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Eliot among the Women

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An abstract of
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Abstract

Eliot among the Women
By Shannon C. Hipp

This dissertation reconsiders T. S. Eliot's treatment of women in his complete poetry and drama through *The Cocktail Party*. Literary criticism has long decried the propensity of women in Eliot's work to suffer and die violently. This investigation offers no apologies for such grim realities; instead, it reiterates that Eliot fixates, even obsesses, on the bodies of women. However, Eliot's abiding interest in women is rooted not in hate but admiration, as he struggled against the limitations of his male body in the pursuit of complete Christian devotion. The first chapter, "What Bits May Sprout: The Violated Body" details Eliot's literary exploration of violence on male and female bodies. Eliot wrote against the body by dismembering, drowning, desiccating, and martyring it, imagining the effects of such abuse on each gender and coming to the conclusion that the female body better withstood such treatment and thereby possessed the privilege of redemption. The second chapter, "In the room Eliot comes and goes," examines the author's purposeful imaginings of empathy with the feminine. When he found his own male experience inadequate for self-knowledge, Eliot aimed to imagine an open body or penetrable space in which he might fully experience both humanity and the Absolute. Eliot also experimented with losing himself in the feminine through linguistic subversion. The third chapter, "Eliot's Third Sex," looks beyond Tiresias to recover Eliot's simultaneous attempts to muddle the gender binary. Eliot created a limited number of transgendered figures in the hope that the male-female body might resolve sexual futility and power struggle, uniting the capacities of man and woman toward a devotional purpose. His collaboration with Djuna Barnes on *Nightwood* further reinforces this abiding interest even after he had himself abandoned it. Finally, the fourth chapter, "Revelations of Divine Vision: Eliot and Julian of Norwich" turns to the fourteenth-century mystic who shaped Eliot's understanding of devotion as requiring suffering and surrender. Beginning with images of recumbent women awaiting visions in the earliest poetry, the chapter tracks Eliot's deconstruction of feminine Christian mysticism according to the model of Julian through to his invocation of her in *Little Gidding*.

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I have been glad to cite many of these scholars in this dissertation after having met them and experienced first hand their generosity with those eager to join the conversation on Eliot. I am thinking in particular of Jewel Spears Brooker, Robert Crawford, Denis Donoghue, Lyndall Gordon, and Sir Christopher Ricks. My time at the Eliot Summer School included a remarkable evening reading of Eliot's poetry; Mrs. Valerie Eliot was in attendance. Though I did not meet her, I feel grateful too to have been in her presence as her role in Eliot's life has been at the forefront of my consciousness in this work.

Finally, I would be terribly remiss not to thank those who have literally made my work possible by providing their space, resources, and endless cups of tea—my dear, dear friends at Starbucks Cambridge Square #8412. Thank you so very much.

Eliot among the Women

Contents

Introduction

There are three photographs from the first of November 1959 in the digital archive of Time & Life Pictures that document T. S. and Valerie Eliot sitting in an audience in Chicago. The two of them, as well as all of the surrounding men and women, are dressed to the height of formality. The seventy-two-year-old Eliot appears as expected: black tie, round spectacles, his hair carefully combed and parted. Valerie sits beside him in a satin evening gown. Her arms are bare and folded on her lap is a fur, perhaps a stole or shawl given the late-fall date. The theater in which they sit is nondescript, its only distinguishing feature a kind of temporality. The two seats directly in front of the Eliots remain empty, and thus they are revealed as metal folding chairs that stand in contrast to the otherwise glittering occasion.

In all three of the photographs, Mr. and Mrs. Eliot sit beside one another, publicly expressing the intimacy between them in various ways. In one of them, they read from the same program, Eliot's raised eyebrows suggesting him to be pointing out or explaining a detail to his wife, who looks on with equal interest. Just above the program, the couple's hands are intertwined. The second photograph is much like the first. Eliot still holds the program in his right hand, and the fact that his left is not apparent suggests that he still holds Valerie's hand, as her arm reaches across his side. His eyes face the stage in this image, and a slight smile is creeping across his mouth. Valerie, still reading from the program, leans her head toward her husband's shoulder. Her smile is evident, as her comfort in her husband's personal space.

The third photograph departs from the other two, for it was clearly taken during the performance. The entire audience, the Eliots included, is focused on the action before

them, which must have just taken a comic turn. Everyone is laughing. T. S. Eliot and his wife are laughing. It is a simple moment of easy joy in spite of the careful appointment of each person's appearance. More significantly, it is a picture of the poet unguarded and at ease, in the company of the woman he loves at a performance that, at least momentarily, must have pleased him.

It is in the spirit of these three photographs, two of which testify to the love that Eliot made public in his marriage to Esmé Valerie Fletcher in 1957 and one that captures him caught off guard by humor, that I undertook "Eliot among the Women." For in them, the poet, dramatist, and critic is at ease among his contemporaries male and female, particularly beside his wife. They represent a rare occasion, as this project will attest, for a man whose force of intellect and imaginative genius left him often skeptical of and distant from transitory human relationships in favor of a yearning for that which offered a more lasting promise, namely Christianity. The canonical force of T. S. Eliot's legacy means that we have heard much about this detached genius, this Pope of Russell Square, this Nobel Laureate whose words crowd literary anthologies and whose voice crackled over the BBC wires. Perhaps it is his often-cited theory of impersonality, as transcribed in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," that lends legitimacy to the popular conception of Eliot as a kind of self-selected outcast from society. But if there is a "man who suffers" yoked to the "mind which creates,"[1] I offer these photographs as evidence that there is also a man who laughs and a man who takes his wife's hand. In these photographs, T. S. Eliot sits comfortably in a way that his creation J. Alfred Prufrock never could. He sits comfortably among the women.

I undertook this study with these photographs close at hand because scattered

clues in Eliot's poetry suggested such comfort to be more than momentary, perhaps rarely seen but more frequently deeply felt within the mind of the poet himself. I had read studies, surveyed in the first chapter of this work, that condemned Eliot categorically as misogynistic, and I had found such scholarship both compelling and unforgettable. I had read his biography and Vivien's as well, both of which emphasized the grave unhappiness of their marriage and utilized those details as a basis for locating anger and hatred directed toward the women of Eliot's creation. And finally, with respect to gender, I had read studies declaring that Eliot acted out of a homosexuality repressed by loss of its object following the death of Jean Verdenal. As my own reading of Eliot has evolved, I have embraced from time to time elements of each of these arguments, finding them indeed difficult to resist. Some of them, as evidenced perhaps most clearly in Lyndall Gordon's biography *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* (1998), even managed to hold in balance the import of Eliot's creative work and the offense of his perceived personal views. Gordon in particular also managed to remain inclusive of Eliot's spiritual devotion, characterizing him as severely flawed and yet earnestly devout. She granted that the same man who she understood as conceiving of women as "tinsel artifice, false emotion, and pathetic nonentity to be bypassed on the way to the City of God"[2] could still genuinely desire redemption according to a Christian model that seemed so contradictory.

And yet, though I found all of these studies alluring, various female figures in the poems continued to pull at my consciousness. Among them, two in particular weighed heavy on my impression of Eliot: the woman of "Preludes" part III, who "lay upon [her] back, and waited;/ . . . dozed, and watched the night revealing/The thousand sordid images/Of which [her] soul was constituted"[3] and the "epileptic on the bed"[4] of "Sweeney

Erect." These two, despite their faceless identities and the seeming subjection of their bedroom surroundings, haunted me. Some aspect of them transcended depravity, as though the mere fact that Eliot had enfleshed and vivified them lent them power of resistance against categorical generalization. These two women in Eliot's early poetry had something unique to contribute to an understanding of the work and its author. Neither would lay still. Instead they seemed, one awaiting "a vision" and the other enduring bodily visitation, to be necessary conduits for an otherworldly presence. They seemed objects of Eliot's interest rather than enmity, and I puzzled over their relationship to one another as well as to the more highly individuated women whose voices, names, and experiences are detailed in Eliot's later work.

I filed these women away, however, effectively closing the doors of the bedrooms that housed them until the summer of 2009 when I attended the inaugural T. S. Eliot Summer School, held at the University of London, directly across from 24 Russell Square, once Eliot's office at Faber and Faber. Like so many other students from across the globe, I came out of admiration for Eliot, eager to learn from poets and scholars whose work he had indelibly shaped. Among them was Gordon as well as many other critics who contribute to my own scholarly discussion here. Together we attended lectures, participated in seminars, and visited sites in London and the surrounding area that remain significant to Eliot studies. At the summer school, three lectures in particular provoked my interest with respect to Eliot's relationship to women. Ronald Schuchard discussed *The Waste Land* in terms of the poet's profound sense of betrayal following Vivien's sexual infidelity with Bertrand Russell, and as I listened, I began to wonder about the specific figures with whom Eliot seemed to be empathizing in the poem, for the

majority of those injured by what Schuchard pointed out as Eliot's rendering of Augustine's "cauldron of unholy loves" were women. Robert Crawford read and explicated "Marina," focusing in particular on its genuine yearning for a daughter in the context of Eliot's own childlessness. And in the final lecture slot on the last day of the summer school, Jewel Spears Brooker addressed the end of Eliot's poetry by discussing his admiration for the young, female English mystic Julian of Norwich as evidenced by his explicit invocation of her writing in "Little Gidding." In my mind, those women laying on their beds, that yellow-soled urban dweller and backward-curving brothel dweller suddenly had a historical prototype. Had not Eliot himself quoted Mary, Queen of Scots's "In my end is my beginning" in a prior section of *Four Quartets*? In ending with Julian, then, perhaps the poet was suggesting a return to the images that had populated his earliest poetry. The search was on: could Eliot's interest in and admiration for this fourteenth-century female mystic be the transcendent reverberation I had previously sensed in the women of "Preludes" and "Sweeney Erect"?

To undertake this project, I had to assume that Eliot used the language of his writing to expound upon the modern urban environment that both attracted and repelled him, populate it with men and women whose capacities he both respected and abhorred, and reach across centuries to lend classical weight and spiritual wisdom external to his own intellect to his poetry and drama. I believe that Eliot's creative work afforded him a unique opportunity for utilizing his imagination to realize escape from a physical body and temporal lifespan that burdened him. As I discuss in more detail in my third chapter, words served Eliot as a nearly inexhaustible tool that he wielded against the restraints of the common life. Because of this, their significance, both individually and collectively, is

momentous. Eliot himself instructed literary critics to this end in his 1926 Clark Lectures, now gathered in the volume *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry* (1994):

> The ideal literary critic should have both an intense concentration and an indefinite awareness . . . he should be primarily concerned with the word and the incantation; with the question whether the poet has used the right word in the right place, the rightness depending upon both the explicit intention and an indefinite radiation of sound and sense.[5]

As a literary critic approaching Eliot, I have therefore attempted to align my methods with his guidelines, putting into practice his critical wisdom in order to approach his creative work. The way that I read the poetry in this study, then, represents an attempt to hold in balance the explicit intentions of Eliot's language as well as its intentional and unintentional radiations. I believe that Eliot, using the word "indefinite" to describe the effect of language, was always aware of the authorial predicament he described in "Burnt Norton"—that despite his best efforts "Words strain,/Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,/Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,/Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,/Will not stay still."[6] Such a linguistic shortcoming, however, is accompanied by the benefit of what may be considered a kind of evolution. Over the span of a literary career, words may shift and slip not only due to the ever-changing historical context in which they are read, but also according to the widening scope of their author's oeuvre.

This is particularly true in the case of Eliot, for a propensity for recurrence not only of theme but also of image and language spans the whole of his output. In *Words Alone: The Poet T. S. Eliot* (2000), Denis Donoghue describes Eliot's writing process: "By [Eliot's] own account, what came first was a fragment of rhythm, a motif he felt

impelled to stabilize in a few words. "[7] Donoghue admits that these fragments were occasionally "set aside," though "on a happier day he would put one fragment beside another and stir some energy or reverberation between them,"[8] but when a rhythm, motif, or image possessed a particular weight or appeal, Eliot often tinkered with it repeatedly. To quote "Marina," as I conducted this study of Eliot's relationship to the physical, psychological, and spiritual feminine, I sought out "what images return"[9] concerning the body, its gender, and its potential for devotion through the course of the poetry and drama. In some cases, Eliotic recurrences have been subjected already to critical consideration—the excised passage of *Murder in the Cathedral* that returned as the first fourteen lines of "Burnt Norton,"[10] the closure brought by Eliot's citation of a fourteenth-century mystic in "Little Gidding" after opening his career by citing a fourteenth-century poet in "Prufrock,"[11] the suggestion of the hyacinth girl in "La Figlia che Piange" and her reappearance in *The Waste Land*. But other recurrences, scattered from Eliot's earliest and uncollected efforts through to his verse plays, are less overt, suggested perhaps by the repetition of a single word or a similar environment, as the example of the two faceless recumbent women suggests. As Donoghue describes, Eliot "wrote few poems, and those with difficulty."[12] Within those poems, his lexicon is concentrated, his images compressed. The philosophical questions that troubled Eliot's intellect lingered, and the fragments of words he gathered to address them were painstakingly chosen; thus the bond holding them together typically endures. "The use of recurrent themes is as natural to poetry as to music," Eliot wrote in "The Music of Poetry" (1942),[13] explaining poetry's natural evolution as beginning in rhythm, then moving to language, idea, and finally, to its final incarnation in the image.

Keeping this creative progression in mind, I have attempted to capture in this study evidence of Eliot's specialized interest in femininity through the course of his career. I hope that in it, I have balanced a sense of Eliot's literary legacy as a unified whole (for Eliot himself stated that "It is a function of poetry . . . [to] creat[e] a unity of feeling out of various parts.")[14] and as evidence of an intellect never resting in its continual pursuit of both understanding and empathy. For despite the recurrence of images, phrases, and matters of inquiry within Eliot's creative work, neither the poetry nor the drama is ever static. In a letter to Paul Elmer More dated 27 March 1936, Eliot explained his own perception of his work as both consistent and evolving. Though the two effects seem oppositional, each ought to inform the other, the development of his approach reinforcing the continuity of his preoccupation:

> I think that what appears to another person to be a change of attitude and even a recantation of former views must often appear to the author himself rather as part of a continuous and more or less consistent development. Certainly my attitude . . . is very different from what it was fifteen years ago, but I tend to see it myself rather as a readjustment of values through a widening of interests.[15]

To the best of my ability, I have tried to remain cognizant of Eliot's point on this matter, for my research depends upon the entire span of his poetic work, including the juvenilia, attending to points of consistency as well as departure. For too long, critics eager to condemn Eliot as misogynistic have adhered to a very different methodology, lifting isolated images and lines from their original context and thus robbing them of the "reverberations" Eliot intended within the poems and the larger scope of individual

volumes.[16] In fact, Eliot's authorial intent seems of little consequence, falling as it does by the wayside in comparison with critical intent.

In my reconsideration of Eliot's conception of femininity in general and created female figures more specifically, I have been keenly aware of this failure in the methodology of the critics who have characterized Eliot as a misogynist. Thus I set out to remedy this tendency by making a commitment to representing Eliot's poetry as a whole. In *Eliot's Dark Angel*, Schuchard discusses Eliot's expressed belief that, in reading Ben Jonson, "getting to Jonson's temperament requires . . . 'intelligent saturation' in the whole, moving beyond the surface forms into an apprehension of the subjective preoccupations that unify and sustain the whole body of work."[17] Such a lesson proves instructive, particularly for the power it offers to the critic who assumes a comprehensive view. My study takes into account Eliot's earliest poems, both those published at Harvard during his student days and those gathered by Christopher Ricks in *Inventions of the March Hare* (1997). I agree with Donoghue that the early poems gain significance as Eliot's attempt "to find a language for his feelings at the earliest stage of their emergence,"[18] even if he later decided to suppress the poem entirely. Allowing Eliot yet again a guiding role in my criticism, I followed his dictum that "in searching for the personal pattern the critic must not focus solely on the major works and neglect those works of apprenticeship or decline that initiate and complete the pattern."[19] Certainly the early poems, as well as suppressed drafts and fragments Eliot abandoned during the writing or publishing process, must be understood for what they are, but as Eliot himself instructed, they do serve to illuminate the complexity and fullness of the poet's effort.

Although my reconsideration of T. S. Eliot and the women who populate his

poetry and drama was inspired by two figures from the early poetry, this study does not begin with them. It considers first the author's relationship to the body itself. I acknowledge that Eliot took a specialized, even at times a brutal, interest in the female body, but unlike the criticism that precedes me, I contend that Eliot's women neither suffer nor die at the hand of an author who takes pleasure in such treatment. To address such criticism, my first chapter, "What Bits May Sprout: The Violated Body" will begin by surveying the critical argument that understands Eliot as misogynistic, for the shadow it has cast upon the poet must first be confronted in order that it might be overcome. From there, I will focus specifically on Eliot's career-long use of his writing to combat the oppression of his body. He wrote against it by dismembering, drowning, desiccating, and martyring it, imagining the effects of each abuse on each gender. Perhaps because he was himself male, Eliot felt certain of the limitations of masculinity, limitations he imagined the feminine to exceed via an acute capacity for suffering. The women of his writing bear the brunt of their author's experimentation with the limits of such suffering, and for that, T. S. Eliot admired them. Crucial to this perspective is awareness of Eliot's interest in the suffering ecstasies of Christian mystics and martyrs, to whom he alludes directly in the corpus of his creative work. While his interest in mystics and martyrs is not limited to women, the Christian women who occupied Eliot's mind trouble spiritual devotion with eroticism. In this way, their experience redeems the female body as a site paradoxically presented as an easy victim, not of hate, but of a sometimes violent asceticism that reveals woman's unique capacity for union with the Godhead.

The physical body represented to Eliot the ultimate obstacle to spiritual devotion. A look at the violence in Eliot that considers not only the women but also the men of his

poetry and drama as its subjects will thus delineate the equanimity with which he doles out authorial brutality, irony, and sarcasm against it. In so doing, however, Eliot found and exploited the openness of the female body—vagina, womb—as a physical reality that presents, not the burden of earthly desire, but woman's inherent capacity for self-surrender according to the ascetic way of suffering. Eliot pushed his women to suffer physically and sexually as implied by the nature of such vulnerability, and criticism typically assigns them the binary characterizations of virgin or whore.[20] Subjecting the women of his poetry and drama to fragmentation and suffering is certainly not an act Eliot could assume without risking female usurpation, an accusation leveled against him by Gilbert and Gubar.[21] Had he stopped there, such integration of the feminine in his work could have legitimately been understood as misappropriation. My chapter, however, concludes by suggesting not only transcendence but transhumanisation in the context of Dante as the ultimate redemption Eliot grants exclusively to a woman for her endurance of physical suffering.

My second chapter, "In the room Eliot comes and goes," takes a more focused look at Eliot's tendency in the poetry and drama to write of male characters who sense their own assumption into the body of the female, for example, the mermaids' chambers of the sea in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and the rippling muscles of the woman's gullet in "Hysteria." Ranging from metaphoric to graphically physical, these experiences of vicarious ingestion can be understood anew as purposeful imaginings of empathy: Eliot probing the question of whether he might be able to penetrate, even occupy, the female body in order to vicariously experience her capacity for surrender. Eliot caricatured this very search for identity within the feminine through the figure of

Sweeney, who literally spends his life slipping inside the female prostitute's body with no higher purpose than momentary animal gratification. In this chapter, I will return to a question that first occurred to me at the Eliot Summer School, that in *The Waste Land*, Eliot probed the repercussions of his own sexual betrayal through a cast of likewise betrayed female characters from history, myth, and contemporary society. The controversial figure of Fresca from the poem's manuscript draft comprises a central aspect of this chapter as a female figure through which Eliot parodied and thus further probed his own literary and personal anxieties. Returning to Sweeney, the chapter ends with a consideration of feminine language as it opposes his dictum "I've gotta use words when I talk to you" in Eliot's creative work. In addition to writing female characters through whom he could imaginatively empathize, Eliot also experimented with assigning his women alternative forms of linguistic expression with the potential to bridge the inarticulacy against which his male characters consistently struggle.

Reading Eliot's interest in women as an expression of his own desire for empathy and escape lends particular significance to the few moments in the poetry in which loss of gender, either as a result of ambiguity or alternative identity, surfaces as a possibility. My third chapter, "Eliot's Third Sex," focuses on Eliot's simultaneous interest in the possibilities of non-normative gender identity, looking beyond its best-known example, Tiresias, to recover Eliot's earlier and under-recognized efforts to muddle the gender binary. Among the quatrain verses of *Poems, 1920,* in which Sweeney makes his debut, lies the explicit tribute to the "blest office of the epicene,"[22] an outright declaration that perhaps androgyny might serve as a model for a male-female body that would resolve sexual futility and gender power struggle, uniting the capacities of man and woman

toward a devotional purpose free of the burden of physical desire. Exploration of alternative gender identity was certainly an abiding interest of modernism as a whole, best represented by Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. Eliot created transgendered figures, however, with the hope that they might contain the privilege of patriarchy and the feminine capacity for self-surrender in one human body fully open to spirituality. To perceive Eliot as categorically misogynistic obscures the realization of this struggle, which is of a piece with his well-documented sexual anxiety, physical loathing, and spiritual yearnings. I contend that none of these impulses in the poetry can be completely separated from the others and that all are evident in the earliest of Eliot's poems through the end of his poetic oeuvre in *Four Quartets* and his major verse plays *The Family Reunion* and *The Cocktail Party*. In addition to close reading in this chapter, I will make use of both historically contextual and contemporary theories of gender identity to consider Eliot's brief interest in the biological, psychological, and spiritual effects of alternative gender. Finally, I will consider a singular example of Eliot as editor, specifically with regard to Djuna Barnes's 1936 novel, *Nightwood*. Though Eliot's own inquiry into the possibilities of transgender had ceased at this point, Barnes's character Dr. Matthew O'Connor reignited the poet's interest. In this remarkable moment of authorial synergy, Eliot's and Barnes's literary impulses overlapped, and Eliot's introduction to Barnes's novel makes clear the hopes he had harbored for transgender throughout his creative career.

My fourth chapter, "Revelations of Divine Vision: Eliot and Julian of Norwich," turns finally to the female figures who inspired this study, those two circumscribed by their bedrooms in the early poems and Julian of Norwich as well, whose debilitating

illness left her likewise bedridden, willingly laid open to the revelations of Christ's Passion and God's abiding love. Although the inspiration for my work began with them, these poetic women and Eliot's specific interest in Julian are best considered only after establishing his disdain for the physical, his inclination to resolve such anxiety through feminine empathy, and his literary consideration of alternative gender. Understanding Eliot's various and futile attempts to redeem his own troubled relationship to the body serves to underscore the significance of Julian as a spiritual mentor and literary inspiration. Though critics including Schuchard, Brooker, and Donoghue have cited the poet's initial exposure to Julian as a student at Harvard and remarked on his unexpected return to her in the last of his poetic utterances, there has yet to be a critical look at Julian as a guiding influence for Eliotic women. Simultaneous with his expression of his physical frustrations and desire for escape via empathy and alternative gender in body and language, Eliot created female characters through whom he could deconstruct and thereby comprehend the requirements for genuine mystical visitation. As early as the notebook poems in *Inventions of the March Hare*, recumbent women await visions, suggesting that Eliot continually probed the question of whether the banal, depersonalizing sexuality from which he recoiled might be put to a higher use as a model of utter sublimation for which women are best equipped. In the later poems and drama, these recumbent women rise up and interact with the world around them, and their heightened sensibilities mark them out for otherworldly access that Eliot understood as a feminine privilege. Realizing the power of their capacity for self-surrender, some of these women have taken such power in hand, no longer recumbent but standing, moving, acting, and most importantly, wielding vulnerability as a tool of ascetic endurance. Over

all of them hovers Julian, and her very words underscore not only her own significance, but the significance of all women like her in Eliot's writing up to and including "Little Gidding."

This argument will not treat the whole of Eliot's creative work chronologically but rather thematically, turning and returning through poems and plays already well-trodden by critical scholarship. I aim to disrupt the conventional trajectory of a chronological and genre-based progression through Eliot's collected works in favor of examining the poetry with an eye toward recurrent motifs that reveal the corporal, gender, and spiritual anxieties that drove Eliot's creative and intellectual pursuits. In so doing, I will admittedly pair odd bedfellows, bringing together poems and plays from vastly different moments in Eliot's personal, spiritual, and critical development. My own close readings will challenge the narrow focus that has become endemic to criticism of Eliot's treatment of women, much of which lingers on individual lines and images and leans heavily on excised passages of manuscript drafts for its most damning evidence.[23] My argument will admittedly visit poems multiple times, as I believe Eliot's multivocal, multilingual method deserves a reading that examines separately the multiple forces that operate simultaneously within individual works. In this way, I may first read a poem according to its treatment of the body, returning later to parse out its subtle hints of empathy, and even later to consider a recumbent woman within its stanzas. Any explication of poetry or drama misrepresents the literature's total effect, though which all layers operate at once in order to appeal to the conscious and subconscious mind. This one aims to pull several long threads through the full corpus of Eliot's writing in order to jar the widespread critical perception of the poet as misogynistic, opening a window to

the reconsideration of his continual return to the troubling intersection of body, gender, desire, and devotion as an honest striving toward his own spiritual self-realization.

Chapter One

What Bits May Sprout: The Violated Body

"I have searched the world through dialectic ways."

—"Oh little voices of the throats of men," 1914

We readers of Eliot think we know his women so well: the maligned first wife, the sinister prostitute, the hysteric, the cloistered nun. We have been told of their types and their flaws. We have been made unimaginably aware of the danger that surrounds them, particularly since, as his character Sweeney says, "Any man has to, needs to, wants to/Once in a lifetime, do a girl in."[1] Over the past thirty years, Eliot criticism has worried a great deal over the place of women in the poetry and drama, and the case against this elder statesman of modernist literature has been made so convincingly that, as Schuchard describes in *Eliot's Dark Angel*, "we are told that his voice is in reality misogynistic, homoerotic, elitist, fascist, absolutist, orthodox, and … 'terribly malignant,' until we are intimidated into believing that the voice we must have misheard was not a voice we want to hear at all."[2] The dominance of criticism that vilifies Eliot and the intentions he demonstrated through his characters is viscerally effective,[3] fueled by the panic best articulated by Sweeney—that a woman *does* run a terrible risk. Totalizing fear of this imagined risk magnifies any unexpected treatment of the female body, non-reproductive consideration of her sexuality, or suggestion of violence against her as symptomatic of a singular hatred for which contemporary culture has a zero-tolerance policy. Literary criticism has long decried the propensity of women in Eliot's work to suffer and die violently. In "Tradition and the Female Talent: Modernism and Masculinity," Sandra

Gilman and Susan Gubar's landmark answer to Eliot's dictum "Tradition and the Individual Talent," the critics apply the term "femicide" to Eliot's work, calling attention to the fragmented women as well as those fully destroyed in his poetry: the strangled woman in "The Love Song of St. Sebastian," the female corpse lying for months in her bath of Lysol in *Sweeney Agonistes*, and the crucified and consumed Celia Coplestone in *The Cocktail Party*. Thus they imagine the intersection of the many 'isms' to which Eliot supposedly subscribes to be a site of murderous intent specifically targeted toward women.

This investigation offers no apology for such grim realities in the poetry and verse plays of T. S. Eliot. Instead, it reiterates that Eliot fixates, even obsesses, on abuse of the physical body throughout his oeuvre, reserving a particular interest in the bodies of women, even more specifically, in those of recumbent women. Lying prone, these women have been understood by critics as inhumanly presented, sexually objectified, and rendered powerless by their author.[4] Their own, as well as their author's, relationship to sex is indeed most troubling, as the sex act offers neither a generative nor a redemptive aspect in Eliot's work. Rather it is always resonant with decay, bestiality, and vapidity—attributes too often drawn from Eliot's presentation of human sexuality in general and overlaid onto the characters of the women. But women must count for more than simple sexuality, and thus what is perceived as misogyny in Eliot is actually a neurosis rooted in sexual phobia and rejection of the physical. My intent is to call into question the critical use of Eliot's creative work as a basis for accusing him of misogyny in the hope of recognizing that the women who so completely populate Eliot's poetry and prose represent instead valued figures in his poetic and personal self-exploration. As they

evolve in Eliot's oeuvre, these women offer him a means of imagining an alternative to his own limited, male body, an alternative with which he first attempts to empathize and finally comes to admire, particularly with regard to devotion. Eliot's exploration of the effects of violence on male and female bodies, beginning in his earliest poems now published in Christopher Ricks's 1996 edition of *Inventions of the March Hare*, offered him a way of imagining the potential ramifications of Christian martyrdom enacted on the female body (as opposed to the conventionally accepted male body) as a means of approaching the Absolute.

Surveying the Misogynistic Argument

To begin to answer back to the critical interpretation of Eliot's work as misogynistic, let me first introduce the way that such an argument has been made, as there are aspects of it that are valid and constructive in spite of its gaps, elisions, and discrepancies. One of the most frequently cited and prolific scholars in this camp is literary biographer Lyndall Gordon, author of *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* (2000), an amalgamation of her previous volumes *Eliot's Early Years* (1988) and *Eliot's New Life* (1989). Gordon is remarkable for the way in which she maintains admiration for the poet while leveling against him accusations not only of misogyny but also anti-Semitism. The title of her latest volume is thus apt; its cover shows a well-coiffed and serious Eliot in white tie and tux, an exterior perhaps too polished to be taken at mere face value. Gordon's engaging biography weaves a torturous narrative. At its crux is the conviction that Eliot's relationships with women—most particularly his first wife, Vivien Haigh-Wood, and his first love, Boston's Emily Hale—are the defining elements of his life and work. To Gordon, every questionable image in his writing, every anxiety about sexuality,

every spiritual yearning can be linked directly to the pain, fear, and regret Eliot experienced in relationship with these and a few other women. In her introduction, Gordon admits that *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* is more "vitriolic" than her earlier works, "expanding my initial focus on Eliot's misogyny to his anti-Semitism . . . having in Eliot a special character determined by a lofty 'hatred of life' that he called 'a mystical experience.'"[5] Thus, Gordon attempts to debunk Eliot's yearning for mysticism as a mere excuse for misanthropy, a conviction reiterated throughout her argument as she characterizes the martyrs of his poetry as not only exclusively male, but "absurd, [though their] ordeal is serious."[6] Gordon's argument relies largely on the accusation from "Conversation Galante" in which Eliot channels Jules Laforgue—"You, madam, are the eternal humorist,/The eternal enemy of the absolute,"[7]—leaving no room for the notion that Eliot may have come to realize that women would lead him down a new pathway to the Absolute.

Like Gordon, Carole Seymour-Jones, author of *Painted Shadow: The Life of Vivienne Eliot, First Wife of T. S. Eliot* (2002), assumes Eliot's struggle against women to be the major motivating factor of his writing. Seymour-Jones is, of course, invested primarily in recovering the artistic biography of Vivien, but both she and Gordon utilize the author's revulsion for sexuality, specifically sex with his wife, as a basis for making categorical claims about his hatred of women's physicality. Gordon, for example, states that "Eliot's obscene poems were . . . a license to think of sex so long as it's seen to be ugly and degraded. His hatred of women's physicality is dangerously close to the sex-criminal who fancies he's called upon to punish women for their allure"[8] just as Seymour-Jones explains that Vivien "was left alone with a resentful husband who

expressed his stark feelings of disgust for his wife's body in the repressive 'Ode,' written in May 1918."[9] I concur with both critics that Eliot's attitude toward sex is rampant with hatred, disgust, and revulsion. Furthermore, I do not disagree that he harbored "stark feelings of disgust for his wife's body," but I understand too that all of Eliot's poetry and drama suggests him to have been disgusted with physicality itself, not just his wife's body, but any body, male or female. Seymour-Jones's reference to the suppressed poem "Ode," published in *Ara vos Prec* and then pulled from the volume when it was republished in America as *Poems, 1920*, represents another general trend of criticism that labels Eliot's misogynistic. Along with the Bolo poems and the excised appearance of Fresca in *The Waste Land,* "Ode" is a kind of mantra of the misogynistic camp, frequently conscripted into evidence alongside Eliot's collected poems. Now widely available to Eliot's readers and scholars, these suppressed poems and their disturbing content are worthy of consideration for all critical arguments, though to situate them so as to loom over and obscure the poems that Eliot himself collected and published suggests that the canonical Eliot has been exhausted, turning instead to that which the poet and his closest advisors recognized as flawed and thus discarded. Eliot's trash bin should not replace his bookshelf, particularly at the expense of letting the books gather dust.

A biography rather than a work of literary criticism, *Painted Shadow* is most deeply invested in recovering the contribution of Vivien Eliot to the work and life of her acclaimed husband, drawing attention also to the ways in which her mental and physical health were mismanaged in a marriage that constrained wife and husband alike. As a foundation for her position that Eliot engaged in "violent misogyny,"[10] Seymour-Jones marshals general evidence, such as that "Misogyny and anti-Semitism were historical

partners in nineteenth-century Europe, expressed in the Symbolist and Decadent movements; and this historical linkage formed part of the context for Eliot's writing," alongside his own prose writing, including an October 1917 letter to his father, Henry Ware Eliot, Sr., in which he admits to running the *Egoist* so as to "'keep the writing as much as possible in Male hands, as I distrust the Feminine in literature.'"[11] This expression of distrust of the other gender as a literary rival at the outset of Eliot's critical career, though distasteful, must be distinguished from murderous woman-hate. Seymour-Jones complicates her own position within the misogynistic camp later, when she claims that "at the core of the revulsion Eliot felt for Vivienne was her very femininity, which reminded him of the shameful, feared feminine part of himself."[12] Citing Eliot's frustration at not being declared healthy enough to serve in World War One, Seymour-Jones states outright that the poet "was concerned about perceptions of his own effeminacy."[13] Both of these suggestions rest on fear of the feminine, but I will argue instead that Eliot consciously indulged the feminine aspect of himself in his literature as a means of escape from a body he felt to be spiritually restrictive and maddeningly temporal.

Two further tenets of the argument for Eliot's misogyny are the foundational understanding of modernism as such and the misguided assumption that Eliot's characters are no more than mouthpieces for the voice of Eliot himself. Addressing the flaws in Sandra Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's "Tradition and the Female Talent," Jewel Spears Brooker explains both tendencies. The feminist critics first cite:

> Eliot's opposition of modernism/romanticism . . . [which] in turn suggests Eliot's classicism/romanticism. Romanticism, Gilbert and Gubar will argue, was

> feminized and demonized by Eliot, and classicism was masculinized. Thus his oppositions of modernism/romanticism and of classicism/romanticism are used to substantiate Gilbert and Gubar's equation of modernism and masculinism, their contention that modernism is sexist.[14]

Secondly, citing another favorite mantra of the misogynistic argument from *The Waste Land* manuscript: "Women ~~grown~~ intellectual grow dull,/And lose the mother wit of natural trull," Brooker identifies Gilbert and Gubar's propensity for taking the characters' words out of their imagined mouths, stating that Gilbert and Gubar level accusations against the author "without making any distinction between Eliot and his narrators/characters."[15] Gilbert and Gubar are not the only ones to indulge such a tendency. In his book *Women in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot: A Psychoanalytic Approach* (1984), Tony Pinkney states explicitly that "my reading of Eliot's work will be guided throughout by a maxim enunciated . . . by Eliot's own imaginative creation, Sweeney . . . the excited generalization that 'Any man has to, needs to, wants to/Once in a lifetime, do a girl in.'"[16] Without any compunction about either lifting a single line completely out of context or directly attributing Sweeney's sweeping declaration to his author, Pinkney ignores the larger context of the Sweeney poems, all of which situate him as Eliot's buffoon, bestial in appetite and completely lacking in spiritual desire. Instead, Pinkney repeatedly invokes Sweeney's words verbatim in his argument, variously contending both that "Eliot's poetic *oeuvre* may be regarded as a rich set of elaborations on the possibilities of those two lines"[17] and making a gross generalization against modernism as a whole, claiming it to be his duty to "poin[t] out . . . just how often the morsels of the European mind that surface have to do, in one way or another, with the general theme of

doing girls in."[18] This criticism is thus even more reductive than that of either Gordon or Seymour-Jones. In Pinkney's case, not only women—but murdered women—serve as the crux of Eliot's entire oeuvre.

Most disturbing among the criticism that labels Eliot misogynistic is the intangible power that it has to make a good story sensational. Gordon, Seymour-Jones, and Pinkney all fall into such a trap, themselves at times indulging its power to dangerous and seductive ends. As explained by Gail McDonald in "Through Schoolhouse Windows: Women, the Academy, and T. S. Eliot" (2004), female critics who cry misogyny run the risk of too heavily interweaving their own personal offense in their argument. Referring to Gordon's use of a review of *The Cocktail Party* that attributes Celia's death to her femininity and includes an admission of feeling herself violated by the end of the play, McDonald explains that "Gordon identifies the critic as a woman, emphasizes the 'we' that she is a woman, and then links the treatment of the fictional Celia to the treatment of the real Emily Hale. All separations—between the reader and the text, the play and the artist's life—are blurred in a general disapprobation of both text and author."[19] Seymour-Jones twice asserts that Eliot's women in "A Game of Chess" and *Murder in the Cathedral* "invite rape"[20] based on her assessment of their clothes and words, never quoting a line of evidence. And Pinkney employs literary blinders to accuse Eliot of fragmenting women into "alarmingly autonomous part-objects—teeth, throat, breasts—that the shaken narrator cannot totalize,"[21] neglecting the men treated likewise. This narrow view makes for a better story, but it renders Pinkney's own analysis disturbingly reductive to women. For example, Pinkney explains Eliot's troubling reference to "female smells in shuttered rooms" with the even more troubling equation of woman with

fruit: "The woman is thus not to be trusted, for she may be secreting her heated sexual juices even in the most unlikely moments."[22] Thus, searching out the misogyny in Eliot has a way of revealing the critic's own anti-feminist agenda, one that is variously rooted in irresponsible treatment of the text and a belief in woman's willing collusion in her sexual violation.

Women—and men—but particularly women suffer as a result of violence in the poetry and drama of T. S. Eliot. The author imagined such suffering; the characters only inflict and endure it. Cassandra Laity's and Nancy K. Gish's critical anthology *Gender, Desire, and Sexuality in T. S. Eliot* (2004), however, opens up the possibility for reconsidering not only their suffering but also Eliot's overall presentation of women according to a new model. In his essay included in the volume, titled "T. S. Eliot Speaks the Body: The Privileging of Female Discourse in *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Cocktail Party*," Richard Badenhausen builds on Marianne DeKoven's assessment that "'vicious representations of women have been *allowed* to define Eliot's relationship to the feminine,'" arguing that "the poet's attitude toward women alternated at times among fear, disgust, worship, fascination, hostility, attraction, sympathy, and even understanding. In portions of his later work, Eliot's positive representations of the feminine produce some of the strongest characters in all his writing."[23] Limited in scope because it only considers *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Cocktail Party*, Badenhausen's contribution is significant because it gives women privilege of place among Eliot's dramatic characters. McDonald's article does likewise, affirming "the violent treatment of women [to be] a significant, even defining, element of his work."[24] McDonald, however, celebrates such treatment: "Insofar as modernist poetry in the

person of Eliot was perceived to be heady in its experimentalism, its widening of subject matter, even its darkness, the women of Eliot's own generation could see their pioneering energies mirrored in his work,"[25] citing the poetry and prose of Djuna Barnes in particular. Finally, Elisabeth Däumer, considering "Eliot's Christian society plays," makes a distinction between his female characters and the misogynistic society to which they are bound, affirming that "the formidable authority wielded by women within the symbolic order of Eliot's drama coexists with misogynistic forces designed to reinstate traditional gender arrangements within the social order of the play."[26] All of these arguments can serve as models that reconsider literary as well as historical context in discussing the multiple forces at work in Eliot's women. None of them assesses the entirety of his creative work, but they open the door. I aim to further such efforts with the benefits of close reading and analysis of the entirety of Eliot's poetry and drama, which will always maintain attention on both the literary context and the distinction between author and poetic persona.

Abusing the Physical

In his introduction to Eliot's published Turnbull Lectures, editor Ronald Schuchard includes an anecdote about Eliot's 1932 "Thursday evening lecture and reading before the Poetry Society of Maryland, where [his] topic was indeed the charge of obscurity against modern poetry."[27] Within that lecture, Eliot used what Schuchard terms "a graphic example to illustrate his point" that illuminates the vicious treatment of the body that drives so much of Eliot's poetry and drama:

> 'Suppose you went into a drawing room where the people were all without their skins . . . At first it would be hard to get used to seeing people like that . . . It

> would be so entirely new, seeing anyone without human skin . . . Then conceive that you found them more comfortable without their skins. You could then adjust yourself to the sight . . . Afterward you would find them, possibly, more interesting. Their eyes would be more expressive. The play of their muscles would be fascinating.'[28]

The extent of detail to which Eliot went in explaining this example of shifting perspectives reveals his interest not just in its message, but in its anatomical particularities. Eliot proclaims the need for new eyes accustomed to the repulsive. Beginning with Prufrock's concern about the ways in which the eyes and arms of women he has known already will size up his own thinning arms, legs, and hair through to the young men, "red and pustular" in "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service," and rhymingly "carbuncular" in *The Waste Land*, Eliot rejects the Romantic desire for beauty in truth, truth in beauty, adjusting his vision so that he might find truth in the visually repugnant. Eliot's treatment of the physical bodies of men and women throughout his poetry and drama suggests that his characters might have been better off if they were literally "like a patient etherised upon a table,"[29] subject to the poet's unflinching hands as he surgically opens them for the sake of a new vision of humanity.

One of the rare bodies presented whole in Eliot's poetry belongs to Sweeney, but Eliot's disdain for the body renders full physical ability a liability, making him and his highly sexed body a figure of caricature. In no way mere shadow, Sweeney's body has a weight and needs a wash, indicated by the fact that he "shifts from ham to ham/Stirring the water in his bath" in "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service." Tellingly, however, in "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" he belies a desire to revoke his humanity as his erect

status gives way and "the silent vertebrate in brown/Contracts and concentrates, withdraws," even declining proffered sexuality. At the root of Sweeney's one whole, lustful body, Eliot still left a trace of the disgust for physical desire, appetite, and temporality that continually pervaded his work.

Eliot's disgust for the physical body lies at least partially in its irrevocable relationship with time. A far cry from Sweeney, the child in "Animula" feels the weight of physical embodiment from the very first moments of his life. Learning to walk and seeking affirmation, this child is neither happy nor free as "The heavy burden of the growing soul/Perplexes and offends more, day by day," later becoming "Irresolute and selfish, misshapen, lame,/Unable to fare forward or retreat."[30] Eliot further outlines the maddening terms of the body in the second part of "Burnt Norton": "Yet the enchainment of past and future/Woven in the weakness of the changing body,/Protects mankind from heaven and damnation/Which flesh cannot endure." Long before his spiritual yearnings became codified in conversion, Eliot found the temporal failing of the physical body an ever more frustrating obstacle between himself and God, compelling him to subject the body in his writing to dismemberment, drowning, desiccation, and martyrdom in the hope of overcoming it in order to approach the transcendent. In doing so, he realized that the body's reaction to destruction sometimes split along the line of gender.

The Body Dismembered

In a frequently quoted letter to Conrad Aiken in 1914, Eliot wrote of creative renewal in corporal terms reminiscent of the example he later gave before the Poetry Society of Maryland. Eliot wrote, "It is worth while from time to time tearing oneself to pieces and waiting to see if bits will sprout."[31] Indeed he did just that throughout all of his

poetry and even in some of his plays by dismembering and fragmenting the bodies of his characters. Contrary to Pinkney's misdirected attribution of the "part-objects"[32] in Eliot as, first, exclusively feminine, and second, a symptom of the author's stunted psychological development,[33] all personae, male and female, in Eliot's poetry are most frequently comprised of mere parts—eyes, hands, feet, hair, and mouths. Disembodied eyes accuse, fix, and bear witness in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar," 'Sweeney Erect," *The Waste Land*, "Eyes that last I saw in tears," "The Hollow Men," "Ash-Wednesday," and "Burnt Norton." Hands reach out, snatch, and even turn automatic in "Preludes," "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar," "Sweeney Erect," *The Waste Land,* "The Hollow Men," and "Journey of the Magi." Feet—muddy, yellow, and insistent—figure as the major physical attribute of the sordid urban residents in "Preludes" and likewise comprise figures in "Sweeney Erect," "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service," *The Waste Land*, "Journey of the Magi," and *Sweeney Agonistes*. Hair, typically associated solely with the female, is very much a concern of Prufrock's, while elsewhere, the feminine moon and the typist "home at teatime" are both described as smoothing it. Twice in *The Waste Land*—at the opening of "A Game of Chess" and in "What the Thunder Said"—women also brush their hair and thereby transform it. But Eliot's most memorable use of the synecdoche of hair for woman recurs in the image of the hyacinth girl, whose hair in "La Figlia che Piange" falls "over her arms and her arms full of flowers," replacing Prufrock's horror with the attraction of the sexual fetish, whereby the hair displaces the woman's face and becomes the feature that lingers in memory, both in "La Figlia" and "The Burial of the Dead."[34] Finally, mouths

and their associated throats, grins, and smiles figure menacingly in "Preludes," "Morning at the Window," "Mr. Apollinax," "Hysteria," "Sweeney Erect," "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," and "Ash-Wednesday." As the locus of appetite gratification as well as a threatening intersection of internal and external, the "oval O cropped out with teeth" from "Sweeney Erect" opens up into "the dark caverns of her throat" in "Hysteria" as well as shrieks and laughter in "Preludes" and "Sweeney Among the Nightingales." Horrifyingly, the mouth likewise reveals the exposed bones of teeth, real and false, in "In the Department Store," "Hysteria," and most memorably in the pub conversation of "A Game of Chess." This list of dismembered body parts in Eliot's poetry is in no way comprehensive: knees, fingers, skulls, faces, ears, breasts, and hearts reduce human beings to component parts throughout the poetry, rendering in language what Abstract Expressionist Willem de Kooning did visually in paint.[35]

Interchangeable Parts

In his early poetry, Eliot experimented with using the fragmented bodies of men and women associatively as interchangeable parts. Thus, Eliot used these bodies to undercut gender differentiation even when they belong to characters as individuated as Prufrock, Sweeney, Doris, and Grishkin. As early as "Prufrock," Eliot employed specific body parts as links that not only condemn men and women to the same predicament but also bind together the poems themselves. J. Alfred Prufrock worries about the appearance of his own arms: "[They will say: 'But how his arms and legs are thin!']" and then reflects "I have known the arms already, known them all—/Arms that are braceleted and white and bare/[But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!]." In the very next stanza, Prufrock's mind drifts back to male arms, remembering first "lonely men in

shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows" and then fantasizing that he himself might devolve to arms alone: "I should have been a pair of ragged claws/Scuttling across the floors of silent seas." Likewise, male and female heads suggest one another and prove interchangeable in Prufrock's consciousness. He imagines his own head "[grown slightly bald] brought in upon a platter," and then expresses his fear of miscommunication through the image of "one, settling a pillow by her head,/ . . . say[ing]: 'That is not what I meant at all./That is not it, at all.'" The extremity of Prufrock's psychological state might be employed to explain such associations as characteristic less of Eliot's style than indicative of the title character. But this is not the case. In fact, male and female body parts substitute for and suggest one another throughout Eliot's poetry in an attempt, never realized, for one to complete the other, united in the limitations of physical life.

In "Gerontion," beast, woman, and man are implicated consecutively, opening the human condition out even further into shared corporeality. Like "Prufrock," "Gerontion" is a dramatic monologue driven by a vociferous persona, the self-proclaimed "old man in a dry month" and "dull head among windy spaces."[36] But his dull head is in fact foreshadowed in the lines leading up to it by two other dull heads, that of "The goat [who] coughs at night in the field overhead" and "The woman [who] keeps the kitchen, makes tea,/Sneezes at evening." Exhibiting cold symptoms, both goat and woman must also be experiencing the dulling of their "sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch." Though the poem is so heavily dominated by Gerontion's voice, his consciousness is constantly collective. He thinks of men and women—Mr. Silvero, Hakagawa, Madame de Tornquist, and Fräulein von Kulp—consuming the Eucharist and exhibits collective fear for when "The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours." Gerontion counts loss as his

own plight: “I that was near your heart was removed therefrom/……./I have lost my passion . . . /……./I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch,” but Eliot’s authorial hints suggest the deprivation to be both widespread and contagious.

The quatrain poems that follow “Gerontion” linger on the banal realities of casual sexuality, perhaps best exemplifying Eliot’s practice of interchangeable male and female body parts. Princess Volupine, the sole feminine presence in “Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar” hosts clients Burbank and Sir Ferdinand Klein in her “shuttered barge,” but her one disclosed body part, “A meagre, blue-nailed, phthisic hand,” unites her physically with Burbank, whose “palms turned out” seem to await such asexual, manual contact.[37] Similarly, in “Whispers of Immortality,” Eliot balanced the poem’s opening macabre image of “breastless creatures under ground” with Grishkin’s “friendly bust” and “promise of pneumatic bliss.”[38] Within the spectrum of that poem, Grishkin’s body is the only vital one. Webster’s, in contrast, is “much possessed,” his “skull” and “lipless grin” associated with staring, clinging, and “tightening.” Donne too, who “found no substitute . . . /To seize and clutch and penetrate,” is rendered desperate. But Grishkin, “nice. . . /Uncorseted . . . [and] friendly” offers promise of life in her maisonette, even with its attendant odors. Reductive readings of Eliot’s poems that take the presentations of female bodies out of the context of these poems ignore the way in which the women’s bodies complete and complement the male bodies, even to different ends. Princess Volupine, sickly with tuberculosis, in no way presents the buoyant sexual energy promised by Grishkin. Instead, both women’s bodies accompany the male ones to balance them, proving less about Eliot’s impression of womanhood than it does his exploration of the physical across the gender spectrum. In this case, he interchanged parts

of differently-gendered bodies in a manner that foreshadows his later interest in gender identity with regard to Christian devotion.

The Body Drowned

Characters whole and dismembered, male and female, also drown in Eliotic water, its lethal and generative attributes explained by Marianne Thormählen in Marja Palmer's book *Men and Women in T. S. Eliot's Early Poetry* (1996):

> Water symbolism in *The Waste Land* follows two main directions which often cross each other. There is an aspect of drowning, both a disaster and a necessary prelude to regeneration; and there is the double function, salvaging and tormenting, of rain—both directions, that is, are cross-checked by powerful undercurrents.[39]

As early as "Prufrock," Eliot expressed simultaneously the desire for water and the awareness of the threat of drowning, though that poem's final word refers less to a watery death than to a submersion in human chatter, what Eliot would come to call "this twittering world." Prufrock first wishes for submersion in the middle of the poem: "I should have been a pair of ragged claws/Scuttling across the floors of silent seas." In this image, he yearns to be at home on the sea floor, a desire for reverse evolution that would render the speaker a (partial) crustacean. As discussed earlier, the claws are yet another pair of disembodied arms, but Prufrock's desire for a marine habitat only finds reification at the close of the poem. Though he cannot muster the conviction to "eat a peach," Prufrock resolves to "wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach," a typographical inversion of "b" for "p" that situates him in the liminal environment

between hard, masculine land and the mysterious and feminine sea. The next lines make it clear that he has been there before:

> I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.
>
> I do not think that they will sing to me.
>
> I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
> Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
> When the wind blows the water white and black.

Though much of Prufrock's "love song" consists of his own recollection of lost virility, when he considers the mermaids, Prufrock's lines (though melancholy) are surprisingly free of the tedium with which he recalls the actual women of his past:

> For I have known them all already, known them all:—
> Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
> ……
>
> And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
> The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
> ……
>
> And I have known the arms already, known them all—
> Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
> [But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!]

Prufrock's discussion of the mermaids varies in syntax from that of the women, and though they are hybrid figures, half-woman, half-fish, their particular type of body is presented whole. The hair of the waves is indeed Prufrock's own anatomical detail projected onto the water itself, further blurring the divide between man, woman, and water. Like the ragged-clawed crab on the sea floor, the mermaids are at home in the water, singing "each to each" in homogeneous contentment. Prufrock's fetish for the mermaids renews itself like the continual waves, and the possibility of returning to "the chambers of the sea" remains open by way of Eliot's shift from past tense in the poem's penultimate two lines to present in the final line:

> We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
> By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
> Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Just as Eliot reattributes the poem's hair to the foaming wave, he displaces the pleasurable drowning for which Prufrock yearns with a more cruel final fate, a metaphoric drowning-out. Prufrock's voice, for which his reader and companion alike are a captive audience, has no place in the society conversation that will inevitably and presently interrupt. After all, Prufrock contributes no actual dialogue in the course of the poem, preferring instead to silence himself with paranoia: "And how should I begin?" and "It is impossible to say just what I mean!" To be drowned out is as neat a pun as the replacement of beach for peach, but a deeper investigation into Eliotic drowning makes graphic just exactly the death to which Prufrock would thus be subject in human society, a "worried" death like that of drowned sailors, most notably he who shares Prufrock's initial, Phlebas the Phoenician. Realizing the ultimate fate of the drowned men in Eliot's

poetry answers back to one of the most damning threats against his women, that of cannibalistic attack. Doris in *Sweeney Agonistes* may be the only one so verbally threatened and Celia in *The Cocktail Party* the only one dramatically ingested, but both of these women have male counterparts in the drowned men who face the threat of voracious mouths in Eliot's poetry. Whether or not we choose to look, Eliot continually reminds us of their fate at the bottom of the obscuring sea.

Understanding the particular fate to which drowned men are subject in Eliot's poetry is a task largely overlooked by the criticism of Thormählen, Palmer, and Pinkney, which examines the drowned women almost exclusively—as though they were the only ones to perish in this manner. Reading Eliotic drowning in such a vacuum thus fails to recognize Prufrock's metaphoric drowning alongside that of Phlebas and the drowned men briefly mentioned in "Mr. Apollinax" and in the context of the watery "Dry Salvages." Collectively, these scattered invocations of drowned men offer a glimpse into the watery grave as Eliot imagined it. Phlebas serves as its most explicit example, a grim reminder to "Gentile or Jew"[40] of human mortality at the bottom of the ocean. "Death by Water" lacks any description of his actual death, though in "The Dry Salvages," Eliot anthropomorphizes the sea as a massive gullet hungry for sailors who find their end "in the sea's lips/Or in the dark throat which will not reject them."[41] The second stanza of "Death by Water," however, makes explicit that after Phlebas is swallowed whole by the sea, he is consumed bit by bit by its inhabitants: "A current under sea/Picked his bones in whispers." Pinkney correctly describes Phlebas as "the target of a prolonged oral attack,"[42] a description that makes explicit what "Picked his bones in whispers" delicately suggests. In the larger context of Eliot's poetry, however, Phlebas is not the only one to

undergo consumption. The horrific cackle of Mr. Apollinax, after all, reminds his hearer of "the old man of the sea's/Hidden under coral islands/Where worried bodies of drowned men drift down in the green silence,/Dropping from fingers of surf."[43] This tiny submarine detail, "worried bodies," reveals the fate of all submerged corpses, which are "killed or mangled by biting,"[44] according to the primary definition of "worried" in *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Thus both "Death by Water" and "Mr. Apollinax" reinforce a micro-ingestion that follows the body's watery consumption. The flesh of Eliot's drowned men, Phlebas among them, is continually picked from its bones by predatory creatures at the opposite end of the evolutionary spectrum. However, such picking is not an act of "cannibalistic incorporation,"[45] as Pinkney describes it. For by consuming Phlebas, the sea is not ingesting one of its own. Prufrock, on the other hand, prohibited from actual drowning by the utter neglect of his desired mermaids, suffers a drowning-out in which his voice and, by extension, his total existence, fall victim to the tongues, teeth, and mouths of his own kind. His is a cannibalistic end. As an inevitable aspect of their diverse drownings, both Phlebas and Prufrock, like Doris and Celia, are threatened by and suffer that most gory of fates, physical consumption.

Women likewise drown in Eliot's poetry; thus, Madame Sosostris's warning "Fear death by water"[46] universally applies. The women who drown are individually and vividly presented—Ophelia at the close of "A Game of Chess" and the murdered woman kept "in a bath/with a gallon of lysol in a bath" in *Sweeney Agonistes*. However, it is significant to note that Eliot's women are also positively associated with water. The mermaids of "Prufrock" make the sea their home; the daughter of "Marina" returns in nautical memory; the hyacinth girl appears in *The Waste Land* with her "arms full, and

[her] hair wet"; and finally, at the sign of the "silent sister" of "Ash-Wednesday," "the fountain sprang up and the bird sang down."[47] The fact that these women are at home in the water of Eliot's poetry greatly reduces its threat.

Drowned women in Eliot are rarely mere victims; a careful analysis of them reveals that they possess instead the capacity not only to withstand but also to wield their watery deaths as powerful. Their bodies in Eliot are never "worried." If anything, women as diverse as prostitutes and madams, *Hamlet*'s Ophelia, and the murdered mistress whose corpse haunts *Sweeney Agonistes* are curiously preserved by water, even when it proves a lethal force. Doris and Mrs. Porter, for example, depend upon and utilize water-based sexual restoratives throughout the poetry. In "Sweeney Erect," the former enters "towelled from the bath," her sexual attractiveness thus preserved via water, "Bringing sal volatile/And a glass of brandy neat." And in "The Fire Sermon" when Mrs. Porter and her daughter "wash their feet in soda water,"[48] the solution is once again preservative. Employing the Biblical euphemism of "feet" for genitalia, Eliot reveals mother and daughter in the practice of douching with soda water, a home remedy for both feminine hygiene and birth control. The allusion to Ophelia signals a change, for the water drowns her wholly, marking her ultimate end. I contend, however, that Eliot's reference to her at the end of "A Game of Chess" suggests the paradoxical means by which her self-inflicted drowning preserved her human dignity in the face of a devolving world. The section's memorable last call, "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME,"[49] is answered with drunken, dropped-d Goonights ("Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight./Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight."), which associatively lead the poem's voice to echo Ophelia's litany of pre-suicide farewells, the very well-articulated "Good night, ladies, good night,

sweet ladies, good night, good night." The line, taken from *Hamlet* (IV.v), immediately precedes Claudius's assessment of the young woman's condition: "Poor Ophelia/Divided from herself and her fair judgment,/Without the which we are pictures, or mere beasts."[50] Though Ophelia's riddling songs, speech, and flower-giving seem at first to substantiate the king's claim, the clear articulation of her "good night" in the context of the slurring revelers' "Goonights" suggest her to be in fact much closer to fair judgment than those who linger too long in Eliot's pub. The proper enunciation of her language, the truths suggested in the riddles of her songs, and the much-studied symbolism of the flowers she distributes in her final scenes represent evidence that suggests the sanity of her words and actions right through to her death. Considering Eliot's disdain for the animalistic and natural elements of human life, he would have found heroic the self-arresting of a life in advance of bestial madness. Perhaps the end of "A Game of Chess" instead positions those pub dwellers who wash away their human birthright up until last call as the ultimate victims.

Lysol as Drowning Agent: A Special Case

The most disturbing woman drowned in Eliot, however, lingers in an interior, domestic watery grave, at least according to the way Sweeney tells it. Against the wishes of Doris, who claims not to "care for such conversation," herself empowered enough to both realize and articulate—twice— that "A woman runs a terrible risk," the title character of *Sweeney Agonistes* explains "I knew a man once did a girl in/Any man might do a girl in/……/……/Well he kept her there in a bath/With a gallon of lysol in a bath." Sweeney claims that this cohabitation of living with dead went on "for a couple of months." Perhaps Lysol's advertising agency would argue that this murderous

marriage at least outwardly resembles one of the happy ones shown in the after-douching photographs featured in its 1920s print advertisements, which explicitly advocated women's use of the disinfectant as a douching solution guaranteed to restore "marriage hygiene" by "pursu[ing germs] into the hidden folds of the feminine membranes."[51] A commercial context for Sweeney's shocking revelation, these advertisements testify to cultural misogynistic panic with regard to the female body and its sexuality. Lysol, then, is a water-based force both fatal and preservative, as it "pickled,"[52] as opposed to picked, the corpse of the murdered woman, a point Pinkney both observes and well explains:

> In *Sweeney Agonistes* full admission of violence is evaded by a gallon of lysol, a neat device of manic denial whereby the corpse is preserved 'for a couple of months' after death . . . No longer as obstreperous as Doris, yielding itself entirely to the subject's phantasy, the corpse allows the perfect 'mutuality' it had always frustrated in life.

Going on to describe Ophelia as the female figure in Eliot who "looks forward to the girl in *Sweeney Agonistes* who floats in her gallon of Lysol," Pinkney begins to connect the spectrum of drowned women in Eliot, though his interpretation stops short of realizing the preservative function of water for them. In her death, the murdered mistress represents as strong a warning to the living as does Phlebas to "Gentile or Jew." But her body remains intact and available for observation while his is both consumed and obscured at the bottom of the dark sea.

There is one more drowned woman of significance in Eliot's oeuvre, Harry's late wife in *The Family Reunion*, "swept off the deck in the middle of a storm."[53] She remains

nameless through the entirety of the play although the weight of her death is palpable. Ivy, Amy, Charles, Agatha, and the others gathered at Wishwood chatter anxiously about how to broach the subject of her death upon Harry's return. Ivy comments on the particular difficulty "to lose anybody in *that* way—/Swept off the deck in the middle of a storm/And never even to recover the body." The play, of course, reveals Harry to be both relieved and guilt-pursued in the wake of his wife's death, for which he feels somewhat responsible, as if in imagining it, he actually pushed her over. This predicament offers a basis for critics like Seymour-Jones to assert that Harry stands in for Eliot himself, for she claims that the author continually rehearsed his own wife's death, harboring a "belief that he would in some way cause" it.[54] In even more egregious criticism, Pinkney blames Harry's late wife, asserting that "in a poetic *oeuvre* where the woman runs a terrible risk it seems to me simply prudent to keep one's marital relations on a permanent alert. The dangerous moments are when you 'lean over a rail,' averting your vigilant gaze."[55] The power of the drowning water offered Harry relief to his paranoid concern "that she was unkillable. It was not like that." As opposed to *The Cocktail Party*'s martyred Celia, of whom Reilly assumes that she suffered the common "reluctance of the body to become a *thing*,"[56] Harry explains to his family and friends "You would never imagine anyone could sink so quickly." The water takes her completely, and without bodily evidence, the authorities cannot pursue an inquiry. Seymour-Jones's assessment of Harry's guilt as representative of Eliot's murderous desire is conjecture, offered without textual evidence, and Pinkney's accusation sheds light on his own sexist tendencies. To answer them, I contend that "Little Gidding," published three years after *The Family Reunion* and thus generated by a similar moment in Eliot's personal and spiritual journey, suggests Harry's

anxiety to be instead reflective of Eliot's fear of his own swift death, coupled with an awareness of the futility of his career: "Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,/Every poem an epitaph. And any action/Is a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat/Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start."[57] The surprise is then that any body, even one armed with poetry, could sink so quickly.

The Body Desiccated

Ever searching the world through dialectic ways, Eliot also exposed his characters to desiccation as an expression of their moral obsolescence, drying them from the inside out. Among its victims are Gerontion and Lil, Tiresias and the Sibyl, and even Edward Chamberlayne, according to Celia's vision in *The Cocktail Party*. Undeniable commonalities link these figures. Gerontion's reiteration of himself as an "old man" and his final self-assessment as a "dry brain in a dry season" parallel the fate of Lil, prematurely aged with a "look so antique./(And her only thirty-one.)" Lil's sterility, chemically induced by "them pills [she] took, to bring it off," is reflected in the "wrinkled dugs" of Tiresias, both remnants of the now-foreclosed capacity to nurture children. Even the Sibyl, invoked in the epigraph to *The Waste Land*, her old and withered body reduced to that of a caged insect, is matched by a male counterpart when Celia tells Edward:

> I looked at your face: and I thought that I knew
> And loved every contour; and as I looked
> It withered, as if I had unwrapped a mummy.
> I listened to your voice, that had always thrilled me,
> And it became another voice—no, not a voice:

What I heard was only the noise of an insect,

Dry, endless, meaningless, inhuman—

You might have made it by scraping your legs together—

Or however grasshoppers do it. I looked,

And listened for your heart, your blood;

And saw only a beetle the size of a man

With nothing more inside it than what comes out

When you tread on a beetle.

Edward's entymological core, revealed to Celia in vision and hearing, reduces him just as the Sibyl is reduced, not only rendering him inhuman but also temptingly killable. The boys who taunt the desiccated Sibyl in her cage do so with the same intent as Celia, who wishes to "tread on" the beetle of Edward. Both human victims have become completely brutalized with desiccation. Celia, however, goes on in the next few lines to revise this statement, correcting herself to explain: "That is not what you are. It is only what was left/Of what I had thought you were." Such backpedaling, however, does little to erase the vivid imagery of her characterization. Her words first unwrap Edward from his skin (bringing to mind yet again Eliot's lecture in Maryland) and then metaphorically break him open to reveal that he consists of nothing more than a Kafka-like insect. Celia's eyes thus send him backward through centuries of evolution until he wishes for death. "Tread on me, if you like," he responds, although her words have already done so. There is nothing left of the man in the desiccated Edward, just as there is little vitality in Gerontion, Lil, Tiresias, and the Sibyl.

Unlike the dried-out figures male and female who serve as representations of utter

moral lack in Eliot, the dry bones that sing "chirping/With the burden of the grasshopper" in "Ash-Wednesday" offer a pathway to devotion, redeeming not only desiccation but also dismemberment of the physical body as legitimate aspects of corporal divestment. It is significant, of course, that this particular opportunity is reserved only for the male speaker of the poem. Unlike the already-mentioned sterile individuals classical and contemporary, each of whom has a corresponding partner of the opposite gender, the fate of the dry bones is singularly theirs. Just as Eliot's exploration of literary drowning led him to expose both men and women to it, only to distinguish the unique capacities of each gender in relation, he came to recognize desiccation as an emblem of the male *via negativa*. In the passage, Eliot lifted elements from the Book of Ezekiel; most telling are the adjustments he made to fit the Biblical prophecy to his purpose. Ezekiel remarks that "the hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones."[58] When Ezekiel's bones not only live but speak, they become miraculously connected and enfleshed: "the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew, and skin covered them."[59] Eliot's revision of Ezekiel's witness, however, reduces the speaker's own body to its barest, unconnected elements in the vision of the dry bones. Neither sinew nor flesh grows upon them. This is also a development from the 1932 lecture in which he invoked the flayed body as an emblem for truth. To a greater extent than, but similar to the men and women throughout Eliot's poetry, the speaker in "Ash-Wednesday" willingly subjects himself in this instance to first being dismembered. Like the men at the bottom of the sea and Celia Coplestone in Kinkanja, he is then consumed. And finally, like the morally and physically wanting postwar landscape of *The*

Waste Land, he is dried out. But in this singular moment, the bones achieve a breakthrough. Not only has all of Eliot's philosophical thinking and spiritual self-examination brought him to this point, but his literary abuse of the bodies of men and women throughout his work contribute to this realization of the redemptive possibility of asceticism.

In a letter to his friend and confessor William Force Stead from April 1928, the same year "Ash-Wednesday" was published, Eliot wrote of soul and body as oppositely nurtured, making clear his decision to prioritize the former by the way of deprivation. Referring to his own spiritual journey during the Easter season, Eliot wrote:

> I do not expect myself to make great progress at present, only to 'keep my soul alive' by prayer and regular devotions. Whether I shall get farther, I do not know . . . I do not know whether my circumstances excuse my going no farther or not . . . I feel that nothing could be too ascetic, too violent for my own needs.[60]

This pairing of asceticism and violence is absolutely essential for understanding Eliot's antagonism for, and propensity to enact literary violence against, the physical bodies of his characters. It is as if in his writing he proposes the treatment of the body that he eventually internalizes as an aspect of his own conversion and devotion. Thus Eliot's idealized body is a martyred body, destroyed in the pursuit of spirituality.

The Body Martyred

Just as Eliot came to realize his own devotional path through physical violence against his literary personae, he also recognized woman's distinct capacity to endure, creating out of his respect for such endurance his most devotional figure, the Lady of

"Ash-Wednesday." In criticism quick to oversimplify Eliot's characterization of women as either virgin or whore, this Lady can be blithely overlooked. Both Gordon and Seymour-Jones have identified her as Emily Hale to the denigrated woman's Vivien,[61] reifying the misogynistic binary without fully considering how she may be a unique redemptive figure. An emblem of the evolution of woman through Eliot's poetry, she has her roots in a most mistreated predecessor from "The Love Song of Saint Sebastian" (1914). Gordon initiates such a link by glancing at their similarity of attire: "This Lady, withdrawn in her 'white gown', is continuous with a lady in a white gown in 'The Love Song of Saint Sebastian' whose role was to witness the lover flogging sexual desire to death."[62] But an assessment of the relationship between these two women never follows, merely suggesting instead the odd coincidence that Eliot dressed the figures alike.

Both "The Love Song of Saint Sebastian" and "Ash-Wednesday" are first-person monologues by a male speaker addressing a woman, using the intimate 'you' in the former poem and the much more formal "Lady" in the latter. Fifteen years, during which time Eliot established his career, endured his troubled marriage to Vivien, and formally converted to Anglo-Catholicism, separate the two. In no way are they exactly symmetrical, but the parallels between them speak to Eliot's resolution of concerns he had about the treatment of Sebastian in general, as evidenced by the letter that accompanied the poem, sent to Aiken on 25 July 1914:

> Do you think that the *Love Song of St. Sebastian* part is morbid, or forced? . . . Does it all seem very laboured and conscious? The S. Sebastian title I feel almost sure of; I have studied S. Sebastians—why should anyone paint a beautiful youth and stick him full of pins (or arrows) unless he felt a little as the hero of my

> verse? Only there's nothing homosexual about this—rather an important difference perhaps—but no one ever painted a female Sebastian, did they? So I give this title *faute de mieux*.[63]

This remarkable excerpt suggests Eliot's poetic mind to be at work in imagining how a gender shift from male to female would impact the understanding of Sebastian's penetration and physical sacrifice. As Gordon points out, the strongest image from "The Love Song of St. Sebastian" that suggests "Ash-Wednesday" is that of the female addressee, whose "gown is white"[64] and mentioned twice in consecutive lines. In "Ash-Wednesday," "The Lady is withdrawn/In a white gown, to contemplation, in a white gown." The reiteration calls forth Sebastian's ghostly and idealized female figure. As a second point of comparison, both male speakers endure a brutal death in the poem. For Sebastian, the sacrifice of his life is self-induced:

> I would come in a shirt of hair
> I would come with a lamp in the night
> And sit at the foot of your stair;
> I would flog myself until I bled,
> And after hour on hour of prayer
> And torture and delight
> Until my blood should ring the lamp
> And glisten in the light;

The speaker of "Ash-Wednesday" offers himself no less willingly to the "three white leopards." Glistening blood makes the Sebastian figure "hideous in [her] sight," just as

those few body parts that "the leopards reject" render the latter persona hideous in the sight of lady, beast, and reader alike. The metaphor of the stair in both poems situates the men far below the higher ladies. In "St. Sebastian," Eliot makes clear the speaker's inferior position, "at the foot of your stair" from the outset, while in "Ash-Wednesday," such a location may be deduced from the beginning of Part III, in which the speaker must ascend from "the first turning of the second stair" to "the second turning of the second stair" and "the first turning of the third stair." In both poems, the speaker is engaged in "hour on hour of prayer," becoming "thus devoted, concentrated in purpose" through his own physical destruction. Furthermore, both destroyed male bodies are first set ablaze with feminine light and then later resurrected:

> Until my blood should ring the lamp
> And glisten in the light;
> I should arise your neophyte
> And then put out the light
> To follow where you lead, ("The Love Song of St. Sebastian")

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

My guts the strings of my eyes and the indigestible portions

Which the leopards reject. ("Ash-Wednesday")

The "goodness" and "loveliness" of the Lady of "Ash-Wednesday" as well as the extent of her sublimation to the Virgin represent a much more complete development of the feminine aspect than Eliot had mastered in 1914, but St. Sebastian's addressee becomes far more significant than an unrequited lover[65] in the context of the later poem. Though the self-inflicted flogging makes the speaker of "St. Sebastian" hideous, he expresses gratitude that she "would take me in without shame/Because I should be dead," just as the speaker of "Ash-Wednesday" credits his lady with kindness of devotion to the Virgin Mary. Perhaps to the credit of each woman, through the intercession of God, the speaker's voice in both poems persists past death. In "St. Sebastian," the stanza ends with an out-of-body vision of the speaker's inert head almost infantilized "Between [her] breasts," while in "Ash-Wednesday" though "there is no life in" the speaker's bones, he is able to pray on "chirping/With the burden of the grasshopper." Read in the much later light of "Ash-Wednesday," perhaps Eliot's own criticism of "St. Sebastian" as "laboured and forced" lies in the speaker's agency in his own martyrdom. The overseeing presence of the white-gowned lady is consistent between the two poems, but the later one is a scene of self-sacrifice to external, rather than self-inflicted, physical destruction.

The second stanza of "The Love Song of St. Sebastian," however, does depict physical violence by an external force, the beautiful woman subjected to the strangling hands of her male lover. Decried as yet another scene of "Eliotic femicide,"[66] this troubling stanza serves as a mirror image that inverts and reflects its predecessor. Eliot's epistolary question to Aiken: "no one ever painted a female Sebastian, did they?,"

however, allows the second stanza to be read as the poet attempting just that. And why not? If the beautiful male youth may be stuck full of pins and aestheticized in portraits, why must the beautiful woman not experience love "because I had mangled you"? Given Eliot's loathing for the physical body, Sebastian's murderous sensibility can be reinterpreted as an enactment of the lady's martyrdom or even sublimation—an early attempt at imagining her body subjected to the mortification of the flesh assumed by the often-queered body of the male Sebastian. Like the Sebastian figure in the first stanza, the murdered woman too avoids the arrows. Unlike him, her corpse remains completely intact. Though brutal in its hand-to-neck directness, the choice of strangulation as the means of her murder leaves her body whole and unmarred, a fate rarely enough achieved in Eliot's oeuvre. That alone must be a kind of tribute. Just as Eliot subjected both genders to dismemberment, drowning, and desiccation, he is here in 1914 already experimenting with the power of gender shift, himself writing the female Sebastian and then destroying her, waiting for "bits to sprout." Though this corpse he planted gestates for fourteen years, what eventually sprouts is her counterpart, the "silent sister veiled in white and blue." This Lady is indeed alive, but her beauty is obscured and her voice muted in a development from "The Love Song of St. Sebastian," in which she is also, albeit much more graphically and fatally, silenced ("your head beneath my knees") and obscured ("you were no longer beautiful/To anyone but me"). Only through this woman in the second stanza of "The Love Song of St. Sebastian" could Eliot have conceived of the Marian Lady of "Ash-Wednesday," making her in one sense a poetic resurrection. Her complete martyrdom of self-surrender is redeemed by her elevated status in relation

to the poem's speaker, who must himself endure the violent annihilation of his body and reverse evolution to the voice of the grasshopper in order to begin to pray.

Sebastian's influence, then, illustrates not only Eliot's early interest in physical denial of the body male and female, but also his career-long interest in shifting the lens of gender in order to fully comprehend the means of approaching devotion. References to Sebastian's particular martyrdom as well as painted portrayals of it likewise reveal themselves throughout the poetry. The arrows absent from "The Love Song of St. Sebastian" penetrate instead the body of Saint Narcissus, the third-century Bishop of Jerusalem who is believed to have suffered not a martyrdom but a natural death in the one hundred and sixteenth year of his life.[67] The two men, however, were near contemporaries. Saint Narcissus is believed to have died circa 215 and Saint Sebastian circa 288. Such proximity of life spans and the fact that the two men experienced the same historical moment of the church help to illuminate Eliot's choice to project Sebastian's corporal punishment onto the body of Narcissus. Eliot also alludes to his contemporaneous poem "The Burnt Dancer" in "The Death of Saint Narcissus," assigning to the bishop the following experience:

> So he became a dancer to God.
> Because his flesh was in love with the burning arrows
> He danced on the hot sand
> Until the arrows came.
> As he embraced them his white skin surrendered itself to the redness of blood,
> and satisfied him.[68]

Thus red and white, the very colors associated with male and female in "The Love Song of St. Sebastian," combine in the symbolic martyrdom of Narcissus. Such a dual-gendered rendering of martyrdom is fit conclusion to this particular poem, in which Narcissus, as Schuchard describes, "has hallucinative visions of what he believes to be the succession of his Ovidian metamorphoses," an evolution that progresses from tree to fish to young girl "sexually violated by a drunken old man."[69] What is remarkable about "The Love Song of Saint Sebastian" paired with "The Death of Saint Narcissus" is that they reveal that as early as 1914, Eliot was expanding the permutations of martyrdom: the delicate balance between willed self-sacrifice and vaulting ambition, the intersection of sexual desire with bloodlust, and its rippling affective distinctions when imposed on male versus female bodies. Sebastian, the Lady, and Narcissus complicate these binaries by literally embodying all of them. As in the later figure of Tiresias, "the two sexes meet"[70] in Narcissus. Thus the whiteness of his skin evokes the white gown of the women who precede and follow him. He is victim to desire both sexual and devotional, depicted not only by his being stuck full of pins but by his explicit desire for and enjoyment of erotic penetration. Both "The Love Song of Saint Sebastian" and "The Death of Saint Narcissus," then, launched Eliot's poetic exploration of physical annihilation in the service of martyrdom as it operates on male and female bodies. They serve as early indications that Eliot felt that his own male body restricted his full understanding of devotion, inspiring him to use literature in order to imagine the same operations on the female body. As a male writer, Eliot necessarily risked being misunderstood as a man silencing women by claiming their voices and idealizing femicide by destroying their bodies. Instead, I propose that Eliot's women (especially the most brutalized of them),

alongside the likewise brutalized men, allowed him to explore bodily destruction as a means by which he might step through, as he had hoped to in "Spleen" (1910), "the doorstep of the Absolute."[71]

The bodies of martyrs male and female thus represent those most troubled and hallowed in Eliot's corpus, for martyrdom is a ticket out of time, out of body, out of the Original Sin that taints humanity. *Murder in the Cathedral* takes the historical martyrdom of Thomas à Becket as its central subject and uses those exact words to explain the purgative process only accessible through such a death. The chorus of Canterbury women, as the murder is enacted, describe it thus: "But this, this is out of life, this is out of time,/An instant eternity of evil and wrong./We are soiled by a filth that we cannot clean, united to supernatural vermin,/It is not we alone, it is not the house, it is not the city that is defiled,/But the world that is wholly foul."[72] Through his death at the end of *Murder in the Cathedral*, Becket is no longer the victim but instead the liberated, for he has been transmigrated to a fate completely separate from the earth-bound action. Victimized instead are those left behind: the murderous knights who carried out the action and the witnessing women who stood idly by. The 1965 Faber and Faber edition of *Murder in the Cathedral* includes a stage direction for Becket's murder that further emphasizes Eliot's constant consideration of martyrdom across the dialectical spectrum of gender. The note states that his execution "must not be done naturalistically, but as part of a deliberate ritual, like a slow and symbolic ballet-movement. Thomas should be at the centre of a wheel the spokes of which are the swords of the Knights."[73] Such a direction places Becket literally "at the still point of the turning world," pointing to the ultimate end as described in the simultaneously written "Burnt Norton." Specifically

making Becket "the centre of a wheel" likewise places him in the feminine martyring space of fourth-century Christian saint Katherine of Alexandria, condemned to torture and execution on the wheel for attempting to convert the Roman Emperor Maximus. Katherine's mere touch, however, broke the four wheels set up to kill her, and she was subsequently beheaded, though milk flowed from her wound instead of blood.[74] But like Saint Sebastian shot through with arrows, Katherine's iconography consistently portrays her with the attribute of her intended martyrdom, posed victoriously over the wheel, spokes and all. *Murder in the Cathedral* thus overlays Katherine onto Becket. Though he actually dies at the point of the knights' swords, his death is visually rendered upon the spokes of a wheel she never had to endure.

Implicit throughout Eliot's dismembered, drowned, and desiccated bodies, martyrdom becomes a central subject in Eliot's post-conversion writing, specifically the Ariel poems, *Four Quartets*, and the plays. In "A Song for Simeon," the title character acknowledges the death that follows his witness of the Christ child, but specifically distinguishes that experience as distinct from martyrdom. Though he knows that he "has eighty years and no to-morrow./According to thy word," he excludes himself from the plural pronoun "they" to whom martyrdom is granted: "They shall praise Thee and suffer in every generation/With glory and derision,/Light upon light, mounting the saints' stair./Not for me the martyrdom, the ecstasy of thought and prayer,/Not for me the ultimate vision."[75] Simeon's is an expected and timely death; thus it lacks the spiritual significance of that suffered by others like St. Lucy,[76] mentioned in "The Cultivation of Christmas Trees;" St. Thomas à Becket, the protagonist of *Murder in the Cathedral*; and St. Agatha,[77] alluded to by the character that shares her name in *The Family Reunion*.

All human martyrdom falls short of the ultimate martyrdom of the incarnate Christ, which preoccupied Eliot's mind for the way it, the central act of Christian salvation, both necessitates the body and requires its bloody destruction. In a letter to More from 11 January 1937, Eliot refuted More's quotation of John Henry Newman's assessment of "but two beings in the whole universe, our own soul and God," writing "to feel at any moment that 'there are but two beings etc.' seems to me almost a denial of the Mystical Body of Christ."[78] The intersection of 'Mystical' and 'Body' in Eliot's phrase seems of central significance as he continued to struggle theologically with his own hatred for the physical body and the necessity of Christ's human incarnation. Evidence of such contemplation surfaces variously in the late poetry. In "Choruses from 'The Rock'" Part VI, Eliot's chiastic rhetoric demonstrates the need for a continuous cycle of bloodshed and martyrdom through its pattern of positive-negative-positive syntax as well as its repetition:

> And the Son of Man was not crucified once for all,
> The blood of the martyrs not shed once for all,
> The lives of the Saints not given once for all:
> But the Son of Man is crucified always
> And there shall be Martyrs and Saints.
> And if blood of Martyrs is to flow on the steps
> We must first build the steps;[79]

Physical asceticism likewise goes hand in hand with Eliot's post-conversion obsession with martyrdom. His own vow of celibacy represented a denial of the physical that aligned him with the consecrated virgins and celibates. But bloodshed and death came to

represent Eliot's requirements for complete devotion. Schuchard cites Eliot's 1934 essay "Liberty" as instructive of the total annihilation of the body that he considered essential: "The soul, by resigning itself to the divine light, that is, by removing every spot and stain of the creature, which is to keep the will perfectly united to the will of God . . . becomes immediately enlightened by, and transformed in, God."[80] Every spot and stain of the creature must have also existed within the body of the incarnate Christ, and yet his mystical aspect was able to overcome and destroy such tarnish in the single act of crucifixion. "East Coker" most clearly demonstrates Eliot's sense of Christ's crucifixion, as opposed to his resurrection, as the central image of salvation:

> The wounded surgeon plies the steel
> That questions the distempered part;
> Beneath the bleeding hands we feel
> The sharp compassion of the healer's art
> Resolving the enigma of the fever chart.[81]

This image rests on paradox: Christ, human and divine, is wounded and surgeon, bleeding and healer, embodying in one flesh the world's long, sinful fever and its resolution. Eliot's choice of the verb "plies" transforms the nail, one of the weapons of Christ's torture, into a penetrating tool. In this way, Eliot endows Christ, shown on the instrument of execution that failed to defeat him, with a unique agency. Eliot does not leave it to his readers to understand that Christ emerged victorious over the cross (as it is left to readers and viewers to remember that Sebastian survived the arrows and Katherine the wheel and coals). By making Christ an active figure on his own cross, he is the wounded surgeon who actually takes hold of the steel nails, bends them to his purpose,

consents to their pain, even writhes in response to it in order to draw out the distemper with his fortitude. Throughout that section of five ababa, iambic tetrameter quintains in "East Coker," Eliot uses poetic form and metaphor to contain the terrifying "paternal care" of the Christian God as he understands it. In the fourth stanza, Eliot even imagines himself experiencing Christ's martyrdom according to the diction of his admired Dante. Pain, suffering, and extremity are only appropriate, as they are the visceral symptoms of humanity's fever:

> The chill ascends from feet to knees,
> The fever sings in mental wires.
> If to be warmed, then I must freeze
> And quake in frigid purgatorial fires
> Of which the flame is roses, and the smoke is briars.

But there is yet one further aspect of Christ's physical martyrdom that puzzles Eliot. Though Eliot, through the speaker of "East Coker," may have divested himself enough of fear and corporality to welcome ascending chill and purgatorial fire, Christ divested himself still further—"To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk," as explained in "Gerontion"—his body become "The dripping blood our only drink,/The bloody flesh our only food," according to "East Coker."

Standard Christian theology explains Christ's Passion, including the transubstantiation of the Last Supper, crucifixion, and death as all absolutely necessary for the redemption of sin through the resurrection. And though Eliot acknowledges this fact as actively "Resolving the enigma of the fever chart," his attention is always fixed on the mystery of Christ's physicality. Eucharistic wine is "dripping blood" and the

transubstantiated host "bloody flesh." Neither is far distant from that which the leopards devoured in "Ash-Wednesday," thereby closing a circle of penitence that begins in the poem named for the beginning of Lent and ending on the day "we call . . . Friday good." Understanding Eliot's fixation on the physicality of Christian redemption, a physicality which requires surrender to the violent destruction of the body until it becomes food, not for the proverbial worms, but for the essential nourishment of those to come, helps also to illuminate the motif of bodily consumption in his writing. As early as "Mr. Apollinax" and "Death by Water," the bones of Eliot's drowned men are picked by mouths at the bottom of the sea. Despite conventional criticism that would never associate these men with the directly threatened missionary women, I have aligned them as men and women facing consumption under different circumstances. But it is via two women—the threatened Doris and the martyred Celia—that Eliot directly challenges the easy acceptance of the physical sacrifice and consumption of the male Christ, doing so in a manner similar to his revision of Sebastian through the figures of Narcissus and the Lady. Thus he removes the veil of patriarchal complacency from theology that Christians tend to swallow whole.

The fact that men threaten Doris and Celia with torture, death, and consumption has been mistakenly interpreted as an expression of the author's own fantastical desires. Such a critical interpretation rests on feminine paranoia and repressed inferiority, a kind of unspoken accusation that violence is somehow legitimized when a man picks on someone of his own gender. Men, of course, accused, tortured, and killed the male Christian martyrs alongside the female ones. Men accused, scourged, and crucified Christ. And thus for men to somehow pardon women from violence as a result of their

delicacy, their otherness, their lack—*that* exception would represent gender pandering. Instead, in Eliot, only women have the fortitude to venture into the sacrifice of missionary life.

Badenhausen acknowledges the predominant critical misunderstanding of Celia's death and goes on to suggest how Eliot ultimately privileged her surrender to martyrdom: "Although some might want to read Celia's crucifixion as just another Eliotic femicide sanctioned by the trappings of Christian martyrdom, within the model I have drawn that privileges absence, lack, and silence, Celia, despite her tragic end, is the only 'successful' character."[82] In a manner similar to the ironic replacement of martyrdom by the enemy's arrows with strangulation at the hands of a lover in "St. Sebastian," Eliot complicates the matter by making a parody of Celia's sacrifice. It is as if in both works, he insists on the destruction of the physical for the realization of the Absolute. Even if the crucifying agents are Christian-eating "heathens" seeking revenge on behalf of their sacred monkeys, Celia still gives herself over wholly, surrendering bodily to the all-consuming power of violence. Thomas à Becket's well-explained, expected martyrdom this is not. For Celia, the possibility of dying with religious dignity is foreclosed. Her murder is ridiculous and horrific, but her resolve, perhaps even more than that of Christ who prayed that this cup might pass, remains constant and thus redeems it. Through the lens of Eliot's overall loathing for the body and obsession with violent asceticism, Celia's propensity for and acceptance of brutality must be reexamined. Her destiny has always been as inherent to her character as Becket's is to him. In *Murder in the Cathedral,* the latter reflects, "All my life they have been coming, these feet. All my life/I have waited. Death will come only when I am worthy,/And if I am worthy, there is no danger./I have therefore only to

perfect my will." How such a will is perfected varies from person to person, gender to gender, across ways and means of martyrdom beginning with the experience of Christ himself. When Reilly tells Celia "It is a terrifying journey," she completes the poetic line: "I am not frightened/But glad." Her willingness for suffering and death is unblinking, even in the face of the most violent and brutal, even "very near an ant-hill."

Beyond the Physical: Striving toward Hope

For all of the destructive treatment of the body in Eliot's poetry and prose, ranging from corporal fragmentation to full martyrdom, there is simultaneously the suggestion of hope. Schuchard explains:

> The somber persona who begins to speak on Ash Wednesday is already in an advanced state of mortification, having willfully and utterly divested himself of temporal desire…Paradoxically he has found liberation in deprivation, and joy in suffering, for though he has renounced all hope of trying to turn again to a lost life, he now has the hope of constructing 'something' new, 'something/Upon which to rejoice,' a *vita nuova*.[83]

Eliot's insistence on the repudiation of the physical—his own body as well as those of his male and female personae—risks being misinterpreted as violent fantasy. But as his devotion grew, so did his understanding of such bodily divestment as spiritual requirement. In "Little Gidding," the last of the *Four Quartets* and the end of Eliot's poetic corpus, he revised the departure of soul from body as presented over thirty years earlier in "La Figlia che Piange." There, the two were rent apart, the "soul leav[ing] the body torn and bruised," reminiscent of Eliot's own expression that nothing could be too

violent to nurture his own soul. In "Little Gidding," however, the first-person persona who meets the "familiar compound ghost" uses diction of ease, and not violence, to speak of such a separation. He is "compliant to the common wind" and "In concord at this intersection time," even commenting that "'The wonder that I feel is easy." The ghost, beyond physicality, then describes the soul's parting from the body as liberation into a new language: "So I find words I never thought to speak/In streets I never thought I should revisit/When I left my body on a distant shore." Gone is the anxious attention paid to the body's destruction, "torn and bruised." Instead, the ghost promises as one of the "gifts reserved for age," negative sensation, the antithesis of pain, perhaps an undoing of Eden's sinful apple: the "bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit/As body and soul begin to fall asunder." In the third part of the poem, the speaker reflects on his visitation. With the ghost having "faded on the blowing of the horn," he is left to internalize its message, coming to the conclusion that human "History may be servitude,/History may be freedom. See, now they vanish,/The faces and the places, with the self which, as it could, loved them,/To become renewed, transfigured in another pattern." Here, in the penultimate section of "Little Gidding," nearly at the close of his poetic existence, Eliot acknowledges directly for the first time hope for resurrection, as he says, "in another pattern." What pattern exactly that might be is left unexplained, though the following stanza break and turn to the diction of fourteenth-century mystic and saint Julian of Norwich offer clues.

Perhaps the feminine offered Eliot a means by which to imagine "another pattern," another body, another transfigured physical life in resurrection. It is remarkable that Eliot, the same man whose expressed obsession with the ramifications of Original

Sin made him confess to Ezra Pound "I am afraid of the life after death,"[84] could bring himself to the point in "Little Gidding" whereupon he lifts verbatim Julian's prizing of the very same sin. At the dialectical opposite of Eliot's fear is Julian's conviction that "Sin is Behovely, but/All shall be well, and/All manner of thing shall be well." Her perspective is indeed a completely transfigured version of his. And with it, she answers his anxiety as the preserved women of water correspond to the picked, drowned men, reifying the necessity of surrender. Once again, treated to the same grim fate, the damnation of sin, women in Eliot emerge better equipped to respond. A similar optimism resurfaces in a curious moment at the end of *The Cocktail Party*. Discussing Celia's fate to leave for the African mission, Reilly asserts that she "will go far," but Julia articulates the hope beyond bodily destruction and resurrection:

> Oh yes, she will go far. And we know where she is going.
> But what do we know of the terrors of the journey?
> You and I don't know the process by which the human is
> Transhumanised: what do we know
> Of the kind of suffering they must undergo
> On the way of illumination?

On the cusp of Celia's step away from modern civilization to meet her physical and spiritual destiny, Eliot abandons modern diction. Instead, he employs a linguistic correlative for the process by which the body achieves union with the Absolute by reaching back to Dante, in whose *Paradiso* (I, 70–71) the gaze of Beatrice has the following effect: "*Trasumanar significar per verba/non si poria*." Eliot himself had translated this line in his essay "Dante" (1929) as "To transcend humanity may not be

told in words."[85] Twenty years later, in both poetry and prose writing, *trasumanar* recurs. In the year following the opening of *The Cocktail Party*, Eliot cited it in the essay "What Dante Means to Me" (1950), this time citing the word in its original form as the ultimate example of Dante's genius for "developing the language, enriching the meaning of words and showing how much words can do . . . making possible a much greater range of emotion and perception for other men, because he gives them the speech in which more can be expressed."[86] In the very next sentence, when Eliot offers the "instance [of] what Dante did for his own language—and for ours, since we have taken the word and anglicized it—by the verb *trasumanar*,"[87] Eliot is most certainly invoking himself. For he had guaranteed the word's Anglicization in *The Cocktail Party,* bestowing on Celia, through her martyrdom, the experience of the poet Dante upon gazing at Beatrice. Invoking this word—given his preoccupation with and admiration for it—Eliot infused Celia's fate with complete solemnity. More than any other Eliot character, Celia willingly surrenders body and soul, willingly endures bodily suffering. In response, she is transhumanised, according to its literal definition. Her humanity—and the body that accompanies it—is carried across, over, or beyond to that which can only be inadequately expressed as illumination. Through Celia, let us turn now to find Eliot simultaneously at work not just employing and imagining a feminine Other, but himself striving to experience her body in order to know its self-surrender.

Chapter Two

In the room Eliot comes and goes

"The co-ordination of thought and feeling—without either debauchery or repression—seems to me what is needed."

—T. S. Eliot, Letter to Paul Elmer More, 3 August 1929[1]

"Only the act of feeling with (*einfülen*), putting oneself in the place of someone else, will produce understanding. This is no complicated theory of hermeneutics, but simply a return to a world that is worth living in because it escapes classification and gains little by being constricted by straitjackets."

—Marina van Zuylen, *Monomania*, 2005

The feminine realm in Eliot is not necessarily safe. And yet, time and again throughout the poetry and prose, it is the realm into which male speakers compulsively enter. Prufrock yearns to linger "in the chambers of the sea/By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown," and the brothel-going Sweeney continually finds himself in coitus, physically attempting to lose himself within the bodies of female prostitutes. In so doing, these male personae, as well as many others, enact or hope to enact Eliot's own desire to lose himself in the feminine. Her open body both invites and repels, finding an analogy in the open rooms she inhabits in Eliot's poetry, for they are also mysterious and cloying spaces that nevertheless continually attract her male counterparts.

The literal entry into the body-space of the female evident in Eliot's poetry from its inception demonstrates the poet's continual reimagining of an alternative corporal

reality based on his own perception of the feminine as possessing an expanded potential for sublimation and devotion. Throughout this argument, but particularly in this chapter, I refer to such a perception as empathy, intending the term both in its most literal sense—the desire to feel as another—as well as in a creative, authorial sense. Just as the above excerpt from his letter to More demonstrates, Eliot staked his poetic practice on an integrated sensibility of thought and feeling. Thus, when he found his own male experience inadequate for complete understanding, he aimed to imagine an alternative, an open body or penetrable space in which one might fully experience both humanity and the Absolute. Striving toward empathy in this way was for Eliot a fully selfish endeavor; Eliot's empathy has no interest in alleviating the suffering he perceived as inherent to women. Rather, he desired to be able to imagine and vicariously experience it in order to learn about himself as both a writer and a Christian.

Understanding Eliot's forays into empathy is aided by contemporary theories on the relationship between empathy and aesthetics, which can then be applied to Eliot's particularly loaded relationship with the feminine. Marina van Zuylen, likewise quoted above, takes as her major subject Victorian novelist George Eliot, whose novels, she claims, understand and portray "empathy as a spilling out of emotion, an ability to live several lives at once."[2] Van Zuylen goes on to suggest such understanding as implicit in the creative impulse, stating that "empathy is the tool of the writer herself, a tool that cuts both ways—productive, but also destabilizing."[3] This association is echoed by Mitchell Green in "Empathy, Expression, and What Artworks Have to Teach"[4] and developed further by Madelyn Detloff in *The Persistence of Modernism: Loss and Mourning in the Twentieth Century*.[5] With this understanding of empathy in mind, then, I contend that

Eliot must have first understood empathy to be inherent to writing itself, a concept that he further developed as an aspect of his creative process by crafting his poems so that they might offer him the perspective foreclosed to him physically as a man. Eliot understood women as privileged in their capacity for suffering and wished to at least imaginatively empathize with such a capacity in order to further know himself. Green in particular emphasizes the rightful place of imagination in such an endeavor, affirming both that empathy "does not . . . mandate any requirement that I actually feel what I imagine you to be feeling" and that art can inspire empathy "by engaging the imagination, or by exploiting our sensitivity to congruences between experiences, on the one hand, and emotions and moods on the other."[6] Such an outcome resounds with Eliot's call for a necessary integration of conscious thought and attention to emotion. Therefore, though he did not use the term empathy in defining his own literary endeavor, Eliot's tendency in the early poetry to create female characters whose bodies and rooms exist as spaces open to male penetration and departure represents a desire for empathy that offered him the hope of shedding his own, closed male body while also achieving a more complete understanding of himself.

Women in Eliot have too long been misread as occupants of closed spaces that produce, as Palmer argues, a "shut-in feeling and a kind of confinement."[7] In fact, Palmer's study of male/female relationships in Eliot rests on the assumption that "Man and woman never achieve any mutual understanding, let alone empathy; consequently, no communication between them is ever attained. Both are isolated in their own world, the woman mostly in a closed room which the man reaches by climbing stairs."[8] In foreclosing the possibility of empathy between men and women, Palmer preempted

Gordon, who declared unequivocally two years later that Eliot "seemed to suffer from an inability to empathise with suffering outside his own experience."[9] By situating the women in closed rooms, Palmer also echoes Edward Lobb, whose article "Chamber Music: Eliot's Closed Rooms and Difficult Women" (1990), takes for granted that "the closed rooms are usually associated with women, and the women of Eliot's earlier poetry are not—with one or two notable exceptions—an attractive lot."[10] But to perceive women as closed rooms neglects the frequency of man's penetration into their bodies, their boudoirs, and even their shuttered barges. Recognizing instead the inherent openness of the feminine, as outlined in my chapter's first section, allows the male speakers of Eliot's poetry the (sometimes frightening) option of seeking refuge within the body of the opposite gender. Woman's open body is possibly the very key to which Eliot alludes through his cryptic, inclusive imagining in *The Waste Land*'s "What the Thunder Said": "We think of the key, each in his prison/Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison." To gloss these words, Eliot provided in the poem's notes the following quotation from F. H. Bradley that reifies the male body as the closed system from which there issues, at least for Eliot, an acute desire for escape:

> My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and, with all its elements alike, every sphere is opaque to the elements which surround it. . . . In brief, regarded as an existence which appears in a soul, the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul.[11]

Eliot found the means of penetrating beyond the closed circle of his own existence in the women of his composition. Keeping in mind the Bradley allusion, my first section

contends that Eliot wrote of women as open beings, penetrable circles that offered him the fantastical possibility of taking up permanent residence inside.

In the chapter's second section, I will explain how empathy with his female characters offered Eliot not only a sense of physical liberation but also a pathway toward more complete self-knowledge, beginning as early as the poems of *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917) but particularly evident through the women of *The Waste Land* and its manuscript drafts. Gordon asserts that *The Waste Land* "is filled with broken women betrayed by sex or marriage,"[12] but only Schuchard clarifies this generalization, pointing out that these women are not mere victims, but rather representatives specially chosen by Eliot for the way in which they reflect and amplify his own personal trauma in the wake of the sexual betrayal of his first wife, Vivien, with Bertrand Russell in 1915, only shortly following the Eliots' marriage. Schuchard refrains, however, from exploring the gender implications of this association, which is played out time and again in *The Waste Land* in a way that significantly opposes Eliot's own experience. It is not men but rather women, including Cleopatra, Philomel, Lil, the typist, and the Thames daughters, who are either threatened by or suffer violently from sexual betrayal, rape, and abandonment. In populating his writing with them, Eliot was indeed working out the "recurring phantasma" of his own betrayal. The illicit relationship between his wife and his teacher left Eliot with a sense of personal victimization that he understood to be feminine and thus explored by consciously empathizing with sexually betrayed female characters.

Within this second section will be a special consideration of the character of Fresca, critically understood to be the ultimate embodiment of Eliot's misogyny. According to an understanding of Eliot's emphasis on woman's physical openness as a

means of self-realization through empathy, Fresca becomes an important and necessary figure for re-examination. Never will she be completely recovered as a heroine—Eliot himself suppressed her—but the work that she did for him while he wrote *The Waste Land* reveals his own fears about himself as both poet and character-creator. She is therefore a productive figure, the last in a line of female characters through whom Eliot imagined himself as a means toward physical and vocational self-knowledge.

Finally, the chapter's third section explores how Eliot's tendency to allow himself to be engulfed by the open female reveals itself in linguistic play, particularly through his recognition of women's propensity to subvert the patriarchal dominance of language. In attacking what they call Eliot's "usurpation" of women's words, Gilbert and Gubar argue that "Eliot transcribes female language in order to transcend it,"[13] but I disagree, seeing in his use of female language an act of homage. The feminine means of linguistic subversion in Eliot are multiple and eclectic. They range from the musical to the twittering to the silent, tacitly refuting Sweeney's assumption "I've gotta use words when I talk to you." Establishing this tension must have required Eliot to himself assume an authorial vulnerability akin to that which he understood as inherent to the female body.

Eliot's poetry on the whole, then, represents a longstanding engagement with the feminine that posits her not as an enemy but rather as a valid and enviable alternate being in the world, one with whom he attempted to empathize, through whom he could seek a way out of isolation toward self-knowledge, and in admiration of whom he could find modern, non-narrative linguistic possibilities.

Open Bodies, Open Rooms

Eliot's earliest explicit articulation of the desire to lose himself within the realm

of the feminine can be found in the early, unpublished poems "He said: this universe is very clever" (1911) and "The Love Song of Saint Sebastian" (1914). Although both make this desire explicit, it is always cloaked by what appears to be a desire for self-destruction. Instead of desiring anything generative as resulting from the union of man and woman, Eliot's speakers imagine what might be otherwise interpreted as Thanatos instead of Eros. The earlier poem quotes an unnamed speaker, "He," who compares the universe to "a geometric net/And in the middle, like a syphilitic spider/The Absolute sits waiting, till we get/All tangled up and end ourselves inside her."[14] The poem's presentation of the female is thus complicated. Eliot uses the third-person pronoun "she" to refer on one hand to an elevated, unconventionally feminine representation of the Absolute, but she is simultaneously denigrated, rendered predatory and syphilitic. And yet the syntax of the poem's last phrase, "till we get/All tangled up and end ourselves inside her," renders the female spider less a predator than a vehicle for the collective self's own willing undoing. The very same desire to lose himself and his life within the body of the female occurs in "The Love Song of Saint Sebastian," although the poem's blood, violence, and murder nearly obscure it. After the saint figure flogs himself, he imagines rising to follow the lady "In the darkness toward your bed/And where your gown is white/And against your gown your braided hair." Rife with imagery as sexual as the spider imagery is predatory, the poem also includes a slight shift in language that makes clear the male speaker's similar desire to be assumed by the feminine: "Then you would take me in/Because I was hideous in your sight/You would take me in without shame/Because I should be dead." Read thus in the wider context of Eliot's own physical loathing as well as his consciousness of confinement within the self, these early poems

evince his early interest in being fully assumed, even at great risk. Both speakers desire a paradoxical and threatening escape from their present male condition.

The cost of such a desire is high, not only death but also imprisonment in another body, in this case, an open and vulnerable one. In *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains that feminine identification, however, requires the acceptance of such vulnerability: "At least for relatively privileged feminists of my generation, it has been an article of faith," she says, "and a deeply educative one, that to conceive of oneself as a woman at all must mean trying to conceive oneself, over and over, as if incarnated in ever more palpably vulnerable situations and embodiments."[15] While Eliot's conception of women is far from what Sedgwick would consider feminist, her explanation of the psychological impact of a feminine identity is helpful for reconsidering Eliot's troubling images of willing death inside the female body. That he imagined feminine empathy as requiring the total self-sacrifice of death suggests Eliot's inclinations to align with Sedgwick's theory. Unlike Pinkney, who argues that "any Eliotic text has to, needs to, wants to, in one way or another, do a girl in," and further, that "if it fails to achieve that goal, [the text] is itself murderously threatened by the girl,"[16] I contend that the female figures of these early poems possess neither the agency nor the intent to harm, much less to murder. In grossly generalizing Eliot's women as either victims or murderers, Pinkney fails to consider both Sedgwick's perspective on feminine self-perception and Eliot's syntax of male self-surrender. A closer reading reveals the poem's speaker in both cases to have willingly subjected himself to a new, strange, and risky embodiment. As early as these two poems, Eliot was imagining himself surrendering to, and thus ending himself in, the feminine.

These poems thus set up a new means of reading "Hysteria," the collected poem most frequently conscripted into evidence for Eliot's misogyny. Like "Introspection" from *Inventions of the March Hare*, "Hysteria" is a rare prose poem in Eliot's oeuvre. It immediately follows "Mr. Apollinax" in *Prufrock and Other Observations* as well as in Eliot's collected poems, and the pair serve as companion poems in which, as Schuchard explains, Baudelairean laughter of pride distorts man and woman alike.[17] The only hint of context for the unexpected events of "Hysteria" lies in its opening three words: "As she laughed." With them, Eliot expressed the physically destructive power of pride. Mr. Apollinax's laughter destroys his body completely in its wake, but in "Hysteria," the woman's laughter expropriates the male observer completely within her body, presenting a fantasy of monstrous engorgement:

> As she laughed I was aware of becoming involved in her laughter and being part of it, until her teeth were only accidental stars with a talent for squad-drill. I was drawn in by short gasps, inhaled at each momentary recovery, lost finally in the dark caverns of her throat, bruised by the ripple of unseen muscles. . . . [18]

In *Eliot's Dark Angel*, Schuchard comments on Eliot's admiration for Fyodor Dostoevsky specifically with respect to his "controlled use of epilepsy and hysteria," citing Eliot's understanding that in Dostoevsky, "epilepsy and hysteria cease to be the defects of an individual and become—as fundamental weaknesses can, given the ability to face it and study it—the entrance to a genuine and personal universe."[19] What better entrance into the universe of the female could there be than hysteria? With its origin understood as a gynecological disorder of the uterus (*hystera*) dating from classical Greece, hysteria shifted in Eliot's historical moment from, as Seymour-Jones describes, " a label often

pinned upon young women who were unhappy and frustrated with their circumscribed lives in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries"[20] to a diagnosis given to male veterans of World War One. Nancy K. Gish offers the following context, explaining that "Discussion of hysteria was . . . intensified in Britain during World War I as 'shell-shocked' soldiers came home exhibiting symptoms traditionally attributed to 'hysterical' women."[21] Hysteria thus represents a medical intersection of gender that offered Eliot Dostoevskian entrance. The woman's hysterical laughter becomes his experience of dissociation. And just as in the poem "He said: this universe is very clever," Eliot offers subtle clues to indicate his own co-conspiracy in his near-loss of self within her gullet. The verbs describing the effect of her laughter on him exude passive compliance: "I was aware of becoming involved in her laughter and being part of it." There is no sense of his resistance in this poem. Instead, the poem's emphasis is always on the "I," which remains intact and functioning as he passes through her mouth, past her teeth, and down her throat, the new and foreign landscape of his dwelling. He transforms her teeth into "accidental stars" and her throat into "dark caverns" as he is "drawn in by . . . inhaled . . . [and] lost finally," that last adverb suggesting a longed-for orgasmic release into the "unseen muscles" of a new body. The fantasy barely lasts five lines, however, before it is interrupted by "An elderly waiter." This figure of another man abruptly jerks both speaker and reader out from the dark interior space of the body to the banal repetition of social table talk: "'If the lady and gentleman wish to take their tea in the garden, if the lady and gentleman wish to take their tea in the garden . . .'" and the "trembling . . . hurrie[d]" arrangement of tablecloth on table.

The figure of the waiter engineers the speaker's extrication from the woman's

body before he suffers any sort of trauma, rendering the inhalation less a threat than the exercise of fantasy. The feeling of being "lost finally" lasts no longer than an orgasmic loss of control. The speaker may be "bruised," but he remains able to concentrate and under at least a delusion of his own power at the end of the poem. Significantly, even after completely assuming her male companion, the woman's body also remains both intact and aesthetically pleasing.

Remarkably, "Hysteria" includes no reference to female odor even though her body is described as dark, akin to the "stifled . . . darkened chambers" of "Do I know how I feel? Do I know what I think?"[22] and the "female smells in shuttered rooms" of "Rhapsody on a Windy Night."[23] Preoccupation with female smell is so explicit and recurrent in Eliot's poetry that its absence in "Hysteria" demands attention. Pinkney explains the dominance with which Eliot associates smell with women in his oeuvre, from "the 'perfume from a dress' delicately wafting to Prufrock's nostrils" to the "dense, heated animality" excreted by Princess Volupine, Grishkin, and Fresca.[24] Perhaps more than any other characteristic of Eliot's female characters, the stench that pervades them offers yet another indication of his obsession with the positive and negative implications of the open female body, which Pinkney rightly understands as "seeth[ing] with forces, substances, and secretions that threaten to burst forth upon the outside world."[25] But I understand this unpleasant characterization as evidence of real anxiety rather than vituperous hatred. So aware is Eliot of woman's inherent openness to the external environment that he fixates on its most socially damning aspect, as though he is attempting to fully reconcile himself to the possibility of that which is most internal and most private leaking out into the public world. Helen Gardner's remark on the visceral,

untranslatable effect of smell proves instructive in explaining its relationship to such anxiety: "Taste and smell are the most immediate of our senses, and the least translatable into intellectual terms by the conscious mind. They are also the most at the mercy of the external world, for we can avert our eyes, stop our ears, and refrain from touching more easily than we can escape a smell which is haunting and pervasive."[26] Smell just might be the cost of opening up the closed circle and unlocking the individual prison of the body. Significantly, though, when the male speaker is most wholly swallowed up by the female body in "Hysteria," the consuming body is a deodorized body. "Hysteria" is not, then, a poem of anxiety but instead of experimental fantasy.

The interruption of the elderly waiter who relocates the poem in the external world balances the inhalation fantasy of "Hysteria." His "trembling hands . . . hurriedly spreading" the tablecloth, as well as his repeated murmuring, suggest that he too has been disarmed by the couple's unorthodox interaction, though the extent to which he has been affected remains unclear. His individuation from them, as well as the objective realities of the tablecloth, table, tea, and garden, is necessary for resituating the speaker's perspective. Apparently the woman continues to laugh throughout the poem, for the speaker hopes to stop "the shaking of her breasts" in its last line, even though he seems to have recovered himself following the waiter's interruption. Again, Eliot makes this change explicit through his choice of verbs. No longer willingly passive, the speaker asserts himself with verbs that are both direct and active in the last third of the poem: "I *decided* that if the shaking of her breasts could be *stopped*, some of the fragments of the afternoon might be *collected*, and I *concentrated* my attention with careful subtlety to this end."[27] This ending is ominous. Read anachronistically, through Pinkney's lens of "Any

man might do a girl in," the speaker seems to assert his own power to stop not just the laughing but the woman herself. But Eliot would not write *Sweeney Agonistes* for nine years, and even when he did, he placed this threat in the mouth of his most loathed persona. Therefore, to take the mantra as an expression of Eliot's own beliefs is exceedingly misguided. Instead, the last lines of "Hysteria" demonstrate the male speaker floundering in the realization that he and the woman have been reestablished as separate beings in the external world. The woman's breasts, her most pronounced and obvious gender demarcation, become his focus, and he relies on force of intellect to confront them. The poem itself never indicates whether or not this effort will be successful, but if the hoped-for result is that "some of the fragments of the afternoon might be collected," then Eliot seems still in pursuit of such an end at the close of *The Waste Land* when he underlines the poem itself as "fragments I have shored against my ruins."

Though "Hysteria" is the most "alarming" of what Pinkney calls both the "engulfings" and "'in-volvings'"[28] of the masculine speaker by the feminine antithesis in Eliot's poetry, an anthropomorphic reading of the poetry that posits the interior spaces occupied by female figures as allegories for woman's open body illustrates the omnipresence of the theme in Eliot's oeuvre. As indicated earlier, critics including Palmer, Pinkney, and Lobb have begun such work, but they persistently characterize these interior spaces as closed. On the contrary, all of the internal spaces in which women are found in Eliot are open, penetrable rooms. As early as "Prufrock," the women "come and go" within them; it is the title character himself who remains subject to psychological paralysis. Most of Eliot's men, however, willingly enter these rooms, experiencing at least for a short time the simultaneous ecstasy and claustrophobia of losing oneself in an

alternate space. Even Prufrock dreams of returning to "the chambers of the sea/By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown," an assertion Palmer links in a series of ever-more-allegoric images to "a grotto, a female room, a womb."[29] Throughout her argument, Palmer accuses that "the monotony of the female world reigns inside,"[30] but if this were true, why would Eliot's male speakers continually manifest the desire for such interior spaces? Open rooms throughout the poetry attract male characters who cannot resist entry. "Portrait of a Lady" opens in the candlelit "atmosphere of Juliet's tomb" and, as Palmer points out, "all the three encounters in the three acts occur in the lady's room in the afternoon, at sunset or at night."[31] Women linger at thresholds in three poems—in a lit doorway in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," at the gates in "Morning at the Window," and again at the doorway in "*The Boston Evening Transcript"*—thereby underscoring Eliot's association of woman with portal. Additionally, women line the corridor of the prostitute's room in "Sweeney Erect," themselves thereby "involved" in Sweeney's sexual pursuit of the feminine interior.

Most often and more conventionally, however, the women of Eliot are well established inside domestic spaces, which readers glimpse solely through the eyes of the men who enter them. Pipit in "A Cooking Egg" and Grishkin in "Whispers of Immortality" are nearly indistinguishable from the interior spaces they occupy. Though introduced at the outset of "A Cooking Egg" as its ostensible subject, Pipit soon fades into furnishings and accoutrements as dormant as the coffee-table books, knitting, daguerreotypes, and screen that surround her. Grishkin's "feline smell," elicited from within, suffuses the "drawing-room" in which she is located. Through such smell, Grishkin claims the drawing-room as her own, just as her possession of a "maisonette"

establishes her independence in working society. Princess Volupine too, only barely emerges as a being separate from "Her shuttered barge" in "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar." The fact that it "burned on the water all the day" is widely read as an expression of her voracious sexuality, but scholars fail to acknowledge that in their willing descent into this space, Burbank, Sir Ferdinand Klein, and other male clients demonstrate their preference for sexual gratification within the passionate feminine. Perhaps the most dramatic association of open room with female body occurs in the scene that opens "A Game of Chess." The section's first lines, "The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,/Glowed on the marble" identify the boudoir's resident to be Shakespeare's Cleopatra. Her room appeals sumptuously to both sight and smell. A mirror doubles the "flames of sevenbranched candelabra" and "the glitter of her jewels" while "in vials of ivory and coloured glass/Unstoppered, lurked her strange, synthetic perfumes" that "drowned the sense in odours." Though he reads it as overwhelmingly profuse, particularly with regard to smell, Pinkney refers to: "The 'rich profusion' of the throne-room, its dense and cloying voluptuousness" as "an objectification of the slow viscous inner fermenting of the female body."[32] By opening "A Game of Chess" in the liquid profusion of Cleopatra's room, Eliot delineates the poem appropriately as the realm of the feminine. Sensation, music, violence, and chatter will flow through the women who follow: Philomel, the nervous wife, Lil and the gossip, and Ophelia. Just as the "unseen muscles" of "Hysteria" caused bruising, so might this open space of the feminine be "rudely forced." But from the earliest published poems through *The Waste Land*, Eliot continually returned to penetrable feminine spaces in order to both lose himself and find access to empathy. After all, Ricks claims in his notes to "Prufrock's

Pervigilium" that the questions of *The Waste Land*'s nervous wife, who asks "'What shall I do now? What shall I do?'" and then resolves, "'I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street/'With my hair down, so" reflects a "twist" on Eliot's own "feeling of the city at night," which he described in a letter to Aiken on 31 December 1914: "One walks about the street with one's desires, and one's refinement rises up like a wall whenever opportunity approaches."[33] Just as Eliot expressed his own feelings after his wife's betrayal by invoking abandoned female figures as proxies for himself in *The Waste Land*, so too does he here transpose his own conflicted struggle with desire and paranoia onto an anxious wife.

Eliot's fascination with metaphorically entering female bodies and, by extension, open rooms tapers off after *The Waste Land,* though male characters continue to flounder, suffering from self-doubt in the external settings of "The Hollow Men," "Ash-Wednesday," and even "Burnt Norton." References to the capacity of woman's bodies to function as open rooms in which man can find an opportunity for self-escape seem to no longer hold Eliot's interest. But significantly, in *Murder in the Cathedral* and "Little Gidding," he returned to the female body as an expansive site of assumptive potential, a possibility that van Zuylen understands as endemic to "rushes of empathy," during which "the individual embraces the world, overcome by feelings that blur the distinctions between right and wrong, true self and that of others."[34] Women's bodies in *Murder* and "Little Gidding" reveal this stunning capacity. Badenhausen describes how the Chorus of Women of Canterbury so extensively "processes and understands the world through bodily sensation and seasonal cycles" that:

> at times [they] merge with the landscape that surrounds and threatens them: 'I have tasted/The living lobster, the crab, the oyster, the whelk and the prawn; and they live and spawn in my bowels, and my bowels dissolve in the light of dawn.'[35]

Such an evaporation of boundaries recurs in "Little Gidding," published seven years later, particularly in the second section when Eliot alludes to the experience of "Hysteria" by employing the verb "inbreathed." He no longer experiences the vicarious possibility of inhalation by another. Instead, Eliot takes dust, that last of physical forms to which all material things will eventually fade,[36] as his subject. Opening with "Ash on an old man's sleeve," the section goes on to muse that "Dust in the air suspended/Marks the place where a story ended./Dust inbreathed was a house—/The wall, the wainscot and the mouse." Though Eliot refrains from invoking women in the passage, the reference to dust being inbreathed points backward to the "short gasps, inhaled" of the hysterical woman. Just as in *Murder in the Cathedral*, the implied woman who breathes in dust breathes in everything—stories begun and left unfinished, houses lived in and abandoned, forms of life as insignificant as mice or as powerful as humanity. Inhalation, Eliot claims in "Little Gidding," is "the death of air," but that must be only half true. Exhalation must follow, just as the waiter must extricate the speaker of "Hysteria" from his inhalation fantasy. The alternate body or space in which one might completely lose oneself pervaded Eliot's writing. Only through female figures could he have fully explored the permutations, exciting and terrifying, of such an interest.

Woman as a Means of Self-Knowledge

Eliot's own critical stance has long served as a barrier obscuring the personality of the poet, making him instead "a medium for others' voices," according to Tim Dean.[37]

Dean and others, including Michele Tepper, have thus probed the gender repercussions of such an aesthetic stance, both concluding in distinct ways that Eliot establishes the impersonalist poet's role as a feminine one. Dean explains that Eliot's critical approach "clears a space for otherness at the expense of the poet's self," a self-sacrificing move that makes him "a passive medium for alien utterances [and] tacitly feminizes the poet's role."[38] Continuing on, Dean explicitly invokes Madame Sosostris as well as "the raped and wounded figures in his poetry," figures remarkable for their capacity for total self-surrender as "Eliot's poetic ideal."[39] Tepper, on the other hand, drawing not from "Tradition and the Individual Talent" but "Reflections on Contemporary Poetry IV" for her conclusions, perceives the poet Eliot to be not only feminine, but also pregnant, "'quickened' by tradition" so that he is "carrying . . . the tradition in his body. What is produced from the poet's labour . . . is not a new child, but the poet, reproducing himself . . . in a patriarchal literary and social order."[40] Articulating in both instances an alterity in Eliot that likens him to the feminine and implying that Eliot himself actually chose such an approach, Dean and Tepper thus open a new means of reading Eliot that crucially separates the gender implications of his work from his sexuality.

John Peter's suppressed article "A New Interpretation of *The Waste Land*" (1952), which posited the poem as rooted in a homosexual affair between Eliot and Jean Verdenal, opened Eliot's major work to a queer reading, an effort furthered by James E. Miller, Jr.'s book *T. S. Eliot's Personal Waste Land* (1977). Furthermore, speculations about Eliot's homosexuality are rife throughout scholarship on his work, including that of both Gordon and Seymour-Jones. To borrow a phrase of Sedgwick's from *Epistemology of the Closet*, the misogynistic and, to a slightly lesser extent, homosexual perceptions of

Eliot are "by now at least inalienably grafted onto the affordances of the text."[41] But any current consideration of gender identity must be established on contemporary theory that insists on the separation of gender and sexuality. Considering that Eliot may have specifically chosen the impersonalist approach and accepted its likeness to self-sacrificing femininity allows for a re-reading of the gender implications of his poetry, drama, and critical prose writing that completely leaves out speculations regarding his sexuality. We have seen already his propensity for imagining the open, feminine body as an alternative to his closed male prison, and Dean and Tepper have begun to illuminate the feminine tendencies of his aesthetic. Empathizing with women additionally allowed Eliot a means of furthering his own understanding of self, not only from a tender age but recurrently throughout his life, particularly as he faced marital and professional confrontations. If, as transgender theorist David Valentine suggests, "all identities are discursively produced,"[42] then Eliot's writing reveals him to be continually reasoning out his own identity through the female personae he created, ranging from the most cold presence of the woman in "Portrait of a Lady" to that most maligned and suppressed figure of Fresca from the manuscript draft of *The Waste Land*.

Among the many scholars who refer to this particular anecdote from Eliot's childhood, Gail MacDonald draws the title of her article, "Through Schoolhouse Windows: Women, the Academy, and T. S. Eliot," from Eliot's own recollection of the proximity of his childhood home to the Mary Institute, a girls school in whose yard he played after hours. MacDonald quotes Eliot himself, from an address given at the school's centennial celebration, describing "I was always on the other side of the wall. . . . On one occasion . . . when I ventured into the schoolyard a little too early when there

were still [girls] on the premises and I saw them staring at me through a window, I took flight at once."[43] Such a moment probably happens to every child. The sensation of accidentally slipping into a space reserved for the other gender is a necessary part of identity formation. Sedgwick explains:

> After all, to identify *as* must always include multiple processes of identification *with*. It also involves identification *as against*; but even did it not, the relations implicit in *identifying with* are, as psychoanalysis suggests, in themselves quite sufficiently fraught with intensities of incorporation, diminishment, inflation, threat, loss, reparation, and disavowal.[44]

Recognizing his own maleness in the company of the unexpectedly present female students in the schoolyard, then, Eliot responded to the intensity of being gazed upon, discovering himself to be both diminished and incorporated in the eyes of the girls, a compromised position not so unlike that of the speaker of "Hysteria." But why is this story of the boy Eliot in the yard of the Mary Institute so frequently cited in critical consideration of the poet? I contend that it is representative of the repeated tendency of the adult Eliot to slip into the feminine space—physical and intellectual—in an attempt to achieve full self-realization.

I have already discussed the physical space of "Portrait of a Lady" as comparable to the interior of the woman's body: dark, murky, and eliciting a vague but palpable threat. Excepting its final stanza, the entire poem occurs within the feminine space and is dominated by her conversational voice, included verbatim within quotation marks, making it not only a "Portrait" but a venture into Eliot's experimentation with the musical and nonlinear particularities of feminine language, which I will further discuss later in

this chapter. The speaker's attitude toward his hostess seethes with condescension. Not once does he respond to her verbally in conversation, acknowledging her instead only in thought and more often than not relaying his boredom to the reader: "Inside my brain a dull tom-tom begins/Absurdly hammering a prelude of its own." In spite of the speaker's efforts to keep up his appearance of independence from the lady, however, "Portrait of a Lady" is in fact just what its title suggests, an explicit representation of a woman of great influence, a necessary figure against whom and only through whom the male speaker is able to discover a means of knowing himself. Something compels him to keep returning to her internal, domestic space over the educational period of ten months. In the poem, Eliot makes the male speaker's reliance on the woman explicit by the fact that his "self-possession" (to use his own word) is constantly affected by her presence. Almost a grown-up version of the boy Eliot, overwhelmed and overcome in the Mary Institute schoolyard, the speaker of "Portrait of a Lady" requires her intimate and uncomfortable company for his own development, which is still in an early state as evidenced by the immature condescension and withdrawal he constantly displays toward his female companion.

The poem opens on a "December afternoon," continuing through the spring and finally closing on an "October night," implying the speaker's prolonged compulsion to "mount the stairs and turn the handle of the door" to her room. Parts II and III suggest precisely why he might have done so, as they both explicitly invoke the effects of her presence on his sense of self-possession. Three times her comments are comparative in nature, hesitating just on the brink of her final revelation of their ultimate compatibility across gender: "'For everybody said so, all our friends,/They all were sure our feelings

would relate/So closely!'" In the face of the threat of being assumed into her sentimentality, the speaker clings to himself, boasting once that "I keep my countenance,/I remain self-possessed" and later, upon her suggestion that he write from abroad, recoiling: "My self-possession flares up for a second;/*This* is as I had reckoned." His sense of himself, identifying against her, is absolutely acute in this poem, so acute that in her company, he feels forced to constantly reassert what masculinity he can muster. In fact, at the first invocation of the speaker's self-possession in Part II, he exposes exactly that which annihilates his self-assurance:

> I keep my countenance,
> I remain self-possessed
> Except when a street piano, mechanical and tired
> Reiterates some worn-out common song
> With the smell of hyacinths across the garden
> Recalling things that other people have desired.

The music of the street-piano playing a common song, as well as the smell of hyacinths, both of which challenge his self-possession, are also associated with women throughout Eliot's poetry. In this poem specifically, the lady and her talk are constantly related to music. Even if it is at times "cracked," "broken," or "mechanical and tired," her conversation consists of violins, ariettes, and cornets, while the man's brain contains only the rhythm of "a dull tom-tom," as much a primitive beat as a play on Eliot's own first name, suggesting even further the persistence of his self-possession in her company. And thus it is fitting that the melody of a street piano would challenge his sense of self, confronting him again with the feminine against whom he will be defined.

The most incisive challenge to the speaker's identity follows the lady's request for his correspondence and confession of ignorance at their lack of a bond. His "self-possession" at first "flares up" and then, when she reveals "'I have been wondering frequently of late/(But our beginnings never know our ends!)/Why we have not developed into friends,'" she effectively annihilates him. His sense of self is so fragile that the flare born seven lines earlier "gutters," leaving them both "really in the dark." One way of reading these lines would be to suggest that Eliot the poet painted her as the savage thief of male identity, but this would assume his unquestioning complicity with her demands. Instead, I read the poem as a demonstration of the necessity of the feminine in the development of male identity. The lady's social banter, at the polar opposite of his propensity for detached philosophical analysis, forces him, as Sedgwick suggests, to identify *against* her, and in so doing, to accept the risks of "diminishment, . . . threat, [and] loss."[45] And yet, in articulating his own symbolic loss of self, the male speaker engages verbally in a Freudian process of mourning, which, as Tammy Clewell explains: "names an experience of grief and a process of working through during which the mourner relinquishes emotional ties to the lost object," in this case, his own physical male body.[46] The poem continues as he flounders in the hope of recovery:

> And I must borrow every changing shape
> To find expression . . . dance, dance
> Like a dancing bear,
> Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape.

Finally, after a second escape into "a tobacco trance," he recovers, only to find himself "pen in hand," just exactly as the lady had predicted. Her posthumous voice persists in

the "music . . . successful with a 'dying fall'" that plays through the final lines, suggesting her irrepressible influence on both his ongoing voice and his recovered, perhaps more complete, sense of himself.

Four further poems in *Prufrock and Other Observations* underscore the relationship between Eliot's male speakers and the female subjects of his poems. Eliot employs kinship to align his male speaker directly with Cousin Harriet in "The *Boston Evening Transcript,"* Miss Helen Slingsby in "Aunt Helen," and Miss Nancy Ellicott in "Cousin Nancy." In none of these three poems does the familial relationship between speaker and subject further the action. Only "The *Boston Evening Transcript"* includes contact between the two. But by announcing the blood relation in their titles, Eliot underscores the speaker's shared shame in the disrespect of Aunt Helen's death and complicity in the groundbreaking modernism of Cousin Nancy.[47] The poems also point subtly toward the significance of the young poet's matrilineage. Remarkably, these are not poems of patriarchy that establish Eliot as the inheritor of "the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country,"[48] as "Tradition and the Individual Talent" would lead one to expect. Rather, in them, the male world of literature falls at the feet of the male poet's female relatives. La Rouchefoucauld fades as Cousin Harriet accepts a newspaper, literature's ephemeral opposite. Emerson and Arnold become the "glazen" figures of Matthew and Waldo, "unalterable" in opposition to the kinetic dominance of Cousin Nancy.[49]

Finally, in "La Figlia che Piange," which is distinct from the others because its female subject is the beloved rather than a relative, Eliot confirmed his early interest in aligning himself with the feminine perspective. The poem's epigraph, translated, is

Aeneas asking the disguised Venus, "O Maiden, how shall I name thee?," which renders the poem her reply. Read with Venus as its speaker, then, "La Figlia" becomes a tale of feminine empowerment, the goddess of love choosing to exert her dominance to rend girl from lover, "As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised,/As the mind deserts the body it has used."[50] Eliot later claimed in a January 1937 letter to More that he knew the feeling of "being stripped" before God,[51] which suggests that his simile has its roots in his own experience, though he could only have logically placed such certainty about the division of body and soul in the mouth of a divine speaker. Thus, in "La Figlia," as in "Portrait of a Lady," "Aunt Helen," and "Cousin Nancy," Eliot's male speaker and the dominant women of the poems share collective emotional experiences. The women serve in varying ways as alternate selves through which the impersonal poet furthers his own access to comprehensive knowledge; for this, they are always respected and never compromised in the process. Even the lady of "Portrait" who is the recipient of such condescension is redeemed when her prediction about his writing is fulfilled and her music plays on.

Women came to figure even more significantly in Eliot's poetry after he learned of Vivien's infidelity. As referred to in my introduction to this chapter, Schuchard posits that in response, "Eliot turned savagely to the sexual caricature of Sweeney and his friends" in order to create "a personal myth of sexual betrayal, psychological retribution, and moral regeneration."[52] Beginning with the character of Aspatia from *The Maid's Tragedy*, quoted in the epigraph to "Sweeney Erect," Eliot shifted his focus in *Poems 1920* and *The Waste Land* from the critique of banal society to the victimization of sexual betrayal, as specifically expressed by female figures. Aspatia, betrayed by her husband

Amintor in the seventeenth-century play *The Maid's Tragedy*, offers herself as a model for the similarly betrayed Ariadne set to be depicted in her companion Antiphilia's needlework. Finding Antiphilia's thread too bright and the story of Ariadne's betrayal ill depicted, Aspatia begs her friend to revise the scene, asking her instead to "do it by me,/Do it again by me, the lost Aspatia" in the lines that precede Eliot's epigraph: "And the trees about me,/Let them be dry and leafless; let the rocks/Groan with continual surges; and behind me/Make all a desolation." To put the request that the scene of sexual betrayal be revised "by me" at the beginning of his poem directly aligns Eliot with Aspatia. Though divided by biological gender, both Eliot and Aspatia were sexually betrayed, spurring Eliot to yearn to occupy her space—just as Aspatia once claimed Ariadne's role for her own. Eliot likewise underscored his desire to redress his victimization in the European publication of *Poems 1920*, titled *Ara vos Prec* (1920). Schuchard describes that, in the one print run of this rare volume, "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" "included a second epigraph . . . from *The Raigne of King Edward the Third* . . . 'And why should I speake of the nightingale?/The nightingale sings of adulterous wrong.'"[53] Noting its "bold black capitals, typographically disproportionate to title and text," Schuchard describes the epigraph as "a telling emblem of mind during composition."[54] Accompanied by it, the nightingales of the poem serve not only as symbols of bestiality and prostitution,[55] but also as figures for the poet. Like Aspatia, the nightingales—and by extension, the prostitutes—represent feminine figures through whom Eliot was able to sing, or rather, write, of his own pain.

Though Schuchard has established the critical groundwork proving Eliot's fixation on sexual victimization in both *Poems 1920* and *The Waste Land*, he has not set

this in the context of Eliot's larger treatment of women as figures through whom he could empathize on the way to personal development. Beginning particularly in the poem's second part, "A Game of Chess," and continuing through its third, "The Fire Sermon," Eliot's poem traces a lineage of classical, literary, and contemporary women either betrayed or threatened with betrayal by their male lovers. Most brutally victimized and most fully developed in the poem, the character of Philomel, raped and then mutilated when her tongue is severed, is remarkably transformed into the nightingale whose "inviolable voice" cries "'Jug jug' to dirty ears." Brooker picks up where Schuchard leaves off, documenting Philomel's unique position as a figure of "unambiguous sympathy," particularly as "Eliot's version" of her myth focuses on "Philomel as the victim . . . while entirely omitting the second half of the story in which she takes disproportionate revenge."[56] Noting the significance of the fact that Philomel is both explicitly named and offered a prominent voice—"seven consecutive lines" in "A Game of Chess," followed by "four lines in 'The Fire Sermon' and one in 'What the Thunder Said'"—Brooker describes her as both the "archetypal violated and silenced female" and "one of the great symbols of the poem as a whole."[57] In her brutal violation, Philomel becomes an ideal candidate for Eliot's empathy. Transformed into a nightingale, she bears both the prostitute's status as an available sexual object and the poet's compulsion to sing madly of her own victimization. That her mutilation impairs her speech only aligns her more directly with Eliot himself, compelled to sing of adulterous wrong to an audience ill prepared to hear it, their ears blocked to hear only "jug jug," which Brooker describes as simultaneously a "parody of sounds of sexual intercourse, a slang expression of prostitution, the sound of a mutilated singer, and the dark undersong of the nightingale,

itself a figure for the poet."[58] Philomel's voice, comprehended or not, is "inviolable," and it resounds, as Brooker points out, throughout *The Waste Land*.

Comparing Philomel to "Cleopatra, Dido, and Eve," who also surface in the poem, Brooker declares that "The allusion to Philomel is the most important in 'A Game of Chess.'"[59] I agree, for Philomel serves as the most explicit key toward unlocking the presentation of women throughout *The Waste Land*. In choosing betrayed women rather than cuckolded men as representatives of his own plight, Eliot relied on a general perception of them that was based on his reading and his own relationships. Eliot's understanding of woman's greater capacity for suffering and physical vulnerability coupled with his admiration for her endurance made her the most fitting emblem for his exploration of the depths of betrayal and consideration of the possibility of recovery. Although the women in "A Game of Chess" are included precisely because of their status as victims, each of them emerges as an intact, sometimes even formidable, presence. Cleopatra's boudoir, overwhelming and indulgent, lifts the "brown fog of a winter dawn" that closes 'The Burial of the Dead,' replacing it with a warm and exotic interior in which speaker and reader alike are pleasurably immersed. Both Eve and Philomel emerge among the elements of her "rich profusion," referenced in the tapestry or painting displayed "Above the antique mantel." Despite her claims of weakness ("'My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.'"), the contemporary woman whose insistent demands and questions follow her classical counterpart epitomizes a brash and formidable manner. In particular, a supernatural quality seems to infuse her hair, which "Spread out in fiery points." When her male companion refuses to engage in conversation, it is she who threatens to leave him: "'I shall rush out as I am, and walk the

street/'With my hair down so.'" This threat gives way to the pub talk regarding Lil and her "demobbed" husband Albert, in which Lil is only represented second-hand by the gossip's recounting of their dialogue. Lil's contributions within the recounted conversation are minimal, and the end of her story is truncated by the barman's call: "Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon,/And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot—/HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME/HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME." Thus, despite the gossip's best efforts, Lil's downfall escapes narration, and both she and her marriage remain intact at the end of the story. The potentially disastrous effects of Albert's return home fade into the waste land itself. Even the typist of "The Fire Sermon," its major female figure following Pound's editing, recovers herself after she endures the young man's "caresses/Which still are unreproved, if undesired." Consciously registering the apathetic experience of their coupling, she thinks "'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.'," and though the allusion to Oliver Goldsmith's 1875 poem "When lovely woman stoops to folly" would seem to point to her resulting demise ("The only art her guilt to cover . . . /is—to die"),[60] again the text switches tack, saving her from such a fated end. Instead, the typist literally moves on, "Paces about her room again, alone,/She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,/And puts a record on the gramophone." Although Lawrence Rainey has underscored her "automatic hand" as a "gesture charged with communicating" the postcoital "horror and terror" that he understands to be "more powerfully present for being inscribed in silence,"[61] I understand the adjective as reiterating Eliot's overall illustration that the modern erotic has been supplemented by the mechanic, a reduction of humanity to a

"human engine" from which the typist recovers by seeking refuge in the feminine language of music.

Reconsidering the Repressed: Fresca

One of the most frequently cited women in criticism that accuses Eliot of misogynistic intent, Fresca, who dreams of "pleasant rapes" and "slips softly to the needful stool,"[62] is continually exhumed from the manuscript drafts that fail to contain her as the target of Eliot's most vicious hatred. In *Tiresian Poetics: Modernism, Sexuality, Voice 1888–2001* (2008), Ed Madden makes this point most explicit, significantly invoking her as a figure of the author's repression: "Since the publication of the facsimile text and drafts of the poem in 1971, the deleted Fresca appears repeatedly, haunting discussions of gender and sexuality in the poem—a critical return of the repressed."[63] Indeed Fresca is both complicated and troubling, the most troubling of what Schuchard describes as the "the phantasmagoria through which Eliot expresses his moral convictions about a world governed by vanity, fear, and lust."[64] Deleted from *The Waste Land,* her name lingers in the consciousness of Gerontion, who imagines in the penultimate stanza of his eponymous poem that "De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, whirled/Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear/In fractured atoms." Though her repudiated appearance in *The Waste Land* is limited to activities undertaken in bedroom and bathroom, Fresca wields a cosmic force. Eliot too must have ultimately recognized her as detrimental to *The Waste Land*, but his creation of her must be re-examined in the context of the other women through which he, as poet, explored his own identity. For Fresca, in spite of her distasteful tendencies, represents a figure through which he not only earnestly wrestled with his own feelings for his wife but also worried both about the

progress of his writing and his place in the tradition that he had himself defined. To this end, I also see her as a figure of Eliot's own repression, though perhaps not in the sense that Madden suggested. Absolutely suggestive of Eliot's inclination to caricature, Fresca is not a fantasy through which Eliot's repressed misogyny manifests itself but rather an expression of repressed literary and personal anxiety, transformed through empathy into a feminine figure. Her story, after all, closes with the perverted Marvell couplet that lays bare his own paranoia: "But at my back from time to time I hear/The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear."

With her literary origins in Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock," Fresca can be understood as having, like Venus Anadyomene (to whom she is directly compared), "stept ashore to a more varied scene" in Eliot's poem.[65] Fresca can be understood as the awakened, aroused, and contemporary anti-Belinda, the "rape" of her antithetical incarnation now faded into dreamlike memory. Eliot likewise tweaked other significant details of Pope's introduction of Belinda, many of which likewise contribute to an overall disconcerting effect. Much is made, for example, of Fresca's "slip[ping] softly to the needful stool,/Where the pathetic tale of Richardson/Eases her labour till the deed is done." Madden reads in this image "Eliot's disgust for female sexuality and his suspicion of women's writing, both of which he figures in terms of defecation."[66] Pinkney muses to great extent on the psychological effect of fecal matter, finally linking it to the "good old hearty female stench" referenced later in the passage and in Eliot's previous poetry.[67] Reading Fresca's awakening alongside that of Belinda, however, points up intentional similarities of diction between their first moments. Both are "summoned"[68] by a "bell," and Belinda's newly opened eyes fall upon a "billet-doux," the banal opposite of which

Fresca will pen soon after her own waking. Immediately after Belinda gazes upon the love letter, however, Pope writes that "all the vision vanish'd from [Belinda's] Head./And now, unveil'd, the toilet stands display'd."[69] Pope's use of the word "toilet," of course, draws on his eighteenth-century historical moment to refer to her dressing table, where "Each Silver Vase in mystic Order laid," and her attendant sylphs help to prepare her appearance for the day: "These set the Head, and those divide the Hair,/Some fold the Sleeve, while others plait the Gown;/And *Betty*'s prais'd for Labours not her own." Fresca's stool, where she too "labour[s]," is thus another ironic inversion of Pope, through which Eliot twisted the diction to the point of caricature, distorting Pope's language to its vulgar, twentieth-century equivalent. As Pinkney suggests, Fresca's toilet, like Cleopatra's boudoir, is a site of cloying smell, but Eliot's addition of the twentieth-century toilet is not an indication of his disgust for the female. In such analysis, critics fail to mention the overwhelming presence of feces in Eliot's Bolo and Columbo poems, in which pisspots, "bungholes," and a cargo consisting of "forty tons of bullshit'" are pervasive within the imagined civilization that demonstrates Eliot's disdain for all things physical. Buddha's own fire sermon, to which the section directly refers, is after all a credo of asceticism, crying out against all that appeals to the senses and would thus produce fecal waste. Even such an understanding is complicated, however, by an assertion of Eliot's in the contemporaneous essay "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921) that redeems human waste. Writing poetry, Eliot explains, requires that "one must look into the cerebral cortex, the nervous system, and the digestive tracts."[70] Perhaps then the product of Fresca's labour has a redemptive, creative potential.

Thus, two of the most troubling details of Fresca's introduction can be understood

as emblematic of Eliot's parodic tendencies. But there remains the section's condescending focus on the "scribbled contents" of her bed-written letters and "chaotic misch-masch" of her poetry. However she may be judged, Fresca is by nature a writer. In this way, she departs from Belinda, her gorgeous literary predecessor. Interestingly, however, when Eliot recovered her character by publishing "Letters of the Moment—II" (1924), attributed to FM, a pseudonym for Vivien Eliot, this sanitized revision of Fresca shares her propensity to write. In both versions, Fresca peppers her letters with empty questions that require no answer and refers to her various correspondents with the effusive salutation "my dear." In "Letters of the Moment," Fresca mentions a recent evening at the theater, while Eliot's original refers to the goings-on at "Lady Kleinwurm's party." The tone of each, with their recounting of social events, resounds particularly with correspondence penned by both of the Eliots. Most interestingly, Fresca's particular choice of closing salutation, "your devoted/friend," closely mirrors Eliot's own preferred means of ending letters to his own parents, particularly his mother. Beginning with a letter dated 1 March 1917, Eliot concluded letters to his parents with the phrase "your devoted son" over fifty times through 23 August 1921.[71] Indeed both Tom and Vivien were avid correspondents. In their letters, both spouses often recount what they are currently reading (evidenced in Fresca's reference in both versions to "a clever book by Giraudoux"), their recent social and cultural engagements, and their professional and health concerns. All of these are likewise aspects of Fresca's letters, further aligning her with the very couple that engendered her.

It is Fresca's profession as poet, as opposed to her previous incarnation as a slatternly Magdalene, however, that most closely makes her a figure for Eliot's empathy

despite her opposing gender and propensity for indulgence. Even Madden, who recognizes Fresca as "sexual and excrementitious . . . emblematic of the fear, disgust, and anxiety that animate Eliot's representations of the female body and sexuality," acknowledges that "Strangely enough, Fresca also seems to be an abject and self-reflexive version of Eliot himself, since he (like Fresca) might be said to produce 'chaotic' poetry."[72] Following Madden's logic, then, Fresca is a female Sweeney, the gender opposite of Eliot's masculine antithesis who longs to lose himself over and over again within woman's physical body. Fresca instead fully inhabits her body, claiming her excrement, her sexuality, her "female stench," and her literary inclinations as equal aspects of a legitimate identity. So entrenched are Fresca and Sweeney in their physical bodies that they both need to bathe: Sweeney in "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service," and Fresca, who seeks "Odours, confected by the ~~cunning~~ artful French" in her "steaming bath." The major difference between them, of course, is that Sweeney, despite his ubiquitousness in Eliot's quatrain poems and drama, has no literary ambition. Only Fresca belies the literary anxieties of her creator. Her intellectual efforts directly follow twelve lines that align her with dirty prostitution, culminating in the offending generalization that "Women ~~grown~~ intellectual grow dull,/And lose the mother wit of natural trull." Thus brought to such a sordid characterization, Fresca emerges both as a reader (her chosen authors condescendingly presented as "Symonds—Walter Pater—Vernon Lee" as well as the Scandinavians and Russians) and a writer. Her poems, neither considered nor studied, are instead the product of a last-ditch effort to fight insomnia: "When restless nights distract her brain from sleep/She may as well write poetry, as count sheep./And on those nights when Fresca lies alone,/She scribbles verse of such a gloomy

tone." And yet, such unconsidered poetry has caught the attention of "cautious critics" and "flattering friends," who have established her reputation. Eliot's poem declares that Fresca has "arrived"; no longer a street prostitute, she has achieved the rank of "can-can salonniere," that latter word Eliot's own invention to proclaim her the madam of a new kind of lowbrow salon that infuses caricature into literary culture, a salon of which he too felt himself a denizen, having told Virginia Woolf as she recounted in her diary on 20 September, 1920, that "he was more interested in people than in anything. . . . His turn is for caricature."[73]

The fifteen lines that concern Fresca's literary knowledge and contribution must be read through the lens of Eliot's own professional concerns. Valerie Eliot's twenty-page introduction to *The Waste Land* facsimile and transcript begins this work, documenting the years 1915 to 1923 in which Eliot not only conceived of and wrote *The Waste Land* but also struggled greatly with professional and financial concerns. As the introduction attests, such matters led Eliot to question his own capacity for the literary life and his reliance on other means of making a living—as a teacher, lecturer, editor, banker, and shrewd peddler of his own texts in spite of his and Vivien's ill health. Quotations from Eliot's letters throughout the introduction evince the author's strain, particularly a letter to John Quinn from 12 March 1923, which closes with the inked comment "I am worn out, I cannot go on."[74] Throughout the introduction, Valerie Eliot includes specific financial details: royalties promised for accepted books, salaries offered for teaching posts and accepted editorships, and donations requested by Pound for the *Bel Esprit* group, which was formed with the intention of relieving Eliot of the need to work for Lloyds Bank. So much emphasis on the financial pressure endured by Eliot during

this period speaks to a concern that Eliot and his literary circle must have felt deeply: the necessary evil of writing poetry in order to garner an adequate financial return. Facing this tension meant negotiating (as the introduction proves that Eliot did) back and forth with publishers including Knopf, Boni and Liveright, and *The Dial,* a process that must have felt at least a bit like prostitution. Fresca's literary ambitions, following directly on the description of her as a "doorstep dunged by every dog in town," must thereby reflect Eliot's own closely-felt anxieties of balancing his bank employment and the business of selling his own work in order to guarantee a comfortable lifestyle for himself and his wife. In a remarkably similar way to F. Scott Fitzgerald's character Marcia Meadow in the 1920 short story "Head and Shoulders," Fresca evokes her male author's fear of first selling out and then becoming obsolete in a world growing ever more modern and vernacular. No wonder the rhythm of Fresca's career as "can-can salonniere" sounds to the male speaker of "The Fire Sermon" like "The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear." Rather than the target of Eliot's vicious hatred, Fresca is thus a significant participant in a lineage of women through whom Eliot processed his own anxieties, in this case, of producing a legitimately marketable and valued result from his needful labor.

'I Gotta Use Words When I Talk To You'

The casual informality and effectiveness of feminine language, as posited by Fitzgerald in "Head and Shoulders," Eliot in the Fresca passage of *The Waste Land*, and even Joyce in the Penelope episode of *Ulysses*, was clearly of interest to the imagination of male modernists. Referring specifically to *The Waste Land*, Madden paraphrases Alison Tate on the issue of gendered language, explaining that

> the production of voices in the poem is a gendered construction: the poem repeatedly constructs women's (and lower-class) voices as nonliterary, spoken, vernacular, and embodied, not only in bodies but within distinct social and circumstantial contexts, while men's (or the presumably male) voices are represented as literary, educated, and disembodied, at times anonymous or prophetic.

While I agree that language is gendered in *The Waste Land*, I take issue with Tate's assumption that by characterizing woman's language differently (as "nonliterary, spoken, vernacular, and embodied"), Eliot intends to denigrate it. Instead, I believe that Eliot pays tribute to women through his multifaceted representations of their language, all of which prefigure both Hélène Cixous's desire for "a feminine practice of writing [that can] surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system"[75] and Luce Irigaray's call in for a new language which would "*cast phallocentrism, phallocratism,* loose from its moorings in order to return the masculine to its own language, leaving open the possibility of a different language. Which means that the masculine would no longer be 'everything.'"[76] Preceding Cixous and Irigaray by over fifty years, Eliot's effort to carve out a unique space for feminine language is by no means radical or innovative enough to fulfill their call. It is instead a first effort, perhaps not strong enough to be understood in Irigaray's as a "'style' that resists and explodes every firmly established form, figure, idea, or concept,"[77] but one that certainly anticipates this need.

Exploring Eliot's adaptation of various alternative means of linguistic expression through the lens of French feminism has begun. Calvin Bedient's book on *The Waste Land,* titled *He Do the Police in Different Voices* (1986), leans on Julia Kristeva's essay

"Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection" (1982) in order to support his view that the feminine in Eliot's earliest poetry through *The Waste Land* is rendered so abject that any male inclination toward its "amniotic waters" is a grave misdirection, leading away from God. More helpfully, however, Bedient understands the "heteromodality and heteroglossia" of *The Waste Land* as representative of a literary style that Kristeva ascribed specifically to modern literature: "'a descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct . . . retracing the fragile limits of the speaking being, closest to its dawn, to the bottomless 'primacy' constituted by primal repression."[78] Interpreting further, Bedient then aligns *The Waste Land* with Kristeva's essay: "*The Waste Land* unfolds over the same terrain . . . Eliot's structural avant-gardism *is* his 'descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct'."[79] Surprisingly, Bedient does not connect this interpretation to gender. Instead, he simply allows for the possibility that a broader linguistic mode—as Kristeva, a leading feminist critic, understands it—directly aligns with Eliot's poetic intent.

More recently, Badenhausen has described Eliot as employing a "female discourse" that "borrows from, and in fact assimilates, as much as that is possible, Cixous's notion of an *écriture féminine*, Kristeva's postulation of the semiotic, and Irigaray's construction of a fluid, 'bodily' discourse separate from dominant forms of speech."[80] Badenhausen, however, focuses solely on the two late plays to substantiate his argument, using the Chorus of the Women of Canterbury as his major example for "women's experimental language [that] anticipates Cixous's claims that the 'flesh speaks true' and woman 'physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body.'"[81] In *The Cocktail Party*, Badenhausen focuses on Celia as a woman who

demonstrates a refusal to speak that situates her on the one hand as the polar opposite of the Chorus but on the other, as united with them in confrontation with patriarchal discourse. He explains their relationship thus: "While the power of the Women of Canterbury hinges on the verbalization of their discourse, it is Celia's very lack of words at the end of the play that signifies her transcendence above and beyond the phallogocentric atmosphere of the cocktail party."[82] His argument is both convincing and illuminating, and I will revisit his work on Celia below. However, Badenhausen justifies his narrow focus by assuming that Eliot's earlier poems and plays evince an "uneasiness . . . with both female discourse and personal poetic utterance," which makes them irrelevant to his discussion. To imagine that an awareness of alternative means by which women might achieve poetic expression somehow germinated for the first time in Eliot's mind while he wrote *Murder in the Cathedral*, however, is a specious assumption. Taking Badenhausen's work instead as evidence of the extent to which Eliot evolved in his development of a proto-feminist *écriture féminine*, I have sought out clues in the early work that point to woman's unique propensity for linguistic code-switching between the phallocentric, social-commercial market and the exclusively feminine community through music, overly verbose twittering, and contemplative silence. These alternative forms of expression anticipate not only the call for the establishment and recognition of *écriture feminine* but also the sophisticated linguistic oppositions that Badenhausen recognizes in *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Cocktail Party*.

In Eliot's earliest poetry, music represents the alternative linguistic realm to which women have privileged access. The relationship between women and music in Eliot's poetry begins with "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in which one of the

only elements of ironic "song" within the poem itself is the feminine-rhymed refrain: "In the room the women come and go/Talking of Michelangelo," which recurs twice in the first five stanzas. Soon after, rehashing both his prior knowledge and faded past, Prufrock claims to "know the voices . . . /Beneath the music from a farther room," thereby locating music as both distant and interior, alluding to the anthropomorphic analogy between women and rooms. Both associations between women and music, however, are negligible in comparison to Prufrock's explicit memory of having "heard the mermaids singing, each to each," a homogeneous expression of contentment from which he is explicitly excluded. If Prufrock is certain of anything, he is certain of the poem's only solo line: "I do not think that they will sing to me." Prufrock's exclusion from the poem's most poignant song sets up the male speaker's alienation from the Chopin, violins, cornets, and ariettes in "Portrait of a Lady." The music of "Portrait," however, is earthly rather than supernatural, and it is presumably produced (at least in the case of the "latest Pole" who "Transmit[s] the Preludes") by men rather than women. But it fully infuses the realm of the lady herself, while, as discussed above, "a dull tom-tom" opposes it in the speaker's head. Just as distant music plays from the "farther room" of "Prufrock," the "insistent out-of-tune/Of a broken violin on an August afternoon" of "Portrait" pervades "the gulf" between man and woman. In the end of the poem, imagining the death of his female companion, the male speaker admits to being at a loss for words. What prevails instead is music. The speaker of "Portrait" himself even admits that "This music is successful with a 'dying fall,'" an allusion to *Twelfth Night* that overturns the finality of the lady's death. Her music remains.

Though music is the parlance of women in the early poems through *The Waste Land*, Eliot's sensitivity to the multiplicity of possibilities for feminine expression also allowed him to extend and expand the capabilities of the feminine tongue throughout his creative work. The shifting narrative perspective of *The Waste Land* gives equal air time to masculine and feminine voices, and the poem's two middle sections—"A Game of Chess" and "The Fire Sermon"—are dominated by feminine chatter that once again seems gender exclusive. The omnipresence of the female voice in "A Game of Chess" is foreshadowed by the overpowering environment of Cleopatra's boudoir as well as the "inviolable voice" of Philomel, whose mutilation fails to prevent her and Procne from crying out "Twit twit twit/Jug jug jug jug jug jug/So rudely forc'd./Tereu." Those first cries, Procne's "Twit twit twit," which precede Philomel's "Jug jug jug . . . " anticipate Eliot's yearning, thirteen years later in "Burnt Norton," for contemplative darkness within "this twittering world." By transforming the swallow's insistent cry into an adjective to describe the constant chatter of modern culture, Eliot gave women an empowering verbosity that could be mistaken for denigrating gossip.

Twittering, however, must be understood as evidence of the endurance of women: first, of Philomel and Procne after their betrayal by Tereus and second, of the constant yet unheeded prophecies of ancient Greece's Cassandra. Contemporary poet C. K. Williams, in "Cassandra, Iraq" (2006), makes the latter association explicit. Imagining her role in the Trojan War as applied to the contemporary predicament in Iraq, Williams concludes "If we were true seers,/as prescient as she, as frenzied, we'd know what to do next./We'd twitter, as she did, like birds; we'd warble, we'd trill/But what would it be really, to twitter, to warble, to trill?"[83] Twittering thus carries the association of both feminine

articulation and feminine misinterpretation, so a section of *The Waste Land* comprised largely of woman's banal chatter—both the nerve monologue and the pub conversation—benefits from such a reconsideration. Verbosity to the point of redundancy, as seen in the nerve monologue,

> 'My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
> 'Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
> 'What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
> 'I never know what you are thinking. Think.'

and to which Vivien famously responded "WONDERFUL" on Eliot's manuscript, establish the anxious woman's voice as also "inviolable" in spite of the weakness to which she attests. The repetition of her questions, as well as the fact that her male listener fails to respond to them, seems to indicate their excessive nature, but I contend that Eliot reveals her to be both productive of speech and inquisitive of her male companion in an attempt to reach "across the gulf" that separates man and woman. Her chatter is articulate, as opposed to her companion's replies, which are terse, impatient, and internal. Denigrating the feminine twittering in his discussion of this passage, Madden concludes that, in Eliot, "Male voices *think*, their voices are interior. . . . The 'nerve *monologue*,' for example, is actually a *dialogue* between a female speaker in quotation marks and the unmarked male speaker, presumably thinking his responses to her rather than speaking them."[84] Clearly Madden requires a revision of terminology in order to make a one-sided conversation with a thinking man a dialogue. The woman actually asks her companion "'Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?'," revealing that she interprets his verbose silence as a mark of inertia rather than any kind of active participation. By

refusing to participate in articulate conversation, the men in "A Game of Chess" are completely powerless. Woman's twittering, on the other hand, even at its most nonsensical, repetitive, and petty, remains an active means of interpersonal communication.

The women of *The Waste Land* can be generally characterized according to the gossip's admission: "I didn't mince my words." Beginning with the childhood recollection of Marie and the business dealings of Madame Sosostris and through the penetrating, mutilated calls of Philomel and Procne, women twitter on. The pub conversation at the end of "A Game of Chess," banal as it is, offers one of the poem's liveliest moments, an eighteen-line snapshot of a marriage strained by the modern predicament: a husband home from World War One in advance of an understanding of post-traumatic stress disorder, a wife weary of childbearing in advance of both oral contraception and legalized abortion, and two women straddling cultural expectations for their gender that range somewhere between the Victorian angel of the house ("What you get married for if you don't want children?") and women's liberation ("If you don't like it, you can get on with it, I said."). Though her language is colloquial, as far from Eliot's own lyric as it could be, the gossip's second-hand narrative brings these tensions to light in a vivid manner that wields an undeniable power in the poem.

A completely different tone pervades its parallel narrative, the forty-plus lines detailing the coupling of the "typist home at teatime" in "The Fire Sermon." Though the latter also illustrates postwar isolation within the heterosexual relationship, Eliot withholds speech from it almost completely. Through the eyes of Tiresias, the reader observes passive, passionless sexuality, as the typist makes "a welcome of indifference."

In the end, she is "Hardly aware of her departed lover." Remarkably, however, she "allows one half-formed thought to pass:/'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.'" before the section ends. Significantly, Eliot placed this thought within quotation marks. After allowing the young man complete access to her body, the typist recovers her internal voice, which he could never access. In that way, she prefigures the three Thames daughters whose testimonies immediately follow. Following from their twittering, nonsensical song, which Eliot borrowed from Wagner's Rhinemaidens, "Weialala leia/Wallala leialala," they too employ the power of speech to detail their individual desertions by men. One after the other, they testify in quoted monologues of being undone, misled, and broken:

'Trams and dusty trees.
Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew
Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees
Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe.'

'My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart
Under my feet. After the event
He wept. He promised "a new start."
I made no comment. What should I resent?'

'On Margate Sands.
I can connect
Nothing with nothing.
The broken fingernails of dirty hands.

My people humble people who expect

Nothing.'

la la

Significantly, the second Thames daughter regrets having "made no comment" in the moment of a betrayal that places her in the stead of Ophelia.[85] Thus her testimony in the poem indicates a compulsion for verbal confession. All of these women, and Fresca too, whose writing Madden describes as "framed by quotation marks, its gossipy tone . . . rendered colloquial," speak freely as opposed to men like Prufrock, the male listener in "Portrait," and the male listener in the nerve section of "A Game of Chess," all of whom find the limitations of spoken language absolutely impenetrable. In *The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (1987), Crawford articulates the split thus, specifically discussing Prufrock, who "can find no language in which to articulate the inner energy whose potential is at times sensed in his words. . . . Words are in the control of his female enemies."[86] Though I do not think that woman's access to spoken language makes her the enemy of either Prufrock or the author who created her, Crawford's description of words as endemic to femininity points to the remarkable way in which Eliot employs the twittering chatter of the third Thames daughter in order to articulate his own aesthetic process. It was of course Eliot who found himself at the Albemarle Hotel on Margate Sands in 1921, connecting "Nothing with nothing" in order to construct *The Waste Land*. Eliot revealed this foundational moment, however, through the confessional voice of a broken woman. Clearly he understood women to have a propensity for speech that could endure the most suffocating of circumstances, and he drew on, honored, and utilized this propensity in his own poetry.

What is remarkable, however, is that Eliot still refrained from limiting women's expression thus to the insistent clamor of music and words, for as his poetry evolved, he also came to make room for their singular capacity for contemplative silence. Eliot's exploration of silence itself began early, as evidenced by the poems "Silence" (1910) and "Entretien dans un Parc" (1911). In both, silence falls of its own power, suggesting that Eliot associated it with an absolute and terrifying force. In "Silence," the "garrulous waves of life," which (by their nature) he must have imagined to be populated by women, become "suddenly still" with a "peace" of which "there is nothing else beside."[87] In the poem Eliot renders the experience "the ultimate hour/When life is justified," and thus it is a transcendent moment, one Gordon describes as "the forerunner of later beatific moments in Eliot's work."[88] When Eliot invoked the noun "silence" again six months later in "Entretien dans un Parc" therefore, he must have had the gravity of the previous poem in mind. The male figure of "Entretien," "With a sudden vision of incompetence/ . . . seize[s] her hand/In silence," and he and his female companion are both surprised to find that "the world has not been changed;/Nothing has happened that demands revision." The silence has "simply happened so to her and me," he testifies, but this generalization bothers him. He terms it "at last a bit ridiculous/And irritating," citing his own "exasperation" at the "unaccountable . . . odd . . ." omnipresence of quiet.[89] These early examples of Eliot's poetic interest in silence reveal his assurance of its profundity.[90] When he finds himself in a silent space, such as the "atmosphere of Juliet's tomb/Prepared for all the things to be said, or left unsaid" in "Portrait of a Lady," he recognizes it as sacred, reminiscent perhaps of that 1910 moment on the Boston street. In "Portrait" then, when the male speaker first renders silence as belonging to that which is

feminine ("Juliet's"), lethal ("tomb"), and pregnant with possibility ("Prepared for all the things to be said, or left unsaid.") and then willingly enters the silent space, he must be actively willing to become what he is not. "Portrait of a Lady" presents him with the most contradictory of possibilities for expression, for he is forced into at least a superficial submission to feminine silence in contrast to his twittering hostess. The silence in which he participates, however, is never comfortable to him. Though the lady attests to feeling "immeasurably at peace," filling her silent rooms with meaningless chatter, he is absolutely thrown off balance, describing himself as "ill at ease" and comparing each entry into the space to a penitential climb: "I mount the stairs and turn the handle of the door/And feel as if I had mounted on my hands and knees."

Though Eliot does not make explicit the direct association of women and silence until "Ash-Wednesday" in 1930, "Portrait of a Lady" offers the first association of silence as a woman's space in which she can either command speech or linger comfortably in its absence. Eliot invokes the word silence sparingly in his poetry, but when he does, he associates it almost exclusively with women and, by extension, with reproduction. The death of his aunt, Miss Helen Slingsby, brings "silence in heaven/And silence at her end of the street," that is, until the "second housemaid" exercises her newfound liberty with the footman. The memory of the hyacinth girl in "The Burial of the Dead," the first section of *The Waste Land*, brings the narrator into an annihilating confrontation with "the heart of light, the silence," thereby rendering its impact, according to Gordon's understanding, as both beatific and otherworldly. Finally, at the end of *The Waste Land*, Eliot's speaker yearns for silence. "What the Thunder Said" begins "After the torchlight red on sweaty faces/After the frosty silence in the gardens"

and then complains that "There is not even silence in the mountains/But dry sterile thunder without rain." The longed-for silence is thus associated with the desire for fertility; sixty lines later, "The jungle crouched, humped in silence" just prior to the first redemptive word of the thunder. Though these examples never explicitly mention femininity, the fact that Eliot first posits silence as directly opposite both dryness and sterility and then attributes it to the crouching jaguar, almost a reiteration of the "couched Brazilian jaguar" and "sleek Brazilian jaguar" to whom Grishkin is compared in "Whispers of Immortality," furthers the association of femininity with silence. It is only, of course, in "Ash-Wednesday" that Eliot explicitly outlines silence as a realm to which only women have privileged access. The figure he uses to do so is the "Lady of silences."

Through her character, Eliot spelled out woman's unique power to make a transition between social chatter and serious intellectual devotion, an idea that he had been developing through his earlier female characters. Part IV of the poem opens in such amazement of this element of the Lady's humanity that the very sentence lacks structure. The relative pronoun that begins the section lacks an antecedent, the woman thus exceeding herself:

> Who walked between the violet and the violet
> Who walked between
> The various ranks of varied green
> Going in white and blue, in Mary's colour,
> Talking of trivial things
> In ignorance and in knowledge of eternal dolour

Who moved among the others as they walked,

Who then made strong the fountains and made fresh the springs

Attired as Mary, another full human woman with the capacity to walk among other humans, "talking of trivial things," though she embodied "knowledge of eternal dolour" as the mother of Christ, this Lady confounds the poem's speaker. Three stanzas later, this woman "who walked between" the two worlds is literally enlightened before his eyes: "White light folded, sheathed about her, folded." The ideal Christian woman, the Lady of "Ash-Wednesday" builds on the characters of her female predecessors. With her ability to walk between, the Lady exhibits a dual nature that makes her not only an intercessor but also a figure for human sympathy. When Eliot, in the very next part, asks whether she will "pray for/Those who walk in darkness," and twice "for those who chose thee and oppose thee," the implication is certainly yes. Her femininity, like that of the poetic women before her, gives her the remarkable capacity to adapt her language as appropriate as she communicates variously with society and the Absolute.

The admirable capacity for silence demonstrated by Eliot's women stands in stark contrast to Sweeney's memorable refrain: "I've gotta use words when I talk to you." Antithetical as always to the beliefs of his creator, Sweeney represents the ultimate example of limited, almost premodern, man, a *homo erectus* who has evaded extinction. Just as his frequently-cited "Any man has to, needs to, wants to/Once in a lifetime, do a girl in" must be understood as illustrative of his despicable character, so too does Sweeney's assessment of communication as solely linguistic demonstrate his spiritual ignorance. Sweeney, in his own words, understands life as solely "Birth, and copulation, and death./That's all, that's all, that's all, that's all." Though he epitomizes Eliot's disdain

for the material and corporal, Sweeney was useful to Eliot as a tool through which he could clearly articulate observations about human behavior that he suggested more subtly in his earlier poetry. Sweeney's conviction that he has "gotta use words," for example, illuminates the word-congested paralysis to which men are subject throughout Eliot's poetry.

To this point in my argument, I have interpreted silence as accessible to women alone, but that does not preclude men from choosing not to engage in spoken conversation. I have cited such moments—in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "Portrait of a Lady," and the nerve monologue in "A Game of Chess." In all three of these examples, however, the man's silence is a façade, crowded with verbose replies that are thought and not said. In each case, the man still relies on words, whether or not he chooses to "talk to you." Exactly as Sweeney attests, when Eliot's men "avoid speech," as the hollow men describe themselves as doing "In this last of meeting places," they cannot fully quiet their minds, and thus the speaker of "Ash-Wednesday" must turn instead to the Lady as the singular means through which he can access "Speech without word and/Word of no speech." In fact, he immediately follows this realization with a veneration to her: "Grace to the Mother/For the Garden/Where all love ends." Significantly, there is one moment when Sweeney actually does fall silent in the poem "Sweeney among the Nightingales." The poem is perhaps Sweeney's most bestial portrayal. His very name in the first line is preceded by the adjective "Apeneck,"[91] and his hanging arms and unshaven jaw are variously presented in the first stanza as akin to primate, zebra, and giraffe. He neither thinks nor speaks in the entirety of the poem, not even in response to the prostitutes who clamor for his attention. Instead, Sweeney seems

bent on relinquishing his humanity in this singular poem, particularly in the moments when he is characterized as silent:

> The silent man in mocha brown
> Sprawls at the window-sill and gapes;
> The waiter brings in oranges
> Bananas figs and hothouse grapes;
>
> The silent vertebrate in brown
> Contracts and concentrates, withdraws;

This is neither a silence crowded with linguistic thought nor a transcendent encounter with the Absolute. Instead, within the space of six lines, Eliot relinquishes according to Sweeney's desire. Stripped of his name, identity, and libido, Sweeney is no longer erect, virile, and speaking, but rather sprawling and observing. In the latter stanza, Eliot even divorces him from his status as "man," replacing the word with the more general characterization of "vertebrate," an ironic contrast to his ever more withdrawn and contracted physical posture. Sweeney has got to use words when he talks, for his silence is vacuous and gaping, antithetical to that associated with the hyacinth girl, the feminized jungle, and the Marian Lady of "Ash-Wednesday." It is no wonder that Eliot's other men who hope to avoid speech reach instead for linguistic thought.

Finally, near the end of Eliot's writing career, he reiterated his belief in silence as a singularly feminine realm through the character of Celia in *The Cocktail Party*. In Act Two of *The Cocktail Party*, when she meets with psychologist Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly, Celia claims to have come "in desperation," largely skeptical of the implications of her

own nervous state. The first among "two things [she] can't understand," which she thinks he "might consider symptoms," is "an awareness of solitude" that presents itself linguistically. At the conclusion of trying to explain such an awareness, the exasperated Celia exclaims: "Do you know—/It no longer seems worth while to *speak* to anyone!" Understood in the larger context of Eliot's women, what seems broken in Celia is the very ability to "walk between," a capability that the Lady of "Ash-Wednesday" maintains. No longer able or even desiring to talk of trivial things, Celia instead attests to a psychic state in which the twittering world is foreclosed. "No . . . it isn't that I *want* to be alone," she says to Reilly, "But that everyone's alone—or so it seems to me./They make noises, and think they are talking to each other;/They make faces, and think they understand each other./And I'm sure that they don't. Is that a delusion?" Carefully tempering her fear, Reilly explains "There are other states of mind, which we take to be delusion,/But which we have to accept and go on from." He offers to "reconcile [her] to the human condition" of conventional communication, with its paradoxical lapses and bonds, but she refuses, choosing silence and solitude instead. Badenhausen describes this as a choice that "provides dignity to her quest" and aligns with Susan Gubar's "association of the 'Blank Page' and female creativity, whereby 'blankness' can serve as 'an act of defiance,' a dangerous and risky refusal."[92] Although Badenhausen discusses Celia's silence at length, he never connects it to either Eliot's 1910 encounter on the Boston street or any of the invocations of silence associated with female figures throughout his poetry. This limited approach renders Celia a unique figure with the possible capacity to redeem the misogynistic perception of Eliot, while a more complete perspective reveals her to be the culmination of Eliot's career-long venture into the

exclusive and expansive possibilities of feminine expression. Celia may feel hampered by the sense of her own loss of the ability to converse, but she does speak to Reilly, who understands her and prescribes a remedy for her condition. But Celia also possesses a heightened awareness that distinguishes her from the Lady of "Ash-Wednesday." Evolved from her predecessors in the early poetry, Celia will be no one's intercessor, as she no longer wishes to engage. Instead, when she chooses the second path, which Reilly describes as "unknown, and so requires faith—/The kind of faith that issues from despair," Celia surrenders herself fully to it. Thus, when Reilly and Julia pray for her at the end of the act, Julia ends the prayer by pleading "Protect her in the silence." Badenhausen describes this phenomenon exactly by articulating that Celia's "spiritual authority releases [her] from the burden of social expectations, directing [her] to a metaphysical world beyond human comprehension."[93] Celia thus represents Eliot's ultimate challenge to phallocentric language. She alone becomes psychologically liberated from its dominance and is unwilling to return to its realm, even when faced with an unknown and dangerous alternative. Celia's total release from language removes her from society into the otherwise inaccessible realm of the saint.

Eliot's Third Sex

"you Tiresias if you know know damn well or else you dont."

—Handwritten by Ezra Pound

on the manuscript draft of "The Fire Sermon"

There remains one type of body not yet fully explored in the work of T. S. Eliot. Unlike the mundane physical bodies, male and female, that populate his poetry and prose, this body is not constructed by Eliot to endure a test of suffering and death as an expression of its temporal shortcomings, though it is subject to the stranglehold of age. Unlike the poet's own male body, this one is not rejected in favor of an idealized and penetrable female alternative. This third body goes by many names—alternatively androgynous, transgendered, or hermaphrodite—but all of them hold in common the propensity to blur the gender binary upon which human society too comfortably rests. Gender ambiguity is represented most memorably in Eliot by *The Waste Land*'s Tiresias, whose pride of place is reinforced by Eliot's famous note to the poem, the explicit description of the classical soothsayer as "yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest," a comment that cries out for an oppositional critical stance. Whether or not he is to be taken as Eliot instructs, however, Tiresias represents a larger tendency within Eliot's work to make space for gender ambiguity. Rendered not only through explicit, named characters whose identities challenge the traditional gender binary, this ambiguity is also evident in poetic language that consciously drags, as Sedgwick describes in *Epistemology of the Closet,* "the chalky rag of gender . . . across the blackboard of sexuality, [and] the

chalky rag of sexuality across the blackboard of gender" in order to "create a cloudy space from which a hidden voice can be heard to insist."[1] Considering the recurrence of gender ambiguity in Eliot's poetry and the reverence with which he surrounds specific, named figures of alternative gender identities further underlines Eliot's career-long tendency to use his writing as a means of escape from the physical by first metaphorically destroying it, then by imagining his own loss of self within the feminine, and finally by seeking out the personal and spiritual ramifications of literary sexual inversion.[2] What is remarkable is that all of these efforts—to overcome the body, to explore the possibility of male self-loss through empathy, and to imagine the extraordinary potential of transgender—occur simultaneously throughout Eliot's corpus. Though I have dealt with them here as sequential endeavors, I would be remiss not to acknowledge that for Eliot, all three were aspects of one larger effort to come to terms with the shortcomings of the physical body and the limitations of a binary existence, both of which drove his writing from its very inception.

Donoghue's study on Eliot, *Words Alone* (2000), approaches Eliot via a stance that is both critical and reflective. In so doing, he is able to access the man Eliot in a collegial manner that nonetheless still reveres him for his contributions to literature and culture in the twentieth century. In allowing room for his own personality within the space of critical analysis, Donoghue likewise makes room for that of the poet, and a living, breathing T. S. Eliot emerges through the words alone of Donoghue's book. In keeping with this method, Donoghue recognizes and well articulates the extent to which Eliot clung to language as the means by which he might resolve his own personal anxieties. Referring to Eliot's pull toward asceticism, Donoghue explains that "while the

self flees every created thing and refuses to recognize itself anywhere but in words, it needs something besides itself. Perhaps language is enough."[3] If Eliot, then, turned to language as the sole means by which he might strive for self-recognition, it follows that his poetry, drama, and criticism contain traces of this quest. Donoghue goes on to quote F. R. Leavis explaining that in "Ash-Wednesday," "the poetry itself is an effort at resolving diverse impulsions, recognitions, and needs."[4] Among those impulsions, recognitions, and needs, I contend that Eliot explored the permutations of gender ambiguity in the hopes of discovering that a middle ground between male and female represented a unique existence with potential access to the Absolute. Just as in my previous chapters, I insist on the separation between gender and sexuality in order to argue that Eliot uses his writing to explore the possibilities of reaching beyond the physical, beyond the male, and beyond the gender binary. In so doing, it is essential to realize how Eliot conceived of language itself, further explained by Donoghue thus:

> Lost in the flesh, he is content to be taken in the chains of language; or if not content—since he often complains that the words are not right or not sufficient—he can't think of any other chains in which to be held. His poems let the ordinary world in only because, language being discursive, it can't be kept out.[5]

Words served as the body that Eliot accepted, the body he could alter, imagine, and tinker with throughout his career. What I suggest in this chapter with regard to his exploration of alternative gender identities in his poetry and in his editorial contributions to Djuna Barnes's novel *Nightwood*, then, makes no assumptions about Eliot as himself participating in transgendered behavior.[6] Indeed, just as the previous two chapters insist first that Eliot's exploration of victimized and murdered bodies are not reflective of any

homicidal inclinations and then that his empathy with the female is not an indication of homosexuality, this chapter too is based on an understanding of writing as the means by which Eliot followed literary experiments in alternative gender to their fullest conclusion.

I begin by seeking out Eliot's initial efforts to challenge the gender binary in diction, specifically through his use of ambiguous plural pronouns in his earliest poetry, now collected in *Inventions of the March Hare*, through *The Waste Land*. Eliot's propensity for leaving vague the gender of the nameless characters who populate his early poems raises questions, leading up to the well-known muddle of the "you and I" invoked by Prufrock at the outset of his "Love Song" and the ambiguously gendered voices that cry out throughout *The Waste Land*. I will then move to establishing in the second section the scientific and fictional contexts for understanding and imagining non-normative gender in the early twentieth century. I will also interrogate the distinctions of language used both in Eliot's time as well as in our contemporary moment, questioning whether one term may be properly used to describe figures as distinct as the "epicene" bees and Origen in "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" and the alternately-gendered "old man with wrinkled female breasts," Tiresias. I will then, in the third and fourth sections, closely analyze the individual and collective purposes of these figures in *Poems, 1920* and *The Waste Land*. Much has been written about Tiresias in particular, but in the fourth section, I hope to convey a new understanding of his significance in the context of Eliot's overall disdain for the body and evident empathy for the female as well as in the context of other, less frequently considered representations of gender ambiguity in Eliot's creative and editorial work.

The figure of the non-normative gendered person notably drops out of Eliot's

writing following *The Waste Land*. After so much investment in this exploration through both language and individual, named characters, Eliot seems to lose interest in what Monika Faltejskova calls the "endless possibilities of different gender identifications."[7] In spite of this change in literary exploration, however, Eliot continues to investigate what it means, physically and spiritually, to be solely male or solely female through the rest of his poetry as well as in his verse dramas, as my previous chapters have illustrated.

Whether or not Eliot felt as though he had exhausted his own potential for imagining the transgendered individual as possessing unique access to spirituality remains impossible to determine, but in January 1936, he agreed to help Djuna Barnes publish *Nightwood* by lending his editorial hand, his influence at Faber and Faber, and an introduction to the novel, which was published in December of that same year. At the center of Barnes's novel are the characters of Robin Vote and Dr. Matthew O'Connor, both of whom challenge the gender binary in differing ways. This chapter's fifth and final section thus muses on whether these characters raised again the specter of Eliot's inquiry into the potential of non-normative gendered individuals. As editor and publisher of *Nightwood*, Eliot was able to return to a subject in which he had previously expressed authorial interest, but this time around, he had the opportunity to do so by entering the manuscript of a woman. Thus he himself occupied the somewhat problematic space of the literary man in drag,[8] manipulating the text of the woman who had originally imagined the fictional characters of lesbian woman and transvestite man. Inquiring into Eliot's editing of *Nightwood* completes my investigation into his investment in gender ambiguity. Its echoes resound in *The Cocktail Party* and *The Family Reunion*, revealing Eliot's lingering interest in the subject despite his reticence toward it in his late writing.

In Dr. O'Connor, Eliot found a Tiresias who not only "perceived the scene, and foretold the rest," but lived, walked, and worked in the modern world—a scenario that only Barnes could have imagined, but in which Eliot was certainly invested. Her creations unexpectedly furthered the investigation that his poetry had only begun.

Blurring the Gender Divide in Language

For Eliot to have explored the physical and spiritual capacities of alternative gender identities as part of a genuine exploration of his own potential for asceticism and denial of the physical, he must have had a personal stake in it, one that is apparent in his expressed affection for transgendered characters. In his 1932 lecture "The Bible as Scripture and Literature," Eliot himself made reference to the need for authorial investment in the kinds of images the poet chooses to use, a comment which illustrates his own conviction in a kinship of feeling between poet and poetic content, despite the "extinction of personality" called for in his previous essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent":

> You cannot effectively 'borrow' an image, unless you borrow also, or have spontaneously, something like the feeling which prompted the original image. An 'image' in itself . . . is only vigorous in relation to the feelings out of which it issues, in the relation of word to flesh. You are entitled to take for your own purposes in so far as your fundamental purposes are akin to those of the one who is, for you, the author of the phrase, the inventor of the image; or if you take it for other purposes then your purposes must be consciously and *pointedly* diverse from those of the author, and the contrast is very much to the point; you may not take it merely because it is a good phrase or a lovely image.[9]

The relation of word to flesh, then, becomes the area of interest in any examination of Eliot's poetry, particularly in the allowance for gender ambiguity in his language, which begins as early as Eliot's Harvard poems as well as in *Inventions of the March Hare*, the volume in which the above excerpt is quoted in full as part of Ricks's preface. Just as Eliot's physical self-loathing led him to write of women as an alternative and more appealing body space, so too did it drive him toward imagining a third option, which took its earliest form not in a specific "image" (as described above) but rather as a manner of speaking toward a nongendered, plural other.

Published during Eliot's student days in the *Harvard Advocate* and then later collected in the notebook he titled *Inventions of the March Hare*, Eliot's earliest authorial efforts perhaps more fully indicate his indebtedness to seventeenth-century verse than prefigure the modern poet he was to become. In sixteen of the fifty-one poems that Eliot composed between 1905 and 1914, he follows seventeenth-century style by referencing a "you" or including himself as part of a "we" or "us" whose collective gender identity cannot be definitively determined from the context of the poem itself. Several other poems from this period reference a "you" that the context implies to be certainly male or female, but for the purpose of this argument, I am interested only in Eliot's allowance for gender inclusivity or, even more significantly, gender ambiguity. These sixteen poems point to an early resistance to binary gender designation.

In "On a Portrait" from January 1909, for example, the female gaze of the portrait itself holds sway over the living men and women described as "us of restless brain and weary feet."[10] Likewise, she stands "Beyond the circle of our thought," a phrase that not only separates art from life, privileging the former, but also implicates men and women

alike. The pronouns in "On a Portrait" are thus inclusive rather than ambiguous, but other poems of the same moment challenge such a categorical understanding. "Spleen," from January 1910, opens with a "satisfied procession/Of definitely Sunday faces" male and female, as evidenced by their headwear: "Bonnets, silk hats, and conscious graces." The speaker then turns his attention to the effect said procession has on his listener: its "repetition . . . displaces/Your mental self-possession." Though the allusion to an intimate "you" in verse typically points to the beloved, the phrase "Your mental self-possession" in "Spleen," read through the context of Eliot's collected poems, seems to anticipate "Portrait of a Lady," written over the course of the next two years, in which the male speaker's "self-possession" flares up and gutters out repeatedly as he interacts with his female acquaintance. Reading "Spleen" through the lens of "Portrait," then, suggests the fragility of male self-possession to be an interest of Eliot's, perhaps an interest he first articulated in "Spleen" and only later explicitly assigned to the male gender. In at least one other case, however, Eliot attributes an identical gesture in two distinct poems to individuals of opposing gender. "Oh little voices from the throats of men" (1914), also contained in Eliot's notebook, includes a male figure who "drew the shawl about him as he spoke/And dozed in his arm-chair till the morning broke,"[11] an image that challenges the gender determinacy of the better-known arms and shawls from the contemporaneously written "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock": the women's "arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl" and are imagined later "settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl." In this case, then Eliot seems to have borrowed the shawl from "Oh little voices," re-appropriating it in "Prufrock" as no longer the comforting blanket of the elderly man but the revealing wrap of seductive women.

One final example of Eliot utilizing pronoun ambiguity as a challenge to the gender binary in his early poetry, "Goldfish: Essence of Summer Magazines IV," similarly resonates with later poems, specifically "Portrait of a Lady," "Prufrock," and *The Waste Land*. As in the above example comparing "Oh little voices" to "Prufrock," the overlap between poems complements the ambiguity of the pronouns, serving to underscore the contradictions that cloud any determination of gender. The first stanza of "Goldfish" consists largely of a catalogue of detritus:

> Among the débris of the year
> Of which the autumn takes its toll:—
> Old letters, programmes, unpaid bills
> Photographs, tennis shoes, and more,
> Ties, postal cards, the mass that fills
> The limbo of a bureau drawer—
> Of which October takes its toll
> Among the débris of the year
> I find this headed 'Barcarolle'.[12]

The speaker identifies himself in the final line, mentioning a "Barcarolle," the title of a poem or song, the lyrics of which comprise the second stanza. In it, as the poem progresses, "A crowd of barking waves pursue/Bearing what consequence to you/And me." This "you/And me," so closely situated to the "barking waves," also evokes "Prufrock"—the afternoon "Stretched . . . beside you and me" and the loathed social graces located "Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me." In all three examples, the pair seems to be a male/female couple yoked together by intimacies of

relationship and predicament. But "Prufrock" precludes any such certainty. All that can be said for certain is that the "me" in both "Goldfish" and "Prufrock" alludes to the poem's first-person, male speaker. Further on in the "Barcarolle," however, comes a supernatural reference to personal failing carried on "The neuropathic winds" that presents further complication:

> The neuropathic winds renew
> Like marionettes who leave their graves
> Walking the waves
> Bringing the news from either Pole
> Or knowledge of the fourth dimension:
> 'We beg to call to your attention
> 'Some minor problems of the soul.'

Here the "your" seems inclusive, an indication of mutual guilt and a warning against actions that could lead only to further damnation.

The quoted "Barcarolle" reaches its conclusion with this warning, and the third stanza reopens with direct address, again using the word "Your." In context, however, this "your" is singular:

> —Your seamanship is very neat
> You scan the clouds, as if you knew,
> Your language nautical, complete;
> There's nothing left for me to do.
> And while you give the wheel a twist

I gladly leave the rest to fate

And contemplate

The aged sybil in your eyes

At the four crossroads of the world

Whose oracle replies:—

'These problems seem importunate

But after all do not exist.'

The poem's addressee is thus complimented for neat "seamanship" and "language," making the "you" seem suddenly and distinctly male, certain of the seas, in command of his boat, and reminiscent of the sailors who will later populate Eliot's poetry—from Phlebas the Phoenician and those who "turn the wheel and look to windward" in *The Waste Land*'s "Death by Water"[13] to "all those who are in ships, those/Whose business has to do with fish," who follow more than twenty years later in "The Dry Salvages." The interfering lyrics of the "Barcarolle" separating stanzas one and three make it possible that this "you" is not consistent with the "you/And me" that preceded it; however, even the explicit association of "you" with "man" implied in the phrase "Your seamanship" becomes obscured when the poem's first-person speaker describes his leisured thoughts: "I gladly leave the rest to fate/And contemplate/The aged sybil in your eyes." The aged sibyl, again read through the lens of Eliot's later work, pairs with Tiresias as a classical soothsayer poised at the proscenium of *The Waste Land*. Both are ravaged by age and desiccation, having outlived their fertility and relevance. Perhaps she, like him, having lived so long, has also outlived her gender. She appears here as an apparition in the eyes of what seems to otherwise be a male "you." Does this overlay of sibyl onto seaman

undercut her gender or expand his? Or might it complement the gender of each, transposing what Eliot would recognize as her feminine gift for prophecy onto his masculine nautical expertise? Could the vision of the sibyl in the sailor's eye represent a gender blend that is the only voice through which humanity could possibly speak back to the winds at the end of the poem? Perhaps, for the sibyl's "oracle" replies "'These problems seem importunate/But after all do not exist.'" One thing is certain—the figures of sibyl and seaman, as well as their conventional gender roles, continue to feature prominently in Eliot's later poetry. Though he never again overlaid one onto the other as in this example, he did continue to probe the possible permutations of transgender, both in language and explicit example.

Generally speaking, the poems that comprise Eliot's published work, beginning with "Prufrock," demonstrate his authorial maturity through both their break from seventeenth-century convention and Eliot's development of a population of urban dwellers faced with the crisis of modern existence. As individual figures emerge in his poems, Eliot relies less and less often on gender-ambiguous, second-person pronouns. Among Eliot's most widely anthologized poems, however, "Prufrock" and "Preludes" have their origins in the same time period as these uncollected poems. Thus, they demonstrate a provocative transition between Eliot's juvenilia and the foundation upon which his reputation would come to rest. They demonstrate Eliot continuing to leave the door open to divergent poetic interpretations depending on the reader's assumption of gender identity even as he began to hone his interest on specific, single-gendered personae.

As foreshadowed in "Goldfish: Essence of Summer Magazines IV," "The Love

Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" famously opens with an invitation to an ambiguous "you" that likewise involves the speaker's narrative "I": "Let us go then, you and I,/When the evening is spread out against the sky." Twice more in the poem's first twelve lines Prufrock uses the inclusive plural pronoun "us," reiterating "Let us go," which is balanced in the last stanza by three more inclusive plural pronouns: "We have lingered in the chambers of the sea/By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown/Till human voices wake us, and we drown." Noting the ambiguity of this significant other, Palmer calls Prufrock's "you" "a dubious pronoun . . . a person who has no voice of its own and never interferes with the action. It is not reserved for the beloved woman, which one would naturally have expected in a love song."[14] Donoghue likewise comments on the unusual attribution of the "you," concluding that "some of the invocations to 'you' in 'Prufrock' are perfunctory, they hardly mean more than 'one.' It is hard to believe that the 'We' at the end, 'We have lingered . . .' includes more than Prufrock's sole if notional self."[15] I agree with Donoghue on both counts, particularly noting that in lines such as "time for all the works and days of hands/That lift and drop a question on your plate;" and "The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase," the "you" represents a nongendered, impersonal stand-in. But what about the other references to "you" throughout the poem: could they refer to a man, either a companion or another aspect of Prufrock's fragmented consciousness? There may be a clue in that the plural pronouns 'they' and 'them' refer to women throughout the poem—their impressions of Prufrock, their eyes and arms, and, in the end of the poem, the mermaids riding the waves. Perhaps this is evidence enough for the 'you' to be male, opposed to the certainly female 'they.' But it may not be so. The 'you' could refer to a woman, a mother or sister figure excluded from Prufrock's

romantic or sexual candidates, just as easily as it could refer to a male companion. Phenomenologically, when the 'you' implies the reader, it must be necessarily gender ambiguous. In all of his self-conscious paranoia, Prufrock is indeed the subject of the poem, and the gender of his addressee is insignificant in comparison. What is significant is that Eliot refrained from assigning a specific gender to Prufrock's companion, signaling at the beginning of his career a poetic practice that would culminate in the multivocal, multigendered narrative style of *The Waste Land*.

The four parts of "Preludes" likewise exemplify Eliot's early interest in blurring the gender divide. In its Imagist stanzas of the dirty city, the poem presents an environment that supersedes both people and nature, and individuality nearly vanishes as a result. The single mention of the second-person other in Part I, "And now a gusty shower wraps/The grimy scraps/Of withered leaves about your feet," is easily overlooked by the insistent settling, wrapping, beating, steaming, and stamping of all that surrounds it. But those disembodied and ambiguously attributed feet remain. Eliot absented this figure completely from the poem's Part II, revising his wording for the poem's other, which may or may not refer to the same figure in the first part, to a likewise ambiguous "one": "With the other masquerades/That time resumes,/One thinks of all the hands/That are raising dingy shades/In a thousand furnished rooms."[16] Schuchard acknowledges the gender ambiguity of speaker and addressee in the first two parts of the poem, explaining that "the despondent persona imagines a masquerade of other isolated, rootless souls pouring out of 'a thousand furnished rooms' onto the street."[17] In this reading, Schuchard twice resists gender-determined diction by calling the speaker a "persona" and the population "souls." All are rendered faceless and genderless by the urban environment.

Gender, however, does resurface in "Preludes" Parts III and IV, though it seems as though Eliot almost attributed it to his figures as an afterthought. Gender is the sole individuating quality for the poem's two personae, and it ironically has a blurring rather than distinguishing effect. The "you" in Part III, invoked nine times in twelve lines, is on the receiving end of memory and accusation: "You tossed a blanket from the bed,/You lay upon your back, and waited;/You dozed, and watched the night revealing/The thousand sordid images/Of which your soul was constituted." Only the last invocation, however, suggests the figure to be female by the act of removing curling "papers from your hair." Just as Part III concludes by disclosing its yellow-soled persona as female, Part IV opens with gender clarity: "His soul stretched tight across the skies/That fade behind a city block." Thus both woman and man are burdened by "the conscience of a blackened street," neither one less tortured by it. The verbs that describe both of them, like the newspaper of Part I, are overwhelmingly oppressive. She "tossed . . . waited . . . dozed . . . [and] watched" while he is subject to being both "stretched" and "trampled." The last line, which describes him specifically and both collectively, "Impatient to assume the world," suggests that the force of the created world presses heavily upon them both. Perhaps the existential divide of binary gender is one aspect of such pressure. If so, the speaker, continuing the poem after a break, seems capable of separating himself from it and from all worldly force—at least for a moment—by contemplating the transcendent: "The notion of some infinitely gentle/Infinitely suffering thing."

Absolute in its capacity for passive submission, this "thing" seems to sound a dull, premature conclusion to "Preludes," one Gordon began to elucidate in *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life*, musing "Thing. This is not a casual word for an articulate poet.

Whatever it is transcends the limitations of language."[18] But perhaps that is not all it transcends. To counter Gordon, perhaps language here serves Eliot perfectly. Rather than underlining and then superseding the limitations of language, "thing" is the only word Eliot could have possibly used to elide the gender binary so immediately assigned to all living beings. In "Preludes," a poem almost as depersonalized as possible, even the attribution of gender burdens the human figures, and that which *almost* redeems them is a Platonic Form so difficult to imagine that its articulation resounds with impotence (things, after all, are typically inert) and quickly devolves into empty hilarity ("Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh"). The place of the "thing" in "Preludes" is precisely that which figures such as Origen and Tiresias will come to occupy later in Eliot's writing and also that which Dr. Matthew O'Connor occupies in Barnes's *Nightwood*. All three of these figures will challenge the nomenclature available to define them. All will exist in the liminal space of the outcast. All will be, both in their own eyes and those of society, recognized as exceeding the capacities of the typical human—and yet all will also suffer the self-doubt of the ridiculous. This is the precarious and privileged role of the "thing," the "third sex"[19] in Eliot, to which he ritually returns in order to balance his hope for an asexual likeness to God severed from physical human desire and his fear of grotesque alienation from men and women that would ultimately result in isolation. "Preludes" thus gains significance as the primary moment in Eliot's writing when he declared himself to be captivated by an imagined, expansive potential beyond the gender binary—"moved by fancies that are curled/Around these images, and cling"—a position he would continue to occupy both as a writer and an editor into the 1930s.

As Eliot's poetic evolved, so too did the population of male and female personae

who would come to fill his poems. Intentional gender ambiguity in language, in fact, seems to drop out of his style completely until five years later in *The Waste Land*. At the very outset of "The Burial of the Dead," the second-person pronoun "us" surfaces in the fifth line: "Winter kept us warm," and repeats in the eighth: "Summer surprised us." Both instances are reminiscent of the ambiguous "Let us go then" from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," though the invocation of the term in *The Waste Land* seems universal, all of humanity kept warm and numb in "forgetful snow" and washed by the change of season's "shower of rain." Upon Marie's identification of herself as speaker in line fifteen, conversations, interactions, and tensions between individual men and women become the center of Eliot's focus in the poem. Gender ambiguity does not recur until Part V, "What the Thunder Said." It thus serves to close the poem according to the terms that opened it, heaping man and woman alike into the "hooded hordes swarming/Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth/Ringed by the flat horizon only." This return to blurred gender at the end of the poem might easily be overlooked were it not for the single hooded figure whose obscured presence foreshadows the rest:

> Who is the third who walks always beside you?
> When I count, there are only you and I together
> But when I look ahead up the white road
> There is always another one walking beside you
> Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
> I do not know whether a man or a woman
> —But who is that on the other side of you?[20]

In all of Eliot's corpus, this is the sole example of a character testifying to an inability to identify gender. Thus, it parallels the speaker's musing on "thing" at the conclusion of "Preludes." These two moments stand as evidence to the poet's fascination with that which exceeds the apprehension or determination of gender. Within *The Waste Land*, this passage certainly has resonance with the figure of Tiresias, who I will discuss in depth later, but in the context of the early poetry, particularly "Preludes," this voiceless, nongendered walking companion challenges the distinction between devotion and delusion. The situation Eliot describes resonates with the journey to Emmaus as presented in the Gospel of Luke,[21] but his own note on the poem annihilates the Christian parallel as a mere projection rooted in extremity of climate.[22] Just as the apparition of the "Infinitely gentle/Infinitely suffering thing" in "Preludes" leads to the invective to "Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh," so too does the specter of the transgendered in "What the Thunder Said" trouble spiritual certainty. Significantly, in both cases, that which exceeds gender raises the possibility of a spiritual presence amid and among the mundane. This possibility, however, remains far from certain, and Eliot's intentional shading of each instance with a hint of the absurd presents the risk of unequivocally equating transgender with divinity. He seems, in these instances, simply not to know whether or not to trust his own instinct for such an association.

The Third Sex in Historical and Fictional Context

David Valentine's study *Imagining Transgender: Ethnography of a Category* (2007) takes as its foundation "a central problem with language and naming,"[23] specifically in relation to sexualities and performances of gender that fall outside of conventional terms of sexual identity delineated either by sexual object choice or

adherence to the male/female gender binary. "There are simply no neutral terms," Valentine argues, going on to assert that "complicated topics require complicated language"[24] and much later, claiming "dislocatedness" as integral to his study: "Because borders between gender categories are zones of overlap, not lines, our dislocatedness is constituted by our locations in the overlapping margins of multiple gender categories."[25] In considering Eliot's relationship to gender-ambiguous language as well as to figures of non-normative gender in his own poetry and in *Nightwood*, linguistic overlap and potential dislocatedness must comprise part of the discussion. Both the context for articulating gender variance in Eliot's historical moment and the far more widely variant vocabulary now available must remain close at hand.[26] Together, they make it possible to articulate not only why Eliot felt himself drawn to the figure of the "third sex," but also the implications for modern readers who may understand all variations on gender according to Valentine's broader category of transgender.[27]

Scholars including Valentine and Sedgwick, as well as Madden in *Tiresian Poetics* and Faltejskova in *Djuna Barnes, T. S. Eliot, and the Gender Dynamics of Modernism* (2010) all allude to the modernist interest in androgyny, using Virginia Woolf's invective to think "woman-manly or man-womanly"[28] as well as the specific example of *Orlando* as the major representations of such an interest. Individually, the scholars also offer historical background, commenting on the burgeoning scientific and biological practices occurring contemporaneously in the area of gender identity. Madden, who spends much of his book lingering on the withered female breasts of Tiresias, locates "surgical procedures such as mastectomy and castration, as well as hormonal therapies, . . . used to effect or alter gender and sexual identifications" as originating in

the 1920s and 1930s.[29] Valentine cites "tensions" between "gender-normative homosexual desire and public gender variance"[30] as evident beginning in the late nineteenth century. Faltejskova specifically mentions the work of sexologists Havelock Ellis (1859–1939) and Edward Carpenter (1844–1929) as significant to the historical context of *Nightwood*, specifically Ellis's claim that sex was "mutable, proposing the possibility of one sex being changed into another" and Carpenter's naming of gender variance as "a 'third' or 'intermediate' sex" in which biological gender is in conflict with mannerisms, behaviors, and appearances that adhere to a perception of the opposite gender."[31] Finally, Madden likewise stakes his own argument on that which had been previously articulated by novelist Jonathan Ames, who reiterates "Foucault's claim that the eighteenth century is haunted by the image of the transvestite, the nineteenth by the hermaphrodite, [and] the twentieth century . . . by the figure of the transsexual, which forces broad reexaminations of gender and sexual identity."[32] Both biological alteration of gender as well as the psychological impact of thinking across gender boundaries thus permeated the atmosphere in which Eliot was writing, making it absolutely unsurprising that divergent male figures who cross over into aspects of the third sex would surface in the work of an author already frustrated by the limitations of physical masculinity.

The catalogue of such figures is not long, and queer studies of Eliot concentrate instead on biographical details, such as the dedication of *Prufrock and Other Observations* to Jean Verdenal, in order to divine homosexual leanings in the poetry. I argue instead that Eliot explored the spectrum of male gender variance through these few individual characters in keeping both with his historical and literary moment[33] and as an outgrowth of his expressed interest in female empathy. The androgyne is figured

animalistically through the "epicene" bees in "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service," the poem that also features the transsexual castrate Origen. Tiresias, invoked in *The Waste Land*, is a hermaphrodite, "throbbing between two lives,/Old man with wrinkled female breasts," rather than sequentially gendered male, then female, then male again, according to classical dictates. Instead, the figure of St. Narcissus, from the suppressed poem "The Death of St. Narcissus" (1915), fills this role, for his identity is a composite of beings and genders ranging from a tree to a young girl until he is fully sublimated by the end of the poem as a martyr and "dancer to God." Finally, Barnes's Dr. Matthew O'Connor, the male protagonist of *Nightwood*, rounds out Eliot's exploration of gender variance as a transvestite whose impotence or hesitance restricts him from sexual relationships with men, but who understands himself to be inherently feminine, for he infantilizes his penis with the nickname "Tiny O'Toole" and refers to himself as "the Old Woman who lives in the closet."[34] No single term or understanding for gender variance suits any two of these characters, not to mention the collective group. Instead, Eliot explored the intersection of gender identity, sexuality, and religious devotion through what Valentine would call "zones of overlap" that inform one another and the rest of the poetry with regard to how Eliot imagined himself and his male characters with respect to gender identity. Through these divergent figures, Eliot proposed various options for inhabiting a middle ground of gender that would be detached from sexuality and that he hoped might be more completely available to God.[35]

"Blest Office of the Epicene":
Transgender and Androgyny in the Early Poetry

Any study of transgender in Eliot must begin with the figure of St. Narcissus, for the poem that describes his death likewise details his divergent incarnations as tree, fish,

young girl, and drunken old man. As the saint's name implies, the poem as a whole is suffused with explicit physical autoeroticism no matter what shape Narcissus takes. It is as if he as a figure is so filled with sexual desire that mere existence brings arousal: "the wind made him aware of his legs smoothly passing each other/And of his arms crossed over his breast."[36] In spite of the self-gratifying pleasure Narcissus takes in such a phenomenon, however, Eliot makes clear that the saint "was struck down by such knowledge," devolving into a search for his own identity[37] that led him through his previous incarnations. None of them provides him liberation from the burden; instead they collectively reinforce Narcissus's hypersexual nature:

> First he was sure that he had been a tree
> Twisting its branches among each other
> And tangling its roots among each other.
>
> Then he knew that he had been a fish
> With slippery white belly held tight in <u>his</u> own fingers,
> Writhing in his own clutch, his ancient beauty
> Caught fast in the pink tips of his new beauty.
>
> Then he had been a young girl
> Caught in the woods by a drunken old man
> Knowing at the end the taste of her own whiteness
> The horror of her own smoothness,
> And he felt drunken and old.

In light of this revelation, the earlier descriptions of Narcissus's autoeroticism hold true. The "legs" stimulated by the wind share a likeness with his branches, and the "breast" of fish, girl, and man is "caught" and caressed. His unavoidable self-gratification proves to be a burden so violent that it can uproot a tree, enact rape on a young girl, and isolate a martyr. In *T. S. Eliot's Civilized Savage* (2003), Laurie MacDiarmid mistakenly categorizes Narcissus's autoerotic physical state as "masturbatory" and thus entirely wasted, reducing him to nothing but a wretched aftertaste, "green, dry, and stained/With the shadow in his mouth."[38] Such an interpretation, however, overlooks the burden of Narcissus's hyperawareness of his own changing, autoerotic self. Instead, in keeping with Eliot's poetry and drama as a whole, Narcissus presents an early example of the unbearable sensuality of physical existence, whether male or female. Even when Narcissus's incarnations are not human forms, as in the examples of tree and fish, they are explicitly sexual, demonstrating its requisite "twisting," "tangling," and "writhing," as well as its visceral effects and shades: "slippery" and smooth, colored alternately white and pink. Eliot even forces Narcissus to articulate his own burden, directly equating sensuality with horror in the example of the saint's memory of his own rape as a young girl at the hands of the drunken old man he comes to realize himself to be: "knowing at the end the taste of her own whiteness/The horror of her own smoothness." The only alternative Eliot can imagine for Narcissus is self-sublimation by way of a violent and erotic martyrdom. Concluding the assessment of his own highly sexual and transgendered past, Narcissus adjusts his own purpose: "So he became a dancer to God/Because his flesh was in love with the burning arrows."

The martyrdom ascribed to Narcissus in this poem is of course a more extreme

form of that which is conventionally understood to be Sebastian's, shot through with arrows that the young man's flesh is typically depicted as eager for, direct religious penetration. Narcissus's relationship to his previous incarnations is nothing if not fraught with anxiety, each bringing with it a recurrence of autoerotic trauma. If Narcissus is Eliot's first transgendered figure, little is redemptive about his condition. Instead, he suggests the anxiety with which Eliot first approached the attribution of gender mutability to an individual figure and the possibility of religious devotion as a means of sublimation and peaceful resolution. MacDiarmid thus consistently understands Narcissus as a representation of Eliot himself. She reads the anxiety of his condition as proof that "Eliot distrusted his fascination with religious consciousness," suggesting that the author "may have ascribed these experiences and interests to a 'perversion' in his personality that produced self-deluding hallucinations."[39] Given the early date at which Eliot wrote "The Death of Saint Narcissus," I am inclined to agree partially with MacDiarmid. Though I remain unconvinced that Narcissus serves as an "alter ego" for Eliot,[40] I likewise understand this to be a unique poem in which transgendered identity carries with it a hypersexual burden. Although Narcissus's gender vacillation makes him an ancestor to *The Waste Land*'s Tiresias, "The Death of Narcissus" must not be misunderstood, as it is by Seymour-Jones, as "a poem which anticipates the androgyny"[41] of the latter figure. Narcissus's burden is an active one, his hypersexuality neither eased nor negated by its evolution from tree to fish to human and through masculinity to femininity and back. Eliot rightly understood that the unique end, or "death," of such a figure must consist of equal parts sublimation and eroticism, his final masculinity undercut by the arrows, described in an early draft of the poem as "penetrant" and then revised to "burning," that

brought on a martyrdom suffused with lust. Though Narcissus ostensibly achieves that which all of Eliot's corpus will hope for—annihilation of the physical for the purpose of union with God—he ultimately fails, a fact made obvious by the fact that Eliot suppressed the poem. He kept it close for years, but though Pound submitted it to *Poetry* magazine, it was never published.[42] Only a revision of the poem's refrain about the shadow and the rock remains as part of "The Burial of the Dead."[43] Despite its failings, "The Death of St. Narcissus" represents Eliot's first step into the waters of mutable gender identity, a step that evolved into an imagined idea for alternative gender to do the work Eliot hoped it might in reaching beyond the sensual toward the Absolute.

Eliot's second venture into the potential of the transgendered is often overlooked by the looming appearance of Tiresias in "The Fire Sermon" section of *The Waste Land*. "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service," written in September 1918, however, opens with the neologism "Polyphiloprogenitive," which Eliot himself coined to set a tone of unprecedented fecundity for the poem, a fecundity that meets a premature end at the close of the poem's second stanza, when "the mensual turn of time/Produced enervate Origen." One of two named characters in the poem, Origen stands in sexual and gender tension with his counterpart, Sweeney, who shifts "from ham to ham" as he draws his bath. As I have established already, the fictional Sweeney is consistently presented throughout Eliot's poetry and drama as a fully physical male whose attempts to lose himself in the female manifest themselves solely as banal sexuality. The historical figure of the Christian theologian Origen (c. 185–254), on the other hand, is "enervate" in contrast to his superfetate environment, for according to tradition, he castrated himself as a literal response to Matthew 19:12, the gospel passage that immediately follows the Pharisees'

questioning of Christ on the subjects of divorce and adultery. Having been warned by Christ that remarriage after divorce is equal to adultery, for it separates "what God has joined together," the disciples conclude, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." Christ's response is cryptic; taken literally, it seems to endorse the very act Origen undertook, but the fact that it is immediately followed by his far-more frequently referenced dictum "Let the little children come to me" undercuts such an interpretation:

> His disciples said to him, 'If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.' But he said to them, 'Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.[44]

According to *Inventions of the March Hare*, Eliot's original draft of "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" read "castrate Origen," but Pound crossed out the former adjective and revised it to "enervate," a change that (like replacing "penetrant" with "burning" in the case of St. Narcissus) made the sexual content of Eliot's allusion less explicit.

Few scholars linger long on the significance of Origen, either in this poem or in Eliot's oeuvre as a whole. He even seems to occupy only a moment of Eliot's attention, placed as an endpoint to the line "In the beginning was the Word," which is repeated twice in the first two stanzas. Christ's simultaneous human and divine natures, as well as his dual existence as incantation and incarnation, perhaps represent the "Superfetation" to which the poem refers and to which Origen brings an ironic end. Without naming him

exactly, MacDiarmid misinterprets Origen as a celebrated character, again a figure for Eliot himself as impersonal poet, who, she says, imagines "castration as a privileged place from which to speak" and "metaphorical castration [to be] the poet's goal."[45] Madden too refers to Origen, using the adverb "dryly" to describe the tone of Eliot's allusion, and calling both the poem's mention of the Christian thinker and its later reference to the "epicene" bees as "ironic and slightly condemnatory."[46] In the case of Origen, I agree with Madden, for nothing about Eliot's mention of him suggests that he occupies a place of honor in the poem. He represents an end—a mistaken and false, weak and emasculated—end to the fertile "beginning" initiated by Christ. If Origen is at all a figure for Eliot, a November 1922 letter from Pound makes the connection explicit. In it, Pound refers to Eliot as "exhausted and enerve" as a result of Lady Rothermere's criticism of *The Criterion*, which tempted Eliot to sever himself from the progeny of his own literary magazine. Origen's self-castration, while done in the service of the Lord (thereby making it akin to the work of the "sapient sutlers" in the poem's second line) is similarly anti-generative: it will never let the little children come to Christ but instead represents another human misstep rooted in the selfish desire for salvation. Just as the oversexed Narcissus chooses a martyrdom that fails because of its attendant sexual gratification, the devout Origen undercuts the homonymic association of his name by mutilating himself in an act that thwarts the fertility the poem suggests to be intended by the incarnation of Christ.

Notably, however, Origen does not represent the end of "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service," as he is followed by three more paradoxical religious images before the poem turns back to the "window-panes" of its second line. Five stanzas after Origen's

appearance, the poem shifts to an exterior scene that represents a return to the "polyphiloprogentive" environment that opens the poem:

> Along the garden-wall the bees
> With hairy bellies pass between
> The staminate and pistilate,
> Blest office of the epicene.

Madden is right, in the comment considered above, to couple Origen and the bees together in his reading of the poem, for both trouble a conventional understanding of binary sexuality, but his criticism dangerously overlooks the operative adjective "Blest," which Eliot attributed to the latter beings. The bees in this poem serve a generative service, one from which they simultaneously remain sexually detached. In this singular stanza, Eliot's regard for his poetic subject matter is neither ironic nor condescending. The bees' "hairy bellies" recall the "religious caterpillars" of the poem's epigraph from Marlowe's sixteenth-century play *The Jew of Malta*.[47] But bees, of course, are not caterpillars. By no means earth-bound, they fly, busy with the work of pollination as opposed to awaiting the life-after-death of metamorphosis. The bees in this poem represent Eliot's realization of "the sapient sutlers of the Lord/[who] Drift across the window-panes," and are thus opposed to those who identify themselves as explicitly religious in the poem, including Origen, "The sable presbyters," "The young . . . /Clutching piaculative pence," and "the devout," whose souls "Burn invisible and dim."

The poem's penultimate stanza thus returns it to its fertile beginnings as well as to what Sedgwick refers to as a "botanical hermaphrodism"[48] represented by the singular process of pollination. As opposed to "enervate Origen," whose self-castration results in

isolation and the false martyrdom of sexuality, the bees perform a "blest office," for their work both furthers creation and allows them to remain sexually detached. Referring to a similar moment in Marcel Proust's contemporaneous novel *A la recherché du temps perdu* when the fertilization of an orchid is seen through the character Guermantes's window, Sedgwick explains the nature of such a reproductive transaction: "One thing the triangle of orchid-bee-orchid does suggest . . . is a possible dependence of that apparently two-sided eros on the highly invested busy-ness of some mobile, officious, vibrant, identification-prone third figure who both is and isn't a transactor in it."[49] Applying Sedgwick's characterization to Eliot's poem, then, the bees are blest exactly for the work in which they are invested, uniting the male staminate with the female pistilate, which simultaneously and naturally lends them the qualities of both sexes while keeping separate their own reproductive capacity and gender identity.

It is this unique "office" that I understand to have most fully captivated Eliot's mind, leading him to continue to search for a possible human equivalent. Neither Narcissus, canonized for his endurance of martyrdom, nor Origen, revered for his theological teaching, is ever able to achieve such a blessing. In fact, "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" represents the sole appearance of the adjective "blest" in all of Eliot's corpus. Its close relative, the adjective "blessed," surfaces multiple times, though with only one exception, "blessed" is reserved for saints and Christ himself.[50] Given the unique place and role of the bees in Eliot's exploration of alternative gender and sexual identities, however, I feel that recognizing the unique terminology used to define them as well as their kinship with saints and martyrs is essential. They oppose Origen and magnify his folly, but even they are not free from Eliot's skepticism, for the poem does

not end on the bees' hopeful and industrious work but rather turns back to the ridiculous. If Eliot seeks the human equivalent of the bees with their "blest office," all he seems to find instead is the ludicrous figure of Sweeney, presumably naked as he waits to bathe. Such a coda to the poem recalls "Preludes," its hope for "The notion of some infinitely gentle/Infinitely suffering thing" annihilated by the cynical invective to "Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh" in response to the preposterous ideal. Likewise, the officious bees are once again replaced by the caterpillar Sweeney in "Sweeney among the Nightingales," which immediately follows "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" in both *Poems, 1920* and Eliot's complete poems.

That "Most Important Personage": Tiresias

Most explicit among the examples of Eliot exploring the potential of alternative physiological gender is of course the one he underscored himself in his Notes on *The Waste Land*:

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

The critical instinct is to disbelieve Eliot on this point, to discount the note as too direct, for it stands among so many others intended not to clarify, but rather to further obscure the poem's meaning. William Carlos Williams famously said of *The Waste Land* as a

whole that it "returned us to the classroom just at the moment when I felt we were on the point of an escape;"[51] thus appropriately, even the lucidity of this particular note is undercut by what immediately follows it. To the note Eliot attached nineteen lines of Ovid in the original Latin out of, in his words, "great anthropological interest." But Tiresias, so explicitly marked as the figure in which "the two sexes meet," demands to be taken seriously not only as a classical seer who furthers Eliot's use of the mythical method within the poem but also as the ultimate body that might allow Eliot to realize his own inclinations for empathy with the female without compromising an inherent male identity. Eliot's Tiresias both aligns with and departs from his classical predecessor in a manner that represents a development from the other alternately gendered figures who preceded him, for in him, Eliot attempted to revise the human failings of Narcissus and Origen. No longer is the seer alternately gendered, first male, then female, then male again. Eliot's Tiresias is an aged hermaphrodite, the self-identified "Old man with wrinkled female breasts"[52] whose powers to see (though he also identifies himself once as "blind") are represented by both vision and clairvoyance. And yet even Tiresias fails Eliot, a point on which critics concur, though their reasons diverge. There is indeed a gulf between the potential that Eliot states outright for Tiresias and his actual capacity, both in the scene between the typist and "the young man carbuncular" in "The Fire Sermon" and in *The Waste Land* as a whole. This gulf renders Eliot's note almost an apology for Tiresias's failings and a last-ditch attempt to recover nonbinary sexuality as the ultimate representation of comprehensive, generative, and even sympathetic knowledge detached from selfish human desire.

Eliot's note claims "What Tiresias *sees* [emphasis his], in fact, is the substance of

the poem." Coupled with Pound's criticism that stands as the epigraph of this chapter, which questions the extent of what Tiresias knows, these comments elucidate two essential qualities of Eliot's incarnation of the classical figure. Madden, who traces the figure in the various modern guises written by Eliot, Barnes, Austin Clarke, and Michael Field, understands the Tiresian figure in general as "heterogeneous and strangely hybrid . . . ambiguously gendered and sequentially sexed" in order that he "embodies and personifies anxieties about the nature of both sexual and artistic identities."[53] But given the context of Eliot's rejection of the physical and investment in female empathy, his Tiresias must be recognized for the ways in which he departs from classical generalizations. Explicitly hermaphroditic rather than "sequentially sexed," Tiresias thus has naturally the body that Origen attempted to attain brutally and that Narcissus had sequentially as his life forms evolved and genders alternated. Tiresias also has a capacity of voice that allows him to narrate his own position and perspective, a capacity mirrored only by the mutilated call of Philomel and Procne that immediately precedes his entrance: "Twit twit twit/Jug jug jug jug jug jug/So rudely forc'd./Tereu." As Madden points out, Tiresias thrice asserts his first-person perspective and reiterates his name within the "longest continuous narrative in the poem,"[54] almost too heavily insisting on his own significance. He is seer and speaker; even without Eliot's note, Tiresias demands to be recognized for an omniscience akin to divinity.

Like the epicene bees, Tiresias seems to have achieved a consciousness devoid of physicality and thus liberated from desire. He is notably neither aroused nor repulsed by the coupling he sees on the typist's divan, though his memory does intervene, reminding him that he has "foresuffered all/Enacted on this same divan or bed." Perhaps then

Tiresias represents the idea that a dialectical intellect may be best housed within a dually gendered body that mirrors its capacity for juxtaposition. Donoghue, in fact, locates the origins of Eliot's Tiresian interests in the dissertation Eliot wrote on F. H. Bradley:

> In a chapter on solipsism from his dissertation, Eliot writes 'The point of view (or finite center) has for its object one consistent world, and accordingly no finite center can be self-sufficient, for the life of a *solu* does not consist in the contemplation of one consistent world but in the painful task of unifying (to a greater or lesser extent) jarring and incompatible ones, and passing, when possible, from two or more discordant viewpoints to a higher which shall somehow include and transmute them . . . we are led to the conception of an all-inclusive experience outside of which nothing shall fall.[55]

Thus the painful, jarring, and incompatible hermaphrodism of Tiresias is for Donoghue a metaphor for comprehensive contemplation that is inclusive of dialectical opposition, which brings him to the conclusion that "In *The Waste Land* Eliot calls this higher perspective Tiresias."[56] It is worth noting, however, that immediately following this assertion, Donoghue retreats somewhat, asserting that the Tiresian consciousness as presented in the poem is not "the ultimate form of consciousness," explaining that "It is necessary for the poem, for poetry, to go beyond the phase of consciousness which Eliot calls Tiresias." Donoghue's chief complaint about Tiresian consciousness has its roots in its solipsistic effect, which isolates Tiresias from emotional involvement with the other characters,[57] but such an assumption calls into question the validity of Tiresias's memory. In assuming that Tiresias does not sympathize, Donoghue overlooks the seer's recollection of having "foresuffered all/Enacted on this same divan or bed," which is

perhaps an Eliotic deconstruction of Tiresias's well-known conclusion that women enjoy the greater pleasure in sex. Perhaps *The Waste Land*'s Tiresias, re-created via Eliot's own physical self-loathing, hints at a revision of such a statement that replaces pleasure with suffering. Thus Tiresias's memory is indeed sympathetic. His feminine experience may be reflected in the very lack of sexual pleasure he beholds between typist and clerk, for he claims to have once occupied her exact position—same divan, same bed, same suffering.

It is the admission of his having endured the feminine experience of sex that renders Tiresias a *solu*. If his hermaphroditic body is a metaphor for a comprehensive intellect, Eliot's Tiresias is a connoisseur not of sexual pleasure but of sexual suffering. He has endured it "on this same divan or bed," and he, like the typist, persists. Sedgwick describes the liminal zone of transgender in a way that resounds both with Donoghue's reading of Tiresias as evolved from Bradley's understanding of the *solu* without excluding him from sympathetic, even empathetic, potential. She explains that "what cannot be avowed as a constitutive identification for any given subject position runs the risk not only of becoming externalized in a degraded form but repeatedly repudiated and subject to a policy of disavowal."[58] This is the no-man's-land in which Tiresias dwells, and his degraded, disavowed subject position is primarily rendered via the detached perspective from which he observes the scene and is then reinforced by the overwhelming tendency of readers and scholars alike to mistrust and degrade him, to render him a failure. Though referring to him originally as "hermaphroditic seer," Dean calls him "a freakish hybrid" two pages later, further detailing him as a "particularly disturbing outcome of the self-transformation that poetic utterance demands."[59] Part of

this tendency to denigrate Tiresias must also have its roots in Eliot's overbearingly didactic note. In stating that Tiresias "is yet the most important personage of the poem, uniting all the rest," Eliot underscores the impossibility of such a capacity, even for a classical seer and a hermaphroditic poetic persona.

I believe that Eliot wrote the character of Tiresias into "The Fire Sermon" out of a hope that his hermaphroditic physiology combined with his classical omniscience would lend genuine empathy to the poem's most apathetic scene of human coupling. Tiresias enters "The Fire Sermon" more directly than any of the figures that precede him—Ferdinand, Sweeney, Philomel, Procne, and even Mr. Eugenides. None of these personae either introduce or describe themselves directly. Ferdinand is only identifiable via the allusion to "the king my brother's wreck/And . . . the king my father's death before him," and the others are described only by an external observer. Tiresias, on the other hand, enters boldly, striding into the poem in opposition to "the human engine [that] waits/Like a taxi throbbing," and immediately defining himself by his own idiosyncrasies: "I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,/Old man with wrinkled female breasts." The single word "throbbing," however, works against such an opposition, for it yokes Tiresias to the modern individuals against whom he seeks to define himself, thus forcing him to participate in their mechanical existence as engines and taxis. Madden points out that "Tiresias's observation of the coupling of clerk and typist is, in a way, parallel to his watching the two snakes: a similar animalism and mechanism occur in the two scenes."[60] His insight gains support from the fact that the scene is bookended by the aforementioned comparison of humanity to engine and taxi and the concluding reference to the postcoital typist's "automatic hand." Dean refers to Tiresias as the poem's

"hermaphroditic seer,"[61] although the body given him by Eliot is explicitly female only in its possession of breasts, which he later denigrates as "wrinkled dugs," reinforcing their desiccated, nongenerative potential. Madden focuses intensely on this aspect of Eliot's Tiresian physiology, understanding him not as hermaphroditic but rather gynecomastic, quoting Alice Dreger's idea of male breasts and nipples as representative of the "atavistic memory" of the body.[62] For all of the attention on the particulars of Tiresias's body, however, it is worth noting that in the entire forty-two line passage of "The Fire Sermon" told from his perspective, his consciousness is completely detached from his body. Most of what he recounts, in fact, (including the detail that the young man is "carbuncular," the list of items discarded on the typist's divan, and most pointedly, his description of her glancing at herself in the mirror in the aftermath of their encounter) is only perceptible through the power of vision, even though he asserts himself as physically blind.

The critical writing about Tiresias largely lingers on him as a failure despite (or perhaps explicitly as a result of) Eliot's highest hopes for him. Madden's interpretation of Tiresias's failings posits his potential as a "shamanic" transgendered individual[63] against both the "utterly confused and confusing"[64] body Eliot gave him and Madden's disappointment in his tendency to occupy the compromised feminine position. Unsurprisingly, at the root of Madden's argument detailing the failure of Eliot's Tiresias is the expressed belief that the character belies "the degenerative feminine and homoerotic."[65] In accusing Eliot of inscribing "the degenerative feminine" into his Tiresias, Madden reveals his own entrenched misogyny, finally damning Tiresias for over-identifying with the typist and lingering too long in her place: "he ends the narrative still in the room with the typist (after the exit of the clerk), in the realm of the feminine,

the passive . . . and the mechanical."[66] Madden's facts are correct; Tiresias does remain in the typist's home past the young man's departure, and he does claim, in the very moment of the clerk's climax, to have "foresuffered" exactly the same kind of experience. There is something threatening about his occupation of the feminine space, in the same way that the fantasy of total assumption into the female body that Eliot imagined in "Hysteria" is threatening. Total immersion in the feminine, however, according to a perspective that understands Eliot's loathing of the physical, emphasis on suffering, and desire for total empathy with the feminine, would have been of extreme interest to Eliot. The vision granted Tiresias paradoxically through his blindness, the omniscience of his long and varied experience, and the hermaphroditic potential of his physical body all lend Tiresias special permission to remain in the open room of the typist. He neither comes and goes nor has to be extricated from the physical female body as were his predecessors in "Prufrock," "Portrait of a Lady," and "Hysteria." And yet Tiresias's masculinity remains also intact. Though he stays behind with the typist after the young man leaves, the poem makes clear that the departing male takes with him too a Tiresian aspect, namely his blindness, for he "Bestows one final patronising kiss/And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit . . . "[67] The young man's blindness upon departure demonstrates that a key physical characteristic of Tiresias leaves the room with his male counterpart while the seer's consciousness remains in the typist's domicile. Even through the end of the scene, then, Tiresias remains paradoxically bifurcated and whole, his dually gendered nature allowing for such endurance.

And yet there remains a way in which Tiresias, in spite of all of Eliot's hopes for his hermaphroditic powers of sustainability, still fails to fully earn the significance

branded onto him. Eliot claims that "what Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem," but if his role—as degenerate hermaphrodite and classical seer—is to find or to lend redemption to *The Waste Land*, he is absolutely unsuccessful. What Tiresias sees is a coupling that replaces Narcissus's autoerotic with the automatic, so that the linguistic root of 'machine' literally replaces that of 'eros.' Although he demonstrates not only vision but also omniscience in the scene, he neither interferes with the action nor lends it purpose. If his perspective is the site where "the two sexes meet," such a site lacks both the basic human desire for gratification as well as the epistemological desire for understanding. It is interesting, therefore, to note that in the manuscript drafts of "The Fire Sermon," all of the short stanzas that present Tiresias's self-reflections remained untouched by Pound's editorial pencil and thus appear in the poem's final form just as Eliot first drafted them. Eliot's Tiresias is exactly that—the classical figure refracted through his author's very biased perspective, one bent on exploring the possibility of a poetic persona of alternative gender that might somehow transcend the physicality of human desire, discovering devotional power via sexual sublimation. Pound remarked on Tiresias only once in the draft with the comment that leads this chapter, a reaction against Eliot's original line describing the typist, abandoned, regarding herself in the mirror, "Hardly aware of her departed lover;/Across her brain one half-formed thought may pass." Pound struck through the word "may" and challenged Eliot with a comment that both pokes fun at his revision of the seer and superimposes it onto Eliot's own authorial perspective: "make up yr. mind you Tiresias if you know know damn well or else you dont."[68] The comment is not only superficially witty in its mockery of Tiresias's constant self-naming; it also illustrates the hubris at the root of Eliot's creative endeavor. In

attempting to create a character that amalgamates the human and prophetic, male and female, classical and modern in order to realize some higher truth, Eliot perhaps exceeded himself. Pound's marginalia acknowledges the nobility and potential folly of such a risk. Tiresias, then, remains a central, if flawed, figure in *The Waste Land*, the last of Eliot's occasional ventures into transgender as a possible means of annihilating sexual desire while enjoying full knowledge of male and female experience.

Indeed Eliot had tread on the border of the sublime and the horrific before, as most explicitly demonstrated in the poem "Silence," specifically when "the garrulous waves of life/Shrink and divide," a departure from the mundane that leaves him thus: "At such peace I am terrified./There is nothing else beside." Gordon and others attribute "Silence" to a moment of Eliot's own experience,[69] and thus, according to Donoghue's logic, Tiresias may represent one attempt on Eliot's part to conceive of a figure with an inborn capacity for such access. The burden of such access, in fact, once had a parallel in *The Waste Land*'s original epigraph from *Heart of Darkness*. Though Pound insisted on its excision, Eliot's reference to the last words of Conrad's Kurtz would have served as an introduction to the possible effects of a "supreme moment of complete knowledge," as Kurtz memorably "cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision—he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath—'The horror! the horror!'" With this epigraph, Tiresias would have served as a classical counterpart to the modern imperialist monster, a less threatening embodiment of disavowed knowledge than Conrad's Kurtz. Without it, Tiresias represents the lone voice with such potential, though there are other figures whose omniscience approaches his: in *The Waste Land,* the clairvoyant Madame Sosostris and the Sibyl, and according to Badenhausen, in the chorus of women in

Murder in the Cathedral.[70] Donoghue again presents the most interesting comparison, likening Tiresias's unexpected and unwelcome entry into the domestic relationship between typist and young man to that of the Unidentified Guest in *The Cocktail Party*. This first mention of a male figure as a comparison to Tiresias aligns the hermaphrodite's capacity for comprehensive knowledge with the Freudian power of psychiatry, with its attendant insights into the motivational power of biological gender and sexuality, as demonstrated by Dr. Henry Harcourt-Reilly. And yet, even Donoghue realizes the limitations of not only psychiatry but also gender, acknowledging that: "Tiresias is the Unidentified Guest until he too is transcended in Celia."[71] Though sexually desired by both Edward and Peter, Celia shares with Tiresias the outcast status of being, as Sedgwick explains, "externalized in a degraded form . . . repeatedly repudiated" and, most explicitly in the pathetic case of her crucifixion, "subject to a policy of disavowal."[72] None of these figures, neither Tiresias's companions in *The Waste Land* nor those who follow in the poem's wake, share in his sense of dual-gendered identity, but in unique ways, they still partake of his potential. After *The Waste Land*, Eliot never again indulged his own authorial imagination in the possibility of alternative gender, turning instead to other means of portraying humanity striving to annihilate the physical and surpass the limitations of common knowledge. He made most of these attempts through female characters, with *The Cocktail Party* existing as an interesting case of transference between male and female. But it was through his editorial relationship with Djuna Barnes on *Nightwood* that Eliot found one more chance to explore the potential of alternative gender, this time through the character of the self-appointed gynecologist Dr. Matthew O'Connor.

Dr. Matthew O'Connor and "Hypersensitive Awareness"

Near the end of January 1936, on the heels of Eliot's writing of both *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Burnt Norton*, a singular editorial opportunity crossed his desk at Faber and Faber. The text was Djuna Barnes's novel *Nightwood*. Eliot had been asked by Barnes's determined friend Emily Coleman to consider it before, but his previous consideration of the book had been limited by the fact that he had only been provided excerpts, which he later cast as "misleading" and thus not indicative of the book's serious tone.[73] Coleman's letters to Eliot reflect the depth of her understanding of his poetic and spiritual sensibility, not specifically to matters of gender identity but rather to human suffering, and she used this understanding to convince him to reconsider *Nightwood*. For someone "preoccupied with the problems of evil and suffering, " she explained, "*Nightwood* should be a document of extraordinary value."[74] Thus she convinced him to revisit the novel, this time in its entirety. Upon doing so, Eliot came to be *Nightwood*'s champion, working with Barnes and Coleman on editing the manuscript, convincing the Faber editorial board that the book was worth publishing, and even writing the introduction to both the American and British editions. In itself, this story is less than remarkable. Eliot had been in the business of recognizing the potential in manuscripts and fostering them to publication for over ten years at Faber, but *Nightwood* is singular for the way in which his investment in the book itself and specifically in the character of Dr. O'Connor effectively contributed to the completion of one of his own literary endeavors—that of journeying into the permutations and potential of male transgendered experience.

Nightwood centers on the character of Robin Vote, the female androgyne

described in the moment of her conversion to Catholicism as "a tall girl with the body of a boy."[75] Robin's transgendered appearance and identity make her universally appealing, a figure exuding such sexual power that nearly all of the book's other characters fall in love with her, and yet she remains completely untouched by them, continually unsatisfied. It is Robin who Barnes describes as "outside the 'human type'—a wild thing caught in a woman's skin, monstrously alone, monstrously vain"[76] despite the fact that she is the expressed object of three other characters' physical and emotional affections. Outside of the circle of Robin's lost loves, Dr. Matthew O'Connor serves as her male counterpart. Likewise separated from the conventional "human type" by a feminine gender identity that conflicts directly with his masculine body, Dr. O'Connor is absolutely asexual. Indeed, in his case, Sedgwick's "chalky rag of gender" does not drag across his "blackboard of sexuality."[77] Dr. O'Connor, the unlicensed gynecologist, stands absolutely apart from his acquaintances sexually, but he shares with them a psychologist's intimacy as Felix and Nora run to him for comfort in the wake of Robin's abandonment.

What Barnes accomplished in the figures of Robin and Matthew was to create viable characters interacting in contemporary culture in a manner that flows organically from their distinctive transgendered predicaments. This represents a significant development from what Eliot had been able to accomplish in his poetry: though he explored variations on transgender in Narcissus, Origen, and Tiresias, he never created a contemporary transgendered character and then allowed him/her to interact with other characters in the modern world.[78] In Barnes's novel, I believe that Eliot was astonished to find a woman writing with aspirations that were so closely aligned with those he had

once embraced and later abandoned. Acutely critical of Eliot's hand in the final manuscript of *Nightwood*, Faltejskova cites Coleman's diary as recording "that Eliot liked the novel but would not have guessed that [it] had been written by a woman." Faltejskova interprets Coleman's comment as evidence for Eliot's misogyny, "revealing his belief that only men were capable of writing good literature" and then provides Eliot's additional clarification to Coleman that "he didn't think the Doctor seemed like a woman's creation."[79] Certainly the comment resounds with sexist judgment, but after examining the kind of transgendered figure Eliot had attempted to create, particularly in Tiresias, I feel that it reveals far more envy than misogyny. Eliot couldn't believe that anyone could have created a figure so in keeping with the aims of his own early work, particularly not someone born with a biological gender that opposed both his own and that of Dr. O'Connor. And thus when Eliot agreed to participate in *Nightwood*'s publication as editor and advocate, he likewise complicated the gender of its authorship. If he read *Nightwood* as a fortunate coincidence in which his own exploration of transgender overlapped with that of Barnes, then editing the novel represented for Eliot an opportunity for literary drag. To use such a term indicates a possibly problematic assumption of Barnes's creative work while also underscoring the significance of this editorial project in the context of Eliot's (and Barnes's) career.

By the fall of 1936, when the manuscript had been finalized and *Nightwood* was approaching publication, Eliot wrote its blurb and preface without either the consent of or any input from Barnes whatsoever. In her introduction to the *Selected Works of Djuna Barnes: Spillway/The Antiphon/Nightwood*, Cheryl J. Plumb cites two letters that Barnes wrote to Coleman regarding her anxiety at the prospect. In the first, dated 20 September

1936, Barnes describes herself as "in a fever to see what Eliot wrote," particularly as she concludes "What a beast he is."[80] After reading it two days later, however, Barnes found herself reluctantly accepting of her editor's assessment: "'I like it because I hate blurbs, and understatement so delights me when it is so thoroughly well done, so British, so somber, so sober.'"[81] Eliot's introduction established *Nightwood*'s status in the context of literary modernism, though he oddly positions himself in it as no more than a common reader, claiming his intent thus: "to trace the more significant phases of one's own appreciation of [the novel]" because "it took me, with this book, some time to come to an appreciation of its meaning as a whole."[82] The introduction makes clear that such an appreciation came solely through the singular figure of O'Connor. It is O'Connor, Eliot claims, who first impressed him as a literary character and through whom he came to appreciate the others as a supporting cast. Because Eliot so explicitly underlined the significance of O'Connor at the outset of the novel, it is nearly impossible for a reader to approach *Nightwood* any other way. Eliot's literary and modernist reputation as well as the clarity and forthrightness of his introduction lend professorial endorsement to *Nightwood*.[83] Upon this status the novel, which had been rejected by seven other publishers before Eliot advocated for it at Faber and Faber, took flight.[84] But critics such as Faltejskova lament Eliot's single-minded approach, rightly claiming that "he emphasizes the role of the doctor as pivotal for the book but somewhat at the expense of the other characters," most importantly Robin, whom Faltejskova calls "a central character" because "(the novel is a story of those who loved Robin and were rejected by her)."[85] The figure of the transvestite male, who appropriates for his own everything from a female appearance to supposed expertise of her reproductive system, certainly supplants

Robin in Eliot's introduction, completely obscuring Barnes's admission to Eliot that *Nightwood* "was to be regarded as a semi-autobiographical story" that drew both on her own childhood and her stormy, almost ten-year relationship with the artist Thelma Wood.[86] However, even Faltejskova admits that both for the power of Eliot's influence and the character of his appreciation for *Nightwood*, Barnes "came to admire Eliot deeply. Her admiration was a mixture of deep respect and admiration for him as a poet and critic, but also of exaggerated gratefulness and awe."[87]

Eliot's introduction makes his own appreciation of Dr. O'Connor most lucid, citing him as not only the first impressive element of the novel—"When I first read the book I found the opening movement rather slow and dragging, until the appearance of the doctor"—but also its most enduring one. Describing his "repeated reading" of *Nightwood*, Eliot concludes that "the other characters . . . became alive for me . . . [but] the figure of the doctor was by no means diminished. On the contrary, he came to take on a different and more profound importance when seen as a constituent of a whole pattern."[88] While Eliot never mentions either sexuality or gender in his discussion of O'Connor as both central and admirable, he lingers on the doctor as a figure at once detached and also deeply invested in the emotional realities of those around him. Describing the doctor's character as possessing "a desperate disinterestedness and a deep humility," Eliot clarifies the paradox by describing that "His monologues . . . are not dictated by an indifference to other human beings, but on the contrary by a hypersensitive awareness of them."[89] The doctor is able to achieve a dual existence, one that echoes exactly that which Eliot himself had tried to achieve fourteen years earlier in Tiresias. This singular role played by O'Connor again recalls Judith Butler's discussion of "what

cannot be avowed as a constitutive identification for any given subject position," but what Barnes was able to achieve through O'Connor exceeds Butler's expectations for such atypical identification. O'Connor's particular brand of suffering, within a physical body that runs counter to his own sense of female gender identity, may make him "run the risk of not only becoming externalized in a degraded form but repeatedly repudiated and subject to a policy of disavowal,"[90] but Barnes endows him with an altruism that aims to relieve the suffering of others. As a result, O'Connor has the power to redirect his own self-repudiation toward a higher aim, one that Eliot in the introduction admits to be his most impressive trait. Though Eliot acknowledges O'Connor's human limitations, "his revulsion against the strain of squeezing himself dry for other people," he redeems the doctor for continuing such selfless work: "But most of the time he is talking to drown the still small wailing and whining of humanity, to make more supportable its shame and less ignoble its misery."[91] It is no wonder then that Faltejskova finds fault with the introduction as heavy-handed. Anyone approaching *Nightwood* through Eliot's preface would have to be influenced by the degree to which he touts O'Connor as the novel's unfailing hero. For the purpose of Eliot studies, however, such a comprehensive endorsement hints at the editor's appreciation for that which he had himself once attempted but could not fully achieve in his own writing.

On the whole, Eliot's editorial hand in *Nightwood* was light. As Plumb describes, Coleman was the first to strike through almost all of the manuscript's deleted passages, which included "approximately thirteen pages," most of which Coleman described as "stories of the doctor that slowed the narration" and would "infuriate Eliot."[92] Eliot approved all of Coleman's cuts, and those that he made in addition are smaller—words

and phrases, as Plumb describes, "blue-penciled by Eliot" because they "relate to sexuality or religion."[93] Of the long "stories of the doctor" suggested for deletion first by Coleman and then approved by Eliot, three refer directly to masturbation (one O'Connor's own memory of masturbating in public and being jailed for it), one presents the sacrament of confession infused with homosexual innuendo, and two are memories of a "girlish boy" killed in World War One. Faltejskova points out the seeming idiosyncrasy that Eliot "willingly censored the one character in the novel he was fascinated by," but explains it as an act of "subsuming Matthew's homosexual experience" out of Eliot's repression of his own homosexual tendencies.[94] Although he dresses and thinks of himself as a woman, however, O'Connor never engages in or even imagines homosexual relationships in the novel. To read this separation of sexuality from gender as solely indicative of Eliot's repressed homosexuality is not only reductive, but also unsupported—Faltejskova offers no biographical evidence to support her claim. Additionally, reading the excision of these scenes as Faltejskova does forecloses the possibility that Eliot and Coleman together uncovered a more productive role for O'Connor in the novel as both a celibate foil for the sexually ravenous Robin and a transgendered conduit for an even more unique, comprehensive identity. The latter possibility would have not only proven more interesting to Eliot, as it built on the possibilities of alternative genders imagined in his early poetry, but already lay dormant within Barnes's novel. For example, when Nora comes into O'Connor's bedroom unexpectedly at three in the morning, she finds that

> The doctor's head, with its over-large black eyes, its full gunmetal cheeks and chin, was framed in the golden semi-circle of a wig with long pendent curls that

> touched his shoulders, and falling back against the pillow, turned up the shadowy interior of their cylinders. He was heavily rouged and his lashes painted. It flashed into Nora's head: 'God, children know something they can't tell; they like Red Riding Hood and the wolf in bed!'[95]

Thus he is man, woman, and beast in one body and one apparition. Not only does O'Connor seem a comprehensive identity to others, he is aware of his own capacity in this regard, consoling Nora by referring to himself in the third person, encouraging her to "Ask Dr. Mighty O'Connor; the reason the doctor knows everything is because he's been everywhere at the wrong time and has now become anonymous."[96] While Eliot needed a note in *The Waste Land* to make explicit that "the two sexes meet in Tiresias," what he must have discovered in Barnes's manuscript was a character whose universality is inherently explicit, both by his own admission and via the observations of those who surround him.

Faltejskova likewise denigrates Eliot's editorial contributions to *Nightwood* because they "shift the emphasis from Matthew's individual consciousness to a 'heightened consciousness' and thus present the Doctor as a disinterested, religious-like figure of higher knowledge."[97] She later calls him a "prophet-like figure resembling the Tiresias of [Eliot's] *The Waste Land*," but she fails to acknowledge that Eliot did not add to Barnes's manuscript. If Dr. Matthew O'Connor, after Eliot's (and Coleman's) cuts, is no longer a marginalized, sexually suffering outcast but rather a prophet, he must have been at least a hybrid of the two in the original manuscript. After all, it was Barnes and not Eliot who wrote O'Connor's self-scrutinizing monologues, in which he struggles against his own sense of being "an angel on all fours," a "permanent mistake," and, in the

end, "The uninhabited angel!"[98] Indeed the spiritual overtones of O'Connor's predicament were already extant alongside the sordid in Barnes's manuscript. Such an intersection must have fascinated the creator of Sweeney, Tiresias, and the veiled Lady of "Ash-Wednesday." For the doctor, whose "favourite topic . . . was the night"[99] also inhabits a space that Nora describes as "appallingly degraded . . . like the rooms in brothels, which give even the most innocent a sensation of having been accomplice."[100] In O'Connor, Eliot must have recognized that Barnes had created a living, breathing, transgendered, and deeply troubled saint figure, one who demonstrates the suffering Eliot would later come to pose as endemic to true devotion in *The Cocktail Party* when Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly, referring to Celia, asks rhetorically:

> Do you imagine that the Saint in the desert
> With spiritual evil always at his shoulder
> Suffered any less from hunger, damp, exposure,
> Bowel trouble, and the fear of the lions,
> Cold of the night and the heat of the day, than we should?

O'Connor's desert is both urban and cosmopolitan, his "hunger, damp, exposure,/Bowel trouble" comprised of the loneliness of remaining always on the margins of sexual and romantic relationships, his extremities of cold and heat the opposing ends of the gender spectrum with which he wrestles on a constant basis. But I believe that what Eliot learned by editing *Nightwood* transferred directly to his work on both *The Family Reunion* and *The Cocktail Party*, two plays in which characters fully integrated in the banal and often political aspects of contemporary life, including work, family, and romance, suffer isolation as a result of a deeper pull toward what Harry would come to call the "bright

angels" and Celia "a vision of something/Though I don't know what it is."

Dr. O'Connor is after all not Eliot's creation, but he became a figure of great interest to Eliot, and Eliot had a hand both in his evolution into the prophet figure that now populates *Nightwood* and in bringing him and his story into literary history. He is a transgendered individual living among a population that includes men, women, and others "outside the 'human type,'" not only Robin Vote, the "wild thing caught in a woman's skin, monstrously alone, monstrously vain,"[101] but also minor characters such as the aptly named Frau Mann, Duchess of Broadback, whose lower body is described as at one with her clothing: "The stuff of the tights was no longer a covering, it was herself; the span of the tightly stitched crotch was so much her own flesh that she was as unsexed as a doll."[102] Significant aspects of O'Connor's character, however, overlap with the transgendered figures as well as the major motifs of Eliot's poetry. Like Narcissus, O'Connor retains an atavistic memory: "In the old days I was possibly a girl in Marseilles thumping the dock with a sailor."[103] He testifies to the torment of the physical body in a manner that recalls Eliot's embrace of the ascetic, claiming "Our bones ache only while the flesh is on them. . . . We will find no comfort until the night melts away; until the fury of the night rots out its fire."[104] And yet O'Connor also differs significantly from any character Eliot would create, particularly with regard to his investment in procreative sexuality, his desire to be not only female, but reproductive: "—for, no matter what I may be doing, in my heart is the wish for children and knitting. God, I never asked better than to boil some good man's potatoes and toss up a child for him every nine months by the calendar."[105] Any examination, however, of Eliot's interest in and creative relationship to alternative gender must consider the special case of Dr. Matthew O'Connor.

I believe Eliot understood that Barnes had exceeded his capacity for exploring the potential for the transgendered individual to stand as an intermediary figure between the everyday struggles of humanity and divine detachment, exceeding him because O'Connor—unlike Narcissus, Origen, or Tiresias—was truly engaged in relationships with the people around him, a characteristic to which Eliot paid explicit tribute in his Introduction, asserting that "such a character as Doctor O'Connor could not be real alone in a gallery of dummies: such a character needs other real, if less conscious, people in order to realize his own reality. I cannot think of any character in the book who has not gone on living in my mind."[106] O'Connor is part of a fictional community, not to be understood, as Eliot also clarified, "as a horrid sideshow of freaks,"[107] but instead as "characters . . . all knotted together, as people are in real life, by what we may call chance or destiny, rather than by deliberate choice of each other's company."[108] In creating such a character who embodies the oppositions between male and female, detachment and integration, suffering and enlightenment, Barnes both earned Eliot's admiration and complemented his own literary endeavor.

Eliot's writings simultaneous with and following *Nightwood* include *Four Quartets* and all of the major verse plays excepting *Murder in the Cathedral*. In these works, both Eliot's turn to the communal interactions of people in contemporary life as well as his interest in the struggles of individuals called to devotion echo *Nightwood* generally and Dr. O'Connor specifically. But even the most tormented figures in these plays never individually fulfill the role of the "uninhabited angel"[109] as O'Connor does. None of them singly possesses his "hypersensitive awareness."[110] Instead, Eliot's dramatic characters in the works he wrote after editing *Nightwood* achieve access to

mysticism through conventionally gendered pairings: Harry has his Eumenides, Henry Harcourt-Reilly his Celia Coplestone. Perhaps this shift indicates that Eliot found that Barnes's Matthew O'Connor fulfilled the imagined potential of the transgendered figure. And so he returned, in the latter portion of his own literary career, to exploring the genders separately, finishing out one last inquiry he had sustained throughout his writing, specifically the relationship between mysticism and the feminine, a relationship that integrates the physical, the sexual, and most importantly, the devotional.

Chapter Four

Revelations of Divine Visitation: Eliot and Julian of Norwich

"So I find words I never thought to speak
In streets I never thought I should revisit
When I left my body on a distant shore."
—Eliot, "Little Gidding"

"Without voice and without opening of lips,
these words were formed in my soul."
—Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*,
Revelation VIII

To find words upon leaving behind the body: this singular discovery, though it comes from the mouth of the compound familiar ghost of "Little Gidding," aptly describes the fulfillment of Eliot's literary efforts as I have thus far outlined them. So much attention in his creative work—in the poems of *Inventions of the March Hare*, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, and *Poems, 1920*—was devoted to destroying the body that so plagued him. So much frustration in the later work reflects a mounting awareness of the inadequacy of language, an awareness prefigured in Prufrock's claim "It is impossible to say just what I mean!" And yet, though no critic has yet argued that the compound familiar includes a woman within its multifaceted identity, the moment of discovery of which it seems to speak is a mystical one epitomized by the experience of the young Julian of Norwich. Her voice, of course, compounds "Little Gidding," cleaving

significantly to Eliot's own at the end of his poetic career. For in her prayerful desire for physical suffering and pain, Julian abandoned the comfort of her body and gained in return both vision and language that exceeded her human consciousness. By invoking Julian in the final lines of his last poem, then, Eliot codified his veneration for feminine Christian mysticism that was first engendered in his studies at Harvard. Thus he brought his intellectual work full circle, according to the unifying motif of *Four Quartets*. More importantly, however, Eliot's decision to so prominently feature the words of a female mystic among the last of his poetic utterances tips the end of his work back to his earliest efforts and forces a new consideration of the women who preceded her lying prone—women awaiting visions, mistaken for mere sexual vehicles. Reconsidered in the later light of Julian's physical suffering, surrender, and mystical vision, however, these women in Eliot's poetry demonstrate the poet's progression in understanding the female via an abiding interest in Christian mysticism that began when he was a student. According to this progress, the epileptic paves the way toward the ecstatic in the same way that the twittering women evolve into the silent. Just as Eliot indicated that "in my end is my beginning," so in his culminating poetic allusion to Julian can women who appear at the outset of his oeuvre be understood anew as genuine efforts on Eliot's part to probe the physical, social, and linguistic requirements of devotion so complete it could be rewarded with holy vision and extraordinary understanding.

Much work has already been done to probe the origins of Eliot's interest in mysticism, most of it particularly focused on establishing his philosophical and spiritual kinship with Julian, though she and Eliot represent two individuals divergent in gender, worldly experience, and historical era. Schuchard, Donoghue, and Brooker all cite Evelyn

Underhill's *Mysticism* as the seminal text that directed Eliot's attention to her, and they date his reading of the text to 1913–14.[1] Schuchard calls the fourteenth-century anchoress Eliot's "predecessor in prayer," not only for her total immersion in the contemplative life, but also for the fact that she was English.[2] Brooker describes that the poet's engagement with her "evolved and deepened, went through several stages."[3] She points in particular to the decade of Eliot's conversion, pointing out that his "engagement with Julian was continuous from the early 1930s," and reading Julian and her signature optimism as emblems of reassurance: "An awareness of evil had been at the center of his poetry, his politics, and his understanding of history from the beginning, but after his conversion in 1927, that awareness had to accommodate a newfound belief in the power and goodness of God."[4] Donoghue, however, sets Julian apart as an emblem of Eliot's penchant for Keatsian negative capability. In her discussion of *Four Quartets*, Helen Gardner first noted this tendency, though she did not connect it in any way with Julian.[5] Donoghue's categorization of Julian, however, reinforces Gardner's connection by demonstrating it through Eliot's interest in the mystic:

> When he knew himself best, [Eliot] acknowledged without fuss states of being for which there is no rational accounting. I don't think he sought mystical epiphanies or prayed for such privileges, but he revered the tradition—if it is a tradition—of Christian mysticism, and read its records without irony . . . Lady Juliana's visions were unquestionable.[6]

And yet even in Donald J. Childs's study *T. S. Eliot: Mystic, Son, and Lover*, Eliot's involvement with mystical thinking is marked by the bookends of a "turn-of-the-century study of the phenomenon as a philosophy student" and "his mid-century experience of it

as represented by *Four Quartets*."[7] Remarkably, none of these critics suggest Eliot's mystical interest, nor his specific connection to Julian, to be a thread running through his career as a whole, and she is never discussed in direct relationship to Eliot's plays. Even Brooker, whose work most fully probes the relationship between Eliot and Julian, contends that Eliot simply "returned to reading Julian" near the time of his conversion when "he was also circling and worrying."[8]

To fully understand the representation of women in Eliot's poetry and drama, however, the invocation of Julian's "all shall be well" at the close of "Little Gidding" must be recognized as a late bloom from an early seed, one that germinated during the long years in between. Just as the "East Coker" declaration "In my beginning is my end" answers the concern of the woman from "Portrait of a Lady," "(but our beginnings never know our ends!)," so Eliot's poetic and dramatic work benefits in this instance from a cyclical read through the lens of its terminus. Julian's presence and language at the end of "Little Gidding" evince Eliot's respect for and inquiry into her experience, which persisted throughout his writing career and personal journey to Christian devotion. Eliot's admiration for Julian forecloses once and for all the possibility that he harbored a categorical misogyny. As Brooker describes, Eliot's "direct quotation" allows Julian grammatical "pride of place, even above Dante"[9] at the end of "Little Gidding." But to make Julian's appearance in "Little Gidding" the sole exception to a misogynistic rule, as the extant scholarship has seemed to indicate, discounts her import. Instead, in this chapter, I propose that reading Eliot's poetry and drama backward[10] through her significant presence at the end of his writing career reveals the permutations of feminine mysticism to be a consistent motif yet unrecognized in Eliot's poetry. In exploring the

physical, social, and gender dynamics that would allow a woman like Julian of Norwich mystical access to the Absolute, Eliot once again wrestled with the limitations of his own gender. Just as he sought to annihilate his own body and its accompanying desires in order to seek self-knowledge in empathy with the feminine and the transgendered, so did Eliot undertake a career-long study of the possibility of mystical vision for women and men, not only in his poetry but also in his drama, most notably *The Family Reunion* and *The Cocktail Party*.

In order to establish this argument, I will first attempt to define mysticism in Eliot's historical context, with particular attention paid to the individual case of Julian of Norwich. Certainly she was but one in a much larger company of mentors from whom Eliot sought spiritual guidance, including male mystics Augustine of Hippo and John of the Cross, female mystic Theresa of Avila, and female martyrs such as Katherine, Agatha, and Lucy. The surrender of power and inherent eroticism endemic to divine visitation, however, problematizes feminine mystical vision while simultaneously elevating women's status as subjects. Thus, I will briefly acknowledge the feminist theoretical understanding of mysticism, using it to clarify how Eliot explored the ramifications of the female mystic via guises that have been critically misconstrued as compromising. Finally, through discussion of excerpts from Julian's *Revelations of Divine Love* and, to a lesser extent, *The Motherhood of God*, I will consider specific elements of her vision and theodicy that would have appealed to Eliot, especially those that align directly with his own desire for the way of contemplation.

Returning to the beginning from the end, then, the chapter will next consider female figures from poems from as early as *Inventions of the March Hare* through

Poems, 1920. In doing so, and throughout this chapter, I will consciously return to poems, female figures, and even specific lines from Eliot's oeuvre that I have already discussed in previous chapters, but with a different purpose. As established in my introduction, I believe that Eliot's poems operate, as Harry describes in *The Family Reunion*, on "several planes at once," among them a mystical one. One of Eliot's driving questions was how the common world and its ordinary occupants integrated with the divine one, and he puzzled particularly over intercessory figures and moments when the two collide. His creative work, then, plays frequently on both levels at the same time, each plane informing and completing the other. In Eliot's early poems, I will focus specifically on female figures that lie recumbent, suggestive of ecstasy absent spirituality. In such a pose, these women have been for too long understood as solely sexual despite the fact that both Theresa and Julian likewise lay prone while receiving their visions. Early poems including "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "Preludes," additionally suggest the possibility of imagined vision becoming apparent, but in later works, Eliot explored mysticism by dividing its components so as to examine them empirically. If the mystical experience is one of leaving the body "on a distant shore," Eliot began his study of it by first occupying that shore and probing what remains of the recumbent physical self.

Eliot next ventured to understand the relationship between femininity and mysticism by turning from the recumbent to the upright through the character of Doris in "Sweeney Erect." This effort returns the recumbent waiting women to the world in which they must socially interact. These women fall into two categories in Eliot: the occult medium, against whom the poet often levels incisive criticism, and the upright woman in

society. Incredibly, Doris functions as a prototype that stretches across both ends of the spectrum. Agatha of *The Family Reunion* and Celia of *The Cocktail Party* likewise represent notable characters within this discussion, as their existence within the verse play requires that they have a voice with which to testify to the suffering and endurance concomitant with mystical access. Analysis of them as well as of Harry Monchensey—the singular male visionary among so many women—in the context of the other upright female characters reveals the import of genre on Eliot's burgeoning understanding, suggesting that his movement from poetry to drama in the 1930s was to some extent rooted in his need to force women elected for mystical visitation into social interaction—with families, husbands, lovers, and in the rare case of Celia, with the vicious world at large.

Rereading these female figures as signifiers along Eliot's path toward comprehending the gender and political dynamics of feminist Christian mysticism returns this chapter to its beginnings in Julian. Fully sublimated to the will of God, Julian represented for Eliot the human achievement of the spiritual ideal, an achievement to which she had exclusive access through what Eliot understood as an inherently feminine capacity for suffering and surrender, both of which ushered her toward ecstatic union with Christ. While Eliot may have first learned of her and other mystics by reading Underhill at Harvard, he persisted in understanding the predicament that became her privilege through the whole of his literary career. Only by using his writing to first discard her body "on a distant shore" and then subject it to both silent and verbal exploration of the social world could he then liberate Julian in his writings to an existence comprised solely of words, words so optimistic that he himself might have "never

thought to speak" them. The "All shall be well" of "Little Gidding" originated in Christ, the ultimate figure of suffering and surrender, flowed through Julian as mystic, and was finally reiterated by Eliot as artist. Unlike Brooker and others who argue that this invocation of Julian marks not only a conversion-inspired return to an early student interest but also a "reexamination of his own moorings"[11] at the end of his career, I hope to demonstrate in this chapter that Julian's mystical example and resulting theological teachings so captivated Eliot's intellect that traces of her lie hidden throughout his literary oeuvre. When he brought her back to the very surface of his writing in "Little Gidding," he revealed the moorings that had been guiding his literary exploration of spirituality all along.

"A sceptic with a taste for mysticism"

In Donald Childs's study *T. S. Eliot: Mystic, Son, and Lover* (1997), the above line from Eliot's short story "Eeldrop and Appleplex" (1917) establishes and grounds the argument. In Childs's opinion, "there is neither a briefer nor a more accurate way of describing Eliot's own religious and philosophical point of view—whether in 1917 or in the 1940s when he contemplated his most 'mystical' poem."[12] Simultaneously, Childs turns a skeptical eye to the term mysticism, rightly citing Caroline Spurgeon's insight that "it has become the first duty of those who use it to explain what they mean by it."[13] In this chapter, I will utilize Eliot's denotation of the term as he explained it both in personal correspondence and public lecture, bisecting the term according to its intellectual and emotional properties. In an August 1929 letter to Paul Elmer More, Eliot denounced both extremes: "I don't like either the purely intellectual Christian or the purely emotional Christian—both forms of snobism."[14] Schuchard cites the March 1930 BBC broadcast

that became Eliot's essay "A Survey of Early 17th-Century Verse" for its emphasis of the same delineation: Eliot notes "a decline in the quality of mysticism—from the 'intellectual and international' mysticism of the Victorines to the 'sensual and erotic' mysticism of the Spanish mystics."[15] In spite of Eliot being certain of the inferiority of the latter type, however, Schuchard includes a gloss from the essay "Religion without Humanism," published the same year. In it, Eliot first reiterates the crucial distinction between the two types of mysticism—"for the modern world the word means some spattering indulgence of emotion, instead of the most terrible concentration and askesis."[16] Surprisingly then, in the same breath, Eliot compliments the verity of those who practice each type, explaining that "it takes perhaps a lifetime merely to realize that men like the forest sages, and the desert sages, and finally the Victorines and John of the Cross and (in his fashion) Ignatius really *mean what they say*. Only those have the right to talk of discipline who have looked into the Abyss."[17] With that last statement, Eliot vested himself with the requisite authority, implying that he had both earned the realization of a lifetime and peered into the eternal. Not quite calling himself a mystic, Eliot had begun to codify mysticism as a devotional state only comprehensible to those who themselves adhered to its contemplative discipline.

In the 1933 Turnbull lectures, Eliot called contemplation "probably the most ecstatic state possible,"[18] thus locating in the full engagement of the mind the possibility of divorcing soul from body in rapture. In so doing, he knowingly or unknowingly aligned himself with Julian, for in Revelation XIX, she elevates contemplation over prayer as a means to vision: "Thus prayer brings about harmony between God and the soul; and when a soul is finally at rest with God it does not need to pray actively, but can

reverently contemplate what is shown."[19] Through the lens of Julian, then, both mysticism itself and the understanding of it as a concept are exclusively available to minds fully engaged and fully at rest. Such a paradox suggests divine mystery and includes the promise of vision, that which, as Julian describes, "is shown." Accordingly, in this chapter, then, I understand mysticism to entail a complete surrender to contemplation through which elect individuals can receive divine visionary access.[20] As explained earlier, Eliot read and drew inspiration from mystics male and female. *The Waste Land*'s "cauldron of unholy loves" is verbatim Augustine; the epigram of *Sweeney Agonistes* cites John of the Cross. But the particular requirement of surrender endemic to mysticism as Eliot understood it presents itself most aptly through the figure of the woman in his poetry and drama. Time and again Eliot obsesses over that which allows and blocks vision. Most often, his men come up blind, but his women realize a visionary access that they then either pervert or redeem.

The subjection inherent to mysticism aligns with the other-ness that Eliot prized about femininity. Childs lingers in his introduction on Luce Irigaray's definition of mysticism as paradoxically elevating feminine subjection. Citing *The Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985), Childs quotes Irigaray as defining mystical experience as "the only place in the history of the West in which woman speaks and acts so publicly."[21] He goes on to further cite Toril Moi explaining that Irigaray understood that woman's "utter abjection before the divine . . . paradoxically opens up a space where her own pleasure can unfold."[22] In equating the need to be "poorest in science and most ignorant" with the opportunity to be "richest in revelations," Irigaray defines mysticism as the domain of the feminine. Eliot anticipated and enacted Irigaray's perspective in his poetry and drama

long before she articulated it. Men are not completely excluded from mystical access, as Eliot's admiration for Augustine, John of the Cross, and others demonstrates, but Eliot seems to have understood the male pathway, at least his own pathway, to be far more pernicious than that available to women. In the same letter to More in which he distinguished between intellectual and emotional Christianity, Eliot complained of not only the complexity of his spiritual journey but also the burden of its misinterpretation:

> I acknowledge the difficulty of a positive Christianity nowadays; and I can only say that the dangers pointed out, and my own weaknesses, have been apparent to me long before my critics noticed them. But it [is] rather trying to be supposed to have settled oneself in an easy chair, when one has just begun a long journey afoot.[23]

Eliot's "long journey afoot" never afforded him vision, but I believe that he engineered the entirety of his creative writing as an attempt to understand such access. In anticipation of Irigaray, he admired women for their propensity for divine suffering and surrender, and he wrote of masculinity as its dialectical opposite, littered with obstacles and offering only glimpses into a transcendent Absolute. Childs does cite that Irigaray allowed for "a poststructurally 'healthy' version of mysticism . . . also . . . accessible to men who have somehow come to appreciate within phallocentric discourse some part of the marginalization that defines the 'feminine'," [24] an allowance that likewise seems apt for Eliot himself. Just as my second chapter argues that Eliot created female characters who speak in a multiplicity of ways outside of phallocentric language, I believe here that Eliot's disdain for the physical and empathy with the feminine drove him to imagine the feminine as encompassing the privilege of mystical access of which he must have been

jealous.

At the beginning and at the end of Eliot's investigation of feminine Christian mysticism stands Julian, whose writings collected in *Revelations of Divine Love* (first set down in 1373) and *The Motherhood of God* convey the knowledge she obtained as a result of personal suffering and illness. Editor Frances Beer explains: "Earlier in her life she had asked God for three gifts: a closer experience of the Passion; a physical illness; and three 'wounds'—'the wound of contrition, the wound of compassion, and the wound of earnest longing for God' . . . the immediate experience began with the onset of a near-fatal illness for which she had previously prayed."[25] In the sixteen revelations Julian transcribed, she not only described Christ's Passion and death, to which she bore witness in body and sight, but also her own theological understanding as it evolved during and following her trauma. Childs quotes Eliot's notes on Underhill's characterization of "3 main types of visions & voices 1. intellectual, 2. distinct, but recognized as interior, 3. Hallucination."[26] Accordingly then, Julian's description that "The blessed teaching of our lord was shown me in three ways . . . by bodily sight, by words formed in my understanding, and by ghostly sight"[27] would have not only confirmed the lessons of Eliot's introduction to mysticism but also reestablished them within the confines of body and mind. For as clearly as Julian experienced ecstatic contemplation, her mystical experience is rife with the awareness of physical suffering and the proximity of inevitable death.

So physically broken at one point that she reports her mother beginning to mourn at her bedside,[28] Julian's sheer endurance demonstrates her belief in the virtue of suffering, a virtue Eliot likewise held dear. Brooker describes "Julian's basic question" as

"what good can come from suffering?,"[29] and indeed, one of the most rewarding effects of reading *Revelations of Divine Love* is discovering an explicit answer to this question. Julian reports that in beseeching God that she might share the pain of Christ's Passion: "my suffering seemed to surpass any bodily experience, it seemed I had little understood what I had asked for."[30] Following her ecstatic trial, however, Julian apprehends the divine promise that answers her inquiry:

> Then to encourage me to endure and be patient, God said: 'Suddenly you will be taken from all your pain and anxiety, from all your sorrow. You will ascend, and have me as your reward, and be filled with joy and bliss; and you will feel neither pain, nor sickness; neither sorrow, nor dissatisfaction—only endless joy and bliss. Why should it grieve you to suffer a while, since it is my will and my worship?[31]

Physical suffering as God's will, answered with hope of ascension and divine union, recalls Eliot's conviction that "nothing could be too ascetic, too violent" for his own devotional practice.[32] The larger implications of Julian's teachings, however, diverge widely from those typically associated with Eliot, making her a remarkable choice of spiritual mentor. In the introduction to her edition of *Revelations*, Beer underscores Julian's import as a feminist not only for the fact that "despite the misogynist climate of her time, she found the courage to . . . articulate even the most difficult of the revelations—to act as God's intermediary,"[33] but also for her outspoken flouting of patriarchal Christian tradition. Julian's rejection of orthodoxy takes many forms, most notably *The Motherhood of God,* in which she establishes a comprehensive view of God almighty as father, Christ as self-sacrificing and nurturing mother, and self as "beloved wife and fair maiden."[34] This feminist strain within Julian further complicates Eliot's

relationship to her. While I do not claim that he embraced wholly all of her teachings, I do believe that his poetic interest in vision and its counterfeits as well as woman's troubled intersection with both language and society represent his literary efforts to understand the extent of Julian's unique, feminine paradigm of ecstatic surrender. By the close of "Little Gidding," when Eliot invoked her reassuring words, it is clear that as a poet and believer, he had realized and accepted his own male exclusion from Julian's unquestioning understanding, which had been made possible only by her spousal union with God.

Lying in Wait: Recumbent Women and Hints of Vision

Eliot's early poetry is haunted by two recurrent motifs: the recumbent woman and the promise of vision. Gordon has rooted her study of Eliot in the poem "Silence," reading it autobiographically as a glimpse of the Absolute that forever altered his worldview.[35] Critics including Pinkney, Palmer, Rachel Potter, and others similarly focus their perspectives on the suggestively posed women of the early poetry, using them as categorical support for claims of the poet's misogyny. But a broader perspective that considers recumbency not as solely representative of sexual subjection but as a physical representation of willing surrender linked to the possibility of mystical vision allows for these two impulses within the early poetry to be understood anew as inextricably rooted in one search. Seen in this light, recumbent female figures in poems including "Suppressed Complex," "Preludes," and "Sweeney Erect" become physical prototypes for Julian, their poses preparing them for the possibility of vision, which Eliot privileges in these poems and others as a basic human yearning, always hovering just slightly out of reach.

Hints of vision pervade the early poetry, though its elusive nature pertains also to its linguistics. Vision, imagination, memory, and nervous projection all function as modes through which Eliot's characters hearken after the transcendent. When J. Alfred Prufrock, confronting his own incoherence, ventures the comparison that it is "as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen," I understand the simile as a desperate cry for a vision to confirm, if not assuage, his solitary condition. Echoes of the famous line likewise exist in poems Eliot wrote prior to and following "Prufrock." In "Mandarins 4" (1910), the speaker comments on "How very few there are, I think/Who see their outlines on the screen,"[36] replacing biological electricity with silhouette. Nerves too recur in relationship to vision in "Easter: Sensations of April" (1910) wherein false vision, referred to as "impressions" generated by the onset of spring, "Irritate[s] the imagination/Or the nerves."[37] Remarkably, in his note on the poem in *Inventions of the March Hare*, Ricks invokes Arthur Symons saying of the artist Gerard de Nerval: "Every artist lives a double life, in which he is for the most part conscious of the illusions of the imagination. He is conscious also of the illusions of the nerves, which he shares with every man of imaginative mind."[38] Ricks's gloss connecting vision with the imagination of the artist aligns directly with a passage from Underhill's *Mysticism* that Eliot copied into his notes as a student and that Brooker uses as evidence for his interest in Julian, for "Underhill praises Julian not only as the crown of English mysticism but as a powerful artist."[39] Thus in these early poems, and perhaps most explicitly in "Prufrock," Eliot is probing the artistic capacity of nervous stimulation to produce vision. His effort even resurfaces in *The Waste Land*, in "A Game of Chess," when the Cleopatra figure in her boudoir, whose hair "Spread out in fiery points/Glowed into words, then would be

savagely still," serves as a precedent for the anxious wife's complaint: "'My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.'" In this late instance, extraordinary apparition lingers close to the stimulated nerves, but the link between them exists as mere negative space. It seems that, as in "Mandarins 4," only "very few" achieve visions that are neurologically induced, and when they do, said visions offer little respite from the mundane. And yet the attraction of their promise remains.

Additional references to vision within the early poetry illustrate Eliot's linguistic grasping after its essence as well as his personal grappling with its reliability. The illusory, mirrored interior of "Interlude in a Bar" (1911) produces questionable reflections: "Across the floors that soak/The dregs from broken glass/The walls fling back the scattered streams/Of life that seems/Visionary, and yet hard."[40] In "First Debate between the Body and Soul" (1910), the poet progressively denigrates the capacity of human perception, allowing "The withered leaves/Of our sensations—" to serve as a refrain for the "Masturbations," "Poor Relations," and finally, "Defecations" of the imagination.[41] Finally, in "Oh little voices of the throats of men" (1914), the male third party who speaks in the third stanza answers the questions "For what could be more real than sweat and dust and sun?/And what more sure than night and death and sleep?" with "Appearances appearances," going on to describe them in paradox—as "nowise real; unreal, and yet true;/Untrue, yet real;—of what are you afraid?" Together, these early poems attest to the poet's interest in the indefinable essence of vision. While he never comes close to fully endorsing the reality or verity of vision, Eliot cannot seem to completely relinquish it either. Significantly, no true vision appears in any of these poems. "Interlude in a Bar" muses on reflections, "First Debate" on memory,[42] and "Oh

little voices" ends with the dancing, leaping shadows of lilacs offering only the slightest promise of something more transcendent, though, as the poem ends, "You had not known whether they laughed or wept."

Underhill's *Mysticism* devotes an entire chapter to "Voices and Visions" as the expected phenomena attending mystical experience, warning against "the danger of attributing too much importance to [either] . . . or accepting them at their face value as messages from God."[43] She stops short of excluding either one, however, granting that "the messengers of the invisible world knock persistently at the doors of the senses: and not only at those which we refer to hearing and to sight."[44] In keeping with Underhill's teaching, then, Eliot too investigates the visual manifestation of mystical experience, but his more provocative probing of the subject occurs when he turns his focus away from the expected sight and toward the seer. Whether provoked by nerves or understood as illusion or memory, these early attempts to capture vision in poetry pair well with Eliot's simultaneous arrangement of the visionary body of woman, anxious and waiting. In shifting his focus, Eliot discovered a subject more apt for creative exploration, for in anticipating transcendent visitation, the mystic still exists in the physical realm, within a body preparing for and a spirit open to surrender.

Two women lie in wait in Eliot's early poetry, their predicaments and immediate environments nearly identical, yet one has come to supplant the other by virtue of her poem's more canonical status. Though it was not published until 1917, the third section of "Preludes" (1910) preceded "Suppressed Complex" (c. 1914–15). The latter poem, however, illustrates two modes of mystical waiting, the first of which is still and empty, the mind at rest in anticipation: "She lay very still in bed with stubborn eyes/Holding her

breath lest she begin to think."[45] The line recalls a portion of Underhill's explanation of mysticism as "an undifferentiated act of the whole consciousness,"[46] but the intensity of the woman's concentration, tied as is to her human need for breath, is only temporary. In the poem's second stanza, she is instead fitful and asleep: "She stirred in her sleep and clutched the blanket with her fingers/She was very pale and breathed hard." The anxiety of this second mode may point to an irritation of her nerves, for what separates the two is the appearance of the poem's first-person, ephemeral speaker, "I was a shadow upright in the corner/Dancing joyously in the firelight." Ricks glosses the point by referring to Crawford and Bradley on the possibility of the spirit divorcing itself from the body, in this case, the shadow vacating the female corpus. In the context of "Oh little voices of the throats of men," however, the dancing shadow may be understood as linguistic shorthand meant to evoke uncertain vision. The third section of "Preludes" offers yet another point of comparison, as in it, Eliot explores not only the physical pose of the mystic but imagines her vision. He approaches her more directly, for she is addressed as "you" and thus not objectified as a third party:

> You tossed a blanket from the bed,
> You lay upon your back, and waited;
> You dozed, and watched the night revealing
> The thousand sordid images
> Of which your soul was constituted;
> They flickered against the ceiling.

Bed, blanket, and recumbent woman are thus common to both poems. Circumscribed by their surroundings, however, these are not merely women in closed rooms as Palmer and

others have misconstrued them,[47] but willing participants in a process that requires both patience and the relinquishment of the external world. The woman of "Preludes," for example, substitutes an experience of the actual street with indirect apprehension of "the light [that] crept up between the shutters" and "the sparrows in the gutters," as well as "such a vision of the street/As the street hardly understands."[48] In her room, as in the room of "Suppressed Complex," she occupies a space similar to that of Julian the anchoress. In her passivity, she foreshadows the visionary women of Eliot's much later plays, most notably the chorus of women in *Murder in the Cathedral*, for whom "there is no action,/But only to wait and to witness," and Agatha and Mary of *The Family Reunion*, whom Agatha describes as "only watchers and waiters: not the easiest rôle." Significantly, in this comparison only women exhibit the endurance required by such an endeavor; Edward of *The Cocktail Party* most aptly characterizes his own male intolerance for it: "Wait!/But waiting is the one thing impossible./Besides, don't you see that it makes me ridiculous?"

But waiting and watching are inherent aspects of the woman's occupation in "Preludes," and that which she apprehends flickers on the ceiling like the emerging technology of the motion picture. The vision available to her is in fact reflective of her, and thus is reminiscent of that which is kept from Prufrock. He desires a projection of his own nerves as a complement to his inarticulacy while she confronts the "sordid images" of her own mortal soul. In light of Julian's endorsement of contemplation as the soul at rest, the woman of "Preludes" can be understood as far from such a contemplative bearing. Instead, her vision most closely corresponds to that described as the last of the "gifts reserved for age" by the compound familiar ghost of "Little Gidding": "the

rending pain of re-enactment/Of all that you have done, and been; the shame/Of motives late revealed, and the awareness/Of things ill done and done to others' harm/Which once you took for exercise of virtue." In confronting these human shortcomings, then, the woman of "Preludes" endures her own separation from the Absolute. The poem, however, also includes a secondary vision—"such a vision of the street/As the street hardly understands"—that recalls the momentary stillness to which Eliot testified in "Silence." But the terrifying peace of "Silence" is fleeting and unrepeatable; in contrast, the recumbent woman of "Preludes" Part III assumes solitude and subjectivity in order to invite a similar vision. In his notes to "The Burial of the Dead," Eliot paid homage to Baudelaire's description of the "Unreal City, city full of dreams,/Where the spectre in plain sight accosts the passerby," but what of the days and years during which the spectre remains absent? Through the watching, waiting women, I propose that Eliot explored the gendered and physical parameters required to initiate divine visitation. Even at the end of his poetic career, he paid homage once again to the image of the recumbent visionary woman, alluding in "The Dry Salvages" to the tolling bell as "older/Than time counted by anxious worried women/Lying awake, calculating the future,/Trying to unweave, unwind, unravel/And piece together the past and the future/Between midnight and dawn."[49]

The women of "Suppressed Complex" and "Preludes," though both lying in bed, remain alone. Their prone status is representative of either restlessness or fatigue rather than sexual availability. Later recumbent women, most notably the "epileptic on the bed" from "Sweeney Erect," as well as the three Thames daughters of *The Waste Land*, blur this distinction as the circumstances of their reclining are instead explicitly sexual. This

overlay of sexuality marks a development in Eliot's exploration of the physical mode of mystical devotion. He began to trouble the concept of ecstasy with the deception of lust. In *The Savage and the City*, Crawford underlines Eliot's interest in the relationship between the two, explaining that Eliot "was interested in Murisier's connections between illness and vision, reading Janet on hallucination and hysteria, and was investigating religio-sexual frenzy."[50] The Sweeney poems as a whole probe the banal persistence of the sordid and the sexual, but Eliot's investigation of lust has its roots in his earliest poetry. "Opera" (1909) recounts the passion of Tristan and Isolde as demonstrating "love torturing itself/To emotion for all there is in it,/Writhing in and out/Contorted in paroxysms,/Flinging itself at the last/Limits of self-expression."[51] The body thus "contorted" in love would certainly resemble that of "The epileptic on the bed [who]/Curves backward, clutching at her sides" and must also be reconsidered in light of the bodies of women reclining alone in "Suppressed Complex" and "Preludes." Brooker has begun to forge the connection, making the point in "Mimetic Desire and the Return to Origins in *The Waste Land*" that "the association between sexuality and violence is firmly rooted in religion, where the two meet in agricultural/fertility rituals."[52] But for all of her interest in the import of Julian in the later poems, Brooker does not make the connection between Eliot's female bodies contorted in lust and those trembling in wait. Pinkney too approaches the connection, commenting on "Sweeney Erect" thus: "By making the woman an epileptic, the terrific violence it evokes becomes a biological visitation divorced from human agency."[53] While I disagree with Pinkney's literal interpretation of the descriptor "epileptic," I appreciate his use of the word "visitation." What the woman's paroxysms in "Sweeney Erect" reveal is the power of an outside

force—laughter, arousal, emotion, or neurological disorder—to claim and wrack the body. In the case of this poem in particular, the woman's seizure exists as a contrast to the recumbent women of Eliot's earlier poems, for this rapture is confined to the brothel. And yet there remains something compelling about the proximity of one prone female body to the other, implying that Eliot may have understood not only gender but also sexuality as essential for mystical union.

In realizing this, Eliot began to establish a distinction of gender in his own imagining of human access to visionary spirituality. In the early poetry, there are also recumbent male figures. In "Prufrock's Pervigilium," the title character attests to an experience nearly identical to those I have discussed in "Suppressed Complex" and "Preludes"—with one significant difference. Prufrock describes it:

> And when the midnight turned and writhed in fever
> I tossed the blankets back, to watch the darkness
> Crawling among the papers on the table
> It leapt to the floor and made a sudden hiss
> And darted stealthily across the wall
> Flattened itself upon the ceiling overhead
> Stretched out its tentacles, prepared to leap[54]

In this instance, the darkness first constitutes the vision and then displays animalistic, octopusian traits. In the light of the next morning's dawn, Prufrock refers back to this vision as his "Madness," which he hears "singing, sitting on the kerbstone." No such denigration of the woman's vision occurs in "Preludes," though her immediate environment is nearly identical. Of course, the above scene (and all of the "Pervigilium")

was excised from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" when it was published. Vestiges of the passage's tentacles remain only in the "ragged claws" to which Prufrock resigns himself in the very next stanza. Male vision, at least in the case of Prufrock, collapses into an overwhelming sense of self-loathing. But much later in Eliot's oeuvre, the nightmarish vision of the recumbent male recurs:

> When you're alone in the middle of the night and you wake in a sweat and a hell of a fright
>
> When you're alone in the middle of the bed and you wake like someone hit you in the head
>
> You've had a cream of a nightmare dream and you've got the hoo-ha's coming to you.
>
> Hoo hoo hoo

Four men—Wauchope, Horsfall, Klipstein, and Krumpacker—speak these lines in unison as a close to Eliot's unfinished verse play "Sweeney Agonistes." The plural "you" that is their subject implies the testimony to exceed its speakers. What they speak of is a collective nightmare. But the relative insignificance, as well as the common masculinity, of the characters who describe the hoo-ha's suggests that their appearance is antithetical to mystical vision. The men speak of the hoo-ha's coming upon them while asleep and unawares ("you wake like someone hit you in the head"), not following a period of restless waiting. Like the octopus of the "Pervigilium," the hoo-ha's are explicitly menacing, guided by Orestes's admission that serves as the play's epigram: "You don't see them, you don't—but *I* see them; they are hunting me down, I must move on." Schuchard makes the point in *Eliot's Dark Angel* that it is the second

epigraph, Saint John of the Cross's "Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created beings," that provides a possible escape from such pursuit.[55] I contend that Eliot found John singular because, in completely divesting himself, John must have been liberated too from the limitations of gender on the path to mystical union. But Eliot was not John, and so, while honoring John's teaching of the *via negativa*, the poet continued to use his own creative power to explore mystical access through the figure of the female.

Padding on Broad Feet

Immediately following the backward convulsions of the "epileptic on the bed" in "Sweeney Erect," Eliot invokes the other women standing in the hallway, twittering in condescension of their associate. Given the poem's setting, their open disgrace at her behavior is both ironic and humorous, although it does mark out her rapture as somewhat extraordinary. At the beginning of the poem's last stanza, though, Eliot turns his attention back to the epileptic, naming her for the first time as she walks erect among her antagonizers. Freshly bathed and "towelled," Doris "enters padding on broad feet" and carries sexual restoratives, presumably back to the room where Sweeney awaits.[56] She is thus the first recumbent woman in Eliot's poetry to herself rise from the sheets and walk among her peers. Quite literally through Eliot's use of the word "Enters," Doris commands the short theatrical scene that follows, processing upright and carrying the libations appropriate for renewing her vocation. In so doing, as Pinkney points out and Palmer discounts, she can be imagined as a perverse kind of priestess figure.[57] Though I take issue with Pinkney's central thesis, I find evidence to reinforce his reading of Doris in Eliot's later poem "Coriolan": "Now they go up to the temple. Then the sacrifice./Now

come the virgins bearing urns."[58] If in Doris's epileptic rapture, Eliot explored physical visitation absent spirituality, then it follows that her re-entrance later in the poem should likewise confuse the two realms. Of course, even this entrance is not Doris's last, for she emerges finally as a full character in *Sweeney Agonistes*, wherein is revealed her "touch with the cards." In advance of this last incarnation, however, Doris, walking on her "broad feet" is the first of the women through whom Eliot imagined the proximity of the mystic to the mundane. Childs points out Underhill's explanation that: "Strange and far away though they [mystics] seem, they are not cut off from us by some impassable abyss. They belong to us. They are our brethren."[59] In imagining women as not only open to spiritual and sexual abandon in their beds but also as individuals who rise and interact, Eliot enacted Underhill's theme so as to ground mystical women in the social world to which we all belong.

Socially engaged and upright women populate the whole of Eliot's poetry. Even at the outset of "A Cooking Egg," which immediately followed "Sweeney Erect" in *Poems, 1920*, Pipit is defined by her posture: "Pipit sate upright in her chair."[60] Those who demonstrate the capacity for extraordinary understanding, however, do so at opposing ends of what might be understood as a spiritual spectrum. At one end are the occultists, most of whom have commercialized their spiritual life, whatever its verity. At the other stand intercessors, women for whom devotional access lends them the incredible power to teach and to guide. Eliot would have understood Julian as the epitome of the second type, as her writings guided his own spiritual journey. Significantly, she herself deflected this role, instructing in Revelation VI: "God forbid that you should take me for a teacher. Such is not my intention and never has been. I am a

woman, ignorant, weak and frail, but I know what I am saying: I have been shown it by the sovereign teacher."[61] Thus she restores her wisdom to its divine origin, revealing selfless intercession as integral to her very nature. It is to be expected, though, that Eliot's dialectical mind would not venture to understand her without her antithesis. Thus, his imagined occultist most certainly informs his intercessor. Childs too understands that Eliot explores variations on mysticism, but he interprets them as structured according to hierarchy rather than across a linear spectrum.[62] In limiting his reading of figures such as Madame Sosostris, Madame Blavatsky, and others to "Eliot's regular denigration of the occult,"[63] Childs remains blind to the way in which these female figures paved the way for the Lady of "Ash-Wednesday" and the remarkable Agatha and Celia of Eliot's dramas.

It is no coincidence that the first two occultists in Eliot's poetic procession are addressed as "Madame," the pun of their title knitting them to Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Porter. Like the madams, Madame Blavatsky of "A Cooking Egg" and Madame Sosostris of "The Burial of the Dead" garner capital gain on the proclivities of their sex. In the first example, the condescending tone of "A Cooking Egg," which rhymes "Sir Philip Sidney" with "kidney" and "Sir Alfred Mond" with "Exchequer Bond," sets up Madame Blavatsky, the nineteenth-century spiritualist who founded the Theosophical Society, as a charlatan tenant of a popularly conceived Heaven. Madame Sosostris of *The Waste Land* also demonstrates the popular demand for what Palmer calls "the religious borderlands, such as Tarot cards, horoscopes, and fortune-telling."[64] Though Eliot's presentation of her, "known to be the wisest woman in Europe,/With a wicked pack of cards," is laced with skeptical irony, her voice resounds. Madame Sosostris's interpretation of the Tarot

stretches over fourteen lines of *The Waste Land* and echoes through to its last section. Her premonitions largely concern vision itself. The eyes of the "drowned Phoenician Sailor" have been replaced by blind pearls, likening him to Gerontion and the male companion of the hyacinth girl, both of whom suffer when their eyes fail them in confrontation. Madame Sosostris's succeeding card, "Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks," likewise alludes to the visual organ. Palmer explains that "Belladonna, meaning 'a beautiful lady' in Italian, is a flower from which a certain dangerous drug is extracted; it was used by women to enlarge the pupil of the eye."[65] Palmer reads such enlargement as reinforcing the blindness of the Phoenician sailor, but she is incorrect to liken it to the "petrified" status of his pearls. With their enlarged pupils, the Belladonna's eyes may see less of the mundane physical environment before them, but they likewise underscore the expanded capacity of feminine vision. In this way, even while Eliot populated his poetry with occult women "dish[ing] out a debased and secondhand form of spiritual knowledge,"[66] as Potter describes it, he reinforced his association of masculinity with blindness and femininity with unnatural sight.

In the spirit of Madame Sosostris, Doris of "Sweeney Erect" reappears in "Sweeney Agonistes" endowed with a "touch with the cards." Doris's companion Dusty compliments this talent, but Doris herself admits "You've got to *think* when you read the cards,/It's not a thing that anyone can do." Both women are horrified by the appearance of the two of spades, which they immediately recognize as "THE COFFIN," thereby revealing not only their participation in card-reading but also their genuine emotional investment in it. Therefore, when Sweeney later reduces life to the "brass tacks" of "Birth, and copulation, and death," Doris's complaint—"I'd be bored."—reveals the

spiritual yearning that is inherent to her character. Though her inclination is toward the occult rather than the devotional, Doris distinguishes herself from Sweeney and his compatriots by at least seeking vision beyond the ordinary. Incredibly, Pinkney uses this comment to link her with Eliot's most well-known female intercessor: "'I'd be bored,' she complains, or, insisting on her role as missionary rather than stew, 'I'll convert you,' (and so she will, not in this play but in 'Ash-Wednesday')."[67] Pinkney's connection disturbs the role of the silent Lady in the later poem, but more importantly, it reveals the border between the self-serving pull of the occult and the sublimation necessary for devotion to be both thin and permeable. Even through to "The Dry Salvages," Eliot catalogues the many forms of occult access:

> To communicate with Mars, converse with spirits,
> To report the behavior of the sea monster,
> Describe the horoscope, haruspicate or scry,
> Observe disease in signatures, evoke
> Biography from the wrinkles of the palm
> And tragedy from fingers; release omens
> By sortilege, or tea leaves, riddle the inevitable
> With playing cards, fiddle with pentagrams
> Or barbituric acids, or dissect
> The recurrent image into pre-conscious terrors—
> To explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams; all these are usual
> Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press:

Though in the end, Eliot casts off the previous eleven lines as empty "pastimes and drugs," the detail with which he specifies the practices of mediums, soothsayers, fortune-tellers, and astrologers reveals the depth of his curiosity and lends gravity to his earlier female mediums. For Tiresias and the Sibyl, classical investigators into "time not our time," reside among the modern seers Blavatsky, Sosostris, and Doris. Eliot's catalogue underlines the perpetual force of natural human inquiry that fuels the occult industry; the effect legitimizes its practitioners.

By delineating the opposing ends of a spectrum of women with extraordinary access, I do not mean to accuse Eliot of essentializing all women into two narrow categories. Certainly women unburdened of Julian's mantle populate the poetry, for Eliot's profound sense of selective election extended to his understanding of mysticism. Just as Julian herself assumed a passive role in order to experience the pain and vision of the Passion—"all this blessed teaching of our lord God was shown me in three ways"—so too are some women marked out for divine access while others live, breathe, and interact among men, free of the weight of mystical possibility. Moreover, particularly in Eliot's plays, some characters understand and articulate the distinction. In *The Family Reunion*, the intercessor Agatha explains to Mary that the two of them, as well as Harry, may "very likely meet again/In our wanderings in the neutral territory/Between two worlds." The play as a whole suggests that the phrase refers to Harry's and Agatha's select potential to negotiate all three territories—the "two worlds" to which Agatha alludes and the neutral zone to which Mary is limited. At the end of *Murder in the Cathedral,* the chorus of women begin to further illuminate the distinction. Referring to themselves as "type of the common man/Of the men and women who shut the door and

sit by the fire," they explain their fears of "the blessing of God, the loneliness of the night of God, the surrender required, the deprivation inflicted." Answering them, the chorus of *The Family Reunion*, comprised of Harry's aunts Ivy and Violet and uncles Gerald and Charles, claim that "the circle of our understanding/Is a very restricted area," not equipped to welcome the transcendent unexpected:

> We do not like to look out of the same window, and see quite a different landscape.
> We do not like to climb a stair, and find that it takes us down.
> We do not like to walk out of a door, and find ourselves back in the same room.
> We do not like the maze in the garden, because it too closely resembles the maze in the brain.
> We do not like what happens when we are awake, because it too closely resembles what happens when we are asleep.
> We understand the ordinary business of living,
> We know how to work the machine,
> We can usually avoid accidents,
> We are insured against fire,
> Against larceny and illness,
> Against defective plumbing,
> But not against the act of God.

The kind of existence to which both choruses testify takes comfort in the truths of the physical world rather than the paradoxes of the metaphysical. In both plays, the chorus serves as witness alongside the audience.

Violet's character in particular expresses the bewilderment of her audience, bluntly exclaiming "I do not understand/A single thing that's happened," a sentiment that Charles immediately ratifies with his own. Becket answers the women in *Murder* with a consolation that could extend to Violet and Charles as well: "Human kind cannot bear very much reality." Indeed Eliot must have felt compelled to extend this sentiment beyond the play, as he reiterated the line via the supernatural voice of the bird in "Burnt Norton." As demonstrated in the plays, then, men and women alike inhabit the "neutral territory" that Eliot distinguished as earthly but not reality. And yet, in the case of the Chorus women of Canterbury, there remains a hint of extraordinary sensibility exclusively available to women. Frightened in advance of Thomas's martyrdom, they exclaim: "I have smelt them, the death-bringers, senses are quickened . . . /I have heard/Fluting in the nighttime, fluting and owls, have seen at noon/Scaly wings slanting over, huge and ridiculous."

Willing habitation in the "neutral territory" of mundane interaction and limited vision is an acknowledged possibility for Eliot's men and women alike, particularly as they come to live and breathe in his dramas. What separates them from the elect, for whom a more consistent and expanded sensibility is possible, is fear. Fear precludes them from the vulnerability required. The example of Julian helps to establish Eliot's paradigm of mystical potential as rooted in physical suffering and surrender, both of which he explored primarily (but not exclusively) via female characters. Early on in *Revelations of Divine Love*, Julian makes clear her desire for not only "every kind of bodily and spiritual pain that I would suffer if I were dying," but also specifically, that the pain of Christ's Passion would "become my pain through compassion . . . I wanted to suffer with him,

while living in my mortal body."[68] Beer characterizes Julian's desire as "sympathetic identification," a term likewise useful for understanding Eliot's creative effort. Donoghue locates Eliot's specific interest in "a religious faith that offered to make sense of guilt and suffering by extending the hope that these emotions could be turned to spiritual purpose" as rooted in his own "acutely personal . . . guilt, self-disgust, and revulsion,"[69] thereby granting Eliot a measure of intense personal suffering as well. But to Donoghue I add that Eliot only understood such redemption to be possible when accompanied by total surrender. For though he, like Prufrock, had "wept and fasted, wept and prayed," Eliot could not sustain vision. As early as "Spleen" (1910), his imagined male devotee is "a little bald and gray,/……/Languid, fastidious, and bland," waiting "On the doorstep of the Absolute," but lacking any promise of entry. Alluding to the poem, Schuchard describes Eliot's "spiritual torpor and inaction" as having its origins in "the utter inability of the intellect to find a way out of the self to the Absolute."[70] It follows then that in recognizing his own intellectual paralysis as a spiritual obstacle, Eliot would try to imagine its inverse, projecting the possibility of spiritual vision onto the opposite gender. Such a pat conclusion, however, seems to indicate misogyny, for it rests on the problematic conclusion that Eliot robbed female characters of intellect and inflicted suffering upon them in order to allow them the surrender he could not achieve.

Re-establishing Julian as the central representative in Eliot's understanding of mysticism, however, reveals the folly of such an assumption. As she demonstrates, productive suffering and mystical access come neither to the vapid mind nor the easy victim. Instead, they visit only upon those whose intellects have philosophically evolved to the point of conscious desire for such sublimation. As a point of comparison, Childs

cites Eliot's notes on *Mysticism* as a basis for his theory of impersonality as put forth in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." In a passage Eliot copied into his notes, Underhill wrote:

> The essence of the mystic life consists in the remaking of personality: its entrance into a conscious relation with the absolute. . . . So long as the subject feels himself to be *somewhat* he has not yet annihilated selfhood and come to the ground where his being can be united with the Being of God."[71]

Actively seeking the Absolute in repudiation of the self, then, is critical to the mystic's existence. The example of Julian, in the context of Theresa of Avila as Eliot discussed her in his 1926 Clark Lectures, underlines the reason for his special admiration for the English mystic. Though in the lectures he complimented Theresa's autobiography, calling it "not only an interesting book, but a really great book . . . great because of the great beauty of character and the transparent honesty and scrupulousness and profound piety of the writer," he reserved genuine admiration, instead condescending to characterize her as "more loveable, more human" than St. John of the Cross.[72] Julian's *Revelations*, in contrast, show her not as loveable but as intellectually engaged with love, not as victimized but as desiring suffering as to relieve her of the physical, not as merely human but as striving toward compassionate physical union with the divine. Julian looked to Mary as a model intercessor, and she elucidated for all readers of *Revelations of Divine Love* that "[Mary] and Christ were so united in love that the greatness of her love caused the magnitude of her pain."[73] Thus in her sympathetic experience of the Passion, Julian came to a physical and an intellectual—thus, a complete—understanding of Christian suffering. Among the "words formed in her understanding," upon which Julian herself

expounded in her own writing, lies the divine justification for her suffering. Julian concludes that fallen humanity maligns divine infliction of pain "because of ignorance of love."[74] Indeed, Julian's theodicy is one of love. Among the background Helen Gardner includes about Julian in *The Art of T. S. Eliot* is her didactic conclusion: "Learn it well: Love was his meaning. Who shewed it thee? Love. What shewed He thee? Love. Wherefore shewed it He? For Love."[75]

Eliot too writes of suffering, self-surrender, and love as necessary, tripartite elements of the mystical experience, all of which must eventually be surrendered when the Absolute descends. Immediately following the similes of the dark theater and underground tube train in "East Coker," the poem's speaker reports his own internal monologue, one which recalls the Chorus of Women of Canterbury and *The Family Reunion*'s Agatha as well. Most essentially, though, it follows Julian's prescription for complete divestiture:

> I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
> For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
> For love would be love for the wrong thing; there is yet faith
> But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
> Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
> So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

Faith, hope, and love, those tenets of Saint Paul's Corinthian epistle, become redefined individually and collectively through Julian's experience. Even watching as her mother reaches to close her eyes in apparent death, Julian recounts that "despite all my pain I would not have been hindered from the love I was feeling."[76] This love eschews pleasure

for endurance and withstands pain in compassion. Eliot more fully develops his conception of it in "The Dry Salvages," calling it remarkably "an occupation for the saint—" as opposed to men:

> Men's curiosity searches past and future
> And clings to that dimension. But to apprehend
> The point of intersection of the timeless
> With time, is an occupation for the saint—
> No occupation either, but something given
> And taken, in a lifetime's death in love
> Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.

What would be a lifetime's death is, for the saint or mystic, the revelation of love, setting the self aflame in passion. Though fire is most closely associated with Eliot's fourth quartet, "Little Gidding," its destructive and redemptive capabilities surface here in Eliot's choice of the word "Ardour," originally a synonym for "fierce or burning heat"[77] and later expanded to suggest the symbolic heat of passion. At the outset of Eliot's last line defining the saint, however, the flames of ardor are linked twice to the willing repudiation of self. Indeed then Julian's wisdom abides, as Eliot articulates most clearly in the fourth section of "Little Gidding," nearly echoing her conclusion: "Who then devised the torment? Love./Love is the unfamiliar Name/Behind the hands that wove/The intolerable shirt of flame/Which human power cannot remove." His words pay tribute to her experience in the same way that her surrender allowed her physical empathy with Christ crucified. The gender of the intercessor thus changes twice: Christ's pain visited upon Julian's body, Julian's wisdom comprising Eliot's theodicy.

And yet the utter surrender implied by Christ's crucifixion complicates the matter, raising one final point that ratifies Eliot's association of the mystical body with the feminine. Discussing images of Christ in *Epistemology of the Closet,* Sedgwick cites the homophobic conundrum of his worship, with specific attention given to the compromised position of Christ's body: "And presiding over all are the images of Jesus. These have, indeed, a unique position in modern culture as images of the unclothed or unclothable male body, often in extremis or in ecstasy, prescriptively meant to be gazed at and adored."[78] Christ then becomes the subject of a homoerotic gaze that complicates the certainty of his gender. Among the efforts Sedgwick mentions that have been used to restrict the homoerotic dilemma of Christ's body is "feminizing it," which she says "only entangle[s] it the more compromisingly among various modern figurations of the homosexual."[79] Embracing the physical and mental surrender of Christ's Passion through Julian's vicarious experience, however, would have relieved the poet of the homoerotics Sedgwick describes.

Unusual Mystics: A Nun, A President, and a Mistress

"Ash-Wednesday," of course, comes to mind immediately with respect to Eliot's effort to imagine the total physical and intellectual surrender of the mystic, for its Lady, "the silent sister veiled in white and blue," commands not only the awe of the poem's speaker but possesses such prominence in the poem that she seems to hover above it. Her Marian colors, imposed silence, and power over the garden's natural elements underscore her distinction from the mundane. And yet she retains her humanity, for (to recall Underhill) she has "moved among the others as they walked" and thus remains a credible figure as opposed to the poem's fanciful "White jewelled unicorns" and "gilded hearse."

Referring to her simply as "the surrendered soul,"[80] Gardner establishes the Lady of Silences according to the paradigm of the Blessed Mother, describing that she integrates "perfect innocence and supreme experience, at once Mater Gloriosa and Mater Dolorosa."[81] Eliot makes explicit her knowledge of both extremes by explaining that she lives "In ignorance and in knowledge of eternal dolour." Though Gardner denounced the significance of Eliot's allusion to Julian,[82] she could have benefitted from considering Julian as a model for the Lady, for Julian's revelations likewise gave her the wisdom to comprehend the glory and the sorrow of Christ's incarnation.

In the six parts of "Ash-Wednesday," the penitent speaker discovers the Lady as an alternative to solipsistic paranoia, as though she is an answer to his prayer "that I may forget/These matters that with myself I too much discuss/Too much explain." Her leopards relieve him of his corporeal weight, and her contemplation of "the Virgin in meditation" makes his bones "shine with brightness." This progression illustrates once again the pervasiveness of Julian's teaching in Eliot's writing, for Julian reveals that "each contemplative soul to whom it is given to seek and look for God, shall see [Mary], and pass unto God by contemplation."[83] As an intercessor, the Lady first meditates on Mary and then becomes, as Schuchard describes, "identified in vision with the Virgin."[84] So instead of moving directly through Mary on the way to divine contemplation, the speaker in "Ash-Wednesday" approaches a consecrated human woman and then slowly moves through her in order to make his plea. Parts V and VI illustrate his spiritual maturity as it evolves through the poem. In Part V, he obsesses over what "the veiled sister" may pray for:

Will the veiled sister between the slender
Yew trees pray for those who offend her
And are terrified and cannot surrender
And affirm before the world and deny between the rocks

Once again the male speaker denigrates himself in comparison with the Lady, reiterating his incapacity for surrender. But by the poem's sixth part, whether out of desperation or a deeper spiritual understanding, he musters his own prayer, finding words out of the silence to express his own shortcomings and plead for their redemption. To begin, he praises her in litany: "Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden." He then begs his case for self-surrender and divine union, both of which she embodies but he finds unattainable without intercession:

Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks
Our peace in His will

In thus petitioning the Lady to endow him with the ability for surrender, Eliot quotes Dante's *Paradiso*. The line he chooses—"Our peace in His will"—nods significantly at Underhill. In so doing, Eliot implies her role in his spiritual education with regard to mystical surrender. Though he does not make the specific case for Eliot's quotation of the line at the end of "Ash-Wednesday," Childs explains: "In a line from the *Paradiso* quoted often by Eliot . . . Underhill finds the state of utter self-surrender that represents the touchstone of true mysticism . . . (His will is our peace)."[85] Thus the speaker of "Ash-

Wednesday" requests the mystic's ability as Dante first articulated it and Underhill recognized it, as Julian experienced it and the Lady imaginatively embodies it. As the poem closes, he makes one final request of her. He first reiterates the significance of her gender: "Sister, mother," and then pleads for divine union. He requests it twice, first "Suffer me not to be separated," and then, borrowing the words of Psalm 102 in direct address to God, "And let my cry come unto Thee." Only through the reassuring presence, focused attention, and example of sublimation that the Lady of Silences provides could the anxious penitent of "Ash-Wednesday" have stumbled along his own path to God.

If, as Pinkney suggests, Doris evolves into the Lady of "Ash-Wednesday," then the Lady gives way to Agatha from *The Family Reunion*.[86] Not only do both *The Family Reunion* and *The Cocktail Party* follow Eliot's poetry chronologically, reflecting the further development of his quest toward understanding feminine mysticism, but they also require that the mystical women function, at least to some extent, in the modern social world. As characters in plays, Agatha and Celia are embodied by the actresses that give them voice and physical substance. As opposed to the Lady, they must speak in order to exist on the stage. Through Agatha and Celia, then, Eliot had to confront what it would mean for a real woman—with friends, lovers, and a profession—to simultaneously lead an active visionary life. In the case of *The Family Reunion*'s Harry, Eliot also attempted to sustain the imagined male mystic. Characterizing Eliot's spiritual perspective following his conversion, Donoghue asserts that "In his Christian years he believed that his best practice, in addition to daily prayer, was to regard human relations as provisional and ancillary to some relation beyond them,"[87] but as a playwright, Eliot had to work out the means by which the elected devotee could extricate him- or herself from such

relations. Doing so is far from simple, and though critics including Däumer and Badenhausen recognize in their readings of the plays the spiritual empowerment of the female figures facing this dilemma, they find fault with the means by which Eliot demonstrates the human difficulty of such a predicament.[88] I contend that this difficulty is compounded by the characters' femininity, for Harry escapes the suffocating environment of Wishwood relatively unscathed. When his female companions, however, undertake similar behavior, they are described as "disruptive," and as a result, Däumer suggests that Eliot makes certain that they be "curbed." Indeed, as I have discussed earlier with respect to Celia's transhumanisation, these female figures, and Harry as well, are by their natures detached from quotidian existence. Physical departure from this existence, then, even in its most violent form, must not be misunderstood as punishment but rather as both inevitable and spiritually liberating. Just as the pain of Christ's Passion becomes Julian's ultimate experience of love, the casting out of the plays' visionary characters becomes the singular means by which they can achieve miraculous mystical union.

Ever steeped in paradox, the path toward such union in *The Family Reunion* requires a modicum of solitude. Despite the promise of the play's title, neither Agatha, its central intercessor, nor Harry, its male visionary, reunite in any way with their relations at Wishwood. Each one's closest attempts to communicate and relate to another human being in the play occur with the other, though the play's conclusion demands the separation of nephew from aunt, even in spite of Agatha's maternal feelings for Harry. Eliot establishes Agatha as accustomed to such solitude. Having misspent her affection and opportunity for motherhood on Harry's father,[89] her brother-in-law, Agatha threw

herself into her career, a modern and feminist choice often misread as the last resort of the spinster.[90] In so doing, she endures "thirty years of solitude,/Alone, among women," a life not so unlike that of the anchoress in the convent.[91] Living outside of the conventionally prescribed feminine realms of wife- and motherhood, Agatha suffers the disparagement of her family and friends, as becomes apparent when they reunite: "What people know me as," she tells Harry, "The efficient principal of a women's college— /That is the surface. There is a deeper/Organisation, which your question disturbs." Remarkably, Harry claims to understand her, and he speaks back to her in acknowledgement of the "deeper/Organisation" to which she alludes. In articulating his admiration for her, Harry refers to Agatha as "liberated from the human wheel," and claims to share himself in "A common pursuit of liberation." In this moment alone Agatha renders impossible the misogynistic reading that fellow characters and far too many critics have cast upon her. With Harry, she rises above even the image of the martyring wheel that Eliot had established in *Murder in the Cathedral*.[92] But Eliot takes care in the course of the play to underscore the inability of even the blood relatives of the spiritually elect to comprehend such transcendence. In the play's final scene, Amy accuses Agatha of a double betrayal: "Thirty-five years ago/You took my husband from me. Now you take my son." Mary's innocent entrance into the scene forces Amy to further explain her accusation. In so doing, Amy aligns Agatha with the false visionaries and occultists of Eliot's earlier poetry by concluding that Agatha "has some spell/That works from generation to generation." In writing Agatha's denial of participation in any such witchcraft, Eliot realigns her along the legacy of women awaiting vision that began with "Suppressed Complex": "He is going./But that is not my spell, it is none of my

doing:/I have only watched and waited." Furthermore, Agatha makes explicit that evangelism to the mystical life is not only of no interest to her, it is beyond her capacity:

> Do you think that I would take the responsibility
> Of tempting them over the border? No one could, no one who knows.
> No one who has the least suspicion of what is to be found there.
> But Harry has been led across the frontier: he must follow;

According to the engine of the play, Harry's leading vision consists of the Eumenides, pursuing female Furies that he comes to understand as "bright angels" upon his change of heart to join, rather than run from, them.

And yet what happens to Harry in the course of *The Family Reunion* could never have happened without Agatha's influence. Just as Eliot gives to the Lady of "Ash-Wednesday," Eliot grants Agatha visionary access and the power of intercession, though he also protects her from ultimate responsibility. She does not command vision—neither her own nor Harry's—but she serves as, in Däumer's words, "high priestess" to her nephew, a mother and intercessor in the spirit of Mary herself.[93]

Just before his departure to "follow the bright angels," Harry wonders "why I have this election," and thus Eliot puts into Harry's mouth his own belief that only a very few have the "strength demanded" for the visionary role. Agatha's maternal feeling for Harry establishes him in a lineage of vision, but his singular role as a male visionary marks him out within Eliot's oeuvre. Even Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral* only claims to have experienced "a tremor of bliss, a wink of heaven, a whisper" as opposed to Harry's constant sense of pursuit. Recalling Orestes at the outset of *Sweeney Agonistes*, Harry tells his unseeing cousin Gerald at the outset of *The Family Reunion*: "*You* don't

see them, but I see them,/And they see me." The visitation of the Furies presses hard upon his psyche, and at Wishwood he is both haunted further by the accusative presence of his family, who presume that the blood of his wife stains his hands, and metaphysically affirmed by the visionary capacity of his aunt. Significantly, the relentless presence of the Furies has a feminizing effect on Harry. Directly upon his arrival at Wishwood, he distinguishes himself from his gathered family. Unlike them, he feels himself to be "wide awake," and he presents himself thus: "I am the old house/With the noxious smell and the sorrow before morning,/In which all past is present, all degradation/Is unredeemable." In this one sentence self-description, Harry three times alludes to the feminine. Aligning himself with the domestic space of the house not only effeminizes him but links him directly to his mother, Amy, about whom Agatha says "You see your mother as identified with this house—" and who says herself at the end of the play "So you will all leave me!/An old woman alone in a damned house." Harry's sense of himself as house, though, introduces even further similarities to Eliot's women, for it is a house with a "noxious smell," not unlike that which the poet usually associates with the foreign, open room of the female body, and an atmosphere of "sorrow before morning," reminiscent of the recumbent woman of "Preludes" Part III. Even in his determination to create a male character struggling with spiritual visitation, Eliot could not help but reinforce his association of the mystical with the feminine.

Furthermore, in the same way that Amy mischaracterizes Agatha as participating in the occult, Harry struggles with language that is ill equipped to name the Eumenides, calling them variously "invisible pursuers" and "phantoms," both of which acknowledge their evanescence; "spectres," alluding to Baudelaire and recalling Eliot's earlier

description of the rarity of vision; and finally "bright angels," redeeming their origin as a Christian heaven as opposed to the pagan underworld. Following Harry's departure at the end of the play, the only means by which the others can understand his vocation is by characterizing him as a missionary. Harry rails against them, claiming "I never said that I was going to be a missionary," and struggles again with an inability to explain himself. In the family's mischaracterization, they feminize Harry one last time. His predecessor in the missionary position, so to speak, is Doris, and his successor, Celia. Though Harry does make a choice that he describes as "at once the hardest thing, and the only thing possible," Eliot ends the play without resolving Harry's ultimate fate. Only through Celia will Eliot follow completely the path that leads through vision to martyrdom. Her character is thus not only informed by Julian, but also by Doris, Agatha, Harry, and Christ.

Celia is a complex character in the spectrum of Eliot's visionary women, for what pursues her is a sense rather than a vision. Unlike Harry, who felt keenly the imposition of the Furies on his sight as well as his mind, Celia tells Sir Henry Harcourt Reilly "I don't imagine that I'm being persecuted;/I don't hear any voices, I have no delusions—." Like Harry, however, she struggles with describing that which plagues her, finally admitting "It sounds ridiculous—but the only word for it/That I can find, is a sense of sin." In the conversation that follows, she and Reilly discuss this sensation. Although Celia is aware of her compromised position as mistress, what she feels is not remorse. She even goes so far as to clarify her sensibility as distinct from morality, guilt, or regret: "It's not the feeling of anything I've ever *done*,/Which I might get away from, or of anything in me/I could get rid of—but of emptiness, of failure/Towards someone, or

something, outside of myself." What Celia confesses, then, is more accurately the imposition of a very tangible sense of sin's essence. It is neither her personal sin nor does it seem to be even the Judeo-Christian concept of Original Sin, and yet she tells Reilly that it seems "more real than anything I believed in." Celia's preoccupation with sin rounds out Eliot's adaptation of Julian of Norwich's teaching through his female figures, for Julian's central inquiry is the place of sin in a world created by a loving God. In the early parts of *Revelations*, Julian confronts the pride that would lead her to question God on this point, for she is shown Christ's "glorious reparation" as far exceeding the harm of Adam's sin.[94] Eliot created Celia to converge with Julian with regard to sin as a means of spiritual election. Celia explains to Reilly that in claiming her sense of sin, "I don't mean sin in the ordinary sense." Reading her through Julian's Revelation XVII clarifies the extraordinary possibilities for the term:

> Further, God showed me that sin is no shame, but a source of honor. In this showing my understanding was lifted up into heaven; then in truth I was reminded of David, Peter and Paul, Thomas of India, and the Magdalene, and of how they are known in the church on earth with their sins to their honor. It is no shame to them that they have sinned, nor is it in the bliss of heaven, where the tokens of sin are turned to honor.[95]

Sin in this sense, then, marks out an elect few for Christian ministry. As Underhill said of mystics and Donoghue writes with regard to the *The Cocktail Party*,[96] these saints too are our brethren by means of their human failings. The sin of Celia, like that of the Magdalene, is adulterous. The price of her metaphysical understanding of sin's paradoxical existence—a presence rendered as an absence—is her submission. When

Reilly offers her two possibilities for curing her condition, she rejects the first option, which is that he "reconcile [her] to the human condition." Her explanation underscores the especial significance of surrender. Though she acknowledges this path as practical, she denies it, saying "I feel it would be a kind of surrender—/No, not a surrender—more like a betrayal." As the word "surrender" slips from Celia's lips, Eliot takes the opportunity to reiterate its importance, for she repeats and then recants it. Reconciling herself back to ordinary life would be a betrayal of her spiritual gift; what she must do instead is surrender herself to it completely.

As Reilly offers Celia the second option, the "terrifying journey," Eliot once again reiterates the necessity of the solitude and darkness of the anchoress's cell. Celia asks, "I suppose it is a lonely way?" and Reilly responds that it is "No lonelier than the other," except that "those who take the other/Can forget their loneliness." Loneliness before God is inherent to humanity,[97] but direct confrontation of this reality is only for the prepared. Reilly further explains that "Each way means loneliness—and communion," but Celia welcomes his second path as a release from what she calls the "hell" of "imagination, shuffling memories and desires." In this way, Eliot establishes Celia's calling. Though in poems such as "Preludes," "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," and *The Waste Land*, Eliot had experimented with conflating these concepts, "mixing/ Memory and desire," Celia's complaint reveals that, by the end of his career, Eliot had realized that such human urges could never approximate the command of divine vocation. Even in the face of a violent martyrdom with nonsensical political implications, Celia is heroic for surrendering to a spiritual knowledge that requires total detachment from self and society. She embraces solitude like the anchoress, renounces ignorance of sin, and willingly journeys blind.

What is remarkable about her with respect to the other female characters through whom Eliot explored Julian's example as mystic is that Celia extends Julian's reach beyond the role of intercessor to that of Christ martyred. Badenhausen explains that in so doing, "Celia makes real Cixous's dream of 'performing the gesture that jams sociality,'"[98] and Däumer grants that her character is "endowed with the symbolic centrality of Christ."[99] In her shadow, the play's female spiritual intercessor, Julia Shuttlethwaite, who in assisting Reilly understands not only that Celia "will go far" but also that the two of them "know where [Celia] is going," becomes almost completely obscured. Julia and Reilly know at the end of Act Two that Celia will endure "projected spirits," "scolding hills," and "the valley of derision." Julia even goes so far as to declare "Yet she must suffer." Together they pray that she be protected from "Voices" and "Visions," but they know the fate for which she was created and to which she must willingly submit. In Act Three, Reilly's chilling admission "—When I first met Miss Coplestone, in this room,/I saw the image, standing behind her chair,/Of a Celia Coplestone whose face showed the astonishment/Of the first five minutes after a violent death," is redeemed by its parallel in Julian's showings. Endorsing the significance of physical suffering, Julian reveals a vision of "four kinds of dread," the first of which illuminates Reilly's insight, as it is "the dread that suddenly comes over a man through fright. This dread is good, for it helps to purify him, as does physical illness or any other kind of pain that is not sin: such fright is beneficial, if it is patiently borne."[100] Through Julian, Celia's frightened astonishment becomes a refining fire that assuages the profound awareness of sin that severed her from the cocktail party. No longer must she be grossly misconstrued as an imagined physical body upon which Eliot enacted vicious mutilation

for misogynistic sport. Rather, Celia demonstrates Eliot's most literal translation of Julian's vision upon a woman socially engaged in the modern world. As a devotee of Julian, Eliot used his imagination and his writing to humanize and thereby fully absorb her teachings. Celia is the last in a line that began with unidentified, solitary women lying in bed and staring at the ceiling. The plight to which she is subject in the play represents a profound evolution from the Imagistic glances in the early poetry, and thus, she is far more prone to misinterpretation. In Celia, Eliot followed his creative interpretation of Julian to its fullest extent. After Celia, the only option that remained for him to finish pursuing his understanding of the relationship between femininity and devotion was to welcome Julian herself.

More than an Order of Words

At the end of Eliot's creative career stands "Little Gidding," a poem that not only serves as the fourth and final quartet but functions pragmatically as an effort toward Christian reconciliation. Brooker has eloquently articulated that "*Little Gidding* clarifies what had been implicit in the previous three poems—that *Four Quartets* as a whole constitutes a demonstration of the struggle to reconcile good and evil by finding unity in warring elements, different seasons, and conflicting voices."[101] Julian's reassuring words, most memorably her refrain "And all shall be well and/All manner of thing shall be well," resound twice in the poem's third section and comprise the penultimate image of the final section. To this point, they have been understood as an exemplary nod on the part of Eliot to a mystical optimism that he had come to humbly accept, even in the face of World War Two. Schuchard explains that Julian's words were "a late but significant addition to the draft": "as Eliot wrote to [John] Hayward on 2 September 1942, he wanted

'to give greater historical depth to the poem by allusions to the other great period, i.e. the fourteenth century.'"[102] This explanation for his invocation of Julian is elusive, as it neglects to mention either her spiritual authority or Eliot's vested interest in mysticism. However, it serves well to date his treatment of Julian's words as following the publication and debut of *The Cocktail Party*. At the end of a literary career in which he created female figures who lay recumbent in the physical manner of the mystics, distorted visionary access by participating in the occult, and struggled against the burden of spiritual election while interacting on the social stage, Eliot invoked Julian directly—through the very words she claimed Christ "formed in [her] understanding."[103] In *Four Quartets* Julian is never named. Although "Little Gidding" represents Eliot's most prominent invocation of her divine wisdom, he invoked her also in "Burnt Norton," namely, in the image of the still point, which he also referenced in *Murder in the Cathedral*. Brooker cites Underhill quoting Julian's vision of God thus: "'I saw God in a point . . . by which sight I saw that He is in all things . . . He is the mid-point of all thing."[104] Eliot hid Julian's identity as the originator of this singular image just as he hid the children in the poem's foliage. At the end of Eliot's career, Julian's words come to obscure her very being. No longer is Eliot interested in her body, her suffering, her pain, her ecstasy, her surrender, or even, incredibly, her gender. He had explored all of these already. In *Four Quartets* Eliot paid Julian his highest tribute by invoking only her words, for in them is the most pure legacy of her divine visitation. In them he finds the ineffable—language that can comprise prayer.

Eliot first denigrates the word as a tool for prayer in the ninth chorus from the pageant-play "The Rock," in which he attests to amazement that "Out of the slimy mud

of words, out of the sleet and hail of verbal imprecisions,/. . . . . ./There spring the perfect order of speech, and the beauty of incantation." Thus he establishes incantation as a level of speech with the power to lift words from the mud of the material world. But time and again, particularly in *Four Quartets*, the transition from speech to incantation eludes him. Unable, it seems, to discover "the perfect order of speech," even in a life wholly dedicated to writing, Eliot struggles first in "Burnt Norton" against the paradox that "Only by the form, the pattern,/Can words or music reach/The stillness" even though "Words strain,/Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,/Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,/Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,/Will not stay still." How can even the most devoted Christian and the most practiced writer achieve a perfectly ordered incantation with tools that constantly betray and undermine him?

Eliot's awareness of the slippery status of words, the connotations and denotations of which are constantly subject to shifting interpretations by the masses, becomes even more explicit in "East Coker." In its second section, Eliot writes his doubts into the verse itself, halting its progress with an exasperated release: "That was a way of putting it—not very satisfactory:/A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion,/Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle/With words and meanings." From there, the poem moves steadily into the dark, a literal dark Eliot imagines as that of the stopped underground train or a patient under ether, a darkness associated with terrifying silence. His tone evokes the *via negativa* of Saint John of the Cross, and the poem's third section closes with the invective to "go by the way of dispossession," instructing readers directly through the second-person "you" to "go through the way in which you are not." Therefore, when Eliot's frustration with his own linguistic limitations becomes most

explicit in the fifth section of "East Coker," he seems to be reaching out for a path antithetical to his own, the way that is the way *he* is not:

> So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—
> Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres*—
> Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
> Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
> Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
> For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
> One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
> Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
> With shabby equipment always deteriorating
> In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
> Undisciplined squads of emotion.

For Eliot to state at the end of his poetic career that he feels the past twenty years to have been comprised of false starts and various failures is remarkable. In this passage he attests to words as constantly falling out of date and to intended meanings as ridiculously ephemeral. No longer does he yearn for "the perfect order of speech," but instead he reframes his efforts as recurring "raid[s] on the inarticulate." That last word is nearly invisible, but within the dilemma of devotional writing, the inarticulate is of the utmost importance.

By re-framing his literary efforts as ventures into the inarticulate, I understand Eliot to be surrendering his masculine ties to phallocentric language in this last of devotional and personal poems. To venture into the inarticulate is to psychologically

inhabit a contemplative silence in order to approach what Eliot called in "A Song for Simeon" the "still unspeaking and unspoken Word." Imagining such an effort, Eliot recognizes age and corporeality as equally damaging, referring to body and mind collectively as "shabby equipment always deteriorating" while also evincing his discomfort with nontraditional expression. Calling inarticulacy a "general mess" containing "Undisciplined squads of emotion," he settles at the end of the stanza unable to fully commit to such an unfamiliar means of self-expression. Directly implicating himself, Eliot resigns: "For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business." Speaking of being physically present in the chapel of Nicholas Ferrar's Christian community at Little Gidding, Eliot reiterates once more his revised notion of prayer as feminine surrender that is beyond linguistic pattern, conversational speech, and even consciousness: "You are here to kneel/Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more/Than an order of words, the conscious occupation/Of the praying mind or the sound of the voice praying." Unexpectedly, Eliot here warns against active prayer. The "you" of the poem is not instructed to kneel and pray, but rather to be aware of being in the presence of prayer already uttered, prayer beyond the normal capacity of the linguistically restricted mind. It has to be enough in "Little Gidding" for Eliot and his implied reader to contemplate the possibility of true prayer and to reflect on its reward, for example, as it was given to Julian herself.

Following the visitation of the compound familiar ghost with which I began this chapter, the words engendered by Julian's valid, contemplative prayer first surface. Significantly, they follow explicit material renunciation. In the spirit of Julian's teaching in Revelation XX that "each soul should forget if it can all created beings, recognizing all

God its lover has done for it,"[105] Eliot relinquishes the people and sites of both political and personal history:

> History may be servitude,
> History may be freedom. See, now they vanish,
> The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them,

Having repudiated all, including himself, Eliot then allows Christ's words, as they were formed in Julian's understanding, to articulate the conciliatory spirit of "Little Gidding." He begins with Julian's notion of sin, thereby reifying Celia's divine awareness, and moves immediately to its redemption:

> Sin is Behovely, but
> All shall be well, and
> All manner of thing shall be well.

Eliot's second invocation of Julian comes twenty-eight lines later, this time in the wake of his consideration of the dead. Schuchard describes the effect of "Little Gidding" as a whole as Eliot "finally possessed by the dead,"[106] and in this moment, he embraces the legacy of their contemplative silence, hearing in it Julian's refrain and explanation once again:

> And all shall be well and
> All manner of thing shall be well
> By the purification of the motive
> In the ground of our beseeching.

By "beseeching" Julian implies the commitment of the human will to be "oned and fastened to the will of our Lord."[107] The undertaking is deceptively simple, best illustrated to varying degrees by the women who populate Eliot's poems and plays. As Eliot parenthetically mentions at the end of "Little Gidding," it comes at a high price: "(Costing not less than everything.)"

To understand the tribute Eliot paid to Julian at the end of his career requires extending the conventional critical interpretation of the poem as reconciling the "warring elements" of history and the present, voice and silence, beginning and end, and male and female. When Peter Middleton refers to the "incremental desexualization of *Four Quartets*," he mistakes the closest Eliot comes to achieving a productive union of male and female for its erasure. When Eliot turns to the "order of words" impressed upon Julian's understanding through ecstatic vision, however, he comes as close as humanly possible to achieving surrender according to her example. His surrender remains incomplete, for through it, he does not achieve divine union. Rather, to borrow a phrase that Frances Beer used to describe Julian's prayer, Eliot gestures toward a "twinning of wills," his and Julian's, at the end of his poetic career. Only through the incremental understanding of the physical and psychological demands of Julian's spiritual election and resulting vision achieved in his poetry and drama could Eliot have come to this peace. In so doing, Eliot closed a circle that brought his literary end back to its inquisitive beginnings.

Conclusion

"I have been wondering frequently of late
(But our beginnings never know our ends!)
Why we have not developed into friends."
—"Portrait of a Lady"

At the end of this study, the lady's inquiry remains. For even if Eliot respected woman's capacity for suffering, found himself envious of her potential for devotion, and put his mind to the task of imagining a path for his own empathy, his poetry never makes room for the male/female friendships that would suggest true equanimity of feeling between the genders. Instead, even though both men and women evolve through Eliot's work both as individuals and according to their author's deepening sense of devotion, they remain to an extent variations on the "isolated, rootless souls"[1] of "Preludes." It would be easier to accept Eliot's admiration for and empathy with women if indeed his male and female characters established a common ground upon which relationship could be built, but even at the beginning the lady unwittingly does know her end. No common ground will be established between the two of them; no real friendship will ever exist. The fact that "everybody said so, all our friends" matters little. The lady's statement stands instead as a kind of premonition, as though in denying her own knowledge of the end, she too has a gift for second sight, predicting as she does that her beginning does in fact know the limitations of her end. The possibility of friendship between any of Eliot's men and any of his ladies, will remain out of reach.

In this study that takes as its task resituating Eliot among his women, it is worth noting that Eliot's literary legacy understands woman as a distinct other rather than as a

kindred being with whom man can share himself. Palmer came to a similar conclusion in *Men and Women in T. S. Eliot's Early Poetry,* deciding ultimately that the impossibility of a productive relationship between the genders was one of Eliot's central interests. Although I am not invested in debating the extent of Eliot's interest in this impossibility, I do feel compelled at the end of my study to address one last point that threatens to disturb my argument. If Eliot truly harbored no animus against women, why would he foreclose the possibility of friendship with them?

The answer may lie in the fact that when put to examination, the poems likewise reveal a lack of friendship among men, making simple misogyny a flawed rationale for Eliot's omission. What surfaces instead is a unique propensity for exclusively female friendships, foreshadowed in the "women [who] come and go/Talking [presumably among themselves] of Michelangelo" and the mermaids singing "each to each" in Prufrock. Even the lady's comment in "Portrait" implies both that she maintains a community of friends from which the poem's speaker is excluded and that through them, she understands that her engagement with him lacks the commitment and exchange of true friendship. Among the female friendships in the collected poetry, three are implied in *The Waste Land*. They thus provide an understated and yet irrepressible counterpoint to its barren modern landscape, as they offer their participants, if not companionship, then at least the support of commiseration. At the end of her Tarot reading, Madame Sosostris remarks: "If you see dear Mrs. Equitone,/Tell her I bring the horoscope myself," implying a friendship comprised of at least as much affection as warrants the prefix "dear" and the concern to "be so careful" in the intended delivery. In the poem, Eliot next alludes to the relationship between sisters Philomel and Procne through the "sylvan

scene" visible in the boudoir of "A Game of Chess." Philomel's plight, mutilation, and transformation into a nightingale are certainly the scene's central focus, but the swallow's voice of her similarly reincarnated sister echoes Philomel into "The Fire Sermon": "Twit twit twit/Jug jug jug jug jug jug/So rudely forc'd./Tereu." Finally, Lil and the gossip have an implied friendship, however contentious, as retold by the gossip to yet another attendant listener. Even if the gossip does not infuse kindness into her advice, she does provide Lil with a sounding board for her helpless plight. The gossip retells Lil's disclosure: "I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,/It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said./……./The chemist said it would be all right, but I've never been the same." Perhaps the most fully developed female friendship in Eliot's work is the one shared by Doris and Dusty in *Sweeney Agonistes*. The women together read the cards and complete one another's sentences. Dusty even lies for Doris when Mr. Pereira calls. In much the same manner as the woman in "Portrait of a Lady," they also speak frequently of friends, as though popularity is very much on their minds. As they draw the cards together, Dusty interprets them variously: "'News of an absent friend,'" "'A quarrel. An estrangement. Separation of friends,'" and, regarding THE COFFIN signifying death, she attempts to reassure Doris, "Well it needn't be yours, it may mean a friend." Granted, none of these examples represent more than suggestions of friendship on Eliot's part. They are fragmented and shallow, offering company rather than compassion. And yet they remain.

Between men no such friendships surface in the poetry. Madame Sosostris's mention of Mrs. Equitone is followed in *The Waste Land* by the poem's speaker calling out to Stetson in spite of the fact that "each man fixed his eyes before his feet." Eliot does

not include any hint of Stetson's reply, suggest the speaker's exclamations to have fallen on uncaring ears. The invitation of Mr. Eugenides in "The Fire Sermon" is likewise ignored, its mention of the Cannon Street Hotel and Metropole critically interpreted as a homosexual advance from which the speaker withdraws. The closest men come to achieving friendship or community in Eliot's poetry occurs in "The Hollow Men," but in "death's dream kingdom," community is suggested only by its absence. If friendship requires dialogue, the hollow men have instead only a "whisper . . . quiet and meaningless." Later, they admittedly "avoid speech." As mere representations of emptiness, the hollow men's physical community, "leaning together" and "grop[ing] together," only reinforces the substance they collectively lack. *Sweeney Agonistes* provides a hint of possible fraternity, as Wauchope refers to Klipstein and Krumpacker as "friends," a designation Krumpacker reinforces by explaining "We were all in the war together/Klip and me and the Cap and Sam." Sweeney too attests to a kind of camaraderie in his tale of the man "once did a girl in," describing that "He used to come and see me sometimes/I'd give him a drink and cheer him up," a notion shocking to Doris and Dusty. These extremely limited circumstances for male friendship, however, remain distinct from and incompatible with those that foster female friendship. That which the men of *Sweeney Agonistes* understand as friendship is indicative instead of a violent complicity, either war or murder.

I comment on the lack of friendship between men and women in contrast to Eliot's nominal acknowledgement of exclusively female bonds at the conclusion of my study as a means of suggesting one further aspect of femininity that the poet granted as more fully evolved than that of her male counterparts as well as to anticipate the

challenge implied by the lady's inquiry. Friendship is as rare to the inhabitants of Eliot's poems as laughter is to the face of the author in the photographs. Its singular flowering among women, however imperfect, just might suggest another benefit of a gender Eliot understood as inherently open and thereby available for the occupancy of another. Significantly, however, Eliot's women do not consequently become the territory of men but rather of one another and, in the case of the mystics, of God. As the whole of this study has demonstrated, Eliot understood feminine vulnerability as not only virtuous but also powerful. Eliot and his male characters remain at a distance from his female characters, coming and going from their bodies and rooms, but never staying long enough to develop into friends. Even his literary attempts to assume the feminine via transgender failed Eliot, and thus he came to honor them even more completely. Eliot's women exceed his reach by all means except imaginative empathy and devotional admiration.

As in their presentation of mystical women, the plays force dialogue and interpersonal relationship; thus male/female friendship as Eliot imagined it does come to fruition in both *The Family Reunion* and *The Cocktail Party*. Its counterfeits likewise exist as a dialectical opponent. Agatha and Harry in the former play and Reilly and Celia (assisted by Julia) in the latter both achieve meaningful communication, particularly in relation to the imposition of vision given to Harry and Celia. In these two plays, Eliot makes clear that successful male/female friendship offers intercession and leads in one direction: to God. Alternative intergender relationships, as exemplified by the plays' married couples, lovers, and even mother and son, continually fall short of this goal. In one of the most damning renderings of the modern human condition in *The Cocktail Party*, Reilly explains to Celia his characterization of marriage as "Two people who

know they do not understand each other,/Breeding children whom they do not understand/And who will never understand them." This is not the life for which Celia was intended, nor is it the one Reilly desires for her. Its effects are suggested in *The Family Reunion* as Amy is forced to concede the authority of motherhood to her son's intercessor, Agatha. When Harry indicates his departure in the third scene, his aunt Violet and his uncles Gerald and Charles each inquire individually about where and why he is leaving. Amy responds the same way three times in a row: "Ask Agatha. . . . Ask Agatha. . . . Ask Agatha." Only the aunt with whom Harry has shared his vision could possibly answer the question, evidence of the unique and enduring power of their bond of intercession.

Even when Eliot holds women in highest esteem as physical and spiritual embodiments of the example of Julian of Norwich, his perspective requires male distance. With the exception of the relationships in which gender collusion hastens the potential mystic toward the Absolute, there remains in Eliot's poetry and prose an incompatibility between the force of his intellectual and creative admiration and real flesh and blood women.

Except in those remarkable photographs. Ten years had passed since he had written *The Cocktail Party*; fifty years since he had first taken up his poetic pen. T. S. Eliot, laughing among these women and men in a Chicago theater, had his creative career behind him. He had a new wife, and from the looks of the photographs as well as reports of personal scrapbooks kept by the couple,[2] he had found love. I wonder how his poetry and drama would have been different had he made this discovery in the throes of his creative career. Early in my work on this subject, I made the decision to exclude

assumptions that aligned Eliot's female characters and general presentation of women directly with either his relationships with his mother, Charlotte, or his first wife, Vivien. Scholars have already undertaken many endeavors to this point. However, in concluding this study, I cannot help but wonder myself about the timing of Valerie's 1949 arrival in Eliot's life. Maybe that moment, after a lifetime of creative genius spent imagining the capacity for feminine surrender and seeking literary empathy, found T. S. Eliot finally able to reconcile himself to woman's humanity. Maybe all the women he had written led him to one woman, with whom he could finally develop into friends.

Introduction

[1] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, Ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 41, Print.
[2] Lyndall Gordon, *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1998), 40–1, Print.
[3] T. S. Eliot, "Preludes," *The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909–1950*, 1950 (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1980), Print. Hereafter referred to as *CPP*.
[4] Eliot, "Sweeney Erect," *CPP*.
[5] Eliot, *T. S. Eliot: The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, Ed. Ronald Schuchard (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993), 287, Print. Hereafter referred to as *VMP*.
[6] Eliot, "Burnt Norton," *Four Quartets, CPP*.
[7] Denis Donoghue, *Words Alone: The Poet T. S. Eliot* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 5, Print.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Eliot, "Marina," *CPP*.
[10] Ibid., 252.
[11] Jewel Spears Brooker, "The Fire and the Rose: Theodicy in Eliot and Julian of Norwich," *Julian of Norwich's Legacy: Medieval Mysticism and Post-Medieval Reception,* Eds. Sarah Salih and Denise N. Baker (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 69–86 (69), Print.
[12] Donoghue, 206.
[13] Eliot, "The Music of Poetry," qtd. in Helen Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot* (New York, E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1950), 36, Print.
[14] Eliot, *VMP*, 51.
[15] Eliot, Letter to Paul Elmer More, 27 March 1936, Used with permission from the Paul Elmer More Papers, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
[16] Donoghue, 5.
[17] Ronald Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 73, Print.
[18] Donoghue, 134.
[19] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel*, 76.
[20] See Marja Palmer, *Men and Women in T. S. Eliot's Early Poetry* as well as Tony Pinkney, *Women in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot: A Psychoanalytic Approach* and Gordon, *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life*.
[21] In "Tradition and the Female Talent: Modernism and Masculinity," Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar accuse Eliot of, among other crimes, the "usurpation of women's words." Qtd. in Jewel Spears Brooker, "Tradition and Female Enmity: Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar Read T. S. Eliot," *Making Feminist History: The Literary Scholarship of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar,* Ed. William E. Cain (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 237–53 (242), Print.
[22] Eliot, "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service," *CPP*.
[23] Most specifically, I have in mind the sampling tendency of criticism by Gilbert and Gubar, Pinkney, and Palmer.

What Bits May Sprout: The Violated Body

[1]Eliot, "Sweeney Agonistes: Fragment of an Agon," *CPP*.

[2]Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel*, 20.

[3] For criticism of Eliot's misogyny, see Gilbert and Gubar, "Tradition and the Female Talent: Modernism and Masculinity" as well as scholarship by Gordon, Seymour-Jones, and others outlined below. For criticism of Eliot's writing as evidence of a repressed homophobia, see James E. Miller, Jr., *T. S. Eliot's Personal Waste Land*. For criticism of Eliot as a fascist and anti-Semite, see Anthony Julius, *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form*. These examples represent seminal works of criticism that have engendered a far more widespread view of Eliot as representative of all that should not be valued in literature or culture.

[4] A sampling of the critics who promote Eliot's treatment of women thus include Gordon, Seymour-Jones, Gilbert and Gubar, and Pinkney.

[5] Gordon, x.

[6] Ibid., 34.

[7] Eliot, "Conversation Galante," *CPP*.

[8] Gordon, 236.

[9] Carole Seymour-Jones, *Painted Shadow: The Life of Vivienne Eliot, First Wife of T. S. Eliot* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 203, Print.

[10] Ibid., 40.

[11] Eliot, Letter to Henry Ware Eliot, 31 October 1917, qtd. in Seymour-Jones, 202.

[12] Seymour-Jones, 479.

[13] Ibid., 483.

[14] Brooker, "Tradition and Female Enmity: Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar Read T. S. Eliot," 241.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Tony Pinkney, *Women in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot: A Psychoanalytic Approach* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), 18, Print.

[17] Ibid., 90, emphasis his.

[18] Ibid., 132.

[19] Gail McDonald, "Through schoolhouse windows: women, the academy, and T. S. Eliot," Laity and Gish 175–94 (190), Print.

[20] Seymour-Jones, 307.

[21] Pinkney, 23.

[22] Ibid., 85.

[23] Richard Badenhausen, "T. S. Eliot speaks the body: the privileging of female discourse in *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Cocktail Party*," Laity and Gish, 195–214 (195), Print.

[24] McDonald, 189–90.

[25] Ibid., 184.

[26] Elisabeth Däumer, "Vipers, viragos, and spiritual rebels: women in T. S. Eliot's Christian society plays," Laity and Gish 234–53 (235).

[27] Schuchard, Editor's Introduction: The Turnbull Lectures, The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry, *T. S. Eliot: Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, By T. S. Eliot, 231–48 (236), Print.

[28] Eliot, *VMP*, 236.
[29] Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," *CPP*.
[30] Eliot, "Animula," *CPP*.
[31] Eliot, Letter to Conrad Aiken, 1914, qtd. in Robert Crawford, *The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 101, Print.
[32] Pinkney, 40.
[33] Pinkney understands the propensity for physical fragmentation in Eliot as reflective of the author's confrontation with the feminine, explaining "It is proximity to the female body that ruptures narrative continuity: not only can the alarming fragments of that body not be totalized, but one's relationship to it cannot be given the reassuring shape of a teleology" (46).
[34] In the latter poem, the first section of *The Waste Land*, the hyacinth girl returns thus: "'You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;/They called me the hyacinth girl.'/—Yet, when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden/Your arms full, and your hair wet . . . "
[35] The disembodied limbs, teeth, and eyes of a painting like *Excavation* come to mind as do de Kooning's many portraits of women that render them as forceful figures who meet the viewer head-on as unflinching compositions of eyes, teeth, and breasts.
[36] Eliot, "Gerontion," *CPP*.
[37] Eliot, "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar," *CPP*.
[38] Eliot, "Whispers of Immortality," *CPP*.
[39] Marianne Thormählen, qtd. in Marja Palmer, *Men and Women in T. S. Eliot's Early Poetry* (Lund, Sweden: Lund University Press, 1996), 171, Print.
[40] Eliot, "Death by Water," *The Waste Land, CPP*.
[41] Eliot, "The Dry Salvages," *Four Quartets, CPP*.
[42] Pinkney, 108.
[43] Eliot, "Mr. Apollinax," *CPP*.
[44] "worried, adj.", *OED Online*, March 2011, Oxford University Press, 28 May 2011, Web.
[45] Pinkney, 108.
[46] Eliot, "The Burial of the Dead," *The Waste Land, CPP*.
[47] Eliot, "Ash-Wednesday," *CPP*.
[48] Eliot, "The Fire Sermon," *The Waste Land, CPP*.
[49] Eliot, "A Game of Chess," *The Waste Land, CPP*.
[50] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* IV.v.84-86, *The Riverside Shakespeare,* 2nd ed., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), Print.
[51] Lysol, "The Trouble, Madame, is not with your heart . . . *but in your head*!," Advertisement, *McCall's*, June 1934: 120, Print.
[52] Pinkney, 91.
[53] Eliot, *The Family Reunion*, *CPP*.
[54] Seymour-Jones, 307.
[55] Pinkney, 122.
[56] Eliot, *The Cocktail Party*, *CPP*.
[57] Eliot, "Little Gidding," *CPP*.
[58] Ezekiel 37:1, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Ed. Michael D. Coogan, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Print.

[59] Ezekiel 37: 7–8, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.
[60] Eliot, Letter to William Force Stead, 10 April 1928, qtd. in Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel*, 157.
[61] Gordon, in fact, imagines that "Eliot saw Emily Hale . . . as the material of religious poetry," suggesting her influence on not only "Ash-Wednesday" but also *Four Quartets* and *The Cocktail Party* (399). Of "Ash-Wednesday," Gordon says specifically that "she became the presiding 'Lady' of Eliot's poetry" (400). Seymour-Jones characterizes that "the asexual 'woman in white' [was] a role into which Emily Hale was forced to fit" to distinguish her "from Vivienne—viewed as whore, temptress, and Eve" (498).
[62] Gordon, 400.
[63] T. S. Eliot, Letter to Conrad Aiken, 25 July 1914, qtd. in Christopher Ricks, Notes, *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909–1917*, By T. S. Eliot, 101–303 (267). Hereafter abbreviated *IMH*.
[64] Eliot, "The Love Song of St. Sebastian," *IMH*.
[65] Of Eliot's characterization of martyrs, including St. Sebastian, Gordon has written "As a person his martyr or 'saint' is absurd, but his ordeal is serious" (34). Of "The Love Song of Saint Sebastian" specifically, she characterizes the poem as "a martyrdom [that] is not only self-inflicted, but is an exhibitionistic attempt to gain a woman's attention," failing to realize the irony of the title and the gender play at work in the poem.
[66] Gilbert and Gubar, qtd. in Badenhausen, 195.
[67] *Butler's Lives of the Saints Complete Edition,* Eds. Herbert J. Thurston, S. J., and Donald Attwater, 4 vols. (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1956), 217, Print.
[68] Eliot, "The Death of St. Narcissus," qtd. in Ricks, Notes, *IMH*.
[69] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel,* 10.
[70] Eliot, Notes on *The Waste Land, CPP*.
[71] T. S. Eliot, "Spleen," *The Undergraduate Poems of T. S. Eliot* (Cambridge, MA: The Harvard Advocate, 1948), 5, Print.
[72] Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, *CPP*.
[73] Nevil Coghill, Notes, *Murder in the Cathedral,* By T. S. Eliot, 95–137 (133), Print.
[74] Claire M. Waters, ed. *Virgins and Scholars: A Fifteenth-Century Compilation of the Lives of John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, Jerome, and Katherine of Alexandria* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2008), 283, Print.
[75] Eliot, "A Song for Simeon," *CPP*.
[76] The story of Lucy's martyrdom varies somewhat. Though her actual death may have been incurred by either an attempt to burn her or a sword held to her throat, Lucy, consecrated a virgin, is consistently depicted in painting and sculpture holding her eyes on a golden plate, which alludes to the legend that her eyes were gouged out, perhaps by the emperor Diocletian or by Lucy herself. Like Katherine and Sebastian, Lucy did not fall victim to blindness even after this punishment; God restored her eyes immediately. According to *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, Lucy's new eyes were "more beautiful than before" (4: 549).
[77] Agatha had also promised her virginity to God and was thus punished by being sent to what Butler calls "a house of ill-fame" run by a "most wicked woman" named "Aphrodisia." When Lucy would not participate in carnal sin, she was variously punished—on the rack, with iron hooks, with burning torches, and finally with the

lopping off of her breasts. Such torture failed to kill her and Saint Peter restored her health. Later, she was punished again by being rolled on hot coals. After this last punishment, she prayed that her soul be taken to heaven and perished. Like the other Christian martyrs, she is typically depicted with the attribute of her most severe torture, her excised breasts on a platter. *Butler's Lives of the Saints: Complete Edition* (1: 256).
[78] Eliot, Letter to Paul Elmer More, 11 January 1937, qtd. in B. A. Harries, "The Rare Contact: Correspondence between T. S. Eliot and P. E. More," *Theology* 75 (March 1972), 135–44 (139), Print.
[79] Eliot, "Choruses from the Rock," *CPP*.
[80] Eliot, "Liberty, " qtd. in Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel*, 180.
[81] Eliot, "East Coker," *Four Quartets, CPP*.
[82] Badenhausen, Laity and Gish, 211.
[83] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel,* 152–3, emphasis his.
[84] Gordon, 210.
[85] Eliot, "Dante," *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, 227.
[86] Eliot, "What Dante Means to Me," *To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings* (New York: Octagon Books, 1980), 125–35 (134), Print.
[87] Ibid.

In the room Eliot comes and goes
[1] Eliot, Letter to Paul Elmer More, 3 August 1929, qtd. in Roger Kojecky, *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), 74, Print.
[2] Marina van Zuylen, *Monomania: The Flight from Everyday Life in Literature and Art* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2005), 105, Print.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Green cites Alex Neill and Berys Gaut in their definition of the symbiotic relationship between empathy and imagination: "Following Neill, Gaut also holds that 'empathy requires one imaginatively to enter into a character's mind and feel with him because of one's imagining of his situation.'" Mitchell Green, "Empathy, Expression, and What Artworks Have to Teach," Ed. Garry L. Hagberg, *Art and Ethical Criticism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 113, Print.
[5] Detloff takes these ideas a step further by linking empathy not only to the production of modern literature but to its effect, citing Martha Nussbaum: "For Nussbaum, exposure to literature, especially drama, enables world citizens to develop 'habits of empathy and conjecture [that] conduce to a certain kind of citizenship and a certain form of community: one that cultivates a sympathetic responsiveness to another's needs, and understands the way circumstances shape those needs." Madelyn Detloff, *The Persistence of Modernism: Loss and Mourning in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 120, Print.
[6] Green, 113, 117.
[7] Palmer, 30, speaking specifically of the room in "Prufrock."
[8] Ibid., 16.
[9] Gordon, 215.

[10] Edward Lobb, "Chamber Music: Eliot's Closed Rooms and Difficult Women," *T. S. Eliot: Man and Poet, Volume 1,* Ed. Laura Cowan (Orono, Maine: The National Poetry Foundation, 1990), 167–79 (173).
[11] F. H. Bradley, qtd. in Eliot's Notes on *The Waste Land, CPP*.
[12] Gordon, 187.
[13] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, qtd. in Gail McDonald, "Through schoolhouse windows: women, the academy, and T. S. Eliot," Laity and Gish 175–94 (178).
[14] Eliot, "He said: this universe is very clever," *IMH*.
[15] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 62.
[16] Pinkney, 18.
[17] In *Eliot's Dark Angel*, Schuchard explains thus: "Baudelaire's essay 'On the Essence of Laughter' . . . originally argues that laughter, which is satanic and based on pride and the individual's feeling of superiority over other beings, is the experience of contradictory feelings—of infinite greatness in relation to beasts and of infinite wretchedness in relation to absolute being" (89).
[18] Eliot, "Hysteria," *CPP*.
[19] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel,* 126. This observation becomes even more important given that Eliot uses both terms to refer to laughing women in his poetry: not only "Hysteria," but also "the epileptic on the bed" in "Sweeney Erect."
[20] Seymour-Jones, 17. Within scholarly discussion of Vivien Eliot's condition, Seymour-Jones most directly understands her condition in terms of hysteria. Neither Gordon nor Schuchard apply the term to her physical and mental shortcomings, but Seymour-Jones cites Vivienne's hysteria as "an unconscious attempt to hold on to the husband she idolized" as well as a "protolanguage" meant to "arouse emotion in the listener and induce action" (327). In so doing, Seymour-Jones understands hysteria as a means of "immobilising and silencing" women in the Eliots' time (335), but she makes room for the possibility that T. S. "Eliot could play the hysteric too when circumstances demanded" (328).
[21] Gish, "Discarnate desire: T. S. Eliot and the poetics of dissociation," Laity and Gish 107–29 (112).
[22] Eliot, "Do I know how I feel? Do I know what I think?," *IMH*.
[23] Eliot, "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," *CPP*.
[24] Pinkney, 85.
[25] Ibid., 17.
[26] Gardner, 80.
[27] Emphasis mine.
[28] Pinkney, 44.
[29] Palmer, 50.
[30] Ibid., 42.
[31] Ibid, 57.
[32] Pinkney, 111.
[33] Ricks, Notes to "Prufrock's Pervigilium," *IMH*.
[34] van Zuylen, 105.
[35] Badenhausen, Laity and Gish 205.

[36] The Genesis verse (3:19) that accompanies the imposition of ashes in Ash Wednesday services comes to mind: "Remember, O man, that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return." *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.
[37] Tim Dean, "T. S. Eliot, famous clairvoyante," Laity and Gish 43–65 (44).
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Michele Tepper, "'Cells in one body': nation and eros in the early work of T. S. Eliot," Laity and Gish 66–82 (77), Print.
[41] Sedgwick, 233.
[42] David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 25, Print. Later, Valentine both clarifies and reiterates this point in a manner that likewise applies to Eliot: "For identity is not something that simply arises from the self and its experience but is the product of an ongoing process of meaning-making" (223). I contend that Eliot's writing comprises quite an explicit process of meaning-making, in which he was engaged all of his adult life.
[43] T. S. Eliot, "Address," in *From Mary to You* (St. Louis: Centennial Issue, December 1959), 134, qtd. in MacDonald, 176.
[44] Sedgwick, 61.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Tammy Clewell, "Mourning beyond Melancholia: Freud's Psychoanalysis of Loss," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 52.1 (2004), 43–67 (44), Print.
[47] Brooker is likewise attentive to the kinship made explicit in these poems in "Tradition and Female Enmity," though to a slightly different end. She answers Gilbert and Gubar's "conflict-dependent" reading of "Cousin Nancy" by asserting that "The narrator is not so much hostile to Nancy as to her culture, to that against which she is rebelling. The narrator and Nancy are of the same generation ('cousins'), and each is rebelling in his/her way against their elders and the culture epitomized by Arnold and Emerson" (250).
[48] Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, 38.
[49] Eliot, "Cousin Nancy," *CPP*.
[50] Eliot, "La Figlia che Piange," *CPP*.
[51] Eliot, Letter to Paul Elmer More, 11 January 1937: "I know a little what is the feeling of being alone—I will not say *with* God, but alone in the presence and under the observation of God—with the feeling of being stripped . . . of the qualifications that ordinarily most identify one: one's heredity, one's abilities, one's *name*," qtd. in Harries.
[52] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel,* 91.
[53] Ibid, 94.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Palmer, writing of "Sweeney among the Nightingales," suggests that: "The title places Sweeney not only in an animal domain, but also in a world of prostitutes, since the word 'nightingales' is also a slang expression for whores, used during the First World War as well as during Elizabethan and Jacobean times" (104).
[56] Brooker, "Mimetic desire and the return to origins in *The Waste Land*," Laity and Gish 130–49 (142).
[57] Ibid, 143.
[58] Ibid., 141.

[59] Ibid., 142.
[60] Oliver Goldsmith, "Woman," *The Oxford Book of English Verse 1250–1900,* Ed. Arthur Quiller-Couch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 543, Print.
[61] Lawrence Rainey, "Eliot Among the Typists: Writing *The Waste Land*," *Modernism/Modernity* 12.1 (2005), 27–84 (75, 74), Print.
[62] T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, Ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), Print.
[63] Ed Madden, *Tiresian Poetics: Modernism, Sexuality, Voice 1888–2001* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008), 132, Print.
[64] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel*, 88.
[65] In *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts*, editor Valerie Eliot points out that though Fresca was cut from "The Fire Sermon," she once again "stepped ashore to a more varied scene" in October 1924, when an article titled "Letters of the Moment—II," attributed to FM, a pseudonym for Fanny Marlow used by Vivien Eliot, ran in *The Criterion*. Waking at the opening of "The Fire Sermon," Fresca "blinks, and yawns, and gapes," a line that mirrors the later revision: "The amorous Fresca stretches, yawns, and gapes." Going on, the 1924 Fresca is "aroused from dreams of love in curious shapes," far less problematically than the original, "aroused from dreams of love and pleasant rapes." Of this reappearance of Fresca, Valerie Eliot comments that "It probably amused Eliot to print 'these few poor verses' knowing that only two other people [Ezra Pound and Vivien Eliot] knew their source." (Editorial Notes, 127).
[66] Madden, 132.
[67] Pinkney first interprets Fresca's "needful stool" thus: "Moist and solid at once, eager for escape yet obstinately clinging, the faeces share the ambivalence of *The Waste Land*'s unguent perfumes, 'unstoppered' and 'lurking' at the same time. They can neither be securely stowed away within the intimate cavities of the subject's body nor discarded safely as mere waste products into the public realm" (134). Pinkney likewise assumes that Fresca's "process of excretion is explicitly a labour, a hard and bitter one indeed if she needs a novel as long as Richardson's to occupy her" (134), but such an assumption fails to probe the reason Eliot would choose Richardson over any other novelist. Valerie Eliot's editorial notes to the manuscript draft of *The Waste Land*, however, provide a helpful clue, suggesting the novel in question to be Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa Harlow*, the title of which likewise points to Pope. Clarissa, of the novel's title, is thus an allusion to Belinda's rival and the keeper of the scissors that sever her beloved lock. Here again, Clarissa is the catalyst for the poem's major event.
[68] Alexander Pope, "The Rape of the Lock," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*: *The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century*, Eds. Lawrence Lipking and James Noggle (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2006), 2513–32 (2515), Print.
[69] Ibid., 2517.
[70] Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, 66.
[71] Eliot, *The Letters of T. S. Eliot,* Ed. Valerie Eliot, Vol. 1 (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), Print. Other preferred closings include "Your loving son," "Your affectionate son," and variations on "Your devoted son," including "Always devotedly your son," "Devotedly your son," and "Very devotedly."

[72] Madden, 133.
[73] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf,* Ed. Anne Olivier Bell, Vol. 2 (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 68, Print.
[74] Eliot, Letter to John Quinn, 12 March 1923, qtd. in Valerie Eliot, Introduction, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts*, By T. S. Eliot, xxvii, Print.
[75] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *The Essential Feminist Reader*, Ed. Estelle B. Freedman (New York: The Modern Library, 2007), 318–30 (324), Print.
[76] Luce Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine," *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2004), 795–8 (797), Print. Emphasis hers.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Kristeva, Julia, qtd. in Bedient, Calvin, *He Do the Police in Different Voices* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 206, Print.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Badenhausen, Laity and Gish196.
[81] Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," qtd. in Badenhausen, 204.
[82] Badenhausen, Laity and Gish, 209.
[83] C. K. Williams, "Cassandra, Iraq," *The New Yorker,* 3 April 2006, 54–5, Print.
[84] Madden, 166, emphasis his.
[85] The sentence "He promised 'a new start.'" recalls Ophelia's regretful song: "You promised me to wed," from *Hamlet* IV.v.63, further linking the verbal twittering of the Thames daughters to the pub gossip in "A Game of Chess." This section of *The Waste Land* closes with Ophelia's call "Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night," the very lines that signal her exit in act IV, scene V.
[86] Robert Crawford, *The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 77, Print.
[87] Eliot, "Silence," *IMH*.
[88] Gordon, 49.
[89] Eliot, "Entretien dans un parc," *IMH*.
[90] Interestingly, Gordon also explains Eliot's relationship with silence thus: "At first, Eliot did not conceive of the religious implications, simply that the Silence was antithetical to the world" (49). This notion gains significance, then, when he reassigns silence to the realm of women, suggesting that women can, through twittering, participate in the banal verbosity of the world while also having privileged access to otherworldly silence.
[91] Eliot, "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," *CPP*.
[92] Gubar, qtd. in Badenhausen, Laity and Gish, 209.
[93] Badenhausen, Laity and Gish, 240.

Eliot's Third Sex
[1] Sedgwick, 239.
[2] Commonly used in the nineteenth century, the term "sexual inversion" is thus defined and distinguished from homosexuality by Sedgwick: "As George Chauncey argues, 'Sexual inversion, the term used most commonly in the nineteenth century, did not

denote the same conceptual phenomenon as homosexuality. "Sexual inversion" referred to an inversion in a broad range of deviant gender behavior'—the phenomenon of female 'masculinity' or male 'femininity,' condensed in formulations such as Karl Heinrich Ulrichs' famous self-description as . . . a woman's soul trapped in a man's body—'while "homosexuality" focused on the narrower issue of sexual object choice.'" (158).

[3] Donoghue, 124.

[4] F. R. Leavis, qtd. in Donoghue, 149.

[5] Donoghue, 157.

[6] In their biographies of T. S. and Vivien Eliot, respectively, both Gordon and Seymour-Jones cite novelist Clifford Kitchin's claim that Eliot had a tendency to go out in the evening wearing "a bit of slap"(Gordon 256, Seymour-Jones 508) to cruise for homosexual affairs. Seymour-Jones goes on to cite Osbert Sitwell observing Eliot sitting beside him at dinner in 1923, "amazed to notice on his cheeks a dusting of green powder—pale but distinctly green, the colour of a forced lily-of-the-valley" and later corroborating his observation with Virginia Woolf (357). Though it does not speak to the verity of these claims, Louis Adeane's article "An Appraisal of Mary Butts" suggests the contemporaneous trend of "young men . . . powdering their faces before descending to dinner," offering an alternative reading that is in keeping with fashion rather than suggestive of homosexuality. Louis Adeane, "An Appraisal of Mary Butts," *A Sacred Quest: The Life and Writings of Mary Butts*, Ed. Christopher Wagstaff (Kingston, NY: McPherson & Company, 1995), 97–106 (102), Print.

[7] Monika Faltejskova, *Djuna Barnes, T. S. Eliot and the Gender Dynamics of Modernism: Tracing Nightwood* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 150, Print.

[8] Judith Butler, in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, redefines drag according to a psychological model that applies well here and aligns Eliot's practice of editing with Matthew O'Connor's transvestism: "Drag thus allegorizes *heterosexual melancholy*, the melancholy by which a masculine gender is formed from the refusal to grieve the masculine as a possibility of love; a feminine gender is formed (taken on, assumed) through the incorporative fantasy by which the feminine is excluded as a possible object of love, an exclusion never grieved, but 'preserved' through heightened feminine identification" (146, emphasis hers). In the cases of both Eliot and O'Connor, participation in drag attempts to replace isolation with the assumption of the feminine but never corresponds to a genuine relationship with it.

[9] Eliot, "The Bible as Scripture and Literature," qtd. in Christopher Ricks, Preface, *IMH*.

[10] Eliot, "On a Portrait," *The Undergraduate Poems of T. S. Eliot*.

[11] Eliot, "Oh little voices of the throats of men," *IMH*.

[12] Eliot, "Goldfish: Essence of Summer Magazines IV," *IMH*.

[13] Eliot, "Death by Water," *The Waste Land, CPP*.

[14] Palmer, 24.

[15] Donoghue, 8.

[16] Eliot, "Preludes," *CPP*.

[17] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel*, 82.

[18] Gordon, 70.

[19] Faltejskova defines the third sex as "made up of beings that cannot be described as either men or women, neither do they present an equal coupling of the two traditional genders of the binary within one figure" (153).
[20] Eliot, "What the Thunder Said," *The Waste Land, CPP*.
[21] From Luke 24:13–17: "Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad." *The New Oxford Annotated Bibl*e.
[22] Although Eliot's statement preceding his notes on "What the Thunder Said" states outright that "In the first part of Part V three themes are employed: the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel Perilous (see Miss Weston's book) and the present decay of eastern Europe," his note on this passage in particular reads thus: "The following lines were stimulated by the account of one of the Antarctic expeditions (I forget which, but I think one of Shackleton's): it was related that the party of explorers, at the extremity of their strength, had the constant delusion that there was *one more member* than could actually be counted" (emphasis Eliot's).
[23] David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, NC: Duke University Pres, 2007), 27, Print.
[24] Ibid., 28.
[25] Ibid., 136.
[26] Madden offers the following helpful distinction: "In their cultural associations, we may further distinguish between the hermaphrodite and the androgyne, the first a figure of hybridity, simultaneity, or confusion, the other a figure of union, asexuality, and idealization. In the body of the androgyne, a conservative and sometimes misogynistic figure, sexual difference is usually erased; the androgyne is taken up by Jungian psychology to represent an ideal wholeness, the psychic reconciliation of 'masculine' and 'feminine' psychic principles. The body of the hermaphrodite, on the other hand, combines sexual differences on the same body, unresolved and intractable" (45).
[27] Valentine defines transgender by citing both Virginia Prince and Holly Boswell, aligning himself with the latter in defining his broad use of the term transgender: "Unlike Prince's assertions of normality, Boswell challenged the notion of 'normal' itself, claiming a space for transgender not simply as a category between 'transsexual' and 'transvestite' but as an alternative to binary gender" (32).
[28] Seymour-Jones, 309.
[29] Madden, 144.
[30] Valentine, 53.
[31] Faltejskova, 168.
[32] Madden, 49.
[33] In "The Unnatural Object of Modernist Aesthetics: Artifice in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*," Suzanne Young establishes Woolf as part of a literary context dedicated to exploring the implications of gender variance thus: "What Woolf called 'sex-consciousness' was both a problem and a provocation for modernist art. On the contested ground of literary modernism, artists often chose to explain creativity through biological

metaphors that tended to reinforce an array of social codes." Suzanne Young, "The Unnatural Object of Modernist Aesthetics: Artifice in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando,*" *Unmanning Modernism*: *Gendered Re-Readings*, Eds. Elizabeth Jane Harrison and Shirley Peterson (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 168–88 (180), Print.

[34] Djuna Barnes, *Selected Works of Djuna Barnes: Spillway/The Antiphon/Nightwood* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1962), 233–336 (336, 341), Print.

[35] Although he is not explicitly referring to Eliot, psychoanalyst Adam Philips, in his response to Judith Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, reflects helpfully on the intellectual pull of the possibility of a third sex, one which I believe Eliot himself felt and demonstrated through his varying transgendered characters: "It can sometimes seem a shame that there are only two sexes, not least because we use this difference as a paradigm to do so much work for us. . . . There is a kind of intellectual melancholy in the loss of a third sex that never existed and so cannot be mourned; this third, irrational sex that would break the spell (or logic) of the two . . . Starting with two sexes (as we must) . . . locks us into a logic, a binary system that often seems remote from lived and spoken experience and is complicit with other binary pairs—inside/outside, primary process/secondary process, sadism/masochism, and so on." Philips, "Keeping It Moving: Commentary on Judith Butler," *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 151–9 (158), Print.

[36] Eliot, "The Death of St. Narcissus," *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts*.

[37] Narcissus's self-examination, which leads him through these previous bodies in search of his own identity, resounds with Eliot's own inclination toward empathy within the female body and precludes a similar confession in "Portrait of a Lady," which is not necessarily of previous incarnations, but rather possibilities for metempsychosis: "And I must borrow every changing shape/To find expression . . . dance, dance/Like a dancing bear./Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape," *CPP*.

[38] Laurie MacDiarmid, *T. S. Eliot's Civilized Savage: Religious Eroticism and Poetics*, (New York; Routledge, 2003), 6, Print.

[39] Ibid., 94.

[40] MacDiarmid makes this claim in the following context, casting her nets wide in assessing Eliot's impulses: "According to this reading, Narcissus serves not only as Eliot's scapegoat, but as his alter ego: a mask for a scholar tired of his polite, Unitarian background, an alibi for a virginal fop who craves the blood and guts of an Indian dance, the ecstatic oblivion of a masochistic intercourse with 'god.'" (23).

[41] Seymour-Jones, 303.

[42] Valerie Eliot, Editorial Notes, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts,* By T. S. Eliot.

[43] The opening lines from "The Death of Saint Narcissus": "Come under the shadow of this grey rock/Come in under the shadow of this grey rock/And I will show you a shadow different from either/Your shadow sprawling over the sand at daybreak, or/Your shadow leaping behind the fire against the red rock:/I will show you his bloody cloth and limbs/And the grey shadow on his lips" become in *The Waste Land:* "Only/There is shadow under this red rock,/(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),/And I will

show you something different from either/Your shadow at morning striding behind you/Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;/I will show you fear in a handful of dust."

[44] Matthew 19:10–12, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

[45] MacDiarmid, xv, xviii. Oddly, MacDiarmid finds this to be most true in Eliot's post-conversion work, never mentioning Origen by name and thus perhaps overlooking the fact that a self-emasculated castrate even exists in Eliot's poetry. In her discussion of "what is perverse about Eliot's conversion," MacDiarmid says the following: "The Eliot after 1927 is an uncanny eunuch, transvestite. As he offers himself to the tradition, and then to God, Eliot metaphorically pokes his eyes out and demands to be eaten" (118).

[46] Madden, 140.

[47] The full epigraph of the poem reads as follows: "Look, look, master, here comes two religious caterpillars." "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" is the second of Eliot's poems headlined by an epigraph from Marlowe's play. The other is "Portrait of a Lady."

[48] Sedgwick, 220.

[49] Ibid., 221.

[50] In "Ash-Wednesday" Part I, Eliot wrote "Because I know that time is always time/And place is always and only place/And what is actual is actual only for one time/And only for one place/I rejoice that things are as they are and/I renounce the blessèd face." Later, in the poem's part VI, he uses the same word to describe the Lady as the blessed Virgin Mary: "Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden." Finally, in *Murder in the Cathedral*, the word is applied to various saints, including Stephen, the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist, the martyr Denys, and in the poem's last line, to Thomas à Becket, the archbishop of Canterbury. The one exceptional use of the adjective "blessed" outside of saintly context is by the character Amy in *The Family Reunion*, who refers to how the family thinks of Harry's wife's death as "nothing but a blessed relief." Because it thus used in accusation by a dramatic figure, I discount the exception as working against the consistency of Eliot's other uses of the word.

[51] William Carlos Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1967), 174, Print.

[52] Eliot, "The Fire Sermon," *The Waste Land, CPP*.

[53] Madden, 15.

[54] Ibid., 117.

[55] Donoghue, 124.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Specifically, Donoghue concludes that "Tiresias can see the world only as one alienated from it: he does not give or sympathize, he does not participate in the suffering and transformation of 'What the Thunder Said'" (124–5).

[58] Sedgwick, 149.

[59] Dean, Laity and Gish 59.

[60] Madden, 199.

[61] Dean, Laity and Gish 57.

[62] Madden, 142.

[63] Ibid., 49.

[64] Ibid., 112.

[65] Ibid., 142.
[66] Ibid., 118–9.
[67] In the manuscript draft, one further couplet describes the departing young man and aligns him with Fresca, for it reveals him relieving himself, thus equating sexual desire with animalistic physical relief from the orifices of both penis and mouth: "And at the corner where the stable is/Delays only to urinate, and spit." Pound deleted these two lines in the manuscript, however, with a marginal note that read "Probably over the mark." As the young man's departure stands now in *The Waste Land*, blindness represents his postcoital reality, perhaps a transference of Tiresias's disability without the accompanying power of omniscient vision.
[68] Ezra Pound, qtd. in Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts*.
[69] Gordon, 34.
[70] Badenhausen: "In effect, the women become a more fully realized version of Tiresias, whose visions, Eliot claimed in a note, were the 'substance' of *The Waste Land*" (Laity and Gish 201).
[71] Donoghue, 201.
[72] Sedgwick, 149.
[73] Cheryl J. Plumb, Introduction, *Nightwood: The Original Version and Related Drafts*, By Djuna Barnes (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995), vii–xxvi (xxi), Print.
[74] Faltejskova, 84.
[75] Barnes, 268.
[76] Ibid., 347.
[77] Sedgwick, 239.
[78] In making this claim, I am intentionally keeping gender separate from sexuality; therefore, a figure like Mr. Eugenides from *The Waste Land*, who makes a homosexual pass at the narrator, inviting him to "a weekend at the Metropole," is intentionally excluded. An understanding of transgender that is synonymous with homosexuality would include him, but there is nothing about Mr. Eugenides's appearance or description in *The Waste Land* that is indicative that he harbors any kind of feminine identity. He is "unshaven" and identified solely by his profession and the items in his possession: "Smyrna merchant . . . with a pocket full of currants/C.i.f. London," *CPP*.
[79] Faltejskova, 84.
[80] Plumb, Introduction, *Nightwood: The Original Version and Related Drafts*, By Djuna Barnes, xxiii.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Eliot, Introduction to "Nightwood," *Selected Works of Djuna Barnes: Spillway/The Antiphon/Nightwood*, By Djuna Barnes, 227–32 (227).
[83] One of Faltejskova's further criticisms of Eliot's introduction is that it spoils hope for the novel's democratic appeal. She quotes an interpretation of the introduction written by Miriam Fuchs as evidence: "[Eliot] constructs an ideal readership, one that is likely to be receptive to his own interpretation (. . .) These well-trained readers on whom Eliot is counting will not misread Barnes's novel; he hopes he has encouraged them to study its musical rhythms, poetic devices, general structure, and design" (109).

[84] Andrew Field gives Eliot complete credit for the publication of *Nightwood* in his biography *Djuna: The Life and Times of Djuna Barnes:* "*Nightwood*, though it had been rejected by seven major American publishers, did appear in New York in 1937, thanks entirely to Eliot's Introduction and his connections" (20). Field, *Djuna: The Life and Times of Djuna Barnes* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1983), Print.
[85] Faltejskova, 107.
[86] Field, 43, 16–17.
[87] Faltejskova, 114.
[88] Eliot, Introduction to "Nightwood," 228.
[89] Ibid., 229.
[90] Butler, 149.
[91] Eliot, Introduction to "Nightwood," 229.
[92] Plumb, Introduction, xxii–xxiii. In addition to these lengthy cuts, the manuscripts of *Nightwood* show evidence of several instances of Eliot taking issue with single words of Barnes's diction, most of which he seems to have edited out of either a fear of the censor or a desire for the text to be less sexually explicit. Barnes and Eliot debated these changes. In one well-documented instance, Faltejskova describes Coleman recalling that "At one point Eliot changed the word 'buggers' to 'boys.' Djuna said to me, 'Imagine trying to wake Eliot up!' I said, 'Yes, he's rather ascetic.' 'Looks as if his testicles had been tied in a Greek knot,' said Djuna" (Faltejskova 86). Andrew Field cites that Eliot's "single greatest contribution" to *Nightwood* was "the title itself," explaining that Barnes's previous title, *Anatomy of Night,* "was very likely the springboard which suggested the title to Eliot," who added "its unwitting secret watermark of Thelma's name in it" (Field 212).
[93] Plumb, Introduction, xxiii.
[94] Faltejskova, 104.
[95] Barnes, *Selected Works of Djuna Barnes: Spillway/The Antiphon/Nightwood*, 295.
[96] Ibid., 297.
[97] Faltejskova, 104.
[98] Barnes, *Selected Works of Djuna Barnes: Spillway/The Antiphon/Nightwood*, 307, 337, 349.
[99] Ibid., 296.
[100] Ibid., 295.
[101] Ibid., 347.
[102] Ibid., 242.
[103] Ibid., 304.
[104] Ibid., 299–300.
[105] Ibid., 304.
[106] Eliot, Introduction to "Nightwood," 229.
[107] Ibid., 231.
[108] Ibid., 230.
[109] Barnes, *Selected Works of Djuna Barnes: Spillway/The Antiphon/Nightwood*, 349.
[110] Eliot, Introduction to "Nightwood," 229.

Revelations of Divine Vision: Eliot and Julian of Norwich

[1] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel,* 183; Donoghue, *Words Alone*, 272; Brooker, "The Fire and The Rose," 71.

[2] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel,* 183. Slightly earlier in his text, he describes Eliot's conversion process thus: "accompanied to the Anglo-Catholic church by a French poet and a Spanish mystic, Eliot had nonetheless begun his search for their counterparts on English soil" (177).

[3] Brooker, "The Fire and the Rose," 70.

[4] Ibid.,72.

[5] Gardner wrote: "His poetic career has shown to a high degree the quality that Keats called 'negative capability,' when a man is 'capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.' He has never forced his poetic voice, but has been content with 'hints and guesses'" (78).

[6] Donoghue, 260.

[7] Donald J. Childs, *T. S. Eliot: Mystic, Son, and Lover* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), xii, Print.

[8] Brooker, "The Fire and the Rose," 72.

[9] Brooker explains: "The incandescent beauty of the fire and the rose, however, should not detract from the crucial point that the closing image is adverbial. The main clause in the coda, the part that announces the yes indeed of Eliot's theodicy, is the double 'all shall be well.' This direct quotation gives Julian of Norwich pride of place, even above Dante, who is situated in the modifier" ("The Fire and the Rose" 84).

[10] For such a description of reading, I am indebted to Pinkney, who writes thus of Prufrock via the facsimile edition of *The Waste Land* (emphasis mine): "With its haunting vision of the three Sirens singing in the cross-trees of the ship, Eliot's account of the fishing expedition achieves an epiphany every bit as bafflingly intense as that in the hyacinth garden. The blanched trio of weird sisters in the Facsimile will return later in Eliot as the 'three white leopards' of 'Ash-Wednesday' and are *related backwards* to the singing mermaids 'Combing the white hair of the waves' in 'Prufrock'" (109).

[11] Brooker, "The Fire and the Rose," 72.

[12] Childs, 1.

[13] Ibid., x.

[14] Eliot, Letter to Paul Elmer More, 3 August 1929, qtd. in Kojecky.

[15] Schuchard, Notes, *VMP,* 171.

[16] Eliot, *VMP,* 100.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 254.

[19] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love, The Motherhood of God: An Excerpt*, Ed. Frances Beer (Suffolk, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1998), Revelation XIX, 52, Print.

[20] Certainly Eliot pursued the science behind extraordinary vision, for Childs cites "his notes on books like E. Murisier's *Les Maladies des sentiments religieux* (The Diseases of the Religious Passions) and P. Janet's *Neuroses et idees fixes* (Neuroses and Obsessions)" and catalogues the volumes to which Eliot may have referred in his research on mysticism. See pp. 33–34.

[21] Luce Irigaray, *The Speculum of the Other Woman,* qtd. in Childs, xiv.

[22] Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, qtd. in Childs, xiv.
[23] Eliot, Letter to Paul Elmer More, 3 August 1929, qtd. in Kojecky.
[24] Childs, xiv–xv.
[25] Beer, Introduction, *Revelations of Divine Love,* 1.
[26] Childs, 14.
[27] Julian, Revelation VII, 58.
[28] Ibid., Revelation X, 39.
[29] Brooker, "The Fire and the Rose," 82.
[30] Julian, Revelation X, 39.
[31] Ibid., Revelation XX, 53.
[32] Eliot, Letter to William Force Stead, 10 April 1928, qtd. in Schuchard, 157.
[33] Frances Beer, "'All Shall Be Well': The Political Implications," *Revelations of Divine Love, The Motherhood of God: An Excerpt,* 71–80 (77).
[34] Julian of Norwich, "The Motherhood of God," *Revelations of Divine Love, The Motherhood of God: An Excerpt,* LVIII, 61.
[35] Gordon quotes the poem in full at the outset of her second chapter, calling it "his first and perhaps most lucid description of the timeless moment" he experienced while walking one day in Boston (23).
[36] Eliot, "Mandarins 4," *IMH*.
[37] Eliot, "Easter: Sensations of April," *IMH*.
[38] Ricks, Note on "Easter: Sensations of April," *IMH*.
[39] Brooker explains that Eliot copied from Underhill thus: 'Visionary experience is . . . the outward sign of a real experience. . . . As the artist's paint and canvas picture is the fruit, not merely of contact between brush and canvas, but also of a more vital contact between his creative genius and visible beauty or truth; so too we may see in visions . . . the fruit of a more mysterious contact between the visionary and a transcendental beauty or truth . . . [T]he paint and canvas picture . . . tries to show . . . that ineffable sight, that ecstatic perception of good or evil . . . to which the deeper, more real soul has attained' ("The Fire and the Rose" 71).
[40] Eliot, "Interlude in a Bar," *IMH*.
[41] Eliot, "First Debate between the Body and Soul," *IMH*.
[42] The poem's central figure, who "sits delaying in the vacant square," is troubled by images that "The eye retains" and against which "The sluggish brain will not react," both of which are inanimate and oppressive, lingering in the mind but seemingly unrelated to the surrounding environment. Thus, I read them as inescapable memories. Memory also surfaces as an earthly alternative to vision in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" (1917), in which "The memory throws up high and dry/A crowd of twisted things;/A twisted branch upon the beach/Eaten smooth and polished/As if the world gave up/The secret of its skeleton."
[43] Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, 12th ed. (London: Metheuen & Co. Ltd., 1930), 268, Print.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Eliot, "Suppressed Complex," *IMH*.
[46] Underhill, 268.

[47] Palmer describes the woman of "Preludes" Part III as a victim of oppression thus: "An atmosphere of suffering surrounds this woman, who seems trapped in her 'room enclosed.' Similar ideas surface in Part IV, the utterance of a sensitive speaker who is moved by 'the notion of some infinitely gentle/infinitely suffering thing.' As often with Eliot, suffering is connected with women" (144).
[48] With regard to the street, Crawford also comments on the relationship between vision and the street in *The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot*, explaining that "Eliot noted how ether might stimulate mystical experiences, and read James's quotations from B. P. Blood of visions experienced under ether 'in a bed pushed up against a window, a common city window on a common city street'" (80).
[49] Eliot, "The Dry Salvages," *Four Quartets, CPP*.
[50] Crawford, 79.
[51] Eliot, "Opera," *IMH*.
[52] Brooker, "Mimetic desire and the return to origins in *The Waste Land*," Laity and Gish 136.
[53] Pinkney, 86.
[54] Eliot, "Prufrock's Pervigilium," *IMH*.
[55] Schuchard explains the relationship between the two epigraphs of "Sweeney Agonistes" thus: "Only divestment of desire, Eliot implies through the second epigraph from St. John of the Cross, can lead one from the horror of the hoo-ha's to the ecstasy of divine union" (129).
[56] Responding to critics who read the woman of "Sweeney Erect" as victimized by her sexual encounter with Sweeney, Schuchard emphasizes Doris's contentment and wholeness at the close of the poem: "Doris is nonchalant and wholly unrepentant . . . She soon returns, happily spent, washed, and toweled, to her sometime fancy man Sweeney, 'padding' like a lioness, bountifully toting those old restoratives, those creature comforts, 'sal volatile/And a glass of brandy neat.'" (93).
[57] In a footnote, Palmer quotes Pinkney only to discount him: "Tony Pinkney thinks that 'Doris's entry in the final stanza has some of the hieratic ritualism of the priestess bearing libations at a sacrifice, as well as the routine efficiency of the surgeon's assistant administering an anaesthetic, entering just as the poem itself exits, she suggests a narrative beyond the letter of the text (p. 86).'" Palmer then goes on to state that "this statement seems to give Doris a rather too elevated position" (122).
[58] Eliot, "Coriolan," *CPP*.
[59] Childs, 40.
[60] Eliot, "A Cooking Egg," *CPP*.
[61] Julian, Revelation VI, 33.
[62] Childs categorizes three schools of metaphysical philosophy, including Eliot in his general interpretation: "The inclination of those with the scientific temperament to place the scientific above the mystical, and the inclination of the more orthodox of those with the mystical temperament to place the properly mystical above the occult, helps to account for Eliot's regular denigration of the occult. If to be a mystic is to be intellectually suspect, to be an occultist is to be beyond the pale indeed" (8).
[63] Ibid.
[64] Palmer, 173.

[65] Ibid., 172.
[66] Rachel Potter, "T. S. Eliot, women, and democracy," Laity and Gish, 226.
[67] Pinkney, 89.
[68] Julian, Revelation I, 26, and Revelation III, 28.
[69] Donoghue, 276.
[70] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel*, 83.
[71] Underhill, qtd. in Childs, 38.
[72] Eliot, *VMP*.
[73] Julian, Revelation X, 39.
[74] Ibid., Revelation XXIV, 58.
[75] Gardner, 182.
[76] Julian, Revelation X, 39.
[77] "ardour | ardor, n.", *OED Online*, March 2011, Oxford University Press, 19 May 2011.
[78] Sedgwick, 140.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Gardner, 121.
[81] Ibid., 117.
[82] Writing of Eliot's quotation of Julian in "Little Gidding," Gardner declares "We do not gain any particular help . . . from knowing that the sentence comes from Julian of Norwich" (55).
[83] Julian, Revelation XIII, 43.
[84] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel*, 156.
[85] Childs, 48.
[86] Pinkney makes the connection via a discussion of the women's detachment from the traditional female role of motherhood: "Like her holy predecessor in *Ash-Wednesday*, Agatha too has achieved the difficult feat of virgin birth; she is thus lifted clear away from the messy, viscous physicality that Eliot usually associates with women into some realm of unencumbered spirituality" (125).
[87] Donoghue, 276.
[88] Däumer describes that the women of Eliot's plays live "a double life . . . custodians of a world of stifling civility and banality . . . [and] as pursuing and hieratic figures representing the disruptive claims of a higher spiritual reality, to which only the elect few find access." She understands that these women function as "intercessors, spiritual guides, and stern priestesses," but misreads the plays as demonstrating the misogynistic moral that "women's emotional and social dominance has to be curbed before the protagonists can find their true vocation" (Laity and Gish 234, 240). Badenhausen limits his recognition of female spiritual power to *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Cocktail Party*, explaining that the women simply "serv[e] as a symbolic representation of the benefits of self-transcendence" (Laity and Gish 195).
[89] After explaining to Harry how she came to reside with Amy and her husband at Wishwood and, further, how she prevented his father from murdering his mother while pregnant with him, Agatha resolves: "But I wanted you!/If that had happened, I knew I should have carried/Death in life, death through lifetime, death in my womb./I felt that you were in some way mine!/And in that case I should have no other child." Ironically,

then, either outcome would have left her barren, carrying either death in her womb or restricting her maternal instincts to Harry alone. *CPP*.

[90] Pinkney describes Agatha as enduring "a spinsterly academic existence as head of a Cambridge college," thereby foreclosing to women the possibilities of economic independence and academic leadership (125).

[91] In her interpretive essay on Julian, Beer offers two possible interpretations for Julian's decision to live as an anchorite, revising the assumption that such a choice has its roots in penitence: "The eremitic tradition was inherently ascetic; the solitary life implied a mistrust of the flesh and the physical world, and its penitential focus presumed an emphasis on personal sin. But in fact these elements are not evident in Julian's writing. She seems to have been a naturally spiritual person who chose to live alone not because she was beset by worldly temptations, but simply to be closer to God" (78). In the same way, then, perhaps Agatha's decision to resist marriage and family and embrace instead an academic career instead can be reinterpreted as a positive means of furthering her metaphysical sensibility rather than as misogynistic denial.

[92] Coghill, 133.

[93] Däumer, Laity and Gish, 242.

[94] Julian, Revelation XIV, 45.

[95] Julian, Revelation XVII, 49.

[96] In *Words Alone*, Donoghue compares Part V of "The Dry Salvages" and *The Cocktail Party*: "Two conditions are described in this part, and they are distinguished as firmly as in *The Cocktail Party*; that of the saint, Celia, and that of the rest of us, Edward and Lavinia at the end of the play, 'a good life,' but not sanctity or the refining fire" (242).

[97] In a 1933 letter to Paul Elmer More, Eliot reiterated this point based on his own example, declaring to More that "as one gets older . . . one's solitude in life becomes more and more evident to oneself—I hope that still more age will eventually bring me to complete Christian acceptance of the fact." (Eliot, Letter to Paul Elmer More, 26 March 1933, qtd. in Harries).

[98] Badenhausen, Laity and Gish, 208.

[99] Däumer, Laity and Gish, 239.

[100] Julian, Revelation XXV, 59.

[101] Brooker, "The Fire and the Rose," 75.

[102] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel,* 192.

[103] Julian, Revelation VII, 33.

[104] Brooker, "The Fire and the Rose," 71, footnote 11.

[105] Julian, Revelation XX, 54.

[106] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel,* 194.

[107] Schuchard expands on the significance of the term "beseeching" as Julian understood it in her terms: "'Beseeching,' she writes of contemplative prayer, 'is a true, gracious, lasting will of the soul, oned and fastened into the will of our Lord by the sweet inward work of the Holy Ghost'" (*Eliot's Dark Angel* 193).

Conclusion

[1] Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel*, 82.

[2] Robert McCrum, "Revealed: The Remarkable Tale of T. S Eliot's Late Love Affair," *The Observer*, 24 May 2009: 8, Print.

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