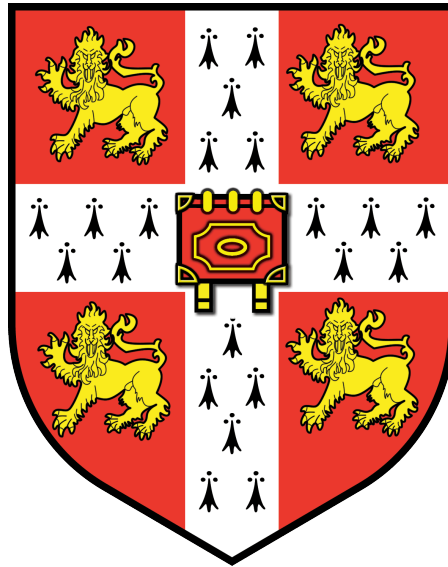


George Eliot's Generative Economies

Transactional maternal sacrifice in social realist fiction, 1853-1894



Helen Myfanwy Hoggarth Charman

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Faculty of English, University of Cambridge

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Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee

Abstract

George Eliot's Generative Economies: Transactional maternal sacrifice in social realist fiction, 1853-1894, Helen Charman

This project argues for a reconsideration of the importance of the maternal body in mid-to-late nineteenth-century social realist fiction, taking George Eliot's work as its primary case study. Using recent work in sacrifice studies as a framework, I illustrate the ways in which maternal sacrifice underpins canonical Victorian narrative structures. The thesis draws on historical advancements in obstetrics and gynaecology, political economy, and Freudian psychoanalysis: these interlocking contextual strands combine to question the received idea that the pressures of the new industrial age created a divide between the public, masculine workplace and the feminine, domestic domain of the home. As the novel became increasingly concerned with an explicitly capitalist system of value, the figure of the mother became symbolic of the commodification of care; thus, the reproductive bodies of the female protagonists in these novels are embedded in a complex value system in which their idealized virtue is directly related to their economic function as producers, compounded by the patriarchal structures that obstructed female sexual autonomy.

The thesis begins with an introduction that uses George Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858)—three narratives of complicated reproduction—to establish its theoretical and contextual concerns, before moving to a consideration of Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) alongside Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853). It then reads *Daniel Deronda* (1876) as a proto-Freudian fragmentation point for the novel form, before turning to an analysis of infanticide in *Adam Bede* (1859). The final chapter reads George Moore's rewriting of these Victorian stories of taboo maternity in *Esther Waters* as a pathbreaking text in the renegotiation between representation and realism that came to define twentieth-century fiction. Published in 1894 and continuously revised until 1930, *Esther Waters* straddles the changing century, and so demonstrates the importance of maternity to this broader paradigm shift: the illegitimate mother survives, and the bodies sacrificed to the text are those of the father and, ultimately, the imperial soldier son.

Acknowledgements

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For my family, who have helped me see that alternative domestic structures are possible, and whom I love very much: my dad, Cliff; my stepdad, Nick; my stepmum, Louise; my half- and step- siblings Emma, Lois, Ross, and Kay. For my brilliant, funny, clever brother, Tom, and for brilliant, funny, clever Zoë.

For Chris Law: for correcting my rogue equations, for helping me step gently over lawsuits, for breaking the hooligan sky. Thank you for living with me and for making me happy. Love is a conference | & we stay warm.

This doctoral thesis is dedicated to my mum, Jane Hoggarth, who I could never hope to properly thank for everything, and who I admire, like, and love more than it is possible to say. Mum,

in our own shade
we embrace each other gravely &
look out tenderly upon the world

seeking only contemporaries
and speech and light, no father.

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Introduction:

Narrative obstetrics

George Eliot is still frequently regarded as a sort of Victorian Athena, the self-created, motherless, and mother-denying daughter who sprang full-grown and fully-armed, with a pen at least, from the head of a paternal and magisterial George Henry Lewes.¹

For learning to love anyone is like an increase in property: it increases care, & brings many new fears lest precious things should come to harm.²

How have women given birth, who has helped them, and how, and why? These are not simply questions of the history of midwifery and obstetrics: they are political questions.³

George Eliot is a figure whose critical reception embodies—I use this term intentionally—the erasure of maternity in her own fiction, and in subsequent interpretations of the mid-century social realist novel. Separated by her critics and, indeed, through her own self-representation, from ‘normal’ women, the analogy of Athena illustrates Eliot’s success in separating herself, to a large extent, from gendered harm.⁴ In the above letter, written to the Hon. Mrs. Robert Lytton in 1870 after the death of Thornton ‘Thornie’ Lewes the year before, Eliot—who was stepmother, or ‘Mutter’, to G. H. Lewes’s sons—expresses the filial bond of maternity in economic terms: ‘for learning to love anyone is like an increase in property’. Just as she was a shareholder in the Cape Town railroad, she was a shareholder in the lives of these young men, two of whom died in South Africa: the youngest, Herbert or ‘Bertie’, died in 1875.

Maternity in the mid-nineteenth century existed at the intersection of two sacrificial ideologies: the sacrifice of the maternal body to the production of a son, and the sacrifice of the son to the demands of the empire. Nancy Henry, in *George Eliot and Empire* notes that ‘the export of English literature, money, and sons to the colonies formed a pervasive and diverse culture of empire in mid-nineteenth century England’. Her study goes on, however, to suggest that those implicated in that culture did not perceive it, and that ‘the pursuit of caring

¹ Nancy L. Paxton, *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer: Feminism, Evolutionism, and the Reconstruction of Gender* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 1.

² George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, 9 vols (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1954), v, p. 106. This will be referred to as *Letters* and all further page and volume references will be in the text.

³ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1977 repr. 1987), p. 128.

⁴ See, for example, her refusal to contribute to Bessie Rayner Parkes’s *English Woman’s Journal* (1858-64) because she would rather devote her time to writing books, than ‘give up building my own house to go and help in the building of my neighbour’s garden wall’ (*Letters*, II, p. 431).

for family by providing financial security through investments and finding colonial careers for young men' was 'benign'.⁵ Demonstrably it was not, however prevalent false nostalgia for a benevolent empire is today, and the traditional hetero-patriarchal family was a key tool in the implementation of British rule.⁶ Feminised domestic space—the 'portable home' abroad and the seat of 'British values' at home—played a crucial role in imperial ideology, particularly in the period in which Eliot was active both as a writer and investor. Migration to New Zealand, for example, was heavily encouraged by the British government from 1840 onwards, consciously conceived as a 'Better Britain', a model colony that 'should and would enjoy the advantages of Britain's long experience as a colonizer of other Neo-Europes'.⁷ Narratives of settler domesticity and racialised representations of the idealised white mother played a key role in this propaganda.⁸

At home, too, the implementation of empire relied upon the instrumentalization of the female body. The recognition of a psychological splitting of femininity into the virtuous (virginity and its opposite number, respectable maternity) and the sinful (sexuality, illegitimate maternity) is something of a critical commonplace.⁹ Yet, following Susan Fraiman's important intervention against the tendency to dismiss all elements of domestic labour as reactionary, and Lisa Baraitser and Stella Sandford's warnings against the 'swallowing up' of maternal labour into the broader category of social reproduction, I want to stress that the conflation of all kinds of motherhood with oppressive domestic practices is not the purpose of this project.¹⁰ Similarly, I hope the work that follows is attentive to Jacqueline Rose's warning that 'feminism has nothing to gain from a validation of motherhood in the

⁵ Nancy Henry, *George Eliot and the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 2.

⁶ See, in particular, Sunil M. Agnani, *Hating Empire Properly: The Two Indies and the Limits of Enlightenment Anticolonialism* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2013); Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988); Priyamvada Gopal, 'Redressing anti-imperial amnesia', *Race and Class*, 57.3 (January-March 2016), 18-30; Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus 1993).

⁷ D. C. Archibald, *Domesticity, Imperialism and Emigration in the Victorian Novel* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002), p. 36.

⁸ For an account of Māori women's experiences in the nineteenth century, via land court cases, libel testimonies, accounts of warfare, religious writing, interaction with colonial institutions, personal documents and community records, see Lachy Paterson and Angela Wanhalla (eds.), *He Reo Wāhine: Māori Women's Voices from the Nineteenth Century* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2017).

⁹ See, famously, Coventry Patmore, 'The Angel in the House', first published in 1854 and expanded until 1862, and Virginia Woolf's reclamation of the figure of the angel in the house as something to be killed by the woman writer in her speech delivered to the London and National Society for Women's Service in 1931, in *Collected Essays*, ed. Stuart N. Clarke, 6 vols, (London: The Hogarth Press, 2009), v, pp. 635-48.

¹⁰ See Susan Fraiman, *Extreme Domesticity: A View from the Margins* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2017); Lisa Baraitser, *Enduring Time* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); Stella Sandford, 'What is Maternal Labour?', in *Studies in the Maternal*, 3.2 (2011), 1-11.

name of creativity or power': the feminist point of my project is not to further freight the female body, but to try and understand better one of the mechanisms by which it is burdened.¹¹ In focussing on the dominant literary representations of what might be termed conventional—or biological—motherhood, my goal is to unpick the relationship between the construction of the conventional conservative home and the suppression of the radical possibility contained within *all* modes of mothering, at a historical moment where both narrative fiction and capitalist society were coalescing.¹²

The conventional maternal body had, by the mid-nineteenth century, become a symbolic site of convergence for a simultaneous idealisation and condemnation that relied upon the erasure of its physicality.¹³ Most acceptable when it could be rationalised as fulfilling the function of maternity, the physical reality of a pregnant female body was nevertheless a serious threat to repressive norms that governed societal and literary expression.¹⁴ Just as, by mid-century, fiction cannot be disentangled from its political contexts—in 1865 the novelist was declared in the *Westminster Review* to be 'now our most influential writer'—its representation of maternity is profoundly implicated in any claim to socioeconomic or political relevance of fictional texts.¹⁵ Considered in this way, motherhood links three key contextual strands: the rapid developments in midwifery and obstetrics; the secularisation of sacrifice; and the burgeoning discipline of political economy. Adrienne Rich's famous questions, in this context, are questions of literary productivity itself.¹⁶ As the novel became increasingly concerned with an explicitly capitalist system of value, the figure of the mother became symbolic of the commodification of care; thus, the reproductive bodies of the female protagonists in these novels are embedded in a complex value system in which

¹¹ Jacqueline Rose, *Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty* (London: Faber and Faber, 2018), p. 82. See also Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of the Child and Mother* (London: Virago, 1983).

¹² After the period this thesis covers, recent social reproduction theory has reoriented itself around a globalised perspective, moving beyond the family to a 'global working class'. See *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

¹³ See, for example, Sally Shuttleworth, 'Demonic Mothers: Ideologies of Bourgeois Motherhood in the Mid-Victorian Era', in *Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History, and the Politics of Gender*, ed. Linda Shires (London: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁴ For the reality of contraception in the period, see Aeron Hunt, 'Accidental Pregnancy', *Victorian Review*, 40.2 (Fall 2014), 43-46.

¹⁵ Justin M'Carthy, 'Novels with a Purpose', *Westminster Review*, cited and posthumously attributed to M'Carthy in Lisa Rodensky, *The Crime in Mind: Criminal Responsibility and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 4.

¹⁶ For an interesting theoretical account of the relationship between literary production, aesthetics, and political economy in the nineteenth century, see Jan Mieszkowski, *Labors of Imagination: Aesthetics and Political Economy from Kant to Althusser* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2006). For an account of literary production, authorial surrogates and psychoanalysis, see Neil Hertz, *The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1987).

their idealized virtue is directly related to their economic function as producers, compounded by the patriarchal structures that condemned female sexual autonomy.

This doctoral dissertation argues for a reconsideration of the importance of the maternal body in social realist fiction of the mid- to late nineteenth century, with a particular, though not exclusive, focus on George Eliot, whose novels both sublimate and problematise motherhood in a way that pushes narrative fiction itself to a representational brink. Rather than attempt to offer a comprehensive cultural history of maternity, by focusing on a relatively small number of literary texts and by limiting my focus to fiction I want to show how much our understanding of social realist novels—defined by Eliot as ‘experiments in life’ (*Letters*, VI: 216-17)—gains from a sustained confrontation with the figure of the mother, and how closely intertwined the narrative structures of these fictions were with sacrificial logic. However dependent these stories are upon the possibility representation holds for empathetic understanding, when it comes to the maternal body, they remain disciplinary forms. Who is allowed the luxury of full representation? Who, in these texts, is excluded from their community? Realism is, after all, as Isobel Armstrong notes in *Novel Politics*, related to democratic representation: in their portrayal of the family, Eliot’s texts confirm Frederic Jameson’s belief that the realist novel has an ontological commitment to the status quo.¹⁷

Eliot referred to her fiction in a letter of 1866 as an attempt to ‘make certain ideas thoroughly incarnate, as if they had revealed themselves to me first in the flesh and not in the spirit’ (*Letters*, IV: 300). Yet in Eliot’s novels mothers either die young or are comic, incompetent grotesques, replaced by substitutionary maternal figures who provide moral guidance uncomplicated by the problem of physicality. This Athena-like reification of the mind over the body prefigures a concern crucial to object relations psychoanalysis. For D.W. Winnicott, the attempt to absolve creation of the debt owed to the maternal body was present in language itself, writing as he did that ‘the idea of being born out of the head is often found, and it is certainly easy to jump from the word “conception” to the concept of “conceiving of”’.¹⁸ Any work of criticism that tries to emphasise the importance of the maternal body owes—at the very least—a debt to psychoanalysis: my focus on the mechanisms of

¹⁷ See Isobel Armstrong, *Novel Politics: Democratic Imaginations in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Frederic Jameson, *Antimonies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2014).

¹⁸ D. W. Winnicott, ‘This Feminism’, in *Home is Where We Start From: Essays by a Psychoanalyst*, ed. Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepherd and Madeleine Davis (New York, NY: Norton, 1986), pp. 183-194 (p. 191).

repression that characterise the representation of the maternal body in these texts follows the tradition of British psychoanalysis—particularly feminist-Marxist—that interrogates the erasure of maternal subjectivity. Rather than seeing Freudian psychoanalysis and feminism, or indeed Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxism, as antithetical, in this project I strive for a mode of reading psychoanalytically, that is, of attending to the specifically literary economy of representation. This is in the hope, following Jacqueline Rose, that an interrogation of the conservative *demand*s made of mothering as a primary and necessarily feminine duty—demands whose fulfilment and neglect are legible in the interstices of literary representation—can ‘help us to open up the space between different notions of political identity—between the idea of a political identity for feminism (what women require) and that of a feminine identity for women (what women are or should be)’.¹⁹

The proximity of ‘conception’ and ‘conceiving of’ is even closer in the German word, *empfangnis*. Eliot, a scholar and translator of German, cautioned in her 1856 *Westminster Review* essay, ‘The Natural History of German Life’ that, if we need ‘a true conception of the popular character to guide our sympathies rightly, we need it equally to check our theories, and direct us in their application’.²⁰ This essay is now very famous, occupying a near-talismanic position in Eliot studies and frequently read as her treatise on the realist project she was to embark on with the publication of *Scenes of Clerical Life* two years later. It envisages a cross-class solidarity enacted through representation: ‘Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot’.²¹ For my purposes, Eliot’s definition of fictional ‘conception’ as reliant upon the application of ‘theories’ erases even as it foregrounds conception itself: realism, here, is rooted in the head, in ‘conceiving of’, just as, in the John

¹⁹ Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 103. For an account of the tensions between Marxism, feminism, and Freudian analysis, see the entire chapter, ‘Femininity and its Discontents’, pp. 82-103. In this project, I am necessarily working with a different definition of repression than John Kucich, in his influential *Repression in Victorian Fiction: Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Charles Dickens* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), which explicitly rejects psychoanalysis in its analytical framework. His decision to do so turns on what he sees as psychoanalysis’s neglect of subjectivity; we might see Jessica Benjamin’s underlining of importance of intersubjectivity in psychoanalysis in *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1988) as a method of redress to this. Psychoanalysis is not, of course, a single entity; see, amongst many others, Lisa Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption* (London: Routledge, 2009); Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A Radical Reassessment of Freudian Psychoanalysis* (London: Allen Lane, 1974); Robbie Duschinsky and Susan Walker (eds.), *Juliet Mitchell and the Lateral Axis: Twenty-First-Century Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

²⁰ George Eliot, ‘The Natural History of German Life’, in *The Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited, 1963) pp. 266-299 (p. 272).

²¹ Eliot, ‘Natural History’, p. 271.

Ruskin passage she quotes towards the end of the essay, ‘generation’ is a matter of geographical and continental continuity. In England, it is harder to keep the past in mind. In the English realist novel the past—or, at least, the dual psychic histories of maternity and infancy—is, thinking psychoanalytically, intentionally repressed.

Eliot was preoccupied with inheritance throughout her career, and although there is a case to be made for the importance of *Felix Holt*, *Romola*, and *Silas Marner* to a study of generative patterns in her novels, I have chosen to attend to the texts in this thesis because of their concern with maternal generativity and its attendant anxieties of embodiment, rather than theological and paternal ones. In doing so, I will read Eliot’s work alongside novels by Elizabeth Gaskell and George Moore, whose *Ruth* (1853) and *Esther Waters* (1894), respectively, reveal the ways in which the literary representation of the maternal body was key not only to Eliot’s social realism but to the genre more broadly, until the century’s end. This thesis begins with a reading of *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858), Eliot’s earliest fictional output: three stories initially published anonymously in Blackwood’s magazine in 1857 before being gathered together in one volume. In ‘Amos Barton’ and ‘Mr Gilfil’s Love Story’, frustrated childbirth is the central, fatal, event of each narrative. Chapter 1 foregrounds the evolution of the sacrificial logic of maternity in its focus on the twin problems of illegitimate pregnancy and adolescent sexuality, reading Gaskell’s *Ruth*—an exemplary text of illegitimate pregnancy, sacrifice, and redemption through labour—against Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860): the frustrated Bildungsroman of Maggie Tulliver illustrates the narrative impossibility of a non-generative sexual future.

Rather than move chronologically from here, Chapter 2 offers a reading of Eliot’s final novel, *Daniel Deronda* (1876), as the crux of my project’s theoretical claims. The novel, which marks the point at which the uneasy truce between social realism and the suppression of a fully embodied maternal representation splinters, uses the metaphorical pregnancy that occurs in the body of Gwendolen Harleth to enact its theoretical banishment of female sexuality. Ultimately, in *Daniel Deronda*, the primacy of masculine kinship creates a fantasy of male parthenogenesis that requires the exorcism of maternity as a whole. Chapter 3 will then return to Eliot’s first novel, *Adam Bede* (1859) which, in the light of this analysis of *Daniel Deronda*, we can now read, in the *actual* pregnancy and punishment of Hetty Sorrel, as the physical representation of the metaphorical banishment achieved at the end of Eliot’s

last fictional narrative.²² If Gwendolen Harleth's story is a conceptual rewriting of Hetty Sorrel's, George Moore's *Esther Waters* is a conscious reinterpretation of the narrative of illegitimacy in both *Adam Bede* and *Ruth*. Eliot and Gaskell's novels emphasise the tension between the representational demands of realism and the necessity of plot: the destabilising (pro)creative potential of the female body must be subdued, and narrative order must be imposed upon it.

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, these sacrificial obligations had changed. In *Esther Waters*, the mother survives: the bodies sacrificed to the text are those of the father and, ultimately, the imperial soldier son. *Esther Waters* is a novel that straddles the changing century: Moore revised the novel until 1931, allowing it to lay claim to both the Victorian novelistic tradition and that of the proto-modernist text.²³ In bringing these texts together, I hope to offer a new gloss on the rift that is widely acknowledged to have opened in novelistic structure with *Daniel Deronda*: after the final banishment of the mother, the only way for fictional creation to be continued is through a recuperation of maternity. If the repression and control of the maternal body is as inherent to the socioeconomic, medical, and political structures of the nineteenth century as I contend, in the new sacrificial economy that ends *Esther Waters*, we can find a tentative way forward. In 1970, Raymond Williams wrote that *Daniel Deronda* signalled a transition

between that form which could end in a series of settlements in which the social and economic solutions and the personal achievements were in a single dimension, and that new form which extending and complicating and then finally collapsing this dimension ends with a single person going away on his own, having achieved moral growth by distancing or extraction. It is a divided consciousness of belonging and not belonging. The social solutions—the common solutions—are still taken seriously up to the last point of personal crisis, and then what is achieved as a personal moral development has to express itself as some kind of physical or spiritual renewal; an

²² For my purposes, I am interested in the way this masculine kinship appears in realist fiction, rather than gothic fiction or autobiography, but I am indebted to Barbara Johnson's reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in 'My Monster/My Self', in *Diacritics*, 12 (Summer 1992), 2-10. For readings of *Frankenstein* as a text born of postpartum depression, see Ellen Moers, 'Female Gothic', in *The Endurance of Frankenstein*, ed. George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 77-87, and (in the same volume) U.C. Knoepfelmacher, 'Thoughts on the Aggression of Daughters', pp. 88-119. See also S.M. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), and Mary Poovey, 'My Hideous Progeny: Mary Shelley and the Feminization of Romanticism', *PMLA*, 95.3 (May 1980).

²³ Virginia Woolf, who favourably reviewed *Esther Waters*, attributes in her 1924 critique of realism 'Character in Fiction' the fact that 'all human relations have shifted—those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children' to have effected a change in literature that she places 'about the year 1910', in *Collected Essays*, ed. Andrew McNeillie, 6 vols (London: The Hogarth Press, 1988), III, pp. 420-437 (p. 422).

emigration, at once resigned and hopeful, from what had originally been offered as a decisive social world.²⁴

This ‘emigration’ is an act that traverses the boundaries of both the nation state and the family, tracing the divided consciousness of the protagonist—in this case, Deronda—along the already-fragmenting lines of communal identity that entered the next century. By extending the focus forward to novels that cross, like *Esther Waters*, into the twentieth century, I want to offer a reading of the destruction of this ‘decisive social world’, following Williams’s troubling of the boundaries between the Victorian and the modernist text, as an opportunity for renewal.²⁵ We can find in the current zeitgeist for texts—fictional, theoretical, and various mixtures of the two—that unabashedly take maternity as their central concern the legacy of modernism’s move toward fictional maternal recuperation.²⁶ Lily Gurton-Wacher, writing in 2016, noted that despite their generic variety, this emerging maternal canon ‘is united by the authors’ decision to treat motherhood not as an interruption of intellectual work but as its impetus’.²⁷ In 2019, we can add to this analysis a new urgency, spurred on by the increasing threat posed to reproductive rights by the global resurgence of right-wing politics and their accompanying hetero-patriarchal structures. The reckoning with the maternal is far from over.

²⁴ Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 86-87.

²⁵ See, in particular, Williams, ‘When Was Modernism?’, in *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso, 1989, repr. 2007), pp. 31-35.

²⁶ Modernism is, of course, in many respects inextricable from psychoanalysis. See Baraitser, *Enduring Time*: ‘We might view psychoanalysis itself as one of modernism’s chronic conditions; a form of knowledge that co-emerges at the turn of the last century with empire and the late colonial state, and the decolonization movements and independence struggles of the modern period that is from its inception on the verge of dying, and yet chronically persists’ (p. 18). See also Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Destructive Element: British Psychoanalysis and Modernism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

²⁷ Lily Gurton-Wacher, ‘The Stranger Guest: The Literature of Pregnancy and New Motherhood’, *Los Angeles Review of Books* (29 July 2016) <<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/stranger-guest-literature-pregnancy-new-motherhood>> [accessed 10 September 2019].

i: Eliot's sacrificial economies

The relationship between Eliot's fiction and an economic mode of thought is well-documented, both in the specific links between Eliot's early Evangelism and its corresponding focus on atonement, and in the importance of a post-Malthusian understanding of suffering and physicality.²⁸ Eliot's life, like that of her peers, was shaped by a series of economic transformations and a growing tendency towards a more monist value system, as representational forms of value and the institutional frameworks that governed its circulation began to shift and change.²⁹ Catherine Gallagher's work in *The Body Economic* is still perhaps the most important account of Eliot's economic thinking, focusing as it does on the reproductive physicality of Malthusian logic in *Scenes of Clerical Life*. In her analysis of the first editions of Thomas Robert Malthus's *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), Gallagher identifies the 'body/society opposition' that was to colour political economy in the following century:

By rhetorically melting one generation into another in this way, Malthus occludes the possibility of using the healthy particular body to signify the healthy group. The healthy body here has lost, in the very power of its fecundity, the integrity of its boundaries and hence comes to be a sign of its opposite. The blooming body is only a body about to divide into two feebler bodies that are always on the verge of becoming four starving bodies. Hence, no state of health can be socially reassuring. Malthus's argument ruptures the healthy body/healthy population homology. Simultaneously, by making the body absolutely problematic, he helps place it in the very centre of social discourse.³⁰

By contradicting William Godwin and David Hume's notions that the healthy body is a sign of prosperity, Malthus identifies fecundity as a site of the body's dissolution. This metaphorical location of a social problem within a necessarily female body identifies reproduction, in turn, as a danger to civilised society. In this thesis, I want to demonstrate that

²⁸See, particularly: Kathleen Blake, *Pleasures of Benthamism: Victorian Literature, Utility, Political Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Catherine Gallagher, *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

²⁹ See Mary Poovey's 'vanishing point' in *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2008) and Dermot Coleman's contention that the temporal setting of the majority of Eliot's work at this vanishing point allowed her to explore its moral and social implications in *George Eliot and Money: Economics, Ethics and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

³⁰ Gallagher, *Body*, p. 39.

this logic is crucial to the rest of Eliot's fiction, too.³¹ If the broader moral economy of Eliot's work has its roots in the development of political economy in the nineteenth century, then, following Gallagher and Malthus, the reproductive body is at the very core of the novelistic transactions. *Scenes from Clerical Life* focuses on three women whose fecundity—or, in the case of 'Janet's Repentance', the lack thereof—leads them directly to their death: by the time we reach *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot is indeed approaching new territory, as she tries to reckon with the problematic maternal body within a narrative that is more romance than tragedy.³²

Ruth and *Esther Waters*, bookending Eliot's career as they do, illustrate that this shift was not exclusive to Eliot's thinking, but rather indicative of a broader cultural moment. Both are awkwardly liminal texts in their own right: *Ruth*, neither pastoral or urban, with no cumulative marriage plot, constructs and then denies an alternative redemptive future for the transgressive sexual-maternal body. *Esther Waters* allows that alternative future to bear fruit, although the position of the novel at the threshold of the new century gestures towards new relationships of demand and deficit. Although this thesis is not a work of economic study, it is indebted to the challenge made by feminist economists to prevailing notions of economic theory, particularly its highly gendered and racialised metaphors and to the figure of *homo economicus*: 'a conception of human agency that reflects a privileged, masculine worldview. Rational agents have no necessary obligations or responsibilities and interact contractually with others only when it is in their best interests to do so'.³³ Rationality is often a cipher for that other condition awarded to the status quo, neutrality. As Jan-Melissa Schramm and others have noted, most influential philosophical investigations of abnegation and the sacrifice of the individual will—Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Hobbes, Spinoza—centre the experience of the 'neutral' subject: here, as in nineteenth-century jurisprudence, this neutral subject, like *homo economicus*, is a reasonable man.³⁴ If maternal subjecthood and the maternal body are figured as objects of necessary sacrifice, the generative female body is by definition considered to be fundamentally different to that of its normative masculine counterpart at the level of value: producer versus product.

³¹ As Lana L. Dalley notes Eliot had 'intellectual ties to classical-school economics', primarily through the *Westminster Review*. See 'The Economics of "A Bit O' Victual," or Malthus and Mothers in *Adam Bede*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 36.2 (2008), 549-567 (p. 549).

³² See Gallagher, *Body*, pp. 181-182, and Jan-Melissa Schramm, *Atonement and Self-Sacrifice in Nineteenth-Century Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 217-218.

³³ Drucilla K. Barker and Edith Kuiper (eds.), *Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Economics: Economics as Social Theory* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 2.

³⁴ See, particularly, Jan-Melissa Schramm, *Testimony and Advocacy in Victorian Law, Literature, and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

It is a common assumption that, by the 1850s, the advance of an industrial age had transformed the social and familial structures of the early nineteenth century through the creation of a binary divide between the public, masculine workplace and the feminine domestic domain of the home, the latter functioning as a refuge from social change and a preserver of traditional systems of value.³⁵ This is a false dichotomy: domestic space was necessarily regulated by the prevailing economic values of the day. Valerie Fildes, Lara Marks and Hilary Marland in the introduction to their study of maternal and infant welfare in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, *Women and Children First*, make a persuasive case that the increasing medicalization of childbirth and nursing was given impetus by major conflicts that decimated populations: ‘Imperialist concerns were bolstered by a range of economic, social, and humanitarian motivations, and the desire to save the lives of mothers and young children’.³⁶ Ruth Perry links this—alongside charitable drives to save infant lives in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, like the foundation of the London Foundling Hospital—to the construction and valorisation of bourgeois motherhood:

[M]otherhood was a colonial form—the domestic, familial counterpart to land enclosure at home and imperialism abroad. Motherhood as it was constructed in the early modern period is a production-gearred phenomenon analogous to the capitalizing of agriculture, the industrializing of manufacture, and the institutionalizing of the nation state. The emergence of the nineteenth-century maternal ideal, rather than a positive or empowering development for women, was means of co-opting the female reproductive body into the service of a patriarchal societal system.³⁷

The commodification of motherhood has its roots in the history of medicine, too. In *Of Woman Born*, Rich links motherhood to productivity with a neat instance of paronomasia: for almost two millennia, she writes, the ‘labour of childbirth has been a form of forced labour’.³⁸ Rich continues:

³⁵ See introductory works like Josie Billington, ‘Families and Kinship’, in *George Eliot in Context*, ed. Margaret Harris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 129-136.

³⁶ Valerie Fildes, Lara Marks and Hilary Marland (eds.), ‘Introduction’ in *Women and Children First: International Maternal and Infant Welfare 1870-1945* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 1.

³⁷ Ruth Perry, ‘Colonizing the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2.2 (1991), 204-234 (p. 205). For an account of the link between intellectual property and the married women’s property law—an interesting counterpart to this phenomenon—and especially the 1856 petition signed by Marian Evans, see Clare Pettit, *Patent Inventions: Intellectual Property and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³⁸ Rich, p. 158.

Patriarchy has told the woman in labour that her suffering was purposive—it was the purpose of her existence; that the new life she was bringing forth (especially if male) was of value and that her own value depended on bringing it forth [...] Given this patriarchal purpose she could obliterate herself in fertility as her body swelled year after year, and pain and suffering might well become associated, for her, with her ultimate value in the world.³⁹

Labour, then, is equated with purpose: motherhood is figured as a sacrificial transaction where suffering becomes worth, and in this ‘obliteration’ in ‘fertility’, the valued commodity that is renounced is the woman’s individual subjectivity.⁴⁰ The proliferation of dead mothers across nineteenth-century fiction embeds this logic of exchange in narrative.

This physical suffering itself, however, was transfigured in the middle of the century. When the Scottish doctor James Simpson discovered in 1847 that the contractions of the uterus did not rely upon the consciousness of the labouring mother, he began to experiment with the use of chloroform as a method of pain relief. The theological backlash to this practice reinforced the notion that pain—the burden of Eve—was not only just but necessary in the continuing generation of value.⁴¹ Rich, who contends that ‘the truly radical act’ of Queen Victoria’s reign was her ‘acceptance of anaesthesia by chloroform for the birth of her seventh child in 1853’, notes that this ‘opened the way for anaesthesia as an accepted obstetrical practice’.⁴² Suffering, however, did not come only with labour. Despite the recent historical research that suggests the maternal mortality rate in the nineteenth century was not as high as was once accepted to be the case,⁴³ the change in the medical practices of childbirth that occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought with it an epidemic of puerperal fever, something that, to many, was an understandable continuation of the suffering that was women’s purpose and inheritance: what the Reverend Richard Polwhele termed (after Mary Wollstonecraft’s death from septicaemia after the birth of her second

³⁹ Rich, p. 159.

⁴⁰ Although it is often noted that the distinction between production and reproduction is semi-illusory, as Sophie Lewis observes, the notion that the two might literally be mutually constitutive is less frequently entertained. Sophie Lewis, ‘International Solidarity in reproductive justice: surrogacy and gender-inclusive polymaternalism’, *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 25.2 (2018), 207-227.

⁴¹ See Walter Radcliffe, *Milestones in Midwifery and The Secret Instrument: The Birth of the Midwifery Forceps* (San Francisco, CA: Jeremy Norman & Co., 1989).

⁴² Rich, p. 169.

⁴³ See Adrian Wilson, *The Making of Man-Midwifer: Childbirth in England 1660-1770* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), and Irvine Loudon, *Death in Childbirth: An International Study of Maternal Care and Maternal Mortality 1800-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

child in 1797) ‘the destiny of women’.⁴⁴ Puerperal fever notwithstanding, Rich is right in her assertion that ‘even in a place and time where maternal mortality is low, a woman’s fantasies of her own death in childbirth have the accuracy of metaphor. Typically, under patriarchy, the mother’s life is exchanged for the child’.⁴⁵ This is relevant, inevitably, to the infamous unmarked grave of *Middlemarch*’s Dorothea Brooke, but also to the premature deaths of Hetty Sorrel and her earlier counterpart, Gaskell’s Ruth: despite the fantasy of cleansing, repentance, and rebirth offered to Ruth, her illegitimate pregnancy has already set in motion a fatal narrative exchange.⁴⁶

‘Sacrifice’ is a heavy term, and I will be following theorists of narrative fiction like Schramm, Susan Mizruchi, and Ilana Blumberg in my consideration of the presence of sacrifice in the literary tradition—the ‘inherited *imaginary* of sacrifice’—rather than its anthropological or theological context. In nineteenth-century fiction, nonetheless, the representation of sacrifice is inseparable from the logic of political economy.⁴⁷ Novelistic considerations of the ethical cost of self-renunciation during this period contain within them unmistakable echoes of contemporary debates about Bentham’s utilitarian notions of value and cost, seeking a new mode of understanding duty, society, and the self.⁴⁸ The ongoing theological shift towards a focus on Christ-the-man was itself concerned with the moral pressures of economic and scientific innovation, with Incarnationalist economists like Wilfrid Richmond and Llewellyn Davies linking social Darwinist thought to the work of Christian socialism. The resulting tension between the desire to personally emulate the self-sacrifice of Christ and the societal concept of mutual benefit, Blumberg argues, eventually resolved itself as

mid-Victorian novels of sympathy moved toward a version of mutual benefit differentiated from the world of the market by intention, agency, and the desire for ethical progress brought about consciously. The economic logic of substitution and

⁴⁴ Claire Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1974), p. 226.

⁴⁵ Rich, p. 166.

⁴⁶ Helen Small, in *Love’s Madness Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity, 1800-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon, Press, 1998), notes that despite the critical focus on hysteria nervosa, puerperal fever, and female insanity more broadly, medical literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries mentions ‘the aetiology and treatment of women’s maladies’ a remarkably small amount (pp. 44-45). For a list of Eliot’s medical books, see William Baker, *The George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Library: An Annotated Catalogue of Their Books at Dr. Williams Library, London* (New York, NY: Garland, 1977).

⁴⁷ See Schramm, *Atonement*; Susan Mizruchi, *The Science of Sacrifice: American Literature and Social Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Ilana Blumberg, *Victorian Sacrifice: Ethics and Economics in Mid-Century Novels* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2013). See also Douglas Hedley, *Sacrifice Imagined: Violence, Atonement and the Sacred* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011).

⁴⁸ See Hilton, p. 5, and Blumberg.

exchange, as transmitted by Christian theology and classical political economy, came to serve an experimental contemporary ethics explored in novels that represented and evaluated outcome and strategy in tandem.⁴⁹

Yet by focussing on the specific configuration of maternal sacrifice, we can see that there is an economic logic applied to the generative female body that requires the mother's self-renunciation in a manner that risks dissolving the careful boundaries established by—mostly male—Victorian thinkers. Blumberg notes that

The frequent assimilation of duty to sacrifice was a hallmark of Victorian moral thought, one so regular that John Stuart Mill saw fit to correct it in Utilitarianism by distinguishing the free offering of what he called “generosity,” which no one was bound to offer his fellows, from the just payment of the debt of “duty,” which could be exacted rightfully from every human being.⁵⁰

Maternal virtue is idolised as a holy, feminised self-renunciation at the same time that the suppression of the sexual body and prioritisation of the production of healthy citizens is seen as precisely this debt of duty: this is why, in 1853, Gaskell's Ruth cannot survive her circumstances, and why the primary plot device of *The Mill on the Floss* is Maggie Tulliver's inability to imagine an ‘ethical alternative to self-sacrifice’.⁵¹ If the survival of Moore's Esther Waters offers us a path to an alternative, recuperative future, we can read backwards and see that Eliot, through her ‘incarnate’ fiction that followed *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*, creates various figurations of the maternal body in an attempt to imagine just such an ethical alternative: unable, as Moore is, to come to terms with sexuality, she sacrifices her dutiful mothers to obscurity, and her desiring female subjects to expulsion.

Nancy Jay, in her pioneering study *Throughout Your Generations Forever*, diagnoses sacrifice studies with gender-related blindness:

In no other major religious institution is gender dichotomy more consistently important, across unrelated traditions, than it is in sacrifice [...] Most of the immense literature on sacrifice ignores or takes for granted these gender-related features, even though they appear repeatedly in different traditions. Neither the exclusion of women nor the repeated father-son themes have been seen as needing explanation. Consequently, a study of sacrifice focussing on gender leads to a new understanding: sacrifice as remedy for having been born of woman.⁵²

⁴⁹ Blumberg, p. 226.

⁵⁰ Blumberg, p. 8.

⁵¹ Blumberg, p. 8.

⁵² Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. xxiii.

This thesis will apply Jay's question to the sacrificial requirements placed upon the woman giving birth, in the light of the socioeconomic circumstances in which mid-nineteenth-century social realist novels were situated. In doing so, we can see maternal sacrifice as a form that subverts the usual relationship between death and identity.⁵³ Rather than a Derridean notion of death as a guarantee of the singularity of the self, death in childbirth is merely a literal counterpart to the death of individuation that occurs in nineteenth-century representations of maternity: a rite of passage for society—childbirth—that absorbs the mother into an institutional identity that necessitates the relegation of her own existence.⁵⁴ Whether literal or figurative, maternal sacrifice guarantees a loss of distinction: the work of 'delivery' is a labour that erases singularity.

Eliot, Gaskell, and Moore's use of sacrificial logic is figurative, but there is a blurring of the distinction between the traditional modes of sacrifice as represented in Christian doctrine and the new necessities created by a secularising society working out a new capitalist morality. Kierkegaard's rejection of an explicit identification of the religious with the ethical indicates the gap left for economic and scientific developments to fill, something we can find in Henry James's 1873 complaint that even the achievement of *Middlemarch* 'is too often an echo of Messrs. Darwin and Huxley',⁵⁵ and in Nietzsche's famous dismissal of the moral fanaticism of secular literary practice and of 'little moralistic females'.⁵⁶ Recent thinking in sacrifice studies tends to focus on what Hedley calls the 'shaping imagination' of figurative, literary interpretations of ethics, and the persistence of the desire that humanity will prove to be more than just biology: 'If Darwin thought there was more to *homo sapiens* than natural selection, why shouldn't we?'⁵⁷ More often than not, this 'shaping imagination' is attributed to the influence of Shakespeare, and in turn linked to modes of economic thought. Illustrative here is Derek Hughes's questionable assertion that Shakespearean literature was the first to 'reflect upon the sacrificial implications of a culture increasingly dominated by measurement, statistics, and commercial calculation: a culture that reduced

⁵³ See Andrea Brady's work on Bourdieu's reclassification of Van Gennep's rites of passage as 'rites of institution', *English Funerary Elegy in the Seventeenth Century: Laws in Mourning* (Basingstoke: Pan Macmillan, 2006), p. 8.

⁵⁴ See Schramm, p. 42.

⁵⁵ Henry James, 'A Book Review of George Eliot's Novel', *Galaxy*, 15 (March 1873), 424-428.

⁵⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, ed. and trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 13.

⁵⁷ Hedley, p. 8.

individuals to exchangeable ciphers in a fashion analogous to the transactions of human sacrifice'.⁵⁸ Little attention is paid, however, to the prominence of maternity in Shakespearean sacrificial dynamics, particularly in the romances, something this thesis will interrogate with reference to their influence on Eliot's novels in particular.⁵⁹ Eliot, who, as we know from her journals, read and reread Aristotle's *Poetics*, was keenly interested in tragedy, and the narrative 'justice' that is meted out in her own work functions as a kind of jurisdiction that occurs at the level of genre: both tragedies and romances necessitate some kind of sacrifice to the prevailing order.⁶⁰

Indeed, Eliot herself thought of the Malthusian connection between creative production and a specifically reproductive misery in Shakespearean terms. In an 1867 letter to John Morley, discussing female enfranchisement, we can find an embedded reference to the lost mother-child dyad and Polixenes's 'art | Which does mend nature'⁶¹ in *The Winter's Tale*:

I never meant to urge the "intention of Nature" argument, which is to me a pitiable fallacy. I mean that as a fact of mere zoological evolution, woman seems to me to have the worse share in existence. But for that very reason I would the more contend that it in the moral evolution we have 'an art which does mend nature'— an art which "itself is nature". It is the function of love in the largest sense to mitigate the harshness of all fatalities, and in the thorough recognition of that worse share, I think there is a basis for a sublime recognition in women and a more regenerating tenderness in man. (*Letters*, IV: 364-65)

Gallagher glosses this letter thus: 'If we were happy, if life were not a perpetual encounter with dead mothers and babies, we would have no need for the art that mends nature'.⁶² Her argument seems to be women's reward for reproductive suffering is a kind of intellectual generativity, yet, as in *The Winter's Tale*, in Eliot's fiction the maternal body is either a site of contagion or suspicion or banished entirely: like the statue of Hermione, it can only be celebrated and restored after its fleshly humanity has been exorcised. In Eliot's novels—

⁵⁸ Hedley, p. 67.

⁵⁹ Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest* (Oxford: Routledge, 1991) will be hugely influential in grounding the elements of this thesis that deal with Shakespearean maternity in its early modern and psychoanalytic contexts respectively.

⁶⁰ In a letter of 1866, Eliot wrote that her aim in her fiction was 'to urge the human sanctities through tragedy— through pity and terror' (*Letters*, IV, p. 301). For a compelling account of genre as jurisdiction, see Jonathan Kertzer, *Poetic Justice and Legal Fictions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁶¹ William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed. John Pitcher, Arden Shakespeare Third Series (London: Routledge, 2010), IV. 4. 96-7.

⁶² Gallagher, *Body*, p. 179.

always concerned with the economic circumstances of labouring bodies—the body-in-labour is never focussed on wholly but expelled through a variety of substitutionary transactions.⁶³

As we shall see, from her very first fictional work, Eliot avoids the stuff and matter of bodies: she cannot ‘tell’ explicitly the story of the maternal body. Her fiction, then, is constantly circling the issue of procreation and its place in society through a series of secondary economies—of art, of morality, of marriage—that all ultimately require the banishment of the mother. Eliot’s use of ‘sublime’, here, points us towards a crucial element of what could be seen as the philosophical justification for maternal sacrifice in nineteenth-century fiction. In demanding recognition of the superiority of reason over sensibility, the Kantian sublime—in both its ‘mathematical’ and ‘dynamic’ versions—provides a model for the necessary sacrifice of both bodily experience and simple narrative progression. To ‘tell’, after all, can relate to both narrative and counting; the suspension of either, therefore, is ultimately productive of a higher respect for the ‘idea of humanity’.⁶⁴ Feminist theorists of the sublime, however, have worked to identify its gendered economy: Barbara Claire Freeman, in her study of gender and excess in fiction argues that ‘the canonical theories that seem merely to explain the sublime also evaluate, domesticate, and ultimately exclude an otherness that, almost without exception, is gendered as feminine.’⁶⁵ This excluded otherness can be figured as that of embodied reproductive experience. Such an insight gives rise to Sheila Lintott’s corrective repositioning of childbirth as a site not only of the abject or the beautiful but of a potentially feminist sublimity’.⁶⁶ In this sense, whilst Eliot’s ‘sublime recognition’ in the face of the physical injustices of women’s lived experience may indeed suggest a Kantian investment in the consolations of reason, the mechanisms of repression it relies upon still require close attention.

⁶³ Many works acknowledge this but fail to fully investigate the pattern of maternal expulsion in Eliot’s work: Neil Hertz contends that the expulsion of the Alcharisi from *Daniel Deronda* is symbolic of the author expelling herself in *George Eliot’s Pulse* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 112, and Gallagher in *The Body Economic* links it to authorial fears of overproduction. Ivan Kreilkamp, in *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), examines links this authorial anxiety to the problematic evolution from a vocal to a written culture, and to the familiar notion of ‘repressed’ sexuality in Victorian England.

⁶⁴ See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 128-159 (p. 141); Peter De Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989). Hertz, in *George Eliot’s Pulse* makes a case for the continuity of Eliot’s works with the theoretical writing of Burke and Kant.

⁶⁵ Barbara Claire Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women’s Fiction* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), p. 3.

⁶⁶ Sheila Lintott, ‘The Sublimity of Gestating and Giving Birth’, in *Philosophical Inquiries into Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Mothering*, ed. Sheila Lintott and Maureen Sander-Staudt (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 237-250.

I want to pause briefly here to pay close attention to a typical treatment of gender and maternity in contemporary sacrifice studies. In Hughes's *Culture and Sacrifice*, the transactional nature of figurative sacrifice is acknowledged in its consideration of the 'cultural achievement' of the *Oresteia*'s 'formulation of a closed and intelligible system of equivalences for managing violent death'. Hughes compares sacrifice to incest:

If incest in Levi-Strauss's account is the sexual pairing that blocks and disrupts the cycle of sexual exchange current in a society, enforced human sacrifice is the transaction which deranges the accounting system with which we regularize death. The nature of the monstrous transaction changes with different configurations of culture, but any system will create the conditions for its own violation, and the process of violation will exercise profound fascination. In literature, such monstrous transactions are often figured as human sacrifice.⁶⁷

The inherent gendered dimensions of sacrifice identified by Jay, however, show us that sacrifice is also a way of understanding sexual exchange: the transactions required of the female body account for birth, as well as death. Although Hughes, in his analysis of *Titus Andronicus*, notes several times the thematic importance of the womb—'Like a film played backwards, civilization goes into reverse. Children disappear back into their mother's womb'; 'If Alarbus is, to Titus, simply Other, his brothers lose all separateness and are reabsorbed into their mother's body'—he never fully investigates the link between the dissolution of masculine selfhood and the maternal body; the womb is always a proxy for another concern.⁶⁸ Hughes dismisses the critical commonplace that conflates the pit that Bassianus, Quintus and Martius fall into with the vagina, and focuses instead on the mouth, offering a wilful misinterpretation of inference in the process—'certainly the blood-stained briars which surround the pit strongly suggest the vagina, but the word "mouth" even more strongly suggests the mouth'⁶⁹—a critique that is not only a kind of repression in itself, but one that refuses to consider the vast quantity of work that has been done, following Julia Kristeva, on the self-consuming 'maternal temporality' that complicates the distinction between the mother and the self.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Derek Hughes, *Culture and Sacrifice: Ritual Death in Literature and Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 12.

⁶⁸ Hughes, p. 70.

⁶⁹ Hughes, p. 71.

⁷⁰ See, in particular, Denise Riley, *Time Lived, Without its Flow* (London: Picador, 2019); Alison Stone, *Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and Maternal Subjectivity* (London: Routledge, 2012).

Hughes's work on maternity and sacrifice in Wagner, however, is a useful counterpoint to Eliot's fiction, although, despite the strand of critical thought that argues that *Daniel Deronda*'s Herr Klesmer is a parallel for the composer, this is primarily contextual and thematic.⁷¹ Eliot was familiar with Wagner's work, and included 'one of the first favourable critiques in English of his work' in her 1855 article 'Liszt, Wagner and Weimar'.⁷² There is an intellectual kinship between some of Eliot's writing about birth and death and the section of Wagner's 1852 *Opera and Drama* from which Hughes quotes extensively:

the true woman is biologically programmed to sacrifice, because of her child-bearing function:

A woman *who really loves*, who sets her virtue in her *pride*, her pride, however, in her *sacrifice*, that sacrifice whereby she surrenders, not *one portion* of her being but *her whole being* in the amplest fulness of its faculty—when she *conceives*.⁷³

Hughes goes on to note the absence of 'mortal' mothers in the mature Wagnerian operas: the only one, Sieglinde in *Die Walkure*, dies in childbirth. As in Eliot's fiction, maternal bodies are banished, partly because of their uncomfortable link to male virility:

Parsifal's mother died through sorrow caused by his male wanderlust, and he cannot remember her until he recovers the memory in the moment of sexual awakening brought about by Kundry. The fathers die also, but in battle. Wagner's self-immolating heroines are doing so for their men what they are predetermined to do for their child.⁷⁴

We can use Hughes's analysis of Wagnerian self-abnegation and economics to further explore the maternal body as a site of necessary renunciation:

From Euripides onwards, critics of economic man have identified sacrifice with economic exchange: Marx approvingly quotes a reference in the *Daily Telegraph* (17 January 1860) to 'this slow sacrifice of humanity' and compares the all-devouring nature of capitalism to Moloch. Wagner is certainly concerned with the trade in human bodies: indeed, he uses it as a fundamental example of economic transaction (as in the sale of Freia in *Das Rheingold*). He does not, however, use such trade as his

⁷¹ See David A. Reibel, 'Hidden Parallels in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*', *George Eliot- George Henry Lewes Studies*, 64-65 (October 2013), 16-52.

⁷² Delia de Sousa Correa, *George Eliot, Music, and Victorian Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 11.

⁷³ Hughes, p. 182, citing Richard Wagner, *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, trans. William Ashton Ellis, 8 vols (London: Kegan Paul, 1895-9), II, pp. 114-15.

⁷⁴ Hughes, p. 182.

model sacrifice: rather, sacrifice is self-abnegation that transcends and supersedes the trade in bodies.⁷⁵

In mid-nineteenth century England, the double bind of the commodification of the maternal body and the idealisation of domesticated maternity render this Wagnerian dichotomy void: the ‘trade in bodies’ is inherent to motherhood even while total self-renunciation is required. Here we can return to Nancy Jay, whose interpretation of Marx’s analysis of the factors of production in *Das Kapital* emphasises the conflation of women’s bodies with reproductive resource: like many in the women’s liberation movement and the Marxist-feminist theoretical tradition,⁷⁶ she notes that ‘the control of the means of production is inseparably linked with the control of the means of reproduction, that is, the fertility of women’.⁷⁷

This ‘control of the means of reproduction’ is, Jay reminds us, related to the masculine ‘civilised’ desire for power over the body that represents both pollution and mortality: the childbearing woman. A central thesis of Jay’s work is that the exclusion of women from sacrificial rites, particularly in the Judaeo-Christian world, is a desire to establish a transcendence of death via patrilineal inheritance. We return again to the conflation of the womb and the tomb in the ritual regulation of the female sexual body: the structure of patriliney

encodes mortality just as it does sexuality. The social and religious continuity of the patrilineal family gives males an attenuated form of immortality in the institutionalized succession of fathers and sons. The beasts, recognizing no fathers, have no continuity at all to mitigate individual mortality. On the other hand, if children only resembled their fathers perfectly, they would be identical younger versions, cloning exact duplicates in their turn, and the Golden Age of male immortality would have returned. It is only mothers, bearing mortal children, who dim this glorious vision of eternal and perfect patriliney. Remember Pandora: because of a woman, men are mortal.⁷⁸

This womb/tomb equation nestles at the heart of the western canon: in Freud’s 1913 essay ‘The Theme of the Three Caskets’, the caskets in question—from *The Merchant of Venice* but originally from the medieval *Gesta Romanorum*—are, like Pandora’s Box and other enclosed spaces, ‘symbols of what is essential in a woman’:

⁷⁵ Hughes, p. 185.

⁷⁶ See *Wages for Housework, The New York Committee 1972-1977: History, Theory, Documents*, ed. Silvia Federici and Arlen Austin (Chicago, CA: AK Press, 2018); Mary O’Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1981).

⁷⁷ Jay, p. 35.

⁷⁸ Jay, pp. 30-31.

what is represented here are the three inevitable relations that a man has with a woman—the woman who bears him, the woman who is his mate, and the woman who destroys him; or that they are the three forms taken by the figure of the mother in the course of a man’s life—the mother herself, the beloved one who is chosen after her pattern, and lastly the Mother Earth who receives him once more.⁷⁹

This cyclical, symbolic feminine is at its most explicitly sacrificial in narratives of death in childbirth. This is crucial, of course, to *Scenes of Clerical Life*.⁸⁰ Carolyn Dever, in her study of maternal mortality in fiction, *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud*, argues for the death of the mother as the necessary catalyst for a narrative that focuses on the story of the orphaned child: in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, the children that die with their mothers are barely referred to. At this early stage in her career, Eliot is tackling the crisis of origin without addressing the product. In this respect, these two stories have more in common with medical writing of the period than in the ‘maternal quest’ narratives that Dever identifies, referring to manuals like Sinclair and Johnson’s 1847 *Practical Midwifery*:

Narratives of mortality are central to medical discourses of maternity, and especially of childbirth, and these narratives negotiate the fine line between the canonisation of the mother and their engagement with the material and often horrifying implications of her embodiment. But stories of maternal mortality in medical literature retain agendas very different from—and revealing of—those belonging to fictional texts.⁸¹

But if Eliot’s focus on the mother is more like an obstetrical case study than a novel, why are the physical aspects of the maternal characters so consistently obscured and erased?

Building on the fact that maternal mortality rates in nineteenth-century fiction far exceeded the actual rates of childbed death, which remained well below 1%, Dever’s work argues for an acknowledgement of the influence Victorian fiction had upon psychoanalysis. Locating the narrative drive common to both nineteenth-century fiction and psychoanalysis in

⁷⁹ Sigmund Freud, ‘The Theme of the Three Caskets’, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols, ed. and trans. James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74), XII (1958), pp. 289-301, p. 301. All further references to Freud will be to this edition, and abbreviated to *SE*. For a reading of this essay, see Elissa Marder, *The Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Psychoanalysis, photography, deconstruction* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2012).

⁸⁰ It is also explicitly rendered in texts that predate Eliot, such as Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s striking lyric address to a foetus, ‘To a little Invisible Being who is expected soon to become visible’, in which the expectant mother’s womb is called a ‘living tomb’. See *The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld, with a Memoir*, ed. Lucy Aikin, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), I, pp. 199-201.

⁸¹ Carolyn Dever, *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud: Victorian Fiction and the Anxiety of Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 10-11.

a ‘maternal quest’ for origin, Dever links this to the propulsive motion of the growing scientific concern with the origin of the species, both of which find their full expression in dead or absent mothers: ‘Novels of this period are infected with a puerperal fever of their own, involving the impossible reconciliation of a maternal ideal with the representation of the embodied—and potentially eroticized—female subject’.⁸² Throughout the nineteenth century, the effectiveness of lying-in hospitals, forceps and wet nursing was fiercely debated, and the discourse—particularly in publications like the *British Medical Journal* and *The Lancet*—was suffused with the anxiety of moral culpability relating to the canonisation of the virtuous mother as vital producer.⁸³ In nineteenth-century narrative, the tragic death of the mother ensured her virtue: free of the troubling aspects of her embodied existence, she could fulfil the symbolic role society required of her.

In ‘Amos Barton’ and ‘Mr Gilfil’s Love Story’, the link between domesticity and the increasing currency of ‘natural’ maternity is inscribed in the deaths of Milly Barton and Caterina Sarti, although the two narratives approach this idealisation of nurture from opposite ends. In *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, Mary Poovey’s study of the economic, medical and legal institutions of the nineteenth century, the case is made that both the creation of the domestic ideal and the suppression of the sexual female self stemmed from the continuing imposition of external patriarchal narratives on the threatening generative body: ‘when it was given one emphasis, women’s reproductive capacity equalled her maternal instinct; when given another, it equalled her sexuality’.⁸⁴ Poovey’s argument that idealisation and repression were two sides of the same coin—the continuing representation of women ‘not only as dependent but as needing the control that was the other face of protection’—centres on the growing understanding of biological difference that sanctioned the association of women with emotion rather than reason: the female reproductive system, to the mid-Victorian mind, was the device of its own suppression.⁸⁵ The deaths of Milly and Caterina are required for the narrative equations of the two stories to balance, and although the events of ‘Mr Gilfil’ see Caterina subdued into a domesticity of which Milly Barton is already an exemplar, the value of both texts is situated in the same place: the reproductive body as a source of meaning and the Malthusian notion

⁸² Dever, pp. 18-19.

⁸³ See Loudon, pp. 164-5.

⁸⁴ Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 11.

⁸⁵ Poovey, p. 11.

(emphasised by Gallagher) that ‘the most admirable traits of human nature arise from the identity of the source of both happiness and misery’.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Gallagher, *Body*, p. 179.

ii: domestic maternity

The position of the maternal body at the troubling boundary between the public and private sphere is perhaps best exemplified by the role played by Queen Victoria in mid-century conceptions of maternity. The queen's body is figured as a source of anxiety, stemming in part from the common conflation and confusion of Victoria's reign with the domestic control of a household: she 'ruled her nation as a mother and her household as a monarch'.⁸⁷ Until the death of Prince Albert in 1861, her generative female body was both a marker of her success as a monarch—providing her kingdom with heirs—and a threat to the idealised, nonsexual version of virtue: 'belonging at once to wife and mother, woman and queen, Victoria's body must reify the ideal that her position threatens to subvert'.⁸⁸ Widowhood allowed Victoria to circumvent the 'iconographic confusion' that the irrepressible physicality of her 'confoundingly physical and fecund' body caused: initially unable to assimilate this fecundity into the necessary spiritual authority possessed by an idealised mother—a Madonna—Victoria is transformed from an active wife and mother to a figurehead.⁸⁹ Dever, in her discussion of Munich's work on Victoria's body, suggests that the death of Albert functions as a *recuperation* of virginity through 'the metaphor of widowhood in an idealization of pristine, asexual maternity that reflects an ethical investment similar to that of the melancholic novel'.⁹⁰

'Recuperation' is a crucial term in Janet Adelman's work on the return of the purged maternal body in *The Winter's Tale*, a play Eliot, as we have seen, relied upon in her own consideration of generativity. Both 'Amos Barton' and 'Mr Gilfil's Love Story' can be read as versions of the transaction at the heart of *The Winter's Tale*: although the play situates psychic recovery in the actual recovery of the maternal body, as 'trust in female process similarly bursts the boundaries of the tragic form', this requires the banishment and purification of the sexualised female body.⁹¹ Hermione returns, but she returns sixteen years older, no longer pregnant, and no longer vocal: she speaks only in apostrophe to the gods and to her daughter, staying well within the appropriate domestic confines she so eloquently

⁸⁷ Adrienne Auslander Munich, *Queen Victoria's Secrets* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996) p.187.

⁸⁸ Dever, p. 8.

⁸⁹ Adrienne Auslander Munich, 'Queen Victoria, Empire and Excess', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 6.2 (Autumn 1987), 265-281 (p. 265).

⁹⁰ Dever, p. 8.

⁹¹ Adelman, p. 192.

escapes from in the first two acts of the play. Just as, for the recovery of Hermione, faith is invoked as the agent of resurrective justice, both Amos Barton and Mr Gilfil are reconsecrated by the sacrifice of their wives: Amos's loss sanctifies him in the eyes of his flock, and Gilfil, ever devout, worships Caterina's empty room as a shrine. But without the lenient boundaries of theatrical play, Eliot's prosaic mimesis requires that both Milly and Caterina's bodies are actually, not metaphorically, ceded to their husbands' ethical possibilities. Both narratives enact the splitting of the female body into a maternal and a sexual self, but the generic difference between the Bildungsroman of 'Mr Gilfil' and the melodrama of 'Amos Barton' requires the division be enacted differently. Caterina, who begins the novel as a passionate, talented child, must be subdued by illness and tragedy; Milly Barton undergoes no such journey. Instead, her perfect embodiment of natural maternity is emphasised by the inverted mirror of the selfish, vain Countess. Milly's death is, in part, a scapegoating: a displacement of the punishment of the non-maternal, unnatural female who escapes to London, consequence-free.

Throughout 'Amos Barton', Milly's value is figured in explicit relation to domesticated maternity. Her first appearance, sleepless baby in her arms, glancing, 'with a sigh' at a heap of unmended stockings, establishes her as 'the patient mother' first and foremost, with all physical description situated firmly within the realm of idealised iconography: 'a large, fair, gentle Madonna'.⁹² Although not an active economic agent in the way her husband is, Milly Barton is the orchestrator of an alternative structure within the home: an economy of care, simultaneously reified as a natural rather than industrial process, and continuously couched within the language of political economy. This, of course, is one with the ways in which the new economic discipline was communicated to the public through the familiar vocabulary of domestic household management, primarily through the work of popular writers like Harriet Martineau and Jane Marcet.⁹³ State-supported childcare, meanwhile, was opposed as an institution that would risk dismantling the home: middle class wives and mothers, although free of the factories, merely became unpaid labouring subjects within the domestic sphere.⁹⁴ Milly Barton's proficiency at stretching their limited means to

⁹² George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, ed. Thomas A. Noble (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 19. All further references will be to this edition, and page numbers will be in the text, when necessary with the abbreviation *S*.

⁹³ See Boyd Hilton, *The New Oxford History of England: A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People? England 1783-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 368.

⁹⁴ See Margaret Hewitt, *Wives and Mothers in Victorian Industry* (London: Rockcliff, 1958).

provide for the family is explicitly explained as a product of the domestic discipline of economic thinking: Amos, who continues to spend his money on new clothes, does not understand the complexities of their familial expenditure, an ignorance belonging to ‘the non-maternal mind’ (43).

The financial problems of the Bartons are initially figured as a Malthusian equation based on Amos’s earning power:

And now, pray, can you solve me the following problem? Given a man with a wife and six children: let him be obliged always to exhibit himself when outside his own door in a suit of black broadcloth, such as will not undermine the foundations of the Establishment by a paltry plebeian glossiness or an unseemly whiteness at the edges; in a snowy cravat, which is a serious investment of labour in the hemming, starching, and ironing departments; and in a hat which shows no symptom of taking to the hideous doctrine of expediency, and shaping itself according to circumstances; let him have a parish large enough to create an external necessity for abundant shoe-leather, and an internal necessity for abundant beef and mutton, as well as poor enough to require frequent priestly consolation in the shape of shillings and sixpences; and, lastly, let him be compelled, by his own pride and other people’s, to dress his wife and children with gentility from bonnet-strings to shoe-strings. By what process of division can the sum of eighty pounds per annum be made to yield a quotient which will cover that man’s weekly expenses? This was the problem presented by the position of the Rev. Amos Barton, as curate of Shepperton, rather more than twenty years ago. (10)

Fecundity poses a threat to solvency, as the subsequent introduction of Mrs Patten illustrates, a woman whose wealth is linked to her childlessness. A ‘childless old lady, who had got rich chiefly by the negative process of spending nothing’, she is the beneficiary of a different kind of procreation: ‘money breeds money’ (10). This ‘passive accumulation of wealth’, however, is not afforded moral superiority—indeed, the ‘inviting succulence’ of the spread of food she serves gives it an air of comic vulgarity (11)—but serves to emphasize the difficulty of maintaining wealth with a growing family. Milly Barton’s chief social value is figured again and again as her ability to balance the books: ‘his wife’s as nice a lady-like woman as I’d wish to see. How nice she keeps her children! and little enough money to do’t with; and a delicate creatur’—six children, and another a-coming’ (14). The ideal mother must by necessity become an economic paradox to fulfill both requirements: her duty is not only to create life, but to continue to sustain it with ever-diminishing resources.

The characterization of Milly Barton prefigures the sentiment that John Ruskin was to express in his 1864 address ‘Of Queens’ Gardens’, extending the metaphor of Queen Victoria’s domestic reign:

So far as she rules, all must be right, or nothing is. She must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise—wise not for self-development, but for self-renunciation: wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she may never fall from his side.⁹⁵

Dever notes that this list of feminine qualities illustrates the necessity of the invisibility of female power, the ‘social contract of subjection’.⁹⁶ Maternity is the very bedrock of virtue, as long as it remains contained, or transferred onto the active body of the male child, something gestured towards in the funeral scene of ‘Amos Barton’ as the baby is brought along in the hope that ‘some dim memory of that sacred moment might remain even with little Walter, and link itself with what he would hear of his sweet mother in after years’ (67). Much of the writing that deals with maternal influence in magazines and periodicals of the time sees it as a wholly positive way to transfer moral qualities: the popular advice writer Mrs Ellis contended in 1844 that no man ‘need be utterly despaired of, with whom his mother’s influence still lingers on the side of virtue’.⁹⁷ This, from *The Mothers of England*, reiterates the moral duty of the mother and, in doing so, absolves her offspring of some of the responsibility for their own actions. The mother’s influence can be salvific, but to ensure this she must herself transcend her own flawed humanity: it is not a coincidence that to become the ‘voice’ of conscience in the head of her progeny, the mother must necessarily have transcended her own body.

Eliot’s narrator ensures that Milly’s powerful qualities are always balanced by a feminine decorum that tacitly condones her own subjection: ‘Among strangers she was shy and tremulous as a girl of fifteen; she blushed crimson if anyone appealed to her opinion; yet that tall, graceful, substantial presence was so imposing in its mildness, that men spoke to her with an agreeable sensation of timidity’ (19). This ‘sensation of timidity’ can only be agreeable—as it evidently is—to both parties if the balance of power is in no real danger of subversion: Milly is imposing only in her mildness, and therefore her considerable charisma

⁹⁵ Dever, p. 9.

⁹⁶ Dever, p. 9.

⁹⁷ Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Mothers of England: Their Influence and Responsibility* (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1843), p. 57.

is neutralized as a threat. Indeed, she is denied any active agency at all, as the domestic domain is reconceptualized from the site of feverish economic activity we know it to be to a place of serenity and stasis:

Soothing, unspeakable charm of gentle womanhood! which supersedes all acquisitions, all accomplishments. You would never have asked, at any period of Mrs. Amos Barton's life, if she sketched or played the piano. You would even perhaps have been rather scandalized if she had descended from the serene dignity of *being* to the assiduous unrest of *doing*. (19)

This passage continues to detail—contrary, perhaps, to the reader's expectations—that not only does the narrator think it is right that 'this bliss would fall to the share of precisely such a man as Amos Barton', who is then swiftly compared to a 'mongrel ungainly dog' (19), but that it is in fact necessary for Milly's 'sweetness' that she is married to someone who is perhaps not quite her equal, and does not fully appreciate her:

let the sweet woman go to make sunshine and a soft pillow for the poor devil whose legs are not models, whose efforts are often blunders, and who in general gets more kicks than halfpence. She—the sweet woman—will like it as well; for her sublime capacity of loving will have all the more scope; and I venture to say, Mrs. Barton's nature would never have grown half so angelic if she had married the man you would perhaps have had in your eye for her—a man with sufficient income and abundant personal éclat. Besides, Amos was an affectionate husband, and, in his way, valued his wife as his best treasure. (20)

It does not matter that Amos's value system is insufficient to reveal to him before her death that Milly deserves more, because within the value system of the novel, the sacrifice of such a woman to circumstances that are less than what she deserves is the way her virtue is developed and defined. Crucially, 'her sublime capacity of loving' and her 'angelic' nature are inherently linked to a 'natural' maternity—again, the masculinist notion of a female sublime requires the subjugation of female subjectivity—and her quiet acceptance of hardship: maternal suffering is equated with purpose.

In another embodiment of Ruskin's contradictory language of maternal virtue, Milly's beauty is a mark of her worth that increases only as she negates it:

For Milly had one weakness—don't love her any the less for it, it was a pretty woman's weakness—she was fond of dress; and often when she was making up her own economical millinery, she had romantic visions how nice it would be to put on really handsome stylish things. (32)

Although this is couched in the language of transgression and ‘weakness’, it reinforces Milly’s virtue: despite the obvious temptation towards vanity, she only dreams of ‘really handsome stylish things’. Immediately after this, as the Countess’s servant spills gravy on the dress we have seen Milly working very hard on, she bears it with impossible placidity: ‘she felt a little inward anguish, but no ill-temper’ (34).

Milly is the inverted double of the self-regarding Countess, whose own vanity traps her brother, Mr Bridmain ‘under the yoke of his handsome sister’ (38), and who the narrator constantly frames in aphorism as a typical ‘woman’, rather than a mother. Where Milly is a Madonna, the Countess has a ‘Diana-like form’, a goddess whose virginity here signals not purity but childlessness. The Countess’s long stay in the Barton’s house requires both the physical sacrifice of Milly’s maternal body, as ‘quite the heaviest pressure of the trouble fell on Milly—on gentle, uncomplaining Milly—whose delicate body was becoming daily less fit for all the things that had to be done between rising up and lying down’ (58) and the dismantling of the sanctity of the domestic space. As gossip mounts in the village, Milly is forced to engage with the unpleasantness of the external world, but even here conforms to the high ideal of Victorian maternity, still conceding her existence and agency as subordinate to that of her unsatisfactory husband, whose ‘*misconception*’ she nevertheless bears a responsibility for:

A loving woman’s world lies within the four walls of her home; and it is only through her husband that she is in any electric communication with the world beyond. [...] So it was with Milly. She was only vexed that her husband should be vexed—only wounded that he was misconceived. (58)

The narrative arc of ‘Mr Gilfil’ aims to teach Caterina Sarti the qualities so exemplified in Milly Barton. We first meet her—or rather, we first meet the *idea* of her—as an absence symbolized by domestic conformity: despite the fact that Gilfil’s sitting room ‘seemed to tell a story of wifeless existence that was contradicted by no portrait, no piece of embroidery, no faded bit of pretty triviality, hinting of taper-fingers and small feminine ambitions’, we are soon permitted entry to the enclosed, contained embodiment of these ‘small feminine ambitions’: a satin pin-cushion, a fan, a ‘dainty looking-glass’ and, crucially, ‘an unfinished baby-cap, yellow with age’ (84). When we meet Caterina, however, it rapidly becomes apparent that this tranquillity may be the destination of her narrative, but it is not the

origin. Never described as beautiful in the way Milly Barton is, Caterina's physical appearance is simultaneously denigrated—she is repeatedly called a 'black-eyed monkey' (104)—and objectified; an unmarried woman, she displays unseemly desires. This is partially due to a xenophobic unease generated by Caterina's Italian heritage—even by the time of her marriage she is categorised as 'a furriner' (85)—but not exclusively: her attempted self-determination is just as alien. In an equation that foreshadows Daniel Deronda's mother, Caterina's prodigious singing voice is equated with an uncontrollable temperament: her 'stream of passion' (96) variously represented as symptomatic and causative of her emotional instability, a parallel she shares with Jane Austen's Marianne Dashwood.

Despite the overt culpability of Captain Wybrow in his seduction and abandonment of Caterina, his association of her emotional nature with 'madness' is tacitly endorsed, both by her constant fits of Gothic weeping and her eventual seizure of the dagger, and by the punishment meted out to her for this indulgent desire for independence: denied the passionate partnership she craves, she will first be domesticated, then die in the service of a maternal ideal. Early on in the story, as Caterina looks at Wybrow, we see how sharply she diverts from feminine appropriateness: 'The fawn-like unconsciousness was gone, and in that one look were the ground tones of poor little Caterina's nature—intense love and fierce jealousy' (97). When, after they share an illicit kiss, Wybrow declares Tina to be 'a mad little thing' (98), the narrative concurs.

Although Wybrow is later justly mocked by Gilfil for his claims of self-sacrifice—'O to be sure! I know it is only from the most virtuous motives that he does what is convenient to himself' (137)—his talk of duties 'before which feeling must be sacrificed' (98) illustrates that Caterina is not behaving in the manner she is required to. Unable to subdue her passions, her 'loving sensitive nature' does not, like Milly Barton's, allow her to bear all manner of crosses, but instead begets 'a certain ingenuity in vindictiveness' (109): the selfishness of the childless woman. Correspondingly, the economy of care in 'Mr Gilfil' is not the domain of Caterina. Mr Gilfil who, it is implied, valued his wife higher than her worth—'he looked at her as if he was worshippin' her' (86)—is responsible for the careful storing up of financial benefit for the next generation, thinking of his nephew, due to inherit his wealth, that '[i]t will perhaps be the better for *his* hearth that mine was lonely' (83). Like Milly's supposed vanity, Mr Gilfil too is given a false 'weakness': he might be 'close-fisted', but this extends only to his personal habits, not to 'withholding help for the needy' (83). The sacrificial economy of

‘Mr Gilfil’s Love Story’ is more problematic than the clearly defined substitutionary logic of ‘Amos Barton’. Caterina is the bargaining chip within the property exchange orchestrated by her paternalistic guardian, Sir Christopher, who himself embodies the patriarchal expectations of female productivity: ‘I hate old maids. They make me dismal to look at them’ (152). Yet, though it is Caterina who pays the ultimate price in the ratification of idealized maternal absence, Mr Gilfil does not see the social benefit that Amos Barton does: as the most enthusiastic and devoted subscriber to the notion of purity, when Tina dies, ‘Maynard Gilfil’s love went with her into deep silence for evermore’ (185).

To a certain extent, Caterina fulfills the Bildungsroman plot as described by Dever. Caterina’s loss of her own mother as a small child can be read as the initiation of her ‘maternal quest’, aided by the heavy-handed symbolism of her father’s tendency to leave his daughter in church, underneath a ‘tinsel Madonna’: ‘when Sarti came back, he always found that the Blessed Mother had taken good care of Caterina’ (102). Rather than lead her to self-determined independence, however, Caterina’s narrative requires the subjugation of her individuality. The force of her will strips her of her femininity, transforming her into ‘the incarnation of a fierce purpose, rather than a woman’ (155), but the plot requires her acceptance of the social norm. The familiar trope of a prolonged illness, followed by a confinement to the house—another similarity with Austen’s Marianne—locates the cure for willfulness in the female sphere: Caterina is to be ‘domesticated for a time with his mild gentle sister, who had a peaceful home and a prattling little boy’ (181). Caterina’s recovery—and, indeed, Gilfil’s romantic fulfillment—can occur only through the loss of her sense of self:

In these hopes, and in the enjoyment of Tina’s nestling affection, Mr Gilfil tasted a few months of perfect happiness. She had come to lean entirely on his love, and to find life sweet for his sake. Her continual languor and want of active interest was a natural consequence of bodily feebleness, and the prospect of her becoming a mother was a new ground for hoping the best. (185)

Even her musical talent doesn’t escape this purgative reconfiguration: when she finally returns to the harpsichord, it is after the accidental prompting of Gilfil’s young nephew, and although it releases a series of memories, it is as if a ‘new soul were entering her’ (183), culminating not in her own satisfaction but the acceptance of Gilfil’s suit: ‘the delicate-tendrilled plant must have something to cling to. The soul that was born anew to music was born anew to love’ (180). Maternity, we understand, is the culmination of this process, as

Gilfil pins his hopes on her pregnancy as the completion of this recuperation: ‘A mother dreads no memories—those shadows have all melted away in the dawn of baby’s smile’ (185). Caterina’s wedding, usually the joyful consummation of the marriage plot, is overshadowed by the reader’s knowledge of her imminent death, something emphasized to the point of ridiculousness as she greets Mr Bates: “‘always remember Tina,” said the sweet low voice, which fell on Mr Bates’s ear for the last time’ (185).

iii: absent physicality

There is no doubling in 'Mr Gilfil's Love Story': instead of the substitutionary figure of the Countess, there is split within the character of Caterina. If her passionate behaviour and talent are ultimately punished, it is through the delicacy and weakness of her body; correspondingly, it is this physical fragility that provides the locus for the reader's sympathy. Her musical ability threatens to exceed her edges: she is 'welly laike a linnet, wi' on'y joost body anoof to hold her voice' (111), and, like Dickens's childlike heroines, she is repeatedly described as so diminutive that she appears not to have fully reached womanhood. Bates calls Caterina 'Miss Tiny', whilst Wybrow continually seeks to delegitimize his relationship with her by comparing her to a child: 'She is more child than woman. One thinks of her as a little girl to be petted and played with' (133). Even during her illness, which directly leads to her marriage and pregnancy, she is visually closer to a child than a mother: lying in bed, she looks like 'a little girl of twelve' (177), and Dorcas compares her 'tiny' fingers to 'my poor baby's as died, when it got so thin. O dear, its little hands, you could see thro' em' (176).

This repeated denial of Caterina's adult body is present, too, in Mr Bates's comparison between his friend 'Miss Tiny' and a flower:

I shouldn't woonder if she fades away, laike them cyclamens as I transplanted. She puts me i'maind on 'em somehow, hangin' on their little thin stalks, so whaite an' tinder. (131)

The fragility of the flower prevents it from flourishing, and this is the case, too, with Caterina's attempt to join in with maternity: 'the delicate plant had been too deeply bruised, and in the struggle to put forth a blossom it died' (185).⁹⁸ This euphemistic treatment of death in childbirth is the natural culmination of the novel's repeated removal of Caterina's body from the realm of physical reality. It is true that death is often treated lightly or euphemistically in 'Mr Gilfil': the grief of Mrs Hartopp is made faintly ridiculous by Sir Christopher (91), Miss Assher's mourning attire is relevant only because of the effect it gives to her complexion (119), and Caterina herself wishes for death because 'when people get

⁹⁸ See Claire Jarvis, *Exquisite Masochism: Marriage, sex, and the novel form* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2016) for the use of waves, blooms and other metaphors as a substitute for a sexual act. Jarvis's argument that 'Metaphor, in other words, provides protection for writing about the internal experience of sex' (p. vii) might equally be said to be true of both the internal and external act of childbirth.

very ill, they don't mind about things' (142). Yet although these mounting dramatic ironies situate the tragic ending of the story within a sense of structural inevitability, this erasure of physicality cannot be explained as only resulting from narrative tone. In 'Mr Gilfil's Love Story', the idealized state of motherhood is the ultimate narrative goal, whilst the actuality of it is exorcised completely: Caterina's pregnancy, even when it actually kills her, is never permitted to leave the childish metaphorical realm it is confined to by Sir Christopher: 'The little monkey is quite old enough. It would be pretty to see her a matron with a baby about the size of a kitten in her arms' (147).

The body of Milly Barton, mother of six with another on the way, is not the body of a child. Nevertheless, her body is also mentioned mostly with regard to its fragility, or metonymically, as if Eliot's narrator can only bring themselves to refer to her physical existence in synecdochic parts: the Countess's dinner invitation directs her to bring 'your lovely face with your husband to dine with us on Friday at seven' (21), and her sewing ability is found not in her entire person but in the '[w]onderful fingers' that were 'never empty' (22). Indeed, these hands, in isolation, escape the gendered body entirely: when employed in the making of gun-cases, 'she knew she could make them so well that no one would suspect the sex of the tailor' (22). Although Milly's value, as we have seen, is rooted in nurturance and provision, this is only ever figured as a metaphorical transcendence of the body: 'Her body was very weary, but her heart was not heavy [...] for her heart so overflowed with love, she felt sure she was near a fountain of love that would care for husband and babes better than she could foresee' (22). This fountain imagery is the closest Eliot comes to anything reflecting the embodied, milky reality of motherhood, unlike this extraordinary passage that begins the story:

Reader! Did you ever taste such a cup of tea as Miss Gibbs is this moment handing to Mr. Pilgrim? Do you know the dulcet strength, the animating blandness of tea sufficiently blended with real farmhouse cream? No--most likely you are a miserable town-bred reader, who think of cream as a thinnish white fluid, delivered in infinitesimal pennyworths down area steps; or perhaps, from a presentiment of calves' brains, you refrain from any lacteal addition, and rasp your tongue with unmitigated bohea. You have a vague idea of a milch cow as probably a white-plaster animal standing in a butterman's window, and you know nothing of the sweet history of genuine cream, such as Miss Gibbs's: how it was this morning in the udders of the large sleek beasts, as they stood lowing a patient entreaty under the milking-shed; how it fell with a pleasant rhythm into Betty's pail, sending a delicious incense into the cool air; how it was carried into that temple of moist cleanliness, the dairy, where it quietly separated itself from the meaner elements of milk, and lay in mellowed

whiteness, ready for the skimming-dish which transferred it to Miss Gibbs's glass cream-jug. If I am right in my conjecture, you are unacquainted with the highest possibilities of tea; and Mr. Pilgrim, who is holding that cup in his hands, has an idea beyond you. (11)

Eliot's narrator, delighting in the distinction between the 'vague idea of a milch cow as probably a white-plaster animal standing in a butterman's window'—a symbol of its nurturing potential, rather than the actual mechanism of bounty—intimates that there is no substitute for the physical reality of milk: 'the sweet history of genuine cream'. The 'thinnish white fluid' of the impoverished urban imagination is no substitute for the 'mellowed whiteness' of reality, and the process of production, the 'udders' of the 'large sleek beasts' described with a naturalist's attention to detail, is a holy one: 'how it was carried into that temple of moist cleanliness, the dairy'. It is perhaps unnecessary to point out the irony of the argument that it is impossible to know the true, rather than the symbolic, potential of this life-giving substance without a thorough understanding and appreciation of its embodied nature. Milk is figured within the same economic relationship of value and consumption as Milly Barton's careful financial provision: perhaps in reference to the eighteenth and nineteenth-century fallacy that agricultural labourers were impoverished because they spent their wages on luxuries such as tea and milk, Mrs. Hackit declines cream out of a misplaced prudence, as 'she has so long abstained from it with an eye to the weekly butter-money, that abstinence, wedded to habit, has begotten aversion' (11).⁹⁹ Mrs. Hackit's misguided fixation on economic value prevents her from partaking in something firmly established as both a nourishment and a pleasure.

Milly Barton's body is a paradox of value: despite the high importance placed upon not only the production but the nurture of her children, she is never represented as a nursing mother. Contextually, however, the practice of breastfeeding had become a symbol of precisely the kind of maternal virtue that Milly Barton embodies. As Perry and Fildes's studies of wet nursing illustrate, by the mid-eighteenth century a proliferation of admonitory treatises had emerged that argued for the replacement of the widespread practice of wet nursing and urging mothers to breastfeed their own children both for the benefit of the child and for the good of the nation.¹⁰⁰ Bolstering the concept of 'natural' maternity, a mother who

⁹⁹ In fact, as Harry Hopkins notes in *The Long Affray: The Poaching Wars in Britain* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), for most of the rural poor, 'tea' comprised of boiling water poured over burnt or stale crusts of bread.

¹⁰⁰ Valerie Fildes, *Wet Nursing: A History from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 1988).

refused to breastfeed was portrayed as a woman who prized her own pre-maternal identity over the needs of her child and the state, something attacked by William Cadogan in his 1748 'An Essay upon Nursing and the Management of Children from Their Birth to Three Years of Age' as an unforgivable vanity stemming from the desire to preserve sexual attractiveness.¹⁰¹ Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1742) declares breastfeeding to be the 'divine duty'¹⁰² of a mother, whilst at the turn of the century Mary Wollstonecraft, in a chapter that begins with a comparison of 'unnatural distinctions established in society' to a 'poisoned fountain', bringing to mind Eliot's depiction of the 'fountain' of Milly's familial devotion, declared nursing to be both a tool of emancipation and a necessary condition for female participation in the state: the woman who 'neither suckles nor educates her children scarcely deserves the name of a wife, and has no right to that of a citizen'.¹⁰³ Although Wollstonecraft and Richardson, as well as many others, argue that men actually find breastfeeding women more attractive, in reality, this was a mechanism that required the psychological and physical denial of the mother's former 'sexual and 'social identity',¹⁰⁴ not least because of the antithetical biological relation between sex and breastfeeding: lactation has mild contraceptive properties, which, alongside the physical exhaustion of the new mother, mean it is 'simply less possible for a woman to conceive when she is nursing'.¹⁰⁵

The necessary displacement of virginity by motherhood as the measure of female worth reinscribes the ethical model of sexual restraint onto breastfeeding, a practice that, when read as the sacrifice of the mother's sexual self to her 'natural maternity', allows the masculine control of the valuable female commodity to continue even after virginity is no longer feasible. This was a deeply embodied value: the literary explorations of the diseased breast in the late-eighteenth century can be seen as a reaction to this further masculine erosion, or colonisation, of the female sphere. This was, Perry writes,

the other side of the new reverence for motherhood, record of a growing feeling among women that they no longer controlled their own bodies, no longer believed they could understand their own physiological processes, no longer believed in their

¹⁰¹ Perry, p. 222.

¹⁰² Samuel Richardson, *Pamela in her Exalted Condition*, ed. A.J. Rivero (Cambridge, 2012; from the 1742 text), p. 309.

¹⁰³ Mary Wollstonecraft, 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman', *The Vindications: The Rights of Men, The Rights of Women*, ed. D.L. MacDonald and Kathleen Scherf (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1997), p. 284.

¹⁰⁴ Perry, p. 229.

¹⁰⁵ Perry, p. 227.

shared medical and herbal knowledge, no longer expected to exercise independent judgment about how to deploy their bodies.¹⁰⁶

This internalisation of fear, inherently linked to the seismic changes occurring at the same time in obstetrics and midwifery, extended beyond metaphorical representation: in Frances Burney's 1812 account of her mastectomy, she is surprised not to see a visual manifestation of the disease, transferring this sense of infection to an ethical ailment, the resolution of which may require the sacrifice of her life: 'the poor breast was nowhere discoloured, & not much larger than its healthy neighbour. Yet I felt the evil to be deep, so deep, that I often thought if it could not be dissolved, it could only with life be extirpated'.¹⁰⁷ This was compounded by the often painful effect of nursing on the body—breastfeeding women often lost their nipples completely—something that correspondingly increased the importance of nursing to the idealised notion of the self-renouncing mother.¹⁰⁸

By the mid-nineteenth century attitudes toward nursing had so comprehensively shifted that handfed children, such as Dickens's Pip and Oliver Twist, were portrayed as lucky to survive such neglect.¹⁰⁹ Milly's position as an idealised maternal figure, therefore, could only be reinforced by the sacrifice of her body to her children's needs. Eliot's determined elision of the physical is a puzzling refusal to take up the other opportunity provided by the relationship between breastfeeding and value: nursing as an ethical economic practice. The business of wet nursing—for it was a business, and a lucrative one—relied on the uncomfortable transaction between the welfare of the wet nurse's infant and the welfare of the child of her wealthy employer, as we will see in Chapter 4. Anxieties about baby farming and infanticide were high throughout the first decades of Eliot's career: the *British Medical Journal* campaigned against wet nursing throughout the 1860s and 1870s, and despite the passing of the Infant Life Protection Bill in 1872, the unease about this monetised exchange of infant life did not fully dissipate.¹¹⁰ In part, the move towards an idealisation of the breastfeeding mother was an attempt at the transference of middle class guilt about these uncomfortable transactions onto a moral validation of the 'natural' reproductive order:

¹⁰⁶ Perry, p. 234.

¹⁰⁷ Frances Burney, *Fanny Burney: Selected Letters and Journals*, ed. J. Hemlow (Oxford, 1986), p. 131.

¹⁰⁸ Fildes, p. 101.

¹⁰⁹ See Valerie Phillips, 'Children in early Victorian England: infant feeding in literature and society, 1837-1857', *Journal of Tropical Pediatrics*, 24.4 (August 1978), 158-166, and "'Brought up by hand": Dickens' Pip, little Paul Dombey, and Oliver Twist', *Dickensian*, 74 (1978), 144-147.

¹¹⁰ Fildes, pp. 193-200.

something Perry contextualises in the inequality of the Victorian class system, as ‘practices commodified earlier as services performed for wages by working-class women are remunerated ideologically (with adoration) when performed voluntarily by middle class women’.¹¹¹

This transformation in wet nursing practice was, in part, a reconfiguration of the idea of a mother as an economic agent. Perry writes that ‘women’s bodily services were commodified and purchased across class lines in the early part of the eighteenth century, while in the second half of the century, those services were redefined as the unpaid labour that women owed their husbands, their families, and even the state’.¹¹² As it became less acceptable for women to delegate their reproductive responsibilities, the Victorian valorisation of motherhood co-opted breastfeeding, too, into Rich’s ‘forced labour’: a nursing Milly Barton would have coded her exemplary status as a mother/producer within her bodily, ‘incarnate’ existence. Rhonda Shaw, in ‘Theorizing Breastfeeding: Body Ethics, Maternal Generosity, and the Gift Relation’, uses Baumann, Levinas and Mauss to identify breastfeeding as an example of gift exchange between mother and child: although Shaw’s focus is on twentieth-century sociological examples, the relationship between gift and sacrifice makes this a useful line of enquiry to pursue with relation to the absence of nursing in the sacrificial fable of ‘Amos Barton’.¹¹³ Shaw argues that the twentieth century division between the ‘good’ maternal body and the ‘bad’ sexual body can be seen as inherently linked to the practice of breastfeeding:

[A]s an expression of the corporeal generosity between mother and child, the transferring of nourishment from mother to infant is conventionally identified as a natural, non-contractual, bio-physiological act. As a unitary expression of the gift relation, the mother–infant breastfeeding model not only carries with it certain assumptions about motherhood and maternity, but also a corollary logic that rests upon a dichotomy between motherhood and sexuality (Young, 1990).¹¹⁴

If we take this ‘corollary logic’ and apply it to what we know of the emergence of this ‘dichotomy’ in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the sacrifice of Milly Barton’s body for the recuperation of her husband’s reputation and financial stability can be read as a

¹¹¹ Perry, p. 231.

¹¹² Perry, p. 220.

¹¹³ Rhonda Shaw, ‘Theorizing Breastfeeding: Body Ethics, Maternal Generosity, and the Gift Relation’, *Body and Society*, 9.2 (June 2003), 55-73.

¹¹⁴ Shaw, p. 63.

projection of the breastfeeding gift relation: Eliot's metaphorical use of this 'corporeal generosity'.

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Like Caterina Sarti's transfiguration into a flower curtailed in almost-bloom, the death of Milly Barton is entirely removed from the arena of the physical. After a swift, dismissive reference to puerperal fever—'the prospect of the baby's birth was overshadowed by more than the usual fears' (62)—Milly's suffering is simultaneously ideologically crucial and eschewed with a firm narrative hand. Indeed, Milly's weakness is presented as more evidence of her virtue, as, despite a traumatic premature birth and the fatal illness incubating within her, Milly lies 'placid and lovely in her feebleness' (60). This placidity replaces any possibility of pain, as, surrounded by her sobbing family, Milly asks only for the children, and smiles 'with that strange, far-off look which belongs to ebbing life' (64). Like the 'ebbing' tide, Milly's death is accepted as a natural process, and she is concerned only with ensuring the perpetuation of the structure of maternal sacrifice and care in her absence: 'Patty will try to be your mamma when I am gone, my darlings' (65). It is certainly true that there is a transformative power in Amos Barton's suffering that allows him entrance into a religious community, evidenced by the vocabulary of religious blessing.¹¹⁵ Attending Milly's funeral, he is 'consecrated anew by his great sorrow', gaining the respect of 'men and women standing in that churchyard who had bandied vulgar jests about their pastor, and who had lightly charged him with sin' (67), and his reputation undergoes miraculous repair: 'No one breathed the Countess's name now; for Milly's memory hallowed her husband, as of old the place was hallowed on which an angel from God had alighted' (68).

Gallagher asserts that Milly herself is recuperated, as the 'cult that forms around him has moved from its ossified Christianity to a spontaneous form of devotion to the dead woman, a modern counterpart to a mother goddess, whose resurrection is effected by the narrator'.¹¹⁶ This does not quite account for the sacrificial obligation placed on the reproductive female body. Milly Barton's death is reminiscent of the deaths of both Hermione and Alcestis, but in Eliot's realist narrative there is no actual resurrective

¹¹⁵ Gallagher, *Body*, p. 180.

¹¹⁶ Gallagher, *Body*, p. 180.

possibility. The inconsistencies of Eliot's attempted decoding of the symbolic reproductive origin that occurs in *Scenes of Clerical Life* can be seen as the beginning of a grappling with the maternal that structures the rest of her work. In the final scene of the novel, the resemblance between Milly and Patty, the daughter we have already witnessed mimicking her mother's domestic labour, is not enough to recover the irretrievable: 'a sweet, grave face, which strongly recalled the expression of Mrs Barton's, but was less lovely in form and colour' (71). Although the narrator asserts 'Milly did not take all her love from the earth when she died. She had left some of it in Patty's heart', this is only 'some'; a part, rather than the whole. The fact that this remainder of maternal and wifely affection is present in Amos's 'neat linen' that 'told of a woman's care' confines the daughter to the duties of the domestic space that caused her mother's decline. It is undoubtedly beneficial to Amos that 'Patty alone remains by her father's side, and makes the evening sunshine of his life', but this substitutionary bond can only ever be a surrogate relationship that requires the renunciation of the daughter's own potential to create new bonds of her own (72).

Chapter 1:

‘As much woman as worker’: labour, maturity and non-redemptive reproduction in *Ruth* and *The Mill on the Floss*

Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*, first published in 1853, predates *Scenes of Clerical Life* by half a decade, but the narrative of Gaskell's titular seamstress allows for a more explicit articulation of the relationship between economic labour and the female body than any of Eliot's three tales. From the opening scene in Mrs Mason's workshop, where the physical needs of the labouring women are explicitly figured as antithetical to the business's profits whilst Ruth becomes melancholy at memories of her dead mother, Gaskell's protagonist is both embodied and unmothered. In this chapter, I will read *Ruth* alongside Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). Although Gaskell's novel is perhaps a more obvious companion to *Adam Bede*, it is within the frustrated Bildungsroman of Eliot's Maggie Tulliver that we can find a similar narrative urge to sacrifice the novel's protagonist in order to contain the destabilising possibility of a non-generative sexual future.¹¹⁷ Maggie and Ruth live short, circular lives curtailed by this narrative inevitability; they also both exceed in some way the confines of their plots, illustrating the problem of containment posed by the generative female body, whether sexualised by desire (Maggie) or pregnancy itself (Ruth).

Both protagonists tread the cusp of maturity without serious maternal guidance. Mrs Tulliver is emotionally absent and opposed to her daughter's intellectual and spiritual growth, whilst Ruth's mother, although beloved, is, in her domestic impracticality, ill health, and death, held responsible for the subsequent death of Ruth's father and the financial trouble that forces Ruth to leave her home and become a seamstress. Ruth, only 15 and completely free of even a euphemistic knowledge of the value and vulnerability of her virginal body, falls back on a succession of unsuitable surrogate parental figures—her guardian, Mrs Mason, the poorly Jenny, and, finally, Mr Bellingham's hostile mother—before meeting the Bensons, by which time it is already too late: Ruth is pregnant, and must forgo the rest of her adolescence, transcending any further sexual awakening or experience, devoting herself to God and her child, and, indeed, conflating the two. The ending of Gaskell's novel, in which Ruth succumbs to a fatal fever after nursing Mr Bellingham, the man who seduced and abandoned her, sparked contemporary critique, and the general consensus was that Ruth should have

¹¹⁷ Fraiman, in 'The Mill on the Floss, the Critics, and the Bildungsroman', *PMLA*, 108.1 (January 1993), 136–150, calls it an 'anti-Bildungsroman'; for reasons that will become apparent, I think frustrated is more apt.

been allowed to live: one reviewer reminded Gaskell that many fallen women did become happy wives and mothers.¹¹⁸ I want to follow Charlotte Brontë's example and consider the ending of *Ruth* not an aberration in an otherwise spiritually redemptive plot, but a sacrifice integral to the text as a whole: writing to Gaskell in 1852, Brontë asked her to

hear my protest! Why should she die?... And yet you must follow the impulse of your own inspiration. If *that* commands the slaying of the victim no bystander has a right to put out his hand to stay the sacrificial knife, but I hold you a stern priestess in these matters.¹¹⁹

However stern the author/priestess, the agency Brontë figures as 'inspiration' suggests a compulsion to consider the plot of the novel as not only necessary, but the logical culmination of the text's treatment of the maternal body.¹²⁰

Yet *Ruth*, at least, is allowed some progression, into motherhood and into the community that eventually accepts her: it can be read as a text that contains within its middle section the possibility of a move towards a recuperation of the maternal body that allows the 'fallen' woman to live, and live as the protagonist. Maggie Tulliver, however, is constantly striving but eternally girlish: bound to the past by her conception of duty, she is received back into the amniotic waters of the Floss and buried with her brother. Eliot, here, is writing an ur-version of Hetty Sorrel, of Gwendolen Harleth, even of *Middlemarch*'s Dorothea Brooke. After Hetty and Maggie, Eliot lets her female protagonists live, but Maggie's actual death—and the offstage disappearance of Hetty—is always their metaphorical fate, just as *Ruth*'s actual bodily sin—illegitimate pregnancy—is a version of Maggie's theoretical crime.

¹¹⁸ Sharpe's *London Magazine*, 15 Jan. 1853, in Angus Easson (ed.), *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 210-211.

¹¹⁹ Easson, p. 234.

¹²⁰ Eliot, Gaskell, and Brontë, amongst others, were part of an emergent community of women writing in the mid-nineteenth century who read and corresponded about each other's work. See, for context, G. H. Lewes, 'The Lady Novelists', *Westminster Review*, 2 (July 1852), 129-40; Pauline Nestor, *Female Friendships and Communities: Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

i: a wilderness of girls

For Gaskell, who began writing to alleviate some of the grief she experienced after the death of her son, maternity occupies the heart of almost all of the major sacrificial transactions that occur in her texts.¹²¹ Unitarianism—particularly Manchester Unitarianism, the movement Gaskell belonged to—was notable for its commitment to social justice and reform, as well as for its feminist stance, yet despite their relative radicalism, Manchester Unitarians like Gaskell were still in thrall to a capitalist logic of social transaction: ‘they held to an ideal of individualism rather than one of equality, to the ethic of the market as much as that of the Gospels [and] did not take kindly to interfering criticisms of the free-market forces of political economy’.¹²² Maternal virtue, therefore, is offered in Gaskell at a market price: the only way in which illegitimate mothers can redeem themselves is through their productive use to society.

In mid-Victorian England, the secondary economic, social and sexual position of women limited the kind of productive labour they could do: at the Census of 1851, less than half of women over the age of 10 were in paid work, and the conception of women’s earnings as supplemental to the male breadwinner’s prevailed even for unsupported single women—and orphans, like Ruth—as well as for widows with dependents.¹²³ This was linked to the prevalence of prostitution and infanticide, the two demons in woman’s shape that haunted the nineteenth-century collective consciousness: Frederic Hill, at a meeting of the reformist group the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science in 1873 was referring to both of these when he blamed ‘practical monopolising of the male sex of all the more lucrative branches of employment as one of the great causes of the present evils’.¹²⁴ This, of course, was highly conditioned by class: illegitimacy, although always technically taboo, posed practical difficulties for working class women in the way it did not for their aristocratic and even middle class counterparts. A woman in service was uniquely vulnerable to dismissal

¹²¹ Virginia Woolf, in her unfavourable review of Mrs Ellis Chadwick’s biography of Gaskell, *Mrs Gaskell: Haunts, Homes, and Stories*, refers to Gaskell as ‘driven to write by the death of her baby’ (‘Mrs Gaskell’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 September 1910, in *Collected Essays*, ed. by Andrew McNeillie, 6 vols (London: The Hogarth Press, 1986), I, pp. 340-344, p. 340).

¹²² Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), p. 87.

¹²³ Lionel Rose, *Massacre of the Innocents: Infanticide in Britain, 1800-1939* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 15.

¹²⁴ Rose, p. 17.

with no references; upper class women frequently disposed of illegitimate infants and disguised pregnancies, supported by their position and relative financial freedom.

Gaskell, however, depicts Ruth's virtue as one that transcends social and financial circumstance. The mechanism through which she is permitted to have her illegitimate child and continue to occupy the space of the virtuous protagonist is one of self-abnegation: Ruth devotes her life to serving others and raising her son, denying herself all physical needs and pleasures, and, in the process, her body becomes reconsecrated holy ground.¹²⁵ This can only occur through the removal of the reality of the pregnancy itself: from the birth of Leonard onwards, her maternal body is rewritten as virginal. In the chapter 'Mother and Child', the passing of the seasons is aligned with the progress of Ruth's pregnancy in language common to most accounts of the bringing forth of new life in nineteenth-century fiction: 'it was more cheerful when the earth put on her beautiful robe of white, which covered up all the grey naked stems, and loaded the leaves of the hollies and evergreens each with its burden of feathery snow'.¹²⁶ Gaskell goes on to quote from John Milton's 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity', compounding the natural imagery with that of sinful process and, in doing so, successfully transferring the focus from reproduction itself to more abstracted forms of creation:

The earth was still "hiding her guilty front with innocent snow," when a little baby was laid by the side of the pale white mother. It was a boy; beforehand she had wished for a girl, as being less likely to feel the want of a father—as being what a mother, worse than widowed, could most effectually shelter. But now she did not think or remember this. What it was, she would not have exchanged for a wilderness of girls. It was her own, her darling, her individual baby, already, though not an hour old, separate and sole in her heart, strangely filling up its measure with love and peace, and even hope. For here was a new, pure, beautiful, innocent life, which she fondly imagined, in that early passion of maternal love, she could guard from every touch of corrupting sin by ever watchful and most tender care. And *her* mother had thought the same, most probably; and thousands of others think the same, and pray to God to purify and cleanse their souls, that they may be fit guardians for their little children. Oh, how Ruth prayed, even while she was yet too weak to speak; and how she felt the beauty and significance of the words, "Our Father!" (134-35)

¹²⁵ In her later work, as Clare Pettitt argues, Gaskell attacks the idea of a passive sexuality inherent to femininity: see *Patent Inventions*, p. 229.

¹²⁶ Elizabeth Gaskell, *Ruth*, ed. Angus Easson (London: Penguin, 1997, revised edn 2004), p. 134. All further references will be to this edition, and page numbers will be indicated in the text.

This fantasy of maternal protection from ‘corrupting sin’ and its proximity to the positioning of Ruth in a genealogy of mothers is placed in a curious antagonism with the specific circumstances of the birth—‘the pale white mother’ and ‘her individual baby’—and enacts a move from the universality of feminised, personified Nature towards an almost parthenogenetic emphasis on the universal Father. The lack of specificity in the sole reference to birth itself erases the physicality and agency of both the mother and the child: ‘a little baby was laid by the side of the pale white mother’. The reference to the wish for a girl contains a brief radical moment of possibility for a representation of a female-centric upbringing—this is, after all, a representation of single working motherhood—but this is swiftly subsumed into the broader narrative of virtue and the paternalistic religious code that defines it. In Milton’s ode, female sexuality and generativity is coded throughout as ‘gaudy’, ‘wanton’, and ‘lusty’, the virgin birth of Christ separated from the inherent sinfulness of procreation by its whiteness:

Only with speeches fair
She woos the gentle air
 To hide her guilty front with innocent snow,
And on her naked shame,
Pollute with sinful blame,
 The saintly veil of maiden white to throw,
Confounded, that her Maker’s eyes
Should look so near upon her foul deformities.¹²⁷

In quoting from this poem, Gaskell situates the birth of Leonard within an oppositional logic that positions holiness as necessarily distant from the biological circumstances of reproduction. The recurring motif of the danger of Ruth worshipping her son as a proxy to God manages to tread a narrow line: it avoids the danger of blasphemy whilst enshrining the illegitimate child in an untouchable, almost holy position. Just as Ruth’s self-sacrifice re-consecrates her body as newly virginal, the unusual circumstances of Leonard’s birth are likened to those of Christ:

“Ah, my darling!” said Ruth, falling back weak and weary. “If God will but spare you to me, never mother did more than I will. I have done you a grievous wrong—but, if I may but live, I will spend my life in serving you!”
“And in serving God!” said Miss Benson, with tears in her eyes. “You must not make him into an idol, or God will, perhaps, punish you through him.”

¹²⁷ John Milton, ‘On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity’, *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey (London: Longman, 1968), pp. 101-113 (p. 102).

A pang of affright shot through Ruth's heart at these words; had she already sinned and made her child into an idol, and was there punishment already in store for her through him? But then the internal voice whispered that God was "Our Father," and that He knew our frame, and knew how natural was the first outburst of a mother's love; so, although she treasured up the warning, she ceased to affright herself for what had already gushed forth. (135-36)

The repetition of 'Our Father' again relocates the birth within a paternal, non-physical lineage, whilst the 'pang of affright' and the reference to punishment occurring through the son emphasises the appropriateness of the maternal body as an instrument of sacrificial will.

In her discussion of Milton's text in *The Poet's Freedom*, Susan Stewart links the poem to the ode as a form. Noting the thematic concern with unusual births in English Pindaric and Horatian odes—like the child crawling back into the womb in Ben Jonson's 'To the Immortal Memory and Friendship of That Noble Pair, Sir Lucius Cary and Sir Henry Morison'—Stewart reads Milton's poem as one that 'marks the death of the pagan gods and proleptically reads the sacrifice of the new god into the account of his birth'.¹²⁸ Stewart goes on to recall the debt owed by Milton's ode to the Hebrew psalms and their articulation of the new as 'something waiting to be made'.¹²⁹ Linking this to Hegel's argument in the *Aesthetics* that the ecstasy of the Hebrew psalms is 'purely vague' in its inability to find specific expression, as well as the familiar connections between *technē* and birth, formal rigidity and death, Stewart uses the metaphor of reproduction herself: 'Praise, the child of wonder, is thereby the parent of exaltation, but all praise results in a kind of evaporation [...] the speaker of praise, in awe of the referent, longs for the creation of new forms'.¹³⁰ Yet in the context in which Gaskell places Milton's ode, the desire for a physical depository for ecstasy is found in the process of reproduction and childbirth, and Ruth's transference of worship from God to her newborn son also transfers the sacrificial subject: the obliteration of the speaker of praise—the mother—is located in the birth and continuing life of the new human form, the son. Yet the absence of physicality, and indeed the constant reference to Ruth as peaceful or patient as death, as well as her corpse-pale body, suggests that the life of her son and, indeed, his cleansing of her sin, must ultimately rely upon the death of the mother, who, like Milton's old gods, dies to make space for the new.

¹²⁸ Susan Stewart, *The Poet's Freedom: A Notebook on Making* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 51.

¹²⁹ Stewart, p. 50.

¹³⁰ Stewart, p. 52.

ii: the body trade

For a text so concerned with maternal spiritual nourishment, the actual feeding of the infant Leonard is completely absent from the novel. In the few instances where the word ‘breast’ is mentioned in the text, Ruth is praying, or sleeping, ‘peaceful as death’, rather than feeding the child. Eventually the physical nourishment of the mother is transferred to her charitable works when Leonard meets the father of one of the fever victims outside the hospital:

“Such a one as her has never been a great sinner; nor does she do her work as a penance, but for the love of God, and of the blessed Jesus. She will be in the light of God’s countenance when you and I will be standing afar off. I tell you, man, when my poor wench died, as no one would come near, her head lay at that hour on this woman’s sweet breast. I could fell you,” the old man went on, lifting his shaking arm, “for calling that woman a great sinner. The blessing of them who were ready to perish is upon her.” (351)

After this, the crowd outside the hospital rush to acclaim the now-adolescent Leonard for his mother’s virtue, and ‘from that day forward’ he walks ‘erect’ in the streets: the transferral of his mother’s breast to a virtuous site of spiritual succour for the dying cleanses it the connotations of sin that came from its earlier, practical, use.

This evacuation of the physical mirrors the curious absence of the economic realities of motherhood. Ruth only once suggests going out to work and leaving Leonard, a suggestion met with horror by all the members of her household, and so—miraculously for a single mother—she avoids both the hiring of a wet nurse and working as a wet nurse herself. Indeed, when Ruth takes a position as a governess for the wealthy Mr Bradshaw’s daughters, the potential for contamination historically attributed to physical acts of nurture like breast feeding is transferred onto intellectual proximity to children: Ruth herself doubts her ability to take up the position for fear of not being ‘good enough to teach little girls’, a fear assuaged by Miss Benson only through reference to her maternal virtue: ‘I answered and asked her if she did not hope to be good enough to bring up her darling to be a brave Christian man?’ (166). This inverts the previous relationship between Ruth’s influence on children and her fallen status before the birth of Leonard:

Ruth sat on a low hassock, and coaxed the least of the little creatures to her, and showed it pictures till it fell asleep in her arms, and sent a thrill through her, at the

thought of the tiny darling who would lie on her breast before long, and whom she would have to cherish and to shelter from the storms of the world.

And then she remembered, that she was once white and sinless as the wee lassie who lay in her arms; and she knew that she had gone astray. (127)

Here, Ruth's pregnancy—the 'thought of the tiny darling who would lie on her breast before long'—is coded as an embodied imperative to care, before the memory of her sexual shame arrives to separate her from the 'white and sinless' girl in her arms. The logic is cyclical: first, Ruth's imminent maternity prevents her from having the virtue needed to look after children without contaminating them; then, after giving birth, relying heavily on the cleansing white, religious imagery used to describe the event, it is within the subordination of Ruth's physical self to dutiful motherhood that her pedagogical appropriateness is rediscovered.

Ruth's labour for Mr Bradshaw, then, is never conceived of as paid work but rather a prolonged test of her virtue: this is, perhaps, in part due to the controversial reception of *Mary Barton* five years earlier, after which Gaskell infamously distanced herself from the politicised aspects of her descriptions of working class Manchester life, writing to Mary Ewart in 1848 that 'no one can feel more deeply than I how wicked it is to do anything to excite class against class'.¹³¹ This removal from class politics is striking: although Ruth could theoretically be claimed as a radical figure in her status as a simultaneously exemplary and working mother, *Ruth* the novel, as one early reviewer noted, 'lies far from all class-feelings, from all the subjects for blue-books and commissions of inquiry'.¹³² The codification of Ruth's labour, regardless of her pay, as a penitential duty—'her life had become significant and full of duty to her' (159)—rather than an economic necessity means her hardships stem from her virtue, and have little to do with her poverty. In part, this serves to formally cleanse Ruth of her association with the 'great social evil' of prostitution. For mid-century Victorians, this was not confined to sex work itself, but any transgressive female sexual acts, living with a man outside of marriage, dressing in a provocative manner, or working as an

¹³¹ J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (eds.), *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), p. 67. Raymond Williams, in his famous analysis of the novel in *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1959), pp. 87-91, argued that Gaskell's decision to make John Barton the murderer and center the rest of the novel around Mary was the disavowal of a (better) Chartist class narrative. Fraiman's argument in *Extreme Domesticity* that we should see Mary's story as 'no less than her father's, as one of class struggle and labor—the difference being that her labor is often unrecognized as such' (p. 46) offers a gentle corrective to this reading, as does her interesting work on the representation of childcare as labour in the novel through its association with paternal figures.

¹³² *English Review*, April 1853, in Easson, p. 282.

actress. In 1861, Bracebridge Hemyng wrote that ‘literally every woman who yields to her passions and loses her virtue is a prostitute’.¹³³

The regulation of prostitution was, therefore, inseparable from the management of the female body by the medical establishment and the state, as the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 would go on to illustrate: legislation that effectively used the panic about venereal disease to arrest women who appeared to be in some way threatening to the social fabric.¹³⁴ The bodies of women of colour and working-class women were particularly vulnerable to this legislation: the act ‘gave the police the power to subject any suspected prostitute to a forced pelvic exam with a speculum—a device, still in use today, invented by a doctor who found gynaecological contact repellent, and who purchased enslaved Black women to experiment on’.¹³⁵ Juno Mac and Molly Smith, in their comprehensive history of sex work, note that

In London in 1893, Cesare Lombroso studied the bodies of women from the ‘dangerous classes’, mostly prostitutes and other working class women, and women of colour, all of whom he described as ‘primitive’. He asserted that prostitutes experienced increased pubic-hair growth, hypertrophy of the clitoris, and permanent distention of the labia and vagina, clearly believing that their unnatural deeds and their unnatural bodies were two sides of the same coin. To him, the social and moral degradation they represented became legible in their physical bodies.¹³⁶

Smith and Mac go on to quote Émile Zola’s 1880 novel *Nana* which describes a prostitute as ‘a shovel full of putrid flesh’: the physicality of (paid for, extramarital) sex is indistinguishable from a graphic horror of physical corruption. This horror of the sexual body, is present, too in the grisly narratives of pregnancy and birth—tales of monstrous motherhood—that have informed narrative tradition from the Middle Ages onward.¹³⁷ Gaskell’s repeated insistence on the ‘whiteness’ of Ruth’s illegitimate birth and baby, in this context, is an attempt to separate Ruth’s story from bodies ‘degraded’ by conscious sin.

¹³³ In Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: A Cyclopaedia of the Condition and Earnings of Those That Will Work, Those That Cannot Work, and Those That Will Not Work*, 4 vols (London: Bohn, 1861), IV, p. 215.

¹³⁴ See, particularly Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*; Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society—Women, class, and the state* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

¹³⁵ Juno Mac and Molly Smith, *Revolt of Prostitutes: The Fight for Sex Workers’ Rights* (London: Verso, 2018), p. 23.

¹³⁶ Mac and Smith, pp. 23-24.

¹³⁷ See, in particular: Marilyn Francus, *Monstrous Motherhood: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Ideology of Domesticity* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2013); Sarah Alison Miller, *Medieval Monstrosity and the Female Body* (London: Routledge, 2010); Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993).

Indeed, Gaskell's novel follows an evangelical tradition in seeing its protagonist as a victim of cross-class sexual predation, bad financial planning, and the sudden collapse of a specific family, rather than following either the Calvinistic belief in these women as morally corrupted, or the utilitarian assertion of the prostitute as a pragmatic response to male sexual needs.¹³⁸ As Catherine Gallagher notes, Ruth's position as a seamstress at the time of her seduction not only makes her uniquely vulnerable to temptation but also casts her as a figure who encapsulates the uncomfortable proximity of industrial work and sex work: 'because all women sewed, the seamstress seemed as much woman as worker. She was, therefore, a perfect working-class symbol for writers who wished to see class relations entirely in terms of family relations'.¹³⁹ Ruth's sexual vulnerability is inherently linked to her position as a worker. Her removal from her lodging at the dressmaker's to the surrogate familial setting of the Bensons removes her sin from its site of collective, societal relevance, and instead allows her to exist as an individual character—Ruth the protagonist, not Ruth the seamstress—and to atone through individual good works. Yet Gaskell still ultimately sacrifices Ruth to the kind of 'inevitable' downfall at the hands of her seducer that characterised middle class moral panic about female sexuality and its social consequences.

Ruth marked the first time Gaskell featured an unwed mother as her protagonist, but it was not the first time she had treated such characters with sympathy: both *Mary Barton* (1848) and her 1850 novella *Lizzie Leigh* include narratives of seduction, betrayal, and illegitimacy. In *Mary Barton*, the erstwhile Aunt Esther—who, like Ruth, thought the man who impregnated her intended to marry her—is blamed for Mary's mother's death, and is tacitly criticised both for being pretty and for knowing how pretty she was. She returns in 'faded finery', a member of 'no doubtful profession'.¹⁴⁰ Esther's fall is explicitly linked to industrial work by John Barton, who uses it as a rationale to forbid Mary from working in a factory (she becomes a seamstress instead):

That's the worst of factory work, for girls. They can earn so much when work is plenty, that they can maintain themselves anyhow. My Mary shall never work in a

¹³⁸ For an interesting discussion of Gaskell's use of 'reverse slumming' in cross-class narratives, see Kucich, 'Reverse Slumming: Cross-Class Performativity and Organic Order in Dickens and Gaskell', *Victorian Studies*, 55.3 (Spring 2013), 471-499.

¹³⁹ Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 130.

¹⁴⁰ Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, ed. Stephen Gill (London: Penguin, 1970, revised edn 1977), p. 168. All further references will be to this edition, and page numbers will be indicated in the text.

factory, that I'm determined on. You see Esther spent her money in dress, thinking to set off her pretty face; and got to come home so late at night, that at last I told her my mind: my missis thinks I spoke crossly, but I meant right, for I loved Esther, if it was only for Mary's sake. Says I, 'Esther, I see what you'll end at with your artificials, and your fly-away veils, and stopping out when honest women are in their beds; you'll be a street-walker, Esther, and then, don't you go to think I'll have you darken my door, though my wife is your sister.' (43)

The factory is linked to 'artificials'; women's earning power is directly related to the breakdown of accepted moral codes and, it is implied, the family structure itself. Indeed, throughout the text, familial duty is figured as the last bastion of morality: we know Jem, Mary's suitor, to be virtuous both by his understanding of consent—he takes Mary's no for a no—and through his figuration of his money and labour as duty paid to his mother for her care of him:

Wild visions of enlistment, of drinking himself into forgetfulness, of becoming desperate in some way or another, entered his mind; but then the thought of his mother stood like an angel with a drawn sword in the way to sin. For, you know, "he was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow;" dependent on him for daily bread. (186)

Indeed, the return and semi-redemption of Esther herself is also due to familial loyalty: 'One thought had haunted her both by night and by day, with monomaniacal incessancy; and that thought was how to save Mary (her dead sister's only child, her own little pet in the days of her innocence) from following in the same downward path to vice' (207).

Esther's quest is hampered by her alienation from society: her "sin" has denied her the little agency she had, rendered by Gaskell as a removal of a specifically narrative ability:

To whom shall the outcast prostitute tell her tale? Who will give her help in her day of need? Hers is the leper-sin, and all stand aloof dreading to be counted unclean. (207)

It was impossible for Gaskell to deny Esther the punishment that fit her supposed crime—she dies of consumption shortly after revealing herself to Mary—and although her rescue mission was accomplished, she is never able to articulate the truth of her situation to her niece without Jem as an interlocutor. *Ruth*, although the death of the fallen woman is still inevitable, is perhaps an attempt to give more space to the outcast tale: Ruth—who, crucially, never actually trades in sex—is given the time and the space to tell her own story before she dies, and to sketch out the possibility of a productive social future. The living child is crucial to

this: with Leonard to care for, Ruth can locate her social usefulness in a maternal virtue that, originating as it does in her sexual transgression, can begin to atone for it. Esther, whose daughter Annie dies in infancy, has no such reproductive future, and her child is instead absorbed into the matrilineal parade of ghosts that haunt her:

It is so frightful to see them [...] There they go round and round my bed the whole night through. My mother, carrying little Annie (I wonder how they got together) and Mary—and all looking at me with their sad, stony eyes; oh Jem! it is so terrible! (213)

If, in her construction of the ‘inset liberal fable of community tolerance and empathy, of domestic and maternal salvation, which defies, or at least temporarily staves off, the usual fate of the fallen woman’, Gaskell imagines a future in which bourgeois morality is less stringent, her ending is a mark of her inability to construct a fictional society in which a woman could be truly sexually free.¹⁴¹ This failure can be read in context as related to Gaskell’s involvement in what the anthropologist Laura Agustín has termed the ‘rescue industry’ of middle-class women who ‘reformed’ prostitutes:

But the creation of professionalised caring roles, such as philanthropic and social work, was about employment that *reproduced* rather than upset gender roles. These women were reasserting their position in a class hierarchy over working class people, particularly working-class women and children, who were targeted as recipients for maternalistic and coercive forms of ‘care’.¹⁴²

Although the interests of sex workers and the burgeoning women’s movement often aligned, such as in the resistance to the Contagious Diseases Acts, the notion of true solidarity or, indeed, acknowledgement of meaningful equality, between middle-class philanthropists like Gaskell and working-class women working in the sex trade was absent.

This is not to say that Gaskell was not profoundly impacted by her work in the rescue industry and the New Bayley prison, nor that she didn’t wholeheartedly believe in the good of the cause. She was particularly unhappy about the ‘solution’ of forced emigration for fallen women provided by initiatives such as Urania Cottage, cofounded by Charles Dickens and Angela Burdett-Coutts.¹⁴³ It is interesting to note here that forced emigration was not

¹⁴¹ Tim Dolin (ed.), ‘Introduction’, in *Ruth*, Elizabeth Gaskell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. xiii.

¹⁴² Mac and Smith, p. 9.

¹⁴³ Gaskell, in desperation, wrote to Dickens in January 1850 asking him to take in Pasley, the young needlewoman who inspired elements of *Ruth*, but she did not see forced emigration as a solution (*Gaskell Letters*, p. 98). Indeed, as Elsie B. Michie notes in *Outside the Pale: Cultural Exclusion, Gender Difference, and the Victorian Woman Writer* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 80-85, Gaskell and

only considered an option for women who had conceived illegitimate children, but was seriously suggested by social reformers like Frances Power Cobbe as a way to curb the troubling prevalence of unmarried women: in the reproductive economy of the British Empire, nonconformist female bodies were punished for both being too generative and for not being generative enough.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, the idea of narrative agency as a form of rehabilitation—let the outcast prostitute tell her tale—is entirely absent from accounts of Urania Cottage, where Dickens, who saw the project as ‘like a novel, but with real people’, would interview the women, write their stories down in his ‘Case Histories’, and then instruct them to never speak of their own past experiences again.¹⁴⁵ Even within the fantasy of rehabilitation presented in *Ruth*, the worth of the woman is located in a capitalist logic of productivity as much as in evangelical atonement or communal care: the work of atonement is, crucially, *work*, reinforcing, rather than challenging, existing social hierarchies. Gaskell—who, after all, used Thomas Carlyle as the epigraph to *Mary Barton*—constructs her rehabilitative fantasy along organicist lines, advocating for institutionalised philanthropy and the empathetic behaviour of social superiors (Mr Benson rather than Mr Bradshaw) as a means of improving social conditions. The actions of the police in *Ruth*, for example, are embedded as neutral plot points rather than evidence of the fact that, in the early nineteenth century, professionalised police forces were established to repress urban working class organising against atrocious living and working conditions, something evident in Gaskell’s earlier treatment of law enforcement in *Mary Barton*.¹⁴⁶

Ironically, the kind of community-minded care that Gaskell advocates for in her fiction—see, particularly, the rallying round for Miss Matty in *Cranford*—was already being practiced by communities of sex workers in British cities. As Mac and Smith note, the notion of care as

Dickens’s editorial relationship was a difficult one, coloured by his attempts to control her writing and his disinclination towards her view that fallen women could be redeemed. She even donated some of the proceeds from ‘Lizzie Leigh’ towards the refuges for prostitutes that Dickens disapproved of.

¹⁴⁴ See Frances Power Cobbe, ‘What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?’, in *Essays on the Pursuits of Women: Also, a Paper on Female Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 58-101.

¹⁴⁵ See Charles Dickens, ‘Home for Homeless Women’, *Household Words*, 23 April 1853, *The Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens’ Journalism*, ed. Michael Slater, 4 vols (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1999), III, pp. 127-140, and Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

¹⁴⁶ See Fraiman, pp. 56-57. See also Kucich, pp. 493-494. Additionally, Mac and Smith note that ‘David Whitehouse explains, the state needed a way to control burgeoning crowds, protests, and strikes, without ‘sending in the army’, which risked creating working class martyrs and further radicalising the populace. Thus the police were designed to inflict generally non-lethal violence to protect the interests of capitalism and the state.’ (p. 15).

political work most often associated with second wave feminism, was an aspect of Victorian life that is ‘missing from the usual tellings of feminist history’:

In nineteenth-century Great Britain and Ireland, prostitutes created communities of mutual aid, sharing income and childcare. A journalist observed at the time that ‘the ruling principle here is to share each other’s fortunes... In hard times one family readily helps another, or several help one... What each company gets is thrown into a common purse, and the rest is provisioned out of it.’¹⁴⁷

This ‘common purse’—akin to the nascent development of the trade union in the same period, something Gaskell engages with ambivalently in *North and South*—is conceptually present in the alternative economic systems operated by the female characters in *Ruth*. Although not as obvious in *Ruth* as it is in *Cranford*, what Barbara Straumann has termed the ‘eccentricity of female economic agency’ in Gaskell’s fiction allows for alternative valuation systems to structure the narrative.¹⁴⁸ Ruth exemplifies her own virtue—and value—in her refusal of financial gifts from those she does not wish to be indebted to: first, the money left by Lady Bellingham, and secondly, the stream of gifts from Mr Bradshaw. Her understanding of the ‘obligation’ the acceptance of these gifts would place her under is echoed in Jemima’s indignant rejection of the utilitarian attitude her father and, she presumes, her suitor, have to her marriage:

Now I can believe that all you do is done from calculation; you are good because it adds to your business credit—you talk in that high strain about principle because it sounds well, and is respectable—and even these things are better than your cold way of looking out for a wife, just as you would do for a carpet, to add to your comforts and settle you respectably. (185)

Yet Jemima—who eventually marries Farquhar—is still contrasted unfavourably with the ideal of self-abnegation presented by Ruth, as Farquhar wonders ‘how it was that Jemima could not see how grand a life might be, whose every action was shaped in obedience to some eternal law; instead of which, he was afraid she rebelled against every law, and was guided only by impulse’ (178-79). Indeed, there are only certain kinds of economic understanding—and certain kinds of parity—that Gaskell condones, and, just as the family is

¹⁴⁷ Mac and Smith, p. 6.

¹⁴⁸ Barbara Straumann, ‘The Eccentricity of Female Economic Agency: Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford*’, unpublished paper delivered at the conference ‘Women, Money, Markets, 1750-1850’ (King’s College London, 11 May 2017).

figured as the opposite of the corrupting workplace, filial obligation is represented as oppositional to the fair treatment of the working classes. Sally's act of returning her pay rise to Mr Benson—'it always was yours' (311)—although touching, figures just payment for hard domestic labour as the opposite of loyalty. Goodness, in *Ruth*, is an impossible balancing act: hard-working, but not in the workforce; resistant to economic norms, but only in a self-sacrificial context.

iii: Mother Floss

In *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie Tulliver suffers and dies in the service of a fiction of childhood. Maggie's displacement of her own desires onto a conception of 'good' behaviour that takes total self-abnegation as its foundational tenet combines with the socioeconomic constraints of her circumstances to trap her in eternal adolescence. *Mill* is a novel entangled in the transitional contradictions of the period between the 'Age of Atonement', where doctrinal atonement connected enlightenment rationalism and Evangelical eschatology, and a move towards a comprehensive focus on the Incarnation. The latter, linked to collectivism and social action, emphasised the ethically exemplary life of Christ *as a man*. Correspondingly, self-renunciation, self-sacrifice and their potential for atonement were imbued with a new, practical importance.¹⁴⁹ In *Mill*, Eliot rewrites these moral problems, as the liturgical model of self-denial becomes, as Catherine Pickstock has contended, a mediating force between art and politics, the ideal and the real.¹⁵⁰ The initial tendency in *Mill* towards the successful completion of the Bildungsroman is consumed by what has often been termed a tragic inevitability, instigated in the repetitive cycles of self-renunciation Maggie embarks upon as a child and culminating in her death. Eliot, writing about Sophocles's *Antigone* in 1856, expressed her own deeply felt belief in the tragic potential of contemporary life: 'Wherever the strength of a man's intellect, or moral sense, or affection brings him into opposition with the rules which society has sanctioned, there is renewed the conflict between Antigone and Creon'.¹⁵¹ We might remember that Antigone, like Maggie, died in the name of a brother; we might notice, too, Eliot's use here of 'a man'. By reading *Mill* against Gaskell's reproductive social realism, I want to illustrate that the 'poetics of renunciation' governing Eliot's narrative are rooted in the same necessary banishment of the sexual body that structures *Ruth*.¹⁵²

Maggie's self-denial has often been compared to that of *Middlemarch*'s Dorothea Brooke. Yet unlike Dorothea—an heiress who can enact some of her self-abnegating desires through jewels and Maltese puppies—the working-class Maggie has very few options. Even her romantic choices are limited to either the unavailable Stephen Guest or the 'deformed'

¹⁴⁹ Boyd Hilton, *Atonement*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁰ Catherine Pickstock, 'Liturgy, Art and Politics', *Modern Theology*, Vol. 16, Issue 2 (April 2000), 159-180.

¹⁵¹ Eliot, 'The Antigone and its Moral', *Essays*, pp. 261-265, p. 265.

¹⁵² Lynn Franken, 'The Wound of the Serpent: The Philoctetes Story in *The Mill on the Floss*', *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (1999), 24-44.

Philip Wakem, whom the novel positions as an abnormal, unproductive choice of partner: two non-choice choices. In mid-nineteenth century rural communities, ‘women’s economic vulnerability was compounded by their extraordinarily poor prospects of marriage’: women outnumbered men by almost 5 percent, but according to the 1851 census, 41 percent of the female population between 20 and 40 were classed as spinsters, whilst, as Power Cobbe pointed out in 1862, statistics suggested that 30 per cent of women would never marry.¹⁵³ Given the problem presented by illegitimacy, unmarried women were, in the eyes of the state, unproductive citizens. In a novel in which the action takes place during the 1820s and 1830s, Maggie’s potential future in the workforce is limited by her gender and geographical position just as her family’s economic position is jeopardised by bad management and the quickening pace of change. The focus on steam power and slow labour in the novel—Uncle Deane reminisces about a time when ‘the looms went slowish, and fashions didn’t alter quite so fast: I’d a best suit that lasted me six years’—allows Maggie to be overtaken by the changing world and, eventually, with no option to absolve her ‘sin’ through labour as Ruth does, to be drowned in the river that represents, among other things, the Tullivers’ reliance upon outdated modes of life and work.¹⁵⁴

Like Ruth, Maggie suffers. In 1860 Eliot’s belief in the relationship between productive suffering and ethical life was already honed by her 1846 translation of Strauss’s *Life of Jesus* and her 1854 translation of Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity*. Throughout her writing life Eliot made a case—in fiction, criticism, and verse—for an ethics that asserted that, even when God is a projection, to suffer for others is worthy; that the ‘highest’ life is one of ‘conscious voluntary sacrifice’.¹⁵⁵ Maggie’s discovery of Thomas à Kempis leads to a fundamental misunderstanding of the ‘productive’ purpose of self-denial:

Renunciation seemed to her the entrance into that satisfaction which she had so long been craving in vain. She had not perceived—how could she until she had lived longer?—the inmost truth of the old monk’s outpourings, that renunciation remains sorrow, though a sorrow borne willingly. Maggie was still panting for happiness, and was in ecstasy because she had found the key to it. (254)

¹⁵³ Power Cobbe, p. 59.

¹⁵⁴ George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 347. All further references will be to this edition, and page numbers will be indicated in the text, and when necessary abbreviated as *MF*.

¹⁵⁵ George Eliot, *Romola*, ed. Andrew Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 9.

Eliot's use of 'ecstasy' in her description of Maggie's misconception contains a kind of sustained pun on *ekstasis*, realised two pages later, illustrating that her impassioned, self-absorbed devotion cannot be entirely disentangled from her desire to escape her impoverished circumstances: 'Some have an emphatic belief in alcohol and seek their *ekstasis* or outside standing-ground in gin' (255). Maggie is forced to make 'a faith for herself without the aid of established authorities and appointed guides, for they were not at hand and her need was pressing' (255). *Mill* is populated by her repeated denials, first of reading, then of Philip Wakem's friendship, then of Stephen Guest and finally—fatally—the chance to leave St. Ogg's and start anew.

Franken's reading of a 'poetics of renunciation' in the novel relies upon what she sees as the inherent structural 'parabolic retard' in the text that Maggie's commitment to self-sacrifice effects; here, Maggie's desire for renunciation is a desire to return 'home', a desire at odds with both 'public destiny' within the novel and the 'destination of the plot'.¹⁵⁶ Yet this desire to return home is not, as Franken suggests, at odds with the ending of the novel: in fact, both the commencement and consummation of the plot pertain to the force of Maggie's internal association between her childhood values and self-renunciation, the primary form of which is a unity between siblings that is, in later life, ruptured by her own romantic attachments. If Maggie's death in the Floss is prefigured from the beginning, with Mrs Tulliver's early pronouncement 'she'll tumble in one day' (11) functioning as a kind of prophecy, Maggie's own memories insist upon a childhood shared wholly with Tom: 'the first thing I remember in my life is standing with Tom by the side of the Floss while he held my hand; everything before that is dark to me' (270). Their 'public destiny' perpetuates this, in their epitaph—'In their death they were not divided' (460)—and the narratorial account of their deaths:

The boat reappeared, but brother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted, living through again in one supreme moment the days when they had clasped their little hands in love and roamed the daisied fields together. (459)

The union of Tom and Maggie in death is both an intolerable tragedy and the ending we have seen coming from the start; it functions as a return to childhood consciousness, 'living through' their memories in 'one supreme moment', compounded by the image of 'their little

¹⁵⁶ Franken, pp. 27-29.

hands in love' and the high romanticism of 'daisied fields'. The problem of the sexualised body is not solved by their double death, but emphasised: indeed, for many readers, Tom and Maggie's relationship is transgressively close to an incestuous one.¹⁵⁷ Felicia Bonaparte has observed that 'most of what we have taken to be failures of Eliot's realism are, in fact, the triumphs of her poetry', and we can interpret 'poetry', here, as the poetics of the text as a whole. The ending of *Mill* is the culmination, rather than the frustration, of the poetics of renunciation present in the text.¹⁵⁸

Yet this emphasis on Maggie's inability to forge a path into adulthood ignores the persistence of the problem of the female body in Eliot's novels. Whilst it is true that Maggie's renunciations frustrate the plot, drawing it back into a reflexive loop that ritualises the practices learnt in childhood, the connection between the specific renunciation of a future characterised by requited sexual desire and the desire to return to a prepubescent bond with her brother is rooted in the inability of Eliot's text to reconcile Maggie's goodness with her potentially fertile, adult body. Matthew Kaiser has written about the 'extensive ideological work' undertaken by concepts of 'play' in the Victorian period, extending even to the notion of death as a prize, an ethical reward for a life lived well.¹⁵⁹ We can certainly take Kaiser's interpretation of Edward Gross's play theory and apply it to the ending of *Mill*, reading Maggie's death —attempting to save her brother from their flooded childhood home—as an inevitability created by these textual and behavioural patterns, by her play at self-sacrifice. Gross's notion that 'play becomes the life-work of the players' is enacted in Maggie's sacrificial self-fashioning, as the initial scenes of renunciation eventually consume the entire text.¹⁶⁰ Yet a psychoanalytic consideration of play requires us to push harder against the interpretation of the text as one that allows childhood to remain a space free of sexuality. As Melanie Klein and Julia Kristeva have, in their different fields, shown, play-work is linked to Freudian dream-work in its provision of a narrative for an analyst to interpret. Carolyn Dever compellingly connects this to the patriarchal structure contained within the *fort-da* of narrative itself: Kristeva's factoring-in of the mother into paternalistic semiotics, although

¹⁵⁷ See Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979); William A. Cohen, *Sex Scandal: the Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Mary Jean Corbett, *Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage, and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

¹⁵⁸ Felicia Bonaparte, *The Triptych and the Cross* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1979), p. 5.

¹⁵⁹ Matthew Kaiser, *The World in Play: Portraits of a Victorian Concept* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 5.

¹⁶⁰ Edward Gross, 'A Functional Approach to Leisure Analysis', *Social Problems*, 9.1 (Summer 1961), 2-9 (p. 2).

restoring a kind of anterior power to the mother, ‘subtly reinscribes the equation of subjectivity and maternal absence’, meaning, ‘if the absent mother lurks in the unconscious, then the institutional anxiety is not that of her departure, but rather that of her return; not for her *fort*, but perhaps ironically, for her *da*.’¹⁶¹

There are two important elements to this analysis that are relevant to *The Mill on the Floss*. First, we can read the mother that requires banishment from the text not as Mrs Tulliver—who is, like many of Eliot’s mothers, sidelined from the start by her incompetence—but instead the threatening potential of Maggie’s own reproductive body. Second, we can follow Dever’s psychoanalytically informed lead in locating Maggie’s teenage devotional, self-sacrificial impulses in her childhood play. Maggie’s intractable youth has been widely analysed by critics, but most, like Kaiser, favour a Darwinian, rather than a Freudian, analysis. Although Sally Shuttleworth, in her influential *The Mind of the Child*, terms the novel a ‘complex model of mind and memory’, particularly in its influence on the first book-length study of child psychiatry, Leonard Guthrie’s 1907 *Functional Nervous Disorders in Childhood*, she places this history at odds with the ‘current cultural dominance of Freudian theory’.¹⁶² Shuttleworth notes the relationship between Maggie’s fetish doll and play-work: ‘While dolls were commonly seen as objects of love upon which girls could hone their maternal skills, this one is seemingly an object of both hate and violence’.¹⁶³ Yet, although the legacy of Auguste Comte is clear in both Eliot and G.H. Lewes’s non-fiction, Shuttleworth’s analysis, in reading Maggie’s doll through Comte’s framework of social development, transfers the focus to the theological.¹⁶⁴ Whilst Maggie’s fervent religious piety is certainly in part genuinely theological, it is also the result of a yearning for more than the mundane ‘Pagan’ kind of belief exhibited by the rest of the Dodsons and Tullivers; in other words, it is a response to the ‘oppressive narrowness’ that characterises her young life (238).

Indeed, Maggie’s religious fervour is situated on the cusp of her adolescence, and the fetish doll, though consigned to the attic, is the marker of a vivid internal life:

¹⁶¹ Dever, p. 50.

¹⁶² Sally Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 16.

¹⁶³ Shuttleworth, p. 98

¹⁶⁴ The Comtean framework sees human life as moving through the theological, the metaphysical, and the positive, with fetishism the first part of the theological. See G. H. Lewes, ‘Hereditary influence, animal and human’, *Westminster Review*, 66 (July 1856), 135-162, in particular.

To the usual precocity of the girl, she added that early experience of struggle, of conflict between the inward impulse and outward fact, which is the lot of every imaginative and passionate nature; and the years since she hammered the nails into her wooden Fetish among the worm-eaten shelves of the attic had been filled with so eager a life in the triple world of Reality, Books, and Waking Dreams, that Maggie was strangely old for her years in everything except in her entire want of that prudence and self-command which were the qualities that made Tom manly in the midst of his intellectual boyishness. And now her lot was beginning to have a still, sad monotony, which threw her more than ever on her inward self. (241)

This internal life—the triple world of Reality, Books, and Waking Dreams—is hardly difficult to associate with the process of puberty, and the ‘inward impulse’ that Maggie fails to control is clearly partly related to adolescent sexuality. Under the sign of a passionate devotion to God, Maggie displaces her former instinct to punish the fetish doll—which we can term sadism, the infliction of ‘vicarious suffering’ (25)—onto a desire to deprive and punish herself, which we can term masochism.¹⁶⁵ I want to link Maggie’s theological fetishism, then, not to Comte, but to Freud.¹⁶⁶

In ‘The Economic Problem of Masochism’, Freud offers a definition of ‘moral masochism’:

The third form of masochism, moral masochism, is chiefly remarkable for having loosened its connection with what we recognise as sexuality. All other masochistic sufferings carry with them the condition that they shall emanate from the loved person and shall be endured at his command. This restriction has been dropped in moral masochism. The suffering itself is what matters; whether it is decreed by someone who is loved or by someone who is indifferent is of no importance.¹⁶⁷

This ‘loosened’ connection is not with sexuality itself, but with *what we recognise* as sexuality. Later in the essay, Freud invokes the Oedipus complex as something that ‘proves to be—as has already been conjectured in a historical sense—the source of our individual ethical sense, our morality.’¹⁶⁸ This is in part due to the reading put forward here and in *The*

¹⁶⁵ For an account of the gothic inheritance of Eliot’s masochistic female characters, see Royce Mahawatte, *George Eliot and the Gothic Novel: Genres, Gender, Feeling* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013).

¹⁶⁶ As Jacqueline Rose notes in *The Case of Peter Pan, or, the Impossibility of Children’s Literature* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), ‘Freud was first brought up against the unconscious when asking how we remember ourselves as a child.’ (p. 12).

¹⁶⁷ ‘The Economic Problem of Masochism’, *SE*, XIX (1961), p. 165.

¹⁶⁸ Freud, ‘The Economic Problem’, pp. 167-68.

Ego and the Id that the fear of death is the fear of punishment by an Oedipal parental figure, with fate, too, ‘a later projection of the father’.¹⁶⁹

With this in mind, the imagery of the flood leads us to the now common reading of submersion in water as a return to the amniotic fluid of the womb, following Freud’s reading of dreams of water as ‘phantasies of intra-uterine life, of existence in the womb and of the act of birth’.¹⁷⁰ Water in *Mill* is the source of Maggie’s circular narrative progression/regression. The novel is pervaded by the constant threat of the flooding Floss—related, perhaps, to the German *Fluss*, meaning river—which is pre-empted the first time we meet Maggie in Chapter Two, as her mother warns her ‘in a tone of half-coaxing fretfulness’, calling her for the first time ‘this small mistake of nature’:

Where’s the use o’ my telling you to keep away from the water? You’ll tumble in and be drowned some day, an’ then you’ll be sorry you didn’t do as mother told you.
(12)

Mrs Tulliver’s worry work is her primary labour in the text, something in itself related to the novel’s concern with the increasing pace of industry and her maternal function: in his 1921 fragment ‘Capitalism as Religion’, Walter Benjamin, following Max Weber and offering a reading of Freud, categorises worry as ‘the mental illness belonging to the epoch of capitalism’.¹⁷¹ This initial union of worrying about Maggie—her hair, her ‘cuteness’, her skin—with worrying about the threat of drowning reinforces the sense that Maggie’s eventual end was both inevitable and inextricably bound up with the maternal body. Maggie’s mother’s love, otherwise mostly ineffectual, is both partly responsible for her death—Maggie stays in the boat in pursuit of Tom and her mother—and her salvation when she returns to St. Ogg’s a presumed fallen woman, as Mrs Tulliver’s ‘poor frightened mother’s love leaped out now, stronger than all dread’, and, defying her son’s wishes, she accompanies Maggie in her distress: ‘My child! I’ll go with you. You’ve got a mother.’ (427)

¹⁶⁹ ‘The Ego and the Id’, *SE*, XIX (1961), p. 58. As Diane Jonte-Pace notes in *Speaking the Unspeakable: Religion, Misogyny, and the Uncanny Mother in Freud’s Cultural Texts* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), the mother, too, is associated with a fear of death in the Freudian canon, both in images of dead mothers and uncanny maternal bodies.

¹⁷⁰ Freud, Sigmund, ‘The Interpretation of Dreams II’, *SE*, V (1953), p. 399.

¹⁷¹ Walter Benjamin, ‘Capitalism as Religion’, in *Selected Writings*, ed. Marcus Bullock et al, 4 vols, (Cambridge, MA; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996-2003) I, pp. 287-291 (p. 290).

The unity of Maggie and Tom, the most obvious force that keeps her bound to the past, is also located in the waters that stand in for the maternal body, both in the famous recurring image of Maggie's first memory of standing hand in hand with Tom by the river, and in the scene at the end of Chapter 5 that marks the end of Tom and Maggie's childhood together before he is sent to school:

They were on their way to the Round Pool—that wonderful pool, which the floods had made a long while ago. No one knew how deep it was; and it was mysterious, too, that it should be almost a perfect round, framed in with willows and tall reeds, so that the water was only to be seen when you got close to the brink. The sight of the old favorite spot always heightened Tom's good humour, and he spoke to Maggie in the most amicable whispers, as he opened the precious basket and prepared their tackle. He threw her line for her, and put the rod into her hand. Maggie thought it probable that the small fish would come to her hook, and the large ones to Tom's. But she had forgotten all about the fish, and was looking dreamily at the glassy water, when Tom said, in a loud whisper, "Look, look, Maggie!" and came running to prevent her from snatching her line away. (35)

This 'deep' and 'mysterious' round pool is the site of this childhood memory that, totemic and almost dream-like, encodes a fundamental difference between the siblings rooted in Maggie's own anxieties of production:

Maggie was frightened lest she had been doing something wrong, as usual, but presently Tom drew out her line and brought a large tench bouncing on the grass. Tom was excited.
"O Magsie, you little duck! Empty the basket."
Maggie was not conscious of unusual merit, but it was enough that Tom called her Magsie, and was pleased with her. There was nothing to mar her delight in the whispers and the dreamy silences, when she listened to the light dripping sounds of the rising fish, and the gentle rustling, as if the willows and the reeds and the water had their happy whisperings also. Maggie thought it would make a very nice heaven to sit by the pool in that way, and never be scolded. She never knew she had a bite till Tom told her; but she liked fishing very much. (35)

Maggie takes pleasure in the peace that comes from *knowing* she is being productive, though she is not actually interested in the fishing—or the fish—itsself: it is only in these moments of accidental success that she is free of the relentless expectation of socially-sanctioned productivity that curtails and frustrates her life.

The scene at the pool is followed by the famous passage that closes that section, in which Eliot's narrator sketches out the circular arc of the story:

Life did change for Tom and Maggie; and yet they were not wrong in believing that the thoughts and loves of these first years would always make part of their lives. We could never have loved the earth so well if we had had no childhood in it,—if it were not the earth where the same flowers come up again every spring that we used to gather with our tiny fingers as we sat lisping to ourselves on the grass; the same hips and haws on the autumn’s hedgerows; the same redbreasts that we used to call “God’s birds,” because they did no harm to the precious crops. What novelty is worth that sweet monotony where everything is known, and *loved* because it is known? (36)

This ‘sweet monotony’ is opposed to progression: Maggie, by this logic, remains bound to the past that requires a link to the maternal body, the pool, and to productivity without agency, performed to please Tom.

iv: 'I will not begin any future, even for you'

The opening of Book 5, 'In the Red Deeps', explicitly links Maggie's restrictive chiasmic structure of renunciation to her sexual development:

One would certainly suppose her to be farther on in life than her seventeenth year—perhaps because of the slow resigned sadness of the glance from which all search and unrest seem to have departed; perhaps because her broad-chested figure has the mould of early womanhood. Youth and health have withstood well the involuntary and voluntary hardships of her lot, and the nights in which she has lain on the hard floor for a penance have left no obvious trace; the eyes are liquid, the brown cheek is firm and round, the full lips are red. With her dark coloring and jet crown surmounting her tall figure, she seems to have a sort of kinship with the grand Scotch firs, at which she is looking up as if she loved them well. Yet one has a sense of uneasiness in looking at her— a sense of opposing elements, of which a fierce collision is imminent; surely there is a hushed expression, such as one often sees in older faces under borderless caps, out of keeping with the resistant youth, which one expects to flash out in a sudden, passionate glance, that will dissipate all the quietude, like a damp fire leaping out again when all seemed safe. (263)

Maggie's 'broad-chested figure [...] the mould of early womanhood', is sexualised even in her penance. She appears, particularly in her entanglement with Philip Wakem, to be prematurely barred from the youth that belongs to her and simultaneously provocatively childlike: at their first meeting since their parting, Maggie tells Philip 'I cannot keep anything I loved when I was little' (265). Philip, meanwhile, bitterly perceives that 'Maggie was almost as frank and unconstrained toward him as when she was a child' (267).

In *Mill*, anxieties about time are necessarily linked to anxieties about industrial expansion on the one hand, and the Darwinian complication of biblical apocalypse narratives on the other.¹⁷² The use of steam power as a displacement for broader worries about expansion—Malthusian population anxieties as well as industrial growth—allows Eliot to map her interest in epochal change onto the bodies of her young protagonists.¹⁷³ The Red Deeps—a place that owes its significance to her childhood— offers a space simultaneously

¹⁷² Eliot's idea of timescales was linked to biblical ideas of the apocalypse: see Mary Wilson Carpenter, *George Eliot and the Landscape of Time: Narrative Form and Protestant Apocalyptic History* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

¹⁷³ As Elizabeth Carolyn Miller notes in 'Fixed Capital and the Flow: Water Power, Steam Power, and *The Mill on the Floss*', in *Ecological Form: System and Aesthetics in the Age of Empire*, ed. Nathan K. Hensley (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2018), pp. 85-100, Eliot's concern with steam power in the novel comes from an interest in non-progressive temporality, energy regime transition, and the birth of an economic reliance on fossil fuels.

exposed and enclosed. Its very name references the womb, and the relationship that develops there between Maggie and Philip, who is continuously compared to a woman, is trapped in its own kind of circular temporality that resembles theoretical accounts of a time that can be gendered both female and maternal.¹⁷⁴ In contrast to Maggie's relationship with Stephen, which, in its trajectory of progression and accumulation, is both masculine and capitalist in principle, Maggie and Philip's relationship—rooted in childhood, never consummated—has more in common with the cyclical, repetitive, gestational temporality familiar from Julia Kristeva's 1979 essay 'Women's time'.

Kristeva—famously, controversially—identifies the post-1968 feminist desire to reclaim maternity as part of the desire 'to give a language to the intra-subjective and corporeal experiences left mute by culture in the past.'¹⁷⁵ In posing 'creative time' against 'epic time', Kristeva identifies a rupture in the sociosymbolic contract:

In return, female subjectivity as it gives itself up to intuition becomes a problem with respect to a certain conception of time: time as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding; time as departure, progression, and arrival—in other words, the time of history.¹⁷⁶

This sociosymbolic contract—living under patriarchy in the time of history—is, for Kristeva, intrinsically related to the reproductive aspect of sexual difference, particularly maternity: a young girl, she states, has 'greater difficulty than the boy in detaching herself from the mother in order to accede to the order of signs as invested by the absence and separation constitutive of the paternal function', something that returns us to Mrs Tulliver's accompaniment of Maggie in her shame, setting up the reunion of her two children in the symbolic maternal waters of the flood. The impossibility of re-establishing this closeness to her own specific mother is figured by Kristeva as a kind of sacrificial debt:

¹⁷⁴ There is not space here to go into what Emily Apter refers to as the 'time wars': the reproductive face-off between women's time and queer time, 'with the former defined by an attachment to anachronism (as in Judith Butler's claim that psychoanalytic feminism was justified by the need to examine the anachronistic traces of kinship in psychic and the latter characterized by temporal supersession (of the category of woman).' See "'Women's Time" in Theory', *differences: a journal of feminist cultural studies*, 21.1 (2010), 1-18 (p. 6). See also Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). For a convincing critique of Edelman, and a necessary intervention regarding the necessity of maternal time, linked to Luce Irigaray's rethinking of sexual difference through the maternal-feminine, see Baraitser, *Enduring Time*, pp. 80-85.

¹⁷⁵ Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, *Signs*, 7.1 (Autumn 1981), 13-35. (p. 19).

¹⁷⁶ Kristeva, p. 17.

In sum, all of these considerations—her eternal debt to the woman-mother—make a woman more vulnerable within the symbolic order, more fragile when she suffers within it, more virulent when she protects herself from it. If the archetype of the belief in a good and pure substance, that of utopias, is the belief in the omnipotence of an archaic, full, total, englobing mother with no frustration, no separation, with no break-producing symbolism (with no castration, in other words), then it becomes evident that we will never be able to defuse the violences mobilized through the counterinvestment necessary to carrying out this phantasm, unless one challenges precisely this myth of the archaic mother.¹⁷⁷

This myth of the archaic mother, and the necessary violence of her banishment, as we have already begun to see in Carolyn Dever's application of Kristeva's interpretation of semiotics to the Victorian novel, is integral to the narrative paradigms of nineteenth-century fiction; more striking, perhaps, is that psychoanalytic theories—particularly in object-relations theory—themselves appear to 'duplicate' these paradigms.¹⁷⁸ Dever's reading of Kristeva's emphasis on synchronic, choric pre-Oedipal language notes its importance in recuperating the mother within psychoanalysis, but suggests that this emphasis on the anterior means the mother's influence can only exist in the 'always-already'.¹⁷⁹ In fiction, particularly in novels like Eliot's which structure their narrative along familiar lines of epic, historic time, any understanding of maternal influence relies upon the absence of the mother if the plot is to progress and reach its satisfactory ending.¹⁸⁰

Published as it was in 1860, *Mill* is a text we can read—although, as we have seen, Eliot herself had a complex relationship to the women's movement—as part of the proto-feminist generation that Kristeva describes as struggling for a place in linear or epic time, for agency and a place in history.¹⁸¹ Reading that struggle through the lens of the post-68 psychoanalytic feminists, we can see that, for Eliot, the fictional landscape of a novel was that of epic time, against which Maggie, with no hope of finding a way of 'living the sacrifice', of finding a balanced place in the sociosymbolic contract, can exist only in circular time. It is important to note, here, the difference between symbolically reproductive

¹⁷⁷ Kristeva, p. 29.

¹⁷⁸ Dever, p. 39.

¹⁷⁹ Dever, pp. 49-50.

¹⁸⁰ For an account of female analysts and their recuperation of maternity, see Janet Sayers, *Mothering Psychoanalysis* (London: Penguin, 1992).

¹⁸¹ For an account of Kristeva post-1977, and her divergence from any kind of political totality, see Jacqueline Rose, 'Julia Kristeva—Take Two', in *Ethics, politics, and difference in Julia Kristeva's writing*, ed. Kelly Oliver (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 41-61. In the same volume, there is a useful account of maternal ambivalence in Kristeva: Allison Weir, 'Identification with the Divided Mother: Kristeva's Ambivalence', pp. 79-91.

temporality and heterosexual reproduction as experienced by the novel's characters. If Maggie had been able to marry Stephen—overcoming both her laudable principles and her harmful masochistic will—and returned to St. Ogg's with the trousseau that the women of the town note as so conspicuously absent, and had gone on to become a mother through her relationship with Stephen, she would have been absorbed into linear, masculine, productive time. Maggie's principles define her subjectivity: the Bildungsroman-like structure of the first four books of the novel illustrate the intellectual and emotional bedrock provided by her understanding of self-abnegation. A reproductive future with Stephen would have required the denial of her self; instead—caught between the impossible myth of the archaic mother and the necessary violence of masculine time—she can only protect her subjectivity by refusing to participate in a life defined by those terms.¹⁸²

These terms, of course, are those of exchange: within the maternal body is the virginal body, and vice versa. 'In the Red Deeps' is the chapter that begins the fifth book of the novel, 'The Wheat and the Tares', which, in its reference to the parable in Matthew 13:24-13:30, situates the rekindling of Maggie's relationship with Philip within an allusion not only to faith and deceptive appearances, but to a story centred around the fear of the contamination of a harvest by an enemy's 'bastard' seed. Throughout the second half of the novel, Maggie is feared corrupted by all three of the male characters she has close relationships with: her suitors, Philip and Stephen, and her brother, Tom. Tom's fear of contagion is rooted in his disgust for what he considers to be Philip's deviance from the physical norm, and in Maggie's flouting of the terms of familial loyalty he considers her to be committed to:

A love for a deformed man would be odious in any woman, in a sister intolerable. But if she had been carrying on any kind of intercourse whatever with Philip, a stop must be put to it at once; she was disobeying her father's strongest feelings and her brother's express commands, besides compromising herself by secret meetings. He left home the next morning in that watchful state of mind which turns the most ordinary course of things into pregnant coincidences. (299)

The use of 'pregnant' here, only a sentence after the assertion of Maggie's 'compromising' of herself through her secret and unaccompanied meetings with Philip illustrates that part of the

¹⁸² In Apter's words: 'In literary studies, epic time is typically enshrined in the largely male-authored tradition of the historical novel, which seeks to grab the event through an epoch-defining narrative of watershed dates (wars and revolutions). Kristeva provided the impetus for untiming these historical periodizing frames [...] through a feminist recuperation of archaic and futural temporal measures: cycle, period, pregnancy, the creative time of aesthetic practice' (p. 4).

contract Tom envisages Maggie as flouting is a reproductive one: the implicit fear, in the emphasis of the specific intolerability of a sister forming an attachment to ‘a deformed man’, is that of contaminating the familial line through an imprudent and illegitimate pregnancy. The fact that Tom’s discovery of Maggie and Philip’s relationship immediately precedes the chapter in which Tom pays the last of his father’s debts and Mr Tulliver dies after an altercation with Mr Wakem, making Tom the head of the family and further cementing their ancestral animosity, is not coincidental. The narrator’s description of the confluence of this financial victory and familial death refers again to the contaminated harvest of the wheat and the tares, with another reproductive pun: ‘Sad ending to the day that had risen on them all like a beginning of better times! But mingled seed must bear a mingled crop’ (314).

Even Philip, who is marked out as separate from masculine society by his physical deformity and heightened sensitivity, is not free of the impulse to commodify Maggie. Despite the narrative emasculation in which he seems to switch genders with her—‘Maggie smiled, with glistening tears, and then stooped her tall head to kiss the pale face that was full of pleading, timid love— like a woman’s’ (296)—Philip still positions his love for her within a transactional system:

It might be a happiness to have many tastes if I were like other men [...] I might get some power and distinction by mere mediocrity, as they do; at least I should get those middling satisfactions which make men contented to do without great ones. I might think society at St. Ogg’s agreeable then. But nothing could make life worth the purchase-money of pain to me, but some faculty that would lift me above the dead level of provincial existence. Yes, there is one thing— a passion answers as well as a faculty. (287)

Here, the possession of Maggie—‘a passion’—is seen by Philip to function as an atoning mechanism for his ‘purchase-money of pain’. The constant references he makes in their revived acquaintance to the waste of Maggie ‘shutting’ herself away, with their obvious connotations of asceticism and religious enclosure, emphasises this conception of her purpose as a curative one, intended only for him; the waste is a waste of resource.

Within the narrative, Philip’s sense of Maggie’s love as a recompense can also be read as a specific atonement for the loss of maternal love he suffered at birth:

Philip had never been soothed by that mother’s love which flows out to us in the greater abundance because our need is greater, which clings to us the more tenderly

because we are the less likely to be winners in the game of life; and the sense of his father's affection and indulgence toward him was marred by the keener perception of his father's faults. Kept aloof from all practical life as Philip had been, and by nature half feminine in sensitiveness, he had some of the woman's intolerant repulsion toward worldliness and the deliberate pursuit of sensual enjoyment. (291)

Maternal care is figured by the free indirect narratorial voice in the same terms that Philip himself consciously uses: a recompense for the purchase-money of being predisposed to lose. Indeed, later, when he asks for his father's consent to marry Maggie, Mr Wakem compares her unfavourably to his dead mother, immediately accepting the fact that these are the terms of comparison:

"She's not the sort of woman your mother was, though, Phil," he said, at last. "I saw her at church— she's handsomer than this— deuced fine eyes and fine figure, I saw; but rather dangerous and unmanageable, eh?"
"She's very tender and affectionate, and so simple,—without the airs and petty contrivances other women have."
"Ah?" said Wakem. Then looking round at his son, "But your mother looked gentler; she had that brown wavy hair and gray eyes, like yours. You can't remember her very well. It was a thousand pities I'd no likeness of her." (376)

Mr Wakem, here, is suggesting that, had Philip been able to remember his mother better, or if, indeed, there had been an image of her in the house he grew up in, he might be better-equipped to make an appropriate choice for a bride. Maggie herself conceives of her love for Philip, and especially of her consent to marriage, as a kind of self-sacrifice by which she would mirror the idealised dead mother represented by Mrs Wakem:

She had a moment of real happiness then— a moment of belief that, if there were sacrifice in this love, it was all the richer and more satisfying. (296)

For Maggie, the maternal feelings she experiences towards Philip relate to her desire for self-abnegation; her masochistic urge. For Philip, his sincere love for Maggie is rooted, too, in the loneliness of his childhood, as well as his maternal loss. The representational opposition of Maggie's feelings for Philip—stemming, as they do, from pity and duty—with her sexual desire for Stephen enforces a kind of psychic division in the text between the commitments that relate to childhood and the potential for adult sexual consummation. Eliot, writing in 1860, cannot envisage a fictional landscape in which these two apparently oppositional poles can be reconciled. Lucy Deane continuously compares Maggie and Philip's relationship to the kind she knows from childhood fairy tales:

The scene was just what Lucy expected, and her kind heart delighted in bringing Philip and Maggie together again; though, even with all *her* regard for Philip, she could not resist the impression that her cousin Tom had some excuse for feeling shocked at the physical incongruity between the two,—a prosaic person like cousin Tom, who didn't like poetry and fairy tales. (361)

In Eliot's fiction the fairy tale and the childhood story cannot yet function as they do in Freud, but instead are impossible placeholders for a relationship innocent of the unconscious, and without the practical impositions of adulthood and the marketplace.¹⁸³

The descriptions of Maggie and Stephen's interactions are a marked contrast to the fundamentally platonic desire Maggie experiences for Philip, as is particularly evident from the scene in the conservatory when they find themselves together alone for the first time, amidst the heavily symbolic 'wicked' roses:

Stephen was mute; he was incapable of putting a sentence together, and Maggie bent her arm a little upward toward the large half-opened rose that had attracted her. Who has not felt the beauty of a woman's arm? The unspeakable suggestions of tenderness that lie in the dimpled elbow, and all the varied gently lessening curves, down to the delicate wrist, with its tiniest, almost imperceptible nicks in the firm softness. A woman's arm touched the soul of a great sculptor two thousand years ago, so that he wrought an image of it for the Parthenon which moves us still as it clasps lovingly the timeworn marble of a headless trunk. Maggie's was such an arm as that, and it had the warm tints of life.

A mad impulse seized on Stephen; he darted toward the arm, and showered kisses on it, clasping the wrist. (388)

Stephen's 'mad impulse' to touch—an echo of Maggie's 'inward impulse'—moves the description from the aesthetic and general—'who has not felt the beauty of a woman's arm?'—to the specific and sexual with Eliot's typical discomfort: even as Stephen commits to his action, Maggie's arm is detached from her, becoming the preceding arm of the Parthenon. In the crucial dialogic exchange between the lovers that happens in 'Waking', Stephen emphasises their sexual attraction in his repeated designation of it as 'natural':

We have proved that it was impossible to keep our resolutions. We have proved that the feeling which draws us toward each other is too strong to be overcome. That natural law surmounts every other; we can't help what it clashes with. (417)

¹⁸³ See Freud 'The Occurrence in Dreams of Material from Fairy Tales' *SE*, XII (1958), pp. 279-287. For fairytales and the relationship between siblings, see Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

In Maggie's psychic economy, however, the 'debt' that she and Stephen 'owe' to other people is entirely preventative of action: sexual desire, and the progress it represents, can never outweigh the claim of family, filial duty, and maternal origin. The opposite of Hetty Sorrel, who is like 'one of those plants that have hardly any roots: you may tear them from their native nook of rock or wall, and just lay them over your ornamental flower-pot, and they blossom none the worse', Maggie's blossoming is curtailed by roots that smother: 'If the past is not to bind us', she famously asks, 'where can duty lie?'.¹⁸⁴

Maggie's conception of duty is rooted in empathy—'Oh, what is Lucy feeling now?'—but this empathy is self-abnegating to the point of anti-futurity. Whilst Stephen, in response to Maggie's entreaty he think of her jilted cousin, responds that he *can't* think of her, Maggie is absolute in her belief in renunciation. Faithfulness and constancy, in her ethical framework, require a total rejection of self:

They mean renouncing whatever is opposed to the reliance others have in us—whatever would cause misery to those whom the course of our lives has made dependent on us. (417)

This use of 'dependent' again links Maggie's self-sacrifice to maternity and to nurture, as does Stephen's diagnosis of her position as inherently feminine: 'I can think of nothing but you, Maggie. You demand of a man what is impossible' (417). Although he is right in this acknowledgement of the gendered dynamic, and right that Maggie's decision to return to St. Ogg's without him is cognate with her earlier masochistic religious impulse—'She had made up her mind to suffer'—Stephen fundamentally misunderstands the role sacrifice is playing in their conflict: he accuses Maggie of sacrificing *him*, rather than herself:

No, I don't sacrifice you—I couldn't sacrifice you [...] but I can't believe in a good for you, that I feel, that we both feel, is a wrong toward others. We can't choose happiness either for ourselves or for another; we can't tell where that will lie. We can only choose whether we will indulge ourselves in the present moment, or whether we will renounce that, for the sake of obeying the divine voice within us— for the sake of being true to all the motives that sanctify our lives (418-19)

¹⁸⁴ George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, ed. Carol A. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), p. 146. All further references will be to this edition, and page numbers will be in the text, and when necessary it will be abbreviated to *AB*.

Maggie, here, refuses to acknowledge that in running away together as they have done, the societal reality of the situation necessitates a reconfiguration of her idea of ‘duty’ if it is to be liveable: ‘you *are* mine now,—the world believes it; duty must spring out of that now’ (419). Maggie, ultimately, chooses to renounce all possibility of reconciling herself to life: her statement that ‘I desire no future that will break the ties of the past’, considered within the value system she has described, really means ‘I desire no future that facilitates desire’. Maggie’s frustrated Bildungsroman is curtailed by the impossibility of the female generative, sexual, desiring body remaining virtuous:

I will not begin any future, even for you [...] with a deliberate consent to what ought not to have been. What I told you at Basset I feel now; I would rather have died than fall into this temptation. It would have been better. (416)

Ultimately, both Maggie and Ruth are unable to begin any meaningful future: both Gaskell and Eliot are versions of Brontë’s ‘stern priestess’, and the sacrificial knife at mid-century requires the reproductive body as an offering. Within these narrative structures, governed by ‘the impulse’ of the author’s own inspiration’, however, are other, rebellious impulses expressed at the level of character: Maggie’s ‘inward impulse’; Stephen’s ‘mad impulses’; the impulse that governs Jemima’s criticism of the marriage market and her hatred of the female obligation to perform a reproductive function. It is in these impulses—related as they are to sexuality and desire—that the fissures in the structure of the social realist novel begin to appear.¹⁸⁵ Fredric Jameson, in his distinction between realism and narrative in general in *The Antinomies of Realism* writes of ‘a storytelling impulse that precedes the formation of the realist novel and yet persists within it’.¹⁸⁶ What happens when the ‘storytelling impulse’ begins to chafe at the restraints of realist representation? As we shall see in the following chapter, by the end of Eliot’s writing career, these sudden pulses of feeling—in an epigraph to a chapter about Gwendolen’s desire for a career in *Daniel*

¹⁸⁵ Impulse has an interesting psychoanalytic history, too: Strachey’s use of ‘instinct’ (rather than ‘drive’) to translate *Trieb* is perhaps the most famous translation issue in Freud. Lacan, arguing for fidelity to Freud’s distinction between drive and instinct translates *Trieb* as *pulsion*, a word that shares its Latin etymology with the English ‘impulse’: impulse, therefore, can be seen as not something wholly animal or instinctive, but something developmentally contingent. This also concerns play: Friedrich Schiller’s ‘play-drive’ (*Spieltrieb*), which for Schiller overcomes the division between the ‘formal drive’ and the ‘sense drive’, is one of the sources for psychoanalytic *Trieb* in Freud. See Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: in a Series of Letters*, trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967). See also Ulrike Kistner, ‘Translating the First Edition of Freud’s *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*’, in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality: The 1905 Edition*, trans. Ulrike Kistner, ed. Philippe Van Haute and Herman Westerkamp (London: Verso, 2016), pp. lxxvii-xc.

¹⁸⁶ Jameson, p. 15.

Deronda, Eliot writes that a defining feature of human lives is ‘a constant spontaneous pulsing of their self-satisfaction’¹⁸⁷—destabilise the mechanisms of repression that the form relies on. Within this fragmentation, however, nestles the potential for renewal. As Jemima notes in the middle of *Ruth*, railing against paternalistic lectures about self-control in the chapter entitled ‘Jemima Refuses to be Managed’, there is violence encoded in self-denial, and impulse itself is, in reality, a scapegoat: ‘Poor impulse! how you do get abused’ (180).

¹⁸⁷ George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Graham Handley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 232. All subsequent references will be to this edition, and page numbers will be given in the text, and when necessary abbreviated to *DD*.

Chapter 2:

'As if I had been a tender mother': transactional kinship and the fantasy of male parthenogenesis in *Daniel Deronda*

It is tempting to categorise *Daniel Deronda* as a novel chiefly concerned with its dual plots—its protagonist's identity and corresponding vocation, and the unhappy domestic tragedy of Gwendolen Harleth—and, as such, a novel in which the fortuitous ending of the first is secured by the relegation of the second to a muted, miserable closure. Although it is true that the two marriage plots are part of a chiasmic structure that functions like Fortune's wheel, as Deronda's union with Mirah Cohen leaves the widowed Gwendolen alone, such a categorisation is a misreading of Eliot's complex system of sacrificial accountancy. The competing demands of filial atonement and ethical renunciation mean the novel consistently frustrates itself: each transaction in turn is unbalanced by its successor. Deronda himself, at the centre of the novel, exists for the first five books in a state of paradox. Caught up in the search for his own origin he is able, by remaining in ignorance of his parentage, to take up the position of Mordecai Cohen's intellectual brother without relinquishing his place within English society as symbolised by his presumed father, Sir Hugo Mallinger. Thus, through Daniel, Gwendolen Harleth and Mordecai Cohen can inhabit the same text. As the narrative progresses this equilibrium is destabilised as two kinds of kinship battle for primacy: familial relation, linked to stasis and gendered female, and intellectual and spiritual brotherhood, gendered male. Book 6, 'Revelations', and Book 7, 'The Mother and the Son', break the inertia of the bipartite narrative structure: first, Daniel's identity is completely destabilised at the hands of his mother, before the banishment of the maternal body allows him to achieve a complete identification with his paternal ancestors. This is enacted through the culmination of the marriage plot: Daniel's union with Mirah is a substitutionary means, not an end.

This chapter positions Eliot's final novel as the fragmentation point of her synthesis of social realism and maternal suppression. In *Daniel Deronda*, maternal origin and masculine destiny are ultimately irreconcilable: by establishing the parallels between Gwendolen Harleth's 'unnatural' fertile body and the Alcharisi, alongside the conflation of Mirah and Mordecai Cohen, we can see that narrative resolution is only possible if masculine

kinship explicitly replaces or subsumes the biological kinship of maternity.¹⁸⁸ Neil Hertz contends that the expulsion of the Alcharisi from *Daniel Deronda* is symbolic of the author expelling herself; Catherine Gallagher links it to Eliot's fears of authorial overproduction; I want to contend that it can be read as the final and most extreme iteration of the problematisation of the maternal body that is crucial to Eliot's fictional practice. As we have seen, in *Scenes from Clerical Life*, Eliot focuses on women whose fecundity leads them directly to tragedy, whilst in *The Mill on the Floss* Maggie's self-renunciation ensures an eternally-deferred maturity. In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot is trying to situate her sacrificial logic of maternity within a narrative that is more romance than tragedy: the maternal loss occurs not once but twice, through abandonment, return, and banishment. By her final novel, Eliot's narrative necessitates the imposition of a moral mathematics that allows Daniel to maintain his goodness whilst foregoing his links to the world of his mother and Gwendolen; both bodies must therefore be shown to be examples of unnatural, contaminated reproduction. This transference of kinship occurs through Daniel's own biological link to the Jewish faith, which works in tandem with the transactions of substitutionary parenthood we have seen throughout the novel, culminating in a narrative resolution that relies upon a fantasy of what Janet Adelman has termed, in her work on Shakespearean tragedy and romance, 'male parthenogenesis': in understanding the human 'potentiality for frailty only as the continuation of [the] mother's fault', the idea of a process of reproduction that eliminates the need for female participation is one that eliminates the anxiety of original sin.¹⁸⁹

As Catherine Gallagher notes in *The Body Economic*, this 'split in narrative logic' contributed to the contemporary consensus that *Daniel Deronda* tends to excess. Working with Gallagher's identification of the 'syntagmatic' and 'paradigmatic' character systems in the novel that stymie the progression of the plot, we can trace its origins in the Malthusian logic that structures *Scenes of Clerical Life*, illustrating that this problematic stasis is ultimately located in Eliot's logic of maternal transference and transaction. If the broader moral economy of *Daniel Deronda*, like Eliot's other work, has its roots in the development of political economy in the nineteenth century, then the reproductive body is at the very core of the novel's transactions. Returning briefly to Gallagher's analysis of Malthus's

¹⁸⁸ Nancy Chodorow, in *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), argues that the repression of male identification with the mother occurs through cultural taboo.

¹⁸⁹ Adelman, p. 95.

‘body/society opposition’—‘The blooming body is only a body about to divide into two feebler bodies that are always on the verge of becoming four starving bodies’—we can see that Gallagher’s language takes on a new relevance to the language of the flesh that suffuses *Daniel Deronda*. The conflation of the ‘blooming body’ with the dissolution of boundaries is a concern that governs the novel’s language: the power of ideas ‘made flesh’ relies upon the suppression of such blooming bodies. The fractured families in the text extend this ‘rupture’ of the ‘healthy body/healthy population homology’ by suggesting that substitutionary familial relationships that replace or sterilise maternal care can provide a way of evading the dangers of the problematic body.

It is not the female gender as whole that is banished by the close of *Daniel Deronda*, but the maternal body; femininity is subjugated, but not exorcised. Progress, however, is strictly masculine. In the strange triangulation of the three main female characters, Gwendolen is linked to the Alcharisi through the imagery of corrupted fertility, and Mirah is the opposite of Gwendolen, her would-be rival for Daniel’s affections. By choosing to marry Mirah, a woman aligned with and almost subsumed by the masculine force of her brother’s beliefs, Daniel replaces the women in his life who are uncomfortably linked to narrative origin with a woman who is defined chiefly in opposition to others of her sex. Whilst the presence of his mother is enough to overwhelm and—to an extent—feminise Daniel, Mirah’s relationship with him, even as a potential spouse, always feels secondary to his more intense relationship with her brother. Indeed, when Daniel reveals to Mordecai that Mirah is his lost sister, the news is something of an anti-climax: Mordecai initially assumes the recovered kinship to be Daniel’s. The urgent physicality of the language Mordecai uses to greet this imagined news of brotherhood—‘You are even as my brother that sucked the breasts of my mother—the heritage is yours—there is no doubt to divide us’ (530)—renders the vocabulary used to greet the actual sister lukewarm.

In ‘sucked the breasts of my mother’ the maternal body is rendered solely as a function of nurture; in a sentence otherwise concerned with ‘heritage’, the explicit image of the breasts becomes almost grotesque, whilst the passivity of them implies that the action belongs solely to the male infant: the verb, ‘to suck’, belongs to him, and there is no mention of its partner, ‘to feed’. Even Daniel cannot seem to muster up an enthusiasm that escapes Mordecai’s reverence for abstract fraternity and safe, dead maternal sacrifice, praising Mirah only through the reflected shine of her inherited virtue: ‘Your sister is worthy of the mother

you honoured' (570). After the crucial exchange of property with the father substitute Joseph Kalonymos, Daniel's renewed sense of purpose is declared in a sentence that sketches out the trajectory from mother's son to father's heir: 'His mother had compelled him to a decisive acknowledgement of his love, as Joseph Kalonymos had compelled him to a definite expression of his resolve [...] It was as if he had found an added soul in finding his ancestry' (745). Romantic love in *Daniel Deronda* is always held at one remove: it is not love for Mirah itself but the 'acknowledgment' of it that moves Daniel to action, and this in turn serves as an intermediary between Daniel's reaction against his mother, his meeting with Kalonymos, and his discovery of his 'soul'.

In *Suffocating Mothers*, writing of the maternal return narratives of Shakespearean romance that *Deronda* resembles, Adelman identifies a pre-Malthusian concern with fecundity that identifies the danger the sexualised maternal body poses to masculine identity:

But the attempt at recovery itself reinscribes the conditions of loss: in the plays of maternal recovery, the father's authority must be severely undermined and the mother herself subjected to a chastening purgation; in the plays of paternal recovery, the mother must be demonised and banished before the father's authority can be restored.¹⁹⁰

If *Daniel Deronda*, with its recovery of lost family and final journey into unknown waters, can be read as a romance, this 'reinscription' of maternal loss happens quite literally in the return and second leave-taking of the Alcharisi. Yet the sacrifice of the maternal does not come without an acknowledgement of the costs: the interviews between Daniel and his mother, occurring as they do in a self-contained space on foreign soil, provide a moment in which a different future, one of maternal care and recuperation, is allowed to flicker. The epigram to Chapter 53 of the novel, prefacing the scene in which Daniel's mother takes her leave of him for good, is from *Antony and Cleopatra*: 'My desolation does begin to make | A better life' (614).¹⁹¹ Terence Cave notes that, 'like Cleopatra after the eclipse of her fame and happiness, 'the Alcharisi' finds a kind of repentance and reconciliation', yet, if this is the case, it seems a more fitting epigram for Gwendolen's adjustment to her loss of Daniel, particularly her final declaration that 'it will be better with me, having known you' (754).¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Adelman, p. 193.

¹⁹¹ William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. John Wilders, Arden Shakespeare Third Series (London: Routledge, 1995), v. 2. 2.

¹⁹² Terence Cave, 'Notes', George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Terence Cave (London: Penguin 1995, repr. 2003), p. 842.

Adelman contends that *Antony and Cleopatra* represents a ‘new psychic economy’ that, for a brief moment, allows Shakespeare to imagine the female body as restorative:

This moment is fragile: if Shakespeare opens up the possibility of escape from the either/or of psychic scarcity in *Antony and Cleopatra*, he immediately forecloses that possibility again in *Coriolanus*. Nonetheless, the psychic economy glimpsed in Cleopatra’s monument will eventually lead Shakespeare to *The Winter’s Tale*, where trust in maternal amplitude enables Shakespeare’s own imaginative bounty.¹⁹³

Eliot’s version of this fragile moment exists between Daniel and his mother only until she relents and reveals his identity, allowing him to acquire both a vocation and a wife in rapid succession. Daniel’s selfhood is safe only if he rejects the corrupted fecundity of origin represented by his mother and discovers a father with whom to align himself. In order to reach its narrative conclusion, Eliot’s novel must move past this possibility into action—the forging of a masculine future—rather than tragic closure. After the Alcharisi’s exit, *Daniel Deronda* becomes an inversion of the maternal recuperation Adelman’s Cleopatra symbolizes: indeed, it reads almost like a reimagining of *Cymbeline*, another story that relies upon ‘the achievement of the parthenogenetic family’ (Cymbeline’s recovery of his sons) to unite its two narrative strands.¹⁹⁴

There is a lengthy critical tradition of comparing Eliot to Shakespeare, both amongst her contemporaries and more recently: Herbert Spencer called Eliot the female Shakespeare, and Alexander Main said she had done for the novel what Shakespeare had for drama; in 2003 Philip Davis noted that this was characteristic of an age obsessed with the ‘writing out’ of drama into a novel.¹⁹⁵ Davis gives an account, too, of the general contemporary consensus that the connection between Eliot and Shakespeare can be found primarily in her portrayal of ‘mixed characters’, like *Measure for Measure*’s Angelo and *Much Ado About Nothing*’s Claudius—the much-vaunted portrayal of ‘human nature’—and what Davis considers to be an approach to the development of meaning in prose that elaborates on John Henry Newman’s implicit and explicit thinking.¹⁹⁶ Davis argues for Eliot as the ‘Victorian Shakespeare’ in her ability to transmit the universal through the particular. If, as Davis notes, to the ‘great Victorian critics, Shakespeare seemed an implicit, almost pre-conscious thinker’,

¹⁹³ Adelman, p. 165.

¹⁹⁴ Adelman, p. 199.

¹⁹⁵ Philip Davis, ‘Implicit and Explicit Reason: George Eliot and Shakespeare’, in *Victorian Shakespeare Volume 2: Literature and Culture*, ed. Gail Marshall and Adrian Poole (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 84-99 (p. 85).

¹⁹⁶ Davis, pp. 87-91.

and Eliot's prose was a decidedly conscious imposition of reason onto natural feeling, it is particularly interesting to use Adelman's psychoanalytic reading of Shakespeare's late romances to illuminate the subconscious scapegoating of maternity that occurs in Eliot's late novels. Indeed, the links between the two are often under-read: although the allusions to *Cymbeline* in the Pforzheimer notebooks have most often been linked to the brief references to Imogen in *Middlemarch*, Eliot's reading of *Cymbeline* can be more productively traced in the familial rupture and re-stitching of *Daniel Deronda*.¹⁹⁷ Like *Cymbeline*, which allows Imogen to be recognised by her father only when her inheritance has been returned to her brothers, Mirah—a woman who is positioned as the antithesis of the Alcharisi, 'capable of submitting to anything'—represents the return of the female body in a manageable, limited form. And, like *The Winter's Tale*, where Perdita is only allowed to be recognised as the heir to one kingdom when safely betrothed to the male heir of its twin, the only mother allowed to remain onstage for the final act is a silent embodiment of chaste purity: in accepting Mordecai's kinship even as he marries his sister, Daniel aligns himself with the good, dead, Jewish mother.

Similarly, although there has been a general critical consensus that *Daniel Deronda* is 'the most consciously Shakespearean of all her novels', most of the work that focuses on the links between the two does little more than comb the text for direct allusions.¹⁹⁸ In Marianne Novy's account of *Daniel Deronda*, the claims she makes for a the novel as an 'affectionate critique' of Shakespeare rely upon the similarities between *As You Like It*'s Rosalind and Gwendolen and an 1876 review that compared Daniel to Hamlet; rather than applying any serious pressure to the comparison, Novy is happy to agree that Daniel is 'Hamlet without a grievance'.¹⁹⁹ Thinking with Adelman, it's clear that it is more productive to examine the ways in which Hamlet's grievance—the betrayal of the mother—is located, explored, and finally banished in Eliot's novel in order to provide a possible narrative future. In *Suffocating Mothers*, the return of the problematic maternal body that comes, through Gertrude, to Shakespeare's work at the turn of the seventeenth century 'disables holiday' and 'initiates tragedy': the paternal identification that occurred so easily in the History plays is disturbed

¹⁹⁷ A. G. van den Broek, 'Additional Notes to Shakespearean Entries in the Pforzheimer Holographs', *The George Eliot, George Henry Lewes Newsletter*, 12/13 (1988), 6–11.

¹⁹⁸ U.C. Knoepfelmacher, 'Daniel Deronda and William Shakespeare', *Victorian Newsletter* 19 (1961), 27–28 (p. 27).

¹⁹⁹ Marianne Novy, *Engaging with Shakespeare: responses of George Eliot and other women novelists* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1994), p. 133; p. 118.

by female reproduction.²⁰⁰ Daniel achieves this identification *through* the problematisation and sacrifice of the mother's body: the presence of the Alcharisi is grievance personified. It is useful here to return to Jacqueline Rose's argument that *Daniel Deronda*—published, as she notes, only ten years before the first writings of Freud—is a transitional text in which the hysterisation of the woman's body in the nineteenth century is the cause of a broader fracture: 'Gwendolen's moral journey, Daniel's historical quest, not only mime a classic sexual paradigm or distribution of identities, they also show the sexual division which lies at the heart of morality itself'.²⁰¹ The fear of the dissolution threatened by the mother that Adelman diagnoses in Shakespeare is the same psychic instability Rose finds in Eliot, as the novel becomes the product of a transitional point, a breakdown 'felt within these two orders, of representation and culture, together'.²⁰² I want to further Rose's claims for the importance of sexual difference in *Daniel Deronda* by establishing the parallels between Gwendolen's potentially fertile female body and Daniel's mother, the Alcharisi, and, therefore, the ongoing connection between the two stories in the text:

The division between Gwendolen's and Deronda's story is a false one, not just because the moralism of the second is challenged by the irony or rhetoric of the first, but also because the search for a sureness of identity relies on the disturbance of the woman to give it form. The incompatibility of the two halves can be heralded as the collapse of self-knowledge of the (any) text, but they lock back into each other at the point of sexual division. Gwendolen's hysteria serves to halt, even as it exposes, the ceaseless dispersal of the text.²⁰³

If, as Rose argues, Gwendolen's hysteria halts the threatened 'dispersal' in *Daniel Deronda*, it is because she remains caught in a narrative loop even after Daniel has left. Gwendolen's body, as we shall see, is constantly figured in frustrated procreative terms: in order for the story of Daniel's destiny to take precedence over hers, her reproductive capacity must be made metaphorical, and its damage kept at bay. This furthers Gwendolen's affinity with the Alcharisi, meaning Rose's suggestion that Daniel's sureness of identity 'relies' upon Gwendolen's 'disturbance' can also be applied to the disturbance of the mother. Here we can briefly return, too, to the discussion of Raymond Williams's reading of Eliot's fiction in *The Country and the City*. Williams, like Rose, reads *Daniel Deronda* as a novel on the brink:

²⁰⁰ Adelman, p. 13.

²⁰¹ Rose, *Sexuality* p. 113-14.

²⁰² Rose, p. 119.

²⁰³ Rose, p. 119.

The social solutions—the common solutions—are still taken seriously up to the last point of personal crisis, and then what is achieved as a personal moral development has to express itself as some kind of physical or spiritual renewal; an emigration, at once resigned and hopeful, from what had originally been offered as a decisive social world.²⁰⁴

Daniel's journey—Williams's resigned and hopeful emigration—is a departure that requires distancing completely from the maternal origins symbolised by Gwendolen and the Alcharisi. The 'divided consciousness of belonging and not belonging' is what Daniel attempts to heal, not through unification—Adelman's fragile recuperation, perhaps—but through removal. The choice Williams offers between a physical and spiritual renewal is a false one: Daniel's moral recuperation requires the kind of 'physical renewal' that endeavours to separate the physical—and the contaminated social, or maternal sphere—from existence itself.

*

Both *Daniel Deronda* the novel and Daniel Deronda the character simultaneously elevate kinship above all other concerns and subordinate certain kinds of biological kinship to a sense of intellectual fellowship and continuity. Even as Daniel arrives in Genoa to meet his mother, his emotional turmoil is constantly related to the Cohens: 'All sights, all subjects, even the expected meeting with his mother, found a central union in Mordecai and Mirah, and the ideas immediately associated with them' (578). These ideas are the intermingled notions of romantic fulfilment and possible spiritual destiny, but despite their potency, Deronda is careful to restrain himself from filial disloyalty:

he had never yet fully admitted to himself that he wished the facts to verify Mordecai's conviction: he inwardly repeated that he had no choice in the matter, and that wishing was folly—nay, on the question of parenthood, wishing seemed part of that meanness which disowns kinship: it was a disowning by anticipation. (578)

Eliot's plot is ingenious in its creation of a loophole through which Daniel can escape this 'meanness' whilst nevertheless 'disowning' his undesirable ancestry. Despite lacking 'the Jewish consciousness', Daniel's admirable desire for duty—'his yearning, grown the stronger for the denial which had been his grievance, after the obligation of avowed filial and social ties'—is linked to Mordecai: after their conversations, Daniel believes his feeling to be 'ready for difficult obedience' (506). In her work on atonement and renunciation in *Daniel*

²⁰⁴ Williams, pp. 86-87.

Deronda, Schramm observes that ‘whatever Eliot’s distaste for Anglican penal economies of redemption at mid-century’, and despite her corresponding distrust in the displacement of responsibility onto a Christian saviour, ‘life itself is nevertheless ‘a debt to be repaid’ with a ‘loving, penitential purpose’’.²⁰⁵ This allows us to see that this transference is not just occurring between an Anglican and a Jewish economy of repentance but between a physical ‘debt’ to life (owed to the mother) and a spiritual one. Here, then, redemption lies in the transcendence of bodily weakness through the transcendence of purely biological ties, necessarily devaluing them in the process.

Although the primary concern of this chapter is not *Daniel Deronda*’s treatment of Judaism, it is important to note that the concept of the ‘Jewish soul’ is itself related to gender, inheritance and identity. Whilst it is tempting to use the matrilineality of Orthodox Judaism, where the maternal line is crucial to the metaphysical soul, as evidence that *Deronda* is still in some way honouring the mother, this is far from a uniform aspect of the faith—the majority of Karaite Judaism, for example, is patrilineal—and most other aspects of Orthodox Jewish family law is centred around the male ancestral line. The relationship between gender and legitimacy has always been a live concern in Jewish thought. Even within the body of criticism, from David Kaufmann’s enthusiastic 1877 review onwards, that reads the novel as a broadly positive move towards a fairer representation of Judaism, the notion of the ‘soul’ is linked to the seriousness with which Mordecai’s Kabbalist, proto-Zionist thought is portrayed, rather than any kind of recuperation of maternity. Cynthia Scheinberg’s recent work on *Daniel Deronda* and Jewish poetics gives a convincing account of the novel as a ‘self-conscious revision of the Christian scriptural approach to Jewishness’, suggesting that Eliot, who was widely read in medieval Hebrew poetry, the Talmud and Kabbalah, is questioning the appropriation of Jewish texts and ideas by Christian doctrine and attempting to return some agency to Jewish authors and readers.²⁰⁶

Scheinberg’s comparison of Daniel to Jesus Christ in the Gospels in his ability to be ‘both Jew and not-Jew’ stakes its claim in Daniel’s ability to integrate his Jewish inheritance with a worldview recognisable to Christian readers.²⁰⁷ ‘The beloved ideas made flesh’ that

²⁰⁵ Schramm, *Atonement*, p. 213.

²⁰⁶ Cynthia Scheinberg, “‘The beloved ideas made flesh’: Daniel Deronda and Jewish Poetics’, *ELH*, 77.3 (Fall 2010), 813-839.

²⁰⁷ Scheinberg, p. 816.

Scheinberg quotes in her title contains deliberate echoes of the transubstantiation of Christian communion, and her thesis is that such ideas, figured as the ‘poetic energy’ that is so often referenced at crucial moments in Daniel’s narrative, are inherently related to the resolution of his identity crisis at the novel’s conclusion:

The “chief poetic energy” is that which connects the everyday, actual, and often vulgar aspects of life to the great larger heroic, moral, and aesthetic questions of existence. Eliot’s narrator asks whether Daniel (and perhaps this very novel itself) can achieve that higher vision—a vision that would transcend a marriage plot in the name of higher moral and spiritual “battle.” on another level, she suggests that Daniel’s own “poetic energy” depends upon his ability to see beyond the stereotypical Jewish associations he brings to his understanding of Jews and Judaism, and on his ability to understand “commonplace” Jews as the embodiment of “beloved ideas made flesh.”²⁰⁸

Whilst I agree with Scheinberg’s analysis of the spiritual turn in Daniel’s narrative, I want to focus on what is ignored, or removed, in this ‘transcendence’ of the marriage plot. Scheinberg’s use of ‘transcendence’ is apt, both in its obvious religious signifiers and its implications for Daniel’s marriage to Mirah: surpassed by the masculine visions of her brother, their union is a means to an end rather than an end in itself. The necessity that she identifies for Mordecai to learn how to engage with the fleshly world of these ‘commonplace Jews’ is consistent with Eliot’s notion of universal ideas ‘ennobling’ in some way the vulgarity of physical humanity, but with a crucial alteration. Scheinberg writes that as ‘a contemporary repository of Jewish/Hebrew textuality, Mordecai is threatened with a kind of textual and philosophical extinction if he cannot find a way to adapt his ideas to a broader Jewish audience. Daniel becomes to Mordecai a living hope for the idea that his “beloved ideas” can “become flesh”’.²⁰⁹ This substitution of physical inheritance and reproduction with intellectual and spiritual continuance figures Daniel as a substitute wife and mother who surpasses what he is modelled upon; he becomes the body through which Mordecai’s line can continue. The process by which the ‘beloved ideas’ are ‘made flesh’ necessitates not only the absence of the female body, but the appropriation of its reproductive abilities by men: Daniel’s spiritual destiny functions primarily as an assertion of the fantasy of male parthenogenesis that dictates the ending of the novel.

²⁰⁸ Scheinberg, p. 827.

²⁰⁹ Scheinberg, p. 829.

i: mothers and others

Without succumbing to the temptation to embark upon a taxonomy of mothers in *Daniel Deronda*, we can see quite clearly the oscillating pattern that repeats throughout the novel's character system. The mother is either reduced to manageable proportions and confined within the domestic sphere, or invested with an unsettling, malevolent power. Both are implacably linked to origins. The domesticated mothers, comprising of docile nuisances like Lady Mallinger and Mrs Cohen, the intelligent but ultimately meddling Mrs Arrowpoint, the kind-hearted but anti-Semitic Mrs Meyrick and Gwendolen's mother Mrs Davilow, have the power to complicate matters only within their own familial environment: Mrs Meyrick's over-indulgence of Hans is blamed for his spoilt and erratic behaviour, whilst Catherine Arrowpoint finds contentment with Herr Klesmer only by disobeying her mother's wish for her to marry Grandcourt. Mrs Davilow's financial troubles are a governing factor in the series of moral bargains Gwendolen strikes with herself in order to enable her own marriage to Grandcourt. From its very beginning, intended in part to save her mother's pride, Gwendolen's marriage is shadowed by the two distorted doubles of these conventionally domestic maternal characters: Lydia Glasher, the mother of Grandcourt's illegitimate children, and the Alcharisi, in whom she mistakenly locates the source of her atonement for the wrongs she believes she has done to Lydia and her children. Both Lydia and the Alcharisi are repeatedly linked to classical tropes of feminine destruction. The arrival of the diamonds on Gwendolen's wedding night brings 'the Furies' across Grandcourt's threshold (331), and Lydia takes pains to continue her campaign of terror:

Lydia, feeding on the probabilities in her favour, devoured her helpless wrath along with that pleasanter nourishment; but she could not let her discretion go entirely without the reward of making a Medusa-like apparition before Gwendolen, vindictiveness and jealousy finding relief in an outlet of venom, though it were futile as that of a viper already flung to the other side of the hedge. (563)

Here, Lydia's maternity is both asserted and subverted: the power she holds over Gwendolen stems from the children she has borne her fiancé, but 'nourishment' and 'feeding' position her as a consumer, rather than a provider, the refusal of maternal care doubly compounded by the venomous nature of the 'outlet'—like contaminated milk—and its ultimate futility.

This ghoulish appearance is not entirely without consequence: the slow-moving venom of guilt is already advancing on Gwendolen, contributing to her murderous fantasies

and subsequent nervous collapse. The Alcharisi, ‘a mysterious Fate rather than [...] the longed-for mother’ (583) is drawn less crudely than Lydia, who becomes something of a pantomime villain to all but Gwendolen. She is repeatedly figured in language of sacredness and perversion. During their first interview, Daniel is deeply affected by her indifference to his protestations of filial love, ‘clutching his coat-collar as if he were keeping himself above water by it, and feeling his blood in the sort of commotion that might have been excited if he had seen her going through some strange rite of religion which gave a sacredness to crime’ (584). ‘Rite of religion’ and ‘sacredness to crime’ combine with the context of the mother denying her son and the classical references and bring to mind the image of Agave ripping off Pentheus’s head in a Bacchic frenzy: as the ‘natural’ bonds of duty and affection are distorted, the son is harmed by the mother.

Where Lydia Glasher’s malevolent maternity expands beyond the confines of the house Grandcourt tries to contain her in, the most positive portrayal of a living mother in the novel, Mrs Meyrick, remains firmly located within the home. The Meyrick house is a highly feminine domain, where Hans is spoilt and Daniel is worshipped: ‘Kate burns a pastille before his portrait every day [...] And I carry his signature in a little black-silk bag round my neck to keep off the cramp. And Amy says the multiplication-table in his name. We must all do something extra in honour of him, now he has brought you to us’ (207-8). As such, the Meyrick’s house represents the realm of the maternal made stable: the rituals that take place here are androcentric and protective. Eliot repeatedly diminishes the already small house with comparisons to the male body. The majestic ending of Chapter 38 paints Mordecai’s religious fantasies with generous strokes on a limitless vista of possibility: ‘He yearned with a poet’s yearning for the wide sky, the far-reaching vista of bridges, the tender and fluctuating light on the water which seems to breathe with a life that can shiver and mourn, be comforted and rejoice’ (448). Immediately after this, Chapter 39 opens with the diminutive Meyrick residence, and Mordecai’s ‘poetic yearning’ is replaced with women’s work. When Herr Klesmer enters, the surroundings themselves begin to recede, the rooms shrinking ‘into closets, the cottage piano [seeming] a ridiculous toy’ and so, too, do the women themselves: ‘his grandiose air was making Mab herself feel a ridiculous toy to match the cottage piano’ (450). Although Klesmer’s talent is confirmed, the Meyrick daughters, despite their own artistic endeavours, change their opinion of him based on their filial affection for their adopted sister Mirah, not his musical prowess. Mirah’s good opinion of Klesmer is grounded

in her desire to confirm the existing hierarchy: she ‘liked the look of Klesmer, feeling sure he would scold her, like a great musician and a kind man’ (451).

Yet, unlike the tacit approval of the domestic status quo we shall see in *Adam Bede*, even in the harmonious scenes in the Meyrick residence the transactional structure of this peaceful domesticity is explicitly acknowledged. Towards the end of the chapter, once Klesmer has pronounced his verdict on Mirah’s abilities, Kate—who, working as a teacher, functions as an economic agent outside of her family home—playfully voices the economy of opinion that has structured the entire visit, and in doing so, contextualises it: ‘You don’t consult me, ma [...] I notice mothers are like the people I deal with—the girls’ doings are always priced low’ (455). Her mother’s response, clothed in affectionate humour, is startling:

“My dear child, the boys are such a trouble—we could never put up with them, if we didn’t make believe they were worth more,” said Mrs. Meyrick, just as her boy entered. “Hans, we want your opinion about Mirah’s dress.” (455)

Here, Mrs Meyrick acknowledges that the discrepancy in the treatment of men and women is a direct assertion of value; moreover, this value is simultaneously entirely arbitrary and completely necessary. As ‘her boy’ enters, the conversation returns to practicalities, and male opinion is restored to primacy. Without the complicity of the participants in each individual evaluative recognition and exchange, the entire system would cease to function: the fact that Eliot draws attention to this complicity through the most wholly domestic characters themselves further isolates *Daniel Deronda* as a novel that operates on a representational brink.

Mirah, a character with remarkably little interiority, is a function of this fractured narrative purpose. She begins the novel as a motherless woman without family who, in her singularity, possesses the possibility of action. As she is adopted by Mrs Meyrick and her daughters and acquires the patronage of Daniel, Mirah is absorbed into the domestic space and neutralised by its vocabulary. At the end of Chapter 43, contemplating the Meyrick household, Daniel imagines Mirah as furniture, her speech more important for its sound than its content: ‘But was not Mirah to be there? What furniture can give such finish to a room as a tender woman’s face? –and is there any harmony of tints that had such stirrings of delight as the sweet modulations of her voice?’ At the end of this passage, Mirah’s importance is linked primarily to her relation to Mordecai: ‘Here is one good, at least, thought Deronda,

that comes to Mordecai from having fixed his imagination on me. He was recovered a perfect sister, whose affection is waiting for him' (507). This recovery can be read as a version of the purified maternal recuperation Adelman identifies in Shakespearean romance: the transaction can only be completed if Mirah is assimilated fully into the sphere of gendered filial relations as 'a perfect sister', defined primarily by her obedience to the masculine family unit.

In *Daniel Deronda* 'foreignness' is ultimately less of a barrier to substitutionary familial relationships than class. In Chapter 46, Mrs Meyrick again makes explicit the transactional relationships of the novel, assuring Daniel that she 'can live up to the level of the pawnbroker's mother' (528). Referring to the Cohens, Mrs Meyrick is acknowledging that the particular type of fellowship offered by the vulgar 'pawnbroker's mother' is the base level against which all other relationships can be judged. The reference to maternity here is not incidental: by specifying the mother of the pawnbroker rather than the pawnbroker himself, Eliot is calling to mind the Malthusian anxiety of social reproduction and poverty; the 'blooming body' and the societal want contained within it. Despite their kindness to Mordecai, Daniel is almost comically eager to confirm that the Cohens have no hold over his new friend:

"Is there any kinship between this family and yours?" said Deronda.

"Only the kinship of Israel. My soul clings to these people, who have sheltered me and given me succour of the affection that bides in Jewish hearts, as a sweet odour in things long crushed and hidden from the outer air. It is good for me to bear with their ignorance and be bound to them in gratitude, that I may keep in mind the spiritual poverty of the Jewish millions, and not put impatient knowledge in the stead of loving wisdom."

"But you don't feel bound to continue with them now there is a closer tie to draw you?" (532)

Ultimately Daniel gets what he hopes for, and the Cohens are made ridiculous. Their own story of a lost daughter and a grieving mother is relegated to the status of a colourful embellishment, their socioeconomic circumstances denying them the pathos afforded to the other narratives of familial loss and recovery in the text. Their understandable sadness at losing Mordecai, their long-term guest and surrogate family member, is figured in relentlessly financial terms, with the domestic maternal tenderness so valued in memories of Mirah and Mordecai's mother reduced to vaguely ridiculous sentiment by this other Mr Cohen: 'a child-bearing, tender-hearted thing is the woman of our people. Her children are

mostly stout, as you'll say Addy's are, and she's not mushy, but her heart is tender' (535). Even the paternal bond between Mordecai and the young Jacob Cohen is rendered materialistically, and he is dispatched with once and for all in Chapter 52 in the letter from Hans that Daniel receives in Genoa. The child, who has been enjoying his former relationship with Mordecai in Daniel's absence—emphasising again the substitution of Mordecai's parental desires to 'reproduce' his learning from the unsatisfactory Jacob to Daniel himself—is described as being as devoted to Mordecai as ever, just like a 'dog' (599).

ii: Gwendolen's maternal mathematics

Jacob Cohen is not the only character in *Daniel Deronda* whose devotion is dog-like:

And Gwendolen? She was thinking of Deronda much more than he was thinking of her—often wondering what were his ideas “about things,” and how his life was occupied. But a lap-dog would be necessarily at a loss in framing to itself the motives and adventures of doghood at large; and it was as far from Gwendolen's conception that Deronda's life could be determined by the historical destiny of the Jews, as that he could rise into the air on a brazen horse, and so vanish from her horizon in the form of a twinkling star. (508)

Despite her considerable suffering, the hierarchy of kinship in *Daniel Deronda* means Gwendolen's misery is confined to secondary proportions. Here, Gwendolen's canine quality is her inability to understand the importance of the relationships established by Mordecai's revelations, and her own attempts to escape the boundaries of her situation are attributed to her over-active imagination: ‘With all the sense of inferiority that had been forced upon her, it was inevitable that she should imagine a larger place for herself in his thoughts than she actually possessed’ (508). Eliot's narrator is not unsympathetic to Gwendolen's plight, but there is a discrepancy between male and female sacrifice in the novel that is expressed through this mismatch of interior and exterior senses of scale, something that characterises the entirety of Gwendolen's story.

Gwendolen could be read, after all, as a laudatory example of self-renunciation. Whatever her initial motives are for courting Grandcourt's affection, by the time she accepts his marriage proposal Gwendolen is foregoing her own future to secure her mother's financial stability. When Mrs Davilow tells her daughter, still valiantly performing her role as ‘a very good Mrs Grandcourt’, that she “‘would not have had you marry for my sake. Your happiness itself is half mine,’” the irony is painful: Gwendolen's is a thwarted sacrifice that fails to achieve its objective, returning her to her mother's house and to stasis (514). Deronda's declaration that, in her widowhood, Gwendolen can and ‘will, be among the best of women, such as make others glad that they were born’ is rich with the implication that this ‘best’ version of her womanhood is a return to the domestic confinement of her original family unit, with no generative future (716). Eliot figures this as a new beginning for Gwendolen, but the language of reproduction is co-opted into a kind of purified desire:

Mingled emotions streamed through her frame with a strength that seemed the beginning of a new existence, having some new power or other which stirred in her vaguely. So pregnant is the divine hope of moral recovery with the energy that fulfils it. So potent in us is the infused action of another soul, before which we bow in complete love. But the new existence seemed inseparable from Deronda: the hope seemed to make his presence permanent. It was not her thought, that he loved her, and would cling to her—a thought would have tottered with improbability; it was her spiritual breath. For the first time since that terrible moment on the sea a flush rose and spread over her cheek, brow and neck, deepened an instant or two, and then gradually disappeared. She did not speak. (716)

‘Pregnant’, here, is a moral condition rather than a physical one, as any material connection between such ‘souls’ is precluded by the hopelessness of Gwendolen’s unproductive love for Daniel: correspondingly, ‘breath’ becomes ‘spiritual’, and her one physical response—a blush—is neutralised by her silence.

‘What future lay before her as Mrs Grandcourt gone back to her mother, who would be made destitute again by the rupture of the marriage for which one chief excuse had been that it had brought that mother a maintenance?’ (560-561). Trapped between two opposing poles of maternal obligation, Gwendolen oscillates between the prospect of freedom at the cost of her mother’s comfort and her guilt at depriving the Glasher children of their inheritance. On the disastrous yachting holiday, physically confined to ever-decreasing spaces, Gwendolen’s attempts at balancing her ethical books cannot progress to any kind of atonement, trapped as she is in a circle of culpability.²¹⁰ In her mind, salvation seems only to be possible for the completely innocent, something that Eliot’s narration endorses:

She could not excuse herself by saying that there had been a tacit part of the contract on her side—namely, that she meant to rule and have her own way. With all her early indulgence in the disposition to dominate, she was not one of the narrow-brained women who through life regard all their own selfish demands as rights, and every claim upon themselves as an injury. She had a root of conscience in her, and the process of purgatory had begun for her on the green earth: she knew that she had been wrong. (623)

This inability to ‘excuse herself’, although linked to a hopeful root and the ‘green earth’, is fertile ground only for increasingly hysterical—I use this word intentionally—admissions of guilt, as she figures herself almost as a murderess, locating her crime in financial language:

²¹⁰ For an account of the legal implications of Eliot’s erasure of the distinction between thought and deed, see Rodensky, *The Crime in Mind*.

I wanted to make my gain out of another's loss— you remember? It was like roulette—and the money burnt into me. And I could not complain. It was as if I had prayed that another should lose and I should win. And I had won. I knew it all—I knew I was guilty. (645)

Like Hetty Sorrell before her, Gwendolen's adolescent selfishness is figured as a serious offence against the ethical reciprocity of mutual 'claim', and the return of sexual desire and its consummation is a specifically female crime. Crucially, where Hetty's actual pregnancy leads to the crime of infanticide, Gwendolen's body becomes a site of imagined reproductive harm that, in its all-encompassing psychic hold, characterises all reproduction in the novel, rather than one specific child, one specific crime.²¹¹

In her analysis of moral responsibility and sacrifice in Eliot's fiction, Jan-Melissa Schramm uses a quotation from *Romola* that conceptualises misdeeds as progeny:

Eliot feared the possible erosion of accountability for criminal behaviour which may stem from the evangelical reliance on the cleansing blood of the lamb—mechanisms of repentance and forgiveness must not allow us to escape the education supplied by the 'inexorable' and 'unpitying law of consequences': deeds, 'like children born to use', assert their 'indestructible life' outside of our own consciousness (R, p.129), and duly chasten the offenders. It is ideologically essential that identity can be fixed for such purposes.²¹²

In Eliot's final novel, this alignment of salvation and reproduction is at its most complex and its most figurative. Although Lydia Glasher's children appear in the text, their power is more symbolic than actual, and Gwendolen's initial Hetty Sorrell-like carelessness with children becomes an obsession with what parenthood represents. As Schramm notes, her fixation upon the supposedly illegitimate Daniel as the substitute through whom she can atone for her usurpation of Grandcourt's illegitimate children provides an 'almost inverse symmetry' that offers Gwendolen some redemption in the expansion of her sympathies as she seeks to 'make atonement for her own act of dispossession'.²¹³ Yet as Daniel moves away from Gwendolen's domestic orbit and toward a different economy of atonement altogether, Gwendolen, in stasis, must remain to count the cost of her choices. Unable to occupy the space she requires, her ultimate chance of salvation arrives second hand, in her letter to Daniel on his wedding day,

²¹¹ Doreen Thierauf argues for a 'causal link between marital abuse and spiritual and biological barrenness' in 'Daniel Deronda, Marital Rape, and the End of Reproduction', *Victorian Review*, 43.2 (2017), 247-269 (p. 254).

²¹² Schramm, *Atonement*, p. 181.

²¹³ Schramm, *Atonement*, pp. 212-213.

and although it is plausible that she will attain the goodness she hopes for, it is harder to imagine her attaining happiness. There are moments in which Gwendolen appears to be an inverted double of Dorothea Brooke: both women are able to do good only within the limits circumscribed by their context and their gender, but Dorothea's diffusive benefit has its roots in generativity and progression, located as it ultimately is in her children.²¹⁴ Gwendolen, although she may indeed 'live to be one of the very best of women', exists within the psychic economy of *Daniel Deronda*, not *Middlemarch*, and her reproductive body can offer her only to a kind of static, sorrowful obedience: every aspect of procreation is linked to her misdeeds.

Here we can return to the Malthusian logic that structures *Scenes of Clerical Life*, extending it to the extremity of Gwendolen's inaction. Her potentially reproductive body is rewritten as the site of the moral transactions that bound her to misery in the first place:

Some unhappy wives are soothed by the possibility that they may become mothers; but Gwendolen felt that to desire a child for herself would have been consenting to the completion of the injury she had been guilty of. She was reduced to dread lest she should become a mother. It was not the image of a new sweetly-budding life that came as a vision of deliverance from the monotony of distaste: it was an image of another sort. In the irritable, fluctuating stages of despair, gleams of hope came in the form of some possible accident. To dwell on the benignity of the accident was a refuge from worse temptation. (626)

Gwendolen's belief that to desire a child of her own would be tantamount to an admission of her own complete moral bankruptcy makes sense within the narrative system of the novel. Yet the linguistic transference that occurs between a 'sweetly-budding life' and the temptation to conjure thoughts of harm befalling Grandcourt, the presumed father of the child imagined in the first sentence, embodies this ill will as a surrogate or substitute child. 'Deliverance', in this context, becomes an unsettling pun. Ethically unable to experience the transition of actual pregnancy and motherhood, Gwendolen is mother only to the 'Fantasies [that] moved within her like ghosts', the 'hidden rites' of the mind that link her to the mythology of monstrous mothers inhabited by Lydia and the Alcharisi (564). Like the metaphorical double of *Adam Bede's* Hetty Sorrel, what dwells inside Gwendolen's body has the capacity to turn a woman into a murderer. During her interview with Daniel after

²¹⁴ Jane Wood, in *Passion and Pathology in Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), writes that Dorothea's maternity is enabled by her 'altruism and visionary idealism', which are 'positive and healthy signs of social integration' (p. 149).

Grandcourt's death, Gwendolen's harmful impulse has taken on a life of its own: 'I only know that I saw my wish outside me' (648). Although this can be partly accounted for by Gwendolen's exhausted emotional state, even Daniel's rational reassurance accepts the equivalence of her murderous will and the state of childbearing:

Its effect is confined to the motives in your own *breast*. Within ourselves our evil will is momentous, and sooner or later it *works its way outside us*—it may be in the vitiation *that breeds evil acts*, but it also may be in the self-aborrence that stings us into better striving. (651, emphasis mine)

The 'self-aborrence' is key. Gwendolen is right to hope for salvation, but it will come only with the banishment of her potential maternal body. As the narrative focus of the text requires a complete shift of focus to the paternal identification of Daniel and his departure from England, this is something that Gwendolen accepts: with regard to Grandcourt's will, the childless widow declares herself to be 'saved from robbing others' (651).

iii: the Alcharisi

Gwendolen's declaration at the end of Book 7 echoes a phrase used by Daniel himself thirty pages earlier, during his final interview with his mother. Speaking of his newfound knowledge of his Jewish inheritance, Daniel implores his mother to think of his allegiance to his grandfather's way of life in a positive, even salvific light:

And now, you have restored me my inheritance— events have brought a fuller restitution than you could have made— you have been saved from robbing my people of my service and me of my duty: can you not bring your whole soul to consent to this? (616-17)

She cannot bring herself to do so, and she disappears from the novel shortly after this interaction takes place, allowing the final part of the book to solidify Daniel's kinship with his male ancestors and with Mordecai: the banishment of the mother enables the realisation of the male parthenogenetic family. This sudden move to narrative action has its roots in Gwendolen's stasis. In Gallagher's analysis of the novel's paradigmatic character system, she places Gwendolen as the centre of a series of analogies:

Gwendolen is refracted and multiplied through other stories in Daniel's plot, especially those of Mirah, the reluctant performer who nevertheless makes an honest living by her talent, and the Alcharisi, Daniel's mother, who sacrifices him for her genius.²¹⁵

As soon as she appears in the flesh, Daniel's mother ceases to be a useful imaginary symbol; the impetus for Gwendolen's misreading of Daniel's heritage and 'the centre of a nexus of analogies and serves as a primary template for female misery'.²¹⁶ The relationship between Daniel's mother and Gwendolen becomes one of interlinking notions of value, sacrifice, and commodity. Whilst Gallagher's argument linking the Alcharisi to Eliot's dread of overproduction is persuasive, it is not the only anxiety at play: in Book 7, 'The Mother and the Son', we see Eliot grappling openly with motherhood, duty, and identity. Neil Hertz's explicit identification of Eliot with the Alcharisi is perhaps too simplistic a reading, glossing over as it does the importance of maternity, but his assertion that when Daniel's 'mother removes herself from his life, her disappearance may be read as an exorcism, a scapegoating' touches on a primary argument of this chapter.²¹⁷ Hertz's use of 'scapegoating' inevitably

²¹⁵ Gallagher, *Body*, p. 140.

²¹⁶ Gallagher, *Body*, pp. 140-141.

²¹⁷ Hertz, p. 112.

provides a reminder of the need to link nineteenth-century discourses of sacrifice to motherhood, but its coupling with ‘exorcism’ is perhaps even more telling: it is not simply that the culmination of Daniel’s dual vocation/marriage plot requires the sacrifice of his mother as a scapegoat, but that the power she exerts over masculine identity must be purged—or exorcised—by the total removal of her body from the text.

‘The Mother and the Son’ begins with the destruction of the comforting fantasy of an imaginary suffering mother by the letter Daniel receives, first through the disclosure of her name and rank—the Princess Halm-Eberstein—and then with her sign-off: ‘your unknown mother’ (575). Immediately prior to this introduction of an unknown and therefore ungovernable quantity into a space previously occupied by a familiar symbol, Daniel loses, too, the father he believed himself to be sure of, Sir Hugo:

“Is my father also living?”

The answer came almost immediately in a low emphatic tone—

“No.” (570)

This interview is interspersed throughout with the vocabulary of harm, as Sir Hugo, hoping to be assured that the secrecy surrounding Daniel’s parentage has not been ‘an injury’ but finding no such comfort forthcoming, proceeds with ‘a more anxious tenderness, as if he had a new fear of wounding’ (570). As Book 7 begins, Daniel’s chief wound is his sense of an unravelling identity, bringing his entire past into question: ‘There had been a resolved concealment which made all inference untrustworthy, and the very name he bore might be a false one’ (578). No longer able to identify himself as a father’s son, Deronda exchanges the freedom of the English landscape for domestic confinement in Genoa, engaged in the highly feminised, passive state of waiting. ‘Day after day passed’ as ‘Deronda, in his suspense, watched this revolving of the days as he might have watched a wonderful clock’ (579-80). Removed from the masculine intellectual world, his introversion increases to such an extent that his thought processes begin to mirror those he warned against in Gwendolen—‘that state of mind to which all subjects become personal’—and his desires begin to echo Mirah’s as he yearns for ‘the attraction of devoted service; sometimes with a sweet irresistible hopefulness that the very best of human possibilities might befall him—the blending of a complete personal love in one current with a larger duty’ (581).

The two meetings that take place between Daniel and his mother prove the necessity of this exorcism, both in order to reach its narrative conclusion and to protect its protagonist's masculine identity. The Alcharisi's rejection of traditionally feminine behaviour—'Men followed me from one country to another. I was living myriad lives in one. I did not want a child' (584)—centres on 'natural' reproductive urges, and establishes a system of surrogate equivalences, a zero sum game of femininity: in her rejection of maternity, her son absorbs the traits she lacks. Whilst his mother's physical handsomeness is repeatedly described as something linked to her strength of will and unusual talent, Daniel's aspect is not one of handsomeness, but 'beauty'. Entering the room, 'he felt himself changing colour like a girl' as his mother subverts his previous 'ideal meetings' with her; his beauty is referred to as 'adornment', recalling the passage in which Mirah's face is described so; and his mother's first words to him are 'You are a beautiful creature!' (582-83). Daniel begins the interview by attempting to transfer Sir Hugo's fear of wounding onto his mother, hoping to retain the idealised image of female suffering, but she returns the focus of the 'wound' to his parental identity:

"I used to think that you might be suffering," said Deronda, anxious above all not to wound her.

"I used to wish that I could be a comfort to you."

"I am suffering. But with a suffering you can't comfort." (583)

Chapter 51 begins with an epigram from Eliot's poem 'Erinna', about the Greek poetess who 'died in early youth, but was chained by her mother to the spinning-wheel. She had as yet known the charm of existence in imagination alone.'²¹⁸ Gillian Beer points out that the figure of Erinna can be seen as a counterpart to that of Armgart, another eponymous female artist that Eliot devotes a poem to, and that both are symbolic of the repression of women's talents and thus relevant to *Daniel Deronda* as a whole.²¹⁹ Whilst this is true, here, situated as it is at the beginning of the chapter, the fragment of 'Erinna' can also be read as symbolic of Daniel himself. The description of 'Erinna with the thick-coiled mat | Of raven hair and deepest agate eyes' bears more than a passing resemblance to Daniel's own dark-haired 'beauty', and the 'dreary' practice of isolating, domestic 'insect-labour' is recognisable as the state of static femininity we have seen Daniel begin to emulate whilst

²¹⁸ Eliot, *The Complete Shorter Poetry of George Eliot*, ed. Antonie Gerard van den Broeck, 2 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005) II, p. 113.

²¹⁹ Gillian Beer, *George Eliot* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986).

waiting for his mother's summons.²²⁰ Chained by her mother to the spinning-wheel, an endeavour of marginalised, feminised labour, Erinna—according to Eliot's own description of her in the preface to the poem—was confined to an imaginary life: Daniel, as we have seen, is paralysed by the prospect of his imagined mother colliding with the actual.

When this collision occurs, it destabilises Daniel's masculine identity in a remarkable instance of transactional sympathy:

But to Deronda's nature the moment was cruel: it made the filial yearning of his life a disappointed pilgrimage to a shrine where there were no longer the symbols of sacredness. It seemed that *all the woman lacking in her was present in him* as he said, with some tremor in his voice—
“Then are we to part, and I never be anything to you?”
“It is better so,” said the Princess, in a softer, mellower voice.
(615, emphasis mine)

In her denial of Daniel's kinship, his mother transfers her 'lack' into a presence; into a wound. Although the conditions under which Daniel will reassemble his identity in his grandfather's image are already being established in this exchange, the Alcharisi denies Daniel a position as her biological son, suggesting that he wishes to become a kind of surrogate for her actual children:

There would be nothing but hard duty for you, even if it were possible for you to *take the place of my son*. You would not love me. Don't deny it [...] I know what is the truth. You don't like what I did. You are angry with me. You think I robbed you of something. You are on your grandfather's side. (615, emphasis mine)

Schramm and others have detailed the importance of paternal inheritance and the anxiety of the deceived Isaac in nineteenth-century fiction; here, that anxiety is simultaneously affirmed and rejected, as the Alcharisi first casts Daniel in the role of the fraudulent heir—'take the place of my son'—before denying him his own claim to grievance: 'You *think* I robbed you of something'. Until Daniel meets Joseph Kalonymos and retrieves the tangible proof of his paternal inheritance, he still bears the wounds of this emasculation. During his interview with Gwendolen, and required to resume the role of her paternalistic confessor, the experience prevents him from doing so: 'She sank in her chair again and broke into sobs. Even Deronda had no place in her consciousness at that moment. He was completely unmanned' (646).

²²⁰ Eliot, *Complete Shorter Poetry*, II, p. 114.

Daniel, with his renewed sense of duty and vocation, is still yet to relocate his masculinity to his new consciousness: Gwendolen's suffering, we might say, is too close for comfort.

The events of Book 7 require Daniel to finally make the painful transition between the two kinds of kinship he has been able to oscillate between whilst protected by the paradox of his origin: 'A veiled figure with enigmatic speech had thrust away that image which, in spite of uncertainty, his clinging thought had gradually modelled and made the possessor of his tenderness and duteous longing' (577). The embodied mother displaces the fantasy, and in doing so creates a need for a new definition of filial duty. The Alcharisi denies the 'natural' bond of parenthood, declaring of Daniel 'I have not the foolish notion that you can love me merely because I am your mother' (583), and disowns her own parents entirely: 'I was born amongst them without my will. I banished them as soon as I could' (614). Her complete rejection of 'precedent'—'precedent had no excuse for her' (584)—is a subversion of the natural order of things: Daniel, aligned through his gender with her oppressive past, 'would have hampered my life with your young growth from the old root' (620). Embedded within this question of maternal kinship is a question of value. They are unable to agree upon the worth of his Jewish heritage, as she constantly reiterates that she 'did not think that I deprived you of anything worth having' (584), and on the worth of interpersonal obligation: where Daniel sees his true vocation, his mother sees 'subjection' that 'takes another for a larger self, enclosing this one' (620); the hampering of an ambitious life 'with other lives' through bonds of nurture and care (584).²²¹

Each of these encounters turn upon a mutual misunderstanding of the value system the other is working within. Both believe that, in the sacrificial transaction that has occurred between them, they are the renouncing party:

"You rebuke me. Well—I am the loser. And you are angry because I banish you. What could you do for me but weary your own patience? Your mother is a shattered woman. My sense of life is little more than a sense of what was—except when the pain is present. You reproach me that I parted with you. I had joy enough without you then. Now you are come back to me, and I cannot make you a joy. Have you the cursing spirit of the Jew in you? Are you not able to forgive me? Shall you be glad to think I am punished because I was not a Jewish mother to you?"

²²¹ For an interesting discussion of Judaism and female theatrical talent, see *Modernity, Culture and 'the Jew'*, Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus (eds.) (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

“How can you ask me that?” said Deronda, remonstrantly. “Have I not besought you that I might now at least be a son to you? My grief is that you have declared me helpless to comfort you. I would give up much that is dear for the sake of soothing your anguish.” (618)

His mother figures her sacrifice of Daniel as a double loss, both of the actual child and of a kind of inverted legacy: the hope that she had prevented her father’s wishes from bearing fruit. Daniel, on the other hand, is grieving for the loss of his ideal mother to the actual. The Alcharisi refuses him even the satisfaction of renunciation in the name of duty, declaring that ‘You shall give up nothing’, but in doing so she relies upon the ties of affection he still feels: ‘You shall be happy. You shall let me think of you as happy. I shall have done you no harm. You have no reason to curse me. You shall feel sorry for me as they feel for the dead whom they say prayers for’ (618). Within this incantation-like command, she is able to effect one final substitution: despite her ‘loss’ of Daniel to the memory of her father’s will, she can replace her mental image of her oppressor with that of her son: ‘But perhaps now I have satisfied my father’s will, your face will come instead of his— your young, loving face’ (596).

In so positioning Daniel as a barrier to ‘come between me and the dead’ (618-19), the Alcharisi is trying to find some benefit in the outcome she hoped to avoid by keeping him in ignorance of his heritage: she begins to read his embrace of his heritage as her own final act of atonement. In the face of maternal rejection, Daniel is forced to remake himself in the image of his male ancestors, enabling him to align his ‘birthright’ with his relationship with Mordecai. His mother has nothing to bequeath him—‘A great singer and actress is a queen, but she gives no royalty to her son’(591)—except the knowledge he can glean of his father and grandfather. Although even the fear that his name is not his own proves true as, asking his mother ‘Then it is not my real name?’ she responds, painfully casually, ‘Oh, as real as any other’ (594), Daniel is able to recuperate a version of masculine selfhood through the paternal line. By the middle of their first interview, he is already linguistically aligning himself with his grandfather’s family through the collective noun ‘us’: ‘Mother! take us all into your heart—the living and the dead’ (591).

This new alignment necessarily distances Daniel from Gwendolen: as she moves towards an increasingly explicit understanding of her guilt as a function of her fertile body, Daniel is removing himself from that particular social realm altogether. This compounds the

twisted doubling that occurs between Gwendolen and the Alcharisi, reinforced by the famous passage in which Eliot discusses the actress's 'double consciousness' (586). This brings us once again to the body of critical work on the intertextual relationships in Eliot's oeuvre, and particularly to Neil Hertz's work on 'Armgart': like 'Erinna', the poem is frequently invoked in discussions of the maternal presence in *Daniel Deronda*. The poem's protagonist, too, is an accomplished actress punished for her ambition and talent by losing her voice. The metaphor employed in the poem is that of motherhood, as she is urged to 'bury [her] dead joy' and find solace in transference: 'Mothers do so, bereaved | then learn to love | Another's living child'.²²² Armgart herself likens her suffering to stillbirth: 'Oh it is hard | To take the little corpse, and lay it low, | And say, 'None misses it but me'.²²³ Hertz's reading of this is persuasive, and places Armgart in a more forgiving narrative than that of *Daniel Deronda*: 'this burial, of a fragment of herself, is a sacrifice intended to bear fruit: Armgart, it is implied, will eventually be the better for it.'²²⁴

The Alcharisi, however, rejects the narrative of salvation Daniel offers her, refusing to mediate the suffering she perceives to be the lot of the talented woman:

"Though my own experience has been quite different, I enter into the painfulness of your struggle. I can imagine the hardship of an enforced renunciation."
 "No," said the Princess, shaking her head, and folding her arms with an air of decision. "You are not a woman. You may try—but you can never imagine what it is to have a man's force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl."
 (588)

Unlike Armgart and unlike Gwendolen, Daniel's mother does not believe, in a world already weighted against female expression, that self-renunciation will bring anything but complicity with those who aim to silence her. Within the narrative of the novel, her unconsenting voice must be banished for the plots to complete themselves, but Eliot does not implement this exorcism lightly, or without sympathy. Whilst the Alcharisi rejects Daniel's interpretation of the sacrificial transaction they are engaged in, Eliot does not lose sight of the fact that the circumstances of his birth mean that she would not have been able to exercise her remarkable talent without foregoing a relationship with her son. Indeed, the tragedy of the Alcharisi is, perhaps, a natural one. In her final sickness, the Alcharisi's body, like Gwendolen's

²²² Eliot, *The Complete Shorter Poetry*, I, p. 134.

²²³ Eliot, *The Complete Shorter Poetry*, I, p. 134.

²²⁴ Hertz, p. 10.

murderous will, is figured as a dark inversion of its procreative possibility. The fatal illness she suffers from is 'growing in [her]', and the shadows that rise around her, like the embodiment of Gwendolen's wish for harm, are created by this negated fertility: 'Sickness makes them' (586).

iv: masculine kinship

After the disappearance of the Alcharisi, Daniel's kinship with his male ancestors and with Mordecai is solidified, and in this new metaphorical economy his mother, with nothing to bequeath him, is rendered infertile, as reproductive inheritance becomes a specifically male system. In this context, the exchange of goods that occurs during Daniel's subsequent meeting with his grandfather's friend Joseph Kalonymos is highly symbolic. Daniel's restitution as a father's son is figured by both Daniel and the Alcharisi herself in the language of ritual death and rebirth: 'I told [Kalonymos] that you were dead: I meant you to be dead to all the world of my childhood' (593); 'Something has determined that I shall be all the more the grandson whom you also willed to annihilate' (618). As his mother repeats her father's wish for 'a grandson with a true Jewish heart', the very act of speaking seems to be against her will: she speaks 'slowly with a new kind of chest-voice, as if she were quoting unwillingly' (617). Daniel follows this with an explicit acknowledgement of the overpowering of the maternal will by masculine duty, denying his mother any agency in the revelation of his identity:

No wonder if such facts come to reveal themselves in spite of concealments. The effects prepared by generations are likely to triumph over a contrivance which would bend them all to the satisfaction of self. Your will was strong, but my grandfather's trust which you accepted and did not fulfil—what you call his yoke—is the expression of something stronger, with deeper, farther-spreading roots, knit into the foundation of sacredness for all men. (618)

Here, Daniel establishes an interpretative chronology that awards significance to his earlier meetings with Mordecai and his chance encounter with Kalonymos in Germany. By the time he is preparing to meet Kalonymos on purpose, the transference from the maternal to the paternal realm is complete. He is still highly sensitive, but he is no longer the possessor of womanly traits: 'Long after the farewell he was kept passive by a weight of retrospective feeling [...] He allowed himself in his solitude to sob, with perhaps more than a woman's acuteness of compassion, over that woman's life so near to his, and yet so remote' (636). As he distances himself from his 'remote' mother, his compassion—although still a womanly feeling—supersedes a woman's capability.

For this transference of inheritance to occur, Daniel's mother's sacrifice is reconfigured once and for all as an act of theft, of fraud: 'You come with willing thankfulness

yourself to claim the kindred of heritage that wicked contrivance would have robbed you of. You come with a willing soul to declare, "I am the grandson of Daniel Charisi'" (670). Kalonymos, who either only has or only mentions male offspring of his own, is described in language that allows him to absorb the positive traits of motherhood into the masculine life of the mind: 'He spoke without difficulty in that liberal [German tongue] which takes many strange accents to its maternal bosom' (669). Echoing the religious fervour of Mordecai, Kalonymos uses the imagery of water and positive contagion that we recognise from 'Revelations', establishing a symbolic relationship between Daniel Charisi, who 'drank in learning as easily as the plant sucks up water' (672) and Mordecai, who has a similar belief in the positive reproductive possibilities of intellectual communication: 'he poured himself out to me' (672).

Like Mordecai, Kalonymos figures male interpersonal relations as sacred bonds: speaking of his relationship with Daniel Charisi, he repeatedly describes how the two boys 'bound' themselves to each other, for 'duty is the love of law; and law is the nature of the Eternal' (670). The theft metaphor returns, as Kalonymos reinforces the notion of Daniel's new identity as a vocational duty: 'When he was dead, they sought to rob him: but they could not rob him of me. I rescued that remainder of him which he had prized and preserved for his offspring. And I have restored to him the offspring they had robbed him of' (671). Thus Daniel is able to imagine a kind of positive fecundity in the wake of maternal destruction: borrowing from Milton, Eliot allows his grandfather's words 'to speak with him in those written memorials which, says Milton, "contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul whose progeny they are"' (670). Daniel, in this new landscape of masculine procreative possibility, finally discovers the familial identity he craves, seeming 'to himself to be touching the electric chain of his own ancestry' (670).

This substitutionary masculine reproductive system is foregrounded in the preceding chapters by the speech and behaviour of Mordecai. Eliot often uses maternal language in her descriptions of him: the first time he uncovers himself in front of Daniel, with each man having 'as intense a consciousness as if they had been two undeclared lovers' (462), the homoeroticism is dispelled by a larger description of motherly tenderness:

[T]hen give to the yearning consumptive's glance something of the slowly dying mother's look when her one loved son visits her bedside, and the flickering power of

gladness leaps out as she says, “My boy!”—for the sense of spiritual perpetuation in another resembles that maternal transference of self. (462)

Eliot’s comparison to the ‘maternal transference of self’ does a lot of work in this passage, particularly in its link with ‘consumptive’. Throughout Book 5 and onwards, the language Eliot uses to describe Mordecai is full of complex and paradoxical associations between his body, maternity and transcendence. Despite the multiple occasions in which Mordecai is compared to a mother figure, his refusal of the physical and domestic aspects of this role are emphasised, often through the repeated assertion that his feeble body has betrayed him. Mordecai is the character in the novel who is most often described in physical terms and his fleshliness is inextricably entangled with the limitations of mortality. Yet despite this deep association with his failing flesh, he can transcend and transgress these physical limits through his Jewish visions and his relationship with Deronda: ‘Mordecai gave no sign of shrinking: this was a moment of *spiritual fulness*’ (490, emphasis mine). Mordecai’s consumption is necessary to the narrative, providing as it does an urgency that drives his search for Deronda: ‘how shall I save the life within me from being stifled with this stifled breath?’ (463), and his breath is a motif that reoccurs throughout the latter part of the novel, synonymous with the ineffable nature of the soul and the potential for it to be extinguished. In Mordecai—‘a frail incorporation of the national consciousness, breathing with difficult breath’ (480)—a nation-building spirituality is contained and threatened by his own failing biology.

If Eliot’s system of equivalences suggests that the female body = the maternal body = narrative origins = narrative limitations, we can see that she compares Mordecai to a mother only in order to illustrate his transcendence of maternity’s physical limitations, linking his weakness to his own mother and allowing his relationship with Deronda to simultaneously be wholly concerned with inheritance and free from the mundane complications symbolised by the female gender. Eliot’s comparison of Mordecai’s ‘sense of spiritual perpetuation in another’ to the ‘dying mother’ is repeated later on in Book 6, as Deronda’s consideration of Mordecai’s ‘greatness’ is detailed by Eliot’s narrator:

[A] mind consciously, energetically moving with the larger march of human destinies, but not the less full of conscience and tender heart for the footsteps that tread near and need a learning-place; *capable of conceiving and choosing a life’s task with far-off issues*, yet capable of the unapplauded heroism which turns off the road of achievement at the call of the nearer duty whose effect lies within the beatings of the

hearts that are close to us, *as the hunger of the unfledged bird to the breast of its parent.* (506, emphasis mine)

The obvious connotations of ‘conceiving’ are echoed in the final simile of the parental breast, as the positive relationship between ‘duty’ and generativity is firmly relocated from biological to intellectual continuance: again we jump, following Winnicott, from conceiving to conceiving of. At the same time, Eliot is always careful to reiterate that Mordecai’s assumption of caregiving, maternal characteristics is nobler than the images of domestic motherhood the novel provides us with:

It was something more than a grandiose transfiguration of the parental love that toils, renounces, endures, resists the suicidal promptings of despair—all because of the little ones, whose future becomes present to the yearning gaze of anxiety. (495)

Even a ‘grandiose transfiguration’ of parental love is too closely associated with the ‘toil’ of earthly existence: Mordecai’s concern is not for any specific children, but for the life of an entire people.

Even before the onset of his illness, Mordecai’s repeated insistence that he does not care for the life of the body enables him to figure himself as a kind of martyr to his own physicality: ‘I counted my sleep and my waking and the work I fed my body with, and the sights that fed my eyes—I counted them but as fuel to the divine flame’ (497). The Kabbalistic doctrine that he follows links this notion of the body as a kind of prison to the ‘real’ existence of the Jewish soul:

It was the soul fully born within me, and it came in my boyhood [...] and when its dumb tongue was loosened, it spoke the speech they had made alive with the new blood of their ardour, their sorrow and their martyred trust: it sang with the cadence of their strain. (464-65)

This ‘new blood’ reconfigures inheritance and familial obligation as kinship forged in martyrdom and sacrifice, requiring a subordination of the actual blood and labour of the biological mother: maternity is sacrificed to patriarchal futurity for the sake of the plot. This substitutionary renunciation of the maternal body occurs first metaphorically, as Mordecai rejects the claim of English, his ‘mother tongue’ and England, ‘the native land of this body’, declaring it to be

but as a breaking pot of earth around the fruit-bearing tree, whose seed might make the desert rejoice. But my true life was nourished in Holland, at the feet of my mother's brother, a Rabbi skilled in spiritual learning and when he died I went to Hamburg to study [...] and drink knowledge at all sources. (464)

During Book 5, however, Mordecai explicitly links his illness to his own mother, meaning that his eventual (partial) 'transcendence' of mortality through Deronda necessitates the conquering of the female compulsion to return and the association between maternity and death, labour and earth. Motherhood is enough to link such disparate characters as Mrs Cohen and the Alcharisi, as Mordecai's description of his obedience to his mother's summons seems to foreshadow the Alcharisi's later admission to Deronda that she is no longer able to exist fully in the present: 'Then it is as if all the life I have chosen to live, all thoughts, all will, forsook me and left me alone in spots of memory, and I can't get away: my pain seems to keep me there' (592-93). Before his mother's request for his return, Mordecai's planned journey to the East is a planned escape from the conventional structures of domesticity. The association between poverty and bachelorhood reiterates the female body's link to production: 'I had wedded poverty, and I loved my bride—for poverty to me was freedom' (502). The call of his mother brings this freedom to an abrupt end:

And that sound of my name was like the touch of a wand that recalled me to the body wherefrom I had been released as it were to mingle with the ocean of human existence, free from the pressure of individual bondage. I opened the letter; and the name came again as a cry that would have disturbed me in the bosom of heaven, and made me yearn to reach where that sorrow was—"Ezra, my son!" (502-3)

Despite Mrs Cohen's numerous virtues, the relationship between her and her son becomes that of debtor and creditor, as the mother's disembodied voice becomes the tool through which Mordecai's filial debt frustrates his spiritual progress. Mordecai himself explains it to Daniel as a transactional form of atonement:

Mine was the lot of Israel. For the sin of the father my soul must go into exile. For the sin of the father the work was broken, and the day of fulfilment delayed. She who bore me was desolate, disgraced, destitute. I turned back. On the instant I turned—her spirit, and the spirit of her fathers, who had worthy Jewish hearts, moved within me, and drew me. God, in whom dwells the universe, was within me as the strength of obedience. I turned and travelled with hardship—to save the scant money which she would need. I left the sunshine and travelled into freezing cold, In the last stage I spent a night in exposure to cold and snow. And that was the beginning of this slow death. (503)

Even when the fulfilment of spiritual ‘obedience’ requires his return to his mother, Mordecai attributes this to his male ancestry, as ‘the spirit of her fathers, who had worthy Jewish hearts’. Holy obligation is gendered male, but the reader is left in no doubt that the bodily sacrifice Mordecai makes is for his mother: the request she is making is an economic one, and the hardship that Mordecai undergoes as a direct result of this costs him his health. Finally, the mother herself becomes synonymous with illness:

And she was ill: the clutch of anguish was too strong for her, and wrought with some lurking disease. At times she could not stand for the beating of her heart, and the images of her brain became as chambers of terror, where she beheld my sister reared in evil. In the dead of night I heard her crying for her child. (503-504)

The holiness of martyrdom, however, is Mordecai’s alone to bear: ‘Death delivered my mother, and I felt it a blessedness that I was alone in the winters of suffering’ (504). Similarly, in Mirah’s reiteration of their family myth, Mordecai’s suffering takes precedent. Detailing to her father the repercussions of his behaviour, Mirah uses Ezra’s predicament as the trump card: ‘That broke my mother’s heart—it has broken Ezra’s life’ (690). Not only is this figuration of the consequences an inversion of fact—surely, within this logic, their mother’s life can also be said to have been broken, as she actually died—it also reiterates the substitutionary structure of the novel as a whole. Their mother is the subject of a transaction in which the metaphorical becomes the physical, as maternal grief becomes death from a broken heart, and Ezra’s physical illness becomes something more: ‘life’ itself, and the opposite of the synecdochic approach to maternity that sees the death of the mother confined to the heart, transferred from the spiritual realm of ‘life’ to something specifically and only physical.

Mordecai’s desire to escape the limitations of physical kinship is at first tested upon young Jacob Cohen, as he attempts to find his intellectual heir in the child during their Hebrew lessons: ‘The boy will get them engraved within him [...] it is a way of printing’ (444). Despite the physical effort Mordecai goes to, Jacob, Eliot’s narrator implies, does not pay due attention to these classes, or the verses ‘on which Mordecai had spent some of his too-scant heart’s blood’ (444). Mordecai’s frustration with his pupil is figured in physical language as, in an outburst of temper, he threatens Jacob with a ‘curse on your generation’, accusing his peers of turning gold into earrings for ‘wanton women’ meaning that ‘their heart shall be the tomb of dead desires that turn their life into rotteness’ (446). This association

between female sexuality and ‘the tomb of dead desires’—that familiar conflation of the womb and the tomb—directly contrasts with the life-giving properties of the masculine reproduction that Mordecai finds in Deronda, once his experiment with Jacob has been replaced by their kinship:

You will be my life: it will be planted afresh; it will grow. You shall take the inheritance; it has been gathering for ages. The generations are crowding on my narrow life as if a bridge: what has been and what is are meeting there; and the bridge is breaking. (466)

Elaborating on the Kabbalistic soul, Mordecai again links the obstruction of spiritual progress to the ‘imperfection’ of those who live the life of the body, whilst simultaneously valourising a concept of birth and rebirth entirely divorced from the actual circumstances of human reproduction:

In the doctrine of the Cabbala, souls are born again and again in new bodies until they are perfected and purified, and a soul liberated from a worn-out body may join the fellow-soul that needs it, that they may be perfected together, and their earthly work accomplished. Then they will depart from the mortal region, and leave place for new souls to be born out of the store in the eternal bosom. It is the lingering imperfection of the souls already born into the mortal region that hinders the birth of new souls and the preparation of the Messianic time [...] When my long-wandering soul is liberated from this weary body, it will join yours, and its work will be perfected. (501-502)

Although the vocabulary of united and mingling souls brings to mind matrimony as much as it does parenthood, the fact that Mordecai’s journey to the East is completed by Daniel cements his usurpation of the maternal role in the text’s parthenogenetic reconfiguration of kinship. His transcendence of the flesh allows him to use Deronda as a vessel to fulfil his ambitions, aligning his generative impulse with Deronda’s destiny. Mordecai has managed to assure his own continuance without the bodily act of reproduction:

There is nothing to wail in the withering of my body. The work will be the better done. Once I said, the work of this beginning is mine, I am born to do it. Well, I shall do it. I shall live in you. I shall live in you. (504)

v: Mirah at the margins

Mordecai's inheritance, of course, relies upon a female body. In Mirah Cohen, the relationship between the two systems of kinship that govern *Daniel Deronda* is blurred. Despite their eventual matrimony, by the time Mordecai's identity is revealed it seems that, for Daniel, Mirah is something of an afterthought. Although Daniel initially feels that the revelation of Mirah's parentage is 'suffusing his own strange relation to Mordecai with a new solemnity and tenderness', he responds to Mordecai with far more fervour than he ever has to Mirah: he is 'agitated as he had never been before', 'his strong young heart beating faster and his lips paling' (504). Soon after this, Mirah's feelings about the approaching reunion with her lost sibling are dispatched with in a single sentence, as Daniel speaks for her in a construction that hinges upon Mordecai's importance: 'Concerning Mirah's feeling and resolve he had no doubt: there would be a complete union of sentiment toward the departed mother, and Mirah would understand her brother's greatness' (505).

We have already seen how Mirah's ability to bridge these two narrative spheres compounds the similarities between her role within the novel and the role of Imogen in *Cymbeline*, and her positioning as the counter to the models of toxic femininity provided by Gwendolen, Lydia, and the Alcharisi. During a conversation with his mother, Daniel makes these differences explicit:

"Not ambitious?"

"No, I think not."

"Not one who must have a path of her own?"

"I think her nature is not given to make great claims." (619)

The transactional nature of Mirah and Daniel's relationship enables him to fulfil the marriage plot without endangering his masculine identity: from their first meeting, she has held herself so completely in his debt that she would renounce whatever he wished her to.²²⁵ The recurring impact in Gwendolen's mind of Deronda's assertion that Mirah, in the guise of Miss Lapidoth, is 'capable of submitting to anything in the form of duty' (517) reinforces her position as an image of dutiful sacrifice. This is borne out, too, in her inability to refuse her

²²⁵ Nadia Valman, in *The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century British Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp. 1-5, reads in the doubling of Mirah with the lost Cohen daughter a split in the representation of Jewish femininity as a whole.

father the little she herself possesses as, in Chapter 68, he takes not only coins but her purse, too. Immediately before this theft, we see that Mirah feels kinship so strongly that despite her father's abusive behaviour, the notion of deserting him would be tantamount to warming her 'hands in the blood of my kindred' (606). It is clear that Mirah believes both in the redemptive power of kinship and the ritual performativity of filial bonds: she is quoting from a play she performed in whilst under her father's control. Mirah's mode of sacrificial thinking is a kind of extreme piety that reinforces the gender divide in the novel: the episode where she scolds Mab for introducing an air of pragmatism into the story of the Buddha and the tiger—'it takes away the beauty of the action' (434)—is reminiscent of Maggie Tulliver's juvenile desire for self-renunciation in *The Mill on the Floss*.

Yet there are several moments towards the end of the novel at which Eliot allows her to deviate from the prescriptive goodness that dominates her character. One such moment is the spark of jealousy revealed by the notion of Deronda harbouring feelings for Gwendolen:

But what difference could this pain of hers make to anyone else? It must remain as exclusively her own, and hidden, as her early yearning and devotion towards her lost mother. But unlike that devotion, it was something that she felt to be a misfortune of her nature—a discovery that what should have been pure gratitude and reverence had sunk to selfish pain [...] an angry feeling toward another woman who possessed the good she wanted. (682)

No sooner is the uncharacteristic emotion felt, however, than it is dispelled by Mirah's determination to be virtuous, the natural feeling suppressed by an adherence to an ideal. Consequently, the novel suffers: unlike the extraordinary passage in *Middlemarch* when Dorothea overcomes her jealousy of Rosamond Lydgate, this is not a transformational episode in Mirah's character. Her feelings towards Gwendolen never soften, and her devotional attitude towards the men in her life does not alter: the feeling is buried, and eventually neutralised by her and Daniel's departure.

Eliot allows Mirah another moment of potential in her discussion of the story of the Jewish woman who loved a Gentile king in the *Midrash* as, in a rare instance of disagreement, Mirah questions Mordecai's reading of sacrifice. Although the episode proceeds along familiar lines, with Mordecai as didactic superior—he asks 'Dost thou understand, Mirah?' and she replies 'A little [...] but my mind is too poor to have felt it'—Eliot's narrator is implicitly critical of Mordecai's tone: "“And yet,” said Mordecai, *rather*

insistently, “women are specially framed for the love which feels possession in renouncing, and is thus a fit image of what I mean” (683, emphasis mine). Later in the passage, Mirah’s disagreement with Mordecai’s declaration that the woman’s sacrifice of herself was ‘surpassing love, that loses self in the object of love’ is described as having a ‘low-toned intensity’: Mirah’s divergence from her brother’s story has none of his insistence, but a quiet pathos. Schramm’s analysis of this passage articulates precisely the subtle way in which Eliot makes it clear that something in Mirah is being suppressed by external expectation. Although ‘it is Ezra’s moral economy that the novel seems to validate’ with its repeated insistence that their mother is ‘good’, Mirah is speaking here with the authority of empathetic identification— something Mordecai attempts to devalue by dismissing it as the result of reading ‘too many plays’— and this is powerful: ‘Ezra’s attempt to police or close down the potentially disruptive force of female devotion is thwarted here despite Mirah’s final obedient silence’.²²⁶

This is a doubly interesting moment, both for the departure it marks from Mirah’s conformation to Mordecai’s system of self-sacrificial value and for its belatedness: just as the reader is shown a new side of Mirah, the novel’s drive toward its conclusion swallows her in its mechanisms. Mirah’s silence neutralises any threat her dissent might pose, aligning her once again with the idealised, dead, neutralised maternal figure and allowing the novel to reach its close. But the echoes of her dissent are not without consequence. After this extraordinary scene in which she seems almost to burst from the novel’s confines, Mirah must be assimilated back into the plot; we must believe that ‘when the bridal veil was around Mirah it hid no doubtful tremors’ (752). When we first meet Mirah, she is alone and about to attempt suicide. The *Midrash* passage is the only time in the entire novel that we hear Mirah speak about suicide after her rescue at the hands of Daniel:

No, Ezra, no [...] that was not it. She wanted the king when she was dead to know what she had done, and feel that she was better than the other. It was her strong self, wanting to conquer, that made her die. (684)

This combination of ‘strong self’ and ‘conquer’ is a frank admittance of the possibility of a relationship between death, strength and autonomy. Mirah makes no ethical claim for suicide,

²²⁶ Schramm, *Atonement*, p. 222.

linking it to 'jealousy' and implying it to be in opposition to 'greatness', but nevertheless there is a suggestion of her ability to read independence into death.

These momentary flashes of complexity in Mirah illustrate Eliot's awareness of what must be sacrificed to narrative conclusiveness. *Daniel Deronda* is not Mirah's story, and a novel with space within it for her development would risk capsizing itself. Despite Mirah's alignment with the manageable smallness of feminine domesticity, after the radical destabilisation of Daniel's masculine identity in Book 7 even marriage to a perfect cipher like Mirah is not quite enough to unite his two personal plots. Although markedly less so than Gwendolen and the Alcharisi, Mirah's gender still links her to the potential frustration of masculine purpose: it is only through Mirah's subordination and semi-replacement by Mordecai that Daniel can rest easy in his new identity. During Daniel's interview with his mother, the Alcharisi makes a statement that, although glossed over in the course of the conversation, resonates retrospectively as both an acknowledgement of this thematic concern and a warning to Mirah:

Why, she is made for you, then. Sir Hugo said you were bitterly against being a singer, and I can see that you would never have let yourself be merged in a wife, as your father was. (620)

Daniel ignores this, but the truth of the statement is clear. Mirah fits her life to his, and it is difficult to imagine this changing after their marriage: their journey to the East is too closely aligned with the misogynist version of Jewish society articulated by the Alcharisi and tacitly endorsed by Deronda's alignment with his maternal grandfather. Indeed, the displacement of Mirah by her brother in the triangulated relationship between Deronda and the Cohens situates her importance within the domestic sphere first as a woman with reproductive potential and then within the broader purpose of nation-building in the East. Mirah's reproductive body may not be being repurposed through matrimony for specifically British imperial concerns, as the introduction to this thesis details, but the guiding principle is the same.

vi: necessary sacrifices

‘I can see that you would never have let yourself be merged in a wife, as your father was’. *Daniel Deronda*, as we have seen, is intimately concerned with merging and dispersing, with dissolution and combination. In the final section of this chapter, I want to return to the comparison I made earlier between Eliot’s final novel and *Antony and Cleopatra*, working with Janet Adelman’s reading of the play to illustrate Eliot’s awareness of the potential for recovery held within the necessity of the sacrifices she makes to her ‘happy’ resolution. *Daniel Deronda* can certainly be read as a kind of reimagining of *Cymbeline* and, to an extent, *The Winter’s Tale*, but the parallel Eliot herself sets up between the Alcharisi and Cleopatra in the epigraph to Chapter 53 is, I want to contend, crucial to the understanding of the double bind Eliot articulates both with regard to her characters and as an author herself. To borrow again from Franken, Eliot uses *Antony and Cleopatra* to reveal the difficulties of creating a novelistic ‘poetics of renunciation’.²²⁷

‘My desolation does begin to make | A better life’. Although, unlike Armgart, the Alcharisi’s desolation does not offer much promise of continuance, there is a deep pathos invested in the flicker Eliot allows of a different relationship to the maternal body, in which motherhood could indeed be a space for recuperation, recreation, and imaginative play. Cleopatra, like the Alcharisi, is a woman associated with theatrical variety, and Adelman suggests a source for the play in Plutarch’s story of Isis and Osiris, centring upon the transformative power of the central female characters: ‘Like Isis [...] Shakespeare’s Cleopatra is at home in the realm of becoming’.²²⁸ If the Alcharisi’s constant performing—a source of disparagement and distrust in the text itself and in much of the novel’s critical heritage—is rewritten as positive creativity, we can see her imaginative decree to Daniel towards the end of their second interview as a kind of alternative reading of fertility: ‘When I am in your mind, you will look as you do now—always as if you were a tender son—always—as if I had been a tender mother’ (619). It is as if Daniel’s mother is attempting to bring him to life for a second time; as if the sheer force of her imagination can keep him young. In Adelman’s reading of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cleopatra’s womb becomes a recreative space in which Antony can be restored to his masculine identity, but this too is

²²⁷ Franken, p. 24.

²²⁸ Adelman, p. 185.

initially figured in language reminiscent of abortive birth, as Mardian reports her apparent death:

Then, in the midst, a tearing groan did break
the name of Antony; it was divided
Between her heart, and lips: she rendered life
Thy name so buried in her. (IV. 14. 31-34)

Adelman contends that Cleopatra's 'recreation' of Antony in her monument is a way of rewriting this abortive birth: 'in the protected female space of her own monument, the memory of her womb can at last bring Antony forth whole and undivided, rendering him life'.²²⁹ The Alcharisi lacks a monument, but Eliot herself was deeply concerned with the afterlives of texts. In the epigraph, the maternal body represented by the Alcharisi is offered a moment of reflection and, crucially in Eliot's textual ethos, sympathy. Indeed, the epigraph could be read as a broader commentary on the structures than enforce Daniel's choice. The rest of the speech affirms the ultimate futility of the masculine parthenogenetic future—'Tis paltry to be Caesar' (v. 2. 2)—and culminates with a conflation of the parity and inevitability of death and a kind of nurture that makes no economic return: 'Which sleeps, and never palates more the dug, | The beggar's nurse and Caesar's' (v. 2. 7-8).

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Caesar's fantasies of male parthenogenesis are rooted in nation-building and wealth acquirement; masculine economies. Antony's restoration, too, is figured in economic terms, as Adelman notes, but these are deliberately feminine:

In his capacity to give without being used up, he replicates the female economy of breast milk, self-renewing in its abundance; leaving behind Caesar's male economy of limited resources, he becomes like Cleopatra, feeding and renewing the appetite in an endless cycle of gratification and desire, making hungry where most he satisfies.²³⁰

Yet this use of resource illustrates that some kind of sacrifice is unavoidable: there is always a cost to be accounted for. It is worth pausing here on this 'female economy of breast-milk' as a symbol of renewal. In the next chapter, I will turn to the symbolic place of breast milk within the imaginative and actual economy of the mid-nineteenth century, but it is enough to note here that even in the seventeenth century breast milk had more complex socioeconomic

²²⁹ Adelman, p. 185.

²³⁰ Adelman, p.190.

associations than this implies: the wet-nursing profession and the production of pap meant it was already commodified. Adelman's image of Antony as an infant in need of nurture does, however, acknowledge the ambivalence of the mother-infant bond:

Through Cleopatra's final image, the end of the play returns him to Cleopatra's maternal body, the resting place from which he will no longer stray. In Cleopatra's final words, he becomes one with the asp, the baby at her breast, as she carries them both toward death [...] Insofar as the play ends with a fantasy of a mutual sleep that undoes boundaries, it fulfils the dangerous desire at the heart of masculine selfhood, the dream of a reunion with the maternal matrix. And fulfilment of this dangerous dream seems to require no less than all: Antony can be cured only with a wound.²³¹

The fantasy of masculine abundance cannot exist except as the catalyst for tragedy; Antony and Cleopatra cannot sustain their nuptial plenitude in a society that is governed by the finitude of resources. Antony lets his masculinity go willingly—'No more a soldier: bruised pieces, go, | You have been nobly borne' (IV. 14. 43-44)—accepting his own death as the price of his refusal to banish Cleopatra's symbolic and actual body. Here, the metrical emphasis on 'borne' is almost unbearable, the punning stress linking birth and death with the creation and destruction of a traditional and restrictive masculine identity: 'no more a soldier', Antony is born into freedom, and into death. Generic difference is crucial here. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the fragile recuperative space of the monument can exist enduringly as a moment of pure play, outside of the governing logical rules of naturalistic fiction. In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot cannot make such a choice, and so for Daniel a return to the matrix could only result in the complete effacement of masculine identity, a death with no resurrective potential.

Daniel's rigidity, unwilling to be 'merged in a wife', is the opposite of Antony's dispersal: 'bruised pieces, go'. Dismemberment is a recurring theme in the vocabularies of both texts: as *Daniel Deronda* approaches its conclusion, Mordecai's religious language becomes increasingly intertwined with wounded and expiring body parts, whilst Shakespeare's characteristic metonymic diction is compounded by the origin myth of Isis and Osiris.²³² In the Egyptian generation story, after Osiris's brother/rival Typhon cuts him up into fourteen parts and scatters them, Isis—Osiris's sister/wife—gathers the parts together

²³¹ Adelman, p. 187.

²³² Eliot was interested in the Egyptian pantheon, as we can see from her notebooks, in which it features alongside pages detailing her research into Judaism and fertility goddesses. See *George Eliot's Daniel Deronda Notebooks*, ed. Jane Irwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 486.

and ‘performs the work of revival’ by building memorials to them. This is crucial to Adelman’s thesis: ‘like Isis, Cleopatra finds and restores, memorialises and consecrates Antony’s male identity: in the womblike receptive space of her female memory, suffused with sexual longing, he can live again’.²³³ In Plutarch’s source text, Isis is figured as the familiar conflation of womanhood/nature: she ‘is the feminine part of nature, apt to receive all generation, upon which occasion called she is by Plato, the nurse and Pandeches, that is to say, capable of all [...] for that she receiveth all forms and shapes’.²³⁴ Female variety can thus be reconstitutive as well as dissembling. Yet, in *Daniel Deronda*, the masculine fear of being wounded is transferred onto the fear of dissolution within the mother.

This, then, requires a different approach to disintegration. In *George Eliot’s Pulse*, Neil Hertz argues that fragmentation in Eliot’s novels figures women as victims. His etymologically grounded thesis is that Eliot’s work is intimately concerned with ‘pulse’ and ‘seed’; for Hertz, these terms epitomise the tensions that play out in her fiction ‘between an expansive volubility and a scrupulous, contractile restraint’.²³⁵ Drawing on Eliot’s translation of Strauss’s *Life of Jesus*, Hertz contends that Eliot’s translation of the section in which Strauss, attempting to elucidate which of Jesus’s sayings are authentically his, compares the Word of God to ‘indissoluble’ granite, is ‘authentic Eliot, not ‘authentic Strauss’.²³⁶ Although Hertz’s argument is not always completely convincing, his attempts to link Eliot’s concern with disintegration to gender bears relation to the affinity between *Daniel Deronda* and *Antony and Cleopatra*:

The materials out of which to illustrate each of these vocabularies of motivation are present in abundance in George Eliot’s writings; her novels are shaped and marked by her efforts to articulate them, and, more often than not, the stress of articulation is most evident in her representation of a transgressive woman, a woman who is herself made to bear the marks of that stress.²³⁷

Hertz goes on to relate this explicitly to the position of a female author in the nineteenth-century, turning to Longinus, Sappho and dismemberment in the process: the ‘transfer of power’ enacted by Sappho’s act of writing is, for Hertz, the ‘sublime turn’, transforming her from ‘victimised body’ to an admired poet. In Longinus’s ‘poetic economy’, Sappho’s

²³³ Adelman, p. 184.

²³⁴ Quoted in Adelman, p. 184.

²³⁵ Hertz, p. 4.

²³⁶ Hertz, p. 5.

²³⁷ Hertz, p. 7.

physical fragmentation is explicitly linked to her status as a powerful shaper of language.²³⁸ Something similar, he argues, occurs in Eliot's female characters as their passive suffering and active aggression is 'linked to signs of the impingement of force on a receptive surface, either to the marks left by that force or to the forced fragmentation of the surface itself, the breaking down of larger into smaller units'.²³⁹

This reading overlooks the importance of maternity, and its corresponding threat to masculine identity, in Eliot's fiction. It is useful here to turn to Yopie Prins's *Victorian Sappho*. Although this is not the place for a full examination of the increasing visibility of Sappho as an 'exemplary figure' in the nineteenth century, Prins's work helps us to illuminate the gap between Hertz's analysis of Eliot's disintegrating female bodies and their power as fragmentary forces.²⁴⁰ Although Eliot is not explicitly concerned with Sappho in her fiction, it is interesting to note that just over a decade after the publication of *Daniel Deronda*, Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper (writing under the pseudonym Michael Field) included Erinna in their Sapphic imitation *Long Ago* (1889). *Victorian Sappho*, although focussing mainly on texts published after Eliot's death, helps to contextualise Eliot's concern with disintegration within the broader Victorian interest in 'renderings' and 'rendings' of the Sapphic corpus: Prins observes that the 'close relationship between nineteenth-century philology and Victorian poetics' produces a reading of Sappho in which a 'body, person, subjectivity and voice can be imagined as prior to, yet also produced by, a history of fragmentation'.²⁴¹

This returns us to Queen Victoria's threatening maternal body. Prins notes that 'Victorian Sappho' as a term is in fact a double personification:

I invoke Victoria alongside Sappho, in order to name the second half of the nineteenth-century as a time when feminine figures and figurations of femininity contribute in complex ways to the formation of aesthetic categories, and more generally to the feminisation of Victorian culture.²⁴²

²³⁸ Hertz, p. 7.

²³⁹ Hertz, p. 7.

²⁴⁰ Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 3.

²⁴¹ Prins, p. 4.

²⁴² Prins, p. 14.

This ‘feminisation’ can be read, in relation to Eliot, as synonymous with the threat of dissolution itself. If the primary focus of Prins’s argument is the construction of Sappho as an exemplary, gendered lyric voice, this discussion of a speaking subject can be usefully extended to Eliot as novelist. Once again, Franken’s argument that within *The Mill on the Floss* the ‘poetics of renunciation’ create a structural ‘parabolic retard’ that frustrates and eventually consumes the entire text can be applied to the poetics that govern *Daniel Deronda*.²⁴³ Like the paradoxical nature of lyric subjectivity itself—necessitating the speaker is both created and dismantled, embodied and disembodied—Eliot is acutely aware of the paradox she herself must create: in order for the (female) creative voice to complete the novelistic narrative, the representations of embodied femininity within the novel must be subordinated and sacrificed to a masculine, or purposive, ending. Like Victoria’s simultaneous transcendence and symbolic representation of the creative and reproductive functions of the female body, Eliot’s fictional practice depends upon a series of transactions in which part of her empathetic project must always lose.

Prins’s critique of Hertz’s 1985 reading of Longinus, which predates *George Eliot’s Pulse*, convincingly argues that Hertz’s investigation of the transfer of power that occurs in ‘Fragment 31’ from Sappho’s victimized body to an active poetic force is not careful enough in its use of the female body as the ‘inevitable’ site of mutilation and abuse by a male reader:

As Longinus performs his autopsy on Sappho, he produces a lyric subject that is not only dead but increasingly feminized. Here the figure of Sappho—or rather the violent disfiguring of that bodily figure—points to a gendered subtext throughout the Longinian treatise, which often describes the impact of sublime language on the reader in terms of masculine domination and feminine submission. Because Sappho is identified with the figurative feminization of the reader, she also becomes identifiable *as* a feminine figure through that very structure of transference. Gender is generally and perhaps inevitably implicated in any account of the sublime, as Hertz acknowledges: “Questions of gender enter here: when these dramas turn violent, women are frequently the victims of choice—are they bound to be?” (1985: 223). Yet Hertz does not articulate the implications of this question for his own reading of Longinus, where the description of Sappho as victimized body makes that choice seem inevitable.²⁴⁴

I want to carry this forward to Hertz’s interpretation of Eliot’s ‘put-upon’ female characters: in his understanding of renunciation and dispersal in the text, the sacrifices required by the ‘poetic economy’ of gendered authorship are never fully accounted for. Eliot believes in the

²⁴³ Franken, p. 27.

²⁴⁴ Prins, p. 39.

potential for transcendence through suffering, but her fiction never loses sight of the potential for this self-renouncing impulse to be misguided, nor—crucially—the actual losses that such mechanisms of atonement require.

Prins, drawing on Auslander-Munich's work on Victoria's body, argues that, in her fragmentation, Sappho converges with the nineteenth-century 'woman question' because, like the queen, 'she becomes a "representative" woman who embodies the very possibility of such representations, allowing them to multiply in often contradictory forms'.²⁴⁵ The practice of fictional 'incarnation'—Eliot's mimetic realism—as a narrative mode denies her female characters the opportunity to remain alive to these representational possibilities. Prins argues that Sappho is made sublime by her dismemberment, as 'the body of the poet is sacrificed to the body of her song, and this body of song is sacrificed to posterity'.²⁴⁶ The sacrifices of the flesh that occur in Eliot's fiction are necessary: the dangerous (pro)creative potential of the female body must be managed and subdued, and narrative order must be imposed upon it. Yet Prins herself, despite employing the metaphors of maternity in passing—the 'Sapphic riddle', she contends, is Sappho's 'conception' of 'infants in her womb' or letters in her 'dress'—never fully links her observations about the gendered creative voice to reproduction.²⁴⁷ The observation that finishes her critique of Hertz and Longinus is less convincing than what precedes it: 'If Sappho is bound to be victimized by this argument, however, the reason is not that she exists as a female body prior to the Longinian reading of Fragment 31, but that the Sapphic body is gendered in the very process of being read: it bears the mark of gender, posthumously, by bearing its own death'.²⁴⁸ Here, compounded by the following declaration that '[r]ather than bearing infants that come to life when they are delivered to the reader, Sappho gives birth to a tradition of lyric reading that kills the very thing it would bring to life', Prins's generalisation fails to interrogate the complexities that underpin the linking of textual birth and death: the reading is indebted to the dubious claims of Freud's 'The Theme of the Three Caskets' in its use of motherhood as a mechanism, shorthand for the psychoanalytic conflation of the womb and the tomb.

²⁴⁵ Prins, p. 14.

²⁴⁶ Prins, p. 116.

²⁴⁷ Prins, p. 27.

²⁴⁸ Prins, p. 40.

Daniel Deronda ends with the affirmation of masculine kinship and the implied achievement of the male parthenogenetic fantasy. As Ezra dies, he figures himself as bequeathing his 'soul' to Deronda:

Death is coming to me as the divine kiss which is both parting and reunion—which takes me from your bodily eyes and gives me full presence in your soul. Where thou goest, Daniel, I shall go. Is it not begun? Have I not breathed my soul into you? We shall live together. (754)

The final image of the novel is of the two Cohens and Daniel linked together, arms round each other, sibling indistinguishable from sibling, husband indistinguishable from wife. Mordecai and Daniel are not able to marry and reproduce with each other, but with Mirah as a kind of substitutionary interlocutor, the continuation of Mordecai's line is assured. After the bodies of Gwendolen and the Alcharisi are banished, Mirah's, too, is reduced to its reproductive function.

Chapter 3:

In the Pleasure Dairy: the scapegoating of Hetty Sorrel

It has frequently been noted that *Daniel Deronda*'s Mirah Cohen is an intertextual double for the earlier character of Dinah Morris in *Adam Bede* (1859): similar in their external appearance, their commitment to their faith—though Dinah is a Methodist, not a Jew—and even their rhyming names, both women end their narratives married to the male protagonist. In contrast to these proper narratives of implicit, legitimate reproduction, we can read Gwendolen Harleth's non-reproductive femininity as a later double for the actual illegitimate pregnancy of Hetty: Hetty's transgression and her punishment is the first—and the only fully embodied—appearance of the sacrificial maternal economics that would reach its culmination in the fragmented disembodied crisis point of *Daniel Deronda*.

Unlike Maggie Tulliver, whose penitential belief system frames her curtailed lifespan as a kind of self-sacrifice, the death of Hetty is a mechanism of narrative punishment and scapegoating. Published in serial form in 1859, Eliot's first novel can be read as a kind of blueprint for the familiar nineteenth-century story of the 'bad' mother, the inverse of the idealised, domesticated angel in the house. Hetty's story was initially intended to be one of the *Scenes of Clerical Life*, and its trajectory is familiar both from the literary tradition of unmarried mothers and from the social history of the period. The landlady who takes Hetty in acknowledges this and, in the process, links Hetty's circumstances to her physical attractiveness: 'it's plain enough what sort of business it is... it 'ud have been a good deal better for her if she' been uglier and had more conduct'(355). Hetty recognises the story too: 'she thought of a young woman who had been found against the church wall at Hayslope one Sunday nearly dead with cold and hunger—a tiny infant in her arms: the woman was rescued and taken to the parish' (356). Yet Hetty can receive no such redemption: unable to ask for help without admitting to her sexual misdemeanour, she gives birth alone and, it is implied, kills her child. The critical consensus, at least since V.S. Pritchett's *The Living Novel* (1946), is that Eliot sacrifices Hetty precisely because of this inability to articulate the fact of her condition: the dairy maid becomes a scapegoat for an authorial and indeed a societal inability to 'admit natural [sexual] passions in a virtuous character'.²⁴⁹ This constructs a transaction in which Hetty's story is exchanged for Adam and Dinah's marital happiness, both factors

²⁴⁹ V. S. Pritchett, *The Living Novel* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1946), p. 83.

characterised by a lack: Hetty gets no interiority, and no future, whilst Adam and Dinah's relationship is variously read as a denial of Dinah's potential and a subjugation of sexual desire.²⁵⁰

Yet it is not only Eliot's inability to represent illegitimate sexuality that is responsible for the 'sacrifice' of Hetty: if we follow Ilana Blumberg's suggestion that in *Adam Bede* 'we can see Eliot working toward an ethical consequentialism, one that departs from but nonetheless is indebted to utilitarian thinking', we can see a more complex kind of transaction in play.²⁵¹ Throughout the novel, Hetty's lack of maternal virtue is figured as correlative with her sexuality and, therefore, her fertility: the pregnancy is the result of the vanity and moral lassitude Eliot describes in great detail and attributes to Hetty's sexual body *in general*, not the vague and elusive sex act itself.²⁵² If the stories of pregnancy in *Scenes of Clerical Life* are parable-like tales that allow Eliot to test out different aspects of maternal experience in her fiction and *Daniel Deronda* is the culmination of her inability to rehabilitate the physical, by returning to *Adam Bede* we can see Eliot moving towards an understanding of the world in which the equation of virtue always requires a representative of the sexual female body to be suppressed, or even banished, in order for its virtuous counterpart to carry forward the necessary maternal virtues.

²⁵⁰ The most influential account of this can be found in Kucich, *Repression*. See also Aeron Hunt's argument that Dinah and Hetty occupy the same sacrificial continuum in 'Calculations and Concealments: Infanticide in Mid-Nineteenth Century Britain', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 34.1 (2006), 71-94.

²⁵¹ Blumberg, p. 104.

²⁵² Dalley, in 'The Economics of "A Bit O' Victual"' argues that Hetty's 'rejection of maternal responsibility through the murder of her child is a reflection of Malthusian economics; Eliot shifts the focus from the financial pressures placed on the father (as imagined by Malthus) to those placed on the mother' (p. 559), something also relevant to Hetty's sexual indiscretion.

i: the dairy and the pool

Biographical readings of *Adam Bede* have long used Eliot's relationship with G.H. Lewes to contend that in sacrificing Hetty she is banishing a part of herself. Nina Auerbach has argued that this, in effect, is the ill treatment of a character who by rights should have been 'the writer's chief ally': it was through Eliot's own 'fall' that she was 'born into artistry', at the price of her own 'fierce suppression of the impulse to self-pity and apologia'.²⁵³ And, indeed, Eliot did represent her own writing as a kind of reproductive act:

What comes after is the sense that the work has been produced within one, like offspring, developing and growing by some force of which one's life has served as a vehicle, and that what is left of oneself is only a poor husk. (*Letters*, VIII: 383).

Yet the link between Eliot's relationship with Lewes and her own reproductive choices is crucial here. Insofar as Eliot's decision to enter into an extramarital domestic life with Lewes can be read—and, indeed, was seen at the time—as behaviour in contravention of social propriety, like Hetty's liaison with Arthur, Eliot's decision not to have children with Lewes has itself traditionally been figured as a kind of sacrifice to social morality. She developed a financially supportive relationship with Lewes's sons, who called her 'Mutter', but did not conceive a child of her own, something that has traditionally been attributed to her fear that any child would suffer with the social stain of illegitimacy.²⁵⁴

Eliot experienced a great deal of social and personal difficulty as a result of her relationship with Lewes. Alongside the infamous rift it caused between her and her family, the abrupt decline in her letters to most of her female friends after 1855 testifies to the tensions it caused in her friendships, too: in an 1856 letter to Bessie Rayner Parkes, Eliot corrects the address of 'Miss Evans' to 'Mrs Lewes' and acknowledges her isolation with 'I have no other visits to pay' (*Letters*, II: 192). Eliot's decision not to reproduce with Lewes, alongside her role as a stepmother, certainly does seem to be present in Eliot's fictional representations of maternity, but the idea that Eliot was necessarily sacrificing a deep desire for biological maternity is queried both by her harsh punishment of illegitimate mothers like

²⁵³ Nina Auerbach, 'The Rise of the Fallen Woman', *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 35.1 (1980), 29-52, p. 45.

²⁵⁴ Nancy Henry, in *The Life of George Eliot: A Critical Biography* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), questions the usual account that follows Gordon Haight's 1968 biography of Eliot in emphasizing Eliot's devotion to Lewes's sons. Nevertheless, it is clear they had a parental relationship. As Clare Pettitt notes on p. 258 of *Patent Inventions*, both Eliot and Lewes referred to her books as 'children'.

Hetty and in the positive portrayal of substitutionary parental relationships in the two novels that followed *Adam Bede*, *Silas Marner* (1861) and *Romola* (1863). In light of this, Eliot's description of her fictional practice—her incarnational practice—as a gestational one takes on a new gloss: if the act of fictional creation mimics that of biological creation in its draining of the life force of the mother/writer, the product still confirms the skill and value of its creator. In biological creation, then, we can see that Eliot considers the mother as a function: a 'vehicle' only for the continuation of the species; a 'poor husk'. If the reproductive body in general is so drained of value, and Hetty's reproductive body in particular is an irresponsible one, the notion of Eliot's identification with her is unconvincing. Instead, Hetty's body can be read as a system for the containment and expulsion of the threat of female sexuality itself. This system is split into two parts: the doubling of Hetty with Dinah, and Hetty's inarticulate body. Unlike the detailed documentation of Hetty's physical appearance that precedes it, Hetty's pregnancy and birth is present only in blurred figurative images, as 'the hidden dread' of Hetty's pregnancy is represented only by the 'dark shrouded pool' (345) outside Hayslope that becomes the externalised image of Hetty's womb.²⁵⁵

Before we reach the pool, it is necessary to contextualise these sacrificial exchanges within the economy of care in *Adam Bede*, which is played out through the dairy, a site of milk and nurture and a site of production reliant upon Hetty's physical labour. We have already seen how, in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, Eliot's censure of the reproductive body of Milly Barton is split between her embodied financial value and the descriptive passage about the production of cow's milk, the rural 'sweet history of genuine cream' far superior to the 'thinnish white fluid' of the town. This passage continues with a rapturous description of the delights of 'that temple of moist cleanliness, the dairy, where it quietly separated itself from the meaner elements of milk, and lay in mellowed whiteness' (*S*, 7). In *Adam Bede*, the dairy at Hayslope is described in similarly reverential tones:

The dairy was certainly worth looking at: it was a scene to sicken for with a sort of calenture in hot and dusty streets—such coolness, such purity, such fresh fragrance of new-pressed cheese, of firm butter, of wooden vessels perpetually bathed in pure water [...] But one gets only a confused notion of these details when they surround a distractingly pretty girl of seventeen, standing on little pattens and rounding her dimpled arm to lift a pound of butter out of the scale. (78)

²⁵⁵ Here, I differ from Neil Hertz's argument, in *George Eliot's Pulse*, that the pool represents a drop of ink or a mirror, and therefore has its primary relevance to Eliot's anxieties of authorship.

Here, the ‘moist cleanliness’ is figured as a background for the distraction of Hetty, something logically at odds with the fact that she is performing—expertly—the labour that the workspace is designed for and financially requires. Her aunt’s oblivious ‘discoursing’ to Arthur Donnithorne—‘about the limited amount of milk that was to be spared for butter and cheese so long as the calves were not all weaned, and a large quantity but inferior quality of milk yielded by the shorthorn, which had been bought on experiment, together with other matters which must be interesting to a young gentleman who would one day be a landlord’ (78)—echoes the discussion of the milk in *Scenes of Clerical Life*. Here, the weaning of the infant animals and the quality of the milk move the reproductive eroticism of Hetty and Arthur’s interaction into a financial and animal framework; whilst Hetty’s labour is erased by her status as a desired subject, her commodity value is implicitly reinforced. The dairy, with all its submerged erotic potential, is the site of the conflation of Hetty’s two (re)productive functions. As their flirtation is played out through her blushes and gestures, the butter-making continues: ‘Hetty tossed and patted her pound of butter with quite a self-possessed, coquettish air, slyly conscious that no turn of her head was lost’ (78). Just as Milly Barton’s body is a paradox of value—despite the high importance placed upon not only the production but the nurture of her children, she is never represented as a nursing mother—the alienation of the breast in *Adam Bede* is furthered by the complex representation of taboo sexuality in Hetty’s dairy work. Whilst contextually, as we have seen, the necessary displacement of virginity by motherhood as the measure of female worth reinscribed the ethical model of sexual restraint onto breastfeeding, in *Adam Bede*, the virtuosity of ‘natural’ nursing is subverted by Hetty’s position as both dairy worker and an illegitimate mother with, as we are repeatedly told, no instinctive maternal care.

Alicia Carroll’s work on breast milk in *Adam Bede* and Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* reads the texts in the context of the economic tradition of the working farmhouse dairy and the history of the nineteenth-century manor house’s ‘private’ or ‘ornamental’ dairy. In doing so, she argues that the traditional interpretation of literary dairy settings as pastoral and—crucially—natural, ignores the reality of ‘gendered workspaces that are specific to separate historical moments and hence, separate ideologies and technologies of labor’.²⁵⁶ Pre-empting Meredith Martin’s work on the pleasure dairy of early-modern

²⁵⁶ Alicia Carroll, ‘Human Milk in the Modern World: Breastfeeding and the Cult of the Dairy in *Adam Bede* and *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*’, *Women’s Studies*, 31.2 (2002), 165-197 (p. 165).

France—liminal spaces in which noblewomen could display their refinement and proclaim both their maternal virtues and managerial capability—Carroll links the British dairy (also known as the ‘polite’ dairy) to the increasing emphasis on ‘natural’ maternalism in the eighteenth-and nineteenth-centuries.²⁵⁷ She also makes a claim for the fancy dairy as having a bearing on Eliot’s fictional representation of a functional dairy:

Victorian fancy dairies continue to express an anxiety over woman’s fertility and her potentially disruptive sexual desires [...] Such interiors attempt to integrate appropriate visions of productive and erotic fecundity, locating an accessible eroticism made pleasing and productive in the eternally spouting female fountains. As women are contained as domestic “milk-givers” in dairy architecture, so in dairy ornament and iconography are their body fluids made, metaphorically, a gift to the onlooker.²⁵⁸

Carroll’s argument is that Eliot’s fictional representation of the dairy—which is, after all, idealised—allows Hetty to ‘figuratively play at the pleasures of embodied maternity. But when real human milk comes in, disastrously for the infanticidal milkmaid Hetty Sorrel, the dairy and its sensuous largesse become a cruel joke’.²⁵⁹

Yet this distinction between the figurative space of the dairy and what Carroll reads as a theoretical critique of human lactation ignores the problem of embodiment. Indeed, Eliot links Hetty’s work in front of Arthur Donnithorne to the fetishized work of the fancy dairy—‘the linen butter-making apron, with its bib, seemed a thing to be imitated in silk by duchesses, since it fell in such charming lines’ (79)—but to read in this a ‘necessarily troubled’ vision of breastfeeding fails to ask why Eliot is displacing real representations of embodied nurture onto a shallow critique of the class differences in real and ornate dairies. Although, as Carroll notes, Raymond Williams’s famous comparison of *Tess* and *Adam Bede* problematically categorizes Eliot’s ‘abandonment’ of Hetty as that of a neglectful or murderous authorial parent, Carroll’s decision to interrogate the ‘silencing’ of breastfeeding discourse in nineteenth-century literature still leaves the charged issue of Hetty’s subjectivity up for debate.²⁶⁰ Carroll notes the irony by which the narratives of failed parturition in *Adam Bede* are preceded by examples of skilled dairy work, but rather than focussing on the

²⁵⁷ Meredith Martin, *Dairy Queens: The Politics of Pastoral Architecture from Catherine de’ Medici to Marie-Antoinette* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011). See also Esther Leslie and Melanie Jackson, ‘Milk’s Arrays’, *Studies in the Maternal*, 10.1 (2018), 8.

²⁵⁸ Carroll, p. 170.

²⁵⁹ Carroll, p. 167.

²⁶⁰ Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 173.

elisions and expulsions in the depiction of Hetty's body, she constructs a comparison between the irony of Mrs Poyser's competence with cow's milk and her incompetence as a substitutionary maternal caregiver to Hetty: 'Indeed, her own state of "inflammation," some illness suffered after the birth of her daughter Totty, places her ailing maternal body in direct contrast to her thriving business in animal milk'.²⁶¹

Although Carroll's reading of *Adam Bede* makes an interesting case for the presence of *actual* breast milk, its charting of the novel's morbid linkage of lactation and infanticide rests heavily on this reading of Mrs Poyser's inflammation and on the passage at the end of Book 2 where the schoolmaster Bartle Massey scolds his dog for being a 'sly hussy': 'But where's the use of talking to a woman with babbies? [...] She's got no conscience—no conscience; it's all run to milk' (232). The relationship between the displacement of human onto animal milk on the one hand and Eliot's repeated use of ineffectual and surrogate mothers on the other is, however, far more complex, and rooted in a horror of the generative body. Carroll's comparison of *Adam Bede* with Hardy's text charts the consequences of the technological advances that meant, by the end of the nineteenth century, cow's milk had replaced human milk as the 'ideal' food for infants, locating within the image of the sexually transgressing young woman in the dairy 'deeply embedded anxieties' over the erotic possibilities of nursing and the problematization of the domestic space, women's work, and the productive body in industrialized capitalism.²⁶² Indeed, by the time *Tess* was published in 1891, the business of rural dairies producing milk for 'babies who have never seen a cow' was well under way. Tess's position in Talbothays—which engages in this production line—after the death of her own infant is far more rooted in the explicit, lived business of (dis)embodied lactation than Hetty's. In *Adam Bede*, which is set at the turn of the nineteenth century, before these advancements had fully taken hold, the substitution of animal milk for human is representative of a psychological, rather than a technological, reality.

Throughout the entire text, physical maternity is transferred onto non-human objects—animals, peaches—and so is Hetty's lack of maternal instinct:

Hetty would have been glad to hear that she should never see a child again; they were worse than the nasty little lambs that the shepherd was always bringing in to be taken special care of in lambing time; for the lambs *were* got rid of sooner or later. As for

²⁶¹ Carroll, p. 176.

²⁶² Carroll, p. 166.

the young chickens and turkeys, Hetty would have hated the very word “hatching,” if her aunt had not bribed her to attend to the young poultry by promising her the proceeds of one out of every brood. The round downy chicks peeping out from under their mother’s wing never touched Hetty with any pleasure; that was not the sort of prettiness she cared about, but she did care about the prettiness of the new things she would buy for herself at Treddleston Fair with the money they fetched. (146)

Here, Hetty’s beauty—and, implicitly, her vanity—is credited with dishonesty: the double affront of subverting the ‘natural’ purpose of femininity and using that very femininity to mislead onlookers into believing the opposite. The text is dependent upon a transactional value system where Hetty’s faults give value to their opposite, but the conflation of natural maternity and animal instinct is confused. The young animals Hetty so revealingly doesn’t like represent the virtuous maternal instinct as expressed through care for the vulnerable, but maternal animals themselves are—like Bartle Massey’s conscienceless dog—too closely associated with the physical side of reproduction to be symbolically purified. This confusion is present, too, in the representation of labour in the text. Like the erasure of Hetty’s skilled dairy work, the narrator chides Hetty for her laziness but never acknowledges that affective and domestic labour *are* work: the narrator’s disdain for Hetty’s preferences for spending money and for ‘new things’ confers a symbolic value of ‘natural’ nurture onto her care for the children and the animals.

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Once Hetty becomes pregnant, the milk, the dairy, and the animal stand-ins disappear from the text. Her pregnancy is figured in religious terms as an ‘advancing shame’, and the ‘foolish lost lamb’ is recognisable not as a real animal but as a biblical figure:

A young blooming girl, not knowing where to turn for refuge from swift advancing shame: understanding no more of this life of ours than a foolish lost lamb wandering farther and farther in the nightfall on the lonely heath: yet tasting the bitterest of life’s bitterness... (344-45)

In the chapter called ‘The Hidden Dread’, Hetty’s bodily experience of pregnancy is erased entirely by euphemism. The temporal disruption to the menstrual cycle that pregnancy brings is replaced in by this encroaching ‘dread’ and the recurring thoughts of the ‘shrouded pool’ that both symbolises Hetty’s womb and offers the possibility of escape from it. Biological time is replaced by this semi-real visualisation, and the birth that pregnant women’s lives

necessarily move towards is replaced by arrival at the pool itself. The pool's first appearance comes at the point where the reader realises Hetty's situation, replacing diagnosis:

Farther on there is a clump of trees on the low ground, and she is making her way towards it. No, it is not a clump of trees, but a dark shrouded pool, so full with the wintry rains that the under boughs of the elder-bushes lie low beneath the water. She sits down on the grassy bank, against the stooping stem of the great oak that hangs over the dark pool. She has thought of this pool often in the nights of the month that has just gone by, and now at last she is come to see it. She clasps her hands round her knees, and leans forward, and looks earnestly at it, as if trying to guess what sort of bed it would make for her young round limbs.

No, she has not courage to jump into that cold watery bed, and if she had, they might find her—they might find out why she had drowned herself. There is but one thing left to her: she must go away, go where they can't find her. (345)

The advancement of the pool, counted in months, coupled with its 'fullness', the 'roundness' of Hetty's limbs, the repetition of 'find her' and its elision of the assumed next word, 'body', combine with the 'dark shrouded' nature of the pool and the submerged items that it conceals to represent the gravid uterus. Hetty's pregnancy is dated in a twisted version of the traditional nuptial narrative—'the first on-coming of her great dread, some weeks after her betrothal to Adam'—and her crime of concealment is, paradoxically, the only thing elucidated clearly. Her refusal to face up to what has happened is coded in language of childishness that both continues the infantilization of Hetty and alludes too, to the infant she is concealing, the 'unshapen chance' within her: 'In young, childish, ignorant souls there is constantly this blind trust in some unshapen chance: it is as hard to a boy or girl to believe that a great wretchedness will actually befall them as to believe that they will die' (346).

After she embarks upon her miserable journey, the pool recurs again and again in Hetty's mind, 'fancying herself at the edge of a hidden pool, low down, like that in the Scantlands; wondering if it were very painful to be drowned, and if there would be anything worse after death than what she dreaded in life' (361). For Hetty herself, the pool represents both the potential death that could release her from the necessity of birth, and, in its smallness, the limits of her experience, her scandalous vulnerability, and her lack of any recuperative imagination: 'she chose to go to Stratford-on-Avon again, where she had gone before by mistake, for she remembered some grassy fields on her former way towards it—fields among which she thought she might find just the sort of pool she had in her mind' (362). At no point is the earlier depiction of Hetty as a thoroughly non-maternal character challenged; rather, the performance of care that she still manages to repeat when observed—

‘choosing her decent lodging at night, and dressing herself neatly in the morning, and setting off on her way steadily, or remaining under shelter if it rained, as if she had a happy life to cherish’ (362)—is both a moving denial of any real futurity for Hetty and an affirmation of the fact her care is directed only toward herself.

As the chapter reaches its climax and Hetty approaches an—the—actual pool, the word is repeated multiple times, and the entire scenery itself simultaneously real and imagined:

At last she was among the fields she had been dreaming of, on a long narrow pathway leading towards a wood. *If there should be a pool in that wood!* It would be better hidden than one in the fields. *No, it was not a wood,* only a wild brake, where there had once been gravel-pits, leaving mounds and hollows studded with brushwood and small trees. She roamed up and down, *thinking there was perhaps a pool in every hollow* before she came to it, till her limbs were weary, and she sat down to rest. (362-63, emphasis mine)

Immediately after this moment where Hetty sits down to rest, we realise the pool is not there after all, and the search continues: ‘after a little while Hetty started up again, feeling that darkness would soon come on; and she must put off finding the pool till tomorrow, and make her way to some shelter for the night’ (345). When she finally does find a pool, it is through feeling rather than sight:

Hetty’s heart gave a great beat as she thought there must be a pool there. She walked towards it heavily over the tufted grass, with pale lips and a sense of trembling. It was as if the thing were come in spite of herself, instead of being the object of her search. (345)

The refusal even here to assign agency to Hetty is, of course, indicative of her state of mind, but with Williams and others’ point about the erasure of Hetty’s subjecthood in mind, it’s impossible not to read this passage as a deliberate denial of agency at the level of the narrative. With the quickening beat of Hetty’s heart, the chapter attempts to re-root itself in the physical, and the erased body returns:

There it was, black under the darkening sky: no motion, no sound near. She set down her basket, and then sank down herself on the grass, trembling. The pool had its wintry depth now: by the time it got shallow, as she remembered the pools did at Hayslope, in the summer, no one could find out that it was her body. But then there was her basket—she must hide that too. She must throw it into the water—make it heavy with stones first, and then throw it in. (363)

Yet, despite the weight of the food and the stones, the physicality represented still ignores the actuality of Hetty's condition and, crucially, the specificity of her act. Deciding against suicide, she eats the buns in her basket, then falls asleep. Upon waking she is once again 'out of all human reach'; the sequence of events between this moment, her failure to throw herself into the pool, and the appearance of the old man who advises her not to get up to 'mischief' is unclear. The only way the reader can understand what is happening at this crucial juncture of the narrative is by following the unconscious symbolic language Eliot uses. The pool, like Maggie Tulliver's fishing pond and the waters of the Floss, represents the act of birth: Hetty's inability to find it and Eliot's inability to describe it embeds the concealment of the pregnancy in the very fabric of the narrative, 'as if the thing were come in spite of herself', instead of being the object of either of their search. The substitution of Hetty's consideration of the logistics of a potential suicide for the logistics of giving birth—what happened to the umbilical cord?—reinforces the associative relationship between birth and death, as the body of the mother and the body of the infant merge: 'by the time it got shallow [...] no one could find out that it was her body'.

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Of course, part of the reason the description of Hetty's actions are vague is their criminal nature. The criminalisation of the concealment of pregnancy, which emerged concurrently with the Puritan movement in the early seventeenth century, was unique in common law in its reliance upon circumstantial evidence alone:

When physical evidence of childbirth was found (witnesses who heard a child crying, for instance), but the alleged mother was unable to produce a living child or anyone to whom she had spoken about her pregnancy, a verdict of concealment and sentence of execution were mandated. No intention of wilful murder needed to be proved, and no penalty less than death could be given if concealment was proven.²⁶³

That this circumstantial evidence could be solely reliant upon the perception of sound, for example, rather than tangible physical proof, gives a new gloss to Eliot's ambiguous representation of Hetty's actions: the uncertainty mimics the legal framework upon which the

²⁶³ Rosemary Gould, 'The History of an Unnatural Act: Infanticide and *Adam Bede*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 25.2 (1997), 263-277 (p. 265).

rest of her narrative turns.²⁶⁴ Indeed, as Josephine McDonagh and others have noted, the precise temporal setting of Hetty's story has its own legal significance: throughout the 1770s, attempts to reform the statute were unsuccessful. In 1803, Lord Chief Justice Ellenborough's Offences against the Person Act became law, which separated the murder of an infant from the concealment of a pregnancy. In the novel, Hetty's trial occurs in 1800: 'if Hetty's case had been heard under the 1803 law there would have been no positive proof of murder, so it is likely that a court would have found Hetty guilty only of the secondary charge of concealment, for which she would have received the lesser penalty of imprisonment for two years'.²⁶⁵

Perhaps, as has been frequently argued, Eliot partially intended Hetty's case to argue for the benefit of empathetic treatment of young women like her; Ellenborough, however, certainly did not. His reform of the law was 'primarily motivated by a desire for administrative efficiency, both in the treatment of women culprits (who he felt had been treated too leniently) and in relation to the administration of Ireland (a savage and unruly colony)'.²⁶⁶ Indeed, when Arthur returns with her reprieve in the nick of time, he is returning from his colonial duties in Ireland, which would have entailed violent suppression of rebellion and nationalist communities. By the mid-nineteenth century, infanticide had taken on something of a representative relationship with national character: the dominant discourse, despite the actual barbarity of empire, was that the British, as a *civilised* nation, cared for their children, whilst *savages* committed child murder.²⁶⁷ This emphasis on the nation state cannot be separated from the mass hysteria of the 1850s and 1860s around the perceived 'wave of infanticide' that was sweeping the country, something that much of the critical heritage of *Adam Bede* considers to be the novel's primary context. Despite the fact that

²⁶⁴ In Scotland, the law was even more draconian, as illustrated by Walter Scott's 1818 *The Heart of Midlothian*, set in 1734. Indeed, even after hangings for suspected infanticide became uncommon, women could still be sentenced to banishment: failed citizens, who had neglected their social reproductive duty.

²⁶⁵ Josephine McDonagh, 'Child-Murder Narratives in George Eliot's *Adam Bede*: Embedded Histories and Fictional Representation', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 56.2 (September 2001), 228-259 (p. 251). Schramm, in *Testimony*, argues that Hetty's confession suggests that she never intended to kill the child, meaning the legal nature of the crime is ambiguous.

²⁶⁶ McDonagh, p. 252.

²⁶⁷ See McDonagh's discussion of Adam Smith's 1759 *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), p. 242. In abolitionist narratives, too, the inhumanity of slavery was illustrated through the narrative device of the enslaved mother sacrificing her child, to prevent it from having to endure a life of bondage. See, in particular, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 1850 poem 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim Point', in *The Complete Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Charlotte Porter and Helen A. Clarke, 6 vols (New York, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co, 1900), III, pp. 160-70. For an account of slavery and breastfeeding, see Marcus Wood, *Black Milk: Imagining Slavery in the Visual Cultures of Brazil and America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

social historians are now broadly in agreement that the percentage of unmarried mothers who committed infanticide was vanishingly small, as Rosemary Gould points out, '[c]oroners and journalists agreed in attributing this mass infanticide to unmarried mothers because, it was believed, such women were the only people with an incentive to kill children'.²⁶⁸ The will to sacrifice, to destroy, and punish, was embedded in the consciousness of society and the state: unmarried mothers were the scapegoats.²⁶⁹

Even the Foundling Hospital itself, founded by Thomas Coram in 1739, required—like Dickens's *Urania Cottage*—its mothers to come for interviews, providing respite only for first-time lapsers. The prevailing assumptions of mid-Victorian culture disproportionately demonised working-class mothers: there was a widespread, demonstrably false belief that working class women endangered the lives of their infants by returning to work in factories after they gave birth, and there was a prevailing idea that most illegitimate births were the responsibility of servants 'seduced' by their superiors.²⁷⁰ McDonagh cautions against too rigid a historicist reading of *Adam Bede* as the product of this particular cultural moment, however: although the publication of the novel in 1859 positions it in the midst of this perceived infanticidal epidemic, Eliot's ambitions are broader than an exclusive focus on this context. McDonagh, pointing to the importance of the 'cultural associations that have accrued over a much longer historical period and that have been transmitted and adapted through a whole range of discursive forms, including the many literary works that Eliot drew upon', suggests that Hetty's act operates 'as a nodal point of what Freud describes in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) as a repository of associations from diffuse contexts and as a device through which the novel enters into much more speculative relations with the past and the future'.²⁷¹

These 'literary works' were varied: in November 1857, whilst she was writing *Adam Bede*, Eliot wrote in her journal a description of Richmond Hill in which she references Walter Scott's 1818 *The Heart of Midlothian*. McDonagh and others have suggested that this reading would also have included William Wordsworth's 'The Thorn', the 1844 story 'The

²⁶⁸ Gould, p. 265.

²⁶⁹ See, for example, the fact that, upon its publication in 1840, 'Populousness', a tract now believed to have been a Swiftian satirical project, advocating gassing illegitimate children, was taken seriously, alongside the view put forward by utilitarians like Malthus that the London Foundling Hospital should be closed, as the deaths of these children would be 'less' of an evil than the promiscuity it 'promoted'. See R. Sauer, 'Infanticide and Abortion in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Population Studies*, 32.1 (March 1978), 81-93 (p. 83).

²⁷⁰ See Lionel Rose, pp. 8-9 (p. 21).

²⁷¹ McDonagh, p. 237.

Chimes' from Dickens's *Christmas Book* which dramatized the popular belief in the wake of the 1834 New Poor Law that mothers were forced to kill their children as a result of extreme poverty, and the tale of Gretchen in Goethe's *Faust*, who drowns her illegitimate child and is convicted of the murder. Although these contextual factors are important to the project of understanding the ambiguities of Eliot's infanticidal plot, I want to suggest that alongside the broader historical and cultural associations, the lack of clarity surrounding Hetty's actual crime obfuscates the absolute necessity of her banishment. Hetty is Eliot's first maternal scapegoat: Eliot, like Gaskell, is a stern priestess presiding over a fictional structure that requires transgressive female sexuality to meet the sacrificial knife. In this sense, Eliot's reception of other writers acts as a cipher for literature's ability to provide an interpretation or recasting of events, including those we are unable to process in our everyday lives. This can, owing to the subsequent development of psychoanalysis, be described as proto-Freudian in a way that extends beyond the act of borrowing a single term from Freud as McDonagh does.²⁷²

In reading the buried body of Hetty's baby as a figure for repression in the text, McDonagh turns to Wordsworth's 'The Thorn'. First published in *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, the poem focuses on 'mad Martha Ray', a woman who, we are led to believe, probably killed her illegitimate child, and, mad with grief, roams the landscape where she buried the body.²⁷³ For McDonagh, although 'The Thorn' is, in its echo in the burial of Thias Bede under a white thorn, linked to the fulfilment of Adam's Oedipal desire for his father's death, this patricidal subtext is supplanted by a kind of sacrificial renewal: the burial of Thias is repeated and covered over in the burial of Hetty's baby, which in turn becomes a kind of triumphant repression—the founding sacrifice of the nation—of the symbolic burial of all that 'must' be repressed.²⁷⁴ McDonagh links the poem to Malthus—the 'Essay on the Principle of Population' and *Lyrical Ballads* were published in the same year, although Malthus didn't insert the figure of Dame Nature until the 1803 edition—in its relocation of the 'problem of female sexuality in nature, dissipating its political threat but generalising its social dangers'.²⁷⁵

²⁷² For an account of the historiography of psychoanalysis before Freud, see Matt ffytche, *The Foundation of the Unconscious: Schelling, Freud, and the Birth of the Modern Psyche* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²⁷³ William Wordsworth, 'The Thorn', *Lyrical Ballads: With a Few Other Poems* (London: J. & A. Arch, 1798), pp. 117-132, p. 119.

²⁷⁴ McDonagh, *Child Murder and British Culture, 1720–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 48-52.

²⁷⁵ McDonagh, *Child Murder*, pp. 70-72

Yet reading with Wordsworth's complex, dissembling lyric illustrates that the return of the repressed in *Adam Bede* cannot be so easily accounted for. Readers of Eliot who were familiar with Wordsworth's text might have noticed the familiarity of the symbolic pool that stands in for Hetty's womb in the 'little muddy pond | Of water—never dry' that Martha Ray may have drowned her own baby in. Like the vague descriptions of Hetty's actions and her stuttering testimony, the very structure of Wordsworth's poem encodes a kind of failed repression in its oscillation between articulation and denial.²⁷⁶ Over and over again the speaker simultaneously reveals and obscures, as the mossy hill is described as both *like* a grave and not: 'Is like an infant's grave in size | As like as like can be | But never, never any where, | An infant's grave was half so fair'.²⁷⁷ Likewise, the 'true' reason for Martha's cries of misery is repeatedly confirmed and denied in the same stanza, even amongst the graphic descriptions of the 'moss spotted red' with blood and the ghost of the baby that haunts the spot: 'There's no one that could ever tell; | And if 'twas born alive or dead, | There's no one knows, as I have said'.²⁷⁸

Even at the moment of plainest revelatory speech in the text, the (apparently) full disclosure of 'She was with child, and she was mad', the secondary clause throws the first into doubt: this is another kind of doubling, a pregnancy represented as a fracture in the psyche. Stephen Hill, whose name represents the mossy mound that might clothe the body of his child and rhymes with the 'goodwill' in which Martha held him, marries another woman on the very day he was supposed to marry her: the text splits off into an imaginary happy narrative of the woman he weds and the tragedy of the woman he leaves, doubling the former's implied hope of legitimate pregnancy with Martha's reproductive madness. The threatening, destabilising female body is once more split into two: the horror specific to sexuality is contained in the body that bears the burden of illegitimate childbirth. Adam's Oedipal fantasies, as McDonagh terms them, do not only manifest themselves in the death of Thias Bede: the pull of a reproductive female body is what solicits that patricidal violence. In his desire for Hetty, Adam comes perilously close to the dangerous female; it is only in the

²⁷⁶ Corinna Russell, in her account of the 'complex play of repetition, substitution and difference' in the poem notes that, 'just as the narration shies continually away from finally identifying the hill of moss as a grave, the figure of similitude in the poem holds off from the exchange or substitution of terms that takes place in metaphor'. See 'A Defence of Tautology: Repetition and Difference in Wordsworth's Note to "The Thorn"', *Paragraph*, 28.2 (2005), 104-118 (p. 109).

²⁷⁷ Wordsworth, p. 120.

²⁷⁸ Wordsworth, p. 127.

purification of his love for Dinah that he can escape the threat of dissolution in the maternal body.

The removal of Hetty from the novel can, like the death of Gaskell's *Ruth*, be read as a kind of sacrificial expulsion of the faults of the community or of society in general only when the full weight of the subconscious horror of the female is reckoned with. Gould, calling the punishment of Hetty a 'sacrificial dream of renewal', notes in relation to Hetty's journey that

English society was using the fictional expulsion of the fallen woman from her community as a kind of ritual purging and sacrifice. These novels reassured the readership that the dangerous "vice" which threatened their stability had a way of taking care of itself (as Malthus claimed), even as they also transformed the impulse to punish into an impulse to save.²⁷⁹

The use of Hetty's pregnant body as a symbol of sexual corruption brings to mind once more Gallagher's description of *The Winter's Tale*: 'if life were not a perpetual encounter with dead mothers and babies, we would have no need for the art that mends nature.'²⁸⁰ Rather than bring back a Hetty carved in marble, purged of her misdeeds and reunited with her child, however, Eliot kills her off, displacing the symbolic, uncorrupted maternal body onto Dinah: both motherless, the cousins represent the sides of orphaned femininity that Gaskell combined in Ruth's fall and purification.

The most famous example of this dynamic in *Adam Bede* can be found in the visual contrast of the two characters in 'The Two Chambers':

What a strange contrast the two figures made, visible enough in that mingled twilight and moonlight! Hetty, her cheeks flushed and her eyes glistening from her imaginary drama, her beautiful neck and arms bare, her hair hanging in a curly tangle down her back, and the baubles in her ears. Dinah, covered with her long white dress, her pale face full of subdued emotion, almost like a lovely corpse into which the soul has returned charged with sublimer secrets and a sublimer love. (150)

Hetty, adorned with 'baubles', hair in a tangle, with flushed cheeks, is all too embodied. Dinah's corpse-like pallor, however, again positions the sublime as a way to escape the corrupting bodily aspects of femininity: 'a lovely corpse into which the soul has returned

²⁷⁹ Gould, p. 270.

²⁸⁰ Gallagher, *Body*, p. 179.

charged with sublimer secrets and *a sublimer love*'. Later, when the narrator compares Adam's relationship with Dinah to his love for Hetty, the analogy, too, is of something that has transcended the flesh, transcended the 'seed': 'what better harvest from that painful seed-time can there be than this?' (496). Ilana Blumberg, in her analysis of the transaction that occurs in *Adam Bede* by which Hetty's life is exchanged for Dinah's, reads the relationship between Hetty's suffering and Adam's happiness as an economic one:

As *Adam Bede* traverses time and space from a waning feudal country life to an emerging industrial-capitalist urban economy, Eliot's description of the human relations in which one's loss is subsumed by others' gain evokes a particularly troubling version of the invisible hand of economics that divorced the morality of individual intention from the utility of collective effect.²⁸¹

This idea that in matrimony one party's loss is 'subsumed' into another's gain is inextricable, in its relation to utilitarian economics, from a consideration of infanticide, particularly in the Malthusian context of *Adam Bede*'s literary inheritance. The notion of marriage as a productive arrangement that thrives, in part, on deprivation, is something Eliot returns to, in both an ethical and an explicitly economic sense, in the relationship between Gwendolen Harleth and Lydia Glasher in *Daniel Deronda*. We can read Hetty's actual pregnancy as a Freudian 'nodal point' in Eliot's body of work and in the culture as a whole. It is the *actual* representation of a concern that, by her final novel, has evolved into the metaphorical pregnancy of Gwendolen: figured, as we have seen, as pregnant with her own misdeeds, the salvation that she finds in *Deronda*—safely devoted to that new version of Dinah, Mirah Cohen—is also what confines her back to what we might call a non- or pre-reproductive state: living alone, unmarried, with her mother.

²⁸¹ Blumberg, p.101.

ii: the spectacle of Hetty

Gould contends that ‘no one’ in *Adam Bede* believes Hetty’s unborn child to have a right to life. Rather, they consider her to be a criminal for getting pregnant out of wedlock in the first place: ‘Hetty is punished by that society not because she has harmed another person but because she has attempted to escape from the consequences of her fall and has revealed herself to be dangerously deviant: unfeminine in her lack of maternal love’.²⁸² Here we might return to Eliot’s choice of phrasing at the edge of the pool, to the foetal imagery of ‘some unshapen chance’. We can also return to Hetty’s animal beauty:

It is a beauty like that of kittens, or very small downy ducks making gentle rippling noises with their soft bills, or babies just beginning to toddle and to engage in conscious mischief—a beauty with which you can never be angry, but that you feel ready to crush for inability to comprehend the state of mind into which it throws you. Hetty Sorrel’s was that sort of beauty. (78)

If it holds true that Hetty must be expelled so the community can purge itself of its own wrongdoings, then Eliot’s logic, made clear here, is one of brutal productivity: Hetty’s beauty is like that of an infant animal, and therefore linked inexorably to her own lack of maternal instinct. Her sexual attractiveness, therefore, is a threat to order, to the narrative surety of the text: it must be crushed.

Hetty is primarily figured as an object to be looked at. Without the narrator giving voice to her physical experience, there is little chance that Hetty could voice it herself. As Beer notes, throughout *Adam Bede* Hetty is ‘never herself articulate and given remarkably little direct speech’.²⁸³ The story of childbirth and abandonment is only told to us in fragments long after the event in question, first through the witnesses’ disclosure of the gift of baby clothes and the discovery of a baby’s hand, and finally in the confession Hetty gives to Dinah while incarcerated, a confusing, dream-like experience:

I will speak I will tell ... I won’t hide it any more I did do it Dinah I buried it in the wood... the little baby it cried... I heard it cry... ever such a long way off night... and I went back because it cried [...] I lay comfortable, and the baby was warm against me;

²⁸² Gould, p. 270. See also Lionel Rose, p. 5: ‘Historically, the value of infant life is determined by the forces of supply and demand, and contemporary attitudes to the inevitability of death. Dead babies were quickly replaceable when the birth rate was high; and an ignorance of the means to prevent death bred a helpless, resigned mentality—‘it’s God’s will’, ‘perhaps it’s for the best’ and so forth—which compounded the cheapening of infant life.’

²⁸³ Beer, p. 63.

and I must have gone to sleep for a good while, for when I woke it was morning, but not very light and the baby was crying. And I saw a wood a little way off ... I thought there'd perhaps be a ditch or a pond there ... and it was so early I thought I could hide the child there, and get a long way off before folks was up. (423-24)

Hetty's incantatory 'I will speak I will tell' marks a breaking of her silence far too late for action; the child's cries, in the past tense, are no longer urgent. The mention of the 'warmth' of the baby's body is the only physical thing recorded here, articulated after the baby is dead and Hetty is imprisoned. The first time the reader is informed of what has happened to Hetty and the child, it is Adam's reaction that provides the focus, as Mr Irwine situates the revelation in the terms of Adam's experiences, Adam's sorrows:

Adam, my dear friend, you have had some hard trials in your life. You can bear sorrow manfully, as well as act manfully. God requires both tasks at our hands. And there is a heavier sorrow coming upon you than any you have yet known. (384)

Indeed, throughout Irwine's account, Hetty's very identity is in question:

She will not confess her name or where she comes from; but I fear, I fear, there can be no doubt it is Hetty. The description of her person corresponds, only that she is said to look very pale and ill. She had a small red-leather pocket-book in her pocket with two names written in it—one at the beginning, 'Hetty Sorrel, Hayslope', and the other near the end, 'Dinah Morris, Snowfield.' She will not say which is her own name. (385)

The oscillations over naming and 'real' identity, or truth, compound the connection between Hetty's vanity and Dinah's virtue. Adam's disbelief echoes the narrative instability of the vaguely depicted pregnancy itself: 'It isn't possible. She never had a child. She can't be guilty. Who says it?', and later:

"But what proof have they got against her, if it is Hetty?" said Adam, still violently, with an effort that seemed to shake his whole frame. "I'll not believe it. It couldn't ha' been, and none of us know it. (385)

The physicality of Adam's 'effort', which is said to 'shake his whole frame', is still situated in the cognitive act of believing, or knowing, whilst his later fury at Donnithorne taking advantage of Hetty 'so weak and young' quite literally denies her strength. We have not seen, after all, the enormous act of physical labour it takes to give birth to a child. The pun in Adam's cry of 'I can't bear it...' is followed by another indication of the burden the knowledge places on him, who has no relation to the child: 'O God, it's too hard to lay upon

me—it's too hard to think she's wicked'. Again, the difficulty is a difficulty of thought: it's not too hard that she *is* wicked, but it is too hard to *think* it. At the climax of the chapter, Adam's appearance is detailed once more:

Adam before him, with that look of sudden age which sometimes comes over a young face in moments of terrible emotion—the hard bloodless look of the skin, the deep lines about the quivering mouth, the furrows in the brow—the sight of this strong firm man shattered by the invisible stroke of sorrow, moved him so deeply that speech was not easy. Adam stood motionless, with his eyes vacantly fixed in this way for a minute or two; in that short space he was living through all his love again.

“She can't ha' done it,” he said, still without moving his eyes, as if he were only talking to himself: “it was fear made her hide it...I forgive her for deceiving me...I forgive thee, Hetty...thee wast deceived too...it's gone hard wi' thee, my poor Hetty...but they'll never make me believe it.”

He was silent again for a few moments, and then he said, with fierce abruptness, “I'll go to him—I'll bring him back—I'll make him go and look at her in her misery—he shall look at her till he can't forget it—it shall follow him night and day—as long as he lives it shall follow him—he shan't escape wi' lies this time—I'll fetch him, I'll drag him myself.” (386)

It is Adam's life, not Hetty's genuinely endangered one, that counts here, as mortality is invoked only passingly and aesthetically—‘that look of sudden age’—and the experience being ‘lived through’ is Adam's love, not Hetty's suffering. The repetition of Adam's promise to ‘forgive’ compounds the image of her as a criminal, whilst the focus on retribution through ‘dragging’ Arthur back to look at Hetty reduces her to a spectacle: ‘I'll make him go and look at her in her misery—he shall look at her till he can't forget it’. The scene foreshadows the compulsion to look at Gwendolen Harleth that opens *Daniel Deronda*:

Was she beautiful or not beautiful? and what was the secret of form or expression which gave the dynamic quality to her glance? Was the good or the evil genius dominant in those beams? Probably the evil; else why was the effect that of unrest rather than of undisturbed charm? Why was the wish to look again felt as coercion and not as a longing in which the whole being consents? (*DD*, 1)

In *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, Rose uses these lines to ground her analysis of Gwendolen as the ‘spectacle’ of femininity that structures the novel's crisis of representation, and the way in which, in the ‘relentless and punishing scrutiny of the woman’ that dominated the second half of the nineteenth century, ‘morality makes a spectacle of itself’.²⁸⁴ Rose links the two moments of spectacle that centre on Gwendolen's body, reading the moment where

²⁸⁴ Rose, p. 112.

Gwendolen freezes in horror at the gargoyle during the early charade of *The Winter's Tale* as a precursor of the image of Grandcourt's dead face that renders Gwendolen guilty and penitent at the close of the text.²⁸⁵ We receive these two images through Herr Klesmer and Daniel himself: 'thus Gwendolen's fear 'terrifying in its terror' is received by the male spectator and completes itself in the place of the one who looks'.²⁸⁶ The importance of *The Winter's Tale*, for Rose, lies in its the imperative to return, its dramatization of circular entrapment:

In both of these episodes, George Eliot contradicts her own commentary at an earlier point in the book: 'For Macbeth's rhetoric about the impossibility of being many opposite things in the same moment referred to the clumsy necessities of action and not to the subtler possibilities of feeling. We cannot speak a loyal word and be meanly silent, we cannot kill and not kill in the same moment; but a moment is room wide enough for the loyal and mean desire, for the outlash of a murderous thought and the sharp backward stroke of repentance.' To kill and not kill in a clumsy, necessitous action fairly describes the drama of *The Winter's Tale* as much as the drowning of Grandcourt. Unlike Hermione, Grandcourt dies. Gwendolen does not kill him, but she does not save him and, along the lines of the finest discrimination, that is enough—in her judgement at least—to condemn her.²⁸⁷

Rose links this ambiguous moment—wide enough for competing desires—to a Freudian understanding of this crisis of knowledge as 'the division of being itself'; this rupture is also present in the failure of omniscient narrative:

Only a fictional character can be totally known. But if knowledge is of the order of fiction, then the certainty of knowledge itself starts to fail. The relentless scrutiny of the woman and her guilt can then be seen as a type of logical response to this failing. Guilty or not guilty, the question of the woman's sexuality transposes the problem of the limits of knowledge into the form of a judgement.²⁸⁸

In *Daniel Deronda*, this works itself out—or rather, doesn't—in the radical splitting of the story.

In *Adam Bede*, at the opposite end of Eliot's career, Hetty, although far from the protagonist that Gwendolen is, is a prototype for this problematic sexuality. Gwendolen's moment is wide enough for her to live within its ambiguity: she, at least, is afforded the

²⁸⁵ Rose, pp. 105-6.

²⁸⁶ Rose, p. 106.

²⁸⁷ Rose, p. 107, quoting from *Daniel Deronda*, p. 36.

²⁸⁸ Rose, pp. 108-9

dignity of being condemned by her own judgement. Both characters are prized for their beauty, but Gwendolen's is afforded an unsettling power of rupture and discontent—'Was she beautiful or not beautiful?'—that Hetty's is not: as we have seen, her likeness to young animals produces confused and potentially dangerous responses that stem from the very infuriating sweetness of her undisputed good looks. The opening of *Daniel Deronda* positions the moral categories of 'good' and 'evil' in relation to judgement, 'a judgement which might settle the disturbance posed by the woman to the one who looks. As if desire lights upon its object, finds itself disarmed and then punishes the woman for the upset produced'.²⁸⁹ Gwendolen is symbolically punished for a symbolic misdeed; Hetty is actually punished, first by her expulsion from the community, and then by her death, reported at the end of the novel. The compulsion to look at Gwendolen is ambiguous, the genesis of narratorial judgement; the compulsion to look at Hetty, by the time Adam discovers what has happened, is specifically directed from one spurned lover to another, from Adam to Arthur, and active only in the way it figures Hetty herself to be synonymous with 'her misery': it is not *Hetty* that will 'follow him night and day', or even 'she', but 'it'.

If *Daniel Deronda* needs Gwendolen to embody its 'crisis of representation' within her conflicted and conflicting self, *Adam Bede* functions differently: Hetty's body is almost too representative, her removal from the text too convenient, her role too fundamentally that of a scapegoat. The beginning of the second volume of the novel is titled 'A Crisis', and it can be read as a literal, microcosmic version of the psychological crisis that plays out over the entirety of *Daniel Deronda* almost twenty years later. The opening depiction of a sunny day places the action of the chapter in a Malthusian framework in its reference to 'untimely seed' and ambivalent births:

For if it be true that Nature at certain moments seems charged with a presentiment of one individual lot, must it not also be true that she seems unmindful, unconscious of another? For there is no hour that has not its births of gladness and despair, no morning brightness that does not bring new sickness to desolation as well as new forces to genius and love. *There are so many of us*, and our lots are so different: what wonder that Nature's mood is often in harsh contrast with the great crisis of our lives? *We are children of a large family*, and must learn, as such children do, not to expect that our hurts will be made much of—to be content with little nurture and caressing, and help each other the more. (277-78, emphasis mine)

²⁸⁹ Rose, p. 116.

Here, Nature, personified as female, is a neglectful mother of too many children: the lack of nurture and caressing an absence of feminised traits of maternal care. Immediately after this passage Adam ponders Hetty's fitness for matrimony, framing it within his own mother's standards: 'She'll make a wife as mother'll have no occasion to grumble at, after all'. The heavy-handed irony of this statement, moments before he happens upon Hetty and Arthur's tryst in the woods, frames Hetty's romance within the terms of the matrimonial contract Adam had set out for her: the episode is presented entirely from his perspective. Indeed, even the chapter entitled 'Hetty's World'—the shortest chapter in the novel—allows Hetty no space to articulate what draws her to Arthur Donnithorne; rather, it reinforces the existing narrative, beginning with her own appreciation of her looks, her dreams of luxury, and her heart's 'little foolish tunes' and her 'little silly imagination' (91).

The sight of Hetty and Arthur in the wood, then, is a crisis of spectacle. The dramatic tension of the interrupted movement of the two figures 'bending to kiss' is transferred onto the image of Adam's pale and stricken form, 'as motionless as a statue', and the image becomes the terrible knowledge of Hetty's sexual transgression: 'Adam was still motionless, looking at him as he came up. He understood it all now—the locket and everything else that had been doubtful to him' (282). During their confrontation, Adam figures a kiss from Hetty as property that he would 'ha'worked hard for years for the right to'; this, coming after his declaration that 'I thought you was my best friend, and a noble-minded man, as I was proud to work for' positions Hetty's physical affection at the centre of a Sedgwickian homosocial triangle based on a masculine exchange of labour.²⁹⁰ The spectacle, too, is embedded in this exchange, as the final image of 'A Crisis' transfers Adam's motionless face to Arthur's apparent death mask:

There was no sign of life: the eyes and teeth were set. The horror that rushed over Adam completely mastered him, and forced upon him its own belief. He could feel nothing but that death was in Arthur's face, and that he was helpless before it. He made not a single movement, but knelt like an image of despair gazing at an image of death. (286)

²⁹⁰ See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1985).

The symmetry of the dead faces suggests, like that of Grandcourt and the gargoyle in *Daniel Deronda*, a judgement, a punishment, and a cause.²⁹¹ The fact that Arthur does not die, and is instead helped up by Adam in the next chapter, means the deaths that occur in the novel are those of Hetty and her child; Hetty's body, the causative factor that links these two frozen male faces, is both the cause and its consequences; she gives birth to her own death sentence.

In *Daniel Deronda*, Gwendolen refers to herself as having to *bear* her husband's dead face:

If he were here again, what should I do? I cannot wish him here—and yet I cannot bear his dead face. I was a coward. I ought to have borne contempt. I ought to have gone away—gone and wandered like a beggar rather than stay to feel like a fiend. But turn where I would there was something I could not bear. Sometimes I thought he would kill *me* if I resisted his will. But now—his dead face is there, and I cannot bear it. (*DD*, 696)

Gwendolen both cannot bear the death mask and, crucially, always already has: the fantasies that 'moved within her' have delivered and been delivered, the contempt she could not bear has moved outside the confines of her body and committed murder. In *Adam Bede*, the repression of Hetty's labour—both in the dairy and in the act of childbirth—surfaces again and again in the language that surrounds her, particularly in the repetition of the verb to bear. The difference between the positions occupied by Hetty and Gwendolen in their respective texts is the difference between the actual and the symbolic; from actual sexual transgression to representative transgression; between the real and the fancy dairy. In both cases, the female sexual body is generative only of destruction and sorrow: we return again to Freud's 'Three Caskets', to the symbiotic relationship of the womb and the tomb.

²⁹¹ Rose notes of this figure in *Daniel Deronda* that the 'repetition therefore has a moral purpose; it signals that the moment could have been anticipated as the fulfilment of a moral judgement, one to which Gwendolen will increasingly submit 'as if she had waked up in a world where some judgement was impending' (pp. 105-106).

iii: fancy dairies

Class difference is also erased in the suppression of certain kinds of labour that occurs in Eliot's female pairs. A substitutionary doubling mechanism is present, as we have seen, in Hetty and Dinah and Gwendolen and Mirah; it is present, too, in *Middlemarch*'s Dorothea Brooke and Rosamond Lydgate. Unlike Hetty, Rosamond and Gwendolen do not have to toil for their money: although they both experience financial troubles, they are neither of them working class. One of the ways in which the real dairy of Hetty's reproductive transgression becomes the fancy dairies of Rosamond and Gwendolen's symbolic murders is through the two later characters' inability to understand the relationship between labour and financial comfort. Indeed, the perfection of *Middlemarch*'s structure and the triumphant ending Rosamond secures for herself at the novel's close allow her embodiment of feminine harm to express the most troubling element of this psychic split. Rosamond, like Gwendolen, fosters her husband's death within her (potentially) maternal body; unlike Gwendolen, she feels no remorse, and, indeed financially benefits from his early demise. A basil plant, she thrives on 'murdered mens' brains': 'Lydgate's hair never became white. He died when he was only fifty, leaving his wife and children provided for by a heavy insurance on his life'.²⁹²

Like Hetty, Rosamond derives pleasure from her beauty; unlike the dairymaid, her expensive education has rendered her almost entirely artificial:

Every nerve and muscle in Rosamond was adjusted to the consciousness that she was being looked at. She was by nature an actress of parts that entered into her physique: she even acted her own character, and so well, that she did not know it to be precisely her own. (114)

From the very beginning of her relationship with Lydgate, her ability to manipulate is emphasised—'Ever since that important new arrival in Middlemarch she had woven a little future'—alongside her refusal to factor cost into her plans: 'There was nothing financial, still less sordid, in her previsions: she cared about what were considered refinements, and not about the money that was to pay for them' (115). Rosamond's calculations, expressed as they are through a narrative voice that can barely disguise its vitriolic dislike of her—'think no *unfair* evil of her' (262, emphasis mine)—enact passive violence on her husband:

²⁹² George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. David Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 821. All further references will be to this edition and page numbers will be in the text; where necessary it will be abbreviated to *M*.

Circumstance was almost sure to be on the side of Rosamond's idea, which had a shaping activity and looked through watchful blue eyes, whereas Lydgate's lay blind and unconcerned as a jelly-fish which gets melted without knowing it. (266)

In half an hour he left the house an engaged man, whose soul was not his own, but the woman's to whom he had bound himself. (295)

Her inability to manage a household is Hetty's inability to dream of anything but luxury removed from the educative aspects of poverty; her refusal to take responsibility for her role in their expensive lifestyle, handing Lydgate her jewellery and abdicating responsibility, is the opposite of the self-sacrificial heroism of her aunt, Harriet Bulstrode. When Harriet removes her ornaments, jewellery and hairpieces after her husband's financial failure and shame, she engages in a process of complete self-renunciation: this is 'her way of expressing to all spectators visible or invisible that she had begun a new life in which she embraced humiliation' (*M*, 740). Embodying the sentiment, we have seen in *The Mill on the Floss*, whereby 'renunciation remains sorrow, though a sorrow borne willingly' (*MF*, 254), the financier's wife puts her matrimonial duty above her own happiness: 'now that punishment had befallen him it was not possible for her in any sense to forsake him' (*M*, 740). Her ability to perform the task her husband cannot fulfil sacrificial logic: the guilty party does not suffer.

Rosamond's attachment to her jewellery is an extension of her falsity, and her relationship to the natural world is initially represented as the opposite of Hetty's kittenish charm:

"Do you call yourself a raw country girl?" said Lydgate, looking at her with an involuntary emphasis of admiration, which made Rosamond blush with pleasure. But she remained simply serious, turned her long neck a little, and put up her hand to touch her wondrous hair-plaits—an habitual gesture with her as pretty as any movements of a kitten's paw. Not that Rosamond was in the least like a kitten: she was a sylph caught young and educated at Mrs. Lemon's. (157)

Yet, like Hetty's 'beauty with which you can never be angry, but that you feel ready to crush for inability to comprehend the state of mind into which it throws you' (*AB*, 76), Rosamond's femininity inspires in both Lydgate and Ladislav the will to punish and to crush:

Lydgate sat paralyzed by opposing impulses: since no reasoning he could apply to Rosamond seemed likely to conquer her assent, he wanted to smash and grind some object on which he could at least produce an impression, or else to tell her brutally that he was master, and she must obey. (648)

It would have been safer for Will in the first instance to have taken up his hat and gone away; but he had felt no impulse to do this; on the contrary, he had a horrible inclination to stay and shatter Rosamond with his anger. It seemed as impossible to bear the fatality she had drawn down on him without venting his fury as it would be to a panther to bear the javelin-wound without springing and biting. And yet—how could he tell a woman that he was ready to curse her? (766-67)

The violence she incites, through her ‘obstinacy’ and her refusal to listen and her insusceptibility to ‘reasoning’, is psychically revelatory. Rosamond’s body is valuable because of the desire it incites; this desirability is rooted in its femininity, which, in turn, is impossible to separate from its calculating obstinacy, its falsity. Lydgate’s wish to ‘smash and grind some object on which he could *at least* produce an impression’ not only brutally inscribes the power dynamic of master and slave into matrimony but places the blame for his violent urges onto his wife: an object, *at least*, would yield to his mastery, even if the woman he should expect to will not. Ladislaw’s desire to ‘shatter’ is not displaced onto an object but is levelled straight at Rosamond; his hand is stayed not by the presentiment that this violence is wrong, but a problem of articulation implicitly situated in the *woman’s* inability to understand. We return again to Rose’s analysis of the opening of *Daniel Deronda*: the novel, in its treatment of Gwendolen, seeks a ‘judgement which might settle the disturbance posed by the woman to the one who looks. As if desire lights upon its object, finds itself disarmed and then punishes the woman for the upset produced’.²⁹³

If Rosamond unleashes this psychic violence, the narrative suggests, it is an inevitable consequence of her power to emasculate. Repeatedly, the reader is told, she removes masculine agency, ‘paralysing’ her husband—like Adam and Arthur Donnithorne, like Grandcourt and Deronda—and undermining his dominance: Lydgate, immobilised, ‘had a growing dread of Rosamond’s quiet elusive obstinacy, which would not allow any assertion of power to be final [...] As to saying that he was master, it was not the fact. The very resolution to which he had wrought himself by dint of logic and honourable pride was beginning to relax under her torpedo contact’ (648). Earlier in the text, we are told that, for Lydgate,

²⁹³ Rose, p. 116.

The first great disappointment had been borne: the tender devotedness and docile adoration of the ideal wife must be renounced, and life must be taken up on a lower stage of expectation, as it is by men who have lost their limbs. But the real wife had not only her claims, she had still a hold on his heart, and it was his intense desire that the hold should remain strong. In marriage, the certainty, “She will never love me much,” is easier to bear than the fear, “I shall love her no more.” (639-40)

This transferral from the ideal wife to the real emphasises the continuing necessity for the language of the symbolic, mimicking as it does the action of castration: like a man who has lost his limbs, Lydgate’s very masculinity is at risk in the loosening of ‘the hold’; ‘borne’ and ‘bear’ appearing in such close proximity pushing him dangerously close to the position of the feminised, maternal body, foreshadowing the feminisation that occurs in Daniel’s conversations with the Alcharisi.²⁹⁴ The final sentence of the later passage where his urge to smash and grind and master is articulated furthers this metaphorical castration as the phallic power is transferred to Rosamond, and his own fought-for rigidity cannot hold: ‘The very resolution to which he had wrought himself by dint of logic and honourable pride was beginning to relax under her torpedo contact’ (648).

Trapping Lydgate in a matrimonial contract is also, according to the familial structures of the period, positioning him in a (potentially) paternal role. Yet, despite her devotion to the endgame—or product—of matrimony, Rosamond is simultaneously presented as callously, almost monstrously, unmaternal. The story of Rosamond’s pregnancy and miscarriage is almost entirely articulated through the narrator and the perspective of other characters: we learn that she is pregnant through Lydgate’s honourable silence on the matter of an unpaid furniture bill—‘Rosamond was expecting to have a baby, and Lydgate wished to save her from any perturbation’ (459)—and then later, through Mrs Vincy, that she was ‘disappointed of her baby; but she got over it nicely’ (556). The baby itself is figured as an afterthought, something to be ‘got over nicely’, and then dismissed by Mr Vincy as a primarily economic concern: ‘Baby, pooh! I can see Lydgate is making a mess of his practice, and getting into debt too, by what I hear. I shall have Rosamond coming to me with a pretty tale one of these days’ (556). The blame for the loss of the pregnancy is attributed entirely to Rosamond’s behaviour, on her financial largesse, her sexual pride, and her vanity:

²⁹⁴ See Freud, ‘On Narcissism: An Introduction’ *SE*, XIV (1957), pp. 73-107.

At the time when Mr. Vincy uttered that presentiment about Rosamond, she herself had never had the idea that she should be driven to make the sort of appeal which he foresaw. She had not yet had any anxiety about ways and means, although her domestic life had been expensive as well as eventful. Her baby had been born prematurely, and all the embroidered robes and caps had to be laid by in darkness. This misfortune was attributed entirely to her having persisted in going out on horseback one day when her husband had desired her not to do so; but it must not be supposed that she had shown temper on the occasion, or rudely told him that she would do as she liked. (566-67)

Rosamond, 'delighted' by the admiration of Lydgate's cousin, a captain and the son of a baronet, who, for his part 'found it easy to spend several hours of the day in flirting with her' loses her baby because she insists on riding out on the Captain's new horse:

the gentle gray, unprepared for the crash of a tree that was being felled on the edge of Halsell wood, took fright, and caused a worse fright to Rosamond, leading finally to the loss of her baby. Lydgate could not show his anger towards her, but he was rather bearish to the Captain, whose visit naturally soon came to an end. (571)

Again, Lydgate, unable to 'show his anger towards her' is immobilised by Rosamond's femininity, this time through her physical vulnerability after the miscarriage. The only time Rosamond is permitted to express anything about the loss of the pregnancy, she refers to it at the height of an argument in an attempt to manipulate her husband into solving his financial difficulties in the way she wants him to: 'It is so very hard to be disgraced here among all the people we know, and to live in such a miserable way. I wish I had died with the baby' (655). Miscarriage—also known as 'spontaneous abortion'—has a long history of maternal blame, with cultural documents from the early modern period onward illustrating that the work of mourning performed by the mother in these cases was figured, often, as a kind of penance for the causation of the loss.²⁹⁵ In this sense, then, we can see that Rosamond's reproductive body operates as a kind of bridge between the real dairy of Hetty and the fancy dairy of Gwendolen: she might not, like Hetty, be guilty of infanticide, but her responsibility for the miscarriage portrays the feminised trappings of sexual desire and agency as accountable for the loss all the same.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ See Andrea Brady, *English Funerary Elegy*; Lisa J. Schnell, 'Maternal Elegy in Early Modern England', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, ed. Karen Weisman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 481–497.

²⁹⁶ Indeed, under new abortion laws that have come into effect in the America during the current administration's rollback of reproductive rights, in some states she would be found guilty of murder.

Throughout *Middlemarch*, Rosamond's character defects are attributed to the influence of the maternal line, and explicitly contrasted with her father's sister, Harriet Bulstrode. Mary Garth, although not the primary textual double for Rosamond, possesses all the sensible qualities that she lacks. Mary is a woman firmly embedded in a paternal lineage: 'Oh, you dear good father! [...] I wonder if any other girl thinks her father the best man in the world!' (816). Mary and Fred produce three boys, and Mary sacrifices even the continuity of her character to a fantasy of a male parthenogenetic family:

Mary was not discontented that she brought forth men-children only; and when Fred wished to have a girl like her, she said, laughingly, "that would be too great a trial to your mother." [...] But Mary secretly rejoiced that the youngest of the three was very much what her father must have been when he wore a round jacket. (819)

Dorothea, too, has sons. These male heirs succeed in reconciling her with her sister and brother-in-law, and in continuing the pattern of inheritance down the Brooke generations: 'Mr. Brooke lived to a good old age, and his estate was inherited by Dorothea's son, who might have represented Middlemarch, but declined' (824).

Parentless, Dorothea offers a version of reproductive femininity that fully absorbs itself into the male line. In her friendship with Lydgate, Dorothea constructs where Rosamond destroys, restoring honour through the salvific force of her own belief:

"Not because there is no one to believe in you?" said Dorothea, pouring out her words in clearness from a full heart. "I know the unhappy mistakes about you. I knew them from the first moment to be mistakes. You have never done anything vile. You would not do anything dishonourable." (751)

In doing so, she creates a new space in Lydgate's understanding of gender:

It was the first assurance of belief in him that had fallen on Lydgate's ears. He drew a deep breath, and said, "Thank you." He could say no more: it was something very new and strange in his life that these few words of trust from a woman should be so much to him. (751)

Although in one sense this recuperation is a relief, it comes at a high cost: Dorothea is a woman who is good despite her femininity, rather than because of it. It is only through her transcendence of the body—Hermione resurrected—that she can occupy this purified position, and she is compared repeatedly to the Virgin Mary:

As Lydgate rode away, he thought, “This young creature has a heart large enough for the Virgin Mary. She evidently thinks nothing of her own future, and would pledge away half her income at once, as if she wanted nothing for herself but a chair to sit in from which she can look down with those clear eyes at the poor mortals who pray to her. She seems to have what I never saw in any woman before—a fountain of friendship towards men—a man can make a friend of her.” (758)

Immediately after this, he muses that ‘her love might help a man more than her money’: unlike Rosamond, who has neither, and is therefore by this logic rendered barren, Dorothea is the perfect example of a productive feminine body, her ‘fountain’ of friendship, along with her complete lack of regard for her own ‘future’, allows her to act as a non-sexualised maternal and matrimonial figure to the men she interacts with in the second half of the text.²⁹⁷

Even her love for Ladislav is figured in simultaneously maternal and sanctified terms: even at the moment of consummation in the library they are depicted as standing ‘with their hands clasped, like two children’, and, immediately before she is compared again to a ‘mater dolorosa’ and raised from her contemplations by the sight of a woman with a baby on her back, she visualises her love for him as

two images—two living forms that tore her heart in two, as if it had been the heart of a mother who seems to see her child divided by the sword, and presses one bleeding half to her breast while her gaze goes forth in agony towards the half which is carried away by the lying woman that has never known the mother’s pang. (775)

Ladislav himself figures Dorothea as a kind of holy figure. Thinking of Lydgate, Ladislav and Rosamond as ‘suppliants’ who bear an ‘obligation’ on *her*, Dorothea has evolved from a suppliant self-renouncer to a productive salvific agent in herself: she can preside over instances of reconciliatory atonement, rather than seek them. Where Dorothea’s desire to aid Casaubon in his scholarly endeavours is figured as a kind of perpetual wifely renunciation, from their first meeting Ladislav places himself in the role of suppliant:

The remote worship of a woman throned out of their reach plays a great part in men’s lives, but in most cases the worshipper longs for some queenly recognition, some approving sign by which his soul’s sovereign may cheer him without descending from her high place. That was precisely what Will wanted. (213)

²⁹⁷ See Auslander Munich on the desexualised position of the widowed Queen Victoria.

This elevation of Dorothea above the attainable world of the flesh continues: even when their acquaintance is at the height of its intimacy, Ladislaw idealises her, declaring to Rosamond ‘[n]o other woman exists by the side of her. I would rather touch her hand if it were dead, than I would touch any other woman’s living’ (767-68). Here, Dorothea’s dead hand, like the image of Dinah as a corpse and a vehicle for a ‘sublimar’ love, illustrates that, although there is certainly a redemptive ethics present at the close of *Middlemarch*, the cost is high: the only positive representations of maternity that survive the text are those that consciously reject, or purify, the female sexual body. Blumberg reads in Dorothea’s matrimonial transcendence of her earlier impulse to renounce pleasure a move towards ethical progress brought about through mutual benefit:

In place of social atomism [...] a world where human beings were mutually dependent. In such a world, costly self-sacrifice could no longer set the ethical standard because it would be recognised as equally destructive to others as it was to the self. Sacrifice would then yield to the pursuit of benefits that would be truly collective: constructive for others, constructive for the self.²⁹⁸

Diffusive benefit: that of a wide and general distribution. Yet, the unreconciled space between these ideals and the pragmatic transactional relationships within which life occurs necessitates, in Eliot’s narrative, a thwarted drive for literary atonement. Ultimately, a society—however constructive—based on such a repression of productive femininity was not feasible, as we have seen in the maturation of Hetty into Gwendolen: at such an edge of representation, the novel itself fragments. In the following chapter’s analysis of another rewriting of Hetty’s story, George Moore’s *Esther Waters*, we can a way forward for the representation of maternity, built up from the rubble: a sympathetic representation of a working class, illiterate, illegitimate mother as a thinking, desiring subject.

²⁹⁸ Blumberg, p. 12.

Chapter 4:

Esther Waters: the proto-modernist maternal body

As we have seen, the maternal body—and, by extension, the sexual female body more generally—functions as the point of irreconcilability between the fictional demands of social realism and the subversive potential of physicality. This final chapter will read George Moore's *Esther Waters*—first published in 1894 and revised until 1931—as a rewriting of the problems of maternity and sacrifice that are uneasily reconciled in the novels we have already encountered. Moore himself considered *Adam Bede* to be a particular source text for his novel: in his memoir, *A Communication to my Friends*, he wrote that, contrary to Eliot's plot, a 'true moulding' of the subject 'would be Hetty living to save her child'.²⁹⁹ *Esther Waters*'s realism allows the mother to survive: the bodies sacrificed to the text are those of the father and, ultimately, the imperial soldier son. It is a novel that straddles both the changing century and the middle of a career that was controversial in its rejection of conservative social mores. From the publication of his 1877 poetry collection *Flowers of Passion* onwards, Moore's work faced critical censure for its explicit sexual content. After the influential circulating libraries Mudie's Select Library (founded in 1842) and W. H. Smith (founded in 1860) refused to stock his first novel *A Modern Lover* in 1883, he embarked upon a campaign against the censorship of literature by 'tradesmen'.³⁰⁰

Moore's continuous revision of *Esther Waters*, alongside his overt interest in and commitment to the tradition of French realism he had discovered during his years studying art in Paris, allow it to lay claim to both the Victorian novelistic tradition and the more experimental corpus of twentieth century texts whose centring of the interior lives of female characters formally problematized the gendered norms of sacrifice. In works like *To the Lighthouse* and *The Return of the Soldier* ambivalent and conflicting maternal impulses became canonical.³⁰¹ In 'A Colloquy', a revision of the *Observer* article 'Esther Waters and Mr Moore' (21st February 1932) published in the 1932 Black and Gold Library edition of the text, Moore stages a dialogue with his own work, in which the novel pleads with the author to

²⁹⁹ George Moore, *A Communication to My Friends* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1933), pp. 65-67.

³⁰⁰ See George Moore, *Literature at Nurse, or, Circulating Morals: Strictures upon the selection of books in circulation at Mudie's Library* (London: Vizetelly & Co., 1885). See also Troy J. Bassett, 'Circulating Morals: George Moore's Attack on Late-Victorian Literary Censorship', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 40.2 (2005), 73-89.

³⁰¹ Virginia Woolf reviewed the 1920 edition of the novel favourably ('A Born Writer', *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 July 1920, in *Collected Essays*, III, pp. 250-251).

cease his revisions: 'I belong to the nineteenth century. All its ideas are incarnate in me'. Moore replies, indignantly, 'But thou wert written at the end of the century!', and goes on to position the novel on a temporal and ideological boundary: 'Something more than ideas I owe to thee: a faith in humanity which the nineteenth century has repudiated, but which has been accepted by the twentieth century'.³⁰² This rekindling of faith in humanity can be interpreted, through *Esther Waters*'s treatment of illegitimate pregnancy, as paradigmatic of the new possibilities for the representation of sexuality in fictional texts, rooted in female subjectivity: an understanding, concurrent with the formal birth of psychoanalysis, of the attempted recognition of the sexual dimension of existence, and the corresponding necessity to write towards comprehension, against shame.

Jacqueline Rose diagnoses the repression that characterises Victorian fiction through Eliot's example, arguing against the idea that that the discourses of medicine and the law which 'surface in the body of George Eliot's texts' are 'sexually innocent'. Instead, they contain within them the fundamentals of sexual representation that can be linked to the novel form as a whole:

George Eliot's writing reveals that same scenario which focuses its anxiety on the sexuality of the woman and makes her the privileged object of investigation and control. The moral examination of female psychology—in which we classically locate the depth of George Eliot's fully human perception—is therefore doubly contaminated. By the sexual fantasy which supports it as well as by all the questions about social inequality and misery which this attention directed at the woman serves to displace. We can recall Brecht's criticism of the nineteenth-century novel—that it concentrated a whole history in the moral consciousness of an individual as if this was the place where history was best examined or resolved—and add to that criticism a sexual question or gloss. For in whose consciousness, historically, has that morality been invested? Or, more precisely, whose morality, that of the man or woman, has been seen as the *sum total* of their history, making them answerable for, yet also sharply excluded from, the vaster expanses of historical time?³⁰³

Brecht's critique of the relation between form and content is especially relevant to my diagnosis of the difference between Eliot's final transitional novel, positioned as it is on the edge of a growing fracture, and *Esther Waters*, which moves headlong into the twentieth

³⁰² George Moore, *Esther Waters: An English Story* (New York: Liveright, 1932), pp. ix-x. In this chapter, I will be referring to *Esther Waters*, ed. Stephen Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), which uses the text of the revised 1899 edition, and all page references will be in the body of the text. For a comprehensive account of Moore's revisions, see Lionel Stevenson (ed.), *Esther Waters* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963).

³⁰³ Rose, *Sexuality*, p. 113.

century and its corresponding incipient formal experimentation. Brecht's Marxist belief in the radical historicization of art forms can be read alongside Rose's further gloss as an engagement with the questions we have seen posed by feminist economists about the fantasy of *homo economicus*:

But where, in this fiction, is Economic Woman? Marx, who considered the family's division of labour to be a "spontaneously developed system," didn't bother to look for her, and, for the most part, neither did his contemporaries. Although recent discussions of Economic Man by economists and cultural historians of the period have richly complicated his isolated productive stance, his analogue, Economic Woman, remains at best a liminal figure.³⁰⁴

A reliance on medical, economic, and religious discourse, culturally conditioned and constructed as they are, cannot alone resolve the tensions inherent in the representation of the generative female body.

By the time *Esther Waters* was published, the Contagious Diseases Act had been repealed—in 1886—and the industrial capitalism of the early nineteenth century had begun to generate serious anxieties about the social body, as Jules Law's interpretation of *Dracula* (following Franco Moretti) illustrates:

If Britain's colonial machinery was beginning to cost more to administer than it could compensate for by way of preferred commodity-markets or natural resources (as some contemporary critics of colonialism argued), it nonetheless provided a much-needed outlet for surplus capital. And this capital was less and less in the traditionally visible form of commodities, military expeditions, and public administration, and more and more in the "invisible" form of finance capital and management expertise. If the metropole was being invaded, it was also being therapeutically bled. Clearly, anxieties about the integrity of the national body involved a complicated relationship between fears of surfeit and fears of loss.³⁰⁵

Moretti's assertion—another act of radical historicization—that 'if the vampire is a metaphor for capital, then Stoker's vampire, who is of 1897, must be the capital of 1897' uses the vampire as a symbol of the new precariousness inherent to globalizing capitalism.³⁰⁶ Rather than read *Esther Waters* as a product solely of 1894, we can use its continuous revisions and

³⁰⁴ Lana L. Dalley and Jill Rappoport (eds.), *Economic Women: Essays on Desire and Dispossession in Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Columbus OH: Ohio State University Press, 2013), p. 1.

³⁰⁵ Jules Law, *The Social Life of Fluids: Blood, Milk, and Water in the Victorian Novel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), p. 160.

³⁰⁶ Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 92.

its formal innovation to see it rather as a kinetic text, engaged with fluctuating social boundaries as well as formal and disciplinary shifts. Writing of nineteenth-century economics, Dalley and Rappoport observe that,

Consigned to the “private” sphere by such conduct-book writers as Sarah Stickney Ellis and fiction writers as Charles Dickens, considered a “relative” creature whose aims were to serve her family rather than herself, [a woman] was an unlikely character to showcase the self-interest so crucial to political economy. Even such economically significant efforts as her household management and reproduction were most frequently detached from the market and characterized as modes of service that privileged the needs of others over the individual economic agent.³⁰⁷

Esther Waters, as we shall see, marks a clear change: the economic self-sacrifice and calculations Esther performs throughout the text are not detached but painstakingly detailed in pounds as Esther oscillates between poverty and relative prosperity:

Those who came to the workhouse for servants never offered more than fourteen pounds a year, and these wages would not pay for her baby’s keep out at nurse. Her friend the matron did all she could, but it was always fourteen pounds. “We cannot afford more.” At last an offer of sixteen pounds a year came from a tradesman in Chelsea; and the matron introduced Esther to Mrs. Lewis, a lonely widowed woman, who for five shillings a week would undertake to look after the child. This would leave Esther three pounds a year for dress; three pounds a year for herself. (133)

Moore’s text combines the economic, ethical and physical aspects of the life it details through the consciousness of its protagonist. To return to Rose’s gloss on Brecht, then, Moore’s novel’s progressive treatment of the maternal body resides in its move away from spectacle.

Esther Waters contains within its free indirect discourse a serious move towards stream of consciousness: as Regan details in his introduction, Moore wanted to eschew the first-person and instead to ‘come as close as possible to conveying the viewpoint of his heroine within an otherwise omniscient narrative [...] representing the subjectivity or consciousness of Esther Waters was to constitute a major breakthrough in Moore’s fictional technique and in novel writing in England more generally’ (vii-viii).³⁰⁸ From the very opening of the novel, everything is conveyed through Esther’s perception of it: ‘She smiled, and her face became as bright as the month. It was the first day of June’ (4). Here, although Esther’s appearance is the subject of the sentence, the agency attributed to it is a far cry from

³⁰⁷ Dalley and Rappoport, p. 2.

³⁰⁸ Regan, ‘Introduction’, *Esther Waters*, pp. vii-viii.

the frozen culpability of Gwendolen's at the opening of *Daniel Deronda*. Rather than the aesthetic and moral questions asked of Gwendolen, Esther's 'brightness' is the absolute that defines her surroundings, with first the weather and then the date becoming apparent only after her action is announced. The narrative focus on Esther's appearance is free—to a remarkable extent, at least—of coercion.³⁰⁹ The difference in agency between Esther's account of the weather and the depiction of Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede* is similarly clear, where not only Hetty but also the light itself is mediated through the desiring subject, Adam: 'And he could glance at her continually as she bent over the fruit, while the level evening sunbeams stole through the thick apple-tree boughs, and rested on her round cheek and neck as if they too were in love with her' (*AB*, 208). *Esther Waters* is, primarily, an exercise in perception, rather than voyeurism, spectacle or blame.

³⁰⁹ For a compelling, Winnicott-inspired account of the phenomenology of non-coercive appearances, see Rei Terada, in *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction, Kant to Adorno* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

i: twentieth-century women

Although most initial reviews of *Esther Waters* were positive, there soon sprung up a controversy around the novel that mirrored Moore's experience with *A Modern Lover* ten years previously: within a month of its publication, the novel had been banned by the W.H. Smith circulating library. It is useful for us to consider the comparative logic in this moral panic: citing other Victorian texts, most often Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and Eliot's *Adam Bede*, Moore's detractors took issue with bodies, not morals. In an 1894 interview with the *Daily Chronicle*, William Faux, head of W.H. Smith's circulating library, compared *Esther Waters* to *Tess*, which was not banned, blaming the explicitness of the former: where Hardy was 'delicately inferential', Moore was 'precisely positive'. Although this was possibly more related to the novel's frank depictions of working class life than its portrayal of female sexuality, in the correspondence between Moore and Faux that ensued in the *Daily Chronicle* Faux directly referenced the 'detailed descriptions of a lying-in hospital' that feature heavily in the novel's middle section.³¹⁰ Arthur Quiller-Couch's review of the same year inverted Faux's use of *Tess*, praising the veracity of Moore's depiction of the eponymous 'fallen woman' over Hardy's 'incredible' novel. Quiller-Couch's review centres, too, on the question of maternity: the death of Tess's child, he contends, loses the reader's sympathy, whilst Moore's decision to let the child live makes Esther's fight 'the more heroic', and 'one of the most beautiful stories of maternal love ever imagined by a writer'.³¹¹

This valorisation of motherhood is, of course, related to the contextual intersection of maternity and capitalism, and the belief in the virtue of the life of the child is hardly free from sacrificial obligation. Yet the detail with which Moore describes the reality of motherhood without money is radical in its explicitness. The first time mothers feature in the text it is as an absence, as generalised maternal nurture is little more than a pleasant blur on the edge of the summer's day: 'On both sides of the straight road there were tall hedges, and the nursemaids lay in the wide shadows on the rich summer grass, their perambulators at a little distance' (5). As Esther's narrative continues, however, this idyllic picture of child-rearing is meticulously dismantled, and the total decimation of Esther's mother's health by continuous

³¹⁰ *Daily Chronicle*, 2 May 1894, p. 3, quoted in 'Note on the Text', Stephen Regan, *Esther Waters*, p. xxxvi.

³¹¹ Arthur Quiller-Couch, 'A Literary Causerie: *Esther Waters*', *Speaker*, 31 March 1894, 366-7; repr. as 'Mr George Moore' in *Adventures in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896), pp. 355-363.

childbearing is positioned within her economic dependence on her violent husband and the inherited disadvantage it causes Esther:

Many changes were taking place in Barnstaple, new houses were being built, a much larger and finer shop had been opened in the more prosperous end of town, and Mrs Waters found herself obliged to sell her business for almost nothing, and marry again. Children were born of this second marriage in quick succession, the cradle was never empty, and Esther was spoken of as the little nurse. Her great solicitude was for her poor mother, who had lost her health, whose blood was impoverished by constant child-bearing. Mother and daughter were seen in the evenings, one with a baby at her breast, the other with an eighteen months old child in her arms. Esther did not dare leave her mother and to protect her she gave up school, and this was why she had never learned how to read. (22)

By the time Esther has given birth and been ejected from the lying-in hospital, the group of women pictured are mothers rather than nursemaids, and the season has changed from plentiful summer to an autumn associated with decay and neglect:

Some eight or nine poor girls stood outside, dressed alike in dingy garments. They were like half-dead flies trying to crawl through an October afternoon; and with their babies and a keen wind blowing they found it difficult to hold on their hats. (114)

Later, Moore describes a group of poverty-stricken mothers in unflinchingly physical detail: 'The courts and the alleys had vomited their population into the Lane. Fat girls clad in shawls sat around the slum opening nursing their babies' (257).

Although the graphic nature of the scenes describing William Latch's fatal tuberculosis at the end of the novel also proved controversial, the vivid depiction of the lying-in hospital where Esther gives birth to her son that Faux so objected to is relentless in its intensity. The indignity of Esther's situation—the students and nurses eating sweets whilst observing her dilation; the embarrassment and anger she experiences as they argue over her prone body as the chloroform is administered—is recorded alongside the erotic, embodied amazement of the moments after birth:

A pulp of red flesh rolled up in flannel was laid alongside of her. Its eyes were open; it looked at her, and her flesh filled with a sense of happiness so deep and so intense that she was like one enchanted. When she took the child in her arms she thought she must die of happiness [...] Her personal self seemed entirely withdrawn; she existed like an atmosphere about the babe, an impersonal emanation of love. She lay absorbed in this life of her life, this flesh of her flesh, unconscious of herself as a sponge in warm sea-water. She touched the pulp of life, and was thrilled, and once more her

senses swooned with love; it was still there. She remembered that the nurse had said it was a boy. She must see her boy, and her hands, working as in a dream, unwound him, and, delirious with love, she gazed until he awoke and cried. She tried to hush him and to enfold him, but her strength failed, she could not help him, and fear came lest he should die. She strove to reach her hands to him, but all strength had gone from her, and his cries sounded hollow in her weak brain. (105)

The repetition of ‘flesh’ works in tandem with the experience of disembodied adoration; the repetition of ‘pulp’ contains within it echoes of the physical violence of birth and the sensuality with which the chapter ends. Like a smitten lover, Esther is besotted with her son, with this flesh of her flesh: ‘She did not sleep. She could not sleep for thinking of him, and the long night passed in adoration’ (105).

Moore’s comments about motherhood still sometimes tend towards the sentimental—he considered calling the novel *Mother and Child*—and he certainly conformed to the contextual belief in ‘inherent’ maternity: ‘women bear the world on their shoulders when they lack that eternal instinct of motherhood that pervades the world from end to end, and perhaps extends to the furthest star’.³¹² Indeed, criticism of *Esther Waters* often focuses on Moore’s insistence on the morality of Esther keeping her child above the realistic treatment of social determinism in the novel’s considerations of class and fate. Moore’s surprising act of intervention at the halfway point of the narrative makes this explicit: ‘Here is an heroic adventure if one considers it—a mother’s fight for the life of her child against all the forces that civilisation arrays against the lowly and the illegitimate’ (143). Yet despite the possibility of reading an implicit criticism of those mothers in circumstances similar to Esther who did not win this ‘fight’—or indeed, have the energy to begin it in the first place—Moore’s novel is, for the most part, startling in its refusal to assign moral judgement. Its emphasis on the capriciousness of circumstance—‘the fight between circumstances and character had gone til now in favour of character, but circumstances must call up no further forces against character. A hair would turn the scale either way’ (137)—marks a significant departure from the maternal narratives produced earlier in the century.

Throughout *Esther Waters*, behaviour that the reader expects to be punished is cause for empathy rather than condemnation. Esther’s temper, although sometimes shocking in its cruelty, as when she boxes the Demon’s ears (17), is always psychologically realistic, and the

³¹² Moore, *A Communication*, pp. 65-7.

occasion when she rushes at William with a knife in Chapter 11 is understood by everyone involved to be, partly, an understandable response to William's cruel and evasive behaviour: his mother, Mrs Latch, states, 'I can read the lie in your face; a girl doesn't take up a knife unless a man well-nigh drives her mad' (69). Esther's temper is described in the same synaestheliac manner as Gwendolen Harleth's desire for her husband's death; she 'sees blood' before brandishing the knife at William, just as Gwendolen's 'blood is fired' when she thinks about Grandcourt's cruelty (*DD*, 649). Yet where Gwendolen's desires and physical responses are distinctly separate from what she perceives to be her intellectual or, perhaps more accurately, her moral self, Esther's anger is not something 'outside' her but rather a clear expression of the link between physical and emotional response. Suicide, too, is treated with more equanimity than in Eliot's work. The desire to die, particularly by drowning, is commonly expressed by the despairing fictional young women, and Eliot figures it for Hetty as an extension of her vanity rather than a real choice or threat:

Hetty felt that no one could deliver her from the evils that would make life hateful to her; and no one, she said to herself, should ever know her misery and humiliation. No; she would not confess even to Dinah. She would wander out of sight, and drown herself where her body would never be found, and no one should know what had become of her. (*AB*, 361)

It is worth remembering, here, that in the nineteenth century cliterodectomies and ovariectomies were performed on women for reasons like "troublesomeness," "attempted suicide" and "erotic tendencies".³¹³ In this sense, Daniel Deronda's symbolic rescue of Mirah functions as a kind of recuperation of her reproductive body into a functional, rational course. At various points throughout *Esther Waters*, women like Esther's mother and her friend Sarah experience suicidal ideation in response to the unrelenting gendered pressures of poverty:

Sometimes I think I can bear it no longer, Esther, and long to go and drown meself [...] I don't want to make my troubles seem worse than they be, but sometimes I think I will break up, 'special when I get to thinking what will become of us and all them children, money growing less and expenses increasing. I haven't told yer, but I daresay you have noticed that another one is coming. It is the children that breaks us poor women down altogether. (81)

³¹³ Rich, p. 170.

Later on, in the chapter told from the point of view of the seduced and abandoned Sarah, staring at the sea, it is not a Deronda-like apparition that stops her from drowning herself, but a total lack of energy: ‘She could not go on living. She could not bear with her life any longer, and yet she knew that she would not drown herself that morning. There was not enough will in her to drown herself’ (239).

More shocking, perhaps—and a more pertinent counterpoint to Hetty Sorrell and Gwendolen Harleth—is the way Moore treats infanticide. In the midst of her despair at the thought of sending her son out to nurse, Esther spends a sleepless night contemplating infanticide:

She could not sleep; she lay with her arms about her baby, distracted at the thought of parting from him. What had she done that her baby should be separated from her? What had the poor little darling done? He at least was innocent; why should he be deprived of his mother? At midnight she got up and lighted a candle, looked at him, took him in her arms, squeezed him to her bosom till he cried, and the thought came that it would be sweeter to kill him with her own hands than to be parted from him. (118)

Here, the prospect of killing a child is directly linked to both the financial difficulty experienced by its mother and the intensity of the maternal attachment: in Esther, Moore is locating an act often seen as the antithesis of nature within the impulse to nurture. Perhaps more shocking, however, is the swift dismissal of the thought the next morning: ‘The thought of murder went with the night, and she enjoyed the journey to Wandsworth’ (119). Later, Moore once again allows Esther thoughts of the death of her child, this time more explicitly locating them within the dehumanising effects of poverty under capitalism:

She had passed through fourteen hours of almost unintermittent toil, and it seemed to her that she would never be able to summon up sufficient courage to get through the last three hours. It was this last summit that taxed all her strength and all her will. Even the rest that awaited her at eleven o’clock was blighted by the knowledge of the day that was coming; and its cruel hours, long and lean and hollow-eyed, stared at her through the darkness. She was often too tired to rest, and rolled over and over in her miserable garret bed, her whole body aching. Toil crushed all that was human out of her; even her baby was growing indifferent to her. If it were to die! She did not desire her baby’s death, but she could not forget what the baby-farmer had told her—the burden would not become lighter, it would become heavier and heavier. (137)

This break down of fatigue and despair into ‘hours’ echoes the exact financial calculations that occur throughout the novel, as Esther’s life is continually subject to the transactional

demands of class and gender. The ‘toil’ that ‘crushed all that was human out of her’ is compounded by its consequent reduction of her access to the one human relationship that she is working for: separated from his mother, her son is adapting to a new caregiver. The ‘burden’, although not, here, a justification for infanticide, is neither diminished nor belittled, but presented as a series of requirements potentially impossible to fulfil. Esther’s harmful intent is realistic and not narratively catastrophic precisely because it is one element of her complex psyche, distinguished from the violent outbursts of temper elsewhere in the novel.³¹⁴

This is a clear progression from the case of Gwendolen Harleth’s impulse to harm which in itself marks a significant progression from Hetty Sorrel: we are allowed no access to Hetty’s thoughts that lead up to the abandonment of her child, and, therefore, when we eventually hear the story of the birth—told to Dinah in prison—the consequences of her actions are known. Hetty is so thoroughly punished for her double sin of sexual transgression and infanticide—itsself foreshadowed, as we have seen, in her vanity and dislike of children—that she is sacrificed to the narrative without a chance to exhibit any interior complexity. Gwendolen’s violence—or at least wished-for violence—towards Grandcourt, however, bolsters Rose’s argument about *Daniel Deronda* being a point of fragmentation for the novel form. Gwendolen’s ‘wish’, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is simultaneously ‘outside herself’ and deeply internal, displacing as it does her reproductive system: the ‘fantasies [that] moved within her like ghosts’ (*DD*, 564). It is as if, with Gwendolen, Eliot is straining with Gwendolen to break out of the constraint of textual decorum, encouraging the reader to imagine a world in which a woman could be permitted to have violent or sexual urges and retain the possibility of a productive future, whilst simultaneously refusing to permit a narrative representation of this recuperative possibility.

In *Esther Waters*, desire, especially female sexual desire, is also free from some of the unforgiving associations of sin. Even when Esther leaves Woodbridge, the reprobation of her peers is not forthcoming, and they toast to the health of the baby. In *Exquisite Masochism*, Jarvis identifies the evasive techniques used to depict sexual want:

³¹⁴ For an interesting discussion of non-violent ways of responding to and understanding narratives of maternal violence specifically, see Elisabetta Bertolino, ‘Predictable Medea’, which reads Medea through the Arendtian category of action and forgiveness (*Studies in the Maternal*, 2.1 (2010), 1–10).

(W)aves, oceans, blooms, and illuminations mark the sexual act within the respectable novel and allow a writer to refer to sexual action without realistically describing the act itself [...] More than this, though, fuzzy metaphor locates the description of sex as internal to a character. By describing a sexual act as a bloom or a wave, an author is not describing something in the external world. Instead, she is focusing on the internal register of a sexual act—on orgasm and its felt experience, on seduction and its bodily effects.³¹⁵

As Jarvis's study enters the twentieth century—it begins with Brontë and finishes with Lawrence—she contends that the move from 'descriptive hermeneutics' into 'descriptive clarity' is linked to the increasing challenge posed to 'domestic Englishness' by 'cosmopolitan, financial power'.³¹⁶ Whilst sexuality in Eliot mostly conforms to the 'exquisite masochism' Jarvis describes—we need look no further than the scene between Dorothea and Will in the library in *Middlemarch* to find an example of a scene of 'sustained stasis' in a 'highly aestheticized environment'³¹⁷—*Esther Waters* bridges the divide between 'fuzzy metaphor' and the 'obscenity' of 'naming things as they are'.

From the beginning of the novel, Esther is represented as a desiring subject, and her sexuality is projected externally as we perceive everything through her eyes. The period leading up to the loss of her virginity employs an extended familiar pastoral metaphor:

She even noticed that the elm trees were strangely tall and still against the calm sky, and the rich odour of some carnations which came through the bushes from the pleasure-ground excited her; the scent of the earth and leaves tingled in her, and the cawing of the rooks coming home took her soul away skyward in an exquisite longing; she was, at the same time, full of a romantic love for the earth, and of a desire to mix herself with the innermost essence of things. (36)

Esther's bodily experiences of the rural world are coloured with the language of eroticism: the grass is the 'pleasure-ground', and the external scent of earth and leaves is transposed back into her body, and 'tingles in her'. This 'romantic love for the earth' is soon made specific, however, as Moore roots Esther's romanticism in a longing for a partner: 'It was a pleasure to touch anything, especially anything alive' is soon followed by the definitive statement 'she wearied for a companion' (36-7). In fact, rather than 'descriptive haze', Moore subverts symbolic desire making its mechanisms explicit: as Esther and William walk the country, visiting 'the old workshop, the forge, and the old cottages where the bailiff and the

³¹⁵ Jarvis, p. vi.

³¹⁶ Jarvis, p. viii.

³¹⁷ Jarvis, p. vii.

shepherd lived; and all this inanimate nature—the most insignificant objects—seemed inspired, seemed like symbols of her own emotion’ (39).

In *Adam Bede*, the embodied representation of desire is always exterior to Hetty: her vanity, emphasised throughout the novel, is always refracted through an imagined masculine onlooker. Adam’s desire for Hetty is figured a delusion that takes its cue from familiar narratives, and repeatedly the notion that Hetty *is* anything but a refutation of this ideal is denied currency. Hetty exists at the level of Adam’s fantasy and its mirror, the narrator’s scorn:

Nature has written out his bride’s character for him in those exquisite lines of cheek and lip and chin, in those eyelids delicate as petals, in those long lashes curled like the stamen of a flower, in the dark liquid depths of those wonderful eyes. How she will dote on her children! She is almost a child herself, and the little pink round things will hang about her like florets round the central flower; and the husband will look on, smiling benignly, able, whenever he chooses, to withdraw into the sanctuary of his wisdom, towards which his sweet wife will look reverently, and never lift the curtain. (*AB*, 144)

The elision of being a child—‘She is almost a child herself’—and being a mother—‘How she will dote on her children!’—enacts an erasure of sexuality in which the mechanism by which motherhood occurs is repressed and so are all acts of nurture and care: ‘the little pink round things will hang about her like florets round the central flower’. Eliot’s sarcasm is obvious, but her critique of marital gender relations is responsible for much of the blindness it derides.

ii: a land of milk and money

In *Esther Waters*, spectacle is invoked almost incidentally, through the eyes of a woman, and explicitly depicts the physical act of breastfeeding:

At that moment Esther's baby awoke crying for the breast. The little lips caught at the nipple, the wee hand pressed the white curve, and in a moment Esther's face took that expression of holy solicitude which Raphael sublimated in the Virgin's downward-gazing eyes. Jenny watched the gluttonous lips, interested in the spectacle, and yet absorbed in what she had come to say to her sister. (107)

Here Esther, with her actual nipples and her sexual transgression, is not a spectacle for male scrutiny like Hetty or Gwendolen, transfixing a male onlooker and doomed to punishment, but rather an image of nurturing virtue: like Dorothea, like Ruth, she is compared to the Virgin Mary. This comparison, however, is an momentary aside to primary concerns at hand: the explicitly transactional context in which working class motherhood occurs. Jenny is in the lying-in hospital where her sister has given birth with the purpose of striking a bargain: she wants Esther to give her the money to take her out to Australia—how things have changed since the banishment of Hetty Sorrel—to escape their violent father. The only way Esther will be able to do so is if she takes up a position as a wet nurse; the beatific image of nursing that precedes the bargain serves only as a kind of impossible dream of nurture:

The conversation paused. Esther changed the baby from the left to the right breast, and Jenny tried to think what she had best to say to induce her sister to give her the money she wanted. (109)

The bargain relies completely on the commodification of Esther's milk:

"If your sister wants to go out as a wet-nurse, I dare-say I could get her a pound a week."

"But," said Esther, "I should have to put baby out at nurse."

"You'll have to do that in any case," Jenny interposed; "you can't live for nine months on your savings and have all the nourishing food that you'll want to keep your milk going." (111)

Jenny's mercenary approach to both the life of both her newborn nephew and the desires of her sister is situated within a larger familial narrative in which the deaths of both infants and mothers were common place, and had negative financial implications. When Jenny first

arrives, she tells Esther that their mother is dead; that her baby was born dead, and then she died, and that Esther could not attend the funeral because she was giving birth at the time.

This loss, which renders wasted the savings Esther would give to her violent stepfather to prevent him from (further) hurting her pregnant mother, then sets in motion another loss, both financially and familiarly-inscribed, as Esther cannot now honour her filial bond to her sister, because it would require giving her money now meant for Esther's child:

Esther understood that Jenny had come to ask for money. She could not give it, and lapsed into thinking of this sudden loss of all her family. (108)

Dalley and Rappoport note that, when Marx 'positioned himself against the individualist ethos of Economic Man, he gave less thought to already extant forms of economic behaviour that depended on more communal ideals', including the practices of 'economic women' that functioned through altruism and sacrifice and remained 'on the margins of economic thought'.³¹⁸ These, which often 'emerged out of suffering' could be said to include the practices that defined Esther's early life—her participation in the familial system of care rather than the education system; her continuous economic support of her mother—but, for Esther the mother, her inability to continue to participate in these economies of care is precisely because of the 'Victorian turn away from *o*economy and toward political economy', as 'the gift practices associated with community care typically gave way to less interpersonal notions of interpersonal contract and self-help'.³¹⁹ The New Poor Law of 1834, which famously dissolved the traditional responsibility for their destitute held by parishes, is a key example of this—something Esther's alienated search for a sponsor to ensure her access to the Lying-in Hospital shows—and so, too, is the move away from traditional all-female practices of midwifery and nursing that occurred during the medicalisation and financialization of public health.

Despite the clear evidence that Esther both loves her son and enjoys breastfeeding, neither she nor the novel can afford for her to keep him. Yet rather than an immediate catastrophe, Moore's realism allows for both necessity and ambivalence:

³¹⁸ Dalley and Rappoport, p. 4.

³¹⁹ Dalley and Rappoport, p. 5.

Esther did not feel the pangs at parting which she had expected to feel. She would see him in a few weeks, and in those weeks she would be richer. It seemed quite wonderful to earn so much money in so short a time. She had had a great deal of bad luck, but her luck seemed to have turned at last. (119)

As Moore's representation of maternity progresses in its psychological complexity—Esther's ambivalence seems to anticipate object relations theory by several decades—the idea of 'natural' maternal instinct is brought into question:

Her baby was lost sight of. Even a mother demands something in return for her love, and in the last year Jackie had taken much and given nothing. But when she opened Mrs Lewis's door he came running to her, calling her Mummie; and the immediate preference he showed for her, climbing on her knees instead of Mrs Lewis's, was a fresh sowing of love in the mother's heart. (139)

Here, in a scene where her son has been living with a nurse, Mrs Lewis, whilst Esther goes out to work, her 'love' is figured, too, as a transactional element, a crop that needs to be cultivated if it is to remain productive. *Esther Waters* is explicit in its understanding of the commodifying impact of material need. In Esther's first position as a wet nurse, the baby farmer Mrs Spires seems to personify Malthus's Dame Nature when she describes the loss of five children to one of the nurses in her employ:

"She used to care for them, but if they had all lived I should like to know where she'd be. There 'as been five of them—that's the fifth—so, instead of them a-costing 'er money, they brings 'er money. She 'as never failed yet to suit 'erself in a situation as a wet-nurse."

"And they all died?"

"Yes, they all died"

"It goes to my 'eart," said Mrs Spires, "it do indeed, but, Lord, it is the best that could 'appen to 'em; who's to care for 'em? and there is 'undreds and 'undreds of them—ay, thousands and thousands every year—and they all dies like the early shoots. It is 'ard, very 'ard, poor little dears, but they is best out of the way—they is only an expense, and a disgrace." (128)

These infants, dying 'like the early shoots', are positioned as creatures outside of any 'natural' security their vulnerability should provide them, and occupy a position that inverts conventional life cycles: their life's work is to biologically provide the milk that can then be used to financially provide for their mother. Yet the text is aware, too, of the fallacy of the idea that infants 'naturally' outlived their parents unless there was some sensationalised foul play. When a pregnant Esther visits her mother—before she dies in childbirth—their discussion of what to purchase for the infant is couched entirely in the conditional, and the

necessity of calculating expenditure based on the likelihood of the baby living to see the use of it:

“We have some first-rate longcloth at sixpence-halfpenny a yard.”

“You might take three yards, Esther; if anything should happen to yer bairn it will always come in useful. And you had better take three yards of flannel. How much is yer flannel?” (94)

Esther Waters is set at the tail end of the wet-nursing profession: fears of class and racial contamination, the changing labour market, the increased production of formula food for infants and the development of milk pasteurization and sterilization meant that by the turn of the twentieth century, the practice had mostly fallen out of favour.³²⁰ The nature of milk as a substance was changing, too. Urban demand had been steadily rising, and—with rural dairies slow to adopt the expensive methods of pasteurization, sterilization and refrigeration—contaminated cow’s milk was recognised by the medical establishment as bearing responsibility for spreading diseases like typhoid, scarlet fever, and tuberculosis.³²¹ Alongside these two-pronged fears of contamination through unnatural milk—either from the wet nurse’s breast or from a distant udder—anxieties about women’s labour were conflated with the milk crises: in 1894, referencing the false idea that infant mortality was increasing because women were not nursing their infants and instead finding work in factories, Home Secretary Asquith ‘vowed to press for factory labour regulations that would discourage the employment of married women’.³²² The conflation of the physical body with the social body, as we have seen, meant wet-nursing was a productive boundary site for late Victorian anxieties about the loss of societal cohesion: wet nurses had even been known to sue for custody of the children they had cared for, threatening the property guarantee of the patriarchal family.³²³

³²⁰ See Law, p. 138.

³²¹ For accounts of sanitarianism and the social body, see Catherine Gallagher, *The Making of the Modern Body* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987); Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments*; Anthony S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

³²² See Law, pp. 139 -140. This was debunked by *The Lancet*, but increased Asquith and the government’s popularity amongst the male base of trade unions. The juxtaposition of factory work with care work is something we will recall from Mr Barton’s fears in *Mary Barton*. See also the fact, as Law notes, that Karl Pearson published the influential ‘Women and Labour’ in 1894, a few months after *Esther Waters* was published, in the *Fortnightly Review*, which diagnosed the two great problems of modern social life as ‘the problem of woman and the problem of labour’. The essay is particularly relevant for its emphasis on the need for new social legislation over property and wealth, alongside the democratic reforms of the Women’s Movement and the labour movement, to extend class solidarity and help women and workers—and women as workers—understand ‘the essential value of their functions’.

³²³ See Fildes, *Wet Nursing*.

The moral panic over taking in a wet nurse with a history of perceived ethical transgression—a fallen woman—was a particularly strong manifestation of these anxieties about permeable boundaries and inheritance.³²⁴ Yet, as *Esther Waters* demonstrates, the demand for milk meant the ease of employing a mother in need of financial compensation triumphed over the general disquiet. Moore's depiction of the lying-in hospital as a hiring fair for wet nurses is accurate, according to contemporary accounts: a Dr Curgenvin told the Infant Life Protection Committee in 1871 that the Queen Charlotte's lying-in hospital, where 80 percent of the intake were unmarried, was the major source of wet nurses for London.³²⁵ Within the narrative, however, Esther's own moral suitability to nurse is never questioned. The corruption emphasised by Moore's fictional voice is not sexual, nor classist—Esther's illiteracy does not impede her morality—rather, it is structural and societal. Moore uses Esther's experience as a wet nurse to set out in no uncertain terms the sacrificial equation of the wet nursing economy, in which the life of a working-class woman's child is exchanged for that of its 'better':

By what right, by what law, was she separated from her child? She was tired of hearing Mrs Rivers speak of 'my child, my child, my child', and of seeing this fine lady turn up her nose when she spoke of her own beautiful boy. When Mrs Rivers came to engage her she had said that it would be better for the baby to be brought to see her every three or four weeks, for two had died already. At the time Esther had not understood. She supposed it vaguely, in a passing way, that Mrs Rivers had already lost two children. But yesterday the housemaid had told her that that little thing in the cradle had had two wet-nurses before Esther, and that both babies had died. It was then a life for a life. It was more. The children of two poor girls had been sacrificed so that this rich woman's child might be saved. Even that was not enough, the life of her beautiful boy was called for. (121)

The assumption of a value rooted in class means that Esther's own attachment to her baby, like the nurses whose children have already died, is assumed to be equivalent to her circumstances, a transactional system of affect:

³²⁴ See the opening of Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*. See also Janet Golden, on stigma around the commodification of human milk came from the 'association of breast milk with underclass providers', 'From Commodity to Gift: Gender, Class, and the Meaning of Breast Milk in the Twentieth Century', *Historian* 59.1 (1996), 75-87; and Laura C. Berry's argument that the anxiety about wet nursing was linked to the railway boom in *The Child, the State, and the Victorian Novel* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999).

³²⁵ 'Report from the Select Committee on Protection of Infant Life; together with proceedings of the Committee, minutes of evidence, appendices and index', quoted in Margaret L. Arnot, 'Infant death, child care and the state: The baby-farming scandal and the first infant life protection legislation of 1872', *Continuity and Change*, 9 (2) (1994), 271-311. See also J. Brendon Curgenvin, *On baby-farming and the registration of nurses* (London: W. Wilfred Head, 1869).

“Then you can get someone to write for you. But your baby is no doubt alright.”
“But, ma’am, you are uneasy about your baby; you are up in the nursery twenty times a day; it is only natural I should be uneasy about mine.” (121)

Implicit in Moore’s account of Esther’s short-lived position as a nurse is a corrective to the prevailing notions, detailed in the previous chapters of this thesis, that conflated working class existence with infanticidal complicity: through the character of Mrs Rivers, Moore details the distinction drawn between public and private knowledge that allowed middle and upper class society to condemn the waste of infant life whilst privately contributing to it, the class privilege of killing and not killing in the same instant. When Esther, fearing for the life of her son, leaves the position, she discovers that Mrs Rivers understands the implicit terms of exchange:

“You don’t know what you’re saying, nurse, you can’t... You’ve forgotten yourself. Next time I engage a nurse I’ll try to get one who has lost her baby, and then there’ll be no bother.”
“It is a life for a life—more than that, ma’am—two lives for a life; and now the life of my boy is asked for.”

A strange look passed over Mrs Rivers’s face. She knew, of course, that she stood well within the law, that she was doing no more than a hundred other fashionable women were doing at the same moment; but this plain girl had a way of putting things, and she did not care for it to be publicly known that the life of her child had been bought with the lives of two poor children. (124-25)

In Valerie Fildes’s history of wet nursing, she quotes an unpublished diary entry from the journal of Mr E. Watson, a wealthy middle-class diarist. Watson details how, in 1848, he hired a Mrs Webb to act as a wet nurse for his daughter, and almost immediately afterwards, Mrs Webb’s child dies: ‘It is a very melancholy reflection that our own infant should be sustained, as it were, at the expense of the life of another infant.’ Watson believes the act of recording this death to be of moral importance, with a didactic paternal purpose: ‘so that Margaret and Alice may hereafter know the cost of their wet nurses, and if their lives are spared they can never be sufficiently thankful to a kind providence.’ Just over a year later (6 August 1849), Watson hires another wet nurse. Although aware of the ‘melancholy’ economics of nursing, Watson’s diary functions as a self-absolving confession of helplessness within a larger system, as he transposes the free market onto a notion of faith, and ‘kind providence’: Margaret and Alice’s lives were never at risk of commodification and purchase in the same way the children of the wet nurses in his employment were.³²⁶

³²⁶ Fildes, p. 193.

Nursing, in *Esther Waters*, is a thoroughly embodied sacrifice, its physical toll likened to that of poverty. When ‘only two pounds five shilling remained between her and the workhouse’, despite her physical condition, Esther must still put her body out to work: ‘if she had to crawl along the street on her hands and knees, she must go to the hospital and implore the matron to get her a situation as a wet-nurse’.

Her hair hung about her, her hands and wrists were shrunken, her flesh was soft and flabby, and she had dark shadows in her face. Nursing her child seemed to draw all strength from her, and her nervous depression increased; she was too weary and ill to think of the future, and for a whole week her physical condition held her, to the exclusion of every other thought. (115)

The nursing infant, drawing ‘all strength from her’, is almost vampiric in its extraction of life, a familiar trope in Victorian depictions of breastfeeding: Mrs Beeton, in her *Book of Household Management*, called the infant ‘her baby vampire’, and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* famously features several comparisons between vampiric blood-sucking and an infant at nurse.³²⁷ Yet Esther’s physical sacrifice, in a novel that is otherwise fully alive to the harm wrought by manual labour, has a double character: it is both labour and not labour, depending on whose child sees the benefit of it. Mrs Rivers, faced with the imminent departure of her third nurse, tries unsuccessfully—to appeal to Esther’s sense of general responsibility to infant life:

“If you go to-night my baby will die. She cannot be brought up on the bottle.”
“Oh, I hope not, ma’am. I should be sorry, indeed I should.”
“Then stay, nurse.” (126)

Inside her entreaty is an imperative that Esther remember her function: ‘stay, nurse’, could just as easily be read as an instruction for Esther to perform her duty as an address. For Esther, the duty to feed and save is couched entirely within the question of who the milk in her breasts biologically ‘belongs’ to. Law, who argues that Esther’s labour, in the novel, is no longer alienated ‘as long as her breast milk is not alienated’, situates this within a question of redemption: ‘How has Esther’s refusal to wet nurse redeemed the sinister equation of a life

³²⁷ Isabella Beeton, *Mrs Beeton’s Book of Household Management*, ed. Nicola Humble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 489. One of the most interesting examples of this, for our purposes, is the scene in George Eliot’s 1859 story, ‘The Lifted Veil’, in which a blood transfusion brings a corpse back to life. In the same year ‘The Lifted Veil’ was published, G.H. Lewes published his *Physiology of Common Life*, in which he argued that human physiology could never be studied in laboratory conditions, because they would alter its essential nature.

for a life, the milk of one baby for another?’³²⁸ Indeed, she cleaves to an idea of kinship that refuses any potentially utopian notions of surrogacy and mutual care; in her understanding, the sacrificial logic of exchange that underscores wet nursing is wrong, but the ‘natural’ sacrifice of a mother’s body for her own child is right:

If you had made sacrifice of yourself in the beginning and nursed your own child such thoughts would not have come to you. But when you hire a poor girl such as me to give the milk that belongs to another to your child, you think nothing of the poor deserted one. He is but a bastard, you say, and had better be dead and done with.
(125)

As with the codification of value within Eliot’s portrait of a nursing Milly Barton in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, Esther’s insistence on the moral imperative for a mother to ‘make a sacrifice’ of herself and nurse her own child mimics the redefinition of women’s bodily labour in the second half of the nineteenth century as labour owed—and therefore, unpaid—to their husbands, their families and the state.³²⁹ The disdain Moore’s narrative shows for ‘fashionable women’ who didn’t nurse their own infants has its heritage in the literature that precedes it, and it is certainly not free of the impulse to punish the improperly sexual maternal body. Yet within it is a more complex understanding of the ways in which anxieties of inheritance, corruption and substitution exceeded a middle- and upper-class patriarchal lineage. Mrs Latch, the paternal grandmother of Esther’s son, works for free at Woodview to absolve herself and her son of the debts run up by his father, but refuses her employer’s offers of help, for fear of ‘losing’ her child to their influence: ‘Why cannot they leave me my son?’ (12)

³²⁸ Law, p. 137.

³²⁹ See Perry, p. 220.

iii: food for powder and shot

Yet *Esther Waters* complicates this idea of biological belonging in its representation of single motherhood as an alternative to the patriarchal familial model. Indeed, when William Latch returns to try and reunite his family, his absence has removed the need for a paternal role at all:

He would marry her when he got his divorce, and then the child would be theirs. She did not answer him, but her blood boiled at the word 'theirs'. How could Jackie become their child? Was it not she who had worked for him, brought him up? and she thought as little of his paternity as if he had fallen from heaven into her arms. (167)

Paternity, here, is largely irrelevant, and entirely removed from the realm of the physical: the nurture of the child is what creates the filial bond. When William tries to purchase Jack's affection with gifts of clothes and toys, including a much-loved miniature boat, Esther smashes it, enraged at the apparent success of William's plan to usurp her parental position, forcing the child into a logic of comparison:

"You shall have another boat, my darling."
"I don't want no boat at all! I love you better than a boat, mummie, indeed I do."
(191)

Even when, after he and Esther have rekindled their romance, William is dying in the hospital, Esther figures her maternal bond as separate to any paternal claim:

If she was to lose him she would lose everything. No, not everything; her boy would still remain to her, and she felt that, after all, her boy was what was most real to her in life. (291)

William's death is important to Esther, and therefore important to the novel, because it is the death of her lover; the consideration of what the loss of a father might do to Jack is absent, and the child is possessed solely by his mother: 'her boy'.

Esther brings Jack up with the help of a support network constructed of surrogate maternal figures, a collective mode of maternity distinguished from Eliot's use of surrogate figures to purify or uncomplicate the intellectual 'raising' of adolescents: Mrs Barfield, Mrs Jones, and Miss Rice, provide lodging, care for her child, pay her fairly, and teach her to

read.³³⁰ Anticipating second wave feminism's conceptualisation and practice of a mode of gestation that, through surrogacy, communal living, and non-heteronormative unions, aspired to the abolition of the traditional family, *Esther Waters* offers female relationships that mitigate the earlier representations of the harm imposed by normative domesticity. The character of Mrs Barfield most fully represents the radical possibility for an alternate family as the subversion of gender hierarchies and financial hierarchies is imagined: she begins the novel as Esther's employer and finishes it as her companion, co-parent, and housemate. Mrs Barfield, who, in a pleasing foreshadowing of late twentieth-century feminism's non-human turn, seems to extend her definition of maternal care to interspecies nurture—'These plants were dearer than all things to her except her children; she seemed, indeed, to treat them as if they were children' (31)—invites Esther to return to a deserted and mortgaged-off Woodview to live as her companion. Living together in the ruins of the great Victorian household, the two women—both past their fertile years, in 'a final stage'—quietly subvert societal norms:

And, dressed in long cloaks, the women went for walks together; sometimes they went up the hill, sometimes into Southwick to make some little purchases. On Sundays they walked to Beeding to attend meeting. And they came home along the winter roads, the peace and happiness of prayer upon their faces, holding their skirts out of the mud, unashamed of their common boots. They made no acquaintances, seeming to find in each other all necessary companionship. (318)

Later, asked by Mrs Barfield—over twenty years her senior—whether she would consider marrying again, Esther responds that she would rather remain at Woodview, and live to see her son settled. This second life at Woodview is a kind of redress to the wounds inflicted on the two women by familial life: on their first night together, they tell each other their stories: of Mrs Barfield's dead husband and her daughter's long, terminal illness; of Esther's hard labour, her marriage, and her grief. This shared storytelling is a kind of mirror image of Mrs Barfield teaching her to read in the same room seventeen years previously: unlike Gaskell's outcast prostitute, and the inhabitants of Dickens's *Urania Cottage*, Esther's narrative is one of ownership through articulation, a redress for the woman who 'gave up school' to protect her mother in the face of overwhelming domestic need (22).

³³⁰ Here I am using the term 'surrogacy' in the broadest theoretical sense, rather than just referring to gestational surrogates, following scholars like Donna Haraway in 'The Cyborg Manifesto', in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1991) and Sophie Lewis in *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against Family* (London: Verso, 2019).

The anxieties about inheritance that characterised many mid-century novels are reconfigured through Moore's networks of non-biological kinship to construct a new lineage, as the figure of Arthur Barfield—the rightful heir to Woodview—is symbolically disinherited in favour of Jack. Arthur, in his distaste for his mother who 'kneels down with little shopkeepers' at the Quaker meetings she holds in the house—'You could receive the Prince of Wales in a ruin, but he wouldn't care to ask him into a dissenting chapel'—represents masculine capitalist economics, neglecting his mother and disavowing any qualities of domesticity and care:

"I'm only down for the day, I'm going home to-morrow."

"Home, Arthur! This is your home. I can't bear to hear you speak of any other place as your home."

"Well, mother, then I shall say that I'm going back to business to-morrow." (320)

Rather than investing her money back into the estate and therefore Arthur's future, Mrs Barfield gives money to Esther to send to her son in the city, in the process referring to Jack as belonging to both of them: 'What's the use of money to us except to give it to *our* children?' (322, my emphasis). The final page of the novel, when Jack comes to Barfield in his soldier's uniform, is given over to a dialogue between Esther's son and Mrs Barfield, who then enter the house together in a silent companionship that mirrors the one she shares with Esther: a symbolic, monetary completion of a maternal parthenogenetic family.

*

Jack's uniformed return, however, reinscribes the relationship between the maternal body and sacrificial obligation. Rather than the mother's banishment, it is the masculine body—'so handsome' (326)—that is expelled from the text. Esther, who is conscious that she has 'accomplished her woman's work' in producing this citizen of empire notes the possibility that her son may die, but emphasises that this is an economic necessity:

If a war was to break out to-morrow, what should I do? His regiment would be ordered out. It is sad to think that he had to enlist. But, as he said, he couldn't go on living on me any longer. Poor boy! (324)

The mother's life extends beyond the obligation she owes to her child, and with this financial duty we can see, too, echoes of the physical nurture the text has so explicitly made transactional. In *The Social Life of Fluids*, Law argues that *Esther Waters*—a text that begins

in the decaying maritime economy of Barnstaple—holds within its focus on breastfeeding and the wet nursing economy a fear about the threat to social cohesion that will occur through the ‘bleeding’ of the ‘national body’:

The task of producing citizens fit for empire hinges upon the regulation of fluids, a phenomenon that in turn is understood to figure in the movement of women and their bodies outside the household. Thus both novels link shifts in the patterns of women’s labour, independence and empowerment to cultural fantasies about the perilous economy of breast-feeding.³³¹

Blood and milk, as we have seen, are not so different, and both are linked, in this analysis, to the conflation of womb and tomb, to fears about contagion through milk, to the belief that breast milk was ‘nothing else but blood whitened’.³³² Jack’s appearance in his uniform, according to Law,

represents the intrusion of an epic horizon that the novel has rigorously excluded throughout. The idea that the national body—and not just individual bodies or general collectivity—could be bled is raised almost as an afterthought. That Esther’s symbolic sacrifice—the husbanding of her bodily fluids—should have national and not just local implications is raised only in the course of undermining her own personal project.³³³

This idea of motherhood, for Esther, being a ‘symbolic sacrifice’ in aid of a ‘personal project’, rather than a national one, is a marked departure from the fictional mothers earlier in the century who sacrificed the personal in order to fulfil the idealised maternal role of producer. *Esther Waters*, its foregrounding of the mother as an embodied consciousness, offers the hope of a fragile reconciliation with the realm of the symbolic itself.

³³¹ Law, p. 131.

³³² Adelman, p. 7.

³³³ Law, p. 144.

Conclusion:

Lavished and spent

[H]ear my protest! Why should she die?... And yet you must follow the impulse of your own inspiration. If *that* commands the slaying of the victim no bystander has a right to put out his hand to stay the sacrificial knife, but I hold you a stern priestess in these matters.³³⁴

If we were happy, if life were not a perpetual encounter with dead mothers and babies, we would have no need for the art that mends nature.³³⁵

In the introduction to this thesis I set out an equation of sorts in which maternity, in the mid-nineteenth century, functioned as the intersectional point of two sacrificial transactions: the sacrifice of the maternal body to the production of a son, and the sacrifice of the son to the demands of the empire. This shift does not erase the earlier imposition of ideological renunciation onto the mother, but complicates it, moving, in the process, towards a notion of maternity that, following Eliot, might be read as incarnational after all: the long progression towards literary representation of maternal subjectivity that, as I write this in late 2019, continues. Eliot, like Gaskell, made a career out of the exploration of sacrifice, of the question of what art gains from the confrontation with tragedy. Brontë's identification of authors as stern priestesses suggests a duty to the construction of narratives that refuse to shy away from the renunciation life requires. Ultimately, this critique of the social conditions of sacrifice never extends to their reliance upon the scapegoat that underpins the core of their fictional projects: the generative female body.

Eliot's reading of *The Winter's Tale* in her 1867 letter to John Morley, glossed by Gallagher as an assertion of the recuperative potential of art, contains within it an assertion of the inseparability of art from the life it represents: 'an art which "itself is nature"' (*Letters*, IV: 364-65). Why, then, is this understanding of nature divorced from the 'impulses' that propel it forward? When it comes to the culmination of their plots, these novels function as disciplinary forms, whatever moments of valiant resistance they contain. If art functions as a kind of consolation for the horrors of the human life cycle—the perpetual encounter with dead mothers and babies—but, at the same time, the literary representation of maternity relies upon a Freudian conflation of the womb and the tomb, then one of the fundamental problems

³³⁴ Easson, p. 234.

³³⁵ Gallagher, *Body*, p. 179.

for literary critics, as for psychoanalysts, must be the question of whether we are ever able to properly represent the horror of the body, or if we and our stories function only through our ability to displace it.

In limiting my focus to three authors, I have tried to argue for the thematic importance of the maternal body that extends beyond the boundaries of the texts themselves, something that recent scholarship about these works has, in my view, neglected. In Isobel Armstrong's 2017 study *Novel Politics*, for example, which reads *Esther Waters*, *Ruth* and *Daniel Deronda* within a broader narrative of illegitimacy, the body of the mother is never fully explored; rather—in a book focussed on the power of the image—it itself is used as a kind of meta-image in the guise of illegitimacy that brings the texts together but is never fully interrogated.³³⁶ For Armstrong, illegitimacy is important in its articulation of the 'democratic imaginary'; in her pursuit of an alternative political reading of bourgeois fiction, she argues for the intrinsic importance of genealogy to the novel, but as a cipher for the exploration of social hierarchy in a larger sense. Indeed, it is telling that in her reply to the responses to the book brought together in *Textual Practice*, Armstrong, writing in late 2018, relates the importance of the book to the political events of that year, but never mentions the sustained attack on reproductive rights in America, including the assault on *Roe vs. Wade*, or the attack on 'illegitimate' families in all senses in the British political landscape.³³⁷ Even when the book comes its closest to a focus on the physical—in the discussion of Walter Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian*—Armstrong notes the violence enacted upon the illegitimate mother without acknowledging its link to the psychological power held by the legitimate mother in general, preferring instead to reach outwards towards form:

Narratological purity comes under attack. The novel of illegitimate birthing envisages remaking, a change to the social order. A new form of justice is inaugurated or implied. New social formations are postulated. And concurrently an inquiry into the ways the self can be represented in civil society through different kinds of proxy takes place. Proxy itself is problematized.³³⁸

³³⁶ This is far from unique; Supriya Rajan's *A Tale of Two Capitalisms: Sacred Economics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Detroit, MI: Michigan University Press, 2015), for example, posits a convincing theory of sacrifice and political economy without mentioning maternity once.

³³⁷ Peter Boxall, George Levine, Josephine McDonagh, David Russell, Amanda Anderson and Isobel Armstrong, 'Isobel Armstrong's *Novel Politics*: four responses, and a reply from the author', *Textual Practice*, 32.7 (2018), 1049-1093.

³³⁸ Armstrong, p. 102.

Proxy may well be problematized, but the kind of substitutionary thinking that positions the maternal body as symbolic marker of value perpetuates the prevailing system in which the specificity and subjectivity of the mother is sacrificed. In this thesis, I hope I have begun to trouble the firm boundaries of a critical culture that, for the most part, still refuses to acknowledge the importance of the maternal body to the very construction of the novel as a form: a kind of repression that occurs in the mode of reading itself, like Winnicott's warning against jumping from the word 'conception' to the concept of 'conceiving of'.

*

Returning to the circumscribed psychological territory of the generative woman, set out by Eliot in 'Amos Barton', from the literary vantage point of the first half of the twentieth-century we might find a new gloss on the apparent serenity of the domestic: 'A loving woman's world lies within the four walls of her home; and it is only through her husband that she is in any electric communication with the world beyond' (*S*, 56). What happens when the 'four walls' of the home are no longer sufficient to contain the action of a narrative that occurs primarily within its characters' heads? What happens when the world beyond begins to intrude upon the home by demanding new sacrifices of the husband? The premonition of loss that shadows the end of *Esther Waters*, with Jack in his uniform ready to put virility to the test against powder and shot, became a solid presence with the advent of the First World War in 1914. The loss of so many young men—creating a generation of women whose fertile futures were characterized as stolen or lost—blurred the gendered notions of sacrifice even further, particularly in the prevalence of shell shock, or 'hysterical fugue': the male body, now, was hystericized.³³⁹

In Rebecca West's 1918 novel *The Return of the Soldier*, the traumatized Chris Baldry returns from the trenches with significant memory loss, which has caused him to forget his entire marriage: he believes himself to still be in the midst of a cross-class romance with Margaret, the daughter of a pub landlord on Monkey Island, though the affair ended over a decade previously. The action of the novel, as his wife Kitty—'the falsest thing on earth' (181)—and cousin Jenny try to get him to forsake his rekindled love affair with Margaret and return to 'normality', comes to a head when they engage the help of Dr

³³⁹ Victoria Glendinning, 'Introduction', *The Return of the Soldier*, Rebecca West (London: Virago, 1980), p. 3. All further references will be to this edition and page numbers will be in the text.

Anderson, a psychoanalyst who believes in a subterranean ‘mental life’ that cannot be controlled by effort. Locating in Chris’s relationship with his distant parents a need for sexual dependency, unfulfilled by his wife—who is represented throughout as unmaternal, never visibly grieving for or even remembering their dead son—the key to unlocking his repressed memories lies with Margaret’s self-renunciation. Only she realizes that the way to bring him ‘back’ is by awakening a memory of his lost child. Margaret, who has lost a child of her own—the suggestion these children were doubles of each other recurs, in the idea they each had ‘half a life’ (176)—has the power to effect Chris’s return precisely *through* her own lived experience of maternity. Despite her initial refusal to ‘cure’ the man she loves and in doing so deny herself a second chance at happiness, expressed through her desire to reproduce with him—‘I want a child! I want a child!’ (176)—her eventual acquiescence is attributed to her maternal understanding: ‘Her hard hunger for the child that was not melted into a tenderness for the child that had been’ (177). Chris is cured, and, freed from the safe harbor of a sexualized maternal love, must return to the war, and his likely death:

He walked not loose limbed like a boy, as he had done that very afternoon, but with the soldier’s hard tread upon the heel. It recalled to me that, bad as we were, we were not yet the worst circumstance of his return. When we had lifted the yoke of our embraces from his shoulders he would go back to that flooded trench in Flanders under that sky more full of flying death than clouds, to that No Man’s Land where bullets fell like rain on the rotting faces of the dead... (187)

At the end of *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud*, Carolyn Dever writes lovingly about *To the Lighthouse*, a book she calls both Virginia Woolf’s ‘Victorian novel’ and her ‘psychoanalytic novel’, its ‘psychoanalytic tropes overdetermined from the moment of James Ramsay’s Oedipal rage’.³⁴⁰ In her reading of Lily Briscoe’s purple triangles, and Woolf’s depiction of artistic creation as something that makes this ‘passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child’, Dever argues that Woolf integrates the key lesson from Victorian literature—that narrative begins with maternal loss—into the centre of her account of both consciousness and the creative act.³⁴¹ Yet

³⁴⁰ Dever, p. 209. Woolf was writing *To the Lighthouse* between 1925 and 1927, and during this time the Hogarth Press was publishing the earliest English translations of Freud’s works, and she herself referred to the writing process like the process of psychoanalysis, freeing her from her obsession with her late mother Julia Cameron. See also Elizabeth Abel, *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

³⁴¹ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Penguin, 1964), p. 23. All further references will be to this edition and page numbers will be in the text.

Woolf's novel transcends the obligations of Victorian texts in its inability to kill Mrs. Ramsay, even after she actually dies in middle of the narrative:

In its genuine celebration of the vastly imperfect but appealing depth of character represented in Mrs. Ramsay, and in its concluding nostalgia for the coherence that Mrs. Ramsay once gave this newly disparate, halting, stuttering, faulty domestic sphere, this novel mourns the loss of the mother, despairs of ever recapturing even the fictional sense of wholeness that her presence alone engenders.³⁴²

In *To the Lighthouse*, the banishment of the maternal body is not a structural necessity but a deeply felt, integral loss: correspondingly, motherhood is not freed of its sacrificial obligations but allowed to express them. Mrs. Ramsay's emotional labour is the subject of the most crucial scene in the text, where, through the lens of the young James's Oedipal rage and Mr. Ramsey's spousal demands and paternal insecurity—'his son hated him'—her efforts, and their high cost, are calculated:

Mrs. Ramsay, who had been sitting loosely, folding her son in her arm, braced herself, and, half turning, seemed to raise herself with an effort, and at once to pour erect into the air a rain of energy, a column of spray, looking at the same time animated and alive as if all her energies were being fused into force, burning and illuminating (quietly though she sat, taking up her stocking again), and into this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare. He wanted sympathy. (44)

Mrs. Ramsay is the source of energy upon which her husband feeds. At the heart of her ability to nourish and sustain is the imagery of the maternal body as she sits, both literally and metaphorically caring for a child. This maternal imagery is deeply, intensely sexual—the 'delicious fecundity' into which 'the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself'—and this sexuality is not opposed to maternal virtue but a crucial, central element of it:

It was sympathy he wanted, to be assured of his genius, first of all, and then to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed, to have his senses restored to him, his barrenness made fertile, and all the rooms of the house made full of life—the drawing-room; behind the drawing-room the kitchen; above the kitchen the bedrooms; and beyond them the nurseries; they must be furnished, they must be filled with life. (44)

³⁴² Dever, p. 208.

This procreative imperative—‘they must be filled with life’—locates within the domestic sphere a powerful responsibility.³⁴³ It also emphasises the permeable boundaries between the sexual element of the marital sphere and the act of childcare. Mr. Ramsay, a grown man and a metaphysical philosopher, is reassured by his wife’s ‘competence, as a nurse carrying a light across a dark room assures a fractious child’: only this maternal protection can convince him of the tangible reality of the world. His life of the mind relies upon the continuance of the domestic; Mrs. Ramsay rises to the occasion, but suffers the consequences:

So boasting of her capacity to surround and protect, there was scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by; all was so lavished and spent; and James, as he stood stiff between her knees, felt her rise in a rosy-flowered fruit tree laid with leaves and dancing boughs into which the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of his father, the egotistical man, plunged and smote, demanding sympathy. (45)

Mrs Ramsay here is, like her earlier counterparts, both producer and commodity: ‘lavished and spent’, she is the centre of a primal tussle of ownership between her husband and her son. At the end of the novel, when the grown-up James and Cam Ramsay finally do visit the lighthouse with their father, the absence of Mrs. Ramsay allows them to forge, finally, some kind of reparative relationship with their father: in an earlier text, this would have been a final affirmation of maternal banishment in the construction of a male parthenogenetic family group. Yet the very final passage of the novel is given over to Lily Briscoe completing—after a decade—her painting of Mrs. Ramsay: the loss of the mother pervades, even to the point of her physical artistic representation, the entire text.³⁴⁴

In Enid Bagnold’s 1938 novel *The Squire*, the novel is structured around the duration of its protagonist’s fifth pregnancy: a literal maternal temporality. With barely any of what might conventionally be called plot, the text focuses almost entirely on the consciousness of the titular Squire, who occupies the central role in a household with a largely absent imperial patriarch, and the physical changes five children have wrought on her body:

³⁴³ It is also prescient in its foreshadowing of the fact that, after the Second World War, the positioning of ‘the reproductive woman at the heart of the family policy [was] surrounded by the language of pronatalism’. See Denise Riley, ‘“The Free Mothers”: Pronatalism and Working Women in Industry at the End of the Last War in Britain’, *History Workshop*, 11 (Spring 1981), 58-118 (p. 60).

³⁴⁴ Woolf, according to Gail Marshall, ‘must take a large part of the credit for the rejuvenation of George Eliot’s reputation in the twentieth century’. Marshall finds in her famous 1919 essay ‘George Eliot’ and her later correspondence with Dadie Rylands the signs that, for Woolf, Eliot’s novels were ‘a precursor of some of the innovations of Modernism’. See Marshall, pp. 413-414.

She who had once been thirsty and gay, square-shouldered, fair and military, strutting about life for spoil, was thickened now, vigorous, leonine, occupied with her house, her nursery, her servants, her knot of human lives, antagonistic or loving. Twelve years married to a Bombay merchant and nearly five times a mother, she was well accustomed to her husband's long absences, and to her own supreme command.³⁴⁵

The text openly considers the change that has occurred in nursing and birthing practices over the first half of the twentieth century. The Squire, at one point, makes a joke about a husband instructing his wife not to breastfeed: 'Don't feed the brat! You'll spoil your lovely figure. You'll make your breasts droop! Remember, you're *mine!*' (115) The other two primary characters in the novel are the Nurse and the Midwife, both of whom conceptualise the Squire's pregnancy as a kind of shared occupational task between them, particularly the Nurse:

Then she remembered the baby. Again and again Nurse remembered the baby. Thinking of it at the turns of passages, waking, sleeping, bending, washing, counting linen. Though this was her lady's fifth birth, to Nurse it was yet like being in love, it was the prince arriving; core and stomach of her work; leap and triumph of her virgin maternity. Her soul swelled but gave place to her tabulating mind. (7)

The Nurse's virginity is immaterial to the language of fecundity that characterises her urges; her soul 'swelled' like a pregnant stomach, the 'core and stomach of her work'.³⁴⁶ The Nurse understands the potential for surrogate maternal relationships to construct strong psychic bonds, and resents the loss of the opportunity to feed the child:

Tiresome that the squire was such an expert. And, thank God, she would feed her own baby. Theoretically, and too with all her honest heart she believed in breast-feeding, but nooked away somewhere was the down-pushed knowledge that bottle-feeding was more fun—for her. He who feeds the dog is the dog's master. (7-8)

The Squire, in its occasional narrative forays into the children's consciousness, foregrounds the fear of maternal loss that characterises the child's subconscious:

³⁴⁵ Enid Bagnold, *The Squire* (London: William Heinemann LTD, 1938), p. 16. All further references will be to this edition, and page numbers will be in the text.

³⁴⁶ Indeed, as children raised partly by servants in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries began to write about their lives, it becomes clear that this caused tensions and ambivalences. Lucy Delap, in 'For ever and ever': Child-raising, domestic workers and emotional labour in twentieth century Britain Studies' in *Studies in the Maternal*, 3.2 (2011), 1-10, notes that 'For children, the impact of the turnover of carers, or navigating hierarchies of caregivers was potentially harmful; Michael Roper has noted in his work on soldiers and mothers during World War One that middle- and upper-class children might suffer split subjectivities as a result of their dual attachment to the domains of servants and parents' (p. 4).

Deep below the child's mind stewed the vapour which would rise when the time was ready: "Axed—my mother. Axed—my life." (41)

The birth scene, two-thirds of the way through the novel, also engages with the capacity of the maternal body to contain within it both life and death, profit and loss: between contractions, the Squire watches

The preparations for the unborn; watched the things laid out with which to wash what WAS NOT THERE, to warm the feet of what DID NOT BREATHE, the settling of the pillows and the blankets for what COULD NOT BE TOUCHED. (144)

The possibility of the mother to contain these multiple temporal realities at once is, however, no longer a threat to narrative cohesion. Here, almost a century after the first novels of Eliot and Gaskell began to grapple with the complex relationship between the womb and the tomb, Bagnold offers a mode of articulation that is enriched by these contradictions, that is no longer scared of the sacrifices made by desiring and desired bodies. At the very end of the novel, before a lyrical scene in which the Squire nurses her infant outside in the lushness of her dark garden, she offers an alternative, radical female genealogy to her daughter, Lucy, rewriting the tragic parade of maternal forebears that haunted Gaskell's fallen woman Esther in *Mary Barton*:

She took her place then in a line of women like a figure on a roll of film, her mother before her, her children behind, in a dream, in a bubble, in a fever, in an incandescence of oxygen and salt and water, that beautiful display called life. (264)

In a prescient inversion of Winnicott's 'good enough mother', Lucy, waking from a nightmare, asks her mother if she herself has been good enough, or grateful enough, for her mother's sacrifices. The Squire replies and in doing so joyfully and explicitly situates maternity within an alternative female economy of duty that replenishes even as it extracts:

"Lucy!" said the squire, remembering all her girlhood. "Don't get that pain at your heart about what I do for you, that tenderness, that kind of anguish! Shake free from that while you can. I, too, used to have it, about my mother. And now that I'm your mother, I see that it wasn't needed, it had no need to be there. Can you understand when I tell you that you owe me nothing? That to have a child is an account that is settled on the spot? [...] Love me but don't be grateful. I'm paid by having you. And what I do for you I do for myself! See, when I scold you I don't love you less, and when I give you presents I don't love you more! My pride in you is my own vanity. You are myself, Lucy, you children are my family, my future, my skin. If I were starving and fed you it would be I who received the food" (267-268).

Here, we can find a mode of loving and of being loved that embraces its own ambivalence, its flawed physicality; a mode that valiantly tries to transcend commodity exchange. The mother, in this identification with her children, extends beyond circumscribed boundaries. Like the recuperative, atemporal space of Cleopatra's monument, in moving away from the requirements of realist narrative the novel becomes a space that welcomes ambivalence; that pushes against the sacrificial imperative in representing, rather than disciplining, the maternal subject.

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