

Nick Montes

Jarica Watts

English 376

15 December, 2016

Montes 1

Mary Magdalene's Key, The Witch, and the Parted Wardrobe: Female Sexuality and the Occult in Joyce's "Clay" and Lawrence's "Tickets, Please"

Many scholars have acknowledged that James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence approached Modernism from two very different walks of literary theory. Joyce was writing amongst elitists such as Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound, and Katherine Mansfield, all of whom ascribed to a belief in art superseding the need for vulgar money. Michael Bell neatly describes the sentiment that these avant-garde figures held for Lawrence, where on one occasion Pound referred to him as "detestable" (179). In fairness to Pound and the avant-garde, Lawrence unabashedly bartered away his literature "as a way of making 'running money'" (Coroneos and Tate 103). But Pound did Lawrence no better justice in detesting his approach to modernism in a commerce driven periodical marketplace, than he did in ignoring Joyce's renowned ability to drink away every penny he made from his own literature. To deny that commerce was driving the rise in popularity of literature would be a blind approach to both Joyce and Lawrence's works which were published in the little magazines of the time. The context in which they originally appear is as important as their content. But I would like to focus in more heavily on the content of these stories as they appeared in their original context; effectively putting them back into a true modernist framework.

Scholars Con Coroneos and Trudi Tate stumbled upon a gold mine in their wide overview of *Lawrence's tales*, that proves useful to contextualize Joyce and Lawrence as modernists when they suggest that his work "effortlessly integrat[ed] the most occult concepts with everyday gossip and malice..." (113). While their definition of occult suggests only that

Lawrence was fidgeting with subordinate and at times subversive ideas and intermingling them with external experience, I would like to carry this definition a bit further in consideration of both Lawrence's "Tickets, Please," and how it differs from Joycean scholars' interpretation of "Clay." Both Lawrence and Joyce were indeed fascinated with both things occult and symbols of the Occult. Nothing can be ruled out when considering how Lawrence interlaced religion, sexuality, and sadism. In 1908 Lawrence declared that "If I had my way I would build a lethal chamber as big as the Crystal Palace, with a military band playing softly...then I'll go out on the backstreets and main streets and bring them in, all the sick, the halt, and the maimed, I would lead them gently, and they would smile me a weary thanks; and the band would softly bubble out the 'Hallelujah Chorus'" (Lawrence 30). This is echoed in "Tickets, Please" when Lawrence writes of the tram drivers: they "are men unfit for active service: hunchbacks and cripples. So they have the spirit of the devil in them" (Lawrence 225). Lethal chambers, the hallelujah chorus, cripples, and the spirit of Satan? Lawrence was clearly dabbling in the occult. Women were, for the first time, entering into what were previously considered singularly masculine roles. This coupled with the devastating effects of the First Great War, created a reactionary culture in modern literature that manifested more rapidly than ever before in a periodical culture that was saturating society. Joyce and Lawrence dealt very differently on many levels with the sudden upending of both religion and gender roles, but both were steered down darker paths that had scarcely been trodden before. They were both driven to a fascination with sexuality and religion. Their fascination manifested in their literature; that is in their usage of Occult symbols to supplement gaps created by the rise of new female sexuality and the death of God in a war torn world.

Written in the space between the World Wars, "Tickets, Please," is the story of a young tram inspector, John Thomas Raynor, in the midlands of England, who makes a sport of seducing each of the conductresses along his route. After seducing conductress Annie Stone, John Thomas breaks off their relationship abruptly when he realizes that she has begun to develop deeper attachment to him. When Annie discovers that John Thomas has started seducing other conductresses, she devises a plan to confront him with 6 other tram girls. Over a pot of tea, the conductresses subdue and attack John Thomas in the equivalent frenzy of a date-rape. Bloodied and beaten they force John Thomas to pick one of them as his bride. When Annie is chosen, she is filled with mixed emotion. Despite her sadistic lust for blood vengeance, she has the key to the door and allows John Thomas to leave disrobed and defeated with torn wrists, in similitude to the crucified Christ. The story is Lawrence's way of dealing with the upheaval of empowered women post-WWI and hypothesizing about what a world of newly empowered feminine sexual dominance would look like—bleak to say the least, from Lawrence's perspective.

In each story we are given a Mary Magdalene figure (Annie Stone and Maria respectively) who is at some point in the story given a key of some sort. Perhaps this is because both Joyce and Lawrence were responding to similar forces at play in post-Victorian society from parallel but dissimilar angles. Michael Bell draws the similar conclusion that Lawrence's work was "in a relation of significant parallel to dominant currents of modernism" similar to those being explored in the narrative voice of Joyce or Woolf (Bell 181). For example, publishing a short story in a collection of one's own collected works, such as *Dubliners*, would have allowed Joyce to remain ambivalent in his political views. A short story published in a magazine must engage with the many voices of commercialism and political opinion that surround it throughout the magazine. Lawrence denied himself the luxury of ambivalence by first

publishing his piece for financial reasons in *Strand Magazine* in 1919 (Coroneos and Tate 103). Thus while sexuality and its cross over into religion was being explored allegorically by both Joyce and Lawrence, the marked periodical culture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century led them to dissimilar conclusions about what that meant in terms of forming a modernist theory. Modernism is for this reason pinned with the formalizing or rebellion or dissimilarities in the fabric of literature.

Few scholars have addressed the overt connection that Lawrence makes between symbols of sexuality and symbols of religion in “Tickets Please.” One such scholar, Li Hongmei, said of the sexual tension between Lawrence’s two antagonists, Annie Stone and John Thomas Raynor, that it was a “crippled love” (2288). While this seems a little obvious, provided that we are told that the conductors are all physically handicapped within the context of the story, Hongmei does present a starting point to evaluate whether or not Lawrence was twisting religious symbols. Hongmei draws attention to the importance of the main characters’ names, in particular John’s nickname “Coddy” and the meaning behind Annie’s name. Hongmei argues:

“In The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names, “Annie”, first name of one tram conductress, is defined as being graceful, easy to love and full of favor (Withycombe, 1977, p.25). But all the feminine attributes are what “Annie” can hardly be found as the conductress. On the contrary her surname “Stone”, which is evocative of a hard, mineral substance, is quite in coincidence with her inflexible demeanor for asserting her new soldier-like authority...” (2288).

Indeed, Annie hardly fits the feminine role that her first name implies, rather she channels a kind of roughness from her surname that Victorian chauvinism would have found undesirable.

Hongmei merely touches upon the reference that John’s nickname makes to the codpiece: an article of clothing worn about the loins to accentuate or make more prominent the male genitalia (2288). While I concede the obvious reference that is made to John Thomas’ phallus, it is more than a sly nod to the phallic old world by Lawrence. “Coddy” is also an allusion to the fish that

owns this name. While this too is an obvious claim, this is Lawrence's way of turning the Christian symbol of the Ichthys fish into a symbol that represents the Occult.

Lawrence's is clearly uncovering the Occult nature in even the most widely beloved symbol of Christ next to the cross itself. Ichthys was a secretive Christian used to identify one Christian to another—pre-Constantine era (*Encyclopedia of the Bible Online*). One of the first theologians to truly coin the Greek term behind the symbol with two swooping arcs forming a fish, was Tertullian:

“The use of the Greek word *ἰχθύς* (fish) in a Latin context indicates that Tertullian used coined language, i.e., an established and well-known title or metaphor. In all likelihood he already knew the famous acrostic *ΙΧΘΥΣ* = Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς Θεοῦ Υἱὸς Σωτὴρ [meaning] Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior” (*Encyclopedia of the Bible Online*).

While the Ichthys was a well-known symbol of Christ, predating Christianity's adoption, it was also a pagan symbol of female fertility. Although in Christianity the fish became a symbol of the masculine divinity, arguably a phallic allusion of masculine dominance, Lawrence has turned it back in time to its vaginal root as a symbol of female supremacy in society. Even John Thomas who is once again a reference to male fertility we see a distaste for his nickname. Why should he be bothered by the nickname “Coddy” should it be a genuine reference to his dominance, unless in reality the name is really a renaming of the emergence of the woman as the dominant figure. Luckily Lawrence doesn't leave us in any doubt. Looking back at the story we are told that he is only slighted as Coddy “in malice” when he is caught flirting “with the girl conductors in the morning, and walks out with them in the dark night” (Lawrence, 226-7). To Lawrence, much of the mystic symbolism of Christianity was the Occult, due to its historic need for secrecy of practice. John Thomas is the fallen Christ in that he has fallen under the condemnation of the pharisaic looks cast “in malice” upon him when he reenacts, as Christ did, walking amongst the

prostitutes (226). The modern Christ figure to Lawrence is one who does more than walking amongst rough women such as Annie Stone; he actually takes part in sexual acts with each as is implied with his entering with them into “the dark night” (227). The malice is that of the female figures in the story, the tram-girls, who desire to tear down the false façade of power that the male God incarnate, John Thomas, wields over them. The darkness of the night is the black nature of the Ichthys, with its desire to enslave the female consciousness with its secret Eucharist.

While Lawrence believed in a “star equilibrium” between the sexes (Hongmei), Joyce was more passive albeit just as vocal about the shift in sexual power. For our purposes, Lawrence’s equilibrium is the relational balance between a man and a woman and the sexual power that each wields. Likened to a Christian priesthood, Lawrence believed that should the masculine dominance fail, and the woman should change “sex relations between newly empowered women-in-work and the men on the Home Front,” that society should fall (Coroneos and Tate 108). Scholars liken Lawrence’s literary tone to that of Nietzsche who says “‘Could it be possible? This old saint in the forest has not yet heard anything of this, that *God is dead?*’” (117). Lawrence saw the war’s empowerment of women as a symbol of the Modern Christ crucified. “Tickets, Please” is a reluctant, and malicious, prediction on Lawrence’s part of what would happen should the sexual energy, the equilibrium of masculine power as he saw it, be passed into the hands of women. While Lawrence seems to be writhing in prophetic doom over this passing of the torch, Joyce’s female figure Maria from “Clay” seems less doomsdayistic in its calm disinterested approach to the woman empowered. We know that she is one of the few empowered women in Joyce in that we are told that she “didn’t want any ring or man either” (Joyce 84). While empowered by her choice to avoid both servitude to a man or being committed

to a masculine God, she is constantly reminded by her fellows that she does not fit her Christian surroundings. Maria purposefully omits the second verse from the song *I dreamt that I dwelt* we are told that “no one tried to show her her mistake” (Joyce 89). There is no mistake in her intentional omission, as Maria is not as her namesake would suggest—the lowly incarnation of Mary Magdalene—instead she is empowered by her secret subversion of societal constraints that would force her to be married to man or Christ. We know that she is a Magdalenian figure when Joyce connects her to the laundry where she works to help fallen women (reformed protestant prostitutes) to regain their position in society. Although she is Magdalenian, she is not atypical for she lacks a love for the Word made flesh in the form of “the tracts on the walls” which she “didn’t like” (84).

Joyce even presents ample opportunity for Maria to yield her sexual powers to a masculine figure in the form of the “colonel-looking” man on the train. While his hat and mustache would suggest him to be another phallic reference, I assert that he is in fact the realization of the wizard on the tarot card while Maria is merely an “aberration of the male Magician” (Watts 9). She nods and hems demurely for him at his exposure, but in the end she maintains the secret that she is unwed, allowing him to believe that “the bag was full of good things for the little ones” (86). The true thing that is occult in Maria is her connection to the Occult.

While I have found the arguments made by Margot Norris regarding the representation of the clay as “Number-Two” and an opportunity for the children to “gratify their aggression toward Maria” (Norris 212) intriguing, I am most convinced by Jarica Watts’ interpretation of the clay as indeed a “clé,” the French word meaning key. Watts discusses in what way this key serves as a decoding mechanism based upon “paronomasia” and the numerology of the Catholic

Church, the Tarot, and the Kabalistic systems (Watts 1). A part of the key that she offers in her analysis of the Occult that I find most useful in building an argument for Maria as an empowered Magdalenian figure, is her assertion that “the most prominent duality in the story” is “namely, the intersection between marriage and religion” (2) and that Maria seen through an Occult lens, is indicated by the “number four” to be “a witch” (7). Her features are witch-like as we are reminded time after time by Joyce that “the tip of her nose nearly met the tip of her chin” (Joyce 84). This is a signifier in that it is an indication that Maria is wielding some kind of Occult power in the text. For instance, if we read in the gap where she is first portrayed as witchlike in the presence of the women at the laundry, we are told that the other woman is “a common woman,” and the gap being that Maria is anything but common herself. But then women who wield power that subverts Christian constraints have always been portrayed as sorceresses and were often burned at the stake as heretics. Joyce who may or may not have been indulging in a bit of potty humor had never been above shaming the female in her sexual identity. As a boy he and his brother would torment their nanny by playing what they called “the spanking game” in which they would hide and run out and swat their female caretaker on the backside, before running away (Stewart). Joyce was, in “Clay,” again running away after the secretive and the occult sexuality, as he had done as a boy.

The “clé” is as much a Joycean pun for female empowerment as it is the signifier for both sexual and religious power in Lawrence. The signal in Lawrence first appears in the scene where the women enter into one Lawrence’s states of “sexual panic” and lock John Thomas in until he has chosen whom he will marry (Coroneos and Tate 107). John Thomas responds by demanding that they “Open the blasted door” in a voice of “official authority” (Lawrence 233). But Lawrence surprises us when we are shocked to discover, following the state of “sexual

panic” that Cuddy’s false pretense at power is as falsely padded as the glorified jock strap from whence his nickname is derived (Coroneos and Tate 107). In fact, it is Annie who is given the “clé” or as it appears in the story: “Annie’s got the key” (Lawrence 237). Between both modernist texts which approach female empowerment there is at least a concordance in the signs and signifiers used.

While we have already addressed Joyce’s chosen witch, or Magdalenian for our purposes, but we have yet to identify an emasculated Christ figure. But Joyce has done that for us. In the story, from whom was it that Maria, who denies partaking of alcohol up to this point, accepts “a glass of wine” (Joyce 88). While I assert that Joe is indeed a weak Christ figure, it would not be beneath Joyce for him to manifest a Christ figure in the form of the stereotypically drunk Irish male. Several things indicate this to us. First is that Maria has already been saved the effort of partaking in a first communion of “plumcake” by the man on the tram who seems to have confused her into forgetting it on the car (85). Then when she is offered the second communion, the wine, we are told that “Joe made Maria take a glass of wine.” Joe and everyone else who has been quite rude to her up to this point in the story is suddenly merry in the thought of Maria entering “a convent” before the end of the year (88). Watts raises a useful observation here that her being a witch figure “predestines her ‘to bring discord to those she most desires to share happiness with’” as she is paralyzed by the dualisms of a Catholic constraint (Watts 9). And yet Joe is weeping when the story closes. He does not weep out of sadness that the woman has been empowered. We are told that “he could not find what he was looking for and in the end he had to ask his wife to tell him where the corkscrew was” (Joyce 89). I assert that what he is looking for is his own glass of wine. I interpret this being that what he is to drunk and emotionally overcome to find is that the glass of wine that Maria is drinking was his glass. He has become to drunken to

notice that the woman has stepped forward and stolen his wine; the symbol of his divine blood, if you will.

Just as Joyce offers us a drunken Christ figure who is defeated by female authority, John Thomas is a fallen Christ figure in the parting of his robes in the story. In the 35<sup>th</sup> verse of the 27<sup>th</sup> chapter of the King James Version of the New Testament we are told that “they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots... they parted my garments amongst them.” Similarly, in the wild ritualistic frenzy of beating down John Thomas his own robes are metaphorically parted and allotted to each girl. Nora held his “collar,” one “tore his tunic off his back,” and another bared his arms and received “his shirtsleeves” (Lawrence 234). The duality in the Christian narrative and in Lawrence’s work is undeniable. We know that this story is an apocalyptic narrative due to the signifier of the two horses of destruction at the fair—one called “Black Bess” and the other “Wildfire”—and Lawrence’s earlier referenced belief that female empowerment meant the end of God and the world as he knew it. While the crucifixion story of Jesus is redeemed by the resurrection, Lawrence’s tale has no resurrection. Even as “his wrists were torn” and he lies bleeding on the station depot floor, “without a word or a sign he was gone” (234, 236). In the same mode as T.S. Eliot’s poetry, Lawrence’s Christ figure is crucified and departs this world without hope of return or a whimper.

The evidence at the end of the story suggests that the power of sexual dominion is already gone for Lawrence and that Christ and the masculine power of the phallus has in effect been castrated. This is a ritual killing as we are told by Annie who sits astride John Thomas’ chest and the girls stand in a circle moaning in “Oh-h-hs and sighs” and she shouts that “you ought to be killed” and they found “themselves filled with supernatural strength” (235). Once again we are told that “Annie’s got the key,” and immediately following her offering of the key “silently” to

the girls we are told that “his head dropped.” This scene of ritual carnage is signaling that he has given up the ghost and that his power has gone out of him and entered into the hands of first Annie, and then the rest of the women. Occult legend has it that Mary Magdalene could have been a reformed prostitute who was occultly married to Christ. But what are we to do with the fact that neither Annie Stone nor John Thomas ultimately desire to be married to each other? The answer is in the type of Christ figure that is crucified in Lawrence’s tale. In the New Testament Christ was able to be resurrected because he was an unblemished lamb; a man without sin. The darkness of the night in which John Thomas fornicates with each of the women in turn tells us that he is tarnished and cannot be redeemed nor can he redeem. History would tell us that masculine power, chauvinism at its worst, is the bringer of war and not peaceful resolution. Annie’s last name “Stone” is the key (as Peter was the rock upon which Catholicism founded its power, Annie Stone symbolizes the female rock (in an empowered Magdalenian sense) upon which the new age of sexual power is given to women who entered the work force. Bernard-Jean Ramadier asserts that this is “the emblem and instrument of alienating progress” for Lawrence (293). Yet even with all her power, Lawrence depicts her as colic, sadistic, and ultimately too weak to assert complete possession of John Thomas. Lawrence quite literally believed that a female topped hierarchy would bring about the apocalypse

Lawrence’s Mary Magdalene figure, Joyce’s chosen witch, and the parted wardrobe of dominant masculinity are all a part of modernism’s move towards the rise of the sexually empowered female. Both Annie Stone and Maria in some way are able to subvert before the stranglehold of Christianity and the sexual power of an emasculated society. They both avoid the marriage vows; Annie in her moment of choice with John Thomas and Maria in her choice to deny the need for “any ring or man” (Joyce 84). While Joyce was publishing from an elitist

stance, and Lawrence was often publishing out of material need, both are responding to pressure being applied in the modernist arena. On the one hand the competition to be the first to put your literature out there was becoming fiercer than ever before, due to the rise in commerce of the modernist little magazine culture. On the other the First Great War had a tremendous and a traumatic effect upon the literature of the day. Joyce was publishing *Dubliners* in 1914 midway through the war and Lawrence was releasing his rather more apocalyptic commentary on female empowerment during the beginning of the post-War period. Joyce's ambivalence to the situation of the modern women's question was only split ever so slightly by his own need to satisfy his sexual desires. But as for Lawrence, modernism meant the end of his precious equilibrium and the death of the masculine God that he had cared so little about before the rise in female power. But to do due justice to Lawrence's literary consciousness, God had always been dead to his own imagination.

## Works Cited

- Bell, Michael. "Lawrence and Modernism.". Edited by Anne Fernihough., Cambridge UP, 2001, *MLA International Bibliography*.
- Coroneos, Con, and Trudi Tate. "Lawrence's Tales.". Edited by Anne Fernihough., Cambridge UP, 2001, *MLA International Bibliography*
- "Fish, Fishing" *Encyclopedia of the Bible Online*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter. 2014. Retrieved from [http://www.degruyter.com/view/EBR/MainLemma\\_13533](http://www.degruyter.com/view/EBR/MainLemma_13533)
- Joyce, James. "Clay." *Dubliners*. Ed. Margot Norris. Norton Critical Edition. New York: Norton, 2006. 82-89. Print.
- Lawrence, D.H. *The Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence*. Viking Press, 1962, University of Michigan, vol. 1, 2008. pp. 2008.
- Lawrence, D.H. "Tickets Please." *The Penguin Book of First World War Stories*. Ed. Thomas Seltzer. Penguin, (1919) 224-37.
- Li, Hongmei. "A Study of Overturned Sexual Roles in Lawrence's Tickets, Please." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, vol. 3, no. 12, 2013. 2286-2290.
- Norris, Margot, "Narration under a Blindfold: Reading Joyce's 'Clay,'" *PMLA*, 102, no. 2 (1987), 206-15.
- Ramadier, Bernard-Jean. "Dubious Progress in D. H. Lawrence's Tickets, Please." *Short Story Criticism*, edited by Joseph Palmisano, vol. 73, Gale, 2005. *Short Story Criticism Online*, Originally published in *Journal of the Short Story in English*, no. 35, Autumn 2000, pp. 43-54.
- Stewart, Bruce. "Joyce, James Augustine Aloysius (1882–1941)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Eds. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford:

OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. Oct. 2007. "Spanking Game"

Watts, Jarica. "Failed Mary, Stuck in Place: Number Symbolism and the Occult in James Joyce's 'Clay.'" *Hypermedia Joyce Studies* 13.1 (2014): 1-10.