

NEW DIRECTIONS IN IRISH AND IRISH AMERICAN LITERATURE



JAMES JOYCE AND THE REVOLT OF LOVE

MARRIAGE, ADULTERY, DESIRE

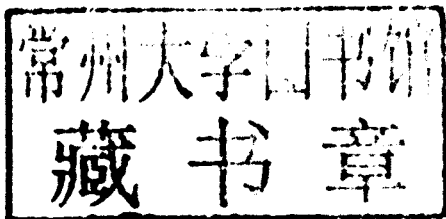
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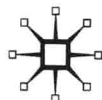
*James Joyce and the
Revolt of Love*

Marriage, Adultery, Desire

Janine Utell



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Marriage, Adultery, Desire*

by Janine Utell

The foundation of such a method is love.

—Albert Rosenfeld

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the text:

<i>D</i>	<i>Dubliners</i> , ed. Margot Norris (New York: Norton, 2006)
<i>E</i>	<i>Exiles</i> (New York: Viking, 1951)
<i>FW</i>	<i>Finnegans Wake</i> (New York: Penguin, 1999). References are to page and line numbers, e.g., <i>FW</i> 585.24. Chapters are indicated by book and chapter numbers, e.g., III.4.
<i>GJ</i>	<i>Giacomo Joyce</i> (New York: Viking, 1968)
<i>JJ</i>	<i>James Joyce</i> , by Richard Ellmann, revised edition (New York: Oxford UP, 1982)
<i>Letters I, II, III</i>	<i>Letters of James Joyce</i> , vol. I, ed. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Viking, 1966); vols. II and III, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking, 1966)
<i>OCPW</i>	<i>Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing</i> , ed. Kevin Barry (New York: Oxford UP, 2000)
<i>SL</i>	<i>Selected Letters of James Joyce</i> , ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking, 1975)
<i>U</i>	<i>Ulysses</i> , ed. Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior (New York: Random House, 1986). References are to episode and line numbers, e.g., <i>U</i> 7.150.

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Introduction

Joyce's Sexual/Textual Ethics

Dear me, when one thinks of it, one must admit that art owes a great deal to adultery.

—Moore 135

In a 1904 letter to the girl who would become his lifelong companion—much of that life spent together unmarried—James Joyce writes, “No human being has ever stood so close to my soul as you stand...I honour you very much but I want more than your caresses” (*Letters II* 50). He seeks to know and to be known; he seeks a caress that will bridge not just physical but ontological distance. But Joyce’s intellectual and political leanings, shared by many progressive thinkers of his day, led him away from marriage, despite his profound desire to become one with his beloved, Nora Barnacle. In a May 1905 letter to his brother Stanislaus, Joyce writes, “It is a mistake for you to imagine that my political opinions are those of a universal lover: but they are those of a socialistic artist. I cannot tell you how strange I feel sometimes in my attempt to live a more civilized life than my contemporaries. But why should I have brought Nora to a priest or a lawyer to make her swear away her life to me?” (*Letters II* 89). In spite of, or perhaps even because of, his deep love for this other person, he chose not to marry her. He sought a transcendent, soul-merging union—not a connection formed through exchange and use.

Yet, an interesting question arises: if Joyce found the institution of marriage to be so problematic, why does he continually explore it, even affirm it? Why does marriage become, over the course of his *oeuvre*, the site of ethical love when his rejection of its foundations and constraints would seem to indicate the opposite? Why is adultery accepted not only as part of the marital world of two, but even presented as potentially transformative? How does Joyce reconcile the desire for fusion and the pain of separation, and even come to celebrate that tension?

This book will attempt to answer these questions. I propose that marriage and all its complexity is the crucible in which Joyce formulates a conception of ethical love, a figuring through that takes place in his work and letters, from *Exiles* and *Giacomo Joyce* to *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. In his fictive world (and letters, themselves arguably a fictive world in their own right), James Joyce imagines marriage to be the ideal means for two people to come together—a complete joining.¹ However, such a complete joining of two, the classic romantic ideal of merging, is impossible. Furthermore, marriage itself is fraught with destructive social conventions and a tendency toward instrumentality, particularly the model of marriage rejected by Joyce and his more progressive contemporaries. Love in the work of Joyce is part of his “lifelong engagement with an ever-denser and more impenetrable otherness” (Mahaffey, *States* 144). Marriage should be a space wherein a union can occur, transforming the individuals partaking of it into a “we”; yet we find again and again that such a union is impossible, or that to fully partake of that merging is to subsume the self into objecthood. Thus for Joyce, marriage—and its dark margin, adultery—becomes a site instead for grappling with, confronting, facing, and ultimately recognizing the other.² Adultery in Joyce’s texts highlights the impossibility of complete oneness, while also highlighting the ethical necessity of acknowledging that impossibility. We want to be one, and I cannot; I want you to desire me only, but that negates you as a person, as a desiring subject.

This study will focus on marital love in all its forms. Marital love—couplehood—between two adults includes (ideally) erotic attraction and connection, companionship, an impulse toward mutual understanding and sacrifice, a commitment to creating a world of two. The demise of such love results in alienation, disaffection, mutual acrimony, and defeat, an inability to see the other as valuable in and of him or herself. Nancy Tuana and Laurie Shrage make the following claim for marriage: “Marriage prevents us from using others merely as instruments for fulfilling our sexual appetites, for marital partners satisfy their sexual desires as part of a lasting relationship in which each treats and regards the other as a human being” (17). The commitment evinced in this description to a nonutilitarian stance, to a rejection of instrumentality, to an embracing of mutual flourishing has been an ideal for marriage from the Victorian period, with the emergence of companionate marriage, to our own; however, in his letters and elsewhere, we see

Joyce articulating a darker view—wives and mothers become victims, men are brutal and lost, and the larger sense of the human within and without that microcosm of the marital couple is nowhere to be found. We see in his work, then, a playing out and a playing with different conceptions of physical, emotional, and ontological union.

The title of this project, *James Joyce and the Revolt of Love: Marriage, Adultery, Desire*, comes from Charles Albert's 1910 book *L'Amour Libre*, an examination of free love and marriage reform; one of many owned and read by Joyce. Like many other intellectuals and social critics writing about marriage at the turn of the century, Albert's critique rests on the idea of marriage being a "simoniacal" relationship based on a vision of human erotic relationships characterized purely by instrumentality and exchange. Adultery, for Albert, is "the revolt of love against marriage" (qtd. in Kershner 259).³ Illicit desire becomes a space in which to explore questions of autonomy, selfhood, and value; it is a revolutionary move against conventional and utilitarian understandings (or lack thereof) of the erotic. It is precisely this revolt that Joyce is staging in his work: a revolt against conventional frameworks of marriage that stifle desire, restrict individuals, and keep men and women from *seeing* the person they love and recognizing that person as autonomous and, separate.

In this introductory chapter, I will focus on some historical context, particularly Joyce's reading and writing into the debates and texts of his time surrounding marriage, such as Albert's book, as well as the exploration of a theory and practice of ethical love that I see emerging through Joyce's representation of marriage and adultery. My work is grounded somewhat in a historicist approach, somewhat in the formulation and application of a philosophical vocabulary. The intersection of these two elements provides the aesthetic and ethical equipment needed to explore ways of loving and ways of understanding the other in Joyce: how to love better, how to approach the beloved in his or her infinite distance and unknowability, how to recognize the face of the other and not turn away.

Context

Much valuable work has been done by Joyce scholars on the author's political, social, and cultural context, as well as his

engagement with that context. The consideration of the ways in which his works are part of the “circulation” of ideas and debates of his time, to use Cheryl Herr’s language, forms a significant foundation to this study, as does Richard Brown’s early important text, *James Joyce and Sexuality*. I will not rehash every scholarly intervention into this area, but I will selectively draw upon the contributions these scholars have made, both in their contextual findings and in their discussions of what Joyce did with that context.

Readers of Joyce who focus on his engagement with the intellectual and social debates of his time note that a significant area of concern for the author was the vociferous public conversation taking place around sex and marriage during the Victorian and Edwardian periods. The debates surrounding divorce as part of the passage of the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, the late Victorian purity movement, the scandals of Charles Stewart Parnell’s involvement in the divorce trial of Katharine and Willie O’Shea, Oscar Wilde’s libel case and subsequent trial for homosexuality—all created an atmosphere in the late Victorian period wherein sex, marital or not, was part of the public square. R. Brandon Kershner captures the multivalent quality of turn-of-the-century discussions of sex and marriage:

For the Edwardians, the major difficulty in addressing the problem of marriage and fidelity was in knowing where to stop, for at each point this central social institution was connected to a multitude of other institutions... The specter of feminism, socialism, and sexual education arise almost automatically from such questions... Others concentrated upon reform of the antiquated divorce laws, which seemed to underline bourgeois sexual hypocrisy by producing scandalously explicit divorce trials of the sort that ruined Parnell. These trials were followed assiduously by a public that professed shock at the idea of reading Zola’s yellow-backed novels. (255)

In addition, those participating in these conversations were concerned with prostitution, birth control, population growth rates, free love, and the burgeoning field of sexology as practiced by Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter, Krafft-Ebing, and Marie Stopes, all of whose texts Joyce knew and read. What should be clear from this brief catalog of the issues is that people were confused, hypocritical, puritanical, and prurient: it should all look very familiar, a point echoed by both Trevor Fisher in his study of

Victorian scandal and Samuel Hynes in his survey of Edwardian society. Tracey Teets Schwarze in her study of Joyce and the Victorians sees Joyce engaging very explicitly in these currents, writing that he "repeatedly marks gender constructs, colonial politics, and religiosity as the dominant ideological forces of this time and reiterates the difficulties of existing and creating outside their sphere as well as his determination to do so" (4).

These issues were complicated even further in Ireland, where the Roman Catholic Church held almost total hegemony over a significant part of the population in terms of such personal questions. As one priest put it in a paper read at the Social Science Congress in Dublin in October 1881, "Both the Church and the State have the highest reasons for endeavouring to regulate the laws and customs regarding marriage as it is so intimately connected with morality and property" (Carre 289). This voice of the Church makes clear the link between morality and property, as well as the regulatory quality inherent in marriage and its relationship to the rest of society. The marriage question and issues of reform took on a different hue in Ireland in another area: the *Ne Temere* debate. The decree of *Ne Temere* was issued by Pius X in 1907 ("*ne temere*" meaning "not rashly," the opening words of the document); it extended the clandestinity requirements of the Council of Trent to state that a Catholic priest had to be present at all marriages, a ruling that impacted Catholics everywhere, including the United Kingdom, and especially in Ireland. The ramifications of the law were that mixed marriages could be defined as no longer valid; priests could refuse to perform mixed marriages without strict and punitive conditions like conversion, and marriages that took place in front of a registrar or other civil official were considered void. The debate was significant in that it highlighted across the United Kingdom the tension between individual desires and the power structures of Church and State that bind and regulate them; the realm of private erotic life was, in the case of the *Ne Temere* controversy, infiltrated in a very public way by these competing power structures. Joyce was certainly aware of the debate, both as an Irish citizen and as a resident of Trieste, itself a very heterogeneous city, when the decree was made.⁴ The ensnaring of the individual within these constraints on private erotic life is precisely the issue against which Joyce struggled in his life and writing, a struggle at the foundation of his ethics.

In the individual's personal life, confession played an enormous role in the construction of sexual identity and sexual practice, as Mary Ann Lowe-Evans and Wolfgang Streit both show. The overdetermination of sexual discourse as perpetrated by the Roman Catholic Church, coupled with the culture of surveillance and restriction of thought and movement that came with living in a colonial society, led to a world in which individual autonomy was a privilege extended to few.⁵

Beyond the religious and political, Joyce was well aware of other limitations placed on both men and women in terms of their erotic lives; these were intimately linked to further economic and social constraints. As many have pointed out, *Dubliners* is a depiction of the economic, social, political, religious, and familial restrictions placed on individuals, wrought with what C. L. Innes characterizes as "sociological accuracy" (70). Florence Walzl's readings of *Dubliners* focus specifically on the utilitarian attitude toward marriage I argue Joyce is questioning; not only was there no room for "romance," but men and women barely regarded each other as human: marriage was "a deliberate, unromantic business involving acquisition of money and property on the bridegroom's part in exchange for presumed security on the bride's" (35). (*Dubliners* also provides an early demonstration of some of Joyce's ideas around marriage and fidelity, as I note briefly in chapter four.) Lowe-Evans, in her monograph on Joyce and population control, argues that the economic and social concerns connected to marriage—ideology, security, exchange, duty—became in a sense crimes, against individual autonomy, humanity, and desire. Bonnie Kime Scott has detailed the impossible roles women were forced to take and uphold, the "ideal of the Irish colleen," beholden to "Victorian English dictates of femininity" and submissive to their husbands' power and society's demands that they "procreate and serve" (13–14). Yet, as young men writing for *Dublin University Magazine* argued in 1862, these idealizations were no good for men, either. Neither men nor women benefit when the individual members of a couple are deprived of their selfhood, as many Victorian and Edwardian commentators on marriage claimed, from John Stuart Mill to Marie Stopes. One writer claimed in the May 1862 issue that in a good marriage, "Man and woman are each to work out their own scheme of inner life, to enforce upon themselves only their own discipline, and to do each their own duty... The two counterparts are not fused into one, but are brought into close parallelism; they run on in the

same direction, each to its own limit" ("Marriage" 549). This relatively enlightened view of marriage is one Joyce came to share; as we witness in his letters to his companion-later-wife Nora Barnacle, the romantic ideal of merging, of union, is one Joyce held in marriage. It was through the ethical and epistemological trials we will see him undergo in his texts that he came to see that such merging is impossible, even finally undesirable.

Joyce engaged with these debates both as a writer and as a man. Kershner writes, "Roughly between 1900 and 1915, Joyce apparently gave a great deal of serious thought to the problem of sexuality and marriage. In this he was entirely representative of 'advanced' thought of the period in the British Isles" (253). It was once a commonplace of Joyce studies that Joyce was apolitical; it has now become a commonplace that Joyce was deeply involved in political thought of his time. Nevertheless, it is worth noting again, as Dominic Maganiello does in one of the earliest studies to claim a political Joyce, that the cosmopolitan author tended toward progressive movements of all kinds. In fact, Manganiello points out specifically that for Joyce, "the brutalism of love and politics were interconnected," and he viewed the cruelty toward women perpetrated by the Irish to be linked to the colonial oppression and degradation of the Irish (51–52). Joyce, however, did also put into practice his progressive political ideas, as we have seen. Having watched his own mother waste away and die as a victim of the system against which he was rebelling, Joyce had no intention of subjecting his own lover—and her subjecthood—to the same fate.⁶

I hope to show that Joyce *did* value marriage in its potential for erotic union; as we shall see in his 1909 letters to Nora Barnacle, discussed in the next chapter, marriage construed otherwise than a sublunary site of exchange and use, regulated by society and regulating of desire, was a very powerful idea. Marriage could be union, it could be that idealized merging of selves. But what happens when the "act of union" is "repealed" (FW 584.25)? When Joyce realized that such union was actually impossible, a realization made over the course of his time in Trieste in the early years of his conjugal relationship with Nora—an educative period culminating in the twin stunners of the discovery of Nora's possible betrayal with a friend during their 1904 courtship and Joyce's infatuation with the "dark lady" of *Giacomo Joyce*—he turned to examining *why* union between lovers is impossible, and ultimately undesirable.⁷ The instrument by which this examination might unfold is adultery, a threat to marriage that hinges on the desire