bodies” and “blood” of the Irish people. However, Cathleen ni Houlihan remains a symbol of the purity that can be achieved through the implementation of eugenics, a “pure,” “tall” Christian woman of the “Holy Rood.” Cathleen’s purity here also serves as an example for women, demonstrating the importance of their role as “creative geniuses” in the improvement of the race.

Although she tended to support the New Woman’s rejection of domestic life, Irish novelist and poet Emily Lawless entertained the same kinds of eugenic issues in her writing as those with which Shaw and Yeats were concerned. Her work stands as an example of the fact that early feminists were torn between accepting their newly important role in the improvement of the race and rejecting motherhood as an oppressive domestic role. Although little biographical information about Lawless is available, it would have been impossible, given her milieu and interests, for her to remain innocent of eugenic ideas. As Childs notes, “Although it by no means earned everyone’s trust and support, the science of eugenics and the social-policy debates to which it gave rise interested everyone in the early years of the twentieth century” (9). As evidenced by the eugenic themes in her work, Lawless was not immune to the influence of eugenic thought in the discourse of the Ascendancy circles in which she moved. Her interest in science, especially her extensive notes on botanical observations and natural history, also would have moved her in the direction of

eugenics. As James Cahalan notes, Lawless's feminist treatment of gender in her fiction became "closely intertwined" with her attention to scientific and naturalistic detail and "look[s] ahead to ecofeminism, which opposes patriarchal domination of the natural world as well as male oppression of women" (42). Elizabeth Grugbeld has also noticed this trend in Lawless's writing, acknowledging that "[Lawless's poems] often concern decidedly Victorian issues such as the opposition of science and faith, or an end-of-century nihilism" (35). Similarly, Lawless's most sophisticated and important novel, Grania: The Story of an Island, deals with both science and gender using eugenic themes and language. Grania, the story's protagonist, is described as tall and muscular, genetic qualities that would make her a perfect specimen for eugenic breeding. However, Lawless allows Grania to choose not to marry, and even criticizes the institution of marriage in Shavian terms:

The theory that love would be less felt if it was less talked about certainly finds some justification in Ireland, and amongst such well-developed specimens of youthful manhood as Murdough Blake. It is seldom talked of there, and apparently in consequence less felt. Marriages being largely matters of barter, irregular connections all but unknown, it follows that the topic loses that predominance which it possesses in nearly every other community in the world. Politics, sport, religion, a dozen others push it from the field. (1: 127)

Not only is Murdough Blake, the man who wishes to marry Grania, described in eugenic terms (he is a "well-developed specimen"), but marriage is downplayed as an important institution. Lawless suggests that in the Aran Isles (the setting for Grania), marriage is merely a "barter," and therefore a trade that Grania is unwilling to make. Although Lawless's brand of feminism prevents her from marrying off Grania and making her a mother, the language of her novel often suggests that she at

least partially agrees with eugenic ideals. Grania comments on the plight of the poor in Ireland and suggests that the lower classes should stop bringing children into a world so full of suffering (Lawless 2: 184). Lawless, then, serves as an example of woman writer dealing with the contradiction between feminism and eugenics. As Grania illustrates, Lawless struggled with the same problem of reconciling feminism with eugenic ideals as Shaw did, which demonstrates that women writers dealt with these issues in much the same way as did their male counterparts, espousing contradictory ideals without attempting to reconcile them.

The male writers concerned with eugenics during the modernist period were not misogynistic, overtly patriarchal men; if they were, and if women had been consistently objectified and marginalized in their literature, their interest in eugenics would simply amplify their prejudices against women. Similarly, if feminists and women writers such as Lawless simply reacted against the gender bias implicit in the field of eugenics, their work would demonstrate that women could not be implicated in the racial, class, and gender stereotypes that eugenic discourse perpetuated. However, since Shaw and Yeats both approached the woman question from conflicted philosophies that supported the emergence of the New Woman, while at the same time chastising her for her decision not to have children, their literature must be read within a critical framework that identifies and analyzes the way in which this contradiction was breached. Given that Lawless's writing is simultaneously feminist and eugenic, her contribution to eugenic discourse must be approached as an example of the way in which women addressed the same

contradiction. Thus, the literary representation of eugenic thought in *fin de siecle* England and Ireland provides a lens through which to examine influence on the political and social theories of this period. Within this context, the works of Shaw, Yeats, and Lawless demonstrate that men and women were equally conflicted about the role of women and the position of motherhood within both feminist and eugenic discourse.

WOMAN "AS A WISE MAN SEES HER":  
SHAW'S VITAL GENIUSES AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE SUPERMAN

In his 1911 biography George Bernard Shaw: His Life and Works, Archibald

Henderson quotes an unpublished manuscript by Shaw:

In short we must make a religion of Socialism. We must fall back on our will to Socialism, and resort to our reason only to find out the ways and means. And this we can do only if we conceive the will as a creative energy as Lamarck did; and totally renounce and abjure Darwinism, Marxism, and all Fatalistic, penny-in-the-slot theories of evolution whatever. (qtd. in Bentley 46)

With this one remark, Shaw establishes himself as both a Vitalist and a detractor of mainstream socialism and evolutionism. His emphasis on the will, which he names the "Life Force" in Man and Superman (1901-03), stems from a Lamarckian sensibility that sets Shaw apart from his primarily Darwinian scientific contemporaries. At a time when scientists took Darwin's theory of random mutation and unguided natural selection as absolute truth, Shaw's belief in the power of the human will allowed him to scoff at these central ideas in favor of Lamarck's theory of inherited "acquired habits" (Shaw, Back to Methuselah xx) or "Functional Adaptation" (xlv). Although from a scientific perspective Shaw's Lamarckian ideas were outdated and viewed as unscientific by the turn of the century, Shaw himself was not a scientist, nor should his ideas be taken as strictly scientific. He was, however, a powerful political, social, and philosophical thinker whose analysis and critique of human failings were, to a degree, steeped in the cynicism of a partially failed Romantic.

Shaw's Romanticism opened the door for his interest in socialism. As Sally Peters notes, "[Shaw] entered socialism as a militant and an individualist, not a peaceful collectivist"; however, "within five years he had reversed both those positions" (93). His attitude toward socialism was largely influenced by the Fabian Society of intellectual socialists which Shaw joined in 1884, shortly after Galton had coined the term "eugenics" (Bentley 2; Bradshaw 190). Soon after, socialists and conservatives alike began entertaining the idea of eugenics as a possible solution to social ills, such as a disparity in birthrates between the upper and lower classes resulting in a perceived "crisis" of "racial degeneration." Increased attention toward eugenic discourse prompted the establishment of the Eugenics Education Society (later the Eugenics Society) in 1907, whose meetings were often attended by Fabians, including Shaw (Bradshaw 190; Parrinder 1). Although Shaw's contributions to eugenic discourse changed in both intensity and content later in his career, his first dramatic attempt to address the philosophy of eugenics as a possible means toward eventually achieving a Shavian Socialist Superman was his play Man and Superman (1901-3). In his 1957 biography of Shaw, Eric Bentley recognizes the eugenic nature of Man and Superman, but ultimately downplays Shaw's participation in the movement itself. He claims that, as a "philosophical treatise," Man and Superman is a "very faulty one," but admits that the play provides "eugenic breeding" as a "recipe" for "how to improve our civilization" (Bentley 54). However, Bentley goes on to suppose that "when he finished *Man and Superman*, Shaw could hardly have felt that he had solved his problem," a supposition which is

not necessarily evident in Shaw's non-fiction writing. In fact, Shaw's 1928 non-fiction work The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism includes a chapter entitled "Eugenics," in which he discusses his liberal view on marriage with an eye toward a more thoughtfully bred society. Although he proposes an alternative to forced breeding programs, he does not reject them on moral grounds, but merely recognizes the impracticality of such programs:

There are some who say that if you want better people you must breed them as carefully as you breed thoroughbred horses and pedigree boars. No doubt you must; but there are two difficulties. First, you cannot very well mate men and women as you mate bulls and cows, stallions and mares, boars and sows, without giving them any choice in the matter. Second, even if you could, you would not know how to do it, because you would not know what sort of human being you wanted to breed. . . . The moment you ask yourself what sort of child you want, beyond preferring a boy or a girl, you have to confess that you do not know. At best you can mention a few sorts that you dont [sic] want: for instance, you dont want cripples, deaf mutes, blind, imbecile, epileptic, or drunken children. But even these you do not know how to avoid as there is often nothing visibly wrong with the parents of such unfortunates. (53-4)

After continuing on to describe the difficulty of determining the ideal genetic qualities for children, Shaw concludes, "There is nothing for it but to let people choose their mates for themselves, and trust to Nature to produce a good result," which, he argues, is quite impossible, given the power of Victorian marriage conventions (54). However, unlike many eugenisists who primarily placed the blame for the perceived problem of degeneration of the human race on the new trend among educated bourgeois women toward not having children, and on lower class women for having too many, Shaw blamed a marriage system that told the bourgeois "Miss Smith or Miss Jones" that "she cannot marry the dustman; and the duke

cannot marry her; because they and their relatives have not the same manners and habits. . . . And it is difference of income that makes difference of manners and habits” (Intelligent Woman’s Guide 55). Thus, in an ideal Shavian socialist world, “Nobody would marry for money, because there would be no money to be gained or lost by marriage. No woman would have to turn her back on a man she loved because he was poor, or be herself passed by for the same reason” (55).

Consequently, “If the race did not improve under these circumstances, it must be unimprovable” (55). Like the pure socialist he was, Shaw initially used eugenics to address the class divisions of capitalism, rather than focusing primarily on issues of race, as did many of his contemporaries.

The earliest dramatic representation of Shaw’s arguments surrounding Victorian bourgeois marriage is Mrs. Warren’s Profession, which also provides Shaw’s first solid characterization of his vision of the New Woman. Written in 1894 at the advent of the eugenics movement, Mrs. Warren’s Profession is also the first play in which Shaw uses decidedly eugenic language to describe his characters, demonstrating that, for him, eugenics, marriage conventions, and the New Woman were ideas that overlapped inextricably with one another. He describes Vivie Warren, his portrait of the New Woman, as “an attractive specimen of the sensible, able, highly-educated young middle-class Englishwoman” (Mrs. Warren 34). She is “prompt, strong, confident, self-possessed. Plain business-like dress, but not dowdy” (34). When she shakes hands with a visitor, it is a “resolute and hearty grip,” leaving his fingers “slightly numbed by her greeting” and she closes the gate behind him

“with a vigorous slam” (34). Vivie likes “a comfortable chair, a cigar, a little whisky, and a novel with a good detective story in it” (37) and calls herself, rather sarcastically, a “perfectly splendid modern young lady” (38). She has graduated from Cambridge, where she excelled in mathematics (which she herself admits is unusual for a woman), and is preparing to enter the workforce as an actuary (36-40). Thus, Shaw’s New Woman is intelligent, physically and mentally strong, educated, and has even developed the traditionally masculine habits of smoking cigars and drinking whiskey. She eschews marriage and dedicates herself wholly to her work, which gives her “joyous content” (105), thus demonstrating that women need not marry to be happy and successful. Though Vivie may not be the modernist ideal of human felicity (Praed is horrified that she has no passion for art), she leads a life which is satisfactory to her, a point which Shaw makes clear in order to prove that women can be independent and strong without being unhappy. In many ways, however, Vivie is not the perfect characterization of the New Woman because her extreme nature makes her almost a caricature. Her mother, Mrs. Warren, calls her a “pious, canting, hard, selfish woman” (103) and Vivie, in the face of her mother’s anguish, says, “I wish you wouldn’t rant, mother. It only hardens me” (104). She tells Frank that he “can always depend on me for two things: not to cry and not to faint” (95), establishing herself as an unconventional woman, but also as one who lacks traditionally female emotions. She claims that she “must be treated as a woman of business, permanently single and permanently unromantic” (93). Shaw demonstrates his disapproval of this sort of “masculine” woman in a 1920 McCall’s

article by claiming that “[m]asculine affectations were always a mistake” (11). He laments the fact that women “cut their hair short; put on men’s stiff collars and cravats; wore masculine waistcoats and shirt-fronts and watch chains; and made themselves mannish above the waist while remaining quakerish below it” (11). Although he recognizes that women like Vivie needed to begin the women’s movement with extreme actions, claiming that “it was inevitable that the movement should begin with women insisting on doing everything that men did,” he ultimately found that “[t]here was no sense in this” (11). Thus, Vivie is an early incarnation of a New Woman who must go to extremes in order to achieve a respectable position in the patriarchal power structure. Even though she is masculine, lacks sensitivity, and is incapable of sympathy toward women like her mother who are “conventional . . . at heart” (Mrs. Warren 104), Vivie’s strong will and body and her liberal attitude toward marriage, education, and the workforce make her the perfect eugenic “specimen” and open the door for Shaw to create Ann Whitefield in Man and Superman who, though not perfect herself, is a more full realization of Shaw’s eugenic, marital, and evolutionary philosophies.

One of Vivie Warren’s shortcomings, for both Shaw and for more conservative thinkers, was her lack of a predisposition toward motherhood. Although her mother, the title character, has become entirely bourgeois by means of her success as a prostitute and madam, she simultaneously engaged in the willful pursuit of motherhood. While not the model caretaker (Vivie is raised in boarding schools), Mrs. Warren wants both economic independence and happy domesticity for

her daughter. When Mrs. Warren claims, "Youve [sic] no right to turn on me now and refuse to do your duty as a daughter," Vivie replies: "My duty as a daughter! . . . Now once and for all, mother, you want a daughter and Frank wants a wife. I dont [sic] want a mother; and I dont want a husband" (103). However, not only does she eschew marriage and daughterhood, but she rejects motherhood by being uninterested in sexual relations. She tells Frank that "brother and sister would be a very suitable relation for us" because "[i]t's the only relation I care for, even if we could afford any other. I mean that" (90). Thus, Vivie takes her New Womanhood a step too far for Shaw because, although he encouraged women to rebel against marriage conventions, he would not want a sound eugenic specimen like Vivie to reject motherhood. Correspondingly, the perceived "motherhood crisis" in England during this era was based on the fact that intelligent, educated, ambitious women were having few or no offspring. These women were accused of an almost androgynous apathy toward the societal need for children. G. Stanley Hall, addressing the British Medical Association in 1886, stated:

The bachelor woman has taken up and utilized in her own life all that was meant for her descendants, and has so overdrawn her account with heredity that, like every perfectly and completely developed individual, she is also completely sterile. This is the very apotheosis of selfishness from the standpoint of every biological ethics. (qtd. in Showalter 40)

Thus, these New Women were not only directly responsible for an imminent child drought, but sinned against nature by being selfish enough to think of their own needs before the needs of humanity; essentially, these women were "monsters": "Emblems of filthy materiality, committed only to their own private ends, these

women are accidents of nature, deformities meant to repel, but in their very freakishness they possess unhealthy energies, powerful and dangerous arts" (Gilbert and Gubar 29). In his previously quoted McCall's article "Woman Since 1860," Shaw voices his objection to the vilification of childless women, but also expresses his own concern with the "revolt against maternity":

I can testify that among the women brought up amid the feminist movement of the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a revolt against maternity which went deeper than that revolt against excess maternity which has led to birth control. These more thorough-going rebels objected to the whole process, from the occasional event itself to the more permanent conditions it imposes. It is easy to dismiss this as monstrous and silly; but the modern conception of Creative Evolution forbids us to dismiss any development as impossible if it becomes the subject of an aspiration. (11)

Although Shaw claims to understand women's reasons for foregoing motherhood and objects to outwardly chastising them for their decisions, he disapproves nonetheless. He goes on to suggest that such women need to be rationally convinced that motherhood is their duty to the race:

I suggest that when a woman is found in complete revolt against maternity, the proper treatment for her apparent mania is not to revile her as a monster, but to explain to her that her instinctive antipathy is a creditable movement toward an end that will one day be reached, though it cannot relieve her from the necessity for making the best of the existing provisional arrangements. (27)

Shaw's somewhat patronizing appeal to women's greater sense responsibility to preserve and improve the human race echoes Beatrice Webb's desire for intelligent women to become mothers despite their aversions to the domesticity of the task:

"The . . . alternative [to ignoring intellectual pursuits in favor of motherhood], so often nowadays chosen by intellectual women, of deliberately forgoing motherhood,

seems to me to thwart all the purposes of their nature” (Webb 52). Although Shaw, Webb, and other “progressive” thinkers attempted to endow motherhood with a larger purpose, the reality is that the issue was almost always reduced to an argument about women’s biology, or “nature,” which predestined them for children. In an attempt to convince women to become mothers in “Woman Since 1860,” Shaw recognizes that “[t]here is . . . a rebellion against nature in the matter of the very unequal share of the burden of reproduction which falls to men and women in civilized communities” and claims that, in such “civilized communities,” “the extremely artificial life of the modern lady has the effect of making her natural functions pathological” (11). He then manages to simultaneously threaten and elevate women who rebel against maternity when he announces:

[T]hough for the moment a refusal to accept the existing conditions of reproduction would mean race suicide, the rebels against nature may be the pioneers of evolutionary changes which may finally dispose of the less pleasant incidents of nutrition, and make reproduction a process external to the parents in its more burdensome phases, as it now is in many existent species. (11)

Essentially, Shaw tells women to continue bearing children and the burdens that accompany motherhood until evolution brings humanity to a point when parenthood becomes much less taxing. Consequently, Shaw’s feminist rhetoric only takes him so far; ultimately and ironically, Shaw’s motherhood plea cycles back to traditional Victorian, although without the Biblical, arguments: women, by their very nature, are domestic creatures who make bearing and raising children their ultimate priority.

Shaw’s emphasis on motherhood for women stemmed largely from his belief that the force behind Creative Evolution would naturally lead women to become

mothers. Shaw took from Schopenhauer the idea of a “Will” as the “main driving-force of human existence” and called it the “Life Force” (Bentley 48). However, as Bentley notes, “Schopenhauer found the Will horrifying; Shaw finds it inspiring” (48). For Shaw, this “Will” translated into a defense of Lamarckianism in the face of the coldly mechanical process of Darwinian natural selection. In an interview with George Sylvester Viereck in 1930, Shaw claimed, “Natural Selection must have played an immense part in adapting life to our planet; but it is Creative Evolution that adapts the planet to our continual aspiration to greater knowledge and greater power” (qtd. in Bentley 61). Thus, Shaw rejects the notion that humans evolve by random mutation and selection because, as a Romantic, he cannot accept a purely mechanistic and deterministic world. According to Bentley, “Shaw’s is so purely an espousal of free will against determinism, of mind against materialism, above all of the *x*—the soul—against mechanism, that there is scarcely any need to follow him into specifically biological arguments” because Shaw is a “religionist” rather than a scientist (61). Nonetheless, in the preface to Back to Methuselah, Shaw establishes Creative Evolution as a theory which stands opposed to Darwinian Natural Selection, dubbing it “the genuinely scientific religion for which all wise men are now anxiously looking” (xvii). He goes on to subscribe the idea of a Life Force to early religious thinkers, thus giving Creative Evolution religious, rather than merely scientific, sway:

In 1562 the Church, in convocation in London ‘for the avoiding of diversities of opinions and for the establishment of consent touching true religion,’ proclaimed in their first utterance, and as an Article of

Religion, that God is 'without body, parts, or passions,' or, as we say, an *Elan Vital* or Life Force. (xxxiii).

Thus, "Evolution as a philosophy and physiology of the will is a mystical process" (xl), which separates it from the more scientific and mechanistic process of Darwinian Natural Selection. If the Life Force governs Creative Evolution, then what part do men and women play in the evolution of the species? According to the philosophy of Man and Superman, educated, bourgeois men must be socially active "artist-philosophers," while the role of their female counterparts is generally that of the instinctual "vital genius" (M&S 530) and mother to the Superman, both of which Shaw portrays in the characters of Ann Whitefield and Jack Tanner.

Ann Whitefield in Man and Superman represents the ultimate embodiment of the Life Force in the female form, representing the vitality that a mother must possess in order to pursue and convince the intelligent socialist philosopher who must, by decree of the Life Force, father the Superman. When Ann is first introduced, she is described as a "well formed creature" and "perfectly ladylike, graceful, and comely, with ensnaring eyes and hair" (530). Although this in itself could easily be a description of any beautiful woman, Shaw makes a point of saying, "Whether Ann is good-looking or not depends upon your taste; also and perhaps chiefly on your age and sex" (530). Ann is not simply a lovely lady; rather, it is the drive of the Life Force in her which makes her attractive:

Turn up her nose, give a cast to her eye, replace her black and violet confection by the apron and feathers of a flower girl, strike all the aitches out of her speech, and Ann would still make men dream. Vitality is as common as humanity; but, like humanity, it sometimes rises to genius; and Ann is one of the vital geniuses. (530)

Thus, Ann's eugenically sound characteristics (she is, after all, a "well formed creature") combined with her innate "vitality" make her the perfect candidate for mother to the Superman. The role of parent, however, does not stop with Ann, for Shaw does not relieve Tanner from fatherhood. Tanner also possesses eugenically promising traits, as he has a "certain high chested carriage of the shoulders, a lofty pose of the head, and the Olympian majesty with which a mane, or rather a huge wisp, of hazel colored hair is thrown back from an imposing brow, suggest Jupiter rather than Apollo" (523). And, as much as he fights and speaks against the trap of marriage throughout the play, he foreshadows his fate of succumbing to Ann and the Life Force (and thus fatherhood) in an early comment: "I cant [sic] control [Ann]; and she can compromise me as much as she likes. I might as well be her husband" (525). Tanner can see what other characters in the play cannot, which is that Ann will do everything in her power, including deceiving those she loves, to serve what Tanner will later explain to her as the Life Force. However, even though Tanner is implicated in the process of Creative Evolution, by using Ann as the primal force behind the goal of breeding Shaw exploits the social construct of woman as fertile and passionate in order to convey his philosophy to a dramatic audience still entrenched in Victorian gender roles. Because Shaw focuses primarily on Ann's fitness for maternal servitude to the Life Force, he concentrates his attention on her vitality and biology, placing on her the majority of the responsibility for bearing and rearing the Superman.

Though Ann may not yet be the Superperson whom she wishes to create with Tanner, she still embodies intellect and maternal instinct. Susan C. Stone asserts that Ann “is mother-woman, triumphant in her clash with genius-man; however, she has certainly nothing in herself of the genius” (133). However, Stone is overlooking her earlier assertion, responding to Shaw’s portrait of George Sand in the Epistle

Dedicatory to Man and Superman:

Shaw sees the combination of the mother-drive and the genius-drive as a complication; the two forces are in competition, with the genius-urge surpassing the mother-urge. At the same time the combination seems to strengthen the rare being who possesses it. (131)

It is possible, then, that Shaw endows Ann with both characteristics, and gives her one more—the ability to identify the mother-drive as the priority which is best in service of the Life Force. She also, then, has the insight and strength of character to allow her genius-drive to fall secondary to motherhood and to disguise her intellect as a tactic for achieving her single-minded purpose. As Barbara Bellow Watson notes, “The Shavian heroine (or hero) is expected to assess herself and her choices without illusion. And between her alternatives she is expected to choose fearlessly on the side of life” (61). Ann is not simply endowed with instinct, but is gifted with an intellect that provides her with the capacity to decide whether or not she will follow that instinct and to discover the best means of carrying out her decision. While Vivie “chooses fearlessly” on the side of success, Ann chooses on the side of procreation, following her more finely honed instincts toward an end that will benefit humanity.

Shaw illustrates Ann's intellectual genius by demonstrating her ability to use men's impressions of her, and indeed the impressions of all those she manipulates, to her benefit, putting on the appropriate hats for each step in her quest to become the mother for the Superman. "Ann is seen by Ramsden as the epitome of female propriety and innocence" (Adams 159), claiming that "she is only a woman, and a young and inexperienced woman at that" (M&S 528). Ann plays on Ramsden's opinion of her maturity by responding, when asked to decide between guardians, "I feel that I am too young, too inexperienced, to decide" (534). She then epitomizes this childish role by reverting to the language of a small girl: "And I shall have my dear Granny to help and advise me. And Jack the Giant Killer. And Jack's inseparable friend Ricky-ticky-tavy" (534-5). Here, Ann uses diminutive language to successfully disguise her agenda, her desire to serve the Life Force by becoming the mother for the Superman, and hides the depth of her intellect under a guise of childish banter and self-deprecation. Even the name Ann Whitefield "suggests commonplace innocence and nubility" (Vogt 55), which she manages to disprove by exploiting it for her own purposes. If she is able to transcend the character attributes associated with her name, then she must also be capable of transcending the ones associated with her sex once she has achieved her goal. The play ends with an engagement, which means that Shaw does not show how Ann transforms herself after marriage and after giving birth. However, if she follows Beatrice Webb's advice and if she has an iota of Vivie in her, once she has done her part to serve the

Life Force she will perhaps choose to allow her intellect to come back to the forefront of her attentions.

Ann makes her sole plea for the recognition of her intellect in Act I of Man and Superman:

ANN. I am so glad you understand politics, Jack: it will be most useful to you if you go into parliament. But I am sorry you thought my influence a bad one.

TANNER. I don't say it was a bad one. But bad or good, I didn't choose to be cut to your measure. And I won't be cut to it.

ANN. Nobody wants you to, Jack. I assure you—really on my word—I don't mind your queer opinions one little bit. You know we have all been brought up to have advanced opinions. Why do you persist in thinking me so narrow minded? (Shaw 553)

Ann is begging to be recognized as an intellectual with opinions as important as Tanner's, yet her failure to pursue this recognition proves that she is capable of realizing her priorities, which don't only include pursuing "queer opinions." Just as Ramsden could not fathom Ann the predator, Tanner cannot yet reconcile Ann the intellectual. It is not her lack of either of these attributes that allows these opinions to be formed, but rather her ability to decide which aspects of her character she must play on and which she must hide in order to fulfill her instinctual vision for humanity and serve the Life Force in the role for which she was born.

If Ann is to give birth to the Superman, then it follows that she is something of a Superman herself, and that Shaw was simply using *Superman* as the universal-male pronoun. Fredric Berg claims that, in Man and Superman, Ann is actually the "instinctive Superman" (148) and asserts that "Ann, the Superman, know[s]

(instinctively) that all ideas are transitory, and that the real importance is serving the Life Force by propagating the species” (149). However, in a society that has yet to embrace Shaw’s liberal ideas about marriage, Ann and Tanner must ultimately wed in order to fulfill the eugenic drive of the Life Force. Tanner’s views on marriage are decidedly Shavian, but he eventually succumbs to the necessity of such a union and to the power of Ann’s will because, in Tanner’s words, “Vitality in a woman is a blind fury of creation. She sacrifices herself to it: do you think she will hesitate to sacrifice you?” (537). He also knows, as he claims in “The Revolutionist’s Handbook,” that “[t]he essential function of marriage is the continuance of the race” (734). When Violet, Ann’s foster sister, is supposedly pregnant by a man to whom she is not married, Tanner declares with delight that Violet has done what all women were born to and, moreover, has done so without the ridiculous constraint of marriage:

She has turned from these sillinesses [of frivolous bourgeois life] to the fulfilment of her highest purpose and greatest function—to increase, multiply, and replenish the earth. And instead of admiring her courage and rejoicing in her instinct; instead of crowning the completed womanhood and raising the triumphal strain of ‘Unto us a child is born: unto us a son is given,’ here you are . . . all pulling long faces and looking ashamed and disgraced as if the girl had committed the vilest of crimes. (540)

In fact, for Tanner, the father is insignificant: “What on earth does it matter who [the father] is? He’s done his part; and Violet must do the rest” (541). Although it seems that Shaw, who shares many of Tanner’s philosophies, places the entire burden of parenthood on the mother, Tanner will soon be duped by his own assumptions, demonstrating that Shaw and Tanner, though similar, are not necessarily one.

Bentley argues that, indeed, Tanner is not Shaw because Shaw “deliberately makes him—among other things—an ineffectual chatterbox” with “an appearance which exactly corresponds to that of [Shaw’s] most redoubtable political antagonist H.M. Hyndman” (55). Instead, Bentley suggests that since “statesmen try out a dangerous idea by having one of their underlings advance it. . . . [m]ight not Tanner be such an underling of Shaw?” (56). If we take Bentley’s suggestion, then Tanner can be seen as an underdeveloped representation of the ideal father for the Superman: he is not perfect, but he will do for now. And, as Tanner himself claims in “The Revolutionist’s Handbook,” “The proof of the Superman will be in the living; and we shall find out how to produce him by the old method of trial and error, and not by waiting for a completely convincing prescription of his ingredients” (M&S 692). As a result, we cannot know if Tanner, or even if Tanner’s child, will be the Superman. Rather, Shaw suggests that all we can do is recognize Tanner’s characteristics as temporarily suitable “ingredients” (willfulness, iconoclasm, socialism, and intellect) and try our best.

Although Shaw’s Life Force philosophy can be seen as simply an idealistic desire for the will-driven human race to improve itself, the eugenic language used in Man and Superman, especially by Tanner, demonstrates that Shaw’s ideas about motherhood are practical as well as philosophical. Tanner claims that “Violet is going to do the State a service” by bearing a child (543) and that she was “right to follow [her] instinct” because “vitality and bravery are the greatest qualities a woman can have, and motherhood her solemn initiation into womanhood” (558).

Tanner's sentiments indeed once again echo the eugenic discourse of the early twentieth century. In his 1922 The New Decalogue of Science, Albert Edward Wiggam describes eugenics in the same terms with which Tanner describes motherhood and the Life Force:

Eugenics means a new religion, new objects of religious endeavor, a new moral code, a new kind of education to our youth, a new conception of the objectives of social and national life, a new social and political Bible, a change in the very purpose of civilization and the fundamental mores of man. It means improvement of man as an organic being. It means that the enhancement of man's inborn capacities for happiness, health, sanity and achievement shall become the one living purpose of the state. (104-5)

Wiggam's rhetoric convincingly paints eugenics as the salvation of humankind. However, despite the lofty ideals implied here and by Tanner, Shaw also advocates for a will-driven evolutionary force that does not necessarily separate man from animal. Tanner tells Octavius that "if women could do without our work, and we are their children's bread instead of making it, they would kill us as the spider kills her mate or as the bees kill the drone" (568-9). Thus, what separates human from animal is a socio-political system that requires a breadwinner to support mother and child. For Shaw, eugenics is not a simple matter; it is neither merely a means by which to bolster the state with a flood of eugenically sound "specimens" nor solely a lofty philosophical ideal. It is both a biological necessity, a means to an end, and an enduring aspect of human nature.

In the "Don Juan in Hell" scene of Act III of Man and Superman, Shaw, through the character of Don Juan (presumably a more developed incarnation of Tanner, and thus, perhaps, more Shavian), provides his most soundly philosophical

explanation of the role of the Life Force and the importance of breeding the Superman. When Doña Ana (presumably a dream incarnation of Ann) asks, “Is there nothing in Heaven but contemplation, Juan?” he replies by detailing his vision of the role of the Life Force:

In the Heaven I seek, no other joy. But there is the work of helping Life in its struggle upward. Think of how it wastes and scatters itself, how it raises up obstacles to itself and destroys itself in its ignorance and blindness. It needs a brain, this irresistible force, lest in its ignorance it should resist itself. What a piece of work is man! says the poet. Yes; but what a blunderer! Here is the highest miracle of organization yet attained by life, the most intensely alive thing that exists, the most conscious of all the organisms; and yet, how wretched are his brains! (618)

In this one passage, Shaw manages to combine his aversion to a purely mechanistic, “brainless” form of evolution (i.e. Darwinian) with his diagnosis of social ills through human shortcomings (“how wretched are [man’s] brains!”). His solution, then, is the “irresistible force” that is the Life Force. However, the Life Force alone cannot solve the crisis of humanity; for Juan, as for Shaw, motherhood is the only apt prescription. Juan says to Ana: “To a woman, Señora, man’s duties and responsibilities begin and end with the task of getting bread for her children. To her, Man is only a means to the end of getting children and rearing them” (624). Although this is a seemingly misogynistic comment, when Ana expresses her horror at the “cynical and disgusting animalism” inherent in Juan’s “idea of a woman’s mind,” Juan responds with what is a typically conflicted Shavian feminist argument:

[Woman’s] view of Man as a separate sex. . . is no more cynical than her view of herself as above all things a Mother. Sexually, Woman is Nature’s contrivance for perpetuating its highest achievement. Sexually, Man is Woman’s contrivance for fulfilling Nature’s behest

in the most economical way. She knows by instinct that far back in the evolutionary process she invented him, differentiated him, created him in order to produce something better than the single-sexed process can produce. Whilst he fulfills the purpose for which she made him, he is welcome to his dreams, his follies, his ideals, his heroisms, provided that the keystone of them all is the worship of woman, of motherhood, of the family, of the hearth. (624)

Thus, for Juan, and arguably for Shaw, men are both physically and mentally conceived by women, making women the primary creatures of importance in the greater scheme of humanity. Although women must still be mothers, Shaw attempts to console them by claiming that men only exist to serve the Nature-driven force of motherhood. Juan also tackles Shaw's aversion to marriage by demonstrating that marriage works against the goals of the Life Force. He argues that, although Ana was eugenically responsible by having twelve children, the fact that she did so with only one man reduced her chances of mothering the Superman, "for twelve children by twelve different husbands would have replenished the earth perhaps more effectively" (632-3). Juan claims that "the Life Force respects marriage only because marriage is a contrivance of its own to secure the greatest number of children and the closest care of them," but, "the confusion of marriage with morality has done more to destroy the conscience of the human race than any other single error" (633). If society were able to release itself from its moral obligation to only conceive children in wedlock, a truly Shavian state of eugenic reproduction might be reached:

[Juan.] In the sex relation the universal creative energy, of which the parties are both the helpless agents, over-rides and sweeps away all personal considerations, and dispenses with all personal relations. The pair may be utter strangers to one another, speaking different

languages, differing in race and color, in age and disposition, with no bond between them but a possibility of that fecundity for the sake of which the Life Force throws them into one another's arms at the exchange of a glance. (637)

Tanner and Ann cannot achieve this state of fecund freedom because of the restrictive marriage conventions that exist even within their own "free thinking" circle of friends and family. However, in the Heaven and Hell that Shaw proposes in Tanner's dream, Juan and Ana can. Juan sufficiently appeals to Ana's sense of feminine duty to the human race and to the Life Force so that, when she discovers that the Superman has not yet been created, she declares: "Then my work is not yet done. I believe in the Life to Come. A father! a father for the Superman!" (649).

As Shaw's "vital genius" and "instinctive" mother for the Superman, Ann embodies all of the female characteristics that Juan describes in Act III, even if she doesn't realize it. She recognizes that "Man is Woman's contrivance for fulfilling Nature's behest in the most economical way" (624), and sets her sights on Tanner. When she laments to Octavius that Violet "somehow gets [her way] without coaxing—without having to make people sentimental about her," he naively responds: "But surely no really nice woman would deliberately practise on men's instincts in that way" (673). Ann's reply to this statement demonstrates that she herself "practise[s] on men's instincts" in order to serve the Life Force: "Oh, Tavy, Tavy, Ricky Ticky Tavy, heaven help the woman who marries you!" (673). Octavius does not know what Tanner knows, which is that "We do the world's will, not our own" (680). Tanner does not consciously want to marry Ann, but instinctually he knows that, as "frightful" as it may be, he "shall let [him]self be

married because it is the world's will that [Ann] should have a husband" (680). Although Tanner says "I wont, wont, wont, wont, WONT marry you [sic]" (680), he ultimately realizes that he is "in the grip of the Life Force" (681). When Tanner finally admits that "the Life Force enchants me: I have the whole world in my arms when I clasp you," he still feels the need to fight for his "freedom, for [his] honor, for [his] self, one and indivisible" (683). However, Juan knows what Tanner does not, which is that, "[w]hilst [man] fulfills the purpose for which [woman] made him, he is welcome to his dreams, his follies, his ideals, his heroisms, provided that the keystone of them all is the worship of woman, of motherhood, of the family, of the hearth" (624). Tanner may still be a revolutionist, may still live a life of contemplation and radical ideas, as long as he fulfills his duty to the Life Force by fathering the Superman with Ann because, as he claims at the end of Man and Superman, their marriage will not be a conventional one of domesticity and material trappings. Rather, they will sell any wedding gifts "and the proceeds [will be] devoted to circulating free copies of the Revolutionist's Handbook" (686). Although Ann has had a seemingly instinctual role in the process of identifying and trapping the father for the Superman, her complacency in Tanner's plan for their future indicates that she is fully aware of the intellectual nurturing her child will need. When Tanner finishes his explanation of the kind of marriage and household he and Ann will have, Violet says, "You are a brute, Jack" (686). Ann responds by saying, "Never mind her, dear. Go on talking" (686), demonstrating that she is fully aware

that his intellect and socialist ideas make him the ideal father for the Superman she will bear.

Although Shaw's Life Force philosophy and his vision of a Superman make his eugenics appear to be more closely aligned with idyllic musings than the racist and classist discourse of his contemporaries, it must not be forgotten that Man and Superman is still essentially a eugenic text. Although Bentley claims that, in Man and Superman, "Eugenic breeding may not be a practical proposal. But as a suggestion thrown out by Tanner it forces people to see *why* Superman is desperately needed" (57). However, for Shaw, the impracticality is not necessarily tied to morality. Eugenics may be impractical for the same reason that free mating without marriage is impractical for Shaw: society is not yet ready. This does not, however, negate the fact that Shaw's eugenic philosophy used guilt and flattery to convince women to become mothers and contradicted powerfully with his feminism. It also does not allow us to ignore Shaw's less attractive and more extreme ideas concerning the development of a desirable human race:

Extermination must be put on a scientific basis if it is ever to be carried out humanely and apologetically as well as thoroughly . . . [I]f we desire a certain type of civilization and culture, we must exterminate the sort of people who do not fit in. (On the Rocks 353-4)

Although he may not have always agreed with them, the people with whom Shaw kept political and social company also held radical beliefs about the crisis of the human race and the appropriate eugenical solutions. Sidney Webb argued that the high birthrate among "Irish Roman Catholics and the Polish, Russian, and German Jews, on the one hand, and the thrifless and irresponsible . . . , on the other, . . . can

hardly result in anything but national degeneration” (qtd. in Childs 8). Shaw’s fellow Fabian H.G. Wells claimed that the “vicious, helpless and pauper masses” had “characteristic weaknesses [that] are contagious and detrimental in the civilizing fabric” and that “to give them equality is to sink to their level, to protect and cherish them is to be swamped in their fecundity” (qtd. in Childs 9). Perhaps the most extreme of all eugenic thought among modernist writers was D.H. Lawrence’s entertainment of negative eugenic policy:

If I had my way, I would build a lethal chamber as big as the Crystal Palace, with a military band playing softly, and a Cinematograph working brightly; then I’d go out in the back streets and main streets and bring them in, all the sick, the halt, and the maimed; I would lead them gently, and they would smile me a weary thanks. (qtd. in Childs 10)

Written in a 1908 letter, Lawrence’s proposal eerily foreshadows Hitler’s gas chambers. And yet, as extreme as Lawrence’s views are, they demonstrate that eugenic discourse is a slippery slope that moves quickly from Shavian ideals to Lawrencian extermination. Shaw may have been socialistically philosophical in his eugenic arguments, but he was well aware of his contemporaries’ beliefs and therefore is indirectly implicated in their discourse.

“LIKE HEAVY FLOODED WATERS OUR BODIES AND OUR BLOOD”:  
DEGENERATION AND MOTHERHOOD IN YEATS’S EARLY POETRY AND  
LATE PROSE

In his 1939 non-fiction work On the Boiler, Yeats describes the pattern of human “degeneration” which eugenicists had been lamenting since the late 1800s. Since Yeats had recently joined the English Eugenics Education Society (1936), his interest in the subject was burgeoning and his 1938 pamphlet On the Boiler reflects his excitement of having statistics and “facts” to support the observations and assumptions (many based on his own prejudices) he had made previously. On the Boiler was, according to Elizabeth Cullingford, “the culmination of five years in which Yeats rejected all forms of government, watched Europe moving closer to war, and had as his sole political aim the neutrality of Ireland” (216). However, it is also his most clearly eugenical work, in which he lays out his theory of degeneration and proposes eugenics as the best solution. Yeats cites Raymond B. Cattell’s The Fight for Our National Intelligence (1937) as the source of the majority of his facts and figures, and recommends it to his readers (n. 423). In this book and many others, Cattell, a psychologist who primarily studied intelligence across various socioeconomic and racial population samples, argues for the purification and separation of races based on the kinds of racial research which were prevalent in Europe and America before World War II:

In a pure race, the inheritance of impulses in each individual is bound to be well balanced. The innate forces which are the innate material of character-building must have reached a certain incompatibility and potential power of good integration. If two such races inter-breed, the

resulting re-shuffling of impulses and psychic forces throws together in each individual a number of items which may or may not be compatible and capable of being organized into a stable unit. (qtd. in Tucker 240)

Although Cattell claimed that he was an “apolitical investigator dedicated only to the pursuit of scientific truths” (Tucker 247), his “science” was obviously tinged by his racial prejudices, especially his anti-Semitism. In praising the Third Reich for their “eugenic laws” and “sterilization” practices, Cattell equates eugenics with religious purpose:

The Atlantic democracies are bewildered, envious and hostile at the rise of Germany, Italy and Japan, countries in which individuals have disciplined their indulgences as to a religious purpose . . . in comparison with the vast numbers in our democracies lacking any super-personal aim. Their rise should be welcomed by the religious man as reassuring evidence that in spite of modern wealth and ease, we shall not be allowed to sink into stagnation or adapt foolish social practices in fatal detachment from the stream of evolution. (qtd. in Tucker 243)

Thus, the “fight for our national intelligence” is one that takes on metaphysical proportions: the “superior” races must limit the reproduction (and numbers) of the “inferior” races in order to assure that evolution moves ahead smoothly and racial degeneration ceases. Yeats took Cattell’s theories as justification for his own beliefs. Although he was more concerned about the Irish peasantry than about Cattell’s Jews and blacks, Yeats managed to seamlessly apply Cattell’s arguments to his own. Citing Cattell’s 1933 Psychology and Social Progress, Yeats applies “scientific” observations about “constitutional defects” to Catholics, thus strengthening his position that the Catholic lower classes were responsible for Irish degeneration:

The physical degeneration is the most easy to measure. In England since 1873 the average stature has declined about two inches, chest measurement about two inches and weight about twenty pounds. In almost all European countries, especially those where Catholicism encourages large families among the poor, there has been an equal or greater decline. (n. 422)

Thus, for Yeats (by way of Cattell), physical size is a measure of genetic superiority and the supposed “decline” in “stature” is indicative of “degeneration”—all of which is ironic considering Yeats’s own small stature and diminished physicality. Yeats furthers his argument about the eugenic inferiority of the peasant classes by reporting the results of class studies, again taken from Cattell:

[I]f you arrange an ascending scale from the unemployed to skilled labour, from skilled labour to shopkeepers and clerks, from shopkeepers and clerks to professional men, there is not only an increase of mother-wit but of the size of the body and its freedom from constitutional defects. . . . As intelligence and freedom from bodily defect increase, wealth increases in exact measure until enough for the necessities of life is reached. (421-2)

Although he does not name them directly, Yeats’s concern with the peasantry is obvious here. Earlier, in his “Preliminaries” to On the Boiler, Yeats claims that, though “probably clever, far-seeing men when ploughing their fields,” the intellect of the peasantry was such that if you “show them a book . . . they buzz like a bee in a bottle” and they “should not have been taught to read and write” (411). In her essay “Yeats and the Myth of Rural Ireland,” Jacqueline Genet notes the criticism many Irish writers during the modernist period received for using “the same language as the British imperialists talking of the savages in the jungle. Like them, the peasants are presented as naive, close to animals integrated to the landscape, out of history. In a way, the Renaissance has nationalized the colonial attitudes” (141). This

perpetuation of British “colonial attitudes” was possible because the Renaissance was very much an Ascendancy affair, with the portrait of the peasantry constructed largely by the Anglo-Irish. As Kiberd notes, “Irishness is like Jewishness, whatever people say it is. To be Irish, in such a context, is simply to be called Irish, and to know what that means you have to ask the English” (147). Thus, for Yeats, Cattell’s arguments about both race and class transitioned nicely into discussions of the “Irish question” because the language and metaphors of imperialist research could be easily appropriated.

The consensus among Yeats scholars has generally been that Yeats’s late-career espousal of eugenic arguments was simply an indication of his final obsession and does not reflect a lifelong interest in the subject. Elizabeth Cullingford, in Yeats, Ireland and Fascism, attempts to apologize for Yeats when she claims:

This last of Yeats’s enthusiasms [eugenics] is probably the most questionable. Admittedly eugenics in the thirties did not possess the sinister connotations now indelibly stamped upon it by Hitler’s policies, and Yeats’s version of eugenic theory owes little to ideas about breeding Aryan supermen, much to the Irish passion for breeding race-horses. (229)

However, although “Hitler’s policies” were not, perhaps, widely known yet, Germany enacted the Nazi Eugenic Sterilization Law in 1933 (Childs 6) and England passed its own Mental Deficiency Bill in 1913, which, as Mathew Thomson notes, has generally been studied by historians “as an event within the history of eugenics” (10). The Mental Deficiency Bill sought to separate from society anyone “in whose case it is desirable in the interests of the community that they should be deprived of the opportunity of procreating children” (qtd. in Thomson 39). The combination of

these two laws, both of which Yeats was aware of, makes it difficult to see his eugenics as simply an manifestation of the “Irish passion for breeding race-horses.” However, Cullingford is not alone in her apologetics. Paul Scott Stanfield claims that, although “the reputation of eugenics has never recovered from its association with the worst forms of state cruelty, particularly the genocidal policies of Nazi Germany,” Yeats is excused from this association because:

At the time eugenics attracted Yeats’s interest . . . its scientific basis appeared firm, and it numbered among its English promoters not only many eminent biologists and doctors, but also such reputable non-scientists as Dean William Inge, Havelock Ellis, Harold Laski, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson and John Maynard Keynes. (158)

However, as demonstrated by Shaw’s associations, we can also add H.G. Wells and D.H. Lawrence to this list and thus include frighteningly pre-Nazi sentiments like Lawrence’s gas chamber proposal. Ultimately, although the Yeats of On the Boiler is not the Yeats of the early poetry, his concerns with degeneration and its effects on Ireland began early in his career. As evidenced by the images of eugenic motherhood and vital genius in poems from The Wind Among the Reeds, In the Seven Woods, and Michael Robartes and the Dancer, it is difficult to read Yeats’s poetry completely outside the context of the eugenics movement.

Although Yeats’s later writings such as On the Boiler demonstrate a distinct eagerness for information about the supposedly inherent and genetic differences between races and classes, and therefore make clear a eugenic agenda concerning the Irish, he was also very concerned, especially earlier in his career, with the mythical and mystical qualities of the peasantry stemming from their Celtic origins. He saw

them as “a vessel through which ancient traditions gave birth to new literary artifacts” and this “Celtic spirit” was directly related “to the poverty and harshness of Irish peasant life” (Howes 36). According to Yeats, this innate imagination existed because “[n]o conscious invention can take the place of tradition, for he who would write a folk tale, and thereby bring a new life into literature, must have the fatigue of the spade in his hands and the stupor of the fields in his heart” (qtd. in Howes 36). This sensibility can be seen in Yeats’s “The Stolen Child,” in which faeryland is established as a peasant escapist vision:

*Come away, O human child!  
To the waters and the wild  
With a faery, hand in hand,  
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.*

(Collected Poems 18)

This refrain, repeated throughout the poem, demonstrates Yeats’s assumption that only an existence “full of weeping” can create fantasies worthy of the literary imagination. And yet, as much as he admired and then idealized certain peasant qualities, especially their innate “Irishness,” he also made it clear that this did not mean that he saw the peasants as equals. In a letter to Richard Ashe King in August of 1897, Yeats describes his aesthetic in terms of the classical ideals of heroism and sacrament:

My first principle in my work is that poetry must make the land in which we live a holy land as Homer made Greece, the Anciant Indians India & the Hebrew Prophets Judea, if it is to have its full vividness. I believe that the celtic literature which is now beginning will find it possible to do this, for the celtic races love the soil of their countries vehemently, & have as great a mass of legends about that soil as Homer had about his. . . . At the same time I am not a democrat in

literature for I beleive (sic) that a writer must get his point of view wholly from the few. (Yeats, Letters 130)

This letter is particularly poignant because it encapsulates Yeats' early view of the peasantry as well as prophesizes his later assertions that democracy, or "mob rule," was not the appropriate form of government for Ireland, and that the poor masses need to be ruled by the aristocratic, artistic and educated few. As is apparent in his letter, this political philosophy began as an artistic philosophy, a belief that literature should not be written for the appreciation of the masses, but for the aesthetic sense of the elite. This sensibility that "Irishness" in literature is for the English, rather than the Irish, becomes central to Yeats's nationalistic philosophy. While he finds it important to admire the symbol he has created of the peasantry, he argues that the peasant people themselves are incapable of understanding the significance of the role they play in the move toward a nationalistic identity. In his 1927 Autobiographies, Yeats espouses this distinction and places it in the context of education. Although he takes his stories and mythologies from the peasant class, he admits that, ultimately, the peasants are uneducated people with an inability to appreciate the importance of their own history. It is only when these myths are given to the educated that they become significant and have the potential for instilling a sense of national identity in the Irish people:

Have not all races had their first unity from a mythology that marries them to rock and hill? We have in Ireland imaginative stories, which the uneducated classes knew and even sang, and might we not make those stories current among the educated classes . . . and at last, it might be, so deepen the political passion of the nation that all, artist and poet, craftsman and daylabourer would accept a common design? (qtd. in Genet 145)

Although he sees the peasantry's body of myths and legends as a potential unifier for Ireland, Yeats's ultimate goal was for the "leisured classes" to take those stories and infuse them with a Romantic and symbolist aesthetic. And while the imagination of the peasant classes was admirable and their Celtic heritage was essential for unifying Ireland, Yeats's Cattellian ideas about the intellectual capabilities of a hierarchy of social classes allow him to name the Ascendancy as the only possible interpreters of a legion of peasant myths. In a 1905 letter to Florence Farr, Yeats makes the clear this distinction between the literary abilities of the upper "leisured" classes and the lower "Catholic" classes:

I have noticed, by the way, that the writers of this country who come from the mass of the people,—or no, I should say who come from Catholic Ireland, have more reason than fantasy. It is the other way with those who come from the leisured classes. They stand above their subject and play with it, and their writing is, as it were, a victory as well as a creation. The others—Colum and Edward Martyn for instance, are dominated by their subject, with the result that their work as a whole lacks beauty of shape the organic quality. . . . I wonder if this is true everywhere of the man of the people as contrasted with the man of traditional leisure. (Florence Farr 51)

In other words, the "mass of the people" are too steeped in the practicality of and true belief in their own myths to see the artistic value inherent in ancient stories. The "leisured classes," on the other hand, are "above" such day-to-day belief in myths (and also have time on their hands to trifle with such things), thus allowing them to "play" with the stories and create a "victory" of aesthetically informative art.

Despite his later politics, which seem to reject and betray the peasantry, Yeats' early poetry seems to demonstrate an appreciation for the peasant soul,

admiring their “natural” ways and their connection with the land and with Irish/Celtic history. He adopts their superstitions about faeries, remnants of a Celtic paganism, and incorporates those aspects of their belief system into his poetry. However, he largely ignores the fact that the peasantry was predominantly Catholic and, despite their residual Pagan beliefs, led an existence of grueling agrarian poverty that left them little time for contemplating faeries and ancient myths. In an 1898 letter to the editor of the *Outlook*, Yeats responds to an unnamed “paragraphist” (presumed to be T.P. Gill) who had written a critique of “The Broken Gates of Death” which stated:

Mr. W.B. Yeats writes so charmingly of things Celtic that it is a pity he is not always sure of his facts. A dreamer of faery dreams, when he sits down to write for a prosaic world he cannot always separate the dreams and poetic fancies from the realities he has witnessed. In his visits to old-world Connaught quarters he has heard much fairy lore, and has come to believe that Fairyland takes the place of Heaven in the general Irish peasant’s mind. . . . Nearly all this is the dream of a poetical folk-lorist. (qtd. in Yeats, *Letters* 212-3)

In response, Yeats quotes his own Fortnightly Review article in which he espouses his theory about peasant theology:

The most of the Irish country people believe that only people who die of old age go straight to some distant Hell or Heaven or Purgatory. All who are young enough for any use . . . are taken . . . by the fairies; and live, until they die a second time, in the green ‘forts.’ (*Letters* 212)

He then goes on to say:

And if your paragraphist, who is, perhaps, a Catholic, will wait until I have completed the series of essays . . . he will find that the Irish peasant has invented, or that somebody has invented for him, a vague, though not altogether unphilosophical, reconciliation between his Paganism and his Christianity. (*Letters* 213)

Yeats' observation that the peasantry had assimilated Paganism into Christianity was only partly true. The fact remained that the Irish peasants were Catholic above all else, most often under the feared power of a parish priest, and it is quite possible that Yeats exaggerated their propensity toward Pagan beliefs in order to strengthen their symbolic qualities for use in his literature and philosophy. In Strange Country, Seamus Deane attempts an explanation for Yeats' paganization of the Irish peasantry and describes it as a symptom of the Anglo-Irish sensibility:

The Anglo-Irish, having lost their land, rediscovered their territory—the territory of an art that had its roots in the soil of the peasantry. Nor did it matter that the peasantry had for the most part become tenant farmers or landless labourers. These people were still, in the most honorific sense Yeats could manage, peasants, atavars of a religion the whole world had lost and which they, because of their long history of exclusion from that world, had in fragmentary fashion preserved. (Deane 112)

Thus, the Anglo-Irish saw the peasantry, much as Yeats did, not as a social class with their own religion (Catholicism) but as the ancestors of an ancient race, who still held on to their pre-Christian belief systems. In this way, Yeats and other Ascendancy figures could exploit the peasantry in literature, under the guise of homage and moral and aesthetic instruction, in order to promote their nationalistic agenda; for, the best way to separate oneself from one's country of origin (in this case England) is to adopt a new identity and claim oneness with the history and culture of the land in which one now lives. Stephen Regan theorizes that Yeats' motivation for embracing Irish nationalism, and thus adopting Celtic sensibilities, was "the disaffection of the Irish Protestant rather than the ardour of the

revolutionary patriot” (67) and that his nationalism “emerges from a deep sense of colonial insecurity and a deep sense of anxiety about the future of his own embattled class . . . concern about the increasing dislocation of his class—the so-called ‘Anglo-Irish Ascendancy’” (73). Seamus Deane echoes this observation, claiming that the Literary Revival is “the story of the spiritual heroics of a fading class—the Ascendancy—in the face of a transformed Catholic ‘nation’” (qtd. in Regan 73). Thus, the move toward Irish nationalism, especially by way of the Literary Revival, occurred not out of a concern for preserving the culture of the Irish people, but out of an Ascendancy desire to find a place in Irish culture to fit in, a need to embrace an artificial “Irishness” that arose out of a Protestant identity crisis. By romanticizing the peasantry, the Ascendancy literary figures were able to adopt as a symbol a sense of Irish nationality that had its roots in the countryside and its future in a national literature. However, this romanticization also allowed simultaneous appropriation from and disavowal of the peasantry. This dichotomy is particularly apparent in the Paganization of a peasantry that was primarily Catholic. However, it is also indicative of Yeats’s distaste for Catholicism, which manifested itself not only in his dismissal of non-idealized peasant qualities, but also in his attitude toward the Catholic middle classes of Dublin, which he dubbed “Paudeens” in poems such as “To a Wealthy Man” and “Paudeen.” He often deemed this group a “crowd” or the “dull masses” and in 1909 asked, “Are there not groups which obtain, through powerful emotion, organic vitality? How do they differ from the mob of casual men who are the enemies of all that has fineness?” (qtd. in Howes 95). According to

Yeats, not only can the Catholic middle classes not understand “fineness,” but they exist in direct opposition to all that is artistic and beautiful.

Yeats’s distaste for the Catholic Irish is crystallized in a portion of his memoirs in which it is difficult to determine whether he believes that cross-breeding between the Protestant aristocracy and the Catholic peasantry was unfavorable because it caused racial impurities and further degeneration, or whether he thinks that such cross-marriages should be encouraged in order to improve the Catholic bloodline. Regardless of his intent, the following passage from Yeats’s Memoirs, in which he discusses the genetic compositions of his Catholic gentry friends Edward Martyn and George Moore, demonstrates his belief in the superiority of Protestant families over Catholic ones:

I have been told that the crudity common to all the Moores came from the mother’s family, Mayo squireens, probably half-peasants in education and occupation, for his father was a man of education and power and old descent. His mother’s blood seems to have affected him and his brother as the peasant strain has affected Edward Martyn. There has been a union of incompatibles and consequent sterility . . . Both men are examples of the way Irish civilization is held back by the lack of education of Irish Catholic women. An Irish Catholic will not marry a Protestant, and hitherto the women have checked again and again the rise, into some world of refinement, of Catholic households. The whole system of Irish Catholicism pulls down the able and well-born if it pulls up the peasant, as I think it does. A long continuity of culture like that at Coole could not have arisen, and never has arisen, in a single Catholic family in Ireland since the Middle Ages. (qtd. in Howes n. 219-20)

This anti-Catholic and anti-peasantry sentiment is the result of Yeats’s gradual move over the course of his career from an idealization and romanticization of the peasantry to a complete rejection of the uneducated masses who threatened to pollute

Yeats's construct of an Irish "race" with their degenerate mental deficiency and incapability of economic success. The very people whose mythology and lifestyle Yeats adopted to promote his sense of Irish nationalism (as well as to promote his own literature) were abandoned by the man who originally claimed to admire their "primitive grace and wildness" and eventually used those very traits as proof of their status as "undesirables."

Yeats's intolerance of Irish Catholics becomes especially apparent and relative to his eugenics in On the Boiler, where he deems them the "unintelligent classes":

In the opinion of most sociologists the level of mother-wit in all West-European countries is still much the same. But we are threatened as they are; already we have almost twice as many madmen as England for every hundred thousand. Sooner or later we must limit the families of the unintelligent classes, and if our Government cannot send them doctor and clinic it must, till it gets tired of it, send monk and confession-box. We cannot go back as some dreamers would have us, to the old way of big families everywhere, even if the intelligent classes would consent, because that old way worked through lack of science and consequent great mortality among the children of those least fitted for modern civilisation. (On the Boiler 426)

Here, Yeats seamlessly equates "madmen," "unintelligent classes," and Catholicism, demonstrating that the discourse of degeneration allowed for systematic fusion of all undesirable human traits. For Yeats, Catholicism was one of these traits. Yeats claims, rather cryptically, that "monk and confession-box" can, for the time being, substitute for "doctor and clinic" as a means of birth control. He seems to be implying here that much of the reproduction of the lower classes is occurring out of wedlock, a circumstance that the guilt brought by "monk and confession-box" could

possibly remedy. However, the most interesting point of Yeats's statement is his reference to the birth control movement in his invocation of "doctor and clinic." Unlike Shaw, who encouraged women of Yeats's "intelligent classes" to have more children, Yeats sees this as an idealistic "dream" and instead finds an overall reduction of the birth rate a more practical solution to the problem of degeneration. In a section of On the Boiler entitled "To-morrow's Revolution," Yeats makes this point more clearly by discussing the problematic Fascist model of population:

The Fascist countries know that civilisation has reached a crisis, and found their eloquence upon that knowledge, but from dread of attack or because they must feed their uneducatable masses, put quantity before quality; any hale man can dig or march. They offer bounties for the seventh, eighth, or ninth baby, and accelerate degeneration. In Russia, where the most intelligent families restrict their numbers as elsewhere, the stupidest man can earn a bounty by going to bed. Government there has the necessary authority, but as it thinks the social problem economic and not eugenic and ethnic—what was Karl Marx but Macaulay with his heels in the air?—it is the least likely to act. (424)

Although Yeats believed that "we urgently need the children of women of genius" (qtd. in Howes 171), he also felt that "limit[ing] the families of the unintelligent classes" was a more practical place to start.

As evidenced by Yeats's use of the term "mother-wit," which he defines in On the Boiler as the "innate intelligence" "upon which success in life in the main depends" and which "may be called coordination or a capacity for sustained purpose" (420), his eugenics was not completely divergent from Shaw's. Yeats's "capacity for sustained purpose" sounds remarkably similar to Shaw's Life Force in that both will and "innate" (or genetic) intelligence are the most essential traits to

breed for. Also, by gendering his term “mother-wit,” Yeats echoes Shaw’s assignment of the term “vital genius” to women and simultaneously recasts women into the roles assigned them by Victorian anthropology, in which motherhood was their “supreme role, a role prescribed by Nature as utterly fulfilling for all women” (Gates 21). Yeats’s contribution to the pervasive view of women in eugenic discourse is his repetition of and focus on the image and myth of Cathleen ni Houlihan in Irish legend and iconography. Through Cathleen ni Houlihan and other mythical women, Yeats genders Ireland, specifically the land and the nature of Ireland, female. However, as Marjorie Howes points out in Yeats’s Nations, Yeats is simply following a tradition in “much Irish literature and culture” in which:

Women represent national ideals or goals, particularly in figures like Cathleen ni Houlihan, Mother Ireland, Dark Rosaleen and the Shan Van Voght. . . . National discourses take up gender and sexuality as metaphors *and* as concrete realities with material resources and direct implications for political action. (12)

Although this gendering of Ireland takes on several different meanings depending on the critical context, two interpretations most closely aligned with Yeats’s eugenics are the structuralist and political views. As Cullingford notes, “From a structuralist point of view the identification of the land as female reflects the patriarchal opposition between male Culture and female Nature, which defines women as the passive and silent embodiments of matter” (“Gender and History” 56). Thus women, under a myth which genders land as female, are reasserted in their traditional role as the embodiment of “Nature,” a role which positions women primarily as images of fertility and fecundity. Secondly, according to Howes, “Politically, the land is seen

as an object to be possessed, or repossessed: to gender it as female is to confirm and reproduce the social arrangements that construct women as material objects, not as speaking subjects" ("Gender and History" 56). Although Yeats's play Cathleen ni Houlihan gives Cathleen a voice, it does so as a means of giving Irish nationalism a symbolic representation. In other words, Cathleen functions as a female representation of Irish values which men can serve as if pleasing a mother figure. Outside of specifically nationalistic politics, however, the image of Ireland as woman often functions in Yeats's poetry as a symbol of motherhood, and especially of motherhood toward eugenic ends. Although neither the Countess Cathleen nor Cathleen ni Houlihan are actual physical mothers, both are symbolic mothers in different ways. The Protestant landlord Countess Cathleen serves as a savior for the impoverished peasantry, selling her soul to simultaneously save them from poverty and damnation, but her gender makes this a symbolically motherly act. Cathleen ni Houlihan, on the other hand, is a mythical earth mother whose transposition between old age and youth allows for a complete vision of Ireland as it exists under English rule and as it can be through independence. Although neither Cathleen actually bears children, both demonstrate Yeats's view of woman's role in saving Ireland from degeneration.

Although critics disagree on the point in his career at which Yeats began thinking about eugenics, it is possible to date his first encounter with eugenic thought to 1900 and perhaps earlier (Childs 170). As both Donald Childs and Paul Scott Stanfield point out, the blatant nature of the eugenical writings from late in Yeats's

career does not imply that Yeats did not address such issues more subtly earlier in his life (Childs 149; Stanfield 146). Childs points to Yeats's 1904 collection of poetry In the Seven Woods as an early example of "Yeats's interest to define woman's role in the eugenical enterprise" (191). That is not to say, however, that Yeats's poetry solely functions as eugenic discourse, for Yeats remains above all a symbolic, romantic, and mystical poet. Rather, the eugenic language and ideas that appear in these early poems serve as evidence that Yeats was thinking about eugenics much earlier than On the Boiler and that his ideas about degeneration, motherhood, and issues of class in Ireland began to pervade this early work. "Adam's Curse" (1904) serves as an example of the subtle way in which Yeats worked eugenic language and ideas into his poetry. Primarily, this poem compares the art and craft of poetry to women's "labour" to be beautiful. However, within this structure, Yeats espouses both his perception of the peasantry and his view of women:

I said, 'A line will take us hours maybe;  
 Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,  
 Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.  
 Better go down upon your marrow-bones  
 And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones  
 Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;  
 For to articulate sweet sounds together  
 Is to work harder than all these, and yet  
 Be thought an idler by the noisy set  
 Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen  
 The martyrs call the world.' (Collected Poems 80, Lines 4-14)

Here, Yeats claims that writing poetry is harder work than the most difficult manual labor. However, this section of the poem also rings of Yeats's defensiveness about his profession: he recognizes that those who are not poets will think him "an idler"

because his work does not appear laborious. Thus, Yeats sets himself apart from the “noisy set,” an arguably elitist move to distinguish himself from the “masses.”

When the woman figure in the poem replies to the poet’s lament, the first hint of eugenic ideas is introduced:

And thereupon  
That beautiful mild woman for whose sake  
There’s many a one shall find out all heartache  
On finding that her voice is sweet and low  
Replied, ‘To be born woman is to know—  
Although they do not talk of it at school—  
That we must labour to be beautiful.’ (Lines 14-20)

Here, the woman’s first words, “To be born a woman is to know,” recall Yeats’s idea of the “mother-wit” and the Shavian “vital genius.” For the woman speaking, and thus conjecturally for all women, knowledge is not learned or gained through formal education or life experience; rather, the knowledge of which she speaks is innate because anyone “born woman” instinctively “know[s]” the truth of her statement. Given the instinctual nature of this knowledge, however, it is perhaps possible to read line 20 in two ways. On the surface, and in keeping with the primary theme of the poem, the woman compares the feminine art and “labour” of making oneself beautiful to the work of poetry. However, as Childs points out, we can also read “labour” here as the pains of childbirth, “for the labor of the ‘beautiful mild woman’ that the poem contemplates is as much a matter of the womb as a matter of the dressing table or proper schooling” (191). The fact that “they do not talk of [this labor] at school” further indicates that the types of knowledge and labor the woman is referring to are innate rather than learned. Thus for Yeats, women know that labor

is necessary on an instinctual level, while male artists know that labor is a product of self-conscious manipulation of art toward aesthetic—and perhaps eugenic—ends.

The poet's response to the woman in the next stanza continues the eugenic idea of motherhood as instinctual, as the poet recalls that "There have been lovers who thought love should be / So much compounded of high courtesy / That they would sigh and quote with learned looks / Precedents out of beautiful old books" (Lines 23-26). Here, love, like poetry and beauty, requires work. However, Yeats does not agree with this view of love, for he ends the stanza by commenting, "Yet now it seems an idle enough trade" (Line 27). Instead, love for Yeats should be the same kind of instinctual knowledge that beauty and motherhood are for women, a state of coexistence that, like the "moon," slowly ebbs and flows with time, like a "shell / washed by time's waters as they rose and fell / About the stars and broke in days and years" (Lines 31-33). In the section of On the Boiler entitled "Private Thoughts,"

Yeats makes a similar argument about love and instinct:

When a man loves a girl it should be because her face and character offer what he lacks; the more profound his nature the more should he realise his lack and the greater be the difference. It is as though he wanted to take his own death into his arms and beget a stronger life upon that death. We should count men and women who pick, as it were, the dam or sire of a Derby winner from between the shafts of a cab, among persons of genius, for this genius makes all other kinds possible. (430)

This innate "genius" which Yeats discusses in terms of eugenic pairing is also what "To be born woman is to know" and what makes true love the antithesis of "high courtesy." Further, although Cullingford and Stanfield try to downplay Yeats's eugenics, his comparison of human mate selection to the breeding of racehorses

makes it impossible to see his eugenic philosophy as separate from the programs advocated by more radical eugenicists.

Eugenic language and themes also appear in “Old Memory,” which was published in In the Seven Woods. In this poem, Yeats laments his rejection by Maude Gonne and hopes that she will sometimes think of him. However, in his description of Gonne, he paints her as a eugenic specimen who might usher in a “new age”:

O thought, fly to her when the end of day  
 Awakens an old memory and say,  
 ‘Your strength, that is so lofty and fierce and kind,  
 It might call up a new age, calling to mind  
 The queens that were imagined long ago  
 Is but half yours: he kneaded in the dough  
 Through the long years of youth, and who would have thought  
 It all, and more than it all, would come to naught,  
 And that dear words meant nothing?’ But enough,  
 For when we have blamed the wind we can blame love;  
 Or, if there needs be more, be nothing said  
 That would be harsh for children that have strayed.

(Collected Poems 78)

The woman’s “strength” here is “lofty and fierce and kind,” which suggests that she is both protective of her heredity and a nurturing mother. This interpretation becomes more evident in lines four and five, where her “strength” has the power to “call up a new age” that would “call[] to mind / The queens that were imagined long ago.” The woman, then, represents the future of Ireland, a future free from the present “degeneration,” but also a future reminiscent of the idyllic Celtic period of “long ago” when Ireland itself was “lofty and fierce and kind.” Childs suggests that the woman’s (presumably Gonne’s) “beauty and strength” presented in this poem

“should inspire emulative behavior—emulation extending all the way to procreation” (192-3). He goes on to claim that *Gonne’s* beauty in this poem “is the result of the collaboration between the poet’s imagining of those queens and the people’s breeding of such queens as the heroic king’s reward” (194). Indeed, this reading is illuminated by Yeats’s invocation of the eugenic image inherent in the line “he kneaded in the dough.” Kneading dough, much like the more common and Biblical image of molding clay, suggests a kind of intentional shaping and creation of this “new age” from the queenly and strong eugenic mother. In the end, if “it all, and more than it all, would come to naught,” then both “the wind” and “love” can be “blamed.” Although Yeats here is literally lamenting a lost love and demonstrating the uselessness of blaming love itself for the rejection, his reference to “children who have strayed,” or offspring from this queenly love, suggests that careless mating is also being lamented. If the eugenic experiment fails and mankind degenerates beyond hope of repair, then both natural and social forces will be to blame. These same images also appear in “Red Hanrahan’s Song about Ireland,” in which Cathleen ni Houlihan symbolizes the essential role of woman in saving Ireland from degeneration. Like Maude *Gonne’s* fierce strength reminiscent of ancient queens in “Old Memory,” Cathleen bears the hope and strength of Ireland in her eyes: “But we have hidden in our hearts the flame out of the eyes / Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan” (*Collected Poems* 81, Lines 4-5). Again in this poem, natural forces, especially wind, threaten Ireland and only nature as manifested in the body of woman can provide salvation: “The wind has bundled up the clouds high over

Knocknarea / . . . / Angers that are like noisy clouds have set our hearts abeat; / But we have all bent low and low and kissed the quiet feet / Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan” (Lines 6-10). While nature rages and threatens, the feet of the woman, the fertile ground, are “quiet” and require homage. Finally, Yeats uses his most blatantly eugenic language of these early poems when he describes degeneration as a pollutant of the blood and body: “The yellow pool has overflowed high up on Clooth-na-Bare, / For the wet winds are blowing out of the clinging air; / Like heavy flooded waters our bodies and our blood” (Lines 11-13). Again, the winds in these lines serve to spread the “yellow pool” of degeneration from the lowlands (or lower classes) to a point “high up” the socio-economic scale. Eventually, “our bodies and our blood” become “flooded” with bad genes and degenerate characteristics and only the vital genius of a woman possessing “mother-wit” can remedy the situation: “But purer than a tall candle before the Holy Rood / Is Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan” (Lines 14-15). The image of Cathleen’s height and purity echoes Maude Gonne’s “lofty and fierce and kind” qualities in “Old Memory” (Maude Gonne was six feet tall), suggesting that only certain women, whether they be Shavian vital geniuses or Yeatsian earth mothers, have the innate ability to use their wombs to save humankind from degeneration.

Later in Yeats’s career, the eugenic language in his poetry became less subtle and more pervasive as his study of and attraction to the eugenics movement grew. This is especially true of his nationalistic poetry, which ultimately points to eugenic breeding as one of the best ways to build a strong and healthy nation. In “The Rose

Tree,” from his 1921 collection Michael Robartes and the Dancer, Yeats uses the decidedly eugenic images of a tree and blood in conjunction with nationalist rhetoric:

‘O words are lightly spoken,’  
Said Pearse to Connolly,  
‘Maybe a breath of politic words  
Has withered our Rose Tree[.]’ (Collected Poems 183, Lines 1-4)

Although the primary message here is that political rhetoric without action has injured Ireland, the image of a “withered” tree suggests degeneration. As Howes notes, the symbol of a tree was often used to represent eugenics:

A wall poster for the 1932 Third International Eugenics Congress in New York City pictured a large tree, labelled ‘Eugenics,’ with diverse roots representing its constituent disciplines, areas of inquiry and issues. Yeats probably never saw the poster, but its caption, ‘Like a tree eugenics draws its materials from many sources and gives them organic unity and purpose,’ indicates that Yeats and the eugenics movement shared common metaphors as well as convictions. (178)

Although the tree represented eugenics, it also served as a broader metaphor for the human race, suggesting, perhaps, a “tree of life.” Yeats goes on in “The Rose Tree” to offer a eugenic solution to the problem of the “withered tree” of Ireland:

‘It needs to be watered,’  
James Connolly replied,  
‘To make the green come out again  
And spread on every side,  
And shake the blossom from the bud  
To be the garden’s pride.’ (Line 5-10)

Thus, only by guiding the breeding of the Irish people, or “watering” them, will the “green” of Irish sovereignty and greatness “come out again.” Then, once eugenics has been used to repair the “tree,” the Irish race will “blossom” and become the

“garden’s pride.” In the final stanza, however, Yeats complicates this solution by lamenting the shortage of suitable eugenic parents:

‘But where can we draw water,’  
Said Pearse to Connolly,  
‘When all the wells are parched away?  
O plain as plain can be  
There’s nothing but our own red blood  
Can make a right Rose Tree.’ (Lines 11-16)

Yeats is literally discussing a historical conversation between Pearse and Connolly in which they call for a blood sacrifice to stand as a nationalistic beacon. However, the language here suggests that the Irish race has degenerated, or been “parched away,” making eugenic solutions more difficult. In response to this crisis, Yeats ultimately provides an elitist solution when he suggests that only “our own red blood” can rebuild Ireland. Although he writes the poem as a dialogue between Pearse and Connolly, the “our” here can easily be seen as a reference Yeats’s own Anglo-Irish Ascendancy class. Thus, as Yeats proclaims in On the Boiler, the “leisure classes” are the most suitable specimens for such “nationalistic” breeding.

As evidenced by his increasing use of eugenic language, from the subtle references in his early poetry to the blatantly eugenic program advocated in On the Boiler, Yeats’s contribution to eugenic discourse spanned the length of his career. While eugenics for Shaw served as a means for achieving a Shavian Superman, and was thus largely philosophical, Yeats found justification for his Anglo-Irish elitism and was able to practically apply eugenic concepts to his nationalistic agenda. Also, despite the opinions of Yeats’s many apologists, his flirtation with fascist ideology and his admiration, though temporary, of Hitler demonstrate that he could not have

been innocent of the horrific applications of eugenic thought which were possible and which became a reality in the Nazi Germany which Yeats lived to see.

“OUTRAGED WOMANHOOD” AND “STARVED POISON-FED INFANCY”:  
LAWLESS’S GRANIA AND THE IRISH PEASANT CONDITION

In the conclusion to her biography of Maria Edgeworth (1904), Emily Lawless points out that Edgeworth “lived for the most part a remarkably quiet life; a life, moreover, which was so exclusively domestic, that it could hardly have failed to be a more or less humdrum one” (213). From this sentiment it is obvious that Lawless herself was disdainful of the idea of domesticity, a tendency which played out in both her life and her novels. In Double Visions, James Cahalan compares Lawless with Edgeworth, highlighting their similarities as women writers: “Both of their mothers died when they were young and both of them chose not to marry, devoting themselves instead to their roles as writers and caretakers of the land (Edgeworth on her County Longford family estate and Lawless in her garden)” (37). That neither Edgeworth nor Lawless married speaks in part to their shared feminist ideals and also to a dedication to work that precluded the possibility of family. As “an early feminist or protofeminist” (Cahalan 28), Lawless laments the “enormous emphasis laid upon the necessity at all times and places of a due subordination of the feminine to the masculine judgment” (Lawless, Maria Edgeworth 18), on one level demonstrating her disapproval of Edgeworth’s domineering father, but also making a statement about oppressive patriarchal power. Lawless’s fictional works, especially her novel Grania: The Story of an Island, echo this feminism but have been largely ignored by contemporary critics, and her treatment of women’s issues in *fin de siècle* Ireland has gone almost completely unnoticed. Lawless’s literary career also,

however, found her “the victim of critical neglect and scorn” during her life (Cahalan 30). As Cahalan notes, “Lawless operated at a disadvantage not only as a Victorian Irishwoman, but also as a member of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy who neither sought out nor was accepted by Yeats and the other members of the (mostly Ascendancy) Irish Literary Revival movement” (31). Lawless herself came from a third-generation Ascendancy family who were traditionally Nationalists, and, as an adult, she supported Irish Home Rule and criticized “past English misgovernment and neglect” (Wolff v, viii). However, despite her nationalist politics, her work had the misfortune of being the brunt of Yeatsian criticism:

Yeats held up the peasant writer William Carleton as his romanticized model of what an Irish fiction writer should be, and his pronouncements were tremendously influential on the formation of the Irish literary canon. It was therefore devastating to Lawless’s reputation when Yeats declared in 1895 that she was ‘in imperfect sympathy with the Celtic nature,’ even though as a matter of fact her best fiction portrayed the Irish peasantry much more realistically than Yeats was ever able to do. (Cahalan 31)

Synge, who Cahalan claims “owed a particular debt to *Grania*” (39), also criticized Lawless, in the notebook he kept during his stay on Inis Meáin, for what he considers her inaccurate portrayal of peasant life:

I read *Grania* before I came here [to Inis Meáin] and enjoyed it, but the real Aran spirit is not there. . . . To write a real novel of the island life one would require to pass several years among the people, but Miss Lawless does not appear to have lived here. Indeed it would be hardly possible perhaps for a lady [to stay] longer than a few days. (qtd. in Cahalan 39)

Inherent in Synge’s critique of Lawless’s novel is an equally scathing critique of her gender. Although Synge and Lawless were both Anglo-Irish and thus equally

removed from the day-to-day struggle of peasant life, Synge implies that Lawless, as a woman, is less capable than he is of surviving harsh conditions. However, the character of Grania immediately dispels any notions that women were less suited to life on Inis Meáin than men because she is very much a strong, independent, and capable woman.

In the eponymous novel, the protagonist Grania's strength and physical prowess open the door for examination of Lawless's eugenic discourse, a reading which has been overlooked by critics of Irish literature who focus instead on Yeats's more blatant and overtly political brand of eugenics. However, although little has been written about Lawless and very little biographical information exists, Grania, when read in the context of the feminist and eugenic discourses which were beginning around the time of its publication, reveals eugenic language in both its plot and its character descriptions. Lawless was a naturalist who began collecting insects as a young girl and continued her passion for the natural world as an avid gardener later in life, a passion which is reflected in the naturalistic details of her landscape descriptions in Grania (Cahalan 35). Her naturalism was largely scientific and, as Cahalan notes, Lawless "insisted that the natural world should be understood on its own terms, scientifically, rather than romantically misperceived from the outside" (34-5). Cahalan also argues that her "abiding interest in the natural world . . . is not separate or divergent from her attention to gender, but rather closely intertwined with it" and claims that "[w]e can therefore identify aspects of her work that look ahead to ecofeminism, which opposes patriarchal domination of the natural world as well as

male oppression of women” (34). Thus, Lawless possessed what was for her era a rare combination of scientific and feminist interests which often manifested themselves together in her works, a blend of traits which directly corresponded to her burgeoning interest in eugenic discourse. Although her level of political and social engagement in the subject is unknown, it would have been nearly impossible for Lawless to remain unaware of the eugenic discussions taking place around her in both England and Ireland. In its critique of marriage and motherhood, Grania especially reflects the particularly feminist brand of eugenics which used eugenic language in order to forward an argument against Victorian marriage conventions and, simultaneously, for birth control. However, women who spoke out in favor of birth control were often prosecuted, so the type of subtle display of eugenic ideas which Lawless provides in Grania protected her from the fate of such writers as birth control advocate Annie Besant, who “was charged with publishing an obscene work that might suggest to the young and unmarried ‘that they might gratify their passion’” (Rowbotham 75). Although Besant was later “found guilty but let off on a technical point on appeal,” she ultimately suffered the more drastic consequence of losing “custody of her child because the judge thought her daughter might follow in her mother’s footsteps” (Rowbotham 75). Unlike Besant, however, Lawless established herself first and foremost as writer interested in the peasantry and in Irish nationalist issues, rather than as a feminist and birth control advocate. For example, her earlier novel Hurrish (1886) deals with issues surrounding Home Rule and was praised by British Prime minister William Gladstone as a piece of fiction which

established Land League tensions “not as an abstract proposition, but as a living reality, the estrangement of the people of Ireland from the law” (qtd. in Cahalan 32). The eugenic language in Grania, however, suggests that her interest in science and the women’s movement led her to eugenic ideas and perhaps becomes, like that of her rival Yeats, a subset of her Irish nationalism, albeit a more enlightened feminist one.

In his introduction to Grania, Robert Lee Wolff quotes Swinburne’s response to Lawless’s novel, which praises it as “one of the most exquisite and perfect works of genius in the language—unique in pathos, humour, and convincing persuasion of truthfulness” (1: xi). Lawless’s “truthfulness” manifests itself in part in her commentary on the poverty and harshness of life in the Aran Islands. However, this commentary in Grania often takes the form of character descriptions which, when viewed through a eugenic lens, reflect Lawless’s suggestion that the poverty and harshness were due in part to the genetic degeneration of the peasantry. The first description of an Inis Meáin peasant is of a man named Shan Daly who, though not given a major role in the novel is, we are told, hated by Grania:

The face, too, above the rags was rather wilder, more unsettled, more restless than even West Connaught recognises as customary or becoming. Nay, if you chose to consider it critically, you might have called it a dangerous face, not ugly, handsome rather, as far as the features went, and lit by a pair of eyes so dark as to be almost black, but with a restlessly moving lower jaw, a quantity of hair raked into a tangled mass over an excessively low brow, and the eyes themselves were sombre, furtive, menacing—the eyes of a wolf or other beast of prey—eyes which by moments seemed to flash upon you like something sinister seen suddenly at dead of night. . . . Every time his line neared the surface with a fish attached, he clutched at it with a

sudden clawing gesture, expressive of fierce, hungry desire, his lips moving, his eyes glittering, his whole face working. (1: 4-5)

Why Lawless would provide such a detailed description of a relatively minor character is difficult to determine except in a eugenic context. Shan Daly represents the type of peasant who possesses animalistic, indeed bestial qualities which establish him as less human and less intelligent than Grania and her family, but also which make him “sinister,” and thus frightening. Since Lawless was herself entirely shaped by Ascendancy culture, Genet’s observation that many modernist Irish writers used “the same language as the British imperialists talking of the savages in the jungle” applies here because, “[l]ike . . . [savages], the peasants are presented as naive, close to animals integrated to the landscape, out of history” (141). When Shan Daly gets into a fight on the curragh, Lawless describes his cries as “less like the anger of a human being than like the violent jabbering, the harsh, inarticulate cries of some infuriated ape” (1: 12) and, in his anger, his “face [was] spotted green and yellow with passion, teeth gleaming whitely, rage and the desire of vengeance struggling in every line of it” (1: 14). Her description of Daly’s “gleaming” teeth here is reminiscent of the language a host of colonial writers used to describe natives, “savages,” in colonized countries (see Flaubert’s Flaubert in Egypt and Conrad’s Heart of Darkness for examples), demonstrating that her “realistic portrayal” of the peasantry (Cahalan 31) was actually steeped in racial and class prejudices. Grania herself refers to Daly as a “beast” (1: 18), signifying her own superiority. Lawless’s description of Daly becomes more eugenically poignant when she later comments on his inferior intellect and implies that his animalistic

physical qualities are directly related to his intellectual (and perhaps biological)

deficiencies:

Beings of so eminently elementary an order as that presented by Shan Daly are apt to be more or less offenders against whatever society they chance to be thrown into; nay, are apt to belong in a greater or less degree to what we call the criminal classes; but their criminality is pretty much upon a par with the criminality of mad dogs or vicious horses. Punish them we must, no doubt, for our own sakes; restrain them still more obviously, if we can; but anything of a high tone of moral and abstract condemnation is, I am apt to suppose, sheer waste of good material in their case. (1: 29-30)

Thus, the “criminality” of Shan Daly is less related to actual criminal intent than it is to genetic inferiority. Like a “mad dog,” he cannot comprehend “abstract” thinking and is unaware of his moral shortcomings. Lawless’s use of “criminality” here echoes the feminist eugenicist Frances Swiney’s similar description of the type of men who should not father children:

Vices, however, like curses, come back to roost. In his own enfeebled frame, in his diseased tissue, in his weak will, his gibbering idiocy, his raving insanity and hideous criminality, he reaps the fruits of a dishonoured motherhood, an outraged womanhood, an unnatural, abnormal stimulated childbirth and starved poison-fed infancy. (qtd. in Greenslade 208).

Although Daly is, ultimately, not “entirely bad” (because he doesn’t know any better), his true crime is the fact that he has fathered children and thus “outraged womanhood.” Lawless tells us that Daly has “a wretched, sickly, generally starved wife at home upon Inishmaan; a wretched, sickly, generally starved family too” (1: 30). The Daly family “squatted, lived, and starved” in a “foul and decaying hovel,” a fact which Lawless deems the greatest of Shan Daly’s crimes against nature (1: 30). Her condemnation of Daly’s choice to have children becomes even more

scathing when she describes his “wretched, sickly” family: “Though this was [Mrs. Daly’s] fourth child she had a feeling of delicacy about alluding to the fact of its birth which would have seemed not merely inconceivable, but monstrous to a woman of another race and breeding” (1: 70). Although, on the surface, Lawless is lamenting the habit of Irish peasants of bringing multiple children into a world of abject poverty, the eugenic language here is difficult to overlook. A “woman of another race and breeding” would know better, Lawless implies, than to breed with a man of such poor genetic stock and, since Mrs. Daly has four children by this man, she is “monstrous.” When we see the Dalys six years later, Shan has “grown even a more confirmed vagrant than before” and often sleeps “in holes or under the banks of ditches,” and his wife is, “if anything, more of a moving skeleton than when we saw her last.” (1: 100). Only two of their “many children” have survived and Lawless comments that it is “[h]appy for the rest that fate had been pitiful, for in any less kindly country those left would literally have starved” (1: 100-1). Thus, Lawless’s commentary on peasant poverty becomes a eugenic critique of the peasant contributions, through poor mating choices, to racial degeneration. There is no sense here that the conditions of the inhabitants of Inishmaan are the victims of colonial rule and English hegemony; rather, Lawless blames their innate, or genetic, inferiority on their conscious reproductive decisions.

Murdough Blake, Grania’s childhood love interest and adult suitor, who she ultimately rejects, is described as the opposite, in both physical and intellectual constitution, of Shan Daly. Although he is also a peasant, Lawless describes him as

“a tall, active, lissom young fellow” whose beautiful physicality “ought to have rejoiced the inmost heart of a painter, had a painter ever thought of going to the Aran isles in search of subjects, a ridiculous supposition, for who would dream of doing so?” (1: 101). Even though Blake is attractive, Lawless gives the first indication here that he is only superior in the context of the other residents of Inishmaan, because to compare the island peasants with other men is a “ridiculous supposition.” We are told that, although he is the best choice for a husband on Inishmaan, Grania only considers marrying him because of oppressive Irish marriage conventions:

The theory that love would be less felt if it was less talked about certainly finds some justification in Ireland, and amongst such well-developed specimens of youthful manhood as Murdough Blake. *It is* seldom talked of there, and apparently in consequence seldom felt. Marriage being largely matters of barter, irregular connections all but unknown, it follows that the topic loses that predominance which it possesses in nearly every other community in the world. (1: 127-8)

Though Blake is a physically a sound eugenic “specimen,” he lacks the qualities of will and intellect which make for an ideal eugenic father, and Grania’s attraction to him is “largely” a matter of “barter,” a fact which makes her ultimate rejection of him relatively unsurprising. We are told that he is selfish, shiftless, and only wants to marry Grania because she has money and enjoys work. Still, Blake is a better choice than a man like Shan Daly would be, a point which Lawless makes in order to emphasize the superiority of Grania’s reproductive instincts over those of women like Mrs. Daly. If Grania must marry and have children (which she never actually does), at least she will do so with the best the island has to offer.

The character of Grania, though also flawed in many ways and of peasant stock herself, is the most eugenically superior of all the characters in Lawless's novel. By making the novel's namesake and its strongest character a woman, Lawless reveals her feminist tendencies. However, given her affinity for Grania, the tragedy of Grania's harsh life and early death serve as Lawless's indictment of the degrading living conditions and degenerate gene pool of the Aran Islands, circumstances which even the most eugenically sound woman cannot survive. As a twelve-year-old girl, Grania is "a born aristocrat" who is well aware of her own superiority, which becomes apparent when she realizes that "Teige [a crippled child] was in some way or other immensely inferior to herself, and therefore a person only to be tolerated when no more attractive company was to be had" (1: 82). When we see Grania six years later as an eighteen-year-old woman, she is described as a "tall, broad-chested maiden, vigorous as a frond of bracken in that fostering Atlantic air, so cruel to weaklings, so friendly to those who are already by nature strong" (1: 99). She is "immensely strong . . . , the strongest girl on Inishmaan" (1: 108) and "[s]he could dig, she could chop, she could carry, she could use her muscles in every sort of outdoor labour as a man uses his, and moreover, could find joy in it all" (1: 111). However, despite her strong physicality, "[f]or words . . . she had no talent" and "[h]er thoughts, so far as she had any conscious thoughts, would not clothe themselves in them. They stood aside, dumb and helpless" (1: 111). Lawless attempts to make up for Grania's ineloquence by giving her "senses . . . [which] were exceptionally wide awake, while for sheer muscular strength and endurance she

had hardly her match amongst the young men of the three islands" (1: 111).

Although Grania is not an intellectual creature, she possesses an innate sensibility which Lawless describes in terms that echo Shaw's "Life Force" and Yeats's "mother-wit": "[T]he mere joy of life, the sheer animal zest and intoxication of living was keener in her than it often is in those of her own rank and sex in Ireland" (1: 177). However, Grania is only "dimly aware" of her own "animal zest," demonstrating that, like the natural drives which Shaw and Yeats describe, her own force of life is innate. This instinct becomes more apparent when Grania contemplates the possibility of death and her will to live overpowers her senses: "The youth in her veins cried for life, life! sharp-edged life, life with the blood in it, not for a thin bloodless heaven that no one could touch or prove" (1: 226). Thus, Grania is a Shavian "vital genius" who has had the misfortune of being born onto a peasant island that offers her no solid choice of a mate and no possibility of education and intellectual betterment.

As Grania grows older and becomes increasingly aware of Murdough Blake's shortcomings, she begins to envision what her life would be like with him. She ultimately decides that she wants a better life than she would have if she married Blake because she cannot accept her sister Honor's view of life for a peasant woman. According to Honor, a woman must "bear and bear, that's all she's got to do, so she has, till God sends her rest—nothing else. Isn't that what she has come into the world for, no other?" (2: 18). Although Honor is speaking literally here about the burdens women "bear," the language also implies that "what [woman] has

come into the world for” is to “bear” children and contribute to the race. However, Grania knows instinctively that having children with Murdough will be a mistake because, although he is handsome and strong, ultimately his peasant constitution makes him an unsuitable mate. Although she loves Murdough, eventually she realizes that “[s]omething new was at work in her. She did not yet know what it was, but it was a revelation in its way” (2: 118). This “revelation” leads her to question the purpose of peasant life, and she asks, “Why *should* people go on living so? . . . Why, above all, should they marry and bring more wretched creatures into the world, if this was to be the way of it? How stupid, how useless, how horrible it was!” (2: 119). Not only does she decide that, even though she possesses the qualities of a “vital genius,” she cannot, as a peasant, responsibly bring children into the world, but she also realizes that “Murdough Blake would be just like the rest of them, just like every other husband—worse, perhaps, than some” (2: 119). Grania imagines what her life would be like if she married Murdough:

Grania seemed to see herself a dozen years later: broken down in spirit; broken down in health; grown prematurely old; her capacity for work diminished; with a brood of squalid, ill-fed children clamouring for what she had not to give them; with no help; with Honor long dead; without a soul left who had known her and cared for her when she was young; with shame and a workhouse on the mainland—deepest of all degradation to an islander—coming hourly nearer and nearer, and a maudlin, helpless, eternally drunken—[.] (2: 121-1)

Grania leaves off with her thoughts of Murdough, finally convinced that, though she had done her best to pick the best possible mate on the island, her life would ultimately be no better than Mrs. Daly’s, and she would ultimately find herself poor and unhappy, with a “brood of squalid, ill-fed children.” Although she is a peasant

herself, Grania possesses enough of the Life Force to realize that the children of peasants will be degenerate, regardless of their mother's strength. At the end of the novel, Grania drowns in the ocean while attempting to cross the bay in the fog to fetch a priest for the dying Honor. By killing Grania, the novel's strongest and most promising character, Lawless implies that the genetic deterioration of the peasantry implicates even its most genetically sound "specimens" in its demise. Thus, though Grania's "revelation" about marriage and peasant life establishes her as a potential eugenic savior for the peasantry, her own peasant blood prevents her from escaping their fate and she dies rather than raise a "brood of squalid, ill-fed children."

Although writing from a female and feminist perspective, Emily Lawless engages the same contradiction between emancipation and motherhood for women as do her male contemporaries. Though Grania ultimately eschews marriage and motherhood, it is only because there is not a suitable mate for her on Inishmaan and her ties to family and to the land prevent her from leaving to look elsewhere for a husband. Likewise, Lawless's powerful portrayal of Irish poverty and peasant inferiority in Grania transcends gender and engages directly in eugenic discourse, demonstrating the pervasive nature of eugenic arguments surrounding race and class. Ultimately, though she never directly addresses eugenic concerns in non-fiction prose, as do Shaw and Yeats, Lawless's engagement in the culture of degeneration and fear of a "race crisis" implicate her in the eventually horrific consequences of eugenic thought.

## CONCLUSION

The fundamental issues underpinning eugenic discourse during the modernist period did not disappear after World War II and, as evidenced by the disparate politics and literature of Shaw, Yeats, and Lawless, the eugenic ideology attracts people from a wide range of political and social milieus. While the term “eugenics” has largely fallen out of the current political and scientific vocabulary, the ideologies which established and fostered eugenic thought in the early twentieth century continue to be central to contemporary ethical issues such as cloning, genetic testing, and genetic engineering. The London Eugenics Society changed its name to the Galton Foundation in 1968 and published its most recent issue of the Journal of Biosocial Science (formerly the Eugenics Review) in April, 2002. The American Eugenics Society now calls itself the Society for the Study of Social Biology (since 1968) and changed the name of its journal from Eugenics Quarterly to Social Biology, the last issue of which was published in 2000. A recent book by Richard Lynn, Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland, is entitled Eugenics: A Reassessment (2001) and defends the goals of the early twentieth-century eugenics movement. The controversy surrounding this book, and the accolades it has received from many contemporary scholars (a glowing review appeared in the December, 2001 issue of Mankind Quarterly), demonstrate the appeal that eugenic ideas still have. Just as the eugenics movement during the modernist period was mostly a discussion among intellectuals, the organizations

which continue this line of thought today are made up of men and women from privileged socio-economic and educational classes and perpetuate many of the same arguments originally forwarded by Galton and his disciples. However, although anxiety about high birth rates among the lower classes and about the consequences of egalitarianism is more easily classified under the heading of eugenics than the more prevalent and more widely debated ethical issues surrounding cloning and genetic engineering, the underlying question for both is the same: What do we, as a society, consider to be undesirable human traits, and who do we empower to make that decision? In the attempt to eradicate potentially devastating genetic disorders, scientists performing genetic testing and engineering often assume that the conditions which they target are generally considered undesirable. While the elimination of physical disease is universally considered a morally sound endeavor, the question becomes more complicated when undesirable psychological predispositions and temperaments are added to the list of undesirable qualities. Recently developed treatments for many psychological disorders use drugs to treat them physiologically, demonstrating a trend in medicine toward identifying more and more diseases as physical, and often genetic, rather than acquired. Thus, the nature versus nurture debate has begun to implicate nature in an increasing number of physical and psychological ailments, opening the door for manipulation of the gene pool toward eugenic ends under the umbrella of "fixing" genetic disease. Ultimately, the list of disorders fixable through genetic manipulation, or those caused by "nature" rather than by environmental factors, will continue to grow until we

decide where the line is between helping people and using science to justify our prejudices. As evidenced by the eugenic rhetoric of the modernist period, the ideas of political and social thinkers with a desire to do what is best for humankind can quickly become the justification for implementation of racist, classist and sexist public policies, or worse.

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