

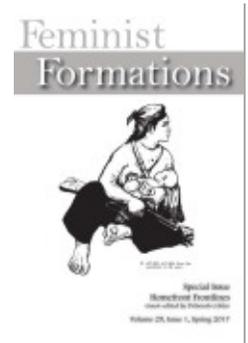


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Serving on the Eugenic Homefront: Virginia Woolf, Race, and Disability

Matt Franks

If eugenics was a “war against the weak,” as Edwin Black characterizes it, then interwar Britain was a homefront in the crusade against contagion from all sides: disabled, sexually perverse, working class, and nonwhite enemies at home in England and abroad in the colonies. I contend that modernists like Virginia Woolf enlisted dysgenic subjects to serve on the battlefield in order to lay the foundations for new, seemingly more inclusive, versions of eugenics and also to provide the raw material for the intellectual and bodily fragmentation of modernist aesthetics. I read this phenomenon in Woolf’s own blackface, cross-dressing performance in the 1910 Dreadnought Hoax and in her 1927 novel To the Lighthouse. These examples demonstrate how the nation was beginning to recruit unfit subjects and put them on the frontlines of the war on degeneracy, rather than eliminate them. By demonstrating how such service members were nonetheless stripped of their worth and even sacrificed in battle, my reading of Woolf excavates the modernist roots of liberal biopolitics—or what I call the afterlife of eugenics.

Keywords: biopolitics / colonialism / disability / eugenics / modernism / race

In her 1926 essay *On Being Ill*, Virginia Woolf construes her experience of illness as a refusal to serve on the battlefield of eugenics. “In illness . . . we cease to be soldiers in the army of the upright,” she states, and instead “we become deserters” (2002, 12). Her use of the term “upright” has direct eugenic connotations, and suggests that there is a war being waged at home against the unfit. But in Woolf’s figuration, the infirm are not merely unfit for service in the war against degeneracy, nor are they the enemy. Instead, they choose to abandon the frontlines and blur the battle lines between fit and unfit. Rather than being purely marked by deficiency, in Woolf’s formulation, the sick gain abilities not

available to the ambulatory: in contrast to the upright, who “march to battle,” she writes, the ill “float with the sticks on the stream; helter-skelter with the dead leaves on the lawn, irresponsible and disinterested and able, perhaps for the first time for years, to look round, to look up—to look, for example, at the sky” (12). For those who are ill, their horizontality affords them new modernist perspectives of randomness and fragmentation that challenge military and eugenic uprightness. Being disabled, in other words, might disqualify one from fighting for the nation, but it also endows one with the ability to challenge the definitions upon which the eugenic war is predicated, by casting off one’s obligation to march forward, one’s responsibility to future generations, and one’s interest in protecting the homefront.

And if eugenics was a “war against the weak,” as Edwin Black characterizes it, then interwar Britain was indeed a homefront in the crusade against contamination from unfit enemies at home in England and abroad in the colonies (2003). Deborah Cohler demonstrates, for example, how, in the context of British “home-front nationalism” of the period, “wartime nationalist homophobia . . . could be transformed into a discourse of eugenic and sexological contagion after the war” (2010, 146). In this peacetime eugenic war, in other words, Britain secured its frontlines in order to prevent the unfit from undermining the rehabilitation of the damaged national body. The nation’s integrity was seen as threatened by the postwar specter of corruption from disabled returning soldiers, nonwhite colonial immigrants, and perverse sexual inverts. In order to rehabilitate the nation after the devastation of the First World War and to maintain its integrity in preparation for the (possible) next one, Britain attempted to secure its borders from degeneration at home and abroad by maintaining a eugenic frontline against the unfit.

While many modernists abandoned their posts on this eugenic homefront, I contend that in doing so they sent others to serve in their place.¹ For example, while Woolf lambasted military uprightness directly by participating in the Dreadnought Hoax, she enlisted caricatures of black mental inferiority to do so. And while she mounted an attack on Victorian family and imperial values in her 1927 novel *To the Lighthouse*, she enlisted a disabled, Irish working-class character to fight for her. As I will demonstrate, these examples illustrate how Woolf helped to break up the trenches in the “war against the weak,” but in doing so, she reconstituted new frontlines wherein those who would otherwise be unfit for service would serve their country and regulate their own subjection. Even in “On Being Ill,” which seems to be a rejection of able-bodied norms of eugenic militarism, Woolf exploits disabled (horizontal) modes of perception and expression while casting temporary illness as an exceptional disability in contrast to the “deformed” bodies of people with permanent physical and intellectual disabilities (8). This split between illness and disability is characteristic of Woolf, as Janet Lyon and others have demonstrated, since her reaction to people with disabilities is consistently one of shock and disavowal (2012).² Woolf

is one of many examples of how interwar feminist and anti-imperialist authors mobilized discourses of eugenics, and eugenic notions of race and disability in particular, to do the work of their radical social dissent even as they stigmatized people with disabilities.³

By putting dysgenic figures into service in these ways, Woolf participated in the transition from eugenic determinism to liberal biopolitics.⁴ As Daniel Kevles has demonstrated, the reform eugenicists of the 1920s and 1930s in Britain championed voluntary rather than enforced sterilization, rehabilitation rather than institutionalization, and environmental rather than purely biological approaches to improving the health of “the race” (1995). In the context of a eugenics movement that was transitioning from coercive, deterministic approaches to choice-based, uplift models of genetic fitness, unfit subjects were now being called to participate in their own rehabilitation rather than being purged from the national body through sterilization and institutionalization. Moreover, the unfit became symbols of national rehabilitation and progress after the devastation of the Great War. Putting unfit subjects into literal and symbolic service for the nation did not liberate people with disabilities and people of color from state control, however, but instead produced subtler forms of biopolitical management based on uplift rather than repression. Sexually perverse, racially other, disabled subjects were less often quarantined in institutions or consigned to generational death through sterilization. Instead, more and more they were sent to the eugenic front to protect the nation against their own contagious deviance.

The Dreadnought Hoax and *To the Lighthouse* demonstrate the bind between race and disability both in colonial eugenics abroad and eugenic colonialism at home. In the Hoax, Woolf and her cohorts impersonated Abyssinians, employing black stereotypes of mental incapacity to expose the instability of Britain’s colonial rule in Africa. And in *To the Lighthouse*, the disabled Irish housekeeper Mrs. McNab, a colonized racial other, provides the physical labor and cripp perspective required for the artist Lily to receive her maternal inheritance and feminist independence as an artist. In both of these examples, racial otherness and disability are collapsed to produce an army of soldiers on the frontlines of eugenics, even while such troops serve the interests of seemingly anticolonial and anti-eugenic commanding officers like Woolf.⁵ These service members would provide the nation with a self-image of tolerance and progress, and would also produce the raw material for the intellectual and bodily fragmentation of modernist aesthetics. For example, in “On Being Ill,” Woolf breaks up both the political perspective of eugenic uprightness and the formal perspective of realist social responsibility by irresponsibly floating and looking up at the sky, refusing her eugenic duty to the race by temporarily occupying the position of disabled immobility. Nonwhite, disabled people were enlisted to fight for their country, but they were also robbed of the profits of their aesthetic and political worth, and they were ultimately sacrificed in the battle. My reading of Woolf

demonstrates how modernists broke up and reconstituted the frontlines of the war on the unfit, compelling nonwhite disabled subjects (like the Abyssinian delegation and Mrs. McNab) to serve their own subjection in what I call the afterlife of eugenics.⁶

Enlisting the Unfit

The transition from eugenic determinism to biopolitical management that took place across the twentieth century depended on the integration, rather than the sequestration, of those deemed unfit into national interests and capitalist processes. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder have recently argued, in *The Biopolitics of Disability*, that “disabled people are increasingly fashioned as a population that can be put into service on behalf of the nation-state rather than exclusively positioned as parasitic upon its resources and, therefore, somehow outside of its best interests” (2015, 17). I read the word “service” here, in the context of Woolf, as signifying both serving in the military and performing domestic labor, and I contend that putting disabled people into service was a biopolitical tactic that emerged in the push toward rehabilitation in and after the Great War. The impact of the war on social perceptions and norms of disability was momentous, since the appearance of vast numbers of physically disabled and “shell shocked” veterans returning from the front shifted the treatment of disability in the UK from a model of institutionalization to one of reintegration.⁷ Disability studies scholars have long rejected such curative approaches to disability. For example, in her reading of Rebecca West’s 1918 novel *The Return of the Soldier*, Maren Linett outlines the negative impact that reintegration had on soldiers in World War I Britain (2013).⁸ As she demonstrates, curing a wounded soldier meant taking away his control over his own body and returning him to serve on the front where his life would be at risk all over again. On the other hand, a failure to reintegrate would have meant consigning him to social death in an institution or on the streets. Linett also argues that returning a soldier to the front meant restoring his lost masculinity, which aligned disability with effeminacy and sterility. By going (back) into service through rehabilitation, people with disabilities now had the potential to join the ranks of the fit, but this ensured that they would lose their bodily autonomy, sacrifice their lives, and mask the biopolitical management of those deemed unfit.

In interwar Britain, promoting an image of national progress and tolerance on the peacetime front meant making some exceptional rehabilitated people with disabilities visible as a testament to the regeneration of a disabled national body and the liberal inclusiveness of the modern state. Such a strategy, however, also depended on ensuring that the majority of people with disabilities remained invisible, because to encounter them would contradict the ideals of progressive liberalism. Lyon interrogates this dynamic by looking at Woolf’s encounters with disabled subjects, asking,

if mental deficiency, however ill-defined, becomes the provisional ground for what is in effect a liberal state of exception, where institutions like the asylum system take up the biopolitical management of defective “life,” then what would it mean to encounter those cancelled citizens, whose public appearance or disappearance has been constitutively tethered to national health? (2012, 554)

However, if before the war, the eugenic health of the nation depended on making all disabled bodies disappear, as Lyon demonstrates, then after the war the appearance of certain exceptional disabled subjects was necessary to display the potential for the rehabilitation of a debilitated national body. In effect, then, the kind of exceptionalism that arose in this historical moment made possible the integration of certain people with disabilities into the national future through service. And this integration depended on the continued internal colonization—not only in institutions but also in positions of servitude—of the vast majority of subjects designated as unfit.

Embodying Blackness in the Dreadnought Hoax

Woolf’s own eugenic exceptionalism, made possible by her performance of exceptional bodily and racial mobility, was a means for her to enlist other unfit subjects to serve on the frontlines of colonial eugenics, and her performance in the Dreadnought Hoax exemplifies her capacity for such transgressions. If human character changed sometime around December 1910, as Woolf famously claimed, then for her it was a year punctuated by performative character changes of other types—notably gender and race—as well. Earlier that year, on February 7, Woolf disguised herself in blackface, a fake beard, robes, and a turban, and along with five Bloomsbury cohorts, boarded the flagship of the British navy, the H. M. S. Dreadnought, masquerading as a delegation of Abyssinian royalty. What came to be known as the Dreadnought Hoax was an embarrassment for the navy and a successful mockery of British militarism for the up-and-coming modernist perpetrators. Woolf and her fellow hoaxers performed caricatures of blackness in order to gain access to the ship, including a complete tour, refreshments, and a full twenty-one-gun salute. They demonstrated the vulnerability of the British Empire behind its façade of strength by penetrating the frontlines of the imperial homefront in blackface masquerade.⁹ Scholars like Urmila Seshagiri have elucidated the colonial and racial politics of the Hoax, arguing that Woolf replicated the very hierarchies she attempted to challenge by playing into stereotypes of blackness (2004).¹⁰ For the hoaxers, humiliating the Royal Navy depended on tricking them into bowing down to their performance of black inferiority and thus demonstrating that they were unfit for service. As such, their embodiment of blackness produced dysgenic disabilities—such as mental incapacity, speechlessness, and malnutrition—on the racialized bodies of those they impersonated.

The hoaxers' choice to target the military in particular points to the eugenic nature of the prank in its exploitation of race and disability, since it was the supposed physical unfitness of British soldiers in the South African Boer Wars at the turn of the century that initially sparked a national panic about degeneration.¹¹ The Hoax reminded the public that the nation's army was itself unfit to protect itself from racial infiltration, demonstrating that military able-bodiedness was necessary to maintain the integrity of Britain's whiteness. And in their choice to impersonate Abyssinians—the only Africans to successfully resist European colonization—Woolf and her compatriots pointed to Britain's tenuous grip on its African colonies that the Boer Wars also exemplified, linking the threat of colonial and racial insecurity with that of degeneration.¹² The hoaxers simultaneously punctured the colonial front abroad that separated white from black and the eugenic front at home that separated fit from unfit. Moreover, the Hoax exposed that the two fronts were intertwined, since colonial eugenics abroad and eugenic colonialism at home both depended on constructing blackness as a disability, and disability as a threat to racial purity. As Ellen Samuels argues, the “fantasies of identification” that associate “racial difference with physical immutability” have a long history in which “disability, the social identity most associated with the immutability of the physical body, . . . plays a dual role in these fantasies, as both the *object* of identification and the symbolic *anchor* that enables its function” (2014, 13). Samuels demonstrates how, while disability constitutes racial embodiment by anchoring it to biological inferiority, it also challenges racial identification because of disability's instability and particularity as an object. The Hoax exemplified a similar duality: by pointing to the insecurity of the British navy behind its front of spectacle, and in the terms of eugenic unfitness in particular, Woolf's performance rekindled fears about national vulnerability by anchoring racial contamination to disabled weakness even as it exposed the instability of racial embodiment and able-bodiedness.

Woolf herself might have easily fallen into the category of the unfit based on her struggles with mental illness and her queerness, but she eluded the tangled binds of eugenics by performing her own transcendence of such eugenic categories. Woolf delivered an autobiographical account of the 1910 Hoax as a speech to the Rodmell Women's Institute in 1940, the manuscript of which was edited by Georgia Johnston and republished in *Woolf Studies Annual* in 2009. In her speech, Woolf emphasizes her ability to not merely simulate otherness, but to actually become the other: “Dressed up dyed and painted as I was, I might be safe,” she remarks about her initial uncertainty about being able to pass as a black man (Johnston 2009, 17). But when the party arrived and a naval officer gave them a full salute, she gained confidence in her transformation: “at once I became all over in my actions in my thoughts in my gestures a royal prince” (18). For Woolf, being literally hailed allowed her to become African and male. Her self-professed ability to inhabit the subjectivity of an Abyssinian prince exemplifies her capacity to embody racial otherness, and echoes other modernist

stories of white subjects desiring to “go native.”¹³ Woolf claims this exceptional racial and social mobility in order to exceed the gendered and racialized categories that mark her position in relation to the British Empire. In passing as a man, she demonstrates the falsity of military masculinity by exposing gender as performative. As a white subject in England, however, her assumption of blackness depends upon her status as an imperial subject who has free access to the fungible black body. As Saidiya Hartman argues, “the fungibility of the commodity, specifically its abstractness and immateriality, enabled the black body or blackface mask to serve as the vehicle of white self-exploration, renunciation, and enjoyment” (1997, 26). Woolf performs her own mastery over the cultural markers of blackness by asserting that she became an African prince through her masquerade—though in the context of racial colonialism rather than slavery. In Hartman’s terms, this mastery gives her the mobility to explore the imperial homefront by boarding the ship, renounce it by exceeding its gender and racial categories, and enjoy it by playing into (and playing up) those very categories in her minstrelsy. All of these ways of using the fungible black body endow Woolf herself with a kind of exceptional able-bodied mobility to exceed the parameters of her own race and eugenic status, while it consigns blackness to limited mobility and arrested development: in other words, to the very forms of disabled deviance that she transcended.

Woolf and her compatriots produced blackness as dysgenic by embodying generic, superstitious practices of non-Western stereotypes that would have been seen as irrational, uncivilized, and unhealthy. For example, in her account, Woolf describes how the hoaxers pretended to have religious dietary restrictions when offered refreshments, since eating would have risked smudging their blackface makeup. To protect the integrity of their minstrel performance, they played up the supposed superstitious irrationality of non-Western religious practices. And in the context of contemporary fears of degeneration based on a lack of adequate nutrition—as in the scandal of unfit Boer War soldiers—turning down food would have been seen as an unhealthy as well as an irrational practice. In other words, by intentionally starving themselves, the Africans’ supposedly backward religious practices made them appear malnourished and mentally unfit. While the hoaxers pointed to the incapacity of the navy in falling for such pranks, exposing them as unfit to defend the homefront, they did so by producing the Africans they impersonated as dysgenic themselves. Robert Nowatzki identifies a similar dynamic in the intersection between minstrel performance and the freak show, arguing that, “like blackness, disability is a form of otherness that ‘normative’ (in this case, able-bodied) people can perform, counterfeit, and appropriate” (2010, 145). Likewise, Woolf and the hoaxers performed blackness as disability, citing minstrel and freak shows, in order to pull off their penetration of the army’s frontlines.

In aesthetic terms, the hoaxers lampooned the outdated, hollow pageantry of British militarism by employing characteristic modernist modes of parody,

pastiche, and cognitive dissonance through their dysgenic blackface. In their outfits, for example, they embarrassed the military by pointing to the ridiculousness of the navy's own costumes after the Hoax was revealed, but did so by producing African dress as effeminate. For example, several days after the Hoax, on February 15, 1910, the *Daily Mirror* reported, "All the princes wore vari-coloured silksashes as turbans, set off with diamond aigrettes, white gibbah tunics, over which were cast rich flowing robes, and round their necks were suspended gold chains and jeweled necklaces" (quoted in Stansky 1996, 30). By wearing such lavish costumes, including robes and accouterments that would have been seen by the English as feminine, the hoaxers mimicked the fanciful dress and empty ritualism of the British military itself, a theme to which Woolf would return in her anti-imperialist, feminist work *Three Guineas* in 1938.¹⁴ In order to expose the instability of British masculinity, the hoaxers played up the effeminacy of both military and African dress. Their parody depended on asserting their own exceptional modernity in their freedom from the gendered rules of dress, and this was particularly true for Woolf as the only cross-dressing member of the party. Moreover, the hoaxers appropriated non-Western costumes from various locations and mixed them with Western dress, including the gibbah from Egypt, the Classical Greek and Roman tunic, the Turkish aigrette (which itself was appropriated by the French in their military uniforms), and a generic turban fashioned out a sash, which is itself an item worn in various European military and royal ceremonies and is made of silk, a Chinese product. This cultural appropriation and mixing is characteristic of modernist eclecticism, but its use in the Hoax also exemplifies how primitivist homogenization was central to modernist politics and aesthetics.¹⁵ The hoaxers confronted and replicated the multiple cultural appropriations already in place in military dress, sabotaging the military's eugenic project of separating colonial warfront from imperial homefront by playing up its existing stylistic hybridity. But their performances played into notions of blackness as improperly gendered, perversely backward, and arrested in its development.

In performing primitivist pastiche, the Hoax also reinforced the homogenization of non-Western, nonwhite others by displacing the cultural specificity of Abyssinia. The costumes demonstrated this on a visual level, and linguistically, the hoaxers played into cultural homogenization by communicating through a fake translator and using a made-up language from bits and pieces of Greek and Swahili. Their use of Swahili as a stand-in for Oromo, Amharic, or another Ethiopian language replicates the colonialist homogenization of non-Western otherness characterized by their dress. They swapped one African language for another, which played into the imperial fantasy of the interchangeability and flatness of different colonial spaces. This specific choice of language runs counter to the radical potential of impersonating an Abyssinian delegation in the Hoax. The hoaxers could have pushed their mockery of the military further by pointing to Britain's inability to overpower and rule this supposedly inferior

nation, echoing the unfit soldiers and British failures in the Boer War that were seen as indicators of degeneration and military failure. However, by presuming the interchangeability between Abyssinian languages and Swahili, they blunted the edge of their critique by reverting to homogenized notions of African bodily weakness and mental submissiveness rather than demonstrating the specificity of Ethiopian strength and independence. By using Swahili, they participated in military imperialism's own attitude of African cultural interchangeability that was evident when the navy band played the national anthem of Zanzibar for the hoaxers, rather than that of Abyssinia. Had they been a real royal delegation from Abyssinia, they would doubtless have been offended by such ignorance, but the cultural flattening on both sides of the Hoax demonstrates how anti- and pro-imperial politics similarly depended on homogenized notions of Africanness. The Hoax played into the fantasy that a noncolonized African nation, Abyssinia, is the same as a colonized one, or that it is colonized at heart if not in practice. Indeed, the navy must have assumed that the delegation was mentally unfit if they did not know the difference between their own national anthem and Zanzibar's. In all, the Hoax positioned Abyssinia as an enemy in the eugenic war against racial, disabled, and feminine contamination, no matter how penetrable the frontlines.

The fact that Woolf's critique rested on the homogenization of racial and cultural difference bespeaks not just the limitations or contradictions but also, more importantly, the increasing plurality of anticolonial modernist politics and aesthetics. As Edward Said argues, "[W]hen European culture finally began to take due account of imperial 'delusions and discoveries' . . . it did so not oppositionally but ironically, and with a desperate attempt at a new inclusiveness" (1993, 189). To the extent that modernists lambasted imperialism by using irony in examples like the Hoax, such interventions merely folded certain exceptional figures (like Woolf) into modernity. But they did not challenge colonial racism, since Woolf's gender and racial mobility endowed her with a kind of superable-bodiedness in contrast to the mental deficiency of those she portrayed. In Said's terms, this mobility depended on her ability to ironize colonial eugenic categories, her mobility to define herself outside of them, and her recapitulation of them in "going native."

Intersecting with her racial performance, Woolf's cross-dressing also raised the specter of gender inversion as a eugenic threat. For example, *The Dorchester Mail* reported on February 10, 2010, that Woolf "stepped into the breach and the breeches," suggesting that a breach of security was triggered by her breach of social and military gender regulations. Contemporary reports also suggested that the navy was all the more foolish in falling for the Hoax when one of the participants was, as the February 14 *Daily Express* termed it, a "lady prince" (quoted in Stansky 1996, 44). By demonstrating that even a prized symbol of the British military, its flagship, was penetrable—and by a woman in blackface drag at that—the hoaxers poked fun at the vulnerability of the nation's line of

defense against racial contamination and gender perversion, which were both perceived as signs of national degeneration and individual disability. If, following the scandal of the Boer Wars, the British military had to purge any evidence of disability within its ranks to appear eugenically fit and able-bodied, then Woolf's infiltration of its flagship on the homefront suggested that the threat of racial contamination and sexual perversion was still alive and well. In other words, Woolf's participation in the Hoax broke open the border between the feeble-minded and the healthy in the battle against degeneracy at home, since she seemed to be able to exceed categories of race, gender, and class; but her performance consigned others to the very forms of disabled degeneracy—feminine, feeble-minded, and perverse—that she cast off.

Woolf's role in the Hoax may seem to exemplify how modernists' sexual and racial masquerades helped to break up eugenic categories of fit and unfit by putting on and taking off degenerate traits, but her performance also demonstrates how this fluidity created the conditions for a eugenic exceptionalism that policed most other unfit subjects. In one sense, Woolf's successful act of passing demonstrates the performative nature of race and gender as eugenic categories: if eugenics depended on the statistical plotting of defective genes and the visibility of degenerative traits, then Woolf's racial and gender mobility indicates that for modern subjects, genetic fitness and unfitness may not be determinate but can be put on or taken off at will. Again, Woolf's experience of mental illness throughout her life and her affairs with women would have made her unfit to reproduce according to eugenicists. As an exceptionally capacious figure, however, to exceed the limits of genetic unfitness, she set herself apart from other unfit subjects rather than extending such fluidity and mobility to them.¹⁶ While the racial and sexual fluidity that she embodied in the Hoax lent credence to her own exceptional capacity, in other words, her act of minstrelsy depended on a primitivist construction of blackness as exotic, irrational, unmodern, and unfit.

Despite the exceptional racial and bodily mobility of her performance, Woolf's participation in the Hoax was evidence to some that she herself was a degenerate. Woolf's cousin, an officer on the Dreadnought who did not recognize her, told her brother that the other officers were calling her "a common woman of the town" after the Hoax (Stephen 1983, 52). And as she recounts in her 1940 speech, "Many of our friends and relations were furious. They said we had degraded our family name and were a disgrace to the parents who had borne us" (Johnston 2009, 30). The language of prostitution and degradation here points to the fact that Woolf's racial and gender cross-dressing mark her as dysgenic in her deviance. Accusing Woolf of being a prostitute was a specific accusation of mental unfitness: as Paula Bartley has demonstrated, sex workers at the time were categorized and often institutionalized as feeble-minded (2000). In direct contrast to such accusations of degeneracy and even disability, Woolf's participation in the Hoax elevated her social status in other circles:

“Great ladies implored us to come to their parties—and please they added, do come dressed as Abyssinians” (Johnston 2009, 30). The cultural capital and class privilege that her participation in the Hoax afforded her demonstrates her exceptional modernity, in that she was autonomous from and able to appropriate racial and sexual otherness to her own benefit, even as her eugenic status was called into question. Proving her both unfit (degraded) and fit (modern) at the same time, Woolf’s masquerade demonstrates the interpenetration—but not a disappearance—of the borders between eugenic and dysgenic.

Woolf herself makes it clear how she crossed these borders of eugenic fitness only in order to reconstitute them, however. In her 1940 talk, she claims that, “we heard afterwards that one result of our visit had been that the regulations were tightened up; and that rules were made about telegrams that make it almost impossible now to repeat the joke. I am glad to think that I too have been of help to my country” (28). By resolving her actions back into a renewed English nationalism that bolsters the frontlines of the imperial military, however tongue-in-cheek, Woolf demonstrates how her exceptional status at once disrupts lines between fit and unfit subjects and also positions her as an enforcer of the new frontline of liberal biopolitics. In the aftermath of the Hoax, for example, Woolf commented that when the real Emperor of Abyssinia came to London shortly after, he was barred access to military sites and mocked in the streets by children, who shouted out nonsense phrases that the hoaxers had invented in their made-up language.¹⁷ On even a practical level, then, the Hoax had deleterious effects on Africans by producing them as disabled—which decreased their mobility and framed them as idiotic clowns to poke fun at—even as it inverted eugenic and colonial categories of difference. These examples show how the homefront of eugenic colonialism persisted precisely because of its perceived instability in instances like the Dreadnought Hoax.

In her speech, Woolf herself subtly points to the racial politics of the Hoax by raising the image of milk as a symbol of whiteness and eugenic health. On her way to the docks, she describes thinking, “[W]hat on earth was I doing driving through London at eight o’clock on a spring morning dressed in royal red satin with a turban on my head. People were going to work with their bags & baskets. The milk carts. I did feel very queer . . . everybody stared” (15). When she describes realizing that “the porters and the milkmen gaped [but] they didn’t seem to see that I was a young lady,” she again claims that she, “became another person” (15). Woolf’s references to milk here are significant, especially in this key transitional moment from her initial feelings of uncertainty to her “queer” transformation into “another person” in the form of a black man. Milk represents the whiteness of everyday domestic Englishness, and its stability is threatened by Woolf’s cross-dressing and blackface performance. It is a stable frame of reference that both allows her to be grounded in the able-bodied whiteness of her English femininity even as she exceeds it in her performance of black masculinity, and that also will allow her to return to normalcy after

her performance is over. Milk thus represents how Woolf's exceptional ability to transcend given markers of gender and race depends on her reinscription of the immutability of such categories as a rule.

Disabled Servitude in *To the Lighthouse*

In *To the Lighthouse*, milk is also a eugenic symbol representing not only white English purity but also a new rehabilitative approach to disability. To the reform eugenicists of the interwar years, milk represented the hope that even unfit children, though changes to their environment and nutrition, could be uplifted and join the ranks of the eugenic homefront. Mrs. McNab is the primary figure of racial otherness and disabled degeneracy whom Woolf enlists to serve on the eugenic homefront in the novel. But Mrs. Ramsay, the Victorian matriarch, also links race and disability when she expresses her disgust with the dairy industry: "It was a disgrace. Milk delivered at your door in London positively brown with dirt. It should be made illegal" (Woolf 2005, 61). As Donald Childs and others have noted, Mrs. Ramsay's views about milk express her concern about eugenic purity and racial contamination (2001, 33–34).¹⁸ Her way of approaching social problems is inflected by racial and class-based discourses of eugenics, and for her, milk represents both the whiteness of Englishness and her concern over maintaining its able-bodied integrity in the face of its potential contamination by the racialized images of "dirt" and brownness. Janet Winston argues that Mrs. Ramsay is a stand-in for Queen Victoria, the "Great White Queen" and "Empress of India," and that Mrs. Ramsay's death represents the decline of the British Empire (1996). The lack of a stable hierarchy between Britain and its colonies is alarming for supporters of imperialism like the aging Mrs. Ramsay, since it raises the specter of racial mixing. This connection between the breakdown of empire and fears about eugenic degeneration at home, through the symbol of milk, demonstrates how discourses of race and disability were tethered together in the interwar years. Whiteness was seen as a precondition for mental and bodily integrity, and feeding milk to British children was a strategy to maintain an impenetrable white, able-bodied frontline in the fight against degeneracy.

In addition to the precarity of imperialism abroad, the breakdown of class stability at home also threatened to destabilize English whiteness and bodily fitness. Mrs. Ramsay recommences her discussion of milk later in the novel, for example, proclaiming that "it was much rather a question (she was thoroughly roused, Lily could see, and talked very emphatically) of real butter and clean milk. Speaking with warmth and eloquence, she described the iniquity of the English dairy system, and in what state milk was delivered at the door" (Woolf 2005, 105). Mrs. Ramsay's alarm about the "iniquity of the English dairy system" is a class-based concern about the dangers of the supposedly incompetent working-class dairy farmers who, without policy guidance from

upper middle-class administrators like Mrs. Ramsay, threaten the purity of their own product. This other civilizing mission with the working classes at home stressed the importance of maintaining the line between fit and unfit subjects, particularly since working-class, dysgenic subjects were increasingly construed as having the potential to enter the ranks of the fit through hygienic self-care. As Pauline Mazumdar argues, milk had a central role in discussions about child-rearing and increasing the strength of growing generations through control over environmental factors such as diet (1992, 182). For example, she summarizes the position of reform eugenicist J. B. S. Haldane, who argued that “providing a proper diet for poor children—subsidised milk in particular—would be the best way of preventing physical, and mental, defect” (182). As part of the transition to the welfare state, ensuring that every child had access to plenty of fresh milk was a eugenic tactic of increasing physical characteristics such as height and bone strength in order to ensure the maximum productivity and growth of coming generations. The superficial “warmth and eloquence” of Mrs. Ramsay’s new type of eugenics masked its continued, more productive, biopolitical management of populations, and of people with disabilities in particular. In the novel, then, milk represents a shift in eugenics toward adapting to environmental, rather than purely biological, accounts of health, highlighting the increasing centrality of uplift as a biopolitical strategy in managing racial purity and able-bodied fitness.

As in the Dreadnought Hoax, in *To the Lighthouse* the rehabilitative uplift of a damaged national body is dependent upon the labor of the unfit. In the “Time Passes” section of the novel, for example, Virginia Woolf depicts the renovation of the Ramsays’ summer home the terms of physical rehabilitation and rebirth, describing how “some rusty laborious birth seemed to be taking place, as the women, stooping, rising, groaning, singing, slapped and slammed, upstairs now, now down in the cellars. Oh, they said, the work!” (2005, 143). Here the domestic servants work to induce the house’s rebirth, which has been threatened by the devastation of the war. That the birth is “rusty” is significant, since rust in the novel represents the decaying prospects of the British Empire in and after the Great War. As Winston argues, the imagery of sinking ships and deterioration throughout *To the Lighthouse* represents the “sharp decline in Britain’s naval superiority and the decline of the Empire” (1996, 48). Rust signifies a weakening national body, which parallels the dirty milk as a symbol of racial contamination as well as the bodily decay of disability. Just as the Dreadnought Hoax referenced the losses of the Boer wars, the novel alludes to how the devastation of the Great War left Britain open to the perceived threat of racial contamination and disabled enfeeblement. The two servants, Mrs. Bast and Mrs. McNab, work to eliminate the rust, rehabilitating the house from its fall into disrepair, but they also paradoxically propagate it, since they themselves are old and decaying, colonized and disabled. This contradiction between laboring to produce and eliminate rust indicates the women’s liminal position as figures of colonial, working class, and disabled degeneration who

nonetheless labor for the restoration of the homefront of British national health. Woolf portrays Mrs. McNab, the more prominent of the two servants, as physically and mentally disabled, and as a racial other who is colonized by virtue of her Irishness.¹⁹ As such, Mrs. McNab represents how disability and racial primitivism were enlisted into service to produce modernist aesthetic innovations and political interventions, as in the Hoax.

Woolf portrays Mrs. McNab as physically ungainly and mentally deficient in ways that are inseparable from her working-class and colonized identity. The novel introduces us to her character by describing her multiple impairments: “As she lurched (for she rolled like a ship at sea) and leered (for her eyes fell on nothing directly but with a sidelong glance that deprecated the scorn and anger of the world—she was witless, she knew it), as she clutched the banisters and hauled herself upstairs and rolled from room to room, she sang” (Woolf 2005, 134). Mrs. McNab is not able-bodied; she does not walk, but lurches, rolls, and hauls herself around the house, always returning to what Woolf describes as “the old amble and hobble” (135). Her hobbling gait is a sign of physical disability, particularly since she requires assistance to complete able-bodied tasks like climbing stairs. Woolf suggests that Mrs. McNab’s mobility is limited, since she must hobble and roll to get around instead of walking. And because there is no infrastructure to support alternative types of mobility, she is forced to use resourceful ways of moving around that lower her physical body and social status to ground level. The reference to rolling like a ship again connotes the rusty ships of the empire in the novel, suggesting that Mrs. McNab is always in danger of tipping over, falling down, and sinking due to her rusty, incapacitated bodily frame. In the quote, Woolf also suggests that Mrs. McNab is mentally disabled, or “witless”, a term with eugenic connotations to the catchall term feeble-mindedness. Such terms assimilated disabled, nonwhite, and working class subjects into categories of mental deficiency and criminality (though the fact that she knows that she is witless is a sly contradiction to such homogenization). She is also portrayed as visually impaired, since she cannot see the world around her in a straight or normal way but only “sideways” through “her sidelong leer” (134). This suggests that she may have a condition such as macular degeneration, which would cause a blind spot in the center of her vision and make her only able to see peripherally. All of these impairments—ambulatory, mental, and visual—are related and collapsed in Woolf’s portrayal of Mrs. McNab as a colonized, working class, racially other subject whose years of service and a lack of access to care have broken her body.

Woolf only points to Mrs. McNab’s disabilities in a peripheral way, which mirrors and even appropriates, Mrs. McNab’s way of seeing sideways. This is significant because it demonstrates how Mrs. McNab’s colonized, disabled perspective is valuable for modernist aesthetics and also how her impairments do not disqualify her from serving on the eugenic homefront. Focusing on her disabilities directly would play into a eugenic determinism that disqualifies her

from service because she is unfit. But instead, Woolf reflects the growing focus on rehabilitation by redeeming the aesthetic value of Mrs. McNab's disabled ways of being, shifting the focus away from her impairments directly and toward her capacities. As with the new liberal eugenics, impairment was now a peripheral concern to enlisting people with disabilities to serve. Indeed, Mrs. McNab's disabilities do not prevent her from working to restore the house. Her affective and physical labor is the foundation on which the repaired home, Lily's painting, and even the novel itself, rests. For example, her alternative forms of mobility, thought, and vision are what Lily's painting, as Woolf's aesthetic avatar, utilize to break up and reconstitute bodily and mental wholeness. In these ways, Mrs. McNab represents the shift from eugenic determinism to biopolitical uplift: the very figures that threaten racial, class, gender, and able-bodied integrity (like herself) are the ones who do the work to restore it. It is the disabled, racially impure degenerates who find themselves thrust into positions of servitude to rehabilitate the decaying national body and reconstitute Mrs. Ramsay's eugenic homefront.

Woolf makes it clear that the destruction of the Ramsay home is a metaphor for the devastation of the First World War, and that its restoration constitutes rebuilding homefront trenches to keep queer, disabled, racial contamination at bay. She describes the destruction of the house in military and colonial terms, comparing its decline to how "gold letters on marble pages describe death in battle and how bones bleach and burn far away in Indian sands" (Woolf 2005, 131–32). The military casualties and the decay of bones in the colonies mirror the deterioration of the aristocratic summer home, and both are brought on by the Empire's rusty, sinking capacity to hold out against the encroaching tide of bodily degeneration and racial contamination. Woolf takes us into the decaying house, describing how

one feather, and the house, sinking, falling, would have turned and pitched downwards to the depths of darkness. In the ruined room, picnickers would have lit their kettles; lovers sought shelter there, lying on the bare boards; and the shepherd stored his dinner on the bricks, and the tramp slept with his coat round him to ward off the cold. Then the roof would have fallen; briars and hemlocks would have blotted out path, step and window; would have grown, unequally but lustily over the mound. (142)

Figures such as illicit lovers, homeless wanderers, and peasants penetrating the crumbling home suggest the infiltration of the sanctity of upper-class domestic space by dysgenic, feebleminded subjects of all types. The "lusty" excessive forces of nature and the lovers' excessively perverse sexuality threaten the sanctity of Mrs. Ramsay's former domain at the forefront of the white English purity and able-bodiedness. Their promise to reproduce along with tramps and the poor, who were seen as racially impure under eugenics, would lead to degeneration of future generations, polluting "the race" with bad blood.

Strikingly, Mrs. McNab is the one who triumphs over these downward forces of degeneration, even though she herself is disabled and racially other. As Woolf writes, for example, “there was a force working; something not highly conscious; something that leered, something that lurched; something not inspired to go about its work with dignified ritual or solemn chanting. Mrs. McNab groaned; Mrs. Bast creaked. They were old; they were stiff; their legs ached. They came with their brooms and pails at last; they got to work” (143). This portrayal of Mrs. McNab’s leering, lurching, unconscious body would seem to position her as one of the destructive interlopers in the house. Woolf also describes Mrs. McNab’s family history as dysgenic, imagining her “at the wash-tub, say with her children (yet two had been base-born and one had deserted her), at the public-house, drinking” (135). She has had too many children to properly manage, which implies excessive fertility and deviant sexuality, and the fact that two are “base-born” suggests both that she has had children out of wedlock and that they are also feeble-minded. These narrative judgments of her dysgenic body and family status rely on colonial stereotypes of Irish alcoholism and dimwittedness, which in turn equate Irish racial otherness with disability. Susan Stanford Friedman, for example, argues that as Mrs. McNab “witlessly lurches, leers, and drinks her way through her first appearance. . . . [T]he English stereotypes of the drunken Irish and the Celts as an inferior race hover uncomfortably within the geopolitical unconscious of the text” (1998, 75). Such a stereotypical portrayal encompasses the flattening of racial otherness and disability in a specifically eugenic sense. As Stephen Howe has shown, while accounts of how the Irish were racialized differ greatly, including whether or not they were seen by the British as white, there is no doubt that Irish stereotypes were highly racialized in their links to racist portrayals of Black and Native American people, which also equated being nonwhite with being feeble-minded (2004).²⁰

Although Woolf constructs Mrs. McNab and her children as dysgenic themselves, Mrs. McNab’s physical labor and disabled perspective serve the new biopolitics of rehabilitation. She not only literally rebuilds the house, representing the restoration of homefront walls against unfit interlopers, but she also provides the disabled, fragmented formal aesthetic that Lily requires to finish her painting. One prominent example of this crip aesthetic is Mrs. McNab’s “sidelong leer,” which as Woolf describes it, “slipped and turned aside even from her own face” as she “hobbled to her feet again” while dusting (Woolf 2005, 134). Lily uses some of the same modes of seeing in order to produce her abstract painting of Mrs. Ramsay and her son, which itself slips and turns the spectator’s gaze away from the faces portrayed in the painting through the abstraction of its subjects’ faces into a “triangular purple shape” (55). Seeing sideways, then, serves as a structural basis for modernist visual art’s most famous formal movement of multiple perspectives: cubism. Deborah Marks, for example, demonstrates how cubism uses racial primitivism and disability aesthetics to produce anxiety

about the unified subject (1999, 186). Similarly Michael Davidson argues that cubism employs disability as a critique of the “ocularcentrism” of “single-point perspective” (2008, 101). In other words, Lily has built her modernity upon not just Mrs. McNab’s labor, but on her visual perspective as a colonized and disabled subject. Such appropriation demonstrates how, as in the Dreadnought Hoax, modernist aesthetics and politics are staged within the counterfeit performance of racialized disability.

Woolf’s emphasis on disabled ways of seeing in the novel exemplify how British identity integrated the perspectives of racial and disabled others without extending them value in themselves. Throughout the novel, for example, Lily directly depends on alternative modes of vision to see and portray Mrs. Ramsay in her painting, such as her “Chinese eyes” that represent an Orientalist gaze and her “different ray” that represents her lesbian desire.²¹ In addition to these racialized and queer ways of seeing, Lily makes it clear that she also appropriates Mrs. McNab’s disabled perspective. Woolf again peripherally references Mrs. McNab’s visual impairment when Lily claims, “One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with,” but realizes that in order to capture Mrs. Ramsay, “among them, must be one that was stone blind to her beauty” (Woolf 2005, 201). In other words, Lily requires Mrs. McNab’s blind spot in order to fulfill her cubist aesthetic project, fusing together her fifty different perspectives by seeing Mrs. Ramsay sideways. Mirroring Lily’s own vision of Mrs. Ramsay, which finally allows her to finish her painting at the end of the novel, Mrs. McNab also has a vision of “Mrs. Ramsay as she came up the drive with the washing” (140). Presumably, through her sidelong leer, Mrs. McNab’s vision captures the matriarch’s visage like one of Picasso’s cubist faces: with her eyes looking sideways from her profile but straight at the viewer, “slipping” and “turning aside” from her face. Yet Mrs. McNab’s reproductive labors are not legible as forms of value to anyone in the novel. As Mary Lou Emery argues, by the novel’s end, “Much more than Lily’s painting, Mrs. McNab, her coworker, and their labors have become invisible, while Lily’s [creation] remains forever, and Lily is the ‘one’ who decides it is so” (1992, 231). While Mrs. McNab performs the physical labor necessary for Lily to come back to the house and complete her artistic vision of feminist radicalism and modernist abstraction, Lily’s modern capacity and mobility depend on Mrs. McNab’s disability.

The implied answer to the question in the “Time Passes” section of the novel—“What power could now prevent the fertility, the insensibility of nature?”—is Mrs. McNab herself, since she is the one who labors to restore and maintain the home against the ravages of time and decay (Woolf 2005, 142). Mrs. McNab helps to curb the excessive fertility and senselessness of even her own nature as a racialized and disabled subject by paving the way for its management by a queer culture in the form of Lily’s painting. Mrs. McNab even participates in the management of racialized, disabled bodies directly, since she takes over management of the house from another colonized servant whose

physical disability prevented him from properly maintaining it: as Mrs. Bast remembers in her fragmented stream of thought, “old Kennedy was supposed to have charge of it, and then his leg got so bad after he fell from the cart; and perhaps then no one for a year, or the better part of one” (144). Mrs. McNab is forced to compensate for her predecessor’s lapses, which caused the house to fall into a rusty decay and opened up a gap in the eugenic frontline. Notably, here again Irish racial difference is equated with disability, since Kennedy is also an Irish name. Kennedy’s deteriorating leg—exacerbated by his risky job and lack of access to medical care—leads to the deterioration of the house, which in turn requires Mrs. McNab’s service to rehabilitate it. A midwife to the birth of a new modernist aesthetic and a new biopolitics, Mrs. McNab is not prevented from serving because of her racial and bodily unfitnes, but instead she is enlisted into service but prevented from reaping any profits from her labor. In other words, she is robbed of her soldier’s pay, despite her time served on the eugenic homefront.

Crip Labor and Queer Value

As my readings of the Dreadnought Hoax and *To the Lighthouse* have illustrated, racialized, disabled subjects serve on the eugenic frontlines, producing value by rehabilitating a damaged national body. Such value, I would suggest, is also queer in its disruption of eugenic exclusions and its establishment of biopolitical exceptionalism. Meg Wesling argues that “queerness is a part of the establishment of hierarchies of value and . . . the practices and desires wrapped up in the category of sexuality constitute forms of affectively necessary labor” (2012, 122). By portraying the Abyssinian delegation as effeminate and Mrs. McNab as improperly sexualized, Woolf demonstrates how deviant sexual and gender expressions held value in the nation’s transition from eugenics to biopolitics, and particularly in making exceptions to and reestablishing hierarchies of race and disability. In the Hoax, for example, Woolf exceeded her own dysgenic status by crossing lines of race, gender, and mobility, producing a kind of value to the nation by opening up and resealing a gap in the navy’s frontline. Woolf performed such affective labor to puncture borders of gender and race, but positioned herself at the top of a new, exceptionalist hierarchy where the Abyssinians she impersonated, due to their race and supposed arrested development, were at the bottom. Making a similar argument in the context of British colonialism, Patrick R. Mullen argues that queer Irish subjects “are marked by an affect of excess that is at one and the same time attributed to them by ruling cultural forces and harnessed by individuals as response to their lived situations” (2012, 16). While Lily harnesses this excessive queerness and transforms it into the affective value of art, Mrs. McNab’s excessive labors are delimited by the “ruling forces” of colonialism and her “lived situation” as a domestic worker, placing her at the bottom of the biopolitical ladder.

Nevertheless, such forms of affective labor are disruptive in their excess. In both cases, the value produced by these crip/queer/racialized bodies is, as Emery puts it, “robbed of meaning.” But as Mullen observes, “[V]alue is stripped from forms of affect whose productive traces haunt capitalist profit as both a new figure of alienated labor and the potential for radical transformation and intervention” (40). While Woolf, in the Hoax and in the novel, strips and appropriates the value of racialized crip labor, its traces haunt the afterlife of eugenics. Though Woolf portrays the Abyssinians and Mrs. McNab as inferior based on their supposed physical and mental deficiencies and stereotypical racial characteristics, their labors on the frontlines draw attention to the contradictions within the new biopolitics that is based on their newfound integration and continued exclusion from the national body. Such figures remind us that eugenics is not really dead: their presence haunts the triumphant exceptionalism, progressivism, and liberalism of neoliberal biopolitics by drawing attention to the still-marginalized crip/queer/colonized figures who labor for national interests yet receive no compensation for their service or access to state services. Pheng Cheah accounts for similar figures within the international division of labor (IDL) (2007, 90). For Cheah, “In this transnational circuit of labor, impoverished women from the rural peripheries are integrated into the IDL as temporary migrant workers through the biopolitical crafting of their interests as subjects of needs, by weaving their very needs in the fabric of global capitalism, rather than just by obscuring their voices through ideological subject-formation” (90). Despite the stark differences between Mrs. McNab and, say, workers in a sweatshop, the integration of poor, racialized, and disabled women like Mrs. McNab into national service set the stage for “what Cheah calls the “new international division of reproductive labor”” Rather than being obscured and left out through eugenics, Mrs. McNab’s labor is integrated within and foundational for modern biopolitics. As a migrant (an Irish woman in Scotland), her labor is only temporarily needed to restore the home. In fact, when the remaining characters return after “Time Passes,” she completely disappears from the rest of the novel and only remains a ghostly figure whose peripheral presence and unacknowledged labor haunt the house, the landscape, and Lily’s painting itself.

As my readings of Woolf suggest, deserting the frontlines of the war on degeneration did not herald the end of eugenics, but rather the beginning of its ghostly afterlife. The new homefront would by definition be perforated in its exceptionalism, and would depend on biopolitical management through rehabilitation rather than institutionalization. In short, it would rely on uplift rather than on maintaining an impenetrable line between the fit and the unfit. Certain exceptions, like Woolf in the Hoax or Lily in *To the Lighthouse*, could pass freely between eugenic categories of gender, race, sexuality and ability that were increasingly permeable. In fact, the formal and political qualities of their transgressions would even be valuable under new modernist aesthetic and political economies, rather than devalued as forms of perversion and degeneracy.

Woolf was celebrated for her transgressive role in the Hoax, and Lily's painting represents the high value placed on abstract art. But in being deserters by abandoning their posts in the "war against the weak," they required an army of unexceptional, racialized, disabled servants against whom to contrast themselves, and upon whose labor their modernist transgressions and aesthetics would be built. The afterlife of eugenics is haunted by the ghosts of such figures. Their peripheral presence makes us aware of the ongoing construction of penetrable, invisible frontlines that nonetheless violently divide able-bodied from disabled, citizen from immigrant, laborer from master, white from nonwhite, and normal from queer. The difference is that, in the eugenic afterlife, the unfit maintain the battle lines themselves—thanks in large part to those exceptions whose ability to cross them make the frontlines themselves seem unreal and invisible: phantom trenches on the biopolitical homefront.

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Notes

1. In contrast, many other modernists took up eugenic arms with pride. See Childs (2001) for an overview of the more overt forms of eugenics proposed by Eliot, Lawrence, and Yeats.

2. See Lyon's reading of how Woolf uses disability to challenge normative modes of thought and embodiment even as she consistently recoils in shock from disabled bodies (2012).

3. Mina Loy's 1914 "Feminist Manifesto" is one salient example of this, since she articulates the empowerment of women in explicitly eugenic terms: increasing genetic fitness and weeding out degeneracy "for the harmony of the race" (1996, 155).

4. As bioethicists such as Catherine Mills point out, the kinds of "liberal eugenics" that dominated after World War II were based on individual freedom but masked the continuation of eugenic "genetic interventions," which were "mobilised in the interests of population normalization, even when they are directed toward individuals rather than populations" (2011, 12).

5. My argument is in contrast with the tendency in Woolf scholarship to debate whether she is a eugenicist or not. For example, Childs claims that Woolf supported eugenics by identifying an unambiguous and consistently eugenic attitude toward the unfit in her writing (2001). David Bradshaw, on the other hand, argues that Woolf resisted eugenic discourse since her novels satirize eugenics (2003). Rather than focus on her isolated opinions about eugenics, however, I argue that it is more productive to see Woolf, and modernism in general, as reflecting a shift in liberal eugenics rhetoric toward being increasingly adaptable, diverse, diffuse, and concealed.

6. Here I am adapting Saidiya Hartman's term "the afterlife of slavery" to my reading of liberal eugenics (2007). I conceptualize the history of eugenics as part of the afterlife of slavery, which Hartman defines as the ongoing practices of enslavement that perpetuate violence against black bodies in a post-emancipation context.

7. Kevles, for example, documents the impact that the Great War had on shifting eugenicists' focus away from isolation and toward rehabilitation (1995).

8. Critiques of discourses of rehabilitation and cure are fundamental to disability studies scholarship. As just one example, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues that the push toward curing disability equates with the "cultural conviction that disability can be extirpated; inviting the belief that life with a disability is intolerable" (2002, 14).

9. Anna Snaith, for example, argues, "The success of the Hoax and the duping of the British military officials speak not so much of the performance skills of the participants but an ignorance that undercuts ideas of British superiority" (2012, 209).

10. Seshagiri focuses on the racial politics of the Hoax, arguing that, "the Bloomsburyites' antimilitarism reveals an ironic complicity with the very imperial violence the Hoax intended to deride" (2004, 64).

11. Kevles demonstrates the centrality of the Boer War to the incitement of a panic over "national deterioration" (1995, 73).

12. As Snaith argues, "Abyssinia's history of resistance to colonization adds another level of subversion to the escapade" (2012, 209).

13. In "Passing as Modernism," Pamela Caughie argues that "while [modernists] sought ways to incorporate native art and culture into Western lives without 'patronizing, appropriating, or destroying' it, such a project was necessarily fraught with ambiguity: cultural preservation depended on Western tourism, and spiritual renewal meant 'going native'" (2005, 386–87).

14. In Jean Kennard's reading of the Hoax, for example, she argues that, "Woolf points out in *Three Guineas* the elements of vanity and powerseeking in male uniforms. Although she does not directly call the uniforms effeminizing, Woolf describes them in terms that suggest female rather than male dress" (1996, 161).

15. For readings of these discourses of primitivism, especially in the context of abstract painting, see Harrison, Frascina, and Perry 1993.

16. Alice Hall, for example, has written about Woolf's mental illness in terms of disability, and particularly in her reading of "On Being Ill." Hall argues that Woolf sees her own disability in illness as productive since it forces her to reconceptualize bodily norms and translate such a subjective experience into her writing (2015, 92).

17. For a reading of the backstory of Woolf's family relationship to Abyssinian royalty, see Reid 1999.

18. See also Kato 1997.

19. Though Woolf does not specify Mrs. McNab's cultural background in the novel, scholars such as Laura Doyle and Susan Stanford Friedman have argued that she is Irish (1994, 167; 1998, 264). Friedman, for example, bases this claim on her name (the Irish "Mc" rather than the Scottish "Mac"), and the fact that northern Scotland was settled by many Irish immigrants (264n27). However, I would also argue that the lack of distinction between the Scottish and Irish names suggests the flattening of distinctions between colonized peoples under imperialism and working-class, racially other, and disabled populations under eugenics.

20. Howe gives an overview of these debates about Irish racialization, as well as clear examples of the "very close parallels between anti-Irish and anti-black racisms in nineteenth (and indeed twentieth) century Britain" (2004, 233).

21. Seshagiri argues that the Orientalism of Lily's "Chinese eyes" allow for her freedom from marriage and aesthetic traditions: "Racial difference, in other words, provides a meeting ground for social critique and aesthetic innovation in *To the Lighthouse*" (2004, 75). Lise Weil demonstrates how Lily's "different ray" represents her desire for Mrs. Ramsay, or her "lesbian field of vision" (1996, 242).

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