ACCORDING TO THY WORD

The Modern Madonna in Early Twentieth and Twenty-First Century English Literature

University of Malta

Warren James Borg Ebejer
0236394M

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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I hereby declare that I am the author of this dissertation which is being presented in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English (Modern and Contemporary Literature and Criticism) at the University of Malta. I further confirm that all the sources utilised in my research have been duly acknowledged.

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr Maria Frendo for her invaluable information and supervision throughout the completion of this work.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the presence of the Virgin Mary in both early twentieth and twenty-first century literature. Although recourse to her has endured in both contemporary spaces of faith and the arts, her presence suffers brevity in English literature, a direct consequence of the Reformation in England which had sought to erase any memory of her with public burnings and mutilations of her statues, thereby burning up a rich tradition of poetry, fiction, drama and ballads inspired by her. Her literary image slowly recovers several hundred years later, appropriated and reformed according to her authors' words, which this dissertation studies accordingly in the works of four writers: T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Colm Toíbín. Starting with T. S. Eliot, his poetry is not only a spiritual biography but a gradual development of womanhood and the Blessed Mother. The image of womankind is slowly purified with the revelation of the Virgin Mary, a silent but active figure in Eliot's poetry who becomes a guide as well as a herald of salvation, pointing towards her Son, Our Saviour. The Virgin Mary then retracts into a more traditional and ambiguous figure in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, acting as both an oppressor and nurturer through May Dedalus, Stephen's mother, and later giving up her throne to mortal woman who becomes the new object of veneration for Leopold Bloom and Stephen. Themes of motherhood and myth are strengthened in Virginia Woolf's two women Mrs Dalloway and Mrs Ramsay, whose maternal and royal attributes combined with self-sacrifice, feasts and dinner parties resonate the two women not only with the Virgin Mary but also with pagan myth and deities, creating a sorority of sorts between Christian and pagan mothers. Mary is finally seen directly in Colm Toíbín's *The Testament of Mary* as an evangelist for non-belief, and although she speaks and empowers herself, she only projects and intensifies her author's doubting voice. Through these four writers, the Virgin Mary is revealed as an ever-changing construct reflecting both her authors and the philosophies in vogue of their time.

Dissertation Tutor

Dr Maria Frendo

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving parents, Philip and Gladys Borg; my beloved sister and brother-in-law, Alison and Luke Said; my darling niece Elisa Said, and my faithful companion Leonardo Biondani, for their constant support and encouragement that has sustained me throughout this dissertation.

Epigraph

I think I know exactly what you mean by the order of Grace; and of course by your references to Our Lady, upon which all my own small perception of beauty both in majesty and simplicity is founded.

J. R. R. Tolkien (Letter to Robert Murray, S. J., 2 December 1953)

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Delving into early twentieth and twenty-first century literary works with hopes of discovering the literary presence of the Virgin Mary has not been an easy attainment. Marian representations and persona discussed in this dissertation are typically heavily coded and obscure, which would give reason as to why modernist studies of the literary Virgin Mary have roughly been an indirect form of study rather than direct, brief mentions and references embedded in larger bodies of work. Particularly in modernist works by T. S. Eliot, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, whose oeuvres will be the prime focus along with the contemporary writer Colm Tóibín, the Mother of Christ may at times be barely visible to a reader's untrained eye, or if directly mentioned, would be considered as nothing more than a background character, such as in Joyce's nominally Catholic Ireland. In contemporary literature, there is a change where Mary unexpectedly takes centre stage, literally and metaphorically, with the publication of Colm Tóibín's play – and later novella – *The Testament of Mary* – where the Virgin's voice no longer stands on the margins but is delivered verbatim from the woman herself (despite the irony that she is merely a projection of her author's own male voice). For someone endowed with a rich history of cults, celebration, art and unceasing veneration, even recognised by the *National Geographic* magazine as the 'world's most powerful woman'[1], Mary's ambiguity in English literature may indeed seem a rather strange predicament. Her fading and revival story in the history of English literature is none the more fascinating, with roots tracing their way far back into the late medieval literature, and with a resurgence of interest within feminist and women's studies in the middle of the twentieth century.

Before the Church of England's break from Rome, the Virgin Mary had occupied a most central place in late medieval culture, whether it be in prayer, festivities, art or popular Marian shrines in places like Walsingham and Ipswich. English poetry, romance and story was also imbibed with mentions of and allusions to the Blessed Mother, while English plays commonly placed her in 'domestic and familial situations'.[2] Early modern Marian poetry

[1] Maureen Orth, 'The Virgin Mary: The World's Most Powerful Woman', National Geographic, December 2015, pp. 34-59.
[2] Gary Waller, *The Virgin Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern English Literature and Popular Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 65.

such as those written by John Lydgate heavily drew from medieval gynotheological obsessions on the Virgin's maternity and bodily functions, praising and lauding her heavenly milk and cloistered womb[3], 'virginall[…] closed and shutte.'[4] Other writings such as romance have the Virgin acting as the catalyst which conjoins 'the religion of love and the religion of devotion'[5], while tales such as Chaucer's 'The Prioress' Tale' present a Virgin Mary who is a mother even to the most undeserving of sinners and reprobates, a tale reflecting the belief of Mary being 'the Queen of Heaven whose *amor vincit omnia*.'[6] This literary flourishing would slowly rot away with the arrival of the reformers, who saw all of this as an 'idolatrous, pagan, and blasphemous feminization of Christianity',[7] initiating the Virgin's fading away.

Much later, narrowing towards the end of the Enlightenment's secularisation in eighteenth-century Europe, the revival of faith in Europe and Britain 'heralded a recovery of appreciation of the Virgin Mary,' so Barry Spurr writes, 'as a theological entity and a focus of individual spirituality.'[8] We have, perhaps unexpectedly for some, within the Romantic Movement, Wordsworth's sonnet *The Virgin*, a celebration of Mary's purity and, though she is excluded from the sensuality of the Romantics, she is nonetheless celebrated for her most unique womanhood[9]:

Mother! Whose virgin bosom was uncrost
With the least shade of thought to sin allied;
Woman! Above all women glorified,
Our tainted nature's solitary boast;
Purer than foam on central ocean tost;[10]

In point of fact, both the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries boast several Marian poems written from the pens of acclaimed poets, artists such as the likes of Coleridge, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Oscar Wilde, W. B. Yeats and Edwin Muir.[11] In the domain of early

[3] Waller, pp. 56-57.
[4] John Lydgate, *Life of Our* Lady, ed. by Joseph A. Lauritis, Ralph A. Klinefelter, and Vernon F. Gallagher (LouvainL E. Nauwelaerts, 1961), p. 103.
[5] Waller, p. 58.
[6] Hardy Long Frank, 'Chaucer's Prioress and the Blessed Virgin', *The Chaucer* Review, 13. 4 (1979), 346-362 (p. 346).
[7] Waller, p. 55.
[8] Barry Spurr, *See the Virgin Blest* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 123.
[9] Spurr, p. 130.
[10] William Wordsworth, 'Sonnet to the Virgin', in *Poetry Foundation* <www.poetryfoundation.org> [accessed 22 June 2018]
[11] Spurr, pp. 147-148, 152-162, 163-164, 168-173, 173-4.

twentieth-century novels, Mary's influence is more subtle than obvious, which this dissertation will speak of via three of the most authoritative early twentieth-century texts and one contemporary Irish text.

More recently, and particularly in feminist and women's studies, there has been a resurgence of interest in the Virgin Mary as well as the history of the Christian ideal of virginity, in what may adequately be described as a rediscovery of the Virgin Mary. Three books on virginity and Our Lady by John Bugge, Geoffrey Ashe and Marina Warner were all published simultaneously in 1976, something which was of no surprise to British historian Janet L. Nelson:

> 'The near-simultaneous appearance of these three books is not fortuitous. There is a widespread contemporary interest in apparently exotic religious forms, especially within Christianity itself: hence recent preoccupation, scholarly and popular, with witchcraft and exorcism, with heresy, with mysticism and ecstasy, and now with celibacy and the cult of the Virgin Mary.'[12]

Marina Warner's book *Alone of all her sex* is, for example, not so much about the young Jewish maiden as it is about 'the story of how the story came to be told', an attempt to 'exorcise and excise the living cult of the Virgin from the modern church'[13], and to define what the contemporary faithful pursue in a woman heavily dressed in myth and who 'represents a central theme in the history of western attitudes to women.'[14] Warner's conclusion in her book is quite contentious, having the Virgin Mary 'prematurely consigned […] to the oblivion of a mere aesthetic significance'[15], a statement which presumably did not sit well with many readers. Notwithstanding, Marian devotion and interest could not be further away from Warner's statement that the 'Virgin's legend will […] lose its present real powers to heal and to harm.' Charlene Spretnak's book *Missing Mary* places itself in what Spretnak calls 'the Marian rebellion', a growing movement of Marianism 'part of a contemporary recovery of the sacred' which is ironically developing outside official Western Christianity.[16] Spretnak writes:

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[12] Janet L. Nelson, "VIRGIN TERRITORY: Recent historical work on Marian belief And Cult", *Religion*, 7 (1977), 206-225 (p. 206).
[13] Nelson, 206-225 (p. 214).
[14] Marina Warner, *Alone of all her sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, 1976), p. xxv.
[15] Spurr, p. 197.
[16] Spurr, p. 198.

'The Marian renewal has brought us back into contact with the vital, through a rich communion that cannot be replaced. We are grounded once again in an organic expression of the unity of the cosmos. We are embraced once again by the compassionate Great Mother, arms outstretched as always, for indeed the universe is beneficent […]'[17]

Indeed, this dissertation is a work born out of a renewed contemporary interest in the Virgin Mary's place in early twentieth and twenty-first century English literature, besides the author's own personal faith. It is ultimately an interdisciplinary approach drawing on literary criticism, theology, psychoanalysis, mythology and history to justify its conclusion, that the Virgin Mary is an ever-changing construct in literature continually shaped by the literary ages and authors' fantasies that shaped her, thus speaking volumes of her writers' own personal history and the philosophies which transformed the Virgin's image.

The first chapter begins with several of T. S. Eliot's poetry, poems which chronicle not only Eliot's spiritual journey but which also reveal a slow development of both the female image and the Virgin's engagement and importance thematically and personally for Eliot. The women in his poetry are taken from both mythology and religion. The other women who shaped his poetry are more concrete than ethereal, since they come directly from Eliot's own personal life. The women first encountered in *The Waste Land* are startling and indubitably troubling: 'suicidal sybils, false prophetesses, and neurotic, promiscuous, and hysterical denizens of the demimonde of the Modernist metropolis.'[18] It is only in later poetry where the Virgin Mary makes herself more known to both the speaker and the readers. Intercession, protection and salvation are among the substantial themes in connection with Eliot's Blessed Mother, who is a silent but very active figure in his later poetry, a woman who redeems the broken womanhood in previous poetry and who becomes a herald of salvation to mankind through the birth of Our Saviour.

Continuing onto the second chapter, the Virgin Mary's veiled presence in James Joyce's works begins with the nurturing and maternal Mrs Dedalus doting on her young son, Stephen, who he later comes to affiliate his own mother with Ireland and religion, and so indirectly with the Blessed Virgin Mary. Likewise, indirect echoes of Scripture and Marian allusions hidden in the pages are evaluated, not to mention the experience of twentieth-

[17] Charlene Spretnak, *Missing Mary: The Queen of Heaven and Her Re-Emergence in the Modern Church* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 108.
[18] Spurr, p. 175.

century Irish women which creates a bond between them and the Virgin Mother that is characterised by the desires of men, veneration and the salvaging of women's voice, a voice which they desire to claim as their own. A brief example would be the relationship between Stephen and his mother and its Scriptural allusions. A common occurrence in the Gospels is that of Christ severing ties between Himself and His Blessed Mother. Mary and His brethren wait outside to speak to him, but Christ addresses the crowd instead, saying, '"Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?"'[19] At the wedding of Cana, Jesus appears to reproach his Mother, '"O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come"'[20], and at his final hour upon the Cross, he speaks to His mother one last time, giving her away to the Beloved Disciple: '"Woman, behold your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!"'[21]

Accordingly, in Joyce's *Portrait*, this treatment echoes itself in the relationship between Stephen Dedalus and his mother, a woman affiliated by her son with Ireland and religion (and indirectly with the Virgin Mary), who he shuns and only listens to via his own interpretation of her words. What therefore Julia Kristeva had commented about Mary and Christ in the Scripture also applies to Stephen and Mrs. Dedalus, that 'any trace of matrilinearity is explicitly disavowed, leaving only the symbolic tie between mother and son.'[22] Later, Stephen and Leopold Bloom's new religion of sexuality transforms remnants of their old religion to a fleshlier reality, where veneration and recourse to the New Eve is now given to mortal women. Lastly, all of what is said of women, their bodies, status and being begins to cleave in one body, that of Molly Bloom.

In the third chapter, we find ourselves accompanying Virginia Woolf's two of her best well-known characters, Mrs Dalloway and Mrs Ramsay, who are elevated to the level of myth and find themselves encapsulated in marriage and the blooms of female sexuality, which has repeated itself from generation to generation. The figure of Mrs Ramsay has resonances with both religious and pagan figures, and her self-sacrifice and regal figure easily transforms her into a figure deserving of veneration and recourse, while Mrs Dalloway comes across as more contemplative, like a nun, whose life is at a stage where the flowering

[19] Matthew 12. 48
[20] John 2. 4
[21] John 19. 26-27.
[22] Julia Kristeva and Arthur Goldhammer, 'Stabat Mater', *Poetics Today*, 6 (1985), 133-152 (p. 136).

of her womanhood is now drying up and closing within. Still, she puts on herself an aura of vivacity, her green colours evoking life like Mrs Ramsay's green cashmere shawl, and holds a dinner party for her guests, a Last Supper of sorts, disrupted by the suicide of Septimus Warren Smith, a war-battered Christ-figure whose sacrifice is but for nought.

The final chapter takes a broad leap into the contemporary literature of Colm Tóibín. This is a writer who attains the figure of the Virgin Mary not as an image of devotion but, similarly to Marina Warner's own intentions, as a medium to evangelise to readers about his own atheism and revisionist theories about the woman behind the myth, the real – as he perceives her to be – Mary of Nazareth. Tóibín's novella (previously a play) is inspired from an introduction to the Gospel of Saint John he had read, and a trip to Ephesus. The introduction's suggestion that John may had actually read Aeschylus before he wrote his Gospel, and Tóibín's imagining the Evangelist attending the open-air theatre in Ephesus engendered his own personal Mary, a woman quintessential to his drama and to John's, 'gaining power from her own voice'[23], and identifying herself among other powerful women, mythical and real. The final result however is less of an empowerment to Mary than it is to the author. As Joe Pinsker cunningly notices, 'Tóibín might be putting his own words into Mary's mouth less to evoke the state of her soul than to expound some of his own views.'[24]

[23] Colm Tóibín, 'Colm Toíbín: How I wrote Mary's story', in *The Telegraph* <http://www. telegraph.co.uk> [accessed 31 May 2018]
[24] Joe Pinsker, 'The Testament of Mary isn't really about Jesus' Mother at all', in *The Atlantic* <http://www.theatlantic.com> [accessed 22 June 2018]

Chapter 2: Divine Womanhood and the Silent Virgin

2.1 Discovering divine femininity

Readers and academics have run into a kaleidoscopic myriad of Eliot's women in pre- and post-*Waste Land* poem. The women initially come across as complex, worn and deceitful, while others find themselves plucked off their mythical plains and placed in Eliot's sorrowful waste land. This tormented view of femininity, or rather a misogynistic treatment of the female sex, had critics reading into the text a 'mirror [of] cultural breakdown' as well as their perception of Eliot's 'own sexual unease'.[25] Hence Eliot's poetry can be described to be not so much an extension and improvement of language (as Eliot saw fit as a poet's duty)[26] as it is a treatise of his vision on the graces and misgiving of the female sex. Couple this with Eliot's own exploration of religion tradition and myth, and we may see his complete works as some form of spiritual autobiography.

Eliot discovers divine femininity at a much later stage in his work; his higher preoccupation as a younger poet was cultivating and discovering the fruits of love and spiritual meaning 'amid the "stony rubbish" of a post-Christian world'[27], as John Gatta further elaborates:

> 'This larger search […] involves for him the recovery of myth and revalidation of "the mythical method". In an age of analysis and demythologising rationalism, Eliot looked retrospectively towards the symbolic expression of myth for hints of continuity between the inner worlds of archaic and contemporary humanity.'[28]

Eliot slowly uncovers and expands upon femininity, womanhood and the Virgin Mary as he matures in his poetry. Comparable to his religious beliefs and convictions, there is a crescendo on the redemptive and purifying qualities on the duality between divinity and femininity, especially as to what they entailed to the American poet considering his later confirmation as an Anglo-Catholic in 1927.[29] The women in his life plucked away not only at the strings of his poetic talent but also deepened his Marian devotion. The expedition takes

[25] Jacqueline Pollard, 'T. S. Eliot, "Perpetual Angelus"', in <http://japollard.wordpress.com> [accessed 19 June 2018]
[26] T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 20.
[27] John Gatta, *American Madonna: Images of the Divine Woman in Literary Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 117.
[28] Gatta, p. 117.
[29] Barry Spurr, 'T. S. Eliot's extraordinary journey of faith' in *ABC* <http://www.abc.net.au> [accessed 19 June 2018]

place not only in his poetry but reaches out further into his personal life, especially considering that it is parallel to Eliot's maturing in his religious beliefs. *The Waste Land* may be adequately described as a Christian poem, which sets it against the prevailing resentment of the early twentieth century, which saw Christianity as a faith that 'appears to have failed to carry out what it wanted to.'[30] With the turn of the new century and a new prospect of machinery, design and progress, the West began its era of 'analysis and demythologizing rationalism', which Eliot defied by looking 'retrospectively toward the symbolic contemporary humanity.'[31] American historian Henry Adams, known for developing an interest in the Virgin Mary (yet an interest which never fully matured and was therefore probably 'idiosyncratic'[32]) develops in writing the modernist philosophy of putting aside myth for a more masculinist future, where the divine woman is a fragmented relic of the past and traditions of old. His encounter with the Mother of God at Chartres Cathedral is best described as a watershed moment, for he juxtaposes both the Theotokos and the dynamo as two sources which have electrified the current of civilisation, giving it energy and vitality. In his autobiographical work *The Education of Henry Adams*, Adams writes:

> Symbol or energy, the Virgin had acted as the greatest force in the Western world ever felt, and had drawn man's activities to herself more seemingly that any other power, natural or supernatural, had ever done; the historian's business was to follow the track of the energy; to find wherever it came from and where it went to; its complex sources and shifting channels; its values, equivalents, conversions.[33]

Adams also saw within the Virgin the '*personal* female face of God', though this is not an original concept of his. He saw the Madonna's sexuality not as purity, but as her potency and fecundity, an 'unseen erotic force' which has made men build cathedrals and sustained mankind's creative life.[34] Yet this supernatural feminine aura now found itself waning, and man's yearning for what the mother of mankind had provided continues its search, desiring that it may be satisfied again. For the new modern world, this yearning employed itself in the new power of machinery. Adams, despite his flirtation with the Virgin Mary, her mystery and power, came to a conclusion most similar to Marina Warner's in the last few pages of

[30] A. G. George, *T. S. Eliot: His Mind and Art* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962), p. 12.
[31] Gatta, p. 117.
[32] Gatta, p. 95.
[33] Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, Oxford's World Classics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 325.
[34] Gatta, p. 97

her book *Alone of all her sex,* for he saw the Virgin Mary to be a resource depleted of its energy, and did not find himself wanting to do with a church. It was not his intent anyway, much less embrace the Roman faith too.[35] Having now been overthrown by machinery and progress, 'the Virgin in her majesty […] look[s] down from a deserted heaven, into an empty church, on a dead faith.'[36] Eliot would soon politely write off such views as new-fangled nonsense. The twentieth century had indeed faith 'in technological deliverance and economic expansion' as its driving force though it had failed to see the consequences of considering technological prowess as a moral force: [37]

> '[W]e now grapple with industrialism's destruction of the quality of our soil, air, and water; the ramifications of genetic engineering; the effects of the electronic childhood […] In fact, it can be said at the beginning of the twenty-first century that "the Virgin and the Dynamo" are now engaged in a rematch. This time the sterile values, spiritual emptiness and devastating "trade-offs of technocratic wonderworld hold far less allure."'[38]

Eliot's *The Waste Land* addresses a concept much in line with Spretnak, for he presents to the reader a decaying world that is impoverished both spiritually and physically; the fecundity of technology comes in sharp contrast with widespread sterility. In consequence, myth, religion, and thus indirectly the Virgin Mary, become Eliot's intercessory powers for regeneration. Eliot's recognition of this phenomena being germane to the inhabitants of the waste land brings him to conceive the Lady of his later poetry, his own Beatrice. This was not without the dying influence of his wife Vivienne, however, as well as his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism. Spurr writes:

> That marriage, which had been disintegrating for years, was the source of much of Eliot's negative representation of negative representation of romantic and sexual love and, thereby, of women in his earlier verse. As Vivien's influence waned, along with her presence in the poet's life, and as his religious convictions as an Anglo-Catholic developed through the 1920s, so, too, did his appreciation of the kind of female perfection and transcendental love represented by the Virgin'.[39]

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[35] Gatta, p. 99.
[36] Henry Adams, *Mont-Saint Michel and Chartres* (New York: Gallery Book / W.H. Smith Publishers, 1980), p. 117.
[37] Charlene Spretnak, *Missing Mary: The Queen of Heaven and Her Re-Emergence in the Modern Church* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) pp. 28-29.
[38] Spretnak, p. 29.
[39] Barry Spurr, *See the Virgin Blest: The Virgin Mary in English Poetry* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 176.

Womanhood in Eliot's *The Waste Land* brings up 'the prospect of a redemptive female presence' several times throughout his poem, yet this is 'never fully realised'[40], along with other themes of salvation, renewal and resurrection, which seem implied by the title of Part I, *The Burial of the Dead*. Lack of any attempt for some articulation of argument or narrative, an 'abrupt, elliptical mode of the poem', and 'deliberate discontinuities, [seem] to reflect a general disorientation'[41], hence elevating themes as previously mentioned are quickly stumped or cut short in this 'piece of rhythmical grumbling'.[42]

2.2 Troubled beginnings

The epigraph of *The Waste Land* is our first encounter with women in this poem, the Sibyl of Cumae in fact, whose prophecy in the ancient world foretells the flourishing prosperity of the newly founded city of Rome, and guides Aeneas to the underworld, where his late father reveals his future descendant as the founders of the new city.[43] The Sibyl's illustrious reputation is crushed in Eliot's opening epigraph. Taken from Petronius, the English translation reads: 'With my own eyes I saw the Sybil hanging in a bottle at Cumae, and when the boys said: "Sybil, what's the matter"; she replied: "I long to die."'[44]

There is an absence of any hope of salvation through divine womanhood[45], and there is an implication of the burden of possessing prophetic knowledge, a coy juxtaposition between the Sybil and the poet. Rather than having anything conclusive about some redemption, womanhood first enters the pages as suffering the consequences of hubris (because of the Sybil's cursed state by not asking for eternal youth along with eternal age) and its disgust and weariness of the world it is condemned to live in, together with the impossibility of death. The Sybil's awareness of horror leaves a bitter taste of despair and loneliness before the start of *The Waste Land* is even begun. Before we are to meet Our Lady, herald of the Saviour in Eliot's later poetry, we receive the Sibyl's annunciation of gloom and despair.

[40] Gatta, p. 118.
[41] David Ward, *T. S. Eliot: Between Two Worlds; A Reading of T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 68.
[42] T. S. Eliot, 'In Eliot's Own Word: *The Waste Land*', in *T. S. Eliot* <http://tseliot.com> [accessed 19 June 2018]
[43] Ben Amundgaard, 'The Sibyl of Cumae' in *Classical Wisdom* <https://classicalwisdom.com> [accessed 19 June 2018]
[44] Ward, p. 72.
[45] Gatta, p. 118.

Further on into Part I of *The Waste Land*, prophecy allows both a second encounter with divine womanhood, conjointly with the entry of a 'religious theme' for the first time in the poem.[46] The clairvoyant Madame Sosostris gives herself an aura of godliness and divinity, yet it is nothing but a false alibi. She takes pleasure in being known as 'the wisest woman in Europe'[47], because she presents herself as having the ability to foretell the future by means of her trusty old Tarot cards. She might as well add to her grand reputation as a failed prophetess too, since Eliot endows his given praise to the charlatan with a tinge of irony. Her having 'had a bad cold'[48] infects both her wholesome and mystical image as well as her system, giving the reader a feeling of 'seediness'. '[A]n ironic version of a prophetic figure in the present time'; her name too sounds exotic yet cheap, an imitation of an Egyptian deity, while the archetypes and allegories within her Tarot cards, thought to be a 'central part in the most crucial fertility rites of ancient Egypt'[49] are mere entertainment for swindle and gullibility, traits of the waste lands' inhabitants who are desperate to find their way. What she does bring about is false hope, ambivalent certainties and several motifs of the poem, such as death, life and fertility. Among the cards that she picks is the Belladonna,

> […] The Lady of the Rocks, The lady of situations.[50]

Traversi links this Tarot archetype to a world where lust has come to be divorced from any redeeming or humanizing conception of love'.[51] This card can also be interpreted as one of laudatory qualities, for it is most likely The Queen of Pentacles, the one who sees 'all the worlds therein', though in this reading it is reversed, hence its 'Belladonna', the poisonous plant. The title 'Lady of the Rocks' recalls the famous Marian painting by Leonardo da Vinci[52], though here the image is more occult, since the name not only betrays her identity as an 'anti-Madonna', but also reflects the suffering and desperate sexuality of the modern secular society; she is 'a composite figure of lovelessness both ancient and modern'.[53]

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[46] Derek Traversi, *T. S. Eliot: The Longer Poems* (London: The Bodley Head, 1976) p. 28.
[47] T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems: 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p. 54.
[48] Eliot, p. 54.
[49] Alireza Farahbakhsh and Zahra Habibi, "Eliot, Time In Modernist Thought, And Contemporary Reality", *Journal Of The Australasian Universities Language And Literature Association*, 2012. 117 (2012), 35-47 (p. 39).
[50] Eliot, p. 54.
[51] Traversi, p.29.
[52] Leonardo da Vinci, *Virgin of the Rocks*, 1483-1486, oil on panel, 199 x 122 cm, Louvres, Paris.
[53] Gatta, p. 119.

There does appear to be some hope. Eliot brings into the text a tinge of freshness and fecundity in Part I of *The Waste Land* with the hyacinth girl within the garden, 'an antithesis of the wasteland'. Gatta:

> 'Particularly by association with the erotic and fecund hyacinth, she qualifies as a mother of life – in effect, as an Eve allied to the free-spirited "Marie" named in the opening verse stanza.'[54]

Nonetheless, Eliot wedges the hyacinth girl between verses taken directly Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*, a tale of loss, pain and grieving. The last verse, roughly translated to 'Waste and empty is the sea', are the words of the dying Tristan in Cornwall, waiting for Isolde to come for him, who has just been notified by a man keeping guard that she is nowhere to be seen sailing towards her love. Hope sinks beneath the waves, and now the hyacinth girl verses stand out bitterly since, as Traversi puts it, '[f]or the first time there is the sense of a possible relationship […] of one person to *give* himself, positively and unreservedly, to another'.[55] Yet having been framed between *Tristan und Isolde*, the freshness of this scene begins to wilt. Looking at her full arms and wet hair, the speaker's words and eyes fail him; because of the opera, it is now difficult to see her 'not only as a Lady of the Garden but also as Lady of the Sea'[56], as Gatta interprets her to be. Her giving of flowers, a provision of life and fertility, become a futile act, merely followed by silence.

Just as the estranged and disappointing love life of the famed poet had brought much fecundity to his poetry (Eliot's sister-in-law had said of his first wife, Vivienne, that she 'ruined Tom as a man, but she made him as a poet'[57]), the women 'come and go'[58], from the harlot to the Sybil, to the hyacinth and the lady of silence, and lastly, and perchance the most significant, the Virgin Mary. The deception and miserable longing for affection of women like Madame Sosostris and the female speaker in *Portrait of a Lady* are easily memorable, while the Virgin Mary passes over verse and strophe in silence. Her mentioning is primarily through passing reference, namely the prayers that the faithful offer to her and Marian symbology, as well as how her image is envisioned through Dante's Beatrice. Considering the fluctuating resonances of both misogyny and praise for the feminine

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[54] Gatta, p. 119.
[55] Traversi, p. 27.
[56] Gatta, p. 119.
[57] Carole Seymour-Jones, *Painted Shadow: The Life of Vivienne Eliot, First Wife of T. S. Eliot, and the Long-suppressed Truth about Her Influence on His Genius* (USA: Nan A. Talese, 2001), pp. 4-5.
[58] Eliot, p. 3.

present in Eliot, the Virgin Mary acts as the perfect point to observe Eliot's untempered writings. John Gatta writes: 'By reflecting on how Eliot envisions the Virgin Mother artistically, through Dante, one can depend understanding of the peculiar feminine symbology that pervades his poetic corpus.'[59]

2.3 Revealing the Virgin Mary

Prior to *Ash-Wednesday* (1930), references to women 'are almost entirely negative'[60], while the sex 'is almost always bad sex, either libidinally limp or morally vicious'[61]. Once Eliot began to become convinced of Anglo-Catholicism in the late 1920s, the women in Eliot's verse begin to display more refined feminine qualities and appear less difficult or as a threat. Barry Spurr alludes that these improvements in Eliot's life also ameliorated 'his appreciation of the kind of female perfection and transcendental love represented by the Virgin'[62]. *Journey of the Magi* is where a definite shift in Eliot's 'personal and poetic vision becomes substantial'[63]. The poem, as spoken from the perspective of one of the Magi, was written in 1927, the same year that Eliot had converted to Christianity. It was also written very hastily:

> 'I had been thinking about it in church […] and when I got home I opened a half-bottle of Booth's Gin, poured myself a drink, and began to write. By lunchtime, the poem and the half-bottle of gin, were both finished.'[64]

Like *The Hollow Men*, and possibly Eliot too, the Magi find themselves in limbo between two worlds, transitioning from their former Zoroastrian faith to the newly born King of Kings. The journey begins from a land of times regretted, such as,

> The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
> And the silken girls bringing sherbet.[65]

[59] Gatta, p. 117.
[60] Spurr, p. 175.
[61] Louis Menand, 'The Women Come and Go', in *The New Yorker* <https://www.newyorker.com> [accessed 24 October 2018]
[62] Spurr, p. 176.
[63] Spurr, p. 176.
[64] 'A Short Analysis of T. S. Eliot's 'Journey of the Magi'' in *Interesting Literature* <https://interestingliterature.com> [accessed 19 June 2018]
[65] Eliot, p. 99.

Albeit certainly less of a threat than the women of *The Waste Land*, we still find these silken girls as the appealing 'allure of the fallen world'[66]. The Magi's escape from the former world brings them to a 'temperate valley', or in the words of Dante, the 'vita nuova'[67], who have become deeply affected with their witness of the Birth of Christ, a birth that was '[h]ard and bitter agony'[68] for them. On return to their Kingdoms, the Magi are

> […] no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
> With an alien people clutching their gods.[69]

This marked event in history brings forward the beginning of a new era, alienating the Magi with their fresh damning knowledge. The speaker of the poem sees 'his own gods and his own tribe effete, displaced, destined to be overtaken by the advent of Christ'.[70] One could see the open-ended uncertainty of Eliot's own conversion to Christianity here. His conversion now confronts him with the Sacrifice on Golgotha. This agonising rumination over the cost of embracing Anglo-Catholicism recalls the language of *Ash-Wednesday*, the 'hope to not turn again'[71], an echo of Guido Cavalcanti's best-known ballad, *Perch'io non spero di tornar giamai*, penned down when he was in exile. And with this pondering of life and death in the Christian tradition, the Virgin Mary, the new Eve and bearer of the living God, now transforms in Eliot's following poem *A Song for Simeon* into Our Lady of Sorrows, bearing her own sorrows and of her Son, and ultimately of all who have recourse to her. Gatta adds that male speakers in Eliot's poetry 'even tend to identify with labour pains that the woman of Nazareth endured at Jesus' birth and still more at his death.'[72] Simeon, a 'righteous and devout'[73] man from Jerusalem according to the Evangelist St Luke, prophesies the fall and resurrection of many in Israel through the birth of the Divine Child. The new era has settled, and the foundations of belief are to be levelled and shaken; 'God's peace will shatter the outward tranquillity of believers for generations to come.'[74] Mary herself will suffer too,

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[66] Spurr, p. 176.
[67] Spurr, p. 176.
[68] Eliot, p. 100.
[69] Eliot, p. 100.
[70] 'A Short Analysis of T. S. Eliot's 'Journey of the Magi''
[71] Eliot, p. 85.
[72] Gatta, p. 122.
[73] Luke 2. 25
[74] Gatta, p. 123.

(And a sword shall pierce thy heart,
Thine also).[75]

which shall come at 'the time of cords and scourges and lamentation'[76], Christ's Passion. There she will suffer '[b]efore the certain hour of maternal sorrow'[77], which shall be an apocalyptic time for her and all mothers, for in the Gospel of St Luke Christ's proclamation of the end of the world also speaks of maternal sorrow: 'Alas for those who are with child and for those who give suck in those days! For great distress shall be upon the earth and wrath upon the people'.[78] Making his way to Golgotha, Christ's consolation to the weeping women also contain a calamity that is yet, where the barren women shall be blessed, for they shall not suffer the cruel loss of a child. Eliot recognises, and ergo Simeon, this duet between birth and death. The poem is set in winter, a dying season, while Simeon is an old man 'waiting for the death wind'.[79] Still, he recognises within the Christ Child a new covenant for Israel. His canticle, the *Nunc Dimittis*, a prayer that is still recited in Vespers and read at the Feast of Candlemas, proclaims Christ as God's salvation and as

'a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to thy people Israel'.[80]

Marina, a poem within the Ariel series, celebrates the qualities of water symbolism, as well as joyously speaks of the graces bestowed through blessed womanhood, another Marian quality within Eliot's universe. The poem's attained joy and vision of new life are, however, 'not separated from agony'[81], tempting as it would be to forget so by critics. The 'blessed face' of Marina, an image which David Ward describes as 'bear[ing] in some sense or other the grace of God'[82], is ambiguous and distant; it is also an image that is acquired through trials and tribulations, gazed upon between becoming aware of an unforgiving world and that suffering and loneliness may be resolved. In brief, the mythical Marina allows the persona to 'return to sweetness and peace through an extraordinary grace.'[83] Inspired from

[75] Eliot, p. 101.
[76] Eliot, p. 101.
[77] Eliot, p. 101.
[78] Luke 21. 23.
[79] Eliot, p. 101.
[80] Luke 2. 32.
[81] John H. Timmerman, '"Marina": T. S. Eliot's Moment of Recognition', *Christianity and Literature*, 41.4 (1992), 407-419 (p. 408).
[82] Ward, p. 170.
[83] Ward, p. 170.

the Shakespearean play *Pericles* (c.1609), Marina is the daughter of Pericles, whose mother Thaisa is perceived to have died while giving birth to her in a stormy sea, hence the meaning of her name 'daughter of the sea'. Having later been sold to a brothel by pirates, her virtue saves her from the debauchery and she becomes its charwoman. In the last act, her singing revived her comatose father, and all three members of the family are finally reunited. The poem accentuates Pericles' moment of discovering his daughter, 'when the lost innocence seems to be found again'. The sea is an echo of the dominant poetic metaphor in Eliot's work. John H. Timmerman:

> 'It is shown as befouled, desolate, absent, and destructive, but also as pure, invigorating, present, and restorative. From his earliest work water imagery embodies the contrary emotions – joy and anguish, recovery and loss – that prefigure the conflict of "Marina."'[84]

The figure of Marina is also permeated with water imagery: she is born at sea and the speaker encounters her on a sailing vessel, whose 'rigging [is] weak and the canvas rotten'.[85] The vessel is 'his life upon the seas'[86], and the form and face of Marina emerging from the waters affirms his salvation and restoration from trials past. She is 'a symbol of affirmation […] the objective correlative of the poet's rebirth, full of vital intensity'[87] who casts away memories of death which constantly reminded him of the losses he suffered. The sea has cleansed him on his suffering, like the sea described by prophet Micah, as Timmerman references, which swallows sin and restores mercy:

> You will again have compassion on us;
> You will tread our sins underfoot
> And hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.[88]

There is also the tantalising figure of the *Stella Maris* in Marina, Our Lady, Star of the Sea, guiding star for Christians by leading them to Christ (in the same manner as it led the Magi to the birthplace of Jesus and away from Herod), as well as intercessor and protector of seafarers. Marina is 'more distant than the stars and nearer than the eye'[89], a guide to Pericles that he may arrive and claim his loss and life journey. The regenerative qualities of

[84] Timmerman, pp. 407-419 (p. 407).
[85] Eliot, p. 106.
[86] Timmerman, pp. 407-419 (p. 417).
[87] Timmerman, pp. 407-419 (p. 415).
[88] Micah 7. 19.
[89] Eliot, p. 105.

water also evoke the miraculous waters of Lourdes and other Marian shrines, where pilgrims go by the thousands, hoping for physical and spiritual regeneration. Before the seer St Bernadette Soubirous, the Virgin appeared as a child no older than twelve, yet her words and directives contain great maturity and grace[90]. Here too, Marina 'returns […] with the unexpected shape and spiritual authority of an adult.'[91] The duality of water and the Virgin Mary also finds itself in the nineteenth Surah of the Holy Koran, where the Lord Allah nourishes the heavily pregnant and exhausted Virgin with a rivulet, as well as some dates from a date tree.[92] Thus, the poem lauds the 'victorious qualities' of water: restoration, renewal and hope.[93] Eliot lastly presents the paradox of Marina as mother of Pericles' renewal, suggesting not only a reconstitution of former relations through new life, but also the 'famous spiritual paradox'[94] 'figlia del tuo figlio'[95] ('daughter of your son'), St Bernard of Clairvaux's words of praise to Our Lady quoted in Dante's *Paradiso*, as who Eliot cites in his own *Dry Salvages*, another water poem veiled with Mary's mantle.

Eliot explicitly evokes the Virgin Mary in Part IV of *The Dry Salvages*, where she overlooks the harbour from her shrine, which 'stands on the promontory'.[96] She emerges, so Gatta denotes, 'from her natural mythic element: water.'[97] The speaker asks for her intercession for the common folk[98]:

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[90] 'The Apparitions' in *Lourdes Sanctuaire* <http://www.lourdes-france.com/en> [accessed 24 October 2018]
[91] Gatta, p. 124.
[92] Koran 16. 24-27
[93] Timmerman, pp. 407-419 (p. 408).
[94] Gatta, p. 124.
[95] Paradiso, XXXIII, 1.
[96] Ref. from poem.
[97] Gatta, p. 132.
[98] Eliot's depiction of the Virgin among seafarers and fishermen also brings to a focus point Marian devotion among the commoners of society. Our Lady has always unceasingly been more sought for by the poor and low-class than the elite. In modern day Mexico, for example, devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe still burns brightly, its demographic profile fitting that of the fisherfolk in *The Dry Salvages*, according to Gatta. On the Maltese islands, we find countless of churches dedicated to Our Lady, the most popular Marian shrine being Our Lady of Pinu, Gozo, where hundreds of ex-votos, letters and memorabilia on display inside the Basilica attest to the people's belief in the Virgin's intercessory powers in times of great need. Feasts and processions lauding Our Lady only enrichen Maltese culture and add tremendous joy and colour to the Maltese streets. Paintings of Caravaggio such as *Madonna of Loreto* and *Madonna of the Rosary* portray the closeness shared between the Theotokos and the commoners.

Pray for all those who are in ships, those
Whose business has to do with fish, […]
Women who have seen their sons or husbands
Setting forth, and not returning […]
Also pray for those who were in ships, and
Ended their voyage on the sand, in the sea's lips[99]

The setting of the poem is also typically American, with memories of the Mississippi River and the Atlantic Ocean at Cape Ann; the title does this too, 'which might greet a traveller crossing the Atlantic'. Such bodies of water are a nod to the poet's upbringing yet is an 'old world left behind him long ago.'[100] The waters appear unforgiving, as the poem echoes both *The Waste Land* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, where the brief time of the river in the summer becomes a 'constant unregarded reminder of the unhurried rhythms of the natural world'.[101] Derek Traversi sees the river as a retreat to personal origins and the history of the human race.[102] Reading the poem, one perceives this sense of religious awe for water, which Eliot describes as 'a strong brown god', and several passages easily depict the waters as menacing, almost alive:

The sea howl
And the sea yelp, are different voices
Often together heard: the whine in the rigging,
The menace and caress of wave that breaks on water,
The distant rote in the granite teeth,
And the wailing warning from the approaching headland
Are all sea voices[103]

Along with the howls and yelps of the sea comes the tolling bell, forewarning danger and death. It begins to gain incremental force, until in Part V it becomes one with the 'music heard so deeply / That it is not heard at all'.[104] Eliot cleverly transforms the ringing toll of danger and death into an announcement of birth: the dismal toll of the bell turns into a sweet ringing announcing the Angelus prayer[105], a devotional practice which recalls the

[99] Eliot, p. 198.
[100] Ward, p. 253.
[101] Ward, p. 254.
[102] Traversi, p. 153.
[103] Eliot, p. 193.
[104] Eliot, p. 199.
[105] Ward, p. 259.

Angel Gabriel's salutation to Mary, who '[has] found favour with God'[106] and who is to bear the Son of God. Gatta: 'Thus, the Angelus leads toward bittersweet recollection of Christ's incarnation, the central point of *Four Quartets*.'[107] The Incarnation is indeed 'the end of it'. Namely, it is the ultimate purpose behind the world of time, and, 'that if offers the Christian the means by which he may achieve a life which is not the scale of time, by sharing in the resurrection.'[108] Therefore, the mimicking of the bells at sea shows the possibility of becoming liberated from this time-constricted world, 'of timelessness in the midst of time'.[109] Through the Marian cult and the Virgin's intercession, this possibility becomes a reality. The timeless message of salvation that the Angelus bell rings also recalls the penitential theme of *Ash-Wednesday*, a call for penance and reflection on death and the mystery of Christ's Passion. Similar to this turning-point poem, in *Dry Salvages* the Christian is reminded of their mortality via the 'the calamitous annunciation'[110] of the sea bell; the 'announcement of death' is converted into an 'announcement of life'.[111] The figure of Mary in her shrine on the promontory recalls her *fiat* to the Angel Gabriel, her self-surrender to God's will, thus fulfilling the words of the prophets: 'And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us'.[112]

Ash-Wednesday is 'permeated with the flavour of Marian devotion'[113] as well as maternity, a relationship to which Eliot was 'intensely ambivalent' towards.[114] Barry Spurr considers it to be 'perhaps the greatest Marian poem in English, of the twentieth century'[115], yet there is a lot more going on than transcendental beauty stirred up through the image of the Virgin Mary. Even though Eliot moves on from his *femmes fatales*, there retains some 'decidedly disturbing aspect'[116] in the male speaker's adulation of the lady of silence, where he is reduced to chirping, scattered dry bones and she is

[106] Luke 1. 30.
[107] Gatta, p. 134.
[108] Ward, p. 259.
[109] Spurr, p. 186.
[110] Eliot, p. 194.
[111] Ward, p. 260.
[112] John 1. 14.
[113] Gatta, p. 125.
[114] Elisabeth Däumer, 'Charlotte Stearns and "Ash Wednesday"'s Lady of Silences', ELH, 65. 2 (1998), 479-501 (p. 479).
[115] Spurr, p. 177.
[116] Däumer, pp. 479-501 (p. 479).

withdrawn

In a white gown, to contemplation, in a white gown.[117]

The first section of *Ash-Wednesday* begins with Guido Cavalcanti's words, repeating them over and over again,

Because I do not hope to turn again

Because I do not hope

Because I do not hope to turn[118]

incantatory lines which invoke conversion (turning) and liturgy; the repetition 'convey[s] the idea of traditional liturgical language'.[119] This poem's value in understanding femininity and the Virgin Mary in Eliot is twofold: its importance autobiographically and its representation of women. Spurr attests in another book, *Anglo-Catholic in Religion: T. S. Eliot and Christianity*, that *Ash-Wednesday* contains, 'an extraordinary reversal of the negative representation of women in Eliot's earlier poetry and the concomitant revulsion from or fear of them that his male speakers had repeatedly expressed.'[120] The poem's importance autobiographically rests on the compilation of all its three sections in 1930, three years after Eliot's conversion to Anglicanism, therefore signalling Eliot's breaking off of his family's and ergo, mother's, Unitarian tradition[121], and his plunge into the theology of the *via negativa*, a philosophy espoused by its master St John of the Cross whom Eliot was strongly drawn to. Ash Wednesday and the entire liturgical season of Lent encourages a turning from earthly matters and reconciliation with God our salvation. Accordingly, St John of the Cross writes that a soul bent on salvation must 'cast away all strange gods – namely, all strange affections and attachments'.[122] This divesting of love can be seen as the love of women and indirectly the mother. The poem's image of motherhood is offered through a 'panoply of female figures'[123], and Eliot's maternal anxieties can be interpreted through his reluctance to turn from the world as well as women, who 'embody […] the realm of the flesh as much

[117] Eliot, p. 87.
[118] Eliot, p. 85.
[119] Spurr, p. 177.
[120] Barry Spurr, *Anglo-Catholic in Religion: T. S. Eliot and Christianity* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2010) p. 218.
[121] Däumer, pp. 479-501 (p. 484).
[122] John of the Cross, *The Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. and ed. by E. Allison Peers, The Complete Works, I (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1947), p. 32.
[123] Däumer, pp. 479-501 (p. 484).

as that of the spirit.'[124] The speaker begins his journey with ambiguity, and his hesitation indicates the need for some spiritual discipline: he must 'sit still'[125] like a child. Spurr calls this a 'journey in reverse', a return to the 'first world' as the Magi, and 'become like a little child in order to enter the kingdom of Heaven.'[126] The closing verses of the *Ave Maria* are invoked,

> Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death
> Pray for us now and at the hour of our death[127]

a prayer that is among the first that a child learns to memorise and recite. Now the Virgin Mary gently begins to show herself in *Ash-Wednesday*, where in truth, Eliot invokes her more into the picture with the title of Part II, *Salutation*[128], which reminds us not only of Beatrice's greeting to Dante in *Vita Nuova*, but of the Angel Gabriel's annunciation to Our Lady, even Mary's salutation to her cousin Elizabeth. Yet these Biblical episodes are the few instances in which Our Lady directly speaks. After that (save her chiding of the twelve-year-old Jesus after he was found in the Temple having been presumed lost), the Virgin speaks no more. She becomes a 'lady of silences', just like the lady in Part II, 'who honours the Virgin in meditation'[129] and is withdrawn to contemplation. Through the poetic allusion to a 'juniper-tree' in Part II, readers are introduced to two murderous women: the biblical Queen Jezebel who persecuted the Prophet Elijah, and the evil stepmother who beheads and cooks her step-son in the Grimm's fairy-tale 'The Juniper Tree'.[130] Elisabeth Däumer sees this as Eliot's splitting of the mother into good and evil, which she argues is visible in 'virtually all dominant cultural representations of femininity and motherhood'[131], and which may show the Lady of Silences' 'potentially devastating, highly mythologized power of the mother to destroy the life and identity she also has the power to bestow.'[132] It is more plausible however that the juniper tree echoes spiritual regeneration, for Elijah takes shelter and

[124] Däumer, pp. 479-501 (p. 485).
[125] Eliot, p. 95.
[126] Spurr, p. 178.
[127] Eliot, p. 86.
[128] Spurr, p. 177.
[129] Eliot, p. 87.
[130] Däumer, pp. 479-501 (pp. 486-487).
[131] Däumer, pp. 479-501 (p. 487).
[132] Däumer, pp. 479-501 (p. 488).

sustains himself beneath a juniper tree[133], and the magical tree in the fairy-tale transforms and restores the murdered stepson to life.[134]

What follows after this section is what is best described as a litany to the Lady of Silences, comparable to traditional Marian litanies such as the Loreto Litanies[135]. The silent Lady excites the speaker's dry bones to call out in song to her, showing her power to be both intercessory and purgative. The speaker of the poem 'invokes the powers of intercession and mediation between flesh and spirit, human and divine, attributed in Catholic theology to the Virgin Mother.'[136] Once again, Eliot brings in the Rose and the garden:

> Rose of memory
> Rose of forgetfulness […]
> The single Rose
> Is now the Garden
> Where all loves end
> Terminate torment of love unsatisfied […]
> Grace to the Mother
> For the Garden
> Where all love ends.[137]

The Rose becomes the leitmotif of *The Four* Quartets. John Gatta observes the comparisons between Eve and her biblical antitype Mary, for with her love began, and with Mary 'all love ends', the one who is the 'enclosed garden', the *hortus conclusus* from the Canticle of Canticles; the verse 'Torn and most whole' may also be a reference to the virgin birth and Our Lady's perpetual virginity.[138] Here in *Ash-Wednesday*, she is

> The Single Rose
> [which] Is now the Garden.[139]

[133] 1 Kings 19. 5-8.
[134] Jacob Ludwig Carl Grimm and Wilhelm Carl Grimm, 'The Juniper-Tree' in *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales*, trans. by Margaret Hunt (New York:Race Point Publishing, 2013), pp. 163-169.
[135] 'The Loreto Litanies' in *La Santa Sede* <http://www.vatican.va> [accessed 24 October 2018]
[136] Däumer, pp. 479-501 (p. 488).
[137] Eliot, pp. 87-88.
[138] Gatta, p. 129.
[139] Eliot, p. 88.

In Part III, published as *Al som de l'escalina*, Eliot describes the ascent of a penitent up a mountain. This is both 'in the spirit of St John of the Cross and his ascent of Mount Carmel'[140], as well as Dante's scaling of Mount Purgatory:

'In its form (a hallucinatory dream), its visual images of turning and climbing, its sensual embodiment of the them, this third poem strikingly reflects the ambivalent emotions of hope and suffering in *Purgatorio*.'[141]

There, the speaker encounters the pagan 'broadbacked figure'[142] enchanting the May time with an antique flute. Here, we too find hints of the Blessed Virgin in this ambiguous vision: the figure is 'drest in blue and green', blue being 'Mary's colour' as Eliot later writes, and 'maytime' is Mary's month.[143] We may be led to believe that this pilgrimage is done so 'under the influence, implicit and aestheticized as it may be, of the spirit of the Virgin.'[144]

With the beginning of Part IV, Eliot again draws on 'imagery of springs, fountains and the sea to dramatize the rebirthing capacities of Our Lady'[145], even bringing to mind medieval motifs of the *hortus conclusus*, where Our Lady was depicted reading or accompanied by the Christ Child and angels, along with other imagery linked to her, such as an ivory tower.[146] Our Lady is now seen as sharing her humanity with others as a daughter of God, a sister to others in times of need and darkness. Having lived on this Earth as a human mother, she can now with her Son 'Redeem / The time'.[147]

Before concluding the poem, the speaker in Part V speaks of his concern about how he is able to communicate the Logos to the modern world, an unbelieving generation whose speech is suffering. Readers can also sense the speaker's tone of desperation – he cannot find anywhere to communicate the word:

Where shall the word be found, where will the word
Resound? Not here, there is not enough silence

[140] Spurr, p. 179.
[141] Audrey T. Rodgers, 'T. S. Eliot's "Purgatorio": The Structure of "Ash-Wednesday"', ELH, 65. 2 (1998), 479-501 (p. 104).
[142] Eliot, p. 89.
[143] Eliot, p. 89.
[144] Spurr, p. 180.
[145] Gatta, p. 129.
[146] Upper Rhenish Master, *Garden of* Paradise, c. 1410, 26.3 x 33.4 cm, Städel Museum, Frankfurt.
[147] Eliot, p. 90.

Not on the sea or on the islands, not
On the mainland, in the desert or the rain land.[148]

Ironically, if one is to look closely to the text, they will find that the Word has indeed spoken, and it is the first and last time that it has in Eliot's poetry[149]:

> O my people, what have I done unto thee.[150]

Eliot pens down 'Christ's reproach from the Cross', taken from the Good Friday liturgy.[151] And along with Christ's words, the Virgin is invoked several times to intercede with the refrain 'Will the veiled sister pray':

> Will the veiled sister pray for
> Those who walk in darkness, who chose and oppose
> thee,
> Those who are torn on the horn […]
> […] those
> who wait
> In darkness? […]
> For the children at the gate
> Who will not go away and cannot pray
> […] for those who offend her
> And are terrified and cannot surrender[152]

Truly, Eliot has redeemed not only his wastelanders, but also himself, for his past dissents on women, through this final figure of the 'veiled sister', though unidentified, who resonates unquestionably with Our Lady.

Finally, in Part VI, Eliot gives a retelling of the original 'Because I do not hope to turn again', substituting the word 'Because' with 'Although', showing the speaker's shift in perspective and his more certain approach to spiritual affirmation. There is this 'newfound hope'[153] emerging from the seascape that is next described:

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[148] Eliot, p. 92.
[149] Spurr, p. 181.
[150] Eliot, p. 93.
[151] Spurr, p. 181.
[152] Eliot, pp. 93-93.
[153] Gatta, p. 130.

From the wide window toward the granite shore
The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying
Unbroken wings[154]

The poem is a movement from the beginning of Lent to Good Friday, but does not reach the Resurrection, hence it is left open-ended. Christ has redeemed the world, yet man's 'weak spirit quickens to rebel'.[155] But the redemption has happened, and 'transcendence and resurrection have been glimpsed'. Eliot also gives us the feminine face of God, since the petitions which are later spoken and typically directed at God are now directed towards the Blessed Virgin. Although this is done, the speaker does not wish his petition 'to be separated'[156], that is, Gatta writes, 'in ritual context of the Anima Christ prayer,' the speaker hopes he will 'not to be separated from Christ – to one who achieved singular unity with Christ both in spirit and in flesh.'[157]

The last image that we have of the Blessed Virgin is of a mother teaching her children 'to sit still', so that they may know God, as the Psalmist writes.[158] These closing lines may also be a tribute, as Däumer sees fitting, towards Eliot's poet-mother, Charlotte, 'whose persistent effort to come into voice against the strictures of a tradition to which she remained committed to' inspired Eliot to gain his own artistic and religious independence.[159] What we can be certain of is that Eliot communicates Christ 'the unspoken word'[160] to the modern world through the Virgin, whose prayers and intercession are efficacious that she spits out the 'withered apple-seed'.[161] Femininity, previously reviled and broken, now brings forth mankind's salvation. The iconoclastic is redeemed by the iconographic.

[154] Eliot, p. 94.
[155] Eliot, p. 94.
[156] Eliot, p. 95.
[157] Gatta, pp. 130-131.
[158] Psalm 46. 10.
[159] Däumer, pp. 479-501 (p. 491).
[160] Eliot, p. 92.
[161] Eliot, p. 93.

Chapter 3: Marginality and Dethroning the Oppressive Nurturer

3.1 The Marginal Voice of Women

There is an understanding of art being a form of sublimation, a turning of psychological conflict into art. It is this turning that Stephen Dedalus struggles with and fails to consummate, even when separating from his family to define his own autonomy. Freud interpreted sublimation to be the origin of art, a 'diversion of sexual instinctual forces from sexual aims and their direction to new ones'.[162] Stephen suggests belief in this line of thinking when discussing Shakespeare in the episode 'Scylla and Charybdis' who he esteems to be the 'lord of language and […] a coistrel gentleman', whose 'belief in himself has been untimely killed'.[163] The great bard's wound is interpreted to be the cause of love, a 'woman's invisible weapon', so describes Mark Morrison, who vulgarly describes Shakespeare's loss of confidence as being 'sexually murdered' by Anne Hathaway, a usurpation of the senses.[164] Stephen believes that he himself is following in Shakespeare's footsteps. At Bella Cohen's brothel, as both Stephen and Bloom gaze in the mirror, '[t]he face of William Shakespeare, beardless, appears there, rigid in facial paralysis'.[165] Shakespeare had his Anne, and Stephen has his mother as his own psychological conflict. The young artist wishes to believe that it is so, but he is a pale reflection of the bard. Shakespeare's undoing by Anne's love had become, according to Stephen, his moment of diverting his passion into a new passion:

> 'There is, I feel in the words, some goad of the flesh driving him into a new passion, a darker shadow of the first, darkening even his own understanding of himself.'

By channelling his passion into playwriting, Shakespeare becomes born again:

> 'But because loss is his gain, he passes on toward eternity in undiminished personality, untaught by the wisdom he has written or by the laws he has revealed.'[166]

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[162] Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on Sexuality*, ed. by James Strachey, The Standard Edition, 7 (London: Hogarth P., 1953), p. 178.
[163] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. by Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 188.
[164] Mark Morrison, 'Stephen Dedalus and the Ghost of the Mother', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 39. 2 (1993), 345-368 (p. 346).
[165] *Ulysses*, p. 528.
[166] *Ulysses*, p. 188.

Unlike Shakespeare, Stephen fails at language and as a poet, feeling himself unable to turn passion to art. Not severing his ties to Ireland and his mother, the wound remains open and fresh, and the artist's talent does not flourish. Going back to the very first page of *Portrait*, Stephen's selfhood is defined by maternal love. His mother, Mrs Dedalus, is introduced as having a 'nicer smell than the father' and who played the piano for Stephen to dance to.[167] Her presence from the start gives Stephen a dichotomous understanding of the world, where everything is set in a binary, where every person or thing complements another: mother and father, religion and politics and so forth. His father the storyteller 'inaugurates the linguistic apprenticeship that inscribes the boy into the symbolic order of patriarchal authority'[168], giving the pretext of language as a patriarchal domain. This inauguration usurps the words of women for Stephen, despite having Dante as his educator, 'a clever woman and a wellread woman' who is then quickly 'supplanted by male instructors'.[169] Correspondingly in *Ulysses*, language is also given a patriarchal treatment by Joyce, especially in Molly's monologue, to which he assigns four cardinal points 'in a vocabulary of mortal female anatomy'[170], the supposedly female word 'yes' and typical female attitudes:

> '['Penelope'] begins and ends with the female word *yes*. It turns like a huge earth ball slowly surely and evenly round and round spinning, its four cardinal points being the female breasts, arse, womb and cunt expressed by the words *because*, *bottom* (in all senses bottom button, bottom of the class, bottom of the sea, bottom of his heart), *woman*, *yes*.'[171]

Molly's interior monologue, her sole space in the novel in which she may speak freely becomes a 'private code that equates the chapter's 'four key words with parts of a woman's body that excited [Joyce] sexually', not to mention that we as readers take in Molly's words as we lie in the marriage bed with her, an ending pleasing to 'an audience of heterosexual male readers'.[172]

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[167] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Herts: Granada Publishing, 1983), p. 7.
[168] Suzette Henke, 'Stephen Dedalus and Women: A Feminist Reading of *Portrait*', in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young* Man, ed. by R.B. Kershner, Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism (New York: Bedford Books *of* St. Martin's Press, 1993), pp. 307-325 (p. 307).
[169] Henke, pp. 307-325 (pp. 309-310).
[170] Bonnie Kime Scott, *Joyce and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 157.
[171] James Joyce, 'Letter from Joyce to Frank Budgen, 16 August 1921', in *Selected Letters of James* Joyce, ed. by Richard Ellmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1975) pp. 284-285 (p. 285).
[172] Diana E. Hendersen, 'Joyce's Modernist Woman: Whose Last Word?', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 35. 3 (1989), 517-528 (p. 517).

Mrs Dedalus is not even heard directly in *Portrait*. She is only to her son a 'sweet-smelling guardian [who] is more directly responsive to the boy's infantile emotional demands and more closely associated with sensuous comfort and bodily joy.'[173] As the artist grows up and desires to cross the threshold of the literary, he works to have her put aside, forcing her words to be little, as there is not much talk between Mrs Dedalus and her son, in some way like Christ's rebuke to his Mother's words at the wedding in Cana.[174] When writing *Portrait*, Joyce had inserted a brief conversation between Stephen and her, 'the only real conversation between mother and son'[175] that could have been found in the novel. This was however replaced by the diary entry of 24 March, where the young anti-hero unwittingly provides the reader a neat and sufficient anecdote of all that impedes him from his search for identity, specifically his mother and Catholicism:

> 'Began with a discussion with my mother. Subject: B.V.M. Handicapped by my sex and youth. To escape held relations between Jesus and Papa against those Mary and her son. Said religion was not a lying-in hospital. Mother indulgent. Said I have a queer mind and have read too much.'[176]

In this small conversation Mrs Dedalus gains the upper hand, forcing Stephen to recognise her as 'an autonomous self with desires of her own.'[177] By replacing the conversation with Stephen's diary entry, Mrs Dedalus is effectively silenced even further, seen only through the words of her son. What begins then is a pattern of keeping his mother quiet, either by refusing to listen to her, or 'preferring instead to rely on his warped interpretation of her words'.[178] Language is not only Stephen's way of setting up a barrier between his mother and himself, but it is also a realm where he strives to create his own position. Mark Morrison notes on Stephen's dilemma with language:

> 'Stephen's literary and intellectual inheritance [is] a long male line, or "apostolic succession" of male authors and thinkers (most of them either British or Roman Catholic scholars, and hence a problem for the Irish writer, who is a slave to the British imperial state and even its literary succession, as well as to the Roman Catholic Church).'[179]

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[173] Henke, pp. 307-325 (p. 308).
[174] Boysen, p. 157.
[175] Marylu Hill, '"Amor Matris": Mother and Self in the Telemachiad Episode of *Ulysses*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 39. 3 (1993), 329-343 (p. 332).
[176] *Portrait*, p. 224.
[177] Hill, 329-343 (p. 330).
[178] Hill, 329-343 (p. 331).
[179] Morrison, 345-368 (p. 349).

With a conundrum that is therefore two-fold, Stephen finds himself failing in this endeavour. Relishing in language that is the heritage of Britain and religious men is a counterproductive act for someone who is striving to cut himself from them, thereby leaving Stephen to fall back on using Latin phrases in *Ulysses*, condemning himself to use the language he does not want.

What disturbs Stephen even further is realising that his mother has her own interest and affinity with language. Marylu Hill comments: 'Mrs. Dedalus shows herself to be a woman of some literary awareness though her married life has prevented much active participation in it.'[180] In *Stephen Hero*, Joyce's early version of *Portrait*, Mrs Dedalus expresses interest in her son's scholastic essay and shows herself willing to hear what he has to say, to which Stephen thwarts her interest into suspicions of her unable to understand beauty as nothing more than 'often a synonym for licentious ways'. Stephen deliberately chooses to be ignorant of her thoughts. He indulges himself in his pride, uncomfortable with his mother's interest. He cries back at her and his father, 'But since you married neither of you so much as bought a single book!', and then accuses his mother of contradiction and ignorance, 'You evidently weren't listening to what I said or self you didn't understand what I said'.[181] Stephen would not simply allow her to speak, though she is a woman who possesses language, and can be moved by it and poetry just as well as her son. Later in *Ulysses*, Stephen's obsession with Queen Gertrude's suspected adultery in *Hamlet* indicates a troubled mind who realises that the mother may establish herself and break off from having an identity only within patriarchal dimension, i.e. wife to husband and mother to son.[182]

In a corresponding manner, the exegesis behind the words of the Virgin Mary (Mrs Dedalus' and Molly Bloom's counterpart) in the New Testament, specifically in the Lucan infancy narrative, has similar parallels to Joyce's approach to women's speech in *Portrait*. First impressions of a novice reader of the Gospels would see Mary speaking directly, which she does so at the Annunciation and the Visitation. She speaks twice before the Angel Gabriel, wondering how the miraculous pregnancy would come about having not known a man, and

[180] Hill, 329-343 (p. 331).
[181] James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, ed. by Theodore Spencer (New York: *New Directions Publishing*, 1963), pp. 84-86.
[182] Hill, 329-343 (p. 337).

then offering her *fiat* to the Lord.[183] At the Visitation, she breaks out in beautiful poetry[184], giving the Christian Church her famous Magnificat, which continues to be recited and sung to this day. Mary does have a voice, but it is not her own. What readers would be mistaken or unaware of is that their way of regarding such accounts in the Gospels as discourse which should be taken to the letter. John McHugh commented on this common mistake, stating that it is erroneous to regard the Annunciation as a third-person report or

> 'a verbatim report of a conversation between Mary and Gabriel, such as might have been taken down in shorthand by an observer or recorded on an electro-magnetic tape.'[185]

New Testament scholars have also called attention to parallels between other annunciation accounts in the Bible, such as the annunciation of John the Baptist's birth to Zechariah or the angelic annunciation of Jesus' birth to the shepherd and St Joseph, not excluding birth annunciations in the Old Testament. Secondly, regarding the composition of the Magnificat, 'one would be hard-pressed to find any critical biblical scholar' who would affirm Mary as its composer, since it follows the Old Testament trope to have well-known personages proclaim canticles 'in order to have them voice appropriate sentiments of praise at a particular manifestation of God's goodness'.[186] Considering the Magnificat's fine verses and the unlikeliness of it spontaneous composition, scholars are hard-pressed to believe that another author or authors are responsible for it, and not the Jewish maiden to whom it is attributed to.[187]

Oscillating between both Joycean works, *Portrait* and *Ulysses*, the woman's voice begins and ends as a marginal voice. Molly may not suffer the same treatment as Mrs Dedalus, but she too will not speak for herself before the others would have given their due judgment of her, and she only speaks late into the early hours of the morning. Cook Callow finds it apt for Molly to speak in the dark hours of morning, for the '[n]ight, darkness, and their companion, silence, have traditional feminine associations'[188] in addition to her being kept 'in bed, inside

[183] Luke 1. 34, 38.
[184] Luke 1. 46-55.
[185] John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975), p. 11.
[186] *Mary in the New Testament*, ed. by Raymond E. Brown and others (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), p. 139.
[187] Brown, p. 140.
[188] Heather Cook Callow, '"Marion of the Bountiful Bosoms": Molly Bloom and the Nightmare of History', *Twentieth Century* Literature, 36. 4 (1990), 464-476 (p. 465).

the house, in her place'.[189] What suffocates Molly from truly speaking is that her words are from a listless interior monologue, ramblings from a woman who cannot sleep, meaning Molly is not truly speaking, hence adding more to her silence. Silence upon silence continues to amass with Joyce's representation of Molly's interior monologue in his book as eight, long paragraphs sans punctuation, exhausting readers (as difficult as the book is already to read) from being able to completely read and comprehend her words. Indeed, it is a truly a 'delicious irony' that Molly's 'independent strength […] her *singing* voice [is] the voice we, as readers, cannot hear.'[190]

3.2 Usurping the Throne of Love

In the diary entry, there is the other mother who adds to Stephen's rebellion, the Blessed Virgin Mary, a reminder of the dual-image that an Irish woman may have projected on her, as either temptress or virgin. This dichotomy, the Madonna-whore complex as it was popularised by Freud's theories, was previously explored by Joyce in his short story 'Clay'. The protagonist, Maria, a middle-aged Dublin spinster who works in at the Magdalene Laundries, shows the ills of Dublin society by seeing its women as either virtuous or fallen. Joyce himself 'saw that Irish Catholic Mariology (devotion to the Virgin Mary) licensed and provided the rhetoric for this Manichean divide.'[191] Hence alongside Mrs Dedalus, the Virgin recalls not only this dichotomy, but another, as inspired by Freud's theory in his essay 'On the Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love'. Sheldon Brivic writes:

> Here Freud describes how many boys cultivate ideal, desexualised visions of their mothers. A boy reaches adolescence hearing that sex is nasty and refusing to admit that his mother engages in it. As a man, he separates women into two types, one of which is idealised and love but cannot be defiled by sex, while the other is sexually approachable but can never be respected.[192]

Seeing the Virgin Mary as the double of Mrs Dedalus, the other-mother, Stephen tries to turn the tables by disrespecting that which should be loved and turns to what does not deserve respect. As a young man, he initially feels disturbed and ashamed of his dirty

[189] Hendersen, 517-528 (p. 521).
[190] Hendersen, 517-528 (p. 521).
[191] Marian Eide, 'James Joyce's Magdalenes', *College Literature*, 38. 4 (2011), 57-75 (pp. 58-59).
[192] Sheldon Brivic, 'The Disjunctive Structure of Joyce's *Portrait*', in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young* Man, ed. by R.B. Kershner, Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism (New York: Bedford Books *of* St. Martin's Press, 1993), pp. 251-267 (p. 258).

thoughts and tries his best to control 'the squalor of his own mind and home'. Upon reaching a breaking point, he releases himself into a fallen woman. The reader eventually follows Stephen's hedonism from the bedroom of the prostitute to the quasi-ritualistic visits of Dublin's red-light district. The undertone is of Stephen partaking in sacrilege, his own attempt to 'deflower the Blessed Virgin of Catholicism and supplant the Italian Madonna with a profane surrogate – voluptuous Irish muse rooted in in sensuous reality.'[193] In 'Telemachus', Buck Mulligan's song 'Ballad of the Joking Jesus' jokingly juxtaposes repeated references to the Annunciation, Leda and the swan, and Stephen's namesake, Daedalus, pushing the image of the mother and one of the greatest mysteries of the Christian faith (the Annunciation) to 'the grosser realities of sexuality, death, and other things of a non-intellectual nature', while the father (and his son Icarus) take flight from the dregs of religion to higher values of 'intellect, art, beauty, and language.[194]

Devotion to God and the Blessed Virgin Mary had by this time 'gone by the board'.[195] Stephen's sacrilege is also implied in Chapter 5, when Cranly asks Stephen if he would deflower a virgin, while another lad adds, 'Excuse me, […] is that not the ambition of most young gentlemen?'[196] Joyce also adds the ironic remark that Stephen's rebellion has made him more Christ-like: 'His sin, which had covered him from the sight of God, had led him nearer to the refuge of sinners.'[197]

The Blessed Virgin Mary's recurring presence in *Portrait* (and more subtly in *Ulysses*) sets the undertone, ironically of Stephen's conversion to the religion of mortal beauty and who is also but one of many women who moulds Stephen's relationship with the opposite sex. Before Stephen's austere and uptight pious phase, the dual image of woman as either temptress or virgin is wedged even deeper into his mind via the sermon section, 'a part of *A Portrait* whose very oppressiveness invites the reader's skepticism'. The reader is given the impression that the Blessed Virgin haunts Stephen, not only mentally but even physically. As he reminisces on his formation of identity, 'destined to learn his own wisdom apart from others', he chances to meet the Mother of Christ:

[193] Henke, pp. 307-325 (p. 311).
[194] Hill, 329-343 (p. 336).
[195] *Portrait*, p. 96.
[196] *Portrait*, p. 222.
[197] *Portrait*, p. 97.

'He crossed the bridge over the stream of the Tolka and turned his eyes coldly for an instant towards the faded blue shrine of the Blessed Virgin which stood fowlwise on a pole in the middle of hamshaped encampment of poor cottages.'[198]

The mother eagle, her arms outstretched, looks on to the Prodigal Son inviting him to return to the Father, to join the Jesuits and 'swing the thurible before the tabernacle as priest'. Her invitation remained unanswered. Stephen is now already set and taken. He shall become a secular priest of the arts, and his woman of contemplation is a beautiful mortal body 'instead of the religious mysteries with which he occupied his mind after his confession and communion'.[199] The Blessed Virgin could not hold him back from the baptism to which he was heading. Later at the beach, he wades into the waters barefoot, 'alone and young and wilful and wildhearted', rebellious and free. It is there that she comes before him, a girl, a mortal beauty Stephen does not know, who 'seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird.' Her sight stirs the worship of the flesh within Stephen, converting him 'from the worship of things divine to the worship of things earthly'.[200] Unlike the heavily-clad Virgin of churches and cathedral, this girl's body is bared, her slateblue skirts 'kilted boldly about her waist' and her thighs 'fuller and softhued as ivory, were bared almost to the hips'. Feeling his presence and worship, she locks her gaze onto his, drawing out of Stephen the profane ejaculation 'Heavenly God!' Like Dante's Beatrice,

'she has come as a messenger of ultimate truth, and, like Beatrice, she has come as a messenger of ultimate truth.'[201]

Her image coalesces into three roles: she is Virgin, temptress and inspiration. With Stephen as the catechumen in the waters, and the girl described as a graceful bird, she easily and profanely takes on the image of the Holy Spirit. In *Ulysses* too, Leopold finds his own threefold fleshly image of veneration, Gerty, as Mass is being said, Joyce's own extraordinary attempt at both profaning the sacred and sacralising the profane. Zack R. Bowen comments:

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[198] *Portrait*, p. 148.
[199] Eugene M. Waith, 'The Calling of Stephen Dedalus', in *Joyce's Portrati: Criticisms and Critiques*, ed. by Thomas Connally (London: Peter Owen, 1964), pp. 114-123 (p. 120).
[200] Barbara Seward, 'The Artist and the Rose', in *Joyce's Portrati: Criticisms and Critiques*, ed. by Thomas Connally (London: Peter Owen, 1964), pp. 167-182 (p. 173).
[201] Seward, pp. 167-182 (p. 173).

As the mass builds to a climax and the prayers to the Virgin are said and Tantum ergo sung, so too does Gerty move to her climax, in an orgasmic parody of the conclusion of chapter four of Portrait. Gerty swings her foot in time to the music as the girl in Stephen's scene stirs the water hither and thither with her foot. In both works the Virgin and the ecclesiastical elements are blended.'202

Joyce himself was confirmed into Stephen's new religion and went so far as to dismiss marital convention, divorcing himself from the traditions of Ireland by living together with Nora in an unmarried union for 27 years.[203] Like his literary alter-ego, he wished to 'lead the life of a libertine'[204]. In the episode 'Ithaca', both Stephen and Bloom admit to each other their unorthodox beliefs, according removing the Virgin from her throne of veneration to have mortal woman and her allures to take her place, becoming the head of their new religion:

'Both indurated by early domestic training and an inherited tenacity of heterodox resistance professed their disbelief in many orthodox religious, national, social and ethical doctrines. Both admitted the alternately stimulating and obtunding influence of heterosexual magnetism.'[205]

In his pursuit of decadence, Stephen fails to realise that he needs a mother. The sensual pleasures soon come to be illusory, and he begins to regain some consciousness of his needs:

'Wallowing in the pleasures of a physicality that has always repelled him, Stephen delights in a riot of sensuality. His defiant sexual practices mesmerize consciousness until, watched by a thousand flickering heavenly eyes, his weary mind is transported into a "vast cycle of starry life".'[206]

Probably unbeknownst to him, Stephen discovers his aching want of maternal love in the arms of the prostitute. Wanting her strong hold and slow caresses, he begins to transform in her arms, which now become 'maternal'[207]: 'In her arms he had felt that he had suddenly become strong and fearless and sure of himself'.[208] Thus the conflict of *amor matrix* begins to germinate, and the Virgin again slowly draws him in via the rector's fire and brimstone sermon, where the virgin/fallen woman dichotomy is again wedged into Stephen's mind.

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[202] Zack R. Bowen, *Musical Allusions in the Works of James Joyce: Early Poetry through Ulysses* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1974), p. 228.
[203] Brown, p. 13.
[204] Brown, p. 16.
[205] Joyce, p. 619.
[206] Henke, pp. 307-325 (p. 315).
[207] Brivic, pp. 251-267 (p. 259).
[208] *Portrait*, p. 94.

The rector speaks of the original fallen woman, Eve, and her purest counterpart who unties the undoing of her sinful pride by partaking of the Forbidden Fruit: 'He came to the woman, the weaker vessel, and poured the poison of his eloquence into her ear, promising her […] He came. He was born of a virgin pure, Mary the virgin mother.'[209]

At the close of *Portrait*, Stephen prepares to leave Ireland, his childhood and caregiver. There is one last reference to his mother, who insists on persevering until the end to attend to her rebellious son's need, 'putting [his] new secondhand clothes in order.' She prays that her son learns 'what the heart is and what if feels',[210] imposing upon Stephen his 'greatest challenge on Bloomsday' later on in *Ulysses*, which he in fact does seek to discover.[211] Mrs Dedalus, made into an allegory by her son as Ireland and religion (her name 'May' strengthens the ties between her and the Blessed Virgin Mary), may be controlled linguistically according to her son's needs, yet she exits the end of novel on an ironic tone via the use of her words, effectively turns the tables on her son by setting a task on him, increasing his frustrations along with his failure in language.

Eve's sin of pride, '*non serviam*'[212] which becomes Stephen's own sin, haunts him after the death of his mother. Having refused to pray at her request as she lay on her own deathbed, he becomes afflicted with a 'crisis of identity', since he must now recognise who she really was, 'with the added dimensions of guilt for having figuratively killed her with his demands for unconditional love and acceptance'[213]. Mrs Dedalus' death also causes a split in him:

> 'The tragedy of the mother's death causes Stephen to be deeply split as he oscillates between *amor matris* and *non serviam*, which means that he oscillates between a desire for the mother and a need to revolt against her authority.'[214]

In the Telemachiad episode, there is a rare occurrence where Mrs Dedalus' selfhood is confirmed and is finally seen as a person when Stephen recollects singing a melancholy song

[209] *Portrait*, p. 109.
[210] *Portrait*, p. 228.
[211] Benjamin Boysen, 'The Mother and the *word known to all men*: Stephen's struggle with *amor matris* in James Joyce's *Ulysses*', Neophilologus, 94 (2010), 151-163 (p. 152).
[212] *Portrait*, p. 108
[213] Hill, pp. 332-333.
[214] Boysen, 151-163 (p. 152).

by W.B. Yeats to her at her deathbed, about Fergus, an ancient Irish king who renounces the world and goes to the woods to ponder philosophy:

> 'Her door was open: she wanted to hear my music. Silent with awe and pity I went to her bedside. She was crying in her wretched bed. For those words, Stephen: love's bitter mystery.'[215]

At the deathbed of Mrs Dedalus, *amor matris* becomes equal to *crudelis amor*, demanding that Stephen faces the inevitability of 'death, temporality, and the linear time of the family'. The ghoulish mother that Stephen conjures up in *Ulysses* lurks around him like a Fury acts like a *memento mori*[216]:

> 'All must go through it, Stephen […] You too. Time will come.'[217]

3.3 Inherited Images

Previously mentioned, Molly's image comes across to the reader via second-hand accounts. Her representation does not come from her, but from men:

> 'The voices of male Dublin (including Bloom's) weighs heavily in our initial assessment of Molly, and their testimony comes down forcefully, in the first seven-eighths of the novel, in favour of her beauty, sensuality, and immorality.'[218]

This assumed alluring beauty of hers underlines 'the whole question of her sexual morality' and her infidelity[219], which the following question by Nora Joyce is why it may be jarring to many: 'What do you think […] of a book with a big, fat, horrible married woman as the heroine?'.[220] Heather Cook Callow brings to our attention to this: '[O]ur sense of her beauty dims rather than increases as the day progresses. There is plenty of testimony to her fleshly charms, but closer inspection reveals that some of it is retrospective.'[221] In the episode 'Hades', Bloom describes her body as 'getting a bit softy […] but the shape is there. The shape is there still. Shoulders. Hips. Plump.' We then see she has a 'plump, bare generous arm', with the most unflattering descriptions of her reserved in 'Cyclops', referred to as 'the fat heap he married with a back on her like a ballaley', and Bloom's 'flabbyarse of a wife'

[215] *Ulysses*, p. 9.
[216] Boylen, 151-163 (p. 157).
[217] *Ulysses*, p. 540.
[218] Callow, 464-476 (p. 465).
[219] Callow, 464-476 (p. 467).
[220] Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 37.
[221] Callow, 464-476 (p. 467).

with ‘eight inches of fat all over her’.[222] Her image verges on two extremes, to which the reader must decide what is truly wanting of the truth.

Molly Bloom’s image with deities is also up for interpretation, having been a preoccupation with previous scholars. Popular talk has centred on her being a *Gea-Tellus* (from the Greek and Roman names for the earth goddess); Joyce had explained to Frank Budgen that ending the chapter as it had begun, i.e. with the word ‘yes’, is a mirror of Molly with earth goddesses, since ‘Penelope’ ‘is the clou of the book’.[223] The scholarly focus on this interpretation fixated on representation of reproduction, which Bonnie Kime Scott describes as a ‘reduction and oversimplification inappropriate to both Molly and the goddesses’[224], considering that primal goddesses had also lorded over creation and made the laws of the universe, inventing, healing, prophecies, and being providers of human destiny and leaders in battle.[225] Diana E. Hendersen takes a step further to claim that the cardinal points attributed to Molly’s monologue are attempts to control the ‘m/Other’, the mother as ‘the other’ reduced to a womb, a sex object desired by those ‘seeking their Penelope’, kept contained in the image of ‘an earth mother, a creature of her sexual body.’[226] A role that may lie dormant below stronger preoccupations of Molly’s sexuality and escapades is that of being a mother. Readers may easily forget that she is a mother, a mother to a living daughter Milly and to a son, Rudy, who died in infancy, a death which pains her still:

> ‘I suppose I oughtnt to have buried him in that little woolly jacket I knitted crying as I was but give it to some poor child but I knew well Id never have another our 1st death too it was we were never the same since’.[227]

It is possible that her singing Rossini’s *Stabat Mater* indicates that her mind is still preoccupied with her son’s death. In her thoughts, like the Virgin Mary, she still stands before her dead child and finds solace from the Mother of Christ. She comforts her during thunderstorms – ‘I thought the heavens were coming down about us to punish us when I blessed myself and said a Hail Mary’ – and lights herself a candle for luck ‘in Whitefriars

[222] *Ulysses*, pp. 293, 321, 302.
[223] ‘Letter from Joyce to Frank Budgen, 16 August 1921’, pp. 284-285 (p. 285).
[224] Scott, p. 158.
[225] Scott, p. 9.
[226] Hendersen, 517-528 (p. 522).
[227] *Ulysses*, p. 728.

street chapel for the month of May'.[228] In some ways Molly also embodies the Original Woman and the New Eve. Losing her baby son, she bears children in pain like Eve, with Stephen cast 'as a possible surrogate son to redeem her loss'[229], and questioning the authority of priests in confession, she sees herself as 'having a more direct channel to God'[230], as Mary is first seen at the Annunciation, recognising God and none other as the 'real father'. In addition, Joyce merges menstruation with Molly's musing on nature and flowers, thereby making a 'possible association with a standard symbol of the Virgin Mary'.[231] In keeping with Irish tradition, Bloom's worshipping of Molly's 'plump mellow smellow mellons' hints towards the Dublin tradition of a pagan Irish king having his queen usurp the throne of God by making her sit upon the altar at Christ Church, Dublin; in like fashion, Molly (and Stephen and Bloom's faith in the religion of sex) have her replacing the Blessed Virgin Mary as the woman of veneration.[232]

The final coalesces of Eve and Mary in Molly Bloom is the seedcake kiss she shared with Bloom 'lying among the rhododendrons on Howth'[233], which Diane Tolomeo describes as Bloom's fall for partaking in the 'communion of the seedcake'. The medieval illustration, 'Tree of Life and Death flanked by Eve and Mary-Ecclesia'[234] found in a missal in Salzburg, fulfils clearly the parodic seedcake and the duality of the two Biblical women we have come to see in Molly. In the illustration, a tree bearing both the Forbidden Fruit and sacramental hosts 'combines the paradisaical Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge from Eden.' Flanking the tree are both Eve and Mary-Ecclesiae who have before them a line of communicants. Eve administers the Forbidden Fruit while Mary-Ecclesiae administers the sacramental, becoming 'a mirror image of Eve and thus the salvific antidote to the Fall'.[235] At Howth among the rhododendrons, 'fall and redemption come at once', and Molly, the

[228] *Ulysses*, p. 693.
[229] Hendersen, 517-528 (p. 523).
[230] Scott, p. 171.
[231] Scott, p. 172.
[232] Scott, p. 180.
[233] *Ulysses*, p. 731.
[234] Berthold Fertmyr, *Tree of Life and Death flanked by Eve and Mary-Ecclesia*, 1489, paint and gold leaf on vellum, 38.29 x 28.7 cm, Bavarian State Library, Munich.
[235] 'Tree of Life and Death flanked by Eve and Mary-Ecclesia', in *Feminae: Medieval Women and Gender Index* <https://inpress.lib.uiowa.edu/femainae/Default.aspx> [accessed 24 June 2018]

'Flower of the mountain' in a red dress, becomes 'both a purely white and bloody red rose in Bloom', and 'virgin and lover'[236].

'Penelope' deconstructs the discords and resonances grafting Molly Bloom's image in previous sections of *Ulysses*. Transgressing herself as an unconventional woman who is unfit to place herself in the dichotomies of Irish men and women, Joyce betrays the reader's trust in the narrative's past judgments, making readers concede that they have in fact misjudged her. Molly is now 'less promiscuous and more vulnerable' and received ideas and expectations 'well-developed by nineteenth-century novels and society' slowly begin to crumble. Molly Bloom's deconstruction correlates, mismatched as it may seem, to Our Lady's story. Edvard Munch's oil composition commonly known as *Madonna*[237], of which he made several versions, the latter in print form, illustrates the two women's deconstruction. A sensual and dark image, the woman in the picture evokes neither religiosity nor virginal piousness as most Madonna images are wont to illustrate her as. Save for a blood-red nimbus surround her head, the woman is bare-breasted, twisting in the waves of a convulsing, womb-like mandorla, her face gaunt and corpse-like. Her closed eyes convey 'a sense of modesty', while her contorting body in the light suggests sexual intercourse, hence the painting might as well be 'a modernist, if irrelevant depiction' of the Incarnation of Christ.[238]

There is speculation who the woman really is, and the model behind the work, who is popularly believed to be Dagny Juel Przybyszewska, a close friend of Munch. The story of her own image is tinged with echoes of the voices of the men of Dublin which painted readers' first impressions of Molly Bloom:

> '[Dagny] was considered by many in her in their shared circle to be a *femme fatale*. Her peers described her in extreme terms, calling her "goddess, queen sovereign" but also "cold" and "deadly."'

According to Joyce, the word 'yes' is a female word, a closing word encapsulating the final image of Molly Bloom tantalising her lover 'with a poetic pabulum that resuscitate his manhood and wins, in turn, the seminal gift of sexual/phallic/fetishistic completion.'[239]

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[236] Hendersen, 517-528 (p. 524).
[237] Edvard Munch, *Madonna*, 1894, oil on canvas, 90 x 68 cm, Munch Museum, Oslo.
[238] 'Important Art by Edvard Munch', in *The Art* Story <http://www.theartstory.org> [accessed 25 June 2018]
[239] Suzette Henke, *James Joyce and the Politics of Desire*, Routledge Library Editions (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. 161.

Molly's own *fiat* redeems her by renouncing herself and her vulnerability to a man, glossing over her previous 'self-assertion, a sexual release of self in the chapter's final climactic pun'[240], therefore implying that sex 'is an epic conquest over feminine resistance'[241]. This is where parallels typically end between Molly, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Munch's *Madonna*, who, while depicted in an act of giving herself completely to another, the other is absent in the picture; Mary does not even look on to who will pass by her painting. Rather, '[h]er face is turned to God.'[242]

In the Infancy Narratives, the Virgin Mary's story is also one of alterity. The Evangelists indirectly tell the tale of an emboldened young woman who is given the choice by God Himself to transgress and subvert her predestined vocation and expectations endowed upon by societal ideals of first century Judea. Betrothed to St Joseph but pregnant before the right time to move in with him as husband and wife, Mary is susceptible to accusations of adultery and death by stoning. Marrying St Joseph too would not silence her critics, for, if we believe the Catholic tradition that Mary had made a vow of virginity to God, a child would have been 'proof' that she had undone her vow; the young maiden would always be seen as a fallen woman. Even so, Mary presses on. She makes herself vulnerable and moves beyond the Madonna-fallen women dichotomy herself, allowing others to see her as impure, as Munch's painting might initially suggest, and how Molly is temporarily suspect in the beginning of *Ulysses* before we can even hear her think. B.D. McClay concludes:

> 'Munch's Mary is strange and unfamiliar, but she's a Mary for all of us […] whose rescue will not come from giving herself to a man, from formlessness, or from self-obliteration. She is there for virgins, as she is for whores. […] Before God, she is naked, as we all are; she is pure, but in the way fire is pure. Her communion with God is wild and strange, not respectable, even a little off-putting. But that her soul "doth magnify the Lord" … well, that's undeniable.'[243]

[240] Hendersen, 517-528 (p. 522).
[241] Hendersen, 517-528 (pp. 520-521).
[242] B.D. McClay, 'Thunder Entered Her: The Mystery in Munch's Madonna', in *Commonweal Magazine* <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org> [accessed 25 June 2018]
[243] 'Thunder Entered Her: The Mystery in Munch's Madonna'

Chapter 4: The Great Mother

4.1 The atheist's religion and mythic interpretation

Belief in the divine realm and the seeking of mystical union with God are affairs which do not feature so positively within Virginia Woolf's novels. Set against a wider background of non-belief to which major characters subscribe to, religious devotion is more individual and privatised, a consolation for a poor soul to help them transcend the suffering world and obtain refuge. *Mrs Dalloway* is set in a London where 'traditional consolations' promised by the church have now 'ceased to inspire the city's inhabitants'[244]; Doris Kilman is the only person in the novel who believes and attends church. In *To the Lighthouse*, the religious state of the novel's background is not considered, as it is a given considering the Victorian society's sacrosanct Christian belief. Rather, we find more pagan myth than belief hiding deep within the characterisation and goings-on of the novel. Let it not also be forgotten that Woolf herself 'was famously no supporter of institutional religion' yet who interested herself 'in alternative forms of the sacred'.[245] It is therefore difficult, even assuredly so, injudicious, to say that there are secular and refined archetypes of the Virgin Mother of Christ, or that resonances with her are intentional, yet it is safe to consider that Marian myth and parallels do surface in the novels. After all, the history of Our Lady overlaps in one way or another with the harmony of a woman's experience. The Mater Dolorosa, for instance, finds herself in *Mrs Dalloway* 'with hands raised, with white apron billowing', there within the streets of post-World War I London,

> 'an elderly woman who seems […] to seek, over the desert, a lost son; to search for a rider destroyed; to be the figure of the mother whose sons have been killed in the battles of the world.'[246]

In contemporary times, she finds herself in war-torn Syria clutching countless lifeless bodies of her children, her heart stabbed by sorrow. In both Syria and the elderly woman in *Mrs Dalloway*, Mary belongs 'to a universal language of cleansing and rebirth.'[247] Taking a mythic approach to Woolf's novel is also, admittedly, a differing perspective to what may have

[244] Elyse Graham and Pericles Lewis, "Private Religion, Public Mourning, And Mrs. Dalloway", *Modern Philology*, 111.1 (2013), 88-106 (p. 89).
[245] Graham and Pericles, pp. 88-106 (pp. 91-92).
[246] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, ed. by Stella NcNichol (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 63.
[247] Warner, p. 223.

been originally written upon completion of the novel, but it is still a justified approach. Madeline Moore argues:

> In using myth as an approach to a work of literature, the critic can assume that, when coherent and illuminating parallels are discerned, a work may be interpreted in terms of the myth it resembles. Often what appears as only partly disclosed in the work may be revealed as complete and explicit through the myth.[248]

There is mutuality between Clarissa Dalloway and Mrs Ramsay in their rejection of religious belief, a reflection of Woolf's own agnosticism. Mrs Ramsay is annoyed with herself when she says with a tinge of irony, 'We are in the hands of the Lord':

> 'Who said it? Not she; she had been trapped into saying something she did not mean […] who brought her to say that […] she wondered. The insincerity slipping in among the truths roused her, annoyed her […] How could any Lord have made this world?'[249]

Clarissa never seems to have believed in God. While sifting through his memories, Peter Walsh observes how '[o]ddly enough, she was one of the most thorough-going sceptics he had ever met'.[250] Both women do find themselves at brief moments looking upward to the heavens. In Mrs Ramsay's situation, she quickly retracts from her statement 'We are in the hands of the Lord' and grounds herself once again. Unlike the Virgin Mary before the Angel Gabriel, she is unwilling to say her *fiat*, for religious truth holds no water for her, as well as with Clarissa, since life seems too unbearable for them to accept. Life is some dangerous animal, 'hostile, terrible, quick to pounce on you if you gave it a chance'.[251] It is the same with Clarissa. There is a brief moment where she blames 'the Gods' for her sister's sudden death, though this thought soon ebbs away with her grief, 'and so she evolved this atheist's religion of doing good for the sake of goodness'[252]. Post-war, the belief that 'death ended absolutely' had become more consoling for Clarissa than religion.[253] Because of Clarissa and Mrs Ramsay's non-belief, musing in the relationship between myth, pagan undertones and Our Lady is a cautious and delicate matter, yet nonetheless a position which may be utilised to illustrate the subconscious prevalence of myth in literature. Like Joseph Blotner's *Mythic*

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[248] Madeline Moore, 'Some Female Versions of Pastoral: *The Voyage Out* and Matriarchal Mythologies', in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Jane Marcus (Hong Kong: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1981), pp. 82-104 (p. 88).
[249] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 53-54.
[250] *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 85.
[251] *To the Lighthouse*, p. 51.
[252] *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 85.
[253] *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 9.

Patterns in To the Lighthouse, it 'raises significant issues about the role of myth in literature and criticism'.[254]

In the eyes of several characters, Mrs Ramsay's image is amplified beyond the person that she is. Lily Briscoe is in a struggle to sever her connection with the woman, only to realise that 'her own vision clothes the woman in more than human shape'. There is also the moment where she paints Mrs Ramsay who

> 'was supposed to be keeping her head as much in the same position as possible for Lily's picture. Lily's picture! Mrs Ramsay smiled. […] and so remembering her promise, she bent her head.'[255]

This submission, her lowering her head, hints at countless images of the Madonna, her head lowered in submission and humility, her visage adorned with the sweetest of smiles. Joseph Blotner claims that Woolf's agnosticism places Christian symbolism as 'quite inappropriate for Mrs. Ramsay', a statement which overlooks the overtones present in myth and religion. There is as much to share with the Blessed Virgin as there is to Rhea, Demeter and Persephone (as Blotner would so prefer); the comparison does not imply an impersonation of the character. There are even more paradigms of womanhood and femininity which have adorned Mrs Ramsay and Clarissa. Mrs Ramsay confesses Victorian ideals of motherhood and femininity, conveniently fitting with many Madonna images, not to mention the adoring responses she elicits from their admirers. Clarissa displays a regaler manner than meek and virginal, yet all the same she too moves men into veneration, particularly Peter Walsh, who is infatuated with her:

> What is this terror? What is this ecstasy? He thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?
> It is Clarissa, he said.
> For there she was.[256]

Upon these observations, mythic interpretation would also allow the development of pagan values and their connection to women, especially in Mrs Ramsay's *Beouf en Daube* feast, or Septimus being the sacrificial scapegoat for Clarissa's dinner party.

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[254] Morris Beja, 'Introduction', *Virginia Woolf: To the Lighthouse*, Casebook Series (Bristol, Macmillan and Co Ltd, 1970), pp. 11-31 (p. 25).
[255] *To the Lighthouse*, p. 18.
[256] *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 213.

4.2 Sacrifice and communion

Making use of British and elite social events such as the dinner party, Woolf brings out not only a 'scathing indictment of the British class system', but also a 'eucharistic vision', setting the sacred within the profane, a 'sacramental celebration'[257] as Richard Kearney describes it of the everyday bread and wine. Beginning with Mrs Ramsay, she presides over her famous *Boeuf en Doube* feast, ministering to her guests. Woolf adds a sacramental tone to the feast. The guests are gathered in the hall, who then 'assemble into the dining-room for dinner'. Mrs Ramsay conducts where they should sit, and a change goes through them all,

> 'as if that really happened, and they were all conscious of making a party together in a hollow, on an island; had their common cause against that fluidity over there.'[258]

Rather than Christian, the 'eucharistic vision' here is more resonant with pagan festivals. Mrs Ramsay is the high-priestess of the celebration, a celebration which is really for her, the Great Mother, since she is 'herself the container for the life she warms at her party'[259]. It is not only her green cashmere shawl which speaks of her vivacity and fecundity, but the offerings laid out on the table too:

> 'What had she done with, Mrs. Ramsay wondered, for Rose's arrangement of the grapes and pears, of the horny pink-lined shell, of the bananas, made her think of a trophy fetched from the bottom of the sea, of Neptune's banquet, of the bunch that hands with vine leaves over the shoulder of Bacchus (in some picture), among the leopard skins and the torches lolloping red and gold'.[260]

The olive oil and juice also evoke ancient festival foods 'often sanctified by dedication to The Great Mother'[261]. Mrs Ramsay's intuition with the minds of the others, and vice versa, indebted to Woolf's utilising of free indirect voice, a 'tunnelling process'[262] as she describes

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[257] Richard Kearney, "Sacramental Imagination: Eucharists of the Ordinary Universe", *Analecta Hermeneutica*, 1.2009 (2018), 240-288 (p. 272).
[258] *To the Lighthouse*, p. 80.
[259] Jane Lilienfeld, ""The Deceptiveness Of Beauty": Mother Love And Mother Hate In To The Lighthouse", *Twentieth Century Literature*, 23.3 (1977), 345-376 (p. 356).
[260] *To the Lighthouse*, p 79.
[261] Lilienfeld, 345-376 (p. 357).
[262] *A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Leonard Woolf (New York: Mariner Books, 2003), p. 60.

it, makes the *Boeuf en Daube* feast 'a perfect triumph'[263] with everyone 'united in eucharistic communion'[264] despite their rivalries.

With Clarissa's dinner party, there is also an element of eucharistic communion, added with overtones of ritual sacrifice, i.e. Septimus' suicide. However, it would be erroneous to construe the dinner as a 'pagan Mass'[265], as Suzette A. Henke argues. Surmising that Septimus, the novel's broken Christological figure, acts as a 'traditional scapegoat' would argue that the Mass is a borrowing of tenets held in pagan ritual, which is debatable considering its Jewish roots.[266] She even claims that the theme of the scapegoat in Greek tragedy 'comprises one of the central tenets of the Catholic liturgy'. To be more accurate, the Sacrifice of the Mass finds its roots in the Paschal Lamb, the unblemished innocent victim slaughtered at every Passover which foreshadowed Christ's Sacrifice, a sacrifice which liberated the bonds of sin, establishing an eternal alliance between creature and Creator[267]. The Sacrifice of the Mass brings the crucifixion eternally present to the people, which the Council of Trent describes as

> 'truly propitiatory and has this effect, that if we, contrite and penitent, with sincere heart and upright faith, we fear and reference, draw nigh to God, *we obtain mercy and find grace in seasonable aid*.'[268]

The scapegoat which was ceremoniously sent into the wilderness did not bring mercy. It merely carried away guilt, and what had become of it was not speculated upon. Septimus' death is void of mercy, for it is a pitiful sacrifice which only destroys its victim, leaving Clarissa feeling 'glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living.'[269] Arthur F. Bethea notes: 'If this is all that a man's death can achieve, however – a transient moment of "fun" – the impoverishment of *Mrs. Dalloway*'s world is clear.'[270]

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[263] *To the Lighthouse*, p. 80.
[264] Kearney, pp. 240-288 (p.273).
[265] Suzette A. Henke, ''Mrs Dalloway': the Communion of Saints', in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Jane Marcus (Hong Kong: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1981), pp. 125-147 (p. 126).
[266] Brant Pitre, 'The Jewish Roots Of The Mass', in *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops* <http://www.usccb.org> [accessed 18 June 2018]
[267] 'The Sacrifice Of The New Covenant', in *Catholic News Agency* <http://ww.catholicnewsagency.com> [accessed 18 June 2018]
[268] Fathers of the Church, *The Canons and Decrees Of The Council of Trent*, trans. by Rev. H. J. Schroeder (Illinois: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc. 2009), p. 146.
[269] *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 204.
[270] Arthur F. Bethea, "Septimus Smith, The War-Shattered Christ Substitute in MRS. DALLOWAY", *The Explicator*, 68.4 (2010), 249-252 (p. 251).

The dinner party is a celebration for sustenance in an afflicted world whose society desires sustenance, which Clarissa gives to her guests in high class fashion. It is their manner of healing after a devastating First World War which has snuffed out the lives of countless youthful men, and which has forever changed England. Clarissa, who has been completely absorbed by her parties, thinks of them as a 'gift' to the people, an event that one may fall back on and lose themselves in, leaving behind the pains and suffering of the world. Elaine Showalter writes:

> As Woolf takes us into the minds of the various guests, we see that their facades of festivity and good breeding conceal a terror of ageing and death. Coming together is a way for them to affirm continuity. […] Despite its fascination with death, Mrs Dalloway ends, as it begins, with a tribute to endurance, survival and joy.[271]

And this survival and joy comes through Clarissa and her dinner party, who has offered her life 'to the forces of spiritual fertility'. Embodying 'female beauty, naturalness and a consciousness of sensuous joy', Clarissa's dinner party 'constitutes a sacramental paean to life and regeneration.'[272]

Septimus Warren Smith's suicide shatters this lustrous celebration. This 'war-shattered' "Christ" is coerced into committing suicide because of his severe shell-shock, a 'pathetic' death which achieves 'virtually nothing'[273]. His death becomes a twisted perversion of Christ's self-sacrifice on the Cross, who gave Himself freely and willingly into the hands of his persecutor, and whose death resulted in the Redemption, the opening of Paradise and the salvaging of the just and saintly. Yet who in Clarissa's dinner party is to be salvaged, and how may Septimus' impaled body on the railings bring about this salvaging? There is none to offer, so by transmuting the greatest salvific moment of history into Septimus' suicide, Woolf suggests how Christianity in a post-war world is 'ineffectual for most, if not all, of the characters in [her] novel.'[274] When news of the death reaches the dinner party, Clarissa is the only person to feel some connection with the deceased, the man who throughout the novel has been her double, from their beak-noses to the thoughts they embodied; Septimus

[271] Elaine Showalter, 'Introduction', in *Mrs. Dalloway*, ed. by Stella McNichol (London: Penguin Books, 2000), pp. xi-xlviii (pp. xliv-xlv).
[272] Henke, pp. 125-147 (p. 127).
[273] Bethea, pp. 249-252 (p. 250).
[274] Bethea, pp. 249-252 (p. 250).

may be seen as the son that Clarissa never had. The Virgin Mother, 'standing alone, after a day of meditating on privacy and the soul', receives with 'uncanny accuracy' this mystical vision of her Son's death. Perhaps 'some extraordinary connection might have passed after all between the hostess and the suicide.'[275] Through the eyes of myth, the image of Clarissa becomes a secularised Stabat Mater, the Holy Virgin mournfully standing at the Cross. The 13th century hymn describes the sorrow shared between Our Lady and Christ Crucified; the first two stanzas show the shared suffering:

> At the Cross her station keeping,
> stood the mournful Mother weeping,
> close to her Son to the last.
>
> Through her heart, His sorrow sharing,
> all His bitter anguish bearing,
> now at length the sword has passed.[276]

Sadly, Clarissa quickly loses her warmth towards Septimus, and revokes any feelings for him; 'she did not pity him'.'[277] Perhaps it is easier for Clarissa to process the dead as 'guides for the living'. What she does come to realise is

> that not only is her own life a structure of artifice and evasion […] but that access to some redemptive mystical center is closed off as well. Perhaps, this implies, the mystical center itself is an illusion, not a presence but an absence, a mirage at the inverted horizon of despair.[278]

Her meditation on the death of Septimus does not bring up hopes of redemption for her and the dinner guests, since there may be in fact 'nothing redemptive about it, and we are just prone to telling ourselves stories that will make us feel that there is.'[279]

4.3 Marriage and maternity

There was no cause for dispute among critics and readers: the Ramsays were the paragon of sexual complementarity, icons if you will, described as 'the symbols of marriage, husband

[275] Graham and Pericles, 88-106 (p. 104).
[276] 'Stabat Mater dolorosa' in *Lyrica Catholica*, trans. by Edward Caswall (London: Levry, Robson and Franklyn, 1849), pp. 138-139.
[277] *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 204.
[278] Vereen M. Bell and Vereen Bell, "Misreading "Mrs. Dalloway"", *The Sewanee Review*, 114.1 (2006), 93-111 (p. 108).
[279] Graham and Pericles, pp. 88-106 (p. 106).

and wife'[280]. Here we have the maternal, self-sacrificial helpmate honour-bound to her husband, a volatile man easily enraged by the 'folly of women's minds'[281]. These images fit well into the assumptions of the likes of Bernard Blackstone and Lord David Cecil, recognising the typical sex-role stereotypes as though they are unflawed conventions, even truths.[282] Like Raphael's The Marriage of the Virgin[283], past readers could feel the balance and symmetry between the two. The artist presents Mary and Joseph standing before each other, harmoniously together in symmetry, each a split half which are now to be enjoined together, as Mary's chaste spouse puts the ring on her finger, overlooked by the High Priest. Raphael's artistic compositional principles fit within this 'Victorian social arrangement on the Ramsays, that their 'marriage is the eternal union of the masculine and feminine principle.'[284] It was therefore, quite simply, a sacrilege to imply the imperfections of the marriage, and especially Mrs Ramsay's, yet it is a prospect which is not so much a deviation as it is a confirmation of Woolf's intention, who was after all 'outspoken as a feminist, known to object to traditional views of sex roles'[285]. The marriage is, in fact, wearing out the Ramsays, and the imbalance of power between the two surges and beats and churns like the raging sea. The early initiation of a small tempest between Mr and Mrs Ramsay begins with Mr Ramsay dashing little James' hopes of going to the lighthouse at the beginning of the novel, therefore having the two rejecting each other's proposition.

Upon marrying, both Clarissa and Mrs Ramsay no longer hold autonomy to their names or personalities but are now recognised socially as their husbands' helpmates. At least with Clarissa, we learn of her former last name, Parry, before she marries Richard Dalloway. With Mrs Ramsay, she hasn't a name to call her own other than her official status as wife. Clarissa's married name hides away her true personality, allowing her to be 'invisible; unseen; unknown; […] not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway'.[286] Yet both Clarissa and Mrs Ramsay are shrewd of judgement, sensitive to their surroundings, and in Mrs Ramsay's case, highly intuitive of the others. Clarissa may find it 'necessary to avoid

[280] *To the Lighthouse*, p. 60.
[281] *To the Lighthouse*, p. 29.
[282] Lilienfeld, pp. 345-376 (p. 148).
[283] Raphael, *The Marriage of the Virgin*, 1504, oil on round-headed panel, 174 x 121 cm, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.
[284] Lilienfeld, pp. 345-376 (p. 149).
[285] Lilienfeld, pp. 345-376 (p. 149).
[286] Henke, pp. 125-147 (p. 130).

the masculine terrain of law and government'[287], which she makes up with her own private world, while Mrs Ramsay finds herself trying to climb the social ladder at her dinner party by grasping at 'the particulars of the moment'[288], showing her concerns about milk and 'the iniquity of the English dairy system'. A domestic matter of such importance to a Victorian housewife like Mrs Ramsay is only disparaged at the table, a subject that is laughed at even by her own children:

> [A]ll round the table, beginning with Andrew in the middle, like a fire leaping from tuft to tuft of furze, her children laughed; her husband laughed; she was laughed at, fire-encircled, and forced to vail her crest, dismount her batteries.[289]

Clarissa does not try to involve herself in manly discourse; perhaps in another life, she may don a man's body and be 'interested in politics like a man'[290], but for now she lives in privacy, a choice she made by marrying Richard rather than Peter, 'an instinctive and judicious choice in the interests of self-preservation.'[291] 'Like a nun withdrawing,' Virginia Woolf describes her, 'or a child exploring a tower, she went, upstairs'.[292] Nun-like, she has a schedule for her own private rituals, and chooses an attic for refuge. This simplicity gives Clarissa a spiritual 'virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet'[293], isolating her and feeding her germinating dread:

> 'She had a perpetual sense […] of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very, dangerous to live even one day.'[294]

The Victorian culture would have Mrs Ramsay restrained to domesticity, a pet that is to be kept indoors and for companionship. Mrs Ramsay fulfils the role of a secular Madonna, bound by marriage to be a helpmate to her husband and a mother to her children. Like the allegory of Lady Charity, she becomes the image of passivity, the self-sacrificial, fully devoted mother for her children. This is her role in life,

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[287] Henke, pp. 125-147 (p. 130).
[288] Jane Lilienfeld, 'Where the Spear Plants Grew: the Ramsays' Marriage in *To the Lighthouse*', in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Jane Marcus (Hong Kong: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1981), pp. 148-169 (p. 152).
[289] *To the Lighthouse*, p. 84.
[290] *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 11.
[291] Henke, pp. 125-147 (p. 131).
[292] *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 33.
[293] *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 34.
[294] *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 9.

to bring joy and beauty to those around her, to protect the enchantment of childhood, to comfort and sustain. Hers is the soft glow that irradiates over all, like a green shawl thrown over the sharp contours of life; hers, the creative warmth that flows through others' lives.[295]

We can almost hear Christ's words on the Cross to his mother and the Beloved Disciple, entrusting her to be the mother of the living Church. She sustains the guests not only with the food, but also as the intuitive mother that she is, which her *Bouef en Daube* represents:

The body of the stew is a referent to Mrs. Ramsay's maternal body […] the beauty and sensuality of the moment is in 'female time', as the womb-like quality of the stew pot is matched in its maternal quality by Mrs. Ramsay's intuitive ability to decode the emotional effects of each character's body language.[296]

When responding to Brenda Silver about students' reactions to Mrs Ramsay, Madelyn Detloff noted how students of hers were 'gung-ho to read the novel as a critique of patriarchal marriage'[297]. With so little a world to have dominion in, and yet so many subjects to be a mother for, Mrs Ramsay's usurpation of her people by marrying them off to each other reveals her pulling at the restraints of Victorian convention, doing her best to transcend what is to be expected of her as a woman. Yet she does this in a way by conforming to the ideals, reaching out only through matchmaking which may not be for the benefit of the couple (the future breakdown of Peter and Minta's marriage), or coupling those with no desire to enter a marriage, like Lily Briscoe. Mrs Ramsay's pagan attitude towards marriage[298] also transmutes her feelings of the dinner party, which takes place after Paul's proposal to Minta, as though they were,

celebrating a festival as if two emotions were called up in her, on profound – for what could be more serious than the love of man for woman, what more commanding, more impressive, bearing in its bosom the seeds of death; at the same time, these people entering into illusion glittering eyed, must be danced round with mockery, decorated with garlands.'[299]

In her writing, Woolf often 'triangulate[s] mothers, beauty and the body', which may be seen as both a reproof to the binary convention of beauty as 'the passive feminine to be contemplated by a male observer', as well as giving 'the maternal body somatic depth and

[295] Deborah Guth, "Virginia Woolf: Myth And "To The Lighthouse"", *College Literature*, 11.3 (1984), 233-249 (p. 237).
[296] Maggie Humm, "Beauty and Woolf", *Feminist Theory*, 7.2 (2006), pp. 237-254 (p. 224).
[297] Brenda R. Silver, "Mothers, Daughters, Mrs. Ramsay: Reflections", *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 37. 3/4 (2009), pp. 259-274 (pp. 271).
[298] Joseph L. Blotner, "Mythic Patterns in *To The Lighthouse*", *PMLA*, 71.4 (1956), pp. 547-562 (p. 553).
[299] *To the Lighthouse*, p. 82.

visceral beauty'.[300] In other words, Woolf is claiming beauty from social convention and masculine ideals and finding beauty within the maternal as she sees it. Mrs Ramsay's beauty is reminiscent of Woolf's mother, Julia Stephens, who describes her as 'not only the most beautiful of women as her portraits will tell you, but also one of the most distinct'.[301] Woolf recreates this maternal beauty in Mrs Ramsay, which is both evocative and regal, who draws in every character in the novel. When Charles Tansley sees her against a picture of Queen Victoria, 'all at once he realized that it was this: - she was the most beautiful person he had ever seen.'[302] He also feels an enormous sense of pride for accompanying her for a walk. The guest Mr. Bankes sees Mrs Ramsay's beauty as Madonna-like, 'mother and child […] in this case the mother was famous for her beauty'[303], and Lily pictures her 'sitting up there with all her beauty opened against her.' She beholds a power which is not easily escaped, and which can obscure one's thoughts; initially, Lily Briscoe, with her own complicated feelings for Mrs Ramsay, 'is so enmeshed in Mrs. Ramsay's powers that the painter cannot acknowledge consciously the depths of her anger at the older woman'[304]. For Joseph Blotner, Mrs Ramsay is the 'symbol of the female principle in life', and her beauty may easily be equalled to what Marian devotees attribute to the Mother of God in painting, tradition, as well as how she is described by visionaries.

Something of interest mentioned by Anne Fernald in Brenda R. Silver's *Mothers, Daughters, Mrs. Ramsay: Reflections* is the positive response to Mrs Ramsay's character and sacrifices that she received when lecturing at a Catholic university. She wrote to Silver, saying that her students

> were not at all bothered by [Mrs. Ramsay's] sacrifices for her tetchy husband and her compulsion to impose the fate of marriage even on a woman as self contained as Lily. They were enraptured by the evocation of Mrs Ramsay and the references to her beauty and saw Lily as pinched and sad.[305]

It would not be a stretch to conclude and consider that the students' Catholic upbringing had conditioned them to see not only Catholic values within this Victorian-type mother, but to also see the Mother of God. She is larger than life and her beauty and favourable

[300] Humm, pp. 237-254 (p. 238).
[301] Humm, pp. 237-254 (p. 243).
[302] *To the Lighthouse*, p. 15.
[303] *To the Lighthouse*, p. 45.
[304] Lilienfeld, pp. 345-376 (p. 346).
[305] Silver, pp. 259-274 (p. 271).

attributes become even more defined and compelling thanks to the mythologizing in Woolf's writing and her characters, for even though she and the others are symbolic[306], such as the Ramsays described as 'the symbols of marriage, husband and wife', the accentuation of Mrs Ramsay brings her to be some form of divine figure, even regal. When Mrs Ramsay goes downstairs to greet her guests for the dinner party, we see how like the Fisherman's wife of the fairy tale that she reads to James, she acknowledges, perhaps indulges herself slightly, in her esteemed royalty:

> And like some queen, who, finding her people gathered in the hall, looks down upon them, and descends among them, and acknowledges their tributes silently, and accepts their devotion and their prostration before […] she went down, and crossed the hall and bowed her head very slightly, as if she accepted what they could not say: their tribute to her beauty.[307]

For Blotner, he would have her as the Primordial Goddess, precursor to pagan goddesses like Rhea and Demeter. Jane Lilienfeld sees her as Erich Neumann's Great Mother, a primordial image of human psyche. An example of this would be Lily's resting on Mrs Ramsay's lap, laughing almost hysterically 'at the thought of Mrs. Ramsay presiding with immutable calm over destinies which she completely failed to understand'.[308] Neumann extrapolates on how being taken to the lap means to be fed at the breast[309], and here Lily, though in denial, wants according to Jung 'to be caught, sucked in, enveloped, and devoured, seeking, as it were, the protecting, nourishing, charmed circle of the mother'.[310] This 'passion for fusion with the mother's essence [is] the central meaning of Lily's longing'.[311] Correlating this desire for a nourishing mother to the Virgin Mary, Mary's milk has similar qualities. With the Early Renaissance art world slowly perfecting its craft to imitate real life, representations of Mary's breasts had become more eroticised and life-like, compared to the flat 'compressed sack[s]' the Medieval world had allowed. Her breasts had come to represent motherhood, femininity and erotic longing[312], and her milk took on more

[306] Blotner, pp. 547-562 (p. 549).
[307] *To the Lighthouse*, p. 68.
[308] *To the Lighthouse*, p. 43.
[309] Erich Neumann and Ralph Manheim, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 98.
[310] C. G. Jung, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, trans. by R. F. G. Hull, 2nd edition (UK: Routledge, 1991), p. 11.
[311] Lilienfeld, pp. 345-376 (p. 351).
[312] Waller, p. 37.

therapeutic properties in art. A prime example is the Miraculous Lactation of St Bernard[313], a vision which endows the saint with knowledge and inspiration after Our Lady squirts her breast milk onto him.[314] Another motif is Our Lady nourishing the suffering souls of Purgatory, their hands raised in plea for mercy, hoping to catch some of the milk drops.[315]

Mrs Ramsay's power 'draws towards her the lives of others [which] cannot be avoided'[316]. Lily, the only woman who resists marrying as Mrs Ramsay would have liked her to do, remembers,

> she had laid her head on Mrs Ramsay's lap and laughed and laughed and laughed, laughed almost hysterically at the thought of Mrs. Ramsay presiding with immutable calm over destinies which she completely failed to understand. There she sat, simple, serious. She had recovered her sense of her now – this was the glove's twisted hand.[317]

The Nursing Madonna also finds herself in the fantasies of Mrs Dalloway's obsessive and ridiculous devotee, Peter Walsh, who grants her the ill-fitting role of a *magna mater*, an 'abstract guise' for him to venerate. A man who cannot forfeit his love for Clarissa, Peter refuses to shirk off the possibility that he could have been married to her. Nonetheless, he recognises the fact that 'marriage to Clarissa would have been disastrous for them both'[318], yet he still rejects Clarissa's 'nun-like' privacy, which makes him think of her as 'cold as an icicle'[319]. His reckless passion leaves him not only possessive of Clarissa, but infantile, desiring to be nurtured. Indeed, Peter 'dreams of the ideal woman as a great nurse who comforts and soothes, who offers sensuous gifts flowing from a warm, fertile body.'[320] He fantasises Clarissa to be his nourishment, sustenance, and healer. Indeed, this is no less different than what many devotees look for when having recourse to the Blessed Virgin. The Marian shrine at Lourdes draws those sick in health and spirit in search for healing in the frigid spring water that St Bernadette Soubirous revealed under instruction of the *Aquero*

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[313] Alonso Cano, *Saint Bernard and the Virgin*, c. 1657-1660, oil on canvas, 267 x 185 cm, Prado Museum, Madrid
[314] 'Saint Bernard Clairvaux, the Mellifluous Doctor', in *Ad Imaginem Dei* <http://imaginemdei.blogspot.com> [accessed 18 June 2018]
[315] Pedro Machuca, *The Virgin and the Souls of Purgatory*, 1517, oil on poplar panel, 167 x 135 cm, Prado Museum, Madrid.
[316] Lilienfeld, p. 351.
[317] *To the Lighthouse*, p. 43.
[318] Henke, pp. 125-147 (p. 132).
[319] *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 88.
[320] Henke, pp. 125-147 (p. 131).

inside the rocky niche.[321] Today, this feminine power of restoration emanates as strongly as it does today as it was so in the past. Gary Waller writes:

Any shrine dedicated to the Virgin, whether Walsingham or Woolpit, Penrhys or Ipswich or Willesden has this special distinction: it was a place of imminent female power, centered on an event in which a woman's body was revered as the vehicle of salvation, which encouraged devotees to revere, and even worship, that body.[322]

One final connection between the two novels and the maternal figure is through the genre of elegy, a tradition which Woolf closely worked on especially when writing *To the Lighthouse*. In a diary entry of 1925, Woolf contemplates: 'I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant 'novel'. A new – by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?'[323] It has only been recent that interests in the way Woolf treated elegy and mourning have begun to become a 'growing scholarly interest'.[324] According to Christine Froula, *Mrs Dalloway* reads as a 'communal post-war elegy'[325], while *To the Lighthouse* becomes a therapeutic form of remedy to cure Woolf of her obsession with her mother; the parents of the large family in the novel become surrogates for Woolf's own parents, Leslie and Julia Stephen. In *Mrs Dalloway*, the connection between mother and elegy is subtler. Clarissa's dinner party, with all its pagan overtones, is an offering, 'to combine, to create; but to whom?' This query of hers may be rhetorical, since her 'entire life is an offering to her parents, especially to her mother'. In a moment of fantasy Clarissa imagines herself as both child and woman in the presence of her parents:

> For she was a child, throwing bread to the ducks, between her parents, and at the same time a grown woman coming to her parents who stood by the lake, holding her life in her arms which, as she neared them, grew larger and larger in her arms, until it became a whole life, a complete life, which she puts down by them and said, 'This is what I have made of it! This!' And what had she made of it? What, Indeed?[326]

Consequently, the dinner party is but one more offering to them, showing the strong bond between parents and daughter, and the need to connect to them beyond the grave via the

[321] 'The Apparitions'
[322] Waller, p. 94.
[323] Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, p. 78.
[324] Graham and Pericles, pp. 88-106 (p. 93).
[325] Christine Froula, 'Mrs. Dalloway's Postwar Elegy: Women, War, and the Art of Mourning', *Modernism/modernity*, 9. 1 (2002), 125-163 (p. 126).
[326] *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 46.

ritual of communion. A haven once 'sanctified by maternal benevolence', Clarissa yearns to enter once more:

> After the loss of her mother, Clarissa felt it incumbent on her to re-create the beatific communion shattered by Mrs Parry's death. Her gatherings serve as a perpetual tribute to the absent mother, creative acts of social artistry based on the primary mode of family affiliation. Clarissa's parties are works of art that challenge mortality and strive to reinstate the prelapsarian delights of infant joy.[327]

Mrs Ramsay's presence and effects are still felt after death. Her memory is preserved in the others' mourning. The working-class woman Mrs McNab beholds the ghostly Mrs Ramsay in her natural element, flowers: 'She could see her now, stooping over her flowers, and faint and flickering, like a yellow beam or the circle at the end of a telescope, a lady in a grey cloak, stooping over her flowers[…]'[328]

With the death of Mrs Ramsay, she remains to be but a shade suspended in her house and among those who knew her. This general feeling in this section of the book is what Virginia Woolf herself felt that her mother was when she was a child, a woman who 'must have been a general presence rather than a particular person to a child of seven or eight.'[329]

It is with Mrs Ramsay's death that Woolf finally lays her own past to rest and the influence of her mother, described by her to be the most significant of 'invisible presences', even describing the 'hold of Victorian ideals of femininity as a haunting'.[330] In her writings, Woolf describes these hauntings:

> It is perfectly true that she obsessed me, in spite of the fact that she died when I was thirteen, until I was forty-four. Then one day walking around Tavistock Square I made up, as I sometimes make up my novels, *To the Lighthouse*; in a great, apparently involuntary, rush. One thing burst into another. […] Why then? I have no notion. But I wrote the book very quickly; and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her.[331]

Julia Stephens has finally crossed over, and Mrs Ramsay finally returns to the Elysian fields, 'stepping with her usual quickness across fields among whose folds, purplish and soft,

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[327] Henke, pp. 125-147 (pp. 127-128).
[328] *To the Lighthouse*, p. 112.
[329] Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past' in *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Jeanne Schulkind (London: Sussex University Press, 1976), pp. 64-137 (p. 83).
[330] Laura Marcus, *Virginia Woolf*, 2nd edn, Writers and their Work (Devon: Northocote House Publishers Ltd, 2004), p. 95.
[331] Woolf, pp. 64-137 (p. 81).

among whose flowers, hyacinths or lilies, she vanished'.[332] Just like Woolf, Lily has finally and successfully severed ties with the late Mrs Ramsay, giving her up to the underworld and memory. Her time of mourning has ended, and now she can finally see the triangular core of Mrs Ramsay, the 'purple triangle' she had once painted her as twenty years ago, and which she had stopped at being unable to see Mrs Ramsay's humanity, 'a simple shape shadowed by incompleteness'.[333] The mythical spell has been broken, the elegy has been painted, and Lily is now free from the Great Mother. Breaking away from the mother's grasp echoes the Christian art motif of Christ taking leave of His Mother, where Jesus bids farewell to Mary before he departs to Jerusalem, knowing full well that he will be captured there (it is sometimes said this parting marks the beginning of Christ's Passion). Several depictions of this show Jesus calmly blessing Mary in her typical posture of prayer.[334] Albrecht Dürer decides to turn the tables in one of his woodcuts depicting this scene by having Mary tearfully begging her Son not to go.[335] The severe look on Christ seems to change His blessing hand into a reprimand. She cannot understand Him, having already tried to keep Him from pursuing his mission of reconciliation of humanity with God. Jesus persists. He will not be held back from doing the will of God even by His own mother. Neither will Woolf or Lily permit themselves to be conditioned or haunted by Julia Stephens and Mrs Ramsay.

[332] *To the Lighthouse*, p. 148.
[333] Lilienfeld, pp 345-376 (p. 366).
[334] John Oliver Hand, with Catherine Methzger and Ron Spronk, *Prayer Portraits: Unfolding the Netherlandish Diptych* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 66.
[335] Albrecht Dürer, *Christ taking leave of his Mother*, c. 1507, 29.8 x 21 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Chapter 5: Disrobing Our Lady's Mantle of Myth

5.1 The Play's the Thing

At the 2011 Dublin Theatre Festival, a one-woman performance commissioned by Loughlin Deegan and directed by Garry Hynes took place. Irish actress Marie Mullen stood on stage before her audience, alone and determined to deliver her eighty-minute monologue.[336] Unequivocally an arduous challenge set by the playwright and author Colm Tóibín, his play *Testament* easily surpasses Shakespeare's own lengthy monologues. Impassioned, relentless yet articulate, the sole character of the play is Mary, the Mother of Christ, who post-crucifixion now lives in exile in Ephesus. In the play she is an embittered woman who has little to do except clutch at mostly painful memories of her son and his ministry, the miracles and wild cacophony that followed her son everywhere, and eventually Christ's tragic hours on Golgotha, hanging in agony on the cross; briefly do happy memories appear in this re-imagining of Our Lady.

On stage, Mary appears before her audience as a witness. She hungers to tell all the words she has heard and pondered in her heart, and reveal what truly happened in first-century Judea, namely, her disapproval of her son's ministry; her disgust at the Apostles that Jesus gathered around him, 'a group of misfits, who were only children' like her son[337]; the Gospel writers' pestering who only desire her memories as fodder for their writing, and lastly, and perhaps most shockingly, her own denial of the worth of Jesus's sacrifice, which has led to her falling away from his followers and the Jewish faith. A most peculiar Mother of Christ indeed, unrecognisable from her Biblical counter-part. As secular and un-mythical as the Virgin Mary ever was onstage in a Catholic country, the play was nonetheless a success at the theatre. Tóibín, sensing that his little project was a mere fledgling, eventually set on turning into a novella, which was published in Autumn 2012 as *The Testament of Mary* and later shortlisted for the 2013 Man Booker Prize. The play, now reworked and retitled, went

[336] Colm Tóibín, 'Colm Tóibín: how I wrote Mary's story', in *The Telegraph* <http://www.telegraph.co.uk> [accessed 02 January 2017]
[337] Colm Tóibín, *The Testament of Mary* (London: Penguin Books, 2013) p. 9.

on Broadway starring the Irish actress Fiona Shaw.[338] The book found itself a new name in English literature, along with striking a very sensitive nerve.

5.2 Behold the Handmaid

The Mother of Christ aptly shows herself to the reader as an eyewitness, and not a messenger of a new creed, hence the novella's treating of her story as a testament (witness) and not a gospel. Not by any means are there to be found any intimations of the Gnostic Gospels. This is a book imbibed with earthly humanity,[339] the defining trait of Mary and the novella. Arguably, few novels present the Mother of God as human and secular as Tóibín does; Nikos Kazantzakis' *The Last Temptation*, a book of similar qualities, had found itself listed in the Vatican's Index of forbidden books in 1954.[340] In Tóibín's novella the readers are greeted with an old insomniac woman prepared to die. Indeed, this Biblical retelling is infected with death. Mary broods over it, even anticipates it. Her acknowledgement and anticipation of death underscores the eternal rest she desperately hopes to achieve, rest which she has so little of. Knowing that she is nearing the grave is repeated several times in the book; she brings it up immediately:

> 'Maybe I do not need to dream, or need to rest. Maybe my eyes know that soon they will be closed forever […] Before the final rest comes this long awakening. And it is enough for me to know that it will end.'[341]

She also muses over her late husband, a memory preserved as a tormenting absence in the form of an empty chair, one 'in which no one has ever sat', and which belonged only 'to a man who will not return, whose body is dust but who once held sway in the world.'[342]

Morbid verses like this, especially those pertaining to Mary bring the Catholic reader to reflect upon the dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, which declares that Mary, 'when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things'[343]. Belief in the Assumption (or Dormition according to Orthodox tradition) goes back centuries and appears in a wide

[338] 'How I wrote Mary's story'
[339] 'How I wrote Mary's story'
[340] Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Last Temptation*, trans. by P.A. Bien (Croydon: Faber and Faber, 2003), p. ii.
[341] Tóibín, p. 3.
[342] Tóibín, p. 19.
[343] Pius XII, 'Munificentissimus Deus', in *La Santa Sede* <http://www.w2.vatican.va> [accessed 02 January 2018]

variety of apocryphal narratives which recount her passing, the earliest possibly being the third-century Ethiopic *Liber Requie Mariae* ('Book of the Repose of Mary'):

> And our Lord said to them: 'Let them bring the body of Mary into the clouds.' […] And when they arrived together in Paradise, they placed the body of Mary beside the tree of life. And they brought her soul and placed it upon her body. And our Lord dismissed his angels to their places.[344]

Contrastingly, *The Testament of Mary* is barren of such paradisal imagery; Mary's death is not mentioned, yet readers anticipate it to be a common death. And after all, Tóibín's atheism would not permit it. Death, according to Tóibín's Mary, is 'fullness'[345]. It has the final word in this vale of tears and hopes of an afterlife are short-lived and empty. A more fitting image to the Virgin Mary's passing according to Tóibín would be Caravaggio's *Death of the Virgin*[346]. This noteworthy work of art is a Roman altarpiece and Caravaggio's largest. Commissioned in 1604 or 1605 for a papal lawyer's chapel in the Carmelite church Santa Maria della Scala, it now hangs in the Louvre as a rejected piece, condemned as unfit for its original spot. Like Tóibín, Caravaggio had a taste for controversy, and this painting certainly stirred the pot. Professor of Italian Baroque art Howard Hibbard describes the painting's earthliness as Caravaggio banishing the supernatural from his work and sets a dark and grim scene. He emphasises Mary's bodily death, and not her *transitus*, which was the proper subject according to the Counter Reformation's theological opinion.[347] The Apostles and Mary Magdalene, evidently distraught, surround the Virgin's lifeless body sprawled on an untidy deathbed, swollen and without decorum, save her young looks, yet even those are not really remarkable. Light from an out-of-view window shines a spotlight on Mary. The only thing that divulges her holiness, invisible for the unobservant viewer, is a thread-thin halo around her head: Hibbard comments: 'By showing Mary dead rather than dying, Caravaggio not only flaunted decorum but also denied the spiritual content of the scene'.[348]

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[344] Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of Mary's Dormition and Assumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 163-164.
[345] Tóibín, p. 31.
[346] Caravaggio, *Death of the Virgin*, c. 1601-1606, oil on canvas, 369 x 245 cm, Louvre, Paris.
[347] Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio* (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1983), p. 202.
[348] Hibbard, pp. 202-203.

Similar to Caravaggio, Tóibín's work 'is part of a tradition of religious art that wants to examine biblical stories from a more realistic perspective'.[349]

Even when Tóibín rewrites the account of Christ raising Lazarus from the dead, a shroud of 'sepulchral gloom' overshadows the miracle.[350] There is an emphasis of the grave and unnaturalness of the miracle. '[T]he birdsong ceased and the birds withdrew from the air', and Lazarus' body jerks and wriggles like a worm, until he rises before the bewildered crowd. Although 'unchanged by death', he begins to weep as he is led away by his sisters Mary and Martha.[351] Charity has not been shown to this poor soul. At the wedding of Cana, at which Lazarus is also present (here the events have been rearranged to the author's own suit), he is 'utterly isolated' and can only be fed water-soaked bread and water by his sisters. Mary realises that he is expiring: 'If he had come back to life it was merely to say a last farewell to it.'[352] One can only pity Lazarus. Christ is no miracle-worker here; he bears more resemblance to a necromancer. Death, Tóibín believes, is not to be meddled with. It is his parting message to his reader, a furtive dig at those who 'look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come'[353].

Mary's story, just as she ponders on sweet memories of mother, father and son going to the Temple every Sabbath day[354], is an exploration of an individual imbued with a real human personality, just as Tóibín reflects on his family and the faithful Irish who have been enchanted by the Catholic spell: '[It] comes from belief. In our house we said the rosary every night and it ended each time with the Hail Holy Queen'[355].

A popular motif of the Virgin Mary in Christian art was to present her under the title of *Virgin of Mercy*. Images of Mary under this title show her spreading out her luxurious cloak or pallium, under which the faithful huddle beneath her for protection, sometimes

[349] Charles McNulty, 'Review: Fiona Shaw fleshes out 'The Testament of Mary'', in *Los Angeles Times* <http://articles.latimes.com> [accessed 02 January 2018]
[350] Mark P. Shea, 'Not Your Mother: An Autopsy on "The Testament of Mary"', in *The Catholic World Report* <http://www.catholicworldreport.com> [accessed 02 January 2018]
[351] Tóibín, pp. 34-36.
[352] Tóibín, p. 45.
[353] 'The Nicene Creed', in *Blessed Be God*, ed. by Very Rev. Charles J. Callan, OP. S.T.M. and Very Rev. John A. McHugh, O.P., S.T.M. (Boonville, NY: Preserving Christian Publications, 2016), p. 61.
[354] Tóibín, p. 17.
[355] 'How I wrote Mary's story'

accompanied with the donors of the portrait[356]. Grand in stature, Mary stands tall and steadfast over her small children, a lookout for any impending danger. This image echoes what is most likely the oldest prayer of petition to Our Lady that we have evidence thus far, the *Sub tuum praesidium*. It is also possibly the first Marian poem, written on an Egyptian papyrus which was discovered in 1917, and dates well before the Council of Ephesus (AD 431). Expressing 'the cry of distress of persecuted early Christians', it is evidence of Christians having recourse to Mary early in the Church's history:

> We fly to thy patronage,
> O holy Mother of God;
> despise not our petitions in our necessities,
> but deliver us always from all dangers,
> O glorious and blessed Virgin.[357]

Mercy and mantle go together. Mary's mantle defines her overshadowing by divinity and her regal status. She is the maternal sovereign for Christians, Queen of Heaven and Help of Christians. Sometimes, her mantle accompanies her when she appears to the faithful. At her apparition in Knock, Ireland in 1879, she was described by eyewitnesses to have worn a brilliant crown and 'a large cloak of a white colour, hanging in full folds and somewhat loosely around her shoulder, and fastened to the neck'[358].

Succinctly, whether draped over her shoulders or her head (hence, a veil), the mantle is the Virgin Mary's mark, symbolising her uniqueness and privileged status. Deborah Warner wished to show this with her 2012 production. Before the play began, she made her audience recognise Fiona Shaw as the Virgin Mary we are all too familiar with – 'a static mute symbol of motherly perfection draped in pale blue and surrounded by candles'. Encased in a glass box onstage, the audience was encouraged to get up close and take a good look at her; some took selfies with the living icon. Fiona Shaw held an apple and a lily and apple, tokens of the Old Eve and New Eve. A framed picture of William Bouguereau's *Pietà* was placed at her feet. Once the audience returned to their places, the glass display

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[356] Piero della Francesca, *Madonna della Misericordia*, 1460-1462, oil and tempera on panel, 273 x 330 cm, Pinacoteca Comunale, Sansepolcro.
[357] Barry Spurr, *See the Virgin Blest: The Virgin Mary in English Poetry* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 13-14.
[358] 'The Official Testimonies of the Fifteen Witnesses to the Knock Apparition on 21 August 1879', in *Knock Shrine* <http://www.knockshrine.ie> [accessed 18 June 2018]

was lifted, and 'Shaw's Mary discards the robes of her iconic image and reveals the woman she really is – complicated, angry and a firm non-believer.'[359]

5.3 Colm Tóibín's Sock Puppet

The image of the Virgin has always transformed according to the times that have formed her; Mary in *The Testament of Mary* is no different. Her words preach a gospel of unbelief; in all respects, the novella itself is a literary parable of the doubtful veracity of the Gospels and the New Testament. The Apostles are hard-headed ruffians, self-centred and disagreeable men; they are untrustworthy ambassadors for the one they call Christ. Their Gospels are fabricated accounts, long-drawn exaggerations and far from authentic. One of the two men who come to visit Mary, possibly St John, 'scowl[s] impatiently when the story I tell him does not stretch to whatever limits he has ordained.' It is no matter, however:

> I know that he has written of things that neither he saw nor I saw. I know that he has also given shape to what I lived through and he witnessed, and that he has made sure these words will matter, that they will be listened to.[360]

Even her guides contribute to the fabrications. They belittle Mary in their demeaning words, as though they were speaking to a child, telling her that she held Christ's dead body when it was taken down from the cross, and that she was present at the burial, when she really was not:

> You watched us as we covered his body in spices and wound his body in linen cloths and buried him in a sepulchre near the place where he was crucified. But you were not with us, you were in a place where you were protected when he came in a place where you were protected when he came among us three days after his death and spoke to us before he rose to be with his father.[361]

An amusing irony present here is Tóibín's accusations of tampering with the evidence, when he simultaneously does the same thing himself with his own modern fantasy of the Gospels. His own novella is a reworking and tearing apart of the Gospel narratives, a patchwork of anecdotes and episodes which best fit the bill for his story of an embittered, silenced woman who shall be an ambassador for unbelief. And what better woman shall play the

[359] Victoria Sadler, 'Fiona Shaw in 'The Testament of Mary', Barbican Centre', in *The Huffington Post* <http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk> [accessed 03 January 2018]
[360] Tóibín, p. 5.
[361] Tóibín, 101.

part? why, none other but the Mother of Christ herself, icon and model of true Christian faith and piety. It is no conundrum that several Christians took offence at Tóibín's work. Catholic apologist, author and speaker Mark P. Shea does not see Our Lady in the novella, '[b]ecause, of course, the thing about Mary is that the thing is never about Mary.' Mary is the author's 'sock puppet' for evangelising scepticism and atheism.[362] An example of the author's meddling would be the wedding at Cana. Among the wedding guests is Lazarus and his two sisters, a man who is not yet to be raised from the dead in the Johannine Gospel for another nine chapters. Later, Mary informs her son of the 'great danger' he is in, rather than point out the depleted wine as in the original. Jesus moves away before she even finishes speaking, and merely returns cold word to his own mother: 'Woman, what have I to do with thee?'[363] Christ's words at the wedding of Cana have been of great speculation throughout the centuries. These 'supposedly dismissive' words may give one the 'propensity to read the incident domestically or psychologically [which] may obscure its theological point.'[364] According to John McHugh, Protestant polemicists see these words in this manner, for they say that choosing the term 'woman' rather than 'mother' is indicative of a certain coldness of Jesus's side.' On the other hand, Catholic counterparts would declare that Christ is showing courtesy to his mother, although John McHugh sees this as a 'very gratuitous contention':

> Jesus was […] drawing attention away from Mary's blood-relationship with him by addressing her as 'Woman'. And if one objects that on Calvary (Jn 19:25-7) he was certainly regarding her as the mother who gave him birth, is this not begging the question? Perhaps Calvary has a different message too; perhaps Jesus on the cross was thinking of something other than physical ties of blood.[365]

Claudia Setzer adds that the Virgin Mary, along with other women like Mary Magdalene, the Samaritan woman, and Mary and Martha, all 'show some misunderstanding of Jesus that does not interfere with their coming to faith and model discipleship.'[366]

Therefore, what is clear here is that there is more to Christ's words than mere filial contempt. Yet this is of no interest to Tóibín, who finds these words suitable for his figure of

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[362] 'Not Your Mother: An Autopsy on "The Testament of Mary"'
[363] Tóibín, p. 47.
[364] Spurr, p. 13.
[365] John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975), p. 363.
[366] Claudia Setzer, 'Three Odd Couples: Women and Men in Mark and John', in *Mariam, The Magdalen and the Mother*, ed. by Deirdre Good (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 75-94 (p. 87).

a pompous and outrageous Christ who attends the wedding of Cana wearing rich, purple clothes, moving 'as though the clothes belonged to him as of right.'[367]

Nonetheless, contemporary times are now lenient to such literary works and beliefs. Tóibín was worried about any protests or walk-outs that could have happened at the 2011 Dublin production, considering the country's Catholicity. He knew that he was 'playing with fire'.[368] His fears unfounded, things went on smoothly, and surprisingly received small praise by a Church representative:

> One preview night in Dublin, however, something strange happened. I was walking up a side aisle of the theatre […] when I saw a well-known Catholic priest, a moral theologian, sitting at the end of a row. Since I knew him, I felt free to kneel and ask him what in the name of God he was doing at my play. He smiled and said he wanted to see it. Afterwards, he smiled at me again, and said that, while he had enjoyed watching the play, his hearing was not so good and he thought he might have missed some of it. He gave me an enigmatic grin as he passed and went home.

Strange as this exchange of words was for Tóibín, the moral theologian's compliments to the play were a 'subtle way of handling a delicate moment',[369] though one may discern some irony in the Catholic priest's apology that he is hard of hearing. The two men's conversation may also allude to a Church, specifically the Church in Ireland, which has less authority in the wake of controversy and societal changes. The calm after the play is also a nod to this ecclesiastical silence, which is for Tóibín 'a small thing in our evolution as a republic'[370]. Ireland is in a period of change; the platform has now shifted.

Mary's bitter anger and disbelief about the Resurrection are not her words, but Tóibín's. What he perceives to be irrelevant and disappointing false hope is reiterated by the Mother of Christ. She feels assaulted by her guides who reiterate that her son's death was necessary, how it 'has freed mankind from darkness and from sin', and how '[e]veryone in the world will know eternal life.'[371] When she final speaks, she utters what she has kept pent up within her soul all this time, firmly sealing the deal about what she (and ergo her author) truly believes. Tóibín: 'This is about the idea of the personal sacrifice of an

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[367] Tóibín, p.46.
[368] Colm Tóibín, 'We were often silent: Colm Toibin on gay marriage and The Testament of Mary', in *The Sydney Morning Herald* <http://www.smh.com.au> [accessed 04 January 2018]
[369] 'How I wrote Mary's story'
[370] 'We were often silent'
[371] Tóibín, p. 100.

individual, chosen by a group […] It's about the idea that no cause is worth that particular sacrifice.'[372] Hence Mary's following words:

> I was there,' I said. 'I fled before it was over but if you want witnesses then I am one and I can tell you now, when you say that he redeemed the world, I will say that it was not worth it. It was not worth it.[373]

Blasphemous for the devout believer, and brave for the other, these are her final spoken words. The rest of the novella is in her narrative voice, yet she need no longer speak. The author's work is consummated. This book is therefore a 'preparation of a legacy'[374], a final word before her death.

5.4 Our Contemporary Lady

Mary's testimony, vivid and colourful rather than dull and lifeless, 'comes to life, raw, anguished, angry and daringly human'.[375] It is also strikingly modern. Now we can truly see the death of the humble and meek woman of art, poetry, literature and religion. Tóibín's Mary has suffered a deep trauma, and she who spoke so little in the Gospels has now found her voice. No longer shall she be overshadowed by her son and follower. Stephen Romei notes: 'An author interested in the power of silence, he is passionate about letting Mary speak.'[376] She realises however that she has not much time. 'Maybe this woman has not spoken before,' Tóibín remarks, 'and maybe this story is new to her in the telling.' This would explain his Mary's manner of speech:

> It would be done in snatched time by someone utterly traumatised. The very act of speaking would cause her to realise and formulate things which she had been afraid even to think before, and would cause her to remember things which had been too painful up to then.[377]

This new vision of Our Lady did eventually lead to some controversy. Outside the theatre for the Broadway production of the play, on the first preview night, crowds carrying placards and religious icons opposite the theatre protested the production. The show's poster depicted Fiona Shaw's face, a shade of ghostly white, with her mouth gagged by a ghastly

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[372] Stephen Romei, 'Colm Toibin's The Testament of Mary at the STC: a mother's tongue', in *The Australian* <https://www.theaustralian.com.au> [accessed 19 June 2018]
[373] Tóibín, p. 102.
[374] Mary Gordon, 'Blessed Among Women: The Testament of Mary by Colm Toibin', in *New York Times* <http://www.nytimes.com> [accessed 04 January 2018]
[375] 'Colm Toibin's The Testament of Mary at the STC: a mother's tongue'
[376] 'Colm Toibin's The Testament of Mary at the STC: a mother's tongue'
[377] 'Colm Toibin's The Testament of Mary at the STC: a mother's tongue'

crown of thorns, its cruel spines long and pointed.[378] Witty and shrewd, the artwork sent a single message: here was the Mother of God, forcibly silenced by her Son and his following. This was a message which incontrovertibly did not sit well with a few. The author recalls receiving emails by those 'who had been hurt by the play and others which were openly abusive'. Nevertheless, the production continued, and as it had been in Dublin, there were no walk-outs from the theatres or attempts to stop the show.[379]

Although writing about the Mother of God in the most human and secular of ways possible, the tone of the story is not disrespectful towards or mocking of the woman herself. Mary's tone 'is too compassionate for mocking intentions'. Tóibín himself said in an interview: 'I am serious. I am not involved in mockery. I want people to believe me.' The voice of Mary is 'all power, but it is the powerlessness that causes the voice to have such power'. He is also uninterested in entertainment, but 'in hitting the secret spirit within the drama of this.'[380] Tóibín's Mary is a secular woman born from the legacy of other powerful women, women who have inspired her author to create her. They are women like the South African Novel laureate Nadine Gordiner, the poet Sylvia Plath, the French heroine Joan of Arc, and the Greek mythological figures Electra, Medea and Antigone.[381] This Mary, a woman who is more modern than first-century in words and thought, may too be appropriated as an allegory of the modern woman's woes of disempowerment and unrecognition, a tale of fear which swept across the US following the inauguration of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the USA, and which the media decrees with some authenticity through Hulu's tele-series adaptation of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. The spate of sexual harassment and assault allegations in Hollywood, media and other power centres has only increased the discussion on the emancipation of women and the unspoken, private shame that many are burdened to carry, for fear of judgement and abandonment. The *#MeToo* phenomenon, a movement which mushroomed via tweets and retweets on the social network Twitter, allowed women to share their own personal stories of harassment and assault, breaking the taboo of such heinous actions. *The Guardian* has described the anti-harassment movement as a watershed moment, and *Time* magazine celebrated it by naming all of the women who

[378] 'The Testament of Mary', in *New York City Theatre* <https://www.newyorkcitytheatre.com> [accessed 04 January 2018]
[379] 'Colm Tóibín: how I wrote Mary's story'
[380] 'Colm Toibin's The Testament of Mary at the STC: a mother's tongue'
[381] 'Colm Toibin's The Testament of Mary at the STC: a mother's tongue'

shared their stories as Person of the Year, calling them 'The Silence Breakers'.[382] The modern, earthly Mary is what contemporary feminism, and Colm Tóibín believes will resonate more with the women of today. Therein lies the rub between Our Lady and feminism, this conjecture that by elevating this Nazarene young woman to the status of the Theotokos (God-bearer) and Queen of Heaven, the Church has not only denigrated the status of women but has become unattainable to modern women especially.

This hypothesis is explored by Marina Warner, who looked further into the 'social and political origins of 'official' Mariolatry' within the cult of the Virgin Mary and its repercussions of women in her book *Alone of all her sex*.[383] Warner's writing stems from similar origins to those of Colm Tóibín; the beginning of her book is a 'heady mixture of nostalgia and irony'[384], with memories of childhood veneration towards Our Lady, and her agnostic father's belief that the cult of Mary 'was a good religion for a girl'[385]. Warner not only speaks of 'feminine submissiveness' that Mary's *fiat* at the Annunciation apparently epitomises for every woman, but also of her identification with women through the Franciscan order's revolution in Christian thinking on the Incarnation. Although 'her silence, modesty, and self-effacement had previously been extolled by the Fathers and held up as an example to the female sex', it was through St Francis of Assisi that this state became translated into 'a physical and social condition'. The Franciscan spirit of humility etched itself into cult of the Virgin, now giving her the new title of the Madonna of Humility[386]. Follow this with re-imaginings of the Nativity with the Virgin Mother kneeling before her son, and we get Simone de Beauvoir's reflection in *The Second Sex*:

> For the first time in human history the mother kneels before her son; she freely accepts her inferiority. This is the supreme masculine victory, consummated in the cult of the Virgin – it is the rehabilitation of woman through the accomplishment of her defeat.[387]

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[382] Molly Redden, '#MeToo movement name Time magazine Person of the Year', in *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com> [accessed 04 January 2018]
[383] Janet L. Nelson, 'Virgin Territory: Recent historical work on Marian belief and cult', *Religion*, 10. 1, (1980), pp. 206-225 (p. 214).
[384] Johanna Wolgast, 'Virgin and Maid', *The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal*, 9. 3 (1990), pp. 25-34 (p. 25).
[385] Warner, p. xx.
[386] Warner, pp. 177-179
[387] Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. by H.M. Parshley, Everyman's Library (London: David Campbell Publishers, 2000), p. 181.

Where feminism speaks for the rise and empowerment of women, subservient female figures cannot be reconciled with their teachings. Other feminine virtues extolled through Mary, those of gentleness, sweetness, and innocence, were only to be chastised and disposed of, for they bear harsh consequence for women:

> Modern images of the Virgin Mary are vapid and savourless, especially when compared to the exalted matriarchs of early Christian art. But it is the very cult of the Virgin's "femininity," expressed by her sweetness, submissiveness, and passivity that permits her to survive, a goddess in a patriarchal society.'[388]

Marian dogmas like the Immaculate Conception only complicates matters even further, as Warner and other feminists like Mary Daly are warrant to believe. This dogma, proclaiming the Virgin Mary as 'the only human creature ever to have been preserved from all taint of original sin'[389], yet without impairing her free will, makes her a most perfect created being, surpassing the beatitude of Adam and Eve before the Fall. This, however, exempts Mary from the penalties of the Fall, such as death (a matter which the Church has remained silent on when proclaiming the dogma of Mary's Assumption), as well as the pains of childbirth that cursed Eve, hence truly setting Mary apart from the rest of humanity by denigrating it:

> As the icon of the ideal, the Virgin affirms the inferiority of the human lot. Soaring above the men and women who pray for her, the Virgin conceived without sin underscores rather than alleviates pain and anxiety and accentuates the feeling of sinfulness.'[390]

This desire to abandon, as is perceived to be, such loftiness of devotion and the need to humanise Our Lady has also found its way into the Church. Charlene Spretnak explores in her book *Missing Mary* the polarisation developing over Mary. She observes the Catholic left, the 'progressives' who 'defend the radical shrinkage of Mary to strictly biblical delineations as a rational, modern step', and the Catholic right, who are fighting for Marian traditions and beliefs to be upheld and promoted.[391] Where a Church has always held Our Lady to be 'an expansive bridge between humans and the Divine', such a devaluing, if not truly, a banishment of what has made Mary who she is, modern times have now crept in and altered the image to be more acceptable and updated. Spretnak documents this changing scene, where theologians, writers, the faithful and the feminists are rediscovering

[388] Warner, p. 191.
[389] Warner, p. 236.
[390] Warner, p. 254.
[391] Spretnak, p. 1.

and reclaiming Mary as a woman who has been liberated to become a true human sister ready to take 'her place in the Catholic communion of saints, having no greater intercessory powers than her saintly peers.' There is even talk about redesigning the Holy Rosary to make it more feminist, progressive, and focused on biblical women: the 'Feminist' Rosary, a form of prayer that may be embraced by feminists and reformers.[392] Arguments of feminist progressives quoted by Spretnak coincide with those of Marina Warner and other feminists like Els Maeckelberghe who summarises their propositions in her discursive book *Desperately Seeking Mary*. She mentions feminist writers like E.A. Johnson, who mourns the loss of the historical Mary and believes that the Marian tradition has 'truncated'[393] feminine fulfilment and wholeness, and the eccentric Mary Daly, who warns that the proclamation of the doctrine of the Assumption in 1950 was not unhelpful, but also denigrated women with the elevation of Mary.[394] *The Testament of Mary* presents a Mary who shall fit pretty well into this circle of progressive, feminist and faithful sisterhood. Her scaling down to a housewife, 'albeit a pious forerunner of the Church', is truly '[s]o much more rational!'[395]

5.5 Artemis Reformed

An immigrant in Ephesus, there is practically no respite or joy for Mary, save the few memories she treasures and her new Ephesian friend Farina. She is wary of her at first and avoids the water that she leaves out for her. She feels rather too glad to inform her visitors that she spares no thought on the woman and her identity, although this cold attitude soon leaves her, and Farina becomes a good friend. She accompanies her to the Temple, where she is awe-struck by the goddess Artemis, a statue that 'was radiating abidance and bounty, fertility and grace, and beauty maybe, even beauty'. She is inspired and feels the poison in her heart ebbing away. '[S]he who has seen more' and 'suffered more because she has lived more' comforts Mary in the sheltered confines of her Temple. Mary even buys a small statue of the goddess from a silversmith to lift her spirits and whisper to at night[396]. Tóibín's juxtaposition and foreshadowing between the two is clear-cut: here is the new mother-goddess visitng the old, and unknowingly sees before her the cult that, in future, shall be

[392] Spretnak, p. 3, p.7.
[393] E. A. Johnson, 'The Marian Tradition and the Reality of Women', *Horizons*, 12. 1 (1985), 116-135 (p. 126).
[394] Mary Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. 124.
[395] Spretnak, p. 48.
[396] Tóibín, p. 14.

built around her, a following that shall call her the Theotokos, Mother of Good Counsel, Seat of Wisdom, Mystical Rose, Tower of David, Queen of Angels, and all other titles that she is hailed under to this day. The novella ends with Mary back in the Temple before 'the great goddess Artemis, bountiful with her arms outstretched and her many breasts waiting to nurture those who some towards her.'[397] She has found her refuge. The woman in prayer before the goddess shall soon have many others at prayer before her. Catholicism and Orthodoxy, as tempting as it is to claim by Protestants, do not consider the Virgin Mary as a goddess, as some people are errant to believe. Saint Augustine distinguishes two kinds of *servitus*, that which is due to man (dulia), and service 'pertaining to the worship of God'. Our Lady comes in between, for the veneration that is shown towards her is 'hyperdulia'[398], hence occupying 'the principal mediating position, as a creature belonging both to earth and heaven'[399]. She is an intercessor who lays before God our prayers and petitions and bestows His graces to us. Mediation is the 'most constant theme'[400] of the Marian cult, and her face is that which is most like Christ's, as observed by Dante[401], yet all the same, discussions on the links between Mary began to resurface with second wave feminism. The errant concept of Our Lady as a mother-goddess had driven fear into the hearts of the English reformers, giving them a greater zeal to end the plague of idolatry that had infested the land. Iconoclasm, the 'central sacrament of the reform'[402], so writes Eamon Duffy led to the literal executions of multiple images of Our Lady, who as a 'target of unusual violence in England'. During the 1600s, her images were brought from Marian shrines and were publicly beheaded, slashed at, pierced, amputated and burnt, in hopes 'to destroy the images and idols within people's minds.'[403] Claiming the Virgin Mother is under the guise of a goddess may be because of her being so approachable to the faithful; her shrines around the world are visited by the millions, and her image is a loved icon that is found in virtually every faithful's home. The Rosary is a beloved Christian's prayer, and hundreds of churches have

[397] Tóibín, p. 103.
[398] 'Dulia', in *New Advent* <http://www.newadvent.org> [accessed 05 January 2018]
[399] Warner, p. xxii.
[400] Warner, p. xxiii.
[401] *Paradiso* 32. 85-86
[402] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-1580*, 2nd edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 480.
[403] Waller, p. 9.

been dedicated to her. In the words of R. Radford Ruether, 'Mary was the one you talked to if you wanted to pray'.[404] Sidney Callahan argues:

> [The] worship of the great mother goddess and female pagan deities are not viewed as a means to subordinate women, but rather as a symbolic enhancement of female power and a validation of women's experience. According to most feminists when God was, or is, or shall be, symbolised with female images, ordinary women in a society will be better off for it.[405]

Ruether, although wary of the introduction of the Goddess into Christianity, finds herself grounded in traditional theology which excels the Virgin as a powerful image and brings the belief of a Mary-goddess to redundancy. She acknowledges the 'multifarious images and symbols' of the Mediterranean image of the Goddess appearing in the Old Testament and believes that they developed and became appropriated for the image of Christ's mother. She also claims a link between the Isis cult and Marian cult in third century Egypt. However, her disapproval of introducing the Goddess into Christianity is linked to her fear that it will limit women to the old cliché of being a symbol of nature. Rather, Mary 'embodies the co-creatorship between God and humanity'. She who is the original wholeness of humanity reveals man's free will in union with God's. With Our Lady, a patriarchal image of God can be escaped, while she 'becomes the human being in whom God shows how s/he can be conceived.'[406]

Some may still question the ontology of the Virgin Mary: is she the Mother of God, or a docile goddess? Colm Tóibín readily hints the sneaking in of a goddess into the monotheistic, patriarchal Christian through the integration of archaic goddess cults into the Marian cult, while treatises in feminism will adamantly describe the Virgin as a domesticated goddess, tamed to become 'a pale derivative symbol disguising the conquered Goddess'.[407] Fr Manfred Hauke illuminates the brush between the two with Our Lady of Guadalupe, a miraculous image whose appearance in Mexico not far from a destroyed temple dedicated to the mother goddess Tonantzin had led to 'the greatest mass conversion in the history of the Church'. As spoken of earlier, the image has roused theories of the

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[404] R. Radford Reuther, *Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian* (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), pp. 111-112.
[405] Sidney Callahan, "Mary and the Feminist Movement: from December 18, 1993", in *America Magazine*, 1993 <https://www.americamagazine.org> [accessed 31 May 2018]
[406] Els Maeckelberghe, *Desperately Seeking Mary: A Feminist Appropriation of a Traditional Religious Symbol*, 2nd edn (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing, 1994), pp. 17-18.
[407] Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (London: The Women's Press, 1984), p. 84.

Church reincarnating an ancient Mexican earth mother because of the motifs found within the image that pertain Aztec gods, such as the sun, moon, stars and serpent: her starry mantle, the sun rays that emanate around her, and the crescent moon on which she places one foot, a symbol of a serpent god with a fearful bloodlust, raving human sacrifice, to which thousands were sacrificed to. Mary appears greater than all of this,

> [a]nd yet Mary is no goddess, for she folds her hands together in prayer and bows her head before on who is greater than she. She wears no mask in order to conceal her godly nature – as do the Aztec gods – but quite openly displays her human status.
>
> What we see here is […] the heritage and longings of humanity […] acknowledged yet simultaneously transformed and directed toward God. […] Veneration of Mary signifies the end of the idolization of creaturely values and certainly the day of judgement for any sort of the pantheistic self-idolization. Mary points human beings toward Christ.[408]

[408] Fr. Manfred Hauke, 'Mary in Feminist Theology; Mother of God or Domesticated Goddess', in *Ignatius Insight* <http://www.ignatiusinsight.com> [accessed 05 January 2018]

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Subtly if not implicitly, Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* is a story moulded not only on the regal figure of Hermione, a woman who acquires 'increased moral authority even while […] being demoted and persecuted', but also on fragmented memories of Marian devotion.[409] The inherited remains of the Old Religion within the play are described by Ruth Vanita as 'Mariological memory', whereupon Marian myth acts as a form of criticism on the newly-reformed patriarchal ideals of family and ideals deemed proper for women in Protestant England. As an example, Hermione's autonomous decision to live away from her husband and live in a women's community posits an alternative to the greatly encouraged married life, as well as recalling the same-sex celibate communities of monks and nuns 'often attacked by Protestant reformers for [their] supposedly unnatural character'.[410] Her words in the play show her to be a dignified woman of great strength before her adversaries and misfortunes[411], with great certainty that divine powers favour her in her wronged state:

> 'But thus, if pow'rs divine
> Behold our human actions (as they do)',
> I doubt not then but innocence shall make
> False accusation blush, and tyranny
> Tremble at patience.[412]

Upon her return and 'resurrection' in Act V, 'the language […] is full of unmistakeable Mariological connections'.[413] One gentleman, echoing the Marian cults of devotions of England past, describes Hermione as a woman 'not to be equall'd''[414], a creature who,

> Would she begin a sect might quench the zeal
> Of all professor else, make proselytes
> Of who she but bid follow.[415]

[409] Ruth Vanita, 'Mariological Memory in *The Winter's Tale* and Henry VIII', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 40. 2 (2000), 311-337 (p. 311).
[410] Vanita, 311-337 (p. 314).
[411] Waller, p. 174.
[412] *The Winter's Tale*, III. 2. 28-32.
[413] Waller, p. 177.
[414] *The Winter's Tale*, V, 1. 100.
[415] *The Winter's Tale*, V, 1. 107-109.

The women too will follow her:

> Women will love her, that she is a woman
> More worth than any man; men, that she is
> The rarest of all women.[416]

Likewise, Hermione's hiding at Paulina's 'removed house'[417] and the miracle of her statue coming to life also deeply resonates with accounts of statues, images and vestments hidden away from the destructive and auctioning hands of reformers, and the miracle stories of saints and statues coming to life before the faithful.[418] Her whole being is quite plausibly Shakespeare's way of reforming the Virgin Mary of old into a wholly new woman who may side-step the censors' quills and still play her part in theatre. Gary Waller writes:

'In Shakespeare's plays of redemption through female figures, it is as if a medieval Madonna has been transformed and reintegrated into popular culture, no longer explicitly associated with the Virgin or one of her "madonnine" image, but humanized, embodying a more fragile but concrete humanity.'[419]

This spirit of a new kind of reformation in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (as well as his other plays) is what may best describe the character which binds together the oeuvres especially selected for examination in this dissertation, a work which has striven to develop an understanding of the literary reformation which the Blessed Virgin has undergone in early twentieth and twenty-first century literature. Naturally, this literary rewriting of the Virgin Mary has its own historical backing, where both writer and theologian have perpetually reworked the image of Our Lady up till the present day, giving us a woman with an image far greater than her humble beginnings as a humble Jewish maiden in the Gospels. From the virgin mother of Christ to the Church's declaration of her as *Mater Ecclesiae* (Mother of the Church) at the Second Vatican Council – now recently inserted into the Roman calendar by Pope Francis as the Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church)[420] – Mary's influence continues to be an irresistible force in the contemporary

[416] *The Winter's* Tale, V, 1. 110-112.
[417] *The Winter's Tale*, V, 1. 106.
[418] Vanita, 331-337 (p. 320).
[419] Waller, p. 165.
[420] Devin Watkins, 'Pope institutes new celebration of Mary, Mother of Church', in *Vatican News* <https://vaticannews.va/en> [accessed 25 June 2018]

world; on the occasion of the Centenary of Our Lady of Fátima in 2017, the Shrine of Fátima boasted a number '9.4 million pilgrims who participated in the 14.326 official and private celebrations organized in the celebratory areas of the Shrine of Fatima', a number which 'exceeded all expectations'.[421]

Mary's added presence in early twentieth and twenty-first century literature reveals the enticing power that draws authors to have her included within the story, even if done subconsciously due to her shared qualities with myth and women. With these literary women heavily or lightly subdued with 'Marian memories', the Virgin Mary's presence maintains a good stronghold in literature without any sign of abating. Eliot's poetry and Toíbín's novella are deliberate transformations of the Virgin, who is made to suit her author's own personal purpose, either salvaging women and heralding salvation, or acting as the oppressive nurturer. Joyce and Woolf's Madonnas are subtler. In the case of Woolf, the Marian imagery contained in her works is less of an affirmation of the Virgin's presence in Mrs Ramsay and Clarissa Dalloway than it is a subconscious underlying of imagery typically and heavily associated with the Blessed Mother, such as maternity, womanhood and regeneration. The Virgin's appearance in later works such as *The Testament of Mary* attests to the fact, as John Gatta commented on Mary's presence in Anglo-Protestant spaces of the United States, that she 'refuses to vacate'[422] her role in literature, despite Warner's disheartening conclusion that the Virgin's legend 'will be emptied of moral significance' and ability to heal and harm.[423] By virtue of Colm Toíbín's re-imagining of Mary of Nazareth as silenced, angry and pushed around by the Apostles, his work may allow one to place the novella in the genre of feminine dystopia, in conjunction with the burgeoning discourse in media on hearing women's voices.[424] Thus, Mary displays her power not only in maintaining her literary space but also acting as a vehicle with which conversations may be started and attention is drawn to pressing issues. For example, the dichotomous virgin-whore motif does not retain itself to the Catholic Ireland of the 1900s in Joyce's works, but renews itself

[421] 'Number of pilgrims who visited the Shrine of Fatima in 2017 exceeded all the expectations', in *Official Webpage Shrine of Fatima* <https://www.fatima.pt/en> [accessed June 25 2018]
[422] Gatta, p. 138.
[423] Warner, p. 339.
[424] 'BBC to mark 100 years since women won the vote in landmark Hear Her season', in *BBC* <http://www.bbc.co.uk> [accessed 25 June 2018]

into a more vivid image in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, revealing the persistence of such dichotomous views that still shape societies:

> The modesty costumes worn by the women of Gilead are derived from Western religious iconography — the Wives wear the blue of purity, from the Virgin Mary; the Handmaids wear red, from the blood of parturition, but also from Mary Magdalene.[425]

Subtle or subconscious literary appearances of the Blessed Mother have also been sustained unto the present day precisely because of the universality of her personality and how – to use Barry Spurr's words – 'she answers so immediately' to the needs of authors who aspire to create women who are distinguished and captivate the readers. Contemporary children will even find strikingly Marian qualities in one of their best loved characters, Lily Potter, the mother of the renowned boy wizard Harry Potter. Like Mrs Ramsay and Clarissa Dalloway, she too is heavily associated with flowers. Her name, 'Lily', which can be pessimistically associated with the tomb considering she is murdered by Lord Voldemort, may also be interpreted as beauty, elegance and sweetness.[426] It is also the flower of Our Lady, a most holy symbol of purity which befits Lily as she is so heavily considered to be so by both her orphaned son and Severus Snape, whose unrequited love for her lasts until his last breath.[427] Harry Potter, the Christ-figure who defeats the ancient serpent in the form of Lord Voldemort, shares ever so much with his mother as Christ does with His own mother. Albus Dumbledore noted that while Harry resembles his father, 'his deepest nature is much more like his mother's.'[428] Love, a virtue which comes part and parcel with the image of the Blessed Mother, is also the virtue which defines Lily and protects her son even beyond the grave:

> Your mother died to save you. [Voldemort] didn't realise that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark […] to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection for ever. It is in your very skin. Quirrell, full of hatred, greed and ambition, sharing his soul with Voldemort, could not touch you for this reason. It was agony to touch a person marked by something so good.[429]

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[425] Margaret Atwood, 'Margaret Atwood on What 'The Handmaid's Tale' Means in the Age of Trump ', in *New York Times* <https://www.nytimes.com> [accessed 25 June 2018]
[426] 'Lily, Petunia and the language of flowers', in *Pottermore* <https://www.pottermore.com> [accessed 25 June 2018]
[427] J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007), pp. 551-552.
[428] *The Deathly Hallows*, p. 549.
[429] J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2001), p. 216.

Today, as it has always been, containing the Virgin Mary as an ancient relic remains an impossible task, if not one that is completely absurd, which this dissertation has demonstrated with the works of distinguished writers. The love and reverence which she receives burns like a blaze which cannot be extinguished. Candles continue to burn at her shrines, testimonies of hundreds of thousands of prayers whispered daily. Charlene Spretnak sees the Virgin Mary in a new world where she is allowed to flourish rather than be demythologised. She may now take her place among women not only as Queen, but also as a woman who is, like Queen Hermione, 'not to be equall'd' because of who she truly is.[430]

This Marian flourishing will also maintain itself in English literature. Measures to stamp out her memory by burning and destroying her images during the Reformation had torn a large wound in literature, forcing the Virgin Mary to hide in the texts, never fully revealing herself until much later. Ironically the iconoclasm of the past only served to be counterproductive, as it gave birth to a new language of iconography. The works of Eliot, Joyce, Woolf and Toíbín give readers the means to not only see the Blessed Mother again, but to also draw a literary map of the Virgin Mary's intricate travels in English literature. Indubitably, this dissertation is but the tip of the iceberg of something greater which merits its own study, with both historians and literary scholars working together to illustrate a more detailed picture of the literary fads and personal preoccupations which shape the literary Virgin Mary. To borrow a popular metaphor among Catholics about Mary's complete dependence on Christ for her beauty, as the moon reflects the sun's light[431], so too does the literary Virgin Mary reflect the light of her authors. It is up to us to perceive this light and listen closely, that we may see and hear her voice.

[430] Spretnak, p. 245.
[431] Jennifer Fulwiler, 'Beautiful like the moon', in *Jennifer Fulwiler* <http://jenniferfulwiler.com> [accessed 25 June 2018]

Works of Art

Figure 1 Leonardo da Vinci, *Virgin of the Rocks*, 1483-1486, oil on panel, 199 x 122 cm, Louvres, Paris.

Figure 2 Upper Rhenish Master, *Garden of Paradise*, c. 1410, 26.3 x 33.4 cm, Städel Museum, Frankfurt.

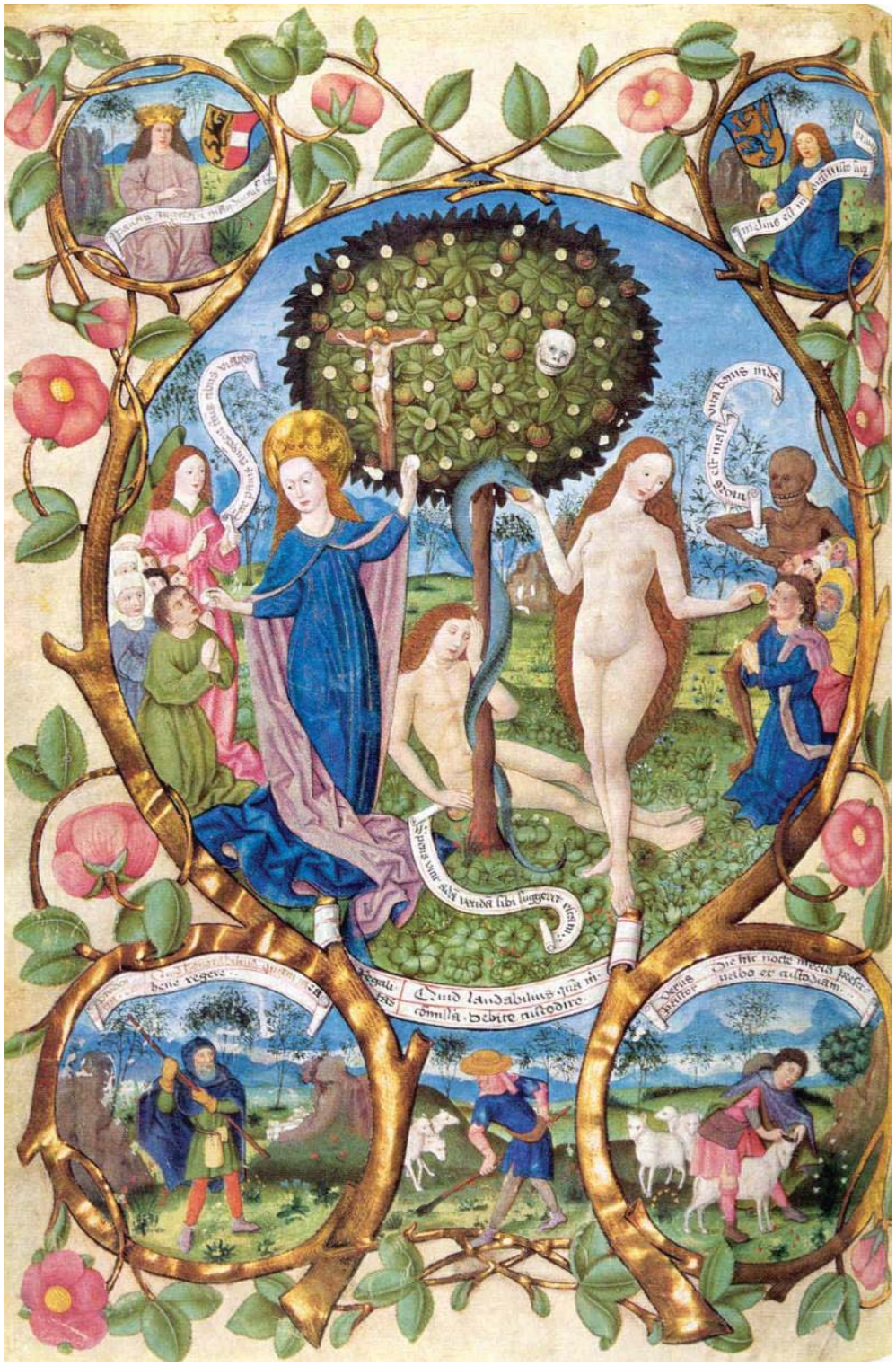

Figure 3 Berthold Fertmyr, *Tree of Life and Death flanked by Eve and Mary-Ecclesia*, 1489, paint and gold leaf on vellum, 38.29 x 28.7 cm, Bavarian State Library, Munich.

Figure 4 Edvard Munch, *Madonna*, 1894, oil on canvas, 90 x 68 cm, Munch Museum, Oslo.

Figure 5 Raphael, *The Marriage of the Virgin*, 1504, oil on round-headed panel, 174 x 121 cm, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

Figure 6 Alonso Cano, *Saint Bernard and the Virgin*, c. 1657-1660, oil on canvas, 267 x 185 cm, Prado Museum, Madrid.

Figure 7 Pedro Machuca, *The Virgin and the Souls of Purgatory*, 1517, oil on poplar panel, 167 x 135 cm, Prado Museum, Madrid.

Figure 8 Albrecht Dürer, *Christ taking leave of his Mother*, c. 1507, 29.8 x 21 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 9 Caravaggio, *Death of the Virgin*, c.1601-6, oil on canvas, 369 x 245 cm, Louvre, Paris.

Figure 10 Piero della Francesca, *Madonna della Misericordia*, 1460-1462, oil and tempera on panel, 273 x 330 cm, Pinacoteca Comunale, Sansepolcro.

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