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ABORTION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT

BY CHRISTINA HAUCK

It is true that the protagonist does not witness a revival of *The Waste Land*; but there are two important relationships involved in his case: a personal one as well as a general one. If secularization has destroyed, or is likely to destroy, modern civilization, the protagonist still has a private obligation to fulfill. Even if the civilization is breaking up . . . there remains the personal obligation: "Shall I at least set my lands in order?"

—Cleanthe Brooks

Of all the many tragedies I met in the war none exceeded that attaching to the loss of only children. It often means the end of all things; nothing to live for—just blank.

—Lord Dawson of Penn

All this is endangered (caught in the act, one might say) by a *nothing*. . . . A nothing that might cause the ultimate destruction, the splintering, the break in their systems of "presence," of "re-presentation," and "representation."

—Luce Irigaray

I dislike the word "generation."

—T. S. Eliot

I. PURULENT, OFFENSIVE DISCHARGE

Near the end of 1925, when Conrad Aiken wrote congratulating T. S. Eliot on the publication of *Poems 1909–1925*, Eliot responded by sending Aiken "a page torn out of the *Midwives' Gazette* [upon which] Eliot had underlined the words *Model Answers*, which came at the top of a column which was describing various forms of vaginal discharge." He also underlined the words, "*blood, mucus, shreds of mucus, and purulent offensive discharge*," but offered no explanation.¹ It is difficult to know how to interpret this bizarre and

extremely disturbing response. It may reflect despair over the health of his wife, Vivian Haigh-Wood, who apparently suffered from almost continuous menstrual bleeding.² It may also intimate an anguished identification with the (diseased) female body. But because of the context, it also suggests that by 1925 Eliot had come to view his poetry as an unviable production, even, perhaps, to elaborate the reproductive metaphor, a miscarriage or abortion. (Aiken, by the way, wrote back recommending Kotex.)³

Eliot's use of reproductive figuration is striking, but hardly uncommon. Terry Castle has documented the long history of such figuration by male writers, which she connects to changing literary values. In methodologically dissimilar studies, Susan Stanford Friedman and Barbara Johnson both discover pronounced differences in the ways that male and female writers handle reproductive figuration and, in the case of Johnson, respond to reproductive failure. In their encyclopedic study of twentieth-century writers, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar discover a pronounced tendency for male modernists to simultaneously deploy reproductive figuration and denigrate female reproductive capacity. Wayne Koestenbaum puts it succinctly, "Fantasies of male maternity buttress male modernism."⁴ For Koestenbaum, as for Gilbert and Gubar, Ezra Pound stands as an especially egregious example of this tendency, not least because he both castigates Eliot's inscription of an allegedly feminine sensibility into the drafts of *The Waste Land*, all the while likening his own role in the production of *The Waste Land* to that of a "sage-homme," or male midwife.⁵ What seems strikingly different about Eliot's figuration is that he turns the engendering reproductive metaphor inside out, asserting a painful and painfully fragmented sense of his poetry—and of himself as a poet. His poetry has not been brought successfully to term, as Pound insists, but rather has emerged in bloody inchoate pieces. This inversion of conventional male reproductive figuration problematizes attempts, such as Johnson's, to arrive at a purely gendered account of differences in the ways that male and female poets treat reproductive failure figuratively and thematically. Indeed, it simply would not be possible to apply to *The Waste Land* Johnson's claim that when men address dead children, "the speaker does not split self-accusingly or infra-symbolically in the ways we have noted in the abortion/motherhood poems," because the speaker of *The Waste Land* does "split self-accusingly" and "infra-symbolically."⁶

Jonathan Crewe suggests, in a recent essay, that one difficulty in generalizing from Johnson's thesis arises because "historical differ-

ence is fully subsumed under gender difference in the contrast Johnson draws between poems by nineteenth-century men and twentieth-century women.”⁷ Arguing that for men as for women “[t]he figure of the dead child becomes a culturally haunting one par excellence,” Crewe goes on to make his point using poems by Ben Jonson and John Donne. In this essay, I pursue a similar point via a reading of *The Waste Land*, a poem saturated with images of reproductive failure. Yet I do not want to dismiss gender as a factor in either the production or the reception of poetry, especially poetry that thematizes reproduction and/or employs reproductive figuration; men and women, after all, have very different physical, psychic, and social relations to that most fundamental of all human activities. Rather, in this essay I will argue that we cannot begin to understand Eliot’s figuration of his own poetry as an abortion/miscarriage without also understanding that reproductive failure constituted a major crisis for late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Anglo-American culture, and that the definition and resolution of that crisis offered very different consequences for men and for women. Furthermore, given that *The Waste Land* is widely regarded not only as Eliot’s major poetic achievement, but also as one of the exemplars of modernism itself, I will also argue that reproductive failure in the poem, particularly abortion, signals, for Eliot, the multiple failures of modernism: as a viable literary project and as a means to reconstitute wholeness at either a personal or a general level, that is, at the level of the individual male subject or the level of history.

II. BIRTH CONTROL AND THE BIRTH OF MODERNISM⁸

In “State and Society, 1880–1930,” Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz sketch the outlines of “a profound crisis of the British state which became acute from 1910 to 1926.” Characterizing this as “a crisis of liberalism,” out of which grew “new ‘collectivist’ forms of state organization and social regulation which were distinctly different from the *laissez-faire* individualism of the mid Victorian period,” they go on to describe “a *succession* of crises of the state . . . which in their combination amounted to a crisis of the social order itself.” The most significant of these crises, they argue, are those of imperialism, posed by the question of Home Rule for Ireland; of labor, posed by the Socialist Revival; and of feminism, posed by the Suffrage Movement. What underlies them all “was the pressure for mass democracy.” Their uneven, imperfect, and incomplete resolution constitutes a “passive revolution,” in which dominant groups successfully limit the

bid for democratic participation by the “masses” (of colonial subjects, workers, women), imposing solutions that “contribute to restoration and continuity.”⁹

At several points Hall and Schwarz describe this crisis in British state and society as a “crisis of reproduction,” because “[c]rises occur when the social formation can no longer be reproduced on the basis of the pre-existing system of social relations,” and “in the closing decades of the nineteenth century the liberal state and its attendant modes for regulating civil society could no longer be reproduced by liberal policies, practices and objectives.”¹⁰ But I would argue that this figuration of social crisis as reproductive failure masks a fourth, perhaps even more fundamental crisis of this period, one of sexual reproduction. Demographers and demographic historians have long held the demographic transition of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, characterized by a declining birthrate and a shift from a rural to an urban population, to be one of the most significant transformations of modernity. As early as 1909, sociologists began attributing the decline in the English birthrate to voluntary efforts to limit fertility, most commonly supposing contraception to be the primary agent of such limitation. However, some historians have argued that abortion has played an even greater, perhaps pivotal, role. Most recently, Simon Szreter has argued that the decline in the birthrate was achieved primarily through varying forms of sexual continence, including the tendency to delay marriage.¹¹ Regardless of the cause of the declining birthrate (and it seems likely that most couples probably experimented with the full range of interventions), it remains a fact of fundamental importance during this period.

However, the declining birthrate cannot be taken as the only significant feature of the reproductive crisis. For many women of the period, reproductive control was an important issue, but their sense of reproductive crisis was spurred by the widespread incidence of venereal infection, particularly syphilis, which had reached epidemic proportions; syphilis was responsible for a high percentage of stillbirths, infant deaths, and birth defects; and many, if not most of the feminists, attributed its spread to profligate male sexuality. In their work on feminism, venereal infection, and the Purity Movement, Lucy Bland and Frank Mort have already outlined the extent to which venereal infection may be understood as a significant crisis of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹² To their analyses I would add that definition and resolution of the venereal infection crisis occurred within the parameters of the larger, more fundamen-

tal crisis of sexual reproduction. In the following brief account I will stress four aspects of the reproductive crisis. First, it occurred in roughly the same time period they describe, 1877–1931, that is, between the Bradlaugh-Besant Trial and the issuing of the Ministry of Health Memorandum 153/M.C.W. in 1931.¹³ Second, it conformed to the specialized meaning of crisis Hall and Schwarz deploy (“each moment of crisis is *also* a moment of reconstruction: crises are the means by which social relations are reconstituted”), in that it embodied the simultaneous failure and reconstitution of maternity, that most fundamental of all social relations.¹⁴ Third, the earliest responses to the reproductive crisis were made by volunteers whose efforts were gradually overtaken by new professional classes within the government. Last, the resolution of this crisis, like others of the same period, took the form of a “passive revolution,” in which calls for the government to distribute contraception (and abortion) were met, but in a manner that tended to limit rather than expand reproductive freedom for women. Beyond those four points I will also discuss the extent to which the discourses about reproductive control draw upon the evolutionary paradigm Hall and Schwarz claim structures “[t]he emerging welfare and collectivity ideologies which came to be channelled most directly through the state.”¹⁵ The most famous expression of this paradigm is Social Darwinism, which maps Darwin’s theory of the evolution of species onto the social realm. Last, I will extend this discussion of reproductive control and the evolutionary paradigm into a discussion of literary modernism, which I argue responds to and attempts to resolve—or rewrite—the reproductive crisis of this period.

The 1877 republication of Charles Knowlton’s birth control manual, *Fruits of Philosophy*, by freethinkers Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh marks the beginning of England’s demographic transition. The publicity attending their obscenity trial created enormous demand for *Fruits of Philosophy* and precipitated a sudden concerted effort among the middle classes to control reproduction through any possible means: delayed marriage, long periods of sexual abstinence, contraception, and/or abortion.¹⁶ The practical result of this effort can be seen in the steady and dramatic decline in the British birthrate: between 1876, the year preceding the trial, and the early 1930s, when the government began providing women with contraception on a limited basis, the British birthrate declined from 36.3 births per thousand to between 14.5 and 15 births per thousand.¹⁷

However, although England's birthrate did decline steadily for sixty-five years, it did not decline uniformly across all classes. The steepest declines occurred first among the wealthier, more highly educated classes, gradually spreading to the poorer, less educated classes. This differential birthrate—the tendency for certain classes to produce markedly fewer children than other classes—remained in effect throughout most of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, equalizing only in the period after the war. It was a source of intense anxiety that fueled debate and wild speculations about the future of “the race.”¹⁸ In retrospect, it appears to be the result of different population groups beginning to practice reproductive control at slightly different times.¹⁹

The years 1877–1931 can be broken into three distinct periods, each marked by a new proliferation of written discourse about reproductive control. From 1877 until about 1911, this discourse existed primarily in three sources: manuals and handbooks such as *The Fruits of Philosophy*, magazine advertisements for various contraceptive devices and abortifacients, and the many publications of the privately organized Malthusian League.²⁰ Beginning in 1911, the year of the *Fertility of Marriage Census*, discourse about reproductive control also found its way into an increasing number of official and quasi-official pamphlets and reports.²¹ Ten years later, in October 1921, the widespread publication of “Love-Marriage-Birth Control,” a speech made to the Anglican Bishops by Lord Dawson of Penn (a prominent churchman and the King's personal physician), put the subject of contraception on the front page of nearly every periodical in England, making it a respectable topic for public discourse throughout the 1920s and beyond. The year 1921 is also significant as the year that Marie Carmichael Stopes and her husband, Humphrey Verdon Roe, opened England's first birth control clinic in Lower Holloway, London. Their volunteer efforts proved instrumental to the growth of the birth control movement.²²

The Anglican bishops did not respond favorably to Dawson's appeal (or to anyone else's), continuing to maintain for another nine years that procreation was the primary purpose of sexual union in marriage. Finally, however, the Bishops conceded Dawson's point, that “birth control is here to stay,” and, in Resolution 15 of the 1930 Lambeth conference, gave grudging authorization to the practice of birth control in marriage, under the dictates of the individual conscience and medical supervision. The British government shortly followed suit. Issued in 1931, the Ministry of Health's Memorandum

153/M.C.W. “reaffirmed that it was not the function of the maternal and child welfare centers to provide birth control instruction,” but nonetheless authorized the provision of limited information about contraception to married women whose lives would clearly be jeopardized by pregnancy. It seems clear this represents, at best, a passive revolution, as it acknowledges, without actually acceding to the widening claim that the government should make contraception available on demand. The full integration of family planning services into the National Health System was not recommended until 1949 and not implemented until 1976.²³

Throughout the fifty-five-year period framed by the publication of *Fruits of Philosophy* and Memorandum 153/M.C.W., proponents and opponents of birth control, as contraception came to be known, connected it repeatedly not only to the triumvirate of crises identified by Hall and Schwarz, but also to any number of other crises, including those of sex, sexuality, marriage, prostitution, venereal infection, maternity, religion, morality, medicine, population, gender, nationalism and nationality, economics, war, evolution, and race (to name but the most prominent). The articulations between birth control, the reproductive crisis, and these other crises became particularly pronounced as commentators attempted to imagine the future of British culture and empire. In general, two wildly divergent narratives, each driven by the logic of the evolutionary paradigm, appeared and reappeared. According to its advocates, birth control would fundamentally alter the relationship between men and women, making mutual sexual pleasure and its attendant intimacy the cornerstone of marriage. Stronger, healthier marriage relationships would fortify the family and the nation. Prostitution and venereal infection would be eradicated because men would no longer defer marriage or seek sexual gratification outside of marriage. War would be eliminated because nations would no longer experience the need to expand their borders in order to provide for a burgeoning population. Furthermore, proponents claimed, birth control would enable the fulfillment of evolution because fewer babies would entail less competition for scarce resources, allowing each child to grow to his or her fullest potential. According to this scenario, each successive generation would top the last in terms of physical and intellectual capacity. Mirroring this utopian scenario is the dystopian narrative generated by those who viewed with alarm increasing use of contraception. According to this narrative, the separation of sexual pleasure from any reproductive consequence would lead to a breakdown of

the family, the community, and the nation. The social position of women would be further degraded as they would be forced to comply with men's unrestrained sexual demands and consequently lose their power as mothers. Prostitution and venereal disease would flourish. The British Empire would be trampled by its enemies, whose reproductive rates were significantly higher than Britain's. At its absolute worst, pronounced its detractors, birth control portended the eventual extinction of the species itself, either because so-called inferior races and classes would overrun the so-called superior races and classes, or because women, preferring sex to maternity, would refuse to breed and thus let the species expire.

Although contemporary commentators and later historians have widely agreed that contraception was responsible for the demographic transition, at least one group of writers has identified abortion as the pivotal practice. In *Abortion*, Malcom Potts, Peter Diggory, and John Peel, argue that it takes a substantial period of time, at least two generations, for any given population group to establish an effective contraceptive regimen. Moreover, even when such a regimen has been established, each new generation of practitioners "tends to learn by mistakes." In the wake of the inevitable pregnancies, many women resort to abortion, a phenomenon Potts, Diggory, and Peel document not only for England, but for a variety of diverse cultures as well.²⁴ Although it is impossible to determine the abortion rate in England during the period I am discussing, all the evidence points to a steady increase, certainly after, but perhaps beginning before, the Bradlaugh-Besant trial. By the 1920s and 1930s, it appeared to be a virtual epidemic.²⁵

Given that "resort to abortion and the use of contraceptives are often positively related," we might expect to find strong congruence between the two sets of discourse.²⁶ And it is true that abortion discourse tends to intensify certain aspects of the debates about contraception, particularly those organized around class and/or gender stereotypes. Debate about middle- and upper-class abortion focused on the selfishness of the aborting woman, who was perceived to be far more interested in maintaining her figure and her social life (which more often than not was feared to include extramarital affairs) than in fulfilling her maternal function.²⁷ Debate about working-class abortion focused on the perceived ignorance of the aborting woman, who was often imagined to be uninformed about the dangers of abortion and who was often depicted as hapless in the face of her

husband's sexual demands and her own fecundity.²⁸ Whether she was rich or poor, whether her fault was producing too few or too many children, whether she aborted from selfishness or ignorance, woman was inevitably constructed as mother, and the mother appears in the reproductive crisis as a key figure, whose instincts and impulses needed to be brought into line with the new ideologies of the state. Not only was the mother responsible for the continuation of the race, she also became responsible for the production of useful, that is, healthy, future citizens.

However, discourse about abortion also differs from discourse about contraception in several important ways. First, contraception was never illegal in England; however, from 1803 until 1967, abortion was. Prior to 1861, abortion law targeted the abortionist. Beginning in 1861, with the passage of the Offences Against the Person Act, women themselves were prosecuted for procuring, or attempting to procure, their own abortions. The threat of legal prosecution fostered silence around the topic, which was reinforced by general taboos against speaking/writing about sex and reproduction: "for the bulk of women having abortions, the event was likely to have been the most private and secret thing that ever happened to them."²⁹ Second, although abortion followed birth control into the arena of public discourse, it did not become a respectable topic until the mid-1930s and even then remained somewhat taboo. Third, abortion never found widespread advocacy. A few early feminists, such as Stella Browne, Dora Russell, and Alice Jenkins, made abortion a significant feature of their campaigns for feminist-socialist reform, but they were exceptional in their response. Indeed, abortion was routinely and widely denounced by advocates and opponents of contraception. Fourth, abortion discourse appears to be much more narrowly bounded than contraception discourse. Even when the Abortion Law Reform Association (ALRA) began advocating in 1936 for easier access to medically supervised abortion, it tended not to make abortion the cornerstone of any utopian goal, preferring to concentrate its arguments on the more practical matter of the preservation of maternal life.³⁰ Last, and most significantly, abortion discourse appears to resist being incorporated into any evolutionary narrative. Rather, abortion always already appears to be the site of massive social and discursive failure: of medical knowledge and control; of patriarchal authority over women; of the very idea of social evolution.

The linked failure of medical knowledge and legal control appears to result from a fundamental difficulty in effectively demarcating

abortion from other physiological phenomena or social practices. One commonly voiced concern was the inability of medical doctors to definitively differentiate between miscarriage and abortion, that is, between spontaneous and induced abortion.³¹ Women themselves often did not think of their self-induced abortions as abortions per se, which they defined in terms of surgical intervention. Instead, they treated the wide variety of uncontrolled abortifacients (over-the-counter pills, potions, and caustic douching solutions) as emmenagogues, means of inducing a delayed menstrual period, of setting their bodies right.³² Confusion between abortion and miscarriage, abortifacient and emmenagogue, made it difficult, if not impossible, to determine intention, further thwarting legal and medical attempts to control abortion.³³ Further confusion existed in attempts to differentiate between abortion, infanticide, and child murder, on the one hand, and abortion and contraception, on the other. Such confusions do not simply reflect nineteenth-century gynecological ignorance; they persisted well into the twentieth century. A doctor writing in the *Lancet* in 1920 claims that “infanticide . . . abortion, and preventing conception are manifestly three degrees of the same crime.”³⁴ The confusion between contraception, abortion, and infanticide was sometimes pursued with apparent deliberation, as birth control opponents sought to discredit all forms of reproductive control. In response, birth-controllers adopted the counterstrategy of not only joining in the emphatic denouncement of abortion, but also of promising that the widespread availability of effective means of contraception would eradicate abortion entirely.³⁵

On one level, then, abortion can be understood as a social problem left unresolved within the general period described by Hall and Schwarz. Unlike other social problems, whose solutions were shaped by an evolutionary paradigm, abortion eluded medical, social, or legal definition, and it was not solved by efforts to place reproduction under medical control, to make maternity more attractive to women, or to penalize them for refusing to carry a child to term. At another level, however, abortion can be understood as revealing a momentous interpretive conflict at the site of maternity. For the culture at large, maternity constituted the epitome of femininity, the physiological, psychic, and social fulfillment of every woman.³⁶ This interpretation of maternity serves as the linchpin holding together the interlocking discourses and structures of power revealed by analysis of the reproductive crisis. It was as deeply felt by the staunchest advocate as by the strictest opponent of reproductive control. The success of

birth control advocates such as Marie Carmichael Stopes, for instance, rested on their ability to conceptualize contraception as the means to make women better mothers.³⁷ Better mothers made better babies, and better babies made better citizens: contraception was fully absorbed as a solution to the reproductive crisis. But the decision to abort rests on the radical reinterpretation of (a particular) pregnancy as disruptive rather than fulfilling.³⁸ Such an interpretation stalls the evolutionary narrative; it generates the possibility of other narratives, other futures.³⁹ Given the wide incidence of abortion during this period, a significant number of women were engaged in such a reinterpretation. The resulting panic, the belief that abortion “presented ‘a grave national danger,’” suggests that abortion can be understood not merely as an unresolved social problem but rather as the most severe and least understood crisis of modernity, not only because of its pivotal role in reducing the birthrate, but also because the “flight from maternity” appeared as a threat that might unleash utter chaos.⁴⁰ Indeed, we might say that the deliberately emptied womb signified “[a] nothing that might cause the ultimate destruction, the splintering, the break in their systems of “presence,” of “re-presentation,” and “representation.”⁴¹

But even given that the reproductive crisis is constitutive of modernity and is thematized by writers of every imaginative genre, it remains to be argued that the reproductive crisis is in any sense constitutive of modernism.⁴² Such an argument can never be fully realized, of course, not least because critics have been unable to agree on what modernism is or was or what its social/political/philosophical motivations and consequences are or were.⁴³ Most critics, however, agree on at least a couple of points: that modernism is a more or less self-conscious movement in art and literature that emerged between 1910–1926 (the same years that Hall and Schwarz identify as most acute for the British state). And most critics would agree that it can—indeed, must—be distinguished from realism, the dominant literary mode of the nineteenth century. The realist/modernist binary tends to generate a number of other binaries which are taken more or less adequately to describe each mode of writing: whereas realism is taken to be traditional, objective, unitary, mimetic, and content-oriented, modernism is taken to be innovative, subjective, fragmentary, creative, and form-oriented. As Eysteinnsson points out, however, those terms, far from being objective critical evaluations, are extremely subjective and value-ridden. He suggests that one way to achieve a more objective assessment of these two modes

of writing is to deprivilege them as literature, treating each instead as discourse, subject to the same rules and constraints as any other discourse.⁴⁴

My reading of the discourses of reproductive control against the backdrop of the evolutionary paradigm suggests a model for both deprivileging and reconceptualizing literary discourse generally, modernism particularly. The relationship between realism and the evolutionary paradigm seems fairly clear: the realist plot most often narrates the life story of a protagonist who is seen to develop (or evolve) from a simpler, immature state of being to a complex, mature state. In contrast, the relationship between modernism and the evolutionary paradigm isn't so clear. Indeed, the modernist break with, or revolt against, the conventions of realism, particularly those pertaining to plot and character, would also seem to entail a break with the evolutionary paradigm. This seems particularly true of some of the more violent expressions of modernism in pre-war (and pre-*Waste Land*) London: F. O. Marinetti and his Futurist friends "trampled [their] atavistic ennui" to "lay amorous hands on [the] torrid breasts" of an automobile; Vorticists Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound "blasted," among other people, products, institutions, and ideas, "SNOBBISH BORROVIAN running after / GIPSY KINGS and ESPADAS / bowing the knee to / wild Mother Nature, / her feminine contours, / Unimaginative insult to / MAN."⁴⁵ These (interrelated) rejections of the past, of women, and of nature, and the concomitant celebrations of technology and a particular form of masculinity impute a self-conscious break with the evolutionary paradigm, which emphasizes the biological grounds of culture and its gradual evolution through time. But the break is only gestured toward, never complete. For instance, at the same time that Marinetti asserts the kind of radical estrangement of the subject that is often viewed as a hallmark of modernism, he also puts "anarchic individualism" in the service of human evolution: "As the greatest affective force of the individual, Futurist patriotism, while remaining disinterested, becomes the most favorable atmosphere for the continuity and development of the race." According to Marinetti, maternity (the utmost expression of femininity) and war (the utmost expression of masculinity) underwrite the evolutionary imperative: "The life of insects demonstrates that everything comes down to reproduction at any cost and to purposeless destruction."⁴⁶ Here is evidence for the failure of at least one strain of modernism, which cannot sustain the break with the past it seems to initiate. The Vorticist program of

breaking with the evolutionary paradigm also fails at the point that it encounters sexual reproduction: in *Blast* 2, Lewis “blasts” birth control and “blesses” war time babies, a curious anomaly for a theorist who otherwise “blesses” technology and “blasts” nature. Moreover, in “blasting” Beecham’s Pills, Lewis may also be attacking abortion, since those over the counter cure-alls “were accompanied by ‘Advice to Females’ recommending their use for ‘any unusual delay.’”⁴⁷

The incomplete break of these early modernists with the evolutionary paradigm at the exact moment that they encounter reproduction and/or reproductive control has some important consequences for our understanding of modernism. First, it reveals that the formal innovations so often taken as the hallmark of modernism contain a set of rather old-fashioned ideas about men, women, sex, and reproduction. This strain of modernism does not so much “make it new” as make it seem new. Second, modernism does react, sometimes directly, often indirectly, to the reproductive crisis, and it does so in a way that our study of birth control discourse might have predicted: it returns maternity as a stable social and discursive site beyond human/male control. But modernism does not only react to the crisis, it also attempts to rewrite the crisis in ways that are generally, but not always, gendered through reproductive figuration that privileges male creativity as the key cultural site. This double movement—or rather, this pair of double movements: the break that is also a recuperation, the simultaneous privileging and erasure of maternity—is a prime example of the extreme difficulty of coming to terms with modernism, for the double movement contains within it a notorious instability which generates the interpretive conflicts of modernist studies—a variation of what Marianne DeKoven calls “*sous-rature*”: modernism can plausibly be viewed as radical or reactionary, creative or mimetic, fragmentary or unified.⁴⁸

But what happens to the instability of modernist discourse when maternity cannot be returned to as a privileged site, as in the case of abortion? It amplifies itself, I would argue, doubles and redoubles, creating something very like *The Waste Land*, a poem which not only exhibits many, if not all, of the contradictory features of modernism, but also encodes abortion as a practice inimical to and irrecoverable by patriarchal hegemony.⁴⁹ For Eliot, the “splintering” effects of abortion are spatially and temporally limitless. They occur simultaneously at the most “personal” and “general” levels of the poem, in the boudoir and in the (concrete) jungle, within the psyche of the

individual male and within the “system of ‘representation’” called history. We can understand this figuration in Irigarayan terms: abortion poses a crisis for male identity because it disrupts the process of specula(riza)tion upon which male identity depends. In the first place, the destruction of the fetus deprives the father of an opportunity for self-identification through the mutual and mutually reinforcing gaze between him and his son. In the second place, and more importantly, abortion utterly refutes the myth of male origin. In destroying the fetus, the woman makes it clear that her body is the site of origin: she renders herself opaque, refuses the role of speculum, and forces the male to see himself not through but in her—or in the fetus, the only other possible object of the male gaze at the moment the abortion is revealed.⁵⁰

Before turning to a discussion of abortion in *The Waste Land*, however, I would like first to explore some of Eliot’s references to the related questions of contraception and prophylaxis, partly to establish the degree to which Eliot’s concern with reproductive failure saturates the poem, and partly to establish the reading strategy by which I decode the centrality of abortion in *The Waste Land*.

III. “DEATH BY WATER”

The Waste Land is deeply concerned with reproduction, as the last word of the first line suggests: “April is the cruelest month, breeding.”⁵¹ That this famous line is usually recited without the last word can be attributed to the enjambment. However, the line does constitute a grammatically complete sentence, suggesting perhaps another motive for the common omission of the word “breeding.” That omission, I would like to propose, has been produced by one manifestation of modernist *sous-rature*: the desire to simultaneously disclose and conceal a profound concern with reproduction and reproductive failure. In *The Waste Land* this general desire is connected to, but not identical with, Eliot’s private desire both to disclose and to conceal the facts of his personal life, especially the sexual, reproductive, and specular crisis attending his marriage to Haigh-Wood. “The Burial of the Dead” offers evidence that all these conflicting desires operate in *The Waste Land* at formal and thematic levels. For example, the intrusion of Marie, whose voice abruptly supplants that of the poet eight lines into the poem, introduces one of the poem’s most novel and modernistic formal device, narrative pastiche. At this moment, Eliot ceases speaking as Eliot, and begins speaking as Marie. But Marie, like all the personae of *The Waste*

Land, exists primarily as a projection of the poet, enabling Eliot to reveal some of his deepest, most intimate concerns, without risking the self-exposure that a more explicitly confessional mode would entail. Furthermore, despite the fact that there is nothing overtly sexual about what Marie has to say for herself, her nocturnal isolation evokes one of *The Waste Land*'s most prominent themes, repressed or absent sexuality. As one critic has it, if Marie is reading through the night, she's probably not having sex.⁵² To that I would add, if she's not having sex, she's not reproducing—and neither is the poet.

Reading reproductive failure as a theme of *The Waste Land* is hardly an original enterprise. Indeed, recognition of the theme permeates the criticism. But the tendency has been to read sterility as the vehicle of an elaborate metaphor for cultural, spiritual, or historical deficiency. This tendency constitutes a rather spectacular trend in the early criticism, from “[t]he sick king and *The Waste Land* symbolise, we gather, the sick soul and the desolation of this material life” (1923) and “[t]he poem depicts a world where the wholesome flowing water of emotion, which alone fertilizes all human activity, has dried up” (1938), to “all [the poem's characters] are leading essentially aimless and barren lives” (1945) and “[t]hese people, spiritually sterile, describe a purposeless circle” (1956).⁵³ It also appears in more recent, theoretically denser criticism as well. Harriet Davidson writes that “every separation from memory and a world (even a bad world) is sterile and barren” (1984), a point of view metonymically echoed by Andrew Ross's “any sexual failure is represented as either aborted or lacking at the level of desire” (1987).⁵⁴ The fundamental difference between those readings and my own is elucidated by the distinction Peter Stallybrass and Allon White draw between “displacement” and “sublimation”: whereas “displacement in general can be considered as strong transcoding of semiotic material and its corresponding position of utterance *across* unequal semantic territories, . . . sublimation is a process of *upward* displacement through the social stratification of discourse.”⁵⁵ Thus, in contrast to critics who almost reflexively sublimate the theme of reproductive failure, transcoding it vertically as cultural failure, I will begin by following its more horizontal displacements through a range of other discourses and discursive sites, including contraception, prophylaxis, abortion, homosexuality, eugenics, and population.

The ideal place to begin such transcoding is with Madame Sosostri, the fortuneteller who warns the poem's speaker to “Fear death by water” (55). Two cards are typically read as defining

Madame Sosostri's role in the poem and signifying the limits of her ability to foresee the poet's fate: "And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card, / Which is blank, is something he carries on his back, / Which I am forbidden to see" (52–54). In conventional accounts of these lines, we learn that Madame Sosostri, "the wisest woman in Europe" (45), is the avatar of a debased religious ritual whose original meaning is not available to her. "[T]he one-eyed merchant" stands for the spread of the ancient mystery cults along the trade routes of Asia, Africa, and Europe; the "blank" card stands for the loss of the original rituals.⁵⁶ What begins, however, as rather promising horizontal reading, merely feeds the sublimating impulse: M. Sosostri becomes little more than another vehicle for modern spiritual sterility. If, in contrast, we begin by de-sublimating the images—and keeping in mind the theme of sexual reproduction—it becomes possible to read "the one-eyed merchant" as a (crude) figure for the one-eyed phallus whose transformations into the (homosexual?) Smyrna merchant and Phlebas the Phoenician constitute one of the poem's more obvious displacements.⁵⁷ It follows then that the next card in the reading, "Which is blank, is something he carries on his back," can be read in terms of reproduction—or reproductive failure. "Shooting blanks" is, after all, a euphemism for male infertility. But the merchant "carries" the blank card "on his back," suggesting a couple of related readings: the blank card can be read either as a figure for the (nearly invisible) condom that sheathes the phallus, at once defeating reproduction and protecting from venereal infection, or as venereal infection itself, which often produces no symptoms until the very late stages. Within the economy of this reading, it becomes apparent that the interdiction against Madame Sosostri "seeing" the "blank card" encodes (enforced) female ignorance of contraception, prophylaxis, and/or venereal infection.

The interdiction against Madame Sosostri seeing the condom can be attributed to female ignorance of contraception. As I discuss earlier, one major cause of post-war sterility was the ever widening availability of contraception. Despite the increasing availability and efficacy of contraceptive technology, however, birth control remained inaccessible to those whose birthrate was highest, the working classes. To accomplish their aim of universal access, birth controllers such as Marie Stopes felt compelled to bypass the medical establishment, whose members not infrequently refused to provide their female patients with birth control instruction, though they might, if hard pressed, provide it to their male patients.⁵⁸

To read the “blank card” as a prophylactic against venereal infection or an asymptomatic venereal infection is to discover an even more ominous cause of reproductive failure in *The Waste Land*, for birth defects and sterility in women are two long-term results of untreated venereal infection, as are paralysis, deafness, disorders or loss of speech, loss of memory, and, importantly, blindness.⁵⁹ In either case, Madame Sosostri’s inability to see encodes ignorance. On the one hand, as I have intimated, venereal infections, particularly gonorrhea, are often asymptomatic, and Madame Sosostri, like other women of her time, would have no means of detecting such an infection in her partner or herself. On the other hand, she, like many other British women, would have been susceptible to venereal infection not only because the British medical profession protected women by refusing to teach them how to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy or venereal disease, but also because doctors conspired (the word is not too strong) to protect syphilitic men by refusing, in the name of doctor-patient privilege, to divulge the fact of a man’s infection to his wife or to inform a woman that she and/or her children were similarly infected.⁶⁰

The fortuneteller’s ignorance of what the one-eyed man carries on his back thus becomes the vehicle for some of the poem’s most wicked irony: the epithet “wisest woman” links Madame Sosostri with the wise women of Europe, that is, the witches, who were the practitioners of the ancient medical arts, including the prevention of pregnancy and procurement of abortion.⁶¹ Their destruction during the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries coincides not only with the assimilation of reproduction to male control, but also with the introduction of venereal infection into Europe.⁶² Madame Sosostri, the “wisest woman in Europe,” is incompetent to defend herself against the perils of pregnancy or venereal disease, or to advise her clients how to do so, except perhaps to advise abstinence: “fear death by water.”

But is Madame Sosostri really as ignorant as I have suggested? Identifying her with the witches raises the possibility that she is not so much the avatar of a debased religious tradition as a living conduit for “secret information . . . which every woman knows,” information widely perceived at the turn of the century to represent a threat to masculine hegemony.⁶³ Indeed, her warning to “fear death by water” suggests knowledge of two forms of female reproductive control, abortion and postcoital douching, which, although very different in their intervention, can appear very alike. According to Potts, Diggory,

and Peel, "Intrauterine injections with syringes of various fluids to induce abortion . . . may have been particularly widely used in England."⁶⁴ There is, of course, a direct reference to abortion in "A Game of Chess," which I will discuss below. Unrecognized, however, is Eliot's reference to abortion/postcoital douching, contained in "The Fire Sermon." The prostitutes, Mrs. Porter and her daughter, "wash their feet in soda water" (201), widely taken to be a sort of ironic allusion to the washing of Christ's feet by the prostitute Mary Magdalene. Yet critics have noted that Eliot is collating two or more versions of a popular WWI song. One very telling version goes:

The moon shines bright on Mrs. Porter
And on her daughter:
She washes out her cunt in soda water,
And so she oughta
To keep it clean.⁶⁵

Neither of the critics who cites this version of the song states the obvious: Mrs. Porter and her daughter are douching, as a means of contracepting, or of avoiding venereal infection, or both. This critical omission seems peculiar in light of these critics' awareness of the importance of fertility to this passage. Smith, in particular, asserts that "Mrs. Porter . . . is first of all Diana . . . who was a fertility goddess before she was the chaste huntress."⁶⁶ Their omission here, like that governing the omission of the word "breeding" in recitations of the poem's first line, is symptomatic of the tendency to sublimate *The Waste Land's* concern with reproductive sterility. Overreliance on this reading strategy leads these critics astray: missing the obvious implication of Eliot's miscitation, they go on to misread the closing line of this stanza, "*Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!*" (202). In Verlaine's poem, from which Eliot borrows this line, the children sing while Parsifal, who has overcome his lust (for boys as well as women), prepares to adore the Holy Grail. Schwarz seems especially drawn to read the allusion to Parsifal as a sublimation of the previous scene: "With a dreamlike turn of the mind, the brothel scene has faded into a sacred ritual, symbolic consummation of the latent potentiality existing in even the basest moment."⁶⁷ Rather than reading the children as symbols of "latent [sacred] potentiality," I read them as the consequence of the prostitutes' profession: the children's choir provides a very ironic commentary on Mrs. Porter's and her daughter's abortive/contraceptive efforts.

If “fear death by water” encodes a reference to female reproductive control/prophylaxis, then it is clear that Madame Sosostriis, far from being an ignorant victim of a phallic economy, only professes ignorance. Indeed, she might herself be, like the wise women of Europe, a midwife/abortionist, one who uses the profession of fortuneteller as a cover for more significant (and profitable) activities. Her surprising caution in the final three lines of this passage (“if you see dear Mrs. Equitone, / Tell her I bring the horoscope myself: / One must be so careful these days” [57–59]) suggests the discretion Lionel Rose asserts was an important trait of the successful abortionist, particularly one whose clients included the wealthier classes: “It was important for the midwife to reassure her client not only of her competence but also her discretion, for [her] high-class clients were conscious of their vulnerability to blackmail.” As well as performing abortions, M. Sosostriis might also be engaged in a practice Rose calls “baby planting,” by which he means the arranging of fake confinements, usually for wealthy women who were for some reason unable to bear a child. In this case the “horoscope” (horror-scope?) might consist of, “as well as the drugged and concealed baby, . . . suitably stained bed-linen and the afterbirth,” which in some cases actually consisted of “bottles of bullock’s blood acquired from the butcher’s.”⁶⁸ In either event, Madame Sosostriis, seen in this light, is not so much the passive victim of socially ordained ignorance as she is the originator of a kind of sexual fraud, a magician who makes babies appear and disappear without any regard for the law of the father.

The conclusion of the tarot reading articulates these concerns with female reproductive control to larger, more inclusive discourses: “I see crowds of people walking around in a ring” (56) alludes to the population question, which drove much of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debate about the declining birthrate (and of which Eliot appears much more deeply conscious in the drafts of *The Waste Land*).⁶⁹ But students of the birthrate were less concerned about over-population (“crowds of people”) than the differential birthrate, the tendency for the so-called lower classes to produce significantly more children than the so-called upper classes. All too often the solution to this problem involved some version of eugenics, a putative science which sought to improve the race both by reducing the birthrate of so-called undesirable groups (working classes, Jews, Catholics, Asians, epileptics, the deaf, and mentally ill, to name but a few) and encouraging the reproduction of the so-called desirable groups (the wealthier classes, Protestants, Anglo-Saxons, and so on).

The poem's first articulation of the discourses of reproductive control, prophylaxis, population, and eugenics occurs in the scene involving Mrs. Porter and her daughter. While I might offer all sorts of explanations for the prompt appearance of the children's choir (including, especially, the relative inefficacy of douching as a contraceptive practice), I would here like to focus on two questions: the children's parentage and their status as cultural interpreters. Mrs. Porter's sole customer is (so far as the poem tells us) Sweeney, Eliot's version of the unwashed and diseugenic male. One can, I suppose, imagine the children, his and Mrs. Porter's, singing hosannas to some imminent spiritual revelation, but one could just as plausibly imagine them knocking off some popular music hall ditty or even, if the least liberal intentions of the ventriloquist poet be taken into account, intoning a dirge lamenting the cultural death hastened by the "low" whose "breeding" Eliot elsewhere in the poem reviles (for example, "the young man carbuncular" [231]).⁷⁰

A more complex articulation of these discourses occurs in the figure of Lil, the aborting woman whose story Eliot recounts in the second half of "A Game of Chess." Lil is a type, often found in the discourse about reproductive control, of what I call the abject mother, the usually working-class woman whose inability to control her own fertility was inscribed on her pain-wracked, weakened body. Most often evoked by the birth controllers as evidence for the need for contraception, she was also evoked by the opponents of birth control as proof that maternal morbidity was nothing more than the sign of maternal reluctance. Beginning after the Boer War, the abject mother was also the target of intensive efforts to reduce infant mortality rates, as part of what Jane Lewis calls "the drive to improve the quality and quantity of the population." Lewis documents the pervasive efforts to blame working-class women for high infant mortality rates: "In a report made . . . in 1913, the Medical Office of Health for Birmingham reiterated that dirt alone was responsible for infantile diarrhoea, and admitted the influence of poverty only insofar as drink and poverty combined with dirt made mothers positively dangerous." So, even before she aborted her pregnancy, Lil would have been under attack as a mother. She would have been subject to "visits" from middle-class volunteers, who would have attempted to "reform her character . . . and to inculcate the requisite sense of moral responsibility" by teaching her how to keep herself, her children, and her home clean. She would have faced this demand for cleanliness in the face of the most appalling living conditions,

which would have included not only dark, close quarters, but also the absence of hot running water.⁷¹ Ironically, Lil's very efforts to comply with the demands of her culture that she be clean, and of her husband that she get her teeth fixed, might have offered her the very information she needed to abort: investigations conducted by the *Lancet* in the early 1900s revealed a vast commercial network of pills and douches offered to "set women right."⁷² Lil might just as easily found out her abortifacient among advertisements for soap and dentists as she does by visiting her local chemist, who has possibly sold her pills containing "ergot, [a] compound of lead, [or] oil of savin."⁷³ The irony of Lil's predicament is compounded when we realize that Albert would probably have returned home with condoms given to him as part of the effort to halt the spread of venereal infection among the troops.⁷⁴

IV. "DIG[GING] IT UP": ABORTION AND THE FAILURE OF
(MASCULINE) IDENTITY

The following description comes from *The Golden Bough* (to which Eliot's notes also refer us). In it, a Bantu tribesman describes the effect of a "secret miscarriage," that is, abortion, on the land:

When a woman has had a miscarriage, when she has allowed her blood to flow, and has hidden the child, it is enough to cause the burning winds to blow and to parch the country with heat. The rain no longer falls, for the country is no longer in order. When the rain approaches the place where the blood is, it will not dare to approach. It will fear and remain at a distance.⁷⁵

There are several reasons to read this passage as describing abortion rather than miscarriage. First, James George Frazer uses the phrase "secret miscarriage" as a euphemism for abortion, as his indexing makes clear. In this Frazer simultaneously replicates and contributes to nineteenth- and twentieth-century confusion between abortion and miscarriage. Second, Frazer's informant describes a woman who clearly possesses agency; she has "allowed her blood to flow." The secrecy of her subsequent action, "hiding" the child, also suggests abortion rather than miscarriage. Notably, the self-induced miscarriage—the abortion—creates climatic conditions remarkably similar to those Eliot describes in *The Waste Land's* final section: burning winds, parching heat, unremitting drought. And the Fisher King's query, "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" (425) directly echoes Frazer's text: "the country is no longer in order." Implicit in both lines is the need for an order-restoring, guilt-expiating ceremony.

Much of the passage from *The Golden Bough* goes on to describe such a ceremony, in which the women, directed by the men, dig up and rebury the fetus. Can Eliot's poem be said to record a search for a modern European equivalent, a symbolic means of restoring the order abortion disrupts, of reasserting male authority over women, reproduction, culture? Many critics have recognized the poem's ritualistic elements, which seem to emerge most clearly in the same section of the poem that contains the allusion to Bantu abortion (ritual): not only does the poet/pilgrim appear to be physically en route from a low secular site to a higher more holy site, he also evokes Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist mystic traditions, as well as repeating a series of apparently "magical" words and phrases.⁷⁶ The poem, furthermore, is haunted by a pregnancy and a dead body: "the hyacinth girl" with her "arms full and [her] hair wet" (36, 38), and "That corpse [Stetson] planted last year in [his] garden" (71).

Critics have tended to read the scene involving the hyacinth girl as a fragment of a love story that begins well and ends badly or as an episode in a spiritual quest, in which the questor turns from sensual pleasure to seek spiritual illumination. The narrative described in *From Ritual to Romance* (the other indispensable text to which Eliot's notes refer us) authorizes the latter reading: the speaker, who is seeking his and his culture's salvation, must successfully resist the profane allure of the hyacinth girl or, alternatively, undergo to a potentially transformative sexual experience.⁷⁷ The framing of the scene with fragments from Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* authorizes the former narrative: the happy song from the first act encodes the promise of love ("*Frisch weht der Wind / Der Heimat zu / Mein Irisch Kind, / Wo weilest du?*" [31–34]); the fragment from the last act encodes the loss of love ("*Oed' und leer das Meer*" [42]). Regardless which interpretative schema one subscribes to, it must be admitted that something else is at work here. Consider, for instance, the multiple ambiguities of the speaker's response to the hyacinth girl:

—Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,
 Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
 Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
 Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
 Looking into the heart of light, the silence.

(37–41)

If the speaker is a questor, can we say that he has successfully resisted the sexual lure, thereby readying himself for the next stage of his

quest? Or perhaps he has succumbed, thereby stalling out the quest. Or perhaps succumbing is the point, and inability to perform sexually points to failure in the quest (or vice versa). Similarly, if we read the speaker as a lover rather than a questor, it is not clear whether his response to the hyacinth girl—his inability to speak or see or know—signifies ineffable passion or rather his failure to respond appropriately to his lover's passion. Nor is it clear whether he is anticipating the promise of love or rather dreading the threat of its loss. Does the occasion fill him with joy or despair? Ecstasy or fear?

It is the ability of the poem to invite and support such contradictory interpretations that perhaps makes it so appealing to generations of critics. But I would argue that we do not need to choose between them: none of these interpretations are mutually exclusive, nor does the poet describe an event calculated to evoke anything but profoundly contradictory emotions. This scene, in fact, draws upon the new aesthetic of sexual union beginning to emerge at about the time of the publication of *The Waste Land*. The text most responsible for this aesthetic was Marie Carmichael Stopes's *Married Love* (1918), a bestselling sex manual (in)famous for its sensationalized descriptions of the transcendent raptures of mutual orgasm. The wide appeal of the Stopesean ideal lies in its successful combining of a narrative of spiritual quest with a narrative of sexual romance. The following passage is an especially apt, but by no means unique or unusual, example:

When two who are mated in every respect burn with the fire of the innumerable forces within them, which set their bodies longing towards each other with the desire to inter-penetrate and to encompass one another, the fusion of joy and rapture is not purely physical. The half swooning sense of flux which overtakes the spirit in that eternal moment at the apex of rapture sweeps into its flaming tides the whole essence of the man and woman, and as it were, the heat of the contact vapourises their consciousness so that it fills the whole of cosmic space. For the moment they are identified with the divine thoughts, the waves of eternal force, which to the Mystic often appear in terms of golden light.⁷⁸

Even if this passage is not directly echoed by the scene in the hyacinth garden, at least we can say that Eliot, like Stopes, appeals to an ideal of transcendental sexual union. Moreover, by attending to what follows next in Stopes's text, we can go so far as to say that Eliot invites us to read past the passion:

From their mutual penetration into the realm of supreme joy the two
lovers bring back with them a spark of that light which we call life.
And unto them a child is born.⁷⁹

Surely this suggests that the speaker's rapture might also encode a response to a pregnancy, which was, according to popular and medical discourse, one of the greatest fulfillments of love's promise. Indeed, the very image of a woman with her arms full of flowers visually suggests pregnancy. And "hair wet" suggests childbirth, both in its image and the unusual syntax.

Reading pregnancy into this scene, moreover, helps to explain the ambiguity of the speaker's response, for if the armful of flowers suggests pregnancy, it also suggests the premature termination of pregnancy: "flowers" was a slang term for menstruation; the phrase "bringing down the flowers" may have been a euphemism for inducing menstruation.⁸⁰ As we have seen, what might appear to a woman as inducing menstruation, might appear to others—her doctor, her husband, her neighbors, the local magistrate—as inducing abortion. Thus it would seem that this scene may ambiguously suggest both the joy of the discovery of pregnancy as well as the desolation—the "nothing to live for—just blank"—experienced in the aftermath of the loss of a child.⁸¹ The Wagnerian frame also supports such a reading: "*Mein Irisch Kind, / Wo weilest du*" (33–34) joyfully anticipates the arrival of a child, while "*Od' und leer das Meer*" ("Waste and void the sea," 42) encodes a desolation of spirit and of matter (*mutter*-mother). Moreover, the "Waste and void" body of water anticipates the "death by water" which, as we have seen, signifies douching/abortion later in the poem. Indeed, the tarot reading, which might be understood to confirm reproductive failure in the poem, also links the hyacinth girl with Stetson, in whose garden a corpse is buried.

Critics have tended to identify the corpse variously with the ancient god whose burial ensures a bountiful harvest, as a symbol for the war dead (because Stetson was "with [the speaker] in the ships at Mylae" [70]), or as the "objective correlative" of some repressed memory whose disinterment Eliot fears ("Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men, / Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!" [74–75]).⁸² Without specifically rejecting any of these readings, I would like to suggest that the buried corpse might as plausibly be that of a dead child or fetus, not least because this reading can easily absorb all of the more conventional ones. The identification of the

corpse with the god of the ancient fertility rituals pretty obviously suggests the reproductive theme that saturates the poem, albeit ironically: they, like the Bantu abortion ritual, are instances of sympathetic magic intended to alleviate plant, animal, and human infertility. But the identification of the corpse with the war dead also suggests the reproductive theme, again ironically. The war years saw a recurring conjunction of images—"full coffins and empty cradles"—linking the death of the male soldier with a full range of reproductive failures, including high infant mortality rates and a birthrate that continued to decline despite private and governmental efforts to encourage reproduction and discourage reproductive control, especially abortion.⁸³ Read within the context of England's double set of losses—her soldiers and her infants—the corpse in Stetson's garden could as plausibly be that of an infant as of a fallen soldier. Indeed, infanticide, commonly thought of as a pre-twentieth-century phenomenon, did not disappear until the 1920s.⁸⁴ But I would take the substitution one step further and claim that the corpse is that of a fetus, not only because abortion and infanticide were frequently confused, or because abortion had begun to displace infanticide as a preferred method of reproductive control.⁸⁵ But, also, because a buried fetus would be the perfect, if somewhat overdetermined, objective correlative for abortion itself. According to this interpretation, Eliot here approaches his own vision of the ideal state of language in which "there is, properly speaking, no relation between the symbol and that which it symbolises, because they are continuous." It might be objected that Eliot openly displays abortion as a motif in the poem; he doesn't appear particularly concerned to keep it buried. Moreover, there is an almost complete absence of guilt, or even remorse, in all of the abortions the poem represents: if Madame Sosostri is, as I have suggested, an abortionist, then abortion in this poem is being represented as a business enterprise—or the adjunct to a business enterprise, in the case of Mrs. Porter and her daughter; and Lil expresses no more feeling than a kind of hapless regret that her abortion has prematurely aged her, accompanied, perhaps, by dim anger toward the chemist who provided "them pills [she] took, to bring it off" (158). Her putative friend's rejoinder (You are a proper fool, I said. / Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said, / What you get married for if you don't want children? [162–64]), while implicating Lil in a system of retributive justice, more importantly registers a fatalism at odds with ritualized attempts to expiate sin. Indeed, the very naturalism which renders this scene so powerful also

thwarts efforts to place Lil's abortion in the kind of mythic context an expiatory ceremony requires. Naturalism, in fact, works by definition in a completely amythic direction. As we have seen, Lil's abortion does evoke a specific set of historical conditions, as does the emotional distance of the poet, who seems more interested in Lil and Albert as sociological specimens and reproduces (so to speak) middle- and upper-class fears about the perceived dangers of the so-called epidemic of abortion among working-class women. Viewed in this light, Lil's abortion seems, at best, to be only another instance of reproductive failure in *The Waste Land*; it is most definitely not the ur-crime which motivates the speaker's anguished pilgrimage.

It might be, however, that the scene's naturalism belies its underlying mythicism. Eileen Wizeniter has argued that we miss the significance of this character unless we understand that "Lil" abbreviates "Lilith," a character infamous for both the production of monstrous offspring and the murder of other people's children.⁸⁶ Read as an allusion to Lilith, the story of Lil acquires a certain transhistorical and transcultural meaning; her abortion thus lies simultaneously inside and outside of history, partakes of and defeats the very idea of story.

If Lil is, as Wizeniter has argued, the true center of the poem because she is the poem's only fertile female, then it stands to reason that she provides a lens (speculum?) through which to read the rest of the poem. But whereas Wizeniter identifies Lil's significance with her procreativity, I identify Lil's significance with her refusal of procreativity. Lil's "antique" look (the result of her abortion) demands that we take a second "look" at the "sylvan scene" that "above the antique mantle was displayed" (97) in the sitting room/boudoir of the first half of "A Game of Chess." There we find depicted another story of betrayal and murder, "the change of Philomel" (97). As Ovid tells it, after Tereus has raped his sister-in-law, Philomel, Tereus cuts her tongue out and hides her in a house in the woods to prevent her from revealing what has happened. She depicts the crime in a tapestry, however, which she manages to have conveyed to her sister. Procne's rage knows no bounds. To revenge the adulterous/incestuous rape and mutilation, she kills her child, Itys, and feeds his flesh to Tereus in a specially prepared dish. But before he can exact his revenge, all are turned into birds: Philomel into a nightingale, Procne into a swallow, Tereus into a red-eyed plover.⁸⁷ There is no disputing the importance of this myth to the meaning of *The Waste Land*. Eliot alludes to it again in both "The Fire Sermon" and "What the Thunder

Said" (203–6, 428). In making sense of it, critics have tended to focus on the rape and mutilation of Philomel. But rape seems completely irrelevant to this scene, which is noteworthy for its lack of sexual connection, violent or otherwise. Indeed, I would go so far as to argue that the focus on the rape and mutilation results from misreading: Eliot's reference to her violation ("by the barbarous king / So rudely forced" [99–100]) describes her, not the scene depicted above the mantle. That is, Eliot does not direct our gaze to the rape, but rather to "the change of Philomel" (99) which occurs consequent to the murder of Itys. And it is through the murder of Itys by his mother that I understand the conflict of the couple of the first half of "A Game of Chess." That is to say, I read the murder of Itys as a covert reference to abortion, which must be counted as a source of bitter conflict between this couple—and as the ur-crime motivating the poem's speaker. True, the murder of Itys is clearly not abortion (the boy appears to be about five years old). Nonetheless, as I have shown, the distinctions between contraception, abortion, infanticide, and child-murder were not always clear; a logic that equates contraception with infanticide also equates child-murder with abortion.

The claim that abortion is the unspoken point of conflict between the couple in this section of the poem is supported by a series of intratextual allusions contained within the first half of "A Game of Chess." Thus, for example, Eliot's note to the line, "Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head" (126), refers the reader back to the scene in the hyacinth garden and forward to the drowned Phoenician Sailor, that is, to the nexus of references to pregnancy, douching, abortion, the phallus, homosexuality, and death. The "wind under the door" (118) also recalls the wind that helps to frame the scene outside the hyacinth garden and the "burning winds" of "What the Thunder Said" (and the *Golden Bough*). But whereas the wind originally intimated the birth of a child ("*Mein Irisch kind, / Wo weilest du,*"), this, and all subsequent winds, do "nothing again nothing" (120). The reiteration of the word "nothing" in this passage (six instances in seventeen lines) suggests the "void" that follows the scene in the hyacinth garden (and here I am reading both the "waste and void sea" as well as the blank space of the stanza break), the "nothing to live for—just blank" that Lord Dawson claims follows on the death of an only child, as well as the Irigarayan "nothing" I earlier associate with the deliberately emptied uterus. Reading the "nothing" as a very specific "something" ("that might cause the ultimate destruction, the splintering, the break in their systems of 'presence',

of ‘re-representation’, and ‘representation’”) gives the wife’s insistent questions, “‘Do / You know nothing? do you see nothing? Do you remember / Nothing’” (121–23), a taunting air, as if she is trying to provoke her husband to acknowledge, to see, to remember a very specific *something* whose very existence seems to dictate his very inability to know, see, or speak.

The suggestion that abortion is an unspoken point of conflict between this couple is also supported by a series of extratextual literary allusions. Thomas Middleton’s *A Game at Chess*, which seems a more apt context for reading this section of the poem than *Women Beware Women*, contains an unequivocal reference to abortion. The Black Knight’s Pawn’s complaint that

when [he] look[s] to gather fruit
Find[s] nothing but the savin tree
Too frequent in nuns’ orchards, and then planted
By all conjecture to destroy fruit rather

is a deliberate (and to Middleton’s contemporaries, probably clear) reference to abortion, for “savin” was an abortifacient popular in early modern England.⁸⁸ The Black Knight’s Pawn seems intent, moreover, on blaming women for acting without regard for male right; the nuns “conjecture to destroy the fruit” the Black Knight’s Pawn “look[s] to gather.” Additionally, the poem’s final section, “What the Thunder Said,” contains a number of other allusions to, if not abortion, then child-murder. In “What the Thunder Said,” Eliot stresses the abortion theme not only through the allusion to Frazer, discussed above, and the renewed allusion to the Philomel-Procnety-Tereus story, but also through allusions to “*El Desdichado*” (429) and the *Spanish Tragedy* (431). This compressed series of allusions, moreover, reiterates the theme of male powerlessness encoded through the silence of the pair of husbands in “A Game of Chess,” as well as Tereus’s interrupted revenge.

Alerted as we now are to Eliot’s use of literary rather than social allusion for the exposition of the abortion motif and the concomitant dissolution of male identity, we are free to explore the almost obsessive allusions in the poem’s final section to abortion/child-murder, and the poet’s concomitant attempt to heal the resulting fractures in his identity. The attempted healing occurs through two conflicting identifications: with the grieving vengeful patriarch, whose authority has been usurped by abortion, and with the (feminized?) Christian God of forgiveness and redemption. Asking, “Shall I set my

lands in order?" (424), the poet prepares to begin the poem's final rituals. But first he must acknowledge that he cannot do penance for any sin but his own, and certainly not for the sins of an entire civilization. "Even if the civilization is breaking up . . . there remains the personal obligation": "London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down" (426), and there is nothing he can do about it.⁸⁹

The renewed allusion to the story of Philomel, suggests the difficulty of the intrapsychic shift he is attempting to make, for in order to identify with either a vengeful or a forgiving male figure, he must first overcome his identification with the mother: "*Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina / Quando fiam ceu chelidon*" (428–29) ("Then he dived back into the fire that refines them / When shall I be as the swallow?"⁹⁰) In the marriage of these lines from *The Inferno* and the *Pervigilium Veneris*, Eliot announces his identification with Procne, the murderous mother, and asks when he shall be, like her, refined, transformed into something entirely different. The full citation from the *Pervigilium Veneris*, "When shall I be as the swallow that I may desist my silence," records a desire for both transfiguration and the relief of confession.⁹¹ Eliot's next line heightens the anguish of his conflicted identification: "O swallow swallow" calls out to Procne (who might yet confess for him) and reproaches her. The fragment also records a demand for self-mastery, to swallow his anguish and maintain silence, as well as attesting to his identification with Tereus, who, it will be recalled, swallowed the flesh of his own child. Furthermore, this fragment also reencodes the themes of (marital) estrangement and reconciliation via the allusion to a song, from Alfred Lord Tennyson's *The Princess*, which laments the separation of two lovers and promises their reunion.

The next two lines seem to cement this shift from identification with the female/mother to identification with the male/father, evoking as they do grieving male figures. The first line, "*Le Prince d'Aquitaine a la tour abolie*" ("The Prince of Aquitaine with the ruined tower") comes from "*El Desdichado*," a sonnet whose speaker mourns his dead wife.⁹² Here is the ultimate marital estrangement. The allusion may express the speaker's fear that reconciliation is impossible, or it may express his desire to prolong the estrangement by exacting the ultimate revenge.⁹³ The fuller meaning of the citation, however, turns on the word "*tour*" (which itself means "turn"). Indeed, the various meanings of the word "*tour*" capture in small what the poem has writ large. In the first place, "*tour*" connects this part of the poem directly to many of the passages I have

identified as carrying the abortion theme. “[T]our,” meaning “tower,” is one of the cards of the Major Arcana of the Tarot. In the tarot, the tower is always “*abolie*,” ruined; its meanings, though varied, are routinely negative. Furthermore, according to Bill Butler, “[t]he origins of this card are uncertain. It is usually referred to as ‘The House of God’, a medieval term for hospital.”⁹⁴ In light of this information, it may come as no surprise to discover that “*tour*” also refers to the door of a hospital where infants are abandoned.⁹⁵ These echoing significations connect the allusion to “*El Desdichado*” with Eliot’s earlier appropriation from Verlaine: “*Et, O ces voix d’enfants, chantant dans la coupole!*” (202). But this “*tour*,” unlike that “*coupole*,” is “ruined,” thereby signifying the inhospitality to children that characterizes *The Waste Land*. Moreover, inasmuch as “*tour*” is phallic (and “*coupole*” is uterine? and replete with children?), we might read in this line an assertion that patriarchal authority has crumbled, perhaps irreparably.⁹⁶ The conflation here of (broken) phallus and (absent) child underscores the extent to which Eliot is associating (failed) masculinity with (failed) reproduction. Finally, “*tour*” refers to the rook in the game of chess, thereby connecting this part of the poem to “A Game of Chess.” In a sense, we can say that the speaker of the poem feels himself to have been cheated, “rooked,” in the psychosexual exchange with his wife. In Irigarayan terms, the abortion signals a breakdown in the process of specula(riza)tion; nowhere can the poet discover an object that permits him to consolidate an identity.

The second line which seems to cement the poet’s identification with the grieving male parent, “Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo’s mad againe,” comes from Thomas Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy*, a play about a father’s revenge for the murder of his son.⁹⁷ It suggests that, however much the poet thinks he is attending to his own (Christian?) redemption, “shor[ing]” “these fragments” “against [his] ruins” (430), he still must contend with being “mad againe,” in other words, both angry and consumed with an insane desire for vengeance. This (inevitable?) (re)turn to a state of almost blind insanity inscribes yet another meaning to the word “*tour*”: to circle about a fixed point. Our knowledge that Hieronymo, at the end of the play, bites out his own tongue amplifies to the nth degree the almost unendurable conflict and frustration experienced by the poet: not only is he unable to escape his identification with the mutilated Philomel as he circles around the fact of the loss of a child, he confesses his utmost inability

to “say exactly what [it] mean[s].”⁹⁸ Indeed, he confesses an inability to say anything at all.⁹⁹

Well, not quite. The poem offers two final incantatory lines: “Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata” and “Shantih shantih shantih” (432–33). These lines seem to deny that Hieronymo’s silence is also the poet’s, not only because they are spoken, but more notably because the majority of the consonant sounds (dee, tee, ess) require a tongue for their utterance. Refuting the condition of speechlessness, these lines also deny the cause of speechlessness, the loss of a child: the penultimate line (“What the thunder [finally] says”), sounds remarkably like what a child might have said, *da-da*, an act of naming that simultaneously inscribes the child’s emergence into the Lacanian symbolic and reifies patriarchal authority. The two consonant sounds that don’t require the tongue, “vee” and “em,” are both labial, suggestive of sucking, of infants. In fact, the reiterated “em” sound evokes the naming of the “other” parent, the “mama,” thereby giving the lie to the assertion of patriarchal authority. Moreover, the repetition which constitutes the poem’s final line, “Shantih shantih shantih,” suggests the sound made to silence children (and adults!)—shh, shh, shh—a caution extending from the poem’s speaker(s), to its character(s), to its reader(s): nobody is meant to speak of or hear what the thunder really says. But, the truth will out, the repressed will return: Eliot’s translation of “shantih” also encodes one last allusion to abortion: the phrase, “The peace that passeth understanding,” concludes Annie Vivanti Chartres’s WWI rape and abortion novel, *The Outrage*.¹⁰⁰ But whereas Chartres points to a specifically Christian doctrine of forgiveness, Eliot’s evocation of another, possibly less forgiving, religious tradition signals his incomplete acceptance of Christian doctrine, perhaps because forgiveness is incompatible with the attempted recuperation of masculine identity.

V. ABORTION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT

It is very tempting to join certain other critics in identifying the speaker of *The Waste Land* with Eliot and to attribute the poem’s pervasive sense of guilt and anguish to an actual abortion—Vivian’s—of a child whose father may have been Tom (assuming the marriage was consummated) or Bertrand Russell, with whom Vivian is rumored to have had an affair.¹⁰¹ Such a speculation would go a long way toward explaining the poem’s obsession with reproductive failure, inappropriate sexuality, female duplicity, and male powerlessness. It would also normalize what other critics have pathologized,

namely Vivian's menstrual irregularities: some women, determined not to get or stay pregnant, took so many abortifacients so regularly that they menstruated almost continuously.¹⁰² All this, however, is pure speculation; I can adduce no extraliterary evidence to substantiate it.

In the meantime, given the evidence that *The Waste Land* is deeply concerned with reproductive failure and given the wide cultural context for such a concern, it seems worthwhile to consider what general meaning can be extracted from the poem's obsessive turns around reproductive failure, particularly abortion. I should reiterate my resistance to sublimating the theme of reproductive failure to spiritual failure, regardless of how insistently the poem or subsequent work by Eliot directs us to such a reading.¹⁰³ Such a reading only pretends to a wholeness that neither the poem nor its speaker attains. Reproductive failure can, however, be sublimated in psychoanalytic, literary, and historical terms: abortion, in *The Waste Land*, figures the simultaneous failure of male identity, modernism, and history. Regarding the first of these failures, I would refer the reader to the opening of this essay, my reading of the closing lines of *The Waste Land*, and my speculations about the personal level of the poem, all of which suggest that abortion signifies a severe and debilitating crisis of identity for the poem's speaker, if not for the poet himself.

The second assertion, that abortion figures the failure of modernism, can also be explained in psychoanalytic terms. Andrew Ross offers a good example of such an approach, which proceeds through questions of enunciation posed by Lacan's revisions of Freudian theory. Asserting that the "failure of modernism" lies in the modernists' failure to understand the difference between subjectivism and subjectivity ("Modernism . . . equates a philosophical [or theoretical] attack on the epistemological and metaphysical tradition of subjectivism with a literary [or practical] attempt to dispossess or to purge poetic discourse of subjectivity *tout court*," he goes on to read *The Waste Land* as an attempt by a son ("Eliot") to renegotiate the terms of his own subjectivity, which entail(ed) the submission of the child to the law of the father. For Ross, "*The Waste Land* itself mourns the fallibility of identity and reproduces the same failures . . . within all the sexual relations it depicts."¹⁰⁴ This doubleness (*sous-rature*?), the poem's inability to transcend the grounds of the crisis that instigates it, greatly resembles the doubleness I have discovered in the poem's final section as the poet attempts to overcome the crisis of abortion by multiplying examples of abortion. But whereas in Ross's account, "Eliot" is always only a son, never a father (except as the progenitor of

“the fallibility of identity”), in my account, “Eliot” is also a father, and the poem encodes a clear correspondence between the failure of identity, the failure of language, and the failure of reproduction. Moreover, Ross’s Lacanian account of enunciation and (male) subjectivity, however lucid and intriguing, overlooks Irigaray’s concept of specula(riza)tion, the process by which men deny their mother and refuse her name. The poem’s failure, and by extension the failure of modernism, lies therefore not only in the poet’s inability to wriggle out from under the law of the father, but also his inability to wriggle out from what we might call the law of the mother: female reproductive capacity, which includes the power to deny as well as to give life.

The third and final assertion, that abortion, for Eliot, figures the failure of history, requires that we return, briefly, to the question of the relationship between modernism and the evolutionary paradigm. As we have seen, one way to understand modernism is as an attempt to escape the realist/evolutionary paradigm, which underwrites most if not all of the discourse in the period I have been discussing. As such an escape, *The Waste Land* succeeds brilliantly for although the poem invites the reader to assemble its fragments into a coherent (realist) narrative, it also resists such attempts; there is always something that eludes incorporation, escapes the reading. In this, the poem as discourse resembles abortion as discourse: it simply will not be recuperated according to any known narrative. But any known narrative includes history, which is always a story about the relationship of past, present, and future. The very success of the poem as a discourse violently wrenched from the folds of the realist/evolutionary paradigm also implies the failure of history. The poet turns and turns around the memory of an event whose effects cannot be contained safely in the past; a violent rupture contaminates and defines the present and the future; the voided womb voids historical understanding, indeed, history itself.

I hope that now we are in a better position to understand why Eliot figures not just *The Waste Land* but all his poetry prior to 1925 as an abortion. Inasmuch as *The Waste Land* is a poem about abortion, it must inscribe the horrible effluences the *Midwives’ Gazette* names. The poet’s guilt, however, and his horror of self-exposure, mandate that he excise the “blood, mucus, shreds of mucus, [and] purulent offensive discharge” upon which exposition of his theme depends. Such excision, unfortunately, creates a wasteland offering no refuge to the individual whose anguish constitutes the

heart of the poem. In a way, the poem aborts individuality, thereby fulfilling Eliot's ideal of "escap[ing] from emotion . . . escap[ing] from personality."¹⁰⁵ But Eliot has left himself nowhere to escape; abortion utterly forecloses any possibility for birth or rebirth. In short, there is no future in *The Waste Land*. So the poet—the individual—must fantasize a place in the past where he and his work can exist. But the past is an "unreal city" where no one can dwell, and the very act of writing the poem has "undone" the poet (60, 63). Thus, *The Waste Land*, a poem about abortion, is in measure also a poem about the failure of individual talent, and quite possibly, of modernism itself.

But modernism is not a monolithic practice even among the self-avowed high modernists, and abortion seems a singularly inadequate figure to describe the sometimes joyous experiments of writers such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, or D. H. Lawrence. Thus, my account of Eliot's modernism remains qualified by my knowledge of, and speculations about, the facts of Eliot's life, in particular his marriage to Vivian. I am not however making a claim to the kind of factualness we demand of biographers. What my reading of *The Waste Land* suggests is that Eliot has embedded *The Waste Land* as much in social as in literary discourse, and that he has done so in the service of producing a kind of autobiography: one that does not discern between the individual and the culture which produces him; one that does not distinguish past from present; one that represents anthropological, literary, and personal facts as equally valid and true. However, even if abortion is not a satisfactory figure for the "other" modernists (including not only the so-called high modernists but all those writers whose modernism has yet to be discovered), my reading of *The Waste Land* points to the importance of the reproductive crisis for a renewed understanding of modernism: that is, just as Eliot's deliberate confusion in *The Waste Land* of private and general concerns centers on sex and reproduction, so might modernism in general. To assert this is to move beyond a Freudian fantasy about the latently sexual content of the unconscious to a more complex understanding of the relationships between sex, reproduction, the subject, writing, and history, relationships inflected by class and race, but more prominently by gender, where subjectivity cannot be separated from sexual and reproductive autonomy.

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NOTES

¹ Cited in Peter Ackroyd, *T. S. Eliot, A Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984): 150–51.

² Ackroyd, 62.

³ Conrad Aiken, *Selected Letters*, ed. Joseph Killorin (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1978), 109–10. Aside from extreme insensitivity to Eliot's pain, this action may also mark Aiken's attempt to reinterpret Eliot's "abortion" as "menstruation."

⁴ Terry Castle, "Lab'ring Bards: Birth *topoi* and English Poetics, 1660–1820," *JEGP* 78.2 (1979): 193–208. Susan Stanford Friedman, "Creativity and the Child-birth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse," *Feminist Studies* 13 (1987): 49–82; Barbara Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, Abortion," *A World of Difference* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1987), 184–99. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, vol. 2 of *Sexchanges* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1988), xi; Wayne Koestenbaum, "The Waste Land: T. S. Eliot's and Ezra Pound's Collaboration on Hysteria," *TCL* 34.2 (1988): 113–39.

⁵ Ezra Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound: 1907–1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950), 168.

⁶ Johnson, 197.

⁷ Jonathan Crewe, "Baby Killers," *differences* 7 (1995): 3.

⁸ I am using the phrase "the birth of modernism" very differently than Leon Surette, whose recent book, *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, and the Occult* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1993), emphatically affirms the spiritual meaning of sex and reproduction in *The Waste Land*. See also Surette, "The Waste Land and Jessie Weston: A Reassessment," *TCL* 32 (1988): 223–43.

⁹ Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz, "State and Society, 1880–1930," *Crises in the British State 1880–1930*, ed. Mary Langan and Bill Schwarz (London: Hutchinson, 1985), 7–25.

¹⁰ Hall and Schwarz, 9, 20.

¹¹ The "demographic transition" seems to have occurred at roughly the same time throughout Europe and the United States. Here I am only concerned with its appearance in England. For a rich account of contraception as the primary factor in declining birth rates, see Richard Allen Soloway, *Birth Control and the Population Question in England, 1877–1930* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1982). For an account of abortion as the primary factor, see Malcolm Potts, Peter Diggory, and John Peel, *Abortion* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977), 168, 463. Simon Szreter, *Fertility, Class and Gender in Britain 1860–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996).

¹² Lucy Bland, "'Cleansing the portals of life': The Venereal Disease Campaign in the Early Twentieth Century," in Langan and Schwarz, 192–208; Frank Mort, "Purity, Feminism and the State: Sexuality and Moral Politics, 1880–1914," in Langan and Schwarz, 209–225. They do not situate their analyses within the framework of "reproductive crisis" as I do.

¹³ These are Soloway's dates. It may be that the beginning of the crisis needs to be pushed back at least to 1861, the year that British law made women accountable for their abortions, and forward to the present, as hard-won abortion rights come increasingly under attack.

¹⁴ Hall and Schwarz, 16.

¹⁵ Hall and Schwarz, 20.

¹⁶ Pre-trial sales of *Fruits of Philosophy* hovered around 1,000 copies per year, but in the three years following the trial, between 18,500 and upward of 20,000 copies were sold (S. Chandrashekar, 'A Dirty, Filthy Book', *The Writings of Charles Knowlton and Annie Besant*, . . . [Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981], 45; J. D. O'Hair and Maddalyn Murray, forward, *Fruits of Philosophy, by Charles Knowlton* [Austin, TX: American Atheist Press, 1980], 3).

¹⁷ Soloway, 6.

¹⁸ A variety of ingenious explanations for the decline circulated for decades, from Spencerian theories about the evolution of the species, to John Brownlee's theory of the fertility cycles of human populations. See Soloway, 20–24.

¹⁹ Other factors helping to account for the dramatic decline in the birthrate included the tendency for men and women to postpone marriage, as well as a slight decline in the marriage rate (Soloway 9, 10).

²⁰ *Fruits of Philosophy* was originally published in the United States in 1832. It is not, however, the earliest such advice manual. That honor goes to Francis Place's eminently practical broadsides "To the Married of Both Sexes," "To the Married of Both Sexes in Genteel Life," and "To the Married of Both Sexes of the Working People" (1822–1823). Also appearing before *Fruits of Philosophy* were Richard Carlile's *What is Love* (1825), subsequently reprinted as *Every Woman's Book, or What is Love* (1826), and Robert Dale Owen's *Moral Physiology* (1830). Perhaps the most popular and enduring of these books was Henry Arthur Allbutt's *The Wife's Handbook* (1886). With the exception of Place's broadsides, these books appear to have been addressed to a primarily middle-class audience. For a rich history of their publication, including detailed bibliographic data, see Norman Himes, *Medical History of Contraception* (Baltimore: The Williams & Wilkins Company, 1936). The magazine advertisements seem to provide a point of articulation between the middle-class "birth control" manual and the oral transmission of information that characterized working-class and women's cultures. Lionel Rose, *The Massacre of the Innocents: Infanticide in Britain 1800–1939* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 166. They were largely unregulated, a situation very different from that of the United States, where the Comstock Act effectively interdicted the flow of information about reproductive control for generations. See Thomas C. Dienes, *Law, Politics, and Birth Control* (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1972). For many years the Malthusian League staged the only organized advocacy of birth control in England. However, until the 1913 publication of *Hygienic Methods of Family Limitation*, its advocacy always occurred on a theoretical, never a practical, plane (Soloway, 58).

²¹ Although the tabulated statistics of this census were not published until 1917, and the final report did not appear until 1923, the findings were well-known, at least among professional circles (Soloway, 8). Szeleter's evidence for his thesis rests on a reworking of these statistics.

²² Dawson of Penn, "Love-Marriage-Birth Control," *The Malthusian* (November 1921): 87. Soloway, 190–91. For accounts of the life and work of the remarkable Dr. Stopes, see Ruth Hall, *Marie Stopes, A Biography* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1977), and June Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1992).

²³ Dawson, 87. Soloway, 311, 318.

²⁴ Potts, Diggory, and Peel, 454–504.

²⁵ Barbara Brookes, *Abortion in England 1900–1967* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), 2, 108–11; Jane Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 209–11; Rose, 86–87.

²⁶ Potts, Diggory, and Peel, 454.

²⁷ Brookes, 112. I have found the most vehement expressions of this point of view in certain American texts, including John Todd's tract, *Serpents in the Dove's Nest* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1867), Amelia Barr's novel, *The Measure of a Man* (New York: D. Appleton, 1915), and Lois Webber's film, *Where are my Children* (Universal, 1916). I am not sure how wide a circulation the tract or the novel achieved in England. The film was shown by the National Council of Public Morals (NCPM) during the war (Soloway, 118; Annette Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality, 1909–1925* [London: Routledge, 1988], 37–45).

²⁸ For a particularly striking example of this point of view, see Marie Carmichael Stopes, *Wise Parenthood* (1918) (London: Putnam, 1951), 16. *Wise Parenthood*, originally published in 1918, was probably the single most important birth control tract of the interwar years. By 1940, it had gone into twenty-four editions, selling hundreds of thousands of copies. It was also translated into eleven European and Asian languages.

²⁹ Potts, Diggory, and Peel, 273.

³⁰ Brookes, 82–98. See also Lewis, 211. Stella Browne is one clear exception to this general trend, connecting reproductive control to feminism's potential for transforming the status of women and society (Brookes, 95).

³¹ Brookes, 15; Potts, Diggory, and Peel, 52.

³² Brookes, 14.

³³ The problem persists: "In the large majority of cases it is impossible to distinguish clinically between induced and spontaneous abortion, other than relying on the history given by the woman herself" (Potts, Diggory, and Peel, 52). The situation is complicated when women and their interviewers define abortion differently (Brookes, 21 n. 102).

³⁴ Quoted in Brookes, 57. Such confusion was widespread and persistent. In 1945, Delmore Schwartz describes Lil as "a cockney woman who has been made ill by contraceptive pills taken to avoid the consequences of love." Schwartz, "T. S. Eliot as An International Hero," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations: A Collection of Critical Essays on "The Waste Land,"* ed. Jay Martin (Englewood Cliffs, NY: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 100–1.

³⁵ As Potts, Diggory, and Peel assert, this claim is mostly wishful thinking (459).

³⁶ Brookes, 71.

³⁷ Some of the more radical of the early abortion advocates, who by and large justified the legalization of abortion on the grounds that it would preserve maternal health, may have been attempting to expand female reproductive rights by rendering abortion as innocuous as contraception; others merely revealed their commitment to a fundamental relationship between maternity and female health. Dorothy Thurtle, for instance, a member of the Birkett Committee which convened in 1937 to study the problem of maternal mortality, disagreed in her Minority Report that abortion should remain an exceptional procedure undertaken only to preserve maternal health. Instead, she advocated "voluntary abortion" for any woman who had survived at least four pregnancies (Brookes, 126–27). But to advocate "voluntary abortion" under even so limited a condition is to admit that maternity is not amenable to a single interpretation. The limited appeal of Thurtle's point of view suggests that a

good many people were unwilling to grant individual women the authority to interpret their own pregnancies according to their own circumstances and to continue or discontinue them accordingly.

³⁸ This interpretive conflict is far from resolved, nor is it unique to British culture.

³⁹ For a discussion of the different types of narratives generated in contemporary British and American literature by conflicting interpretations of pregnancy, see Judith Wilt, *Abortion, Choice, and Contemporary Fiction* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁴⁰ Quoted in Brookes, 2.

⁴¹ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 50.

⁴² For literary representations of venereal infection, see Henrik Ibsen, *Ghosts* (Chicago: IR Dee, 1990), and Harriet Comstock, *The Place Beyond the Wind* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1914). For literary representations of abortion, see the previously mentioned novel by Amelia Barr, as well as Annie Vivanti Chartres's *Vae Victus* (published in the United States as *The Outrage* [New York: Knopf, 1918]). Two filmic representations of the reproductive crisis also deserve mention: the previously mentioned *Where Are My Children* and *Maisie's Marriage*, coscripted by Stopes, which thematizes the unrestrained fertility of the poor and hints at the middle-class solution, contraception (*Maisie's Marriage*, dir. Alexander Butler for Samuelson, 1923). Consider also as representations of reproductive crisis Leopold and Molly Bloom's unresolved grief over the death of their only son Rudy (James Joyce, *Ulysses* [New York: Random House, 1986]), Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's preoccupations over the large size of their family (Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1927]), and Clifford Chatterley's hope that science will provide him with a means of producing an heir in spite of his impotence (D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* [New York: Cardinal Edition, 1959], 175–76). For an essay yoking radical feminist response to the venereal disease crisis with the emerging modernist aesthetic, see Janet Lyon, "Militant Discourse, Strange Bedfellows: Suffragettes and Vorticists before the War," *differences* 4.2 (1992): 100–33.

⁴³ For a lucid and thorough account of the many interpretive conflicts within modernist studies, see Astradur Eysteinnsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (Cornell: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990).

⁴⁴ Eysteinnsson, 183–84, 199.

⁴⁵ F. O. Marinetti, "The Founding Manifesto of Futurism," in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, ed. R. W. Flint, trans. Flint and Arthur A. Coppotelli (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972), 39. Quoted in William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1972), 167.

⁴⁶ Marinetti, 147–48. I can't be sure that other readers will discover in this formulation a very beleaguered masculinity as I do: I can't help but visualize, each time I read this sentence, a female praying mantis slowing devouring her mate as he continues depositing his seed. Other critics have noticed how much bluff and bravado underlies the swaggering assertions of masculinity by not only Marinetti, but also the Vorticists. See Cinzia Sartini Blum, "Transformations of the Futurist Technological Mythopoeia," *Philological Quarterly* 74 (1995): 78; Charles Ferrall, "Melodramas of Modernity: The Interaction of Vorticism and Futurism before the Great War," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 63 (1993–1994), 347–68.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Wees, 218, 227, 217. Brookes, 5.

⁴⁸ Marianne DeKoven defines "*sous-rature*" as "an unresolved contradiction or unsynthesized dialectic . . . that enacts in the realm of form an alternative to culture's

hierarchical dualisms, roots of those structures of inequity that socialism and feminism proposed to eradicate." DeKoven, *Rich and Strange: Gender, History, Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991), 4. But whereas she applies this concept to the modernist texts she studies, I am also applying it to modernist criticism. In addition to supplying me with this very useful term, *Rich and Strange* has also suggested ways that I might use Irigaray to expand some of my arguments about abortion. "Rich" as this work is, however, it is also "strange": having asserted the importance of "history" to "modernism," DeKoven entirely bypasses historical specificity. This is most evident in her collapse of all subversive activity into a conglomeration she calls "socialism and feminism." Here she disregards the historical antagonisms between "socialism" and "feminism," not to mention differences between anarchism, Marxism, communism, and socialism, or the ways that the emerging discourses of postcolonialism intersect with and diverge from all of these. Her elision of historical specificity can be seen as well in her collapse of the "feminine" with the "maternal," a rhetorical gesture that completely erases the reproductive crisis of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One of the notable anxieties generating modernist "*sous-rature*" is, I would argue, precisely the (incomplete) separation of the feminine and the maternal enabled by spreading practices of reproductive control. Finally, I would have to agree with Jacobs that DeKoven errs in not questioning the category of the "literary" upon which so much of her analysis rests (Jacobs, 273–77).

⁴⁹ I hasten to add that Eliot's representing abortion in such a manner does not mean that abortion is never recuperable by patriarchy. The apparently high incidence of enforced abortion in China is a contemporary and disheartening instance of a such recuperation. It may be related to the use of involuntary sterilization against poor women and women of color in the United States.

⁵⁰ It may well be doubted that abortion affects every man so, or that it appears to every woman as a liberatory possibility; much historical work remains to be done on the effect of abortion on specula(riza)tion.

⁵¹ T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, ed. Valérie Eliot (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 1. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by line number.

⁵² Koestenbaum, 130. The substitution of nocturnal reading for sex is a recurring trope in modernist literature. Marie reminds us both of Lawrence's Clifford and Constance Chatterley, who attempt to substitute reading and writing for sex and procreation (Lawrence, 15–16, 32), and Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway, who would rather read than engage in social or sexual intercourse with her husband. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1925), 45–46.

⁵³ F. L. Lucas, in *T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land: A Case Book*, ed. C. B. Cox and Arnold P. Hinchleffe (London: MacMillan, 1968), 34; R. G. Collingwood, in *Twentieth Century Interpretations*, 51; Genevieve W. Foster in *Critical Essays on T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land*, ed. Lois A. Cuddy and David H. Hirsch (Boston: GK Hall, 1991), 115; and Grover Smith, Jr., *T. S. Eliot's Poems and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1956), 78. I could cite such examples endlessly.

⁵⁴ Harriet Davidson in Cuddy and Hirsch, 212; Andrew Ross, *The Failure of Modernism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987), 58.

⁵⁵ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), 197.

⁵⁶ For examples of such readings, see Brooks, 133–34; John T. Mayer, *T. S. Eliot's Silent Voices* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), 256–59; and Smith, 76–78.

⁵⁷ Irigaray attributes “penis envy” to “envy of the omnipotence of gazing, knowing? About sex / about the penis. To envy and jealousy of the eye-penis, of the phallic gaze?” (47). Smith, in a later work than I have been citing, suggests another reason to read the “one-eyed man” as the phallus. According to Smith, “Phlebas” comes from a Greek word meaning both “vein” and “phallus” (Smith, *The Waste Land* [London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983], 106–7). Ross discovers “[o]ne of the clearest statements of the modernist centrality of the eye and its sexual (phallic) corollary in Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man*” (Ross, 224 n. 38).

⁵⁸ Muriel Box, *The Trial of Marie Stopes* (London: Femina, 1967), 282.

⁵⁹ A. Maud Royden deplores the double-standard of those who advocated educating men, especially infected men, about venereal infection, but also argued that women, even married women, should not be given any information about the disease. “Report of the Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases,” *International Journal of Ethics* 37 (1917): 178–79. Comstock develops the idea of conspiracy in her novel, *The Place Beyond the Winds*.

⁶⁰ Royden, 178–79. Intriguingly, Eliot reviews Wilhelm Wundt’s *Elements of Folk Psychology* in the same issue of *International Journal of Ethics* in which Royden’s article appears, suggesting, insofar as he might have perused the journal’s entire contents, an awareness of the debate on “social hygiene.” In his review, Eliot critiques Wundt for, among other omissions, not discussing “the influence of the sexual instinct . . . upon religion and myth” (Eliot, review of *Elements of Folk Psychology* by Wilhelm Wundt, *International Journal of Ethics* 27.2 [1917]: 253). Chilling evidence of his awareness comes in a letter written to Eliot by his father “suggest[ing] that, if a cure were not to be found for syphilis, it might be necessary ‘to emasculate our children to keep them clean’” (quoted in Ross, 47).

⁶¹ Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press, 1973), 11.

⁶² If we want to read Madame Sosostriis as the avatar of a debased tradition, it may be that we need look no further than the culture of the witches. See also Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon, 1978).

⁶³ Potts, Diggory, and Peel, 257, 258.

⁶⁴ Potts, Diggory, and Peel, 263.

⁶⁵ Smith (1956), 86; Schwarz, 168.

⁶⁶ Smith (1956), 86.

⁶⁷ Schwarz, 168–69. Notice how his reading turns on a sublimation of the sexual meaning of the word “consummation” to its transcendent meaning.

⁶⁸ Rose, 86–91.

⁶⁹ Although *The Waste Land*, as it was published, bears very little trace of Eliot’s interest in the issue of population, the earlier drafts from which Pound carved out the finished poem demonstrate a considerable interest. Consider as one example, Eliot’s obsessive revision of a section Pound eventually excised:

London, the swarming life you kill and breed,
Huddled between the concrete and the sky;
Responsive to the momentary need,
Vibrates unconscious to its formal destiny

Eliot revised the first line a couple of times, once as “London, the swarming creatures you breed,” and once as “London, the swarming life you kill and breed and

feed" (37). The repetition of the word breed underscores its importance in the poem. That Eliot's last attempt at this line introduces the idea of feeding also suggests his interest in the population problem which, as originally articulated by Thomas Malthus, was the problem of population growth outstripping food production leading to mass starvation (Malthus [1798], *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. Philip Appleman [New York: Norton, 1976]). Furthermore, because of the dual meaning of breeding, this particular set of lines also points toward the problem of the differential birthrate. "Swarming life/creatures" doubtlessly refers not to the Madame Equitones of the world, but to the masses, the Alberts and the Lils, whose high birthrate was supposed to be a prime factor contributing to the deterioration of race and nation.

Another line from this same discarded section of the poem similarly points to the population question: "London, your people is bound upon the wheel!" (31). Not only does this line appear twice within a single stanza, thus indicating its importance to Eliot, he revises it in a manner that more clearly delineates its sociological antecedents: "London, your population is bound upon the wheel!" (37).

⁷⁰ If we could hear the children's song, it might sound like that sung by the Cockney children in Woolf's *The Years* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1937, 429–31).

⁷¹ Lewis, 15, 67, 1, 61, 66. See also Caroline Rowan, "Child Welfare and the Working Class Family" (Langan and Schwarz, 231).

⁷² Brooks, 4.

⁷³ Potts, Diggory, and Peel, 122, 185; Brookes, 119. Rose reproduces a page of advertisements from the *Weekly Times and Echo* (29 June 1890) which reveals the close proximity of some of the discourses I have been discussing (and perhaps provides a visual correlative to the displacements I have been tracing through *The Waste Land*). Column one advertises "Accouchements," sometimes a code for "baby-planting"; column two advertises "fostering and 'adoption' inserts," two practices widely implicated in infanticide; column three features two prominent advertisements for dentists and dentifrices; and column four advertises abortifacients ("magic female pills," "the modern remedy—for ladies," "female corrective powders . . . mixture[s] and pills") (Rose, 166).

⁷⁴ Soloway, 170.

⁷⁵ James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1911–1915), 3rd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1963), 3:153–54.

⁷⁶ See, for example, "Roy Harvey Pearce," in Martin, 25–26.

⁷⁷ Jessie I. Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1920).

⁷⁸ Stopes, *Married Love: A New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties* (London: Gollanz, 1995), 106. It would be difficult to overestimate the influence of this book, which appeared in scores of editions in a dozen languages between its initial publication in 1918 and the author's death in 1958. In 1935, a group of American scholars named *Married Love* the sixteenth most important book published in the preceding fifty years—behind *Das Kapital*, but ahead of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Five years later an Australian M. P. denounced Stopes as a greater threat to the British Empire than either Adolf Hitler or Joseph Goebbels. More recently, and more soberly, literary historian Samuel Hynes has identified *Married Love* as one of three or four texts fundamental to shaping postwar British consciousness. In particular, Stopes has been credited with making shared sexual pleasure the cornerstone of marriage, providing her readers with a vocabulary for talking about

sex and legitimating the use of contraception. Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* [London: 1990], 368. Barbara Brookes, "Women and Reproduction, 1850–1940," in Jane Lewis, ed., *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family 1850–1940* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 149–71; Laurie Taylor, "The Unfinished Sexual Revolution," *Journal of Biosocial Science* 3 (1971): 473–92. To that assessment I would add that she is also important as a writer who was able to reconcile the drive to liberate female sexuality with the drive to constrain male sexuality. Contraception, for Stopes, does enable women to experience sexual pleasure unencumbered by fears of unwanted pregnancy. But she also demands that female sexual desire, rather than male, determine the frequency of intercourse in marriage, and cautions men to practice continence during those periods when their wives are not receptive.

⁷⁹ Stopes, *Married Love*, 106.

⁸⁰ Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth, *The Curse: A Cultural History of Menstruation*, rev. ed. (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1988), 190–93. Angus MacLaren identifies "bringing down the flowers" as an early modern euphemism for inducing menstruation. It is not clear how long it survived in the language (*Reproductive Rituals* [NY: Methuen, 1983]: 102).

⁸¹ Dawson of Penn, "Love-Marriage-Birth Control," *The Malthusian* (November 1921): 87.

⁸² See for example, Brooks, 136; Pearce, 25; Schwarz, 117; Smith (1956), 78. Elsewhere, Smith comes close to the reading I am proposing when he writes that "[t]he dog . . . denoted something detrimental to fertility and reproduction and even spiritual revitalisation, which was reputedly a 'friend to man', but busied itself reminding them of guilt and betraying them; . . . Paws working, their object a dead horror: the image is suggestive, the theme complementary to the abortion motif of 'A Game of Chess'" (Smith [1983], 98). See also Gareth Reeves *T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 6; Schwarz, 118.

⁸³ Soloway, 159–69; Brookes, 12.

⁸⁴ Rose, 174.

⁸⁵ Rose, 174.

⁸⁶ Eileen Wiznitzer, "Legends of Lil: The Repressed Thematic Center of *The Waste Land*," *Women's Studies* 13 (1986): 87–102.

⁸⁷ Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, trans. Horace Gregory (New York: Mentor, 1960), 175–83.

⁸⁸ Thomas Middleton, *A Game at Chess*, ed. T. H. Howard Hill (London: Manchester Univ. Press, 1993), 1.1.215–18. The appeal of *Women Beware Women* as a context for this scene is very strong. First, Eliot's notes refer to this text, not *A Game at Chess*. Second, the seduction that parallels the game of chess in *Women Beware Women* can be read as rape, a displacement that strengthens arguments about the importance of the rape motif to the poem. But I think that Eliot's direction is, in this instance, misleading, perhaps deliberately so. MacLaren, 105.

⁸⁹ Cleanthe Brooks, "*The Waste Land*: A Critique of the Myth," in Cox and Hinchleffe, 153–54.

⁹⁰ Trans. Schwarz, 236.

⁹¹ Trans. Schwarz, 236–37.

⁹² Trans. Schwarz, 238.

⁹³ For an account of *The Waste Land* as "precisely an Oresteian phantasy of attack on the mother," see Tony Pinkney, *Women in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot: A*

Psychoanalytic Approach (London: Macmillan, 1984), 101–15. I agree that the poet at this point is toying with the idea of killing a mother—but I also have a very different understanding of what is signified here by mother.

⁹⁴ Butler, 169. Relevant interpretations of *The Tower* cited by Bill Butler include: “Peh, the mouth as an organ of speech. The power of utterance.” “[R]uin. The Punishment of pride.” “Quarrel, ruin, combat, danger, destruction of plans, sudden death.” “The force of destiny, possibly self-induced.” “Change or catastrophe.” “Imaginary creations produced by the desires of man.” “That which is dead renewed by fire, baptism by fire.” “The confirmation of the life of one form while destroying another.” “The ruin of the House of Life when evil has prevailed therein, the rending of the House of a False Doctrine. Intellectual destruction. Misery, distress, indigence, adversity, calamity, disgrace, deception, ruin. Unforeseen catastrophe.” Butler, *Dictionary of the Tarot* (New York: Schocken, 1975), 171–72.

⁹⁵ This and all other definitions of “*tour*” taken from *Dictionnaire Général du la Langue Francaise*, ed. Adolphe Hatzfeld, et. al. (Paris: Librairie Ch. Delagrave: n.d.).

⁹⁶ Indeed, this is the meaning assigned to “The Tower” in the feminist tarot. See Vicki Noble, *The Motherpeace Tarot* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1983).

⁹⁷ I cannot resist discovering a pun on the playwright’s name.

⁹⁸ Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, vol. 3, ed. M. H. Abrams, 5th ed., (New York: Norton, 1986).

⁹⁹ And can we say that the absent tongue is equalled by the absent(ing) of the child/phallus? It certainly seems to for Procne:

She stared back at her sister, then her son,
And looked at both: “Why does one speak so sweetly,
While the other’s lost tongue cannot say a word?
Why can’t she call me sister? He cries mother.
I am the child of Pandion, a king,
Must I recall whose wife I am? Tereus?
Honour his bed? Such honour is perversion
In my blood!” And no more words—she caught up
Itys, and as a tigress carries off
A poor teat-sucking fawn down the deep forests
Of the Ganges’ side, so she took Itys,
Far to a lonely room of the huge palace (Ovid, 181–82).

¹⁰⁰ Chartres, 261.

¹⁰¹ The two most notable are the so-called homosexual reading, which attributes the guilt in the poem to Eliot’s homoerotic attachment to Jean Verdenal, a reading first proposed by John Peters in 1952 and later elaborated by Miller; and the reading proposed by Cynthia Ozick, which attributes the guilt to Eliot’s mistreatment of his first wife, Haigh-Wood, whom he committed to an asylum where she lived out the last fifteen years of her life (Peters, “A New Interpretation of *The Waste Land*,” *Essays in Criticism* 2 [1952]: 242–66; Cynthia Ozick, “T. S. Eliot at 101,” *New Yorker* [20 Nov. 1989]: 119–54). Ackroyd, 84.

¹⁰² Brookes, 6.

¹⁰³ In the former instance, I am thinking of the poem’s attempt to sublimate the grounds of its own being through the pilgrimage into the mountains, an echo of Plato’s parable of the ascent from the cave [of instinct] in the light [of reason], which Irigaray identifies as paradigmatic for the masculine attempt to repudiate maternity

as the ground of all human being. In the latter case, I am thinking of *Thoughts after Lambeth*, where Eliot “refer[s] with some reluctance, but with positive conviction, to the much discussed Resolution 15 on marriage and birth control.” Roundly criticizing the bishops for having abdicated their spiritual authority in this and other matters, he insists that birth control is “a question which should be considered as a detail subsumed under the more general question which should have been treated first—that of Spiritual Direction and Authority.” In other words, by 1932, Eliot thought of birth control as a spiritual rather than a medical problem. Couples contemplating family planning should, in his opinion, first seek the advice of their clergyman, not their physician. This should not come as a great surprise to students of Eliot, who, after his conversion in 1927, seems to have viewed all the crises of modernity as essentially spiritual problems. Eliot, *Thoughts After Lambeth* (London: Faber & Faber, 1931), 16, 20.

¹⁰⁴ Ross, xv, 57.

¹⁰⁵ Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” 2212.