A Feat of Strength in "Ithaca": Eugen Sandow and Physical Culture in Joyce's *Ulysses*

Vike Martina Plock
University of Durham

Ithaca" is Joyce's most engaging reflection on contemporary science. Astronomy, eugenics, and experimental psychology are just a few examples of the great number of exact or imperial sciences that inform the content of *Ulysses*' most inquisitive section. The episode, in its formal reliance on the catechism, also adopts the style of a scientific discourse, presenting a good deal of loose textual material as though it were factual and precise observations of social reality. Indeed, "Ithaca" both embraces the empiricism of modern science by relying on its vocabulary and simultaneously satirizes its widely accepted hegemonic stance. As Andrew Gibson notes, in exaggerating, inaccurately adopting, misquoting, and comically alluding to scientific rhetoric, this episode in Joyce's novel humorously but effectively accentuates science's didactic rule over turn-of-the-twentieth-century culture (*Joyce's Revenge* 227–51).

The exact sciences mentioned above are not the only sources Joyce folds into his catechizing narrative. One pseudo-scientific discourse alluded to repeatedly in "Ithaca" is that of physical culture. This popular fitness cult had its heyday in the years between 1850 and 1918 and became almost synonymous with the name Eugen Sandow (1867–1925), turn-of-the-twentieth-century's most famous strongman, performer, and publisher. The publication of Sandow's 1897 *Strength and How to Obtain It*, a book decorating Bloom's bookshelf in "Ithaca," marked the zenith of a fitness craze that relied on new media such as advertising and photography, growing degeneration paranoia, and resurfacing concepts of Hellenistic body aesthetics as a means for its dissemination.

Brandon Kershner has already provided Joyce's readers with Sandow's fascinating back-story (667–93), but his essay does not discuss the question

of why Joyce's encyclopedic novel integrates the discussion of Sandow and physical culture prominently in "Ithaca," the most scientific of all episodes in *Ulysses*. It is here, on his return to 7 Eccles Street, that Bloom is confronted with concerns that he has successfully managed to suppress throughout the day. Thoughts about Molly's adultery, his social alienation, and racial "Otherness" all await him there. At the same time, "Ithaca" shows that the unexpected encounter with Stephen Dedalus has had a remarkably uplifting effect on Bloom. Left alone, he conjures up the Bloom of Flowerville (*U* 17.1581), a confident, lionized alter ego.

Turn-of-the-twentieth-century physical culture is related to all the themes that form such an integral part of the "Ithaca" episode. In *Ulysses* the glamorous Sandow evolves into a complementary figure to Leopold Bloom. Like Bloom, who is stigmatized on grounds of his racial identity in "Cyclops," Sandow's Germanic background made him the target for verbal assaults from contemporaries. The topic of race is further linked to physical culture by its growing significance in the Zionist context, which in turn is a principal motif in "Ithaca," the chapter of homecoming. Finally, Bloom's reveries after Stephen's departure repeat a central assumption of Sandow's fitness manuals: a firm belief in dormant potential. Like the mystic figure of the glorious strongman, Bloom of Flowerville is the product of self-improvement stretched to the utmost. And whereas Bloom's transformation obviously remains an idealizing fantasy, it is significant to remember that Sandow's physical culture empire firmly relied on advertising fantasies of perfection and on promoting psychological determination as a requirement for physical empowerment. Joyce's chapter has therefore more than a tangential involvement in the physical culture intertext. As I shall show, physical culture literally gives shape to the "Ithaca" episode.

The muscular gentleman Eugen Sandow was regarded as the representative male body in turn-of-the-twentieth-century England. Doctors eagerly categorized him as "the most perfect male specimen alive" (Budd 44). Arthur Conan Doyle and W. T. Stead were both ecstatic supporters of the strongman, and in 1901 a Sandow body cast was commissioned for the Natural History Museum in London. Having grown up as Friedrich Wilhelm Müller in East Prussia,[1] Sandow had, from early childhood on, witnessed the growing interest in physical fitness in his home country. By 1870, the time of his birth, no fewer than 1,500 gymnasiums had been established in the German States (Chapman 6).

But the development of this new fitness cult was not restricted to Germany alone. Throughout nineteenth-century Europe, as industrialization, deteriorating working and living conditions, poor diet, and disintegrating religious and social values threatened to crush working-class male bodies and spirits in vast numbers, the idealized muscular body of the male strength performer was hailed as the symbol of social and national progress (Budd 7). Moreover, the

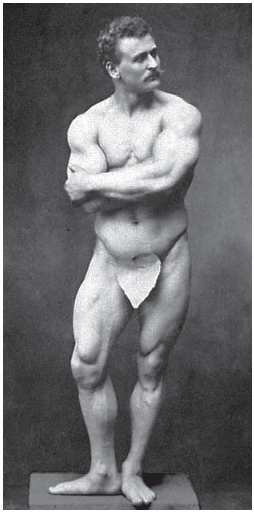

Figure 1 (left): Sandow in his Prime
Figure 2 (top): Sandow on Film

suggestion that the male body could be modeled, organized, and its vigor and strength controlled by a rigid system of physical exercises was applauded at a time when revolutions and Chartist agitations threatened to overthrow the social status quo. As Eugen Sandow argues, "[t]he man who means to make his body as nearly perfect as possible must perforce cultivate habits of self-control and temperance. The man who has cultivated his body has also cultivated self-respect" (7). The firm, fit, and healthy body of the muscular gentleman and above all his self-possessed nature thus allegorized the stability of the body politic in a time of growing social and economic upheaval. All this, combined with the fear of national degeneration and a craving for self-improvement that captivated European citizens in the second half of the nineteenth century, amply explains the fanatic promotion of fitness, strength, and health. By the time the first Modern Olympiad was held in 1896, this obsessive belief that the body could be shaped, formed, cultivated, and improved with the help of scientifically-approved training systems such as Sandow's had been firmly established.

Joyce's 1922 *Ulysses* shows a remarkable indebtedness to different aspects of this fascination with athleticism. The "Nymph" in "Circe" gives "unsolicited testimonials for Professor Waldmann's wonderful chest exuber" (*U* 12.3255). The sailor in "Eumaeus" has a distinctively "manly" chest (*U* 16.690), and Bloom and Molly both independently contemplate Boylan's muscularity. (While Molly reflects on his "big hipbones," his heaviness, and his "hairy chest" [*U* 18.415–16], Bloom rejects "duel by combat" [*U* 17.2221–22] as a potential retribution with the thought of the "muscularity of the male" [*U* 17.2216].) Young Patrick Dignam is fascinated by a prize fight in "Wandering Rocks" (*U* 10.1130–49), and this boxing match between an Irish and an English champion is further

examined in "Cyclops," the episode that also discusses the "revival of ancient Gaelic sports and the importance of physical culture, as understood in ancient Greece and ancient Rome and ancient Ireland, for the development of the race" (*U* 12.899–901). Gerty MacDowell fantasizes about her future husband's virility: she wants a "manly man" with "sheltering arms" (*U* 13.210–12). And Bloom, when reflecting on Father Coffey in "Hades," calls him a "Muscular Christian" (*U* 6.596), referring thus to Charles Kingsley's "Muscular Christianity" movement that had since the 1850s widely advocated the strong and healthy body as contributing to improved moral and religious standards (*mens sana in corpore sano*) (see Schwarze 113–35).

For Leopold Bloom, who admits in "Circe" that he feels "exhausted, abandoned, no more young" (*U* 15.2778), complaining about "a twinge of sciatica in his left glutear muscle" (*U* 15.2782–83), health and physical fitness are particularly significant. As Brandon Kershner notes, Sandow's exercise regime appears as a promising remedy whenever Bloom faces self-doubt or failure (Kershner 683). Both physically and commercially Sandow has achieved what Leopold Bloom can only dream of: physical superiority and professional success in advertising. For not only was Sandow hailed as "the perfect man," he was also known as a prosperous entrepreneur and promoter. Some of his noteworthy marketing successes included the famous "Grip Dumbells," introduced around 1899, the "Sandow cigar," manufactured by S. Cantrovitz and Sons in Chicago between 1896 and 1898**,** and various publications, especially the launch of his magazine *Sandow's Magazine of Physical Culture* (1898–1907). Contrary to this, Bloom's cherished advertising project for Hely's, the "illuminated showcart, drawn by a beast of burden, in which two smartly dressed girls were to be seated engaged in writing" (*U* 17.608–19), remains unfulfilled while his measurements "after 2 months' consecutive use of Sandow-Whiteley's pulley exerciser" (*U* 17.1816–17) continue to be grotesquely undersized for a man of Bloom's height (see Kenner 505–08).

In spite of this apparent dissimilarity between the strongman and Bloom, they still share a similar fate regarding the precarious issue of racial difference. Undoubtedly, because racism was such a charged topic at the time he was publishing his manuals, Sandow's physical culture movement constantly emphasized its universal and democratic nature. Sandow thus opens his fitness gospel, the 1897 *Strength and How to Obtain It* with the words, "You can all be strong, all enjoy the heritage which was intended for you" ("Introduction" in Sandow n. pag.). The second part of the book, the "Incidents of My Professional Career" that begins with Sandow confessing his delicacy as a child, is followed by the notable statement: "It is not necessary, as some may think, to be born strong in order to become strong. Unlike the poet, who, we are told, has to be born a poet, the strong man can make himself" (Sandow 85). The physical culture movement and Sandow as its primary campaigner therefore advocated a

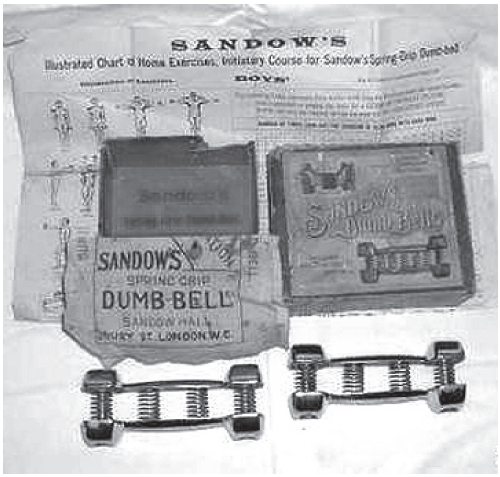

Figure 3: The Sandow Grip Dumbbells

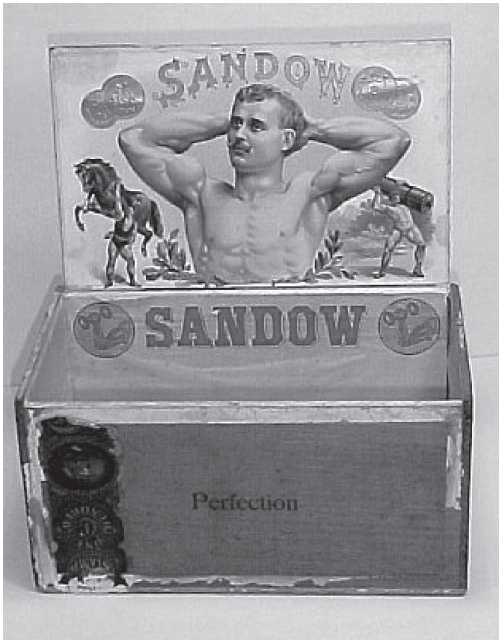

Figure 4: The Sandow Cigar

radically different agenda to that of another pseudo-scientific discourse widely in use at the turn of the twentieth century: eugenics. Whereas eugenicists preached biological determinism and racial elitism, Sandow and his followers underlined the egalitarian nature of their programs and the utopian promise of bodily empowerment for all. Although Sandow allegedly chose the Christian name "Eugen" out of admiration for Francis Galton's new science eugenics (Budd 147, n. 24), his physical culture movement relied on psychological

determination rather than biological determinism, and thereby serves as an important historical counter-narrative to eugenics' exclusive rhetoric.

Nevertheless, physical culture pamphlets published in Great Britain became an opportune location for the distribution of the eugenic movement's racial sermons. And although Sandow had renounced his German citizenship, married an Englishwoman in 1894, and put his educational system into the service of the English crown, his Prussian background became a prime target for the scorn of some British strongmen. One particular violent onslaught came from William Bankier, a Scottish strongman, who used the stage name "Apollo." In his 1900 *Ideal Physical Culture and the Truth about the Strong Man* Bankier intertwined the promotion of his professional philosophy with a ferocious attack on Sandow that blamed the world-famous performer for one thing in particular: his Germanic descent. While stating that he is "no believer in patent 'exercises'" and boldly claiming that "a strong man is *naturally* so, and has been strong even from boyhood, and not, as one tells us, that he was a weak child up to seventeen, and only then began to exercise and develop strength" (Bankier 24–25), Apollo's argument is clearly indebted to the rhetoric of eugenics. Its specific racial aspect is further accentuated when the Scotsman declares that "no nation in the world can excel in bone and muscle our own countrymen," "there are better athletes in Britain than ever came from Germany," and that Sandow "has three very grave faults — viz., the sloping shoulders, small calves and flat feet, common to all the German athletes" (Bankier 1, 3, 40). Ironically, then, while Sandow was busying himself with the patriotic task of outlining programs for raising the physical fitness of the British nation, his adversaries used his racial "Otherness" as a welcome opportunity for the expression of professional dispute and the slander of Sandow's reputation. In this, Sandow clearly resembles Joyce's Leopold Bloom, who, in spite of his emphatic answer to the Citizen's question: "—What is your nation if I may ask? says the citizen –Ireland, says Bloom. I was born here. Ireland" (*U* 12.1430–31), his active interest in Arthur Griffith's Irish Home Rule politics (*U* 12.1574, 18.383–86), and his adopted Anglicized name, nevertheless becomes, not unlike Sandow, the target for racial prejudices and hostilities.

The nature-nurture dispute that informed the physical culture rhetoric at the turn of the twentieth century is also relevant to Bloom's Jewish background in yet another sense. It is not only in the "Cyclops" episode that Bloom is assaulted on grounds of his racial difference. With Stephen's offensive recital of the legend of "Little Harry Hughes," "Ithaca" also openly introduces racism as a subtext. That Bloom is uncomfortably aware of his complex Semitic background during his nocturnal get-together with Stephen is illustrated by his equally convoluted meditations on whether or not he has been identified as a Jew: "He thought that he thought that he was a jew whereas he knew that he knew that he knew that he was not" (*U* 17.530–31). And while "Ithaca" is

the chapter of homecoming, it is interesting to note that physical culture plays a very significant role in a specific Jewish context: the Zionist movement that responded to recurring pogroms in Russia (1881 and 1882) and the French Dreyfus affair (1894–1906). With this political perspective in mind and the simultaneous genesis of racial anti-Semitism in many European countries, the question of the Jewish physique and the fitness of the Jewish male body became of utmost importance and was widely discussed by Zionist leaders such as Theodore Herzl and Max Nordau.

Significantly, the first issue of Sandow's *Physical Culture* magazine, launched in 1898, contains an article entitled "Physical Culture Among the Jews," suggesting the centrality of this issue to the Zionist movement. It argues that "the physical culture movement among the Jews may fairly be described as a communal one" and that it is one that "is followed with the closest possible attention by its leaders" (Dettas 128). Indeed, Zionist activists willingly adopted the democratic claim of Sandow's physical culture rhetoric described above. In his 1902 article "The Meaning of Exercise for us Jews" Max Nordau thus argues that: "Our muscles have an outstanding potential for development. One can say without exaggeration: no one has to be satisfied with his muscles. On the contrary, everybody can have the muscles he himself wishes. Methodical and persistent exercise is all that is required. It is down to every Jew, who considers himself weak or is weak indeed to build up an athlete's muscular system."[2] Two years earlier, in his 1900 publication "Muscular Jews," Max Nordau had already identified the educational benefit of exercise and physical instruction for his race ("Muskeljudentum" 380), establishing a synecdochical relationship between physical culture and the Zionist movement: "[w]ho is better constituted than the Zionist movement to organize the helpless, chaotic Jewish masses in the East?"[3] Sculpturing the individual Jewish body was regarded as working towards the management and shaping of the Jewish population at large.

Given this historical setting that blends physical culture, idealized masculinity, the question of Jewish muscularity, and Zionism, the suggestion that Sandow's body cult and his fitness vocabulary come into view predominantly in *Ulysses*' chapter of homecoming cannot be unexpected. Through Herzl's book *Der Judenstaat* that he owned in Trieste, Joyce was, of course, familiar with the political agenda of Zionism. Physical culture clearly provides the Irish-Jewish analogy that is suggested throughout *Ulysses* with further material. While Zionist leaders prescribed exercise for their citizens to be, the Gaelic Athletic Association, founded in 1884, simultaneously promoted new muscular Irish manhood and distinctively Irish Games.

In accordance with the Zionist leaders' designs for a Jewish Palestine, Bloom ambitiously imagines the scene of Bloom of Flowerville in "Ithaca": "planting aligned young firtrees, syringing, pruning, staking, sowing hayseed,

trundling a weedladen wheelbarrow without excessive fatigue at sunset amid the scent of newmown hay, ameliorating the soil, multiplying wisdom, achieving longevity" (*U* 17.1583–87)—in other words, an improved and idealized version of his present social and economic situation. Moreover, this image of Bloom of Flowerville leads to a more metaphorical interpretation of the fitness intertext in relation to Joyce's episode, for "Ithaca" adopts one central aspect of the physical culture movement: the emphasis on latent potential. Defining the term "physical culture" Sandow explicitly stresses the importance of developing dormant physical aptitude: "To constantly and persistently cultivate the whole of the body so that at last it shall be capable of anything that sound organs and perfectly developed muscles can accomplish—that is physical culture" (Sandow 5).

"Ithaca" is an episode obsessed with latent potential, possibilities, and revisionist settings. And it is Leopold Bloom's unexpected encounter with Stephen Dedalus that triggers his reflections on alternative scenarios. Simply put, while Stephen's presence has a distinctively rejuvenating effect on Bloom, it makes alternatives more conceivable. Joyce himself baptized *Ulysses*' penultimate episode "a mathematico-astronomico-physico-mechanico-geometrico-chemico sublimation of Bloom and Stephen" (*Letters* 164) and, as Andrew Gibson recalls, "sublimation" in scientific language means a "transmutation into a higher or purer substance" (*Joyce's "Ithaca"* 7)—in other words a transformation or growth into an improved state. This is why "Ithaca" excessively catalogues images of horticulture (*U* 17.1553, 1568, 1609, 1701) and presents Bloom "in loose allwool garments with Harris tweed cap, price 8/6, and useful garden boots with elastic gussets and wateringcan" (*U* 17.1582–83); this is the prototypical image of the passionate gardener and cultivator of both muscles and plants.

It is also in this episode that Bloom's designs for urban improvement, voiced at various moments throughout the day, are collected and expanded. The cattle trains he envisions first in "Hades" (*U* 6.400) reappear in "Ithaca" in an extended version under the heading of the appropriate question "Were there schemes of wider scope?" (*U* 17.1709). Other Bloomian designs include a "scheme to enclose the peninsular delta of the North Bull at Dollymount" (*U* 17.1714–15) for the development of an amusement esplanade and a "scheme for the development of Irish tourist traffic" (*U* 17.1729). And although Bloom's schemes are mainly of a logistical nature, they are reminiscent of Eugen Sandow, another social reformer, who never tired of advocating his quest for national physical education, and who suggested that the British army adopt his patent exercise regime (Chapman 127–28). In "Ithaca" it is Molly's education that is at stake. Whereas Stephen's prolonged visit at 7 Eccles Street could have assisted her in the "acquisition of correct Italian pronunciation" (*U* 17.939), Bloom's habit of "assuming in her, when alluding explanatorily, latent knowledge" (*U* 17.695–96)

demonstrates both his intention to firmly believe in Molly's intellectual potential and the episode's passion for dormant abilities and potential growth. In this context it is worth remembering that Joyce, in writing to Harriet Shaw Weaver, famously called "Ithaca" "the ugly duckling of the book and therefore, I suppose my favourite" (Ellmann 500). Critics have read Joyce's comment as a remark on the alleged monotony of the chapter. After the phantasmagoric "Circe" the two following episodes may strike the reader as dull; especially "Ithaca," in which the reader will "know everything and know it in the baldest coldest way" (*Letters* 159–60) is probably, contrary to Joyce's own preference, the least favorite chapter of many Joyceans. But the story of the ugly duckling is, of course, the best example of a narrative dealing with imminent transformation and latent potential.

Growth, expansion, and proportions are further relevant to the structure and style of the episode. No other chapter is as occupied with the question of form and shape. Although its language appears reduced and stripped to the bone, it should not be forgotten that "Ithaca" as Fritz Senn mentions, "swelled to become the second largest chapter in the book" (53). Information is crammed into the pages, often more than the reader requires. The best example is the disproportionate relationship between the short question "Did it flow?" (*U* 17.163) and its long answer. On the one hand, the strict, disciplining, and restricting form of the catechism underlines the latent potential of the answers. It seems as if the language constantly tries to break out of the shaping form of the episode, emphasizing that there are always more answers and in turn more questions to be asked, and thus simulating exuberant narrative expansion. By the same token, it must be noted that the restrictive nature of the catechism is synonymous with the discipline associated with the physical culture movement. While social and economic paradigms were threatening to spin out of control during the nineteenth century, the composed yet muscular body of the strongman suggested ideologies of continuous, well-managed growth and development. Likewise, "Ithaca" carefully and skillfully negotiates this correlation between discipline and growth, between narrative restriction and expansion.

Sandow's physical culture movement is on many different levels an essential intertext for the "Ithaca" episode of Joyce's *Ulysses*. Leopold Bloom is in part modeled on the famous strongman. In addition, the theme and structure of the episode owe something to Sandow's model. It thematically adopts physical culture's emphasis on latent talent and potential, and its narrative structure while relying on the mutual interaction of enormous expansion and closely-monitored control, imitates the essential characteristics of the strongman as the remarkable creation of Sandow's fitness tutorials. That Joyce chose to include this potent turn-of-the-twentieth-century popular pseudo-scientific discourse in "Ithaca" illustrates his sustained interest in contemporary science while signaling awareness of the dogmatism that threatened to infiltrate

scientific language in his time. Instead, Joyce's take on popular and imperial sciences remains a light-hearted one. Intrigued but skeptical of its potential, he brought humor and curiosity to his treatment of Sandow and the physical culture movement as it connected to Bloom's hopes and insecurities.

Notes

1. It has been suggested that in adopting the pseudonym "Eugen Sandow," Müller simply Germanized his mother's maiden name, Sandov (Chapman 6).

2. "Unsere Muskeln sind hervorragend entwicklungsfähig. Man kann ohne Uebertreibung sagen: niemand braucht sich mit den Muskeln zufrieden zu geben, die er hat. Jeder kann vielmehr die Muskeln haben, die er selbst wünscht. Methodische, ausdauernde Uebung ist alles, was dazu nötig ist. Jeder Jude, der sich schwach glaubt oder schwach ist, hat es also in der Hand, sich eine Athletenmuskulatur zuzulegen [. . .]." Nordau, "Was bedeutet das Turnen für uns Juden?" 385. [Translation mine]

3. "Und wer ist mehr dazu berufen, die hilflos chaotische jüdische Masse im Osten zu organisieren, als der Zionismus?" Nordau, *Generalreferat* 24. [Translation mine]

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This article on turn-of-the-twentieth-century physical culture in Ulysses analyses Joyce's fascination with and comical exploitation of modern medical discourses. While it regards body-building and the life story of the glamorous nineteenth-century strongman Eugen Sandow as important intertexts for the "Ithaca" episode, it draws on physical culture's connections to Zionism, racism and eugenics to explore how Joyce creatively used this pseudo-scientific discourse for the characterization of Leopold Bloom. "Ithaca" is identified as the episode where all these themes come to the fore. Generally regarded as the most scientific of all chapters in Ulysses, it formally adopts some central premises of the physical culture discourse: its obsession with form, shape and latent potential. Physical culture thus informs both form and content of Ulysses' *most inquisitive section.*

Keywords: physical culture / eugenics / Zionism / medicine / racism