Deviant Sexuality and Positive Outcomes in Ulysses and The Waste Land

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In 1922, two important contributions to the world of literature were introduced with the publications of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. At this time, Europe was reconstructing itself after having been devastated by World War I and the victorious allies were rearranging the political map. Families had been separated because of the war, and women had left their homes to go into the work force. Many lovers had been split up and were receiving notices of the deaths of their lovers either from the war or from other circumstances. The aftermath of the war created conditions that modernist writers reacted to in their literature.

Stanley Sultan, in his book of essays entitled *Ulysses, The Waste Land, and Modernism*, writes: "Bloom, Stephen and the protagonist of *The Waste Land* are walkers in the city and doomed victims of it. Their peripatetic experiences are a means by which novel and poem both close on the condition of modern urban man" (37-8). Joyce and Eliot were keenly aware of the conditions of their worlds, and both sensed a desolate and barren world where deviant sexuality was

overwhelming; their works can read as "a sexual failure which signifies a modern spiritual failure" (Sicker 420). Each writer was also experiencing hardships in their individual lives. Eliot drafted *The Waste Land* in 1921 "during [his] convalescence from some kind of nervous breakdown due to the . . . prolonged strains of his disastrous marriage" (Pinkney 94). Joyce had exiled himself from Ireland because Dublin was becoming "that city . . . on the benighted fringe of Europe" and traveled with his wife Nora for sixteen years in Europe (Gifford 1). Eliot and Joyce's ideas were born from the hardships and disappointments experienced in their personal lives.

My definition of "deviant sexuality" that will be used throughout this essay describes a sexuality that is infertile, ineffective, and habitual - the kind of sexuality that bears no passion or love. The aforementioned works are seeped in this sexuality; masturbation, rape, abortion, fetishes, and ineffectual sex are unrestrained.

Paradoxically, the theme of deviant sexuality that is present in these works can have a positive outcome. In the sections "A Game of Chess" and "The Fire Sermon" from *The Waste Land*, there are positive functions that are born out of the detached sexual acts, and Eliot writes of these problems in a furious manner in hopes it can raise awareness and bring an end to the distress. In the "Nausicaa" episode of *Ulysses*, the characters are quite aware that they are doing something that violates social and moral code, yet they encourage one another and even flaunt their behavior. Their rebellion is eventually a strengthening agent that frees them from the restraints of society. Stanley Sultan writes that *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* contain "similar thematic assertions about civilization, a meaningful life for humankind, and the cosmos" (Sultan 193).

"A Game of Chess" starts out with a detailed narrative about a woman and the room she sits in. After a few lines describing the exotic milieu she inhabits, Eliot draws his reader's attention to the portrait which looms ominously in the background: Ovid's Philomel.¹⁾ The rape of Philomel by Tereus is portrayed above

¹⁾ Eliot is referring to the story of Philomela who was raped by her sister Procne's husband, Tereus. Tereus then cuts out her tongue so she cannot tell her sister, but she reveals the

the woman's mantel, a place where a family portrait or a holy relict might be placed. Instead of worshipping family or a God, this Jezebel worships the violation of a virgin. The violation of Philomel also connects with the title of this section. The title "A Game of Chess" was taken from two of Thomas Middleton's works in which a woman is similarly taken advantage of. Middleton's seduction scenario is seen as a game, and this "chess" game is "being used in the contemporary wasteland, as in the play, to cover up a rape and is a description of the rape itself" (Brooks, Jr. 195). This idea of rape being a form of a game, somewhat a cat-and-mouse form of seduction, is certainly an example of deviant sexuality at work in the poem.

One paradoxical positive outcome present in these lines in "A Game of Chess" is seen through the flight image portrayed in the picture of Philomel being placed above the mantel. In the picture, Philomel is seen in her nightingale figure, flying away from the earth into the free firmament. In Christian tradition, the nightingale's song was allegedly supposed to smooth "anxiety and fear associated with death by weaving mortal and immortal worlds together, by placing the nightingale's song in conjunction with the coming of a spring associated with the resurrected Christ" (Williams 47). Understanding this idea, Philomel transcends from a tortured, trapped human being into a freer *anima* who is released from her cage and experiences true freedom. It is with this in mind that she is saved, making the woman who owns this painting able to rise above the wasteland she lives in as well.

The next twenty-eight lines are extremely autobiographical, as they are modeled from conversations and arguments Eliot had with his first wife, Vivienne: "My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me. / Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak," (9) an imaginary Vivienne pleads. In those sentences, there is an obvious longing for companionship that is absent in their relationship. In a mode

story to her sister by weaving it on a loom. Procne then kills Tereus's child, and in rage he goes after his wife and her sister. All three are in the end turned into birds; Procne and Philomel into a nightingale and a swallow, and Tereus into a lapwing.

of desperation, the woman threatens in lines 132-133, "I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street / "With my hair down, so." This is a direct reference to a situation Eliot experienced with Vivienne. Lyndall Gordon describes how Eliot took a drive with his friend Mary Trevelyan in 1942 and pointed out to her some places in London from which he drew inspiration. "It was from there that Vivienne threw her nightdress out of the window into the street in the middle of the night," Eliot remembered, pointing to Trafalgar Square (Gordon 68). Vivienne's sometimes erratic behavior was a source of great frustration for Eliot. In a society where women seen in public with loose hair were considered prostitutes, Eliot was often embarrassed by Vivienne's tendency to violate what was considered socially acceptable. In The Waste Land, Eliot confronts Vivienne's penchant for pushing beyond the social confines of early twentieth-century England in several occasions and reincarnates her as an avatar in the poem. Vivienne "remarked at the time of publication that The Waste Land became 'A part of me (or I of it)" (Gordon 68). Vivienne is present in many parts of the poem; almost every female antagonist in the poem displays part of her negative personality and sexuality.

The positive outcome that is born from this passage is one that was difficult for Eliot to invent. Having been with Vivienne for a long time, he had dealt with much of her hardships while trying to make a life for himself as a writer and scholar. Taking an image of his uncontrollable wife and her emotions, and converting her into a character in his poem was the only way that he could control her. This poem "ha[d] served him for therapy, catharsis" (Smith 3). For once Vivienne is not in the spotlight creating problems because he dominates her. Although this poem is about the negative condition of the world and his unhappy marriage, it is essentially about Eliot himself. By skillfully illustrating his hidden self-caricature, he frees himself.

Gordon also gives an example in the same essay about the time in Eliot's past when he used to live on the border of Paddington in London, in the "dingy flats of Crawford Mansions" (68). Eliot's flat near Paddington was next to a pub, and he saw the dregs of London there every night. He spent hours watching the people

at that particular pub. This is where the last thirty-seven lines of "A Game of Chess" are taken from. These lines are filled with the sterile, lust-filled unhappiness that the wasteland encompasses. The woman, Lil, has a dreadful sexual relationship with her husband. Their sex life does not come from love, or even the desire to make another life, as she aborts her sixth child: "It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said./ (She's had five already and nearly died of young George.)/ The chemist said it would be all right, but I've never been the/Same" (WL 10). Lil's husband, Albert, is coming home from World War I, and Lil's friend encourages her to pretty herself up and have sex with her husband for his homecoming, lest he go elsewhere to satisfy his desire.

This couple is no longer attracted to one another, and sex is not for procreation. In this marriage, there is nothing productive about intercourse, and sometimes it is non-existent. John T. Mayer sees this as well, and in his essay "The Waste Land: Eliot's Play of Voices" he writes:

In part II, [Eliot] sees in the emptiness of his own marriage and those of others that even relationships bind individuals to the wheel . . . The would-be prophet is caged by a marriage that turns his eye from the vision to his own anguish; yet this cage may release the prophet within the husband. He looks at his marriage and sees parody lovers . . . confirming that love is death. (271)

The idea of a "cage" holding a marriage is not exactly a positive image of a loving union. Christopher Mills strengthens this interpretation when he writes that "section II is thus another view of degenerate love" (63). Albert sent Lil money to get her teeth fixed, and instead she used it to get an abortion. Her actions and decisions kill life rather than embrace it. It is these types of distorted relationships that make the wasteland a barren, frozen place where deviant sexuality abounds.

The marriage between Lil and Albert is not perfect, but they still are indeed together. When Albert returns from the war, their unhappiness may in fact change. It will take time, just as the world took time to reconstruct itself from World War I. Maybe this marriage needs its own reconstructing, and when Albert returns they

can work on rebuilding their lives. Sicker writes that Albert and Lil "promote economical gain and sexual abuse" (421). What he does not take into consideration is that Eliot's wasteland can be cleaned up through awareness; this awareness will lead to cleansing and redemption.

The second section of this poem explores deviant sexuality where there is no love in sexual actions, especially between husband and wife. Grover Smith, Jr. writes, "The subject of part II is sex without love, specifically within marriage, just as the subject of part III is the same horror outside it" (128). The outside horror in the world is literally outside, in the city streets in London, on the River Thames or on its banks, and in other unexpected places such as offices or other places of business. In "A Game of Chess," Eliot modeled the dysfunctional sexuality after his own life, but in "The Fire Sermon," he gains inspiration from the barrenness of society.

The title of section III, "The Fire Sermon," holds a meaning of deviant sexuality. "The Fire Sermon" is a reference to Buddha who preached about a "fire of passion" (Eliot 54); this fire represents a "sterile burning of lust, and the section is a sermon, although a sermon by example only" (Brooks, Jr. 195). Lust is an important aspect of this section as this vision of the wasteland is a world without passion where the sexual encounters "seem fleeting or devitalized" (Gibson 108). In "A Game of Chess," there might have once been love and meaning in sex through the sanctity of marriage, but in the third section, every ounce of the meaning has been burned out. The voyages in the third section are equally futile. The reader is taken on "a hopeless, aimless journey through the mechanical world to the bored mechanical typist: again, all images of distorted sexuality with no procreative purpose" (Mills 64-5). In "The Fire Sermon," the rape of Philomel is mentioned for the second time in the poem: "Jug jug jug jug jug jug / So rudely forc'd. / Tereu /" (WL 12). In her transformation into a nightingale, Philomel sings her bird song (also an onomatopoeia for intercourse) and accuses Tereus at the end. This rape is repeated during the sexual episode between the typist and the clerk. This scene is the epitome of empty, sterile sexuality in the poem. It is automatic

and unnatural, void of any feeling. It is not even a task:

The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavors to engage her in caresses
Which are unreproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defense;
His vanity requires no response
And makes a welcome of indifference.
. . . Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:
"Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over."
. . . Paces about her room again, alone,
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone. (WL 13-14)

Similarly, John Xiros Cooper sees the portrayal of sterilized sexuality in this section, however, his interpretation contradicts itself. Cooper writes, "Eliot was no humanist and we must beware of hoping against hope that he was" (46). Eliot was indeed suffering from a breakdown as he completed the poem in 1921, but Cooper fails to take into consideration that one of the most positive parts in the poem happens after the long passage of the typist's tryst. In lines 257-265, beauty is present and wonderful light bearing colors of white and gold are expressed. These colors are symbols for virginity, and also represent rebirth, hope, light, and holiness. Through the use of this color scheme Eliot is sharing with his reader his optimism. ". . . I can sometimes hear / Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street, / The pleasant whining of a mandoline" (14). The protagonist can still "sometimes hear." Everything is not lost.²⁾ Eliot knows the world is dying, but life does come out of death (as the form of reincarnation), and the world still lives. The earth, "for this narrator, is a dead land, a place of sterility and loss, yet one in which value might

²⁾ The protagonist remembers the chatter of fishermen near Magnus Martyr. Coincidently, in Christianity the fish is a symbol of life.

be possible" (Gish 41). This passage demonstrates that it is possible for the world to improve itself and be fertile again. At this time in the poem, the world does not seem horrifying but "calm and quiet, and freeing from [negative] memory and desire" (Gish 89). The world can still pursue pleasure even if the land is in pain and suffering; Eliot never writes that his hope is gone forever, he just expresses that things have never been this bad.

Ulysses has its share of sexual deviance, especially in "Nausicaa." This chapter parallels the scene in *The Odyssey* where Odysseus lands at the mouth of a river in the land of the Phaeacians. The Princess Nausicaa finds and refreshes him, and helps him on his journey home to Ithaca. The sexual taboo that Joyce treats in the chapter occurs when Leopold Bloom, excited by a young woman named Gerty, masturbates on a beach in Dublin. Masturbation is an "isolated form of sexual gratification" that does not allow a person to directly procreate with another (Senn 187).³⁾

The ironic aspect of the masturbation that makes it even more outrageous is that the object of Bloom's sexual desire is described in a very "virginal" manner, as she wears "blue for luck".⁴⁾ Also, her face is seen as being "spiritual in its ivorylike purity though her rosebud mouth was a genuine Cupid's bow" and it was "flush, delicate as the faintest rosebloom" (*U* 348-9). In Don Gifford's notes, he writes that "ivorylike" represents the "'Tower of Ivory,' an epithet for the Virgin Mary" and that the flush of her face was another epithet for the Virgin, symbolizing the "'Mystical Rose'" (385-6).

The most important example of deviant sexuality occurs when Bloom flagrantly masturbates on a public beach. Not only does Gerty arouse Bloom, but he arouses her as well. At the same time that Bloom and Gerty are fantasizing about each

³⁾ Of course this is not true in certain instances, where the act is done for medical implantation of the sperm into a woman. It is still not the same, as male masturbation cannot directly impregnate a woman.

⁴⁾ Don Gifford writes in his annotated notes for the novel that Joyce had noted for this chapter that "Color: gray, blue [blue is the color of beauty, chaste affections, and true love; it is an attribute of the Virgin Mary]; Symbol: virgin . . ." (Gifford 351).

other, the Roman Catholic church of Mary, Star of the Sea is nearby, holding a service dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The juxtaposition of these individual coincidences makes for a number of noteworthy deviances. The act begins when Gerty notices Bloom. Whenever she makes eye contact with him, his arousal is mentioned, and a slight arousal of hers is hinted at as well: "She felt the warm flush, a danger signal always with Gerty MacDowell, surging and flaming her cheeks," (U 356). Her embarrassment is obvious because of the color of her cheeks; flushed cheeks also denote genital arousal. Paradoxically, she is not the paradigm of virginity, but a temptress whose "transparent stockings" fuel Bloom's fervent imagination (U 358). She knows Bloom is looking at her and she gets pleasure in arousing him as well. The arousal comes to a head when the first mention of his erection is written about:

She could almost see the swift answering flush of admiration in his eyes that set her tingling in every move . . . He was eyeing her as a snake eyes its prey. Her woman's instinct in her told her that she had raised the devil in him, and at the thought a scarlet burning swept from throat to brow till the lovely color of her face became a glorious rose. $(U\ 360)$

Again, "glorious rose" is an epithet for the Virgin. It can also be seen as an allusion to a woman's vagina. While Joyce plays with the Virgin/vagina concept, the service at the church is still going on. Gerty is a symbol of the proverbial virgin-/-whore and Bloom's arousal has not yet reached its climax.

He puts his hands in his pockets and starts to pleasure himself, until Gerty's friend walks over to him to find the time. Interestingly enough, Bloom becomes nervous, "Looking at the church" as the friend approaches him (U 361). Bloom feels guilty for his pleasure, even enough to look towards the church for holy repentance. As the friend walks away, however, he returns to pleasuring himself. The tension mounts as fireworks fill the sky, and Gerty purposely "reveal[s] all her graceful beautifully shaped legs," taunting Bloom to quicken his pleasure (U 365). Joyce delicately writes: "The eyes that were fastened upon her set her pulses

tingling . . . His hands and face were working and a tremor went over her" (U 365). They are both experiencing each other in passion, but Bloom is more physical since he is literally pleasuring himself. They have simultaneous orgasms, his physical and hers emotional, as a

long Roman candle going up over the trees, up, up and in the tense hush, they were all breathless with excitement as it went higher and higher and she had to lean back more and more to look up after it, high, high, almost out of sight, and her face was suffused with a divine; an entrancing blush from staring back and he could see other things too . . . and she let him and she was that he saw and then it went so high it went out of sight a moment and she was trembling in every limb from being bent back so far he had a full view high up above her knee. (U 365-66)

Even from the way Joyce writes the passage, it is climactic. There is hardly any stopping punctuation. Read aloud, the words seem to slowly build to a crescendo until the actual point of the simultaneous orgasm. Joyce writes:

And then a rocket sprang and band shot blind and O! then the Roman candle burst and it was like a sigh of O! and everyone cried O! O! in raptures and it gushed out of it a stream of rain gold hair threads and they shed and ah! They were all greeny dewy stars falling with golden, O so lively! O so soft, sweet, soft! (U 366-67)

The orgasmic cries of "O!" and the words "bang," "burst," and "gushed" specifically pertain to the male ejaculation, and the gentle, feminine words of "dewy," "sweet," and "soft" pertain to the female orgasm. As she is aroused she thinks, "Besides there was absolution so long as you didn't do the other thing before being married" (U 366). Gerty thinks that being sexually aroused is "... only a venial sin and not a mortal sin ... and thus ... it will be easy to confess and receive absolution" (Gifford 394). She is well versed in her catechism, as any good Catholic is, but she obviously is tailoring the rules of impurity to fit her

situation. In the trend of the deviant sexuality in the chapter, Gerty finds nothing creepy or wrong with what just happened, and acknowledges "that was their secret, only theirs, alone" (*U* 367).

The inappropriateness of the sexuality in the chapter continues as Bloom loses his erection when he sees Gerty limp away. "Glad I didn't know it when she was on show. Hot little devil all the same. Wouldn't mind," Bloom thinks (U 368). As he is relaxing after his session, there are quite a lot of incredible thoughts that run through his mind about his genitals and the state that they are in:

Mr Bloom with careful hand recomposed his wet shirt. O Lord, that little limping devil. Begins to feel cold and clammy. Aftereffect not pleasant. Still you have to get rid of it someway . . . This wet very unpleasant. Stuck. Well the foreskin is not back. Better detach. Ow! (*U* 370-73)

Bloom "provides contrasts within his own monologue; and his public masturbation . . . during a service celebrating the virgin has its own sensational irony" (French 233). Sensational and ironic to say the least, Bloom's masturbation fantasies about a young virgin/Virgin on a beach near a church show yet another example of Joyce's deviant Dublin.

Although these examples of deviant sexuality in the *Ulysses* may prove to be uncomfortable, they also play a role where this act of self-pleasure is positive and helps to liberate the characters. Bloom's self gratifying act helps him on his way home, just like Nausicaa does for Odysseus. Although he desires other women, he never physically cheats on Molly;⁵⁾ he stays faithful through his "interaction" with Gerty, showing an example of how this experience is liberating. These women always remind him of Molly, eventually having him recall happy memories of their life together: "Tired I feel now. Will I get up? O wait. Drained all the manhood

⁵⁾ In Christianity, thinking about someone sexually other than a spouse is adulterous. Bloom is certainly overstepping social and moral boundaries by doing this private act in public. He may be physically faithful, but his mind is certainly deviant and sinful (in the mind of the Catholic Church).

out of me, little wretch. She kissed me. My youth. Never again. Only once it comes. Or hers" (*U* 377). Molly is the "she" who kissed Bloom in their youth. He acknowledges that his youth has passed and so has hers. Molly's affair somehow saves their marriage because she can still get pleasure since he will not give it to her. Also, Gerty acts as Nausicaa, sending him on his way home; after he wakes up from his nap after being "taken care of" by Gerty, he continues on his voyage back home. "Longest way round is the shortest way home," (377) Bloom realizes. From this scene between them, he realizes certain tensions in his life and allows Gerty to strengthen him "not only by providing the stimulus for his masturbation, but by choosing him now as Molly chose him in the past" (Peake 246).

Gerty also experiences her own liberation. Even though she is fueling Bloom's fire, she becomes very empowered by this situation. She is a young woman, probably a bit insecure as all young women are, but she is confident and aware of her sexuality, and that is quite powerful: "She had to go but they would meet again, there, and she would dream of that till then," (U 367). She walks away from this situation comfortably and yearns to see him again. It is with this maturity and romanticism that she does not fall victim to the barren world that Joyce believed he was living in.

The overwhelming presence of sexual deviancy in *The Waste Land* and the flaunting of sexual taboos in *Ulysses* reflect how Eliot and Joyce viewed the post-war relationships between man and woman. Eliot saw the relationships taking place between man and woman as sinful and deviant and expressed that in *The Waste Land*; the emptiness and lack of passion characterizing the relationships between people is omnipresent in this poem. While sexuality is often portrayed in a dark light in *The Waste Land*, Eliot is not so bitter as to say that there is no hope for mankind. There are several flickers of hope sprinkled throughout *The Waste Land*. Joyce also reacts to the sexual deviancy he sees taking place around him in *Ulysses*; however, whereas Eliot seems to be judging the sexual deviants, Joyce sees them as people who are not afraid to challenge societal norms. Joyce does not judge Bloom and Gerty for their public display of affection. He gives his readers

the impression that there is a positive function to Bloom's relationship with Gerty and even the Catholic church looming in the background has little effect on the consciences of these ardent paramours. Despite the fact that Eliot and Joyce had different worldviews on sexual deviancy, what is important is that they were expressing their thoughts about this hitherto taboo subject. What is revolutionary about these works is that Eliot and Joyce opened up a new dimension for literature. Now, at last, writers could explore human sexuality in their writing with more freedom. By pushing the narrow limits imposed on Victorian writers with regard to topics of a sexual nature, Eliot and Joyce helped to open up a more honest exploration of human sexuality in literature for subsequent generations of writers.

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Abstract

Deviant Sexuality and Positive Outcomes in Ulysses and The Waste Land

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This essay aims to highlight the forms of deviant sexuality in the "Nausicaa" episode of *Ulysses* and the sections "A Game of Chess" and "The Fire Sermon" in *The Waste Land*. At the same time, uncovering biographical details from the authors' personal lives can help us to understand why they were so fixated on this type of sexuality and may aid us in understanding why these deviant behaviors can be a form of positive outcomes and liberation for the characters and/or societies in the works.

■ Key words: James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land, Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom, Gerty MacDowell, Deviant Sexuality (제임스 조이스, T. S. 엘리엇, 『황무지』, 『율리시스』, 리오폴드 블룸, 거티 맥도웰, 성적 일탈)

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