

T. S. ELIOT AND THE MOTHER: AMBIVALENCE, ALLEGORY AND FORM

by

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PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is the first full-length study on T. S. Eliot and the mother in thirty years. Responding to a shortfall in Eliot studies in understanding the true importance of Eliot's poet-mother, Charlotte, to his life and works, it rethinks Eliot's ambivalence towards women in the context of mother-son ambivalence, and shows his search for belief and love as converging with a developing maternal poetics. Utilising the work of feminist and psychoanalytic thinkers seeking to reinstate the mother against Oedipal models of masculinity, it looks at Eliot's changing representations and articulations of the mother/mother-child relationship—from his earliest writings to the later plays. Particular focus is given to mid-career works: 'Ash-Wednesday', 'Marina', 'Coriolan' and *The Family Reunion*. Drawing on newly available materials, this thesis emphasises Charlotte's death as the decisive juncture marking both Eliot's New Life and the apotheosis of the feminine symbolised in 'Ash-Wednesday'. Central to this proposition is a new concept of maternal allegory as a modern mode of literary epiphany. This thesis breaks new ground revealing the role of the mother and the dynamics of mother-son ambivalence to be far more complicated, enduring, changeable and essential to Eliot's personal, religious and poetic development than was previously acknowledged.

In loving memory of

Kevin William Geary

1955-2004

Dedicated with love to Tash and Louis,

Mom, Paul, Rachel and Katie

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Without Contraries is no progression.

William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

NOTE ON THE TEXT AND REFERENCES

For the most part, this study follows the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing Third Edition* (2008). This is to aid clarity, accuracy, ease of reference and to keep interruptions to a minimum. It uses an author-page system to give parenthetical reference to in-text and footnote quotations with author name(s) and page numbers in brackets: '(Smidt 33)'. If the name of the author(s) is in the text then only the page number is referred to in the citation: '(33)'. In a citation to one of two or more works by the same author or authors, the date of composition or publication is included: '(Gordon, 1998: 19)' or 'Gordon (1998)'. If there is only one work by an author then just the author's name is featured unless the date of composition or publication is relevant or important: '(Hall)' or 'Hall'; 'Ingman (1999)'. T. S. Eliot's letters, poetry, prose and plays, as well as archive collections and other frequently cited sources are identified in parentheses by abbreviation and page or call number(s): for example, '(LTSE1, 11; IMH, 16; SW, 47-59; CPP, 285; HL, MS Am 2560/262; CES, 35)'. For periodicals, the date of publication is included '(C., July 1931: 768-74)'. Quotations of Eliot's poems *The Waste Land*, 'Ash-Wednesday' and 'Marina' are exceptions and are cited by line number(s). Well-known works such as the Bible and by authors Dante, Shakespeare, Virgil, Aeschylus and Wordsworth are abbreviated in parentheses. Commonly studied verse plays and poems are cited by division (act, scene, canto, book, part) and line: '(Purg. 30.28-32, Cor. 1.3.17)'. Footnotes are used to give further comment, explanation and information that the text cannot accommodate and for references containing numerous citations or evaluative and extended comments on sources. Full details for both published and unpublished writings, articles, illustrations, photographs, media and other sources are included in the bibliography. The bibliography contains sources both cited and consulted. Entries in the bibliography are arranged in alphabetical order by author's last name or, if unknown, by title. If there are two or more works by the same author(s) then entries are arranged by date. Works sharing the same author(s) and date are ordered by title.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

WORKS BY T. S. ELIOT

- ASG *After Strange Gods: A Primer for Modern Heresy* (London: Faber, 1934)
- AVP *Ara Vos Prec* (London: Ovid, 1920)
- ‘A-W’ ‘Ash-Wednesday.’ *T. S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber, 1969), 87-99, lines 1-219
- CP1 *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 1: Apprentice Years, 1905-1918* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University P, 2014)
- CP2 *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 2: The Critical Edition: The Perfect Critic, 1919-1926* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University P, 2014)
- CPP *T. S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber, 1969)
- FLA *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order* (London: Faber, 1928)
- IMH *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917* (London: Faber, 1996)
- LTSE1 *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 1: 1898-1922* (London: Faber, 2011)
- LTSE2 *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 2: 1923-1925* (London: Faber, 2011)
- LTSE3 *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 3: 1926-1927* (London: Faber, 2012)
- LTSE4 *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 4: 1928-1929* (London: Faber, 2013)
- LTSE5 *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 5: 1930-1931* (London: Faber, 2014)
- OPP *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber, 1971)
- PWEY *Poems Written in Early Youth* (London: Faber, 1967)
- SE *Selected Essays* (London: Faber, 1958)
- SP *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* (Orlando: Harcourt-Brace, 1975)
- SW *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Butler and Tanner, 1920)
- TCTC *To Criticize the Critic, and Other Writings* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1965)
- UPUC *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London: Faber, 1933)
- WL *The Waste Land. T. S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber, 1969), 59-80, lines 1-433
- WLF *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber, 1971)
- VMP *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry* (London: Faber, 1993)

PERIODICALS

- A. *Athenaeum*
C. *Criterion*
D. *Dial*
E. *Egoist*
IJE. *International Journal of Ethics*
NEW. *New English Weekly*
TLS. *Times Literary Supplement*

BY CHARLOTTE ELIOT

- CES Charlotte Eliot Scrapbook. T. S. Eliot Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University
SA *Savonarola: A Dramatic Poem* (London: R. Cobden-Sanderson, 1926)

BY SHAKESPEARE

- Cor. *Coriolanus* (London: Methuen, 2006)
Ham. *Hamlet* (London: Thompson, 2006)
Per. *Pericles* (London: Methuen, 2004)
Tmp. *The Tempest* (London: Cengage, 1999)

OTHER WORKS

- Aen. Virgil. *Aeneid*. Trans. John Dryden (London: Penguin, 1997)
Or. Aeschylus. *The Oresteia: Agamemnon, The Libation Bearers, The Eumenides*. Trans. Robert Fagles (London: Penguin, 1979)
Inf. Dante Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy*. Trans. C. H. Sisson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993)
Pur. Dante Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy*. Trans. C. H. Sisson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993)
Par. Dante Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy*. Trans. C. H. Sisson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993)
Vn. Dante Alighieri. *La Vita Nuova*. Trans. Mark Musa (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992)
Prel. William Wordsworth. *The Prelude* (New York, NY: Norton, 1979)

ARCHIVE COLLECTIONS

<i>B</i>	Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University
<i>BL</i>	Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University
<i>HB</i>	The Hayward Bequest, King's College Modern Archive Centre, Cambridge University
<i>HL</i>	Houghton Library, Harvard University
<i>MH</i>	Missouri History Museum Library and Research Centre, St. Louis
<i>OL</i>	Special Collections, Olin Library, Washington University
<i>RC</i>	Special Collections, Eric V. Hauser Memorial Library, Reed College, Portland

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

OED	Oxford English Dictionary
MS	Manuscript
TS	Typescript

INTRODUCTION: T. S. ELIOT AND THE MOTHER



Fig 1. Michelangelo. *Pietà*. 1498-99. Marble. St Peter's Basilica, Vatican City.

This study takes as its subject T. S. Eliot and the mother. Elisabeth Däumer, a leading scholar on Eliot and the maternal, declares ‘one need not be a psychologist to note from the evidence of T. S. Eliot’s poetry and criticism that the poet had an intensively ambivalent relationship to the maternal’ (1998: 479).¹ His early poetry, climaxing in *The Waste Land* (1922), is ‘haunted by a series of voracious, often voluble, semi-hysterical women who, in their capacity to trap, “formulate”, and disintegrate the male speakers of these poems, exhibit female power at its most frightening’ (479). However, Däumer notes that in the wake of Eliot’s admittance into the Anglo-Catholic Church in 1927, there is a notable turn in his works ‘from images of fatal femininity to those of silent, holy motherhood’ which ‘continue to coexist with representations of maternal excess or neglect’. Such figures of maternal benevolence include

¹ For further comment on Eliot’s ambivalence toward the maternal feminine, see DeKoven (1991: 190-93).

the Virgin Mary from 'Ash-Wednesday' (1930), Agatha from *The Family Reunion* (1939) and Monica from *The Elder Statesman* (1958). Eliot's highly conflicted, often polarised and changing views and representations of women and gender have instigated a vast amount of critical debate with an obvious bifurcation of opinion. As Cyrena Pondrom summarises: there are

those who argue for the misogyny of Eliot's texts, particularly but not exclusively feminist critics (Pinkney; Gilbert and Gubar; Nicholls; DuPlessis); and those who stress the importance of Eliot's vision of a Beatrice-like figure or 'dark angel', usually explicitly female, with whom the poet's personae struggle in his early poetry and who ultimately becomes an intercessory presence or divine vision in his later writing (Gordon; Schuchard).² (Chinitz, 2009: 323-24)

The first-wave feminism that emerged coincident with the rise of literary modernism between 1880 and 1920 considered Eliot the figurehead for an elitist, monolithic conception of modernist culture defined traditionally by the oppressive first term in a series of binaries: *masculine/feminine, reactionary/progressive, high/low*. Accordingly, Eliot was consigned along with the male tradition to 'a masculinist limbo, emptied of women writers, feminist protestors and the feminine' (Laity and Gish 3). Second-wave feminists Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar were prominent in the 1980s and 90s in continuing the charge against modernism as a product of *resentiment* against female literary and social power.³ Notably, Eliot was again attacked and upheld as the forbearer of New Criticism and the central villain framing the ideal order of a patriarchal literary history. These accusations had a near-

² See Pondrom's chapter 'Conflict and Concealment: Eliot's Approach to Women and Gender' (Chinitz, 2009: 323-34).

³ The 'high' feminist stance of Gilbert and Gubar's three part *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (1988, 1989, 1994) daringly attempts to rewrite the masculinist version of modern history by introducing a 'new' modernism through progressive reintroduction of women into the literary and cultural 'no-man's land' previously held by men. They consider the fantasies of violence against women prevalent in Eliot's works—such as *The Waste Land* (1922)—to be 'virile reactions' (1989: 37) to the rising powers of the 'New Woman', indicating male modernist fear of both emasculation and the erosion of male hegemony at the hands of the feminisation of literary culture. Jewel Spears Brooker (1995: 213-30) has vehemently opposed this position citing such proclamations as an instance of female enmity. Brooker indicts Gilbert and Gubar as grossly misrepresenting Eliot through their strict adherence to a binary logic which in turn precludes aspects of Eliot's work which support feminism. See Brooker's chapter 'Tradition and Female Enmity: Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar Read T. S. Eliot' in *Mastery and Escape: T. S. Eliot and the Dialectic of Modernism* (1995: 213-30).

exclusive focus on the negative pole of his ambivalent relation to the feminine.⁴ Gilbert and Gubar's negative polemics toward Eliot were consolidated, if unintentionally, by psychoanalytic criticisms contemporaneous with their radical feminist agenda. For instance, Tony Pinkney's controversial post-Freudian approach in *Women in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot: A Psychoanalytic Approach* (1984) argues for a conflicted relation to the maternal body as compelling Eliot's textual violence toward women.⁵ Similarly, Maud Ellmann's now classic, and more sophisticated, poststructuralist reading of *The Waste Land* in *The Poetics of Impersonality* (1987) also identifies a 'ferocious misogyny' (98) toward the maternal body. Ellmann's important study implies that personal anxieties concerning an unresolved relation to the powerful mother are ultimately responsible for the poem's radical instability, self-division, fragmentation and apocalyptic abjection. Such an implication contradicts and undermines Eliot's and Pound's male modernist ideologies of impersonality, mastery and supremacy, revealing their dependence upon, and attraction to, the maternal femininity that the poem 'reviles' (98).⁶ More recently, Gilbert and Gubar's confrontational standpoint has been revitalised with 'male' and 'female' modernist traditions being treated separately.⁷ Critical attention to Eliot's life and works continues to condemn his relation to women, the maternal and gender. As M. Teresa Gilbert-Maceda points out, when 'discussing Eliot's treatment of women most readers just label (him) misogynist' (Thormählen 105).⁸

⁴ Feminist criticism is vehemently opposed to New Criticism and its claim to neutrality and universality. See Schneller's entry 'New Criticism' in Kowaleski-Wallace 408.

⁵ Pinkney's analysis of Eliot's treatment of women in his poetry is guided by the maxim from the Aristophanic melodrama *Sweeney Agonistes* (1925-26). Pinkney claims 'any Eliotic text has to, needs to, wants to in one way or another do a girl in; and if it fails to achieve that goal, it is itself murderously threatened by the girl' (18). For Pinkney, the recurring figure of the 'murdered woman' in Eliot's writings is 'never simply one's mistress', but 'first and foremost recipient of unconscious phantasies pertaining to the most primitive stages of the infant-mother relationship' (49). As G. Smith (1987) notes, Pinkney's study has regrettable shortcomings due to a seeming prejudicial piecemeal selection of texts and ignorance of external and biographical evidence in validation of his speculations on Eliot's family life.

⁶ For criticisms wishing to dismantle a masculine ideology of modernism, see Burke (1985, 1987); Huysen; and Wolff.

⁷ See Benstock; Suzanne Clark (1992); and Duplessis (2001, 2012), and her chapter "'Virile Thought": Modernist Maleness, Poetic Forms and Practices' in Lusty and Murphet 19-37. Rachel Blau DuPlessis views Eliot's poetry as strictly 'patriarchal' (2012: 57) and sees his resort to female death in works such as 'Portrait of a Lady' (1915) as functioning as a solution to the problematic of male engulfment and gender fear incited by female power. In particular, DuPlessis lambasts Eliot and Pound's universalising tendencies, 'the imperial, all-sexes-and-all-genders subject of patriarchal poetry' (2012: 195), for reasserting male identity, privilege and hegemony and a hierarchical, imbalanced male/female dualism at the expense of the feminine.

⁸ The misogyny of Eliot's works has been heavily debated by critics with a wide range of opinions on the issue, see J. Brooker (1995); Christ (Bush, 1991: 23-40); Steve Clark (1994: 185-216); Duplessis (2001, 2012); Eagleton (2007); Ellmann (1987); Faltejskova; Gilbert and Gubar (1988, 1989, 1994); Gelpi; Julius; Scott; Lamos; Nicholls; MacDiarmid; Miller, Jr.; Palmer; Pinkney; Potter; Raine; Ricks; Seymour-Jones; and S. Stockton.

Although charges of Eliot's misogyny have been understandable and not without supporting evidence, they have often been reductive, narrow in scope and hackneyed, avoiding the social, cultural and biographical contexts in which Eliot's works were produced. The full range of Eliot's portrayals of women—and the fluctuations in that range that are apparent throughout the breadth of his works—has been ignored. The vicissitudes and complexities of the inner conflicts and personal desires from which these projections originate have not been sufficiently attended to. Further, such adverse criticisms of Eliot have often functioned expediently to serve the polemical ideologies of radical feminist and postmodernist agendas. Still-prevalent myths fixing Eliot as the static 'symboliste' of 'high' modernism have perpetuated and antagonised the tension between literary values gendered as masculine and feminine, maintaining rigid polarisation between the opposing precepts of modernism and postmodernism. As a consequence, Eliot has been disallowed direct access to the sex/gender complexities and cross-fertilisations of 'high' and mass culture seen as the preserve of feminist and postmodern thought. Cassandra Laity notes that the effect of such inclement prejudices and misconceptions means that Eliot's 'relation to early modernist spheres of feminism, alternative masculinities, the feminine and homoeroticism remains largely unexamined' (Laity and Gish 2).

Recent scholarship has attempted to address the stringency of the view that typecasts Eliot as exemplary of a male, elitist, monolithic modernism, by depicting his texts as containing multiple, fluid and non-traditional forms of sexuality, gender, desire and the feminine. Concomitant with current feminist modernist studies now examining the polymorphous gender politics of the modernist period and gender instability as foundational to modernist concepts of identity and difference, Eliot's relationship to the maternal feminine is now starting to be read as 'far more complex than critics usually concede' (Laity and Gish 195).⁹ Contemporary efforts to reconsider and recontextualise Eliot have been led predominantly by a range of biographical, feminist, psychoanalytic, postmodernist or queer reassessments, with some critics conflating and employing two or more of these theoretical perspectives. For example, David Chinitz's seminal work *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (2005) reveals an 'other' and more complicated Eliot. In the first full-length study concerning Eliot's approach to popular culture, Chinitz warns against both under-reading and

⁹ For an introduction to the recent discussions taking place regarding gender complexity and instability in the modernist text, see Deborah Longworth, 'Gendering the Modernist Text' (P. Brooker et al. 157-77). For studies seeking to move beyond polarised versions of modernism and postmodernism, see Huyssen; North; Lyon; Rainey; and Felski.

underestimating Eliot. He affirms Eliot to be a ‘complex product of modernity, whose work is full of contradiction and mood’ (10). Another important contribution is Cassandra Laity and Nancy K. Gish’s collection *Gender, Sexuality and Desire in T. S. Eliot* (2004), which recalibrates and resituates Eliot in the sex/gender/erotic complexities and contradictions of the modernist milieu. This study promotes a more comprehensive account of Eliot by looking at his largely unexplored engagement with various public and private worlds of women, homoeroticism, eroticism and the maternal. This re-examination has already been afforded to other ‘hyper-masculine’ modernists such as W. B. Yeats and James Joyce.¹⁰ Moreover, Laity and Gish’s study rebukes one-sided criticisms of Eliot. In the collection, Gail McDonald contends that ‘contemporary feminist readers of the male modernists must address misogyny directly, if only to move beyond it to more complicated readings of gender-inflected aspects of their work’ (190-91). These publications have gone a long way to counteract critical hypostasizing of male modernism and Eliot by emphasising his doubleness, complexity and self-contradiction. As Rachel Blau Duplessis points out, however, there are gaps in the project to revitalise Eliot that remain to be filled, such as ‘mid-career Eliot and Christian social thinker Eliot’ (2004: 601).¹¹ Moreover, Eliot’s ‘own careful building (from the ruins) of a male subjectivity offering humble, yet redoubtable authority’, continues to be ‘under-discussed’ (601).

Although Eliot decreed that he did not want his biography written, Duplessis notes how biography, in particular, has provided a rich ‘zone for gender/sexuality readings’ of his work (Harding, 2011: 295).¹² To illustrate, Lyndall Gordon’s thorough expositions of Eliot’s life have been instrumental in revising and complicating interpretations of Eliot’s attitudes

¹⁰ To choose two examples from Laity and Gish’s collection, Gail McDonald’s essay ‘Through Schoolhouse Windows: Women, the Academy and T. S. Eliot’ (175-194) explains how early women academics viewed Eliot’s ‘theory of impersonality’ and transgressive attitudes towards domesticity and marriage as positive, liberating and ‘uniquely inspiring’ (7). In the same vein as McDonald, Richard Badenhansen’s ‘T. S. Eliot Speaks the Body: The Privileging of Female Discourse in *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Cocktail Party*’ (195-214) attempts to show Eliot’s relationship to the feminine to be decidedly more complex than usually conceived, examining the more positive representations of women and Eliot’s giving power to the female voice in the plays *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Cocktail Party*. In Badenhansen’s view, Eliot’s juxtaposition of male and female discourses in these plays performs a dialectic between male and female that, in contrast with his early works, calls into question rigid gender polarities.

¹¹ Duplessis states that ‘it’s always amazed me how little of Eliot’s total poetic output most Eliot critics discuss’ (2004: 601). She notes that Laity and Gish’s collection on gender, desire and sexuality strangely omits reference to mid-career works ‘Ash-Wednesday’ (1930), the ‘Ariel Poems’ (1927-31), ‘Coriolan’ (1931-32), *Sweeney Agonistes* (1925-26), and *The Rock* (1934); all of which ‘evinces gender ideas that could have been examined here’ (601).

¹² Eliot added a memorandum to his will in 1960 stating: ‘I do not wish my executors to facilitate or countenance the writing of a biography of me’ (*LTSE5*, xx).

towards women, gender and sexuality.¹³ Demonstrating evidence in defiance of unilateral assumptions of Eliot's negative treatment of women, Gordon reveals new biographical insights into four quite different relationships with women: namely, his lifelong Platonic love, Emily Hale, his first wife, Vivien Haigh-Wood, his close friend Mary Trevelyan and finally his second wife, Valerie Eliot. Gordon then provides new literary insights by suggesting how all of these women enter Eliot's works in very different ways.¹⁴ In like manner to Ronald Schuchard's *Eliot's Dark Angel* (1999), Gordon also highlights the importance of a sacred feminine apparition in Eliot's texts who is conveniently overlooked or discounted by critics who argue for the misogyny of his works. This figure is not first demarcated in 'Ash-Wednesday' (1930) in the 'Lady of silences'—as often referred to by critics in response to his entry into the Anglo-Catholic Church—but is pre-empted by the girl with 'her arms full of flowers' in 'La Figlia Che Piange' (1916), the 'hyacinth girl' of *The Waste Land* (1922), and also by the gendered characteristic of the 'Multifoliate rose' in 'The Hollow Men' (1925). This observation is significant as it reveals much of the polemical verve denouncing Eliot's triumphal masculinity to be partisan, selective and focused mainly on his writings pre-1927. In countering a modernism perceived as a citadel of hegemonic, male logocentrism, feminist critics have largely ignored important instances of feminine identification which are not threatening or abject within Eliot's works. In the process of exposing the gender ideology of modernist writers, and in excavating the façade of patriarchal values on which modernism was founded, it seems that everything antithetical to or in the margins of 'emancipatory' feminist and postmodern projects within Eliot's life and works has been conveniently barred.

Of greatest note in Gordon's biographical writings is her calling attention to the formative and significant influence of Eliot's mother, Charlotte Champe Stearns. At first, modernist critics tended to either marginalise or completely neglect Charlotte Eliot's role. This was mainly the result of an initial scarcity in available biographical information, a lack of attention to Charlotte's social, political and religious work and prodigious writings, in addition to restrictions placed on the Eliot archives.¹⁵ As a consequence, Charlotte's character was largely speculated upon and even vilified by early critics and biographers. A case in

¹³ See Gordon's *Eliot's Early Years* (1977), *Eliot's New Life* (1988), and *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* (1998). Gordon's third biography combines and revises her previous two studies.

¹⁴ Gordon (1998) views Eliot's poetry as displaying Vivien in 'powerful, doomed roles' (198) such as the Duchess of Malfi or Cleopatra in *The Waste Land*. She regards Mary Trevelyan to be a model for Julia in *The Cocktail Party* (453), and also sees Monica in *The Elder Statesman* as a parallel to Valerie Eliot (519). Still, for Gordon it is Emily Hale who is the most pervasive female presence in Eliot's works. She cites her as the most likely source for the many ethereal women in his poetry: La Figlia in 'La Figlia Che Piange', the hyacinth girl in *The Waste Land*, the 'Lady' in 'Ash-Wednesday' and Celia in *The Cocktail Party*.

¹⁵ See Däumer (1989: 10-15).

point, T. S. Matthews (1974) would describe Charlotte as a ‘possessive’ (12), ‘clucking’, ‘protective’ and ‘apprehensive’ mother, while in the 1980s, even more diligent, well-intentioned biographers such as John Soldo (1983) and Peter Ackroyd (1984) continued to reprimand Charlotte and skim over her achievements as both a mother and a woman. She was depicted as a ‘thwarted artist’ who simply routed ‘her own frustration with her literary gifts . . . into ambition for those of her son’ (Ackroyd 19).¹⁶ Contrary to this, Gordon’s more detailed explications of Charlotte’s accomplished life as a wife, mother, teacher, social reformer, political activist and feminist, coupled with an examination of Charlotte’s religious and social writings, have since authorised and encouraged the emergence of fuller, more credible, sympathetic and complex critical assessments of the centrality of the mother’s place in Eliot’s emotional and creative development. Accordingly, more recent speculation on the intense love and bond between Charlotte and Eliot is now part of an emerging critical consensus citing Charlotte as a ‘considerable influence on her son’s artistic development’ (Oser 1998: 31).

With greater access to a burgeoning, seemingly inexhaustible wealth of Eliot material, biographers and critics are now beginning to elucidate and more fully understand the true significance of this mother-son relationship to Eliot’s life and works, amending previously negative, inaccurate and unsophisticated portraiture. Robert Crawford’s recent biography, *Young Eliot* (2015), gives a nuanced and intimate account of the first twenty-one years of Eliot’s life, offering new findings and insights. Like Gordon, Crawford touches upon Charlotte’s writings and passions, emphasising her commitment to the Unitarian Church, social reform and intellectual life, her ‘high sense of artistic mission’ (14) and her fascination with martyrs and ascetic figures (15). Compared to the aforementioned accounts, Crawford shows greater sensitivity to the many demands and pressures that Charlotte faced as a mother.¹⁷ Moreover, his biography documents more thoroughly Charlotte’s continued anguish at being separated from her son, reaching well into his young adulthood.¹⁸ Notwithstanding this improved treatment, however, Crawford’s overall account of the early Eliot mother-son relationship is sketchy and leaves many questions insufficiently answered. For example, to what extent did Eliot’s intense early relationship with his mother inform his relationships with

¹⁶ For other unsympathetic negative accounts of Charlotte and her mothering, see Beer; and Drexler.

¹⁷ Crawford notes that Charlotte ‘had to face several demands’ when Tom was young with her having to manage looking after a family of six alongside her ‘continuing commitment to social reform in St. Louis’ (2015: 28).

¹⁸ Crawford’s 2015 biography indicates Charlotte Eliot’s continuing anxiety and distress at being separated from Tom during his schooling years at Smith Academy (1898-1905) and Milton Academy (1905-06), while a student at Harvard (1906-10 and 1911-14) and in Paris (1910-11), and also during his time in London from 1914 up to 1922.

and opinions of women? To what degree did it inform transformations in the style, content and form of his writings, as well as his conflicting and changing depictions of women?¹⁹ How and why did Eliot's relationship with the maternal feminine change in his mid-life? And how is this associated with his ongoing search for belief and love?

A number of scholarly works utilise Eliot auto/biographical studies in combination with psychology and literary analysis in order to reinterpret Eliot's relation to the maternal feminine. A chief example is Donald Childs' *T. S. Eliot: Mystic, Son and Lover* (1997) which notes how Eliot found similarities in D. H. Lawrence's work to his own. In a dedicated chapter, Childs views Eliot's changing opinion of Lawrence in the 1920s and 30s as indicating an effort to disentangle 'his own psychological history (and the mysticism consequent upon it) from Lawrence's psychological history (and the mysticism consequent upon it)' (134). For Childs, Eliot's poem 'Coriolan' (1931-32) suggests that by the early 1930s, Eliot had 'come to understand at least his own Coriolanus—if not Shakespeare's Coriolanus—as suffering from a Lawrentian mother-complex' (141). However, Childs' analysis of Eliot's 'mother-complex' does not occupy the whole of the monograph. It fails to take into account the whole of Eliot's life and the sheer breadth and trajectory of his works that spanned fifty years. Further, it ignores Charlotte's life and writings completely.²⁰

Of the work conducted on Eliot and the mother, Elisabeth Däumer's erudite, insightful and sensitive studies have most advanced, complicated and problematised perceptions and understandings of Charlotte Eliot, her abiding, powerful influence on her son and also his relation to women. To date, Däumer's doctoral thesis 'A Literary Mother and a Literary Son:

¹⁹ In spite of numerous studies detailing Eliot's relationship with his mother, the subject remains to be sufficiently excavated, see Ackroyd; Asbee; Beer; Bergonzi; Braybrooke; Bush (1983); Crawford (2015); Dale; Däumer (1989, 1998, 2004); Drexler; Gordon (1977, 1988, 1998); Howarth; Kenner (1959); March and Tambimuttu; T. S. Matthews; Miller, Jr.; Sanna (2002, 2003); Sencourt; Seymour-Jones; Soldo (1983); Tobin; Tomlin; and Worthen. For discussion of Eliot's distrust of biographical criticism, see Timothy Materer's article 'T. S. Eliot and his Biographical Critics' (2012).

²⁰ The Eliot mother-son relationship is touched upon in Lois Cuddy's *T. S. Eliot and the Poetics of Evolution: Sub/Versions of Classicism, Culture and Progress* (2000), which views Eliot's works through the Darwinian theory of evolution. Colleen Lamos' *Deviant Modernism: Sexual & Textual Errancy in T. S. Eliot, James Joyce & Marcel Proust* (1998), which is informed by deconstruction, feminist and queer theory, has a chapter largely dedicated to Eliot's relationship with his mother and its impact on his early work. Lamos suggests that excavation of latent 'maternal intertexts' within Eliot's texts opens 'up the possibility of a more generous understanding of the textual circuits of errant desires, including but not limited to those between men' (117). She sees Eliot's poetry as 'erring' from its apparent objectives and attesting to a female power that he fought to disavow; a power ultimately traceable back to his relationship with his mother. Lamos argues the importance of recognising 'errant female sexual energies' (effeminate, homosexual, homoerotic, matrisexual or sadomasochistic) in Eliot's works if we are to read him with 'something other than hostility or incomprehension' (103). While Lamos' study is an important contribution to the reading of diversity in Eliot, it is focused largely on Eliot's early writings and is overwhelmingly negative in its criticism of Charlotte. Further, her notion of the 'maternal intertext' is under-elaborated and she does not go on to show how Eliot came to reconcile his ambivalence in later works.

Charlotte Eliot and T. S. Eliot' (1989) remains, remarkably, the only full-length study completely dedicated to this topic. This work has since been augmented by two important essays: 'Charlotte Stearns Eliot and *Ash-Wednesday's* Lady of Silences' (1998) and 'Vipers, Viragos and Spiritual Rebels: Women in T. S. Eliot's Christian Society Plays' (Laity and Gish, 2004: 234-53). Däumer's research considers Charlotte's writings in combination with biographical, historical, psychological and feminist perspectives to elucidate the influence of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century constructions of gender in shaping both the interaction between Charlotte Eliot and her son, as well as the poetry and poetic identities of each. Counteracting the 'thwarted artist' and 'domineering mother' theories, Däumer states that Charlotte's ambition to be both a mother and poet was assisted by her deep commitment to a liberalist, progressive Unitarian Church adhering to the Victorian belief in the exalted heavenly mission of mothers as the moulders and creators of the human character. She explains how Victorian idealisations of motherhood advocated, rather than castigated, a mother's vicarious involvement and ardent investment in the life of her children. This, Däumer summarises, conferred on Charlotte 'an unapologetically central role in shaping the moral, intellectual and artistic development of her son' (1998: 483).

Like Däumer, I find it curious that 'even well-meaning biographers have tended to obscure or minimise Charlotte Eliot's pivotal role in the creative life of her youngest son' (1998: 481). Däumer is particularly hostile towards negative criticisms of Charlotte that have ignored her writings and criticised her mothering through use of psychological models and theoretical frameworks deeply ambivalent toward maternal subjectivity, stating:

this critical tendency . . . appears to be the effect of an ahistorically deployed psychological framework so riveted to the changing needs of the infant that it is theoretically unequipped to account for the complex role of mothers as speaking and desirous subjects in the individuation of their children and the production of culture. (481)

Däumer rightly points out the preoccupation in traditional Freudian and object relations psychoanalysis with infantile development, mother-blaming and the pathologisation of mothers. Her studies instead refer to feminist and psychoanalytic writers of the 1970s and 80s, such as Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein, whose works went to great lengths to address the issue of cultural denigration of mothers by highlighting the role of maternal

subjectivity, ambivalence and desire in compelling a child's individuation. However, Däumer is unable to implement fully these theorists in support of her case.²¹ This is unfortunate and misses an opportunity to further authenticate her contentions. Moreover, the work of these feminist writers has in the last thirty years been expanded upon and amended significantly, with a proliferation of new ideas on motherhood, mothering and the maternal.²² Däumer's pioneering forays into humanising and vocalising the developing, complex mother in Eliot's life have done more than any other criticism to further our understanding of the changing representations of women in his works. However, this work needs to be updated in step with current theoretical developments and insights. Däumer herself recognises this shortfall:

what remains to be sufficiently acknowledged . . . is the extent to which the poet's lifelong effort at understanding his mother shaped his creative work, in particular his frequently hostile and, in later works, increasingly complex, depictions of strong-willed women. (Laity and Gish 250)

In answer to both Däumer's petition to fill a gap in Eliot studies with regard to a true understanding of the mother, and to the need to supplement, ameliorate and further substantiate the significant insights recently gained into Charlotte's influence on her son, my study rethinks Eliot's ambivalence towards the maternal feminine in the context of mother-son ambivalence. To do so most effectively, I use psychoanalysis to examine mother-son ambivalence from the perspective of both mother and son. Rozsika Parker, a prominent psychoanalytic thinker on the maternal, contends that 'psychoanalysis is necessary for any deep understanding of ambivalence' (Hollway and Featherstone 18). Echoing Däumer's complaints, however, she stresses that 'we have to reframe, realign and rewrite theory to illuminate this theme [of ambivalence] from a maternal perspective' (18). After all, ambivalence, like object relationships, is not one- but two-sided.

My study moves beyond the one-sided phallicism of traditional Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalytic paradigms that have neglected the maternal subject. Instead, it fully utilises a combination of contemporary feminist and psychoanalytic theorists who have looked at theories of creativity, destruction, the maternal and ambivalence in more innovative and positive ways. Such models have challenged traditional and Oedipal models of masculinity

²¹ See Rich (1976); Dinnerstein (1976); and Chodorow (1978).

²² For recent accounts theorising maternal subjectivity, see Baraitser; Hollway (2006, 2015); and Stone (2012).

hinged on Oedipal configurations by being inclusive rather than dismissive of maternal contribution. They have also made visible the primacy of the pre-Oedipal (m)other, and especially the affective maternal body, to early psychic life and subjective constitution, as well as to cultural, textual and aesthetic reproduction.²³ In reinstating the missing mother and arguing her importance to Eliot's work, I adhere to the view of certain male and female, feminist and non-feminist, Anglo-American object relations and post-Lacanian thinkers: that the impetus for creativity, sociality, language and love lies firmly in the pre-verbal layers of the mind and is contingent on the adaptation and provision of the pre-Oedipal 'poet mother' of infancy (I take the term 'poet mother' from Jan Campbell (2013) to indicate the mother not as a poet *per se*, but as a formative, affective, creative, attuned and responsive force through which the child's sense of self and creative capacities are constituted).²⁴ I include Rozsika Parker's groundbreaking work on maternal ambivalence, Jessica Benjamin's emphasis on the reciprocal pre-Oedipal mother-child bond and her outline of the developmental trajectory from this relationship, in addition to Jean Laplanche's general seduction theory. I also incorporate theorists whose differing, and sometimes incompatible, models all stress the importance of elaborating a maternal idiom or poetics associated with the early mother-child bond: specifically, Julia Kristeva and her notion of the 'semiotic *chora*', Jan Campbell and her innovative idea of 'lived maternal form', Luce Irigaray and her privileging the symbolisation of the mother and Kenneth Wright's work on visual and facial mirroring. Although there are clear divergences and disagreements between these theorists and among the traditions from which their models derive—for instance, between Kristeva's post-Lacanian conception of the semiotic and Campbell's feminist object relations influenced theory of maternal form—I recommend the existence of rich connections between them, as

²³ Although Pinkney's study endorses the critical return to the pre-Oedipal mother in Eliot's works, his reductive account pathologises Eliot through Kleinian, Winnicottian, and to a lesser extent, Lacanian, frameworks.

²⁴ Campbell states:

having a receptive mother enables us to desire and to communicate that desire, without it being too traumatic. Perhaps most importantly the imaginative and receptive mother enables us to elaborate a dreaming self in which we can make up our new and evolving characters. But it is not enough for the mother to be simply dreamy; she has to be active enough in her appetites both in relation to the baby and beyond the baby. The mother's ability to feel passionate about her infant has to be mixed with another more nonsensical capacity to play and dream. Meeting the poet in your mother is arguably just as important as engaging with maternal desire. And arguably it is this poet through elaborating the infant's capacity to play, that will mediate and reformulate the melodrama of the child's first passions. (2013: 125)

illustrated by Eliot's writings.²⁵ Using the work of these important maternal theorists, this study breaks new ground revealing the role of the pre-Oedipal mother and the dynamics of mother-son ambivalence to be far more complicated, enduring, changeable and essential to Eliot's personal, religious and poetic individuation than has been previously acknowledged.

This study moves beyond previous criticisms of Eliot and the mother by offering a comprehensive mapping of Eliot's maternal poetics, from his very earliest writings to the later plays. As well as looking at the irregular shifts in literary representations and articulations of the mother, mothering and the mother-son bond, it also reveals a developing maternal aesthetic based upon the bodily rhythms, gestures, and non- and pre-verbal forms experienced and elaborated in the early unconscious reciprocal mother-child bond. Just as Eliot deemed the whole of Shakespeare's work should be read as 'one poem' (*SE*, 179), Eliot's *oeuvre* is viewed in its entirety so that the varying pattern in the relation to the maternal can be properly ascertained.²⁶ Of course, to examine all of Eliot's poems, prose and plays is a subject beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, I have specifically selected and given new readings to the most important 'maternal works'—as I wish to call them—which position the maternal and suggest Eliot's relation to the maternal at different stages in his life. These include little known, suppressed or insufficiently attended to published and unpublished poems such as 'A Lyric' (1905), 'Mandarins' (1910), 'La Figlia Che Piange' (1916) and 'Coriolan' (1931-32), canonical texts and prose works 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1915), *The Sacred Wood* (1920), *The Waste Land* (1922) and 'Dante' (1929), mid-life, mid-career works: 'Ash-Wednesday' (1930) and 'Marina' (1930), and the decisive late melodrama: *The Family*

²⁵ The conflicts between varying psychoanalytic traditions and models are well explicated in Jan Campbell's *Arguing with the Phallus* (2000). Rozsika Parker's account of maternal ambivalence employs but amends traditional Freudian, Kleinian and Winnicottian theory from a maternal perspective. Jessica Benjamin is a complex theorist who draws on the long tradition of object relations theorists (Ferenczi, Balint, Fairbairn, Winnicott) to recast the Freudian framework from an intersubjective perspective. Jean Laplanche is a post-Lacanian theorist whose rewriting of Freud's seduction theory privileges the pre-Oedipal realm. And Julia Kristeva's work follows Lacanian psychoanalysis with its emphasis on the phallus and symbolic functioning, but diverges from Lacan in her notion of the 'semiotic *chora*' which instead seeks to valorise the pre-Oedipal mother-child relation, rather than the Oedipal, as the locus of subjectivity. Like Kristeva, Luce Irigaray is a post-Lacanian who seeks to affirm the importance of the pre-Oedipal mother-child relation and its symbolisation. However, she differs from Kristeva in that she insists on de-idealising the Lacanian phallus in psychoanalytic theory. For the incompatibility of Kristeva's and Irigaray's models, see Grosz (1990: 147-87). Like Irigaray, but working from an alternative Freudian/Winnicottian/feminist tradition, Jan Campbell also aims to disinvest reliance on the phallus and proposes the prospect of a renegotiated interpretation of the symbolic system. Akin to Irigaray, her idea of maternal form posits a more bodily imaginary which maintains, rather than castrates, the real relation to the maternal body. Kenneth Wright's understanding of a pre-verbal unconscious language, or communication in the early mother-child relation in terms of a maternal aesthetics, is firmly in the Winnicottian tradition.

²⁶ Eliot states in 'John Ford' (1932): 'the whole of Shakespeare's work is one poem; and it is the poetry of it in this sense, not the poetry of isolated lines and passages or poetry of the single features he created, that matters most' (*SE*, 179).

Reunion (1939). The criterion largely (but not completely) discernible in choosing these ‘maternal works’ is the presence of either one of two ‘passion scenes’ recurrent and metamorphosing throughout Eliot’s writings: the Coriolanus scene and the garden-flowers scene. Formulated by Anthony Cuda (2010), ‘passion scenes’ refer to ‘a trope or scenario that occurs regularly over some segment of a writer’s career, one which tends to appear at key moments of intellectual or emotional discovery’ (10). These scenes ‘typically portray passive suffering, vulnerability and powerlessness; passion in its several senses is their subject matter’. For Cuda, the critical interest of the ‘passion scene’ derives ‘from the way that its unpredictable shifts and modulations register the artist’s shifting modulations and concerns’, sketching ‘the wildly uneven contours of a lifelong emotional and intellectual engagement, complete with all its false starts, circularities and paradoxes’ (11). Cuda sees changes in the ‘passion scenes’ in an artist’s work as indicating ‘important tensions in his or her thinking about passion and creativity’ (11). The Coriolanus and garden-flowers passion scenes I analyse show such tensions to be intrinsically related to, and representative of, lifelong changes and important events in the mother-child relationship. The maternal dimension of Eliot’s passion scenes has generally been missed or its implications underexplored by critics.

Although Eliot’s works are thoroughly embedded in and symptomatic of a Western patriarchal, Oedipal symbolic and tradition, I view them as exploratory, questioning, and at times, subversive of this tradition. I argue that they show the importance of poetic self-reflectiveness in the constitution and deconstitution of the subject. That is to say, the trajectory of Eliot’s works indicates what Kristeva calls *le sujet-en-procés* (‘the subject-in-process/on trial’) (1980: 103), in which the maternal body and pregnancy form the primary model.²⁷ They do not reveal a pre-constituted fixed substantive subject, but rather, an action, a movement, an ‘open system’ that creatively reconfigures relations between self and (m)other, subject and object, through negation, difference and alterity: namely, through recognition of the (m)other as both within and outside the self. I view the revolution in Eliot’s poetic language as indicating a revolution in the subject, constitutive of rather than constituted by the subject.

Regarding male subjective, spiritual and poetic transformation, the years 1925 to 1939 mark a crucial phase in Eliot’s development. These transformations are reflected most

²⁷ Kristeva’s theory of the ‘subject-in-process’—originally conceived in her essay ‘The Subject in Process’ (1973; rpt. Ffrench and Lack, 1998: 133–78)—is elaborated in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (1980) and *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984). The ‘subject-in-process’ informs her study of the male avant-garde of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: Lautréamont, Mallarmé, Joyce and Artaud.

particularly in his more direct, visionary and ascetic ‘between-poems’: ‘Ash-Wednesday’, ‘Marina’ and ‘Coriolan’, in addition to the play *The Family Reunion*, all of which are a main focus in this study. James Olney states:

there are a number of transitional poems that record major events in Eliot’s life and at the same time mark significant stages in the Poet’s Life . . . These transitional moments are always double, and in a double sense: they are poems of setting out but they are also poems of summary of what has gone before, so that later poems regularly take up into themselves earlier poems; and they are poems of heightened self-consciousness as the poet, observing everything, forever observing, includes himself in the observation.

(Moody, 1994a: 8)

The ‘major events’ that critics note as informing Eliot’s ‘transitional poems’ habitually include his acceptance into the Anglo-Catholic Church and severance from America in his taking up British citizenship in 1927, the fragmentation of his marriage to Vivien Haigh-Wood in the 1920s and 30s, and also his reunions with Emily Hale.²⁸ Nevertheless, the most important event to occur during Eliot’s mid-life in and around the composition of his ‘transitional poems’ was the death of his mother on 29 September 1929. Despite Charlotte’s influence on her son, her death and its impact on his poetics have received negligible attention and severe undervalue. This study addresses this critical oversight. In the same way the death of Beatrice was pivotal to precipitating entrance into a new Christian life and the apotheosis of the feminine in Dante’s *Vita nuova*, I show Charlotte’s death to be the decisive juncture marking both Eliot’s New Life and the change in his relation to women symbolised in ‘Ash-Wednesday’. Central to this proposition is my elaboration of a concept of maternal allegory in chapter 2 led by both Eliot’s meditations on Dantean allegory through the 1920s and Walter

²⁸ The influence of Vivien Eliot and Emily Hale on Eliot’s writings has been thoroughly explored by biographers and critics alike. For controversial interpretations of Eliot’s first marriage and its impact on his work, see Michael Hasting’s play *Tom and Viv* (1985) and Carole Seymour-Jones’s biography *Painted Shadow: The Life of Vivienne Eliot* (2001). In regard to Vivien’s and Emily’s influence on Eliot’s middle period works, Tony Sharpe states of ‘Ash-Wednesday’: ‘the feelings requiring sublimation were those toward his wife Vivien (who in 1928 told friends he couldn’t stand the sight of her) and Emily Hale’ (Chinitz, 2009: 199). Gordon (1977, 1988, 1998) has heavily chronicled Eliot’s relationship with Emily Hale and sees her as a pervasive presence in his writings from ‘La Figlia Che Piange’ (1916) to the late plays, but especially in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ (1930) and ‘Burnt Norton’ (1936).

Benjamin's modern reconceptualisation of allegory stated in his *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928). I claim maternal allegory to be a historically contingent modern mode of literary epiphany whose appearances in 'Ash-Wednesday', and reappearances in 'Marina', 'Coriolan', *The Family Reunion* and *Four Quartets*, are premised upon melancholic reflection of the dead mother within a maternal poetics.

This new understanding of T. S. Eliot and the mother is timely and greatly needed. As well as the critical efforts taking place to reinsert Eliot into the gender complexities of the modernist milieu, he is now being extensively rewritten with new materials that are being made available. The previous release of such material in the 1990s led to a renaissance in Eliot studies. These included Eliot's 1926 Clark Lectures, much needed editions of unpublished manuscripts and a new scholarly edition of Eliot's notebook poems *Inventions of the March Hare* (1907-17). More recently, the commencement of the T. S. Eliot research project in 2009 has granted scholars unprecedented access to archival resources from around the world, including those owned by Valerie Eliot, the Eliot Estate and Faber and Faber. To date, this has resulted in five volumes of correspondence (1898-1931) and two initial volumes of Eliot's complete prose (1905-26). According to Schuchard (2014), these new materials 'will have a transformative effect on the perception of Eliot' (K. Williams).²⁹ He adds: 'these are the things that show a dimension of his life that we've never before seen'.³⁰ The newly released volumes 3, 4, and 5 of Eliot letters covering the years 1926-31 are especially significant to this study and are referred to throughout, giving fresh understanding to the mother-son relationship and its impress on Eliot's poetry. The letters give previously unseen evidence of the strength of Eliot's love for his mother and the bond between them. They demonstrate Eliot's growing recognition of Charlotte's immense influence on his life and work. Further, the letters record his intense emotional trauma in view of his mother's failing health and eventual death in 1929. In addition to Eliot's published poems, prose, plays and letters, this study incorporates personal testimony from television and radio documentaries and interviews, as well as important archival material located at The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University; The Houghton Library, Harvard University; King's College Modern Archive Centre, Cambridge University; Missouri History Museum Library and Research Centre and St. Louis County Library, St.

²⁹ Schuchard's comments are from an online interview conducted by Kimber Williams on 24 September 2014, and refer to the online release of the first two volumes of *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition* (1905-26).

³⁰ Cuda (2014) also states: 'while there are critical attitudes toward him, I think this work will slowly erode uninformed views' (K. Williams).

Louis; Special Collections, Eric V. Hauser Memorial Library, Reed College, Portland; and Special Collections, Olin Library, Washington University. Materials include Charlotte Eliot's scrapbook and manuscripts of her poetry and writings, as well as family photographs, obituaries and diaries. They also include original manuscripts and typescripts of Eliot's poems, prose and plays, in addition to unpublished correspondences. I adduce new details about Charlotte's life and commitment to the Unitarian Church, as well as her work as a feminist and social reformer. I also give unprecedented attention to Charlotte's writings and, especially, to her passion for the Virgin Mary.³¹ This is both the first full-length study of T. S. and Charlotte Eliot in thirty years and the first to make use of the wealth of old and new, noted and ignored materials now available.

Andrea O'Reilly—a pioneer of modern motherhood studies—states how 'over the last twenty-five years the topic of motherhood has emerged as a central and significant topic of scholarly enquiry across a wide range of academic disciplines' (2013: 1). Throughout the 1970s, female and feminist philosophers, psychoanalysts and poets did much to bring mother-daughter relationships as the 'great unwritten story' (Rich 226) into circulation and to reimagine the maternal beyond its traditional, patriarchal subservience to father-son dynasties. This work encouraged a proliferation of much-needed studies into literary representations of the maternal, mothering, motherhood and mother-daughter relationships in women's writings in the 1980s and 1990s, the most notable being Marianne Hirsch's *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (1989).³² Despite these important contributions, however, critical re-investigations and reconsiderations of male modernist literary representations of mother-son relationships, the maternal and the feminine, and the elaboration of a maternal poetics in the works of male writers, in light of recent advances in feminist, psychoanalytic and maternal theory, have been largely neglected.³³ O'Reilly notes

³¹ Surprisingly few critics have looked at Charlotte Eliot's writings and their relation to her son and his work, see Crawford (2015: 14-16); Däumer (1989, 1998, 2004); Gordon (1998); and Oser (1998).

³² Other notable studies include Davidson and Broner (1980); Ingman (1999); and Pearlman (1989). For more recent critical studies seeking to revitalise the mother, see Giorgio (2002); Greenfield (2002); and Podnieks and O'Reilly (2010).

³³ There are a few multiple-author studies looking at representations and articulations of the mother, mother-son relationships and the maternal in the works of male modernist writers, some of which take a psychoanalytic approach. These include Marianne DeKoven, *Rich and Strange: Gender, History, Modernism* (1991) whose Irigarayan/Derridean approach reassesses male modernist ambivalence towards the maternal feminine and women writers; Maud Ellmann, *The Nets of Modernism: Henry James, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Sigmund Freud* (2010); Marylu Hill, *Mothering Modernity: Feminism, Modernism, and the Maternal Muse* (1999); Marcia Ian, *Remembering the Phallic Mother: Psychoanalysis, Modernism, and the Fetish* (1993) with its serialised inquiry into the work of Eliot, James Joyce, Georges Bataille, Henry James and D. H. Lawrence; Dianne Stubbing, *Anglo-Irish Modernism and the Maternal: From Yeats to Joyce* (1999); and Jane Silverman Van Buren, *The Modernist Madonna: Semiotics of the Maternal Metaphor* (1989). Single author studies focused solely on the mother are virtually non-existent.

that the critical search for the mother in the last thirty years ‘has been daughter-centric in that she is positioned almost entirely in terms of her relations with, and as perceived by, the daughter’ (O’Reilly and Podnieks 8). As Linda Forcey notes, the relationship between mothers and sons in literature remains a ‘taboo topic’ (2).³⁴ This study both contributes to feminist efforts to reinstate the mother as subject and addresses a chasm in modernist scholarship and motherhood studies in respect to rethinking and rewriting the mother, the mother-son story and the maternal feminine in men’s writing. It argues male literary symbolisation, recognition and revaluing of the maternal feminine contributes positively to the way motherhood, femininity and masculinity are viewed, in a manner that is beneficial and empowering for men and women, sons and daughters, fathers and mothers.

This study draws on a framework that combines auto/biographical and mainly current psychoanalytic and feminist perspectives, endeavouring to maintain a steady, judicious course which acknowledges the importance of these bodies of evidence without submitting entirely to any single approach alone. Although I utilise auto/biography and psychoanalysis, I also acknowledge the misgivings about these modes of criticism. Eliot expressed his own reservations about biographical and psychological explanations of literature in ‘The Frontiers of Criticism’ (1956), distinguishing between the ‘explanation’ of origins and the importance of context (*OPP*, 123). Although not dismissing critical biography completely, he states that it ‘is a delicate task in itself; and the critic or the biographer who, without being a trained and practicing psychologist, brings to bear on his subject such analytical skill as he has acquired by reading books written by psychologists, may confuse the issues still further’ (123).³⁵ This study does not aim at absolute or superior truth, caricature, exploitative biographical or psychoanalytic reduction or distortion. It does not wish to completely conflate biography with Eliot’s writings. Further, it does not use psychoanalysis as a set narrative. Rather, it allows Eliot and his works to guide and develop the psychoanalysis. All psychoanalytic approaches are partial, relative, and indeed vulnerable to wishfulness and overdetermination. What is more, we cannot ever know the real Charlotte or T. S. Eliot—the true nature of their relationship, their inner thoughts and feelings, his childhood, dreams, memories, desires or fantasies. Thus, as Adam Phillips advocates, I take the approach that ‘a repertoire might be

³⁴ Like Forcey, Backes notes that although the mother-son relationship ‘is one of life’s most permanent and powerful relationships’, it has ‘not been much studied’ by literary critics (29).

³⁵ Eliot was notoriously sceptical about psychoanalysis, finding it to be ‘a scientific method’ based ‘upon a dubious and contentious branch of science’ (*D.*, Sept. 1922: 330). For an interesting discussion of Eliot’s dislike for, and affinity with, Freud, see Adam Phillips, ‘The Soul of Man under Psychoanalysis’ (2001).

more useful than a conviction' (1993: 4); that Eliot refuses fixity accounts for the range of psychoanalytic models and thinkers employed in this study.³⁶ As Phillips states:

psychoanalysis is essentially a transitional language, one possible bridge to a more personal, less compliant idiom. It is useful only as a contribution to forms of local knowledge, as one among the many language games in a culture (and the local, of course, starts with the individual person and his always recondite sense of himself). In order to regain interest in the idea of the unconscious we have to lose interest in the idea of the superordinate point of view. (1993: 8)

This study aims to give a wide-ranging, balanced and nuanced portrait of the Eliot mother-son relationship, and to show its conflicts, complexities and passions to be a vital, though not exclusive context that contributes both obviously and obliquely to the content and form of Eliot's works. That being said, this study does not claim the maternal as the definitive source of Eliot's works. It does, however, contend the maternal to be an important source, insufficiently examined by critics. It takes care to give frequent and direct contact with Eliot's words and to quote published and unpublished primary sources as a check on mere speculation. Where it is speculative, however, contentions are supported with evidence. Eliot himself was not averse to biographical speculation, as shown by his accounts of Dante, Shakespeare, Baudelaire, D. H. Lawrence and others. Further, they demonstrate a particular interest in these writers' differing and changing representations, and their relations to, women, passion and mysticism. This interest is suggestive of the goal of Eliot's own poetic endeavour regarding the maternal body and is discussed throughout this study.

Although this study has a maternal bias with its focus on mother-son relations, it also touches on the issue of the father in Eliot's writings. Certainly, the role of the father, paternal identity and identification and father-son ambivalence are important, underexplored areas in Eliot studies. Moreover, paternal ambivalence is still a subject of neglect in psychoanalysis with questions of paternity and paternal identity requiring new rendering in a postmodernist culture which, led by cultural theorists Julia Kristeva, Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler, deems

³⁶ See Phillips, 'Introduction' (1993: 1-8).

the masculine and the paternal function to be in crisis.³⁷ In Pinkney's analysis of Eliot's *oeuvre*, he notes a general 'effacement of the father' (143), which he holds responsible for its dialectical representation of women. For Pinkney, the father never fully emerges as the Oedipal agent of prohibition. Accordingly, he locates Eliot's works largely in the realm of Melanie Klein's 'paranoid-schizoid position' and, therefore, unable to accede to the 'depressive position' which predicates maturity and a tolerance of ambivalence.³⁸ In contrast, this study shows the problem of paternal identification as being addressed not only through Eliot's Christian adherence, but also through his elaboration of a maternal poetics in his middle period writings. I argue that it is in the poetic return to, and rediscovery of, the pre-Oedipal mother that Eliot ultimately rediscovers the father.

A limitation of this thesis is the non-availability of important primary sources. At the time of writing, volumes of Eliot letters are still to be officially released and the Emily Hale letters are under embargo at Princeton University until 2020. Further, volumes 3-5 of Eliot's complete prose, containing restricted or inaccessible material and covering years central to this thesis (1927-39), have yet to be released. There is no doubt that these sources would have further illuminated Eliot, his poetry and his relationship with the mother, either supporting or contravening the arguments of this study. Moreover, this study is primarily concerned with Eliot's transitional, mid-life, mid-career works 'Ash-Wednesday', 'Marina', 'Coriolan' and

³⁷ For discussion of such crises in postmodern culture, see Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul* (1995) and *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis* (2000); Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (1999); and Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (2000). Kristeva states her concern with the decline of a regulative paternal element in modern society:

today, the state of the world poses a crucial question: Are we still living in a civilisation structured by authority and symbolic laws, or—like the patients suffering from new 'maladies of the soul'—have we lost our capacity to represent, to maintain a superego and paternal function? And if so, are we not threatened with regression into barbarism, into tyranny? (2000: 129)

For an excellent, though rare, discussion on paternal ambivalence, see Stephen Frosch, 'Fathers' Ambivalence (too)' in Hollway and Featherstone 37-53. Frosch notes how, in reaction to Freudian-Lacanian theory and its giving pre-eminence to the father, object relations theories have marginalised the father in the effort to reinstitute the mother.

³⁸ For Klein, the 'paranoid-schizoid position' and 'depressive position' mark developmental phases in early childhood and these positions persist and constantly alternate throughout life. As Hanna Segal explains, the 'paranoid-schizoid position' is the earliest position and is 'characterised by the infant's unawareness of "persons", his relationships being to part objects, and by the prevalence of splitting and paranoid anxiety' (ix). Whereas, the beginning of the 'depressive position' is marked by 'the recognition of the mother as a whole person and is characterised by a relationship to whole objects and by a prevalence of integration, ambivalence, depressive anxiety and guilt' (ix). The 'depressive position' is indicative of relative maturity but never fully supercedes the 'paranoid-schizoid position'. Klein introduces the concept of the 'depressive position' in the essay 'A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States' (1934; rpt. 2011: 262-90). The 'paranoid-schizoid' position was introduced later in her 'Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms' (1946; rpt. 1997: 1-24).

The Family Reunion. For reasons mentioned, these texts have been chosen for their maternal resonance, at the expense of others. A full examination of *Four Quartets* is a regrettable exclusion, as it would warrant more space than can be afforded.

Aside from the introduction and conclusion, this new study of Eliot and the mother consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 is prefatory to the following chapters and re-examines Eliot's early life and Unitarian upbringing in St. Louis, Missouri. It argues for Charlotte Eliot's experience and creative handling of maternal ambivalence as a formative influence energising and shaping Eliot's early ambivalence towards the maternal feminine and his representation of women in his early poetry (1908-22). Chapter 2 shows Eliot's search for a maternal form and *Vita nuova* to translate and order the passions associated with the maternal body is a preoccupation of his prose works through the 1920s, culminating in his championing of allegory in his 'Dante' essay of 1929. Further, it places Charlotte's death in 1929 as central to both the emergence of maternal allegory in 'Ash-Wednesday' and the apotheosis of the feminine in Eliot's life and works. Chapter 3 shows Eliot's use of childhood memory and elaboration of a maternal poetics in 'Ash-Wednesday' as bringing the repressed pre-Oedipal mother to the fore. Chapter 4 sees Eliot's turning to Shakespeare's late plays *Pericles* and *Coriolanus* in the early 1930s as models for 'Marina' (1930) and 'Coriolan' (1931-32) respectively, indicating a continuing, if uneven, *sea-change* in his thinking about the maternal feminine. Finally, chapter 5 looks at Eliot's maternal melodrama, *The Family Reunion*, perceiving it as a culmination with regard to the poetic effort to symbolise and understand the ambivalent mother. By recognising the importance of the ambivalent mother to Eliot's life and his progressively more ambivalent and complex representations of the mother through the work, and in showing how Eliot's own recognition of the mother through a maternal poetics transformed his very life and works, this study contributes to current scholarship and renewed interest in Eliot in the fiftieth anniversary year of his death.

1. 'THERE WILL BE TIME TO MURDER AND CREATE': CREATIVE/DESTRUCTIVE AMBIVALENCE IN T. S. ELIOT'S EARLY POETRY

Home is where one starts from

T. S. Eliot, 'East Coker' (1940)

It has been to mothers that I have so deeply needed to speak . . .

D. W. Winnicott, Postscript to *The Child and the Family* (1957)

Ambivalence refers to 'the coexistence in one person of contradictory emotions or attitudes (as love and hatred) towards a person or thing' (OED). It is a normal, powerful, foundational, fluctuating and complex aspect of the human condition and it characterises all human relations. Ambivalence engenders and is engendering. It is love and hate, life and death, the beginning and the end. As Kenneth Weisbrode states 'ambivalence lies at the core of who we are' (1).¹

In 1941 Virginia Woolf wrote 'it was only the other day when I read Freud for the first time that I discovered that this violently disturbing conflict between love and hate is a common feeling called ambivalence' (2002: 116). The birth of psychoanalysis that coincided with literary modernism in the 1890s was marked by a deep ambivalence towards the maternal feminine.² Sigmund Freud, the foremost male modernist gender theorist, saw the defensive conflict of simultaneous positive and negative components in the emotional attitude as an instinctual dynamic instrumental in the formation of the Oedipal complex.³ Yet, in defence of his theorisations Freud was unwilling to go behind the Oedipal situation to the primal object relationship of the child and the all-powerful mother. Instead, he situated the mother as a mere passive object and recipient of the child's libidinal urges rather than a

¹ For a tracing of the concept of ambivalence from Genesis to the present, see Kenneth Weisbrode, *On Ambivalence: The Problems and Pleasures of Having it Both Ways* (2012).

² Drawing on the work of Irigaray, DeKoven (1991) notes ambivalence towards the maternal feminine to be a defining feature of modernist writing. She asserts the maternal feminine to be the repressed other of patriarchal Western culture, this repression being even greater in the work of canonical male modernists who she argues reacted against the emergence and power of the feminist New Woman. Nevertheless, DeKoven states that it is the return of the repressed maternal that energises and delineates innovative modernist practice and form 'as the space of unresolved contradiction or unsynthesized dialectic' (10).

³ Laplanche and Pontalis describe the Oedipal complex as an 'organised body of loving and hostile wishes which the child experiences towards its parents. It bears a triangular structure and is seen as fundamental in the structuring of the personality, and in the orientation of human desire' (273-74). For Freud's notion of the Oedipal complex, see 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' (1905; rpt. 2001f: 135-230); 'A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men' (1910; rpt. 2001h: 163-76); 'The Ego and the Id' (1923; rpt. 2001m: 12-68); and 'The Dissolution of the Oedipal Complex' (1924; rpt. 2001m: 173-82).

subject in her own right—her subjectivity, desire, power and autonomy relegated to the margins of consideration. Moreover, while Freud side-lined the mother's importance and denigrated her as inferior and castrated, at the same time, he idealised the mother-son relationship, stating:

a mother is only brought unlimited satisfaction by her relation to a son; this is altogether the most perfect, the most free from ambivalence of all human relationships. A mother can transfer to her son the ambition which she has been obliged to suppress in herself, and she can expect from him the satisfaction of all that has been left over in her of her masculinity complex.⁴

(2001o: 133)

Madelon Sprengnether notes Freud's strategies in formulating the Oedipus complex appear 'designed to obscure [the mother's] relative strength and importance vis-à-vis that of the infant' (3).⁵ Further, Freud's speculations on culture determined the young boy must separate, repudiate and transcend the pre-Oedipal mother and all feminine identifications and attributes to negotiate his castration complex and establish himself as a male subject. In Freud's conception, the father represents the principles of individuation, triangulation, prohibition and separation which the son must identify with for socialisation to take place, whereas the pre-Oedipal mother must be repressed and made unconscious under social and cultural law and language. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (2004) understand the Oedipal narrative to be not only a central feature of Freudian psychoanalysis but also a master discourse of modernism more generally.⁶ Lee Oser notes 'the period of Freud's Oedipus complex was the most Oedipal in modern history. Revolution and war dominated politics. Style overthrew style, philosophy philosophy' (2007: 97).⁷ The negative consequence of this has been for literary critics to respond to male modernist literature as if it were *Oedipus Rex*.

Elisabeth Däumer remarks how applications of traditional psychoanalytic models to T.

⁴ Freud's theory of female sexuality and writings on mothers, mother-son and mother-daughter relationships is exemplified in his paper 'Femininity' (1932; rpt. 2001o: 112-35).

⁵ Sprengnether (1990) gives a detailed account of Freud's difficulties with patriarchy and the effacement of the mother and the pre-Oedipal phase in his theories on human development, civilization and culture. For a further scathing feminist attack on, and deconstruction of, Freudian theory, see Irigaray's essay 'The Blind Spot of an Old Symmetry' (1985: 13-129).

⁶ For a critique of the dominance of Freud's Oedipal narrative in Western modern society, see Deleuze and Guattari.

⁷ Oser adds: 'the Oedipus Complex is the modernist version par excellence of generational conflict because it minimalizes, denies, or voids the love of parent and child' (2007: 97).

S. Eliot's life and works by critics such as Ernst Beer, Peter Drexler, Tony Pinkney and Peter Ackroyd have served to pathologise both Eliot's relation to the feminine and Charlotte Eliot's mothering. As in Freudian Oedipal theory, negative portraits of Charlotte as an inadequate, barely good enough or domineering phallic mother who sought vicarious satisfaction through her children have been painted primarily from the son's perspective, ignoring Charlotte's individual achievements, subjectivity and desire. As a consequence, maternal dominance and failure, and the need to repudiate and separate from the omnipotent mother, have been blamed for both Eliot's Prufrockian anxieties as a man and the violent misogyny of his early writings. Däumer's work has been prominent in challenging such readings of Charlotte's impact on her son, demonstrating them to be androcentric, one-sided and overly simplistic. Chronicling Charlotte's long and busy life as a mother, a poet, an active feminist and social reformer, in addition to surveying her many writings, Däumer argues that Eliot's mother provided her son with 'a daunting, deeply contradictory model of maternal authority' (1998: 484). She states:

Charlotte Eliot nurtured in her son the uneasy conviction that women, far from being merely passive vessels of the Word, were its arbiters and authors. Complicating Eliot's emotional and intellectual separation from his mother along the lines prescribed by ideals of masculine autonomy, this conviction may indeed have fuelled the sometimes violent misogyny of his early poetry while also animating his continuing effort to symbolise the mother in ways that do justice to her centrality in his own artistic development as a source of subjectivity and speech. (484)

For Däumer, Charlotte's simultaneous acquiescence in and ambivalence toward Victorian constructions of motherhood nurtured in her son the belief that women held an important authoritative and influential position in regard to language, art and culture. In other words, Charlotte's maternal example, coupled with the repressive imperialism of the Oedipus myth in modern Western culture, tore Eliot in two—both inspiring his poetic quest for selfhood and exacerbating his ambivalence toward the maternal feminine. Däumer's writings on the Eliot mother-son relationship are essentially a parenthetical discussion about the continuing dilemma, influence and passion of mother-child ambivalence in Eliot's works and the ongoing need to symbolise and recognise independent maternal subjectivity in order to mediate and

achieve ambivalence and differentiation.⁸ Even though Däumer's work has acted as a corrective to imbalanced readings of the Eliot mother-son relationship, her failure to fully theorise motherhood and ambivalence beyond traditional psychoanalytic and older feminist formulations has meant that Charlotte's positive contribution to Eliot's personal, intellectual and poetic individuation remains unclear and underappreciated.

This opening chapter builds on the work of Däumer and others who have recently contextualised and greatly illuminated Charlotte Eliot's life and writings to bring new insights into the Eliot mother-son relationship and its enduring influence on Eliot's development and creativity.⁹ Robert Crawford comments that 'Eliot's formative years were exactly that. Their importance is greater than readers have realised' (2015: 3). In heed of this statement, this chapter necessarily reconsiders Eliot's determining childhood years and Unitarian upbringing in St. Louis, Missouri, with particular focus on Charlotte. It looks at both old and new evidence related to different manifestations and expressions of Charlotte's ambivalence toward patriarchal motherhood and the mothering role, and also examines Eliot's early individual experience of this ambivalence. This includes: letters sent between Charlotte and Eliot during periods of separation in his adolescence and early adulthood, Charlotte's social and political writings and religious verse, documents detailing her feminist involvement in public life, testimonies corroborating both the relative absence of Eliot's father in his early life and the presence of multiple female carers, and also a little known letter confirming the traumatic impact on the Eliot family of the premature death of a daughter, Theodora, in 1886, just a year and a half before Eliot's birth. I show Charlotte as creatively managing and utilising vicissitudes in her experience of maternal ambivalence and striving to maintain her sense of well-being, individual female identity, autonomy and individuation through her writings. Moreover, Charlotte's private veneration of Mary is highlighted as important in providing an ideal maternal form, identification and support through which her own conflict of ambivalence is balanced and mediated. Having provided this background, this chapter re-examines what critics deem to be Eliot's most misogynistic and sadomasochistic early texts in the context of mother-son ambivalence: 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' (1914), 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1915), 'Hysteria' (1915) and *The Waste Land* (1922). My biographical reading of mother-son ambivalence does not directly equate biography with a

⁸ For Freud's discussions on ambivalence, see 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' (1905; rpt. 2001f: 135-230); 'Taboo and the Ambivalence of Emotions' (1912; rpt. 2001i: 18-74); 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes' (1915; rpt. 2001j: 109-40); and 'The Devil as a Father-Substitute' (1932; rpt. 2001m: 83-92).

⁹ For instance: Crawford (2015); Gordon (1998); Oser (1998); Sanna (Bloom, 2003b: 3-44); Spurr (2010); and Tucker (2010).

claim to a definitive understanding of Eliot's works but uses biography as an element to be read alongside these works in order to further our understanding of them. I contend Eliot's 'hysterical' early works and their repudiation of women to be a creative/destructive representation of, and continuing response to, his changing experience of mother-son ambivalence. I argue the mobilisation of aggression and heightening of ambivalence occurring during the process of mother-son separation—with its attendant issues of autonomy and dependence—to be not only difficult and traumatic for both Charlotte and Eliot but also enabling and contributing to the creativity, content and production of Eliot's writings during his years at Harvard (1906-10 and 1911-14), in Paris (1910-11) and also in London (1914-22).

In pursuing and upholding the aims of this chapter, I utilise D. W. Winnicott's and Melanie Klein's respective object-relations theories and also contemporary feminist theorists who have emended this work to incorporate more fully a maternal perspective. I include Rozsika Parker's ground-breaking writings on maternal ambivalence, most notably *Torn in Two* (1995). Parker's writings have helped broaden understanding of the complex emotions and feelings involved in mothering, in addition to the cultural fantasies and fears about mothers which are developed and promulgated as a result of maternal ambivalence. In particular, I make reference to Parker's calls for recognition of a creative and positive—as well as destructive—potential inherent in the conflicts generated by maternal ambivalence. Further to this, I make use of Jessica Benjamin's writings on the dangers of identificatory love, and her elaboration of Winnicott's notion of destruction as a necessary counterpart to the tension between self-assertion and true recognition of the (m)other in human development. Finally, I draw upon Jan Campbell's thesis put forward in *Freudian Passions: Psychoanalysis, Form and Literature* (2013) which argues for a more positive reading of hysteria as a creative performance of affects in search of a 'lived maternal form' (4). Sharpening Däumer's case, Eliot's effort to symbolise and understand the mother is shown to be a search for a 'maternal form', driven by ambivalence, through which the excessive passions related to the maternal body can be sublimated and managed. This project ultimately fails in Eliot's poetry up to *The Waste Land* due to continuing Oedipal repression of the pre-Oedipal mother in the endeavour to establish male self-identity through detachment from and transcendence of the mother. As Luce Irigaray has pointed out, this sacrifice of the maternal bond is a typically Western patriarchal Freudian-Lacanian solution to separation through the phallus. It demonstrates 'a forgetting of life, a lack of recognition of debt to the mother, of maternal ancestry, of the women who do the work of producing and maintaining life' (2001:

7).¹⁰ Despite this, however, I view the ambivalence towards and symbolic destruction of the metaphorical mother in Eliot's early writings as fantasies preparing the ground for psychic differentiation and recognition of the pre-Oedipal (m)other in his transitional writings of the 1920s and 1930s. Contrary to previous pathologising interpretations of the Eliot mother-son relationship, I uphold Parker's belief that 'it is in the very anguish of maternal ambivalence that fruitfulness for mothers and children resides' (1995: 6). This chapter contends that to gather a deeper, more balanced, just and sensitive understanding of both the ambivalence shown towards the maternal feminine and the varying and often contradictory maternal forms that Eliot uses in his works, to paraphrase Winnicott, it is to mothers that we so deeply need to speak.¹¹

Charlotte Eliot: Ambivalence towards Motherhood

Through Eliot's grandfather William Greenleaf Eliot (1811-87), a renowned Unitarian minister in St. Louis, Missouri, Eliot's family had a long established and distinguished association with the Unitarian Church. Eliot's mother, Charlotte, an apparently strict and high-minded woman,¹² identified herself most loyally with her husband's family and its traditions and was particularly proud of her father-in-law due to his lobbying for women's rights.¹³ As a nineteenth century matriarch with aspirations towards radical social and intellectual reform Charlotte was, as Ackroyd describes her, 'very much in the militant mould of her generation of women in America' (20).¹⁴ Although she was described in her graduation

¹⁰ For Irigaray, 'all of Western culture rests on the murder of the mother' (1995: 7).

¹¹ See the postscript to Winnicott's first collection of broadcast talks published under the title *The Child and the Family* (1957). In the postscript Winnicott makes it clear that he had a 'driving propulsion' to speak to mothers in particular, largely because the mother's contribution to society was only just being recognised (1957: 124).

¹² In memoriam on behalf of The Wednesday Club, St. Louis, Clara H. Scudder states Charlotte Eliot's personal characteristics were 'sincere conscientiousness and great reserve' (*HL*, MS Am 2560/92). She adds: 'both by inheritance and personal convictions, [Charlotte] possessed the highest standards for individual education, development and responsibility. She felt that privilege implied responsibility, and most faithfully tried to live her creed'.

¹³ In St. Louis, William Greenleaf Eliot played a decisive role in early advocacy of reform for women, joining the Woman Suffrage Association of Missouri and delivering sermons virulent in their assertion of equality between the sexes. In one of his 'Lectures to Young Men' (1854) entitled 'Transgression', he advises, 'He who loses his respect for woman and his veneration for woman's virtue, is sinking very fast; he is travelling rapidly toward ruin' (126). In particular, William emphasised deliverance of female suffrage as correlative with the offerings of education. His action to amend Missouri's school system was seen in his founding of the Mary Institute for girls in 1850, admittance of females into the theological school he had founded in Meadville, Pennsylvania in 1868, and his promotion of a special department for females at Washington University. Through such achievements, Shepley asserts William Greenleaf Eliot as having 'proved himself a feminist' (74); exemplifying how the revolutionary theology of Unitarianism had done much to promote egalitarian ideas on gender in nineteenth century America.

¹⁴ For a short summary of the role of women in the Unitarian movement, see Tucker's entry 'Women in the Unitarian Universalist Movement' in Keller and Ruether 380-93.

testimonial as a ‘young lady of unusual brilliancy as a scholar’ (*LTSEI*, 11), Charlotte’s ambitions to proceed onto higher education and become a poet were thwarted early on: she was debarred from her studies at the age of eighteen and obliged to earn a living teaching until she met and married Henry Ware Eliot in 1868. Abandonment of her literary ambitions would remain an issue of disquiet for Charlotte. Her frustration and resentment at having to adhere to a nineteenth century patriarchal culture restrictive of womanhood is revealed in a letter she wrote to Eliot in 1910 while he was at Harvard:

I hope in your literary work you will receive early the recognition I strove for and failed. I should so have loved a college course, but was obliged to teach before I was nineteen. I graduated with high rank . . . but when I was set to teaching young children, my Trigonometry and Astronomy counted for naught, and I made a dead failure. (*LTSEI*, 11)

Despite this setback Charlotte remained undeterred, and like other erudite women of her epoch sought to affirm female subjectivity, individual agency and self-assertion in an attempt to ameliorate the world which ‘had denied her the full use of her gifts’ (Ackroyd 20). For this, she found sustenance in her faith, naturally absorbing the fundamental tenets of William Greenleaf Eliot’s strong Unitarian beliefs. The liberal creed of optimism and social progress posited by heretical figures such as William Ellery Channing and Ralph Waldo Emerson made Unitarianism expedient to the arguments of the women’s rights movement in America.¹⁵ Charlotte acknowledged the doctrine’s emphasis on education as allowing women to practice a proactive spiritually based feminism through its promoting entrance into public life and the professions. In an article entitled ‘The Higher Education of Women’ (n.d.), she states education ‘is useful in proportion as it enables [women] to labour intelligently, not as the slave who bows under the yoke, but as one who goes forth to achievement and victory’ (*CES*, 37).¹⁶ No other religion so freely allowed women a lectern from which to articulate radical politics or dissension against gender hierarchy. Confirmed by Bonnie S. Anderson to

¹⁵ For studies on Unitarian and Universalist feminist women in the nineteenth century and their efforts to achieve social justice, equality in education, religious reform and an end to slavery and prejudice, see W. Leach; Anderson; Watts; May-Emerson; and Tucker (1994, 2010).

¹⁶ Clippings of many of Charlotte Eliot’s writings were pasted into her personal scrapbook now housed in the T. S. Eliot Collection at the Houghton Library, Harvard University (MS Am 2560/68). Most of the poems were written for the *Christian Register* and many are undated. In-text citations of the scrapbook from herein are abbreviated *CES*, followed by page number.

be ‘the *only* existing religion in the early nineteenth century that supported and encouraged non-traditional roles for women’ (62, my emphasis), Unitarianism appeared the lone modern apostasy remotely congenial to Charlotte’s belief in the feminisation of cultural and political power.¹⁷

Although Unitarianism was more progressive, inclusive of women and liberal than Christian Orthodoxy, at the same time it still proved restrictive for women by asserting limits to the opportunities and liberties afforded to Unitarian sisterhood.¹⁸ This is indicated in a sermon delivered by William Greenleaf Eliot in 1856 in which he vindicates the rights of women to education but demarcates the ‘Home’ as the only sphere for most women ‘in which success and happiness can be at the same time secured’ (39-40). Nineteenth century Unitarianism promoted the idea of the idealised mother whose duty it was to tend to the needs of her children and her home. Cynthia Grant Tucker (2010) notes that by ‘setting the home apart as the “church of childhood” and woman’s preserve’, Unitarianism subsequently reinforced the division of the sexes and ‘strengthened men’s authority in the larger church outside’ (11). This meant that ‘the ideology of the separate spheres still prevailed’: ‘females needed good schooling’, but only so ‘they would be fit companions for husbands and ready to teach their children at home’ (11).¹⁹ As Ruth Watts states, ‘Unitarians did play a significant part in changing assumptions about the capacities and role of women and thus gender conceptions’ (9). However, historical and contextual gendered notions of propriety would continue to regulate the extent of women’s opportunities.

Charlotte’s feminist efforts to come to voice and individuation would be seen in her endeavours to instigate social, cultural, political and educational reform through the membership of several activist women’s groups in St. Louis, such as the Wednesday Club, the Colonial Dames of America and the Humanity Club.²⁰ Charlotte co-founded and was extremely proactive in the Wednesday Club, which was established in 1890, two years after

¹⁷ Not only did Unitarian ministers like William Greenleaf Eliot and Theodore Parker inspire rebellious women to break from the confines of domesticity through education, but, quite remarkably, by 1870 the faith’s generation of a highly rationalist, almost fully secularised sexual cosmopolitanism meant ‘women could orate in almost any Unitarian pulpit and attend most Unitarian schools’ (W. Leach 278).

¹⁸ For details of the controversy between Unitarianism and Christian Orthodoxy in the nineteenth century, see G. Ellis.

¹⁹ Kathryn Gleadle (1-6) supports Tucker’s view elucidating how many Unitarians espoused Evangelical notions of feminine domesticity and submission which instead privileged force over reason, perpetuating ancient notions of feudal protection.

²⁰ A typescript at Harvard Houghton Library states how ‘the members of the Humanity Club of St. Louis were so impressed with the evils of this system, that a Committee of two of which Mrs Eliot was Chairman, was appointed to effect reforms in the treatment of children under the law. With the assistance of a few interested persons, a Probation Law was passed in 1901, and a Juvenile Court Law in 1903’ (HL, MS Am 2560/119).

the birth of Tom. Promoting high ideals and describing its purpose to be ‘to create and maintain an organised centre of thought and action among the women of St. Louis’ (Hyde and Conard 2484),²¹ the club’s activities included the study of literature and the arts, mythology and classical antiquity, education, philanthropy, and it also held an annual poetry contest.²² Charlotte’s unwillingness to be a silent domestic female bystander within a male-dominated society is evident in a poem she penned for the club in which she declares: ‘No longer of quiet domestic taste, / Anxious to save, unwilling to waste, / She strives to enlarge her sphere’ (CES, 81). This discomfort and resistance to Unitarian prescriptions of radiant motherhood, and the wish to extend the domain of women beyond the home, is also shown in her article ‘Women’s Interest in National Affairs’ (n.d.). She states:

undoubtedly woman has a ‘sphere’, and should not neglect her duties in that sphere; but its boundary need not be like the ‘dead line’ at Andersonville. In our complex civilisation there ought to be a place for those women, exceptional though they be, who have a God-given talent for what is considered man’s work, and for all those who are forced into this work by circumstances. (CES, 35)

Crawford notes that in spite of the demands and limitations placed on Charlotte as both a mother and woman ‘the vein of poetry was not repressed’ (2015: 14). Further to her keen involvement in the women’s club movement, Charlotte continued to strive for success and recognition as a female poet and author. This is shown by the many poems and articles that were accepted by religious journals such as the *Unitarian* and the *Christian Register*. Herbert Howarth comments how Charlotte’s delight in the publication of her own writings was clear, ‘for she clipped the columns and pasted them in scrap books for her children’ (28). In her verse writings, which are now housed at Missouri History Museum Library, St. Louis, and Houghton Library, Harvard University,²³ Unitarian belief, philosophy and theology are

²¹ The establishment of the Wednesday Club and its aims and pursuits are documented in Hyde and Conard 2479-84. The club was extremely active in the years immediately following Eliot’s birth in 1888, and many of its members were proactive in education reform and the women’s suffrage movement. Some of the topics discussed and papers delivered by members of The Wednesday Club bear striking similarity to the themes and titles of own Eliot’s poetry and prose: for instance, ‘The Divine Commedia—Its Philosophy and Symbolism’, ‘The Real Value of the Study of Art’ and ‘The Function of the Critic’.

²² For a detailed account of the influence and importance of the popular women’s club movement to American civic life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Hobbs.

²³ I wish to thank Dennis Northcott and Molly Kodner at Missouri History Museum Library and Research Centre, St. Louis, for their assistance in locating three notebooks of Charlotte Eliot’s poetry in her hand (MH, MS A0445). I also wish to thank Micah Hoggatt, Emelie Hardman, Susan Halpert and Emily Walhout of Houghton Library, Harvard University, for their help in locating Charlotte’s writings and correspondence.

conflated as shown by her writing about both male and female saints such as Savonarola, Giordano Bruno and Saint Marguerite of Antioch (*CES*, 19-21, 16),²⁴ her retelling of tales from the scriptures such as ‘The Raising of Lazarus’ (11) and also by her celebration of traditional Christian festivals: for instance, Pentecost in ‘Pentecost, the Day of Rejoicing’ (16), the birth of Christ in ‘The Nativity’ (28) and, most prominently, the commemoration of Easter as shown by her ‘Easter Songs’ pamphlet.²⁵ Like the work of her better known contemporary and fellow Massachusettsan Emily Dickinson, her poems also constantly draw analogies between God, faith, death, spiritual renewal and resurrection and the natural world. An instance of this is ‘Not in the Flesh, But the Spirit’, in which God is shown to be present in the coming of spring:

Now happy spring has come again,
 In valley deep, on outstretched plain,
 In forest glade, on mountain height
 The leaf buds open to the light.

They sought the Lord, they loved in
 vain
 Within the grave where he had lain.
 The Christ has risen! Bear thou away
 The hopes that come with Easter Day. (*CES*, 14)

Notwithstanding their obvious conventionality, Däumer identifies in Charlotte’s writings ‘the curious amalgam of rebellion and compliance that marks the rhetorical strategies of nineteenth century domestic feminism’ (1998: 483). Charlotte’s misgivings about the Unitarian faith and its gender arrangements are especially insinuated in her poems on radical Christian heretics Giordano Bruno and Savonarola. In these dramatic monologues, Charlotte circumvents the paralysing strictures of Victorian womanhood with its ideals of a passive maternity by appropriating the voices of heroic male martyrs, enabling both a covert attack on

²⁴ Sainte Marguerite/Margaret of Antioch, virgin and martyr, is called Marina in the Eastern Church. Maureen Quilligan (2011: 224) speculates that Saint Marina of Antioch may well have been the inspiration for Shakespeare’s characterisation of Marina in *Pericles*, itself an inspiration for Eliot’s Ariel poem ‘Marina’ (1930) which I discuss in chapter 4. For discussion of the legend of Sainte Marguerite of Antioch, see Clayton and Magennis.

²⁵ Charlotte’s other Easter compositions include ‘Easter Morning’, ‘An Easter Carol’ and ‘An Easter Hymn’ (*CES*, 13, 14, 23).

patriarchy and an expression of female desire and self-assertion. Däumer states:

for rebelling against church and society in the name of Christian piety, these martyrs modelled a vicarious, essentially ventriloquistic, affirmation of subjectivity and voice that would have been especially appealing to a woman who sought to venture into politics and poetry *as* a Christian mother, speaking not of her own desire, but on behalf of others—God, her children, and even the world. (483)

Also worthy of special mention in Charlotte's writings is her occasional homage to the 'holy Mother' Mary. In 'Both are Sisters in the House of God' the speaker is clear in her spiritual telos and divine identification: 'Thou Queen of Heaven, this I seek' (*CES*, 7).²⁶ Further, Charlotte invokes the *Stabat Mater*, a medieval hymn which celebrates the Virgin Mary, in the last section of 'Giordano Bruno in Prison':

Stabat mater dolorosa,	The mother stood mourning,
Juxta crucem lachrymosa	Next to the cross weeping,
Dum pendebat filius.	While the son was hanging.
(<i>CES</i> , 21)	(trans. Davis)

Charlotte's response to Mary is interesting considering Unitarians were vehemently anti-Catholic, and regarded the cult of the Virgin Mary as idolatrous.²⁷ Daniel P. McKanan confirms that 'American Unitarianism was a liberal offshoot from Puritanism, and as such it inherited the Puritan lack of interest in Mary'.²⁸ Unitarian humanitarian rationalism despiritualised both Jesus and his mother. Denying the possibility of the Virgin birth, Unitarians could not call Mary 'Mother of God', since she was deemed mother only of

²⁶ Charlotte's poem 'Both are Sisters in the House of God' is a translation from the Bavarian poet Oscar von Redwitz, a Roman Catholic.

²⁷ For a reading of important Unitarian and Universalist thinkers in American liberal theology such as William E. Channing, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Paul Tillich, all of whom stressed 'the critical check against idolatry' as a requisite to experiencing 'the Holy', see Dorrien 514-15.

²⁸ I wish to thank Dr Daniel P. McKanan of Harvard Divinity School for e-mail correspondence elucidating aspects of Unitarian and Universalist thought in the nineteenth century: including, the establishment of Unitarianism in reaction to Puritanism; the role of Mary in Unitarian thought; the growing nostalgia for Mary in the sentimental novels of the period; and Henry Ware Jr.'s rebuttal of Emerson in 'The Personality of the Deity' (1838) which expresses a wish to reintroduce to Unitarianism feminine images for God (Ware and Robbins 26-39).

Christ's human nature.²⁹ Yet, in a picture of Charlotte's bedroom at 2635 Locust Street, St. Louis (Fig. 2 and 3), in which all of her seven children were born, we can see in the top left-hand corner a print of Murillo's *The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin* (Fig. 4) and just below on the mantelpiece an image of a Madonna and Child.



Fig. 2. *Charlotte's Bedroom at 2635 Locust Street, St. Louis, Missouri*. 1905. Photograph. MS Am 2560/262. T. S. Eliot Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

²⁹ Unitarian moralist, William E. Channing exhorted that the purpose of true religion was not to create Gods in our image, regarding this as heresy. For Channing, to afford Mary divine status and the quality of spiritualisation of peoples through identification would be to succumb to the insensible delusions of papist Rome: 'we do believe, that the worship [of Mary] . . . though attractive, is not most fitted to spiritualize the mind, that it awakens human transport, rather than that deep veneration of the moral perfections of God, which is the essence of piety' (1830: 304). Channing's propounding of the religious and humanitarian implications of Unitarian dissension reveals the consequent demythologization and dereliction of Mary as goddess. Subsequently, in Unitarian endeavour to distance themselves from what they deemed 'the absurd superstitions and idolatrous worship of the Catholic Church' (Clarke, Channing, and Perkins, 1838: 349), as stated in the *Unitarian* of 1827: 'the deification of the Virgin (had) been long done away' (183).



Fig. 3. Close up of Bartolomé Esteban Murillo's *The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin* and a Madonna and Child in Charlotte's bedroom.



Fig. 4. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo. *The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin*. c. 1678. Oil on canvas. Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain.

Charlotte's writings and the paintings in her bedroom not only show the strength of her Unitarian faith but also indicate that she had her own divine horizon and independent passionate identifications, desires and beliefs aside from Unitarian principles. Importantly, they suggest that Charlotte privately upheld Mary both as a mother and as a most sacred and supportive identificatory aspect of the feminine constitution and its subjectivity and individuation.³⁰ This is despite the demoted role of Mary in Unitarian Christology—its denial

³⁰ The ramifications of precluding the notion of a female divine have been discussed at length by Irigaray. For Irigaray, to posit a gender a God is mandatory: '*guaranteeing the infinite*' (1993c: 61). The divine is the symbolic form of the imaginary which provides the ideal for imaginary identification. Though the divine is only imaginary, it upholds the imaginary supporting each sex's mode of perfection for itself and its transcendence in the difference of sexual difference. In Irigaray's view both sexes require a gender or sexuate essence as '*horizon*' to fulfil 'the wholeness of what we are capable of being' (61). She states: 'Divinity is what we need to become free, autonomous, sovereign. No human subjectivity, no human society, has ever been established without the help of the divine'. And, 'but as long as woman lacks a divine made in her image she cannot establish her subjectivity or achieve a goal of her own' (63). In the metaphysics of the Charlotte Eliot's Unitarian world, Mary was relegated under patriarchal tenor thus abrogating women a means of authentic individuation. See Irigaray's essay 'Divine Women' (1993c: 55-73).

of the Virgin's importance and its underwriting of 'the maleness of God' (Watts 101).³¹

The significance of Charlotte's enthusiasm for the Virgin with regard to her experience of mothering can be suggested through reference to Julia Kristeva's essay 'Stabat Mater' (1987b: 234-63). Here, Kristeva places emphasis on the mother as *subject* rather than merely as an *object* for the child. She privileges Christianity, particularly Catholicism, and its powerful figure of the Virgin Mary, as providing 'the most refined symbolic construct in which femininity . . . is focused on *Maternity*' (234, emphasis in original). Kristeva defines the maternal as

the ambivalent principle that is bound to the species, on the one hand, and on the other stems from an identity catastrophe that causes the Name to topple over into the unnameable that one imagines as femininity, non-language, or body. (234-35)

Kristeva explains how for centuries Mary has satisfied the desire for maternal love and granted self-identity to both men and women through her affirmation of difference: that is, in her conflation of femininity and maternity and her status as a paradoxical mother and virgin who is both inside and 'outside the law' (250). Mediating the maternal and the symbolic,

³¹ Nostalgia for Mary was widespread among Unitarians in the nineteenth century and twentieth century. In his sermon 'The Public Function of Woman' (1853), Theodore Parker complains 'the popular theology leaves us nothing feminine in the character of God' (15). Parker equates the lack of a female divine in the Unitarian faith with the silencing of woman, more generally, and with the reduction of woman to domesticity and motherhood. He states:

in order to attain the end—the development of man in body and spirit—human institutions must represent all parts of human nature, both the masculine and the feminine element. For the well-being of the human race, we need the joint action of man and woman in the family, the community, the Church, and the State. A family without the presence of a woman—with no mother, no wife, no sister, no womankind—is a sad thing. I think a community without a woman's equal social action, a church without her equal political action, is almost as bad—is very much what a house would be without a mother, wife, sister, or friend. (17-18)

Unitarian and modern degradation of Mary also found opposition in Henry Adams; a distant cousin and literary hero of Eliot's. Like Eliot, Adams was reared in the cultural milieu of New England Unitarianism. However, in a veiled slight at the religion's ignominious treatment of Mary, he evinces in a letter of 1891: 'if only I still knew a God to pray to, or better yet, a Goddess, for as I grow older I see that all the human interest and power that religion ever had was in the mother and child, and I would have nothing to do with a church that did not offer both' (E. Samuels 272). Adam's meditative Mariology comes to the fore in his autobiographical *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918), with his exposition in the chapter 'The Virgin and the Dynamo'. In a search for values that might sustain and centre the human psyche in what he saw as an emerging crisis in the consciousness of modern man, Adams perpetually returns to an ideal of eternal womanhood symbolised by the Virgin Mary. For Adams, 'something had been lost as well as gained in the new Reformation that accompanied Anglo-Saxon migration to New England' (Gatta 136). This sense of dispossession he blames on the conspicuous absence of Mary. Only restoration of the Virgin as a still effective historical force can provide humanity's best hope of recovery from an individual crisis of soul. For Eliot's felt affinity with Adams, see his 'A Sceptical Patrician. A Review of *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography*' (23 May 1919) (CP2, 41-47).

Mary offers women a 'skilful balance of concessions and restraints' (258-59) and a means of dealing with 'feminine paranoia' (257).³² For women and men, she functions as an intercessory maternal-feminine agency (the feminine is not only attributable to women) unifying desire and the law, the deeply private and the social. Moreover, Mary symbolises the possibility of reconceptualising traditional and patriarchal ethics. Perhaps most importantly, she both indicates and covers lack, and in doing so helps negotiate the loss of the mother. Motherhood, Kristeva maintains, needs the support of the mother's mother (even in the person of the father) as the mother's alternating union/disunion with her child recalls her own union with her mother. For Kristeva, the Virgin Mary fulfils this role by functioning as a go-between who both gives form to the returning passion and need for the mother and provides a model of future becoming for women (a similar positive facility is available for men with regards to both aiding differentiation and fostering recognition of maternal desire and subjectivity).³³ We may speculate, then, that Charlotte's interest in the Virgin Mary was the result of a lack in Unitarian religious structure with respect to the maternal. Certainly, in Charlotte's efforts to combine motherhood with feminine self-authorship, Mary as a maternal feminine ideal exemplifying both the suffering and joy of motherhood, a balance between self-love and object-love and the ability to negotiate separation from her son through love of God the Father would have provided a discourse otherwise missing in Unitarianism. It would be through the combination of Charlotte's devotion to the Unitarian Church and membership of women's clubs and her identification with the Virgin, together with her religious and

³² Kristeva states in 'Stabat Mater' how, on the one hand, the Virgin Mary enables for women a homosexual identification with the mother, makes possible the survival of matrilinearity and reconciles 'the unconscious needs of primary narcissism' (1987b: 259). In her virginity Mary denies the role of the male in procreation and 'overcomes him by setting up a third person' (257) by establishing woman's unique relationship to God in the Immaculate Conception (albeit in subservience to God). She fulfils female desire for power as Mary 'Queen of Heaven' but stifles this power 'by putting it on the knees before the child-god'. In addition, she mitigates ambivalence by obstructing 'the desire for murder or devouring by means of a strong oral cathexis (the breast), valorization of pain (the sob), and incitement to replace the sexed body with the ear of understanding'. On the other hand, the Virgin Mary confirms interdependence with the 'symbolic paternal agency' (259). Thus, preserving the maternal order within a symbolic paternal hegemony, Kristeva affirms that the Virgin maintains 'a certain balance between the two sexes' (241).

³³ Kelly Oliver interprets the love that founds Kristeva's 'herethics' as a 'daughter's love through identification with her mother' (1993b: 65). She states:

herethics is founded on the ambiguity in pregnancy and birth between subject and object positions. It is an ethics that challenges rather than presupposes an autonomous ethical agent. Herethics sets up one's obligations to the other as obligations to the self and obligations to the species. This ethics binds the subject to the other through love and not Law . . . the model of ethical love is the mother's love for the child, which is a love for herself and a love for her own mother. The mother's love is also the willingness to give herself up, to embrace the strangeness within herself. (183)

Kristeva's notion of 'herethics' is discussed in further detail in chapter 5.

political writings, that Charlotte would find a means of creatively managing the trials and tribulations of mothering, alongside her own independent ambitions.

A Virgin Mary to William Greenleaf's God, Charlotte embodied a sense of female independence and strength ultimately checked, controlled and subsumed within a patriarchy that Unitarianism only implied. Despite shortcomings in Unitarian philosophy limiting the achievement of a fuller sense of female identity and independence, Charlotte remained devout and resolute in the certitudes of William Greenleaf Eliot's faith throughout her life.³⁴ She translated the grandfather's law and its attendant codes of self-denial, self-control, conscience, reason, altruism and duty into family practice. Moreover, her identification with and adoration of her father-in-law was such that she wrote a memoir *William Greenleaf Eliot* (1904), which she dedicated to her children to remind them of his legacy 'Lest they forget'.³⁵ William died on 23 January 1887, a year before T. S. Eliot was born. Nonetheless, the abiding law and power of this ghostly, prophet-like father-figure would have a resounding effect on Eliot's maturation and his future life, so that paternalistic ties to this eminent preacher would leave Eliot with an onerous and permanent 'sense of possession' (Ackroyd 16). In a lecture which he gave at Washington University fifty years after his grandfather's death, Eliot notes:

I was brought up to be very much aware of him: so much so,
that as a child I thought of him as still the head of the family . . .
The standard conduct was that which my grandfather had set;
our moral judgements, our decisions between duty and self-
indulgence, were taken as if, like Moses, he had brought down
the tables of the Law, any deviation from which would be sinful.
(*TCTC*, 44)

From early on, then, the cultural imposition caused by familial obligation to a most intellectual and high-minded Unitarian tradition would prove a formative influence and pressure on Eliot. Ackroyd stresses how family became for Eliot 'a model for both the private and public relationships which he felt obliged to establish' (16). Eliot's sister, Ada, noted in a 1971 BBC documentary that he often felt 'rather overwhelmed' by his family ('Mysterious Mr Eliot'). This was possibly caused by his being the last child of six in a late-Victorian

³⁴ In view of Charlotte Eliot's feminist sympathies, Däumer supposes her allegiance to William Greenleaf Eliot 'cannot have been without tension and ambivalence' (1989: 31).

³⁵ Tucker sees Charlotte's book about William Greenleaf Eliot as ultimately bowing to patriarchal convention and hiding her own sex's narrative (2010: 242).

household of people all considerably older than himself. Furthermore, filial piety and obedience were paramount and inextricably linked to the observance and emotional reserve of the family's Unitarian religion and tradition.³⁶ Such demands would provoke opposition from young Tom as recognised by Eliot's cousins, who quickly saw that 'their expectations and unemotional Unitarian culture were incompatible with his artistic interests and personality' (Tucker, 2010: 226). Under the spiritual constraints of Unitarianism, through adolescence into early adulthood Eliot grew gradually more opposed to his inheritance, viewing it as an encumbrance.³⁷ Of particular import was the faith's denial of the Trinity, its rationalist hostility to ideas of Original Sin and the Incarnation and its simultaneous effacement of Calvinist theology. Eric Sigg explains that once Unitarianism had discredited Calvinism in its foundational moment it 'remained only the negation of a negation, prompting Eliot's indifference and hostility' (1989: 28). Sigg infers that the imposition of Unitarian conventions in Eliot's early childhood was 'too stiff' and 'withheld any spiritual compensation' (27-28). He suggests that Eliot appears to have understood emphasis on public duty at the expense of the private self as adversely resulting in an 'absence of self' and 'vulnerability' in human relations (28). Much like the male hysteric which Eliot saw dramatised in *Hamlet*, he would later diagnose himself in 1921 as having suffered from an 'aboulie and emotional derangement which had been a lifelong affliction' (*LTSEI*, 486).³⁸ Sigg notes these symptoms as characteristically shaped by the high moral charge of Unitarian domesticity, stating 'such melodramatized Manichaeism . . . tends to divide and desiccate the self, as well as the sense of actuality' (1989: 25). This onus on familial ideals requiring a sacrifice of self would

³⁶ For fuller exposition on Eliot's Unitarian background and heritage, see Ackroyd (15-29); Crawford (2015: 11-35); Dale 3-30; and Sigg's chapter 'New England' (Harding, 2011: 17-24).

³⁷ Eliot's dissatisfaction as an adolescent with his Unitarian inheritance is evident in a scathing, thinly veiled attack on Unitarian belief and progressivism in an address entitled 'The Relationship between Politics and Metaphysics' (*CPI*, 90-105), which he gave to the Harvard Philosophy Club in 1914. He states:

I do not plan to deprecate the alcoholic or stimulant value of the idea of Progress. I belong to a church of which one of the tenets refers to the Progress of mankind 'onward and upward forever'. I do not understand what this phrase means, but I acknowledge its value for enthusiasm; and however we may distrust enthusiasm or enthusiasts, we must not fail to provide for them. So long as people use the concept of Progress as an incentive to endeavour, they enjoy a harmless stimulant. For we are all always agreed that present conditions are bad, and the man who does not want to improve them is morally dead. But as soon as a man makes of Progress something independent of human need and human meaning, something upon which these rather are dependent—then he is losing his hold upon social reality; he is become an intellectual drunkard. (95)

For further evidence of Eliot's early critique of Unitarianism and aspects of New England culture, see 'Review of *Conscience and Christ: Six Lectures on Christian Ethics*, by Hastings Randall' (Oct. 1916) (*CPI*, 428-29).

³⁸ *Aboulie* is described by Gregory S. Jay as 'a variant of *aboulia*, a psychiatric term for the loss or impairment of the ability to decide or act independently' (Bloom, 2007: 86).

precipitate Eliot's ambivalence towards his family and its tradition, a familial ambivalence which would in turn manifest itself as ambivalence towards God (this scenario is most fully played out in Eliot's late play *The Family Reunion*, see chapter 5).³⁹

Couched in terms of gender, Eliot's rejection of Unitarianism would amount to a rejection of the religion of the *materfamilias*.⁴⁰ Gordon remarks how, by his being sullied by the religion's optimism and ecumenism, 'Eliot's mother gave him a blueprint he could only partially follow' (1998: 65). Ronald Bush refers to Emerson as a 'surprisingly good measure of the complexities of Eliot's inner biography' (Porte 180). Like Emerson, 'a figure divided against himself, and divided in a peculiarly New England way' (181), Eliot, as evidenced by his spiritual and philosophical investigations while at Harvard, would harbour a Calvinist need for a religion of the heart which Unitarianism neither eradicated nor satisfied.⁴¹ Eliot states in his late essay 'Goethe as the Sage' (1955): 'for anyone like myself, who combines a Catholic cast of mind, a Calvinistic heritage and a Puritanical temperament, Goethe does indeed present some obstacles to be surmounted' (*OPP*, 243). Attempted severance from familial religious roots would demonstrate on his part a will and determination for separation and individual striving. However, this disjunction would not be without consequence or conflict. This splitting would envelop a long-sustained, anxiety-ridden preoccupation with the maternal feminine as reflected in his real-life relationships with women and suggested by the depiction of women in his early poetry.

Harvard (1906-10 and 1911-14)

A notable consequence of Eliot's disenchantment with his inherited faith would be evident by the time he had enrolled at Harvard in 1906, where it was noted he 'had become indifferent to

³⁹ For later reflection by Eliot on his Unitarian upbringing, see his 'Review of *Son of Woman: The Story of D. H. Lawrence*, by John Middleton Murry' (*C.*, July 1931: 768-74). In this review Eliot openly derides the Unitarian dictums which had harangued him in his early life, considering 'this sort of loose talk to be, at best, in bad taste' (772).

⁴⁰ Tucker explains how Unitarianism itself was couched in terms of gender in the nineteenth century. Unitarianism was castigated by Trinitarians who mockingly labelled them as 'effeminate frauds' (2010: 10). Tucker cites Unitarian quieting of the female voice as defence against the full-scale fear of cultural and religious 'emasculatation' which presided over America in the nineteenth century. To prevent further debasement of the faith it was therefore deemed 'critical that females remember their place and be quiet so men could be men' (10).

⁴¹ For Eliot's relation to Ralph Waldo Emerson, see Ronald Bush's chapter 'T. S. Eliot: Singing the Emerson Blues' in Porte 179-97.

the Church' (Gordon, 1998: 18).⁴² Eliot's poetic juvenilia written during his time at Harvard (1906-10 and 1911-14), including his bawdy Colombo/Bolo poems, those published in the *Harvard Graduate* (1907-10) and those found in his Notebook (1909-17),⁴³ show the first signs of his rebellion against genteel Unitarianism, as well as the emergence of a sexualised masculinity deeply troubled by women.⁴⁴ Inspired by Arthur Symons' *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) and its accounts of modern French poets such as Jules Laforgue 'whose behaviour [and mysticism] would have horrified Lottie Eliot' (Crawford, 2015: 108), Eliot's early poetry is full of ambivalence towards the maternal, latent sexual anxieties and instances of female abjuration and objectification.⁴⁵ James E. Miller, Jr. observes Eliot's hostile attitude towards women and routine association of women with sin in such early poems as 'Circe's Palace' (1908), finding Eliot's view of women as 'mantraps', 'destructive' and 'emasculating' (2005: 71). From this he concludes 'there is a reason to see Eliot's Circe as his archetypal representation of Woman, with her sexually centred control of men enabling her to reduce them to their animal natures'. Of particular note is the pornographic 'The Triumph of Bullshit' (1910) with its rude retort 'For Christ's sake stick it up your ass' (*IMH*, 307), which Miller, Jr., regards as 'not comic, but soberly serious in his intensively negative feelings about women' (75).⁴⁶ Accusations of misogyny in relation to Eliot's violent rejection of women, principally in his early work, have also been levelled by Pinkney who, like Miller, Jr., highlights 'Circe's Palace' as 'evoking a woman of sinister and violent eroticism' (1984: 25). For Pinkney, Eliot's summoning of the *vagina dentata*, whose 'petals are fanged and red / With hideous streak and strain' (*CPP*, 598), functions as a symbolic instantiation of the threat of castration posed by 'an ambivalently desired and threatening woman' whom he identifies as the omnipotent mother (1984: 25). In this

⁴² Despite Harvard University being a stronghold of Unitarianism, while at Harvard Eliot explored contending philosophical and theological systems under the tutelage of Irving Babbitt, Josiah Royce, and George Santayana. Jason Harding considers George Santayana's Catholic interests and characteristic scepticism to be a particular influence 'helping Eliot to define the nature of his own discontent with the Harvard of his time' (2011: 317).

⁴³ Eliot's 'flower' poems written for the *Advocate* suggest to Crawford that 'part of him was still at high school' (2015: 101). They are conventional and lacking in development. Crawford notes a change, however, in 'Circe's Palace' of 1908. Eliot's early 'flower' poems 'Song: When we came home across the hill' (1907), 'Before Morning' (1908), 'Circe's Palace' (1908) and 'Song: The moonflower opens to the moth' (1909) are discussed in further detail in relation to Charlotte's unconscious influence in chapter 3.

⁴⁴ Crawford comments that Eliot's 'sexually explicit, overtly racist, outrageously carnivalesque and taboo-breaking' 'Colombo' verses 'might have made his mother pass out' (2015: 96).

⁴⁵ Eliot states in an interview in 1959 how his writing output proliferated in his undergraduate years at Harvard at the discovery of French modern poets Charles Baudelaire and Jules Laforgue: 'I wrote a few at Harvard just enough to qualify election to an editorship on *The Harvard Advocate*, which I enjoyed. Then I had an outburst during my junior and senior years. I became much more prolific, under the influence first of Baudelaire and then of Jules Laforgue, who I discovered I think in my junior year at Harvard' (Hall 261).

⁴⁶ Eliot privately circulated 'The Triumph of Bullshit' to Wyndham Lewis for publication in *Blast* in 1915. For further commentary on the poem, see Miller, Jr. 74-77; Johnson 14-25; and McIntire 10-38.

interpretation, 'Circe's Palace' is a condensation of 'the Oedipal prohibition and the more primitive phantasy of the persecuting breast' (27). The poem both sublimates and condemns the maternal body whose seductive allure debar the child's access to the paternal metaphor, the phallus.

Donald Childs (1997) cites Eliot's 'Ode' of 1918 as heralding the first appearance of Shakespeare's Coriolanus in his works: the fatherless 'man-child' (*Cor.* 1.3.17) who is 'More bound to's mother' than any other man in the world (5.3.159). Childs sees Eliot's Coriolanus as an outer arrangement of the inner psychodynamics of the ambivalent mother-son relationship, indicating a changing awareness and exploration of Eliot's own 'mother-complex' (1997: 136). However, Childs crucially ignores Eliot's juvenilia and so misses the presence of the castrating *vagina dentata* and the antipathy towards maternal authority and desire detectable in these earlier writings. As both Christopher Ricks and Neil Corcoran note, Eliot's first allusion to *Coriolanus* is not in 'Ode' but in his unpublished 'Mandarins' (1910)—a series of poems written at Harvard which observe and sardonically berate a variety of mandarins caught up in vacuous triviality and perfunctory service.⁴⁷ The first 'Mandarins' poem implies the first part of *Coriolanus*, in which the protagonist uses his opposition to the common populace to define himself and fend off his vulnerability:

Stands there, complete,
Stiffly addressed with sword and fan:
What of the crowds that ran,
Pushed, stared, and huddled, at his feet,
Keen to appropriate the man?

Indifferent to all these baits
Of popular benignity
He merely stands and waits
Upon his own intrepid dignity;
With fixed regardless eyes—
Looking neither out nor in—
The centre of formalities. (*IMH*, 19)

Here, there is a hint of the discontent Coriolanus experiences at the false mask of ceremony he

⁴⁷ See Ricks (*IMH*, 127-30); and Corcoran 102.

has to wear in subservience to his mother Volumnia's controlling wishes and design.⁴⁸ Despite Coriolanus' haughty pose as a self-sufficient phallic 'hero' he has in fact been 'framed' by his mother's desires (*Cor.* 5.3.62-63). He is a virtual automaton, in thrall to maternal domination and unable to 'author' a true male self (5.3.36). At the end of this sketch Eliot's Coriolanian figure displays an undercurrent of dissatisfaction and uncertainty about the idealised role assigned to him: 'A hero! and how much it means; / How much— / The rest is merely shifting scenes' (*IMH*, 19).

As Colleen Lamos notes, and as the advent of Eliot's Coriolanus scene in 'Mandarins' implies, a 'maternal intertext' (71) imbues and energises Eliot's early poems and is paradoxically revealed by symbolic efforts to suppress, ignore, disparage or violently abject this influence.⁴⁹ Lamos naturally deems Charlotte Eliot to be 'the unacknowledged precursor' whom all of these poems, 'in one way or another, silently cite' (58). Hence, as Gordon states, it is extremely 'telling to read Charlotte Eliot's poetry in the context of her son's work' (1998: 9). As early as 1908, there is a 'logic of profanation' (Kristeva, 1993: 41) in Eliot's early poetry with regard to the mother and Charlotte's maternal sublime that suggests a wish for separation from the maternal and 'the anxiety of influence', to use Harold Bloom's term.⁵⁰ These poems show none of the earnest religiosity of Charlotte's verse. Where Charlotte's verse purveys a message of religious optimism, individual calling and the turning to a faith that will endure, Eliot's poetry lacks the epistemological grounding of religious certitude. As stated in 'Spleen' (1910), all metaphysical questioning remains 'On the doorstep of the

⁴⁸ Charlotte's letters to Eliot during his studies at Harvard show her as maintaining an interest 'in every detail' of her son's 'life' (*LTSEI*, 11).

⁴⁹ Lamos explains her use of the term 'maternal intertext' as:

the general heading for these representations because Eliot's relation to female authority, including the power of female sexuality, is not mediated through citations but is portrayed in various, often occluded ways within his poems. Moreover, these poems point back to Eliot's relationship with his mother and his wife, whose roles in Eliot's poetry are crucial yet obscure. Reading the suppressed intertexts of Eliot's early poetry allows us to explore decisive personal and cultural (the 'already read') forces at play in Eliot's text, specifically, the nexus of gynophobic and homoerotic energies that coincides ambivalently with his revealed intentions'. (71)

⁵⁰ In her study *Proust and the Sense of Time* (1993), Kristeva notes a 'logic of profanation' (41) taking place in the works of Marcel Proust in relation to the mother. For her, Proust's aggressive 'profanation' of the mother is a purposeful strategy which serves to differentiate the male self from the mother and is a critical step in Proust's quest to become an artist. Kristeva points out Eliot's great admiration for Proust in the 'Preface' to *Sense and Time*, recognising 'a number of deep similarities' between the two writers that goes beyond 'mere cultural politics' (xvi).

Absolute' (*CPP*, 603).⁵¹ Moreover, in contrast to Charlotte's veneration of Mary, women are continually rendered as material antagonists, the 'eternal enemy of the absolute' (*CPP*, 33): that is, as agents of seduction and bathetic sentimentality debarring the male quest for individuation, authentic meaning and apprehension of the divine (see 'Circe's Palace', 'On a Portrait', 'Nocturne', 'Portrait of a Lady II', 'Mandarins 1-4', 'Goldfish I-IV', 'Spleen', 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', 'Conversation Galante').

Perhaps the most shocking instances in Eliot's early poetry of misogyny and contravention of his mother's faith and Unitarianism occur in 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' (1914) and 'The Death of Saint Narcissus' (1915).⁵² In these poems bloody martyrdom inverts Charlotte's commonplace projections of sainthood, transmuting them into a form of 'neurotic sanctity' (Mayer 192). Taking 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' as a case in point, Childs notes the language of the first stanza is 'explicitly religious' (1997: 187), the 'neophyte' (*IMH*, 78) adoring an idealised lady gowned in 'white' as if she were the Virgin Mary. Initially, this lady emulates both Charlotte's sacred Madonnas and her 'spotless and pure' Saint Marguerite (*CES*, 16), and is an embryonic version of the maternal 'Lady' from 'Ash-Wednesday'. Yet, in this sadomasochistic poem of erotic psychopathology the maternal ideal is the troubling Lorelei whose omnipotence induces misogynistic rage, male hysteria and self-flagellation.⁵³ Accordingly, Eliot has his Dantesque protagonist strangle his Beatrice in an attack which exhibits a wish to possess the (m)other's consciousness out of fear of being possessed and dominated:

⁵¹ This is indicated in 'Easter: Sensations of April' (Apr. 1910) which parodies his mother's many spring/Easter poems yet executes a brazen clinamen in its Laforguean tone and style, wry pessimism and show of waning faith:

Geraniums, geraniums
 On a third-floor window sill.
 Their perfume comes
 With the smell of heat
 From the asphalt street.
 Geraniums, geraniums
 Withered and dry
 Long laid by
 In the sweepings of the memory. (*IMH*, 23)

⁵² The inspiration for Eliot's 1914 St. Sebastian poem appears to go back to 1910. A painting of St. Sebastian by Florentine painter Antonio Pollaiuolo is ticked in Eliot's copy of London Baedeker bought in 1910. Childs reckons 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' to have been written 'as early as 1910 or 1911' (1997: 227).

⁵³ Lamos cites the lady in 'The Love Song of Saint Sebastian' as Freud's mother-figure with reference to Freud's paper 'A Child Is Being Beaten' (1919): 'according to Freud, the prototypical male masochistic fantasy is one of being beaten by the mother . . . In Eliot's poem, the speaker's self-flagellation is performed in subservience to a woman (Freud's mother figure)' (Laity and Gish 35).

You would love me because I should have strangled you
And because of my infamy;
And I should love you the more because I had mangled you
And because you were no longer beautiful
To anyone but me. (*IMH*, 78-79)

Unlike Charlotte's depictions of venerable piety, Eliot's decadent 'St. Sebastian' is 'no authentic saint' (G. Smith, 1996: 153). In fact, 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' is extremely antithetical to Charlotte's Madonna and child and Saint Marguerite, overlaying, as Albert Gelpi describes, 'a grotesque pietà with a grotesquer Madonna with child' (95). In Lacanian terms, Eliot's poem expresses a male fantasy of exchange, a wish to separate from the Other and the Other's desire through severance of the mother vis-à-vis destruction of the substitute object orienting the subject to his desire (Lacan's object *a*).⁵⁴ In real life terms, the poem's differing use of martyrdom and 'logic of profanation' demonstrates a conflict of wills between poet-mother and poet-son: in short, 'you and I don't want the same thing' (Petrucci 353).⁵⁵

Charlotte Eliot and Ambivalence towards Mothering

In observing the virulent abjection of the maternal feminine in Eliot's early published and unpublished poetry, Gordon finds it 'puzzling that women kin to Eliot in no way shaped his judgement of their sex, as though that judgement excluded every attribute women share with men beyond sexual instinct' (1998: 37). Gordon considers the many 'spirited, humane and active women around Eliot in his youth' (36), including his mother and sisters, and declares Eliot's reductive distortion of women as 'inexplicable in a man of questioning intelligence' (37). This ambivalence is even more baffling if we take into account Eliot's obvious love for his mother and sisters, his mother's feminism and admiration for sacred virginal mother figures and his Unitarian background with its egalitarian stance on gender issues. Despite overwhelming evidence of the strength of the love and fidelity between Charlotte and her

⁵⁴ For description of Lacan's concept of object *a*, see D. Evans 128-29. The object *a* 'denotes the object which can never be attained, which is really the CAUSE of desire rather than that towards which desire tends' (128, capitalisation in original). For Lacan, the object *a* is 'any object which sets desire in motion'.

⁵⁵ Stanley Coen (1992) sees sadomasochism as a defensive reaction to pathological dependency, particularly on the mother. In a letter by Eliot to Conrad Aiken in which he supplies a draft of 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' there is a note in the margins next to the lines 'You would have loved me because I have strangled you / And because of my infamy' (see *LTSEI*, 48-51). In the note Eliot alters 'infammy' to 'infamy' and jokes about resisting an urge to rhyme 'infamy' with 'mammy'. Vincent Sherry views this as a 'slip' (244) full of psychological content for a Freudian reader of the poem, implying the mother to be an unconscious basis for the poem.

children, Richard Badenhause writes of Eliot that ‘few writers have been so alone amidst so many people’ (27).⁵⁶ Eliot’s parents were both forty-five when he was born and he recalls them in his early life as remote, like ‘ancestors’ (qtd. in Gordon, 1998: 5). His father, Henry Ware Eliot Sr., who called himself a ‘Simpleton’, was profoundly deaf and often absent due to the demands of his work as a successful brickmaker.⁵⁷ Eliot’s second wife, Valerie, states how Eliot felt his father ‘was inclined to leave too much’ to his mother (*LTSEI*, xviii). This fact would no doubt have shaped and powerfully affected Charlotte’s experience of mothering.⁵⁸ Henry commended Eliot in early youth as a modest and caring son, but ‘not a promising one’ (Gordon, 1998: 6) due to mediocre school grades which blanketed his latent gifts.⁵⁹ Eliot admitted in a conversation in 1950 that his father’s lowly appraisal had left him ‘mournful’ as a child (qtd. in Gordon, 1998: 6).⁶⁰ Due to disparities in interests and identification it appears that Henry was discordant with his son throughout his life, and unable to forge the necessary paternal bond. With regard to his poet-mother, however, Eliot was undoubtedly closer and completely devoted to her throughout his life. In correspondence with her during his early residence in England, Eliot’s addresses are always of earnest devotion: ‘always your loving son’ (*LTSEI*, 133), ‘always your devoted son’ (182), with the strongest show of expression signed on a flyleaf of a copy of *Union Portraits*, ‘with infinite love’ (213). That Charlotte was equally devoted to her children is suggested by her dedication ‘To My Children’ in her published play *Savonarola* (1926). In spite of this, Eliot’s closest cousin, Eleanor Hinkley, gives an intriguing anecdote which suggests Charlotte at times gave out signs of maternal ambivalence towards her children, stating ‘she wasn’t particularly interested in babies, that’s the fact of it and I don’t think she petted her daughters at all but I think they were well taken care of, there was a nurse’ (‘Mysterious Mr Eliot’).⁶¹

Elaboration of Freud’s distinction of ambivalence by object relations theorists Melanie Klein and D. W. Winnicott resulted in the concept of maternal ambivalence being well

⁵⁶ See the chapter ‘“Speaking as Ourselves”: Authorship, Impersonality, and the Creative Process in the Early Essays’ in Badenhause 27-61.

⁵⁷ Henry Ware Eliot Sr. self-titled his short autobiography ‘The Reminiscences of a Simpleton’ (1910-11). The sixty-page typescript is now housed at Olin Library, Washington University, St. Louis (*OL*, TS WUA 03 wua00068).

⁵⁸ For discussion of how paternal ambivalence affects mothers and mothering, both positively and negatively, see R. Parker (1995: 13-15).

⁵⁹ Tucker notes further disdain from Eliot’s father in his belittling Eliot’s love of theatre in college as ‘too dramatic bizzzy’ (2010: 226); a pursuit far too contrary to preparation for more legitimate work.

⁶⁰ Ackroyd states ‘there is a sense in which Eliot never seems to have felt close to his father’, adding ‘certainly, in later life, Eliot felt he had let him down, that he had left him unhappy and bewildered with the course of his son’s life’ (19).

⁶¹ Quoted by Abigail Eliot in an interview for BBC *Omnibus* production, ‘The Mysterious Mr Eliot: Aspects of T. S. Eliot’, televised 3 Jan. 1971.

established in psychoanalytic theory.⁶² However, while these theorists emphasise the child and the child's view of the mother, Rozsika Parker's pioneering work focuses on the mother and her ambivalence towards the child. Parker describes maternal ambivalence as 'normal, natural and eternal' (1995: 25) and highlights both its positive and negative contributions to mother and child. For Parker, maternal ambivalence constitutes 'not an anodyne condition of mixed feelings, but a contradictory state of mind, shared variously by all mothers, in which loving and hating feelings for children exist side by side' (Hollway and Featherstone 17).⁶³ It is 'determined by complex interactions of external and internal reality and has to be socially and culturally located' (19). Further, maternal ambivalence is not a static affair but a 'life-long process' (25). It is a complex, dynamic experience of struggle with oscillations recurrently felt by a mother throughout a child's development, varying between different children, and often sensitive to environmental and other circumstantial factors.

For Parker 'the crucial issue is how a mother manages the guilt and anxiety ambivalence provokes' (1995: 8). She states the conflicts engendered by ambivalence can have creative or destructive possibilities for both mother and child depending on whether its affects are 'manageable' or 'unmanageable'. Manageable ambivalence can prompt and mediate union, separation and autonomy, healthy narcissism, space and distance between mother and child. It can be a source of creative insight and a spur to individuation, motivating love, understanding, self-reflection and self-knowledge. On the other hand, unmanageable ambivalence may prevent separation. It may foster regressive idealising tendencies, nostalgic fantasies of oneness, promote negative self-evaluation, extreme anxiety and feelings of helplessness. Parker states how culturally prescribed notions of ideal motherhood such as those propagated in the nineteenth century and supported by Unitarianism very often function to deny maternal ambivalence, subjectivity and desire, and the fallibility of the mother (the circulation of passionate feelings of hate as well as love towards her child) at the level of the social. Discrepancy between a personal ambivalent self and an unachievable all-giving, all-loving maternal ideal may provoke in the mother feelings of shame, inadequacy and disgust that inflate maternal ambivalence to uncontrollable levels of despair, depression and hatred. Kristeva states in 'Stabat Mater' how for both mother and child the ideal of a perfect mother

⁶² For seminal papers in psychoanalytic theory that build upon and extend Freud's work on ambivalence, see Melanie Klein, 'A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States' (1935; rpt. 2011: 262-90); and D. W. Winnicott, 'Hate in the Countertransference' (1947; rpt. 1992: 194-204).

⁶³ See Rozsika Parker's *Torn in Two* (1995) and also her essays 'Maternal Ambivalence' (Spurling 3-17), 'The Production and Purposes of Maternal Ambivalence' (Hollway and Featherstone 17-37), and 'Shame and Maternal Ambivalence' (Mariotti 85-112).

can defend against and contain ambivalence. While this may be true, at the same time Parker points out that idealisation may also magnify ambivalence by its denying of full recognition of the real *normal* experience of motherhood and maternal desire (34-35). As a consequence, the capacity to hold ambivalence in tension can break down, widening the breach between polarities (love and hate, aggression and masochism, femininity and masculinity), preventing separateness and mutual reciprocity between mother and child and forcing the unacceptable, often violent and hysterical face of ambivalence to come to the surface (56). Parker holds that for idealisation and denigration to subside, and for ambivalence between mother and child to be managed and tolerated, there must be recognition of the ubiquity of maternal as well as infantile ambivalence and desire. Moreover, for both mother and child to achieve ambivalence they must negotiate entry into what Klein calls the ‘depressive position’ from the ‘paranoid-schizoid’.⁶⁴ Following Klein and Winnicott, Parker stresses the importance of the mother’s gratifying care, love and support in enabling the child to hold and transform ambivalence into creativity and insight.⁶⁵

John Soldo suggests that by the time Eliot was born his parents were financially secure enough for Charlotte to commit more fully to her efforts in the public sphere. She was able to employ an ‘Irish maid for her infant’, freeing her ‘to pursue her own interests and satisfy the desire to succeed on her own merit’ (1983: 3). Factors contributing to Charlotte’s ambivalence towards mothering cannot be verified. However, as noted earlier it is evident that she was unwilling to be totally subservient within an ultimately patriarchal Unitarian ideology. Although Charlotte was devoted to her children, she did not inhibit her independent passions, limit herself to a maternal function or regard herself as merely an object for her children. Instead, through her Unitarian faith, women’s clubs and love of the Virgin Mary she found ways to combine motherhood and writing to manage, reflect upon, and utilise her maternal ambivalence as both a source of creativity and an impetus for maternal individuation. Still, it is possible that in her exertions to balance her commitments in both public and private spheres her responses to Eliot in early life were limited. Crawford lends support to this suggestion explaining that Eliot’s sister Charlotte was taken ill not long after his birth, which added to the several demands placed upon Charlotte Sr. For Crawford ‘such circumstances, and his mother’s continuing commitment to social reforms in St. Louis,

⁶⁴ For explanation of Klein’s notions of the ‘paranoid-schizoid position’ and ‘depressive position’, see ‘Introduction’, n. 38.

⁶⁵ R. Parker states how the mother’s mothering and ability to handle her own ambivalence is inflected, but not determined, by the experience of her own mother (1995: 86-94).

brought Tom even closer to Annie Dunne' (2015: 28), his Irish Catholic nurse. Eliot corroborates this fact in a 1930 letter in which he admits, in his early years, he grew 'greatly attached' to Annie Dunne, remembering her as his 'earliest personal influence' besides his parents (*LTSE5*, 281).⁶⁶

Soldo goes as far as to distinguish Annie Dunne as the 'real' mother of Eliot's childhood (1983: 4).⁶⁷ However, John Bowlby points out that 'monotropy', that is deep attachment to a particular figure, 'is by no means absolute' (Holmes 69).⁶⁸ At other times Eliot's sisters, and in particular Ada, would compensate for Charlotte's remoteness, also adopting 'an almost maternal role towards him' (Ackroyd 21).⁶⁹ Thus, what *is* evident is that in the early interpersonal familial environment of his childhood, Eliot was surrounded and dominated by women who provided multiple attachments and an abundance of love (see Fig. 5). This shield of maternal care would foster a reliance and need whose absence Eliot later readily admitted induced psychopathological fear and Prufrockian anaesthesia within the self: 'I am very dependent upon women (I mean female society); and feel the deprivation at Oxford . . . the deprivation takes the form of numbness only' (*LTSE1*, 82). An inability to separate from female attachment figures to form new attachments would represent a developmental challenge to Eliot throughout his adolescence and young adulthood; a problem exacerbated by the relative absence of a strong paternal identification. Therefore, in answer to Gordon's puzzlement at the ambivalence towards women in Eliot's early works, we may surmise that Eliot's felt experience in infancy of fluctuations in maternal presence and absence—due to complex issues of both maternal and paternal ambivalence and cultural ambivalence towards female agency, power, subjectivity, and sexuality—alongside, at times, an overwhelming degree of female love, care, and protectiveness by the mother and her substitutes, were formative factors in modelling the polarities of Eliot's relation to the

⁶⁶ Eliot's comments on his attachment as a boy to his Irish nurse Annie Dunne is in a letter to Marquis W. Childs dated 8 August 1930 (*LTSE5*, 281). Eliot later admitted being 'devoted' to his nanny. She was to him 'more important than anybody else' and expressly 'to the much-the-youngest child of a large family' (qtd. in Spurr, 2010: 10). Charlotte allowed Annie Dunne to take her son to Catholic Mass, and he states how these visits greatly impressed him: 'I liked it very much: the lights, the coloured statues and paper flowers, the lived-in atmosphere, and the fact that the pews had little gates that I could swing on'. For further comment on Eliot's relationship with Annie Dunne, see Crawford (2015: 24-28); Moody (1994b: 3-4); and Soldo (1983: 3-12).

⁶⁷ Soldo states that 'it is undeniable that Anne Dunne was one of the major influences of his childhood' (1983: 5). He cites the prominence of Annie's influence on Eliot as unveiled in a childhood recollection in an early draft of *The Family Reunion*: 'Of those you loved in childhood . . . Above all, perhaps, the nursemaid' (qtd. in Soldo, 1983: 4).

⁶⁸ For further comment on non-exclusive mothering, different parenting arrangements, and the importance of caregivers other than the parents on child development, see Chodorow 73-76.

⁶⁹ This point is supported by Valerie Eliot who confirms that his eldest sister, Ada, 'who was nineteen years his senior, seemed more like a mother to him' (*LTSE1*, xviii).

maternal feminine. Importantly, it would be this complex of early childhood affections, and expressly those of his mother, that would provide the initiatory context, creativity and content for the uncomfortable truths veiled in the sublimations of his emerging poetic voice.



Fig. 5. *T. S. Eliot with mother and group at front gate at 2635 Locust Street. 28 May 1896.* Photograph. MS Am 2560/162. T. S. Eliot Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

I wish to suggest another possible underexplored explanation for Charlotte's ambivalence towards mothering: that she was still mourning the death of her sixth child. A daughter, Theodora Sterling Eliot, born just three years prior to Eliot's birth, died in 1886 aged just sixteen months.⁷⁰ Charlotte's attachment to Eliot most certainly would have been

⁷⁰ Theodora Sterling Eliot was born 25 July 1885. Her death on 5 December 1886 is mentioned by Ackroyd 16; Crawford (2015: 12); Däumer (1989: 37-38); Howarth 23; and Seymour-Jones 176, 348. However, the psychological implications of Theodora's death on Charlotte and the family have not been discussed except briefly by Tucker (2010: 225, 296). The impact of the death of Theodora remains an area of critical opportunity in understanding T. S. Eliot's early life and subsequent relation to his mother.

affected by Theodora's loss.⁷¹ Although high infant mortality was commonplace in the nineteenth century, Charlotte's mother-in-law, Abigail Cranch Eliot, comments in a letter dated 5 December 1886 on the 'passing away of Hal's little one' (RC, MS Eliot. T. L.).⁷² Abigail states how the plight of Theodora meant that she had securely 'wound herself' around her parents' 'heart'. Theodora was born severely impaired with 'one pair of limbs and no strength in the legs' and Abigail gives 'water on the brain' (known in medical terms as hydrocephalus) as the reason for her death. Abigail goes on to state how the family were deeply affected and 'sadly bereaved' by her loss, adding that they 'will miss her so much'.⁷³

Klein (1940) highlights mourning as responsible for intensifying ambivalence and magnifying feelings of hate or persecution (2011: 340-77).⁷⁴ For Klein, real loss of a child reactivates in the mother the processes of the 'depressive position'.⁷⁵ The persistence of ambivalence thereby becomes the structuring modality of all relations.⁷⁶ Marguerite Reid in her research on mothers who had given birth following the death of a small child confirms the 'complexity of feelings associated with both the conception and birth of the next baby' (2007: 182), explaining:

a mother often struggles to separate the two babies in her mind . . . There may, however, be a continued state of hyper-vigilance . . . as well as feelings of ambivalence towards the new infant and disloyalty to the dead infant. When there is a difference in gender between the live and dead baby some

⁷¹ Tucker's biography of three generations of Unitarian Eliot women in the nineteenth century *No Silent Witness* (2010) gives account of how the Eliot men and women managed differently the impact of the untimely death of children. She also shows the susceptibility of the Eliot women to loneliness and depression. She states:

when they suffered the death of a child or defeat in denominational politics, men doubled their workload, burned themselves out, and went off alone to recuperate. However refreshed upon their return, they were no more receptive to wifely laments. Their spouses, obliged to protect the minister's privacy outside the parsonage, typically had no one else with whom they could share the whole of their burdens. (15)

⁷² I would like to thank Gay Walker and Mark Kuestner at Special Collections and Archives, Reed College, Portland, for their help in locating Abigail Adams Cranch Eliot's letter to Henrietta and Thomas Lamb Eliot detailing Theodora's death.

⁷³ Barbara Almond states how mothers often experience a child's deformity as a punishment, and how there is always an element of the negative side of ambivalence in their reactions (141-65). Thomas J. Brown regards T. S. Eliot's initials as a family commemoration of 'the short life of his sister' (344).

⁷⁴ See Melanie Klein, 'Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States' (1940; rpt. 2011: 344-70).

⁷⁵ Notably, Klein elaborated her idea of the 'depressive position' in the aftermath of the death of her own son Hans in 1934. For comment on this, see Kristeva (2001: 73-81).

⁷⁶ R. Parker adds how a mother in response to the bereavement of a child may resort to manic omnipotence over her other children due to feelings of shame, guilt and culpability. She may feel responsible for having done harm to her child and, as a consequence, her overwhelming anxieties about loss can render ambivalence unmanageable and be unconsciously communicated to her other children (Hollway and Featherstone 31-35).

mothers feel regret and disappointment. This may lead the mother to perceive her infant as being the wrong sex, and I would question how this affects . . . her sense of pride in her baby's sexuality. When there is unresolved mourning the mother often feels preoccupied with her feelings of distress, and therefore emotionally unavailable. The baby is cared for in the shadow of the dead infant, hence my preference for the term *penumbra baby* rather than *replacement child*.⁷⁷

(198, emphasis in original)

Pregnancy is reported in much research, following the loss of a previous child, as instilled with special significance and an attendant 'atmosphere of vigilance and anxiety' (Reid, 2007: 198).⁷⁸ Tucker states that after Theodora's death Charlotte's 'morbid expectation of losing the child was transferred to Tom' (2010: 226), so that 'when it was discovered that Tom had been born with a double-hernia, its gravity was exaggerated, exacerbating the clutching parental anxiety' (296).⁷⁹ Information concerning Theodora's death and observation of Charlotte's anxiety and mourning, as well as Charlotte's occasional unavailability due to her efforts to enter the public sphere, is therefore important. It suggests that as a 'penumbra baby' (a child born in the shadow of a deceased infant), Eliot may have been subject to the ensuing ambivalence of his mother towards mothering and the unconscious recipient of his mother's persecutory and depressive anxiety: a condition of self-blame which can, at times, impinge on a mother's ability to care for her child.⁸⁰ This is not to say that Charlotte did not love her son,

⁷⁷ See also Reid 2003a, 2003b.

⁷⁸ For further comment on pregnancy following the death of a child, see Raphael-Leff; and Phipps.

⁷⁹ Eliot was born with a double-congenital hernia meaning he had to wear a truss all of his life. As a result, he was afforded closeted attention by his mother and carers throughout the early phase of his life through into late adolescence. Charlotte's over-solicitous concern over her son is evidenced in her disallowing him from partaking in sports due to his physiological infirmity while at Milton Academy (1905-06). Observing this, many critics and biographers have scolded Charlotte's mothering as having a detrimental effect on her son. However, as Däumer points out, these critics have not taken into account the fact of Theodora's death prior to Eliot's birth (1998: 498). Crawford reasons that Theodora's death would have considerably effected both Charlotte's pregnancy with Tom and her mothering during his early life, stating: 'few mothers in their mid-forties who had recently watched a baby die would not have worried at a subsequent birth, even if they were, like Lottie, of "unusual character"' (2015: 12).

⁸⁰ Remarkably, despite her mourning Theodora's death, her daughter Charlotte's illness, the pressures of mothering and her responsibilities in the public sphere, Charlotte continued to write both through the course of her pregnancy with Tom and throughout his boyhood. Charlotte's scrapbook shows the poem 'Force and God' (1887) to be published in the *Unitarian* just eight months after Theodora's death (*CES*, 11). Crawford also notes 'three months pregnant with Tom, she wrote, as she often did at the advent of spring, a poem celebrating Easter. . . . During the second year of Tom's life she wrote "An Easter Song", and in 1891 "An Easter Hymn"' (2015: 14).

was too overbearing or that she was incapable of caring for him, far from it.⁸¹ Rather, it suggests that on a primitive level Eliot in his early years may have struggled with anxious feelings of not being ‘good enough’. This proposal is supported by Valerie Eliot, who confirms that it was ‘from his mother, who understood him well’ that Eliot ‘inherited an anxious nervous temperament’ (*LTSEI*, xviii).

In the son’s desire to identify with the mother, Parker notes a mysterious aspect in that whereas some sons resist fully taking on the mother’s projections, others take them on wholesale, becoming ‘almost a lookalike of some aspect of the mother’s personality’ (1995: 67). Once the stage of early infancy had passed and Eliot’s burgeoning literary gifts became apparent to the family, Charlotte recognised and correlated his precocious intellect with her own interests and thwarted desires as a poet. Ackroyd confirms that it was at a later period that Charlotte was seen to develop a *real* relationship with Eliot, establishing a more ‘immediate influence’ (19) and projective identification with her son.⁸² Charlotte would speak to her youngest child as an equal and endow him with her own strong sense of literary culture; this culture providing commonality and an intimate love and sharing that would animate and augment their relationship as Eliot grew older. For example, she gifted her son red leather-bound volumes of the Temple Shakespeare edition.⁸³ In turn, in 1912 Eliot bought his mother Henri Bergson’s *Introduction to a New Philosophy*.⁸⁴ Most notable in this mutual exchange of reading-matter is the fact that Eliot habitually sent Charlotte copies of nearly all of his work for comment and approval throughout her life right up to her death in 1929.⁸⁵

Charlotte’s early involvement and joy in the publishing and promoting of Eliot’s works is indicated by a manuscript copy of an early poem by him held in the Houghton

⁸¹ As R. Parker states, ‘ambivalence is emphatically not synonymous with the inability to love, but in a society wedded to the maternal ideal, it can seem that way to women’ (Mariotti 105).

⁸² Projective identification is described by Charles Rycroft as ‘the process by which a person imagines himself to be inside some object external to himself. This is again a defence since it creates the illusion of control over the object and enables the subject to deny his powerlessness over it and to gain vicarious satisfaction from its activities’ (67-68).

⁸³ Eliot and Charlotte often bought each other books and exchanged literature. Eliot remembers his mother buying him a volume of Walter Pater’s *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) at ‘a sale of surplus books of the Mercantile Library, St. Louis, U.S.A., for 10 cents’ (*HB*, B/21). Most striking is Frank M. Chapman’s *Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America* (1895) found in Eliot’s private book collection (*HB*, B/8). The book was a gift from Eliot’s mother and is inscribed in her hand ‘Thomas Stearns Eliot. September 26th 1902’. Eliot provides an additional note ‘In my mother’s handwriting. A much coveted birthday present on my 14th birthday. T. S. Eliot. 18 June 1928’. Charlotte’s gift and Eliot’s belated note indicates the importance literature played in supplementing and symbolising their relationship.

⁸⁴ Eliot recalled in 1938 how his ‘family advised and exhorted me to read’ improving works, ‘for they concerned themselves about my reading’ (*HB*, H1/A). He remembered his ‘mother’s anxiety because I devoted too much attention to the novels of Mayne Reid’ and how ‘she tried to interest me in Macaulay’s History instead’.

⁸⁵ Henry Eliot Jr. writes ‘it was T. S. E.’s custom to send carbons or proofs of forthcoming works to his mother’ (*VMP*, 24). A notable exception is Eliot’s controversial poem ‘Ode’ (1918).

collection which begins ‘If time and space as sages say’ and is in Charlotte’s hand, complete with annotations (*HL*, MS Am 2560/65). Eliot’s brother, Henry, indicates in another manuscript that Charlotte took great delight in promoting her son’s literary talents as she ‘had a number of copies typed and sent them around to relatives and friends’ (*HL*, MS Am 1691.6/2). The poem was later published as ‘A Lyric’ in the *Smith Academy Record* in 1905 when Eliot was sixteen. Eliot recalls that when he initially showed his mother the poem ‘she thought it better than anything in verse she had ever written’ (*PWEY*, v).⁸⁶ Split between the societal obligations of Victorian maternity and internal desires of feminine subjectivity, Charlotte no doubt glimpsed something in her son she could potentially relate to in view of her own personal attributes, interests and desires. Enthralled by her son’s relatedness, Charlotte appears to have been greatly drawn to Eliot for his provision of a ‘second chance’ (Benjamin, 1988: 116): an opportunity through which her own desires could be finally recognised and realised. This identification would be emphasised by the physical resemblance that Henry Jr. attested to: ‘of all the family, my brother most resembled my mother in features and . . . if there is anything in heredity, it must have been from that side of the family that T. S. Eliot got his tastes’ (*HL*, MS Am 2560/27). The suggestion of Eliot’s works being indebted to Charlotte’s influence and a protraction of her own work and desires was intimated in 1932 when the Eliot children dedicated a bequest of Eliot materials to Harvard: ‘In memory of Charlotte C. Eliot 1843-1929’.⁸⁷ I quote at length a remarkable letter written by Eliot to his mother on 22 August 1927 that confirms this to be the case:

I believe that you and I understand each other and are like each other perhaps more than we know, and that we shall surely meet. And whenever I have done anything that the world has thought good, or that the world is likely to think good for a generation or two after I am dead, I have always felt that it was something that you and I did together, or even something that you had dreamt of and projected before I was born. I often feel that I am merely a continuation of you and Father, and that I am merely doing your work for you. (*LTSE3*, 648)

⁸⁶ Eliot reflected further on his mother’s fine declaration upon viewing ‘A Lyric’: ‘I knew what her verse meant to her. We did not discuss the matter further’ (*PWEY*, vi).

⁸⁷ The gift to Eliot House of Eliot material was negotiated by both Eliot and Henry Eliot Jr. between 1932 and 1944. The instruction that the book gift be recorded in memory of Charlotte Eliot is detailed in a letter by Henry to Professor Merriman on 27 April 1932 (*HL*, MS Am 2560/27).

In light of Henry's acknowledgement of Eliot's likeness to his mother in both looks and talent, as well as Eliot's extraordinary revelation of mother-son mirroring (in the above letter), it may be deduced that through identification in reaction to maternal ambivalence operative in the early mother-son dyad, young Eliot introjected Charlotte as love-object taking her as ego ideal.⁸⁸ Winnicott describes how in a child's striving to be seen, particularly in instances of maternal detachment which create an exaggeration of need, the child becomes 'his or her own mother' (2005: 153).⁸⁹ In response to absence of 'the feeling of real' (107) caused by a general failure of recognition, and in order to get 'the mirror to notice and approve' (114), it seems Eliot brightly adapted to his mother's needs through compliance with her desires and aspirations for him.⁹⁰ Eliot suggests this might be the case in his *Use of Poetry* lectures of 1933 in which he states: 'the only pleasure that I got from reading Shakespeare was the pleasure of being commended for reading him; had I been a child of more independent mind I should have refused to read him at all' (*UPUC*, 33).⁹¹ Thus, Eliot's literary abilities may be interpreted as 'gift gesture[s]' (Winnicott, 1992: 270) designed to alleviate his guilt, elicit his mother's response and receive her love.⁹² The general function of this mirroring would enable young Eliot to experience himself in his mother's attitude: 'When I look I am seen, so I exist' (2005: 154). However, Winnicott states that through this 'false self organisation' and its forced attentiveness to the mother's needs, fantasies or demands, the 'false self' always 'lacks something, and that something is the *essential element of creative*

⁸⁸ A concept elaborated by Freud, the ego ideal (*Ichideal*) is described in Laplanche and Pontalis as 'a comparatively autonomous intrapsychic formation which serves as a reference-point for the ego's evaluation of its real achievements' (144). Very often, it is the parents and their ideals that the child first identifies with and measures themselves against.

⁸⁹ See D. W. Winnicott, 'Mirror-Role of Mother and Family in Child Development' (1967; rpt. 2005: 149-59).

⁹⁰ See D. W. Winnicott, 'The Use of an Object and Relating through Identifications' (1969; rpt. 2005: 115-27).

⁹¹ Soldo (1983) speculates that Eliot read Shakespeare as a child only to please his mother; she apparently censored the works of Mark Twain (67).

⁹² See D. W. Winnicott, 'The Depressive Position in Normal Development' (1954; rpt. 1992: 262-78). In this paper Winnicott's idea of the 'stage of concern' (264) contributes to Klein's 'depressive position' by emphasising the role of the environment and the mother's ability to withstand and 'hold' the child's 'cannibalistic ruthless attack[s]' (267). Winnicott describes the 'gift gesture' as the child's guilty attempt to make 'reparation' to the 'hole' in the mother they feel they have damaged (270). He sees this as a maturational achievement by the child marking movement into the 'depressive position'.

originality' (1990: 152, emphasis in original).⁹³ As a consequence, the child does not find 'I' reflected but rather the mother's image of who the child should be. At its most extreme, the 'false self' who accepts the other's control can experience 'a feeling unreal or a sense of futility' (148).

Paris 1910-11

Jessica Benjamin stresses in *Like Subjects, Love Objects* (1995) both the dangers and positive aspects of internalisation of the mother as ego-ideal.⁹⁴ Referring to the concept as the 'Angel' (136), Benjamin warns that the mother Angel has the 'double-sidedness of all idealisation' (163). Love of the Angel can be 'at once heady and lamenting, elated and terrifying, hopeful and crushing' (146). She is both dark and divine Angel. Benjamin states that narcissistic idealisation of the mother as an exalted figure may inspire a self-abnegating love, a projection of the ideal that vitiates the self in the desire to be recognised in one's 'true self'. Yet, the mother may also remain a surreptitious threat to the child through the child's assignation of omnipotence to her.⁹⁵ Benjamin explains how domination very often follows ideal identification and the desire for recognition, with the child submitting to the powerful mother who personifies the fantasy of omnipotence.⁹⁶ As a consequence, collapse occurs in the necessary tension between self-assertion and mutual recognition, self and other, with the delicate balance maintaining the intersubjective realm foreclosed. Each a mirror of the other, gender polarity in the complementarity of subject and object therein establishes the coordinates for the Hegelian positions of master and slave (domination and submission) in the child's Oedipal development. A logic of 'fateful paradox' ensues proffered by the child's

⁹³ Winnicott's complex notions of the 'True Self' and 'False Self' are set out in 'Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self' (1960; rpt. 1990: 140-53). The 'True Self' is 'the theoretical position from which come the spontaneous gesture and the personal idea. The spontaneous gesture is the True Self in action. Only the True Self can be creative and only the True Self can feel real' (148). It appears 'as soon as there is any mental organisation of the individual at all, and it means little more than the summation of sensori-motor aliveness' (149). Winnicott states that the 'False Self' develops at the beginning in the infant-mother relationship with the mother playing an absolutely crucial part. The 'good-enough mother meets the omnipotence of the infant' (145), enabling the child's 'True Self' to have life. The mother 'who is not good enough is not able to implement the infant's omnipotence, and so she repeatedly fails to meet the infant gesture'. Instead, 'she substitutes her own gesture which is to be given sense by the compliance of the infant'. For Winnicott, the child's 'True Self' does not come to fruition without the mother's 'good-enough' adaptation. On the one hand, the 'False Self' can work to defend and make possible the 'True Self'. On the other hand, if the mother cannot adapt well to the child, they may be seduced into a totally compliant 'False Self' persona that reacts to environmental demands, effacing the 'True Self'.

⁹⁴ Benjamin discusses both the dangers and creative aspect of idealisation in the chapter 'What Angel Would Hear Me? The Erotics of Transference' (1995: 143-174).

⁹⁵ See the note on 'Idealization' in Akhtar 137-38.

⁹⁶ See the chapter 'Gender and Domination' (Benjamin, 1988: 183-219).

simultaneous need for recognition and independence: ‘that the other subject is outside our control and yet we need him (her)’ (1988: 221). The experience of this paradox is often painful for both mother and child with the conflict of dependence and independence, union and separation, at its extreme forcing the psyche to favour a polarisation where one side is devalued and the other idealised. However, Benjamin explains that splitting does not have to remain rigidified. Like Parker’s comments on ambivalence, she states that the destructive component in identifications and idealisations can also be used creatively for recognition and differentiation.⁹⁷

Benjamin highlights separation as equally traumatic for mother and child, stating:

separation—whether really leaving or simply asserting one’s own will—is often interpreted as a hostile act, by both parties. Both must manage not only separation, but the associated aggression.⁹⁸ (1988: 213)

In April 1910, in view of Eliot’s plan to move to Paris in the autumn, Charlotte expressed extreme distress at the thought of separation from her son, stating:

I have rather hoped you would not specialize later on French literature. I suppose you will know better in June what you want to do next year. And you will have the literary judgement of able advisers probably. I cannot bear to think of your being alone in

⁹⁷ Benjamin’s thoughts on splitting, idealisation, identification and recognition are most fully explicated in *Shadow of the Object: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis* (1998). She states:

we might recognise that alienated forms of complementarity, based on idealization and repudiation created by splitting are inevitable. In the best of circumstances, these alternate with recognition. It follows that the ability to symbolically work and play with the fantasmatic relations produced by splitting will be a condition of reinstating recognition. Splitting itself is not the problem, but only its rigid congelation into indissoluble complementarity, which structures the subject and his other as mirror opposites (good/bad, excluded/included). (96)

⁹⁸ R. Parker (1995: 101-38) highlights adolescence, in particular, as a crucial time when the conflicts of ambivalence and maternal power and authority intensify due to the child’s attempts to establish their separate identity. Separation for the mother at this time can even be unbearable if it induces echoes of old bereavements, intolerable losses and the powerlessness to prevent such losses. In response, the mother may hate the child for frustrating her, for withdrawing their love and attention and for threatening her with loss. Nevertheless, Parker regards the existence of maternal and infantile ambivalence as ‘vital for the project of separation’ (101).

Paris, the very words give me a chill.⁹⁹ (*LTSEI*, 11-12)

Despite Charlotte's protestations, Eliot travelled to Paris in October 1910. Manju Jain describes Eliot's experience in Paris as 'fraught with emotional and intellectual tensions' which he attributes in part to Eliot's 'overwhelming feeling of liberation from the pressures of his family' (1992: 51-52).¹⁰⁰ Eliot more than likely ventured to Paris in homage to a country which he believed promulgated the kind of spiritual malaise and morbidity prevalent in the works of the French poets he so admired: Mallarmé, Laforgue and Baudelaire (another poet with an intensely ambivalent relation to the maternal).¹⁰¹ In Eliot's engagement with these poets he scrutinised the rationale of their spiritual hunger and 'awareness of the Shadow' (Schuchard, 1999: 19). Despite the promise of cultural enlargement, his move to Paris aggrieved his sense of isolation. William Marx notes how Eliot's 'loneliness was more complete in Paris than it would be in London' (Harding, 2011: 25). Eliot later refers in a letter to the malady of separation-anxiety which troubled him in Paris: 'I have been going through one of those nervous sexual attacks which I suffer from when alone in a city . . . the worst since Paris' (*LTSEI*, 82). Nonetheless, the drama of this setting and essential separation from Charlotte would instil a characteristic independence of mind and stimulate a creative flourish. During this time, Eliot wrote many poems, including the chauvinistic 'The Triumph of Bullshit' and parts of 'Portrait of a Lady'—a poem highly ambivalent towards the maternal.¹⁰² Most importantly, Paris would serve as the environment in which his first great work—and companion-piece to 'Portrait of a Lady'—'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1915)

⁹⁹ A mother's sorrow and concern at being parted from her son is expressed in her 1926 verse drama *Savonarola*. In the opening scene the martyr's mother, Elena, states her distress at Savonarola's leaving: 'Must we part, / And loneliness and longing in my heart / Usurp love's deep content?' (*SA*, 2). Despite her ambivalence, Elena's faith in God reconciles her pain at her loss. She admits 'The Lord' now directs her son 'In His own course' (3), and with a 'heavy heart' (5) she lets him go.

¹⁰⁰ For details of Eliot's time in Paris, see Crawford (2015: 140-64); Hargrove (2009); and Miller, Jr. 115-60.

¹⁰¹ Baudelaire's deep ambivalence towards his mother, Caroline, is described in Jean-Paul Sartre's study *Baudelaire* (1950). Sartre argues that before the age of six Baudelaire had no sense of individual identity. This changed, however, when Caroline married Captain Aupick and her son was cast into a painful state of solitude. Sartre writes:

Baudelaire was six when his father died. He worshipped his mother and was fascinated by her. He was surrounded by every care and comfort; he did not yet realise that he existed as a separate person, but felt that he was united body and soul to his mother in a primitive mystical relationship. He was submerged in the gentle warmth of their mutual love. There was nothing but a home, a family and an incestuous couple. 'I was always living in you', he wrote to her in later life; 'you belonged to me alone. You were at once an idol and a friend'. (16)

¹⁰² In 'Portrait of a Lady' death is wished upon a woman by a young man due to her attempt to school him in life and the arts, despite her own failure to live a creative life: 'Well! and what if she should die some afternoon' (*CPP*, 21).

would germinate.

Although in the poem Prufrock rejects comparisons with Hamlet—‘No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be’ (*CPP*, 16)—male unconscious denial of otherness, sadomasochism and antagonism towards the maternal is apparent.¹⁰³ In like manner to Charlotte’s martyr poems, the dramatic monologue in ‘Prufrock’ ventriloquizes subjective self-division and voices private desires and ambivalences.¹⁰⁴ Prufrock is a Winnicottian ‘false self’ caught up in the mind, a male hysteric caught between being and doing, the social world and the private self, reason and passion: ‘Do I dare?’, ‘And how should I begin?’, ‘Shall I say’ (14-15).¹⁰⁵ His fear is a fear of being stuck, ‘deferential’ (16) and committed to duty and the desires of others. It is a fear of an unfulfilled life, of not having enough time and of coming to old age and death having not acted out of one’s own passions. Like Hamlet, Prufrock’s desire is ‘pinned’ (14), made passive and reduced by women. In an echo of John the Baptist, who was decapitated at the demand of Salome and her mother, Prufrock sees his ‘head (grown slightly bald) / brought in upon a platter’ (15)—implying symbolic castration and male feminisation at the hands of female power.¹⁰⁶ Even Lazarus (who is proffered respectful treatment in Charlotte’s poem ‘The Raising of Lazarus’) is travestied in his resurrection, ‘restored to the ministrations of his sisters!’ (G. Smith, 1996: 59). As Oser, Gordon and Sigg all point out, ‘Prufrock’ recalls the genteel Boston society and the women’s organisations that Eliot would have known through his mother.¹⁰⁷ For example, there is the repeated and seeming involuntary interpolation of a fragment of maternal aesthetic in Prufrock’s interior monologue as he walks through the city: ‘In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo’ (*CPP*, 13, 14). Here we have a hint of resentment against the cultural inheritance and female environment that Prufrock has apparently had to comply with and under which he has had to hide his creative true self; an affront more obviously demonstrated by the poem’s original title ‘Prufrock among the Women’ (*IMH*, 39). Prufrock’s struggle for both recognition by and separation from the mother and the female world necessitates his intrapsychic drama: his fear of maternal engulfment, aggression towards women and non-

¹⁰³ For Corcoran, ‘Prufrock is actually Prince Hamlet, and is meant to be’ (96, emphasis in original).

¹⁰⁴ See Michael O’Neill’s comments on Eliot’s remodelling of the Victorian dramatic monologue in ‘Prufrock’ (Harding, 2011: 200-10).

¹⁰⁵ In Winnicott’s paper ‘Creativity and its Origins’ (1971; rpt. 2005: 87-114), he associates ‘being’ and ‘doing’ with ‘female’ and ‘male’ elements, respectively.

¹⁰⁶ Freud states in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900): ‘to represent castration symbolically, the dreamwork makes use of baldness, hair-cutting, falling out of teeth and decapitation’ (2001b: 357).

¹⁰⁷ See Oser (1998: 26-35); Gordon (1998: 65-68); and Sigg (Harding, 2011: 7-24). Oser compares ‘Prufrock’ with Charlotte’s poem ‘The Wednesday Club’ seeing Eliot’s poem and its depiction of John the Baptist to be a ‘reaction against a familial legacy at once too demanding and too futile to be renewed’ (1998: 41).

recognition of the maternal feminine. This ambivalence is exaggerated in the poem by the missing of a paternal ideal of identification or an alternative ‘third term’ that can prevent him from drowning in oceanic oneness with the maternal body.¹⁰⁸ Despite this, however, the poem’s end is irresolute in its willing return to amniotic waters, implying male non-relinquishment of the attraction to the maternal:

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.¹⁰⁹ (*CPP*, 17)

In the absence of a ‘third term’, a seemingly immutable gender polarity is present in ‘Prufrock’ between male subject and female object, a painful division within the self (intrapsychically) and between self and other (intersubjectively). Yet, in Prufrock’s wish to separate from the maternal world towards which he is ambivalent there is an intimation of the maternal origin, the sufficiency of its environmental provision and his dependence on this environment in enabling him to creatively use the external world and imagine an independent existence. In other words, despite Prufrock’s antipathy towards the maternal feminine and his being at odds with himself, he is at least able to use ambivalence, identification and idealisation as a motor for creation and fantasy, thought and comparison, rather than just destruction. Contrary to Hamlet’s ‘Had I but time’ (*Ham.* 5.2.320), for Prufrock ‘There will be time to murder and create’ (*CPP*, 14). This statement is highly suggestive of Winnicott’s (1969) description of the important and healthy move in the child’s development from ‘object-relating’ to ‘object-usage’ for differentiation and the establishment of a ‘true self’ (2005: 118).¹¹⁰ According to Winnicott, in ‘object-relating’ the experience of the subject is that of ‘an isolate’ with the object perceived as a ‘projective entity’ (118). In ‘object-usage’, however, the object is recognised as ‘an entity in its own right’ (120). Winnicott states ‘this change (from relating to usage) means that the subject destroys the object’. But this does not happen easily and

¹⁰⁸ Originally elaborated by Lacan, the ‘third term’ is the psychoanalytic idea of a ‘third’ as a solution to dyadic, ambivalent struggle. In Lacanian psychoanalysis the ‘third’ refers to language, the paternal function, along with Oedipal prohibition and castration. As in Freudian theory, Lacan sees the Symbolic father as the ‘third term’ that makes it possible for the child to move away from the mother into the world of speech, culture and recognition. For both Freud and Lacan, to assume a position as subject the child must renounce the mother and the maternal body. See Jacques Lacan, ‘The Object Relation and the Intersubjective Relation’ (1954; rpt. 1988: 209-19).

¹⁰⁹ For comment on the positive and negative transformative capacities of the maternal feminine and its relation to the sea and water imagery in ‘Prufrock’ and *The Waste Land*, as well as other modernist male and female texts such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Virginia Woolf’s *A Voyage Out*, see DeKoven (1991).

¹¹⁰ Winnicott’s concepts of ‘object-usage’ and ‘object-relating’ are set out in ‘The Use of an Object and Relating through Identifications’ (1969; rpt. 2005: 115-27).

automatically by the maturational process alone. The capacity to use the object is dependent on the 'facilitating environment' which, at first, is the mother. For Winnicott, otherness is only accepted by the self when the attempt to psychically destroy the object is resolved through the (m)other's survival.¹¹¹ He explains the process as follows:

the subject says to the object: 'I destroyed you', and the object is there to receive the communication. From now on the subject says: 'Hullo object!' 'I destroyed you'. 'I love you'. 'You have value for me because of your survival of my destruction of you'. 'While I am loving you I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) fantasy'. Here fantasy begins for the individual. The subject can now use the object that has survived. (120-21)

Winnicott propounds murder of the mother in creative play as bearing an intersubjective aspect facilitating recognition of the other, destruction becoming 'the unconscious backcloth for love of a real object' (2005: 126). Hence, the pronounced ambivalence towards women in Eliot's early poetry ('Circe's Palace', 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian', 'Portrait of a Lady' and 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock') should not be read simply or unequivocally as testaments to male ego positioning on the feminine. The women in Eliot's poems are not his mother, he does not want to kill his mother and he does not merely hate women. Rather, Eliot's early poetry should be interpreted as creative sublimations of inner fantasies of destruction that are in fact negating reality towards an outward movement of recognising the other, and of mutuality. As Benjamin states, 'destruction in creativity' is 'the Other of recognition' (1995: 48). Eliot's ongoing objectifications of women are productive and enabling male fantasies within the dynamic of erotic domination in reaction to the threat of engulfment by the omnipotent mother. They promulgate a wish for differentiation: a 'wish to finally reach the mother as well as to punish her, to separate from her as well as to control her, to be recognised by her as well as to obliterate her' (Benjamin 1988: 188). Moreover, they reveal attempts to step out of the 'zero-sum relationship' (1998: 43): to transcend a subject-object Oedipal complementarity whose mutual exclusivity of binary polarisations

¹¹¹ R. Parker contends that for Winnicott's theory to work there must also be 'maternal use of the *infant-as-object*' (Spurling 14, emphasis in original). That is, the mother must also use her ambivalence creatively/destructively to acknowledge the child's separate existence, for 'only via "destroying" her baby can she said to have achieved the use of an infant, meaning a relationship to the baby as a person increasingly separate from herself'. Parker stresses, however, that for the mother's destruction to remain benign and non-retaliatory it must be accompanied by her love.

(male/female, active/passive) has served to structure a Hegelian system of domination and submission that disallows the male protagonists ownership of their subjectivity and desire. Jan Campbell states that 'objects are central in helping to bring the true self or psychic immanence into being' (2006: 7). Object negation in creative dissociation in Eliot's early poems is crucial in advancing on the path to male individuation, usurping the excessive objectivity of the 'false self' through gradual recognition of the 'true self'. As 'Prufrock' insinuates, the paradox inherent in enabling this transformation is the fact of dependence on the environmental mother to facilitate the child's capacity to use forms and objects to achieve a sense of male independence and autonomy.

It would be through roaming the sordid streets of Paris, through detachment from and confrontation with female sexuality and otherness that Eliot would establish his Hamlet and Pierrot personae. Schuchard reads Eliot's actual 'nervous' attacks in Paris as instances of spiritual terror presided over by the presence of a 'dark angel': a staging of the 'drama of spiritual consciousness under sensual assault' (1999: 13). Eliot later objectively explicates the poet's relation with the dark angel in 'The Three Voices of Poetry' (1953) as an 'unknown, dark *psychic material* . . . the octopus or angel with which the poet struggles' (*OPP*, 100, emphasis in original). Schuchard refers to this analogy as 'startling' in Eliot's recognition of 'the poet's dark angel as both the agon and the muse of his morbid art' (1999: 17). If we conflate the opinions of William Marx and Schuchard, it is surely no coincidence that this chthonic, nocturnal anti-mother would appear precisely at a time when Eliot's emotions were wrestling with the guilt of separation and a fear of dependency and maternal omnipotence. A seeming instance of the 'Malady of the Ideal' expressed in Mallarmé's *Igitur* (1869), Eliot's sojourn to Paris would prove integral to his poetic development, nurturing a rich, creative sensibility split between sensual and spiritual polarities. Analogous to Baudelaire's own attempts to master the tumult of sexual desire, these early experiments would exemplify Eliot's inner creative/destructive use and mediation of ambivalence and idealisation in 'a desperate search for a divine' (Schuchard, 1999: 14).

London 1914-22

Eliot left France in mid-1911 in answer to his parents' adjuration that he return to Harvard to work for his philosophy doctorate. However, Eliot deferred his Harvard studies for the academic year 1914-15, taking on a travelling fellowship to move to England. Importantly, 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' was completed a month before Eliot left for England in the

July of 1914, at a time when he was again determined to actively separate from his mother and family and their demands. In a letter to Conrad Aiken he signals his readiness for alternative female love, jesting ‘I should find it very stimulating to have several women fall in love with me’ (*LTSEI*, 59). Provoked by what Gordon regards as a failure to ‘awaken to religious emotions’ (1998: 97), Eliot would kindle extreme consternation and disbelief in Charlotte and his family in the summer of 1915 with a staggering *fait accompli*: an abrupt marriage to Vivien Haigh-Wood. Appearing as a public act of blatant familial disobedience, Eliot’s estrangement from Charlotte’s wishes now seemed to invalidate the redemption he had once promised as restitution for the sense of failure in the relationship for, as Ackroyd explains, he was ‘the child in whom she had placed her hopes, and in whom she recognised abilities that she had done her best to nurture’ (65). Rozsika Parker postulates how a mother can discern her son’s struggle for independence and individuation as ‘a deliberate attempt to spoil her own beautiful creation—indeed, to spoil her self’ (1995: 251).¹¹² Separation from a son representative of unconscious aspects of herself not yet actualised would inflict upon Charlotte a narcissistic wound. In expressing his independent will, Eliot was now establishing himself as ‘no longer *her* object’ (Benjamin, 1995: 38, emphasis in original).

While in London, Eliot strove to placate his mother’s anxieties and maintain her ambitions for him through reports to the family from Ezra Pound assuring them of his happiness, literary achievements and potential. Bertrand Russell would take it upon himself to affirm to Charlotte the ‘considerable literary gifts’ (*LTSEI*, 130) of her son as auguring him ‘reputation’ in England. Particularly upsetting, however, was Eliot becoming a secondary school teacher which Charlotte bemoaned to Russell was ‘like putting Pegasus in harness’ (131). Däumer notes this as a ‘deeply felt analogy’ (Laity and Gish 237), touching on Charlotte’s own experience of having to relinquish her literary abilities due to teaching obligations.¹¹³ Nevertheless, 1915 would be the signal year for Eliot as a poet. It would be with knowledge of his family’s reticence about both his wife and marriage and his choice of residence and profession in England that Eliot would elaborate highly personal feelings and emotions in creative ways, publishing as many as eight poems including ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’, ‘Cousin Nancy’, ‘Aunt Helen’ and the controversial prose poem ‘Hysteria’, to which I now turn.

¹¹² Howarth relates Charlotte’s sleepless nights during this period as a symptom of an ‘attrition of her powers’ (34).

¹¹³ Charlotte later expresses in a memorandum typed circa 1922-23: ‘had his mother sufficient means, she would settle on him enough to enable him to devote his entire time to literature, but it is impossible’ (*HL*, MS Am 2560/106).

Similar to Parker's and Benjamin's respective advocacies of the creative possibilities of ambivalence and idealisation, Jan Campbell states that the hysteric is interesting as their symptoms 'are a pre-requisite to the artist (he)/she can become' (2013: 19). For Parker, it is ambivalence that 'makes passions circulate' (1995: 24). And for Campbell it is hysteria that best shows our passions on the move and the need 'for the translation of these passions through forms that are telepathically read and responded to by another' (2013: 23). Campbell argues for 'unconscious telepathy' (ix), beginning with the non-personal primary mother-child relationship, as key to the transference, communication and sublimation of the passions into art.¹¹⁴ She contends that at times of extreme crisis and unmanageable ambivalence when the most violent and disturbing of previously repressed affects are felt and threaten to take over the ego—as in hysteria—it is to the telepathy experienced in the early mother-child relation that we return in order to sublimate our passions. In other words, our way of managing ambivalence is always a return to the 'first forms and the imaginary affects of the maternal body' (17).

Campbell states that the sublimation of repressed passions is highly evident in the wider cultural objects and forms carried by the mother (but not only the mother) that begin and continue to surround us from when we are born. To illustrate, she cites Freud's classic case-study of the hysteric Dora and her dream associations of standing rapt in front of Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* (Fig. 6).¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Campbell's concept of 'lived maternal form' is discussed further in chapter 3 in relation to flowers and the garden in 'Ash-Wednesday'.

¹¹⁵ Freud's case study of Dora is discussed at length in his paper 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' (1905 [1901]; rpt. 2001f: 7-124).



Fig. 6. Raphael. *The Sistine Madonna*. 1513-14. Oil on canvas. Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden.

In Campbell's reading, Dora's autoerotic idealisation and identification with the Madonna indicates a 'search for a maternal telepathic form' (23). It is, she argues:

her attempt to symbolise her homosexual relation with the maternal order; to find a living painterly form with which to paint and shape her passions for Frau K (a female friend of her parents), whom she adored. Both these ideal women, the real and the painterly, have to be read as Dora's repressed excess in terms of her own mother whose 'housewife's psychosis' (hysterical lack of desire) had posed the initial problem for Dora. (24)

For Campbell, Dora lacks an adequate form able to 'shape' and bring her ideal and sexual loves together. Dora wants something in relation to the mother as well as the father and both of these Oedipal desires need to be elaborated and worked out in relation to one another in order for her to move on. Campbell sees the problem of the female hysteric of regulating desire for the mother as also problematic—but different—for men. The loss for men, she states, is 'that the marriage of their narcissism and desire is so often at the expense and loss of elaborative maternal identifications' (26). The result of this is evident in the historical sexism and misogyny of our cultures.

Campbell's solution for the hysteric in respect of their incapacity to accede to the paternal order lies in the elaboration of 'maternal form'. It is through 'maternal form' that the ideal love for the mother can be expressed and maintained and yet kept secret and safe. For this idea she uses Leo Bersani's Platonic account of 'impersonal narcissism' (Bersani and Phillips 112), and Adam Phillips' direct relating of this notion to the primal mother-child bond, to explain how passions move and are given different ego shapes in the unconscious telepathic communication between mother and child.¹¹⁶ Campbell suggests that such 'unconscious reading' is a way for the hysteric's excessive passions to be translated into forms which can both elaborate their sexuality and emancipate them from trauma (2013: 9). She reads Dora's experience of the *Sistine Madonna* as a 'genre' (3) of female desire pleasurably mobilised through the initial unconscious mother-child relationship. The *Sistine Madonna* is 'a virtual form of the female divine', Dora's ego ideal found in another and 'a virtual form of what she can be, abstracted in a painting' (28). Dora's love and ego identification with the mother is put into motion through unconscious perception of the Madonna as a 'lived unconscious form' (31). For Dora, the Madonna is a permissible screen working both backwards to the real of an early passionate tie with the maternal body and forwards through aesthetic sublimation of her passions. She is not just a substitute for the lost object but more 'a shared ideal form of becoming' (217), an impersonal, relational object and a form of love for the mother deemed more acceptable to the psyche.

Eliot's 'Hysteria' (1915) is generally viewed by critics as describing a woman's hysterical attack and a male observer's reaction to it.¹¹⁷ Yet, displacement is evident in 'Hysteria'. The autoerotic shock of the woman's hysteria causes the male speaker to regress

¹¹⁶ Bersani's concept of 'impersonal narcissism' is set forth and expanded upon by Adam Phillips in their book *Intimacies* (2008).

¹¹⁷ This interpretation of 'Hysteria' is expressed by Raine who views hysteria in the poem as a purely female phenomenon provoking 'detachment' and 'cold embarrassment' in the male speaker (60-63). For a similar feminist critique, see Potter 138-39.

back to an inchoate infantile condition of helplessness, confusion and fusion, an underlying hysterical layer: ‘As she laughed I was aware of becoming involved in her laughter and being part of it’ (*CPP*, 32). It is not just the woman who is hysterical. Equally, it is not singularly the male speaker who is hysterical, as Grover Smith concludes.¹¹⁸ To be more precise, a circular erotic transference and countertransference of essentially mobile and excessive passions is being telepathically communicated between the woman and man in Eliot’s poem: ‘I was drawn in by short gasps, inhaled at each momentary recovery, lost finally in the dark caverns of her throat, bruised by the ripple of unseen muscles’ (32).¹¹⁹ Hysteria is both relational and mutable with this scene showing a hysterical coupling, a parallel hysterical regression. The speaker is engulfed, shattered and disorganised by the woman’s seductive bodily excess. He is possessed by the hysteria of a foreign other who is ‘too much’ and who threatens ego dissolution and a collapse of self and other, subject and object. He has fallen into the ‘hole of non-recognition’, the ‘unrecognised mind-body’ (J. Mitchell 219) condition that typifies the empty terror of the hysteric. The excessive stimulation of excitation triggered by the woman destroys the male speaker’s protective shield, awakening an early repressed trauma and sexuality that cannot be specified but which indicates a relation to an erotic origin. The scale of the man’s intrapsychic ordeal may be matched with a high idealisation and affectionate love for the maternal which punishes his sexual reverie with harsh rebuke. In other words, the transference of the formerly erotic repressed is excessively personal, literal, conflicting and horrific. There is no protection for the speaker against the convergence and conflict of his affectionate and sexual longing. Unlike Dora’s *Madonna*, the woman is inadequate as a maternal form that is able to hold, translate or sublimate his excessive passions into something new and bearable. Quite the opposite: she merely returns him to the distress of ‘old and familiar fixations’ (Campbell, 2013: 28), her own hysteria, misattunement and non-responsiveness an apparent reminder of both a strictly forbidden desire and a lack in maternal ‘holding’. There is too much ‘sameness’ (too much of mother) and not enough ‘difference’ (of the father).¹²⁰

We have in Eliot’s ‘Hysteria’ not only hysterical dramatisation of female sexuality but also representation of a buried maddening male hysteria. Notably, it is the ambivalent maternal breast which is the point of the speaker’s fixation, the source of excitement and

¹¹⁸ G. Smith states in his reading of ‘Hysteria’ that ‘it is he, not the lady, who is hysterical’ (1974: 33).

¹¹⁹ My reading of ‘Hysteria’ as indicating both male and female hysteria is supported by McIntire 54-57.

¹²⁰ Phillips states ‘to recognise our desire for what it is—as both dependent on others, and forbidden and therefore transgressive—reveals us as too unacceptable to ourselves, too conflicted, too endangered; it puts us, quite literally, at odds with ourselves’ (2012: 35).

torment, satisfaction and frustration: ‘I decided that if the shaking of her breasts could be stopped, some of the fragments of the afternoon might be collected’ (*CPP*, 32). The speaker’s reversion with mature, rational language to a paranoid-schizoid state of fragmentation and preoccupation with the woman’s breasts confirms the continuing presence of unconscious desire for the mother and non-separation from the maternal body. A high degree of ambivalence is characteristic of hysteria: just like Hamlet and Prufrock, the male protagonist in ‘Hysteria’ is tormented by his being caught between ‘having’ and ‘not-having’, ‘being’ and ‘not-being’. As Juliet Mitchell states: ‘one loves the mother for giving the breast and hates her for removing it’ (47). It is the woman’s hysterical excess and allure as an *aide-mémoire* of dependence on the maternal body that causes the speaker’s ambivalence to rise to an intolerable level, provoking a sadistic fantasy of revenge and a wish for self-assertion also present in ‘The Love Song of St. Sebastian’. Pinkney rightly notes that the ‘relative absence of the father’ situates ‘Hysteria’ not within an Oedipal constellation but in the realm of the pre-Oedipal and pre-genital (22).¹²¹ I would add that ‘Hysteria’ enacts the borderline conflict between the reality of the law of castration (you cannot have the mother) and the male hysteric’s refusal to assume the law that divides him from his unconscious desire. It is a conflict between reality and fantasy, love and hate. ‘Hysteria’ creatively stages the ambivalence which cannot be spoken: the silent melodrama of the hysterical relation to the desire for the mother which still lives inside the male speaker. In short, like ‘Prufrock’, it indicates continuing unconscious male non-relinquishment of the absent mother.

Eliot resigned from his teaching position in 1916 to take a job at Lloyd’s Bank in March 1917. From this period he would express increasing anguish at his mother’s absence. Letters to Charlotte in 1917 chart Eliot’s ever-growing longing for return. He remarks on 21 March, ‘I think of you and wonder what you are doing very often’ (*LTSE1*, 182). By October 1917, the wrench of separation and possibility of not seeing his mother appears intolerable: ‘Don’t talk about not seeing me again; it is too painful, and besides you *shall* see me again’ (222, emphasis in original). The facts of real separation and his marriage to Vivien had clearly not instituted a mental separation between Eliot and his mother. Ackroyd states of Eliot’s first marriage and settling in England that ‘for a young man of such strong familial loyalties, acutely aware of his parent’s ambitions for him, it was tantamount to an act of betrayal—the significance of which never faded from his memory’ (65). Eliot’s extreme anguish and guilt at

¹²¹ Pinkney notes the father in Eliot’s works is routinely ‘a dim, barely defined figure, present only at the remote fringes of consciousness; rarely does he attain his full Freudian stature as castrating rival for the mother’s body’ (22). He adds ‘for Eliot’s poetry the classical Oedipus is less a starting point than a goal to be reached’.

his exile from America and his mother would be documented, along with shocking depiction of his marriage's sexual problems, in the suppressed 'Ode' of 1918.¹²² On 3 January 1919 his father wrote: 'Wish I liked his wife, but I don't' (*LTSEI*, 314). Three days later Henry Ware Eliot Sr. died. No consolation and no substitute—including Vivien—would appease Eliot's guilt in going against his family's wishes, his sorrow at having felt that he had failed his father and his overriding desire to see and make final reconciliation with his mother. Again, Eliot's publishing and offering of his work to his mother would be a way of both tolerating the guilt and repairing the damage that he felt he had caused. In a letter to John Quinn four days after his father's death he states:

you see I settled over here in the face of strong family opposition, on the claim that I found the environment more favourable to the production of literature. The book [*Ara Vos Prec*] is all I have to show for my claim—it would go toward making my parents contented with conditions and towards satisfying them that I had not made a mess of my life, as they are inclined to believe.¹²³ (*LTSEI*, 315)

By 1920, Eliot's yearning for his mother had become obsessive: he states to his brother 'I am thinking all the time of my desire to see her. I cannot get away from it' (442). Eliot's appeals to convince Charlotte to visit him were finally answered with his mother arriving in London in the summer of 1921. Prior to his mother's stay there were signs that Eliot's health was deteriorating. He divulged to Quinn that he was feeling the pressures of leading an 'exhausting life' and that he was extremely nervous and apprehensive about Charlotte's visit: 'Now I am expecting my mother from Boston in a few weeks; as she is

¹²² A little known, difficult and extremely personal confessional poem, 'Ode' was originally included in Eliot's *Ara Vos Prec* (1920: 30) but was omitted, suppressed and eventually replaced with 'Hysteria'. The Coriolanus scene, first seen in 'Mandarins' (1910), resurfaces in the epigraph to 'Ode' to obliquely signal the mother-son relation. However, Eliot's own Coriolanus is now 'tired', 'tortured' and fiercely vengeful towards the maternal. Tellingly, Eliot never showed his mother 'Ode' and feared that she would see it. He states in a letter to his brother Henry 'I have not sent this to Mother or told her about it' (*LTSEI*, 441). For critical and biographical discussions of 'Ode', see Ackroyd (66); Alderman; Childs (1997: 128-51); Corcoran 103-06; Lamos 96-113; Mahaffey; Mason; Miller, Jr. (47-58); and Oser (1998: 87). 'Ode' is discussed in further detail in chapter 4 in relation to Eliot's growing recognition of both the mother and his own 'mother-complex' in the later poem 'Coriolan' (1931-32).

¹²³ The urgency of having his book published in order to placate his mother's concerns is emphasised in another letter to Quinn: 'I explained to you when I wrote last how important it was to me for family reasons to get something in the way of a book published in America. Since then my father has died, but this does not weaken the need for a book at all—it really reinforces it—my mother is still alive' (*LTSEI*, 319).

seventy-seven, and not so strong as she was when I last saw her, that will be another anxiety as well as a joy' (557). Eliot had not seen his family in six years. What is more, it would be the first time that Charlotte would meet Vivien and Eliot no doubt felt his mother's apprehension about his new wife. It is recorded by Theresa Garrett that Eliot tried to keep his mother and wife apart for the duration of Charlotte's visit.¹²⁴ On his mother's return to America on 20 August 1921, Eliot felt her departure intensely, writing to her 'it is very difficult to realise that you have gone' (575).¹²⁵ A large part of *The Waste Land* was composed while Eliot was in recovery from a nervous breakdown in the autumn following his mother's visit.¹²⁶ He was diagnosed at Lausanne by Dr. Vittoz as suffering with neurasthenia—at the time a more acceptable term for male hysteria.

Maud Ellmann has labelled *The Waste Land* as the most 'hysterical' and 'abject' of texts in English literature (1987: 92-93). In my reading, *The Waste Land* demonstrates a search for a 'lived maternal form' through which a most intense and difficult ambivalence towards the maternal body can be managed and translated. The beginning of the poem's final version 'April is the cruellest month' (*WL*, 1) places it immediately at odds with not only Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* but also—and less evidently to the reader—with Charlotte Eliot's own Easter poems, in the comparison, for example, between Charlotte's 'An Easter Hymn' and its opening lines:¹²⁷

'Tis Easter Day,
 Now and for age,
 When spirit triumphs over earth's decay.
 O soul, be strong,
 On wings upborne
 Of aspiration and triumphant song!

Flowers pierce the sod:

¹²⁴ After meeting Eliot's family, Vivien moved to the Eliot's summer place while his mother and sister resided at their Clarence Gate Gardens flat in London. Crawford suggests Eliot 'evacuated' Vivien from London due to both the strain of his family's visit on them (2015: 381) and the terrible pull he felt 'between his mother and his wife' (383).

¹²⁵ Both Eliot and Vivien became unwell on his mother's return back to America. Eliot confided to Sydney Schiff 'that the "strain" surrounding his family's departure had left him with a "reaction" that was "paralysing"' (qtd. in Crawford, 2015: 384).

¹²⁶ For details of Eliot's composition of *The Waste Land* prior and subsequent to his mother's visit to London in 1921, see Matthew J. Bolton, 'Manchild in *The Waste Land*: The Narrator of Eliot's 1921 Manuscript' (Moffett 35-50).

¹²⁷ T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land, The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber, 1969), 59-80, lines 1-444. References to *The Waste Land* are cited parenthetically in the text as *WL* followed by line or note number(s).

The senseless clod
Stirs with new life, touched by the hand of God . . . (*CES*, 23)

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers . . . (*WL*, 1-7)

Eliot's opening sequence indicates seduction, separation, and alienation from the life-giving maternal land/body which feeds 'A little life with dried tubers'. The rebirth of sexual spring has stirred the 'dull roots' of a 'desire' previously laid dormant, buried under 'forgetful snow'. Unlike Charlotte's 'Easter Hymn', the maternal body/mother earth in *The Waste Land* is not 'triumphant' but cruel. In the second stanza there is profound blasphemy of his mother's religious notion of springtime and a migration from the mother's forms as all descends into decay and abjection: 'stony rubbish' (*WL*, 20), 'broken images' (22), 'dead tree' (23). Sexual eruption and disruption, the intrusion and withdrawal of the mother and a loss of origins and lack inaugurate *The Waste Land* and prompt the slippery metonymic movements of an excessive, dissatisfied and unruly desire that both renders and fragments the poem's form. As in the hysteric, there is no stable identity or gender differentiation in the poem but an undulating trying on of male and female guises and forms, an inhabiting of others and false-self orientations, a revisiting of childhood and adult memories and a playing out of simultaneously exciting and repugnant fantasised scenarios.¹²⁸ Exemplified by the figure of Tiresias—who Eliot calls 'the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest' (*WL*, n. 218)—the speaker(s) of *The Waste Land* is/are neither male nor female. He/she is a bisexual hysteric torn in two, caught in an abject state of psychic indeterminacy, lacking in reception, love and holding from the mother and also lacking the repressive and socialising faculties attributed to the father. Tiresias is highly representative of this dual deprivation. The care and nourishment felt by the child at the mother's breasts are shown to be withdrawn in

¹²⁸ For critical discussion of hysteria in *The Waste Land*, see Wayne Koestenbaum, 'The Waste Land: T. S. Eliot's and Ezra Pound's Collaboration on Hysteria' (Bloom, 2007: 167-93). Koestenbaum's view of *The Waste Land* as a hysterical text brought under control and to birth through the editorial assistance of Ezra Pound is discussed in greater detail in chapter 4.

the shape of Tiresias' 'wrinkled female breasts' (219), whereas the insufficiency of the Father is indicated by Tiresias' weariness and powerlessness.¹²⁹

Ellmann (1987) points out the impotence of the paternal principle (the symbolic as opposed to the literal father) and the anguish of separation from the maternal body as typified in *The Waste Land* by the Fisher King whose loss of virility is reflected in the devastation of the land and by the shipwrecked Kings from *The Tempest* in 'The Fire Sermon'.¹³⁰ Further, I contend that no adequate equivalent to Charlotte's Madonna and Child, Sainte Marguerite or Virgin Mary, or Dora's *Sistine Madonna*, is present as a virtual maternal form capable of either regulating the ambivalence felt towards the mother or shaping the errant passions which run through the poem. On the contrary, there is 'Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks' (WL, 49) a burlesque of Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Virgin of the Rocks*, which John Gatta labels an 'anti-Marin Madonna' (117), and the sensual Cleopatra in 'A Game of Chess' who turned soldier Antony into a sybarite. The women of *The Waste Land* metamorphose and recur as desirable but unsafe figures—the possible exceptions being 'Marie' and the 'hyacinth girl' (WL, 16, 36).¹³¹ As caricatures of desire they do not reconcile the ideal and the sexual but rather pit them against each other.¹³² In the absence of a maternal or paternal ideal identification that lives up to the expectations of the hysteric's ego-ideal all sexual life in *The Waste Land* is subsequently viewed as degrading and contaminating. Without either an impersonal maternal form able to carry, translate and sublimate the passion for the mother or a strong phallic identification to sever the asphyxiating umbilical bond, desire moves (rhythmically grumbles?) through a gallery of maternal substitutes that are overly personal, seductive and harrowing. With no 'third term' in this organisation there is no route out of ambivalence or

¹²⁹ The significance of Tiresias' possessing characteristics of both genders has been discussed at length, inviting varying interpretations. See Abdo; Brooker and Bentley (1990: 34-59); DuPlessis (Harding, 2011: 295-304); Frick (Moffett 15-34); Lamos 111-13; Madden 132-75; Pinkney (97-114); and Pondrom (2005).

¹³⁰ Ellmann notes the lines 'Musing upon the king my brother's wreck / And on the king my father's death before him' (WL, 191-92). She states: 'wrenched from their context in *The Tempest*, these deaths suggest the downfall of the father, as do the oblique allusions to the Fisher King' (1987: 105).

¹³¹ Prefigured in 'La Figlia Che Piange' (1916) by the girl with 'her arms full of flowers', and developed into the 'Lady of silences' in the later 'Ash-Wednesday' (1930), Gordon calls the appearance of the hyacinth girl in *The Waste Land* a 'non-Wasteland moment' (Bush, 1991: 9-22). For further discussion of the 'garden-flowers scene' in 'La Figlia Che Piange' and other early poems, and also its relation to the maternal in 'Ash-Wednesday', see chapter 3.

¹³² Crawford (2015) notes in lines written for *The Waste Land* in Lausanne, but later dropped, Eliot's writing of how 'Aeneas' mother, with an altered face, / Appeared once in an unexpected place' and his comparing the classical goddess with a cinematic screen 'goddess' (WLF, 28-29). Crawford sees Eliot's fusing a classical mother with the erotic power of the screen 'goddess' as indicating 'a rather awkward attempt to reconcile the maternal with the erotic: a challenge for Tom in life' (395). The scene from *Aeneid I* in which Aeneas meets his mother disguised as a virgin huntress in the Carthaginian woods occupied Eliot throughout his life, being both featured in the epigraph to 'La Figlia Che Piange' (1916) and mentioned in his late essay 'Virgil and the Christian World' (1951).

object relations, no way of giving birth to a new self or hope in reviving a ‘broken Coriolanus’ (*WL*, 417). The bisexual desires and needs of the hysteric remain both stuck and mobile, ‘throbbing between two lives’ (218), unable to choose or elaborate a relation between the desires for both mother and father. Refused recognition, representation, voice and citation, Gertrude, Volumnia and Charlotte—the ‘Murmur of maternal lamentation’ (368)—all haunt Eliot’s hysterical text as both desirable and desiring, absent yet fiercely present, powerful ‘spectral’ mothers (Sprengnether 5).¹³³

Eliot, like Baudelaire, greatly believed that illness could both inspire poetic composition and provide profound insight.¹³⁴ He states in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* that ‘ill-health, debility, or anaemia, may . . . produce an efflux of poetry in a way approaching the condition of automatic writing’ (*UPUC*, 144), and he writes of Pascal,

we know quite well that he was at the time when he received his illumination from God in extremely poor health; but it is a commonplace that some forms of illness are extremely favourable, not only to religious illumination, but to artistic and literary composition. (*SP*, 237)

Eliot’s early poetry from his Harvard years to *The Waste Land* indicates that it is the very dissatisfaction of unsatisfied desire, the intolerable pain of mother-child ambivalence and separation and the sometimes debilitating breakdown in the tension between self-assertion and recognition that motivates the hysteric’s creative/destructive surge and manic plundering of forms in search for a way out of ‘rats’ alley’ (*WL*, 115).¹³⁵ Just as Campbell states that the

¹³³ I use Sprengnether’s term ‘spectral mother’ (5) to emphasise the ‘ghostlike function’ of the repressed pre-Oedipal mother in *The Waste Land*. Although central to the construction of *The Waste Land*, the pre-Oedipal mother’s subjectivity and importance is effaced in the poem in its failed attempt to accede to the paternal. Gatta notes ‘the prospect of a redemptive female presence is raised at several junctures but never fully realised. Neither, for that matter, does the poem ever realize that broader prospect of renewal, salvation, and resurrection implied by Eliot’s title for part 1, “The Burial of the Dead”, within the context of Anglican funeral liturgy’ (118). Even deeper in the ‘penumbral consciousness’ (*WLF*, 37) of the poem I suggest that we can even detect the presence of Theodora Sterling Eliot in a fragment which was excised under Pound’s recommendation: ‘The infant hydrocephalus, who sat / By / At a bridge end, by a dried-up water course / And fiddled (with a knot tied in one string’ (*WLF*, 75).

¹³⁴ Baudelaire proposes in *The Painters of Modern Life* (1863) that the artist’s capacities are at their most acute in the immediate aftermath of illness. He likens this state to that of a child’s heightened curiosity at newness, form and colour. Baudelaire states: ‘convalescence is like a return towards childhood. The convalescent, like the child, is possessed to the highest degree of the faculty of keenly interesting himself in things, be they apparently of the most trivial. The child sees everything in a state of newness; he is always *drunk*’ (7-8, emphasis in original).

¹³⁵ I read ‘rats’ alley’ in *The Waste Land* as referring to Gregorio Kohon’s notion of ‘divalence’: that is, ‘a specific moment in which the subject—caught up in her need to change object from mother to father—is unable to make the necessary choice’ (1999b: 18).

hysteric needs to elaborate ‘maternal form’ as a way of balancing the tension between the ideal and the sexual, Eliot suggested the same solution when he spoke of Baudelaire in his 1930 introduction to Christopher Isherwood’s translation of *Journaux Intimes*:

he has arrived at the perception that a woman must be to some extent a symbol; he did not arrive at the point of harmonising his experience with his ideal needs. The complement, and the correction to the *Journaux Intimes*, so far as they deal with the relations of man and woman, is the *Vita nuova*, and the *Divine Comedy*. (SE, 430)

Post-*The Waste Land*, it would not be until ‘Ash-Wednesday’ (1930) when Eliot would, like Freud’s Dora, be able to finally harmonise his own experience with his ideal needs in the figure of the ‘Lady of silences’.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Charlotte writes in a letter to her brother-in-law how *The Waste Land* ‘puzzled her at first’, but that she grew to ‘understand it better’. She states that up until her son’s marriage and residence in England he had ‘dwelt in an ideal world’. However, ‘the invalidism of his wife’, overwork and tiredness meant that some of his ideals were now ‘shattered’. Charlotte saw her son ‘had put so much of his own life into [*The Waste Land*]’ and wished it to be supplemented ‘by its natural sequence “The Coming of the Grail”’ (HL, MS Am 2560/26).

2. MATERNAL ALLEGORY: DEATH AND THE MOTHER, FAITH AND REVELATION IN 'ASH-WEDNESDAY'

There is also a practical sense of the realities behind [the *Vita nuova*], which is antiromantic: not to expect more from life than it can give or more from human beings than they can give it; to look to death for what life cannot give.¹

T. S. Eliot, 'Dante' (1929)

In God's world, the allegorist awakens.

Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928)

In 1926, while visiting Rome, T. S. Eliot fell to his knees before Michelangelo's *Pietà* in veneration of the Holy Mother (Fig. 1).² This incident was to anticipate Eliot's formal commitment to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927 and his acceptance of its doctrines (the Incarnation, Original Sin, devotion to Mary).³ In the same year, Eliot's hastening religious conviction and submission to God's will would be seen by his beginning the composition of the poetic sequence 'Ash-Wednesday', his Lenten, most liturgical and explicitly Anglo-Catholic poem (*CPP*, 87-99).⁴ Completed in 1930 when Eliot was forty-two, 'Ash Wednesday' occupies the chronological mid-point of his poetic career and is also a statement placing him, as it did Dante in the *Commedia* (1308-21), in the 'dark wood' (in the middle of the journey of life).⁵ Stylistically and aesthetically, the poem indicates an evident move away from the poetics of narcissistic crisis and modern nihilism which had generally defined his

¹ *SE*, 235. In a similar vein, Eliot writes in the *Criterion* in 1933: 'what faith in life may be I know not . . . for the Christian, faith in death is what matters' (*C.*, 12 Jan. 1933: 248).

² For various accounts of Eliot's falling before Michelangelo's *Pietà* while visiting Rome in 1926 with his brother Henry Ware Eliot Jr. and sister-in-law, see Gordon (1998: 192); Murphy 18, 579; Spurr (2010: 43); and T. S. Matthews 88. Theresa Eliot would remember 'when they all together entered St Peter's, Rome. Vivien, who wasn't really impressed, said something like "It's very fine", and then they suddenly saw that Tom was on his knees praying . . . It was the first hint that his brother and sister-in-law had that his conversion was imminent, and they naturally misunderstood it. They thought he was going to Rome, and perhaps he thought so himself' (qtd. in Spurr, 2010: 43).

³ Spurr comments on Eliot's accepting of the Anglo-Catholic faith and its dogma of the Incarnation: 'although decades from articulating it affirmatively, what Eliot was searching for was the philosophy embodied in the theology of the Incarnation (the Word of God being made flesh, in the birth of Christ), which is at the very heart of the Anglo-Catholic doctrine and spirituality' (2010: 21).

⁴ 'Ash-Wednesday', *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 87-99, lines 1-219. All quotations of 'Ash-Wednesday' are from this edition with line number(s) cited in parenthesis. At times, 'Ash-Wednesday' is indicated by the abbreviation 'A-W' to avoid confusion with other citations.

⁵ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*. Trans. Steve Ellis (London: Random House, 2007), 1.

work (*The Waste Land* 1922; ‘The Hollow Men’ 1925) before his admittance into the Anglo-Catholic church.⁶ For Hugh Kenner, Eliot’s declaration of faith and the difficulties of faith in a new poetic positions ‘Ash-Wednesday’ as a dividing line in his *corpus* and biography, subsuming for good the ‘secular Eliot’ (1959: 261). Heavily influenced by Saint John of the Cross, the sermons of Lancelot Andrewes, Dante’s *Commedia* and, in particular, Dante’s earlier *libello* and thesis on desire and memory, the *Vita nuova* (c. 1292-94), the poem’s simplified diction, inclusion of Biblical language and liturgical rites, new rhythms and symbols represent a significant reorientation towards God on Eliot’s behalf.⁷ Most notable in comparison to the power of condensation, the Babel of voices and vacillations of sensual bodily desire delineating early works such as ‘Hysteria’ (1915) and *The Waste Land* is a striking asceticism and a peculiar, esoteric and fragmentary practice of allegory—what Laurie J. MacDiarmid calls ‘phantasmagoric and associational’—which coalesces with Eliot’s religious conviction in parts II and IV as ‘a metaphysical manifestation: an epiphany in the truest sense of the word’ (103-4).

As many critics note, ‘Ash-Wednesday’ also embodies an intrinsic change in attitude towards the feminine in Eliot’s works (Gordon; Schuchard; Spurr),⁸ and the maternal in particular (Gatta; Däumer).⁹ Gone are the streetwalking harlots of ‘Prufrock’ (1916), the devouring old dames of ‘Hysteria’ and the seductive Belladonna of *The Waste Land* to be replaced by a ‘veiled’ (‘A-W’, 141), more divine ideal of femininity, the mysterious allegorical ‘Lady of silences’ (66). In comparison with Eliot’s earlier works, female otherness and desire now take upon more complex and positive connotations in disposition and conduct to establish a new and more productive relationship between the sexes. Spurr comments in observation of Eliot’s ‘Lady’:

the portrait and characterisation of her, and the response of the speaker to her, together amount to an extraordinary reversal of the negative representation of women in Eliot’s earlier poetry

⁶ For Scofield, ‘Ash-Wednesday’ is ‘remarkable in its new departures and its transfigurations of the earlier verse, in its new rhythms, both incantatory and discursive, and in its attempt to rediscover and revitalize the traditional language of the Bible and the liturgy’ (1988: 159).

⁷ Moody notes of ‘Ash-Wednesday’: ‘Dante’s presence is all pervasive, and operates at all levels. He is behind the opening allusion to Cavalcanti, as the implicit master of love poetry. There are everywhere specific images, phrases and effects borrowed from him; at certain moments a feeling of the *terza rima* informs the verse; and the separate poems appear to be modelled more nearly upon the sonnets and canzone of the *Vita nuova* than upon the Catholic liturgy or anything else I can think of’ (1994b: 139).

⁸ For comment on the change in relation to the feminine in Eliot’s works shown in ‘Ash-Wednesday’, see Gordon (1998: 84-85); Schuchard (1999: 150-61); and Spurr (2010: 218).

⁹ See Gatta 117; and Däumer (1998: 479-501).

and the concomitant revulsion from or fear of them which his male speakers had repeatedly expressed. 'Ash-Wednesday' is the finest Marian poem, in English, of the twentieth century . . .

(2010: 218)

As Eliot indicated that 'all the women' of *The Waste Land* are in fact 'one woman' (WL, n. 218), I also take the various women throughout the sequence of 'Ash-Wednesday' to be one and the same woman: from the 'blessèd face' in part I, to the 'Lady' of part II and, finally, to the 'Blessèd sister, holy mother' in the poem's final section ('A-W', 21, 42, 209).¹⁰ In consideration, it is noticeable that Eliot's 'Lady', like Dante's Beatrice in the *Vita nuova* and Monica in Augustine's *Confessions* (c. 397-98), undergoes an apotheosis in death through the poem's sequence. In part IV she is transfigured and beatified in death as a salvific symbol of the divine akin to the Virgin Mary, 'White light folded, sheathed about her, folded' (134). A resounding figure of maternal benevolence, 'Grace to the Mother' (86), the Lady's integral importance as catalyst and mirror to the speaker's spiritual transformation is emphasised:

Because of the goodness of this Lady
And because of her loveliness, and because
She honours the Virgin in meditation,
We shine with brightness. And I who am here dissembled
Proffer my deeds to oblivion, and my love
To the posterity of the desert and the fruit of the gourd.
It is this which recovers . . . (49-55)

Elisabeth Däumer's essay 'Charlotte Stearns Eliot and *Ash-Wednesday*'s Lady of Silences' (1998) has been particularly important in highlighting the 'submerged mother-centred maternal narrative' (486) brought to bear in part II of the poem and the duality of Eliot's 'Lady of silences' ('A-W', 66) as both good and bad mother, 'Calm and distressed / Torn and most whole' (67-68). Däumer aligns the 'Lady' with not only Beatrice from Dante's works and the Virgin Mary but also with more malevolent images of motherhood such as the

¹⁰ Eliot writes in the notes to 'The Fire Sermon' section of *The Waste Land*:

Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character', is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. (WL, n. 218)

evil stepmother from the Brothers Grimm fairy tale ‘The Juniper Tree’, as well as with ancient pagan and savage icons of maternity such as Isis and Kali.¹¹ For Däumer, despite the Lady’s ‘goodness’ and ‘loveliness’ (‘A-W’, 49-50), she carries a ‘disturbing aspect’ (1998: 479) as the object of the male speaker’s exaltation. Her maternal silence, autonomy, and pious wholeness

betoken an awe-inspiring, even threatening, otherness, in other words, not absence of subjectivity but its presence, not selflessness but selfhood, and most paradoxical perhaps, not simply silence but ‘the word unheard’. (480)

It is the Lady’s ‘contemplative self-containment’ (490) and transformative maternal power as both ‘bestower and destroyer of life’ (489) that reduce the speaker to ‘bones’ (‘A-W,’ 46) and inspire his resurrection into a new self: ‘It is this which recovers’ (55).

For Däumer, ‘Ash-Wednesday’ is a threshold in Eliot’s works in respect to the symbolisation of maternal power, desire and subjectivity. While his early poetry ‘is haunted by a series of voracious, often voluble, semi-hysterical women who . . . exhibit maternal power at its most frightening’ (1998: 479), ‘Ash-Wednesday’ presents through its figuration of the ‘Lady of silences’ and changing ‘panoply of female figures’ a more complex and mature innovation and exploration of motherhood (484). The ‘Lady’ blurs and implicitly counters the binary oppositions by which traditional, patriarchal and dominant discourses of culture—such as Christianity and psychoanalysis—have defined the ‘good mother’. Thus, Däumer views ‘Ash-Wednesday’ as an aesthetic realisation of a psychological change in the poet’s ‘intensively ambivalent relationship to the maternal’ (479), and naturally concludes the model for the ‘Lady’ to be not Eliot’s life-long Platonic love Emily Hale—as Lyndall Gordon forcefully argues—or Vivien Eliot to whom the poem was originally dedicated, but more so Eliot’s mother, Charlotte.¹² On this point I am firmly in agreement. Eliot suggested this to be the case in an interview with Kristian Smidt in 1949:

¹¹ Eliot’s sources for the ‘juniper tree’ have been pointed out by Frye as associated with Elijah (Kings 1. 19) who sat under a juniper tree and prayed for death, and also ‘with a resurrection from bones in a fairy tale of Grimm’ (1963: 76): ‘The Juniper Tree’. Child psychology in relation to a substitute mother resonates in this connexion with the Brothers Grimm reinforcing maternal identification with the ‘Lady’. In Grimm’s tale of ‘The Juniper Tree’ an evil step-mother murders and decapitates her son. He is then buried by his sister beneath a juniper tree which, once revitalised as a rose tree by his cadaver, raises him from the dead as a bird singing the refrain ‘My mother cut my head off, / My father swallowed me, / My sister buried all my bones / Under the juniper tree’ (Pullman 191). The male child metamorphoses is completed full-circle when on killing the evil step-mother he is transformed from a bird back into a child in the presence of his real mother.

¹² See Gordon (1998: 235).

Smidt: There's a painting that comes vividly to mind when I read 'Ash-Wednesday'. Were you ever struck by Murillo's picture of the Immaculate Conception with the Virgin standing on a crescent moon?¹³

Eliot: It is curious you should mention that. There was a steel engraving of it, my mother's in my father's house . . . Things have a way of sticking in the memory. (Smidt 33)

In arguing for the centrality of the mother to the composition of 'Ash-Wednesday' Däumer rightly draws attention to the biographical positioning of the poem's construction as being at 'a pivotal time in the poet's relationship to his mother, marked as much by final separations as new rapprochements' (1998: 484). As well as Eliot's separation from Vivien and reunion with Emily Hale, Däumer underscores both his separation from his mother's Unitarian faith and the renunciation of his American citizenship, both of which occurred in 1927.¹⁴ However, while these factors no doubt permeate 'Ash-Wednesday', Däumer only mentions the death of Eliot's beloved poet-mother in 1929 as an *obiter dictum*. This is despite Charlotte's death being the most definitive and profound separation to have occurred during the poem's writing. Further, Däumer does not refer at all to the death of Eliot's 'favourite' sister, also called Charlotte, of peritonitis on 22 August 1926, aged only fifty-two.¹⁵ Certainly, the deaths of Eliot's mother and sister, both called Charlotte, at or near the composition of 'Ash-Wednesday', is a very suggestive typological event prefiguring the identification of the composite 'Sister, mother' (216) alongside the litany of the Virgin at the poem's end: 'Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden' (209). Däumer notes that Beatrice and the events of the *Vita nuova* inform in part Eliot's complex rendering of the maternal 'Lady' and her transformation through the 'Ash-Wednesday' sequence. In addition, she identifies how the male tension in the poem between separation and union, recognition and non-recognition of the mother, is alleviated by the spiritualisation of maternal agency and subjectivity in parts IV and VI. However, Däumer does not build upon her observations to

¹³ Eliot's interview with Smidt is intriguing as it reveals Eliot's associations as not always purely literary. It acknowledges the possibility of identification between the Virgin Mary and Charlotte Eliot having unconsciously entered into the symbolism of 'Ash-Wednesday' from the recesses of Eliot's childhood memory. See Charlotte's Murillo painting of the Virgin (Fig. 4) in chapter 1, 34.

¹⁴ By June 1927 Eliot's long troubled marriage to Vivien Haigh-Wood was 'dead' (Cooper, 2006: 13).

Seymour-Jones states how 'behind the façade of domesticity, Vivien and Tom now lived separate lives' (451).

¹⁵ *LTSE3*, 279.

correlate the life, death and spiritualisation of Beatrice in the *Vita nuova* with the life, death and spiritualisation of the ‘Lady’ in ‘Ash-Wednesday’. She neither identifies how death inscribes the maternal Lady’s divinisation in part IV in the vision of the allegorical *high dream* nor how this may be related to the death of a real person—as in the *Vita nuova*. I regard Däumer’s failure to consider fully the impact of the deaths of Eliot’s mother and sister on the writing of ‘Ash-Wednesday’ to be a critical oversight, especially in regard to the mother’s particular influence on the poem’s allegorical aesthetics. This shortfall is symptomatic of critical readings of ‘Ash-Wednesday’ and the lack of acknowledgement of maternal influence in Eliot studies more widely.

The newly released third volume of Eliot’s letters indicates that his sister’s death in 1926 had come as a ‘great shock’ (*LTSE3*, 279). Moreover, they report how his sister’s loss had also had a debilitating effect upon his mother who, now aged eighty-four and in failing health, was ‘quite self-possessed’ by the ‘tragedy’. The letters show that the imminence of Eliot’s mother’s death and the possibility of not seeing her again were foremost in his mind and a cause of great anxiety to him during the composition of ‘Ash-Wednesday’. On 29 July 1927, Eliot speculates in a letter to his brother Henry of the possibility of his mother’s death: ‘I gather that Mother is likely to live about six months or a year? Is this your opinion?’ (*LTSE3*, 599). On not hearing from his mother, he laments to Henry: ‘during the last week I had grown increasingly anxious, as I had had no news whatever’. He adds: ‘when things get *better*, or when they get much *worse*, I can come; meanwhile I must try to put the best face on it I can’ (649, emphasis in original). By June 1929 Eliot’s mother was dying and he was greatly distressed. Vivien recollects it as being ‘A *terrible* time for my poor angel boy’ (qtd. in Gordon, 1998: 252, emphasis in original).¹⁶ Physical and psychical separation from ‘the most powerful single influence upon his work’ (Lamos 68) would finally befall Eliot—during his final drafting of ‘Ash-Wednesday’—with Charlotte dying on 10 September 1929. Eliot’s remarkable declaration to his mother already quoted in chapter 1, here bears repeating:

I believe that you and I understand each other and are like each other perhaps more than we know, and that we shall surely meet. And whenever I have done anything that the world has thought good, or that the world is likely to think good for a generation or two after I am dead, I have always felt that it was something that

¹⁶ This quote is taken from Vivien Eliot’s unpublished diary for the year 1935 now housed in the ‘Papers of Vivien Haigh Eliot’, Bodleian Library, Oxford University, Oxford (*BL*, MS Eng. misc. e.876-8, f.532).

you and I did together, or even something that you had dreamt of and projected before I was born. I often feel that I am merely a continuation of you and Father, and that I am merely doing your work for you. Anyway, you are the finest and greatest woman that I have ever known. (*LTSE3*, 648)

In light of this statement emphasising the degree of mother-son love and Eliot's acknowledgement of the profound impact of Charlotte upon his life and work, this chapter further substantiates and elaborates on Däumer's maternal reading of 'Ash-Wednesday' and her proposition of Eliot's mother as the model for the 'Lady of silences'. Building on chapter 1, it reads Eliot's prose works 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' and 'Hamlet and his Problems' from *The Sacred Wood* (1920) as expressing a search for a poetic form through which those excessive passions intrinsically related to the maternal body may be carried, controlled and translated. Through Eliot's progressive readings on Dante in the 1920s, I show allegory as the form arrived at in answer to this dilemma of artistic representation and as feeding into the symbolism of 'Ash-Wednesday'. Unlike Däumer, this chapter places Eliot's real life contemplation and mourning of the death of his mother as central to 'Ash-Wednesday' and as precipitating the fleeting appearance and significant import of its unique construction of revelation-allegory in parts II and IV. I argue that, as with Dante's allegory, Eliot's allegory is historically and individually specific and marks a profound interstice between death, the feminine, mourning, faith and revelation. To corroborate this contention, this chapter compares the 1928 typescript and final published 1930 version of 'Ash-Wednesday' in the context of Eliot's relationship with his mother. In addition, it draws upon Walter Benjamin's radical reconceptualisation of allegory put forward in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928) (which focuses on the German baroque *Trauerspiel* or 'mourning play' of the seventeenth century) as opposed to traditional and stereotyped ideas of allegory based, for instance, on John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678).¹⁷ I use

¹⁷ Copeland and Struck verify the subject of allegory to be 'vast' (1) and, furthermore, troublesome and elusive with recent accounts attesting to the instability of the mode. The etymological definition of the term has Greek origins: *allos* (other) and *agoreuein* (to speak in public) producing a sense of 'other speaking'. The traditional, standardised formulation of allegory as an 'extended metaphor' is derived from Quintilian's rhetorical definition of allegory given in his *Institutio Oratoria* (8.6.44). My reading of allegory in 'Ash-Wednesday' runs counter to this interpretation. Instead, it follows modernist and postmodernist theorisations which have challenged the assumptions of allegory to complete knowledge, meaning, totality and transcendence: seminal discussions include Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928); Paul De Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' (1969; rpt. 1989: 187-223); Joel Fineman's essay 'The Structure of Allegorical Desire' (1980); and Fredric Jameson's article 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism' (1986).

Benjamin's reading of allegory in the *Trauerspiel* as a highly dialectical symbolic mode that follows—when melancholic speculation is carried to its end—the archetypal model of Christian eschatology in Christ's death and resurrection as a means to validate my reading of 'Ash-Wednesday' as a visionary poetics intimately related to the maternal body. This chapter argues for the spiritualised presence of the mother in 'Ash-Wednesday' existing in eschatological-allegorical moments of faith under the conditions of melancholia, death and doubt.¹⁸

Eliot's Prose Works 1919-29: A Search for Form

Concurrent with his religious 'turn', by the time of writing 'Ash-Wednesday' it is evident that Eliot had become seriously determined to exercise greater control over the passions and emotions which had stimulated works such as 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian', 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', 'Hysteria' and *The Waste Land*: 'And I pray that I may forget / These matters that with myself I too much discuss / Too much explain' ('A-W', 27-29). Indeed, 'Desire and control' (*CPP*, 107), a line from one of his Ariel poems of the period, 'Animula' (1929), may be volunteered as the dictum persistent throughout Eliot's prose works of the 1920s—from *The Sacred Wood* (1920) to his 'Dante' (1929). These essays consistently show an anti-Romantic sentiment opposed to the expression of excessive emotion, a heightened need for intellectual structure and an express intention by Eliot to find a new, mature poetic form adequate to carrying, controlling and objectifying passions which, as mentioned in chapter 1, almost always first emerge and are given shape in the early mother-child relation.¹⁹

Both featured in *The Sacred Wood*, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (*SW*, 47-59) and 'Hamlet and his Problems' (95-103) were written contemporaneously and may be viewed as complementary in their relating Oedipal transmission, questions of paternity and maternity, regulation of the passions, and male maturity with poetic form. 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919) is an entirely masculine enclave that espouses the importance of awareness of, identification with, and accession to an established ideal literary patrilineage and order. As in Freud's Oedipal formulations, Eliot states how a strong paternal identification and affiliation

¹⁸ For readings of Benjamin's allegory in relation to religion, philosophy, psychoanalysis and aesthetics, see Pensky; Wolin; Stewart; and Brent Plate.

¹⁹ This chapter continues from chapter 1 in following Jan Campbell's argument for unconscious reading in the primary pre-discursive mother-child relationship as first giving form and shape to excessive passions first related to the mother's body. See Campbell's chapter 'Passions in Search of Form' (2013: 1-32).

with the poetic forefathers that distinguish tradition is not inherited but obtained by ‘great labour’ (SW, 49). This distinction between inheritance and procurement, passivity and activity, adheres to a traditional, patriarchally gendered feminine/masculine binary arrangement weighted towards giving fathers ideological primacy. Paternal identification is posited as requisite if the ‘personal emotions’ (57) from which the work of the male poet begins are to become a genuinely ‘new’ objective artwork (49). In Eliot’s famous theory of impersonality put forward in the essay he suggests the need for Oedipal interdiction through assumption of the Father’s law and language in order to precipitate a more perfect sublimation of emotions and feelings, stating:

the other aspect of this Impersonal theory of poetry is the relation of the poem to its author. And I hinted, by an analogy, that the mind of the mature poet differs from that of the immature one not precisely in any valuation of ‘personality’, not being necessarily more interesting, or having ‘more to say’, but rather by being a more finely perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations. (53-54)

Eliot delineates the immature poet by the inability to find forms adequate to transmuting the most ‘special’, ‘very varied’ and denied feelings and passions: ‘in fact, the bad poet is usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious’ (58). Unable to fully accede to the paternal signifier the immature poet remains wrapped in the sensations of the maternal envelope and theorised stereotypically as feminine under the jurisdiction of masculine and classical parameters. Eliot states ‘the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality’ (53), adding, ‘poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality’ (58). In short, for Eliot, the immature poet is too ‘personal’ (58), narcissistic and sentimental, too emotional and feminine, too Romantic, a ‘personality’. The mature poet, however, is able through active, conscious paternal identifications to find ‘new combinations’, forms and shapes through which his passions can be elaborated: ‘only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to escape from these things’ (58). As MacDiarmid observes, Eliot in ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ goes to ‘great pains to create a new genealogy for poetry that leaves out the woman *as*

the male poet takes her place' (64, emphasis in original). There is no mention of a maternal genealogy, female poets or poetry, maternal identification, influence or maternal form. Rather, there is a clear stand-off between the maternal body and affect and the paternal phallus with Eliot resolutely on the side of the symbolic and repression in his idealisation of the paternal order as the only route out for the passions out into poetry. In service to his aesthetic ideals the consummate male artist is deemed successful by Eliot in his ability to simultaneously use, exclude and repress the maternal precursor from whose body his passions are both derived and unconsciously fixated. Eliot states:

the more perfect the artist , the more completely separate in him
will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the
more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions
which are its material. (SW, 54)

An unconscious motive resides in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' which asserts a wish for rigid self-other differentiation. Instead of a healthy sublimation of passion, Eliot advocates a Freudian-Lacanian solution to the problem of the maternal body by repression and a defensive splitting of mind and body. The maternal is to be submerged, effaced and denied as constituent of the art object with the credibility and identity of the male artist viewed in opposition to sexual difference. Read today, Eliot's text, like *The Waste Land*, now appears symptomatic of a collective cultural repression and disavowal of the maternal.

If 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' can be read as concerned with defensive poetic repression of the mother in order to assuage the poet's anxiety of maternal influence, then 'Hamlet and his Problems' is an inquiry into finding a solution when repression fails due to an apparent crisis in the paternal function. Eliot's 'Hamlet' essay is a remarkable treatise on maternal ambivalence and maternal desire and the subsequent, sometimes debilitating, effect of its unconscious affects upon the child. In the essay, Eliot perceives a failure in objective equivalence in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in its attempt to deal with 'the effect of a mother's guilt upon her son' and those feelings 'of a son towards a guilty mother' (SW, 98, 99). Eliot refers to J. M. Robertson's comments on *Hamlet*: 'The guilt of a mother is an almost intolerable motive for drama, but it had to be maintained and emphasized to supply a psychological solution, or rather a hint of one' (1919: 73). Although in agreement with Robertson's statement, Eliot pronounces 'it is not merely the "guilt of a mother" that cannot be handled' (SW, 100). There are deeper, more primal and disturbing unconscious forces at work in the

play which are ‘very difficult to localize’. For Eliot, ‘Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in *excess* of the facts as they appear’ (101, emphasis in original). His object ‘disgust’ is occasioned by his mother, Gertrude, yet she is not an ‘adequate equivalent’ for it. Her character is too ‘negative’ and ‘insignificant’. As a consequence, Hamlet’s disgust ‘envelopes and exceeds her’. Eliot considers the play an ‘artistic failure’ (note: not an artistic disaster) due to the intractability of the material it is trying to deal with (98). He observes incongruities in the construction and standard of versification of *Hamlet* and hypothesises a biographical and psychological reason for these derangements in supposing that the play was written by the author during a ‘period of crisis’ (99). Eliot conflates Hamlet and Shakespeare’s biography to suggest that ‘Hamlet’s bafflement at the absence of objective equivalent to his feelings is a prolongation of the bafflement of his creator in the face of his artistic problem’ (101). In other words, Hamlet’s dilemma is the pressing artistic dilemma in the face of intolerable ambivalence to ‘express in art’ (102) the ‘buffoonery’ of an intense subjective ‘emotion’ so that ‘emotional relief’ can be brought about. As Craig Raine notes, in opposition to what Eliot regards as romantic evagation, the last two pages of Eliot’s ‘Hamlet’ essay ‘expound, not Shakespeare’s play, but Eliot’s own classical poetic agenda’ (135-36)—to express the most intense ‘fugitive’, ‘unusual’, and usually ‘inexpressible’ and ‘unknowable’ emotions in the pursuit of the most profound and obscure of meanings. Further to Raine’s point, I would argue that Eliot’s unconscious motive in achieving this aim is a covert wish to find a creative solution to the problem of ambivalence towards the maternal.²⁰

Eliot’s discussion of the difficulties of aesthetic translation of the mother’s excess in ‘Hamlet and his Problems’ is highly concordant with Jean Laplanche’s general seduction theory and his notion of the ‘enigmatic signifier’ in its explicating the problem of the mother’s (unintentional) ‘primal seduction’ and the child’s inability to ‘metabolise’ or codify her enigmatic sexual messages (1989: 126).²¹ For Laplanche, the problem for the child is the unconscious of the mother or ‘concrete other’ which invades the child’s consciousness: the something which passes ‘from the nursing person to the child, as an enigma’ (Caruth and Laplanche, 2001: par. 41).²² Following the other’s ‘implantation’, the subject at the beginning

²⁰ Rabaté notes a ‘deep personal implication’ in Eliot’s ‘Hamlet’ essay in regard to his comments on Shakespeare’s difficulty in Hamlet objectifying his feelings for his mother (Moody, 1994a: 218).

²¹ A revival of Freud’s seduction theory which he abandoned in 1897, Laplanche’s general seduction theory is elaborated in his *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis* (1989) and the collection *La révolution copernicienne inachevée* (1992b), part of which had been translated in *Essays on Otherness* (1999).

²² See Cathy Caruth, ‘Interview with Laplanche’ (Caruth and Laplanche, 2001: pars. 1-142).

is what Laplanche calls ‘Copernican’ in that he or she is ‘circulating around the other’s message’ (pars. 7, 40). There is ‘too much other’ and the task for the subject is to recover from this imposition through the defensive, metabolising processes of ‘translation’ and ‘binding’, with their twin correlates of sublimation and repression (pars. 126, 107). Laplanche explains however that there is in the child’s attempts at ‘translation’ always a ‘residue’ that is untranslatable, what he calls the *à traduire*, the ‘yet-to-be-translated’ (1999: 16). Hence, in Laplanche’s view the ‘enigmatic signifier’ is in no way resolvable. There is no authentic means of completely signifying the enigmatic sexualised messages received from the other. They are unconscious even to the adult and therefore ‘unmasterable’ for the child (129). For Eliot, Hamlet’s dilemma is exactly this problem. There is an excessive element in *Hamlet* that is resistant to translation. Messages are objectively felt as signals by Hamlet but he cannot account for what is causing these messages. He is subject to a ‘feeling’ which he ‘cannot understand; he cannot objectify this ‘feeling’, and therefore it remains to poison life and obstruct action’ (SW, 101). Hamlet’s problem of the enigma is a universal problem of representation for both the infant and the artist: how do I translate and explain that which is a mystery to me? Despite its failings, Eliot attributes the persistent fascination of *Hamlet* to audiences as due to it being exactly ‘full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art’ (100). For its very puzzlement he bestows *Hamlet* the title ‘the “Mona Lisa” of literature’ (99).

In observing the mystery of desire in the play and in showing moral and aesthetic concern at its being an ‘artistic failure’, Eliot extends his theory of the ‘objective correlative’ as his own ‘hint’ of a solution in answer to both the predicament of excessive passion and ambivalence between mother and son, and the child’s structuring of the mother’s unconscious desire. He states:

the only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an ‘objective correlative’; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula for that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. (SW, 100, emphasis in original)

Jacqueline Rose notes the remarkable fact that Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, is the figure whose representational inadequacy provokes Eliot's formulation of the objective correlative.²³ Gertrude is not enigmatic or mysterious enough for Hamlet's needs. The failure of *Hamlet* which Eliot betokens in his analysis is, then, the very failure of a 'maternal objective correlative' (Lupton and Reinhard 66). This concept is Eliot's idealistic creative solution to the problem of 'primal seduction' and the mother's excess in its wish to substitute a signifier or a signifying sequence for the 'enigmatic signifier'. If achievable, the objective correlative is a means of metabolising excess and mastering the subject's founding trauma, a way of foreclosing receptivity to the other and the intrusive over-proximity of their desire. However, in seeming agreement with Laplanche who insists that 'translation is always at the same time a failure of translation' (1999: 11), Eliot notes how the problem of the mother's excess resists 'objective equivalence' (*SW*, 101). Shakespeare, he concludes, simply 'tackled a problem which proved too much for him' (102). For a more complete 'translation', higher sublimation and control and ordering of the passions Eliot turns to the work of Dante.

Dante and Allegory

Mario Praz in *The Flaming Heart* (1958) aligns Eliot's theories of poetic impersonality and the 'objective correlative' very closely with his study and interpretation of Dante's allegory.²⁴ In the culminating 'Dante' essay in *The Sacred Wood*, Eliot expresses admiration for the 'emotional structure' (*SW*, 168) made possible by Dante's use of allegory in the *Commedia*. Eliot discerns a distinct relation between emotion and aesthetic experience in Dante's work. Dante's allegory relates to matters not only moral, political, and theological, but also personal and psychological. The mechanical framework of Dante's allegory contains every experience, Eliot states, 'from the most sensuous to the most intellectual and the most spiritual' (169)—all dramatically translated, objectified and systematized in relation to each other in a universal

²³ Rose's essay 'Hamlet—the "Mona Lisa" of Literature' (123-40) suggests the 'unknowable' that Shakespeare is unable to translate is the repressed feminine: or, more precisely, female sexuality, represented by the figure of the mother. For Rose, the enigmatic feminine returns in *Hamlet*, and to Shakespeare, to trouble the 'literary super-ego' (129). Rose suggests that Eliot ties 'the enigma of femininity to the problem of interpretation itself' (127).

²⁴ Praz states in *The Flaming Heart* (1958):

we have seen thus how some of the most characteristic utterances of Eliot as a critic—his theory of the 'objective correlative', the other of the 'impersonality of the poet'—arose in connexion with the study of Dante . . . the ideas he develops under the stimulus of Pound *il miglior fabbro*, concern rather the technique of poetry, the finding out of a pattern of clear visual images capable of evoking immediately the underlying emotion. (359)

schema. He adds ‘it is one of the greatest merits of Dante’s poem that the vision is so nearly complete’ (170). Eliot applauds the classical phenomenalism of the *Commedia* as an aesthetics of representation for its being ‘the most comprehensive, and the most *ordered* presentation of emotions that has ever been made’ (168, emphasis in original).

Eliot observes a further benefit of Dante’s allegorical mode in the remarkable phenomenological astuteness and spectrum-like suitability it proffers in its being ‘*perceived*’ (SW, 171, emphasis in original). Allegory tends towards vision rather than lyricism. Eliot states in his later ‘Dante’ of 1929: ‘allegory is only one poetic method, but it is a method which has very great advantages’ (SE, 204). Despite being thought of as a ‘tiresome crossword puzzle’, it is for a ‘competent poet’ a method which makes for ‘simplicity and intelligibility’. It means ‘*clear visual images*’ with Eliot insisting that ‘speech varies but our eyes are all the same’ (204, emphasis in original). While ‘the thought may be obscure’, the ‘poetic lucidity’ (201) of allegory means that intelligence is not necessary for its effectiveness as a dialectical mode. Good allegory, such as Dante’s, is not only impersonal but most importantly makes for ‘universality’ (201). Eliot states:

Dante’s is a *visual* imagination . . . it is visual in the sense that he lived in an age when men still saw visions. It was a psychological habit, the trick of which we have forgotten, but as good as any of our own. We have nothing but dreams, and we have forgotten that seeing visions—a practice now relegated to the aberrant and uneducated—was once a more significant, interesting, and disciplined kind of dreaming. We take it for granted that our dreams spring from below: possibly the quality of our dreams suffers in consequence.

(204, emphasis in original)

In this passage, Eliot’s championing of vision achieved through a skilled and disciplined application of allegory alludes to artistic revelation of that which would otherwise be unseen by ordinary sight, incomprehensible to the conscious mind and impossible to articulate literally within language. For Eliot, allegory ‘raised to the point of genius can make a great poet as well as a great mystic or saint’ (204). By the time of his ‘Dante’ of 1929 (written synchronously with the composition of ‘Ash-Wednesday’) Eliot promotes allegory as the only

‘scaffold’ (SW, 242) on which the *Commedia* could have been built.²⁵ In the sequence of Eliot’s prose works from *The Sacred Wood* (1920) to ‘Dante’ (1929) there is increasing realisation of an ideal form through which those deepest, most troubling and elliptical personal emotions and desires may be structured and transmuted into a more impersonal, objective voice. This ideal is allegory.²⁶

Eliot recognises desire in Dante’s allegory as both a theme and a structuring principle. For Eliot, the translation and concretization of the passions enabled by the allegorical form bring forth the ‘recrudescence of an ancient passion in a new emotion, in a new situation, which comprehends, enlarges, and gives meaning to it’ (SE, 223). In other words, obsessive artistic longing for the arrest and objectification of desire brings about allegorical structure. Through allegory the poet is able to dissociate himself and purge his emotions in order to visualise them and give them meaning. This *dédoublement* (De Man, 1989: 211) gives the self the gift of looking upon the self as if it were an other.²⁷ Allegory presents itself therefore as an epitaph to the flesh, to the word. Eliot explains the advantage of this aesthetic procedure in relation to Dante’s own biography and the understanding of the significance of his meetings with Beatrice:

now Dante, I believe, had experiences which seemed to him of some importance; not of importance because they happened to him and because he, Dante Alighieri, was an important person . . . but important in themselves; and therefore they

²⁵ Eliot continues his appraisal of Dante’s allegory throughout the whole of his ‘Dante’ (1929) (SE, 199-240). He states: ‘Dante’s “allegorical” method has great many advantages for the writing of *poetry*: it simplifies diction, and makes clear and precise the images’ (SE, 229, emphasis in original). For Eliot, the comprehensiveness of Dante’s vision in the *Commedia* is attributable to his use of allegory which allows ‘every degree of humanity’ to be arranged ‘according to the logic of sensibility’.

²⁶ Eliot’s promotion of allegory in his ‘Dante’ (1929) was anticipated in his comments on the use of allegory in Dante’s *Vita nuova* in Lecture III, ‘Donne and the *Trecento*’, taken from the Clark Lectures given at Trinity College, Cambridge University, in 1926. Here Eliot notes:

when we read the book in question, we may receive the impression that the *Vita nuova* is a dry and lifeless allegory. (The very word ‘allegory’ is enough to condemn anything, to many people!) No such thing. The *Vita nuova* is to my thinking a record of actual experiences reshaped into a particular form . . . I do not reject the part of allegory. Allegory itself may be only a mode of expression of a mind passionately eager to find order and significance in a world—though it may find order or set order in ways which we have come to neglect. (VMP, 97-98)

²⁷ De Man borrows the term *dédoublement* from Baudelaire and uses it to explain the reflexive activity connoted by Baudelaire’s use of the infinitive form *se dédoubler*, that being an activity of ‘self-duplication or self-multiplication’ (1989: 211-13).

seemed to him to have some philosophical and impersonal value. (*SE*, 233)

For Eliot, by way of the allegorical injunction on desire those experiences of ‘greatest *personal* intensity’ (224, emphasis in original) can communicate for the artist, a universal and impersonal truth related to, yet perpetually deferred from, an ancient passion by their very objectification within language. Eliot’s repeated mention and linking of the ‘impersonal’, the ‘general’ and the ‘universal’ in his prose works (*The Sacred Wood* 1920; ‘Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca’ 1927; ‘Dante’ 1929; ‘Yeats’ 1940; ‘What is a Classic?’ 1944), in relation to the expression of ‘intense’ early personal experience, equates with Leo Bersani’s Platonic account of a relational and impersonal narcissism, ‘a general, universal individuation’, whose precondition Adam Phillips locates in ‘the impersonality of mothering’ (82, 104). That is to say, the poet in his allegorization of personal desire uses moments of intense passion as a heuristic principle from which to trace the frontiers of consciousness and the profound unconscious impersonal intimacy of the pre-Oedipal, pre-verbal and pre-linguistic mother-child dreamworld. Through the allegorical procedure the poet is able to go beyond conventional meaning. Eliot asserts, however, that the development of an adequate medium able to fully speak and truly reflect upon the passions is a privilege that comes to the poetic genius only in retrospect with ‘maturity’ and through great labour—he cites Virgil, Dante and the late work of Yeats as examples.²⁸ Only high allegory, such as Dante’s, can transmute, objectify and structure repressed unconscious desire and in doing so apprehend the unrealisable, generalised truths located before the subject’s *fall* into language: the originating primal trauma of subjectivity, sexuality, the unconscious and ego structuration. In the anagogical and purgative purpose of the allegorical intention the poet’s epistemophilic urge as ‘a desire to know’ is revealed (Fineman 61).

In Joel Fineman’s essay ‘The Structure of Allegorical Desire’ (1980) he states how ‘the motive for allegory emerges out of recuperative originology’ (49). The source of desire (the ghostly lost origin) is what beckons desire for allegory. Hence, allegory is an elegiac, nostalgic form. In psychoanalysis this lost origin is forever the lost terrain of the pre-Oedipal maternal body anterior to the symbolic. Freud notes in ‘Family Romances’ (1909) how the enigma of the mother’s body is the object of the child’s ‘most intense sexual curiosity’

²⁸ See Eliot’s ‘Dante’ (1929) and essay’s ‘What is a Classic?’ (1944), ‘Virgil and the Christian World’ (1951) and ‘Yeats’ (1940) (*OPP*, 52-74; 135-48; 295-308).

(2001g: 239).²⁹ The child wishes to bring his mother ‘into situations of secret infidelity and into secret love-affairs’. Nonetheless, the child is disallowed reunion with the mother due to the incest prohibition which requires the child be interpolated into culture. As the ‘sacred founding shrine’ (Fineman 59) from which ‘desire originates in and as the loss of structure’ (61) it follows that the motive of allegorical movement is poetic pilgrimage back to the tabooed origin of the mother’s body. However, as in *The Canterbury Tales*, this temporal pilgrimage is one that can never arrive. Due to its demarcation of a paradise lost, allegory is related to the object-loss that promulgates desire and repetition and which delineates the melancholic. In ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (1917), Freud states that it is only in mourning the lost object that loss is brought to consciousness.³⁰ By the subject’s recognition of lack through sufficient mourning, separation from the object is effected and desire revived within the matrix of language through reinstitution of the phallus in subjection to the paternal law against incest. The resourcefulness of allegory for the melancholic poet lies, therefore, in its evoking knowledge of the ineffable but ‘unforgettable thing’: Lacan’s *das Ding*, the real of the mother’s body (Lacan, 1997: 43).³¹ In its bearing witness to ‘the verdict of reality that the object no longer exists’ (Freud, 2001j: 255), allegory in its mournful end works paradoxically to open the poet onto the *jouissance* of the Other (JO), feminine *jouissance* (Lacan, 1999: 77).³² This feminine *jouissance*—which Lacan also identifies as the mystic’s *jouissance*—turns the poet towards infinity, the enigmatic and the inexpressible. For Eliot, allegory is the rhetorical mode of temporality which when elevated to its highest level of practice can enable the poet to identify both his beginning and end, signalling: ‘the effort and triumph of a new renunciation, greater than renunciation at the grave, because a renunciation of feelings that persist beyond the grave’ (*SE*, 224). He states in praise of Dante: ‘one can only feel awe at the power of the master who could thus at every moment realize the inapprehensible in visual

²⁹ Sigmund Freud, ‘Family Romances’ (1909; rpt. 2001g: 235-44).

³⁰ Sigmund Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (1917; rpt. 2001j: 237-60). Freud conjectures that in normal mourning

each single one of the memories and situations of expectancy which demonstrate the libido’s attachment to the lost object is met by the verdict of reality that the object no longer exists; and the ego, confronted as it were with the question whether it shall share this fate, is persuaded by the sum of the narcissistic satisfactions it derives from being alive to sever its attachment to the object that has been abolished. (244)

³¹ In Lacanian language *Das ding* is the lost object of desire which must be continually refound: in other words, the forbidden object of incestuous desire, the mother. Lacan extensively discusses *Das ding* in Seminar 7, see Lacan (1959-60; rpt. 1997); and also the entry ‘Thing’ in D. Evans 207-08.

³² For Lacan, feminine *jouissance* is not phallic *jouissance* but ‘beyond the phallus’ (1999: 74). It is of the order of the infinite, like the mystical ecstasy experienced by Christian mystics like St. Teresa of Avila. See Lacan, ‘God and Woman’s Jouissance’ (1973; rpt. 1999: 64-77).

images' (228). Notably, allegory would only be an absolutely crucial concept in Eliot's prose works around the time of his writing 'Ash-Wednesday' (1927-30) and his mother's death. His concern with allegory would not persist into later works like *Four Quartets*.

Allegory in 'Ash-Wednesday'

In June 1930, Eliot admitted the strength of the link between 'Ash-Wednesday' and Dante in a letter to Paul Elmer More, writing "'Ash-Wednesday" is really a first attempt at a sketchy application of the philosophy of the *Vita nuova* to modern life' (*LTSE5*, 209).³³

Notwithstanding this confession, the application of the Dantean conceptualisation and practice of allegory is not clear in the poem. Eliot's allegory is complex, inconsistent, hard to discern and obscure in its meaning.³⁴ It is quite unlike traditional, medieval and Dantean versions of the allegorical form which, 'at its simplest', appears 'a way of saying one thing and meaning another' (Tambling, 2010: 6).³⁵ Though Eliot suggests he is working from within a medieval paradigm (as he indicated in his prose writings on Dante), there is a striking disparity between allegorical intent and the actual practice of allegorical form. As F. O. Matthiesen notes, there is a marked digression from Dante's use of allegory in 'Ash-Wednesday' through 'the inevitable absence in Eliot of the strict medieval interpretation of what the figures stand for' (115).³⁶ In pursuance of this, Balanchandra Rajan writes of Eliot: 'he does not limit the suggestions of his symbols as Dante does, or as his commentators have done for him' (1947: 37).

I discern the poem's significant allegorical moments relating to the maternal to be the figure of the 'Lady' and her paradisiacal 'Garden' in part II, and also the 'jewelled unicorns' which draw by the 'gilded hearse' in part IV ('A-W', 42, 87, 140). These points appear as revelatory glimpses intuited in transitory flashes. They materialize as beautiful veils which transitorily show but still conceal the origin, identity and violence of the deeply personal dilemma elemental in the poem's construction. This is despite the poem's overtly

³³ See Harries 136-44.

³⁴ For further discussion of style in 'Ash-Wednesday' and its allegorical moments, see Matthiesen 115; Rajan (1947: 37); S. Ellis (2009: 82); and MacDiarmid 99.

³⁵ In its most customary usage allegory refers to two related procedures, a manner of composing and a method of interpreting. In traditional, medieval and Renaissance interpretations of the form, as in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1596) or Guillaume de Lorris' *Romance de la Rose* (c. 1230), allegory is often understood as representational, a mechanical mode capable only of an abstraction of its original meaning.

³⁶ C. S. Lewis explains the programmatic nature of medieval allegory in *The Allegory of Love* (1936): 'there is nothing "mystical" or mysterious about medieval allegory; the poets know quite clearly what they are about and are well aware that the figures which they present to us are fictions. Symbolism is a mode of thought, but allegory is a mode of expression' (48).

confessional and penitential mode and the presence of a definite subjective ‘I’ who speaks in a tone of unassailable candour: ‘Because I do not hope to turn again’ (1). As Arnold Hinchcliffe states, ‘the poem is clearly about Eliot, but he has made himself very distant from it’ (1987: 51). The allegorical symbolism of ‘Ash-Wednesday’ thus portrays a curious personal-impersonal meld that intimates, but somehow evades, clarification of the poet’s meaning and deep psychological workings.³⁷ Although generally conceived by critics as Eliot’s ‘conversion poem’, Schuchard states

it is in fact an extraordinary love poem of great personal intensity and spiritual discipline . . . It is neither a devotional poem nor a poem of conversion; it represents the beginning of an exile’s arduous Lenten journey from a life of tormented love towards the prayerful hope of finding, like Dante, a *Vita nuova* in divine Love. (1999: 117)

The concrete vision of the ‘Lady’ and the ‘leopards sat under a juniper-tree’ (‘A-W’, 42) at the beginning of part II presents an enigmatic hieroglyphic conjured by lexica—a kind of rebus-writing—which abruptly obtrudes out of the poem with lucid immediacy and an attendant element of shock, wonder and awe, placed as it is following the speaker’s ritualistic incantations in part I. These pictorial images appear supplementary to speech and as such figure as disjunctive principles of almost cosmogonical significance in the narration. Despite being stripped of intelligible meaning, Matthiesen senses in the figures ‘an unexpected density of implication’ (117). Indeed, the ‘Lady’ and the ‘leopards’ bear eminence as agents of death and destruction in the stripping naked of the physical body and the reduction of the speaker into ‘bones’ (46). They fascinate by their resplendent aura of both beauty and terror through which redemption and resurrection is promised:

³⁷ Eliot himself was not completely sure of the meaning of the symbolism of ‘Ash-Wednesday’. He states in a letter to Philip Parker on 17 May 1930:

do not worry at being unsure of the meaning, when the author cannot be sure of it either. The *Vita nuova* might give you some help; but on the other hand it is much more obscure than I have the talent to be. If you call the three leopards the World, the Flesh and the Devil you will get as near as one can, but even that is uncertain. (*LTSE5*, 187)

Later, Eliot concedes in his introduction to *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1932): ‘if a poem of mine entitled “Ash-Wednesday” ever goes into a second edition, I have thought of prefixing to it the lines of Byron from *Don Juan* . . . “I don’t pretend that I quite understand / My own meaning when I would be very fine; / but the fact is I have nothing planned / Except perhaps to be a moment merry”’ (*UPUC*, 30-31, emphasis in original).

Because of the goodness of this Lady
And because of her loveliness, and because
She honours the Virgin in meditation,
We shine with brightness. And I who am here dissembled
Proffer my deeds to oblivion, and my love
To the posterity of the desert and the fruit of the gourd. (49-54)

The renunciation of the will to *know* in part I, ‘Because I do not hope to know again’ (9), and the throwing off of the brash temerities of the ego in part II, ‘As I am forgotten / And would be forgotten’ (60-61), has ushered a flicker of the ‘infirm glory’ (10), a ‘transitory power’ (13) mediated by the ‘Lady’. The prominence of the ‘Lady’ is figured by her nominative capitalisation which confers an allegorical status and context. Yet, it remains uncertain whether the ‘Lady’ is as an allegorical personage, a real woman, a purely imaginary figure, a symbol, or a concentration of all of these possibilities.

The Enigma of the ‘Lady’

The likeness of Eliot’s ‘Lady’ to Dante’s idealisation and memory of Beatrice in the *Vita nuova* was insinuated by Eliot with the original titling of part II, ‘Salutation’, which bears obvious relation to canto 3 of Dante’s *libello* where he experiences ‘the summit of bliss’ when he first takes sight of his Beatrice and receives her ‘sweet greeting’ (*Vn.* 3.10-12). In a pivotal scene in canto 24 of the *Vita nuova* a personification of Love concedes to Dante ‘she who so resembles me is Love’ (*Vn.* 24.52). Robert Harrison notes at the heart of this absolute identification between Love and Beatrice ‘lies an analogy with Christ’ (Jacoff 41).³⁸ Beatrice’s role as analogue to Christ, and her death in canto 28 of the *Vita nuova* is more patently developed by Dante in cantos 29 and 30 of the *Purgatorio*—episodes which significantly influenced the writing of ‘Ash-Wednesday’. Due to such correspondences, it may be argued that Eliot’s ‘Lady’ is likewise both ‘incarnational and hypostatic’ (Jacoff 43); a substantial embodiment of love itself to whom the speaker must surrender.³⁹ However, Beatrice has long defied simple interpretation as shown by the lack of critical consensus on

³⁸ Robert Harrison, ‘Approaching the *Vita nuova*’ (Jacoff 34-44).

³⁹ Charles Singleton calls Beatrice ‘a love *de sursum descendens* (“descending from on high”), the blessed Virgin Mary’s love and, in the last analysis, God’s love’ (1970: 32-33). He adds: ‘Beatrice in the *Commedia* is no Pre-Raphaelite “Blessed Damozel”’ (33).

her meaning. In 1913 Jefferson B. Fletcher conceived an alternate view of the allegory in the *Vita nuova* as pertaining to celestial authority, bestowing upon Beatrice the high praise of being the ‘allegorical vision’ of God (26).⁴⁰ Even earlier commentators on Dante, including his son Pietro, proposed Beatrice’s conventional role in the *Commedia* to be an allegorical representation of faith and theology.⁴¹ On the contrary, Erich Auerbach in his seminal essay ‘Figura’ (1944) strongly refutes absolute interpretations of Dante’s allegory instead asserting that it should be read as figural rather than figurative. Beatrice, he states, is ‘incarnation, she is *figura* or *idolo Christi*’ and ‘her relation to Dante cannot fully be explained by dogmatic considerations’ (75).

Varying speculations of Beatrice’s allegorical meaning as Love, Christ, faith, theology, Incarnation or God identify her as a figure of semantic complexity and openness whose tenor speaks of a heterogeneity of *logos* and *materia*, of signifier and signified; her very alterity and hermeneutic density bespeaks reified significance but defies explication.⁴² Beatrice’s allegorical multi- or non-referentiality, coupled with her pointing to and beyond transience, explains the strange fascination she has exercised for critics and readers. For Auerbach, Dante’s ‘figural realism’ is allegorical in the ‘widest sense’ but is more in its emphasising the ‘earthly’ and the ‘temporal’ (54). Dante’s *figura* retains a ‘historicity both of the sign and what it signifies’. It is ‘something real and historical which announces something else that is also real and historical’ (29).⁴³ Auerbach adds:

for Dante the literal meaning or historical reality of a figure stands in no contradiction to its profounder meaning, but precisely ‘figures’ it; the historical reality is not annulled, but confirmed and fulfilled by the deeper meaning. The Beatrice of the *Vita nuova* is an earthly person; she really appeared to Dante, she really saluted him, really withheld her salutation later on, mocked him, mourned for a dead friend and for her father, and really died. Of course this reality can only be the reality of

⁴⁰ In agreement with Fletcher, Charles Williams also affirms Dante’s design of Beatrice as being brought ‘as near as he could to the final image, so far as he could express it, of Almighty God’ (8).

⁴¹ Pietro comments on *Inferno* (10.51): ‘after she died, to enhance the fame of her name, he wanted her to be taken as an allegory and type of theology in this poem’ (qtd. in Lansing 91).

⁴² For discussion of the many meanings given to Beatrice by both Dante and commentators on his works, see Lansing 89-95.

⁴³ Joan M. Ferrante states of Beatrice: ‘those who would deny her historicity, like those who reject her allegorical significance, deny the fullness of Dante’s poetry’ (Lansing 95).

Dante's experience—for a poet transforms the events of his life in his consciousness, and we can take account only of what lived in his consciousness and not of the outward reality. (73-74)

The historical specificity and individuality of Dante's allegory was not lost on Ezra Pound and Eliot who both supposed Beatrice to be a mix of the 'personal and allegorical' (*TLS.*, 11 Oct. 1928: 732).⁴⁴ Eliot comments on the *Vita nuova*: 'if this curious medley of verse and prose is biographical, then the biography has unquestionably been manipulated almost out of recognition to fit into conventional forms of allegory' (*SE*, 232). Similarly, the ambiguity of Eliot's 'Lady' has caused a plethora of suggestions to her allegorical meaning with critics also offering her biographical status. Inferences to her real identity range from Emily Hale (Gordon; Schuchard) to Vivien Eliot (T. S. Matthews; S. Ellis) and even to Eliot's Irish nurse from childhood Annie Dunne (Bush).⁴⁵ To all appearances Eliot's 'Lady' bears a condition of incomprehension.⁴⁶ She refers to what Freud terms 'the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches into the unknown' (2001d: 525). This suggests her identity as so entangled by unconscious allusion, both actual and fantastical, that it cannot be unravelled and thus must be left obscure. In support, John H. Timmerman postulates that 'the Lady conjoins in one person several literary allusions, and probably more than one historical figure' (95).⁴⁷ If we are to assume that Eliot's prose works on Dante are functional as ancillary aids to his poetry, we must consider that his allegorical images are not only a 'serious and practical means of making the spiritual visible' (*SE*, 227), but that they, too, carry an oblique biographical import which has been consciously or unconsciously manipulated almost out of recognition.

⁴⁴ In a 1928 review of Gretia Baldwin's *The New Beatrice* from the *Times Literary Supplement*, Eliot complains that the union of the personal and the allegorical in Dante's *Vita nuova* is something 'which commentators are anxious to deny' (*TLS.*, 11 Oct. 1928: 732). He continues: 'though the form of the *Vita nuova* be shaped by convention, it is in no way biographical in the modern sense, the book is obviously based on human passion; and without this basis it would have been merely a curiosity, not an immortal work'.

⁴⁵ See Gordon (1998: 235-39); Schuchard (1999: 160); S. Ellis (2009: 82-83); T. S. Matthews 108; and Bush (1983: 146-47).

⁴⁶ F. R. Leavis (1932) warns readers against 'crude interpretation' of 'Ash-Wednesday' and its symbolism (1960: 119). He sees the poem's impersonality and obscurity as due to Eliot's achievement of a 'paradoxical precision in vagueness' which aims 'at resolving diverse impulses, recognitions, and needs'.

⁴⁷ Notably, the enigma of the 'Lady' was maintained by Eliot himself in response to a student query. Stephen Spender gives the following anecdote:

even Eliot could be less than helpful if one tried to 'explicate' him. In 1929, there was a meeting of the Oxford Poetry Club at which he was the guest of honour. Before it, some of us arranged a separate meeting with Father M. C. D'arcy, with whom we studied the text of 'Ash-Wednesday', just published. Some points were not cleared up, and at a later meeting an undergraduate asked Eliot: 'Please, sir, what do you mean by the line: *Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper tree?*' Eliot looked at him and said: 'I mean, *Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper tree*'. (Tate 42, emphasis in original)

Death in parts II and IV of 'Ash-Wednesday'

'Ash-Wednesday' is obsessed and saturated with a sense of death, melancholia and mourning. In 1930, Eda Lou Walton noted in an early review of the poem: 'every poem published since his pronouncement of his creed is upon the theme of death in life, life in death, and the sincere desire for oblivion' (J. Brooker, 2004: 179). The title 'Ash-Wednesday' recalls the liturgy of Ash Wednesday and its focus on the passion and death of Christ: 'Remember man that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return'. Further, the penitent's opening admission 'Because I do not hope to turn again' borrows and identifies with the words of Guido Cavalcanti's *Perch'io non spero*: a ballad unto a distant lady in which the exiled poet shows awareness of the imminence of his own death. For George Williamson, death is both the theme and 'the reminder of Ash-Wednesday' (171) and it is death that provides transition from part I to the spectral 'Lady' in part II through the invocation to Our Lady: 'Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death / Pray for us now and at the hour of our death' (40-41).

In the beginning of part II there is an admixture of the usually antagonistic life forces, Eros and Thanatos (what Freud calls 'ambivalence' in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*).⁴⁸ The speaker's masochistic self-submission delivered in the lines 'And I who am here dissembled / Proffer my deeds to oblivion' (52-53) exhibits a suicidal tendency and a wish for dissolution that links with Freud's conception of the death instinct.⁴⁹ This evident turning round of the sadistic instinct towards the feminine apparent in Eliot's early works appears as a 'negative therapeutic reaction' against the sense of primal guilt which, according to Freud, is harnessed by most neurotics for whom the ultimate cause of repression is 'the anxiety due to separation from the protecting mother' (2001m: 58). Freud notes in 'Totem and Taboo' (1912) that 'self-sacrifice points back to blood-guilt' (2001i: 154). He elaborates in 'Mourning and Melancholia': 'it is true, that no neurotic harbours thoughts of suicide which he has not turned back upon himself from murderous impulses against others' (2001j: 252). Thus, the contrition and surrender of the self at the end of part I, 'Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our

⁴⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920; rpt. 2001: 7-66).

⁴⁹ Originally proposed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and elaborated in *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud's concept of the death drive contends that 'the aim of all life is death' (2001: 38). Freud sees sadism and masochism as incarnations of the death instinct, stating: 'is it not plausible to suppose that this sadism is in fact a death instinct which, under the influence of the narcissistic libido, had been forced away from the ego and has consequently only emerged in relation to the object? It now enters the service of the sexual function' (54). He adds: 'it might indeed be said that the sadism which has been forced out of the ego has pointed the way for the libidinal components of the sexual instinct, and that these follow after it to the object. Wherever the original sadism has undergone no mitigation or intermixture, we find the familiar ambivalence of love and hate in erotic life' (54).

death' (40), may be viewed as an act of sublimation of some of the libido and its purposes, by the ego, which Freud states 'assists the id in its work of mastering the tensions' (2001m: 47). To put it another way, penitential masochism in 'Ash-Wednesday' serves to alleviate anxieties synonymous with ambivalent feelings towards the mother, such as love and hate, which constitute melancholia and perpetuate the countless unconscious efforts by the self to detach libido from the object. It is a melancholic reaction which aims to simultaneously preserve the other and dissimulate violence toward the other.

The trope of death and the finding of salvation in death is especially prominent in part IV. Walton notices that in this section 'the forces of life and death' are 'interwoven' (J. Brooker, 2004: 180). The 'silent sister' (141) is positioned at a focal point 'Between' (142) the funereal 'yews' which project as emblems of death and resurrection, mortality and immortality. As in death, the 'sister' is 'veiled' (141), unnamed, 'breathless' (143) and wordless. Raine argues that the 'jewelled unicorns' which 'draw by the gilded hearse' signify allegorically as Eliot's intended 'image of perpetual death' (29). Steve Ellis, Eloise Knapp Hay and Balanchandra Rajan offer a different interpretation linking Eliot's 'gilded hearse' with Dante's allegorization of the Church as a chariot preceded by a whole body of prophets and ministers in canto 30 of the *Purgatorio*.⁵⁰ In spite of these conflicting conjectures, this most Dantesque vision emerges as Eliot's most consolidated fragment of allegory in the poem. It is a cursory revivification of the *high dream* of the old medieval poetic imagination:

White light folded, sheathed about her, folded.
The new years walk, restoring
Through a bright cloud of tears, the years, restoring
With a new verse the ancient rhyme. Redeem
The time. Redeem
The unread vision in the higher dream
While jewelled unicorns draw by the gilded hearse (134-140)

In this fleeting moment, eternity is glimpsed in death: the 'higher dream' gazed upon in the folding of time upon itself. The love object in death regains her immediacy and worth with a startling new configuration punctuated by allegorical vision. Significantly, Eliot only completed part IV after Charlotte Eliot's death.

⁵⁰ S. Ellis (1983: 218); Hay 96; and Rajan (1947: 61).

The 1928 Typescript and 1930 Published Version of ‘Ash-Wednesday’

Leonard Woolf’s letter supplementing his donation of the 1928 typescript of ‘Ash-Wednesday’ to King’s College, Cambridge, speaks of ‘considerable differences between the typescript and the published version’ (*HB*, V/6A/1).⁵¹ Indeed, the typescript contains only parts I-V, all of which contain variances and incongruities compared to the final version. Sections of part V of the typescript copy are later moved to part VI in the final version.⁵² In addition, aspects of the draft composition are more personal in address.⁵³ The most important difference to note is that part VI was missing and yet to be finished in October 1928. As a consequence, the apotheosis of the maternal ‘Lady’ into a syncretic female divine figure—‘Blessèd sister, holy mother’ (209)—is not yet complete. Moreover, the speaker’s solace in God’s ‘will’ (214) has not been fully effected, and the overwhelming tone of concern surrounding separation from the ‘Sister, mother’ (216) has not been sufficiently expressed and mourned.

The genesis of the writing of ‘Ash-Wednesday’ is complicated and not fully known.⁵⁴ Part II was published in the *Saturday Review of Literature* in December 1927 under the title ‘Salutation’, part I followed in *Commerce* in (Spring) 1928, and part III was published in *Commerce* (Autumn) 1929. The three remaining parts (IV-VI) were not published until the whole poem appeared in April 1930. The typescript draft reveals that the final three parts were completed between October 1928 and April 1930. As Charlotte Eliot died on 10 September 1929, and given the strength of Eliot’s bond to his mother, we may assume that, like that of Beatrice in Dante’s *Vita nuova* and Monica in Augustine’s *Confessions*, the death of Eliot’s mother would have had a significant impact on the completion of parts IV-VI. Whether Charlotte was bordering on death or had actually died by the time part IV was finished, it remains the case that the allegorical funeral pageant which draws by ‘the gilded hearse’ (140) appears to have been written into the poem in and around Eliot’s mourning of

⁵¹ See T. S. Eliot, ‘Ash Wednesday.’ Typescript of the first draft of Parts I-V. 5 pp. folio with notes by T. S. Eliot at the head of p. 1, ‘No need to acknowledge this. We look forward to seeing you on the 10th. T.’ Bought from Mr. Leonard Woolf, 1967, with a letter from Mr. Woolf to the Librarian of 10 Dec. 1966, giving the history of the typescript, which was sent to him and Virginia Woolf in Oct. 1928 for criticism (*HB*, TS V/6A).

⁵² Part VI is entirely missing in the Oct. 1928 typescript but parts of V were moved to part VI in the 1930 version. Although the typescript includes many of the lines which were to make up part VI, there are some important sections missing: for instance, the compound ‘Blessèd sister, holy mother’.

⁵³ There are several differences between the 1928 typescript and the final 1930 published version of ‘Ash-Wednesday’ which make the typescript more personal in address. A notable edit can be noted at the beginning of part III. In the 1928 typescript ‘My own shape twisted on the banister’ is altered to read ‘The same shape twisted on the banister’ in the published version.

⁵⁴ I am extremely grateful to Jim McCue for his response to my request for assistance in establishing the genesis of the composition for ‘Ash-Wednesday’.

his mother's death. The full disparities between the 1928 typescript draft of the crucial section of part IV and the 1930 version are below:

1928 typescript of part IV:

White light folded, sheathed about her, folding the flame and green
Clothes that now clothe her, while the flowers rejoice
In the blessed face
And the blessed voice
Of one who has heard the unheard, seen the unseen.
Desire chills, and the hidden thoughts outrace
The way of penance to the means of grace.

Poi s'ascose nel foco and
After this our exile (*HB*, V/6A/6)

1930 published version of part IV:

White light folded, sheathed about her, folded,
The new years walk, restoring
Through a bright cloud of tears, the years, restoring
With a new verse the ancient rhyme. Redeem
The time. Redeem
The unread vision in the higher dream
While jewelled unicorns draw by the gilded hearse.

The silent sister veiled in white and blue
Between the yews, behind the garden god,
Whose flute is breathless, bent her head and signed but spoke no
word

But the fountain sprang up and the bird sang down
Redeem the time, redeem the dream
The token of the word unheard, unspoken
Till the wind shake a thousand whispers from the yew

And after this our exile (134-48)

Comparing the versions, the ‘silent sister veiled in white and blue’ (141) is missing in the typescript. Moreover, the redemption of time, ‘Redeem the time, redeem the dream’ (145), and the renewal of the self, ‘But the fountain sprang up and the bird sang down’ (144), do not take place until the funereal pageant has manifested itself in part IV in the 1930 text. From this evidence, the prevalence of death and its injunction in the poem (as typified by the ‘gilded hearse’) is not as apparent in the earlier draft. Death, then, is the pivotal event punctuating the speaker’s entrance into the ‘New Life’ in the final version of ‘Ash-Wednesday’. Indeed, both the temporal ‘desire’ that ‘chills’ the path to salvation and the lines spoken by the poet Arnaut Daniel who Dante punished among the lustful in canto 26 of *Purgatorio*, ‘Poi s’ascose nel foco’ (‘Then he hid himself in the fire’),⁵⁵ are extinguished by 1930, replaced by the allegorical *high dream*.⁵⁶ Therefore, we may speculate that the death of the mother is the ontological break and the temporal gap which has brought forth the ‘unread vision’ of the ‘gilded hearse’ (139-40), hastening both the purgation of lust and transformation of the maternal ‘Lady’ into a female divine.⁵⁷ Notably, in Dante’s *Vita nuova* it is death which elevates the feminine to a state of glorification in heaven, and transfigures Dante’s physical love for Beatrice into divine love.⁵⁸ Eliot states of Dante’s *libello*: ‘the system of Dante’s organisation of sensibility—the contrast between higher and lower carnal love, the transition from Beatrice living to Beatrice dead, rising to the Cult of the Virgin, seems to me to be his

⁵⁵ Eliot strongly identified with the poet caught in the purgatorial fire, Arnaut Daniel, and continually referred to the lines at the conclusion of canto 26 of the *Purgatorio*: ‘Poi s’ascose nel foco che gli affina’ (‘Then he hid himself in the fire which refines them’) (*Purg.* 26.148). In addition to being featured in ‘Ash-Wednesday’, Daniel’s words provide the original epigraph to ‘Prufrock among the Women’ (*IMH*, 39), and they are also evoked in *The Waste Land* in the poem’s dedication to Ezra Pound, ‘il miglior fabbro’ (‘the better craftsman’) (*CPP*, 60), and at the poem’s end, ‘Poi s’ascose nel foco che gli affina’ (*WL*, 428). For Massimo Bacigalupa, Arnaut is ‘perhaps the Eliot persona’ (Harding, 2011: 180, emphasis in original). Bacigalupa tallies the fact of Arnaut’s penitence and punishment among the lustful in Dante’s *Commedia* as significant to Eliot’s sense of affinity with the poet as ‘Eliot’s sexuality’, too, ‘was more than usually conflicted’ (181).

⁵⁶ Dante’s capacity for vision and belief, Eliot says, ‘belongs to the world of what I call the *high dream*, and the modern world seems capable only of the *low dream*. I arrived at accepting it, myself, only with some difficulty’ (*SE*, 262, emphasis in original).

⁵⁷ Eliot openly fortified his position on the subject of love and desire in 1929 declaring, ‘the love of man and woman (or for that matter of man and man) is only explained and made reasonable by the higher love, or else is simply the coupling of animals’ (*SE*, 234-35). He expands on these comments in 1935: ‘I mean the turning away of the soul from desire . . . of drugged pleasures, of power, or of *happiness*. I mean “love”, in the sense in which “love” is opposite of what we ordinarily mean by “love” the desire to possess and to dominate or the desire to be dominated by’ (*NEW.*, 6 June 1935: 152, emphasis in original).

⁵⁸ In the final sonnet of the *Vita nuova*, Dante tells of a ‘miraculous vision’ of his ‘blessed Beatrice’ gazing upon ‘the countenance of the One who is through all ages blessed’ (*Vn.* 42.13, emphasis in original). From this view of Beatrice in heaven Dante resolves to ‘say no more about this blessed one until I would be capable of writing about her in a more worthy fashion’.

own' (*SE*, 275). A similar organisation of sensibility is apparent in 'Ash-Wednesday' with Eliot's 'Lady' rising to the cult of the Virgin in the final part of the poem. Thus, in view of the influence of Dante and his works upon Eliot, and through recourse to biographical information relating to Eliot's life around the time of his writing 'Ash-Wednesday', it appears more than arguable that the fact of his mother's death and the eventuality of this loss became the fundamental interest orientating the poem's drafts to its final rendering. That being the case, Charlotte's death on 10 September 1929—and Eliot's mourning of her loss—may be said to be the key event to which the apotheosis of the feminine in Eliot's work and life may be traced.

Hence, the 'gilded hearse' of part IV may be interpreted as an 'allegorization of the physis', as Walter Benjamin describes it in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928: 217).⁵⁹ The mother's body is a *memento mori*: an allegory which has been carried 'through in all its vigour in respect of the corpse'. In her death Charlotte has entered into 'the homeland of allegory', to quote Benjamin. Like Beatrice in the *Vita nuova* and Monica in the *Confessions*, in death Charlotte has become authentically other to Eliot, 'other speaking', enabling a divine economy of redemption. Charlotte has been elevated in Eliot's estimation as a *figura Christi*; her death positioned at the intersection pre- and post- his new life. In the melancholic's mourning of the lost (m)other—a mourning hastened through recognition of her as irretrievably lost—the 'silent sister' emerges in part IV of 'Ash-Wednesday' as an object of eschatological intuition. In short, it is in intuition of death via contemplation of the mother's dead body that the 'Lady' transfigures as a sacred feminine figure.⁶⁰ Regarding this, the emergence of allegory in 'Ash-Wednesday' declares itself indebted to the maternal body that is its vehicle. To elaborate from the etymology of allegory as 'other speaking', we may say that Eliot's rendering of allegory in 'Ash-Wednesday' is, to be more specific, (m)other

⁵⁹ Subsequent in-text citations of Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928) are in the short form (*OGT*).

⁶⁰ Benjamin identifies the corpse as 'the pre-eminent emblematic property' of the baroque genre (*OGT*, 218). For Benjamin, the corpse possesses a redemptive power in its pointing to something else which makes it no longer commensurable with profane things. The sacrosanct quality of the corpse is realised in mourning in many great literary works. For instance, Hamlet, Dante, and Augustine are all invigorated in moments of epiphany in which the allegorist awakens in realisation of themselves as a being-toward-death, and of the universality of death, through the death of the love object and her corpse (paradigmatically the female body). In Benjamin's view, such revelations are unsurprising as the evocation of death in the corpse signifies immediately as allegory and liberty. He states:

if it is in death that the spirit becomes free, in the manner of spirits, it is not until then that the body too comes properly into its own. For this much is self-evident: the allegorization of the physis can only be carried through in all its vigour in respect of the corpse. And the characters of the *Trauerspiel* die, because it is only thus, as corpses, that they can enter into the homeland of allegory. It is not for the sake of immortality that they meet their end, but for the sake of the corpse. (*OGT*, 217-18)

form: maternal allegory. It is a threshold form functioning on the borderline of language and the maternal body ‘between’ (‘A-W’, 202). Further, maternal allegory in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ traverses boundaries to reveal in its ephemeral epiphanic occurrences the archaic maternal foundations whose drives both constitute and break-up paternal symbolic formations. In consideration of the coalescence between death, the mother, the divine, faith, redemption and revelation that constitute the poem’s significant allegorical moments, I contend that Eliot’s allegory is much more in keeping with Walter Benjamin’s radical reconceptualisation of allegory than with traditional notions of allegory.

T. S. Eliot and Walter Benjamin

Despite obvious differences between Eliot and Benjamin in regard to political, social and religious belief and affiliation (Eliot: Anglo-Catholic, Conservative / Benjamin: Jewish-Secular, Marxist), critics (Bowen 1994; Jameson 1969; Kramer 1975; S. Mitchell 1973; Neilson 2007) have noted deep affinities between these two thinkers.⁶¹ In particular, these relate to Eliot’s and Benjamin’s speculations on history and time, the relation between aesthetics and metaphysics, their common debt to Baudelaire and his idea of correspondence, their interest in early modern drama, modernity and fragmentation, and also in their retrieval of allegory from romantic devalorisation as a symbolic mode with religious implications. Death is central to Benjamin’s idea of allegory as expressed in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. He states: ‘fate leads to death. Death is not punishment but atonement, an expression of the subjection of guilty life to the law of natural life’ (131). For Benjamin, access to the realm beyond historical, material life—what he calls the Messianic realm—can only be attained through complete ascetic mortification of all worldly and bodily value. Death is highlighted as the reverential matter and cornerstone of the Christian *Trauerspiel* as death is

⁶¹ See John Bowen, ‘The Politics of Redemption: Eliot and Benjamin’ (Davies and Wood 29-54); Fredric Jameson, ‘Walter Benjamin, or Nostalgia’ (1969: 52-68); Jürgen Kramer, ‘T. S. Eliot’s Concept of Tradition: A Reevaluation’ (20-30); Stanley Mitchell, ‘Introduction to Benjamin and Brecht’ (41-50); and Brett Neilson, ‘At the Frontier of Metaphysics: Time and History in T. S. Eliot and Walter Benjamin’ (Cianci and Harding 201-14). On Eliot sharing Benjamin’s viewpoint on allegory, Jameson states: ‘the tendency of our own criticism has been to exalt symbol at the expense of allegory (even though the privileged objects proposed by that criticism—English mannerism and Dante—are more properly allegorical in nature; in this, as in other aspects of his sensibility, Benjamin has much in common with a writer like T. S. Eliot)’ (1969: 61). Stanley Mitchell writes ‘Benjamin . . . was always avant-garde, but in the spirit of an Eliot (with whom he shared a great deal: Eliot’s recovery of the metaphysical poets stems from the same roots as Benjamin’s interest in German baroque drama), and as a critic he matched the associate, allegorical powers of Eliot’s poetry’ (48). Neilson notes, despite obvious religious and political differences, ‘there exist deep affinities in the thought of Eliot and Benjamin, affinities that operate at the metaphysical level and complicate any easy attempt to classify them according to neat conservative/radical, modernist/anti-modernist dichotomies’ (Cianci and Harding 202).

the singular, absolute condition of man that overcomes nature's repetitive temporality. Death bears a palliative as well as a destructive element as its interruption in the rhythmic flow of life marks a temporary caesura before the commencement of the history of salvation. Benjamin notes in the pessimistic worldview of the *Trauerspiel* that the technique of allegory portrays a negative system of physiognomic details of the body (bones, skeleton, corpses) through which value is unearthed in profane material content by its pointing to a transcendent, external referent. In those allegorical images signifying death, nature confirms its transience and its subjection to finality and irrevocable decay. He states:

whereas in the symbol destruction is idealised and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape. Everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face—or rather in a death's head . . . This is the heart of the allegorical way of seeing, of the baroque, secular explanation of history as the Passion of the world; its importance resides solely in the stations of its decline . . . The greater the significance, the greater the subjection to death, because death digs most deeply the jagged line of demarcation between physical nature and significance. (166)

To Benjamin, allegorical images are not merely inconsequential, hollowed-out and empty shells. In highlighting negative self-knowledge and human finitude, the irreconcilable difference and separateness between subject and object, signifier and signified, allegory projects itself as the 'key to the realm of hidden knowledge' (183). Allegory in the *Trauerspiel* represents, or rather, actualises man's relation to the Absolute. This understanding of allegory corresponds very much with Eliot's notion of the *high dream* expounded in his 'Dante' of 1929 as a kind of spiritual love-vision intuited by faith.⁶² For Benjamin and Eliot, it is in moments of termination (death) in the profane order that a qualitative Kierkegaardian leap *to* faith takes place and the sacred is shown: amidst, over, and

⁶² Murphy states: 'the *high dream* is neither "truth" nor "fiction" but rather an intensely personal admixture of both—primarily of experience with its greatest possible significance' (70, emphasis in original).

because of doubt.⁶³ Eliot notes in his 1931 essay on Pascal: ‘the man who is trying consciously and conscientiously to explain to himself the sequence which culminated in faith . . . proceeds by rejection and elimination’ (*SE*, 408). In a later essay he pronounces the ultimate stage for civilised man ‘is to unite the profoundest scepticism with the deepest faith’ (1946: 76).⁶⁴ For the allegorist, melancholic immersion in objects ends when recognition of the paradoxical nearness to God is achieved in one ‘about-turn’ (*OGT*, 233); a turn precipitated by Judeo-Christian faith in God.⁶⁵ That is, for Eliot, in acceptance of ‘the essential fact of the Incarnation’ (Baillie and Martin 1).⁶⁶ Eliot writes in his ‘Dante’ that ‘acceptance is more important than anything that can be called belief. There is almost a definite moment of acceptance at which the New Life begins’ (*SE*, 277).

In the opening of part II of ‘Ash-Wednesday’, then (which we might claim has something of a baroque sensibility), and in contemplation of the skull and bones under the juniper-tree (Benjamin’s ‘attentiveness to the creaturely’), the speaker becomes allegorist. The profane world is both elevated and devalued. It is in the assumption of this position, of this knowledge of non-knowledge and denial of *all* meaning that God is subsequently awakened:

In the hollow round of my skull. And God said
 Shall these bones live? shall these
 Bones live? And that which had been contained

⁶³ The concept of a leap *to* faith is central to the writings of Kierkegaard. Ferreira explains it as ‘a qualitative transition to religiousness and to faith in an eminent sense, namely, Christian religiousness’ (Hannay and Marino 207). It is a ‘break in immanence’ when the quality of faith makes its appearance through the embrace of Absolute paradox.

⁶⁴ See T. S. Eliot, ‘Leçon de Valéry.’ Valéry 74-81.

⁶⁵ For Benjamin, melancholia in the Christian *Trauerspiel* ends in faith and a reversal of allegory into its theological antitheses. He states:

this solves the riddle of the most fragmented, the most defunct, the most dispersed. Allegory, of course, thereby loses everything that was most peculiar to it: the secret privileged knowledge, the arbitrary rule in the realm of dead objects, the supposed infinity of the world without hope. All this vanishes with this *one* about-turn, in which the immersion of allegory has to clear away the final phantasmagoria of the objective and, left entirely to its own devices, re-discovers itself, not playfully in the earthly world of things, but seriously under the eyes of heaven. And this is the essence of melancholy immersion: that its ultimate objects, in which it believes it can most fully secure for itself that which is vile, turn into allegories, and that these allegories fill out and deny the void in which they are represented, just as, ultimately, the intention does not faithfully rest in the contemplation of bones, but faithlessly leaps forward to the idea of resurrection. (*OGT*, 232-33, emphasis in original)

⁶⁶ Eliot asserted the centrality of the dogma of the Incarnation in his belief in 1937, stating: ‘I take for granted that Christian revelation is the only full revelation; and that the fullness of Christian revelation resides in the essential fact of the Incarnation, in relation to which all Christian revelation is to be understood’ (Baillie and Martin 1-2).

In the bones (which were already dry) . . . (45-48)

Here we meet Benjamin's maxim: 'In God's world, the allegorist awakens' (*OGT*, 232). The dialectical images emanate an aura that signifies a theological dimension rendered at an intersection of petrification and trembling. The speaker's masochistic subjection of himself to oblivion before the ideal object of the maternal 'Lady' relinquishes any pretension to totality, unity and mastery over the object and, moreover, any knowledge of the Absolute. A realisation of fundamental lack, an unbridgeable dissociation from the ideal mother, has come upon the speaker. Nevertheless, through his renunciation of the will to know in part I, 'Because I know I shall not know' (12), the transient nature of things has been discovered through allegory. The life of things and the dead are redeemed and re-rendered highly significant in the 'higher domain of theology' (*OGT*, 217). That is, from a Christian perspective of faith, they are recognised by their very material desolateness as allegories of salvation. Benjamin asserts that in the extreme allegorical form of the *Trauerspiel* (he cites Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as the supreme example) 'paradox must have the last word' (216).⁶⁷ This is also the case in 'Ash-Wednesday'. The proximity of allegory (the bones, skull) to the figure of the maternal 'Lady' inaugurates 'itself most permanently where transitoriness and eternity confronted each other most closely' (*OGT*, 224). The dialectic of death that she, the 'leopards', the 'bones' and also the 'gilded hearse' of part IV represent causes all natural and corporeal content to be transmuted into its opposite. Under the gaze of the allegorist, 'the death's head' (*OGT*, 232) in 'Ash-Wednesday' becomes, momentarily, the 'angel's countenance' under the incitement of 'desperate faith', to use Bainard Cowan's term (1981: 119).⁶⁸

⁶⁷ In the graveyard scene in *Hamlet*, Yorick's skull and Ophelia's dead corpse are the dead objects which become 'allegorical under the gaze of melancholy'. Hamlet's acknowledgement of death in his contemplation of the skull initiates a significant peripeteia in the play through his realising that even great men like Alexander and Caesar 'returneth to dust' (*Ham.* 5.1.199). He tells Horatio that he has to come to learn that it is 'a divinity that shapes our ends' (5.2.10). On account of Hamlet's epiphany on the universality and inevitability of death, Benjamin regards *Hamlet* as the apex at the extreme of the *Trauerspiel* tradition as it alone points 'to the Christian providence in whose bosom his mournful images are transformed into blessed existence' (*OGT*, 158). Owing to the genius of Shakespeare, he states, 'it is only in this prince that melancholy self-absorption attains to Christianity'.

⁶⁸ Cowan writes: 'the obscurity, fragmentariness, and arbitrariness of allegory all signify the absence of a fulfilling event; this absence, in turn, serves to invoke that event with a greater urgency and a desperate faith' (119). 'Desperate faith' is 'the oxymoronic term to denote the final moment, the end point, in Baroque allegory'. He adds, 'the continuous line of impoverishment in allegorical action is only in the service of a final replenishment; this final moment, however, is continually deferred to a point beyond life, or beyond history, or beyond propositional certifiability. The eschatological moment, the motive force, defining allegory, exists *in* allegory only under the condition of death and doubt, whose grammatical marks are the future tense or the subjunctive mood'.

Thus, the aesthetic shifts to allegory in parts II and IV of 'Ash-Wednesday' emerge as exceptional stylistic diversions with significant connotations. As images of the nostalgic past encoded in tradition, Eliot's allegorical visions break through the historical continuum as 'now-time' *Jetztzeit*: an instant of a 'Messianic cessation of happening', as Benjamin describes it in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (1999: 254). These shock breakthroughs of allegory provide a chance for transformational aesthetics, carrying from the past a temporal index of redemption. Benjamin states:

where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with the tensions, it communicates a shock to that configuration, by which thinking crystallises into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only when he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognises the sign of a messianic *Stillstellung* of the course of events, or, put differently, of a revolutionary chance in the fight for the repressed past. (254)

To put it another way, the 'Lady', 'leopards', and the 'gilded hearse' all appear as brief messianic eruptions of the repressed past in the present. What had been repressed or previously escaped representation, the mother's body, has returned spiritualised in death through the veil of allegory.

Julia Lupton and Kenneth Reinhard note that at the end of Benjamin's *Origin* his new derivation of allegory as provisional on mourning is admitted through 'the figurative vehicle of the feminine' (62). 'Mourning', Benjamin states, 'is at once the mother of the allegories and their content' (*OGT*, 229). In this highly suggestive maxim the experience of death is closely aligned with the maternal and the exorbitant proliferation of signs which in poetic representation takes on the form of allegory. Lupton and Reinhard continue:

Benjamin's choice of metaphor manifests through the very act of figuration the role of the 'Mother' in the mutual constitution of allegory and mourning. Mourning is the 'mother' of allegory in two senses: it derives the structural disjunction of the allegorical sign from originary loss, and it describes the affective condition, the 'dominant mood' (*Gemütszustand*), that colours and discolours allegory. Furthermore, in using the mother to figure this double role of mourning, Benjamin's line

imagines origin only to hollow it out, since ‘mother’ functions precisely not as the tenor or object of allegorical mourning, but as its vehicle. The origin of allegory can only be presented in an allegory of origin *as allegory*, a paradox embodied and gendered in Benjamin’s use of the mother as figure of originary loss.

(62, emphasis in original)

For Benjamin the mother is the ground of figuration: ‘its *mater* as well as its *matrix*’ (63, emphasis in original). I would argue that allegory points to the primary infantile situation of ‘primal repression’, that is, the constituting moment of the child’s unconscious and induction into the symbolic universe, as allegory, that Laplanche states is caused primarily by unconscious maternal address of enigmatic messages to the child.⁶⁹ Thus Eliot’s maternal allegory (as I term it) signifies, and in some senses satisfies, nostalgia and desire for the lost origin: the ‘End of the endless’ of the mother’s ‘Garden’, as ‘Ash-Wednesday’ says (80, 87). By the very disparity from the site of inauguration that allegory designates it reveals the impossibility of indigenous return to the (m)other. Nonetheless, in the acceptance of man’s limitedness (Original Sin), admission of the gap and discontinuity which allegory institutes, as well as openness to the paradox which gives it its enigma, there is an opening up to the possibility of a relation to the sacred, to the other.⁷⁰ This, Benjamin notes, is the miracle-ending of allegory in the baroque *Trauerspiel*. It confirms in its final encounter with death, loss, earthly transience, history, otherness and mourning that there is ‘no conclusive finality’ (W. Benjamin, 1996: 56), and in doing so it negatively gestures towards redemption.⁷¹ Death becomes an ironic immortality in which salvation is found to be hidden. Benjamin states:

in the bleak confusion of Golgotha . . . transitoriness is not signified or allegorically represented, so much as, in its own significance displayed *as allegory*. As the allegory of *resurrection*. (OGT 232, emphasis in original)

⁶⁹ ‘Primal repression’ is a central element in Freud’s theory of repression. According to Freud, primal repression is at the origin of the first unconscious formations. Laplanche’s new idea of primal repression expands on Freud through his introduction of the notion of the ‘enigmatic signifier’. See the entry ‘primal repression’ in Laplanche and Pontalis 333-34.

⁷⁰ On paradox in allegory, Akbari states: ‘allegory creates meaning *within* the reader, bypassing the inevitable degeneration of meaning as it passes through the obscuring veil which makes the transmission of meaning—the revelation—possible. Allegory is trope when it is expressed through language; but it is intelligible image at the moment of the reader’s illumination’ (9, emphasis in original).

⁷¹ See Benjamin’s 1916 essay ‘*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy’ (1996: 55-58). Unpublished during Benjamin’s lifetime, this essay anticipates many of the ideas later developed in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928).

In the same way that Benjamin saw the allegorical structure of *Trauerspiel* as presenting an image of Christian redemption through death, Eliot recognised the allegorical vision of God and redemption in canto 33 of Dante's *Paradiso* as only received through Dante's investigations into the impact of Beatrice's death in the *Vita nuova* as developed in the *Commedia*. He states:

the attitude of Dante to the fundamental experience of the *Vita nuova* can only be understood by accustoming ourselves to find meaning in *final causes* rather than in origins . . . The final cause is the attraction towards God. (*SE*, 234, emphasis in original)

Eliot's maternal allegory in parts II and IV of 'Ash-Wednesday' is the poetic extension of personal experience and passion completed in the higher realm of the impersonal universal. It is a fleeting aperture of the primal eternal forbidden in the dimension of temporality-historicity—Benjamin's 'profane illumination' (1986: 179), Eliot's 'intersection of the timeless / With time' (*CPP*, 197).⁷² Maternal allegory is necessarily enigmatic as is its incommensurability with the profane which, as Benjamin says, raises it 'onto a higher plane' (*OGT*, 174). Further, it is intimately linked to death and a paradoxical faith (not dogmatic faith) assumed in a moment of insight in which 'the essential fact of the Incarnation' (as Eliot calls it) is made apparent to the speaker amidst and through the work of doubt and extreme melancholic immersion in the dead object, the mother. It is the moment of faith *in* allegory in part IV of the poem where we witness the resurrection of the dead mother as female divine and a profound turning point in Eliot's life and work in relation to the feminine.

As shown, Charlotte Eliot's death looks to have been instrumental in forging Ash-Wednesday's allegorical aesthetics and in bringing forward symbolisation and recognition of the centrality of the poet-mother to Eliot's life and works. In the poem, it is the speaker-child-poet's recognition of the debt to the earthly, profane mother who 'honours the Virgin in

⁷² As Neilson points out, Benjamin's secular radicalism seems to put his ideas on epiphany and revelation at 'cross-purposes' with Eliot's religious late belief in 'an inaccessible metaphysical realm' (Cianci and Harding 212). For Benjamin, 'profane illumination' is the 'true, creative overcoming of religious illumination' (1986: 179). It is a 'materialistic, anthropological inspiration to which hashish, opium, or whatever else can give a preliminary lesson'. In contrast, Eliot's 'intersection of the timeless' is interpreted as Christian Incarnation. Recently, Giorgio Agamben (2005) has challenged the unequivocal character of Benjamin's radical secularism through insistence on a secret appointment between St. Paul and Benjamin in Benjamin's works—most notably, in Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (1940) and in his concept of *Jetztzeit*. These claims have since been contested by Sigrid Weigel (2013). That Benjamin's work and thought is close to a radical construal of Eliot's remains an area of critical opportunity.

meditation' (51) and her own transformative powers as mother and mediatrix, 'Teach us to sit still' (212), that inspires faith, transforms the self and identifies her as comparable to the Virgin Mary in both the latter half of part II, 'Speech without word and / Word of no speech' (84-85), and also in part IV, 'White light folded, sheathed about her, folded' (134). As in Dante's works and Augustine's *Confessions*, the death of the female other is the locus of recognition and revelation in 'Ash-Wednesday' (of individual identity, human finitude and limitedness), transforming carnal love into divine love. Moreover, it is in death that the various women of the poem ('blessèd face', 'Lady', 'silent sister') accumulate and merge to form a transcendent unity at the end of part VI with the division of the mother annulled and the 'Sister, mother' (216) sanctified into a composite feminine figure identified as the Virgin: 'Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden' (209).⁷³

We might expect the final words of 'Ash-Wednesday' to be a prayer to God the Father: 'And let my prayer come unto Thee'. Yet, the poem ends 'And let my cry come unto Thee' (219). For Linda Leavell, this 'cry' is a 'primal sign from a baby to its mother' (Olney 151).⁷⁴ The 'ritual method' and rhythms of 'Ash-Wednesday' carry to its end a performance of 'the ritual itself' (151): childbirth. We do not have a resounding affirmation of faith in movement towards God the Father, but rather there is still a fear of separation from the 'Sister, mother'. Thus, the speaker's return to the mother at the close—and the general absence of the father within 'Ash-Wednesday'—arguably indicates that weaning from the mother has not been completed.⁷⁵ An almost entirely mother-centric poem, 'Ash-Wednesday' displays the extent of the difficulties involved in true relinquishment of the mother and full mourning of her loss. Although the poem indicates a significant change in the relation to the feminine in Eliot's works, we might say that by the end of the poem the problem of the maternal body remains and the negotiation of ambivalence towards the maternal is shown to be ongoing and variable in success.

⁷³ The compound lady at the end of 'Ash-Wednesday' anticipates the 'Lady, whose shrine stands on the promontory' and the invocation to Dante's Virgin Mary, 'Figlia del tuo figlio' (daughter of thy son), in 'The Dry Salvages' (*CPP*, 189). Eliot recognised Dante's *Vergine Madre, figlia del tuo Figlio* as having unconscious significance to the psyche. In a letter to Colin Still on 13 May 1930, he comments how the 'veiled lady' from 'Ash-Wednesday' was 'a direct employment of a dream', adding 'I think there is some permanent basis for the mother-sister-daughter complex' (*LTSE5*, 171).

⁷⁴ For Leavell, at the end of 'Ash-Wednesday' the speaker addresses in his ritual 'the divine source of life, the holy mother'. She adds: 'the spirit of the sea is the source of life from which we are separated when we are born, like a baby from its mother' (Olney 151).

⁷⁵ See Melanie Klein's paper 'Weaning' (1936; rpt. 2011: 290-305). Klein states: 'we must remember that at the critical time of weaning the child, as it were, loses his "good" object, that is, he loses what he loves most' (296).

'Ash-Wednesday' is Eliot's silent tribute to his mother and the maternal body as both the hidden foundation and material support to his poetics. It is a son's statement of love, his letter of goodbye. Nevertheless, Eliot's baptism into the Anglo-Catholic Church in 1927 and commitment to its Incarnational theology would provide consolation for his mother's death and allay his fear of separation. To return to his letter to Charlotte on 22 August 1927, he states:

Dearest mother, your letter made me very sad; you speak as if you would perhaps never see me again either here or elsewhere. In the first place I hope to come to America and spend a month with you next winter, and in the second place I have much more positive conviction than you that I shall see you in another life. It is rather too soon to talk of that! but I somehow have a much firmer conviction than you have, and I wish that you felt as I do; for although I am sure of seeing you at least once more in this life, yet as either of us, or anybody, might suddenly be taken away by some accident, I should like to feel that you felt sure as I do of our meeting again. I feel that the 'future life', or our future meetings, may not be in the least like anything we can imagine; but that if it is different we shall then realize that it is right and shall not then wish it to be like what we can now imagine. (*LTSE3*, 647-48)

Immediately, we may recall and re-evaluate the significance of the final lines of the poem:

Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden,
Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,
Our peace in His will
And even among these rocks

Sister, mother
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea
Suffer me not to be separated⁷⁶

And let my cry come unto Thee. (209-19)

⁷⁶ The line 'Suffer me not to be separated' is taken from the medieval prayer to Christ, the *Anima Christi*. It is usually written 'Suffer me not to be separated from you'. The 'from you' is ellipsed by Eliot in 'Ash-Wednesday'. Traditionally, the *Anima Christi* is used during Holy Communion and expounds the centrality of the Incarnation of Christ in Christian existence. In 'Ash-Wednesday', however, the implication of the line 'Suffer me not to be separated' is complicated by Eliot's positioning of it in the context of the sister and mother. Further, it is noticeable that 'Ash-Wednesday' places emphasis on Mary and her indispensable role in the Incarnation as mother of God, rather than on Christ. As Murphy notes, where 'The Hollow Men' (1925) ends with the Lord's Prayer, 'it is a significant indication of how humbled the speaker of "Ash-Wednesday" is in comparison that his prayer is from the Hail Mary, the prayer addressed to the Virgin Mary as the human mediator and advocate between God and his children' (61).

3. 'ASH-WEDNESDAY': A POETICS OF THE MATERNAL BODY

The ways in which the passions and desires of the creator may be satisfied in the work of art are complex and devious. In a painter they may take the form of a predilection for certain colours, tones or lightings; in a writer the original impulse may be even more strangely transmuted.

T. S. Eliot, 'Ben Jonson' (1919)

The absolute, as Bradley says, bears buds and flowers and fruits at once.¹

T. S. Eliot, 'Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley' (1916)

Chapter 2 proposed T. S. Eliot's prose works of the 1920s as harbouring a fervent lifelong quest for a lived, impersonal creative form through which desire and sexuality might be more adequately translated and objectively represented in language. We have conjectured that Eliot's search for form is in fact a search for a more maternal idiom in which the relation to the mother's body can be sublimated, and repressed passions symbolised. It can be seen as a wish for an integration of past eroticisms associated with the first object, the maternal body, in the sentient present of the aesthetic moment. With regard to poetic fulfilment of this desire in Eliot's works, chapter 2 put forward an idea of maternal allegory in 'Ash-Wednesday', through use of Eliot's own reading of Dantean allegory and Walter Benjamin's modern reconceptualisation of allegory in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, as marking an interstice between death, the mother, faith and revelation.

This chapter broadens my conceptualisation of maternal allegory and the understanding of it as part of a 'maternal poetics' in 'Ash-Wednesday' by bringing it into relation with the work of three prominent psychoanalytic theorists on such aesthetics in poetry and art. Working from within differing psychoanalytic traditions, Julia Kristeva (post-Lacanian), Jan Campbell (Freudian/Winnicottian/feminist) and Kenneth Wright (Winnicottian) have all argued for the importance of developing a maternal idiom for the child, the adult and the artist. Briefly, Kristeva's idea of a maternal poetics is postulated in her conception of the semiotic *chora* which she describes as—by way of reference to Plato's

¹ This quote is taken from Eliot's PhD dissertation 'Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley' completed in 1916 while at Harvard (*CPI*, 238-386). For comment on Eliot's interpretation of Bradley's philosophy, see Mallinson; and Jain (1992).

chora from the *Timaeus*—‘an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases’ (1984: 25). The semiotic *chora* is ‘receptacle, unnameable, improbable, hybrid, anterior to naming, to the one, to the father, and consequently maternally connoted’ (26). For Kristeva, it is a pre-verbal semiology preceding language and Lacan’s mirror-stage with the mother-child interaction being its exemplary articulation.² The semiotic is heard in rhythms, intonation, music and children’s echolalia as well as in artistic practice and in discourse that signifies less an ‘object’ than a *jouissance*. It is also outside time, contrariwise to the time of the symbolic order which is rendered as linear time.³ Kristeva emphasises the dominance of the semiotic in art and poetic language and its appropriation of the ‘archaic, instinctual and maternal territory’ by what she calls the *subject-in-process* (1980: 134). In her opinion, art is the semiotisation of the symbolic and represents the infiltration and flow of *jouissance* into language. In relation to this, she privileges the transgressive poetics of the male avant-garde (James Joyce, Stéphane Mallarmé, Georges Bataille) as revolutionaries of representation. For Kristeva, these poets enact a psychotic identification with the maternal reintroducing the music of the semiotic, the return of the repressed, into the symbolic order. She regards this poetic practice as ‘equivalent to incest’ (136).

² Lacan’s mirror-stage is a fundamental feature in his theory of subjectivity and is a consistent and changing trope throughout his work. D. Evans summarises:

the mirror stage describes the formation of the ego via the process of identification; the ego is the result of identifying with one’s own specular image. The key to this phenomenon lies in the prematurity of the human baby: at six months, the baby still lacks coordination. However, its visual system is relatively advanced, which means that it can recognise itself in the mirror before attaining control over its bodily movements. The baby sees its own image as whole, and the synthesis of this image produces a sense of contrast with the uncoordination of the body, which is experienced as a fragmented body; this contrast is first felt by the infant as a rivalry with its own image, because the wholeness of the image threatens the subject with fragmentation, and the mirror stage thereby gives rise to an aggressive tension between the subject and the image. In order to resolve this aggressive tension, the subject identifies with the image; this primary identification with the counterpart is what forms the ego. The moment of identification, when the subject assumes its image as its own, is described by Lacan as a moment of jubilation, since it leads to an imaginary sense of mastery; ‘[the child’s] joy is due to his imaginary triumph in anticipating a degree of muscular co-ordination which he has not yet actually achieved’ (Lacan, 1953: 15). However, this jubilation may also be accompanied by a depressive reaction, when the child compares his own precarious sense of mastery with the omnipotence of the mother. This identification also involves the ideal ego which functions as a promise of future wholeness which sustains the ego in anticipation. (118)

³ Lacan uses capital letters to denote and revere ‘the Symbolic’ order and ‘the Law’, while Kristeva’s symbolic is and is not equivalent to Lacan’s Symbolic. Kristeva uses the symbolic in two senses to refer to both the Symbolic order and also a specifically symbolic element within the Symbolic order that she opposes to the semiotic element. She identifies Lacan’s Symbolic with patriarchy and the repression of the maternal body, whereas she sees the semiotic to be a disruptive force that brings back the body into language. The term symbolic is denoted throughout the chapter according to its Lacanian, Kristevan or conventional usage. For summary of the distinction between Lacan’s and Kristeva’s use of the symbolic, see Oliver (1993b: 1-17).

Kenneth Wright's idea of a maternal aesthetics follows a Winnicottian line of thought in stressing the importance of the early mother in facilitating the child's symbol-making capacities. For Wright, the mother is the child's primary perceptual art object and he regards vision and the mother's face, in particular, as important in 'holding', mirroring and giving form to the child's passions and affects.⁴ Jan Campbell's notion of a 'lived maternal form' (referred to in chapter 1) follows and adds to Wright's work and, like Kristeva's semiotic, refers to those pre-verbal, non-verbal and non-discursive forms present in art which mirror the pre-discursive relationship between mother and child. We may think here of forms of communication preceding the ego and language (vision, rhythm, colour, sound, touch and gesture) which are anterior to Lacan's notions of the 'mirror stage' and the Symbolic (the threshold in a child's psychic maturation). Campbell notes that in Kristeva's theorisations of the semiotic the 'excesses, the poetic and the thing repulsed' are always structured in relation to a repressive Oedipal Symbolic (2013: 7). That is to say, Kristeva's semiotic suggests that a sublimation of the passions related to the maternal body is only achievable through 'repression, a fixed ego ideal or castration through language' (Campbell, 2013: 7). On the contrary, Campbell argues for an alternative idea of maternal form that has 'a more intimate relationship with the bodily drives than language' (6). Whereas language represses the drives, 'maternal form mixes with them and unconsciously translates and communicates with them telepathically'. For Campbell, the pre-Oedipal imaginary is not only fantasmatic—as in Lacanian psychoanalysis.⁵ The early mother is real and the pre-Oedipal has a relationship to reality that predates repression and the Symbolic. Thus, it is form and not language that is

⁴ Winnicott introduces his concept of 'holding' in the paper 'The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship' (1960; rpt. 1990: 37-56). For Winnicott, 'holding' denotes:

not only the actual physical holding of the infant, but also the total environmental provision prior to the concept of *living with*. In other words, it refers to a three-dimensional or space relationship with time gradually added. This overlaps with, but is initiated prior to, instinctual experiences that in time would determine object relationships. It includes the management of experiences that are inherent in existence, such as the *completion* (and therefore the *non-completion*) of processes, processes which from the outside may seem to be purely physiological but which belong to infant psychology and take place in a complex psychological field, determined by the awareness and the empathy of the mother.

(43-44, emphases in original)

He adds: 'holding includes especially the physical holding of the infant, which is a form of loving. It is perhaps the only way in which a mother can show the infant her love of it. There are those who can hold an infant and those who cannot; the latter quickly produce in the infant a sense of insecurity, and distressed crying' (49).

⁵ Unlike Kristeva, whose maternal semiotic is situated in respect of Lacan's Imaginary and the Symbolic, Campbell works from an alternative Winnicottian tradition. Her work differs fundamentally from Kristeva's in its more embodied view of the imaginary. For discussion of the differences between Campbell's idea of maternal form and Kristeva's semiotic, see Geary (2013).

fundamental to sublimation of the maternal body. She states ‘without maternal form, we have a repression of the body through language with no sublimation’. I quote her thesis at length:

I want to suggest that there is a lived maternal time and form, associated with a poetics of the maternal body, that is not oppositional to the repressive linear history of the subject and the Symbolic that Kristeva describes. Lived maternal form is an early telepathic reading between the ego and its other which can elaborate our more repressed and hysterical passions through a more receptive unconscious. This receptive unconscious and telepathic unconscious transfers the repressed unconscious and gives living form to our imaginary reminiscences so they can be moved and shaped in new ways by the ego. (35)

According to Campbell, maternal form ‘is not repressed under the Symbolic but partakes of a different kind of sublimation of sexuality which is non-repressive, reduplicating the primary identification with the mother in ways that form and de-form, shape and re-shape the ego’ (7). She tells us how, early on, the mother is to the child a ‘genre’ (3). She is a ‘virtual form . . . in an uncanny and a poetic sense’ (5), an enigmatic alien returning the child’s passions and giving them shape through mimetic processes. These returned forms are ‘never simply the same’ (36). They are passions with maternal form added. Campbell stresses a vital improvisation at work in the early telepathic mimesis between mother and child and it is these new and creatively elaborated early maternal forms that help express and sublimate the child’s bodily drives in the realm of the imaginary. Moreover, it is to these significant maternal forms that we continuously return throughout adult life—especially in periods of crisis and heightened ambivalence (as chapter 1 argues)—within shared cultural forms such as art and poetry for creative translation of our repressed primary passions and deepest wishes.

This chapter examines Eliot’s complex elaboration of a ‘maternal poetics’ in ‘Ash-Wednesday’. To do this, various motifs in the poem associated with the feminine, and motherhood especially, are considered. Campbell’s reading of flowers and the garden as a ‘lived maternal form’ in Virginia Woolf’s *A Sketch of the Past* (1941) is utilised as a guide to analyse the evolution of these themes from Eliot’s very earliest flower poems such as ‘A Lyric’ (1905), through ‘La Figlia Che Piange’ (1916) to ‘Ash-Wednesday’.⁶ Kenneth

⁶ This chapter on Ash-Wednesday’s maternal poetics is indebted to Jan Campbell’s work on maternal form.

Wright's work on vision and facial mirroring helps make clear the numinous significance of the face as one of the poem's most prevalent topoi. Also, colour and rhythm are discussed in relation to Kristeva's semiotic. Although there is no straightforward fit between these maternal theorists' work, I contend that Campbell's idea of maternal form, Wright's work on maternal mirroring and Kristeva's semiotic offer enabling descriptions through which to think about a maternal poetics in Eliot's writings. Further, this chapter suggests these maternal models are linked through Eliot. From this analysis, I indicate a relation between maternal form, the semiotic and the revelatory moments of maternal allegory that appear in parts II and IV of the poem.

Flowers and the Garden

Campbell explains how 'conscious perception is always shadowed by an unconscious sensory perception and our virtual and affectual memory, thus giving our desires their shape in the present moment' (2013: 48). We constantly collect unconscious perceptions through telepathy throughout life and these perceptions link with our unconscious memory and affects. In Campbell's view, flowers as visual forms are particularly relevant to our 'perceptual mimesis' (47) and often submitted as lived maternal forms in art, given that they are

easy to imagine . . . not just because of their outward appearance, their size and shape, but because they act as elementary forms, as internal rhythms and patterns that can marry our perception and memory. Forms, then, that can gather our disparate and unbearable passions and make them into something expressive and communicable. (49)

As a case in point, Campbell refers to Virginia Woolf's early memory of her mother's dress in *A Sketch of the Past* where she sees the

red and purple flowers on a black background—my mother's dress; and she was sitting either in a train or in an omnibus, and I was on her lap. I therefore saw the flowers she was wearing very close; and can still see purple and red and blue, I think against the black; they must have been anemones . . . (2002: 78)

Campbell points out the significance of Woolf's flower memory of her mother in its leading onto what Woolf calls 'the most important of all my memories' in bed in the nursery at St Ives:

of lying half asleep, half awake, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind . . . It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive. (78-79)

Woolf's unconscious reading and perception of the colours and forms of the flowers on the mother's dress is provoked by an individuated and conjunctive aesthetic percept whose metaphoric effect stimulates a metonymic trace back to a whole synaesthesia of overlapping senses (colours, sights, scents and sounds) that are connected to a more impersonal intimacy with the mother. Woolf reveals her memory of her mother's dress to be a happening upon the unconscious. It is what Freud calls a 'screen memory' that covers the more hidden, sensual and important earlier memory of the shock of her perceptual awakening to the world in the nursery.⁷ In this foundational memory the root of Woolf's association of the mother with flowers is revealed as being there 'from the very first' (2002: 93). Indeed, on the two occasions when Woolf attempts to paint a description of this early sensual environment both her mother 'in her white dressing gown on the balcony' and the passion flowers on the nursery wall emerge together as one, freely associated in her mental image: flowers = mother / mother = flowers.

For Campbell, Woolf's childhood reminiscences demonstrate how our early body egos are primarily formed 'as a mimesis with the mother, where her gestures, voice, smile—are us' (2013: 53). If I may put this in Laplanchean terms, they affirm the ontological priority of the mother in the formation of the infant's psychic life, her vague but determinative presence and intrusion as a virtual object—a pre-personal ambivalent Goddess whose gestures of care, tenderness and guardianship both nourish and facilitate transformation of the infant self.

⁷ Conceptualised by Freud in his investigations into the operations of memory and its distortions, the importance of phantasies, infantile amnesia and, behind all this, infantile sexuality, the 'screen memory' is described in Laplanche and Pontalis as 'a childhood memory characterised both by its unusual sharpness and by the apparent insignificance of its content' (410-11). Like symptoms, parapraxes and slips, it is 'a formation produced by a compromise between repressed elements and defence'. See Freud's papers 'Screen Memories' (1899; rpt. 2001b: 303-22) and 'Childhood Memories and Screen Memories' (1901; rpt. 2001e: 43-52).

Campbell describes the early mimesis with the mother as a ‘primitive dreamworld’ where ‘we don’t just perceive our mothers, or the garden she might be sitting in, we embody the leaves, the smell of hair and scents of sweat or summer air as parts of ourselves’ (53). Woolf’s flowers are an ‘unconscious perception working back to the “real” of an early passionate tie with the maternal body’ (215). They are virtual forms derived from the early non-personal maternal environment that provide Woolf telepathic access to her formative first impressions. In their unconscious and imaginative elaboration they transform and move ordinarily fixed, repressed, unknowable, unbearable and hysterical passions and traumas out into reality, into new poetic spaces, shapes and configurations. They enable Woolf to sublimate and move, and yet remain connected, to her repressed desires and primary pleasures. Campbell states how ‘passions are by their very nature the incestuous, enigmatic currents that dog our lives’ (242). Yet, Woolf’s flowers make her past desires ‘real’ in a more bearable and disguised way. They are the lived maternal forms unconsciously sought out, perceived and re-dreamt by Woolf in order to poetically landscape a maternal ‘holding’ environment that will mitigate the love and hate of ambivalence, loss and death, the mother’s presence and absence, her passions, needs and wants. Recapitulating the early rapport with the mother, Woolf’s flowers are a transitional form that—like the mother—encourages growth, separateness, health and development. They indicate that although the mother may be physically unavailable she is still available to unconscious perception and thus present as an intimate—if shadowy—part of the self. Hence, Woolf’s flower writings are more than just a repetition of old fantasies. They are a way for her to move beyond the repressive ego and envisage her future possibility and becoming. Campbell states:

flowers are like a version of the virtual mother we all need . . .
they are transient, they bloom and die, and so have to be re-
invented again and again, between the real and the imaginary
and through the imagination. And this is what makes flowers
and our imagination, and hopefully a version of our mother,
different, and distinct from an imaginary fantasy. Because a
fantasy, as Winnicott says, is a fixed thought and idea that can
never be transformed, it just keeps on repeating in an unchanged
way, whereas a mother that is a flower rather than simply a
fantasy moves all the time like our dreams between the inside
and the outside. (49-50)

Woolf speaks of her memory in the nursery and other significant moments to which she returns to in her writing as ‘sudden shocks’ (2002: 85) which through reason and translation in later life may ‘become a revelation of some order’. She adds that ‘it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words’. To Woolf, flowers both incarnate the mother and point to primal repression and her primitive, inaugural sense of being, identity, excitation, the first inscriptions of memory and the first flowerings of the imagination. Flowers are a primal sublimation coeval with primal repression and as such appear synonymous with the revelation of the deepest meaning and the neogenesis of sexuality. In privileged moments the flower reawakens the residue of the primal situation and in doing so renews the originary relation to the enigmatic signifier. In this way, Woolf’s flower-mother acts as the enigmatic inspiration towards which her writings continually strain.

Eliot notes in his essay ‘Wordsworth and Coleridge’ (1932) how ‘memory plays a very great part in imagination . . . but how much more of memory enters into creation than only our reading!’ (*UPUC*, 78). For Eliot, much of the poet’s selection of reading is ‘instinctive and unconscious, as well as deliberate’. The poet when magnetised by his reading automatically chooses and preserves ‘an image, phrase, a word—which may be of use to him later’. Eliot goes on to extend this view of automatic selection in the poet’s reading to a view of automatic selection in memory in respect to the investigations of poetic imagination. He states:

and this selection probably runs through the whole of his sensitive life. There might be the experience of a child of ten, a small boy peering through sea-water in a rock-pool, and finding a sea-anemone for the first time: the simple experience (not so simple, for an exceptional child, as it looks) might lie dormant in his mind for twenty years, and re-appear transformed in some verse-context charged with great imaginative pressure. (79)

Eliot states how an author’s imagery comes from ‘the whole of his sensitive life since early childhood’ (*UPUC*, 148) and, like Woolf, he regards the recurrence of images in a poet’s work as indicating symbolic significance:

why, for all of us, out of all that we have heard, seen, felt, in a lifetime, do certain images recur, charged with emotion rather than others? The song of one bird, the leap of one fish, at a

particular place at a particular time, the scent of one flower . . .
such memories may have symbolic value, but of what we cannot
tell, for they come to represent the depths of feeling into which
we cannot peer. We might just as well ask why, when we try to
recall visually some period of the past, we find in our memory
just the few meagre arbitrarily chosen set of snapshots that we
do find there, the faded poor souvenirs of passionate moments.

(148)

Eliot acknowledges in this passage the work of repression in those selected memory fragments retained from childhood. Though seemingly ‘arbitrary’, like Woolf’s ‘sudden shocks’ and Freud’s screen memories, he suggests that the ‘snapshots’ of passionate moments preserved by the mind and utilised within poetry are actually coded flashes of earlier reminiscences signalling unconscious psychological intent and desire. The true ‘depths’ and explanation of these moments are obscured, repressed or hidden from view due to the trauma or intensity affiliated with them. Nevertheless, for Eliot, as with Woolf and Freud, the persistence and influence of such memories and the occurrence of tendentious forgetting in relation to them suggest the unconscious prevalence of the originary motive. It is in the enigma of forgetting in those selected ‘snapshots’ of memory preserved by the mind where the importance and repetition of symbolism in poetic discourse lies. Eliot states in his 1929 ‘Dante’ essay:

the experience of a poem is the experience both of a moment and
of a lifetime. It is very much like our intenser experiences of other
human beings. There is a first, or an earlier moment that is
unique, of shock and surprise, even of terror (*Ego dominus tuus*);
a moment which can never be forgotten, but which is never
repeated integrally; and yet would be destitute of significance if it
did not survive in a larger whole of experience. (*SE*, 212)

Following Campbell’s maternal reading of Woolf’s flowers, I wish to demonstrate flowers in Eliot’s works—and ‘Ash-Wednesday’, in particular—as lived maternal forms associated with early unconscious reading and perception of the mother. Flowers and poetry were a point of affiliation and memory and an important expression of love and comfort nourishing the relationship between Eliot and Charlotte throughout their life, and especially

during moments of crisis and separation. To illustrate, Eliot's letters to his mother in America during his early residence in England in 1917-18 are populated with descriptions of flowers and gardens: 'the gardens of Marlow are brilliant with hollyhocks now, which start after the foxgloves and lupins and larkspur are over. In England there is continuous bloom, one flower to another, from March nearly to December' (*LTSE1*, 272). Of special note is Eliot's frequent mention of his own garden and flowers in his correspondence with his mother when she was in failing health around the time of his writing part II of 'Ash-Wednesday'. He states on 13 June 1926: 'Our little garden is doing well, the rosebushes and lupins and larkspur will soon be in flower, and I wish Vivien was here to see them' (*LTSE3*, 186). I return in a different context to the letter already quoted in chapters 1 and 2 in which, alongside Eliot's remarkable statement of love for Charlotte and his belief in their reunion beyond her death, he gives a long description of his beautiful garden:

I am going to get a little Kodak so that I can take some photographs of our house and garden to send you. We have now a little tent in the garden, which Lucy has bought, and we have tea and sometimes supper there every fine afternoon, and some of the flowers have grown beautifully—especially hollyhocks and lupins, and I think we shall have some nice chrysanthemums, and grapes from the vines which old James has tended so carefully . . . Dearest mother, your letter made me very sad; you speak as if you would perhaps never see me again either here or elsewhere. In the first place I hope to come to America and spend a month with you next winter, and in the second place I have a much more positive conviction than you have that I shall see you in another life. It is rather too soon perhaps to talk of that! but I somehow have a much firmer conviction than you have, and I wish that you felt as I do . . . I feel that the 'future life', or our future meetings, may not be in the least like anything we can imagine; but that if it is different we shall then realize that it is right and shall not then wish it to be like what we can now imagine. After all, any ideas that we can have of the future life can only be right in that such ideas may be more nearly right than any other ideas that we could

have. That is what I always feel about the truths of religion: it is not a question of something absolutely true (or false) in so many words; but they are more nearly true than the contradiction of them. (*LTSE3*, 647)

In Eliot's letters to his ill mother, flowers and the garden are a locus of mutual connection, deep affiliation, love and sharing. He paints a picture of a blooming garden for Charlotte to imagine and delight in and creates a virtual space *between* for them to dwell in together, despite their separation.⁸ Although Charlotte's death is nigh, Eliot's talk of flowers and gardens alongside his speculations of life and death, mortality and immortality, creates a synaesthetic effect that tacitly reminds his mother that death is the consummation rather than the termination of life.⁹ The garden is a matrix of creation, destruction and re-creation, a place of ongoing physical change, growth, colour, appearance and form. It adheres more to cyclical time than linear development and follows the rhythms of its own growth. Thus, while Eliot and his mother would no doubt have sought the reassurance of religion in expectation of her death, Eliot's speaking of the garden to her also unconsciously communicates psychic solace. It provides what Ella Sharpe calls a 'magical reassurance' (127) by reinforcing the universal truth of nature and flowering metamorphosis, the tragicomic harmonious intermixture of life and death.¹⁰

Mentioned in chapter 1, Charlotte's poetry frequently uses botanical imagery to analogise Christian love, faith, hope, growth, new life, renewal and spirituality within the self. Further, these poems are extremely antithetical to Eliot's *The Waste Land*. For instance, in

⁸ The importance of the garden to human relations is stressed by H  l  ne Cixous:

we look at the garden together: the garden is a place of relations . . . Relations of colours together; of different species together; between the vegetable and the human. In relation to all the phenomena of growing, to the question of preservation. Gardening is an act that is absolutely strange, in relation to life and death. And if I only listen to myself gardening, I have a very light sense of suffering in saying to myself: why garden when I know it will die? That, for me, is the other. Between us: death. Together we look at the garden'. (Cixous and Calle-Gruber 13)

⁹ On Epicurean belief on organic cultivation, see Harrison: 'the most important pedagogical lesson that the Epicurean garden imparted to those who tended it was that life—in all its forms—is intrinsically mortal and that the human soul shares the fate of whatever grows and perishes on its earth. Thus the garden reinforced the fundamental Epicurean belief that the human soul is amenable to moral, spiritual, and intellectual cultivation as the garden is to organic cultivation' (2008: 101).

¹⁰ Ella Freeman Sharpe states in her paper 'Certain Aspects of Sublimation and Delusion' (1930) how art, music, dance, drama and creative literature are sublimations rooted in primary identification with the parents. She regards this identification as a 'magical incorporation' (1950: 135). For Sharpe, art at its height provides a 'magical reassurance' (127) and a 'magical nullification of fear in *sublimation*' (136, emphasis in original) by its providing a vital communication: 'from a world of apprehension and anxiety, a world of temporal things, of vicissitudes and death, we temporarily escape. In those few moments of conviction, immortality is ours' (128).

‘Not in the Flesh, But the Spirit’ Charlotte identifies human mortality with immortality through identification with nature and the life, death and rebirth of blue and white spring violets:

Where the green hillside gently slopes
To yonder stream, shall early hopes
Soon be fulfilled! There blue and white
Will sweet spring violets greet the sight.

Though bud and flower return once more,
And bird songs echo as before,
The dead alone no life can thrill,
Within the grave so cold and chill.

Be still, sad lips, that thus complain,
The flowers unchanged, return again:
No brighter hues their petals show,
No sweeter fragrance they below.

But when the light of heaven breaks
Upon the spirit, as it wakes,
Too gross the body to express
The new life in its blessedness . . . (*CES*, 13)

Further, in ‘Be Glad and Gay’ Charlotte analogises the withering or blooming of the rose with doubt and faith in God:

Where is the doubt
That chilled thy beating, checked the
vital flow,
Made the cheek pale, and bid its roses
go? . . . (1899: 11)

As in Woolf’s writings and his mother’s poetry, flowers and garden symbolism are privileged metaphors in Eliot’s poetry and are disseminated and continuously reworked as

images throughout the whole of his poetic works and extending into the plays.¹¹ Eliot's enthusiasm for flowers and their enduring link with his poetic writings are evident from the very first in his self-published schoolboy journal 'Floral Magazine' (Feb. 1899), which shows an advanced knowledge of flowers for a boy of his age and features pencil drawings of flowers (Fig. 7):

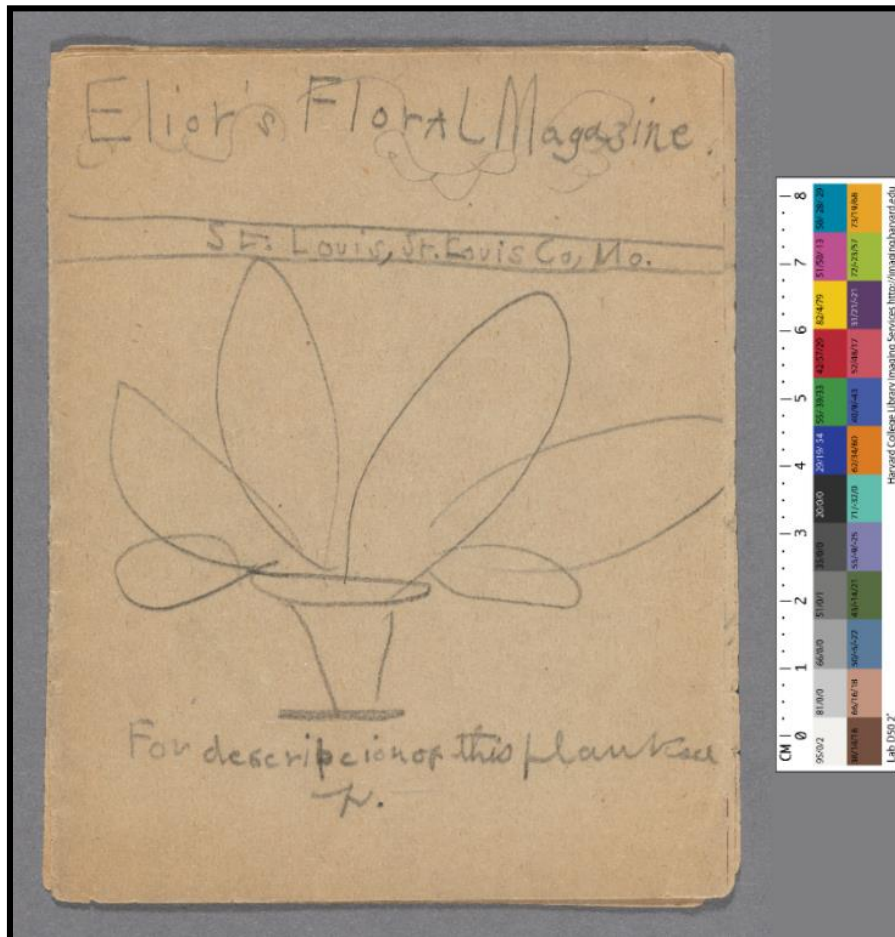


Fig. 7. T. S. Eliot. *Eliot's Floral Magazine* [Front Cover]. 1899. MS Am 1635.5/12. T. S. Eliot Juvenilia, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Flowers are also present in a great many of Eliot's romantic and somewhat conventional poems of early youth that were written and published between the ages of sixteen and twenty-two: 'A Lyric' (1905), 'Song: When we came home across the hill' (1907), 'Before Morning' (1908), 'Circe's Palace' (1908) and 'Song: The moonflower opens to the moth' (1909). Moreover, all the flowers in these early poems are, in one way or another, relatable to the

¹¹ Unger notes a development of flower and garden imagery, from the beginning to the end of Eliot's works (36).

mother. To illustrate, Eliot's first published poem 'A Lyric' (as initially instructed by his schoolmaster at Smith Academy) clearly imitates Ben Jonson in its plain ballad style, locked strength and alternating iambic tetrameter and trimeter lines (as in Johnson's 'Song: To Celia'). However, on closer inspection 'A Lyric' also bears resemblance to Charlotte's puritanical verse in its dry, meditative tone, formality and traditional use of flower imagery as a spiritual metaphor. Tonal, formal and verbal affinities between Eliot's and his mother's verse can be seen by comparing stanzas from Eliot's 'A Lyric' and Charlotte's 'At Easter Tide':

A Lyric

The flowers I gave thee when the dew
 Was trembling on the vine
Were withered ere the wild bee flew
 To suck the eglantine.
So let us haste to pluck anew
 Nor mourn to see them pine,
And though our flowers of life be few
 Yet let them be divine. (*CPP*, 590)

'At Easter Tide'

So, deep within this soul of mine,
A living principle divine
 Awaits in day and hour,
To feel the quickening current flow,
To feel the heavenly warmth and glow
 That bursts in bud and flower . . . (*CES*, 25)

As well as stylistic and formal equivalences, flowers in Eliot's early verse share the same signalling of the continuance of eternal nature. Gordon notes 'in all three of the first poems he published in the *Advocate* blooming and withering flowers are the images of love, and the fragrance of decay interweaves with the fragrance of bloom' (1998: 24). In 'Song: When we came home across the hill' (*CPP*, 596) the 'wild roses in your wreath' whose leaves

are already ‘brown’ are a direct replica of Ben Jonson’s rose wreath in ‘Song: To Celia’.¹² However, neatly juxtaposed to Jonson’s flowers of rejected love and loss are Charlotte’s flowers of life and death: ‘The hedgerow bloomed with flowers still, / No withered petals lay beneath’. This comingling and interplay of contraries, bloom and decay, life and death, through flower symbolism is continued in Eliot’s ‘Before Morning’ (*CPP*, 597) whose ‘Fragrance of bloom and fragrance of decay, / Fresh flowers, withered flowers, flowers of dawn’ echoes Charlotte’s ‘Be still, sad lips, that thus complain, / The flowers unchanged, return again’ (*CES*, 13). Further corroboration of an unconscious correspondence taking place between flowers and the mother in Eliot’s early poems is strengthened by the two subsequent *Advocate* poems ‘Circe’s Palace’ and ‘Song: The moonflower opens to the moth’. In both of these poems there is a profanation of the mother’s flowers: ‘Have you no brighter tropic flowers / With scarlet life, for me?’ (*CPP*, 600). These poems indicate the first hint of Laforgue’s influence, in addition to the first stirrings of male sexuality and ambivalence toward the omnipotent, inaccessible mother in Eliot’s writings. For John T. Mayer, ‘Song: The moonflower opens to the moth’ suggests ‘a deep conflict within Eliot himself’ (35-36) and ‘it is the mother who is ultimately behind the pallid wraith figure, pallid because sexually inaccessible’ (37).¹³

Jayne Stayer regards the tone, manner and content, the flower images and emotion of Eliot’s juvenilia verse as ‘stock and insipid’ (Chinitz, 2009: 108). He remarks that ‘to search for precedents of Eliot’s style and manner in these poems is to be baffled by their desultory flatness, the lack of a distinctive voice. The poems do not sound like Eliot’. Moody gives the reason for the banality of Eliot’s early verse as due to its being ‘wholly dependent on literary resources’ (1994b: 5). He finds the diction and poetical effects to be drawn from the poets and texts with whom Eliot felt a personal intimacy in his adolescence: Tennyson, Swinburne, Byron, Gray, Arnold, Shelley and Keats.¹⁴ For Moody, the young poet’s direct sensations have not penetrated the verse, making it ‘not impersonal but remote and artificial, its images not original but reproductions’ (1994b: 17). Yet, as Mayer states, there is in these poems—as in all poetry—‘the disguising of the personal in the conventions of the familiar’ (22).

¹² Jonson’s ‘Song: To Celia IX’ (1616) reads ‘I sent thee, late, a rosy wreath, / Not so much honouring thee, / As giving it a hope, that there / It could not withered be’ (1996: 72).

¹³ Mayer’s view is in line with Pinkney’s comments on ‘Circe’s Palace’ and the mother in chapter 1.

¹⁴ Eliot states in a ‘Prize Day Address at the Methodist Girls’ School, Penzance’ given sometime in the 1930s, now housed in the Hayward Bequest: ‘Byron and Shelley, Omar Khayyam, Rossetti, Swinburne—and smaller men too, like Ernest Dowson: I seemed to get suddenly a personal intimacy with these poets whom I read for myself; and perhaps the feeling that some of them would not be approved by my elders added to the pleasure’ (*HB*, H/1/A). He adds: ‘what matters at that stage, is not whether the poets we read are great poets, what matters is a personal relationship with them’.

Surprisingly, in spite of Moody asserting Eliot's dependence on literary resources in his early verse he does not consider the impact of Charlotte's conscious and unconscious influence as the first critic and most personal and immediate writer and poet that Eliot knew. As shown, Eliot's experimental pre-Laforguian juvenilia poems suggest a degree of cross-fertilisation of conscious and unconscious influences in their make-up. On the one hand, they demonstrate a schoolboy's deliberate attempts to imitate the various forms and styles of the male poetic predecessors he admired. On the other hand, the flowers that continually bloom and die in these poems are highly suggestive of not only Jonson's and Tennyson's romantic flowers of rejected love but also those flowers derived from unconscious, telepathic reading of the 'poet-mother' and her forms. Eliot explains in 'The Three Voices of Poetry' (1953) how such an arrangement and mixture of the non-personal and the personal, the conscious and unconscious, can take place in a poem despite the poet's original intention:

the frame, once chosen, within which the author has elected to work, may itself evoke other psychic material; and then, the lines of poetry may come into being, not from the original impulse, but from a secondary stimulation of the unconscious mind. (*OPP*, 111)

'La Figlia Che Piange' published in 1916 continues the unconscious correspondence in Eliot's poetry between the mother and flowers with the image of the idealised girl placed at the top of stairs with 'her arms full of flowers' (*CPP*, 34).¹⁵ This crucial poem is an early instantiation of the 'garden-flowers' passion scene in his work and contains the germination of many of the themes embellished and explored more fully in *The Waste Land* (1922) and later in 'Ash-Wednesday' (1930), 'Marina' (1930), 'Burnt Norton' (1936) and *The Family Reunion* (1939). The poem's speaker expresses a wish to be joined with the girl compelling his imagination, and he remains troubled—even obsessed—by the memory of his vision of her: 'And I wonder how they should have been together!' (*CPP*, 34). Gordon strongly supposes this image to be inspired by Eliot's memory of his lifelong Platonic love, Emily Hale.¹⁶ According to Gordon, the impact of Eliot's first meeting with Emily Hale in 1912 was such that she became 'the source for a series of garden encounters in Eliot's poetry, moments

¹⁵ 'La Figlia Che Piange' ('The Girl Who Weeps') was completed in November 1911, first published in September 1916, and later featured in *Prufrock and Other Observations* in 1917. For Frye, the poem marks the 'beginning' (2009: 223) of the symbolism which finds its 'end' in Eliot's 'Marina' (1930).

¹⁶ See the chapter 'Enter Beatrice' in Gordon (1998: 233-82).

of romantic attraction to a woman' (1998: 81).¹⁷ Despite this assertion, however, closer examination of 'La Figlia Che Piange' suggests the presence of a shrouded maternal aspect within the poem which has received little attention from commentators, and is rarely noticed by readers.¹⁸

Eliot insinuates the possibility of a submerged maternal intertext as primary to the construction of 'La Figlia Che Piange' with his chosen epigraph taken from Book I of Virgil's *Aeneid*: 'O quam te memorem virgo' ('O Virgin! Or what other Name you bear'; *Aen.* 1.451; Dryden, 14).¹⁹ This epigraph recounts an episode in which Aeneas questions his mother Venus, goddess of Love. Aeneas has come upon Venus manifesting as a virgin huntress in the Carthaginian woods. Fixing on Venus' face he does not distinguish his mother, only her divine status: 'Above that style; O more than mortal fair! / Your Voice and Mien Celestial Birth betray!' (1.452-53). Aeneas goes on to mistake the apparition of his mother for the virgin goddess of chastity, Diana: 'If, as you seem, the Sister of the Day; / Or one at least of Chast Diana's Train' (1.454-55). As a consequence, Aeneas takes his mother as a potential love partner, much to his upset when he realises his mother's true identity:

Unkind and cruel, to deceive your Son
 In borrow'd Shapes, and his Embrace to shun
 Never to bless my Sight, but thus known;
 And still to speak in Accents not your own. (1.564-67)

The impact of this scene from *Aeneid I* stayed with Eliot throughout his life. In addition to 'La Figlia Che Piange', it originally appeared in *The Waste Land* facsimile in the 'Fire Sermon' section (*WLF*, 28-29) and is also commented upon in Eliot's late essay 'Virgil and the Christian World' (1951). In this essay, Eliot notes: '[Aeneas] had a good deal to put up with from Juno; and even his mother Venus, as the benevolent instrument of his destiny, put him

¹⁷ Gordon's explanation is highly unlikely as the poem was supposedly conceived when—during Eliot's sojourn in France in the academic year 1910-11—he went on an excursion to Northern Italy in the July of 1911 to view a marble relief entitled 'La Figlia Che Piange' which had been recommended to him by a friend. Eliot did not find the statue of the weeping girl. Nevertheless, a poem inspired by the idea of the missing statue and its name was completed by Eliot in November 1911, after his return to the Harvard Graduate School to conclude his philosophy doctorate.

¹⁸ For a fuller Lacanian reading of 'La Figlia Che Piange' and its unconscious relation to the mother, see Matthew Geary, "Unkind and cruel, to deceive your Son / In borrow'd Shapes, and his Embrace to shun": Mother-Son Love in T. S. Eliot's "La Figlia Che Piange" (2015).

¹⁹ Eliot confirms in his essay 'Virgil and the Christian World' (1951) that as a boy he read Virgil's *Aeneid* in the Latin (*OPP*, 138). For all quotations in English I refer to John Dryden's 1697 English translation which Eliot was no doubt familiar with. For comment on Virgil as a pervasive and changing presence in Eliot's works, see Reeves.

into one very awkward position' (*OPP*, 143).²⁰ Regarding the same passage, Marianne Shapiro comments on the obvious 'incestuous undertones' (12) in Venus' teasing presentation of herself to her son in the guise of a marriageable girl.²¹ Here, Aeneas' unconscious incestuous desire for his mother as the original love object is revealed. However, in Venus' refusal of Aeneas he is forced as an adult to redirect formerly infantile libidinal energies towards more acceptable substitute figures. Venus is shown by Virgil to be the guide and ideal for Aeneas' later sexual relationship and transgression with Dido. The scene confirms the metonymic movement of desire from signifier to signified—demonstrated by the diachronic relation between Venus-Dido-Diana—as rooted in the blissful narcissistic experience of an archaic pre-object relationship.²² Freud states in 'Three Essays on Sexuality' (1905) 'the finding of an object is in fact a re-finding of it' (2001f: 88) and, indeed, we may say Aeneas' finding of Dido in the *Aeneid* is in fact a re-finding of the first object, Venus. The autoeroticism associated with Aeneas falling in love with Dido is a residual effect of the childhood relation to the mother.

In consideration of this exposition, and if we take it that the usual purpose of an epigraph at the beginning of a poem is to 'indicate the leading idea or sentiment' (OED), we are immediately struck by a new implication given by Eliot's choice of epigraph for 'La Figlia Che Piange'. The speaker's identification with the girl in the 'garden-flowers' scene is in fact an identification implying the return of a repressed memory that was previously confined to the unconscious. 'La Figlia' is a disguise for the original 'ideational representative' of the sexual drive or instinct, to quote Freud (2001j: 149).²³ The weight of the meaning of 'La Figlia' to her male observer, and his continued 'wonder', infatuation and erotic overstatement of her is due to just this resonance: 'Sometimes these cogitations still amaze' (*CPP*, 34).

²⁰ A fourteen page typescript of 'Virgil and the Christian World' featuring manuscript corrections is held in the Hayward Bequest at King's College, Cambridge. In this typescript draft the word 'humiliating' is crossed out by Eliot and replaced with 'awkward' (*HB*, P/25).

²¹ In her essay 'Virgil Stuff', Shapiro comments on Aeneas' meeting with his mother in disguise: 'Venus appears before Aeneas at once as a mother and as a potential love partner . . . The point is that Venus presents herself to her son in the guise of a marriageable girl. The incestuous undertones are amplified as if all heterosexual desire were incestuous, a recursive movement in time and space' (13).

²² Oliensis remarks:

when Aeneas recognises the departing goddess, she instantly regains her maternal status. Aeneas' complaint—'why do you so often mock your son with false images? why are you cruel too?' (*quid natum totiens, crudelis tu quoque, falsis / ludis imaginibus?*, *Aen.* 1.407-8)—is loosely modelled on Odysseus' speech to his mother when her shade eludes his embrace . . . Whatever we make of this tangle of lovers and mothers—Venus, Medea, Creusa, Nausicaa, Dido—we can at least remark that the knot in which they are twined in the first half of the *Aeneid* is disturbingly tight. (Martindale, 1997: 306)

²³ See Sigmund Freud, 'Repression' (1915; rpt. 2001j: 146-58).

Through reference to Aeneas' seductive encounter with his disguised mother, then, Eliot's 'La Figlia' appears not only a prototype of the hyacinth girl of *The Waste Land*, the 'Lady' of 'Ash-Wednesday' and the daughter in 'Marina', but also a 'screen-woman' signifying a son's deep-held unconscious love for his mother.²⁴ Deliberating this proposition, the lines 'As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised, / As the mind deserts the body it has used' (*CPP*, 34) take on the striking new connotation of birth. They give 'La Figlia' a maternal characteristic that is not immediately obvious but relates her to the rites of birth and death also spoken of in 'Ash-Wednesday' in the figure of the 'torn and most whole' Lady ('A-W', 68). Shoshana Felman states the 'screen-woman' can serve a triple function, 'it can serve to divide or separate, to conceal or hide, to protect or shield' (1981: 30). As signifiers, 'La Figlia' and her 'flowers' go beyond the simple referent of the poem to properly name an impropriety. Expressed differently, they figure as beautiful euphemisms covering the less pleasant incestuous (unconscious) narcissistic fantasy of a child's love for the mother.

My suggestion that flowers in Eliot's earliest poems and 'La Figlia Che Piange' indicate the mother's unconscious influence and Eliot's unconscious perception and reading of the mother is supported by repetition of the flower motif and its continuing and growing association with unconscious childhood memory and the maternal throughout his mature works with the exemplary case being 'Ash-Wednesday'. On the surface, the various flowers featured in 'Ash-Wednesday' appear to convey traditional poetic, religious, ideological and universal symbolic meanings and affiliations. To begin with, in part II, as in Dante's *Paradiso*, the 'Lady' is elevated beyond her traditional romantic status in courtly mediaeval dream-allegory to 'The single Rose' (73): a perpetual emblem of sacred love highly suggestive of the Virgin Mary.²⁵ In part III the 'hawthorn blossom' (109) takes up its traditional pagan connotation as a symbol of sexuality and fertility associated with 'the maytime' (111). Lastly, in part IV the 'violet' (120) and the 'blue of larkspur' (129) are

²⁴ Felman uses the term 'screen-woman' (1981: 29) to describe the rhetoric of sexuality present in Balzac's short novel 'The Girl with the Golden Eyes'. A 'screen-woman' is a positive 'active discretion' covering men's narcissistic, incestuous fantasies. Dante continuously uses screen-women as a device in the *Vita nuova* to cover the identity of the real referent of the lover's desire. Dante's screen-women are intermediates in a circuit of eroticised vision which starts and terminates in Beatrice. He states in canto 5:

between her and me [Beatrice], in direct line with my vision, sat a worthy lady of very pleasing aspect who gazed at me frequently as if amazed at my glances which appeared to be directed at her . . . At once I thought of making this good lady a screen for the truth, and so well did I play my part that in a short time my secret was believed known by most of those who talked about me. (*Vn.* 5.4-18)

²⁵ In canto 23 of the *Paradiso*, Dante refers to Mary as 'the rose in which the divine word / Was made flesh' (*Par.* 23.73-74).

confirmed as associated with the ‘blue of Mary’s colour’ (129). However, as is the case in Woolf’s writings, evidence indicates that some of these flowers carry great personal significance to Eliot and are linked to not only his childhood memories of his family homes in St. Louis, Missouri, and New England, but also to even earlier unconscious perceptual reading of the mother and her love. That is to say, as Georges Bataille came to realise in ‘The Language of Flowers’ (1929), the relationship between flowers and their symbolic meaning in ‘Ash-Wednesday’, as opposed to being motivated, artificial, linear or rational, is more akin to the workings of the unconscious and the kind of substitutions and translations apparent in dreams.²⁶

Eliot confirmed late in his life that his work ‘in its sources, in its emotional springs, it comes from America’ (1959: 70). In 1930, around the time ‘Ash-Wednesday’ was published, he responded to a question on the influence of St. Louis on his life and writing, stating:

St. Louis affected me more deeply than any other environment has done . . . I find that as one gets on in middle life the strength of early associations, and the intensity of early impressions, becomes more evident; and many little things, long forgotten, recur. The occasions on which my nurse took me with her to the little Catholic Church which then stood on the corner of Locust Street and Jefferson Avenue, when she went to make her devotions; spring violets . . . of course I spent many years out of America altogether; but Missouri and Mississippi have made a deeper impression on me than any other part of the world.

(*LTSE5*, 281-82)

Considering this statement, the flowers of ‘Ash-Wednesday’ immediately assume more individual, unconscious and intimate implications. In Eliot’s sketch of his early memories the spring violets in part IV are revealed as associated with not only the Virgin Mary but also

²⁶ See Bataille’s essay ‘The Language of Flowers’ (1929). He states:

men have linked the brilliance of flowers to their amorous emotions because, on either side, it is a question of phenomena that precede fertilization. The role given to symbols in psychoanalytic interpretations, moreover, would corroborate an explanation of this type. In fact it is almost always an accidental parallel that accounts for the origin of substitutions in dreams. Among other things, the value given to pointed or hollowed-out objects is fairly well known. (1985: 11)

Eliot's intense early childhood experiences of Missouri and Mississippi.²⁷ Further, as a native wildflower and the floral emblem of Missouri the 'hawthorn blossom' in part III represents both the pagan and medieval rites of spring and the flowers prominent in the botanical terrain of Eliot's childhood. Still, it is in parts II and VI that the flowers and garden aesthetics of 'Ash-Wednesday' are confirmed as non-teleological emergences related to unconscious perception and telepathic reading of the early mother. In 1928, at the time of writing 'Ash-Wednesday', Eliot listed his most prominent childhood memories in the preface to E. A. Mowrer's *This American World*:

in New England I missed the long dark river, the ailanthus
trees, the flaming cardinal birds, the high limestone bluffs
where we searched for fossil shell-fish; in Missouri I missed the
fir trees, the bay and golden-rod, the song-sparrows, the
red granite and the blue sea of Massachusetts. (xiii)

This bears comparison with part VI of 'Ash-Wednesday':

Wavering between the profit and the loss
In this brief transit where the dreams cross
The dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying
(Bless me father) though I do not wish to wish these things
From the wide window towards the granite shore
The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying
Unbroken wings

And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices
In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices
And the weak spirit quickens to rebel
For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell
Quickens to recover
The cry of quail and the whirling plover
And the blind eye creates

²⁷ Spring violets are also mentioned in Charlotte's own poetry, see 'Not in the Flesh, But the Spirit' and 'The Last Wish' (*CES*, 14; 10). While, as referred to earlier, Eliot's letters to his mother written during his time in England feature the 'larkspur' (see *LTSE1*, 272; *LTSE3*, 186).

The empty forms between the ivory gates
And smell renews the salt savour of the sandy earth (188-203)

The granite rocks, flowers, sea and shoreline which form the landscape of part VI of ‘Ash-Wednesday’ (and also the later ‘Marina’ and ‘The Dry Salvages’), are most certainly the perceptual phenomena of New England that Eliot experienced as a child. The red rock of *The Waste Land* made blue in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ is that of Cape Ann, Massachusetts. Furthermore, the ‘lost lilac’ and the ‘bent golden-rod’ are the flowers which recover Eliot’s memory of his family homes in Missouri and Gloucester, Massachusetts.²⁸ Nancy Hargrove confirms that ‘the lilac, fragrant in early summer, still grows on the grounds of the Eliot house, and golden-rod, bent by the ocean wind, is in great evidence among the rocky coast’ (1978: 104). Eliot’s (unconscious) associating of the mother and the maternal body in his poetry with the seas, shores and flowers of the New England landscape is epitomised by a photograph showing Eliot as a young boy stood on the rocks at Eastern Point, Gloucester, with his mother sat close by (see Fig. 8):²⁹



Fig. 8. *T. S. Eliot with his mother, Charlotte Eliot at Hawthorne Inn, Eastern Point, Gloucester, Massachusetts. 1895. Photograph. MS Am 2560/158. T. S. Eliot Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University.*

²⁸ The 1928 typescript also features ‘the lost roses, sweet peas’ but these are omitted in the final version (*HB*, V/6A/8).

²⁹ The photograph of Charlotte Eliot sat on the rocks at Eastern Point, Gloucester, brings to mind ‘Belladonna, Lady of the Rocks’ from *The Waste Land* (*WL*, 49), and also the ‘Lady, whose shrine stands on the promontory’ in part IV of ‘The Dry Salvages’ (*CPP*, 189).

Just as Woolf's screen memory of the flowers on her mother's dress opens up onto her earlier memory of being in the nursery at St. Ives, it is Eliot's 'snapshot' of New England in part VI of 'Ash-Wednesday' and the flowers, sights, smells, sensations and sounds that accompany this memory that bring the repressed passions and private relation with the 'Sister, mother' into conscious illumination:

This is the time of tension between dying and birth
The place of solitude where three dreams cross
Between blue rocks
Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden,
Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,
Our peace in His will
And even among these rocks
Sister, mother
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,
Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee. (204-19)

Regressive recollection of the early pre-object relation with the mother and her environment in 'Ash-Wednesday' is typified in part II by the speaker's shock in his encounter with the 'Lady of silences' (66): the 'Rose of memory / Rose of forgetfulness' (69-70). Due to her resonance with the originary (m)other, like Dante's encounter with Beatrice in the *Vita nuova*, the 'Lady' reopens 'the wound of the unexpected, of the enigma' (Laplanche, 2002-03: 30). Here, Eliot's 'Lady' is confirmed as what Christopher Bollas calls the sought after 'signifier of transformation' (1987: 14) that is recurrent in object-seeking in adult life from its

origin as a feature of childhood existence in relation to the early mother.³⁰ The suggestion of the ‘Lady of silences’ as representative of the previously repressed pre-verbal, pre-linguistic, pre-Oedipal mother is shown by her enigmatic character and muteness, her marginal presence, ‘The Lady is withdrawn’ (57), as well as her formative influence: ‘And because of her loveliness . . . We shine with brightness’ (50-52). Further, the dismemberment of the speaker’s body, ‘And I who am here dissembled’ (52), suggests the fragmentary pre-Oedipal subject who is to be integrated by the mother through her presence as a processing form—‘It is this which recovers’ (55). It is the speaker’s anticipation of being transformed by the ‘Lady’—‘itself an ego memory of the ontogenetic process’ (Bollas, 1987: 16)—which inspires his reverential attitude towards her and his nomination of her as sacred. For Bollas, the instinctual belief in the object to transform the self is due to its elicitation of the pre-verbal, symbiotic ego memory.

In the ‘garden-flowers’ scene in part II, the enigmatic ‘Lady’ gradually becomes equated and conflated with ‘The single Rose’ (73), which is conventionally representative of the Virgin Mary as *Rosa Mystica*.³¹ In this communion there opens up a privileged allegorical vision of the maternal ‘Garden’ where all paradoxes and ambivalences are bound, harmonised and held in tension and where all binary positionality and meaning is temporarily transcended:

³⁰ Bollas (1987) explains how in the early object relation the mother is experienced by the child as ‘a process of transformation’ (14) rather than a fully identifiable other. Whether the mother’s particular ‘idiom’ of mothering is sufficient or frustrating the child internalises the phenomenological reality of the maternal aesthetic as a forming and transforming idiom (36). Although the mother sponsors transformation of both the child’s internal and external world the child is not aware of her influence. The child’s experience of the object precedes the knowing of the object. With the child’s growth and independence the relation to the mother changes ‘from the mother as the other who alters the self to a person who has her own life and her own needs’ (28). Nevertheless, the early impersonal ego experience of being transformed by the other and their aesthetic remains as an unconscious memory and can be reactivated and re-enacted in adulthood in radical, profoundly moving aesthetic experiences which reawaken the deep subjective experience of the first object. Very often this experience of being held in the ‘aesthetic moment’, as Bollas calls it, is felt as ‘awesome and sacred’ (39)—the sacred being our earliest experience of the ‘maternal aesthetic’ prior recognising the mother in her own right. Bollas states how the search for the ‘transformational object’ in adult-life is often correlative with periods of crisis in which self-transformation is sought after in order to mitigate loss and assist ego repair.

³¹ Mary’s identification as *Rosa Mystica* was prevalent in the medieval period. John Henry Newman reflects on this title and Mary’s association with flowers and the garden in his *Meditations and Devotions*. He writes:

how did Mary become the *Rosa Mystica*, the choice, delicate, perfect flower of God’s spiritual creation? It was by being born, nurtured and sheltered in the mystical garden or Paradise of God. . . . Excepting her, the fairest rose in the paradise of God has had its blight, and has had the risk of canker-worm and locust . . . when the angel Gabriel had to come to her, he found her ‘full of grace’, which had, from her good use of it, accumulated in her from the first moment of her being. (126-28)

Considering Newman’s meditation on Mary, it appears notable that lines in the rose-garden section in the 1928 typescript of ‘Ash-Wednesday’, ‘Spattered and worshipped’ and ‘With worm-eaten petals’ (*HB*, V/6A/5), are omitted in the 1930 text. This editorial amendment supports my argument in chapter 2 for the spiritualisation of the ‘Lady’ in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ as being more complete in the final text due to the death of the mother in 1929.

Lady of silences
Calm and distressed
Torn and most whole
Rose of memory
Rose of forgetfulness
Exhausted and life-giving
Worried reposeful
The single Rose
Is now the Garden
Where all loves end
Terminate torment
Of love unsatisfied
The greater torment
Of love satisfied
End of the endless
Journey to no end
Conclusion of all that
Is inconclusible
Speech without word and
Word of no speech
Grace to the Mother
For the Garden
Where all love ends. (66-88)

Eliot's rose-garden is not just the sacred space of the virginal womb, as many critics suppose, but also an ego shaping of the originary infantile encounter with the imaginary pre-Oedipal 'Exhausted and life-giving' maternal body and psyche, a reconstruction of the primal scene. It is an allegorical return to and of the primary ambivalent situation with the enigmatic caring and non-caring (m)other, 'Calm and distressed / Torn and most whole'. The rose-garden is maternal allegory arrived at through textual descent into unconscious memory by way of childhood screen memory and desire and the poetic flowering of affective maternal forms.

Claudette Sartiliot states how ‘the flower which has its roots in the underground, always leads back to it’ (41).³² When pursued, Eliot’s flowers can be seen as the lived maternal forms which work with and through unconscious memory—as in Woolf’s *A Sketch of the Past*—to return us to their original implantation; to the rose ‘Garden’ (74), the ‘unread vision in the higher dream’ (139), and to the ‘Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden’ (209). Eliot’s flowers are not merely ornamental devices bearing an ostensible content related to their aesthetic beauty, neither are they simply mirrors of the environment in which they are placed nor purely religious symbols. They are spectres of the mother rooted in the real of the maternal body: screens that both inscribe repressed content and are the mode of repression itself. They uphold a paradoxical relationship to forgetting, relaying both the wish to forget and the insistence of excessive passion to find form. As in Campbell’s reading of Woolf’s flowers, the flowers of ‘Ash-Wednesday’ help Eliot constitute not only his childhood memories of St. Louis, Missouri, and New England but also his early sensuous unconscious reading of the mother; his memories, his forgetting.³³ Flowers are part of the topography of a primitive, unconscious and virtual dreamworld in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ that, like the dream, allows formerly repressed incestuous passions to blossom and take shape, to sublimate and remodel the ego. Thus, although Eliot’s flower memories appear to be innocent, sensory earthly details they can, in fact, be seen to be sublimations of deeper, more oblique memories of emotionally conflicted and ambivalent experiences related to the earliest passionate tie to the maternal body. They speak both of secret unconscious longing for the mother and a telepathic ‘unconscious seeing’ of her and they move unconscious memory as a repetitive and unheard reminiscence into a more embodied experience. It is no coincidence that flowers are conventionally regarded as

³² Sartiliot describes flowers in reference to Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida as pointing to the ‘degree zero of interpretation’ as they appear to deconstruct the effect of the transcendental signified. Derrida in *Glas* (1986) affirms flowers to be fundamentally disseminative and differential. In reference to Jean Genet’s metaphor of the flower-as-glove in *Notre-Dame-des-fleurs* (1943), Derrida notes the double sexual disposition of the flower as both penis and vagina, male and female. For Derrida, just as Genet’s metaphor symbolises ‘castration, phallus’ it simultaneously “‘signifies’—again!—at least overlaps virginity in general, the vagina, the clitoris, “feminine sexuality,” matrilinear genealogy, the mother’s *seing*, the integral *seing*, that is, the Immaculate Conception’ (1986: 47). Thus, flowers are part of an economy that reconciles contraries. They are non-logocentric and allegorical in nature and therefore can transgress symbolic law and phallogocentric logic. As such, their appearance in literary texts such as ‘Ash-Wednesday’ represents rather than represses the workings, motility and the plurality of the signifier and the primary processes of the unconscious. For explanation of degree-zero writing, see Barthes. For discussion of modern readings of allegory and their affinity with the radical allegorical nature of flowers, see Tambling (2004).

³³ The use of garden-imagery as a veiling intermediary between prohibited elements of childhood sexuality and defence is a perennial motif in Eliot’s works. For example, in the early censored poem ‘Ode’ (1918) there is ‘the children singing in the orchard / (Io Hymen, Hymenaeae) / Succuba eviscerate’ (*CPP*, 604), who reappear in ‘New Hampshire’ (138). Further, there are the ‘children in the foliage’ in ‘Burnt Norton’ (*CPP*, 176) who resurface in ‘the apple-tree’ in ‘Little Gidding’ (197).

supplementary to the work of loss and mourning. It is with this connotation that they bloom in the work of Eliot and Woolf. Eliot's flowers garland the mother's form in her absence and in doing so bring her presence. They rediscover the enigmatic mother and our original mimesis with her, bringing her back in life and death in a more bearable way 'as something both virtual and real; a non-personal composition that is always driven by a more underground furnace, of our more earthy and primitive affects' (Campbell, 2013: 58).³⁴ Like the flower, the mother is metaphorically reborn in the earth of the text of 'Ash-Wednesday' through poetic elaboration and dissemination ensuring her survival in spite of her loss. In this way, the seminal first impressions, shocks and sensations of the paradise lost previously to irretrievable time are newly felt. In this way, unconscious desire is able to move beyond the repressive ego.

Colour

In part IV of 'Ash-Wednesday' the colour violet appears with the appearance of the woman wearing blue of Mary's colour: 'Who walked between the violet and the violet' (120). Violet is the flower of humility and one of the flowers traditionally associated with the Virgin Mary.³⁵ It is also the liturgical colour of Lent and penitence and is very often draped over the statues and altar in Roman Catholic churches during this period. Consequently, the colour violet and its use are congenial to a poem called 'Ash-Wednesday' which features a sacred feminine figure modelled on the Virgin. Nonetheless, Eliot's 1930 reminiscence of the intensity of the impression of 'spring violets' in St. Louis, and the strength of this association with his childhood, provides an added dimension to the meaning of colour in the poem. It implies that colours, as well as flowers, play on a complex register in 'Ash-Wednesday' working by unconscious synaesthesia, childhood memory and association as well as by conscious symbolism and the ideological values that a particular age, religion or culture places on them.

Kristeva in her essay 'Giotto's Joy' (1980: 210-36) relates colour specifically to the 'conflictual scene of primary narcissism and auto-eroticism' (225). The use of colour, she states, is heavy with 'semantic latencies' and linked to the subject's economy of self-

³⁴ The flowers in 'Ash-Wednesday' are in stark contrast to those mainly ridiculed or uprooted and replanted in the context of the city in his early poetry: for example, the flowers whose petals are 'fanged and red' in 'Circe's Palace' (1908), the dead geraniums in 'Easter: Sensations of April' (Apr. 1910), and the 'paper roses' in 'Convictions' (Jan. 1910) and 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' (1915).

³⁵ Frédéric Portal states how 'the drapery of the Virgin Mary is often violet, to indicate the mother of God sacrificed to save mankind' (16).

constitution. For Kristeva, colour comes before the identification of objects and self-identification, that is, the ‘mirror stage’. She states

[colours] thereby return the subject to the archaic moment of its dialectic, that is, before the fixed, specular ‘I’, but while in the process of becoming this ‘I’ by breaking away from instinctual, biological (and also maternal) dependence. (225)

Kristeva comments on Giotto’s paintings (see Fig. 9): ‘one is struck by the light that is generated, catching the eye because of the colour blue. Such a blue takes hold of the viewer at the extreme limit of visual perception’ (224). She states how the colour blue, above all, has a decentring effect ‘lessening both object identification and phenomenal fixation’ (225). Kristeva equates this impact to the fact that the fovea centralis part of the eye develops the latest in humans, approximately sixteen months after birth. Colour perception precedes centred vision. Thus in the fovea’s emergence and development the colours with the shortest wavelength, such as blue, are the ones that have the most significant effect on the developing child. The colour blue returns the subject to that ‘archaic moment’, the predisposition in which they were dependent on the mother as primary caregiver. Blue, then, is the colour of pre-object experience, primary identification and separation: the first differentiation, the first splitting. It recalls the experience of subject-object indeterminacy, connectivity and undifferentiated bliss with the mother. Further, it is resonant of the Lacanian Real and emanates a mnemonic trace of the child’s marginal experience of *jouissance* with the maternal body. For Kristeva, blue is the colour of motherhood and accordingly the traditional colour of the Virgin Mary.



Fig. 9. Giotto. *The Adoration of the Magi*. 1303-05. Fresco. Padua, Arena Chapel.

According to Kristeva, colour is a primary process and has its basis in the semiotic. It is an essential human principle preceding language and the chromatic scale is utilised by the poet or artist indicating the instinctual and signifying resources of the subject. In other words, the artist sublimates innate sexual and aggressive energies onto the coloured painted or textual surface with the colour chosen dependent on both conscious and unconscious correspondences. In 'Ash-Wednesday', a poem replete with chromatic markings, blue is the pre-eminent colour occurring seven times. There is the Pan-like 'broadbacked figure drest in blue and green' (110) in part III, the 'blue rocks' in part VI (206), the female figure adorned in the 'blue of larkspur' (129) in part IV who appears as an apparition of Matilda from Dante's *Purgatorio*, in addition to the 'Lady' from part II who is transfigured in part IV into a sacred feminine 'in white and blue' (141), consistent with the colours of traditional Marian devotion.³⁶ In Kristeva's essay 'Motherhood According to Bellini' (1980: 237-70), she

³⁶ For comment on the significance of the colour blue in Western Christianity, see Spurr (2010: 221).

comments on the devotional paintings of Giovanni Bellini and Leonardo Da Vinci and finds in Bellini's countless pictures of the Madonna and Child a hidden maternal discourse. For Kristeva, as in Freud's famous commentary on Da Vinci's 'Mona Lisa', the 'individual's biographical matrix' is brought out in Bellini's paintings (249).³⁷ She states how the language of such art is a sublimation which takes place at 'the very moment of primal repression within the mother's body' (242). Kristeva notes, however, that Bellini's Madonnas are very different to Da Vinci's. There is a 'distance, if not hostility, separating the bodies of infant and mother' (247). The faces of Bellini's Madonnas are 'turned away'—they are 'absent, dead and mute' (248) (Fig. 10). Unlike Da Vinci's ambivalent depictions of the Madonna, Bellini's paintings represent a gradual distancing between mother and child and increasingly grant autonomy to the Christ child. For Kristeva, Bellini's paintings represent the 'very space of the lost-unrepresentable-forbidden *jouissance* of a hidden mother' (242).



Fig. 10. Giovanni Bellini, *Madonna and Child*, 1510, Rome, Galleria Borghese. Oil on Wood.

³⁷ See Sigmund Freud, 'Leonardo da Vinci: A Memory of his Childhood' (1910; rpt. 2001h: 63-138).

Eliot's 'silent sister' in part IV of 'Ash-Wednesday' is very much like the Madonnas of Bellini's paintings in her manner of representation. She is 'veiled in white and blue' (141), retaining an air of anonymity and mystery.³⁸ Bowing her head, she denies the speaker vision of her face and remains 'silent' (141). She is elsewhere. Her silence connotes both the lack of a voice and an ineffable *jouissance*: 'beyond discourse, beyond narrative, beyond psychology, beyond lived experience and biography—in short, beyond figuration' (Kristeva, 1980: 247). There is an evident separation between the speaker and her; a gap yet to be bridged. Unlike Bellini's paintings, however, there is no embrace or contact with the 'sister' figure. Furthermore, the dominance and juxtaposition of 'white and blue' delineates a sense of space 'Between' (142) within the chromatography of the poem that relativises the distance between the speaker and the 'silent sister'. Only in occasional moments of brilliant, pure white light implying infinite spatial luminosity do we get a glimmer of the sense of unity and indescribable *jouissance*: 'White light folded, sheathing about her, folded' (134).³⁹ Incandescent white in 'Ash-Wednesday' reaches a higher level of sublimation, symbolising Incarnation, integration, enigma, open infinity and the dissolution of boundaries. If blue represents motherhood, then whiteness graces a *jouissance* that reaches at the far limits of repression beyond and before the mother's form. In Kristevan terms, white in part IV announces the inspiration and eruption of the semiotic (the latent mother) and a communication of the sacred. Whiteness encompasses the unbounded religious energy (the 'limitless narcissism') which Freud traces back to 'an early phase of ego-feeling' with the

³⁸ Explained in chapter 1, Eliot in his early childhood was surrounded and given love by a shield of women that included his mother, sisters and his Irish nurse Annie Dunne. All of these women took on maternal responsibilities towards Eliot and were extremely important to him as a boy. The fact of Eliot having multiple maternal figures in his early life, along with the deaths of his sister and mother, both named Charlotte, in 1926 and 1929, respectively, seems important to the appearance of the 'silent sister' in part IV and my suggestion of her being a maternal figure. It is also appears to bear relevance to the spiritualisation and fusion of the various women of 'Ash-Wednesday' into the compound sacred feminine at the poem's end: 'Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden' (209).

³⁹ Evelyn Underhill explains that whiteness in mysticism is 'equivalent of the Illuminative Way: the highest point which the mystic can attain short of union with the Absolute' (176-77).

idealised mother and terms the ‘oceanic feeling’ (2001n: 72).⁴⁰ That is to say, white in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ is linked to the preservation of primary narcissism.

The Face

Mentioned four times in ‘Ash-Wednesday’, the ‘face’ is another important topos relatable to the mother (and also in Eliot’s 1930 Ariel poem ‘Marina’ discussed in detail in chapter 4).⁴¹ Winnicott in his seminal paper ‘Mirror-Role of Mother and Family in Child Development’ (1967) describes the ‘mother’s face’ as the ‘precursor of the mirror’ (2005: 149).⁴² Initially, he tells us, it is in the mother’s face that the baby sees him or herself reflected. The mother’s crucial role in the early relation is to give ‘back to the baby the baby’s own self’ (158). As the child’s first emotional mirror, it is the mother’s view and her responsiveness (her smiles, gestures, reflections and creative adaptations) that enables the child to come to know his own emotions, ‘to exist and to feel real’. The mother’s view provides a visual analogue of the child’s inner state and strengthens their embryonic sense of self. Hence, Winnicott views the early face-to-face interaction between mother and child to be the creative foundation both underpinning the child’s subjective realisation and protecting them against the fragmentation

⁴⁰ Freud argues in *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930) that the true source of religious sentiment is to be found in the desire for the undifferentiated bodily unity with the mother. He states:

the derivation of religious needs from the infant’s helplessness and the longing for the father aroused by it seems to me incontrovertible, especially since the feeling is not simply prolonged from childhood days, but is permanently sustained by fear of the superior power of Fate. I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father’s protection. Thus the part played by the oceanic feeling, which might seek something like the restoration of limitless narcissism, is ousted from a place in the foreground. The origin of the religious attitude can be traced back in clear outlines as far as the feeling of infantile helplessness. There may be something further behind that, but for the present it is wrapped in obscurity. (2001n: 72)

⁴¹ The ‘face’ in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ is mentioned in lines 21, 101, 104 and 166.

⁴² See D. W. Winnicott, ‘Mirror-Role of Mother and Family in Child Development’ (1967; rpt. 2005: 149-59).

to which the self is vulnerable.⁴³ He stresses, however, that if the mother's face fails to reflect the child's moods, the child's sense of self and identity may be distorted and their creative capacity will begin to atrophy. The mother's adaptations have to be 'good enough'.

Extending Winnicott's ideas on child development, Kenneth Wright's theory of artistic creativity gives a pre-eminent role to the face.⁴⁴ For Wright, early maternal mirroring and attunement give both external 'resonant form' to the child's inner states and also act as a bridge between mother and child (2009: 24).⁴⁵ He states: 'the enacted maternal form straddles two selves and connects two subjects. This is the crux of experiential sharing' (25). Maternal mirroring indicates a development from the mother-child interaction at the breast ('primary creativity') into a social and quasi-symbolic communicative exchange, but it remains a transitional process because it retains a 'harmonious mix-up' of subject-object, mother and child (Balint 62).⁴⁶ Like Winnicott's 'transitional object' (2005: 5), the paradoxical quality of the maternal reflection allows the child to stay 'in touch' with the mother (Wright, 2009: 15-26), making the child's separation from her 'not a separation but a form of union' (Winnicott,

⁴³ Winnicott's 'Mirror-Role' paper is an extension of his earlier paper 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena' (1951; rpt. 2005: 1-34). In this, Winnicott asserts the child's innate potential for creativity and development as beginning at the initial stages of life and only realised within and through the mother's provision and responses. The sensitive 'good-enough' (13) mother who knows her baby and its needs and hunger realises its satisfaction in the feeding situation (through the actual breast), and other situations, by providing the right fit for its anticipation. In these instances, the child's imagined experience of the breast prefigures its realisation. As the child is unable to differentiate the mother at this early stage, her provision of the breast in answer to the child's anticipation endows the child with a god-like sense of omnipotence and agency due to their experience of having created the breast ('primary creativity') (15-16). In this sequence, the mother's 'good enough' adaptation has succeeded in giving the child 'sufficient opportunity for illusion' (15). Having been given this experience by the mother, the child can now repeatedly create the mother/breast out of their 'capacity to love or (one can say) out of need' (15). From this primitive scenario, Winnicott sees the child's subsequent use of a special 'transitional object' (5), the first 'not-me' possession, as marking and mediating the transitional experience of separation from the mother. For Winnicott, the 'transitional object' is something found as well as created by the child and is imbued with personal significance, carrying with it the memory of earlier experiences with the mother: 'the baby creates the object, but the object was there waiting to be created and to become a cathected object' (2005: 119). In his view, the fact that the transitional object is not the mother/breast is as important as the fact that it stands for the mother/breast. The harmonious subjective-objective mix-up of the transitional object 'gives room for the process of becoming able to accept difference and similarity' (8). In Winnicottian thought, the child's experience of 'primary creativity' through the (m)other's emotional response is the crucial foundation aiding not only the child's development of transitional objects and phenomena but also their capacity to be alone, creative, autonomous and healthy.

⁴⁴ Wright (2009: 6) notes Winnicott's comments on the mother's face in his 'Mirror-Role' paper as subsuming for the child a whole range of early affective and bodily experiences including that of being held and fed at the breast. Winnicott states: 'perhaps a baby at the breast does not look at the breast. Looking at the face is more likely to be a feature' (2005: 150).

⁴⁵ Wright's use of the term 'attunement' is taken from the work of Stern (1985). It refers 'to certain processes by which a mother tracks, and then reflects back to her infant, her sense of having shared in her infant's feeling state' (Wright, 2009: 22). It is 'essentially non-verbal and spontaneous, and relatively outside of the mother's awareness. It forms part of her intuitive response to her baby, and equally important, is more or less continuous so long as the infant is active'. Attunement tends more to the child's relational than physical needs.

⁴⁶ Balint's phrase 'harmonious mix-up' (1968: 200) denotes the interpenetration of subject and object in the child's early relationship with the mother. For Wright, this equally applies to Winnicott's 'transitional object'.

2005: 132), assuaging the anxiety of separation. Thus, the mother's face as a pure visual, iconic form has 'an irreducible communicative significance' in the child's experience as it spans and allows contact with the mother over distance (Wright, 1991: 109). Consequent to its primary impact, Wright states the child internalises the mother's face (as well as other maternal forms) as a pre-verbal 'containing symbol' (2009: 24) that authenticates the child's experience and is continually returned to, created and looked out for in adult life for ego-support; and especially in times of loss, separation and breakdown. He finds evidence of this to be most prevalent in art, love poetry and religious writings.

Wright sees the poet as someone who 'struggles through his art to make good an earlier maternal deficit' (2009: 186) by mastering poetic language and creating his own containing forms and attuning others. Like Winnicott's child, the poet is heir to the adaptive mother and elaborates analogical maternal structures whose sensory semblances evoke the needed experience of the breast and early maternal mirroring. Poets keep alive the maternal function and continually return to and modify the early mother's responsive 'holding' forms in order to evoke the mother's initial life-enhancing recognition and to create, transform and look after the self the way the mother did.⁴⁷ Wright adds: 'it is surely [the poet's] own unspoken, unreflected self that turns in silent supplication to the poet-mother (also part of himself) for redemption' (171). In Wright's view, the longing of love apparent in poetry revitalises the imagery from a pre-verbal, long-forgotten past 'when the mother's face filled the child's world with radiance and adoration' (1991: 17). The sacred, almost numinous, quality of a loved object's face, whether it be of a loved one, the art object or the Virgin Mary is due to the intuition of pre-verbal experience with the mother. Considering the heightened significance of the face paradigm in 'Ash-Wednesday', the mother's face would appear to be the trace at the centre of emotional development and transformation in the poem. It is the visual correlative in the poem mirroring the speaker's internal state in his quest for divine love.

⁴⁷ Wright cites Eliot, Rilke, Heaney, Proust and Wordsworth as examples. A famous literary instance of mother-child mirroring occurs in book 2 of Wordsworth's *Preludes*:

Blest the infant Babe,
 (For with my best conjecture I would trace
 Our Being's earthly progress), blest the Babe,
 Nursed in his Mother's arms, who sinks to sleep
 Rocked on his Mother's breast; who with his soul
 Drinks in the feelings of his Mother's eye!
 (*Prel.* 2.233-38)

In Winnicottian terms, the renunciation of the ‘face’ in part I marks disengagement from the maternal object, the ‘good-enough mother’ who is the one to first reflect back to us our ‘true self’.⁴⁸ Hereon, we may say that a maternal deficit ensues from the speaker’s pronouncement. In part III the face as object of recognition subsequently becomes an ambivalent object: ‘Struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears / The deceitful face of hope and of despair’ (100-01). On ascent of the purgatorial stairs the speaker finds himself alone: ‘There were no more faces and the stair was dark’ (104). In spiritual movement up the spiral staircase towards the Heavenly Father he now battles the ‘Distraction’ of the sensual (114). It is apparent in part III that the autoeroticism stimulated by the phallic mother still menaces and persecutes the ego, frustrating separation.⁴⁹ ‘At the first turning of the third stair’ (96) an alluring pastoral scene preoccupies the speaker’s gaze through ‘a slotted window bellied like the fig’s fruit’ (108). As well as being affiliated with female genitalia, the fig bears obvious associations with Adam and Eve and their transgression in the Garden of Eden.⁵⁰ Hence, part III implies that attraction to the maternal vagina as a repository of desire obstructs male ascension and identification with the Father. Without the support and mediation of the face as a maternal form, the active desire and pre-verbal memory that the vagina and its sexual function arouse threaten to sway the penitent from his redemptive path.⁵¹ Accordingly, in the attempt to continue up the purgatorial stairs to assume the necessary ‘third term’ (the paternal phallus) the speaker petitions the Father for ‘strength’ (115): ‘Lord, I am not worthy / but speak the word only’ (118-19). In this utterance, there is expression of a wish for organisation along more paternal lines: that is, for atonement and subservience to the Father in order to move from *Eros* to *Agape*, from the pre-Oedipal to the Oedipal, from non-

⁴⁸ For Winnicott’s explanation of ‘True Self’ and ‘False Self’, the ‘good-enough’ and ‘not good enough’ mother, see chapter 1, n. 93.

⁴⁹ In psychoanalysis, the ‘phallic mother’ refers to the mother who is thought by the child to possess the phallus. She is a powerful fantasmatic figure who arouses deep feelings of ambivalence. Marcia Ian describes her as offering ‘the simultaneous resonances of being and having as a fantasy of continuity, the satisfaction of hungers not yet felt, the fulfilment of desires prior even to their failure to appear’ (8).

⁵⁰ D. H. Lawrence suggests an explanation for Eliot’s fig simile in his own poem ‘Figs’ (1923):

The Italians vulgarly say, it stands for the female part; the
fig-fruit:
The fissure, the yoni,
The wonderful moist conductivity towards the centre. (1986: 18)

⁵¹ Steve Clark (1994: 208) notes the *vagina dentata* image in part III that accompanies the absence of the face: ‘There were no more faces and the stair was dark, / Damp, ragged, like an old man’s mouth drivelling, beyond repair, / Or the toothed gullet of an aged shark’ (104-06).

differentiation to separateness from the earthly mother through a tertiary logic.⁵² However, the reappearance of the lady in ‘white light folded’ in part IV reiterates the importance of vision and the ‘face’ in providing a maternal holding environment and form that mediates separation from the mother and advancement to the Father. Here, we may note a relation between Campbell’s idea of maternal form, the phallus and the establishment of a more loving paternal ‘third’ that is referred to but not discussed fully in Campbell’s work.⁵³ For Campbell, maternal form has ‘an allegiance to the real of the mother’s body’, but also ‘links up with what we call the phallic desire that travels beyond the mother to the cultural world’ (2013: 3). Parts III and IV of ‘Ash-Wednesday’ corroborate this postulation. These parts suggest that the face as a prominent maternal form both retains connection to the sacred real while also linking to or bringing forth the paternal symbolic function, thus negotiating the stand-off between the maternal body and the phallus.⁵⁴ Explained in the introduction to this chapter, Campbell’s idea of maternal form and Kristeva’s semiotic are not immediately compatible models. However, ‘Ash-Wednesday’ suggests that reconciliation between a loving Father God and phallic law is enabled by maternal form, and the ‘face’ especially. In this way, the poem indicates a meeting ground between Campbell’s and Kristeva’s work on the maternal.

As chapter 2 shows, Eliot’s mother Charlotte was dying while he was composing ‘Ash-Wednesday’. An essential distance was to occur between mother and son. In the 1928 typescript of the poem written prior to Charlotte’s death the ‘blessed face’ and the ‘blessed voice’ of the mother figure renounced in part I is venerated in her return in part IV:⁵⁵

⁵² Wright (1991) argues that it is the place of the father to definitively establish the third position which guarantees the space for thought and representation; a space which opens up within the previously undifferentiated unity of the mother-child dyad. Symbol formation, intersubjectivity and communication are related to object loss and separation from the mother. According to Wright, it is the visual faculty which encourages separation through the appreciation of distance. The gradual pre-eminence to the child of the visual over carnal knowledge allows organisation of the world and its objects within a synchronic space. Through vision a gap is opened up in relation to the object within which the image of the object can be held, but not possessed. Vision demarcates boundaries and develops a forbidden distance between self and other, child and mother.

⁵³ Campbell’s *Freudian Passions* (2013) is primarily about maternal form in relation to the mother. However, she states: ‘the Oedipal complex explains how we identify with and desire *both* parents, and it is this sameness and difference that makes out mothers and fathers into “alive” genres, where we can re-find our first loves and yet fashion them differently, again and again’ (2013: 3, my emphasis).

⁵⁴ Campbell’s work on maternal form tries to de-emphasise reliance on the phallus as the ‘third’ term. For Campbell, in contrast with Kristeva, the phallus is a violent repression of the link to the maternal body that is unnecessary in bringing the child out of the psychotic relationship with the mother. Instead, she posits maternal form as a telepathic means of working through repression. Maternal form unconsciously translates and communicates passion through a restrictive Lacanian Symbolic, maintaining rather than completely severing the relation to the maternal body. Eliot’s writings suggest that maternal form has a crucial role in both moving the child into the symbolic and apprehending the divine.

⁵⁵ Unlike the 1930 text, there is no grave accent over the letter ‘è’ in ‘blessed face’ and ‘blessed voice’ in the 1928 typescript of part IV of ‘Ash-Wednesday’.

White light folded, sheathed about her, folding the flame and green
Clothes that now clothe her, while the flowers rejoice
In the blessed face
And the blessed voice
Of one who has heard the unheard, seen the unseen.
Desire chills, and the hidden thoughts outrace
The way of penance to the means of grace.

Poi s'ascose nel foco and
After this our exile (*HB*, V/6A/6)

Also mentioned in chapter 2, the presence and ellipsis of Arnaut Daniel's lines from the *Purgatorio* (Poi s'ascose nel foco') suggest that—as in part III—carnal sexuality and desire remain to obstruct salvation in part IV of the typescript. In contrast, in the final 1930 text redemption has taken place in contemplation of the mother's dead body through the vision of the allegorical *high dream*—what I term maternal allegory. In the mother's absence the speaker has had to 'construct something / Upon which to rejoice' (24-25). Thus in part IV in the 1930 text we appear to have the creation of a maternally adapted object to compensate for maternal deficit:

White light folded, sheathing about her, folded.
The new years walk, restoring
Through a bright cloud of tears, the years, restoring
With a new verse the ancient rhyme. Redeem
The time. Redeem (134-38)

Inspired by Dante's vision of Beatrice in *Purgatorio* (canto 30), Eliot's own sacred maternal figure in 'White light folded' functions in this scene as 'a complex derivative of the face' (Winnicott, 2005: 158). She is a kind of surrogate mother providing visual illusion of the mother's presence and responses in her absence. As the child first gazes upon the life-giving

mother, Eliot's Beatrice emerges radiant 'Through a bright cloud of tears' (136).⁵⁶ Here, the sensations Eliot's woman in 'white' stimulates appear analogous to the reverie a child first feels upon early vision of the mother and her face.⁵⁷ Owing to poetic mimesis of the resonant non-verbal forms associated with pre-verbal mother-child relatedness, the rapture of the experience with the early mother is 'held' in the mind in symbolic form (Wright, 2009: 20). Despite the mother's loss, the capacity to symbolically recreate the mother's form has allowed the speaker to remain 'in touch' (21) with the thoughts and feelings first associated with her. Continuity with the mother has been maintained rather than relinquished and the self remains subjectively supported and realised in the mother's view. Moreover, such symbolisation has aided the speaker's movement in the poem from personal desire to ideal aspiration, giving the feeling of omnipotent agency. It is the poet's creative restoration of the maternal face and the experience of maternal 'holding' in this scene in part IV that bridges the trauma of separation evident in 'Ash-Wednesday'. By bringing the mother back in a transformed and enlivening way through aesthetic form the mother can now be let go. To use Kristeva's words, in 'death's very site' we have the implementation of maternal love as a veil over death by way of establishment of the female divine (1987b: 253). This vision is a recollection which tells 'of the primal shelter that ensured the survival of the newborn'. It is a 'sublimated celebration of incest' and, as a result, satisfies the unconscious needs of primary narcissism. It is in the speaker's imagining reunion with the mother in part IV that the real loss of the mother is made bearable. And it is this vision that engenders maternal allegory in the subsequent image of the gilded hearse.

Wright notes how 'holding precedes understanding in both development and analysis' (2009: 37). Thus, it seems significant that following the 'holding' scene (the vision of the

⁵⁶ Kristeva explains in 'Stabat Mater' (1987b) how 'milk and tears' are the privileged signs of the *Mater Dolorosa* (250). Tears are 'metaphors of non-speech', semiotic. They speak of an awakened narcissism outside of the Law, predating the Law. Where the 'Lady' in 'Ash-Wednesday' restores the speaker 'Through a bright cloud of tears', Beatrice appears to Dante in the *Purgatorio* from amidst another maternal form: 'within a cloud of flowers . . . clothed in the colour of flame' (*Purg.* 30.28-32). Dominic Mangienello sees the image of the 'Lady' in part IV as 'an image that condenses the cloud of flowers, through which Beatrice first appears, with Dante's subsequent weeping' (78).

⁵⁷ Dante makes this explicit comparison in the comparable scene from *Purgatorio* (canto 30):

Without knowing her any more, with my eyes,
 But through the secret virtue which went out from her,
 Felt the great power of the ancient love.
 The moment that, as I looked, I was struck
 By the high virtue which had already stabbed me
 Before I was out of my boyhood (*Purg.* 30.37-42)

Lady in 'white light folded'), Eliot's 'silent sister' reappears 'veiled in white and blue' to deny the speaker vision of her face:

The silent sister veiled in white and blue
Between the yews, behind the garden god,
Whose flute is breathless, bent her head and signed but spoke no
word (141-43)

Winnicott's idea of 'graduated maternal failure' or 'gradual disillusionment' is relevant to this vignette (2005: 152). Situated 'Between the yews', a separation between the mother figure and the speaker has occurred since the preceding image of symbiosis marked by the vision of the maternal figure sheathed in 'white light'. In comparison, the silent-sister's non-verbal and less well adapted responses (her bowed head, veiled face, lack of voice) indicate a relative failure. This is a moment of recognition of distance and rupture, and correlates with the emotional, physical and visual loss of the real of the mother's body that Eliot experienced in 1929. Yet, this separation is understood in positive terms as also having a liberating effect upon the speaker and is compatible with the Church's function in reinvigorating his potency and poetry: 'But the fountain sprang up and the bird sang down / Redeem the time, redeem the dream / The token of the word unheard, unspoken' (144-46). Winnicott states in 'The Location of Cultural Experience' (1967) how graduation from the mother is necessary for ongoing self-development, consciousness and individuation.⁵⁸ The denial of the face by the 'silent sister' in part IV withdraws maternal environmental provision. As in Bellini's paintings, this may reflect early experience of maternal ambivalence, a relative deficiency in mirroring or attunement or indeed the actual loss of the mother. Whatever the significance, this denial as a 'point of separation' inaugurates a 'potential space' (Winnicott, 2005: 100) for experiencing between mother and child, self and other, that encourages a differentiated twoness (it is no coincidence that the word *between* first arises in part IV, and is subsequently mentioned twelve times in the rest of the poem).⁵⁹ There is recognition of maternal

⁵⁸ See D. W. Winnicott, 'The Location of Cultural Experience' (1967; rpt. 2005: 368-72).

⁵⁹ Winnicott's notion of 'potential space' is set out in his paper 'The Place Where We Live' (1971; rpt. 2005: 140-48). Winnicott calls 'potential space' the 'third area' (144). It is the 'hypothetical area that exists (but cannot exist) between the baby and the object (mother or part of the mother) during the phase of repudiation of the object as not-me, that is, at the end of being merged in with the object'. It is the space between mother and child where creative playing takes place and indicates the child's 'separating out the mother from the self', the beginnings of recognising the mother to be a 'separate phenomenon' (145), as well as the avoidance of separation. For Winnicott, the child's need for 'potential space' begins soon after birth and only with trust in the mother can 'potential space' start to occur for the child. There is no true separation between mother and child but only 'a threat of separation'. He states, this is the paradox that 'must be tolerated'.

subjectivity through realisation of the mother as a separate object 'out there'. In other words, there is apparent acceptance of difference through acknowledgement of the mother as, to use Campbell's terms, a 'sexual and desiring, leaving being' (2013: 22). This separation is represented as the Fall or exile in the poem, 'And after this our exile' (148), with the Church replacing the mother's function.

Part V of 'Ash-Wednesday' states 'No place of grace for those who avoid the face' (166). In this section the speaker comes face-to-face with the mother's face via creation of a maternally adapted object which allows the face to be kept in sight despite its ordinary loss. A less threatening, less psychotic identification takes place that preserves the structure of separateness from, and non-possession of, the real mother. It is this new 'face' (a semblance of the mother) that is recognised as promoting faith and toleration of separation and, as a consequence, a new Oedipal organisation which supersedes the old through triangulation of experience (mother-father-child), that is, by attaining the ability to see from an objective paternal third position:

Will the veiled sister pray for
Those who walk in darkness, who chose thee and oppose thee,
Those who are torn on the horn between season and season, time and
time, between
Hour and hour, word and word, power and power, those who wait
In darkness? Will the veiled sister pray
For children at the gate
Who will not go away and cannot pray:
Pray for those who chose and oppose

O my people, what have I done unto thee.

Will the veiled sister between the slender
Yew trees pray for those who offend her
And are terrified and cannot surrender
And affirm before the world and deny between the rocks
In the last desert between the last blue rocks
The desert in the garden the garden in the desert
Of drouth, spitting from the mouth the withered apple-seed.

O my people. (168-84)

Here, 'Ash-Wednesday' again evinces a relation between Campbell's idea of maternal form, the appearance of maternal allegory—'the Word unheard' (152)—and the introduction of the paternal 'third'. Part V indicates a flowing, continuous, mediated movement of desire to and from the mother to the father, the body to language, carried by a maternal poetics. It suggests that it is in face-to-face identification with the maternal, with a 'face' that evokes the early world of the child in which the mother's face played a central supportive role, that the self can move forward and also progress toward the divine. Wright asserts 'the deepest roots of religion lie in the pre-verbal core of the self' (2009: 167). The mother's face is the primary form through which 'deep calls unto deep' (71). In support of Wright's claim, 'Ash-Wednesday' attests the maternal face as lying at the very heart of the sacred. As Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians: 'For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known' (1 *Cor.* 14:12).

Semiotic Rhythm and the Maternal Body

In a letter to Walter de la Mare of 18 October 1929, Eliot reveals that the six poems making up 'Ash-Wednesday' were originally given the title 'Ash-Wednesday Music' (*LTSE4*, 648). De la Mare told Eliot in response that although he felt the title 'not exactly right' he enjoyed the 'covert poetic nuance between Ash and music', finding it 'pregnant and arresting'. Eliot's original title suggests that when constructing the poem he expressly intended to give it a musical element and a focus on rhythm. Certainly, Eliot was highly aware of the subtle power of rhythm and music in poetry and drama. To give a few examples, he states in 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry' (1928):

the human soul, in intense emotion, strives to express itself in verse. It is not for me, but for the neurologists, to discover why this is so, and why and how feeling and rhythm are related . . . if we want to get at the permanent and universal we tend to express ourselves in verse. (*SE*, 46)

He adds in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933):

what I call the ‘auditory imagination’ is the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end.
(*UPUC*, 118-19)

And in the same book he surmises:

poetry begins, I dare say, with a savage beating a drum in a jungle, and it retains that essential of percussion and rhythm; hyperbolically one might say that the poet is *older* than other human beings . . . It may make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate, for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves, and an evasion of the visible and sensible world. (148, emphasis in original)

In these passages, Eliot relates rhythm in poetic verse to the need to express the most ‘permanent and universal’ of human feelings. He proposes that emotionally-induced, often unconscious, primary psychic and somatic forms of movement and energy are responsible for initiating the beginnings of poetic construction, and are subsequently translated into musical rhythms within that construction. Furthermore, in Eliot’s use of the word ‘primitive’ he suggests not only the rudimentary rhythms and beginnings of aboriginal music-making, but also the archaic experience and non-verbal forms, rhythms and sensations that the primitive mind of the child registers in early intimate relationship with the mother. Eliot privileges poets for their intuitive ability to articulate the universal rhythms synonymous with the embryonic stages of all human development, throughout history. For this reason, he regards poets as ‘*older* than other human beings’.

Eliot’s notion of the ‘auditory imagination’—and his describing of its ability to invigorate every word and sink to the ‘most primitive and forgotten’—shows similarity with Kristeva’s concept of the maternal semiotic *chora*. Dominated by primary processes the *chora* is the first world that the child is immersed in. It is ‘indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine’ (1984: 29). Moreover, it is ‘rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgement, but restrained by a single guarantee:

syntax'. The *chora* is rhythm. It is protean, heterogeneous and ultimately the most primitive and ineffable level of ordering in the psyche. In Kristeva's view, as the child gets older, separates from the mother and acquires language the semiotic remains a constant companion to the symbolic, energising it and giving it meaning and affect by the motility of its drives and charges moving through rhythmic space. Hence, for Kristeva, the music of poetry is the articulation of the maternal *chora* in language. In Eliot's idea of the 'auditory imagination' there is an analogy to Kristeva's later conceived semiotic as that which invigorates the words of poetry. When Eliot speaks of 'returning to the origin' through rhythm to bring something back, of 'seeking the beginning and the end', he appears to be speaking of something like the *chora*; that through which all poetic discourse moves and depends upon but which refuses axiomatic form. Eliot indicates that through rhythm 'something' of the maternal *chora* is brought back in poetry through what Kristeva calls the 'second-degree thetic' (50), suggesting both the 'beginning and end' that Eliot so often sought and wrote about.⁶⁰

For both Eliot and Kristeva, 'deeper, unnamed feelings' and meanings emerge through rhythm and its organisation in poetry. Eliot reiterates in 'The Music of Poetry' (1942) the ability of poetic rhythm to penetrate unconscious memory. He states that it can traverse the 'frontiers of consciousness' and communicate the most primitive, pre-logical experiences and primary processes related to the deeper non-verbal levels of the psyche 'beyond which words fail' (31). Music and rhythm in poetry can also translate a meaning 'different from what the author thought he meant'. Consequently, Eliot states 'there may be much more in a poem than the author was aware of'. As in Dante's *Commedia*, through the germ of its inception and depths of its incantation, rhythm and its secondary stimulation of the unconscious mind can 'communicate before it is understood' the most spiritual and essential of psychic and biological experiences (*SE*, 200): that is, the pre-linguistic rhythmic modalities, drives and material reality of the maternal body experienced by the child. Through poetic rhythm there is the chance of anamnesis back to the most distant memories, sensations, drives and affects of childhood, back even to what Freud calls the 'dream's navel' (2001d: 525).

In an early commentary on 'Ash-Wednesday', F. R. Leavis (1932) describes the repetitive incantatory rhythms of the opening lines of part I as 'having certain qualities of ritual' (1960: 89): 'Because I do not hope to turn again / Because I do not hope / Because I do not hope to turn' (1-3). For Leavis, these lines are in stark contrast to Eliot's Ariel poems of the period which he states 'suggest marvellously the failure of rhythm' (88). On the contrary,

⁶⁰ The 'beginning-end' motif recurrent throughout Eliot's work is most prominent in *Four Quartets* (1943).

they are ‘much more nerved and positive’, producing ‘in a high degree the frame-effect, establishing apart from the world a special order of experience, dedicated to spiritual exercises’ (89). Various other ritualistic phrases from Christian liturgy occur in ‘Ash-Wednesday’, such as the repetition of the end of the *Salve Regina* at the end of part I: ‘Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death / Pray for us now and at the hour of our death’ (40-41). A repetition of the words from the invitation to Communion is taken from the Catholic mass at the end of part III: ‘Lord, I am not worthy / Lord, I am not worthy / but speak the word only’ (117-19). And finally, as discussed in chapter 2, there are the lines from the *Anima Christi* that close part VI with a primal cry that addresses in ritual the divine source of life, the holy mother:

Sister, mother
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,
Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee. (216-19)

The connection between rhythm, liturgical rites and the spiritual in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ indicates an aspiration to articulate the most primitive and sacred real. In other words, the repetitive rhythm of incantation in the poem compels a desire to return to an instant of firstness so that the most rudimentary of beginnings and ends may be felt and expressed. In part II the sacred real is shown to be associated with the real of the maternal body when through the measured, regular cadences of control and pure stress the speaker is granted entrance into the Lady’s ‘Garden’:

Lady of silences
Calm and distressed
Torn and most whole
Rose of memory
Rose of forgetfulness
Exhausted and life-giving
Worried reposeful
The single Rose
Is now the Garden
Where all loves end

Terminate torment
Of love unsatisfied
The greater torment
Of love satisfied
End of the endless
Journey to no end
Conclusion of all that
Is inconclusible
Speech without word and
Word of no speech
Grace to the Mother
For the Garden
Where all love ends.

In the simplicity of this stanza there is a disabling of syntax which privileges the motor of rhythm. As a consequence, the simple stresses move with a serene air of grace and strength to the primitive depths of the maternal body in the final spondaic line, 'Where all love ends' (88), before falling into the silence (abyss, caesura) which the 'Lady' represents: 'Word of no speech' (85). Despite the spiritual significance of this vision, there is a swaying modulation to the rhythm in this section: 'Calm and distressed / Torn and most whole' (67-68). The rhythms, strong stress, metrical regularity, simplified diction and alliteration ('Terminate torment') resembles, to a certain extent, the accentual measures of a nursery rhyme or lullaby as well as alliterative medieval verse and prayer. For example, compare the opening to the 'Lady of Silences' section with the traditional nursery rhyme 'Solomon Grundy':⁶¹

Solomon Grundy,
Born on a Monday,
Christened on Tuesday,
Married on Wednesday,
Took ill on Thursday,

⁶¹ The nursery rhyme is used elsewhere in Eliot's works. Towards the end of 'What the Thunder Said' in *The Waste Land* the nursery rhyme words 'London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down' precede Arnaut Daniel's lines from Dante's *Purgatorio*, 'Poi s'ascose nel focoche gli affina' (*WL*, 427-28). In addition, a parody of the nursery rhyme 'Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush' both begins and ends part V of 'The Hollow Men': 'Here we go round the prickly pear', 'This is the way the world ends' (*CPP*, 85-86).

Grew worse on Friday,
Died on Saturday,
Buried on Sunday.
That was the end of,
Solomon Grundy.⁶²

Our first encounter with poetry usually comes in the form of the nursery rhyme, a lullaby or primitive song, and the mother is most often the first and most frequent person to take upon the role of narrator while cradling and rocking the child in her arms. For Wilfrid Bion ‘nursery rhymes express the primitive vitality’ (Symington and Symington 183). When we hear them they strike an ‘archaic chord’ and have the ability to penetrate the barriers that act as obscuring screens over primitive meaning. Hence, Eliot’s instinctual sense and use of rhythm in this section of part II plays out as a supportive counterpart to a regressive fantasy of primary narcissism. Mimicking the rhythms and ideal nature of the early mother-child dyad, its gentle two-stress pulsation acts as a mnemonic aid that returns the speaker (and also possibly the reader) to the most primitive memory before and beyond the human ego—towards what Campbell calls the ‘virtual non-psychological unconscious’ (2013: 77).⁶³ As Kristeva states in ‘Stabat Mater’: ‘Mamma: anamnesis’ (1987b: 240). In re-creation of the early mother’s rhythms and form there is a release and translation of previously paralysed passions related to the maternal body. A mix of memory and perception has taken place in the act of imagination at an unconscious level precipitated by—and precipitating—non-discursive rhythm.⁶⁴ Here, Eliot is conducting a melody based upon an early unconscious reading of the

⁶² Opie and Opie 467-69.

⁶³ Campbell describes the ‘virtual non-psychological unconscious’ as the child’s early telepathic dreamreading of the mother as a non-psychological object (2013: 75).

⁶⁴ The word ‘rhythm’ derives from the Greek word *rhein* which means ‘to flow’. Ellen Dissanayake describes rhythm as associated with ‘mutuality—the sharing of emotional states in patterned sequences with others’ (7). Dissanayake highlights infants, in particular, as being supremely sensitive to rhythm and to the mothers that spontaneously produce rhythm for their young; whether through sounds, song, voice, the movement of rocking, the beat of the mother’s heart or the rhythm of her breath. In her view, such rhythms and modes are characteristic not only of mother-child intimacy but also of ritual ceremonies. She proposes that ceremonial rituals—whose basis is rooted in salient stimuli such as repetition, accentuation, orderliness and organisation—derive from inborn rhythmic-modal capacities used in moments of conscious and unconscious attunement between mother and child. For Dissanayake, rhythm in ritual works by replicating the elements of mother-child engagement, reinforcing memory, conscious and unconscious organisation and guiding emotions. It is a non-verbal form whose analogical facility provides an instinctive way of knowing the archaic mother of our pre-linguistic, pre-Oedipal, prehistoric past. At a deeper level, rhythm echoes and imprints traces from the *prima materia* of our biological origins. It is a part of the maternal aesthetic (along with colour, gesture, tone and facial expression) whose semiotic disposition unconsciously speaks the primal, telepathic bond between mother and child. Thus, rhythm has the recuperative force of reinstating the repressed maternal within masculine symbolic structures as well as moving the child towards culture and sociality.

mother's bodily form (the 'Garden'). The memory and passion originally moved and created by the affectual vocal and bodily rhythms of the mother and her environment are brought to life by an intuitive poetic rhythm which silently speaks the mother's love:

Speech without word and
Word of no speech
Grace to the Mother
For the Garden
Where all love ends. (84-88)

Mentioned in chapter 2, Leavell argues that ritualistic rhythm in 'Ash-Wednesday' goes beyond the acknowledged sources from Anglo-Catholic liturgy. In her interpretation, the rhythms of 'Ash-Wednesday' carry to its end a performance of childbirth. Leavell equates the 'spirit of the sea' (217) with the mother's womb and the amniotic fluid from which the child is separated at birth. Moreover, she regards the 'cry' at the end of the poem to be not a prayer to the Father but a 'primal sign from a baby to its mother' (Olney 151). In support of Leavell's reading, Eliot discusses in the final paragraph of 'The Music of Poetry' (1942) the conception, gestation and completion of a poem in the language of pregnancy and childbirth, stating

I know that a poem, or a passage of a poem, may tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches its expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image; and I do not believe that this is an experience peculiar to myself. The use of recurrent themes is as natural to poetry as to music. (*OPP*, 38)

Eliot retains this equivalence between poetic creation, pregnancy and birth in 'The Three Voices of Poetry' (1953) in which he states the need of the poet who is 'oppressed by a burden' to bring it to 'birth in order to obtain relief' (*OPP*, 98). Only in doing this can he gain respite from 'acute discomfort'. Eliot continues this analogy with the language of maternity describing how by the end of the whole process of giving birth to the poem the poet will experience 'a moment of exhaustion, of appeasement, of absolution, and of something very near annihilation' (99). He adds that the poem is then ready to be given over to an unknown audience completing 'the consummation of the process begun in solitude'. Succeeding this,

the poem—like the child—begins its ‘long process of gestation . . . because it marks the final separation of the poem from the author’. After the poet-mother’s prolonged labour and delivery, Eliot requests ‘let the author, at this point, rest in peace’ (100).

Through maternal identification and mimicry of maternal rhythms in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ Eliot simultaneously murders and gives birth to a new mother, a new poem and a new self. The mother undergoes symbolic sacrifice in part IV (as well as death in real life) and is recreated for the self in an allegorical instant. Like the flower, both Eliot and his mother are reincarnated in body/text in this *Aufhebung*.⁶⁵ Through poetic imitation of the jubilant semiotic rhythms of the life cycle and the maternal body (birth, sex, death), Eliot has become mother-child. Kristeva states that in the crack of the symbolic surface created by semiotic violence ‘the shadow of the travestied mother’ appears (1980: 194). In psychotic identification with the pre-Oedipal mother and her forms the speaker in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ inscribes an incestuous fantasy of consummation guided by maternal rhythm. Indeed, in part VI the body/text is noticeably pregnant: ‘This is the time of tension between dying and birth / The place of solitude where three dreams cross / Between blue rocks’ (204-06). And by the end of the poem the speaker has given birth to himself. He is Dionysius ‘born a second time for having had the mother’ (Kristeva, 1980: 192): ‘Suffer me not to be separated / And let my cry come unto’ (‘A-W’, 218-19). As Kristeva states, ‘know the mother, first take her place . . . go beyond her’ (1980: 191). Like Eliot, Kristeva highlights childbirth and maternity as suitable metaphors for both the contradictory alternation of semiotic and symbolic in poetic creation and the appropriation of the maternal by male avant-garde poets. She notes the exclamation of Mallarmé at the birth of his daughter Genevieve, ‘I *am* the father of my imaginative creations’, and Artaud’s claim in his poem *Ci- Gît* (1948): ‘I am my father, my mother, my son, and me’ (qtd. in Kristeva, 1980: 139, emphasis in original). Similarly, at the end of ‘Ash-Wednesday’ we witness transvestism of the male poet who gives birth to a new self through the silent birthing support of the ‘Sister, mother’ (216) and the legislation of the Name of the Father: ‘Our peace in His will’ (214). In the works of avant-garde poets enthralled by archaic mothers such as Mallarmé and Joyce there is utilisation of the semiotic and a whole primitive libidinal apparatus which emphasises the subject’s heterogeneity and exposes the repressed ground of the symbolic. In ‘Ash-Wednesday’, like Mallarmé and Joyce,

⁶⁵ The German word *Aufhebung* can mean both ‘to annul’ and ‘to preserve’. Freud takes the term from Hegel and uses it in his paper ‘Negation’ (1925) to describe the simultaneous ‘lifting [*Aufhebung*]’ and maintenance of repression (2001k: 236). For Freud, negation entails recognition of the unconscious in a negative formula and the movement from the pleasure to the reality principle. He states: ‘the outcome of [negation] is a kind of intellectual acceptance of the repressed, while at the same time what is essential to the repression persists’.

Eliot engenders all roles. He is 'mother' (216), 'father' (191), 'sister' (168) and son, releasing the unconscious multiplicity and *jouissance* interior to the poet and language.⁶⁶ In this, he reveals the alterity within body/text, the scission in the subject and also suggests a fundamental relation between poetic language, the maternal, the paternal and the sacred real.

'Ash-Wednesday' evokes through its rhythms and ritual a semiotic language characterised by repetition and alliteration which, on occasion, disrupts syntactic linearity and intimates symbolic destruction and renewal in the poem. In these moments there appears a 'surge of instinctual drive', a repetitive impulsive breathlessness whereby logical discourse and syntax is unsettled by semiotic motility and language falls into visionary allegorical breaks ('maternal allegory') that are conveyed by primary non-verbal processes and maternal/semiotic forms (sound, rhythm, colour, vision) and which point beyond meaning and signification. For instance, the lines previously discussed at the end of part I precede the allegorical vision of the 'Lady' and the 'white leopards' at the beginning of part II: 'Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death / Pray for us now and at the hour of our death' (40-41). Also, the end of part III, 'Lord, I am not worthy / Lord, I am not worthy / but speak the word only' (117-19) is followed by the vision of the woman between the violets and the allegorical *high dream* in part IV. These repeated moments of liturgy replicate the echolalia of not only the obsessive-compulsive but also the child learning to speak. From these recitations, sense dissolves into sound therefore anticipating 'the eruption of the buried object' in parts II and IV. With this, the 'I' who speaks in 'Ash-Wednesday' emerges (I), dissipates (II, IV), and re-emerges (III, VI) at various points as rhythm touches upon primal repression: the setting of the loss of the irrecoverable mother where she is constituted again in parts II and IV as a new object through affective hallucination. That is to say, rhythm in 'Ash-Wednesday' facilitates 'projective actualisation' of the fantasy of the primal scene (Green, 1997: 159).⁶⁷ Rhythm has mobilised and reanimated the connection back to the pre-Oedipal maternal body.

⁶⁶ This engendering of all roles in poetry is spoken of in greater detail in chapter 4 in relation to 'Marina' and the poetic return to a pre-Oedipal position of 'overinclusiveness' through the elaboration of maternal form.

⁶⁷ Andre Green states in 'The Dead Mother' (1997: 142-73):

every resurgence of this fantasy [of the primal scene], constitutes a projective actualisation, the projection aiming to assuage the narcissistic wound. By actualised projection I designate a process through which the projection not only rids the subject of his inner tensions by projecting them onto the object, but constitutes a *revivifying* and not a *reminiscence*, an *actual* traumatic and dramatic repetition. . . . instead of his rival being the object who had captivated the dead mother in her experience of bereavement, on the contrary, he becomes the third party who shows himself apt, against all expectation, to return her to life and give her the pleasure of orgasm. (159, emphasis in original)

Thus, there is in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ alternation in maternal form, the semiotic and symbolic disposition. Kristeva calls the semiotic in language the genotext, whereas the symbolic—which represents syntax, semantics and the signifying process—she calls the phenotext. The genotext, she states, includes ‘semiotic processes but also the advent of the symbolic’ (1984: 86). It includes ‘drives, their disposition, and their division of the body, plus the ecological and social system surrounding the body, such as objects and pre-Oedipal relations with parents’. On the contrary, the phenotext denotes language ‘that serves to communicate, which linguistics describe in terms of “competence” and “performance”’. According to Kristeva, all texts are an admixture of semiotic-genotext and symbolic-phenotext and nowhere is this dual nature more evident than in the works of male avant-garde writers. Similarly, Eliot’s construction of the mother in representation is achieved in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ through varying dialogue between these modalities. We may say that part I of ‘Ash-Wednesday’ is largely symbolic—phenotext and paternal. That is, largely conscious and communicative as shown in the speaker’s incantations. In contrast, the overdetermined, allegorical passages in parts II and IV dominated by primary processes (rhythm, colour, vision, echolalia, music and repetition) can be viewed as maternal/semiotic-genotext. They indicate maternal germination: the return of the repressed and the non-repressed in poetic language. In these parts of ‘Ash-Wednesday’ a maternal intertext noticeably penetrates paternal structure driven through rhythmic invocation. In the aforementioned moments, jubilation is expressed by the speaker in his being ‘united’ (92) with the body/text of the undifferentiated mother: ‘And because of her loveliness . . . We shine with brightness’ (50-52). Here, there is recovery of the child’s early experience of maternal holding and transverbal communication: a refinding and re-exploration of the unconscious passions experienced in mother love. This union cannot be maintained by the speaker-poet and separation ensues commencing a renewed struggle for and against the mother’s body. Significantly, it is only in a couple of revelatory instances of maternal allegory in parts II and IV where paradoxical union-separation from the mother occurs and is momentarily held in ‘tension’ (204).

To conclude, I have argued for and attempted to demonstrate through the work of Campbell, Wright and Kristeva a complex network of sensuous corresponding non-discursive, non-verbal and pre-verbal maternal/semiotic forms in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ (the garden and flowers, colour, vision and the mother’s face and rhythm). These poetic forms interlace and work through conscious and unconscious memory, perception and telepathy to move and translate repressed passions and redeem lost infantile memory. In their operations they pledge

allegiance and go back to the real of the mother's body and the child's early reception of the mother's gestures. Yet, at times, they also go on to combine with the father's language demonstrating fluid dialectical oscillation between semiotic-maternal and symbolic-paternal registers in the poem. This is a dynamic productive and poetic oscillation that meets and crosses thresholds, which moves passion, perception and unconscious memory backwards and forwards between past, present and future, between dreams and reality, the maternal and the paternal, body and language. Thus, 'Ash-Wednesday' connects Campbell's, Wright's and Kristeva's differing maternal models. It demonstrates Eliot's maternal poetics as partaking in both the Oedipal (the symbolic, the phallus and language) and the pre-Oedipal imaginary (the maternal, the semiotic *and* the real), in addition to mixing and facilitating movement between these modalities.⁶⁸ This is contrary to Eliot's works pre-1927 where binary categories appear to be in opposition and there is an attempted repression of the pre-Oedipal mother. 'Ash-Wednesday' testifies that it is through poetic rereading of the 'snapshots' of childhood memory, and the unconscious refinding and elaboration of the impersonal forms and rhythms first provided by the mother, that we can return to our deeper, more primary and virtual memories, perceptions and feelings—to the most personal, repressed and enigmatic parts of the self. Through a poetics of the maternal body we can move, express and translate our passions and, with this, open ourselves up to love, future becoming and to moments of the most profound and intimate illumination.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ As mentioned earlier, for Campbell the pre-Oedipal imaginary is not simply fantasmatic—as in Lacan and Kristeva. There is a relation to reality in the pre-Oedipal that works through telepathy. Eliot's maternal poetics therefore indicate not only a metaphoric relation to the maternal body but also a relation to the real.

⁶⁹ To speak in Laplanchean language, the maternal flowers, colours, face and rhythms of 'memory' and 'forgetfulness' selected to terrain the poem speak of 'the beginning of sublimation' that constitutes and preserves 'the sharp goad of the enigma' (qtd. in Fletcher and Ray 96). They are signifiers whose sublimation is derived from the primal scene and primal repression and they lead—if tracked—towards the secrets of our desires, to the very site of primal seduction coextensive with unconscious communication of the enigma by the enigmatic adult other ('Speech without word and / Word of no speech') and to the truth of the presence of the other within the self. In other words, maternal form facilitates the 'opening of the dimension of alterity' (1999: 230). It confronts the reality of the (m)other and confirms the link to the (m)other through preservation of the essence of the (m)other's enigmatic messages. Further, maternal form reveals the sacred to be grounded in our earliest experience of the rhythms, colours, shapes and forms of the maternal aesthetic and the worldly material objects that make up this aesthetic. The force, rhythms and trajectory of maternal form is centripetal, coming from 'the enigma of the other' and the beginnings of unconscious life, and it is this status as primary sublimations of the enigma that arouses and seduces the poet or artist and inspires their repeated creation and investigation. Maternal forms are the primary aesthetic forms of our psychic life which our passions unconsciously return to and through for translation. They are the poetics of the maternal body which return us to the 'rose-garden' of our beginnings (*CPP*, 'Burnt Norton', 171).

4. RECOGNITION IN 'MARINA' AND 'CORIOLAN': *SEA-CHANGES* IN ELIOT'S THINKING ON THE MATERNAL FEMININE

(off Rogue Island)

What old forgotten images return

And form themselves around – O my daughter¹

Manuscript draft of 'Marina', Bodleian Library, University of Oxford

The loving mother is like the grace of God . . .

St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*

O mother

What shall I cry?

'Coriolan' (1931-32)

Eliot's Ariel poem, 'Marina' (*CPP*, 109-10)—a counterpart to 'Ash-Wednesday'—was written in July 1930 and published on 25 September 1930, almost a year after Charlotte Eliot's death.² It is a poem about wonder and illumination—'What seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands' (1)—buried childhood memory and its return from the unconscious—'Whispers and small laughter between leaves and hurrying feet' (20)—and separation and reunion. Most importantly, it is about recognition. In 'Marina' a voyager comes 'through the fog' (3) of repressed memory to land upon the edge of the lost granite shores of the New England suggested in part VI of 'Ash-Wednesday'. Awaiting the seafarer is the recovery of a vision of a lost woman and love—'What images return / O my daughter' (4-5)—whose serene face awakens personal phenomenological sensations related to distant and forgotten childhood experience: 'the scent of pine and the woodthrush singing through the fog' (3). For Helen Gardner, "'Marina'" embodies what "'Ash-Wednesday'" only hints at' (1969: 125-26). Indeed, in atmosphere, poetic form, theme and technique it can be viewed as the culmination of a pattern of development and experimentation traceable from 'The Hollow

¹ Manuscript and typescript drafts of 'Marina' are held in 'The Works of T. S. Eliot' collection at the Bodleian Library, Oxford University, Oxford (MS Don. c. 23/1-3). The cited draft is in Eliot's hand and is missing the epigraph from Seneca. All subsequent references to these drafts in the text are cited parenthetically *BL* with full call number, including folio (leaf) numbers.

² 'Marina', *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 109-10. All subsequent quotations of 'Marina' are from this edition with line number(s) in parenthesis.

Men' (1925) onwards. Regarding the presence of a sacred daughter figure in Eliot's works, the roots of 'Marina' are traceable even further back, beyond the 'Sister, mother' of 'Ash-Wednesday' to the earlier 'La Figlia Che Piange' (1916). Finally in 'Marina', as Lyndall Gordon states, 'grace comes to Eliot in a human form, no longer veiled, but close as family. A pulsing moment of approach gives way to a recognition of kinship' (1998: 241). Emerging from what Eliot called the 'supreme spiritual pressure', from the blind spots of consciousness arises a strange but familiar anima figure, Marina.³ Etymologically associated with the Virgin Mary as *Stella Maris* ('star of the sea'), Eliot's Marina comes to existence at the limits of the perceptible as a lost female remnant of the spiritual tautology. She is an internal other and opposite-complement whose hidden capacity has lain close to the speaker but has largely been unrecognised within the inscrutable self.⁴

Anthony Cuda views 'Marina' as 'an ideal vision, a telos of sorts' (2010: 63).⁵ The poem is the first *full* articulation of the recognition scene in Eliot's poetry, and is related to what Cuda calls the 'passion scene' (9-11): that is, a scene, image or trope recurrent and changing in a poet's work—apparently related to unconscious memory and desire—that typically portrays 'passive suffering, vulnerability, and powerlessness' (10) and which exerts an unusual and life-long force upon the poet's mind. The most memorable and recurrent 'passion scene' in Eliot's work may be found in 'La Figlia Che Piange' and the shock and sublimity of the recognition scene in the garden with the hyacinth girl. This particular 'passion scene' (which generally features an enigmatic female figure, primarily in a garden) moves, repeats and transforms in *The Waste Land*, 'Ash-Wednesday' and 'Marina', and takes more complex development in the later *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), 'Burnt Norton' (1936), *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Confidential Clerk* (1953) and *The Elder Statesman* (1958), indicating a creative struggle and development in artistic insight and agency. For Cuda, 'Marina' marks a pivotal point in Eliot's writings. It demonstrates a profound change in Eliot's understanding of psychological vulnerability: namely, in the realisation of the

³ Eliot refers to the 'supreme spiritual pressure' in his second 1918 review of 'Religion and Science: A Philosophical Essay, by John Theodore Merz' (*CPI*, 434-35). In this review, Eliot notes Merz's relating of religion in adult life to the formative early influence and 'spiritual pressure' of a mother on a baby as the 'first external object' that the baby apprehends. Carl Jung describes the anima as 'the feminine and chthonic part of the soul' (2015: 3567). She is an archetypal aspect of the contrasexual psyche and a personification of the male unconscious. For comment on Marina as a female anima figure, see Drew 159-63; Timmerman 145; and Manganiello 37.

⁴ According to the OED, *Stella Maris* is 'the title given to the Virgin Mary . . . used allusively of a protectress or a guiding spirit'.

⁵ Cuda's comments on recognition in 'Marina' are developed in the chapter 'Who Stood over Eliot's Shoulder? Passions of Recognition in His Later Work' (2010: 62-88).

mind's own limitations, structural incompleteness and radical dependence, and also in the awareness of the mind being constantly moved by unconscious passions and forces not subject to conscious control. Through recognition, Eliot rethinks instances of affective intensity and cognises the deficiencies of the mind in relation to its own self-knowledge and the multiple degrees of experience that it consciously and unconsciously perceives and registers. Cuda equates Eliot's poetry with an effort towards and a belief in the ability 'to reconcile, unify, or recapture' these blind-spots: the 'unconscious and the peripheral' (2010: 67). On occasion, this effort terminates in his works in a moment of 'sudden illumination'—as 'The Dry Salvages states' (*CPP*, 186), a fleeting scene in which a complex of emotional ambivalence is condensed. These privileged moments of rupture, discontinuity and enigmatic vision were investigated in chapter 2 as 'maternal allegory'. In chapter 3 I argued for maternal allegory as arising amidst and due to correspondences between sensuous maternal/semiotic forms derived from early childhood and unconscious reading of the mother: for instance, in 'The unread vision in the higher dream' in 'Ash-Wednesday'. Cuda labels the enigmatic and unconscious parts of the psyche that Eliot seeks to recover the 'soul' (2010: 64).

This chapter elaborates on Cuda's comments on recognition in 'Marina' to show its deeper personal implications as a moment of intellectual, emotional and spiritual discovery and understanding for the male subject. Further, in the case of Eliot, it suggests Cuda's 'passion scene'—as a scene of receptiveness, suffering and passivity—to be related to the primal scene of the pre-Oedipal mother-child encounter.⁶ First, the chapter re-examines the two recognition scenes in 'Marina' taken from Shakespeare's *Pericles* and Seneca's *Hercules Furens* to reveal a hidden maternal narrative playing alongside the poem's more open theme of paternity. Second, in like manner to my discussion of 'Ash-Wednesday' in chapter 3, I affirm the natural coastal sea and land setting of 'Marina' as related to not only Eliot's childhood memories of New England but also to earlier unconscious perception and memory of the mother. With regard to recognition of the maternal, I demonstrate how 'Marina' is in stark contrast to Eliot's works pre-1927. Utilising Luce Irigaray's critique of Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1991), I show the analogy between the sea and the maternal feminine in *The Waste Land* as similar to Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-91) in its indicating male non-recognition of maternal origins and violent

⁶ Cuda (2010) also examines the 'passion scene' in the work of Yeats, Woolf, and Mann. My reading of the 'passion scene' as related to the pre-Oedipal mother-child relation only refers to it as it appears in Eliot's works.

repudiation and assimilation of the feminine. Through reference to *The Waste Land* facsimile and an original maritime section from ‘Death by Water’ that Pound excised, and also Wayne Koestenbaum’s critical relating of Pound’s editing of *The Waste Land* to a removal of its feminine qualities, I argue ‘Marina’ reinstates the symbolism *The Waste Land* excludes or denigrates. Thus, I see Eliot’s Ariel poem as rejuvenating the forgotten relation to the pre-Oedipal (m)other. Third, I examine more thoroughly male symbolisation of the maternal feminine in ‘Marina’ to show its effectiveness in bringing about re-identification with the pre-Oedipal (m)other. To do this, as in chapter 3 with ‘Ash-Wednesday’, I build upon Kenneth Wright’s work on maternal mirroring and show how the ‘face’ and other features in ‘Marina’ indicate the rudimentary conditions of primary intersubjectivity (early face-to-face and bodily interaction and mutual recognition between mother and child). I refer to Irigaray’s work on the importance of male symbolisation of the maternal, female morphology, and the first relation with the mother—as man’s natural and affective origin—to show its positive transformative, transcendent and ethical implications for the male subject. Also, I employ Jessica Benjamin’s theory of pre-Oedipal gender ‘overinclusiveness’ to show mutual recognition in ‘Marina’ as discovering a lost female remnant of the male psyche. Finally, having re-assessed the implications of recognition in ‘Marina’, this chapter proceeds to look at recognition in Eliot’s little discussed and unfinished ‘Coriolan’ poems, ‘Triumphal March’ and ‘Difficulties of a Statesman’, written subsequent to ‘Marina’ in 1931.⁷ Although they are very different to ‘Marina’ in vision, sentiment and symbolism, and indicate a resurfacing of ambivalent feelings towards the mother, I show Eliot’s mature development and final manifest articulation of the Coriolanus passion scene in ‘Coriolan’ to be as important as ‘Marina’ in marking a *sea-change* in Eliot’s thinking on the maternal feminine in his mid-career works.⁸

Senecan and Shakespearean Recognition in ‘Marina’

In 1932, Eliot highlighted in his essay ‘John Ford’ the symbolic value of the ‘Recognition Scene’ in Shakespeare’s late plays (*Cymbeline*, *The Winter’s Tale*, *Pericles* and *The Tempest*) (*SE*, 170-80). Inspired by reading G. Wilson Knight’s ‘papers’ (Tate 247) and a new holistic

⁷ ‘Triumphal March’ was first published in October 1931 in Faber and Faber’s Ariel series. ‘Difficulties of a Statesman’ was published independently in the 1931-32 edition of *Commerce*, and also in the *Hound and Horn* in 1932. In 1932 Eliot combined the two poems and presented them under the collective title ‘Coriolan’ in the 1936 edition of his *Collected Poems*, including them alongside ‘Sweeney Agonistes’ as ‘Unfinished Poems.’

⁸ According to the OED, *sea-change* refers to ‘a change wrought by the sea’. It indicates ‘an alteration or metamorphosis, a radical change’.

approach to Shakespeare in 1928,⁹ Eliot had taken a teleological view of Shakespeare's works observing a pattern and a change in relation to the feminine in his movement from tragedy to the music of the late romances.¹⁰ In 'John Ford' Eliot views the prominence of the 'father-and-daughter theme' and recognition scene in Shakespeare's plays ('primarily the recognition of a long-lost daughter, secondarily of a wife') as having 'very deep symbolic value' to Shakespeare in his last productive years (*SE*, 171). These scenes have an 'inner significance', writes Eliot (172). They seem personally meaningful and signal an emotional maturity; the realisation of a transformative potential within the self which grows 'stronger and stronger', dramatising 'an action or struggle for harmony in the soul of the poet' (173). Likewise, Eliot's predilection for Shakespeare's 'Recognition Motive' suggests that the shock and revelation of these scenes also held a deep and personal emotional resonance for Eliot, a resonance penetrating beyond the frontiers of consciousness to enliven the residual trace of a memory of a significant first impression. Jason Harding observes that the heightened affective intensity and redemptive quality of the recognition scenes of Shakespeare's late plays appear to have emotionally encapsulated something of great value to Eliot at 'a decisive juncture in his life' (2012: 168).

Out of all Shakespeare's plays, Eliot expresses (in his unpublished Edinburgh lectures of 1937) particular affection for what he called 'that very great play *Pericles*', regarding the reunion of Pericles and Marina in act 5 scene 1 as 'the finest of all the "recognition scenes"' (*HB*, P/7/18).¹¹ *Pericles* is, he states, 'a perfect example of the "ultra-dramatic", a dramatic action of beings who are more than human, or rather, see in a light more than that of day'. For Eliot, something 'beyond sense'—'not only of ear and eye'—is conveyed through the characters of Pericles and Marina in their mutual recognition at the end of the play (17).¹² They are pseudo-allegorical personages of significant import and 'belong to a world from which some emotions have been purified away, so that others, ordinarily invisible, may be

⁹ Knight later confirmed the 'papers' that Eliot read in 1928 to be the manuscript of *Thaisa* sent to Faber for consideration as a book (Tate 247).

¹⁰ Eliot states in 'John Ford': 'the standard set by Shakespeare is that of a continuous development from first to last, a development in which the choice of theme and of dramatic verse technique in each play seems to be determined increasingly by Shakespeare's state of feeling, by the particular stage of his emotional maturity at the time' (*SE*, 170).

¹¹ T. S. Eliot, 'The Development of Shakespeare's Verse' (*HB*, TS P/7).

¹² The 'beyond' of Shakespeare's late romances is a central concern in 'The Development of Shakespeare's Verse' (1937). The word 'beyond' is mentioned eleven times. Eliot sees Shakespeare in his later work as writing for himself: 'for Shakespeare was not turning away from the theatre, but taking it with him onto a plane where the majority of the audience can never follow' (2b). For Eliot, 'what was latent in [Shakespeare's] early work comes to the foreground in the later; and without his success in the "dramatic" he could never have found the way to what lies beyond it' (20).

made apparent' (18). In his introduction to Knight's *The Wheel of Fire* (1930), Eliot confirms that an allegorical 'doubleness' (xvii) resides in Shakespeare's writings: 'the poet is talking to you on two planes at once'. He praises Knight's 'insight in pursuing his search for the pattern [in Shakespeare's writings] below the level of "plot" and "character"' (xx). For Eliot, Knight's attempt to grasp the whole design of Shakespeare's plays, rather than interpret the narrative or character of any given play, reveals the contribution of the development of its poetic symbolism and imagery to the overall meaning: its fundamental poetic subtext and vision. Knight's allegorical reading of the ritual symbolism of reunion and rebirth in Shakespeare's late romances seeks to hear and understand the 'real pattern': the 'subterrene or submarine music' of the poet's soul (xxi). Eliot states:

Here I say Mr. Knight has pursued the right line for his own plane of investigation, not hypostasizing 'character' and 'plot'. For Shakespeare is one of the rarest of dramatic poets, in that each of his characters is most nearly adequate both to the requirements of the real world and to those of the poet's world. If we can apprehend this balance in *Pericles*, we can come to apprehend it even in *Goneril and Regan*. And here Mr. Knight seems to me to be very helpful in expressing the results of the passive, and more critical, poetic understanding. (xx)

Knight's pioneering approach to the trajectory of Shakespeare's opus highlights at its denouement a deep spiritual awakening, love, rebirth, reunion and music which supersedes the great intensity of death (murder), the desires of the body and sexual degradation (rape, incest) present in tragedies such as *Titus Andronicus*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet* and *Coriolanus*. Key to this transformation is Shakespeare's recovery of daughter figures (Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*, Miranda in *The Tempest*, Imogen in *Cymbeline*, and Marina in *Pericles*) who, carrying with them revelation of the divine, act as redemptive graces by aiding integration of previously repressed or dissociated feminine aspects of the paternal protagonists.¹³ Diane Dreher notes how in all these plays 'the psyches of paternal protagonists are redeemed through regeneration of the anima, or feminine principle' (146). It is not surprising that, despite *Pericles'* pagan mythology, both Eliot and Knight (along with other critics like M. D. H. Parker and Honor Matthews) view the play as a kind of unorthodox Christian allegory on

¹³ See Hoy's chapter 'Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare's Romances' in Jacobs and Kay 77-90.

the theme of redemption.¹⁴ Roger Carson Price (1974) notes the presence of an astounding number of Christian analogues and resonances.¹⁵ Certainly, Pericles' transformation may be likened to that of Job, Jonah, Augustine or Jesus. Like Augustine (the voice of Western asceticism in *The Waste Land* who indulged his most carnal impulses in Carthage), Pericles struggles with sensual desire and female sexuality as an obstacle to spiritual growth and undertakes rigorous self-discipline in the movement towards revelation. Furthermore, during the play he refuses to cut his hair in a vow of sexual renunciation and takes upon himself a life akin to a Christian ascetic.¹⁶ In a similar fashion to Augustine and Pericles, Gordon reports that Eliot, with a view to living a new life under more Christian parameters, took a vow of celibacy after his entrance into the Anglo-Catholic church in 1927. For Eliot, becoming a Christian meant a rigorous ascetic vocation. He writes in 'Thoughts after Lambeth' (1931): 'thought, study, mortification, sacrifice . . . the way of discipline and asceticism must be emphasised' (*SE*, 329). Eliot's strong affiliation with *Pericles* and the recognition motif implies, then, a deep inner wish to attain psychic equilibrium and reintegrate dissociated or unconscious feminine aspects of the mental economy—in my reading, to address a masculinity previously troubled by Oedipal sexuality and accede to a true Christian selfhood through an altered relation to the maternal feminine. In consideration of Eliot's growing interest in the ascetic path to enlightenment around the time of writing 'Marina', it is apt that he chose to write into the poem his own version of Pericles' recognition of a virgin daughter.

Eliot utilises, juxtaposes and combines two extremes of the recognition scene in 'Marina' to form the tension of the narrative between dramatic antitheses: agony and ecstasy, loss and rediscovery, death and rebirth, completeness and incompleteness. First, there is the horrific scene from act 5 of Seneca's *Hercules Furens* referred to in the epigraph: *Quis hic locus, quae regio, quae mundi plaga?*¹⁷ In brief, the epigraph recalls Hercules' awakening from unbridled madness and hallucination to the sudden realisation that he has violently

¹⁴ Knight notes many Christian allusions in *Pericles* (1947; rpt. 2002: 32-75). He sees the suggestion of Christianity as especially present in the reunion scenes in act 5 of the play, stating: 'the phraseology throughout these reunions is saturated in religious suggestion . . . our final scene, is aptly played outside a temple, with Thaisa as high priestess. Cerimon, too, is regarded as a divine instrument, functioning very precisely as Christ Himself in the Christian scheme' (69). Eliot is known to have agreed with many of Knight's readings. M. D. H. Parker (1955) also sees many Biblical allusions in *Pericles* regarding Marina as a stand-in for the Virgin Mary.

¹⁵ See Price's PhD dissertation 'Pauline Perils: A Religious Reading of *Pericles*' (1974).

¹⁶ In an article entitled 'Magical Hair' (1958), anthropologist Edmund Leach describes the erotic symbolism of hair and religious cults where leaving the hair uncut indicates the celibate's renunciation of all sexual activity (156-59).

¹⁷ This translates as 'What place is this, what region, what tract of the earth?'

murdered his wife and children. Despite his wife's appeal to him to recognise her and his children—'O husband, spare; Thy Megara behold and recognise'—during a paroxysm induced by his stepmother, Juno, Hercules slays his family (153). In this act Hercules obliterates familial bonds and the genealogical line.¹⁸ Upon stirring from his mad passion Hercules realises his misdeeds: 'For I have lost my all: my balanced mind' (161). Eliot's use of *Hercules Furens* at the beginning of 'Marina' intimates that, like Hercules, the seafarer in the poem has 'lived a lifetime in that horror of loss', as John H. Timmerman states (140). Nonetheless, new 'hope' ('Marina', 32) arrives with Eliot's second recognition scene found within the poem and taken from *Pericles* which counteracts the psychological imbalance and interminable suffering bestowed upon Hercules.

Eliot's use of the two contrasting recognition scenes is a purposeful design. He states at the end of a manuscript draft sent to Sir Michael Sadler dated 9 May 1930:

I intend a crisscross between Pericles finding alive, and Hercules finding dead—the two extremes of the recognition scene—but I thought that if I labelled the quotation it might lead readers astray rather than direct. It is only an accident that I know Seneca better than I know Euripides. (*LTSE5*, 166)

Eliot later adds in a letter to E. McKnight-Kauffer on 24 July 1930:

the theme is paternity; with a crisscross between the text and the quotation. The theme is a comment on the Recognition Motive in Shakespeare's later plays, and particularly of course the recognition of Pericles. (*LTSE5*, 293)

Likewise, *Pericles* is made up of two contrasting recognition scenes centred on the issue of fatherhood. At the beginning of the play, Pericles uncovers Antiochus's incestuous transgression with his daughter through the solving of the daughter's riddle:

¹⁸ Emily Wilson observes Hercules in *Hercules Furens* to be 'a man who is ruled by his passions and who hopes to use his passions to overcome natural boundaries rather than live in accordance with nature' (99). Hercules is an extreme exemplar of the Roman pagan value *virtus* (manliness, physical prowess, power and valour) and does not recognise limits. He possesses attributes deemed antithetical to the feminine which imply an exaggerated repudiation of femininity and psychic disequilibrium in relation to the genders.

I am no viper yet I feed,
 On mother's flesh which did me breed.
 I sought a husband, in which labour
 I found that kindness in a father.
 He's father, son, and husband mild
 I mother, wife—and yet his child.
 How they may be, and yet in two,
 As you will live resolve it you. (*Per.* 1.1.69-70)

In Antiochus' sin the essential difference, limit and interval preserved by the incest taboo are abolished, conflating father and daughter and intensifying destructive family relationships. Antiochus rediscovers his dead wife in his daughter in a sensual manner, and by sleeping with her he invalidates the injunction of the paternal metaphor and dangerously violates Oedipal triangulation. As a result of maternal absence and paternal dominance, Pericles' hope for secure filial relations and strong paternal identification, 'That would be son to great Antiochus' (1.1.27), is ruined. Antiochus' sexual relation with his daughter (a double of his dead wife) is unspeakable to Pericles, afflicting him with Oedipal dread and leaving him in fear for his life: 'All love the womb that their first being bred; / Then give my tongue like leave to love my head' (1.1.108-09). Pericles shows awareness of the regressive incestuous love for the life-giving mother that promulgates desire and is fundamental to all relations; a love and origin that must ultimately be renounced and separated from. Yet, unable to be suitor to Antiochus' daughter, he is denied a real feminine alternative to mediate the loss and passion for his own mother. Without the satisfaction of a substitute for the desire for/of the mother (Lacan's *objet petit a*), Pericles' masculine identity remains destabilised by the sexual and contaminated female body, by the seductive lure of the maternal origin. A failing in the symbolic function of paternity (Lacan's 'Law of the Father') is emphasised as the problem of the play at its beginning due to Antiochus' violation of the incest taboo. As a consequence, Pericles flees Antioch and the rest of the play recounts his wanderings in the attempt to find both a stable father-figure as a rejoinder to Antiochus' flagrant abuse of masculine authority and a non-sexual means through which familial relations can be restored. Hence, *Pericles* is not only about fathers and their daughters. It is also about the loss and recovery of mother-son relations. It is about how sons symbolise their mothers and deal with the trauma of separation. For Coppelia Kahn, the father-daughter incest of the riddle at the beginning of *Pericles* 'is a projection of the son's desire to possess the mother and is associated with Pericles as a son'

(165). Although Eliot highlights to McKnight-Kauffer the theme of paternity as central to *Pericles*, and thus to ‘Marina’, we may wonder whether he also recognised the prevalence of a more clandestine maternal element also seeking expression and resolution.

For Janet Adelman, *Pericles* restates the incest dilemma evident in the earlier *Hamlet*, where everyone is ‘a little more than kin, and less than kind’ (*Ham.* 1.2.65). Moreover, as in *Hamlet*, both Adelman and Kahn locate the origin of Pericles’ problem in the sexual maternal body. Contrary to *Hamlet*, however, Pericles strives to purge sexuality and solve the problem of the dangerous maternal body. This is achieved in the eventual rediscovery and recognition of his daughter, Marina, who he thought long-lost at sea. Having been separated from her mother, Thaisa, Marina is bought from pirates and sold into a brothel. Despite this predicament she manages to avoid rape and prostitution. Later, she is miraculously returned to Pericles as a virtuous daughter-figure cleansed of any sexual nature and remodelled as a virtual incarnation of the virginal divine mother (as opposed to Antiochus’ daughter). Through his inviolate, chaste daughter Pericles is reborn anew and all ‘virtue preserved’ (*Per.* Epilogue, line 5) in a moving mutual recognition scene. Like a child to its mother Pericles says to Marina, ‘Thou that beget’st him that did thee beget’ (5.1.185). Marina is the daughter who re-mothers the father. Faith in life, love, divine providence and human relations is restored to Pericles through recognition of Marina. Subsequent to Pericles’ rebirth, the play concludes with the descent of Diana—the pagan goddess of both chastity and childbirth—who brings Thaisa back to life.¹⁹ Both mother and daughter, ‘flesh of thy flesh’ (5.3.46), are recovered and maternal genealogy symbolically restored. This sacred epiphany and reunion is the antithesis of the unholy ‘foul incest’ (1.1.127) and ‘monstrous lust’ (Epilogue, line 2) between Antiochus and his daughter which begins the play. As C. L. Barber and Richard Wheeler note, the wife-mother-feminine is now returned to Pericles through the daughter in a ‘sublime’ rather than sexual way (Skeele 149).²⁰

Marina brings symbolic satisfaction to Pericles against the psychic perturbations which had previously troubled him. Her Marian form of motherhood offers a way out of phallogentric strictures and neurotic formations by providing an acceptable outlet for repressed male desire for the mother. Indeed, the father-mother-child triad conflated by transgression of the incest taboo at the start of the play is dramatically sundered, desexualised,

¹⁹ In his 1937 Edinburgh lectures, Eliot recognises the mutual recognition scene at the end of *Pericles* as having the quality of Christian ritual. He states: ‘the scene becomes a ritual; the poetic drama developed to its highest point turns back towards liturgy: and the scene could end in no other way than by the vision of Diana’ (*HB*, TS P/7/18).

²⁰ See Barber and Wheeler’s chapter ‘Excerpt from “The Masked Neptune”’ in Skeele 147-63.

decontaminated and reconfigured by a recognition scene in which otherness and the inviolability and irreducibility of the other is brought to perception. In this spiritual action family ties are freed from sexual degradation, Oedipal confusion and the sexual maternal body by recovery of the relation to sacred maternal presence. Thus, a structural mutation precipitating a new effective triangulation has taken place. Like Mary ‘Queen of Heaven’ ‘whose shrine stands on the promontory’ in ‘The Dry Salvages’ (CPP, 189), and who Eliot explicitly identifies with Dante’s *Vergine Madre, figlia del tuo Figlio* (daughter of your Son),²¹ Pericles’ Marina is an object of polyamorous desire with multiple roles (daughter-wife-mother).²² With Pericles’ recognition of Marina as a virginal daughter figure the human family is reinstated and reunited along the complex lines of the Virgin Mary and the Christian Holy Family, countering Antiochus’ contravention. Thus, Marina provides Pericles with a circuitous route through which the lost maternal body and its *jouissance* can be approached but not consumed. Her virginity is her essential attribute as it is a bar to the wish to profane the maternal body. It provides a limit and an interval for the approach to the other, effecting pseudo-separation from the mother and permitting the emergence of alterity and difference. Divine spiritual incest in *Pericles* functions as a mode of indirection and paradox through which the male quandary of incompleteness is resolved and total intimacy with God attained. By the end of the play, Pericles holds a new respect for and a special relationship with femininity, otherness and the maternal; one through which divine transcendence can now be achieved.

²¹ These words are spoken by St. Bernard of Clairvaux in the final canto of the *Paradiso* (33.1) as he presents Dante before the throne of the Virgin Mary. The description of Mary as daughter-mother-wife evokes the story of the Incarnation and the experience of love rekindled in the Virgin’s womb.

²² The lines from ‘The Dry Salvages’ read:

Lady, whose shrine stands on the promontory,
 Pray for all those who are in ships, those
 Whose business has to do with fish, and
 Those concerned with every lawful traffic
 And those who conduct them.

Repeat a prayer also on behalf of
 Women who have seen their sons or husbands
 Setting forth, and not returning:
 Figlia del tuo Figlio,
 Queen of Heaven.

Also pray for those who were in ships, and
 Ended their voyage on the sand, in the sea’s lips
 Or in the dark throat which will not reject them
 Or wherever cannot reach them the sound of the sea bell’s
 Perpetual angelus. (CPP, 189)

Pericles is widely thought to have only been part-authored by Shakespeare, with George Wilkins.²³ Suzanne Gossett comments however that there seems no doubt that Shakespeare ‘wrote both reunion scenes in *Pericles* or that these events were personally meaningful to him’ for ‘they recur in his plays and are elaborated in the romances he would write alone’ (162). In the same way, Eliot’s choice of contrasting Senecan and Shakespeare recognition scenes for ‘Marina’ indicates a deep series of cross-identifications with persons, themes and concerns in both *Hercules Furens* and *Pericles*. As mentioned in chapter 2 and earlier in this chapter, Eliot in the later 1920s, like Augustine in the *Confessions* and Hercules in the epigraph to ‘Marina’, awoke to the truth and reality of his sins, his psychological inequity, limitedness and loss, and he now sought control over his passions and atonement for his mortal transgressions through entrance into the Anglo-Catholic faith. In the two recognition scenes which make up ‘Marina’—and in Eliot’s identifications with both Hercules and Pericles (as opposing types of paternal figures)—there is a series of movements: from misrecognition and non-recognition to recognition of the maternal feminine, from Senecan/Sweeneyesque passion and Roman patriarchy to a Christian expiation of the passions, from a pagan conception of the female divine—which in *Hercules Furens* is the omnipotent, threatening and vengeful Juno—to a redemptive, virginal Marian figure (Marina). Unlike Hercules, Pericles represents a Christ-like virtuous masculinity and paternity that can control its passions and physiology. Hercules is like Antiochus in *Pericles* in that he, too, cannot control his excessive masculine desires and violates laws, taboos and boundaries which cause a breakdown in the family structure. It is likely that Eliot chose not to use the incest recognition scene at the beginning of *Pericles* because of its emphatically unsavoury nature. Nevertheless, in both *Pericles* and ‘Marina’ mutual recognition between Pericles and Marina is used as an efficacious antidote to issues of excessive male passion and incestuous desire, phallic narcissism, sadomasochism and other pathological perturbations associated with male negative relation to the female other. Like Hercules, Pericles is similarly tormented by the sexuality and allure of the feminine. Yet, as a result of Pericles’ insight, ascetic discipline and recognition of limitation, he is able to re-find the family he thought dead.

²³ For details of Shakespeare’s collaboration with Wilkins on *Pericles*, see Gossett 161-63. On the composition of *Pericles*, F. G. Fleay contends: ‘Shakespeare wrote the story of Marina, in the last three acts, minus the prose scenes and Gower. This gives a perfect artistic and organic whole’ (1874: 197). Fleay’s *Marina: A Dramatic Romance* was published in 1902 and edited by S. Wellwood with only the sections believed to be written by Shakespeare.

Closer analysis shows a hidden maternal narrative carried alongside the theme of paternity that Eliot identifies in the two recognition scenes he chose for 'Marina'. As Thaisa's daughter, Marina is and is not the mother. She is both a metonymic link and a prohibitory power vetoing access to the maternal body. Hence, Marina provides a veiled, displaced way for Pericles and the voice of Eliot's poem to symbolise and sublimate the excessive passions related to the mother.

The Marine Element in *The Waste Land* and 'Marina'

Chapter 3 argued for the sublime natural dream-vista of 'Ash-Wednesday' as being related to not only Eliot's childhood memories of Missouri and New England but also to earlier unconscious perception and memory of the mother and her environment, 'Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden' (209). Moreover, it maintained various enigmatic women in the poem to be representative of the virtual, non-personal pre-Oedipal (m)other who functions as the child's first 'transformational object' (Bollas, 1987: 17) and who defines the unconscious self and gives shape and form to the child's internal world and passions. As with the women of 'Ash-Wednesday', Marina's regressive significance and relation to the mother is indicated by the salient land and seascape imagery and the old memories of Eliot's American childhood that accompany her reappearance. Eliot states in a letter to McKnight-Kauffer (referred to earlier): 'The scenery in which [the poem] is dressed up is Casco Bay, Maine. I am afraid no scenery except the Mississippi, the prairie and the North East Coast has ever made much impression on me' (*LTSE5*, 270-71). An early manuscript draft of 'Marina' shows Rogue Island, a childhood holiday destination off Casco Bay, as the place and inspiration for the poem. Moreover, the draft confirms the sea and shore topography of Eliot's childhood to be a powerful synaesthesia producing stimuli evoking a whole range of sensory correspondences (sights, smells, sounds and sensations), non-personal forms and images from which the early forgotten memory and reading of the feminine emerges:

What seas, what shores, what grey rocks, what islands,
What water lapping the bow
And scent of pine, and the woodthrush singing
through the fog

(off Rogue Island)

What old forgotten images return

And form themselves around – O my daughter

(*BL*, MS Don. c. 23/1)

The correspondence in ‘Marina’ (and also ‘Ash-Wednesday’ and ‘The Dry Salvages’) between the marine element, nautical imagery and jargon—‘bow’, ‘bowsprit’, ‘rigging’, ‘canvas’, ‘garboard strake’ (‘Marina’, 2, 22, 25, 28)—and the maternal is unsurprising. Gordon informs us that when Eliot was taught to sail as a boy by a mariner hired by his mother, ‘Charlotte would go along, fortified by a guard of [his] grown-up sisters, to ensure that he did not get too wet or too hot or too tired’ (8). Eliot’s friend at Harvard, W. G. Tinckom-Fernandez, confirms this association, stating:

I used to descend on him at his summer home in East Gloucester on my way to Maine. There I saw him in a quiet, charming family circle of parents and sisters, whose affectionate understanding of his arduous scholarship and his untried gifts must have been an inspiration for him in those lean years he later faced in a foreign land. He used to take me sailing in his catboat, and he could handle the sail with the best in Gloucester harbor. (48)

Photographs in the Eliot collection at Harvard show Eliot at Eastern Point, Gloucester, playing as a boy on the beach with his cousins and nurse (Fig. 11), and also sailing as an adult with his mother and father (Fig. 12). Eliot would later recall the summers of his youth spent sailing ‘between one June and another September’ (‘Marina’, 26) as some of his happiest memories. He later wrote to Charlotte: ‘I don’t regret all the sailing that you and I and father did together, I assure you!’ (*LTSE1*, 217).



Fig. 11. *T. S. Eliot at the beach with cousins and his nurse, Annie Dunne: East Gloucester, Massachusetts. 1896. Photograph. MS 2560/165. T. S. Eliot Collection, Harvard Houghton Library, Harvard University.*



Fig. 12. *T. S. Eliot sailing with his parents: Gloucester, Massachusetts. N.d. Photograph. MS 2560/219b. T. S. Eliot Collection, Harvard Houghton Library, Harvard University.*

James Olney notes that much of the landscape and sea scenery from Eliot's childhood present in 'Ash-Wednesday' and 'Marina' is largely absent in his early poetry (J. Brooker, 1991: 70).²⁴ While this is true, *The Waste Land* facsimile shows that Eliot originally included a large section in 'Death by Water' specifically referencing the dangerous seas and ragged 'Dry Salvages' rocks off the coast of Cape Ann where he spent his holidays and sailed as a youth (*WLF*, 55).²⁵ Inspired by the Ulysses section in Dante's *Inferno* (canto 26) and Tennyson's *Ulysses*, Eliot's seafaring tale recalls his very earliest juvenilia prose writings published in the *Smith Academy Record*—'A Tale of the Whale' (Apr. 1905) and 'The Man Who Was King' (June 1905).²⁶ A long paean to sailors and the seafaring life (92 lines), the original tale in 'Death by Water' is distinctly Conradian in style and tone and recounts a

²⁴ Olney states: 'one is startled to realize how void most of the early poetry is of anything to be called . . . "scenery"; at the same time one is impressed with how much "scenery" recalled from early childhood—particularly the scenery of Mississippi and the North East Coast—there is in the late poetry' (J. Brooker, 1991: 70).

²⁵ *The Waste Land* facsimile makes the first mention of The Dry Salvages rocks which later feature in the third of Eliot's *Four Quartets* (*CPP*, 184-90).

²⁶ Chapter 3 argued for Charlotte's influence on Eliot's writings as being especially present and pervasive in his first poems written between 1905 and 1910 which were published in the *Smith Academy Record* and the *Harvard Advocate*. Eliot's prose writings of the period 'A Tale of the Whale' (Apr. 1905) and 'The Man Who Was King' (June 1905)—both published in the *Smith Academy Record*—are also suggestive in this respect (see *CPI*, 4-7). These juvenile adventure tales show Eliot's fervent interest in ships, boats, sailors and the sea life to be a feature of his writings from the very start. Both feature shipwrecks and display an advanced knowledge of nautical terminology ('top-gallant shrouds', 'staysail', 'flying jib-boom' 'monkey rail', 'port-bow', 'spar' and 'masts'). They also show an interest and openness to adventure, otherness and discovery. Charlotte Eliot's poem 'Saved!' (*CES*, 6) displays a similar maritime imagination and use of maritime diction to encode ideas of human mental and physical endeavour and challenge, crisis and revelation. Further, it bears a striking correspondence with Eliot's 'The Dry Salvages' (see n. 22) in its display of maternal anxieties over sons:

Saved!

[Four prisoners at Deer Island very bravely rescued a boat's crew at the imminent risk of their lives. They were pardoned at once.]

Helpless it lay,
 Tossed on the angry waters of the bay—
 The ship that erst defied both wind and wave,
 No skill could save,
 Her timbers strained with each successive shock,
 Soon must they part upon sunken rock.
 Now where are they,
 Who full of hope once sailed on her away?
 The anxious wife the storm's wild outcry hears
 With bitter tears.
 The mother shudders, thinking of her son,
 The comfort of her age—the only one.
 Quick, bring the glass!
 Aye, there are men upon the barque! Alas,
 They give no sign of life!—to spar and mast
 All frozen fast. (*CES*, 6)

disastrous sea voyage and shipwreck upon an iceberg and a bleak 'white' landscape far from 'Home and mother' (*WLF*, 61). As the editorial notes for the facsimile indicate, the seafaring section pre-dates and pre-empts 'Marina' in its use of the New England land and seascape and nautical terminology: 'canvas', 'sails', 'Astern' and 'garboard-strake' (56-57). However, the journey's end in the sailor's tale in 'Death by Water' is totally antithetical to the divine horizon from which Marina materializes in Eliot's later Ariel poem. In *The Waste Land* facsimile, despite the sailor's 'concentrated will against the tempest and tide' (55), and their thoughts 'Of home, and dollars, and the pleasant violin / At Marm Brown's joint' (65), Eliot's Odysseus remains lost in a 'different darkness' (61).

Eliot admits that when he first gave *The Waste Land* manuscript to Pound in Paris it was 'a scrawling, chaotic poem' (qtd. in Bush, 1983: 70). Wayne Koestenbaum labels the poem pre-Pound a 'female text' (136); an unruly semiotic psychopoetics of female hysteria, disturbance and crisis that embodies the hysteria of Eliot's wife, Vivien. Like Koestenbaum, critics have made much of Eliot's abhorrence of women's bodies during menstruation or childbirth, and his relating of this in his poetry to Vivien's own gynaecological problems.²⁷ Donald Childs notes 'Vivien's menstruation problem certainly seems to have preoccupied [Eliot]' (2001: 104). He cites as example Eliot's near approach to telling his father about Vivien's situation in a letter in 1917: 'when she worries she bleeds internally . . . in a metaphorical sense' (*LTSE1*, 177). Like others before him, Childs draws further attention to a printed page Eliot tore out of *The Midwives' Gazette* and sent to Conrad Aiken in which he had underlined signs of vaginal discharge: 'Blood—mucous—shreds of mucous—purulent offensive discharge' (Aiken 133).²⁸ Childs sees Eliot's eugenical concerns as displaced into poems such as 'Hysteria', 'Ode' and *The Waste Land*. He asserts these poems must be 'about his new wife and her uncontrollable womb' (2001: 105).

For Maud Ellmann, it is *The Waste Land* that encapsulates Eliot's simultaneous fascination with and obsessive fear of femininity. In her Freudian/Kristevan reading of *The Waste Land*, Ellmann considers the subject of the poem to be suffering from 'a general collapse of boundaries' (1987: 92) due to an upsurge in abjection in confrontation with the

²⁷ These include Ackroyd 66-68; J. Brooker (Laity and Gish 130-49); Hauck; Hastings; Ellmann (Fletcher and Benjamin 178-200); Scott (113-44); Koestenbaum; Lamos (78-113); Miller, Jr. (390); Seymour-Jones (10-12); and Childs (2001: 99-120).

²⁸ Koestenbaum also refers to Eliot's ripping a page out of *The Midwife's Gazette* (118-20), stating: 'the strange conjunction of Vivien's blood, Eliot's use of *The Midwives' Gazette* to characterize his own poetry, his statement that the poet is "oppressed by a burden which he must bring to birth," and Pound's role as midwife of *The Waste Land*, reveal that women, blood, and birth were central to Eliot's poetry, and imply that Vivien embodied the hysteria that *The Waste Land* both suffers and portrays' (118).

feminine. Images of abjection proliferate throughout and include ‘abortions, broken fingernails, carious teeth and “female smells”’ (93), as well as corpses and various instances of the *vagina dentata*: ‘decayed hole among the mountains’ (*WL*, 386).²⁹ Ellmann views the poem as contriving to abject the encroaching, polluting ‘waste’ that threatens dissolution of the self by a ritualistic purgation that seeks to establish subjective and social boundaries and limits. Further, she implies the abjection taking place is that of the mother.³⁰ Still, in spite of its cathartic endeavour, Ellmann states *The Waste Land* ‘surreptitiously repeats the horror that it tries to expiate’ (1987: 95). As mentioned in chapter 1, she blames this on the weakness of the paternal principle with the fall of the Father unleashing ‘infinite displacements, be they sexual, linguistic or territorial’ (107). Ellmann notes: ‘it is as if the father’s impotence entailed the dissolution of identity, imaged as asphyxiation in the body of the feminine’ (107). Consequent to the father’s insufficiency, and without a maternal form capable of sublimating the desire for the mother, *The Waste Land* fails to shore up the borders of the subject, formulate an ‘I’, reconstitute the face—‘Who is the third who walks always beside you?’ (*WL*, 360)—and separate from the abject mother. Rather, it merely figures the ‘continual extinction’ of the self and ‘stages the ritual of its own destruction’ (Ellmann, 1987: 109). As a result, the poem’s ‘broken Coriolanus’ (*WL*, 417) is only temporarily revived at its end, and the poem remains bound to the mother that it seeks to repress.

Koestenbaum notes that in early works such as ‘Hysteria’ (1915) men are invoked by Eliot to collaborate and help separate troubled male figures from hysterical women. Regarding *The Waste Land*, he cites the crucial intervention of Dr. Vittoz at Lausanne in helping Eliot overcome his neurasthenia and begin to write again, and also Pound’s ‘blunt mediation and superior strength’ (119) in ordering and giving shape to the hysterical *Waste Land* manuscript. For Koestenbaum, Pound acted as ‘midwife’ (118) to Eliot as ‘mother’ in helping give birth to the poem. Pound treated *The Waste Land* ‘as if it were an effeminate Prufrock he wishes to rouse’ and cured it of what he considered to be its textual neurasthenia ‘by suggesting that central representations of the feminine be expunged—thereby masculinizing the poem’s core’ (125). These included the removal of the original epigraph

²⁹ Kristeva’s theory of abjection is set out in *Powers of Horror* (1982). She regards ‘the corpse seen without God and outside of science’ to be ‘the utmost of abjection’ (3). She states: ‘it is death infecting life. Abject. *It is something rejected from which one does not part*, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us’ (4, emphasis in original).

³⁰ Kristeva maintains the abject is the mother: ‘defilement is the translinguistic spoor of the most archaic boundaries of the self’s clean and proper body. In that sense, if it is a jettisoned object, it is so from the mother (1982: 73). For Kristeva, separation from the mother occurs and the subject is made autonomous only once the mother has been abjected. Through this process she herself is made abject: ‘the abject would thus be the “object” of primal repression’ (12).

from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (whose horror and fear of primitive, tribal Africa may be read as analogous to fear of Freud's 'dark continent'—the maternal body), the feminine 'hyacinth girl' section which he equated with Tennyson's hysteric Mariana and also the misogynistic Fresca passages.³¹ Koestenbaum argues that it was these editorial revisions and excisions that 'fathered, husbanded, and procured Eliot's feminine *Waste Land*, and marked it as male' (136).³² According to Koestenbaum, Pound's editorial genius disburdened Eliot of 'two hysterical presences—the poem and the wife' (120).

Despite Koestenbaum's stimulating reading of Pound's influence and Vivien's hysterical impact on *The Waste Land*, he fails to elaborate a further motive in Pound's deletions: the masking of maternal influence, the denial of maternal power, subjectivity, desire and agency and male suppression of his maternal origin.³³ Pound wrote 'Bad' (*WLF*, 54) in red ink next to the shipwreck lines in *The Waste Land* manuscript and ruthlessly crossed out the whole fragment. Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley note that in cutting this episode Eliot lost both the only explicit reference to his American experience and also 'one of his classical sources, the Ulysses story' (1990: 166). However, they and Koestenbaum fail to note the significant correspondence between the excised narrative in 'Death by Water' and Eliot's childhood memories of New England with their unconscious association with the mother—an association symbolised more blatantly in 'Ash-Wednesday', 'Marina' and 'The Dry Salvages'. Therefore, these critics crucially miss the mother's significant unconscious

³¹ For feminist comment on Joseph Conrad's depiction of Africa in *Heart of Darkness* as 'a figural conflation of racial and female-maternal otherness for white Western masculinity', see DeKoven (Levenson 218-19).

³² For a feminist critique of Pound's editing of *The Waste Land* as reacting against female power and influence, see the chapter 'Pound Edits Loy and Eliot' in Duplessis (2012: 32-58).

³³ Koestenbaum notes Pound's editorial recommendations remove evidence of Eliot and Pound's fear of female literary power and agency, as well as Eliot's arguably homosexual interest in Jean Verdenal. Although Koestenbaum implies a maternal influence in his discussing the impact and ordering of hysteria in the composition of *The Waste Land* this line of enquiry is not elaborated. This is unfortunate. Indeed, Pound's poem 'Sage Homme' evidences an effort by Pound to usurp the pre-Oedipal mother in order to realise 'a sea change into masculinity' (Koestenbaum 136) for both Eliot and *The Waste Land* text. Notably, Pound makes Eliot into mother and transforms Milton's maternal muse into a transsexual sire:

These are the Poems of Eliot
By the Uranian Muse begot;
A Man their Mother was,
A Muse their sire.

How did the printed Infancies result
From Nuptials thus doubly difficult?

If you must needs enquire
Know diligent reader
That on each Occasion
Ezra performed the caesarean Operation. (Paige 233-34)

.....

influence upon the writing of *The Waste Land* and her pervasive unconscious presence within the poem. They overlook Eliot and Pound's effort to deny maternal influence in order to both sustain corporeal, textual, and psychic separation from the mother, and fashion and maintain both the text's and the subject's identity, autonomy and boundaries (a homosocial effort that Ellmann believes fails in its ambitions). Moreover, Brooker, Bentley and Koestenbaum do not recognise and correlate *The Waste Land*'s non-representation, abjection and burial, fear and denigration of the mother with the metaphysical failure and 'mystical void' (Childs, 1997: 107) that the poem epitomises.³⁴

Luce Irigaray's critique of Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1991) explains the implications of Eliot and Pound's attempt to renounce and sever the maternal bond and failure to symbolise the maternal body in *The Waste Land*. Irigaray equates the sea with the maternal and states how the 'movement of the sea, of going and returning, of continuous flux' represents 'feminine *jouissance*' (48-49).³⁵ She criticises Nietzsche's male metaphysics in terms of water, in particular, because 'it is the element of which he is most afraid' (1981: 43). Irigaray notes that Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* continuously refers to land-based metaphors associated with earth, fire and air. Yet, in relation to water it displays a harrowing male fear of the 'Deluge' (Irigaray, 1991: 43). As mentioned, a similar male dread of water is omnipresent in *The Waste Land*—especially in 'Death by Water' where Phlebas the Phoenician sailor drowns in the 'whirlpool' (WL, 318). Irigaray states:

one knows of the desire Nietzsche had to be a mother, and how much he suffered from not being able to be one. The marine element is therefore both the amniotic fluids, the deepest marine element which can't simply be an appearance and to which Nietzsche will never return, which escapes him forever . . .

(1991: 48-49)

Irigaray detects a fundamental *ressentiment* in Nietzsche's thinking on the maternal. His male materialism, solipsism and fear of water amounts to a metaphysical refusal and non-

³⁴ Childs sees the 'mystical moments' in *The Waste Land* as a 'mystical void' based on Eliot's experience of separation and a void in the middle of his relations with women; see the chapter 'The Waste Land's Mystical Void' (1997: 107-27). Chapter 1 argues Eliot's separation from his mother after her visit to London in 1921, and the ensuing unmanageable ambivalence, was the catalyst instigating both Eliot's breakdown and his writing of *The Waste Land*.

³⁵ In agreement with Irigaray, Cixous calls water 'the feminine element *par excellence*' (Moi 117).

recognition of the maternal feminine and a horror at women's materiality, fluidity and corporeality (a criticism also levelled at both Eliot and Pound in Ellmann's reading of *The Waste Land*). In Irigaray's view, male aversion to a primal feminine ingredient of the mater matrix from which all life is given is to preclude a vital factor in man's Dionysian becoming. It is to forget the 'first waters' and dam up the 'first springs' of man's birth (1991: 38, 21). Consequently, despite Nietzsche's ongoing nostalgia and search for the source and a metaphysical beyond, his denial of difference, closure to the other, non-recognition of his maternal origin and effacement of maternal genealogy condemns him to a circuitous eternal return of the 'same' and a perpetual nomadism. Irigaray states: 'if a man wants to delude himself, the sea will always lend the sails to fit his fortune' (46).

For Irigaray, the original relation to the mother is the original relation to the divine that has been forgotten and denied by patriarchy. She says in *Elemental Passions* (1992):

man is divided between two transcendences: his mother's and his God's—whatever kind of God that may be. These two transcendences are doubtless not unrelated but this is something which he has forgotten. (1)

Man's monologic nature and will to master the world of objects forgets the (m)other at the origin of his beginnings. In man's non-recognition, non-symbolisation and non-restitution to the maternal source he cuts himself off from the real and its truth, the other, and the truth of himself also. Therefore, he denies himself the possibility of genuine divine and 'sensible transcendence'.³⁶ Irigaray states: 'from the moment they separate from her, of Her, they also distance themselves from the gods' (2013: 40). This Nietzschean scenario of a shortfall in male metaphysics due to a denial of the (m)other is patent in *The Waste Land*. Burton Blisstein notes Eliot's mariners in 'Death by Water' 'are unaware, or unwilling to acknowledge, that they owe their auspicious beginnings to God. They believe they can conquer the Sea unassisted' (288). Consequent to this non-recognition of God—which Irigaray argues is equivalent to male non-recognition of the 'maternal-feminine (*le maternal-féminin*)'—the sailors sail away from, rather than to, 'Home': 'the Garden / Where all love ends' ('A-W', 87-

³⁶ Irigaray's 'sensible transcendental' (1993a: 30) is a key concept in her feminist philosophy of sexual difference. She calls it 'the dimension of the divine *par excellence*' (97). It is both spiritual and material. It is not an ideal transcendental opposed to the sensible flesh but is within the sensible. The 'sensible transcendental' is a horizontal transcendence that finds the universal through love, sharing, respect and mutuality between 'two'.

88).³⁷ Unsurprisingly, their end is a non-recoverable materialist's dead end, a long way away from the New England coast of Eliot's childhood whence they set off.

At the end of *The Waste Land*, maternal waters are seemingly calmed and the seafaring boat finally controlled by 'hand expert with sail and oar' (WL, 420). Regardless of this, however, as with Nietzsche's fear of water, the poem's aquaphobia, abjection and gynephobia perpetuate male metaphysical fear of and refusal to recognise the mother, her influence and the maternal origin. Ironically, in the male poetic attempt to order and master the 'maternal-feminine' and assert male self-identity, genuine separation from the mother is forestalled. Instead, the ambivalent attachment to the sexualised maternal body is reinforced and maternal omnipotence exacerbated. Chapter 1 showed the continuing power and pervasiveness of the mother as indicated in *The Waste Land* by the spectral presence of Volumnia, Gertrude and Charlotte.³⁸ In addition, the poem's forgetting of the primitive relation to the pre-Oedipal mother denies itself the divine horizon to which it aspires. In Eliot's cutting of the seafaring section from 'Death by Water' he lost not only his sole explicit reference to his American experience (as Brooker and Bentley suggest), but also the maternal symbolism from which divine transcendence may be apprehended. Indeed, Phlebas in 'Death by Water' forgets 'the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell' (WL, 313). In doing so, he consigns himself to a 'wheel' (320) of perpetual death without sacramental resurrection. As both Steve Ellis (1991) and Anthony Cuda (2010) note, *The Waste Land* recognises a need for water in the 'water-dripping song' (WL, n. 357) whose sparseness anticipates the stylistic shift, the reclamation of the mother and the spiritual renewal of the subject that takes place in Eliot's works post-1927:³⁹

³⁷ The 'maternal-feminine' as delineated with a hyphen is a specific term in Irigarayan terminology. Set forth in Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985b), it refers to the non-differentiated pure, raw and fluid materiality which, associated with the maternal, is the foundation for all forms and structures. Irigaray sees the 'maternal-feminine' as preceding and exceeding Western male metaphysics. She writes: "'First matter" . . . is perhaps the foundation upon which the supreme elevation (of) god is erected' (1985b: 161-62).

³⁸ For discussion of murderous mothers in *The Waste Land* and the effort to sever identification with the mother in the poem, see Christina Hauck, 'Abortion and the Individual Talent.' *ELH* 70.1 (Spring 2003): 233-66.

³⁹ Ellis notes that in 'What the Thunder said' 'we not only have figures like the risen Christ at Emmaus, but we also get what can be seen as Eliot's earliest sustained exercise in the sparseness of the "classic" style in the "water-dripping song" (II. 331-58), the only part of the poem Eliot seemed satisfied with after its completion' (1991: 33). Cuda (2010: 84-88) notes the 'third' who appears after the 'water-dripping song' in 'What the Thunder Said' as indicating the earliest of Eliot's spiritual recognition scenes. However, this vision cannot be maintained and so plunges back into nightmare. Like Augustine in the *Confessions*, the subject of *The Waste Land* remains at Carthage. About the 'water-dripping song', Eliot wrote to Ford Madox Ford: 'there are I think about 30 good lines in *The Waste Land*. Can you find them? The rest is ephemeral' (WLF, 129, emphasis in original).

If there were water

And no rock

If there were rock

And also water

A spring

A pool among the rock

If there were the sound of water only

Not the cicada

And the dry grass singing

But sound of water over a rock

Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees

Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop (*WL*, 346-58)

But, 'there is no water' (359) and, as a consequence, there is no positive Arielian 'sea-change' (*Tmp.* 1.2.400).⁴⁰ Only in the later 'Ash-Wednesday', 'Marina' and 'The Dry Salvages' is the formative role of the 'Sister-mother', daughter-mother, ultimately symbolised and recognised. Only in these works do Eliot's conscious and unconscious childhood memories truly re-emerge to combine with a positive marine element and a new articulation of the maternal feminine that sets the stage for the announcement of a new life, a new world, a new relation with God and a new relation to the (m)other.

⁴⁰ Eliot took several lines from Ariel's song in *The Tempest* for *The Waste Land*:

Full fathom five thy father lies:
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes;
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea nymphs hourly ring his knell:
Burden. Ding-dong.
Hark! Now I hear them—ding-dong bell. (*Tmp.* 1.2.396-405)

Eliot describes Phlebas the drowned Phoenician sailor in 'The Burial of the Dead': '(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)' (*WL*, 49). Eliot also included the lines 'Full fathom five' in a parody of Ariel's song in a short poem called 'Dirge' featured in *The Waste Land* manuscript (*WLF*, 119-21). Like Ariel's song, the imagery of 'Dirge' indicates metamorphosis in death. However, Pound excised 'Dirge' along with the marine tale in 'Death by Water' and the Fresca passages. In Pound's Oedipalisation of *The Waste Land* text he seems to diminish the possibility of positive redemption for the male subject.

Mutual Recognition: Poetic Return to the Pre-Oedipal (M)other

Kenneth Wright's work on maternal form and maternal mirroring (explained in chapter 3), Irigaray's calls to symbolise the mother and Jessica Benjamin's ideas on 'overinclusiveness' all argue in different ways the efficacy of symbolisation of the pre-Oedipal mother-child relationship in art and poetry. For these theorists, the representation and recovery of pre-Oedipal knowledge of the maternal body, dependency on the mother and mother-child mutual recognition as the intersubjective origin of subjectivity, imagination and creativity aids positive transformation of the developing self and ego. The 'return to the mother' and the maternal body in art promotes psychic health and a more authentic individuation for both men and women by its facilitating recognition and integration of difference and a revaluation of female desire and subjectivity. For both Irigaray and Wright, in particular, the intuition of the sacred, the religious impulse and the possibility of divine becoming are all rooted in the pre-verbal mother-child experience.

Chapter 3 argued for 'Ash-Wednesday' as creating an analogical maternal 'holding' structure in response to maternal deficit in the context of Charlotte Eliot's death. It showed this as achieved by the poem's elaboration of non-verbal and pre-verbal maternal forms. Additionally, it highlighted the 'face' as the key visual analogue mirroring the speaker's fluctuating states of emotional and spiritual well-being, development and transformation. According to A. D. Moody, 'Marina' 'originated in the drafting of "Ash-Wednesday"' (1996: 12). He finds the transcendent beauty of its lines and its coastal imagery of New England to be closely related to part VI of Eliot's Lenten poem. Further similarities between the two poems include thematic concerns with renunciation and revelation, death and rebirth, separation and reunion, the use of childhood memory, the presence of a blessed female figure who regenerates the poet, as well as the prevalence of the face motif. Moreover, like 'Ash-Wednesday', 'Marina' was completed and published in 1930—just ten months after Eliot's mother's death. Still, despite these correspondences, Eliot's Ariel poem is not set in the context of the Christian Church and calendar. Rather, following Homer, Virgil, Coleridge and Shakespeare, its poetic quest for spiritual wholeness is set within the literary tradition and language of the sea-voyage. Also, 'Marina' is notably a more assured, joyous and hopeful, condensed and complete expression of the recognition, reconciliation, recovery and revelation that 'Ash-Wednesday' tends towards.

Kenneth Wright specifically refers to 'Marina' in *Vision and Separation* (1991) and he highlights the line 'What is this face, less clear and clearer' (17) as evocative of the mother's

face: the first visual object of recognition ‘dimly remembered’ at the pre-Oedipal stage of the child’s early life (1991: 21). For Wright, the ‘face’ in ‘Marina’ is a maternal form that reaches back to the first years of life before the child’s entry into language. Adding to Wright’s comment, there are other features in the poem that may be interpreted as related to the return of somatic, rhythmic, perceptual and kinaesthetic experiences found in the early mother-child matrix. For example, there is the mother’s ‘breath’ (15) that initially breathes for the foetus and then goes on to comfort the newborn and regulate the child’s breathing. There is the mother’s ‘scent’ (3) which the child becomes attuned to early on and recognises as belonging to her. Also noticeable is the unconscious resonance of the mother’s voice and ‘singing’ (3) and the ‘pulse’ (18) of the mother’s heartbeat first felt *in utero*. These qualities continue to confirm the presence of the mother to the child subsequent to its birth. These features and sensations show ‘Marina’ to represent almost the entire maternal *Gestalt* that the child experiences and assimilates in the early love relation with the pre-Oedipal mother. In Wright’s reading, the following lines encapsulate the blissful maternal world of ‘forgotten yet not forgotten images’ (22):

What is this face, less clear and clearer
 The pulse in the arm, less strong and stronger –
 Given or lent? More distant than stars and nearer than the eye

 Whispers and small laughter between leaves and hurrying feet
 Under sleep, where all the waters meet. (17-21)

Whereas the maternal ‘face’ in *The Waste Land* is concealed from view, and oscillates in appearance and tenor in ‘Ash-Wednesday’, the ‘face’ in ‘Marina’ comes to full recognition: ‘less clear and clearer’ (17).⁴¹ Like ‘Ash-Wednesday’, ‘Marina’ demonstrates a return to the mother’s ‘face’ in the longing for love and support in the face of object loss. Unlike ‘Ash-Wednesday’, however, the ‘face’ does not come-and-go but is held in the speaker’s view. Reminiscent of the child’s early experience of the mother’s face while being held and fed at the breast, the ‘face’ in ‘Marina’ is the central part of a total experiential moment in the poem subsuming a whole range of feelings and sensations related to the

⁴¹ Brooker and Bentley note that the maternal face is missing in *The Waste Land*: ‘Marie, the hyacinth lovers, Madame Sosostriis, and the affluent women are all faceless’ (184). The only clear faces in the poem are those of the ‘bats’ which they identify as ‘the faces of human infants mounted on bat bodies’. Brooker and Bentley’s observations support my argument for male non-recognition of the maternal and non-symbolisation of maternal origins in *The Waste Land*.

child's early affective and emotional relatedness to the mother. Noticeably, like 'Ash-Wednesday', 'Marina' reinstates the landscape ('pine'), marine ('seas', 'shore', 'islands', 'water') and nautical imagery ('bow', 'canvas', 'rigging', 'ships') from Eliot's happy childhood memories of the New England coastline that were minimised in or excluded from *The Waste Land*. For instance, the line 'And then the garboard strake began to leak' (*WLF*, 66) from the seafarer's tale omitted from 'Death by Water' returns: 'The garboard strake leaks, the seams need caulking' (28). Yet, 'Marina' differs essentially from 'Ash-Wednesday' in that the 'seas', 'shores', 'rocks' and 'islands' (1) are the poem's dominant setting. Moreover, aside from the 'Death' section listing four of the seven deadly sins (6-13), 'Marina' lacks the discursive, communicative oration and the traditional religious and liturgical language directing 'Ash-Wednesday'.⁴² Instead, alongside its literary sources, it is powerfully made up of childhood reminiscence and resonant non-verbal and pre-verbal forms relatable to the mother's 'idiom of care' as the 'earliest human aesthetic' (Bollas, 1987: 32). Its 'speech' is committed to the 'unspoken' (31). In the same way as 'Ash-Wednesday', the poem's 'visual imagination' (*SE*, 204)—to use Eliot's term—takes us behind the feelings and vision of 'La Figlia Che Piange' and the hyacinth girl in *The Waste Land*, and also behind the 'snapshots' of childhood memory, on to a deeper, more unconscious and intimate love with the pre-Oedipal (m)other: 'Whispers and small laughter between leaves and hurrying feet / Under sleep, where all the waters meet' (20-21). Different from 'Ash-Wednesday', however, due to its 'raid on the inarticulate', as Eliot says in 'East Coker' (*CPP*, 182), 'Marina' is largely immersed within the pre-Oedipal submarine dream-world.⁴³ For this reason, the poem marks a culmination in respect to the 'garden-flowers' passion scene in Eliot's work. Unlike 'Ash-Wednesday', 'Marina' maintains and crystalizes in its form the pre-Oedipal experience of maternal holding and mother love, the self-realisation in being recognised and responded to by the mother, and the wonder of the mother and child's gradual coming to 'mutual knowing and mutual recognition' (Wright, 2009: 184, emphasis in original): 'What images return / O my daughter' (4-5). Similar to Eliot's Beatrice in 'white light folded' in part IV of 'Ash-Wednesday', Marina is a maternally adapted object created by the poet in response to maternal deficit and a lack in maternal response. Yet, Marina (both the daughter and the

⁴² Scofield sees the lack of religious language or allusion in 'Marina' as a mark of its newness and 'radical creativity' (1988: 162).

⁴³ Kenner notes the prominent non-discursive, dream-like nature of 'Marina': 'its organisation is not syntactic at all. One probably wants to call it "musical", based on associations and recurrences . . . the poem faced toward a domain of waking dream, so certain of its diction that we concede it a coherence it need not find means of specifying' (1990: 216).

poem) is a more ideal and reliable surrogate mother. 'Marina' is a new version of the maternal face that never dies, fades or disillusion the child-poet. If read, she is always in view—face-to-face.

In poetic return to pre-Oedipal experience of the creative mother and her care, the speaker of 'Marina' rediscovers and affirms his Godlike capacity to create what the self needs and desires: 'I made this, I have forgotten / And remember' (23-34). Here, a repeat of the speaker 'having to construct something / Upon which to rejoice' in 'Ash-Wednesday' (24-25), we have an echo of what Winnicott calls 'primary creativity' where the child's need is first anticipated and realised within and through the mother's provision of the breast.⁴⁴ Due to the mother having provided the child with the illusion that he or she created the breast, the speaker of 'Marina' can now confidently find, create and recreate the 'answering forms' (Wright, 2009: 53) of the mother he needs in the mother's absence. Moreover, as in part IV of 'Ash-Wednesday', he gradually perceives the fact of his unconscious dependence on the mother for his creative refashioning and growth of the self: 'What images return / O my daughter' (4-5). With the 'return' of Marina's 'face' amidst poetic arrangement of images in correspondence with maternal forgetting—as in *Pericles* and as told by the poem's allegory of the shipbuilder and the 'new ships'—the subject is validated, made anew and continuity with the mother maintained rather than lost. The New England boat shipwrecked in 'Death by Water' in *The Waste Land* has been shored against its ruin and set to sail. At the poem's end there is a hint that this boat may run aground: 'What seas what shores what granite islands towards my timbers' (33). Nevertheless, the anxiety of such an eventuality is assuaged by the poem's assertion of faith in rebirth and renewal in death expressed in the previous line: 'The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships' (32).

Of greater note in 'Marina', in addition to the speaker realising his self in perceptual re- 'awakening' to the mother's face in mutual recognition, he also perceives God.⁴⁵ Eliot writes in 'Ash-Wednesday': 'No place of grace for those who avoid the face' (166). The transforming presence of God's grace is only confirmed and seen in 'Marina' indirectly through poetic mimesis and holding of the pre-Oedipal memory of the maternal face in the original transforming mutual recognition scene. 'Marina' shows the poet as having felt and brought back the effects of a forgotten vision. Consequently, as Beatrice says to Dante in the

⁴⁴ See chapter 3, n. 43.

⁴⁵ For discussion of 'face-writing' and revelation in the work of Dante and Derrida, see Ambrosio 159-228.

Paradiso, he can now ‘sustain [the mother’s] smile’ (*Par.* 23.48).⁴⁶ Through the mother’s face ‘Death’ (13) becomes ‘unsubstantial / reduced by a wind,’ (14)

A breath of pine, and the woodsong fog
By this grace dissolved in place

What is this face, less clear and clearer (15-17)

Here, Eliot links the transcendences of God and the mother with ‘grace’ presented as manifest in the mother’s face.⁴⁷ As in St. John of the Cross’s *The Dark Night of the Soul* where the ‘grace of God’ is likened to a ‘loving mother who warms her child with the heat of her bosom, nurses it with good milk and tender food, and carries and caresses it in her arms’ (163), God’s ‘grace’ in ‘Marina’ is tacitly equated with mother love. Faith in God is like the faith the mother instils in the child in preparation for the self’s odyssey out from her ‘shores’ (1) to sea and back in the journey of life. Faith in the maternal ‘face’ directs the speaker ‘beyond’ her and the human condition to the God face: the Word become flesh and flesh become Word.⁴⁸ Again, in common with ‘Ash-Wednesday’, maternal allegory is sacred allegory. As Dante states at the end of the *Vita nuova*:

⁴⁶ Beatrice addresses Dante in canto 23 of the *Paradiso*: “‘Open your eyes and see how I appear: / You have seen things which make it possible / Now for you to sustain my smile’” (*Par.* 23.46-48). At which Dante describes his response to Beatrice’s words: ‘I was like one who still feels the effects / Of a long forgotten vision, and tries in vain / To bring it back to his mind again’ (49-51). Kristeva notes that the smile is related to beauty and, in particular, female beauty in Christian art and is seen as a ‘direct consequence of the initial miracle, the Incarnation’ (2012: 57). The smile is ‘the most spiritual of physical manifestations’ and ‘the source of the identity the mirror reflects back to us’ (58).

⁴⁷ See also William Blake’s ‘A Cradle Song’ (1789):

Sweet babe in thy face,
Holy image I can trace.
Sweet babe once like thee.
Thy maker lay and wept for me

Wept for me for thee for all,
When he was an infant small.
Thou his image ever see.
Heavenly face that smiles on thee. (1977: 110)

⁴⁸ Hegel states in the *Phenomenology of Mind* (1807): ‘self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness’ (2003: 103). That is, the self exists only by existing for the other, that is, by being recognised: ‘they recognise themselves as mutually recognising one another’ (106). This dialectic expresses what Hegel calls ‘the concept of mutual recognition of self-consciousnesses’. Infinity realises itself in the finite as spirit (what Hegel calls *Geist*) in and by consciousness. This recognition has obvious spiritual and religious implications.

and then it may please that One who is the Lord of Graciousness
that my soul may ascend to behold the glory of its lady, that is,
of that blessed Beatrice, who in glory gazes upon the
countenance of the One *who is through all ages blessed*.

(Vn. 42.9-13, emphasis in original)

Like Wright, Irigaray looks to the pre-Oedipal mother-child relationship for recognition of the mother, transformation of the subject and apprehension of the divine.⁴⁹ For Irigaray, the undertaking for the masculine subject to move beyond a narcissistic subjectivity that privileges sameness—as exemplified by Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*—is to journey back to the ‘unthought’ (2002a: 74):⁵⁰ the first intimate dwelling environment with the ‘feminine-maternal *you*’ where Being was determined as relational (2004: 38).⁵¹ Irigaray reminds us how the mother is the first other we take in through ‘breath’ and the first other who gives us life through her milk, body and nourishment. She calls this two-as-one or one-as-two economy between mother and child, the maternal body and the foetus, the ‘placental economy’ (1993b: 40-41).⁵² Unlike the libidinal, narcissistic economy by which the male Oedipal cultural imaginary functions, Irigaray states that the ‘placental economy’ engenders difference in itself, preserves ‘twoness’, respects growth and offers fluid mediation and passage between self and other, other and self.

Irigaray promotes the economies of the ‘two lips’, the ‘placenta’ and ‘mucous’ as modalities in the feminine conducive to establishing a female imaginary in art, poetry, culture and society which will counter the traditional patriarchal imaginary.⁵³ For her, the ‘two lips’ (both the lips of the mouth and the lips of the female genitalia) reproduce very closely the placental economy. As opposed to the phallus, the woman’s lips embrace a mutual touching and a dual connectedness and separateness. They figure female sexuality, multiplicity and the traversing of difference and, as such, contest the traditional dualisms of a masculine standard.

⁴⁹ Irigaray’s work is mainly focused on recovering the mother-daughter relationship and on promoting production of a female imaginary for the feminine. However, later works *The Way of Love* (2002) and *In the Beginning, She Was* (2013) show an increasing stress on the need for male symbolisation of the maternal origin and its positive implications in radically rethinking subjectivity for both men and women.

⁵⁰ Irigaray writes in *The Way of Love*: ‘without the mother, there is no engendering, no birth, no survival nor awakening of consciousness. This ground constitutive of subjectivity has remained unthought or reduced to facticity, to the empirical. Now its role, in Being and in thinking, is not nothing, including through its unconscious effects’ (2002: 74).

⁵¹ See Irigaray’s article ‘Beyond All Judgement, You Are’ (2004: 66-77).

⁵² Irigaray’s elaboration of her notion of the ‘placental economy’ is stated in *Je, Tu, Nous* (1993b: 38-42).

⁵³ Irigaray’s writing on the metaphors of the ‘two lips’ and ‘mucous’ are set out in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993a). See also ‘*La Mystérique*’ in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985b: 191-202), and her essay ‘When Our Lips Speak Together’ in *The Sex Which Is Not One* (1985a: 205-18).

The ‘two lips’ ‘offer a shape of welcome but do not assimilate, reduce, or swallow up’ (1993a: 18). Further, they act as ‘a threshold that is always half-open’ to the infinite and provide a touching and a ‘flow’ that allows continuing contact with the maternal body (18). The two lips both welcome and limit the other.⁵⁴ To this model of the two lips, Irigaray adds the notion of mucous and its fluidity within the lips and the uterus. She writes: ‘the mucous should no doubt be pictured as related to the angel, whereas the inertia of the body deprived of its relation to the mucous and its gesture is linked to the fallen body or the corpse’ (17). Irigaray’s statement on mucous neatly summarises absolute distinctions between ‘Marina’ and *The Waste Land*. For instance, ‘Marina’ articulates the economies of the placenta, mucous and lips in symbolisation of female bodily morphology in its image of the ‘lips parted’ (32). It features the presence and recognition of a sacred anima figure. Also, in its marine imagery it symbolises the repressed maternal origin and wonders at and celebrates the virtues of water: renewal, rebirth, replenishment, passage and exchange. In contrast, *The Waste Land* is largely aquaphobic, gynephobic, misogynistic, littered with abject corpses and its landscape is barren, sterile and dry. While ‘Marina’ celebrates mucous and its generative powers and opens the male speaker on to otherness, revelation and a new identity, *The Waste Land* mostly reviles female ‘waste’, fluidity and abjection and collapses otherness and identity.⁵⁵ For Irigaray, all thinking about the feminine and sexual difference has to consider mucous due to its ability to ‘reverse dialectic’ (1993a: 94). Pertaining to the most intimate dwelling of the female body, mucous ensures passage, protection and lubrication between inside and outside, outside and inside. Mucous is the mark of *difference* and a site of mediation which resists incorporation into the male imaginary. As a medium of mutual exchange mucous signifies openness and facilitates the ‘return to the possible of intimacy’ (166) between two bodies without annihilation. Without mucous there can be no movement ‘Between’ (‘Marina’, 26).

⁵⁴ Irigaray states of the ‘lips’: ‘closed and open, neither ever excluding the other, they say they both love each other. Together . . . Without lips, there is no more “us”’ (1985a: 208).

⁵⁵ Irigaray does not adhere to the notion of psychic bisexuality. For her, the psyche is never bisexual nor neuter. It is sexuate: either male/masculine or female/feminine. Contrary to this essentialist position, I adhere to the view of those who regard the psyche to be bisexual (Freud, Fleiss, Kristeva, J. Benjamin, Winnicott, Jung, Fast). In particular, I subscribe to Hélène Cixous’s notion of ‘other bisexuality’. That is, the suggestion that in the mind there is a latent ‘presence of both sexes, evident and insistent in different ways according to the individual’ (Cixous and Clément, 1996: 85). Despite Irigaray’s opposition to psychic bisexuality, I believe that her insistence on the need for the male subject to return to and symbolise his maternal origins, her stressing of the importance of recognition of sexual difference and limit, her notion of the ‘interval’, and also her advocating symbolisation of female bodily morphology are all extremely useful in helping men find solutions for the problem of integrating dissociated or repressed masculine and feminine aspects of the psyche. In other words, for overcoming Oedipal exclusions, castration fear, the refusal of the feminine, disavowal of the (m)other and for rearranging sex and gender hierarchies.

The ‘lips parted’ in ‘Marina’ are contrariwise to the threatening *vagina dentata* images that populate Eliot’s earlier works (‘Circe’s Palace’, ‘Ode’, ‘Hysteria’ and *The Waste Land*). They do not suggest a phallogentric fear and horror of maternal femininity and closure to the feminine but rather the continuity of mother and daughter, maternal and paternal genealogies, intercourse between mother and father, man and woman, woman and woman, and a half-open perpetual flow and play between self and other. In comparison with Eliot’s early poetry, the ‘lips’ are non-threatening and articulate traditionally unacknowledged aspects of feminine existence and corporeality (the two lips, mucousity and a placental economy).⁵⁶ Thus, they suggest a resolving of the relation to the maternal body and a move toward Eliot giving voice to the feminine in his late plays. Importantly, this new symbolisation is aligned in ‘Marina’ with masculine rebirth and renewal: ‘the hope, the new ships’ (32). Further, the difference of the maternal body is recognised as the locale for ‘grace’ (16) and divine Incarnation. Eliot, like Irigaray, locates ““God” between the lips’ in ‘Marina’, to use Kathryn Stockton’s phrase (28). This is a male symbolisation of an alternative bodily imaginary which revalues the feminine, reopens intersubjective space and rouses the divine. In addition, this thinking of the ‘vulvomorphologic’ (Gallop 81) of the female body is a metaphoric subversion which deconstructs the determinations of phallogentric logic due to the bringing of such symbols to consciousness.⁵⁷ In the poem’s return to childhood memory, symbolisation of the pre-Oedipal maternal body and exploration of its corporeality it remembers what Irigaray criticises Nietzsche for having forgotten: ‘the first waters’ of his birth whose economy is difference rather than sameness. In contrast to *The Waste Land*, ‘Marina’ remembers ‘that everything is born out of the lips of one woman, or of some women’ (Irigaray, 1993c: 38). The poem’s ‘lips’ display the difference of the female sex and, as a consequence, the other as other is brought to recognition. These lips safeguard an ‘interval’ between: ‘a space of freedom and attraction, a possibility of separation and alliance’ (1993a: 14). As a result, a flow of ‘new ships’ (‘Marina’, 32) can continue infinite harmonious passage between—from external to internal, from interior to exterior. ‘Parted’, the lips can now ‘receive other embraces’ (Irigaray, 1985b: 195). Still, the transcendence of the other cannot be penetrated or

⁵⁶ The ‘lips’ in ‘Marina’ appear to be the positive fulfilment and redemptive female presence hoped for in *The Hollow Men* (1925) by the ‘lips that would kiss’ (CPP, 84).

⁵⁷ Gallop states how ‘vulvomorphologic’, by newly metaphorising the body, sets it free, if only momentarily. For as soon as the metaphor becomes a proper noun, we no longer have creation, we have paternity’ (81). She adds that although ‘the new construction, the modernist, multiple body, will not be any more “real” in an essentialistic, numenal way’, it might still ‘produce a rearrangement in sexual hierarchies, a salutary jolt out of the compulsive repetition of the same’ (83). See Gallop’s essay ‘Quand nos lèvres s’écrivent: Irigaray’s Body Politic’ (1983).

appropriated. Indeed, at the end of 'Marina' the enigma of the other remains open: 'What seas what shores what granite islands towards my timbers' (33). Nonetheless, with the poem's marking the negative of male incompleteness (the difference of the other sex), an alternative transcendence is attained between two through the preservation of what Irigaray calls a 'to': 'a safeguard of the in-direction between—I Love to You, and not: I love you' (2001: 19, emphasis in original).⁵⁸ The result of this reconfiguration is a new interior and exterior intersubjective relation between self and other through transformational maternal aesthetics.

As well as promoting recognition of the mother and female otherness, Jessica Benjamin's work on 'overinclusiveness' explains a facet of Eliot's poetic return to the pre-Oedipal mutual recognition scene. In *Like Subjects, Love Objects* (1995) Benjamin explains that the other is both part of the self and an exterior other. Using the work of Irene Fast (1984, 1990), she states how children in the pre-Oedipal phase are initially bisexual and 'overinclusive' (53). They are not gender specific and identify with both parents.⁵⁹ In the Oedipal phase the boy child tends to repudiate the opposite sex and the maternal role to reify his own gender position and role within the binary structure of Oedipal subject-object oppositions. In this process of othering, as in *The Waste Land*, the feminine (the maternal) becomes the unwanted, femininity is set up as a passive, negative counterpart to masculinity and that which is primordial and fundamental to the constitution and development of the self is denied. The paradox of this scenario is that the lost maternal body promulgating the boy's desire is repressed. Further, Oedipal renunciation of the feminine runs the risk of developing into misogyny and repudiation, 'splitting the difference, rather than truly recognising it' (1995: 64). This polarised relation to the maternal feminine other is evident in Eliot's works pre-1927.

Despite the Oedipal scenario, Benjamin states that Oedipal polarity can be transcended and suspended and a different, less hostile stance towards oppositional differences achieved through post-Oedipal symbolisations that uncover and reintegrate pre-Oedipal elements of identification that are missing or have been cancelled. In 'Marina' the use of childhood memory and alternative formulations of the pre-Oedipal mother-child relationship—its maternal forms (the 'face', 'breath', 'singing', 'pulse') and symbolisation of

⁵⁸ In Irigaray's *I Love to You* (1996) she insists on saying 'I love to you' rather than 'I love you' to emphasise the between in love relations. For Irigaray, the 'to' adds a between and boundary that refuses assimilation of the other. This is a non-hierarchical reconceptualisation of love outside of domination.

⁵⁹ Fast (1984) does not see bisexuality as a constitutional biological anlage. Rather, her notion of bisexuality refers to a position of identifying with both parents. For other theorists promoting post-Oedipal symbolic recuperation of gender overinclusiveness, see Bassin; Elise; and Stimmel.

the maternal ('seas', 'water') and female morphology ('lips', placental economy, mucous)—facilitate reversion back to an earlier stage of bisexual identification before gender differentiation, Oedipal rigidity and the attribution and repudiation of gender characteristics. In revisiting the overinclusive capacities and gender ambiguity of the pre-Oedipal realm, the multiple parts of the self are recognised and symbolised, allowing reintegration of these cross-identifications which go on to serve multiple functions. For instance, in identifying with Pericles there is identification with the loving pre-Oedipal father-son who recognises difference in differentiation, as opposed to the strict prohibitive Oedipal father who repudiates difference (as stated in both chapter 1 and this chapter, this identification is absent within *The Waste Land*).⁶⁰ It is a wish to be more like Pericles as ideal male other: to escape the trappings of incestuous desire and to attain a more divine love. Ideal identification with Pericles as father, as opposed to Antiochus, Hercules and Ezra Pound, delivers a new sense of masculinity and a new means of establishing difference. In the case of Marina, the speaker of the poem (like Pericles) unconsciously identifies with the first other (the mother) indirectly through the daughter-wife. Marina compensates for loss of the mother's body and, as a daughter, represents the genealogical principle, sexual difference, creativity, growth and generation in opposition to the incest drive, regression, fusion and nostalgia. Still, this identification is not only with the mother. The speaker's 'daughter' is also a male post-Oedipal recuperation of the missing feminine half of the Oedipal complementarity—what Eliot calls the 'unknowing, half conscious, unknown, my own' (28). Benjamin states:

the familiar can be found by 'returning' to the overinclusive position, in which it was still possible to use the transitional space of communicative play to entertain wishes that reality denies. (1995: 75)

Marina's identification deconstructs gender dichotomies to aid a higher level of differentiation and a more empathetic stance towards oppositional differences. It holds in tension the paradox

⁶⁰ Pericles appears to realise his own precluded primary feminine aspect in the mutual recognition scene with Marina:

Tell thy story.
If thine considered prove the thousand part
Of my endurance, thou art a man, and I
Have suffered like a girl. Yet thou dost look
Like Patience gazing on kings' graves and smiling
Extremity out of act. (*Per.* 5.1.129-34)

of sameness and difference that is existent both within the male self and between the sexes through ‘memorial symbolisation of an earlier overinclusive body-ego’ (Dimen and Goldner 164). Eliot stated in a letter to John Hayward on the composition of the ‘compound ghost’ section of ‘Little Gidding’: ‘recognition is surely the *full* identification of the person’ (qtd. in Gardner, 1978: 180, my emphasis). It is the reintegration of difference in mutual recognition that makes Eliot’s ‘Marina’ a document of ‘wholeness’ (Knight, 1966: 243),⁶¹ and the first *full* articulation of the recognition scene in his poetry.⁶²

In sum, then, the Periclean mutual recognition scene in ‘Marina’ operates as a complex *deus ex machina* with multiple connotations. First, it appears to have unconsciously resonated with Eliot at a ‘decisive juncture in his life’ due to its remarkable ability to mediate the loss of the mother and to safeguard and transform the self in the face of this loss by its evoking and reliving the pre-Oedipal bodily relation, mutual recognition and love between child and mother.⁶³ Second, through aesthetic elaboration and correspondence between maternal forms and re-exploration of forgotten pre-Oedipal moments in subjectivity always already intersubjective, mutual recognition (re)members the pre-Oedipal (m)other forgotten and precluded by the masculine self and the dominant cultural masculine imaginary—the prefix re- in ‘remembers’ denoting the quest ‘to reverse a previous action or process, or to restore a previous state of things’ (OED). In doing this, it reminds us of the transformational

⁶¹ Knight (1966) finds the sense of human ‘wholeness’ lacking in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ to be present in mystical terms in ‘Marina’ (243). He calls Eliot’s Ariel poem his ‘one uncompromisingly direct, happy, and assured statement’.

⁶² Winnicott’s complement to the Freudian theory of bisexuality stated in his essay ‘Creativity and Its Origins’ (1971; rpt. 2005: 87-114) also suggests the importance of the male speaker’s identification with the ‘daughter’ figure. Winnicott states: ‘in health, there is a variable amount of girl element in a girl, and in a boy . . . Add to this the variable capacity of mothers to hand on the desirability of the good breast or that part of the maternal function that the good breast symbolises, and it can be seen that some boys and girls are doomed to grow up with a lop-sided bisexuality, loaded on the wrong side of their biological provision’ (111-12). For Winnicott, the ‘pure female element’ of the psyche is associated with *being* and is found at the beginning of life when mother and infant are merged in a state of undifferentiation (111). In the differentiation into Me and Not-Me (separation) the male element comes more fully into play. Thus, the female element ‘forms the only basis for self-discovery and a sense of existing’ (111). Winnicott states the female element in *Hamlet* is ‘to be’. It is the source of creativity and aliveness for the child, who receives these gifts from the mother. In contrast, ‘the object-relating of the male element presupposes separateness’ (108). In sum, ‘the male element *does* while the female element (in males and females) *is*’ (109, emphasis in original). According to Winnicott, maternal provision is absolutely pivotal to giving the child the basis for being. For some figures, such as Hamlet, who hold a deeply ambivalent relation to the maternal feminine there is a complete dissociation between the split-off male and female elements of the psyche. Hamlet is a false self removed from unconscious life. His failure to find an objective correlative to meet his passion means that he is unable to recognise and integrate that which is repressed or dissociated: the split-off female aspect of the self. Hence, Hamlet is unable to *be*: gather a sense of self. Unable to state the dissociation, he is fated to a repetitive sadomasochism as seen in his violence towards Ophelia and Gertrude. As a result, unlike Pericles, the basis for love and mutual recognition comes too late for Hamlet. He is bound in internal torment and eventually felled by the operations of desire.

⁶³ For Barber and Wheeler ‘the great recognition scene in *Pericles* has such extraordinary power because it recapitulates the process by which a human being establishes relationship to the world through the mother’ (Skeele 159).

aspect of the maternal object, the mother's unconscious support in identity, creativity, growth and continuity and the child's radical helplessness and dependence on maternal love. Further, it recovers the maternal body as man's forgotten origin through which the divine may be intuited.⁶⁴ Third, in the poem's return to a position of pre-Oedipal 'overinclusiveness' and recuperation of an earlier bisexuality in the context of a post-Oedipal differentiated self, it prompts recognition of the polymorphism of all individuals—counterbalancing monistic views of gender as simply male or female. The speaker of the poem's recognition of Marina registers that we are both two and one (differentiated and overinclusive), inside and outside (intrapsychically and intersubjectively). Thus, mutual recognition achieves a complex marriage between interiority and exteriority, love and loss, upholding the double-sidedness of the original relation to the primary other (prototypically the mother). It reworks the relations of self and other (inside and outside the self) by reinstating difference (inside and outside the self) and holding ambivalence in tension. As a consequence, the true primordial self is 'awakened' in post-Oedipal symbolisation.

Eliot identified the worth of the recognition scene in Shakespeare's late plays in the 'struggle for harmony in the soul of the poet' (*SE*, 172). Its re-enactment in 'Marina' suggests a true *sea-change* in his thinking on the maternal feminine and otherness. It implies a maturational development and a new ego organisation that overhauls the narcissistic, sadomasochistic mode of object relations apparent in *The Waste Land*—a transformation marked by the poem's maternal/marine imagery and its move from Phlebas to Pericles, another Phoenician. Above all, 'Marina' is a more assured statement of belief than 'Ash-Wednesday'. Through faithfulness to the pre-Oedipal mother-child relationship it more completely conveys the 'beyond' so often mentioned by Eliot in his comments on *Pericles*.

'Coriolan'

Despite the poise of 'Marina', Eliot's unfinished 'Coriolan' poems, 'Triumphal March' and 'Difficulties of a Salesman' (1931-32) (*CPP*, 127-130), suggest the occurrence of a relapse in the ongoing drama of male relation to the maternal body in his work.⁶⁵ From Eliot's preoccupation with the liberation of the male protagonists in Shakespeare's late romances,

⁶⁴ Just as the goddess Diana descends in Shakespeare's *Pericles* with Pericles' recognition of Marina as daughter-mother-wife, grace appears in both 'Ash-Wednesday' and 'Marina' through the creation of female trinities: sister-mother-spirit, daughter-mother-spirit.

⁶⁵ In the same manner that Shakespeare's tragic *Coriolanus* (c. 1608) follows the romance of *Pericles* (c. 1607-08), Eliot's 'Coriolan' (1931-32) was written after 'Marina' (1930).

‘Coriolan’ indicates a telling reversal back to fixation with the Coriolanus passion scene. As mentioned in chapter 1, Eliot was fascinated with *Coriolanus* throughout his career, regarding the tragic play, alongside *Antony and Cleopatra*, to be ‘Shakespeare’s most assured artistic success’ (SW, 84). Indeed, Shakespeare’s hero is a recurrent and changing figure of latent and manifest significance in his early works: ‘Mandarins’ (1910), ‘Ode’ (1918), ‘A Cooking Egg’ (1919), ‘Hamlet and his Problems’ (1919), ‘Rhetoric and Poetic Drama’ (1919) and *The Waste Land* (1922). As many critics note, Eliot’s Coriolanus points to a dramatisation and exploration of themes concomitant with Shakespeare’s tragedy such as the division and tension between public and private worlds, social and personal relations, outer appearances and inner feelings.⁶⁶ Most importantly, he appears to underscore key moments of separation, regression, breakdown, development and discovery in the ambivalent mother-son relationship. Largely absent from Eliot’s middle-period, Coriolanus’ reinstatement in ‘Coriolan’ accompanies a disintegration of the vision of ‘Marina’. This insinuates a heightening of internal conflict, a dissociative splitting in the male subject and also a renewal of the ambivalence towards the maternal feminine previously witnessed in ‘Prufrock’ and *The Waste Land*.

In many ways, ‘Coriolan’ is a return to the symbolism, anxieties and concerns of *The Waste Land*.⁶⁷ In ‘Triumphal March’ the natural landscape and garden imagery of ‘Ash-Wednesday’ and ‘Marina’ is overridden by a Roman martial procession of ‘Stone, bronze, stone, steel, stone, oakleaves, horses’ heels’, marching ‘Over the paving’ through the ‘City’ (CPP, 127).⁶⁸ This public, civic-ceremonial setting amalgamates ancient pagan Rome and the modern secular world. In contrast to ‘Ash-Wednesday’ and ‘Marina’, the language and imagery is mechanical, vainglorious, ‘metallic’ and ‘hard’ (Knight, 1931: 156), mirroring Eliot’s hubristic Coriolanus as he rides about his horse ‘watchful, waiting, perceiving, indifferent’ (CPP, 127). Initial impressions of ‘Triumphal March’ suggest it to be a

⁶⁶ Criticism of ‘Coriolan’ tends to be split between the poem’s political and personal concerns. On the one hand, critics see ‘Coriolan’ as Eliot’s commentary on the various political crises taking place across Europe in the 1920s and 30s. These include Kirk (2008: 151-60); Reeves 82-90; S. Matthews 152-58; and Murphy 134-43. On the other hand, there are those who read the poem to be a public ruse for a deeply personal dilemma, such as, Bollier; Bush (1983: 153-56); Childs (1997: 139-42); Corcoran 102-09; Lamos 97; and Scofield (1988: 183-87).

⁶⁷ For Bush, ‘Triumphal March’ ‘borders on the private nightmare of *The Waste Land*’ (1983: 153).

⁶⁸ Eliot’s use of ‘stone’, ‘metal’ and ‘city’ imagery in ‘Triumphal March’ appears to have been inspired by his reading G. Wilson Knight’s commentary on *Coriolanus* in 1930. Knight’s commentary would form the chapter ‘The Royal Occupation: An Essay on *Coriolanus*’ in *The Imperial Theme* (1931). Knight later surmised that his writings on Coriolanus had influenced not only Eliot’s imagery in ‘Triumphal March’ but also ‘the repeated Shakespearian reminiscence of “Mother” and “o mother” in the second “Coriolan” poem, “Difficulties of a Statesman”’ (1966: 266). For further comment by Knight on his perceived influence on Eliot’s writings, see *Neglected Powers: Essays on Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Literature* (1971), and his essay ‘My Romantic Tendencies’ (1982).

recapitulation and embellishment of Eliot's 'indifferent' Coriolanus from his adolescent 'Mandarins' who looks 'neither out nor in' and is the 'centre of formalities' (*IMH*, 19). The key line 'The natural wakeful life of our Ego is a perceiving' (*CPP*, 127) characterises the extreme dissociation extant in the poem between literal surface reality and inner depth, between Coriolanus, the city and the anonymous crowds and the individual mind. The throng of people 'crowding the way' to the temple are transfixed by appearances and dissolve into the collective spectacle, losing their individual instincts and identities: 'We hardly knew ourselves that day' (127). Here, we are reminded of the 'Unreal City' in *The Waste Land* and the crowds flowing over London Bridge who live merely on the horizontal axis of temporal time (*WL*, 60).⁶⁹

As well as comparisons with *The Waste Land*, Ronald Bush notes that 'Coriolan' 'shares more than chronology with "Ash-Wednesday"' (1983: 153).⁷⁰ Notably in 'Triumphal March' the lubricating waters and childhood memories of the New England coastline that brought redemption in 'Ash-Wednesday' and 'grace' in 'Marina' have dried up: 'Dust / Dust / Dust of dust' (*CPP*, 128).⁷¹ Consequently, the 'still point of the turning world' remains 'hidden' beneath illusory surfaces: 'hidden under the dove's wing, hidden in the turtle's breast' (127). Both Coriolanus and the watching mass crowds are spiritually anaemic to the 'Light' (128).⁷² A dissociative splitting remains between inner subjective and outer objective realities. Nevertheless, 'Triumphal March' and 'Difficulties of a Statesman' show this Coriolanus to be very different from the sanctimonious adolescent in 'Mandarins' and the 'tortured' and 'broken' males in 'Ode' and *The Waste Land*. Unlike earlier representations, Eliot's 'man-child' is now portrayed from the perspective of a convinced Christian whose mother is no longer alive. For instance, at the end of 'Triumphal March' the Sanctus 'bell'

⁶⁹ This also looks towards 'Burnt Norton' and the distracted 'men and bits of paper' who move in the 'dim light' of London's underground stations (*CPP*, 173-74).

⁷⁰ Bush sees 'Coriolan', like many passages in 'Ash-Wednesday', as owing a great deal to Eliot's work on St. John Perse's *Anabase*, 'from which its opening lines borrow shamelessly' (1983: 153).

⁷¹ This problem of spiritual drought is noted in 'Difficulties of a Statesman' where a committee is appointed 'to nominate a commission of / engineers / To consider the Water Supply' (*CPP*, 129).

⁷² Knight (1966) views Eliot's Coriolanus in 'Triumphal March' as an attempt to fuse separated Renaissance and Christian values of heroism and love, State and Church, in a manner similar to Nietzsche's 'Super-hero' in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. He sees this as only momentarily achieved in the following six lines:

There is no interrogation in his eyes
 Or in the hands, quiet over the horse's neck,
 And the eyes watchful, waiting, perceiving, indifferent.
 O hidden under the dove's wing, hidden in the turtle's breast,
 Under the palmtree at noon, under the running water
 At the still point of the turning world. O hidden. (*CPP*, 127-28)

rings to mark ‘Easter Day’ (128) and the culmination of Lent that began with ‘Ash-Wednesday’. Here, Christ’s triumphant procession into Jerusalem looks to override the Roman triumphal march and hints at the redemption that ‘Ash-Wednesday’ achieves. Further, there is a correspondence present between the Roman triumphal march in ‘Coriolan’ and the procession of the ‘gilded hearse’ in part IV of ‘Ash-Wednesday’ that reiterates the trauma of separation from the mother.⁷³ This sense of affiliation between the two texts is emphasised in the opening to ‘Difficulties of a Statesman’ with its anguished primal ‘Cry’ (129) to the mother from whom the speaker has been separated, as heard at the end of ‘Ash-Wednesday’, which goes on to resound eight times. However, the maternal deprivation feared in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ (‘Suffer me not to be separated’) is now unbearable. Like an abandoned child, Cyril (the Coriolanus voice of ‘Difficulties of a Statesman’ and the young boy in ‘Triumphal March’) asks in both lamentation and reproach: ‘What shall I cry? / Mother mother’ (129). Aside from Coriolanus’ cold façade of adult masculinity and independence in the first poem, ‘Difficulties of a Statesman’ reveals a deep yearning to be reunited with the mother. In an echo of the hankering after the maternal body apparent in the earlier ‘La Figlia Che Piange’ (‘And I wonder how they should have been together!’), Cyril confesses to a wish for maternal contact and protectiveness and, at the same time, reveals the ‘still point’ hidden in ‘Triumphal March’ to be related to the mother:

Mother
 May we not be some time, almost now, together,⁷⁴
 If the mactations, immolations, oblations, impetrations,
 Are now observed
 May we not be
 O hidden (130)

Yet, there is no response from the mother. She is noticeably unavailable to answer Cyril’s calls. Unlike ‘Ash-Wednesday’ and ‘Marina’, there is no maternal figure, ‘face’ or surrogate object. Hence, there is no mutual recognition between mother and child, self and other, to affirm the male subject’s sense of self and prevent his fragmentation. This absence—reflected

⁷³ This section of ‘Triumphal March’ echoes the many Easter poems and hymns that Charlotte Eliot wrote while Eliot was a boy. Like ‘Coriolan’, Charlotte’s ‘At Easter-Tide’ notes ‘the sweet bells chime’ (*CES*, 25), ringing the tower and calling people to church on Easter Day.

⁷⁴ This line resembles the words of Elena in Charlotte Eliot’s *Savonarola* (1926) who cries out at her son Savonarola’s separation: ‘Must we part, / And loneliness and longing in my heart / Usurp love’s deep content?’ (*SA*, 2).

by dust and dryness in the poem—suggests a fall from the balance of ‘Marina’ and an atrophy in the powers of the male poet to create what he needs. Indeed, Eliot states in ‘The Three Voices of Poetry’ that he felt he had ‘exhausted’ his ‘meagre poetic gifts’ around the period of his aborted attempt to write ‘Coriolan’ (*OPP*, 11). For Martin Scofield, ‘it is surely not irrelevant here that Eliot’s own mother, from whom he had in some ways felt unhappily estranged, had died two years before [Eliot’s writing ‘Coriolan’], in 1929’ (1988: 185). It is also not irrelevant that the poem’s call for the mother’s support coincides with increasing disturbances in Eliot’s marriage to Vivien and his desperate striving, as his friend Robert Sencourt noted, ‘to establish serenity between them’ (*LTSE5*, xxxvii).⁷⁵

In ‘Difficulties of a Statesman’ the child’s pained apostrophe to the mother, ‘O mother’ (*CPP*, 130), signals the first materialization of the repressed, spectral mother in Eliot’s *Coriolanus* passion scenes and, like ‘Ash-Wednesday’ and ‘Marina’, suggests a further poetic breakthrough in regards to male recognition of the maternal feminine. In 1930 Eliot announced to Knight a radical change in his view of *Coriolanus*:

I have been rereading *Coriolanus*. I wonder if you will agree with me—it is rather important—I feel now that the political criticism, so much mentioned, is a very surface pattern; and that the real motive of the play is the astonishing study of the mother-son relationship: ‘he did it to please his mother . . .’
(*LTSE5*, 368)

That ‘Difficulties of a Statesman’ draws its lines ‘Mother mother’ from *Coriolanus*’s final act is extremely pertinent to this statement:

O, mother, mother!
What have you done? Behold the heavens do ope,
The gods look down, and this unnatural scene
They laugh at. O my mother, mother! O!
You have won a happy victory to Rome;
But, for your son,—believe it, O, believe it,

⁷⁵ The Eliot letters show the years 1930-31 to have been a ‘tough time’ for him (*LTSE5*, xiii), both in his public and personal life. They indicate that Eliot’s marriage to Vivien was becoming increasingly desperate due to her deteriorating health. Also, a letter to William Force Stead suggests that Eliot had been advised by Father Underhill to separate from her (see *LTSE5*, 413-14). Eliot’s formal separation from his wife would not happen until 1933.

Most dangerously you have with him prevail'd,
 If not most mortal to him. But let it come.
 Aufidius, though I cannot make true wars,
 I'll frame convenient peace. Now, good Aufidius,
 Were you in my stead, would you have heard
 A mother less? Or granted less, Aufidius? (*Cor.* 5.3.182-92)

In this recognition scene, Coriolanus' egocentric ideal breaks down and he becomes a child again. He finally surrenders to Volumnia's demands indicating an acknowledgement of his inability to truly separate from her, 'author' himself and transcend maternal dependence: 'You have won a happy victory to Rome'. For the first time, Coriolanus has come to see the illusion of his omnipotence and the fundamental role of the mother in constituting, conditioning and compounding his subjectivity. All of his achievements, status, courage and aggression have been formed and moulded by Volumnia. As she states: 'Thou art my warrior' (5.3.62).⁷⁶ Furthermore, Coriolanus comprehends how mother-child idealisation has 'dangerously' entrapped him. A. D. Nuttall notes that Coriolanus' voice in this scene 'is not that of the constructed automaton' (299). He is now speaking from his core identity. In G. Wilson Knight's interpretation (which Eliot knew well and which Knight saw as informing 'Coriolan'), Coriolanus' *virtus* is melted away at the play's end by Volumnia's and his wife Virgilia's display of mother love and familial love.⁷⁷ Coriolanus realises 'love's intolerant autonomy within his own breast' (1931: 196) and, with this, 'the heavens do ope' (*Cor.* 5.3.183).⁷⁸ Coriolanus' recognition of his ambivalence and complete indebtedness to mother

⁷⁶ Adelman states on act 5 scene 3 of *Coriolanus*: 'throughout this scene, Volumnia has simultaneously asserted [Coriolanus'] dependence on her and made the dangers inherent in his defence against that dependence horrifyingly clear; and in the end, it is the combination of her insistence on his dependency and her threat to disown him, to literalize his fantasy of standing alone, that cause him to capitulate (161).

⁷⁷ Knight enclosed in a letter to Eliot 'a couple of pages on the mother-son relation' in *Coriolanus* before writing the full essay (*LTSE5*, 388). Knight states in the letter: 'if I were asked in one sentence what the play stands for I think I should put it like this: *A conflict in the soul between a supreme but self-contained value and love*' (388, emphasis in original). Eliot responds: 'I am not quite sure, but I think that in the case of this play, I can go with you almost the whole way. Indeed, I was astonished to find the conclusions which you arrived at by analysis so close to those suggested to me by my personal experience'.

⁷⁸ It is noteworthy that Coriolanus' transformation and recognition in act 5 scene 3 is attended by a trinity of women: Volumnia, Virgilia and Valeria. Knight states in a letter to Eliot: 'Coriolanus is, as it were, attacked by the feminine ideal in full strength, a trinity of womanly love and beauty' (*LTSE5*, 468 n. 2). Knight traces a succession in *Coriolanus* 'from lust to spiritual love'.

love brings reconciliation with Volumnia and Virgilia and also peace to Rome and himself.⁷⁹ Resultantly, both his mother and wife are conferred the status of Goddesses.⁸⁰

. . . Come, enter with us. Ladies, you deserve
To have a temple built you: all the swords
In Italy and her confederate arms,
Could not have made this peace. (*Cor.* 5.3.211-14)

Although Eliot's 'Coriolan' does not reach Coriolanus' *anagnorisis* and integration of antithetical values (public and private, social and personal), and has neither a 'gracious' Virgilia, Marina or answering maternal form to redeem its speaker, 'Difficulties of a Statesman' does intimate a stirring towards this end in the breakthrough of nature and flower imagery amidst the Roman visual aesthetic. The following section shows the 'still point' as markedly recast from 'Triumphal March' as a refuge in the maternal:

Here is the row of family portraits, dingy busts, all looking remarkably
Roman,
Remarkably like each other, lit successively by the flare
Of a sweaty torchbearer, yawning.
O hidden under the. . . Hidden under the. . . Where the dove's foot
rested and locked for a moment,
A still moment, repose of noon, set under the upper branches of noon's
wildest tree
Under the breast feather stirred by the small wind after noon
There the cyclamen spreads its wings, there the clematis droops over
the lintel
O mother (not among these busts, all correctly inscribed) (*CPP*, 130)

⁷⁹ A. C. Bradley writes of this scene how 'at the sound of his mother's voice and the sight of his wife and child, nature asserts itself' (George 282). In Coriolanus' giving way to nature 'he has saved his soul'.

⁸⁰ In Middleton Murry's analysis of *Coriolanus* he finds Coriolanus' wife, Virgilia, to be the most congenial of all the characters in the play and the only one that promises Coriolanus salvation. Murry states:

behind the disdainful warrior and his Amazonian mother, behind the vehement speech of this double Lucifer, the exquisite, timid spirit of Virgilia shrinks out of sight into the haven of her quiet home. One can almost hear the faint click of the door behind her as it shuts her from the noise of brawling tongues. Yet in her presence, and in the memory of her presence, Coriolanus becomes another and a different being. It is true we may listen in vain for other words so tender as 'My gracious silence!' from his lips. (George 353)

Trammelled and exhausted by the responsibilities and demands of public service and committees,⁸¹ Cyril appears at risk of breakdown as indicated by his neurotic stammer: ‘CRY what shall I cry?’ (129), ‘O hidden under the . . . Hidden under the . . .’ (130).⁸² Observing the disrupting force of nature, however, Russell Kirk supposes that ‘for solace and counsel, perhaps, his mother’s ghost may come to him “with the sweep of the little bat’s wing. . . .”’ (2008: 163).

Gordon tells how Eliot intended ‘Coriolan’ to be a four part sequence moving from ‘empty shows of power to a prophetic role and then on towards a state of mystical elevation based on St. John of the Cross’ (1998: 246). At the end of ‘Coriolan’, the insistent ‘RESIGN RESIGN RESIGN’ (*CPP*, 130) demonstrates an evident struggle with renunciation in the reaching for liberation and transcendence that ‘Marina’ achieves. As a consequence, the poem’s longed for reunion with the mother and God is unfulfilled. Still, regardless of Eliot’s abandoning of ‘Coriolan’, it stands alongside ‘Marina’ by its demonstrating growing recognition of the maternal feminine in Eliot’s middle works.⁸³ That Eliot incorporated into ‘Coriolan’ the recognition scene from the climax of Shakespeare last tragedy suggests a similar profound awakening and movement towards understanding and accepting his own

⁸¹ The sense of the public versus private life is emphasised in ‘Difficulties of a Statesman’ by the incessant talk of committees juxtaposed against the calls for ‘mother’. As mentioned in chapter 1, Charlotte Eliot was heavily involved in committees serving on the board of the Wednesday Club and the Colonial Dames of America. Eliot believed he inherited a similar motivation to serve on committees from his grandfather’s ‘law of Public Service’. He states in an address at Washington University in 1953: ‘it is no doubt owing to the impress of this law upon my infant mind that, like other members of my family, I have felt, ever since I passed beyond my early irresponsible years, an uncomfortable and very inconvenient obligation to serve upon committees’ (*TCTC*, 44).

⁸² Corcoran sees ‘Coriolan’ and the speaker’s stammer as directly related to the conflict of mother-son ambivalence that dominates the drama of *Coriolanus*. He states: ‘what is hidden in the depths of this Coriolan, is a desire for maternal love of a kind he appears never to have had’ (109). Although I agree with Corcoran that ‘Coriolan’ indicates the conflict of mother-son ambivalence, I do not fully agree that the poem desires a maternal love that it appears never to have had. Rather, I read Eliot’s poem as coveting a maternal love previously given but which is now absent.

⁸³ For Corcoran, ‘Coriolan’ indicates a further failure by Eliot to objectify the ambivalent mother-son relationship. He states: “‘Coriolan’, like *Sweeney Agonistes*, may be unfinished because it handles material that remains unfinished business for Eliot himself, material that this poet could not manipulate any further into art’ (109).

Coriolanus.⁸⁴ Like ‘Marina’, ‘Coriolan’ indicates an increasing maturity and awareness of radical dependence on the mother’s love and support for the development of the self, even after the mother’s death. It also hints at a solution to man’s narcissistic antimonal nature in the symbolisation and recognition of the pre-Oedipal (m)other and her love at the creative foundation of our beginnings. Dissimilar to ‘Marina’, however, ‘Coriolan’ shows the enduring dangers of identificatory love and mother-child idealisation. It confirms the holding of difference in tension in mutual recognition, as shown in ‘Marina’, to be a delicate balance and ideal that is always at risk of breakdown and splitting in the face of unmanageable ambivalence. Eliot’s plans for ‘Coriolan’ imply that he viewed his Coriolanus as surmounting mother-son ambivalence and only saved from the tragic fate of Shakespeare’s hero in the acceptance of Christian Orthodoxy. An underappreciated and transitional work, the poem would crucially pre-empt Eliot’s turn to poetic drama and his more complete playing out of this scenario in *The Family Reunion* (1939).

⁸⁴ A similar argument is put forward by Childs (1997: 128-51). However, Childs reads ‘Coriolan’ (1931-32) alongside Eliot’s 1931 review of Middleton Murry’s biography of D. H. Lawrence, *Son of a Woman* (C., July 1931: 768-74). Eliot was a long-time admirer of Lawrence and, in particular, the novel *Sons and Lovers* (1913). Eliot’s review equates Lawrence’s spiritual malaise, restricted vision, false mysticism and personal unhappiness with an unresolved ‘mother-complex’ (770). Suggestively, Eliot likens Lawrence’s dilemma to his own dissatisfaction with Unitarianism and its idea of the ‘inner light’. Eliot indicates his own mediation of the spiritual and the maternal in his move to Christian Orthodoxy in 1927. In Childs’ opinion, Eliot’s review is an indirect acknowledgement of his own ‘mother-complex’ and an attempt to disentangle himself from identification with Lawrence. He sees ‘Coriolan’ as conflating Eliot’s altered views on Lawrence and *Coriolanus* in the 1930s. For Childs, the poem suggests that by 1931 Eliot had come to understand at least his own Coriolanus—if not Shakespeare’s Coriolanus—as suffering from a ‘Lawrentian mother-complex’ (1997: 139). While I agree with Childs, he misses an opportunity to strengthen his claim through reference to Eliot’s allusion to the final act of *Coriolanus*. Also, he misses Eliot’s endorsement of Lawrence in his lecture notes made for a course on contemporary literature delivered at Harvard in 1932-33, published as *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (1934). In the notes Eliot identifies with and champions Lawrence’s *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922)—and specifically the chapter ‘Parent Love’ which he revealingly misremembers as being called ‘Mother Love’ (qtd. in Soldo, 1983: 43). Lawrence argues in ‘Parent Love’ that it is the ideal love between mother and child that instigates a child’s introversion and intense self-consciousness about sex. A mother’s love for her son is a ‘poison’ (177) that impedes rather than promotes male maturity and independence. Eliot states in a typescript of his Harvard lectures: ‘What [Lawrence] says about mother love in *Fantasia* is better than all the psychologists’ (qtd. in Soldo, 1983: 43). Eliot’s changing identification with Lawrence and its implications remains an area of critical opportunity.

5. 'EVERYTHING HAS ALWAYS BEEN REFERRED BACK TO MOTHER'—THE MELODRAMATIC STAGING OF AMBIVALENCE IN *THE FAMILY REUNION*

When sufferings are engendered among the affections—for example, if murder is done or planned, or some similar outrage is committed, by brother on brother, or son on father, or mother on son, or son on mother—that is the thing to aim at.

Aristotle, *Poetics*

I think, mother,
I shall make you lie down

T. S. Eliot, *The Family Reunion* (1939)

For A. D. Moody, Eliot's 'Coriolan' poems, though uncompleted, 'show Eliot working towards his special form of poetic drama' (1994b: 165), a form which would be developed more fully in his verse plays of the 1930s: *The Rock* (1934), *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) and *The Family Reunion* (1939). Eliot's fervent interest in poetic drama and gravitation towards working in this medium had been anticipated in the late 1910s and through the 1920s in numerous critical essays such as 'Rhetoric and Poetic Drama' (1919) and 'Four Elizabethan Dramatists' (1924), as well as in his unfinished verse drama *Sweeney Agonistes* (1925-26). In the late 1920s, Eliot became compelled to turn his attention to more political, cultural and religious concerns after overtly declaring his allegiances as 'classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion' (*FLA*, ix). Hence, Eliot's reasons for writing for the theatre in the 1930s appear to be in line with his growing belief in the responsibility of art and culture to promote and uphold Christian social, political and religious ideals. He would strenuously elaborate such ideas over the next twenty-five years in various publications: the *Criterion*, *After Strange Gods* (1934), *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939), *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (1949).¹ Despite this outwardly public-facing premise, however, several of Eliot's prose writings of the time put forward a more personal, unconscious motive for his turn to drama and his experimentations with the form. In *After Strange Gods*, Eliot unashamedly admits being 'double-faced' and acknowledges a large disparity between the

¹ Eliot states in the *Criterion* in 1927 'politics has become a too serious a matter to be left to the politicians' (*C.*, Nov. 1927: 386).

‘ideals’ expressed in his prose and the ‘actuality’ of his verse (ASG, 28). Also, he acknowledges the likelihood of strong unconscious forces operative within his works which belie the intentions of the conscious intelligence:

if you examine the works of any great innovator in chronological order, you may expect to find that the author has been driven on, step by step, in his innovations, by an inner necessity, and that the novelty of form has rather been forced upon him by his material than deliberately sought. (ASG, 24)

Eliot later speculates ‘it may be that from the beginning I aspired unconsciously to the theatre’ (OPP, 90).

Eliot considered his first two forays into drama in the 1930s to be experiments: *The Rock* being a pageant with a specified scenario and *Murder in the Cathedral* a history worked into a verse drama.² Nevertheless, both dramas would be necessary divagations leading to a new form in Eliot’s first completely original play *The Family Reunion*. Although published and first performed in March 1939, *The Family Reunion* was begun in 1934 and subjected to numerous redraftings by Eliot under the advice of theatre director and friend E. Martin Browne.³ In a draft of the play in the Hayward Bequest at King’s College, Cambridge, it is curiously given the subtitle ‘A Melodrama’ (HB, TS D/5).⁴ Though eventually excised, this subtitle is extremely revealing of both the content and Eliot’s initial vision for the play. The term melodrama is taken from the Greek μέλος (melos) which means ‘song’ or ‘melody’. With its emphasis on scenic display, the sensationalist expression of the fullest and most visceral and vulgar of human emotions, the rectitude and (even) sanctification of the lead protagonist, and also idealisation and simplification of the world of actuality, melodrama became the most popular dramatic form in England and France in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nonetheless, in comparison to tragedy and classical high drama, it was generally regarded by critics as a low, sentimental, two-dimensional and frivolous dramatic form and convention. Though critical derogation of melodrama as a low cultural artefact placed it as antipodal to the

² In ‘Poetry and Drama’ (1951) Eliot admits that he had not solved the problem of dramatic language in *Murder in the Cathedral* and that the play was a ‘dead end’ (OPP, 84). He adds in a 1959 interview with Donald Hall: ‘I started, really, from *The Family Reunion*, because *Murder in the Cathedral* is a period piece and something out of the ordinary. It is written in rather a special language, as you do when you’re dealing with another period. It didn’t solve any of the problems I was interested in’ (Hall 269).

³ For detailing of the composition and stage performance of *The Family Reunion*, see Browne 90-151.

⁴ The first draft held in the Hayward Bequest and dated 28 September 1938 does not feature the subtitle ‘A Melodrama’ (HB, TS D/4).

high elitist male modernist agenda of the early twentieth century, David Chinitz (2005) notes that Eliot had a lifelong attraction to the dramatic form.⁵ Indeed, during Eliot's time at Harvard he regularly frequented the Grand Opera House in Boston to watch performances of melodramas such as Lillian Mortimer's *No Mother to Guide Her* (1905).⁶ Eliot later asserted his belief in the merits of melodrama and his interest in melodramatic form in 'Wilkie Collins and Dickens' (1927) (*SE*, 460-70). In the essay, he berates modern cinematographic melodrama and accuses it of being responsible for the decline of the melodramatic stage. Of special note is Eliot's stress on an inherent human need for the hysterical excess and catharsis provided by the hyperbole of popular commercial melodrama. He states 'melodrama is perennial' and 'the craving for it is perennial and must be satisfied' (460).⁷ Eliot privileges popular stage melodrama as the essential social dramatic mode through which habitually recurrent and resurfacing human longings, wishes and desires of the popular masses are best satisfied. Melodrama is both energised by extreme emotions and offers the audience an escape from them. In rebuttal of critics lambasting melodrama as over-excessive and obsolete, Eliot contends: 'perhaps no drama has ever been greatly and permanently successful without a large melodramatic element' (467).

This chapter sees the theme of mother-son ambivalence—which, I have argued, was a central feature and motivator of Eliot's works—reaching an apex of expression in *The Family Reunion*. First, it looks at the efficacy of the melodramatic mode in staging and resolving ambivalence and suggests this to be a formative reason why Eliot turned towards poetic drama in his late career. Second, it shows Eliot's choice of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* as a model for *The Family Reunion* as due to its providing an alternative male solution to the Oedipus myth for the problem of the maternal body in the absence of paternal authority.⁸ Eliot's turn to the *Oresteia* appears most apposite considering his intense personal suffering experienced during the demise of his marriage to Vivien in 1933 and her entrance into a private mental hospital in 1938, all of which occurred in and around his melodrama's composition (1934-

⁵ Chinitz (2005) notes Eliot's fervent interest in various types of so-called popular and 'lowbrow' culture: vaudeville, boxing, melodrama, music hall and minstrel shows. For Eliot's interest in music hall, see the 1923 essay 'Marie Lloyd' (*SE*, 172-74).

⁶ See Crawford (2015: 106).

⁷ Eliot states in 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry' (1928): 'we cannot be aware solely of divine realities. We must be aware also of human realities. And we crave some liturgy less divine, something in respect of which we shall be more spectators and less participants. Hence we want the human drama, related to the divine drama, but not the same, as well as the Mass' (*SE*, 49). He adds the 'craving for poetic drama is permanent in human nature' (56).

⁸ Eliot's use of the *Oresteia* for the basis of a modern melodrama is not so surprising. Sirk states: 'the *Oresteia* is really a melodrama, I think. But what used to take place in the world of kings and princes has since been transposed into the world of the bourgeoisie. Yet the plots are profoundly similar' (227).

39).⁹ Third, as in Tony Pinkney's Kleinian interpretation of *The Family Reunion*, this chapter reads the play's mother figures, Agatha and Amy, to be split-representations of the ambivalent mother.¹⁰ Yet, I correct and ameliorate Pinkney's reading to grasp the true significance of Eliot's creation of Agatha in promoting and achieving ambivalence. This is done through reference to Julia Kristeva's implicit critique of Kleinian theory in her notion of the 'imaginary father' (1987b: 21-56).¹¹ Further, elaborating on the connection drawn between Jan Campbell's and Kristeva's work in chapter 3, I show Eliot's portrayal of Agatha implies a relationship between maternal form and perception of the 'imaginary father'.¹² On Eliot's late plays, Elisabeth Däumer states 'the ambiguous double life of Eliot's female characters as domestic vipers and agents of spiritual transformation calls for a reevaluation of Charlotte Eliot's legacy to her son' (Laity and Gish 239). I claim that *The Family Reunion* is Eliot's own reevaluation, using the dramatic form of melodrama, of the lifelong legacy of his mother on his poetic works, personal and religious development and attitude towards women—a task undertaken at a critical juncture in his life and marriage when ambivalence towards the maternal body had again become unmanageable.

Melodrama

For Peter Brooks, the high emotionalism and high conflict of melodrama makes it the 'literary aesthetic of excess' *par excellence* (1976: 502).¹³ He states:

the desire to express all seems a fundamental characteristic of the melodramatic mode. Nothing is spared because nothing is left unsaid; the characters stand on stage and utter the

⁹ Gordon's detailing of the composition of *The Family Reunion* (1998: 551-53) shows it to be long and complicated, spanning the period of Eliot's separation from Vivien in 1933 to her confinement in Northumberland House in 1938 (1934-39). Gordon notes Eliot's first reference to a new play in a letter to Hallie Flanagan in February 1934.

¹⁰ Pinkney 118-43.

¹¹ In the biography *Melanie Klein* (2001), Kristeva both praises the genius of Melanie Klein and indirectly criticises aspects of Kleinian theory. Following Freud's 'father in individual prehistory' set out in 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego' (1921; rpt. 2001: 67-144), Kristeva's concept of the 'imaginary father' is introduced in *Tales of Love* (1987b: 21-56). It is discussed and elaborated throughout her works. For discussion of Kristeva's 'imaginary father' and her reassertion of the value of the paternal function, see Maria Margaroni, 'The Trial of the Third: Kristeva's Oedipus and the Crisis of Identification' (Lechte and Margaroni 34-62).

¹² For Campbell's comments on melodrama as a maternal form, see the chapters 'All about Our Mothers: Melodrama's Maternal Form' and 'Sympathies beyond the Self in Daniel Deronda' (2013: 119-172).

¹³ See Brooks' seminal study *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (1976).

unspeakable, give voice to their deepest feelings, dramatize through their heightened and polarized words and gestures the whole lesson of their relationship. They assume primary psychic roles, father, mother, child, and express basic psychic conditions. (4)

According to Brooks, melodrama lays bare the psychodynamics of the private Oedipal drama, externalising psychic conflict and structure. It works at the unconscious level of the family's relations and modes of functioning. Also, melodrama shows how passions circulate within the family: hence, the obsession in melodrama with themes of adultery, love and hatred of parents, death and familial succession, incest and sadomasochism. Like Eliot's writings on Shakespeare's late plays and verse drama, Brooks explicates how melodrama—in particular—plays out on several planes and gives several meanings. It gestures 'beyond' (xi) surface reality to express deeper sources and emotions:¹⁴ the 'underneath' and the 'inside' to use Eliot's terms (Bethell 9).¹⁵ Melodrama abstracts and dramatises basic inner passions in their 'primal, integral, unrepressed condition' (Brooks 35), circumventing, outwitting and breaking through social decorum, duty, censorship, triviality, symbolic law and the reality principle: the paternal 'No'. In its being *too much*, melodrama displays and confesses latent truths through the affective disorders and passions of the hysterical subject. Excess and subtext are central to the meaning of the form. For this reason, Brooks closely links melodrama with the unconscious and the work of psychoanalysis. Indeed, remarkably like the psychoanalytic method, melodrama is a therapeutic 'sense-making system' (77), insofar as it stages, acts out and works through those persistent—often unspeakable, and always extremely ambivalent and debilitating—symptoms of the body and mind. For Brooks, both melodrama and psychoanalysis articulate what has been repressed. In both modes cure and resolution 'come as the result of articulation which is clarification' (202). In its extravagant expressionism, confession and expiation of sin, communication and reformulation of repressed or

¹⁴ Brooks writes: 'melodrama's relation to realism is oblique—it is tensed toward an exploitation of expression beyond. It insists that the ordinary may be the place for the instauration of significance. It tells us that in the right mirror, with the right degree of convexity, our lives matter' (ix).

¹⁵ On the poets with ambitions towards the theatre, Eliot states in his introduction to S. L. Bethell's *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition* (1944):

they must somehow disclose (not necessarily be aware of) a deeper reality than that of the plane of most of our conscious living; and what they disclose must be, not the psychologist's intellectualisation of this reality, but the reality itself . . . a verse play is not a play done into verse, but a different kind of play: in a way more realistic than 'naturalistic drama', because, instead of clothing nature in poetry, it should remove the surface of things, expose the underneath, or the inside, of the natural surface appearance. (8-9)

unconscious desires, melodrama is both cathartic (abreactive) and purgative. In this way, melodrama satisfies collective spiritual urges towards resacralisation, purification and the re-establishment of a moral universe in a fallen and secularised modern age—motivations that Eliot strongly possessed after his commitment to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927.

Jan Campbell regards melodrama as crucial in helping us to understand how passions move: ‘how passions evolve or don’t evolve, within sensibilities that are historically inscribed’ (2013: 147). Mobile passions break out in search of new forms in melodrama, staging the affects that are usually in excess of representational forms. For Campbell, ‘melodramatic passions are both deeply secret and personal, and they are also something completely impersonal; a copy from someone else’ (121). In other words, our melodramatic passions are never completely our own. As stated in chapters 1 and 3, Campbell tells how passions are initially given, received and returned in a circuit of unconscious telepathic mimesis between mother and child; the early mother acting as a ‘non-personal (and virtual) form’ (119) and ‘genre’ (135) in rhythm with the child’s bodily needs.¹⁶ Despite repression and prohibitions, these old first passions continue to flow and resurface again and again throughout adult life in new forms, different symptoms and guises, through art, melodrama, hysteria and also in dreams. Campbell, like Winnicott and Kenneth Wright, highlights the early formative role of the maternal in facilitating the child’s symbolic capacities in relation to independence and autonomy, creativity, poetry and art, noting that

having a receptive mother allows us to desire, and to communicate that desire, without it being too traumatic. Perhaps most importantly the imaginative and receptive mother enables us to elaborate a dreaming self in which we can make up our new and evolving characters. (125)

Our first pre-Oedipal desires and passions are given new shapes through the maternal forms and gestures internalised by the child through the mirror and reverie of the early mother’s aesthetic. Campbell tells how this is ‘a simple kind of dream experience’ that dreams us into being (124). How we come to being, however, is highly dependent on maternal containment. Melodramatic trauma and suffering articulates itself like tormented wayward child-ghosts through the body. This suggests that for the hysterical child there has been some sort of

¹⁶ Campbell understands the early mother to be a ‘genre’ and ‘form’ for children of both sexes through which ‘the melodramas of our primary passions can be moved and mixed’ (2013: 136).

absence or failure in maternal holding; a missing of the mother's mirror and form. Thus, in the wish to find expression, sublimate and move forward, our first melodramatic passions always weave back through conscious and unconscious memory to re-find, refantasise, reorganise, or reidealise the mother, father or family that we had or wished we had had. Campbell notes: 'we regress to familial fantasies again and again and then transform them into whom we want to be' (2007: 36). If this is the case then all melodrama is essentially maternal: all melodramatic passions are instinctual wishes to return, feel and listen to the music and rhythms, shapes and poetic form of the early maternal body: our first melodramatic stage, our first childhood dream home. Campbell states:

meeting the poet in your mother is arguably just as important as engaging with maternal desire. And arguably it is this poet through elaborating the infant's capacity to play, that will mediate and reformulate the melodrama of the child's first passions. (2013: 125)

For Brooks, Campbell, Michael Booth and Eric Bentley the affective structure of melodrama strongly equates it with the experience of the dream.¹⁷ Bentley calls melodrama 'the Naturalism of the dream life' (205). Like Campbell, he locates the forces of the genre as rooted in the unconscious theatricality and narcissism of the infantile dream world. The melodramatic stage is a dream space where fantasy becomes imagination and the dream becomes experience. It is where thwarted, unbearable, buried and yet insistent infantile desires awaken to be fulfilled and shaped in reality. As Booth states:

melodrama is a dream world inhabited by dream people and dream justice, offering audience fulfilment and satisfactions found only in dreams. An idealisation and simplification of reality, it is, in fact, what its audiences want and cannot get. (14)

As in the Freudian dream, the potential of melodrama allows the subject through symbolisation to substitute, condense, displace and represent the self and his inner world of objects through multiple, differently sexed characters, dream scenarios and stylised plot narratives. Eliot recognised this relation between the stage and the dream in 1917 in relation

¹⁷ For key works reappraising melodrama as a dramatic mode, see Michael Booth's *English Melodrama* (1965) and Eric Bentley's *The Life of the Drama* (1967).

to the Japanese Noh theatre, stating: ‘dreams, to be real, must be seen’ (*E.*, 102-03).¹⁸ He adds: ‘it is only ghosts that are actual; the world of active passions is observed through the veil of another world’.¹⁹ In the dream world of melodrama, the subject and his ‘buried life’ can be conjured on the stage and he can separate and view himself—as in a dream—as other via an imaginative detour. Eliot writes in ‘The Three Voices of Poetry’ (1953):

a playwright may implant in his characters some aspect of his own personality, something perhaps very latent within himself. . . . In the plays of a great verse dramatist, such as Shakespeare, the playwright is the common element in every character: he is present everywhere, and hidden everywhere, in the plays’ world.
(*OPP*, 102)

Melodrama, like the dream, is allegory. It has an inherent plurality, ambivalence and obliqueness which allows it to not only speak the body but also stage forbidden desires, tabooed subjects and that which takes place in the repressed unconscious. Melodrama demonstrates affect in search of the imaginative maternal forms and ideals that will help us to express, shape and move our passions beyond the self and old familiar fixations. In this manner, melodrama helps us dream into being the people we wish to be.

Campbell states how ‘as a dream world, both ideal and simple, melodrama dramatises the violence and the clash between good and evil’ (2013: 154). For Brooks, this sense of ‘fundamental bipolar contrast and clash’ is central to the appeal of melodrama (36). Following ‘the logic of the excluded middle’, melodrama is ‘built on an irreducible Manichaeism, the conflict of good and evil as opposites not subject to compromise’. In the structural splitting inherent to the form, then, and its tendency towards antithesis, oxymoron, paradox and overstatement, melodrama is perfectly suited to performing the trials of familial ambivalence (love and hate, good and evil) in all its polarised conflict and passionate excess. The allure of melodrama is further enhanced by its wishful resolution of ambiguities and ambivalences, its happy endings and family reunions (as with Ibsen’s *Ghosts*), feigned omnipotence and childish narcissistic indulgence. It is therefore no surprise that Eliot renewed his rendezvous with melodrama in *The Family Reunion* (as the excluded subtitle suggests). In his desire to

¹⁸ For Eliot’s comments on the Japanese Noh drama, see ‘The Noh and the Image.’ *Egoist* 4.7 (Aug. 1917): 102-03.

¹⁹ For fuller examination of Eliot’s thoughts on the dream and its relation to drama and the stage, see Ronald Bush’s chapter ‘The Poet’s Inner World of Nightmare’ (1985: 41-52).

finally escape from personal inner turmoil, negate ambivalence toward the maternal body and disinvest the long-worn tragic Hamlet and Coriolanus personae recurrent throughout his works from the beginning ('Mandarins', 'Ode', 'Prufrock', 'Hamlet and His Problems', *The Waste Land*, 'Coriolan'), no other dramatic medium would appear so relevant to his cause. By the melodramatic staging of ambivalence in all its 'transparency, immediacy and first impressions' (Phillips, 2006: 223), it is possible that a solution to the male problem of ambivalent relation to the maternal body—first catalysed in the responsive or non-responsive early mother-child bond—may be dreamt of and put into action.²⁰

The Family Reunion

Eliot's *The Family Reunion* (1939) (CPP, 283-350) is a domestic family melodrama which selects, condenses and reworks aspects of Aeschylus' classical Greek trilogy, the *Oresteia*, from a modern Christian viewpoint.²¹ It is primarily concerned with the unbearable ambivalence present between an imperious mother, Amy, Dowager Lady Monchensey (a modern day Clytemnestra/Volumnia) and her son, Harry, Lord Monchensey (a modern day Orestes/Hamlet/Coriolanus).²² The drama enacted in the play lies in the Manichean struggle taking place within Harry's psyche. He is desperately torn between polarised issues corresponding to his unresolved dilemma with the biological mother: between love and hate for the mother, desire for and revulsion of the female body, between a wish for separation and reunion with the maternal body and between identification with the mother and the quest for a true self identity. Like the *Oresteia*, *The Family Reunion* is a centripetal play with everything taking place at the Monchensey family home, the dreamily named Wishwood.²³ Harry has

²⁰ See Phillips' comments on Dickens and theatrical melodrama (2006: 218-62). He states:

melodrama works with and on our wonderings about transparency, immediacy and first impressions; and especially our first impressions of other people. The drama of character, the suspense of character, is about what drama does to our expectations about character. . . . The audience's first impression of a character in a melodrama is a true but diminished thing because it cannot develop; impression conforms to expectation and vice versa. For Pip in *Great Expectations* Dickens wants to show us that his first impressions are true (and sometimes false) in ways in which he would never have expected. (2006: 223-34)

²¹ T. S. Eliot, *The Family Reunion, The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber, 1969), 283-350. All subsequent quotations of *The Family Reunion* are cited parenthetically with page number from this edition. For detailed analyses of *Oresteian* analogies in *The Family Reunion*, see Bodkin; Carpentier (1989, 2013: 133-70); and Pinkney 118-31.

²² S. Ellis (2009) notes 'associations between Harry and Shakespeare's Hamlet, particularly in that sense of his tormented apartness from those around him being occasioned by "deeper" levels of experience' (98).

²³ Many modern melodramas centre on the family home, including Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (1890), Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1904) and O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931).

returned to the ‘cold’ (*CPP*, 285) home of his childhood for his mother’s birthday after an absence of eight years. In that time, his difficult, overbearing, disturbed wife—who, like Vivien Eliot, is not favoured by the family—has died in an ‘accident’ (299) by falling overboard at sea. Since his wife’s death Harry has been experiencing transactions between the dream world and surface reality that is confusing notions of reality and unreality, truth and falsehood. Harry’s murderous fantasies towards his wife have coerced him into believing that he somehow instituted her drowning: ‘That cloudless night in the mid-Atlantic / When I pushed her over’ (294) (whether or not Harry did kill his wife is never made clear). As a consequence of Harry’s guilt and paranoid self-torment, he is pursued by the frightful Eumenides who, as in the *Oresteia*, appear to represent the vengeance of a terrifying, retaliatory, chthonic maternal superego: ‘Clytemnestra: Watch out—the hounds of a mother’s curse will hunt you down. / Orestes: But how to escape a father’s if I fail?’ (*Or.* 218).²⁴

In accord with its dramatic forefathers the *Oresteia*, *Hamlet* and *Coriolanus* and also *The Waste Land*, Amy’s maternal omnipotence and ambivalence, affect and excess in *The Family Reunion* are heightened by paternal absence. We discover through the course of the play that Harry’s father died when Harry was young and was seen as passive, ‘solitary’ (*CPP*, 331), a ‘weakling’ (341) and ineffectual in family matters. We learn that he was ‘unwilling’ (340) to be involved with his sons, intensifying Harry’s ‘rapprochement crises’ (Mahler 79).²⁵ Further, Amy indicates that she had to silently endure the pain and humiliation of knowing about her husband’s love for her sister, Agatha: ‘You thought I did not know! / You may be close, but I always saw through *him*’ (340, emphasis in original). Amy reveals that she had to relinquish her husband for the sake of her family and to attend to the demands of Wishwood: ‘Then I let him go. I abased myself. / Did I show any weakness, any self-pity? / I forced myself to the purposes of Wishwood’ (341). Despite Amy’s admissions, however, it is Agatha

²⁴ In Melanie Klein’s essay ‘Some Reflections on the *Oresteia*’ (1963; rpt. 1997: 275-99), the Erinnyes are linked to ‘the earliest and most relentless super-ego and represent the terrifying figures which are predominantly the result of the child projecting his destructive phantasies on to his objects’ (292). Their appearance in the *Oresteia* is a direct result of Orestes’ murder of his mother, Clytemnestra. For Klein, ‘the fact that nobody but Orestes can see the Furies shows that this persecutory situation is an internal one’ (284). Further, ‘the unforgiving nature of the super-ego, and the persecutory anxieties it arouses’ (287) are indicated by the continuing power of the Furies even after death.

²⁵ This bears striking similarities with Eliot’s complaints toward his father stated in chapter 1. Margaret Mahler’s theory of separation-individuation describes the ‘rapprochement crisis’ as a period (typically between 18 and 24 months old) of deep ambivalence for the child over issues of separation, autonomy, omnipotence and maternal engulfment. The role of the father is generally regarded as crucial in negotiating this ambivalence. For Mahler, in the final phase of separation-individuation some resolution of the crisis occurs through the child’s consolidation of self-identity and achievement of ‘libidinal object constancy’ (Mahler, Pine, and Bergman 86). Mahler supposes object constancy as being possible only when the maternal image becomes intrapsychically available to the child. The ‘rapprochement crisis’ is seen as shaping the emotional makeup of the adolescent and the adult.

who makes the most shocking revelations in the play. First, Agatha admits to Harry that she had always wished to be his mother: ‘I felt that you were in some way mine!’ (333). Next, she divulges that Harry’s father had plotted to murder Amy while she was pregnant with Harry, but was prevented from doing so by her intervention. Thus, Harry has two warring mothers vying for his affection and no father. Moreover, due to his father’s incapacity to resolve the problem of male ambivalence towards the maternal body, Harry’s ‘curse’ (336)—the ‘knot’ (316) of his guilt, mental suffering and matricidal impulses—is revealed to be a transgenerational inheritance. Ambivalence is affirmed as a family complex. It is ‘the noxious smell untraceable in the drains’ (294); a ‘putrescent’ (335) contagion which has long diseased the Monchensey genealogy. It is not just Harry’s personal quandary. To be more exact, as Agatha tells Harry: ‘You are the consciousness of your unhappy family’ (333). Like Orestes in the *Oresteia*, *The Family Reunion* shows Harry taking it upon himself to return to investigate the ‘nether world’ (350) of his childhood. At Wishwood, he hopes to find ‘a clue, hidden in the obvious place’ (337), that will help break the ‘curse’ (336) he has inherited from his progenitors.

It is no shock that Eliot chose the *Oresteia* as a model to try and work through the issue of ambivalence towards the maternal feminine. Aeschylus’ trilogy has been interpreted by psychoanalytic thinkers Sigmund Freud (1939), Melanie Klein (1963), Andre Green (1979), Luce Irigaray (1993) and Julia Kristeva (2001) as illustrative of the child’s transition from matriarchy to patriarchy.²⁶ Like *Oedipus Rex*, the *Oresteia* points to an enigmatic dilemma rooted in a primal situation. However, in contrast to *Oedipus Rex*, it provides an alternative logical process for a son mediating the loss of the maternal object in the father’s absence.²⁷ In Christina Wieland’s opinion, ‘the *Oresteia* represents the “hidden version” of

²⁶ See Sigmund Freud, ‘Moses and Monotheism’ (1939; rpt. 2001p: 7-140); Melanie Klein, ‘Some Reflections on the *Oresteia*’ (1963; rpt. 1997: 275-99); Andre Green, ‘Orestes and Oedipus: from the Oracle to Law’ (1979: 35-82); Luce Irigaray, ‘Body Against Body: In Relation to the Mother’ (1993c: 7-21); and Julia Kristeva, ‘An *Oresteia*’ (2001: 132-36). For Klein, the *Oresteia* is the record of a movement from the ‘paranoid-schizoid’ to the ‘depressive position’ symbolised by both Orestes’ transformation and that of the Erinyes into the Eumenides. She states: ‘in my view [Orestes] shows the mental state which I take to be characteristic of the transition between the paranoid-schizoid and the depressive position when guilt is essentially experienced as persecution. When the depressive position is reached and worked through—which is symbolised in the Trilogy by Orestes’ charged demeanour at the Areopagus—guilt becomes predominant and persecution diminishes’ (1997: 286).

²⁷ For Freud, the Oedipal problematic in the absence of a father is the problem of ‘identification’ which he states is the crucial stage in the ‘metamorphosis of the parental relationship into the super-ego’ (2001o: 62). In ‘The Dissection of the Psychical Personality’ (1933), he relates the super-ego with ‘the functions of self-observation, of conscience and of [maintaining] the ideal’ (66). The super-ego serves as ‘the vehicle of the ego ideal’ by which the child ‘measures itself, which it emulates, and whose demand for ever greater perfection it strives to fulfil’ (65). According to Freud, the super-ego is based on the child’s early identifications with the parents and, in particular, with what he terms ‘the father in his own personal prehistory’ (2001m: 31).

the Oedipus complex and its dissolution' (28).²⁸ In the myth of Orestes, matricide is shown to be the principal culturally sanctioned masculine solution to the problems of identity that beset the Western male subject's maturation. Avenging his father Agamemnon's death at the hands of his mother Clytemnestra, Orestes murders his mother and in doing so he violently severs the mother-son object relation. Both Electra and Athena adhere to Orestes' matricide by maintaining paternal identification with Apollo who denies the mother's generative powers: 'The *man* is the source of life' (*Or.* 260, emphasis in original).²⁹ In spite of Orestes lacking a paternal ideal, Athena crucially intervenes at the end of the play—saving him from madness, tempering the wrath of the pursuing Furies and moving him from the maternal realm to the Law of the Father.³⁰

For Martha Carpentier, Agatha in *The Family Reunion* is 'exactly analogous to Athena' (1989: 167). Like Athena, Agatha encourages Harry's leaving of Wishwood, 'You must go' (337), endorsing Amy's death.³¹ Further, Agatha exonerates Harry of his guilt and hastens both his psychic transformation and that of the Eumenides into 'bright angels' (339).

²⁸ In Eliot's 1931 review of Middleton Murry's biography of D. H. Lawrence, *Son of Woman*, he questions the Oedipus complex as the only ordeal of subjective autonomy, as was believed by Freud. Eliot credits Murry with demonstrating that Lawrence instead suffered from 'the emotional dislocation of a mother complex' (*C.*, July 1931: 770). For Eliot, Murry shows the 'common designation of "Oedipus complex"' to be 'inappropriate'. Eliot's comments anticipate his turning to the *Oresteia* in *The Family Reunion* as a means of dealing with Harry Monchensey's own 'mother-complex'.

²⁹ Apollo declares in the *Eumenides*:

Here is the truth, I tell you—see how right I am.
 The woman you call the mother of the child
 is not the parent, just a nurse to the seed,
 The new-sown seed that grows and swells inside her.
 The *man* is the source of life—the one who mounts. (*Or.* 260, emphasis in original)

Athena confirms this and shows her allegiance to Apollo: 'No mother gave me birth. / I honour the male, in all things but marriage. / Yes, with all my heart I am my Father's child' (*Or.* 264).

³⁰ In Irigaray's view, Orestes' murder of Clytemnestra represents the exclusion and silencing of the woman-mother as the founding act of patriarchy that is still taking place today. Athena is not a woman but a patriarchal construction. She is a perfect model of femininity, 'born of the Father, obedient to his laws at the expense of the mother' (1993c: 13). She perceives the Erinyes to be 'almost like ghosts of [Orestes'] mother . . . They are women in rebellion, types of hysterical revolutionaries who rise up against the patriarchal power that is being established' (12).

³¹ Although *The Family Reunion* is based on the *Oresteia* and endorses matricide as a means of psychic restructuring, it is not the *Oresteia*. There is no bloodletting and it is more oblique in its violence towards the mother's body. There is no direct murder of the mother and Harry's wife is presumed to have committed suicide. Rather, Harry's incrimination in his mother's death is shown by his leaving Wishwood. This is despite Dr. Warburton's forewarning of his mother's frailty and need to shield her from any shock:

At the present moment. The whole machine is weak
 And running down. Her heart's very feeble.
 With care and avoiding excitement
 She may live several years. A sudden shock
 Might send her off at any moment. (320)

Similarly, Harry's second cousin, Mary, is a dramatic creation comparable to Electra. She shares in Harry's resentment towards Amy, shows her own wish for independence from Amy's desires and colludes in the mother's downfall.³² Therefore, equivalent to Athena and Electra in the *Oresteia*, Agatha and Mary are emotionally and structurally fundamental within Eliot's play in justifying, supporting and enabling the son's violent separation from the mother-monster. They are Eliot's own dreamed-up agents functioning as female accessories to the male hero's sacrificial crimes and liberation. In seeming agreement with the *Oresteia*, *The Family Reunion* appears, on the surface, to advocate matricide as a patriarchal solution to the problem of the maternal body. Apparently, as Kristeva declares in *Black Sun* (1989), 'matricide is our vital necessity, the sine-qua-non of our individuation' (28).³³

Lyndall Gordon considers *The Family Reunion* to be Eliot's 'most autobiographical play', stating:

Eliot was brooding on the past after his mother's death in 1929 and two years later before he took up the Norton professorship in 1932, a belated fulfilment of a family's wish that he return to Harvard. The dream of return entered Eliot's work for a decade, culminating in *The Family Reunion* in 1939. (1998: 240)

As chapter 4 demonstrated, despite 'Marina' (1930) marking a developmental achievement in Eliot's works, 'Coriolan' (1931-32) indicates that male ambivalence towards the female body remained a wholly unsolved and an increasingly unpredictable predicament for Eliot in the 1930s. The reason for this dramatic upsurge was no doubt due to both the loss of Charlotte in 1929 and a severe intensification in difficulties in his relationship with Vivien during the period of his writing *The Family Reunion* (1934-39). In November 1932, Eliot travelled to America to give the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard. In May 1933, he wrote from America to his solicitor in London requesting a Deed of Separation from his

³² Mary's resistance against Amy is more prominent in earlier drafts available in the Hayward Bequest at King's College, Cambridge (HB, D4-5).

³³ Kristeva's thoughts on psychical matricide differ from Irigaray's. On the one hand, Kristeva argues for matricide as our 'vital necessity' (1989: 28) for autonomy in a patriarchal culture and society. She states that this is more difficult for girls due to the strength of their identification with the mother. On the other hand, Irigaray contends that the mother must be recovered from patriarchal matricide by describing a desiring maternal body. Only by recognising sexual difference can genuine individuation take place. As Stone (2012: 55-78) points out, Kristeva's work contains anti-matricidal as well as pro-matricidal strands of thought. This is especially evident in her account of pre-Oedipal triangulation and the 'imaginary father', which suggests that separation from the mother need not be definite in order to establish the self as a speaking subject.

wife, which Vivien refused.³⁴ Eliot returned to England in July. However, Ann Pasternak Slater explicates how ‘he went into hiding and tried never to see Vivien again’ (7). In February of 1934, Eliot began planning and writing *The Family Reunion*. In the ensuing years, although separated, Vivien became increasingly volatile and unable to withdraw herself from her husband’s life. Robert Sencourt testifies: ‘if he could have forgotten [her], she could not forget him’ (173). Vivien was eventually admitted to Northumberland House mental hospital in August 1938, seven months before the first performance of *The Family Reunion* at the Westminster Theatre, London.

In consideration of the historical context of the composition of *The Family Reunion*, critical opinion is unanimous in recognising a deep personal import in the play connected to the breakdown of Eliot’s marriage. Virginia Woolf saw at once Eliot’s connection with Harry, stating in her diary ‘the chief poker is Tom’ (Woolf, 1985: 210), while Gordon affirms that ‘the description of the wife in *The Family Reunion* is an accurate picture of Vivien as others saw her at this time’ (1998: 290).³⁵ For Raine, ‘Eliot’s difficult relationship with Vivien clearly feeds *The Family Reunion*’ adding ‘his play discloses what Eliot was so careful to repress in his daily life’ (121). In a letter to Browne dated 19 March 1938, Eliot hinted at the negative impact that his marriage had had in reintroducing his disquiet about women and how this had seeped into his portrayal of Harry Monchensey. He writes:

the effect of [Harry’s] married life upon him was one of such horror as to leave him for the time at least in a state that may be called one of being psychologically partially desexed: or rather, it has given him a horror of women as of unclean creatures. The scene with Mary is meant to bring out, as I am aware it fails to, the conflict inside him between this repulsion for Mary as a woman, and the attraction which the *normal* part of him that is

³⁴ See Slater’s account of the final years of the Eliot marriage and her condemnation of Seymour-Jones’ biography of Vivien Eliot in the article ‘Visisection: Vivien Eliot’s Biography.’ *Arteté* 7 (Winter 2001): 5-22.

³⁵ Woolf’s comments on *The Family Reunion* are made in a diary entry dated 22 March 1939. Gordon is referring to Amy’s description of Harry’s wife in the first scene of the play:

She never wanted to fit herself to Harry,
But only to bring Harry down to her own level.
A restless shivering painted shadow
In life, she is less than a shadow in death. (290)

These words tally with writer Hope Mirrlees’ recollection of Vivien’s decline in the 1930s: ‘she gave the impression, you see, of absolute terror. Of a person who’d seen a hideous ghost; a goblin ghost, and was always seeing a ghost in front of her’ (qtd. in Slater 6).

still left, feels towards her personally *for the first time*.

(qtd. in Browne 107, emphases in original)

Both Freud and Klein have written on how bereavement, rejection, frustration, a sense of failure and also loss rekindle and exaggerate deep-rooted primal feelings of ambivalence. Klein (1952) explains how the nourishing good internal object is severely impacted by loss and how this induces guilty feelings of having done harm to a loved one, stating: ‘when anxiety is paramount, the ego even denies that it loves the object at all’ (1997: 73).³⁶ In March 1933, Eliot remarked in a scathing letter to Ottoline Morrell:

for my part, I should prefer never to see [Vivien] again; for hers, I do not believe that it can be good for any woman to live with a man to whom she is morally, in the larger sense, unpleasant, as well as physically indifferent. But I am quite aware of putting my own interests first. (qtd. in *VMP*, 242)

Raine rightly correlates Harry’s matricidal feelings towards his wife in *The Family Reunion* with the extreme internal difficulties Eliot was experiencing in separating from Vivien at the time of writing the play.³⁷ He states: ‘and what did Eliot repress? The desire to be rid of his wife—definitively, permanently, impossibly. Short of murder, a clean break was impossible in actuality’ (121-22). Ever concerned for his wife and her wellbeing during their marriage, Eliot felt tremendous guilt and responsibility over Vivien’s loss and demise and he continued to feel implicated in her destruction.³⁸ In his desperate wish to escape from her possessive

³⁶ See Melanie Klein, ‘Some Theoretical Conclusions Regarding the Emotional Life of the Infant’ (1952; rpt. 1997: 61-93).

³⁷ Eliot later hinted at his association with Harry Monchensey and his matricidal feelings. He states in ‘The Three Voices Of Poetry’ (1953):

the author may put into that character, besides its other attributes, some trait of his own, some strength or weakness, some tendency to violence or to indecision, some eccentricity even, that he has found in himself. Something perhaps never realized in his own life, something of which those who know him best may be unaware, something not restricted in transmission to characters of the same temperament, the same age, and, least of all, of the same sex. Some bit of himself that the author gives the character may be the germ from which the life of that character starts. On the other hand, a character which succeeds in interesting its author may elicit from author latent potentialities of his own being. I believe that the author imparts something of himself to his characters, but I also believe that he is influenced by his characters. (*OPP*, 93-94)

³⁸ Despite the painful history of Eliot’s relationship with Vivien, Slater reminds us how he showed concern for his wife and was protective of her throughout their marriage, and even after its breakdown. She notes: ‘there is not a single unkind reference to her in the published letters of 1915-22. More to the point perhaps, there is only one negative reference in all Eliot’s unpublished letters cited in this biography, for the entire period of Vivien’s life’ (8).

clutches Eliot believed that he had in fact destroyed her. As a consequence of this psychic attack on the female body, it seems that Harry's fear of retaliation by the vengeful Furies in *The Family Reunion* was a very real situation for Eliot.³⁹

Evidence suggests, then, that the escalating problems in Eliot's marriage in the 1930s caused a heightening of ambivalence and, at times, a breakdown in the tension between co-existing feelings of love and hate. Herbert Read tells how Eliot's mental suffering was 'acute' during these tumultuous years (Tate 23). In like manner, *The Family Reunion* and the figure of Harry imply a revitalisation of those persecutory anxieties, sadistic impulses and Kleinian 'paranoid-schizoid' defences (splitting, idealisation, denial, ejection, manic omnipotence, projective identification) prevalent in Eliot's earlier works and discussed in chapter 1. Pinkney interprets *The Family Reunion* in terms of Kleinian psychoanalysis, noting 'deep affinities' (119) between the work of Eliot and Klein due to the devotion expressed by both to Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. In his view, Harry's return to Wishwood following his wife's death indicates adult regression to the 'paranoid-schizoid position' that is prominent in infantile dynamics. Although Pinkney does not explicitly state the case, he intimates a defensive splitting of the mother-breast into persecutory bad object and good idealised object, aligning Amy with Clytemnestra (bad object) and Agatha with Athena (it is no coincidence that Eliot chose the name Agatha for his divine mother as its etymology derives from the ancient Greek *ἀγαθός* which literally means 'good'). In the alternative Kristevan reading I am pursuing, Amy and Agatha are excessively split-off part objects derived from the same maternal object: the originary mother-breast.⁴⁰ In the loss and fantasised destruction of his wife as substitute object there has been a renewal in Harry of infantile feelings of both conscious and unconscious guilt concerning the violent past destruction in unconscious phantasy of the original loved object: the mother. As Moody states, it is not Harry's relationship to the wife but his relation with the mother that is the *real* 'beginning and the end of the story' (1994b: 175).⁴¹ Under the stress of unmanageable ambivalence—exacerbated by the absence of a father and an insufficient paternal superego—the inner maternal object has again been deeply split with a good object now needed to counterbalance the bad one. In Pinkney's Kleinian understanding, only

³⁹ Gordon writes of *The Family Reunion*: 'it is as though Eliot were living out a tale by Poe or James in which superficial order is forced upon terrible wrong which lurks beneath the surface becoming ghosts of the mind' (1998: 310).

⁴⁰ G. Evans notes: 'the inner lives of Agatha and Amy are so entwined that it is most revealing to consider them in tandem' (51).

⁴¹ Discussing Harry's mental derangement, Browne noted: 'Eliot evidently conceived his condition as deriving partly at least from a family background' (93). Pinkney observes how 'Harry's marriage has in fact only delivered him over to a woman who repeats in essentials the characteristics of that mother' (122). Harry's imagined pushing of his wife from the ship is really 'a phantasy attack on the mother' (123).

through Harry's recognition of the mother as a whole object—both good and bad, but at once one and different—can advancement be made beyond the 'paranoid-schizoid position' to the 'depressive position'. However, as Kristeva (2001) points out, this rediscovery of the mother is not enough.⁴² To read *The Family Reunion* through Klein does not explain the diacritical mark of difference that Harry identifies with which moves him beyond Wishwood at the play's end.⁴³

Pinkney shows how, from its outset, *The Family Reunion* sets up a power struggle and performance dialectic between the ambivalent motherly objects, Amy and Agatha. As stated earlier, the usefulness of Eliot's utilisation of melodrama for staging ambivalence lies in its propensity for presenting characters that embody primary psychic roles organised in Manichaeic conflicts, and its ability to dream stage those repressed, hysterical and forgotten first passions experienced by the child in relation to the pre-Oedipal mother. In the play's opening, Harry's return to Wishwood is a return to the excessive melodrama of the maternal body: the inaugurating site of his ambivalence.⁴⁴ The drama immediately externalises the fantasy-like Manichaeic schism of the maternal object that takes place within the child's inner dream world in defensive response to intolerable persecutory anxiety. If primal splitting of the maternal object is the first step in separation from the mother, *The Family Reunion*—beginning in the 'paranoid-schizoid position'—instantly prepares us for a quest for the father (the paternal ideal) and the Oedipal complex proper. Defence, denial, a fantasised matricide of

⁴² Kristeva both praises and implicitly criticises Klein's emphasis on the pre-Oedipal, the mother, her relegation of paternal agency and explanation of the dissolution of the Oedipus complex through the 'depressive position', stating:

before the formation of the Oedipal *triangle*, which divides the protagonists of the family, a *trio*, also Oedipal but founded provisionally upon the uncertain identities of the protagonists (in reality, on their narcissistic and objectless unconscious), plays a role of its own, in Klein's view, in the paranoid-schizoid position. Like a band in a Möbius strip that is characterized by its limitlessness, the future subject is forever transported toward the 'ab-ject' (on the side of the mother) and toward 'primary identification' with the 'father of personal prehistory' (on the side of the loved and loving pre-Oedipal father, who displays traits of both parents). As a figure of fascination as well as abjection, this narcissistic state of the early object relation, which I have described as *abject* and *abjection*, challenges not only pathology but limit states of sublimation as well: it challenges the sacred and the mystic as well as the difficulties posed by modern art. Melanie Klein exposes us to this sort of understanding of the archaic object, but only if we are willing to merge its genius into consideration of the symbolic function of the father as set forth in Freud's conception of the Oedipus conflict and Lacan's notion of the Name-of-the-Father—a function that is lacking in the matriarch. (2001: 73, emphases in original)

⁴³ In agreement with Kristeva, Doane and Hodges note how Klein does not 'provide a specific place for the father as an "idealising agency" who makes possible primary identification and establishes the conditions for both imagination and sublimation' (66). They add: 'it is difficult to discern how the Kleinian infant would come to modify its practices of projection, introjection and splitting and so both enter and resolve the depressive position'.

⁴⁴ As Campbell states: 'melodrama as our most personal, and passionate characters, seems to know only one way—back home' (2013: 122).

the wife, the splitting of the mother and a lack of integration in the main protagonist set in motion the drama of *The Family Reunion*. However, as we learnt earlier, it is specifically in the dreamlike realm of the sensual buried past of pre-Oedipal experience that the source of ambivalence can be enacted melodramatically on the Oedipal stage and the unbearable translated and metabolised. In this way, creative insight may be gained, ambivalence recognised, mitigated and worked through, and a true resolution hopefully realised.

In my interpretation, Amy and Agatha represent, to an extent, certain extreme polarised aspects of Charlotte Eliot. In a manner reflective of Charlotte, Eliot describes Amy Monchensey in a typescript of the play as ‘distinctly the head of the family’ (qtd. in Browne 93). She runs an efficient household, is dutiful, proud and a formidable presence. From the opening scene, Amy’s gratification and sense of identity is seen to be dependent upon Wishwood and her children and family—whom she has conflated together as one. For Amy, like Clytemnestra, familial blood ties take precedence over spiritual ties. Her love for her children is excessive and binding and she is unwilling to be separated from them:

If you want to know the reason why I never leave Wishwood
That is the reason. I keep Wishwood alive
To keep the family alive, to keep them together,
To keep me alive, and I live to keep them. (287)

In the father’s absence, the law of the mother has dominion at Wishwood. Amy controls and wishes to design the life of all of the family and, as Mary states, ‘what Cousin Amy wants, she usually gets’ (304). Owing to an unhappy loveless marriage, domestic responsibilities, thwarted ambitions and a restricted female subjectivity, Amy’s own life and desires are now lived vicariously through her family. In particular, Harry has come to represent her desire to her and the promise of its fulfilment. Amy declares in act 1 scene 1: ‘Harry is to take command at Wishwood / And I hope we can contrive his future happiness’ (290). Later, she says in dispute with Agatha:

Who has planned his good? Is it you or I?
Thirty-five years designing his life,
Eight years watching, without him, at Wishwood,
Years of bitterness and disappointment. (341)

Because of the losses Amy has endured, compensatory love and completeness is now sought in a prodigal son who most resembles her lost husband: 'You looked like your father / When you said that' (325). She totally identifies with Harry as her definite complementary other and views him as a continuation of her independent and generational aims. As Dr. Warburton states to Harry: 'Your mother's hopes are all centred on you' (320). Amy appears to indicate Winnicott's 'not good enough' mother who forces her child to attend to her routine wants and needs (1990: 145).⁴⁵ It seems Harry's own needs in his early childhood were not sensed or met by his mother. Due to the stifling of Amy's longings, ambitions and subjectivity, she was unable to tune into Harry's own joys and failures. A direct repercussion of this deep inscription of the mother's narcissistic desire upon her son, and Harry's previous compliance with her 'design' (306), has been his development of a psychopathological 'Prufrockian' false self persona. He states in act 1 scene 2: 'Perhaps my life has only been a dream / Dreamt through me by the minds of others' (333).⁴⁶ Harry has not experienced his life, desire and emotions as his own. His true self has been hidden and lost, drowned like Prufrock and Phlebas under the oceanic swell of the mother.

In Harry's exploratory discussion with his cousin Mary in act 1 scene 2 it is revealed that both of their childhoods were unhappy:

Harry.
 It seems I shall get rid of nothing.
 Of none of the shadows that I wanted to escape;
 And at the same time, other memories,
 Earlier, forgotten, begin to return
 Out of my childhood. I can't explain.
 But I thought I might escape from one life to another,

⁴⁵ Winnicott states in 'True and False Self' (1960): 'the mother who is not good enough is not able to implement the infant's omnipotence, and so repeatedly fails to meet the infant gesture; instead she substitutes her own gesture which is to be given sense by the compliance of the infant. This compliance on the part of the infant is the earliest stage of the False Self, and belongs to the mother's inability to sense her infant's needs' (1990: 145).

⁴⁶ In conversation with Agatha, Harry talks of 'the degradation of being parted from my self. / From the self which persisted only as an eye, seeing' (330). He adds:

All this last year, I could not fit myself together:
 When I was inside the old dream, I felt all the same emotion
 Or lack of emotion, as before: the same loathing
 Diffused, I not a person, in a world not of persons
 But only of contaminating presences. (330-31)

And it may be all one life, with no escape. Tell me,
Were you ever happy here, as a child at Wishwood?

Mary.

Happy? Not really, though I never knew why . . .

Harry.

Why were we not happy? (306)

In the same way that Orestes' sister, Electra, accords with his ambivalence towards the mother in the *Oresteia*, Mary partakes of Harry's own feelings and experience. She, too, has been imprisoned by Amy's 'indomitable will' (320) and each finds solace in mutual recognition of their shared plight. Having been unable to rid himself of his suffering, the emergence of repressed memories in the transference dialogue between Harry and Mary, such as the shared memory of the 'hollow tree' (307), confirms Harry's return to his childhood home to be an investigative return to the drama of pre-Oedipal beginnings and attachments: before/beyond the constraints of primary repression.⁴⁷ Wishwood is confirmed as the site of regression where the male narcissist will face the primary loves, needs, identifications and complexities of his childhood in order to re-find and reorganise the 'true self' that has been given over to 'design' (306).⁴⁸ As Agatha states near the outset of the play:

Yes. I mean that at Wishwood he will find another Harry.

The man who returns will have to meet
The boy who left. Round by the stables,
In the coach-house, in the orchard,
In the plantation, down the corridor
That led to the nursery, round the corridor

⁴⁷ Browne suspects that the memory of the 'hollow tree' is a personal memory of Eliot's American childhood (116).

⁴⁸ Mary states to Harry:

But surely, what you say
Only proves that you expected Wishwood
To be your real self, to do something for you
That you can only do for yourself.
What you need to alter is something inside you
Which you can change anywhere—here, as well as elsewhere. (308)

Of the new wing, he will have to face him—
And it will not be a very *jolly* corner. (288, emphasis in original)

In act 2 scene 3, in the confrontation between Amy and Agatha (the ‘bad’ and ‘good’ mother), it is apparent that Amy is oblivious to both the fact of Harry and Mary’s unhappy childhoods and the family’s ambivalence towards her:

I wanted to obliterate
His past life, and have nothing except to remind him
Of the years when he had been a happy boy at Wishwood;
For his future success. (341)

Amy does not recognise Harry’s own desire, subjectivity and autonomy. In addition, she experiences his determination to leave Wishwood as frustrating and a threat to her individual identity and maternal individuation. Just as Charlotte Eliot felt about Eliot leaving for Paris in 1910, Amy displays extreme persecutory anxiety at the thought of Harry’s separation and is unable to manage his ambivalence towards her. In Amy’s conversation with Agatha her own melodramatic passions hysterically break through her usual decorum to unveil and speak the source of her anguish and hostility:

And now at the moment of success against failure,
When I felt assured of his settlement and happiness,
You who took my husband, now you take my son.
You take him from Wishwood, you take him from me,
You take him . . . (341)

Eliot describes Amy in a letter to Browne as someone who ‘understands nothing: she is merely a person of tremendous personality *on one plane*’ (qtd. in Browne 107, emphasis in original). On the contrary, Harry does show some insight into his ambivalence towards his mother and voices it to Dr Warburton:

What about my mother?
Everything has always been referred back to mother.
When we were children, before we went to school,
The rule of conduct was simply pleasing mother;
Misconduct was simply being unkind to mother;

What was wrong was whatever made her suffer,
 And whatever made her happy was what was virtuous—
 Though never very happy, I remember. That was why
 We all felt like failures, before we had begun.
 When we came back, for the school holidays,
 They were not holidays, but simply a time
 In which we were supposed to make up to mother
 For all the weeks during which she had not seen us
 Except at half-term, and seeing us then
 Only seemed to make her more unhappy, and made us
 Feel more guilty, and so we misbehaved
 Next day at school, in order to be punished,
 For punishment made us feel less guilty. Mother
 Never punished us, but made us feel guilty.
 I think that the things that are taken for granted
 At home, make a deeper impression upon children
 Than what they are told. (317-18)

Like Proust's narrator in *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913), whose future life, relationships and sexuality are determined by the mother's early withholding of her kiss, Harry also locates a moment in childhood—which he believes was the night when his father died—as the instant when he was pinioned by the mother's seduction and entangled in the web of the maternal spider. He says to Warburton: 'Yes, I see now. That night, when she kissed me, / I felt the trap close. If you won't tell me, / I must ask Agatha. I never dared before' (319). Harry's insinuation is condemnatory: Amy took the death of the father as an opportunity to completely over-invest in Harry as the phallus. The overwhelming unconscious force of Harry's relationship with his mother is due to the perpetual haunting presence of the 'shadow of Jocasta', as Christiane Olivier calls the imprint of the woman who is unable to give up her son (101).⁴⁹ With the absence of the father there was no incursion, no definition of ego boundaries or any alternate love rival to mediate the ambivalence and incestuous impulses

⁴⁹ Olivier rethinks the Oedipus myth through examination of Jocasta's role in Oedipus' dilemma. She states of Jocasta: 'the woman has unconscious difficulties about giving up the only male she has ever been able to keep by her; she whose father let her down and whose husband is more often away than at home' (40). For Olivier, the more intense and prolonged the mother's insistence on holding onto her son, the more violent will be his rebellious feelings. The maternal trap, she states, 'is the main driving force of man's misogyny' (41).

between mother and son. As Amy states to Agatha in act 3: 'I *would* have sons, if I could not have a husband' (340, emphasis in original). As a result, Amy and Harry's bond is almost unbreakable. For Harry, there is 'too much of mother' (Lowenstein 281).⁵⁰ It is evident that Harry needed his father when he was young and is seeking an alternative identificatory paternal bond. In questioning Warburton he states,

But I want to know more about my father.
I hardly remember him, and I know very well
That I was kept apart from him, till he went away.
We never heard him mentioned, but in some way or another
We felt he was always here.
But when we would have grasped for him, there was only a vacuum
Surrounded by whispering aunts: Ivy and Violet—
Agatha never came then. Where was my father? (319)

In like manner to Eliot's works pre-1927, maternal excess and a lack in masculine identification in *The Family Reunion* threaten Harry with absorption into the mother. A lopsided Oedipal constellation has caused his lack of differentiation, fear of women and matricidal impulses, in addition to his guilt and regressive narcissism. Moreover, it has put him at risk of various neuroses and even psychosis, as seen in his visions of the Eumenides. With the father's absence, Harry has been unable to mediate the pre-Oedipal relationship with the mother and fully adapt in the social world as an independent male self. His internalisation of the dysfunctional parental relationship has caused disequilibrium in his inner world of objects. This has heightened unconscious feelings of ambivalence towards the mother which have subsequently been projected on his wife. Furthermore, due to the taboo on mother-son love imposed by reality and the law, Harry's childhood love for the mother has been subject to a vigorous repression. As Harry's chauffeur, Downing, notes: 'For what my judgement's

⁵⁰ For discussion of the influence of strong mothers upon their sons' development in 'matriarchal' families where the father is absent or regarded as ineffectual, see Grete Bibring, 'On the "Passing of the Oedipal Complex" in a Matriarchal Family Setting' (1953) (Lowenstein 278-84). Bibring notes that in such situations a son will generally experience his mother as overwhelming and resent her for this, contributing to his fear of women. She notes:

in its more positive form the son admires his mother for her devotion and strength and looks for her approval in a rather dependent and passive way. The father is loved with warm affection, sometimes mixed with compassion for his gentleness and ineffective position in the family and toward mother. In the negative form: mother is intensely feared and hated; the father is despised and/or resented for being a weakling and a coward, accused of 'neglecting' the child'. (Lowenstein 280)

worth, / I always said his Lordship / Suffered from what they call a kind of repression' (299). Nevertheless, in the recurring appearance of the Eumenides, we have a failure in repression, an increase in traumatic anxiety and a return of the repressed maternal body. As in the *Oresteia*, the Eumenides are linked to an insufficient paternal ego-ideal which causes regression to a tyrannical, ferocious maternal superego. Herein, then, is the difficulty for Harry in resolving the problem of ambivalence at the very core of his problems of separation-individuation. He must not only work through childhood repression to locate the hidden source of his pathological behaviour. Once there, he must also somehow establish a strong paternal identification—even though the father is not present—that will transform the Eumenides from dark angels into 'bright angels' (339). The solution to this problem lies with Agatha.

Agatha—The Transitional Father-Mother

I wish to here build upon and substantiate my challenge to some of Pinkney's assertions made in his Kleinian approach to *The Family Reunion*. To do this, I will use Kristeva's understanding and extension of Kleinian theory to explain more fully how the play indicates a significant movement in Eliot's work towards the 'depressive position'. In my view, Pinkney severely understates and does not explicate fully the role of Agatha in Harry's spiritual transformation. In fact, I would maintain that Agatha is the most important female creation in Eliot's *oeuvre*.⁵¹ In the absence of the father, Agatha importantly takes up a position of observation and judgement outside of the biological mother-son dyad. Although Agatha possesses strong maternal feelings towards Harry, as an aunt, she is structurally apart from the nuclear family and so is able to be free and flexible enough to occupy a number of important roles. As a kinship resource, Agatha provides both a psychic space and actual supportive and creative space for Harry away from Amy. She also offers an alternative psychotherapeutic relationship much like that in a trusted analytical setting: 'What is in your mind, Harry?' (330). As a confidante, Harry is able to publicly verbalise his private worries, aggression and desires to her without fear of destructive retribution or defensive denial. Unlike Amy who does not take into consideration Harry's thoughts and feelings, Agatha listens and tries to understand Harry: 'And you must try at once to make us understand / And we must try to understand you' (293). Moreover, Agatha supports Harry's separation and recognises that his

⁵¹ In his 1939 review of *The Family Reunion*, Ransom finds Agatha 'knowing and sympathetic beyond any other woman character that Eliot has drawn' (Grant, 1982b: 397).

future happiness resides in his solitary religious pursuit away from Wishwood, rather than as custodian of the family home. She states to Amy: ‘Success is relative . . . It is what he can make, not what you would make for him’ (341). Most importantly, as a second/other/supplementary mother, Agatha is void of the deep ambivalence that binds and paralyses the real mother-son relation.⁵² She is, to use Rozsika Parker’s description of the idealised fantasy mother, ‘hate-free, constant and unreal’ (1995: 24). She is Harry’s fairy godmother. In Agatha, the mother’s desire is turned away from, rather than toward, the child. Thus, Agatha is able to withstand, absorb, filter and regulate Harry’s ambivalent feelings and aggressive impulses in a way that Amy cannot. She is enabling rather than prohibitive. Unlike real mothers, Agatha maintains love alone fulfilling the perfect Madonna image of maternity that Eliot and his mother both revered.

In *The Family Reunion*, Agatha is the wished-for Winnicottian ‘good enough’ mother to Harry, and Harry the wished-for ‘satisfactory’ son to Agatha (343). Dissimilar to Amy, Agatha is not solely defined by her domestic or mothering function. She is representative of, and points toward, an outside. In a draft of the play, Agatha warns Harry: ‘But you cannot go on living in a private world / Unless you reconcile it to the public’ (*HB*, TS D5/14). Like Athena to Orestes, Agatha offers Harry what Patricia J. Sotirin and Laura L. Ellingson call ‘transitional nurturing’ (2010: 25). She enables his triumph over sorrow, his relinquishment of the lost maternal object and exit out of intrapsychic turmoil into the symbolic, intersubjective, social world. This is achieved by her providing Harry with a transitional relationship between pre-Oedipal and Oedipal registers. Agatha is what Campbell describes as a ‘maternal form’. She helps Harry hold, express, mediate and move his melodramatic passions. More than this, however, she is a maternal form with noticeable symbolic aspects. Agatha is simultaneously a ‘father-in-mother’ and ‘mother-in-father’ (Ogden 147).⁵³ She encompasses paradoxical characteristics that pertain to *both* parents (softness-in-hardness, hardness-in-softness).⁵⁴ In recognition of the *couple*, she symbolises the bisexual economy of the self and provides Harry with the crucial missing ‘third’ that will triangulate previously ambivalent object relations. She is a transitional father-mother that enables Harry to reconcile his sexual and ideal needs

⁵² Sotirin and Ellingson comment on the positive role of aunts: ‘occupying a niche outside the nuclear family enables the aunt to avoid the deep identification, responsibility, and vulnerability of the parent-child bond that (ideally) leads both to closeness and to children’s need to rebel to establish their own identity’ (2006: 496).

⁵³ See Ogden’s chapter ‘The Threshold of the Male Oedipal Complex’ in *The Primitive Edge of Experience* (1989: 141-68).

⁵⁴ Lamos comments on Agatha: ‘her virility renders her more of a man than any other character in the play, and she is given the privileged role of the wise truth-teller. It is she who informs Harry about his father and who castigates Amy for her “fury for possession.” In effect, Agatha stands in for the father that Harry never had’ (115).

and forgo his regressive desire for the pre-Oedipal mother. Like Athena, she operates differently from, but also in conjunction with, the symbolic father: Apollo/God the Father.

According to Pinkney, Harry's strengthening of the paternal superego and his final liberation are due to Agatha telling of news about his father. It is through Harry's procurement of this information that 'he finds a father in his own image, no less full of murderous intent towards Amy' (125). Moreover, Pinkney argues that 'Harry does not accede to the paternal reference, does not discover the father as an agent of prohibition, a third term violently intervening into the dual relation with the mother' (125).⁵⁵ Counter to Pinkney, I claim Harry does find the father through Agatha as a virtual non-personal father-mother, rather than the actual father. Rather than the stern Lacanian father, Agatha is the alternative loving 'third' that intervenes in the dual relation with the mother. In *Tales of Love* (1987b), Kristeva calls the supportive 'imaginary father'—after Freud—the 'father in individual prehistory' (23). She tells how the 'father' is the same as 'both parents' and provides a solution to the kind of persecutory anxiety suffered by Harry in response to the mother's excess. For Kristeva, the assistance provided by Agatha to Harry would be due to 'none other than maternal desire for the Father's phallus' (40). She explains:

if there is an *immediacy* of the child's identification with *that desire* (of the Father's Phallus), it probably comes from the child's not having to elaborate it; rather, he receives it, mimics it, or even sustains it through the mother who offers it to him (or refuses it) as a gift. In a way, such an identification with the father-mother conglomerate, as Freud would have it, or with what we have just called the maternal desire for the Phallus, comes as a godsend. And for very good reason, since without that disposition of the psyche, the child and the mother do not yet constitute 'two'. (1987b: 40, emphases in original)

⁵⁵ Pinkney argues that 'in Eliot the father never gets his penis back . . . Folded away within the maternal body, the father will never emerge in Eliot as the fully Oedipal agent of prohibition' (17). Regarding *The Family Reunion*, he states: 'freedom for Harry could only be a matter of acknowledging violence towards the mother, but he does not do so, and the play itself is still more evasive, chorically attributing the disaster to "certain inflexible laws / Unalterable"' (126).

In Kristevan terms, Agatha is Harry's 'godsend' from whom he receives the 'gift' of the 'Father's Phallus' (42).⁵⁶ Kristeva describes her idea of Winnicott's 'good enough' mother in relation to the 'father in individual prehistory' as a 'mother who has something else to love besides her child, it could be her work, her husband, her lovers' (Appignanesi 23).⁵⁷ If, like Amy, the only meaning in a mother's life comes from her child 'it's too heavy'. There has to be something else to which the mother's desire refers in order to achieve and surmount ambivalence. For Kristeva, it is the direction of the mother's desire away from the child and towards the 'not-I' that opens up a maternal space. In *The Family Reunion*, Agatha is this kind of mother. As a 'father-mother conglomerate', she is a mixture of the mother's love and her desire. She is 'strong' (CPP, 331), 'liberated from the human wheel', intelligent and has deeply loved Harry's father as well as Harry.⁵⁸ She has fought for her 'dispossession' (331), pursued a university degree and gone on to be principal of a women's college. What is more, in contrast to Eliot's 'Lady of silences' and Marina, Agatha has a voice.

In many ways, Agatha is indicative of particular qualities of the real Charlotte Eliot and a dream realisation of Charlotte's deepest desires. Elisabeth Däumer, whose argument for maternal desire as a force of disruption, separation and renewal in Eliot's late plays pre-empts and prompts my Kristevan reading of *The Family Reunion*, notes:

Agatha, whose educational accomplishments echo Charlotte Eliot's own capacities and aspirations, dramatises the transformative potential of a liberated motherhood anchored in a woman's sense of her autonomous agency. (Laity and Gish 241)

In Däumer's view, Agatha implies Eliot's recognition of his indebtedness to the particular brand of spiritually based feminism that Charlotte practised and exhorted. Her maternal authority realises 'an autonomous position as female subject, capable of individual agency

⁵⁶ Kristeva states: 'within sight of that Third Party I elaborate the narcissistic parry that allows me to block up that emptiness, to calm it and turn it into a producer of signs, representations, and meanings, I elaborate it within sight of the Third Party. I seduce this "father of individual prehistory" because he has already caught me, for he is simple virtuality, a potential presence, a form to be cathected' (1987b: 42– 43).

⁵⁷ See 'Julia Kristeva in Conversation with Rosalind Coward' (Appignanesi 18-27).

⁵⁸ Agatha's love for Harry's father is important, as Kristeva states:

the father of primary identification (*Einführung*) is an ideal imago of the sexual partner, as identified and reconstructed by maternal eroticism—an eroticism that is invested in the sexual partner as the loved/ loving father of their child. The future subject's 'I' is possible only because this 'father in individual prehistory' signifies to me a cathexis/recognition, only if I am reconnected [*relié*] to him through the maternal investment in him. (2014b: 77)

and authoritative self-assertion' (1998: 483). Agatha is not simply a silent, intercessory Virgin Mary figure submissive to the will of the Father. Neither is she, as Carpentier has it, purely an Athena-like pagan goddess adjudicating over the contest between ancient matriarchal divinities and a patriarchal godhead—favouring the latter. Däumer notes that Agatha is linked to both matriarchal and patriarchal spiritualities: 'Harry's transformation requires not his liberation from the maternal archetype . . . but his reconnection with the creative spirituality of the Great Mother' (Laity and Gish 242-43).⁵⁹ Curiously, Agatha safeguards both maternal and paternal functions and divinities, the maternal body and speech-logic. As stated above, in Kristevan terms, Harry's identification with Agatha is with the 'imaginary father'. By means of this loving idealisation, he takes from Agatha—as Eliot may have taken from Charlotte— aspects of intellect, language and poetry, individual autonomy and spiritual striving, an awareness of otherness, the possibility of love and potential identity. Harry's acquisition of these attributes liberates him from the 'burden' of ambivalence (334), grants him faith and

⁵⁹ In Däumer's opinion, Carpentier 'overlooks the depth of Agatha's ties to a matriarchal spirituality, manifest in cryptic invocations of a richly pagan world' (Laity and Gish 242). Agatha is an autonomous 'speaking mother' (243) who amalgamates pagan and Christian worlds and meanings. She is both compliant with and resistant against the masculine Oedipal order. She holds a 'curious position both within and on the margins of the social world presented in the play' (243). As a result, she 'is able to reveal to [Harry] his father's, and thus his own, identity'. In Däumer's view, in his portrayal of Agatha and the Eumenides, Eliot 'found a way of reconciling matricidal impulses with a recognition of the mother's centrality in human development'. It is these comments that suggest Kristeva's 'imaginary father'.

moves him toward what we understand to be the Heavenly father.⁶⁰ In this sense, Agatha is, to some degree, an individuated dream-Charlotte void of the extreme ambivalence that tormented the real Eliot mother-son relationship. As I am about to show, she is the pre-Oedipal poet-mother, an imagined dream lover and a maternal-paternal threshold form that provides access to symbolisation, support against abjection and whose love for her poet-son realises her desire in the gift of their verse. Amy, on the other hand, is more an extreme ‘surface’ (331) caricature personifying select characteristics and desires that Eliot found troublesome and disagreeable in his relationship with his mother, such as, overt possessiveness, stern authoritativeness, jealousy and anxiety.

In Kelly Oliver’s reading of Kristeva’s notion of the ‘imaginary father’ she notes how the subjective processes of negation and identification are in process on the level of the maternal semiotic body before the child’s entry into the symbolic (1993b: 69-90; 1998: 55-78). For Kristeva, splitting, aggression and abjection of the mother (matricide) are simultaneous with primary idealising identification and the emergence of narcissism, and

⁶⁰ Despite being a secular atheist, Kristeva likens the ‘father in individual prehistory’ with faith and the *agape* of the Christian understanding of God’s fatherhood as affiliated with the maternal. I quote at length:

in reading about famous mystical experiences, I felt that faith could be described, perhaps rather simplistically, as what can only be called a primary identification with a loving and protective agency. Overcoming the notion of irremediable separation, Western man, using ‘semiotic’ rather than ‘symbolic’ means, re-establishes a continuity or fusion with an Other that is no longer substantial and maternal but symbolic and paternal. Saint Augustine goes so far as to compare the Christian’s faith in God with the infant’s relation to its mother’s breast. ‘What am I even at the best but an infant sucking the milk Thou givest, and feeding upon Thee, the food that perisheth not?’ What we have here is fusion with a breast that is, to be sure, succouring, nourishing, loving, and protective, but transposed from the mother’s body to an invisible agency located in another world. This is quite a wrench from the dependency of early childhood, and it must be said that it is a compromise solution, since the benefits of the new relationship of dependency are entirely of an imaginary order, in the realm of signs. However intelligible or reasonable this dynamic may be (and theology excels at describing it), it appears to be driven, in essence, by infra- or translinguistic psychic processes which behave like primary processes and gratify the individual in his or her narcissistic core. At the dawn of psychic experience Freud saw a primary identification, a ‘direct and immediate transference’ of the nascent ego to the ‘father of individual prehistory’, who, according to Freud, possessed the sexual characteristics and functions of both parents.

This ‘direct and immediate transference’ to a form, a structure, or an agency (rather than a person) helps to bring about primary stabilization of the subject through its enduring character; because it is a gift of the self, it both encourages and hinders the disintegrative and aggressive agitation of the instincts. This is perhaps what Christianity celebrates in divine love. God was the first to love you, God is love: these apothegms reassure the believer of God’s permanent generosity and grace. . . . This fusion with God, which, to repeat myself, is more semiotic than symbolic, repairs the wounds of Narcissus, which are scarcely hidden by the triumphs and failures of our desires and enmities. Once our narcissistic needs are met, we can find images of our desires in stories recounting the experience of faith: the story of the virgin birth, for instance—that secret dream of every childhood; or that of the torment of the flesh on Golgotha, which mirrors in glory the essential melancholy of the man who aspires to rejoin the body and the name of the father from whom he has been irrevocably severed.

In order for faith to be possible, this ‘semiotic’ leap toward the other, this primary identification with the primitive parental poles close to the maternal container, must not be either repressed or displaced in the construction of a knowledge which, by understanding the mechanism of faith, would bury it. (1987a: 24-26)

these processes precede rather than coincide with the symbolic. In other words, Kristeva—inspired by Klein—forwards the proposition of a formative maternal law and function (a penis already inside the breast) that moves the child into the paternal symbolic. This is contrary to the stern paternal function privileged by Freud and Lacan. She asserts in *Tales of Love*:

the immediate transference towards the imaginary father . . .
withstands a process of rejection involving what may have been
chaos and is about to become an *abject*. This maternal space can
come into being as such, before becoming an object correlative
to the Ego's desire, only as an *abject*. In short, primary
identification appears to be a transference to (from) the
imaginary father, correlative to the establishment of the mother
as 'ab-ject'. Narcissism would be that correlation (with the
imaginary father and the 'ab-jetted') enacted around the central
emptiness of that transference. (1987b: 41-42)

In *The Family Reunion*, we have a triangular Oresteian structure (Amy-Agatha-Harry), similar to Kristeva's, that prefigures Freud's traditional Oedipal model (mother-father-child) with its symbolic father (see Fig. 13): a proto-Oedipus complex (Fig. 14).

Fig. 13: Freud's Traditional Oedipal Model:

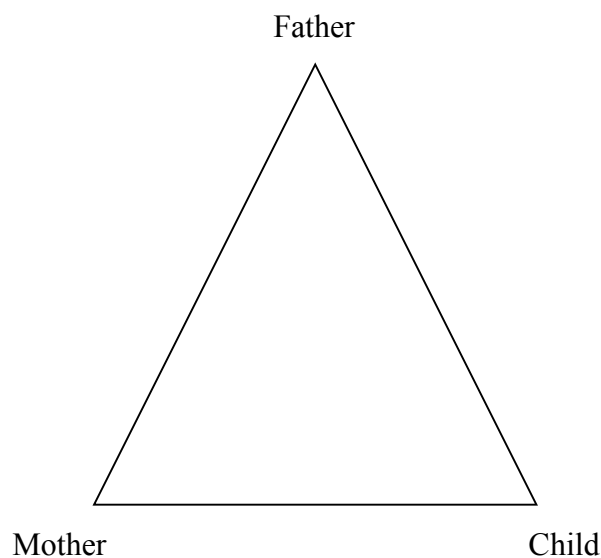
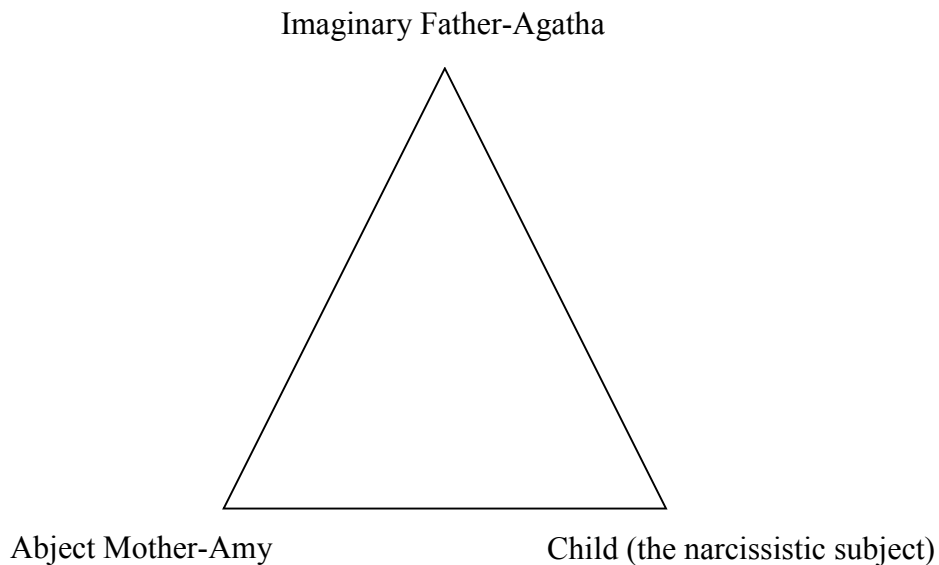


Fig. 14: Kristeva's Proto-Oedipus Model in *The Family Reunion*:



In Harry's quest for a father, there has been a necessary regression back to Wishwood—the site of ambivalence and splitting—only to find a 'maternal-father' through identification with an idealised 'good enough' mother-object, Agatha, and the abjection (matricide) of a 'not good enough' mother, Amy. For Oliver, 'identification with the imaginary father, the father in individual prehistory, is an identification with a fantasy of one's own conception. It is a transference to the site of the *jouissance* of the primal scene' (1993b: 79).⁶¹ In other words, it is a fantasy of reunion with the maternal body 'which takes the place of the real union that must be lost so that the child can enter language' (79). This family reunion—a literal attempt to repair damaged familial bonds and move forward in the absence of a father—is evidently shown in act 2, scene 2 in Harry and Agatha's 'love-duet'.

In Harry's powerful conversational duologue with Agatha in act 2 we have the beginning of 'thirdness' (Kristeva, 2000: 53): a meeting at a threshold of duality between

⁶¹ Oliver's understanding of the 'imaginary father' as being related to the primal scene is influenced by Kristeva's analysis of the primal scene in *In the Beginning Was Love* (1987a). Oliver explains her reasoning as follows:

through the immediate transference onto the imaginary father, the child undergoes a transference to the site of maternal desire, which Kristeva claims is the desire for the Phallus. It is an identification with the father whom the child imagines took part in the primal scene. But it is an identification with this imaginary father only insofar as he represents the Phallus that satisfies the mother's desire. The child is identifying with the imaginary father entering the mother; it is identifying with a reunion with the mother. It is identifying with her *jouissance*, her satisfaction. Through its identification with the imaginary father, the child, in its imaginary, can replace itself back inside the mother's womb. This imaginary identification with the mother's body provides the support needed to lose the real identification with the mother's body and the move to an identification with her desire, which is a move into the Symbolic order. (1993b: 79-80)

mother and father, pre-Oedipal and Oedipal.⁶² In Eliot's comments to Browne he tells how in this scene Harry 'finds a refuge in an ambiguous relation—the attraction, half of a son and half of a lover, to Agatha, who reciprocates in somewhat the same way' (Browne 107). As in 'Ash-Wednesday' and 'Marina' we have ecstatic *jouissance* in an impossible return to the 'shores' of the maternal 'first world', the Edenic 'rose-garden': Kristeva's and Laplanche's place of primary identification and primal repression. The deep relational intimacy between Harry and Agatha is revealed and gradually intensified through the incantatory rhythms and music of their reciprocal speech:

Agatha.

I only looked through the little door
When the sun was shining on the rose-garden:
And heard in the distance tiny voices
And then a black raven flew over.
And then I was only my own feet walking
Away, down a concrete corridor
In a dead air. Only feet walking
And sharp heels scraping. Over and under
Echo and noise of feet.
I was only the feet, and the eye
Seeing the feet: the unwinking eye
Fixing the movement. Over and under.

Harry.

In and out, in an endless drift
Of shrieking forms in a circular desert
Weaving with contagion of putrescent embraces
On dissolving bone. In and out, the movement
Until the chain broke, and I was left

⁶² Kristeva states of primary identification with the 'imaginary father':

at this archaic stage of the psychical evolution, the subject already moves away from the mother/child dyad and toward a third pole, not yet a symbolic agency but already the beginning of thirdness prefigured by the mother's desire for someone other than the child (her father? The child's father? An extrafamilial or symbolic agency?). In the uncertainty of this disengagement, however, an imaginary space is sketched out where this loving third party is found, the 'father of the individual prehistory', the keystone of our loves and imagination. (2000: 53)

Under the single eye above the desert.

Agatha.

Up and down, through the stone passages
Of an immense and empty hospital
Pervaded by a smell of disinfectant,
Looking straight ahead, passing barred windows.
Up and down. Until the chain breaks.

Harry.

To and fro, dragging my feet
Among inner shadows in the smoky wilderness,
Trying to avoid the clasping branches
And the giant lizard. To and fro.
Until the chain breaks.

The chain breaks,
The wheel stops, and the noise of machinery,
And the desert is cleared, under the judicial sun
Of the final eye, and the awful evacuation
Cleanses.

I was not there, you were not there, only our phantasms
And what did not happen is as true as what did happen
O my dear, and you walked through the little door
And I ran to meet you in the rose-garden. (334-35)

Here, intersubjective physical and emotional attunement and mirroring between Harry and Agatha is shown in their respective imitation, repetition, response and counter-response and turn-taking: their rhythmic to-ing and fro-ing and vocal matching of words, forms and sounds. Affiliative sensations, words and emotions are systematically sustained, overlapped and reinforced in a freely associating duologue. Agatha as virtual mother does not engulf Harry, or vice versa. Instead, an idealised distance is maintained which allows a free and fluid back-and-forth movement and exchange of passion, form and speech. Harry and Agatha remain two subjectivities engaged in conscious and unconscious reading of each other, a dialectical rhythm of two. In contrast with Amy who fails to adequately respond to Harry and who is *out of rhythm* with his desire, Agatha is ongoing in gesturally responding, holding, mediating and

giving music and shape to Harry's affects—echoing the rhythms of early mother-child mutuality. Through their mutual recognition, respect and sharing, an intersubjective 'third' position is engendered between them as a site of mediation. As a maternal form, Agatha provides Harry with an alternative maternal aesthetic and transitional space, 'the desert is cleared' (335), through which he can creatively translate and sublimate his melodramatic passions. But further to this, Harry and Agatha's rhythmic exchange of maternal form brings forth perception of the 'judicial sun / of the final eye' which, as Grover Smith points out is a 'traditional symbol for God' (1974: 211).⁶³ As I have demonstrated to be the case in 'Ash-Wednesday' and 'Marina', Eliot's love-duet shows the poetic elaboration of maternal/semiotic form as fostering both identification with a more benevolent paternal ideal—in this instance, God's love—and movement into the symbolic. Agatha is not a 'dead genre, or mother' (Campbell, 2013: 2).⁶⁴ Rather, she is the guardian angel of Harry's maturity.⁶⁵

As Eliot emphasises in his prose on Shakespeare's late verse dramas, as the love-duet develops there is a musical pattern, monotonous control and a heightening movement 'beyond character' (*HB*, P/7/9). We have what Eliot in *The Rock* calls 'the beauty of incantation' (*CPP*, 164): a shared, co-created, ceremonial chanting that is also evident in *Murder in the Cathedral*. Browne viewed the scene between Harry and Agatha as 'the climax to the play' (128). Indeed, the coordinated movement and accord between Agatha and Harry builds in rhythmic intensity to a transcendent climax and achieves an emotional reunion in the dreamlike 'rose-garden' (*CPP*, 335).⁶⁶ A balanced two-in-oneness, one-in-twoness, similar to mother-child pregnancy, early mother-child engagement (cradling, rocking) and actual sexual intercourse is simulated on the melodramatic stage. Transference love and sensual mutuality in this aria is noticeably articulated in suggestive sexual language: 'In and out', 'Up and down', 'To and fro'. The forbidden and previously paralysed love for the mother appears to find satisfaction and expression beyond the repressive ego. In this scene, there is a poetic recovery and a return back to the maternal body achieved by an intensifying motility of vocal

⁶³ For Kline, the 'final eye is of course the still point' (470), while Carpentier comprehends the 'eye' to be 'symbolic of patriarchal divinity' (1989: 40).

⁶⁴ Campbell states how 'the melodrama and mimesis with our initial mother can be more or less generative in unconscious terms, a dead mother produces dead genres and arguably fixed translations of sexual difference' (2013: 135).

⁶⁵ G. Smith notes that Harry 'exists rather "between sleep and waking", too sensitive and acute not to revolt against the dictatorship of his mother and the family who serve her, yet spiritually too childish without Agatha's guidance' (1974: 198).

⁶⁶ Browne comments how the rhythm of the verse in the love-duet 'is essential to the effect aimed at, of allowing characters to escape from conscious thought into a shared subconscious state, almost of trance' (116).

and kinetic rhythm.⁶⁷ In this incestuous transgression, the poet-dramatist penetrates and experiences (or re-experiences?) the pre-thetic, pre-symbolic, and pre-ambivalent state of the heterogeneous aporetic maternal *chora*. The pleasure in this transgression is the music and *jouissance* of the mother's body.⁶⁸ Desire has danced its way to its maternal home through the veil of the dream:

I was not there, you were not there, only our phantasms
And what did not happen is as true as what did happen
O my dear, and you walked through the little door
And I ran to meet you in the rose-garden. (335)

In this articulation, the repetitive 'chain' (*CPP*, 335) of metonymic desire that defiles and weaves 'contagion' through 'putrescent embraces' is broken and consecrated 'under the judicial sun': the paternal 'eye' of God's love. With a final 'awful evacuation' (ejaculation/abjection?), the sin of desire for the mother is ritually cleansed and lined with a sacred facet: the 'desert' of *The Waste Land* becoming a 'rose-garden' of pure love. But why is this so?

The answer is rather complex but is explained by Kristeva's notion of 'herethics' (1987b: 263). It is important to note that Harry's return to the pre-Oedipal maternal body and

⁶⁷ Eliot explains in 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry' (1928) the effectiveness of verse drama in achieving such a result:

the human soul in intense emotion, strives to express itself in verse. It is not for me, but for the neurologists, to discover why this is so, and why and how feeling and rhythm are related. The tendency, at any rate, of prose drama is to emphasise the ephemeral and superficial; if we want to get at the permanent and universal we tend to express ourselves in verse. (*SE*, 46)

He states later in 'Poetry and Drama' (1951):

at such moments, we touch the border of those feelings which only music can express. We can never emulate music, because to arrive at the condition of music would be the annihilation of poetry, and especially dramatic poetry. Nevertheless, I have before my eyes a kind of mirage of the perfection of verse drama, which would be a design of human action and of words, such as to present at once the two aspects of dramatic and of musical order. It seems to me that Shakespeare achieved this at least in certain scenes – even rather early, for there is the balcony scene of *Romeo and Juliet*—and that this was what he was striving towards in his late plays. . . . For it is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of an order *in* reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness and reconciliation; and then leave us, as Virgil left Dante, to proceed toward a region where that guide can avail us no farther. (*OPP*, 87, emphasis in original)

⁶⁸ Lechte notes how music and love are implicated in the immediacy of primary identification: 'subject identification is called "primary" and corresponds to the tie with the "father of individual prehistory", whereas object identification is secondary, and, by way of summary, we can say that music is the "language" of love, and so the language of immediacy, but not language in the linguistic sense' (Lechte and Margaroni 73).

eventual separation from Amy is only achieved through ‘primary identification’ with Agatha as both ‘archaic mother’ and ‘imaginary father’. Like the Virgin Mary, Agatha as a divided mother straddles both biology and culture, semiotic and the symbolic, maternal and paternal, and has knowledge of inherent alterity within the self. As a result, Agatha realises her obligations to the other as obligations to the self and also to the species. Hence, unlike Amy who loves Harry as herself and has no diversion to the other, Agatha loves both the other and the self. This is a kind of maternal ethical narcissism directed towards the other. Oliver explains:

this ethics binds the subject to the other through love and not Law . . . The model of ethical love is the mother’s love for the child, which is a love for herself and a love for her own mother. The mother’s love is also the willingness to give herself up, to embrace the strangeness within herself. (1993b: 183)

In Oliver’s convincing reading of Kristeva, she interprets the ‘imaginary father’ as really the ‘mother’s love’ in ‘disguise’: an ‘outlaw authority’ (1998: 72).⁶⁹ Thus, it is Harry’s rediscovery of mother love as ‘imaginary third’—a ‘facsimile of the third person’ (Kristeva, 1980: 157)—that enables him to relinquish psychotic attachment to, and desire for reunion with, the real maternal body. Despite the father’s absence, Harry’s separation is aided by his identification with Agatha which introduces him to maternal desire (her implication in the paternal function). In this way, the mother remains an object of love to Harry through a weaning abjection of the maternal body (represented by Amy) that is supported by the mother’s love (represented by Agatha). As imaginary ‘maternal father’ and a desiring subject not solely reduced to the maternal body, Agatha provides Harry with the assurance that an imagined pleasure and reunion with the maternal body can be symbolically achieved in

⁶⁹ Campbell’s work does not overtly express an idea of the imaginary father. However, her idea of maternal form and more embodied view of the imaginary does suggest a different interpretation to Kristeva and Oliver. As mentioned in chapter 3, for Campbell the imaginary is not just fantasmatic and repressive, it is also non-repressive, telepathic and real. This is contrary to the Lacanian standpoint which views the imaginary as divided from the Symbolic by the phallus. For Campbell, maternal form is both fantasmatic and real and ‘we all begin with loving and identifying both parents, Freud’s affectionate currents’ (2013: 25). She states: ‘I don’t think we can enter Symbolic language without this unconscious reading or dreaming of a maternal form and it is the telepathic dream forms we get from the mother (and arguably the pre-Oedipal father) that allow us to move our rhythms from dreams towards language’ (79). By implication, then, Campbell’s imaginary father is the more ‘helpful’ (21) loving pre-Oedipal father—both fantasmatic and real—whose maternal form also promotes the child’s differentiation and capacity for sublimation. This is contrary to Kristeva’s loving father, the ‘third’ found through identification with maternal desire for the phallus. And also different to Oliver’s ‘imaginary father’ as a screen for mother love.

signs.⁷⁰ Situated on a ‘ridge’ she represents a ‘sundered unity’ of paradoxical maternal and paternal positions and roles: on the one hand, maternal ‘holding’, love and gratification and, on the other hand, paternal identification, differentiation, distance, language and sociality.⁷¹ For this reason, Agatha holds in dialectical tension opposing desires, preventing a violent breakdown in relations and the fall into abjection. Harry’s reunion with Agatha in the rose-garden is a re-meeting not a regressive fusion. It is, in Kristeva’s words,

not a narcissistic merger with the maternal container but the emergence of a *metaphorical object*—in other words the very splitting that establishes the psyche and, let us call this splitting ‘primal repression’, bends the drive towards the symbolic of an other.⁷² (1987b: 31)

As in ‘Marina’, Harry’s ‘relief’ and rebirth in *The Family Reunion*—his paradoxical identification and reunion with the ideal father-mother (Agatha) and final weaning and separation from the abject mother (Amy)—is attained through a primal scene fantasy in which he assumes multiple roles (son/father/mother/lover) and discovers alterity within the self. The desire for fusion with the maternal body is transcended through a ‘secondary, mediate identification’ that recovers the ‘primary direct identification’ (Kristeva, 1987b: 27). Eliot states in the ‘Music of Poetry’ (1942): ‘I know that a poem, or a passage of a poem, may tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image’ (*OPP*, 38). It is in a dream state of pure love, maternal form and rhythm first born between mother and son in the pre-Oedipal

⁷⁰ Kristeva calls this reconnection with the mother through language *dénégation*, allowing us to comprehend the relationship between melancholia, mourning, love and loss. She states in *Black Sun* (1989):

signs are arbitrary because language begins with a negation (*Verneinung*) of loss, along with the depression occasioned by mourning. ‘I have lost an essential object that happens to be, in the final analysis, my mother’, is what the speaking being seems to be saying, ‘But no, I have found her again in signs, or rather since I consent to lose her I have not lost (that is the negation), I can recover her in language’. (43)

⁷¹ Margaroni notes the ‘imaginary father’, in combining the characteristics of both mother and father, brings together ‘in one gesture such conflicting operations as attachment and detachment, *eros* (the desire to *have*) and *agape* (the desire to project oneself onto an Ideal, to *be like*)’ (Lechte and Margaroni 45-46, emphases in original).

⁷² For Kristeva, this metaphorical identification, which ‘perhaps represents the conditions of sublimation’ (1987b: 45) and ‘imagination’, is at the level of the semiotic, the heterogeneous and of the drive which is the basis for the symbolic matrix and the child’s use of language. Mentioned in chapter 3, in Campbell’s view, it is form and not language that sublimates the mother’s body. Maternal form mixes with and unconsciously translates the drives. For her, the connection to the maternal body through maternal form is real, uncanny and poetic. It is not just metaphoric.

relationship (rather than a loveless marriage) that Harry is conceived anew in the rose-garden. In the love-duet, the truth of mother-son Eros is paradoxically concealed and revealed by its transference into the disguise of the Logos under Agatha/Athena's jurisdiction. In contrast to *The Waste Land* with its fallen fathers (its impotent Fisher King and shipwrecked kings), Harry replaces the missing father and in doing so achieves liberation from the horror of the primal scene at the root of his ambivalence: 'The shadow of something behind our meagre childhood, / Some origin of wretchedness' (331). Moreover, in replacing the father and in his spiritual incest with Agatha, Harry psychically restores the good parental couple, the lost link with the loving father and mother, and the good family as a whole. In this *real* family reunion and in Amy's death, the male fantasy of parthenogenesis which supports the paternal symbolic is perpetuated and the mother's law and generative capacities overridden and denied.⁷³ It is the phantasy of the loving parental couple constituted in the primal phantasy—central to the organisation and stability of the unconscious—which leads Harry both out of his impasse with the biological mother and into the advent of the Oedipal structure.⁷⁴

In like manner to 'Marina' and 'Ash-Wednesday', Harry's meeting with Agatha in the 'rose-garden' is a re-engagement with the rhythmic activities, primary processes and maternal forms that first initiated the 'zero degree of imagination' (Kristeva, 1987b: 24). It is a poetic dream of reunion with the mother's love found through the early poet-mother's forms. This final transgressive dalliance with Agatha marks both Amy's fate and Harry's movement towards the symbolic father. Agatha's father-mother love has mitigated Harry's hatred towards Amy.⁷⁵ Through the 'good enough' mother's responses, music, rhythms and gestures Harry is able to realise his true potential and being. As Agatha says: 'This is the next moment. This is the beginning' (335). Most importantly, Agatha's imparting of information to Harry about his childhood and family history means that he now has cognition of the affective, ambivalent maternal basis of his own personality and feelings. It was not Amy's fault. Harry

⁷³ 'Marina' fundamentally differs from *The Family Reunion* in that it does not partake in matricide.

⁷⁴ The love-duet between Agatha and Harry is in stark contrast to the loveless primal scene between the 'typist' and the 'young man carbuncular' that Tiresias overlooks in *The Waste Land* (WL, 222-48). For Oliver, the fantasy of a father-mother conglomerate in the primal scene supports a 'sense of wholeness', alterity becoming 'a pleasurable excess rather than a painful gap' (1993b: 80).

⁷⁵ For Klein (1963), Orestes' relationship with Electra and Athena in the *Oresteia* suggests 'that his internalization of a good object was relatively stable and a basis for normal development had been laid' (1997: 287). She continues: 'we can only guess that in the earliest stage these feelings entered in some way into the relation to his mother' (287-88). In the same way, Harry's relationship with Mary and Agatha suggests some forgotten experience and identification with mother love given and received in childhood which had initially formed part of the superego and encouraged the stability of the individual. However, it seems that this helpful identification has since been interfered with. For Klein, grief, in particular, causes difficulties in the struggle to preserve the internal relation with the good object.

states in fuller recognition and intelligent understanding of Amy's omnipotent mothering: 'Now I see / I might even become fonder of my mother— / More compassionate at least—by understanding' (334). Comparable to the finale of the *Oresteia*, the Eumenides that pursued Harry are appeased and become 'bright angels' (339) whom he must now follow. The threatening 'dark continent' of the maternal body that had tormented Harry, and also *The Waste Land*, is now a place of illumination. Still, there is no relief, love or 'third' for Amy. With the shock of Harry's leaving, the matricide of the abject villainous mother is executed and the knot of mother-son ambivalence 'unknotted' (337). Unable to deal with her conflicting feelings, Amy goes to lie down and dies in the dark. At this very moment, Harry has his mother cake and eats it. He has satisfied both his desire and hatred for the mother. In ritualistic fashion, Agatha and Mary walk clockwise around Amy's birthday cake and blow out the candles, signalling the end of the 'curse'. Through Agatha as 'father-mother conglomerate', Harry realises that he can now leave the mother without having to leave her at all through primary identification with the 'imaginary father'—through faith in God. For Harry, this is not a tragic separation. The 'sense of separation, / Of isolation unredeemable, irrevocable' (330) beleaguering him has been alleviated. As Oliver states, Kristeva's 'imaginary father' represents not a stern paternal stricture but infinite 'maternal love' itself. Harry has found his path to salvation in his beginning to recognise, hold and integrate what is both good and abject in the maternal object: 'But I know there is only one way out of defilement— / Which leads in the end to reconciliation. / And I know that I must go' (337). What is more, having established identification with the 'imaginary father' through maternal/semiotic form he can now move fluidly from two to three to two—that is, between the maternal body and the paternal symbolic, poetry and narrative, Eros and Agape—driven rather than encumbered by ambivalence, enthralled by the mother's *jouissance*, carried by her love and forms and yet protected from psychosis by the Father's Law.⁷⁶ Through this amorous identification, the bond between mother and son can be forever maintained, re-experienced and elaborated through love, creativity, play, sharing and poetry rather than through commandment, covetousness, destruction or force.

⁷⁶ For Campbell, maternal telepathic form is different to the Name of the Father in that it 'does not separate the (castrate) the subject from its object, or the body from the symbolic' (2013: 137). It moves 'continually in rhythm backwards and forwards between passions and forms and between fantasy and the world'. Maternal form is a 'means of mediating our opposing desires, translating the sameness and difference of the Oedipal stage, enabling the primary passionate forms in relation to the mother to be broken up in a generative manner and translated into more active desires within the cultural and social field' (3).

Eliot's *The Family Reunion* demonstrates that it is through the re-finding and re-cognition of the first love, forms and provision of the early poet-mother that the child's melodramatic passions can be mediated and reformulated. In addition, it shows the rediscovery of the pre-Oedipal mother encourages primary identification with the 'imaginary father'. It is this which provides an escape out of unmanageable ambivalence, satisfaction for perennial craving and a movement forward for the male subject. Most certainly, the dilemma of mother-son ambivalence is not completely resolved at the end of the play. Amy's death denies the perfect resolution of Shakespeare's late romances, full recognition of the mother as a whole object or the finding of a perfect maternal objective correlative.⁷⁷ Indeed, Eliot acknowledged in retrospect that the play left the audience with a 'divided frame of mind, not knowing whether to consider the play of tragedy of the mother or the salvation of the son' (*OPP*, 84). It may be for this reason that he found the subtitle 'a melodrama' inadequate.⁷⁸ Ultimately, as in the realm of the dream, *The Family Reunion* is wish-fulfilment: a hedonic tension regulator of ambivalence. It enacts male fantasies of parthenogenesis, matricide, phallic omnipotence over the maternal body, the perverse wish for both union with and separation from the mother. It seeks to have the best of both worlds: the mother's love and law, as well as the father's.⁷⁹ As in the *Oresteia*, *The Family Reunion* denies but still uses and sacrifices the maternal body in the attempt to dissolve the protagonist's virulent and harrowing Oedipus complex. Yet, by staging mother-son ambivalence through melodrama the play does establish a more mature, positive and progressive relation to the mother that is new.⁸⁰ Moreover, it facilitates a healthier restructuration of the male psyche by aiding both re-examination of dysfunctional familial structures and the re-inclusion of absent or excluded imaginary phantasy structures; whether it be the mother or the father.

Against the opinion of Pinkney, I believe that Harry does accede to the paternal reference at the end of the play through primary identification with Agatha as 'imaginary father'. This is signposted by Harry's love-duet with Agatha, his beginning to feel more

⁷⁷ Considering Eliot's 'Hamlet' essay, Campbell argues against the making of an 'objective correlative' 'because being the latter would mean there would be nowhere for the hysteric, or us as readers to go' (2013: 170). For Campbell, it is our very excessive passions in search of new forms that make art, poetry and theatre.

⁷⁸ Instead of Amy's matricide enabling Harry's movement from Wishwood, a more agreeable ending to the play may have entailed Harry's loving reconciliation with Amy, his recognition of her contribution to his future becoming, Amy and Agatha's reconciliation and Amy's letting him leave Wishwood at the end of the play.

⁷⁹ For Phillips, 'only in words is anyone ever omniscient' (2012: 136). He states: 'our fantasies of satisfaction are clues to our fears about desiring. Wishful fantasies are the original sins of omission' (143).

⁸⁰ As Cuddy states: 'there is instead a mature insight and "compassion" for mother as Harry gains his independence from the parent who had tied him inexorably to home, guilt and a past in which father seems to have played little part' (208).

ambivalent about Amy, Amy's death, his departure from Wishwood and crossing of the 'frontier / Beyond' (342), in addition to the transformation of the Eumenides.⁸¹ Yet, I admit that Harry's reaching of the 'depressive position' is not played out fully.⁸² In my reading, Agatha is the 'loving third party' (Kristeva, 2000: 53)—originally situated within a pre-Oedipal structure—that interrupts the dual relationship with the biological mother.⁸³ In like manner to 'Ash-Wednesday' and 'Marina', *The Family Reunion* indicates that melodrama as maternal form, as Campbell talks about it, participates in the formation of an early paternal function that introduces a third term. That is, maternal form links with, creates, or possibly revives, the 'imaginary father': a more loving and less rigid and castrating third term which, against the phallus, both allows a relationship with the maternal body and moves the child to the symbolic. In Kristevan theory, which believes that the logic of the symbolic is already present in archaic object relations, Harry's identification with Agatha's desire for his father constitutes the 'third', supporting Amy's abjection and his exit from Wishwood. This suggests that melodrama not only expresses, moves and gives shape to passion but also motivates identification with the symbolic function latent in the maternal-semiotic realm. In Oliver's view, the imaginary father is actually the imaginary mother whose love for her own mother enables transference to the site of maternal desire. In this reading, melodrama works through repression to identification with mother love—not (yet) the desire for the phallus—as the bedrock for loving relations, meaning and sociality.⁸⁴ Different again to these positions, Campbell's work on maternal form implies that the imaginary father is the loving father—both fantasmatic and real—who also partakes in relaying telepathic maternal form in the pre-Oedipal. Campbell reminds us that it is not just mothers who participate in the maternal. The pre-Oedipal has a relation to reality with both mothers and fathers carrying both maternal form and the symbolic. In Campbell's view, the 'third' is inherent in maternal form in the

⁸¹ In agreement, G. Smith notes: 'on the literal level Harry *does* become independent, precisely because by accepting the Eumenides [as Agatha does] he enables them to draw him outside his psychological involvement with the family' (1974: 210, emphasis in original). In my argument, the Eumenides become 'bright angels' due to Harry's 'secondary identification' with Agatha, which immediately relives the 'primary identification' with the 'imaginary father'.

⁸² Cuddy states: 'until the son extricates himself psychologically from that birth-bond in order to love his mother in a new mature way, he cannot be free to know himself as a man or to love any other woman. Though Harry does not articulate all this in the play, he takes the first step towards wholeness when he recognises his feelings about Amy and then says goodbye' (192).

⁸³ Kristeva stipulates that this 'loving third party' has 'nothing to do with the subsequent father who forbids, the Oedipal father, the father of the law' (2000: 53).

⁸⁴ Oliver suggests that 'it is the mother's love and her love for her own mother, a narcissistic love from generation to generation, that supports the move into the Symbolic, that fills language with meaning' (1998: 76). She adds: 'this maternal love is not (yet) the *metonymic* desire for the phallus; rather, it is what Kristeva calls the *metaphor of love*'.

cultural and aesthetic forms carried by both mother *and* father. Maternal form establishes space between mother and child, moving the child through sublimation on to the symbolic. In this interpretation, maternal love and form, and *not* maternal desire for the phallus, supports and weans the child and identifies the loving ‘imaginary father’ in the maternal realm.⁸⁵ Melodrama as maternal form indicates, then, in staging the conflict of the hysterical relation to the maternal body, the passionate search for an all-encompassing, universal love that will rival the harsh stricture and negative repercussions of phallic law. It is the wish to believe that we are all loved and born out of love. Kristeva’s, Oliver’s and Campbell’s alternative models all suggest explanations for Harry’s transformation in the love-duet with Agatha and his movement toward God the Father. Whatever the means by which maternal form and the semiotic (as corresponding, but different, aspects of a maternal poetics) establishes a connection with the imaginary father, the love-duet embodies this coming together: the arrival at, and crossing of, the maternal-paternal, body-symbolic threshold. In psychoanalytic terms, this threshold is primary identification and primal repression—what I alternatively term maternal allegory. In Eliot’s post-1927 works, this threshold is religion. Along with ‘Ash-Wednesday’, ‘Marina’ and ‘Coriolan’, *The Family Reunion* is a decisive transitional work carrying the male Oedipal subject to the ‘depressive position’ attained more completely in *Four Quartets* and Eliot’s last play, *The Elder Statesman*.⁸⁶

Eliot acknowledged in his later reflections on *The Family Reunion* an anaphoric function within the play which gave new meaning and a more balanced perspective that he had not initially seen.⁸⁷ He writes:

my sympathies now have come to be all with the mother, who
seems to me except perhaps for the chauffeur, the only complete
human being in the play; and my hero now strikes me as an
insufferable prig. (*OPP*, 84)

⁸⁵ For Campbell (2015), telepathic maternal form reaches back and forth in time and is something that the masculine imaginary might inherit and then repress in symbolic terms. As in Ferenczi’s thinking on the feminine principle, Campbell sees maternal form and telepathy as either preceding or coinciding with the first primal repression.

⁸⁶ For G. Smith: ‘Eliot’s paradox of psychologically affirmative attainment through negative withdrawal reaches its most nearly perfect expression in the closing lines of “Little Gidding”’ (1974: 212).

⁸⁷ Like Eliot, Browne perceived the play as having this quality, stating in 1966: ‘the longer I live with *The Family Reunion* the more value I set on it, and admitting its flaws as the author himself did (exaggeratedly, to my mind) in his lecture on ‘Poetry and Drama’, I believe the homogeneity of the original creation is of greater importance’ (Tate 127). He adds in 1969: ‘of all his plays, this one was, and is, the most difficult to apprehend. It is the one which, to me at least, has over the years yielded the most in fresh insight at each repeated contact’ (Browne 90).

Over time, Eliot began to identify more so with the plight of the biological mother in *The Family Reunion*, as opposed to the motives and desires of Agatha and Harry Monchensey. In his wish to work out a solution to the problem of ambivalence at a difficult time in his life, and in his writing and staging *The Family Reunion*, Eliot found in melodrama a way not available in his poetry to explore and reflect more objectively on both maternal ambivalence and his own ambivalence towards the maternal feminine—facilitating an important passage from ignorance to knowledge. In doing this, he would rediscover the poet-mother's ambivalence to be the source of his own creative genius and desire, the unconscious centre and silent strength of his entire life's work.

Virginia Woolf commented on completing *To the Lighthouse* (1927):

when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her. I suppose that I did for myself what psychoanalysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long and deep felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and then laid it to rest. (1989: 81)

In comparison, I am reminded of Harry's words to his mother in act 2 of *The Family Reunion*: 'I think, mother, / I shall make you lie down. You must be very tired' (325). And on his return to the stage: 'Mother is asleep' (326). The mother would never feature so prominently in Eliot's work again.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Pinkney notes that in Eliot's subsequent plays 'the tension has dropped' (129): 'the parent-child relationship is apparently not at issue in *The Cocktail Party*' (130), while 'in *The Confidential Clerk* the theme of paternity is predominant, but less for its own sake even now than for its strategic value in repudiating the mother'. As Colby states to Mrs Guzzard in *The Confidential Clerk*: 'Let my mother rest in peace, As for a father— / I have the idea of a father' (*CPP*, 513). Cuddy comments on *The Family Reunion*: 'thereafter in Eliot's work, mothers are essentially irrelevant—except to verify a man's birth and name' (192).

CONCLUSION: ELIOT'S *STABAT MATER*

The way up is the way down, the way forward is the way back.

T. S. Eliot, 'The Dry Salvages'

It is in motherhood that the link to the other can become love . . .

Julia Kristeva, *Hatred and Forgiveness* (2013)

This study has brought insights into the Eliot mother-son relationship which confirm the enduring influence and importance of Charlotte Eliot on her son's personal, intellectual, poetic and religious development. It has shown T. S. Eliot's early experience of maternal ambivalence and his mother's positive and creative handling of this experience in her quest for maternal individuation, to be formative, complex factors. These factors inspired both Eliot's early ambivalence towards women and his creative/destructive efforts to constitute and transform the self—as seen in 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian', 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and *The Waste Land*. Far from pathologising Charlotte and holding her responsible for either her son's Prufrockian anxieties as a man or the misogyny of his works, I have argued that maternal ambivalence provided Eliot with a vital model through which he could creatively/destructively handle the conflict of mother-son ambivalence as a spur for individuation and a source of imagination and insight.¹ Further, contrary to previous readings that simply condemn Eliot's treatment of women, I have indicated object usage in his works pre-1927, in the form of symbolic destruction of the maternal feminine, is a positive means of using and mediating ambivalence *in fantasy* for advanced psychic differentiation and recognition of the (m)other in external reality. Although writings such as 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' and *The Waste Land* show a violent effort to reverse the relationship with the omnipotent mother, these early works are the foundational steps on the road to the symbolisation and greater recognition of the pre-Oedipal (m)other in Eliot's transitional writings of the 1920s and 30s.

¹ For Campbell,

the relationship between mother and son does not need to be a bloody or deathly struggle, with the son's victorious and separate identity being based on an unconscious murder of the mother. Maternal ambivalence can help us understand a new way for sons to relate to both their literal and metaphorical mothers. Implicit in this description is that the literal and metaphorical mother is connected, providing a two-way communication between self and other. (2000: 36).

The content and trajectory of Eliot's *oeuvre* indicate a typical Oedipal story, with difficulties in mother-son ambivalence, identity formation, ideality and the establishment of love relations, exacerbated by a lack of paternal identification—what Lacan and Kristeva term the paternal 'third'.² However, as *The Waste Land* testifies, the classic Western Oedipal solution of repression of the maternal body by the phallus, and the idea of an exclusive bounded masculine subjectivity, are for Eliot an undesirable and unsatisfactory method for entering the Oedipal. This way out of ambivalence negates the affective maternal strata, primary identifications, idealisations and love upon which his poetry is based and the divine horizon and meaning to which it aspires. As in *The Waste Land*, the outcome of such a dilemma is the possibility of being stranded in a hysterical and loveless no-man's land. To use Kelly Oliver's words, it is to have 'absent fathers and animal mothers, neither of whom can provide an adequate image of love' (Lechte and Zournazi 3).³ Yet, Campbell and Parker remind us how hysteria and ambivalence prompt passions to search for creative strategies out of the impasse between maternal and paternal orders, identifications and functions—to have the best of both worlds. And so, as I have shown, Eliot's middle period works return to the early affective 'good enough' poet-mother, and the primary sublimatory forms that initially gave shape to his childhood passions, in order to transform the self and move forward.

Chapter 1 hypothesised the effort to symbolise and understand the mother in Eliot's works to be a search for a maternal form, in reaction to ambivalence and inspired by maternal ambivalence, through which the love for the mother may be sublimated and moved. The next four chapters showed how this is achieved in Eliot's 'maternal works'—'Ash-Wednesday' (1930), 'Marina' (1930), 'Coriolan' (1931-32) and *The Family Reunion* (1939)—by his return to and rejuvenation of the pre-Oedipal (m)other through elaboration of a poetics based on the maternal body and early maternal relations. These chapters also showed Eliot as adopting varying dramatic strategies (the pattern of Shakespeare's recognition scenes, melodrama)

² Moody (1994b) notes how, in Eliot's works 'the relationship with the mother is always the dominant one—with a mother who becomes both the object of desire and the Divine Mother; and how the usual relationship with a woman is always the deeply wrong form of love; and then how the father-figures are disposed of' (289). He continues: 'then we are struck by the resemblance to the Oedipus Complex, Freud's key to "the understanding of human history and the evolution of religion and morality"'.

³ Oliver states how

cultural norms for primary relationships, norms manifest in psychoanalytic theory, normalise the *impossibility* of love. In other words, our conceptions and images of our primary relationships exclude the possibility of being loved or lovable. Western images of conception, birth, and parental relationships, leave us with a father who is not embodied, who cannot love but only legislates from some abstract position, and a mother who is nothing but body, who can fulfil animal needs but cannot love as a social human being.

(Lechte and Zournazi 42-43, emphasis in original)

which would be productive both in countering negative aspects of the Oedipal complex (excessive narcissism, denial of sexual difference, repudiation of the (m)other) and in reintegrating loving pre-Oedipal identifications with each parent. Eliot's efforts to find sublimatory creations and forms of signification capable of moving the subject beyond the struggle with the mother were assisted by his acceptance of Anglo-Catholicism in 1927 and his embrace of its images and discourse on motherhood in the form of the Virgin Mary. Like Charlotte, Eliot discovered in the Virgin an unconscious maternal form through which he could mediate the conflict of ambivalence and balance the psyche—we may recall the moving scene of Eliot falling to his knees before Michelangelo's *Pietà* in St. Peter's Basilica in 1926 (Fig. 1). Post-1927, Eliot's veneration of Mary would grow and remain until the end of his life. This is evident in the prayers to the Virgin which make their way into 'Ash-Wednesday' and 'The Dry Salvages'. Moreover, Barry Spurr notes how the feast of the Assumption came to take on special significance for Eliot, for 'he always made his confession before it' (2010: 124).⁴

Eliot's need for an ideal maternal form would have been considerable after the death of his mother in 1929. As an early unconscious memory and perception of Charlotte's maternal aesthetic, the Virgin Mary provided an ongoing ego ideal, support and psychical connection to his mother and her love in spite of her loss. Although the Virgin Mary may be regarded as another objectification and domestication of women's power, desire and subjectivity under patriarchy, Eliot's works indicate her more positive value for men in promoting recognition and ambivalent understanding of the real mother.⁵ For instance, commencing with the Virgin's appearance in 'Ash-Wednesday' we have Eliot's more complex rendering of motherhood in the 'Lady of silences', as well as the recognition and call for the ambivalent mother, Volumnia, in 'Coriolan'. In addition, there is Eliot's creation of Agatha in *The Family Reunion* and his more positive perception of the biological mother,

⁴ For comment on Eliot's growing veneration of the Virgin, see Spurr (2010: 155-61).

⁵ Warner sees Mary as merely an instrument in the service of a patriarchal Catholic Church: 'the Virgin Mary is not the innate archetype of female nature, the dream incarnate; she is the instrument of a dynamic argument from the Catholic Church about the structure of society, presented as a God-given code' (1976: 538).

Amy, after the play's production.⁶ As I have demonstrated, these plural maternal forms indicate shifting positions in Eliot's relation to the mother, beyond Charlotte's death.⁷ Moreover, they are the continuing maternal ideals and identifications—virtual flower forms of the dead mother—which both regenerate the mother's love in her absence, and continue to translate and move the passion for the mother through new shapes and forms. This study has shown these changing maternal forms as key to moving Eliot in his mid-life into new perspectives and relations, and toward the depiction in his work of a truer sense of self.

Campbell states how 'we become the people we love, but especially when we lose them' (2013: 110). Arguably, it was Eliot's ability to elaborate a maternal poetics—his own *Stabat Mater*—in the expectation and eventuality of his mother's death that allowed him to mourn her and finally move on with his life.⁸ Ironically, Eliot would only truly rediscover his mother and his connection with her in these elegies, as well as realise the contribution of her faith and love to his creative spiritual life and future.⁹ Indeed, Eliot's real-life recognition of his mother as *subject*, her achievements as both a mother (her love and holding) and a woman (her gifts and desire), and her importance to his life and works, are indicated in his providing the introduction to Charlotte's *Savonarola* in 1926, her dedication in *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1928) and the bestowal of the Eliot Collection to Harvard in Charlotte's name. Referred to

⁶ In an early draft of *The Family Reunion* the Virgin Mary features in Agatha's final speech and is shown as the mediatrix facilitating Harry's separation from the mother and guiding his movement to God the Father:

The crossed is uncrossed
 And the crooked is made straight
 By intercession of the Virgin Mary [Mary is in pencil]
 At the centre, in the abyss,
 To the Father, to the Son
 And to the Holy Ghost. (*HB*, TS D4/5)

⁷ We may also include Mrs Guzzard in *The Confidential Clerk* (1953). Moody sees Mrs Guzzard as reconciling the good and bad mothers of *The Family Reunion*, Agatha and Amy, into one mother figure. In *The Confidential Clerk*, the son's life is shown as dependent on natural mother love rather than a divine mother. Mrs Guzzard's sacrifice for her son 'amounts to a reconciliation of the two realms of the flesh and spirit, such as seemed inconceivable in *The Family Reunion*' (1994b: 276).

⁸ Campbell states: 'maternal form . . . is like a spiritual shape or companion, a soul mate; something to fall back and rest on, when the mother becomes missing' (2013: 184). Spurr notes how Eliot's 'The Dry Salvages' particularly embraces the idea of Mary as *Mater Dolorosa*, the Mother of Sorrows, 'in reference to the women who suffer while their menfolk undertake hazardous, life threatening work at sea' (2010: 161).

⁹ I quote from the *Stabat Mater Dolorosa*:

Eia, Mater, fons amoris me sentire vim doloris fac, ut tecum lugeam	Ah Mother, fountain of love Make me feel the power of grief so that I may mourn with you:
Fac, ut ardeat cor meum in amando Christum Deum ut sibi complaceam.	Make my heart burn in loving Christ as God so that I may be pleasing to him. (Davis 2015)

often in this study, Eliot's moving letter written to his mother in 1927 is worthy of citing one final time: 'you are the finest and greatest *woman* that I have ever known. I know that you have wanted to do more than anyone could possibly do – not that you have not accomplished more than all but very few people already' (*LTSE3*, 648, my emphasis).

The fecundity of Eliot's poetic return to childhood and exploration of pre-Oedipal maternal space and timelessness in his post-1927 writings has been shown to establish a new male subjectivity based upon a discourse of affect, plurality, fluidity, love and openness to otherness.¹⁰ This is contrary to his writings pre-1927, as exemplified by *The Waste Land*, in which the modern Oedipal subject appears to have forgotten the potential for love and is caught up in the quest for identity, absolute knowledge, self-mastery and mastery of the other. This Oedipal subject remains bound within conflicting object relations, gender polarisation and the plight of ambivalence and, therefore, unable to ground narcissism in a productive relationship with otherness. Thus, Eliot's 'maternal works' indicate a pivotal maturational transition. They demonstrate continuing poetic self-reflexive deconstruction, reconstitution and re-evaluation of the male Oedipal subject through an intrapsychic rethinking and reinstatement of the (m)other. This reorganisation of the self through reintegration of pre-Oedipal identifications promotes an ability to hold in tension masculine and feminine tendencies and identifications within the self, while also informing the intersubjective perspective. On occasion, Eliot's maternal poetics culminate in a more balanced, assured, ambivalent and fluid sense of manhood, as in 'Marina'. But in other works, such as 'Coriolan' and *The Family Reunion*, this poise is again split or broken—affirming the human conflict of ambivalence to be complex, fragile, always in process, open-ended and in and out of entanglement.

In 1958, Eliot stated in an interview: 'I am astonished when I read my work to see the things I thought years ago, the opinions, the moods. They change' (Pritchett 72). Many critics have conveniently ignored Eliot's secular, human aspect. While this study does not declare that Eliot transcended patriarchy and proved himself a feminist, it has shown his *oeuvre* as increasingly redressing a system of negative values perpetuated by a hegemonic, masculine symbolic through provision of sexual specificity to *both* sexes, in language and in culture. This is demonstrated, for example, by his maternal poetics, in addition to his more complex,

¹⁰ In Kristeva's essay 'Women's Time' (1981; rpt. 1986: 187-213), she expresses 'repetition and eternity' as two temporalities (cyclical and monumental time) related to the female body in its 'cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm' (cyclical time) and the maternal body (monumental time) (191). Kristeva associates linear, historical time with the masculine and the symbolic.

sympathetic, human and ambivalent representations of women, as well as by his giving voice and prominence to women in his late plays—the Chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral*, Mary and Agatha in *The Family Reunion*, Celia in *The Cocktail Party*, Lucasta and Mrs Guzzard in *The Confidential Clerk*, and Monica in *The Elder Statesman*.¹¹ Eliot's post-1927 writings display regressive tendencies, occasional breakdowns and splitting in the male subject (as in 'Coriolan' and *The Family Reunion*), and the return of old hostile and polarised attitudes towards women (*The Family Reunion*). Nevertheless, they progressively indicate the fluid and heterogeneous interiority and sexuality of a more fully realised manhood. Eliot's continuous creative refiguring of the positions of self and other, his writings' flexible oscillation between pre-Oedipal identifications and an Oedipal logic of male identity, and also his growing positive revaluation of the maternal feminine, all contribute to a more fluid, postmodern understanding of the maternal feminine within modernist masculine subjectivity. Identifying Eliot as plural, complex and continually transforming in a process of individuation in the framework of language, the body and culture, enlivens our appreciation of his aesthetics. It is to be noted that Eliot's liberation and senses of wholeness, balance and transcendence were achieved not only through his Christian adherence, but also through the poetic return to and rethinking of the (m)other. His mid-life maternal poetics, stimulated by the death of his mother, moved him towards a more ambivalent, plural and feminine sense of identity, a greater recognition of maternal subjectivity and a greater appreciation of sexual difference. For this reason, Eliot should not be fixed as exemplary of a Western, elitist, oppressive male modernism and subjectivity traditionally defined against the maternal feminine. Rather, he should be viewed as highlighting the dangers of repressive Oedipal structures and as increasingly calling into question the authority of imperialist, modernist binaries. Eliot's personal and poetic development was gradual and irregular, imperfect and incomplete. His opinions on women and on the nature of love changed, as did his representations of the maternal feminine. This study has shown that his life should be considered in its continuity, his work in its unity. To read Eliot's attitude to women in one poem or another, one play or another, is to neglect the complexity and development of his relationship to women. Eliot noted of Shakespeare's works: 'the end is in a sense, implicit in the beginning; and the beginning is explained by the end' (*HB*, P/7/16). Comprehension of the whole pattern of

¹¹ For comment on Eliot's giving importance, power and voice to women in his late plays, see Richard Badenhansen, 'T. S. Eliot Speaks the Body: the Privileging of Female Discourse in *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Cocktail Party*' (Laity and Gish: 195-214); and Elisabeth Däumer, 'Vipers, Viragos, and Spiritual Rebels: Women in T. S. Eliot's Christian Society Plays' (234-53).

Eliot's works as *one* work, rather than individual focus on any of his poems, plays or prose writings, emphasises its transformative and reintegrative achievement. It shows Eliot as both working with and revolting against the Oedipal signifying order to create meaning, new modes of relating and new psychological structures beneficial to health and growth. Eliot's discovery of the self—the death of his Narcissus—through his life and works, in the conditions of modernity, involved gradual opening out to internal and external otherness, and growing acceptance of ideas of paradox, limitedness, contradiction and multiplicity. His late achievement of ambivalence indicates his works to be pre-emptive of the 'emancipatory' postmodern agenda and, therefore, of use and benefit to contemporary feminist, postmodern, gender, maternal and psychoanalytic discourses.

Four Quartets: Maternal Allegory and Divine Love

Perhaps most importantly, this study has illustrated Eliot's maternal poetics as working through childhood repression to compel fleeting instances and varying translations of enigmatic maternal allegory: the image of the 'gilded hearse' in 'Ash-Wednesday', the vision of Marina, 'the still point' in 'Coriolan', the 'judicial sun' in *The Family Reunion*. In *Four Quartets* (1943), the revelation and recognition that is attained in the return to, and reconstruction of, *le temps perdu* of childhood—'our first world' (*CPP*, 171)—is notably presented in terms of Christian theology and its doctrines. 'Burnt Norton' affirms that through creative use of memory and desire, Christian *agape* (as we come to understand in 'The Dry Salvages' V) may be glimpsed amidst 'the waste sad time' (176) in the sacrificial gift of Christ's Incarnation: the divine 'still point' (173).¹²

Although a full appraisal of *Four Quartets* is beyond the scope of this thesis, as in 'Ash-Wednesday', 'Marina', 'Coriolan' and *The Family Reunion*, maternal allegory in 'Burnt Norton' manifests through following the 'echoes' of the maternal 'garden' (171): 'the unheard music hidden in the shrubbery, / And the unseen eyebeam crossed' (172).¹³ These pre- and non-verbal maternal/semiotic forms are the 'hints', as 'The Dry Salvages' puts it, which allow us 'to apprehend / The point of intersection of the timeless / With time' (190). In 'Burnt Norton', 'they', 'dignified, invisible' (171)—ghosts who Raine states 'are parental, surely' (124)—stand behind these ephemeral visions: of the rising lotus emergent 'out of heart of

¹² 'The Dry Salvages' states 'The gift half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation' (*CPP*, 190).

¹³ In these lines, I am reminded of Bollas' notion of the 'unthought known'. Bollas describes the 'unthought known' as the 'known, but not yet thought' (4) which develops out of the early unconscious relationship with the mother as the child's first 'transformational object'.

light' (*CPP*, 172).¹⁴ Yet, these parental apparitions of childhood and the vision they attend disappear once looked at: for 'human kind / Cannot bear very much reality' (172).¹⁵ For Eliot, language as a temporal, materialist medium is customarily inadequate for expressing 'the Word in the desert' (175), the 'timeless' (189) or Absolute.¹⁶ Words 'strain', 'crack', 'slip, slide, perish' (175). Whereas

Only by the *form*, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness. (175, my emphasis)

And then it is still a deception, a created or recreated analogue of the 'meaning' (186), felt immediately but indirectly as allegory. As Ellmann notes, Eliot's *Quartets* maintains that 'there is no final truth, but just different ways of putting it. For the point does not reside in any single voice but in its friction with its own antithesis' (1987: 118):

See, now they vanish,
The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them,
To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern. (*CPP*, 195)

In *Four Quartets*, as I have shown to be the case in 'Ash-Wednesday', 'Marina' and *The Family Reunion*, 'the backward half-look / Over the shoulder' (187) achieved through the elaboration of a maternal poetics returns us to the primitive unconsciously perceived: to the primal moment of parental seduction and becoming, primal repression and the birth of the unconscious—'known, forgotten, half recalled' (193). 'Little Gidding' pronounces the analytic terminus of the poet's epistemological quest to be a return to this 'condition of

¹⁴ Although 'Burnt Norton' is inspired by Eliot's re-meeting with Emily Hale in 1935, I have argued in this thesis that the figure of the mother lies behind Eliot's Coriolanus and garden-flowers passion scenes. For Donoghue, the 'they' in 'Burnt Norton' are 'figures in a ballet of childhood, called upon to be nothing more than present' (2000: 257). Eliot wrote to John Hayward on 5 August 1941: 'the defect of the whole poem ['Little Gidding' as opposed to the whole of the *Quartets*], I feel, is the lack of some acute personal reminiscence (never to be explicated, of course, but to give power from well below the surface) and I can *perhaps* supply this in Part II' (qtd. in Gardner, 1978: 67, emphasis in original).

¹⁵ Like Raine, Scofield sees 'they' in 'Burnt Norton' to be 'parental presences, from whom there has been some alienation, but with whom there is now, in the imagination, a kind of reconcillation' (1980: 55).

¹⁶ Also, 'I can only say, *there* we have been: but I cannot say where. / And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time' (*CPP*, 173, emphasis in original).

complete simplicity', to the 'illegible stone' where we begin and end (198, 197).¹⁷ Demonstrated in chapter 2, the 'still point' is where ambivalence and desire momentarily come to a standstill as maternal allegory: 'A symbol perfected in death . . . By the purification of the motive' (196). However, 'Little Gidding' affirms that the 'still point' can only ever be a new, partial and failing translation of the enigma: 'Every poem an epitaph' (197).¹⁸ Ellmann entitles these fleeting and uncanny moments of epiphany 'still point(s) of illegibility' (1987: 128). Her label encapsulates the coming together of Eliot's thoughts on Incarnation and Walter Benjamin's writings on the hieroglyphic nature of Baroque allegory discussed in chapter 2.¹⁹ In Eliot's works, maternal allegory is apprehended in the terms of faith and Christian Incarnation and, as in the *Trauerspiel*, is witnessed in imagistic 'Christian sparks from the baroque rigidity of the melancholic', as Benjamin states (*OGT*, 158).²⁰ In my reading, it marks a breach in the subject's Ptolemaic narcissism by its denoting both dissymmetry and passivity in the subject's primary intersubjective relationship with the (m)other and the alterity inherent in identity. In *Four Quartets*, and especially 'Burnt Norton', maternal allegory not only suggests the parental unconscious in the child, but also a certain

¹⁷ Touched upon in chapter 2, I see maternal allegory in remaining an enigma as drawing close to what Laplanche calls the 'designified signifier' (1999: 97). That is, as with Mona Lisa's smile or the loss of the legibility of the hieroglyph, although maternal allegory has lost what it signifies, it has not lost their power to signify *to*. Pointing to the originary moment of 'dislocation, resistance, enigma' (Laplanche, 1992a: 114) at the core of the subject precipitated in the first intimacy and 'leaning on' of the (m)other, maternal allegory provides solace in the knowledge of death and earthly transience through its assurance of contiguity, resurrection and immortality. The relation in art and literature between maternal allegory, maternal/semiotic form as part of a maternal poetics, and Laplanche's 'enigmatic signifier' is an area of further research I intend to pursue beyond this thesis.

¹⁸ Eliot states in 'The Frontiers of Criticism' (1956):

I am even prepared to suggest that there is, in all great poetry, something which must remain unaccountable however complete might be our knowledge of the poet, and that is what matters the most. When the poem has been made, something new has happened, something that cannot wholly be explained by *anything that went before*. That, I believe, is what we mean by 'creation'. (*OPP*, 124, emphasis in original)

¹⁹ Eliot states in 'East Coker': 'There is only the fight to recover what has been lost / And found and lost again and again . . . / For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business' (*CPP*, 182). Benjamin states in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928):

even the story of the life of Christ supported the movement from history to nature which is the basis of allegory . . . The mystical instant [*Nu*] becomes the 'now' [*Jetzt*] of contemporary actuality; the symbolic becomes distorted into the allegorical. The eternal is separated from the events of the story of salvation, and what is left is a living image open to all kinds of revision by the interpretative artist. (*OGT*, 182-83)

²⁰ We may recall lines from 'Little Gidding': 'And what you thought you came for / Is only a shell, a husk of meaning / From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled' (*CPP*, 192).

sovereign presence that cannot be fully revealed. It is divine love achieved through ‘the *work* of love’ (Zizek, 2000: 128, emphasis in original).²¹ This is the use of Eliot’s maternal poetics:

For liberation – not less of love but expanding
Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
From the future as well as the past. (*CPP*, 195)

This study has perceived a link in Eliot’s works between Campbell’s idea of maternal form, the symbolic, Kristeva’s semiotic and what she calls ‘the imaginary father’—a mysterious and unconditional love at the origin of consciousness, a father-mother conglomerate. This shows the maternal, the phallus, the semiotic and the imaginary father as interrelated and all having a fluid role in Eliot’s writings. In other words, for Eliot, there is no paternal without the maternal, no divine without the body. They go hand in hand, with his masculinity, sense of self and spiritual becoming all bound up in his poetics. The *Quartets* exemplify this relationship, showing how a maternally-connoted embodied poetics leads both to the symbolic—the ‘word’ (197)—and divine love—the ‘Word in the desert’ (175), what Eliot calls ‘the absolute paternal care’ (181). The fundamental importance of the mother in this relationship is demonstrated by the figure of the ‘Lady’ in ‘The Dry Salvages’ who is petitioned to ‘pray for those who are in ships’ (189). The ‘Lady’ is the maternal, threshold form who brings about ideal identification with God the father and who assures safe movement backwards and forwards between oppositions: the maternal and the paternal, masculine and feminine, body and language, Word and word, sea and land.²² Without her, the sailors who set forth on the seas of commerce or war—like those in the mariner’s tale in *The Waste Land* facsimile—do not return but languish in ‘the dark throat’ of the mother ‘which will not reject them’ (189). As Kristeva states,

at the dawn of individuation a life raft thus appears on the
horizon of the ‘oceanic feeling’: the loving father. An imaginary
Surface who, through his loving authority, takes me from the
engulfing container: he is the guarantor of my being. (2009: 10)

²¹ Eliot’s maternal allegory suggests Zizek’s notion of the ‘fragile absolute’ as Christian *Agape*: ‘a magic moment when the *Absolute appears* in all its fragility’ (2000: 159, emphasis in original).

²² For Irigaray (2010), Mary can be read as ‘a temporal bridge between the past, the present and of the future, and a spatial bridge between all the cultures of the world’ (qtd. in Irigaray and Marder 115). She represents the experience of the divine through the maternal body.

Kristeva terms the paradoxical maternal facility aiding both individuation and immediate perception of the imaginary father ‘maternal *reliance*, or eroticism’ (2014b: 71).²³ *Reliance* is the pre-discursive bio-psychical maternal locale of faith, passion and infinite love, the degree zero of imagination and ambivalence, which I contend Eliot traces by way of maternal poetics. As mentioned in chapter 5, in Kristeva’s model it is the symbolic capacity in the pre-Oedipal mother (her own loving investment in the loving father) that elects the ‘third’ for the child.²⁴ Identification with the imaginary father signifies mutual recognition, constitution of the ego-ideal and is the true basis for future loving relationships and ‘herethics’.²⁵ It is the counterbalance of abjection which surmounts separation and ambivalence. It is the loving father-mother that supports sublimation, symbolisation, the formation of new ideals and identifications and new forms of object relations different from those established through the jurisdiction of the severe Oedipal father. Kristeva states that ‘reliance is a distinct dimension of *religere*, which actually rebels against the latter’s laws and powers’ (82). In Eliot’s maternal works, it is the re-turning to the very beginnings of (m)other-child intersubjectivity, back to his more mobile and plural maternal side, back indeed to his polymorphous childlike self (both son and daughter, male and female), where he finds not only mother love but also a more benign father. In *Four Quartets* this ideal parental love is sanctified. In *The Elder Statesman* (1958), however, Eliot’s last and ‘most human play’ (Gardner, 1958: 9), it is the rediscovery of real parental and familial love, whether refound or fantasised, that finally moves Eliot in his works from a son to a father, from divine to ordinary human love.²⁶ The resolution of this final play confirms the maternal to be the aegis of his spiritual and poetic development, happiness and manhood.

***The Elder Statesman* and Human Love**

The remarkable fact of Eliot’s life is that he found marital love, reconciliation and contentment in his later years. In marrying Valerie in 1957 he experienced a happiness and

²³ See Kristeva’s essay ‘Reliance, or Maternal Eroticism’ (2014b).

²⁴ Mentioned in chapter 5, Campbell’s idea of maternal form and view of the imaginary implies a different reading of the ‘imaginary father’ as the loving pre-Oedipal father whose maternal form also promotes the child’s differentiation and capacity for sublimation.

²⁵ For Kristeva, ‘there will not be a free woman [or man?] as long as we lack an ethics of the maternal. But this ethics is just being born; it will be a herethics of reliance’ (2014b: 83, my words in brackets).

²⁶ The title of an anonymous review of *The Elder Statesman* for the *Times* is ‘Mr. Eliot’s Most Human Play’. The titles of other reviews of the play also indicate Eliot’s late change in attitude to human and marital love; for example, ‘Love and Mr. Eliot’ in *Time*; ‘Mr Eliot Jolts His Disciples’ in *Tatler & Bystander*; and in the *New Leader*, ‘Affirmation and Love in Eliot’. For contemporary reviews of *The Elder Statesman*, see Grant (1982b: 702-30).

wholeness he said he had not felt since childhood, confiding to his old friend Ezra Pound: ‘The only happy years of my life, since I was a small boy, have been due to marrying [Valerie]’ (*B*, MS 43/647). This new found and unexpected love would be the basis for *The Elder Statesman*, as indicated by Eliot’s poem, ‘To My Wife’, which is the dedication to the play. Aside from its title, the poem may also be read as expressing a child’s gratitude to and reverence for the early poet-mother:²⁷

To whom I owe the leaping delight
That quickens my senses in our wakingtime
And the rhythm that governs the repose of our sleepingtime,
The breathing in unison

Of lovers . . .
Who think the same thoughts without need of speech
And babble the same speech without need of meaning:

To you I dedicate this book, to return as best I can
With words a little part of what you have given me.
The words mean what they say, but some have a further meaning
For you and me only. (*CPP*, 522)

The Elder Statesman is an extraordinary counterstatement to Eliot’s declaration made in 1929: ‘the love of man and woman (or for that matter man and man) is only made reasonable by the higher love, or else is simply the coupling of animals’ (*SE*, 234-35). Both ‘To My Wife’ and the play itself announce a resounding belief, previously lacking in his works, in romantic human love as a spiritual power. In the play, unconditional mutual love and acceptance is articulated to the aged Lord Claverton by his daughter Monica—a possible allusion to Augustine’s mother in the *Confessions*: ‘Oh Father, I’ve always loved you’ (*CPP*, 581).²⁸ Emulating the transition from Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* to *Oedipus at Colonus*,

²⁷ Eliot married Valerie on 10 January 1957 midway through writing *The Elder Statesman*. Recalling a conversation with Eliot, Gardner states that Eliot ‘thought that the critics who had called *The Elder Statesman* his most human play were probably right, but added, speaking of the earlier comedies, that the Pauline conception of marriage attributed to him had not been what he intended’ (1958: 9).

²⁸ Eliot replied when asked whether he read himself in the role of Lord Claverton: ‘there are three ingredients in all one’s characters: (1) observation of other people, (2) pure invention, and (3) something of oneself which includes what Yeats calls the anti-self. But I find that the character is most effective when one is least conscious of putting oneself into it’ (Grant, 1982b: 706).

Claverton is no longer an Oedipus in crisis stranded in the wasteland, but a more mature Oedipus having realised his true self in familial love.²⁹ Eliot's shocking late reevaluation of human relationships and new understanding of the impulse towards the ideal is epitomised by Monica's speech at the end of act 2:

Father, you know I would give my life to you.
Oh, how silly that phrase sounds! But there's no vocabulary
For love within a family, love that's lived in
But not looked at, love within the light of which
All else is seen, the love within which
All other love finds speech.
This love is silent. (CPP, 561-62)

Despite being elderly, Claverton declares at the end of the play that 'I've only just now had the illumination / Of knowing what love is' (581). In his knowledge of a love eternal and 'unchanging' (583) in human love, as in *Oedipus at Colonus*, Claverton finally comes to rest and dies underneath a beech tree.³⁰

The Elder Statesman suggests that by the time of the play's production, Eliot had finally made the difficult movement from the mother, to God, to the man he needed himself to be. In an interview given on his seventieth birthday, he admitted, 'I'm just beginning to grow up, to get maturity. In the last few years, everything I'd done up to 60 or so has seemed very childish' (Nicholson 21). We may question if Eliot ever would have been able to achieve maturity or open himself up to love if not for his gradual reawakening to mother love and his radical dependence on this love. It is to be remembered that however painful it was for Charlotte to accept her son's decisions, like Elena in her *Savonarola*, she allowed him as a young man to go to Paris and London to follow his creative ambitions and dreams: 'Thy destiny? My son, with heavy heart / I leave thee since I must. I know we part / But for a little while' (SA, 6). Charlotte was far more a loving than a clinging mother. Her identification with the Virgin Mary, as an ongoing representation of her own loving mother, would have helped her relinquish her son and orientate him toward God. Charlotte's maternal ambivalence,

²⁹ For Kristeva, *Oedipus at Colonus* differs fundamentally from *Oedipus Rex* in that it stages a major shift in relation to the Law, indicating a movement beyond abjection and Oedipal subjectivity (2000: 65-93).

³⁰ Eliot's use of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* as a model for *The Elder Statesman* recalls what he had said in 1938 about *The Family Reunion*: 'Harry's career needs to be completed by an *Orestes* or an *Oedipus at Colonus*' (qtd. in Browne 107).

passion and ‘dispassion’ (Kristeva, 2009: 43), faith, love and idealisations provided her son with the requisite resources to live a poetic life: to use ambivalence to constitute and transform the self, to make and remake his ideals in both divine and human ways, to traverse separation, move passion and reproduce the seeds of love.³¹ Although Charlotte complained to Eliot in 1908 that she thought her gifts had amounted to nothing, some delightfully comic verses by Henry Ware Eliot Jr. in 1934 testify that the family felt she had succeeded in her ambitions as both a mother and woman:

No ‘Might-have-been’ was C. C. E.
Although she lacked a Ph.D.
She was an ‘Is’, and in her day,
She did her part, and said her say.
From Boston she went westward ho,
And married in St. Louis, Mo.
Where charities absorbed her time,
And social work to lessen crime.
Small boys of then, now grown to men,
Have cause to thank her active pen,
And still more active agitation
In aid of Juvenile Probation.
She wrote a big bi-og-raph-ee
Of Dr. William Greenleaf E –
Of Washington Universitee
And saved him from obscuritee.
She wrote a poem of modest fame –
‘Savonarola’ was its name.
Her husband manufactured bricks;
She raised a family of six,
Of whom the fifth affirms herein,
She was a ‘was’, not ‘Might-have-been’.

(*HL*, MS Am 2560/88)

³¹ For Kristeva, maternal love involves both passion and dispassion. It is the mother’s ‘progressive dispassion and/or by her aptitude for sublimation that the mother lets the child interiorize and represent *not the mother . . . but the absence of the mother*’ (2009: 46). She adds: ‘the “good enough mother” might be the one who can go away, making a place for the child to have *the pleasure of thinking of her*’ (46, emphasis in original).

In Eliot's poetic search for belief and divine love he rediscovered, or maybe made for himself, a more benign mother, father and human love at the creative foundation of his forgotten beginnings. Eliot's maternal poetics were his *Stabat Mater* erected on the indelible trace of maternal *reliance* in his adaption to loss. This study has shown his maturation and devotion to God occurred within, not counter to, a sense of continuous connection with the maternal body. In Charlotte's *Savonarola*, Elena states to her son:

Has human love *no* claim? Didst thou not learn
God's love through this? Will thy devotion burn
Less pure if beats in unison with thine
Thy mother's heart? (*SA*, 3, emphasis in original)

Eliot would come to learn the path of transition to love, both human and divine, is mother love.

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