

MONSTERS IN OUR MINDS:
THE MYTH OF INFANTICIDE
AND THE MURDEROUS MOTHER
IN THE CULTURAL PSYCHE

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Originality Statement

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Abstract

If, as author Toni Morrison believes, we tell stories about what we find most terrifying, then our cultural narratives suggest an overwhelming preoccupation with the murderous mother – the monster in our minds. This dissertation examines some of the most powerful and enduring stories told about the murderous mother and considers how these stories are shaped by the unconscious fears and fantasies that dominate the cultural psyche. Revolving around the idea of infanticide as an 'imaginary' crime, this dissertation uncovers the psychoanalytic foundations of the obsessive telling and consumption of stories of maternal child-murder in Western culture and contends that infanticide narratives can be read as symptoms of psycho-cultural dis(-)ease. Underlying all stories about the murderous mother is an unconscious fear of infanticide and fantasy of maternal destructiveness that is repressed in the individual psyche. These fears and fantasies are expressed in our cultural narratives. Chapter 1 examines fairytales as the literary form that most clearly elaborates individual fears and psychic conflict and locates the phantasmic murderous mother within psychoanalytic narratives of individuation. Chapter 2 shows how individual fears and fantasies of maternal monstrosity are transferred to society and revealed in the myths through which our culture is transmitted. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the particular neuroses of ancient Greek society and early modern culture and consider stories of the murderous mother that most powerfully reflect anxieties of maternal origin and fantasies of maternal power. Chapters 5 and 6 shift to a contemporary setting and consider stories that reveal, in differing ways, how the murderous mother haunts the cultural psyche. Examining a variety of texts and drawing material from a spectrum of disciplines, including law, literature, criminology, theology, philosophy, and medicine, this dissertation concludes that it is only by exposing the underpinnings of our cultural stories about the murderous mother that we can hope to break free from the unconscious attitudes that imprison us. Emerging from this study is an original and important theoretical framework concerning conceptualisations of infanticide, the ways in which we imagine maternal child-murder and the limits of that imagination, and how we might escape the murderous maternal monster buried deep in the labyrinths of the mind.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to Eve and John, for their unfaltering love and support and for always letting me shine, and to the memory of Joy – forever in our hearts.

Acknowledgments

*Dear Muse, show me the sacred stream ...
offering vision to the heart, passion
to the mind ...
Support me in those healing waters,
Plummet me one depth more than I can bear;
give me aspiration, give me tranquillity;
give me ... the curiosity
to go on and on and on ...*

*“But First ...”
Diane Fahey
Metamorphoses*

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***We are not provided with wisdom,
we must discover it for ourselves,
after a journey through the wilderness
which no one can take for us, an effort
which no one can spare us, for our
wisdom is the point of view from which
we come at last to regard the world....***

**-Marcel Proust,
*Within a Budding Grove***

***We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time***

**-T.S. Eliot,
Four Quartets
'Little Gidding'**

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Prologue: 'Monsters in Our Minds'

[T]ry to imagine your life being spread out, ripped to pieces, examined, opinions cast, character assassinated, your every word, action, thought, doubted, and you're told you don't know yourself. Add to that, because of all of the above becoming the most HATED woman alive ... You can't. I now live with that every day. I endure all of this knowing that vindication will one day be mine. This is the last time I'll state – I did not kill my children¹

These are the words of Kathleen Folbigg, the thirty-seven year old Australian mother convicted in October 2003 of murdering her four children aged between 19 days and 19 months.² These words – which are probably as difficult for us to read as they were for Folbigg to write – are from a four-page letter written to her foster sister from the confines of Mulawa Women's Prison at Silverwater in Sydney. The letter, which was published in part by the *Daily Telegraph*, allows us some insight into the thoughts and feelings of a mother who maintains her innocence in the face of scathing and relentless public criticism. But the

¹ L. Knowles, "I'm the most HATED woman alive – Letter from the baby killer", *Daily Telegraph*, 9 July 2003, p.1; emphasis in text.

² A jury made up of six men and six women - who were told by Justice Graham Barr not to "judge this case with your hearts, but with your minds" - took just under nine hours to find Folbigg guilty of murdering Patrick, Sarah and Laura between 1991 and 1999, guilty of the manslaughter of Caleb in 1989, and guilty of inflicting grievous bodily harm on Patrick in 1990. L.Knowles, "Jury retires in Folbigg case", *Daily Telegraph*, 21 May 2003, p.7. In November 2004 Folbigg was sentenced to 40 years imprisonment, a sentence labelled "too harsh" by David Jackson QC. G Jacobsen, "Child Killer's Sentence Too Harsh: Lawyer", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27-28 November 2004, p.9.

letter provides no sense of closure for a “nation [that] has been struggling to make sense of the bewildering crim[e] of [maternal child-murder]”³ and the events surrounding the death of Folbigg’s children.

“[How could] someone commit such monstrous acts?”⁴ the public demanded to know. “How could she have done it?”⁵ “How could a mother have placed her hand or a pillow over the mouths of her four babies and ended their lives? It is a stomach-churning question asked whenever a mother murders her own children”.⁶ The media was determined to satisfy public curiosity. The case, labelled ‘incomprehensible’, ‘baffling’, and ‘dreadful’, became the subject of what can only be described as a media frenzy.

Throughout her seven-week trial, Folbigg made front-page headlines in Australian newspapers and attracted the attention of the international community. Who could forget the haunting images? - the Sydney Morning Herald’s front-page life-size colour pictures of Folbigg’s four dead children positioned under the heading “Dead by their

³ A. Manne, “Anatomy of a multiple killer”, *Age*, 7 June 2003, p.9.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Australian*, “Four deaths we must remember”, 24 May 2003, p.16.

⁶ L. Milligan, “Killing them softly”, *Australian*, 24 May 2003, p.21.

Delvecchio writes: “It’s the kind of thing we prefer to forget ever happens. But the gruesome news stories of children killed by their [mothers] ... are inescapably etched on our minds. They haunt us not only because of their inherent brutality, but because we can’t make any sense of them”. J Delvecchio, “The kiss of death”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 September 1994, p.13. Criminologist Denise Weelands also comments: “Any crime involving the death of young children resonates deeply with the public and whips up a great deal of emotion”, cited in Milligan, p.21.

mother's hand".⁷ Who could forget the statistics? - that Folbigg is Australia's worst convicted maternal child-murderess or that the odds of four babies dying of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (as Folbigg claimed) in the same family are "a staggering one in one trillion".⁸ Who could forget how those infants died? - a forensic pathologist told the jury that smothering a baby takes several minutes – "[t]he babies do struggle".⁹ Who could forget the video, played in court, of youngest daughter Laura in the last days before her death? – "Her pretty blue eyes ... She is a picture of childhood innocence, her mouth and cheeks covered with ice cream".¹⁰ Who could forget the grieving husband and father who referred to his children as his

⁷ L. Glendinning, "Dead by their mother's hand", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 May 2003, p1.

⁸ L. Knowles, "She killed them all", *Daily Telegraph*, 22 May 2003, p.1. Sudden Infant Death Syndrome is known by the acronym 'SIDS'. SIDS is defined as "the sudden and unexpected death of an apparently healthy infant, typically occurring [within twelve months of birth], and not explained by careful postmortem studies". C. Goldenberg, "Sudden Infant Death Syndrome as a Mask for Murder: Investigating and Prosecuting Infanticide", *Southwestern University Law Review*, 28, 1999, pp.599-625 at p.601. SIDS is still highly controversial in both scientific and legal fields. For more, see S.W. Kairys et al, "Distinguishing Sudden Infant Death Syndrome from Child Abuse Fatalities", *Pediatrics*, 107(2), 2001, pp.437-441; M.A. Green, "Time to Put 'Cot Death' to Bed?", *British Medical Journal*, 319, 1999, pp.697-698; S. Limerick, "Not Time to Put Cot Death to Bed", *British Medical Journal*, 319, 1999, pp.698-700; G. Little and J. Brooks, "Accepting the Unthinkable", *Pediatrics*, 94(5), 1994, pp.748-749. Commenting on the unlikelihood of SIDS as the cause of death, Crown prosecutor Mark Tedeschi QC said: "one day some piglets may be born with wings and might fly", cited in L. Milligan, "Kathleen Folbigg – murderous mother or just very unlucky?", *Australian*, 15 May 2003, p.3.

⁹ J. Albrechtsen, "Mums must not get away with murder", *Australian*, 28 May 2003, p.13.

¹⁰ L. Knowles, "Little Laura's final hours", *Daily Telegraph*, 23 May 2003.

“gorgeous little bubb[ies]”?¹¹ – “my most humble thanks go to 12 people whom I have never formally met, who today share the honour of having helped set four beautiful souls free. Free to rest in peace finally”.¹² Who could forget reports of a mother who “laughed and joked at Laura’s wake and returned to the gym the first Monday after her cremation”?¹³

Folbigg was portrayed as a selfish woman who “was obsessed with herself – particularly with working out at the gym and going out ... [and] about her appearance – [she] dyed her hair to reflect her mood”.¹⁴ Prosecutor Mark Tedeschi, QC, argued that Folbigg “was deeply resentful of the intrusion her children had on her life, in particular on her sleep, her ability to go to the gym, and her ability to socialise including going out dancing”¹⁵ and that “[s]he resolved this by killing [them]. She was totally obsessed with her own needs, wants and desires”.¹⁶ Folbigg was labelled a “callous mother whose babies never stood a

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Glendinning, “Dead by their mother’s hand”, p.6.

¹³ Knowles, “Little Laura’s final hours”. See also L. Knowles, “Mother laughing at dead baby’s wake”, *Daily Telegraph*, 11 April 2003.

Compare these reports with a statement by a friend who said that Folbigg “was crying, shaking, sometimes she could hardly stand up she was crying so much” [L. Glendinning, “Folbigg close to baby Laura, gym friends testify”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 May 2003, p.5.

¹⁴ Knowles, “Little Laura’s final hours”.

¹⁵ L. Knowles, “Mum ‘resented’ murdered children”, *Daily Telegraph*, 1 April 2003.

¹⁶ Knowles, “Little Laura’s final hours”.

chance”,¹⁷ “narcissistic”¹⁸ and “just plain evil”.¹⁹ Her own foster sister branded Folbigg a “monster”.²⁰

Friends and family testified against Folbigg at her trial and spoke to journalists. A neighbour, Millard Close, said that Folbigg always had a “faraway look in her eye”.²¹ Another neighbour said that she was “an odd character who repeatedly watched ‘The Hand that Rocked the Cradle’ on video”.²² The most damning testimony came from her now estranged husband, Craig Folbigg, who sat in court with his new fiancée. Craig told reporters how he “fell to pieces but she [Kathleen] didn’t seem to”²³ after the death of their first son. Craig recounted how after the death of their second child “the world stopped for [him], but Kathy just got on with it”.²⁴ He claimed that on the day of their third child’s death “Kathleen pinned the child to her in a bear hug while slapping her bottom, then threw the child at him, telling him to ‘deal with her’”.²⁵ Craig remembered that he

¹⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, “Monstress – the diary of a child murderer”, 22 May 2003, p.31.

¹⁸ Manne, “Anatomy of a multiple killer”, p.9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* Albrechtsen writes: “Sob sisters refuse to admit that some women are evil enough to kill their babies. When Kathleen Folbigg screamed: ‘My baby! Something is wrong with my baby!’ she knew exactly what was wrong. She had just smothered her 19-day-old son Caleb. Over the next 10 years she smothered Patrick, Sarah and Laura ... She was a mother and we prefer our killers to be strangers” (“Mums must not get away with murder”, p.13).

²⁰ Knowles, “I’m the most HATED woman alive”, p.1.

²¹ L. Milligan, “Mother guilty of murdering children”, *Australian*, 22 May 2003.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Knowles, “She killed them all”, p.1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

was “aghast”²⁶ when Kathleen wanted to have another baby but made no mention of the fact that he urged her to have another baby almost immediately after the death of their first child. After the death of their fourth child, Kathleen took steps to end her marriage. But her nightmare was only beginning.

Craig Folbigg found, and read, his wife’s diary – an A5 notebook covered in pictures of teddy bears and angelic children – in which she wrote her deepest and most personal thoughts. Reading what were essentially the fears and frustrations of a woman struggling to cope with the demands of motherhood,²⁷ Craig believed that he had stumbled across enough evidence to incriminate his wife for the deaths of their children - “I had had the odd suspicion but had always faltered with it. I talked to people after the death of my children and I was, I guess, waiting for people to say something to me. It was too horrible to think of”.²⁸ He gave the diary to the police. The prosecution case relied on the diary (and three others which were found later) to show Folbigg’s involvement in the deaths of her children.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Folbigg wrote that she had “dark moods” and that at times she felt like “the worst mother on Earth”, (Milligan, “Mother guilty of murdering children”). Folbigg’s close friend Karen Hall stated: “She did not have a lot of people she could confide in and her diaries were the only way she could confide – you write down things that just pop into your head. They were nothing but motherly frustration – show me a parent that doesn’t have that”, (Milligan, “Mother guilty of murdering children”).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Defence counsel, Peter Zahra SC, accused Craig Folbigg of being “biased - downplaying favourable matters which probably took place, but putting a sinister edge on them”.²⁹ At trial, Craig confessed to altering his version of events surrounding the death of his third child which he had earlier recounted in a police statement. He did so after reconciling with his wife briefly in 1999. When she finally left him after the death of their youngest child, he went to the police with his wife’s diary. In a conversation taped by police, Craig Folbigg says he “reported her because he was ‘so full of hate and spite ... I’ll go and tell some ... horrible things about you [so] that the police think you did it”.³⁰ Folbigg’s good friend Karen Hall “believes the Crown portrayal of Folbigg was a Craig Folbigg fabrication constructed out of spite when his wife left him”.³¹ In another conversation intercepted by police, Craig admitted using his children’s deaths for sympathy so that he could sell more cars in his job at a car dealership.

In the letter to her foster sister, Folbigg argues that the use of her diaries to incriminate her was preposterous:

They’re mine, not yours, not anyone’s –
mine. What I was feeling and what I wrote
and all I’ll say is everyone has no right to
be so presumptuous as to know what I
meant or was saying. They are not literal,

²⁹ L. Milligan, “Bias warning in dead babies trial”, *Australian*, 20 May 2003, p.5.

³⁰ Milligan, “Mother guilty of murdering children”.

³¹ *Ibid.*

definitely not a window to my brain – how ridiculous. They were a place for me to offload and then wipe my hands and move on. There’s a huge difference from inferring murder to doing it. It’s a sad day when a mother can be put away for merely being a normal mother, who wrote down her emotions, anxieties and frustrations.³²

The defence argued that the prosecution’s focus on her diaries was a convenient excuse to pin blame on Folbigg. The tendency of investigators and prosecutors to implicate mothers in cases of unexplained infant deaths, regardless of a claim of innocence by the mother, is part of a more pervasive ‘politics of blame’.³³ The ‘suspicion of harm’ which characterises these cases is evidence of a cultural backlash against the earlier view that “it is a form of cultural heresy to suggest that mothers aren’t naturally good”.³⁴ According to Abraham, “[b]ack when the babies died [we were] not prepared to admit that some mothers might kill their children ... [n]ow we are”.³⁵ Hospital staff are taught to ‘look for the signs’ of murderous mothers. Investigators are told to “think dirty”³⁶ when it comes to

³² Knowles, “I’m the most HATED woman alive”, p.1.

³³ M. Ladd-Taylor and L. Umansky, eds, *‘Bad’ Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America*, New York, New York University Press, 1998.

³⁴ P. Pearson, *When She Was Bad: Violent Women and the Myth of Innocence*, New York, Viking Penguin, 1997, p.84.

³⁵ Cited in S. Begley and A. Underwood, “Death of the Innocents”, *Newsweek*, 132(7), 17 August 1998, p.36.

³⁶ M.A. Green, “Time to put ‘cot death’ to bed?”, *British Medical Journal*, 319, 1999, pp.697-698 at p.698, commenting on a Canadian investigative protocol. Joyce Epstein, director of the British Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths, is critical of the “current

mothers, children, and child-murder. Perhaps fearful of repeating mistakes of the past,³⁷ doctors now adopt the hard line approach – that “SIDS [does not] run in families ... murder does”.³⁸ Folbigg still maintains that her children died from SIDS and believes that “vindication will one day be [hers]”.³⁹ Until then, she alone must bear the overwhelming grief a mother feels when she loses not one, but four children. She alone must confront the phantoms of the night. She alone must pray for a miracle that may never come.

Folbigg’s case bears a striking resemblance to that of British woman Sally Clark, who until February 2003 was serving a double life sentence for the murder of her two infant sons. Like Folbigg, Clark maintained that her children died from SIDS, a theory which was dismantled

eagerness to view all sudden and unexpected deaths with suspicion”. Cited in S. Laville, “Experts call for change in cot death inquiries”, *Telegraph*, 31 January 2003, p.13. Clark goes one step further with his comment that “[m]others who have suffered cot death are assumed to be guilty until they can prove they are innocent”. Cited in J. Sweeney, “New facts raise more doubt: did Sally Clark really kill her babies?”, online at

<http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/legal/story.jsp?story=311129>.

³⁷ In 1986, Marybeth Tinning confessed to murdering her nine babies over a period of thirteen years, from 1972 to 1985. All were believed to have died from SIDS. In 1994, Waneta Hoyt confessed to having killed all five of her children 23 years earlier, during the period 1965 to 1971. In all cases, SIDS was believed to be the cause of death. In 1994 and 1995, Tammy Corbett, Paula Sims, and Claudette Kibble also confessed to murdering their children. In 1998, Marie Noe confessed to killing four of her children, all apparent victims of SIDS. For an investigative journalist’s perspective on the Tinning case see J. Egginton, *From Cradle to Grave: Why Did a Mother’s Nine Babies Have to Die?*, London, True Crime, 1992.

³⁸ S. Begley, “The nursery’s littlest victims”, *Newsweek*, 130(12), 22 September 1997, pp.72-73 at p.72, citing Dr. Jerold Lucey.

³⁹ Knowles, “I’m the most HATED woman alive”, p.1.

by the leading expert in the field who “told the jury that the chance of the babies dying naturally was 73 million to one”.⁴⁰ And, like Folbigg, Clark was portrayed as a cold-hearted and selfish woman, unequipped to handle the demands of motherhood:

[S]he was a selfish, alcoholic, grasping, depressive, career-obsessed woman who liked pretty clothes, and who first abused and then murdered her children because they ruined her figure and stood in the way of her lucrative future ... on the day she murdered Harry she [reportedly] popped out in the morning to buy, in total ... nine bottles of wine.⁴¹

In fact, Clark and her husband – both solicitors – had moved North to a cottage in Cheshire to start a family. Clark admitted that she had suffered from a mild drinking problem caused by depression after the death of her first son. And she had made no secret of the fact that she liked

⁴⁰ *BBC News*, “Fresh hope for baby killer appeal”, 6 January 2002, online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1745058.stm>. Professor Roy Meadow constructed the formula, “now known as Meadow’s Law: that unless proven otherwise, one cot death is a tragedy, two is suspicious and three is murder”. J. Sweeney, “The love that put doctors’ claims on trial”, *The Observer*, 2 February 2003, online at <http://www.observer.co.uk/focus/story/0,6903,887163,00.html>. Sweeney’s film ‘Cot Death Mothers – The Witch-Hunt’, produced by J. Booth, aired on 13 February 2003 on BBC2. British researchers now claim that “[m]ysterious deaths of more than one newborn in the same family are much more likely to be the result of natural causes than infanticide”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 January 2005, p.21.

⁴¹ B. Woffinden, “Against the odds”, 11 May 2001, online at <http://www.sallyclark.org.uk/againsttheodds.html>.

to “look smart”.⁴² Clark was “vilified as a monstrous mother ... [a]t the time she was one of the most hated women in the country”.⁴³ As with the Folbigg case, the public asked “what sort of woman murders her own two babies?”⁴⁴ Crown prosecutor Robin Spencer QC argued that a mother who was “suffering from alcoholism and depression, [and who] had reached the end of her tether” could murder her children. The prosecution demonised Clark, contending that her actions “str[uck] at the very core of everything natural and wholesome in the relationship between mother and child”.⁴⁵

After serving more than three years in prison, and already suffering the disappointment of a first, unsuccessful appeal in 2000, Clark, who had always maintained her innocence, was finally vindicated when the Court of Appeal found that she had been wrongfully convicted because medical evidence was withheld from the jury at her trial in 1999. It was Clark’s husband who found the undisclosed medical report by the pathologist who had carried out the postmortem on her second child which cleared his wife of any wrongdoing. While she is “relieved

⁴² F. Lockyer, “Why the conviction?”, January 2000, available online at <http://www.sallyclark.org.uk/why.html>.

⁴³ G. Wansell, “The mother of all injustices”, *Daily Mail*, 4 July 2002. Woffinden writes that “there is no figure more reviled than a mother accused of the ultimate evil – murdering her baby”. B. Woffinden, “Back from hell”, *Sunday Magazine*, 16 February 2003, pp.18-23 at p.19.

⁴⁴ Wansell, “The mother of all injustices”.

⁴⁵ *BBC News*, “Mother given life for baby murders”, 26 November 1999, online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/538162.stm>.

that her nightmare [is] over”,⁴⁶ Clark has vowed to help other mothers in a similar position.

Clark was lucky. Many others have been less fortunate.⁴⁷ As I begin this dissertation, it is impossible not to remember all the women who have been unjustly accused of murdering their children throughout the ages – those who, despite their protests of innocence, were vilified and made into monsters, those who have been sentenced to life imprisonment – the ‘living dead’, and those who have prayed for a miracle as they waited to be hanged or as they sat on death row. This dissertation is written in their memory ...

*[E]ach generation produces its own monsters ...
[that] crouch in the cellars of ... the human
psyche ... the monster[s] in our minds...*⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *BBC News*, “Pathologists may face action over case”, 30 January 2003, online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/2708019.stm>. British woman Susie Sale, who also lost two babies to SIDS says: “Losing a child destroys you but losing two [and] being blamed for it ... is unimaginably horrific”. Cited in S. Desmond, “I lost babies like Sally”, *Sun*, online at <http://www.thesun.co.uk/article/0,,2001290023-2003041602,00.html>.

⁴⁷ As this thesis was in the final stages of preparation, Folbigg’s appeal to the Court of Criminal Appeal to overturn her conviction was rejected. However, Justice Brian Sully reduced Folbigg’s sentence from 40 to 30 years imprisonment (with a minimum 25 year jail term). Commenting on the ruling Folbigg’s lawyer, Peter Krisenthal, told reporters that his client is “adamant she did not commit these offences and 25 years is a long time if you’re innocent” (G. Jacobsen, “Folbigg’s sentence reduced”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 February 2005, p.6).

⁴⁸ A. Stevens, “Foreword” in F. Cawson, *The Monsters in the Mind: The Face of Evil in Myth, Literature and Contemporary Life*, Sussex, Book Guild, 1995, pp.viii-ix at p.viii.

Introduction
Telling Stories:
Maternal Child-Murder, ‘Mythic Mother
Narratives’, and Murderous Mothers in
the Cultural Imagination

*Writing is not just telling stories ...
It's the telling of a story, and the
absence of that story¹*

*[W]e conceive of the crime of
infanticide as [an] ... exceptional
act committed by a deranged or
evil woman ...²*

[T]he criminal woman is ... a monster³

*Women criminals seem to spark a
special fear, fantasy and overreaction⁴*

*Dread not infanticide; the crime is
imaginary⁵*

¹ M. Duras, *La Vie Matérielle*, Paris, P.O.L., 1987, pp.31-32. Cited and translated in L. Hill, *Marguerite Duras: Apocalyptic Desires*, London, Routledge, 1993, p.36.

² C. Meyer and M. Oberman et al, *Mothers Who Kill their Children: Understanding the Acts of Mums from Susan Smith to the ‘Prom Mum’*, New York, New York University Press, 2001, p.177.

³ C. Lombroso and G. Ferrero, *The Female Offender*, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1895, pp.151-152. Discussing the work of Lombroso and Ferrero, Hutchings suggests that the criminal woman is an “anthropometric mythical creature”. P.J. Hutchings, *The Criminal Spectre in Law, Literature and Aesthetics: Incriminating Subjects*, London, Routledge, 2001, p.110. See also Gelfand for ways in which early criminological theory conceived of the criminal woman as a “biological monster”. E. Gelfand, *Imagination in Confinement: Women’s Writings from French Prisons*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1983.

⁴ R. Shannon, “Equality on the Wanted List”, *Oui*, April 1975, p.122.

⁵ M. de Sade, “Philosophy in the Bedroom” (1795) in M. de Sade, *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, and Other Writings*, comp. and trans. R. Seaver and A. Wainhouse, New York, Grove Weidenfeld, 1965, pp.177-367 at p.249.

Maternal child-murder is a pervasive feature of modern society.⁶ Without realising it, we confront infanticide⁷ in the

⁶ Meyer and Oberman found that at least once every three days, a mother somewhere in America kills her children (*Mothers Who Kill*). The authors note that infanticide is “a nationwide phenomenon” (p.39). Their work builds on previous studies by P.T. d’Orban, “Women Who Kill their Children”, *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 134, 1979, pp.560-571; A. Wallace, *Homicide: The Social Reality*, Sydney, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, 1986; M.D. Overpeck et al, “Risk Factors for Infant Homicide in the United States”, *New England Journal of Medicine*, 339, 1998, pp.1211-1216; L. Wissow, “Infanticide”, *New England Journal of Medicine*, 339, 1998, pp.1239-1241 who all suggested that infanticide figures are underestimated. The increased media focus on infanticide in America is the result of a spate of what Meyer and Oberman refer to as “prom mum” cases which consist of young women giving birth alone in bathrooms and leaving infants in toilet bowls, garbage bins, and dumpsters. Some cases which attracted media attention include: Rebecca Hopfer, 17, who gave birth alone in the bathroom of her parents’ home, wrapped the newborn infant in towels and two plastic bags and placed the baby in the garbage; Melissa Drexler, a high school senior, who delivered her baby in the bathroom and disposed of him in the garbage during her prom before returning to dance to her favourite song; Linda Chu, a sophomore at the University of Southern California, delivered her baby secretly in her dorm room and later disposed of the corpse in a dumpster. For more on the so-called ‘prom mum’ cases see L.M. Kohm, “Prom Mum Killers: The Impact of Blame Shift and Distorted Statistics on Punishment for Neonaticide”, *William and Mary Journal of Women and the Law*, 9, 2002, pp.43-71; J. Brienza, “When the Bough Breaks: Can Justice be Served in Neonaticide Cases?”, *Trial*, 33(12), 1997, pp.13-17. Fazio and Comito suggest that intense media coverage and the tendency to sensationalise these stories sparked fears about the prevalence of infanticide (“Rethinking the Tough Sentencing of Teenage Neonaticide Offenders in the United States”, *Fordham Law Review*, 67, 1999, pp.3109-3168) – fears which were ‘confirmed’ by American talk show host, Oprah Winfrey, who pronounced that infanticide is a “disturbing epidemic” (episode aired in Australia on 2 July 2000). For statistics on child homicide in Australia in the last decade see J. Mouzos, *Homicidal Encounters: A Study of Homicide in Australia 1989-1999*, Canberra, Australian Institute of Criminology, 2000; A. Wallace, *Homicide: The Social Reality*, Sydney, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, 1986. Statistics released by the U.S. Bureau of Justice show an increase in the incidence of infanticide in the last twenty-six years. See J.A. Fox and M.W. Zawitz, *Homicide Trends in the United States, 1976-2002*, available online at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide/homtrnd.htm>.

⁷ The word ‘infanticide’ is derived from a combination of the old French/Latin *infantium* (‘unable to speak’) and *caedes* (‘a cutting

down, killing or slaughter'). In everyday usage, infanticide means 'one who kills an infant or murders a child'; 'the killing of an infant'; or 'the practice/custom of killing newborn children' (Oxford English Dictionary). In contrast, 'filicide' refers to child murder by a parent while 'neonaticide', a term coined by Resnick (P.J. Resnick, "Murder of the Newborn: A Psychiatric Review of Neonaticide", *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 126, 1970, pp.1414-1420), refers to the murder of an infant within the first twenty four hours after birth. The terms 'prolicide' and 'pedicide' have also been used to refer more generally to the killing of children (see G. Hausfater and S.B. Hrdy, eds, *Infanticide: Comparative and Evolutionary Perspectives*, New York, Aldine, 1984, p.xv). In legal usage, the term 'infanticide' typically refers to a mother who murders her child (some countries include adoptive mothers and others, such as the Philippines, Korea, and Turkey, include other family members such as fathers, grandparents and brothers). The age of the child varies according to jurisdiction, and can range anywhere from immediately after birth (Italy) to under one year (as is the case in some states of Australia and in Britain) or prior to ten years of age (New Zealand). Penalties also vary according to jurisdiction. Countries which recognise infanticide as a specific, less culpable form of homicide include Austria, Colombia, Finland, Greece, India, Italy, Korea, New Zealand, the Philippines, Turkey, and Switzerland. In Austria and the Philippines, the punishment for killing an illegitimate child is far less severe than that for killing a child born in wedlock. In Hungary, the Government increased the penalty for infanticide from a maximum jail term of two years to mandatory imprisonment for two to eight years. Infanticide operates either as an offence, partial defence to murder, or both. Although the term 'infanticide' only came into routine usage in the nineteenth-century (see M. Jackson, *New-Born Child Murder: Women, Illegitimacy and the Courts in Eighteenth-Century England*, Manchester, UK, Manchester University Press, 1996), historians have favoured the term (see for example W.L. Langer, "Infanticide: A Historical Survey", *History of Childhood Quarterly*, 1, 1973-74, pp.353-388, R. C. Trexler, "Infanticide in Florence: New Sources and First Results", *History of Childhood Quarterly*, 1, 1973-74, pp.98-116, and P.C. Hoffer and N.E.H. Hull, *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and New England 1558-1803*, New York, New York University Press, 1981). Although there is no single accepted definition of infanticide in the research literature (see A. Brewster et al, "Victim, Perpetrator, Family, and Incident Characteristics of 32 Infant Maltreatment Deaths in the United States", *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 22(2), 1998, pp.91-101), infanticide is the term most commonly used by authors who have written about women who kill their children (see S. Pitt and E.M. Bale, "Neonaticide, Infanticide, and Filicide: A Review of the Literature", *Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 23(3), 1995, pp.375-386). Therefore, throughout this work I use the terms 'infanticide' and 'maternal child-murder' interchangeably to ensure consistency with previous work in the field and to emphasise my specific focus on *mothers* who kill their children.

strangest places and at the oddest moments⁸ – in supermarkets where we see mothers cuddling their precious babies and fussing over them - ‘you are so cute, yes you are, you look good enough to eat’, in the lullabies we sing to put infants to sleep, in the fairy tales we read to children before bedtime⁹ – precious moments we typically

⁸ During my research, I have encountered rather standard reactions from people when I tell them the topic of my thesis – a mixture of horror, disbelief, and intrigue. In response, I usually defer to L. Corti, *The Myth of Medea and the Murder of Children*, Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1998, who said that “[r]esearch on the theme of child-murder is not for the faint-hearted” (p.vii), and add, “but it makes good dinner conversation”. The need to ‘lighten’ what seems to be regarded as such a serious intellectual pursuit is at odds with the ‘desensitised’ manner with which we seem to simultaneously confront and avoid the reality of infanticide in our everyday lives.

⁹ David Bakan, in *Slaughter of the Innocents: A Study of the Battered Child Phenomenon*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1971, has considered “the infanticidal content of some of the most popular children’s folklore in Western culture” (p.59). Along with Maria Piers, in one of the earliest studies on infanticide – *Infanticide: Past and Present*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1978 (at pp.28-30) - Bakan suggests that “one of the most blatantly infanticidal” (p.60) lullabies is “Hush-a-bye baby”. “The very context of tenderness”, Bakan observes, “is licence to allow the ugly thought which the [lullaby] contains to find expression” (p.61). See the following chapter for more about the infanticidal and cannibalistic content of fairy tales. Bynum makes an interesting association between cannibalistic desire and maternal affection: “I would eat you up, I love you so much”. C.W. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, Berkeley, California, University of California Press, 1987, p.250. See also Devereux who notes that “it is never the child [but] always the parent who says: ‘I love you so much, that I could eat you’”, “The Cannibalistic Impulses of Parents”, *Psychoanalytic Forum*, 1, 1966, pp.114-124 at p.118. Bergmann suggests that “endearments like ‘you’re so sweet, I could eat you up’” mask unconscious hostile wishes and “destructive urge[s]” (p.61). M.S. Bergmann, *In the Shadow of Moloch: The Sacrifice of Children and Its Impact on Western Religions*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1992. Bakan suggests that “[t]he deepest wishes and concerns of people find their way into fiction and [folklore], which [also] provide[s] them with entertainment. Hard thoughts, thoughts that would otherwise be too unpleasant to think, smuggle their way into these fanciful renditions ... [which provide] an adequate protective cover so that they are not overtly threatening” (pp.59-60). “Seeming

associate with maternal love and nurturance. We encounter murderous mothers when we are trying to relax - when we go to the cinema¹⁰ or turn on our favourite television program¹¹ or read the newspaper. Whether buried deep in the unconscious¹² or at the centre of public consciousness (in front-page tabloids), infanticide is an unavoidable aspect of modern life. Infanticide is both a psychic and social reality.

Stories about infanticide are a regular component of our everyday lives and readily available for public consumption. "Few crimes generate greater public reaction"¹³ - a fact well-acknowledged by newspaper

untruth is a licence for the story to live in conscious imagination" (p.59).

¹⁰ The murderous mother is one of the female murderers who feature in Barbara Creed's study of film portrayals of the female killer, "Bitch Queen or Backlash?: Media Portrayals of Female Murderers" in K. Greenwood, (ed.) *The Thing She Loves: Why Women Kill*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1996, pp.108-122.

¹¹ The American television series 'Law and Order' regularly includes infanticide as a story line, and the popular talk show 'Oprah' has devoted entire episodes to infanticide and teen mothers, and convicted infanticide Susan Smith. Oprah Winfrey has herself also starred in the film adaptation of Toni Morrison's 1987 'infanticide novel' *Beloved* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1993). Consider also a comment made by the mother of lead character Sydney Bristow in the U.S. drama series 'Alias': "I should have ended it when I had the chance. You were so small when you were born. It would have been so easy ..." (1st episode of second series).

¹² Piers surmises that "[t]he fantasy of infanticide is very likely part of every human being's unconscious" (p.9). Through detailed case studies, Dorothy Bloch ("*So the Witch Won't Eat Me*": *Fantasy and the Child's Fear of Infanticide*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1978) found that infanticide is a 'regular component' of children's psychic lives and also remains buried in the unconscious of all adults. For further discussion see the following chapter.

¹³ G. McKee and S. Shea, "Maternal Filicide: A Cross-National Comparison", *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 54(5), 1998, pp.679-687 at p.679.

editors who equate ‘newsworthiness’ with “the unusual ... [the] abhorrent ... [that which is] beyond belief”.¹⁴ In the introduction to her book *Writing British Infanticide*, Jennifer Thorn notes the regularity with which stories of abandoned or murdered infants appear in the media.¹⁵ It is not unusual to find a story about a mother who drowned her eight-month-old baby in a washing machine¹⁶ or a mother who murdered her babies and kept their corpses in her freezer¹⁷ amongst more mundane daily news items. Maternal child-murder is ‘made familiar’ to us through the media “focus on the drama, details of the events ..., the scene of the crime, the amount of blood”¹⁸ – what Shaw

¹⁴ P. Priest, C. Jenevsky, and J.D. Swenson, “Phallogocentric Slicing: 20/20’s Reporting of Lorena and John Bobbitt” in A. Myers and S. Wight, (eds) *No Angels: Women Who Commit Violence*, London, Pandora, 1996, pp.101-112 at p.103.

¹⁵ The author wishes to thank Jennifer Thorn for making available a pre-publication copy of the Introduction (“Stories of Child-Murder, Stories of Print”) to *Writing British Infanticide: Child-murder, Gender, and Print, 1722-1859*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 2003, pp.13-41.

¹⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, “Mother held over drowned tot”, 14 May 2002, p.8.

¹⁷ In May 2002, a Swedish woman was convicted of child-murder after her thirteen year old son found body parts of two babies in his mother’s freezer (details on file with the author). Contemporary newspaper reports of infanticide constitute part of a cultural discourse closely aligned with what O’Connor calls “dead child” or “child murderess” traditions – drawn from legend, folklore, and mythology – which imagine the death of a child at the hands of its mother. Placed side by side with tales of the woman who boils her baby in a pot of soup (S. Figiel, *They Who Do Not Grieve*, Toronto, Random House, 2000) or a mother who murders her twin babies with a penknife (O’Connor, p.57), factual and fictional accounts of child-murder become almost indistinguishable. A. O’Connor, *Child Murderess and Dead Child Traditions: A Comparative Study*, Helsinki, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1991.

¹⁸ M. Shaw, “Conceptualizing Violence by Women” in R.E. Dobash, R.P. Dobash and L. Noaks, eds, *Gender and Crime*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1995, pp.115-131 at p.122.

calls “the human equation” that makes for a “riveting”¹⁹ read – mixed with standard discussions about female criminality and motherhood. In these stories, a woman who murders her child becomes an ‘infanticidal woman’, defined by her essential nature rather than the specificity of her actions, and thus “immediately recognisable”.²⁰

The frequency and visibility of stories of infanticide belies the invisibility of the women accused and/or convicted of child-murder.²¹ The stories of individual women are lost amidst a seemingly endless array of ‘authoritative’ legal, scientific, medical, psychological, and forensic versions which purport to present us with *the* truth – sanitised and sensitised explanations designed to ‘protect’ the public from the “special horror of child-murder”.²² In these tales of child-murder, the women who kill their children remain as elusive as ever - “dark characters who disturb and fascinate”.²³ As the public becomes consumed with each

¹⁹ *Id.* at p.123.

²⁰ M. Jones, “Too Common and Most Unnatural: Rewriting the ‘Infanticidal Woman’ in Britain, 1764-1859”, diss., York University, 1999, p.4.

²¹ Thorn asks: “What can we make of the visibility of stories of child-murder and the paradoxical invisibility of that visibility?” (p.1).

²² *Id.* at p.3.

²³ Shaw, p.123. As the murderous mother transforms from a woman into an idea, her narrative is replaced by “a discourse made in the image of all that [is] feared, desired, and repudiated” about women in Western culture. Discourses which purport to provide us with the ‘truth’ of infanticide are a “cultural symptom” of dis-ease about women as women and as mothers. J. Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1994, p.3. As Corti also notes, “tales of infanticide are not mere reflections of individual pathology, but rather are representations of essential communal concerns” (p.16).

new story of the murderous mother, the possibility of hearing the mother's own story becomes more remote.

Infanticide has always been a potent source for the imagination and thus a significant subject for storytellers. Major dramatists, poets, novelists, and librettists throughout the centuries have turned to the murderous mother for creative inspiration. We only need to look at the dramas of Euripides and Shakespeare, the poetry of Goethe, Schiller, and Wordsworth, the operas of Berlioz, Wagner, and Janáček, and the novels of Scott and Eliot to realise that infanticide is a prominent feature of the narrative landscape. The infanticide seems to both torment and fascinate these creators and the public for whom they wrote. In contemporary society too, the potency of infanticide as a creative source has not escaped authors such as Toni Morrison, Christa Wolf, Anne Redmon, or Thor Vilhjálmsón to name a few.²⁴

The appearance of, and continuing demand for 'true crime' stories²⁵ about now notorious infanticides such as

²⁴ T. Vilhjálmsón, *Justice Undone* (1995), trans. B. Scudder, London, Mare's Nest, 1998; A. Redmon, *Music and Silence*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1980. For a useful discussion of Redmon's novel see E. Ammons, "Infanticide and Other Ways of Mothering in Anne Redmon's *Music and Silence*", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 25(2), 1983, pp.343-363. For further discussion of Morrison and Wolf see Chapter Six.

²⁵ According to Kerry Greenwood, "[t]rue crime books are a great underground success, because no respectable person will admit to reading them (but [people] out there [are] buying them)", *On Murder 2: True Crime Writing in Australia*, Melbourne, Black Inc., 2002, p.1. Cullen writes that such stories offer a veritable "smorgasbord of

Susan Smith or Andrea Yates²⁶ also indicates the public predilection for “grisly details”²⁷ and “dark delights”,²⁸ the type of interest that might be paralleled with the nineteenth-century thirst for murder stories at a time when homicide “first became institutionalised as a ‘popular’ form of entertainment”.²⁹ Knelman, in her study of representations of the Victorian murderess, shows how the press and public were “fascinated by those acts ‘most unnatural’ of the fairer sex”.³⁰ Murders committed by women were “sensationalised” and formed part of “a broader public agenda, set and controlled by men”.³¹

murder”, “Murders don’t usually happen to just anyone”, *The Record*, 8 August, 1986, at p.20. Knox has considered the “interestedness of American culture in the tale of murder (p.5) ... Americans consume murder as a daily fare (p.17) ... Death fascinates (p.25)”. S.L. Knox, *Murder: A Tale of Modern American Life*, London, Duke University Press, 1998. For an interesting discussion of the ‘true crime’ genre see S. Turnbull, “Too True? The Representations of True Crime”, *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 6, 1996, pp.179-184.

²⁶ According to the sales rank for one of the largest online booksellers, Amazon.com, 715,309 copies of G. Rekers, *Susan Smith: Victim or Murderer* (Lakewood, Colorado, Glenbridge, 1995) have been sold since October 1995. Another major online bookseller, Barnes and Noble, reports having sold 316,544 copies of Suzy Spencer, *Breaking Point* (a St. Martin’s True Crime Library Series book about Andrea Yates) since January 2002.

²⁷ D.E. Williams, “Victims of Narrative Seduction: The Literary Translations of Elizabeth (and ‘Miss Harriot’) Wilson”, *Early American Literature*, 28(2), 1993, pp.148-170 at p.149.

²⁸ C. Strange, “Murder and Meanings in U.S. Historiography”, *Feminist Studies*, 25(3), 1999, pp.679-697 at p.690. Woffinden writes that tales of the murderous mother are “compellingly sordid [and consumed by the public] ... with a mix of relish and horror”. B. Woffinden, “Back from hell”, *Herald Sun*, 16 February 2003.

²⁹ R. Altick, *Victorian Studies in Scarlet*, New York, Norton, 1970, p.10.

³⁰ J. Knelman, *Twisting in the Wind: The Murderess and the English Press*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1998, p.ix.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Women accused of child-murder “got bad press”.³² As a means of emphasising the horrific nature of their actions, these women were labelled “inhuman mothers”, guilty of “cold-blooded atrocities”, “cruel”, “callous”, “iron-hearted”³³ and totally devoid of maternal feelings. Glancing at contemporary newspaper articles about accused and convicted infanticides, it seems little has changed in terms of the language used to describe murderous mothers.³⁴ Knelman suggests that the media focus on the most ‘heinous’ acts - “horrors heaped upon horrors” - determines the public reaction to the “theatricality” and “titillation” surrounding both nineteenth-century and modern infanticide cases.³⁵ It seems that no amount of

³² *Id.* at p.3. Harris also suggests that “[i]nfanticide narratives ... were most often used by those in authority as a textual means of social control over the body politic, but also over the body and discourse of the convicted woman”. S.M. Harris, “Feminist Theories and Early American Studies”, *Early American Literature*, 34(1), 1999, pp.86-93 at p.87.

³³ Knelman, pp.128-129.

³⁴ See for example “M is for mother ... But M is for murder, too. And when a woman kills her child, M is also for monster”, A. Jones, “Mothers Who Kill”, *Newsday*, 19 October, 1986, p.12; “cold-blooded monster”, M. Oberman, “Mothers who commit murder: How should society punish these women who kill their children?”, *Chicago Tribune*, 5 February, 2002, p.17; “[s]he was a monster pure and simple”, R. Goldstein, “Sympathy for the suspect: When a crime becomes a tragedy”, *The Village Voice*, 3 December, 1996, p.20; “[s]he was vilified as a monstrous mother”, G. Wansell, “Mother of all injustices?”, *Daily Mail*, 4 July 2002; “[s]ob sisters refuse to admit that some women are evil enough to kill their babies”, J. Albrechtsen, “Mums Must Not Get Away With Murder”, *Australian*, 28 May 2003, p.13.

³⁵ Knelman, p.40. Knelman writes: “Newspapers give us what we want to read. If a society wants to read that women who kill are insane or demoniacal, that is how they will be depicted” (p.13). The press “encourage[s] the public to ... poke sticks through the cage at women accused of murder” (p.21).

storytelling is ever adequate to satiate the imaginative hunger for, and public curiosity about, infanticide.

The telling of the story of maternal child-murder is, however, a site of profound anxiety. In *No Angels: Women Who Commit Violence*, Wight and Myers suggest that the “need to tell and re-tell”³⁶ stories about murderous women is “a symptom of social anxiety about women’s roles and the perceived abandonment of traditional femininity”.³⁷ Women who murder, those who transgress gender constraints and rules of decorum, threaten the social order³⁸ and storytelling is a means of containing that threat by “reconstruct[ing] female violence to make it more palatable (and, perhaps, easier to dismiss)”.³⁹ Storytelling is also a way of maintaining invisible boundaries between violators of social order and law-abiding citizens as it encourages us to ‘experience criminality’ vicariously. Commenting on the ‘therapeutic function’ of crime fiction, Turnbull suggests that the fictional murderer “does what

³⁶ S. Wight and A. Myers, “Introduction” in A. Myers and S. Wight, eds, *No Angels: Women Who Commit Violence*, London, Pandora, 1996, pp.xi-xvi at p.xiv.

³⁷ *Id.* at pp.xii-xiii

³⁸ Clarice Feinman says that women who have failed to conform – those who “questio[n] established beliefs or practices, ... engag[e] in activities traditionally associated with men, or who commit crime – ... generat[e] fear and anxiety ... in almost all civilizations throughout history ... [The infanticide is an] obvious recipient of society’s scorn [as she is] perceived as a threat to the social order and as a challenge to traditional cultural beliefs about women”, *Women in the Criminal Justice System*, New York, Praeger, 1986, p.3.

³⁹ Myers and Wight, p.xv.

we ... would never do but may well fantasise about”.⁴⁰ Storytelling mediates “between the fear ... and pleasure of crime”, between our desire to know and our fear of the unknown.⁴¹

Of course, not all narratives have equal force. Scheppele has shown how “selective narratives come to have the power of truth”.⁴² Legal narratives are artificial constructs designed to “make and shape” reality, afforded the “naturalness and inevitability” of a “superior discourse” which “purports to pronounce irrefutable truths”.⁴³ Davies warns against the notion that legal narratives might provide us with the ‘truth’ of child-murder because the event itself is unknowable.⁴⁴ The narrative of child-murder “that reaches the public as the representation of murder’s event (the event itself always lost) freights its kernel of fact with much that belongs *outside* of the narrative proper

⁴⁰ S. Turnbull, “A dame with a gun is like a guy with a knitting needle: Women and crime fiction” in K. Greenwood, *The Thing She Loves: Why Women Kill*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1996, pp.19-29 at p.25. Oates suggests that storytelling permits us to visualise aspects of “ourselves derailed and gone terribly wrong”, J.C. Oates, “I had no other thrill or happiness”, *New York Review of Books*, 41(6), 24 March 1994, pp.52-59 at p.56. Corti notes that studies which show that “many adults ... [harbour] murderous hostility toward children” also imply that these same individuals “may derive satisfaction from the spectacle of violent excess on the part of the adult aggressor” in films about child-murder or abuse (p.3).

⁴¹ A. Young, *Imagining Crime: Textual Outlaws and Criminal Conversations*, London, Sage, 1996, p.13

⁴² K.L. Scheppele, “Foreword: Telling Stories”, *Michigan Law Review*, 87, 1989, pp.2073-2098 at p.2074.

⁴³ M. Aristodemou, *Law and Literature: Journeys from Her to Eternity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p.3.

⁴⁴ S. Davies, “Sara L. Knox, Murder: A Tale of Modern American Life”, *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 14, 2000, pp.132-136 at p.132.

(what happened, to whom, when and why)".⁴⁵ As Wight and Myers suggest, the tale of murder ultimately lies somewhere in the vacuous gap between reality and representation.⁴⁶

Despite the seemingly endless array of stories about women who kill their children, there has been a growing concern among feminist legal theorists and cultural criminologists about the "failure of representation to ever adequately capture the nature and meaning of such an act".⁴⁷ Maternal child-murder, as an "event [which] exceeds the limits of representation and as such represents the border of what can be imagined",⁴⁸ requires us to "construct frames for [its] interpretation which block out other interpretations, erase other memories, obliterate the nuances".⁴⁹ The reconstruction of what can only ever be an 'imaginary' crime leaves us with a narrative – legal, literary or otherwise – which is "[n]ever complete; there are always gaps, silences, ignorances".⁵⁰ "Imagination is always doubled", Young suggests, "in including one vision, it rules out another. All our understandings of crime exist in a tense relation with

⁴⁵ S. Knox, "Alison Young, Imagining Crime: Textual Outlaws and Criminal Conversations", *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 8, 1997, pp.169-175 at p.172; italics in text.

⁴⁶ Wight and Myers, p.xii.

⁴⁷ Davies, p.132.

⁴⁸ Young, p.137.

⁴⁹ *Id.* at p.212.

⁵⁰ Aristodemou, p.2.

these *other* stories, sights, voices which are *beyond* the narrative, the frame, the listening ear”.⁵¹

Murder emphasises the deception of law in its re(-)presentation of reality. It is part of the work of law’s imagination of crime to cover over the “gap in knowledge’s representation of reality”,⁵² making the representation of a crime which is essentially unknowable appear real. Young identifies the ways in which the legal imagination produces its ‘textual’ body “as a thing that can be read, and therefore a thing that is never complete in itself, always open to (re)interpretation”.⁵³ It is a thing that can be investigated and invested with meaning, a container for the anxieties it contains:

In imagining crime, the body is continually being constituted, brought into crisis, and reconstituted ... The letter of the law excises the body in a *coupure* (cut) which displaces and realizes all the anxieties surrounding the body ... that suffers under the weight of imagination as a spectacle to be consumed, disciplined, repressed.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Young, p.212; italics in text.

⁵² Young, p.23.

⁵³ *Id.* at p.18.

⁵⁴ *Id.* at p.17. Legal theorist Robert Cover proposes an intrinsic relationship between (narrative) violence and the law. He suggests that we witness law’s violence through the inscription of its interpretations and meanings on bodies. For more see M. Minow, M. Ryan, and A. Sarat, eds, *Narrative, Violence and the Law: The Essays of Robert Cover*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1992.

Peter Brooks, in his *Body Work*, shows how the female body is a site on which “the aspirations, anxieties, and contradictions of a whole society are played out”.⁵⁵ Indeed, in Young’s analysis we see how the investigatory gaze of criminal law is fixated on the ‘secret’ female body. Woman⁵⁶ ... is “criminology’s secret”⁵⁷ – both as ‘precondition’ (“she is essential to the meaning of masculinity”⁵⁸ and “the self-authorization of the discipline”⁵⁹) and ‘enigma’ (“absent, shadowy, disturbing”⁶⁰). On the one hand, she is contained and ‘secreted’ “in criminology as a result of its construction and metaphorization of sexual difference”.⁶¹ On the other hand, she defeats sight because she is “always seen as Other ... as the inverted negation of masculinity”.⁶²

According to Kittay, “[W]oman is a cipher, an Other onto which man can project all his ‘dreams, fears and idols’. Woman is thus metaphorically represented by whatever

⁵⁵ P. Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1993, pp.5-6.

⁵⁶ We need to be aware that the term ‘Woman’ is troubled (unfixed) and troubling (full of ambiguity and contradiction). As Smart notes, “the category of Woman is constantly subject to differing constructions. Each discourse brings its own Woman into being and proclaims her to be natural Woman ... there have always been contradictory discursive constructs of Woman”. C. Smart, “Disruptive Bodies and Unruly Sex: The Regulation of Reproduction and Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century” in C. Smart ed., *Regulating Womanhood: Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality*, London, Routledge, 1992, pp.7-32 at p.7.

⁵⁷ Young, p.33.

⁵⁸ *Id.* at p.48.

⁵⁹ *Id.* at p.47.

⁶⁰ *Id.* at p.31.

⁶¹ *Id.* at p.27.

⁶² *Ibid.*

alterity man seeks to engage, and so becomes myth”.⁶³ Mulvey also notes that “man can live out his fantasies ... by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer and not maker of meanings”.⁶⁴ Within criminology’s confines, Woman is “*made to mean*” - “closeted and obscured ... continually measured, recorded, examined and inspected”.⁶⁵ At the same time, Woman “slip[s] through its strictures ... elud[ing] detection, confound[ing] discovery, ... dangerously slippery ... exist[ing] as ghost”.⁶⁶ Criminology is preoccupied with this “feminine phantom” – that ‘dark figure’ of masculine phantasy which “both signifies criminality and seems to license the most elaborate fantasies”.⁶⁷

Scraton notes that within the discipline of criminology there exists “a pervasiveness of hegemonic masculinity”⁶⁸ that masks the seductive processes by which images of women and crime are accepted as given. Other ‘sensitised’ discourses support criminology’s mask and

⁶³ E.F. Kittay, “Woman as Metaphor” in D.T. Meyers, (ed.), *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, New York, Routledge, 1997, pp.265-285 at p.280.

⁶⁴ L. Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, *Screen*, 16(3), 1975, pp.1-16.

⁶⁵ Young, pp.23; 27; italics in text.

⁶⁶ *Id.* at pp.27-28.

⁶⁷ Hutchings, p.87. In his consideration of the evolution of the criminal spectre in the nineteenth-century, Hutchings suggests that “woman resisted definition and so became the focus of an enormous discursive labour aimed at producing her truth and, with it, her definitive form ... [a] fantastic product” (p.88).

⁶⁸ P. Scraton, “Scientific Knowledge or Masculine Discourses?: Challenging Patriarchy in Criminology” in L. Gelsthorpe and A. Morris, eds, *Feminist Perspectives in Criminology*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1990, pp.10-25 at p.16.

make us believe that these images are realistic representations of criminal behaviour.⁶⁹ Drawing on the work of Susan Suleiman, Bumiller has shown how the law is not only “an agent in the production of symbolic images of the body in Western culture” but also how the law is “implicated in the construction of body images, and that those images always exist in mediated social space”.⁷⁰ The body exists in and through the various discourses by which it is represented. These representations are “never innocent”.⁷¹ Naffine believes that feminist theory holds the key to challenging the purported reality of these representations – “the threat it poses to a masculine criminology is considerable”.⁷²

Laster contends that infanticide poses one of the greatest challenges for legal feminists who continue to take “an

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ K. Bumiller, “Body Images: How Does the Body Matter in the Legal Imagination?” in B.G. Garth and A. Sarat, (eds) *How Does Law Matter?*, Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 1998, pp.145-161 at p.145. See also Weiss who considers “the roles played by the constitutive imagination and fantasy in the construction of individual and cultural body images” (p.4). G. Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality*, London, Routledge, 1999.

⁷¹ *Id.* at p.146. Naffine suggests that “there are often sinister forces behind these images” (p.264). Moreover, “seeing is never innocent ... whenever we see, we do so as creatures of a culture. We form culturally-specific concepts which are subject to manipulation by the powerful agents in our culture” (p.265). N. Naffine, “Sight and Insight: Is There a Lawful Relation Between What We See and What We Know?”, *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*, 12(1), 1997, pp.263-273. Irigaray has also shown how legal discourse “illicitly naturalizes what is in fact a representation”. M. Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, London, Routledge, 1991, p.85.

⁷² N. Naffine, *Female Crime: The Construction of Women in Criminology*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1987, p.133.

unnecessarily limited view”⁷³ of women who kill their children.⁷⁴ Expressing grave concerns about the negligible feminist contribution to the issue of female violence towards children, Dougherty suggests that “even when they do confront the subject, feminist scholars have tended to focus attention away from women’s violence toward that of men”.⁷⁵ Although feminist theorists have been responsive to the position of women as victims of violence, there is a far greater reticence to consider violence perpetrated by women. Perhaps this reticence is part of a cultural tendency to deny female aggression.⁷⁶ And with cultural denial there is an absence of language to describe the ‘unspeakable’. In her book *When She Was Bad: Violent Women and the Myth of Innocence*, Pearson provocatively questions the idea that women do not perpetrate acts of violence, the idea that “[v]iolence is the

⁷³ K. Laster, “Infanticide: A Litmus Test for Feminist Criminological Theory”, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 22, 1989, pp.151-166 at p.152.

⁷⁴ According to Pearson, the ways in which we perceive maternal aggression “has less to do with a fixed reality than [with] the lenses we are given through which to see”, p.6. P. Pearson, *When She Was Bad: Violent Women and the Myth of Innocence*, New York, Viking Penguin, 1997.

⁷⁵ J. Dougherty, “Women’s Violence against their Children: A Feminist Perspective”, *Women and Criminal Justice*, 4(2), 1993, pp.91-114 at p.92.

⁷⁶ Shaw suggests that one of the main barriers to conceptualising violence by women has been the “difficulties which feminists have had in thinking about women as violent” (p.116). Birch states that “the idea that women are capable of extreme violence is anathema to most of us” (p.5). H. Birch, (ed.) *Moving Targets: Women, Murder and Representation*, London, Virago Press, 1993. Corti associates the denial of female violence with cultural ideals of motherhood: “the denial of maternal aggression, like the celebration of maternal benevolence, is quite compatible with the general tendency of popular culture to stress the positive and mutual quality of love between parents and children” (p.xi).

province of the male. Violence is masculine. Men are the cause of it, and women the ones who suffer”.⁷⁷ Creed has also considered the ‘unnatural’ association between women and violence.⁷⁸ “Competent and capable women do not kill their children”, Creed contends, “when they do there must be some obvious ‘weakness’ in the mother to account for it”.⁷⁹

At the other extreme is the idea that when women do engage in criminal behaviour they are “more deadly than the male”.⁸⁰ Kirsta, in *Deadlier than the Male: Violence*

⁷⁷ Pearson, p.7. Pearson suggests that female aggression is “more socially acceptable” when it is self-inflicted (pp.21-22). Fedler notes that “[i]t is apparently more forgivable for a mother to kill her child if she takes her own life, too”, J. Fedler, “When mothers kill”, *Sydney Morning Herald GoodWeekend Magazine*, 19 July 2003, pp.39-42 at p.42.

⁷⁸ Shaw also notes that “[o]ur image of violence is based on that of male violence – macho, tough, aggressive; we have no ways of conceptualising violence by women except in terms of its ‘unnaturalness’”, *supra* note 70, at p.122.

⁷⁹ Creed, “Bitch Queen or Backlash”, p.109.

⁸⁰ Creed suggests that “[f]emale killers – fictional and real – have over the centuries provided a catalyst for intense debate about the nature of woman. Is the female sex more deadly than the male? Is woman by nature more evil, sadistic, murderous? Is she capable of turning on her own offspring and killing them? ... Women are seen as more dangerous because they are supposedly less rational than men and more at the mercy of their bodies and hormones” (“Bitch Queen or Backlash”, p.109). See also Sparrow who begins his 1970 study of women who murder with the “adage that the female of the species is more deadly than the male”, G. Sparrow, *Women Who Murder: Crimes and the Feminine Logic Behind Them*, New York, Tower, 1970, p.7. Kerrigan notes that “heightened anxiety attaches to female violence” (p.315). J. Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996. In her study of women who kill, Ann Jones shows how anxiety about the women’s movement was reflected in growing fears about female criminality. She writes: “the presence of one prompts fear of the other ... [t]he panic provoked by feminism and the alarm at female criminality coincide almost perfectly, as though according to some plan” (pp.13-14). In the

and Aggression in Women,⁸¹ considers the implications of both chaining women to an unattainable masculine ideal - the 'angel in the house' - and chastising women who fail to conform to preconceived notions of 'appropriate' and 'acceptable' female behaviour. Wilczynski has shown how criminal women are judged not only according to their

association between feminism and social chaos lies the fear that if women are "released from some traditional restraints [they] will turn to unbridled evil, mayhem, and murder" (p.13). In her study of Victorian law and literature, Morris too shows how women who committed violent crimes were denounced as 'unnatural', just as those who "challenged their unequal status ... were abhorred as unwomanly" (p.26). Morris demonstrates how female authors regularly attacked the "scientific experts, men of probity and discernment" who identified "the 'new' liberated women as closet killers and patronesses of 'charming young murderesses'" (p.32). Criminology presented itself as the 'cure' for both the 'epidemic' of female criminality and the 'virus' of feminism that 'attaches' itself to otherwise subservient and submissive women and compels them to commit horrific acts. Indeed, Jones notes that the 'father' of criminology, Cesare Lombroso, was haunted by the idea that a seemingly 'good' woman might, at any moment, metamorphose into her 'evil' alter ego (p.8). Dijkstra has shown how at the beginning of the twentieth century, men of science "set out to prove that nature had given *all* women a basic instinct that made them into predators, destroyers, witches – evil sisters" (p.3). It seems that the association between feminism and female criminality still persists into our own day and age. Consider the comment made by Robertson in 1994: "[t]he feminist agenda ... is about a political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, [and] practice witchcraft" (cited in Keitner, p.38). Not only do Robertson's words demonstrate a clear apprehension about feminism as a political movement that advocates the rights of women in patriarchal regimes, they also draw on ideological associations between women and evil – "the persistent fantasies and formulaic nightmares that inform discourses about [female criminality]" (Shapiro, p.9). A. Jones, *Women Who Kill*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980. V. Morris, *Double Jeopardy: Women Who Kill in Victorian Fiction*, Lexington, Kentucky, University of Kentucky Press, 1990. B. Dijkstra, *Evil Sisters: The Threat of Female Sexuality and the Cult of Manhood*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1996. C. Keitner, "Victim or Vamp? Images of Violent Women in the Criminal Justice System", *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, 11, 2002, pp.38-87. A-L. Shapiro, *Breaking the Codes: Female Criminality in Fin-de-Siècle Paris*, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1996.

⁸¹ A. Kirsta, *Deadlier Than the Male: Violence and Aggression in Women*, London, Harper Collins, 1994.

“legal infraction, but also for [their] compliance or variance with stereotypically female behaviour”.⁸² According to Leonard, ideas about innate and essential female qualities still “manage to lurk about”.⁸³ Women who are accused of murdering their children continue to fall prey to the “stereotypes by which all women who murder are still judged”.⁸⁴ And, as Carlen suggests, women are “still subject to the misogynous mythology which inseminates stereotypes of female lawbreakers”.⁸⁵

Boetzkes, Turner, and Sobstyl suggest that infanticide has an immense “hold on the cultural imagination. The infanticidal woman is a complex symbol of differing (and dangerous) images of women – women as naturally maternal, yet irrational; women as secretive, untrustworthy, moral incompetents, ... as the scapegoat[s] for male guilt, or communal guilt”.⁸⁶ Wilczynski has shown how two images, in particular, have dominated portrayals of women who murder their children:

⁸² A. Wilczynski, “Images of Women who Kill Their Infants: The Mad and the Bad”, *Women and Criminal Justice*, 2(2), 1991, pp.71-88 at p.72. See also A. Wilczynski and A. Morris, “Parents who kill their Children”, *Criminal Law Review*, January 1993, pp.31-36 at p.31. Female offenders are “doubly deviant doubly damned”, to use the title of Ann Lloyd’s book *Doubly Deviant, Doubly Damned: Society’s Treatment of Violent Women*, London, Penguin, 1995.

⁸³ E.B. Leonard, *Women, Crime and Society: A Critique of Theoretical Criminology*, New York, Longman, 1982, p.14.

⁸⁴ K. Greenwood, “Preface” in K. Greenwood ed., *The Thing She Loves: Why Women Kill*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1996, pp.x-xi at p.xi.

⁸⁵ P. Carlen, ed., *Criminal Women*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1985, p.1.

⁸⁶ E. Boetzkes, S. Turner, and E. Sobstyl, “Women, Madness, and Special Defences in the Law”, *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 21(2-3), 1990, pp.127-139 at p.127.

a rigid dichotomy of images exists to deal with women who kill their infants. Such women are viewed as either 'mad' (the offence is explained away in terms of psychiatric illness [victims at the mercy of 'raging hormones' which make them unaware of what they are doing], and the woman is treated sympathetically)⁸⁷ or

⁸⁷ The idea that a woman who killed her baby suffers from a medical disorder was codified in England's *Infanticide Act 1938* which states: "Where any woman by any wilful act or omission causes the death of her child under the age of twelve months, but at the time of the act or omission the balance of her mind was disturbed by reason of her not fully recovered from the effect of giving birth to the child or by reason of the effect of lactation consequent upon the birth of the child, she is by statute guilty of the offence of infanticide". The Act presupposes that the physiological and psychological trauma of childbirth may cause a mother to murder her child. For similarities between British and Canadian legislation see J. Osborne, "The Crime of Infanticide: Throwing Out the Baby with the Bathwater", *Canadian Journal of Family Law*, 6, 1987, pp.47-59. Despite the ready acceptance of postpartum disorders and puerperal insanity by legislators, there is considerable disagreement about their nature and aetiology. For a good general outline, see A.L. Nelson, "Postpartum Psychosis: A New Defence?", *Dickinson Law Review*, 95, 1991, pp.625-650; B. Barton, "When Murdering Hands Rock the Cradle: An Overview of America's Incoherent Treatment of Infanticidal Mothers", *SMU Law Review*, 51, 1998, pp.591-619; D. Maier-Katkin and R. Ogle, "A Rationale for Infanticide Laws", *Criminal Law Review*, December 1993, pp.903-914; L.E. Reece, "Mothers Who Kill: Postpartum Disorders and Criminal Infanticide", *UCLA Law Review*, 38, 1991, pp.699-757. For historical background and a medical point of view see I. Brockington, *Motherhood and Mental Health*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996. For a discussion of U.S. case law see J.L. Grossman, "Postpartum Psychosis – A Defence to Criminal Responsibility or Just Another Gimmick?", *University of Detroit Law Review*, 67, 1990, pp.311-344; A.D. Brusca, "Postpartum Psychosis: A Way Out For Murderous Mums", *Hofstra Law Review*, 18, 1990, pp.133-1170; M. Oberman, "Mothers Who Kill: Coming to Terms With Modern American Infanticide", *American Criminal Law Review*, 34, 1996, pp.1-95; D.C. Moss, "Postpartum Psychosis Defence: New Defensive Measure for Mothers Who Kill Infants", *ABA Journal*, 74, 1988, p.22; B.E. Rosenberg, "Postpartum Psychosis as a Defence to Infant Murder", *Touro Law Review*, 5, 1999, pp.287-308. For discussion of the view that postnatal depression "is no more than a fancy name for the exhaustion and crises of confidence that grip mothers of babies who cry a lot and sleep very little" see J. Cadzow, "Birth of the Blues", *Sydney Morning Herald GoodWeekend Magazine*, 8 July 2000, pp.16-20 at p.16. Of particular importance is Cadzow's discussion of

'bad' (the offence is due to wickedness or callousness [their evilness making them an aberration and setting them apart from

the more recent work of British psychologist Ruth Partridge who refutes the notion that women with postnatal depression are ill. For studies of the relationship between early hospital discharge and postnatal depression see J.M. Lumley, "Evaluating Policy and Practice: What are the Effects of Early Hospital Discharge After Childbirth?", *Medical Journal of Australia*, 172, 2000, pp.524-525; S. Nixon, "Hospital Departure No Link to Baby Blues: Study", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 June 2000, p.2. See Cadzow for the idea that women with young babies are statistically less depressed than at other times in their lives. See L. Iffy and A. Jakobovits, "Infanticide: New Medical Considerations", *Medicine and Law*, 11, 1992, pp.269-274 for research which detracts from the possibility of a purely causal connection between childbirth and mental disturbance. For discussion of the use of biologically-based defences such as postpartum and premenstrual disorders by female offenders see B. McSherry, "The Return of the Raging Hormones Theory: Premenstrual Syndrome, Postpartum Disorders and Criminal Responsibility", *Sydney Law Review*, 15, 1993, pp.292-316; P. Vanezis, "Women, Violent Crime and the Menstrual Cycle: A Review", *Medicine, Science and Law*, 31(1), 1991, pp.11-14; S.M. Liu, "Postpartum Psychosis: A Legitimate Defence for Negating Criminal Responsibility?", *St. Mary's Law Review on Minority Issues*, 4, 2002, pp.339-404; L. Luckhaus, "A Plea for PMT in the Criminal Law" in S. Edwards, ed., *Gender, Sex and the Law*, Kent, Croom Helm, 1985, pp.159-182; C. Huang, "It's a Hormonal Thing: Premenstrual Syndrome and Postpartum Psychosis as Criminal Defence", *Southern California Review of Law and Women's Studies*, 11, 2002, pp.345-367. See R. Lansdowne, "Infanticide: Psychiatrists in the Plea Bargaining Process", *Monash University Law Review*, 16, 1990, pp.41-63 for the view that judicial leniency afforded to women who kill their children is "the triumph of infanticide". For an opposing view, see K. Laster and K. Alexander, "Chivalry or Death: Women on the Gallows in Victoria 1856-1975", *Criminology Australia*, October/November 1992, pp.6-10; M. Flick, "Frailty Thy Name is Woman: An Evaluation of the New South Wales Infanticide Provision", *Australian Feminist Studies*, 20, 1994, pp.193-202; K. Laster, "Infanticide: A Litmus Test for Feminist Criminological Theory", *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 22, 1989, pp.151-166. In her study of the "iconic image of the madwoman" (p.21), Frigon argues that the discursive labelling of women as 'mad' and 'disorderly' disqualifies their resistance and defiance. Female transgression is "translated into a discourse on madness" (p.42). See S. Frigon, "A genealogy of women's madness" in R.E. Dobash, R. Dobash, and L. Noaks, (eds) *Gender and Crime*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1995, pp.20-47. For a similar idea from a literary perspective see M. Caminero-Santangelo, *The Madwoman Can't Speak: Or Why Insanity is not Subversive*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1998.

'normal' women and 'true' feminine behaviour], and the woman needs to be harshly punished). Between these two pathological extremes there is no room for any other explanation to be offered for child-killings.⁸⁸

As Birch laments, in *Moving Targets: Women, Murder and Representation*, these extremes "defin[e] the norm".⁸⁹ Discussing the case of Texan mother Andrea Yates who was found guilty of drowning her five children,⁹⁰ Fedler states "I need[ed] her to be mad or evil to distinguish 'mothers like her' from 'mothers like me'".⁹¹ Fedler's

⁸⁸ Wilczynski, "Images of Women", p.84. For a critique of the construction of murderous women as "wholly mad or wholly bad" (p.92) see C. Gwynn, "Women and Crime: The Failure of Traditional Theories and the Rise of Feminist Criminology", *Monash University Law Review*, 19(1), 1993, pp.92-103.

⁸⁹ Birch, p.5. Birch states: "[I]n courtrooms and newspapers throughout the Western world, women who kill are divided into two camps: bad – wicked or inhuman; or mad – not like 'ordinary women'" (p.5). Crimmins et al are also critical of the tendency "to focus upon these women as mad or bad" ("Convicted Women who have Killed Children: A Self-Psychology Perspective", *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 12(1), 1997, pp.49-69 at p.66).

⁹⁰ For useful discussions of the case see S.F. Colb, "The Conviction of Andrea Yates: A Narrative of Denial", *Duke Journal of Gender, Law and Policy*, 10, 2003, pp.141-147; D.W. Denno, "Who is Andrea Yates? A Short Story About Insanity", *Duke Journal of Gender, Law and Policy*, 10, 2003, pp.1-137; J. Huckerby, "Women Who Kill Their Children: Case Study and Conclusions Concerning the Differences in the Fall From Maternal Grace by Khoua Her and Andrea Yates", *Duke Journal of Gender, Law and Policy*, 10, 2003, pp.149-172.

⁹¹ Fedler, p.40. Consider also Garner's similar motivation for examining cases of women accused of murder: "I needed to find out if anything made them different from me" (p.24). S. Wyndham, "Femme Fatale", *Sydney Morning Herald GoodWeekend Magazine*, 17 July 2004, pp.22-26. Focusing on the mad/bad paradigm, Colb similarly writes: "[t]he public desperately sought an explanation. Everyone hoped for a reassuring narrative about Andrea's actions that would make sense out of the senseless and thereby restore our faith that mothers do not kill their children, even in the face of the reality that

almost overwhelming need for an excuse, a reason why a mother would kill her children, lies in the unsettling realisation that the “experience of colliding head-on with the realities of child-rearing is common. Few of us own up to it ... [Yates] shot the red light where most of us would stop”.⁹²

As a mother herself, Fedler feels compelled to try to understand maternal child-murder, “to look into the eye of what [is] beyond forgiveness”.⁹³ But even as Fedler realises that ‘neat formulations’ are inadequate for the task, she relies on the only discursive paradigm available to her to describe a mother’s “forbidden turn towards the underworld, where the unimaginable occurs”.⁹⁴ Fedler also finds a certain degree of comfort in the idea of the infanticide as either ‘mad’ or ‘bad’ because it allows us to “pick and choose between mothers who kill their kids”.⁹⁵ We are allowed to feel sympathy for women like Andrea Yates if we adopt the ‘mad’ stance – “[s]he must have loved [her children] – every mother does ... [she just] snapped. It was a moment of self-disintegration”.⁹⁶ Any “unforgivable example[s]” are relegated to the “just evil”

they do, and that Andrea had” (p.141). Salecl attempts to understand the crime of Andrea Yates through the discourse of psychiatry and Lacanian theory, in particular her “lack of remorse ..., cold blooded planning ... and her continuous insistence that she had done the right thing”. R. Salecl, “The Real of Crime: Psychoanalysis and Infanticide”, *Cardozo Law Review*, 24, 2003, pp.2467-2480 at p.2471.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Id.* at p.39.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Id.* at pp.39-40.

category – “[t]hey have ... forfeited compassion by breaking a powerful taboo”.⁹⁷

Heinzelman problematises the “symbolic systems by which we represent [infanticide]”.⁹⁸ Heinzelman denounces the way in which “the woman who commits infanticide is ... pre-judged to have committed a crime so awful as to be unrepresentable except by essentialist narratives of maternity”.⁹⁹ According to Heinzelman:

[I]nfanticide is frequently represented as the prototype of uncivilized behaviour, consistent with an ancient narrative about women, their irrationality, and violence. The mother is demonized not only for the horror provoked by her individual actions, but as the representative of the principle of evil, the personification of all that must be cut out from the body politic ... the murdering mother embodies all that threatens civilization.¹⁰⁰

This is one half of what Heinzelman calls the “mythic mother narrative” in which women are either “scapegoat[s] for all that is evil and disruptive in society ... [or] for all the potential frailty and instability of women, especially reproducing women”.¹⁰¹ For Heinzelman, “the power of

⁹⁷ *Id.* at p.39.

⁹⁸ S.S. Heinzelman, “Going Somewhere: Maternal Infanticide and the Ethics of Judgment” in P.J. Heald, (ed.) *Literature and Legal Problem Solving: Law and Literature as Ethical Discourse*, Durham, North Carolina, Carolina Academic Press, 2000, pp.73-97 at p.73.

⁹⁹ *Id.* at p.82.

¹⁰⁰ *Id.* at p.81.

¹⁰¹ *Id.* at p.86.

the mythic mother narrative to compel assent to a certain kind of judgment overwhelms any opportunity for an alternative narrative”.¹⁰²

Focusing on the 1993 trial of thirty-four year old Texan woman Susan Bienek, accused of the murder of her newborn baby boy, Heinzelman shows how symbolic narratives of “mythic or prototypical motherhood”¹⁰³ are relied upon by both prosecution and defence lawyers – “[s]he was [either] a good mother who had made a terrible ... mistake ... [or] a bad mother, a force of evil in the community”.¹⁰⁴ In her analysis of this case, Heinzelman also shows how the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mother transform into the nurturing and devouring mother of myth in the narratives of both defence and prosecution lawyers. Heinzelman’s work illuminates the importance of breaking free from these static representations which prevent mothers from telling, and the public from hearing, other stories.

Relying on the discourse of ethical feminism, Heinzelman shows how feminist theory “has direct application to the[se] hardest of legal cases”.¹⁰⁵ She refers to what Ashe and Cahn¹⁰⁶ term the “war of interpretation” that

¹⁰² *Id.* at p.87.

¹⁰³ *Id.* at p.95.

¹⁰⁴ *Id.* at p.85.

¹⁰⁵ *Id.* at p.97.

¹⁰⁶ Ashe and Cahn problematise popular and theoretical conceptualisations of women who neglect, abuse, or murder their children. They state that “[t]he developing contemporary

characterises the feminist engagement with the issue of infanticide and the need to move beyond existing debate discourse:

For feminists, infanticide ... raises a set of questions ... that are especially difficult to adjudicate ... [because it] 'involves competing understandings of women, one which defines them as fully responsible moral agents and another which defines them as victims of individual men and of patriarchal society'. These 'hard cases', where women act violently against the vulnerable, are the ones that test the resilience and integrity of feminism in its claim to be ethical politics.¹⁰⁷

Laster has no doubt about the "centrality of infanticide research for feminist theory".¹⁰⁸ "Infanticide research must be informed by and take account of a feminist perspective. Without it, a story of infanticide reads like a cheap (and inaccurate) tabloid, detailing the horrors of the 'massacre of the innocents' by deranged or ... evil [mothers]".¹⁰⁹ Boetzkes, Turner, and Sobstyl also suggest that "from the perspective of critical feminist analysis, the study of

understanding of child abuse within and without the legal system, to the degree that it focuses on perpetrators of abuse, tends to reduce to a story of the 'bad mother'". M. Ashe and N.R. Cahn, "Child Abuse: A Problem for Feminist Theory", *Texas Journal of Women and the Law*, 2, 1993, pp.75-112 at p.76. See also M. Ashe, "The 'Bad Mother' in Law and Literature: A Problem of Representation", *Hastings Law Journal*, 43, 1992, pp.1017-1037.

¹⁰⁷ Heinzelman, p.73.

¹⁰⁸ Laster, p.155.

¹⁰⁹ *Id.* at p.164.

infanticide promises to unmask a host of ... ‘unenunciated unformalized attitudes which permeate almost invisibly in the treatment of [murderous mothers]’.¹¹⁰

But, as several critics have noted, infanticide has not received adequate critical feminist consideration. Infanticide has been an almost ‘taboo’ topic - a “dangerous issue”.¹¹¹ As Wilt puts it, infanticide has been “relegated for so long to the darkest corners of fear and mythology that an unwritten contract virtually requires that it remain untouched and undiscussed”.¹¹² By failing to adequately address infanticide, feminists have left a “critical void in a field dominated, if not defined, by a perspective that provides fertile ground for misogynist assumptions to thrive”.¹¹³ This dissertation seeks to fill the void by exposing the underpinnings of our cultural stories about the murderous mother in order to break free from the unconscious attitudes that imprison us.

The work of feminist theorists such as Young and Heinzelman establishes the parameters and provides the

¹¹⁰ Boetzkes, Turner and Sobstyl, p.127.

¹¹¹ M.A. Fineman and I. Karpin, (eds) *Mothers in Law: Feminist Theory and the Legal Regulation of Motherhood*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1995, p.xi. Consider also Johnson’s comment: “when a woman speaks about the death of children in any sense other than that of pure loss, a powerful taboo is being violated”. B. Johnson, “Apostrophe, Animation and Abortion”, *Diacritics*, 16(1), 1986, pp.28-47 at p.38.

¹¹² J. Wilt, *Abortion, Choice, and Contemporary Fiction: The Armageddon of Maternal Instinct*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1990, p.10.

¹¹³ Dougherty, p.94.

impetus for my own study. Young's notion of "the cultural weight of crime as imagination" which we looked at earlier resonates powerfully with the words of nineteenth-century author the Marquis de Sade whose fictional creation Madame de Saint-Ange says to her protégé – "Dread not infanticide; the crime is imaginary" – an idea which not only prefaces this Introduction but which continues to haunt the pages of this entire dissertation. And Heinzelman's article ends where my own work begins in her association between infanticide and "culture's deepest anxieties".¹¹⁴

If, as author Toni Morrison believes, we tell stories about what we fear most, then our cultural narratives suggest an overwhelming preoccupation with the murderous mother – the monster in our minds. This dissertation examines some of the most powerful and enduring stories told about the murderous mother and considers how these stories are shaped by the unconscious fears and fantasies that dominate the cultural psyche. Through the telling and retelling of these stories, this dissertation challenges the ways in which we imagine maternal child-murder and the limits of that imagination.

This dissertation uncovers the psychoanalytic foundations of the obsessive telling and consumption of stories of

¹¹⁴ Heinzelman, p.97.

maternal child-murder in Western culture, and contends that infanticide narratives can be read as symptoms of psycho-cultural dis-ease. Underlying all stories about the murderous mother is an unconscious fear of infanticide and fantasy of maternal destructiveness that is repressed in the individual psyche. These fears and fantasies are given expression in our cultural narratives such as myths, fairytales, and legends, and in imaginative creations such as drama, novels, and poetry. Murderous mothers fill these narratives, and through them the monstrous maternal imago repressed in our unconscious minds is released and projected onto fantasy figures of extreme evil – monsters with whom we engage in battle in the labyrinths of the mind. In these nightmare worlds, the murderous mother assumes monstrous forms, appearing and reappearing in the guise of serpent-dragons (chapter 2), witches (chapter 1), or mythic *phasma* (chapters 3 and 4). From the earliest myths of autochthony to the Greek tragedies and beyond, the murderous mother lingers in the unconscious as both phantom and phantasy – “culture’s core obsession (and repression)”.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ A. Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1977, p.70. In Part 1 we will see how the individual psyche and the cultural psyche are intimately related to one another. For now, Greenberg describes the association in a way that appropriately emphasises the close relationship between them: “the individual is sutured into the cultural and, at the same time, the cultural responds to the most intimate fantasies of the individual” (p.48). M. Greenberg, “Racine, Oedipus, and Absolute Fantasies”, *Diacritics*, 28(3), 1998, pp.40-61.

This work conceives of the murderous mother as a spectral figure, haunting the minds of those telling and consuming stories of infanticide – an ‘absent presence’ whose metaphoric and symbolic potency renders her at once an object of fascination and horror – “a thing almost too terrible even to think about for patriarchal culture, a focus for anxiety so intense that it is almost paralysing”,¹¹⁶ a Medusan sight too fearful to confront yet from which we cannot seem to avert our gaze.

The phantasmic murderous mother “evokes a nightmare that is as threatening to the individual psyche as it is to the communal matrix”.¹¹⁷ If social order is the product of neurosis,¹¹⁸ then it is to the unconscious – “that dark realm that governs us”¹¹⁹ – that we must turn in order to excavate the ‘imaginary’ foundations on which our culture is built. Feminist theorists such as Luce Irigaray, Cixous and Clément, and Drucilla Cornell have shown how psychoanalysis is “crucial” for cultural transformation and for questioning that which appears “inevitable”, given,

¹¹⁶ M. Nicholson, “Magic Food, Compulsive Eating, and Power Poetics”, in L.R. Furst and P.W. Graham, eds, *Disorderly Eaters: Texts in Self-Empowerment*, University Park, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992, pp.43-60 at p.48.

¹¹⁷ Corti, p.xvi.

¹¹⁸ J.C. Smith, *The Neurotic Foundations of Social Order: Psychoanalytic Roots of Patriarchy*, New York, New York University Press, 1990, p.4.

¹¹⁹ Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995, p.187.

fixed¹²⁰ – ideas and images that are seemingly set in stone but which are merely “mythic constructions”.¹²¹

This dissertation journeys into the future *through* the past – a past which may be perceived “as *undead*”¹²² and thus alive to conscious criticism. In order to “[g]o beyond the old dichotomies”¹²³ and to “challenge received ideologies, values, and prejudices”¹²⁴ we must remove the ‘mythic lenses’ through which we perceive the world. Re-imagining infanticide involves not only presenting new ways of understanding old stories (*demythification*) but also creating new stories which may replace the old (*remythification*).¹²⁵ “[E]ach time we listen to a new way of

¹²⁰ D. Cornell, *Beyond Accommodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction, and the Law*, New York, Routledge, 1991, pp.9-10.

¹²¹ J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York, Routledge, 1990, p.25. The association between feminism and psychoanalysis is considered further in Chapter 1. See also Appignanesi and Forrester (especially chapter 16) for the way in which “psychoanalysis ... make[s] possible the pursuit of the feminist project of revealing the construction of the subject” and how “its theories of the unconscious will allow feminism to avoid the traps or blind alleys in which other theories have led it” (pp.460-461). L. Appignanesi and J. Forrester, *Freud's Women*, New York, Basic Books, 1992.

¹²² Sage writes: “It’s the very whiff of the past – if you perceive the past not as a living heritage, but as *undead*, stuff to animate, and galvanise and replay”. L. Sage, “Introduction” in L. Sage, ed., *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*, London, Virago, 1994, pp.1-23 at p.4; italics in text.

¹²³ L. Sage, *Women in the House of Fiction: Post-War Women Novelists*, London, Macmillan, 1992, p.175.

¹²⁴ Aristodemou, p.9.

¹²⁵ Mythopoeia – myth making or remaking – is a method, a strategy which involves “a deliberate reshaping, reversion, and revision, of male myths” (pp.8-9). For feminist author Hélène Cixous, mythopoeia consists of the dual processes of ‘demythification’ and ‘remythification’ in her “recuperation of old myths through the invention of totally new mythic interpretations, creations, and syntheses” (p.9). T.A. Sankovitch, *French Women Writers and the*

knowing”, Minow suggests, “we learn more about the limits of our current way of seeing”.¹²⁶ It is perhaps in this respect that the work of feminists such as Young and Heinzelman, and legal theorist Robert Cover,¹²⁷ has proved to be most inspiring. Their defiant search for alternative versions and other stories embedded in legal narratives holds the promise of new “imaginaries” which will “reopen the gap between representation and reality to a time *before* existing practices, begun as myths, became law”.¹²⁸

Following Weigel, I engage with the notion of myth as ‘social imaginary’ – as both “a memory of the incomprehensible, of what is repressed by reason and cannot be named in rational discourse, and ... as a canon of images which have been handed down over the

Book: Myths of Access and Desire, New York, Syracuse University Press, 1988.

¹²⁶ Minow, p.62.

¹²⁷ Cover suggests that legal meaning and the authority of law can be contested by narratives which imagine other possible worlds. It is Cover’s vision – his search for “new worlds” – which has inspired many legal and literary theorists to penetrate law’s seemingly impermeable boundaries. See M. Minow, M. Ryan, and A. Sarat, eds, *Narrative, Violence, and the Law: The Essays of Robert Cover*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1992.

¹²⁸ Aristodemou, pp.20-21. Hodges notes that “[L]aws originate not in an all-knowing, clairvoyant mind, but rather in the contextual narratives of a given society – in its particular language, history, and myth”, E.P. Hodges, “The Letter of the Law: Reading Hawthorne and the Law of Adultery” in B.L. Rockwood, (ed.) *Law and Literature Perspectives*, New York, Peter Lang, 1998, pp.133-168 at p.138. Cain and Smart also note that “mythology is not extant only in ‘other’ societies, but pervasive in our own, and perhaps most potent in those places where its absence is most loudly proclaimed ... the law”, M. Cain and C. Smart, “Preface” in P. Fitzpatrick, *The Mythology of Modern Law*, London, Routledge, 1992, pp.xii-xiv at p.xii.

centuries”.¹²⁹ Working with this notion of myth allows us to “reflect upon the structuring of our perception and experience through patterns of the imaginary, and read mythical configurations as primal scenes of our history retained in memory”.¹³⁰ Gatens has also engaged with the “imaginaries of specific culture[s]: those ready-made images and symbols through which we make sense of social bodies ... the origins of which have been long forgotten”.¹³¹ Focusing on representations of sexual difference, Gatens shows how “social imaginaries ‘link up’ [with] ... many legal, political, and ethical accounts of women [by relying on] ... recurring images ... which are implicitly used to justify women’s differential treatment [and which] ... have now become second nature”.¹³²

Feminist legal theorist Drucilla Cornell suggests that “[t]he word ‘myth’ ... emphasise[s] the hold that [representations of] the feminine have over both individuals and cultures”.¹³³ “[W]omen have been important motors of mythical (hi)stories ... fabulations of women, probably not

¹²⁹ S. Weigel, “Body and Image Space: Problems and Representations of a Female Dialectic of Enlightenment” in A. Milner and C. Worth, (eds) *Discourse and Difference: Post-Structuralism, Feminism and the Moment of History*, Clayton, Victoria, Centre for General and Comparative Literature, Monash University, 1990, pp.107-126 at p.116.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ M. Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality*, London, Routledge, 1996, pp.viii; xi.

¹³² *Id.* at p.xi.

¹³³ Cornell, *Beyond Accommodation*, p.172.

created by women”,¹³⁴ Curti suggests. Indeed, Sankovitch notes how women “appear in male myths, in forms, figures, and images that are not hers, and do not reflect her adequately or accurately”¹³⁵.

When women show up in the books of male myths it is under names they themselves do not recognise ... clad in deceptive images ... false names, false icons ... pretend to represent women.¹³⁶

Invoking earlier feminist critics of male-invented myths such as Mary Daly and Simone de Beauvoir, Sankovitch criticises the “nefarious processes of mythification by which women have been defined, and which have become part and parcel of our cultural heritage” and she attempts to come to terms with the “debilitating consequences of a history in which myth and culture have worked hand in hand to enfeeble women”.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ L. Curti, *Female Stories, Female Bodies: Narrative, Identity and Representation*, New York, New York University Press, 1998, p.ix.

¹³⁵ Sankovitch, p.3.

¹³⁶ *Id.* at pp.3-4.

¹³⁷ *Id.* at p.4. See also S. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949), trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1978 and M. Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, London, Women’s Press, 1984. According to Purkiss, “[f]or feminists, the rewriting of myths denotes participation in these historical processes and the struggle to alter gender asymmetries agreed upon for centuries by myth’s disseminators”. D. Purkiss, “Women’s Rewriting of Myth” in C. Larrington, (ed.) *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*, London, Pandora Press, 1992, pp.441-457 at p.441.

“History comes from discord, and discord comes from women”,¹³⁸ Curti suggests. But myth is “more malleable than history”¹³⁹ – “[t]here can always be other mythologies”.¹⁴⁰ Cornell argues that myth is “necessary, indeed unavoidable, in feminist theory if we are to ... [move] beyond the logic of phallogocentrism ... [t]he role of myth in feminist theory is essential to the reclaiming, and retelling, of ‘her story’”.¹⁴¹ Cornell describes the process of engaging with our mythic past as ‘recollective imagination’:

We re-collect the mythic figures of the past, but as we do so we reimagine them. It is the potential variability of myth that allows us to work within myth ... to reimagine our world, and, by so doing, to begin to dream of a new one ... [M]yths ... may be rooted in masculine fantasy, but they cannot ... be reduced to it ... even in myth, ‘reality’ is always shifting ...¹⁴²

Through her provocative analysis, Cornell seeks to disrupt “the tyranny of established reality”.¹⁴³ “We cannot simply erase myth ... [we cannot] den[y] myth’s hold on us in a

¹³⁸ Curti, p.ix.

¹³⁹ A. Carter, ed., *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, London, Virago, 1990, p.xvi.

¹⁴⁰ Cornell, p.172.

¹⁴¹ Cornell, p.172. Calhoun contends that feminist legal theorists have not only “neglected [law’s] mythic dimension” but have also failed to “fully explor[e] the possibilities of using myth in order to argue on behalf of women”. E. Calhoun, “The Breadth of Context and the Depth of Myth: Completing the Feminist Paradigm”, *Hastings Women’s Law Journal*, 4(1), 1993, pp.87-108 at pp.87-88.

¹⁴² Cornell, p.178.

¹⁴³ *Id.* at p.2.

genderized society. The way beyond is to retrace the circle that seemingly encircles us ... Our only option is to work within myth to reinterpret it".¹⁴⁴

Focusing on the murderous mother, Cornell turns to ancient myth and to a cultural icon that figures the relationship between maternity and monstrosity. The myth of Medea is an 'underlying social fantasy'¹⁴⁵ and an enduring cultural myth. In her reading of Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*,¹⁴⁶ in which a slave mother murders her infant daughter, Cornell draws on the Medea myth to problematise the "universality" of symbols of the "killing mother":

¹⁴⁴ *Id.* at p.196. Caputi suggests that "myth – *living* symbols and stories – is ... charged with the energy to transform consciousness" (p.3). Referring to feminist de-mythologiser and mythmaker Mary Daly, Caputi writes that "patriarchal myth contains stolen energies. Feminist interpreters can see through the 'foreground' deceptions of patriarchal myth [and] reverse [its] characteristic reversals" (p.4). J. Caputi, "On the Lap of Necessity: A Mythic Reading of Teresa Brennan's Energetics Philosophy", *Hypatia*, 16(2), 2001, pp.1-26.

¹⁴⁵ In line with Weigel and Gatens, Cornell calls underlying cultural myths and fantasies the "social unconscious" (pp.194-195).

¹⁴⁶ T. Morrison, *Beloved* (1987), New York, Alfred Knopf, 1993. Morrison's novel is a fictional reconstruction of an historical event. For more about the 'history' of *Beloved* see S. Weisenburger, *Modern Medea: A Family Story of Slavery and Child-Murder from the Old South*, New York, Hill & Wang, 1998. Morrison's novel has attracted numerous scholars in the field of 'law and literature' studies and has, perhaps more than any other contemporary fictional work, brought these disparate disciplines into closer proximity. Some engaging examples include: M. Aristodemou, "Language, Ethics and Imagination: Narratives of the (M)other in Law and Literature", *New Formations*, 32, 1997, pp.34-48; E. Tobin, "Imagining the Mother's Text: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Contemporary Law", *Harvard Women's Law Journal*, 16, 1993, pp.233-273; T. Plank, "How Would the Criminal Law Treat Sethe?: Reflections on Patriarchy, Child Abuse, and the Uses of Narrative to Re-Imagine Motherhood", *Wisconsin Women's Law Journal*, 12, 1997, pp.83-111.

In *Beloved*, the myth is retold, and as it is retold, the 'meaning', the deep significance of killing one's children, is problematised, by the slave 'reality' in which the mother is allowed to bear the children but not to 'raise' them ... the allegory of *Beloved* relies on myth to dramatize the very difference of the Afro-American mother's situation. In this sense, the 'universals' expressed in myth are not and cannot be just the mere repetition of the same.¹⁴⁷

We may not be able to "simply escape myth, particularly myths of the feminine",¹⁴⁸ Cornell suggests, but we can expose the 'reality' that myths disguise.

In her study of 'dangerous mothers', Warner also focuses on Medea, whom she describes as "one of the most famous and most fascinating ... [o]f the throng of mythical and monstrous enchantresses".¹⁴⁹ As Corti has shown, the myth of Medea "has haunted the Western imagination for over two thousand years".¹⁵⁰ First introduced as infanticide in Euripides' dramatic adaptation of the myth, successive interpretations of Medea have tended to follow Euripides' negative portrayal.¹⁵¹ Medea "speaks to our times", as Warner puts it, as child murderess and in

¹⁴⁷ Cornell, pp.194-195.

¹⁴⁸ *Id.* at p.196.

¹⁴⁹ M. Warner, *Managing Monsters: Six Myths of Our Time*, London, Vintage, 1994, p.6.

¹⁵⁰ Corti, p.xvi.

¹⁵¹ See S.I. Johnston, "Corinthian Medea and the Cult of Hera Akraia" in J.J. Clauss and S.I. Johnston, (eds.) *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1997, pp.44-70.

cultural interpretations of 'bad mothers' "she is the worst".¹⁵² Not only is she "a powerfully destructive woman whose excessive and transgressive violations of law bring destruction upon herself, her household, and her community"¹⁵³ but she also "contravenes the most fundamental criterion of femininity – maternal love".¹⁵⁴

When Medea transgresses the cultural codes that dictate her behaviour as a woman and mother, she cements her position as monstrous mother in the cultural imagination. Medea's ruthless resolve to murder her children and the 'unnaturalness' of her actions links Medea with other fantasies of female evil, embodied in figures such as Judith or Helen of Troy, and with fantasies of maternal maleficence, manifested in figures such as Agave, Ino, Procne, Jocasta and Creusa from Greek myth or Eve and Lilith from biblical myth, and with "creature[s] in the surrealist bestiary of misogynist folklore"¹⁵⁵ such as the Mesopotamian Lamashtu or Lamia, Gello, Mormo, *empousai* and *strigoi* from ancient Greece or La Llorona from Hispanic legend or the witch and ogress from fairy tales – "[m]yths of female aberration [that] predispose the mind to believe in monstrous crimes".¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Warner, p.7.

¹⁵³ Ashe and Cahn, p.80.

¹⁵⁴ Warner, p.7.

¹⁵⁵ *Id.* at p.16.

¹⁵⁶ *Id.* at p.7.

Warner suggests that “[a]ncient myths ... are perpetuated through cultural repetition”.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, these mythical malignant and destructive maternal figures haunt the cultural imagination throughout the centuries. In each era, they are invoked and transformed according to the artistry of novelists, poets, dramatists, librettists, painters and sculptors. These mythic figures have come to epitomise female transgression, deviance, and ‘evil’. But, like Cornell, Warner also points out that “this does not mean they will never fade, that they cannot yield to another, more helpful set of images or tales”.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, both Cornell and Warner believe that “stories might provide a way of salvation ... newly told stories can sew and weave and knit different patterns into the social fabric”.¹⁵⁹ Warner writes:

Myths offer a lens which can be used to see human identity in its social and cultural context - they can lock us up in stock reactions, bigotry and fear, but they're not immutable, and by unpicking them, the stories can lead to others ... myths aren't writ in stone, they're not fixed ... [myths] are never set so hard they cannot be changed again.¹⁶⁰

To recall the belief of an author who was one of the most prolific late twentieth-century myth-makers, Angela Carter,

¹⁵⁷ Warner, p.xiv.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Id.* at pp.13-14.

myths are malleable. They allow us to journey not only into the past but also into the future. *Monsters in Our Minds: The Myth of Infanticide and the Murderous Mother in the Cultural Psyche* follows the path of this mythic journey – beginning from abjection and ending with transformation.

If, as O'Connor suggests, "[a]ncient mythology is invaluable for understanding the issues, feelings and conflicts we've repressed either as individuals or a culture",¹⁶¹ then the figure of Medea, and her murderous counterparts from Greek myth, biblical myth, folklore, and fairytales, recall psychic resonances with the archaic maternal body as source of life and death. Van Buren suggests that "anxieties about mortality and vulnerability associated with human infancy and mothering are buried under the rituals of culture".¹⁶²

In Part 1 - *Anatomy of the Psyche* – we consider the relationship between the individual and cultural psyche, in particular the way in which infantile fears and fantasies are repressed in the unconscious mind and resurface in our cultural stories.

¹⁶¹ P. O'Connor, "Stories for the soul", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 April 2001, 'Spectrum', p.2.

¹⁶² J. Van Buren, "The Psychoanalytic Semiosis of Absence or, the Semiotic Murder of the Mother", *International Review of Psychoanalysis*, 18, 1991, pp.249-263 at p.253.

In Chapter One - *Infanticidal Phantasmagoria: Monstrous Imagos, Devouring Mothers, and Fantasies of Maternal Malevolence in the Social Unconscious* – we consider the psychoanalytic roots of our cultural preoccupation with the murderous mother. We locate the dreadful mother of psycho-cultural fantasy within psychoanalytic narratives of infant development. Focussing on pre-oedipal and oedipal narratives of individuation, this chapter reveals the mother as the primary source of infantile psychic conflict. Analysing fairytales as the narrative form that most clearly elaborates infantile fears and anxieties, we see how the fear of infanticide is a “central preoccupation”¹⁶³ for children. Fairytales are filled with mothers and mother figures whose unspeakable savagery can only form part of an horrific imagination. This chapter suggests that the monster of fairytales and psychic fantasies is the murderous mother in disguise. This monstrous maternal imago remains repressed in the unconscious mind.

In Chapter Two - *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide, Matricide, and Oedipal Lore* – we consider how infantile fears and fantasies are transferred to society and revealed in the myths through which our culture is transmitted. In this chapter we see how the monstrous maternal phantoms that characterise childhood fairytales reappear in Greek mythology as destructive and deadly murderous

¹⁶³ D. Bloch, *‘So the Witch Won’t Eat Me’: Fantasy and the Child’s Fear of Infanticide*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1978, p.2.

mothers. Focusing in particular on the mother and hero archetypes that constitute these myths, we consider Greek mythic heroes such as Oedipus and Orestes, their encounters with the murderous mother, and how they defend themselves in battles with maternal monsters where victory means the difference between life and death.

The monstrous mother of infantile fantasy remains buried in the unconscious of all adults. For the adult male psyche, however, fear assumes a hostile cultural form. The cultural expression of hatred towards women (misogyny) is no less than an unconscious fear of the mother (matriphobia), and by extension a fear of *all* women as mothers *in potentia*. In Part 2 - *Phallogentric His(-s)tories/Cultural Neuroses* – we consider how unconscious fears of the murderous mother are revealed at different historical periods and in varying cultural forms. The chapters in Part 2 focus on the particular neuroses¹⁶⁴ of ancient Greek society and early modern culture because they most powerfully reflect masculine anxieties about the mother's potentially destructive force and demonstrate most clearly anxieties of maternal origin and fantasies of maternal power. These chapters show how the murderous mother of psychic fantasy emerges and re-emerges at moments of social crisis when concerns about

¹⁶⁴ Christopher Lasch believes that “[e]very age develops its own peculiar forms of pathology” (*The Culture of Narcissism*, New York, Warner Books, 1979, p.88).

the position of women in the body politic are most problematic. In each chapter, we see how the murderous mother threatens both psychic and social disintegration.

In Chapter Three - '*An Unnatural Crime, A Monstrous Act*': *Imag(in)ing Maternal Child-Murder in the Theatre of Dionysus* - we consider the figure of the mythic murderous mother and how child-murder is engendered in Greek tragedy. Focusing on the mother-child relationship, this chapter elucidates the ways in which tragic representations of maternal child-murder bring to the fore unconscious fears and fantasies of maternal destructiveness. Greek tragedies such as Euripides' *Bacchae* and the *Medea* resonate as much with audiences in fifth-century Athens as those in our own day and age because they deal with the 'stuff' of the unconscious, erecting a pathway to the "phantasmagoria of infancy"¹⁶⁵ – forcing us to confront the fearful fantasy that beneath the nurturing façade of all mothers lies the deadly infanticide.

In Western culture fantasies of maternal destructiveness are informed by the "physical and psychic weight of responsibility on woman"¹⁶⁶ for bearing children. Maternal power derives from the ability to bring new life into the

¹⁶⁵ M. Ellmann, "Introduction" in M. Ellmann ed., *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism*, London, Longman, 1994, pp.1-35 at p.9.

¹⁶⁶ Rich, p.35.

world and it is this *female reproductive power*¹⁶⁷ that is so threatening to men. According to Rich, “[t]he power of the mother has two aspects: the biological potential or capacity to bear and nourish human life, and the magical power invested in women by men”.¹⁶⁸ From the Church Fathers and witch-hunters to physicians and male poets and playwrights, the reproductive female body is imagined as a body that threatens to breach not only its somatic boundaries but also those of the body politic. Woman is conceived of as a threat to patriarchal social order because she is out(side) of (male) control. In the space between the physical and the psychical, the female reproductive body assumes power over both life *and* death.

If it is at the site of childbirth that the liminal experiences of life and death coincide, then it is little wonder that the maternal matrix features most prominently in male fantasies of maternal monstrosity. Poets and playwrights have long fantasised about the excessive and deadly possibilities of the generative maternal body and erected imaginative defences against its dangerous force. In the early modern era male physicians, law-enforcers, and dramatists defended themselves against the fantasised threat of mothers by delimiting and even denying the role of women in the reproductive process.

¹⁶⁷ *Id.* at p.90.

¹⁶⁸ *Id.* at p.xv.

In Chapter Four - *'Deeds Against Nature and Monsters By Kind': Childbirth, Child-Murder and Early Modern Anxieties of Origin* - we consider early modern fantasies of maternal monstrosity and defences against the deadly maternal matrix. Revolving around the sixteenth-century case of Agnes Bowker, a woman who allegedly gave birth to a monster, this chapter shows how powerful fears and fantasies dominate the early modern cultural imagination. Focusing on the allegations of child-murder and witchcraft sparked by the monstrous birth, we become aware that in the story of Agnes Bowker the father is absent, even as the Father's Law dictates the story that is told and the terms of its telling. The chapter concludes that the maternal monster haunting the minds of medical, legal, and literary men is, in fact, a monster of their own creation.

In Part 3 - *Haunting Tales* – we consider the haunting power and spectre of the murderous mother in the cultural imagination, a “ghostly figure who dwells in the Western psyche”.¹⁶⁹ From narratives about real women accused of child-murder who have become symbols of maternal monstrosity to tales about mythic women who are cultural icons of female, and more specifically, maternal evil, the infanticide is a monster in our minds – haunting those who both tell and consume her story.

¹⁶⁹ J. Grbich, “Reading the Phantom: Taxation Law, Psychoanalysis and Apparitions”, *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 8, 1997, pp.81-109 at p.83.

In Chapter Five - *'A Monster Pure and Simple': Incredible Mother Plots* – we consider the power of the imagination to shape narratives of maternal child-murder. Focusing on several late twentieth century cases of women accused and/or convicted of murdering their children, this chapter highlights the ways in which the myth of infanticide and fantasies of maternal malevolence impact both on the telling and interpretation of stories of maternal child-murder. In the stories of women such as Lindy Chamberlain, Patsy Ramsey, Susan Smith, Darlie Routier, Caroline Beale, Joanne Hayes, and Christine Villemin, supposedly reliable 'signs' of maternal monstrosity prove to be both unreliable and misleading. Problematizing the very notion of storytelling itself, this chapter shows how in the blurring of the 'fictional' and the 'real', the possibility of hearing the mother's own story is remote. The more we tell stories about murder, the more murder slips away, leaving us to "imagine the worst".¹⁷⁰

"Men have told the stories and framed the cultural precepts", writes Frye, "women ... bound by those precepts, have too often found themselves living men's stories rather than telling and living their own".¹⁷¹ Chapter Six - *'Her Side of the Story': Scenes of (In)justice, Fables of Desire, and Revisionary Mythopoeism* – focuses on

¹⁷⁰ G. Bataille, *Gilles de Rais*, cited in M. Hénaff, *Sade: The Invention of the Libertine Body* (1978), trans. X. Callahan, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p.76.

¹⁷¹ J.S. Frye, *Living Stories, Telling Lives: Women and the Novel in Contemporary Experience*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1986, p.v.

narratives by female authors such as Christa Wolf, Rhodessa Jones, Vivian Deborah Wilson, Cherríe Moraga, Michèle Fabien, Ursule Molinaro, Toni Morrison, Yvonne Vera, and Angela Carter who locate in mythic murderous mothers powerfully defiant and vocal women. Focusing on the issue of voice, and putting into practice Hirsch's belief that "feminism might begin by listening to the stories that mothers have to tell, and by creating spaces in which mothers might articulate those stories",¹⁷² these revisionists explode ideas, misconceptions, and prejudices that circumscribe the telling of *other* stories. Considering mythic women who have appeared throughout this entire dissertation - Medea, Jocasta, Eve, and Lilith – these female creators allow the murderous mother to tell "her side of the story".

Examining a variety of texts and drawing material from a spectrum of disciplines, including law, literature, criminology, theology, philosophy, and medicine, this dissertation concludes that it is only by exposing the psychoanalytic underpinnings of our cultural stories about the murderous mother that we might begin to unravel and re-imagine the myths that shape and define, that shackle and silence. Emerging from this study is an original and important theoretical framework concerning conceptualisations of infanticide, the ways in which we

¹⁷² M. Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, Bloomington, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1989, p.167.

imagine maternal child-murder and the limits of that imagination, and how we might break free from the unconscious attitudes that imprison us by slaying the murderous maternal monster buried deep in the labyrinths of the mind.

PART 1: Anatomy of the Psyche

The culture, the language, the imaginary and the mythology in which we live at the moment ... let's see what ground it is built on ...

Luce Irigaray

Chapter One Infanticidal Phantasmagoria: Monstrous Imagos, Devouring Mothers, and Fantasies of Maternal Malevolence in the Social Unconscious

*We take monstrous pleasure in creating monsters...*¹

*Monster! Mother Monster! ... run ...[she is]
frightening...*²

*[The mother] has been every culture's core
obsession (and repression)...*³

*Somewhere every culture has an imaginary zone
for what it excludes...*⁴

*[Infanticide] has regularly been stored in the
'dark places' of the mind...*⁵

'Phantoms of extreme evil'⁶

In the realm of fantasy, "irrational fears [are] swept away from the external world and c[o]me to haunt the interiority of the human psyche".⁷ In the dark and dangerous labyrinths of the mind, where "everything may grow and

¹ A.P. Farley, "Amusing Monsters", *Cardozo Law Review*, 23(4), 2002, pp.1493-1528 at p.1494.

² J. McKeever, *Mother Monster!*, Sydney, Collins, 1986, p.19.

³ A. Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1977, p.70.

⁴ H. Cixous and C. Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (1975), trans. Betsy Wing, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p.6.

⁵ L. Corti, *The Myth of Medea and the Murder of Children*, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1998, p.3.

⁶ J. Van Buren, "Postmodernism – Feminism and the Deconstruction of the Feminine: Kristeva and Irigaray", *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 55(3), 1995, pp.231-243 at p.241.

⁷ L. Mulvey, "Cinema Magic and the Old Monsters: Angela Carter's Cinema" in L. Sage, ed., *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*, London, Virago, 1994, pp.230-242 at p.241.

spread as it pleases”,⁸ we encounter “all of the teeming perils of the night and the forest, ghosts, hobgoblins, ogres, babies on gridirons, witches that fatten their captives in cages for cannibal tables ...”,⁹ ghastly and ghoulish monsters whose unspeakable savagery can only form part of an horrific imagination. Despite our fearful reactions, we are drawn to this nightmare world which is preserved in our earliest childhood memories.¹⁰ Fairytales, that staple of childhood entertainment, unfalteringly take place in seemingly unimaginable worlds in which monsters of all sorts continually threaten to devour, maim, or otherwise destroy innocents. Typically, the threatening entity assumes the form of mother or mother figure.

According to Phillips, fairytales “lead us straight to the figure of the mother” in the form of either “a kind, protective parent” who is weak, frail or dead or a “persecuting monster” who plots to harm her own and other children.¹¹ Tatar suggests that fairytales rely on

⁸ D. Bloch, *So the Witch Won't Eat Me: Fantasy and the Child's Fear of Infanticide*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1978, p.2.

⁹ A. Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979), London, Penguin Books, 1981, p.111.

¹⁰ According to Warner, “[s]cariness has gained ground as a pleasure ... the imagination often stirs up dread on purpose for its own sake, as well as for the mind's stimulation ... the special flavour of scary things ... has swelled into a contemporary, loving obsession with monsters and other horrors”. M Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling, and Making Mock* (1998), New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999, p.4.

¹¹ J. Phillips, *Nathalie Sarraute: Metaphor, Fairy-tale and the Feminine of the Text*, New York, Peter Lang, 1994, pp.159-160. As Todd puts it, mothers “are usually bad and living, or good and dead”. J. Todd, *Women's Friendship in Literature*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1980, p.2. According to Bakan, “[t]he theme of

images of the evil mother in all her guises while the loving mother is typically absent or relegated to the margins of the narrative.¹² The nurturing angel is juxtaposed with the murderous monster, representing “all that is evil and wicked in Woman”.¹³ In these tales, notes Ussher in *Fantasies of Femininity*, women who “stray from the path of ‘perfect’ femininity” and ‘natural’ motherhood are “denounced as ‘wild women’ or witches ... [who] always deserve [their] punishment”.¹⁴ “Nothing is more

getting rid of children by abandonment or by killing them is present in most [fairy tales] (p.65) ... infanticide or mutilation or exploitation of children is always present” (p.68). D. Bakan, *Slaughter of the Innocents: A Study of the Battered Child Phenomenon*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1971.

¹² M. Tatar, “Folkloristic Phantasies: Grimm’s Fairy-tales and Freud’s Family Romance” in M.M. Metzger and K. Mommsen, eds, *Fairy-tales as Ways of Knowing*, Berne, Peter Lang, 1981, p.88. Bettelheim suggests that the nurturing “usually dead” mother is preserved in memory by the fantasy of her evil alter ego. B. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1975), New York, Vintage Books, 1989, p.69. The evil mother is “horrifying, excessive in some essential way, and worthy of great fear ... [her] neglectful, abusive, reckless, or murderous behaviour threatens or destroys children ... and [she is] depicted as so split off from the normal reality of ‘good motherhood’ that [she is] ... consigned to ‘the attic’ of deviance”. M. Ashe and N.R. Cahn, “Child Abuse: A Problem for Feminist Theory”, *Texas Journal of Women and the Law*, 2, 1993, pp.75-112 at pp.80-81.

¹³ J. Ussher, *Fantasies of Femininity: Reframing the Boundaries of Sex*, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1997, p.8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Ashe and Cahn note that “the ‘bad mother’ is depicted as the figure always threatening to exceed, to violate the norms that prescribe the boundaries and the scope of her duty. Her boundary-violations have tragic consequences” (p.81). See also Creed’s critique of male film theorists who “believ[e] that ‘femininity’, by definition, excludes all forms of aggressive, monstrous behaviour” (p.5). B. Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, New York, Routledge, 1993. Gabbard and Gabbard also note that “women who stray from traditional female roles - or pervert these roles ... - are increasingly likely to take monstrous forms”. K. Gabbard and G. Gabbard, “Phallic Women in the Contemporary Cinema”, *American Imago*, 50(4), 1993, pp.421-439 at p.421.

monstrous, more ‘unnatural’”, writes Creed, “than a woman who turns her back on [motherhood]”.¹⁵

In her book *From the Beast to the Blonde*, Marina Warner notes that maternal monsters and other figures of female evil “outnumber” their male counterparts “and certainly eclipse them in vividness and their lingering grip on the imagination”.¹⁶ In the most well known fairytales transmitted to us by Charles Perrault and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, the wicked witch transforms into the cannibal ogress or evil stepmother – their terror reflected in the potency of female and, more specifically, maternal malevolence. Walt Disney, the so-called “spiritual heir”¹⁷ of tale-tellers such as Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, recognised the power of maternal monsters in these tales. His own retellings have, Warner suggests, “done more

¹⁵ B. Creed, “Bitch Queen or Backlash? Media Portrayals of Female Murderers” in K. Greenwood, ed., *The Thing She Loves: Why Women Kill*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1996, pp.108-122 at p.111.

¹⁶ M. Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairytales and their Tellers* (1994), New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1995, p.202. Tatar confirms Warner’s view in her observation that “ill will and evil are so often personified as adult female figures in fairy tales” (*Off With Their Heads: Fairytales and the Culture of Childhood*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1992, p.228). The “omnipresent, powerful mother” reflects a psychological burden in our cultural stories. Lederer also notes that “while there are a few male ogres in myth and fairy tale, there is no body of male monsters comparable to female [monsters]. In myth, as in Grimm’s fairy tales, the father is nearly always the ‘good guy’, the mother ... the deadly witch” (p.65). W. Lederer, *The Fear of Women*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968.

¹⁷ Warner, *Beast*, p.207.

than any other creation to naturalize female – maternal – malignancy in the imaginations of children worldwide”.¹⁸

The maternal monster is one of the most powerful and enduring “creature[s] in the surrealist bestiary of misogynist folklore”.¹⁹ Tales about the ‘good’ mother “have not gained the currency or popularity of ‘Cinderella’ or Snow White’ in which she is supplanted by a monster”.²⁰ Moreover, as “[t]he historical context of the stories has been sheared away, figures like the wicked stepmother have grown into archetypes of the human psyche, hallowed, inevitable symbols ... The danger of women has become more and more part of the story ...”.²¹ In the hands of tale-tellers such as Disney, “the misogyny present in many fairy stories ... has come to look dangerously like the way things are ... always were and always shall be”.²²

Myths about “dangerous mothers ... are perpetuated through cultural repetition”.²³ Each generation finds new and innovative ways to tell tales about its murderous

¹⁸ *Ibid.* According to Zipes, “Walt Disney ... re-created fairy-tale figures for popular consumption ... Disney celebrates the virile innocence of male power ... the rugged male hero is daring, resourceful, polite, chaste, and the conqueror of evil. This evil is always associated with female nature out of control ... witches, bitchy stepmother[s] ... [and] nasty daughters”. J. Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp.59-60.

¹⁹ M. Warner, *Managing Monsters: Six Myths of Our Time*, London, Vintage, 1994, p.16.

²⁰ Warner, *Beast*, p.201.

²¹ *Id.* at p.417.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Warner, *Managing Monsters*, p.xiv.

mythic ancestors - “the deadly female predator prowls in many popular artefacts”.²⁴ In his book *The Fear of Women*, Lederer notes the regularity with which we confront monstrous mothers and deadly females in our cultural stories.²⁵ Lederer suggests that stories about maternal monstrosity are so fascinating because they express our repressed anxieties about women: “in all such stories we are caught with our defences in disarray; some uncomfortable and embarrassing truth is showing: we do think that women can be dangerous. We do think that mothers can reject, disown, harm, kill, even eat their children”.²⁶

In this chapter we expose the psychoanalytic roots of our cultural preoccupation with the dangerous and deadly mother and come face to face with “the devouring monster we have turned the mother into”.²⁷ We consider how our cultural stories about maternal monstrosity are fuelled and nourished by the phallogentric fears and fantasies that dominate the social unconscious.

‘Monsters from the id’²⁸

American author Toni Morrison once commented that we tell stories about what we fear most. Perhaps because

²⁴ *Id.* at p.3.

²⁵ Lederer, p.65.

²⁶ *Id.* at p.66.

²⁷ L. Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies* (1987), trans. Gillian C. Gill, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993, p.15.

²⁸ S.M. Gilbert, “Introduction: A Tarantella of Theory” in H. Cixous and C. Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (1975), trans. Betsy Wing, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, pp.ix-xviii at p.x.

they are part of our common language,²⁹ fairy tales state these fears “with greater accuracy than more sophisticated literary texts”.³⁰ They are, as Barzilai suggests, “complex reflectors of the unconscious concerns of their readers”.³¹ According to von Franz, fairy tales present the “basic patterns of the human psyche ... in their simplest, barest and most concise form”.³² Fairy tales deal with universal themes and are the “purest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes”.³³ Birkhäuser-Oeri suggests that “fairy tales ...

²⁹ von Franz states that “[f]airy tale language seems to be the international language of all mankind [sic] – of all ages and of all races and cultures” (p.18). M. von Franz, *An Introduction to the Interpretation of Fairy Tales* (1970), Texas, Spring Publications, 1982.

³⁰ S.M. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979, p.36. Fairy tales “translate psychic realities into concrete images, characters, and events ... In this respect, they resemble dreams; but [they do not merely] giv[e] us personalized wishes and fears, they [also] offer collective truths, realities that transcend individual experience and that have stood the test of time”. M. Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1987, pp.xv-xvi. Tatar also notes that fairy tales not only “incarnate [one’s] own personal phobias and idiosyncratic fantasies, but [also] the deepest fears of mankind [sic] ... they capture psychic realities [that are] persistent and widespread” (p.xvi).

³¹ S. Barzilai, “Reading ‘Snow White’: The Mother’s Story”, *Signs*, 15(3), 1990, pp.515-534 at p.515. See also Jacoby who adopts a Jungian approach to fairy tale interpretation to show how fairy tales are products of the unconscious. M. Jacoby, “C.G. Jung’s View of Fairy Tale Interpretation: General Reflections on Hermeneutics in Depth Psychology” in M. Jacoby, V. Kast, and I. Riedel, *Witches, Ogres, and the Devil’s Daughter: Encounters with Evil in Fairy Tales* (1978), trans. M.H. Kohn, London, Shambhala, 1992, pp.3-15.

³² von Franz, *Interpretation*, p.1.

³³ *Ibid.* von Franz elaborates on the relationship between myths and fairy tales. She looks at two theories – the first being that myths began as fairy tales and the second being that fairy tales are “degenerated” or “decayed” myths. She finds merit in both theories and concludes that “the fairy tale is like the sea, and the sagas and myths are like the waves upon it; a tale rises to be a myth and sinks

are the dreams of the whole of humanity ... [t]hey raise the curtain on the drama of the soul and the characters in them are present in everyone's psyche".³⁴

Freud was a theorist of the psyche. But he was also a "theorist of the imagination" – someone who "understood the power of story".³⁵ Freud was interested in both the stories of individuals and cultures, and the interrelationships between them. Freud established a connection between culture and the individual psyche showing how infantile fears and fantasies are transferred to society and given expression in our cultural stories.³⁶ For Freud, myths and fairy tales are the cultural expression of the private fears and fantasies of individuals.³⁷ Both cultural stories and the dreams and

down again into being a fairy tale" (p.17). Fairy tales provide a "bridge" to myths and vice versa. According to Phillips, "[i]t was nineteenth-century Romantics like Jacob Grimm who first elevated the fairy tale to the status of myth, but it is mostly the Jungians [like von Franz] who help to sustain this notion today" (p.154, note 20).

³⁴ S. Birkhäuser-Oeri, *The Mother: Archetypal Image in Fairy Tales* (1977), ed. Marie-Louise von Franz, trans. Michael Mitchell, Toronto, Inner City Books, 1988, p.9.

³⁵ S.N. Garner, C. Kahane and M. Sprengnether, eds, *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, London, Cornell University Press, 1985, p.15.

³⁶ In his development of psychoanalytic social theory, Joseph Smith turns to the work of Freud to elucidate "common patterns in the structure of society, the family, and the psyche" (p.27) and thereby building on Freud's theory about the relationship between the individual psyche and collective psyche to show how all societies can be analysed in terms of pre-oedipal and oedipal phases of development that mirror the phases of individual development. J.C. Smith, *The Neurotic Foundations of Social Order: Psychoanalytic Roots of Patriarchy*, New York, New York University Press, 1990.

³⁷ In "The Interpretation of Dreams", Freud suggests that myths are culture's "waking dreams" (*The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, trans. A.A. Brill, New York, Random House, 1938).

fantasies of the individual psyche constitute what Cornell has termed the 'social unconscious'.³⁸

Exploring the unconscious foundations of the underlying myths and fantasies of society – exposing “the unconscious underpinnings of patriarchy”³⁹ – is where Freud and feminism meet. Regardless of whether one regards Freud as a “prophet” or “propagandist”,⁴⁰ “revolutionary”⁴¹ or “one of the greatest misogynists of all time”,⁴² Freud is important for feminism “precisely because of his power to elucidate ... the paradigmatic fit between individual psychic structure ... and the essential features of patriarchal society”.⁴³

³⁸ D. Cornell, “What Takes Place in the Dark”, *Differences*, 4(2), 1992, pp.45-71.

³⁹ Garner, Kahane, Sprengnether, p.16. Sprengnether similarly notes that “psychoanalysis offers a means of comprehending the unconscious structure of patriarchy” (p.8). M. Sprengnether, *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1990. Sayers notes the relevance of Freud for understanding the way we situate ourselves in relation to patriarchal authority (pp.11-12). J. Sayers, *Sexual Contradictions: Psychology, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism*, New York, Tavistock, 1986. Bassin, Honey and Kaplan also note that feminists intent on “dismantling the ideology of motherhood” have turned to psychoanalysis as a means of “understanding its patriarchal roots” (p.3). D. Bassin, M. Honey and M.M. Kaplan, eds, “Introduction” in *Representations of Motherhood*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994, pp.1-25.

⁴⁰ J. Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974), London, Penguin, 1979, p.303.

⁴¹ L. Appignanesi and J. Forrester, *Freud's Women*, New York, Basic Books, 1992, p.455.

⁴² Mitchell, p.297.

⁴³ Garner et al, p.16. Feminist theorist Teresa Brennan also turns to Freudian psychoanalysis and its revisionists in her consideration of the theoretical grounds for the connection between psyche and social order. See, for example, *History After Lacan* (London, Routledge, 1993) in particular chapter three.

According to Smith, patriarchal social order reflects the primary concerns of our unconscious minds.⁴⁴ The driving force of patriarchy is repression and the source of repression is psychic conflict.⁴⁵ When the “mechanisms of repression” are torn away, we are “faced with what most haunts our unconscious” – the primary root of all psychic conflict – the mother.⁴⁶ “The mother, once conjured, must always already be repressed”,⁴⁷ Blaine tells us. Feminist theorist Jessica Benjamin suggests that “[maternal] dread [is] banished to the darkness beyond the portals of enlightenment. There it remains alive, in the unconscious ... ready to serve diverse fantastic purposes”.⁴⁸

Psychic dread of the mother not only dominates the phases of infant development but also persists into adulthood. As we will see in the following pages, all children fear the mother. For the adult male psyche, however, fear assumes an unremittingly hostile cultural form. In his book *The Fear of the Feminine*, Neumann suggests that for men, infantile fear of the mother translates into a ‘fear of the Feminine’ which manifests itself in the form of misogyny that characterises

⁴⁴ Smith, pp.4-6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ D.Y. Blaine, “The Abjection of Addie and Other Myths of the Maternal in *As I Lay Dying*”, *Mississippi Quarterly*, 47(3), 1994, pp.419-439 at p.421.

⁴⁸ J. Benjamin, “The Omnipotent Mother: A Psychoanalytic Study of Fantasy and Reality” in D. Bassin, M. Honey and M.M. Kaplan, eds, *op. cit.*, pp.129-146 at p.129.

phallogocentric Western culture.⁴⁹ “Men’s hostility toward women more often than not hides their fear of the feminine ... [which] derives from their subconsciously stored fear of their own all-powerful mothers”.⁵⁰ Fear of the mother is transferred to women in general. Misogyny is a direct result of matrophobia.

Gilmore suggests that misogyny is both “a unifying discourse of Western thought [and] one of the most enduring”.⁵¹ In *Misogyny: The Male Malady* Gilmore explores the “near universality”⁵² of the phenomenon that is misogyny through a psycho-cultural lense. Gilmore argues that “[because] no factor in the external environment can account for the ubiquity of the phenomenon ... the answer must lie in the shared psychic course of the male of the species”.⁵³ “Misogyny has to be

⁴⁹ E. Neumann, *The Fear of the Feminine and Other Essays on Feminine Psychology*, trans. B. Matthews, E. Doughty, E. Rolfe and M. Cullingworth, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1994. Gilmore defines ‘misogyny’ as “an unreasonable fear or hatred of women that takes on some palpable form in any given society” (p.9). D. Gilmore, *Misogyny: The Male Malady*, Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.

⁵⁰ S. Diamond, *Anger, Madness and the Daimonic: The Psychological Genesis of Violence, Evil, and Creativity*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1996, p.42. Diamond contends that fear is a fundamental factor in the genesis of hatred (p.35). Diamond draws on the work of psychiatrist Willard Gaylin who proposed that there is an “intricate linkage” between hatred and fear: “it is almost impossible to locate either one of these emotions in an instance of human behaviour without finding the other lurking in the background” (p.35). Misogyny finds expression in various social forms and, whether culturally expressed as mere disdain or profound hostility, is a powerful defence against the primal psychological threat of the mother.

⁵¹ Gilmore, p.6.

⁵² *Id.* at p.9.

⁵³ *Id.* at p.10.

studied as an aspect of male psychology ... an example of a 'gendered psychosis'.⁵⁴ Gilmore views misogyny as "essentially an affective or psychological phenomenon ... a specifically emotive sensibility that feeds off phobias, terrors, and fantasies ... [is] visceral and irrational ... based on passion, not thought".⁵⁵

Focusing on the psychogenesis of misogyny, Gilmore contends that "misogyny stems from unresolved inner conflicts in men".⁵⁶ In this chapter we will focus on these "unresolved inner conflicts" as the source of both individual and cultural dis-ease. As we will see, maternal dread is an extremely complex form of psychic conflict that incorporates a fear of the mother as death-dealer that must be reconciled with an almost all-consuming desire to return to the maternal womb and recapture the 'oceanic feeling' of pre-natal bliss. Fears of maternal engulfment merge with the desire to be engulfed and overwhelmed by the omnipotent mother of childhood fantasy.⁵⁷ These "secret" fears and desires "spark unconscious opposition, internal conflict, and consequently psychic turmoil in men".⁵⁸ Misogyny is an attempt to "relieve and ... diminish psychic turmoil by attacking its source".⁵⁹

⁵⁴ *Id.* at p.13.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Id.* at p.14.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Id.* at pp.9; 15.

In the following sections we locate the dreadful mother of psycho-cultural fantasy within psychoanalytic narratives of infant development. Then, in Chapter Two we will consider how infantile fears and fantasies are manifested in the myths through which our culture is transmitted.

The fear of infanticide

As the source of every individual's physical and psychological origin, the mother is central to narratives of infancy and development. Freudian psychoanalysis begins with an initial pre-oedipal mother/child symbiosis – “that state of undifferentiation, of fusion with mother, in which the ‘I’ is not yet differentiated from the ‘not-I’ ... a dual unity within one common boundary”.⁶⁰ At this stage, the mother is omnipotent - “ever-bountiful, ever-giving, self-sacrificing ... substantial and plentiful”.⁶¹

The child gradually begins to recognise his or her separateness from the mother and increasingly becomes

⁶⁰ Smith, p.91.

⁶¹ Bassin, Honey, and Kaplan, pp.2-3. Chodorow and Contratto consider the cultural implications of infantile fantasies of omnipotence in their essay “The fantasy of the perfect mother” in B. Thorne and M. Yalom eds, *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions*, New York, Longman, 1982, pp. 54-75. Bassin, Honey, and Kaplan recall the concerns of feminist theorist Adrienne Rich who, as a young mother, was ‘haunted’ by the maternal imago - any feelings of “anger or rage” were suppressed and imagined as “monstrous parts of herself” (p.3). Benjamin also writes about the dangers inherent in the idea of omnipotence: “[t]he idea that mother is or should be all-giving and perfect expresses the mentality of omnipotence, the inability to experience the mother as an independent existing subject ... The symbolic structure of gender polarity produces the fantastic ideal of motherhood even as it stimulates the fear of destroying all maternal goodness”. J Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination*, New York, Pantheon, 1988, p.214.

aware of the distinction between self and other.⁶² With this increasing recognition and awareness comes the child's realisation of his or her vulnerability and dependency which propels the desire for individuation. During this period the child experiences both separation anxiety and engulfment anxiety⁶³ – "oscillation between a longing to blissfully merge with the mother, and the fear of re-engulfment by her ... which is often marked by the rapidly alternating desire to push mother away and to cling to her".⁶⁴

⁶² Object-relations theorist Donald Winnicott, who is perhaps most well known for his notion of the 'good enough' mother, suggests that separation results from the mother "gradually failing absolutely to meet the infant's needs as they arise. She thereby 'disillusions' the baby of the omnipotent fantasy of having the whole world – represented by her – at its beck and call. This also involves exploding the infant's illusion of oneness with the mother". J. Sayers, *Mothering Psychoanalysis: Helene Deutsch, Karen Horney, Anna Freud and Melanie Klein* (1991), London, Penguin, 1992, p.263. For a feminist reconsideration of Winnicott's work see J. Doane and D. Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva: Psychoanalytic Feminism and the Search for the 'Good Enough' Mother*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1992; E. First, "Mothering, Hate, and Winnicott" in Bassin, Honey and Kaplan, *op. cit.*, pp.147-161.

⁶³ Engulfment anxiety is also variously referred to by psychoanalysts as 'symbiosis anxiety'. See for example Robert J. Stoller's usage in *Perversion: The Erotic Form of Hatred*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1975.

⁶⁴ Smith, p.91. According to Kofman, the mother figure is "an ambivalent representation of supreme security and ultimate risk, life and death" (p.73). "The child suffers the ambivalence of wishing both to regain the former unity with the mother and to achieve independence" (p.181). S. Kofman, *The Enigma of Woman: Woman in Freud's Writings* (1980), trans. Catherine Porter, New York, Cornell University Press, 1985. The child wishes to unite with and lose it(s)-self in the mother in order to heal the narcissistic wound. "The separation of the child's body from that of the mother is the source of the narcissistic wound. What is lost is wholeness and connectedness, the feeling and experience of omnipotence, and the feeling of being fulfilled and without need. This loss constitutes the narcissistic wound. The wound creates a need to feel whole and connected, to feel omnipotent, fulfilled, loved, embraced, and encompassed" (Smith,

The journey to subjectivity is fraught with psychic danger. Murder and cannibalism characterise the phases of individuation and continue to “haunt us ... throughout our life cycle”.⁶⁵ In the pre-oedipal phases of development, the infant contends with the ‘primal terror’ of infanticide – the fear of being killed/devoured⁶⁶ by the mother who transforms in the infant’s mind from omnipotent, all giving, all goodness to devouring monster.

The process of separation/individuation involves a “descen[t] into the lower world of reality, full of dangers and discomforts”, a world in which the child “experiences the horror of nameless lurking forces”.⁶⁷ According to Neumann, infantile anxiety “*normally* appears as fear of the Terrible Mother, the witch ... [t]he fear-arousing mother appears as ‘terrible’ because she represents the

p.222). “Throughout life, the individual seeks to regain the prenatal state of omnipotence and harmony or ‘oceanic feeling’ by merging or inflating the self in order to heal the narcissistic wound” (p.11). Smith suggests that “[c]ivilization itself can be viewed as ‘a kaleidoscope of different attempts by man to restore narcissistic omnipotence’” (p.11). The drive to return to or merge with the mother is repressed but never entirely overcome.

⁶⁵ L. Shengold, *Father, Don’t You See I’m Burning? Reflections on Sex, Narcissism, Symbolism, and Murder- From Everything to Nothing*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1991, p.xiii.

⁶⁶ Freud uses these terms interchangeably.

⁶⁷ E. Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (1949), trans. R.F.C. Hull, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1954, p.39. In *Psychology of the Unconscious* (New York, Dodd & Mead, 1916) Jung discusses the process of separation/individuation in terms of opposing desires – on the one hand, the infant desires the security and sustenance provided by the nurturing mother; on the other hand, the infant desires independence and escape from the dangerous and destructive mother.

element that 'holds fast' or 'arrests', that hinders the development necessary and now 'due'".⁶⁸

Dorothy Bloch, in her book *'So the Witch Won't Eat Me'*, suggests that the fear of infanticide forms a child's "central preoccupation" and that "children are universally predisposed to the fear of infanticide".⁶⁹ Moreover, she establishes that this fear remains deeply buried in the unconscious of all adults. For children, infanticide is "usually right on the surface".⁷⁰ Bloch comments on the

⁶⁸ Neumann, *Fear of the Feminine*, p.239; italics in text. For further discussion of the mother-witch figure in fairy tales see V. Kast, "How Fairy Tales Deal with Evil: Thematic Approaches to the Fairy Tale as a Dynamic Process" in M. Jacoby, V. Kast, and I. Riedel, *Witches, Ogres, and the Devil's Daughter: Encounters with Evil in Fairy Tales* (1978), trans. M.H. Kohn, London, Shambhala, 1992, pp.16-39.

⁶⁹ Bloch, *'So the Witch Won't Eat Me'*, pp.1; 3.

⁷⁰ *Id.* at p.1. Bloch found that the fear of infanticide is dominant in childhood and persists into adulthood, although on an unconscious level. There is also a direct relationship between the fantasies of children and of adults which function as a defence against the fear of infanticide. Rheingold has shown that men and women "alike fear destruction by the mother or a mother figure". J.C. Rheingold, *The Mother, Anxiety, and Death: The Catastrophic Death Complex*, Boston, Little, Brown & Co, 1967, p.85. "Childhood anxieties do not simply disappear, but take pathological forms in the adult" (Smith, p.159). Chasseguet-Smirgel suggests that "at times of danger and critical moments in a lifetime, the archaic maternal imago is reactivated. The best of mothers may be (re)transformed into a witch, a Fury, or a Gorgon" (p.124). "Increased comfort and greater security help keep the dangerous maternal imago at bay, whereas famine and fear, on the other hand, awaken this imago ... a [sense of] general well-being mean[s] therefore that witches can stay shut away in the pages of children's fairy tale books" (p.126). J. Chasseguet-Smirgel, "Being a Mother and Being a Psychoanalyst: Two Impossible Professions" in D. Bassin, M. Honey and M.M. Kaplan, eds, *Representations of Motherhood*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994, pp.113-128. Riedel similarly notes that in adult crises, the dangerous mother of fantasy "turn[s] up again like lost keys and enter[s] into consciousness". I. Riedel, "Preface" in M. Jacoby, V. Kast, and I. Riedel, *Witches, Ogres, and the Devil's Daughter: Encounters with Evil in Fairy Tales* (1978), trans. M.H. Kohn, London,

extent of children's fears and her own astonishment about the frequency with which children "[a]lmost invariably informed [her] ... of what they experienced as the precariousness of their lives".⁷¹ She states: "[a]s one child after another admitted me to his [sic] world of fantasy, I witnessed a terror of being killed that varied only in its intensity".⁷²

In Bloch's case studies, the children's fantasy worlds are infused with a foreboding and fear that characterises fairy tales. They are filled with "beasts of terrifying mien, cruel witches and monsters who pursu[e] their victims with unrelenting savagery. In those preserves, the air continually vibrate[s] to the rat-a-tat-tat of machine guns, corpses h[a]ng from trees, and streams [run] red with blood".⁷³ And each child's response is invariably the same: "[d]o you want to help me run? The monster is after [me]".⁷⁴ The monster of fairy tales and psychic fantasies is the murderous mother in disguise. She is the one who figures in our nightmares, or as Gilbert emphasises, our

Shambhala, 1992, p.viii. See also Neumann for a consideration of the persistence of the fear of the mother in adults (*Fear of the Feminine*, pp.251-273).

⁷¹ Bloch, 'So the Witch Won't Eat Me', p.1.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Id.* at p.2. According to Bettelheim, fairy tales are a repository for childhood anxieties - "the inescapable cauldron of emotions which every child ... has to manage" (*Uses of Enchantment*, p.24). Riedel also notes that fairy tales are "personal adepts for dealing with evil ... [which help children] get through [their] fear [and] keep [their] composure [in the face of] external danger ... Fairy tales tell of critical encounters with evil and are intended for just such critical times" (p.viii).

⁷⁴ Bloch, 'So the Witch Won't Eat Me', p.2.

nightmères. She is “the one who erupts at, and disrupts, the edge of ... consciousness, the liminal zone between sleeping and waking ... the mistress of our imaginations”.⁷⁵

‘A child is being eaten’⁷⁶

In *The Mother: Archetypal Image in Fairy Tales*, Birkhäuser-Oeri analyses the various types of evil mother figures in fairy tales, such as witches and stepmothers. She suggests that “these mother figures [are] harmful and destructive ... [t]hey appear particularly to have a great appetite for human flesh, for witches will often try to eat their victims after cooking them” and are well-versed in the ‘art’ of dismemberment – “[t]hey kill their victims with knives [and] tear them to pieces”.⁷⁷ Evil mother figures have a particular penchant for tasty little children. “[T]he hordes of [these] cannibalistic fairy tale fiends”, Tatar points out, “can never satisfy their craving for the flesh of children”.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Gilbert, p.x. According to Chasseguet-Smirgel, “[i]n individual analysis, dreams and nightmares are especially informative as to the nature of imagos, whereas on the collective level they appear in myths and religions and fairy tales” (“Being a Mother”, p.115).

⁷⁶ A play on Freud’s essay title “A Child Is Being Beaten: A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions” (1919) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, (24 vols.), trans. James Strachey, London, Hogarth, 1953-74, vol. 17, pp.177-204.

⁷⁷ Birkhäuser-Oeri, pp.27-28.

⁷⁸ Tatar, *Off With Their Heads*, p.205. The association between maternal monstrosity, infants and food is explored by Warner who notes that “[e]ating and being eaten inspires one of the most common games adults play with babies ... they play-act monsters ... going ‘Yum yum, you’re a sweet morsel and I’m going to pop you in my mouth and eat you all up...’” (*No Go the Bogeyman*, p.139). An

According to Stevens, the monster is a “demonic personification” of the Terrible Mother who “devours her children and crunches up their bones”.⁷⁹ Classic fairy tales and their tellers repeatedly incorporate a malevolent and

example of these ‘baby-eating games’ involves a mother pretending to turn her child into a pie, then baking and eating it. Tatar warns that adult indulgence in “mock cannibal feasts” may fuel children’s fears of being devoured rather than exorcising these fears (p.205). Both Warner and Bakan also notes the sinister role of the mother in nursery rhymes and lullabies. Examples include ‘Baby and I were baked in a pie’ and a mother who, trying to make her baby fall asleep, assumes the role of ferocious cat and wolf until she herself finally eats her baby (the threat is surely disproportional!) (Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman*, pp.139-140). In Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), ed. Hugh Haughton, London, 1998, babies turn into food for cooking and consumption (‘Pig and Pepper’) and food comes to life and ‘talks back’ to its consumers: “I wonder how you’d like it, if I were to cut a slice of *you*” (p.56). Carroll makes an horrific and uncanny connection between the consumers and the consumed. Bakan suggests that in the Alice story, “the child turning into a little pig ... is license to the imagination to think of the child as to be eaten” (Bakan, *Slaughter of the Innocents*, p.71). Consider also tales such as Wilhelm Busch’s *Max und Moritz* in which two mischievous boys find themselves being kneaded like dough and baked like a cake (see Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman*, pp.140-141) or ‘The Gingerbread Boy’ who cockily and foolishly claims that he can outrun a hungry predator (typically a fox) – hence the well-known refrain, ‘You can’t catch me, I’m the gingerbread boy’. As a child (and to this day) I took great pleasure in devouring the gingerbread boys bought for me by unsuspecting adults, harbouring feelings of extreme delight as I broke off an arm, a hand, a foot, a head, taking great care to consume every last morsel to prove the gingerbread boy wrong.

⁷⁹ A. Stevens, *Ariadne’s Clue: A Guide to the Symbols of Humankind* (1998), New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1999, p.368. Stevens writes: “Universally, the negative aspect of the mother has been personified in monsters, gorgons, witches, ghouls, who have murdered the sleep of children (and adults) since the dawning of mankind [sic]”. A. Stevens, *Archetypes: A Natural History of the Self*, New York, William Morrow, 1982, p.90. Jung also notes that the ‘bad’ mother is symbolized by the witch, dragon, serpent and other devouring or “entwining” creatures. C.G. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation: An Analysis of the Prelude to a Case of Schizophrenia* (1956), trans. R.F.C. Hull, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1976, especially pp.207-273 on symbols of the mother. Caputi writes: “[t]he devouring monster-mother is the perverse underside of the idealised maternal fantasy”. J. Caputi, “On the Lap of Necessity: A Mythic Reading of Teresa Brennan’s Energetics Philosophy”, *Hypatia* 16(2) 2001, pp.1-26 at p.5.

threatening maternal presence that draws on infantile fears of being devoured.⁸⁰ In the Grimms' 'Hansel and Gretel', the sinister witch lures the children to her house with the promise of nurturance that their own mother cannot give them.⁸¹ Once inside, the children learn of the witch's murderous plan to fatten up Hansel and eat him.⁸²

⁸⁰ According to psychiatrist Joseph Rheingold, "myths, legends, and fairy tales are replete with stories representing the terror of being devoured, and we see the same in infantile phobias and nightmares". J.C. Rheingold, *The Fear of Being a Woman: A Theory of Maternal Destructiveness*, New York, Grune & Stratton, 1964, p.228. Bakan points out that "[t]he cannibalistic theme with respect to children is barely disguised in the fairy tale literature" (pp.70-71). Warner also notes that "[a]ppetite defines bogeys, and many myths explore obsessively a deep and insistent fear: that the thing that comes in the dark wants to gobble you up" (*No Go the Bogeyman*, p.10). See Favazza for an interesting discussion of the relationship between the child's experience of learning to eat and his or her fear of being dismembered and ingested. A.R. Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege: Self-mutilation and Body Modification in Culture and Psychiatry* (1987), Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, especially Chapter Three. See also Neumann who associates the alimentary images of eating, devouring, hunger and death with cannibalism and the fear of "being swallowed and eaten" (*Origins*, p.28).

⁸¹ In the tale, the children's stepmother formulates the plan to abandon them in the woods. Walter notes that sometimes she is identified as the children's natural mother. V. Walter, "Hansel and Gretel as Abandoned Children: Timeless Images for a Postmodern Age", *Children's Literature in Education* 23(4) 1992, pp.203-214 at p.204. In her discussion of modern productions of 'Hansel and Gretel', Warner notes the symbolic significance of having the witch play the role of the mother thereby "identif[ying] the mother who could abandon [her children] with their persecutor in the woods" (*From the Beast*, p.222).

⁸² "As soon as she had any children in her power, she would kill, cook, and eat them. It would be like a feast day for her" (J. Grimm and W. Grimm, "Hansel and Gretel" in *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, trans. Jack Zipes, Toronto, Bantam, 1987, pp.58-64. A comparative example from Russian folklore is the tale 'Vasilisa the Beautiful' whose evil stepmother sends her to the house of the witch Baba Yaga. Like Hansel and Gretel, Vasilisa narrowly escapes the voracious appetite of the wicked flesh-eating witch. Similarly, in Grimms' 'Fledgling', an evil female cook decides to cook the young Fledgling and eat him. Fortunately, his sister Lenchen saves him. According to Birkhäuser-Oeri, "Fledgling is under threat from the

In Giambattista Basile's tale 'Sole, Luna e Talia', the king's wife orders her cook "to butcher" her husband's two children "and turn them into various delicacies and sauces".⁸³ In Grimms' 'The Mother-in-Law', the king's mother orders her chef to cook her grandsons and serve them with a brown sauce. In Perrault's 'La Belle au bois dormant' ('The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood'), the prince's wicked and envious mother – who "liked eating the fresh meat of little children"⁸⁴ – orders her butler to prepare her grandchildren with a special gourmet sauce⁸⁵ and serve them one by one. In Grimms' 'Snow White', the evil stepmother orders cook to "salt and stew" Snow White's lungs and liver.⁸⁶ In the Scottish tale 'Pippety Pew', a

terrible mother in the shape of a cook ... [who] is in a sense Fledgling's second, negative mother" (p.77). The Russian fairy tale 'Ivan and the Witch' also invokes the evil mother figure in the guise of a wicked witch who catches Ivan, stuffs him into an iron sack and prepares to roast him in her oven. Like Hansel and Fledgling, Ivan also avoids the witch's sinister plan to consume him for dinner. In Chapter Four I consider the association between witchcraft and infanticide in further detail.

⁸³ G. Basile, "Sole, Luna e Talia" in *The Pentamerone* (1847), (2 vols.), trans. B. Croce, ed. N.M. Penzer, New York, John Lane, 1932, pp.498-503.

⁸⁴ C. Perrault, "La Belle au Bois Dormant" in *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault*, trans. A. Carter, New York, 1977, pp.57-71.

⁸⁵ Warner, citing a 1750 chapbook, informs us that the special sauce is 'Sauce-Robert' "made up with onions, shredded and boiled tender in butter; to which is added vinegar, mustard, salt, pepper and a little wine" (*No Go the Bogeyman*, p.62).

⁸⁶ J.L.K. Grimm and W.K. Grimm, *Grimms' Tales for Young and Old: The Complete Stories* (1819), trans. Ralph Manheim, New York, Doubleday, 1977, p.185. In earlier versions of the tale "Snow White's own mother suffered murderous jealousy of her and persecuted her" (Warner, *From the Beast*, p.211). Tatar also notes that in the first edition of Grimms' *Nursery and Household Tales* "Snow White's mother never dies; her vanity and pride turn her into an ogre who orders her daughter murdered; she then devours what she believes to be the girl's lungs and liver" (*Hard Facts*, p.143). The Grimm Brothers were the first to replace Snow White's natural mother with a

father finds pieces of his little son Johnnie's dismembered corpse (a foot and hand) in a stew prepared by his wife.⁸⁷ And in Grimms' 'The Juniper Tree', a boy is murdered by his stepmother, mutilated and added to a stew seasoned with his sister's salty tears.

stepmother (Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p.211). Warner suggests that "[o]n the whole, they tended towards ... substituting another wife for the natural mother who had figured as the villain in the versions they had been told" (*From the Beast to the Blonde*, p.211). They could not bear the idea of a natural mother who was dangerous, murderous ... infanticidal. Bakan also notes that the wicked stepmother is an appropriate substitute "for it is too hard to think this [cannibalism] of a real mother" (p.65). Tatar too suggests that "[b]iological mothers seldom command a central role in the fairy tales compiled by the Grimms, in part because Wilhelm Grimm could rarely resist the temptation to act as censor by turning the monstrously unnatural cannibals and enchantresses of these tales into stepmothers, cooks, witches, or mothers-in-law. As the audience for the tales changed [originally fairy tales were told by adults to adults and only became a staple of children's literature in the last two to three hundred years – for more on this point see J. Zipes, *When Dreams Came True: Classical Fairy Tales and Their Tradition*, New York, Routledge, 1999. Zipes begins his book by overturning the commonly held belief that fairy tales have always been the province of children], the need to shift the burden of evil from a mother to a stepmother became ever more urgent" (*Hard Facts*, p.142). The tale powerfully enacts a perversion of maternal nurturance. As Barzilai notes: "[t]he unnatural mother is seen as desiring to eat rather than to feed her child" (p. 531). For Rheingold, "stepmother represents mother. The universal derogation of the stepmother is a displacement of fear and hatred of the mother to a scapegoat" (*Mother, Anxiety, and Death*, p.141). For an analysis of the jealous stepmother in 'Snow White' as a dark or negative mother figure see Birkhäuser-Oeri, pp.29-40. See also J.C. Cooper, *Fairy Tales: Allegories of the Inner Life*, Wellingborough, Aquarian Press, 1983, at pp.25-6 on the interrelationships between mothers and stepmothers in fairy tales. See Tatar (*Hard Facts*) for a discussion of other fairy tales in which the infanticidally-inclined biological mother is replaced by the wicked stepmother as a more 'savoury' means of "depict[ing] maternal abuse of children and at the same time preserv[ing] the sanctity of mothers" (p.143).

⁸⁷ N. Montgomerie and William Montgomerie, *The Well at the World's End: Folk Tales of Scotland*, Toronto, Bodley Head, 1956, pp.56-59.

According to Tatar, “the various cooks, stepmothers, witches, and mothers-in-law with voracious appetites for human fare, even for the flesh and blood or for the liver and heart of their own relatives, ... [are] cannibalistic fiends [known in] German [as] *Menschenfresserin* (devourer of humans)”.⁸⁸ They lure their innocent victims to the slaughter “with magnanimous maternal behaviour, then reveal their true colours as cannibalistic monsters”.⁸⁹ For Tatar, these wicked female fiends are some of “[t]he many faces of maternal evil in fairy tales represent[ing] the obverse of all the positive qualities associated with mothers”.⁹⁰ They are devouring mothers who take rather than give life, and destroy rather than nurture. “Instead of functioning as providers, cannibalistic female villains withhold food and threaten to turn children into their own source of nourishment, reincorporating them into the bodies that gave birth to them”.⁹¹ Biological mothers are replaced by figures of female evil who “stand as the flesh-and-blood embodiment of maternity, and [whose] ... manifest evil is most openly associated with women as mothers”.⁹² The tellers of fairy tales such as the Grimm brothers, while going to great lengths to sanitize the content of tales for children, also inflate maternal evil in the figures of evil stepmothers, wicked witches, ghastly

⁸⁸ Tatar, *Hard facts*, pp.139-140.

⁸⁹ *Id.* at p.140.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Id.* at p.151.

mothers-in-law, gruesome cooks who “are almost always thinly disguised substitutes for biological mothers”.⁹³

It is no coincidence that the maternal monsters that fill these tales harbour cannibalistic and destructive desires towards children. In his essay “Female Sexuality”, Freud noted “the surprising, yet regular, dread of being killed (devoured) by the mother”.⁹⁴ Fenichel also focused on “the dread of being eaten”, locating “abundant proof” of his theory in the “terrible mothers” of myth and fairy tales.⁹⁵ The fear of maternal destructiveness is a “basic anxiety” in

⁹³ Daly makes a similar observation: “Fairy tales teach that the only good mothers are dead ones, thinly disguising living mothers as ‘evil’ stepmothers ... nearly everyone has been indoctrinated from infancy in the [practice of] mother-hating [condoned and encouraged in fairy tales]”. M. Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1978, p.266.

⁹⁴ S. Freud, “Female Sexuality” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, (24 vols.), trans. James Strachey, London, Hogarth, 1953-74, vol. 21, pp.221-246 at p.227. Freeman and Streaan note that although Freud associated the fear of being killed/devoured to the pre-oedipal attachment of the girl to her mother, Freud modified his comment saying “we ought not to make this reply until we have made a close study of the pre-oedipus phase in boys”. L. Freeman and H.S. Streaan, *Freud and Women*, New York, Frederick Ungar, 1981, p.235. According to Neumann, “[i]n regard to the primal relationship to the mother, i.e., the first phase of childhood, the same conditions hold true for both the boy and the girl” (*Fear of the Feminine*, p.265). Bloch has shown that the fear of infanticide is experienced by both sexes – how the boy and girl deal with and resolve these anxieties differs (*So the Witch Won't Eat Me*).

⁹⁵ O. Fenichel, “The Dread of Being Eaten” in *The Collected Papers of Otto Fenichel*, H. Fenichel and D. Rapaport eds, New York, Norton, 1953, pp.158-159. According to Birkhäuser-Oeri, the ‘dark mother figures’ of fairy tales “appear particularly to have a great appetite for human flesh, for witches will often try to eat their victims after cooking them” and are well-versed in the ‘art’ of dismemberment - “[t]hey kill their victims with knives [and] tear them to pieces” (pp.27-28).

response to “the ever-existing threat of ... cannibalistic incorporation”⁹⁶ by the mother.

Freud believed that the dread of being eaten is “the result of the transformation of oral aggressive tendencies directed upon the mother”.⁹⁷ Drawing on Freudian theory, Bruno Bettelheim, in *The Uses of Enchantment*, suggests that the fear of being eaten reflects the child’s own “destructive desires”⁹⁸ and oral greed. Using the tale of ‘Hansel and Gretel’ to illustrate his ideas, Bettelheim argues that the children are “[c]arried away by their uncontrolled craving[s]”.⁹⁹ In a child’s imagination, a house most frequently symbolises the mother’s body.¹⁰⁰ In the fairy tale, “[the] gingerbread house, which one can ‘eat up’, is a symbol of the mother, who in fact nurses the

⁹⁶ Rheingold, *Fear of Being a Woman*, p.228. According to Rheingold, “[t]o the child the loss of love of ... the mother is catastrophic. Loss of love means vulnerability to the danger of the mother’s destructive impulses ... the catastrophic concept of death includes not only ... the fantasy of dismemberment ... being cut to bits, being decapitated, being eaten ... [but] also the fantasy ... of being engulfed whole” (*Mother, Anxiety and Death*, pp.18-19). Rheingold suggests that the fear of death “stems from the dread of being eaten and ... figures as a material force in our psychic life ... With the eventual decrease of biological helplessness, the flood of cannibalistic anxiety recedes, but swells again instantly during traumatic situations” (*Mother, Anxiety and Death*, p.65).

⁹⁷ Freud, “Female Sexuality”, p.235. E. Erikson (*Childhood and Society*, New York, Norton, 1950) similarly sees the devouring mother as a projective fantasy of infantile oral destructive desires. See also E. Fromm, *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil*, New York, Harper, 1964 and K. Angel, “The Role of the Internal Object and External Object in Object Relationships, Separation Anxiety, Object Constancy and Symbiosis”, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 53 1972, pp.541-545 for other views about the fear of being devoured/destroyed by the mother.

⁹⁸ Bettelheim, p.160.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Id.* at p.161.

infant from her body. Thus, the house at which Hansel and Gretel are eating away blissfully and without a care stands in the unconscious for the good mother, who offers her body as a source of nourishment”.¹⁰¹ Feeling guilty about their unrestrained and destructive orality, the children project their “cannibalistic inclinations” onto the witch.¹⁰²

Bettelheim’s discussion also draws on the work of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein who developed Freud’s theory of oral aggression. According to Klein, infants split the mother into a ‘good’ and ‘bad’ breast. Infants idealise the ‘good’ breast from which they derive constant satisfaction and seek to destroy the ‘bad’ breast which threatens them with annihilation. In Klein’s words, “the child [imagines] attack[ing] [the mother’s body], robbing it of everything it contains and eating it up”.¹⁰³ These

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* See also Phillips who considers the association between ‘house’ and ‘mother’ in his study of fairy tale metaphors in the novels of French author Nathalie Sarraute, pp.163-169. Creed similarly associates house and maternal body (*Monstrous-Feminine*, p.55).

¹⁰² Bettelheim, p.161. Bettelheim suggests that the fantasy of the wicked stepmother, witch, mother-in-law and other female villains “not only preserv[e] the good mother intact, it also prevents having to feel guilty about one’s angry wishes about her” (p.69). Psychoanalyst Lillian Malcove suggests that “[f]or the child, eating is literally a cannibalistic procedure which includes the ante-mortem tortures of cutting and crushing ...” (cited in Favazza, p.47). As Favazza notes, “the experience of learning to eat is the prototype of the fear of being dismembered or mutilated” (p.47). Rheingold notes that “ghosts, witches and other objects that do not have a relation to the child’s objective world ... fulfil significant functions for his [or her] subjective needs” (*Mother, Anxiety, and Death*, p.140).

¹⁰³ M. Klein, “Weaning” in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works, 1921-1945*, London, Hogarth Press, 1975, pp.290-305. According to Shengold, the infant who fears being killed is also “terrified by the experience of feeling like killing. This starts with

cannibalistic fantasies are projected onto the mother who becomes a devourer in the infant's imagination.¹⁰⁴ Klein suggests that "the child's fear of being devoured, or cut up, or torn to pieces, or its terror of being surrounded and pursued by menacing figures [is] a regular component of its mental life".¹⁰⁵ Klein's contemporary, Helene Deutsch, similarly recognised that children imagine the mother as "one who bears children and one who kills them; one who nourishes them, another who poisons them".¹⁰⁶ Children

cannibalistic impulses and feelings directed against the self and the mother's breast" (p.xii). "The mother who does not fulfil the infant's needs invokes a terrible and terrifying devaluating rage that is then projected upon her" (p.24).

¹⁰⁴ Klein writes: "The fear of being devoured ... derives from the projection of the infant's impulses to devour [his or her] objects. In this way, the mother's breast (and the mother) becomes in the infant's mind a devouring object" ("The Theory of Anxiety and Guilt" in *Envy and Gratitude: The Writings of Melanie Klein 1946-1963*, London, Virago, 1988, p.30). Rheingold puts it another way: "[t]he mother becomes the object of the infant's sadistic impulses, and because of talion fear, she is conceived as wishing to devour, mutilate, and annihilate the infant. This image is then reacted to as if it were a reality ... [t]his is what I call the 'monster' conception of the infant" (*Mother, Anxiety, and Death*, p.78).

¹⁰⁵ M. Klein, "The Early Development of Conscience in the Child" (1933) in *Contributions to Psychoanalysis 1921-1945*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1964, pp.267-277 at p.268. According to Klein, the infant's idealisation of the 'good' breast and its attack of the 'bad' breast and subsequent fear of retaliation occur in the 'paranoid-schizoid position'. As the infant begins to see the mother as an individual, he or she experiences guilt and adopts the 'depressive position' which is characterised by a "desire to make reparation to the injured loved object – first of all to the good breast" ("The Theory of Anxiety and Guilt", pp.34-35). Van Buren states that "Klein's theory makes clear the potential of the infant's murder of the maternal imago or phantom, with the accompanying terror of potential retaliation in infanticide". J. Van Buren, "The Psychoanalytic Semiosis of Absence, or The Semiotic Murder of the Mother", *International Review of Psychoanalysis* 18(2) 1991, pp.249-263 at p.253.

¹⁰⁶ H. Deutsch, "Homosexuality in Women", *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 14 1933, pp.34-56. For an interesting discussion of the relationship between food, cannibalism and mother/child body boundaries in patients with eating disorders see M. Levens, *Eating*

exhibit “bloodthirsty and murderous”¹⁰⁷ impulses towards the mother who threatens them with death and destruction.

Child-victim/predator-villain

Perrault’s ‘*Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*’ (‘Little Red Riding Hood’), part of his late seventeenth-century collection of fairy tales entitled *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* or *Contes de ma Mère l’Oye* (1697), is one of the most well-known fairy tales in the Western world.¹⁰⁸ Perrault adapted the traditional story of a girl bringing food to her sick grandmother and meeting a wolf on her way through

Disorders and Magical Control of the Body: Treatment Through Art Therapy, London, Routledge, 1995, pp.49-65.

¹⁰⁷ Deutsch, p.50. In his case studies, Rheingold discusses mothers who fear being ‘devoured’ while breastfeeding (*Fear of Being a Woman*, p.235). He cites Deutsch who suggests that “the child’s sucking is felt as devouring, and thus the naïve infantile idea that the child devours the mother is experienced emotionally. If this feeling reaches awareness, the mother complains that her child throws himself upon her like a beast ... If a woman’s emotional life is full of fear of the little devouring beast and if this fear is accompanied by an aggressive reaction ... [the child’s] role as a dangerous beast is more profound. The mother’s own aggression is projected in the child ...” (p.569). Just as the idea of being devoured by the mother is a projection of the infant’s wish to devour/destroy her, “the idea of being destroyed by the infant is a projection of the mother’s wish to destroy it” (p.570). According to Rheingold, infants are ‘aware’ of hostile impulses in the mother, “even though they may be repressed and coexist with a conscious attitude of tenderness. [Infantile] [r]age, then, is a defensive reaction, a primitive assertion of the will to live”. While Rheingold believes that “the bad-mother image is founded on *actual* pathogenic influence stemming from attitudes, impulses, and acts on the part of the mother” (*Mother, Anxiety, and Death*, p.81; my italics), he is aware that this issue remains a point of contention amongst theorists in the field (p.80).

¹⁰⁸ For a detailed study of many versions of the tale from France and French-speaking areas see P. Delarue, ed., *The Borzoi Book of French Folktales*, trans. Austin E. Fife, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1956.

the forest. Perrault's tale is "deeply disturbing",¹⁰⁹ to use Warner's description, because unlike later versions, it does not spare us Red Riding Hood's horrific fate. In Perrault's tale, Red Riding Hood is eaten by the wolf-grandmother and never seen again.¹¹⁰

Perrault's tale blurs the distinction between the wolf, grandmother, and Red Riding Hood by making each a part of the other. Red Riding Hood, "the lineal and female descendant of the grandmother",¹¹¹ is incorporated into the grandmother who has herself been incorporated into the wolf.¹¹² According to Vaz da Silva, "both women fuse within the wolf by being devoured ... the wolf is then the image of the interaction between two women – each a wolf in turn".¹¹³ Incorporation into the wolf makes Red Riding Hood a "lupine girl"¹¹⁴ who metaphorically transforms into the wolf. In Róheim's analysis, "[t]he wolf

¹⁰⁹ Warner, *From the Beast*, p.269.

¹¹⁰ Warner writes: "It is almost as if Perrault could not bring himself to follow the convention of the happier ending, with Granny dead and Little Red Riding Hood cunningly escaped, because he wanted them to remain united, in the wolf's belly" (*From the Beast*, p.183). See also Vaz da Silva on the avoidance of traditional 'happy' endings. F. Vaz da Silva, *Metamorphosis: The Dynamics of Symbolism in European Fairy Tales*, New York, Peter Lang, 2002, pp.129-131.

¹¹¹ Warner, *From the Beast*, p.182.

¹¹² Róheim suggests that "[t]he wolf, the grandmother, and the little girl, are essentially the same person". He also likens the process of incorporation of the little girl by the grandmother to the Normanby Island initiation ceremony of novice witches in which the novice "disappear[s] in the mouth of the old witch (her mother, or grandmother)". G. Róheim, *Fire in the Dragon and Other Psychoanalytic Essays on Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1992, pp.150; 152.

¹¹³ Vaz da Silva, p.140.

¹¹⁴ *Id.* at p.55.

comes first, goes in as Little Red Riding Hood and swallows the grandmother. Then when the little girl comes he acts the role of the grandmother and swallows the little girl ... Little Red Riding Hood (as Wolf) eats the grandmother first and is then eaten by the grandmother-wolf".¹¹⁵

Subsequent retellings of Perrault's tale toy with the idea that Red Riding Hood has a wolf-like hunger of her own. Oral versions typically involve the heroine "eat[ing] the flesh and drink[ing] the blood of her grandmother".¹¹⁶ In an oral version recounted by Joisten, Red Riding Hood brings blood sausages (*boudins*) to her ailing grandmother "whose blood the heroine afterwards cooks in the guise of the selfsame boudins".¹¹⁷ In another version recounted by Rolland, she brings pins in place of food. According to Vaz da Silva, "pricking pins are homologous to boudins in that

¹¹⁵ G. Róheim, "The Dragon and the Hero", *American Imago* 1(2-3) 1940, pp.40-69 at p.63.

¹¹⁶ Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman*, p.37. According to Warner, these versions "were collected after Perrault, though probably in circulation before" (p.37). For a detailed study of the relationship between Perrault's tale and oral tradition see Vaz da Silva, pp.113-162; Paul Delarue, "The Story of Grandmother" in Alan Dundes ed., *Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, pp.13-20. Vaz da Silva also provides a slightly altered translation at p.133. Vaz da Silva cites Delarue and Tenèze who believe that Perrault omitted the more gory aspects of the oral tradition (ie. Red Riding Hood's consumption of her grandmother) because they "would have shocked the society of its period by their cruelty" (p.119). However Vaz da Silva disagrees with Delarue, arguing instead that "the fact that in oral versions the girl sent to feed granny instead feeds *on* granny admits the implication that not feeding the grandmother – which Perrault stresses – amounts to feeding on her" (p.120).

¹¹⁷ Vaz da Silva, p.120.

both spell out blood ... [these] blood-related items anticipate granny's blood being taken as a meal".¹¹⁸ Red Riding Hood is no longer merely a victim of the devouring mother figure (grandmother in the guise of wolf in the guise of grandmother) but is herself a cannibalistic aggressor.¹¹⁹

Tatar tells us that in an Italian version entitled 'The Wolf and the Three Girls', "the wolf kills the heroine's mother, makes a door-latch cord from her tendons, chops her up to make a meat pie, and pours her blood into a wine bottle. Both meat pie and blood are downed by the heroine with obvious pleasure".¹²⁰ The infanticidal and matricidal fears and fantasies that characterise the pre-

¹¹⁸ Vaz da Silva associates the girl's insatiable appetite with her gradually awakening pubescent sexual desire. He likens Red Riding Hood to the girls of Iberian folklore whose cannibal and sexual appetites were said to transform them into she-wolves (p.138). Two versions of the folk-belief exist: Seventh or ninth-born daughters were cursed by their parents for their excessive desires and fated to become *peeiras de lobos* ('wolf-keepers') (p.35) or witches (p.49) and in northern variants, seventh-born daughters (p.54) and lastborn children (p.47) were condemned to become wolves. A Portuguese fairy tale incorporating both versions and which provides a variation on the 'Little Red Riding Hood' theme is 'The Girl of the Little Red Hat'. For more about this fairy tale and its relationship to Perrault's tale see Vaz da Silva, pp.50-58.

¹¹⁹ Birkhäuser-Oeri suggests that the grandmother being replaced by the wolf in this tale is "the good mother becom[ing] an evil devourer" (p.75). Warner (*No Go the Bogeyman*) deals at length with the monstrous child. See also Edward Gorey's *Beastly Baby* which illustrates the idea of infantile aggression and monstrosity with a spectacular physical transfiguration of a baby into a grotesque beast.

¹²⁰ Tatar, *Off With Their Heads*, p.209. Orenstein notes a similar version by François Briffault whose tale also includes a girl who eats the minced flesh of her grandmother and drinks the old woman's 'decanted' blood/wine. C. Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality, and the Evolution of a Fairytale*, New York, Basic Books, 2002, pp.68-69.

oedipal phase of infant development are also at the heart of Perrault's tale and its numerous retellings. "What makes these tales particularly interesting", suggests Tatar, "is the way in which they efface the line dividing the agent from the victim of oral aggression".¹²¹ Red Riding Hood shifts from "child-victim" to "predator-villain"¹²² and devouring mothers not only consume their own children but are themselves consumed by/with them.

In the Grimm's version of the tale entitled 'Little Red Cap', the grandmother is eaten by the wolf which then disguises itself in her clothes and takes her place. Little Red Cap senses that something is amiss and notices the horrific transformation of her grandmother into a wolf – "What big ears you have, Grandmother ... [w]hat big eyes you have ... what big teeth you have".¹²³ The wolf-grandmother's grotesquely disproportional features are reminiscent of those of the wicked witch. Legend has it that witches shape-shifted into the form of wolves.¹²⁴ Witches would take the souls of wolves and "go out at night ..., do much mischief in this form and then return to their bodies, which

¹²¹ Tatar, *Off With Their Heads*, p.210.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ In some versions 'teeth' are replaced with 'mouth'. Róheim sees the emphasis on 'mouth' in Kleinian terms – the toothless infant's mouth attacking the mother's 'bad' breast. G. Róheim, "Fairy Tale and Dream: 'Little Red Riding Hood'" in A. Dundes ed., *Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook*, *op. cit.*, pp.159-167.

¹²⁴ In Portuguese folklore, "werewolves are supposed to be generated by witches" (Vaz da Silva, p.49). In Nordic fairy tales, the wolf is the companion of witches (M. von Franz, *Shadow and Evil in Fairy Tales* (1974), Boston, Shambhala, 1995, p.256). Orenstein also notes the depiction of witches in broadsides "riding not only on broomsticks but on wolfback" (pp.94-95).

have lain as dead on their beds meanwhile”.¹²⁵ In ‘Little Red Cap’, the witch assumes the form of the wolf-grandmother.¹²⁶ The tale ends with a hunter killing and cutting open the wolf from which the grandmother steps out ‘safe and sound’. The tale’s ending suggests that the grandmother has been “possessed by a dark spirit”.¹²⁷ “[T]hose who ‘eat’”, writes Birkhäuser-Oeri, “have usually been ‘eaten up’ by something else ... By devouring the grandmother the wolf makes her into a devouring creature too”.¹²⁸ The wolf represents the dark, dangerous aspect of Klein’s ‘good/bad’ mother.

¹²⁵ M. von Franz, *An Introduction*, p.14. “[A]ll over the world there are stories of werewolves, people turned into wolves by witchcraft in the night, who perform destructive activities” (von Franz, *Shadow*, p.257). Wolves were also believed to ‘shift skins’ and assume human form (Vaz da Silva p.46). According to Portuguese folklore, “witches, like werewolves ... tak[e] off their clothes at crossroads and metamorphos[e] into animals” (p.49). Witches and werewolves are “double-skinned beings” (p.50).

¹²⁶ Riedel, p.207. Women are typically associated with wolves. In Roman mythology, Romulus, the founder of Rome, and his twin brother Remus were suckled by a she-wolf after they were abandoned as babies. In Kipling’s ‘Mowgli’ story, an abandoned child was also reared by wolves. In Austrian, Japanese, and Chinese legend, wolves are associated with the feminine, in particular with hysterical women who, like witches, are believed to possess the souls of wolves (von Franz, *An Introduction*, p.14; *Shadow*, pp.140-141). In Hispanic legend, there is the tale of *La Loba*, The Wolf Woman (also known as *La Huesera*, Bone Woman and *La Trapera*, The Gatherer), who is described as being “circumspect, often hairy, always fat ... both a crower and a cackler”. For more about the legend of *La Loba* see Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Contacting the Power of the Wild Woman*, London, Rider, 1992, pp.25-38.

¹²⁷ Birkhäuser-Oeri, p.133. According to Orenstein, the wolf was “a projection of evil within and a symbol of evil beyond .. [an embodiment] of ... earthly misfortune and spiritual danger” (p.94).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* Marie-Louise von Franz suggests that “[i]n its negative aspect the wolf is dangerously destructive, representing the principle of evil in its highest form ... The wolf is also one of the Devil’s animals ... In ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, the grandmother turns into a wolf and [either]

Later fairy tales also associate bestiality and cannibalism, incorporating the wolf or ferocious bear as mother figure. In 'The Three Little Pigs' a wolf blows the little pigs' house in, eats two of the little pigs before the third finally consumes the wolf.¹²⁹ The wolf as mother figure is a monstrous devourer but the third little pig/infant¹³⁰ also cannibalises the wolf/mother. "[I]t is the little pig that wanted to eat the mother-wolf all along",¹³¹ writes Róheim. As we saw in Bettelheim's reading of 'Hansel and Gretel', the infant projects feelings of guilt about fantasies of maternal annihilation onto the figure of the wolf/witch. In 'Goldilocks' the wolf transforms into savage bears that decide to eat the little girl with the golden hair who has been sleeping in their beds. Their evil intentions are made clear with the mother bear's final decision: "For supper she shall be, and I shall skin her".¹³²

The horror of infanticide "is the hardest for the developing child (and then adult) to keep in consciousness, to

threatens to eat [or actually eats] little Red Riding Hood in that shape, before the hunter comes and kills her. There the wolf becomes an attribute of dark nature" (*Shadow*, pp.254-255). In some versions, both grandmother and Red Riding Hood are consumed by the wolf and rescued from its belly. Róheim discusses folk-tales (including 'Little Red Riding Hood') in which 'bad' mother figures in the guise of animals consume their children who are then rescued from inside the animal ("The Dragon and the Hero", p.63). Vaz da Silva locates in these patterns of consumption and rescue "symbols expressive of dying and being reborn" (p.140).

¹²⁹ The wolf is killed when it falls down the chimney and lands in the little pig's boiling pot. In some variants, the wolf fails to devour any of the little pigs but is still boiled and eaten for supper.

¹³⁰ Warner remarks upon the disturbing association between 'innocent little piggies' and infants (*No Go the Bogeyman*, p.155).

¹³¹ Róheim, "The Dragon and the Hero", p.63.

¹³² Walter Crane, *Goldenlocks*, London, 1876.

bear”.¹³³ According to Rheingold, “[w]hat we repress is not anxiety itself ... but the agency of the threat, the ‘who threatens’. It is the knowledge that the mother is the source of the danger that must be kept out of consciousness”.¹³⁴ Since it is with the mother that “we struggle with not-being and the abyss, it is she whom we banish and substitute in her place phantoms of extreme ... evil”.¹³⁵ Fairy tales filled with characters and stories representing the terror of being killed/devoured “are attempts to displace the timeless, nebulous [maternal] horror to a monster”.¹³⁶

The phallic mother

The psychic danger that first occurs during the pre-oedipal period of separation from the mother becomes sexualised in the progression towards the oedipal stage of development.¹³⁷ While the oedipal passage for both sexes requires the child to separate from the mother at a psychological level, it poses specific problems for male

¹³³ Shengold, p.164.

¹³⁴ Rheingold, *Mother, Anxiety, and Death*, p.191. Rheingold elaborates further: “The infant’s primordial terror of imminent violent destruction constitutes basic anxiety and the prototype and essence of later anxiety reactions. No matter what the circumstances, and no matter how we rationalize our apprehension, we are, at bottom, afraid of only one thing: annihilation by the mother. When one traces fear, anxiety, and phobia to its ultimate source, one finds it in the mother-child relationship” (p.193).

¹³⁵ J. Van Buren, “Postmodernism”, p.241.

¹³⁶ Rheingold, *Mother, Anxiety, and Death*, p.65.

¹³⁷ Smith, p.177.

children and is “a far more difficult and dangerous process for the male [child] than for the female [child]”.¹³⁸

The boy gradually begins to turn away from his mother and forms an identification with his father.¹³⁹ As the child starts to identify with the father, he takes his mother as love-object.¹⁴⁰ The boy’s incest fantasy is both tied to his “desire to return to and merge with and be exclusively loved by the mother”¹⁴¹ and is sexual in nature. Gradually, the boy realises that his father is a rival for his mother’s love and affection.¹⁴² “Castration is the punishment that the child imagines awaits him if he attempts to take the place of the father”.¹⁴³ Fear of castration compels the boy to renounce his mother as love-object and identify with his father.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ *Id.* at p.157. “[B]ecause males and females are biologically different, the psychic conflicts take somewhat different form, and consequently the neuroses of the male are different from those of the female” (Smith, p.175). Smith notes that while individual neuroses may take many forms, they still reflect particular cultural neuroses. Similarly, particular cultural neuroses may take many different forms but still reflect universal patterns (p.175). I focus on the male child in this section because “Freud took the male psyche as the norm, interpreting the psyche of the female in terms of a pathological reaction to masculinity (p.177) and it is widely held that patriarchal mythic systems are principally a projection of the male psyche (p.178) or what might be called “the male collective unconscious” (p.179). “Since the male represents the norm in social mythology ... our biological evolution has resulted in a cultural evolutionary process which has produced a genderized, male-defined and –dominated world” (p.179).

¹³⁹ Smith, p.96.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Id.* at p.98.

¹⁴² *Id.* at p.97.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Castration anxiety is aroused when the boy first sees his mother's genitals.¹⁴⁵ The boy experiences horror at the sight/site of his mother's genitals.¹⁴⁶ Until that moment, the boy harbours the phantasy that his mother is phallic.¹⁴⁷ The boy realises that the mother is different from himself and "interprets that difference as castration ... he imagines she has lost her phallus/penis".¹⁴⁸ While the mother's body "inspires castration fear ... the father is constructed as the castrator, the one who mutilates the genitals".¹⁴⁹ According to Creed, "[i]t is crucial that the mother's genitals terrify from a passive perspective – terror is associated with their appearance".¹⁵⁰ Creed suggests that Freud denied the terrifying aspects of the female genitals. Freud only tells "a part of the story".¹⁵¹ Creed extends Freud's notion of castration anxiety to

¹⁴⁵ On the issue of castration anxiety see S. Freud, "Medusa's Head" in *Standard Edition, op. cit.*, vol. 18, pp.273-274 and "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" in *Standard Edition, op. cit.*, vol. 19, pp.241-261.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* In their study of phallic imagery in film Gabbard and Gabbard note that "the fantasy of a maternal phallus is a fundamental and therefore universal aspect of normal development". K. Gabbard and G.O. Gabbard, "Phallic Women in the Contemporary Cinema", *American Imago* 50(4) 1993, pp.421-439. See also M. Ian, *Remembering the Phallic Mother: Psychoanalysis, Modernism, and the Fetish*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1993. Róheim locates the phallic mother in European folklore ("Aphrodite, or the Woman with a Penis", *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 14, 1945, pp.350-390).

¹⁴⁸ B. Creed, *Monstrous-Feminine*, p.147. Carter writes: "the social fiction of the female wound, the bleeding scar left by her castration ... is at the heart of Western culture ... Female castration is an imaginary fact that pervades the whole of men's attitude towards women ... that transforms women from human beings into wounded creatures who were born to bleed". A. Carter, *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*, New York, Pantheon, 1978, p.23.

¹⁴⁹ Creed, *Monstrous-Feminine*, p.109.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Id.* at p.89.

suggest that the mother terrifies not because she is castrated but because “man endows her with imaginary powers of castration”.¹⁵² The boy fears his mother not because she is wounded but because she has the “power to wound”.¹⁵³

¹⁵² *Id.* at p.87.

¹⁵³ In her revision of Freudian theory, Page du Bois argues that fear of the female body “comes not from its woundedness but from its power to wound”. P.A. du Bois, *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988, p.147. Grosz also rereads Freud’s theory of the female body as ‘lack’ suggesting that perhaps the female body is “lacking not so much or simply the phallus but self-containment ... a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order”. E. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1994, p.203. “Castration is a primal male fear. Castration anxiety underlies much of men’s fears and ensuing hostility toward women ... Although it is the father who is actually seen as the castrating threat during the Oedipal conflict, it should be noted that the dread of castration, and the overwhelming anxiety that accompanies it, is engendered at first by the boy’s initial interest in the opposite sex (mother). This powerful early association between sexual feelings for females and fear of castration (castration anxiety) remains with the boy into manhood, manifesting most often in an unconscious fear of women and of the ‘feminine’ in general. This deep-seated dread, however, does not typically manifest as a physical fear of castration ... though that too may sometimes be present” (p.36) [and, as Diamond suggests with reference to the now well-known ‘Bobbitt’ case in which Lorena Bobbitt cut off her husband’s penis with a kitchen knife in retaliation for years of alleged abuse, perhaps well-founded]. One may wonder whether Diamond’s own castration anxiety seems to manifest itself in his comments about a portion of the angry and hostile female public who “openly celebrated the castration” in the face of the “anxiety, vulnerability, and fear” that was so apparent in men’s reaction to the case (p.36). Diamond suggests that “more often, it manifests as a symbolic, psychological fear or anxiety associated with the opposite sex, sometimes conceived of by psychoanalysts as the castrating, devouring *vagina dentata* (the dangerous vagina with teeth) ... it is this typically unconscious castration complex that compels [male] hostility toward women” (Diamond, pp.36-37). See also Lederer (1968) who associates the male fear of castration and misogyny.

Creed reminds us that “the image of the phallic [mother] has two forms: the [mother] either has a phallus or phallic attribute or she has retained the male’s phallus inside herself”.¹⁵⁴ The second form implies a relationship between the devouring mother and the insatiability of both her mouths – her “facial mouth and her genital mouth”.¹⁵⁵ “The threat of incorporation issuing from the maternal body is ... concentrated on the two areas associated with incorporation ... mouth and vagina”.¹⁵⁶

Fantasies of the female genital lips opening up into a mouth reflect infant fears of being devoured by the monstrous mother who does not feed but rather *feeds on* her children.¹⁵⁷ The acts of dismembering, engorging, biting, crushing, chewing, and swallowing that define the mother’s cannibalistic incorporation similarly define the devouring female genital ‘mouth’ which also “swallows” and “cut[s] into pieces”.¹⁵⁸ Mythographer Joseph

¹⁵⁴ Creed, *Monstrous-Feminine*, p.156.

¹⁵⁵ *Id.* at p.113. “Woman as monstrous is associated with bodily appetites” (Creed, *Monstrous-Feminine*, p.144). See also Glenn for psychoanalytic symbolism conjoining female genitals and mouth. J. Glenn, “The Fantasies of Phaedra: A Psychoanalytic Reading”, *Classical World*, 69, 1976, pp.435-442 at p.437.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Id.* at p.109.

¹⁵⁸ *Id.* at p.106. In her discussion of the fairy tale ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’, Tatar makes an interesting connection between incest and cannibalism. She writes: “It is difficult to avoid recognizing the powerful double presence of incestuous desire and cannibalistic aggression in this tale” (*Off With Their Heads*, p.199). She notes that incest and cannibalism are typically associated with the child’s separation from the mother. In the tale of ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’, Tatar suggests that Jack fails to separate from his mother, “manag[ing] to negotiate an arrangement that allows him to stay at home as a dutiful and devoted son”. This ‘arrangement’ involves Jack

Campbell recounts numerous tales of the toothed vagina or *vagina dentata* which ensnares, dismembers, and devours not only the phallus but also entire bodies.¹⁵⁹

For the boy dealing with these oedipal crises, castration is not merely physical but also 'symbolic'. Castration anxiety in the oedipal phase of development is related to "the all-

not only murdering his surrogate father (the giant) but also "mutilat[ing] the corpse, much to the delight of his mother" (p.198). Instead of turning away from his mother and identifying with his father, Jack murders his 'father' and thus remains trapped in the transitional period between pre-oedipal and oedipal stages of development.¹⁵⁹ J. Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976. The tale of a father who kicks boys and men inside his daughters' vaginas to be eaten up is a particularly vivid example (see Creed, *Monstrous-Feminine*, p.106). See also Weigle for a brief discussion of this tale and tales of other 'vagina women' from Native American mythology ("Southwest Native American Mythology" in C. Larrington, ed., *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*, London, Pandora, 1992, pp.333-361 at pp.349-350. See also Lederer for tales of the *vagina dentata*. The relationship between the devouring and castrating mother is made plain in a tale from the Pas de Calais in which a boy "takes his willy and pushes it into a hole [in a butcher's attic] ... a woman [enters the butcher shop] ... and she says: so there's no more sausages, then he [the butcher] says, no. And she says, yes, yes there is one". By the end of the tale, the woman has eaten the dismembered 'sausage' and has returned to the butcher shop where she says: "it was really good your sausage, haven't you got another" (Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman*, p.72). In this tale the butcher 'does the snipping' with a pair of scissors *at the woman's request*. In her essay "The Dread of Woman", Horney refers to Groddeck's analysis of the thumb-sucker in *Struwwelpeter*: "[I]t is a man who cuts off the thumb, but it is the mother who utters the threat, and the instrument with which it is carried out – the scissors – is a female symbol" ("The Dread of Woman: Observations on a Specific Difference in the Dread Felt by Men and by Women Respectively for the Opposite Sex", *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 13, 1932, pp.348-360 at p.352). Creed notes that "Freud himself was aware that the mother is frequently viewed by children as the parent who utters the castration threat" (*Monstrous-Feminine*, p.103) although he ignored its significance in his case study of five year-old 'Little Hans' who was threatened with castration by his mother at the age of three and a half. For more about the case of 'Little Hans' and Creed's critique see pp.88-104.

encompassing maternal figure of the pre-oedipal period who threatens symbolically to engulf the infant, thus posing a threat of psychic obliteration".¹⁶⁰ Creed writes:

[f]ear of castration can be understood in two different ways. Castration can refer to symbolic castration (loss of the mother's body, breast, loss of identity) ... or it can refer to genital castration ... [the fear of castration] is related to the subject's infantile memories of its early relation with the mother and the subsequent fear of its identity being swallowed up by the mother.¹⁶¹

The fear of castration is also related to the fantasy of being literally swallowed up by the mother who nurtures/suckles the infant at her breast and who "might in turn desire to feed on [him]".¹⁶² During the oedipal period the boy's dread of being devoured and destroyed is manifested in his desire to "penetrate into [his mother's] body, cut it to pieces, devour and destroy it".¹⁶³ According to Klein, "[t]he tendenc[y] to ... destroy [is] concerned with the organs of conception, pregnancy and parturition, which the boy assumes to exist in the womb".¹⁶⁴ The boy

¹⁶⁰ Creed, *Monstrous-Feminine*, p.109.

¹⁶¹ *Id.* at pp.107; 109.

¹⁶² *Id.* at p.109.

¹⁶³ M. Klein, "Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict", *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 9, 1928, pp.167-180 at p.170.

¹⁶⁴ *Id.* at p.171. The boy resents those objects 'received' into the womb – baby and penis. Klein writes: "[the boy] is motivated by jealousy of the future brothers and sisters whose appearance is expected and by the wish to destroy them in the womb ... [t]he destructive tendencies whose object is the womb are also directed with their full oral- and anal-sadistic intensity against the father's penis, which is supposed to be located there" (p.171). The boy's

fears being punished for his destruction of the mother's body. He fears that he will be mutilated, dismembered and castrated *by his mother*.¹⁶⁵

In the Russian fairy tale 'The Virgin Czarina' we encounter the threat of the castrating mother in the figure of the wicked witch Baba Yaga. In folklore Baba Yaga is said to have a particular penchant for little children and her hut is fenced with the bones and skulls of her victims.¹⁶⁶ "She sets snapping teeth on her door for a lock, with hands to bolt it and human limbs to support it ... a big oven blazes in the hearth where Baba Yaga sleeps at night".¹⁶⁷

Journeying across the country in pursuit of the Virgin Czarina, Ivan comes across the hut of Baba Yaga who asks him: "How is it, my little one". Well aware of her sinister intentions towards him, Ivan does not hesitate to threaten the witch: "I'm going to box your ear, I'll make an ovenhole of your rear. I'll crush the scab with my hand, Till out of your bum comes pouring sand!"¹⁶⁸ According to

aggressive tendencies are "rooted in his dread of his mother, whom he intend[s] to rob of the father's penis, her children and her female sexual organs" (p.172).

¹⁶⁵ Klein suggests that "[t]his dread of the mother is so overwhelming because there is combined with it an intense dread of castration by the father" ("Early Stages of the Oedipal Conflict", p.171).

¹⁶⁶ Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman*, pp.25-26. Róheim describes Baba Yaga as a "cannibal witch" (*The Gates of the Dream*, New York, International Universities Press, 1952, p.398).

¹⁶⁷ Jacoby, p.207.

¹⁶⁸ Kast, p.18.

Kast, “[by] [c]alling [Ivan] ‘my little one’, Baba Yaga really intends to render him impotent and devour him”.¹⁶⁹

Freud told us that blindness is a metaphoric castration.¹⁷⁰ In Charlotte-Rose de la Force’s 1697 tale ‘Parlurette’, a mother promises to give a witch her baby in exchange for some herbs. The witch takes the baby girl, named Parlurette after the herbs her mother desired, and holds her captive in a tower. In the Grimms’ version called ‘Rapunzel’, the witch calls out to the girl “Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair”¹⁷¹ and then climbs up the girl’s long golden plaits to reach the tower. One day a prince witnesses the witch climbing Rapunzel’s hair and also decides to do the same. The prince visits Rapunzel every night after the witch has left and they plan to marry once Rapunzel escapes.

When the witch learns of the prince’s visits, she cuts Rapunzel’s hair and sends her to the desert. She tells the prince: “the love of your life ... the pretty bird [has] ...

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* The fantasy of the witch as castrator is perhaps nowhere more clear than in the accusations of witchcraft levelled against women in the fifteenth century Inquisitor’s manual, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, which included the stealing of men’s penises. On this point see Creed, *Monstrous-Feminine*, p.75. See also Chapter Four.

¹⁷⁰ S. Freud, “The Uncanny” in *Standard Edition*, *op. cit.*, vol. 17, pp.217-252. Freud also told us that decapitation is a form of symbolic castration (“Medusa’s Head”, p.273). The apocryphal Judith - who severs Holofernes head with his own sword - caught Freud’s attention. He interpreted the beheading as a metaphor for castration (Freud, “The Taboo of Virginity”, in *Standard Edition*, *op. cit.*, vol. 11, pp.191-208). See also M. Jacobus, *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986.

¹⁷¹ The tale appears in full in Birkhäuser-Oeri, p.84.

gone from the nest and won't sing any more. The cat's taken it, and it'll scratch your eyes out too. You've lost Rapunzel. You'll never see her again!"¹⁷² Distraught, the prince plunges from the tower and lands on thorns that pierce his eyes. The witch describes herself as a cat that has caught and swallowed the pretty bird, Rapunzel. When the witch encounters the prince she fulfils her promise to scratch out his eyes, leaving him emasculated, weak and ineffectual: "he did nothing but wail and moan".¹⁷³

'My mother, she killed me'¹⁷⁴

Resolution of the Oedipus complex depends on the boy identifying with his father and in turn, denigrating the feminine (m)other who threatens both his masculinity and subjectivity.¹⁷⁵ But the boy is propelled by the competing forces of fear and desire – his fear of being engulfed and annihilated by the mother, and his desire for oneness with the mother. Smith suggests that patriarchy functions as a 'mythic system' that "impel[s] the child away from the mother toward the father ... [t]he mythic system facilitates

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Id.* at p.92. Indeed, as Campbell notes, the phallic mother's threat to men is "perfectly illustrated in the [figure] of the witch" (p.73). See also J.C. Flügel, "Polyphallic Symbolism and the Castration Complex", *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 5, 1924, pp.155-196.

¹⁷⁴ J. Grimm and W. Grimm, "The Juniper Tree" in *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, trans. Jack Zipes, Toronto, Bantam, 1987, pp.171-179.

¹⁷⁵ Smith, p.111. "It is the mother who the child sees as most threatening to the development of its individual ego" (Smith, p.181). "A successful Oedipal passage in the male child requires the object of the ego ideal to shift from the mother to the father, and thus from feminine to masculine" (Smith, p.118).

the individuation process by making the mother a negative pole which will repel the child, and the father a positive pole which will attract the child".¹⁷⁶ Hostility towards the mother strengthens the desire to separate and "energizes and drives the process of individuation".¹⁷⁷ Smith writes:

[Hostility takes the form of] denigration of the feminine/mother/female/body/earth/ other through negative archetypal images, and a positive reinforcement and inflation of the masculine/father/mind/culture/male ego. This creates both conscious and unconscious misogyny which furnishes the energy for the ... process of individuation.¹⁷⁸

Hostility is fuelled by what Stoller refers to as the "ubiquitous fear that one's sense of maleness and masculinity are in danger".¹⁷⁹ Denigration acts as a defence "against succumbing to the pull of merging again with mother ... against our own inner, primitive yearning for oneness with mother ...mother, in her representation as an evil, hated creature ... permit[s] the [engulfing]

¹⁷⁶ *Id.* at pp.153-154.

¹⁷⁷ *Id.* at pp.157-158. Diamond suggests that "men's hostility toward women more often than not hides their fear [of the feminine]" (p.42). Historically, this hostility has manifested itself in the form of misogynistic demonization of women by men – "[m]an has always projected some evil upon womankind..." (p.43).

¹⁷⁸ Smith, p.17.

¹⁷⁹ Stoller, pp.149-150. "Misogyny is used as a cultural tool to drive the male toward masculinity". In adulthood, masculinity "remains fragile at best, since it is a state reached through repression of aspects of the human psyche ... Adult males constantly need to insist on their masculinity and fear any attack upon it" (Smith, p.159).

mother to be repressed; one would hardly wish to merge with a witch".¹⁸⁰

'The Juniper Tree', described by Ussher and von Metzradt as "the greatest of all fairy tales"¹⁸¹ is an allegory of the child's journey through the pre-oedipal and oedipal stages of development. It is a story of "family conflicts ... that charts the reorientation of children from their mothers to their fathers".¹⁸² And it exposes the fears and anxieties that typically characterise the precarious journey from the pre-oedipal to the oedipal realm.

Philipp Otto Runge's version of the tale begins with a woman conceiving a child after many years of infertility. As the seasons change, the foetus grows until it is "big and firm" at springtime. The child is born but the mother dies a short time later. The death of biological mothers in fairy tales is usually extraneous to the main sequence of events. They are typically "absent",¹⁸³ as Warner puts it, relegated to the margins of the narrative while their evil alter egos, in the form of stepmothers or witches, are very much alive and integral to the plot. In his version of 'The Juniper Tree', Runge shuns tradition and makes the death of the biological mother an important part of the tale.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ A. Ussher and C. von Metzradt, *Enter These Enchanted Woods*, Dublin, Dolmen, 1957, p.37.

¹⁸² Tatar, *Off With Their Heads*, p.225.

¹⁸³ See Warner, *From the Beast*, chapter 13.

The boy blames himself for his mother's death.¹⁸⁴ The boy also feels guilt about his anger towards his sweet dead mother that he projects onto the stepmother. While the boy assumes "the burden of guilt for the mother's death, [i]n the second phase of action, the child is innocent victim more than anything else, becoming the target of the stepmother's abuse and homicidal impulses".¹⁸⁵ Although the boy dispels of the mother as a threatening psychological presence, he must still contend with the mother as a threatening physical presence in the form of the stepmother, who, like the devouring mother of pre-oedipal fantasy, harbours infanticidal and deadly feelings towards the child. The boy who imagines himself as murderer of his real-life mother is murdered by her impostor. "The tale moves from a naturalistic episode of birth and death (in which the child figures as 'murderer') to a supernatural inversion of this scene (in which the 'mother' stands as slayer)".¹⁸⁶

Malevolence and murderous intent are well disguised by the stepmother who pretends to harbour only appropriate maternal sentiments when such a ruse will further her evil plans. "[T]he stepmother, as the exponent of artifice [and] malice, serves as the agent of murderous forces, just as the biological mother, tied to the rhythms of nature,

¹⁸⁴ Although another cause of death is implied. In the seventh month of her pregnancy, the mother ate berries "so greedily" from the Juniper tree "that she grew sad and became ill" (Tatar, *Off With Their Heads*, p.223).

¹⁸⁵ Tatar, *Off With Their Heads*, p.223.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

represents life-giving powers”.¹⁸⁷ The stepmother’s wickedness is evident in her cruel mistreatment of her stepson: “She pushed him from one place to the next, slapped him here and cuffed him there, so that the poor child lived in constant fear”.¹⁸⁸ And her capacity for deception is chillingly clear as she sets her infanticidal plan in motion.

Intending to lure the boy to his death with the maternal love and nurturance he so desires, the stepmother speaks to him softly and sweetly, encouraging him to take an apple from the chest. She entices him both with the promised sweetness of the fruit and her own saccharine words. When he delves into the chest, the stepmother swiftly closes the lid on the boy’s head which falls off and rolls around among the blood red apples. In an attempt to disguise her murderous actions, the stepmother reattaches the boy’s head with a scarf and places him on a garden bench still holding the fateful apple.

The boy’s biological mother longed for a child “as red as blood and as white as snow”.¹⁸⁹ And while pregnant her own blood spilled onto the snow as she peeled an apple. These incidents are eerily prophetic as the biological mother unknowingly foretells the death of her own son

¹⁸⁷ *Id.* at p.224.

¹⁸⁸ *Id.* at p.214.

¹⁸⁹ J. Grimm and W. Grimm, “The Juniper Tree” in *The Complete Grimm’s Fairy Tales*, anon. trans., commentary by Joseph Campbell, London, 1975, pp.220-229.

who does indeed become as red as blood and as white as snow at the hands of the stepmother. His spilled blood is compared to the redness of the apple and his lifeless body, drained of blood, is the colour of snow.

In the Grimms' version, the stepmother orders the boy to climb into the chest, shuts the lid with an iron lock and suffocates him. She then decapitates him, resecures the head with a scarf and positions him on the chest with apple in hand. His step-sister Marlinchen asks for the apple but receives no reply. She hits him around the ears (as her mother told her to) and is horrified when his head falls off. The wicked stepmother puts the blame on her own daughter: "What have you done! Be quiet and let no one know it; it cannot be helped now, we will make him into black puddings".¹⁹⁰ She cuts the corpse into pieces and seasons them with Marlinchen's salty tears. The unnaturalness of the stepmother's actions is in stark contrast with her 'natural' role as nurturer.¹⁹¹ The stepmother cooks her stepson's mutilated corpse and dishes out his dismembered body parts by the plateful exactly as she has done with other meals that she has prepared for her family in the past. The boy's father unwittingly cannibalises his own son while his sister buries his bones beneath the juniper tree where his biological mother was previously laid to rest.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ On this point see M. Yearsley, *The Folklore of Fairy-Tale*, London, Watts, 1924, pp.46-48.

The boy is transformed into a bird whose haunting song tells of his tragic fate:

My mother, she killed me,
My father, he ate me.
My sister, Marlinchen,
She gathered up my bones,
Put them in a silken scarf,
Buried them under the juniper tree.
Keewitt, keewitt, what a fine bird I am.¹⁹²

The bird-boy leaves out the part where he drops a millstone on his stepmother's head and comes back to life. The bird-boy's song confirms what was merely implied – the biological mother and stepmother are dual aspects of the Mother of psychic fantasy. The first line, "My *mother*, she killed me", is purposeful in its ambiguity for we are left uncertain as to which mother the boy blames for his murder.¹⁹³ While the distinction between biological mother (life-giver) and stepmother (death-dealer) is clear at the beginning of the tale, by the end of the tale life and death become fused into one being. Tatar describes this merging and mingling of maternal roles:

The biological mother becomes implicated, through her fertility and childbearing, in the cyclical rhythms of nature, which include decay and death. The stepmother, through

¹⁹² Grimm and Grimm, "The Juniper Tree".

¹⁹³ Tatar notes that "nearly every variant of the famous refrain of that tale attributes the murder to a mother rather than to a stepmother, even though the actual perpetrator in the story is usually a stepmother" (*Hard Facts*, p.143).

her murder and dismemberment of the [boy], becomes enmeshed in a process marked not only by death and mutilation, but also by birth and (re)creation ... birth slides into death and destruction into creation.¹⁹⁴

The beautiful bird-boy's song is at once a pavane for a dead child and a requiem for his long dead biological mother and soon to be dead stepmother. When the stepmother hears the dreadful song, the explosive flames of fire that appeared in the juniper tree with the appearance of the bird engulf the wicked woman and the boy rises from the ashes. Death and life are intertwined in an endless cycle of decay and regeneration.

With both mothers dead, the boy is 'reborn' and enacts the final gesture that signifies the completion of his symbolic journey of psychic development from the mother (pre-oedipal) to the father (oedipal). At the tale's end, the boy takes his father's hand and is "right glad". He can now live 'happily ever after' with his father and sister. The (step)mother is no longer a bar to his happiness nor a threat to the family. For Tatar, however, this final scene of domestic bliss – like other fairy tales in which "ill will and evil are so often personified as adult female figures – perpetuate[s] [a] strangely inappropriate notion about what it means to live happily ever after ... [by] impl[y]ing] that

¹⁹⁴ Tatar, *Off With Their Heads*, p.224.

happiness comes in the form of an enduring love triangle consisting of a father and his children (who have defeated an evil female)".¹⁹⁵

The final familial act – sitting down at the table to eat – reverses the disorder and chaos inflicted by the mother who died after childbirth (and left father and son to fend for themselves) and the stepmother (whose ‘false’ maternity is unnatural and destructive). For Tatar, “[t]his last supper figures as an important contrast to the shocking meal in which the three participated earlier, with the son as main course ... it signals a normalization of family relations and marks a period of banal stability leading out of the cataclysmic upheavals of the past”.¹⁹⁶ Warner suggests that it is only after the death of the evil (step)mother that “the family can regroup around the restored, disinfected table in a scene of domestic – and patriarchal – stability ... The family is reborn, re-engendered, restored through the oral language of the fairy tale as a group physically born of the father”.¹⁹⁷ The boy comes back to life from the grave beneath the juniper tree that he shared with his biological mother. But the mother makes no such miraculous return. She has served her purpose – the mother dies so that the son might

¹⁹⁵ *Id.* at p.228.

¹⁹⁶ *Id.* at p.226.

¹⁹⁷ Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman*, p.65.

live.¹⁹⁸ Patriarchy fails to acknowledge its debt to the mother who is “nothing but body”¹⁹⁹ – no/body.

‘The spectral mother’²⁰⁰

Negation of the mother is the “foundational fantasy”²⁰¹ of Western culture. “If infants don’t separate from their mothers’ bodies”, writes Oliver, “then there can be no society”.²⁰² In her book *Family Values*, Oliver attributes the “paradoxical position of the mother” in our cultural phantasies to the “imagined opposition between nature and culture”.²⁰³ Oliver writes:

In order to become social, the infant must separate from the mother’s body, instead realigning himself with the authority of the father. Patriarchy is founded on the father’s authority which is associated with culture against maternal nature ... The relation with the maternal body is imagined as antisocial, a non-relation, which, if anything, threatens the social.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁸ K. Oliver, *Subjectivity Without Subjects: From Abject Fathers to Desiring Mothers*, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield, 1998, pp.36-42. Oliver writes: “The life-giving mother is the secret origin of the gift of life that must be forgotten. The guilt inherent in responsibility could be the guilt involved in matricide that makes it possible for the father/son to claim responsibility (for life) ... it is the father’s/[son’s] gift of the death of the mother that promises life to the son. The son submits to the father because of the promise that someday he will inherit everything and take over the position of the patriarch. The promise of fatherhood is made through the sacrifice of mothers” (pp. 39; 42).

¹⁹⁹ K. Oliver, *Family Values: Subjects Between Nature and Culture*, New York, Routledge, 1997, p.3.

²⁰⁰ M. Sprengnether, *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1990.

²⁰¹ T. Brennan, *History After Lacan*, *op. cit.*, pp.79-117.

²⁰² Oliver, *Family Values*, p.3.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Oliver notes a fundamental contradiction in the Freudian conception of the mother as both nurturer and malevolent force, protector and destroyer. Freud associates the mother “not only with the beginning of life but also with its end”.²⁰⁵ Freud champions the mother as a ‘natural’ supporter of the social body but also equates her with the “ultimate undoing of masculine striving and achievement”.²⁰⁶ Woman/nature is not always benign; she can also be wild, uncontrollable, and chaotic.²⁰⁷ Oliver states that “[t]he first relationship with the maternal body, then, is in the contradictory position of both providing the prototype for all subsequent relations and threatening the very possibility of any social relation”.²⁰⁸

Patriarchy requires a disavowal of that which “does not respect borders, positions, rules”.²⁰⁹ That which threatens the identity of the subject and the emergence of the “clean and proper, obedient, law-abiding, social body”²¹⁰ is abjected – found to be abhorrent and expelled. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, psychoanalytic feminist theorist Julia Kristeva contends that in Western culture the

²⁰⁵ *Id.* at p.54.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ For further discussion of the metaphoric association between Woman and nature see C. Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1980), San Francisco, Harper, 1983, p.127. Brennan suggests that “the association of women and nature can be explained not by what women and nature have in common, but by the similar fantasmatic denial imposed upon both of them” (*History*, p.97).

²⁰⁸ Oliver, *Family Values*, p.3.

²⁰⁹ J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980), trans. L.S. Roudiez, New York, Columbia University Press, 1982, p.4.

²¹⁰ Grosz, p.192.

mother who threatens subjectivity and the social body bears the full weight of abjection. According to Kristeva, “[t]he abject confronts us ... with our earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal* entity ... It is a violent, clumsy breaking away ...”.²¹¹ The most terrifying abject marks are those that recall the initial confrontation with the mother who threatens the infant with an absolute loss of being. Feelings of loathing and terror surround the abject which is associated with decay, disease, defilement and death.²¹²

The mother is relegated to the realm of the unspeakable, banished to “the domain of unthinkable, abject[ion]”.²¹³ The mother must be “radically excluded”²¹⁴ and relegated to the other side of an imaginary border which separates self and other. Relegated to the social imaginary, she

²¹¹ Kristeva, p.13.

²¹² Kristeva rereads Freud via Lacan and associates abjection with the infant’s separation from the mother and entry into the Symbolic Order (language, culture, law). For Kristeva, the Symbolic is associated with order, rules and regulations. Symbolic orders – legal, religious, familial – seek to establish and maintain social and cultural stability through repression of the Semiotic. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva characterises the Semiotic as a pre-oedipal, preverbal maternal space. The Semiotic is associated with the feminine, corporeality, music, rhythm, gesture, laughter - that which exceeds signification. The Semiotic is a place of fusion with the maternal body and the security of corporeal unity. The Symbolic disrupts the idyllic mother/child union when the child acquires language. In order to enter the Symbolic Order, the infant must reject and repress the mother. Kristeva draws together the processes of separation, rejection and repression in her theory of abjection. J. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), trans. Margaret Waller, New York, Columbia University Press, 1984.

²¹³ J. Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’*, New York, Routledge, 1993, p.3.

²¹⁴ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.2.

becomes what Sprengnether terms the 'spectral mother' – a phantom “constantly press[ing] against the barrier of consciousness ... an object of immense fear [and] dread.”²¹⁵ Brennan suggests that “Kristeva makes 'abjection' the foundation of objectification ... [which] comes from the need to exclude ... to [make] other ... to know ... [and ultimately] control”.²¹⁶ Brennan writes:

the [infant's] desires to poison, fragment and destroy the mother's body constitute the process of objectification, a process which has a physical reality ... turning the other into an object also means fragmenting it (in order partly to know it) or poisoning or in other ways attacking it, as well as making it a controllable thing.²¹⁷

The maternal body, associated with “[t]he unclean, the profane, that which is felt to threaten the foundations of sanity and culture”,²¹⁸ must be controlled. Dehumanizing the mother, making her repulsive, abject, Other is, according to Diamond, a defensive strategy by which “the patriarchal tradition has kept [the maternal-feminine] in control”.²¹⁹ By demonising the (m)other, “we imagine [her] as less human, and hence, easier to despise, defame, and ... even kill”.²²⁰ In the following chapter we will see that “[t]he devouring monster we have turned the mother

²¹⁵ Sprengnether, p.5.

²¹⁶ Brennan, p.100.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ Van Buren, “Postmodernism”, p.241.

²¹⁹ Diamond, pp.50-51.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

into”,²²¹ to return to Irigaray’s fitting description, haunts the cultural psyche. In the myths through which our culture is transmitted, heroes battle with monstrous maternal phantoms in deadly encounters where victory means the difference between life and death.

²²¹ Irigaray, p.15.

Chapter Two Murdering Mothers: Infanticide, Matricide, and Oedipal Lore

Myth has an immediate importance to us; it is the currency in which our culture is transmitted¹

So long as humans are born of mothers and remain subject to death they will be neurotic ... So long as they live in communities and communicate, their shared neurosis will be manifested in the form of myth²

The culture, the language, the imaginary and the mythology in which we live at the moment ... this edifice that looks so clean and subtle ... let's see what ground it is built on. Is it all that acceptable? ... the whole of our western culture is based upon the murder of the mother³

A woman in the shape of a monster, a monster in the shape of a woman: the skies are full of them⁴

I grieve that [the mother] is perceived as a monster that must be slain⁵

¹ J. Warden, *Orpheus: The Metamorphoses of a Myth*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1982, p.viii.

² J.C. Smith, *The Neurotic Foundations of Social Order: Psychoanalytic Roots of Patriarchy*, New York, New York University Press, 1990, p.68.

³ M. Whitford, ed., *The Irigaray Reader: Luce Irigaray*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1991, p.47.

⁴ A. Rich, "Planetarium" in *Poems: Selected and New, 1950-1974*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1975

⁵ U. Molinaro, *Power Dreamers: The Jocasta Complex*, New York, McPherson, 1994, p.52.

Cultural psychopathology

In his book *Literature and the Gods* Roberto Calasso tells us that throughout history, “[t]he principal argument levelled against the Greek myths was always of a moral, and above all a sexual, nature: the myths, it appeared, were to be condemned because full of unseemly stories ...”.⁶ It is precisely these ‘unseemly stories’ that Freud found fascinating – mythic worlds filled with themes of betrayal and vengeance, and murderous and incestuous desires akin to anything he might have encountered in his role as analyst.

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle notes that stories in which individuals either “experience[d], or committ[ed], terrifying acts” provided imaginative fodder for the “best tragedies”.⁷ Indeed, Freud found inspiration in the Greek myths as retold by dramatists such as Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus who brought to life repressed fears and anxieties. For Freud, a play such as Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* has the power to move modern theatre-goers as deeply as those in fifth century Athens because myths deal with the ‘stuff’ of the unconscious. In “The Interpretation of Dreams”, Freud writes:

[It] is capable of moving a modern reader

⁶ R. Calasso, *Literature and the Gods* (1988), trans. Tim Parks, London, Vintage, 2001, p.103.

⁷ Aristotle, *Aristotle’s Poetics: A Translation and Commentary for Students of Literature* (1966), vol. 13, trans. Leon Golden, Tallahassee, University Presses of Florida, 1981.

or playgoer no less powerfully than it moved the contemporary Greeks ... [t]here must be a voice within us which is prepared to acknowledge the compelling power of fate in the Oedipus ... His fate moves us only because it might have been our own ... It may be that we are all destined to direct our first sexual impulses toward our mothers, and our first impulses of hatred and violence toward our fathers ... [the play] is nothing more or less than a wish-fulfilment - the fulfilment of the wish of our childhood. But we, more fortunate than [Oedipus], ... recoil from the person for whom this primitive wish of our childhood has been fulfilled with all the force of the repression which these wishes have undergone in our minds since childhood. As the poet brings the guilt of Oedipus to light by his investigation, he forces us to become aware of our own inner selves, in which the same impulses are still extant, even though they are suppressed.⁸

We recognise in the myths told and retold to us by novelists and dramatists of every age our infantile fantasies and anxieties, repressed in the unconscious mind and projected onto the characters with whom we identify.⁹

⁸ S. Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams" in *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, trans. A.A. Brill, New York, Random House, 1938, p.308.

⁹ Van Buren notes that "[t]he processes of projective identification [and] introjection ... moved the characters of Greek mythology onto the template of infantile development and psychopathology ... many infants throughout human history have found themselves in Greek tragedy". J. Van Buren, "The Psychoanalytic Semiosis of Absence or, the Semiotic Murder of the Mother", *International Review of Psychoanalysis*, 18(2), 1991, pp.249-263 at pp.252-253.

Freud believed that the repressed material in our unconscious minds is given expression in our cultural myths and legends, and in imaginative works such as drama and art.¹⁰ The emotional conflicts experienced in infant development are mirrored in parallel stages of societal psychic development.¹¹ Myths reflect the stage of societal psychic development in which they were produced.¹² Pre-oedipal myths reflect separation and engulfment anxieties while Oedipal myths reflect the anxieties generated by the process of individuation.¹³

In the previous chapter we focused on pre-oedipal and oedipal narratives of individuation (*ontogenesis*) and located the mother as the primary source of psychic

¹⁰ Mythographer Joseph Campbell describes myth as “the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation”. J. Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), London, Fontana, 1993, p.3. Psychoanalyst Victoria Hamilton suggests that “[m]yths ... belong to the class of ‘transcontextual syndromes’. They survive over time and are usable by different cultures and disciplines. Their flexibility contributes to their invariance”. V. Hamilton, *Narcissus and Oedipus: The Children of Psychoanalysis*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982, p.221.

¹¹ In Neumann’s words, “[t]he constitutive character of these stages unfolds in the historical sequence of individual development”. E. Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (1949), trans. R.F.C. Hull, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1954, p.264.

¹² Neumann elaborates: “Just as unconscious contents like dreams and fantasies tell us something about the psychic situation of the dreamer, so myths throw light on the human stage from which they originate and typify man’s [sic] unconscious situation at that stage” (*Origins*, p.263).

¹³ Victoria Hamilton suggests that “the Greek myths ... have played an important role in the articulation of psychoanalytic theory”. Hamilton reinterprets the early stages of infantile development in light of Greek mythology, focusing in particular on the myths of Narcissus and Oedipus which “name two stages in early development conceptualised by Freud as ‘primary narcissism’ and the ‘Oedipus complex’” (p.1).

conflict. In this chapter we focus on the corresponding pre-oedipal and oedipal narratives of individuation in parallel periods of the history of culture (*phylogenesis*). We see how the monstrous maternal phantoms that haunt our dreams and the fairytales of childhood also appear as the murderous mothers of myth. Focusing in particular on mythical defences against the mother who threatens both psychic and social disintegration, we consider Greek mythic heroes¹⁴ such as Oedipus and Orestes and their encounters with the deadly and destructive mother. The Greek tragedians bring these mythic heroes to life with all the horror and terror that fills our dreams to create worlds in which confrontations between mothers and sons are restaged as battles between monsters and heroes, and where murdering mothers are re-imagined as “monster[s] that must be slain”.¹⁵

The mother archetype

In his book *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, Erich Neumann considers the relationship between ontogenetic and phylogenetic narratives of individuation, the connection between the individual psyche and the “deeper layers of humanity” as reflected in the cultural, or collective, psyche. Neumann draws parallels between the stages of infant development (embryonic, pre-oedipal, and

¹⁴ Hillman notes that “the heroic model of consciousness always refers back to the child for its origins ... [t]he child returns hidden in the hero’s boots” (p.401). J. Hillman, “Abandoning the Child”, *Eranos*, 40, 1971, pp.357-407.

¹⁵ Molinaro, p.52.

oedipal) and specific stages in the evolution of consciousness (uroboric, infantile, and adolescent) and shows how each stage of development is constituted by the same primordial images or archetypes which are projected as “powerful factors” such as gods and goddesses, witches, demons or monsters. Neumann writes:

The evolution of consciousness by stages is as much a collective human phenomenon as a particular individual phenomenon ... [t]his interdependence of collective and individual has two psychic concomitants. On the one hand, the early history of the collective is determined by inner primordial images whose projections appear outside as powerful factors ... On the other hand, [humankind's] collective symbolisms also appear in the individual, and the psychic development ... of each individual is governed by the same primordial images which determine [humankind's] collective history.¹⁶

Neumann considers the connections between both individual and collective evolutionary stages by focusing on what Warden has called “the currency in which our culture is transmitted”¹⁷ – mythology – and more specifically on the mythological projection of psychic material.

¹⁶ Neumann, *Origins*, p.xx.

¹⁷ Warden, p.viii.

Myths are made up of a series of archetypes or 'primordial images'. According to Jung, "[t]he concept of the archetype ... indicates the existence of definite forms in the psyche which seem to be present always and everywhere".¹⁸ In his book *Ariadne's Clue: A Guide to the Symbols of Humankind*, Anthony Stevens suggests that we encounter archetypes as figures (such as mother, child, and father), events (such as birth, death, or separation from one's parents), or objects (such as water, sun, fish, or predatory animals).¹⁹

Archetypes refer to "inward image[s] at work in the human psyche"²⁰ that are projected out and given symbolic expression in cultural forms. Jung tells us that these images "have their closest analogues in mythological types".²¹ Neumann has shown how the mother archetype, experienced in the universal motif of the Great Mother, is given symbolic expression in mythic figures of the Goddess.

¹⁸ C.G. Jung, "The Concept of the Collective Unconscious" (1936) in *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, vol. 9(1), trans. R.F.C. Hull, ed. H. Read, M. Fordham and G. Adler, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1968, par.89.

¹⁹ A. Stevens, *Ariadne's Clue: A Guide to the Symbols of Humankind* (1998), Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1999, p.32.

²⁰ Neumann, *Origins*, p.3.

²¹ In "Psychology and Religion" (1938/1940) Jung defines archetypes as "[f]orms or images of a collective nature which occur practically all over the earth as constituents of myths and at the same time as autochthonous, individual products of unconscious origin", *Collected Works*, vol. 11, par. 88. In *Psychology and Alchemy* (1944) Jung writes that "Myth is the primordial language natural to these psychic processes, and no intellectual formulation comes anywhere near the richness and expressiveness of mythical imagery", *Collected Works*, vol. 12., p.25.

According to Neumann, “[t]he first cycle of myth is the creation myth”.²² Creation myths or cosmogonies are stories about how the universe began. Leeming suggests that creation stories are metaphors for birth, indicated by “the frequent presence in cosmogonies from around the world of the motifs of the primal egg or the primal waters”.²³ The birth of the infant is mythologically regarded as the beginning of the world.²⁴ “The beginning can be laid hold of in two ‘places’: it can be conceived in the life of mankind [sic] as the earliest dawn of human history, and in the life of the individual as the earliest dawn of childhood. The self-representation of the dawn of human history can be seen from its symbolic description in ritual and myth”.²⁵

Neumann describes the beginning of human history as a state of “perfection, wholeness”,²⁶ symbolically represented by the circle – the uroboros or circular snake biting its own tail without beginning or end. The uroboric phase of cultural development “corresponds to an evolutionary stage which can be ‘recollected’ in the

²² Neumann, *Origins*, p.5.

²³ D.A. Leeming, *The World of Myth*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990, p.15. Freund tells us that “the universality of Sea-myths [is] a reference to the human foetal condition in water, an identification of human and cosmic birth-processes ... the primal water is to be considered as the womb, the breast of the mother, and the eternal cradle”. P. Freund, *Myths of Creation*, London, W.H. Allen, 1964, p.43.

²⁴ Neumann, *Origins*, p.6.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Neumann, *Origins*, p.5.

psychic structure of every human being”.²⁷ The uroboric or embryonic state of “wholeness, unity, non-differentiation, and the absence of opposites”²⁸ corresponds to the pre-
oedipal symbiosis between mother and infant.²⁹

In his study of the foundations of social order, Joseph Smith draws on Neumann’s work. Smith compares the fusion between mother and infant with the closeness between individuals and their natural environment. According to Smith, in the uroboric phase “nature [is] anthropomorphized as a nurturing mother”³⁰ and the “figure of the mother [is] externalised [in myth] as the Goddess or earth Mother or mother earth ... [t]he figure and symbolism of the Goddess relate to the unconscious memory of narcissistic bliss when infant and mother were one”.³¹

Creation myths of nearly every ancient culture begin with the primordial image of the Mother Goddess. For the Sumerians, She was Inanna; in Babylonia, She was Ishtar; for the Canaanites and Phoenicians, She was Astarte; as Isis of Egypt She was known as Mother of the Universe; as Mut She was “the mother of the morning sun who existed when there was nothing and who created

²⁷ *Id.* at p.11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Neumann writes: “The initial stage symbolized by the uroboros corresponds to ... the stage of earliest childhood when an ego germ is just beginning to be” (*Origins*, p.266).

³⁰ Smith, *Neurotic*, pp.256-257.

³¹ *Id.* at pp.18; 263.

what was after her”,³² in Greece She was known as Rhea, Gaia, and Demeter.

In Creation stories from the fourth millennium onwards, the Goddess is “virtually universal as the dominant figure”.³³ The cults of the Great Goddess were based on the belief that it is She who creates life.³⁴ “It is She who is the *prima materia* without which life cannot be born”.³⁵ The Goddess was also associated with death. The attributes of the Goddess were “all-encompassing – her sexuality connected with birth, death, and rebirth; her power for both good and evil, for life and death; her aspects those of mother, warrior, and protector”.³⁶

The primordial image of the Mother Goddess combines positive and negative attributes – “a paradoxical simultaneity of good and evil, friendly and terrible”³⁷ – the ‘good’ mother who gives life, and the ‘terrible’ mother who takes it away. In her positive aspect, the Goddess is “dispenser of life and happiness, the nutrient earth, the

³² H. Diner, *Mothers and Amazons: The First Feminine History of Culture* (1965), trans. and ed. J.P. Lundin, New York, Anchor Press, 1973, p.2.

³³ G. Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986, p.147.

³⁴ *Id.* at p.148.

³⁵ Leeming, p.15; italics in text. According to Woolger and Woolger, “She was the power manifest in all fertility and all its forms, whether human, animal, or vegetable ... she was honoured [as] ‘Lady of Plants’, ‘Lady of Beasts’, ‘Mother of All’”. J.B. Woolger and R.J. Woolger, *The Goddess Within: A Guide to the Eternal Myths that Shape Women’s Lives*, London, Rider, 1990, pp.15; 21.

³⁶ Lerner, *Patriarchy*, p.159.

³⁷ Neumann, p.39.

cornucopia of the fruitful womb, fullness and abundance”.³⁸ As Terrible Mother, the Goddess is a deadly devourer, “bloodstained goddess of death ... darkness, destruction and decay”.³⁹ Jung describes these dual aspects of the mother archetype:

[t]he qualities associated with it are maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason; any helpful instinct or impulse; all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility ... On the negative side the mother archetype may connote anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate.⁴⁰

In her negative aspect as archetypal Devouring Mother, “She is Kali ... filling the world with hideous cries as she seeks to satisfy her insatiable, agonizing hunger for human corpses ... who devours life, clawing it back into her mawlike womb ... she is Rangda who steals children”.⁴¹ In Greek myth she is the monstrous Lamia

³⁸ *Id.* at p.40

³⁹ *Id.* at pp.40; 45.

⁴⁰ C.G. Jung, “Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype” (1938/1954) in *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, vol. 9(1), trans. R.F.C. Hull, Read, Fordham and Adler eds, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957-79, par. 158.

⁴¹ Stevens, *Ariadne’s Clue*, pp.191-192; 176. Campbell writes: “[t]he whole round of existence is accomplished within her sway, from birth, through adolescence, maturity, and senescence, to the grave. She is the womb and the tomb: the sow that eats her farrow ... she unites the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’, exhibiting the two modes of the remembered mother, not as personal only, but as universal” (*Hero*, p.114). In the

who vampirically ingests the blood of young men, feasts on their flesh, and consumes children.

According to Neumann, the stage of the maternal uroboros emphasises the nurturing, protective aspect of the mother and the vulnerability and dependency of the child. "This relationship is most vividly expressed in the [symbolisation of] the Mother [as] the sea, a lake, or a river, and the child swimming in [her] enveloping waters ... a tiny, defenceless speck, enveloped and helplessly dependent, a little island floating on the vast expanse of the primal ocean".⁴²

The child gradually becomes aware of a distinction between self and (m)other and longs to separate from the pre-oedipal mother but also realises his or her dependency and the potentially destructive nature of maternal power. Neumann tells us that this early stage of awareness or self-consciousness is "reflected in the mythology of the Mother Goddess and her connection with

last decade scholars have begun to re-examine the metaphoric and figurative potency of the Goddess and her transformative power. In their book *Dancing in the Flames: The Dark Goddess and the New Mythology*, Woodman and Dickson argue that Kali should not be viewed merely as a "fierce embodiment of the devouring mother, who gobbles up everything, even her own children ... but also as transformer", Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1996, p.14. See also V. Dalmiya, "Loving Paradoxes: A Feminist Reclamation of the Goddess Kali", *Hypatia*, 15(1), 2000, pp.125-150; C.P. Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality*, New York, Addison-Wesley, 1997. For earlier radical approaches see, for example, R. Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth*, New York, Seabury, 1975; M. Stone, *When God was a Woman*, New York, Dial Press, 1976.

⁴² Neumann, *Origins*, pp.43; 40.

the son-lover"⁴³ who acts as her phallic consort. The Goddess' consort was "a conflation of a son She loved in a motherly way, and a lover She discarded after he consummated his duties of impregnation".⁴⁴ As a symbol of "discontinuity, of growth, decay and renewal in the vegetation cycle",⁴⁵ the son-lover died in a yearly ritual sacrifice and was reborn from the body of the Goddess each spring. Baring and Cashford suggest that the myth of the Mother Goddess and her son-lover signifies "[t]he gradual separation of human consciousness from the original matrix (a term deriving from the Latin word for mother, *mater*) ... [the son-lover] comes to symbolise this emerging consciousness".⁴⁶

At this stage, Neumann notes, the son-lover is "not sufficiently strong to resist and break the power of the Great Mother ... he is not yet strong enough to cope with her, he succumbs to her in death and is devoured".⁴⁷ The Mother Goddess who births and loves her sons, the nurturing goddess who gives and sustains life, is also

⁴³ *Id.* at p.46.

⁴⁴ L. Shlain, *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess: The Conflict Between Word and Image*, New York, Viking, 1998, p.6. Miles notes that the son-lover is "always inferior to the Goddess, mortal where she is immortal, young where she is ageless and eternal, powerless where she is all-powerful, and even physically smaller". R. Miles, *The Women's History of the World*, London, Michael Joseph, 1988, p.24.

⁴⁵ R.F. Willetts, *Cretan Cults and Festivals*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962, p.81.

⁴⁶ A. Baring and J. Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image* (1991), London, Arkana, 1993, p.161.

⁴⁷ Neumann, *Origins*, pp.51; 47. Neumann suggests that in the Goddess' relationship with the son-lover we see her "magical and fearful power – the youth burns with desire even when threatened with death" (p.61).

deadly and destructive. In her role as death-dealer, the Mother Goddess resembles the devouring and castrating pre-oedipal mother. When she murders her sons in yearly ritual sacrifices, dismembering and castrating their corpses, “[t]he mother-beloved turns into the terrible Death Goddess”.⁴⁸

Among symbols of the Devouring Mother is the womb, entry to which is guarded by the snapping/castrating vagina – “the jaws of hell” - symbolised mythologically as “[t]he gnashing mouth of the Medusa ... [her] protruding tongue ... obviously connected with the phallus ... [and] the serpents writhing around [her] head [that represent] aggressive phallic elements characterizing the fearful aspects of the uroboric womb”.⁴⁹ Resembling the pre-oedipal mother who seeks to reabsorb her child into the maternal womb, the archetypal earth mother “takes back her progeny as the dead ... the Terrible Mother, who, in her earth projection, becomes the flesh eater and finally the sarcophagus”.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *Id.* at p.47. According to Neumann, “the dangers that threaten [the son-lover’s] destruction are associated with the symbolism of a castration that was often carried out in the actual ritual” (p.53, note 16). “In the earliest fertility cults, the gory fragments of the sacrificial victim were handed round as precious gifts and offered up to the earth, in order to make her fruitful” (p.54). The phallus was preserved and embalmed to ensure fertility after the ritual sacrifice (p.58).

⁴⁹ *Id.* at p.87.

⁵⁰ *Id.* at p.58. Campbell tells us that the sarcophagus signifies the ‘World Womb’ or ‘World Navel’ to which we return after death (*Hero*, p.92).

According to Neumann, the archetype of the Devouring Mother reflects the ascent of man in gaining independence from the powerful, instinctive force of unconsciousness, symbolized in the Great (Uroboric) Mother.⁵¹ Neumann attributes the negative aspect of this Terrible Mother to the struggle of what he calls 'symbolic male consciousness' to liberate itself from the feminine-maternal unconscious.⁵² As masculine consciousness becomes stronger and more independent, "the more it is aware of the emasculating, bewitching, deadly, and stupefying nature of the Great Goddess".⁵³

**Primal antagonism:
Hero(self)/dragon-monster(mother)**

Fear of the Great Mother is expressed mythologically in the volatile confrontations between mothers and sons. Neumann gives numerous examples of myths in which sons struggle with their competing desire for and fear of the mother.⁵⁴ The son is never victorious in these confrontations, but as the desire for autonomy becomes more urgent (comparable with the instinctual drive that propels the infantile movement from pre-oedipal mother to oedipal father) the need to overcome the mother becomes paramount for survival.

⁵¹ Neumann, *Origins*, p.63.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Neumann discusses the myths of Narcissus, Pentheus, and Hippolytus (*Origins*, pp.88-101).

The mother, “originally experienced as paradise, then as dangerous and fascinating”⁵⁵ is now perceived as an enemy who must be destroyed. According to Neumann, the individual’s struggle to separate from the mother is mythically represented as a battle between the hero and dragon-monster where the hero is an archetypal representation of the self and the dragon-monster is an archetypal representation of the Terrible (Devouring) Mother.⁵⁶ The battle between hero and dragon-monster is “[t]he prototype of the mature ego struggling to free itself from the grip of unconscious forces”.⁵⁷

In his study of the image of the monster, Cawson notes that monsters are “images of the archetype of fear that lies deep in the unconscious ... [t]he monster prowls through the heavens of all religions ... symbolising the struggle that confronts the psyche as it emerges ... into

⁵⁵ *Id.* at p.306.

⁵⁶ *Id.* at p.303.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* Slater also writes: “central to liberation from the bond of his mother ... is resolution of the oral-narcissistic dilemma, represented in myth by the conquest of the serpent or dragon ... of maternal origin”. P.E. Slater, *The Glory of Hera: Greek Mythology and the Greek Family*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1968, p.126. According to Jung, “the self appears in dreams, myths, and fairy tales in the figure of the ‘superordinate personality’ ... such as a king, hero, prophet, saviour” (“Psychological Types” (1921) in *Collected Works*, vol. 6, par.790). In her groundbreaking book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York, W.W. Norton, 1977), Adrienne Rich writes: “In the recurrent hero myth, the male infant grows up into the son/lover, who later undergoes *violence* (murder or castration) at his mother’s hands. The myth of killing the dragon (another violence/blood myth) recounts the test by which the young man tries to surmount his dread of the Terrible Mother – his elemental fear of women” (p.106).

consciousness”.⁵⁸ The monster is a symbolic representation of “an unconscious content in the mind. Its most classic form is reptilian – the snake enlarged to the dragon – with the character of a predator ... [i]t implies an ... abandonment to the negative, the destructive, the murderous”.⁵⁹

In his book *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics*, Calvert Watkins examines thematic and structural aspects of mythic dragon-slayer narratives. In his comprehensive study, Watkins indicates that myths in which a hero battles with, and kills, a dragon-monster are common to almost all cultures.⁶⁰ According to Watkins, “[t]he dragon symbolises Chaos, in the largest sense, and killing the dragon represents the ultimate

⁵⁸ F. Cawson, *The Monsters in the Mind: The Face of Evil in Myth, Literature and Contemporary Life*, Sussex, Book Guild, 1995, p.157.

⁵⁹ *Id.* at pp.1-2. Knight defines ‘dragon’ as “a very large snake-like creature which has wings ... usually depicted as reptilian, although it may in places display fur, feathers or other anomalous attributes”. C. Knight, “On the Dragon-Wings of Time” in C.D. Knight, I. Cardigos and J.G.P. Bastos, *Maidens, Snakes and Dragons*, London, Centre for Symbolism and Imagination in Literature, 1991, p.9.

⁶⁰ C. Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, p.297. Watkins suggests that the myth is “widespread if not universal” (p.299). The hero’s adversary is known by various names including ‘dragon’, ‘snake’, ‘serpent’, ‘monster’, ‘beast’ (pp.297; 302). According to Campbell, the myth of the hero is “the one, shape-shifting yet marvellously constant story that we find ... [with more versions in existence] than will ever be known or told” (*Hero*, p.3). Stevens observes that “[t]he serpent-dragon ... [is] present in so many mythic traditions that [it] must have been among the earliest creatures to haunt the human imagination ... [its] natural adversary is the hero”. A. Stevens, “Foreword” in F. Cawson, *The Monsters in the Mind: The Face of Evil in Myth, Literature and Contemporary Life*, Sussex, Book Guild, 1995, p.viii. Knight also notes that the winged snake or dragon is “prominent in mythology in almost all parts of the world” (“Dragon-Wings”, p.7).

victory of Cosmic Truth and Order over Chaos ... [the] myth is a symbolic victory of growth over stagnation or dormancy in the cycle of the year, and ultimately a victory of rebirth over death”.⁶¹

The encounter with the dragon-monster is one stage of the hero's journey towards masculine consciousness. Joseph Campbell, in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, presents what he considers to be “the universal mythological formula of the adventure of the hero”.⁶² Campbell considers the various stages of the hero's journey and uncovers numerous ‘keys’ needed to unlock the “secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation”.⁶³ Myth is the ‘secret opening’, Campbell tells us, and mythic figures “carry keys that open the whole realm of the desired and feared adventure of the discovery of the self”.⁶⁴

The stages of the hero's journey correspond with the infantile stages of individuation. Smith summarises the relationship between both stages:

The first stage is where the hero is in the peaceful comfort of his home. This represents the initial stage of warm and peaceful symbiosis with the mother. Then comes the

⁶¹ Watkins, p.299.

⁶² Campbell, *Hero*, p.21.

⁶³ *Id.* at p.3.

⁶⁴ *Id.* at p.8.

call to adventure, followed by an initial refusal. The call to adventure is the drive toward individuation which ... exist[s] in all infants, and the refusal is the expression of separation anxiety. Then follows the call of a supernatural being or force, which can be seen as the intervention of the father, drawing the child away from the mother. The hero next crosses a threshold, which represents individuation, and enters the world of chaos, which will be the Oedipal struggle ... Within the world of chaos the struggle takes place, where the Hero battles the monster – struggles between the opposing forces of separation and engulfment anxiety in the development of the ego. Eventually the hero triumphs, the ego has formed, full maleness is achieved.⁶⁵

Arnold Van Gennep similarly suggests that the hero's adventures reflect a process of masculine initiation. Van Gennep divides the hero's journey into four main stages: seclusion (a 'waiting'); separation (a physical 'going away'); liminality ('outside of the body' experience); reincorporation (a 'coming back' to an adult body).⁶⁶ For duBois, the search for selfhood is represented by the hero's journey which is characterised by descent into the earth (Mother) – origin of life and receiver of the dead – a return to the maternal matrix, symbolic death, and rebirth.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Smith, *Neurotic*, pp.188-189.

⁶⁶ A. Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960, p.11. For a consideration of the hero's journey in fairytales see V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. L. Scott, ed. L.A. Wagner, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1968.

⁶⁷ P.A. DuBois, *Torture and Truth*, New York, Routledge, 1991, p.77.

Knight suggests that the hero's encounter with the dragon-monster is equivalent to "returning to and being born again from one's mother's womb".⁶⁸ According to Campbell, the hero's entry into the 'world of chaos' is a metaphorical return to the womb, a descent into "darkness, the unknown, and danger",⁶⁹ mythically represented by the hero being swallowed into the belly of a whale or sea-monster.⁷⁰ In his study of the archetypal hero myth, Neumann suggests that the swallowing or devouring of the hero is "often represented as a preliminary defeat in the dragon fight ... [t]his phase of captivity and defeat during his struggle with the monster ... is the necessary prelude to rebirth".⁷¹ Neumann

⁶⁸ Knight, "Dragon-Wings", p.14.

⁶⁹ Campbell, *Hero*, p.77.

⁷⁰ *Id.* at pp.90-94.

⁷¹ Neumann, *Origins*, p.165. The swallowing or devouring monster encapsulates engulfment anxieties. Cawson suggests that at this point in his journey, the hero "still feels threatened by the residual pull of the Goddess ... [a threat that] gives him every justification for entering the sacred womb and laying about it with his sword" (p.37). In his essay "The Dragon and the Hero", Géza Róheim discusses the significance of the devouring dragon-monster in terms of Kleinian notions of introjection and projection. In his interpretation of a Kwakiutl 'Raven' myth, Róheim establishes a connection between the hero/monster and infant/mother and translates the mythic battle between hero and monster into the "phantasy-text" of hostile infant/mother relations: "The infant is hungry (thirsty) and in its rage desires to devour everything in its mother's body ... the mother becomes an ogress through frustration. The child is weaned or siblings are born and it does not get the nipple. In the phantasy world this means that the mother eats the food herself and then the next step is that she devours the child. Hero and child go into the inside of the monster and they restore all those who have been swallowed previously to life ... the hero appears as the life giver [in this] reparation phantasy for the original [desire to destroy the mother] ... [t]he first step in the transformation of unconscious material is projection; it is not the child who wants to kill the monster/[mother] by descending into its belly but the monster or dragon [mother] who

describes the hero's descent into the world of chaos and his re-emergence as a fearless warrior aligned with the father-god:

To the hero, the clutching Earth Mother appears as a dragon to be overcome. In the first part of the dragon fight she twines herself about the son and seeks to hold him fast as an embryo ... She is the deadly uroboric mother, the abyss in the West, the kingdom of the dead, the underworld, the devouring maw of the earth, into which, weary and submissive, the ordinary mortal sinks to his death ... If, however, the hero succeeds in being a hero ... he enters into the Terrible Mother of fear and danger, and emerges covered in glory from the belly of the whale ... or from the uterine cavern of the earth ... the hero penetrates into the dark, maternal chthonic side ... [b]y hacking his way out of darkness he is reborn as the hero ... [he] slay[s] the mother and identifi[es] with the father-god.⁷²

The fearful infant/son is reborn a fearless hero who "break[s] through the barriers of terror to ... face the monster and destroy it; with total dedication he seeks it out ... [n]o monster is too terrifying; in deep forest, remote mountain, even the depths of the underworld".⁷³

Archetypal shifts

swallows children". G. Róheim, "The Dragon and the Hero", *American Imago*, 1(2-3), 1940, pp.40-69 at pp.53-54.

⁷² Neumann, *Origins*, pp.164-165.

⁷³ Cawson, p.33.

When the dragon-monster is slain, the Mother Goddess loses her power. The hero's journey not only reflects the process of infantile development from the pre-oedipal mother to the oedipal father but also an archetypal shift from matriarchal⁷⁴ to patriarchal consciousness. Drawing on the work of both Neumann and Swiss legal historian Johann Jacob Bachofen,⁷⁵ Smith shows how history can

⁷⁴ There has been tremendous contention among scholars about use of the term 'matriarchal'. In her study of feminist myths of origin, Tina Passman provides a useful outline of debate discourse ("Out of the Closet and into the Field: Matriculture, the Lesbian Perspective, and Feminist Classics" in N.S. Rabinowitz and A. Richlin, eds, *Feminist Theory and the Classics*, New York, Routledge, 1993, pp.181-208). I adopt Woolger and Woolger's definition: "by *matriarchal* we refer to cultures that worshipped the Mother Goddess, in one or more of her forms, as the supreme divinity" (p.18; italics in text).

⁷⁵ Bachofen theorised that the first stage in the history of social development was matriarchal. Bachofen believed that property passed from mothers to daughters and that the mother figure dominated all forms of familial and social life. Bachofen conceived of three main stages in human history, culminating in our present patriarchal stage – the tellurian, "in which there is motherhood without marriage, no agriculture, and apparently nothing resembling a state; then the lunar, in which there is conjugal motherhood and authentic or legitimate birth and in which agriculture is practiced in settled communities; and lastly the solar period, in which there is conjugal father right, a division of labour, and individual ownership". J. Campbell, "Introduction" in J.J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right*, trans. R. Manheim, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1967, p.xix. Bachofen distinguishes between "the material-tellurian and the immaterial-solar stage of religion, between a lower and a higher conception of the divine as revealed in nature, between a primordial and a more highly developed stage of culture" (p.63). "[M]other right is not confined to any particular people but marks a cultural stage ... mother right belongs to a cultural period preceding that of the patriarchal system; it began to decline only with the victorious development of the paternal system" (p.71). There has been much controversy surrounding Bachofen's work: at first, theorists generally accepted Bachofen's theory; later, others combined his findings with their own ideas; some theorists, such as classicist Jane Harrison, believed that "in spite of the wildness of [Bachofen's] theories, [his work] remains of value as the fullest existing collection of ancient fact" (*Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903), New York, Meridian, 1959, p.262) ; others abandoned the idea of matriarchy altogether. Followers of Bachofen

be divided into stages which mirror the stages of individual development and how the process of individual development can be interpreted in terms of archetypal shifts:

In the pre-oedipal stage of history the archetypal object of ... the collective psyche is the figure of the mother, externalised as the Goddess ... In the oedipal stage of history the archetypal object ... is the figure of the father ... or father God ... the age of patriarchy [the oedipal stage of history] is a negation of the age of matriarchal consciousness [the pre-oedipal stage of history].⁷⁶

The shift from matriarchal to patriarchal consciousness “is marked by the shift from the archetypal mother to the archetypal father reflected in the decline of Goddess worship and the rise of patriarchal father god religions”.⁷⁷

In *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Gerda Lerner traces the demise or “dethroning” of the Goddess. Lerner notes that during the third millennium B.C., the consort of the Mother Goddess begins to increase in size and gain more power. As the consort transforms from son to son-lover to

who also provided evidence for matriarchal systems in early stages of societal evolution include Sir James Frazer, Jane Harrison, and Leo Frobenius. For a good discussion of the resistance to Bachofen’s theory see S. Pembroke, “Women in Charge: The Function of Alternatives in Early Greek Tradition and the Ancient Idea of Matriarchy”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 30, 1967, pp.1-35.

⁷⁶ Smith, *Neurotic*, pp.18; 129.

⁷⁷ *Id.* at p.137.

husband, the Mother Goddess “loses her supremacy ... [and] generally becomes domesticated”.⁷⁸ Where previously the process of creation was located solely in the mystical and magical province of the Goddess, now “[p]rocreation [is] a matter of essence and being ... [c]reation [is] no longer the flow of nature, but an intervening act which was the exercise of ‘will’ ... Father-Gods, by acts of will brought order out of chaos, or created the world out of nothing”.⁷⁹ “[T]he cult of the nature mother g[ive[s] way to that of the fecundating god”.⁸⁰

In their study of Goddess mythology, Baring and Cashford note that as “the Mother Goddess recedes into the background ... new creation myths, in which the Father God plays the central role, now begin to overshadow the old ones”.⁸¹ In the oldest written creation myth, the

⁷⁸ Lerner, *Patriarchy*, p.154.

⁷⁹ Neumann, *Origins*, p.217. For more on changes in the concept of creation, see E. Fromm, *The Forgotten Language: An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales and Myths*, New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1951, pp.231-235.

⁸⁰ Bachofen, p.169. In terms of an archetypal shift, Smith tells us that this process of separation of man from earth and nature “parallels the process of individuation whereby the individual psyche separates and individuates from the mother” (p.18). The process of separation requires a negation of the maternal-feminine and an assertion of male dominance over (mother) earth (p.246). At this stage, nature is wild and chaotic and needs to be controlled and tamed. Man takes dominion over the earth and creates order out of chaos. The mother who was viewed as the source of life is now viewed as a mere receptacle for the life-giving force of the male (p.279). While the father negates the power of the pre-oedipal mother in the oedipal stage of infant development, the archetypal father-god breaks the power (p.282) of the archetypal mother-goddess in the oedipal stage of history.

⁸¹ Baring and Cashford, p.152.

Sumerian Goddess Nammu creates the mountain An-Ki, Heaven and Earth. An and Ki have a son Enlil (God of Air or Breath) who separates Heaven from Earth and takes Earth, his mother, to be his bride. In this Sumerian creation myth, “[t]he emphasis is no longer on creation emerging from a mother goddess ... Enlil begins to take the place of the Goddess as the supreme creator and [makes] his home ... the temple that was once her body, the primordial mountain”.⁸²

The Babylonian creation myth, *Enuma Elish* (‘The Seven Tablets of Creation’) recounts the demise of the Goddess. Written around 1100 B.C., it tells the story of the defeat and murder of the original Mother Goddess Tiamat who lived in the oceans and could shape-shift between human and sea-serpent form.⁸³ The story begins with a conflict between an older and younger generation of gods. The

⁸² *Id.* at pp.152-153. According to Campbell, “th[e] deeds of the desperate children [in this myth] are nothing compared with the total carving up of the parent power” (*Hero*, p.284) in later myths such as the Babylonian creation myth discussed on the following pages.

⁸³ According to Fisher, “Tiamat is a transmuted version of Nammu ... she of the primeval waters, the watery deep”. E. Fisher, *Woman’s Creation: Sexual Evolution and the Shaping of Society*, New York, Anchor Press, 1979, p.301. Campbell notes that “*ti’amat* is related etymologically to the Hebrew term *tehom*, ‘the deep’, of the second verse of Genesis” (*The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology* (1964), London, Secker & Warburg, 1965, p.85). Géza Róheim tells us that ‘Tiamat’ means “sea water” or “sea chaos” and is “a name which originally signified a dragon of the primeval sea of chaos”, “Dragon”, pp.48-49. According to Campbell, “the cosmic serpent or dragon symbolises the waters of the abyss which are the divine life-creative energy and substance of the demiurge, the world-generative aspect of immortal being”, *Hero*, p.41. Neumann also notes that “[t]he uroboric form of the oldest Mother Goddess is the snake, mistress of the earth, of the depths and the underworld ... the urobor[ic] ring-snake ... the Babylonian Tiamat and Chaos Serpent” (*Origins*, p.49).

young gods “troubled and disturbed the inner parts of Tiamat. Moving, running about within their divine abode, they gave Apsu reason for concern”.⁸⁴ Apsu plans to destroy the young gods. Tiamat questions Apsu’s murderous plan, asking “Why destroy what we ourselves have brought into being?”⁸⁵ But Apsu cannot be persuaded otherwise and devises “a wicked plan against his progeny”.⁸⁶ When the young gods learn of Apsu’s plan, they murder him. At the site of Apsu’s death, the fearful sun-god Marduk is born.⁸⁷ Marduk uses the winds to disturb Tiamat’s waters. The Goddess is furious and vows revenge. In her rage, Tiamat bears eleven terrifying serpent-monsters, “sharp of tooth and fang, filled with poison instead of blood, ferocious, terrible, and crowned with fear-inspiring glory, such that to look upon them was to perish”.⁸⁸

The young gods, fearful of Tiamat and her monstrous brood, encourage Marduk (now fully grown) to attack her. The young gods provide Marduk with a throne and sceptre and make him their king. They also give him a powerful weapon, the thunderbolt, telling him: “Thy weapon shall never lose its power, it shall crush thy foe”.⁸⁹ Seizing his bow, spear and mace, Marduk “set lightning before him,

⁸⁴ Campbell, *Masks of God*, p.76.

⁸⁵ J. Campbell, *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology* (1964), London, Secker & Warburg, 1965, p.76.

⁸⁶ *Id.* at p.77.

⁸⁷ “He had four eyes and as many ears, and when his lips moved, fire blazed forth” (Campbell, *Masks of God*, p.79).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Baring and Cashford, p.277.

[and] with burning flame he filled his body”.⁹⁰ He made a “net to enmesh [Tiamat], and when she opened her mouth to its full, let fly into it an evil wind that poured into her belly ... cut through her inward parts, and pierced her heart”.⁹¹

Marduk proceeds to create the universe from Tiamat’s dismembered body:

With his merciless mace [he] smashed her skull. He cut the arteries of her blood and caused the north wind to bear it off to parts unknown ... [H]e split her, like a shellfish, in two halves”.⁹²

From one part, he makes heaven. The other half becomes the earth. He places a mountain over her head, “pierce[s] her eyes to form the sources of the Tigris and Euphrates”, bends her tail to make the Milky Way, and uses her genitalia to support the sky.⁹³

In the *Enuma Elish* the original Mother Goddess Tiamat is transformed “from a life-giving mother to a death-dealing dragon, bringing forth trouble into the world”.⁹⁴ In a story that would haunt Western culture, the sons murder the father (Apsu), not as a means of possessing his ‘wife’ (as

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Campbell, *Masks of God*, p.83.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Baring and Cashford, p.280.

⁹⁴ *Id.* at p.276.

in Freud's version⁹⁵), but in response to a primal antagonism – the threat of infanticide. The sons' hostility towards Apsu for his infanticidal intentions is transferred to their mother Tiamat at the moment of Apsu's murder.⁹⁶ She is transformed from life-giver to death-dealer, the devouring and deadly infanticidal (m)other – the one who must be conquered so that a new consciousness, patriarchy, can emerge. According to Baring and Cashford, the *Enuma Elish* transmits the idea that the maternal-feminine is "chaotic, destructive, demonic, and is to be feared and mastered".⁹⁷ In *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology*, Campbell similarly sees the *Enuma Elish* as a devaluation of the maternal-feminine which has become "negative, as a demoness, dangerous and fierce".⁹⁸

In the *Enuma Elish*, Shlain finds that "an allegory of death has replaced the metaphor of birth",⁹⁹ and matricide is the sole intent of the murderous son/sun-god:

⁹⁵ For more on this issue see the following section.

⁹⁶ When we first encounter Tiamat, she expresses grave concerns over Apsu's plan to destroy their progeny. As Neumann notes, "she is filled with wrath when Apsu decides to kill the gods, her children; and it is only when the gods have slain Apsu that she takes up the battle of vengeance against them and becomes destructive" (*Origins*, p.214).

⁹⁷ Baring and Cashford, p.283.

⁹⁸ Campbell, *Masks of God*, p.86. Walker provides examples of myths in which the Mother Goddess is simultaneously defeated and diabolised (*The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, New York, Harper & Row, 1983, pp.686-687. Fisher also finds that "in genesis after genesis, tale after tale, from every quarter of the world, the mother is slain, reduced, consumed", p.301.

⁹⁹ Shlain, p.50.

[T]his is the story of a rebellion against a mother by her male children. The powerful woman who has created their life is murdered by one of them. He kills her at the moment her abdomen is massively distended, resembling a woman in her ninth month of pregnancy. Her killer then creates the universe from the anatomical remains of her body ... the Babylonians elevated to the supreme position a god who had conquered and then mutilated a goddess.¹⁰⁰

With the overpowering of the Goddess comes the fragmentation of the maternal archetype. “[T]he ‘good’ goddess and the ‘bad’ goddess come to be worshipped as different beings”.¹⁰¹ In her study of the matriarchal myths

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* Miles suggests that the motif of the mutilated goddess from whose body the world is formed “is astonishingly consistent through a number of widely separated cultures ... all the mythologies speak of the overthrow of the Great Mother Goddess” (p.43). Miles provides diverse examples including the Tiwi people of central Africa, Japan, the Celts, and Aztecs.

¹⁰¹ Neumann, *Origins*, p.12. Neumann elaborates on the fragmentation of the maternal archetype and the resulting cultural ramifications: “The fragmentation of the archetype is represented in myths as the deed of the hero ... the original bivalence of the archetype with its juxtaposed opposites is torn asunder ... from the image of the Great Mother the Good Mother is split off, recognised by consciousness, and established in the conscious world as a value. The other part, the Terrible Mother, is in our culture repressed and largely excluded from the conscious world ... [e]go consciousness had to consign these aspects to oblivion, because its fear of the abyss was still too uncomfortably close: although it had successfully fought the dragon the terrors of this fight were still very much alive. Hence consciousness, afraid lest ‘real knowledge’ should call down the fate of regression ...represses the [Terrible Mother] and with euphemistic imprecations enthrones the Good Mother” (pp.323-324). In Greek culture, the powers of the Goddess were divided and allocated to what Walker refers to as ‘departmental goddesses’ (*Skeptical Feminist*, p.9) such as Demeter (Goddess of Motherhood), Hera (Goddess of Marriage), Aphrodite (Goddess of Love) who governed various aspects of human existence. According to Walker, “classical writers trivialized many aspects of the Goddess by breaking them up

and its lingering force in the cultural psyche, Reis notes that “splitting of the Great Goddess image into a good and evil mother originated with the advent of the patriarchal social, political and religious domination of the goddess-worshipping cultures ... [t]hose aspects of the complete Great Goddess that were most fearful and threatening to the patriarchal peoples were separated from her more beneficent attributes”.¹⁰²

Symbols of life and fertility of the Goddess become symbols of evil and death. She is no longer a creator but

into bureaucratic pantheons confined to one department apiece, such as the love goddess, sea goddess, moon goddess, earth goddess, and so on, as if they were not assorted manifestations of the same deity ... [they] also laid the groundwork for humanizing the transcendent Goddess so her myths seemed to be only old stories about ordinary women” (*Skeptical Feminist*, p.9).

¹⁰² P. Reis, “Good Breast, Bad Breast, This is the Cuckoo’s Nest: Ken Kesey and the Myth of Matriarchy”, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 3(2), 1987, pp.77-96 at p.80. See also Baring and Cashford who write: “The image of unity, incarnated in the goddess of life-and-death, did not survive ... and a radical transformation took place in the image of the goddess. The Great Mother assumed two separate roles: life and death were no longer regarded as two complementary aspects of her divine totality, but as opposites excluding each other. One brought hope and joy, the other terror and despair. The waters beneath the earth that were once filled with the generative power of the goddess now shrank to a single river of death, or a barren underworld of dust and darkness” (p.168). Lerner also discusses the transformation of the Goddess (see in particular p.159). The divided Goddess appears in Judeo-Christian iconography as saint or sinner, virgin or whore, angel or monster. According to Walker, “a pitiful remnant” of the ancient Goddess remains in patriarchal societies which “spent centuries revising their sacred histories and destroying the older scriptures of the Goddess ... Bits and pieces of the Goddess were sometimes adopted ... under the guise of saints or pseudo-historical queens ... [or] diabolised as the ‘Queen of Witches’ ... as dangerous spirits of water or woodland, night-mares or succubae ... or one of a thousand other she-demons”. B. Walker, *The Skeptical Feminist: Discovering the Virgin, Mother, and Crone*, San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1987, pp.8-9.

“the enemy of her own creation”.¹⁰³ The fearful aspect of the Goddess finds its most powerful expression in Greek mythology which is filled with murderous, devouring, and castrating maternal figures. According to Slater, “mature, maternal women were most feared, and regarded as most dangerous”.¹⁰⁴ “Fear of maternal malevolence permeated the mythology of the Greeks, whose bogies were almost entirely female”.¹⁰⁵ Hero myths in which a solar hero defeats a female monster were a means of containing these fears by breaking the power of the maternal archetype. “Stage by stage ... stories are told which show the Goddess demeaned, degraded and despised by the male hero, and transformed eventually into a monster”.¹⁰⁶ In Greek myth, the Goddess becomes a serpentine monster that represents chaos, darkness, evil and death.

Primordial symbolism

The most common symbol in relation to the Goddess was that of the serpent. “[I]n images of the goddess in every culture the serpent is never far away, standing behind her, eating from her hand, entwined in her tree, or even, as in Tiamat, the shape of the goddess herself”.¹⁰⁷ “The

¹⁰³ Baring and Cashford, p.294.

¹⁰⁴ Slater, *Hera*, p.12.

¹⁰⁵ P.E. Slater and D.A. Slater, “Maternal Ambivalence and Narcissism: A Cross-Cultural Study”, *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 11, 1965, pp.241-259 at p.242.

¹⁰⁶ Cawson, p.37.

¹⁰⁷ Baring and Cashford, p.499. According to Dexter, almost half of the figurines of goddesses excavated in Europe dating from 7000 B.C. to 3500 B.C. are in the form of a serpent or have serpentine features. “Snake-goddesses are represented with stripes or spirals; they often have snake-like heads; some have mouths depicted as a

uroboric form of the oldest Mother Goddess is the snake, mistress of the earth, of the depths and the underworld”.¹⁰⁸ The serpent was the “magical protector”¹⁰⁹ of the Goddess. The serpent was believed to possess “life-giving and life-renewing skills”¹¹⁰ because of its ability to slough its skin and was thus “important in magical efforts to facilitate childbirth, heal the sick, or resuscitate the moribund”.¹¹¹ Apart from its associations with healing and regeneration, the serpent was also believed to have the power of prophecy.¹¹²

In the *Enuma Elish* we saw how the uroboric ring-snake Tiamat was split in two. According to Knight, “[w]hen – as happens in patriarchal stories – the snake is chopped to pieces ... [the Goddess] loses her power”.¹¹³ Both the Goddess and her companion/protector, the serpent, lose their positive powers and become negative and fearful

long slash”. M.R. Dexter, *Whence the Goddesses: A Source Book*, New York, Pergamon Press, 1990, pp.5-6. Dexter also provides iconographic evidence of snake goddesses and serpent worship in Neolithic Europe and the ancient Near East, see in particular chapter 1. Neumann also notes that in primitive representations from excavations in Ur and Erech, the Goddess has the head of a snake (p.49).

¹⁰⁸ Neumann, *Origins*, p.49.

¹⁰⁹ Knight, “Dragon-Wings”, p.9.

¹¹⁰ Slater, *Hera*, p.85.

¹¹¹ *Id.* at p.84. Stevens notes that “[t]he snake is sacred to many different healing traditions” (*Ariadne’s Clue*, p.34). The serpent “is also associated with woman, the earth, childbirth, the womb, and fertility in general” (Slater, *Hera*, p.85. Neumann traces the association between the serpent and woman “as far back as Egypt, Phoenicia, and Babylon” (*Origins*, p.49). The relationship between the two will be further explored in the context of the Biblical story of the Fall in Chapter Four.

¹¹² Dexter, p.9.

¹¹³ Knight, “Dragon-Wings”, p.10.

forces to be reckoned with. In her study of the fall of the sacred serpent and the demise of the Goddess, Dexter notes that the transformation of both Goddess and serpent is reflected mythologically: “serpent-deities representing negative forces were pitted against young hero-deities”.¹¹⁴

As we have already seen, the hero myth can be interpreted *historically*, in terms of a father-god culture overcoming the mother goddess culture, *archetypally*, in terms of a shift from matriarchal to patriarchal consciousness, and *psycho-symbolically*, in terms of infantile development - the son’s journey from the mother and towards the father. When the young warrior-hero slays the serpentine monster he is not only “killing off the old order of deities” and entering a new stage of human consciousness but also symbolically slaughtering the snake-like, terrible mother who threatens his (journey towards) manhood.¹¹⁵

In Slater’s consideration of the oral-narcissistic symbolism of the serpent, we discern a relationship between the devouring, castrating mother and “the snake with its yawning jaws ... devouring, enveloping, swallowing,

¹¹⁴ Dexter, p.9.

¹¹⁵ Dexter, p.11. Dexter writes: “In conquering these ‘monsters’, the warriors were symbolically overcoming *very powerful* goddesses of the pre-Indo-European societies; conquering these goddesses was both a reality and a metaphor for conquering the goddess-centred people” (p.181; italics in text).

strangling ...".¹¹⁶ Slater further elaborates on the fearful orality of the serpent and the infantile phantasy of engulfment by the mother:

Since the snake lives by devouring small beings, traditionally interpreted as symbolic either of phalli or *children* or both, it does indeed symbolize a 'dangerous vagina' ... [t]he 'danger' arises, however, because the serpent, whether viewed as genital or not, is orally defined, and the fear which it evokes is of being absorbed by the mother, or poisoned, or enveloped, or strangled.¹¹⁷

The serpent is the life-denying aspect of the archetypal Terrible Mother, "the other half of the cyclical, dust-untodust, womb-tomb vision of woman's procreative capacity – the child is swallowed up and disappears from whence he came".¹¹⁸

In Greek mythology, the Goddess and her symbol, the serpent, become the Medusa¹¹⁹ whose look turns men to

¹¹⁶ Slater, *Hera*, p.87.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, my italics. Slater also sees the spider as another "symbol of the evil aspect of the mother" (p.87 note 7). For more on spider symbolism see M. Weigle, *Spiders and Spinners: Women and Mythology*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1982, and W. Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1998.

¹¹⁸ Slater, *Hera*, p.89.

¹¹⁹ She is described by Fontenrose as "a *Tiamat-like* chaos hag, a demoness of darkness and death". J. Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins* (1959), New York, Biblo & Tannen, 1974, p.291, my italics. For a detailed study of representations of Medusa and her relationship to oriental monsters see B. Goldman, "The Asiatic Ancestry of the Greek Gorgon", *Berytus*, 14, 1961, pp.1-22.

stone, the many-headed Hydra, the Chimera, the riddling Sphinx or the angry Erinyes¹²⁰ – some of the many mythical female monsters with whom the hero engages in battle. These monsters are either serpents, possess snake-like attributes or are serpentine by nature.¹²¹ These monsters embody the death-dealing aspects of the Goddess whose powers were feared by the new father-god cultures.¹²² According to Dexter, [h]er vast powers were detrited into negative [forces] that a clever hero ... might hope to avoid”.¹²³ Although these female figures “continued the personification of ... [ancient] snake goddesses, they were reduced to dire monsters rather than powerful goddesses who ruled life and death”.¹²⁴

According to Smith, “[t]he Medusa is one of several mythic horrible female creatures that the great mother or goddess figures were reduced to in the shift from matriarchal consciousness to patriarchy”. J.C. Smith, “The Sword and Shield of Perseus: Some Mythological Dimensions of the Law”, *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 6, 1983, pp.235-261 at p.260.

¹²⁰ We will consider the Sphinx and Erinyes in relation to Oedipus and Orestes in the following sections.

¹²¹ Dexter, p.178.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Id.* at p.181.

Neumann singles out Perseus and Heracles¹²⁵ as two

¹²⁵ In his 'Hymn to Apollo', Homer tells us that Apollo fought with a female dragon (*drakaina*), known as Delphyne in later literature, near a spring on the slopes of Parnassus and killed the monster with an arrow from his bow. Daly notes that the name 'Delphyne' is connected with an old word for womb (M. Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, London, Women's Press, 1984, p.62). According to Joseph Fontenrose, "[s]he was a monstrous creature, huge and savage, guilty of terrible violence against the people and the flocks of the land" (p.14). Fontenrose links Delphyne with Echidna (mother of the Gorgons, Sphinx, Chimera, and Hydra) who was part woman, part serpent, and suggests that Apollo's dragoness was really Echidna. Fontenrose notes the Argive legend in which the hero Argos Panoptes, "as a doublet of Heracles" (p.95) kills Echidna. In a tale by Herodotos, Echidna, "a woman above her loins but a snake below" (p.97), lures Heracles into her cave/womb. Like other chaos demonesses, "the dragoness puts off her horrid features [her lower part] and becomes a beautiful temptress who ... lur[es] the champion to his doom" (p.257). According to Fontenrose, the sea-monster Skylla, "beautiful in her womanly upper body, but monstrous in her lower body" (p.99), is a form of Echidna-Delphyne who fought with Heracles and was killed by him. Heracles also killed the Hydra of Lerna (child of Echidna), a monstrous sea-serpent with "a prodigious dog-like body, and eight or nine snaky heads; but some credit it with fifty, or one hundred, or even ten thousand heads ... it was so venomous that its very breath, or the smell of its tracks, could destroy life" (R. Graves, *The Greek Myths* (1955), Vol. 2, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1979, p.108. For more on the Hydra, including comparisons with other heroic serpent-slayers see Graves, pp.109-110). Heracles also has an infantile association with serpents: his step-mother Hera sent serpents to attack Heracles in his cradle but he killed them. According to Slater, the relationship between Hera and Heracles "captures the bitter irony of the Greek mother-son relationship, inasmuch as Hera was also the hero's chief persecutor" (*Hera*, p.337). For more on Hera and other persecutory Greek mythic stepmothers see P. Watson, *Ancient Stepmothers: Myth, Misogyny and Reality*, Leiden, The Netherlands, E.J. Brill, 1995. Fontenrose recounts the story of Heracles copulating with the she-serpent Omphale (pp.107-8). Slater suggests that this act demonstrates Heracles' fearlessness and his "masculine antisepsis against matriarchy, femininity, and chthonic forces everywhere ... represents a vigorous denial of weakness in the face of maternal hostility" (*Hera*, pp.338-339). Apollo was also said to have fought and killed a female dragon named Python who guarded the oracular shrine at Delphi which belonged to the ancient goddess Themis. Apollo slew Python and took over the oracle and the power of prophecy belonging to the serpent-goddess. Mary Daly, in *Gyn/Ecology* sees Apollo as "the personification of anti-matriarchy, the opponent of Earth deities. His name is said by some to have been derived from *appollunai*, meaning

heroes who break the power of the Mother Goddess, and suggests that Perseus, in particular, conquers the symbol of matriarchal consciousness in the Gorgon Medusa.¹²⁶ Like Slater, who associates devouring aspects of the serpent and spider with the mother, Neumann similarly associates the serpent-headed Medusa with the castrating mother. For Neumann, the Medusa symbolises the “devouring chasm ... the woman with beard and phallus, the male-eating spider ... [her] gnashing mouth [the *vagina dentata*] ... [and] snapping – i.e. castrating – womb ... the jaws of hell”,¹²⁷ taking into her serpentine self both phalli and children – the serpent’s symbolic meal. Indeed, as Woolger and Woolger note, the Medusa “likes to drink blood, dismember bodies, and devour babies”.¹²⁸

destroy [interestingly, the name ‘Perseus’ also means ‘destroyer’] ... he is the death-dealer, most deadly of all the gods ... upon his temple was engraved the maxim: ‘Keep woman under the rule’...” (p.62). Slater sees “Apollo’s attacks on chthonic monsters” as a means of overcoming the ‘oral-narcissistic dilemma’ that is the “constant struggle against inundation by oral-dependent longings and the dread of [the mother]” (*Hera*, p.160). For Slater, “[t]he myth of Apollo seems to express an infinite process of doing and undoing, of affirmation and negation of the maternal bond” (*Hera*, p.141). Like Apollo, Zeus also fought with a dragon, a male dragon or *drakôn* named Typhon. Fontenrose points to Nonnos’ version of the Typhon myth in which Zeus kills a female monster named Kampe who “had fifty heads of all kinds of beasts, and the body of a woman from the waist up, of a snake from the waist down ... she was Echidna under another name, as Nonnos indicates, calling her Echidnaean Enyo, identifying her snaky legs with echidnas, and likening her to ... Skylla” (p.243).

¹²⁶ Neumann, *Origins*, p.87.

¹²⁷ Neumann, *Origins*, p.87. Róheim similarly sees the Medusa’s face as “a vagina displaced upwards and cathected with anxiety” (“Dragon and Hero”, p.77).

¹²⁸ Woolger and Woolger, p.82. Greek female monsters such as Lamia, Mormo, Gello, Empousa, Nereids (sea-nymphs who steal newborn babies) are also associated with the destruction and consumption of infants. These types of monsters also appear in other traditions, for example the Hebrew Lilith and Estrie (a medieval

Neumann draws attention to artistic representations of Perseus fleeing from Medusa and her sisters (Euryale and Stheno). “The hero’s flight ... testif[ies] very clearly to the overpowering character of the Great Mother”.¹²⁹ Perseus does not risk being paralysed (‘made stiff’ – a reading which involves both narcissistic desire and castration anxiety¹³⁰) or “petrified i.e. impotent”¹³¹ by the sight (eyes)/site (vagina) of the Medusa, overcoming her “[o]nly by indirect means – when reflected in Athena’s mirror, the Gorgon can be destroyed”.¹³² Athena helps the hero

version of a vampire who assumes the form of a nurse to prey on children and suck their blood), Jenny Greenteeth (a malignant water-sprite native to northern England who drags children standing at the edge of a river to their death), and Navky (sprites found in lakes in Finland and Yugoslavia who lure young children into lakes by pretending they are drowning). For more about Lamia, Mormo, Gello, Empousa, and Lilith see Chapter Four.

¹²⁹ Neumann, *Origins*, p.215.

¹³⁰ Feldman believes that “the power to turn men to stone, [is] to castrate, in effect”. T. Feldman, “Gorgo and the Origins of Fear”, *Arion*, 4, 1965, pp.484-494 at p.492.

¹³¹ Róheim, “Dragon and Hero”, p.81. Róheim writes: “the Gorgon as a face which petrifies anybody who sees it is really the vagina. Petrification as death represents erection seen through the mirror of anxiety ...connected with the sight of the mother’s vagina” (p.80).

Slater sees in the idea of ‘turning to stone’ an “immobility much more suggestive of impotence [than] ... a symbolic erection” (*Hera*, p.321).

¹³² Neumann, *Origins*, p.216. Both Neumann and Róheim’s readings emphasise the intrinsic relationship between face and vaginal orifice, between looking and devouring or being looked at and being devoured either through the mouth or the womb “as the jaws of hell” (Neumann, *Origins*, p.87). Like Neumann, Slater suggests that in slaying the Medusa, Perseus “kills the representative of the Evil Mother” (*Hera*, p.309). For Slater too, castration is central in the myth. “[T]he Medusa head *is* a symbol of maternal genitalia” (p.318, italics in text). Slater also considers the “dangers of looking” (p.323) which he links with the child’s fear and fascination surrounding the mother’s genitals. He writes: “[t]he Perseus myth never strays far from the theme of looking – an ambivalent scopophilia. The mother’s genitals are frightening, yet fascinating – the child does not wish to look or be caught looking, but still wants to see. The notion here is that what is directly viewed can ‘look back’; that between the eye and its object

Perseus to kill the Terrible Mother (in one version of the myth she reflects the face of Medusa in the mirror on her shield to prevent Perseus turning to stone; in another version she guides the hero's hand as he strikes Medusa's head)¹³³ – “the primordial power of the female

there is an interaction; that the aggressive act of looking can produce an equally aggressive retaliation ... It is as if showing any sexual interest in the mother was a dangerous commitment, one which would encourage her own insatiable sexuality” (p.327).

¹³³ In Euripides' *Ion*, the infanticidal mother Creusa concocts a plan to poison her son Ion (she does not realise that this is the very child she exposed as an infant). In her monody, Creusa describes the origins of the poison: Athena took two drops of Medusa's blood and gave them to her 'surrogate' child Erichthonius who was born from his Earth mother, the Goddess Gaia (who was impregnated with Hephaestus' semen that fell on the ground when he attempted to rape Athena). One drop was poisonous, the other was an antidote. Erichthonius gave the drops of blood to his grandson Erechtheus, who in turn gave them to his daughter Creusa. Ion pre-emptively forecloses his mother's infanticidal plot and decides to kill her himself. Ion compares his venomous mother to a serpent and invokes the deadly gaze of Medusa: “what a viper is this descendant of yours, a serpent with fiery looks that kill! There is no crime of which she is not capable; she is no less poisonous than the Gorgon's blood with which she tried to kill me” (Euripides, *The Ion of Euripides*, trans. D.W. Lucas, London, Cohen & West, 1949, lines 1261-1265). Euripides establishes a relationship between the son who would kill his vituperous mother and the heroes such as Heracles and Bellerophon who slay monsters. For more on this aspect of the play and Creusa's association with serpents, see V.J. Rosivach, “Earthborns and Olympians: The Parodos of the *Ion*”, *Classical Quarterly*, 27, 1977, pp.284-94. For more about the play's imagery of order versus disorder, in particular the iconography of the hero's conquest of the monster as the taming of wild and chaotic nature compared with the son's attempt to murder the monstrous mother - “the bloodthirsty avenger” whose “primitive, rebellious emotions” must be contained, see D.J. Mastronarde, “Iconography and Imagery in Euripides' *Ion*”, *California Studies in Classical Antiquity*, 8, 1975, pp.163-176. For Creusa's association with serpents, see M. Lloyd, “Divine and Human Action in Euripides' *Ion*”, *Antike und Abendland*, 32, 1986, pp.33-45. For more on the play in general see C. Wolff, “The Design and Myth in Euripides' *Ion*”, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 69, 1965, pp.169-194; J. Larue, “Creusa's Monody: Ion 859-922”, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 94, 1963, pp.126-136; A.P. Burnett, “Human Resistance and Divine Persuasion in Euripides' *Ion*”, *Classical Philology*, 57, 1962, pp.89-103; G.B.

has been subdued by her; she now wears the Gorgon's head as a trophy upon her shield ... in contrast to the Terrible Mother's animosity toward all things masculine, she is the companion and helper of the masculine hero".¹³⁴

Walker notes that Medusa (Greek Metis) was originally a Mother Goddess, "an all-healer from whose name came the word *medicine*, embodying the feminine Wisdom principle anciently known as *med* ..., [who was] converted into a poisonous she-demon by patriarchal reinterpretation and slain by the ancestral hero of Athenian patriarchy".¹³⁵

Walsh, "The Rhetoric of Birthright and Race in Euripides' *Ion*", *Hermes*, 106(2), 1978, pp.301-315; W.E. Forehand, "Truth and Reality in Euripides' *Ion*", *Ramus*, 8, 1979, pp.174-187; E.M. Troiano, "The *Ion*: The Relationship of Character and Genre", *Classical Bulletin*, 61(3), 1985, pp.45-52; G. Gellie, "Apollo in the *Ion*", *Ramus*, 13, 1984, pp.93-101; R. Padel, "*Ion*: Lost and Found", *Arion*, 4(1), 1996, pp.216-224; D.J. Conacher, "The Paradox of Euripides' *Ion*", *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 90, 1959, pp.20-39; F.I. Zeitlin, "Mysteries of Identity and Designs of Self in Euripides' *Ion*", *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 35, 1989, pp.144-197.

¹³⁴ Neumann, *Origins*, p.217. While some Goddesses transmuted into monsters, others were assimilated into Greek culture but were subordinate to male gods who "held in check" the power of these "once-potent goddesses" (Dexter, p.181). Dexter notes that Athena – "a very potent pre-Greek goddess ... was assimilated to the Indo-European Greek culture so thoroughly that she was born not of woman but of man" (p.162). We only need to recall the description of Athena's birth in Hesiod's *Theogony* in which she springs forth from Zeus' head fully armed. Athena helps Perseus slay the serpentine Medusa and also destroys other serpents that "threaten the (patriarchal) society" (p.119). Smith suggests that Athena is "the embodiment of the patriarchal ideal of women ... Men see women as but a reflection in the mirror of Athena. The mirror of Athena is the patriarchal definition of the feminine, the female stereotype constructed and projected by the male psyche" ("Sword and Shield", pp.260-261).

¹³⁵ Walker, *Skeptical Feminist*, p.9. Woolger and Woolger similarly note that when Greek religion ceased to give power to the Goddess,

Classical writers trivialised this aspect of the Goddess by making “her myth seem to be only [an] old stor[y] about [an] ordinary wom[a]n”.¹³⁶ Indeed, as legend has it, Medusa was “once a beautiful maiden whose hair was her chief glory ... [she wronged Athena who] deprived her of her charms and changed her beautiful ringlets into hissing serpents. She became a cruel monster of so frightful an aspect that no living thing could behold her without being turned to stone”.¹³⁷ The Medusa, whose origin lies in the snake goddesses of Neolithic Europe, retains her snake symbolism in the form of ‘snaky hair’ which is now a terrifying attribute.¹³⁸

“figures like the Medusa ... became deadly enemies of the heroic patriarchal religion that Athena represented” (p.82). Thalia Feldman notes that “this myth was created and rapidly evolved in the 8th-6th centuries [when] it took on the particular aspect of male and female conflict”, attributable to changes in attitude towards “the mother, the Mother Goddess and all of life in between” (pp.492-493). According to Smith, “Medusa is the converse of Athena, the free woman, the virgin owned by no man. She is the spirit of the feminine, undistorted, unrepressed, and untrampled – the angry woman, the witch in the pathological society ... And the sword of Perseus which is used to cut off the head of Medusa is the law. The slain Medusa is the patriarchally subjugated female: an object without an identity of her own, to be used by the male for his purposes and pleasure” (“Sword and Shield”, p.261).

¹³⁶ Walker, *Skeptical Feminist*, p.9.

¹³⁷ T. Bulfinch, *Mythology* (1959), ed. Edmund Fuller, New York, Dell, 1967, p.97. Two reasons are offered for Athena’s punishment of Medusa: “either because Poseidon lay with her in the very temple of the goddess or because Medusa boasted that her tresses were more beautiful than Athena’s (or simply judged herself more beautiful than Athena)” (Fontenrose, p.285).

¹³⁸ Feldman traces the origins and aesthetic development of the Gorgon Medusa from her primitive and ancient form as “a menacing, shaggy, feline head, animaloid outcry, and devastating look” (“Gorgo”, p.492) to her “most typical” features of “the face with its snaky locks, huge distended mouth, pendent tongue and ‘gorgon-glaring’ eyes (p.485) ... which came more and more to have the power to turn men to stone ... To control her power it was necessary in turn to endow her with the body of a woman and to cut off her head, the source of

From the body of the slain Medusa emerges the winged horse named Pegasus that helps the hero Bellerophon defeat the monstrous Chimera. Kerényi describes the birth of Pegasus and the relationship between the stallion and Bellerophon:

When Perseus cut[s] off Medusa's head, she [is] with child by Poseidon of ... a winged stallion ... [that] leap[s] out through the neck from the body of [its] beheaded mother ... Bellerophon [is] the mortal brother [of Pegasus] ... for he too [is] a son of Poseidon ... And he ask[s] his father for a winged horse, which Poseidon grant[s] to his son.¹³⁹

The horse is wild and unmanageable but, like Perseus, Bellerophon receives assistance from Athena who provides a magic bridle. During his adventures, Bellerophon encounters the Chimera, sent by the King Iobates of Lycia as punishment for Bellerophon's alleged seduction of his son-in-law's wife Antea.¹⁴⁰ According to Hesiod, the Chimera is the monstrous product of a union

the danger" (p.492). Feldman goes on to suggest that the myth of Perseus and Medusa was created "[f]or that purpose" (p.492). For more on the artistic and literary development of the Medusa see Harrison, *Prolegomena*, pp.187-197. For a detailed discussion of the psycho-cultural symbolic significance of the Medusa see Róheim, "Dragon and Hero" (pp.61-83).

¹³⁹ C. Kerényi, *The Heroes of the Greeks*, trans. H.J. Rose, London, Thames & Hudson, 1959, p.80.

¹⁴⁰ According to Kerényi, it was the son-in-law's wife Antea (also known as Stheneboia) who "tried to seduce the young man, but failing in this she said to her husband: ... 'slay Bellerophon, Who would enjoy me, all against my will'" (*Heroes*, p.82). Bulfinch suggests that the son-in-law, Proteus, was merely "jealous of [Bellerophon], suspecting that his wife Antea looked with too much admiration on the young warrior" (p.104).

between the half-serpent, half-woman Echidna and the serpent Typhon. Homer describes the Chimera as a dreadful three-headed fire-breathing monster with the body of a she-goat, the tail of a serpent, and the head of a lion. Riding Pegasus through the air, Bellerophon manages to slay the Chimera, avoiding its deadly flames.¹⁴¹

Neumann suggests that there is a primordial symbolic relationship between Medusa, Pegasus, and the Chimera. According to Neumann, the horse that emerges from Medusa “belongs to the chthonic-phallic world ... he represents nature and instinct, which are all-powerful in half-human [half-horse] creatures like the centaurs”.¹⁴² Neumann associates Medusa with the “destructive impulse” of the centaurs, pointing to early artistic representations of Medusa herself as a centauress. Neumann suggests that “[t]his symbolism seems to be primordial and is the basis of the story that Pegasus sprang from the slain Medusa; the winged horse is set free when the centauress is destroyed by the winged man”.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Kerényi says that Bellerophon “shot the Chimera from above with his arrows” (*Heroes*, p.82) but also notes that artistic representations depict him with a spear of Poseidon’s trident. Indeed, Slater recounts a version of the Chimera’s slaughter with a spear: “Bellerophon ... thus[t] a lump of lead between her jaws with his spear so that her fiery breath melted it and broiled her own innards” (*Hera*, p.334).

¹⁴² Neumann, *Origins*, pp.217-218.

¹⁴³ *Id.* at p.218.

When Perseus, the so-called 'winged man' because of the winged sandals given to him by the spirits of old age (Graeae), slays the Medusa he is freeing masculine consciousness from the Great Mother.¹⁴⁴ When Bellerophon subdues the offspring of Medusa, the wild Pegasus, "nature is tamed and submissive ... the [destructive impulse] of the Gorgon [is] released and transformed".¹⁴⁵ The slaughter of Medusa and the taming of Pegasus represent "the victory of the masculine, conscious spirit over the powers of the matriarchate".¹⁴⁶ The transformed Pegasus symbolises masculine spirituality and becomes the hero's ally in his battle with the unconscious. Perseus battles with the uroboric Medusa. Bellerophon battles with the Chimera. Perseus is helped by the winged sandals given to him by "[the Gorgon's] hideous sisters, denizens of the deep".¹⁴⁷ Bellerophon is helped by the winged horse Pegasus. Wings represent escape from the Great Mother, and for both heroes a type of "winged spiritual energy carries [them] to victory".¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ *Id.* at p.219.

¹⁴⁵ *Id.* at pp.218-219.

¹⁴⁶ *Id.* at p.218. According to Bachofen, heroes like Heracles, Perseus, and Bellerophon are "combaters of mother right ... They destroy all matriarchy along with Amazonism [Bellerophon battles with and defeats the Amazons]; as pure power of light, they exalt the incorporeal solar principle of paternity over material and tellurian mother right" (p.124). J.J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J.J. Bachofen*, trans. Ralph Manheim, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1967.

¹⁴⁷ Neumann, *Origins*, p.219.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Slater elucidates a maternal threat in Bellerophon's battles with his predominantly female opponents. According to Slater, Bellerophon's battles with Antea, the Chimera, the Amazons, and the Xanthian women (who raise their skirts and expose their genitalia in an attempt to put him off course) all "captur[e] the [thematic] combination of maternal seductiveness and maternal vindictiveness".¹⁴⁹ The sexually seductive mother is also the monstrous mother. Bunker suggests that the unfaithful wife, Antea, is "a disguised representation of the mother"¹⁵⁰ as is the Chimera, described as "a highly disguised (phallic) mother representative".¹⁵¹ Bellerophon refuses to succumb to the seductive Antea and successfully defeats the Chimera.

In Euripides' 'Stheneboia', Bellerophon slays the Chimera before punishing Antea for her false accusations.¹⁵² Realising that Antea still desires him, Bellerophon tells her to mount the winged Pegasus and pretends to take Antea to his kingdom. As they fly over the island of Melos, he pushes her into the sea. According to Bunker, both the murder of Antea and the Chimera, although "not the mother *in propria persona*",¹⁵³ are still forms of matricide. Bunker suggests too a hidden meaning in the matricidal agenda's of mythic heroes such as Perseus and

¹⁴⁹ Slater, *Hera*, p.335 note 18.

¹⁵⁰ H.A. Bunker, "Mother-Murder in Myth and Legend: A Psychoanalytic Note", *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 13, 1944, pp.198-207 at p.204.

¹⁵¹ *Id.* at p. 202 note 13.

¹⁵² Harrison, *Prolegomena*, p.220.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

Bellerophon, namely (sexual) desire for the mother.¹⁵⁴ The union which Bellerophon goes to such great lengths to avoid and prove false is affirmed and 'consummated' in his murder of mother representatives. In Bunker's contention that "the real meaning of the murder of the mother is sexual intercourse with the mother",¹⁵⁵ we are confronted not only with the hero's sublimation of his desire but also a fear of maternal engulfment that plagues the masculine psyche. In the remaining sections we will consider these issues further in relation to two of the most well known mythic heroes, Oedipus and Orestes.

The myth of Oedipus

Kerényi describes Bellerophon as "the greatest hero and slayer of monsters, alongside of Perseus and Cadmus".¹⁵⁶ The story of the Tyrian Prince Cadmus is important for us to consider at this stage because he was the great great grandfather of the hero Oedipus. Cadmus' tale begins with the capture of his sister Europa by Zeus in the form of a white bull. Their father, King Agenor of Tyre, sends Cadmus and his brothers to search for Europa. Cadmus searches unsuccessfully in Greece. Cadmus is about to end his search for Europa when an oracle tells him to buy a cow and sacrifice the animal at the place it falls. The oracle predicts that Cadmus will become king of the city in which the cow falls – Thebes.

¹⁵⁴ Bunker, p.205.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Kerényi, *Heroes*, p.75.

Cadmus learns that a serpent guards the city's water supply, 'Areia' or the 'Spring of Ares' whose water flows into the Dirke River.¹⁵⁷ Cadmus slays the serpent with a stone and, on the advice of Athena, removes its fangs and sows them in a field. Fierce warriors – the *spartoi* or *spurii* ('sown ones')¹⁵⁸ rise from each tooth and kill each other until only five of them remain (Oudaios, Chthonios, Peloros, Hyperenor, Echion) and join with Cadmus to become the founders of the five great Theban families. In Euripides' *Phoenissae*, the chorus describe Cadmus' defeat of the savage serpent guard: "O'er the flowing fount [of Dirke] kept watch and ward ... / Thither on a time came Kadmos bold ... / he the snake did smite, with a rock upon its head / Bloody stained, and straight he shed / All its teeth upon the earth, / Up there sprang an armed birth".¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Fontenrose recounts the tale of Dirke, an evil queen who was killed by her enemy Antiope and her sons, Amphion and Zethos. They threw her body into the Spring of Ares (p.315).

¹⁵⁸ Bachofen refers to the *spartoi* as the *genus draconteum* (dragon people) (p.180). For more on the myth of Cadmus and the 'sown ones' see R. Buxton, *Imaginary Greece: The Contexts of Mythology*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp.184-193.

¹⁵⁹ Cited in J. Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*, London, Merlin, 1963, p.430. Harrison notes that Jason also killed a dragon and sowed its teeth (p.435). Agamben notes that the Greeks attributed the invention of alphabetic writing to Cadmus "whose descendants maintained a relation with writing and signification". G. Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (1977), trans. Ronald L. Martinez, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p.138. He suggests that this is an important aspect of the Oedipal 'mythologeme' but does not develop the idea. Perhaps Lacan's theory of the Oedipus complex as the journey towards the Symbolic Order (language, law, culture) would provide a useful point of intersection. Shlain proposes that there is a direct relationship between the rise of alphabetic literacy, the decline of the Goddess, and the rise of patriarchy. For Shlain, Cadmus is significant because he brought the alphabet to the Greeks who "revised their mytho-history to disempower women" (p.120). Cadmus kills the

Grateful for the slaughter of the serpent, the Thebans make Cadmus their king. In some versions of the myth, Cadmus brings Harmonia from Samothrace to be his wife.¹⁶⁰ Other versions suggest that Harmonia is the daughter of the slaughtered serpent guard.¹⁶¹ Cadmus and Harmonia produce four daughters (Semele, Ino, Agave, and Autonoë)¹⁶² and a son, Polydorus, who rules after his parents leave Thebes. Kingship then passes to Labdacus and finally to Oedipus' father, Laius. The story

serpent, “extract[s] the dreaded fangs of the female's totem ... [and] plant[s] [them] in the ground, and in so doing, invert[s] the life-affirming growth cycle to be death-dealing instead ... the ‘seeds’ ... allegorically letters [of the alphabet] ... grow into soldiers who spring from the ground eager to kill” (pp.121-124). Shlain associates the serpent's teeth with the sharp teeth of the *vagina dentata* and sees in Cadmus' extraction of the serpent's teeth a removal of the threat of woman's devouring mouth, the *femme castratrice*. Shlain also notes that the serpent's teeth are associated with female wisdom and power: “until the appearance of the written word, a writhing snake had been a graphic symbol of female power. Shortly after writing acceptance across the ancient world, male heroes dispatched serpents in order to acquire knowledge or to gain power. Marduk became omnipotent by defeating Tiamat, whose form was a sea snake ... Apollo gained control of the important function of foresight by slaying the terrible she-snake Python ... Perseus killed Medusa, a sorceress with a head of snakes instead of hair. Medusa's most powerful weapon was her image: any man who gazed on her turned to stone. But at the dawn of literacy, Medusa met the fate reserved for all she-serpents” (p.122). Garcés similarly suggests that “the birth of the being of language implies the overthrow and even the slaughter of the monster(s) of the abyss”. M. Garcés, “Berganza and the Abject: The Desecration of the Mother” in Ruth El Saffar and Diana de Armas Wilson, eds, *Quixotic Desire: Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Cervantes*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1993, pp.292-314 at p.312. Garcés considers Biblical monsters that are “defeated by the power of the Word ... In the course of these (textual) combats with the enemy, the names of the monster(s) disappear” (p.313).

¹⁶⁰ Kerényi, *Heroes*, p.31.

¹⁶¹ Fontenrose, p.313.

¹⁶² For more about the daughters of Cadmus (in particular Ino and Agave) see the following Chapter.

of Oedipus begins with the curse that Laius brings upon Thebes.

As a young man, Laius fell in love with the son of King Pelops, Chrysippus. But rather than asking King Pelops for his consent, Laius kidnapped and raped Chrysippus during the Nemean games. King Pelops placed a curse on Laius¹⁶³ – his own son will murder him and marry his own mother. The punishment for the rape of Chrysippus is dealt by Zeus and made known to Laius by the Delphic oracle whom he secretly consults for advice about his and wife Jocasta's failure to produce an heir. Laius is told that his childlessness is "a blessing, because any child born to Jocasta would become his murderer".¹⁶⁴ Fearing the oracle's prophecy, Laius refuses to engage in sexual relations with Jocasta. In some versions of the myth, Oedipus is conceived when Laius becomes intoxicated and rapes Jocasta. Other versions indicate the opposite – in Graves' rendition Jocasta seduces Laius: "having made [Laius] drunk, she inveigled him into her arms again as soon as night fell".¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Licht notes that Pelops "is not driven to the curse because Laius loved a boy and was intimate with him ... but simply and solely because Laius steals the boy, and abducts him against his father's wish" (H. Licht, *Sexual Life in Ancient Greece*, London, Routledge, 1932, p.17). Velikovsky presents the opposing view: "The house of Laius was doomed ... [t]he legend has it that this doom was visited on Laius and his house because he was the first to introduce unnatural love on the soil of Greece: he corrupted a youth, Chrysippus". I. Velikovsky, *Oedipus and Akhnaton: Myth and History*, London, Sidgwick & Jackson, 1960, p.25.

¹⁶⁴ Graves, *Greek*, p.9.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Three days after his birth, Oedipus is exposed¹⁶⁶ on Mount Cithaeron and left to die. In some versions, Laius exposes the infant himself or gives the infant to a servant to expose. In other versions, Jocasta herself exposes the infant.¹⁶⁷ As an added precaution, Laius pierces his ankles

¹⁶⁶ In her study of incest in medieval literature, Gravdal makes the pertinent point that "one of the chief arguments against the abandonment of children ... was the fear of eventually having intercourse with one's own child, without knowing it". K. Gravdal, "Confessing Incests: Legal Erasures and Literary Celebrations in Medieval France", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 32(2), 1995, pp.280-295 at p.285. Devereux suggests that exposure was "a defence against murderous impulses elicited by the sight of the nursing infant, whose very existence interferes with the formerly close relationship between husband and wife". G. Devereux, "Why Oedipus Killed Laius: A Note on the Complementary Oedipus Complex in Greek Drama", *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 34, 1953, pp.132-141 at p.135. Exposure is a form of 'passive' infanticide and refers to "behaviour which ultimately leads to the death of an infant or child" (S.C.M. Scrimshaw, "Infanticide in Human Populations: Societal and Individual Concerns" in G. Hausfater and S.B. Hrdy, eds, *Infanticide: Comparative and Evolutionary Perspectives*, New York, Aldine, 1984, pp.439-462 at p.441). The term 'exposure' conveys a sense of harm or risk: "exposure of children suggests consigning them to death or nearly certain risk of injury" (J. Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe From Late Antiquity to the Renaissance*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1988). Other forms of 'passive' infanticide include neglect (M. Dickemann, "Demographic Consequences of Infanticide in Man", *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, 6, 1975, pp.107-137), underinvestment (H. Ware, "The Relationship Between Infant Mortality and Fertility: Replacement and Insurance Effects" in *Proceedings of the International Population Conference, Vol. 1*, Liege, Belgium, International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, 1977; S.C.M. Scrimshaw, "Infant Mortality and Behaviour in the Regulation of Family Size", *Population and Development Review*, 4, 1978, pp.383-403), excessive physical punishment (R.S. Kempe and H.C. Kempe, *Child Abuse*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1978).

¹⁶⁷ In *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero and Other Writings* (P. Freund ed., New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), Otto Rank provides examples of many other hero myths in which the infant hero is exposed by his mother: Babylonian Sargon was laid in a vessel made of reeds and dropped into the river (p.15); biblical Moses was placed in an ark of bulrushes and sent downstream (p.16); Karna, in the ancient Hindu epic Mahabharata, was laid in a large basket of rushes lined with wax

with a nail and binds them together.¹⁶⁸ A Corinthian shepherd finds the infant (in some versions Laius' servant takes pity on the child and gives him to the shepherd) and gives the child to King Polybus of Corinth to raise as his

and sent down the river (p.18); Ion was left by his mother Creusa in a woven basket in the grotto of the rock of the Athenian Acropolis where he was born (p.19) (for a comparison between the exposure of Oedipus and Ion see J.O. de Graft Hanson, "Euripides' *Ion*: Tragic Awakening and Disillusionment", *Museum Africum*, 4, 1975, pp.27-42 at p.28); Alcmena exposes her son Hercules (p.49); and Auge exposes her son Telephus (p.25). Rank also points to the legends of Judas and St. Gregory on the Stone as 'Oedipal' myths in which a mother exposes her infant (in a box on the sea) who is then found and raised by adoptive parents (pp.21-22). Rank points to the 'intra-uterine' symbolism inherent in the repeated pattern of exposure and rescue: the casket represents the womb and the water the amniotic fluid – the birth process is completed when the infant is pulled out of, or rescued, from the water. Rank suggests that "[t]he exposure in the box and in the water asexualises the birth process, as it were, in a child-like fashion; the children are fished out of the water by the stork, who takes them to the parents in a basket" (p.91). See also Sir James Frazer who considers the theme of infant exposure in Biblical stories, including that of Moses' exposure in the ark of bulrushes, *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament: Studies in Comparative Religion*, London, Macmillan, 1923.

¹⁶⁸ Krauss presents a Slavic version of the Oedipus tale in which mutilation of the infant's feet is accompanied by the hanging of the infant by its feet from a tree: "the mother took a small needle in her hand, threaded it with silk thread, and drew it through the boy's heels. And she hung him from a tree" (p.11). In this tale, the mother is responsible for both the initial abuse and subsequent exposure. F.S. Krauss, "The Oedipus Legend in South Slavic Folk Tradition" in L. Edmunds and A. Dundes, eds, *Oedipus: A Folklore Casebook* (1983), Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 1995, pp.10-22. According to Propp, "Oedipus' pierced feet are [a] deformed mark of death ... signs made on the child's body are signs of death". V. Propp, "Oedipus in the Light of Folklore" in Edmunds and Dundes, *op. cit.*, pp.76-121 at pp.93-94. Propp provides examples of 'marks of death' from Russian folklore including "the mark of decapitation [and] even more often ... simulation of disembowelment" (p.93). Rank notes that although certain legends, such as the Judas legend, present "the mother wound[ing] the child so that she will later recognise him from the scars", in the Oedipus myth "the purpose of the injury [is] to ensure the child's death". O. Rank, *The Incest Theme in Literature and Legend: Fundamentals of a Psychology of Literary Creation* (1912), trans. Gregory C. Richter, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, p.278.

own son. Rank also presents other versions of the story, including one in which Laius locks the infant in a chest and sets it adrift on the sea. The chest is found by Queen Merope (also known as Periboëa), the wife of King Polybus, as she rinses her clothes by the shore.¹⁶⁹ In some versions, the Corinthian shepherd names the infant 'Oedipus'. In other versions, Oedipus is named by his adoptive parents, Polybus and Merope.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Rank, *Birth of the Hero*, pp.20-21. Other versions presented by Rank include the infant being found and raised by horseherds or by a countryman named Melibios (p.21, note 7). According to Rank, "the exposure on the waters was the original rendering" (p.21, note 7).

¹⁷⁰ According to Graves, a Corinthian shepherd found the infant and named him Oedipus "because his feet were deformed by the nail-wound" (in Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, his feet are "pierced through with iron spikes") (Graves, *Greek*, p.9). Velikovsky says that Polybus and Merope "adopted him and called him Oedipus because of his swollen feet" (p.22). Pucci provides a detailed explanation of the etymological derivation of Oedipus' name – literally 'swollen foot' – which "recalls the tortures he suffered at the hands of his parents at his birth". P. Pucci, *Oedipus and the Fabrication of the Father: 'Oedipus Tyrannus' in Modern Criticism and Philosophy*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, p.67. "The name 'Oidipous' can be etymologically explained as a formation from *oidos* (swelling), the abstract noun from the verb *oideo* or *oidao* (to swell, to become swollen), and from *pous* (foot). It could therefore signify: 'with swollen foot' or 'feet'" (Pucci p.70). Pucci emphasises the relationship between 'swollen foot' and the erect phallus suggested by Freud: "[P]ous in Greek not only signifies 'foot' but metaphorically also the male sex and, indeed, the metaphor of *pous* for penis is known ..." (p.76). Pucci also suggests that 'Oidipous' can also become 'knowfoot' by confusing *oideo* (swell) with *oid-a* (know). "[T]he double etymology of the name 'Oidipous', which emphasises both knowledge and the swollen foot (erect penis) ... [points to the] relationship that psychoanalysis has drawn between intellectual and sexual curiosity" (p.76) (on this point see also P.L. Rudnytsky, *Freud and Oedipus*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1987, pp.266-267). Indeed, as will become clear in my discussion, Oedipus' desire for knowledge about his true origins merges with his desire for the mother – intellectual and sexual 'knowing' are inseparable in the Oedipus myth.

When he reaches adulthood, Oedipus learns about the oracle's prophecy that he will kill his father and marry his mother. He leaves Corinth immediately in the belief that Polybus and Merope are his biological parents. During his journey to Thebes, Oedipus is confronted by an old man (Laius) at a crossroad who "order[s] him roughly to step off the road and make way for his betters".¹⁷¹ When Oedipus fails to give way, the old man orders one of his

¹⁷¹ Graves, *Greek*, p.10. In another version, Laius and Oedipus fight over Chrysippus (see Devereux p.134). Velikovsky likewise notes that "Oedipus killed Laius, not at a chance meeting, but defending or avenging Chrysippus" (p.25). Note also Reik who refers to a version in which the "homosexually inclined [Oedipus] killed his unknown father on account of Chrysippus, whom he also loved". T. Reik, *Dogma and Compulsion: Psychoanalytic Studies of Religion and Myths*, trans. B. Miall, New York, International Universities Press, 1951, p.330, note 11. For readers since Freud, the battle is one between father and son for possession of a woman, Jocasta. According to Abraham, the fork in the road represents the female genital (K. Abraham, "Two Contributions to the Study of Symbols" (1923) in *Clinical Papers and Essays on Psychoanalysis*, London, Hogarth Press, 1955). Rudnytsky similarly notes that "the narrow pass is a symbol of the female genitalia" (*Oedipus*, p.83). Shengold likewise refers to the crossroad as "symbol of the maternal genitals". For Shengold, the crossroad is "the place of murder of the father which [will] lead to the blinding ... castration of the son. The maternal genital becomes charged with oral-sadistic libido and 'drinks blood'". L. Shengold, "The Parent as Sphinx", *American Psychoanalytic Association Journal*, 11, 1963, pp.725-751 at p.732. Shengold cites Oedipus' harsh words to his vampiric and insatiable mother: "Ye who drank from my hands that father's blood which was my own" (p.732). For Pucci the crossroad is the place of *tukhê* (chance) (p.106). Dexter tells us that with the demise of the Goddess, Hecate, once 'Goddess of Regeneration', became a "goddess of the underworld and death, of night, of ghosts and of witches. She became, in particular, a goddess of crossroads ... and she was depicted with triple aspect. The goddess of the nocturnal crossroads was also a goddess of death ... the dreaded darkness of the Underworld ... Hecate became a companion of Persephone, the queen of the lower spheres ... [and] was depicted with the chthonic creature, the serpent ... Hecate was banished, as it were, to the nether-regions" (pp.125-126).

men to drive past anyway. When the wheels of the carriage graze Oedipus' feet, he murders both men.¹⁷²

Oedipus continues on his way and arrives at Thebes to find the city plagued by the monstrous Sphinx whose riddle has so far eluded all the Thebans.¹⁷³ The Sphinx strangles and devours anyone who fails to solve her riddle.¹⁷⁴ Daughter of Echidna (or, in some versions, Chimera), the Sphinx has a “woman’s head, lion’s body, serpent’s tail, and eagle’s wings”.¹⁷⁵ Fontenrose elaborates on the Sphinx’s connection with other female monsters:

¹⁷² Rank notes that in the pre-Sophoclean epic, the *Oedipodeia*, Oedipus removes the sword and belt of the old man “probably as a sign of claiming his father’s power” (*Incest*, p.217). According to Devereux, these actions represent a symbolic castration and feminisation of Laius and a form of [albeit unconscious] retaliation: “He [Oedipus] turn[s] the tables on his ... father, by castrating (sword) and feminising him (belt), as he himself had once been castrated and feminised (pierced ankles) by Laius” (p.134). See also Reik who notes that “[t]he ungirt body is a familiar erotic symbol in Greek antiquity, and the taking of the sword is a symbolical substitute for castration” (*Dogma*, p.330).

¹⁷³ In some versions of the myth, the Sphinx is sent to Thebes by Ares as punishment for Cadmus’ slaughter of the serpent guard of the Spring of Ares (see Fontenrose, p.308). In other versions, the Sphinx is sent to Thebes by Hera as punishment for Laius’ abduction and rape of Chrysippus. Rank considers this version in his book *The Incest Theme in Literature and Legend: Fundamentals of a Psychology of Literary Creation*, *supra* note 153. On this point, see also Reik, *Dogma*, p.330, note 11. Fontenrose also notes another version in which Dionysus sends the Sphinx to Thebes (p.308). Fontenrose also notes an early version according to which the Sphinx is said to be the first wife of Cadmus who became jealous when Cadmus married Harmonia (p.310; on this point see also Velikovsky at p.190).

¹⁷⁴ Rank describes the Sphinx as “a man-devouring monster” (*Birth of the Hero*, p.21).

¹⁷⁵ Graves, *Greek*, p.10.

we may see in Sphinx the dragoness or Medusa ... Like Medusa she [is] sometimes called daughter of ... Echidna ... She [is] usually represented as a creature that ha[s] the head of a woman, the body of a lion, the wings and talons of an eagle or vulture: a sort of griffoness or female Zu ... she [also] ha[s] the tail of a snake, which make[s] her more like Chimera, whom Bellerophon fought.¹⁷⁶

Perching on Mount Phicium near the city gates, the Sphinx poses her riddle: "What being, with only one voice, has sometimes two feet, sometimes three, sometimes four, and is weakest when it has the most?"¹⁷⁷ Only Oedipus is able to "unriddl[e] the riddling song of the singing Sphinx"¹⁷⁸ as his daughter Antigone tells us in Euripides' *Phoenician Women*. His answer is "Man, because he crawls on all fours as an infant, stands firmly on his two feet in his youth, and leans upon a staff in his old age".¹⁷⁹ With this answer, Oedipus successfully

¹⁷⁶ Fontenrose, p.308. Fontenrose also notes the Sphinx's similarity to Sphinges, Keres, Lamias, Erinyes, and other "underworld demons" (p.309). Velikovsky finds parallels between the seven-gated Thebes in Greece and the hundred-gated Thebes on the Egyptian Nile. He suggests that the Sphinx first appeared at Thebes in Egypt where, contrary to the "long-standing tradition of a male-faced sphinx ... for the first time female breasts and wings were added to the lion's body of the sphinx ... [and] with the feminisation of the sphinx ... it bec[a]me a cruel creature" (p.42). For further discussion of the stages of transformation of the Sphinx and its symbolism, see Reik, *Dogma*, pp.289-332.

¹⁷⁷ Graves, *Greek*, p.10.

¹⁷⁸ Euripides, *The Phoenician Women*, trans. E. Wycoff, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1959, p.129.

¹⁷⁹ Graves, *Greek*, p.10. In solving the riddle, Pucci suggests that "Oedipus was helped, first, by his own name 'Oidipous', which gave him the key to the solution of the riddle. Interpreting his name as 'he who knows about the foot', he came to see himself – the man – as the correct answer" (p.35).

defeats the monstrous Sphinx who leaps to her death.¹⁸⁰
As a reward, the Thebans make Oedipus their king and he
marries Jocasta (his mother).¹⁸¹

Freud, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the *mundus imaginalis*

¹⁸⁰ Fontenrose notes the legend "according to which [a] spring gushed forth at the spot where Sphinx's body landed" (p.316). In another version, Oedipus kills the Sphinx with his sword. On this point, see G. Róheim, *The Riddle of the Sphinx or Human Origins* (1934), trans. R. Money-Kyrle, New York, Harper & Row, 1974, p.1. Bachofen sees Oedipus' defeat of the Sphinx as "the advance to a higher stage of existence" (p.181). According to Bachofen, the Sphinx represents the stage of tellurian mother right: "she represents the feminine right of the earth in its dark aspect as the inexorable law of death ... [s]he sends forth matter from darkness to light, and she again consume[s] it" (p.181). By defeating the devouring death-dealer, Oedipus rises above this stage of maternal tellurism.

¹⁸¹ According to Velikovsky, the two motifs of a devouring monster tormenting an entire city and a foreigner defeating the monster, becoming king and taking the hand of a woman in marriage as a reward is "a widespread motif of great antiquity ... repeatedly found in the tales of many peoples" (p.31). Edmunds notes the popular view, "à la Propp", that the Oedipus myth develops the folktale theme of the hero who wins the hand of a fair maiden by slaying a monster. He elaborates the view that "the Oedipus legend [is] a folktale recast by vast historical change ... the crimes of the hero [were] ethical[ly] recast ... in response to the advent of a patriarchal order of society. The hero becomes the arch-criminal who commits the crimes that strike at the heart of patriarchy". L. Edmunds, "The Sphinx in the Oedipus Legend" in Lowell Edmunds and Alan Dundes, eds, *Oedipus: A Folklore Casebook* (1983), Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 1995, pp.147-173 at p.149. On this point, see also Fromm who suggests that the myth "as it was known to and formulated by Sophocles had already been changed according to the patriarchal pattern ... [t]he patriarchal system had been victorious and the myth explains the reasons for the downfall of matriarchy". E. Fromm, "The Oedipus Complex and the Oedipus Myth" in R.N. Anshen ed., *The Family: Its Function and Destiny* (1949), New York, Harper, 1959, pp.420-448 at p.433. For an interesting discussion of Propp in light of psychoanalysis and feminist theory see L. Mulvey, "The Oedipus Myth: Beyond the Riddles of the Sphinx" in James Donald, ed., *Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory: Thresholds*, London, Macmillan Education, 1991, pp.27-50.

The story of Oedipus is “over twenty-seven centuries old. For a few hundred years it was carried by word of mouth and was recited as a poem of which only a few lines survive; then, in the form of plays written by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides ... the story seized the human imagination, and its grip has not weakened even after almost three millennia”.¹⁸² Indeed, Freud was fascinated by the myth of Oedipus as retold by Sophocles. He likened himself to Oedipus – a solver of riddles – a comparison recognised by his colleagues who presented Freud with a medallion of himself on one side and Oedipus and the Sphinx on the other, bearing the inscription ‘he who solved the famous riddle, and was most powerful of men’.¹⁸³ In his extensive collection of ancient artefacts Freud also kept a terracotta Sphinx circa 400 B.C. and many other representations of Oedipus and the Sphinx collected over the years.¹⁸⁴

Freud turned to Greek mythology and drama in his theorisation of the processes of individual psychic development. In Sophocles’ play *Oedipus Tyrannus*, he saw confirmation of his theory of the Oedipus complex –

¹⁸² Velikovsky, p.19. For more about the numerous versions of the Oedipus legend see L. Edmunds, *Oedipus: The Ancient Legend and Its Later Analogues*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985, and A. Johnson and D. Price-Williams, *Oedipus Ubiquitous: The Family Complex in World Folk Literature*, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1996.

¹⁸³ The medallion is now part of an extensive collection in the Freud Museum in London. For an illustration of the medallion, see the preliminary pages of Rudnytsky, *Freud and Oedipus*. Rudnytsky also discusses what he refers to as ‘the medallion incident’ at pp.4-6.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

the love of the son for his mother and intense jealousy and hostility towards his father.¹⁸⁵ Freud explained the Oedipus myth as “having grown out of the unconscious desire of a son to possess his mother and to dispose of his father by murder”.¹⁸⁶ Freud suggested that the myth translated the Oedipus complex “from the world of a child’s phantasy into pretended reality”.¹⁸⁷

Freud recognised that myths embody universal human themes and used the Oedipus myth to demonstrate the universality of patricidal and incestuous wishes.¹⁸⁸ Drawing on Otto Rank’s theory of the myth of the birth of the hero, Freud found that there are features common to all hero myths and that they contain the “essential substance” of the Oedipus complex.¹⁸⁹ In *Moses and Monotheism* Freud constructed a general “picture” of the essential features of the hero myth: the hero is typically the son of a king; his conception is difficult; during

¹⁸⁵ Gananath Obeyesekere notes that “Freud initially observed the complex in his own life; then in very scattered form, in dreams; he saw its parallelism with the myth; the myth then helped him to formalize the complex; then back to the myth to legitimise the complex” (*The Work of Culture: Symbolic Transformation in Psychoanalysis and Anthropology*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1990, pp.93-94).

¹⁸⁶ Velikovsky, p.19.

¹⁸⁷ Hamilton, p.234. See S. Freud, “An Outline of Psychoanalysis” (1940), *Standard Edition*, vol. 23, p.189.

¹⁸⁸ Hamilton, p.232. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud exposed “the kernel of the Oedipus situation” in terms of a widespread mythic theme (F. Vaz da Silva, *Metamorphosis: The Dynamics of Symbolism in European Fairy Tales*, New York, Peter Lang, 2002, p.184). According to Edmunds, Freud “transpos[ed] the legend ... into the unconscious [whereby] Oedipus is [not merely] the hero of a legend but [also] the name of a complex” (*Ancient Legend*, p.3).

¹⁸⁹ Hamilton, p.232.

gestation there is a prophecy implying a threat to the father; once born, the infant is exposed; the infant is rescued; as an adult, the hero discovers his biological parents.¹⁹⁰

Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* traces Oedipus' journey of discovery and considers the ramifications of his realisation that he committed "parrincest"¹⁹¹ - to use Pucci's potent term - he murdered his father and slept with his mother. Sophocles' play opens with a plague sweeping over the city of Thebes. In his description of the plague, the Priest speaks of the city "reeling like a wreck ... scarcely [able to] lift its prow out of the depths, out of the bloody surf ... [overcome by] a deadly pestilence ... [that] strikes and spares not".¹⁹² The plague is, in effect, a sign of dis-ease within the Royal House of Thebes – of the curse that haunts King Laius, and his son Oedipus. As Topliss suggests, "What is wrong with the ruler expresses itself, in a disguised form, in the body politic. It is not [difficult] to read the plague as the displaced symptomatic expression of the knowledge of a polluting deed that has been, in all other respects, successfully suppressed".¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.* See S. Freud, "Moses and Monotheism" (1939), *Standard Edition*, vol. 23, pp.10-11.

¹⁹¹ The term 'parrincest' is an amalgamation of Oedipus' two crimes, namely parricide and incest. Pucci uses the term throughout his work.

¹⁹² Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* (trans. D. Grene) in C.A. Robinson, ed., *An Anthology of Greek Drama*, New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967, pp.53-54.

¹⁹³ Topliss goes on to suggest that "[t]he plague symptoms are what Freud would call 'neurotic' symptoms: they have 'a sense'; they have 'a connection with the life of those who produce them'". I. Topliss,

Oedipus sends his brother-in-law Creon to consult Apollo who informs him that there is a murderer in Thebes who must be found before the plague will cease. The murderer must be exiled or put to death: “blood by blood, since it is murder guilt which holds [the] city in [a] storm of death”.¹⁹⁴ Oedipus promises to “bring [this] ... mysterious crime ... to light”¹⁹⁵ and, unaware that he is really cursing himself, prays that the murderer “wear out his life in misery to miserable doom”.¹⁹⁶

The blind seer Teiresias tells Oedipus that he is his father’s murderer: “you are the murderer of the king whose murderer you seek”,¹⁹⁷ but Oedipus ignores what he believes to be merely the ranting and raving of an old man who is “blind in mind and ears as well as in [his] eyes”.¹⁹⁸ Oedipus tells Jocasta who advises him to “not concern [himself] about this matter ... Give no heed [to oracles]”.¹⁹⁹ However, a messenger arrives from Corinth and confirms Teiresias’ words. The messenger tells Oedipus that he was abandoned as an infant, found by a shepherd, and raised by Polybus and Merope.

“Oedipus/Freud and the Psychoanalytic Narrative”, *Meridian*, 14(1), 1995, pp.15-30 at p.20.

¹⁹⁴ Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, p.56.

¹⁹⁵ *Id.* at p.57.

¹⁹⁶ *Id.* at p.61.

¹⁹⁷ *Id.* at p.64.

¹⁹⁸ *Id.* at p.65.

¹⁹⁹ *Id.* at pp.75-76.

According to Bloch, Freud ignores the first part of the myth dealing with Oedipus' abandonment.²⁰⁰ Instead, Freud focuses on the murder of the father by the son and marriage to the mother. While Freud emphasises the son's jealousy of his father and desire for his mother, he ignores the parents' initial wish for infanticide as the first step in the Oedipal conflict.²⁰¹ According to Rogowski, Freud "ignores crucial components of the myth, in effect reversing its logic by ascribing destructive erotic desires to infants while disregarding the impact of violent parental behaviour".²⁰²

In Sophocles' drama, the issue assumes an even greater significance in relation to Jocasta's portrayal as the "fatefully destructive mother of Oedipus".²⁰³ Benjamin suggests that Freud's reading of the Oedipus myth conceals the father's attempted murder of his infant son, and projects the negative qualities of the 'archaic, dangerous father' onto the mother.²⁰⁴ In Sophocles' play, the mother is portrayed as dangerous, destructive, and deadly.

²⁰⁰ D. Bloch, "Some Dynamics of Suffering: Effect of the Wish for Infanticide in a Case of Schizophrenia", *Psychoanalytic Review*, 53(4), 1966-67, pp.31-54 at p.32.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² C. Rogowski, "The Myth of Medea and the Murder of Children", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 37(3), 2000, pp.361-364 at p.361.

²⁰³ M. Ashe and N. Cahn, "Child Abuse: A Problem for Feminist Theory", *Texas Journal of Women and the Law*, 2, 1993, pp.75-112 at p.80.

²⁰⁴ J. Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination*, London, Virago, 1990, p.146.

In the second episode of the play, Jocasta laments the loss of her son: "... my son - / before three days were out / after his birth King Laius pierced his ankles / and by the hands of others cast his forth / upon a pathless hillside".²⁰⁵ Despite Jocasta's appearance as the grieving and blameless mother in this episode, she is later implicated as infanticide. Although Jocasta places the blame for the abandonment and supposed death of her son Oedipus on her husband, we later learn that Jocasta's expression of grief merely conceals her guilt. The Theban servant makes it clear that Jocasta decided to kill the infant – she wanted the child destroyed:

Servant: The child was called [Laius'] child;
... your wife would tell you best
how all this was.

Oedipus: *She* gave it to you?

Servant: Yes, she did, my lord.

Oedipus: To do what with it?

Servant: To destroy it.

Oedipus: She was so hard ... its mother?

Servant: Aye, through fear of evil oracles.²⁰⁶

Sophocles affords primary responsibility to Jocasta – not only through her own admission of guilt but through the exoneration of Laius for his failure to heed the oracle's prophecy and avoid bearing a child. Jocasta is blamed for seducing Laius, and it is she who "wail[s] for Laius, long

²⁰⁵ Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, p.76.

²⁰⁶ Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, p.90; italics in text.

dead / ... remember[ing] that night long past which bred a child / to send [Laius] to [his] death".²⁰⁷ Jocasta is implicated both in her role as infanticidal mother and for bearing a son who would ultimately murder his father, the king.

Oedipus takes the place of his father as Jocasta's husband. However, the happiness of their marriage is in stark contrast to the loveless relationship between Laius and Jocasta whose marital bed remained empty for many years. According to Slater, Oedipus "[i]s the recipient of an 'overload' of sexual impulses from the deprived mother, who we assume [is] more seductive in her relationship with him than she would have been had her marital relationship been more satisfying".²⁰⁸ Jocasta uses Oedipus as a repository "for fantasies of an ideal mate ... someone she could see as leading her to a better life".²⁰⁹ She fulfils her fantasy by marrying her son.

Stewart suggests that Jocasta "consciously wanted Laius' death"²¹⁰ and was well aware of her incestuous relationship with her son. According to Stewart, the incestuous relationship between Jocasta and Oedipus is a "phantasy unity [through which] [t]he husband's penis can

²⁰⁷ *Id.* at p.92.

²⁰⁸ Slater and Slater, "Maternal Ambivalence", p.242.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ H. Stewart, "Jocasta's Crimes", *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 42, 1961, pp.424-430 at p.427.

be denied and destroyed”.²¹¹ She did not want her husband’s killer punished because she knew the killer’s true identity. According to some sources, Jocasta witnessed the death of Laius.²¹² Stewart proposes that if this was the case, “the identity of the murderer must have been obvious to Jocasta”.²¹³ Moreover, the state of Oedipus’ ankles “told a tale which should have alerted Jocasta to the fact that he was the infant son with rivetted ankles who she exposed on Mount Cithaeron.”²¹⁴ For Stewart, Jocasta is guilty of both “wanting and not punishing her husband’s death, and of seducing her son in full knowledge”.²¹⁵

²¹¹ *Id.* at p.429.

²¹² *Id.* at p.426. See also Devereux, p.134; Rank, *Incest Motif*.

²¹³ Stewart, p.427.

²¹⁴ *Id.* at p.425. Bross likewise argues that Oedipus’ deformed feet “surely must have stirred Jocasta’s memory; what were the probabilities that a stranger would have pierced feet (and be called Swollen-foot=Oedipus) ... Jocasta should have strongly surmised that the possibility existed that Oedipus was her son”. M. Bross, “Oedipus and Jocasta: A Re-examination of Freud’s Drama of Destiny” in P. Hartocollis and I. Davidson Graham, eds, *The Personal Myth in Psychoanalytic Theory*, Connecticut, International Universities Press, 1991, pp.161-181 at pp.167-168. Bross also notes other ‘coincidences’ such as the similarity between the appearance of Laius and Oedipus and the fact that Oedipus is the same age her supposedly dead son would have been if he were alive.

²¹⁵ Stewart, p.427. See also Naiman and Valeri-Tomaszuk who agree with Stewart and suggest that “Sophocles may have wished to suggest that Jocasta knew the identity of Oedipus all the time”. J. Naiman and P. Valeri-Tomaszuk, “Sophocles’ *King Oedipus* and Self-Analysis” in, P. Hartocollis and I. Davidson Graham, eds, *The Personal Myth in Psychoanalytic Theory*, Connecticut, International Universities Press, 1991, pp.111-147 at p.133. Baines makes an interesting comparison between Sophocles’ Queen Jocasta and Horace Walpole’s Countess of Narbonne in his eighteenth century tragedy *The Mysterious Mother*. If we follow Stewart’s argument, Sophocles’ Jocasta hangs herself when she learns that Oedipus knows the true identity of his parents (not because she herself learns the truth). Walpole’s Countess of Narbonne who, like Jocasta, sleeps with her own son, and “has borne the knowledge of this truth all along,

For Kanzer, Jocasta is a pre-oedipal bad mother.²¹⁶ As an infant, Oedipus turns away from the persecuting bad mother Jocasta to the good aloe or 'other' mother Merope. However, as Stewart notes, both Jocasta and his foster mother Merope forbid Oedipus from contemplating his origins²¹⁷ and, in so doing, deny him the assurance of mother love he so desperately craves. When he learns that he is adopted, Oedipus replaces both mother figures with an imago: "I account myself a child of Fortune, / beneficent Fortune, and I shall not be / dishonoured. She's the mother from whom I sprang".²¹⁸

Oedipus' maternal imago is a consoling fantasy and a manifestation of adoption trauma. According to Hamilton, adopted children imagine an initial "rejecting, filicidal, foeticidal mother"²¹⁹ who abandons her infant. In the "post-adoptive idyllic period", the children also experience

stabs herself". P. Baines, "This Theatre of Monstrous Guilt: Horace Walpole and the Drama of Incest", *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, 28, 1999, pp.287-309 at p.287. Perhaps in both contexts, suicide is an affirmation of the mother's knowledge of the son's true identity and the sinfulness of their sexual transgression. Olivier suggests that the questions we are forced to ask about Jocasta's knowledge of her son's/husband's identity reflect the phallogocentric stories we have been told "in which *the mother never seems absent, or innocent*". C. Olivier, *Jocasta's Children: The Imprint of the Mother* (1980), trans. George Craig, London, Routledge, 1989, p.2; my italics.
²¹⁶ M. Kanzer, "The Oedipus Trilogy", *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 19, 1950, pp.561-572 at p.564.

²¹⁷ Stewart, p.424.

²¹⁸ Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, p.87. Oedipus is himself a *mythisant* or 'mythmaker' who creates his "own personal narrativ[e] [in which he tries] to make sense out of a history ... that eludes [him]". M. Greenberg, "Racine, Oedipus, and Absolute Fantasies", *Diacritics*, 28(3), 1998, pp.40-61 at p.47.

²¹⁹ Hamilton, p.235.

conflict and fantasise their possible rejection by the adoptive mother who may also harbour infanticidal wishes.²²⁰ Children's infanticide phantasies stem from the "unconscious perception that [they were] rejected".²²¹ Children imagine that they were a disappointment to the biological mother and also to the adoptive mother who, "when disappointed, [might] wish or threaten to return [them] to the foster home or agency".²²² Hamilton suggests that phantasies of pre-natal and post-natal conflict result in pathological children who exhibit "extremely vengeful, destructive"²²³ behaviour. Initially, Oedipus "tries to avoid the painful truth that he was not wanted"²²⁴ by imagining that he is 'born by chance' and that Fortune is thus his real mother. Later, Oedipus is forced to confront the harsh reality - "the woman he loved and married had cast him out to die on a barren hillside".²²⁵

The journey of the hero Oedipus is as much an escape from maternal origins as it is a return. Indeed, Pucci notes that "[we] encounter not only ... the stern figure of the mother who killed her child ... but also the body of the mother in its polymorphous availability".²²⁶ She is, Stewart

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Id.* at p.236.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ Pucci, p.104.

suggests, both a persecutory and idealised object.²²⁷ According to Hillman, origins lie beyond the real, in the world of imagination or fancy – the *mundus imaginalis* – and as such remain ‘enigmatic’ and a constant source of psychological anxiety.²²⁸ The journey of the hero is as much a physical as a psychical endeavour. It enacts a psychological battle with the mother (“surely I must fear my mother’s bed?”²²⁹) and an incestuous return. Oedipus rejects the (aloe) mother Merope as a visible denial of his desire but is unconsciously drawn to his biological mother Jocasta. According to Hillman, abandonment is both a necessary condition for the “independence and invincibility of the child-becoming-hero” and “a permanent psychological reality, not to be cured but to be enacted”.²³⁰ If we follow Hillman’s analysis, Oedipus is abandoned by his mother and transforms from a child into a hero who defeats the Sphinx. In his search for his origins, Oedipus returns to the mother who abandoned him and enacts that aspect of the self which desires a (re)union with her. Engaging in a sexual relationship with his mother, Oedipus abandons his “mature heroic self” to his “inner child”²³¹ who craves the physical and emotional intimacy denied him as a boy.

²²⁷ Stewart, p.429.

²²⁸ Hillman, pp.388-389.

²²⁹ Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, p.83.

²³⁰ Hillman, pp.378; 400.

²³¹ *Id.* at p.400.

Nonetheless, Van der Sterren notes that “there is a sadistic element [in their] sexual passion ... it is clear that Oedipus is hostile towards his mother and that he even desires her death because her seductive powers bring him into danger of punishment and guilty conscience”.²³² When Oedipus realises that Jocasta is his mother, he “shout[s] and ... pace[s] frantically around”.²³³ He tells his attendant to bring him a sword “to find this wife no wife, this mother’s womb, / this field of double sowing whence I sprang / and where I sowed my children”.²³⁴ Rudnytsky suggests that Oedipus requests the sword in order to kill Jocasta,²³⁵ and possibly himself. He “charges” inside her room but finds Jocasta “hanging, the twisted rope around her neck”.²³⁶ Pucci sees Oedipus’ irruption or penetration into Jocasta’s room as a symbolic return to the womb but equally notes that “[h]is rage against Jocasta is manifest in the violence with which he enters [her room]”.²³⁷ Sophocles emphasises the ambivalence of their mother/son relationship by juxtaposing filial love with

²³² H.A. Van der Sterren, “The ‘King Oedipus’ of Sophocles”, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 33, 1952, pp.344-350 at p.348.

²³³ Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, pp.92-93.

²³⁴ *Id.* at p.92.

²³⁵ On this point Rudnytsky is adamant: “there can be no doubt that [Oedipus] wished to use [the sword] to *kill Jocasta*, in response to having learned that she sought to destroy him in infancy” (p.258, italics in text).

²³⁶ Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, p.92. According to Shengold, “[h]er suicide forestalls his murderous intent” (“Parent”, p.731).

²³⁷ Pucci, p.262. Shengold describes the scene as follows: “In a frenzy, calling for a sword, crying out for his mother’s womb, [Oedipus] breaks into the room where Jocasta is, rending the doors with superhuman power” (“Parent”, p.731).

maternal love and focusing on the sexual desire that blurs the boundaries between them.

Jocasta and the Sphinx

Several critics observe similarities between the death of Jocasta and the Sphinx, and draw parallels between the mother and the monster. Neumann suggests that the Sphinx is the archetypal Terrible Mother, “the all-inclusive symbol of [the] devouring aspect of the unconscious”.²³⁸ Oedipus’ defeat of the monster that “bear[s] the mark of the maternal”²³⁹ is a symbolic “self-deliverance from the tyranny of an overpowering mother”.²⁴⁰

Drawing on Neumann, Stewart suggests that the Sphinx represents “the internal persecuting mother-figure [that] has been constantly denied (split off) by Jocasta”.²⁴¹ While her monstrous actions are concealed, the persecuting mother-figure is contained much like the Sphinx silently waiting for her next victim. When her monstrous actions threaten to be revealed, the persecuting mother engulfs Jocasta and she commits suicide. Stewart notes that the Sphinx is also known as the ‘throtter’ and the way in which Jocasta commits suicide – by hanging – is a form of throttling, the implication being that the Sphinx has

²³⁸ Neumann, *Origins*, p.161. On this point, Reik notes that the Sphinx is one half of what Jung called “the ‘mother imago’ which may be described as the imago of the ‘terrible mother’, of whom numerous traces may be found in mythology” (*Dogma*, p.295).

²³⁹ M.J. Reineke, *Sacrificed Lives: Kristeva on Women and Violence*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997, p.157.

²⁴⁰ Velikovsky, p.32.

²⁴¹ Stewart, p.429.

throttled Jocasta.²⁴² Róheim similarly notes that the Sphinx represents the “ambiguous, enticing and dangerous” aspects of the mother – “[t]he danger inseparable from her [is] something unconscious which [is] expressed in the language of consciousness as a riddle to be solved”.²⁴³

In his book *The Gates of the Dream*, Róheim considers a modern Greek folk tale in which a prince attempts to solve three riddles presented by a queen sitting on a rock in the city of Thebes. If the prince answers incorrectly, the queen will devour him. If he is able to solve the riddles, the queen will marry him:

The first riddle is this: What is it that devours its own children? Answer: The ocean, because

²⁴² *Ibid.* We should note Van der Sterren’s observation that there is a parallel between Jocasta’s suicide and that of the Sphinx (who, in one version, throws herself from a cliff upon hearing Oedipus’ answer to her riddle). Van der Sterren suggests that the definite boundaries drawn by some theorists between the Sphinx as ‘bad mother’ and Jocasta as ‘good mother’ tend to ignore important relationships between them. He writes: “The Sphinx therefore is the menacing, dangerous creature, and Jocasta the attractive, loving woman. But in the background Jocasta also appears dangerous and hostile, and Oedipus is her enemy” (p.347).

²⁴³ Róheim, *Riddle of the Sphinx*, p.3. Discussing the theories of those who believe that the Sphinx is a secondary aspect of the Oedipus legend, Reik suggests that “the introduction of the Sphinx should be regarded as the isolation of certain obnoxious features of the mother. But after the introduction of the Sphinx her proper maternal character was effaced by subsequent waves of repression. The original violation of the mother was replaced by a conflict with the Sphinx, and only in later versions was this transformed into an intellectual contest” (*Dogma*, p.326). For proponents of the ‘secondary aspect’ theory see Edmunds, “The Sphinx in the Oedipus Legend”, pp.147-173. For an opposing view see G. Cox, *The Mythology of the Aryan Nations*, New York, Kennikat, 1969.

the rivers come from the ocean and flow back into it. The second riddle: It is white and black and never ages. Answer: Time consists of day and night and is always there. And the third riddle is the one solved by Oedipus.²⁴⁴

From this folk tale, Róheim discerns a relationship between the devouring aspects of the Terrible Mother incorporated by the Sphinx and the infanticidal/incestual mother Jocasta. According to Róheim, “[t]he answers to the first two riddles cannot be independent of the answer to the last one. Indeed, the Sphinx or Jocasta herself is the mother who devours her own son. This applies also to the second answer; the attitude toward the mother is *ambivalent* and in the unconscious it does not age”.²⁴⁵

Róheim regards the Sphinx as a nightmare demon whose very name is derived from the Greek word for nightmare and who manifests herself to Oedipus as fearful ‘night mother’ (*nightmère*).²⁴⁶ In his dreams Oedipus confronts the devouring mother of his unconscious and attempts to resolve the anxieties that plague infants in the oral stage of development.²⁴⁷ Both the Sphinx and Jocasta reflect infantile fantasies of engulfment and mutilation – the

²⁴⁴ G. Róheim, *The Gates of the Dream*, New York, International Universities Press, 1952, p.529.

²⁴⁵ *Id.* at p.530; italics in text.

²⁴⁶ See Chapter 1 of this work for more about the etymology of the word ‘nightmare’.

²⁴⁷ Leonard Shengold suggests that “the Sphinx most meaningfully represents ... the primal parent ... who emerges in ontogenetic development as the bad mother of the oral-sadistic [pre-oedipal] stage – the cannibalistic mother” (“Parent”, p.726).

Sphinx being a devourer - “the monstrous woman who eats children”,²⁴⁸ and Jocasta being a mutilator (in some versions the one who mutilates/orders the mutilation of her infant son’s feet/phallus²⁴⁹). In the previous chapter we saw that wicked witches and monstrous ogresses in children’s fairy tales are projections of the oral frustrations of the infant who splits the mother into both an idealised and monstrous imago. In the Oedipus tale, the Sphinx is the ‘bad’ persecutory mother of infantile phantasy:

The Sphinx is a female being who flies down on those it wishes to devour. It catches them with its claws, flies away with them and eats them. Therefore she is the answer to the first riddle, the mother who devours her children. And if we assume that the time concept is derived from the oral frustration of the infant then time is again the Sphinx mother in person.²⁵⁰

Only Oedipus is able to solve the Sphinx’s riddle and “kill the nightmare”,²⁵¹ as Róheim puts it. Róheim stresses the significance of Oedipus’ slaying of the Sphinx. Oedipus’ nightmare or ‘anxiety dream’ expresses “the never-ending

²⁴⁸ Róheim, *Gates*, p.533.

²⁴⁹ We should also note the remnant of infantile fear once Oedipus is fully grown – his fear of his mother’s bed might be read as a fear of the castrating mother. See also Krauss who notes a Slavic variant of the Oedipal tale in which the mother represents the castration threat. Róheim similarly notes several castrating noon-day demons of Slavic folklore such as the *Prepolnica* whose body is covered with hair (an image evocative of female genitalia) and who cuts off the ‘heads’ of young men with her sickle (the *vagina dentata*) (*Gates*, p.534).

²⁵⁰ Róheim, *Gates*, p.530.

²⁵¹ *Id.* at p.531.

conflict between man's longing for the [mother/maternal-feminine] and his dread of her".²⁵² The mother is transformed into "the man-eating Sphinx"²⁵³ who, in one version, Oedipus slays with his sword. The stabbing or penetrating action of the sword is, for Róheim, a masked variant of the phallus entering the vagina – "coitus takes place in the veiled form of stabbing with a sword. The phallic hero overcomes the anxiety of the oral stage ... the anxiety-distorted image of the mother is the Sphinx. The hero stabs the devouring mother with his sword. The penis is the weapon of victory".²⁵⁴ But the death of the

²⁵² K. Horney, "The Dread of Woman: Observations on a Specific Difference in the Dread Felt by Men and by Women Respectively for the Opposite Sex", *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 13, 1932, pp.348-360 at p.349.

²⁵³ Róheim, *Gates*, p.533.

²⁵⁴ *Id.* at pp.533; 536. Later in his discussion Róheim expresses this point another way in terms of the requirement for a successful transition into adulthood: "the male who conquers anxiety (the Sphinx) achieves genitality" (p.543). In other words, the male who overcomes his anxiety and fear of the monstrous mother through unconscious sublimation (internalising the idea of the mother as 'other') successfully separates from the mother. According to Smith, "[t]he male psyche eventually develops to the stage where it seeks to possess a woman or women to replace the mother as a source of gratification" (*Neurotic*, p.193). Kanzer suggests that the hero's slaying of female monsters such as the riddling Sphinx "symbolically depict[s] the dangers that the young man must overcome before he may attain his sexual partner" (pp.562-563). Creed considers the etymology of the Sphinx's name, "derived from 'sphincter', [which] suggests she is the mother of toilet training, the pre-oedipal mother who must be repudiated by the son ...". B. Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection", *Screen*, 27(1), 1986, pp.44-70 at p.61. Shengold similarly notes that "[t]he entire riddle is about ... moving away from the mother – and, in answering it, Oedipus establishes his identity and his manhood" ("Parent", p.728). Shengold's analysis also highlights the similarities between this scene, in which Oedipus slays the Sphinx, and the later episode in which Oedipus penetrates Jocasta's bedroom chamber, sword in hand. Shengold suggests that the full extent of "mother-son hostility is seen [in the later episode] after Oedipus knows the full truth. The

monstrous Sphinx is never final – she is repressed in the unconscious as a lurking evil force that threatens death and destruction. While her image transforms throughout the ages, the threat to man is always the same: “through her he might die and be undone”.²⁵⁵

Vaz da Silva accepts Róheim’s suggestion that Jocasta is the human facet of the Sphinx²⁵⁶ and proposes that Oedipus has a “murderous/incestuous link to the Sphinx/mother”.²⁵⁷ Vaz da Silva makes clear the relationship between intellectual and sexual knowing to which I alluded earlier. Drawing on the work of folklorist Vladimir Propp, in particular his *Morphology of the Folktale*,²⁵⁸ and his own study of fairy tale metamorphoses, Vaz da Silva proposes that there is an “equivalence between riddle solving and incest ... Oedipus’ solving of the enigma put forward by the Sphinx

scene represents a pre-oedipal sadistic encounter with the mother, and also a primal scene expressed in regressive sadistic terms. The mother, reduced to her sexual parts, is to be attacked with cannibalistic furore. Again Oedipus confronts the Sphinx, via identification and object relationship” (“Parent”, p.731). Like Shengold, Huntley suggests that “the imagined dangers to be faced at the hands of the torturing, devouring, pre-oedipal mother [are] united with the imagined dangers of loss of self in sexual union with Jocasta. The shades of the Sphinx become reborn again in his mind as he subjectively distorts intrapsychically the external image of Jocasta to identify her with the Sphinx”. M. Huntley, “Oedipus and the Process of Maturation in Man and Society” in P. Hartocollis and I. Davidson Graham, eds, *The Personal Myth in Psychoanalytic Theory*, Connecticut, International Universities Press, 1991, pp.331-353 at p.343.

²⁵⁵ Horney, “Dread of Woman”, p.349.

²⁵⁶ Róheim, *Gates*, p.535.

²⁵⁷ Vaz da Silva, p.189.

²⁵⁸ V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. L. Scott, ed. L.A. Wagner, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1968.

is equivalent ... to an amorous connection – an incestuous one”.²⁵⁹ Propp suggests that Oedipus breaks the power of the Sphinx through sexual intercourse.²⁶⁰ For Róheim, the riddle of the Sphinx is concerned with coitus, “and the fact that her death coincides with its solution suggests that she is herself its object”.²⁶¹

Oedipus’ solving of the riddle is also tantamount to dragon-slaying and, if Jocasta is one aspect of the Sphinx, to mother-murder.²⁶² Bunker takes the point one step further to suggest that mother-murder itself is equivalent to incest.²⁶³ The association between murder and incest is made clear both in the fact that the death of the Sphinx coincides with coitus with Jocasta and in the allusions to Oedipus’ use of his symbolically phallic sword that appears firstly (in one version) when Oedipus slays the

²⁵⁹ *Id.* at p.188.

²⁶⁰ V. Propp, “Oedipus in the Light of Folklore”, p.109.

²⁶¹ Róheim, *Riddle of the Sphinx*, p.7.

²⁶² We should remember here Velikovsky’s suggestion that the overcoming of the female monster (that embodies the repulsive traits of the mother) equals the overcoming of the mother (p.32). Note also Róheim’s observation: “The Sphinx is both a woman and a lion. Her form is partly derived from Greek folk-superstition, where she appears as a wanton strangler, a demon, or any other kind of children’s bogey; though *ultimately she is identical with Jocasta herself*” (*Riddle of the Sphinx*, p.7; my italics. According to Creed, “Oedipus has always been seen to have committed two horrific crimes: patricide and incest. But his encounter with the Sphinx, which leads to her death, suggests that he is also responsible for another horrific crime – that of matricide” (“Horror”, p.61).

²⁶³ Bunker, pp.202; 207.

Sphinx, and secondly when Oedipus penetrates the bedroom chamber of Jocasta.²⁶⁴

Jocasta's crime(s) and punishment

In the final episode of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the Second Messenger tells the audience that Oedipus "rushed on the two doors [to Jocasta's bedroom], - wrenching the hollow bolts out of their sockets",²⁶⁵ an image that foreshadows Oedipus' "dashing [out] his own eyeballs"²⁶⁶ from their sockets. When he finds Jocasta already dead, Oedipus takes the gold brooches securing her clothes and uses them to "str[ike] his eyes again and yet again ... the bleeding eyeballs gush[ing] and stain[ing] his beard ... a black rain and bloody hail pour[ing] down".²⁶⁷

Oedipus' ocular mutilation reminds us of the mutilation of his feet as a child. Indeed, Rudnytsky notes that the Messenger returns us to this infanticidal scene by referring to Oedipus as 'child'.²⁶⁸ The use of his mother's brooches implicates Jocasta as destroyer. Kanzer suggests that the mother's brooches are "another version of the talons of the Sphinx".²⁶⁹ For Kanzer, the claws of the bestial Sphinx are identical to the brooches of the

²⁶⁴ For Frank, the doors to Jocasta's room "suggest the female labia". B. Frank, "Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*", *Explicator*, 51(1), 1992, pp.5-6 at p.5.

²⁶⁵ Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, p.93.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ Rudnytsky, *Freud and Oedipus*, p.260.

²⁶⁹ Kanzer, p.564.

phallic mother. Oedipus succumbs to the Sphinx he once overcame and to the overpowering mother. Oedipus' self-blinding is a "fantasy of coitus and orgasm ... depicted as a sadistic and castrating attack from the maternal phallus".²⁷⁰ In his act of self-mutilation, Oedipus transforms from phallic aggressor to passive recipient of the mother's deadly and destructive force.²⁷¹ The scene resonates with the fearfulness and foreboding of a nightmare, the 'child' Oedipus haunted once again by the horrifying maternal imagos of infancy. These phantoms of the night drive Oedipus to his monstrous act ("led by some invisible guide ... [who] showed him the way"²⁷²).

Pucci proposes that Oedipus' self-blinding is a symbolic castration inflicted upon himself as a form of punishment for his incestuous relationship with Jocasta.²⁷³ But Oedipus refuses to assume all the blame. Oedipus

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ Note however Frank who suggests that Oedipus is both aggressor and victim: "Oedipus takes on Jocasta's persona and rapes his own eyes with her 'phalluses'. The blood gushes down and stains his beard – the pubic region, as it were, of his pierced eyes" (p.6). Frank suggests that this is Jocasta's revenge on Oedipus for his insatiable desire for his mother. However, we must wonder whether Frank is also alluding to Jocasta's fantasised revenge on Laius for raping her (one version) or Oedipus' fantasised revenge on Jocasta for seducing Laius (another version). Or is this Jocasta's fantasised revenge on Oedipus who has not assumed his mother's persona but that of his father, the rapist?

²⁷² Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, p.93.

²⁷³ Pucci, p.208. See also Caldwell who suggests that "[t]he tragedy of Oedipus is a tragedy of knowledge ... but it is a tragedy of sex as well, for the knowledge of self-identity brings with it the knowledge of sexuality" (p.216) and knowledge of the limitations of both. R.S. Caldwell, "The Blindness of Oedipus", *International Review of Psychoanalysis*, 1, 1974, pp.207-218.

simultaneously acknowledges his transgression and accuses his mother. As he lifts the brooches to his face, Oedipus cries out: “they will never see *the crime I have committed or had done upon me*”.²⁷⁴ Pucci suggests that Oedipus’ self-blinding is also punishment for the crime of patricide and for his ‘unspoken’ agreement with the complicitous Jocasta²⁷⁵ who had long (been) denied her husband’s penis and desired its destruction.²⁷⁶ Oedipus’ violent and frenzied actions suggest an urgent need to “purge himself of her complicity”²⁷⁷ and of the knowledge that she is infanticide.

Perhaps Oedipus’ actions are a phantasised punishment of the mother who would kill her child. Oedipus enters Jocasta’s bedroom with a sword, only to find her dead. At this point, Pucci notes, Oedipus must have understood “the symbolism of the plague, of the diseased infertility of the earth, reverse image of Jocasta’s excessive fertility”.²⁷⁸ When he enters her chamber, Oedipus “wants to strike that diseased womb ...”.²⁷⁹ Jocasta anticipates his coming “and by choking herself ... close[s] up her

²⁷⁴ Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, p.93, my italics.

²⁷⁵ Pucci, pp.260-262.

²⁷⁶ Stewart, p.429. In this respect, Olivier draws our attention to Freud’s equation: penis = child (p.5). In the context of Sophocles’ drama, the equation is frightening – Jocasta’s desire for the destruction of the phallus is a thinly veiled wish for infanticide.

²⁷⁷ Pucci, p.260.

²⁷⁸ *Id.* at p.152.

²⁷⁹ Frank suggests that Oedipus “intends to thrust his sword into [Jocasta’s] offending womb, which ironically would emulate the sexual act one last time” (p.5).

body's openness and fertility".²⁸⁰ The striking action of the sword that Oedipus would have used on his mother's body is displaced onto his own, the rage he feels towards Jocasta apparent in the repeated and forceful gouging of his eyes.

Jocasta produces four children (her grandchildren) with Oedipus, her fecundity a sign of monstrousness in an incestuously unnatural reproductive cycle. Oedipus breaks the power of the mother, replacing the "fruitful plenty" of birth with the "lifeless sterility" of death.²⁸¹ Jocasta's deadly womb can no longer produce monstrosities. The oozing and seemingly endless flow of blood streaming from Oedipus' eyes merges and mingles with Jocasta's own blood of death – her literal death from the noose that chokes the blood flow to her head and the symbolic death of a child miscarried/mistreated.²⁸² The blood of life now reeks with the stench of death and Oedipus is relegated to the land of the living dead – separated physically and psychically from the mother(land) as site of origin and origin of oedipal anxiety.²⁸³

²⁸⁰ Pucci, p.152.

²⁸¹ Pucci, p.152.

²⁸² For Frank, Jocasta herself "becomes the newborn, the dead infant that Oedipus should have been" (pp.5-6). Oedipus "sever[s] the 'twisted' umbilical cord" (p.6) – the nourishing link between mother and child becomes a symbol of their irreparably damaged mother/son relationship - a broken tie that no longer binds them.

²⁸³ Focusing on the notion of mother/child symbiosis, Huntley suggests that "Oedipus does not function as an independent man but is a man only as an extension of the mother" (p.341). We may infer from Huntley's comment that when Oedipus finds his dead mother, he feels as though a part of himself (his very soul) has also been

Olivier berates Freud for neglecting the role of Jocasta in the play.²⁸⁴ It seems only fitting then, that we conclude our consideration of the Oedipus myth with the words of psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, who saw Jocasta as a pivotal figure whose infanticidal wishes not only set in motion the Oedipus tale but also bring it to its horrific conclusion:

Jocasta's crime is that of not having fulfilled her duty as a mother; she had wanted to kill her child ... It is she who by committing this crime starts the chain of events which eventually lead to her own and to her husband's and son's destruction ... the myth ... proposes that the mother by violating her

excised. He makes his inner pain manifest in the physical extraction of his eyes – the windows to the soul. A soulless/blinded, motherless child, Oedipus withdraws from the mother(land) that can no longer afford him succour, the memory of the awful sight/site of his dead mother etched in both his mind and on his body as scars from the brooch pins that viscerally inscribed his psychical pain. Note also Rank's view that "blindness in the deepest sense represents a return into the darkness of the mother's womb". O. Rank, *The Trauma of Birth*, New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1924, pp.44-45.

²⁸⁴ Olivier, see in particular pp.1-10. See also Bross who states that "it is somewhat puzzling that Freud, aside from passing references, never examined and interpreted [Jocasta's] role in the drama vis-à-vis Oedipus", p.164. Several feminist theorists including Hélène Cixous and Cathérine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (1975), trans. Betsy Wing, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986), Julia Kristeva (see essays in *The Kristeva Reader*, Toril Moi ed., Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986), and Luce Irigaray (see in particular her essay "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother" (1981), trans. David Macey in *The Irigaray Reader: Luce Irigaray*, Margaret Whitford ed., Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1991, pp.34-46) similarly criticise Freud for failing to adequately consider the mother in the Oedipal scenario. For more on feminist critiques of Freud see for example, Susan Suleiman, "Pornography, Transgression, and the Avant-Garde: Bataille's *Story of the Eye*" in *The Poetics of Gender*, Nancy Miller ed., New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, pp.117-136; Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1989; Madelon Sprengnether, *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1990.

paramount duty brought about her own
destruction.²⁸⁵

The murderous mother cannot be tolerated by the Greek patriarchs. What about the murder of the mother?

Return of the repressed

In her critique of the Freudian version of the mythical foundations of social order, feminist theorist Luce Irigaray draws her reader into the world of an unimagined past through her provocative questioning of the unconscious underpinnings of patriarchy. Irigaray asks us to question the acceptability of the “edifice that looks so clean and subtle ... [t]he culture, the language, the imaginary and the mythology in which we live at the moment”.²⁸⁶ Through her rereading of Freud, Irigaray exposes that which has been repressed in the cultural archives of the West. In *Totem and Taboo*²⁸⁷ Freud proposed that Western culture is founded on an act of patricide whereby the primal horde of sons kill the primordial father in order to possess his wives. Irigaray contends that Freud’s theory “forget[s] an even more ancient murder, that of the woman-mother, which was necessary to the foundation of a specific order in the city”.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁵ Fromm, “Oedipus Complex”, p.433.

²⁸⁶ Irigaray, p.47.

²⁸⁷ S. Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, trans. J. Strachey, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950.

²⁸⁸ L. Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies* (1987), trans. G.C. Gill, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993, p.11.

In her book *Sexes and Genealogies*, Irigaray unveils her-story of the matricidal origins of patriarchy. Irigaray contends that “our society and our culture operate on the basis of an original matricide ... our imaginary still works according to the schema set in place by Greek mythology and tragedy”.²⁸⁹ Thus, when Irigaray rereads Freud, she also looks back to Greek mythology, locating other originary stories. According to Aristodemou, Freud’s focus on the patricidal origins of social order conceals another earlier story – the murder of Clytemnestra by her son Orestes.²⁹⁰ In Aeschylus’ trilogy, the *Oresteia* (written forty years before Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*), “what is repressed returns to claim its place alongside or instead of the myth of the murder of the father”.²⁹¹

The story of the mythical hero Orestes begins with the murder of his father, Agamemnon, by his mother, Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus. Reasons for the murder of Agamemnon include the following: he killed Clytemnestra’s first husband Tatalus and their new-born child; he took Clytemnestra to be his wife by force; he took a lover, Cassandra, who bore him two sons; he went away to a long and enduring war; he sacrificed his daughter

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ M. Aristodemou, *Law and Literature: Journeys From Her to Eternity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p.9.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Iphigenia.²⁹² The murder of Agamemnon takes place when he returns from the Trojan War.

Clytemnestra draws a bath for her husband and prepares a banquet feast. As he steps out of the bath, Clytemnestra throws a net over his head and “[e]ntangle[s] [him] in this, like a fish”.²⁹³ Aegisthus stabs Agamemnon twice with his sword. As he topples backwards into the bath, Clytemnestra chops off his head with an axe and then does the same to Cassandra.²⁹⁴ Kerényi suggests that “[i]t might [also] have been part of the plan ... to murder ... her own son, Orestes”.²⁹⁵ In some versions Orestes is saved by his nurse who allows her own son to be slaughtered instead of Orestes.²⁹⁶ In other versions, Orestes is saved

²⁹² See the following Chapter of this work for further discussion of Clytemnestra’s motivation for the murder of her husband.

²⁹³ Graves, *Greek*, p.53. Slater notes that “[t]he method of killing seems to play upon fears of maternal entanglement ... the returning warrior [is] enveloped, but, unlike the maternal monster-slayers, he cannot cut his way out, and is destroyed” (*Hera*, p.178).

²⁹⁴ Kerényi notes a version in which Clytemnestra murders Cassandra first (*Heroes*, p.334). We may draw a parallel between Clytemnestra and her decapitation of Agamemnon, and the biblical Judith who beheaded Holofernes. For consideration of the latter see M. Jacobus, *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986.

²⁹⁵ Kerényi, *Heroes*, p.334.

²⁹⁶ Slater notes that the nurse plays the role of ‘good mother’ (*Hera*, p.181). Green also makes an important point in this respect: “the nurse is given an entire scene in which the most moving maternal feelings are expressed through her lips. She is obviously an image of healing, in contrast with the terrifying Clytemnestra. As the dispenser of the attentions that fulfil the child’s most primitive needs, she moves us by her devotion”. A. Green, *The Tragic Effect: The Oedipus Complex in Tragedy* (1969), trans. A. Sheridan, London, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p.48. Significantly, Orestes imagines his mother as the one who fails to provide ‘good milk’.

by his sister Electra.²⁹⁷ Both Clytemnestra and Aegithus fear the return of Orestes and offer a reward for his murder. On advice from Apollo, the now adult Orestes returns to Mycenae to avenge the murder of his father.

The night before her murder, Clytemnestra dreams that she bears a serpent that bites her breast, drawing a mixture of blood and milk. The palace women recount Clytemnestra's dream to Orestes who interprets the serpent as symbolizing himself: "this snake came forth from the same place as I ... / Its gaping mouth clutching the breast that once fed me ... / the sweet milk mingled with curds of blood ...".²⁹⁸ In the words of Graves, Orestes "declare[s] that he would indeed play the cunning serpent and draw blood from her false body".²⁹⁹ Orestes affords the dream the power of a premonition of his murder of his murderous mother: "I must ... be viperous in heart and act! / ... I am her destined murderer".³⁰⁰ Rabinowitz

²⁹⁷ Friedman and Gassel suggest that Electra "is, in effect, Orestes' 'good mother', saving him as she does from his wicked mother". J. Friedman and S. Gassel, "Orestes: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Dramatic Criticism 2", *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 20, 1951, pp.423-433 at p.429. Slater also notes, however, that Electra, although "protective and nurturant [is] also the manipulating mother, who uses the child for her own ends ... it is always Electra who pushes Orestes to 'do the deed' [matricide]" (*Hera*, pp.180-181). In his consideration of Orestes' other sister Iphigenia in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, Slater suggests that Iphigenia is a type of 'malignant mother' who dreams of vengeance by attacking the father through his son: "a theme enters the dream, in the form of that cruel insight which was shared by so many Greek women: 'sons are pillars of the house'. She will wound Agamemnon by destroying his son" (*Hera*, p.175).

²⁹⁸ Aeschylus, *The Choephoroi* in *The Oresteian Trilogy*, trans. P. Vellacott, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1975, pp.122-123.

²⁹⁹ Graves, *Greek*, p.59.

³⁰⁰ Aeschylus, *The Choephoroi*, pp.122-123.

suggests that Aeschylus emphasises the serpentine aspects of Clytemnestra herself through comparisons between the murderous mother and snaky female monsters such as Medusa and Skylla, portraying her “as a monster to be overcome”.³⁰¹ Aeschylus seems to imply that the mother who births monsters is herself a monster.

Clytemnestra also recognises the serpent/son at the moment before her murder: “Oh God: here is the snake I bore and fed”.³⁰² In his study of the symbolism of the serpent, Bastos turns to Portuguese folklore where “snakes, born of women, suck milk from breasts”.³⁰³ According to Bastos, snakes symbolise the “sucking or oral-sadistic child”,³⁰⁴ the devouring infant who desires to “eat mother’s interior or eat up mother”.³⁰⁵ We are reminded of Melanie Klein’s theory of the cannibalistic fantasies of children who project their own oral-aggressive

³⁰¹ N.S. Rabinowitz, “Paths of Song in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*”, *Classical Bulletin*, 60(2), 1984, pp.21-28 at p.25. Rabinowitz also notes that “although [Skylla] is not serpentine, by tracing her family ties we come again to the region of snake demons”. N.S. Rabinowitz, “From Force to Persuasion: Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* as Cosmogonic Myth”, *Ramus*, 10, 1981, pp.159-191 at p.166.

³⁰² Aeschylus, *The Choephoroi*, p.137.

³⁰³ J.G.P. Bastos, “From the Chaos and the Void of Symbols to the Rainbow of Symbolism: The Spectral Study of Symbols” in C.D. Knight, I. Cardigos, and J.G.P. Bastos, *Maidens, Snakes and Dragons*, London, Centre for Symbolism and Imagination in Literature, 1991, p.75.

³⁰⁴ *Id.* at p.82.

³⁰⁵ *Id.* at p.89.

desires onto the mother who becomes a devourer in the infantile imagination.³⁰⁶

While Orestes sees himself as the poisonous and deadly serpent, he also imagines Clytemnestra as the pre-oedipal 'bad' mother who plans to murder her son and denies him her maternal love. In Orestes' mind, Clytemnestra is not only guilty of murdering her husband but also of harbouring infanticidal wishes towards her son. Friedman and Gassel suggest that Clytemnestra "bestowed her love on a substitute".³⁰⁷ The authors suggest that Aegisthus is a type of Oedipal son who, as "a blood relative of Agamemnon, ... killed the father-king, [and] entered into sexual relations with the queen-mother".³⁰⁸ She is the 'sinful' mother whose incestuous desire transfers from son to lover and who associates the murder of her husband with her infanticidal hostility towards her son: "And by her hand [she] strove, with strong desire / Thy life to crush, O child, by murder of thy sire".³⁰⁹ According to Friedman and Gassel, Orestes' phantasy of himself as a serpent biting his mother's breast "can be construed as an action of revenge for the loss of the breast ... biting his mother's breast is an act which hides the disappointment at having

³⁰⁶ See Chapter 1 for further discussion. Klein herself considers the *Oresteia* in *Our Adult World and Other Essays*, London, Heinemann, 1963, pp.23-54.

³⁰⁷ Friedman and Gassel, p.426.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.* Slater similarly notes that Aegisthus' "role is analogous to that of the son used by the mother to destroy the father" (*Hera*, p.179).

³⁰⁹ Aeschylus, *Choephoroi*, cited in Friedman and Gassel, p.427.

been deprived of the breast”.³¹⁰ Orestes denies his desire for the mother who rejected him. “The incestuous urge between mother and son ... takes the reverse form of rejection of the mother by the son”.³¹¹ When Orestes murders Aegisthus, he is “in effect denying his own oedipal wishes”.³¹²

In a version by Pausanias, Orestes bites off one of his fingers after he murders his mother as a means of purifying himself from the powerful curse associated with the spilling of his mother’s blood.³¹³ According to Ehrenzweig, “this means that symbolically he inflicts on himself oral castration”,³¹⁴ implying a link between the spilling of maternal blood and the spilling of the son’s seed within the maternal womb. In this respect, oral castration could be interpreted not merely as punishment for matricide but also for the son’s incestuous desire for his mother enacted through the penetration of her flesh with his phallic weapon. Bunker interprets this act of self-mutilation as a form of castration in a similar vein to the self-mutilation of Oedipus. Bunker goes on to suggest that there are other similarities between Orestes and Oedipus. Oedipus murders his father. Orestes murders his father-

³¹⁰ *Id.* at pp.427-428.

³¹¹ Velikovsky, p.97.

³¹² Friedman and Gassel, p.430.

³¹³ Graves, *Greek*, p.68.

³¹⁴ A. Ehrenzweig, “The Origin of the Scientific and Heroic Urge (The Guilt of Prometheus)”, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 30, 1949, pp.108-123 at pp.111-112. See also Slater who notes that “[n]o psychoanalytic symbolic substitutions are required to indicate that this ‘finger’ was phallic” (*Hera*, p.190, note 14).

substitute, Aegisthus. Orestes slays his mother while Oedipus enacts a symbolic murder of the mother. Both of them suffer an identical punishment – castration.³¹⁵

Drawing on Róheim's comment that "self-castration is the talion punishment for incest",³¹⁶ Bunker locates in the murderous actions of both Orestes and Oedipus an incestuous desire for the mother. "[T]he real meaning of the murder of the mother is sexual intercourse with the mother".³¹⁷ For Bunker, Oedipus and Orestes are "the same person".³¹⁸ In the Oedipus myth, incest is "unrepressed and undisguised"³¹⁹ - the son's desire for the mother is physically enacted. In the Orestes myth, incest is disguised and repressed - matricide is a "disguised expression of sexual intercourse with [the] mother ... incest with the mother becomes converted into what appears to be its very opposite, her murder".³²⁰

In his *Greek Myths* Graves notes that in one version of the Oedipus myth, Oedipus lives in exile for many years until he finally comes to Colonus – home of the Erinyes ('the Angry Ones'). The Erinyes torment Oedipus, "accus[ing] him of having brought about his mother's death".³²¹ The

³¹⁵ Bunker, p.201.

³¹⁶ *Id.* at p.205.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

³¹⁸ Bunker, p.206.

³¹⁹ *Id.* at pp.206-207.

³²⁰ *Ibid.* For another discussion (also from a psychoanalytic perspective) of the similarities between Orestes and Oedipus see Green, *Tragic Effect*, pp.35-87.

³²¹ Graves, *Greek*, p.12.

Erinyes, described by Slater as “maternal serpent-monsters”,³²² similarly hound Orestes. The Erinyes appear to Orestes as nightmarish phantoms, literally ‘monsters in the mind’, that threaten to drive him mad.³²³ Orestes fears the Erinyes as a “yawning dragon with attendant vipers”.³²⁴ Maternal monstrosity finds perhaps its most potent expression in the image of the blood-sucking Erinyes. They threaten to drink Orestes’ blood, making him their sacrificial victim.³²⁵ Rabinowitz notes Aeschylus’ comparison between the Erinyes and their monstrous counterparts, the Harpies (daughters of Orestes’ sister Electra and the sea-god Thaumias) and Gorgons.³²⁶ “With

³²² Slater, *Hera*, p.180.

³²³ According to Padel, “Erinyes alchemize [Orestes’] past murder to a madness that continually and concretely mangles the innards remembering it ... Erinyes are an important part of Greek discourse about mind and its disturbance ... [Erinyes] assault the mind ... [the mind is where they live and operate]”. R. Padel, *In and Out of the Mind: Greek Images of the Tragic Self*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1992, pp.179; 181.

³²⁴ Slater, *Hera*, p.85.

³²⁵ The Erinyes “goad, drink blood, madden ... They ‘feed’ until their victim is ‘bloodless food for daemons’” (Padel, *Mind*, pp.180-181). They avenge “blood spilled by a blood relation ... they suck [out] the killer’s blood” (Padel, *Mind*, p.173). For more on madness, murder, and blood-lust see the following Chapter.

³²⁶ Rabinowitz, “Paths of Song”, p.26. Padel notes that the “Erinyes resemble visual representations of Gorgons or Harpies” (*Mind*, p.179). To gaze at the Medusa turned men to stone. “Simply to see [the Erinyes] is to be mad, is the sign and moment of madness” (*Mind*, p.181). As in the Oedipus myth, where sight and knowledge are intimately related, here too there is an important relationship between seeing, knowing, and remembering. Blood is a visible sign of “the good bond” between mother and child “gone rotten, the stuff inside where we feel and think – stuff that binds a family – made visible, poured away, fouled ... Murder makes blood visible ... Nightmarishly what was in comes out. What ought to stay unseen is seen” (Padel, *Mind*, p.174). “When Orestes ‘sees’ Erinyes, they are the projected image of and from his blood-filled vision of the world as he now madly inhabits it. ‘Following’, ‘remembering’ Erinyes destroy him by keeping in his eyes ... the fact of having destroyed [m]other” (*Mind*, p.176).

their snaky hair, dripping eyes, and taste for human flesh, [the Erinyes] seem the embodiment of destructive [maternal-feminine] forces”.³²⁷

In his discussion of the theme of maternal menace in the Orestes myth, Slater suggests that Clytemnestra and the Erinyes are primary mother figures or “maternal agents”: “[t]here is Clytemnestra, the unloving, father-killing mother ... [and] [t]here are the Erinyes, the vindictive, devouring, castrating mothers”.³²⁸ The Erinyes are a phantasmagoric manifestation of the ghostly Clytemnestra, the infanticidal destructive mother of Orestes’ infantile nightmares. Green suggests that Orestes recognises in these monstrous mother figures “the bad part of [himself], that which dissociates and destroys”.³²⁹

According to Ehrenzweig, the Erinyes “represent the fear of oral castration”.³³⁰ Ehrenzweig recounts Hesiod’s tale of the ‘birth’ of the Erinyes from the spilt blood of Uranus (Sky) onto Gaia (Mother Earth). Uranus despises his children, three one-eyed giants and three giants with a hundred arms and fifty heads, and pushes them back into Gaia’s womb. Overcome with pain, Gaia begs her son Cronus for assistance. Cronus castrates his father with a sickle while engaged in intercourse. Drops of blood from

³²⁷ Rabinowitz, “Paths of Song”, p.26. In the *Oresteia*, blood drips from the eyes of the Erinyes.

³²⁸ Slater, *Hera*, p.180.

³²⁹ Green, *Tragic Effect*, p.48.

³³⁰ Ehrenzweig, p.112.

the mutilated genital fall onto Gaia who then gives birth to the Erinyes.³³¹ Ehrenzweig suggests that “Cronus, in revenging his mother, represents her. In the same way the Erinyes in revenging crimes committed by sons against the mothers represent the offended mothers”.³³² Through the Erinyes, the mother is “still a living and malignant force”.³³³

Orestes fears the vengeful castrating mother who plants the frightful image of serpentine Gorgons coiled and swarming (‘Let me go!’) in his deluded mind, “an image of a castration sent back to Orestes after the castration that he has just inflicted on the mother”³³⁴ whom he beheads with an axe. Green suggests that Orestes’ fear of the devouring mother merges with his desire for her – both incestuous (oedipal) desire and narcissistic (pre-oedipal) infantile desire.³³⁵ Slater similarly notes that the *Oresteia* is replete with imagery reflecting the oral-narcissistic conflict between mother and son – “references to devouring and encircling serpents and other oral themes

³³¹ Padel suggests that Mother Earth is “she who drinks blood, who nurtured the metal that castrated heaven, who sends forth dark children, holds the dead ... Earth drinks blood of dying warriors ... Earth and the dead in her drink blood, as Earth ‘received the bloody drops’ after Uranus’ castration ... When [blood] falls to earth, it is altered by earth and has dangerous power ... Erinyes operate within this earth-nexus of blood, darkness, good turned bad, fertility made barren. Earth-born Erinyes [are] dark and female, like Earth. She is the possibility of a powerful relationship gone powerfully wrong” (*Mind*, pp.174-175).

³³² Ehrenzweig, p.112.

³³³ F.I. Zeitlin, “The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in the *Oresteia*”, *Arethusa*, 11(1-2), 1978, pp.149-184 at p.167.

³³⁴ Green, *Tragic Effect*, pp.56-57.

³³⁵ *Id.* at p.57.

... [that] express the emotional cycle inherent in the mother-child relationship: as she sows, so shall she reap, as she rejects, so shall she be rejected, as she poisons, so shall she be poisoned”.³³⁶ Orestes’ insatiable orality – his “vindictive hunger” for the mother who rejects him alternates vigorously between denial and longing, translating ultimately into a denial of the devouring mother and a violent refusal to “appease [her/her ghost(s)] ... with the blood of the living”.³³⁷

Feminist theorist Nancy Rabinowitz has shown how the Greek dramatists, in their repeated association between maternity and sexual destructiveness, reveal their ambivalence about female power and man’s urgent need to escape from the predatory clutches of the mother/lover who would destroy him. In her discussion of the motif of the ‘hostile female’ in the *Oresteia*, Rabinowitz suggests that Aeschylus places the mother under scrutiny. According to Rabinowitz, patriarchal female monsters such as Echidna, Skylla, and the Sphinx are monstrous precisely because they “challenge the stability of creation”.³³⁸ They represent both “the evil aspect of the mother”, by either birthing monsters or causing the death

³³⁶ Slater, *Hera*, pp.184-185.

³³⁷ *Id.* at p.185. Slater suggests that Orestes’ “mother-rejecting blindly ignores [his] intense, frustrated craving for maternal love and protection ... A craving so intense leads ... to fears of being utterly swallowed, and cannot, therefore, be permitted free expression ... Because his own needs are so insatiable he pictures everyone else as equally voracious”, *Hera*, pp.188-189.

³³⁸ Rabinowitz, “Force”, p.163.

of newborn infants, and the “seductive dragoness”,³³⁹ killing and devouring those who fall under their enchanting spell. For Rabinowitz, there is no doubt that Aeschylus associates Clytemnestra with these female monsters and with the deadly serpent that was once the Goddess’ totem because she represents “perversions of the natural order”.³⁴⁰

Cassandra describes Clytemnestra as the ‘mother of Hades’, a name that “reflects a paradox: mother implies life, for woman becomes mother only by giving birth, yet Mother of Hades must mean ‘source of death’ – not life”.³⁴¹ Her power to create life is perverted in the *Oresteia* – she births phantom serpents and becomes a monstrous death-dealer. Aeschylus seems to suggest that the creative female force is simultaneously deadly and destructive. The female creative force is threatening to man because it was once the sole province of the Goddess, debased and dethroned by powerful father-gods. Rabinowitz notes that “as mother of Hades, [Clytemnestra] is a fertile dragoness, seductive for deathly purposes”.³⁴² Indeed, Clytemnestra is portrayed as a cunning and ruthless seductress who uses her feminine charms to lure Agamemnon to his death. So, too, when she implores Orestes to spare her life she bares her

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁰ Rabinowitz, “Force”, p.165.

³⁴¹ *Id.* at p.166.

³⁴² *Id.* at p.165.

maternal breast in a sexually seductive manner.³⁴³ Rabinowitz clearly shows how Clytemnestra assumes the role of mythic monster who rules a world characterised by disorder, darkness, and destruction. As sea-monster Skylla, she conjures raging winds and storms; as venomous serpent, she releases her poison in the form of plagues; as “mother of Hades”, she lures, seduces, ensnares, and destroys her prey.³⁴⁴

In the *Oresteia*, the battle between mother and son becomes, once again, a fight to the death between hero and monster. The dragoness Clytemnestra is slaughtered by her son, the hero, “the saviour, the champion of [patriarchal] order”.³⁴⁵ Orestes murders the mother who would murder him and is literally reborn motherless, like Athena – the defender of patriarchy. Athena defends Orestes against accusations of matricide (and casts the final vote in his favour) as does Apollo who declares that the only true parent is the father, thereby absolving Orestes of his crime.

Both Athena and Apollo save Orestes from being hounded to death by the avenging Erinyes, monstrous manifestations of the dead mother – “Orestes’ old

³⁴³ For Green, “[w]hen Clytemnestra tears open her dress in order to weaken Orestes’ resolution, there can be no doubt that this is an act of seduction, in which she is seeking to arouse sexual temptations” (*Tragic Effect*, p.48).

³⁴⁴ Rabinowitz, “Force”, pp.165-166.

³⁴⁵ *Id.* at p.174.

enemy”.³⁴⁶ The Erinyes threaten to set loose a poisonous plague that will ruin crops and destroy infants in their mothers’ wombs. However, the Erinyes are appeased by Athena who offers to accommodate them within the new social order. According to Gewirtz, their transformation ensures that “their primitive energies [are] channel[led] [towards] mak[ing] an effective [social order] law possible ... [their] elemental ‘wildness’ has been tamed”.³⁴⁷ Bachofen reflects on the defeat of ‘Mother Right’ or the triumph of paternity over the chthonian mother goddesses:

The old law is that of the Erinyes, according to which Orestes is guilty and his mother’s blood inexpiable; but Apollo and Athena usher in the victory as a new law; that of the higher paternity and of the heavenly light ... The old era dies, and another, the Apollonian age, rises on its ruins ... The divinity of the mother gives way to that of the father.³⁴⁸

The Erinyes (‘angry ones’) become the Eumenides (‘kindly ones’) who succumb and submit to ‘father right’ and are thus permitted a place in the new social order. The

³⁴⁶ *Id.* at p.179. Rabinowitz makes clear the association between Clytemnestra and the Erinyes: “Her ghost arises virtually in their midst, and if we accept the derivation of Erinyes from the ghosts of the dead, she would inevitably be her own Erinyes ... she acts as their leader, goading them on and showing them their obligation to her ... The Erinyes appear to Orestes as the embodiment of his former opponent” (“Force”, pp.179-180).

³⁴⁷ P. Gewirtz, “Aeschylus’ Law”, *Harvard Law Review*, 101(5), 1988, pp.1043-1055 at pp.1047; 1054.

³⁴⁸ Bachofen, p.110.

Oresteia provides “an invented ... explanation of how [the] reality [of a new social order] was created”.³⁴⁹ Aeschylus presents Clytemnestra, not Orestes, as the ultimate transgressor of law. Zeitlin suggests that Clytemnestra represents a perversion of her role as both wife and mother since she exhibits “both oral aggression against the child [she] should nourish and sexual predation against the [husband] to whom [she] should submit”.³⁵⁰ The vigorous denial of female power at the heart of the *Oresteia* points to anxiety surrounding maternal hostility expressly directed towards the son who represents both himself and his father (he acts on his father’s behalf). As if to conceal and repress the very notion that a mother would murder not only her husband but also her son (a blood relation), Aeschylus invents a ‘legal fiction’ to legitimate mother-murder by the son/father and the establishment of rule by (paternal) law:

Women once had power, but they abused it through ‘trickery and unbridled sexuality’, thus fostering ‘chaos and misrule’. The men ... assumed control and took steps to institutionalise the subordination of women. The point of the myth is ... that women are not fit to rule, only to be ruled.³⁵¹

Women are silenced and subsumed within the father’s law. While the Erinyes are transformed into kind, passive

³⁴⁹ Zeitlin, “Dynamics”, p.151.

³⁵⁰ *Id.* at p.159.

³⁵¹ *Id.* at p.152.

creatures who serve the new social order, others remain as despised, vile, menacing figures – blemishes on the patriarchal landscape, phantoms onto whom all the fears and anxieties of sons and fathers are projected. When Orestes is acquitted by the Athenian court, he defies the power of the mother (goddess) as both creator and destroyer. Orestes frees himself from the monstrous mother who torments him while alive and from beyond the grave. The infanticidal mother is buried in a judgment condoning matricide. Irigaray wonders whether the murder of the mother, “real or cultural, serves to ... destroy the power”³⁵² that men locate (and find so threatening) in her.³⁵³ His-(s)tory provides us with an answer; *her*-story with an alternative.

³⁵² Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, p.15.

³⁵³ Slater thinks not: “The Orestes myth ... has become a story of sex antagonism and mother-son conflict. This conflict is ‘solved’ by the killing of Clytemnestra. And yet the story continues – the solution is ineffective, the feelings remain ... No matter where the fancy turns to elude the conflict, it reappears, since it is internal ... [Orestes] dies in a fashion which reflects the persistence of the problem ... by a snakebite – a serpent, serpent-slain” (*Hera*, pp.186; 190-191).

***PART 2: Phallogentric His(-s)torics/Cultural
Neuroses***

*A journey of darkness, horror, disgust, and
phantasmagoric fears*

Joseph Campbell

Chapter Three
‘An Unnatural Crime, A Monstrous Act’¹:
Imag(in)ing Maternal Child-Murder
in the Theatre of Dionysus

*The law is theatre ... the stage is the
courtroom in which the case is tried²*

*The theatre, that stage set up by the
city for the tangling and untangling
of actions that anywhere else it
would be dangerous or intolerable
even to think about³*

*The theatre is the best embodiment
of that ‘other scene’, the unconscious⁴*

*The danger, however, is not less
real because it is imaginary ...⁵*

*For the images that the mind makes
find a way out, they work into life⁶*

¹ P. McCracken, “Engendering Sacrifice: Blood, Lineage, and Infanticide in Old French Literature”, *Speculum*, 77(1), 2002, pp.55-75 at p.66.

² J-P Sartre, “Interview with Kenneth Tynan” (1961) repr. in *Sartre on Theatre*, eds M. Contat and M. Rybalka, trans. Frank Jellinek, New York, Pantheon Books, 1976, pp.121-34 at pp.126-7.

³ N. Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman* (1985), trans. Anthony Forster, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1987, p.33.

⁴ A. Green, “Prologue: The Psychoanalytic Reading of Tragedy” in M. Ellmann, ed., *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism*, London, Longman, 1994, pp.39-55 at p.40.

⁵ J. Frazer, “Tabooed Things” in *The Golden Bough*, London, Macmillan, 1959, pp.223-244 at p.223.

⁶ R. Jeffers, *Medea*, cited in F. Wertham, *The Show of Violence*, London, Victor Gollancz, 1949, p.225.

Tragic conflict

If, as Goldhill tells us, tragedy is a “genre of transgression”⁷ then the most powerful plays are those that effect a ‘crossing over’ or a “going beyond”⁸ boundaries. For Aristotle, the most compelling transgressions involved horrific breaches of familial ties - crimes “engendered among the affections ... murder done or planned, or some similar outrage by brother on brother, or son on father, or mother on son, or son on mother”.⁹ For Green, the family is “the tragic space *par excellence* ... because in the family the knots of love – and therefore of hate – are not only the earliest, but also the most important ones”.¹⁰ In his book *Tragic Drama and the Family*, Simon shows how tragedy and familial relationships are “inextricably intertwined”.¹¹ The dramas of the ancient Greek tragedians focus on the “tensions – indeed warfare – within the family”.¹² For Simon, “plays dealing with the death of children contain the essence of tragic conflict”.¹³

⁷ S. Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1986, Chapter 6.

⁸ S. Goldhill, “Violence in Greek Tragedy” in J. Redmond, ed., *Themes in Drama*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp.15-33 at p.17.

⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. L.J. Potts as *Aristotle on the Art of Fiction*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1953, p.35.

¹⁰ Green, p.45.

¹¹ B. Simon, *Tragic Drama and the Family: Psychoanalytic Studies From Aeschylus to Beckett*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988, p.1.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Id.* at p.7.

Child-murder is a recurrent motif in Greek tragedy. Euripides, in particular, uses the horror of infanticide as a productive site from which to explore issues of generation and degeneration, reproduction and destruction, life and death. In his plays dealing with maternal child-murder, Euripides juxtaposes the notion that women are 'natural' and 'instinctual' nurturers with the fearful fantasy that "women are by nature disordered, and when given power through motherhood are liable to lapse into extreme evil and commit monstrous acts".¹⁴ In Greek tragedy, maternal child-murder is always unnatural, monstrous, and destructive, and we are repeatedly reminded that the mother who births infants is also deadly.

The prominence of the figure of the murderous mother in Greek tragedy also betrays an "uneasiness about storytelling, related to the kinds of stories being told".¹⁵ While some tragedians attempt to conceal, disguise, and thereby deny the infanticidal intentions of the murderous mother, others blatantly expose maternal monstrosity as being at the heart of the mother-child relationship. Central to the tragic imagination then is the interplay between notions of maternal love and maternal harm – on the one hand "a refusal to admit ... that women may harbour

¹⁴ K. Oliver, *Family Values: Subjects Between Nature and Culture*, New York, Routledge, 1997, pp.30-31. See also B. Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, New York, Routledge, 1993, pp.151; 166.

¹⁵ Simon, p.4. See also B. Simon, "Tragic Drama and the Family: The Killing of Children and the Killing of Story-Telling" in S. Rimmon-Kenan, ed., *Discourse in Psychoanalysis and Literature*, London, Methuen, 1987, pp.152-175.

feelings of hostility towards their own children and that this can lead ... to murder”¹⁶ and on the other hand the belief that a mother can harm and even kill her children.

In this chapter, we focus on the mother-child relationship and consider how tragic representations of maternal child-murder bring to the fore unconscious fears and fantasies of maternal destructiveness. The Greek tragedians bring into consciousness infantile fears of infanticide and locate in the murderous mother not only a threat to individual physical and psychical integrity but also a threat to the household (*oikos*) and city-state (*polis*). Reflecting on broader tensions between men and women in fifth-century Athens, we need to consider how child-murder is engendered in the tragic (male) imagination and how these narratives “bring into view ambiguities, tensions and fears, deep-seated fears, which the norms of law and custom are intended to control and even suppress”.¹⁷

‘Theatres of the Mind’¹⁸

When Goldhill describes tragedy as a “genre of transgression”,¹⁹ he does not merely imply that the characters brought to life and moulded into form by dramatists such as Sophocles, Aeschylus or Euripides

¹⁶ P.A. Watson, *Ancient Stepmothers: Myth, Misogyny and Reality*, Leiden, The Netherlands, E.J. Brill, 1995, p.24.

¹⁷ J. Gould, “Law, Custom and Myth: Aspects of the Social Position of Women in Classical Athens”, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 100, 1980, pp.38-59 at p.55.

¹⁸ J. McDougall, *Theatres of the Mind: Illusion and Truth on the Psychoanalytic Stage* (1982), London, Free Association Books, 1986.

¹⁹ Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy*, Chapter 6.

typically transgress the boundaries of social propriety but that Greek tragedy also requires of its audience an imaginative transgression beyond the boundaries of sight or sound to the recesses of the mind in which scenes of bloody violence – that which is “too horrible to be seen or spoken of” – are repeatedly played out.²⁰ In her psychoanalytic study of drama, Ellmann suggests that the theatre is a ‘psychic’ space that “gives external form to the internal dramaturgy of the mind, where anything may be invoked and brought to life”.²¹ As in the world of dreams, desires and fears are brought out into the open and given form: “thoughts become deeds, fears become monsters”.²² And like dreams, drama creates a world of “picture-thoughts”²³ which harness the powers of mental life. What is repressed makes its way “slowly and painfully”²⁴ into consciousness. In the theatrical space “all the internal characters and psychic scenarios that have been removed from conscious recall may once again come to life”.²⁵

²⁰ C. Segal, “Violence and Dramatic Structure in Euripides’ *Hecuba*” in J. Redmond, ed., *Themes in Drama*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp.35-46 at p.35.

²¹ M. Ellmann, “Introduction” in M. Ellmann, ed., *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism*, London, Longman, 1994, pp.1-35 at p.6.

²² *Ibid.* Green suggests that the theatrical experience “simulates the state of sleep in which the disregarded wishes of the day burst forth in the hallucinations of the dreaming mind” (p.39).

²³ Ellmann, p.6.

²⁴ *Id.* at p.8.

²⁵ McDougall, p.20.

Tragedy opens the doorway to the “phantasmagoria of infancy”,²⁶ to a world in which the dangers of childhood are “not less real because [they are] imaginary”.²⁷ According to Green, “[t]he [dramatist] places the spectator in the position of the infant”²⁸ gradually revealing the violent fantasies of childhood not “as something belonging to the past ... [but] as a contemporary experience”.²⁹ Drama brings into consciousness that which has been repressed in the psyche – “a knowledge both debarred and inescapable”.³⁰ The “psychic dramas of the theatres of the mind”³¹ find their way onto the tragic stage.

The theatre is the space in which “repressed thoughts ... break into the open”,³² where the “deepest and most unwelcome impulses ..., theme[s] too repugnant to our sentiments to be easily admitted to consciousness”³³ are allowed to roam freely through the labyrinths of the mind. Tragedy allows for and encourages an irruption of emotions and a confrontation with issues that “anywhere else ... would be dangerous or intolerable even to think about”.³⁴ According to Rascovsky and Rascovsky, there is

²⁶ Ellmann, p.9.

²⁷ Frazer, p.223.

²⁸ Green, p.39.

²⁹ Ellmann, p.8.

³⁰ Green, p.40.

³¹ McDougall, p.17.

³² J.C. Rheingold, *The Fear of Being a Woman: A Theory of Maternal Destructiveness*, New York, Grune & Stratton, 1964, p.33.

³³ E. Stern, “The Medea Complex: The Mother’s Homicidal Wishes to Her Child”, *Journal of Mental Science*, 94, 1948, pp.321-331 at p.329.

³⁴ Loraux, *Tragic*, p.33.

“universal resistance”³⁵ to acknowledging the infanticidal mother. Stern similarly notes that “there is considerable resistance against admitting these thoughts to consciousness ... [they typically] remain unconscious, since there is a strong prejudice against their recognition”.³⁶ deMause also notes that “[h]istorical opinion [points to a] deep revulsion against the [idea] of filicid[e]”.³⁷ Nonetheless, infanticide remains an “eternal preoccupation ... and latent problem of everyone partaking of the human estate”.³⁸ The fear of infanticide is not merely confined to the imaginary life of the child but lies deeply buried in the unconscious of all adults. “Growing up affords escape from early ties and dangers, but we preserve our conflicts and the threats that attend them within ourselves”.³⁹

In his book *The Mother, Anxiety, and Death*, Rheingold suggests that death is “the foremost problem of the mind”, not merely the knowledge of mortality that is an inevitable part of the human condition but more fundamentally the

³⁵ A. Rascovsky and M. Rascovsky, “On the Genesis of Acting Out and Psychopathic Behaviour in Sophocles’ *Oedipus*”, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 49, 1968, pp.390-394 at p.390.

³⁶ Stern, pp.329-330.

³⁷ L. deMause, ed., *Foundations of Psychohistory*, New York, Creative Roots, 1982, p.117. In his psychogenic theory of history, deMause notes that the topic of infanticide has a taboo status and rarely enters into academic discourse. The notion of a maternal wish for infanticide produces “extreme anger” and anxiety (p.117).

³⁸ G. Devereux, *Dreams in Greek Tragedy: An Ethno-Psychoanalytical Study*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976, p.xxxiii.

³⁹ J.C. Rheingold, *The Mother, Anxiety, and Death: The Catastrophic Death Complex*, Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1967, p.93. See my Chapter One for further discussion.

idea of “catastrophic (traumatic, malevolent) death”.⁴⁰ According to Rheingold, “the psychological problem of death [revolves around] the catastrophic threat, and this threat is the source of basic anxiety ... anxiety has its experiential roots in the mother-infant relationship”.⁴¹ Rheingold locates the psychology of death and the genesis of anxiety within the discourse of maternal destructiveness. “What is terrifying”, Rheingold writes, “is the ever-present menace of malevolent death ... [t]raumatic death inflicted by the mother”.⁴² “[D]eath pervades the relationship between mother and child ... always the source of threat is the mother”.⁴³

In his book *The Fear of Being a Woman*, Rheingold draws on the work of Garre who first located the origin of basic anxiety in fantasies of the murderous mother. According to Garre, the maternal wish for infanticide is universal and either conscious or unconscious.⁴⁴ Rheingold develops the theory of Garre and locates an “innate aggressivity” or “destructive force”⁴⁵ in *all* mothers that may surface or remain latent.

In his work on child abuse, Bakan also alludes to the notion of a universal underlying infanticidal impulse that

⁴⁰ *Id.* at p.2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Id.* at pp.47; 23.

⁴³ Rheingold, *Fear*, p.143.

⁴⁴ W.J. Garre, *Basic Anxiety: A New Psychobiological Concept*, New York, Philosophical Library, 1962, especially chapters 1, 3, and 4.

⁴⁵ *Id.* at p.141.

threatens the sanctity of the mother-child bond.⁴⁶ Drawing on the work of German psychoanalyst Sándor Radó, Bakan warns his reader not to be deceived by a façade of ‘good’ motherhood.⁴⁷ According to Radó, all mothers harbour destructive and hateful impulses towards their children that they repress out of consciousness “by an extreme over-accentuation of devoted tenderness”.⁴⁸ Mothers who are anxious about the safety of their children are really sublimating their own unconscious hostilities. As Radó writes, “[perceived dangers] have no foundation in reality ... they have another, purely psychic origin ... the dangers threatening [the child] lie not in the outside world, but in the depths of [the mother’s] own mind”.⁴⁹ While the ‘good’ mother “displace[s] the evil which she detect[s] from within herself to the outside world”,⁵⁰ the ‘bad’ mother succumbs to the destructive impulses that break through the unconscious layers of the psyche. Radó exposes the mythic ideal mother only to replace her with a murderous monster.⁵¹

⁴⁶ D. Bakan, *Slaughter of the Innocents: A Study of the Battered Child Phenomenon*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1971, pp.44; 56.

⁴⁷ *Id.* at p.104.

⁴⁸ S. Radó, “An Anxious Mother: A Contribution to the Analysis of the Ego”, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 9, 1928, pp.219-226 at p.219.

⁴⁹ *Id.* at p.220.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Not surprisingly, theories of maternal destructiveness have received enormous criticism. Rheingold recalls presenting his work to a women’s club and the “hostile” (*Fear*, p.34) reactions to his ideas. He writes: “the audience became divided ... some women ceased to listen and began talking among themselves ... several women [were] intently concerned. In the rear were a number of dark faced, heavy-bodied women who glared at me murderously. And on each side of the auditorium there was a woman in panic. According to the listener,

In her study of the monstrous-feminine, Creed suggests that “when woman is represented as monstrous it is almost always in relation to her mothering and reproductive functions”.⁵² For Rheingold, there is a close connection between meanings of death and women, particularly in the experience of pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood. In his narrative, childbirth is overshadowed by the spectre of maternal monstrosity. Drawing on his own observations of childbirth, Rheingold imagines the labouring mother not as life-giver but as death-dealer: “I had the feeling that the mother was not delivering the baby but trying to kill it ... the baby was not being ushered into the world but was being annihilated”.⁵³

Theories of maternal destructiveness draw on cultural fears and anxieties about the power of women as mothers and, as is clear from Rheingold’s perception of childbirth, from a sense of “injustice for the phylogenetic exclusion [of men] from the bearing of life”.⁵⁴ For Rheingold,

what I said was unheeded or slanderous or traumatizing” (*Fear*, p.7). Rheingold’s comments reveal his own anxiety about verbalising such ‘hostile’ ideas within what he perceives to be an intensely hostile environment full of incessant female ‘chatter’ and murderous Medusan glances. Rheingold appears almost ‘helpless’ among these misandrous Amazonian women – his words suggestive of the fear that he too may be ‘undone’ by the murderous impulse that he believes lies dormant in all women and may or may not be unleashed with/in motherhood.

⁵² B. Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, New York, Routledge, 1993, p.7.

⁵³ Rheingold, *Fear*, p.34.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* Kittay considers the idea of ‘womb envy’ (defined not as envy of a bodily organ but of the ability to give birth) and notes that in her interviews “there have always been at least some men who were willing to admit feeling jealous of woman’s childbearing capacity”

motherhood is both “a demonstration of adequacy as a woman”⁵⁵ and a deadly reminder of the maternal matrix – “the source of life and nurturance [that] can also be an instrument of destruction”.⁵⁶ Maternal child-murder implies a failure to control “the [competing] life-dealing and death-dealing forces”⁵⁷ that define motherhood.

According to Devereux, the anxieties provoked by the dreadful mother of psychic origin are controlled through the “culturally implemented defence”⁵⁸ of denial. Relegating the murderous mother to the unconscious is a “defence against the fear of death which includes denial of its origin in childhood experience”.⁵⁹ “If we allow ourselves to even entertain the thought of hostile maternal impulses towards children”, warns Rheingold, “our own anxiety of death is aroused”.⁶⁰ These murderous thoughts are fuelled by fantasies of a violent and torturous death at the hands of the mother who gave us life.

(p.95). Kittay believes that the devaluation of childbearing in patriarchal culture is a manifestation of envy and self-loathing – “man [longs] for a power he cannot have ... this powerlessness renders his own sense of impotence so much more acute” (p.109). E.F. Kittay, “Womb Envy: An Explanatory Concept” in J. Trebilcot, ed., *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory*, New Jersey, Rowman & Allanheld, 1984, pp.94-128. See also K. Horney, *Feminine Psychology*, ed. H. Kelman, London, Norton, 1967, p.60.

⁵⁵ *Id.* at p.143.

⁵⁶ *Id.* at p.34.

⁵⁷ *Id.* at p.143.

⁵⁸ G. Devereux, “The Cannibalistic Impulses of Parents”, *Psychoanalytic Forum*, 1, 1966, pp.114-124 at p.117.

⁵⁹ Rheingold, *Anxiety*, p.83.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

In her study of death, femininity, and representation, Bronfen suggests that artistic creation “enacts the reality of death we wish to disavow ... [and] articulates something that is so dangerous to the health of the psyche that it must be repressed and yet so strong in its desire for articulation that it can’t be”.⁶¹ In Greek tragedy, the dangerous thing - unconscious knowledge - is concealed and disguised even as the dramatists point precisely to that material. According to Devereux, “myth-makers and great poets feel and utter the ‘unthinkable’ – but do so in accordance with a special code of the proprieties: with the rules of art”.⁶² Indeed, as Gould notes, “[t]he Greeks rarely show violence ... [and] the best dramatists avoid such scenes.”⁶³ These master illusionists allow the Athenian spectator full licence to imagine the most horrific forms of violence by mere allusion.⁶⁴ As Goldhill notes, “[t]he violence that makes Greek myth [so] scandal[ous] ... happens off stage in the white-sculptured world of Greek tragedy”.⁶⁵ “Multifaceted violence” and murderous plots impact on the Athenian spectator “at the level of narration ... fratricidal, matricidal, patricidal,

⁶¹ E. Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, New York, Routledge, 1992, p.xi.

⁶² Devereux, *Dreams*, p.xxxiv. Easterling similarly notes that “in tragedy, the unspeakable (within the limits appropriate to the genre) can be spoken”. P.E. Easterling, “Women in Tragic Space”, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 34, 1987, pp.15-26 at p.17.

⁶³ T. Gould, “The Uses of Violence in Drama” in J. Redmond, ed., *Themes in Drama*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp.1-13 at p.7.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Goldhill, “Violence in Greek Tragedy”, p.15.

[spousicidal, and infanticidal] aggression that ... is talked about incessantly ... but scarcely staged".⁶⁶

The Greek tragedians turned to mythology for inspiration, and "used this raw material to express profound intrapsychic conflicts in symbolic form ... giving expression to repressed emotions"⁶⁷ and forbidden desires. These dramatists took as one of their most frequent subjects maternal child-murder, an act that, Page tells us, would "move the fifth-century Athenian ... towards incredulity and horror".⁶⁸ That their plots are filled with

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* Segal similarly notes that "Greek drama, on the whole, avoids the direct visual depiction of violence on the stage. The bloody acts which dominate these plays generally occur off stage. Though we often see the results of the violence ... we rarely see the violent acts themselves" (p.35). Devereux also notes that the very few violent acts that "do occur physically on stage may be made invisible to the spectators" as in Euripides' *Hecuba* in which the murder of the children occurs "not on the open stage itself, but inside a tent placed on the stage" (p.61). Pondering the dialectical antithesis between on and off stage, Devereux suggests that "Greek tragedy takes place on two levels: the raw event occurs off stage; its psychological consequences are shown on stage ... As the personages move on and off stage ... they pass from one psychological world to another. Off stage is the world of instinctual acting out ... fantasies ... the depths of the unconscious (p.63) ... This unfolding of the plot on two levels ... reduces to a manageable, catharsis-susceptible and sublimable level the impact of potentially explosive material on the spectator's psyche [which, if] enact[ed] on stage ... would have been intolerably stimulating and anxiety-arousing" (pp.66-67). G. Devereux, "The Structure of Tragedy and the Structure of the Psyche in Aristotle's *Poetics*" in C. Hanly and M. Lazerowitz, eds, *Psychoanalysis and Philosophy*, New York, International Universities Press, 1970, pp.46-75.

⁶⁷ M.S. Bergmann, *In the Shadow of Moloch: The Sacrifice of Children and Its Impact on Western Religions*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1992, p.51.

⁶⁸ D.L. Page, "Introduction" in Euripides, *Medea* (1938), Oxford, Clarendon, 1955, p.xiv. deMause suggests that the frequency of infanticidal motifs in tragedy may be attributed to the infanticidal 'mode' of mother-child relations in classical antiquity. According to

murderous and destructive mothers also suggests, however, an intense fascination with these women. As Porter notes, the Greek tragedians masterfully blend *horror* (repulsion) and *voluptas* (fascination) – “[w]hat compels us to myth also forces us to shrink back in horror from it”.⁶⁹

‘A time out of time’⁷⁰

deMause, each historical period has a particular psychogenic mode of child rearing beginning with the infanticidal mode and ending with the helping mode that began in the mid-twentieth century (*Psychohistory*, see in particular pp.60-63). deMause suggests that “[e]ach advance in psychogenic mode diminishes the emotional distance between mother and child.” (p.107). While the mother of classical antiquity “constantly threatened the child’s life” (p.107), the ‘helping’ mother encourages, empathises with and fulfils the needs of her child without resort to (threats of) violence. The cultural conflicts and defences of each historical period are determined by the psychogenic modes. In the infanticidal mode of classical antiquity, the “calamitous fantasy” (conflict) – best expressed in the image of Medea who “hovers over childhood in antiquity” (p.61) – is the murderous mother. The corresponding “desired fantasy” (defence) that denies the traumatic fantasy of infanticide is that of the father as saviour (for more on the evolution of fantasies in Western culture see deMause chapter four). The experience of the theatrical audience is probably best described using deMause’s notion of the “foetal trance state” (p.145) in which physical and psychical “memories from uterine and perinatal life [are] reawaken[ed]” (p.143). The audience is not overcome by these pre- and peri-natal memories because tragedy “create[s] the illusion of an intact womb-surround [the fabric of society is secure and stable] which contain[s] the traumas of childhood” (p.146). In other words, the Athenian spectator confronts the murderous mother of childhood fantasy within the ‘safe’ space of the theatre and in the full realisation that the spectacle is mere illusion and that the rules of social order still apply at the end of the performance.

⁶⁹ J. Porter, *The Invention of Dionysus: An Essay on the Birth of Tragedy*, California, Stanford University Press, 2000, pp.134; 163. Loraux suggests that the Greek tragedians “g[i]ve the Athenian spectator the controlled pleasure afforded by an enjoyment of the deviant” (*Tragic*, p.65).

⁷⁰ J. Henderson, “Women and the Athenian Dramatic Festivals”, *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 121, 1991, pp.133-147 at p.147.

If, as Loraux suggests, tragedy deals with the 'unthinkable' and the 'unspeakable',⁷¹ it has the power to bring into discourse that which has been silenced and taboo. Dramatists allow their audiences to suspend disbelief, to simultaneously enter the world of "the imaginary, the forbidden, and the real".⁷² In the safe space⁷³ of the theatre, repressed knowledge surfaces and is sublimated at the performance's end⁷⁴ - forbidden thoughts temporarily occupy the privileged position of the real. The murderous mother rises from the unconscious and the imagination is permitted free reign to indulge in the seeming realness of fantasies that "reason forbids us to conclude"⁷⁵ in everyday life. In the imaginative realm, the murderous mother of infantile fantasy comes to life – the repressed returns, dreadful and destructive "to commit the forbidden act".⁷⁶

For Corti, the tragic representation of maternal child-murder is "disturbing precisely because it suggests [an] ambiguous relationship between prohibition and desire".⁷⁷ Tragedy's 'capacity to disturb' derives from its "articulation

⁷¹ Loraux, *Tragic*, pp.32-33.

⁷² *Id.* at p.33.

⁷³ According to Henderson, the "airing of conflicts and anxieties that could not be publicly aired elsewhere depended on there being a safe, neutral ground: a time out of time" (p.147).

⁷⁴ Loraux, *Tragic*, p.65. Tragedy only has a temporary hold on the imagination. At the end of each performance "reality reclaim[s] its rights" (Loraux, *Tragic*, p.48).

⁷⁵ Gould, "Violence", p.6.

⁷⁶ L. Corti, *The Myth of Medea and the Murder of Children*, Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1998, p.x.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

and portrayal of disquieting and subversive [impulses and powerful emotions]”.⁷⁸ The tragic representation of maternal child-murder brings into consciousness the devouring and deadly maternal imago who destroys her own flesh and blood and unleashes repressed murderous desires that remain unarticulated in daily life because of powerful taboos. According to Corti, “[f]orbidden desire is the connecting link between the concept of taboo and the aesthetics of tragedy”.⁷⁹ Tragedy accommodates “the tension between ... the realisation of desire and the ... observance of its prohibition”.⁸⁰ The tragedians indulge our intense fantasies, breaking taboos and “disinhibiting violence ... momentarily trick[ing] ... the internal and external voices that [hold] back [the] full expression of [emotions in daily life]”.⁸¹

In the conclusion to her study of women and death in Greek tragedy, Loraux poses a question for her reader to contemplate: “What do spectators in the theatre gain from thinking, in the mode of fiction, things that in everyday life cannot and must not be thought?”⁸² In posing the question, Loraux highlights the major theme of her book –

⁷⁸ *Id.* at p.xvi.

⁷⁹ *Id.* at p.x.

⁸⁰ Green, p.51.

⁸¹ Gould, “Violence”, p.6. For a discussion of the role of taboo in tragedy see Figes who suggests that not only is “tragedy concerned with the breaking of taboos [but that] without taboos there can be no tragedy”. E. Figes, *Tragedy and Social Evolution*, London, John Calder, 1976, p.138. According to Gould, tragedy satisfies “[o]ur appetite for guilt-free phantasy-fulfilment” (“Violence”, p.3).

⁸² Loraux, *Tragic*, p.64.

that the genre of tragedy allowed citizens of fifth-century Athens to imagine the unimaginable, to bring to the fore repressed thoughts “that should be unknown to the ideal of a good citizen”.⁸³ Loraux emphasises the notion of the theatre as a place of purgation, a forum for purification or emotional catharsis.⁸⁴ In the theatre, boundaries could be imaginatively transgressed without “overturning the civic order of values”.⁸⁵ Within the confines of the theatre and the imaginary world created by the theatrical spectacle, repressed emotions could be “acted out, reflected upon, and tamed”.⁸⁶ The Greek tragedians produced what Shuttle and Redgrove refer to as “psychodramas” that “express and conquer”⁸⁷ the troubling ‘stuff’ of the unconscious.

Psycho-Cultural Productions

The theatre of ancient Greece was a “male space”.⁸⁸ Women were “banned from the stage”, their roles “played

⁸³ *Id.* at p.65. According to Henderson, tragedy was “an outlet for thoughts ... that could not be expressed in other public fora” (p.138).

⁸⁴ Ruminating on the Aristotelian notion of *catharsis* as both ‘purgation’ and ‘purification’, Gottlieb suggests that “what tragedy provides is a purgation in a pseudo-medical sense. It flushes out the unpleasant feelings ... in a gratifying evacuation” (p.277). A. Gottlieb, *The Dream of Reason: A History of Western Philosophy from the Greeks to the Renaissance*, New York, W.W. Norton, 2000. For Green, ‘catharsis’ involves “the treatment of emotion by emotion, with the aim of discharging it” (p.46).

⁸⁵ Loraux, *Tragic*, p.60.

⁸⁶ *Id.* at p.65.

⁸⁷ P. Shuttle and P. Redgrove, *The Wise Wound: Menstruation and Everywoman*, London, Victor Gollancz, 1978, p.78.

⁸⁸ N.S. Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled: Euripides and the Traffic in Women*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1993, p.1.

by male actors in drag”.⁸⁹ Plays were written by male dramatists for the annual festival of Dionysus held over several days and presented as part of a drama competition.⁹⁰ These plays were performed in the theatre of Dionysus for an audience of around fifteen thousand.⁹¹ While it is uncertain whether women attended the theatre in fifth-century Athens, Foley suggests that the plays were “written and performed by men and aimed ... at a large, public male audience”.⁹² According to Rabinowitz, “it

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* Zeitlin suggests that the theatrical convention of men playing women’s roles – “playing the other” – allowed for the “open[ing] of the [masculine] self to those often banned emotions of fear and pity”. F. I. Zeitlin, “Playing the Other: Theatre, Theatricality, and the Feminine in Greek Drama”, in J.J. Winkler and F.I. Zeitlin, eds, *Nothing to Do With Dionysus? Athenian Drama in its Social Context*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1990, pp.63-96 at p.85.

⁹⁰ According to Goldhill, “[t]he dramatic festival of the city or Great Dionysia was one of the great occasions in the Athenian year. All business was abandoned; the lawcourts closed and for five or possibly six days the city was given over to the Dionysia. This was the major dramatic festival in the year, and Athen[jians] ... could spend a large portion of the day in the theatre watching the dramas produced ... the playwrights were chosen and paid by the state ... [t]he judges were elected by a complicated system of lots ... and the competition for prizes ... was fierce ... [t]he festival itself consisted also of processions and sacrifices ... and much eating, drinking and party-holding” (Goldhill, *Reading*, pp.75-76). For more about the festival of Dionysus see S. Goldhill, “The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology”, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 107, 1987, pp.58-76; J.R. Green, *Theatre in Ancient Greek Society*, London, Routledge, 1994; E. Csapo and W. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1995.

⁹¹ T.R. Martin, *Ancient Greece: From Prehistoric to Hellenistic Times*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996, p.131. Pickard-Cambridge puts the figure somewhere between 14,000 and 17,000. Taplin estimates 15,000. According to Henderson, “the theatre accommodated as many as 17,000” (p.136). A. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens* (1953), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1968, p.263. O.P. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1977, p.10.

⁹² H.P. Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2001, p.3. There is considerable controversy over the issue of female attendance. Although the issue

seems probable that tragedy, as a public spectacle, was used like other cultural institutions to bolster the community, and given the predominant masculinity of Greek culture, that meant a community of male citizens”.⁹³

Although the plays were written and performed by, and most likely for, men, women are nonetheless prominent figures in the tragic landscape.⁹⁴ These (fe)male in(ter)ventions on(to) the tragic stage are “something of a surprise ... in a society that preferred its own women to have as limited a public reputation as possible”.⁹⁵ In classical Athens, women were not recognised as citizens and were formally excluded from the political and military

remains unsettled, I prefer the views of feminist classicists such as Foley and Rabinowitz who suggest that Greek tragedy was “primarily aimed at citizen men” (Foley, p.3). According to Winkler, the “notional or proper audience” was conceptualised as male. J.J. Winkler, “The Ephebes’ Song: *Tragodia* and *Polis*” in J.J. Winkler and F.I. Zeitlin, eds, *Nothing to Do With Dionysus? Athenian Drama in its Social Context*, *op. cit.*, pp.20-62 at p.58.

⁹³ Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled*, p.1. On this point, see also John Gould who suggests that “whatever the actual composition of the audience, it was to male judgment and to male sensibility that fifth-century drama was addressed” (“Law, Custom and Myth”, p.39, note 2).

⁹⁴ In his early work on women in Classical Athens, Gomme goes so far as to pronounce that “[t]here is, in fact, no literature, no art of any country, in which women are more prominent ... than in the tragedy, sculpture, and painting of fifth-century Athens”. A.W. Gomme, “The Position of Women in Athens in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries”, *Classical Philology*, 20(1), 1925, pp.1-25 at p.4.

⁹⁵ Foley, *Female Acts*, p.6. Goldhill speaks of the “dangers that are supposed to arise when women come out of the enclosed world of the house ... dangers particularly to sexual honour” (*Reading*, p.70). So too, Cohen notes that “[t]he separation of women from men ... within this protected domain is the chief means by which sexual purity is both guarded and demonstrated to the community”. D. Cohen, “Seclusion, Separation, and the Status of Women in Classical Athens”, *Greece and Rome*, 36(1), 1989, pp.3-15 at p.6.

life of the city.⁹⁶ Women were relegated to the realm of domesticity – “the private, enclosed and often secret world of the Greek household [*oikos*]”.⁹⁷ Their most important role was the conception and rearing of children that would ensure the continued existence of the city-state (*polis*).⁹⁸ Women were expected to marry and produce sons who would inherit their father’s property. It was essential that citizens married Athenian women in order to produce legitimate “citizen-sons”.⁹⁹ In this respect, “the production of children [was not only] a civic duty incumbent on women, but also the protection of the strict paternal line”.¹⁰⁰ The thought that their wives may indulge in illicit liaisons¹⁰¹ and produce illegitimate children plagued Athenian men, evident both in their rigid control over the activities of women and in their myths of autochthony in which men fantasise a world without the need for women.

⁹⁶ Foley, *Female Acts*, p.7; Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled*, p.3.

⁹⁷ Gould, “Law, Custom and Myth”, p.50. For an interesting discussion of the dialectics of inside and outside, public and private in relation to the space occupied by Athenian women see Goldhill, *Reading*, chapter three. On this issue see also Cohen, “Seclusion, Separation”. According to Goldhill, “the inside of the *oikos*, the closed-off space is the area associated not just with family life, but with women in particular ... the connection between the inside and the female, the outside and the male is regularly asserted as natural and proper” (*Reading*, p.70).

⁹⁸ Gould, “Law, Custom and Myth”, p.51.

⁹⁹ This is Foley’s term (*Female Acts*).

¹⁰⁰ Goldhill, *Reading*, p.68.

¹⁰¹ According to Zeitlin, “women are credited by their menfolk with a dangerous excess of sexuality that requires strict protocols to contain its potential misuse” (p.57). The notion that “a woman’s sexual misconduct [would] bring shame upon her husband’s family [acted as] an ideological constraint on her behaviour” (p.59). F.I. Zeitlin, “Reflections on Erotic Desire in Archaic and Classical Greece” in J. Porter, ed., *Constructions of the Classical Body*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1999, pp.50-76.

The potential for female transgression - women who would somehow destroy the father(land) - is a continual source of anxiety and a recurring motif in tragedy. Indeed, as Rabinowitz suggests, the female destroyer is one of only two types of women in Greek tragedy – the other being the ‘good’ woman who would sacrifice herself for the community.¹⁰² According to Cohen, the tragedians exploit the contradiction between the two, “between woman as men think she should be [and] woman as men fear she is”.¹⁰³ Given the anxieties aroused by the role of women as producers of children, it is perhaps not surprising that the image of the female destroyer in tragedy is specifically associated with motherhood. Only maternal women are imagined as destroyers,¹⁰⁴ the murderous mother being the epitome of female destructiveness.

In her study of the position of women in Ancient Greece, Blundell adopts the early views of Just and Gould - that the women of Athenian drama are, as Just puts it, “cultural

¹⁰² Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled*, p.14. Rabinowitz argues that “sacrificial maidens are fetishized, while the murderous mothers are made terrifying by being made signs of the uncanny. The former are rewarded with glory; the latter are punished with blame” (p.23).

¹⁰³ Cohen, p.5.

¹⁰⁴ P.E. Slater, *The Glory of Hera: Greek Mythology and the Greek Family*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1968, p.12. See also P.E. Slater and D.A. Slater, “Maternal Ambivalence and Narcissism: A Cross-Cultural Study”, *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 11, 1965, pp.241-259.

product[s]” and “ideological formation[s]”.¹⁰⁵ Blundell writes:

Almost everything that we know about Greek women is derived ultimately from a masculine source – from the things which men said about women, from the images of women which they created in literature and art, and from the informal rules and legal regulations which they constructed in order to deal with women. Both as a group and as individuals, the women of Ancient Greece are to a large extent creatures who have been invented by men.¹⁰⁶

According to Case, the women of Greek theatre are male fictions: “the culture invented its own representation of the gender, and it was this fictional ‘Woman’ who appeared on stage ... representing the patriarchal values attached to the gender while suppressing the experiences, stories, [and] feelings of actual women ... replacing [them] with masks of patriarchal production”.¹⁰⁷ The tragedians

¹⁰⁵ R. Just, “The Conception of Women in Classical Athens”, *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, 6(3), 1975, pp.153-170 at p.157.

¹⁰⁶ S. Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece* (1995), London, British Museum Press, 1999, p.10. Gould makes the same point: “we can have no direct access to the model of Athenian society to which women subscribed ... [f]or the evidence available to us is almost without exception the product of men and addressed to men in a male dominated world. It takes the assumptions of the masculine order of things for granted” (“Law, Custom and Myth”, p.38).

¹⁰⁷ S-E. Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, New York, Methuen, 1988, p.7 (also cited in Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled*, pp.1-2). Figes similarly notes that “[a] male-dominated theatre in a patriarchal society will project masculine values and conflicts, just as history books, having been written by men, reflect male concerns ... [h]istory is a form of national

“conceived their women from the male point of view, as ‘radically other’”.¹⁰⁸

Women in Greek tragedy “constitute a ‘muted group’”,¹⁰⁹ spoken about and spoken for by powerful men. “When women speak in tragic drama”, writes Freeman, “they do so through men’s voices”.¹¹⁰ The world of tragedy, Gould suggests, is a world of appearances. “[I]n this world ... women ‘speak’ ... But this is a mirage”.¹¹¹ As Zeitlin also warns, “[i]f we ‘hear’ and see’ women in the literary and pictorial traditions, we must keep in mind that they are figures, not persons. Their images are filtered through conventions of artistic representation and norms for social behaviour”.¹¹² Although these women are denied the power of the word and thus “[un]able to tell us what [they] think about [their] lives”,¹¹³ their silences are nonetheless telling in that they reveal to us the psycho-cultural preoccupations of male tale-tellers and the society in which they wrote.

The Greek tragedians retell stories from their mythical past. According to Blundell, myth is crucial to the ways in

mythology, and drama is one of the most fundamental ways of perpetuating that mythology” (p.103).

¹⁰⁸ Henderson, p.145.

¹⁰⁹ Gould, “Law, Custom and Myth”, p.38.

¹¹⁰ C. Freeman, *Egypt, Greece and Rome: Civilizations of the Ancient Mediterranean*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p.177.

¹¹¹ Gould, “Law, Custom and Myth”, p.38.

¹¹² Zeitlin, “Reflections on Erotic Desire”, p.56. Easterling also notes that “[a]ll tragedy could do was to offer a range of images of female behaviour” (*Tragic*, p.26).

¹¹³ Foley, p.11.

which the tragedians represented women on the stage because of its “fantasy element”.¹¹⁴ For Gould, myth “draw[s] our attention to what is not otherwise visible to us, nor even ... consciously grasped by the tellers and hearers of it”.¹¹⁵ Blundell believes that it is through myth that “we can reach the unconscious notions which men entertained about women [and] ... gain an insight into the symbolic value accorded to women”.¹¹⁶

Since tragedy is “the most communal of texts ... [it] represent[s] utterances on questions which concerned the body politic, and [is] thus ideal for discovering speculation about those outside that body”.¹¹⁷ The narratives of the Greek tragedians reveal extreme ambivalence about the liminal status of women who occupy an “imaginary zone”¹¹⁸ outside the parameters of the *polis* even as they reproduce its citizens from within the city walls.¹¹⁹ Themes of masculine identity and lineage dominate tragic plots and threats to both are most frequently imagined through acts of female transgression. The Greek tragedians focus in particular on mythic women who exist on social and psychical margins – margins that are a dangerous threat

¹¹⁴ Blundell, p.16.

¹¹⁵ Gould, “Law, Custom and Myth”, p.52.

¹¹⁶ Blundell, p.16.

¹¹⁷ P.A. duBois, *Centaurs and Amazons: Women and the Pre-History of the Great Chain of Being*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1982, p.25. Easterling notes that “[w]omen have a place in the imaginative world of tragedy, but it is a place separate from the political sphere of the men” (*Tragic*, p.25).

¹¹⁸ H. Cixous and C. Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (1975), trans. B. Wing, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p.6.

¹¹⁹ Gould, “Law, Custom and Myth”, p.58.

to patriarchal rule.¹²⁰ Indeed, as Gould notes, “[e]ncounters between men and women in Greek myth regularly associate women with ... what is outside the limits of ordered civilisation”.¹²¹ Women are seen as both “necessary to the continuity of society and disruptive of it”, simultaneously the lifeblood of the community and “points of weakness in the solidarity of the community”.¹²² Gould elaborates on the ambivalent position of women in ancient Greek society, suggesting that “women are ‘boundary-crossers’, anomalous beings who belong and do not belong, are ‘within’ and ‘without’”.¹²³ “Excluded from the city yet necessary for its reproduction, [women] came to represent a potentially dangerous, even poisonous force which was both within the city and outside it”.¹²⁴

Fears of a disruptive and disorderly female force lurking within the city and continually pressing against its borders are displaced onto the figure of the murderous mother who signifies the threat of social disintegration. The mother who murders her children falls into the category of Shaw’s “bad women ... women doing what women should not do”,¹²⁵ those who have overstepped and violated prescribed boundaries - marital, maternal, and communal. Feminist classicists such as Zeitlin and Foley have shown

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Id.* at p.52.

¹²² *Id.* at pp.54-55.

¹²³ *Id.* at p.58.

¹²⁴ duBois, *Centaurs*, p.5.

¹²⁵ M. Shaw, “The Female Intruder: Women in Fifth-Century Drama”, *Classical Philology*, 70(4), 1975, pp.255-266 at p.256.

that tales about dissident women “go beyond being cautionary examples of the dangers of permitting independence to women”.¹²⁶ Indeed, tales of destructive women imagine instead what may happen if the norms of law and custom that circumscribe female behaviour are too rigid(ly enforced).¹²⁷ Fantasies of female destroyers are fuelled by a fear that women will “escape the nets of male domination”.¹²⁸ In Greek tragedy, rejection of the prescribed roles of ‘good’ wife and mother “can only be voiced as a total rejection of the hierarchies of male control, a rejection finally to be instantiated in bloody violence against men”¹²⁹ and their progeny.

‘Too much blood’¹³⁰: (Paternal) Sacrifice/(Maternal) Child-murder

That the death of children is a recurrent motif in plays consumed with issues of lineage and inheritance is hardly surprising. What is surprising is the fact that the threat to children arises within the family. As Simon notes, “in the tragic characterization, the family is at risk of destroying itself ... the continuation of the family that is actively destroying itself is a dominant motif in Greek tragedy”.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Foley, *Female Acts*, pp.5-6.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Rabinowitz, p.127.

¹²⁹ Goldhill, “Violence”, p.22.

¹³⁰ Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, line 1459 (trans. R.E. Meagher, *Helen: Myth, Legend, and the Culture of Misogyny*, New York, Continuum, 1995, p.8).

¹³¹ Simon, *Tragic Drama*, pp.2; 7. According to Simon, “the deeds triggering the [family] conflict are often done in the name of preserving the house and yet may ruin the house ... the sort of family relationships portrayed in the great tragic dramas [disrupt] ... the

Significant for the purposes of my study is the way in which the Greek tragedians imagine the murder of children as either purposeful, significant, and productive or as meaningless destruction “full of sound and fury, signifying nothing”.¹³² Why is a father’s murder of his child most typically portrayed as a sacrifice, a purposeful and necessary act “committed in the name of continuing and enhancing the line ... and preserv[ing] his house”¹³³ while a mother’s murder of her child is never a sacrifice but always a destructive act that “threatens extinction”?¹³⁴ How is child-murder engendered in tragedy?

For the ancient Greeks, blood is both dangerous and defiling and a purifying substance that not only separates humans from the gods but also distinguishes men from women.¹³⁵ In his *Theogony*, Hesiod labelled ‘Woman’ *kalon kakon* (‘a necessary evil’); evil because she is lustful,¹³⁶ wild, uncontrollable, and lacking reason, but necessary as reproducer of (male) society.¹³⁷ Blood loss

orderly passage of generations ... [but] [a]t the same time, within these plays there is the assumption – indeed the ideal – that the house and line should be continued” (pp.7; 2).

¹³² *Id.* at p.3.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ H. King, “Sacrificial Blood: The Role of the *Amnion* in Ancient Gynaecology” in M. Skinner, ed., *Rescuing Creusa: New Methodological Approaches to Women in Antiquity*, Texas, Texas Tech University Press, 1987, pp.117-126.

¹³⁶ The Greeks believed that women have “less control than men over their carnal appetites” (Zeitlin, “Erotic”, p.58).

¹³⁷ H. King, “Bound to Bleed: Artemis and Greek Women” in A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt, eds, *Images of Women in Antiquity* (1983), London, Routledge, 1993, pp.109-127 at p.110. In the words of Blum and Blum, “women are feared, needed, and disdained”. R. Blum and

distinguishes mature married child-bearing women (*gynaikes*) from unmarried virgins (*parthenoi*).¹³⁸ According to King, “[t]he *gyne* is the opposite pole to the *parthenos*; she should bleed in menstruation, defloration and childbirth, as part of her role reproducing society ... but *she should not shed blood*. Only a man may shed blood in war and sacrifice”.¹³⁹

The rite of sacrifice confirms the status of men in Greek society.¹⁴⁰ Versnel suggests that there is a relationship between women’s lack of citizenship and the associated rights and privileges afforded citizens and their exclusion from altars and sacrificial bloodshed.¹⁴¹ Gatens similarly associates political rights and sacrificial rites:

From its classical articulation in Greek philosophy, only a body deemed capable of reason and deferral can be admitted into the political body as an active member. Such admission always involves *forfeit* corporeal sacrifice has been a constant feature of the compact .. women ... have been excluded from the pact, simply by virtue of their corporeal specificity ... they are defined by *mere* nature, *mere* corporeality and they have no place in the semi-divine political body except to serve it at its most

E. Blum, *The Dangerous Hour: The Lore of Crisis and Mystery in Rural Greece*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1970, p.274.

¹³⁸ King, “Sacrificial Blood”, p.119.

¹³⁹ King, “Bound to Bleed”, p.120, my italics.

¹⁴⁰ King, “Sacrificial Blood”, p.120.

¹⁴¹ H.S. Versnel, “The Festival for Bona Dea and the Thesmophoria”, *Greece and Rome*, 39(1), 1992, pp.31-55 at p.37.

basic and material level.¹⁴²

Women are “bound to bleed”,¹⁴³ as King puts it, but their blood loss is tied to the specificities of female physiology. In her study of ancient gynaecological treatises and the theories of Hippocrates, King locates numerous analogies between female blood (menstrual/lochia)¹⁴⁴ and sacrificial blood. While unmarried ‘bloodless’ virgins (*parthenoi*) take the role of sacrificial victims,¹⁴⁵ giving themselves either voluntarily or involuntarily for the father(land), married ‘bloody’ matrons give of themselves by producing sons who will continue the father’s lineage. The blood shed in menstruation and childbirth is a visible reminder of female sacrifice – the blood of healthy childbearing women “flows like that of a sacrificed victim”.¹⁴⁶ Female blood loss is evidence of women’s specific role *as women*, related to ideas about “the way in which female anatomy and physiology are imagined to work. Men shed the blood of others: women naturally bleed from their own bodies”.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² M. Gatens, “Corporeal Representation in/and the Body Politic”, *Spectator Burns*, 2, 1987, pp.29-33 at p.31.

¹⁴³ King, “Bound to Bleed”, p.109.

¹⁴⁴ Menstrual and childbirth (lochia) blood are conceived as being one and the same. The ancient Greeks believed that “the discharge after childbirth is in fact made up of menstrual blood” (King, “Sacrificial Blood”, p.118).

¹⁴⁵ King notes that “it is most commonly a *parthenos* of the age for marriage ... who becomes the sacrifice” (“Sacrificial Blood”, p.120).

¹⁴⁶ King, “Sacrificial Blood”, p.117.

¹⁴⁷ *Id.* at p.120.

Prohibitions against bloodshed are specifically related to women's role as mothers. In her theory of blood sacrifice, Jay suggests that:

the [o]pposition between sacrifice and childbirth, or between sacrifice and childbearing women, that is, mothers or potential mothers, is present in countless different sacrificial traditions ... It is a common feature of unrelated traditions that only adult males - fathers, real and metaphorical - may perform sacrifice. Where women are reported as performing sacrifice it is never as mothers.¹⁴⁸

In an earlier article, Jay also notes that “[w]here women do so it is as virgins or in some other specifically non-childbearing role. It is not women as such who are regularly prohibited from sacrificing, but women as child-bearers or as potential child-bearers”.¹⁴⁹ For King, the exclusion of maternal women in Classical Athens from actively participating in the sacrificial ritual “forms part of a wider system of classification of male and female, in which women are excluded from culturally significant acts”.¹⁵⁰ Women cannot engage in military service, sacrifice, or be involved in the political life of the *polis*. Women are

¹⁴⁸ N. Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p.xxiii.

¹⁴⁹ N. Jay, “Sacrifice as Remedy for Having Been Born of Woman” in C. Atkinson, C. Buchanan and M. Miles, eds, *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1985, pp.283-309 at p.284.

¹⁵⁰ King, “Sacrificial Blood”, p.120.

“incapable of fulfilling the appropriate forfeit”¹⁵¹ that would allow them active citizenship. Women’s role as reproducers, while deemed necessary for the survival of the community is also negated.¹⁵² Women ‘passively’ serve the state but are never admitted to the body politic as active members.

In Greek tragedy, male characters typically engage in autogenous fantasies that bypass the need for women in the process of reproduction. We only need recall the impassioned words of Euripides’ Jason: “If only children could be got some other way, / Without the female sex”.¹⁵³ The political and religious right of men to sacrifice, to the exclusion of women, is a means of overcoming the problem of being “of woman born”.¹⁵⁴ Discussing Jay’s theory of blood sacrifice, Fields notes that:

sacrificial ritual enacts patrilineal
descent ... Patrilineal kin know they
are kin *because* they sacrifice together;
they become patrilineal kin by so doing.
To so create social and religious paternity
is precisely to transcend a natural relation.

¹⁵¹ Gatens, p.31.

¹⁵² “In the polarity between blood sacrifice and childbirth, killing receives a positive value and giving birth a negative value” (Jay, “Sacrifice as Remedy”, p.284).

¹⁵³ Euripides, *Medea* in *Medea and Other Plays*, trans. P. Vellacott, London, Penguin, 1963, lines 573-574

¹⁵⁴ A. Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1977. Harrison suggests that although “[m]an cannot escape being born of woman, he can, and ... will, as soon as he comes to manhood, perform ceremonies of riddance and purgation”. J. Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*, London, Merlin Press, 1963, p.36.

In this way, sacrifice becomes ... a 'remedy for having been born of women', or, ... 'birth done better' ... Ritual provides an event that is as available to the senses as childbirth.¹⁵⁵

The idea of patrilineal descent through sacrifice also affords an imaginary escape from the deadly, engulfing maternal matrix – the womb as tomb – that both gives and takes life, the Great Mother (Earth) who takes all her mortal children back into her “maw-like womb”¹⁵⁶ upon death. While the mother is associated with death, decay, and destruction, the father is associated with life, fertility, and production. The imagery of birth and generation shifts from the mother to the father (as saviour) who has the power to overcome the maternal destroyer. Jay describes the way in which the father can transcend the mother (birth and mortality):

Man born of woman may be destined to die, but man integrated into an 'eternal' social order ... transcends mortality ... it

¹⁵⁵ K.E. Fields, “Foreword” in N. Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp.ix-xvii at pp.xiii-xiv; italics in text. According to Harrison, birth from the father is mimetic. Harrison suggests that the “powers of childbearing denied to man, powers only half understood, forces of attraction, but also of danger and repulsion, ... fill him with dim terror” (*Themis*, p.36). In Greek myth, the fear of woman is overcome by mimetic birth reversals: Zeus gives birth to Athena through his head and to Dionysus through his thigh. Commenting on the myth of Dionysus, Harrison suggests that “[t]he birth from the male ‘womb’ is to rid the child from the infection of his mother – to turn him from a woman-thing into a man-thing” (*Themis*, p.36).

¹⁵⁶ A. Stevens, *Ariadne's Clue: A Guide to the Symbols of Humankind* (1998), New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1999, p.192.

is through fathers and sons, not through mothers and daughters, that 'eternal' social continuity is maintained ... Where participation in 'eternal' social continuity is a paternal inheritance, mortality itself may be understood as a maternal inheritance ... sacrificially constituted descent, incorporating women's mortal children into an 'eternal' (enduring through generations) kin group, in which membership is recognised by sacrificial ritual, not merely by birth, enables a patrilineal descent group to transcend mortality in the same process in which it transcends birth. In this sense, sacrifice is doubly a remedy for having been born of woman.¹⁵⁷

That the properties of female (menstrual/lochia) blood are typically contrasted with sacrificial blood also suggests extreme ambivalence and anxiety not only about the role of women in the reproductive process but about the female body itself. Blood has the ability to both purify and pollute. While the blood of childbirth and menstruation are associated with pollution¹⁵⁸ and impurity,¹⁵⁹ the blood of

¹⁵⁷ Jay, "Sacrifice as Remedy", p.297.

¹⁵⁸ Feminist theorist Julia Kristeva discusses the polluting force of maternal blood within her theory of abjection. Within the patriarchal order, the maternal body is a site of defilement and annihilation. Menstrual and lochia blood, sources of life and death, are signs of border-threatening pollution and points of confrontation with the abject Mother. For further discussion of Kristeva and the abject see my Chapter One.

¹⁵⁹ According to Ussher, beliefs about the danger of menstrual blood "epitomise the fear of women and the fantasies of men". In these fantasies, female blood – that "most impure of impurities" is inseparable from blood issuing from murder. Women are cursed to "produc[e] blood with the impossible status of a dead person that has never lived". Ussher explores menstrual taboos across various cultures and believes that taboos exist to contain women. Justified on the basis that they protect men against the "dangerous ... [and]

sacrifice is purificatory. Sacrifice purifies the pollution of childbirth. While sacrifice is “the controlled shedding of blood”,¹⁶⁰ menstrual and lochial blood flow is most frequently imagined to be uncontrollable. According to Carson, women are thought to be “specially lacking in control of their own boundaries”, and thus more likely to “confound the boundaries of others”.¹⁶¹ Fears about the fluid, labile, abject, and unruly female body are expressed through pollution taboos that “isolate and insulate the female, from society and from itself”.¹⁶²

It is frequently noted that the ancient Greeks did not have menstrual taboos.¹⁶³ In contrast, the blood of childbirth

contaminating evil” of Woman, menstrual taboos are merely the first pieces of the “misogynistic jigsaw, which, when finally completed, is horrific in its magnitude and extent”. J. Ussher, *Women’s Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?*, London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991, p.22. See also Girard pp.33-38 for cultural blood taboos. R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), trans. Patrick Gregory, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977.

¹⁶⁰ Jay, “Sacrifice as Remedy”, p.294.

¹⁶¹ A. Carson, “Dirt and Desire: The Phenomenology of Female Pollution in Antiquity” in J. Porter, ed., *Constructions of the Classical Body*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1999, pp.77-100 at p.77.

¹⁶² Carson, p.78. According to Coletti, “the rites that cleansed and resanctified the female body after the violations of childbirth ... were principally dedicated to purifying the female body’s dangerous margins” (pp.74-5). T. Coletti, “Purity and Danger: The Paradox of Mary’s Body and the En-gendering of the Infancy Narrative in the English Mystery Cycles” in L. Lomperis and S. Stanbury, eds, *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993, pp.65-95.

¹⁶³ Moulinier (1952) contends that “[t]he Greeks were not very concerned about menstrual blood” (Cited and translated in Jay, “Sacrifice as Remedy”, p.284). See also Vernant who suggests that Moulinier was “perhaps over-emphatic” on this issue. J-P. Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays*, ed. F.I. Zeitlin, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1991, p.124.

was defiling (*miasma*).¹⁶⁴ However, Shuttle and Redgrove believe otherwise. The authors suggest that the release of female blood - menstrual and lochial - is associated with immense power which “gives rise to aggression and anxiety in men”.¹⁶⁵ The Greeks dealt with these aggressive anxieties in two ways. On the one hand, they sought to diminish their fears through “avoidance and ignore-ance”.¹⁶⁶ Drawing on the work of Kerényi, Shuttle and Redgrove interpret the festival of *Thesmophoria* in honour of Demeter as a period of seclusion for menstruating women. Men were forbidden to participate in or even witness the festival. Women were isolated for several days during which they renewed their fertility.¹⁶⁷ So too, the *lechona* (perinatal woman) was isolated for about ten days after childbirth to coincide with pollution beliefs about post-natal blood.¹⁶⁸ The pollution of childbirth and death were closely associated but, Parker notes, “[b]irth seems to have polluted a more restricted circle than death”.¹⁶⁹ Childbirth defiled everyone in the house and those who came into contact with the new mother

¹⁶⁴ R. Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1983.

¹⁶⁵ Shuttle and Redgrove, p.185.

¹⁶⁶ *Id.* at p.78.

¹⁶⁷ Shuttle and Redgrove, p.184. For more about the *Thesmophoria* see J. P. Johansen, “The Thesmophoria as a Women’s Festival”, *Temenos*, 2, 1975, pp.78-87; Versnel, “The Festival for Bona Dea and the Thesmophoria”, *op. cit.*, pp.31-55. See also Burkert for a consideration of Kerényi’s interpretation of the *Thesmophoria*. W. Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical* (1977), trans. John Raffan, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1985, p.245.

¹⁶⁸ Parker, *Miasma*, p.55.

¹⁶⁹ *Id.* at p.50.

were impure for three days.¹⁷⁰ On the other hand, they projected their aggression into sacrificial rituals that “repeat[ed] in external and visible form the fertility-secrets of [female] blood-shedding”.¹⁷¹ According to Detienne, “the absolute control of sacrifice by men ... relie[ves] ... male fantasy fears of the power of women, especially that of mature childbearing women, women as mothers”.¹⁷²

According to Slater, the Greeks were most fearful of “mature maternal women” - *gynaikes*, those who bleed – and suggests that taboos “arise wherever there is a fear of the mature woman”.¹⁷³ Female blood loss makes women dangerous – “a potential source of disorder that ... can

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.* Blum and Blum also note that the clothes of the lechona were disposed of and dedicated to Artemis Brauronia and the lechona was forbidden from entering the temple for forty days. Priests of the Eleusinian cult were not allowed to enter the house of the lechona (p.272) because they were “susceptible to weakening from pollution” (p.298). The authors note that pollution beliefs about the lechona still exist in modern villages in rural Greece: “there is continuity over two to three thousand years, for there exists a similarity in specific practices ... in the regard for powers and pollution, and in all probability in underlying social attitudes and reactions” (p.272). On this last point see also J. Dubisch, “Greek Women: Sacred or Profane”, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 1, 1983, pp.185-202 at p.192.

¹⁷¹ Shuttle and Redgrove 184.

¹⁷² M. Detienne, “The Violence of Wellborn Ladies: Women in the Thesmophoria” in M. Detienne and J-P. Vernant, *The Cuisine of Sacrifice Among the Greeks* (1979), trans. Paula Wissing, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989, pp.129-147 at p.143. Detienne notes that in Greek society “[t]here is not a single example of a *megeiros*, butcher-sacrificer-cook, who is not male. Moreover, the word *megeiros* has no feminine forms ... In other words, the Greek system does not allow any thought of women as butchers and sacrificers” (p.143).

¹⁷³ Slater, *Glory of Hera*, p.12.

never be completely ruled out”.¹⁷⁴ Women were “incorporated” – tamed, yoked, domesticated - into society through marriage.¹⁷⁵ However, as Versnel suggests, “this subjugation never loses a taint of precariousness”.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, the Greek tragedians repeatedly return to the fearful fantasy of women escaping from or overturning the shackles of domesticity, subverting their roles as wives and mothers. As Zeitlin notes, “[t]he distance between social unequals ... conjures up ideas of resistance, competition, reversal, and subversion”.¹⁷⁷

In ancient Greece, children cemented the marital union.¹⁷⁸ According to Shaw, “[t]he wife’s virtues are those demanded by the *oikos*, *mother love* ... and the ability to create harmony”.¹⁷⁹ Wives were expected to protect “the things inside”,¹⁸⁰ the implication here being that women needed to safeguard the sanctity of both their own bodies and the progeny issuing from them. While a father had a

¹⁷⁴ Versnel, p.50. As Mary Douglas notes, “[r]itual recognises the potency of disorder” (p.94). M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966), London, Ark, 1984.

¹⁷⁵ Versnel, p.50.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Zeitlin, “Reflections on Erotic Desire”, p.58.

¹⁷⁸ Shaw, p.259, note 18.

¹⁷⁹ *Id.* at p.256; my italics. According to Slater, the Greeks drew a fine line between notions of maternal love and hate. A mother may “love her child intensely, but also hate his maleness as a representative of those powers that have deprived her of the full rights of citizenship” (p.77). Dowden suggests that women who fail to support the *oikos* necessarily “lose the claim to womanhood” (p.51). K. Dowden, “Approaching Women Through Myth: Vital Tool or Self-Delusion?” in R. Hawley and B. Levick, eds, *Women in Antiquity: New Assessments* (1995), London, Routledge, 2003, pp.44-57.

¹⁸⁰ Shaw, p.256, note 8.

legal right to his children, a “mother’s relationship with her child [was] that of a caregiver, a guardian, a body: it [was] seen as a bond, not a right”.¹⁸¹ The relationship between father and child rests on medical and philosophical conceptions of creation. According to Aristotle, women were merely “foetal containers”,¹⁸² the womb merely housing the male seed that determined the form of the child.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ McCracken, p.70. Delaney conceptualises the relationship between male and female/paternity and maternity through the metaphor of seed and soil: “Paternity has not meant just the recognition of a biological relationship between a man and a specific child ... paternity has meant the primary, creative, engendering role ... it is symbolised by the word seed. Identity ... is imagined as a matter of seed ... it is bequeathed by the father ... Women, in contrast, have been imagined as the nurturing medium in which the seed is planted rather than as co-creators; they foster its growth and bring it forth but do not provide its essential identity ... The seemingly simple word seed is anything but simple or neutral. By evoking associations with agriculture and the natural world, the image naturalises a structure of power relations as it also conceals it. Represented as seed and soil, male and female roles have been differentially valued and hierarchically ordered. This theory of procreation ... has been the dominant folk theory in the West for millennia”. C. Delaney, “Abraham, Isaac, and Some Hidden Assumptions of Our Culture”, *Humanist*, 59(3), 1999, pp.14-22 at pp.16-17.

¹⁸² L. Peach, “From Spiritual Descriptions to Legal Prescriptions: Religious Imagery of Woman as ‘Foetal Container’ in the Law”, *Journal of Law and Religion*, 10(1), 1993-94, pp.73-93. duBois has shown how the female body was “likened to a simple receptacle or a surface for inscription: a passive medium for the inscription of masculine culture” (p.33). P.A. duBois, *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988.

¹⁸³ For further discussion of Aristotle’s theory of generation see the following chapter. According to duBois, “dominant cultural metaphors ... suggest initially that the woman’s body is merely a container of the embryo ... as time goes by the function of woman as nurse of the seed becomes the predominant one” (*Sowing*, p.33). duBois suggests that common metaphors in ancient representations of women such as field, furrow, oven, stone, and tablet “partake of and reinscribe this dominant function of the woman” (*Sowing*, p.33). In Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, Apollo states: “the woman you call the mother of the child is

According to McCracken, “men engender and therefore have the right to dispose of their children”.¹⁸⁴ In contrast,

... just a nurse to the seed, / the new-sown seed that grows and swells inside her. / The man is the source of life” (*The Eumenides*, (trans. R. Fagles, New York, Viking Press, 1975), lines 666-669). According to McCracken, children share their fathers’ blood and are “metonymic extension[s] of the father” (p.56). P. McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, The Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003. Children also share their mothers’ blood – the nourishing blood of menstruation (Aristotle believed that the substance needed for [foetal] growth was supplied exclusively by the menstrual blood – see H. Graham, *Eternal Eve*, Altrincham, UK, St Ann’s Press, 1950, p.42) and parturition (breast milk was believed to be menstrual blood) – “but this blood is not displayed symbolically in proof of lineage” (p.56). A father’s blood (semen) engenders while a mother’s blood is dangerous and defiling. In Apollo’s judgment (in Aeschylus, *Oresteia* – ‘The Eumenides’), the mother who provides nourishment to the foetus is not a ‘parent’ in the legal sense but merely one who “preserves the offspring”. D. Coole, *Women in Political Theory: From Ancient Misogyny to Contemporary Feminism*, Sussex, Wheatsheaf Books, 1988, p.19.

¹⁸⁴ McCracken, “Engendering”, p.61. “In ancient Greece, a father literally had the power of life and death over his children. In a ceremony called the Amphidromia, the father was forced to decide whether to receive his child into his family five days after the child’s birth. Since the law stipulated that the inheritance was to be divided equally among all the male children, there was financial incentive to reject all but the first son so that the family’s property would remain intact after the death of the patriarch” (pp.9-10). B. Gallagher, “A Brief Legal History of Institutionalised Child Abuse”, *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 17, 1997, pp.1-30. “Athenian citizens needed only one son to guarantee the continuation of the *oikos*, which formed the basis of the body politic. This provided one motivation for infanticide ... the Amphidromia, a ritual held several days after the birth of a child, at which the father received the child after it had been carried around the fireplace as a symbol of the baby’s acceptance into his household”. R. Oldenziel, “The Historiography of Infanticide in Antiquity: A Literature Stillborn” in J. Blok and P. Mason, eds, *Sexual Asymmetry: Studies in Ancient Society*, Amsterdam, J.C. Gieben, 1987, pp.87-107 at pp.90; 92. After birth, the infant was inspected by the father. If accepted, the child did not enter the community of humans until the ceremony of the Amphidromia in which it was carried by a man running around the fire ... its purpose was to ascertain whether the baby was real or ... a demon” (Blum and Blum, p.272). “It was the custom in historic times that soon after the child was born and before it had become officially recognized as a family member, the father inspected the infant to decide whether to accept it or to decree its death” (Blum and Blum, p.281). Similarly, under Roman law

where a mother murders her child, she offends against both the *oikos* (the virtue of mother love) and the *polis* (communal continuity) and thus commits both “an unnatural crime” and a “monstrous act”.¹⁸⁵ Maternal child-murder renders men powerless. Paternal destruction is enacted through the destruction of (the father’s) children. Women possess “the ability to create, destroy, or pervert the bonds between father and child”.¹⁸⁶

In Greek tragedy there is a clear distinction between maternal and paternal child-killing. While maternal child-killing is conceived of as “meaningless destruction that threatens extinction”, paternal child-killing is typically justified in terms of sacrifice – “deliberate, purposeful, ‘rational’ action, under perfect control”.¹⁸⁷ McCracken suggests that paternal sacrifice is never equivalent to maternal child-murder: “a father may kill his child in the service of some higher good or higher purpose ... the mother who would kill her child with her own hands does not sacrifice; she murders”.¹⁸⁸ McCracken contrasts “a father’s sacrifice of his children as a right and as an example of ‘goodness’”¹⁸⁹ with “a mother’s murder of her children ... an unnatural crime, a monstrous act that

”the will of the father was absolute, arbitrary will of the *patria potestas* who had the power of life and death over his children”. C. Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory*, Cambridge, UK, Polity Press, 1989, p.37.

¹⁸⁵ McCracken, “Engendering”, p.66.

¹⁸⁶ Shaw, p.260.

¹⁸⁷ Jay, “Sacrifice as Remedy”, p.294.

¹⁸⁸ McCracken, “Engendering”, pp.56-57.

¹⁸⁹ *Id.* at p.63.

cannot be explained in terms of a 'higher' good".¹⁹⁰ "When a mother kills her child, the infanticide is always a murder ... Mothers' murders are located in the realm of the domestic, not the divine; they offer revenge, not a covenant; they impose local justice, not the higher justice of divine right".¹⁹¹

In Greek tragedy, we return to Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia¹⁹² introduced in the previous chapter. In Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, the Greek fleet cannot set sail to Troy due to poor weather. The seer Calchas tells Agamemnon that in order to remedy the

¹⁹⁰ *Id.* at p.66.

¹⁹¹ *Id.* at p.56. In her study of Judeo-Christian sacrificial discourse, Carol Delaney examines the biblical story of the sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham and suggests that "the willingness to sacrifice one's child is seen as model behaviour ... [as] the quintessential model of faith" (p.14). See also her book *Abraham on Trial: the Social Legacy of Biblical Myth*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1998. In her discussion, Delaney mentions a modern American case in which a father 'sacrificed' his child because he believed that it was God's command. There is an interesting parallel between this case, in its association between father/man/God, and the case of Texan mother Andrea Yates, who murdered her five children because 'the devil told her to', in its association between mother/woman/devil. See the following chapter for further consideration of Judeo-Christian conceptions of women and evil.

¹⁹² For an interesting comparison between the sacrifice of Iphigenia and the biblical sacrifice of Isaac see the work of philosophers Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Robert Payne, London, Oxford University Press, 1939 and Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995. For a discussion of the work of Kierkegaard and Derrida, among others, see K. Oliver, *Subjectivity Without Subjects: From Abject Fathers to Desiring Mothers*, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield, 1998, pp.25-42. According to Oliver, "[t]he promise of fatherhood is made through the sacrifice of mothers and their daughters" (p.42). On the sacrifice of mothers and daughters see also L. Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies* (1987), trans. Gillian Gill, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993.

situation he must sacrifice his daughter. In Calchas' prophecy the virgin goddess Artemis demands the sacrifice of Iphigenia.¹⁹³ Agamemnon lures his daughter to the sacrificial site at Aulis under the false pretence of marriage to Achilles.¹⁹⁴ Both (self) sacrifice and marriage

¹⁹³ Foley, *Ritual*, p.66. In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Artemis demands Iphigenia's sacrifice because of her anger over the blood shed before the fleet leaves for Troy as symbolised by eagles devouring a pregnant hare. See J-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (1972), trans. J. Lloyd, New York, Zone Books, 1988, p.145. Burkert notes that Artemis demands a sacrifice "in propitiation for a stag which Agamemnon has killed in Artemis' sacred grove" (Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p.151). "It is the goddess Artemis, reproaching the Achaeans for wishing to exterminate a city that she compares to a pregnant doe pursued by bloodthirsty eagles, who holds the fleet at Aulis and demands a virgin in sacrifice if the expedition is to go on and succeed" (A. Green, *The Tragic Effect: The Oedipus Complex in Tragedy* (1969), trans. A. Sheridan, London, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p.42).

¹⁹⁴ Iphigenia's mother, Clytemnestra, sees Agamemnon's sacrifice as a crime requiring punishment. She slaughters Agamemnon as though he himself is a sacrificial victim. Although steeped in sacrificial imagery, Clytemnestra's act is not a sacrifice but a murder. Indeed, both Orestes and Electra see their mother's murder of their father as a monstrous act. As Guépin puts it, in the eyes of his children, Agamemnon is the "innocent victim whose death must be avenged" (J-P. Guépin, *The Tragic Paradox: Myth and Ritual in Greek Tragedy*, Amsterdam, Adolf M. Hakkert, 1968, p.5). Clytemnestra, not Agamemnon, destroys the *oikos*. In Euripides' *Hecuba* a mother also avenges the sacrifice of her daughter (Polyxena). In that play, Euripides transforms a loving, grief-stricken mother into a bloodthirsty fury. Not only does Hecuba blind (symbolically castrate) King Polymestor but she also murders his children. According to Kerrigan, plays about mythic female figures such as Clytemnestra or Hecuba "exude an emotional intensity that breeds a cycle of violence – 'blood calls for blood'" (J. Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1996, p.5). According to Blum and Blum, tragedies dealing with the theme of paternal sacrifice reflect the "conflict of motherhood versus community codes" (p.282). Women generally did not accept the right of their husbands to sacrifice children conceived in marriage. A notable exception is queen Praxithea in Euripides' *Erechtheus* who encourages her husband king Erechtheus to sacrifice one of his daughters: "I hate a woman who holds her child's life above duty" (Blum and Blum, p.282). So too, in Euripides' *Ion* "Erechtheus' sacrifice of his daughters [is] justified by Creousa as a patriotic act" (M-K. Gamel, "Apollo Knows I have No

are 'appropriate' forms of behaviour for the young virgin (*parthenos*) and in both circumstances she will shed fresh 'pure' blood upon fleshly penetration by the phallus/knife. Foley considers the ritual and mythic analogies between marriage, war, and sacrifice, in particular the requirement that "[b]oth the marriage and the war require a preliminary sacrifice (*proteleia*) to Artemis".¹⁹⁵ According to Loraux, virgins, being "ignorant of marriage", are connected in the cultural imagination with war – "[t]he virgins cannot fight alongside the men, but, in times of peril, their blood flows ... to ensure victory ... If men's blood is not to be spilt in vain, the blood of a virgin must flow".¹⁹⁶

In Greek myth, Artemis is both Huntress, "the one ... whose arrows ... bring sudden death", and Maiden, "the

Children: Motherhood, Scholarship, Theatre", *Arethusa*, 34(2), 2001, pp.153-171 at p.162). For further discussion of the vengeance of Clytemnestra and Hecuba see G. Gellie, "Hecuba and Tragedy", *Anthichthon*, 14, 1980, pp.30-44; D.J. Conacher, "Euripides' *Hecuba*", *American Journal of Philology*, 82(1), 1961, pp.1-26; H.P. Foley, "Marriage and Sacrifice in Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Aulis*", *Arethusa*, 15, 1982, pp.159-180; R. Meridor, "The Function of Polymestor's Crime in the 'Hecuba' of Euripides", *Eranos*, 81, 1983, pp.13-20; R. Meridor, "Hecuba's Revenge: Some Observations on Euripides' *Hecuba*", *American Journal of Philology*, 99, 1978, pp.28-35; F.I. Zeitlin, "Euripides' *Hekabe* and the Somatics of Dionysiac Drama", *Ramus*, 20(1), 1991, pp.53-94; F.I. Zeitlin, "The Motif of Corrupted Sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*", *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 96, 1965, pp.463-508; F.I. Zeitlin, "Postscript to Sacrificial Imagery in the *Oresteia* (Ag.1235-37)", *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 97, 1966, pp.645-653; Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled*, pp.103-124.

¹⁹⁵ Foley, p.69. Foley also notes that "Iphigenia's sacrifice occurs in a meadow sacred to Artemis. In the literary tradition the image of the meadow is particularly associated with a virgin just before ... marriage" (p.70).

¹⁹⁶ Loraux, *Tragic*, pp.33-34.

pure *parthenos*, dedicated to eternal virginity”.¹⁹⁷ She is both goddess of the untamed world and goddess of fertility.¹⁹⁸ She governs female blood flow (menstrual, lochial, hymeneal) and the passage from girl to woman, from *parthenos* to *gynai*. She ensures that the *parthenos* is tamed and domesticated for her role as wife and mother.¹⁹⁹ She presides over childbirth, an act that “definitively cuts the links to the girl’s virginal world”.²⁰⁰ Childbirth is also associated with “the wild and animal side of femaleness ... with its screams, its agony, and its delirium”²⁰¹ – a savageness that must be kept under control. Artemis maintains the boundaries between the wild and the civilized.²⁰² While Artemis is associated with reproduction, life, and fertility, she is also destructive, deadly, and bloodthirsty.²⁰³ In myth, she is particularly

¹⁹⁷ Vernant, *Mortals*, p.196. On the association between hunting and sacrifice see P. Vidal-Naquet, “Hunting and Sacrifice in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*” in J-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (1972), trans. Janet Lloyd, New York, Zone Books, 1988, pp.141-159.

¹⁹⁸ Vernant, *Mortals*, p.197.

¹⁹⁹ A. Henrichs, “Human Sacrifice in Greek Religion: Three Case Studies” in J. Rudhardt and O. Reverdin, eds, *Le Sacrifice Dans L’Antiquité*, Geneva, Hardt Foundation, 1981, pp.195-235 at p.207.

²⁰⁰ Vernant, *Mortals*, p.202, note 15. Bergmann offers a psychological interpretation of the seeming paradox that women in childbirth prayed to the goddess most concerned with sacrifice. He writes: “During the pain of childbirth a woman can feel intense, if unconscious, hatred toward the man who impregnated her. It would not be surprising if in her desperation she turned back to the virgin goddess and begged Artemis not to punish her for having given up her virginity. In the unconscious of Greek men, where both penetration and impregnation evoked guilt, the wrath of the virgin goddess can be appeased by ... the sacrifice of the child” (p.53).

²⁰¹ Vernant, *Mortals*, p.202.

²⁰² *Id.* at p.198. See also, pp.200-201.

²⁰³ According to Lloyd-Jones, “Artemis came to be thought of as a protector of women in travail; but originally she had been a dangerous

harmful to virgins²⁰⁴ and mothers, demanding the sacrificial blood of virgins at times of war or causing the death of women and children, perhaps most memorably the punishment inflicted on the mortal woman Niobe for boasting about her children²⁰⁵ and the transformation of Autonoe's son, Actaeon, into a stag mauled to death by wild dogs.²⁰⁶

According to Bergmann, the ancient Greeks attributed "murderous wishes toward[s] children" to Artemis in her role as 'Lady of Wild Things'.²⁰⁷ In her the "repressed but ... murderous wishes of mother against child [find] expression".²⁰⁸ Harrison compares this side of Artemis to the terrible, destructive aspect of the archetypal Great Mother.²⁰⁹ As a virgin goddess, Artemis embodies hostility

enemy" (p.99). H. Lloyd-Jones, "Artemis and Iphigeneia", *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 103, 1983, pp.87-102. Hartigan notes that Artemis is "particularly vengeful, quick to anger and quick to punish" (p.184). K. Hartigan, *Ambiguity and Self-Deception: The Apollo and Artemis Plays of Euripides*, New York, Peter Lang, 1991.

²⁰⁴ Lloyd-Jones notes that "[s]everal myths record [Artemis'] fury against girls who left her sphere by surrendering their virginity" ("Artemis", p.99).

²⁰⁵ Artemis kills Niobe's six daughters with her bow and arrow. Hera taunts her step-daughter Artemis by telling her "a lion to women Zeus has made you – to kill any at your pleasure" (Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p.151).

²⁰⁶ There are several versions of the myth of Actaeon. Artemis inflicts her deadly punishment on the boy either because he saw her bathing or because he proclaimed that he was a superior hunter. For more see Lloyd-Jones, "Artemis", p.99. See also Guépin (p.13) who notes another version in which Actaeon is punished because of his love for his aunt, Semele.

²⁰⁷ Bergmann, pp.52-53.

²⁰⁸ *Id.* at pp.53-54.

²⁰⁹ Harrison, *Themis*, p.504.

towards those who embrace sexuality and maternity.²¹⁰ Bergmann believes that in her demand for the sacrifice of children, Artemis is motivated by jealousy of those *gynaikes* who are no longer virgins but mothers or potential mothers.²¹¹ If, as Bergmann suggests, women prayed to Artemis during childbirth in fear of being punished for losing their virginity,²¹² then Artemis' demand for the sacrifice of children *enacted by fathers* is both a form of punishment and a visible manifestation of her hostility and resentment towards child-bearing women. The child engendered by the father is the father's to sacrifice. Paternal right breaks the bond of maternal love.

'A disorder that threatens all order'²¹³: Mothers, Mania, Murder, and Maenadism

Both Artemis and Dionysus are associated with the destruction of children. Artemis is "by nature close to Dionysus and [is] associated with him in cult and myth".²¹⁴

²¹⁰ Bergmann, p.53.

²¹¹ *Ibid.* In the course of the following chapter we will consider several mythic women who become dangerous to mothers and children after they have lost their own children or are unable to produce children of their own.

²¹² Bergmann, p.53.

²¹³ E. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1994, p.203.

²¹⁴ W.F. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult* (1965), trans. Robert B. Palmer, Texas, Spring Publications, 1986, p.92. Guépin writes: "Artemis and Dionysus are closely related gods: both have their orgiastic dances, both are divinities of the wild hunt" (p.13). Kerényi notes that the Dionysus cult attached itself to Artemis soon after its arrival on the east coast of Attica (p.184). Burkert (*Greek Religion*) notes that the cults of Artemis and Dionysus "have many parallels. They, and they alone, have a *thiasos*, a retinue of animated dancers ... masks and even phallic costumes are found in dances for Artemis as well as in dances for Dionysus ... the things of Artemis can easily

They are linked in the myth of the three daughters of King Proetus of Argolid. In one version of the myth, “Artemis angrily inflicts the daughters of Proetus with madness²¹⁵ and an itch ... [t]hey wander madly in the wild. A seer cures them”.²¹⁶ Women transformed into maenads - “literally ‘madwomen’”²¹⁷ - by Dionysus also wander through forests and mountains and other “wild untamed Artemisian places”.²¹⁸ In another version of the myth of

turn into the things of Dionysus ... [a]t Patrai the festivals of Artemis and Dionysus are intertwined” (pp.222-223). Dexter notes that “Artemis was indeed associated with the Bacchantic tradition” (p.116) evidenced by the clothing and other items used in the Bacchic dances found in the temple of Artemis near Messenia and by a dedication to Artemis by the poet Timotheus that included epithets of women possessed by Dionysus. M.R. Dexter, *Whence the Goddesses: A Source Book*, New York, Pergamon Press, 1990. See also Detienne for similarities between Artemis and Dionysus.

²¹⁵ Artemis is associated with the monstrous Erinyes discussed in the previous chapter who inflicted madness on Orestes for his matricide. Like Artemis, they too demand blood to appease their wrath. Padel describes the Erinyes as “hunting maenads, pursuant, repellent, blood-lusting” (p.180) and notes that artists reflecting tragic imagery frequently represented the Erinyes as Maenads (p.177). R. Padel, *In and Out of the Mind: Greek Images of the Tragic Self*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1992. Guépin similarly notes that “in art Erinyes and Maenads are hard to distinguish: both wear snakes in their hair and carry wands or torches, and their clothing is similar” (p.21).

²¹⁶ R. Padel, *Whom Gods Destroy: Elements of Greek and Tragic Madness*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1995, p.15.

²¹⁷ *Id.* at p.28.

²¹⁸ *Id.* at p.102. Seaford draws a comparison between maenads and virgin brides. Preparations for marriage included “a type of premarital ritual, associated in particular with Artemis, [whereby] [t]he girls leave their homes for a temporary stay in the wild periphery [of the city-state], in which they are imagined as animals to be ‘tamed’ or ‘yoked’ in marriage (p.121) ... Maenads too leave home collectively for a rite of passage in the wild periphery, where they resist men [and] become like animals” (p.122). R. Seaford, “Dionysus as Destroyer of the Household: Homer, Tragedy, and the Polis” in T.H. Carpenter and C.A. Faraone, eds, *Masks of Dionysus*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1993, pp.115-146.

Proetus,²¹⁹ the king's daughters refuse to honour Dionysus who drives them mad as punishment. The daughters roam the country "with all manner of unseemliness".²²⁰ King Proetus asks Melampus, a soothsayer and healer, to cure his daughters and release them from their madness (*mania*²²¹).²²² In exchange, Melampus demands a third of the kingdom. The king refuses and his daughters descend further into the depths of madness, finally murdering their children.²²³ The madness spreads to all women in Argolid who leave their houses, roam the wilderness, and murder their children.²²⁴ The daughters of Minyas similarly resist Dionysus and are transformed into maenads who draw lots to decide whose child they will murder.²²⁵ In Thebes, the daughters of

²¹⁹ For various versions of the myth see W. Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* (1972), trans. Peter Bing, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1983, pp.170-174.

²²⁰ C. Kerényi, *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, trans. Ralph Manheim, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976, p.186.

²²¹ According to Padel, 'madness' "translates several Greek words, but the one most often used in tragedy is '*mania*' (a 'fit of madness')" (p.106). R. Padel, "Madness in Fifth-Century (B.C.) Athenian Tragedy" in P. Heelas and A. Lock eds, *Indigenous Psychologies: The Anthropology of the Self*, London, Academic Press, 1981, pp.105-131.

²²² N.G.L. Hammond and H.H. Scullard, "Proetus" in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (1970), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1984, p.883.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ Kerényi, *Dionysos*, pp.178; 184; 186 and Detienne, *Dionysos at Large*, p.14.

²²⁵ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p.164; Kerényi, *Dionysos*, p.179. According to O'Flaherty, "there are strong equine overtones to [maenadic] behaviour ... [t]hey are likened to fillies and are replaced by horses in other variants of the myth" (p.200). O'Flaherty notes that the name of the sister whose child is murdered is Leucippe, meaning 'white mare', and her son is named Hippasus ('horseman'). O'Flaherty recounts one version in which the 'wild horse women' are transformed into "winged creatures, flying night-mares – witches and vampires"

Cadmus, great great grandfather of the hero Oedipus, resist Dionysus.²²⁶ Their myth forms the basis of Euripides' final play, the *Bacchae*.

The myths of Dionysus deal with female transgression – those who fail to submit to the will of the Gods are transformed into disobedient and lustful wives and murderous mothers overcome by madness. Dissidence is contagious and uncontrollable. In these myths, women transcend norms of female behaviour and pervert the boundaries between nature and culture, the wild and the civilised.²²⁷ The myths of Dionysus were not popular with the tragedians, perhaps because they too closely acknowledged female power,²²⁸ but they did attract the attention of Euripides whose drama associates the madness of the Dionysian with fantasies about the wildness of women, rooted in ideas about the fallibility of the female body. In Euripides' *Bacchae* women are, by nature, disordered and disorderly and the female body changing shape – both in the natural process of

(p.200). The *parthenos* was also described as a filly needing to be 'tamed' and 'yoked' for marriage. W.D. O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980.

²²⁶ Kerényi, *Dionysos*, p.185.

²²⁷ Vernant notes that Dionysus confuses categories: male/female; young/old; Greek/barbarian; wild/civilised. "The Masked Dionysus of Euripides' *Bacchae*" in J.P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (1972), trans. J. Lloyd, New York, Zone Books, 1988, pp.381-412 at pp.398-400.

²²⁸ Foley, *Female Acts*, p.12, comments on the idea espoused by Rabinowitz (*Anxiety Veiled* at pp.22-27) that the tragedians simultaneously "acknowledged the possibility of a female power" (p.26) and sought to control that power.

pregnancy and in regression to nature and the wilderness in the form of maenads – is a visible reminder of the ‘unnaturalness’ of these seemingly ‘natural’ processes.²²⁹ In the *Bacchae* Euripides uses the monstrosity of female metamorphosis and the discourse of *mania* to imagine what might happen if “the wildness which belongs to motherliness in its primal form ... break[s] loose”.²³⁰

Vernant suggests that “giving birth – the production of human offspring the way beasts produce their own – displays to Greek eyes, with its screams, its agony, and its delirium, the wild and animal side of femaleness”.²³¹ The ancient Greeks imagine the unleashing of this wild and unrestrained female power in the figure of the murderous

²²⁹ Easterling notes that in the *Bacchae* “the idyllic communion with nature [is contrasted with] the destructive violence of the maenads” (“Tragic”, p.25). In the Greek mind, the womb is “fertile with fearful as well as beneficial forces” (Padel, *Mind*, p.101). That which is inside the female body and thus unseen is potentially destructive (p.100). The mother’s womb “resembles dark earth and underworld. Earth brings forth new growth. But her ‘womb’ ... also ‘breeds’ nightmare. Terrifying, impure things ... Madness, Conflict, Giants, Erinyes” (p.102).

²³⁰ Kerényi, *Dionysos*, p.132. In his discussion of Euripides’ *Hecuba*, Segal comments upon Hecuba’s metamorphosis from “a gentler, more loving, maternal self ... to monster ... sealed finally in [her] physical change ... into a literal bitch” (“Violence”, p.39). For Segal, the potency of Hecuba’s metamorphosis lies in its permanency. Hers is an image “frozen” in time – “her canine shape [both] a landmark for sailors” (p.44) and a warning to men. Drawing on Euripides’ references to Hecuba and her female attendants as “Bacchantes of Hades”, Zeitlin locates the play within the Dionysian realm. She suggests that *Hecuba* “is the exemplary Dionysiac plot, the one that arouses men’s deepest fears, when mothers who love their children and hold them close turn in anger against them, their own or those of others, and in a reversal of roles do injury to the bodies of men” (p.56). F.I. Zeitlin, “Euripides’ *Hekabe* and the Somatics of Dionysiac Drama”, *Ramus*, 20(1), 1991, pp.53-94.

²³¹ Vernant, *Mortals*, p.202.

mother. We may recall Rheingold's analogy between birth and death, that the mother in labour appears to observers to be trying to annihilate rather than birth her child.²³² Women mediate between the realms of birth and death,²³³ and in tragedy the mother who gives life readily transforms into the deadly infanticide. Euripides stages a direct confrontation with the murderous mother and locates her act within the realm of bestiality, savagery, and barbarism.

In both the *Bacchae* and another of Euripides' plays, *Medea*, the 'natural' bond that connects mother and child threatens the social connection between father and child and reveals extreme ambivalence about the role of women in reproducing the city and the power of women to "dissolve, not cement, social bonds".²³⁴ According to Gould, women in fifth-century Athens occupy a tenuous position:

Women are not part of, do not belong
easily in, the male ordered world of the

²³² *Supra* at note 53.

²³³ Johansen notes that "the relationship between women and the realms of the dead formed part of a deeper, widespread conception or feeling that creation and death are connected" ("Thesmophoria", p.85). According to Padel, "Greek societies, male-ordered, generally assigned to women ritual presidency over the transitional experiences, dying and birth, which are perceived as passages into and out of darkness. Dying is 'going into the dark', being born is 'coming into the light', an image often doing double service for the body's emergence from the womb and passage into the grave" (p.5). R. Padel, "Women: Model For Possession By Greek Daemons" in A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt, eds, *Images of Women in Antiquity* (1983), London, Routledge, 1993, pp.3-19.

²³⁴ Foley, *Female Acts*, p.11.

‘civilised’ community; they have to be accounted for in other terms, and they threaten continually to overturn its stability or subvert its continuity, to break out of the place assigned to them by their partial incorporation within it. Yet they are essential to it: they are producers ... of children, the guarantors of due succession, the guardians of the *oikos* ... Like the earth and once-wild animals, they must be tamed and cultivated by men, but their ‘wildness’ will out”.²³⁵

Easterling suggests that Euripides’ *Bacchae* focuses on the ‘unnatural’ position of Athenian women as both necessary and alien to their own society – “[t]here is much stress in the play on women being in the wrong place, breaking out of the normal sphere and threatening the whole structure of the community’s life”.²³⁶ Women who transgress legal and moral codes are portrayed as

²³⁵ Gould, “Law, Custom and Myth”, p.57. Seaford notes that disruption to the *oikos* typically “take[s] the irreversible form of killing offspring” (p.122). Maternal child-murder both “expresses and confirms the permanence of [a woman’s] departure from [her household]” (p.124). In the myths of Dionysus, “[f]emale adherence to the household is violently reversed by a frenzy in which women leave their homes and destroy their families” (p.137). Foley notes that in the *Bacchae* Euripides imagines the enormity of “a potentially explosive social situation ... [whereby] women are members of society but not full participants in it”. H.P. Foley, *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985, p.255.

²³⁶ Easterling, “Tragic”, p.25. Burkert associates Dionysus with the “inversion ... [of the] normal order of the polis” (*Greek Religion*, pp.162;165. Henrichs associates Dionysus with “nonconformity and violence”. A. Henrichs, “He Has a God in Him: Human and Divine in the Modern Perception of Dionysus” in T.H. Carpenter and C.A. Faraone, eds, *Masks of Dionysus*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1993, pp.13-43 at p.36. Clytemnestra is also associated with the Dionysian through the vengeful Erinyes and Goldhill sees Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* as a “portray[al] [of] the horrors of reversal that the monstrous woman in charge has enacted” (“Violence”, p.25).

“monstrous, essentially unfeminine, deformat[ies] of nature”.²³⁷ Women who assert power are “somehow not quite ‘normal’ ... [and] [w]hen, on occasion, they are shown as wielding power, they tend to assume ... monstrous qualities” and are branded “schemers against men”.²³⁸ Gatens notes that women who threaten the stability of patriarchal society are either “animalised” or “reduc[ed] to [their] sex”.²³⁹ “Women who step outside their allotted place in the body politic are frequently abused with terms like: harpy, virago, vixen, bitch, shrew”,²⁴⁰ writes Gatens. They are demonised, animalised, and made into monsters.²⁴¹ “The strategy of reducing woman to her ‘sex’ involves treating ... her behaviour as hysterical ... Disorder created by women ... is retranslated into a physi[ologi]cal disorder thought to be inherent in the female sex”.²⁴²

Dionysus was the deity most closely associated with the dis-ease of women. In the tale of the daughters of Proetus, “Dionysism takes on epidemic proportions”.²⁴³

²³⁷ Figes, p.100.

²³⁸ *Id.* at pp.103-104.

²³⁹ Gatens, p.31.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.* In Greek tragedy, women who step outside prescribed boundaries are punished, for example Clytemnestra is murdered by her own son and Hecuba is transformed into a wild, ferocious dog with fiery eyes.

²⁴¹ Rabinowitz notes that “the Greeks established order by projecting chaos onto a monster, who could then be killed” (*Anxiety Veiled*, p.121).

²⁴² Gatens, p.31. On the ‘disorder’ of women see also Pateman, pp.17-32.

²⁴³ M. Detienne, *Dionysos at Large* (1986), trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1989, p.3.

Madness spreads until it affects all the women in Argolid. These women wander the wilderness in a state of frenzy, “already suffering from a disease that requires a physician”.²⁴⁴ The madness reaches its horrific climax when the women return from the mountains to murder their children, “resulting in the utmost defilement ... that calls for purification”.²⁴⁵

Sacrifice separates men from nature, from the disorder and frenzy of the Dionysian. In his study of the Dionysian aspect of tragedy, Nietzsche suggests that the violent impulses associated with Dionysianism are sublimated in cultural institutions, rituals.²⁴⁶ Men deny their own “frightful and inhuman capacities”, attributing them instead to women in the form of maenads who possess a “tiger-like lust for destruction”.²⁴⁷ Symptomatic of Dionysian dis(-)ease is when “familiar things turn eerie”.²⁴⁸ Women ‘infected’ with Dionysiac *mania* are ‘made strange’ by the eruption of supposedly innate, underlying impulses or passions – a disorder manifested in their physical and

²⁴⁴ *Id.* at p.14.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ R. Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography* (2000), trans. Shelley Frisch, New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 2002, pp.65-67. For a consideration of the Nietzschean conception of Dionysianism see A. Henrichs, “Loss of Self, Suffering, Violence: The Modern View of Dionysus from Nietzsche to Girard”, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 88, 1984, pp.205-240.

²⁴⁷ F. Nietzsche, “Homer’s Contest” (1872) cited in J. Porter, *The Invention of Dionysus: An Essay on the Birth of Tragedy*, California, Stanford University Press, 2000, p.145. Girard makes a similar point about the role played by women in the Dionysian cult and the “shunt[ing] [of] responsibility for violence onto women” (*Violence and the Sacred*, p.141).

²⁴⁸ Safranski, p.79.

imaginary transformation into maenads and wild beasts.²⁴⁹

At the height of maenadic frenzy, the women are “literally tak[en] out of [themselves]”²⁵⁰ with rolling eyeballs and foaming mouths telling signs, or rather, symptoms, of Dionysiac disorder.²⁵¹ According to Padel, the ancient Greeks associated passions with what they believed to be the dangerous and destructive aspect of women. Passions are:

the nonhuman outside the human self ...
animate, chthonic, dangerous female
multiplicity is the background for destructive
tragic passion, and underlines by gender

²⁴⁹ Winnington-Ingram reflects on the “animal status” of the maenads: “[t]hey are hunted, as animals are hunted, and when they turn the tables on their pursuers and become the hunters they merely exchange one animal role for another ... they are *hounds*, animals which possess a keen instinct for the chase, and which hunt in a pack ... in so far as the Bacchanals accept animal status, there is nothing surprising about their actions” (94; italics in text). Unlike “human beings, possessed of powers of reason and reflection ... the Bacchic mind ... is absorbed by the emotion and swayed by the impulse of the moment” (p.95). R.P. Winnington-Ingram, *Euripides and Dionysus: An Interpretation of the Bacchae* (1948), Amsterdam, Adolf M. Hakkert, 1969.

²⁵⁰ Guépin, p.19.

²⁵¹ Henrichs elaborates on the symptoms of Dionysiac disorder: “[the maenads] toss back their heads and expose their throats in forceful convulsion; they roll their eyes; they shout like animals, their mouths open and foaming; they trample the ground and stampede through the woods as if engaged in a wild chase; and in the final climax of their fit, they turn into savage beasts, killing goats, fawns, and cattle and devouring their raw flesh” (p.122). Henrichs provides a detailed study of the mytho-history of maenadism. A. Henrichs, “Greek Maenadism from Olympias to Messalina”, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 82, 1978, pp.121-160. See also J. Bremmer, “Greek Maenadism Reconsidered”, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 55, 1984, pp.267-286; E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951), Berkeley, University of California Press, 1968, pp.270-282.

tragedy's general implication that the forces disturbing the tragic self, the male self, are not self, that human passion is nonhuman ... [I]nner violence is female and not self [and] madness, its most extreme example, has a female form.²⁵²

In tragedy, danger to the (male) self is most typically embodied in monstrous female forms.²⁵³ Padel describes the bloodthirsty, maddening Erinyes as “tragedy’s talismanic demons”.²⁵⁴ The Erinyes are located in the realm of the dead, the underworld, and like the numerous ghosts haunting the tragic imagination, “might rise ‘from below’ at any moment”.²⁵⁵ The ancient Greeks associate women with the underworld, the “interior recesses of that dark mother, Earth ... the archetypal dangerous mother”.²⁵⁶ Women are especially monstrous in their hostility towards the male sex. The Lemnian women²⁵⁷

²⁵² Padel, *In and Out of the Mind*, pp.159; 161-162.

²⁵³ According to Padel, “[t]he tragic thought-world was biased to expect forces that threatened human life to be mainly female” (*In and Out of the Mind*, p.161). Carson also notes that “[t]he women of mythology regularly lose their form in monstrosity” (p.79).

²⁵⁴ Padel, *In and Out of the Mind*, p.161.

²⁵⁵ *Id.* at p.171.

²⁵⁶ *Id.* at pp.100-101. Coole suggests that “[b]y linking woman to darkness via the earth, the Greeks associated her with insanity and also with death ... women’s identification with the earth also seems to have suggested an allegiance with dark powers inimical to the mind (but related to the womb). Most Greek demons were born of the earth (chthonic) and were female. They threaten their victims with madness” (p.22). See also Murnaghan on the association between the female body, death, and earth. S. Murnaghan, “Maternity and Morality in Homeric Poetry” in C.N. Seremetakis, ed., *Ritual, Power and the Body: Historical Perspectives on the Representation of Greek Women*, New York, Pella, 1993, pp.35-80.

²⁵⁷ For tales of the Lemnian women see B. Schultz Engle, “Lemnos, Island of Women”, *Psychoanalytic Review*, 32, 1945, pp.353-358.

conspire among themselves to murder all their fathers, husbands, and sons, the Danaids kill their husbands on their wedding night, Circe transforms men into beasts, while the ghost of the murderous mother Clytemnestra²⁵⁸ pursues her son Orestes in the form of the Erinyes until he is 'out of his mind'. These myths express the fear that men may be physically or psychically 'undone' by powerful women.²⁵⁹

In her study of the cult of Dionysus, Zeitlin suggests that "[t]he Bacchic cult is clearly one which could be termed a ritual of rebellion, or inversion, and yet it conforms in a profound way to the view of women's nature by the society which deems the rite subversive".²⁶⁰ The female followers of Dionysus are aggressive, unruly and disorderly but at the same time display symptoms of hysteria and demonic possession.²⁶¹ According to Zeitlin, the Dionysiac rites "support a negative ideology of the

²⁵⁸ Carson notes that "[m]ythical women frequently violate masculinity by enveloping male form in a fatal formlessness, as Clytemnestra encloses Agamemnon in a 'garment that has no boundaries'" (p.80). See the previous chapter for more about the murder of Agamemnon.

²⁵⁹ In her study of fifth-century patterns of fantasy about women in tragedy Padel notes that "Greek systems of fantasy and family generally reflect ... a view that women can threaten male order, male life and sanity" ("Model for Possession", p.3). According to Dexter, myths are "a projection of men's fears, fears of energies which they [do] not control" (p.182). Men attribute evil powers to women who are beyond patriarchal control and who are thus a threat to social order.

²⁶⁰ F.I. Zeitlin, "Cultic Models of the Female: Rites of Dionysus and Demeter", *Arethusa*, 15, 1982, pp.129-157 at p.130.

²⁶¹ Henrichs notes that "[v]arious aspects of maenadic behaviour have invited comparison with ... examples of religious mass hysteria [and] with clinical cases of possession" ("Greek Maenadism", p.122).

female” as being both wild and destructive and “at the mercy of her sexuality and the demands of her womb”.²⁶²

Padel has shown how women were conceived of as being open to possession by demonic forces²⁶³ just as the womb was “open to external impregnation and occupation”.²⁶⁴ In the ancient Greek imagination, woman’s boundaries are fluid and permeable: “[s]he swells, she shrinks, she leaks, she is penetrated, she suffers metamorphoses”.²⁶⁵ Women are unable to control their own bodies – what goes in or what comes out. Woman’s changing shape in Greek family life (pregnancy) and fantasy (monsters of myth and tragedy) attests to the instability of the female body and heightens fears about the potential danger of women who are literally ‘out of control’. Men not only fear “what [is] in women ... [but] the danger of its emergence from inner darkness”.²⁶⁶

²⁶² Zeitlin, “Cultic Models”, pp.134-135. Theories of hysteria promulgated by Hippocrates and Plato were based on the notion of the ‘wandering womb’ and irrepressible female sexual lust. For further discussion of these ideas see the following chapter. For a feminist critique of Plato’s conception of the female body and his attitude towards women see E. Spelman, “Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views”, *Feminist Studies*, 8(1), 1982, pp.109-131.

²⁶³ Padel, “Model for Possession”. See also R. Kraemer, “Ecstasy and Possession: The Attraction of Women to the Cult of Dionysus”, *Harvard Theological Review*, 72, 1979, pp.55-80; Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, pp.66-82. Women are associated with “an endangering wetness” that makes the female physique “more subject than the male to liquefying assaults upon body and mind, especially those of emotion” (Carson, p.81).

²⁶⁴ Padel, “Model for Possession”, p.11.

²⁶⁵ Carson, p.79.

²⁶⁶ Padel, “Model for Possession”, p.17.

As fears about the destructive power of women merged with theories of female physiology, Dionysus was seen to merely draw out the latent 'natural' wildness and murderous desire in women. Men had a "vested interest ... in maintaining this view of women"²⁶⁷ because it was both a "confirmation of women's innate nature"²⁶⁸ and a reason to limit and control female behaviour. It is a view that supports the "male sense that the threat posed by what is female should be contained".²⁶⁹

Associating women with the Dionysian exposes what Bergmann refers to as "[t]he most primitive psychic layer in Greek tragedy ... that [maternal] love can give way to a destructive urge".²⁷⁰ It is significant then, that in the myths of Dionysus, women are both nurturing mothers and monstrous murderers. In the *Bacchae* Euripides invokes the Terrible Mother of infantile phantasy – the destructive and malevolent aspect of the Great Mother who is at once nurturing and deadly. In their maenadic form, the women suckle newborn animals: "And one a young fawn held, and one a wild / Wolf cub, and fed them with white milk, and smiled / In love, young mothers with a mother's

²⁶⁷ Zeitlin, "Cultic Models", p.136.

²⁶⁸ *Id.* at p.134.

²⁶⁹ Padel, "Model for Possession", p.4. We should note here Padel's loaded use of 'sense' – either feeling/emotion or rational belief/logic. Padel wonders, momentarily, whether the male desire for female confinement and containment is driven by fearful fantasy or grounded in reason. No doubt, the Greek male would have denied the 'unreason' of his reasons for exerting control over women.

²⁷⁰ Bergmann, p.61.

breast".²⁷¹ In a later scene, the maenadic mothers turn on their 'newborns' – Agave,²⁷² mistaking her son Pentheus for a young animal,²⁷³ dismembers him.²⁷⁴ As nurturers and murderers, the Dionysian maenads resemble Artemis who "cherishes the young of animals because they are her own; yet at the same time is the huntress who destroys them".²⁷⁵ The murder occurs off-stage but the horrific nature of her deed is made clear in the final scene when Agave appears on stage holding the decapitated head²⁷⁶ of her son in her hands.²⁷⁷ In the guise of a

²⁷¹ Euripides, *Bacchae* in *Works* (4 vols.), Cambridge, Harvard University Press, lines 699-702. On this nurturing aspect of the maenads see also Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, p.178.

²⁷² Agave wonders about the maternity of the 'newborn' she is about to kill and imagines that he was borne by a lioness or a Gorgon. Euripides makes the murderous mother describe herself as a ferocious animal and a hideous monster. duBois has shown how in tragedy women are frequently compared with animals, barbarians, and 'Others' from whom the male citizen distinguished himself. See *Sowing the Body, Centaurs and Amazons*.

²⁷³ Guépin notes that Pentheus is described as both a young bull and lion cub, the "typically Dionysiac victim [being] the bull or calf" (p.24).

²⁷⁴ Agave's sisters also participate in the murder of Pentheus. Agave's sister, Ino, nursed Dionysus as a baby (in one version of the myth Dionysus was the son of their other sister Semele and Zeus). Hera took vengeance on Semele by inflicting Ino with madness. In a version of the myth recounted in Euripides' *Medea*, Ino murders her son Melicertes and, Sphinx-like, throws herself and her dead child from a cliff into the sea. Seaford notes that in a lost play by Euripides, entitled *Ino*, Ino was also a maenad who murdered her child (p.130). Guépin similarly notes that "Ino is a typical maenad" (p.46).

²⁷⁵ Lloyd-Jones, p.88.

²⁷⁶ Agave symbolises the threat of the castrating mother for, if we recall from the previous chapter, decapitation and castration are interchangeable. Note also the possible comparison between Agave holding her son's head in her hands and the biblical Judith holding the head of her violator Holofernes in her hands. Destroying the male, whether through the son or otherwise, means destroying the lineage of an entire house. As Bromberg suggests, "[infanticide] function[s] to render men powerless, either symbolically or in actuality" (p.42). W. Bromberg, *The Mould of Murder: A Psychiatric Study of Homicide*, New York, Grune & Stratton, 1961. According to Green, "[t]he death

of Pentheus is certainly a castration for Cadmus, for by it he is deprived of male heirs – this only grandson was cherished as the hope of his line” (*Tragic Effect*, p.177).

²⁷⁷ Agave’s father, Cadmus, refers to Pentheus’ murder as a sacrifice marked by mythic tales of maenadic dismemberment (*sparagmos*) and consumption of raw flesh (*omophagia*). However, according to Obbink, the murder of Pentheus is “not sacrifice at all. Instead, it constitutes the inversion of normal sacrificial procedure, in which a domesticated (and not a wild) animal is ritually selected (and not merely chanced upon), killed, systematically cut up (and not dismembered by force), and eaten cooked (and not raw). Maenadic *sparagmos* followed by omophagy thus stands in complete contradistinction to ordinary sacrifice and can thus be viewed as a kind of inverted charter myth, setting forth the way in which sacrifice should *not* take place” (pp.69-70). D. Obbink, “Dionysus Poured Out: Ancient and Modern Theories of Sacrifice and Cultural Formation” in T.H. Carpenter and C.A. Faraone, eds, *Masks of Dionysus*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1993, pp.65-86. Foley similarly notes that Pentheus’ murder is a “perverted sacrifice” (*Ritual Irony*, p.206). Foley writes: “though called a sacrifice after the event, the ritual is an aberration, a perversion of the controlled civic norm. In a wild rather than civic context the unwilling victim is torn apart by the hands of maddened women rather than despatched with due ceremony and a sacrificial knife by men” (*Ritual Irony*, p.211). See also J-P. Vernant, “A General Theory of Sacrifice and the Slaying of the Victim in the Greek *Thusia*” in J-P. Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals*, *op. cit.*, pp.290-302. According to Vernant, “[p]roperly speaking, there is no human ‘sacrifice’ which is not also a deviant or corrupted sacrifice, a monstrous offering ... myth, imagery, and ritual are uniformly bound so as to ‘neutralize’ violence and murder ... the harm one would inflict on a family member ... efface[s] the boundary between sacrifice and murder, between animal and human being, a boundary the sacrificial institution ha[s] worked to build” (pp.295-296). When Agave offers her fellow maenads the dismembered head of Pentheus as a meal to be shared, the chorus expresses extreme disapproval reinforcing the view that maenads are women ‘out of control’ and ‘out of bounds’ – doing what women should not be doing. As we have already noted, Athenian women were not allowed to sacrifice so the association of women and sacrificial ritual in tragedy necessarily involves their “regressive transform[ation] into bestial predators”. W. Burkert, “The Problem of Ritual Killing” in R. Hamerton-Kelly, ed., *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, California, Stanford University Press, 1987, pp.149-176 at p.172. Sacrifice was supposed to separate men from beasts, and in tragedy sacrifice separates men from women who have assumed a monstrous form. According to Green, the *Bacchae* preserves the myth of the devouring mother in its “excess of desire” (p.170). Maenads do not consume human flesh, but in the tragic imagination maenadic mothers cannibalise their own children, an act that “abolishes the frontier between the animal kingdom and the

maenad, Agave “represent[s] the bad maternal imago”,²⁷⁸ the return of the dangerous mother repressed in the unconscious. In the *Bacchae* ordered social systems “collapse under the pressure of the repressed, and the mother [becomes murderous], ... tear[ing] at her child’s [flesh]”.²⁷⁹ Agave’s father, Cadmus, gradually draws his daughter out of her Dionysian delusion until she finally realises the horror of her actions.²⁸⁰ Grieving for her son, Agave is left to piece together his dismembered body parts.²⁸¹

That the mothers in Euripides’ plays are at once loving and hateful, nurturing and destructive reveals anxieties about maternal power elucidated by Garre, Radó,

human” (170). Euripides transforms mothers into savage beasts with animal appetites to symbolise their place outside “the community of men” (171). The myth of Agave may be compared with the mythic infanticide Procne whose murder of her son Itys is “rooted in the Dionysian realm” (Burkert, *Homo Necans*, p.181). The myth of Procne will be considered in Chapter Four.

²⁷⁸ Green, *Tragic Effect*, p.175.

²⁷⁹ *Id.* at p.171. Guépin notes that “[i]n its most extreme form Dionysia[n] [delirium] consisted of the mothers tearing apart their own babies ... and eating them raw” (p.xi). The Greeks found the idea “repulsive” and Euripides, well aware of the horror and repulsion that would be felt by his (male) audience in the staging of such acts, drew on the symbolic power of the mythic devouring mother to show what could happen if the boundaries of social order were overturned. According to Gordon, the maenads “represent the ‘return’ of natural forces normally repressed by civilized law” (p.213). P. Gordon, “Misogyny, Dionysianism and a New Model of Greek Tragedy”, *Women’s Studies*, 17, 1990, pp.211-218.

²⁸⁰ For an interesting reading of Cadmus’ role as ‘psychotherapist’ see G. Devereux, “The Psychotherapy Scene in Euripides’ *Bacchae*”, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 90, 1970, pp.35-48.

²⁸¹ March sees in Agave’s recomposition of Pentheus a fantasised resurrection or rebirth which she associates with the birth, death, and rebirth of Dionysus. J.R. March, “Euripides’ *Bakchai*: A Reconsideration in the Light of Vase-Paintings”, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 36, 1989, pp. 33-65 at p.64.

Rheingold, and Bakan earlier in this chapter, in particular the dread that behind every 'good', loving mother lurks an evil destroyer. Bergmann suggests that what makes the *Bacchae* "unique" is the "open hostility ... of mothers toward their sons ... madness bring[s] out only what is otherwise repressed in the unconscious".²⁸² In his study of murder, Wertham invokes the fantasy of mythic murderous mothers "slumbering deep in the [social] unconscious".²⁸³ In the Western imagination, it is the mythic Medea who most powerfully embodies our fears about the destructive potential of mothers.

'Foul murderer of children',²⁸⁴

If the distinction between loving and murderous mothers is blurred in tragedy, then it is nowhere more so than in Euripides' *Medea*. The mother who we now know as the "foul murderer" of her own children is at once nurturing and destructive, loving and yet capable of the most horrific evil. Indeed, March notes that "Euripides seems to have been particularly interested in having people killed by those who really love them".²⁸⁵ The deep connection

²⁸² Bergmann, p.64. Green similarly notes that the originality of the *Bacchae* lies in its enactment of the return of the repressed which is "manifested with untameable violence and frenzy" (*Tragic Effect*, p.168).

²⁸³ Wertham, p.236.

²⁸⁴ Euripides, *Medea*, line 1346.

²⁸⁵ March, p.51. Johnston makes a similar point that in "the tragedies of Euripides ... even the most destructive of mothers can love her children even as she destroys them" (p.44). S.I. Johnston, "Corinthian Medea and the Cult of Hera Akraia" in J.J. Clauss and S.I. Johnston, eds, *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and*

Medea has with her children is signified through repeated references to the senses of smell and touch that typically overwhelm new mothers. Prior to their murder, Medea touches and smells her children and she is “overwhelmed by their physical sweetness”.²⁸⁶ As Guépin notes, Medea “cherishes her children before killing them”²⁸⁷ and enacts an imaginative return to the moment of their birth to coincide with their last moments before death (a psychological return to the maternal womb).

Images of birth and sens(e)-ual reawakening are overtaken by the sight/site of Medea’s daemonic “passion ... [she] glares like a mad bull”.²⁸⁸ Euripides’ repeated references to Medea as bestial, savage, and wild merge with the inhumanity of her actions but also suggest the ferocity of a mother’s love when threatened with the loss of her children²⁸⁹ – “a lioness guarding her cubs”.²⁹⁰ The

Art, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1997, pp.44-70.

²⁸⁶ “How sweet to hold you! And children’s skin is soft, and their breath pure” (*Medea*, lines 1071-1073).

²⁸⁷ Guépin, p.15.

²⁸⁸ *Medea*, lines 183; 188.

²⁸⁹ The loss of her children weighs heavily on Medea: her husband, Jason, makes clear the role of women as bearers of sons for their fathers, telling Medea that she has no need for children; Medea fears that the Corinthians will murder her children; the boys are reprieved from exile and Medea laments that she will lose them forever to their father and to the city which their sons will reproduce: “O children, children! You have a city, and a home; / And when we have parted, there you both will stay forever, / You motherless, I miserable. And I must go / To exile in another land, before I have had / My joy of you, before I have seen you growing up, / Becoming prosperous. I shall never see your brides, / Adorn your bridal beds, and hold the torches high” (*Medea*, lines 1021-1027).

²⁹⁰ *Medea*, line 189.

milk with which a new mother nourishes her babes is replaced with tears that flow at the thought of their death. Tears “come naturally to [women]”,²⁹¹ Euripides notes, at the same time implying that what is inside Woman is also excessive, dangerous, and deadly.²⁹² In Euripides’ plays,

²⁹¹ *Medea*, line 931.

²⁹² There are numerous references to tears throughout the play: tears likened to raindrops – “the dark cloud of her lamentations” (line 105); tears quenching the “flame” in Medea’s heart (line 107); tears as a sign of suffering, – “Do I not suffer? Am I not wronged? Should I not weep?” (lines 110-111) – unhappiness – “She had better save her tears” (line 62); “Has she not stopped crying yet?” (line 57); “That unhappy woman from Colchis still crying ... crying inside the palace ... melting her life away in tears” (line 131); “her sobbing and wailing” (line 206); “my tormented heart is full of tears” (line 902); “I have drenched this young face with my tears” (line 904); “fresh tears fill my eyes” (line 905); “such a sight as tears were made for” (lines 1220-1221). Grief, sorrow, and lamentation dominate the tragic imagery of the play: “passionate grief” (line 158); “irresistible flood” (line 183); “the bitterness and pain of life. Sorrow ... If music could cure sorrow it would be precious” (lines 96; 99); “I weep for [my sons]” (line 349); “Your grief touches our hearts” (line 358); Human life ... all its miseries” (line 575); “That is the most pitiful of all griefs” (line 647); “What makes me cry with pain” (line 791); “no refuge from despair” (line 799); “Why do you grieve so?” (line 928); “grief came over me” (line 931); “Your sorrow next I weep for, pitiable mother” (line 996); “you must not bear grief so hard” (line 1018); “my misery is my own heart” (line 1028); “my life will be all pain and anguish” (line 1036); “Oh, miserable heart” (line 1057); “poor miserable girl” (line 1188); “O miserable mother” (line 1278); “in her misery she plunged into the sea” (line 1286); “what sorrow you have caused” (line 1293); “I will lament this grievous day” (line 1409). For feminist theorist Julia Kristeva bodily fluids such as tears and blood are abject, defiling sources of pollution that threaten somatic boundaries. In the second half of the play tears are replaced with blood that drips and oozes from dying bodies: “Down from her head dripped blood” (line 1197); “her children’s blood” (line 1255); “spill blood” (line 1256); “bloody-handed fiend” (line 1260); “kindred blood” (line 1267); “see them lying in their blood” (line 1314); “polluted with her children’s blood” (line 1407). The tears that signify the emotional destruction caused by broken marriage oaths transform into the blood that signifies the subsequent physical destruction of enemies (the blood of battle), children (the blood that joins sons and fathers), and the entire patrilineal bloodline. According to Loraux, the Greek patriarchs “fantasise maternal mourning into a threat ... all womanly tears must be guilty tears ... [women] mourn for having *destroyed* and not only

the “bond of childbirth ... is without mediation, exacting, painful, and ... ‘terrible’: terribly tender, terribly strong, simply *terrible*”.²⁹³

In Euripides’ *Medea* the mother/child bond²⁹⁴ is subjected to intense scrutiny and fears about maternal power consume the tragic plot. Euripides taunts his audience with the possibility of maternal child-murder before brutally enacting the fearful fantasy with the blood-curdling screams of Medea’s two sons and their futile pleas for help to escape their mother’s (phallic) sword: “Help, help! Mother, let me go! Mother, don’t kill us ... She is killing us! We can’t escape from her sword!”²⁹⁵ The castrating mother has the power to destroy her sons and, through them, their father.²⁹⁶ The mother’s threats and curses from

for having lost” (N. Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning* (1990), trans. C. Pache, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1998, p.64; italics in text).

²⁹³ Loraux, *Mourning*, p.38; italics in text.

²⁹⁴ Euripides focuses on the mother/son relationship. In his plays, mothers only kill sons (Loraux, *Mourning*, pp.51.52). For more about the tenuous relationship between mothers and sons in Greek myth see Slater, *Glory of Hera* and the previous chapter.

²⁹⁵ *Medea*, lines 1271-1272; 1275-1277.

²⁹⁶ Shaw makes an interesting point, namely that “Medea never kills the head of a household in this play; each time she destroys the head of the house through his children: Pelias through his daughters, Creon through his daughter ... her father [through] her own brother ... [and] Jason through his children” (p.259). Segal also notes that Medea also ensures that Jason is stripped of his “generative power” through the murder of his new bride, Glauce (C. Segal, “Violence and the Other: Greek, Female, and Barbarian in Euripides’ *Hecuba*”, *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 120, 1990, pp.109-131 at p.122, note 41). According to Loraux, by killing her sons Medea “depriv[es] [her] spouse of the arrogant tranquillity of a father whose sons will perpetuate his name and lineage. It is not that [Medea] kill[s] the children to whom [she] gave birth, but because the father annexed

the first part of the play are realised, thoughts become deeds. The mother is no longer merely “a threat ... to be fantasized about [but] ... a threat to be contained”.²⁹⁷ But in Euripides’ play, it is not an unambiguous shift from loving mother to monstrous murderer. As Loraux notes, “the tragic thinking of the Greeks places mothers in a dreadful ambivalence, where wrath against spouse prevails over the bodily intimacy with the child”.²⁹⁸ In Greek tragedy, mothers murder sons but, Loraux insists, it is always the father who is “guilty of – outside of other, often serious, grievances – having compromised and destroyed the intimate relationship with the child”.²⁹⁹

For Simon, Euripides brings maternal child-murder “virtually from the wings to centre stage ... distressingly close”.³⁰⁰ Emphasising the mixed power of aural and orality in Euripides’ representation of the children’s

them to his own power, [she] thereby destroy[s] the father in the husband” (*Mourning*, p.51).

²⁹⁷ Loraux, *Mourning*, p.11. Note the Nurse’s warnings at the beginning of the play: “She [Medea] is / A frightening woman” (lines 41-42); “Her mood is cruel, her nature dangerous” (line 102); “Quick, now, children, hurry indoors; / And don’t go within sight of her [Medea], / Or anywhere near her; keep a safe distance” (lines 100-102); “I am sick with fear for you, children, terror / Of what may happen. The mind of a queen / Is a thing to fear ... / And her rage once roused is hard to appease” (lines 117-119; 121).

²⁹⁸ Loraux, *Mourning*, p.51. Loraux later notes that “feminine wrath threatens the son, because he stands in for the father” (p.55).

²⁹⁹ *Id.* at p.52.

³⁰⁰ Simon, *Tragic Drama*, p.69. Easterling similarly notes that Euripides “almost never allow[s] [his audience] to range in imagination away from the immediate painful situation” (p.177). In this respect, Easterling finds the *Medea* “deeply disturbing” (p.177). P.E. Easterling, “The Infanticide in Euripides’ *Medea*” in T.F. Gould and C.J. Herington, eds, *Yale Classical Studies, Vol.25: Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1977, pp.177-191.

murder, Simon suggests that in the *Medea* “[c]hild-murder comes closer and closer and threatens to overwhelm the audience”.³⁰¹ Euripides takes his audience as close as possible (without going beyond the parameters of artistic propriety) to the forbidden scene: the cries of the children; their reference to the murder weapon; their final pleas for help; the deafening silence once the deed is done. It is only for the mind to imagine such horror. Although psychically traumatic for his audience, Euripides returns to the scene of the crime (so to speak) in nearly all his plays.

Simon locates in Euripides’ plays “an extraordinary preoccupation with children and the killing of children ... fifteen of about nineteen extant plays are quite explicitly involved with stories about the death, murder, or sacrifice of children”.³⁰² According to Simon, the threat to children represents the threat to lineage so that stories about child-murder articulate over and over again “the same concern over perpetuation of the family, of the house”.³⁰³ For Euripides women posed the greatest threat to children and thus to the household and city-state. Euripides’ *Medea* “actualises men’s fears that women may be dangerous and annihilative”.³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ Simon, *Tragic Drama*, p.69.

³⁰² *Id.* at p.70.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ *Id.* at p.80.

Euripides is credited with producing the image of Medea as infanticide.³⁰⁵ But, as Graf reminds us, his tragedy is “just a single link in a chain of narrative transmission: on either side of the version that is authoritative for us, there stands a long line of other versions”.³⁰⁶ In earlier versions of the tale, Medea is an innocent victim of circumstance and not responsible for the death of her children. Kerrigan notes an account by Creophylus in which the children of Medea are murdered by relatives of King Creon to avenge his death.³⁰⁷ Kerrigan also recounts another tale implicating the Corinthians in the murder of Medea’s children. Rumour has it that Euripides was ‘persuaded’ by “the citizens of Corinth (enemies of Athens at the time) to pin the crime on Medea”.³⁰⁸ Graf recounts a version of the tale found in the scholia to Pindar in which Medea refuses Zeus’ affections and is rewarded by Hera who promises to make Medea’s children immortal. Medea brings her children to Hera’s sanctuary and follows her instructions but the children die.³⁰⁹ Hera is one of the most feared (step)mothers in myth and she is renowned for the harm

³⁰⁵ Johnston, p.45. But Johnston questions whether “the infanticidal Medea whom we know so well [can] be the product of *any* single mind, however brilliant” (p.45). For Johnston, the issue of whether the infanticidal Medea was purely the product of Euripides’ imagination, inherited by Euripides and moulded to suit his narrative, or a pre-existing mythic figure is still open to debate. March suggests that in the *Bacchae* too Euripides “was the first to have Pentheus killed by his own mother” (p.50; see also pp.50-52).

³⁰⁶ F. Graf, “Medea, The Enchantress From Afar: Remarks on a Well-Known Myth” in J.J. Clauss and S.I. Johnston, eds, *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1997, pp.21-43 at p.21.

³⁰⁷ Kerrigan, p.89.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ Graf, p.35.

she inflicts on pregnant and parturient women and their newborn infants:

her effect on mothers and children is potentially fatal ... She attacks the young child (Heracles, Dionysus), attacks the mother either while she is pregnant or during parturition (Alcmene, Leto), or attacks both the mother and the infant simultaneously, sometimes before birth in such a way as to put the child at risk (Semele, Aphrodite) and sometimes afterward, driving the mother to kill the child (Ino, Aëdon).³¹⁰

In Euripides' *Medea* the Chorus invokes Ino, the wife of Jason's great-uncle Athamas, as infanticide but blames her actions on Hera.³¹¹ Euripides draws the allusion to support his view that no 'natural' mother in her right mind could kill her children and makes Medea's murderous plan all the more monstrous. Euripides typically lessens the psychic threat of the mother by projecting evil onto (m)others – mothers who are 'other' in some way, for example mothers who are maddened by divine forces (Ino, Agave), stepmothers (Phaedra), or barbarians (Hecuba). Indeed, Euripides makes Medea a foreigner, a

³¹⁰ Johnston, p.54. It is interesting to note the similarities between Hera and Medea, in particular the fact that both are associated with childbirth and the fostering of new life (child-bearing women prayed to Hera for the safe delivery of their baby; Medea had the power to make fertile those unable to bear children) but are at the same time maternal destroyers.

³¹¹ "There was but one in time past, / One woman that I have heard of, / Raised hand against her own children. / It was Ino, sent out of her mind by a god, / When Hera, the wife of Zeus, / Drove her from her home to wander over the world" (*Medea*, lines 1281-1285).

barbarian. “All of Medea’s characteristics mark her as ‘other’”,³¹² notes duBois. Jason recalls with shame how he brought Medea “from [her] palace in a land of savages into a Greek home”.³¹³ Jason brands Medea a monster, an “abomination ... No woman, but a tiger; a Tuscan Scylla – but more savage”.³¹⁴ No Greek woman could commit such an atrocity.³¹⁵ Hall reminds us that infanticide is a ‘barbarian’ crime³¹⁶ and that “to the fifth-century theatre-goer an essential aspect of [Medea’s] identity [is] that [she is a] barbarian”.³¹⁷ Segal suggests that associations between barbarian violence, women and monstrosity are “characteristically Euripidean”.³¹⁸

³¹² duBois, *Centaurs and Amazons*, p.117.

³¹³ *Medea*, lines 1332-1333.

³¹⁴ *Medea*, line 1344. Easterling also notes the repeated image of Medea as a wild beast (“Infanticide”, p.177). See also duBois who notes that “[f]rom the beginning the barbarian princess is seen as a potentially animal-like being ... She is an animal, a hybrid woman, a monster created through metamorphosis” (*Centaurs and Amazons*, p.117).

³¹⁵ On this point see Simon, *Tragic Drama*, p.87.

³¹⁶ E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition Through Tragedy*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, p.148. As Page remarks: “[t]he murder of children ... is mere brutality ... Such an act is outside [the] experience ... [of] the fifth-century Athenian” (p.xiv).

³¹⁷ Hall, p.54. According to Easterling, “the fact that [Medea] is a barbarian from Colchis must have helped a Greek audience to accept both her past crimes and her expertise as a powerful sorceress” (P.E. Easterling, “The Infanticide in Euripides’ *Medea*” in T.F. Gould and C.J. Herington, eds, *Yale Classical Studies, 25: Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977, pp.177-191 at pp.179-180). And Simon suggests that “the defence [that] only barbarian women [murder their children] allows [the audience] to tolerate what might otherwise be too much to bear” (*Tragic Drama*, p.88).

³¹⁸ C. Segal, “Violence and the Other”, p.109. Hall notes that “it was a ‘law’ of Greek ethnography that the more barbarian a community the more powerful its women” (p.95). Women were the greatest threat to the continuation of the *polis* and Euripides uses the figure of the barbarian Medea within Greek society to emphasise the urgent nature of the threat: “civilised life is always most precariously poised, continually threatened from within” (Easterling, “Infanticide”, p.191).

Yet, as Holland has recently discovered, Jason's family – the House of Aeolus – is itself tainted by murder and 'barbarian' crimes such as cannibalism, human sacrifice, and infanticide. Holland suggests that Jason's "family history provide[s] a better antecedent for Medea's nefarious actions in Corinth than did her personal history, which did not include infanticide specifically".³¹⁹ According to Holland, "maternal infanticide ... is a recurring motif in this family ... [t]he House's recurring stories about maternal infanticide or attempted infanticide suggest that Medea's actions in Corinth align with the history of her conjugal family".³²⁰

duBois makes a similar point: "Medea exemplifies the eruption of difference within the family, within the *polis*, among the Hellenes. Difference is represented by Euripides as *internal* rather than external, omnipresent in the body of the Greeks. The other, bestial, foreign, most of all female, is for Euripides a marginalised marked figure who is nonetheless at the centre of the tragic drama [and] ... her presence within the city [is] revealed as devastating to its future ... Jason – male, Greek, human – is set against Medea – female, barbarian, animal – and the city, as a culture, as a site for the reproduction of the family, is destroyed from within" (*Centaurs and Amazons*, p.118). On the significance of the dichotomy Greek/barbarian generally see duBois, *Centaurs and Amazons*, pp.78-94.

³¹⁹ L. Holland, "Πᾶς δῶμος ἔρροι: Myth and Plot in Euripides' *Medea*", *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 133, 2003, pp.255-279 at p.256. See however Babatzanis and Babatzanis who suggest that "Medea's father also contemplated child murder, threatening to kill his grandchildren by Medea's older sister. Medea's conduct was thus fashioned after her father's" (p.242). J. Babatzanis and G. Babatzanis, "Fate and the Personal Myth in Medea's Plight: Filicide" in P. Hartocollis and I.D. Graham, eds, *The Personal Myth in Psychoanalytic Theory*, Connecticut, International Universities Press, 1991, pp.235-255.

³²⁰ *Id.* at pp.262-263. Holland discusses the tales of Melanippe, Tyro, and Ino. According to Holland, "Ino provides the crucial family precedent" (p.265) for the crime of infanticide in Euripides' *Medea*.

Moreover Holland suggests there is a blood curse on the House of Aeolus, “that is, a curse originating from murder, usually of kin”.³²¹ Medea brings the curse on her husband’s family to its final ghastly conclusion. She herself comments that Fate has sent her as a curse on Jason’s house.³²² For Holland, Medea’s comment indicates an awareness that she is “enmeshed ... in the curse associated with his larger House”.³²³ In Euripides’ play, Medea assumes the role of “persecutor” or “avenger” (*alastor*), “a personification of the curse that has fallen on the House”.³²⁴ Holland suggests that the curse provides a significant framework within which to locate Medea’s actions. The two main roles of an *alastor* are to punish oath-breakers and blood guilt. Jason breaks his marriage oath to Medea and by so doing reinvokes the House’s inherited curse. Medea fulfils the curse on the House of Aeolus, the blood spilt from her children avenging its ancestors.³²⁵

The curse on his family implicates Jason in the death of his children. For Holland, Jason’s failure to recognise the

³²¹ Holland, p.260.

³²² *Medea*, line 608.

³²³ Holland, p.267.

³²⁴ *Id.* at p.269. Note here the resonance of Murray’s description of Medea as “a sort of living Curse” (cited in Easterling, “Infanticide”, p.191).

³²⁵ As Shaw notes, the children “must be killed so that Jason’s *house* will be destroyed” (p.262). Immediately prior to the murder of the children, the Chorus invoke the blood curse on the House of Aeolus: “Where kindred blood pollutes the ground / A curse hangs over human lives; / And murder measures the doom that falls / By Heaven’s law on the guilty house” (*Medea*, lines 1267-1270).

part he and his family play in their death is the most potent form of tragic irony.³²⁶ Jason locates full responsibility with Medea: “you murdered them ... You killed my sons ... abhorrent child-destroyer”.³²⁷ Yet, throughout the play, Jason repeatedly expresses murderous wishes towards his children, the most blatant of these being the wish that the children had never been born: “Would God I had not bred [my children]”.³²⁸ Jason seems unfazed by the prospect of his children’s exile and merely plans to honour his ‘duty’ to provide for them (“I ... come now, in spite of everything, / To see that you and the children are not sent away / With an empty purse, or unprovided”³²⁹). Jason speaks of “meet[ing] the children’s needs”³³⁰ but in his mind these needs are merely financial rather than emotional. The children’s Tutor says that they “are nothing to their father”³³¹ who, unlike Medea, has no emotional attachment to them. Jason shows no signs of love and only needs his sons to bear their father’s shield in battle,

³²⁶ Holland, pp.266-277.

³²⁷ *Medea*, lines 1395; 1401.

³²⁸ *Medea*, line 1413. For Pucci, Jason’s desire is “frustrated ... [and] empt[y] in the face of the children’s corpses” (p.36). P. Pucci, *The Violence of Pity in Euripides’ Medea*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1980. Jason’s hostility towards his children may stem from doubts about their legitimacy. Bakan suggests that doubt over the “authenticity” of the father’s relation to his children may provoke a hostile reaction towards them. D. Bakan, *The Duality of Human Existence: An Essay on Psychology and Religion*, Chicago, Rand McNally, 1966, p.207. For further consideration of the refusal and psychic denial of children see Corti, pp.32-33; 45 and Simon, *Tragic Drama*, pp.70-71; 100.

³²⁹ *Medea*, lines 460-462.

³³⁰ *Medea*, line 609.

³³¹ *Medea*, line 87.

to “tread down [Jason’s] enemies”.³³² Jason tells Medea that he does not plan to have more children with his new wife (“the sons we have are enough”³³³) but a few lines later entertains the thought of having other sons, “children of royal blood”.³³⁴ The children are also a visible reminder of Medea, not because of any physical resemblance,³³⁵ but because “the maternal body [is] forever weld[ed] to the memory of the newborn: what Greek men would like to

³³² *Medea*, line 923. Only once the children are dead does Jason “long to fold them in [his] arms; kiss their lips ... touch their gentle flesh” (lines 1399-1400; 1403) and Medea rightly points out the seeming insincerity of words and gestures that are so late in coming: “Now you have loving words, now kisses for them: / Then you disowned them, sent them into exile” (lines 1401-1402). Rabinowitz suggests that although “he has been willing to abandon them and thus cannot be supposed to care much about them ... [and although] Jason does not have a physical tie to the children in the present, they do represent the future to him” (*Anxiety Veiled*, p.147).

³³³ *Medea*, lines 558-559.

³³⁴ *Medea*, lines 95-96. According to Corti, “the children themselves represent a threat to the royal succession in a way that Medea does not” (p.33). Shaw also notes that Jason’s plan to marry Glauce “would seem reasonable to an Athenian ... in the light of Attic law; only by marrying a citizen can Jason, and his *oikos*, become part of the *polis*” (p.260, note 20). Rabinowitz makes a similar observation: “Jason was looking for a throne all along ... Since he failed to get what he wanted by consorting with this creature from the border [Medea], he tries the more conventional route of an alliance with a king’s daughter ... an Athenian audience would recognise Jason’s desire for legitimacy as familiar” (*Anxiety Veiled*, p.141).

³³⁵ Children share their father’s blood and in her study of medieval literature McCracken notes that the shared blood of father and child is made textually visible in the child’s physical resemblance to the father. In Ovid’s *Philomena*, for example, the son’s resemblance to his father makes it almost impossible for the mother to distinguish between husband and son: “Ah you look so much like the traitor, the infamous devil ... I have never seen, nor did God ever make, I think, such a clear resemblance between two things, and for this reason I want to cut your head off”. While the mother acknowledges that her son “do[es] not deserve [to die]”, the shared blood of father and son overcomes the bond between mother and child and the son is substituted in place of the father (McCracken, “Engendering”, p.71). For more on the myth of Philomena (Philomela) and her sister Procne see the following chapter.

take away from women so badly”.³³⁶ Indeed, Jason himself fantasises the severance of this tie: “If only children could be got some other way, / Without the female sex”.³³⁷

For Medea the children are a visible reminder of “their father’s wickedness”,³³⁸ of the blood relation that she can never have with her children, of the emotional and physical pain of mothers who bear sons for their husbands and the *polis*, sons who emerge from the womb “*lókheuma*, ... already separate from the mother, already ready to be ‘civilised’ by paternal recognition”,³³⁹ of a lost father(land) (“O my father, my city, you I deserted”³⁴⁰), of severed ties – nuptial and familial. Medea blames Jason for severing her familial blood ties: “You have this city, your father’s home ... I am alone; I have no city ... I have [none] of my own blood to turn to in this extremity”.³⁴¹ In

³³⁶ Loraux, *Mourning*, p.39.

³³⁷ *Medea*, line 573-574.

³³⁸ *Medea*, line 116. See also Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled*, p.147.

³³⁹ Loraux, *Mourning*, p.52.

³⁴⁰ *Medea*, line 168.

³⁴¹ *Medea*, lines 252; 254; 256-257. Corti argues that the children are “living emblems of [Medea’s] mistake in betraying her father for Jason ... [and] the act of killing them will not only hurt Jason but also undo the wrong she has committed against her father” (p.45). Medea is willing to ‘sacrifice’ her children (and herself) for the father(land) – the ‘duty’ of all ‘good’ mothers and daughters. Medea even calls the murder of her children “my sacrifice” (line 1055). Although Euripides denies that Medea’s actions are in any way sacrificial (primarily because her motives are impure and self-serving), he alludes to the role of the mythic Medea and her children in the cult of Hera Akraia (lines 1379-1385). According to Pucci, “Medea’s murder of her children is the ‘sacrifice’ that originates the historical ritual sacrifice in the temple of Hera Akraia at Corinth” (p.132). At the annual ceremony in the temple of Hera Akraia that commemorates Medea’s ‘sacrifice’, a goat is substituted for the children (p.135). Johnston notes that in

Medea's speech, city and child converge and she fears that she will be left childless in the same way that she has been left cityless.³⁴²

Once King Creon declares that it is only Medea and not her sons who will be exiled from Corinth she imagines a future estranged from the children who provide her only link to the city in which women "do not have the title of 'citizen'".³⁴³ Like her fellow "queen and barbarian" Hecuba, Medea will be called "*ápais ápolis*, childless, cityless".³⁴⁴ Without their mother to protect them, Medea fears that her children will be persecuted by the Corinthians for their role in the death of Glauce and her father. Better that a mother would murder her own children than allow them to be killed by enemies.³⁴⁵

For Medea, it seems only 'natural' that "she who gave life will also take it".³⁴⁶ But Euripides suggests otherwise - maternal child-murder is an "unnatural crime" and a

the Corinthian saga of Medea the Corinthians murder Medea's children and offer yearly sacrifices to appease their ghosts (p.56). Pucci delves into Medea's "psychological justification for terming her deed a sacrifice", suggesting that "the children look to Medea like sacrificial victims [in that they are a] substitution for Jason" (p.134). But, as Rabinowitz counters, "there are none of the ... trappings of ritual death, no divine order, no altar or libation; the boys are merely 'sacrificed' to her [Medea's] sense of honour" (*Anxiety Veiled*, p.149).

³⁴² Loraux, *Mourning*, p.40.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁵ Medea states: "I'll not leave sons of mine to be the victims of / My enemies' rage" (lines 1060-1061)

³⁴⁶ Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled*, p.148.

“monstrous act”.³⁴⁷ He does so by making vengeance the primary motivating force for murder. Medea’s vengeance is justified (as the Chorus attest), but it is also excessive and thus terrifying. “Revenge plays an important part in Athenian drama”, writes Figes. “But women are not allowed to take revenge, because revenge implies not only courage, but rights. Women who do take revenge, like Medea, take on a monstrous shape in the mind”.³⁴⁸

For many, it is Medea’s conscious awareness of her actions that makes her so monstrous. King Creon elucidates cultural fears about women’s calculating and scheming natures: “my blood runs cold to think what plots [Medea] may be nursing deep within [her] heart”.³⁴⁹ For Rabinowitz, “Medea is even more threatening to the established order than Agave in Euripides’ *Bacchae*, for she kills her son while in a Bacchic trance, and the ‘true’ villain is Dionysus. Medea is not mad but calculating, and she uses her children in a plot against her husband”.³⁵⁰

Pucci suggests that framing Medea’s violence are the discourses of pity and fear. Pucci contends that despite all of her “indecipherability and monstrosity”,³⁵¹ Medea demands and compels pity from the audience. But Pucci is also quick to point out that such feelings of sympathy

³⁴⁷ McCracken, “Engendering”, p.66.

³⁴⁸ Figes, pp.133-134.

³⁴⁹ *Medea*, lines 315-317.

³⁵⁰ Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled*, p.148.

³⁵¹ Pucci, p.171.

are “ultimately provoked by fear”.³⁵² The audience fears the nurturing and murderous aspects of Medea’s “divided self”.³⁵³ Euripides plays on these fears, well aware that there is something deeply unsettling about the idea that the ‘good’ loving mother and the ‘bad’ murderous mother are one and the same. Euripides thus purpose(ful)ly complicates his audience’s reaction to Medea. “Medea is”, Rabinowitz suggests, “frightening even when she is sympathetic; and ... even when she is terrifying, we cannot forget that we found her sympathetic. That sympathy itself can then work to reinforce the threat”.³⁵⁴ Medea gains sympathy from the Corinthian women of the Chorus by “identifying herself as a woman among women”³⁵⁵ who all suffer the same oppression in a male-dominated society:

Surely, of all creatures that have life and will, we women / Are the most wretched. When, for an extravagant sum, / We have bought a husband, we must then accept him as / Possessor of our body ... / Then the great question: will the man / We get be bad or good? For women, divorce is not / Respectable; to repel the man, not possible / ... If a man grows tired / Of the company at home, he can go out, and find / A cure for tediousness. We wives are forced to look / To one man only. And, they tell us, we at home / Live free from danger ... / I’d rather stand three times in the front line than

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ Foley, *Female Acts*, p.243.

³⁵⁴ Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled*, p.127.

³⁵⁵ *Id.* at p.128.

bear / One child.³⁵⁶

According to Rabinowitz, it is Euripides' emphasis on "[Medea's] similarity to other women [that] makes her most terrifying".³⁵⁷ Her vindictiveness is imagined by the Corinthian women to be contagious and a threat to the entire female (and thereby male) population. Euripides' *Medea* elicits fear from its ancient Greek audience because it imagines the destructive potential of *all* women who may turn on their loved ones. As Rabinowitz suggests, "not only does Euripides make [Medea's] vengeance terrifying, but to the extent that she has been identified with other women ... [they] are also implicated in that vengeance and therefore rendered terrifying".³⁵⁸ To the extent that Medea stands for all women, "the audience takes her as general, symbolic; the threat to her own children becomes a threat to all men's children".³⁵⁹ And Medea's 'escape'³⁶⁰ at the end of the play only emphasises the urgent need to contain that threat.

In both the *Medea* and the *Bacchae*, Euripides "portray[s] the disaster that occurs when a woman is out of control"³⁶¹

³⁵⁶ *Medea*, lines 229-236; 245-250.

³⁵⁷ Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled*, p.132.

³⁵⁸ *Id.* at p.142.

³⁵⁹ *Id.* at p.149.

³⁶⁰ Critics remain divided about the play's ending. On this point see for example, Easterling, "Infanticide", pp.190-191; S. Murnaghan, "Staging Ancient Crimes: A Response to Aristodemou, Tiefenbrun, Purkiss, and Pantazakos", *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature*, 11, 1999, pp.77-88 at p.83.

³⁶¹ Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled*, p.150.

and in so doing forces his (male) audience to consider the threat posed by their own wives and to imagine the horrors that might befall men if women were to “escape the nets of male domination”.³⁶² Euripides “encourage[s] men to control actual women”³⁶³ by playing on their fear that the murderous mothers of phantasy who appear on the tragic stage in the guise of Medea or Agave are trapped “beneath the skin of every woman”³⁶⁴ - waiting to be unleashed

³⁶² *Id.* at p.127; 150.

³⁶³ *Id.* at p.150.

³⁶⁴ H. Musurillo, “Euripides’ *Medea*: A Reconsideration”, *American Journal of Philology*, 87, 1966, pp.52-74 at p.69.

Chapter Four

'Deeds Against Nature and Monsters by Kind'¹: Childbirth, Child-Murder and Early Modern Anxieties of Origin

The explanation of how death came into the world is really an explanation of the fear of death, of anxiety²

'It is not that I dread her', he says, 'it is that she herself is malignant, capable of any crime, a beast of prey, a vampire, a witch, insatiable in her desires'³

[T]he mysterious power of the womb to

¹ From the title of an early seventeenth-century anonymous pamphlet *Deeds Against Nature and Monsters by Kind*, London, 1614. This pamphlet describes the murder of a newborn infant by an unmarried mother who throws the corpse of her baby into a privy. The pamphleteer emphasises the horror of the mother's act by focusing on the revolting sight of the innocent babe covered in dirt and the unsavoury site of the infant's final resting place – "[a] sweet babe lying all besmeared with filth of that loathsome place" (sig.4v). The pamphleteer describes the mother as "a creature more savage than either bird or beast" (sig.3v). Cited in both Lake and Travitsky. P. Lake, "Deeds against Nature: Cheap Print, Protestantism and Murder in Early Seventeenth-Century England" in K. Sharpe and P. Lake, eds, *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1993, pp.257-283. B. Travitsky, "A Pittiless Mother?: Reports of a Seventeenth-Century English Filicide", *Mosaic*, 27(4), 1994, pp.55-80.

² G. Róheim, "The Garden of Eden", *Psychoanalytic Review*, 27(1-2), 1940, pp.1-26; 177-199 at p.198.

³ K. Horney, "The Dread of Woman: Observations on a Specific Difference in the Dread Felt by Men and by Women Respectively for the Opposite Sex", *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 13, 1932, pp.348-360 at p.349. For Rheingold, the "her" in Horney's work is the mother. Rheingold writes: "the dread of woman is the dread of mother ... always and everywhere the man strives to rid himself of this dread by objectifying it [in the form of a beast, a vampire, a witch and so on and so forth] ... the man's quaking fear of woman is a direct response to the malevolence of mother ... he must deny his fear or avenge himself upon mother". J.C. Rheingold, *The Fear of Being a Woman: A Theory of Maternal Destructiveness*, New York, Grune & Stratton, 1964, p.175.

*bring forth life frightened men, who then projected their fear and aggression onto women in the form of monstrous mythical mothers who abandoned, maimed, slaughtered, or devoured their children*⁴

*What could be a more fitting threat to society than the spectre of a woman, the creator of life, taking back into her body as food the very ones to whom she has given birth*⁵

*[T]o offer violence where Nature her Self obliges us to Love is a strange Barbarity ... to lay violent hands on [y]our own Offspring, and cause the death of a helpless innocent that from [you] derived its life cannot but be monstrous and abominable*⁶

*Roger: [W]hat a world is this? How it is chaunged! It is marueilous, it is monstrous! I heare saie there is a young woman, born in the toune of Harborough, one Bowker, a Butcher's doughter, whiche of late, God wote, is brought to bed of a cat, or haue deliured a catte; or, if you will, she is the mother of a catt ...
Ciuis: It is a lie, Roger, beleue it not; it was but a Catte ... It was an old catte, and she a yong Quene ... If it had been a monster, then*

⁴ M. Ladd-Taylor and L. Umanksy, eds, *'Bad' Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America*, New York, New York University Press, 1998, p.6.

⁵ C. Meyers, "Mother (and Father) Cannibalizing Their Daughters (and Sons)" in C. Meyers, ed., *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 2000, pp.214-215 at p.215.

⁶ *Old Bailey Sessions Papers*, 5 September (1673), cited in M. Francus, "Monstrous Mothers, Monstrous Societies: Infanticide and the Rule of Law in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century England", *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 21(2), 1997, pp.133-156 at p.136.

*it should haue had somewhat more or els
lesse; But an other catte was flaid in the
same sorte, and in all poinctes like, or, as it
were, the self same; thus can drabbes do
sometime when thei haue murthered their
owne bastardes, with helpe of an olde Witch
bryng a catte in place ...
Roger: Yet there are many one do beleue it
was a monster⁷*

‘Anxious masculinity’⁸

In the final epigraph to this chapter, taken from William Bullein’s 1578 *A Dialogue Against the Fever Pestilence*, two male characters – Roger and Civis – engage in a discussion about the phenomenon of monstrous births, a topic that consumed the early modern imagination. In the course of their discussion, Roger and Civis refer to a young woman from the town of Harborough in Leicestershire who allegedly gave birth to a cat. The dialogue, although presented as a satirical tract about embryological and teratological theories circulating at the time, is marked by sinister overtones. Roger and Civis imply that the ‘monster’ borne by the woman of Harborough is none other than a bastard produced by an

⁷ W. Bullein, *A Dialogue Against the Fever Pestilence* (1578), M.W. Bullen and A.H. Bullen, eds, London, Oxford University Press, 1888, p.73, lines 6-11; 17-25; 29.

⁸ From the title of Mark Breitenberg’s book *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1996. According to Breitenberg, “masculine anxiety is endemic to early modern patriarchy” (p.31). Focusing on texts as diverse as Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1620) and Shakespearean tragedies, Breitenberg locates “either an overt or disguised anxiety in all the texts [he] discuss[es]” (p.31). For Breitenberg, early modern England is “a cauldron of bubbling anxieties ... anxieties which are located in women’s sexuality” (pp.1; 25).

unmarried and sexually promiscuous woman. Moreover, Roger and Civis suggest that claims of monstrous births by unmarried women merely conceal the crimes of infanticide and witchcraft. In their opinion, the woman of Harborough did not bear a monster but rather murdered her own illegitimate infant and, with the help of a midwife-witch, substituted the baby's corpse with that of a flayed cat.

The woman of Harborough, a twenty-seven year old unmarried servant by the name of Agnes Bowker, claimed that she gave birth to a cat on the evening of January 16, 1569.⁹ Her story of monstrous birth aroused suspicion among secular and church officials and was a source of communal perturbation. For some, Bowker's alleged monstrous birth served as a divine warning against carnal lust and sins of the flesh. For others, it was a portent, a sign from God, of sinister forces threatening social stability.¹⁰

⁹ Quaife notes that the average age of women giving birth to illegitimate children in late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century England was between 27 years 0 months and 27 years 4 months (p.90). G.R. Quaife, *Wanton Wenches and Wayward Wives: Peasants and Illicit Sex in Early Seventeenth Century England*, London, Croom Helm, 1979.

¹⁰ The word 'monster' derives from the Latin *monere* ('to warn') and *monstrare* ('to point to' or 'to show') (T.K. Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*, London, Routledge, 2002, pp.6-7). On the etymology of 'monster' see also M-H. Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1993. For a discussion of monsters as signs see L. Daston and K. Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150-1750*, New York, Zone Books, 1998; O. Niccoli, *Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy* (1987), trans. L. Cochrane, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1990, pp.30-60; A. Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (1999), Oxford, Oxford

Bowker's case was heard by both ecclesiastic and secular officials at a time when interest in monstrous births "appeared to be sprouting up all over, as part of a fecund but putrid cultural landscape".¹¹ Coinciding with Bowker's narrative was the English translation of a French compilation of monsters, *Certaine Secrete Wonders of Nature* (1569), that "may have helped Agnes Bowker to construct her story and her auditors to interpret it"¹² and most certainly fuelled public curiosity. Bowker's case also appeared at a time of social crisis, when concerns about illegitimacy and infanticide were rapidly mounting and accusations of witchcraft¹³ were relentless.¹⁴ Within this

University Press, 2001, pp.194-203; K. Park and L. Daston, "Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France and England", *Past and Present*, 92, 1981, pp.20-54; R. Braidotti, "Signs of Wonder and Traces of Doubt: On Teratology and Embodied Differences" in N. Lykke and R. Braidotti, eds, *Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science, Medicine and Cyberspace*, London, Zed Books, 1996, pp.135-152.

¹¹ D. Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England: Tales of Discord and Dissension*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p.23. Brammall notes that English monstrous births were "more plentiful in the ... 1560s than they had been at any earlier time (or at least were perceived to have been so). As a result, English authors had more familiar native material to exploit in their accounts. Such births provided writers with eyewitness accounts full of detail and created a ready audience both fascinated and fearful enough to demand timely accounts" (p.10). K.M. Brammall, "Monstrous Metamorphosis: Nature, Morality, and the Rhetoric of Monstrosity in Tudor England", *Sixteenth-Century Journal*, 27(1), 1996, pp.3-21.

¹² Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, p.23. *Histoires prodigieuses ... extraites de plusieurs fameux auteurs* (Paris, 1560) was a compilation of monsters produced by the French translator Pierre Boaistuau. His work was translated into several languages. Edward Fenton provided the English translation (*Certaine Secrete Wonders of Nature*, 1569). For more about Boaistuau's work see Park and Daston, "Unnatural Conceptions", pp.30-32.

¹³ Only six years before Bowker's case, the British Parliament introduced what was known in short as the Elizabethan Witchcraft Act (1563) – an 'Act Against Conjurations, Enchantments and Witchcrafts'

which read in part: “any person or persons [who] ... use, practise or exercise, any invocations or conjurations of evil and wicked spirits ... or use, practise, or exercise any witchcraft, enchantment, charm or sorcery whereby any person shall happen to be killed or destroyed ... shall suffer pain of death as a felon or felons” (cited in Seth, pp.27-29) (the first British secular law against witchcraft was the 1542 Act under Henry VIII, repealed in 1547 and not replaced until 1563). Women were most frequently accused of being witches. Noddings notes that critics disagree as to the number of women killed during the European witch-hunts but adds that “[w]hatever the actual figures, many thousands were certainly accused, tortured, and executed, and there is agreement that 80 to 90 percent of the victims were women” (p.44). N. Noddings, *Women and Evil*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989. Barstow contends that “claims [of] three million, six million, or even ten million female victims is mistaken. A statistically based figure, though lower, still makes the same point: that this was an organised mass murder of women that cannot be dismissed by historians” (p.21). A.L. Barstow, *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts*, London, Harper Collins, 1995. For Karlsen, “[t]he story of witchcraft is primarily the story of women ... ideas about women, fears about women, [and] the place of women in society ... witches were generally thought of as women and most of those who died in the name of witchcraft were women” (p.xii). C. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1987. Larner argues that all women were witches *in potentia* with those women who did not “fulfil the male view of how women ought to conduct themselves” (p.100) labelled witches. C. Larner, *The Enemies of God*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1983. On this point see also A. MacFarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study* (1970), London, Routledge, 1999; C. Larner, “Was Witch-Hunting Woman-Hunting?”, *New Society*, 1, 1981, pp.11-12. M. Hester, *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches: A Study of the Dynamics of Male Domination*, London, Routledge, 1992.¹⁴ Monter observes a distinct pattern in the prosecution of the crimes of infanticide and witchcraft: “It is interesting that the rise in witchcraft prosecutions in the sixteenth century, and the decline late in the seventeenth, apparently coincide with the rise and fall in prosecutions of ... infanticide” (p.197). E.W. Monter, *Witchcraft in France and Switzerland: The Borderlands During the Reformation*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1976. Focusing specifically on the situation in England, Hoffer and Hull similarly note a relationship between infanticide and witchcraft prosecutions and the figures of the unwed murderous mother and the witch: “[t]he witch, like the poor, wandering unwed mother, lived at the edge of society. Both had the aura of sexual licence about them. The crimes of both were concealed, and often were directed against children. A full quarter of all the indictments brought against witches in England from the fourteenth through the eighteenth century was for bewitching infants. Sixty-two percent of all those accused of witchcraft were believed to have acted at least once against children ... Accusations of witchcraft, like

uneasy social climate both ecclesiastic and secular authorities concerned themselves with the veracity of Bowker's story, focusing in particular on embryological and teratological theories to ascertain whether a monstrous birth such as that alleged by Bowker was a physical possibility.¹⁵ However, as Bowker's tale unfolds,

suspicions of [infanticide], were by custom heard in the church courts ... both infanticide and witchcraft became objects of royal law and royal prosecution at about the same time ... royal courts responded to allegations of the two crimes in very similar fashion. When fears of one rose, accusations of the other increased correspondingly" (p.28). P.C. Hoffer and N.E.H. Hull, *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and New England 1558-1803*, New York, New York University Press, 1981. Jackson discusses the relationship between infanticide and witchcraft in terms of their status as "crime[s] against God and nature". According to Jackson, infanticide "was a deviant subversion of the role of the 'godly' mother and therefore likely to be associated with witchcraft" (p.360). L. Jackson, "Witches, Wives and Mothers: Witchcraft Persecution and Women's Confessions in Seventeenth-Century England" in D. Oldridge, ed., *The Witchcraft Reader*, London, Routledge, 2002, pp.353-366. See also Wiesner who notes that in Belgium not only were women accused of witchcraft also, by the very nature of the crime, accused of infanticide but "women found guilty of infanticide were generally also accused of witchcraft – the reasoning being that only the devil could lead a mother to kill her child" (p.64). M.E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (1993), Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

¹⁵ Roodenburg cites the case of a Dutch woman who gave birth to a feline monster after she had seen her husband beating a cat to death (p.710). H.W. Roodenburg, "The Maternal Imagination: The Fears of Pregnant Women in Seventeenth-Century Holland", *Journal of Social History*, 21(4), 1988, pp.701-716. Rublack reports the cases of two German women, one who "had been delivered of a cat instead of a child", the other whose child had the appearance of "a dead cat" (p.173). U. Rublack, *The Crimes of Women in Early Modern Germany*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999. Cressy notes the 1556 Swiss case of a child born with a cat's head (*Travesties and Transgressions*, p.37). In 1596 an Italian woman reportedly gave birth to five live rats "which slipped from the womb between the hands of the midwife and ran to a closet. Four of the rats were instantly killed by attendants while the fifth was devoured by a cat" (p.331). J.V. Ricci, *The Genealogy of Gynaecology: History of the Development of Gynaecology Throughout the Ages 2000B.C. – 1800A.D.*, Philadelphia, Blakiston, 1943. Numerous other examples such as

it becomes clear that interrogators, witnesses, and community figures alike suspect, like Bullein's Roger and Civis, that the story of a monstrous birth is mere fiction, a mother's desperate attempt to conceal the murder of her illegitimate child.

In the early modern era women were conceived of as being solely responsible for the production of illegitimate infants who were the physical signs of their sexual licentiousness.¹⁶ The Elizabethan Poor Law (1576) "urged magistrates to ferret out bastardy ... and punish it severely ... [t]heirs was the task of discerning and punishing socially unacceptable conduct ... 'dissolute living' and 'lewd and deceitful practices'".¹⁷ James' Poor Law Enforcement Act (1609) proclaimed that "[e]very lewd woman which shall have any bastard which may be chargeable to the parish, the justices of the peace shall commit such woman to the house of correction, to be punished and set to work, during the term of one whole year".¹⁸ The statute punished women for engaging in sexual relations outside wedlock and "encouraged the idea that social and domestic order depended upon the regulation and scrutiny of women's sexuality – perceived

these circulate in the literature on monstrous births. Pertinent examples may be found in Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*.

¹⁶ Breitenberg, p.19.

¹⁷ Elizabethan Poor Law, 18 Eliz. 1, c.3 (1576), cited in Hoffer and Hull, pp.13-14; 17. Hoffer and Hull surmise that the severity of the statute drove many unmarried mothers to either conceal the birth of illegitimate children or murder these bastard infants (p.17).

¹⁸ Poor Law Enforcement Act, 7 James 1, c.4 (1609), cited in Breitenberg, p.19.

'by nature' to be more prone to transgression".¹⁹ And in 1624 James' 'Act to prevent the Destroying and Murthering of Bastard Children'²⁰ came into force, "crystallizing in legislation ... early modern anxieties about the sexual behaviour of single women, illegitimacy, and [child-murder]".²¹

Social disorder was most frequently imagined in terms of "a female sexuality that had escaped from patriarchal control and was now free to wreak havoc".²² Monstrous progeny were believed to result from 'unnatural' fornication such as bestiality or improper sexual relations between unmarried men and women.²³ The figure of the sexually promiscuous woman bearing illegitimate and monstrous children was representative of a "nightmare world of untrammelled impulse [and] lust",²⁴ a world in which mothers regularly "rid themselves of the unwanted consequences of their [sin] ... inver[ting] the normal ties, feelings and obligations of human society".²⁵ Unmarried

¹⁹ Breitenberg, p.20.

²⁰ Stuart Bastard Neonaticide Act, 21 James 1, c.27 (1624). For further discussion see *infra* at note 294.

²¹ M. Jackson, "The Trial of Harriet Vooght: Continuity and Change in the History of Infanticide" in M. Jackson, ed., *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment, 1550-2000*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2002, pp.1-17 at p.7. Legal codification of the crime of maternal child-murder was first set out in the European penal code, *Constitutio Criminalis Carolina* (1532), that made it an offence for an *unmarried* mother to murder her new-born child.

²² Lake, p.264.

²³ See the following section for further discussion.

²⁴ Lake, p.264.

²⁵ *Ibid.* Lake writes that in the pamphlet literature of the time "[i]nfanticides were presented as ... 'natures cruel stepdames or

mothers who bore monsters or murdered their innocent babes were equally threatening to the social order because they represented a form of perverted maternity and a “bloody assault on family values”.²⁶ Imagined as a

matchless monsters of the female. The[irs] were ... the ultimate ‘deeds against nature’” (p.264).

²⁶ *Ibid.* Underdown suggests that “[f]ears of an impending breakdown of social order ... were at no time more widespread, or more intense, than in early modern England ... even the patriarchal family, the lynch-pin of the whole structure of order, appeared to be threatened ... Patriarchal authority within the family was the cornerstone of Elizabethan and Jacobean political theory, the ultimate, ‘natural’ justification for obedience to the state: to reject either was to threaten the entire social and political order” (pp.116-117). D.E. Underdown, “The Taming of the Scold: The Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England” in A. Fletcher and J. Stevenson, eds, *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp.116-136. Oldridge notes that in patriarchal early modern England, “disorderly women were perceived as the main danger to family life” (p.14). Infanticide represented “an attack on the family” and unmarried mothers and women accused of infanticide were, like prostitutes, viewed as “female enemies of the ‘holy household’” (p.14). D. Oldridge, “General Introduction” in D. Oldridge, ed., *The Witchcraft Reader*, London, Routledge, 2002, pp.1-20. The state of the family reflected the state of the social body and men were said to “govern the common-wealth [as they] rule [their] own house[s]” (Breitenberg, p.18). Indeed, Goldberg has shown how James I legitimised his authority to rule by emphasising the ‘natural’ progression from husband to ruler and ultimately ‘father’ to his loyal subjects. J. Goldberg, “Fatherly Authority: The Politics of Stuart Family Images” in M.W. Ferguson, M. Quilligan and N.J. Vickers, eds, *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp.3-32. Karen Raber, in her consideration of the family/state analogy in Renaissance drama, similarly suggests that “early modern culture assumed the monarch’s right to rule was based in his patriarchal relationship to his nation, that in effect he commanded their obedience because he functioned as a father to them” (p.299). Focusing on Sackville and Norton’s 1562 drama *Gorboduc*, Raber ponders the conflicting loyalties for a man who is “not only king and head of the government, [but] also a father and husband” (p.298). Raber “mobilizes” the figure of the murderous mother “to suggest the barely repressed connection to blood that threatens rule by law” (p.313). For Raber, the murderous mother is a direct threat to “the integrity or continuity of the *polis*” (p.299) and a symbolic representative of “the internalised instability that inevitably accompanies any system founded in familial dynamics” (p.313). K.

threat to both paternal authority and social stability, the maternal body became the site on which concerns about female generative power were repeatedly played out.

In Bowker's early modern England we discern an extreme cultural preoccupation with childbirth and child-murder that betrays anxieties of maternal origin. Using Bowker's case as a portal to the past, we will consider how fantasies of the mother as life-giver and death-dealer are shaped by unconscious fears of the maternal matrix – the womb that can suffocate,²⁷ birth monsters, or take back into itself

Raber, "Murderous Mothers and the Family/State Analogy in Classical and Renaissance Drama", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 37(3), 2000, pp.298-320. For further consideration of *Gorboduc* in terms of anxieties about marriage, lineage, and reproduction see J. Vanhoutte, "Community, Authority, and the Motherland in Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc*", *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 40(2), 2000, pp.227-239.

²⁷ In the following section we will see that in Classical and early modern theories of female physiology, the womb was attributed the power to suffocate the mother. Here, I use the term 'suffocate' both physiologically and psychoanalytically to suggest both the effect of the womb on the mother *and* the child (the womb that engulfs). In her study of Shakespeare's plays, Adelman similarly plays on the term 'suffocate' to emphasise the relationship between maternity and the annihilation of one's self, focusing on the maternal threat to the child and conversely, the child's threat to the mother and the blurring of boundaries between mother and infant that threaten patrilineage. J. Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest*, New York, Routledge, 1992. Dalmolin notes that on a psychoanalytical level "[w]omb fantasies take on the appearance of a return to the unknown and therefore frightening body of the mother. Freud's formulation that the return to the womb takes on the appearance of death, of being buried alive, must be understood as an indirect formulation of his fear of the unknown for which woman and her body are responsible. For Freud, to face motherhood is to face death and in order to avoid the deadly mother, he [represses] the parturient mother" (E. Dalmolin, *Cutting the Body: Representing Woman in Baudelaire's Poetry, Truffaut's Cinema, and Freud's Psychoanalysis*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2000, p.186).

progeny – and the formlessness of the generative maternal body that constantly shifts shape and transgresses somatic boundaries, endlessly releasing fluids associated with reproduction – menstrual blood, lochial blood, breast milk - that are imbued with a contaminating and deadly power of their own.²⁸ According to Roper, the maternal is the “field in which ... the relation of psyche and body [is] at stake”.²⁹ For Roper, early modern mothers and female caregivers were both

²⁸ Roper describes the maternal body as “a body which can lose its organization, and in which liquids within the body become poisonous, killing instead of nourishing ... a container of evil fluids ... a vessel containing dangerous substances ... bursting out in every direction” (pp.23; 25; see also her chapter entitled “Witchcraft and Fantasy in Early Modern Germany” in L. Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe*, London, Routledge, 1994, pp.199-225). Klein tells us that in the Oedipal stage of infant development the child’s fear of the mother manifests in fantasised attacks on the maternal body, most generally directed against “the organs of conception, pregnancy and parturition, which the child assumes to exist *in the womb*” (pp.74; 96; my italics). M. Klein, “Symbol Formation in Ego Development” in J. Mitchell, ed., *The Selected Melanie Klein*, New York, Free Press, 1986. In the previous chapters we saw how infantile anxieties are retained (unconsciously) in adulthood and manifest in the form of cultural neuroses. The womb is a primordial site of anxiety and is at the heart of early modern social dis(-)ease (connoting both uneasiness or discomfort and illness). According to Kristeva, the masculine fear of the archaic maternal body is, in effect, a fear of maternal generative power. “It is this power, a dreaded one”, writes Kristeva, “that patrilineal filiation has the burden of subduing” (*Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. L.S. Roudiez, New York, Columbia University Press, 1982, p.77) . Men attempt to deny maternal power either by “tak[ing] [the mother’s] place [or] going beyond her” (J. Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. L.S. Roudiez, trans. T. Gora, A. Jardine and L.S. Roudiez, New York, Columbia University Press, 1980, p.191). In the following section we will see how early modern male poets sought to deny maternal power and thus sublimate their fear of the maternal (reproductive) body by taking the place of the mother in the process of childbirth. These male creators bear textual progeny bypassing altogether the horrifying and loathsome maternal matrix.

²⁹ Roper, p.3.

“projections of male fantasies [and] active embodiments of evil”.³⁰ Accusations of child-murder and witchcraft levelled at mothers and midwives were the primary medium through which fears of maternal generative power were given cultural expression.

Fantasies of maternal monstrosity are invoked and reinvoked during times of social crisis, with the trope of perverted maternity used to articulate concerns about gender. Bordo suggests that “[i]n periods of gross ... social crisis, such as characterized the period of the witch-hunts in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, [these fantasies] appear to flourish”.³¹ One of the most powerful and pervasive fantasies is that of the devouring mother. Indeed, one of the primary charges brought against women accused of witchcraft was the slaughter and ingestion of infants.³² Stevens has similarly shown how

³⁰ *Id.* at p.20.

³¹ S. Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993, p.161. On this point see also B. Ehrenreich and D. English, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers*, New York, Feminist Press, 1973.

³² Bordo notes how these images of murderous and devouring mothers reappear in the mid-nineteenth century, coinciding with a visible increase in female social power. During this period, biting, devouring, vampiric, murderous mothers figure as signs and symptoms of social dis-ease with the position of women in the body politic. For more see B. Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (1986), New York, Oxford University Press, 1988; P. Bade, *Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women*, London, Ash & Grant, 1979; H.R. Hays, *The Dangerous Sex: The Myth of Feminine Evil* (1964), London, Methuen, 1966. On the metaphors of appetite and consumption in nineteenth-century literature see H. Michie, *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987;

fantasies of maternal monstrosity recur “in situations of social anxiety or ambivalence”.³³ Stevens suggests that “the themes of child-murder and cannibalism ... the stuff of the most dreaded cultural nightmares ... that dominate witchcraft narratives form part of a “demonology ... an elaborate body of belief about an evil force ... exaggerated or totally imaginary ... that is undermining the society’s most cherished values and institutions”.³⁴ In Bowker’s case concerns about excess and monstrous (re)production translate into fantasies of cannibalistic consumption and malevolent nurture, signalling an urgent need to regulate both what is taken into and released from the maternal body. How else might patriarchal society legitimately reproduce itself in the face of the sexually promiscuous monster-bearing murderous mother?

(Mis)conceptions

*[T]he male mind has always been
haunted by the force of the idea of
dependence on a woman for life itself,
the son’s constant effort to assimilate,*

A. K. Silver, *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

³³ P. Stevens, “New Legends: Some Perspectives from Anthropology”, *Western Folklore*, 49, 1990, pp121-141 at p.127.

³⁴ *Id.* at pp.128; 130. On the tropes of cannibalism and child-murder as part of European demonologies see C. Ramsey, “Cannibalism and Infant Killing: A System of ‘Demonizing’ Motifs in Indian Captivity Narratives”, *CLIO*, 24(1), 1994, pp.55-70. Ramsey suggests that these motifs form part of a cultural mythology from which communities draw to express anxieties about their security and about the future (p.63). See also D.E. Stannard, “Recounting the Fables of Savagery: Native Infanticide and the Functions of Political Myth”, *Journal of American Studies*, 25(3), 1991, pp.381-417.

*compensate for, or deny the fact that
he is 'of woman born'³⁵*

*[M]en will have to imagine other ways
to deal with the fact that they, men,
are born of women³⁶*

*In order to defeat the mother, the male
must prove that he is not inferior, that he
has a gift to produce. Since he cannot
produce with a womb, he must produce
in another fashion; he produces with his
mouth, his word, his thought³⁷*

Philosophers, poets, playwrights, and theologians have long fantasised about the excessive and monstrous possibilities of the maternal body and erected imaginative defences against its dangerous force. Focusing on the issue of reproductive anxiety in the work of Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, Francus suggests that “the image of the fecund female has often been associated with monstrosity ... as an emblem of lust, the fecund female ... evoke[s] the seemingly uncontrollable nature of femininity and ... the image functions as a locus of male disgust with, and fear of, sexuality and reproduction”.³⁸ In *The Battle of the Books* Swift imagines the Terrible Mother, the Goddess Criticism who has “Claws like a Cat”

³⁵ A. Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1977, p.xiii, emphasis in text.

³⁶ T. de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, London, Macmillan, 1984, p.156.

³⁷ E. Fromm, *The Forgotten Language: An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales and Myths*, New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1951, p.233.

³⁸ M. Francus, “The Monstrous Mother: Reproductive Anxiety in Swift and Pope”, *ELH*, 61(4), 1994, pp.829-851 at p.829.

and the “Head, and Ears, and Voice ... of an Ass”³⁹ who births and devours her monstrous progeny. Likewise Milton’s serpentine Sin in his *Paradise Lost*⁴⁰ births and nurtures the child ‘Death’ that symbolises the original sin of the biblical Mother Eve who brought death into the world.

Negative images of female fertility and reproductive sexuality derive from the Judeo-Christian myth of origin in which the first woman tempts the first man to take “a bite of death”.⁴¹ Adelman suggests that “original sin is literally the sin of origin ... inherited from the maternal body”⁴² that condemns humankind to mortality. Adelman notes that “[t]he womb was traditionally understood as the entrance

³⁹ J. Swift, *A Tale of a Tub* (1704) in A.C. Guthkelch and D.N. Smith, eds, *A Tale of a Tub, to Which Is Added the Battle of the Books and the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1920, p.240.

⁴⁰ For further consideration of Milton’s Eve see M. Nyquist, “Gynesis, Genesis, Exegesis, and the Formation of Milton’s Eve” in M. Garber, ed., *Cannibals, Witches and Divorce: Estranging the Renaissance*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, pp.147-208; J.S. Shoulson, “The Embrace of the Fig Tree: Sexuality and Creativity in Midrash and in Milton”, *ELH*, 67(4), 2000, pp.873-903; D.K. McColley, *Milton’s Eve*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1983; S.M. Fallon, “Milton’s Sin and Death: The Ontology of Allegory in *Paradise Lost*”, *English Language Review*, 17, 1987, pp.329-350; T.P. Roche, “Spenser, Milton, and the Representation of Evil” in M. Swiss and D.A. Kent, eds, *Heirs of Fame: Milton and Writers of the English Renaissance*, 1995, London, Associated University Presses, pp.14-33.

⁴¹ K. Guthke, *The Gender of Death: A Cultural History in Art and Literature*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.42 (drawing on a passage from Bishop Jean Oliver’s sixteenth-century *Pandora* reproduced in D. Panofsky and E. Panofsky, *Pandora’s Box: The Changing Aspects of a Mythical Symbol* (1956), New York, Bollingen Foundation, 1962, p.11: “Eve in Scripture opened the forbidden fruit by her bite, by which death invaded the world” (p.155).

⁴² Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p.24.

to death and the site of mortality”.⁴³ Indeed, Milton associates the “Womb of Nature” with the grave.⁴⁴ The womb represents, synecdochically, the maternal body “as the site of reproduction ... the sign of sin, for reproduction evokes, if not re-enacts, the initial fall from grace”.⁴⁵

Early modern men were consumed with generation (*generatio*) and women’s role (or lack thereof) in the reproductive process. Pain in childbirth was the punishment for Eve’s transgression in Paradise⁴⁶ but the Scriptures also stated that woman was redeemed by bearing children.⁴⁷ In *The Secret Miracles of Nature* the

⁴³ *Id.* at p.6.

⁴⁴ J. Milton, “Paradise Lost” in M.Y. Hughes, ed., *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, Indianapolis, Odyssey Press, 1957, 2.911.

⁴⁵ Francus, p.829.

⁴⁶ As seventeenth-century scholar Gervase Babington wrote: “[labour is] a paine deserued by sinne”. *Certaine Plaine, briefe, and comfortable Notes upon euerie Chapter of Genesis*, sig. c.2.r (cited in P. Almond, *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.203). This idea persisted well into the nineteenth-century where doctors cautioned against giving women in labour anaesthesia for fear of disobeying the Biblical decree that “women must bring forth children in sorrow” (L. Thompson, *The Wandering Womb: A Cultural History of Outrageous Beliefs About Women*, New York, Prometheus, 1999, p.17).

⁴⁷ P. Crawford, “The Construction and Experience of Maternity in Seventeenth-Century England” in V. Fildes, ed., *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England*, London, Routledge, 1990, pp.3-38 at p.8. Indeed, in the fourth century, Jerome wrote: “Death came through Eve, life through Mary”. St. Thomas Aquinas believed that Mary’s importance lay in her status as mother, for being a mother raised the status of all women. Embedded in Western culture is the idea that motherhood is “woman’s best chance to redeem herself from the sin of Eve and restore herself to honour” (A. Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1984, p.72). Lerner notes that Mary was seen as the “protectress of women in childbirth”. Pregnant and childless women prayed at shrines dedicated to Mary. In churches across Europe, women hoping to conceive “dedicated their wedding dresses or china dolls representing babies to the Virgin” (G. Lerner,

Dutch physician Levinus Lemnius suggested that women are driven to procreate and greedily “snatch the seed from [men] as hungry dogs do at a bone”.⁴⁸ Sexual desire was believed to be necessary for conception and thus acceptable within the confines of marriage.⁴⁹ Popular medical theories pronounced the failure to bear children

The Creation of Patriarchy, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986, pp.125-126). For more on the cult of the Virgin Mary see J. Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996; M. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976; P. Norris, *Eve: A Biography*, New York, New York University Press, 1999. For feminist perspectives see E.S. Fiorenza (1986); S. De Beauvoir (1971); M. Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1978; E.F. Kittay, “Woman as Metaphor” in D.T. Meyers, ed., *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, New York, Routledge, 1997, pp.265-285; J. Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. T. Gora, A. Jardine and L.S. Roudiez, New York, Columbia University Press, 1980.

⁴⁸ L. Lemnius, *The Secret Miracles of Nature* (London, 1658), cited in Crawford, p.6. Witches were accused of stealing the male seed. Plato conceived of the womb as “an animal” that would search for sexual gratification. In *Timaeus*, Plato writes: “the womb or uterus is like a living thing, possessed of the desire to make children ... [t]he womb is an animal which longs to generate children” (cited in Thompson, pp.33-34).

⁴⁹ Culpeper writes that “without that [organ] which causeth lust in women, and gives delight in copulation ... a woman neither desires copulation or hath pleasure in it, or conceives by it”. N. Culpeper, *A directory for midwives; or a guide for women in their conception, bearing and suckling their children* (1651), reproduced in part in K. Aughterson, ed., *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook – Constructions of Femininity in England*, London, Routledge, 1995, pp.57-60; 124-127 at pp.57-58. Compare the ideas of the theologian Augustine who believed that sexual activity should be devoid of pleasure and engaged in by married couples solely for procreative purposes. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. G.G. Walsh and G. Monahan, New York, Fathers of the Church [XIV], 1952, pp.557-558. See also A. McLaren, *Reproductive Rituals: The Perception of Fertility in England from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth Century*, London, Methuen, 1984, pp.13-29; T. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (1990), Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1992, pp.43-52; 99-103.

as a significant cause of illness in women.⁵⁰ And anything

⁵⁰ And women who were barren were seen as 'defective' women because they failed to fulfil their "natural female role" (A. Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1984, p.62; on childless women in general see M. Fissell, "Gender and Generation: Representing Reproduction in Early Modern England", *Gender and History*, 7(3), 1995, pp.433-456 at p.440). The womb (*hystera*) was believed to cause a range of diseases in women that were referred to under the umbrella term 'hysteria', symptoms of which included suffocation, fits, fainting, and nausea. Beizer's study of hysteria shows that "[f]rom Egyptian antiquity until the seventeenth century, hysteria was conceptualised virtually without contestation as a female disease, a uterine disorder" (J. Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1994, p.3). Hippocrates used the term *hysteria* to describe a disease caused by sexual abstinence whereby "the uterus dries up and loses weight and in its search for moisture, rises toward the hypochondrium, thus impeding the flow of breath which was supposed normally to descend into the abdominal cavity" (cited in Thompson, p.34). Drawing on early Egyptian theories of the 'wandering womb', Hippocrates posited that an unsatisfied womb "migrated" from the pelvis interfering with the body's organs. Some of the practices used to entice the womb back to its proper place include the inhaling or ingesting of herbs and 'vulvar fumigation'. The Greek physician Galen proposed that a womb deprived of regular sexual activity and regular pregnancies could 'suffocate' the mother (Thompson, p.36). During the early modern era, hysteria "became a sign of sexuality, a sexual curse that bore witness to a pact with the devil" (Beizer, p.5). Unable to reconcile medical theories that made sexual abstinence the cause of female illness and theological ideas about the virtues of sexual restraint, the Church Fathers aligned hysteria with witchcraft. Micale suggests that it was during this period that the notion of hysteria became "more aggressively misogynistic ... the historical witch/hysteric was pictured as innately and actively evil – a sinister and sexually rebellious creature who threatened the social and moral order" (M.S. Micale, *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and its Interpretations*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1995, p.69). Both witches and hysterics were associated with the perversion of *generatio*. According to Gatens, "physical disorder thought to be inherent in the female sex ... [was] retranslated into ... disorder created by women, in the [social] body" (M. Gatens, "Corporeal Representation in/and the Body Politic" in R. Diprose and R. Ferrell, eds, *Cartographies: Poststructuralism and the Mapping of Bodies and Spaces*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1991, pp.79-87 at p.83). For more on the association between the witch and hysteric see H. Cixous and C. Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (1975), trans. B. Wing, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986. For a discussion of the ways in which hysteria "came to replace the catch-all 'witch' as a label applied to women who were in some way deviant,

that impeded the conceiving and bearing of healthy offspring was regarded as sinful and worthy of divine retribution. Malformed children borne to parents who engaged in sexual relations out of wedlock, conducted extramarital affairs or engaged in 'unnatural' forms of sexual behaviour (such as bestiality or intercourse during menstruation)⁵¹ were seen as both a pronouncement on

in some way different" in the nineteenth-century see J. Ussher, *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?*, London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991. On Hippocrates see H. King, *Hippocrates' Woman: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece*, London, Routledge, 1998. On political uses of the metaphor of disease see R. Salvaggio, *Enlightened Absence: Neoclassical Configurations of the Feminine*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1988. On hysteria as the metaphor and myth of the nineteenth-century see Beizer. For the ways in which scientific and legal discourse bolsters theological and philosophical conceptions of the female reproductive body see C. Smart, "Disruptive Bodies and Unruly Sex: The Regulation of Reproduction and Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century" in C. Smart, ed., *Regulating Womanhood: Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality*, London, Routledge, 1992, pp.7-32. On the willingness of legal authorities to accept scientific theories see H. Marland, "Getting Away With Murder? Puerperal Insanity, Infanticide and the Defence Plea" in M. Jackson, ed., *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment, 1550-2000*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2002, pp.168-192; M. Jackson, *New-Born Child Murder: Women, Illegitimacy and the Courts in Eighteenth-Century England*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1996.

⁵¹ Paré suggests that monstrous births result when men and women "Iye and joine themselves together without law and measure, or luxuriously and beastly, or at such times as they ought to forbear by the command of God and the Church" (A. Paré, *The Collected Works of Ambroise Paré* (1634), trans. Thomas Johnson, New York, Milford House, 1968, p.962). See also the conduct book *Aristotle's Masterpiece* (London, 1690), cited in S.J. Wiseman, "'Tis Pity She's a Whore: Representing the Incestuous Body" in L. Gent and N. Llewellyn, eds, *Renaissance Bodies: The Human Figure in English Culture c. 1540-1660*, London, Reaktion Books, 1990, pp.180-197 at p.184. On monstrous births and menstruation see O. Niccoli, "Menstruum Quasi Monstruum: Monstrous Births and Menstrual Taboo in the Sixteenth Century" (trans. M. Gallucci) in E. Muir and G. Ruggiero, eds, *Sex and Gender in Historical Perspective*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, pp.1-25. In her study of menstrual taboos in various cultures Weideger notes that "menstrual blood [is] almost universally evil" (P. Weideger, *Menstruation and*

the bestial nature of the parents and a sign of “divine displeasure at such sinful acts”.⁵²

Early modern gender ideology reflected Classical conceptions of women.⁵³ Aristotle believed that the female

Menopause: The Physiology and Psychology, the Myth and the Reality, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1980, p.89). According to Gilmore, menstrual blood “is regarded as the world’s most deadly substance” (D. Gilmore, *Misogyny: The Male Malady*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, p.25). Róheim notes that in the Hebrew tradition “Satan ... in the shape of the serpent ... has intercourse with Eve thus giving rise to menstruation” (“Garden of Eden”, p.177). In medieval times, menstruation was known as the “curse of Eve” – “the curse God laid upon woman for her sin in Eden” (Weideger, p.90). In his consideration of menstruation in medieval thought, Wood notes that “to engage in intercourse during the menses “was to increase the likelihood first of female offspring (i.e. only slight deform[ities]); then of badly defective ones; and then of none at all” (p.716). C.T. Wood, “The Doctors’ Dilemma: Sin, Salvation, and the Menstrual Cycle in Medieval Thought”, *Speculum*, 56(4), 1981, pp.710-727.

⁵² L. Daston, “Marvellous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe”, *Critical Inquiry*, 18(1), 1991, pp.93-124 at p.113. In his interpretation of the Fall, seventeenth-century scholar Alexander Ross writes: “[t]he conceptions of the woman are a punishment, because sometimes their conceptions are imperfect and deformed”, *An Exposition on the Fourteene first Chapters of Genesis*, (cited in Almond, p.203).

⁵³ Aughterson notes that early modern conceptions of womanhood are rooted in both the Judeo-Christian tradition, in which woman is responsible for the fall of humankind from Paradise, and the Aristotelian-Galenic tradition that explained female physiology and woman’s role in generation. “Aristotle provided the philosophical underpinning of understanding about gender through his distinction between form (masculine) and matter (feminine) whilst Galen provided the physiological framework in which woman’s health and identity were discussed” (K. Aughterson, ed., *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook – Constructions of Femininity in England*, London, Routledge, 1995, p.42). Although differing on the issue of the production of ‘seed’, like Aristotle, Galen believed that women’s role in procreation was inferior to that of men. In his genealogy of gynaecology Ricci states that “[f]rom the days of Aristotle to the seventeenth century there were practically no changes in the theory of generation” (p.407). See also I. Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical*

body was inferior to the male body – moister, colder, and wetter and therefore more prone to become unbalanced. Because it was seen as wet, the female body was supposedly messier and leakier than the male body and not governed by reason but dictated by passion and desire. In his works, the *Generation of Animals* and the *History of Animals*, Aristotle used his theory to account for women being “smaller and weaker”, “less muscular”, “less compactly jointed”, and possessing a “smaller and less developed” brain than men.⁵⁴ The latter in turn was believed to account for women being “more jealous, more querulous, more apt to scold and to strike, more prone to despondency, more void of shame, more false of speech, and more deceptive”.⁵⁵

Aristotle sought to bolster his theory by contending that a woman’s ‘defective heat’ was required for generation. Accordingly, an embryo became female and thus failed to reach its “proper form” when it could not “concoct nourishment through lack of heat”.⁵⁶ Aristotle believed that the “proper form” of a human being was male, while the female was a defective male – a “mutilated”⁵⁷ man, a

Science in European Intellectual Life, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1980, pp.28-46.

⁵⁴ Aristotle, *History of Animals* (trans. d’A.W. Thompson) in J. Barnes, ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1984, 538.a.23-b.8.

⁵⁵ *Id.* at 608.b.10-12.

⁵⁶ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* (trans. A. Platt) in J. Barnes, ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1984, 766.a.18-20.

⁵⁷ *Id.* at 737.a.27-28.

“departure from type”⁵⁸ – literally a monster. In this early association between woman and monstrosity, Aristotle irrevocably bound woman’s role in procreation to her imperfection and inferiority.

Aristotle is credited with “two thousand years of teach[ing] that woman is ... the passive receptacle for [male] power”.⁵⁹ While the male body was seen as “making sense in itself”, woman’s body was only meaningful in relation to the male who would “impress on her passive matter”.⁶⁰ Aristotle believed that the male delivers form to the child while the female contributes only matter.⁶¹ According to Battersby, women were seen as “tied to a body that was designed for biologically reproductive – not

⁵⁸ *Id.* at 767.b.8-9. In his *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* Galen similarly emphasised female imperfection: “Now just as mankind is the most perfect of all animals, so within mankind the man is more perfect than the woman, and the primary instrument. Hence in those animals that have less of it, her workmanship is necessarily more imperfect” (cited in Aughterson, p.47).

⁵⁹ R.R. Ruether, “Woman/Body/Nature”, *Centre for Women in Religion Newsletter*, 6(3), p.3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* Aristotle’s theory of generation was so influential that despite developments in medical thought about the distinctiveness of male and female reproductive organs, “accounts of generation still gave priority ... to the man’s seed: his was active and the woman’s ‘seed’ was the passive receptacle or bed in which his seed might grow” (Aughterson, p.43).

⁶¹ On this point Keller notes that while “the female’s role as material cause allows her to be rightly considered a parent, it is the male contribution that provides the motion of the offspring and directs its formation, and so it is the male that is considered the primary progenitor” (p.39). E. Keller, “Making Up For Losses: The Workings of Gender in William Harvey’s *de Generatione animalium*” in S. Greenfield and C. Barash, eds, *Inventing Maternity: Politics, Science, and Literature 1650-1865*, Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1999, pp.34-56.

culturally productive – work”.⁶² She states: “[unlike] males, [who] were allowed transcendence of their biological subject-position via the tasks of spiritual production, ... [women were] more integrally linked with embodiment ... to fleshy continuity”.⁶³

In her book *The Troublesome Helpmate*, Katherine Rogers suggests that Aristotle’s denigration of the female sex and women’s role in reproduction is repeated throughout the history of Western culture, pointing to a persistent underlying anxiety that drives men to deny the power of the mother and the maternal body from which they issue. Rogers writes:

Aristotle’s discussion of reproduction shows with particular clarity a motive for the disparagement of women ... His repeated insistence on woman’s unimportance reveals a compulsion to deny her actual power and significance. If the male members of a patriarchal society were altogether confident of their superior power and capacity, they would feel no anxiety about their status and – on this ground at least – no hostility to women. But of course they cannot: the patriarch always has the haunting memory of his original dependence on his mother. Hence he must

⁶² C. Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity*, Cambridge, UK, Polity Press, 1998, pp.9-10. Marcus similarly laments that “the production of culture and the reproduction of children are incompatible” (p.61). J. Marcus, “Liberty, Sorority, Misogyny” in C.G. Heilbrun and M.R. Higonnet, eds, *The Representation of Women in Fiction*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983, pp.60-97.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

keep reassuring himself that woman is really weak and insignificant.⁶⁴

In this respect, we might read the early modern epistemophilic drive to know the female body⁶⁵ through dissection and pictorial representation as a desire to contain that which was previously unseen and therefore unknowable and beyond male control.⁶⁶ Harvey has

⁶⁴ K.M. Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1966, p.37.

⁶⁵ Brooks suggests that the “epistemophilic impulse” to know the interiority of the female body is “conjoined” with the “scopophilic impulse” or eroticised desire to see the fleshly body. P. Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1993, p.11. In critical interpretations of Biblical myth, knowledge and sexuality are intertwined – the desire for knowledge is a euphemism for carnal lust, the eating of the ‘fruit’ of the tree of knowledge is the act of coitus. This issue is elaborated later in this chapter. Braidotti suggests that “[t]he desire to know is, like all desires, related to the problem of representing one’s origin, of answering the most childish and consequently fundamental of questions: ‘where did I come from?’ ... knowledge is always the desire to know about desire, that is to say about things of the body as a sexual entity ... the scientist is like the anxious little child who pulls apart his favourite toy to see how it’s made inside ... All this is related to ... the web of curiosity and taboos surrounding the one site of certain origin – *the mother’s body*” (p.73). R. Braidotti, “Mothers, Monsters, and Machines” in K. Conboy, N. Medina and S. Stanbury, eds, *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1997, pp.59-79; my emphasis.

⁶⁶ Physicians frequently dissected women who had died during labour or the lying-in period. In *A Directory for Midwives* (London, 1651) Culpeper says that he witnessed one such dissection (p.3). Ricci mentions the dissection of a twenty-four year old woman who was hanged for the murder of her child only ten days after giving birth (p.327). Eminent physicians witnessed the dissection, including Ambroise Paré (who wrote about monstrous births – see the following section). According to Laqueur, “Renaissance anatomists dissected, looked into, and visually represented the female body ... [as] an assertion of male power” (pp.70; 73). For further discussion see Laqueur, pp.70-98. Paster goes one step further in her suggestion that “such illustrations ... construct[ed] a discourse of knowledge

shown how increasing medical scrutiny of female interiority coincided with a metaphoric appropriation of pregnancy and childbirth by Renaissance male poets. According to Harvey, the discourse of “maternity”, like the female body, could be “owned or appropriated” by both physicians who “colonized” childbirth and poets who “sought to possess the experience of maternity in language”.⁶⁷ Childbirth was conceptualised “as a new territory ... [to be] explored”,⁶⁸ Donne’s “Mine / Of rich and pregnant phansie”.⁶⁹ Fantasising a release from male dependence on the mother and an escape from the maternal matrix, Renaissance poets such as Sidney, Milton, and Donne imagined themselves as autochthonous conceivers and bearers of (textual) progeny.⁷⁰

alienating women from their own bodies and bodily self-experience, making them subject to those bodies and to those who [could] represent it” (p.178, note 29). G.K. Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1993.

⁶⁷ E.D. Harvey, *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts*, London, Routledge, 1992, p.9.

⁶⁸ *Id.* at p.79.

⁶⁹ *Id.* at p.78.

⁷⁰ For an excellent discussion of the issue of textual progeny see E. Spiller, “Poetic Parthenogenesis and Spenser’s Idea of Creation in *The Faerie Queene*”, *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 40(1), 2000, pp.63-79. For a consideration of the metaphoric appropriation of childbirth in the theories of Freud, the poetry of Baudelaire, and the films of Truffaut see Dalmolin pp.135-186. According to Dalmolin, these male creators – “poet, filmmaker and psychoanalyst become unwilling yet engaged actors in a birth scenario that transports them into a repressed maternal fantasy in which they privately thrive and create as ‘mothers’” (p.15).

In the notion of the fertile imagination, male poets bypass the maternal womb as the site of foetal development, preferring instead to endure an arduous mental labour more painful than any physical birth experienced by a woman.⁷¹ Drawing on the Platonic association between book and child,⁷² these poets midwife their own texts/infants, ensuring both “the safe delivery of ideas, and the survival and health of intellectual progeny”.⁷³ The male poet imagines himself as life-giver and nurturer, in direct contrast to his maternal monsters that too often bear malformed offspring and devour their creations.⁷⁴ In Classical myth too, fathers ingest their progeny but only to rebirth them. Children emerge, at times fully grown, from

⁷¹ Harvey, pp.94-97.

⁷² The metaphor of book or poem as child incorporates the idea that to write is to father progeny – “to produce a male lineage” (R.L. Regosin, *Montaigne’s Unruly Brood: Textual Engendering and the Challenge to Paternal Authority*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996, p.1). Regosin refers his reader to Plato’s *Symposium* in which Diotima tells Socrates that those who “conceive in the spirit rather than in the flesh create children lovelier and less mortal than human seed” (p.1). Plato suggests that “[w]riting is the highest form of conception” (Regosin, p.3). The writer, as father, “represents a text that he has generated as his child”, a “spiritual child ... perfectly formed” on which he bestows affection and which in turn reciprocates “that love by carrying the father’s name into the world” (Regosin, p.3).

⁷³ Harvey, p.95.

⁷⁴ According to Crewe, the male poets appropriate an ideologically “wholesome (healthy, natural, divinely ordained) performance of maternity” (p.4). J. Crewe, “Baby Killers”, *Differences*, 7(3), 1995, pp.1-23. Augustan satirist Jonathan Swift attacks female creativity through the figure of the monstrous mother “who comes to represent the sterility of indiscriminate fecundity, encroaching entropy, and the failure of form” (S. Gubar, “The Female Monster in Augustan Satire”, *Signs*, 3(2), 1977, pp.380-394 at p.390). According to Gubar, “[t]he eternal breeding, eating, spewing, feeding, and redevouring that characterises [Spenser’s] *Errour*, [Milton’s] *Sin*, and [Swift’s] *Criticism* link them to biological cycles considered destructive to intellectual and spiritual forms of life” (p.391).

the bodies - mouths, thighs, heads - and minds of men.⁷⁵
And in those tales in which rebirth is impossible, “the father’s stomach becomes the [child’s] tomb, as the ‘natus’ returns to the body that produced and still owns it ... the masculine version of the traditional womb/tomb identification appropriate to a culture that invests all authority and power of origination in the *paterfamilias*”.⁷⁶

Male poets attribute the “power of the imagination to shape an unborn child”.⁷⁷ Envisaging a world in which mothers are no longer a source of anxiety because they are removed from the reproductive equation altogether,

⁷⁵ Kronos eats his children and then ‘rebirths’ them whole, vomiting them up from his stomach (‘womb’) and out through his mouth (‘vagina’) (Hesiod, *Theogony* (trans. A. Athanassakis), Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983, lines 493-496). Warner suggests that “Kronos’ act of devouring his brood forms a prelude to birth; being eaten equals incorporation, and this in turn stands for a surrogate though unwitting pregnancy – of the male. In this way, his progeny re-enter the world, twice born of their father, begotten and brought forth” (*No Go the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling, and Making Mock* (1998), New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999, p.54). Zeus places the unborn foetus of his son Dionysus in his thigh and gives ‘birth’ to him. Zeus ‘births’ Athena from his head after swallowing Metis (the Goddess of Wisdom) (Hesiod, *Theogony*, line 924). Aphrodite is created from the foaming phallus of Uranus (Hesiod, *Theogony*, lines 191-192). See Loraux for a consideration of the Athenian myth of autochthony in which man bypasses the grotesque and polluted maternal body – the child Erichthonios springs from Mother Earth (Gaia) herself (after Athena cast a piece of wool containing the seed of Hephaistos on the earth), raised from the ground by Athena. N. Loraux, *The Children of Athena: Athenian Ideas About Citizenship and the Division Between the Sexes* (1984), trans. C. Levine, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1993. See also R. Zapperi, *The Pregnant Man*, trans. B. Williams, New York, Harwood Academic, 1991.

⁷⁶ M. Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1990, p.34.

⁷⁷ Harvey, p.103.

these poetic fathers transmit their masculine ‘perfection’ to their progeny. Both male conception and the form of the resulting foetus are flawless. As Harvey suggests, “the poetic progeny that are born from the male body are shaped into linguistic and vocal coherence ... the pregnant poet[‘s] labour results in the perfectly crafted sonnet”.⁷⁸ Commanding authority over the very “life of the mind itself”,⁷⁹ the poet exercised control over the imagination in a way that women could not.⁸⁰ In the early

⁷⁸ *Id.* at pp.97-98. On this point see also Crewe who suggests that for poets such as Sidney and Donne, poems become “figurative offspring, summoned into being by, among other things, their powers of apostrophic animation” (p.1).

⁷⁹ Harvey, p.95.

⁸⁰ In her book *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1989), Battersby examines the history of ideas about creativity. Battersby traces our modern understanding of creativity to Classical and Biblical traditions, the latter revolving around “a male God creating the universe” (p.11) (‘In the beginning was the Word ... and the Word was made flesh’ St John 58.1). According to Battersby, a fundamental idea in ancient Greek and Roman Stoicism was the *logos spermatikos* – ‘the spermatik word’ – which elaborated on the Aristotelian idea that “*logos* was the formula contained within the male seed that enabled the father to reproduce his own likeness in his offspring. The *logos* was a kind of mystical (genetic) code, which only males carried” (p.70). Battersby links the *logos spermatikos* with the Roman notion of *genius*, thought to be inside male children from the time of birth as their “potential virility, energy, or life-giving force” (p.76). *Genius* “circulated throughout the body, but was particularly associated with the head ... a privileged site for masculine procreativity” (pp.76; 83). During the Middle Ages, theologians reworked the notion of *genius* which was seen as “a male procreative force made sublime/sublimated into artistic creativity ... [t]he ‘pollution’ of human flesh is erased by the male brain sending messages to male hands to mimic the greatest *Genius* of all and [write or] draw or paint things into existence” (pp.96-97). [Indeed, as Gilbert and Gubar have shown, the writer’s pen and the artist’s brush were substitute phalli (*The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979)]. Women were denied *genius* and, by association, *ingenium* – “those inherited mental and physical talents that helped an artist conceive and execute his projects” (p.40). Women lacked the “power,

energy and divine inspiration" (p.19) deemed necessary for artistic or literary production. Any attempt by women to produce was believed to be a perversion of femininity resulting from an "abnormality of brain and body chemistry" (p.29). For men, literary or artistic production was "*displaced sexuality*"; for women it was "*misplaced sexuality*" (p.102). As Friedman puts it, "*labour [is] men's production and women's reproduction ... [a] man conceives an idea in his brain, while a woman conceives a baby in her womb ... [t]he pregnant body is necessarily female; the pregnant mind is the mental province of genius, ... understood to be inherently masculine*" (S.S. Friedman, "Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse" in E. Showalter, ed., *Speaking of Gender*, New York, Routledge, 1989, pp.73-100 at p.75; italics in text). Women who attempt to invade the male creative domain are portrayed as maternal death-dealers, as "baby-killing mother[s]" (Crewe, p.6). Feminist theorists have grappled with the idea that female authorship is made possible by the figurative 'death' of a child and how female authors reconcile the death of the *infans* – as the Blanchotian possibility of writing – with their own desire for (textual) production. The idea that motherhood and authorship are incompatible, that maternity and creativity are mutually exclusive, is ingrained in Western patriarchal ideology in the insistence on the primacy of women as bearers of the Word, as bearers rather than makers of meaning. Rich suggests that women who speak/write from the place of the mother are 'not mothers', impostors – "unwomanly women in flight from womanhood ... monster[s]" (p.32). As Curti suggests, "the monster at the end of it all is women's writing" (L. Curti, *Female Stories, Female Bodies: Narrative, Identity and Representation*, New York, New York University Press, 1998, p.xiii). The female author is conceived of as a destroyer, a "demon of destruction" (E.P. Killoh, "The Woman Writer and the Element of Destruction", *College English*, 34(1), 1972, pp.31-38 at p.32). Jouve wonders whether a mother can write, "if she want to create, must she be Kali, Medea, the sow that devours her farrow?" (N.W. Jouve, *Female Genesis: Creativity, Self and Gender*, Cambridge, UK, Polity Press, 1998, p.155). Huston provides a reply to Jouve, contending that writing requires a violent maternal excision. A novelist is "a mother who is willing to kill her own child ... [o]nly mothers who are capable of comprehending this [murderous] gesture – facing death, including the death of their own children – can invent great stories" (N. Huston, "Novels and Navels", *Critical Inquiry*, 21(4), 1995, pp.708-721 at pp.713-714). For Johnson, "it is as though male writing were by nature procreative, while female writing is somehow by nature infanticidal" (B. Johnson, *A World of Difference*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, p.198). Focusing on female poets such as Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich, and Gwendolyn Brooks, Johnson suggests that "each of the[ir] poems exists *because* a child does not" (p.195; italics in text). Johnson considers the haunting figure of the dead child as both a source of creativity and a physical and psychical threat to maternal well-being – "the mother eaten alive by the [memory of the] children she has never fed" (p.192). Suleiman

similarly focuses on the guilt of mothers who write: "With every word I write, with every metaphor, with every genuine act of creation, I hurt my child" (S. R. Suleiman, "Writing and Motherhood" in S.N. Garner, C. Kahane and M. Sprengnether, eds, *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1985, pp.352-377 at p.374). Jardine wonders, conversely, whether the woman writer has to first kill the mother in herself (A. Jardine, "Death Sentences: Writing Couples and Ideology" in S.R. Suleiman, ed., *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1985, pp.84-96). For further consideration of the infanticidal insinuations in the work of these female poets and the idea of the female author as infanticide see B. Erkkila, *The Wicked Sisters: Women Poets, Literary History, and Discord*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992; A. Rich (who situates her discussion "[i]n a living room ... with a group of women poets ... [who] talk of poetry, and also of infanticide", *Of Woman Born*, p.4); J. Rose, *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, London, Virago Press, 1991; L. Yorke, *Impertinent Voices: Subversive Strategies in Contemporary Women's Poetry*, London, Routledge, 1991; S.R. Van Dyne, *Revising Life: Sylvia Plath's Ariel Poems*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1993; V.F. Harris, "Scribe, Inscription, Inscribed: Sexuality in the Poetry of Robert Bly and Adrienne Rich" in M. Barr and R. Feldstein, eds, *Discontented Discourses: Feminism/Textual Intervention/Psychoanalysis*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1989, pp.117-137; L. Mizejewski, "Sappho to Sexton: Woman Uncontained", *College English*, 35(3), 1973, pp.340-345; S.S. Friedman, "Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor"; L. Wheeler, "Heralding the Clear Obscure: Gwendolyn Brooks and Apostrophe", *Callaloo*, 24(1), 2001, pp.227-235; S.A. Demetrakopoulos, "Anais Nin and the Feminine Quest for Consciousness: The Quelling of the Devouring Mother and the Ascension of the Sophia", *Bucknell Review*, 24(1), 1978, pp.119-136; M. Yalom, *Maternity, Mortality, and the Literature of Madness*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985; M. Newlin, "The Suicide Bandwagon", *Critical Quarterly*, 14(4), 1972, pp.367-378; E.Jong, "Creativity vs. Generativity: The Unexamined Lie", *New Republic*, 180, 1979, pp.27-30. On the reclamation of maternity and the female body through poetry see A.S. Ostriker, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1986 (p.179); D. Richard-Allerdyce, "Anais Nin's Mothering Metaphor: Toward a Lacanian Theory of Feminine Creativity" in V. Camden, ed., *Compromise Formations: Current Directions in Psychoanalytic Criticism*, Ohio, Kent State University Press, 1989, pp.86-98; P. Yaeger, "The 'Language of Blood': Towards a Maternal Sublime" in S. Neuman and G. Stephenson, eds, *Reimagining Woman: Representations of Women in Culture*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1993, pp.87-110; S.G. Axelrod, *Sylvia Plath: The Wound and the Cure of Words*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, p.169; Cixous "The Laugh of the Medusa", *Signs*, 1(4), 1976, pp.875-

modern mind, the maternal imagination could only “shape in strange or monstrous ways a developing human foetus”.⁸¹

893; Cixous and Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (p.97); J. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), trans. Margaret Waller, New York, Columbia University Press, 1984 [considering the possibility of “poetry that is not a form of murder” (p.72)]. On Blanchot’s idea that language and psyche are haunted by the death of a child, that “the possibility of speaking and of life” (p.71) presuppose the death of a child – the *infans* see M. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster* (1986), trans. A. Smock, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1996. See also C. Fynsk, *Infant Figures: The Death of the ‘Infans’ and Other Scenes of Origin*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000; S. Leclair, *A Child Is Being Killed: On Primary Narcissism and the Death Drive* (1975), trans. M-C. Hays, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1998. On “inappropriate intellectual activity” in the early modern era see P. Hammons, “Despised Creatures: The Illusion of Maternal Self-Effacement in Seventeenth-Century Child Loss Poetry”, *ELH*, 66(1), 1999, pp.25-49; K.R. King, “Of Needles and Pens and Women’s Work”, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 14(1), 1995, pp.77-93; W. Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1993. On the Romantic myth of the dead child see F. Ferrucci, “The Dead Child: A Romantic Myth”, *MLN*, 104(1), 1989, pp.117-134. On late eighteenth and nineteenth century anxieties of female authorship see Gilbert and Gubar; C. Heilbrun and M.R. Higonnet, eds, *The Representation of Women in Fiction*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983, p.26 and S.C. Greenfield, “Introduction” in S.C. Greenfield and C. Barash, eds, *Inventing Maternity: Politics, Science, and Literature 1650-1865*, Lexington, Kentucky, University of Kentucky Press, 1999, pp.1-33 at p.15 (who consider the negative connotations associated with the term ‘reproduction’); M. Homans, *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writing*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986 (on the marked division between writing and motherhood in the Victorian era in which a woman could be a mother *or* a writer – she could nurture a child *or* a text, but not both); Gubar (female artists feared that they were “a monstrous contradiction in terms” p.26); Friedman (female writers were made to feel abnormal and unnatural); Suleiman (female writers were accused of using literary pursuits as a means of avoiding the “moral obligations of the good wife and mother ... she who has a child [should] feel no need to write books” (p.359).

⁸¹ Harvey, p.97. Adelman has considered the misshaping power of the mother in Shakespeare’s plays (J. Adelman, “Born of Woman: Fantasies of Maternal Power in *Macbeth*” in M. Garber, ed., *Cannibals, Witches, and Divorce: Estranging the Renaissance*,

'Monstrous imagination'⁸²

[T]he mother [has] the capacity to undo the living capital she is carrying in her womb; the power of her imagination is such that she can actually kill or deform her creation⁸³

If womb = monster and womb = mind, then mind = monster⁸⁴

In early modern theories of embryology, the imagination was believed to have a powerful influence on the womb. Theorists held that women were influenced by their thoughts and surroundings during pregnancy – so much so as to affect the developing foetus. The theory of maternal imagination attributed to pregnant women the power to 'mark' their unborn children. Boucé elaborates the ways in which cravings for "strange foodstuffs"⁸⁵ or

Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, pp.90-121. See also her *Suffocating Mothers*, *op. cit.*

⁸² From the title of Huet's book.

⁸³ Braidotti, "Signs of Wonder", p.145.

⁸⁴ E.J. Cohen, "Enlightenment and the Dirty Philosopher", *Configurations*, 5(3), 1997, pp.369-424 at p.408.

⁸⁵ P-G. Boucé, "Imagination, Pregnant Women, and Monsters, in Eighteenth-Century England and France" in G.S. Rousseau and R. Porter, eds, *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1987, pp.86-100 at p.88. See also Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*. In his study of the folklore of pregnancy, Devereux discusses the oral cravings of pregnant women. Devereux notes that in Euro-American folklore these oral cravings, typically "imputed to unborn or dead babies ... tend to bring out the unconscious attitudes of the [mother] ... toward [her] own oral needs, which she projects upon the infant" (p.114; for more on infantile oral desires see Chapter One). Devereux documents numerous legends that emphasise the "aggressive components of the pregnant woman's

particular types of food (typically fruit⁸⁶) could have a detrimental effect on the foetus. French physician Nicholas Malebranche found that a mother's desire for fruit would alter the shape and form of the foetus. In his *De la recherché de la verite* ('In Search of Truth'), Malebranche writes: "[if] the flow of spirits [are] excited by the image of the desired fruit [the foetus] is capable of changing its shape because of its softness. These unfortunate infants thus become like the things they desire too ardently".⁸⁷

It was also believed that certain experiences – “the sequels of an affective trauma (joy, terror, surprise)”,⁸⁸

food cravings” (p.115), including a Hawaiian tale of fantasised child-murder in which an illegitimate baby murdered by its mother reincarnates in the form of a dangerous creature that devours humans. Devereux sees the impulse to eat in these tales as a masked desire, albeit unconscious and thus “culturally implemented only in the form of a projection ... formation” (p.117), for cannibalistic consumption of the baby and/or afterbirth. For Devereux cultural taboos such as the Mohavean prohibition against eating meat during the postpartum period suggest a reactive defence against maternal cannibalistic impulses (p.117). G. Devereux, “The Cannibalistic Impulses of Parents”, *Psychoanalytic Forum*, 1, 1966, pp.114-124.

⁸⁶ Rublack notes that in early modern Germany, “pregnant wom[e]n caught stealing fruit could not be prosecuted” (p.87). U. Rublack, “Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Female Body in Early Modern Germany”, *Past and Present*, 150, 1996, pp.84-111.

⁸⁷ Malebranche (1674), cited in Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, p.48.

⁸⁸ In *The Female Physician* (1724), Maubray also states that women should “suppress all *Anger, Passion*, and other *Perturbations* of Mind, and avoid entertaining too *serious* or *melancholick Thoughts*; since all such tend to impress a *Depravity* of Nature upon the *Infant's Mind*, and *Deformity* on its *Body*” (cited in J. Epstein, “The Pregnant Imagination, Foetal Rights, and Women's Bodies: A Historical Inquiry”, *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities*, 7, 1995, pp.139-162 at p.149). Rublack notes that “shock drove blood away from the limbs to swamp the heart ... and [caused] the foetus [to] starve ... if a pregnant woman became angry, a hot flow of blood would swamp the fragile cells of the foetus, causing miscarriage” (“Pregnancy”, pp.92-

“wild fantasising”, or unpleasant images – would result in physical deformity of the foetus. In her popular midwifery manual *Instruction familiere et utile aux sages-femmes*, Madame de la Marche discusses the negative influence of the mother’s gaze on the foetus: “[t]he cause is both external and internal. The external one is the outside object on which the woman has cast her eyes; the internal one is the strength of the imagination, which, after receiving the impression from the outside object, communicates it to the informing faculty which then imprints it on the seed”.⁸⁹

In his *Des Monstres et Prodiges* (1573), physician Ambroise Paré provides examples of “imagination-made Monsters” – the product of a woman’s “ardent and obstinate fancy ... owing to some object, fantastic dream, or some nocturnal visions”.⁹⁰ Paré recounts the birth of a child “as hairy as a bear, brought into the world by a mother who had gazed for too long at the picture of St John wearing a bearskin”⁹¹ and a “child with the face of a frog” whose mother had held a live frog in her hands.⁹²

93). According to Rublack, some local councils went so far as to produce ordinances requiring “shockingly ill or ugly residents be removed in order to protect pregnant women” (p.95).

⁸⁹ M. de la Marche, *Instruction familiere et utile aux sages-femmes* (1677), cited and translated by Boucé, p.86.

⁹⁰ A. Paré, *Des monstres et prodiges* (1573), cited and translated by Boucé, p.89.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* See also Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, pp.19-21.

⁹² Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, p.16.

According to Harvey, husbands took tremendous care to ensure that their wives gave birth in sparse chambers without images that might harm the child.⁹³ The popular press provided accounts of women who failed to take seriously the theory of maternal imagination: “a mother of 16 fine children was deliver’d of a monster, with nose and eyes like a lyon, no palate to the mouth, hair on the shoulders, claws like a lyon instead of fingers, no breast-bone, something surprising out of the navel as big as an egg, and one foot longer than the other”.⁹⁴

Theories of maternal imagination and stories of monstrous births not only reveal anxieties about childbirth but, more specifically, anxieties about maternal power. Women’s role in generation “challenged established boundaries, exposing and undermining social assumptions regarding maternity”.⁹⁵ Relegated to a space ostensibly beyond male control, mothers who bore monsters were themselves conceived of as monstrous – “a constantly lurking threat to psychic security, the family, and social order”.⁹⁶ Mothers of misshapen infants, like bearers of bastards, “[we]re not producing what they ought to”.⁹⁷ Attributed with the capacity to mark, deform, and even kill their children, mothers who bore monsters undermined

⁹³ Harvey, p.97.

⁹⁴ *Gentleman’s Magazine* (1746), cited in Epstein, pp.149-150.

⁹⁵ M. Francus, “Monstrous Mothers, Monstrous Societies: Infanticide and the Rule of Law in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century England”, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 21(2), 1997, pp.133-156 at p.135.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Gubar, p.389.

social stability by throwing into question paternal authority. As Purkiss suggests, “in these cases what is absent is the mark of paternity; the child fails to replicate the father, as patrilinearity demands, and becomes a mirror ... of the mother’s imagination”.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ D. Purkiss, “Producing the Voice, Consuming the Body: Women Prophets of the Seventeenth Century” in I. Grundy and S. Wiseman, eds, *Women, Writing, History 1640-1740*, London, B.T. Batsford, 1992, pp.139-158 at p.154. Epstein similarly suggests that “the birth of what was invariably termed a ‘monster’ called into question, above all, the legitimacy of its parentage ... A monstrous birth lacked legitimacy in a fundamental way. Such an infant failed to resemble its (or any) father; hence, in a social order ruled by the laws of primogeniture and patrilineage, a malformed birth was a basic social disruption” (p.150). See also Shildrick who notes that the theory of maternal imagination “plays right into a deep seated human anxiety about proper paternal origins ... In admitting that an absent object – represented only by an image in the mother’s mind – can be inscribed as a trace on the body of the foetus, then reference to the primacy of the male principle is overwritten. The monstrous signifier effaces the father as that which should be rightfully signified” (p.249). Drawing on the work of late seventeenth-century theorist Nicolas Venette, Shildrick suggests that mothers might defer to the power of maternal imagination not merely “to explain away the failure of an infant to resemble its rightful father, but equally to forestall altogether the tell-tale occurrence of such a lack of resemblance” (p.250). For instance, an adulterous woman might think of her husband while in bed with her lover and conceive a child that looks like but fails to share the blood of its rightful father (little wonder the ever-present early modern fear of cuckoldry). M Shildrick, “Maternal Imagination: Reconceiving First Impressions”, *Rethinking History*, 4(3), 2000, pp.243-260. On the erasure of paternity see also M-H. Huet, “Living Images: Monstrosity and Representation”, *Representations*, 4, 1983, pp.73-87. Consider also Warnicke’s discussion of the monstrous birth by the wife of Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn. Henry suspected Anne of marital infidelity and deemed the monstrous child to be a sign of her illicit activities. According to Warnicke, Henry realised that the bastard’s father could not be identified (Anne reportedly had five liaisons) but “could never have admitted even to himself that he had sired this foetus” nor endured accusations by his enemies that the monstrous child “was divine punishment for his activities. The blame for its birth was transferred to Anne, who was subsequently convicted and executed [for adultery]” (p.21). R.M. Warnicke, “Inventing the Wicked Women of Tudor England: Alice More, Anne Boleyn, and Anne Stanhope”, *Quidditas*, 20, 1999, pp.11-30. On transferring the blame for bastards to mothers to avoid political recriminations see also S.C. Greenfield,

In theories of maternal imagination there is a relationship between female appetite and unnatural conception. Illicit sexual activity is as much a contributing cause of monstrosity as unrestrained consumption.⁹⁹ It is perhaps no coincidence then that the bodily orifices of most concern in early modern society – mouth and vagina¹⁰⁰ –

“Aborting the ‘Mother Plot’: Politics and Generation in *Absalom and Achitophel*” in S.C. Greenfield and C. Barash, eds, *Inventing Maternity, op. cit.*, pp.86-110.

⁹⁹ Moran considers “conspicuous consumption” to be a threat to “the very existence of the family” (p.127). Focusing on early modern conduct literature, plays, and satirical pamphlets, Moran considers the ways in which “women [are] imagined to destroy their families through consumption” (p.128). Looking in particular at commodity consumption, Moran describes the “fashionable ladies of London as ‘daughters of Eve’, reincarnat[ing] their mother’s sinful appetites” (p.131). Moran links these women who waste their husbands’ money on luxury items and prostitute themselves in clothes designed to “inveigle men’s affections” with adulterous wives who “waste [their] husband[s] biologically by conceiving bastards” (pp.131-132). E. Moran, “Hatching Fashion: Consumption, Femininity and Family in Early Modern London” in P. Kelly, ed., *The Touch of the Real: Essays in Early Modern Culture in Honour of Stephen Greenblatt*, Crawley, Western Australia, University of Western Australia Press, 2002, pp.125-142. Consider also the 1566 broadsheet describing “a child born with ‘ruffs’ because its mother had followed the fashions in dress” (Crawford, p.7).

¹⁰⁰ In her study of early modern conduct books, Jones notes that ‘good’ women remained inside the domestic sphere, diligently guarding against sexual or verbal excess: “[t]he good wife was constructed as the woman who stays indoors, guarding her chastity as she guards the other property of her husband. As her body is locked within the walls of the house, her tongue is locked in her mouth” (p.52). A.R. Jones, “Nets and Bridles: Early Modern Conduct Books and Sixteenth-Century Women’s Lyrics” in N. Armstrong and L. Tennenhouse, eds, *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays in Literature and the History of Sexuality*, London, Methuen, 1987, pp.39-72. Stallybrass discusses early modern fantasies of the “body enclosed” within the physical boundaries of home and flesh, both imagined as being impermeable to hostile outside forces. P. Stallybrass, “Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed” in M.W. Ferguson, M. Quilligan and N. Vickers, eds, *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp.123-142 at pp.126-127. Concerns about the failure of the female body to remain ‘enclosed’

are equally implicated as “sites of rogue production”.¹⁰¹ The legitimacy (or otherwise) of what issues from the female body plays a fundamental role in the transfer of property. What women say – whether in the birthing chamber or courtroom – and the types of children they engender impacts on the power of fathers to ‘pass on’ (in terms of both succession and seminal transmission) to legitimate offspring. For the early modern patriarchs, the

and subject to patriarchal constraints are reflected in a plethora of conduct books that warn against the dire consequences of female transgression. On the issue of garrulity see for example, J. Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue: The Politics of Speech in Early New England*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997; L.E. Boose, “Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman’s Unruly Member”, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42, 1991, pp.179-213; M. Ingram, “Scolding Women Cucked or Washed: A Crisis in Gender Relations in Early Modern England” in J. Kermode and G. Walker, eds, *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England*, London, UCL Press, 1994, pp.48-80. P. Parker, “On the Tongue: Cross Gendering, Effeminacy, and the Art of Words”, *Style*, 23(3), 1989, pp.445-465. See also Burns who notes in her study of Old French literature that “the woman’s mouth and vagina [are] female orifices that ... typically make trouble for men” (E.J. Burns, *BodyTalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993, p.31). For early modern concerns about what is released from both the mouth and vagina see G.K. Paster, “Leaky Vessels: The Incontinent Women of City Comedy” in M.B. Rose, ed., *Renaissance Drama: Essays on Sexuality, Influence, and Performance*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1987, pp.43-65. Paster associates the “greedy mouth” with the “greedy womb” (pp.57-58) as sites of forbidden desire and suggests that anxieties about excessive female speech were as much anxieties about sexual incontinence and bastardy: “overproduction at one orifice bespeaks overproduction at the rest” (p.51).

¹⁰¹ K. Cregan, “[S]he was Convicted and Condemned”, *Social Semiotics*, 11(2), 2001, pp.125-137 at p.132. Consider the Antinomian controversy of the 1630s in which the promulgation of heretical ideas was associated with the bearing of monstrous children. Karlson suggests that Hutchinson was referred to “in terms of her power to ‘hatch’, ‘breed’, and ‘nourish’ heretical opinions much as she hatched, bred, and nourished monsters” (p.144). For further discussion see A.G. Myles, “From Monster to Martyr”, *Early American Literature*, 36(1), 2001, pp.1-30; Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue*; Laqueur, pp.121-122.

urgent need “to avoid a rogue economy”¹⁰² would require containment, control, and observation of the female body *in extremis* - during pregnancy and labour.¹⁰³

Engendering monsters

*Last night I dreamed I gave birth to
a monster. Are you that menacing
creature I saw in my dreams?*¹⁰⁴

When Agnes Bowker realised that she was pregnant she sought the services of a midwife, Mrs Margaret Roos, who examined her and “did feel a thing but whether it were a child or water she could not tell”.¹⁰⁵ Bowker visited

¹⁰² Cregan, p.132.

¹⁰³ Epstein notes that in the early modern period “female interiority represented a potential excess that must be policed” (p.153). As we will see in the following sections, midwives played the most crucial role in the process of surveillance and the recording and reconstructing for male authorities of exactly what was said and done in the birthing chamber. During the seventeenth-century male-midwives and physicians began to insinuate themselves into the tightly-guarded female world of childbirth motivated by the prospect of control over reproduction and supported by the legal “imperative to observe and specularise the aberrant female body” (Cregan, p.133). Anxiety about the unruly and uncontainable female body would translate over the centuries into physical disease located in that same body. By the nineteenth-century, both legal and medical discourses made pathologisation of the female body a socially acceptable means of control. For the rise of male-midwives see A. Wilson, *The Making of Man-Midwifery: Childbirth in England 1660-1770*, London, UCL Press, 1995; Ehrenreich and English, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses*. For more on female illness as a symptom of social dis-ease see E. Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture 1830-1980*, London, Virago Press, 1987; Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies*.

¹⁰⁴ P. Chesler, *With Child: A Diary of Mothering*, New York, Thomas V. Crowell, 1979, p.36.

¹⁰⁵ Buried deep in the archives of the British Library amidst the papers of Lord Burghley is the trial transcript of Bowker’s case. American

the midwife again one week later believing she was “in extreme labour”.¹⁰⁶ But the midwife found otherwise, concluding that Bowker had recently delivered a baby and was now merely experiencing pain from the afterbirth. However, on the 16th of January 1569 the wives of Harborough were forced to send for another midwife, Elizabeth Harrison, because Bowker was in labour. In her testimony, Harrison recounts how she and the other women in attendance¹⁰⁷ in the birthing chamber attempted

scholar David Cressy (*Travesties and Transgressions*, pp.9-28) has reproduced much of the transcript on which I rely in this Chapter. In his brief commentary, Cressy is somewhat reluctant to consider the relationship between illegitimacy, monstrous births, infanticide, and witchcraft that Bowker's case demands. These aspects of early modern culture and the relationships between them form the primary focus of this chapter. Cressy, and Jones before him, focus on the religious and socio-political ramifications of Bowker's monstrous birth.¹⁰⁶ Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, p.12.

¹⁰⁷ Female attendants, also known as childbed gossips (companions), acted as witnesses to the birth and also assisted the midwife. They were expected to be god-fearing, knowledgeable women who had borne children and attended other women in travail (Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, p.55). During the lying-in period, these women “would stay for ‘good cheer’ and would return periodically with other [women] for gossiping and good fellowship” (p.84). Cressy suggests that the cloistered activities in the birthing chamber both during labour and postpartum were extremely anxiety-provoking for men. Cressy writes: “the gathering of women at childbirth was exclusive, mysterious, and potentially unruly ... to reassert masculine authority ... men sought to curtail their excesses” (p.55). During the sixteenth-century town councils began regulating childbed gossipings which, “[r]emoved from male supervision ... could be construed as potential sources of disorder” (p.84). D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997. See also Sanders for a discussion of male anxieties about the exclusively female childbirth domain in popular print and drama. J. Sanders, “Midwifery and the New Science in the Seventeenth Century: Language, Print and the Theatre” in E. Fudge, R. Gilbert and S. Wiseman, eds, *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts, Bodies and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period*, London, Macmillan Press, 1999, pp.74-90. Barstow similarly notes that “[a] deep male jealousy pervades th[e] story [of childbirth], fed by the exclusion of all men from the birthing room. Left

to draw out the foetus but were frightened by a “strange sight ... the hinder part [of what they believed to be a monster] coming first”.¹⁰⁸

to imagine what went on inside, they responded with wild imaginings” (*Witchcraze*, p.113). Donnison notes that childbed gossips not only provided support but played a crucial role in cases where a baby died or was still-born “protect[ing] the mother from suspicions that she herself had caused its death” (J. Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men*, London, Heinemann, 1977, p.3). These female attendants could also “prevent the substitution of children in cases where the mother, desperate to escape the stigma of childlessness or of failure to produce a male heir, might attempt to pass off as her own the child of another” (p.3). Hufton also notes that childbed gossips were, like midwives, subject to accusations of witchcraft such as those levelled at childbed gossips in Reformation Augsburg. One of the women, Anna Ebeler was accused of poisoning a freshly-delivered mother who had slipped into delirium (a possible sign of puerperal fever) and subsequently died and of bewitching a child who also became ill and died (p.357). O. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe 1500-1800* (1995), New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1998.

¹⁰⁸ Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, p.14. It is possible that the women witnessed a breech birth. Pechey’s *The Compleat Midwife’s Practice* (1698) describes the foetus in breech position: “the Infant lies with his Back and his Buttocks leaning against the Back of the Mother, the head inclined ... his Legs folded backward, and touching his Buttocks with each Leg” (cited in A. Eccles, *Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Tudor and Stuart England*, London, Croom Helm, 1982, p.55). Babies born feet first were believed to be bad omens – signs of death (J. Gélis, *History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy and Birth in Early Modern Europe* (1984), trans. Rosemary Morris, Cambridge, UK, Polity Press, 1991, p.202). Malpresentation of the foetus (preterm labour) posed serious problems for midwives. The earliest English manual for midwives, *The Birth of Mankind* (1540) advises the midwife to turn the foetus but does not offer instructions as to how this may be accomplished (Eccles, p.104). Pechey advises the midwife to return any protruding arms or feet to the uterus and then “let the woman rock her self from one side of the bed to the other ... till she apprehend the Child to be turned” (cited in Eccles, p.104). In his *Observations in Midwifery*, Willughby notes that “in severall of these births, through the midwives strugglings to reduce the arm, that the arm hath been broken by them, and the child destroyed” (cited in Eccles, p.104). Gélis recalls a 1691 Parisian case in which such extreme force was used to remove the child from the womb that the child’s head snapped off and remained in the womb. A physician was called to remove the head (p.240). According to Gélis, “those who assisted women in their confinements ... were haunted by the idea of malpresentations and difficult labours which ... risked

Although confident about the monstrosity of the foetus, none of the women who attended the birth could confirm under oath that Bowker actually bore the feline monster. The birthing chamber was dark and the women backed away in fear when the midwife first cried out “in the name of God what have we here”.¹⁰⁹ One of the women went to “fetch a candle for they had not light ... and when she came in with the candle she saw the monster lie on the earth, and she thinketh it came out of Agnes Bowker’s womb”.¹¹⁰ Two women holding their own children in their arms only saw “the midwife dr[a]w ... the monster ... from under the clothes of Agnes Bowker”.¹¹¹ Bowker herself claimed that she did not see the child/monster emerge

‘ending badly’” (p.226). Perhaps Bowker’s labour had ‘ended badly’ with the midwife substituting a dead cat in place of the infant’s corpse in order to avoid legal sanction and/or social reprisal. In the first published work in any language on midwifery, the 1513 *Der Swangern Frauen und Hebammen Roszgarten*, German physician Eucharius Rösslin makes a blatant reference to the role of midwives in the death of children: “the midwives every one / Who have too of knowledge none / By their carelessness beside / They kill off children far and wide / And such evil zeal have shown / In duty they have murder done” (cited and translated in H. Graham, *Eternal Eve*, Altrincham, UK, St Ann’s Press, 1950, p.145).

¹⁰⁹ Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, p.14.

¹¹⁰ *Id.* at p.15. Evenden notes that the birthing or lying-in chamber was “dark and warm and the woman decently, as well as warmly covered” (D. Evenden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.80). Cressy similarly notes that “[t]he birthroom was supposed to be kept warm, dark, and snug for the duration of labour ... [one midwifery] manual advised, ‘you must lay the woman in a dark place, lest her mind should be distracted with too much light’. The room became a womb, warm, dark, and comfortable, restricting entry to evil spirits” (*Birth, Marriage, and Death*, pp.53-54). See also A. Wilson, “The Ceremony of Childbirth and Its Interpretation” in V. Fildes, ed., *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England*, London, Routledge, 1990, pp.68-107 at p.73.

¹¹¹ Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, p.15.

from her body but rather relied on the word of the midwife.¹¹²

The testimony provided by the midwives, female attendants and Bowker herself only served to muddy the issues at hand. For the Archdeacon of Leicester and his commissary Anthony Anderson, fundamental issues remained unresolved: Did a birth actually take place on the evening of January 16, 1569? Had Bowker given birth sometime after New Year's Day as was the opinion of the first midwife, Margaret Roos, and if so what happened to the child? If Bowker did give birth on January 16, did she bear a monster in the shape of a cat? Was Harrison's testimony an elaborate fabrication designed to conceal her role in the death of Bowker's child? Did Harrison and Bowker conspire to murder the child? Did they use the cat as a foil for child-murder?¹¹³

¹¹² “[Agnes] saith that she is not certain and sure that this cat-monster came out of her body; but the midwife told her it did come from her, and she thinketh it did, but upon her oath she is not sure thereof” (Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, p.20).

¹¹³ Klaits suggests that “[m]idwives were vulnerable to elite suspicions of foul play because of ... the authorities' conviction that they were likely to conspire with the [murderous] mother to keep the birth secret in order to protect their standing among their neighbours and prospective clients” (p.99). J. Klaits, *Servants of Satan: The Age of the Witch Hunts*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1985. Moreover, anxieties about the female-generated tales engendered in the birthing chamber linked testimony with tale-telling and cast doubt over the testimony of midwives and childbed gossips. For more on this point see C. Bicks, “Midwiving Virility in Early Modern England” in N.J. Miller and N. Yavneh, eds, *Maternal Measures: Figuring Caregiving in the Early Modern Period*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000, pp.49-64.

'Perhaps my mother murdered me'

*And I could see that child's one eye
Which seemed to laugh, and say with glee:
'What caused my death you'll never know –
Perhaps my mother murdered me'¹¹⁴*

*And then the midwife said, 'Oh, you
innocent little child, if one of us here
is guilty, give us a sign!' and immediately
the body raised its left arm and pointed at
its mother'¹¹⁵*

In early modern England, the process of childbirth (including pregnancy, labour, and lying-in) typically “took place in a female world of ritual and secrecy ... [f]or unmarried women, the state of pregnancy was one in which other women – neighbours, friends, and midwives – were not companions, but threats”.¹¹⁶ The female body was an open site of investigation to be scrutinized by women on behalf of legal authorities.¹¹⁷ Surveillance included “watching women’s stomachs”,¹¹⁸ “inspecting their outer genitalia for signs of distension or

¹¹⁴ W.H. Davies, “The Inquest” in S. Rae, ed., *The Faber Book of Murder*, London, Faber & Faber, 1994, p.228.

¹¹⁵ M.E. Wiesner, *Working Women in Renaissance Germany*, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1986, p.71.

¹¹⁶ L. Gowing, “Secret Births and Infanticide in Seventeenth-Century England”, *Past and Present*, 156, 1997, pp.87-115 at p.87.

¹¹⁷ Wiesner notes that bodily inspections of unmarried women for signs of childbirth were “always justified with comments about a rising tide of infanticide” (*Women and Gender*, p.64). Unmarried women “threatened both familial and national stability and their behaviour was routinely subjected to greater scrutiny than that of their married counterparts” (Jackson, *New-Born Child Murder*, p.47).

¹¹⁸ Gowing, p.90.

discharge”,¹¹⁹ and “inspecting their breasts”¹²⁰ - the latter believed to be a particularly effective means of gauging whether a woman was ‘green’ or “freshly delivered of a child”.¹²¹

In his study of illegitimacy in early seventeenth-century England, Quaife considers the case of an unmarried woman by the name of Elinor Partridge and elaborates on the invasive measures used to ascertain whether she had recently given birth. Brought before the magistrate of Cricket Malherbie upon suspicion of impropriety by the “village wives [who] kept a close eye on the courtship patterns of their unmarried sisters”,¹²² Partridge was required to undergo a bodily inspection by both a midwife and two mothers. Neither the midwife nor mothers found any signs of childbirth apart from a few drops of milk in her

¹¹⁹ D. Symonds, “Reconstructing Rural Infanticide in Eighteenth-Century Scotland”, *Journal of Women’s History*, 10(2), 1998, pp.63-84 at p.69.

¹²⁰ Gowing, p.90.

¹²¹ Symonds, “Reconstructing Rural Infanticide”, p.69; note 14. Jackson further elaborates on the signs of recent delivery: “relaxation or distension of the vagina; swelling of the genitalia; the flow of the lochia or ‘Cleansings’; the open state of the os uteri; a flaccidity or laxity of the abdomen; swollen, hard breasts which produced milk on pressure or suction; and extended areolae” (Jackson, *New-Born Child Murder*, p.72). Rublack emphasises the dehumanising nature of these physical inspections in her description of the examination of the breasts of a German servant suspected of child-murder: “a midwife pulled a ‘glass of milk’ from the woman’s breast as if it were an udder” (*Crimes of Women*, p.173). These inspections, like those of witch-hunters (see below), served to animalise the female body in a way that made the unnaturalness and monstrosity of their (alleged) actions seem all the more ‘natural’.

¹²² G.R. Quaife, *Wanton Wenches and Wayward Wives: Peasants and Illicit Sex in Early Seventeenth Century England*, London, Croom Helm, 1979, p.89.

breasts. But this was reason enough to warrant further inspection,¹²³ including examination of the suspect's clothes and bed linen for the presence of menstrual or lochial blood.¹²⁴

Cases of suspected fornication, bastardy, and child-murder typically came to the attention of ecclesiastical officials on the basis of little more than rumour and gossip.¹²⁵ According to Quaife, "[t]he ecclesiastical courts were willing to act on rumour – on any common fame or voice abroad ... Consequently the imagination and prejudices of parishioners rather than any real knowledge ... could stimulate an inquiry".¹²⁶ According to Rublack, servants were "suspected most easily and punished most relentlessly for 'crimes of the flesh' ... and were also the

¹²³ Considering a similar case in which a midwife testified in court as to the presence of milk in the breasts of a woman suspected of child-murder, Jackson notes that "milk in the breasts encouraged neighbours to continue their search for a body and to urge the suspect to confess to recent delivery" (*New-Born Child Murder*, p.73).

¹²⁴ *Id.* at pp.89-90. Jackson notes that "[b]lood was regarded as a natural product of childbirth, and its presence on the floor, in the privy, in a bed, or on a woman's clothes was interpreted as evidence of recent delivery" (*New-Born Child Murder*, p.66).

¹²⁵ Quaife, p.39. On the significance of rumour, gossip, suspicion, and local opinion see K. Wrightson, "Infanticide in Earlier Seventeenth-Century England", *Local Population Studies*, 15, 1975, pp.10-22. According to Leboutte, "[m]ost cases of infanticide came to light because of rumour. A majority of the records begin with the words, 'It was rumoured that ...'" (176). R. Leboutte, "Offence Against Family Order: Infanticide in Belgium from the Fifteenth Through the Early Twentieth Centuries", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2(2), 1991, pp.159-185. See also Jackson who similarly notes that "[l]ocal suspicions that a single woman had been pregnant and had subsequently given birth to an illegitimate child encouraged the woman's neighbours to interrogate her, to search her rooms or house for evidence of recent delivery and for signs of the child itself, [and] to examine her physically" (*New-Born Child Murder*, p.74).

¹²⁶ Quaife, p.48.

prime suspects for infanticide”.¹²⁷ These women, typically “young, poor, and illiterate, ... [were] watched with obsessive suspicion ... [i]n the closed little world of the village, the farm, or the master’s house, how difficult it was to keep anything hidden. Everyone moved under the inquisitorial gaze of everyone else. Servants usually shared the same room, even the same bed”.¹²⁸

Cregan suggests that the unmarried mother was “an early modern social evil ... in sixteenth century England, the unmarried ‘Lewd Women’ who produced bastard children became ‘typical’ of what was morally wrong with society and with the female body in general: it was immoral, uncontainable and uncontrollable”.¹²⁹ According to Cregan, the single mother was a symbolic scapegoat for widespread social anxiety over procreation in general and female independence in particular.¹³⁰ Hoffer and Hull similarly position the unmarried mother as “scapegoat, ... not just as [a] target for frustration and anger, but as a living definition of the boundary of unacceptable

¹²⁷ Rublack, *Crimes of Women*, p.162. Sexual licentiousness was condemned as “inappropriate behaviour in servants” (Jackson, *New-Born Child Murder*, p.48).

¹²⁸ Leboutte, p.175. Gowing notes that “[t]he life of female servants was one in which searches of both bodies and bedchambers were taken for granted” (p.91).

¹²⁹ Cregan, p.126. Trexler similarly suggests that “[t]he law and conscience of Europe in the sixteenth century vented its force upon ... unwed mothers”. R.C. Trexler, “Infanticide in Florence: New Sources and First Results”, *History of Childhood Quarterly*, 1(1), 1973, pp.98-116 at p.105.

¹³⁰ Cregan, p.129.

deviance".¹³¹ The unmarried mother accused so frequently in the early modern era of murdering her child served as a symbolic reminder of the fragility of the social body, of the disastrous consequences of woman out(side) of (male) control.

The social stigma of bearing an illegitimate child almost certainly weighed on Bowker's mind.¹³² But Bowker had also apparently visited a fortune-teller or cunning woman who told her that she would give birth to a monster after an extraordinarily lengthy fifty-one-week pregnancy. Single and desperate, and with knowledge of the potentially monstrous foetus growing inside her,¹³³ Bowker attempted suicide but her makeshift noose (her girdle) failed to support her weight. She then tried to drown herself in a pond but was rescued.

¹³¹ Hoffer and Hull, pp.30-31.

¹³² Hoffer and Hull suggest that shame was a distinct motivating factor in early modern infanticide cases: "a woman forced to bear the shame of rearing an illegitimate child might well find the situation intolerable" (p.154). On communal chastisement see also D. Hirst, *Authority and Conflict: England 1603-1658*, London, Edward Arnold, 1986. On an illegitimate child bringing shame on an unmarried woman's family see Jackson, *New-Born Child Murder*, pp.47-49. See also Rublack, *Crimes of Women*, pp.185-188; 195.

¹³³ It is perhaps worth noting here the distinct psychiatric condition of 'teratophobia' – fear of giving birth to a monster – which may have afflicted Bowker. Deutsch discusses maternal fantasies of the transformation of the foetus and ensuing monstrous births (H. Deutsch, *The Psychology of Woman*, New York, Grune & Stratton, 1945, p.151). Consider also use of teratological themes in modern horror films such as Roman Polanski's 1968 *Rosemary's Baby* which incorporates fantasies of witchcraft, demonic possession, and foetal monstrosity.

As Bowker's narrative becomes more elaborate, it also becomes more convoluted. Bowker's testimony "takes us into the realms of uncertainty, indeterminacy, and ambiguity, the shifting grounds of bewilderment and wonder".¹³⁴ Bowker allegedly told one of her rescuers, the husbandman Christopher Clarke, that she was married.¹³⁵ At the same time, Bowker's friend testified that she had had the baby and put it out to nurse at Guilsborough. Still another witness said that she saw Bowker "three weeks before Christmas ... and seeing her before having a great belly, and now the same very small and gaunt, asked her whether she were delivered of a child, and she said, yea, and my child is dead and is buried at Little Bowden".¹³⁶ Had Bowker sought the assistance of the midwife Elizabeth Harrison some time before Christmas either to abort the foetus¹³⁷ or to deliver the child, nurse and care

¹³⁴ Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, p.26.

¹³⁵ *Id.* at p.16. Bowker's statement is significant in terms of the differing punishments imposed on unmarried and married women for murdering their children. In the sixteenth-century, married women typically received a penance of one year surviving on bread and water alone. Unmarried women, by contrast, were sentenced to death (W.L. Langer, "Infanticide: A Historical Survey", *History of Childhood Quarterly*, 1, 1973-74, pp.353-365 at p.356).

¹³⁶ Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, p.19. There was no evidence to support the veracity of Bowker's claims about a nursing infant or a newborn infant dead and buried at Little Bowden. At one point in her testimony Bowker also intimates that she may have either miscarried or delivered a still-born babe. Bowker apparently told one of her interrogators that "it [the child] was dead in her" (Cressy, p.16).

¹³⁷ Midwives used folklore remedies to assist women in labour, but witch-hunters imagined that they could also use magical spells and incantations to harm the foetus, causing miscarriage (D. Willis, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-Hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1995, p.35). According to Forbes, it was believed that "[t]he devil ... could trick the midwife into using incantations" (p.127). Forbes notes the

for it on the understanding that Bowker “would not need to worry further about it”?¹³⁸

At every turn, Bowker appears to bypass legal attempts to bring her (story) to order. Ecclesiastical authorities were so perturbed by the tale unfolding before them that they sought assistance from the secular authorities, magistrates Sir George Turpin and Edward Griffin who attempted to determine whether a crime had taken place. However, with no infant’s corpse and conflicting witness testimony, law enforcement officials could only imagine what horrors had taken place and proceeded to (re)construct a tale of monstrous proportions from the various snippets of information that came their way.

‘The devil is in you’¹³⁹

cases of midwives who were burned at the stake for using charms and incantations to both transfer the “pains of childbirth ... into a cat” (p.126) and to “destroy the child *in utero*, causing an abortion” (p.127). Forbes refers to Frommann’s *Tractatus de fascinatione* (1575) which states that “[t]he Devil arranges through the midwives ... the abortive death of the fetuses” (p.127). T.R. Forbes, *The Midwife and the Witch*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1966. Licenced midwives were compelled to swear that they would not administer abortifacients but Rueff, in *The expert midwife* (1637) believed that “many Midwives ... doe counsell & advise such things to great evil and mischief” (cited in Eccles, p.70). See also Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, pp.47-50.

¹³⁸ Langer, p.357. Langer notes that “[s]tarvation or a dose of opiates would settle the child’s fate in a matter of days” (p.357). Rosen notes that “[a]mong the poor, babies were often put out to nurse ... and there is a faint suggestion that some of the poor infants who ‘consumed away’ were simply underfed” (p.44). B. Rosen, ed., *Witchcraft in England 1558-1618* (1969), Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1991.

¹³⁹ Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum*, 1.1. There are several translations of this passage. The one cited is from R.R. Ruether, “Misogynism and

The church courts had jurisdiction over midwives¹⁴⁰ who were required to inform authorities about any misconduct in the birthing chamber, to determine the cause of malformed or monstrous newborns, and to ascertain the names of suspected fathers from unmarried women in the throes of labour.¹⁴¹ In her testimony, Harrison presents the

Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church” in R.R. Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1974, p.157.

¹⁴⁰ Evenden notes that “the practice of licensing midwives by church authorities was legitimised by the legislation of Henry VIII in 1512 ... But the date when the church first began to issue midwifery licences ... remains uncertain ... [although] at least three London midwives [were] licensed in the years 1506-22 ... 1567 has generally been accepted by historians as the earliest [date] of the licensing of midwives” (p.25). The church administered oaths to midwives in the following form: “I will not permit, or suffer that woman being in labour or travail shall name any other to be the father of her child, than only he who is the right and true father thereof; and that I will not suffer any other body’s child to be set, brought or laid before any woman delivered of child in the place of her natural child ... I will not use any kind of sorcery or incantation in the time of the travail of any woman; and that I will not destroy the child born of any woman, nor cut, nor pull off the head thereof, or otherwise dismember or hurt the same, or suffer it to be so hurt or dismembered, by any manner of ways or means” (reproduced in full in Forbes, p.145). Midwives were usually mothers themselves and in some countries it was a condition for licensing that a midwife had borne children (Evenden, pp.113-114). According to Donnison, “personal experience of childbirth was ... considered an advantage” (p.3).

¹⁴¹ Hoffer and Hull suggest that “tremendous moral and legal pressure was exerted on these women to reveal the name of the child’s father, so that the parish could force him to support the destitute infant (pp.13-14). Wrightson notes that this was a particularly “gruesome practice amply evidenced by the scores of surviving midwives’ depositions in bastardy cases” (p.13). Quaife notes that if a woman refused to name the father “she had to withstand tremendous pressure during the critical stage of delivery ... midwives often withdrew their assistance until the last minute in the hope that the pain of childbirth, and the possibility of death, would force the reluctant female to name the man concerned” (p.105). Leboutte recounts the 1544 case of a servant who refused to provide authorities with the name of her baby’s father. After she had delivered the child, interrogation recommenced – “repeated episodes of torture” – until she finally relented (p.175). According to Wiseman, the pregnant body was a “site of central importance in civil and religious

court with evidence about the paternity of Bowker's child/monster:

She asked this Agnes who was the father of her child ... who answered it is one Randal Dowley, for he had many times the use of her body carnally.¹⁴²

In her initial testimony, Bowker provides explicit details about her sexual history that seem to implicate Randal Dowley, a fellow servant, as the father of "this cat-monster".¹⁴³ Dowley apparently "had to do with [Bowker] at Braybrooke over the porter's ward at Michaelmas was twelvemonth"¹⁴⁴ and since then in the malthouse and in the fields surrounding the property of Dowley's employer. Bowker fell pregnant but Dowley wanted nothing to do

society" (p.185). Wiseman suggests that "the single woman's pregnant body partly confesse[d] her crime; fornication and bastardy were meanings attendant upon her pregnancy, but the body of a woman would not reveal the father to whom the parish might turn to require economic support for the child ... As the body of the woman did not reveal the child's father, pregnant women could be subjected to mental and physical torture to elicit a confession of paternity" (p.185). Wiseman notes that women who engaged in illicit sexual behaviour could be banished by the church, fined, forced to wear a white sheet in front of the church, and whipped. Wiseman mentions two cases in which women were stripped naked and whipped in the town square as punishment for fornication. According to Wiseman, since the pregnant body "[did] not of itself disclose the identity of the child's father ... [t]he symbolic *meaning* of bastardy ... was only made evident by the woman's confession and in the demonstration of her body and her physical punishment" (pp.180; 185). S.J. Wiseman, "Tis Pity She's a Whore: Representing the Incestuous Body" in L. Gent and N. Llewellyn, eds, *Renaissance Bodies: The Human Figure in English Culture c. 1540-1660*, London, Reaktion Books, 1990, pp.180-197.

¹⁴² Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, p.13.

¹⁴³ *Id.* at p.20.

¹⁴⁴ *Id.* at p.11.

with her or the baby. But Dowley was not the father, his supposed paternity being mere fiction.¹⁴⁵

The midwife told the court that Bowker admitted that “a thing in the likeness of a bear, sometimes like a dog, sometimes like a man ... had the knowledge carnal of her body in every such shape”.¹⁴⁶ Interrogation of Bowker by Sir George Turpin, magistrate and Justice of the Peace supported the midwife’s claim of bestiality: “a thing came unto her as she was in bed and lay the first night very heavy upon her bed but touched her not. The next night she saw it and it was in the likeness of a black cat. By the moonlight it came into her bed and had knowledge of her body”.¹⁴⁷ The devil in the shape of a cat? Soon after making this statement Bowker allegedly confided in her godmother, Emma Walker, that she “was conjured [by] ... the devil”.¹⁴⁸ Bowker told the Archdeacon’s commissary about the devil’s nocturnal visits in the form of “a trim man ... and after ... like a greyhound and a cat”.¹⁴⁹ She alleged that her evil employer Hugh Brady told her that she must succumb to the devil and engage in acts of bestiality.

Further interrogation by the Archdeacon’s commissary revealed that Bowker was seduced by Brady, “a very vicious man [who] did lie with his maids often, and

¹⁴⁵ Quaife notes that the “most common reaction [during labour] was to name a father – real or false” (p.107).

¹⁴⁶ Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, p.13.

¹⁴⁷ *Id.* at p.16.

¹⁴⁸ *Id.* at p.17.

¹⁴⁹ *Id.* at p.18.

committed adultery with them”.¹⁵⁰ When Bowker told Brady’s wife about his adulterous liaisons he began to “entreat her evil ... and [Brady’s wife] did send her to ... London to dwell, because her master should no more so evil entreat her”.¹⁵¹ But Brady pursued Bowker, gave her some money and asked her to meet him in the grange yard where he “cast her on the ground, and had his carnal pleasure upon her”.¹⁵² Bowker told the court that Brady promised to cure her epilepsy by impregnation: “saith Brady, if thou wilt be ruled by me and not betray me I will help thee of thy disease ... thou must needs have a child first and then thy disease will leave thee”.¹⁵³ Bowker alleged that Brady encouraged her to seek the services of the midwife Elizabeth Harrison and “could not be delivered till this midwife came”.¹⁵⁴ Did Brady and the midwife conspire to destroy Bowker’s child and fabricate an elaborate tale of monstrous birth?¹⁵⁵ Was Bowker herself

¹⁵⁰ *Id.* at p.17.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* Epilepsy was believed to be the work of the devil. A pamphlet entitled *Hartford-shire Wonder or Strange News from Ware* (1669) tells of a woman who drank the devil’s brew and thereafter found herself afflicted with epileptic fits and convulsions (M. Summers, *Witchcraft and Black Magic* (1946), New York, Dover, 2000, p.52). See also Macdonald who discusses the case of Elizabeth Jackson, a woman accused of bewitching a young girl who suffered from fits and convulsions. M. Macdonald, ed., *Witchcraft and Hysteria in Elizabethan London: Edward Jorden and the Mary Glover Case*, New York, Routledge, 1991.

¹⁵⁴ Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, p.20.

¹⁵⁵ Kieckhefer notes that midwives, known invariably as female healers, could be “lured into cockeyed scheme[s] for curing [disease]” (p.198). The author cites one case in which a midwife was drawn into a scheme to cure leprosy “with the fat of a miscarried foetus” (p.198). The midwife was accused of being a witch. R. Kieckhefer, *Magic in*

somehow involved as co-conspirator?¹⁵⁶ Was Bowker a victim of seduction or herself the instigator of an elaborate plot designed to deceive law enforcers?

Metamorphoses

The very nature of Bowker's alleged monster sparked allegations of witchcraft. Lending credence to speculation were the findings of the local townsmen who examined the monster. The curate, innholder, tradesman, and baker of Harborough disembowelled the monster and determined that it was a cat. The curate testified that "when the entrail of the cat was opened ... he with others [saw] and [took] forth very straw out of the gut".¹⁵⁷ The innholder also saw "certain meat congealed, and in the same maw a piece of ... bacon".¹⁵⁸ The townsmen suggested that Bowker did not bear the cat-monster but rather stole a neighbour's cat and used the animal to perpetuate an elaborate hoax designed to deceive local authorities.¹⁵⁹

the Middle Ages (1989), Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

¹⁵⁶ The Archdeacon's commissary Anthony Anderson wonders whether "there be none other, which hath tied up ... this tale ... and given it her [Bowker] to bear" (Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, p.17). Hoffer and Hull mention the 1562 case of a clergyman, midwife, and the clergyman's pregnant lover who "conspired to kill [her] child when it was born. [The midwife] performed the act, but all were hanged" (p.7).

¹⁵⁷ Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, p.15.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ The speculations of the townsmen immediately bring to mind what has become known as the 'Mary Toft affair' in which a British woman deceived some of the most high-profile eighteenth-century physicians who believed that she had given birth to rabbits. Toft's case actually began with the 'birth' of a cat in 1726. In his study of the Toft case,

In the early modern imagination, cats were a sign of the witch and suggested the practice of sorcery or *maleficium*. In his study of feline symbolism in the early modern era, Darnton notes that “[t]o cross [a cat] at night ... was to risk running into the devil or one of his agents or a witch on an evil errand”.¹⁶⁰ According to Purkiss the witch was thought

Todd writes: “And so on 27 September, the Tofts cut up a cat, took out its guts and liver, inserted into its intestines the backbone of an eel they had eaten for dinner the previous Sunday, placed the concoction in Mary Toft, and left her alone in the house. She then sent for a neighbour ..., complained that she was in great pain, feigned a brief labour, and let her [neighbour] hear the monster fall into a pot” (p.6). D. Todd, *Imagining Monsters: Miscreations of the Self in Eighteenth-Century England*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995. The Tofts inserted more portions of the dead cat into Mary and called the head surgeon of Guildford, John Howard, who returned periodically in the course of a month to witness or hear about Mary’s deliverance of almost an entire cat. Howard told Mary that he needed to observe the head of the animal in order to confirm that hers was indeed a monstrous birth. Unable to find the cat’s head, Mary substituted a rabbit’s head in its place. When the hoax was finally revealed, Mary Toft implicated her mother-in-law (who was a midwife) as mastermind and co-conspirator. See also H. Graham, *Eternal Eve*, Altrincham, UK, St Ann’s Press, 1950, pp.334-343; P.K. Wilson, “Eighteenth-Century ‘Monsters’ and Nineteenth-Century ‘Freaks’: Reading the Maternally Marked Child”, *Literature and Medicine*, 21(1), 2002, pp.1-25; B. Blackwell, “*Tristram Shandy* and the Theatre of the Mechanical Mother”, *ELH*, 68(1), 2001, pp.81-133.

¹⁶⁰ R. Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (1984), New York, Random House, 1985, p.92. Darnton notes that cats also “possessed occult power independently of their association with witchcraft and devilry” (p.94). In folklore, cat’s blood was believed to cure almost everything from colic to pneumonia; it was bad luck to kill a cat but entombing a live cat within the walls of a house brought good luck; cats smothered babies (p.94). Cats were also a sexual metaphor, and in early modern France ‘le chat/la chatte’ was a derogatory term for the female pudendum (p.95). Cats were symbols of the female sex and Darnton uses this metonymic association to argue that the great cat massacre in early modern France was a thinly veiled attack on the town’s women. The men involved slaughtered the cat’s of certain women and in so doing “subjected [the women] to symbolic aggression of the most intimate kind ... and got off scot-free” (p.100). Darnton suggests that the great cat massacre was a type of witch-hunt, “which provided an excuse to kill [the witch’s familiar – cat] and insinuate that [these

to regularly 'shift shape' by transforming into other bodies, particularly animals or threatening beasts.¹⁶¹ Purkiss associates the fluidity of the female body that changes shape during pregnancy with the formlessness of the witch.¹⁶² Purkiss recounts the depositions of two accused witches, one of whom would "transform herself into any shape whatsoever, viz, a mastiff dog, a black lion, a white bear, a wolf, a monkey, a horse, a bull, and a calf" while the other "hath been several times in the shape of a cat".¹⁶³ Witches were believed to metamorphose into cats "in order to cast spells on their victims".¹⁶⁴

women] were witches" (p.100). Consider also Freud's discussion of the cat as a symbol of female sexuality ("On Narcissism: An Introduction" (1914) in Philip Rieff, ed., *General Psychological Theory*, New York, Collier Books, 1963, pp.56-82 at p.70).

¹⁶¹ D. Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations*, London, Routledge, 1996, p.125.

¹⁶² *Id.* at pp.119-144. See also Weiss on the power of morphological fantasies in Western culture. G. Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality*, London, Routledge, 1999. Commenting on the 'Mary Toft affair' in the context of growing anxieties about female authorship, Heinzelman considers how male authors employed the metaphor of monstrosity to warn readers "that the magical power of transformation assigned to women's bodies, their tendency to assume the shapes of animals and monsters as well as to reproduce themselves in textual monstrosities, is the natural consequence of the ungovernable nature of their bodies and the fantastical power of their imaginations" (p.386). S.S. Heinzelman, "Black Letters and Black Rams: Fictionalizing Law and Legalizing Literature in Enlightenment England", *Law/Text/Culture*, 5(2), 2001, pp.377-405.

¹⁶³ Purkiss, p.125. See also Harley who cites the case of Scottish midwife Margaret Nin-Gilbert who allegedly confessed to being a witch and assuming the form of a cat (pp.15-16). D. Harley, "Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife-Witch", *Society for the Social History of Medicine*, 3(1), 1990, pp.1-26.

¹⁶⁴ Darnton, p.92. Witches were also said to destroy crops by "fill[ing] the skin of a cat with various kinds of vegetable matter, put[ting] it in a spring for three days, then dry[ing] and pulveriz[ing] the concoction. On a windy day they go up a mountain and scatter the powder across the land as a sacrifice to the Devil, who in return for their offering will destroy the crops" (Kieckhefer, *Magic*, pp.195-196).

Witches were supposed to copulate with the devil who similarly could assume the form of a cat.¹⁶⁵ In his *Daemonologie* (1597), King James VI of Scotland wrote: “[the devil] obliges himself to appear ... either in likeness of ... a cat ... or such-like other beast”.¹⁶⁶ In her testimony, Bowker alleges that a being in the shape of a cat, man¹⁶⁷ or other form had carnal knowledge of her body on several occasions¹⁶⁸ and that her wicked employer, Hugh Brady, encouraged her to fulfil the devil’s every desire. According to Summers, theologians and demonologists generally believed that children could result from a sexual encounter between a witch and the devil.¹⁶⁹ Witch-hunters inspected the bodies of women

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Kieckhefer notes that “the Devil assumes the form of a black cat ... while presiding at [the] assembly [of witches, known as the ‘Sabbat’]” (Magic p.195).

¹⁶⁶ Cited in Summers, p.50.

¹⁶⁷ de Bruyn recounts the early sixteenth century story of Mary of Nemmegen who is seduced by “[t]he Devil in the guise of a young man [who] offers his services ... [and] promises to give her gold and pleasures, and love her above all women” (p.5). L. de Bruyn, *Woman and the Devil in Sixteenth-Century Literature*, Wiltshire, Compton Press, 1979.

¹⁶⁸ Following the Aristotelian tradition, women were believed to possess a ‘natural’ weakness of body and mind that made them susceptible to demonic possession and sexual temptation. (V.L. Bullough and J. Brundage, *Sexual Practices in the Medieval Church*, New York, Prometheus Books, 1982, p.37).

¹⁶⁹ Summers, p.207. Kieckhefer notes that theologians “refined and rationalized [the belief] ... that it [was] possible for intercourse with an incubus [male demon] to produce offspring: the demon appears first to a man as a succubus [female demon], obtains semen, then immediately takes the form of an incubus and transmits it to a woman” (Magic p.197). Consider the 1575 case of a Dutch woman who bore an incubus (a male devil who seduces women for the purpose of copulation). See S. Batman, *The doome warning all men to the judgemente* (1581) in A.W. Pollard and G.R. Redgrave, *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland and of English Books Abroad 1475-1640*, 2nd edn, 3 vols, revised W.A. Jackson, F.S. Ferguson and K.F. Pantzer, 1976-1991, p.401.

accused of witchcraft, searching for “divers strange marks, at which the Devill sucks their blood”,¹⁷⁰ “a preternatural excrescence of flesh ... much like to teats”¹⁷¹ that served as evidence of demonic seduction.

Monstrous children in particular were believed to be the demonical offspring of the devil (Ricci, p.303). According to Moseley, “[t]he mothers of these children were often regarded as witches who have consorted with the devil or other demons” (p.353). Moseley recounts the birth of the monster of Krakow in 1543 whose cat’s head, fiery eyes, webbed fingers and toes, and body covered in monkey and dog heads were believed to be of demonic origin (pp.353-354). K.L. Moseley, “The History of Infanticide in Western Society”, *Issues in Law and Medicine*, 1(5), 1986, pp.345-361. Hole also refers to a case of sexual relations between a girl and her uncle and a subsequent monstrous birth which was blamed on “the divell [who] had so blinded the eies of these two [that] they lay together, and she was gotton with [a monstrous] child” (anonymous pamphlet cited in Hole, p.184). R. Hole, “Incest, Consanguinity and a Monstrous Birth in Rural England, January 1600”, *Social History*, 25(2), 2000, pp.183-199.

¹⁷⁰ Macdonald, p.28.

¹⁷¹ P. Boyar and S. Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1974, p.13. Seth notes that the ‘Devil’s mark’ actually took the form of a scar or fleshly inscription left by the devil on the witch’s body as a sign of their pact. By the mid to late seventeenth-century, the Devil’s mark also included flesh that was insensitive to the sharp blade used by witch-hunters (known as ‘prickers’ in Scotland). The protuberance of flesh or teat from which the devil was said to suck a witch’s blood was the ‘Witch’s mark’ (pp.18-20). R. Seth, *Children Against Witches*, London, Robert Hale, 1969. See also Rosen who describes the way in which “[t]he witch was stripped naked, her body hair was shaved and she was searched, particularly in ‘secret places’” (p.17). Barstow suggests that the witch-hunts were “a cover for making a socially approved assault on [women’s] bod[ies]” (p.132). Powerful men abused their authority, using the witch-hunts to violently reverse social rules of propriety that prevented men observing the process of childbirth or male physicians gazing at women’s bodies during physical examinations. A.L. Barstow, *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts*, New York, Pandora Press, 1994. For some of the more innovative methods used by late eighteenth and nineteenth century physicians to overcome the problem of lack of access to women’s bodies see B. Blackwell, “*Tristram Shandy* and the Theatre of the Mechanical Mother”, *ELH*, 68(1), 2001, pp.81-133. Ehrenzweig suggests that the witch-hunters’ search for signs of the devil is a symptom of “archaic guilt, [a] feeling that surged up in the Middle Ages and forced the learned witch-hunters to project it on to the figures of ‘the Witch and the Devil’ as

In her study of the relationship between Woman and the Devil, de Bruyn suggests that “[t]he sixteenth century tried to explain the forces of evil in terms of a ... Devil in collusion with human beings who act as his agents”.¹⁷² Was Brady the Devil’s agent? Had Bowker compacted with the Devil to murder her newborn infant?¹⁷³ Daston

the hereditary sin from Paradise” (pp.108-109). Ehrenzweig interprets the Biblical myth of creation in oral-sadistic terms whereby the fruit that “Eve [ate] ... represents Adam’s genitals. The Devil serpent who tempts Eve into her crime is a phallic symbol too; his punishment clearly expresses the castration symbolism – Eve will crush his head. The primeval guilt of the ‘Witch and the Devil’ ... culminated in an oral tribute by the witches to the Devil, whom they kissed under his tail. This anal kiss again symbolises oral castration, and the Devil retaliates by sucking the witches’ blood” (p.109). The cultural phenomenon of the witch-hunts parallels the oedipal stage of infant development marked by castration anxiety. The boy initially imagines that the mother is ‘phallic’ and is horrified when he sees her genitals which, as both duBois and Creed suggest, are fearful not because they appear wounded but because they have the power to wound (see my Chapter One). When the witch-hunters search the witches’ bodies, they “re-enact the primeval crisis of the voyeur libido when the frustrated voyeur frantically searched for the vanished genitals in any part of the female body” (p.109). The witch-hunters project onto the figure of the witch unconscious fears of the maternal body that poses a threat to their manhood. A. Ehrenzweig, “The Origin of the Scientific and Heroic Urge (The Guilt of Prometheus)”, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 30, 1949, pp.108-123. For more on *Genesis* and oral guilt see also T. Reik, *Myth and Guilt: The Crime and Punishment of Mankind*, New York, George Braziller, 1957.

¹⁷² de Bruyn, p.xi. According to de Bruyn, the publication of Pope Innocent VIII bull *Summis Desiderantes affectibus* (1484) which pronounced the existence of evil forces in the form of devils, witches and sorcerers gave licence for the early modern imagination to run wild. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, people were readily inclined to believe that the Devil and his minions were responsible for evil (pp.3-4). See also Lake (pp.268-269) who notes the “all-pervasive malice and presence of Satan” in early modern murder pamphlets (p.269).

¹⁷³ Consider the 1686 case of an unmarried servant by the name of Appolonia Mayr recounted by Roper. Mayr confessed to having murdered her newborn baby because the Devil had entreated her to do so. In her confession, Mayr associates the Devil and midwife (read: witch) who oversees the delivery and offers herbs and other remedies to prevent the pains of labour: “[t]he Evil Spirit left her no

notes that sixteenth-century demonologists warned against the power of the devil to “dupe ... [and] trap the unwary ... a peril [that] loomed large in an imagination haunted by the terrors of demonic magic and witchcraft”.¹⁷⁴ Was Bowker’s monstrous birth “staged by the devil?”¹⁷⁵

In a case brought under the Elizabethan Witchcraft Act, and heard at the Chelmsford assizes less than three years earlier, three women (Elizabeth Francis, Agnes Waterhouse, and her eighteen year-old daughter Joan Waterhouse¹⁷⁶) accused of witchcraft confessed¹⁷⁷ to

peace. It was only a moment, the Devil touched [her] as if he were a midwife, it happened quite quickly that the child came out. She strangled it (the newborn infant) immediately with her hand, and she felt no pain in the delivery ... she left it lying quite naked, uncovered, and unburied ... the Devil did not go with her, but remained staying by the child” (Roper, p.1).

¹⁷⁴ Daston, “Marvellous Facts”, pp.106-107.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Holmes notes that witchcraft was thought to “inhere in matrilineal lineage ... by descent ... from the grandmother to the mother, and from the mother to the children” (p.49). C. Holmes, “Women: Witnesses and Witches”, *Past and Present*, 140, 1993, pp.45-78. See also C. Holmes, “Popular Culture? Witches, Magistrates, and Divines in Early Modern England” in S.L. Kaplan, ed., *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, New York, Mouton, 1984, pp.85-111 at p.94.

¹⁷⁷ Witchcraft ‘confessions’ were reportedly extracted under torture. In his *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes* (1593), Gifford notes the “insane ferocity” that marked the witch-hunts (ed. B. White, London, Oxford University Press, 1931, p.v). Suspected witches were tortured and brutalised in the pursuit of ‘confessions’. Ehrenreich and English refer to “thumb-screws and the rack, spikes and bone-crushing ‘boots’, starvation and beatings” (p.8). Under the reign of King James ‘witchducking’ or the ‘water-ordeal’ was a popular method of proving the innocence or guilt of the accused. With her hands and feet bound, the accused was submerged in water. If the woman floated, she was guilty. If she sank, she was innocent. McPherson suggests that in tales of the witch-hunts, “incriminations are cunningly predetermined and women can only plead guilty”. Commenting on

bewitching and seducing men, aborting fetuses, and murdering their own newborn infants and other children. Two of the women claimed to have received assistance from their devilish familiar, a cat named Satan¹⁷⁸. The cat

'witchducking' as a legally sanctioned form of early modern lie detection, McPherson notes "[t]he diabolical twist to the process ... [o]nly by sinking could she prove her innocence. In other words, the woman could plead 'not guilty' only through her silence, her drowning. Any ability to survive the ordeal, to speak in her own defence, condemned her". K. McPherson, *Incriminations: Guilty Women/Telling Stories*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1994. For some of the more horrific forms of torture used by the witch-hunters see H.C. Lea, *Materials Towards a History of Witchcraft* (3 vols.) (1939), ed. Arthur C. Howland, New York, Thomas Joseloff, 1957. See also R.J. Evans, *Rituals of Retribution: Capital Punishment in Germany 1600-1987*, London, Penguin Books, 1997. Witchcraft was legally defined as a *crimen exceptum* – a crime with exceptional status under the law – meaning that judges were not bound by rules of evidence and could gather testimony and confessions outside normal evidentiary restrictions (for further discussion see C. Lerner, "The Crime of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe" in D. Oldridge, ed., *The Witchcraft Reader*, London, Routledge, 2002, pp.205-212). According to Russell, judges "believed that they were performing a necessary service for society, God, and even the accused, whose soul they hoped to save by extracting confession" (J.B. Russell, *A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics, and Pagans*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1980, p.79). In his 1584 treatise *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (repr. with introd. H.R. Williamson, London, Centaur Press, 1964). Reginald Scot draws attention to the credibility of witness testimony that could be taken from almost anyone in the community, including children. Children played a significant role in witch trials as witnesses for the prosecution. Children as young as seven years of age were called to give evidence against those accused of *maleficia* or evil deeds. According to Seth, "evidence offered by children concerning all or any of the defined acts of witchcraft *maleficia* was sufficient to prove the guilt of the accused ... the premise [being] that in their innocence [children] could unfailingly recognise evil" (Seth 14). Seth recounts numerous cases in which children accuse their own mothers of being witches, including nine-year-old Jennet Device who claimed that she had overheard her mother and her mother's familiar in the shape of a brown dog discussing their practice of witchcraft and murder. Seth concludes that children were most likely coerced into giving evidence against their mothers and that their statements suggest no more than an overactive childhood imagination. If we follow Bloch (see Chapter One), these types of accusations were projections of unconscious fears of the mother.

¹⁷⁸ Spelt 'Sathan' in the transcript reproduced in Rosen, pp.72-82.

was apparently given to one of the women by none other than Mother Eve who was also said to be a witch. In her testimony, Joan Waterhouse confessed that she had asked a neighbour's child, Agnes Brown, for some food and when Brown refused she conjured Satan to cause the child harm.¹⁷⁹

Witches were believed to have “abominable appetites”, sexual and otherwise.¹⁸⁰ “All witchcraft comes from carnal lust which is in women insatiable”,¹⁸¹ warned two of the most well-known medieval demonologists – Dominican priests by the names of Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger. Theologians emphasised the role of Eve in the Fall of humankind and associated her transgressions with a corrupt and polluted female body dictated by passions, of which lust was the most dangerous and deadly to man. In the Chelmsford case it is significant that Mother Eve introduces the women to the sin of sorcery and witchcraft. They inherit the original sin of the first woman Eve – theirs are literally sins of origin.¹⁸² In the words of Tertullian, “Do

¹⁷⁹ For more about the Chelmsford trial and other similar cases see Seth; M. Gibson, *Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing*, London, Routledge, 2000.

¹⁸⁰ This point is developed later in this chapter. For now it suffices to note the association between the food desired by Joan Waterhouse and the human flesh (especially that of children) hungered for by witches. We can only imagine the punishment delivered to the child Agnes Brown whose flesh would have made a tasty pastry such as that described by Bodin in his *Demonomanie* (Book IV, Chapter V) (cited in Summers, p.186).

¹⁸¹ H. Kramer and J. Sprenger, *The Malleus Maleficarum of Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger* (1928), trans. M. Summers, New York, Dover, 1971, I.6, p.47.

¹⁸² See Adelman's *Suffocating Mothers* for further elaboration.

you not know that each of you is Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age ... *You are the Devil's gateway ...*"¹⁸³

Sins of the mother (tongue)

*The first in line is tied to a tree*¹⁸⁴

*Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof*¹⁸⁵

In Biblical myth sins of sexuality and unregulated appetites converge in the figure of Eve. In *Genesis*, God fashions the first woman from the rib of the first man Adam:

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from man he made into a woman.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum* 1.1. There are several translations of this passage. The one cited is in R.R. Ruether, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church" in R.R. Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1974, p.157; italics in text.

¹⁸⁴ G.G. Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. G. Rabassa, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972, p.334.

¹⁸⁵ Proverbs, 18:21.

¹⁸⁶ *Genesis* 2: 21-25. See Phillips for a legend in which Eve is formed from the devil's tail (pp.42-44). J.A. Phillips, *Eve: The History of an Idea*, New York, Harper & Row, 1984.

God forbids Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge upon pain of death. But Eve is tempted by the serpent that tells her: “[I]n the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good from evil”.¹⁸⁷ Persuaded by the serpent’s words, Eve eats the forbidden fruit and convinces Adam to do the same.¹⁸⁸ When God confronts Adam about the

¹⁸⁷ *Genesis* 3: 4-5.

¹⁸⁸ There is an association between what Furst and Graham term “disorderly eating” and social disorder. According to Reineke, “[c]ultural order in Europe ... [was] dictated by the regulation of the intake and outtake of food from human bodies ... [a]n unregulated appetite signified an unregulated society” (pp.110-111; 108). Drawing on the work of Mary Douglas and Julia Kristeva, Reineke outlines the ways in which the Church “demarcate[d] order from disorder, sin from sanctity, by appeal to women’s bodies” (p.108), pitting] the “sensual pleasure” (p.111) of conspicuous consumption – grotesque imagery of greedy mouths and bodies engorging and “luxuriating in food” (Bynum p.2) – with asceticism, the deliberate renunciation of food that was believed to guarantee salvation, end “the war of the flesh ... expel demons, exclude evil thoughts, remit sins [and] mortify vices” (Bynum pp.2-3). Physical signs of starvation included the cessation of menstruation, “the bodily curse of Eve which had led women and, through them, all humanity into sin” (Reineke p.113). Holy women ate and drank only the body of Christ, “incorporat[ing] him into themselves. With their own bodies merged with Christ’s, from the mystics’ breasts or mouths also streamed healing, saving fluids” (Reineke p.115). With the renunciation of the sins of appetitive hunger, polluted and dangerous female fluids become “wondrous fluids – food – that heal[s] others” (Bynum p.274). The starved bodies of the holy women signified a denial of the carnal female body, a “defeat and destruction of the dangers that threatened the church” (Reineke pp.115-116). Stripped of all associations with sexuality and reproduction, the female body is rendered harmless – a body whose corporeal excesses are no longer ‘out of control’. L. Furst and P. Graham, eds, *Disorderly Eaters: Texts in Self-Empowerment*, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992. M.J. Reineke, *Sacrificed Lives: Kristeva on Women and Violence*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997. C.W. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987. See also Purkiss, “Producing the Voice, Consuming the Body”, pp.139-158. On menstruation as the ‘curse of Eve’ and more generally the symbolism of female blood in medieval discourse see P. McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, The Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval*

breach, he blames Eve. She confesses her 'crime' but also blames the serpent for its part in enticing her to commit the deed.¹⁸⁹ Eve takes the first 'bite of death' and in so doing condemns humankind to mortality.¹⁹⁰

After eating the forbidden fruit, both Adam and Eve become aware of their nudity and try to hide themselves

Literature, Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003. On the metaphor of incorporation see M. Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism*.

¹⁸⁹ For further discussion of the relationship between Eve and the serpent see J.M. Higgins, "The Myth of Eve: The Temptress", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 44(4), 1976, pp.639-647. Feminist scholars have read the Biblical creation myth "as justification for misogyny" akin to the justifications used by early modern demonologists for the persecution of women during the witch-hunts (Lanser p.68). S.S. Lanser, "(Feminist) Criticism in the Garden: Inferring Genesis 2-3", *Semeia*, 41, 1988, pp.67-84. Other pertinent feminist critiques of the myth of Eve include P. Tribble, "Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread", *Andover Newton Quarterly*, 13, 1973, pp.251-258; P. Tribble, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation" in E. Koltun, ed., *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives*, New York, Schocken Books, 1976, pp.217-240; M. Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987; N. Aschkenasy, *Eve's Journey: Feminine Images in Hebraic Literary Tradition* (1986), Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1994.

¹⁹⁰ Róheim suggests that "[t]he explanation of how death came into the world is really an explanation of the fear of death, of anxiety" ("Garden of Eden", p.198). In *Genesis* man denies that he is 'of woman born' by inverting the natural process of birth whereby man emerges from woman. In so doing, man attempts to erase memories of the maternal womb as a blissful space (and thereby heal the 'narcissistic wound' or pain caused by the trauma of birth or separation from the mother), making it instead a place of fear and loathing. Imagining the maternal matrix as a deadly space of life-denying engulfment inhibits man's desire to return to or be one with the mother. For further discussion of separation anxiety in infantile development see Chapter One. For 'Oedipal' readings of *Genesis* see the work of Edmund Leach, in particular "Genesis as Myth", *Discovery*, 23, 1962, pp.30-35 and "Lévi-Strauss in the Garden of Eden: An Examination of Some Recent Developments in the Analysis of Myth", *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 23(4), 1961, pp.386-396.

amidst the foliage of the tree(s) of the Garden of Eden. Some scholars believe that Eden contained two trees – the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life. Others believe that there was only one tree from which Adam and Eve both ate and concealed themselves from the wrathful God.¹⁹¹ Kelly suggests that the Tree of Life was variously believed to be the *Musa paradisiaca* (banana) or the *Ficus religiosa* (fig) and that the Tree of Knowledge was another variety of banana, the *Musa sapientum*.¹⁹² Both the fig and banana trees had “ample foliage ... to hide [and] ... dress the erring couple”.¹⁹³

The fruit which Adam and Eve ate is most frequently referred to as an apple.¹⁹⁴ However, Kelly notes, there is no Biblical reference to apples and apple trees “were not

¹⁹¹ See J.G. Frazer, *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament: Studies in Comparative Religion, Legend and Law*, London, MacMillan, 1923, pp.15-20. Frazer also proposes another alternative, namely that the Garden of Eden contained a Tree of Life and a Tree of Death. “[T]he forbidden tree was really a tree of death, not of knowledge” (p.17). The first man and woman were supposed to eat only from the Tree of Life. “[M]isled by the serpent, [they] ate of the wrong tree and so forfeited ... immortality” (p.17). For other creation myths in which immortality is forfeited see Róheim, “Garden of Eden”, pp.15-20.

¹⁹² F. Kelly, *The Faithful Garden: An Ecumenical Florilegium*, Sydney, Methuen, 1986, p.46. See also Stone who suggests that the Tree of Knowledge was the sycamore fig, a tree with symbolic power: “According to Egyptian texts, to eat of this fruit was to eat of the flesh and the fluid of the Goddess, the patroness of sexual pleasure and reproduction” (p.220). Stone contends that the Biblical myth of creation removes any traces of female power symbolised by the Great Mother and reverses the early association between pleasure and childbearing. M. Stone, *When God Was a Woman*, New York, Dial Press, 1976.

¹⁹³ Kelly, p.42. For other possibilities including grapes and the mandrake see Almond, p.192.

¹⁹⁴ In Greek myth, the golden apples of the Garden of Hesperides were “the food of the gods and of immortality” (Róheim, “Garden of Eden”, pp.180-184).

even native to the lands from which the story emanated".¹⁹⁵ Almond notes the metaphorical association between the apple and love or lovesickness¹⁹⁶ that might explain Adam's being tempted by Eve, while Shengold considers the psychoanalytic association between the apple and the breast, and the fantasised infantile biting of the maternal breast that "cannot satisfy for long the infant's appetite and need".¹⁹⁷ Seventeenth-century author Thomas Peyton's comparison of Adam with a "silly child"¹⁹⁸ suggests an association between Shengold's voracious and unsatisfied infant and the first man's insatiable sexual hunger.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Kelly, p.46. Kelly elaborates: "Since the apple was a native of Britain, though widely found in Europe, it was unlikely to have been known in the Middle East" (p.140).

¹⁹⁶ Almond, p.192. Róheim notes that in Greek myth, "[t]he apple symbolises love and is the attribute of ... Aphrodite. Throwing an apple at a woman meant wooing her ... Statues represent Aphrodite with the love apple in her hand" ("Garden of Eden", p.181).

¹⁹⁷ L. Shengold, *Father, Don't You See I'm Burning? Reflections on Sex, Narcissism, Symbolism, and Murder: From Everything to Nothing*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1991, p.169. Róheim similarly notes the association between apple and breast, "symbols of a purely pleasure fulfilling aspect" ("Garden of Eden", p.198). Róheim approaches the Genesis myth from Rankian perspective, suggesting that the expulsion of mankind from Paradise phylogenetically re-enacts "the trauma of separation from the mother's body or from the nipple" (p.196). Róheim associates the life-giving nourishment oozing from the maternal nipple with the pendulous "fruit of immortality" (p.196) growing on the Tree of Life.

¹⁹⁸ T. Peyton, *The glass of time, in the two first ages diuinely handled* (London, 1620), cited in Almond, p.193.

¹⁹⁹ Millett reads the Eden myth in terms "sexual guilt". Implied by the 'eating' of the fruit is the act of coitus. Woman is blamed for enticing man and arousing his 'appetite'. "[I]n her inferiority and vulnerability the woman takes and eats, simple carnal thing that she is, affected by flattery even in a reptile. Only after this does the male fall, and with him, humanity – for the fable has made him the racial type, whereas Eve is a mere sexual type ... Adam was seduced by woman, who was seduced by the serpent [read: phallus]. 'The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me the fruit and I did eat', is [man's]

The traditional rather than scriptural legend has the apple figuring in the Fall of humankind from Paradise, “perpetuated by its botanical name *Malus*, a pun on the Latin, *malum*, meaning both apple and evil”.²⁰⁰ Indeed, the association between apples and maleficence is reinforced in fairytales such as ‘Snow White’ or ‘The Juniper Tree’ in which (step)mothers are implicated as death-dealers.²⁰¹ Both tales emphasise the perversion of maternal nurturance in the proffering of poisonous apples and the comparison between apples and a child’s dismembered body parts that are stewed and served for dinner. In these tales the (step)mothers lure their victims with deceitful and venomous words, speaking softly and sweetly with “honeyed tones”²⁰² to mask their poisonous intentions while emphasising the succulence of the fruit, its impressive texture and colour, and the pleasure to be derived from its consumption.

In his book *Slaughter of the Innocents* Bakan considers the cannibalistic content of fairytales and recounts an oral legend of the Fall told to him as a child:

I was told that the story of the fall of man [sic] had a hidden secret: the fruit of the tree of knowledge which Adam and Eve ate was a

defence. Seduced by the phallic snake, Eve is convicted for Adam’s participation in sex” (p.53). K. Millett, *Sexual Politics*, London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1970.

²⁰⁰ Kelly, p.140.

²⁰¹ For further consideration of the murderous mother in fairytales see Chapter One.

²⁰² Gilmore, p.74.

baby ... the biblical writers use the same word for knowing and sexual intercourse, and thus they may have intended to tell us that *the fruit of knowledge is an infant*.²⁰³

In this legend of the Fall carnal lust merges with appetitive hunger and a desire for that which is forbidden. The sin of

²⁰³ D. Bakan, *Slaughter of the Innocents: A Study of the Battered Child Phenomenon*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1971, p.xi, my emphasis. Neumann draws our attention to a fifteenth-century Swiss manuscript in which Eve is depicted holding a skull in her hand, "the fruit of the tree" (p.253). E. Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype* (1955), trans. R. Manheim, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1963. Ehrenzweig suggests that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge is the penis and that there is an "unconscious identification of children with genitals" ("Scientific and Heroic Urge", p.115). On the nature of the fruit and sexual symbolism see also R.F. Fortune, "The Symbolism of the Serpent", *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 7, 1926, pp.237-243. On 'eating' as a euphemism for sexual intercourse see Róheim, "Garden of Eden", pp.22-25. Jung recounts a parallel Hebrew legend that associates the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge with an infant: "one who was permitted to gaze into Paradise after the Fall saw the tree and the four streams, but the tree was withered, and in its branches lay a babe. The 'mother' had become pregnant" (p.248). C. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation: An Analysis of the Prelude to a Case of Schizophrenia* (1952), trans. R.F.C. Hull, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1976. The cannibalising of children by parents occurs in other parts of the Bible, including Leviticus (26:29), Deuteronomy (28:53-57), and the Book of Kings (2 Kings 6:24-33). On the latter see S. Lasine, "Jehoram and the Cannibal Mothers (2 Kings 6.24-33): Solomon's Judgment in an Inverted World", *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 50, 1991, pp.27-53. According to the prophets, infanticide and endocannibalism were punishments from God for sinful behaviour. For example, Moses warned the Israelites of the curse that would plague them for disobeying the word of God: "You will even eat the flesh of your own sons and daughters ... [t]he most tender and delicate woman among you ... will refuse to share with her beloved husband, son and daughter. She will hide from them the afterbirth and the new baby she has borne, so that she herself can eat them" (L.S. Milner, *Hardness of Heart, Hardness of Life: The Stain of Human Infanticide*, Kearney, Morris, 1998, p.39). See also Reed who suggests that the divine prohibition against eating from the Tree of Knowledge was a prohibition against cannibalism (p.279). E. Reed, *Woman's Evolution: From Matriarchal Clan to Patriarchal Family*, New York, Pathfinders Press, 1975.

sexual consumption is metaphorically expressed through the unnatural and insatiable 'appetite' of the archetypal devouring mother who consumes her own children, the fruit of her womb.²⁰⁴ Although both the first man and first woman 'partake' of the fruit, Eve takes the first bite that designates the female the "gender of death".²⁰⁵ In *Paradise Lost* (1667) Milton "made great play of Eve's bite into the apple, presenting it as that swallowing of death which, in archaic modes of thought, would identify *her* with death: 'Greedily, she engorged without restraint / And knew not eating death'".²⁰⁶ Eve's sinful transgression is not merely that of a woman but a mother – "the mother of all the living [who] gave us all over to death".²⁰⁷ The 'great

²⁰⁴ In Chapter Two we saw that the devouring mother is the negative aspect of the Mother Goddess. The Great Mother was typically personified as an apple tree (Neumann, *The Great Mother*, p.262). Neumann suggests that "the goddess as the tree that confers nourishment ... also comprises generation" (p.241). In Egyptian mythology the Great Tree Goddess gives birth to the sun/son. "[T]he childbearing tree may be differentiated into treetop and nest, crib and cradle ... the wood, the *hyle*, which as crib and cradle represents the child-bearing maternal significance of the tree, is also the mother of death, the 'sarco-phagus', devourer of flesh, the coffin that in the form of tree and pillar encloses ... the dead in its wood" (pp.243-244). Jung notes that "trees are at the same time birth-giving mothers, as in the Greek myth where the mothers of the men of the Bronze Age ... are ash-trees" (*Symbols*, p.246). Jung elaborates many traditions in which the tree is a symbol of the mother and includes a picture (dating 1730) of the Turkish wak-wak tree with human fruit (Plate XXXIX). See in particular Chapter V entitled 'Symbols of the Mother and of Rebirth'. See also Róheim who discusses the tree as mother symbol and the Biblical association between tree/woman/mother and fruit/offspring, ("Garden of Eden", pp.179-180). See also J.H. Philpot, *The Sacred Tree or The Tree in Religion and Myth*, London, MacMillan, 1897, pp.72-92.

²⁰⁵ From the title of Guthke's book.

²⁰⁶ Guthke, p.42.

²⁰⁷ *Geistliche Tdts-Gedancken* ('Spiritual Thoughts about Death') (1753), cited and translated in Guthke, p.43.

evil' originates with Mother Eve who feeds off and destroys the very life that she brings into the world.

Eve's Classical counterpart, Pandora, is similarly blamed for bringing evil into the world.²⁰⁸ In Hesiod's *Works and Days* Zeus orders the divine craftsman Hephaistos to create the first woman Pandora as punishment for Prometheus' theft of fire. In her hands, Pandora holds a jar²⁰⁹ that contains 'evils and pains' unknown to men. She opens the lid and "scatter[s] these evils about – she devise[s] miserable sorrows for men".²¹⁰ In ancient

²⁰⁸ Noddings suggests that there is a fundamental relationship between women and evil in "[t]he history of the human psyche [that] teems with devils, demons, and witches" (p.10). Noddings traces the association between women and evil to the ancient Greeks for whom the female body was a source of pollution, contamination, corruption, decay, and death. As we saw in Chapter Three, the ancient Greeks believed that women harbour evil and, unless contained, will unleash their evil forces to destroy men and their progeny. The idea of an inherent female evil waiting to be unleashed finds its most powerful expression in the myth of Pandora.

²⁰⁹ For a detailed discussion of Hesiod's Pandora and her jar see J-P. Vernant, "At Man's Table: Hesiod's Foundation Myth of Sacrifice" in M. Detienne and J-P. Vernant, *The Cuisine of Sacrifice Among the Greeks* (1979), trans. P. Wissing, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989, pp.21-86. See also F.I. Zeitlin, "Signifying Difference: The Myth of Pandora" in R. Hawley and B. Levick, eds, *Women in Antiquity: New Assessments* (1995), Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1999, pp.50-76; London, Routledge, 2003, pp.58-74.

²¹⁰ In *Works and Days* Pandora opens the jar to release evil. In the earlier work *Theogony* the first woman is herself the curse on humankind. For a comparison between the two versions see J-P. Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece* (1974), trans. J. Lloyd, New York, Zone Books, 1990, pp.183-201. In their study of the persistence of the motif of Pandora in Western culture, Panofsky and Panofsky suggest that the Church Fathers used the mythic Pandora to reinforce Eve's sinful transgression – "to corroborate the doctrine of original sin by a classical parallel" (p.11). For Phipps, the images of 'opening and 'unsealing' used by the theologian Tertullian to describe Eve's transgression ("You are the one who opened the devil's door; you unsealed the forbidden tree") mirror the 'raising' of Pandora's lid

Greece, jars (*chutra*) were used for the purposes of burial and food storage.²¹¹ But Oldenziel draws attention to the more sinister usage of the *chutra*. Jars used to bury the dead and store food were also used by women to expose their newborn babies, “a practice so prevalent that a group of women existed specially trained in the art of interring young children in jars, who thereby acquired the name of ‘bottlers’ (*enchutristriai*)”.²¹²

The image of the *enchutristriai* interring and bottling infants as though they were pickling preserves is disconcerting in that it associates the dead child with the food that women store in their containers, the container

(p.46). W.E. Phipps, *Genesis and Gender: Biblical Myths of Sexuality and Their Cultural Impact*, New York, Praeger, 1989. For more on the relationship between Eve and Pandora see J. O’Brien, “Nammu, Mami, Eve and Pandora: What’s in a Name?” *Classical Journal*, 79, 1983, pp.35-45.

²¹¹ P.E. Slater, *The Glory of Hera: Greek Mythology and the Greek Family*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1968, p.77. Slater suggests that Pandora’s jar was one of the jars (*chutra*) in which the Greeks buried their dead.

²¹² R. Oldenziel, “The Historiography of Infanticide in Antiquity: A Literature Stillborn” in J. Blok and P. Mason, eds, *Sexual Asymmetry: Studies in Ancient Society*, Amsterdam, J.C. Gieben, 1987, pp.87-107 at p.94. See also Róheim who notes that in excavations of a site in the ruins of Gezer, archaeologists found the skeletons of infants buried in large jars under the floor of a Canaanite temple (p.452). For an opposing view, see Bolkestein who suggests that the idea that children were “potted by ‘angel-makers’ (viz., practitioners of infanticide) was an absurd figment of the brains of scholiasts” (p.237). H. Bolkestein, “The Exposure of Children at Athens and the *enchutristriai*”, *Classical Philology*, 17, 1922, pp.222-239. For a comprehensive consideration of arguments both for and against the existence of the *enchutristriai* see Oldenziel. See also R. Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1985, p.144.

itself being a metaphor for the womb.²¹³ The relationship between jars that house dead babies and the mothers who prepare meals with food from those same jars is one of perversion. Images of maternal nurturance merge with fantasies of monstrous consumption – the child suckling at the mother’s breast may become her next meal.²¹⁴

²¹³ See L. Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies* (1987), trans. G.C. Gill, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993, p.10. King notes that in some Hippocratic texts, the womb was called “*angos*, ‘jar’” and suggests that the analogy between womb and jar was a pervasive feature of ancient Greek medical and philosophical treatises (p.126). H. King, “Sacrificial Blood: The Role of the Amnion in Ancient Gynaecology” in M. Skinner, ed., *Rescuing Creusa: New Methodological Approaches to Women in Antiquity*, Texas, Texas Tech University Press, 1987, pp.117-126. duBois notes that “Pandora is described as a container into which the gods put something” and that she is “moulded like a vase” (p.46). duBois notes the way in which *pithoi* [vases] closely resemble the female form with their various “protuberances ... erect nipples protruding from the shoulder of the vase ... sometimes called *mastoi* (breasts)” (pp.47-49). duBois develops the association between Hephaestus’ fashioning of Pandora from clay and the same clay used to create a pot or vase (*pithos*). Ceramic containers hold the food that sustains the community just as the female body houses the foetus that reproduces the city-state (*polis*). Both the first woman and ceramic containers “hid[e], contain, produc[e], and giv[e] up substances that permit the continuation of human existence” (p.49). But both the female body and containers are also associated with death. The jars that store essential food for nourishment and the female body that nourishes the foetus are also the site of death. The dead are buried in jars and the female body that opens itself to men for sexual consumption is “full of evils and plagues”. The infants interred in jars are horrific reminders of the sin of sexuality. In the myth of Pandora “[t]here is a suggestion that, as she lifts the lid of the jar, she wastes the goods stored there” (p.47) – she destroys the product(s) of her labour. Woman has the power to sustain life but also to destroy. The earth Mother – the first woman made of clay – gives birth and takes her progeny back into herself in death, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. P.A. duBois, *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988.

²¹⁴ Indeed, as we saw in Chapter One, children in fairytales regularly feature as the main ingredients in meals prepared by mothers. See also Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (London, Dean & Son, 1896) which draws frightening associations between food and infants for consumption. For further consideration of the infanticidal

'Malevolent nurture'²¹⁵

*Trust none of the dishes at dinner:
Those pies are steaming-black
with the poison Mummy put there²¹⁶*

*Who can tell us, that if woman
can give life, she cannot also
take life²¹⁷*

*[T]he power of the mother is,
first of all, to give or withhold
nourishment ... to give or withhold
survival itself. Nowhere else ...
does a woman possess such
literal power over life and death²¹⁸*

Early modern dramatists frequently use the metaphor of unnatural appetite and malevolent nurture to represent abuses of maternal power and the threat mothers pose not only to their immediate family but to the entire social and political system. Shakespeare in particular employs tropes of child-murder and cannibalism to bring into

insinuations in Carroll's 'Alice' series see Silver pp.71-80; K. Burke, "On Catharsis, or Resolution", *Kenyon Review*, 21(3), 1959, pp.337-375 at p.358; J. Gattégno, *Lewis Carroll: Fragments of a Looking-Glass – From Alice to Zeno* (1974), trans. R. Sheed, London, Allen & Unwin, 1977; E. Guiliano, ed., *Lewis Carroll: A Celebration*, New York, Clarkson N. Potter, 1982; D. Einersen and I. Nixon, "Virago and Lamia: Woman as Monster", *Angles on the English Speaking World*, 2, 1987, pp.3-29 at pp.8-10; Bakan (see Chapter One).

²¹⁵ From the title of Willis's insightful and engaging book.

²¹⁶ Juvenal, *The Sixteen Satires*, trans. Peter Green, New York, Penguin, 1967, p.151.

²¹⁷ F. Fromm-Reichmann and V.K. Gunst, "On the Denial of Women's Sexual Pleasure" in J.B. Miller, ed., *Psychoanalysis and Women*, Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1973, pp.86-93 at p.88; emphasis in text.

²¹⁸ Rich, p.42.

discourse that which is most threatening to the patriarchal order and thereby attempts to control collective anxieties about the male dependence upon women – mothers, midwives, and wet-nurses - for their birth and nurture and the power of women to not only create but also destroy men.²¹⁹

In *The Body Embarrassed*, Paster draws attention to the invisibility of childbirth in early modern drama as opposed

²¹⁹ L.A. Montrose, "Shaping Fantasies: Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture" in S. Greenblatt, ed., *Representing the English Renaissance*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988, pp.31-64 at p.36. Traub suggests that "Shakespeare's theatre serves as a projective or transitional space in which to articulate and thereby assuage psychic concerns" (p.137). Traub considers previous studies on the male fear of maternal power in Shakespeare's plays, including one by Murray Schwartz who locates in these works a "recurrent preoccupation with ... feminine powers to create and destroy suddenly, and ... the repeated desire of male characters ... to control the means of nurturance themselves" (p.120). Traub herself focuses specifically on the threat of female erotic power and the metaphoric and dramatic means by which such a threat is contained in Shakespeare's plays. V. Traub, "Jewels, Statues, and Corpses: Containment of Female Erotic Power in Shakespeare's Plays" in D. Barker and I. Kamps, eds, *Shakespeare and Gender: A History*, London, Verso, 1995, pp.120-141. For further consideration of male anxiety and the idea that for Shakespeare true invulnerability would require a "more radical excision of the female" (p.103) – a world of men not 'born of woman', a world in which "mothers no longer threaten because they no longer exist" (p.111) see Adelman, "Born of Woman". See also the masterful analysis of Janet Adelman in her book *Suffocating Mothers*. Traub suggests that "*Macbeth* enacts a paranoid flight from femininity. Assured that he will die only at the hands of a man 'not born of woman', the hero indulges in a fantasy of male identity uncontaminated by uterine birth" (V. Traub, "Gender and Sexuality in Shakespeare" in M. de Grazia and S. Wells, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp.129-146 at p.139). Willbern similarly suggests that *Macbeth* is "like an infant *in utero* forging his way into the world through the containing body of his source. His carved passage effects a C-section from within, incising his world from navel to neck in a simultaneous assault on and escape from the maternal matrix" (p.529). D. Willbern, "*Phantasmagoric Macbeth*", *English Literary Renaissance*, 16(3), 1986, pp.520-549.

to the “obsessive representation” of infant feeding.²²⁰ Traversing the spectrum between invisibility and over-representation, Paster suggests that cultural taboos surrounding the event of childbirth determined exactly what would constitute an appropriate and acceptable dramatic spectacle.²²¹ Childbirth was relegated “offstage”, beyond the gaze of an audience that might be offended or embarrassed by the sight of the maternal body in its most excessive and vulgar state.²²² In the imaginary world of the theatre, as in real life, the scene and site of childbirth were deemed to be *obscene*. The theatrical curtain and the door to the birthing chamber (complete with blocked keyhole) served the same function – to ensure that the grotesque and abject maternal body remained out of sight and, theoretically at least, out of mind.

That the female reproductive body was seen as a dangerous source of pollution is clear from the numerous rituals surrounding childbirth.²²³ New mothers were required to observe a lying-in period and a ritual purification or ‘churching’ before being physically accepted back into the community.²²⁴ However, it was not the

²²⁰ Paster, p.163.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ For a comprehensive consideration of these rituals see Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*; McLaren.

²²⁴ McLaren, p.55. See also Gélis, pp.171-172. According to Evenden, “[t]he ceremony of churching sprang from the ancient belief that postpartum women were ‘unclean’ and must undergo a special rite of purification to be held at the beginning of the first church service they attended after giving birth ... [usually] two to four weeks after delivery” (pp.31-32). Paster notes that “the changes in bodily flow which began

female body *per se* that represented the threat of contamination. Rather one organ “function[ed] metonymically ... for the culturally feared maternal power of women in general”.²²⁵ As both the literal site of childbirth and a symbol of fearful maternity, the womb served as a representative of the cultural terror of the female reproductive body²²⁶ and as the locus for anxieties of origin.

The womb stored and released a potentially deadly flow of blood, waste, and other poisonous or pathological fluids – “menstrual blood before pregnancy, lochial flow in the period after delivery ... leukorrheal discharge ... [and other] ‘inordinate eruption[s]’”.²²⁷ Of all female emissions, menstrual blood was the most feared and therefore the most reviled. But menstrual blood was also “the source of foetal nurture. In order to recuperate blood in this form as food, reproductive discourse ha[d] to work hard to

for the parturient woman after delivery seemed – at least in medical discourses, as in the scriptural discourses they seemed to rationalise – to signify uncleanness and thus to require ritual purification ... the filth of birth [that] washes quickly off the baby ... remain[s] a signal attribute of the newly delivered woman” (*Body Embarrassed*, p.192). Paster goes on to suggest that the churching ritual marked “the purification of the postpartum womb – the end of its postpartum flow, the complete and successful expulsion of the bodily materials stored and gradually released after birth” (p.197). Cressy emphasises the fact that the English religious churching ceremony “makes no explicit reference to the subject of purification” but he nonetheless identifies “a powerful rhetoric about unclean fluids hover[ing] behind the text” (p.200).

²²⁵ Paster, *Body Embarrassed*, p.175.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ *Id.* at p.178.

decontaminate it from its unstable social meanings”.²²⁸ Breast milk was believed to be menstrual blood made pure, “but blood whitened”.²²⁹ In contrast to the womb, the destructive maternal matrix that was representative of all that was fearful and loathsome about the female body, the nurturing “breasts with infants *at* them [were] a central icon of devoted maternity”.²³⁰

As a sure sign of maternal devotion, breastfeeding became the central focus of intense cultural debate. Breast milk was believed to transmit the essential qualities and characteristics of the mother to her child, and by extension, from *any* woman who nursed a child regardless of whether or not she was the child’s mother.²³¹ In *The Nursing of Children*, Guillimeau writes, “We may be assured, that the Milke (wherewith the child is nourish’d) ... hath ... much power to make the children like the Nurses, both in bodie and mind”.²³² Belief in the power of

²²⁸ *Id.* at p.179.

²²⁹ James Guillimeau, *The Nursing of Children. Werein is set downe, the ordering and gouernment of them, from their birth* (London, 1612), cited in R. Trubowitz, “But Blood Whitened: Nursing Mothers and Others in Early Modern Britain” in N.J. Miller and N. Yavneh, eds, *Maternal Measures: Figuring Caregiving in the Early Modern Period*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000, pp.82-101 at p.86. In the seventh century, St. Isidore of Seville described breast milk as “a white liquor” (*Etymologiae*, 11.1.77, cited in Wood, p.719).

²³⁰ Paster, *Body Embarrassed*, p.163; italics in text.

²³¹ Fildes notes that wet-nurses not only transmitted her qualities to the child through her breast milk but also “through her diet (and then through her milk); by direct contact, such as by touching her skin and inhaling her breath; [and] by imitation” (p.189). V. Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles and Babies: A History of Infant Feeding*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1986.

²³² J. Guillimeau, *The Nursing of Children* (London, 1612), cited in K. Schwarz, “Missing the Breast: Desire, Disease, and the Singular

lactational transmission contributed to the idea that mothers should nurse their own children, further supported by the view that “the mothers mylk is more conuenient and agreeable to the Infante, then anye other womans, and more doth it noryshe it”.²³³

Agnes Bowker allegedly told her friend Joan Dunmow that “her child was at the nurse at Guilsborough”.²³⁴ Dunmow’s testimony not only discredits Bowker’s assertion that she gave birth to a monster but also transforms Bowker into a monstrous mother who refuses to nurse her own child. Underlying Dunmow’s testimony is a personal comment about Bowker’s claim of monstrous birth, for both the woman who bears a monstrous child and the woman who puts her child out to nurse threaten the “hereditary

Effect of Amazons” in D. Hillman and C. Mazzio, eds, *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, New York, Routledge, 1997, pp.147-169 at p.152). The author Percy Shelley, reportedly so distraught by his wife’s failure to nurse their infant son and fearful that his child would inherit the wet-nurse’s soul, ripped open his shirt and held the child to his nipple as if to give succour - all the while hoping that milk might somehow miraculously spurt forth (B.C. Gelpi, *Shelley’s Goddess: Maternity, Language, Subjectivity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992, p.3). Paternal fears about hereditary identity are also apparent in Maria Edgeworth’s *Ennui* in which an Irish wet-nurse suckles both her own son and an English heir and switches their identities. For a comprehensive consideration of the elaborate procedures for selecting a wet-nurse see Fildes, chapters 5-7.

²³³ *The Birth of Mankynde, otherwise named the womans booke*, by Thomas Raynalde, *Phisition* (London, 1545), cited in Schwarz, p.152). Eccles notes that “authors were generally agreed that women ought to nurse their own children”. Mothers who did not nurse their children were more susceptible to diseases of the breast – seen by some to be “a judgement on these unnatural mothers” (p.97).

²³⁴ Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, p.16.

identity”²³⁵ of their children. Moreover, putting a child out to nurse also threatened the child’s well-being by “expos[ing] the infant to many hazards”.²³⁶ Indeed, Dunmow intimates that Bowker’s child may also have been exposed to the murderous wet-nurse who smothered her charges by overlaying or feeding them with venomous milk,²³⁷ a threatening figure equally as dangerous as the infanticidal mother who failed to nurse her child “for want of natural affection”.²³⁸ Just as an infant at his or her mother’s breast was a sign of maternal devotion, a mother’s refusal to nurse her child was a sure sign of maternal monstrosity. Indeed, Guillimeau believed that there was “no difference betweene a woman that refuse[d] to nurse her owne childe; and one that kill[ed] her childe”.²³⁹

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare makes these murderous and monstrous associations only too apparent. In this play Shakespeare uses the trope of feeding to elaborate the

²³⁵ Schwarz, p.153.

²³⁶ Eccles, p.97.

²³⁷ Eccles, pp.97-98. Engaging in sexual intercourse was believed to make breast milk poisonous. Wet-nurses were admonished for even fantasising about sex: “dreaming at night of that which their minds run on in the day ... they infect the milk” (J. Wolveridge, *Speculum matricis; or The expert midwife’s handmaid* (London, 1671), cited in Eccles, p.98). See also Fildes, pp.188-210.

²³⁸ Eccles, p.97.

²³⁹ J. Guillimeau, *The Nursing of Children* (London, 1612), cited in Schwarz, p.153. Purkiss has shown how the debates that raged during the early modern era about breast-feeding are still relevant today in terms of medical theories and cultural assumptions about the value of ‘natural’ as opposed to ‘frozen’ breast milk. D. Purkiss, “The Children of Medea: Euripides, Louise Woodward, and Deborah Eappen”, *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature*, 11, 1999, pp.53-64.

potential destructiveness (to herself, her family, and society) of a woman who desires power. For Shakespeare, the maternal breast is no longer a sign of maternal devotion but rather its “demonic opposite”.²⁴⁰ Hillman and Mazzio have shown how the early modern body is a “body in parts” with the breast functioning both as “metonymic icon and a site of inescapable gender difference”.²⁴¹ But Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth refuses to “play the social part to which [her] body parts confine her”.²⁴² She denies her breast to her (imaginary) child,²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Paster, *Body Embarrassed*, p.163.

²⁴¹ D. Hillman and C. Mazzio, “Introduction” in D. Hillman and C. Mazzio, eds, *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, New York, Routledge, 1997, pp.xi-xxix at p.xxi.

²⁴² Schwarz, p.148.

²⁴³ The imaginary status or otherwise of Lady Macbeth’s suckling infant is highly contested in the scholarly literature. For Bristol, the reference to a child (a son) who may or may not have lived (and other references in the play to sons who will not succeed their father (3.1.58-63; 4.3.216-219) is “an ontological contradiction” (p.33) but one that carries weight in terms of patrilineage. Bristol believes that Lady Macbeth has had a child to whom she has “given suck” but wonders “what happened to the baby [she] so lovingly nursed?” (p.22). Bristol offers several explanations including the possibility that the child died or the child was from a previous marriage (on the latter see Calef, p.535). Bristol concludes that “Lady Macbeth’s child cannot be fully accounted for, no matter how carefully the text of *Macbeth* is studied” (p.33). M.D. Bristol, “How Many Children Did She Have?” in J.J. Joughin, ed., *Philosophical Shakespeares*, London, Routledge, 2000, pp.18-33. Calef considers the theme of infanticide in *Macbeth* in an attempt to develop Freud’s theory that “Lady Macbeth was childless as punishment for the crime against the continuity of generations” (p.529). According to Calef, “[t]he powerful wish is to have a child, whom [Lady Macbeth] would so willingly destroy. (It is immaterial whether her child is a real one or a fantasy one). Lady Macbeth’s boast may be considered an expression of fantasy, the return of the repressed, as it were, a sequence of wishes. She wants a child, but is willing to destroy him. She needs and wishes to destroy him. The idea that the destruction of a child is related to the wish to have a child ... suggests that Freud’s conception of the childlessness as punishment may be incomplete. Childlessness may be considered an active crime in its own right rather than only as a punishment.

thereby assuming the role of infanticide. Shakespeare powerfully conflates the mother who refuses to provide nurturance and the mother who brutally murders her child:

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me;
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless
gums, And dash'd the brains out²⁴⁴

Lady Macbeth also denies the physicality of her own body – unsexing herself²⁴⁵ – and thereby figuratively removing the body part that symbolises gender difference. In so

Infanticide is probably the most important crime against the laws of geniture, more important than regicide” (pp.536-537). For Willbern regicide is itself a “symbolic infanticide” (“*Phantasmagoric Macbeth*”, p.524). V. Calef, “Lady Macbeth and Infanticide or ‘How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth’ Murdered?”, *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 17(2), 1969, pp.528-548. Willbern suggests that the phantasised infanticide takes us into the play’s “unconscious” with the “phantom child ... at the psychological centre of *Macbeth*’s dreamscape ... Lady Macbeth’s infant both is and is not, in a pregnant paradigm of the whole experience of *Macbeth*” (“*Phantasmagoric Macbeth*”, pp.538-539). Lady Macbeth’s phantasised infanticide alerts us not only to the “unconscious psychic disorder at its imagined maternal origin” (p.546) but to the disorder that originates in the generative mind of its dramatic creator. Indeed, as Willbern notes, “the issue of imagination was seminal. For Shakespeare himself it may have been personally acute” (p.547).

²⁴⁴ W. Shakespeare, *Macbeth* in P. Alexander, ed., *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (1951), London, Diamond Books, 1994, 1.7.54-58. Focusing on the issue of Lady Macbeth’s child(ren) and considering previous studies that seem to consider the same issue, Bristol realises that earlier critics such as L.C. Knights (*How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth? An Essay in the Theory and Practice of Shakespeare Criticism* (1933), New York, Haskell House, 1973) were not so much concerned with her child(ren) but “with an admonition that Lady Macbeth’s child[ren] must not be talked about. The forbidden action is openly talking about the possibility that a woman might be willing to murder her own children in the interest of her ambition” (p.25).

²⁴⁵ Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 1.5.40-41.

doing she aligns herself with the Amazonian mothers of myth who lopped off their maternal breasts and murdered their sons.²⁴⁶ Shakespeare aligns Lady Macbeth with the witches who offer their teats to the devil. In the fantasies of devils and familiars sucking on witches' teats, there is a complete reversal of "normal standards".²⁴⁷ In place of the breast are hidden fleshly protuberances, and in place of milk there is blood. In early modern childbirth manuals women "out of whose Breasts, issued blood, instead of

²⁴⁶ Note the symbolic resonance between breast and mother in cases of infanticide in which women convicted of child-murder had their breasts "torn out with glowing tongs". Cheesman discusses the 1626 case of a baker's daughter who was found guilty of murdering seven infants and subjected to this most torturous form of punishment (p.124). T. Cheesman, *The Shocking Ballad Picture Show: German Popular Literature and Cultural History*, Oxford, Berg, 1994.

²⁴⁷ P. Mayer, "Witches" in M. Marwick, ed., *Witchcraft and Sorcery: Selected Readings*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1982, pp.54-70 at p.56. Witches were accused of allowing the devil to suck their blood and of feeding their devilish familiars with bodily fluids. In the 1579 witchcraft trials at Windsor, "one Mother Devell" was accused of feeding her familiar – a black cat – "with milk, mingled with her own blood" (Rosen, p.86; p.136). Witches were also accused of stealing milk (N. Hayes, "Negativizing Nurture and Demonizing Domesticity: The Witch Construct in Early Modern Germany" in N.J. Miller and N. Yavneh, eds, *Maternal Measures: Figuring Caregiving in the Early Modern Period*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000, pp.179-200 at p.179. See also Barstow, *Witchcraze*, p.129. Adelman suggests that the "image of [Lady Macbeth's] murderously disrupted nurturance is the psychic equivalent of the witches' poisonous cauldron" ("Born of Woman", p.97). Poisonous insinuations and malevolent nurturance coincide in the horrific image of the murdered infant's body parts floating in the witches' cauldron, a wicked concoction made thick with the blood of a sow that has eaten her farrow (4.1.30; 4.1.65). On this point see Adelman, "Born of Woman", p.100 and P. Stallybrass, "Macbeth and Witchcraft" in S.L. Wofford, ed., *Shakespeare's Late Tragedies: A Collection of Critical Essays*, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1996, pp.104-118 at pp.111-112. Lederer notes that both the sow and the cat often eat their litter – the pig being a personification/companion of the Great Goddess; the cat a personification/familiar of the witch (W. Lederer, *The Fear of Women*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968, p.63.

milk”²⁴⁸ were, like the witch, conceived of as unnatural and anti-maternal. Feeding may be a “sign of connection” and the maternal breast a “sign of devotion” but they “threaten always to become grotesque”.²⁴⁹ Indeed, the close relationship between menstrual blood and breast milk also implies an equally close relationship between maternity and monstrosity. As in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, the nurturing mother always represents a threat, the breast being a site of potential excess and danger, “signifying beyond the logic of social structures”.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ *Dr. Chamberlain’s midwives practice* (1668), cited in Eccles, p.51. For Paré, the “spectacle of the child’s mouth so imbrued and besmeared with blood” was too “grievous and terrible” to even imagine (cited in Eccles, p.51). In her discussion of Theodore Sturgeon’s ‘vampire’ novel *Some of Your Blood*, Gordon shows how in the literary imagination the vampire’s blood-lust is engendered by nursing – “George, the blood-drinking vampire of the novel [is] a suckling babe [re-enacting] ... the preoedipal pleasures of sucking, biting, and symbiosis” (pp.48-49). The child literally derives its life-blood from the mother’s milk and his monstrousness. In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare invokes and inverts the image of the blood-sucking infant who desires to consume the entire contents of the maternal body (for more on this idea see chapter One of my work) – “the babe that milks me”. The mother becomes a vampiric monster – a predator hungering for power and prey. Shakespeare seems to imply that a woman’s desire for power is deadly – the mother threatens to ‘suck’ the very life from her child. J. Gordon, “Sharper Than a Serpent’s Tooth: The Vampire in Search of Its Mother” in J. Gordon and V. Hollinger, eds, *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, pp.45-55. On the monstrous child and the idea that the child inherits ‘original sin’ in the contemporary horror genre see J. Petley, “The Monstrous Child” in M. Aaron, ed., *The Body’s Perilous Pleasures: Dangerous Desires in Contemporary Culture*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1999, pp.87-107.

²⁴⁹ Schwarz, p.156. According to Roper, “fantasies of witchcraft dr[ew] on ... visions of a body ... in which liquids within the body became poisonous, killing instead of nourishing. The most common form such fantasies took was to cluster around the ideas of feeding and nourishment of babies” (p.25).

²⁵⁰ Hillman and Mazzio, p.xxi.

Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* is also concerned with the feeding mother. In this play Shakespeare juxtaposes the nurturing mother who feeds and sustains her children with the devouring mother who *feeds on* her children.²⁵¹ Shakespeare pits the nurturing maternal breast against the deadly and destructive womb, the maternal matrix that swallows its progeny. The theme of consumption overwhelms the play, hammering home the frailty of a human nature that can so easily be consumed by desire.

The play revolves around the rape of Lavinia by the sons of the Goth, Queen Tamora. In this particularly gruesome version, both Lavinia's tongue and arms are severed to prevent her from telling or weaving her tale. In his (re)telling of her story, Shakespeare inverts the myth of Philomela and her sister Procne²⁵² to establish a

²⁵¹ Willbern considers the image of the devouring mother in his essay "Rape and Revenge in *Titus Andronicus*", *English Literary Renaissance*, 8(2), 1978, pp.159-182. For psychoanalytic consideration of food and cannibalism, the critical association between devouring and being devoured and male anxieties about dependency on the maternal body in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* see J. Adelman, "Anger's My Meat: Feeding, Dependency, and Aggression in *Coriolanus*" in D. Bevington and J.L. Halio, eds, *Shakespeare: Pattern of Excelling Nature*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 1978, pp.108-124. For issues of self-consumption see S. Cavell, "Who Does the Wolf Love?: Reading *Coriolanus*" in S. Greenblatt, ed., *Representing the English Renaissance*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988, pp.197-216. In both *Titus Andronicus* and *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare emphasises the horror of unnatural consumption by associating the mother who eats her child with the motherland that "like an unnatural dam / Should ... eat up her own / ... deserved children" (*Coriolanus*, 3.1.290-292). Cavell develops this point at pp.202-204.

²⁵² Shakespeare reworks the myth of Philomela and Procne as it appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Ovid's tale begins with a war between King Pandion of Athens and King Labdacus of Thebes. In

order to defeat his enemy, Pandion seeks assistance from the Thracian Tereus. As a token of gratitude, Pandion betrothes his daughter Procne to Tereus. At first, the couple are extremely happy and Procne bears a son called Itys. When Procne asks Tereus to bring her sister Philomela to Thrace, he falls in love with Philomela. Failing to persuade Philomela to fall in love with him, Tereus acts on his desire and rapes Philomela who vows to 'speak the unspeakable': "If I should have the chance, I would go where people throng and tell it ... I will fill the woods with my story and move the very rocks to pity. The air of heaven shall hear it, and, if there is any god in heaven, she shall hear it too" (2. 545-549). Aware of the power of Philomela to implicate him as the perpetrator of such a horrendous crime, Tereus cuts out her tongue and imprisons her in the woods to ensure her silence. Tereus lies to Procne, pretending that Philomela died on the return voyage. Tereus believes that Philomela will never be able to recount her horrific tale, but she manages to weave her story into a tapestry – which Sophocles called "the voice of the shuttle" [for more see G.H. Hartman, *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays 1958-1970*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1970, pp.337-355; P.K. Joplin, "The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours", *Stanford Literature Review*, 6(1), 1984, pp.25-53] – and sends it to her sister: "She hangs a Thracian web on her loom, and skilfully weaving purple signs on a white background, she thus tells the story of her wrongs. This web, when completed, she gives to her one attendant ... [t]he old woman, as she was bid, takes the web to Procne, not knowing what she bears in it" (F.J. Miller, ed. and trans., *Ovid: Metamorphoses* (2 vols), London, Heinemann, 1916, 6.576-582). Procne rescues Philomela and avenges her sister by murdering her son Itys, dismembering his body, roasting and boiling his corpse, and serving the dead child to Tereus as a stew for dinner. The slaughter of Itys by his mother overwhelms the Ovidian narrative, the gory details punctuated only by the boy's fearful cries: "while the boy stretched out pleading hands as he saw his fate, and screamed, 'Mother! mother!' and sought to throw his arms around her neck, Procne smote him with a knife between breast and side – and with no change of face". Philomela takes part in the dismemberment of Itys, his "body still warm and quivering with life. Part bubbles in brazen kettles, part sputters on spits; while the whole room drips with gore" 92.638-646. Burns notes the violent corporeality linking the two halves of Ovid's tale. In the first half, Tereus "covet[s], Pygmalion-like, the fetishized and silenced female beauty ... Philomela [is] reduce[d] to a series of fragmented body parts" (p.242). The second half of the tale "refocus[es] the male gaze from the metaphorically and literally dismembered female body to a dismembered male one" (Burns, p.242). For Shakespeare's other sources see H. James, "Cultural Disintegration in *Titus Andronicus*: Mutilating Titus, Vergil, and Rome" in J. Redmond, ed., *Themes in Drama*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp.123-140. Shakespeare also appropriates the Philomela myth in several of his other plays (*Cymbeline* and *The Rape of Lucrece*) and sonnets. For further discussion of these works see J. Newman, "And Let Mild

relationship between the powerless Philomela whose tongue (a bodily part associated both with speaking and eating) is cut off by her violator to ensure her silence and the powerful Queen whose actions are dictated by her appetitive hunger.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Procne murders her son to avenge her sister's rape and mutilation.²⁵³ Procne is first

Women to Him Lose Their Mildness: Philomela, Female Violence, and Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 45(3), 1994, pp.304-326; K. Maus, "Taking Tropes Seriously: Language and Violence in Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 37, 1986, pp.66-82; L. Bromley, "Lucrece's Re-Creation", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 34, 1983, pp.200-211. For more on the myth of Philomela and Procne see J. Fontenrose, "The Sorrows of Ino and Procne", *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 79, 1948, pp.125-167. On Chaucer's reworking of Ovid see J.L. Lowes, "Chaucer and the *Ovide Moralisé*", *PMLA*, 33, 1918, pp.302-325. On the threat to patrilineage see P. McCracken, "Engendering Sacrifice: Blood, Lineage, and Infanticide in Old French Literature", *Speculum*, 77(1), 2002, pp.55-75. See also Young for the haunting figure of Philomela in contemporary rape trials. Young suggests that "[i]t is the accusation of Philomela that the sovereignty of law fears and will not hear. Closing its dirty ears, law is deaf to the accusations of rape, and silences woman, replacing her tongue with the pathos of wordless song, inarticulate sound, non-language, the pain of alterity" (p.465). A. Young, "The Waste Land of the law, The Wordless Song of the Rape Victim", *Melbourne University Law Review*, 22, 1998, pp.442-465.

²⁵³ In Ovid's tale, Procne's infanticide is motivated purely by vengeance. Joplin notes that in ancient Greek society, the myth was used as a warning about "the danger of [women's] capacity for revenge" (p.51). Newlands traces Procne's metamorphosis from *blandita viro*, good wife and dutiful daughter, to *terribilis*, a wild and barbaric woman – a powerful woman who transgresses the laws of gender and state (pp.194-195). "[P]ower in a woman is dangerous and destructive [because it] ... threaten[s] to subvert male authority" (p.205), writes Newlands, and Ovid's tale "illustrate[s] how society both denies a woman power and rejects her when she uses it" (p.208). C.E. Newlands, "The Metamorphosis of Ovid's Medea" in J.J. Clauss and S.I. Johnston, eds, *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1997, pp.178-208. Nineteenth-century author Charles Algernon Swinburne reworks the myth of Procne and

compared to a Dionysian maenad²⁵⁴ and then to a tigress as she drags her son to his death: “immediately she dragged Itys away, like a tigress by the Ganges dragging / through the impenetrable woods an unweaned fawn”.²⁵⁵ The account of a helpless Itys being led like a lamb to the slaughter is a chilling repetition of her sister’s

Philomela in his poem ‘Itylus’, a work consumed with the force of female vengeance. In his version of the myth, Swinburne associates female sorority and infanticide to reveal their ‘unnaturalness’. Swinburne uses the nightingale’s song [in the Greek tradition Philomela is transformed into a swallow, Procne into a nightingale, and Tereus into a hoopoe; in the Roman version Philomela is the nightingale] to criticise Procne’s actions and her lack of remorse, and uses the haunting cry of the murdered child as a stark reminder of what may happen when women join forces against their male oppressors. C.A. Swinburne, “Itylus” in *Collected Poetical Works*, New York, Harper, 1924, pp.54-56. On Virginia Woolf’s novel *Between the Acts* (1941) (London, Hogarth Press, 1947) as a rejection of Swinburne see J. Marcus, “Liberty, Sorority, Misogyny”, pp.60-97; J. Marcus, “Still Practice, A/Wrested Alphabet: Toward a Feminist Aesthetic”, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 3(1-2), 1984, pp.79-97. For a potent feminist consideration of an anonymous Old French *Philomena* and the poetics of infanticide and female vengeance see Burns, pp.115-150. For discussion of the nightingale as a recurrent image in medieval literature see W. Pfeffer, *The Change of Philomel: The Nightingale in Medieval Literature*, New York, Peter Lang, 1985. On the nightingale as murderous mother in Homer’s *Odyssey* and for repeated references to the murder of Itys in Greek tragedy see N. Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning* (1990), trans. C. Pache, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1998, pp.57-65.

²⁵⁴ Curley suggests that Euripides’ *The Bacchae* was an important influence for Ovid. D. Curley, “Ovid, Met. 6.640: A Dialogue Between Mother and Son”, *Classical Quarterly*, 47(1), 1997, pp.320-322. As we saw in Chapter Three, in Euripides’ play Pentheus is murdered by his mother Agave in her maenadic frenzy. Curley notes the similarities between the murders of Pentheus and Itys – “Pentheus twice cries to his mother Agave ... and both mothers ignore their sons’ pleas” (p.320). Joplin also notes “a likeness between Procne as unnatural mother and Agave” (p.45, note 35). Both Pentheus and Itys are also dismembered by their mothers – Pentheus is torn to pieces while Itys is butchered and decapitated. Both mothers are also assisted by their literal and figurative sisters – Procne by her flesh-and-blood sister Philomela who hurls the decapitated head of Itys at his father; Agave by her fellow maenads whose ‘sisterhood’ is confirmed by their shared spilling of blood.

²⁵⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 6.636-637 (trans. Newlands, p.194).

helplessness at the hands of her predatory rapist, a “wolf”²⁵⁶ dragging a “dove”²⁵⁷ into the dark forest.

In *Titus Andronicus* the sexual consumption and violation of women is intrinsically related to the “male wish for independence from the maternal body”.²⁵⁸ Prior to her defilement, Lavinia is simultaneously virgin and mother. According to Willbern, “Lavinia is traditionally the mother of Rome”²⁵⁹ for in Virgil’s epic poem, the *Aeneid*, the hero Aeneas married the virgin bride Lavinia, only daughter of King Latinus, and founded the Roman race in a city named in honour of his new wife. Willbern associates mother and motherland, suggesting that Lavinia is a “symbolic personification of female Rome”.²⁶⁰ Their fates are linked – both virgin mother and motherland are subject to violent assault by their invaders.²⁶¹ At the heart of the motherland lies the Andronici tomb, filled with the nation’s sons who fought in her honour. The physical structure of the tomb is also “central to the unconscious action of *Titus Andronicus*”,²⁶² for in the association between tomb and womb the mother(land) shifts from nurturer to destroyer. The loving mother(land) who provides affection and looks after her sons deserves protection.²⁶³ The deadly

²⁵⁶ *Id.* at lines 520-526.

²⁵⁷ *Id.* at lines 527-530.

²⁵⁸ Gatens, “Corporeal representation”, p.80.

²⁵⁹ Willbern, “Rape and Revenge”, p.162 note 7.

²⁶⁰ *Id.* at p.164.

²⁶¹ *Id.* at p.163.

²⁶² *Id.* at p.162.

²⁶³ Willbern emphasises the mother/son relationship between Rome and the Andronici (p.161).

mother(land) who turns against them must be destroyed at all costs.²⁶⁴

Fantasies of matricide and maternal violation are displaced onto the figure of Lavinia who stands, brutalised and mutilated, before her father - “a fearful sight of blood and death”.²⁶⁵ When her brother Lucius demands that she tell him “who hath done this deed?”²⁶⁶ Lavinia’s body does not produce words, only blood. In her masterful consideration of the fluidity of the female body, Paster suggests that Lavinia’s endlessly bleeding body, likened to “a bubbling fountain”, is a sign of her lost virginity.²⁶⁷ The blood issuing from Lavinia’s mouth represents the hymeneal blood of defloration that the audience must

²⁶⁴ As Willbern notes, “[t]he Andronici are defenders of their city’s honour – that is, until she spurns them. Then ... they vow revenge” (p.162). Keane has considered the fantasy of the motherland as devourer in the work of William Butler Yeats and James Joyce. Keane associates the mother who threatens national stability with the motherland that “ingests life” (p.v). Keane suggests that for both authors, the figure at the centre of Irish mythology is the devouring mother – Mother Ireland as “the old sow that eats her farrow” and “blood-exacting queen” (pp.ix; xii). For Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Ireland is not “a land flowing with milk and honey” (p.126) but rather a “corpsechewer” (p.81) that “demand[s] blood” (p.77). P.J. Keane, *Terrible Beauty: Yeats, Joyce, Ireland, and the Myth of the Devouring Female*, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1988. See also K. Cremin, “The Hungriest Narrative: Devouring Mother Ireland” in J. Arnold, K. Davies and S. Ditchfield, eds, *History and Heritage: Consuming the Past in Contemporary Culture*, Dorset, Donhead, 1998, pp.141-153; C. Moloney, “The Hags of *Ulysses*: The ‘Poor Old Woman’, Cathleen Ni Houlihan, and the Phallic Mother”, *James Joyce Quarterly*, 34, 1996, pp.103-120.

²⁶⁵ W. Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus* in P. Alexander, ed., *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (1951), London, Diamond Books, 1994, 2.3.216.

²⁶⁶ *Titus Andronicus*, 3.1.87.

²⁶⁷ Paster, *Body Embarrassed*, p.98.

imagine spurts forth from the unsealed body of the virgin. The dark forest into which Lavinia is dragged by her rapists is the site/sight of penetration, for the coded descriptions of the forest linguistically re-enact Lavinia's rape in a way that she cannot. Martius speaks of the "subtle hole ... / Whose mouth is covered with rude-growing briars, / Upon whose leaves are drops of new-shed blood / As fresh as morning dew distill'd on flowers".²⁶⁸ Lavinia's rape transforms her virginal milk²⁶⁹ into blood, an anti-maternal flow that figures throughout the play as an emblem of death and destruction.

Lavinia is replaced by Tamora, both in the hearts and minds of the Roman people and Saturninus, who takes her as his new bride.²⁷⁰ As a "mother to his youth",²⁷¹ Tamora will fulfil her husband's desires like a "loving nurse"²⁷² satisfies the hunger of the infant suckling at her breast. But, like the nurse whose milk becomes poisonous, Tamora's (maternal) love is deadly. As in *Macbeth*, the maternal breast is not a sign of maternal devotion but of maternal malignance. The mother's breast is the very source of maternal evil, an evil that is passed

²⁶⁸ *Titus Andronicus*, 2.3.198-201.

²⁶⁹ In her study of early modern gynaecology, Eccles notes that "women who had never been pregnant could have milk in their breasts ... marriageable virgins ... full of juice and seed ... had as much milk as nurses" (p.53). Paster locates in the image of "milk-laden virgins" the threatening fluidity of the female body that "must often have seemed ready to overflow" ("Leaky Vessels", p.50).

²⁷⁰ Willbern, "Rape and Revenge", p.164.

²⁷¹ *Titus Andronicus*, 1.1.332.

²⁷² *Ibid.*

on to her children. As Lavinia tells her rapists, “the milk thou suck’st from her [Tamora] did turn to marble; / Even at thy teat thou hadst thy tyranny”.²⁷³ Saturninus’s desire for the maternal affection of the mother(land) is fulfilled by Rome’s malevolent symbolic personification, Tamora.²⁷⁴ When Tamora opens herself sexually to Saturninus, she fulfils his “wished-for opening of the [city] gates”, a boyish fantasy of “[re]entry into the mother’s body”.²⁷⁵ But the mother who entices men with the “nurse’s song / Of lullaby”,²⁷⁶ a Siren song, is a murderous mother – a “dangerous, seductive, threatening mother, *from* whom one needs protection”.²⁷⁷

Tamora is both a deadly sexual predator and Amazonian mother.²⁷⁸ She has an affair with Aaron the Moor. When she bears his illegitimate child, a black baby who would be “stately Rome’s disgrace”²⁷⁹ and its mother’s shame,²⁸⁰ Tamora orders her lover to murder the infant:

²⁷³ *Titus Andronicus*, 2.3.144-145.

²⁷⁴ Willbern, “Rape and Revenge”, pp.161; 164.

²⁷⁵ *Id.* at p.161.

²⁷⁶ *Titus Andronicus*, 2.3.28-29.

²⁷⁷ Willbern, “Rape and Revenge”, p.164.

²⁷⁸ For consideration of the mythic Amazons in Shakespeare’s plays see G.B. Jackson, “Topical Ideology: Witches, Amazons, and Shakespeare’s Joan of Arc” in D. Barker and I. Kamps, eds, *Shakespeare and Gender: A History*, London, Verso, 1995, pp.142-167.

²⁷⁹ *Titus Andronicus*, 4.2.60.

²⁸⁰ We are reminded of Hippocrates’ story of a princess who bore a black child and was accused of adultery. The princess denied any sexual misdemeanour, contending that a picture of a Moor hung above her marital bed during conception and the image had impressed itself upon the foetus (Braidotti, “Signs of Wonder”, p.145).

Chiron: It shall not live.
Aaron: It shall not die.
Nurse: Aaron, it must; the mother wills it so.²⁸¹

In defiance of the murderous mother, Aaron vows to raise his son “to be a warrior”.²⁸² As in the myth of the Amazons, Tamora’s son escapes the infanticidal intentions of his mother with the help of his father.

In *Titus Andronicus*, the mother who feasts on the bodies of her ‘sons’ sexually also hungers for infant flesh.²⁸³ Queen Tamora, “that ravenous tiger”,²⁸⁴ consumes the fruits of her labour:

Why, there they are, both baked in this pie,
Whereof their mother daintily hath fed,
Eating the flesh that she herself hath bred.²⁸⁵

According to Eaton, “Tamora is perceived as ‘bestly’ in her actions ... analogous to ... a great ‘swallowing womb’, a devouring mother”.²⁸⁶ The womb is a fantasised threat

²⁸¹ *Titus Andronicus*, 4.2.80-82.

²⁸² *Id.* at 4.2.178-181.

²⁸³ Willbern reminds us that “[b]eing eaten by the mother symbolises incestuous intercourse (entry into the mother’s body) as well as death by dismemberment and dissolution” (p.179).

²⁸⁴ *Titus Andronicus*, 5.3.195. Compare Euripides’ Medea who is similarly described as a tigress. In both cases, monstrous mothers metaphorically transform into savage animals to represent the bestial and horrifying nature of their actions. For further discussion of Euripides’ Medea see Chapters Three and Six.

²⁸⁵ *Titus Andronicus*, 5.3.60-62.

²⁸⁶ S. Eaton, “A Woman of Letters: Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*” in S.N. Garner and M. Sprengnether, eds, *Shakespearean Tragedy and*

to masculinity in that it not only devours male progeny but the phallus – the organ with which men reproduce themselves. As Irigaray suggests:

[t]he womb is never thought of as the primal place in which we become body. Therefore for many men it is variously phantasized as a devouring mouth, as a sewer in which anal and urethral waste is poured, as a threat to the phallus or, at best, as a reproductive organ. And the womb is mistaken for all the female sexual organs since no valid representations of female sexuality exist. The only words we have for women's sexuality are filthy, mutilating words. Consequently, the feelings associated with women's sexuality will be anxiety, phobia, disgust, and the haunting fear of castration.²⁸⁷

Clearly for Shakespeare the womb is a tremendous source of anxiety, that "abhorred pit"²⁸⁸ that threatens to undo men. The pit that lies both at the textual and psychological heart of the play is the maternal womb/tomb, a fearful infantile phantasy brought to dramatic consciousness through the mother who murders and devours her children and the motherland that consumes their bloody corpses. Titus' plea to the motherland to "[I]et [his] tears staunch [her] dry appetite"

Gender, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1996, pp.54-74 at p.61.

²⁸⁷ Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, pp.16-17.

²⁸⁸ *Titus Andronicus*, 2.3.98.

in place of his “dear sons’ blood”²⁸⁹ is also a plea to the devouring mother. It is only at the end of the play that we realise the depth of their symbolic relationship, for it is through the destruction of the deadly mother that the motherland is saved. From the ashes of an “[e]vil Rome” rises a nurturing “maternal city”²⁹⁰ whose bosom reigns supreme as the vital life source of its hero-sons who would fight for her (honour and affection) to the death.

Reproductive demons

*From a male point of view, women who reject the submissive silences of domesticity have been seen as terrible objects – Gorgons, Sirens, Scyllas, serpent-Lamias, Mothers of death or Goddesses of the night*²⁹¹

*Lilith the satanic baby killer ... a woman-monster of cosmic proportions*²⁹²

Violence towards children by female caregivers, including mothers, grandmothers, stepmothers, midwives, and wet-nurses is a recurrent theme in early modern popular printed forms such as ballads, chapbooks, broadsides, and pamphlets.²⁹³ The story of Agnes Bowker was the

²⁸⁹ *Id.* at 3.1.14; 3.1.22.

²⁹⁰ Willbern, “Rape and Revenge”, p.180.

²⁹¹ Gilbert and Gubar, p.79.

²⁹² Aschkenasy, p.185.

²⁹³ At the time of Bowker’s case ballads were the most widely available form of cheap print (T. Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*

subject of a pamphlet (now lost) that was reportedly of tremendous concern to the church officials charged with trying her case.²⁹⁴ According to Watt, pamphlets dealt with

1550-1640, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p.259). Cressy suggests that Bowker's narrative "[t]hrough structured in answer to legal interrogatories, and paced by the procedures of the court ... has elements in common with sensational folk-tales and ballads" (*Travesties and Transgressions*, p.18). Cressy even goes so far as to suggest that Bowker may have modelled her own story on popular morality tales that closely resemble her narrative both in form and content. For more on the murderousness of female care-givers in early modern popular culture see T. Bowers, *The Politics of Motherhood: British Writing and Culture 1680-1760*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1996; D. Atkinson, "History, Symbol, and Meaning in 'The Cruel Mother'", *Folk Music Journal*, 6(3), 1992, pp.359-380; D. Symonds, *Weep Not For Me: Women, Ballads, and Infanticide in Early Modern Scotland*, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997; Travitsky, "A Pittillesse Mother?", pp.55-80; S.C. Staub, "Representations of Child Murder in the Street Literature of Seventeenth-Century England" in N.J. Miller and N. Yavneh, eds, *Maternal Measures: Figuring Caregiving in the Early Modern Period*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000, pp.333-347.

²⁹⁴ On this point see Cressy who notes that the Archdeacon's commissary was especially concerned because he believed that the pamphlet "falsely reporteth the matter" (p.20). See also N. Jones, *The Birth of the Elizabethan Age: England in the 1560s*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1993. Fox suggests that political insecurities meant that officials became overly anxious about "the effects of idle reports and subversive comment among the people [who] ... were credulous and gullible ..., ever liable to misunderstand the truth of things, prone to distort them still further, hasty to judge and quick to criticise their betters" (p.599). A. Fox, "Rumour, News and Popular Political Opinion in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England", *Historical Journal*, 40(3), 1997, pp.597-620. See also Loftis who uses the fictional trial in William Congreve's play *The Way of the World* to highlight the apparent disjuncture between the public "popularity and appeal of descriptions of lower-class, criminal behaviour" (p.563) and the threat of criminality and its pervasive presence in cultural discourse to the upper echelons of British society. Included in Loftis's discussion is the actual case of accused infanticide Ann Halle who denied both the murder and illegitimacy of her child, claiming she was married. The Stuart Bastard Neonaticide Act 1624 made it an offence for "lewd mothers" to conceal the death of their illegitimate children. The statute, designed to "Prevent the Destroying and Murthering of Bastard Children" was, as McDonagh describes it, "exceptional" (p.240) because it placed a presumption of guilt on an unmarried woman unless she could present a witness to testify that the child was stillborn, demonstrate the preparation of child-bed linen, told someone

about her pregnancy, or consulted a midwife (on the 'benefit-of-linen' and 'want-of-help' defences see Hoffer and Hull, pp.68-71). Since most women bore bastards in secret they were typically unable to produce witnesses to support their claims. The result was that "women were convicted of infanticide based on nothing more than circumstantial evidence of dead children found in privies or closets, or testimony by witnesses who noticed maternal weight loss, illness, [or soiled and] bloody linen" (Francus, p.133). In her study of female defendants in early modern trials Doody refers to the case of accused child-murderess Martha Shackleton, "indicted for the Murder of her Female Bastard Child, by casting and throwing it into a Privy ..." (p.292). The infant's corpse was found on her employer's property. The court heard from Shackleton's employer and the doctor who examined the corpse, both of whom provided incriminating testimony. According to Doody, Shackleton only utters a few words at her trial [women are spoken about and spoken for but never appear to speak for themselves. Backhouse suggests that women are "noteworthy mainly for their silence throughout lengthy legal proceedings" (p.3) and when they do speak, Doody notes, they "must give tongue in ways deemed appropriate ... within a structure dictated by the pre-existent court drama" (p.287)] - "My Husband is at Sea" - and it is her claim of marriage that leads to her exoneration. Juries were reluctant to find married women guilty of child-murder so despite a lack of proof as to her marital status, Shackleton's "assertion of marriage evidently gives the Jury the excuse it wants [and needs] to acquit her" (p.293). Both Shackleton and Halle claim that they are married and therefore do not fall within the ambit of the draconian law. Although they are afforded little opportunity to speak on their own behalf, these women are well aware of exactly what needs to be said - the type of tale that must be told if they are to escape the death penalty for concealing and thereby presumptively murdering their newborn infants. Shackleton and Halle are well aware of "the powerful weapon of words" (Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, p.26) in a world in which men "told the stories and framed the cultural precepts" (Frye, p.v). Both the severity of the law and the limited role of women in the "structured (or even prefabricated) scenario" (Doody, p.287) of the courtroom "contributed to the disempowering of women in [early modern] culture ... [and] reinforced patriarchal power over the bodies and voices of women" (Loftis, p.574). J.E. Loftis, "Congreve's *Way of the World* and Popular Criminal Literature", *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 36(3), 1996, pp.561-578. J. McDonagh, "Child-Murder Narratives in George Eliot's *Adam Bede*: Embedded Histories and Fictional Representation", *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 56(2), 2001, pp.228-259; M. Francus, "Monstrous Mothers, Monstrous Societies: Infanticide and the Rule of Law in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century England", *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 21(2), 1997, pp.133-156. M.A. Doody, "Voices of Record: Women as Witnesses and Defendants in the *Old Bailey Sessions Papers*" in S.S. Heinzelman and Z.B. Wiseman, eds, *Representing Women: Law, Literature, and Feminism*, Durham, North Carolina, Duke University

issues of current interest – “popular news” such as monstrous births, witchcraft, and child-murder – and were available to “anyone who could afford the penny price”.²⁹⁵ The primary appeal of pamphlets was their capacity to shock and titillate”.²⁹⁶ Pamphleteers typically linger over gruesome details so as to satisfy a public desire for the “bizarre, bloody and grotesque”.²⁹⁷

In a 1606 pamphlet, *The Most Cruell and Bloody Murther Committed by an Innkeepers Wife called Annis Dell*, the child-murderess is compared to a murdering midwife who “rip[s] [a pregnant woman] up the belly ... truly a murderess that [brings] an abortive babe to the world”.²⁹⁸ Referred to as a “whore”, “bloody tigress”, “she-wolf” and “more than monstrous woman”,²⁹⁹ Annis the innkeeper’s wife sadistically cuts out the tongue of her child victim: “this bloody tigress, to make herself more monstrous, bade [the little girl] put out her tongue that she might feel it

Press, 1994, pp.287-308; C. Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth-Century Canada*, Toronto, Women’s Press, 1991. J.S. Frye, *Living Stories, Telling Lives: Women and the Novel in Contemporary Experience*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1986. On evidence of marriage as a means of escaping prosecution under the 1624 statute see Jackson, *New-Born Child Murder*, Chapter 2. On the operation of the 1624 statute until its repeal in 1803 see J.R. Dickinson and J.A. Sharpe, “Infanticide in Early Modern England: The Court of Great Sessions at Chester, 1650-1800” in M. Jackson, ed., *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment, 1550-2000*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2002, pp.35-51.

²⁹⁵ Watt, p.265.

²⁹⁶ Lake, pp.258-259.

²⁹⁷ *Id.* at p.259.

²⁹⁸ Anonymous pamphlet cited in Lake, p.259. See also Gibson, pp.151-152.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

... she presently caught it by the end, and with her thumb wresting open the child's jaws to the widest she could stretch them, she cut it out even by the root".³⁰⁰

In British folklore, the murderous ghost of Black Annis was said to haunt Leicestershire, the very place where Agnes Bowker resided. Allardice describes Black Annis as a "hideous, cannibalistic spirit with blue face, single piercing eye and iron claws ... [that] caught children and devoured them".³⁰¹ Legend has it that Black Annis hid in a cave from which she would "leap out, and catch stray children ... she only went out when it was dark [and] ... grabbed babies out of window[s]".³⁰² In *The Fear of Women* Lederer tells us that Black Annis consumed infants and hung their skins on an oak tree.³⁰³ Black Annis is a type of reproductive demon. She is associated with the maternal child-killing demons that dominate the mythology of the ancient Greeks.

In her comprehensive study, Johnston suggests that myths of child-killing or reproductive demons developed out of a folkloric paradigm that was widespread in ancient

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.* Compare the actual case of a French servant who "introduced a knife into the mouth of [her] child and cut off the tongue and the lower jaw exactly as a housewife does to slaughter the poultry" (Leboutte, p.174).

³⁰¹ P. Allardice, *Myths, Gods and Fantasy*, California, ABC-Clio, 1991, p.37.

³⁰² D. Einersen and I. Nixon, "Virago and Lamia: Woman as Monster", *Angles on the English Speaking World*, 2, 1987, pp.3-29 at p.5.

³⁰³ W. Lederer, *The Fear of Women*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968, p.62.

Greece.³⁰⁴ These dreadful phantasmic creatures, like the monsters of contemporary story-telling, were typically invoked by mothers to ‘encourage’ obedience in their children.³⁰⁵ But adults also feared reproductive demons, using amulets and spells to ensure the safety of children and parturient women.³⁰⁶ Large statues (*apotropaia*) were also erected as a form of protection against these demons.³⁰⁷

The infanticidal *phasma* is most typically the spectral apparition of a mother whose own children have been murdered or who “failed to bear and nurture children successfully”.³⁰⁸ Poine is the avenging ghost of the mother Psamanthe whose children were mauled by dogs. Poine assumes the shape of a woman with serpentine features, with talons on her hands and a head of serpents like the Gorgon Medusa. Poine steals infants from their mothers’ arms and feeds on them.³⁰⁹ Lamia’s babies were each murdered by Hera and she was transformed into a

³⁰⁴ S.I. Johnston, “Corinthian Medea and the Cult of Hera Akraia” in J.J. Clauss and S.I. Johnston, eds, *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1997, pp.44-70 at p.45.

³⁰⁵ S.I. Johnston, “Defining the Dreadful: Remarks on the Greek Child-Killing Demon” in M. Meyer and P. Mirecki, eds, *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1995, pp.361-387 at p.361.

³⁰⁶ *Id.* at p.60.

³⁰⁷ *Id.* at p.59.

³⁰⁸ Johnston, “Defining the Dreadful”, p.368.

³⁰⁹ J. Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins* (1959), New York, Biblo & Tannen, 1974, p.104.

monstrous child-killing creature with a woman's head, serpent's body and lion's tail.³¹⁰

According to Johnston, these murderous *phasma* were also believed to be "the souls of women who died as virgins, in childbirth or shortly after the deaths of their own children".³¹¹ The Mesopotamians believed that child-killing demons were incarnations of stillborn infants (*kubu*).³¹² Other ancient child-killing demons include Mormo (who slaughtered and devoured her own children in a mad rage³¹³), Empousa,³¹⁴ and Gello (a snatcher of new-born and unborn children³¹⁵).

The Sumerian demon Ardat Lili or Lilitu ('night demon') is related to the Classical Lamia and is a prototype of the Biblical Lilith.³¹⁶ In terracotta artwork from the period, Lilitu

³¹⁰ D. West, "Gello and Lamia: Two Hellenic Daemons of Semitic Origin", *Ugarit-Forschung*, 23, 1991, pp.361-368 at p.366.

³¹¹ Johnston, "Corinthian Medea", p.57.

³¹² J.A. Scurlock, "Baby-Snatching Demons, Restless Souls and the Dangers of Childbirth: Medico-Magical Means of Dealing with Some of the Perils of Motherhood in Ancient Mesopotamia", *Incognita*, 2, 1991, pp.135-183 at p.150.

³¹³ Johnston, p.58.

³¹⁴ Brown notes that "Empousa is a creature of the popular imagination, a fearful monster ... [with] the ability to change shape ... usually a hag-like creature" (p.42). C. Brown, "Empousa, Dionysus and the Mysteries: Aristophanes, *Frogs* 285ff.", *Classical Quarterly*, 41(1), 1991, pp.41-50.

³¹⁵ West, p.362.

³¹⁶ Russell, *A History of Witchcraft*, p.29; Scurlock, pp.151-152; F.M. Pereira, *Lilith: The Edge of Forever*, Las Colinas, Texas, Ide House, 1998. According to Rudwin, the name Lilith "was originally ... a general noun which signified 'a daughter of the night' and designated any kind of monster in the form of a woman who exercised her power for evil during darkness" (p.95). M. Rudwin, *The Devil in Legend and Literature* (1931), New York, AMS Press, 1970.

is depicted with a female body and possessing wings, taloned feet and hands, and is flanked on either side by owls and lions.³¹⁷ Unable to bear children, Lilitu seduces men and murders infants.³¹⁸ Lilitu was one of many female demons feared in the ancient world including Lamashtu who induced infant deaths by suckling babies with poisonous breast milk.³¹⁹

According to biblical Apocrypha, Lilith was Adam's first wife.³²⁰ Both were created from the earth – Adam from dust and Lilith from sediment – and thus essentially equal.³²¹ But Adam insisted that Lilith lie beneath him during intercourse.³²² Refusing to succumb to Adam's demand, Lilith fled to the Red Sea where she “engaged in unbridled promiscuity and bore a demonic brood of more than one hundred a day”.³²³ God sent three angels – Senoy, Sansenoy, and Semangelof – to find Lilith and ‘persuade’ her to return to Adam.³²⁴ The angels threatened to drown Lilith but no amount of ‘persuading’

³¹⁷ See, for example, a terracotta plaque reproduced in Russell, p30; G. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, New York, Quadrangle, 1974, p.356.

³¹⁸ *Id.* at p.29.

³¹⁹ West, p.365; Scurlock, pp.153-158.

³²⁰ Rudwin, p.95; R. Patai, “Lilith”, *Journal of American Folklore*, 77, 1964, pp.295-314 at p.296. Lilith appears in the Pseudepigraphic writings *The Testament of Solomon*, *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, *The Book of Raziel in the Old Testament*, *The Talmud*, *The Kabbalah* (in the *Zohar*). For a comprehensive discussion of the myth of Lilith and its history see S. Hurwitz, *Lilith: The First Eve – Historical and Psychological Aspects of the Dark Feminine* (1980), trans. G. Jacobson, Einsiedeln, Switzerland, Daimon Verlag, 1992.

³²¹ Patai, p.296.

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ *Ibid.*; B. Koltuv, *The Book of Lilith*, York Beach, Maine, Nicolas-Hays, 1986, p.20.

³²⁴ Patai, p.296.

could make her change her mind.³²⁵ God punished Lilith with the death of one hundred of her own children.³²⁶ Lilith was no longer free to walk on the earth and became a destroyer of infants: “if it is a male, I have the power over him from the moment of birth until the eighth day of his life, and if a girl, until the twentieth day”.³²⁷ During the second to fifth centuries A.D. Lilith became known as a devourer of infants.³²⁸ Mothers placed amulets inscribed with the angels’ names around the necks of their newborn babies “lest Lilith get hold of [them]”.³²⁹ Lilith posed a threat to women during childbirth and was attributed with the power to cause infertility and miscarriage.³³⁰ She also assumed the form of a succuba who seduced and killed men.³³¹ According to Vogelsang, Lilith “as the nascent potential human feminine, [gave] up her foothold in conscious life and [was] reduced to a psychic reality living on deep in the unconscious”.³³²

³²⁵ *Id.* at p.297.

³²⁶ Feminist critics Gilbert and Gubar interpret the story of Lilith in terms of a violent refusal that is both revolutionary and deadly: “What her history suggests is that in patriarchal culture ... angry revolt against male domination ... [is] inevitably demonic. Excluded from the human community, even from the semidivine communal chronicles of the Bible, the figure of Lilith represents the price women have been told they must pay for attempting to define themselves ... Lilith is locked into a vengeance (child-killing) which can only bring her more suffering (the killing of her own children)” (p.35).

³²⁷ Patai, pp.296-297.

³²⁸ Patai, pp.303-305. She would suck the blood of children and strangle them before devouring the corpse (Patai, p.298).

³²⁹ Patai, p.297; Scholem, p.357.

³³⁰ R. Patai, “Lilith”, *Journal of American Folklore*, 77, 1964, pp.295-314 at p.298. Patai outlines some of the ways in which parturient women protected themselves from Lilith (p.305).

³³¹ Patai, pp.302-303.

³³² Vogelsang, p.154

'[Save] our nurse-lings from ... the destroyer'³³³

*The witch ... stands for all the worst
of the feminine³³⁴*

The Sumerian Lilitu, the Classical child-killing demons and the apocryphal Lilith merged to create the image of the "lewd and murderous female spirit who ventures out at night to murder infants, an image that gradually shifted from the supernatural to the natural realm, fixing finally upon the witch".³³⁵ In his *De la Demonomanie des Sorciers* (1580) Bodin argued that witches were enemies of God and guilty of "the most detestable crimes of which the human mind can conceive".³³⁶ Women accused of witchcraft were said to:

abandon themselves to devils, incubi and succubi, and by their incantations, spells, conjurations, and other accursed charms and crafts, enormities and horrid offences, sla[y] infants yet in the mother's womb, as also the offspring of cattle, blas[t] the products of the earth, the grapes of the vine, the fruits of trees ... hinder men from

³³³ J. Norton, *The Heart of New England Rent at the Blasphemies of the Present Generation* (1659), cited in Karlsen, p.144.

³³⁴ D. Holbrooke, *Images of Women in Literature*, New York, New York University Press, 1989, p.160.

³³⁵ J.B. Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (1977), Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988, p.172.

³³⁶ J. Bodin, *De la Demonomanie des Sorciers* (1580).

performing the sexual act and women from
conceiving ... comi[t] and perpetrat[e] the
foulest abominations and filthiest excesses
to the deadly peril of their own souls ...
cause scandal and danger to very many.³³⁷

This passage, describing the *maleficia* or evil deeds of accused witches, is from the *Malleus Maleficarum* or 'Hammer of Witches' (1486), a document commissioned by the Catholic Church and written by two Dominican inquisitors – Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger – and officially authorised by Pope Innocent VIII 1484 Bull *Summis desiderantes affectibus*. By the mid-sixteenth century, the height of witchcraft prosecutions/persecutions, the *Malleus Maleficarum* had been published thirteen times in Europe and was reissued over a dozen times in Germany and France alone. The rhetorical force of the *Malleus* proved to be so enduring and pervasive that “the voice of this document has echoed over the centuries across the broad hegemony of masculine Western culture”.³³⁸

According to Russell, beliefs about sorcery and witchcraft appear in cultures worldwide and all have common features: the witch is usually female and a mother; witches gather at night; witches shift shape; witches seduce and

³³⁷ Kramer and Sprenger, p.xliii.

³³⁸ M. Mawson, “Whores, Witches and the Lore: Rape and Witchcraft, Legal and Literary Intersections”, *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 12, 1999, pp.41-56 at p.44.

destroy men; witches vampirically drink the blood of their victims and devour their dismembered body parts; witches eat children; witches murder children; witches bring the flesh of dead children to the sabbat and offer their souls to Satan.³³⁹ Russell notes the recurring motif of the witch harming men and children, a motif that seems to echo the practices of mythical maternal death-dealers.³⁴⁰ Slater suggests that the murderous demons populating Greek mythology were typically female and maternal.³⁴¹ As we saw in the previous chapter, women consumed by Dionysian frenzy murdered men and children during the night and transformed into raging and wild maenads who were believed to dismember and devour their victims and share the flesh amongst themselves. And in the previous section we considered the reproductive child-killing demons - typically mothers who had lost their own children. They roamed the land at night in the form of monsters or phantoms, murdering and devouring infants.

The European tales of the witches' sabbat that developed during the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries recount in gruesome detail the cannibalistic feasting that was a primary feature of these meetings. Russell describes the infanticidal aspects of the sabbat:

the assembly takes part in feasting and
drinking. The witches ... bring in the bodies

³³⁹ Russell, *History of Witchcraft*, p.22.

³⁴⁰ *Id.* at pp.31-32.

³⁴¹ Slater, p.12.

of children whom they have previously murdered. The infant may be stolen from Christian families, or they may be the offspring conceived by the witches at previous orgies. The children are offered ... to the Devil. The witches may boil the children's bodies, mix them with loathsome substances, and render them into levitating ointment. Or they may consume the children's body and blood³⁴²

The witch-hunter Reginald Scot elaborates on the practice of boiling and consuming children's flesh: "Of the thicker part of the concoction they make ointments, whereby they ride in the aire; the thinner potion they put into flagons, whereof whosoeuer drinketh, obseruing certeine ceremonies, immediatlie becommeth a maister or rather a mistresse in that practise and facultie".³⁴³ Kinloch suggests that witches ate the flesh of children in order to conceal evidence of their evil deeds: "[the witches] took severall pieces [of the slaughtered infant], as the feet, hands, a pairt of the head, and a pairt of the buttock, and they made a py thereof, that they might eat of it, that by

³⁴² Russell, *History of Witchcraft*, p.37. It was believed that "[b]y touching people with an unguent (made from the fat of strangled children and the venom of toads and other animals) [witches] could cause agonizing deaths. To procure the meat and fat of infants they strangl[ed] them at night, pretend[ed] to lament their demise, then exhum[ed] their bodies ... they killed and ate their own children and grandchildren" (Kieckhefer, *Magic*, p.196).

³⁴³ R. Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London, 1584), cited in M.A. Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921), London, Oxford University Press, 1962, p.158.

this means they might never make a confession of their witchcraftis”³⁴⁴.

The witch-hunters conjure images that belong to the world of nightmare and fantasy, images that are brought to life in Goya’s artistic representations of the witches’ sabbat. Indeed, prominent in Goya’s eighteenth-century painting *Conjuro*, one of a series depicting witchcraft, is a basket containing dead babies and in his *Witches Sabbath* witches offer dead infants to a horned devil. Salvatore Rosa’s mid-seventeenth-century painting *Witches at their Incantations* that features on the cover of Ginzburg’s *Ecstasies*³⁴⁵ similarly depicts a witch with her mouth wide open ready to consume the baby in her clutches and in Agostino Veneziano’s sixteenth-century engraving *Lo Stregozzo* a haggard and grotesque witch greedily snatches one of the many dead infants at her feet, her open mouth a sign of deadly intent.

While Classical and Biblical myth, and ancient Near Eastern demonology were extremely influential sources for the development of European witchcraft beliefs, imagery from Pagan sorcery and folklore also contributed to the form and characteristics of the witch.³⁴⁶ According

³⁴⁴ G.R. Kinloch, *Reliquiae Antiquae Scoticae* (Edinburgh, 1848), cited in Murray, *Witch-Cult*, p.159.

³⁴⁵ C. Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches’ Sabbath* (1989), trans. R. Rosenthal, ed. G. Elliott, London, Hutchinson Radius, 1992.

³⁴⁶ A. Ross, “The Divine Hag of the Pagan Celts” in V. Newall, ed., *The Witch Figure*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, pp.139-164.

to medieval legend, the 'wild women' of the forest murdered and ate children. They were said to possess human and animal attributes and also the ability to shift between the human and spirit worlds. The murderous and child-eating aspect of the 'wild women' lingered in the folktales of the lonely witch who lives in the forest and threatens children who cross her path such as those lurking in fairy tales.³⁴⁷ The images of infanticide and cannibalism that dominated folklore re-emerged during the aptly named "witch craze"³⁴⁸ which not only "revived [but also] ... exaggerated earlier associations of women and evil".³⁴⁹

Unbaptised infants were believed to be most susceptible to *maleficium*. Being unbaptised meant that the child did not belong to the Christian community and was therefore "not garded with the signe of the crosse, or orizons".³⁵⁰

³⁴⁷ See Ross, pp.139-164; Russell, *History of Witchcraft*, pp.42-52.

³⁴⁸ See Barstow, *Witchcraze*, for her specific usage of this term.

³⁴⁹ Noddings, p.44.

³⁵⁰ Murray, p.156. Moseley notes that "[u]ntil the rite of baptism, the newborn was the 'devil's child'. Baptism was a true exorcism" (p.355). On the association between baptism, monstrous children, the devil, and child-murder see J. Pentikäinen, *The Nordic Dead-Child Tradition Nordic Dead-Child Beings: A Study in Comparative Religion*, trans. A. Landon, Helsinki, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1968. Medieval theologians encouraged infant baptism as a means of release from the dangerous and sinful maternal body. Augustine believed that baptism was necessary "to expunge original sin" (W. Coster, "Tokens of Innocence: Infant Baptism, Death and Burial in Early Modern England" in B. Gordon and P. Marshall, eds, *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.266-287 at p.268). Infants who remained unbaptised were doomed to eternal torment to suffer the sins of the mother. For a comprehensive study of baptismal rites in early modern England see Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, pp.97-148.

Midwives were required to baptise infants who were struggling for life (and unlikely to survive long enough for the arrival of a priest).³⁵¹ Midwives who failed to baptise these infants using an approved liturgical form, and thereby “lost a chyldre, bothe soule and lyfe”, were forbidden from “[c]om[ing] eftesones where chyldryn were bore”.³⁵² As the first person to have physical contact with the newborn infant, the midwife was susceptible to accusations of witchcraft. Witches were said to either steal unbaptised newborns from parturient women³⁵³ or offer their own infants to the devil:

the witches may or doo catch [newborns] from their mothers' sides in the night, or out of their cradles ... [or] [offer] their owne children to the diuell before baptisme, holding them vp in the aire vnto him, and then thrust a needle into their braines.³⁵⁴

Donnison suggests that the alleged importance of the newborn infant, still-born foetus, umbilical cord, caul, and afterbirth for satanical witchcraft rites provided the impetus for the strict regulation of midwives and “provided additional justification” for the incursion of medical men into the birthing chamber and their attempts to exercise

³⁵¹ Donnison, p.4.

³⁵² R. Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne* (1303), cited in Donnison, p.4.

³⁵³ Witches were also said to steal newborn infants and put changelings in their place. For more on pagan and Christian versions of the changeling myth see Moseley, pp.352-354.

³⁵⁴ Murray, p.156.

control over the female reproductive body and the processes of childbirth.³⁵⁵

'Wicked and divellish practises and murthers'³⁵⁶

*[W]ho had better opportunities than midwives for killing babies?*³⁵⁷

*The barbarous Cruelties of some Midwives ... to young Children, may assure us, That there are greater Monsters upon the Land than are To be found in the Bottom of the Deep*³⁵⁸

As the witch-hunts gained momentum, those involved in the process of childbirth came under increasing scrutiny. Midwives were thought to derive their powers from the devil. As laws governing midwives became more rigid, they were increasingly subject to accusations of

³⁵⁵ Donnison, pp.4-5. On this point see also Barstow who argues that "the sudden rise in prosecutions for witchcraft that began in Europe c.1560 was related in part to attempts to take away women's control of their sexual and reproductive lives. This fitted into the strongly patriarchal concept of family for which the sixteenth century is known, and into the attack by doctors on midwives" (p.8). A.L. Barstow, "On Studying Witchcraft as Women's History: A Historiography of the European Witch Persecutions", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 4(2), 1988, pp.7-19.

³⁵⁶ From the interrogation of accused witch Elizabeth Device by Mr. Justice Bromley during the 1612 Lancashire witchcraft trials (reproduced in Seth, p.73).

³⁵⁷ N. Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, London, Chatto, 1975, p.249.

³⁵⁸ "The Bloody Minded Midwife" (1693) in H.E. Rollins, ed., *The Pepys Ballads*, vol.7, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1931, p.7.

witchcraft.³⁵⁹ Church inspectors were required to determine whether midwives perpetrated “witchcraft, charms, sorcery, or invocations, and to learn of cases in which the midwives, assistants, or patients had exhibited signs of disorder or evil behaviour”.³⁶⁰ The *Malleus*

³⁵⁹ Forbes suggests that because midwives were held in poor esteem by medical men, they were susceptible to accusations of witchcraft, especially “if the delivery had an unhappy outcome” (p.5). Ehrenreich and English establish a direct relationship between the persecution of midwives and female healers as witches and the development of the male medical profession. The authors write: “the creation of a new male medical profession ... played an important role in the witch-hunts, supporting the witches’ persecutors with ‘medical’ reasoning (p.4) ... [t]he witch-healer’s methods were as great a threat to the Church ... as her results, for the witch was an empiricist: She relied on her sense rather than on faith or doctrine, she believed in trial and error, cause and effect. Her attitude was not religiously passive, but actively inquiring. She trusted her ability to find ways to deal with disease, pregnancy and childbirth – whether through medications or charms ... her magic was the science of her time” (p.12). Male doctors resented the magical and mystical power of female healers and midwives and used the witch-hunts to both enforce the witch persecutors accusations against these types of women and discredit them in the eyes of the public (*Witches, Midwives, and Nurses*). See also B. Ehrenreich and D. English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts’ Advice to Women*, London, Pluto Press, 1979, chapter two. The work of Ehrenreich and English has not escaped criticism. For a particularly harsh opposing view see Harley who suggests that the notion of the midwife-witch is no more than a “modern stereotype, which has served either to justify the rise of the men-midwives or to create a multitude of imaginary martyrs for the modern women’s health movement” (“Historians as Demonologists”, p.1). Cressy denies the association between midwives and witches on the basis that “the authorities employed midwives to examine the bodies of suspected witches for witch marks, with no suspicion that the midwives themselves were engaged in *maleficium*” (*Birth, Marriage, and Death*, p.60). Nevertheless, as Ginzburg has shown, those involved in reporting suspected witches to authorities could easily become suspects themselves. The role of midwife as “agent of respectability” (p.60) was no guarantee to immunity from coming under the scrutiny of witch-hunters. C. Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1966), trans. John and Anne Tedeschi, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983.

³⁶⁰ J. Donegan, *Women and Men Midwives*, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1978, p.11. Rosen notes that “the queries made at

Maleficarum outlined the evil deeds of the 'Witch-Midwife': "Women who are Midwives in various ways kill the child conceived in the womb, and procure an abortion; or if they do not this, offer newborn children to devils, [or] ... commit most horrid crimes when they either kill children or offer them to devils in most accursed wise".³⁶¹ The *Malleus* gave details of midwives who had murdered children, including the midwife from Basel who was burned at the stake for killing over forty children and the Strasbourg midwife who "killed more children than she could count".³⁶²

Thompson suggests that because midwives were involved in the liminal experiences of childbirth and death they were most susceptible to accusations of witchcraft. Thompson writes:

A liminal event is one fraught with uncertainty and indecision because it occurs between two life stages or changes. In addition, liminal experiences are the subject of much superstition. Childbirth and death are

ecclesiastical visitations make it clear that midwives were suspected of witchcraft more frequently than any other women" (pp.8-9).

³⁶¹ Kramer and Sprenger, pp.66; 140. In his study of witchcraft in the Jura region (territories on the French-Swiss border), Monter discusses the work of demonologist and judge Henri Boguet, in particular his *Discours des Sorciers* (1602) which included a chapter entitled 'How Midwives, if they are Witches, Kill the Children they Deliver'. Harvey suggests that "[t]he importance of the midwife as custodian to reproduction and the cultural codes governing it made her a potentially dangerous figure, a danger that is registered in the violent attack on her in the *Malleus Maleficarum*" (p.82).

³⁶² Kramer and Sprenger, pp.140-141.

liminal experiences; they are transitional in that a new life comes into the world and an established life leaves it. Wherever such passages take place, great anxiety is expended in dealing with them.³⁶³

In her study of early modern witchcraft, Rosen notes the way in which childbirth was seen as a “mysterious” process that took place in a “world [that] was a ... closed society to men”.³⁶⁴ Anxieties about exactly what took place in the birthing chamber and lack of knowledge about the “physical changes and functions”³⁶⁵ of the maternal body contributed to dangerous fantasies about mothers and those involved in the process of childbirth. In the early modern era, “[t]here lurk[ed] a kind of primitive fear of the midwife; childbirth can never appear to a man ... quite ‘natural’ ...”.³⁶⁶ Unconsciously associating childbirth with “the magical”,³⁶⁷ witch-hunters projected onto midwives masculine fears and fantasies about the unnaturalness of

³⁶³ Thompson, p.49. Kristeva similarly conceives of “the birth-giving scene” as a site of liminality: “something horrible to see at the impossible doors of the invisible – the mother’s body ... the height of bloodshed and life, scorching moment of hesitation (between inside and outside, ego and other, life and death), horror and beauty, sexuality and the blunt negation of the sexual” (*Powers of Horror*, pp.155-156). Consider also Bakhtin’s description of the liminal pregnant body and the horrors of childbirth. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. H. Iswolsky, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1984, p.26. Women were thought to be “especially susceptible to the forces of evil during childbearing” (McLaren, p.48) and wore amulets and charms for protection.

³⁶⁴ Rosen, p.8.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ *Id.* at p.9.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

women bringing forth new life from a body conceived of as a site of pollution, defilement, decay, and death.

Karlsen suggests that the “procreative, nurturing, and nursing roles of women were perverted”³⁶⁸ by the witch-hunters. As primary care-givers to child-bearing women during pregnancy, parturition, and lying-in, midwives were accused of interfering with generation. Karlsen suggests that witch-hunters associated the practice of witchcraft with “the generative act, for it was here that women asserted their greatest power over men”.³⁶⁹ Indeed, witches were accused of causing male impotence,³⁷⁰ stealing penises, and transforming men into animals. Witches were also believed to cause miscarriages, stillbirths, and infertility in women as well as aborting fetuses and murdering newborn infants. “If a [witch] did not keep a man from begetting a child, then she might either kill ... it once it was born, or offer it to a devil”.³⁷¹ Midwives in particular were “the most dangerous to

³⁶⁸ Karlsen, *Devil*, p.144.

³⁶⁹ *Id.* at p.157. In her study of the visual iconography of female murderers, Banerjee comments on the engraved frontispiece of a 1688 pamphlet about a murderous French midwife by the name of Mary Hobrey. The illustration, portraying the midwife brandishing an enormous knife and gazing at her husband’s genitalia – his head, leg, and arm already dismembered, “demonstrates the radical anxieties that hovered around the activities of midwives. As this particular sketch insinuates, the husbands of midwives may have been especially vulnerable to the murderous power of the midwife” (pp.167-168). P. Banerjee, *Burning Women: Widows, Witches, and Early Modern European Travellers in India*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

³⁷⁰ On the magical causes of male impotence and barrenness see McLaren, pp.39-43.

³⁷¹ Karlsen, *Devil*, p.157.

women in this regard ... [for it was claimed that they] surpass all others in wickedness".³⁷² Karlsen concludes that "midwives ..., like women accused of infanticide, could have been likely suspects simply because they were ever-present reminders of the power that resided in women's life-giving and life-maintaining roles".³⁷³

'No naturall Mother, but a Monster'³⁷⁴

The possible role of the midwife Elizabeth Harrison in the case of Agnes Bowker remained a source of contention

³⁷² *Ibid.*

³⁷³ *Id.* at p.144. The association between midwives, witchcraft, and infanticide is a recurring literary theme. See, for example, Sir Walter Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818) (London, Everyman's Library, 1984) in which the midwife-witch Meg Murdockson steals Effie Deans's illegitimate baby after she has given birth in the woods, leaving Effie to bear a charge of child-murder (Effie is prosecuted under a 1690 Scottish statute – 'Act anent Murdering of Children' – that resembles the 1624 British bastardy statute). Scott makes Meg a symbol of monstrous maternity, implying that she may have murdered her own daughter's illegitimate child and other infants – "they say you na'n't been so kind to other bairns, as you call them, that have come in your way" (p.317). For more on the Scottish law and Scott's novel see Symonds, *Weep Not For Me*. See also R.H. West, *Reginald Scot and Renaissance Writings on Witchcraft*, Boston, Twayne, 1984. Harley discusses the cases of several Scottish midwives accused of witchcraft, including one by the name of Bessie Gourdie, a Midlothian midwife who was executed in the late seventeenth-century (p.15). Perhaps her case was a source of inspiration for Scott. On witchcraft in Scott's novels see C.O. Parsons, *Witchcraft and Demonology in Scott's Fiction: With Chapters on the Supernatural in Scottish Literature*, Edinburgh, Oliver & Boyd, 1964.

³⁷⁴ From the title of a seventeenth-century broadside in which an unmarried servant murders her illegitimate child and is described as "more cruell ... than Savage creatures". M. Parker, "No naturall Mother, but a Monster. Or, the exact relation of one, who for making away with her owne new borne childe, about Brainford neere London, was Hang'd at Teyboune, on Wednesday the 11. Of December, 1633" (1634), cited in T. Bowers, "I Wou'd Not Murder My Child": Maternity and the Necessity of Infanticide in Two Novels by Daniel Defoe" in J. Thorn, ed., *Writing British Infanticide: Child-Murder, Gender, and Print, 1722-1859*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 2003, pp.172-195 at p.191, note 1.

among officials and townsfolk alike. But it was Bowker herself who captured the communal imagination and continued to do so even after her case had run its course. Both those closest to Bowker and those who had only met her during the trial found common ground in the belief that Bowker was somehow involved in the murder of her child. Bowker's godmother, Emma Walker (wife of George Walker, the innholder who was involved in disembowelling the cat-monster), told the court that she had provided Bowker with the opportunity to "discharge her conscience".³⁷⁵ Walker rejected the notion that Bowker had given birth to a monster, suggesting instead that Bowker "hast had a child and it [was] made away and this cat by some sleight or sorcery [was] conveyed to [her]".³⁷⁶ Lady Turpin, wife of the magistrate Sir George Turpin, similarly told the court that "it was not possible this cat could come from her".³⁷⁷

Bowker's case was fuelled by suspicion and innuendo, and set against a backdrop of fantasy, folklore, and superstition. Convinced as to the monstrous nature of the 'truth' underlying Bowker's narrative, the Archdeacon's commissary Anthony Anderson sent the trial transcript to the Earl of Huntingdon who passed it on to the Secretary of State and the Bishop of London. Included with the transcript was a pictorial representation of the cat-monster

³⁷⁵ Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, p.17.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

that Anderson himself had drawn after personally conducting some rather gruesome experiments on another cat (including killing and flaying the cat and immersing it in boiling water). In his notes Anderson wrote: “[t]his picture ... containeth the full length, thickness, and bigness of the same, measured by a pair of compasses”.³⁷⁸ The black-and-white picture, reproduced in both Jones and Cressy, looks rather more like a panther than a cat, but it is nonetheless disconcerting to imagine a woman giving birth to such a creature. No doubt the rapid reply from the Bishop of London, Edmund Grindal, agreeing with Anderson that “the monster ... appeareth plainly to be a counterfeit matter”³⁷⁹ was as much a desire to stem rising concerns as to the portentous nature of the beast (and its political ramifications) as it was an attempt to regulate and contain the female (re)productive body which was deemed capable of generating such monsters.

Both ecclesiastic and secular officials vehemently denied that Bowker gave birth to a monster and denounced Bowker’s narrative as a “fardel [of deception] ... great store of wares such as they are, as whoredom, witchcraft and buggery”³⁸⁰ borne by the monstrous imagination of a murderous mother. In so doing, legal officials suggested that Bowker’s story was no more legitimate than the

³⁷⁸ *Id.* at p.21.

³⁷⁹ *Id.* at pp.21-22.

³⁸⁰ *Id.* at p.17.

bastard she purportedly murdered. And the very nature of the story told was made to appear as unnatural as the crimes of which she was accused. At the hands of those who told her story,³⁸¹ the mother who claimed that she bore a monster herself became a monster, haunting the minds of her creators.

³⁸¹ The story of Agnes Bowker is a story told by neighbours, midwives, female attendants, townsmen, family, friends, and foes and structured by the “prefabricated scenario” (Doody, p.287) that constituted the courtroom drama. As Cressy notes, “we are constantly aware that the forum and the format, the historical record, were both controlled by male professional clerical and legal processes” (*Travesties and Transgressions*, p. 26). Cressy also makes the point that “[t]estimony in ecclesiastical court cases ... must be treated with circumspection. The little we know comes from interrogations designed to learn something else, such as the identity of a bastard’s father [as in Bowker’s case]” (*Birth, Marriage, and Death*, p.78). We never hear directly from Bowker but receive a version of her story through hearsay from players or *dramatis personae* (as Cressy prefers to call them) who themselves merely support a narrative constructed, directed, and produced by men. Theirs are “voices of the record”, as Doody puts it, “set forth by men [and] seemingly bring[ing] us within listening distance of veiled voices” (Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, p.26). Bowker’s voice is ‘ventriloquised’ – she is spoken about and spoken for but never appears to speak for herself. Her words are filtered down to us by her interrogators who make sure to emphasise that Bowker was not coerced (“All and every the premises came of herself, without threats or favourings” p.20) and that theirs is a ‘true’ record of her testimony. On the problematic issue of the legal production of ‘truth’ see Harris who suggests that “[w]hat is most frustrating to a feminist critic about early infanticide narratives is that [they are] ... mediated productions ... it is impossible to know whether texts attributed to the accused women actually represent their own words ... [these] narratives were most often used by those in authority as a textual means of social control over the body politic ... [and] over the bod[ies] and discourse of ... women” (pp.87; 90). S.M. Harris, “Feminist Theories and Early American Studies”, *Early American Literature*, 34(1), 1999, pp.86-93. See also Gowing who suggests that witness testimony may in fact “obscure as much as [it] reveals” (p.88). Gowing notes that “witnesses’ informations ... have their own deceptions and omissions, and their own narrative agendas ... [and] also represented stories which had probably been told already in other local contexts ... [and] were part of the currency of oral culture, particularly among women” (p.88).

PART 3: Haunting Tales

History ... is a nightmare from which [we] are trying to awaken

James Joyce

Chapter Five 'A Monster Pure and Simple'¹: Incredible Mother Plots

*M is for mother ... But M is for murder,
too. And when a woman kills her child,
M is also for monster²*

*Some impossible crime that only
the imagination can comprehend³*

*The crime is concealed, and what
is most terrifying is what escapes
us. We are obliged, in the night
it offers our fear, to imagine the
worst⁴*

*We who no longer are at home in a
mythic universe but still are in need
of scapegoats may seek them in ever
more virulent ways⁵*

*[I]t is in the telling of the tale of murder
that the murderer is made⁶*

*Some people ... maintain that they know
the facts ... It doesn't matter what anybody
says – they know⁷*

¹ R. Goldstein, "Sympathy for the suspect: When a crime becomes a tragedy", *Village Voice*, 3 December 1996, p.20.

² A. Jones, "Mothers Who Kill", *Newsday Magazine*, 19 October 1986, p.12.

³ M. Blanchot, "Sade" in M. de Sade, *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, and Other Writings*, comp. and trans. R. Seaver and A. Wainhouse, New York, Grove Weidenfeld, 1965, pp.37-72 at p.57.

⁴ G. Bataille, *Gilles de Rais*, cited in M. Hénaff, *Sade: The Invention of the Libertine Body* (1978), trans. Xavier Callahan, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p.76.

⁵ M.J. Reineke, *Sacrificed Lives: Kristeva on Women and Violence*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997, p.159.

⁶ S. Davies, "Sara L. Knox, Murder: A Tale of Modern American Life", *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 14, 2000, pp.132-136 at p.136.

⁷ L. Chamberlain, *Through My Eyes: An Autobiography*, Melbourne, William Heinemann, 1990, pp.xi-xii, emphasis in text.

'The real as the impossible'⁸

Stories about infanticide circulate regularly in the media, literature, popular culture, and legal texts (including case reports, trial transcripts, investigatory reports, and witness statements). Yet, even before the ink has time to settle, we often believe that we already know the 'true' story – what 'really' happened – regardless of a defendant's claim of innocence or a legal verdict either denying or supporting that claim. Perhaps the clearest and most well known examples are the cases of Lindy Chamberlain and Susan Smith,⁹ two mothers accused of murdering their children in late twentieth century Australia and America respectively. Although both women professed their innocence, only Smith's story was accepted as being true. Chamberlain, on the other hand, was "vilified as a monstrous mother".¹⁰ While the Australian public was, according to legal commentator and author John Bryson, "astonishingly ready ... to believe the unbelievable",¹¹ the American public "readily accepted"¹² Smith's claim of innocence.

In her study of the power of narrative, Scheppelle suggests that "[s]tories carry power because they have the ability to

⁸ J. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973), trans. Alan Sheridan, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p.167.

⁹ Both cases are discussed in detail later in this Chapter.

¹⁰ G. Wansell, "The mother of all injustices", *Daily Mail*, 4 July 2002.

¹¹ J. Bryson, "The Azaria Syndrome", *Good Weekend (Sydney Morning Herald Magazine)*, 12 August, 2000, pp.51-54 at p.51.

¹² C. Harris, "Myths of Race and Gender in the Trials of O.J. Simpson and Susan Smith – Spectacles of Our Times", *Washburn Law Journal*, 35, 1996, pp.225-253 at p.246.

convey truths”.¹³ Smith’s story was ultimately found to be false but the public nonetheless “recognise[d] the realness”¹⁴ in her narrative because it invoked cultural myths of maternity and nationhood. Imagining the death of her children at the hands of an(-)other, Smith told a story that the public wanted and needed to hear.¹⁵ According to Jones, “[t]he murder of a child by its own mother represents such a profound betrayal of human expectations that the mind often refuses to accept it. Women are supposed to give life, not take it away”.¹⁶

The murderous mother is “unsettling precisely because she articulates and embodies a version of motherhood that tends to be denied in the official discourse of society”.¹⁷ “Mothers are supposed to be blissful”, writes Pearson, “suspicion of harm interferes with our faith in the maternal ideal”.¹⁸ The public found little reason to suspect Smith of any wrongdoing because she did not fit the familiar stereotype of ‘bad mother’, identified by Ladd-Taylor and Umansky as the ‘scheming welfare mother’, ‘the unmarried teenage mother’, ‘the career woman with

¹³ K.L. Scheppele, “Foreword: Telling Stories”, *Michigan Law Review*, 87, 1989, pp.2073-2098 at p.2075.

¹⁴ *Id.* at p.2074.

¹⁵ In his examination of the Smith case, psychiatrist George Rekers suggests that Susan also needed to tell herself the story of an imaginary offender to protect herself from the horrible reality of what she had done. G. Rekers, *Susan Smith: Victim or Murderer*, Lakewood, Colorado, Glenbridge, 1996.

¹⁶ Jones, p.12.

¹⁷ L. Corti, *The Myth of Medea and the Murder of Children*, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1998, p.xvi.

¹⁸ P. Pearson, *When She Was Bad: Violent Women and the Myth of Innocence*, New York, Viking Penguin, 1997, p.84.

no time for her children', 'the drug addicted mother', 'the pushy mother', and 'the overprotective mother'.¹⁹

Smith was described by her family and co-workers as "a woman who never so much as screamed at her kids", "a devoted mother", "always very nice ... always smiling".²⁰ As Smith's deception was revealed other community members came forward, incredulous that she had so skilfully "toy[ed] with their emotions and mess[ed] with their minds".²¹ "I always believed her",²² said Smith's neighbour. Smith's co-worker similarly stated: "I never in a million years would have thought that she could do something like this".²³ According to Peyser, the people of Union, South Carolina "[who] had fallen in love with Susan ... were suspended in a state of shock and denial".²⁴

In the telling of stories of infanticide there is a blurring of the 'fictional' and the 'real', between what Aristodemou terms the "fictionality of the so-called real world"²⁵ and the

¹⁹ M. Ladd-Taylor and L. Umansky, eds, *'Bad' Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America*, New York, New York University Press, 1998, p.2.

²⁰ A. Peyser, *Mother Love, Deadly Love: The Susan Smith Murders*, New York, HarperCollins, 1995, p.133.

²¹ *Id.* at p.132.

²² *Id.* at p.133.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.* Ladd-Taylor and Umansky suggest that "the 'bad' mother label ... serves to shift our attention away from a specific act to a whole person – and even to entire categories of people. Thus ... [everyone was] stunned when a likeable white woman like Susan Smith kill[ed] her sons" (p.3).

²⁵ M. Aristodemou, "Fantasies of Women as Lawmakers: Empowerment or Entrapment in Angela Carter's *Bloody Chambers*" in M. Freeman and A. Lewis, eds, *Law and Literature: Current Legal*

illusory realness of fictitious worlds. Indeed, Smith's story appeared to be firmly rooted in reality even though it was mere fiction. According to Wight and Myers, "[f]iction borrows from real life",²⁶ drawing on "broader cultural narratives ... [which] set the terms by which [that which is essentially unknowable] ... is represented and ... made real".²⁷ In constructing her fabrication, Smith relied on symbolic and "recognizable cultural codes"²⁸ in order to tell a certain tale – the offender as "idiosyncratic 'other'",²⁹ the innocent and helpless victims, the distraught mother – tearful,³⁰ inconsolable, chastising herself for failing to keep her babies out of harm's way.³¹ Providing these symbolic

Issues, Vol. 2, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp.191-218 at p.192.

²⁶ S. Wight and A. Myers, "Introduction" in A. Myers and S. Wight, eds, *No Angels: Women Who Commit Violence*, London, Pandora, 1996, pp.xi-xvi at p.xii.

²⁷ Davies, p.134.

²⁸ Umphrey, p.404.

²⁹ *Id.* at p.133. Smith provides her audience with what Colb terms "a reassuring narrative ... a Hollywood-ready story in which the true culprit is an outsider onto which one can comfortably heap all condemnation". S.F. Colb, "The Conviction of Andrea Yates: A Narrative of Denial", *Duke Journal of Gender, Law and Policy*, 10, 2003, pp.141-147 at pp.141-142.

³⁰ Compare the case of confessed child-murderer Marybeth Tinning who "confounded observers because she seemed so genuinely torn up by her losses". According to Pearson, the distinction between female grief and self-pity is "extremely obscure ... because it plays so directly into feminine stereotypes" (Pearson, p.101). See also Z. Kmietowicz, "Mothers Who Kill Their Children Can Show Intense Grief", *British Medical Journal*, 323(7324), 2001, p.1269.

³¹ Consider for example Smith's first public statement: "He [the offender] made me get out of the car. You know, I tried to get my children ... My children wanted me. They needed me. Now I can't help them. I just feel like such a failure" (Peyser, pp.52-3). For more on the various narrative tools or strategies designed to persuade listeners as to the veracity of a story see M.M. Umphrey, "The Dialogics of Legal Meaning: Spectacular Trials, the Unwritten Law, and Narratives of Criminal Responsibility", *Law and Society Review*, 33, 1999, pp393-423 especially pp.402-405 and pp.412-416.

codes or clues, Smith allowed her listeners to conjure the fantasy of violence that underlined her narrative - to supply the 'real' effects of an "impossible crime that only the imagination can comprehend".³² In the end, Smith's fictional narrative was so convincing that the real story itself seemed impossible, unimaginable, incredible.

'Incredible': *seeming too extraordinary to be possible; beyond belief or understanding; not credible; unbelievable; amazing.*³³ In this chapter we focus on several mothers accused and/or convicted of child-murder whose stories were deemed to be incredible³⁴ – either unbelievable because so unlikely or so shocking as to be beyond disbelief – and consider the power of the imagination to shape narratives of maternal child-murder. My own (re)telling of stories about Lindy Chamberlain, Patsy Ramsey, Susan Smith, Darlie Routier, Caroline Beale, Joanne Hayes, and Christine Villemin relies on various narratives drawn from a wide range of cultural discourses and forms including law, science, journalism (print media, television, and radio), fiction, cinema, and autobiography. In this respect, I adopt Ferguson's view

³² Blanchot, p.57.

³³ Oxford English Dictionary.

³⁴ Scutt provides an interesting study of "[t]he incredible woman [as] a recurring character in criminal law" (p.3) in *The Incredible Woman: Power and Sexual Politics*, Vol. 1, Melbourne, Artemis, 1997. Scutt primarily focuses on the credibility of testimony given by victims and survivors of crime and the fundamental issue of credibility in the courtroom setting. In contrast, I focus on the accused and the issue of credibility not only within but also beyond the strict parameters of the courtroom.

that “[t]he cultural work of interpretation in courtroom analysis lies ... in the relation *between* legal and nonlegal narratives”.³⁵ Both legal and nonlegal narratives converge in the “transmission of trial[s] into the realms of communal recognition and understanding”.³⁶

When Smith’s children were finally discovered in the John D. Long Lake, people flocked to the scene of the crime – the site of death: “a strange, potent attraction drew them to the spot where [the children] breathed their last gasp. They just had to see”³⁷ – as if seeing would somehow make the knowledge of infanticide real. “Eyes stared as if in a trance at the lake’s luminous surface; legs seemed propelled, as if by themselves, to the water’s edge”, writes Peyser describing the journey to the lake as a “pilgrimage”.³⁸ The lake functioned both as a literal shrine and figurative melting pot for communal rage. Peering into the depths of the lake as if the force of their combined gaze might somehow miraculously raise the dead, these people attempted to come to terms with Smith’s murder of her children and her lies - “what she’d done to them all”.³⁹ The mourners who gathered at John D. Long Lake imagined themselves as Smith’s ‘victims’ – victims of her unforgivable deception – and sought to confirm their

³⁵ R.A. Ferguson, “Untold Stories in the Law” in P. Brooks and P. Gewirtz, eds, *Law’s Stories: Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996, pp.84-98 at p.84, italics in text.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Peyser, pp.180-181.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Peyser, p.182.

shared sense of victimisation by returning to the very site where Smith drowned her children.

The lake mediates the gap between the “visibl[e] and invisibl[e], ... the seen and the unseen”.⁴⁰ The “visibility of the event”⁴¹ ends as Smith’s car plunges into the lake with the children strapped into their seats. What happens once the car is submerged beneath the murky water – the children’s struggle to survive – constitutes the unseen, that which “exceeds the limits of representation and as such represents the border of what can be imag(in)ed”.⁴² Young suggests that crime’s images are extremely powerful because they give us “a semblance of the real”.⁴³ Of all the images in the media after Smith’s confession, the most potent were the lake, the white gravel and concrete boat ramp, and the burgundy Mazda sedan. In the Beale case it was the mother’s eyes – “[t]hose eyes ... made so killing”⁴⁴ – windows to the soul. In the Routier case it was the image of the innocent, smiling children placed side by side with the bloody murder weapon. In the Chamberlain case it was the dingo, Ayers Rock, and the matinee jacket. “Beyond the image”, Young writes, “there is only death, darkness and the inhuman”.⁴⁵ Crime is itself

⁴⁰ A. Young, *Imagining Crime: Textual Outlaws and Criminal Conversations*, London, Sage, 1996, p.112.

⁴¹ *Id.* at p.137.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Id.* at p.21.

⁴⁴ M.A. Doody, “Those Eyes Are Made So Killing: Eighteenth-Century Murderesses and the Law”, *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 46(1), 1984, pp.49-80 at p.49.

⁴⁵ Young, pp.20; 137.

concealed from us, escapes us, and thus remains most terrifying. “In the night it offers our fear, [we] imagine the worst”.⁴⁶

‘The perfect crime’⁴⁷

‘Story’ is typically “consign[ed] to the realm of tale, legend, myth, fiction, literature ... fiction, not infrequently means lies, and fact, truth”.⁴⁸ Fiction invents, fact reflects. Not so, suggests Aristodemou in her consideration of the ways in which both legal and literary narratives invent reality. All narratives “invent rather than reflect our lives, ourselves, and our worlds. Whether in law [or] in literature ... narratives are not neutral: they investigate but also suggest, create, and legislate meanings”.⁴⁹ The notion of ‘storytelling’ is extremely problematic for law which, as a discourse of ‘truth’, appears seamless. According to Hunt and Wickham, “law is one of the more voluble discourses which claims not only to reveal the truth but to authorise and consecrate it”.⁵⁰ But the authors also warn that the ‘truth’ of law must “not be taken for granted”.⁵¹ Indeed, as Swain suggests, the ‘truth’ of law is itself a ‘legal fiction’ to the extent that legal, and not merely literary, narratives are

⁴⁶ G. Bataille, *Gilles de Rais*, cited in M. Hénaff, *Sade: The Invention of the Libertine Body*, *op. cit.*, p.76.

⁴⁷ J. Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, London, Verso, 1996.

⁴⁸ T.T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1989, p.120.

⁴⁹ M. Aristodemou, *Law and Literature: Journeys From Her to Eternity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p.3.

⁵⁰ A. Hunt and G. Wickham, *Foucault and Law: Towards a Sociology of Law*, London, Pluto Press, 1994, p.12.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

involved in the “fabrication and re/construction”⁵² of actual events.

Neither legal nor literary narratives can tell us the ‘truth’ of murder for:

even a single act of murder can be the subject of numerous, often competing narratives ... continually told and retold in a myriad of ways – through the confessions of murderers, the authoritative accounts of experts, the observations of courtroom spectators, in media reportage, stories of true crime, cinematic productions, social commentaries ... from the popular to the professional, [narratives] attempt to locate, reconstruct and ... explain murder.⁵³

As Scheppele suggests, “narrative is one way of organising, coping with, even acting on the world ... to organise experience, people tell stories. And these stories are telling”.⁵⁴

Narratives of crime both “tell *of*, as well as *telling on*, the culture from which [they] arise”.⁵⁵ ‘Culture’ here might be understood “as a process, or *regime of imagination*,

⁵² S. Swain, “Editorial”, *New Formations*, 32, 1997, pp.5-10 at p.7.

⁵³ Davies, p.132.

⁵⁴ Scheppele, p.2075.

⁵⁵ S. Knox, “Alison Young, Imagining Crime: Textual Outlaws and Criminal Conversations”, *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 8, 1997, pp.169-175 at pp.172-173; italics in text.

through which events come to have meaning as *texts*".⁵⁶

According to Puren and Young:

[c]ommonplace cultural narratives, genres, scenarios and characters have a semantic life independent of the cases brought and heard before the law. Agile questioning practices in the trial deploy cultural devices in the production of meaning. The usual result is the narration of a culturally familiar tale to be recognised by the jury; ... a legal narrative to be recognised by the judge; and a story which will not be recognised by the [accused] ... as the story she told.⁵⁷

Legal storytelling takes place in "an embedded framework ... in which certain beliefs and images are privileged, legitimated and ratified and myths are given power".⁵⁸ The law presents "particular ways" of imagining the world which "come to be seen unproblematically as the only truth there is".⁵⁹ While both law and literature are "directly and indirectly constitutive in our cultural productions and the formation of our social and psychological realities",⁶⁰ literary narratives confess their contingency, provisionality, and artificiality while legal narratives appear under the

⁵⁶ N. Puren and A. Young, "Signifying Justice: Law, Culture and the Questions of Feminism", *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 13, 1999, pp.3-12 at p.3, italics in text.

⁵⁷ *Id.* at p.4.

⁵⁸ Harris, p.226.

⁵⁹ Scheppelle, p.2088.

⁶⁰ Swain, p.10.

pretence of naturalness and inevitability.⁶¹ Goodrich elaborates on these ideas:

Law is a literature which denies its literary qualities. It is a play of words which asserts an absolute seriousness; it is a genre of rhetoric which represses its moments of invention or of fiction; it is a language which hides its indeterminacy in the justificatory discourse of judgment; it is a procedure based on analogy, metaphor and repetition and yet it lays claim to being a cold or disembodied prose, a science without poetry or desire; it is a narrative which assumes the epic proportions of truth; it is, in short, a speech or writing which forgets the violence of the word and the terror or jurisdiction of the text.⁶²

Both law and literature “invent reality”, to use Aristodemou’s potent phrase, but whereas literature guiltily confesses its artificiality, law goes to great lengths to conceal the nature of its creation(s).⁶³ Applying Bataille’s comment about narrative deceit to the legal situation: “[Law] is not innocent. It is guilty and should admit itself so”.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Aristodemou, *Law and Literature*, p.2.

⁶² P. Goodrich, *Law in the Courts of Love: Literature and Other Minor Jurisprudences* (London, Routledge, 1996), cited in Aristodemou, *Law and Literature*, p.8.

⁶³ Aristodemou, *Law and Literature*, p.2.

⁶⁴ G. Bataille, *Literature and Evil* (London, Marion Boyars, 1957). Original cited in Aristodemou, *Law and Literature*, p.6.

Scheppele suggests that those afforded legal authority to tell stories, such as lawyers and judges, abide by rules that determine what is able to be narrated and how stories are told.⁶⁵ Manipulating both “the form and substance of narrative”,⁶⁶ legal storytellers “produce particular kinds of stories”⁶⁷ that conform to a version of reality. The legal imagination creates “fictional worlds ... pretend[ing], ... and expect[ing] others to pretend, that those worlds are ‘real’”.⁶⁸ In so doing, the law “murder[s] reality ... ‘substituting signs of the real for the real itself’ ... the ‘perfect crime’”.⁶⁹

Drawing on the theories of Baudrillard and the novels of Ballard, Aristodemou suggests that contemporary society is constituted by signs. “[S]igns are the only reality we have ... appearances are the only essences: whether in law, politics, economics, or history, it is now impossible to distinguish between the real and the simulacra”.⁷⁰ Reality is a cultural fiction and fiction a cultural reality. Where once “the external world around us represented reality ... and the inner world of our minds ... represented the realm of fantasy and the imagination ... [t]hese roles ... have been reversed. The world around us ... is a complete

⁶⁵ Scheppele, pp.2085; 2094.

⁶⁶ Umphrey, p.403.

⁶⁷ *Id.* at p.404.

⁶⁸ Aristodemou, p.19.

⁶⁹ *Id.* at p.21.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

fiction – conversely, the one small node of reality left to us is inside our own heads”.⁷¹

Young investigates the role of the imagination in the re-presentation of crime, suggesting in the process that narratives of crime powerfully contest the fiction of reality and the reality of fiction. “The scene of representation is the scene of a crime”, writes Young. “While re-presenting the crime, a responsive imagination also constructs the event of crime. That is, it constitutes or *legislates* the event of crime. As an event, crime is thus always already *textual* ... Crime is mediated as text; the text can therefore be read as crime. The text provides the scene of the crime”.⁷² Reading narratives of crime and crime as narrative, Young suggests however that textual or imaginative representations of the ‘real’ never satisfy our demand to know ‘what really happened’. Returning to the scene of the crime, returning to the “scene of representation” itself – revealing “its props, its ‘scenery’, and its backcloth”⁷³ - only confirms “the failure of our imagination of crime to live up to our demands of it (that our imagination of crime should always *be* crime)”.⁷⁴ And in the end, it seems that the more we tell stories about murder, the more murder slips away from us.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Young, p.16; italics in text.

⁷³ M. Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, London, Routledge, 1991, p.105.

⁷⁴ Young, p.15; italics in text.

Presumed guilty: The Lindy Chamberlain case

Incrimination and guilt involve one another but incrimination is not necessarily proof of guilt. It is because of their shared participation in the semantic field of 'crime' that the two concepts are naturally but loosely associated. The association comes to appear motivated, however, even in the absence of proof or compelling evidence, as the incriminating force of the charges makes them stick – as incrimination articulates guilt⁷⁵

[T]he events of the last ten years seem unreal ... It's never been real ... It's never been true. I'd read the newspapers and the reports would bear no resemblance to what actually happened⁷⁶

It is a shock, looking back, to see how we lost our sense of fairness ... [c]onviction of the Chamberlains had become the popular cause ... [p]ursuit ... was relentless⁷⁷

'The Judgment', painted by renowned Australian artist Pro Hart, depicts a blindfolded judge and a jury wearing masks and dark glasses. A woman – the accused – stands in the foreground awaiting the jury's verdict. Standing with her back to the viewer, the accused could be one of many nameless and voiceless women who slip through the criminal justice system unnoticed – whose stories mingle and merge so as to become

⁷⁵ K. McPherson, *Incriminations: Guilty Women/Telling Stories*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1994, p.3.

⁷⁶ Chamberlain, pp.ix-x.

⁷⁷ Bryson, "Syndrome", pp.51-52.

indistinguishable. The only clue as to the woman's identity is the scene beyond the courtroom, a landscape made familiar by the glowing red boulder which is both a cultural icon and crime scene. The place is Uluru (formerly known as Ayers Rock), the woman is Lindy Chamberlain, and the painting is one of a series depicting her trial.⁷⁸

The date August 17, 2000 marked the twenty-year anniversary of the death of Azaria Chamberlain at Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park in Australia's Northern Territory. At approximately 8 p.m. on that fateful day, Lindy Chamberlain, on a camping trip in the Australian outback with her husband and children, went to check on her infant daughter who was sleeping in their tent. But Azaria was gone – only blood and dingo tracks remained. The search for Azaria failed and her body was never found. With no body and no witnesses, the police, media, and public saw Azaria's disappearance as a mystery to be solved. Despite Lindy Chamberlain's unswerving belief that a dingo took her baby, the police dealt with the case as a 'murder mystery' and "construct[ed] their own fantastic theories of homicide".⁷⁹ Nearly two years after her

⁷⁸ Discussing 'The Judgment' in 1989, Pro Hart said that he wanted to express in a visual format his belief that "[t]here had been a gross miscarriage of justice ... The judge [is] painted blindfolded as he was blinded to the real facts. The jury are shown with masks and dark glasses because they did not see or were not told the true details and were kept in the dark". Cited in N.H. Young, *Innocence Regained: The Fight to Free Lindy Chamberlain*, Sydney, Federation Press, 1989, p.vii. The paintings hang on the walls of Lindy Chamberlain's home "as a constant reminder" (60 Minutes interview: 'The Chamberlain Saga: 20 years on', 27 August 2000).

⁷⁹ Young, *Innocence*, p.xv.

daughter's disappearance, Lindy Chamberlain was found guilty of murdering Azaria by slitting her throat with a pair of scissors. Six years later her conviction was overturned by the Northern Territory Court of Criminal Appeal.

When we think of child-murder, it is impossible not to recall the most notorious criminal trial in Australian legal history. In the drama that unfolded before our eyes, fact and fiction became inseparable. Stories surrounding the case grew both in number and unreason. Seventh-Day Adventists, we were told, practised "ritual infanticide"⁸⁰; the name 'Azaria' supposedly meant "sacrifice in the wilderness"⁸¹; Lindy Chamberlain allegedly referred to her baby as "the devil's child",⁸² made a coffin for the baby, dressed the infant in black, and marked accounts of child sacrifice in her bible.⁸³

The legal version of events – "that the child Azaria died by her mother's hand"⁸⁴ – was based solely on scientific evidence which would later be discredited.⁸⁵ While the

⁸⁰ Bryson, "Syndrome", p.51.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* Lindy Chamberlain told fellow camper Judith West that the name Azaria meant "Blessed of God". G. Williams, "I was there", *Sunday Life (Sun Herald Magazine)*, 2 July 2000, p.35.

⁸² Bryson, "Syndrome", p.51.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Young, *Innocence*, p.xvi.

⁸⁵ Scientific evidence that foetal blood was splattered all over the dashboard of the Chamberlain's car was crucial to the prosecution case that the baby was murdered in the car and not taken by a dingo as claimed by the defence. This evidence was later discredited. For further discussion see Young, *Innocence*, pp.63-72. On the issue of scientific evidence in the Chamberlain case and the way in which "scientific evidence is framed, constructed, deconstructed and

'authoritative' discourses of science and law purported to present 'the facts', the media "fuel[led] our worst fears and nightmarish beliefs about ourselves and one another ... making us captive to our most cynical and despairing images of human nature".⁸⁶ Notwithstanding Lindy Chamberlain's distress and desperation after finding her baby missing, nor her emphatic and repeated claim that a dingo had taken her nine-week-old baby, "the *nation* overwhelmingly rejected her story ... [and] demanded [her] incarceration".⁸⁷

The case of Lindy Chamberlain captured the cultural imagination. And even after the passing of time our fascination has not faltered – the "Azaria Syndrome",⁸⁸ as author John Bryson calls it, is still alive and well. There are still those who believe that the baby was murdered in

reconstructed in order to justify findings of 'guilt' or 'innocence' see G. Edmond, "Azaria's Accessories: The Social (Legal-Scientific) Construction of the Chamberlains' Guilt and Innocence", *Melbourne University Law Review*, 22, 1998, pp.396-441 at p.396.

⁸⁶ A. Sarat and T.R. Kearns, "A Journey Through Forgetting: Toward a Jurisprudence of Violence" in A. Sarat and T.R. Kearns, eds, *The Fate of Law*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1991, pp.209-273 at p.222. According to Creed, "[t]he Azaria Chamberlain case ... represent[ed] a bizarre instance of distortion by the media ... the media portrayed Lindy Chamberlain as a freak of nature, a mother who had lost her natural ability to mother, an inhuman parent ...". B. Creed, "Bitch Queen or Backlash?: Media Portrayals of Female Murderers" in K. Greenwood, ed., *The Thing She Loves: Why Women Kill*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1996, pp.108-122 at pp.118-119. For more about the role of the media in the construction of Lindy Chamberlain's 'guilt' see A. Howe, "Chamberlain Revisited: The Case Against the Media" in N. Naffine, ed., *Gender, Crime and Feminism*, Aldershot, Dartmouth, 1995, pp.175-181.

⁸⁷ J. Marcus, "Prisoner of Discourse: The Dingo, the Dog and the Baby", *Anthropology Today*, 5(3), 1989, pp.15-19 at p.15, italics in text.

⁸⁸ Bryson, "Syndrome", p.51.

a bizarre satanic ritual – “everyone has a theory on whether or not she did it”.⁸⁹ A question that continues to puzzle critics is why we were so quick to pass sentence on Lindy Chamberlain? Why, Bryson asks, were the Australian public so “astonishingly ready ... to believe the unbelievable?”.⁹⁰ Bryson pursues the issue in *Evil Angels*,⁹¹ a narrative “excavation of the past”⁹² that

⁸⁹ Marcus, p.15.

⁹⁰ Bryson, “Syndrome”, p.51.

⁹¹ J. Bryson, *Evil Angels* (1985), Melbourne, Penguin, 1989. The title of Bryson’s book draws us back to the Elizabethan era and in particular to the publication of a sermon by Lutheran theologian Urbanus Rhegius under the English title *An Homelye or Sermon of Good and Evill Angels* (1583). At section A3 Rhegius writes: “wee knowe out of gods word that there are bothe good and evill Angelles. Good angels God calleth his children ... But evill Angelles are Devils” (p.467). In his study of the sermon, Brennan suggests that Rhegius influenced Marlowe’s *Dr Faustus* (1593) especially the latter’s use of good and evil angels – the nature of which “seems to have become something of a preoccupation for theological debate at the time” (p.467). M. Brennan, “Christopher Marlowe’s *Dr Faustus* and Urbanus Rhegius’s *An Homelye ... of Good and Evill Angels*”, *Notes and Queries*, 3-4, 1991, pp.466-469. At section A4 Rhegius traces the genesis of evil angels to the paradisiacal Eden where the murderous Mother Eve tempted Adam to partake of the forbidden fruit: “by and by began they in Paradise to molest and provoke the wretched humaine creature unto disobedience” (p.468). In Marlowe’s play, Faust surrenders his soul to the devil/Mephistopheles to fulfil all his worldly desires. Goethe’s Faust similarly makes a pact with the devil to recapture the blissful happiness of youth. In Goethe’s version, Faust seduces a village girl named Gretchen who bears and murders her illegitimate child. She is condemned to death for child-murder but, because she expresses remorse for her actions, eludes the devil’s attempts to capture her soul. In his use of the title *Evil Angels* is Bryson making a scathing comment about the discursive framing of Chamberlain’s guilt and the media’s imag(in)ing of maternal child-murder as the devil’s work? We should note here also the communal response to Susan Smith’s confession: “The devil got ahold of her” (Peyser, p.182) and the defence of convicted American infanticide Andrea Yates who claimed that she was possessed by the devil. In the Yates case the defence’s expert witness found that Andrea was of the belief that she was Satan and thought that murdering her children would save them from hell. For a comprehensive consideration of the legal construction of insanity in light of the Yates case see D.W.

attempts to structure the numerous stories circulating at the time of the trial. For some, Bryson's account is too literary – "facts assume the shape of fiction ... and readers find themselves juggling formal expectations".⁹³ For others, Bryson's penchant for detail detracts from an otherwise 'good story'.⁹⁴ Bliss finds herself questioning the nature of the story that Bryson is trying to tell, a story that purports to be 'real' but "is and can only be imaginary".⁹⁵

The narrativity of Bryson's representation of real events arises from an authorial desire for "coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure"⁹⁶ and feeds the reader's epistemophilic desire 'to know'. Bryson toys with his reader, implying "that there is an extratextual truth to which facts will ... conform"⁹⁷ but precluding the possibility of a final verdict. Bryson challenges public misconceptions by showing that "fact itself, as much as fiction or any other ontological category, is a construct of perceptual

Denno, "Who is Andrea Yates?: A Short Story About Insanity", *Duke Journal of Gender Law and Policy*, 10, 2003, pp.1-137.

⁹² C. Bliss, "Categorical Infringement: Australian Prose in the Eighties", *Journal of Narrative Technique*, 21(1), 1991, pp.43-51 at p.45.

⁹³ Bliss, p.44. See also Pierce who notes that Bryson "deploys fictional techniques, freely entering the consciousness of his characters, presuming their motives, sketching their emotional responses". P. Pierce, *The Country of Lost Children: An Australian Anxiety*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.174.

⁹⁴ Bliss notes: "reviewers have complained of the way massive detail ... impedes narrative progress, smudges what might have been a pristine plot line, and interferes with character development" (p.46).

⁹⁵ H. White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality", *Critical Inquiry*, 7, 1980, pp.5-27 at p.27, cited in Bliss, p.45.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Bliss, p.45.

experience”.⁹⁸ Bryson’s book is what Pierce terms a “lost child narrative”, one of the primary elements of which is the desperate “[t]elling and retelling, trying to form a stock version of events that yet will not hold its shape”.⁹⁹

Craik suggests that the Chamberlain case was a theatrical spectacle, “a psychic drama which tapped deep myths in the human psyche and Australian identity”.¹⁰⁰ The case exposed “a deep reserve of Australian folk memory, called up unexpectedly and disturbingly by the los[t] child [Azaria]”.¹⁰¹ For Pierce, Australia is “the country of lost children ... the place where the innocent young are most especially in jeopardy”.¹⁰² Delving into the folklore of colonial Australia, Pierce uncovers the motif of the lost child in nineteenth and twentieth century narratives. According to Pierce, numerous stories of children disappearing in the Australian bush generated from white settler communities during the mid-nineteenth century. Pierce notes the extreme symbolic resonance of narratives about lost children and the poignant figure of the lost child who, like Azaria Chamberlain, remains lost in

⁹⁸ *Id.* at p.46.

⁹⁹ Pierce, p.175.

¹⁰⁰ J. Craik, “The Azaria Chamberlain Case and Questions of Infanticide”, *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*, 4(2), 1987, pp.123-151 at p.125.

¹⁰¹ Pierce, p.175.

¹⁰² *Id.* at p.xi.

the wilderness – a hostile “landscape *without* figures ... [but] ghosts”.¹⁰³

Marcus suggests that the theme of the lost child is fundamental to the way in which we imagine Azaria’s disappearance. Marcus describes the typical narrative pattern in colonial stories of the lost child as follows:

The child wanders away from ‘civilization’ into the perils of ‘the bush’. Very often, the child is lost forever, found too late to be ‘saved’ by man ... The search for the lost child is carried out by men, while the women stay at home and weep silently¹⁰⁴

According to Marcus, the Chamberlain’s version of events fractured this narrative pattern and thus disrupted frontier mythology – “[Azaria] did not wander away from civilisation into the bush, she was stolen from the ‘red heart’ of the wild ... Rather than the child going out from the safety of the domestic domain of the mother ... the mother herself had entered the wild and exposed her child’s purity to its danger”.¹⁰⁵ Nor did Lindy Chamberlain stand by silently weeping. She proffered her own lost child story, “reconstruct[ing] what she thought she had seen as well as imagining what might have happened by the tent

¹⁰³ P. Foss, “Landscape Without Landscape: Prefatory Remarks” in P. Foss, ed., *Island in the Stream: Myths of Place in Australian Culture*, Sydney, Pluto Press, 1988, pp.1-3 at p.3.

¹⁰⁴ Marcus, p.16.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

that night”.¹⁰⁶ Marcus suggests that Chamberlain’s theory that a dingo took her baby was extremely disturbing not the least because it conjured a horrifying image but also because, in myths of nationhood, the dingo – Australia’s ‘native dog’ – held an “iconic status”.¹⁰⁷ Detractors were

¹⁰⁶ Pierce, p.175.

¹⁰⁷ Marcus, p.16. Perhaps one of the most disturbing images during the trial was that printed on T-shirts worn by some members of the public depicting a smiling Lindy Chamberlain unzipping and stepping out of a dingo suit next to the tent where Azaria was sleeping at the time of her disappearance. A picture of the T-shirt is reproduced in Young, *Innocence* (photo insert after p.138). Wood suggests that “the figure of Lindy Chamberlain was transposed on to the figure of the dingo – and vice versa. This transposition occurred most frequently and readily in the minds of those who knew little of outback lore/law”. B. Wood, “The Trials of Motherhood: The Case of Azaria and Lindy Chamberlain” in H. Birch, ed., *Moving Targets: Women, Murder and Representation*, London, Virago Press, 1993, pp.62-94 at p.79. Young notes that “[b]y the time of the trial Lindy’s dingo account had become a story, a tale, or a theory ... Her dingo claim had become a national joke, sometimes crude, sometimes witty ... but always destructive of the dreadful possibility of its truth”, *Innocence*, p.25. The prosecution played on cultural sentiment describing “the dingo story [as] preposterous ... not capable of belief”, Young, *Innocence*, pp.25-26. Yet, there was evidence warning the Wildlife Department that Uluru dingoes were predators and that “children and babies [could] be considered possible prey” (Ranger Derrick Roff cited in Young, *Innocence*, p.25; see also J.A. Scutt, “Schemers, Dragons, and Witches: Criminal ‘Justice’ and the Fair Sex” in B. Garlick, S. Dixon and P. Allen, eds, *Stereotypes of Women in Power: Historical Perspectives and Revisionist Views*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1992, pp.181-208 at p.186). Other stories of attacks on children by dingoes were in circulation at the time of the trial, including a story reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1902 of a two-year-old boy carried 35 miles by a dingo (Pierce, p.175). And in our own day and age reports of dingo attacks continue to make headlines. In April 2001, a nine year old Brisbane boy was mauled to death by two dingoes while on a camping holiday in Queensland. In their coverage of the incident, reporters Matt Robbins, Kevin Meade, and Paul Toohey (“Dingoes Kill Boy, 9”, *The Australian*, 1 May 2001) draw a connection to the Chamberlain case: “Twenty years after Lindy Chamberlain cried out that a dingo had taken her baby, the doubts and suspicions of Australians can *almost* be put to rest – dingoes do kill” (emphasis added). Their comment evidences traces of the scepticism that continues to surround the case in spite of the exoneration of the Chamberlains of any involvement in the death of

quick to dispel Chamberlain's theory as the fantasy of an evil mother who, as a woman, had "no right to be in the wild outback ... a male domain, ... let alone a woman with her baby".¹⁰⁸ By repeatedly asking the question "[w]hy did [she] take her young and vulnerable daughter out into the heart of the dangerous Australian bush",¹⁰⁹ the media and the public began to associate the dangerous and unforgiving wild with the dangerous and unforgivable mother - making the two indistinguishable.

Considering the ways in which images of the infanticidal mother call into question the boundaries between nature and culture, barbarism and civilisation, feminist theorist Sneja Gunew draws on myths of origin to link maternity and nationality in Western consciousness. Focusing specifically on Australia, Gunew suggests that for immigrants who have left their native homeland, "Australia is the mother who is not mother, the uncanny place that will never give birth: the stillborn. For white Australians, the country is the dead centre, the mother who ingests life".¹¹⁰ Gunew associates the phantasmic devouring

their baby. Such comments show how the case maintains its 'folk-lore' status in the Australian cultural imagination.

¹⁰⁸ Marcus, p.18.

¹⁰⁹ *Id.* at p.16. On this point Scutt notes that Chamberlain "was perceived ... to have placed her child in a position of danger. What 'good' mother would 'allow' her child to be taken away by a marauding animal? ... What was she doing with a young baby in the middle of the Australian desert, anyway?" ("Schemers", p.188).

¹¹⁰ S. Gunew, "Home and Away: Nostalgia in Australian (Migrant) Writing" in P. Foss, ed., *Island in the Stream: Myths of Place in Australian Culture*, Sydney, Pluto Press, 1988, pp.35-46 at p.40. See also Wood who notes the significance of Gunew's work in relation to

mother with the deadly motherland. For those who are strangers (or intruders),¹¹¹ the (mother)land is “indifferent, if not actively hostile to them”.¹¹² In this anti-Edenic topos the (mother)land is harsh and unforgiving, unbountiful, not nurturing but cannibalistic. The (mother)land does not give and sustain life but rather destroys her progeny and those in her care.

When Gunew made her comments about the dead centre as the mother who ingests life, the Chamberlain case was still at the forefront of public consciousness. Aware that her statement was all the more relevant in the context of the case, Gunew was quick to note the “new mythic significance”¹¹³ with which her words resonated. In his consideration of the physicality of the Australian landscape, Wood suggests that Uluru, “[p]ositioned in the centre of Australia where Azaria disappeared, ... became

“psychoanalytic theories of the subject and fantasised representations of parents, parent culture and language” (p.80). For a consideration of the ways in which the murderous mother destabilises boundaries between nature and culture, savagery and civilisation in eighteenth and nineteenth century English legal and literary narratives see B. Orr, “Stifling Pity in a Parent’s Breast: Infanticide and Savagery in Late Eighteenth-Century Travel Writing” in S.H. Clark, ed., *Travel Writing and Empire*, London, Zed, 1999, pp.131-146; F. Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1995; J. McDonagh, “Infanticide and the Boundaries of Culture from Hume to Arnold” in S. Greenfield and C. Barash, eds, *Inventing Maternity: Politics, Science, and Literature, 1650-1865*, Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1999, pp.215-237.

¹¹¹ Wood emphasises Lindy Chamberlain’s status as stranger: “Lindy Chamberlain was born outside the geographical borders of Australia – in New Zealand ... she was an outsider by birth” (p.81).

¹¹² Pierce, p.xii.

¹¹³ Gunew, p.40.

the belly or omphalos of the nation”.¹¹⁴ But, as Gunew notes, the dead centre or ‘red heart’ of Australia is “not mother” – the pregnant mother who gives birth to the dead, the archetypal Terrible (Devouring) Mother who takes her progeny back into herself/Earth as womb/tomb.

For Wood, the theme of unnatural consumption became “a national obsession” inspired by the young Aidan Chamberlain’s vivid description of his baby sister trapped inside the stomach of a wild animal: “the dingo’s got my bubby in its tummy”.¹¹⁵ Perhaps somewhere in his childish imagination he fantasised the rebirthing of his baby sister from the dingo’s belly just as his own mother had given birth to her nine weeks earlier. For other more sinister minds, the boy’s comment fuelled the image of Lindy Chamberlain as “the unnatural mother ... who ‘eats’, or consumes, her own babies”.¹¹⁶ In what Wood describes as a “collapse of sign systems ... the boundaries between nature and culture, the human and the animal, dissolve[d]”.¹¹⁷ While people were reluctant to believe that a dingo would take and devour a baby, they were far more willing to accept the prosecution’s argument that a mother

¹¹⁴ Wood, p.79.

¹¹⁵ *Id.* at p.78.

¹¹⁶ *Id.* at p.77.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* Johnson suggests that “the dingo became imbued with human qualities. Many people felt obliged to take the dingo’s side, particularly after newspaper headlines such as ‘Dingo Massacre – 50,000 killed in the wake of Azaria inquest’. D. Johnson, “From Fairy to Witch: Imagery and Myth in the Azaria Case”, *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2(2), 1984, pp.90-107 at p.102.

would murder her child (and consume the corpse).¹¹⁸ And the fact that Azaria's body was never found only served to bolster the fantasy of maternal consumption of the dead child. Lying just beneath the surface of fantasies of cannibalism are the cultural practices of Aboriginal tribes from central Australia. In his study of Aboriginal culture, Róheim found that:

[t]he prevailing form of cannibalism in central, south and western Australia is 'baby-eating'. The Pitjentara eat every second child. The infant is knocked on the head by the father and then eaten by the mother ... With the Pindupi Yumu and Ngali ... they seem to eat the babies whenever they are hungry and especially when the mother gets a strong craving to do so. They even go to the length of pulling the foetus out of the womb and eating it.¹¹⁹

During the first coronial inquest in 1980 one of the Aboriginal trackers who took part in the search for Azaria after her initial disappearance related the story of the Luritja's dreaming of dingoes and children which told of

¹¹⁸ According to Pierce, "[a]t the core of Australian disbelief in Lindy Chamberlain's innocence, it seems, was the refusal to credit dingoes with such an active and malign agency as she had ascribed to one of them" (p.175). In Fred Schepisi's film adaptation of Bryson's *Evil Angels*, some people at a pub – representative of 'typical' Australians – make their incredulity known to a world-wide audience: "a dingo, they must think we came down in the last shower". Sanders discusses the "sympathy for the dingo movement" that swept across Australia during the trial. N. Sanders, "Azaria Chamberlain and Popular Culture" in J. Frow and M. Morris, eds, *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1993, pp.86-101 at pp.94-98.

¹¹⁹ G. Róheim, *The Gates of the Dream*, New York, International Universities Press, 1952, p.35.

infants being left in the bush for the 'devil dingo'.¹²⁰ The media consumed the tale voraciously, suggesting that perhaps the evil mother in the Chamberlain drama similarly "fed her baby to the dingoes".¹²¹ Perhaps Chamberlain was herself in cahoots with the devil. As we saw in Chapter Four, women accused of witchcraft in the early modern era were said to do the devil's work. In particular, witches were accused of stealing human infants, slaughtering and devouring them during their sabbat. Several theorists including Scutt, Johnson, and Creed suggest that the Chamberlain case was nothing more than a witch-hunt that involved "the making of Lindy the witch".¹²² Chamberlain certainly saw herself as being "the victim of a ... witch-hunt".¹²³

According to Creed, the fantasy of Chamberlain as "a depraved, evil, unnatural mother caught up in black magic and witchcraft held ... strong [public] appeal".¹²⁴ Media coverage of the trial emphasised the way in which Chamberlain transformed her image with each

¹²⁰ In his book *The Crown Versus Chamberlain 1980-1987* (Sydney, Albatross Books, 1987), Crispin describes the 'devil dingo' as an evil Dingo Spirit that "inhabits the body of a living dingo, causing it to act with uncharacteristic malevolence and ferocity" (p.16). See also Johnson (p.101) on the 'dingo spirit'.

¹²¹ J. Simmonds, *Azaria, Wednesday's Child*, Melbourne, TPNL Books, 1982, p.40.

¹²² Johnson, p.90. On a personal note, I still find it extremely disturbing that the prosecution's expert scientific witness, Joy Kuhl, referred to Chamberlain as a witch – "She [Lindy] was there behind me, staring. She just stares. She is, you know, a witch. I could feel her eyes burning holes through my back", Bryson, *Evil Angels*, p.432.

¹²³ Johnson, p.90.

¹²⁴ Creed, "Backlash", p.119.

appearance. Johnson traces the metamorphosis, showing how the media latched onto Chamberlain's changing shape with the pregnancy of her fourth child. In the public eye, Chamberlain went from sexual seductress and cinematic siren ("a filmstar with a black dress, red lips, shoes and handbag"¹²⁵) to a more conformist version of maternity – pregnant and unconcerned with her appearance. The media raised speculation that "Lindy [had] purposefully change[d] her form"¹²⁶ to gain public support and in so doing reinvoked the figure of the shape-shifting witch who assumes various forms (including that of mother/stepmother/grand- mother) to lure her victims.

Scutt suggests that Chamberlain was persecuted for failing to fit the myth of motherhood. According to Scutt, "Chamberlain did not act ... as a mother, who has lost her child to a dingo, should act".¹²⁷ During her trial and media interviews she was described as "stony-faced"¹²⁸ with a

¹²⁵ Johnson, p.100.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Scutt, "Schemers", p.187. As Chamberlain notes in her autobiography, "I didn't behave the way some people thought I should, so of course I *must* be guilty" (p.xii). Kaplan discusses the way in which "the public and the court ... evaluate a mother in terms of her outward, mythically 'motherly' sign[s] ... [Chamberlain] refuse[d] to adopt the mannerisms, dress and submissive style that might turn the court and jury in her direction, or support her case in the public's eye ... the court and the public construct the mother's behaviour as indicating her complicity in the baby's disappearance. The fact that her demeanour, style and manner do not fit the culture's notion of motherliness is read as a capacity to murder". E.A. Kaplan, "Discourses of the Mother in Postmodern Film and Culture", *Westerly*, 34(4), 1989, pp.24-34 at p.28.

¹²⁸ Scutt, "Schemers", p.188.

“stoic expression”,¹²⁹ and “failed to shed any tears”¹³⁰ or disclose “pious maternal sentiments”.¹³¹ And Chamberlain’s description of how dingoes consume their prey (“They never eat the skin. They use their feet like hands and pull back the skin as they go – just like peeling an orange”¹³²) was exposed as a sure sign of maternal monstrosity. Chamberlain was labelled by the media as “a modern-day Lady Macbeth”¹³³, the dreadful Shakespearean mother who fantasised murdering the very child at her breast.

Writing about the ways in which women are both “framed and framed up, indited and indicted”¹³⁴ in legal discourse, Kennedy suggests that:

[i]n the theatre of the criminal court, Lindy Chamberlain was a bad witness. She did not disclose the emotional torment which the situation (and public) seemed to demand. She was disgusted and angry with the way the media had treated her, and made no attempt to conceal her feelings. Her anger at the prosecution meant that she came across

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* Witches were believed to be unable to shed tears (K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Trowbridge, Redwood Press, 1971, p.464).

¹³¹ According to Kaplan, “[Chamberlain is] [t]he mother [who] refuses to display her grief publicly, or trade on her loss in any way ... her strength and independence are read negatively against prevailing motherhood codes” (p.28).

¹³² Cited in Johnson, p.101.

¹³³ *Id.* at p97.

¹³⁴ S.M. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979, p.36.

as a cold, hard-faced woman. She was damned if she was going to give them the show they wanted to prove her innocence, and damned she was as a result.¹³⁵

Chamberlain's legal representative Andrew Kirkham warned her about the unfavourable impression she was presenting for the jury, going so far as to suggest that she should try not to "sound like a fish-wife" and "try to be more 'demure'".¹³⁶ For Watson, there is no doubt that Chamberlain "was thought to be unreliable and a liar ... even though the first inquest had exonerated [her] of all responsibility ... [because] she had violated the stereotypes and sanctity of motherhood, and transgressed the boundaries of normal passive motherhood".¹³⁷ By the time Chamberlain was released from prison in 1987, her appearance and demeanour had altered so drastically that she finally conformed to societal expectations. For the public however, it was 'too little too late'. The fantasy of the evil and unnatural infanticidal mother was so firmly ingrained in the cultural psyche that it could not be undermined. Even today it is a fantasy that continues to "percolate just beneath the [surface]", encroaching on our

¹³⁵ H. Kennedy, *Eve Was Framed: Women and British Justice*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1992, p.251.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ J. Watson, "Lindy Chamberlain and the Media" in C. Atherton, ed., *Intersections: Gender and History*, Melbourne, History Department, University of Melbourne, 1997, pp.78-86 at p.81.

ability to tell and retell the story of Lindy Chamberlain – a story that “can have no ending”.¹³⁸

‘Trial by suspicion’¹³⁹: The murder of JonBenét Ramsey

I love JonBenét and I miss her so much. My chest physically aches with the pain of a broken heart ... Add to that, the helplessness I feel when fingers are pointed and I have to say the words, “I did not kill my baby”. Some days it is almost too much to bear¹⁴⁰

On December 26, 1996 the body of six-year-old JonBenét (nicknamed ‘JonnieB’) – wrapped in a white blanket, her mouth covered with duct-tape, her hands bound with rope, and a garrotte around her neck – was found in the basement of her parents’ home in Boulder, Colorado. The murder of JonBenét Ramsey aroused considerable controversy in the United States. Newspaper reports at the time suggested that “[t]he investigation into JonBenét’s murder in Boulder, Colorado ... has become

¹³⁸ Craik, p.146. Toohey notes that “perception has shifted little in two decades”. P. Toohey, “Witch hunt”, *The Australian Magazine*, 15-16 July 2000, pp.16-23 at p.18. Sanders suggests that the case stirred public consciousness to such an extent that it “subverted official attempts at closure” (p.88). Certainly there can be no closure for Lindy Chamberlain who, when asked in an interview if she has justice yet, replied: “Almost – the Northern Territory needs to apologise and put death by dingo on the inquest” (*60 Minutes* Interview, August 27, 2000).

¹³⁹ *People Weekly*, “Trial by Suspicion: JonBenét Ramsey’s Parents Remain Unvindicated”, 1 November 1999, vol.52, p68.

¹⁴⁰ P. Ramsey, “Forward” in L. McLean, *JonBenét’s Mother: The Tragedy and the Truth*, West Virginia, McClain, 1998, pp.iii-iv at p.iv.

America's version of the Azaria Chamberlain mystery".¹⁴¹ Fox and Van Sichel suggest that the level of public engagement with the murder of JonBenét was perhaps "unprecedented" in the United States.¹⁴² Colorito suggests that the case was 'made' for the tabloid media with its "lurid, titillating, and bizarre details"¹⁴³: beauty pageants,¹⁴⁴ wealthy parents,¹⁴⁵ speculation about parental involvement in the murder;¹⁴⁶ the violent nature of

¹⁴¹ M. Riley, "Mother killed JonBenét in fit of temper", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 April 2000, p.12.

¹⁴² R.L. Fox and R.W. Van Sichel, *Tabloid Justice: Criminal Justice in an Age of Media Frenzy*, Boulder, Colorado, Lynne Reiner, 2001, p.133. Tim Graham, director of media analysis at the Washington, D.C. Media Research Centre cites the Ramsey case as "the most over-reported ... of our time", cited in R. Colorito, "The JonBenét Juggernaut", *World and I*, 16(1), 2001, p.66.

¹⁴³ Police chief Tom Koby berated the American public for their "sick curiosity" in the Ramsey case, cited in G.J. Church, "Deadlock in Boulder", *Time*, 150(14), 6 October 1997, pp.78-80 at p.80.

¹⁴⁴ Cottle notes that "JonBenét's story thrust the entire world of child beauty pageants into the public consciousness. The public promptly declared itself sickened, shocked, and outraged. News articles made repeated reference to the 'strange' and 'bizarre' world of JonBenét, as if the littlest Ramsey had been part of some dark underground community". M. Cottle, "You've come a long way, maybe: JonBenét, Diana, the princess fantasy, and what it has done to women", *Washington Monthly*, 29(11), 1997, pp.20-24 at p.21.

¹⁴⁵ In an article appearing in a Boulder newspaper five days before the murder, John Ramsey is referred to as a 'billionaire'. Detective Steve Thomas, a firm believer that Patsy Ramsey murdered her daughter, voiced concerns in the press that the Ramseys were being fed details about the conduct of the police investigation from the district attorney's office. According to Fox and Van Sichel, the Ramseys were portrayed as 'extraordinary' people who used their wealth and connections to ensure that they received 'special treatment' (p.159). Some suggestions were made that the District Attorney was "vulnerable to big money, [and] that he protect[ed] the Ramseys – who are very big money", Church, p.79.

¹⁴⁶ John and Patsy Ramsey argue that "suspicion", "rumours" and "false allegations" created a public misconception that they were somehow involved in JonBenét's death. J. Ramsey and P. Ramsey, *The Death of Innocence: The Untold Story of JonBenét's Murder and How its Exploitation Compromised the Pursuit of Truth*, Nashville, Tennessee, Thomas Nelson, 2000.

the murder; the idea that the “perfect town”¹⁴⁷ of Boulder was perhaps not so ‘perfect’.¹⁴⁸ Richards and Calvert suggest that the Ramsey family “catapulted ... into instant notoriety both as household names and as saleable commodities on newsstands everywhere ... the ‘soap opera’ nature of this case firmly embedded the visage of [JonBenét] into American popular culture”.¹⁴⁹ A Boulder

¹⁴⁷ This is Lawrence Schiller’s description of Boulder, Colorado. L. Schiller, *Perfect Murder, Perfect Town: JonBenét and the City of Boulder*, New York, Harper Collins, 1999.

¹⁴⁸ Paglia writes: “I still find quite piquant the whole Profanation of Happy Christmas scenario here, where the unctuous cultural rhetoric of Silent Night, Holy Night got blown up by Babylonian trash and flash”. Paglia suggests that the vice and sin associated with big-city living somehow infiltrated and threatened the purity of the Ramsey home surrounded by “[a]ll that telltale, unmarked, virgin snow”. The murder of JonBenét shattered the fantasy of happy family life in suburban utopia. At the same time, Paglia points out that the Ramseys were no ordinary family and Boulder no ordinary place (“downtown Manhattan hasn’t cornered the market on decadence”). C. Paglia, “Why we leer at JonBenét”, *Salon*, September 1997, available online at <http://www.salon.com/sept97/columnists/paglia.html>. “You have to keep in mind”, says a council worker, “that this place isn’t real life. This is dreamland”, cited in J.C. Oates, “The Mystery of JonBenét Ramsey”, *New York Times Review of Books*, 24 June 1999, vol.46(11). Boulder is a place beyond the ‘real’, a place that can only be conjured by the imagination. Until the murder of JonBenét, Boulder was ‘immune’ from violent crime. Boulder was a town known only as a safe place in which to raise children or take holidays. After JonBenét’s murder, Boulder is no longer a ‘perfect’ tourist destination but dystopia. Murder in ‘dreamland’ is more horrifying than the ‘everyday’ murders that are a part of city living – they are expected. The people of Boulder were “wholly unprepared” (Oates) for murder of such an horrific magnitude. Hewitt writes that “JonBenét Ramsey’s life appeared almost unnaturally charmed, making her murder seem all the more darkly perverse”. B. Hewitt, “Lost Innocent”, *People Weekly*, 47(2), 20 January 1997, pp.38-45 at p.38. If Boulder was once a place of dreams, it is now a place of nightmares. The murder of JonBenét also ruptured the Ramseys fantasy of a ‘perfect’ life in Boulder. After her death they left what once seemed like a safe and secure environment in which to raise their children.

¹⁴⁹ R.D. Richards and C. Calvert, “Press Coverage of the JonBenét Ramsey Murder and its Legal Implications: A Dialogue with John and

grand jury failed to indict anyone for the murder of JonBenét, only fuelling the public desire to know what 'really' happened. The public desperately wanted to know who had brutally murdered the innocent child crowned Colorado's 'Little Miss Christmas'.¹⁵⁰

In the early hours of the morning of December 26, 1996, JonBenét's mother Patsy made the 911 call to police saying that her daughter had been kidnapped and that she had found a ransom note. Several hours later, her husband John Ramsey and Detective Linda Arndt made a gruesome discovery – JonBenét was not kidnapped but murdered.¹⁵¹ Investigators sought to discredit the intruder

Patsy Ramsey and their Attorney, L. Lin Wood", *CommLaw Spectus*, 10, 2002, pp.227-250 at p.228.

¹⁵⁰ JonBenét's mother Patsy entered her daughter in numerous beauty pageants. Patsy was once herself crowned 'Miss West Virginia'. Mother and daughter were extremely close and often co-ordinated their wardrobes so as to wear matching outfits. The media focused on this aspect of the Ramseys lives, typically offering pictures of JonBenét in 'beauty queen' poses as "cuisine for public consumption" (Ramsey and Ramsey, p.105). Paglia uses author George Eliot's association between visual consumption and social degeneration to describe the cultural 'leering' at six-year-old JonBenét in modern America: "the seductive, obsessively repeated girlie shots of JonBenét seem to have taken over the nation's television screens like Eliot's 'disease of the retina'" (*supra* at note 142). Paglia exposes the extraordinary gap between contemporary cultural anxiety over child pornography and nineteenth-century representations of children as silently and shyly hiding behind mother's skirt. JonBenét problematises the very idea of 'childhood' by occupying a space at the border of childhood and adulthood, being neither child nor adult. By entering into the 'adult world' of beauty contests, JonBenét became a spectacle and a symptom of cultural disease. Paglia suggests that JonBenét was "prostituted ... [her] sexless paradise garden befouled by serpent adults" (*supra* at note 142). Embedded within narratives about the Ramsey case is the role of the mother in the objectification of her child and her ignor(e)-ance of the dangers of overexposure.

¹⁵¹ Detective Arndt was criticised for her initial handling of the case, in particular her suggestion that John Ramsey search the house rather

theory, suggesting instead that Patsy murdered her daughter “in a fit of temper”, “panicked and ... decided to make the killing look like the work of an intruder”.¹⁵² Regardless of evidence that suggested otherwise,¹⁵³ Patsy Ramsey was and remains the prime suspect.

In his study of the case, *Perfect Murder, Perfect Town: JonBenét and the City of Boulder*, Lawrence Schiller draws together fragments from over one hundred recorded interviews with police, investigators, lawyers,

than police officers. When John Ramsey found his daughter’s body in the basement he carried it upstairs thereby contaminating evidence.

¹⁵² Riley, p.12. One of the detectives (Lou Smit) who was part of the investigative team for eighteen months came forward in 2001 to express his personal belief that Patsy Ramsey did not murder JonBenét but that it was the work of an intruder. In a two-part interview on the American ‘Today Show’, Smit recounts how the Boulder Police department was intent on pursuing the theory that Patsy (or even John) Ramsey committed murder. “What happened is that suddenly everyone that was involved on the intruder side of the story was in effect removed from the case”. During his interview, Smit dispels the myth that there was no possibility that an intruder murdered JonBenét. According to Smit photographers taking pictures of the Ramsey house saw what appeared to be a house surrounded by snow. People then began asking the question “How could anyone get into the house without leaving some type of footprint in the snow?” Smit says that he noticed “that there was no snow around the various doors and entry doors of the house ... or on the sidewalks”. Smit shows how an adult male could easily climb through the Ramseys’ basement window and be screened by surrounding fences (Transcript of the interview is on file with the author).

¹⁵³ DNA found under the victim’s fingernails and on her clothing failed to match that of Patsy Ramsey, her husband John or her son Burke. The DNA also failed to match samples of convicted violent offenders contained in a Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) database. Handwriting experts could not match samples of Patsy Ramsey’s handwriting with the style of writing contained in the ransom note. Detective Smit found “signs of a possible intruder – cobwebs missing from the edge of the window, a shoe scuff on the wall, imprints of a hi-tech sneaker in the wine cellar where JonBenét’s body was found, and a suitcase placed under the window to help someone get out”. According to Smit, “the Boulder P.D. never really pursued the intruder theory” (Transcript of the interview is on file with the author).

and family members to reconstruct the murder investigation. Schiller recounts Patsy's second formal interview at the District Attorney's office in June 1998. She was interviewed by two investigators, Trip DeMuth and Tom Haney, the latter of whom had been warned by Detective Steve Thomas that "Patsy would crank up the charm and could become religiously charismatic at times".¹⁵⁴ The detectives also found that "Patsy was polite and charming ... 'I just did my best', she kept saying".¹⁵⁵ According to Schiller, "Patsy's performance [did] not make a good impression on Tom Haney ... One minute he would be talking to a sophisticated, articulate Miss America contestant ... the next, she'd be trying to charm him".¹⁵⁶

Already deeply suspicious of Patsy, Haney hoped to push her to the point of confession by taunting her with false evidence of her guilt. "What would you do if I told you we had evidence that shows you're not being truthful? he said, looking directly into her eyes".¹⁵⁷ Understandably Patsy became defensive, but her resolve to maintain her innocence was taken as evidence of her 'underlying rage'. As Schiller recounts, "[t]he tougher the questions became, the tougher Patsy became ... [w]hen Haney took the offensive, Patsy was ready for him. She had the answers,

¹⁵⁴ Schiller, p.531.

¹⁵⁵ *Id.* at p.532.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

and she didn't care if he liked them or not".¹⁵⁸ Believing that they had "gotten to the real Patsy ... the hard side of her persona ... a side capable of doing harm to her daughter",¹⁵⁹ the detectives made incredible an otherwise ostensibly believable version of events.

Recalling that particular interview, Patsy Ramsey remembers six hours of continual interrogation sitting in a room with covered windows at a long narrow table in uncomfortable proximity to the faces of the detectives, almost 'nose-to-nose'. When Patsy began to cry uncontrollably, she felt that Detective Thomas "was glad to see [her] emotionally broken".¹⁶⁰ Once the interview was over, and she had time to reflect, Patsy "realised what Thomas was really trying to do. His passionate pledge to get the killer was his way of telling me that he thought I did it. The police had wanted me to stagger away from this interrogation convinced they were going to indict me for JonBenét's murder ... [while] I thought they were hunting for the killer, [they were] trying to lynch the mother".¹⁶¹

Rumours began to surface that Patsy had flirted with Detective Thomas. Patsy's recollection of a small and almost claustrophobic room is countered in Thomas's book about the investigation. He states: "[w]hen I had a

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Schiller, p.533.

¹⁶⁰ Ramsey and Ramsey, p.263.

¹⁶¹ *Id.* at p.264.

question, she would lean so close across that narrow pine table that we were almost in kissing distance, invading my personal space before answering”.¹⁶² Patsy believed that this was ‘police strategy’ – and she was correct. According to Thomas, “at the end of the day, I concluded that we had reached our goal – we had established probable cause. And when Patsy Ramsey left that room, I believe she should have been in handcuffs”.¹⁶³ Like the media fascination with Chamberlain’s appearance, Thomas recalled her “immaculate blue suit with white trim over a white sweater, a silver angel pin on her lapel, gold earrings ... and perfume [which] reached across the table”.¹⁶⁴ Thomas also focussed on her demeanour – her “abrupt” mood swings, from “soft words, big doe eyes” and “little-girl persona”¹⁶⁵ to “confident savvy sophisticate who knew how to work a man”¹⁶⁶ – “the woman was a chameleon”.¹⁶⁷

The media gave force to Thomas’s suspicions. Headlines such as “Mother killed JonBenét in a fit of temper”¹⁶⁸ filled the front pages of every newspaper. Despite a Boulder grand jury ending its thirteen month inquiry without an indictment, Patsy Ramsey remains “at the centre of the

¹⁶² S. Thomas with D. Davis, *JonBenét: Inside the Ramsey Murder Investigation*, New York, St Martin’s Press, 2000, p.185.

¹⁶³ *Id.* at p.184.

¹⁶⁴ *Id.* at p.186.

¹⁶⁵ *Id.* at p.187.

¹⁶⁶ *Id.* at p.185.

¹⁶⁷ *Id.* at p.188.

¹⁶⁸ Riley, p.12.

mystery”.¹⁶⁹ The instinctive ‘feelings’ of investigators about Patsy’s involvement and their expression in the media meant that “there has been no end to the public lynching and speculation which marred the case from the beginning”.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, legal analyst Andrew Cohen suggests that Patsy is “nowhere near out of the woods yet ... [f]ive years from now, ten years from now, [she] could be indicted and tried”.¹⁷¹

In *The Death of Innocence*, co-authored by Patsy and her husband John, Patsy states that one nagging question continued to run through her mind during the police investigations and while reading media reports: “why would they possibly think that I’ve killed my daughter?”¹⁷² The question is one that runs through the minds of all mothers who are falsely accused of murdering their children. It is a question which suggests that the myths and cultural fantasies surrounding cases such as that of Lindy Chamberlain persist regardless of what Toohey suggests “we [should] have learned [from] ... the trial of the century”.¹⁷³

For Bryson, “[t]wenty years on, the compelling question is: could it happen again?”¹⁷⁴ The simple but tragic answer is ‘yes’. Innocent mothers whose children have been

¹⁶⁹ *People Weekly*, “Trial by Suspicion”, p.68.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Ramsey and Ramsey, p.140.

¹⁷³ Toohey, p.16.

¹⁷⁴ Bryson, “Syndrome”, p.52.

murdered are just as much victims as those children. Too often they are made to bear responsibility for the violent and horrific acts of others. The presumption of guilt and politics of blame surrounding these women renders them voiceless because we continually fail to hear their pleas of innocence. The spectre of the evil infanticidal mother continues to lurk in our darkest minds. In the persistence of this vision, fantasy and myth replace reason and justice with fear and loathing.

In telling their story about the death of their beloved daughter, John and Patsy Ramsey use the potent phrase ‘the death of innocence’ to encapsulate what it means to lose a child and how that loss shatters one’s faith in humanity. For the Ramseys the ‘death of innocence’ also suggests the death of a constitutional principle – the presumption of innocence – that goes to the very core of how America defines itself and how the nation is seen by the rest of the world. In the ‘Foreword’ to their book, John and Patsy Ramsey discuss their motivation for telling their story, for “shar[ing] [their] hearts, emotions, and reflections”,¹⁷⁵ for re-entering a nightmare world dominated by recurring panic attacks, flashbacks to the scene of the crime, fears that the killer may strike again, “horrible raw feelings [that] returned day after day”,¹⁷⁶ and “gruesome mental pictures of [JonBenét] lying dead in

¹⁷⁵ Ramsey and Ramsey, p.xiii.

¹⁷⁶ *Id.* at p.118.

front of [the] Christmas tree”¹⁷⁷:

Innocent people are unjustly suspected, publicly accused, arrested, prosecuted, jailed, and in some cases, executed. Our criminal justice system now operates on the presumption of guilt, and then challenges the defendant to prove his or her innocence ... We lost our daughter to the worst imaginable monster in our society and then were persecuted by the police and the media because they *knew* ‘[a] parent [is] always guilty [in these types of cases]’ ... If by telling our story the balance of liberty is brought back to the constitutional premise of ‘innocent until proven guilty’, then something worthwhile will have come out of this tragedy.¹⁷⁸

In a recent interview the Ramseys expressed concern that their book may not have the desired impact because books are rapidly becoming historical artefacts. “Sadly, in our country, people don’t read books anymore”,¹⁷⁹ muses Patsy. Her husband interjects with the comforting thought that “50 years from now, somebody will read it [as] a document of what really happened ...”.¹⁸⁰ In their minds at least, the Ramseys imagine that their story is the only story that will endure the passage of time, that its literary form will lend it authority in a future when books are no longer written but cherished as testaments to the past. In (re)telling the story of JonBenét’s murder then, it seems

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Ramsey and Ramsey, p.xiii; italics in text.

¹⁷⁹ Richards and Calvert, p.237.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

that John and Patsy Ramsey may have the final word after all.

False innocence: The Susan Smith case

*Alas! O dearest mother dear! A black man drags me away from here; Why wilt thou let me go from thee, I cannot walk, no dance for me*¹⁸¹

*I knew from day one, the truth would prevail*¹⁸²

One year prior to the Ramsey case, South Carolina mother Susan Smith was found guilty of murdering her two sons, Michael (three years old) and Alex (fourteen months old), and sentenced to life imprisonment but not before constructing a web of lies and “brutal deception that shocked the nation”.¹⁸³ In October 1994, Smith alleged that a black man carjacked her Mazda Protégé while she was waiting at traffic lights. She said that the man forced her to drive to John D. Long Lake at gunpoint, ordered her to exit the car and drove away with her two small sons still in the back seat. Union County police

¹⁸¹ K. Guthke, *The Gender of Death: A Cultural History in Art and Literature*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.57.

¹⁸² From Smith’s handwritten confession, available online: <http://www.teleplex.net/shj/smith/ninedays/ssconf.html>.

¹⁸³ Peyser, 1995, dustjacket. Trial transcript (State of South Carolina v Susan Vaughan Smith) available online: <http://www.languageandlaw.org/TEXTS/TRIAL/SMITH2.HTM>.

began a massive search for the boys, even consulting the Federal Bureau of Investigation, but with no success.

Smith made impassioned and tearful pleas on television for the safe return of her sons – “I can’t even describe what I’m going through. I mean, my heart is – it just aches so bad. I can’t sleep. I can’t eat. I can’t do anything but think about them ... I plead to the guy – to the man ... please return our children to us safely and unharmed”.¹⁸⁴ The community rallied around Smith, showing their support with yellow ribbons, signs, and prayers. Posters of the alleged carjacker – a black man in his twenties wearing a plaid jacket, jeans, and a knit cap, six feet, 175 pounds (“a profile [which] could have belonged to almost anyone”¹⁸⁵) – appeared on buildings and featured in news reports. According to Peyser, he became “the most sought-after felon in America”.¹⁸⁶

But police never found the alleged suspect because he was merely a figment of Smith’s imagination. After nine days of intense searching and mounting pressure from

¹⁸⁴ *Id.* at pp.53-54.

¹⁸⁵ *Id.* at p.57. Young suggests that crime is a text that can be read for signs of cultural anxiety. Those who figure in narratives of crime as textual outlaws are “continually being reconfigured as feminine, black, young, homosexual, maternal and on and on” (p.19) as reflections of social disorder and dis-ease. See also Threadgold who focuses on the textual production of the Black man as murderer, “Black Man, White Woman, Irresistible Impulse: Media, Law and Literature Making the Black Murderer” in P. Cheah, D. Fraser, J. Grbich, eds, *Thinking Through the Body of the Law*, New York, New York University Press, 1996, pp.163-186.

¹⁸⁶ Peyser, p.57.

police about the veracity of Smith's story, she finally confessed to murdering her two sons – rolling her car into the John D. Long Lake with her sons strapped into their safety seats. In a strange and ironic twist, Smith's initial story was believed but later proved to be false while the real story and her subsequent confession were met with public disbelief. When Smith confessed to murdering her children the mythic façade was “torn away to reveal the mother not as a devoted caretaker but as a kind of demon”.¹⁸⁷

In the case of Susan Smith, signs of ‘good’ motherhood become unreliable indicators of innocence – “[a]ny mother could do what I did ... [others have] had the same thoughts. I know they have. And they know they have too”, said Smith in an interview from prison and in the same breath continued: “I can be a good mother, and when I have another child I’ll prove it”.¹⁸⁸ In her handwritten confession, Smith worried that she “couldn’t be a good mum anymore” and decided to end all their lives “to protect us from any grief or harm”.¹⁸⁹ Yet just moments before her car reached the water, Smith stopped and got out of the car – “I allowed my children to go down

¹⁸⁷ A. Newitz, “Murdering Mother” in M. Ladd-Taylor and L. Umansky, eds, *op. cit.*, 1998, pp.334-355 at p.339. Newitz compares Smith’s case with that of Diane Downs who similarly murdered her children and implicated an imaginary carjacker.

¹⁸⁸ C. Calligaris, “Susan Smith, A Modern Mother: Reflections on the Destiny of Children at the End of Childhood”, *Critical Quarterly*, 39(3), 1997, pp.28-41 at p.31.

¹⁸⁹ From Smith’s handwritten confession, available online at <http://www.teleplex.net/shj/smith/ninedays/ssconf.html>.

that ramp into the water without me”.¹⁹⁰ Tied to her remorse is Smith’s belief that her children “are with our Heavenly Father now ... My children deserve to have the best, and now they will ... As a mum, that means more than words could ever say ... I love my children with all my heart. That will never change”.¹⁹¹

In her confession, Smith conflates maternal love with maternal harm, portraying herself as both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mother. Her statement defies easy judgment because she also represents herself as victim – “I was emotionally distraught. I didn’t want to live anymore! ... I had never felt so lonely and so sad ... I had never felt so scared and unsure”¹⁹² – and positions herself within traditional legal and medical discursive constructs by both showing remorse (“I am sorry for what has happened ... I don’t think I will ever be able to forgive myself”¹⁹³) and acknowledging that she “need[s] some help”¹⁹⁴ (throughout Smith’s trial, the defence also emphasised her victim status, childlike nature, and remorse).

Confused by her ‘mixed signals’, an article in the *New York Times* attempted to rationalise the monstrosity of Smith’s actions. Possible contributing factors were outlined under the headline “Life of a Mother Accused of

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Killing Offers No Clues”: childhood molestation; paternal suicide; emotional and financial pressures of raising young children.¹⁹⁵ But for the media and public, duped by Smith’s initial plea for the safe return of her children from a phantom kidnapper, a “tangled script”¹⁹⁶ of clichéd narratives were not adequate reasons for the callous silence of a mother who stood by while watching her children drown.

Smith’s own reasoning is convoluted - as twisted and tangled as the story she tells. Smith killed her children because she believed that she could not be a good mother, so she killed her children. Smith maintained that she acted in the best interests of her family. However, her reasons were not those the public wanted to hear. For most, the words ‘best interests’ and ‘child murder’ are diametrically opposed. Originally, Smith intended to commit suicide alongside her sons. Pearson contends that “it is more socially acceptable to self-destruct than to be outwardly destructive”¹⁹⁷ but in Smith’s case her “failure to explain just how she was able to exit her car to save herself, but not save her children as the vehicle rolled passively away, was lost on an unsympathetic press”.¹⁹⁸ In the cultural imagination mothers are either nurturing or

¹⁹⁵ *New York Times*, “Life of a Mother Accused of Killing Offers No Clues”, 22 January 1995.

¹⁹⁶ Harris, p.248.

¹⁹⁷ Pearson, p.43.

¹⁹⁸ M.A. Jacoby, “When She Was Bad: Violent Women and the Myth of Innocence”, *Journal of Law and Family Studies*, 2, 2000, pp.85-92 at p.89.

demonic. The myth that they can be one or the other, part of Dinnerstein's 'dirty goddess' theory,¹⁹⁹ allows us to believe that the two extremes of 'good' and 'bad' can, and must, remain separate.

Susan Smith's case became the primary focus of media coverage. What distinguished Smith's case from other reports of maternal child-murder circulating at the time was her scripted performance for the television cameras of a 'perfect mother' – tears on cue and overcome with grief. But Smith's distress, no matter how fabricated it now appears, points to a much harsher reality. In blaming the Black man for kidnapping her children, Smith invoked a racial myth and a prevailing cultural stereotype.²⁰⁰ According to Harris, Smith's story "was so readily accepted because it told the myth that ... racial difference is the source of all societal danger and destruction ... the demonized Black beast that she conjured matched the image in the mind of the dominant society".²⁰¹ Smith shows us how the image of the Black man can still be manipulated by those telling and living a white his(-s)tory.

Narratives are never free from the social, political, and cultural histories that dictate the terms of their telling. In

¹⁹⁹ D. Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*, New York, Harper & Row, 1977. See in particular chapter 7.

²⁰⁰ Harris, p.235.

²⁰¹ *Id.* at pp.246-247. For Harris, the Smith case confirms our "vulnerab[ility] to the distorted images that are the dysfunctional products of prevailing racial ... ideology" (p.231).

her fictional recreation of events, Smith draws on what Gewirtz refers to as “a set of stock stories”,²⁰² stories that are so firmly embedded in the cultural unconscious that their credibility is unlikely to be questioned. Gewirtz suggests that lawyers typically shape their narratives “to fit some favourable stock story [so that they] ... will have an easier time persuading a jury that their side’s story is true”.²⁰³ Both legal and non-legal storytellers attempt to persuade their listeners that the story they are being told conforms with the “set of stock stories in their minds”.²⁰⁴ Smith’s case not only exposes how vulnerable we are to narrative deception but makes us face the frightening truth that telling stories may compromise the lives of innocent people while allowing those who perpetuate deceit to “literally get away with murder”.²⁰⁵

Stranger than fiction: The Darlie Routier case

*Save me, oh Lord, from lying lips
and deceitful tongues*²⁰⁶

The public, media, and legal authorities were extremely affected by the Susan Smith case. The ramifications of Smith’s lies and subsequent confession are clear in the

²⁰² P. Gewirtz, “Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law” in P. Brooks and P. Gewirtz, eds, *Law’s Stories: Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996, pp.2-13 at p.8.

²⁰³ *Id.* at pp.8-9.

²⁰⁴ *Id.* at p.8.

²⁰⁵ *Id.* at p.9.

²⁰⁶ Psalms 120:2. This was the caption beneath a picture of Routier and her two sons printed on a T-shirt worn by supporters.

case of Darlie Routier, a twenty-six year old Texan mother who was accused and found guilty of murdering her two sons Devon (six years old) and Damon (five years old).²⁰⁷ She is currently sitting on death row in Gatesville, Texas.²⁰⁸ Routier pleaded 'not guilty' saying that an intruder stabbed the two boys while they were sleeping and then attacked her. But, according to the head of the Rowlett police department, "the crime scene [told] a story ... unfortunately it [was] different than hers".²⁰⁹

On June 6, 1996 at 2.31 a.m., Routier made a 911 call. In the first fifty-five seconds she says: "somebody came here

²⁰⁷ On the KERA Evening Talk Show, 26 July 2001, host Chris ViaSenior notes that "in the public consciousness Darlie Routier [and] Susan Smith ... are lumped together" (transcript on file with the author).

²⁰⁸ As at 30 June 2004 there were 49 women on death row in the United States. Routier is the fifth woman on death row for child-murder (<http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org>). In the Susan Smith case jurors refused to impose the death sentence despite her initial deception. Routier's mother pleaded with jurors not to send her daughter to death row because she believes that Routier loved her children and did not kill them. In her closing address to the jury, prosecutor Sherri Wallace warned them not to be swayed by family members: "You don't want to believe a mother killed her children. You fight in yourself to say it's not so. This woman over here [Routier] murdered her children in cold blood and then that family comes in here and tries to make you feel guilty for their loss" (cited in S. Verhovek, "Dallas Woman Sentenced to Death in Murder of Son", *New York Times*, February 5, 1997, p.12). Carroll suggests that "[w]omen such as Susan Smith [and] Darlie Routier ... have thrust the question of women and the death penalty back into the spotlight of the collective conscience". J.E. Carroll, "Images of Women and Capital Sentencing Among Female Offenders: Exploring the Outer Limits of the Eighth Amendment and Articulated Theories of Justice", *Texas Law Review*, 75, 1997, pp.1413-1452 at p.1415. See also J. Ford, "Susan Smith and Other Homicidal Mothers: In Search of the Punishment that Fits the Crime", *Cardozo Women's Law Journal*, 3, 1996, pp.521-548.

²⁰⁹ *New York Times*, "Mother's Arrest in Sons' Killings Has a Texas Town in Disbelief", June 23, 1996, p.26.

... they broke in ... they just stabbed me and my children ... my little boys ... oh my God ... my babies are dying ... what do we do”.²¹⁰ The remainder of the 911 transcript is punctuated with similar fragments from a frantic mother whose only thoughts are “where’s the ambulance” and “who would do this ... why would they do this”.²¹¹ The police would also want to know ‘who did this and why’ but as soon as they arrived they were “immediately suspicious”.²¹²

Although Routier had slash wounds to her neck, shoulder, hands, and forearm that would later require surgery, the police believed that they were self-inflicted. It seems that Routier’s story – she had fallen asleep with the two boys in the downstairs family room only to be awoken during the night by a young white man standing over her with a knife – was too similar to that of Susan Smith whose fabricated story was still fresh in everyone’s minds. Indeed, as suggested in the *New York Times* “the police and media [were] bent on turning Mrs Routier into another Susan Smith ... who had at first said [her two sons] were abducted by a carjacker”.²¹³

The prosecution was convinced that Routier had plotted the murder of her two sons and, like Smith, fabricated a

²¹⁰ 911 transcript (dated 3/11/94; transcribed by R. Fields) available online: <http://www.teleplex.net/shj/smith/ninedays/911tape.html>.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *New York Times*, 1996, p.26.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

story about an intruder to confuse investigators. Forensic experts argued that her wounds were self-inflicted and suggested that she may have considered suicide but hesitated because of the pain.²¹⁴ Smith also alleged that she had intended to drown herself with her two sons but changed her mind at the last minute, allowing her sons to perish alone. And like Smith, it would later be revealed that Routier had been sexually abused by her step-father.²¹⁵

During Routier's trial, the prosecution repeatedly referred to her as 'evil': "there is evil in the world, ... and today that evil goes by the name of Darlie Routier"²¹⁶ and portrayed her as a cold-blooded selfish mother whose children "had gotten in the way" of the "lavish lifestyle"²¹⁷ to which she was accustomed. Davis, in her damning account of the case, states matter-of-factly that "Darlie Routier was a woman doomed by having it all ... the dream house, boat, diamonds, hot tub ... She constructed an artificial life, from her pristine white carpets to the implants in her breasts. Once a doting mother ... she became a ... tyrant".²¹⁸

²¹⁴ The findings of Dr. Townsend-Parchman are summarised in B. Davis, *Precious Angels: A True Story of Two Slain Children and a Mother Convicted of Murder*, New York, Onyx, 1999, pp.143-5.

²¹⁵ *Id.* at p.262.

²¹⁶ Trial transcript, Vol.28, January 6, 1997, available online at <http://www.fordarlieroutier.org/Legal/index.html>.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ Davis, p.45.

The media associated the supposed artificiality of Routier's life with superficial mother love that could turn deadly "when things did not go her way ... Darlie always got what she wanted one way or another".²¹⁹ The actions of a self-centred woman (media photographs portrayed Routier posing, pouting, fixing her hair – which is variously bottle blond, platinum, "honey blonde" and "mousy brown",²²⁰ with or without a fringe, short, straight and tidy or long, curly and unruly – and Davis recounts the "pampering sessions" which included "nail sculpting", pedicures, and shopping "at exclusive establishments" ... "whether [she] needed [the items] or not"²²¹) are contrasted with self-sacrificing motherhood (Routier's mother confirms that Darlie practically raised her two younger sisters while her mother was working – "[i]t was Darlie that was patient with them and showed them the right way to do things. She taught me a lot about being a good mother and later about being a good grandmother to her boys"²²²). Routier's reaction to seeing her dead son in the Baylor Medical Centre (Nurse Jody Fitts commented on Routier's reaction: "I'll never forget it. She saw him. She had absolutely no response, just turned her head back and stared straight ahead – cold as ice"²²³) is also juxtaposed with uncontrollable tears and disbelief (Routier

²¹⁹ *Id.* at p.55.

²²⁰ *Id.* at p.57.

²²¹ *Id.* at p.85.

²²² *Id.* at p.49.

²²³ *Id.* at p.108.

was reported as repeating the question “Why’d he kill my boys?”²²⁴).

Like the Chamberlain case, the media focused on Routier’s appearance during her trial. Davis recalls that when Routier took the stand to testify “[s]he wore a pretty green dress with a collar of white lace. Her hair was twisted back in a flattering fashion. A wisp of her bangs fell strategically over her left eye, occasionally causing her to toss her head”.²²⁵ During questioning by the prosecution who systematically attempted to dismantle her intruder story, Routier began to cry “so intensely that she had to stop and take a breath to push [her] words out”.²²⁶ According to media reports, these tears were to be differentiated from the ‘fake tears’ which would suddenly appear when the situation suited. A family member was even quoted saying: “I didn’t realise until that moment that I’d never seen her cry before that day. But today I heard the unmistakable sound of grief. It just wasn’t for those boys”.²²⁷

Routier’s defence attorney, Richard Mosty, attempted to use these inconsistencies to his advantage. He also drew on public concerns about a state-instigated conspiracy theory in light of the Susan Smith trial. In his opening address to the jury, Mosty stated:

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ Davis, p.261.

²²⁶ *Id.* at p.273.

²²⁷ *Id.* at p.274.

the State will suggest to you that it's staging ... that somehow this doting mother turned psychotic killer ... [b]y 6.00 a.m., on June 6th, the Rowlett Police Department had decided that Darlie Routier was guilty, and they never ever blinked from that. They never looked in any other direction. They developed tunnel vision ... All of the investigation, the evidence focuses on Darlie Routier.²²⁸

Mosty's words would haunt him with the jury's guilty verdict. For the jury and prosecution, Routier had acted inappropriately – she did not cry when she saw her dead son; she did not ask if her other son was dead; she allegedly told a friend after the murders that she was going to redecorate her home; witnesses report that she yelled at her sons on several occasions; she was allegedly filmed throwing a graveside 'party' for her dead son's birthday, smiling, and spraying 'silly string'. Fuelled by resentment for being duped by Susan Smith, the American public were unwilling to see beyond the prosecution's portrayal of Darlie Routier as a "cold-blooded, calculating killer".²²⁹ The similarities between the two cases and the inconsistencies between defence and prosecution versions of Routier as 'good' and 'bad' mother proved to be insurmountable. In the end, the prosecution

²²⁸ Trial transcript, Vol.28, January 6, 1997.

²²⁹ Prosecution lawyer Toby Shook, Trial transcript, Vol,28, 6 January 1997.

presented the only story that the jury and public would accept.²³⁰

'Imaginary infant'²³¹: The case of Caroline Beale

*In the United States, you don't get
extra points for killing a baby²³²*

*[W]e are marching back to Salem ...
[w]e are going to burn some women²³³*

In the Routier case, the defence argued that Darlie Routier was “an American mother, just like any other number of American mothers”.²³⁴ The cherished ideal of motherhood, of a natural maternal instinct, of a motherland forged by the blood and sweat of its citizens and their forbears, of a mother who would protect her kin as children of the motherland is fundamental to the American sense of identity and at the heart of nationalistic pride. Those who threaten the ideal are treated harshly. In many States, including Routier’s Texas, the death penalty remains in force as a reminder of the fate that awaits those who fracture cherished maternal ideology. When a

²³⁰ Ferguson notes that within the courtroom, “a story succeeds only when it is well told. Lawyers in conflict look for a story that jurors will believe, and they understand that the most believable story will already appear familiar to their listeners” (p.85).

²³¹ From a newspaper headline appearing during Beale’s trial. R. Mead, “The Imaginary Infant”, *New York*, 28(50), 18 December 1995, pp.36-41.

²³² Prosecuting attorney Marjory Fisher cited in Mead, p.40.

²³³ Michael Dowd, Beale’s lawyer cited in Mead, p.40.

²³⁴ Trial transcript, Vol.28, 6 January 1997.

foreigner threatens the ideal, national and cultural boundaries are redrawn and the body of the mother becomes the site on which ideological battles are fought. The pervasive power and rhetorical force of maternal metaphors that were crucial in early eighteenth-century cases of child-murder is still evident decades later in twentieth-century narratives of infanticide.²³⁵ The ways in which maternal metaphors are used to construct “national identities” is perhaps nowhere more instructive than in the case of Caroline Beale.²³⁶

On September 22, 1994, Caroline Beale, a thirty year old British woman on vacation with her boyfriend and his brothers in the United States, was stopped at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York and found to have, hidden underneath her clothes, the corpse of her new-born infant daughter wrapped in plastic and strapped to the front of her body. Accused of committing child-murder, Beale was arrested and held for eight months in Rikers Island penitentiary while awaiting trial for second-degree murder or showing “depraved indifference to human life”,²³⁷ a

²³⁵ J. McDonagh, “Infanticide and the Nation: The Case of Caroline Beale”, *New Formations*, 32, 1997, pp.11-21 at p.12.

²³⁶ Swain, p.8. The facts of the case presented here are derived from D. Campbell, *A Stranger and Afraid: The Story of Caroline Beale*, London, MacMillan, 1997, and press reports by Jackson, Mead, Slapper, and Frost (details of each item appear in the footnotes below).

²³⁷ The complete charge against Beale reads as follows: “under circumstances evincing a depraved indifference to human life [she] recklessly engaged in conduct which created a grave risk of death of her newborn baby girl by giving birth in a place other than a medical facility, by failing to call for medical attention after the child was born

charge that carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. After intense public, media, and legal pressure, Beale finally agreed to a plea bargain that included a plea of guilty to manslaughter in return for eight months imprisonment (the term she had already served while awaiting trial), five years probation and a minimum of one year of psychiatric treatment in Britain.

The prosecution contended that Beale deliberately suffocated her baby, showed depraved indifference to life by not seeking assistance from a hospital either before or after the birth, and attempted to conceal evidence. Beale denied these accusations, saying that she felt alone, could not tell her boyfriend,²³⁸ friends or family, and gave birth without assistance in her hotel room delivering the baby in the bath. The sequence of events that followed seem almost drawn from history. Believing that the baby was dead because it did not move or utter a sound, Beale cut the umbilical cord, released the placenta into the toilet, wrapped the dead infant in a plastic bag, climbed into bed and fell asleep. This version of events could apply to nearly every case of infanticide by an unwed mother in the eighteenth-century. Indeed, both Jackson²³⁹ and

and continuing in a course of conduct which caused the death of the child due to suffocation" (cited in Campbell, p.71).

²³⁸ In an interview with prosecutor Marjory Fisher, Beale "imagine[s] he [her boyfriend Paul Faraway] would have been happy [about the pregnancy], if he would have known" (cited in Campbell, p.69).

²³⁹ M. Jackson, "Childbirth's Mental Toll", *Times*, 13 June 1995, p.14; M. Jackson, "Infanticide: Historical Perspectives", *New Law Journal*, March 22, 1996, pp.416-417; 420; M. Jackson, *New-Born Child*

McDonagh²⁴⁰ have noted how the issues raised in Beale's case reflect court debates and discussions of infanticide in legal and medical circles during this period, including "the evidential weight of concealment, the validity of medical evidence of live birth, and the mother's state of mind".²⁴¹

The case presents a disjuncture between various versions of events and the competing national and personal interests that are at stake. For the prosecution, it was important to establish that Beale deliberately murdered her child. Prosecutor Marjory Fisher emphasised Beale's deception in her concealment of the infant's body, and sought to treat Beale harshly.²⁴² The press supported Fisher's hard-line stance by portraying Beale as a "cold-blooded killer".²⁴³ The defence, in contrast, made Beale's mental instability the primary concern. The British press portrayed Beale as a "tragic victim who deserved

Murder: Women, Illegitimacy and the Courts in Eighteenth-Century England, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1996.

²⁴⁰ J. McDonagh, "Infanticide and the Nation: The Case of Caroline Beale", *New Formations*, 32, 1997, pp.11-21.

²⁴¹ Jackson, "Childbirth", p.416.

²⁴² C.A. Fazio and J.L. Comito, "Rethinking the Tough Sentencing of Teenage Neonaticide Offenders in the United States", *Fordham Law Review*, 67, 1999, pp.3109-3168 at p.3148. After Beale's initial interview with Marjory Fisher, State-appointed attorney Paul Vladimir recalls Fisher "indicating that this was the crime of the century", cited in Campbell p.70. Beale felt that she was persecuted by Fisher. She told Campbell that her "bitter[ness] about that woman [Fisher] is going to eat [her] up" (p.161). Beale's father recorded a conversation between Fisher and his daughter: "Marjory Fisher said to Caroline, 'I expect you hate all Americans'. Caroline replied, 'I love my Americans and I do not hate you because I do not know you but I hate what you have done to me'" (cited in Campbell, p.162).

²⁴³ Fazio and Comito, p.3148.

sympathy and was in need of psychiatric help”.²⁴⁴ Fazio and Comito note that public support for Beale was so strong in Britain that “[t]he English public [virtually] demanded that the United States release her back to England”.²⁴⁵

In Beale’s own mind, however, her baby was stillborn²⁴⁶ – a story neither side was willing to accept.²⁴⁷ An issue that has been largely ignored in subsequent discussions of the case is the fact that Beale did not dispose of her dead infant.²⁴⁸ On the contrary, she carried the body in a duffel

²⁴⁴ *Id.* at pp.3147-3148.

²⁴⁵ *Id.* at p.3147.

²⁴⁶ Beale’s psychiatrist Margaret Spinelli (editor of *Infanticide: Psychosocial and Legal Perspectives on Mothers Who Kill*, Washington, American Psychiatric Publishing, 2003) believes that at some point during her pregnancy Beale thought that the baby was no longer growing inside her but was already dead.

²⁴⁷ Recounting her version of events to prosecutor Marjory Fisher and Frank Carterisano from the District Attorney’s office, Beale repeatedly emphasises the truthfulness of her words (“it’s true, I swear to you, it’s true; “I am telling you the truth, honestly, what happened ... honestly, I swear to God that is what happened”). When she asks Carterisano whether he and Fisher believe her story, his reply implies disbelief: “it’s really not a question as to whether or not we believe you ...” (cited in Campbell, pp.68-69). Beale’s boyfriend also refuses to hear her story: “I have to listen to the professional views, really” (cited in Mead, p.39). Despite Beale’s insistence that her baby was stillborn, “an opinion corroborated by a number of medical specialists who contended that, had the case gone to trial, she would have been acquitted on these grounds” (McDonagh, p.13), her lawyer encouraged her to confess to manslaughter. Beale’s story was lost amidst legal attempts to reconstruct her narrative to fit only one of two possible scenarios, both of which implicate Beale as having caused the death of her baby.

²⁴⁸ Defence lawyer Michael Dowd emphasised that Beale could have easily disposed of the corpse - “[f]oetuses and babies don’t have MADE IN ENGLAND stamped on them” (cited in Mead 1995 40). So too, Detective Robert O’Donnell noted that “Caroline could have placed the baby in any kind of garbage can and we would probably

bag for an entire day and attempted to take it with her back home. These actions were dismissed as those of either a devious or delusional woman (the prosecution interpreted her actions as calculating evil; a defence expert witness suggested that the action was “analogous to returning the dead baby to a kind of womb”;²⁴⁹ psychiatrists for the defence suggested that Beale was in a ‘dissociative state’ and “behaved in a way that was almost certain to lead to detection”.²⁵⁰) However, these actions could equally be interpreted as those of a grieving mother who wants to bury her stillborn child in her homeland – a mother who has been separated from her child by death and cannot bear to be separated by the physical and psychical divide between two nations.²⁵¹

For Beale, her actions – which included refusing to pass through a security scan at the airport for fear that she might harm her baby – were completely justified. Any mother in a similar situation might have done the same. Yet, no one raised the ephemeral maternal bond, maternal instinct, or strength of mother love. For in that moment when Beale was found to be carrying her dead child, nestled close to her maternal bosom, the infant became the sign of the murderer. Maternal love and maternal harm are a world apart. Regardless of whether

still be looking for the mother ... It's a sort of everyday occurrence in a big city” (cited in Campbell, p.42).

²⁴⁹ Dr. Channi Kumar, cited in Mead, p.41.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ In the end it took more than a year for the infant's corpse to be returned to Britain for a proper burial.

they defended or attacked her, the public, media, prosecution, and defence believed in the ultimate incompatibility of the two – and constructed their cases accordingly. In so doing, they all failed to hear what Beale was trying to say and her story was rendered incredible.

The fight to either punish Beale with a prison sentence in the United States or send her home to Britain for psychiatric treatment forms part of a far deeper ideological struggle between the two nations and reflects historical debates about whether women who commit child-murder should be afforded lenient or harsh treatment.²⁵² The issues were inflamed by the comments of Beale's father who told journalists that his daughter had been the victim of a "cruel and medieval prosecution".²⁵³ The presiding New York State Supreme Court Judge Robert Hanophy retaliated with similar accusations of barbarity directed at British infanticide laws:

I believe any law that grants a blanket exemption from prosecution or punishment for those people who kill their children when their children are under one year of age is a law which is primitive and uncivilised ...

²⁵² Mead suggests that whether we believe in harsh or lenient treatment for mothers who kill their children "depends on whether we are convinced that whatever psychological distress [the mother] was suffering is exculpatory, and *that* depends on how badly we want to believe that she did nothing wrong ... [and] inevitably involves an appeal to what we want to believe about murderers, or about mothers" (p.41; italics in text).

²⁵³ Cited in Jackson, "Infanticide", 1996, p.416.

Granting parents a law to kill their children harkens to uncivilised times ... Baby Doe [Beale's baby], when born, became a citizen of the United States of America, entitled to all the protections that go with citizenship, including life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I'll say to our friends in Britain, God bless America.²⁵⁴

In his discussion of 'mothers and madness', Slapper asks "Who is right: the judge or the father?"²⁵⁵ Certainly the New York State Commission on Judicial Conduct found that Hanophy violated rules of conduct which, *inter alia*, require a judge to be "patient, dignified and courteous ... the exemplar of dignity and impartiality ... [and to] suppress his personal predilections, control his temper and emotions".²⁵⁶ According to the Commission, Hanophy's comments were "discourteous, inappropriate and exaggerated ... mean-spirited and political in nature".²⁵⁷ Hanophy argued that the comments of Mr Beale "got under [his] skin".²⁵⁸ Indeed, it seems that Mr Beale's comments "sparked a trans-Atlantic furore that called into question the way American law deals with

²⁵⁴ Cited in Campbell, pp.203-204

²⁵⁵ G. Slapper, "Mothers and Madness", *Times*, 19 March 1996, archived copy available online at <http://www.times-archive.co.uk/news/pages/tim/96/03/19/timfealeg01004.html>.

²⁵⁶ For the Commission's findings (2 April 1997) go to <http://www.scjc.state.ny.us/Determinations/H/hanophy.html>.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ Cited in B. Frost, "Devil voices may have led Beale to kill baby", *Times*, 9 March 1996, archived copy available online at <http://www.times-archive.co.uk/news/pages/tim/1996/03/09/timnwsnws03021.html>.

infanticide”.²⁵⁹ Not only did the comments of both Mr Beale and Judge Hanophy constitute a personal attack, they also threatened “to undermine the totality and ‘truth’”²⁶⁰ of each legal system. In this “extraordinary exchange”, “the legal treatment of infanticidal women in British and American legislatures was held as testament to the quality of society in each nation”.²⁶¹

According to McDonagh, the case also reawakened “the continuity of a legal problematic [including] its implications for the construction of femininity”.²⁶² By framing Beale as “an innocent abroad who had fallen foul of a brutal, foreign legal system”²⁶³ on the one hand and as a cold-hearted killer on the other, she was made to bear an historical burden of “extreme representations of femininity – on the one hand, the cruel, unmotherly mother; on the other, the hapless victim of circumstances or impulses beyond her control ... at once conniving and cold-hearted, but also meek, defenceless, childlike, and, in the end, insane”.²⁶⁴ It is significant that Mr Beale referred to Caroline as being “only a little girl” in the process of constructing his attack – in particular that “the failure [of] America[n law] to protect vulnerable mothers was a mark of its barbarity”.²⁶⁵ For Mr Beale, “mothers need protection ... from their own

²⁵⁹ A. Wilczynski, *Child Homicide*, London, Greenwich Medical Media, 1997, p.164.

²⁶⁰ Swain, p.8.

²⁶¹ McDonagh, p.12.

²⁶² *Id.* at p.11.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ *Id.* at p.17.

infirmities ... in Beale's equation ... *Caroline* is the baby – the child at risk from herself as mother”.²⁶⁶

Supporters of Beale construed Britain as the mother country – a “place of sympathy, an extension on the grand scale of the idea of the home as the place of familial relations”.²⁶⁷ Britain was presented as a “kinder, more humane, more ‘civilised’ society”²⁶⁸ than the ‘cruel’ America where Beale was, as Campbell puts it, “a stranger and afraid”²⁶⁹ - prevented from returning to her homeland and the physical security of her parent’s home. By ordering that deeds to the house be held until Beale’s probation was complete, Judge Hanophy confirmed the “territorial rupture from the ‘home’ country”.²⁷⁰

When she was finally permitted to return to Britain, Beale was infantilised by the media who misquoted her comments about learning “how to speak proper English again” saying rather, that she now wanted “to learn how to speak properly”.²⁷¹ The *New York Times* almost published an article suggesting that on her return home, “[s]he was welcomed with open arms ... Miss Beale back from ‘holiday’ with a criminal record ... not a felon, but a victim”.²⁷² Beale herself was blinded by the rhetorical force

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*; italics in text.

²⁶⁷ *Id.* at p.20.

²⁶⁸ *Id.* at p.16.

²⁶⁹ From the title of Campbell’s book.

²⁷⁰ McDonagh, p.21.

²⁷¹ Campbell, p.227.

²⁷² *Id.* at p.229.

of her victim status. Reflecting on the case with author Duncan Campbell, Beale comments on the one thought that sustained her while in prison: “I knew that when I was back home in England everything in the garden [would be] rosy”.²⁷³ And so it seemed that, on the surface at least, all was ‘rosy’. On her return, British newspapers showed photographs of a smiling Beale arriving at Maudsley Hospital to begin psychiatric treatment.²⁷⁴

The sad irony of Beale’s case ultimately rests in her own interpretation of and appropriation of the various versions of what happened. In Beale’s happy acceptance of her portrayal as childlike victim, she denies her own autonomy and thereby her narrative power to tell her story. By accepting her role in the legal drama, Beale becomes a pawn in a crucial plea bargain that not only conceals national hostilities but also exposes inherent legal f(r)ictions about (the treatment of) women who kill their children. In the case of Caroline Beale, the voice of the accused is ventriloquised by male authority figures – a judge, a lawyer, and a father – who shape her story to reflect their individual ideas about women as mothers and women as murderers. In their collaborative narrative production, Beale becomes a symbolic figure who never

²⁷³ *Id.* at p.268. Beale’s comments about her time in Riker’s Island penitentiary suggest that the trauma of her ordeal is still fresh in her mind: “I can’t – I can’t – can’t – I can’t talk about things, you know? ... I try and blot it out of my head, because I think that’s how I can almost, like, protect myself, I almost, like, pretend that didn’t exist, that Rikers Island business ... You can’t imagine what it was like” (cited in Mead, p.39).

²⁷⁴ See, for example, Frost, *supra* at note 258.

confesses her 'guilt' but is assumed to *be* guilty. When Beale accepts the plea bargain that will ensure her return to her motherland, she transforms from mother to a murderer who suffocated her new-born baby in a plastic bag. The stillborn child she bore and named 'Olivia Anne' is rendered a figment of Beale's imagination, an "imaginary infant", to return to Mead's haunting description. Beale is left to remember and mourn a dead child who, in the eyes of the law, never existed.

'A woman to blame'²⁷⁵: The case of Joanne Hayes

The possibility existed that Joanne Hayes had been telling the truth. That she had given birth in the field ... that she had then separated herself from her dead son by tearing the cord that bound them together. The tribunal never asked her to give specific details ... Detail was the preserve of the experts ... Joanne Hayes was only the mother²⁷⁶

I will never ... believe in the concept of law and justice²⁷⁷

The story begins on 14 April 1984 when a jogger stumbled across the body of an infant with numerous stab wounds

²⁷⁵ From the title of a book about the case of Joanne Hayes (also known as the 'Kerry Babies case'). N. McCafferty, *A Woman to Blame: The Kerry Babies Case*, Dublin, Attic Press, 1985.

²⁷⁶ *Id.* at p.153.

²⁷⁷ J. Hayes, *My Story*, Dingle, Co. Kerry, Ireland, Brandon Books, 1985, p.178. In 1989, three police officers involved in the case sued the publisher of Hayes's book for defamation. They settled out of court for an apology and £17,500 (the largest libel settlement in Irish history at the time).

on a beach near the Irish town of Cahirciveen.²⁷⁸ As soon as the police were alerted, they “set about trying to find a woman who was known to have been pregnant and due to give birth, but had no baby to show for it”.²⁷⁹ In the small town in which twenty-five-year-old Joanne Hayes lived (Tralee in Kerry County), it was no secret that she was pregnant with her married lover’s child. Within twenty-four hours of beginning investigations in North Kerry, the police (or Gardai as they are known in Ireland) had secured a confession from Hayes for the murder of the Cahirciveen baby.

According to Hayes’s testimony, she was physically intimidated and threatened – “[s]he was told that her brother would be charged with murder, that the family farm would be sold and that her small daughter, Yvonne, would be put up for adoption”.²⁸⁰ Apart from her treatment by the police, Hayes’s ‘confession’ would be complicated by the discovery of another dead baby found on the Hayes’s family farm in Tralee. Like Beale, Hayes claimed that she had given birth to the baby alone and that it had been stillborn. She claimed that during the police interview she specified where police might find the body of her own baby and that her sister had taken police to that location

²⁷⁸ The facts of the case presented here are derived from Hayes’s personal account (*My Story*), two books about the case (McCafferty; O’Halloran), several press reports (Holland; Toibin; Winslow), and the Report of the Kerry Babies Tribunal. Details of each item appear in the footnotes below.

²⁷⁹ M. Holland, “The Kerry Babies”, *New Statesman*, 109, 25 January 1985, pp.17-18 at p.17.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

on their farm. From the police point of view, the second baby did not complicate matters. Instead, the police argued that Hayes slept with two different men (her lover and a second man) and was impregnated by both of them. The police argued that Hayes gave birth to twins – one being the Cahirciveen baby with the blood type of the second man and the other being the Tralee baby with the blood type of her lover.

The police raised an unfamiliar medical theory that required proving Hayes was ‘promiscuous’, had twins, killed them both, and then disposed of their bodies in two different towns which were more than forty miles apart. In a court filled with members of the public and the media, Hayes was forced to reveal highly personal and sexually explicit details of her affair with a married man. Reminiscent of early modern inspections of the female body for signs of birth or sexual impropriety, Hayes was also forced to make public intimate details of all her pregnancies – including “how much she bled before, during and after childbirth, whether her breasts showed signs of lactation, whether she broke the umbilical cord or cut it, [and] whether the placenta came away immediately [after the birth or slowly] in clots”.²⁸¹ As in the witch trials of early modern Europe, the prosecution would “hammer away”²⁸² at Hayes, her friends and family.

²⁸¹ *Id.* at p.18.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

In Catholic Ireland where “the death of babies, in or out of the womb”²⁸³ was commonplace, and where neighbours did not openly discuss “private family traged[ies]”,²⁸⁴ Hayes’ family sought to protect her from unwelcome attention. Hayes had previously miscarried another baby and had given birth to a healthy baby girl (both conceived with her married lover) so news of a third pregnancy was a source of concern for her family. Largely due to the unsupportive attitude of her family, Hayes gave birth in the early hours of 13 April 1984 alone on the farm and hid the infant’s body. Family and neighbours were left only to imagine what had happened – “[a]ll [they] ... knew was that she had been pregnant, had been taken into hospital, and was pregnant no more. Some assumed that the baby had been adopted; some assumed that there had been no baby, but a miscarriage”.²⁸⁵ Indeed, Hayes’s cousin, Mary Shanahan, was so convinced that Hayes had miscarried that she told the police that Joanne lost the baby in hospital.²⁸⁶

However, regardless of her family’s attempts to conceal Hayes’s pregnancy, the community had already formed an opinion about her and other women in her situation. Detective John Courtney had always suspected that Hayes was a woman of “loose morals”²⁸⁷ and other police

²⁸³ McCafferty, p.10.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ *Id.* at p.23.

²⁸⁶ *Id.* at p.25.

²⁸⁷ *Id.* at p.26.

officers attested to knowing of “promiscuous” women who would “have sexual intercourse with the fellow next door ... [before] an Irishman could ... blink his eyes”.²⁸⁸ Hayes’s sister even claimed that she was asked by police how she had voted in a referendum on abortion, a question followed by the comment: “It’s unknown how many ye’ve killed between ye”.²⁸⁹ In her scathing account of the case, Maguire suggests that “it is possible that gardai [police] were not all that concerned with Joanne Hayes’s guilt or innocence in the death of the Cahirciveen baby. She was immediately suspect, as an unmarried mother and adulterer, and even if she did not murder the Cahirciveen baby, she was no ‘innocent’; she could be sacrificed in the name of law, order, and morality”.²⁹⁰

In response to immense public interest, a tribunal, which came to be known as ‘The Kerry Babies Tribunal’,²⁹¹ was established in January 1985 to discover how Joanne Hayes came to “confess to the murder of a baby which [she] could not have committed”.²⁹² Forensic tests showed that Hayes did not give birth to the murdered Cahirciveen

²⁸⁸ *Id.* at p.28.

²⁸⁹ Holland, p.18.

²⁹⁰ M.J. Maguire, “The Changing Face of Catholic Ireland: Conservatism and Liberalism in the Ann Lovett and Kerry Babies Scandals”, *Feminist Studies*, 27(2), 2001, pp.335-358 at p.346.

²⁹¹ The Tribunal presented its Report to the Minister for Justice on 3 October 1985. *Report of the Tribunal of Inquiry into ‘the Kerry Babies Case’*, Dublin, Ireland, Stationery Office, 1985.

²⁹² C. Toibin, “Kerry babies report ‘has made matters worse’”, *New Statesman*, October 11, 1985, p.6.

baby,²⁹³ yet Hayes confessed to that child's murder and five family members also made incriminating statements to the police.²⁹⁴ Expert medical testimony also proved that the child to which Hayes did give birth on her family farm "had not achieved life".²⁹⁵ Hayes was charged with the murder of both babies but these charges were later dropped when suggestions of police impropriety began to surface. The public demanded to know why Hayes confessed to an impossible murder and why the police "pursued the charges [against Hayes] to the bitter end, coming up with improbable theories in an attempt to justify the taking of very questionable statements".²⁹⁶

For the Irish people, the Kerry Babies Tribunal represented a forum in which to comment on contemporary Irish society, especially the "right [of] church and state to interfere in the private moral behaviour of women ... [which saw] single women giv[ing] birth frightened, alone, and stigmatised".²⁹⁷ But the tribunal itself was not without criticism. Police misconduct, while almost completely ignored, also came "too close to [being] excused".²⁹⁸ The method of questioning was reminiscent

²⁹³ B. O'Halloran, *Lost Innocence: The Inside Story of the Kerry Babies Mystery*, Dublin, Raytown Press, 1985, pp.201-202.

²⁹⁴ Statements made by Joanne Hayes and family members to the police are reproduced in O'Halloran, pp.213-224.

²⁹⁵ Hayes, p.37.

²⁹⁶ O'Halloran, p.208.

²⁹⁷ Maguire, p.348.

²⁹⁸ Toibin, p.6.

of an “inquisition”.²⁹⁹ In her book *My Story* Hayes recounts a particular line of questioning by Anthony Kennedy, SC (counsel for the police) about the ‘superfecundation’ or twin theory pursued by police:

Kennedy: Did you have twins?

Hayes: No, I did not.

Kennedy: I must suggest to you that that is what happened, that you had a baby born outside and then a baby born in the house some two hours or so afterwards.

Hayes: I don’t agree with that.

Kennedy: And that for whatever reason, you did what is described in these statements [murdered both babies].

Hayes: No.

Kennedy: Probably in some state of panic or frenzy because you never expected the second child to come.

Hayes: No. There was only one child.

Kennedy: And ... what that [statement] describes is broadly the truth of what happened on that night in your house.

Hayes: No.

Kennedy: And that since then you have persisted in a denial and disowning this statement, that it has become exaggerated with the passage of time by adding to the complaints against the gardai.

²⁹⁹ *Id.* at p.349. In her book about the case, Joanne Hayes also calls the tribunal ‘inquiry’ an “inquisition” (p.178). Hayes describes the tribunal process as a “dreadful ordeal. My head reeled as I fought back the urge to be sick. The palms of my hands were sticky with sweat. My mother, my brothers and my sister were ordered to leave ... I was to suffer alone ... I was terrified ... a terrible experience (p.80). “At one stage she had to be sedated because she was so distressed at the sort of questions she had to answer”, A. O’Brien, “Kerry Babies: Who’s on Trial?”, *Spare Rib*, 152, 1995, p.12.

Hayes: No, I don't agree.³⁰⁰

Hayes recalls that Kennedy's questions "had been fired like bullets"³⁰¹ and she began to wonder "who's on trial".³⁰² Indeed, as O'Brien notes "[t]he tribunal [was] not a trial but it seem[ed] like [one]".³⁰³ And for the "legions of Irish feminists the investigation has attracted",³⁰⁴ the tribunal put all women on trial.³⁰⁵

Women's rights groups expressed their displeasure suggesting that the questioning was "insensitive ... very, very frightening ... harrowing and quite horrific ... and shameful".³⁰⁶ Members of the public also expressed their contempt for a tribunal "that condemned 'immorality' among women but ignored the transgressions of men ... whose own sexual indiscretions"³⁰⁷ were beyond scrutiny or judgment. Indeed, McCafferty recounts the story of a married man – one of forty-three male officials involved in the case – who "went to bed in a Tralee hotel with a woman who was not his wife [during the tribunal] ... [and]

³⁰⁰ Hayes, pp.87-88.

³⁰¹ *Id.* at p.88.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ O'Brien, p.12.

³⁰⁴ P. Winslow, "A small-town murder", *Macleans*, 98, 1985, pp.6-7 at p.7. See Hayes, p.21 for pictures of numerous female supporters holding placards stating: "Women on trial"; "Women are outraged"; "Tribunal or trial?"

³⁰⁵ Maguire suggests that supporters of Hayes and those who criticised the tribunal process primarily "objected to the notion that the government had the right to dictate codes of private morality and to hold up to public scrutiny those who strayed from the norm" (p.338).

³⁰⁶ Dáil Committee on Women's Rights cited in Maguire, p.348.

³⁰⁷ Maguire, p.349.

was assured discretion”.³⁰⁸ McCafferty continues: “[n]o such discretion was assured to Joanne Hayes, as a succession of professional men, including this married man, came forward to strip her character. The lawyers, doctors and police were guaranteed the full protection and licence of law to do so”.³⁰⁹

Despite the lengthy and emotionally taxing tribunal process during which it became evident that she was not the mother of the Cahirciveen baby and had not murdered her own baby, she was ultimately persecuted for bearing an illegitimate child and thereby flouting prescribed norms of morality and femininity. In their vilification of Hayes as a sexually promiscuous woman who murdered her ‘babies’ “because of the social stigma in Roman Catholic rural Ireland of giving birth out of wedlock”,³¹⁰ authorities repeatedly failed to hear Hayes’s story - instead “elevat[ing] wishful thinking into hard fact”.³¹¹ The story of Joanne Hayes “is the story of professional men, ... lawyers, doctors, police and priests, who found a woman to blame”.³¹²

The story of Joanne Hayes begins with death and ends where it began – with the body of a murdered infant at Cahirciveen. Until the murderer of that innocent (and still

³⁰⁸ McCafferty, p.7.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

³¹⁰ Winslow, p.6.

³¹¹ Toibin, p.6.

³¹² McCafferty, p.7.

unidentified) baby is found and brought to justice, the case can have no closure. Perhaps the people of Kerry County are destined to “live with a horror that they would like to forget, but cannot”.³¹³ Perhaps they will not escape the “ghost” of the “small body washed ashore on a beach ... [whose] story, most likely, will never be told ...”³¹⁴

‘An abominable affair’³¹⁵: The case of Christine Villemin

*An abominable affair ... made of suspicions and gossip*³¹⁶

*Perhaps if ... everyone had remained silent ... it would have been just another ordinary crime*³¹⁷

*All I really want to know is, did his mother kill [him]?*³¹⁸

In July 1985 a twenty-five year old French woman, Christine Villemin, was charged with the murder of her four year old son Grégory whose body was discovered nine months earlier in the Vologne River.³¹⁹ The boy’s

³¹³ Winslow, p.6.

³¹⁴ O’Halloran, p.209.

³¹⁵ Judge Olivier Ruysen of the Palais de Justice in Dijon cited in S. Kraft, “The Long Shadow of ‘The Crow’”, *Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 1993.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ P. Prompt (Laroche family lawyer) cited in J. Cawley, “France’s Mystery Murder”, *Chicago Tribune*, August 14, 1985.

³¹⁸ Two European women overheard gossiping about the Villemin case cited in Cawley, 1985.

³¹⁹ The facts of the case presented here are derived from press reports, principally S. Kraft, “The Long Shadow of the Crow”, *LA*

body was found floating four miles downstream from a house in the small town of Lépanges in the Vosges Mountains where he lived with his parents. His feet and wrists were tied together with rope and a beanie covered his face. Police believed that the boy had been abducted from the front yard of his house and subsequently murdered. A post mortem examination found no signs of bruising and concluded that the death was caused by drowning – possibly in tap water rather than in the river in which the body was found.³²⁰

For four years prior to the murder of Grégory, the Villemin family was subjected to death threats and menacing letters from a phantom culprit known as ‘Le Corbeau’ (‘The Crow’).³²¹ The letters were the result of a long-standing family feud³²² but the author remained unknown. After Grégory’s death, his parents – Jean-Marie and Christine Villemin – received an anonymous letter claiming responsibility for the murder. They believed that the letter was from ‘The Crow’. At the beginning of the investigation, police arrested Bernard Laroche, a cousin and well-known enemy of Jean-Marie. But Laroche was

Times, 9 December 1993; J. Cawley, “France’s Mystery Murder”, *Chicago Tribune*, 14 August 1995; *LA Times*, “Jury’s Verdict Fails to Clear Up Mystery of French Boy’s Murder”, 16 December 1993; *LA Times*, “Court Frees Father Jailed in Slaying of Son’s Alleged Killer”, 31 December 1993.

³²⁰ Kraft, “Long Shadow”.

³²¹ According to Kraft, “[t]he name came from ‘Le Corbeau’, a 1943 film in which a small French village is terrorized by an anonymous letter writer who signs himself ‘The Crow’”.

³²² For details of the feud stemming back to 1979 see Kraft, “Long Shadow”.

soon released from jail after a witness (fifteen-year-old Murielle Bolle) withdrew her statement saying that she had been pressured by police to give false evidence.³²³

Police investigators then accused Christine Villemin of murdering her son. They believed that Christine wrote the letters and killed her son to “spite her husband”.³²⁴ The media used the investigators’ suspicions to portray Christine as an “evil witch who harboured a deep-seated anger to[wards] her husband”.³²⁵ This was a dramatic contrast to her initial portrayal as “martyred mother ... every tear documented in words and pictures of her collaps[ing] in her husband’s arms at Grégory’s funeral”.³²⁶ Pregnant with her second child, Christine was subjected to nine hours of gruelling questions during which she fainted and was rushed to hospital.³²⁷

In developing their case against Christine Villemin, the police focussed on four main issues: rope found in the Villemins’ attic resembled the rope used to bind Grégory’s wrists and feet; witnesses allegedly saw Christine mailing a letter on the day of Grégory’s murder; Christine failed to provide details about a radio program she was listening to at the time of the murder; and handwriting experts were eighty percent certain that Christine wrote the letter

³²³ Jean-Marie Villemin was so convinced of Laroche’s guilt that he murdered Laroche (*LA Times*, “Jury’s Verdict”).

³²⁴ Kraft, “Long Shadow”, 1993.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

³²⁶ Cawley, “Mystery”.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

claiming responsibility for her son's murder.³²⁸ Although the case against her was not entirely convincing and there was an "absence of a coherent motive",³²⁹ the first prosecutor or 'juge d'instruction' Jean-Michel Lambert believed, and continues to believe, in the guilt of Christine Villemin.³³⁰ Judge Lambert was later accused of preventing pathologists from collecting adequate samples during Grégory's autopsy.³³¹ Procedural irregularities, and belief by some that the trial had been turned into "a free-wheeling public investigation",³³² created doubt as to the validity of the case against Grégory's mother.

The boy's death and accusations of infanticide filled newspaper headlines for months and became known in media circles as 'l'affaire Grégory'. The public was consumed with this "story of murder, revenge, bizarre family feuding, strange twists and surprise suspects".³³³ According to reporter Janet Cawley, everyone wanted to know if Villemin really murdered her own son.³³⁴ The case also captured the attention of author Marguerite Duras who "[f]or quite some time ... talked only of [Villemin], of

³²⁸ In her book, *Let Me Tell You*, Christine Villemin proclaims her innocence and argues that the pursuit of her son's murderer was marred by speculation, confusion, and uncertainty (Kraft, "Long Shadow").

³²⁹ Appeals Court cited in Cawley, 1985.

³³⁰ Kraft, 1993.

³³¹ *Ibid.*

³³² *Ibid.*

³³³ Cawley, "Mystery".

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

her husband and her child”.³³⁵ According to biographer Laure Adler, Villemin’s “name, her face, her eyes, her story, her sexuality haunted Duras’s imagination”.³³⁶

With her increasing fascination, Duras accepted an offer to write an article about the case for the newspaper *Libération*. Armed with only newspaper and television reports and the scattered images that accompanied them, Duras decided that she would need to meet Villemin. When her request was denied Duras changed her approach. “If [Villemin] wouldn’t speak to her, would she at least agree to see her, just see her, without having to say a word to her?”³³⁷ How would seeing Villemin without speaking to her help Duras to write about the case? Duras’s reliance on second-hand accounts of Villemin’s “every expression ... and slightest gesture”³³⁸ meant that imagination fuelled reality so her desire to ‘see’ Villemin suggests that she wanted to replace Villemin’s ‘larger-than-life’ image with the flesh-and-blood woman. But Duras would neither speak to nor see Villemin who would remain a silent enigma and phantom of the Durasian imagination.

In pursuit of the ‘real’ Villemin, Duras travelled to the house in Lépages with two journalists from *Libération*.

³³⁵ L. Adler, *Marguerite Duras: A Life* (1998), trans. Anne-Marie Glasheen, London, Victor Gollancz, 2000, p.358. Adler notes that Duras had a “hunger for the tragic” (p.357).

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ *Ibid.*

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

Duras believed that returning to the scene of the crime would provide some insight into Villemin's life. But even before this visit Duras was sure about Villemin's guilt and seeing Villemin's house made her fantasies *seem* real: "The moment I saw the house, I shrieked that the crime existed, and I believe it. Beyond all reasonable doubt".³³⁹ Returning to the crime scene told Duras nothing about Villemin or Grégory's death but it made her *feel* as though she knew the crime and the psyche of her imagined murderess. Duras imagined both the world in which Villemin lived and the circumstances of the crime itself: "an imaginary country where love between men and women no longer existed, where maternal love had disappeared ... where a child's life had become meaningless ...".³⁴⁰

The article that Duras finally submitted to *Libération* was, in her words, "a fit of writing, an excess of writing as a reaction to the worst thing a person can do ... kill".³⁴¹ Overcome by her own views about female criminality and child murder, and her "fascination with woman as bearer of life and of death",³⁴² Duras replaced Villemin – the bereaved mother who protested her innocence – with her fictional counterpart – "wild", "fickle", "monstrous", a

³³⁹ Adler, p.359.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² M.R. Schuster, *Marguerite Duras Revisited*, New York, Twayne, 1993, p.11.

“mythical character”,³⁴³ a woman who “satisfied the most abominable desire ... [and] commit[ted] the ultimate crime”.³⁴⁴ Villemin became *the* infanticidal woman – the embodiment of all murderous mothers and a figure with whom Duras believed all women could identify. As a mother herself, Duras realised that “Christine Villemin is me. She could be me”.³⁴⁵ Duras transplanted her own desire to step ‘outside the law’ through the written word onto her fictional creation. “True pleasure can only be achieved against a background of crime”,³⁴⁶ Duras suggests, her own source of pleasure being the fantasy of Villemin’s criminality.

Duras’s publisher, Serge July, juxtaposed what he saw as her “transgression of writing”³⁴⁷ with Villemin’s suspected transgression. Words are murderous, July seems to suggest, they can turn worlds ‘upside down’. July was not the only one who saw the danger of Duras’s assumptions and her merging of fact and fantasy. Duras’s article received tremendous backlash from the French public and several prominent female writers who “were astounded that Duras declared the woman [Villemin] a murderer, when the accused denied having committed the crime, at a moment when the case was still being heard”.³⁴⁸

³⁴³ L. Hill, *Marguerite Duras: Apocalyptic Desires*, London, Routledge, 1993, p.34.

³⁴⁴ Adler, pp.358-359.

³⁴⁵ *Id.* at p.359.

³⁴⁶ *Id.* at p.361.

³⁴⁷ *Id.* at 360.

³⁴⁸ Schuster, p.12.

Through her fantasised recreation of the crime and its representation as fact, Duras both indicts and indites Villemin - 'framing her' as she would a character in one of her novels.

Duras's journey to Villemin's house is, to use Kristeva's evocative phrase, "a journey into ... strangeness"³⁴⁹ to a place where fact and fiction, fantasy and reality no longer have distinct boundaries. Confronted with the tangible representation of Villemin's imagined excess, Duras finds herself "trapped in ... the all-encompassing and infinite imaginary space of a monumental temporal disruption"³⁵⁰ where she grapples with the illusion of reality and the reality of her illusion. For Duras, the illusion *is* reality with the sight/site of the house both familiar (from photographs) and foreign.

Duras's physical journey, which could also be interpreted as an imaginary journey into the psyche, forces us to reconsider not only what *is* but what *appears to be*. Duras believes she knows what happened to Grégory even as 'the event itself is absent'.³⁵¹ No one witnessed the boy's murder and we are only left with the unspeaking and unspeakable image of Villemin whose "absent look"³⁵² is, for Duras, murderous. But Duras never purports to

³⁴⁹ J. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991, p.182.

³⁵⁰ *Id.* at p.53.

³⁵¹ Young, *Imagining Crime*, p.137.

³⁵² V.A. Conley, "L'affaire Grégory and Duras's Textual Feminism", *L'Esprit Createur*, 30(1), 1990, pp.69-75 at p.73.

present “*the truth*”, July argues in her defence, “but a truth”.³⁵³

Both Duras’s narrative and the legal narrative of judgment reach the same conclusion: Villemin’s guilt. Both reach their conclusion through the ‘fictional’ reconstruction of ‘truth’. While Duras’s ‘truth’ is based on the intangible – feelings, emotion, psychic senses – law’s ‘truth’ is based on evidence (no matter how insubstantial). The narratives do not have equal force. Law’s ‘truth’ is the ‘official’ story that shifts from being a mere representation to *the truth* at the moment of judgment. Duras’s narrative, in contrast, becomes one of many imaginative possibilities from which to choose.

For Conley however, Duras’s narrative is dangerous (and therefore exciting) precisely because it blurs the boundary between the fictional and the ‘real’, showing us what happens “when an imaginary opens onto reality, when the law of desire comes in contact with coded law”.³⁵⁴ Duras moulds Villemin according to the law of fiction, “transform[ing] the ‘real’ ... [the] vulgar ... into a piece of imaginary sublime”.³⁵⁵ But, unlike Duras’s other female characters, Villemin “refuses to play her part ... [Duras’s] murderer denies having committed the act”.³⁵⁶ Unable to stamp her fictional creation with the authenticity of the

³⁵³ Adler, p.360; my emphasis.

³⁵⁴ Conley, p.73.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁶ *Id.* at p.74.

'real', Duras "hands [Villemin] over to the judges"³⁵⁷ who have the power to translate the imaginary into the 'real'. In telling her tale then, Duras not only makes Villemin a murderous mother but also incriminates herself as murderer of her own text – a fictional child sacrificed to the 'real'.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Chapter Six
'Her side of the story'¹:
Scenes of (In)justice, Fables of Desire,
and Revisionary Mythopoeism

The law? What is this law that you're sentencing me under? ... It's the men who created this law to use against us women ... [Men] imprison us in a cage and hang children round our necks to keep us quiet ... the way you hang a wooden collar on a cow! ... I am going to demolish this cage and this infamous yoke and this infamous blackmail. You and your laws have bound me with chains to my own children and forced me to bury myself with my own hands!²

Beware of her fierce manner, her implacable temper. Hers is a self-willed nature ... Soon, it is clear, her sorrow like a gathering cloud will burst in a tempest of fury. What deed will she do then, that impetuous, indomitable heart, poisoned by injustice?³

Everybody holds these deaths against me without hearing my side⁴

The retelling of myth begins ... so that 'herstory' can be told, in all its suffering and pain, as well as in all its glory⁵

¹ C.L. Moraga, *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea/Heart of the Earth: A Popul Vuh Story*, Albuquerque, West End Press, 2001, p.38.

² D. Fo and F. Rame, *Medea*, trans. Stuart Hood in D. Fo and F. Rame, *Female Parts: One Woman Plays* (1977), adapt. Olwen Wymark, London, Pluto Press, 1983, pp.37-40; emphasis in text.

³ Euripides, *Medea* in M. Hadas, trans. and ed., *Greek Drama*, New York, Bantam Books, 1982, lines 101-109.

⁴ E. Cooper, "There Are Women Waiting: The Tragedy of Medea Jackson" in R. Fraden, *Imagining Medea: Rhodessa Jones and Theatre for Incarcerated Women*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2001, pp.56-64 at p.59.

'Dangerous possibilities'⁶

In *The Book of the City of Ladies*⁷ fifteenth century author Christine de Pizan, one of the first female professional writers, challenges the myth of woman-as-infanticide by denying the negative representation of Medea as child murderess. Whether Pizan's work operates through the processes of "whitewash[ing]"⁸ or "creative rehabilitat[ion]"⁹, it is significant as an early example of a female-authored text which dares "to tell stories against the grain of tradition".¹⁰ Contemporary female authors pay tribute to Pizan's resistance by reinterpreting, re-telling, and revising cultural myths and stories – whether classical or biblical, folk or fairy – of the murderous mother. According to DuPlessis, these authors "are reformulating a special kind of persistent narrative that is the repository

⁵ D. Cornell, *Beyond Accommodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction, and the Law*, New York, Routledge, 1991, p.196.

⁶ P.M. Spacks, *The Female Imagination: A Literary and Psychological Investigation of Women's Writing* (1972), London, Allen & Unwin, 1976.

⁷ C. de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405), trans. Earl Jeffery Richards, London, Picador, 1983.

⁸ M. Warner, *Managing Monsters: Six Myths of Our Time*, London, Vintage, 1994, p.9.

⁹ M. Hallissy, *Venomous Woman: Fear of the Female in Literature*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1987, p.56. Hallissy suggests that *The Book of the City of Ladies* is "an antimisogynistic tract, antidote to the kind of compendium of stories about evil women ... so beloved in her [Pizan's] day. Christine ignores their flaws, so obvious in earlier versions of their stories" (p.55).

¹⁰ Warner, *Managing Monsters*, p.9. Pizan likewise seeks to 'rehabilitate' the biblical Eve in her newly built City of Ladies. As a human being created equal with Adam in the "image of God", Pizan argues that Eve "should be at his [Adam's] side as a companion and not at his feet like a slave".

of many dimensions of representation”.¹¹ They are engaging in a type of ‘revisionary mythopoeism’ which involves “understand[ing] the writing of the past, and know[ing] it differently than we have ever known it, [and] ... break[ing] [the] hold [of tradition] over us”.¹²

For DuPlessis, ‘revisioning’ the past means “writing beyond the ending”.¹³ DuPlessis’s ‘beyond’ implies another world – an imaginative ‘elsewhere’ which is not merely a “recollect[ion] [of] the mythic figures of the past but ... [a] re-imagin[ation]”.¹⁴ Legal feminist Drucilla Cornell emphasises the role of the imagination in remembering the “‘not yet’ which is recollected in ... myth”¹⁵: “This memory is recollective imagination. We can re-collect the mythic figures of the past, but as we do so we re-imagine them. It is the potential variability of myth that allows us to work within myth to re-imagine our world and, by so doing, to begin to dream of a new one”.¹⁶

¹¹ R.B. DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1985, p.105.

¹² A. Rich, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision”, *College English*, 34(1), 1972, pp.18-30 at p.18.

¹³ DuPlessis defines ‘writing beyond the ending’ as “[t]he invention of strategies that sever the narrative from formerly conventional structures of fiction and consciousness about women” (p.x).

¹⁴ D. Milovanovic, “The Postmodernist Turn: Lacan, Psychoanalytic Semiotics, and the Construction of Subjectivity in Law”, *Emory International Law Review*, 8, 1994, pp.67-98 at p.96.

¹⁵ D. Cornell, *Transformations: Recollective Imagination and Sexual Difference*, New York, Routledge, 1993, p.59.

¹⁶ *Id.* at p.109.

For those female authors seeking to “revise the word and the world”,¹⁷ to use Clark, Joeres, and Sprengnether’s potent phrase, the power of the imagination elicits “dangerous possibilities” – the transgression of boundaries, the “unravell[ing] [of] old laws”, the “disrupt[ion] of traditional structures”.¹⁸ For Spacks, the imagination, dreams, and fantasy provide “significant freedom” from the strictures of phallocratic rule.¹⁹ As Walker suggests, “dreams and fantasies represent the possibility of change rather than stasis and entrapment ... [and reflect the] need to project lives beyond immediate reality”.²⁰ While some authors turn to Classical myth (e.g. Rukeyser, H.D., Levertov)²¹ or fairy tales (e.g. Carter, Sexton) to enact their subversive and ‘unacceptable’

¹⁷ V. Clark, R-E. Joeres and M. Sprengnether, eds, *Revising the Word and the World: Essays in Feminist Literary Criticism* (1979), Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993, p.1.

¹⁸ M. Aristodemou, *Law and Literature: Journeys From Her to Eternity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p.268.

¹⁹ P.M. Spacks, *The Female Imagination: A Literary and Psychological Investigation of Women’s Writing* (1972), London, Allen & Unwin, 1976, p.402.

²⁰ N.A. Walker, *Feminist Alternatives: Irony and Fantasy in the Contemporary Novel by Women*, Jackson, University of Mississippi Press, 1990, p.117. Caputi suggests that the “feminist engage[ment] in energy-raising mythic/symbolic thought and image-making, capable of reconceptualizing reality and changing the world is [a form of] ... *psychic activism*”. J. Caputi, “On Psychic Activism: Feminist Mythmaking” in C. Larrington, ed., *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*, London, Pandora Press, 1992, pp.425-440 at p.426; italics in text.

²¹ For further examples of female writers who “engage with and re-figure women’s representation in Classical myth” (p.444) see D. Purkiss, “Women’s Rewriting of Myth” in C. Larrington, ed., *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*, London, Pandora Press, 1992, pp.441-457; A. Ostriker, “The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking” in E. Showalter, ed., *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, London, Virago Press, 1986, pp.314-338.

fantasies,²² others focus on biblical stories in their search for an alternative Edenic topos. In this chapter we consider the pervasive power and persisting presence of Medea, Jocasta, Eve and Lilith in the work of several contemporary female authors who engage in the practice of revisionary mythmaking by both displacing - “[drawing] attention to the other side of the story”²³ - and delegitimatising the “male” version of “known tale[s]”.²⁴

Mythic Scenes 1: Medea

*I peer into the mirror, see only the children's
blood in smears across my face*²⁵

*They'll call me cruel and evil, a wicked
mother ... a woman insane with pride*²⁶

Woman's weapons: Weeping, crying,

²² Walker appropriates Heilbrun's notion of 'unacceptable fantasy' which includes "fantasies of sexuality, freedom, power: alternate worlds in which women are autonomous, self-defining people" (p.4).

²³ DuPlessis, p.108. In her study of the mythic Helen in H.D.'s poetry, Friedman notes that "revisionist mythmaking offers a rich source of personal and cultural transformations from a woman's perspective". S.S. Friedman, "Creating a Women's Mythology: H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*" in S.S. Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis, eds, *Signets: Reading H.D.*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1990, pp.373-405 at p.376. See also Meagher for a consideration of Helen as the victim of a misogynist plot - "innocent of the charges against her" (p.111). Meagher writes: "Helen ... perhaps *the* image of woman as victim and scapegoat, woman as the object of universal hate" (p.97; italics in text). R.E. Meagher, *Helen: Myth, Legend, and the Culture of Misogyny*, New York, Continuum, 1995.

²⁴ DuPlessis, p.108. Or, as Daly puts it, "dis-spelling the ... pollution that is produced out of man-made myths". M. Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1978, p.315.

²⁵ D. Fahey, "Medea" in *Metamorphoses*, Sydney, Dangaroo Press, 1988, p.48.

²⁶ Fo and Rame, p.38.

*poisons, veils, nets. Who cries there?
... Who? Medea ... How did you moan
... All history is thus troubled with her
incessant moanings, which insist, die
down, come up again, always unheard*²⁷

The mythic Medea is as recognisable today as she was to audiences in fifth-century Athens as “an enduring cultural prototype of specifically female and particularly maternal criminality”.²⁸ In art and literature Medea is perhaps most frequently depicted as a female monster, no doubt due to Euripides’ repeated references to her as Scylla (‘she who rends’) – a six-headed devouring sea-monster residing in a cave on the Straits of Messina.²⁹ Euripides suggests that Medea is an even greater threat than the monsters that she helped Jason defeat on his journey with the Argonauts. Euripides also draws a parallel between Medea and Scylla of Megara, another daughter who betrays her father (King Nisus) for the love of a man (Minos) who later refuses her affections.³⁰ Euripides uses

²⁷ H. Cixous and C. Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (1975), trans. Betsy Wing, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p.107.

²⁸ S. Murnaghan, “Staging Ancient Crimes: A Response to Aristodemou, Tiefenbrun, Purkiss, and Pantazakos”, *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature*, 11, 1999, pp.77-88 at p.79. Convicted infanticide Susan Smith was described in media headlines as “Medea of today” (for discussion of the Smith case see the previous chapter). See also the Introduction to this work for further discussion of the Medea myth in contemporary culture and Chapter Three for discussion of Euripides’ *Medea*.

²⁹ Graves notes that Scylla was a threat to sailors whom she would “seize, crack their bones, and slowly swallow them”. R. Graves, *The Greek Myths*, (vol.2) (1955), Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1979, p.362.

³⁰ See T. Bulfinch, *Mythology* (1959), New York, Dell, 1967, pp.85-87.

the devouring monstrous Scylla as a metaphor for the deadly and dangerous mother whose love is all-consuming. Indeed, while Jason tells Medea that she is “a Scylla – but more savage”,³¹ he also refers to her as “no woman, but a tiger”³² – a bestial insult designed to express the extremes of maternal love and maternal harm that are equally dangerous. Euripides emphasises the irrationality of a mother who would, like a lioness, protect her children to the death and then proceed to murder them like the monstrous Scylla. For Euripides, Medea is neither woman nor mother but a ‘barbarian’ – culturally inferior to the Greek Jason and thus powerless to defend herself against his accusations of monstrosity.³³

Although Euripides’ version of the myth of Medea is the most well-known in Western culture,³⁴ contemporary authors have sought to transcend familiar images, “reshap[ing] events, transforming them in the process of representing them”.³⁵ Geyer-Ryan suggests that at the

³¹ Euripides, *Medea*, trans. Philip Vellacott, London, Penguin, 1963, line 1344.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ As Kerrigan notes, “in Euripides, and Greek tragedy generally, the barbaric is defined against rationality and language”. J. Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, p.106.

³⁴ Corti notes that “the *Medea* by Euripides is the most important example of the literary conjunction between infanticidal themes and tragic form ... it is also, as the oldest extant version of a myth which has haunted the Western imagination for over two thousand years, the first in a long tradition of masterpieces” (p.xvi). Corti considers versions by Euripides, Seneca, Corneille, and Grillparzer. L. Corti, *The Myth of Medea and the Murder of Children*, Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1998.

³⁵ Murnaghan, pp.77-78.

hands of revisionists, the fantasy worlds of literature and drama provide a space in which “the female voice is given the power to say ‘no’, to contradict, to argue, to fight, to judge and to pass sentence”.³⁶ Modern adaptations of the myth of Medea are replete with vocal women who challenge the law and throw into question notions of ‘justice’ and ‘injustice’.

Contemporary interest in the figure of Medea is reflected in a plethora of literary, dramatic, operatic, and cinematic adaptations. Corti notes that there are “nearly a hundred treatments of the [Medea] motif in [the twentieth] century alone”.³⁷ These versions reflect many traditions with wide-ranging interpretations that cross several genres such as Thomas Sturge Moore’s 1920 play *Medea* and Franchini and Fuseya’s 1984 play *Médée*, both influenced by the ‘madwoman pieces’ or *kyojomono* of Japanese Noh theatre, Martha Graham’s 1946 ballet *Cave of the Heart*, Pier Paolo Pasolini’s 1970 film *Medea* starring opera singer Maria Callas, Peter Sellars’s 1984 opera *Medea*, Charles Ludlam’s 1984 satire *Ridiculous Medea*, and works which deal with racial and sexual injustice such as those by Countee Cullen (*Medea*), Guy Butler (*Demea*),

³⁶ H. Geyer-Ryan, *Fables of Desire: Studies in the Ethics of Art and Gender*, Cambridge, UK, Polity Press, 1994, p.91.

³⁷ Corti, *Murder of Children*, p.177. Apart from her brief consideration of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, Corti focuses solely on twentieth century adaptations by men. In contrast, I will discuss works by female creators.

Silas Jones (*American Medea: An African-American Tragedy*), and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.³⁸

In the last two decades there has been a resurgence of interest in the Medea motif in treatments that both develop earlier themes and canvass new and previously unexplored territory.³⁹ Of particular importance is the transformation of Medea into a feminist symbol, a 'spokesperson' for the plight of women in a patriarchal world.⁴⁰ Indeed, Irish poet Brendan Kennelly uses the theme of Medea to criticise the inherent misogyny of

³⁸ Corti sees Toni Morrison's *Beloved* as a version of Euripides' *Medea*, particularly in their association "between aggravated sorrow and eruptive violence" (*Murder of Children*, p.197). Morrison's novel is based on the true story of a slave named Margaret Garner who murdered her two-year-old daughter while fleeing her master. Thomas Satterwhite Noble first established a connection between the mythic Medea and Garner in his 1867 painting of Garner entitled "The Modern Medea". Weisenburger suggests that this is "a title with deeply troubling inferences ... [that] plays on themes nineteenth-century Americans typically spoke about in code" (p.8). For more about the case of Margaret Garner see S. Weisenburger, *Modern Medea: A Family Story of Slavery and Child-Murder from the Old South*, New York, Hill & Wang, 1998. Despite the persistent trend of associating *Beloved* and Medea, I have chosen to consider Morrison's *Beloved* in the final section of this Chapter – 'Mythic Scenes 3' – as a revision of the *Genesis* story of the first woman Eve.

³⁹ See Foley for a discussion of the contemporary predilection for 'reviving' Greek tragedy in general. H.P. Foley, "Modern Performance and Adaptation of Greek Tragedy", available online at <http://216.158.36.56/Publications/PresTalks/FOLEY98.html>.

⁴⁰ In her consideration of Classical Greek themes in contemporary law, Murnaghan suggests that the defiant and destructive women of Greek tragedy "can be reclaimed by modern feminists for their own purposes. The lawlessness of women can become the basis for a compelling critique of law's biases" (p.84). Weisbrod incorporates the myth of Medea in her critique of family law. C. Weisbrod, *Butterfly, the Bride: Essays on Law, Narrative, and the Family*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1999.

divorce politics,⁴¹ while librettist Tony Harrison in his *Medea: A Sex-War Opera* employs opposing male and female choruses to stage a battle of the sexes. Harrison exposes and chastises Euripides for “blacken[ing] [Medea] in his play” and assures the audience that his revision is not merely “[a]nother male plot to demean women”.⁴²

Where infanticide appears in these works, it is in a significantly altered form and invested with new meaning. In Harrison’s opera for example, Medea is wrongly accused of infanticide and receives the death penalty. For Harrison, the false charge of child-murder and Medea’s electrocution are the final horrific result of a “male plot” to subdue and desensitise women into faking domestic bliss. Dissatisfaction is equated with Medean wrath; rebellion with murder: “In every quiet suburban wife / dissatisfied with married life / is MEDEA, raging”.⁴³ Harrison’s play is reminiscent of Fo and Rame’s one woman play, a passage from which appears in the epigraph to this chapter, in which women are taught to subsume themselves – “no voices, no laughter, no love” – in accordance with their husbands’ “rules ... creed[s]”.⁴⁴ Women must “learn the lesson and repeat it and submit to it. And never rebel”.⁴⁵

⁴¹ See M. McDonald, “A Bomb at the Door: Kennelly’s *Medea*, 1988”, *Éire-Ireland*, 28(2), 1993, pp.129-137.

⁴² T. Harrison, *Dramatic Verse 1973-1985*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe Books, 1985, p.431.

⁴³ *Id.* at p.371.

⁴⁴ Fo and Rame, p.37.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Concerns about ensuring that mythic revisions resonate with contemporary audiences has led to adaptations which draw on the cases of real women accused of infanticide. Actress Ellen Geer attributes the praise she received in the Los Angeles *Times* for her performance as Robinson Jeffers's Medea - "pain-racked howls coiling around the verse like a serpent"⁴⁶ - to the case of Susan Smith whose "murder was absolutely a part of the concept behind the production".⁴⁷ Similarly, playwright Bradford Louryk recounts that he had to incorporate the story of Andrea Yates (which appeared in newspaper headlines during the production of his play *Klytaemnestra's Unmentionables*) "to make the play relevant and make Medea a real person".⁴⁸

If Rhodessa Jones's 'Medea Project' is anything to go by, the story of Medea clearly resonates in the hearts and minds of modern women, particularly those who have had direct experience with the law. In the early 1990s, Jones envisioned 'a theatre for incarcerated women' which would involve both "women in the San Francisco County Jail system and women performers who, when they are not working in a rehearsal space in jail, inhabit the free

⁴⁶ C. Wren, "In Medea Res: An Ancient Greek Femme Fatale is the American Theatre's Passion of the Moment", *American Theatre*, 19(4), 2002, pp.22-26 at p.25.

⁴⁷ E. Geer, cited in Wren, p.25.

⁴⁸ B. Louryk, cited in Wren, p.25.

world”.⁴⁹ Her vision was realised through the ‘Medea Project’ which continued for nine years and allowed countless female prisoners – some of “the most marginalised women in our society” – to “traffic”⁵⁰ their stories outside hostile prison walls. Jones named her project after the mythical Medea because she believed that:

this ancient story had everything to do with women in jail in the United States in the late twentieth century ... Medea is full of rage, and so are the women in jail. Like Medea, these women are seen by society as outsiders, barbarians. Like Medea, they have committed crimes, and crimes have been committed against them. They too have broken taboos, transgressed laws. They are women who are ruled by their passions, who are self-destructive, and who destroy others. Their lives, like that of Medea’s, contain examples of courage and debasement intertwined. And, like Medea, many of the women are master storytellers. Storytelling can be a con game, a trick used against one’s foes. It can also be the beginning of a different drama – a way to imagine, if not live out, a new life.⁵¹

It is the complexity of the Medea myth, particularly the way in which it lends itself to a multiplicity of readings and forms, that makes it so attractive to contemporary authors

⁴⁹ A.Y. Davis, “Foreword” in R. Fraden, *Imagining Medea: Rhodessa Jones and Theatre for Incarcerated Women*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2001, pp.ix-xii at p.ix.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ R. Fraden, *Imagining Medea: Rhodessa Jones and Theatre for Incarcerated Women*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2001, p.48.

and audiences alike. In the following sections we consider four revisions of the Medea myth by Christa Wolf, Rhodessa Jones, Vivian Deborah Wilson, and Cherríe Moraga. Perhaps more than anything else these creators are concerned with voice and exploding ideas, misconceptions, and prejudices that circumscribe the telling of *other* stories.

‘Death of the Innocent’⁵²: Christa Wolf’s *Medea - A Modern Retelling*

*Medea ... knows too much and can’t keep her mouth entirely shut ... So much knowledge is dangerous ...*⁵³

*We’re capable of letting ourselves be talked into believing a great many things*⁵⁴

*Even posterity will call me a child-murderess*⁵⁵

In her novel *Medea: A Modern Retelling*, Wolf explodes the image of Medea as archetypal evil mother. In contrast with her ancient Greek predecessor, Wolf’s Medea is an innocent victim of lies, deception and powerful men. Wolf’s novel is, Atwood suggests, “a study of power, and

⁵² M. Atwood, “Introduction” in C. Wolf, *Medea – A Modern Retelling* (1996), trans. John Cullen, London, Virago Press, 1998, pp.ix-xvi at p.xiv.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ C. Wolf, *Medea – A Modern Retelling* (1996), trans. John Cullen, London, Virago Press, 1998, p.120.

⁵⁵ *Id.* at p.186.

of the operations of power, and of the behaviour of human beings under pressure when power squeezes them tight”.⁵⁶ Wolf’s narrative shifts our attention from Medea as murderous mother to the filicidal acts of powerful fathers as corrupt and morally bankrupt rulers.

In Wolf’s version, King Creon murders his eldest daughter Iphinoe to prevent her succession to the throne (“He wanted Iphinoe out of the way”⁵⁷) and conceals his crime from the people of Corinth in an elaborate lie - she was abducted by a young king who wanted her to be his wife. Iphinoe’s corpse is entombed in the palace dungeon, her haunting presence throughout the novel evidence of male violence, corruption, and greed. Medea learns of Creon’s “monstrous deed”⁵⁸ when she follows the “darkened [and] inconsolable”⁵⁹ Queen Merope to this place of death. Medea is traumatised by what she sees, “promis[ing] [her]self to forget it as soon as possible”.⁶⁰ But she cannot forget, “think[ing] of nothing but that meagre, childish skull, those fine-boned shoulder blades, that brittle spinal column”.⁶¹ Medea’s refusal to keep Creon’s dreadful secret becomes the catalyst for a series of horrific events that consume the remainder of the novel.

⁵⁶ Atwood, p.xiii.

⁵⁷ Wolf, p.83.

⁵⁸ *Id.* at p.13.

⁵⁹ *Id.* at p.10.

⁶⁰ *Id.* at p.13.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Wolf's skilful exposition of psychic trauma is served by a contrapuntal style of narrative consisting of six "Voices"⁶² that create the effect of "a tunnel full of mirrors, both reflect[ing] and echo[ing]".⁶³ One of these 'voices' is that of Glauce, youngest daughter of Creon and Merope, who witnessed her sister's murder. Her monologue is perhaps the most 'confessional' in nature and constitutes a resurfacing of repressed memories. Glauce is tormented by the demons of her unconscious and blames Medea for unleashing these dark forces and "yank[ing] [her] [out of] ... the comfort of forgetting".⁶⁴ But Medea only acts as healer, seeking to "guide [Glauce] past the dangerous spots [she] couldn't pass alone".⁶⁵ When Glauce's buried memories manifest themselves physically in the form of a "hideous skin rash ... disgusting, oozing, and itchy",⁶⁶ Medea forces her to confront the past as a means of healing both her body and soul: "[Medea] set her force against [forgetting], she held my body tight and said in a firm, angry voice: No! Go on, Glauce, go on, and I saw the man ... Who was this man, Glauce. The man, the man, which man. Be calm, Glauce, be very calm, look closely. The man was the King. My father".⁶⁷

While Merope and Glauce are imprisoned by their memories and fear of Creon, Medea dares to speak out

⁶² *Id.* at p.2.

⁶³ Atwood, p.xv.

⁶⁴ Wolf, p.113.

⁶⁵ *Id.* at p.112.

⁶⁶ *Id.* at p.115.

⁶⁷ *Id.* at p.113.

against the King and his royal household. Creon immediately instigates a campaign of “insult[s] ... and intimidat[ion]”⁶⁸ and begins to “stir up the people against [Medea]”,⁶⁹ spreading a vicious rumour that she slaughtered her brother, Apsyrtus.⁷⁰ “If [the people believe that] she killed her little brother”, Creon reasons, “[they will believe] she’s capable of anything”.⁷¹ Cold-blooded and calculating, Creon persuades those closest to Medea (including her fellow Colchians Agamedea and Presbon) of her wickedness and capacity for evil.

Creon convinces the emotionally unstable Glauce that Medea is a sorceress who “makes [people] fall under her sway, as women of her type do by nature. She was the one who filled [your] brain with all these images, all these feelings ... She built up all kinds of groundless suspicions in [your] mind”.⁷² Creon’s words are persuasive and Glauce is convinced – long enough, at least, to “incite”⁷³ the people against Medea. But she feels extremely guilty for turning against the woman she thought of as a surrogate mother. Glauce reveals how her father made

⁶⁸ *Id.* at p.83.

⁶⁹ *Id.* at p.79.

⁷⁰ Medea’s father King Aeëtes orchestrated the murder of his son Apsyrtus to prevent the boy from seizing the throne. For further discussion of Classical sources that name Medea as the murderer of Apsyrtus see J.N. Bremmer, “Why Did Medea Kill Her Brother Apsyrtus?” in J.J. Clauss and S.I. Johnston, eds, *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1997, pp.83-100.

⁷¹ Wolf, p.113.

⁷² *Id.* at p121.

⁷³ *Id.* at p.146.

her believe that Medea had “deserted [her], just as [her] mother deserted [her] once [when she was grief-stricken after the murder of Iphinoe]”.⁷⁴ Proclaiming *herself* “the guilty one”,⁷⁵ a term coined by Cixous and Clément to refer to the guilty incriminations heaped upon the sorceress who reappears in the *fin-de-siècle* as her passive, tamed and subordinated ‘sister’ the hysteric,⁷⁶ Glauce commits suicide. The unfeeling Creon uses his daughter’s death to his advantage, telling his First Astronomer to “put out the report ... contest[ed] [on pain of death] ... [that] Medea sent Glauce a poisoned dress, a gruesome farewell gift, and as poor Glauce was putting it on, it burned her skin so badly that the pain drove her mad, and she threw herself into the well to cool her scorched flesh”.⁷⁷

A “monster”⁷⁸ in their minds, Medea becomes a scapegoat for communal wrath. Creon masterfully manipulates his subjects – “the dull-witted mob”⁷⁹ – to turn against Medea and “lay upon her the blame for crimes they themselves commit”.⁸⁰ Medea’s Colchian women castrate Glauce’s protector Turon (“cutting off his sex ... they stuck it on a skewer and bore it along before them as they surged ...

⁷⁴ *Id.* at p.115.

⁷⁵ *Id.* at p.105.

⁷⁶ H. Cixous and C. Clément, “The Guilty One” in *The Newly Born Woman*, *op. cit.*, pp.3-59.

⁷⁷ Wolf, p.179.

⁷⁸ *Id.* at p.153.

⁷⁹ *Id.* at p.146.

⁸⁰ *Id.* at p.79.

howling ... rac[ing] to the grove in a pack”⁸¹) and name Medea as the instigator of this monstrous act. Medea is arrested and “charged with having led the women who committed violence upon Turon”.⁸² While awaiting judgement in a “windowless chamber”⁸³ flanked by two guards, Medea’s children are murdered. Following a variation of the myth of Medea in which the Corinthians murder her children,⁸⁴ Wolf brings her story to its dreadful conclusion:

A crowd of people ...buzzing ... like a swarm of attacking bees ... agitated ... thronged together ... surging this way and that ... declaring again and again ... ‘We’ve done it. They’re gone ... The children! Her goddamned children. We ... stoned them! ... As they deserved.’⁸⁵

Medea is accused of the most horrific crime of all: “And the Corinthians, it seems, are not through with me yet. What do they say? That I, Medea, murdered my children ... Who’s going to believe that? ... Everybody ... They’re at pains to assure that even posterity will call me a child-murderess”.⁸⁶ Yet Wolf forces us to reconsider the myth of

⁸¹ *Id.* at p.160.

⁸² *Id.* at p.161.

⁸³ *Id.* at p.143.

⁸⁴ For more on this version of the myth see S.I. Johnston, “Corinthian Medea and the Cult of Hera Akraia” in J.J. Clauss and S.I. Johnston, eds, *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1997, pp.44-70.

⁸⁵ Wolf, pp.181-182.

⁸⁶ *Id.* at pp.185-186.

Medea as infanticide by showing how “history becomes truth, however untrue it really is”.⁸⁷ By making Medea a victim of hostile forces, Wolf gives voice to *his*-stories silenced women “coming toward us out of the depths of time ... seek[ing] to step out from the shadows of misjudgement”.⁸⁸

**Medea Project: Theatre for Incarcerated Women -
*Reality is Just Outside the Window***

*Eve! Nephertiti! Medea! Come on down. It's
power stripping time! 'Queen to bitch' ...
women's progress through the ages*⁸⁹

*The Medea Project refuses to let the women
prisoners and their collaborators remain
unseen and unheard. Instead, it insists on a
hypervisibility of women's bodies, histories,
and psyches*⁹⁰

Part of the driving force behind Rhodessa Jones's 'Medea Project' is a desire to “reorien[t] the dramatic spectacle so that women are no longer merely catalysts but instead become protagonists of their story”.⁹¹ The need to tell one's own story and the intimate relationship between voice, inscription, and agency are, for Jones, fundamental considerations for a modern reworking of the myth of

⁸⁷ S.E. Havens, “Mother Love”, *Library Journal*, 124(4), 1999, p.136.

⁸⁸ Wolf, p.1.

⁸⁹ T. McNair, “Monologue” - Medea Project performance piece *Reality is Just Outside the Window* in R. Fraden, *Imagining Medea: Rhodessa Jones and Theatre for Incarcerated Women*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2001, pp.54-55 at p.54.

⁹⁰ Davis, p.xi.

⁹¹ Fraden, p.49.

Medea. Focusing on the issue of “[h]ow to take hold of one’s own subject, to control one’s own plot, [and] not to be written over or cast out”,⁹² Jones conceived the idea of a performance piece entitled *Reality is Just Outside the Window*.⁹³ A mixture of theatre and art installation interspersed with music (live and recorded) and street sounds of modern-day urban America, the production would fuse her dual desires to “disrupt boundaries of right and wrong, of borders, and laws”,⁹⁴ and incorporate the personal stories of female prisoners.

Reality is Just Outside the Window is a truly collaborative production consisting of many diverse voices which revolve around Edris Cooper’s African-American adaptation of the Medea myth – “There Are Women Waiting: The Tragedy of Medea Jackson”. As audience members arrive they are confronted with Pam Peniston’s artwork installation – a mixture of wire fences and barricades plastered with images of women in jail. As the audience take their seats, women covered in mud and feathers walk past them singing “Things ain’t what they used to be” from Marvin Gaye’s “Mercy Me”. A monologue, written by actress Teirrah McNair, acts as a prelude to Cooper’s play by introducing the audience to its

⁹² *Id.* at p.53.

⁹³ First performed at Theatre Artaud, San Francisco, 8 January 1992.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

“violent juxtapositions of language – classical reference and street talk”.⁹⁵

Cooper’s play, “There Are Women Waiting: The Tragedy of Medea Jackson”, is set in inner city urban America – a hostile environment filled with “strange sounds” and “bad language”.⁹⁶ Cooper subverts the ancient Greek practice of having men play women’s roles and firmly embraces the idea of an all-female cast as an empowering “parody [of] women’s views of men”.⁹⁷ Cooper’s fascination with the infanticidal Medea meant a return to and revision of Euripides’ play. Although Cooper admits to “fully embrac[ing]”⁹⁸ the ancient Greek version, she “freely rework[s] [the] myth into a new narrative [which] ... operate[s] as [a] mode of contestation”.⁹⁹ Fraden suggests that Cooper’s adaptation relies on the notion of ‘counter-memory’ which “looks to the past for the hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives ...[and] forces revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past ... Counter-memory focuses on localised experiences with oppression, using them to reframe and refocus dominant narratives purporting to represent universal experience”.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ *Id.* at p.54.

⁹⁶ *Id.* at p.56.

⁹⁷ *Id.* at p.55.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Fraden, p.64.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

Cooper transforms Euripides' Colchian Medea into an African-American schoolgirl who falls madly in love with Jason, a drug-dealer. Smitten, she leaves school to be with him despite warnings from family and friends. The play opens with a heart-broken and bitter Medea who has lost Jason to "a white girl!"¹⁰¹ Almost unable to believe what has happened, Medea reflects on her past with Jason. Her dialogue is disconcerting as it shifts from romanticised schoolgirl fantasy to the passionate and embittered invective of a woman scorned:

If only you could seen; we were really good together. We was making money, cleaning up. We could have got out of the coke business, and retired, and travelled ... / gotta ... figure out how to get this bastard ... I'll show that nigga / ... I'ma get that crackhead bitch and that basest of baseheads Jason ... I just don't know whether to burn them butts up as is fitting or if I should cut off Jason's nuts, or slice a hole in her titties and stuff'em".¹⁰²

Medea fantasises about the idyllic life they could have had together – a life that, the female chorus reminds us, was nothing more than "the slow boat to hell".¹⁰³ In the process of trying to piece together fragments of her life while imagining 'what could have been', Medea gradually unravels the past. Her violent orality reflects the injustices

¹⁰¹ Cooper, p.57.

¹⁰² *Id.* at pp.59-60.

¹⁰³ *Id.* at p.58.

she has suffered and her figurative dismembering of both Jason and his new lover suggest Medea's own defiant form of justice.

Homeless, with no job and two young children to support, Medea is left with the "coupla dollars" that Jason "throws [her] ... on [her] way out".¹⁰⁴ It is only now that Medea realises the cost of failing to heed earlier warnings about Jason. Medea reminds Jason of all she has done for him: "I saved *your* life, I showed *you* the game. You wouldn't have *nothing* if it wasn't for me ... And you ain't got no shame for how you treated me".¹⁰⁵ At the same time we are reminded of Medea's personal sacrifice – a lost life full of promise and hope: "Gave up going to SCHOOL to be with him ... Gave up her TIME to work and spend money on him. And gave up her KIDS because he couldn't stand the competition and she even gave up her EARS because she couldn't stand to hear the truth. And gave up the rich black nectar of the goddess to the basest of men".¹⁰⁶

Realising that her own life is 'poisoned' without hope of a cure, Medea uses the urban 'poison' of modern America – "Crystal, ... PCP, and heroin"¹⁰⁷ - in retaliation against those who have "treated [her] like dirt, mistreated, and abused her".¹⁰⁸ Medea sends her "beautiful and

¹⁰⁴ *Id.* at p.60.

¹⁰⁵ *Id.* at pp.60-61; italics in text.

¹⁰⁶ *Id.* at pp.56-57.

¹⁰⁷ *Id.* at p.62.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

expensive”¹⁰⁹ ‘gifts’ to Jason’s lover in order “to save [her] children ... [from] fall[ing] into the hands of those that love them less”.¹¹⁰ Medea’s words seem to suggest that she needs to protect her children from a life without their mother. Jason and his lover would take the children and make a new life for themselves. In the end, however, she realises that life without a mother is no life at all. Whether Medea is in prison, or in a different city, her children would grow up without her in a hostile world in which women and children are “endangered species”.¹¹¹ “Look how I’m treated”, Medea tells the Chorus, “much less my kids. This world isn’t for them ...”.¹¹²

In a revolutionary transformation from Euripides’ version of the Medea myth, Cooper murders the mother: “Oh well! / Oh well, Medea’s dead / How’d she die? / She died like this / She died like this”.¹¹³ These lines are repeated four times and become Medea’s “death chant”.¹¹⁴ Cooper’s transgressive conclusion is a testament to Rhodessa Jones’s dramatic vision: “The Medea Project insists that Medea is, indeed, dead, so that ... a different beginning might be imagined. Women are now in charge of retelling the story ... [Medea’s death] activates us to think about different ways we might tell her story”.¹¹⁵ Medea’s story

¹⁰⁹ *Id.* at p.63.

¹¹⁰ *Id.* at pp.63-64.

¹¹¹ *Id.* at p.63.

¹¹² *Id.* at p.62.

¹¹³ *Id.* at p.64.

¹¹⁴ Fraden, p.64.

¹¹⁵ *Id.* at p.64.

does not end when the lights go down in the theatre. True to Jones's vision, the female prisoners performing in the play birth new Medeas by continuing to build upon, interpolate, and adapt Medea's story in terms of their own stories. These women, although physically confined within prison walls, are psychically released in the process of telling their *own* stories, in their own words, and in their own voices. Through these courageous women, Jones achieves "[t]he great [goal] [of] turn[ing] a tragedy into a different genre altogether, a counter epic, making Medea stand on her own, for herself. These Medeas revise and rewrite history".¹¹⁶

'Rain to wash away the blood'¹¹⁷: Vivian Deborah Wilson's *Medea – An Original Play in Two Acts*

*She has the stuff that myths are born of ...
It is their fear, not their perceptions, that
breeds malicious tales*¹¹⁸

In Wilson's play we shift from Cooper's inner city mayhem to the interview room of a prison. The play begins with Medea being interviewed by 'the Physician'. Using the powerful yet jarring technique of analepsis or 'flashbacks', Wilson allows Medea to recount the series of events that led to her incarceration. Wilson also makes us blatantly aware of the confining and restrictive context in which

¹¹⁶ *Id.* at p.65.

¹¹⁷ V.D. Wilson, "Medea – An Original Play in Two Acts", *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature*, 5(2), 1993, pp.203-263 at 1-1-3 (subsequent references to the play will appear in this form).

¹¹⁸ Wilson, 1-3-24.

Medea tells her story through various reflections on her state of mind and demeanour by those listening to her story (Physician), aware of stories about her (Guards I and II), or part of the story itself (Idyia, Ireni, Glauce, Crane, Jason). Through a variety of characters, Wilson is able to present and challenge a range of views which have been disseminated about Medea.

Throughout the play, the Physician struggles to come to terms with “a crime that is, in truth, beyond ... humanity”.¹¹⁹ But, as he realises, it is not a crime which can be ‘explained’ - though many have tried. As Medea remarks: “Everyone in Corinth knows my story, or some version of it that satisfies their blood-lust. It excites the imagination, stirs the passions. Their eyes flash red, their bodies recoil but they are fascinated”.¹²⁰ Medea criticises the Physician – the “good man (*sarcastic*), purveyor of reason, propriety” – for believing that explanation is “within his power”.¹²¹ While Medea informs us that only she can tell her story, she knows that within the worlds of law and medicine the story is not hers to tell. Wilson effectively satirises medical and legal processes by making Medea tell a tale that fits within their rigid constraints. Using the language of medico-legal discourse, and drawing on

¹¹⁹ *Id.* at 1-1-2.

¹²⁰ *Id.* at 1-1-4.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

notions of literary *testimonio* and legal confession,¹²² Wilson textually circumscribes the fluidity of Medea's story-telling to mirror her physical restraint within prison walls:

[M]y babies felt no pain. I assure you –
they felt no pain / I would not have it painful.
Nonetheless ...It was an awful deed. Awful.
A woman such as I am must be mad. There
is no explanation - and explanation there must
be – save madness / He thinks that. He desires
madness for me, will discover madness, prove
me mad ... He means to save my life. See how
busily he works at it? Crafting my salvation.¹²³

Medea sees her role of providing the Physician with the 'answers' he seeks as that of an 'accomplice'. She is torn between being true to herself and succumbing to those who desire to appropriate her story for their own selfish agenda. The Physician's language reeks with medieval misogyny, his "pursuit of woman's truth"¹²⁴ reminiscent of the witch-hunters' desire to extricate the 'truth' from women's bodies and mouths. If she 'confesses her soul', she can no longer 'lay claim' to her mind. If she 'quibbles', her soul receives 'no credit'. If she "[r]elinquishes her obstinacy, her perversity",¹²⁵ she plays with fate for it is her "destiny to remember" what really happened: "My

¹²² On the "disturbing complicity between fiction and testimony" (p.43) see J. Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* (1998), trans. E. Rottenberg, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2000.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Id.* at 1-1-5.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

duty. To endure, to relive... oh... that slim, graceful knife, so precisely crafted for the skillful boning of a baby lamb".¹²⁶

The Guards, only known as 'I' and 'II' reflect two views. Guard I reiterates the traditional view that Medea's "mind is unhinged. She is too much. Too much!"¹²⁷ while Guard II reflects the nineteenth century medical belief that hysterical women could be 'cured' by a 'good bedding': "Medea would cease her endless mourning. Her whining and her carping. She'd flourish, thrive on a proper bedding. Nightly bedding, and in the noon! That's what women need".¹²⁸ Their views correlate with Medea's own version of herself as being "mad with love, greedy, insatiable ... [catching] Jason up in [her] voracious love".¹²⁹ Medea is at once hysteric, mad, and passionate, and she is reincarnated in the imaginations of the Guards as both sexual and maternal predator.

Yet Idyia, Medea's mother, continually reminds us that "[p]assion undoes woman – be it passion for sexual ecstasy, that awful torment, or the torment of revenge".¹³⁰ A woman who "love[s] too much"¹³¹ is dangerous. Through the character of Idyia, Wilson presents the well known image of Medea as irrational and vengeful

¹²⁶ *Id.* at 1-1-6.

¹²⁷ *Id.* at 1-2-10.

¹²⁸ *Id.* at 1-2-11.

¹²⁹ *Id.* at 1-1-7.

¹³⁰ *Id.* at 1-3-13.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

infanticide. When Medea sees herself through Idyia's eyes, she is transformed into the 'poisonous' and deadly female – both a mother whose "murderous vapours"¹³² are emitted through her breastmilk, "infect[ing]"¹³³ the infant who suckles at her breast, and a woman whose venomous rage leads her to poison the "pretty gilt sweet cream [chocolates]" that Glauce will "pop whole into her mouth, piercing them with her pointy teeth".¹³⁴ The 'pointiness' of Glauce's teeth and the ferocity of her bite are linked to Medea's own violent orality. Her outspoken, wilful, and obstinate rebellion is embodied in her curses or 'death wish' against the house of Ireni: "[I] thrive in the moist, dank, underworld, biding my time, nurturing my venom, until I shall be ready to burst upon the house of Ireni, upon Jason's house".¹³⁵

Contrasted with the 'poisonous devourer' is the Medea of Act 1, Scene 4 – a loving mother who recounts the 'begetting' – "from the flickering embers of a wild, frenzied love" – and birthing – "in solitary agony"¹³⁶ of her infant son. Indeed, part of her animosity towards Jason arises from his 'violation' of both their marital bed and her 'maternal' bed: "As I lay alone ... Jason lay with his colourless, ferret-faced Glauce".¹³⁷ In an extremely powerful monologue, Medea professes her maternal love

¹³² *Id.* at 1-3-16.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Id.* at 2-3-46.

¹³⁵ *Id.* at 1-3-27.

¹³⁶ *Id.* at 1-4-29.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

only to realise that her words fall on deaf ears. Surely a mother who loves her children could not kill them? She must be pronounced mad. But if she says she did not love them, is she not also mad in her unnatural perversion of so-called maternal instinct? The only 'madness' Medea "could claim" is that of "a woman enslaved ... driven by love, so duped to spend her rich purse".¹³⁸ "Mad, indeed, I was for seven years", Medea admits, "struck dumb with madness".¹³⁹

Pondering the unsatisfactory status of women, Medea realises that although she has no claim over the children, without them her life is meaningless. It is female 'destiny' to bear children. Motherhood is not a blessing – it is a duty: "They are Jason's sons, Jason's progeny, not Medea's. Medea was vehicle only, carrier. That is motherhood. That is the curse of womanhood".¹⁴⁰ In an encounter with Jason, the power of the Father's law becomes clear to Medea. Jason tells Medea that her banishment from Corinth "will not be rescinded ... Your bitter, death-driven carping has ruined the life you could have lived".¹⁴¹ He tells Medea that she has "no alternative" – she is to leave Corinth *without* her children: "You make the bed you make. But I caution you. The boys will be mine. Whether taken by force or by law".¹⁴² If she

¹³⁸ *Id.* at 1-4-30.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Id.* at 1-4-31.

¹⁴¹ *Id.* at 1-6-40.

¹⁴² *Id.* at 1-6-41.

attempts to “[flee] with my sons”, Jason warns, “I will pursue her to the farthest reaches of this land and beyond....”.¹⁴³

Jason’s threatening words emphasise Medea’s untenable situation – she fears for her sons’ well-being after she is “gone, slain or ... worse”.¹⁴⁴ Well aware that the Corinthians will seek to avenge the death of Princess Glauce, Medea convinces herself that her “sons are better off dead by [her] own hand than dismembered by Ireni’s minions, left as carrion, unburied, for desert buzzards”.¹⁴⁵ In a poignant speech, Medea considers whether there are any alternatives, including the possibility of fleeing into the desert with her sons. But, she realises that this is not the ‘courageous’ option – “stifling of the soul ... with too much love” is just as destructive as “the steady, unambiguous thrust of the sharpened knife”.¹⁴⁶ For Medea, killing her children is ‘courageous’ because it means she must kill herself: “They are of my flesh, of my soul. As much Medea as Medea is herself”.¹⁴⁷ Wilson ultimately presents Medea’s infanticide as a ‘symbolic suicide’. Medea spares her sons from a fate worse than death¹⁴⁸ and sentences

¹⁴³ *Id.* at 2-5-56.

¹⁴⁴ *Id.* at 2-5-54.

¹⁴⁵ *Id.* at 2-5-55.

¹⁴⁶ *Id.* at 2-5-54.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ The theme of protecting one’s children from future suffering is a common feature of contemporary postcolonial and feminist revisions of the Medea myth. A good example is the novel *Scarlet Song* by Senegalese author Mariama Bâ in which a mother kills her only son – the product of a mixed marriage – aware of the suffering he will endure as ‘outcast’. M. Bâ, *Scarlet Song (Un Chant Écarlate)* (1981),

herself to the purgatory of the 'living dead': "So shall I inflict upon myself a wound not mortal but more terrible ... It is not for Medea to obliterate her pain. Her destiny is to survive, endure her agony. To relive it".¹⁴⁹

Fantasmas: Cherríe Moraga's The Hungry Woman - A Mexican Medea

*'Imagine freedom', I tell myself. 'Write freedom'. And I try to do so by painting pictures of prisoners on the page. They are the surviving codices of our loss ... They are leading backwards, pointing toward a future of freedom*¹⁵⁰

*[T]o be taken for a ghost is to be 'credited' with unnatural desires. No other incriminating acts need to be represented, no fleeting palpitation recorded – it is enough to become phantomlike in the sight of others, to change oneself (or be changed) from mortified flesh to baffled apparition. To 'be a ghost' is to long, unspeakably, after one's own sex*¹⁵¹

trans. Dorothy S. Blair, New York, Longman, 1985. For further consideration see J.P. Little, "The Legacy of Medea: Mariama Bâ, *Un Chant Écarlate* and Marie Ndiaye, *La Femme Changée en Bûche*", *Modern Language Review*, 95(2), 2000, pp.362-373; D.G. Plant, "Mythic Dimensions in the Novels of Mariama Bâ", *Research in African Literatures*, 27(2), 1996, pp.102-111; M-K.F. Miller, *(Re)productions: Autobiography, Colonialism and Infanticide*, New York, Peter Lang, 2003.

¹⁴⁹ Wilson, 2-5-59.

¹⁵⁰ C.L. Moraga, "Hungry for God" in C.L. Moraga, *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea/Heart of the Earth: A Popul Vuh Story*, Albuquerque, West End Press, 2001, pp.vii-x at p.x.

¹⁵¹ T. Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993, p.32.

Commissioned in the early 1990s by Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Cherrie Moraga's *The Hungry Woman - A Mexican Medea* presents a radical feminist vision of social and political transformation. Set in the future (second decade of the twenty-first century) and evolving from "a history at the turn of the century that never happened",¹⁵² the play is a tale of ethnic civil war, revolution, and racial, gender, and sexual oppression. The play revolves around Medea – once a leader in the Chicano revolt which "founded independent nations seceded from the United States"¹⁵³ – her son Chac-Mool, and her lesbian lover Luna. Through these characters, Moraga probes the physical and psychological borders that pollute and poison human relations.

Although the play is set in the future, it evinces a marked preoccupation with the past that is most evident in Moraga's use of Mesoamerican and Greek mythology. Moraga draws together various elements from the Mexican-Chicana/o legend of La Llorona – the ghostly 'Weeping or Wailing Woman' who, according to Sánchez, "unable to rest in her grave ... roams ... mourn[ing] and cr[ying] out for her poor children [whom she drowned or lost] wherever she goes. As she [roams], the rustling of her long white gown and her crying may be heard near

¹⁵² Moraga, *Hungry*, p.6.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

any body of water”¹⁵⁴ - the Aztec myth of the murder of the moon goddess Coyolxauhqui,¹⁵⁵ the Aztec creation myth

¹⁵⁴ L. Sánchez, “La Llorona: New Mexico’s Weeping Woman”, *True West*, 46(10), 1999, pp.36-38 at p.38. Vigil notes that La Llorona “has often been called ‘The Mexican Medea’”. A. Vigil, *The Corn Woman: Stories and Legends of the Hispanic Southwest*, trans. Jennifer Audrey Lowell and Juan Francisco Marin, Colorado, Libraries Unlimited, 1994, p.11. There are several versions of La Llorona: in some she kills her illegitimate children and roams the world stealing children from their beds; in other versions the children die accidentally or they are lost. La Llorona typically appears as the ghost of a mother who has drowned her children and committed suicide. According to Leddy, “the wailing woman had drowned all her children in the canals of Mexico city. Finally repentant, she began to haunt the streets at night, ‘weeping and wailing’, clad in white. Meeting a watchman or a lonely traveller, she would cry out for her children, then disappear. The traveller would lose consciousness or go mad ... to hear her is frightening; to see, to stop, to speak to her is very dangerous”. B. Leddy, “La Llorona in Southern Arizona”, *Western Folklore*, 7, 1948, pp.272-277. In some sources, she is ‘La Sirena’, the siren haunting lakes and canals where she lures men and children to their death. Note the relationship with the ancient Greek Sirens, enchantingly evil mythic creatures with female heads whose song bewitched sailors causing them to crash their boats into rocks. See R.A. Barakat, “Wailing Women of Folklore”, *Journal of American Folklore*, 82, 1969, pp.270-272. A Tucson version depicts La Llorona as a widow whose only son drowned while playing near a flooded river. Overcome with grief, she kidnaps young children as replacements for her dead son. According to Leddy, “often her fingerprints are found on windows, or screens are torn where she tried to enter homes” (Leddy, “La Llorona in Southern Arizona”, p.274). Hawes adds that La Llorona is “constantly searching for her children, and she believes all children to be hers”. Hawes suggests that there are “three faces of the traditional La Llorona – the temptress who is dangerous to men, the child killer, and the mourning woman – merge[d] into one frighteningly ambiguous figure”. B.L. Hawes, “La Llorona in Juvenile Hall”, *Western Folklore*, 27, 1968, pp.153-170 at p.165. For more on La Llorona see J.E. Limón, “La Llorona, The Third Legend of Greater Mexico: Cultural Symbols, Women, and the Political Unconscious” in A. del Castillo, *Between Borders: Essays on Mexicana/Chicana History*, California, Floricanto Press, 1990, pp.399-432; E. Walraven, “Evidence for a Developing Variant of La Llorona”, *Western Folklore*, 50, 1991, pp.208-217; S.L. Arora, “Murderous Mothers: The Theme of Infanticide in a Contemporary Hispanic Legend” in L. Petzoldt, *Folk Narrative and World View*, Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 1996, pp.55-65; B.F. Kirtley, “La Llorona and Related Themes”, *Western Folklore*, 19, 1960, pp.155-168. Like Moraga, several feminist Chicana authors have embraced the figure of La Llorona in their work – see, for example, A.L. Villanueva, *Weeping Woman: La Llorona and Other*

of 'The Hungry Woman',¹⁵⁶ and the ancient Greek myth of Medea. Mayorga elucidates the potency of these mythical figures in Moraga's work:

In the myths of these broken and maligned women, Moraga sees the state of all Chicanas/ mexicanas who suffer the legacy of their antepasados in the injustices of patriarchy ... allowing these women to speak – to attain voices and objectives beyond the confinement of myths tooled to service patriarchy –

Stories, Arizona, Bilingual Press, 1994 (Villanueva's story entitled 'La Llorona/Weeping Woman also has a character named 'Luna'); H.M. Viramontes, *The Moths and Other Stories*, Texas, Arte Publico Press, 1985; S. Cisneros, *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, New York, Random House, 1991. Feminist theorists have found in La Llorona's sorrowful wailing and weeping the semantic polyvocality of a powerful 'unknown language'. In this space of resistance, Swyt suggests, La Llorona becomes a "female symbol that fails to comply with feminine imperatives" (p.191). W. Swyt, "Hungry Women: Borderlands Mythos in Two Stories by Helena Maria Viramontes", *Melus*, 23(2), 1998, pp.189-201. For further discussion of La Llorona in contemporary Chicana literature see B. Simerka, "Woman Hollering: Contemporary Chicana Reinscriptions of La Llorona Mythography", *Confluencia*, 16(1), 2000, pp.49-58.

¹⁵⁵ See the Prelude to Act II, *Medea*, pp.55-57. Coyolxauhqui's brother severs her head and tosses it into the heavens where it transforms into the moon. Arrizón notes the development of the Coyolxauhqui myth in Moraga's earlier work and how in *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* Luna "embodies the Moon Goddess ... whose lesbian desire as an analogy of Coyolxauhqui's disobedience functions ... as an attack on the larger frame of patriarchy". A. Arrizón, "Mythical Performativity: Relocating Aztlán in Chicana Feminist Cultural Productions", *Theatre Journal*, 52(1), 2000, pp.23-49 at p.48.

¹⁵⁶ Moraga takes part of the title of her play from the creation myth of the Hungry Woman: "In the place where the spirits live, there was once a woman who cried constantly for food. She had mouths everywhere. In her wrists, elbows, ankles, knees ... And every mouth was hungry ... the spirits flew down and began to make grass and flowers from the dirt-brown of her skin. From her greñas, they made forests. From those ojos negros, pools and springs. And from the slopes of her shoulders and senos, they made mountains y valles. At last she will be satisfied , they thought. Pero, just like before, her mouths were everywhere, biting and moaning ... opening and snapping shut. They would never be filled" (*Medea*, pp.44-45).

becomes the point of departure for drama that inspires hunger for empowerment.¹⁵⁷

Moraga has also written about the cartographic value of myth – “an opening into the past ... that can provide a kind of road map to our future”.¹⁵⁸ But if the future implies erasure, myth is, for Moraga, a fundamental component of the politics of remembering and a vital tool for holding onto what Ivy calls the “discourses of the vanishing”.¹⁵⁹ Mythic figures become Moraga’s “allies in a war against forgetfulness”.¹⁶⁰ Moraga “write[s] to remember” – to put together the past in order to imagine new worlds in which dreams are “waiting to happen”.¹⁶¹

The opening scene of the play sees Medea in a prison psychiatric ward, incarcerated for the murder of her son. From this site, Medea describes the events (spanning the past seven years) which led to her imprisonment. She recounts her role in the creation of Aztlán – a Chicano ‘space’ within a ‘balkanised’ United States and the ancestral homeland of the Aztec people;¹⁶² “patriarchy’s

¹⁵⁷ I. Mayorga, “Homecoming: The Politics of Myth and Location in Cherrie L. Moraga’s *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* and *Heart of the Earth: A Popul Vuh Story*” in Moraga, *Medea*, *op. cit.*, pp.155-165 at p.156.

¹⁵⁸ Moraga, “Hungry”, p.ix.

¹⁵⁹ M. Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995.

¹⁶⁰ Moraga, “Hungry”, p.x.

¹⁶¹ *Id.* at p.ix.

¹⁶² For more on the place of Aztlán in Chicano/a consciousness and as a powerful symbol for Chicana feminist authors see Arrizón, *op. cit.*; G. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, San

deformation of Aztlán's governance"¹⁶³; her forbidden lesbian relationship with Luna while still married to Jasón; her banishment from Aztlán, because of her lesbianism, to Phoenix, Arizona – "located in ... the border region between Gringolandia (U.S.A) and Aztlán (Mechicano country). Phoenix ... a city-in-ruin, the dumping site of every kind of poison and person unwanted by its neighbours"¹⁶⁴; Jasón filing for divorce and custody of their son, Chac-Mool, without whom Jasón cannot gain citizenship in Aztlán: "You can't hold onto a handful of dirt in Atzlán without him. You don't have the blood quantum"¹⁶⁵; Chac-Mool's looming Chicano ceremony of 'manhood' which would mark "his indoctrination into Atzlán's 'misogyny and machismo'"¹⁶⁶; the irreconcilability of love for one's mother (country) and the law of the Father; infanticide and finally her own death.

In *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*, Moraga conflates transgressive sexual desire with political resistance and the desire for emancipation. Women who seek to subvert the patriarchal order are also perceived as being sexually subversive. Women who hunger for empowerment, and whose desires cannot be contained

Francisco, Aunt Lute Books, 1987; A. Arteaga, *Chicano Poetics: Heterotexts and Hybridities*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1997; D.L. Madsen, *Understanding Contemporary Chicana Literature*, Columbia, South Carolina, University of South Carolina Press, 2000.

¹⁶³ Mayorga, p.159.

¹⁶⁴ Moraga, *Medea*, p.6.

¹⁶⁵ *Id.* at p.72.

¹⁶⁶ Mayorga, p.159.

are 'unnatural' in both body and mind. Political and sexual desire are analogous in Moraga's play – they both stem from an insatiable female hunger. Medea's hunger for political power "reshape[s] her emotional and sexual desire".¹⁶⁷ But, as we learn from Medea's narrative journey into the past, it is a hunger that can never be 'filled' – her dreams of freedom from a repressive patriarchal regime are not realised and she finds out that her lover Luna is having an affair.

In Moraga's mythic transformation, Medea becomes the Hungry Woman of Aztec creation: "a woman who cried constantly for food. She had mouths everywhere ... And every mouth was hungry ... They would never be filled".¹⁶⁸ Although Medea seeks to satiate her hunger she also fears the body – "those thick necklaces of flesh"¹⁶⁹ - which threatens to strangle her in the perversity of an imagined self-consumption. Medea recalls her maternal body, so easily filled by a child and the new love which awakens the "[t]iny ghosts liv[ing] inside [her]".¹⁷⁰ Luna's love returns Medea to infancy. She imagines that she is a baby with "a mouth of corn, sweet baby corn. A mouth of baby teeth sucking at virgin purple pezones".¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Moraga, *Medea*, pp.44-45.

¹⁶⁹ *Id.* at p.12.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Id.* at p.11.

Losing Luna is the equivalent of an infant losing its maternal life source: “How do I live now without her breasts? I can’t open my mouth to suck her”.¹⁷² Without Luna’s love Medea is a mother whose child is ‘all grown up’ and no longer ‘desires’ the mother’s breast: “How is it you used to drink from me ... In the beginning all was me”¹⁷³ Medea says to Luna, mirroring an earlier scene in which she remembers the day her son “just stopped wanting it”: “I show Chac-Mool my breast. His eyes pass over me. Lizard eyes. Cold. ‘Not now, Mum,’ he says. Like a man. I knew then that he already wanted to be away from me, to grow up to suck on some other woman’s milkless tit”.¹⁷⁴

Throughout the play, desire is disrupted and repressed by the law. In a powerful scene depicting Medea’s sexual and emotional ‘rebirth’, Medea and Luna’s passionate encounter is interrupted by a male Border Guard who, Marrero notes, “represents the phallic Law”.¹⁷⁵ Lesbian love is forbidden in Atzlán, banished to a liminal ‘border’ space outside patriarchal imagination. Moraga equates forbidden lesbian desire with the excessive passion of “a mamá who love[s] ... too much”.¹⁷⁶ As he approaches ‘manhood’, Chac-Mool begins to resent his mother’s

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Id.* at p.43.

¹⁷⁴ *Id.* at p.31.

¹⁷⁵ M.T. Marrero, “Out of the Fringe? Out of the Closet: Latina/Latino Theatre and Performance in the 1990s”, *Drama Review*, 44(3), 2000, pp.131-153 at p.143.

¹⁷⁶ Moraga, *Medea*, p.41.

suffocating love. Chac-Mool blames Medea for “send[ing] [Luna] away” and for not telling him that his father “wanted” him:

Chac-Mool: ... Why did you send her away?
Medea: I didn't send her away. She left.
Chac-Mool: You did. You made her unhappy.
 You make me unhappy...
Medea: I'm trying to save you, ingrato!
Chac-Mool: From what?
Medea: From ... him.
Chac-Mool: You made Luna go away. He
 didn't.
Medea: To keep you.
Chac-Mool: To keep me for what?
Medea: For-
Chac-Mool: For yourself.¹⁷⁷

Fighting over custody of their son, Jasón tells Medea: “If you really loved your son, you'd remove him from your tit” (69). But Jasón's claim is one of ownership and self-affirmation - he seeks to “make [Chac-Mool] [into] a man ... in [his own] likeness”.¹⁷⁸ As he nears his thirteenth birthday (the age at which he is allowed by law to leave Arizona for Atzlán), Chac-Mool moves further and further away from his mother/tongue/land. The maternal name carved into the skin of his arm “so [he] won't forget”¹⁷⁹ is erased by his paternal/legal “real name”,¹⁸⁰ Adolfo. The initiation rite which will confirm his entry into ‘manhood’

¹⁷⁷ *Id.* at pp.66-67.

¹⁷⁸ *Id.* at p.69.

¹⁷⁹ *Id.* at p.71.

¹⁸⁰ *Id.* at p.75.

will inscribe a new name, a new law in his heart: "... that's what they'll teach you, to despise a mother's love".¹⁸¹ Chac-Mool begins to believe that his mother denied him his birthright, 'stealing' him away across the border. He erases the memory of his 'bloody' "mother's thighs", replacing it with the autogenous fantasy of his father giving birth to him: "I am my father's son ... my father drilled his fingers into my chest ... You are blessed, he told me. Open your nostrils and flare like a bull. I want you to smell this land. I remember the wings of my nostrils rising up to suck up his breath. It was a birthing of sorts. He penetrated and I was born of him ... And then my mother stole me away ...".¹⁸²

Chac-Mool makes Medea's fears of losing him to the father(land) a reality when he denies his maternal heritage: "I've held my breath for thirteen years in fear of hearing those words come out of your mouth, to hear you finally absolve yourself of me!"¹⁸³ Chac-Mool's words transform Medea into the mythical La Llorona: "All the babies, they're slipping through my fingers now. I can't stop them. They've turned into the liquid of the river and they are drowning in my hands".¹⁸⁴ As Medea wonders

¹⁸¹ *Id.* at p.74.

¹⁸² *Id.* at pp.77; 79.

¹⁸³ *Id.* at p.85.

¹⁸⁴ *Id.* at p.86. Sánchez suggests that for over four hundred years Hispanic people have feared La Llorona's *fantasma* (ghost) and "this fear is often as prevalent today as it was during the past" (p.36). Candelaria agrees with Sánchez and believes that it is "one of the most vigorous folk legends ... [which still has a] bone-chilling impact" (p.111). Most historians and folklorists suggest that the legend of La

whether her love for Luna is to blame for the ‘loss’ of her ‘baby’, Luna regrets her own ‘failure’ for never being able to give Medea children: “I, who would always make her sweat and bleed every month. Our shared moons, a marriage of the most bitter, sweet-lipped kind”.¹⁸⁵ But Medea realises that fate is predestined – the ‘pre-patriarchal’ mother Coatlicue demands her son as a ‘holy sacrifice’: “I cannot relinquish my son to [my enemies] ... where they will call him by his manly name”.¹⁸⁶ On the night before he leaves for his father’s home in Atzlán, Medea gives Chac-Mool a poisonous concoction to “help [him] sleep”.¹⁸⁷ The ghostly figures of the Cihuatateo take his lifeless body to the corn field, placing it on an ‘altar’ made from overgrown cornstalks. The play ends with the laments of the Cihuatateo and the penetrating mourning wail of La Llorona in the wind.

In an epilogue to the play, we are reminded of an earlier discussion between Chac-Mool and his maternal grandmother, Mama Sal, about La Llorona:

Mama Sal: Gives you chicken skin, doesn’t it?
Chac-Mool: La Llorona never scared me.
Mama Sal: No? Not even when you was a

Llorona was most commonly used “to coerce obedience from misbehaving children” (p.113). C. Candelaria, “Letting La Llorona Go or Re/reading History’s Tender Mercies”, *Heresies*, 27, 1993, pp.111-115. Perhaps Medea invokes the wailing woman as a final assertion of maternal power over the son who disobeys her wishes. See *supra* at note 46 for further discussion of La Llorona.

¹⁸⁵ Moraga, *Medea*, p.87.

¹⁸⁶ *Id.* at p.88.

¹⁸⁷ *Id.* at p.90.

little esquinle?

Chac-Mool: No, I felt sorry for her, not scared
... I remember hearing her out
there in the cañon ... Her voice
was inside the wind ... It sounded
like the whole canyon was cryin'.
I felt like she was telling me her
side of the story, like I was the
only one that heard it like that.
Mama Sal: Maybe you were.¹⁸⁸

In death, Chac-Mool's ghost hears his mother's Lloronic wail and returns to stop Medea's "nightmares of babies melting between [her] hands"¹⁸⁹ – to take her 'home'. Giving her potent herbs prepared by Luna, Chac-Mool tells Medea to "watch the moon. By the full moon, you'll be looking at saguaros. You're going home ... I'm taking you".¹⁹⁰ In a scene resembling his own death, Chac-Mool tells his mother to drink the poisonous concoction to "help [her] sleep".¹⁹¹ But Medea's life had ended long before – living with neither son (land) – "You're my land, hijo. Don't you see that? You're my land!"¹⁹² – nor country, imprisoned in a 'no man's land', and haunted by dead babies. Chac-Mool returns to the mother/tongue/land so that Medea can be 're-born'. In the end, the son re(-

¹⁸⁸ *Id.* at pp.37-38.

¹⁸⁹ *Id.* at p.98. See also p.86.

¹⁹⁰ *Id.* at p.99.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Id.* at p.85.

)members his mother by hearing “her side of the story”.¹⁹³
And he is “the only one that hear[s] it like that”.¹⁹⁴

Mythic Scenes 2: Jocasta

*... Jocasta is represented by silence, negation, damnation, suicide. The story of her desire, the account of her guilt, the rationale for her complicity with a brutal husband, the materiality of the body which gave birth to a child she could not keep and which then conceived with that child other children – this story cannot be filled in because we have no framework within which to do it from her perspective*¹⁹⁵

*There is no end to what [Freud] has to say about Oedipus; but who is there to take notice of ... Jocasta ... Can she really be forgotten? ... can she be left in the shadows?*¹⁹⁶

*[A]ll that is at issue is a ‘history’, a story that can be erased and overlaid by another story*¹⁹⁷

The psychoanalytic myth of legal origins features the primal horde of sons murdering the Father because they desire the Mother. The sons feel guilt and remorse for their heinous crime and from the slaughter of the Father

¹⁹³ *Id.* at p.38.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ M. Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1989, p.4; emphasis in text.

¹⁹⁶ C. Olivier, *Jocasta’s Children: The Imprint of the Mother* (1980), trans. George Craig, London, Routledge, 1989, p.1.

¹⁹⁷ *Id.* at p.120.

arises the prohibition against murder and incest. In his discussion of the primal scene, Douzinas elucidates the relationship between psychoanalysis and law:

Psychoanalysis present[s] the birth of the law as a crime story. Violence and crime lie at the beginning of humankind. The law and the social bond emerge in the bloody aftermath of murder and catastrophe ... Law and morality emerge out of evil and derive from what they will eventually come to condemn and repress. The law is an always belated attempt to fight what led to its own genesis¹⁹⁸

The interdiction against desire is a sign of paternal law. Entry into the Symbolic Order (law/language/culture) signifies the legal repression of desire. The law severs “[o]ur union with and our eros for the maternal object ... and control[s] the desire of the all-powerful [m]Other”.¹⁹⁹ The maternal “phantom of Omnipotence”²⁰⁰ rises, phoenix-like, from the Father’s ashes.

In Greek tragedy, those who transgress the boundaries between prohibition and desire unleash irrepressible and fatal passions that wreak havoc. Douzinas notes that Greek tragedy is a “meeting point”²⁰¹ for law and

¹⁹⁸ C. Douzinas, “Law’s Birth and Antigone’s Death: On Ontological and Psychoanalytical Ethics”, *Cardozo Law Review*, 16, 1995, pp.1325-1362 at p.1325.

¹⁹⁹ *Id.* at p.1329.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Id.* At p.1335.

psychoanalysis, two discourses that symbolise the difference between desire and prohibition. Indeed, Freud turned to Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* to elucidate his theory of the Oedipus complex, namely the son's incestuous desire for his mother and death wishes towards his father. However, Freud's focus on the son's forbidden desire allowed him "to turn aside from the significance of maternal desire".²⁰² In Freud's theory, the maternal figure is, Garner, Kahane, and Sprengnether suggest, "relegated to a mere aside, [an] absent presence".²⁰³ Feminist theorists seeking to revise Freudian theory relocate the centrality of mother figures and maternal desire, interpreting Freud's "invocation" and "banishment"²⁰⁴ of the pre-oedipal mother as evidence of his ambivalence about maternal power. Power and motherhood are intrinsically related, Sprengnether suggests, and maternal desire continually "disrupt[s] the smooth flow of the story [Freud] wishes to tell".²⁰⁵

For Aristodemou, maternal desire is crucial to the oedipal narrative. In Sophocles' play, "Jocasta is the woman who mark[s] the fate of Oedipus ... by realising her desire for him".²⁰⁶ Aristodemou interprets the tale of Oedipus as man's symbolic "search for a secure foundation and

²⁰² M. Sprengnether, *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1990, p.4.

²⁰³ S.N. Garner, C. Kahane and M. Sprengnether, eds, *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1985, p.18.

²⁰⁴ Sprengnether, p.3.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ Aristodemou, *Law and Literature*, p.54.

definition of himself in the Father, who stands for order, origin, and law, and away from the Mother who stands for false appearances, chaos, and chance”.²⁰⁷ Jocasta disrupts legal order and threatens the Father’s Law that dictates the son’s journey away from the pre-oedipal (Mother/nature) to the oedipal (Father/culture). Jocasta questions the oracle’s prophecy, choosing chance over destiny: “It’s all chance, / chance rules our lives”.²⁰⁸ She tells Oedipus to “live ... as if there’s no tomorrow”,²⁰⁹ to be guided by passion instead of reason. Aristodemou elucidates the threat of Jocasta, and by extension Woman, to the law:

In proposing ‘chance’ as the force governing the order of the universe, Jocasta intimates the possibility of the existence of a different law, and a different truth, perhaps even a higher law and a higher truth, one that emanates not from conscious knowledge or reason but from unconscious impulses and the body. One can go further and suggest that Jocasta, and woman generally, is distrusted for intimating or understanding this higher truth and this higher law, and therefore her pronouncements need to be discredited and rejected.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ *Id.* at p.48.

²⁰⁸ Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* (trans. D. Grene) in C.A. Robinson, ed., *An Anthology of Greek Drama*, New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967, p.83.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ Aristodemou, *Law and Literature*, p.36.

Jocasta is a dangerous force weaving her way through Sophocles' drama. She is portrayed as the negative half of the 'split' mother of psychic fantasy – not the virginal idealised “angel-mum” but the sexual temptress who “knows exactly what she is doing”.²¹¹ Oedipus longs to acquire knowledge of his origins but locates in the maternal body sins of origin – the original appetitive hunger marking the fall of humankind from eternal Paradise. When Oedipus says that he “fear[s] [his] mother's bed”²¹² he expresses the fear of engulfment – of being reabsorbed into the maternal womb and into death. By destroying Jocasta, Sophocles fantasises a resolution to the son's fear of the suffocating maternal matrix and eliminates her threat to patriarchal order.

In Sophocles' version of the Oedipus myth then, the desiring/desirable mother is silenced. We are left with a story in which the mother is present only in her absence - the mother's “story cannot be filled in because we have no framework within which to do it *from her perspective*”.²¹³ In the following sections we will see how two contemporary female authors have risen to the challenge of bringing the mother “out of oblivion and represent[ing] [her] outside the confines of masculine paradigms”.²¹⁴ Michèle Fabien, in her 1981 dramatic monologue *Jocasta*, and Ursule

²¹¹ J. Caputi, “On the Lap of Necessity: A Mythic Reading of Teresa Brennan's Energetics Philosophy”, *Hypatia*, 16(2), 2001, pp.1-26 at p.7.

²¹² Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, p.83.

²¹³ Hirsch, p.4; italics in text.

²¹⁴ Aristodemou, *Law and Literature*, p.57.

Molinaro, in her 1994 novel *Power Dreamers: The Jocasta Complex*,²¹⁵ revise the Oedipus myth by ‘voicing’ Jocasta – giving her the power to tell her own story and making her the central focus of their narratives. Although drawn from different genres, these works share a vision of Jocasta as an intelligent woman who exposes the irreconcilability between the obligations of motherhood and the intensity of her emotional and physical needs in a society in which women were expected to sublimate those needs to the ‘greater good’ of both family and state. These works are significant because they focus on Jocasta – her emotions, her intelligence, her compassion, her courage, her power, her desire. Jocasta is no longer the silent mother of Greek tragedy. In these works Jocasta is the woman who makes the story of Oedipus possible. As Fabien’s Jocasta puts it, “[w]ithout Jocasta, no Oedipus...”²¹⁶

²¹⁵ M. Fabien, *Jocasta* (1981), trans. Richard Miller in Ubu Repertory Theatre Publications, *Plays by Women: An International Anthology*, New York, 1988, pp.77-101. U. Molinaro, *Power Dreamers: The Jocasta Complex*, New York, McPherson, 1994. These works are important because they represent only a handful of feminist revisions of the Oedipus myth in which Jocasta is the central focus. Hirsch laments that “Jocasta is virtually ignored in feminist revisions” (p.2). The tendency of theorists and authors such as Rukeyser and de Lauretis to focus on the monstrous Sphinx, the ‘non-maternal woman’, rather than Jocasta implies an association between powerlessness and motherhood. Hirsch finds this trend disconcerting as it suggests that feminist goals of power and equality, of “inscribing the female into the male plot, ... can succeed ... only by further silencing one aspect of women’s experience and identity – the maternal” (p.4).

²¹⁶ Fabien, p.87.

'Imprint(s) of the Mother'²¹⁷: Michèle Fabien's *Jocasta*

*[N]o image for Jocasta, Jocasta is Jocasta
and has no image, only the glittering hints
of murder in the eyes of all who meet her²¹⁸*

*She did not commit suicide, the guilty
Jocasta, she was executed. Yes. You sit
up and look at me. Execution. I can read
it in your eyes. Guilty, bearer of plague ...
the bearer of a monster child and of the
monster's children²¹⁹*

*Jocasta outside the walls, outside of love,
outside the law²²⁰*

In her dramatic monologue, *Jocasta*, Michèle Fabien focuses solely on Jocasta and her vision of the events that took place in Thebes. Beginning with a section entitled 'Jocasta the hanged', Jocasta's references to herself as 'not self' suggest that her ghost returns to tell her tale – to "relate the horror of what happened" to those who "didn't see it".²²¹ Drawing the listener into her confidence, Jocasta promises that "you shall know whatever I can remember, how she suffered".²²² She seeks to put an end to all the rumours and insinuations: "Ask me about the sash, the laces, the beam in the ceiling, the scream of the hanged woman, the saliva flowing from her mouth ... her blue deformed face, her

²¹⁷ From the title of Olivier's book (*Jocasta's Children*, 1989).

²¹⁸ Fabien, p.85.

²¹⁹ *Id.* at p.87.

²²⁰ *Id.* at p.90.

²²¹ *Id.* at p.77.

²²² *Ibid.*

lolling tongue”.²²³ A ghost herself, she is haunted by the vision of Oedipus’ “empty sockets ... [a]nd the blood of his eyes [which] flowed down his face in a dark stream, like clotted drops of a dark rain”.²²⁴

The monologue begins and ends with Jocasta stating ‘My name is Jocasta’, and throughout her tale she frequently asks ‘Who is Jocasta?’ and ‘Jocasta is guilty, isn’t she?’. As she presents herself from various points of view, Jocasta asks us to question our own prejudices and misconceptions as she searches for her ‘self’ in the rubble of ancient ruins. Fabien’s Jocasta remembers when she was a flesh and blood woman, the senses of past delights coming alive and filling her now disembodied self:

My hair, so often stroked.
My cheeks, flushed with desire.
My arms, that embraced Laius so tightly.
My hands, that caressed his thighs.
My breasts, taut with desire for his body.
My womb, which bore my son’s children.
My thighs, spread wide to welcome my
son’s body.²²⁵

But when she peers into the mirror, Jocasta sees “a face I do not know, a new body, never seen before”.²²⁶ The image in the mirror represents her struggle to tell a new

²²³ *Id.* at p.78.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ *Id.* at p.80.

²²⁶ *Id.* at p.81.

tale that is unburdened by ancient (his-)stories. Jocasta refuses to recognise herself as 'hair', 'cheeks', 'arms', 'hands', 'breasts', 'womb', 'thighs' – as a series of body parts “isolated, fragmented, disjointed bits ... female-bits, fragments to be consumed, devoured a bit at a time”.²²⁷

Jocasta is aware of the difficulty of telling her story in the face of prior textual inditements: “words kill ... the images words make, become contorted pictures, like ghouls that will attach themselves to anyone, infiltrating their brains, their guts, twisting them with pain and horror and then terror”.²²⁸ Jocasta doubts whether her listeners will accept a new story in place of the old: “drop the name, erase it, cross it out, rub it away ... What is left is Oedipus’ mother ... Mother of Abomination”.²²⁹ Although she fears that her words will be lost in a “vacuum”, Jocasta imagines her story enveloping the listener, “hanging there, somewhere ... so that we ... can unhook [the words], take them down ...”.²³⁰ With Jocasta’s impending death there is an increasing sense of urgency in the telling of her story. Jocasta realises that her story will die with her, innocence lost amidst accusations of guilt:

Come then, slay me. Kill me and then tell
all, speak the words with which it all began.
Tell that the murderer is Oedipus, that his

²²⁷ M. Gatens, “Corporeal Representation in/and the Body Politic”, *Spectator Burns*, 2, 1987, pp.29-33 at p.31.

²²⁸ Fabien, p.84.

²²⁹ *Id.* at p.85.

²³⁰ *Id.* at p.96.

mother is Jocasta ... Say that she did not intend the plague, profanation, Say that one day she gave birth to this son and that later she welcomed him, the same son, into her womb again. Kill me, I will resist you, because I will have nothing to do with such an obscure death.²³¹

Jocasta emphatically denies her knowledge of Oedipus' true identity: "What did I know of Oedipus? That he had come from far away, that he had travelled many miles to get to me and that two deaths had already marked his path ... *That is all*".²³² Jocasta stops to check if the reader has grasped the enormity of her words: "Do you speak my tongue? Do you understand my words?"²³³ Even if the audience understands, it is clear that Jocasta is unable to fathom the events that led to her death. Her recollection of events alternates between her love for Oedipus and denial of the oracle's predictions – "There is no fateful crossroad, no Sphinx, there is no plague in Thebes, and I love Oedipus"²³⁴ – and her final tragic realisation that her lover is none other than her beloved son: "I recognised myself in Oedipus because he was my son".²³⁵ Jocasta tells her listener that she relinquished her hold over Oedipus – it was for him to "make his own decision to hold her close, to bite, [to not] hold back, [to] yearn again and always for

²³¹ *Id.* at p.87.

²³² *Id.* at p.96; my italics.

²³³ *Id.* at p.91.

²³⁴ *Id.* at p.94.

²³⁵ *Id.* at p.95.

her lapping warmth".²³⁶ But she did not extinguish her desire, and nor could Oedipus. "Not a queen, not a widow, not a wife, not a mother",²³⁷ but merely a woman who loved "if only too much".²³⁸ And her name is Jocasta.

**'An innocent slice of moon'²³⁹: Ursule Molinaro's
*Power Dreamers: The Jocasta Complex***

*To look at us side by side, no one would
imagine that we might be mother & son²⁴⁰*

*I had hoped that, together, we would
rebalance the crumbling position of
women in our society ... I had not
expected to become the focus of a
sexual fixation²⁴¹*

In the opening passage of Molinaro's novel *Power Dreamers: The Jocasta Complex*, Jocasta's female attendants compare her to the moon: "Your skin has the cool glow of moon beams ... You are ... as beautiful as the shining moon".²⁴² According to Harding, "[t]he symbol which above all others has stood throughout the ages for

²³⁶ *Id.* at p.99.

²³⁷ *Id.* at p.77.

²³⁸ Moraga, *Medea*, p.41. We may see here a comparison between Moraga's Medea and Fabien's Jocasta – both women are condemned and persecuted for their 'unnatural' desires (lesbian/incestual) which they perceive as unperverted and natural displays of love.

²³⁹ Molinaro, p.96.

²⁴⁰ *Id.* at p.92.

²⁴¹ *Id.* at p.87.

²⁴² *Id.* at p.7.

woman ... is the Moon".²⁴³ In her comprehensive study of moon symbolism, Harding notes that in ancient beliefs the moon was thought to be the source of fertility: "the [moon's] light ... indispensable for growth ... a fertilising force ... without its aid ... women could not have children".²⁴⁴ For Jocasta, it is extremely important that she has the 'blessing' of "a glorious full moon"²⁴⁵ on the night that her husband Laius has chosen to conceive a son. Theirs is a loveless marriage and Laius seeks only to fulfil his duty to produce an heir to the Theban throne. While Laius longs for "a time when men will reproduce with each other, without any need for the power-draining female abyss",²⁴⁶ Jocasta invokes the legendary power of "the moon alone and unaided [to] get a woman with child ... [without] any mortal father".²⁴⁷

Jocasta notes the significance of the date of conception – "Gamelion 26! The alleged wedding night of Hera and Zeus. Quite an omen for conceiving a new life".²⁴⁸ Jocasta compares herself to the jealous Hera who punished Zeus for his infidelity by conceiving a child parthenogenetically. Hera was also renowned for harming her stepchildren. One of Zeus' lovers was Demeter, the goddess of fertility and the earth's harvests. They not only conceived a

²⁴³ M.E. Harding, *Woman's Mysteries Ancient and Modern: A Psychological Interpretation of the Feminine Principle as Portrayed in Myth, Story and Dreams* (1955), London, Rider, 1971, p.20.

²⁴⁴ *Id.* at p.21.

²⁴⁵ Molinaro, p.10.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ Harding, p.23.

²⁴⁸ Molinaro, p.10.

daughter, Persephone, but also the Moon Goddess, Hecate, who possessed the gift of prophecy. Those who worshipped Hecate used an instrument known as 'Hecate's circle', "consist[ing] of a golden sphere with a sapphire concealed in its centre. This was twirled with a thong of oxhide as a means to procure revelation of hidden things".²⁴⁹ Touched by the power of the Moon Goddess, Jocasta foresees in the "bluish-green screen of [her] irises"²⁵⁰ the death of Laius and incestual relations with her son, symbolised by the image of "a bull, his dam, and their young son who suddenly charged and killed his astonished sire. Then triumphantly mounted the widowed dam who moved her rump obligingly, to guide the son's first aim".²⁵¹

Unaware of the significance of the image, Jocasta revels in the fact of her pregnancy and gives birth to "a splendidly healthy, perfectly formed little boy".²⁵² But her happiness is short-lived, for the oracle predicts that the little boy (later named Oedipus) will "grow up to be a murderer. A parricide".²⁵³ Laius blames Jocasta for producing his murderer and it is clear in Molinaro's revision that Laius alone conceives the plan to pre-emptively murder his son. Jocasta is dumbfounded by the oracle's prediction and recoils in horror when her son "a

²⁴⁹ Harding, p.225.

²⁵⁰ Molinaro, p.9.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² *Id.* at p.12.

²⁵³ *Id.* at p.13.

bright new life [is] torn, and handed to a messenger of death ... to be murdered”.²⁵⁴

Laius forbids Jocasta from naming her son, from “personalising [her] grief”²⁵⁵ and fabricates a story to tell the people of Thebes – “that the heir to the throne succumbed to crib death during the night”.²⁵⁶ Laius disregards Jocasta’s feelings and opinions. If the situation were reversed, she protests, “if the prophecy had been that our son would murder his mother, and become his father’s lover, I would have let him live”.²⁵⁷ Laius merely shrugs, smug in the knowledge that the child is no longer a threat to him.

Overcome with grief, Jocasta searches for meaning in Laius’ madness: “my! son ... why kill my son! ... a perfect child put to death ... It all makes no sense”.²⁵⁸ Jocasta can only imagine the gruesome nature of her son’s death and she is haunted by a recurring nightmare: “a thick thorn through his new little feet, h[u]ng upside down from a tree for birds of prey to feed on”.²⁵⁹ When Laius kills their “now forever nameless son” he destroys “any feelings [Jocasta] may have had inside [her]. For either of them”.²⁶⁰ Laius destroys the relationship between

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ *Id.* at p.14.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ *Id.* at p.15.

husband/wife and the bond between mother/son. Jocasta ponders a bleak future – “a son-less life. Married to a child murderer” and puts aside in disbelief the seer Tiresias’ rhymes and riddles about “a helpless infant foil[ing] an attempt on his 2-month long life”.²⁶¹

When Laius is murdered Jocasta imagines a new life for herself and a new world in which women are “not expected to be seductive”²⁶² and in which men are not “accord[ed] ... greater importance [than women]”.²⁶³ No longer trapped in the reflection of her mirror – her “polished silver panel”²⁶⁴ – and bound by the shackles of an unhappy marriage, Jocasta embraces her intelligence and envisions a society in which marriage is “a model of harmony and enlightened co-rulership”.²⁶⁵ Jocasta also reasons that the murder of her husband might mean that her son is still alive, destined to fulfil the Apollonian oracle’s prophecy.

Anticipating the return of her son from the dead, Jocasta’s being is “flood[ed] with long-forgotten warmth”.²⁶⁶ But when Oedipus returns he disrupts Jocasta’s dream of equality between the sexes by “belittling her sex ... [her] intelligence”.²⁶⁷ Oedipus sees in Jocasta a monstrosity

²⁶¹ *Id.* at p.16.

²⁶² *Id.* at p.18.

²⁶³ *Id.* at p.30.

²⁶⁴ *Id.* at pp.9; 30.

²⁶⁵ *Id.* at p.31.

²⁶⁶ *Id.* at p.26.

²⁶⁷ *Id.* at p.41.

that she has never seen in herself. Oedipus compares Jocasta to the monstrous Sphinx, vanquished by his (male) intelligence: “He smiles disarmingly and tells me that: My eyes look very much like the eyes of the Sphinx”.²⁶⁸ In letters written to his ‘parents’ King Polybus and Queen Periboea, Oedipus reveals a plan to seize the throne “quietly, without making waves ... I’ve already won over the treasurer ... and I’m counting on winning Queen Jocasta over with love. I feel that she’s quite attracted to me”.²⁶⁹

While Oedipus takes the inked phallus in his hand to boast of his conquests to an old friend, Jocasta anticipates the moment of seduction – uncertain as to whether he is really the son she lost eighteen years ago: “can I be sure that he always was Oedipus of Thebes? That he is indeed the unlikely survivor of my dead husband’s precautionary measures? ... Do I know for sure? ... The Sphinx was not mentioned by the oracle 18 years ago ... Could that mean that Oedipus is *not* my son, after all?”²⁷⁰ Determined to uncover the truth, Jocasta probes Oedipus about his parents, his childhood, and his journey to Thebes. She inspects his feet but finds “no scar, not even a healed, closed-up puncture point”.²⁷¹ To lose a child for the second time would be “worse than the

²⁶⁸ *Id.* at p.40.

²⁶⁹ *Id.* at p.43.

²⁷⁰ *Id.* at pp.51-52; italics in text.

²⁷¹ *Id.* at p.53.

first time”,²⁷² she reasons. To have him “run from [her] in revulsion”²⁷³ would be unbearable.

Jocasta succumbs to their mutual desire and bears Oedipus four children. As time passes, Jocasta begins to resent Oedipus’ physical hunger for her body and his desire for more children – a desire that prevents her active participation in the daily affairs of political life. More and more Oedipus assumes the visage and mannerisms of his dead father. Jocasta laments the transformation: “his face ... has changed. Suddenly he looks and even sounds shockingly like his father Laius, extolling the philosophical superiority of ... man”.²⁷⁴ Jocasta also witnesses a parallel change in herself. As Oedipus becomes the husband she once despised, Jocasta becomes the mother she thought she had buried with the death of her son. When she speaks to Oedipus she hears “the voice of an indignant mother, whose son is disputing her authority in household matters”.²⁷⁵ To pacify Jocasta, Oedipus “strok[es] [her] ... like a nagging mother, who needs to be told that she’s still loved”.²⁷⁶

The spectre of Laius extinguishes Jocasta’s desire for Oedipus – she refuses to sleep with him, claiming that “a

²⁷² *Id.* at p.54.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ *Id.* at p.74.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ *Id.* at p.77.

mother-body needs more space”.²⁷⁷ When Oedipus returns home drunk with despair at the prospect of a sexless marriage, Jocasta finally recognises Oedipus as “his father’s son”.²⁷⁸ Jocasta loathes the man Oedipus has become – a man whose “expression of love ... [is] an exercise in ownership”.²⁷⁹ Whereas once she tormented herself with the thought of her little son’s swollen feet, now Jocasta “shudder[s] at the thought of his [other] swollen organ”.²⁸⁰ Jocasta can no longer utter the name of her once nameless who she now refers to as ‘Oe’.

In a final attempt to lure Jocasta back to their bedroom, Oedipus acts out a sadomasochistic sexual fantasy in which he assumes the role of naughty little boy, “asking that his mummy beat him, because he has been bad again”.²⁸¹ When Oedipus hands Jocasta a leather whip and sprawls across her knees “to receive his spanking”,²⁸² Jocasta fantasises that she is the Moon Mother “the mother of all living things and yet ... not only the life-giver but also the destroyer ... she stands passively by when her son is killed”.²⁸³ Jocasta’s beating of Oedipus is a physical manifestation of the emotional ‘beating’ she has given herself over the years for failing to protect her infant son.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ *Id.* at p.87.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ *Id.* at p.88.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ Harding, p.109.

If once Oedipus compared Jocasta to the monstrous Sphinx, she now sees the monstrosity in herself. Returning to the “rock on which the Sphinx crouched, 17 years ago”, and climbing the cliff face until her “knees and hands are bloody”,²⁸⁴ Jocasta – daughter of the ‘sown’ warrior Menoeceus who sprung from dragon’s teeth – takes her place alongside the winged monster-woman as a “wingless woman ... with ... dragon blood boiling in [her] veins”.²⁸⁵ Oedipus’ discovery of his origins “propel[s] [her] leap”²⁸⁶ back into the Mother Earth from whence she came. Jocasta undergoes her final metamorphosis into a dragoness and Oedipus into her baby dragon, not borne from the mating of mortals but from the “chaste androgyne’s ... trail of fire”²⁸⁷ – a baby “nurse[d] for as many years as [she] ha[d] teeth in [her] mouth”.²⁸⁸ Molinaro’s Jocasta suffers the fate reserved for mythical maternal dragons but here death is a means of restoring rather than severing the mother/child bond. Jocasta offers herself willingly to deliver Thebes from the gods’ curse of plague and pestilence in place of her son. It is a “long-due sacrifice”,²⁸⁹ the ending to “[a] story that would have fulfilled [her] most desperate wish ... 35 years ago”.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁴ Molinaro, p.117.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ *Id.* at p.78.

²⁸⁸ *Id.* at p.79.

²⁸⁹ *Id.* at p.117.

²⁹⁰ *Id.* at p.115.

Jocasta will “finally know how [her] little son was saved”.²⁹¹ She will be his “saviour”.²⁹²

Mythic Scenes 3: Eve and Lilith

*[T]o be an outcast an outlaw
to stand apart from the law the words
of the law
outlaw
outcast
cast out cast out by her own will
refusing anything but her own place
a place apart from any other
her own*²⁹³

*Lilith. Unusual name loaded with bad
connotations*²⁹⁴

*If she isn't what you imagined, then turn her
into it*²⁹⁵

*Lilith will then dance in the ruins of Western
civilisation*²⁹⁶

The figures of Eve and her apocryphal predecessor Lilith have engaged the literary imagination for centuries.²⁹⁷

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ H. Wenkart, “Feminist Revaluation of the Mythical Triad, Lilith, Adam, Eve: A Contribution to Role Model Theory”, *Philosophy in the Contemporary World*, 1(4), 1994, pp.40-44 at p.42.

²⁹⁴ O. Butler, *Adulthood Rites*, New York, Warner Books, 1988, p.36.

²⁹⁵ E. Bond and E. Bond-Pablé, *Wedekind Plays – Lulu: A Monster Tragedy*, London, Methuen, 1993, p.121

²⁹⁶ W.I. Thompson, *The Time Falling Bodies Take to Light: Mythology, Sexuality, and the Origins of Culture*, New York, St Martin's Press, 1981, p.251.

Both are traditionally derided for their 'sins of the tongue' – Eve tastes the forbidden fruit and introduces death into the world while Lilith argues with Adam about her subordinate status and utters the 'ineffable' word with infanticidal repercussions. Their 'disobedience' – hunger for knowledge and power - is directly related to the serpent that represents temptation and insatiable desire. In some sources, Eve is tempted by Lilith who assumes the sinuous and sinister form of the serpent.²⁹⁸ Eve herself is typically portrayed as sexual temptress and sinner – her "terrible beauty"²⁹⁹ enchanting Adam to take a 'bite of death'. At times, Eve and Lilith appear together as dual aspects of the maternal archetype – "terrible and devouring, beneficent and creative; a helper, but also alluring and destructive; a maddening enchantress yet a bringer of wisdom; bestial and divine, voluptuous harlot or witch and inviolable virgin".³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷ For a comprehensive study see P. Norris, *Eve: A Biography*, New York, New York University Press, 1999. See also J.A. Phillips, *Eve: The History of an Idea*, New York, Harper & Row, 1984. For a discussion of late nineteenth/early twentieth century literature see M. Rudwin, *The Devil in Legend and Literature* (1931), New York, AMS Press, 1970, Chapter 9. For a discussion of Lilith in literature of the same period see S. Braun, "Lilith: Her Literary Portrait, Symbolism, and Significance", *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 7(1-2), 1982-83, pp.135-153. For further discussion of the Old Testament and Kabbalah/midrash stories of Eve and Lilith see Chapter Four.

²⁹⁸ Hallissy notes that the serpent also appears at times (particularly during the fourteenth to sixteenth century) with the face of Eve. M. Hallissy, *Venomous Woman: Fear of the Female in Literature*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1987, p.15.

²⁹⁹ P.J. Keane, *Terrible Beauty: Yeats, Joyce, Ireland, and the Myth of the Devouring Female*, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1988.

³⁰⁰ E. Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (1949), trans. R.F.C. Hull, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1954, p.322. See also Hays who suggests that Lilith "tends to become the evil *alter ego* of Eve or a projection of the bad mana of the earth

As their stories are retold, the figures of Eve and Lilith undergo many metamorphoses – “as diverse [as they are] ingenious”³⁰¹ and reflective of the potency of myths of autochthony as inspirational sources for literary creation. Yet, as Norris concludes in her study of the fantasies of Eve and Lilith (and the Classical Pandora):

except for a few isolated female voices, [their] stor[ies] [have] been read against rather than for women. For over two thousand years, male commentators have plundered [their] history in an attempt to discover and pin down the nature of Woman, and in [their] many faces we have a unique record of the male imagination at work, wrestling with the female other.³⁰²

mother” (p.143). H.R. Hays, *The Dangerous Sex: The Myth of Feminine Evil* (1964), London, Methuen, 1966.

³⁰¹ Norris, p.6.

³⁰² *Id.* at p.403. Indeed, two of the most well-known versions of the Lilith myth – George MacDonald’s *Lilith: A Romance* (1895) and T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) – are seen as embodying “misogynistic portraits of [women] ... and sanitiz[ing] such misogyny by claiming its universality”. S.M. Gilbert and S. Gubar, “Introduction: The Female Imagination and the Modernist Aesthetic”, *Women’s Studies*, 13, 1986, pp.1-10 at pp.8-9. See E. Wiznitzer, “Legends of Lil: The Repressed Thematic Centre of *The Waste Land*”, *Women’s Studies*, 13, 1986, pp.87-102; R.F. McGillis, “George MacDonald and the Lilith Legend in the XIXth Century”, *Mythlore*, 6, 1979, pp.3-11. Schaafsma suggests that MacDonald presents Lilith as the threatening aspect of the archetypal feminine. In MacDonald’s novel “as in the culture it reflects, Lilith’s destructive influence increases proportionally as the feminine is feared and devalued”. K. Schaafsma, “The Demon Lover: Lilith and the Hero in Modern Fantasy”, *Extrapolation*, 28(1), 1987, pp.52-61 at p.53. Gilbert and Gubar similarly suggest that Milton’s “inferior and satanically inspired Eve [in his epic poem *Paradise Lost*] ... a creature of his imagination constitute[s] the misogynistic essence of what Gertrude Stein called ‘patriarchal poetry’”. S.M. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979, p.188.

More recently however, female authors have begun to tell their own stories about Eve and Lilith, “breaking away from conventional interpretations to explore new ways of looking at the problems of gender roles and procreation, of language and power, of good and evil ...”.³⁰³ Wenkart suggests that contemporary revisionists “explore and explode and turn inside out [Eve’s and] Lilith’s relationship with Adam, with other men, with nature, with God, with children, with other women, with historical and mythical figures of all kinds”.³⁰⁴ Braun notes a pervasive trend among female authors towards “the rehabilitation of [these mythical women that began] during the twentieth century as part of woman’s revolt and liberation from man’s domination”.³⁰⁵

Within the last two decades revisionary mythmakers have turned to Lilith in particular as a potent symbol of female resistance. In her study of feminist revisions of the myth of Lilith in the genre of science fiction, Osherow suggests that “changes made to Lilith reflect evolving attitudes toward women’s place within a patriarchal culture. No longer content to define female characters exclusively through relation to male heroes, women writers produce female champions ... empower[ed] and ... emboldened

³⁰³ Norris, pp.351-352. For a consideration of Eve and other transgressive biblical women in contemporary American women’s poetry see A.S. Ostriker, *Feminist Revision and the Bible*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Blackwell, 1993, in particular Chapter 3. See also Ostriker’s revision of Lilith in her ‘Lilith Poems’, Chapter 4.

³⁰⁴ Wenkart, p.41.

³⁰⁵ Braun, p.152.

female characters”³⁰⁶ who deliberately complicate the patriarchal ethos of female subservience and male domination. Lilith is “a figure invested with a ‘challenging power””³⁰⁷ who allows us to “seiz[e] hold of the ... fancy beneath the surface of ideas ... [to] dip into the chaos that underlies the rational shell of the world”³⁰⁸ and destroy images of women - as angels, as monsters, as *types* – that are merely projections of male fear, hate, envy, and desire.³⁰⁹ According to Dame, Lilith “offers possibilities of independence, assertion, and self-definition”.³¹⁰

Focusing on the malleability of myth, Dame suggests that it is time for women to “project their own personal, forbidden, out-of-bounds fantasies”³¹¹ onto mythic female figures whose stories have been told by men and manipulated according to the dictates of phallogocentric law. Indeed, female authors such as Jacqueline Lapidus, Susan Sherman, and Judith Goldenberg imagine new worlds (gynotopias) in which Eve and Lilith are bound by the law of female solidarity, the bond of sisterhood. In her

³⁰⁶ M. Osherow, “The Dawn of a New Lilith: Revisionary Mythmaking in Women’s Science Fiction”, *NWSA Journal*, 12(1), 2000, pp.68-83 at p.69.

³⁰⁷ Osherow, p.71.

³⁰⁸ Wenkart, p.42.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.* See also Dame who similarly notes that “undoubtedly, this figure [of Lilith as she-demon] represents male fears of female autonomy, rebellion, and sexuality” (p.40). E. Dame, “Lilith as Good Mother in Contemporary Jewish Women’s Midrashic Poetry”, *Phoebé*, 9(2), 1997, pp.39-46.

³¹⁰ Dame, p.40.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

revisionary tale, “The Coming of Lilith”,³¹² Goldenberg portrays Lilith as a strong, assertive woman who makes Eve “think about the limits of her own life within the garden”.³¹³ In the tale, Adam tells Eve “fearsome stories of the demon Lilith who threatens women in childbirth and steals children from their cradles in the middle of the night”.³¹⁴ But one day Eve catches a glimpse of Lilith and sees that she is “just another woman”.³¹⁵ Using the branches of an apple tree, Eve climbs the garden wall in order to find and speak with Lilith – to hear *her* story, “the other side”: “And they sat and spoke together, of the past and then of the future”.³¹⁶ Goldenberg’s tale highlights the promise of revisionary mythmaking – “the day Eve and Lilith [will] retur[n] to the garden, bursting with possibilities, ready to rebuild it together”.³¹⁷

In the following sections we consider three female authors who turn to mythic figures “as bearer[s] of the past”³¹⁸ in

³¹² J.P. Goldenberg, “Epilogue: The Coming of Lilith” in R.R. Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (1974), West Broadway, Wipf & Stock, 1998, pp.341-343. For another contemporary revision from Lilith’s perspective see the poem by C. Calbert, “Lilith”, *Southwest Review*, 83(2), 1998, pp.231-232. For a contemporary revision in which Lilith is figured as a ghost that haunts Adam see J. Lind, “The Story of Lilith and Eve” in D.C.G. Lorenz, ed., *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Austria*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1999, pp.203-204. See also E. Dame, H. Wenkart and L. Rivlin, eds, *Which Lilith? Feminist Writers Re-Create the World’s First Woman*, New Jersey, Jason Aronson, 1998.

³¹³ *Id.* at p.342.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ *Id.* at p.343.

³¹⁸ Cixous and Clément, p.9.

order to (re)imagine the future. In each work the mythic burden of woman-as-infanticide is countered with images of emotional and environmental sterility both in the unproductive waste of life that constitutes slavery and war, and the hostile nature of an Eden-like matriarchy that merely perpetuates the patriarchal sexual and physical abuse of women by men. In each novel past and future are inextricably intertwined, each author suggesting that the end of a journey signifies the beginning of a new tale, a new story that, as Heinzelman puts it, “demands an audience”.³¹⁹

Consuming narratives: Dismembering and re(-)membering the mother in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and Yvonne Vera’s *Without a Name*

*Beloved, do not die ... I wrap you in words
so that the future inherits you. I snatch you
from the death of forgetfulness. I tell your
story, complete your ending*³²⁰

*I can understand ghosts. How they have to
come back. What it costs to return through
the bricks of a house. Eyes tight shut.
Weeping, broken skin*³²¹

When she opens her white lips to devour

³¹⁹ S.S. Heinzelman, “Going Somewhere: Maternal Infanticide and the Ethics of Judgment” in P.J. Heald, ed., *Literature and Legal Problem Solving: Law and Literature as Ethical Discourse*, Durham, North Carolina, Carolina Academic Press, 2000, pp.73-97 at p.95.

³²⁰ A. Krog, *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa*, ed. L. Mitchell, New York, Times Books, 1998, p.27.

³²¹ C. Raine, “Sheol” in *Clay, Whereabouts Unknown*, London, Penguin Books, 1996.

*me I bite back and laughter rocks the moon*³²²

*I love this child more than life itself but feel
[s]he is consuming me, eating me alive. A
cannibal*³²³

In Chapter Four we considered an oral version of the Genesis myth in which Eve's sin of consumption was the sin of eating a baby. The fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was literally the fruit of the maternal womb. In this section we consider two novels that invert the myth of the devouring infanticidal mother, focusing instead on the 'bestly baby' as "cannibal bogey".³²⁴ We focus on textual incarnations of the murderous mythic mother and the dead infant who haunts her and threatens her very existence. Caught in what Willbern terms "a web of unconscious desire",³²⁵ mother and child traverse the

³²² D. Levertov, "Song for Ishtar" in *O Taste and See*, New York, New Directions, 1962, p.3.

³²³ R. Johnson, "Confronting the Bogeyman: Latimer, and Other Fearful Tales of Murderous Fathers and Monstrous Children", *Saskatchewan Law Review*, 64, 2001, pp.591-599 at p.593.

³²⁴ Warner suggests that fantasies of monstrous infants are deeply embedded in our cultural stories: "[t]he monsters of popular dread, with their unbridled appetite, insatiable tyranny, unappeasable desire for gratification, are just like ... babies, big babies ... voracious, stupid, clumsy, bumbling, vulnerable to the cleverness of human wits; they have big heads; they are, in spite of their size, rather easily overcome; they eat human flesh ..." (M. Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling, and Making Mock* (1998), New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999, p.145). Within stories of monsters Warner locates a "concealed portrait of an infant ... as insatiable devourer ... monster of greed and gratification and excess" (p.146). The 'cannibal infant' is one of Warner's "bogeys [which] make present what we dread" (p.386).

³²⁵ D. Willbern, "Phantasmagoric Macbeth", *English Literary Renaissance*, 16(3), 1986, pp.520-549 at p.521.

slippery terrain of “symbolic intra-familial relations”,³²⁶ continually redefining the relationship between victim and avenger, lover and beloved. Both authors enact an oedipal journey into the past that represents a desire to re-find the maternal body capable of healing deep wounds inflicted by men against women, masters against slaves, and parents against children. For Jacobus, the maternal body is the “something that could re-member us”,³²⁷ the ‘something’ that has the power to piece us back together even as it is itself torn apart. As we enter into the dystopian dream-worlds of authorial fantasy, we are continually reminded that the journey into the past, the process of re(-)membering, is fraught with danger. Those telling stories - stories that mothers have been warned “not ... to pass on”,³²⁸ stories that have “remained encrypted ... hidden, kept alive but unspoken”³²⁹ – risk being consumed by the stories they are trying to tell.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ M. Jacobus, *First Things: The Maternal Imaginary in Literature, Art, and Psychoanalysis*, London, Routledge, 1995, p.1.

³²⁸ T. Morrison, *Beloved* (1987), New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1993, p.274.

³²⁹ A.S. Kimball, “Genesis, Oedipus, and Infanticidal Abjection in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*”, *Literature and Psychology*, 43(3), 1997, pp.41-65 at p.42. Kimball uses the metaphor of appetite contained in the Genesis myth to comment on the “*father’s infanticidal violence* ... that is constitutive of the symbolic order ... Why this metaphor? Because ... Sethe ... in her bloodletting reveals ... the ultimately infanticidal appetite, and its psychic origins, of the people whose world has enslaved her beloved children. The entire novel can be understood as a meditation upon the violent nature of this abject hunger, unrecognised in themselves by slavery’s masters” (p.42; my italics). Kimball focuses on the insatiable hunger of the men in Sethe’s life, from those who devour her sexually (including the ‘new appetite’ of the engraver’s voyeuristic son produced when he gazes on the act of consumption – his father being a ‘paying customer’ for the pleasures of Sethe’s prostituted body) to the slavemaster’s nephews who beat

In Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name*³³⁰ two mothers endure a physical and psychological struggle to re(-)member the past as a means of envisioning the future. Although they take place in different time frames and settings – a Kentucky slave plantation in 1855 and rural Mhondoro and the city of

her so severely as to leave multiple scars on her back as evidence of their brutality and who violently and with a “death-dealing voraciousness” (p.48) suck the milk from Sethe's breasts. The life-giving milk that would sustain her newborn infant Denver is consumed instead by the masters who parasitically feed off their slaves. The beautiful image of a mother nursing her newborn babe is violated and corrupted, replaced by the image of two boys satisfying their oedipal desire for the mother – one enacting a physical return to the mother's breast (“one sucking on my breast”), the other fantasising an incestuous and sadistic sexual violation of the maternal body (“the other holding me down”). The slavemaster himself (Schoolteacher) compounds the horror of Sethe's violation by silently watching and deriving pleasure from her torture. It is in this brutal passage that Kimball's notion of “desire-as-appetite” is made clear – it “sums up ... the appetite through which the nephews, Schoolteacher, and the institution of slavery would cannibalise her [Sethe's] body without a word. Through this appetite the world of the slave master would also cannibalise the still nursing Beloved and the unborn Denver” (p.50). See also M. Mock, “Spitting Out the Seed: Ownership of Mother, Child, Breasts, Milk and Voice in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*”, *College Literature*, 23(3), 1996, pp.117-127. On Biblical allusions in Morrison's novel see also S.A. Stave, “Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the Vindication of Lilith”, *South Atlantic Review*, 58(1), pp.49-66.

³³⁰ Y. Vera, *Without a Name* (1994), Toronto, Tsar, 1995. While the interrelationships between *Beloved* and *Without a Name* are significant for both postcolonial and feminist theorists, no critics (to the best of my knowledge) have compared these works. Moreover, there has been a disproportionate amount of interest in Morrison's novels compared with scant critical consideration of Vera's work. Professor Eva Hunter has produced some thought-provoking work on Vera's novels, including an interview with Vera (“Shaping the Truth of the Struggle: An Interview With Yvonne Vera”, *Current Writing*, 10(1), 1998, pp.75-86). Hunter says that she is “enthusiastic about Vera's work as it is so thoroughly provocative, especially in areas of concern to women, as well as being aesthetically satisfying” (Personal communication, 4 June 2002, on file with the author of this dissertation). See also Hunter's most recent article “Zimbabwean Nationalism and Motherhood in Yvonne Vera's *Butterfly Burning*”, *African Studies*, 59(2), 2000, pp.229-243.

Harare during Zimbabwe's civil war in 1977 – the novels are linked in their portrayal of maternal child-murder while living under a repressive regime. In both novels we see an association between corporeal and psychic fragmentation – the *corps morcelé* – “the [psychic] body-in-pieces”.³³¹ The desire or need to re-member – to literally ‘put back together’ – is enacted, in these novels, by physical and psychical journeys ostensibly away from but inevitably into the past. Morrison uses the term ‘rememory’³³² to represent these journeys as an implosive and explosive confrontation with traumatic and repressed memories. Exposing the past and the wounds it conceals also ensures a ‘spiritual’ narrative journey for the reader who

³³¹ J. Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” in J. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. A. Sheridan, New York, Norton, 1977, p.4. See also J. Laplanche and J-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith, London, Hogarth, 1983.

³³² Lock distinguishes between the *act* of ‘re-membering’ and the *process* of ‘rememory’: “to re-member something is to perform the act of reassembling its members ... Rememory evokes the more intuitive oral memory process, which both defines the character’s negotiations with the past and provides the novel’s narrative and structural principle”. H. Lock, “Building Up From Fragments: The Oral Memory Process in Some Recent African-American Written Narratives”, *College Literature*, 22(3), 1995, pp.109-120 at p.112. Morrison herself defines ‘rememory’ as “a journey to a site to see what remains have been left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply”. T. Morrison, “The Site of Memory” in W. Zinsser, ed., *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1987, pp.103-124 at p.113. For a psychoanalytic consideration of ‘rememory’ in Morrison’s work see A. Rushdy, “Rememory: Primal Scenes and Constructions in Toni Morrison’s Novels”, *Contemporary Literature*, 31(3), 1990, pp.300-323. See also B.O. Mathieson, “Memory and Mother Love in Morrison’s *Beloved*”, *American Imago*, 47(1), 1990, pp.1-21; J. Fitzgerald, “Selfhood and Community: Psychoanalysis and Discourse in *Beloved*”, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 39(3-4), 1993, pp.669-687.

floats precariously in the novels' *phantasie*³³³ while confronting personal ghosts and demons.³³⁴

While 'memory' is an inherently unstable and fluid concept – it “presents a paradox of presence and absence” and straddles “the domains of fiction and history; the personal and the public; the past and the present”³³⁵ – it has proved useful for those seeking alternatives to history's dominant *Ur*-texts and master narratives.³³⁶ In her essay “Memory, Creation, and Writing”, Morrison states that “[m]emory is for me always fresh, in spite of the fact that the object being remembered is done and past”.³³⁷ For Morrison, the past contains “buried stimuli” which allow us to question

³³³ Laplanche and Pontalis define the German '*phantasie*' as a “term used to denote the imagination, and not so much the faculty of imagining as the imaginary world and its contents, the imaginings or fantasies into which the poet or [author] so willingly withdraws”. J. Laplanche and J-B. Pontalis, “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality”, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 49, 1968, pp.1-18 at p.1.

³³⁴ Morrison requires her readers to immerse themselves in her novels which “contain openings for the reader to fill in, invitations for a re-imagining”. Her works take the reader to ‘another place’ and initiate a form of carthartic and cathexic engagement with the narrative. One interviewer told Morrison: “After reading your books, I always feel so drained. I see my mother there. I see my grandmother there. I see my aunts there. It's absolutely overwhelming”. Morrison's reply: “The draining you should feel only for a little while. Don't you feel nurtured and full later on?” T. Morrison, “A Bench by the Road”, *World Journal of the Unitarian Universalist Association*, 3(1), 1989, p.40. In a rare interview with Eva Hunter, Vera describes the ‘mesmeritic’ effect of her novels and the powerful force of emotion that captivates both herself as an author and her readers, propelling her/them “into the entire world of the book”. Hunter, “Shaping the Truth of the Struggle”, p.86.

³³⁵ S. Radstone, “Screening Trauma: *Forrest Gump*, Film and Memory” in S. Radstone, ed., *Memory and Methodology*, Oxford, Berg, 2000, pp.79-107 at pp.80; 82.

³³⁶ *Id.* at p.84.

³³⁷ T. Morrison, “Memory, Creation, and Writing”, *Thought*, 59, 1984, pp.385-390 at p.385.

'history' as a recording of "the real, the fantastic, and the possible".³³⁸ In her novels, Morrison "displaces 'comfortable' historical positions ... [and] suggests that recorded history ... is a social construction reflecting a particular consciousness, a particular agenda".³³⁹

In their novels, Morrison and Vera reinvent, re-imagine, and remember a physically and psychologically brutal past and re-establish cultural and mythic connections between physical violence and psychic trauma. Focusing on the notion of 'memory', these authors dismantle the historical past only to piece it back together 'bit by bit'. The troubling memories that haunt their narratives resurface in an imaginative reconstruction of a lost/stolen past.³⁴⁰ Relying on the oral tradition of storytelling as a means of healing psychic trauma,³⁴¹ both authors produce fractured yet richly dense narratives that 'speak' silence, suffering and pain.³⁴²

³³⁸ I. Osagie, "Is Morrison Also Among the Prophets? 'Psychoanalytic' Strategies in *Beloved*", *African American Review*, 28(3), 1994, pp.423-440 at p.423.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁰ Brogan, p.6.

³⁴¹ Lock, "Building Up From Fragments", pp.109-120; M. Sale, "Call and Response as Critical Method: African-American Oral Traditions and *Beloved*", *African American Review*, 26(1), 1992, pp.41-50; W.R. Handley, "The House a Ghost Built: *Nommo*, Allegory and the Ethics of Reading in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*", *Contemporary Literature*, 36(4), 1995, pp.676-702.

³⁴² E. Fox-Genovese, *Unspeakable Things Unspoken: Ghosts and Memories in the Narratives of African-American Women*, Kingston, Jamaica, Department of History, University of the West Indies, 1993; T. Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature", *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 28, 1989, pp.1-34.

Both novels are what Brogan terms stories of “cultural haunting”³⁴³ – the spectral figures which appear in and/or consume each narrative are not only “hallucinatory projections of the self” but also represent “a people’s historical consciousness”.³⁴⁴ Their fragmented³⁴⁵ yet lyrical form reflects both individual trauma or the “hidden passageways of the individual psyche” and cultural “pathologies of memory”, and suggests the difficulty of “integrat[ing] ... traumatic experience and a pre-catastrophic lost past”.³⁴⁶ As narratives of trauma, these novels “hold at [their] centre the reconstruction and recuperation of [that which lies] beyond the bounds of ‘normal’ conception”³⁴⁷ even as individual characters long

³⁴³ K. Brogan, *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature*, Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1998, p.4.

³⁴⁴ *Id.* at p.5. For more on cultural haunting see P. Buse and A. Stott, *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, London, MacMillan, 1999; L. Carpenter and W.K. Kolmar, eds, *Haunting the House of Fiction*, Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1991.

³⁴⁵ Koolish notes that “[t]he narrative of [Morrison’s] novel is structured as some aspects of memory are structured: disjointed, circular, insistent, urgent”. L. Koolish, “Fictive Strategies and Cinematic Representation in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*: Postcolonial Theory/Postcolonial Text”, *African American Review*, 29(3), 1995, pp.421-438 at p.422. Morrison’s ‘stream-of-consciousness’ narrative alternates between past and present, dispersing shattered memories like broken shards of glass. On this point see E.B. House, “Toni Morrison’s Ghost: The Beloved Who is Not Beloved”, *Studies in American Fiction*, 18(1), 1990, pp.17-26 at p.20. Vera’s novel, poetically prosaic with non-sequential chapters, similarly replicates the fragmentary, non-linear, and often confusing series of images that constitute memory.

³⁴⁶ Brogan, p.7.

³⁴⁷ K. Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p.17.

to be free from “intruding memories and unbidden repetitive images of the traumatic events”.³⁴⁸

In both novels, mothers – Sethe and Mazvita – are haunted by their dead infants. In *Beloved*, Sethe is literally haunted by her murdered child who returns fully-grown eighteen years after the infanticide. In *Without a Name*, Mazvita endures a symbolic haunting – the dead infant’s body she carries on her back throughout the novel encroaches upon her physical space as an absent presence, a continual tangible reminder of the past. In their own way, both ‘ghosts’ threaten to vanquish their murderous mothers. While Mazvita equates the unbearable weight of the infant/memory with the structural impact of a mountain on the landscape – “She walked sideways, because her left shoulder leaned forward. It was her broken side. Her bones spread in splintered

³⁴⁸ Brogan, p.6. For more on trauma and memory see C. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996; E. Wyszogrod, *An Ethics of Remembering: History, Heterology, and the Nameless Others*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998. On the problem of accommodating narratives of trauma in legal discourse see S. Rudland, “Trauma and Mercy: Reading the Law Through the Narrative of Trauma”, *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 15, 2001, pp.80-104; A. Sarat and T.R. Kearns, eds, *History, Memory and the Law*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1999. On *Beloved* as a narrative of trauma see R.C. Spargo, “Trauma and the Spectres of Enslavement in Morrison’s *Beloved*”, *Mosaic*, 35(1), 2002, pp.113-131; N. Morgenstern, “Mother’s Milk and Sister’s Blood: Trauma and the Neoslave Narrative”, *Differences*, 8(2), 1996, pp.101-126. Simon’s comment about Euripides’ *Medea*, to which *Beloved* is often compared (see my Introduction), is pertinent to Morrison’s novel: “a tale caught between the need and desire to tell and the reticence, indeed horror, of the telling (*Tragic Drama and the Family: Psychoanalytic Studies From Aeschylus to Beckett*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988, p.98).

fragments, across her back. She leaned farther sideways and felt, once more, her bones fall against each other. Her bones built a mountain on her back”³⁴⁹ - Beloved threatens to consume Sethe with her “bottomless longing”³⁵⁰: “Beloved ... never got enough of anything: lullabies, new stitches, the bottom of the cake bowl, the top of the milk ... When Sethe ran out of things to give her, Beloved invented desire ... the bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became ... Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it”.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ Vera, *Without a Name*, p.35.

³⁵⁰ Morrison, *Beloved*, p.58.

³⁵¹ *Id.* at pp.240; 250. In Eskimo folklore, desire for the mother is realised by a devouring infant: “A mother left her baby in the safety above the high tide mark in order to go fishing. She was too engrossed in her fishing to hear her baby screaming from hunger ... In the twilight she consoled her baby and let it suck her breast ... At night when everybody was sound asleep, the mother suddenly cried out with pain. The baby had devoured her right breast ... now the baby had two huge upper teeth and four lower ones ... the baby flew at its mother and ate her up”. B. Stone, “Mythology of the Eskimos” in C. Larrington, ed., *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*, London, Pandora, 1992, pp.162-185 at p.175. This folktale theme finds contemporary expression in Peter Turrini’s play *Pigslaughter* in which a mother’s breasts “are eaten away by her starving infant as her baby licks at the open wounds”. G. Robinson, “Slaughter and Language: Slaughter in the Plays of Peter Turrini”, *Theatre Journal*, 43(2), 1991, pp.195-208 at p.197. Fantasies of consuming the mother’s breast form part of the object-relations theory of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein who, as we saw in Chapter One, distinguishes between the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ breast. Another of Turrini’s plays, *Infanticide*, deals with the psychological consumption of mother (known only as ‘SHE’) by child/ghost in the aftermath of infanticide: “My whole body is leaving. I mean, it’s simply dissolving. My shoulders are getting lighter, my face doubles, then triples. I have the feeling it’s all leaving: arms from arms, body from body” (pp.39-40). As the mother remembers murdering her child and the events leading up to the murder (including buried memories of childhood sexual abuse), she herself unravels within the rigid constraints of an unforgiving narrative form: “I fell down and shattered into a thousand pieces (p.42) ... I get the feeling that I don’t even exist (p.43) ... I felt extinguished ... My body opened up in a thousand bloody wounds. My hands pulled the flesh

In both novels, powerful fantasies of incorporation blur the boundaries between self and other. Mother and child become indistinguishable from one another – “I am Beloved and she is mine ... You are my face; you are me ... You are my face; I am you”.³⁵² In Vera’s novel, it is often difficult to know where Mazvita’s body ends and the corpse of her dead infant begins. Mazvita describes her back as splintered and broken but also says that “[t]he child’s body curved inward, as though its back was broken”.³⁵³ Early in the novel, Vera presents the violent image of Mazvita’s “twisted ... neck” which is associated

apart (p.44)”. As she loses her sense of self, the mother imagines that her “child is growing into a monster” (p.44) that threatens to devour her whole. P. Turrini, *Infanticide* in P. Turrini, *Shooting Rats and Other Plays and Poems* (1972), trans. Richard Dixon, California, Ariadne Press, 1996, pp.37-51. In the context of Morrison’s novel, “[e]ating the other is both a metaphor for imperial violence, and the point where knowing the self and caring for the self merge”. E. Probyn, “Beyond Food/Sex: Eating and an Ethics of Existence”, *Theory, Culture and Society*, 16(2), 1999, pp.215-228 at p.221. Corti also reads *Beloved* as a novel about self-definition in which “the self is attacked by a part of itself”. L. Corti, “*Medea* and *Beloved*: Self-Definition and Abortive Nurturing in Literary Treatments of the Infanticidal Mother” in L.R. Furst and P.W. Graham, eds, *Disorderly Eaters: Texts in Self-Empowerment*, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992, pp.61-77 at p.61. See also B. Schapiro, “The Bonds of Love and the Boundaries of Self in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*”, *Contemporary Literature*, 32(2), 1991, pp.194-210; S.A. Demetrakopoulos, “Maternal Bonds as Devourers of Women’s Individuation in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*”, *African American Review*, 26(1), 1992, pp.51-59; J. Wyatt, “Giving Body to the Word: The Maternal Symbolic in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*”, *PMLA*, 108(3), 1993, pp.474-488; J.L. Holden-Kirwan, “Looking into the Self that is No Self: An Examination of Subjectivity in *Beloved*”, *African American Review*, 32(3), 1998, pp.415-426; K. Boudreau, “Pain and the Unmaking of Self in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*”, *Contemporary Literature*, 36(3), 1995, pp.447-465.

³⁵² Morrison, *Beloved*, pp.214-216.

³⁵³ Vera, *Without a Name*, p.18.

with an overwhelming and destructive mother/infant relationship:

A bone at the bottom of her neck told her that her neck had been turned and turned till it could no longer find a resting place. Her neck had been broken ... There was a lump growing on the side of her neck ... She could no longer swallow ... She had lost her centre ... The lump had swallowed her thoughts ... It swelled endlessly ... She had no doubt that all her body was moving slowly into that lump, that she would eventually turn to find her whole being had abandoned her.³⁵⁴

Later in the novel Vera reconstructs the image of Mazvita's broken neck in Mazvita's description of the infanticide: "She made the knot very softly ... dropped it over the child's neck ... She felt the neck break and fall ... She felt the bone at the bottom of that neck ... The bone broke softly ... The neck was broken".³⁵⁵ Mazvita's imagined broken neck and the infant's actual broken neck become one: "She pulled at the cloth ... She strained hard and confidently though this pulling choked her".³⁵⁶ Saint-Martin sees in the act of infanticide a mother killing part or all of herself. In her study of French authors Aline Chamberland and Suzanne Jacobs, Saint-Martin contends that infanticide is a form of self-destruction –

³⁵⁴ *Id.* at p.4.

³⁵⁵ *Id.* at p.96.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

“suicide in disguise”.³⁵⁷ For Saint-Martin, corporeal disintegration through infanticide and symbolic suicide enacts an otherwise “impossible fusion”³⁵⁸ between mother and child.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁷ L. Saint-Martin, “Les Deux Femmes, La Petite et La Grande: Love and Murder in the Mother-Daughter Relationship” in R.L. Dufault, ed., *Women by Women: The Treatment of Female Characters by Women Writers of Fiction in Quebec Since 1980*, New Jersey, Associated University Press, 1997, pp.195-220 at p.217.

³⁵⁸ *Id.* at p.203.

³⁵⁹ In both novels, death is associated with freedom and infanticide is presented as the ultimate act of mother love. For Sethe, infanticide will ensure a life for her daughter that is free from the horrors of slavery. For Mazvita, a life without dreams, without hope, without freedom is no life at all. For her, “[d]eath was another kind of freedom”, Vera, *Without a Name*, p.44. In Chamberland’s novel *La Fissure (The Crack)* (1985), the mother’s ‘cutting’ of her daughter’s throat establishes an eternal symbiosis with the maternal body. In the novel, the mother (Elaine) marks her infant (Ève-Lyne) with a ‘circumcisional cut’ – a patriarchal incision produced by the sharp blade of a kitchen knife (a phallic representation of Elaine’s stifling domesticity). Whereas circumcision of the male child in the Judeo-Christian tradition ensures purity and a symbolic ‘break’ from the mother (see J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. L.S. Roudiez, New York, Columbia University Press, 1982, pp.99-100; K. Oliver, “The Maternal Operation: Circumscribing the Alliance” in E.K. Feder, M.C. Rawlinson and E. Zakin, eds, *Derrida and Feminism: Recasting the Question of Woman*, New York, Routledge, 1997, pp.53-68; C.D. Daly, “The Psycho-Biological Origins of Circumcision”, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 31(4), 1950, pp.217-236), in Chamberland’s novel ‘cutting’ and spilling of the daughter’s blood ensures a mother/child symbiosis which cannot be severed. According to Saint-Martin, “[i]nfanticide, in [*La Fissure*], is born of love, of a desire for union with the daughter ... Murder is a form of escape; it does not sever the mother-daughter bond but rather strengthens it; placing mother and daughter beyond social barriers, beyond time itself ... [the mother] is convinced that death will reunite her with her daughter, lost for the moment in a hostile world that threatens to separate them” (pp.201-202). See also L. Saint-Martin, “Infanticide, Suicide, Matricide, and Mother-Daughter Love: Suzanne Jacob’s *L’Obeissance* and Ying Chen’s *L’Ingratitude*”, *Canadian Literature*, 169, 2001, pp.60-83. Hirsch notes that Morrison’s novel *Sula* similarly focuses on “the mother’s [self] mutilation in the service of her own and her children’s survival”. M. Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1989, p.179. See also Otten who suggests that Morrison “transform[s] conventional ‘signifiers’ of

If we imagine these fleshly ghosts as the embodiment of maternal consciousness, we discern not only a desire for forgiveness (through an imagined mother/infant reunion) but also the inability to forgive oneself³⁶⁰ (dismemberment in the novels becomes a form of self-consumption and self-erasure³⁶¹). Through their physical and psychological journeys, both Sethe and Mazvita seek to re-establish the pre-oedipal mother/infant bond (with their children and their own mothers who are notably absent in both novels) which has been severed by patriarchal violence and violation. Morrison and Vera allow Sethe and Mazvita to tell their side of the story, to speak injustice and oppression, to reassemble a fragmented past and a sense of self.³⁶²

cruelty and evil into gestures of extraordinary love – incestuous rape, infanticide, and murder ... become acts 'signifyin(g)' a profound if often convoluted love ... In [Morrison's] fictional world monstrous deeds can become expressions of compassion; violent deeds can lead to the restoration of love". T. Otten, "Horrible Love in Toni Morrison's Fiction", *Modern Fiction Studies*, 39(3-4), 1993, pp.651-667 at pp.652; 664.

³⁶⁰ "Sethe plead[s] for forgiveness, counting, listing again and again her reasons" (Morrison, *Beloved*, p.241). "Sethe didn't really want forgiveness given; she wanted it refused" (Morrison, *Beloved*, p.252).

³⁶¹ Consider the tremendous potency of the metaphor of self-consumption for Sethe's loss of self and her fear that the institution of slavery would cannibalise her and force her to "eat [her]self up" (Morrison, *Beloved*, p.202). When Sethe is beaten and molested by Schoolteacher's nephews, she bites off a piece of her tongue. Like the mythical Philomela whose tongue was severed by her rapist, Sethe is denied the power of the word with which to incriminate her violators.

³⁶² In their discussion of memory, narrative, and identity, Singh, Skerrett, and Hogan note that "the act of storytelling is also an act of empowerment ... the use of oral tradition ... [is one] strategy towards reclaiming a suppressed past and helps the process of re-visioning that is essential to gaining control over one's life and future ... Memory interrupts linear narratives in order to make room for multiple voices and perspectives". A. Singh, J. Skerrett and R. Hogan, eds,

Sethe and Mazvita are also haunted by 'voices' from the past. As their dead infants transform into "metaphorical representatives of cultural conscience",³⁶³ their desire for maternal/infant symbiosis becomes a need for communal unity and regeneration. Sethe's ghostly daughter Beloved is, for Horvitz:

a powerful corporeal ghost who ... stands for every African woman whose story will never be told. She is the haunting symbol of the many Beloveds – generations of mothers and daughters - hunted down and stolen from Africa ... At the same time she represents the spirit of all the women dragged onto slave ships in Africa and also all Black women in America trying to trace their ancestry back to the mother on the ship attached to them. Beloved is the haunting presence who becomes the spirit of the women from 'the other side'.³⁶⁴

For the community in which Sethe lives, Beloved gives voice to the "roaring ... [of the dead] ... [t]he people of the broken necks, of fire-cooked blood".³⁶⁵ Beloved acts as a conduit for ancestral spirits who release Sethe from the burden of memory by showing her the healing power of

Memory, Narrative, and Identity: New Essays in Ethnic American Literatures, Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1994, pp.18-19.

³⁶³ D. Lawrence, "Fleshly Ghosts and Ghostly Flesh: The Word and the Body in *Beloved*", *Studies in American Fiction*, 19(2), 1991, pp.189-201 at pp.189-190.

³⁶⁴ D. Horvitz, "Nameless Ghosts: Possession and Dispossession in *Beloved*", *Studies in American Fiction*, 17(2), 1989, pp.157-167 at p.157.

³⁶⁵ Morrison, *Beloved*, p.181.

storytelling.³⁶⁶ Lawrence suggests that Sethe's desire to "claim ownership of [her] freed self ... links Sethe's own horrifying story to the story of the entire community".³⁶⁷ In Morrison's novel, infanticide becomes a metaphor for poisoned human relations and "a deadly form of self-destruction".³⁶⁸ Individual and communal healing – remembering a past "too terrible to relate"³⁶⁹ - involves remembering the self. "The members of the community must put themselves back together – re-member themselves",³⁷⁰ Lawrence suggests, which involves "lov[ing] ... [their] flesh that weeps; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass ... [their] dark, dark liver ... [and] life-giving ... parts".³⁷¹ Sethe realises that she too must "claim herself ... [b]it by bit ... along with the others".³⁷²

In *Without a Name*, Mazvita journeys from her homeland in search of "new dreams to replace ... ancient claim[s]" and to escape the land that she believes "has forgotten [her]".³⁷³ "[M]istak[ing] [her] ... departure for [a new] beginning",³⁷⁴ Mazvita leaves rural Mubaira in Mhondoro, a land devastated by war, for Harare, a soulless city where "people walked the streets without any faces,

³⁶⁶ Horvitz, pp.157-158.

³⁶⁷ D. Lawrence, "Fleshly Ghosts and Ghostly Flesh: The Word and the Body in *Beloved*", *Studies in American Fiction*, 19(2), 1991, pp.189-201 at p.192.

³⁶⁸ *Id.* at p.194.

³⁶⁹ Morrison, "Site of Memory", p.109.

³⁷⁰ Lawrence, p.193.

³⁷¹ Morrison, *Beloved*, pp.88-89.

³⁷² *Id.* at p.95.

³⁷³ Vera, *Without a Name*, p.33.

³⁷⁴ *Id.* at p.42.

invisible, like ghosts”.³⁷⁵ Raped by a soldier fighting for native Zimbabweans – “even those who fight in our name threaten our lives”³⁷⁶ - Mazvita loses “patience and hope”, belief in herself and her ancestral land – a belief “taken ... [by] strangers”.³⁷⁷

Traumatised by the rape, which mirrors the brutalisation of her war-torn motherland, Mazvita embarks on a futile search for “a redeeming silence ... a silence [to] cleanse her ... shelter [her] ... a silence without a ripple or an echo in it”.³⁷⁸ She longs to be free from the “whispering that escape[s] from the lips of stranger[s]”,³⁷⁹ from those who “claim” her as their own. The rape severs Mazvita’s connection with the land as she transfers her hate for the rapist “to the moment itself, to the morning, to the land, to the dew-covered grass ... It was the land that had come towards her ... The land had allowed the man to grow from itself into her body”.³⁸⁰ The rape also severs all

³⁷⁵ *Id.* at p.27.

³⁷⁶ *Id.* at p.33.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.* Vera writes that Mazvita “rose above the land and scorned its slow promises, its intermittent loyalties”, *Without a Name*, p.39. Before she leaves for the city, Mazvita is reminded of the relationship between the land and its people: “[t]he land ... we cannot forget it, it cannot forget us (p.39) ... It holds and claims you. The land is inescapable. It is everything. Without the land there is no day or night, there is no dream. The land defines our unities ... Land is birth and death. If we agree that the land has forgotten us, then we agree to be dead” (p.33). For more on the idea that the land is “the source of the people’s belief in themselves” see E.D. Jones, “Land, War and Literature in Zimbabwe: A Sampling” in E.D. Jones and M. Jones, eds, *New Trends and Generations in African Literature*, London, James Currey, 1996, pp.50-61.

³⁷⁸ *Id.* at pp.28-30.

³⁷⁹ *Id.* at p.28.

³⁸⁰ *Id.* at pp.30-31.

emotional ties with the men in her life. Desensitised and dispossessed, Mazvita heads with “eyes unseeing”³⁸¹ towards a future which “threatened her ... a strong current that determined to move against her”.³⁸²

The infant she murders while in the city – a product of the rape which made her “los[e] her seasons of motherhood”³⁸³ – remains as a visible corporeal and spectral presence for the duration of Mazvita’s journey, carried on her back in a white apron “symbolic of the colonial regime which has tied and sewn up the children of the indigenous peoples into a constricted silence”, and as a reminder of a woman who “has been cut off through war and death from her ancestral past”.³⁸⁴ The infant’s corpse also symbolises the dead parts of her self – a dissolved and fragmented body cut off from its life source.³⁸⁵

In language and imagery evocative of what Quayson refers to as “symbolisation compulsion”³⁸⁶ (a strategic mechanism for coping with traumatic events), Mazvita continually refers to herself as dismembered and

³⁸¹ *Id.* at p.35.

³⁸² *Id.* at p.56.

³⁸³ *Id.* at p.29.

³⁸⁴ P. Ludicke, “Writing from the Inside-Out, Reading from the Outside-In: A Review of Yvonne Vera’s *Nehanda* and *Without a Name*” in D. Wright, ed., *Contemporary African Fiction*, Bayreuth, Germany, Bayreuth University Press, 1997, pp.67-73 at p.71.

³⁸⁵ S. Nuttall, “Reading, Recognition and the Postcolonial”, *Interventions*, 3(3), 2001, pp.391-404.

³⁸⁶ A. Quayson, “Symbolisation Compulsions: Freud, African Literature and South Africa’s Process of Truth and Reconciliation”, *Cambridge Quarterly* 30(3), 2001, pp.191-214.

fragmented – “walking around with her body completely severed”³⁸⁷ and “[h]er skin peeled off, parting from her body ... [i]t hung from below her neck, from her arms ... [t]he skin pulled away from her”³⁸⁸ – and associates infanticide with a “rejection of the things that were hers, that were of her body”.³⁸⁹ Mazvita’s journey to the city and back to her rural home reflects her physical and psychical struggle to reclaim what has been taken from her by force (identity and homeland), to reassemble “the parts of her body that still belong to her”,³⁹⁰ to recover her “name, strength and wholeness”,³⁹¹ and to request “absolution from the mother[land]”³⁹² she believed had abandoned her. Returning to the “place of her beginning”³⁹³ – the “yesterday”³⁹⁴ of her future, Mazvita remembers ancestral spirits and vows to “carry [their] voices”³⁹⁵ with her. As Mazvita offers her dead infant’s corpse to the motherland, she sees the spectre of her own mother and hears her call her name. In this final moment, the spectre of Mazvita’s mother and the spirit of the motherland merge to become the ‘something’ that re(-)members her.

Novel transformations: Angela Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve*

³⁸⁷ Vera, *Without a Name*, p.19.

³⁸⁸ *Id.* at p.4.

³⁸⁹ *Id.* at p.95.

³⁹⁰ *Id.* at p.29.

³⁹¹ *Id.* at p.30.

³⁹² Quayson, p.204.

³⁹³ Vera, *Without a Name*, p.103.

³⁹⁴ *Id.* at p.102.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

*We are ... the one[s] who find our way
back to this scene carrying a knife, a
camera, a book of myths in which our
names do not appear*³⁹⁶

*'Fantasy' – to make visible, to show, in
imaginative vision and critical witness*³⁹⁷

At the hands of contemporary feminist 'fantasy'³⁹⁸ author
Angela Carter, Eve and Lilith undergo a radical
transformation.³⁹⁹ Carter's novel *The Passion of New*

³⁹⁶ A. Rich, "Diving into the Wreck" (1972) in B.C. Gelpi and A. Gelpi, eds, *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose: Poems, Prose, Reviews and Criticism*, New York, W.W. Norton, pp.53-55 at p.55.

³⁹⁷ E. Jordan, "The Dangerous Edge" in L. Sage, ed., *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*, London, Virago Press, 1994, pp.189-215 at p.211.

³⁹⁸ Sage writes that Carter was "a figure identified with 'fantasy', Gothic, otherness ... Though she had always taken the line that fantasy was not the shadow-side of a binary opposition, but had a real life history. Being was marinated in magic, and (conversely) imaginary monsters had no separate sphere (p.1) ... Fantasy was an everyday, domestic business, she'd say" (p.2; italics in text). L. Sage, "Introduction" in L. Sage, ed., *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*, London, Virago Press, 1994, pp.1-23. According to Schaafsma, "[m]odern fantasy ... [is] a subversive, even dangerous literature, challenging the patriarchal values of the culture in which it arises" (p.52). Jackson notes that fantasy "traces the unsaid and unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'". R. Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, London, Methuen, 1981, p.4.

³⁹⁹ For another significant feminist revision of the Lilith myth see science-fiction author Octavia Butler's 1987 novel *Dawn* (New York, Warner), the first in her *Xenogenesis* Trilogy. The central character in Butler's novel is African-American Lilith Iyapo, the only human among a group of aliens called the 'Oankali' who need Lilith for reproductive purposes. Osherow, commenting on the notion of 'revisionary mythmaking', suggests that Butler's novel "encourage[s] [us] to reconcile women's self-love with altruism, female desire with motherhood" and "challenges how we define and consider our female social selves. Lilith Iyapo is sexual and powerful; she is also maternal" (p.74). For further discussion see R. Luckhurst, "Horror and Beauty in Rare Combination: The Miscegenate Fictions of Octavia Butler",

Eve⁴⁰⁰ tells the tale of Evelyn, a chauvinistic young man who leaves England for the “lurid, Gothic darkness”⁴⁰¹ of New York where he is to assume a teaching position. But New York, once “[a] city of visible reason” has become “chaos, dissolution, nigredo, night”⁴⁰² – the university no longer exists and rival militant groups are wreaking havoc on the city streets. In the commotion, Evelyn befriends Leilah, “a girl all softly black in colour”⁴⁰³ who ‘moulds’ herself according to Evelyn’s erotic and fetishistic desire: “she ... seemed to abandon her self in the mirror ... and allowed herself to function only as a fiction of the erotic dream into which the mirror cast me”.⁴⁰⁴ Their relationship is not grounded in reality – Leilah is only a reflection of Evelyn’s subconscious desire, a product of masculine fantasy: “She was a perfect woman; like the moon, she only gave reflected light ... she had become the thing I wanted of her ...”.⁴⁰⁵ Evelyn reflects on the dreadful

Women: A Cultural Review, 7(1), 1996, pp.28-38; R.J. Holden, “The High Costs of Survival: Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* Trilogy”, *Foundation*, 72, 1998, pp.49-57; A. Boulter, “Polymorphous Futures: Octavia E. Butler’s *Xenogenesis* Trilogy” in T. Armstrong, ed., *American Bodies: Cultural Histories of the Physique*, New York, New York University Press, 1996, pp.170-185; N. Jesser, “Blood, Genes and Gender in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* and *Dawn*”, *Extrapolation*, 43(1), 2002, pp.36-62; J. Miller, “Post-Apocalyptic Hoping: Octavia Butler’s Dystopian/Utopian Vision”, *Science-Fiction Studies*, 25(2), 1998, pp.336-360; C. Peppers, “Dialogic Origins and Alien Identities in Butler’s *Xenogenesis*”, *Science-Fiction Studies*, 22(1), 1995, pp.47-62.

⁴⁰⁰ A. Carter, *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), London, Bloomsbury, 1993.

⁴⁰¹ Carter, *Passion*, p.8.

⁴⁰² *Id.* at p.16.

⁴⁰³ *Id.* at p.14.

⁴⁰⁴ *Id.* at p.35.

⁴⁰⁵ *Id.* at p.40. For more on Woman as the object of masculine desire and the cipher into which men project their fears and fantasies see P.

outcome of their brief encounter – pregnancy, abortion, hysterectomy – for which he assumes no responsibility: “I gave her nothing but ... a baby, and mutilation, and sterility ... why did [she] seduce me, in the first place ...?”⁴⁰⁶

Embittered and disillusioned, Evelyn seeks refuge in the American desert – “a landscape that matches the landscape of [his] heart”.⁴⁰⁷ Rather than being a place of refuge however, the desert becomes a prison camp of nightmare proportions. Evelyn is taken prisoner by a militant women’s group whose leader is ‘Mother’ – also known as “the Great Parricide”.⁴⁰⁸ Mother is a parodied Great Mother, “breasted like a sow” with “two tiers of nipples”.⁴⁰⁹ Evelyn compares his encounter with these breasts to “being seated at the console of a gigantic cinema organ”.⁴¹⁰ Mother is an amalgamation of many mythic versions of the Mother Goddess:

Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1993; J. Ussher, *Fantasies of Femininity: Reframing the Boundaries of Sex*, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1997; E.F. Kittay, “Woman as Metaphor” in D.T. Meyers, ed., *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, New York, Routledge, 1997, pp.265-285.

⁴⁰⁶ *Id.* at p.37; p.43. Kaveney interprets Evelyn’s (mis)treatment of Leilah as “his great sin”, one of the “original sins of masculinity and its carelessnesses and selfishnesses” (p.181). R. Kaveney, “New New World Dreams: Angela Carter and Science Fiction” in L. Sage, ed., *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*, London, Virago Press, 1994, pp.171-188. Carter transfers the ‘original sin’ of Eve to her male counterpart Evelyn.

⁴⁰⁷ Carter, *Passion*, p.50.

⁴⁰⁸ *Id.* at p.61.

⁴⁰⁹ *Id.* at p.75.

⁴¹⁰ *Id.* at p.83.

Ineradicable vent of being, oracular mouth ...
Danae Alphito Demeter
who reap with the sickle moon ...
Queen of the Underworld Empress of Demons

...

Destiny with a terrible face ...
White mare child guzzler ...
Dana Bu-Ana the Good Mother
Black Anu the Cannibal ...
Kali Maria Aphrodite
Jocasta.⁴¹¹

Men do not factor in Mother's matriarchal underground city, Beulah, where the most 'perfect' female creation – new Eve – will be able to “seed” and “fruit”⁴¹² herself. But Carter does not simply replace patriarchy with matriarchy. Rather, she suggests that “Mother goddesses are just as silly a notion as father gods ... [they are both] consolatory nonsenses”.⁴¹³ For Carter, the Mother goddess is not a powerful figure – she is a creature of masculine creation – “her own mythological artefact”.⁴¹⁴ Mother's desire to create a 'perfect', 'ideal' woman within the confines of Beulah is merely reflective of the ideological constructs that shape and define femininity in Evelyn's world. Beulah is more dystopian than its Blakean name suggests and Carter makes the point that the mere inversion of patriarchal and matriarchal worlds is unsatisfactory to fulfil the feminist desire for transformation.

⁴¹¹ *Id.* at pp.77-79.

⁴¹² *Id.* at p.98.

⁴¹³ A. Carter, *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*, New York, Pantheon, 1978, p.5.

⁴¹⁴ Carter, *Passion*, p.76.

Mother forces Evelyn to copulate with her while the biblically wise Sophia watches “with the prim enthusiasm of a college girl at a football ball game”,⁴¹⁵ encouraging Evelyn with Oedipal fervour to “Kill your father! Sleep with your mother! Burst through all the interdictions!”⁴¹⁶ Notwithstanding its serious implications, the scene is a comical one punctuated with Evelyn’s fear of being consumed by the devouring mother⁴¹⁷: “[h]er flesh ... burning ... her gaping vagina ... the sun in her mouth ... her tongue ... the size of a sodden bath-towel ... her thighs grasp[ing] with the vigour of the female mantis ... engulfment”.⁴¹⁸ As Evelyn realises after his “unceremonious rape”,⁴¹⁹ Mother was “too much mother, a femaleness too vast, too gross for my imagination to contain ...”.⁴²⁰

Proclaiming herself “Castratrix of the Phallocentric Universe”,⁴²¹ Mother castrates Evelyn “excavat[ing] ... the fructifying female space inside [him] [to] make [him] a perfect specimen of womanhood”.⁴²² Carter not only exposes male fantasies of parthenogenesis and the

⁴¹⁵ *Id.* at p.82.

⁴¹⁶ *Id.* at p.81.

⁴¹⁷ For more on the trope of cannibalism in Carter’s novels see Emma Parker’s article “The Consumption of Angela Carter: Women, Food, and Power”, *Ariel*, 31(3), 2000, pp.141-169.

⁴¹⁸ Carter, *Passion*, p.82.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁰ *Id.* at p.84.

⁴²¹ *Id.* at p.85.

⁴²² *Id.* at p.86.

castrating/castrated mother⁴²³ but also recreates the Abrahamic sacrificial/circumcisional rite: “my wrists [tied] together with rope ... I was led, like a sacrificial animal, to the altar ... where Mother waited with a knife”.⁴²⁴ The blood which flows from the knife’s wound transforms Evelyn into a ‘new Eve’ – a male sexual fantasy, a “Playboy centrefold”⁴²⁵ - while Hollywood ‘nursery tales’ educate him/her about the “pain of womanhood”.⁴²⁶ Although the women of Beulah resent “the domination of man”,⁴²⁷ the atrocities committed against women, and abusive men who use the phallus as “a weapon”,⁴²⁸ their actions are still determined by patriarchal myths.⁴²⁹ ‘New

⁴²³ Carter suggests that “[t]he social fiction of the female wound, the bleeding scar left by her castration, ... is a psychic fiction as deeply at the heart of Western culture as the myth of Oedipus, to which it is related in the complex dialectic of imagination and reality that produces culture. Female castration is an imaginary fact that pervades the whole of men’s attitude towards women ...” (*Sadeian* 23). For a discussion of the prevalence of castration imagery in Carter’s work see J. Wyatt, “The Violence of Gendering: Castration Images in Angela Carter’s *The Magic Toyshop*, *The Passion of New Eve* and ‘Peter and the Wolf’”, *Women’s Studies*, 25(6), 1996, pp.549-571.

⁴²⁴ Carter, *Passion*, p.88.

⁴²⁵ *Id.* at p.95-96.

⁴²⁶ *Id.* at p.91.

⁴²⁷ *Id.* at p.97.

⁴²⁸ *Id.* at p.82.

⁴²⁹ Compare Gayl Jones’ novel *Eva’s Man* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1982) in which the African-American female protagonist castrates an abusive man (Davis) with her teeth. Kester sees Jones’ novel, in which men consume women as though they are exotic foods or ‘sexual dishes’, as “a powerful revision of the eating-of-the-forbidden fruit story” in which the “semiotic system of male appetite and consumption” (p.234) is reversed. Eva castrates Davis in order “to erase the difference between their bodies and their positions in language” (p.235). Kester reads the act of castration not only as a form of ‘disorderly eating’ that is as much ‘sexual’ as it is ‘textual’ but as a symptom of “[Eva’s] longing for a lost female community and oral culture” (p.231). G. T. Kester, “The Forbidden Fruit and Female Disorderly Eating: Three Versions of Eve” in L.R. Furst and P.W.

Eve' is merely a recreation of 'old Eve', the first woman shaped from the body of a man.⁴³⁰

Outside the relative 'sanctuary' of Beulah, Eve endures the suffering of life as a woman. She meets the misogynistic Zero who submits women to horrendous forms of sadistic abuse. Zero rapes Eve, 'formally' "turn[ing] [her] into a woman"⁴³¹ and forcing the old Evelyn to recognise himself "as a former violator".⁴³² But Eve finds a new passion in Tristessa, the transvestite and Hollywood film star whom Eve, as Evelyn, once idolised as a boy. Early in the novel Eve(lyn) expresses his "curious fascination" with the "dual form" of the hermaphrodite "with its breasts and its cock".⁴³³ Tristessa fulfils Evelyn's curiosity and becomes a type of Phallic Mother who fills "the abyss ... emptiness ... [and] inward void".⁴³⁴

Graham, eds, *Disorderly Eaters: Texts in Self-Empowerment*, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992, pp.231-238. For more see F. Lionnet, "Geographies of Pain: Captive Bodies and Violent Acts in the Fictions of Gayl Jones, Bessie Head, and Myriam Warner-Vieyra" in O. Nnaemeka, ed., *The Politics of (M)Othering: Womanhood, Identity, and Resistance in African Literature*, London, Routledge, 1997, pp.205-227. See also Parker who suggests that "[e]ating acts as a muted form of expression" (p.142).

⁴³⁰ In her discussion of the novel, Sage suggests that Eve's birth "out of a man's body once again ... [is] an allegory of the painful process by which the 1970s women's movement had had to carve its own identity from the unisex mould of 1960s radical politics [when] [m]en had stood for universality" (L. Sage, *Angela Carter*, Plymouth, UK, Northcote House, 1994, p.35).

⁴³¹ Carter, *Passion*, p.140.

⁴³² *Id.* at p.132.

⁴³³ *Id.* at p.13.

⁴³⁴ *Id.* at p.143.

Near the end of the novel, the metamorphosed Evelyn encounters Leilah. Eve(lyn) learns that Leilah's real name is Lilith – "I called myself Leilah in the city in order to conceal the nature of my symbolism"⁴³⁵ - and that she is Mother's daughter. Eve and Lilith are 'sisters' – products of a mythic imagination – onto whom "have been projected the fantasies and longings and terrors of generations of men".⁴³⁶ Lilith tells Eve that Beulah no longer exists: "History overtook myth ... And rendered it obsolete. Mother tried to take history into her own hands but it was too slippery for her to hold".⁴³⁷ Eve and Lilith journey to the beach to find Mother in a cave by the sea, no longer a 'surgeon' but merely "a mad old lady".⁴³⁸

Mother's dream of female genesis is now nothing more than the lost hope of new life. But for Eve, secure in the knowledge that "myth is a made thing, not a found thing",⁴³⁹ life can begin anew. In the novel's final passage we are transported to the primordial scene of Eve's (re)birth. Carter is truly a master of reversals, for in her

⁴³⁵ *Id.* at p.228.

⁴³⁶ M. Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form*, New York, Atheneum, 1985, p.37. Leilah/Lilith transforms before Eve(lyn)'s eyes, representing two sides of an imaginary male projection - from "... the slut of Harlem, my girl of bile and ebony ... the projection of ... lust and greed and self-loathing" to a "lucid stranger ... also sometimes masquerading as Sophia or the Divine Virgin" (p.175). At the end of the novel Lilith is a guerrilla fighter in a resistance movement. We are left with the feeling that she will ask Eve to join her. We are reminded here of Adam's fear in Goldenberg's tale (see Mythic Scenes 3) of what might happen if Eve and Lilith join forces.

⁴³⁷ Carter, *Passion*, p.226.

⁴³⁸ *Id.* at p.235.

⁴³⁹ *Id.* at p.70.

ending she takes us back to the beginning. In Carter's dystopia, time has been running backwards and Carter herself journeys back through historical time shattering myths just as Eve fantasises the world (s)he once knew as a "glass mausoleum ... now smashed".⁴⁴⁰ Carter leaves the reader uncertain as to whether Eve is really pregnant but pregnancy nonetheless becomes a potent metaphor and symbol of new life. Eve figuratively gives birth to her 'self' far removed from the paradisiacal Eden. The first in line is no longer tied to the patriarchal Tree but to the ocean – "Ocean, ocean, mother of mysteries".⁴⁴¹ Carter releases the story of Eve from its mythical constraints ... a story yet to be written. "In the beginning ... there was nothing but water ..."⁴⁴²

Jouve describes Carter's novel as a "parody" filled with "omnivorous rhetoric" which can "chew myths, political, religious or feminist, into a pulp of apparently terminal absurdity".⁴⁴³ Carter takes us on a series of journeys "through halls of refracting and broken mirrors"⁴⁴⁴ to strange lands where "we become imaginative tourists"⁴⁴⁵ and witnesses to Evelyn's "painful and disconcert[ing] traipse through his fantasies and fears of womanhood - through the mirage of femininity as both the construct of

⁴⁴⁰ *Id.* at p.250.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴² D.A. Leeming, *The World of Myth*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990, p.39.

⁴⁴³ N.W. Jouve, *Female Genesis: Creativity, Self and Gender*, Cambridge, UK, Polity Press, 1998, p.215.

⁴⁴⁴ Jouve, p.215.

⁴⁴⁵ Kaveney, p.181.

male desire and the experience of subjection and disempowerment".⁴⁴⁶ Yet, through the fantasy worlds she concocts, Carter illuminates other "imaginative horizon[s]" where "negotiat[ions] between the cultural myths that generate desire and the historical conditions and events that underlie, undermine or transform them"⁴⁴⁷ may take place. Perhaps it is only at this meeting point, Carter seems to suggest, that "imagination itself [can be saved from becoming the] obedient handmaid of ideology".⁴⁴⁸

In her essay, "Notes from the Front Line", Carter describes her passion for writing and the impetus for her assuming the role of "demythologiser": "I began to question ... the nature of my reality as a woman. How that social fiction of my 'femininity' was created, by means outside my control, and palmed off on me as the real thing".⁴⁴⁹ Continually contesting the "social fictions that regulate our lives",⁴⁵⁰ Carter worked towards the creation of new images and modes of representation unburdened by myth. She was in Blodgett's words, a "[m]yth breaker ... [who] smash[ed] the tablets of patriarchy" only to create

⁴⁴⁶ Jouve, p.215.

⁴⁴⁷ Jordan, pp.209-210.

⁴⁴⁸ H. Lee, "A Room of One's Own or a Bloody Chamber? Angela Carter and Political Correctness" in L. Sage, ed., *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*, London, Virago Press, 1994, pp.308-320 at p.310.

⁴⁴⁹ A. Carter, "Notes from the Front Line" in M. Wandor, ed., *On Gender and Writing*, London, Pandora Press, 1983, pp.69-77 at pp.70-71.

⁴⁵⁰ *Id.* at p.71.

fantastic “new mosaics from their shards”.⁴⁵¹ Her vision is given voice through the fictional Eve(lyn) who desires a “putting away” of symbols and the creation of a “fresh iconography” - a world in which myth does not “shape female reality”.⁴⁵² Carter’s “visionary writing”⁴⁵³ not only attacks and revises images of Eve and Lilith as maternal death-dealers, sexual predators, temptresses, sinners, and the ultimate disobeyers of phallocratic law but also radically redefines the parameters within which we might begin to unravel and re-imagine the myths that shape and define, that shackle and silence.

⁴⁵¹ H. Blodgett, “Fresh Iconography: Subversive Fantasy by Angela Carter”, *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 14(3), 1994, pp.49-55 at p.55.

⁴⁵² *Id.* at p.53.

⁴⁵³ Ahearn characterises Carter’s novel as a form of “visionary writing – that is, writing that explodes the stabilities of world and person, time and space, consciousness and sexual identity, and with them religious and ideological certainties concerning society and history”. E.J. Ahearn, “The Modern English Visionary: Peter Ackroyd’s *Hawksmoor* and Angela Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve*”, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 46(4), 2000, pp.453-469 at p.453.

Conclusion

The Spectre of the Murderous Mother

*If the sleep of reason engenders
monsters, then spectres are its
persistence of vision ... weighing
'like a nightmare on the minds of
the living'¹*

*When my trust was suspended
from the fragile thread of justice
... they would blindfold me with
the dark handkerchief of law²*

*There's a dead baby in your yard
the newsboy said when he knocked
on the door ... I heard a cry late last
night ... There was a dead baby in
the yard ... Over by the fence ... the
perfect baby ...³*

In the annals of history, women found guilty of infanticide were routinely sentenced to death by hanging in the most theatrical of public spectacles.⁴ Public curiosity about the murderous mother and her punishment is evident in Jones's account of the 1701 execution of Esther Rodgers at Ipswich, Massachusetts where "so many thousands

¹ P. Hutchings, *The Criminal Spectre in Law, Literature and Aesthetics: Incriminating Subjects*, London, Routledge, 2001, p.3.

² F. Farrokhzad, "Window" (trans. L. Farjami), available online at <http://www.foroughfarrokhzad.org/selectedworks/selectedworks8.asp>.

³ J. St. Joan, "Dead Baby" in J. St. Joan and A.B. McElhiney, eds, *Beyond Portia: Women, Law, and Literature in the United States*, Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1997, pp.190-192.

⁴ See V.A.C. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770-1868*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1994; J. Knelman, *Twisting in the Wind: The Murderess and the English Press*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1998, pp.258-271.

gathered ... as was scarcely ever heard of or seen upon an occasion in any part of New England”.⁵ Jones recounts how ministers preached to the spectators to “[b]eware the sin of *Pride*.... Pride has tempted many a young Woman to destroy the Fruit of her own Body, that she might avoid the Scandal of a spurious Child”.⁶ Ministers also typically prepared a statement or “dying declaration” for the infanticide to read “from the foot of the gallows” as a warning to other women about the perils of social and moral transgression.⁷

The declaration of Esther Rodgers included the standard components of confession, remorse, and acceptance of death that characterised these statements:

Here I am come to Dy a Shameful Death,
and I Justly deserve it. Young people take
Warning, O let all take Warning by me; I
beg of all to have a Care. Be Obedient to
your Parents and Masters. O Run not
abroad with wicked Company ... If you
go on in Sin, You will provoke God.⁸

⁵ A. Jones, *Women Who Kill*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980, p.48.

⁶ *Id.* at p.49.

⁷ Harris notes that with regard to the production and/or procurement of dying declarations “it is impossible to know whether texts attributed to the accused women actually represent their own words, and even more dubiously, whether they represent the prisoner’s true beliefs and feelings. Published texts relating to infanticide, almost without exception, were produced by a minister or a magistrate”. Dying declarations were “used to condemn individuals who stepped outside societal norms”. S.M. Harris, “Feminist Theories and Early American Studies”, *Early American Literature*, 34(1), 1999, pp.86-93 at p.90.

⁸ Jones, pp.54-55. Kord suggests that the monologue form of dying declarations “emphasise[d] the confessional [nature] of the speech

While executions were a popular public spectacle – a “spectator sport”⁹ – the death of murderous mothers was also reported in newspapers (official representatives were sent to witness executions) and in broadsides, chapbooks, and pamphlets. These accounts tended to focus on the character and appearance of the infanticide – “she was weak, and pale, and powerless” – and the horrific nature of her death – “strangulation, hanging, falling by one’s own weight ... the gush of blood through bursting arteries and veins to the head”.¹⁰ The public desire for details about condemned women was so great that authorised narratives (those sanctioned by church and state officials) and unauthorised narratives regularly competed in the literary marketplace. As the public “imaginative hunger”¹¹ swelled, many versions of the same story appeared as “textual commodities” intended not only to satisfy but also “to seduce readers”.¹²

In his study of the literary appeal of the theme of infanticide, Williams focuses on a case of child-murder reported in the 1785 *Pennsylvania Journal*:

and camouflage[d] [its] male authorship”. S. Kord, “Women as Children, Women as Childkillers: Poetic Images of Infanticide in Eighteenth-Century Germany”, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 26(3), 1993, pp.449-466 at pp.465-466.

⁹ R. Altick, *Victorian Studies in Scarlet*, New York, Norton, 1970, p.10.

¹⁰ Knelman, p.264. See also T. Cheesman, *The Shocking Ballad Picture Show: German Popular Literature and Cultural History*, Oxford, Berg, 1994.

¹¹ D.E. Williams, “Victims of Narrative Seduction: The Literary Translations of Elizabeth (and ‘Miss Harriot’) Wilson”, *Early American Literature*, 28(2), 1993, pp.148-170 at p.149.

¹² *Id.* at p.164.

About a week ago a woman was committed to Chester gaol, on suspicion of murdering her two suckling infant twins, whose bodies were found under some brush, a traveller passing by, observed his dog searching among the brush, and presently after brought out the head of a child in his mouth ... The woman was charged with the murder, which she denies ... The head which the dog brought out had been cut off; and the woman was seen sucking the children near the spot but a little time before the bodies were discovered.¹³

Despite her plea of innocence, the nameless woman was found guilty of murdering her ten-week-old babies and was sentenced to death by hanging.¹⁴ The story of this

¹³ *Id.* at p.148.

¹⁴ Knelman notes that women were typically sentenced to death by “a travelling judge [and] a jury that would not be let out until it came up with a verdict ... a lawyer appointed, often at the last minute, to conduct the defence ... [and] no provision for the accused to speak” (p.260). In her discussion of nineteenth-century representations of the murderess, Knelman includes the description of a condemned woman’s “final appearance in a black satin gown with a large white collar and a black silk blindfold” (p.262). Knelman’s description invokes the traditional symbol of law in our society – a blindfolded woman holding the scales of justice. ‘Justice’ or *Justitia*, Ziolkowski tells us, “is invariably female ... [appearing] in her recognizably modern hypostasis with the attributes of sword and scales ... around 1250” (p.18). Ziolkowski attributes her blindfold to the late fifteenth-century German artist Albrecht Dürer. “In the course of the sixteenth-century the blindfold was rationalised into the now familiar image of judicial impartiality” (p.106). T. Ziolkowski, *The Mirror of Justice: Literary Reflections of Legal Crises*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1997. For a comprehensive consideration of *Justitia* see D.E. Curtis and J. Resnik, “Images of Justice”, *Yale Law Journal*, 96, 1987, pp.1727-1772. Despite these rationalisations, the blindfold maintained some of its negative connotations. “Neither male, nor sighted, [woman] can have no active role”. V. Kerruish, *Jurisprudence as Ideology*, London, Routledge, 1991, p.2. As Sage notes, “[f]emale figures [were] carved in stone to represent Truth or Justice ... when actual women weren’t supposed able to create or use such concepts for themselves” (L. Sage, *Women in the House of Fiction: Post-War*

woman who “suffered an ignominious death”¹⁵ so intrigued readers that numerous versions of her story appeared and continued to be published “long after the actual events of crime and punishment”.¹⁶ In some versions she was known as Elizabeth Wilson, in others as Miss Harriot Wilson. Some authors followed the ‘official’ version of events while others exercised full imaginative licence to “embellish” and even “contradict”¹⁷ this narrative. While the ‘truth’ of what happened on that fateful day at the beginning of 1785 was lost with the tying of the hangman’s noose, public interest in tales of murderous mothers - particularly those cases that included “grisly details”¹⁸ – ensured that “[Wilson’s] story remained alive”.¹⁹ One chapbook version of her story (*A Faithful Narrative of Elizabeth Wilson*) published only two days after the execution was still of marketable value more than twenty years later.²⁰

Women Novelists, London, Macmillan, 1992, p.177. On this point see also M. Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form*, New York, Atheneum, 1985, pp.xix-xx. See also Goodrich who writes: “How better to figure the control or subjection of a woman ... than by hiding her eyes ... from the vision of law?” (p.158). P. Goodrich, *Oedipus Lex: Psychoanalysis, History, Law*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995.

¹⁵ Williams, p.149.

¹⁶ *Id.* at p.151.

¹⁷ *Id.* at p.149.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Id.* at p.151.

²⁰ Williams tells us that the last edition of *A Faithful Narrative of Elizabeth Wilson* appeared in Philadelphia in 1807 (p.151).

Infanticide is, as Geyer-Kordesch surmises, “a theme that has never ceased to stir the imagination”.²¹ The public interest in Wilson’s case might be compared with the unending fascination with Lindy Chamberlain in our own day and age. More than twenty years after the death of nearly ten-week-old Azaria, Lindy Chamberlain continues to be a source of intense public curiosity and her story haunts the cultural imagination. In recent years we have seen the production of an opera entitled *Lindy*,²² the opening of a dedicated Chamberlain exhibit in the National Museum of Australia,²³ and the airing of the telemovie *Through My Eyes* based on Lindy Chamberlain’s autobiography.²⁴

Although separated by two centuries, the points of intersection between the cases of Wilson and Chamberlain are striking. Both cases are set against the backdrop of a bush landscape. Both women were seen feeding their babies shortly before their deaths. Both

²¹ J. Geyer-Kordesch, “Infanticide and the Erotic Plot: A Feminist Reading of Eighteenth-Century Crime” in M. Jackson, ed., *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment 1550-2000*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2002, pp.93-127.

²² Moya Henderson’s opera *Lindy* had its world premiere at the Sydney Opera House on October 25, 2002. The opera was described in the 2002 Opera House Season Guide as “a poetic and moving meditation on the nature of truth and hypocrisy, on Lindy’s faith and courage and on the myths of the dreamtime, all set within a melodic, musical landscape that creates a powerful framework for the opera’s dramatic events” (p.20).

²³ The National Museum of Australia is located in the nation’s capital Canberra. Opened in 2001, the museum reflects “Australia’s social history – everyday significant events and symbols that impact on everyday life” (Channel 7 news, 7 March 2001).

²⁴ The telemovie *Through My Eyes* aired over two nights on Channel 7 in Sydney on 23-24 November 2004.

women were charged with the murder of their young babies. Both women denied the charge but were subsequently convicted of murder. If Chamberlain had been found guilty of murder in 1785 she, like Wilson, would have faced the death penalty rather than life imprisonment. While the legal execution of 'justice' in Wilson's case was harsh and swift, Chamberlain battled through a lengthy appeal process that finally saw her exonerated of all charges. For Chamberlain however, justice remains elusive - officials refuse to formally acknowledge that Azaria was killed by a dingo.²⁵

In her study of the ways in which the question of 'justice' frames the very concept of law, Valverde suggests that "justice is what law claims to enact but always in fact negates".²⁶ In both the Wilson and Chamberlain cases "[a] crime had been committed, and ... later judgment had been exercised to restore the balance of justice".²⁷ Law undermines justice by purporting to fulfil a *public* need for 'justice to be done'.²⁸ But justice is extremely *personal*,

²⁵ Chamberlain wants a formal apology and a coronial declaration that a dingo killed her daughter. Chamberlain states: "I don't think I should have to apply for this, I don't think I should have to ask for a public apology. I think it's something that they should be man enough just to simply do" (cited in M. Brown, "Let Azaria rest: Lindy", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 October 2004, p.3).

²⁶ M. Valverde, "Derrida's Justice and Foucault's Freedom: Ethics, History, and Social Movements", *Law and Social Inquiry*, 24, 1999, pp.655-676 at p.657.

²⁷ Williams, p.148.

²⁸ Justice Michael Kirby suggests that "[t]he procedures of the criminal trial represent a public drama - a kind of metaphor for bringing the accused wrongdoer to justice and resolving contested claims about

“always particular”.²⁹ The law undermines Chamberlain’s personal desire for justice by honouring only the ‘official’ history of Azaria’s death.

The law fails to acknowledge any relationship between history, memory, and justice, perpetually articulating an historical past that “does not mean to recognise [the past] ‘the way it really was’”.³⁰ Memory, no matter how “partial, incomplete, [or] shot through with subjectivity and desire” allows us to recreate the past, to “imagine it and feel it”.³¹ Memory is shaped by cultural narratives, “by what others [tell] us is important ... by the language we hear in our heads when remembering particular events”.³² The law legislates the ‘truth’ of the past but justice demands that we continually question law’s ‘truth’. Memory is “essential for the work of justice, and therefore ghosts, as the intermediaries between the dead and the living, are key figures of justice, the heralds ... of a justice that can never present itself ... [t]he figure of the spectre who breaks up the placidity of the present by reminding us that we have a duty to the past ...”.³³

guilt and innocence”. M. Kirby, “How We’ve Fashioned the Law to Fit Australia’s Crimes”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 February 2001, p.12.

²⁹ Valverde, p.660.

³⁰ *Id.* at p.659.

³¹ *Id.* at p.664.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Id.* at p.662.

In *Spectres of Marx*³⁴ Derrida brings to life the ghostly angel of history, not Bryson's evil angels who induce a sleep that produces monsters but rather a good angel that "forces [us] ... to look back ... to remember injustices ... that must never be forgotten".³⁵ History's angels – the ghosts of Wilson and her babies, and Azaria – speak to us from beyond the grave. As we imagine the traveller in Wilson's case and his dog emerging from the dense bush with the head of a child in its mouth, we are confronted with new evidence in the Chamberlain case provided by a witness who saw a dingo heading away from the Chamberlain's tent with the child Azaria in its mouth.

In 2004 Frank Cole, a seventy-eight year old pensioner claimed that he shot the dingo and buried the baby in a backyard in suburban Melbourne.³⁶ Cole kept the secret for more than twenty years and decided to come forward with his story after being tormented by nightmares and a

³⁴ J. Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (1993), trans. Peggy Kamuf, London, Routledge, 1994. For more on Derrida, spectres and justice see P. Kamuf, "Violence, Identity, Self-Determination, and the Question of Justice: On *Spectres of Marx*" in H. de Vries and S. Weber, eds, *Violence, Identity, and Self-Determination*, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1997, pp.271-283.

³⁵ Valverde, pp.662-663.

³⁶ Channel Nine's *A Current Affair* program (19 July 2004) reported that Azaria may be buried in the backyard of a home in Blyth Street, Brunswick, Melbourne. The new owner of the home was reportedly shocked when told that a baby was possibly buried in his backyard (S. Hewitt, "Police to quiz man on Azaria", *Sunday Telegraph*, 11 July 2004, p.21; C. Munro, "Hope it's true but story full of holes", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 July 2004, p.3).

desire to release himself from the burden of silence.³⁷ Azaria's body was never found and the whereabouts of this phantom corpse remains a source of speculation and rumour. Bizarre stories circulated, including one suggesting that Azaria was alive and well and living among Aborigines in the Northern Territory.³⁸

Cole's description of the dead baby was graphic and gruesome:

The baby had four puncture holes in its head and one of its ears was missing ... it had obviously been dead some time ... [I] was crying when [I] saw the state the little bub was in, all covered in blood.³⁹

Distraught by the baby's horrific appearance, Cole attempted to clean Azaria – first removing her matinee jacket with scissors. Angels work in mysterious ways – the matinee jacket was later found by chance when a tourist fell from Ayers Rock (now Uluru) in 1986. Five days later Chamberlain was released from prison.

Cole's story should have laid to rest persisting doubts about Chamberlain's innocence. Coroner Denis Barritt,

³⁷ In a moving meeting with the Chamberlains, Cole stated: "I hope that [my confession] clears away all the ghosts that have come to haunt you", Channel 9, *A Current Affair*, 2 August 2004.

³⁸ M. Brown, "The truth is still out there", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24-25 July 2004, p.37.

³⁹ A. Tame and S. Hewitt, "My Azaria secret", *Sunday Telegraph*, 4 July 2004, p.3.

now deceased, had always remained confident in his finding that a dingo took Azaria but that there was human intervention “by person or persons unknown”.⁴⁰ But both the police and public were unwilling to give credence to Cole’s version of events.⁴¹ Despite Cole submitting to a lie detector test, the results of which indicated that he was telling the truth,⁴² many believed that his story was nothing more than a publicity ploy to promote a telemovie ‘reopening’ the Chamberlain case.⁴³ Reporter Malcolm Brown, who was in the courtroom when the jury pronounced Chamberlain guilty of child-murder in 1982, suggests that there are people who refuse to accept Chamberlain’s innocence – people who would “still say Lindy was guilty ... [even] if Azaria walked into the courtroom now alive and well”.⁴⁴

Author of *Evil Angels* (known in America by its alternative title *A Cry in the Dark*) John Bryson suggests that we are haunted by “the spectre of the Evil Mother”.⁴⁵ Indeed as we have already seen, “[t]he fantasy ... of supposed maternal evil far outweighed any discussion of possible

⁴⁰ For Barritt’s findings see N.H. Young, *Innocence Regained: The Fight to Free Lindy Chamberlain*, Sydney, Federation Press, 1989.

⁴¹ Police issued a statement to the press suggesting that the coroner was “not satisfied [as to] the necess[ity] or desirab[ility] [of] reopen[ing] the inquest or tak[ing] further action” (Brown, “Let Azaria rest: Lindy”, p.3).

⁴² Munro, p.3.

⁴³ *Sunday Telegraph*, “Rock of ages”, 11 July 2004, p.82.

⁴⁴ M. Brown, “Mother of all mysteries”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10-11 July 2004, p.33.

⁴⁵ J. Bryson, “The Azaria Syndrome”, *Good Weekend – Sydney Morning Herald Magazine*, 12 August 2000, pp.51-54 at p.51.

[external interference]”.⁴⁶ While the police officer who conducted the initial investigation in the Chamberlain case found Cole’s story “far-fetched” and “hard to believe”,⁴⁷ that same officer had no difficulty believing that “the baby was slaughtered in a religious rite on top of Ayers Rock the night before she was reported missing”.⁴⁸

The Chamberlain case “set the benchmark ... other cases [were] always compared to it in terms of status as a horror story of unimaginable proportions”.⁴⁹ Chamberlain was frequently compared with “imagined female horrors” such as Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth and the mythic Medea who have become “codename[s] for ... evil”.⁵⁰ In his theatrical study of murderous women, Timothy Jones says that he was compelled to produce *Re: Macbeth* because of an intense public fascination with evil women: “there is something compelling about the notion of feminine evil ... [about] that [which] horrifies us”.⁵¹ Jones was equally interested in the strong opinions that murderous mothers (especially) provoke and the subtle nuances between those who “quickly judge [these women] as evil” and those

⁴⁶ B. Creed, “Daughters of Darkness”, *The Age*, 28 May 1994, p.10.

⁴⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, “Gladstone bag triggered neighbour’s Azaria story”, 6 July 2004, p.2.

⁴⁸ Bryson, p.51.

⁴⁹ B. Woffinden, “Back from hell”, *Sunday Magazine*, 16 February 2003, pp.18-23.

⁵⁰ J. Morgan, “A modern take on Shakespeare’s she-devil”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 July 2001, p.14.

⁵¹ Jones, cited in Morgan, p.14.

who allow “warring concepts ... suspicion and contradiction[s] ... to [gradually] take over [their] minds”.⁵²

When she first conceived the idea for her opera *Lindy Moya Henderson* was intent on exposing the monsters in our minds, in particular the way in which those who “pounced on Lindy”⁵³ were caught up in the processes of demonisation whereby Lindy served as a scapegoat onto whom they could project their own fantasies, fears, and anxieties. Indeed, as we have seen throughout this work, the murderous mother, at once phantom and phantasy, is a product of and enduring spectral presence in our “collective dreamworlds”⁵⁴ in which the familiar becomes alien and the repressed returns in the form of a child-killing monster.

In Henderson’s vision we discern the influence of Czech composer Leoš Janáček whose opera *Jenufa* tells the story of a woman who is nearly stoned to death by an angry mob who wrongly believe that she drowned her baby. “Blaming the mother is a societal penchant”, writes Brienza, “but a host of people stand with blood on their hands”.⁵⁵ While Janáček focuses on the guilt of the people

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Henderson, cited in Morgan, p.14.

⁵⁴ A. Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Basil Blackwell, 1989, p.2.

⁵⁵ J. Brienza, “When the Bough Breaks: Can Justice be Served in Neonaticide Cases?”, *Trial*, 33(12), 1997, pp.13-17 at pp.16-17. Indeed, McCallum suggests that Henderson’s opera is “uncomfortable in the mirror it holds up” to our legal institutions, the media, and

who condemn an innocent mother, Henderson uses the haunting image of the dingo with baby Azaria in its jaws as a scathing comment on the media who are represented as bloodthirsty jackals. Prior to the performance, audience members are greeted with several paintings by artist Neville Dawson based on the Chamberlain case, including one entitled *Dingo Spirit: Kulpunya* (1994) portraying a dingo with a baby in its mouth, blood streaming from its jaws. It is this same image that dominates Cole's story about his role in the Chamberlain saga and so horrified readers of the *Pennsylvania Journal* in 1785 when Wilson's case was first reported.

Henderson and her co-librettist, poet Judith Rodriguez, focus on Chamberlain's voicelessness. Invoking the mythic sisters Procne and Philomela who transform into a nightingale and a swallow, Henderson and Rodriguez fill their opera with birdsong. They use elements from the natural world to emphasise the brutality of human nature. Like the dingo that serves as a metaphor for the "grotesque media mongrels ... [who embarked on a] feeding-frenzy that devoured Lindy Chamberlain",⁵⁶ the song of the butcherbird (an Australian magpie) and its method of impaling its prey on thorns resembles the way in which Chamberlain was herself figuratively nailed to a

ourselves. P. McCallum, "Arresting drama in stark parable", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 October 2002, p.16.

⁵⁶ McCallum, p.16.

stake like Joan of Arc or women accused of witchcraft in the early modern era.

Like those female authors who revise familiar narratives of maternal child-murder, Henderson attempts to “shift the frames of reference”⁵⁷ by contesting the notion of ‘truth’. Following Sontag who engages with the Nietzschean notion that “there are no facts, only interpretations”,⁵⁸ Henderson moulds the ‘facts’ to suit her own personal agenda. In so doing, Henderson produces a counter-narrative signalling that women are no longer reducible to a “simplifying plot”.⁵⁹ The power to “reshape the prior version ... and to imagin[e] alternatives”⁶⁰ is the power to rewrite/re-right his(-s)tory. Reflecting on the Chamberlain case, Toohey wonders whether we have learned anything from the past.⁶¹ Perhaps Lindy Chamberlain herself provides us with the answer – to find strength in fear, to re-member, and to retell those stories that others would rather we forget – stories filled with the hope and promise of personal justice ... and communal healing.

⁵⁷ J. Resnik, “Changing the Topic”, *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 7, 1996, pp.95-111 at p.107.

⁵⁸ S. Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (1961), London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1967, p.5.

⁵⁹ Resnik, p.107.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ P. Toohey, “Witch hunt”, *The Australian Magazine*, 15-16 July 2000, pp.16-23. “Twenty years ago Australians played judge and jury in the trial of the century. What have we learned?” asks Toohey.

Lindy Chamberlain recently erected a bronze sculpture of a baby bathing in a fountain in memory of Azaria, 'blessed of God' - in memory of a "beautiful life".

*For with thee is the fountain of life:
in thy light shall we see light*

Psalms 36:9

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