

FLANNERY O'CONNOR, TENNESSEE WILLIAMS, AND SHIRLEY JACKSON:
CRAFTING POSTWAR MATERNITY AS CULTURAL NIGHTMARE

by

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the many amazing women in my life, most especially my daughter, Kathleen, and, of course, my mother, Winnie.

It is also dedicated to my partner, Clyde, for holding my hand and heart through every step of this adventure.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that Flannery O'Connor, Tennessee Williams, and Shirley Jackson all employ gothic representations of maternity, what Madelon Sprengnether calls "the spectral mother," in their gothic works. Through this figure, each author challenges normative concepts of motherhood in the period following World War II, specifically by using the "spectral mother" to analyze critically different psychoanalytic schools of thought. In *Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear It Away*, respectively, O'Connor employs Freudian and Jungian conceptions of maternity in order to critique the theological efficacy of psychoanalytic definitions of motherhood, highlighting the psychoanalytically crafted mother as a site of spiritual annihilation. Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, and *Kingdom of Earth* emphasize how the Kleinian mother, which attempts to enforce normative gender and sexual roles, actually encodes psychoanalytic discourse with its own non-normative undoing. While Kleinian-inspired maternity opens up a space for queerness, Williams' plays reveal that motherhood as imagined by Klein renders subjectivity, for mother and son, an impossibility. Jackson's *The Bird's Nest* and *The Haunting of Hill House* reveal that the sexualized maternal figure of Freudian theory, far from describing "normal" psychological development, is instead an origin of filial and maternal psychosis. Crafted as enactments of psychoanalytic discourse, the spectral mothers in O'Connor's, Williams', and Jackson's narratives reflect upon the monstrous underpinning of a Freudian and post-Freudian world.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Mothers haunt mid-century America. More specifically, the figure of the mother in the period's post-Freudian cultural landscape is a ghostly being of both nightmare and nostalgia, nurture and necrophilia. "Flannery O'Connor, Tennessee Williams, and Shirley Jackson: Crafting Postwar Maternity as Cultural Nightmare" examines the psychoanalytically informed spectral mothers in the post World War II gothic fiction of these authors. The spectral mother, as Madelon Sprengnether contends, operates as an "object of fear or dread" who persistently "appears in the interstices" of Freud's theories of psychosexual development (5; 2). Sprengnether offers the following definition of the spectral mother in terms of the figure's "effect" on Freud's discourse:

Her effect is what I call "spectral," in the full etymological sense of the word. Derived from the latin verb *specere*, to see, to look at, "specter" is related to "spectacle," "speculation," and "suspicion," while its immediate source is the Latin *spectrum*, meaning simply, an appearance. In English a specter is a ghost, a phantom, any object of fear or dread. Freud's representations of the preoedipal mother evoke all of these associations. She is the object of his fascinated and horrified gaze, at the same time that she elicits a desire to possess and to know. (5; emphasis in original)

In the works I study, mothers are "spectral" in the ways Sprengnether discusses and in so far as they rarely appear directly in the text. Spectral mothers in O'Connor's, Williams, and Jackson's works "appear" only as absences: as imperfect memories; as sensations;

and as ghostly figures of terror. And yet, absent though they may be, these spectral mothers are the driving force or limiting boundary that defines the central concerns of each text. On the one hand, these mothers are often represented as submissive figures who act as a support for white, masculinist heteronormativity, which itself is an imbricated subject position that forms a base of mid-century social and political ideologies. On the other hand, mothers frequently appear to wield power from their disenfranchised space by deploying an erotic of subjugation that undermines attempts to naturalize heterosexuality and conservatively determined familial roles. Simply stated, spectral mothers in O'Connor's, Williams', and Jackson's works operate as sites of cultural contest through which the heteronormative and paternalistic foundations of post World War II America are reinforced and challenged. These spectral mothers emerge out of a mid-century popularization of psychoanalysis and its recognition of the mother both as a crucial support and potential threat to her child's wellbeing. Though Freud and his followers attempt to suppress the potential of maternal agency in their writing (2), this "ghostlike" figure, as Sprengnether contends, "creat[es] a presence out of absence. Like the spirit of the mournful and unmourned Jocasta, she haunts the house of Oedipus" (5). The spectral mother, situated at both the origin and end of identity in psychoanalytic discourse, points to the degree to which psychoanalysis itself is a gothic construction, haunted by a spectral mother of Freud's imagining. The mother in Freudian thinking emerges as a monstrous figure that challenges the stability of psychoanalysis, which is a central support of a patriarchal and heteronormative World War II culture. And it is this phantasmagoric mother that "haunts" the narratives of O'Connor, Williams, and Jackson. Each of the authors in my study consciously employs mid-century understandings of psychoanalytic

theories of mothers in their gothic works in order to interrogate psychoanalysis itself and the subject position of mother. As each of the spectral mothers in my study reveals, the mother of Freud's imagining haunts not only the borders of the Child's subjectivity, but also twentieth-century American culture as a whole.

My thesis builds upon the well-established close relationship between Freudian-inspired theories of subjectivity and the gothic,¹ and the shift in contemporary gothic to a more knowing engagement with the exigencies of psychoanalytic discourse (Bruhm, "Contemporary"). To borrow from Steven Bruhm's discussion of contemporary gothic fiction, in the works of O'Connor, Williams, and Jackson, "Freudian machinery is more than a tool for discussing narrative; it is in large part the subject matter of the narrative itself" (262). Indeed, the crux of my thesis is that a Freudian-inspired spectral mother is a "large part [of] the subject matter of the narrative" in each of the authors' works I examine. To be clear, the extent to which mid-century understandings of psychoanalytic theories of the mother inform the constructions of maternity in O'Connor's, Williams', and Jackson's narratives is the object of my investigation. I recognize that at various points in my thesis the distinction between psychoanalysis as object and psychoanalysis as agent, like the presence of the spectral mother in Freud's own writing, is a difficult one to discern. In large measure, this apparent slippage is a function of the intertextual nature of my discussion. In a study of authors who are clearly knowledgeable in the psychoanalytic discourses of their time, especially when combined with an analysis of such a psychologically charged figure as the spectral mother, the functions of authorial intent, intertextuality, and cultural context are necessarily, and messily, entangled. In the end, then, my examination of spectral maternity reflects the extent to which

psychoanalysis, the gothic, and the cultural role of mother are imbricated discourses. Sprengnether suggests that spectral mother in Freud's own writing "disrupt[s] the smooth flow of the story he wishes to tell" (3). Like the spectral mother of Freud's imagining, both the constructions of maternity I discuss and the psychoanalytic and other models through which I discuss them "disrupt the smooth flow" of my study of the spectral mother as a site of ideological contest in the works of O'Connor, Williams' and Jackson.

Throughout my study I focus on mid-century interpretations of psychoanalytic theories of the mother, though at various points I also examine ways in which these authors' constructions of maternity anticipate later extensions of psychoanalytic discourse. In addition to psychoanalysis, my study turns to a number of the theoretical schools that are employed in readings of gothic texts, including post-structuralist, new historicist, and gender theories. However, my overarching approach is a materialist one to the extent that I examine the way in which mid-century discourses of maternity reinforce and challenge dominant ideologies of gender and identity (Hogle, "Progress" 13). Freud's conceptions of psychosexual development are the foundation of psychoanalysis and thus of my study; however, by the mid twentieth century a number of variations to Freud's ideas gained cultural traction. Each of the resulting branches of psychoanalysis build on Freud's thinking, but each offers a distinct version of the role of the mother in a child's subjectivity. I take up detailed discussion of the various and differing psychoanalytic theories of mothers from the period in the main body chapters of my thesis; however, to begin I need to offer a brief discussion of the degree to which Freud's theories of maternity contributed to the emergence of the spectral mother in mid-century gothic literature.

Freud's Gothic Mother

The 1950s is identified as the “golden age” of psychoanalysis in the United States (Genter 137).² Freud's Oedipal drama, the psychosexual framework upon which he builds his theories of subjectivity, and which is recognized as the twentieth-century “cornerstone of patriarchal culture” (Sprengnether 5), posits a crucial role for the mother in the child's subjectivity. Fundamentally, the Oedipus Complex reflects Freud's attempts to parse what he saw as a universal phenomenon: the young son's struggle to come to terms with, and to overcome, his incestuous desire for his mother (16:331). The “great task” here, according to Freud, is for the male child to move from an Object-cathexis toward his mother, his desire to have the mother, to an identification with his father, a desire to be the father (16:337; 19:32). For a girl, according to Freud's plan, the child's cathetic desire for her mother must transfer to her father, and she must develop an identification with her mother (22:118-19). In Freud's heteronormative vision, the mother is denied subjectivity; she is crafted as an object of the son's desire, and as an instrument of the father's “unrestricted power” through her association with castration (22:133). As Sprengnether comments, in Freud's writing “[e]vidence of autonomy or desire on the part of the mother . . . slipped to the margins of his consideration, appearing in the form of digressions or asides” (2-3). Sprengnether sees this marginalization as a strategic move on Freud's part, one that reflects his interest in shoring up a patriarchal model (4). Indeed, the erasure of maternal subjectivity in Freud's work in the interest of a conservative ideology is not unique to mid-century America. Marilyn Francus' recent discussion of motherhood in eighteenth-century literature, for instance, recognizes “one maternal vanishing act after

another” (8), an erasure that Francus convincingly links back to instability in the “ideological dominance of domesticity” (8).

In a manner similar to the subversive value of “spectral motherhood” in the texts that Francus considers, the mother that emerges out of Freud’s Oedipal drama troubles the stability of his heteronormative framework. Although Freud attempts to suppress maternal agency in the interest of his patriarchal and heteronormative agenda, his Oedipal drama rests upon the child’s cathetic detachment from his mother, on a “quicksand foundation of loss” (Sprengnether 5). In Freud’s own writing, as Sprengnether contends, “[t]races” of maternal power “surface in odd moments, producing gaps and inconsistencies in Freud’s argument” (3). This “spectral mother is a ghost, a phantom, [an] object of fear or dread . . . In her disappearing act, she evades and frustrates [Freud’s] attempts at grand theory at the same time that she lures him, like a *fata morgana*, into the mists of metapsychology” (5). The mother is constituted as a “phantom” that threatens not only the child’s subjectivity, but also Freud’s own theories. The psychoanalytically imagined spectral mother is a gothic figure par excellence.

The gothic is a slippery form that evades easy delineation; however, Judith Halberstam’s “loose[]” definition of the gothic as “the rhetorical style and narrative structure designed to produce fear and desire within the reader” provides a useful starting point for my study (2). For most writers, the “fear and desire” that helps to define the gothic relates to the vicissitudes of subjectivity.³ A number of gothic scholars, most notably Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, suggest this overriding concern with subjectivity is behind many gothic literary conventions. Notably, one of the more frequently employed conventions in gothic literature is the absent mother.⁴ “Although all Gothic women are

threatened,” Ruth Bienstock Anolik states, “no woman is in greater peril in the world of the Gothic than is the mother. The typical Gothic mother is absent: dead, imprisoned or somehow abjected” (25).⁵ This erasure of maternity in gothic works evidenced in the “many absent and abject mothers who silently and invisibly haunt the gothic text” (7), Anolik argues, represents the “vague terror” that is a defining feature of the gothic mode (7). Indeed, “[t]he Gothic is quite consistently,” Jerrold E. Hogle notes, “about the connection of abject monster figures to the primal and engulfing morass of the maternal” (*Cambridge* 10). And it is this “primal and engulfing” spectral mother who acts as a linchpin between gothic and psychoanalytic discourses. Julia Kristeva’s psychoanalytic discussion of the mother-as-abject, as the primordial site of desire and fear, binds the mother of Freud’s Oedipal schema with the figure of gothic nightmare. Moreover, this spectral mother, as Hogle’s work suggests, operates as a manifestation of the uncanny and its concomitant return of repressed desire and fear that is central to both psychoanalysis and the gothic (7). In a post-Freudian world, the spectral mother is the site of gothic “terror” in that she is a monstrous figure whose absent-but-present role threatens the child’s, and therefore cultural, stability.

Yet, the mothers in my study are not simply the source of terror. The spectral mothers in each of the works I consider shares much in common with the gothic subject, a subject, Robert Miles suggests, who finds him or herself “in a state of deracination” (3). Though mothers are erased from the plots in the texts of my thesis, they are nonetheless the subjects of my authors’ work. The gothic, Miles contends, is a “mode of debate” whose central preoccupation is the fragmented nature of subjectivity (3). It is this idea of “debate” that underlies my dissertation: each of the writers whose work I examine

employs the subversive force of the gothic in order to intervene in cultural discourses relating to mothers and by so doing reveal the instability dictated by these cultural scripts.

From its beginnings in the nineteenth-century writing of Edgar Allan Poe, American gothic fiction has distinguished itself from its European predecessors, as Teresa Goddu and Eric Savoy discuss, through its exploration of the unstable human psyche, a space that in turn reflects upon a white patriarchal culture in decay (Goddu 8; Savoy 169). It is worth noting that two of the authors in my study, O'Connor and Williams, are identified as Southern gothic writers. The South has long been recognized as America's "preferred literary area of terror" (Fiedler 474), a locale whose historically racist context offers a productive site in which to displace America's dominant fear of, and desire for, Otherness.⁶ Yet, though the family, the foundation of patriarchy, most often provides the setting for modern Southern gothic fiction, the mother is generally absent from the familial scene. This absence has been read as a reflection of the overwhelming impotence of Southern patrimony, and as a literalization of the dictates of a Southern culture that demanded maternal asexuality.⁷ While convincing arguments, my study confirms that the trope of the spectral mother extends beyond Southern gothic. Mothers are also absent from the plot in New England gothic narratives, such as Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* and two of Jackson's texts, *The Bird's Nest* and *The Haunting of Hill House*. Northeastern American gothic, as is well documented, is intimately related to the literary tradition that stems out of the area's guilt-ridden Puritan history and its continued ties to Old World folklore and superstitions.⁸ Work that ranges from the puritan writings of Cotton Mather, to the eighteenth-century novels of Charles Brockden Brown, to Nathaniel Hawthorne's transcendentalist inflected gothic on the mid nineteenth century,

all point to a rich regional gothic tradition. The appearance of the spectral mothers across Jackson's, O'Connor's, and Williams' gothic narratives indicates that concerns relating to the subject position of mother were not constrained by geographic region. Read in tandem, these authors' works suggest that the Freudian-inspired mother haunts not only the borders of filial subjectivity or a specific region, but also twentieth-century American culture.

The "Good Enough" Mother: Maternity in a World Divided

David Punter asserts that the gothic is a literary mode that "re-emerges with particular force during times of cultural crisis and which serves to negotiate the anxieties of the age by working through them in a displaced form" (30). A brief overview of the social, economic, and political landscape of the postwar period reveals that motherhood was the focal point of many of the "anxieties" of a mid-twentieth century United States. As David Krasner states, America emerged from World War II as a dominant political and economic force: "the end of the war catapulted the nation from the periphery of international politics to the position of global superpower" (28). Yet, America's dominance did not lead to political stability. Though the Soviet Union, Andrew Dunar comments, was the "ally that had defeated Hitler in the East" (3), in the years immediately following the war the "Red Army occupied much of Eastern Europe [and] the Soviet Union . . . now loomed as an adversary" for Western nations (3). The "cultural crisis" of the postwar period, as described by Winston Churchill in his "Iron Curtain" speech of 1946, had much to do with a world "divided . . . into two utterly opposed camps" (qtd. in Savran, *Communists* 2). This was an era of Cold War, of America versus the Soviet Union, of Capitalism versus Communism. It was a period of global history in

which the political and military policy of the time--Mutual Assured Destruction--paved the way for what David Savran, in his discussion of Williams' work, identifies as the most massive stockpile of armaments the world has ever seen (2). Not surprisingly, global political instability had a profound impact on the lives of individuals living in the United States. Americans were called upon to prepare for a nuclear attack that could come at any moment. As Dara Downey and Darryl Jones note, "the preparation of the home as a shelter was the item of first priority in the FCDA's [Federal Civil Defense Administration] 1953 manual *Home Protection Exercises*" (22). Though America's global success helped to fuel a robust domestic economy (Dunar 167),⁹ "many" Americans, Elaine Tyler May contends, "shared President Truman's belief that World War III was at hand" (2).¹⁰ Certainly the pernicious atmosphere of government surveillance in the period contributed to this sense of doom. This was a time of Senator Joseph McCarthy, whose search for homosexuals and "Reds" in the 1940s and 1950s as potential threats to the "American way of life" extended far beyond government offices (Savran, *Communists* 4). As Dunar notes, Truman's 1947 Executive Order no. 9835 "establish[ed] a Loyalty Review Board empowered to dismiss federal employees suspected on 'reasonable grounds' of disloyalty or subversion" (40-1). Stephanie Coontz comments that in the years immediately following the war "[t]he Civil Service Commission fired 2,611 persons as 'security risks' and reported that 4,315 others resigned under the pressure of investigations that asked leading questions of their neighbors and inquired into the books they read or the music to which they listened" (33). Though a number of Americans cautioned against "rising tide of anticommunism" in the

postwar years (Christiansen 3), suspicion and surveillance characterized the lives of many Americans in the period.

In addition to the ever-present sense of annihilation and surveillance, systemic racism characterized the postwar era, despite what historian Numan V. Bartley recognizes as advancement in race relations in the period (1-37). Indeed, there were some successes in this regard, such as those implemented by Truman's Fair Deal domestic policy of 1949, which "mandated an end to segregation in the armed forces" (Dunar 32). Moreover, a number of Supreme Court decisions--such as the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case that deemed segregation in public schools to be unconstitutional--were instrumental in the battle against racism (207-9). Nonetheless, as Coontz contends, a racist discourse prevailed in postwar America. Coontz writes: "African Americans in the South faced systematic, legally sanctioned segregation and pervasive brutality, and those in the North were excluded by restrictive covenants and redlining from many benefits of the economic expansion that their labor helped sustain" (30). During the postwar period, membership in the Ku Klux Klan grew, and, Dunar recounts, "cross burnings and violence against blacks became common" (210). In terms of my study, this mid-century racist culture is most obvious in the work of Williams, especially in *Suddenly Last Summer*, its related text, "Desire and the Black Masseur," and *Kingdom of Earth*. But it is also a thread that informs O'Connor's *Wise Blood*. Both Williams' and O'Connor's depictions of race have been the subject of some scholarly discussion. Williams, Savran comments, often "spoke out against racism" (127); however, Williams' work "almost unfailingly objectifies and eroticizes the dark Other" (127). O'Connor's position on the subject of race is equally ambivalent. Early commenters Leon Driskell and Joan Brittain suggest, "O'Connor did

not write about Negro-white relations in the South for the sake of encouraging change or dramatizing inequity” (5). Black characters in O’Connor’s novels and her short stories are not developed, a fact that Driskell and Brittain link to O’Connor being “a product of the segregated South” (5).¹¹ Relevant to my study is the fact that Williams’ and O’Connor’s representations of race and racism are inextricably bound up with cultural constructions of maternity. Both authors problematically employ racist thinking in order to bolster their own authorial desire to critique the psychoanalytically crafted subject position of mother in the culture.

O’Connor’s, Williams’, and Jackson’s constructions of maternity point to the reality that the United States was not only divided in terms of skin colour; lines of inequity in the postwar period were also drawn in relation to gender. This period of American history, May outlines, was characterized by conservatively determined gender roles and an increase in the number of couples “more eager than ever to establish families” (3). In broad terms, men and women were expected to marry early in life, and men were expected to take on the role of “breadwinner” while women assumed the subordinate role of “housewife” and mother (3). While this ideological formation didn’t always play out in the specific, of course, the cultural conservatism that underwrites it, Deborah Weinstein suggests, was in large measure a response to World War II: “In the postwar cultural imaginary, the family itself was seen as a means of repairing the social fabric torn by war” (4).¹² Indeed, many married couples, especially white couples, enjoyed economic prosperity in the period, as evidenced in part by a growing middle class and suburban expansion (Savran, *Communists* 3; Krasner 28-9). For a substantial segment of the population, Krasner notes, “Upward mobility was a fact of economic life”

(28), or at least the expectation of that mobility was supposed to be. Significantly, this normative middle-class family lifestyle was a crucial support for American capitalism (Elaine May 14).¹³ Not only did the increase in family units help to bolster an American consumer economy to unprecedented levels, as Weinstein comments, but the heterosexual family was also viewed as the “cornerstone of a healthy democratic citizenry” (2). The “normative weight” of this ideology of the family was evident in the popularity of contemporary forums such as television’s *Leave it to Beaver*. As Weinstein confirms, “the Cleavers and other mid-century television families became fodder for the political discourse of ‘family values’” (11). The ideology of the family, and the concomitant conservative “family values” it inspired, helped to shore up postwar anti-communist rhetoric. As Coontz writes, “[a] ‘normal’ family and vigilant mother became the ‘front line’ of defense against treason” (33).

Yet, the “real” postwar family was an unstable “‘front line’ of defense.” Coontz notes: “Contrary to popular opinion, *Leave It to Beaver* was not a documentary” (29). Despite the “common stereotype of the 1950s” as a “decade of conformity” (Dunar 2),¹⁴ May comments, “many postwar families bore little resemblance to the fictional Cleavers or their popular-culture peers” (2). Coontz estimates that, in contrast to the Cleaver family, a “full 25 percent of Americans, forty to fifty million people, were poor in the mid-1950s” (29). In reality, in the postwar years the gap between poor and rich widened, especially, as Williams’ and O’Connor’s work illustrates, in the Southern States (Dunar 201). Moreover, in contrast to the stability depicted by the fictional Cleaver household and the like, a pervasive sense of “rootlessness” characterized much of the country as

large numbers of people moved from rural to urban settings, oftentimes leaving their ancestral States for employment (Elaine May 24).

Rather than a “familial paradise” for all white Americans, Shari Thurer explains, “even in white, middle-class suburbia . . . domestic cheer often masked a good deal of quiet desperation” (xix). Indeed, as May discusses, though the success of American corporations in the period decreased unemployment rates, “blue-collar and white-collar employees shared a sense of alienation and subordination in the postwar corporate work force” (21). Coontz in fact argues that the cultural demands imposed on men to marry and to be responsible for their families’ financial stability contributed to a generalized resentment toward women (37).¹⁵ Clearly, women fared no better within the familial ideology than did men, given that a woman’s identity was expected to be predicated on her success as a housewife, spouse, and mother. Notably, the demands of a consumer society meant many women had to take on what May describes as “menial and subordinate” employment (22). May comments: “As long as [a woman’s] employment provided a secondary source of income and did not undermine the authority of the male breadwinner it was acceptable to the family” (167). Women who did not appear to ascribe to this subservient role were subject to “vehement attacks” (Coontz 31). Coontz notes: “In the 1947 best seller, *The Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, Marynia Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg described feminism as a ‘deep illness’” (32).¹⁶ As a result of gendered cultural demands, “thousands of women” Coontz notes, turned to “therapists, tranquilizers, or alcohol” in order to cope (9). It is not surprising, then, that, according to Coontz, “[b]y 1960 almost every major news journal was using the word *trapped* to describe the feelings of the American housewife” (37; emphasis in original). In terms of my study,

each of my authors' constructions of maternity highlights this uneasy underpinning of the cultural narrative of mid-century familial stability. To borrow from Williams' description of *The Glass Menagerie's* Amanda, the postwar mother may not be "paranoiac, but her life is paranoia" (129). Situated at the centre of the American family, in many ways mothers bore the brunt of cultural anxiety.

The extent to which cultural tensions in the aftermath of World War II influenced the subject position of mother has received a great deal of scholarly attention. May's oft-cited work, *Homeward Bound*, traces the many links between the postwar political ideology of communist containment, and a larger cultural retrenchment in a traditional patriarchal nuclear family as a site of safety and protection. For E. Ann Kaplan, World War II functioned as an "historical eruption[]" (19), which, like the Industrial Revolution and World War I, threatened the structure of the nuclear family and thereby caused a shift in the cultural narratives of motherhood. Individual mothers were held to standard of behavior that Betty Friedan famously dubbed "the feminine mystique" (3). Pre-war mothering advice books, Thurer notes, "offered a vast sympathy for mother and were filled with practical short-cuts" (xvii); however, in postwar maternal advice books such as "Dr. Benjamin Spock's *Baby and Child Care* [1946]--the all-time best-selling book in American history after the Bible--sympathy was switched to the child" (xvii). Cultural narratives of mothers worked to construct a subject position that would shore up the economic and social structures of a postwar capitalist patriarchy. Though, as Amber Kinser explains,

Government propaganda during World War II convinced women that entering the workforce was their patriotic duty and that their children were

the better for it . . . After the war . . . the rhetoric directed at mothers changed again, and children were depicted as at-risk if mother continued to work outside the home. (64)

These “moves back home” (6), Donna Bassin suggests, were emotionally devastating to many women: “The combination of maternal isolation and devaluation contributed to experiences of stress, feelings of inadequacy, and overdependence on children” (6). Depression was common in women at the time, as was a concomitant intensity in the association of women with mental illness in popular culture. “In the midst of the 1950s recasting of femininity,” Caminero-Santangelo notes, “the image of madwoman took a startling new form in American popular culture: the female multiple personality” (52). Jackson, in *The Bird’s Nest*, takes up this popularization of “female multiple personality,” and reveals the extent to which this disorder was tied directly to a perceived failed mothering. As I discuss, the long-standing association of the feminine with madness-- which is often a gothically inflected association--was employed in the period, using newer forms of psychoanalytic diagnosis, as an efficacious instrument for the oppression of women.

Motherhood was not only viewed as a site of possible mental disorder, but also as a potential threat to the child’s mental stability. As Kinser outlines, “Adult adjustment and the whole of psychological health were understood to be rooted in the mother-child bond” (65). The subject position of mother, informed by the mid-century popularization of individual psychology and its attendant focus on the child’s wellbeing, was identified as “the primary source[] of neurotic behaviour” (Genter 152). So, it is not surprising that in the early to mid-century, a great deal of energy was expended in attempts to define and

police what object relations theorist Donald Winnicott dubbed the “good enough” mother (111). The “good enough” mother, Elisabeth Badinter notes, “is attentive to all her child’s needs and entirely devoted to him” (275). Although such Kleinians as Winnicott departed from Freudian thinking in a number of ways--many of which I outline in my discussions of Williams’ work--both schools of thought maintained motherhood as a crucial site of the child’s development. Indeed, throughout the various branches of psychoanalysis--including that of Carl Jung, whose theories inform O’Connor’s *Violent*--a mother’s primary, if not singular, purpose in life was to provide an adequate foundation for her child’s emotional and physical growth.

This mid-century focus on the child anticipates the political rhetoric that Lee Edelman identifies as the underpinning of contemporary culture. Edelman argues:

On every side, our enjoyment of liberty is eclipsed by the shadow of a Child whose freedom to develop undisturbed by encounters, or even by the threat of potential encounters . . . terroristically holds us all in check and determines that political discourse conform to the logic of a narrative wherein history unfolds as the future envisioned for a Child (21).

For Edelman, the Child constitutes and polices a specifically heteronormative culture through a cultural belief in the Child’s promise that tomorrow holds meaning. As each manifestation of spectral motherhood that I explore suggests, interest in the stable future offered through the figure of the Child could often result in the near eradication of the mother’s identity. Indeed, a denial of maternal functions as a support to this heteronormative schema. The Child as placeholder for a promised future establishes a trajectory from trauma to healing, from lack to wholeness. The spectral mother, as a

figure of the past, embodies the trauma and lack that the Child, in terms of this cultural phantasy, will leave behind. In other words, the mother-as-negation is a site upon which the Child, and therefore heteronormative culture, attempts to build its bright future.

Badinter describes postwar ideals of motherhood as especially “cruel . . . in that they aroused very little critical discussion, for the prestige of psychoanalysis was then at its height and no one dreamed of demanding stricter proofs” (275). Yet, the vitriol surrounding “bad” mothering was even more “cruel.” Certainly, the work of Phillip Wylie provides a case in point. First published in 1942 (and supposedly written in just eight weeks), Wylie’s *Generation of Vipers* was in its twentieth reprinting by 1955 (Wylie xi). As Genter notes, Wylie “turn[s] to the mother as a source of dysfunction in the child” (152). The consequences of a maternal failing on her children’s development, and therefore on the stability of the nation, are alluded to throughout Wylie’s text. For example, Wylie states:

The nation can no longer say it contains many great, free, dreaming men.
We are deep in the predicted nightmare now and mom sits on its decaying
throne--who bore us, who will soon, most likely, wrap civilization in
mom’s final, tender garment: a shroud. (195-6)

In keeping with psychoanalytic thinking, Wylie blames “moms” for a host of problems associated with non-normative behaviours, such as “homosexuality” and “womanish manner[s]” (65, 123). And Wylie was not alone. Edward Strecker, for instance, was convinced that the high degree of psychiatric illnesses found in men returning from war was linked to failed mothering: “‘Mom’ . . . is merely a convenient verbal hook upon which to hang an indictment of the woman who has failed in the elementary mother

function of weaning her offspring emotionally as well as physically” (13). In mid-century America, mothers provided a masculinist and heteronormative society a site onto which to displace blame for its perceived shortcomings.¹⁷

Much of the vitriol directed towards motherhood in post World War II America relates to non-normative sexuality, which is also a central concern of O’Connor’s, Williams’ and Jackson’s work. In part, fears of homosexuality in the period were incited by the 1948 publication of Alfred Kinsey’s report on male sexuality. As John Bak notes, “Kinsey’s report suggested that almost forty percent of the total male population he and his colleagues had interviewed admitted to having had ‘at least some overt homosexual experience to the point of orgasm,’ though only four percent identified themselves as exclusively homosexual” (“Sneakin” 263). In other words, Kinsey’s report recognized heteronormativity as an unstable concept, an instability that in turn bolstered negative perceptions of motherhood. Specifically, as indicated in Wylie’s and Strecker’s text, and discussed in my chapter on *Suddenly Last Summer*, psychoanalytic thinking enabled commentators a purported scientific basis on which to blame mothers for their children’s non-normative sexuality, including homosexuality. Though Strecker argues that “[m]any cases of homosexuality are, of course, deeply rooted in biological deviations” (128), he, like Wylie, indicts the mother: “[T]here are many instances in which it seems reasonable to implicate an immaturity determined by mom and her wiles” (128). Moreover, Kinsey’s publication of his study of female sexuality in 1953, coming five years after his work on male sexuality, fuelled concern about maternal sexuality, a subject that underpins every text in my study. Kinsey argues that there had been an “exceedingly rapid and revolutionary change in sex attitudes and practices” in women (viii). This “rapid . . .

change,” Kinsey argues, may be attributed in part to women’s postwar “emancipation” as well as their “exposure during the World Wars” to “cultures and people whose sex codes and practices differ greatly from those in which [American youth] had been reared” (viii). Kinsey’s third reason for women’s “revolutionary change in sex attitudes and practices” was the “all-pervasive influence of Freud’s views and discoveries” (viii). The popularization of Freud’s sexualized paradigm of mother-child relations was viewed as a contributing factor in women’s supposed sexual “revolution.” On the one hand, Freud posits maternal sexuality as a necessary element in the child’s development. On the other hand, Freud’s thinking contributed to a culturally proscribed maternal sexuality. Though psychoanalysis attempted to shore up a conservatively defined ideological position by dictating a “normal” subjectivity, its own prescriptions constructed the subject position of mother as a site of cultural instability. As Caminero-Santangelo notes, “Psychiatric discourse typically obscured (and still obscures) its own position within ideology, including gender ideology--and therefore its own interest in the reproduction of particular forms of subjectivity--with a rhetoric of scientific neutrality” (63). However, much of the instability relating to maternal subjectivity that is identified in each of my authors’ works gestures to the failure of psychoanalytic discourse to fully “obscure” its ideological position. Ultimately, O’Connor’s, Williams’ and Jackson’s careful gothic enactment of the exigencies of psychoanalysis reveals that it is white heteronormative dictates relating to mothers, and not the maternal figure itself, that are truly horrifying.

O’Connor, Williams, and Jackson: Psychoanalysis and the Gothic Mother

My study begins with the work of Flannery O’Connor. Although O’Connor’s oeuvre is relatively limited--the author’s work includes only two novels, twenty-five short

stories, fourteen essays and a collection of personal letters--she is considered one of America's most distinctive gothic writers. Known for her interest in the grotesque and in the violent, O'Connor's exploration into a "Christ-haunted" South has garnered a fair amount of critical analysis (Wood). That being said, critical evaluation of O'Connor's work is substantially limited by theological and biographical considerations.¹⁸

O'Connor's frequent depiction of Southern women is the subject of some attention; however, scholarly work on O'Connor's constructions of maternity are few, with most of O'Connor's fictional mothers being reductively characterized as either whores or "failed" parents (Warren and Wolff 11). This lack of critical attention to O'Connor's fictional mothers belies an underlying complexity in the author's construction of spectral mothers as sites of ideological contest between the Catholic Church and psychoanalysis.

O'Connor's interest in both psychoanalytic theory and religious doctrine is well documented. O'Connor, as Michael Kreyling notes, "was far from being a naïve reader of Freud" (20). She often references Freud in her letters to friends, and, in addition to her religious and homiletic book reviews for her church newsletter, wrote a number of reviews on the subject of psychology, philosophy, and intellectual history (Martin). O'Connor herself stated that "I am a Catholic peculiarly possessed of the modern consciousness, that thing Jung describes as unhistorical, solitary, and guilty. To possess this *within* the Church is to bear a burden, the necessary burden for the conscious Catholic" (90; emphasis in original). In her review of *Freud and Religion*, O'Connor writes: "This is a valuable study for anyone interested in Freudian theories and their compatibility with Christian belief" (qtd. in Martin 65). In this same review, O'Connor also reveals her interest in Carl Jung's thinking--the psychoanalytic theory that informs

Violent--to the extent that “Freud’s teachings are in fact less dangerous to religion than Jung’s theories, which use belief in the practical service of psycho-therapy” (qtd. in Martin 65). Ted Spivey, a long-time friend and correspondent of O’Connor, comments, “one of my greatest joys in discovering O’Connor as an intellectual companion was that she had read Jung and understood him, or at least parts of his work” (32). In his discussion of O’Connor, Spivey goes on to identify several volumes by and about Jung in O’Connor’s library. O’Connor references several of these volumes in her letters, including *God and the Unconscious* by Father Victor White (who I reference in my discussion of *Violent*) (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Habit* 382), and a text she reviewed, *The Psychology of Jung* by a Belgian Jesuit priest, Father Hostie. In her review of Hostie’s work, O’Connor discusses the extent to which Jung’s thinking might be of “particular interest to Catholics” (qtd. in Martin 80). For O’Connor, this “interest” was a theologically defensive one in that Hostie’s text was especially relevant for “anyone interested in the problems that the church has to face in combating a growing attitude which tends toward psychologism in its appraisal of religion” (qtd. in Martin 81).¹⁹ A “conscious Catholic” of her time, O’Connor was particularly interested in theological attempts to find common ground between psychoanalytic thinking and religious dogma. Specifically, O’Connor was concerned about the potentially damaging effects this popular discourse posed to the Catholic Church and its adherents.²⁰ While some critics have identified a psychoanalytic subtext with respect to the mothers in O’Connor’s narratives,²¹ readings of her work do not identify the author’s spectral mothers specifically as sites through which O’Connor engages in a larger postwar debate relating to a possible Catholic/psychoanalytic accord. I argue that spectral mothers in O’Connor’s

fiction operate as a challenge to those who would attempt to shore up patriarchal structures of Catholicism with popularized conceptions of psychoanalytic theory.

Given that the spectral mother originates in Freud's own writing, the main body of my study begins with an examination of maternity in O'Connor's *Wise Blood*, a narrative that employs Freud's Oedipal schema in the crafting of its spectral mothers. The narrative recounts the story of Hazel Motes, a disillusioned young man from a Fundamentalist Protestant family who travels to the fictional town of Taulkinham to found "the church of truth without Jesus Christ Crucified" (51). The apparent dearth of mothers in the text makes it an unlikely source for critics concerned with fictional mothers. Haze's mother, already dead when the narrative opens, appears in the text solely as a ghostly presence in Haze's memory. However, though Haze's mother is absent from the narrative's present, this bildungsroman is in fact haunted with substitute mothers whose counterfeit presence in the narrative reflects an intertextual engagement with Freudian theory, Catholicism and gothic convention. Though mothers are absent from the plot, Freudian-inspired mothers repeatedly appear as spectral "ghost[s] of the counterfeit" that allow O'Connor to debunk popular assertions of the mother as a potential site of concordance between psychoanalysis and the Catholic Church (Hogle, "Counterfeit"). The spectral mothers in *Wise Blood* indicate that the sexualized spectral mother as crafted by a Freudian script, in contrast to the Virgin Mary of Catholic dogma, is a site evacuated of spiritual possibility. O'Connor's aim is to advance Catholic doctrine, and to distinguish and therefore protect that doctrine from what she perceived as the damaging effects of psychoanalytic thinking.

Notably, O'Connor's characterization of the Virgin Mary as a distinctly Catholic figure in both *Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear It Away* suggests the author's interest in

engaging in mid-century religious debates that took place between Protestants and Catholics, and within the ranks of Catholic Church membership. As I discuss in my chapter on *Wise Blood*, in the years following World War II, as Patrick W. Carey explains, there was a “widespread resurgence of religion” across Protestantism and Catholicism alike (93). Many Protestants in the period feared a growing Catholic presence in the United States, and the Virgin Mary was a flashpoint for much of the debate. Moreover, Catholics in the period, Carey notes, were “battling each other ideologically” (93). In large measure, tensions developed between those in the Church who wished to protect the supposed sanctity of Catholic dogma against Protestant influence, and those Catholics who felt that the Church should move toward greater “intercreedal cooperation” (99). As I discuss, by highlighting mid-century Catholic beliefs in the near-deity status of the Virgin Mary in her narratives, O’Connor works against ecumenical movements, and affirms her adherence to Church dogma. In terms of my study, O’Connor’s spectral mothers suggest that the spectralization of the mother in mid-century gothic fiction reflects an appropriation of the subject position of mother in the interest of ideological debate. On the one hand, O’Connor presents the mother as a crucial site of identity in that she acts as a mediator between humankind and a Christian God. On the other hand, O’Connor’s spectral mothers reveal instability in the psychoanalytically crafted subject position that works as a critique of Freudian prescription.

From this discussion, I move to a consideration of spectral mothers in *The Violent Bear It Away*, O’Connor’s second novel. In this novel O’Connor takes on an examination of Jungian thinking, a conservatively developed branch of psychoanalysis whose concepts

of subjectivity, and maternity, were viewed as potentially useful to the Catholic Church. In the narrative, a young Francis Tarwater leaves his adopted home and journeys to the city in order to escape his destined role as a Fundamentalist Christian prophet. Like *Wise Blood*, this is a bildungsroman with theological questions at its heart. Throughout the text, a misogynistic characterization of mothers belies the fact that motherhood operates as a site through which the Catholic O'Connor engages in a critique of psychoanalytic theory. Specifically, throughout *Violent*, O'Connor employs Jungian constructions of the Great Mother in order to ultimately reveal that the goal of Jungian psychotherapy--the fully actualized self--is in fact anathema to the Catholic call for a violent destruction of self in order to accept Grace. In *Wise Blood*, then, as in *Violent*, the subject position of mother is appropriated in the interest of ideological debate. Like the Great Mother of Jungian conception and the Virgin Mary of Catholic dogma, the spectral mothers of O'Connor's narrative, held to religio-psychoanalytic demands, are denied agency in the interest of decidedly patriarchal ideologies and a concomitant cultural obsession with the child's subjectivity. In the end, spectral mothers in *Violent* operate symbolically, like the Jungian Great Mother, as signifiers whose referents are always and only the child. Through her spectral mothers, O'Connor attempts to shore up Catholic doctrine, but her employment of a Jungian script underscores troubling instability in the psychoanalytically informed subject position of mother. As a crucial support of patriarchal culture, the spectral mother as depicted by O'Connor troubles the stability of a mid-century patriarchal culture.

The precarious state of maternity in O'Connor's novels is also evident in the works of Thomas Lanier (Tennessee) Williams, the author whose spectral mothers I examine in the second section of my thesis. Williams is recognized as one of the most

important American writers of the twentieth century, and so consideration of his work provides an important addition to my mid-century study. Moreover, whereas O'Connor's texts interrogate the spectral mothers of Freudian and Jungian thinking, Williams employs a Kleinian object relations script in the crafting of his fictional mothers. Klein and her followers developed a vast discourse of prescribed and proscribed maternal behaviours that circulated widely in postwar America, and contributed a great deal to the normative construction of the mother in the period. My study of Williams' spectral mothers thereby provides a crucial addition to my understanding of psychoanalytically informed fictional mothers from the period.

Williams' extensive oeuvre of more than two-dozen full length dramatic works, innumerable one-act plays, and close to fifty short stories is the subject of a great deal of scholarly attention. For the most part, critical study focuses on biographical aspects of Williams' work and its homoerotic subtext. As Bailey McDaniel notes in 2006, consideration of motherhood in Williams' work "remains scarce, with absences unavoidably affecting ways maternity is understood" (274). Indeed, this absence is especially problematic given the centrality of the mother in much of Williams' drama and fiction. Williams states in a 1940 interview with Mark Barron from *The Commercial Appeal* that, "My interest in social problems is as great as my interest in the theater and traveling. I try to write all my plays so that they carry some social message along with the story" (qtd. in Devlin 5). I argue that Williams' spectral mothers "carry [a] social message" in that they offer scathing critiques of psychoanalytic discourse, specifically those theories first adumbrated by Melanie Klein.

Williams' personal involvement with psychotherapy is often cited in scholarly discussion of his work.²² The playwright saw a number of psychotherapists during his life, including the Freudian practitioner Dr. Lawrence Kubie (Williams, *Memoirs* 238), and an "analyst [from] the Karen Horney [object relations] school, named Ralph Harris" (206). Notably, Williams was ambivalent about psychotherapy, though in his 1965 interview with John Gruen, the playwright identifies a distinction between Freudian and object relations psychoanalysis that suggests a degree of knowledge of the subject matter: "I don't know if I'm crazy about Freud or Karen Horney, or any of them" (qtd. in Albert Devlin 119). Indeed, in a 1958 interview with Mike Wallace, Williams states that "I do a lot of reading and I use analytical terms" (qtd. in Devlin 54). In the same interview, he goes on to explain the term "infantile omnipotence" as "the root of most anger . . . in the world" (55), which is a notably Kleinian perspective.²³ As I discuss at some length in my three chapters on Williams' work, Klein posits the mother's relationship with her infant to be the primary and enduring foundation of normative adulthood. Robert Genter in fact attributes the popularization of psychology in the postwar period as "[o]riginating in the work of Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott" (152),²⁴ both object relations theorists who place the "mother-child relationship, [at] the cornerstone of [the child's] development" (152). I argue that Williams' characterization of motherhood, specifically the spectral mothers of *The Glass Menagerie*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, and *Kingdom of the Earth*, enact a critique of the underlying libidinal economy of a Kleinian paradigm. Moreover, read in tandem, these plays indicate Williams' increasing interest in Klein's theories of psychosexual development. From his many re-writings of the underlying script of *Menagerie*, to *Suddenly* and its related works, and finally to *Kingdom*, Williams delves

ever deeper into the exigencies of Klein's theories of the mother and by so doing reveals the subject position of mother to be an increasingly gothic construction. In the end, Williams' interrogation of Kleinian psychoanalysis exposes the devastating consequences to both mother and son that adherence to this cultural script dictates.

The first chapter of my section on Williams examines Amanda Wingfield, the highly acclaimed fictional mother from one of Williams' best-received plays, *The Glass Menagerie*. Set in mid 1930s urban St. Louis, *Menagerie* re-enacts the young adult memories of Tom Wingfield in his final days before leaving his family home. In *Menagerie*, Amanda is a manifestation of the spectral mother that emerges out of Klein's theory of an infant's development, and as such occupies an untenable subject position in the world of the play. In accordance with a Kleinian script, Amanda is characterized both as primary libidinal object as well as an object whose sexuality is always already disavowed. Amanda must exist in a libidinal space of not now, in spectral phantasy. Moreover, as the very premise of *Menagerie* as a "memory" play reveals, Klein's paradoxical demands not only preclude maternal subjectivity, but also render stable subjectivity for the child an impossibility. Haunted by a Kleinian-inspired spectral mother that the child cannot escape, the potentiality of the son's maternally determined schizoid neurosis is unavoidable. In large measure, then, *Menagerie* critiques Kleinian discourse, and, as I point out in my chapter, the play thereby anticipates later feminist critiques of object relations theories. Although the Kleinian-inspired mother of Williams' drama--like the mother of Kleinian discourse--is denied subjectivity, she nonetheless emerges as a force of creative subversion that disrupts the cultural fantasy of a normative nuclear

family. Though Tom is the narrator and protagonist of this familial drama, it is Amanda, I argue, who steals the show.

The second chapter of my Williams section takes up a discussion of Violet Venable, the maternal figure from another of Williams' most successful plays, *Suddenly Last Summer*. Described as the "most shocking drama" in Williams' oeuvre (Hurley 392), *Suddenly* enacts a battle between an emotionally devastated Catharine, former travelling companion to an already deceased Sebastian, and Violet, Sebastian's aging yet formidable mother, to determine whose version of Sebastian's life and death will stand. Though Violet is physically present on stage in "real" time, her characterization, like Amanda's from *Menagerie*, relies upon a Kleinian-inspired script. In the world of the play, Violet, like Amanda, is constituted as a phantasmagoric figure. Violet's maternity is only a memory, a memory contingent upon a gruesome recitation of the cannibalistic murder of her son. Williams' characterization of this fictional mother thereby points to the degree to which psychoanalysis and the gothic are imbricated discourses in relation to motherhood. In *Suddenly*, Williams reveals that the psychoanalytic demands on mothers within Klein's theory of the child's paranoid schizoid stage of development prescribe a sadomasochistic maternal identity with horrifying consequences for both mother and son. As with *Menagerie*, there is a subversive value here: *Suddenly* identifies a prescribed queerness within the exigencies of Klein's heteronormative domestic paradigm that works to destabilize the very normativity that the discourse wishes to enforce. That being said, *Suddenly*'s subversive value relies on an extremely problematic eroticized otherness that perpetuates a racist discourse. This kind of celebratory appropriation is also evident in "Desire and the Black Masseur" (1948), Williams' short story with a number of links to

Suddenly, which I also briefly discuss in this chapter. In the end, both *Suddenly* and “Desire” expose an eroticized and institutionalized violence within normative psychoanalytic discourse, but neither work is extricated from reductive and racist conception of otherness.

The final chapter of my section on Williams discusses the Kleinian-inspired maternal Miss Lottie, from *Kingdom of Earth*, one of Williams’ least considered characters from one of his least considered plays. In the play, a dying Lot returns home with his new wife, Myrtle, to regain control of the ancestral home from his half-brother, Chicken. Although the already dead Miss Lottie is the subject of discussion throughout much of the play, she is situated, like Amanda from *Menagerie* and Violet from *Suddenly*, within a phantasmagoric space. In the play, Miss Lottie’s spectral appearance is made manifest through Lot’s ecstatic drag performance of his mother in the final moments of his life. Lot’s schizophrenic characterization, as I discuss, consciously enacts an underlying potential of filial mental instability that preoccupied Klein’s own writing. In terms of Williams’ play, Miss Lottie emerges on stage as a phantasy-turned-nightmare whose spectral presence demands, and obtains, the complete erasure of her son, Lot. Read through the lens of Williams’ significant ambivalence in regards to Kleinian theories of subjectivity, *Kingdom* operates as Williams’ final dramatic indictment of object relation theories. At the same time, Williams’ play characteristically reveals a subversive value in the Kleinian-inspired mother. The very mechanisms of desire upon which Klein’s normative frame relies leave open a space through which to imagine the ecstasy of a longed-for annihilation into the wholeness of the desired, and all powerful, maternal Other. From Amanda in *Menagerie*, to Violet in *Suddenly*, and finally to the already dead

Miss Lottie of *Kingdom*, these spectral mothers haunt Williams' narratives, and emphasize how the conservative development of Freud's theories through the Kleinian mother encodes psychoanalytic discourse within its own non-normative undoing.

The final section of my thesis considers two works of Shirley Jackson, *The Bird's Nest* and *The Haunting of Hill House*, and thereby marks a return to the Freudian mother and the conclusion of my study. Whereas the Southern authors in the first two sections of my study focus on the spectral mothers of sons, Jackson's New England narratives take up a consideration of the mothers of daughters. Simply stated, I conclude my study with a consideration of Jackson's work because the geographic and gender distinctions between Jackson's work and the work of O'Connor and Williams allow me to extend my study beyond the Southern mothers of sons. Jackson's work, like the work of the other authors in my study, situates the spectral mother at the very centre of its narrative. Unlike O'Connor and Williams', however, Jackson's work has received much less scholarly attention. Writing in 2005, Angela Hague notes that with the exception of "The Lottery" and *The Haunting of Hill House*, Jackson's fiction "is rarely read or written about today" (73). Indeed, though Jackson wrote six novels and one hundred and ten short stories, and is considered "one of the most prominent female writers of the 1950s" (Murphy 3), scholarship on her work is limited. In part, critical reticence to discuss Jackson's work is attributed to the author's interest in domestic fiction, specifically her numerous articles in *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies' Home Journal* (11). Betty Friedan specifically chastises Jackson in *The Feminine Mystique* for helping to prop up stereotypes of women in the 1950s (52-3). In other words, Jackson was not considered a serious writer, and certainly not one whose work contributed to a feminist agenda. Significantly, however, in both *The*

Bird's Nest and *The Haunting of Hill House*, Jackson constructs a spectral mother that operates, like the spectral mothers of O'Connor's and Williams' narratives, as a direct attack on psychoanalytic constructions of maternity.

As is the case with O'Connor and Williams, Jackson's interest in psychological discourse is well documented. Jackson saw a psychiatrist for her "acute anxiety" (Hague 76) and, Judy Oppenheimer notes somewhat sarcastically, was deeply involved with a "determinedly sophisticated bunch; they spouted Freud, they argued Marx" (68).

Alongside Jackson's spouse, Stanley, the author attended seminars at the home of Syracuse University's Leonard Brown in which the group discussed American literature and criticism (73). Although Jackson purportedly "let [Stanley] do the talking . . . Freud came up a lot, as part of criticism" (73). Clearly, Jackson was listening. Jackson employs Freud's Oedipal script in her spectral mothers in order to offer a knowing critique of Freud's normative drama. In the end, Jackson's depiction of the spectral mother of Freud's thinking pushes the critique of psychoanalytic thinking offered by O'Connor's and Williams' texts to its terminal point. As *Bird's Nest* and *Hill House* reveal, psychoanalytic discourse prescribes a maternal figure who is not only denied subjectivity, but is nothing less than monstrous.

My conclusion opens with a discussion of Jackson's *The Bird's Nest*, a narrative that recounts the story of Elizabeth Richmond, a young woman who suffers from multiple personality disorder. Jackson's narrative is based on a well-known late nineteenth-century case study conducted by psychologist Dr. Morton Prince. As with the subject of Prince's text, Miss Christine Beauchamp, the mother of the protagonist of Jackson's text is already dead when the narrative opens. Elizabeth's doctor, Dr. Wright, like Dr. Prince, suggests

that the key to his patient's stability--the assimilation of her various selves into one coherent being--lies in her coming to terms with her mother's death. Throughout Jackson's narrative, Elizabeth's mother is presented as an ambivalent and enduring force in Elizabeth's subjectivity. In other words, Elizabeth's mother, like the mothers depicted in O'Connor's and Williams' work, is relegated to a phantasmagoric space. The underlying script of Jackson's narrative relies upon the incestuous and triadic nature of the Freud's Oedipal schema. Jackson's text suggests that the sexualized maternal figure prescribed by Freud's normative discourse is a figure that threatens the female child's stability through the Freudian-inspired bonds between mother and daughter. Although motherhood in Jackson's text, as is the case in mid-century America, is intimately linked with madness, *Bird's Nest* reveals Freud's spectral mother as the origin of psychosis.

My study concludes with a consideration of Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, a text recognized as the "most influential ghost story since *The Turn of the Screw*" (Murphy 10). In the narrative, Jackson tells the story of Eleanor Vance, a young woman with psychic abilities who is invited to join a scientific study of the haunted Hill House. As is the case with the spectral mother of *Bird's Nest*, Eleanor's mother is already dead when the narrative opens, but it is clear that a Freudian-inspired spectral maternal figure haunts Eleanor's psyche. Throughout the text, Jackson invokes and enacts Freud's Oedipal complex in relation to mothers and daughters in order to explore the horror of an underlying incestuous desire that troubles Freud's normative schema. In *Hill House*, Eleanor, discovers that the "motherhouse" is in full command of the Law of the Father and has the power to bar entrance to heteronormative maturation (156). At the same time, Jackson's representation of maternal power is characterized by ambivalence in that the

subject position of mother is associated with disease and psychosexual instability throughout her text. As in *Bird's Nest*, Jackson's enactment of a Freudian script in *Hill House*, to borrow from Wyatt Bonikowski's commentary on Jackson's work, "exposes the inequity and powerlessness of women's lives in the mid-twentieth century by transforming domestic spaces into gothic nightmares" (67). From the instability first identified in my discussion of O'Connor's spectral mothers, to the undoing of psychoanalytic constructions of maternity in Williams' work, Jackson's narratives explode the psychoanalytically informed spectral mother to nearly postmodern extremes. The Freudian-inspired mother, Jackson's texts confirms, promises a lack of coherent subjectivity for mother and child. Motherhood, as constructed by Freud and his followers, is a "gothic nightmare[]" in which the only possible resolution is found in annihilation for all.

Spectral Maternity as Cultural Nightmare

Though the fictional mothers considered in my study are mid-twentieth-century creations, as a study of mothers, my thesis participates in a contemporary fascination in Western literary culture with all things maternal. Susan Staub comments in her 2007 text, *The Literary Mother*, "Not even taking into account the numerous scholarly treatments, the last five years have witnessed a flurry of best sellers on the subject" (2). Mothers, Elizabeth Podnieks contends, "are suddenly everywhere and their influence is everywhere felt" (4). Podnieks attributes this current-day cultural interest in mothers to the "com[ing] of age" of a baby boom generation in the United States (4). Shaped in large measure by Freud's view of the mother as the foundation of normative psychosexual development, motherhood in a heteronormative and paternalistic America remains an object of cultural

scrutiny. While it is not surprising that motherhood attracts a high degree of interest, the degree to which the mid-century mother continues to inform current-day thinking of mothers is startling. As Podnieks argues, “Mass media praises and vilifies mothers, keeping them under constant surveillance and judging them according to the extent to which they adhere to ideologies of good motherhood” (14). Jacqueline Rose, in her review of several current books on mothers, states that in current texts on maternity,

mothers always fail: the point of most of the writing I have mentioned so far is to make that not catastrophic but normal, to allow failure to be seen as part of the task. But in so far as mothers are seen as the fons et origo of the world, there is nothing easier than to make social deterioration look like something which it’s the sacred duty of mothers to prevent (a socially upgraded version of the tendency in families to blame mothers for everything). (Rose, *London* 19)²⁵

The idea of the mother as “fons et origo of the world” is at the centre of spectral constructions of maternity. From its origin in Freud’s thinking, to the developments of later theorists such as Melanie Klein, and Carl Jung, the psychoanalytically crafted spectral mother continues to fuel our interest in, our suspicion of, and our obsession with mothers. Steven Bruhm explains in his discussion of contemporary gothic fiction that “viewed through the lens of psychoanalysis [the gothic] . . . registers a crisis in personal history” that relates to the subject’s unending cycle of loss and re-identification with a lost object (“Contemporary” 268). The twentieth-century subject, the post Freudian subject, is characterized by his or her inability to overcome infantile experiences of loss. For Bruhm, this “history of repetition . . . constitutes a sense of trauma” that is integral to

“understand[ing] the contemporary gothic and why we crave it” (268). And it is this trauma of repetitive loss that delineates the spectral mother. Each of the authors in my study identifies the mother in a post-Freudian world to be a gothic construction because they are always and only a placeholder of the Child’s trauma. The individual mother is erased from O’Connor’s, Williams’, and Jackson’s texts so that her spectral presence may “register” the mother’s role in the “crisis” of the child’s “personal history.” The subject position of mother is thus rendered monstrous. As David Punter notes, “Etymologically speaking, the monster is something to be shown, something that serves to demonstrate [. . .] and to warn” (263). Spectral mothers in the works I study are depositories of cultural trauma and anxiety, and so serve as a “warn[ing]” and a “demonstrat[ion]” of the horrifying exigencies of psychoanalytically informed mid-century motherhood.

Notes

¹ Eric Savoy, in his Lacanian reading of “Gothic verbal figures,” notes: “[I]t is that very struggle to give the Real a language that singularly shapes the American Gothic as broadly symptomatic of cultural restlessness, the fear of facing America’s darkly pathological levels” (169). See also Michelle Masse, and Steven Bruhm (“Contemporary”).

² Marta Caminero-Santangelo views this “turn to a science of individual psychology” as a cultural attempt to come to terms with a “bewildering and frightening” world (53). See also Jason W. Stevens (2), and David Savran (*Communists* 7).

³ For example, see Jerrold Hogle (Introduction 5-7), Robert Miles (2-3), and Savoy (163).

⁴ The gothic has a long-standing association with the maternal figure. As George Haggerty notes, “Gothic drama began with the imagination and peculiar fantasies of Horace Walpole[’s] *The Mysterious Mother*, his lurid and underrated tale of incest and murder, in 1768” (84).

⁵ Ruth Bienstock Anolik offers a useful overview of critics who connect the absent mother trope in gothic fiction to filial psychological development (30).

⁶ See Fred Botting, Teresa Goddu, and Toni Morrison.

⁷ See Mary Bendel-Simso, Anolik, Hogle, and Miles.

⁸ See Faye Ringel (14-20), and Lawrence Buell (351-70).

⁹ As Andrew Dunar notes, “In the fifties alone, the gross national product nearly doubled, from \$285 billion to \$500 billion, and most other economic indicators experienced similar growth” (167). GI Bills allowed Veterans to pursue secondary education, which, Dunar explains, “provid[ed] an educated workforce that formed the basis of the expansion of U.S.-based multinational corporations” (168). These higher paying jobs, along with guaranteed mortgages and tax benefits for Veterans, helped to fuel a sixty percent increase in consumer spending that in turn strengthened the American economy (May 165-9). Yet, not all Americans were convinced that American economic success could be sustained. With the end of governmental wartime spending, Dunar suggests, “many Americans feared that the end of the war would bring economic decline and a slide back into Depression conditions” (3). Substantial increases in the national debt, alongside a number of labour strikes in key industries in the years immediately following the war increased these concerns (4-7).

¹⁰ There was a great deal of international tension in the postwar period, which led to a number of political and military conflicts on the world stage, including the Korean War. Dunar offers a broad discussion of American involvement in post World War II international conflicts (125–66).

¹¹ Many commentators note O’Connor’s refusal to engage in discussions of race. For example, see Ralph Wood (66), and Sally Fitzgerald (*Flannery*, xvii-xix).

¹² This mid-century turn to conservative gender roles, as part of shoring up the “social fabric” that Deborah Weinstein discusses (4), was in large measure economically motivated. As Marta Caminero-Santangelo comments, many veterans who returned from war “rushed to seek stability in an idealized image of domesticity, [and so] women’s wartime occupation of traditionally male jobs need[ed] to be suppressed in the service of male employment and stable, secure, already nostalgic vision of family life” (53).

¹³ As Stephanie Coontz notes, “in his famous ‘kitchen debate’ with Nikita Khrushchev in 1959, Richard Nixon asserted that the superiority of capitalism over communism was embodied not in ideology or military might but in the comforts of the suburban home, ‘designed to make things easier for our women’” (28).

¹⁴ Dunar discusses the “common stereotype” of “conformity” in the 1950s in relation to “the cookie-cutter ‘Organization man,’ . . . rows of identical boxes in the housing tracts of suburbia, . . . corporate research teams that suppressed individuality, . . . [and] mass consumerism that led everyone to follow fads and fashion trends” (2). Notably, Dunar contests the validity of this stereotype, and points to counter-cultural figures such as the Beats and Elvis Presley as evidence of cultural diversity (2).

¹⁵ The frequency and severity of domestic violence in the postwar period is difficult to accurately measure. As Coontz notes, “Wife battering was not even considered a ‘real’ crime by most people. Psychiatrists in the 1950s, following Helene Deutsch, ‘regarded the battered woman as a masochist who provoked her husband into beating her’” (35). Coontz points to the “only partly humorous diatribes of *Playboy* magazine . . . against ‘money-hungry’ gold diggers or lazy ‘parasites’ trying to trap men into commitment” as evidence of misogyny directed towards women (37).

¹⁶ Coontz chronicles a number of ways in which women were oppressed in the 1940s and 1950s America: “All women, even seemingly docile ones, were deeply mistrusted. They were frequently denied the right to serve on juries, convey property, make contracts, take out credit cards in their own name, or establish residence. . . Women were excluded from several professions, and some states even gave husbands total control over family finances” (32).

¹⁷ As Eugene Meyer comments in the Foreward to Strecker’s text, “Dr. Strecker pulled no verbal punches in indicting the doting ‘mom’ for her sins of commission and omission against her children and therefore against the nation” (5).

¹⁸ Sarah Gordon comments that a “theological approach has dominated O’Connor scholarship” since 1957 when she “came out” as a Catholic (*Flannery* 34). Gordon also mentions the numerous biographical readings that connect O’Connor’s representations of the grotesque body with the author’s struggles with ill health (“Literary”).

¹⁹ In her letters, O’Connor repeatedly characterizes Jung’s vision as “dangerous” for the Church (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Habit* 152,362,491). That being said, in one letter she notes that Jung’s ideas “throw light momentarily on some of the dark places in my brain”

(*Habit* 90). O'Connor was equally ambivalent about Freud. On the one hand she asserts that she opposes Freud "tooth and toenail" (qtd. in *Habit* 110), yet in the same letter she admits that she had "certain uses for him" (110). As she writes in a later letter, "I really have quite a respect for Freud when he isn't made into a philosopher" (491).

²⁰ I disagree, then, with Susan Srigley's assertion that O'Connor's "appreciation of [Jungian texts] is marginal (145). Notably, Paul Wakemann, in his 2009 PhD Dissertation, discusses O'Connor's knowledge of Jungian conceptions in relation to *Wise Blood* and a number of O'Connor's short stories.

²¹ See Gordon (*Obedient*), Christina Bieber Lake, and James M. Mellard ("Flannery" and "Framed").

²² See Donald Spoto (219), Robert Gross (246), and Bruhm ("Blond" 98-9).

²³ Freud links "the principle of the 'omnipotence of thoughts'"--a patient's belief that she/he can control her/his environment--to a childhood narcissism that finds its origins in the "magical" beliefs of "primitive" people (13:85; 86-7). In contrast, within Klein's theories the term specifically references a mechanism of object relations. In a discussion of the processes of a paranoid-schizoid stage of development, Klein notes: "For instance, there is a feeling of omnipotence in the infant which makes both his hating and his loving impulses appear extremely powerful to him" (*Envy* 273). For Klein, and as reflected in Williams' use of the term, "infantile omnipotence" is directly linked to aggressive behaviour in adults (*Love* 350-3).

²⁴ Donald Winnicott aided in the popularization of object relation theories through his participation in a series of weekly radio broadcasts during the years 1940 to 1950. The

broadcast, Winnicott explained, was directed at the “Ordinary devoted mother and her baby” (1).

²⁵ Elizabeth Podnieks offers an excellent overview of current-day texts on mothers. She makes a direct link between conceptions of maternity in the postwar period with current-day prescriptions of mothering through the term “intensive mothering”:
“‘intensive mothering’ denotes the maternal ideology that took hold in the United States just before the Second World War and that has not eased its discursive grip as ‘a gendered model that advises mothers to expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money in raising their children’” (11). See also work being done by *The Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* at York University, and Andrea O’Reilly’s edited collection, *Mother Matters: Motherhood as Discourse and Practice*.

Section One: Flannery O'Connor's Catholic Nightmare: The Psychoanalytic Spectral Mother

Chapter Two

“Call me Momma now”:

The Counterfeit Mothers of Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*

Flannery O'Connor's first novel, *Wise Blood*, which met with mixed reviews when it was published in 1952, recounts the protagonist Hazel Motes' struggle with a Fundamentalist Protestant doctrine of sin and redemption. Set in mid-twentieth century Tennessee, in the novel Haze travels to the fictional town of Taulkinham to found “the church of truth without Jesus Christ Crucified” (51). To date, there has been no extended study of the mothers in *Wise Blood*. This is perhaps not surprising given O'Connor's editing out of mothers from early drafts of her novel (Gordon, “Literary” 292).¹ Sarah Gordon suggests, “O'Connor was experimenting with issues of female power in the drafts of *Wise Blood*” (292), but that the author eliminates these “issues” from her final text. In contrast to Gordon, I argue that “issues of female power” continue to inform *Wise Blood*. Although Haze's mother is dead when the narrative opens, *Wise Blood* is in fact haunted with spectral mothers whose presence in the narrative reflects an intertextual engagement with psychoanalytic theory, religious dogma, and gothic convention (as that convention is articulated in Jerrold Hogle's discussion of the gothic “ghost of the counterfeit”). In *Wise Blood*, the Catholic O'Connor exploits the subversive potential of the close relationship between Freudian-inspired theories of subjectivity and gothic fiction in order to further her own ecclesiastical goals. Though, on the surface, *Wise Blood* presents Haze's struggles with the doctrines of Protestant Fundamentalism, the insistent return of spectral

mothers in the narrative reveals O'Connor's interest in an early mid-century Catholic theological debate that considered the spectral mother of Freud's Oedipal drama as a potentially efficacious site of rapport between Catholicism and psychoanalysis. In other words, though the tone of O'Connor's text is comic, O'Connor's intention for the novel, as she attests, is a "serious" one (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Mystery* 108).² As the final moments of *Wise Blood* confirm, for O'Connor, the spectral mother as crafted by a Freudian script is a site evacuated of spiritual possibility. The novel thereby suggests that attempts to conjoin Freudian thought and Catholic beliefs are substantially flawed, and so the mother's presence in the novel operates as a site of ideological contest, not accord. O'Connor's text fully participates in the appropriation of the cultural role of mother by Freudian and Catholic doctrine in the interest of the author's theological agenda. Ultimately, through her characterization of spectral mothers in *Wise Blood*, O'Connor's text reveals that it is the religious and psychoanalytic cultural discourses of motherhood that are truly horrifying.

"watching him through the trees": The Seeing Mother

At the opening of *Wise Blood*, Haze returns home to Eastrod from a short stint in the army only to find his ancestral home abandoned, and the members of his Fundamentalist Protestant family all dead, and so he decides to travel to Taulkinham "to do some things I never have done before" (7). These "things," as the narrative proceeds, include having sex with a prostitute, pedophilia, murder, self-mutilation and death. Though not the obvious subjects of a text that is considered "one of the most significant religious novels in American literary history" (Kreyling 3),³ Haze's journey has a theological basis. Haze, as he frantically explains to a gathered crowd early in the novel,

desires “to preach a new church--the church of truth without Jesus Christ Crucified” (51). Scholars of O’Connor’s novel such as Gilbert Muller suggest that Haze’s characterization as an “obsessed” protagonist “driven by his demons” codes him as a grotesque figure (23). O’Connor’s grotesques, Muller argues, often function in the service of O’Connor’s theological aims.⁴ Haze’s journey also gestures to a Freudian Oedipal narrative. Haze, as many scholars of the novel discuss, is crafted as an Oedipal figure, and a number of psychoanalytic readings of O’Connor’s work focus on the degree to which Haze’s journey is framed as an Oedipal struggle.⁵ Yet, James Mellard, in his insightful Lacanian reading of O’Connor’s work, notes that although “[v]arious critics have taken psychoanalytic approaches to O’Connor’s fiction . . . what surprises one, given the nature of [O’Connor’s] work, is how infrequently it is taken” (“Flannery” 628).⁶ Mellard suggests that the “obvious reason” for the critical reticence to engage with the psychoanalytic aspects of O’Connor’s work stems from the fact that “O’Connor insisted readers read otherwise” (“Flannery” 628). While early critical readings of O’Connor’s work employ either a theological or psychoanalytic lens, my work on O’Connor’s characterization of mothers builds upon later criticism that, as Irwin Streight suggests, “has been working the territory between these two early polar readings of her art and vision” (85).⁷ I read the spectral mother of O’Connor’s fiction as a site in which the religious and psychological lines of debate in twentieth-century America converge.

The theological underpinning of O’Connor’s constructions of maternity is especially relevant given that in the years following World War II membership in organized religions increased dramatically across the United States. As Andrew Dunar states, “In the fifties, church membership and the proportion of Americans claiming

religious affiliation reached the highest levels they would achieve in the century” (181). Catholicism, Patrick W. Carey notes, participated in this movement, “growing more in the period 1945 to 1965 than it had at any other period in the twentieth century” (93). In general terms, the historically Protestant American population viewed the growth in Catholicism as a threat to the nation. Writing in 1954, George Shuster suggests that a Catholic new to America will “learn that the Church to which he belongs is an object of fear, suspicion, resentment, and more or less abrasive jocosity” (3). Much of this Protestant concern, as William P. Clancy notes, related to popular conceptions of the Catholic Church as an “authoritarian institution that threatened American freedoms granted under the Constitution by uniting Church and State” (11). Indeed, in Paul Blanshard’s hugely popular 1949 text, *American Freedom and Catholic Power*, the author argues, “In many states our citizens have been compelled simultaneously to defend their intellectual freedom against Catholic censorship, their school system against clerical sabotage, and their public treasuries against financial raids” (viii).⁸ Though not all Protestants agreed with Blanshard’s views, the success of his text, alongside the emergence in the period of Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State (POAU), suggests that large numbers of Americans ascribed to anti-Catholic sentiment. Relevant to my study is the fact that Catholic conceptions of the Virgin Mary became a flashpoint for debate. For Blanchard, the Pope’s 1950 declaration of the Virgin Mary’s Assumption, which I discuss later in this chapter, “widened the gap between the [Catholic] Church and all those branches of modern Christendom” (260).⁹ In terms of O’Connor’s *Wise Blood*, as well as *The Violent Bear it Away*, the author’s constructions of maternity not only challenge the theological efficacy of psychoanalytic

thought, but also participate in mid-century religious debates by highlighting Catholic beliefs in the near-deity status of the Virgin Mary. Moreover, many Catholics in the period resisted attempts by some in the Church toward what Carey describes as “intercreedal cooperation for the sake of the common good” (99). O’Connor’s attention to the Virgin Mary furthers a specifically Catholic discourse, and thereby suggests O’Connor’s resistance to mid-century ecumenical movements.¹⁰ The spectral mothers in both *Wise Blood* and *Violent* work to shore up Church dogma not only against psychoanalytically informed concepts of maternity, but also against Protestant influence and Catholics interested in “intercreedal cooperation.”

O’Connor, as indicated in critical work on the role of gender in the author’s texts, was a writer fully imbricated in the patriarchal society in which she wrote. For example, as Katherine Hemple Prown notes, “the strain of misogyny that runs throughout [O’Connor’s] work . . . makes the identification of O’Connor as a feminist problematic, if not impossible” (11).¹¹ However, despite O’Connor’s near vitriolic depictions of women, there is no critical consensus on the text’s depiction of gender roles. Marshall Bruce Gentry, for example, argues “the novel studies the ways in which women struggle mightily against the problems they face, and, more significantly, suggests the possibility that women can recover their ancient power, a power that approaches the Divine” (“Wise” 309). Gentry’s argument rests on the centrality of women to the underlying psychological impetus of the text.¹² Most relevant to my study is the fact that though O’Connor’s representation of gender, and her work’s potential misogyny, has been discussed, scholars have not yet considered the degree to which the spectral mothers of O’Connor’s text operate within a culturally specific intersection of Catholicism and

psychoanalysis. An examination of this intersection, however, can lead to a new recognition of O'Connor's use of religious and psychoanalytic discourse to interrogate each other. Specifically, throughout the narrative, O'Connor directs attention to the visual perspectives of her spectral mothers in order to highlight the very disparate visions of motherhood offered by Church doctrine and Freudian theories of sexual development.

The psychological drama of the Oedipal conflict, named so because of the "psychological truth" (16:331) Freud saw depicted in Sophocles' tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, has generated a complex theoretical discourse, much of it in opposition to Freud's views. As Debra A Modellmog explains, "A number of critics--from Freud's colleagues, Carl Jung and Alfred Adler, to feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir and Nancy Chodorow, to Marxists such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari--have formed a discordant chorus of opposition to Freud's theories of the family, and typically they have worked out this opposition within the Oedipus myth" (87).¹³ As stated in my introduction, in large measure the Oedipus complex reflects Freud's attempt to come to terms with the incestuous desire he perceived as a central feature of a child's relationship with his or her mother (16:331).¹⁴ In terms of the male child, according to Freud's heteronormative view, the son must move from an object-cathexis toward his mother to an identification with his father, a figure that the child, from its earliest moments, "wish[es] to get rid of . . . in order to take his place with his mother" (19:32). This transition, Freud suggests, is aided by the son's fear of the father's retribution, which is perceived as a threat of castration and death.

The mother in Freud's theory, as Madelon Sprengnether contends, "slipped to the margins of his consideration" (3); however, this same figure emerges as "a ghost, a

phantom” that troubles the stability of Freud’s theories (5). The spectral mother in Freud’s psychological drama is not simply a passive object of desire. As Sophocles’ Jocasta states: “Before this, in dreams too, as well as oracles, / many a man has lain with his own mother” (1041-2). The mother, in both Sophocles’ drama and Freud’s theory, recognizes her child’s desires. In fact, in order to ensure a normative resolution to the son’s sexual identity, the mother must first acknowledge her child’s desire, and then reject that desire through her role as an enforcer of the father’s rule. In a discussion of one particular patient, Freud suggests, “The boy’s mother has understood quite well that his sexual excitation relates to herself” (23:189). In Freud’s case study, the psychoanalyst notes:

At last [the boy’s] mother adopts the severest measures; she threatens to take away from him the thing he is defying her with. Usually, in order to make the threat more frightening and more credible, she delegates its execution to the boy’s father, saying that she will tell him and that he will cut the penis off. (23:189)

The paradox here is obvious. On the one hand, the mother is instrumental in ensuring the Father’s rule. On the other hand, the mother, as the knowing object of her son’s desire, poses the greatest threat to the Father’s rule. And, in keeping with Sophocles’ drama, Freud does recognize a mutually incestuous love between mother and son; however, for Freud this highly charged libidinal relationship is governed both by the mother’s role as mediator of the “unrestricted power” of the father and by her own sense of “satisfaction” (22:133). For Freud, a mother’s relationship with her son is “perfect”: “A mother is only brought unlimited satisfaction by her relation to a son; this is altogether the most perfect,

the most free from ambivalence of all human relationships” (22:133).¹⁵ The mother is not a desiring figure because, thanks to her son’s penis, her desire is completely satisfied. As Coppélia Kahn notes, in Freud’s thinking “[t]he mother gets total satisfaction from her child, and the child gets the same from its mother. Such merging of needs and desire Freud portrays as unambivalently benign for *both* mother and child” (83; emphasis in original). Though “portray[ed]” as “benign” by Freud, the sexualized spectral mother of Freud’s theories provides the basis of O’Connor’s scepticism of the efficacy of Freudian discourse for Catholic dogma. In Catholic mythology, Mary is not only virginal, but a figure of “grace” removed from the Original sin of sexual knowledge.¹⁶ In stark contrast, the mother of Freudian discourse is the always already satisfied site of primordial desire.

Though motherhood in Freud’s theories is characterized by troubling ambiguity, in the mid twentieth century, in the period that led up to O’Connor’s writing of *Wise Blood*, the Catholic Church began to examine the efficacy of psychoanalytic theories for its own patriarchal structures. Although, as Peter J.R. Dempsey explains, Catholic scholarship on Freudian theories dates from Roland Dalbiez’s work in the late 1930s and early 1940s, numerous writers, including Dempsey, took up the discussion of a possible “assimilat[ion] [of] the positive findings of psychoanalysis” within Catholic dogma well into the 1940s and into the early 1950s (116). On its face, Catholic interest in Freud’s theories seems antithetical, given that Freud was himself an atheist who saw religion as “the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity . . . [arising] out of the Oedipus complex” (21:43). For Freud, the Christian idea of Original sin was a reflection of the patricidal guilt that stemmed from the primordial familial contest between father and son for sexual access to the mother.¹⁷ Yet, these two discourses were not entirely opposed. As with the

Original sin of Christian mythology, the “sin” of incestuous desire and the guilt associated with patricide, Freud argues, cannot be avoided: “Even if a man has repressed his evil impulses into the unconscious and would like to tell himself afterwards that he is not responsible for them, he is nevertheless bound to be aware of this responsibility as a sense of guilt whose basis is unknown to him” (16: 331). Mirrored by “the nameless unplaced guilt that was in [Haze]” (O’Connor *Wise* 59), the guilt that results from an incestuous desire for the mother frames Freud’s, and as I argue, O’Connor’s, heteronormative script.

Freud viewed deification of the paternal God of Christian mythology as a reaction to Oedipal feelings of guilt (21:43); nonetheless, Catholic theologians in the mid twentieth century saw the mother at the centre of Freud’s Oedipal schema as a site that might be exploited in the interest of the Church. In reference to Freud’s “Three Essays on Sexuality,” Dempsey outlines the importance of mother’s “joy[ful]” and patient role in successfully nursing, weaning, and toilet training the infant during the “prerational period of a child’s life” (108). Not only is the mother’s role critical for normative development, but in regard to the “delicate” matter of sex education, Dempsey notes, “[t]he general run of parents still tend to fob the child off with the stork story” (116); however, “in this respect Catholic parents possess an advantage” (116). According to Dempsey, Catholic children, as opposed to their Protestant peers, have an intimate understanding of the importance of the mother-child relationship via a distinctly Catholic focus on the Virgin Mary. Catholic parents, Dempsey suggests, teach “[t]heir children as soon as they can speak . . . the prayer the Hail Mary and are told about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem”

(116). Dempsey goes on to stress the centrality of the mother in his discussion of Freud's Oedipal complex (120):

analytic investigation throws a new light on the all-importance of mothering and motherhood, and the enormous importance of mature mother love, maternal virtue, and self-sacrifice. It reveals the significance of the tasks that mothers undertake and how devotion and affection are rewarded by the healthy development of the children . . . a wise, enduring, self-sacrificing parental love from which Christianity offers a prototype in the parental love of Mary and Joseph for the child Jesus, which it sanctifies by grace, and rewards with the blessing of happiness and of peace. (120)

Dempsey does point to Joseph's paternal role; however, as Michael P. Carroll argues, "the Roman Catholic emphasis upon Mary is one of the things that most distinguishes the Roman Catholic Church from other Christian groups"(xi). Besides God the Father, Mary, not Joseph, is the central figure in the story of Christ's birth.

In contrast to Protestant doctrine, Catholic dogma, Carroll explains, declared Mary to be a Blessed figure, "the most important of all supernatural beings apart from God himself" (19). Like the spectral mother of Freudian drama, then, in Catholic theology the Virgin Mary was viewed as instrumental in shoring up the authority of the Father. In the late 1940s, in the period during which O'Connor crafted *Wise Blood*, the Church made a number of moves to distinguish the centrality of the mother in its doctrine.¹⁸ Writing in 1949, Jean Guitton notes, "The Church calls it a *year of Mary*, and bids her children offer their tribute to the Blessed Virgin, particularly in respect of her Motherhood of Grace" (vii-viii; emphasis in original).¹⁹ As a self-identified "Catholic

novelist,” O’Connor’s writerly theological interest was understandably drawn to psychoanalytic doctrines of the cultural role of mother (qtd. in Fitzgerald *Mystery* 143).²⁰ And, in *Wise Blood*, O’Connor does indeed populate her text with numerous incarnations of spectral mothers that gesture to the primordial mother of Freud’s theories. However, in opposition to those writers of O’Connor’s time who attempt to find common ground between Catholicism and Freudian psychoanalysis, O’Connor’s portrayals of the seeing and sexualized mothers in *Wise Blood* highlight the impossibility of a psychoanalytic and Catholic concordance.

The narrative of *Wise Blood* is a “journey,” Andre Bleikasten suggests, one that reflects an Oedipal “backward journey . . . to the mother” (149). Indeed, Haze’s mother’s characterization generates direct allusions to Freud’s Oedipal framework through her association in O’Connor’s narrative with a woman Haze encounters when he attends a carnival with his father, when the pubescent Haze was ten years old. In the narrative, Haze, unbeknownst to his father, secretly follows the elder Motes into a “SINsational” and “EXclusive” exhibition (56; emphasis in original). Once inside the room, Haze sees the group of men “looking down into a lowered place where something white was lying, squirming a little, in a box lined with black cloth. For a second he thought it was a skinned animal and then he saw it was a woman” (58). In this gothic moment of “grotesque spectacle” (Lake 63), as in Freud’s Oedipal drama, father and son share a vision of the woman’s sexualized body, and Haze’s father jokingly states: ““Had one of themther built into ever’ casket . . . be a heap ready to go sooner”” (58). Male sexual desire and death intersect, which is a convergence that reflects Freud’s thinking. Specifically, in Freudian discourse, “woman” (123), as Sprengnether explains, “is

synonymous with ‘mother,’ whose aspect changes according to one’s stage in life until it is identical with that of death” (123). In his discussion of the death instinct as the subject’s insistent drive toward his or her “inorganic origin” (5), Freud “equates the body of the mother with the ultimate undoing of masculine striving and achievement” (5). The spectral mother of Freud’s imagining threatens subjectivity with the promise of a longed-for annihilation. The psychoanalytically imagined mother is thereby a gothic creation in that she is a figure of both desire and fear, and life and erasure. Indeed, as Jerrold E. Hogle notes, the return of a “hidden maternal origin” that “patriarchal enclosures” attempt to “contain and even bury” is a recurring trope in gothic fiction (*Cambridge* 11). The gothic is quite consistently, Hogle notes, “about the connection of abject monster figures to the primal and engulfing morass of the maternal” (10). In the carnival scene, the “abject monster figure” is the spectral mother of Freudian Oedipal schema.

O’Connor’s employment of the Oedipal narrative in this early scene is confirmed by the link between the sexualized female body and death via the coffin-like “box lined with black cloth” which is positioned in a “lowered place” (58). The dialogue is clearly misogynistic, as it identifies the naked body of a woman as a “squirming . . . skinned animal.”²¹ In terms of the scene’s Freudian aspects, Gordon comments, “[a] number of O’Connor critics have noted Haze’s obviously Freudian association of his mother with the forbidden flesh of the woman in the ‘coffin’ at the fair” (*Flannery* 117). For example, Frederick Asals, whose Freudian reading of *Wise Blood* I refer to throughout this chapter, writes, “When young Haze sees at the carnival a naked woman in a coffin, his Oedipal imagination substitutes the figure of his mother, thereby fusing sex, death, and his own

sense of sinfulness” (40). O’Connor is anything but subtle with respect to this Freudian-inspired allusion.

What has not been discussed, though, is the extent to which O’Connor’s attention to this gothic spectre within an Oedipal frame gestures to the author’s engagement with Freud’s ideas about the role of the Oedipal conflict in religious dogma. In an attempt to discern the meaning of a “colleague’s religious experience” (21:170), Freud suggests,

The sight of a woman’s dead body, naked or on the point of being stripped, reminded the young man of his mother. It roused in him a longing for his mother which sprang from his Oedipus complex, and this was immediately completed by a feeling of indignation against his father. . . [The boy’s] ideas of ‘father’ and ‘God’ had not yet become widely separated; so that his desire to destroy his father could become conscious as doubt in the existence of God. (21:171)

Here, Freud connects the boy’s Oedipal desire for his mother to a “feeling of indignation” against his father, which is in turn “displaced into the sphere of religion” and manifests in the boy’s skepticism toward God (171). Clearly, this narrative may be overlaid upon the trajectory of Haze’s journey from his early confrontation with the spectral mother at the fair to his all-consuming desire throughout *Wise Blood* to prove that “Nothing matters but that Jesus don’t exist” (50). In O’Connor’s narrative, like Freud’s, the ambivalence initiated by Oedipal conflict, an ambivalence directly associated with the spectral mother, is redirected onto a religious doctrinal dispute. In other words, the spectral mother of O’Connor’s narrative gestures to a Freudian-inspired intersection between sexuality and

theology that confirms the author's engagement with the Catholic and psychoanalytic debate.

Although Freud, as Sprengnether argues, attempts in his discussion of child sexuality to characterize the mother as "object rather than subject--the passive recipient of the son's libidinal urges" (2), the spectral mother of O'Connor's narrative plays a dynamic role in Haze's sexual and spiritual maturation. In the narrative, Haze remembers returning home after seeing the sexualized woman at the carnival and being immediately confronted by the sight of his own mother (59):

She was standing there straight, looking at him. He moved behind a tree and got out of her view, but in a few minutes, he could feel her watching him through the tree. He saw the lowered place and the casket again and a thin woman in the casket who was too long for it. Her head stuck up at one end and her knees were raised to make her fit. She had a cross-shaped face and hair pulled close to her head. He stood flat against the tree, waiting.

(58-9)

O'Connor's heavy-handed symbolism in this scene links a religious sense of morality with a Freudian-inspired masculine world of God the Father. From an anagogic perspective, the mother's job, as her "cross-faced" presence in front to the "washpot" suggests, is to keep her son "clean" in terms of Christian morality. This sense of the mother as a figure of moral rectitude leads Joanne Halleran McMullen to suggest that Haze's mother "is the kind of mother who will save the children of a degenerate society" (96). Through a Catholic lens, Haze's mother acts, like the Virgin Mary, as an enforcer of a divine Father's proscription against sin with an eye to redemption. And, in a penitential

act, Haze places rocks in his shoes and walks one and one-half miles (59-60).²² At the same time, as Lake notes, the overt Oedipal imagery of this scene, imagery in which Haze makes a “clear link . . . between death, sex, and his mother[,] make[s] this passage a favorite among psychoanalytic critics” (63).²³ Indeed, O’Connor herself made the comment in a letter to Ben Griffith, “Of course Hazel Motes is not an Oedipus figure but there are the obvious resemblances” (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Habit* 68). One of Haze’s “obvious resemblances” to Oedipus, as Gentry argues, is “[t]he connection between sin and sight implied by his mother’s question--‘What you seen’” (*Flannery* 133). Notably, several psychoanalytic scholars focus on Haze’s perception in this scene.²⁴ As Jacqueline Rose outlines in her extended study of vision within psychoanalytic narratives, “Freud often related the question of sexuality to that of visual representation” (*Sexuality* 227). Significantly, Freud, in his discussion of the Sandman from Hollmann’s *Nachtstucken*, argues that there is a “substitutive relation between the eye and the male organ” (17:231). Fear of losing one’s sight, fear of blindness, is linked in Freud’s discourse to Oedipal fears of castration (17:231). And, in O’Connor’s narrative, what Haze has “seen” leads to his metaphoric castration. Haze’s mother hits him with a stick, and proclaims, “‘Jesus died to redeem you’” (59). In this moment, Haze’s mother operates simultaneously in the “territory” of psychoanalysis and religion by acting as a mediator of the Christian and Freudian Father’s will.

Yet, the “gaze” of the post-carnival scene, as Mellard suggests, “rests with [Haze’s] mother, not Haze (“Framed” 52,53). In this moment, it is Haze’s mother’s sight, her “view,” her “looking at him . . . watching him through the trees,” that compels Haze’s association of the carnival woman to his own mother (59). In a move that mirrors the

mother-son relations of Jocasta and Oedipus, as well as the Freudian Oedipal family, the libidinal economy in *Wise Blood* relies on Haze's mother's recognition of her son's desire. O'Connor's interest in the maternal perspective of this scene conjures the notably gothic trope of the uncanny, a subject which Freud discusses at length. For Freud, the uncanny is "undoubtedly related to what is frightening--to what arouses death and horror" (17:219).²⁵ At the same time, the uncanny also manifests as "something which is secretly familiar . . . which has undergone repression and then returned from it" (17:245). In terms of O'Connor's narrative, Haze's mother's visual perception figuratively merges the body of the carnival women with the body of the mother in Haze's mind, which is followed by his metaphoric castration. Maternal seeing elicits the uncanny effect of the return of the repressed and subsequent death. Indeed, in his attempt to parse the term uncanny, Freud uses the example of "the female genital organs . . . the entrance to the forer *Heim* (home) of all human beings" (245). For Freud, and as enacted by O'Connor's narrative, the spectral mother is both "home" and annihilation; a site that must remain in the past in order for the subject to survive, but one that insistently returns to remind the child of the nearness of death. In other words, the spectral mother of the carnival scene not only operates as an enforcer of paternal rule, but also as a site through which O'Connor employs the gothic inflection of Freud's schema to highlight the Freudian spectral mother as a figure of death.

O'Connor's use of visual imagery as a harbinger of annihilation in the carnival scene anticipates later extensions of psychoanalytic thinking. In terms of the visual plane, fundamental to Freud's discussion, and to Jacques Lacan's later work, is the notion that "sexuality lies less in the content of what is seen than in the subjectivity of the viewer"

(Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality* 227). Lacan in fact suggests that the Self is constituted through a visual plane, the moment of one's mis-recognition of one's own Othered body in the mirror as an "ideal-I" (*Écrits* 76). This "ideal-I" is directly related to the child's perspective of the mother's desire. As Shirley Nelson Garner explains, "In Lacan's complex narrative of mirror relations, the child desires to be what the mother desires" (21). Central to the child's desire is an ambivalence that forever constitutes both Self and mother. On the one hand, Lacan suggests that this is a "jubilant" moment for the Self (*Écrits* 76). On the other hand, this "fantasy" self, as Rose notes, is based on an image of the Other in the mirror, and thereby "the very image which places the child divides its identity into two" (*Sexuality* 53). Throughout its life, the Self is plagued by a constitutional lack of wholeness. For Lacan, the pre-Oedipal mother, the image upon whom the child's "ideal-I" is constructed, figures as the "originary loss, of a lack in the subject, displaced and veiled by language but persisting as unconscious desire" (Garner 21). Subjectivity, in a Lacanian visual economy, is always a site of unfilled and unending desire and loss that forever relates to the mother and the self-as-mother's-object.

In *Wise Blood*, O'Connor draws attention to the mother as the seer, and Haze, the son, as one who is seen. Given a Freudian construct that locates subjectivity in the act of seeing, Haze is situated in O'Connor's narrative in the space of desired object, a position that in turn situates Haze's mother in the space of desiring subject. Clearly, as Lacan's many discussions of the role of sight in the constitution of Self suggest, the roles of subject and object in the visual plane do not maintain the stable positions I have suggested here. Within Lacanian discourse, Rose outlines, "the observing subject can become object of the look, and hence elided as subject of its own representation"

(*Sexuality* 196). Nonetheless, it is, in O'Connor's novel, a maternal "seeing" through which Haze's position as a desiring subject and a desired object is confirmed. I agree with Bleikasten, then, in that the "visual symbolism of the novel, the urge to see and the fear of being seen are recurrent motifs" (150), and that "the most remarkable feature is that the themes of sin and guilt, sex and death, all coalesce around the mother figure and its surrogates" (150). O'Connor's narrative focuses on the son's sexual desire as frequently noted, but, in line with the later work of Lacan, *Wise Blood* pays an equally critical attention, within a theological paradigm, to the desiring spectral mother that haunts Freud's narrative.

Through the trope of seeing, O'Connor's text identifies an ambivalent maternal presence. On the one hand, though Haze and his mother's theological position in the novel is Protestant, Haze's mother operates as a mediator of a divine Father, and thus gestures to O'Connor's interest in advancing the Catholic Church's doctrine of the critical role of the Virgin Mary. Haze's only belongings, after all, are a Bible and his mother's reading glasses: "the Bible was the only book he read. He didn't read it often but when he did he wore his mother's glasses" (O'Connor, *Wise* 17). Access to God through the Bible is symbolically mediated through maternal eyes. Stuart Burns suggests that Haze's mother's glasses "ultimately function more in a religious than a Freudian context" (128). Yet, the idea that Haze's mother will act as a mediator for God is troubled. Haze's mother's lens "tired his eyes so that after a short time he was always obliged to stop" (O'Connor, *Wise* 17). Read in Freudian terms, maternal sight leads to pain, to castration and death, and Haze is "obliged" to repress the desire that he sees through his mother's

vision. In other words, Haze's mother's vision seems to operate at cross-purposes, with its Freudian aspects obstructing its ability to function as a mediator for the Divine.

The solution to the enigma of Haze's mother's characterization lies in the dual nature of the mother in O'Connor's narrative, which reflects the figure's appropriation as a site of ideological contest. As O'Connor writes in her 1962 preface to the second edition of *Wise Blood*:

That belief in Christ is to some a matter of life and death has been a stumbling block for readers who would prefer to think it a matter of no great consequence. For them Hazel Motes' integrity lies in his trying with such vigor to get rid of the ragged figure who moves from tree to tree in the back of his mind. For the author Haze's integrity lies in his not being able to. (Preface, *Wise Blood*)

From a psychoanalytic perspective, the "ragged figure who moves from tree to tree in the back of [Haze's] mind" is the Freudian son who, in the course of normative development, attempts to evade acknowledgement of the incestuous desire that his mother sees in order to escape the Father's retribution. However, the visual perspective implied in this passage in relation to the narrative of *Wise Blood* shifts focus from the son to the mother. Haze, the figure "who moves from tree to tree" in *Wise Blood*, is a figure constituted through Haze's mother's visual perspective. She is the figure who "watch(es) . . . through the trees," and it is her perspective, O'Connor implies in the above passage, that is implanted in Haze's consciousness, in "the back of his mind." Clearly, this construct highlights the constitutional aspect of the seeing and sexualized spectral mother of Freudian drama. At the same time, Haze's "integrity," his spiritual redemption, relies upon his allegiance to

this maternal “watcher”; like the Virgin Mary of Catholic dogma, the spectral mother is a mediator of God. Notably, O’Connor’s prefatory comments point to a telling conflation between the mother and Christ. While in the preface to *Wise Blood* the “ragged figure” is identified as the object of the mother’s gaze, in the body of the novel this figure is identified as Christ: Haze saw “Jesus move from tree to tree in the back of his mind” (16). So, Haze’s mother’s characterization gestures simultaneously to the Freudian mother Haze must escape and the Christian mother as mediator to Christ who Haze must embrace. Gordon in fact responds to this paradox when she notes, “although the world of sexual psychology asserts that it is ‘normal’ for Haze to seek to reject his Oedipal attachment to his mother, Haze’s salvation will depend on his not being able to rid himself of his mother’s teaching of his fundamentalist legacy . . .” (*Flannery* 117).²⁶ This ambivalence depicted in the maternal subject of O’Connor’s narrative, I suggest, points to the author’s skepticism regarding the efficacy of the Freudian-inspired mother for a Catholic/psychoanalytic accord. In Freud’s theories, Sprengnether contends, Freud “associates women not only with the beginning of life but also with its end, so that the figure of the mother fuses with that of death” (5). In contrast, the Virgin Mary of Catholic theology is a primary mediator towards an eternal life. Throughout *Wise Blood*, O’Connor populates her text with numerous incarnations of the primordial seeing and sexualized mother from Freud’s drama in order to highlight the impossibility of a psychoanalytic and Catholic concordance. Moreover, O’Connor’s narrative reveals that, trapped by the dictates of cultural discourse, maternal subjectivity is an impossibility.

“Momma don’t mind if you aint’s a preacher”: *Wise Blood’s* Counterfeit

Maternity

In *Wise Blood*, Haze’s mother appears solely as a memory; she exists in the text as a ghostly presence, a signifier of the already evacuated space of the Mother within which O’Connor conducts her own examination of Freudian discourse. Hogle suggests that gothic fiction has long been “grounded in fakery” (“Counterfeit” 496), and spectral presences are most often “signifiers of signifiers,” ghostly signs that point to already faked originals (497). One of the advantages that this type of counterfeit image supplies, Hogle’s work suggests, is an “evacuation” (502) of meaning from the sign so that the sign may serve as a “major repository of the newest contradictions in and anxieties about the unknowable real in Western life that most need to be abjected by those who face them . . .” (500). As Hogle notes, for psychoanalytic theorists such as Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and Slavoj Žižek, the maternal body is the primordial space of abjection (499), and is thus an obvious site for a discussion of that which must be “abjected.” At the same time, for O’Connor, the feared “unknowable real” is decidedly spiritual and so, given her interest in mid-century Catholic theology, these “contradictions in and anxieties about” the “unknowable real” are linked, as they are in psychoanalytic discourse, to one’s relationship with the mother. In fact, reading the spectral mother as a specifically counterfeit image helps to explain O’Connor’s problematic erasing of maternal figures from her early drafts. In terms of O’Connor’s text, the mother must be erased from the plot so that the subject position of mother may act as a signifier of cultural discourse. It is useful to consider, then, the extent to which women in O’Connor’s novel, women such as Leora Watts, Sabbath Lily, and Mrs. Flood, operate as counterfeit maternal figures that

insistently, within the parameters of a Freudian script, point back to the originary spectral mother who is already established as a ghostly counterfeit. To borrow Hogle's phrasing, the spectral mothers of O'Connor's text are "the simulation of the simulacrum of the counterfeit" (509). In *Wise Blood*, the role of mother as defined by Freud is highlighted as a site of desire and death, a characterization that works to debunk the idea of the usefulness of Freudian thinking for the advancement of Catholic doctrine.

The genesis of *Wise Blood*'s opening chapter is a short story entitled "The Train" (1948), which was included in O'Connor's Master of Literary Art's thesis and published in the *Sewanee Review* (Gordon, *Flannery* 86). As in the published novel, in the short story Haze travels to Taulkinham, and on his journey is confronted by Mrs. Wall Ben Hosen (née Hitchcock), a woman who reminds him of his mother. The short story contains a number of elements that would later appear in the novel, which include references to Haze's mother's "shifferrobe" and the protagonist's coffin-like berth that inspires memories of his own mother's coffin as well as his fears that she might "fly out" of the enclosed space "to be satisfied" ("Train" 761). One of the obvious differences between the two texts relates to the characterization of Haze's mother, Annie Lou Jackson (754). Though already dead when each narrative opens, Ms. Jackson's character is developed in "The Train" through Haze's fond memories of her idiosyncrasies. In other words, Ms. Jackson is a substantially more developed character than the unnamed mother of *Wise Blood*. The de-subjectification of Haze's mother from the short story to the novel coincides with an increase in religious imagery throughout *Wise Blood*--anagogical elements that are entirely absent from the short story--and an intensification of

psychoanalytic allusion, as O'Connor turns her attention to a critique of the contemporary Catholic interest in Freud.²⁷

From a psychoanalytic perspective, *Wise Blood*'s opening setting on a train suggests a movement toward death. Specifically, Freud states in his discussion of the symbolism of dreams, "Dying is replaced in dreams by *departure*, by a *train journey*" (15:153; emphasis in original).²⁸ The importance of Haze's relationship to his mother in this Freudian-inspired journey toward death is established from the outset through Mrs. Hitchcock, Haze's first travelling company, a woman who is couched in decidedly maternal terms. The character repeatedly references "home," asks Haze if he is "going home" (4), and notes that there is "no place like home" (5). As is the case with Haze's mother, Hitchcock's characterization as a Freudian spectral mother is confirmed through the trope of seeing. This surrogate mother "found herself squinting at [Haze's] eyes," "eyes" that "were what held her attention longest" (4), and she "looked at him with her eyes squinted nearly shut" (12). Like the Oedipal mother, Hitchcock attempts to "see" Haze. The maternal-filial sexual economy is likewise suggested when Haze runs into Hitchcock in her "pink wrapper," an outfit that John Darretta reads as symbolic of "Haze's sexual guilt" (14). Hitchcock's question--"What is the matter with you?" (12)--mirrors Haze's mother's earlier question, and the uncanny effect sends Haze "dash[ing] down the aisle" away from "seeing" the woman (12). At the same time, this figure, like Haze's mother, operates as a mediator of a religious sensibility. Significantly, it is Hitchcock's self-identification as "Mammadoll" that compels Haze to ask a question that links this spectral mother with religious dogma (8): "I reckon you think you been redeemed" (8). Like Haze's own mother, the maternally characterized Hitchcock, also

like the Virgin Mary, is associated with religious redemption. Haze's encounter with Hitchcock effectively repeats the religio-psychoanalytic struggle depicted through Haze's relationship with his mother, an uncanny repetition that highlights O'Connor's interest in the gothic inflection of an Oedipal script. Freud suggests that the subject "is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material . . . of the Oedipus complex" (18:18; emphasis in original).

"[M]aterial," in Freud's discussion, relates to incestuous filial desire and resultant fears of castration and death at the heart of the Oedipal struggle. Repetition of maternal/filial psychic trauma, as Steven Bruhm suggests, is how "we can best understand the contemporary gothic and why we crave it" ("Contemporary" 268). The insistent return of the spectral mother in O'Connor's narrative enacts a gothic repression, repetition, and drive towards death found in Freud's own thinking.

As is the case with the economy of mother-son desire established in the "trees" of Haze's mind, Haze's confrontation with Hitchcock is followed by imagery of death. Haze retires to his berth, a space "he thought . . . was like a coffin" (13). Lying in his "low and curved over" coffin-like berth, Haze "wanted the light off . . . He wanted it all dark, he didn't want it diluted" (13). What Haze fears most is the sliver of light that gave the impression of the berth as "not quite closed; it looked as if it were closing" (13). Darretta comments that "Haze always envisions the coffins with their tops closing," and suggests that "[n]one of the bodies want to be confined; they want to be free; they want to be resurrected" (15). More relevant to O'Connor's aim is the fact that the sensation of closing relates both to Haze's mother's death and his mother's ability to see his desire:

He wondered if she walked at night and came there ever. She would come with that look on her face, unrested and looking; the same look he had

seen through the crack of her coffin. He had seen her face through the crack when they were shutting the top on her. (20-1)

Haze's final vision of his mother was of her "seeing" him, of her recognition of his desire. What haunts Haze, then, is the uncanny ghost of his mother, a woman "unrested and looking" who might, like his own desire, return for the satisfaction that will lead to his own death. To Haze, his mother's final image seems "as if she were going to spring up and shove the lid back and fly out and satisfy herself" (21). As his dream continues, Haze imagines his mother as a "terrible . . . huge bat" that attempts to escape (21), "but [the coffin] was falling dark on top of her, closing down all the time" (21). In this moment of death, Haze assumes his mother's place in the coffin. Suddenly, it is "[f]rom inside he saw it closing, coming closer down and cutting off the light and the room" (21). This scene enacts Haze's ultimate fear and desire, a complete union with the maternal body that conjures, Asals notes, "both the Oedipus complex and its Sophoclean source" (*Flannery* 39). Similar to both Freud's and Sophocles' narratives, O'Connor's text suggests that the potential for the consummation of the mutual desire between mother and son in Freud's narrative leads to death, not redemption.

The characterization of Leora Watts, a prostitute and Haze's first personal connection in *Taulkinham*, like that of Hitchcock, gestures both to Christian and Freudian discourse of mother. In early versions of *Wise Blood*, Gordon comments, the association between Leora and Haze's mother is much more obvious, especially in terms of how Haze's relationship with Leora gestures to mother-son incest. Gordon reads this connection as a "typical" Oedipal pattern "of the literature of the patriarchal tradition, clearly underscoring the fact that O'Connor is learning to adopt 'the male gaze' in her

depiction of Haze's sexual confusion" (*Flannery* 116). However, O'Connor's employment of an Oedipal narrative is far from "typical" in that she uses a psychoanalytic script as an instrument of anagogical contest. In a passage marked by heavy-handed symbolism, Haze discovers Leora's number in a toilet stall, described in coffin-like terms as a "narrow box" that links the scene with Haze's train journey, and with Oedipally inspired memories of his mother. The exterior signage on the toilet stall--"WELCOME, followed by three exclamation points and something that looked like a snake" (26; emphasis in original)²⁹-- is so overt in regards to Original sin as to border on the farcical. Moreover, the obvious and insistent reference to the cigar smoking taxi driver who transports Haze to Leora Watt's home clearly references popular constructions of Freud.³⁰ This satiric gesture adds to the comic tone of the text, but it also reconfirms O'Connor's interest in the role of the Freudian spectral mother. Specifically, Freud suggests that desire for a prostitute "derive[s] directly from the mother-complex" (11:172). Individuals, Freud contends, whose "libido has remained attached to the mother for so long, even after the onset of puberty" may seek out a "woman who is in some way or other of bad repute sexually, whose fidelity and reliability are open to some doubt" (11:166). Haze's experience with Leora, like his cab ride to the prostitute's house, is driven by Freud. "[L]ove for a prostitute," Freud contends, allows an individual to satisfy his desire for his mother and relieve "the pressure of a secret which is burning to be disclosed but which, despite all temptation, they never reveal" (11:170). Connection to Haze's mother is confirmed by Leora's own statement that "'Momma don't mind if you aint's a preacher'" (O'Connor, *Wise* 30). This Freudian-inspired mother desires union and has no interest in the spiritual. Maternal desire leading to death is signaled in the text by a return to the

trope of the “crack” that connects back to “the look [Haze] had seen through the crack of [his mother’s] coffin,” and as Haze approaches Leora’s door, he “put[s] his eye to a convenient crack in the shade” then “moved away from the crack” towards the front door which was “cracked” open and he then “looked through the crack” (28). Like the references to the Freudian cigar, O’Connor’s imagery here is anything but subtle. Indeed, once inside, Leora “observed [Haze] standing behind the crack” with a “bold steady penetrating stare” (29). Clearly, O’Connor wishes to make plain that Haze’s visit to Leora’s bed connects directly to his mother’s lethal recognition of--her seeing of--his desire.

Once inside Leora’s home, Haze’s “senses [are] . . . stirred to the limit” (29), and when he first sits on Leora’s bed he immediately “picked up her foot, which was heavy but not cold, and moved it about an inch to one side, and kept his hand on it” (29). Jill Baumgaertner argues that the numerous references to feet in the novel reflect Haze’s need to “run” from God” (123). More relevant to O’Connor’s aim is Freud’s discussion of the foot as a fetishistic object. In his article entitled “Fetishism,” Freud suggests that “the fetish is a substitute for the woman’s (the mother’s) penis that the little boy once believed in and--for reasons familiar to us--does not want to give up” (21:152-3). The “reasons” to which Freud refers are the boy’s refusal to believe that his mother does not possess a penis, because that recognition leads directly to the child’s fears of castration and death (21:153). The female foot, Freud argues, is a common fetishized object as it “reminds one of the stopping of memory in traumatic amnesia” (21:155). Significantly, Freud’s discussion of this “traumatic” moment prefigures Haze’s experience of seeing at the carnival. Freud writes, “the foot or shoe owes its preference as a fetish--or a part of it--to

the circumstance that the inquisitive boy peered at the woman's genitals from below, from her legs up" (21:155). As is the case with Haze's pubescent trauma, seeing the naked woman's body leads directly to the "possibility of castration" (23: 202).³¹

O'Connor's attention to Leora's feet thereby codes the character as a counterfeit spectral mother whose uncanny return allows the author to highlight the threat of filial death as a central feature of Freud's Oedipal plan.³² In contrast to David Eggenschwiler's argument that Haze's interest in Leora stems from his desire "to refute his religious mother by finding her replacement in a prostitute, a spiritless sexual object" (108), Leora is in fact a counterfeit of the mother through whom the economy of a Freudian-inspired mother-son dyad is manifested.

Sabbath Lily, Haze's next sexual partner, occupies the same counterfeit space as does Leora. For Gordon, Sabbath occupies a peripheral space, one in "startling" contrast to the Sabbath of early drafts of the text "who, for a time at least, occupied a central space in the novel" (*Flannery* 98). I contend that Sabbath continues to "occup[y] a central space in the novel" albeit as a counterfeit maternal presence. Not only does she further Haze's "spiritual quest," but she also operates as a maternal site in which O'Connor plays out her theological critique of Freud's Oedipal narrative. As is the case with Leora, Sabbath's role as a desiring spectral mother is signaled in her earliest appearances in the novel through the motifs of seeing, cracks and fetishism.³³ In the moment just prior to seeing Sabbath for the first time, Haze, angry at the Christian preaching of Sabbath's father, Asa Hawks, tears up the evangelist's pamphlets and "[t]hen . . . looked up and saw the blind man's child not three feet away, watching him" (38). "I seen you," Sabbath notes, "and all at once glared at Hazel Motes . . . She stood a second glaring at Haze" (39). As her

sexual interest in Haze rises, Sabbath repeatedly references Haze's eyes. "I like his eyes . . . They don't look like they see what he's looking at but they keep on looking" (105). Haze has no sexual desire for Sabbath at this point in the narrative, as indicated by his eyes that "don't look like they see"; however, Sabbath sees the potential for desire in those "eyes . . . [that] keep on looking." As Sabbath later tells Haze: "from the minute I set eyes on you I said to myself, that's what I got to have, just give me some of him! I said look at those pee-can eyes and go crazy, girl! That innocent look don't hide a thing, he's just pure filthy right down to the guts, like me" (169). In keeping with a Freudian script, both mother and son are implicated in the sin of incest, but here the conscious desire of the spectral mother is highlighted. And, once again this desire is linked to death, a connection O'Connor confirms again through "crack" imagery. Interested in getting closer to Asa's daughter, Haze rents a room in the pair's rooming house and "The blind man's child opened it a crack and stood looking at him" (103), and later, when Haze leaves the apartment, Sabbath "watched from a lower crack" (105). Finally, after Haze decides to seduce Sabbath, to "return . . . some of [Sabbath's] eye" (104), he returns to the rooming house and "It opened almost at once and the child's head appeared in the crack" (107). Crafted as an Oedipal scene, Haze's union with the Freudian-inspired Sabbath, like his journey to Taulkinham, promises death.

Haze's relationship with Sabbath allows him to prove to himself and to Asa, supposedly Christ's apostle, that Haze refuses to recognize his sin:

Haze had gone out in his car to think and he had decided that he would seduce Hawks's child. He thought that when the blind teacher saw his

daughter ruined, he would realize that he was in earnest when he said he preached The Church Without Christ. (106)

Haze's relationship with Sabbath is a tool of punishment against the Father. Haze will have intercourse with the Freudian-inspired mother. At the same time, one of the most troubling aspects to Sabbath's character is her young age. When Haze first encounters Sabbath in Chapter three, the text describes her as a "child" no less than a dozen times (33-60). Certainly, Sabbath's non-normative (because overly mature) sexuality gestures to the gothic Child, a figure that, as Bruhm notes, has "monstrously proliferated since the 1950s" ("Nightmare" 100) and is read as a "physical embodiment of their mother's hatred and rage" (101). O'Connor's characterization of Sabbath furthers this link back to the threatening spectral mother in a number of ways. This Freudian crime, given the text's insistence on the pedophilic nature of Haze's interest in Sabbath, gestures to Freud's discussion of criminality. Freud suggests that criminal acts are often the result of "an oppressive feeling of guilt, of which [the patient] did not know the origin" (14: 332). Like the "nameless unplaced guilt" that surrounds Haze, Freud locates the source of this guilt within the Oedipal family: "the invariable outcome of analytic work was to show that this obscure sense of guilt derived from the Oedipus complex and was a reaction to the two great criminal intentions of killing the father and having sexual relations with the mother" (14:332-33). In other words, sex with the child Sabbath is a substitute for sex with the mother. Indeed, Sabbath's dual role as mother and child is expressed in Haze's reasoning: "He felt that he should have a woman, not for the sake of the pleasure in her, but to prove that he didn't believe in sin since he practiced what was called it" (106). To practice "it,"

sex with the child/mother, is to deny the sinfulness of that desire, and to thus reject a Christian sense of morality by fulfilling Oedipal incestuous desire.

Though identified as a “child,” Sabbath, like Mrs. Hitchcock and Leora Watts, is a counterfeit presence that allows O’Connor to critique the efficacy of Freud’s thinking for Catholic dogma. In the narrative, Sabbath’s stories all relate to troubled mother-child relationships. Significantly, Sabbath’s own story confirms the mother as a sexualized object, as a site of desire:

‘My mother named me [Sabbath Lily Hawks] just after I was born because I was born on the Sabbath and then she turned over in her bed and died and I never seen her . . . Him and her wasn’t married . . . and that makes me a bastard, but I can’t help it. It was what he done to me and not what I done to myself.’ (116)

Sabbath’s own “dead” mother, like that of Haze, is a spectral presence in the novel.

Characterized as an unwed mother whose sexual partner is a preacher, Sabbath’s mother’s disembodied presence in the narrative forces Haze to acknowledge the mother’s sexuality. This revelation is difficult for Haze to accept, and his psychosexual struggle is confirmed by overt fetish imagery. While Sabbath tells stories of own sexual appetite, she “scratch[es] his ankle with the toe of her sneaker” (117), and notes that ““I like to walk in a field . . . barefooted”” (119), finally directly asking ““Ain’t my feet white, though?”” (120).³⁴ In an attempt to protect himself from the sexual maternal figure, Haze “kicked her foot roughly away from his” (118). In this moment, a moment that operates at the nexus of Christian and Freudian discourses, Haze’s denial of his sin begins to falter. Sabbath’s self-identification as a “bastard” confirms her mother’s inescapable sexuality

and establishes a discordance with Haze's latent Christian views: "The thing in his mind said that the truth didn't contradict itself and that a bastard couldn't be saved in the Church Without Christ. He decided he would forget it, that it was not important" (120). Given the insistent return of Oedipal guilt prescribed by Freudian theories and enacted by O'Connor's narrative, Haze cannot simply "forget it."

And neither, it seems, can Enoch. O'Connor's interest in the maternally compelled unending repetition towards death of Freud's Oedipal drama is more than evident in *Wise Blood's* story lines that relate to Enoch.³⁵ Enoch's history, like that of Haze, is populated with counterfeit maternal figures. From the "welfare woman" who "traded [Enoch] off his daddy" (42), to the young mother at the public swimming pool who Enoch lecherously watches, each woman conjures sexualized maternal imagery of death and castration through the topos of seeing, cracks, and fetish. The text describes the "pool" woman's appearance as follows:

First her face appeared, long and cadaverous, with a bandage-like bathing cap coming down almost to her eyes, and sharp teeth protruding from her mouth. Then she rose on her hands until a large foot and leg came up from behind her and another on the other side and she was out, squatting there, panting . . . She was facing them and she grinned. Enoch could see part of Hazel Motes's face watching the woman. (80-81)

Her "cadaverous" body combined with fetishistic imagery of her "large foot" links this sexualized woman with death, and confirms her narrative function as a counterfeit maternal presence. Here, from Enoch's perspective, the mother is "panting" in an animalistic lust that reflects back on the animalistic imagery that characterizes the spectral

mother throughout the narrative. Hazel Motes “watch[es]” the woman, and she offers a return look, replete with “grinning . . . pointed teeth” as she assumes the same posture as the carnival woman (81). From a psychoanalytic perspective, the imagery here gestures to what Barbara Creed dubs the “Vagina Dentata” of the “monstrous-feminine” (1). These frightening women who often appear in gothic fiction, Creed claims, directly connect back to Oedipal fears of the castrating maternal figure (105). Clearly, in O’Connor’s narrative, the woman with the “grinning . . . pointed teeth” invigorates Haze’s fears of the maternal figure and propels him from the scene in an attempt to escape to the safety of his car.

While Haze attempts to avoid the retaliation of the Oedipal father, Enoch, like the primeval sons of Freudian discourse, searches for a replacement for his father. Freud suggests that remembrance of the murdered father “persisted” in the “primeval hordes,” and so “a substitute for the father” was chosen, a totem (23: 82). When Haze rails to an audience that his church “needs a new jesus [sic] . . . one that’s all man, without blood to waste” (141), Enoch realizes that he will answer the call of his “daddy’s blood” by offering Haze a “substitute father” for Haze’s Church (141), an emaciated cadaver on display in a local museum. On the one hand, as Lake argues, the grotesqueness of Enoch’s totem advances O’Connor’s Catholic theological position that the father who emerges from a Freudian discourse, like the mother, cannot provide a path to redemption (85). On the other hand, this figure allows O’Connor to advance her critique of the Freudian-inspired mother. In fact, in the narrative, it is Enoch’s gift of the totem to Haze that initiates a crisis point in Haze’s psycho-religious mother-son struggle.

Immediately prior to Sabbath's entrance with the totem in tow, Haze, for the first time in the narrative's present, puts on his mother's glasses:

There was a small white-framed mirror hung on the back of the door and he made his way to it and looked at himself . . . The little silver-rimmed glasses gave him a look of deflected sharpness, as if they were hiding some dishonest plan that would show in his naked eyes. (187)

Though Mellard does not discuss this scene specifically, his discussion of the gaze within *Wise Blood* is relevant. For Mellard, O'Connor's narrative may be read as a "virtually flawless" anticipation of Lacan's discussion of the constitutive aspect of the gaze ("Framed" 51).³⁶ Building on Mellard's reading, Haze's "naked eyes" gesture to the role of desire and lack at the heart of a Lacanian subject. When Haze dons the glasses the first thing Haze sees is himself, but this image quickly changes: "He saw his mother's face in his, looking at the face in the mirror" (187). Here, O'Connor anticipates Lacan's discussion of the "Mirror Stage" on the role of the mother in the constitution of a self. Based on the link between desire, sight and the always lost mother throughout *Wise Blood*, Haze's act of looking into the mirror through his mother's glasses points to the importance of the spectral mother in the construction of Haze's identity. At the same time, this moment prefigures a trajectory towards death. In terms of O'Connor's narrative, like the moment on the train in which Haze takes his mother's place in the coffin, Haze's gaze into the mirror marks his annihilation as his identity is subsumed in "his mother's face . . . looking at the face in the mirror." Mellard recognizes that Haze is "beset by the desire of the (m)other" (59), but that the character primarily searches for "an Oedipal Other, an Other of the Law, an Other who will properly impose the law of lack

(that is, castration)” (59). In contrast, to twist the phraseology of Mellard’s discussion of “The Lame Shall Enter First,” I argue that in *Wise Blood* O’Connor locates the mother as the “Other/Autre [who] resides in the place of the father” (“Flannery” 627). And this is precisely O’Connor’s point. Not only does the Freudian mother signify an “original loss,” but she is at the same time a site of excess. As Judith Halberstam notes in her discussion of gothic fiction, the “production of fear in a literary text . . . emanates from a vertiginous excess of meaning” (2).³⁷ The “excess of meaning” in *Wise Blood* relates to the phallic-like power of a Freudian spectral mother who promises death.

Fundamentally, O’Connor’s narrative enacts the son’s desire for patricide and subsequent sexual relations with the spectral mother that underpins Freud’s Oedipal drama. O’Connor’s narrative accomplishes this enactment through Sabbath’s relationship with Haze as she clings to Enoch’s totem:

Some of his hair had come undone and she brushed it back where it belonged, holding him in the crook of her arm and looking down into his squinched face . . . there was just a trace of a grin covering his terrified look. She began to rock him a little in her arm and a slight reflection of the same grin appeared on her face . . . His head fitted exactly into the hollow of her shoulder. ‘Who’s your momma and daddy?’ (185)

The religious critique here is noted by a number of scholars. Lake, for instance, suggests, Sabbath’s “baby” is “a perverted baby Jesus who obviously cannot save anything or anyone” (84).³⁸ “Sabbath Lily,” McMullen argues, “is the secular world’s mockery of the mother of God” (97). Noting the Catholic imagery of the scene, George Kilcourse contends that Sabbath works as a “grotesque portrait of the Madonna” (78). In this

moment, Lake contends, Sabbath “literally embraces death” (85). From O’Connor’s theological perspective, the Freudian-inspired spectral mother cannot, as some mid-century Catholics hoped, act as a site of accord. Unlike the Virgin Mary who acts as a mediator to redemption via a divine Father, it is an all-powerful Freudian mother who promises death at the end point of Freudian conceptions of the Oedipal family.

As Sabbath enters the room with the shriveled corpse, the ghostly presence of Haze’s mother emerges:

[Haze] saw his mother’s face in his, looking at the face in the mirror. He moved back quickly and raised his hand to take off the glasses but the door opened and two more faces floated into his line of vision; one of them said, ‘Call me Momma now.’ The smaller dark one, just under the other, only squinted as if it were trying to identify an old friend who was going to kill it. (187)

The identity of the totem as the Freudian-inspired Father is ironically confirmed by the totem’s “squint[ing] as if it were trying to identify an old friend who was going to kill it” (187). This narrative move identifies Haze as the Oedipal son who will take the father’s place, an identification confirmed by Sabbath’s request that Haze “‘Call me Momma now.’” Significantly, it is Sabbath’s request, her desire, that demands Haze assume the role of the father. Here, the Freudian-inspired mother is a mediator of patricide, which establishes a direct contrast to the Virgin Mary of Catholic theology. O’Connor has suggested that Haze’s “rejection” of Sabbath’s maternal offering is “pivotal” (Lake 86): “That Haze rejects that mummy suggests everything. What he has been looking for with body and soul throughout the book is suddenly presented to him and he sees it has to be

rejected, he sees it ain't really what he's looking for" (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Habit* 404).

Throughout the narrative, Haze wishes to reject paternal figures, both in terms of a refusal to acknowledge his Oedipal guilt and in terms of a refusal to believe in a Christian deity. He wants to build a "Church Without Christ," a system of belief in which there is no father, and therefore no sin or death. What Sabbath offers is this scene, then, is the fulfillment of his incestuous desire without fear of retribution, but it comes at a cost of joining the maternal figure in death. For the Catholic O'Connor, whose vision "is centered in our Redemption by Christ" (qtd. in Fitzgerald 33), this "ain't really what [Haze should be] looking for."

Haze's reaction to this moment is abrupt and violent:

The hand that had been arrested in the air moved forward and plucked at the squinting face but without touching it; it reached again, slowly, and plucked at nothing and then it lunged and snatched the shriveled body and threw it against the wall. The head popped and the trash inside sprayed out in a little cloud of dust . . . Haze snatched the skin off the floor. He opened the outside door . . . and flung out what he had in his hand. (187-8)

The violence of this scene has been read as an affirmation of Haze's Christian upbringing and a condemnation of the secular world. For Lake, the scene enacts Haze's recognition "of death without any promise of life behind it" (86). In a similar vein, McMullen suggests that Haze "hurls the mummy out the window as repudiation of this sacrilegious portrayal" (98). For both critics this is an important turning point for Haze in which he affirms the value of his religious beliefs.³⁹ Yet, readings of this moment as religious epiphany are troubled by subsequent events in the narrative, most notably Haze's murder

of Solace Layfield. Immediately following this scene, Haze throws away his mother's glasses and, as the chapter closes, has sex with Sabbath. As Gordon suggests, "Haze seems to recognize his mother's legacy and once again to rebel against it. He casts aside her glasses and, in so doing, casts aside her view of things . . ." (*Flannery* 122). In this scene Haze embraces his own desire, a desire prescribed and proscribed by Freudian doctrine. O'Connor's text thereby enacts a Freudian-inspired union of mother and son that threatens the stability of psychoanalytic narratives. Unlike the Virgin Mary who mediates a relationship with God, the spectral mother of Freudian drama leads away from, not towards, a paternal authority.

Haze's figurative murder of the father is closely followed in O'Connor's narrative by Haze's murder of Solace, an act that is foreshadowed in Haze's preaching.

Specifically, earlier in the narrative, Haze explains to two strangers on the street, "Your conscience is a trick . . . it don't exist though you may think it does, and if you think it does, you had best get it out in the open and hunt it down and kill it, because it's no more than your face in the mirror is or your shadow behind you" (166). When Haze meets Hoover, then, a "gaunt and thin . . . illusion of himself" (167), Haze must "hunt [Hoover] down and kill" him to protect himself from his own conscience (168). However, as Haze tries to leave Taulkinham to start over, passing by "666 signs . . . [and] even a sign that said, 'Jesus Died for YOU,' which he saw and deliberately did not read" (209; emphasis in original), it is clear that Haze cannot escape his own sense of guilt. Though Haze "had known all along that there was no more country . . . he didn't know that there was not another city" (209). Haze's car is seized by police, which, as Cate Siejk notes, is a "humbl[ing] turning point for Haze that forces him to "surrender[] to the mystery and the

grace that transforms his pride. Thus, his conversion begins” (431). This is his moment of Grace, the dominant “subject” of O’Connor’s fiction (qtd. in Fitzgerald 118). Haze, trapped within the limits of Taulkinham, a site which acts as a metaphor for Freudian and Catholic contest, acknowledges his sin and finally turns his vision toward the spiritual: “the entire distance that extended from his eyes to the blank gray sky that went on, depth after depth, into space” (211). From this point forward in the narrative, the final moments of Haze’s journey toward redemption are characterized as a searing rejection of the spectral mother at the centre of Freud’s Oedipal narrative.

“something she couldn’t begin”: The Limits of Freudian-Inspired Maternity

Significantly, the last chapter of the novel is delivered from the perspective of Mrs. Flood, a counterfeit mother who is characterized as a manipulator, thief and, most critically, an unrepentant atheist. Robert Brinkmeyer suggests that this shift in narrative to “the most normal person in the novel” helps to “ultimately reveal . . . the profound dimensions of Haze’s religious self” (11). Brinkmeyer’s argument rests on the reader’s recognition of Mrs. Flood’s “emerging spiritual growth” (11) and, in a similar reading, Henry Edmonston suggests that readers are meant to “identify” with the character’s “unsettling recognition of her spiritual poverty” (59). The suggestion that Mrs. Flood “recogni[zes] . . . her spiritual poverty” is troubled by O’Connor’s insistent characterization of Mrs. Flood as a decidedly secular figure: “She was not religious or morbid, for which every day she thanked her stars” (213). Mrs. Flood not only rejects Christianity, she also views it with distrust and disdain. And she is particularly vexed by Haze’s self-blinding, an act that has also puzzled literary scholars. In critical discussion, Haze’s self-blinding has been read through both Freudian and anagogical lenses.⁴⁰ In

terms of the scene's Oedipal allusions, Jason Lee suggests that "it is the desire for incest and the moving through the Oedipal phase that is predestined . . . Haze has seen that which he was forbidden to see, and . . . he must blind himself" (221). Lee's suggestion clearly aligns with Freud's comments that "The self-blinding of the mythical criminal, Oedipus, was simply a mitigated form of the punishment of castration" (17:231).

Kilcourse, noting that the event takes place on the only recorded date in the narrative, October fourth, the feast day of St. Francis, argues that Haze's blinding ironically crafts the protagonist as a Christian martyr (89). Certainly at this point in the narrative Haze evinces a saint-like desire for self-mortification; a desire that compels his self-blinding, the placement of stones in his shoes, and the "three strands of barbed wire, wrapped around his chest" (O'Connor *Wise* 228). In an attempt to fathom Haze's self-mutilation, Mrs. Flood notes, "I wouldn't be surprised if you weren't some kind of a agent of the pope or got some connection with something funny" (229). In this moment, once again O'Connor employs irony to point to the Freudian-inspired maternal figure, like Mrs. Flood, who is completely disassociated from the Divine, as an inadequate mediator of Catholic dogma. In keeping with the rest of the narrative, Mrs. Flood's role as a spectral mother is confirmed through her obsessive fears about her own sight, Haze's blindness, and the link between vision and desire. There are multiple ways in which Mrs. Flood attempts to "see" something in Haze's eyes, a "secret" that she cannot imagine even in the final moments of the text (217). Mrs. Flood asks herself, "What possible reason could a sane person have for wanting to not enjoy himself any more?" (213). As is the case with the primordial maternal figure of Haze's nightmare, maternal sight is inexorably connected to desire.

However, by the novel's end, Haze is no longer interested in earthly pursuits; his sight is directed toward the spiritual, and it is at this point in the narrative that O'Connor's critique of a Freudian-crafted mother reaches its apex. On the one hand, Mrs. Flood's "imagin[ings]" of blindness create a vision that has decidedly religious overtones:

She imagined it was like you were walking in a tunnel and all you could see was a pin point of light. She had to imagine the pin point of light; she couldn't think of it at all without that. She saw it as some kind of a star, like the star on Christmas cards. (222-3)

This trajectory of her sight, this "pin point of light," as the narrative suggests, is a direct allusion to the star of Bethlehem that supposedly appeared at the birth of Christ. But viewed through the entirely secular vision of Mrs. Flood, this allusion is rendered so farcical that even Mrs. Flood "had to laugh" (223). Rather than a site of Christian redemption, the desire reflected in this counterfeit mother is confirmed as a site of death. Though Mrs. Flood, "began to enjoy sitting on the porch with [Haze] . . . Anyone who saw her from the sidewalk would think she was being courted by a corpse" (221). Unlike the other counterfeit maternal figures in the narrative, Mrs. Flood cannot "see" Haze's desire because his eyes have turned toward God the Father.

In the end, it is the Freudian-inspired desire of the counterfeit maternal Mrs. Flood that leads to Haze's death in the narrative. When she begins to suggest marriage with Haze, he "sat up suddenly as if he were listening, almost as if he had been alarmed by the tone of her voice" (230). Haze, who has turned away from the Freudian-inspired mother, leaves the house, a decision that proves fatal, but one that ensures he will "go on where

[he's] going" (234). Haze is dead by the time his body is delivered to Mrs. Flood's home, and the final vision of the narrative is hers:

She leaned closer and closer to his face, looking deep into [his eyes], trying to see how she had been cheated or what had cheated her, but she couldn't see anything. She shut her eyes and saw the pin point of light but so far away that she could not hold it steady in her mind. She felt as if she were blocked at the entrance of something. She sat staring with her eyes shut, into his eyes, and felt as if she had finally got to the beginning of something she couldn't begin, and she saw him moving farther and farther away, farther and farther into the darkness until he was the pin point of light. (235-6)

When Mrs. Flood "shut[s]" her eyes, when she effectively blinds herself, she "felt as if she had finally got to the beginning of something." In this moment, spirituality is linked with physical blindness, a connection that echoes Haze's self-blinding and subsequent spiritual conversion. In O'Connor's novel, characters must be blind to the physical world in order to see the Divine.⁴¹ Yet, in terms of Mrs. Flood's final vision, this was the "beginning of something she couldn't begin." Mrs. Flood remains an entirely secularized figure who cannot, in the end, act as a mediator for a Catholic God the Father.

Readings of Haze's potential religious conversion at the end of the novel are mixed. Gordon suggests that in the end Haze "moves beyond the vicissitudes of this mortal coil to find his peace" (125). But Ben Satterfield argues "only readers who have a sacramental view of life and who read fiction with the anagogical lenses provided by religious doctrine see Haze as redeemed" (61).⁴² In O'Connor's view, though Freud

“brought to light many truths,” his doctrine cannot explain “the religious encounter” (qtd. in Fitzgerald 165). Haze’s end, then, does not, as Bleikasten’s Oedipal reading suggests, reflect the character’s “reabsor[ption] into his mother” (150). Within the confines of O’Connor’s theological script, Haze escapes the Freudian spectral mother, and instead chooses to follow the path toward God which the Catholic-inspired maternal “watch[er] . . . through the trees” provides. O’Connor’s text reveals that psychoanalytic theories of the mother dictate a figure that is always already a site of prescribed and proscribed sexuality leading to death, a death that renders absurd her role as a potential site of “assimilation” between psychoanalysis and Catholicism.

Sprenghether notes that the “pre-Oedipal mother” of Freud’s theories “emerges as a figure of subversion, a threat to masculine identity as well as to patriarchal culture . . . Like the spirit of the mournful and unmourned Jocasta, she haunts the house of Oedipus” (5). Certainly the Freudian-crafted spectral mothers of O’Connor’s narrative “haunt” the psycho-religious experiences of Haze. Notably, O’Connor’s interest in the spectral mother as a site of death suggests a potentially fruitful instability in Freud’s Oedipal narrative. Specifically, if we embrace the spectral mother as an “originary condition” Sprenghether argues, “then there is no necessary link between the figure of the father and culture” (10). Returned from “exile . . . the body of the (m)other may actually provide a new, and material, ground for understanding the play of language and desire” (10). Certainly the Freudian-crafted maternal figures of *Wise Blood* operate as a subversive force within the narrative, and as such reflect upon instabilities within Freud’s masculinist and heteronormative schema.

The subversive value of *Wise Blood*'s spectral mothers gesture to the later twentieth-century work of queer psychoanalytic theorists such as Lee Edelman, who posits a disruptive potentiality in the drive toward death at the heart of psychoanalytic narratives. Edelman discusses the Lacanian loss at the centre of self as a “a real rather than a symbolic one [and], [a]s such, it functions not in a mode of absence but in a mode of an impossible excess haunting reality . . . a constitutive *surplus*” (10; emphasis in original). Lacan, Edelman notes, dubs this surplus “an excessive, ‘unreal’ remainder that produces an ever-present jouissance” (10). For Edelman, this constitutional “jouissance” which exists “outside the logic of meaning that, nonetheless, produces it” also figures “the quintessential unnameable, that is to say death” (25). Edelman fundamentally argues that “jouissance,” as a site of desire and death, provides access to a queer disruption in heteronormative culture (10). And this is precisely where Lacan situates both “woman” and “God”: “Jouissance, the property of woman and her sexuality, achieves the status of something that escapes and transcends the Symbolic order with its dependence on the phallus as signifier . . . why not interpret on face of the Other, the God face, as supported by feminine jouissance?” (“Encore”147). Initially, then, it would appear that the mother within Lacan’s discussion, like the cultural “jouissance” which Edelman employs and O’Connor reveals, might be a useful site through which to disrupt a masculinist narrative.⁴³ Rose, in her reading of Lacan, in fact suggests that the moment of “jouissance” only has meaning in relation to the presence and the look of the mother who guarantees its reality for the child: “The mother does not . . . mirror the child to itself; she grants an image *to* the child, which her presence instantly deflects” (*Sexuality*

53; emphasis in original). The child's maturation, as it does in O'Connor's narrative, relies upon maternal recognition of the child's subjectivity.

However, the suggestion that woman or mother can undermine Freud's paternalistic narrative through her own power within a psychoanalytic script is troubled. Garner, for instance, suggests, "Psychoanalysis, whether it posits in the beginning maternal presence or absence, has yet to develop a story of the mother as other than the object of the infant's desire or the matrix from which he or she develops an infant subjectivity. The mother herself as a speaking subject, as author, is missing from these dramas" (25). Indeed, the same holds true for Lacan's "re-writing of Freud's story" in which, as Garner suggests, "woman is nothing but a category within language, constructed by male desire" (22). Specifically, for Lacan, as "jouissance," the woman/mother exists "outside the logic of meaning" in a space of the always is not, a position Lacan articulates when he makes the claim: "There is no such thing as *The woman* since of her essence . . . she is not at all" ("Encore" 144; emphasis in original). In a similar vein, though the spectral mother is at the very centre of O'Connor's narrative, *Wise Blood* offers little relief from misogynistic scripts as the author's aims lead to her appropriation of the cultural role of mother in the interests of a religio-theological contest. The end result, as Gordon's discussion of the "flatten[ing] of Sabbath in the published text" suggests (*O'Connor* 113), is that spectral mothers of *Wise Blood* are characterized in relation "to the male pilgrim's progress to salvation" (113). In other words, though *Wise Blood* offers a critique of contemporary Freudian/Catholic discussions, O'Connor is complicit in the patriarchal agenda of both Freud and the Catholic Church. To borrow Patricia Smith Yaeger's phraseology, O'Connor's text is haunted by mothers "without

any bones” (95).⁴⁴ The spectral mothers of *Wise Blood* operate as counterfeit presences of the already dead original figure, and so, like the Oedipal mother, are denied subjectivity. In the end, the mothers of *Wise Blood* function as spectral counterfeit figures--“presen[t]” yet “absen[t]”--sites of ideological constraint and contest who reflect back upon the impossibility of maternal subjectivity in a post-Freudian cultural imagination.

O’Connor erases individual mothers from *Wise Blood* so that she may use the spectral mother of gothic and Freudian discourse as a site through which to distinguish, and thereby to protect, Catholic doctrine from Freudian discourse. Notably, in the mid-twentieth century, multiple branches of psychoanalytic theory were popularized, and each offered distinct variations to Freud’s Oedipal schema. Especially relevant to Catholic discourse were the theories of Carl Jung. Jung was a student of Freud whose departures from Freudian thinking lead to irreconcilable rift between the two men, and the formation of Jungian metapsychology.⁴⁵ The role of the mother in psychosexual development was a point of fierce debate between Jung and Freud. Though Freud identified matriarchy as an archaic period of cultural development, matriarchy, as Sprengnether notes, “remains unintegrated into Freud’s evolutionary scheme” (86). In contrast, Jung, as I discuss in my next chapter on O’Connor’s *The Violent Bear It Away*, foregrounds the role of the archaic Great Mother in his theories. Many Catholic theologians felt that Jung’s notions of individuation might prove an even more efficacious site of concordance between psychoanalysis and Catholicism than did Freud’s theories of sexual development. Throughout *Violent*, O’Connor interrogates Jungian conceptions of maternity as a potential site of religio-psychoanalytic accord. In terms of O’Connor’s theological interest, the Jungian-inspired spectral mother fares no better than Freud’s in terms of her

theological value. The spectral mother of Jung's discourse, *Violent* reveals, is a figure of spiritual annihilation.

Notes

¹ Early drafts of *Wise Blood*, held at O'Connor's alma mater in the Flannery O'Connor Collection at Georgia College, evidently reveal substantial changes to female figures as O'Connor worked toward her published version (Gordon, "Literary" 292).

² There has been a fair amount of discussion of the comic aspects of the *Wise Blood*, aspects L.B. Kennelly notes, that "become more readily apparent after one recovers from the shock of initial exposure to Mr. Hazel Motes and his friends" (96). See also Sura Prasad Rath and John Byars.

³ For an overview of the critical debate on the issue of the Catholicism of O'Connor's fiction, see Preston M. Browning, Jr. (85-90) and Jon Lance Bacon (5). Farrell O'Gorman's *Peculiar crossroads: Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, and Catholic vision in Postwar Southern Fiction* (2008), which I reference in my introduction, offers the first book-length study of O'Connor's "Catholic vision" in the context of a post World War II Catholic Revival (3). See also Patrick Samway, S.J., Christina Lake, Timothy Caron, John Desmond "Flannery," Joanne Halleran McMullen and Jon Parrish Peede, George Kilcourse, Arthur Kinney, Cate Siejk, Susan Srigley, and Ralph Wood.

⁴ Muller identifies the grotesque in O'Connor's fiction as a "Catholic grotesque" that "define[s] the essence of her fiction" (1). See also Christina Lake (91-117).

⁵ See, for example, Frederick Asals (*Flannery* and "Wise), Andre Bleikasten, Marshall Bruce Gentry (*Flannery*), Thomas LeClair, and James M. Mellard ("Flannery" and "Framed").

⁶ Mellard's "surprise" is due, in part, to the often-noted fact that O'Connor did a great deal of work on the novel while staying with the Fitzgerald family during a time when Robert Fitzgerald was writing his translation of *Oedipus Rex*, and O'Connor often engaged in discussions of the translation with the Fitzgeralds in the evenings. O'Connor in fact wrote to a friend, Betty Body, in 1949, that the author thought Fitzgerald's translation was "very fine" (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Habit* 16). Critics who discuss the impact of Fitzgerald's translation on O'Connor's text include Lake (55-6), Mellard ("Flannery" 631), and Gooch (184).

⁷ Literary critical work on the "territory between" psychological and theological discussions of *Wise Blood* include Lake's *The Incarnational Art of Flannery O'Connor*, Leon V. Driskell's *The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor*, Sarah Gordon's *Flannery O'Connor: The Obedient Imagination*, and Susan Srigley's *Flannery O'Connor's Sacramental Art*. However, attempts at polarized readings persist. For example, Debra Modellmog argues, "It makes as much sense, then, to claim that Haze's mother gains a strong hold over his imagination because she speaks for the religion that obsesses him as it does to claim that she is sexually attractive to him. In fact, it makes more sense" (90).

⁸ The "clerical sabotage" and "financial raids" noted by Paul Blanshard refer in large measure to Protestant concerns over public funding of Catholic parochial schools (Carey 96). Protestants in the period also demanded an end to "diplomatic ties with the Vatican" (Clancy 83).

⁹ Blanshard argues: "American priests, apparently with full Papal approval, are going ahead with the promotion of Mariology to the point where the unofficial worship of

the Virgin is changing the whole theological base of Catholicism--and making co-operation with Protestantism more than ever impossible” (260).

¹⁰ Catholics also battled over what was viewed as a growing intellectualism in the Church; specifically, many Catholics were concerned about what they perceived as a turn away from “contemplation” in favour of biblical “research” (Carey 99). Relevant to my study is the fact that the Virgin Mary was a point of contention within these ideological debates. Pope Pius XII’s “proclamation of the dogma of Mary’s Assumption,” as Patrick W. Carey notes, was “seen as another form of papal repression of theological inquiry” (99).

¹¹ See also Teresa Clark Caruso (“Whores” 355), and Sarah Gordon (119).

¹² See also Asals (39). For a discussion of the feminism of O’Connor’s writing, see Caruso (*On the Subject of the Feminist Business*, and “Whores”), Katherine Hemple Prown and Louise Westling (175-83).

¹³ Clearly, Moddelmog’s list is not intended to be exhaustive. As I discuss in my chapter, O’Connor’s work anticipates the thinking of post-Freudian Jacques Lacan in regards to the link between sexuality and sight, a follower of Freud that Moddelmog fails to note in her above list. Lacan, as well as other notable thinkers such as Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Lee Edelman, all build upon Freud’s Oedipal narrative.

¹⁴ I reserve a discussion of Freud’s views on female sexual development for my coda on Shirley Jackson’s work.

¹⁵ The lack of “ambivalence” Freud notes here relates to his argument that the son’s penis substitutes for the mother’s lack, which allows her “the satisfaction of all that has been left over in her of her masculinity complex” (22:133).

¹⁶ In Catholic mythology, Mary not only maintains a virginal status throughout her lifetime, but Catholic dogma asserts that Saint Anne, Mary's mother, conceived Mary directly from the Holy Spirit. Mary's conception is thereby "Immaculate" or free from Original sin.

¹⁷ Christian sin, Freud argues, can be traced to a time in which "man lived in small hordes, each under the domination of a powerful male" (23:81). Frustrated by the "unrestricted power" of the "lord and father of the entire horde," a figure who "kept" all the women of the tribe for himself, the sons "living in a community, united to overpower their father and, as was the custom in those days, devoured him raw" (23:81).

¹⁸ As I have already discussed, these changes in Church dogma relating to the Virgin Mary were the cause for a great deal of controversy among Protestants and Catholics alike.

¹⁹ The Catholic Church, as Carroll notes, "fanned the flames of this increasing devotion to Mary . . . [b]etween 1948 and 1958, for instance, there were over 126 Marian Congresses held in various cities around the world . . ." (219). Church doctrine positioned "the veneration of Mary" as "an aid to the adoration of Christ" (220).

²⁰ O'Connor was adamant on the centrality of religious belief to her fiction: "I write the way I do because (not though) I am a Catholic. This is a fact and nothing covers it like the bald statement" (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Habit* 90). As I note in my introduction to this study, and in this chapter, O'Connor's theological interest coincided with a broader cultural interest in religious belief. "The post-World War II decades" (Hayes 51), John Hayes remarks, "were a time of heightened religious consciousness in the United States" (51). As Hayes notes, "the phrase 'under God' was added to the pledge of allegiance, and

‘In God We Trust’ became the official national motto, imprinted on every coin of the U.S. Treasury” (51). Though the South was a dominantly Protestant area (51), the 1950s, George Kilcourse comments, was a “time of expansive church growth” in all forms of institutionalized religion, including Catholicism (45). In terms of Catholicism, a number of texts, including Arnold Sparr’s, *To Promote, Defend, and Redeem: The Catholic Literary Revival and the Cultural Transformation of American Catholicism, 1920-60*, suggest that the postwar era was a time of “Catholic literary revival (xi). See also Gene Kellogg’s, *The Vital Tradition: The Catholic Novel in a Period of Convergence (1970)*.

²¹ The imagery here confirms Betty Friedan’s assertion of a specifically Freudian association of “women [as] animals, less than human” that proliferated in the 1940s (Friedan, ch. 5). William Rodney Allen argues that the abundance of animal imagery in O’Connor’s text represents the author’s belief that a world “without its spiritual dimension” quickly transforms into “a zoo for the human animal” (257). Much of the discussion of the animal imagery in the text revolves around Enoch. Lake suggests that connection between Enoch and the animal world “emphasizes the modern world is a world Freud has helped to make. Having lost all distinctions between pure and impure sexual behaviour, people have become mere animals” (60-1). In a similar vein, Jason Lee suggests, “Enoch’s desire to be part of a wider clan and eventually joins the animal kingdom when finally rejected by the human, but before he does so he tries to share the strength of the totem” (218).

²² As Brian Abel Ragen notes, “it is the nameless unplaced guilt--the guilt of Original Sin--that the young Motes is trying to work off” (qtd. in Emerick 170).

²³ Haze's mother, Thomas LeClair suggests, is both the "religious taskmaster . . . [and] the demanding, tempting woman" of Oedipal fantasy (200). For a discussion of the Oedipal elements of the scene, see, for example, Lake (56), L.B. Kennelly (101-2), Mellard "Flannery" (631), and Burns (133).

²⁴ Gentry's argument focuses on Haze as the desiring son of an Oedipal narrative. In a similar vein, LeClair suggests, "Haze feels here a penetrating guilt about his Oedipal fantasy and, it is suggested, a fear that his mother knows that he has 'seen' *her* and not just the girl in the box" (199; emphasis in original). Modellmog argues that the narrative of *Wise Blood* may be charted onto a Lacanian discussion of Haze's movement from "*méconnaissance* . . . to *reconnaissance*" within the "paradigm" of an Oedipal discussion (88; emphasis in original). Gentry, in his Bakhtinian reading of the redemptive possibilities of the grotesque in *Wise Blood*, notes, "One particularly interesting indication of Haze's individual grotesquerie is the novel's emphasis on the strangeness of his eyes" (*Flannery* 125). Finally, L.B. Kennelly offers a discussion of Haze's visual perspective in the novel in order to trace the character's movement from error, to mistrust, to spiritual epiphany (100-3).

²⁵ Though Freud reads the Sandman as a manifestation of the "good" and "bad" aspects of the father-*imago* as a figure of castration (17:227), based on Freud's own writing this ambivalent figure manifests a maternal spectre. Indeed, Freud's own reporting of Nathaniel's dream is as a tale told by Nathaniel's mother and made more "definite" by Nathaniel's maternal substitute, his nurse (17:228).

²⁶ Evidence of Haze's inability to escape his feelings for his mother is also evident in the narrative's attention to Haze's mother's "shiffer-robe" (O'Connor, *Wise* 20). John

Darretta suggests that the piece works to “bind all the woman characters of her novel” in that it gestures to the sexualized “night things” of each woman with whom Haze has relations (14). At the same time, the “shiffer-robe” reflects the text’s teleology of death within a maternal-filial paradigm. Haze’s note warning potential burglars--“THIS SHIFFER-ROBE BELONGS TO HAZEL MOTES. DO NOT STEAL IT OR YOU WILL BE HUNTED DOWN AND KILLED”--foreshadows, through the imagery of “hunt[ing] down and kill[ing],” his murder of Solace Layfield (20; emphasis in original). Solace, as I later discuss, operates as the physical embodiment of Haze’s conscience, a conscience that struggles with incestuous desire.

²⁷ “The Train” has received a fair amount of scholarly attention, most of which takes up changes to O’Connor’s narrative approach from a more interior view of Haze in “The Train” to a sense of “distance and apparent objectivity” in *Wise Blood* (Asals 19); See also Robert Brinkmeyer (53-5), Brad Gooch (182), Margaret Harrison, John McDermott, and Scott and Straight. Interestingly, Asals suggests that “The Train” owes a great debt to William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* “both in conception and stylistically” in that both texts explore “the loss of the mother” (18). As Stuart Burns notes, in addition to “The Train,” *Wise Blood* is also indebted to O’Connor’s early short stories, “The Heart of the Park,” “The Peeler,” “Woman on the Stairs,” and “Enoch and the Gorilla.” See also Driskell and Brittain (33-58).

²⁸ The train also gestures toward the process of psychoanalysis itself. Freud, in his “Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-analysis” suggests that patients should “Act as though, for instance, you were a traveller sitting next to the window of a railway carriage and describing to someone inside the carriage the changing view which you see

outside” (12:135). And, as is the case with the unavoidable Freudian conflict between mother and son, Haze’s train journey is one he cannot avoid. Although Haze “had got off the train at a junction stop to get some air and while he had been looking the other way, the train had slid off” (O’Connor, *Wise* 25). Haze “wait[s] six hours at the junction stop until the right train came” (25).

²⁹ Clearly, the exterior sign of entry to the washroom--“MEN’S TOILET. WHITE” (26; emphasis in original)--invites a consideration of the racist undercurrent in O’Connor’s narrative. As Timothy Carron suggests, proponents of O’Connor’s work sometimes attempt to avoid discussions of racism by turning to O’Connor’s theological aim or by chalking O’Connor’s racism up to the Southern setting of her work (66; See also, Julie Armstrong, Leon Driskell and Joan Brittain (5-6), Sally Fitzgerald (*Habit* xvii-xix), John Hayes, and Ralph Wood (93-120)). Certainly, in addition to being haunted by the maternal body, *Wise Blood* is also haunted by the racialized body. Like the spectral mother, this body is a site of abjection throughout O’Connor’s text. In the pivotal carnival scene of the text, before Haze sees the naked woman, he asks the attendant, ““Is it a nigger . . . Are they doing something to a nigger?”” (57). This image of abjection transforms into an image of the sexualized mother. Later, this abjected figure becomes associated with Haze’s incestuous desire through the figure’s association with Haze’s vitriolic view of Christ. Haze states that ““Jesus is a trick on niggers”” (72), and that the totem figure at the novel’s end is ““part-nigger dwarf that had never done anything but get himself embalmed and then lain stinking in a museum the rest of his life”” (176). Moreover, in order to assert the value of his car as an instrument to escape Christ towards the end of the novel, Haze notes that it ““ain’t been built by a bunch of foreigners or

niggers or one-arm men” (124-5). By the novel’s end, the connection between the racialized black body and the mother as constructed by Freud’s sexualized paradigm is made explicit through the virulent racism of Mrs. Flood. In an attempt to rationalize her own thievery, Mrs. Flood feels that she is owed money considering, in part, the fact “that the government . . . sent [her taxes] to foreign niggers and a-rabs” (218). O’Connor’s text is decidedly racist, but not simply for its use of the term “nigger,” or for the vitriol that surrounds the black body. In the text, O’Connor appropriates the black body, in the same way that she appropriates the subject position of mother, and in the same way that racist ideology informs Tennessee Williams’ texts, for her own authorial agenda of distinguishing between psychoanalytic and Catholic constructions of maternity.

³⁰ In the short span of two pages, the taxi driver’s cigar is mentioned no less than four times: He had “a cigar coming out from the center of his mouth” (27), and “He did not disturb the position of the cigar when he spoke; he was able to speak on either side of it” (27). After Haze tells the driver that “‘I don’t believe in anything’, . . . The driver took the stump of cigar out of his mouth” (28). Later “The driver closed his mouth and after a second he returned the piece of cigar to it” (28). Clearly this image gestures to the popular idiom associated with Freud: “Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.”

³¹ In his discussion of filial sexuality, Freud connects fetish to fears of castration: “The creation of the fetish was due to an intention to destroy the evidence for the possibility of castration” (23: 203).

³² Moreover, the narrative is explicit that Haze’s sexual encounter with Leora is unsuccessful: “Since the night before was the first time he had slept with any woman, he had not been very successful with Mrs. Watt” (55). Later, when Haze visits a

“whorehouse” with a young boy who Haze hoped to bring to his Church Without Christ, “Haze had not enjoyed the whorehouse anywhere near as much as the boy had” (147). For Freud, sexual impotence is a marker of a maternal complex and resultant fear of the father (23:79).

³³ Stuart Burns also recognizes Sabbath’s maternal associations: Haze’s “fascination for the blind preacher’s daughter stems from the fact that her close-cropped hair and too-long dress reminds him of his mother. And his offering her the potato peeler constitutes a symbolic gesture of self-castration” (133).

³⁴ In early drafts of the novel O’Connor’s attention to the foot as a fetishized object is even more overt (Gordon 100-1). In one particular version, Sabbath is portrayed as Asa’s wife, not daughter, and Asa “comes to believe that the sight of Sabbath’s feet is part of his conjugal privilege” (100).

³⁵ A number of critics discuss Enoch’s mirroring of Haze in the narrative. Lake warns that Enoch’s role is not simply “as a comic or diabolic foil” but that “Enoch plays an essential and active role . . . in Haze’s rediscovery of the necessary connection between the spiritual and physical” (72). See also Robert Brinkmeyer (106-7) and Jason Lee (217).

³⁶ Mellard offers an extended discussion of the function of the Lacanian gaze; however, he does so through the “eyes” of Haze. As Mellard notes: In the narrative, “[e]arly and late, the eyes in question are those of Haze Motes” (56).

³⁷ A number of scholars recognize “excess and exaggeration” as a recurring, and threatening, feature of the gothic (Punter and Byron 7).

³⁸ See also Andre Bleikasten (84), George Kilcourse (78), and Jason Peters (180).

³⁹ For similar readings of the scene, see Darretta (39) and Driskell and Brittain (45).

⁴⁰ John Darretta suggests that Haze's self-mutilation is meant to act as "a contrast . . . to the blinding of St. Paul by God" (50). For Darretta, Haze's "self-imposed" blindness is intended as a "meaningless mockery of true justice in that . . . Justice, like Redemption, always comes from the outside, from a higher source" (50). In contrast, Carron argues that "Hazel's self-blinding . . . bestows upon him a theological 'tunnel-vision' . . . that leads him back to Bethlehem and his soul-saving encounter with Christ" (65). See also Edmonston (58), Kinney (118), Gordon (*Flannery* 94), Lawson (29), and Susan Srigley (79).

⁴¹ This connection is also mirrored through Asa Hawkes. According to a ten-year-old newspaper clipping Haze reads, Asa blinded himself in order to "justify his belief that Christ Jesus had redeemed him" (108). However, Haze doesn't read the other clipping that Asa possesses, "EVANGELIST'S NERVE FAILS" (109; emphasis in original). Asa merely pretends to be blind in order to solicit cash donations from naive Christians. In contrast, Haze follows through on this act of self-mutilation, which suggests Haze's religious conversion is sincere.

⁴² In his discussion of the pinpoint of light, Bleikasten suggests, this "oblique reference to the birth of the Saviour, however, is a little too pat . . . [and] simply adds a final twist to the novel's baffling ambiguity" (146). For Darretta, "Haze's position at the end of the novel is left completely unresolved" (50).

⁴³ Sprengnether makes a similar point when she suggests, "As long as the Oedipus complex remains identified with the stage of mastery in masculine development which

acts as a prerequisite for civilization, moreover, the mother will continue to represent a threat to both” (227).

⁴⁴ In her feminist reading, Patricia Smith Yaeger argues that O’Connor “uses every strategy she can think of to avoid becoming or identifying with [a] female abject” (95), but that O’Connor’s attempt “to remain in the tomboyish role of the angel-aggressive little girl” (96) results in “an angel-aggressive woman who uses her violent imaginary and her wicked sense of humor [sic] to change the balance of social power and create a new form of writing as antiritual” (113).

⁴⁵ Sprengnether offers a detailed account of Jung’s split from Freud (86-119).

Chapter Three

“Riding Low Above the Field Beside Him”:

The Maternal Archetype of Flannery O’Connor’s *The Violent Bear It Away*

Whereas Flannery O’Connor’s *Wise Blood* characterizes Hazel Motes’ path to redemption as a contest between the Virgin Mary of Catholic doctrine and the spectral mother of Freud’s Oedipal narrative, O’Connor directs her attention to the spectral mother of Jungian discourse in her second and final novel, *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960). In the novel, considered O’Connor’s “masterpiece” (Hyman 19), a young Francis Tarwater unsuccessfully attempts to elude his destined role as a Fundamentalist Christian prophet. As in *Wise Blood*, in *Violent*, female characters are marginalized. For the most part, women characters are identified as whores and child abandoners. Yet, as the protagonist, Francis Tarwater’s middle name, “Marion,” suggests, in *Violent*, as in *Wise Blood*, O’Connor sustains her interest in the mother’s role in a movement toward God’s Grace.¹ Throughout *Violent*, O’Connor employs Jungian constructions of the Great Mother in order to ultimately argue that the goal of Jungian psychotherapy--the fully actualized self--is anathema to the Virgin Mary’s call for a violent destruction of self in order to accept Grace. The gothic, David Punter suggests, is often about “points where the movement towards humanization, or in Jungian terms towards individuation, runs into a siding. It is side-tracked” (Punter, *Pathologies* 7). In *Violent*, Tarwater’s path towards individuation is “side-tracked” by O’Connor’s belief in the Virgin Mary as a figure who leads toward spiritual redemption. Held to the demands of ideological debate, in O’Connor’s novel the spectral mother is rendered a decidedly gothic figure. As Chad Rohman notes, O’Connor’s “deft ‘Gothic modality’” (279) is evident through the “Gothic

motifs” of “monstrous misfits, devils and demonic figures” (280). Images of death and destruction that dominate *Violent*--Tarwater’s murder of his cousin, Bishop, and the violent rape that Tarwater suffers at the hands of one of O’Connor’s most demonic characters--are, in O’Connor’s text, manifestations of the spectral mother of Jung’s discourse. O’Connor’s appropriation of motherhood as an ideological site accomplishes the author’s dogmatic goal of exposing, from a Catholic perspective, problematic aspects of the spectral mother of Jungian thinking. At the same time, the spectral mother of O’Connor’s text reveals a troubling gothic subtext that underlies both psychoanalytic and Catholic constructions of maternity.

Tarwater, like Haze before him, fits the definition of grotesque characters that O’Connor offers in her essay, “Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction” (*Mystery* 36-50). “Grotesque characters,” O’Connor states, “comic though they may be, are at least not primarily so. They seem to carry an invisible burden” (qtd. in *Mystery* 44). Both protagonists in O’Connor’s novels struggle with the “invisible burden” of religious belief. Indeed, for O’Connor, this “invisible burden” stems from the novelist’s “prophetic vision,” which she describes as “a matter of seeing near things with their extensions of meaning and thus of seeing far things close up” (44). The grotesque quality of O’Connor’s work, the author suggests, always underscores her leanings “toward mystery and the unexpected” of the Divine (40). Yet, in O’Connor’s fiction, it is not only the protagonists who embody the grotesque, but also the spectral mother. The grotesque writer, O’Connor argues, is “looking for one image that will connect or combine or embody two points; one is a point in the concrete, and the other is a point not visible to the naked eye, but believed in by [the writer] firmly” (42). This “one image,” in *Violent*,

as in *Wise Blood*, is the spectral mother of psychoanalytic thinking. Specifically, the grotesque quality of *Violent* relies upon the spectral mother to affect the necessary gap between the concrete and the mysterious, between the secular and the theological. The “always grotesque” characters of O’Connor’s fiction, Rohman explains, are “intended to startle and unsettle the complacent, the unwitting, and the unregenerate” into some kind of mystery of the Divine (280). In O’Connor’s novels, the spectral mother occupies this grotesque space in that her role is to “unsettle” notions of the theological efficacy of psychoanalytic conceptions of maternity. In short, O’Connor’s deployment of the subject position of mother as a site through which she interrogates the competing constructions of maternity offered by Carl Jung and the Catholic Church renders the subject position of mother a monstrous site.

Jungian Discourse and Catholicism

Given the violence that dominates O’Connor’s theologically driven novel, it is not surprising that *Violent* is almost always read either through a theological or a psychological lens in attempts to come to terms with the brutality as well as supposed veracity of Tarwater’s call to prophesize. In the absence of female characters from the plot, scholarly attention is invariably drawn to the central male characters of the text, Tarwater, Mason, Rayber and Bishop. *Violent*, as is often noted by scholars, operates within the masculine tradition of the bildungsroman.² Women in the text, to borrow from Teresa Caruso’s general discussion of O’Connor’s work, are “in some manner, effectively silenced or subject to erasure” (*Subject* 3). That being said, despite the absence of women from the narrative, there is some recognition in critical discussion of a feminine aspect in O’Connor’s novel, though much of that discussion relies upon gender stereotypes.

Marshall Bruce Gentry, for one, suggests that many of the author's male characters, including Tarwater, "find redemption as they move toward androgyny" ("Gender" 57).³ Gentry's argument relies upon, as does Katherine Hemple Prown's, cultural associations of strength and power with the masculine, and vulnerability and passivity with the feminine. Specifically, the power Prown recognizes, not unlike the subversive power Gentry suggests, is based on the presumption of femininity as negation and absence.⁴ And so is Robert Donahoo's; however, in his Jungian reading of the text, Donahoo argues, "if we read O'Connor's texts with eyes not only for individual women but also for the feminine, the feminine emerges as a controlling force" (97). In a move that gestures to the stereotypes that underpin previous scholarly work, Donahoo's argument builds upon Elaine Showalter's description of the feminine as "absence and lack" (qtd. in Donahoo 97). Nonetheless, Donahoo's suggestion that the Jungian-inspired feminine acts as a "controlling force" in the narrative that in the end must be embraced is a cogent one, and I turn to his, and Frederick Asals', Jungian reading for support in my own discussion. However neither Donahoo's nor Asals' reading adequately accounts for the role of the Jungian archetypal Great Mother in this "male plot" (Donahoo 99). The feminine as a "controlling force" in O'Connor's novel is not simply a placeholder for the rejected, and neither does it solely occupy a space of "suffering" and "surrender" as Donahoo suggests (100). Rather, the potency and efficacy of the feminine in *Violent* relies upon the dynamic presence, not absence, of the Jungian maternal archetype that in turn gestures to O'Connor's interest in the central role held by the Virgin Mary in Catholic dogma.

The concept of a maternal archetype emerges out of Jung's theories of the psyche, and plays a complicated role as a potential site of accord between psychoanalysis and

Catholicism. The conscious mind of each individual, Jung claims, is comprised of a “personal unconscious” (9:3), a level specific to that individual, as well as a “deeper layer” that is universal to all individuals, which he dubs the “collective unconscious” (9:3). Jung suggests that the contents of the collective unconscious are organized by archetypes, “potential structure[s]” that reflect psychic energies and wisdom inherited from archaic humans (*Modern* 43). The purpose of these “sources of wisdom,” James Forsyth explains, is to “direct the libido or psychic energy toward the psychological and religious goal of selfhood” (89). Jung dubs this move toward a fully actualized self *individuation*, which, as Susan Rowland explains, is a process “by which archetypes intervene in and educate the ego” (30). Central to Jung’s thinking is the assertion that the process of individuation is confrontational given that archetypes exist as opposite and opposing forces. Archetypes, Jung suggests, “cannot be integrated simply by rational means, but require a dialectical procedure, a real coming to terms with them” (*Four* 5). So, the task of integration in Jung’s paradigm, as Raymond Hostie explains, “means above all things a confrontation” between the contents of the conscious mind and the archetypal contents of the unconscious in the hopes of achieving a balanced self (71). Relevant to my discussion is Jung’s assertion of competing masculine and feminine archetypes within the collective unconscious.

Jung’s theory of the individual, Liz Evans explains, in large measure relies on a conception of “contrasexuality, where masculinity and femininity reportedly exist in both men and women” (28). Jung’s ideas about the animus, the “masculine principal” found in women, and the anima, the “female principal found in men,” Evans notes, “rank among Jung’s more controversial theories because this is precisely where he tangles gender with

archetype” (37). For some, the centrality of the feminine in Jung’s thinking is a potential site of feminist revision. For example, Estella Lauter states, “the most important implication of [Jung’s] line of thought is that culturally defined masculine and feminine qualities are equally available for development by either sex” (4). Despite Lauter’s statements, however, Jung’s view is far from a feminist one. As Evans comments, in Jung’s thinking male energy, or “the masculine principle,” is associated with “logos . . . reason, logic, intellect and objectivity,” while the “feminine principle” is associated with “Eros” and the natural world (37). As Evans notes, “by nailing certain characteristics and aspects of a person to a particular gender . . . contrasexual theory reinforces polarized thinking concerning masculinity and femininity” (36). Lauter takes up this point when she suggests,

Despite all our efforts toward individuation, [Jung] said, Eros [the feminine aspect] would remain weaker in most males and Logos [the masculine aspect] weaker in most females. Thus he set arbitrary limits on the development of both sexes and reinforced the stereotypes of man as thinker, woman as nurturer. (6)

In general terms, Jung favours masculine consciousness, and the feminine emerges as a negative reflection of that which is deemed male. The category of woman, as Evans and others suggest, is confined within a reductive and essentialist paradigm that defines woman, as Jung himself describes, as the “not-I, not masculine” (9:27). Jung writes:

the paternal principle, the Logos . . . eternally struggles to extricate itself from the primal warmth and primal darkness of the maternal womb; in a word, from unconsciousness . . . Unconsciousness is the primal sin, evil

itself, for the Logos. Therefore its first creative act of liberation is matricide. (*Four* 30)

Jung's thinking is substantially problematic with respect to the feminine. While Jung recognizes maternity as a crucial element in the process of individuation, he posits this archetypal force as not only inferior to its masculine counterpoint, but a primordial force that must be annihilated. It is "evil itself."

Clearly, given the centrality of the feminine for Jung, it is not surprising that he dubbed the Catholic Church's 1950 doctrinal assertion of the Assumption of Mary "the most important religious event since the Reformation" (11:464). Significantly, from Jung's earliest writing, the psychoanalyst saw religious iconography and dogma, especially those espoused by the Catholic Church, as psychologically productive in the process of individuation. As Forsyth explains, for Jung, the meaning of "religious dogma, ritual, myth, and symbol" is "to be found in their relationship to those archetypal motifs which, as structural components of the 'collective unconscious', represent the transpersonal goal and meaning of human existence" (85). In Jungian terms, the Church's declaration of Mary's Assumption conferred upon her a god-like status that, as Forsyth notes, "symbolically restores the feminine principle to the deity" (121), and thus achieves a balancing of opposite forces so critical to Jung's ideal. Moreover, Mary's purported Assumption, for Jung, crucially added a fourth element, four being an "alchemical number" (Glover 159), to the previously imagined Holy Trinity. In Jung's view, Mary's Assumption re-constructs the God figure in terms of a "quaternary"--the ultimate archetypal symbol of balance (11:169-72)--not only through the figure's association with the feminine, but also with "materiality" and "evil" (11:172).⁵ As Naomi Goldenberg

notes, the dogma of the Assumption of Mary was “interesting to Jung chiefly because he saw in the dogma of her Assumption that the Catholic Church had now given positive recognition to ‘matter’ and ‘evil.’ In Jung’s view, this was Mary’s contribution to the completion of the image of God” (65). In stark contrast, from a Catholic perspective the Assumption of Mary reflected the Church’s interest in declaring Mary a Blessed figure whose “vocation” was to act as “a direct intermediary between Christ and men” (Carroll 136, 135). While Jung’s views and those of the Catholic Church coincide to the extent that both see the Virgin Mary as a mediator through to the all-powerful site of wholeness, the God/Self, Jung’s vision of Mary as an archetype of “materiality” and “evil” would appear to be a site an irresolvable contest between the two discourses.

Yet, Jung’s perspective on Catholic dogma, a perspective he reflects upon at length in his article “A Psychological Approach to the Dogma of the Trinity” (11:107-200), fuelled interest in a Catholic/psychoanalytic concordance. Catholic writers such as W.P. Witcutt declared Jung “the coming man” whose theories “may be with profit studied and in part absorbed by Catholic philosophy” (5). O’Connor’s personal library, as I note in my introduction, contained several copies of Jung’s works, all of which were heavily annotated by the author. Notably, O’Connor’s view of Jung’s scholarly forays into Catholic doctrinal issues did not echo those of Witcutt. Although Jungian thinking was embraced by a number of Catholics, including Witcutt, in the 1940s and 1950s, O’Connor felt that Jung’s approach to Catholicism, though it had “something to offer religion” (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Habit* 362), was even more “dangerous” than Freud’s (491). Though O’Connor does not directly expound upon the “danger[s]” of Jungian discourse at length, she does, in the same letter, describe Jung’s use of the symbolic (491), and it is Jung’s

consideration of maternal symbology that directly informs O'Connor's characterizations of spectral mothers throughout the narrative of *Violent*. As is the case with O'Connor's deployment of Freudian-inspired spectral mothers in *Wise Blood*, Jung's ideas about archetypal maternal forces provide a relevant frame for the author's engagement in a mid-century psycho-theological debate that relates to the mother's role in the process of self-actualization.

“Out of the womb of a whore”: O'Connor's Jungian-inspired Maternity

The bildungsroman of Tarwater is both a story of a young man's struggle to come to terms with the Divine and a narrative of Jungian self-actualization. Part one of *Violent* is dominated by the Fundamentalist religious zealotry of Mason, an old man to whom God had “sent . . . a rage of vision” (4-5), a vision that instructed Mason “to fly with the orphan boy to the farthest part of the backwoods and raise him up to justify his Redemption” (5). Though, as Paulson suggests, the character seems “crazy” and “domineering” to readers (*Flannery* 24), the staunchly Catholic O'Connor is clear in her paratextual writings on the subject of Mason that the character “has taught [Tarwater] the truth” (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Habit* 536). It is, O'Connor contends, “the old man who speaks for me” (350). Mason, in large measure, as Asals notes, stands in for the Christian Father to whom O'Connor's allegiance is well documented. Therefore, as Asals suggests, Tarwater's capitulation to Mason's demands of prophecy for the young boy early in his life closely align with the first stage of Jung's psychological Trinity (181), in which the son is under the command of the father's will (174).⁶ As Robert Miles argues, gothic fiction is often about a conflict between “authority and youth” (128). In O'Connor's

gothic text, the Fundamentalist Mason acts as a symbol of both a Christian and Jungian Father whom Tarwater must ultimately confront in this coming of age narrative.

Yet, Mason is not characterized, as Asals' reading suggests, simply as a "father." Crafted as a figure out of Jung's contrasexual paradigm, Mason's characterization reveals notable feminine aspects. As Emily Budick contends,

[The] Tarwaters' desire to eliminate sexuality and women from their world coincides with the desire to be their own purely masculine Christs . . . [however,] the Christ story depends on a third element: the Holy Ghost, the principle of love and compassion, which (from the Hebrew shekhinah) is also the female principle. The female spirit, the mother, is what the Tarwaters try to exclude from their world. It is what O'Connor, like Hawthorne before her, would restore. (175)

Though Budick does not recognize the "female principal" in the narrative until Tarwater's final moments, and she attributes no female characteristics to Mason, O'Connor's own statements about Mason's relationship to the "Holy Ghost" substantiate Budick's claims of the textual importance of the "female principle" to O'Connor's narrative. In a discussion of Mason, O'Connor writes: "The old man is very obviously not a Southern Baptist, but an independent, a prophet in the true sense. The true prophet is inspired by the Holy Ghost, not necessarily by the dominant religion of his region" (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Habit* 407). In theological terms, behind Mason's fundamentalist religious zealotry lies the feminized inspiration of a "natural Catholic" (407). Moreover, O'Connor's narrative not only identifies Mason as a feminized force, but also as a maternal one. Mason, as Donahoo suggests, "acts as a mother-substitute: nurturing,

feeding, and teaching a young child--a position in which he surrenders control and responds to another's needs" (99-100). As Erich Neumann notes, in Jungian discourse the Great Mother is associated with "all positive elements of existence, such as nourishment, food, warmth, protection, [and] safety" (67). Mason is both father and mother to the young man and thereby represents, Donahoo contends, a Jungian-inspired "symbol of the balanced union of male and female"(100). Farrell O'Gorman directly references Donahoo's assertion in his own discussion, and adds, "What old Tarwater wants most insistently, of course, is to make sure that all children are not only physically mothered but also baptized into Holy Mother Church" ("Violence" 157). Both aspects of old Tarwater, his religious zealotry for a masculine God and his mothering of Tarwater, are vital components of Tarwater's early years. In other words, though mothers are absent from the action of *Violent*, their spectral presence is evident through Mason, the character who "speaks" for O'Connor.

O'Connor's interest in ideological discussions of motherhood as a potential site of psychoanalytic/Catholic accord understandably draws the author to Jung's conception of an archetypal mother. For Jung, the Virgin Mary of Catholic dogma was a manifestation of the Great Mother, a figure with direct ties to religious belief. Jung writes: "The concept of the Great Mother belongs to the field of comparative religion and embraces widely varying types of mother-goddess" (11:75). The Jungian Great Mother, like the Virgin Mary, was viewed as a mediator of spiritual redemption. O'Connor's interest in the Jungian Great Mother is evident in the opening setting of *Violent*. Specifically, the author draws attention to the Great Mother in her repeated references to the maternally symbolic "woods" that surround Powderhead, Tarwater's ancestral home. The setting of Tarwater's

home, “in the farthest part of the backwoods” (5), “a mile through the woods on a path that appeared and disappeared” (6), is a place that “was not simply off the dirt road but off the wagon track and footpath” (12). Trees, woods, and forests are all considered symbols of the maternal archetype in Jungian thought (11:81). Jung, Susan Rowland explains, views the Great Mother as a “sacred” figure of “the Divine within or immanent in the world, not apart and transcendent of it” (47). Through Powderhead’s association with imagery of the Great Mother archetype, in the opening section of *Violent* O’Connor identifies Tarwater’s ancestral home as a “divine[ly]” maternal space, which in turn reveals the author’s theological attention to Jungian conceptions of maternity. Moreover, O’Connor’s interest in a Jungian quaternary is gestured to throughout *Violent* through the narrative’s insistent repetition of the number four.⁷ When Tarwater first decides to leave Powderhead, “Somewhere deep in the wood a woodthrush called, and as if the sound were a key turned in the body’s heart” and a “thrush . . . call[s] the same four notes again and again” (43). Rayber’s kidnapping by Mason had lasted “four days [during which time] the old man taught [Rayber] what was necessary to know and baptized him” (64). Finally, Tarwater spends four days in the city with Rayber; and, after Tarwater’s rape, “the woodthrush called again. With the same four formal notes it trilled its grief against the silence” (236). Each manifestation of the number four marks a confrontation between the Jungian-inspired forces of good and evil in O’Connor’s text.

O’Connor’s invocation of the numinous maternal archetype in the opening setting of her novel confirms the author’s interest in Jung’s masculinist schema. Just as crucially, the opening of *Violent* also indicates O’Connor’s use of a gothic mode to establish the mother as a site of ideological contest between Jung’s thinking and the Catholic Church.

As previously noted, Jung viewed Mary's Assumption as a valuable contribution to the God figure in part because this figure, for Jung, restored "evil" to the deity. He specifically links the Great Mother archetype to the Virgin Mary: "Perhaps the historical example of the dual nature of the mother most familiar to us is the Virgin Mary, who is not only the Lord's mother, but also, according to the medieval allegories, his cross" (11:82). Not unlike Freud's Oedipal maternal figure, the Jungian Great Mother is an ambivalent force; the figure "is not only a giver and protector of life but, as container, also holds fast and takes back; she is the goddess of life and death at once" (Neumann 45). David Punter points out the notably gothic aspect of this Jungian-inspired spectral mother. The Great Mother, Punter argues, is "always gesturing us backwards towards the undifferentiated and the pre-Oedipal" (*Pathologies* 128). Clearly, the gothic attributes of the Great Mother distinguish the figure from Catholic conceptions of the immaculate Virgin Mary. Indeed, O'Connor, in keeping with her theological interest in Jungian conceptions, highlights the gothic characteristics of the Jungian archetypal mother from the opening moments of her narrative. Tarwater is introduced as the "boy [who] got too drunk to finish digging his [Uncle's] grave" (3). Imagery of death as well as the grave are common gothic tropes, and at the same time, in Jungian thinking, operate as symbols of the "negative, evil" aspect of the Great Mother (Jung 11:81; Neumann 45). This complex symbolism is also conjured by O'Connor's multiple references to Mason's coffin (*Violent* 11,13). In fact, each of the components of the opening paragraph--death, the grave, the coffin, and even the "jug" which "a Negro named Buford Munson" carries (3)--are gothic motifs that at the same time have symbolic value relating to negative aspects of the

numinous Great Mother (Neumann 39). From the outset, the gothic imagery in *Violent* points to O'Connor's interest in problematic aspects of Jung's maternal archetype.

O'Connor's critique of the Jungian maternal archetype as a potential site of psychoanalytic/Catholic concordance helps to account for the misogynistic representations of mothers in *Violent*. Mason raises young Tarwater with the belief that Tarwater's mother, and his grandmother, Mason's sister, were "whores" (40). Both women died in a car crash, and Francis' mother, who was at the time pregnant, "(unmarried and shameless) had lived just long enough after the crash for him to be born" (41). Tarwater's grandmother, Mason's sister and Rayber's mother, is described as a woman who "sat in her nightgown all day drinking whisky out of a medicine bottle" (63). When Mason kidnapped the young Rayber in order to baptize the child, Rayber's "mother had not missed him for three days" (64). Bernice Bishop, Rayber's wife, had decided she could not help raise Tarwater because his "face for her had expressed the depth of human perversity . . . She said she could not have lived with such a face; she would have been bound to destroy the arrogant look on it" (181). Unable to cope with the demands of her intellectually challenged young son, Bernice Bishop abandons her family and was "now as far away as she could get, in Japan, in some welfare capacity" (180). For the most part, O'Connor's misogynistic characterization of female characters, and in this case mothers, is read as a reflection of the author's deference to, and fear of, paternal authority. Sarah Gordon, for instance, in her discussion of O'Connor's problematic "treatment of women" (96), suggests that the author's "obedient imagination" allows O'Connor to both "create[] and explore[] fictive worlds" (245), while at the same time these works are "within the limits of faithful obedience to the hierarchical Church" (245). Similarly, Claire Kahane

suggests that “[p]erhaps because power is associated with the male role, O’Connor is peculiarly harsh toward women who try to succeed by their own efforts” (64).⁸ Yet, O’Connor’s apparent censure of women is even more complex than Gordon’s or Kahane’s readings suggest. A failure to fulfill culturally accepted ideas of mothering is the defining trait of each of the women, which gestures to the author’s interest in the negative aspects of the Jungian archetypal mother.

The violent erasure of mothers from O’Connor’s plot also mirrors the erasure of individual mothers from Jung’s theories. Jung “attribute[s] to the personal mother only a limited aetiological significance” (9.1:83). The individual mother, according to Jung, has little “influence” on the child (83); rather, “all those influences which the literature describes as being exerted on the children do not come from the mother herself, but rather from the archetype projected upon her, which gives her a mythological background and invests her with authority and numinosity” (83). The archetype is the foundation of subjectivity, not the “real” mother. Whereas Freud situates the son’s desire for the mother as an originary element in the process of psychosexual development, Jung posits the child’s sexual desire for the mother as not “the ultimate thing symbolized” (White 55). In Jungian thinking, incestuous feelings are “the symbol of a yet more fundamental need and desire” (55). Specifically, in Jung’s discourse, incestuous desire is symbolic of a “religious and spiritual desire for rebirth which cannot be accomplished by a mere return to the womb” (Forsyth 90). This difference in focus between Freud and Jung not only helps to account for the erasure of mothers from *Violent*’s plot, but also aids in understanding O’Connor’s move from the overtly sexualized counterfeit mothers of *Wise Blood*, to the spectralized maternal figure in *Violent*.

The negatively defined spectral maternity of O'Connor's narrative is key to understanding the author's employment of the subject position of mother as a site of ideological contest between Catholicism and Jungian thinking. For Jung, both positive and negative aspects of an archetype are necessary elements of individuation. As Rowland explains: "Archetypes are bipolar in that they contain their own opposites, so that the mother archetype can be manifested as a caring female form, yet will also be able to produce a devouring monster mother image: it all depends what the ego needs at the time" (30). Even the "monster mother" is a necessary component of self-actualization. With respect to O'Connor's text, Mason asserts that Tarwater's vocation as a prophet is confirmed by Mason's belief that the "Lord" had allowed Tarwater to be "rescued . . . out of the womb of a whore" (*Violent* 41). In terms of Mason's fundamentalist view, "whore" is analogous with monster. For Paulson, Tarwater's birth "out of the womb of a whore" is intended as "a perverse parody of the virgin birth of Christ" ("Apocalypse" 130). In contrast, Asals suggests that the circumstances of Tarwater's birth gesture to the "legendary heroic birth" of a Jungian Hero archetype, whose mother is typically characterized as a royal virgin (177). Indeed, O'Connor herself describes *Violent* as "the one with the hero named Tarwater" (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Habit* 47). However, as Asals notes, Tarwater's "mother is a far cry from the usual virgin" (177). For Asals, Tarwater's rather ignoble beginning gestures to "O'Connor's use of jarring myths whose clash provides the novel with one of its principal sources of tension" (172). I agree with both Asals and Paulson to the extent that Tarwater's birth is intended to "jar" the reader, and to gesture to the "pervers[ion]" of the Virgin Mary's role. Tarwater's birth codes him as a

hero in Jungian terms and confirms O'Connor's employment of the spectral mother as an instrument through which she critiques the fully actualized Self of Jungian conception.

Throughout the text, Tarwater searches for the meaning behind the circumstances of his birth:

He would often ask [his Uncle] why he thought the Lord had rescued him out of the womb of a whore and let him see the light of day at all, and then why, having done it once, He had gone and done it again, allowing him to be baptized by his great-uncle into the death of Christ. (41)

Tarwater's struggle with his destiny, from the outset, is largely characterized by his negatively defined maternal origin and its direct link to baptism and Christian redemption. He is "rescued" from the "womb of a whore," and then baptized in order to receive Christian redemption. In Jungian terms, baptism reflects the human "longing for redemption" and rebirth that is manifested through the Archetypal Feminine (11:81,116). So the narrative trajectory of Tarwater's origins, from mother to rebirth to God, traces the path of the Jungian Archetype. As Forsyth explains, "the religious image of rebirth is a conscious symbol of the unconscious quest for wholeness--a conscious representation onto which the archetype of the self is projected" (87). Tarwater's struggle with baptism throughout the narrative is not simply a struggle over whether or not to accept a Fundamentalist religious view as critics of the novel suggest;⁹ rather, Tarwater's struggle, through the iconography of baptism, and its association with maternity in Jungian and Catholic thinking, reflects O'Connor's interest in points of divergence between psychoanalytic and Catholic conceptions of mothers.

Tarwater's encounter with the maternal archetype closes part one of the novel through the figure of Bishop, Rayber's intellectually disabled son. Bishop is identified by scholars as the "one who, for O'Connor, bears Christ most fully" (Cuba 149), a "Christ type," who "represents the divine mystery Tarwater will have to come to terms with before he can begin his ministry" (Lake 147). Indeed, after meeting Bishop, Tarwater "only knew, with a certainty sunk in despair, that he was expected to baptize the child he saw and begin the life his great-uncle had prepared him for. . . He tried to shout, 'NO!' but it was like trying to shout in his sleep. The sound was saturated in silence, lost" (91-2; emphasis in original). Significantly, through Rayber, Bishop's father, O'Connor makes the link between Bishop and God explicit: Rayber "did not believe that he himself was formed in the image and likeness of God but that Bishop was he had no doubt" (113). But Bishop is just as crucially a symbol of the maternal archetype. Most obviously, the character carries his mother's name. As Budick argues, O'Connor's naming of Bishop after his mother gestures to the feminization of Christ in Christian mythology (168). Moreover, throughout the narrative, O'Connor makes repeated reference to the "completely irrational . . . imperious and all demanding" love that Bishop conjures in Rayber that was "powerful enough to throw [Rayber] to the ground in an act of idiot praise" (113). Jung, in his discussion of religious symbology, suggests that "things arousing devotion or feelings of awe" are "mother symbols" that reflect "our longing for redemption" (11:81). In other words, O'Connor's characterization of Bishop, like that of Mason, reflects both paternal and maternal elements within a Jungian paradigm.

Further evidence of Bishop's association with a Jungian-inspired spectral mother is found in O'Connor's "The Lame Shall Enter First" (1962), which, as Gentry notes, is a

story “closely patterned after [*Violent*]” (155). Gentry points out that the character of Bishop closely reflects that of Norton, and though Gentry suggests that Norton’s “redemptive reunion with his dead mother [is] on the story’s margin” (158), the importance of the mother in Norton’s life and death is at the centre of the narrative. After all, Norton’s suicide, arguably the climax of the narrative, is motivated by his desire to join his dead mother in the “stars” (“Lame” 611). In both “The Lame” and in *Violent*, then, the possibility of redemption for the central male protagonist lies in the existence of a maternal force that will lead to heaven. Norton, the character upon whom Bishop is modeled, operates as a symbol of a desire for, and union with, the mother. In other words, maternity itself is at the very centre of “The Lame,” as it is with *Violent*. From a theological perspective, in *Violent*, the maternally identified Bishop will lead Tarwater towards an encounter with religion. At the same time, from a Jungian perspective, in order to achieve self-actualization, Tarwater must confront Bishop’s contrasexual presence. Though *Violent* is constructed within the masculinist tradition of a bildungsroman, and individual mothers are erased from the plot, the spectral mother, as prescribed by Jungian and Catholic discourse, plays a crucial and dynamic role that confirms O’Connor’s interest in ideological debate.

“Something is going on here that counts”: Jungian and Catholic Maternal Mediation

In part two of the novel, a section that aligns with the second phase of Jungian individuation, Tarwater attempts to collect evidence of what is “true” in his life (*Violent* 107). As Asals’ Jungian reading of O’Connor’s text suggests, “With the full articulation of the defiance, old Tarwater disappears as the dominant presence in the novel. The time

of the ‘Father’ is over, that of the ‘Son’ about to begin” (179). In *Violent*, as in Jung’s discourse, this is a time of confrontation, and, in this section, Rayber attempts to counteract Mason’s influence on the boy with a secularist vision in which “[t]he great dignity of man . . . is his ability to say: I am born once and no more” (172). Yet, with Bishop’s baptism as the central action of part two, the confrontation in O’Connor’s narrative is as much an encounter with the Jungian maternal archetype as it is with Mason’s and Rayber’s radically differing views on God and religion. In fact, whereas Mason is associated with both God and the maternal in part one, in part two Rayber is characterized not only by his rejection of the idea of Christian rebirth and God, but also by his concomitant role as a non-mother. As already discussed, Mason, to echo Donahoo’s argument, acts as a “mother-substitute” in O’Connor’s text in large measure through the character’s normatively prescribed “nurturing” and “feeding” of the young Tarwater (99-100). Significantly, O’Connor distinguishes between Mason and Rayber based on their ability, or inability in Rayber’s case, to nurture, or mother. Rayber’s relationship with his own child lacks any sense of mothering. In contrast to Tarwater and Mason, Rayber and Bishop live “like two bachelors whose habits were so smoothly connected that they no longer needed to take notice of each other” (112). Rather than being fed by his caregiver, as was Tarwater, Bishop must “feed” himself (112). Unlike Mason, the secular Rayber is unable to provide either spiritual or physical nurture: “[Tarwater] and his great-uncle had eaten well. If the old man had done nothing else for him, he had heaped his plate . . . [Rayber] paid scarce attention to what he put inside him” (161). In contrast to the spiritual nurturing that Mason provides, Rayber’s relationship with Tarwater is entirely secular. Rayber, as he tells Tarwater, believes that religion is

“not worth spitting on” (145). Rayber’s inability to provide Tarwater with spiritual or physical nurture thereby strengthens the link between God and the maternal by the association of religious belief with nurture in Mason’s characterization, and the link between secularism with non-nurture in Rayber’s characterization.

In O’Connor’s text, the spectral mother’s connection to God is highlighted through the growing hunger Tarwater experiences in this section of the novel. As the text notes, “The first day in the city [Tarwater] had become conscious of the strangeness in his stomach, a peculiar hunger” (161). Ross Labrie argues that Tarwater’s hunger has a clear theological basis: “Also strongly allegorical is the motif of food in connection with young Tarwater, an insatiable hunger that only God can fill” (227). At the same time, Tarwater’s hunger is associated not only with a paternal deity, but also with the maternal archetype. Specifically, this “peculiar hunger” begins in the moment of Mason’s death:

Since the breakfast [Tarwater] had finished sitting in the presence of his uncle’s corpse, he had not been satisfied by food, and his hunger had become like an insistent silent force inside him, a silence inside akin to the silence outside, as if the grandtrap left him barely an inch to move in, barely an inch in which to keep himself inviolate. (O’Connor, *Violent* 162)

Tarwater’s hunger is an “insistent silent force . . . a silence inside akin to the silence outside.” The author’s attention to silence-as-hunger gestures to the “saturat[ion]” of silence that overwhelms Tarwater when he initially meets the divinely and maternally identified Bishop at the end of section one (91-2). Notably, my reading of the connection between silence and hunger coincides with that of Martha Stephens. Stephens suggests: “This mysterious sense of an awesome silence all around [Tarwater] and of an

unfathomable hunger that will not be satisfied are signs of the futility of his attempt to escape Jesus into the world, and they are really one and the same” (126). Given this conflation of the spiritual with hunger and silence, silence, and by extension hunger, acts simultaneously as a symbol of the Divine and the maternal. Though mothers are eradicated from the plot of *Violent*, their archetypal presence is a driving force in Tarwater’s maturation.

Clearly, O’Connor’s characterization of a feminine energy does little to redeem her masculinist narrative. Initially, differences between Mason’s and Rayber’s characterization of mothers in this section of the text seem to counteract Mason’s misogynist comments about Tarwater’s mother. In contrast to Mason’s misogynistic view, Rayber tells Tarwater, ““Your mother was not a whore . . . That’s just some rot [Mason’s] taught you. She was a good healthy American girl, just beginning to find herself when she was struck down”” (107). Yet, as scholars note, Rayber’s statements fall short of establishing a more positive characterization of Tarwater’s mother. Budick argues that Rayber’s characterization of Tarwater’s mother is intended to reflect his own incestuous perversions (165), and Bruce Bawer reads Rayber’s attempt to re-characterize Tarwater’s picture of his mother as a reflection of O’Connor’s attempt to poke fun at the jargon of secular self-obsession” (317). What Rayber’s characterization does accomplish is that it allows O’Connor to fortify the distinction between Rayber and Mason, and thus between secularism and religion. In keeping with O’Connor’s employment of maternity as a site of ideological contest, the author relies on misogynistic imagery of mothers for her own theological aims. Indeed, O’Connor’s exploration of the spectral mother, an exploration conducted within the patriarchal ideologies of the Church and psychoanalysis,

relies upon the textual negation of mothers and operates solely in relation to filial subjectivity. This is, after all, the story of a son's journey to adulthood.

Despite O'Connor's inculcation within a masculinist frame, it is, nonetheless, Tarwater's hunger and its association with both the maternal archetype and the Divine that drives his return visit to a Pentecostal tabernacle, a site Tarwater, Rayber, and Bishop had come across on one of their many walks during Tarwater's first four days in the city (109). Jung suggests that the physical structure of a Church is a mother symbol (*Collected* 11:81), and in O'Connor's narrative this structure highlights the role of the mother in Tarwater's spiritual journey (123). Within the temple, the first speaker introduced by the preacher is Mrs. Carmody, the mother of child evangelist, Lucette. Though ignored in critical discourse, Mrs. Carmody is a significant character in that she is the only actual mother in *Violent*. In keeping with O'Connor's construction of maternity as an ideological site throughout her text, Mrs. Carmody is depicted solely in terms of her status as a mother. Mrs. Carmody explains to the crowd, "Our little girl began to preach when she was six. We saw that she had a mission, that she had been called . . . and so we have endured many hardships to give her to the world, to bring her to you tonight" (129). Although "Our" and "We" indicates both father and mother, in this scene it is the maternal figure who espouses her role as a mediator for the Divine through her child. Divested of any subjectivity outside of her maternal role, Mrs. Carmody, like the Virgin Mary of Catholic doctrine, purportedly acts as a mediator of Godly redemption. Hiding in the back of the room, Tarwater watches as Lucette takes centre stage to "tell" the crowd how Jesus will "come again" and that they should "be ready so that on the last day you'll rise in the glory of the Lord" (130).¹⁰ For Donahoo, the story Lucette preaches is a

“rejection story” of Christ that directly “link[s] the feminine with the Divine, particularly at the point of rejection” (99). As Donahoo explains, “the world’s rejection of Christ is textually united with the rejection of a woman . . . ‘this blue-cold child and this woman, plain as the winter’” (99). O’Connor’s narrative, Donahoo ultimately asserts, posits the feminine as “something that is rejected as false” (98), as well as the site of “salvation”: “salvation [is] found in the experience of the rejected ‘other,’ the feminine” (105). However, while Donahoo’s assertion that the feminine is a crucial feature of the Tabernacle scene is a sound one, his suggestion that the narrative “reject[s]” this force is problematic. Although in *Violent* Tarwater tells Rayber that he had “‘only gone to spit on it’” (136), the proliferation of maternal figures in this scene confirms a narrative trope at the centre of O’Connor’s text: Tarwater’s prophetic destiny will involve his repeated confrontation with a dynamic, and inescapable, spectral mother.

As Tarwater continues along the path of self-actualization, the spectral mother reappears in the “wood in the middle of the city” that he is “shocked to find” (140). O’Connor describes the entrance to the park as going “inside” to a place that “reminded [Tarwater] of Powderhead” (141). Here Tarwater enters a maternal space that is linked to his Pentecostal upbringing. The link between the maternal and God is furthered through Rayber’s reaction to Bishop in this moment. As Rayber bends to tie the child’s shoes, he remembers the painful and all-powerful love for his child, which, as earlier discussed, operates as a symbol both of the Jungian maternal archetype and the Divine. Here, the complex symbol is directly connected to baptism through the lethal immersion in water. Rayber remembers “one terrible afternoon when he had tried to drown [Bishop]” (141). When, moments later, Rayber attempts to convince Tarwater to accept a secularist view

of the world and to convince Tarwater that Mason was ““only worth our pity”” (145), in the very “center of the park” (145), the spectral mother intervenes.

In Jungian symbology, water is associated with the maternal archetype (*Four* 15), and so it is not surprising that Tarwater’s second confrontation in part two of the narrative occurs at a fountain, where he comes close to baptizing Bishop: “They had come out into the center of the park, a concrete circle with a fountain in the middle of it. Water rushed from the mouth of a stone lion’s head . . . He seemed to be drawn toward the child in the water but to be pulling back, exerting an almost equal pressure away from what attracted him” (145). As Christina Lake notes, “criticism has tended to minimize Bishop’s importance in the novel by treating Tarwater’s call as merely the vestiges of the old man’s vision” (147). For Lake, Bishop operates in the novel as a “complex and living incarnation of the beautiful” which Tarwater is “drawn to instead of repulsed by” (“Transcending” 142).¹¹ Lake’s reading of Bishop as an “incarnation of the beautiful” clearly points to a numinous aspect that, within the narrative, is acknowledged by Rayber in this moment. Here, Rayber sees that Tarwater’s need to baptize Bishop was a “compulsion” that could only be “cur[ed]” with “[s]ome sudden concrete confrontation” (146). In the novel, this confrontation is with the maternally identified and numinous Bishop, and therefore with the spectral mother.

Tarwater’s “mission” to baptize Bishop, as Muller notes, “frames the grotesque action in the novel” (64). Indeed, the conflation of baptism and murder in the novel highlights the “mystery” between the secular and the spiritual. Crucially, the setting of Bishop’s murder/baptism (as Lake notes, the “concrete centre of the novel” (172)), is the Cherokee lodge, a site dominated by symbols of the maternal archetype. Not only is the

Cherokee lodge, like Powderhead and the city fountain, set in woods, but water is also one of its distinguishing features: “One end [of the lodge] sat on land and the other was set on stilts in a glassy little lake across which were dense woods, green and black farther toward the skyline, grey-blue” (149). Tarwater immediately recognizes the significance of this setting and his impending life-altering confrontation: “He looked at the water with a peculiar undisguised hostility” (151) and he tells the lodge’s receptionist that ““You can’t just say NO . . . You got to do NO . . . I never ast to come here . . . I never ast for that lake to be set down in front of me”” (157; emphasis in original). And it is in this moment that the voice of the stranger who haunts Tarwater from the earliest moments of the narrative incites Tarwater to murder. O’Connor is clear in her paratextual writing that the figure of the stranger stands in for the devil.¹² For Gentry, the devil in O’Connor’s work is a narrative device that emphasizes the power of free will.¹³ Miles Orvell’s work on the novel substantiates this view: “In short the *wholly* self-determined action that Tarwater wills is an illusion; in the world of the novel, there is a force surrounding the characters which they cannot help but respond to” (111; emphasis in original).¹⁴ Indeed, in the novel, with a “look of starvation” that characterizes Tarwater’s near breaking point as an overwhelming absence of divine and maternal energy (165), the young man engages in a conversation with his internal tormentor: ““I wasn’t going to baptize [Bishop]’, [Tarwater] said, flinging the silent words at the silent face. ‘I’d drown him first”” (165). Here, O’Connor’s theological interest in Tarwater’s choice between sin and salvation becomes a choice between baptism and murder, between the devil and God. At least in this moment, Tarwater chooses the demonic: “There was a strange suppressed excitement about the boy’s whole figure, as if he had settled on an inevitable course of action” (176-

77). In the presence of the Jungian Great Mother, who, unlike the Virgin Mary, is a figure of both good and evil, Tarwater has the option of choosing the latter. In other words, this moment highlights O'Connor's critique of maternity as a site of Jungian and Catholic accord.

The association of evil with Mary, as discussed earlier, is in direct contrast to the Catholic doctrinal assertion of Mary's immaculate status. Given the Jungian script of O'Connor's narrative, Tarwater's acceptance of the voice of the stranger operates symbolically as Tarwater's embrace of the negative maternal archetype, a figure that, for O'Connor, leads away from God and into death. Tarwater decides: "I can act" (196). As Asals notes, it is in this section of the novel that Tarwater symbolically fulfills the second phase of Jungian individuation (179-80). In this stage of individuation, Hostie explains, the child "inevitably tries to emancipate itself. It turns its back on its mother's love, throws off its father's authority, and hurls itself into a battle for its own personality in the external world" (202). In terms of Tarwater's relationship with the maternally coded devil, in the ironic world of O'Connor's narrative, to choose the demonic path is to follow the Great Mother along a Jungian path of development.

The manifestation of evil is as much the subject of O'Connor's oeuvre as is her oft-noted interest in the power of God's Grace. As she states: "I have found, in short, from reading my own writing, that my subject in fiction is the action of grace in territory held largely by the devil" (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Mystery* 118). Even in the moment of Bishop's murder, arguably one of the more "evil" moments in *Violent*, O'Connor gestures to the potential for a larger divine force. As Lake notes, "Out of the habit of the act so deeply embedded in Tarwater's soul, the mystery of the sacrament overpowers him.

Tarwater acts, but he is also acted upon by the force of the event” (175). Moreover, it is also at this “center point” of the narrative that O’Connor’s critique of Jungian notions of the spectral mother as a site of psychoanalytic and Catholic accord is most pronounced. Notably, the theological stance of O’Connor’s writing is the subject of some scholarly debate, and O’Connor’s depiction of baptism in *Violent* is a flashpoint for some of that debate. As Labrie suggests, Bishop’s baptism is “a curiously Catholic act in a religious culture where adult voluntary baptism was the norm” (225). Labrie sees this discrepancy as an authorial “lapse” which “suggests the ease with which O’Connor sometimes drew on material alternately either from Catholicism or Protestantism in accord with her purposes” (225). For Labrie, the “curiously Catholic act” of Bishop’s baptism “reflected [O’Connor’s] not altogether ecumenical assumption that the best of Protestantism was Catholic at heart” (225). Yet, Labrie’s argument seems unlikely given the vehement disagreements on the issue of infant baptism between Catholics and “left-wing” Protestants such as Fundamentalist adherents (Sweet 43). Writing in 1948, William W. Sweet notes that, in contrast to Catholics, “left-wing Protestants . . . repudiated infant baptism and adopted believers’ baptism” (43).¹⁵ More crucially, Labrie’s reading fails to account for O’Connor’s interest in the complex relationship between Catholic and Jungian thinking. Father White, (a Catholic Priest whose text includes an introduction by Jung), in an attempt to distinguish Jung’s thinking from Freud’s, suggests baptism, and the concomitant spiritual redemption it offers, is a point of concordance between Catholicism and Jungian thinking via the maternal figure. He argues, “the plunging of the neophyte in the font is not [a] sorry substitute[]for incestuous penetration of the mother; the union with the mother is the shadow of inward rebirth and baptismal regeneration into

life more abundant” (55). For White, Jung’s discourse, as is the case in Catholic dogma, posits baptism as a symbolic return to the maternal figure who in turn acts as a mediator through to a “life more abundant.” Baptism is a symbol of the mother-as-spiritual intermediary. Though the archetypal mother acts as a mediator in both discourses, there are critical points of divergence relating to maternity between Catholicism and Jung on this point.

In *Violent*, O’Connor employs imagery of the Jungian maternal archetype in the baptism/murder scene in order to highlight the archetype’s divergence from Catholic conceptions of the Virgin Mary. As is the case with *Wise Blood*, though the superficial setting of the novel is Protestant, the underlying narrative is a Catholic one. Each of the components of the baptism/murder scene, baptism itself, as well as Bishop and the water in which he is drowned, gesture to symbols of the maternal archetype in Jungian discourse. Tarwater and Bishop’s immersion into the water in this scene enact a return to the Great Mother, and at the same time raises the issue, from a religious perspective, of the efficacy of the archetype. At least initially, it appears that the Jungian archetype has indeed led Tarwater to a paternal God: “[Tarwater] knew with an instinct as sure as the dull mechanical beat of his heart that he had baptized the child even as he drowned him, that he was headed for everything the old man had prepared him for, that he moved off now through the black forest toward a violent encounter with his fate” (203). This immersion into the spectral mother appears to lead Tarwater to the God figure, towards “everything the old man had prepared him for.” Yet, Tarwater is not redeemed at this point in the novel. Up until the final moments of *Violent*, Tarwater asserts that Bishop’s

baptism “was an accident . . . I only meant to drown him” (209). In her paratextual writing, O’Connor notes,

When I write a novel in which the central action is a baptism, I am very well aware that for a majority of my readers, baptism is a meaningless rite, and so in my novel I have to see that this baptism carries enough awe and mystery to jar the reader into some kind of emotional recognition of its significance. To this end I have to bend the whole novel--its language, its structure, its action. I have to make the reader feel, in his bones if nowhere else, that something is going on here that counts.

(qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Mystery* 162).

O’Connor’s statements suggest that the question of whether Bishop was baptized or murdered in *Violent* “counts.” For O’Connor, baptism reflects a return to the Divine, to an everlasting life in “the kingdom of heaven” through the annihilation of an earthly self. For Jung, baptism reflects a longing for redemption; however, the aim of Jungian rebirth is a fully actualized self--a very secular goal. As Robert Brinkmeyer suggests, ultimately Tarwater’s choice “is not Christ or the Devil, but Christ or the individual self” (118). While the Virgin Mary leads to a paternal God and life everlasting, the Jungian archetypal mother leads to spiritual death via Jung’s focus on the individual self. In Jung’s view, although God is “psychologically true” (Hostie 116), the figure is in actuality a manifestation of the Self archetype. As Forsyth explains, in Jung’s view, “the various God-images appearing throughout the history of religion” are “archetype[s] of wholeness, unity, and totality,” the Self (89).¹⁶ The question that haunts Tarwater, whether he has murdered or baptized Bishop, reflects the problematic disparity between Catholic and

Jungian conceptions. In effect, O'Connor uses the grotesque baptism/murder scene to pose the question of the theological value of the Jungian spectral mother. Given the ambivalence that characterizes Tarwater's response to the event, O'Connor seems skeptical at best.

“GO WARN THE CHILDREN”: Maternally Determined Annihilation

Part Three of O'Connor's novel focuses on the final stage of Tarwater's journey toward his destiny. In terms of Jung's theories, Asals suggests, this section of the novel aligns with the third and final stage of growth in the process of individuation (191). For Asals, the end of the novel marks Tarwater's "atonement with the father" (191). Notably, Asals' reading of this moment as an affirmation of paternalistic supremacy coincides with Josephine Hendin's suggestion that Tarwater "assume[s] the role of the traditional female protagonist[]" in that his final moments are ones of "submission, dependence, and a 'rude awakening to limits'" (138). The hallmark of this Jungian stage, Hostie explains, is one of "adult submission" (203). The "grown man," Hostie notes,

should unite the two preceding stages by realizing that his independence is no more absolute than the other values in his life and has no meaning unless he is prepared to submit freely to a reality that transcends him. He thus returns to the totality he had left behind him, not through any childish abdication of responsibility but as a result of an adult submission. (203)

Clearly, Tarwater, in the end, "submit[s] freely" to a paternal divine will. In complete capitulation to his Uncle's demands in the first stage of Tarwater's life, the young man ultimately embraces his destiny to "GO WARN THE CHILDREN OF GOD OF THE TERRIBLE SPEED OF MERCY" (*Violent* 242; emphasis in original). However, the

demand that the individual in the third stage of maturation “should unite the two preceding stages” raises some difficult questions in Jungian literary analysis in light of Tarwater’s rejection of Rayber’s views. As Asals notes, “it is precisely at this point [in the novel] that *The Violent Bear It Away* diverges sharply from Jung’s paradigm” (192). Jung, Asals suggests, “posits in this last phase a union of those opposites which appear split in the second stage as “Christ” and the “adversary” (182-3, 6); however, “when [Tarwater] unconditionally rejects his adversary and submits himself to the father, he thereby surrenders reason and reflection altogether” (192, 182). In other words, in Asals’ Jungian reading, Tarwater does not experience a balancing of opposites as represented through the diametrically opposed views of Mason and Rayber. However, O’Connor’s narrative does achieve a “union of opposites.” Specifically, Tarwater’s capitulation to “the father” in the final moments of the novel mirrors his submission to a maternal archetypal force that emerges at each critical narrative point. Tarwater, O’Connor notes, has a “hard head” (qtd. in Cash 69), and so must “see and feel what the devil is [in order] to turn to God” (69). And, it is in the third section of the novel that Tarwater meets one of O’Connor’s most demonic characters, the pedophilic rapist, who will finally compel Tarwater’s submission to both a masculine and feminized force, a submission that secures Tarwater’s turn towards his prophetic destiny.

The rape scene of the novel, like the murder of Bishop, is a horrific one that brings the gothic impulse of O’Connor’s text to the forefront. Clearly the rapist fits the gothic motif of “evil villain” (Goddu 5), and Tarwater’s experience evokes a sense of trauma that is a distinguishing feature of the gothic mode (Bruhm, *Cambridge* 268). Though the rape scene in *Violent* has attracted a fair amount of critical discussion, the inherent

feminization in the scene demands consideration.¹⁷ Specifically, the assault takes place in the maternally defined space of the woods, and the rapist is described in a manner that draws attention to normative links between the feminine and homosexuality. The “pale” and “lean” character has eyes that “were ringed with heavy black lashes” (227), characteristics that point to his feminization. His “lavender shirt,” read in light of Vito Russo’s discussion of homosexual imagery in films, gestures to the link in cultural discourse between homosexuality and the feminine (38-9). Moreover, the potential maternal nature of this feminine force is suggested in O’Connor’s references to the rapist’s strategy of drugging the young Tarwater. In Jung’s discussion of the mother archetype, he lists a number of negative aspects, which include “anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate” (11:82). In order to violate Tarwater, the rapist “poisons” the young man with a marijuana cigarette and a “liquid . . . thicker than any whiskey he had ever had before” (229, 230). In the scene, even “the air itself might have been drugged” (231). When Tarwater awakes, he finds that “[h]is clothes were neatly piled by his side” (232), a domestic act that gestures to a normatively defined maternal role. In the text, this act is followed up by O’Connor’s attention to Tarwater’s mouth: “The boy’s mouth twisted open and to the side as if it were going to displace itself permanently. In a second it appeared to be only a gap that would never be a mouth again” (232). In Jungian theory, as Neumann notes, “*all* body openings,” including the “mouth . . . and rectum,” operate as symbols of the “essence of the feminine” and, as such, are “as places of exchange between inside and outside, a numinous accent for early man” (39; emphasis in original). Indeed, in the text, Tarwater’s rape compels “numinous” feelings. Tarwater “knew that he could not turn back now. He

knew that his destiny forced him on to a final revelation” (233). Brinkmeyer argues, “[t]he rape propels Tarwater out of the realm of everyday concerns and into the faraway country of Christ and the spirit; rather than resisting his prophetic destiny, he now rushes to it” (127). Importantly, O’Connor’s own statements about the rape confirm this trajectory. O’Connor states that the rape “brings home to Tarwater the real nature of his rejection. I couldn’t have brought off the final vision without it” (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Habit* 368). The proposed efficacy of this moment is incredibly problematic. As Prown notes, “Like the heroine of a romance novel, Tarwater experiences rape as an awakening to the pleasures of submission to the power of the phallus, a divine instrument wielded by a rapist who is, in effect, an agent of God” (151). But this scene is even more troubling than Prown suggests. The “agent of God” who compels Tarwater’s submission to a masculine phallus is a malevolent feminized force, which in turn gestures to the Jungian Great Mother as spiritual intercessor. Tarwater’s rape, as O’Connor notes, is a confrontation between Tarwater and the devil, but it is also, like the murder of Bishop, characterized as a confrontation with the evil aspects of Jung’s feminine archetype. In order to further her critique of Great Mother as a site of Catholic/psychoanalytic accord, O’Connor’s narrative fully participates in the misogynistic conceptions of woman at the heart of Jungian theory.

Symbols of the maternal archetype dominate Tarwater’s final return to Powderhead through O’Connor’s multiple reference to “woods”: The “ripening berries, turned sharply and pierced into the wood which lay dark and dense before him” and he “blindly follow[s] the faint path that led down through the wood to the clearing” (236). Tarwater arrives in Powderhead and sees that “[t]he corn the old man had left planted was

up about a foot and moved in wavering lines of green across the field. It had been freshly plowed” (238). Jung suggests that the maternal archetype “is often associated with things and places standing for fertility and fruitfulness: the cornucopia, a ploughed field, a garden” (*Four* 15). So, Tarwater’s return to his ancestral home and the Fundamentalist belief system of Mason is thereby characterized as a return to maternal embrace. In keeping Jung’s ideas of the maternal archetype as a mediator to a God/Self, in the final moments of O’Connor’s narrative maternal imagery conjoins with paternal imagery. Coming full circle from the gothic opening setting of the text, the narrator of *Violent* offers the following description of Mason’s grave:

The grave, freshly mounded, lay between [Tarwater and Buford]. Tarwater lowered his eyes to it. At its head, a dark rough cross was set starkly in the bare ground. The boy’s hands opened stiffly as if he were dropping something he had been clutching all his life. His gaze rested finally on the ground where the wood entered the grave. (O’Connor, *Violent* 240)

Here O’Connor offers an imagistic union of masculine and feminine archetypes. The masculine Christ figure is represented by the cross, and the “bad” aspect of the Great Mother is present through the imagery of the grave (Neumann 67). As Neumann notes, the “bad” or “Terrible Mother” (what Jung dubs the negative aspect of the Great Mother) is associated with “death” and the “grave” “based on her devouring-ensnaring function, in which she draws the life of the individual back into herself” (72). O’Connor’s specific reference to “where the wood entered the grave” thereby draws attention to a contrasexual union of archetypes. For Tarwater, this is a moment of self-actualization, and, as Gentry argues, in this moment, “Tarwater’s freedom is clear” (*Flannery* 151) in that “Tarwater

realizes that his original obligation to Old Tarwater has been fulfilled, and that if he wishes to go off on a path different from the one Old Tarwater wants him to follow, *now* is the time to start” (151; emphasis in original). In O’Connor’s narrative, “now” is the moment of theological transcendence, and Tarwater’s chosen “path” will not deviate from that of Mason’s.

Standing over the imagist and contrasexual union of the archetypal figures, Tarwater has a prophetic vision:

Everywhere, he saw dim figures seated on the slope and as he gazed he saw that from a single basket the throng was being fed . . . The old man was lowering himself to the ground . . . The boy too leaned forward, aware at last of the object of his hunger, aware that it was the same as the old man’s and that nothing on earth would fill him. His hunger was so great that he could have eaten all the loaves and fishes after they were multiplied. (241)

As Donahoo notes, “In this passage, [Tarwater] joins his uncle in accepting rather than controlling, and he envisions the object of his desire in the symbolically feminine ‘basket’ and in the essence of absence, ‘nothing’” (104). However, as with the imagery of the grave, this is not a moment of feminine “absence” but of plentitude. The “throng was being fed” from the spiritual contents of the basket. In O’Connor’s narrative, the maternally coded vessel, “the single basket” provides access to the food that is God. Like the conjoined imagery of the cross and wood, then, the image here is one of masculine and feminine synthesis that was first exemplified by Mason’s religious presence.

In O'Connor's theological text, self-actualization is a turn toward the spiritual, and the imagery of the final scene of *Violent* affirms the transcendent value of the spectral mother. As Donahoo suggests, O'Connor's language imagines Tarwater as a "pregnant host" of prophecy (104). Indeed, in the narrative "The words [of prophecy] were as silent as seeds opening one at a time in his blood" (O'Connor, *Violent* 242). Tarwater, like Mason before him, will assume feminine aspects in order to achieve a balancing of opposing forces. The maternal imagery continues when Tarwater, having recognized his prophetic mission, "stooped and picked up a handful of dirt off his great-uncle's grave and smeared it on his forehead" (242). Tarwater marks himself with the maternally symbolic earth, and, in the final paragraph, this maternal imagery figuratively lights his path. In Jungian symbology, "the moon[] can be a mother-symbol" (*Four* 15). And, in the final moments of O'Connor's text, the moon "riding low above the field beside him, appeared and disappeared, diamond-bright, between patches of darkness" (243). Donahoo chooses to focus on the "jagged shadow" of Tarwater that is created by the moon's light as "literally an absence, a lack" that in turn confirms that Tarwater "practices not the masculine plot of invulnerability but the feminine one of acceptance" (104). But the moon of this scene is described in terms that delineate its presence, not absence, lighting Tarwater's way, as "he moved steadily on, his face set toward the dark city, where the children of God lay sleeping" (243). Like the moon that marks Rayber's collapse in the moment of Bishop's murder/baptism, here the moon is a dynamic presence that marks the violent end of Tarwater's old self and the violent beginning of his new journey as a prophet.¹⁸ The maternally symbolic hunger that has plagued Tarwater has finally led him to embrace a paternal deity.

The confluence of theological and Jungian imagery in relation to Jungian archetypes is suggested in O'Connor's reference to the archaic aspect of the final scene: Tarwater "felt his hunger no longer as a pain but as a tide. He felt it rising in himself through time and darkness, rising through the centuries, and he knew that it rose in a line of men whose lives were chosen to sustain it" (242). As with the contents of the collective unconscious in Jung's paradigm, here "we are dealing with archaic or . . . primordial types, that is, with universal images that have existed since the remotest times" (9:5). Though the imagery in the scene--the moon, the tide, and even Tarwater's hunger--reflects common literary tropes, O'Connor's text gestures more directly to Jungian thinking in that she ties archetypal imagery to Tarwater's individual experience. As Jung argues, archetypes differ from "historical formula[s]" in that a key aspect of the archetype is its archaic nature and its specific manifestation as individual experience (9:5). For Jung, "The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear" (9:5). In a similar construction, Tarwater's epiphany is described as a moment in which archetype drives perception: Tarwater recognizes the symbols as archaic archetypal images that connect back to his individual experience.

As with the ambiguity of Bishop's murder/baptism, and the very problematic efficacy of the rape scene, the ending of O'Connor's novel points to the author's reticence in relation to the maternal figure as a site of Jungian and Catholic accord. Carol Schloss, in her discussion of Tarwater's final moments, asks, "do we witness in this act of identification the consummation or the destruction of a life?" (83). The ambiguity to

which Schloss refers, I suggest, emerges out of O'Connor's interest in points of divergence between psychoanalytic and Catholic views on the role of the mother, and is reflected in the text's title, *The Violent Bear It Away*. O'Connor felt that "the title is the best thing about the book" (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Habit* 382). As scholars note, O'Connor's title draws on a Matthew 11:12: "And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away." Notably, the title has generated a fair amount of discussion, and literary critics of the novel struggle to come to terms with the inherent violence of O'Connor's vision.¹⁹ Considered a difficult passage to understand, the standard Catholic bible in circulation in O'Connor's time, the Douay-Rheims Bible, offers the following gloss: "It (the kingdom of heaven) is not to be obtained but by main force, by using violence upon ourselves, by mortification and penance, and resisting our perverse inclinations" (22). From O'Connor's mid-century Catholic perspective, access to God is only possible through the abnegation of the needs of the self with the ultimate goal of salvation only attainable through near self-annihilation. O'Connor herself noted, "more than ever now it seems that the kingdom of heaven has to be taken by violence, or not at all. You have to push as hard as the age that pushes against you" (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Habit* 229). In relation to *Violent*, O'Connor's paratextual statements on the subject of Tarwater confirm this violent trajectory: "Now about Tarwater's future. He must of course not live to realize his mission, but die to realize it" (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Habit* 343). The Catholic version of the fully actualized self is the annihilated self, the self that is ready to receive Grace, not the Jungian-inspired self who has achieved a balancing of competing archetypal forces.

In the end, crafted by a masculinist worldview, the line between psychosis and religious epiphany in *Violent* is indistinguishable. Notably, the anagogical value of *Violent's* ending is the subject of some debate. Josephine Hendin, for example, suggests that Tarwater's "development . . . culminates in the realization that he must in fact re-join the social order from which he has isolated himself and that he views with such contempt" (138). Susan Srigley's reading of Tarwater's end coincides with Hendin's, as she suggests that Tarwater is "responsible for the children of God who lie sleeping in the city" (5). In contrast, Edward Kessler argues, "Tarwater's interior battle has been fought and won. How he deals with the 'children of God' sleeping in the city is a social concern, the material for the conventional novel O'Connor always refused to write" (141). O'Connor's own statements on the subject would seem to support Kessler's view: "The children of God I daresay will dispatch him pretty quick . . . Tarwater's mission might only be to baptize a few more idiots" (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Habit* 343). Given the promise of Tarwater's failure, it is not surprising that some scholars argue that Tarwater's prophetic vision is a vision of madness. As Ferris notes, "It is with the passion of fanaticism and despair, not of religion, that, hellfire behind him and darkness before him, he begins to walk back to the city" (91).²⁰ Yet, O'Connor's assertion of the veracity of Tarwater's call to prophecy affirms the author's belief in the religious value of Tarwater's final epiphany. O'Connor states that readers "forget that the old man has taught him the truth and that now he's doing what is right, however crazy" (qtd. in Fitzgerald, *Habit* 536). I agree with Hedda Ben-Bassat that the novel's final "apocalyp[ti]c moments" are not moments of violence for its own sake, but moments of apocalypse in the Christian sense, when catastrophe awakens sinners to the sacred light of divine Judgment" (73-4). Jung's

conception of maternity, like that of the Catholic Church, recognizes the mother as a crucial force in filial development. But the teleology of O'Connor's constructions of maternity, unlike the role of the archetypal feminine in Jungian conceptions, is secular annihilation.

From one perspective, the centrality of the spectral mother in *Violent* may be read as an affirmation of the power of the feminine. However, O'Connor's enactment of the Jungian maternal archetype in the interest of exploring Catholic discourse suffers from some of the same limitations that scholars such as Spivey identify in Jung's theories. Specifically, in O'Connor's writing, as in Jung's discourse, the "feminine element . . . [is held] in a kind of dangerous subjection" (33). In *Violent*, individual mothers are violently erased and the subject position of mother is appropriated so that O'Connor may interrogate Jung's masculinist paradigm in order to shore up the equally masculinist frame of the Catholic Church.

The spectral mothers of *Wise Blood* and *Violent*, crafted as enactments of psychoanalytic discourses, offer a harsh commentary of mid-century ideas of motherhood. These texts reflect upon the cultural perception of motherhood in the postwar period as a site of potential cultural instability. O'Connor lamented the kind of narratives she believed many of her readers wanted her to write: "They demand a realism of fact which may, in the end, limit rather than broaden the novel's scope" (39). She disdained the "typical" in fiction, and was much more interested in "mystery and the unexpected" (40)--what she described as a "deeper kind of realism" (39). The author I discuss in the next section of my thesis, Tennessee Williams, shares O'Connor's disdain for the "typical." In Williams' production notes to *The Glass Menagerie*, the first

Williams' play I consider, the playwright condemns "The straight realistic play with its genuine Frigidaire and authentic ice-cubes" (131). Williams was much more interested in drama that would offer a "closer approach to the truth" (131). And, like O'Connor, Williams tests out the "truth" behind the psychoanalytic discourse of mothers. Whereas O'Connor's narratives focus on the spectral mothers of Freud's and Jung's discourse, Williams' plays interrogate the spectral mothers of Kleinian metapsychology. O'Connor's spectral mothers gesture to an instability in psychoanalytic construction of maternity; in Williams' work, the spectral mother of Kleinian thinking emerges as a monstrous force of subversion.

Notes

¹ Notably, my reading of *Violent*, following on my reading of *Wise Blood* in the previous chapter, contrasts readings by literary critics such as Louise Westling, who suggests that O'Connor's "emphasis was always on the power of God the Father through His Son and the Holy Spirit, never through the intervention of the Virgin" (161). For Westling, "O'Connor's religious vision was patriarchal, much in harmony with the Protestant fundamentalism she used in her fiction as symbolic of the passionate father" (161). Suzanne Paulson agrees, arguing, "By focusing on the father and excluding worship of the holy mother, O'Connor separates Tarwater's religion from Catholicism" ("Apocalypse" 122).

² As Emily Budick states, "the conflict among the three generations of Tarwater men proceeds largely in the absence of women" (164). Robert Brinkmeyer suggests that *Violent* "resembles in basic structure not only the classic bildungsroman but, even more

tellingly, its American version, a form that heavily stresses individualism and fierce independence” (189).

³ In his reading of *Violent*, Gentry points to Tarwater’s rape in the final section of the novel as an act that “puts [Tarwater] in the position of being dominated, a position he would associate with being feminized” (67), which instils in Tarwater the necessary subjugation to a paternal God.

⁴ Prown’s argument aligns with Gentry’s in important ways. However, Prown specifically distinguishes her argument from Gentry’s. Prown reads a subversive power in O’Connor’s narrative to the extent that feminization “undermine[s] . . . masculinist narrative conventions” (151). She writes that the feminization Tarwater experiences “appears as evidence not so much of O’Connor’s interest in the redemptive possibilities of androgyny, as Marshall Bruce Gentry argues, but of the lingering presence of the female characters and female-oriented plot lines that appear through her manuscripts” (113).

⁵ In his “Trinity” article, Jung writes: “The *Assumptio Mariae* paves the way not only for the divinity of the Theotokos (i.e., her ultimate recognition as a goddess), but also for the quaternary. At the same time, matter is included in the metaphysical realm together with the corrupting principle of the cosmos, evil” (11:171; emphasis in original).

⁶ John Desmond also reads Tarwater’s experiences in terms of a Jungian path of individuation: “Thus the ‘action’ of consciousness in young Tarwater, which is dramatized analogically as the novel unfolds, is characterized by openness and increasing complexity; the action is a process in which he moves dynamically toward a greater

degree of individuation as he grows toward acceptance of his prophetic vocation” (*Risen* 114).

⁷ Asals discusses the prevalence of the number three in the *Violent* as a sign of O’Connor’s interest in Jung’s conception of the Trinity (172-3).

⁸ Kahane, in her psychoanalytic reading of O’Connor’s work, suggests, “O’Connor’s portrayal of women, dominated by a need to expose their weakness, seems dynamically related to castration fantasies. According to Karen Horney, the need to expose castration derives from a masochistic fantasy of having suffered castration through a love relation with the father” (“Flannery” 65). See also Suzanne Paulson for a similar reading of masculine anxiety (“Apocalypse” 134), and Louise Westling for a discussion of how O’Connor’s female characters work within a paternalistic tradition of Southern Women.

⁹ A number of critics, such as Donald Hardy, discuss *Violent* in terms of “an extended battle for the soul of Francis Tarwater” (5). See also Asals (179). O’Connor herself has stated: “I wanted to get across the fact that the great Uncle (Old Tarwater) is the Christian--a sort of crypto-Catholic--and that the school teacher (Rayber) is the typical modern man. The boy (young Tarwater) has to choose which one, which way, he wants to follow. It’s a matter of vocation” (qtd. in Magee 88).

¹⁰ Ralph Wood offers the most extended discussion of Lucette, whose “sacramental imagination” (174), Woods suggests, is targeted at the secularist Rayber (175-7).

¹¹ For Lake, Bishop's role in the novel "signals, more than any other work, O'Connor's shift in sensibility with regard to the possibilities of the grotesque" (142). See also my discussion (footnote 13) of Gentry regarding the demonic in O'Connor's work.

¹² In an unpublished letter about *Violent* to Elizabeth Fenwick Way, O'Connor states: "That voice you object to is the tempter, the Devil, the same as suggests possibilities to all of us, and he became actualized in the man who gives Tarwater the lift toward the end" (qtd. in Cash 68).

¹³ Gentry offers an excellent overview of critical discussions of the "demonic" in O'Connor's narratives (*Flannery* 143-5). Gentry notes: "Generally, [John] Hawkes [who aligns O'Connor's devil with the narrator of her fiction] and his followers seem to consider the devil a spokesman for nihilism or determinism" (145). But Gentry resists these readings, and instead suggests, "O'Connor's characters achieve redemption not because they submit to the narrator, but because they free themselves from the narrator" and thus O'Connor's work emphasizes a "positive grotesque" (145).

¹⁴ See also Gary Cuba (141-3; 153-5) and Henry T. Edmondson (172-5).

¹⁵ Albert Henry Newman dates the divergence in religious doctrine on the issue of baptism to the second century (3). According to Newman, a Protestant Baptist, pedobaptism reflected the "all-pervasive pagan idea of the magical efficacy of water" (4). Although Catholic dogma maintained the importance of pedobaptism, Protestant beliefs varied. For a discussion of the differing views of baptism within the Protestant Church, see Williams Kervin.

¹⁶ See Jung (9.2:170).

¹⁷ The preponderance of critical discussion of *Violent* addresses, to one extent or another, Tarwater's rape. As I discuss, one of the problematic aspects of the scene is its efficacy in driving Tarwater toward his destiny. A number of critics address similar concerns. Asals, for example, comments that the rape allows Tarwater to "suddenly see[] the apocalyptic nature of the creation" (189). See also Gary Cuba (143), Katherine Prown (151), Marshall Gentry (*Flannery* 146), Claire Kahane (62), and Martha Stephens (136).

¹⁸ As Neumann notes, in Jung's thinking, the moon is "the ship of the sea of night . . . the great lamp" (256).

¹⁹ For critical discussion of the title, see, for example, Emily Budick (177), Preston M. Browning, Jr. (72-3), John Desmond ("Violence" 165), Sumner Ferris (88-91), Ruthann Knechel Johansen (115-6), Albert Sonnenfeld (109-10), and Susan Srigley (98-105). For a discussion of O'Connor's aesthetic of violence, see Robert Donahoo and Avis Hewitt's *Flannery O'Connor in the Age of Terrorism: Essays on Violence and Grace*.

²⁰ See also Bawer who argues that *Violent*, like *Wise Blood*, "in the end, [is a case stud[y] not in religious passion but in abnormal psychology" (313). Paul Binding offers one of the more visceral reactions to the psychological aspects of *Violent*: "Not once in the novel is there any idea of the ordinary stuff of life or of loving feelings returned. I am afraid that I can see the novel, for all the incisive intelligence behind it, only a deeply sick document, a neurotic travesty of existence" (163). Ronald Grimes argues that "O'Connor has little interest in psychological realism [given that] motivation is not directly accessible" (15).

Section Two: Tennessee Williams and the Spectral Mother of Queer Desire

Chapter Four

“A long, long rope of blood”: The Kleinian Haunting of

Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie*

In contrast to the theological concerns that motivate Flannery O’Connor’s protagonists, Haze and Tarwater, the struggles of Tennessee Williams’ central characters are deeply rooted in their sexual identity.¹ Yet, despite their differences in focus, Williams, like O’Connor, relied upon psychoanalytic conceptions of maternity in his characterization of mothers. However, whereas O’Connor employs the spectral mother of Freud’s and Jung’s theories in her texts, Williams’ maternal figures are crafted as enactments of the spectral mother of the object relations theories first imagined by Melanie Klein. Notably, Klein’s theories of the mother-child relationship were the subject of a great deal of controversy in psychoanalytic circles during the war years.² In contrast to Freud, Klein posits the mother, not the father, as the desired and feared “all-powerful object” under whose authority one’s identity is formed. As I note in the introduction to my study, this attention to the mother-child bond gained a large measure of traction in this period, and contributed greatly to the cultural scrutiny of mothers. As enactments of Klein’s spectral mother, Williams’ fictional mothers provide an invaluable addition to my study of the impact of psychoanalytic thinking on the subject position of mother. It is a Kleinian-inspired struggle to come to terms with the desires and fears of the primordial maternal relationship, I argue, that is the central concern of each of Williams’ plays I consider, starting with *The Glass Menagerie*.

The Glass Menagerie, from its opening on the Chicago stage in 1944, to its impressive run of 563 performances on Broadway starting in 1945, to its numerous performances and adaptations in the ensuing decades, is recognized one of Williams' most successful plays.³ *Menagerie* enacts the memory of Tom Wingfield's final days in his impoverished childhood home, a home that Tom, like his father before him, abandons. Much of the interest generated by the play focuses on Amanda Wingfield, the maternal figure of the drama, who is considered to be one of Williams' "most impressive creations"--high praise given the degree of acclaim many of Williams' female characters have received (da Ponte 265).⁴ The action that unfolds before an audience revolves around Amanda's frantic attempts to enlist Tom's support in the task of finding a suitable partner for his painfully shy sister, Laura. In the end, Tom is unable to withstand the suffocating demands of his life at home, and leaves for the Merchant Marines. In an interview about *Menagerie*, Williams suggests that the play "represent[s] the fragile, delicate ties that must be broken, that you inevitably break, when you try to fulfill yourself"(qtd. in Van Gelder 10). Williams' play suggests, though "fragile" and "delicate," the "ties" that bind one to the spectral mother of Kleinian conception are not easily "broken." Though Amanda appears an embodied figure in the play, she is characterized as a reenactment from Tom's "memory," and is thus a spectral figure that Tom is unable to leave behind (Williams, Reading145). Like the spectral mothers of O'Connor's texts, Amanda's presence in Williams' works characterizes the subject position of mother as a gothic site of filial trauma; she is a figure that Tom attempts to repress, but one whose return is inescapable. *Menagerie* reveals that Klein's figuration of

the child's relationship to his or her mother as the scaffold of psychosexual identity renders a stable subjectivity, for the child and for the mother, an impossibility.

As is often noted by Williams scholars, the textual history of *Menagerie* is radically unstable. Writing in 1965, Lester Beaurline suggests that there are "at least four stages in the composition of *The Glass Menagerie*" (142): the short story, "Portrait of a Girl in Glass" (written 1943; published 1948), a sixty page one-act play in five scenes, of which twenty-one pages survive, a reading version of the play (1945), and finally, an acting version of the play (1948) (143). Yet, as Brian Parker argues, the stages of *Menagerie*'s composition are even more complex than Beaurline suggests. Parker includes in the play's genesis a "sheer mass of Gentleman Caller manuscripts," an early film adaptation, that are located at various sites across the United States ("Foreword"). Not only does each manuscript reveal a number of variations, Parker notes, but the genesis of the play is further complicated by a number of one-acts that depict portions of the larger story ("Composition" 413-14). Moreover, Elizabeth Cobbe complicates the historiography of the narrative even further as she identifies that there are in fact two 1948 versions of the Acting edition, an American edition and a London edition (49). In the end, then, only four complete, extant versions of the narrative are available for analysis, each of which I consider in my chapter: "Portrait of a Girl in Glass," the Reading edition of the play (Reading 1945), and the two published Acting editions: American (1948) and London (1948). Relevant to my discussion is the fact that throughout his revisions, Williams increasingly characterizes Amanda as a spectral mother of Kleinian phantasy. In fact, Williams' evolving characterization of Amanda marks the starting point of a trajectory within the playwright's oeuvre that relates to the

Kleinian-inspired spectral mother. As I discuss in later chapters in reference to Violet of *Suddenly Last Summer* and the apocalyptic Miss Lottie of *Kingdom of Earth*, as Williams delves deeper into the exigencies of Klein's discourse, the maternal figure of his drama becomes an increasingly gothic construction that offers an ever-expanding challenge to this branch of psychoanalysis. Beginning with *Menagerie's* Amanda, Williams demonstrates that Klein's figuration of the mother simultaneously queers, and thus renders unstable, the subjectivity of both mother and child.

Developed in the years that led up to Williams' play, Kleinian psychoanalysis argues that from the earliest moments of its life, the infant "has an innate unconscious awareness of the existence of the mother" (Klein, "Our" 292). This sense of awareness creates a "certain unconscious oneness" that forms the basis of all future relations (292). Klein suggests that the mother, as the originary object that the child "encounters," is the first object that the child introjects, or "take[s] into the self," and thus forms the basis of the child's "inner world" (295). For Klein, this "oneness" with the mother is extremely productive for the development of the infant's Self as it provides the infant with a "feeling of being understood" that strengthens the child's ego (292). The mother's role is thereby crucial in the constitution of a "stable personality" (295), which in turn lays the foundation for "loving" adult relationships (295). At the same time, Klein suggests that while the "lov[ing]" or "good" mother operates as a figure who nurtures emotional and physical development, even the "good" mother is not always available to the child and is thus, at times, a "bad" mother. Klein argues that the mother's failure to meet the child's needs, or rather the child's perception of her failure, introduces the child to feelings of "frustration, discomfort and pain" that are experienced by the infant as "persecution" by

the mother (292). In order to negotiate this “persecutory anxiety,” which Klein sees as the defining characteristic of the initial paranoid schizoid phase of development, the child develops strategies to divorce the internalized “good” mother from the internalized “bad” or persecutory mother: “Persecutory anxiety reinforces the need to keep separate the loved object from the dangerous one, and therefore to split love from hate. For the young infant’s self-preservation depends on his trust in a good mother” (296). For Klein, the ego’s identification with the mother maintains its ambivalent character in the next phase of development, the depressive position, as the ego begins to integrate part objects into coherent whole objects. As in the paranoid schizoid position, the depressive position is marked by severe anxiety; however, in the depressive position these negative aspects result in large measure from the child’s recognition of his or her absolute dependence on the integrated mother and its terror that the mother may be lost or destroyed (297). Klein contends that through “cannibalistic phantasies,” the child internalizes the mother, the good object, to keep her safe, and, at the same time, the child experiences feelings of hatred brought on by his or her dependence (*Love* 253). For Klein, the “struggle” to negotiate the anxiety and guilt that arises from the conflicting feelings of “love and hate” towards the mother “to a certain extent persist[] throughout life and [are] liable to become a source of danger in human relationships” (308). In other words, the infant’s relationship with the spectral mother of Kleinian phantasy not only lays the groundwork for adult relations, but the spectral mother also threatens to destroy the very relations it ensures. Klein’s figuration of the mother, like that of Freud and Jung, is a notably gothic construction. She is a figure of “love and hate,” and of fear and desire, whose persistence

in adult psychosexual identity forever embodies the subject's infantile experiences of trauma.

Kleinians assert that the enduring nature of the mother-child bond in the adult psyche is largely the result of the libidinal nature of the relation. As Ronald Fairbairn explains, the mother's breast is the "focal point of [the child's] libidinal object, and his mouth the focal point of his own libidinal attitude" (10-11). For Kleinians, this connection between the mother, consumption, and libidinal satisfaction means that the "libidinal attitude is essentially one in which the aspect of *taking* predominates over that of *giving*" and is "characterized not only by taking, but also by *incorporating* and *internalizing*" (11; emphasis in original). In other words, the child's relationship with the maternal breast establishes a libidinal attitude that is characterized by its internalizing or consumption of an object and, once established, persists into adult sexual relations. Klein's conception of the mother as the child's first libidinal object is in concordance with Freud's thinking that the "great task" of puberty is for the son to move from an object-cathexis toward his mother to an identification with his father (16:337). At the same time, Klein's assertion of the persistence of the child's internalization of the mother in adult sexuality is a marked departure from previous psychoanalytic thought. As Janet Sayers explains, "Whereas Freud focused on repression of past pleasure into the unconscious . . . Kleinians attended to here-and-now internalization and projection of mothering and other relations, as though conscious and unconscious thought differed only in terms of spatial location--inside or out--rather than in terms of history and structure" (242). The mechanisms of object relations, the originary introjection and splitting of the "good" and "bad" mother, are simultaneously a past and present libidinal

experience. The past Self's unconscious relationship to the mother operates as a "here-and-now" force that effects the Self's past and present relations with others (242). Within a Klein's schema, then, the mother is an exceedingly ambivalent object; she is an archaic, phantasmagoric and constitutive figure who forever embodies the child's irresolvable tensions between persecution and desire.

Though Amanda is recognized as one of the most complex and fully realized mothers on the modern stage, critical readings often impose a reductive and normative frame, not unlike Kleinian conceptions of the "good" and "bad" mother, in order to offer scathing critiques of Amanda's maternity. Writing about Laurette Taylor's highly acclaimed performance of Amanda in the 1940s, Rascoe Burton claims that this "horrible mother . . . succeeded in destroying every vestige of hope and beauty and joy in the lives of the two people who loved her--her son and her daughter. She had no love for anyone except herself" (23).⁵ Joseph Davis, writing some thirty years after Burton, confirms the reviewer's assessment of the character when he states, "Amanda's response to life generates devastating consequences for her children, crippling them psychologically and seriously inhibiting their own quests for maturity and self-realization" (198-9).⁶ However, the near vitriol that Amanda's perceived "bad" mothering often incites in critical discourse is countered by readings of Amanda that step outside the reductive "bad" or "good" frame in order to discuss her complexity. As Delma Presley suggests, "Critics often have shared Tom's angry judgment that she is an 'ugly--babbling old--witch.' Yet what are we to make of those occasions when Amanda shows depth and understanding, as we note in her rapprochement with Tom in scene 4?" (19-20).⁷ For Presley, Amanda is a "complex hero," not unlike "Shakespeare's . . . Hamlet" (16). Leo

Schneiderman points to Williams' assertion that "The mother's valor is the core" of the play (qtd. in Jean Evans 14), and suggests that "despite her hysterical behavior and self-dramatization, [Amanda] emerges as a woman who has the strength and courage to face the truth about her blighted life" (103). Schneiderman recognizes a "psychological validity" in Williams' characterization of the Wingfield family, one that "reveals an author who is capable of dealing with object relations without allowing his narcissistic needs to dull his sensibilities" (103, 102). However, the extent to which Williams employs a gothic mode in his characterization of the Kleinian-inspired Amanda, as revealed in the evolution of the role over each successive version of Williams' narrative, remains unexamined. Yet, Amanda, from the opening scene, through the preparation and arrival of the gentleman caller, to the final moments of the closing tableau, consistently performs a role that adheres to the dictates of Kleinian prescription, and by doing so identifies a haunting and prescribed queerness that disrupts the stability of this same discourse.

Williams' increasing attention to the spectral mother of Klein's theory of identification is evident in the increasing complexity and centrality of Amanda's characterization in the playwright's many versions of *Menagerie*. The original short story, "Portrait of a Girl in Glass," is narrated by an unnamed son. In the short story, as in *Menagerie*, the unhappy son recalls the history of his impoverished family. In the story, this family includes his socially awkward and physically challenged sister, Laura, and their mother, an unnamed woman who is driven by the desire to see Laura appropriately "settled" in life. The climax of the short story, as in all of the dramatic versions of the narrative, focuses on the arrival of the gentleman caller who, to the

mother's surprise and dismay, is already romantically attached to "Betty" (118). There is little doubt, however, that the central character of the short story, as Lester Beaurline notes, is Laura (142).⁸ In the closing moments of "Portrait," in contrast to the mother and daughter tableau at the end of *Menagerie*, the narrator, isolated and lonely, is haunted solely by the memory of his father and his abandoned sister. Yet, even though the maternal role in this short story is limited, the mother, like the spectral mother of Kleinian phantasy, is markedly ambivalent. For instance, the narrator notes with disdain his mother's extreme frugality and her "incredible unawareness" of Laura's intense shyness (116), but at the same time admires his mother's tenacity. He describes her as having a voice "that was never tired [and] responded with an energy that made the wires crackle" (115). In the narrator's memory, his mother possesses an energy he likens to an electronic current that both enlivens and threatens to overwhelm her relations with others.

Amanda's ambiguity becomes an increasingly haunting character trait as Williams works to develop this maternal figure in the dramatic versions of the narrative. In contrast to the narrative of "Portrait," from the opening moments of each dramatic version of *Menagerie*, Amanda is identified as a central character. She is the first character introduced by the narrator and her importance is affirmed by the actors' positions on stage in the opening scene. As the stage directions indicate, Amanda "*faces the audience. Tom and Laura are seated in profile*" (Reading 146).⁹ Amanda takes centre stage while Tom and Laura, literally and figuratively, are situated in a peripheral space. Ruby Cohn, in fact, argues that the "stage viability" of the entire play relies upon Amanda's presence (101). Significantly, it is Amanda's voice that is first to become

“audible through the portieres” and her first word is directed to her son, “Tom” (Reading 146), which highlights the importance, in Tom’s memory, of his relationship with his mother. Moreover, Tom’s first words within the dramatic action of the play-- “Yes, Mother”--signal not only the centrality of this mother-son relation to the play, but reveal Amanda to be the dominating presence in the drama (146). Tom’s acquiescence to his mother marks his entrance into his past, and thereby signals the play’s enactment of a psychic mother-son drama. It is at the direction of his mother that Tom “bows slightly” to the audience and “withdraws” from his position outside the dramatic action, to “reappear[] a few moments later in his place at the table” (146). Elizabeth Cobbe, in her analysis of the three published versions of the play, argues that “Amanda’s lines indicate a more aggressive manner of manipulation overall in the American and London editions” (50). At the same time, with each revision, Williams also augments a sense of Amanda’s compassion for her children. Amanda’s speech is softened through the character’s use of the endearment “honey,” which she utters far more frequently in later versions of the play. While “honey” might be read as a passive-aggressive utterance in line with her increasing aggression, it is important to note a progressive complexity in Amanda’s characterization with each revision to Williams’ narrative. Like the spectral mother of Kleinian phantasy, Amanda is an ambivalent, central and controlling presence in the enactment of Tom’s “memory play” (145).

The dramatic world of *Menagerie*, as a creative product, occupies a “potential space” in terms of Klein’s discourse; it is an “intermediary realm of internal and external” that operates, like the child’s earliest activities of play, “in the service of the reality principle,” most especially in terms of the child’s negotiation of feelings of loss

(Shapiro 21).¹⁰ Effectively, Tom's presentation of the dramatic reenactment of his early memories reflects his creation of a phantasmagoric "potential space" in which he attempts to come to terms with the maternally characterized loss associated with the depressive position. Gilbert Rose suggests that the creative writer "refinds his lost world by creating one of his own, peopled with products of self" (qtd. in Shapiro 25). From a Kleinian perspective, then, every fictional enterprise enacts a space of phantasmagoric "potential" that attempts to deal with the trauma of loss. In *Menagerie*, however, Williams' identification of the play as an enactment of Tom's memories and feelings of loss in relation to his earliest moments of development underscores the gothic aspect of this Kleinian-inspired trauma. Specifically, Williams' play enacts the traumatic "history of repetition" at the foundation of subjectivity that, as I mention in the introduction to my thesis, Steven Bruhm identifies as a defining feature of the contemporary gothic ("Contemporary" 268). Amanda's spectral presence within the play, to borrow from Bruhm's discussion, "registers a crisis in [Tom's] personal history" that relates to his unending cycle of loss and re-identification with the always mourned-for mother of Kleinian phantasy.

The connection between memory and loss in relation to the spectral mother in *Menagerie* gestures to Klein's discussion of mourning as a "normal" aspect of the child's development. In a significant departure from Freud, Klein suggests that mourning in an adult is in fact a "reviv[al]" of infantile processes, specifically processes involved in the infantile depressive position which "reach a climax just before, during and after weaning" (*Love* 345). The "depressive position," Klein asserts, "is a melancholia in *statu nascendi*" (345; emphasis in original). As Esther Sánchez-Pardo notes, "Kleinian

metapsychology [is] haunted by the dynamics of object loss”(5). Sánchez-Pardo’s recognition of the “haunt[ing]” quality of object loss within Klein’s conception suggests an identification of the spectral mother in Kleinian discourse as a manifestation of the uncanny. As discussed in my chapter on O’Connor’s *Wise Blood*, Freud defines the uncanny as a frightening “revival” of “infantile complexes” that “lead[] back to what is known of old and long familiar,” specifically, to the maternal body (17: 249, 220). In a notably similar construction, object loss, for Klein, is always experienced, or rather re-experienced, as the remembrance and the loss of the always already lost mother--a loss necessitated by demands for normative development--who is reanimated, as is the case with Williams’ play, in the “here-and-now” world of phantasy. Indeed, as Beverley Clack notes in her object relations discussion of mothers in the Marquis de Sade’s writing, “what is repressed is not dead . . . [and] can be read as examples of ‘the return of the repressed’” (279). What emerges from Williams’ characterization of Amanda, as is the case with psychoanalytic discourse, is a remarkably gothic spectre whose return is frighteningly familiar and unavoidable.

The Queered Gothic Maternal of Kleinian Discourse

The opening setting of *Menagerie*, centered on the dining table over which Amanda reigns, situates the drama within a phantasmagoric space. Like the primordial relationship of Kleinian phantasy, consumption initiates this psychic drama. As Williams indicates in his stage directions (to all versions of the play), the meal itself is to be read as symbolic: “*Eating is indicated by gestures without food or utensils*” (Reading 146). Physical sustenance is not at issue here; in Tom’s phantasy, food is eliminated from the dining table. From this opening moment, Williams draws attention to Klein’s discussion

of the relationship between consumption, the mother, and one's "libidinal attitude." In the Reading edition of the play, once Tom is seated, Amanda immediately directs her attention to Tom's eating. She says: "'Honey, don't *push* with your *fingers*. If you have to push with something, the thing to push with is a crust of bread. And chew--chew'" (146; emphasis in original). The importance of this command is highlighted further in the American edition. The stage directions indicate that the "scrim curtain," the transparent curtain indicating the outside and inside of the dramatic action,¹¹ must rise as Amanda says "'chew, chew--chew!'" (12). This curtain rises at the moment of Amanda's instruction and "does not come down again until just before the end of the play" (12).¹² As Williams' revisions highlight, it is Amanda's directions to Tom in regards to the consumption of food that mark his, and the audience's, entrance into phantasy. Given the association of consumption and libidinal satisfaction within Klein's theories, Amanda's attention to Tom's consumption gestures toward the mother's role as mediator of libidinal desire. Not surprisingly, then, the central action of the underlying narrative, the preparation and arrival of the gentleman caller, is also set around a meal. In "Portrait," the mother's suggestion that they invite a gentleman caller surprises the narrator since "there was seldom quite enough food on her table to satisfy three people" (114). Indeed, from a Kleinian perspective, neither Laura nor Tom is "satisf[ied]." In each version of the narrative, Laura has no previous experience with gentleman callers, and the narrator makes no reference to any relations outside his mother, Laura, and Laura's unavailable "caller." On the one hand, in Tom's phantasy world, Amanda occupies a Kleinian prescribed space of spectral mother as the origin and mediator of desire. On the other hand, Amanda also raises the spectre of the "bad" mother who controls, and in this case

withholds, physical and emotional sustenance. As is the case within Kleinian familial psychic drama, libidinal desire in *Menagerie* hinges on the exigencies of an ambivalent spectral mother.

In each dramatic version of *Menagerie*, Williams initially situates the action within the context of a Kleinian phantasmagoric, and then devotes the rest of the first scene to the establishment of the mother as a libidinal object. After Amanda's instructions to Tom about his eating, she, to the dismay of Tom, begins "again" the story of "one Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain" when she "received--seventeen!--gentleman callers!" (Reading 147, 148; emphasis in original). Amanda, as she explains to Tom, was "possessed of" all of the necessary characteristics of an object of desire: "It wasn't enough for a girl to be possessed of a pretty face and a graceful figure--although I wasn't slighted in either respect. She also needed to have a nimble wit and a tongue to meet all occasions" (148). Tom, as the stage directions indicate, "*plays this scene as though reading from a script*" (148). Tom's role in Amanda's reiteration of her past sexuality is clearly ironic as he "*motions for music and a spot of light on Amanda*" (149). At the same time, Tom's role in the "script" of his memory of his mother gestures to a central dictate of Klein's theories: the son must acknowledge the mother as a libidinal object in order to ensure his normative development. Williams' revisions to this scene, as Cobbe argues, confirm his interest in the presentation of Amanda as a dominant force in Tom's memory. In the Reading edition, Amanda's response to Tom's question about what that "brilliant young Fitzhugh boy" left his widow invites a surprised, but relatively contained response from Amanda: "He never married! Gracious, you talk as though all of my old admirers had turned up their toes to the daisies" (149). In contrast,

in the American and London editions of the play, Amanda's response, as Cobbe argues, reveals a heightened sense of aggression: "He never married! What's the matter with you--you talk as though all my old admirers had turned up their toes to the daises!" (American 14; London 27). The addition of the phrase "What's the matter with you" in both of the later versions of the play clearly operates as a forceful "counterattack" to Tom's sarcasm as Cobbe suggests (50). Though Tom treats his mother's reiteration of her past role as an object of desire with disdain, his on-stage manipulation of music and lighting as well as the attention given to Amanda's words in Tom's present memory confirm his recognition of the libidinal undercurrent of his past and present relationship with his mother.

The temporal complexity of Amanda's characterization is key to Williams' dramatization of the Kleinian-inspired latent libidinal economy of mother and son. Notably, the complex temporality associated with this spectral mother leads to divergent readings of Amanda in scholarly discussion. On the one hand, Sam Bluefarb suggests, "Although [Amanda] quite literally inhabits the present, she is incapable of inhabiting that present other than in terms of the past" (513). Davis' reading agrees with Bluefarb's, as Davis notes that Amanda "cannot accept life in the St. Louis tenement and returns in fantasies to the past" (194). Both Bluefarb and Davis view Amanda as a character who "inhabits" the past within the present of the dramatic action. On the other hand, Alice Griffin asserts, "Despite [Amanda's] lapses into her earlier, more glorious days, Amanda does not live in the past--a luxury she could not afford" (25). Griffin recognizes Amanda as a character deeply embedded in the past, but one who, albeit unwillingly, is very much situated in the present. The lack of consensus in regards to Amanda's temporal position

within the play, I suggest, relates in part to the complex recursive structure of the narrative and its reliance on a Kleinian-inspired template. *Menagerie*, as a representation of Tom's phantasy, like Amanda, "inhabits" a space that is a "here-and-now" enactment of primordial phantasy. Much of the scholarly disagreement about Amanda's place in time relates to her attempts to occupy a sexualized position that is out of sync with her present reality. Like Amanda's temporal complexity, her sexuality gestures to the inherent instability of a Kleinian discourse that prescribes the presence of a maternal sexuality that must always exist within and at the same time be relegated to a phantasmagoric past.

As Amanda prepares for the arrival of Jim, the gentleman caller, the playwright highlights the uncanniness of Amanda's presence. In the Reading edition, Amanda exclaims that she is "going to make a spectacular appearance" (193). And she tells Laura that she will wear "Something I've resurrected from that old trunk! Styles haven't changed so terribly much after all" (193). Amanda reaches into the trunk, into her past, and attempts to bring into the present her past libidinal self. But as Williams' play reveals, the libidinal object of Kleinian phantasy can exist only in the spectral space of not now, and so Amanda's attempt is doomed to failure. In the American edition, as Amanda talks with Laura while they prepare for their gentleman caller, Amanda's discussion of the dress is revised: "I found an old dress in the trunk. But what do you know? I had to do a lot to it but it broke my heart when I had to let it out. Now, Laura, just look at your mother. Oh, no ! Laura, come look at me now" (43). In this version, Amanda is clearly pleased with her own appearance, but notes that she "had to do a lot" to the dress. Tragically, for Amanda, the dress had to be "let . . . out." Amanda is forced

to admit that she no longer has the figure of a young woman. Though Laura suggests that her mother is ““lovely”” (43), Amanda recognizes the beauty of the dress, like her own beauty, is something lost to the past: ““It used to be. It used to be”” (43). Finally, in the London edition of the play, Williams again revises Amanda’s lines:

‘I found this old dress in the trunk. I didn’t have a lot to do to it--the styles haven’t changed all that much. But, oh, it broke my heart when I had to let it out . . . Now, Laura, you just come and look at your mother. Oh no! Wait a minute, wait a minute, I forgot something . . . Now, Laura, come and look at me now. I’m ready now. Laura! Laura!’ (63)

Once again, Amanda recognizes the dress is outdated, but that it is within the bounds of acceptability. This time, however, Williams inserts the lines ““Oh no! Wait a minute, wait a minute, I forgot something.”” What Amanda has forgotten is the “bunch of jonquils” that she carries to complete her outfit, present in all versions of the play. The jonquil, Amanda’s favorite flower, is a form of narcissus, and thus the connection between the flower and Amanda’s delusions of being an object of desire is not subtle.¹³ As I discuss in later chapters on Williams’ *Suddenly Last Summer* and *Kingdom of Earth*, narcissism becomes an increasingly significant character trait for Williams’ spectral mothers as the playwright delves deeper into the exigencies of Kleinian discourse.¹⁴ Here, Amanda’s increasingly artificial and rather pathetic narcissistic attempts to force an association between her present self and her desirable self of the past, within the context of Tom’s phantasy, gestures to Tom’s ambivalence in regards to his own libidinal feelings toward his mother. Moreover, Williams’ addition of the lines ““Now, Laura, come and look at me now. I’m ready now. Laura! Laura!”” makes it clear that Amanda demands

recognition as a libidinal object within Tom's phantasy. At the same time, Amanda's demands also function meta-theatrically, in that her demands to Laura direct the audience's gaze to the gap between Amanda's narcissistic desires and the reality of her circumstance. Given Williams' interest in Klein's theories, Amanda's failed performance as a libidinal object within a phantasmagoric performance gestures to instability within Kleinian discourse that arises from the need to repress and disavow the very sexuality it demands.

Amanda's attempts to resurrect herself as an object of desire creates a sense of the grotesque that is central to the pathos of the gentleman caller's visit and to the play overall. Similar to O'Connor's deployment of grotesque imagery in her novels, Williams' characterization of Amanda's appearance is intended to startle the audience into some kind of recognition. For O'Connor, the grotesque creates a gap that distinguishes the secular Freudian and Jungian spectral mothers from the theologically imagined Virgin Mary. In Williams' work, Amanda's grotesque presence gestures to the problem in Kleinian drama that the sexualized spectral mother poses in the son's psychosexual identity. The aging character's entrance onto the stage at the end of the sixth scene wearing the cotillion gown of her youth evokes the grotesque gap between the here-and-now and the always-in-the-past libidinal maternal object. The importance of Amanda's entrance to Williams' drama is reflected in Beaurline's description of the scene as "[o]ne of the greatest moments in modern theater" (146). The underlying pathos of this scene, as suggested by Beaurline's comments, is augmented by Tom's reaction to his mother. The stage directions in every edition of the play indicate that Tom is "*distinctly shocked at her appearance*" and "*embarrassed*" (Reading 202, 203). On

stage, Tom stands awkwardly and silently by as Amanda's "*gay laughter and chatter*" fill the room (203). In the Reading edition of the play, when Tom is finally able to speak, he interrupts Amanda with one word: "'Mother--'" (203). As the textual hyphen indicates, Tom cannot articulate his emotions. Even within the expansive bounds of phantasy, Tom is rendered nearly speechless by the overwhelming presence of this grotesque maternal imago. When Tom gains her attention, he can only ask "'How about--supper?'" (203). Tom, and the action of the play itself, thereby once again returns to consumption, and hence to the primordial and libidinal foundation of his relationship to his mother. In both Acting editions, Williams adds a short interaction to this scene between Tom and his mother, which, as Beurline notes, adds "a little more to the irony" to the moment (147). After an awkward moment of silence, Tom tells Amanda, "'Mother, you look so pretty'" (American 49). Tom's compliment gestures to Amanda as a libidinal object, or at least to her attempt to appear as a libidinal object. At the same time, Tom's comment, as Amanda's retort suggests, is rather "hollow" (Beurline 147). Amanda states, "'I wish you'd look pleasant when you're about to say something pleasant'" (American 49). Tom is clearly uncomfortable with his mother's appearance, yet can only respond in terms of a libidinal mother-son script. He is trapped within the ambivalent dictates of a Kleinian-inspired familial relation. Here, then, is the emotional, and notably gothic, centre of the play: an enduring prescribed and proscribed incestuous desire between mother and son that continues to haunt the central character.

Williams' interest in the queerness of the mother-son relationship within the libidinal economy of Kleinian discourse is revealed in his significant revisions to the way in which Amanda characterizes herself and Laura during their long-awaited meal with

Jim. In "Portrait," Laura is simply called to dinner; the mother makes no pretense about Laura's role in the meal's preparation. Yet in all of the editions of the play, Amanda surreptitiously suggests a much greater role for Laura. In all versions of the play, Amanda asks Tom to "go ask Sister if supper is ready! You know that Sister is in full charge of supper" (Reading 204). Clearly, she perceives the ability to cook as a crucial skill to obtain a partner. Moreover, Amanda not only suggests that Laura has made the meal, but also that Amanda herself is incapable of the task. Amanda notes that "Laura is, thank heavens, not only pretty but also very domestic. I'm not at all. I never was a bit. I never would make a thing but angel-food cake" (204). Without question, Amanda's reference to only being able to make "angel-food cake" raises the spectre of Williams' own mother, a woman who made a similar assertion about herself, and thus contributes to autobiographical readings of the play.¹⁵ In the 1987 film version of *Menagerie*, Amanda (played by Joanne Woodward) delivers these lines in sexualized manner, and thereby sets up a contrast between herself and Laura. At the same time, from an object relations perspective, Amanda's manipulation effectively displaces her own position as the object of desire. Amanda's assertion of Laura's domestic ability, again within a Kleinian frame, establishes Laura as a maternal substitute object who provides sustenance, which in turn, as Williams' play highlights, situates the potential lover within an infantilized space. Indeed, this incestuous and pedophilic quality to Kleinian thinking is revealed in Amanda's direction to Tom to "Tell [Laura] you hungry boys are waiting for it" (204). While on the surface "it" is certainly food, "it," given Amanda's conflation of libidinal attraction with mothering and food, also refers to the sexualized maternal offering. Schneiderman suggests that Williams' "female protagonists combine the roles

of mother and mistress” (97). Central to Williams’ characterization of Amanda, I suggest, is the recognition that for the Kleinian spectral mother, the roles of “mother and mistress” are indistinguishable (Schneiderman 97).

The incestuous aspect of Tom and Amanda’s relationship has not gone unnoticed in critical discourse. For example, Daniel Dervin argues that Tom’s abandonment of his “provocative but inaccessible mother” reflects a “deep[] urgency to escape from the danger of incest” (157). For Schneiderman, the “incest-motif” is a recurring trope in Williams’ plays that reflects the playwright’s own Oedipal and pre-Oedipal struggles with his own dysfunctional family (97). Lori Leathers Single, in her reading of the Wingfield family’s “dysfunction,” reads an “implicit incestuous aspect to this parent/child relationship” in that Tom, “[w]ithout having actually replaced his father in Amanda’s bed . . . has been forced to be [Amanda’s] partner in other equally inappropriate ways” (77). Williams’ exploration of the spectral mother reveals an undercurrent of queer desire that is dictated by the very discourse that is intended to shore up a heteronormative outcome. In the end, the competing demands of Kleinian discourse create an untenable subject position for the mother: On the one hand, the mother, as the primary libidinal object, must lay the foundation for normative sexuality, a sexuality that is predicated upon pedophilic and incestuous desire. On the other hand, key to normative sexuality is the denial of the mother as libidinal object and subsequent sublimation of desire to a maternal substitute.

Menagerie’s critique of the inherent instability of Kleinian discourse clearly extends beyond Amanda to the larger cultural role of mother. As Alice Griffin suggests, Amanda is “a many-faceted, unique individual. But Amanda is also a universal type, a

mother with the characteristic qualities of devotion to her offspring and determination to survive for their sakes” (23). Judith Thompson offers the most extended discussion of Amanda’s iconic value, and one that connects the spectral mother of Williams’ play with O’Connor’s characterization of mothers in *Violent*. Specifically, Thompson argues that the “diverse imagery and mythic symbolism invested in Amanda render her an embodiment of ‘The Great Mother,’ psychic configuration of the ‘Archetypal Feminine’ in all its complex aspects: the Good Mother, the Terrible Mother, the seductive young witch, and the innocent virgin” (17). Like the negatively defined maternal archetype that haunts Tarwater in O’Connor’s *Violent*, the complexity of Amanda’s characterization marks Williams’ interest in broader cultural role of mother.¹⁶ Certainly the play’s three references to Amanda as the iconic Christian mother, the Virgin Mary, gestures to a link between O’Connor’s and Williams’ interest in the role of mother in cultural discourse.¹⁷ In the second scene of Act 1, when Amanda first discovers Laura’s duplicity concerning Business college, Laura directly associates Amanda with Mary: “‘Mother, when you’re disappointed, you get that awful suffering look on your face, like the picture of Jesus’ mother in the museum!’” (Reading 155). The connection between Amanda and the Virgin is repeated in scene four when Amanda attempts to convince Tom to arrange a gentleman caller. As mother and son share breakfast, stage directions indicate that the “*music of ‘Ave Maria’ is heard softly*” (170). Finally, in scene five, as Amanda prepares for the gentleman caller, in a final reference to the iconic mother, the stage directions call for the word “Annunciation” to appear on a screen behind the dramatic action, referencing the moment in which the angel Gabriel announces to the Virgin Mary that she will give birth to the son of God (178).¹⁸ Unlike O’Connor, whose interest in the

mother as an instrument of a paternal God is sincere, Williams' employs dramatic irony in his characterization of Amanda. Amanda's role in bringing forth a savior for the Wingfield family is likened to the Virgin Mary's birthing of Christ.

The Virgin Mary, as I discuss in my chapters on O'Connor's novels, was envisioned by Catholic theologians in the mid-century as a potential site of accord between Catholicism and psychoanalysis, a suggestion that generated a fair amount of scholarly debate and coincided with an intense scrutiny of the mother's role in the development of her child's subjectivity. Though clearly intended as an ironic conflation in Williams' play, Amanda's association with the Madonna gestures to a crucial overlap between a Kleinian spectral mother and traditional Christian mythology. Certainly, both discourses stress the importance of the mother as a procreative being who ensures the viability of normative structures. For Klein, the mother is the primordial libidinal object upon whom a child's normative sexuality largely relies, and is at the same time threatened. In order to mitigate the threat posed by the libidinally identified mother, as Williams' play suggests, maternal sexuality must be confined to a spectral space of an enduring and phantasmagoric not now. The Madonna is equally determined in problematically sexualized terms. Much of the Church's attention to Mary is directed toward her "perpetual virginity," which, as Walter J. Burghardt notes, is a "vexing problem" that has troubled Church theologians for centuries (100). In order to maintain the purity of its deity, Catholic doctrine imagines Mary as a mother not only "untarnished" by sexual union, but also with an "unbroken hymen--*post partum* (after birth) as well as *in partu* (during [birth])" (Warner xxii; emphasis in original). The Church's construction of Mary, as Francis X. Clooney suggests, "reveals the deep

neurosis of the Christian tradition regarding gender . . . The quintessential Mother, she is also no mother, or rather a mother deprived of maternal experience, a virgin” (19).¹⁹ Catholic mythology, like Kleinian discourse, works to affirm a masculinist hegemony, but at the same time the Catholic Church’s attempt to contain the maternal sexuality that is evidenced by the child’s birth reflects instability within those same constructs of power. In the end, both cultural discourses deny maternal sexuality in a panicked attempt to shore up their own stability.

In *The Rose Tattoo*, a play produced on Broadway in 1951 four years after *Menagerie*’s Chicago premier, Williams returns to the instability that underscores attempts to repress maternal sexuality in Church doctrine. In the play, the maternal Serafina delle Rose is an Italian American dressmaker who, like Amanda of *Menagerie*, has lost her husband (although Serafina is a widow). In contrast to the repressed sexuality of Amanda’s characterization, Serafina, as L. Bailey McDaniel suggests, “repeatedly emerges as overtly, unapologetically carnal” (274).²⁰ What is relevant for my discussion is the intimate relationship between this “carnal” mother and the Virgin Mary. In the play, Serafina often prays to the Virgin, whose shrine occupies a central position on stage, and who, Serafina claims, communicates to her through “signs” (278). One of these “signs” is the central trope of the play: the rose tattoo that miraculously appears on Serafina’s breast when she conceives. While Ruby Cohn suggests that Williams “hammer[s] this fertility symbol to the edge of farce” (110), William H. Beyer argues, “by capriciously tossing [the rose symbol] about . . . it achieves the sophisticated slant of the fetish” (88).²¹ I agree with Beyer that Williams’ use of the symbol in the play is both “sophisticated” and fetishistic. Though clearly in line with the dictates of “folk comedy”

as critics such as Beyer point out (87), Williams' identification of the miraculous rose tattoo as a "sign" of the Virgin, symbolism that relies on a long-standing association of the Madonna with the rose within the Catholic Church (Warner 103), establishes a fetishistic association of the Virgin Mother as a mediator of not only of procreation, but also of passionate sexuality. Williams' sexualization of Mary in fact echoes early Christian interpretations of the Virgin Mother. As Marina Warner notes, Solomon's "Song of Songs" in the Old Testament obliquely gestures to Mary's sexuality, but a vision of the Mother as a sexualized being is rendered overt in the "impassioned love and language of St. Bernard" in the twelfth century (128). At the centre of St. Bernard's adoration of Mary was a commonly held view of the Virgin as the bride of Christ. Clearly, the implied incestuous union of mother and son in marriage challenged the Church's doctrine of Mary's chastity, as well as her role as the Ideal mother. And, as Warner argues, the Church has consciously downplayed this "erotic" construction of Mary as it "made the Church acutely sensitive to potential abuse and ribaldry" (132). In *Tattoo*, the sexualization of the Virgin is countered by her identification as an icon of chastity. The Madonna as a symbol of the repression of libidinal pleasure is evident when Serafina demands that Jack, her daughter's potential lover, swear to the "Holy Mother" that he "will respect the innocence of the daughter, Rosa, of Rosario delle Rose" (333, 334), and when, in Act 1 scene 5, Serafina prays to the Virgin that her dead husband was monogamous during their marriage (315-6). Like the phantasmagoric Kleinian spectral mother, the Virgin is defined in relation to sexuality and determined by a denial of sexuality. At the end of the play, Serafina exclaims, after a night of robust, and quite vocal, sex with Alvaro, that she feels "on my breast the burning again of the rose. I

know what it means. It means that I have conceived! Two lives again in the body! Two, two lives again, two!” (414). Williams states that *Tattoo* celebrates the “Dionysian element in human life, its mystery, its beauty, its significance” (*Selected Essays* 63). Serafina’s maternal sexuality, in the comic world of *Tattoo*, is not confined, as is the sexuality of the Kleinian-inspired Amanda, to a phantasmagoric past.

Ties that Break: Filial Neurosis and Maternal Erasure

Menagerie’s exploration of the toxicity of Kleinian conceptions of the mother reveals dire consequences to the child’s subjectivity. Williams, in a televised interview with Mike Wallace, outlines the negative consequences that emerge from the child’s earliest experiences in terms that clearly gesture to Klein’s theory of object relations:

After a while the mother realizes that it’s no longer an infant, she gets impatient with its outcry or maybe the father gets impatient with it. Anyway, it meets a world which is less permissive, less tender and comforting, and it misses the maternal arms--the maternal comfort--and therefore, then, it becomes outraged, it becomes angry. And that’s where most of our neuroses spring from, from the time when we--when the maternal world which has made us feel omnipotent because every time we cry out, we’re given attention, and love, and care--that ceases to work any more. We meet a more indifferent world, and then we become angry. That is the root of most anger. That is the root of it in the world.

(qtd. in Devlin 55)

What Williams describes above is the underlying filial trauma that is central to post-Freudian gothic forms. Williams posits that at some point in an individual’s development

the “maternal world,” the world that initially offers “maternal comfort . . . ceases to work any more,” a failure that establishes a lifetime of “anger” and frustration that leads to neurosis. The thinking behind Williams’ comments can be traced to an important debate in psychoanalytic discourse related to normative conceptions of sexuality and neurosis. As Sayers claims, in contrast to Freudians, Kleinians such as Karen Horney suggested that neurosis was an “effect not of any biologically given Oedipus complex but of insecure and clinging attachment bred of maternal deprivation, and failure of early maternal holding, both physical and psychological” (123). In other words, though Kleinian discourse intended to shore up a stable heterosexual matrix, the role of the mother as an “all powerful object” initiated a potential threat to the child’s emotional stability.

The vicissitudes of subjectivity, as I note in the introduction to my study, are recognized as a defining concern of the gothic, and one that situates the spectral mother of a post-Freudian world at the centre of the gothic mode.²² Certainly both Haze’s and Tarwater’s confrontation with psychoanalytically crafted mothers in O’Connor’s gothic texts affirm the links between the spectral mother, instability in relation to the subject, and the gothic. In mid-century America, mothers were blamed for filial non-normative sexuality, as indicated in my earlier reference to Phillip Wylie’s work in the introduction to my study. They were also held to account for a host of mental illnesses, as Edward Strecker’s diatribe--which I include an excerpt from alongside Wylie’s text--on ‘moms’ suggests. I take up a discussion of the ways in which Freud’s spectral mother contributed to the mid-century association of the mother with mental illness in the Shirley Jackson section of my thesis. However, Tom’s mental instability, like that of Haze and Tarwater,

reveals the extent to which various branches of psychoanalytic thinking strengthened the link between the mother and neurosis.

In *Menagerie*, Williams' dramatization of Tom's phantasmagoric "memory" gestures to a particular form of maternally determined neurosis that received a great deal of attention from Kleinians: schizoid neurosis. As Fairbairn suggests, schizoid behaviors "feature" in a wide number of individuals: "To be included in this group are many of those who consult the analyst on account of such disabilities as social inhibitions, inability to concentrate on work, problems of character, perverse sexual tendencies, and psychosexual difficulties such as impotence and compulsive masturbation" (5). Though a fairly nebulous concept of wide-ranging scope, Fairbairn suggests that these individuals share a set of common characteristics: "(1) an attitude of omnipotence, (2) an attitude of isolation and detachment, and (3) a preoccupation with inner reality" (6). In effect, individuals with schizoid neurosis fail to negotiate "appropriate" relations with others in their external world. Not surprisingly, as proponents of Klein's theories claim, individuals with schizoid elements in their personality share a common history of a troubled mother-child relation. As Fairbairn argues, these individuals share a "conviction" that their mother "did not really love and value them as persons in their own right" (23). This perceived failure of maternal love, Fairbairn suggests, may be manifested through an "apparent indifference or through apparent possessiveness on the part of the mother" (23). Mothers of individuals who suffer from schizoid neurosis either love too little or too much. The concomitant sense of "deprivation and inferiority" created by the mother's failure to appropriately value her child results in the child's fixation upon the mother and subsequent neurosis. The result, Fairbairn contends, is an

“extreme dependence” that stems from a “general over-valuation of the internal at the expense of the external world” (23).

Tom’s characterization as an “isolated individual” within the confines of a play that stages the reiteration of his phantasmagoric relationship with Amanda, gestures to both a schizoid “fixation upon the mother,” and a resultant “over-valuation” of Tom’s “internal” world. Throughout each incarnation of Williams’ narrative, Tom, like the individual who suffers from schizoid neurosis, is depicted as an “isolat[ed]” character who is “preoccup[ied] with [his] inner reality.” As Tom’s final comments in the Reading edition suggest, he is a loner who “traveled around a great deal” as “the cities swept about [him] like dead leaves” (237). Tom appears unable to negotiate any relations with others outside the haunting figures of his own memory. Tom’s “overvaluation” of his “internal world” and “fixation” on his past are also evident through Tom’s assertion in the final moments of the Reading edition of the play: “I would have stopped, but I was pursued by something [. . .] Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be” (237). Here, the focus of Tom’s guilt is his sister, Laura. Tom claims that it is Laura who haunts him, but as Amanda’s evolving characterization indicates, so too does his mother. In the closing lines of the London edition, Tom states: “And that is how I remember them--my mother and my sister . . . and so--good-bye!” (95). Though Tom attempts to excise the memories of his past, as Brian Parker notes, the play “can just as accurately be seen as repetition” (“Circle Closed” 127). Tom, Parker asserts, “does not really escape the family trap” (127). And it is within this inescapable “repetition” of trauma that the gothic inflection of *Menagerie* is most evident. As is the case with the spectral mothers who repeatedly return to haunt

O'Connor's protagonists, Amanda's presence in this memory play marks an uncanny return of the repressed that is central Williams' narrative. Given Tom's association with schizoid characteristics throughout the play, the gothic impulse of Williams' play falls, in large measure, toward the inescapability of maternally determined neurosis.

As Williams develops the underlying narrative of *Menagerie*, the playwright aspects of Tom's character that gesture to Kleinian conceptions of neurosis are increasingly highlighted. From the narrative's earliest incarnation in "Portrait," Tom is identified as a writer. In Act 1 scene 3 of the London edition of the play, Laura begs her mother to stop interrupting Tom's writing: "Oh, Mother, Mother, Tom's trying to write" (21). In the American edition, Williams not only maintains this dialogue, but also adds an additional reference to writing in this scene in Tom's speech to Amanda. Tom says, "Mother, will you please busy yourself with something else? I'm trying to write," a plea he repeats moments later (36). Scholars point to Tom's authorial pursuits as evidence of the autobiographical nature of the play; however, Tom's writing just as crucially points to a suggested link in Klein's discourse between creative writing and schizoid neurosis. In fact, one of Williams' psychoanalysts, Lawrence Kubie, was especially interested in the underlying neurosis of artists, and published an important text on the subject entitled, *Neurotic Distortion of the Creative Process*. Though a "Freudian" by training, Kubie, like Fairbairn, was convinced that individuals suffering from schizoid neurosis were often attracted to writing, which, for Kubie, stood in the way of their recovery. As Fairbairn notes, "For by means of artistic activity [writers] are able both to substitute showing for giving and, at the same time, to produce something which they can still regard as part of themselves even after it has passed from the inner into the outer

world” (19-20). The prohibition against creative activities in Kleinian thought is particularly relevant to *Menagerie* given its framing device as the narrated memory, or artistic product, of a writer with schizoid characteristics. The dramatic action of the play reflects Tom’s attempt to “produce[s] something which [he] can still regard as part of [him]self even after it has passed from the inner into the outer world.” In other words, the narrative structure of *Menagerie* provides evidence of Tom’s inability to negotiate his ties to his mother, an inability that compels him to narrate the details of his early life, which, in accordance with the proscriptions of Fairbairn and Kubie, precludes Tom’s escape from neurosis.

As a scripted enactment of Kleinian phantasy, Williams’ play troubles critical readings such as that offered by Thomas Adler, who suggests that “by the drama’s end” Tom’s “interiorized confessional appears to have been therapeutic” (“(Un)reliability” 7).²³ From an object relations perspective, the play’s enactment of Tom’s memories may represent a form of reality testing that is a necessary mechanism in allowing the subject “to sever its attachment to the object that has been abolished” (*Love* 344).²⁴ However, it is clear from Tom’s return, years later, to his familial home and the fact that these “memories” are crafted as phantasmagoric, that Amanda has not been “abolished” from Tom’s life. Certainly, in the Reading and stage versions of the narrative, Williams explicitly includes Amanda in Tom’s denouement, and thus opens up the potential for a resolution to Tom’s vexed relationship with his mother. Indeed, despite the censure of creative activities for individuals suffering schizoid neurosis, Kleinian thinking suggests that anxieties may be “undone and reparation set in motion . . . by reinstalling . . . a securely established image of mothering as loved and good” (Sayers 237). Each

performance of the mother and son relationship within *Menagerie* may represent an attempt to establish an “image of mothering as loved and good” (237). Each of Tom’s moments on stage, then, reflects not only his neurotic “fixation” and “extreme dependence,” but also marks his attempt at “reparation.” Moreover, the final moments of the play, at least initially, appear to support the “therapeutic” value that Adler suggests. Tom’s final speech, timed with the final tableau of his mother and sister, situates Amanda as a figure of compassion:

We see, as though through soundproof glass, that Amanda appears to be making a comforting speech to Laura, who is huddled upon the sofa. Now that we cannot hear the mother’s speech, her silliness is gone and she has dignity and tragic beauty [. . .] Amanda’s gestures are slow and graceful, almost dancelike, as she comforts her daughter. (Reading 236)

C.W.E. Bigsby suggests that in this final tableau “Williams presents Amanda as most completely human when she lays aside her performance and allows simple humanity to determine her actions” (“Entering” 39). I agree that there is a focus in this dramatic moment on Amanda’s empathy and compassion; however, this image of a “good” mother has come at a cost to both Tom and Amanda. Trapped within the dictates of Kleinian discourse, Amanda, in the end, must be silenced in order to appear as a “good” mother. Important also is the fact that Tom can only witness this “good” mothering from an imaginary position, in that this image of Amanda takes place after Tom has left the home. In effect, the vision of Amanda as a “good” mother is performed as a wished-for fantasy. Moreover, Amanda’s compassion is not directed to Tom, but to Laura. Tom cannot even imagine a resolution to his own relationship with his mother. Within the

bounds of the play, the schism between mother and son is never healed. The ending of *Menagerie*, then, troubles attempts to locate a resolution in the mother-son bond. Rather, Tom's phantasy confirms the impossibility of stable subjectivity for mother and son, and thus denies the Kleinian phantasy of the normative family altogether.

Yet, despite Williams' dramatization of the inescapable toxicity of the mother-son relationship within Klein's argument, *Menagerie* is not without its compensations. Williams states in his autobiography that,

A man must live through his life's duration with his own little set of fears and angers, suspicions and vanities, and his appetites, spiritual and carnal. Life is built of them and he is built of life. The umbilical cord is a long, long rope of blood that has swung him as an aerialist on an all but endless Trapeze, oh, such a long, long way, from the first living organism that gave birth to another. Define it as the passion to create which is all that we know of God. (*Memoirs* 242)

Williams describes the maternal tie as a "long, long rope of blood," a notably gothic construction, but it is within this bind that he locates the source of a "man[']s]" creativity. Certainly, *Menagerie* is born from the gothic "fears and angers" of the mother-child relation, which in and of itself is perhaps Williams' greatest challenge to Klein's discourse that would later attempt to silence his own artistic vision.²⁵ Though *The Glass Menagerie* reveals the impossibility of severing or repairing mother-son ties, the existence of the play itself confirms Williams' interest in the "passion[ate] creat[ivity]" that comes out of the always in the past, always in the present, spectral mother of Kleinian phantasy. The spectral mother of Williams' drama is denied subjectivity, but

she nonetheless emerges as a force of creative subversion that disrupts the cultural fantasy of a normative familial narrative.

As is the case with much gothic fiction, *Menagerie* explores the “darker shadows of the dominant fiction” of sexuality (Haggerty 3). These “darker shadows,” which emerge from the child’s relationship with the Kleinian-inspired spectral mother, become increasingly obvious, and more monstrous, in Williams’ later dramatic plays. *Suddenly Last Summer*, the subject of my next chapter, opens in the gothic setting of a “jungle-garden” and relates the gruesome and cannibalistic death of Sebastian Venable (349). In the play, Williams presents Violet as a mother who simultaneously reflects aspects of the vulnerable good object in need of protection, as well as the fearful object of persecution from which one must be protected. Miss Lottie, the spectral mother of Williams’ later play, *Kingdom of Earth*, who is already dead when the play opens, emerges as an entirely monstrous figure from Kleinian phantasy-turned-nightmare whose spectral presence demands, and obtains, the complete erasure of her son, Lot. Though Amanda is a somewhat diluted representation of the monstrous within Klein’s thinking, especially compared to both Violet and Miss Lottie, Amanda does not entirely escape consideration as a monstrous figure. Amanda, Williams’ originary Kleinian-inspired spectral mother, marks the starting point of Williams’ interrogation of the dangerous, and gothic, subtext of Klein’s thinking.

Notes

¹ Notably, both Williams and O’Connor were aware each other as contemporaries. On more than one occasion, Williams expressed his deep admiration for O’Connor as a “superb artist” (qtd. in Gaines 222). The feeling, however, was far from

mutual. Williams, O'Connor wrote to a friend, "makes me plum sick" (121). Brad Gooch suggests that O'Connor's aversion to Williams' work related to the non-normative sexuality of his characters (263).

² During the years 1941 to 1945, the prestigious British Psycho-Analytical Society was nearly rocked to its core as key members such as Edward Glover and Anna Freud tendered their resignations from the society due to disagreements between followers of Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein. Glover, in his letter of resignation, states, "It [is] clear to me that the Society could no longer claim the status of a scientific society . . . In fact it had been less and less Freudian since 1933-34 when Mrs. Klein first adumbrated [her] theories" (qtd. in King 851).

Freudians such as Anna Freud posited the patriarchal Oedipal drama as a method of "taming [. . .] the child's 'lawless' instincts" (Sayer 205). Instincts, for the Freudians, existed independently of an Oedipal relation to others. For Kleinians, however, it was the mother's relationship with the child, "not the instincts shorn of relations to others [that] constitute the stuff of mental life" (205). The Oedipal drama was viewed by Kleinians as an effect of early object relations, not "lawless instincts," and the maternal-filial relationship was considered the most critical of relations. Whereas Freudians, as Janet Sayers explains, situated the "nucleus" of neurosis in the "Oedipal rivalry with the father for sexual possession of the mother," Kleinians, such as Karen Horney, suggested,

neurosis is the effect of basic anxiety due to parental abuse. Unable to express the hostility to which this gives rise, she wrote, the child instead represses it. The resulting insecurity this breeds then leads the child to

cling, Oedipal fashion, to the seemingly most powerful parent. Often this is the mother. (123)

³ *The Glass Menagerie* won the Critics' Circle Award for outstanding Broadway play of 1945. As Leo Schneiderman notes, the play is "generally regarded as [Williams'] masterpiece" (101). See also Alice Griffin (21), Jean Evans (12), R.C. Lewis (25), and Delma Presley (10).

⁴ Williams is highly regarded for his ambiguous and complex depictions of women. For a general discussion of female characters in Williams' plays, see Louise Blackwell, Robert Emmet Jones, Jacqueline O'Connor (*Madness*), and Nancy Tischler ("Witches").

⁵ Laurette Taylor's performance of Amanda attracted a great deal of critical attention. See Thomas Adler "The Glass Menagerie" (37), Dennis Brown (116), Robert Garland (19), and Rascoe Burton (23). In his *Memoirs*, Williams explicitly notes his admiration for the actress: "Having created the part of Amanda Wingfield for Laurette Taylor is sufficient reward for all the effort that went before and a lot that has come after" (86).

⁶ Lori Leathers Single offers an equally damning attack of Amanda's mothering when she suggests that Amanda "represents the cornerstone of this family's dysfunction" (76). Edmund Naperiealski, in his critique of Amanda's maternal role, goes so far as to exceed the confines of the play's narrative: "One wonders whether Amanda drove her husband away by forcing him to play a role he despised, which is what she is doing to Tom" (32). See also Eric Levy (530), and Leo Schneiderman (102).

⁷ In the scene, after Tom apologizes for the extremely heated exchange he has with his mother the previous night, Amanda exclaims: "Why, you--you're just *full* of

natural endowments! Both of my children--they're *unusual* children! Don't you think I know it? I'm so--proud! Happy and--feel I've--so much to be thankful for" (Reading 171; emphasis in original).

⁸ The story commits a great deal of its narrative to Laura's tragic isolation, her glass collection, her failed attempt at Business school, her love of listening to old records left by her absent father, and the failed attempt to find her a suitable husband.

⁹ I refer to stage directions frequently throughout my discussion. These types of directions are always an important element in theatre; however, Williams' interest in the details of performance is especially noteworthy in *Menagerie*. Williams writes in the opening comments of the London edition, "Because of its considerably delicate or tenuous material, atmospheric touches and subtleties of direction play a particularly important part. Expression and all other unconventional techniques in drama have only one valid aim, and that is a closer approach to truth" (xix).

¹⁰ As Barbara Ann Schapiro contends, play allows the child, in part, to come to terms with the relationship between inner and outer objects and to begin to form an understanding of his or her reality. Much of the work of play is driven by feelings of loss in relation to internal and external objects, most notably for the mother (20-1). In order to successfully mourn a lost object, Klein suggests, the ego must undergo a process of 'reality' testing' in which "memories and situations of expectancy which demonstrate the libido's attachment to the lost object is met by the verdict of reality that the object no longer exists" (*Love* 344).

¹¹ In both acting versions of *Menagerie*, the play opens with Tom is situated outside of a "gauze curtain" which is intended to "suggest[] the front part, outside, of

[Tom's home]" (London 21). After a direct address to the audience in which Tom provides the "social background" of the play, some family history and explains that this is a "memory play . . . it is not realistic" (23), Tom enters the dining room. In the London edition of the play, this "scrim curtain" rises as Tom enters the room; however, in the American edition, the curtain does not rise until Amanda's commands to Tom to "chew!" From the outset, then, Williams' staging of the play is through a "gauze curtain," an effect he uses in his attempt to create a "new, plastic theatre which must take the place of the exhausted theatre of realistic conventions" (7).

¹² In the opening scene of both the American and London acting editions of the play, the first words of the dramatic action once again go to Amanda, but in each of these versions Amanda's initial dialogue is directed to Laura. Amanda tells Laura of an unpleasant experience she has at church when a "Northern Episcopalian" tells Amanda that an empty pew is already "rented" (American 12). Amanda responds to the obvious insult by retreating to her Southern roots: "These Northern Episcopalians! I can understand the Southern Episcopalians, but these Northern ones, no" (12). The dialogue establishes a sense of empathy for the character as it summons the trope of the aging Southern Belle in a dialogue that is both pathetic and humorous. As in the Reading edition of the play, Amanda is a central figure who invites both revulsion and empathy.

¹³ Amanda's love of "jonquils" also points to the autobiographical aspects of the play. In her memoirs, Edwina notes that "it is high time the ghost of Amanda was laid . . . The only resemblance I have to Amanda is that we both like jonquils" (149).

¹⁴ In his discussion "On Narcissism," Freud posits a "primary narcissism" that is a "normal" developmental stage, "the libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of

self-preservation” (14:73-4). Object-choice, for the normative male follows an “anaclitic” or “attachment” type that stems from “the child’s original narcissism” and takes as its model the child’s earliest relationship with the mother” (88). The narcissistic mother poses a particular problem in Freud’s and in Klein’s heteronormative template. As Steven Bruhm notes, Freud suggests that the narcissistic maternal figure “provides the model of narcissism” for the “homosexual boy” (*Reflecting* 117; Klein, *Love* 123). Freud suggests that “Women, especially if they grow up with good looks, develop a certain self-contentment . . . Strictly speaking, it is only themselves that such women love” (89). Motherhood, Freud suggests, provides narcissistic women with a “road . . . to complete object-love” in that “the child which they bear . . . confronts them like an extraneous object, to which, starting out from their narcissism, they can then give complete object-love” (14:89-90). In other words, Freud posits motherhood as a “cure” to a woman’s self-love.

¹⁵ Edwina Williams frequently noted that “‘Oh, Ah made delightful angel foods . . . that’s one thing Ah *could* make, was cake’” (qtd. in Brown 114; emphasis in original).

¹⁶ Granger Babcock also reads an important cultural critique launched through Amanda that reflects “emergent structures of American capitalism to the hyper-rationalization of Nazi Germany” (18). As Babcock notes, Amanda is an instrument of culture who “wants [her children] to conform, to be ‘normal people,’ as she puts it. She wants them to become instruments, not ‘freaks’ or ‘cranks’ or cripples” (22). In his discussion of the play as an “indictment” of American culture, C.W.E. Bigsby notes that Williams “envisages a production in which all elements will serve his central concern

with those who are the victims of social circumstance, of imperious national mothers of fate and of time as the agent of that fate” (“Entering” 33).

¹⁷ For a discussion of the Catholic symbolism of the play, see Bert Cardullo (85-6). Although Williams was not a Catholic when he wrote *Menagerie*, he would later convert to Catholicism, at the insistence of his brother, in 1968 (Keith 150). Though not a regular participant in Catholic Mass, Williams maintained a deep “love” for the “poetry of the church” (qtd. in Jennings 246). As Haggerty notes, gothic fiction often explores the “horrors of Catholicism” (4), so it is not surprising that Williams would incorporate Catholic iconography in his play. At the same time, the icon’s role in mid-century Catholicism is worth noting. The Church dedicated 1942 to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, declared 1945 Marian year, and adopted the dogma of Mary’s assumption into heaven in 1950 (Warner 363).

¹⁸ Luke 1:26

¹⁹ Marina Warner agrees with Clooney’s assertion, as she notes, “in the very celebration of the perfect human woman, both humanity and women were subtly denigrated” (xxi). As Marcella Maria Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood discuss, while most feminists argue that Mariology is an “inherently oppressive” Cult that works to affirm patriarchal theologies, some feminist critics suggest that “Mariology is, in many instances, one example of these subversive theological women’s practices which may have contributed not only to women’s survival in Christianity but also to their own empowering” (13). The Virgin, like the Kleinian maternal figure, is an ambivalent figure.

²⁰ Bailey McDaniel’s reading of the film version of *Tattoo* offers an interesting discussion of how the narrative transgresses cultural prescriptions of maternity within the

genre of the Maternal Woman's film. See also John L. Gronbeck-Tedesco who discusses the transgressive potentiality of Serafina.

²¹ I explore the topic of fetish in my chapter on Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*. Fetishism, as I discuss, is intimately related to the maternal figure in psychoanalytic discourse. Freud, in his article entitled "Fetishism," suggests that "the fetish is a substitute for the woman's (the mother's) penis that the little boy once believed in and--for reasons familiar to us--does not want to give up" (21:152-3).

²² See Jerrold E. Hogle (Introduction 5-7), Robert Miles (2-3), and Eric Savoy (163).

²³ A number of critics of the play suggest that, in the end, Tom manages to escape the clutches of his mother. As Daniel Dervin notes, "because Tom is able to pour out his anger and hostility onto his mother, their source, he effects a psychic separation from her domination that makes possible his eventual physical escape" (175). See also Eric Levy (532) and Lester Beaurline (147).

²⁴ As Klein states, in the process of mourning,

Each single one of the memories and situations of expectancy which demonstrate the libido's attachment to the lost object is met by the verdict of reality that the object no longer exists; and the ego, confronted as it were with the question of whether it shall share this fate, is persuaded by the sum of the narcissistic satisfactions it derives from being alive to sever its attachment to the object that has been abolished. (*Love* 344)

²⁵ As is well noted, Lawrence Kubie tried unsuccessfully to stop Williams from writing (Spoto 219).

Chapter Five

“We all devour each other”: The Spectral Mother and Child in Tennessee

Williams’ *Suddenly Last Summer*

In the fourteen years that follow on the success of *The Glass Menagerie*, Tennessee Williams wrote a number of short stories, one-act plays, and seven full-length plays. Though mothers appear in a number of these works, it is not until his 1958 play, *Suddenly Last Summer*, that Williams returns to an interrogation of the spectral mother of Kleinian phantasy. Described as the “most shocking drama” in Williams’ expansive, and frequently “shocking,” oeuvre (Hurley 392), *Suddenly* is recognized as “a prominent example of mid-twentieth-century Southern Gothic drama” (Tunç 153).¹ The play recounts the story of the murdered Sebastian Venable, son to an aging Violet, and travelling companion to an emotionally devastated Catharine. At the heart of the play’s action lies Violet’s attempt to censor Catharine’s recitation of the gruesome details of Sebastian’s cannibalistic death at the hands of a group of young boys that--according to Catharine--Sebastian has paid for sex. Throughout the play, Williams raises questions about Violet’s past role in the constitution of Sebastian’s non-normative desires. Robert Gross, who offers one of the most extensive considerations of the play, notes that Violet is both a “phallic, impregnating Mother” (241) and a woman with “surprisingly little power” in the world of the play (237).² For Gross, the complexity of this “easily identifi[able] . . . example of gothic melodrama” may be largely attributed to the play’s “recasting of Edmund Burke’s concept of the Sublime, with all its heterosexual male assumptions, within a gay subjectivity” (229). I agree with Gross that there is a paradoxical tension between power and vulnerability within a libidinal economy that

underlies Williams' gothic drama. However, this complexity, I argue, stems from Williams' exploration of the spectral mother of Klein's theory, an exploration that builds upon Williams' critique of this maternal figure in *The Glass Menagerie*. In *Menagerie*, Amanda is characterized as an ambivalent figure--the "good" and "bad" mother--who both ensures and troubles filial subjectivity. In *Suddenly*, Williams delves even further into the mother-son libidinal economy of Klein's conceptions of identity formation. Specifically, the characterization of Violet in *Suddenly* gestures to the sadomasochistic construction of the mother within Kleinian phantasy. Though Violet is present on stage in "real" time, her role as a mother is relegated to a past that, like Amanda, she unsuccessfully attempts to resurrect. Sebastian, Violet's son, is already dead when the play opens, and so Violet's maternity, like Amanda's, is only a memory. In *Suddenly*, Violet emerges as a spectral figure who reveals the devastating consequences to identity and the familial structure that Klein's paradigm prescribes. Though the object relations theories of Klein and her followers attempt to identify a normative path through to a heteronormative outcome, Williams' gothic play identifies a prescribed queerness that relates to the spectral mother, a queerness that both shores up and destabilizes the very normativity that Klein's discourse wishes to enforce.

The Sadomasochistic Mother

In order to examine Violet's characterization through a Kleinian lens, a discussion of the sadomasochistic aspect of the spectral mother is warranted. Kleinian theory suggests that during the paranoid schizoid phase, the infant's supposed earliest stage of development, the infant perceives the maternal breast as two distinct objects, one Ideal and the other persecutory (*Love* 292-3). Through the act of consumption, the child

believes that it “sucks the breast into himself [sic], chews it up and swallows it; thus he [sic] feels that he [sic] has actually got it there, that he [sic] possesses the mother’s breast within himself [sic]” (291). Whereas in *Menagerie*, Williams focuses on the link between consumption and psychosexual identity, in *Suddenly*, the playwright turns his attention to the consequences of the cannibalistic nature of this libidinal relation. While a primary motivation behind the cannibalism at the centre of the mother-son relation, Klein suggests, is a desire to incorporate loved objects, because the child “projects its own aggression on to these objects . . . the child conceives of them as actually dangerous--persecutors who it fears will devour it” (262). The child, unable to discern a difference between external and internal reality, is driven by persecutory anxiety to launch its sadistic forces to devour its persecutors, the same desired objects who the child fears will devour him or her. The ambivalence of the breast, the child’s initial external and internalized object, thereby establishes, in Klein’s thinking, a fundamentally sadomasochistic character to the mother-child relationship that becomes a constitutional aspect of ego development.

Moreover, the ego’s identification with the mother maintains its ambivalent character in the next phase of development, the depressive position. As in the paranoid schizoid position, this stage of development is marked by severe anxiety; however, the integration of part objects is the hallmark of this stage. Hanna Segal explains that in the depressive position the infant begins to perceive of its mother not as two objects, one good and the other bad, but as an integrated whole object: “the infant, that is to say, relates himself [sic] more and more, not only to the mother’s breast, hands, face, eyes, as separate objects, but to herself as a whole person, who can be at times good, at times bad,

present or absent, and who can be both loved and hated” (68). Although integration signals a more mature level of development, recognition of the mother as a “whole person” causes the infant to experience anxiety “that his [sic] own destructive impulses have destroyed or will destroy, the object that he [sic] loves and totally depends on” (69). At the same time, the infant experiences feelings of hatred and persecution toward the mother brought about by his or her dependence (*Love* 253-4). In the end, for Kleinians, the depressive position, as in the paranoid schizoid stage, is characterized by sadism, which reflects the “fusion” of “phantasies and feelings of an aggressive and of a gratifying, erotic nature” directed toward the maternal persecutor and victim (293). Significantly, then, for Klein, the mother must assume, in phantasy, the role of persecutor and victim of sadistic attacks in order to prepare the child for a normative adulthood, and the child must likewise assume the roles of persecutor and persecuted.³ Klein in fact argues that persecutory anxiety is a crucial component in the child’s development in that these early phantasies lay the groundwork for learning how to respect Others and control impulses (“Our” 294).⁴ Klein’s normative framework, then, is built upon a decidedly ambivalent, and queer, psychosexual mother and child relationship. In contrast to the suggestion by some scholars that Williams’ *Suddenly* explores the “polysexualities” and “perverse” desires “which exist outside the boundaries of social control” (Saddik 347-8), I suggest that both Sebastian’s and Violet’s characterization points to the institutionalized queerness that operates within the Kleinian nuclear family.

As is often noted by scholars of the play, Williams wrote *Suddenly* during a time in which he was “undergoing intensive psychotherapy” (Gross 246). As such, the play is most frequently read in biographical terms as an exploration of Williams’ own

psychosexual fears and desires.⁵ While the autobiographical nature of the play is reasonably well established, more work remains to be done to consider the extent to which Williams' deployment of a gothic mode works to interrogate the role of psychoanalytic theory in this family drama. After all, the competing narratives of Sebastian's identity are presented to a psychiatrist, Dr. Cukrowicz, a character who, in the end, like the audience, is unable to resolve the inconsistencies in Violet's testimony. And, as Gross suggests, "The story is revealed to us through a familiar gothic opposition--the rich, ruthless Violet Venable and her poor, victimized niece, Catharine Holly" (229). Indeed, from the opening moments of the play, Williams establishes a gothic context. The opening setting, Gross notes, in "an exotic, tropical garden within a Victorian gothic mansion . . . looking like a 'well-groomed jungle' . . . establishes the familiar gothic dialectics of overrefinement and wildness, fastidious artifice and dangerous nature that are common to the genre" (229).⁶ Notably, the first person to enter this gothic space is the "rich, ruthless Violet Venable." Her first words within the play--"Yes, this was Sebastian's garden" (350)--situate this maternal figure within the paradigm of mother-son relationship.

Violet Venable, like the spectral mother of Kleinian phantasy, simultaneously reflects aspects of the vulnerable good object in need of protection as well as the fearful object of persecution from which one must be protected. A "*starfish of diamonds*" covers her "*withered bosom*" (350), and though the starfish is known for its regenerative ability, its casting in jewels symbolizes the ironic impotence of her maternal status.⁷ At the same time, Violet threatens real power within the confines of the play. Her role as monstrous Other is evident in her attempts to blackmail Dr. Cukrowicz into performing a lobotomy

on Catharine in order to stop her incessant “babbl[ing]” of her version of Sebastian’s final moments, a narrative that calls into question Violet’s characterization of Sebastian as a “chaste” poet (361). It is not surprising, then, that Violet is overwhelmingly read as monstrous by scholars of the play. Indeed, Violet is arguably the most persecutory of all Williams’ fictional mothers.⁸

The sadism of Violet’s character certainly seems evident in her earliest conversation with Dr. Cukrowicz. Cukrowicz, concerned about the “*new and radical*” nature of his experiments, cautiously attempts to warn Violet of potential risks of the surgery (365; emphasis in original). The doctor treads a precarious line between his duty to advise Violet, his professional ambitions that relate to Violet’s potential financial donation to his research, and his desire to protect this elderly woman who continuously leans on him for support.⁹ Yet, Cukrowicz’s increasing discomfort is met by Violet’s rising enthusiasm. Violet urges Cukrowicz on with an emphatic “Yes” at every turn, clearly eager to hear any gruesome detail Cukrowicz might provide (365-6). Violet is not interested in Cukrowicz’s research, as she makes clear, nor is she concerned that Catharine might be “*limited*” after her surgery (366; emphasis in original). Violet is enthralled by the idea of pain that Cukrowicz’s procedure will inflict. Finally, in frustration, the Doctor notes, “I can’t guarantee that a lobotomy would stop [Catharine’s]--*babbling!!*” (367; emphasis in original). Despite Violet’s earlier assertion that it would be “*blessing*” for Catharine to be “*peaceful*” (366), her lack of concern for Catharine is obvious: “That may be, maybe not, but after the operation, who would *believe* her, Doctor?” (367; emphasis in original). The “*faint jungle music*” suggested in the stage directions confirm the raw and primeval violence of Violet’s character (367).

The conversation clearly leaves the Doctor shocked, and, after a few more discounted suggestions for alternative therapy, the duo get down to the true nature of the business at hand: Cukrowicz wonders if he were to refuse to lobotomize Catharine, ““Would you still be interested in my work at Lion’s View?”” (367). Violet’s response--““Aren’t we always more interested in a thing that concerns us personally, Doctor?”” (367)--confirms that she will not be dissuaded from her sadistic plans and is willing to blackmail the Doctor in order to facilitate those plans. Clearly confused, Cukrowicz points out that Violet’s ““offer of a subsidy”” might be considered by some as a ““*bribe*”” (368; emphasis in original), but Violet, as the stage directions indicate, “*laughs, throwing her head back,*” and responds, ““Name it that--I don’t care--”” (368). Violet takes great pleasure in Cukrowicz’s shock and discomfort. The main action of the scene ends here as the lights dim for the first time in the play, and the audience is left with a vision of Violet as a persecutory and sadistic maternal figure.

Williams’ characterization of Violet raises the spectre of the sadistic and persecutory mother of Kleinian phantasy; however, it also conjures a sense of Violet as the persecuted victim of attack as prescribed by that same discourse. She is, after all, the ailing mother of a murdered son. Significantly, this victimization, like her persecutory behaviour, operates within a libidinal economy, an economy which gestures to a masochistic aspect of her characterization. In other words, Violet’s victimization is not without its own satisfactions. Even though Violet already has the police reports of Sebastian’s death and is well aware of Catherine’s accusations (385), she insists upon staging a performance of her worst nightmare: the reiteration of Sebastian’s elicited desire and horrendous death. Violet willingly and forcefully organizes a public performance of

her loss that suggests a particular form of masochism that garnered a great deal of currency in psychoanalytic discourse at the time of Williams' writing of the play: moral masochism.

Sigmund Freud, in his 1924 essay, "The Economic Problem of Masochism," discusses the ego's "natural" masochism, the internally directed remainder of the instinct of mastery that compels the subject to seek punishment in order to satisfy his or her libidinal demands. Importantly, as Freud notes, this "turning back of sadism against the self regularly occurs where a cultural suppression of the instincts holds back a large part of the subject's destructive instinctual components from being exercised in life" (19:170). In other words, "cultural suppression" is a constitutive factor in the development of the masochistic perversion. Arguably, in postwar American culture, no subject experienced more "cultural suppression" than the mother. Indeed, the cultural demand for mothers to assume a self-sacrificing posture is the subject of much critical work. As Michelle Masse notes, for the mother, masochism is the "end result of a long and varyingly successful cultural training" (3). In the heteronormative familial economy, the mother's role is one characterized by a desire for self-abnegation. Moreover, in psychoanalytic discourse, as Margaret Fitzpatrick Hanly explains, "a debate on the etiology of the masochistic character took place in the 1950s concerning the role of object relations" (269). Central to this debate was the hypothesis that "the entire causation of moral masochism was to be found in the sadism of the parent" (269)--most especially, Otto Fenichel suggests, the sadist mother (306-7). Imbricated with the subject position of mother, then, was, on the one hand, a culturally prescribed masochism that effectively dictated the mother's adherence to a recognized psychosexual perversion. On

the other hand, there was a cultural fear that the mother would breed a perverse filial sexuality that mirrored her own culturally prescribed queerness. Violet, I suggest, is born within this intersection of cultural anxiety and psychoanalytic debate.

Violet displays several important markers of moral masochism. As Fitzpatrick Hanly explains, the “symptomatology” of moral masochism involves “a severe restraint on sexual activity, an intense investment in Oedipal and pre-Oedipal prohibitions, and in pure ideals--ideals of sacrifice and self-abnegation for higher goals” (6). Andrew Sofer’s reading of the play directly recognizes Violet’s “self-abnegatory care of the self” as an instrument, he argues, that she employs in an attempt to “subject time” (346). Significantly, Violet explains to Cukrowicz that ““It takes character to refuse to grow old, Doctor--successfully to refuse to”” (Williams, *Suddenly* 360). In order to stave off the effects of aging, she and Sebastian--according to Violet--employed ““discipline”” and ““abstention”” with regard to food (360). Violet explains that the duo allowed themselves only ““[o]ne cocktail before dinner, not two, four, six--a single lean chop and lime juice on a salad”” (360). Significantly, Violet is not only invested in “sacrifice” and “self-abnegation” to maintain youth, but this denial is made even more exquisite as it is performed ““in restaurants famed for rich dishes”” (360). Scholars point out that the trope of consumption throughout the play stands in metaphorically for erotic desire;¹⁰ thus, Violet’s consumptive restraint operates metaphorically as a libidinally charged denial of sexuality, a marker of moral masochism. Notably, this “severe restraint on sexual activity” is complicated by criticism that points to an incestuous element in Sebastian and Violet’s relationship.¹¹ Violet, after all, envisions herself and her son as a ““famous couple”” and states that she was ““actually the only one in his life that satisfied the

demands he made of people” (362). The latent erotic aspect to this mother-son relationship clearly coincides with the libidinal dynamics of a Kleinian frame. Moreover, the vehemence by which Violet asserts Sebastian’s restraint and chastity reveals Williams’ interest in the consequences of this maternal-filial psychosexual tension on the spectral mother of Kleinian theory. Violet frantically explains to Cukrowicz that Sebastian ““was chaste [. . .] I mean he was c-h-a-s-t-e!--Chaste”” (361). This denial has been read as an act of repression on Violet’s part that can be linked to Violet’s fear of aging and her investment in her role as mother. John Clum follows this thinking when he suggests, “To allow [Sebastian] sexuality would be to lose her primacy in his life” (133). As an act of repression, though, this denial of sexuality not only conjures the masochistic demand for “a severe restraint on sexual activity,” but also reflects the masochistic “intense investment in Oedipal prohibitions.” Violet must deny Sebastian’s sexuality in order to exonerate her own unconscious libidinal satisfaction role in ““PROCURING”” sex for her son (412; emphasis in original), a role that Catharine suggests both she and Violet fulfilled during Sebastian’s life (412). In other words, Violet’s chastity, her need for sexual restraint, is contingent on Sebastian’s. Violet’s denial of her own and of Sebastian’s sexuality is effectively a vehicle through which she unconsciously satisfies her own libidinal needs.

The erotic nature of Violet’s masochistic subjugation is rendered most obvious in the mother’s overt veneration of her son. In a pivotal moment of the play, Violet attempts to outline to Cukrowicz her subjugated position in regards to the ““pure ideal”” of Sebastian and his poetry. Violet explains that ““a poet’s life is his work and his work is his life in a special sense because--oh”” (352). The erotic nature of this assertion is

suggested by the fact that the attempt itself leaves Violet “*breathless and dizzy*” (352). The deification of Sebastian’s work, for Violet, connects subjugation with psychosexual desire. Violet is ““devoting all that’s left of [her] life”” to the preservation of Sebastian’s textual body (352). As the stage directions indicate, she holds up the “*thin gilt-edged volume*” of Sebastian’s poetry and raises the text “*as if elevating the Host before the altar*” (353). In an act of extreme maternal deference, Violet is ascribed a divine power: like the Catholic priest, she purportedly acts as a vessel through which a divine power transforms Sebastian’s poetic text into the body of her martyred son. I agree with Gross when he argues, “Williams’s stage directions make it quite clear that we are not supposed to regard Violet’s Eucharistic ritual ironically” (241). This “intense investment . . . in [the] pure ideal” of Sebastian’s life and work has a profound effect: “*Suddenly, [Violet’s] face [. . .] has a different look, the look of a visionary, an exalted religieuse . . . [and] the old lady seems to be almost young for a moment*” (353). Violet is no longer the “withered” mother; rather, in this “moment,” Violet’s veneration of Sebastian’s text transforms her interpretation of his memory into actual substance, an act that in turn redeems her youth. Williams, however, does not simply invest the maternal figure with a divine maternal authority based on her performance of culturally sanctioned subjugation. In this pivotal scene, and in fact from the opening moments of the play, Violet’s maternal status is only a ghostly echo of motherhood.

As Steven Bruhm suggests in his discussion of homographesis, Sebastian Venable, the object of Violet’s veneration, is “always already consumed at the moment we would have him rendered present so that we may consume him” (“Blond” 97). Sebastian exists only through the very unstable memories of Catharine, Violet’s nemesis,

and Violet's own, equally unstable, memories. In his reading of the absent text of Sebastian's final poem, Bruhm suggests that the lack of material presence in the play is a potentially "productive" site that both "marks the queer meaning of *Suddenly Last Summer*" and "goes to the heart of Williams's self-representation in the late 1950s" (97). Sebastian, as a "signifier with an ostentatiously absent signified" also offers insight into Williams' critique of psychoanalytic conceptions of the mother and son relationship (97). Gross argues that in Lacanian terms Sebastian exists as a "Sublime body," a body that exists in the space between biological and Symbolic death (239).¹² What this Sublime body points to, Lacan suggests, "is in itself nothing else but the signifier of limit" (*Ethics* 322). It is not a substantive form; rather, it is a spectral figure of stasis that is delineated, Lacan argues, by the "Suffering [that] is conceived of as a stasis which affirms that that which is cannot return to the void from which it emerged" (322). In terms of Kleinian thinking, Sebastian's absent-yet-present body gestures to the phantasmagoric self who is always delineated in the now through the pain of persecution and ecstasies of sadism in its earliest moments of life. In Williams' play, Sebastian exists, and only exists, at the limit of suffering, loss, death, and desire, a phantasmagoric space that relies upon the Symbolic for its existence (through the narratives of Violet and Catharine), to the extent that the Symbolic is a marker that is eluded. And so, too, does Violet. Violet proclaims that "[Catharine's] lies will collapse--not my truth--not the truth" (352); however, the movement from phantasmagoric to the substantive that is suggested by Violet's substitution of the definite article, "the," in place of the personal pronoun, "my," is an impossibility within the Kleinian-inspired framework of the play. Like Sebastian's subject position as a son, Violet's subject position as a mother exists, and only exists, in

her unending because always falling short painful rehearsal of her version of Sebastian's life and death. Williams' play thereby critiques the instability of both the child's and the mother's subjectivity within Klein's conceptions. Violet's subject position, like the spectral mother of Kleinian theory, is confined to and defined by the phantasmagoric loss and suffering that relates to her son. As a mother, she has no independent existence. Like the spectral mothers in O'Connor's work, and Amanda in Williams' *Menagerie*, the subject position of mother is characterized as a gothic site of filial trauma. Klein's theories, like Freud's and Jung's, are gothic constructions in that they are built on a spectral mother, who, to borrow from Madelon Sprengnether's discussion, is a "quicksand foundation of loss" (5). Williams' characterization of Violet in fact anticipates later critiques of Klein's thinking such as that of Janice Doane and Devon Hodges. As these scholars note, object relation theories "define[] femininity in relation to mothering and then establish[] women's agency as a set of approved behaviors toward infants . . ." (1).¹³ Yet, Williams' characterization is even more complex. It is Sebastian's absence from the stage, his unknowable and unfixable status that signals and constitutes Violet's character. In other words, Violet's existence is equally predicated on Sebastian's absence, on her status as a non-mother.

Indeed, one of the most perplexing aspects of Violet is her intense investment in her abnegation of her role as mother, an abnegation that is evident in Violet's discussion of Sebastian's poetry. As she explains to Cukrowicz, Sebastian wrote one poem "for each summer that we traveled together. The other nine months of the year were really only a preparation" (354). Sebastian's poetry, Cukrowicz infers from Violet's speech, gestates each year for the "length of a pregnancy" (354). Given that from Violet's

perspective the text *is* Sebastian, here Violet attributes to her son not only the power to birth a poem, but also the power to birth himself. Notably, my reading contrasts with that of Gross who argues that “The maternal image presented here is one of a phallic, impregnating Mother who provides the will necessary for artistic creation to take place” (241). And yet another divergent reading of the meaning of Sebastian’s poetry is offered by Sofer, who suggests, “Sebastian’s art is still-born, engendered through a poisonous combination of incest and narcissism” (342). In terms of my argument, although Violet affirms that the delivery of the poem would have been “*impossible*” without her presence (354; emphasis in original), Violet argues that it is from within Sebastian’s creative ability that the poem, and therefore the poet, emerges. Bruhm suggests the play provides an instance in which Williams “wrest[s] the homosexual from a paralyzing--because sanitizing--diagnosis that makes the gay man captive to his mother” (*Reflecting* 110). Williams’ play also momentarily “wrests” the mother from her equally “paralyzing” captivity to parental identity.

In *Suddenly*, the vacillation between a culturally ideal subjugated mother and the heteronormative nightmare of a mother whose existence relies upon her denial of maternity gestures to the libidinal economy of the moral masochist, an economy that is in turn predicated on the supposed libidinally charged formation of the super-ego. In both Freud’s and Klein’s thinking, the super-ego performs the role of the conscience by providing the ego with an ideal that it must strive to emulate. The super-ego achieves this “demanding role,” Freud (and later Klein) suggests, “through the introjection into the ego of the first objects of the id’s libidinal impulses--namely the two parents” (19:167). As Segal explains, Klein’s “contention is that the extreme, punitive and unreal nature of the

super-ego comes from the child's own cannibalistic and sadistic impulses, a view which Freud, in one of his few published references to Melanie Klein, endorses in a footnote to *Civilization and its Discontents*, *W.E.* 21, p. 130" (qtd. in Klein, *Love* 423-4). Through introjection, the child's "sexual aims" towards its parents, aims that are manifested in the Oedipal stage, are "diverted" (19:167). Though the super-ego "retain[s] essential features of the introjected persons--their strength, their severity, their inclination to supervise and to punish" (167)--the process is effectively one of desexualization of authority. In fact, Freud argues that this process, and "only" this process, makes it "possible for the Oedipus complex to be surmounted" (167), and for the child to substitute external cultural objects for its parents' authority. The perversion of moral masochism, for Freud and Kleinians, is marked by a reversal in the "desexualization" of the Oedipal conflict that had been accomplished through the formation of the super-ego (169). In these subjects, the Oedipus complex is revived; a revival, Freud explains, which results in a re-sexualization of authority and punishment (169). The moral masochist "seeks punishment, whether from the super-ego or from the parental powers outside" which, for Freud, reflects a sublimated wish for sexual relations with the child's parents (169). In effect, in moral masochism the demands of a normatively determined super ego are supplanted by a libidinally charged parent-child structure. Arguably, then, in order to be punished by the parent, the ultimate psychosexual aim of the moral masochist, the subject must assume the role of the child, or non-parent, in relation to its world. What this regression locates in the world of Williams' play is the central horror of the subject position of mother in psychoanalytic discourse. As Freud notes, "a sense of guilt that is mostly unconscious" is a chief distinguishing factor of moral masochism; a guilt that

stems from a recognition that the subject “has not come up to the demands made by its ideal” (19:167). In terms of the spectral mother of Williams’ play, as a moral masochist, Violet’s demand that Catharine “babble” that which Violet wishes to repress--not simply the facts surrounding Sebastian’s death, but more importantly her own complicity in Sebastian’s death--underlies Violet’s characterization and the action of the play itself. Violet believes, ““Without me he died last summer”” (354). Violet’s aim is not to silence Catharine, as is evidenced by her lack of concern that the Doctor ““can’t guarantee that a lobotomy would stop her--*babbling*.”” Violet’s aim, the aim of the moral masochist, is to ensure her own psychosexual satisfaction through the punitive reiteration of her own failed subjugation. Violet is fixated on the repeated rehearsal of the trauma of Sebastian’s death, a trauma that has resulted from her own perceived inadequacy. In effect, in *Suddenly*, Williams subverts the gothic motif of a repetition of the child’s trauma to suggest the traumatic consequences to maternal subjectivity that a Kleinian script demands. In the play, the spectral mother of Klein’s discourse is identified both as the source, and the victim, of the trauma at the centre of a Kleinian-inspired subject position of mother.

In the world of *Suddenly*, the psychoanalytic demand of maternal persecution and subjugation breeds a sadomasochistic subjectivity that ultimately dictates the abnegation of motherhood in order to satisfy the mother’s psychosexual needs. Williams thereby reveals that the Kleinian-inspired demand for a normative filial outcome is predicated upon a sexualized spectral mother whose adherence to Klein’s prescription situates instability at the center of identity. In the end, as Kevin Ohi notes, Violet appears to “lapse into madness” (27). Faced with Cukrowicz’s suggestion that ““we ought at least to

consider the possibility that [Catharine's] story could be true" (423), and that perhaps the need to endlessly affirm and deny the events of Sebastian's death might cease, Violet's ability to maintain the punishing reiteration of persecution and subjugation upon which her subject position relies seems tenuous. On the one hand, her identity within the play relies on the memory of her role as Sebastian's mother. On the other hand, Violet's identity relies equally on her status as non-mother. Caught within the sadomasochistic demands of Kleinian phantasy, subjectivity, for Violet, as it is with each of the mothers in my study, is monstrously untenable.

Suddenly, Last Summer: The Annihilation of Mother and Son in a Kleinian Script

In *Suddenly*, the son's subjectivity, like the mother's subjectivity, exists only in phantasy. From the opening moments of the play Sebastian Venable is nothing more than a libidinally charged memory. Sebastian's death at the hands of a group of cannibalistic youth, as I discuss, is most often read as an implicit condemnation of non-normative desire on the part of the playwright. Yet the link between homosexuality and cannibalism in the play is troubled. Certainly Catharine's description of Sebastian's partially consumed body as a "white-paper-wrapped bunch of red roses" (422), an obvious symbol of erotic desire, with the gruesome imagery of flesh that has been "torn, thrown, [and] crushed" conflates violence and cannibalism with libidinal forces (422; emphasis in original). Gross has already pointed out the connections between this description and lines from Hart Crane's poem "Paraphrase" in which Crane presents "Burkean sublimity figured as total absence" (248). Gross suggests that in *Suddenly* "[t]he poet Sebastian Venable here has become the text, as if he were a masochistic performance artist, to fill

the blazing nothingness of the empty page” (248). For Gross, this is “a highly Romantic gesture [in which] the poet’s body becomes his text, his gift to the reader; Christlike, he gives himself as the ‘pan’ the children chanted for” (248). Though I concur that there is a strong erotic undercurrent of masochism in this scene, consideration of the events that lead up to Sebastian’s grisly murder, and the significance of Violet’s role as mediator of her son’s fears and desires, suggests that Sebastian, like Violet, both enacts and falls victim to the sadomasochism within Kleinian prescription.

In scholarly discussion of Williams’ play, Sebastian’s cannibalistic erasure is often linked with the character’s supposed homosexuality.¹⁴ For those engaged in biographical criticism, like Donald Spoto, *Suddenly* is a “confessional drama” and Sebastian’s tragic end reflects Williams’ feelings of “guilt and remorse” in regards to his own “sexual exploitation” of others (220, 222). Even scholars who do not point to biographical elements of Sebastian’s characterization regularly suggest, as Clum notes, that cannibalism acts as a metaphor for proscribed homoerotic desire in that “Sebastian’s death [is] poetic justice, the queer consumer consumed” (133). The suggestion that Sebastian’s cannibalistic death is a direct result of his implied homosexuality however is troubled by what we are told of Sebastian’s life in the years that lead up to his murder. Although Violet insists that Sebastian was “‘chaste,’” Catharine’s dialogue reveals a very different picture of her cousin’s sexuality. After all, Catharine confesses to Cukrowicz that she was “‘PROCURING for [Sebastian]” and, what is more, “‘[Violet] used to do it, *too*” (412; emphasis in original). While Violet, Catharine states, did “‘not consciously” attract sexual partners for Sebastian, both Catharine and Violet “‘made contacts for him” (412). Whether or not we are supposed to be convinced of the veracity of Violet’s belief

in her claims about Sebastian's sexuality, Williams, many critics points out, goes to great lengths to code Violet's descriptions of Sebastian's life in terms of normative conceptions of homosexuality.¹⁵ What this gap between words and the coded imagery of Sebastian's sexuality does within the play, Bruhm argues, is to "implicate" Williams' audience in an economic, libidinal, and political economy that wants to both "hear" and "silence" the "homosexual story" ("Blackmailed" 535). In any event, in the twenty years of Violet and Sebastian's travels, Sebastian supposedly sustained various homoerotic, if not homosexual, relationships without any incident. It is not until the sadomasochistic Violet is removed from her son's company that Sebastian is figuratively and literally persecuted and consumed by the objects of his desire. In other words, Sebastian's erasure is predicated on his mother's absence, and it is this absence that opens a space through which Sebastian's persecutory behaviour turns back on itself and consumes him. Sebastian's desire, and therefore existence, is sustained as long as he remains under Violet's care, and therefore the suggestion that Williams' interest lies simply in an indictment of homoerotic desire seems problematic at best.

Much of the criticism that attests to the moral message of the play relies on a link between Sebastian and his namesake, Saint Sebastian, a well-known icon of homoerotic desire.¹⁶ The Saint, Gilbert Debusscher explains, "was a Roman martyr traditionally considered the lover of Emperor Diocletian" who is murdered for his conversion to Christianity ("Tennessee" 151). For the most part, Debusscher suggests, the connection between Sebastian Venable and Saint Sebastian is often "interpreted as a straight ironic comment, an unambiguous disparagement of Sebastian through contrast with the early martyr" (152). For instance, Thompson argues that Sebastian Venable's death reflects a

conflation of “legend of Christian saint martyrdom with a Greek myth of death and rebirth and an allegorical struggle between good and evil,” and ultimately suggests that the cannibalization of Sebastian’s body represents the “demonic parody” of the “Eucharistic Feast” (99). Sebastian’s consumed body, then, reflects an inverted Christian allegory that condemns the homosexual sinner. Yet Williams’ depiction of Sebastian in his poem, “San Sebastiano de Sodoma” (1948), like that of Sebastian Venable of *Suddenly*, complicates the kind of condemnation of homosexuality to which Thompson refers. This complication is particularly relevant given, as Brian Parker notes, Williams’ poem, “San Sebastiano de Sodoma,” which is based upon a painting by Giovanni Antonio Bazzi, a late 15th and early 16th century artist (also known as Il Sodoma), is directly referenced in at least two early drafts of *Suddenly* (“Tentative” 306). In the poem, homosexuality is characterized as neither “evil” nor “demonic”:

How did Saint Sebastian die?

Arrows pierced his throat and thigh

which only knew, before that time,

the dolours of a concubine.

Near above him, hardly over,

hovered his gold martyr’s crown.

Even Mary from Her tower

of heaven leaned a little down

and as She leaned, She raised a corner

of a cloud through which to spy.

Sweetly troubled Mary murmured

as She watched the arrows fly.

And as the cup that was profaned
gave up its sweet, intemperate wine,
all the golden bells of heaven
praised an emperor's concubine.¹⁷ (112)

Certainly, the opening line of the poem--"How did Sebastian die?"--reveals Williams' attention to the violent consequences of non-normative desire. However, what follows is not an indictment of homosexuality. Williams references the "arrows [which] pierced [Sebastian's] throat and thigh" (line 2), but immediately redirects attention to the sensuality of Sebastian's body: "his throat and thigh / which only knew, before that time, the dolours of a concubine" (2-4). The image of violent penetration transforms into the "dolours," or pains, of love. Sebastian is a "sweet, intemperate wine" to be consumed in an act that rises to the level of the sacred (14). Sebastian is described as a "cup that was profaned" (13), a divine object whose death is met with the "praise[]" and exultation of "All the golden bells of heaven" (16, 15). The poem is not an indictment of homoeroticism; if anything, the poem is an ode to homoeroticism and an indictment of violence directed toward Sebastian.

Significantly, the poem, "Saint Sebastian," like *Suddenly*, implicates the mother within a familial drama of eroticized violence. As Parker notes, "one of the most interesting things about Williams's poem is that it includes a description of the Virgin Mary looking down in pity . . . though there is no Virgin Mary in Sodoma's painting" ("Tentative" 306).¹⁸ Appearing in the same stanza that "crown[s]" the dead Sebastian with "gold martyr's crown" (line 2), the "Sweetly troubled Mary murmured" (11).

Although only a “murmur,” Mary’s is the only voice of the poem and it is thereby her sorrow through which the death of Sebastian is to a large extent mediated. Like the death of Sebastian in *Suddenly*, the supposed homosexual Saint’s death is very much characterized as a maternal-filial loss. Williams is clearly interested in a sense of violence directed toward non-normative desire, but that interest is decidedly filtered through the subject position of mother. From this perspective, William’s work does not offer a critique of homosexuality; rather, his interest lies in the intersection of mother and son within a paradigm of violence and non-normative desire that mirrors the exigencies of predation within Kleinian discourse.

To suggest an intimate connection between the mother and homosexual son is not surprising. As Bruhm contends, Williams’ characterization of Sebastian in *Suddenly* recalls “the kind of homosexual man the Freudian enterprise had identified some forty-five years earlier, the type whose delusions of grandeur result from an inability to cast the mother in the role of sexual otherness, and who instead identifies with her too fully” (“Blond” 98). Indeed, for Klein, homosexuality in men may be, on the one hand, “an idealization of [the subject] himself” a narcissistic object choice, or, on the other hand, an object choice that is “something between male and female, the mother with a penis” (*Love* 112). In either case, the origin of this “inversion” is situated within the earliest moments of the mother and son relation (112). Yet unlike cultural discourse of homosexuality at the time of Williams’ writing, neither “San Sebastiano” nor *Suddenly* indict the mother as a cause of homosexuality. Though, as Bruhm argues, the maternal Violet appears to “occup[y] the contradictory position of homosexuality’s *cause* and *cure*” (*Reflecting* 107; emphasis in original), in the play, “Williams collapses the binary

of homosexual narcissism and anaclitic object-desire so that they become the same thing (108). Like the maternal Mary of Williams' poem, Violet operates in *Suddenly* as a deified figure of love and desire, but she is also identified as a failed figure of protection who ultimately cannot fend off the violent persecution of a mortal plane. *Suddenly* thereby contests cultural narratives of the mother as “*cause* and *cure* of homosexuality,” and instead works to enact the potential horrors that lie within Klein's conceptions. In the play, both Violet and Sebastian are victims of the same normative discourse.

Klein does warn of potential hazards within object relations, as she notes that in extreme situations, filial persecutory anxiety can lead to paranoid psychosis. Klein suggests that the paranoiac is plagued by concern about his or her safety and coherence (*Love* 269), and views the “bits” of his or her persecuted and persecutory internalized objects as “mainly a multitude of persecutors” (272). Unable to negotiate the resultant anxiety, the paranoiac's interpersonal relations suffer greatly as the subject is incapable of a “full and stable identification with another object” and his or her paranoia “makes him [sic] look at people mainly from the point of view of whether they are persecutors or not” (271). For Klein, the mother plays a crucial role in the prevention of psychosis; yet, this role is a precarious one. On the one hand, in order to prevent a move from the prescribed persecutory anxiety to paranoia, the “good” mother provides “helpful imagos” that transform the super-ego “from being a threatening, despotic force issuing senseless and self-contradictory commands which the ego is totally unable to satisfy,” to a “milder and more persuasive rule . . . [that] make[s] requirements which are capable of being fulfilled” (252). On the other hand, although crucial, the mother's role in the child's development must be mitigated lest the child develop a “torturing and perilous

dependence on its loved objects [that . . .] is too profound to be renounced” (277). In effect, a “profound identification” with the mother may lead to a debilitating fear that the mother as loved object, as well as the child’s ego, will be destroyed by the ego’s persecutors. The stronger the child’s own sadistic desires, the more fearful and persecutory will be the child’s perception of threatening objects, and the more Ideal, exacting and critically important will be the child’s good objects (268-9). Indeed, much of the mid-century American surveillance of and prescriptions for the role of mother, as discussed in my introduction, relate to the Kleinian inspired problem that a mother must be “good,” but not too “good.”¹⁹

Klein argues that in order to mitigate feelings of dependence and persecution, the child’s ego may resort to manic defenses in which it attempts to deny its dependence and emotional attachment to its good object in order to affect its mastery over the object (278). One form of mastery that is particularly relevant to Sebastian’s characterization is a “hunger for objects” (278). As Klein explains, “The ego incorporates the object in a cannibalistic way (the ‘feast’, as Freud calls it in his account of mania) but denies that it feels any concern for it” (278). Cannibalism is both an effect and tool of protection against filial dependence. The child consumes that which he or she desires, but, through repression, maintains a sense of detachment towards its incorporated objects. Cannibalization and a concomitant denial of psychological dependence on objects, as instruments of mastery, offer the paranoid subject momentary relief from persecution.

From the opening gothic setting of *Suddenly*, in the “jungle-garden” just outside Sebastian and Violet’s familial home, Williams establishes Sebastian as a character who is deeply invested in control, a primary marker of persecutory anxiety (349). Spoto notes,

“The effect of the setting, Williams insisted, should mediate the core of the play, which postulates that within the genteel artifice of an apparently advanced civilization lie savagery and destruction” (221-2).²⁰ Yet the “well-groomed” nature of this “jungle” also points to a notable aspect of Sebastian’s character (Williams 351). This, Violet states, ““was Sebastian’s garden”” (350). There is an imposed sense of control of “savagery,” for which Sebastian is entirely responsible: ““That’s how [Sebastian] meant it to be, nothing was accidental, everything was planned and designed in Sebastian’s life and his . . . work!”” (351). The inherent excess of Violet’s assertions of “nothing” and “everything” gestures to a level of obsession that signals Williams’ interest in the dangers of a discourse that both relies upon and is threatened by a predatory spectral mother. In *Menagerie*, Tom is haunted by the ambivalent spectral mother of Kleinian phantasy; yet he manages to survive. In *Suddenly*, Williams delves deeper into the exigencies of Klein’s thinking, and Sebastian, like the Kleinian subject who experiences persecutory anxiety, is overwhelmed by a need to master the fears and desires imbedded within his role as son, fears and desires that in the end prove unconquerable.

Sebastian’s overwhelming need to control the savage forces of his life is further revealed through the first element of “Sebastian’s garden” to which Violet directs Cukrowicz’s attention: the ““insectivorous”” Venus flytrap (350). As Violet explains, the plant ““has to be kept under glass from early fall to late spring and when it went under glass, my son, Sebastian, had to provide it with fruit flies flown in at great expense from a Florida laboratory that used fruit flies for experiments in genetics”” (350). Thompson argues that the plant confirms Sebastian’s mimicry of his mother’s “suffocating ‘love and care”” (116), which in turn provides a template through which he “similarly attempts to

seduce and devour all those within his reach: his mother, the young boys he sexually violates, and, finally, Catharine” (116). However, Thompson’s reading of the plant as a reflection of the lethal “suffocating ‘love and care’” of Violet and, in turn, Sebastian, is troubled to the extent to which the plant does not “suffocate” under its glass case; rather, it is the removal of the protective cover which would prove lethal.²¹ As long as the symbiotic and predatory relationship of plant and flies is contained, the plant will flourish. Notably, this entire exchange is from Violet’s perspective and so may reflect her interest in positing a vision of a “nurturing” womb. Nonetheless, the dialogue sets up an analogy between the plant and Sebastian’s existence. Like the plant, Sebastian survives as a predatory figure as long as he is under the care of his mother within the predatory relationship of mother and son. Moreover, Williams adds a significant detail in regards to the “fruit flies” that further complicates critical readings; namely that these flies, the helpless victims of Sebastian’s predatory interests, were ““used for experiments in genetics.”” This richly symbolic gesture affirms the trope of consumption and mastery within a discourse on subjectivity. The flies act as instruments through which humans attempt to control life through “genetics.” In the same way, Sebastian feeds the flies to a predatory plant in order to satisfy his own needs to control his life.²² Williams’ attention to the intended use of the flies thereby situates Sebastian’s behaviour in a larger discourse of predation fundamental to human subjectivity that in turn gestures toward the exigencies of Kleinian discourse. The “easily identifi[ably]” gothic elements of this drama that Gross, and later Tanfer Emin Tunç, recognizes, then, stem from Williams’ adherence to the dictates of Klein’s normative ideas.

Sebastian's supposed extreme need for control in his interpersonal relationships-- which reflects the characteristic denial of psychological dependence found in the paranoiac--is, in fact, one of the few personal characteristics of Sebastian upon which Violet's and Catharine's narratives agree. Violet suggests that Sebastian "was a snob about personal charm in people, he insisted upon good looks in people around him, and, oh, he had a perfect little court of young and beautiful people around him always" (359). Sebastian's "little court" was filled with "perfect" people from whom Sebastian maintained emotional distance. According to Violet, she "was the only one in his life that satisfied the demands he made of people. Time after time my son would let people go, dismiss them!--because their, their, their!--*attitude* toward him was"--"Not as pure as" Cukrowiz injects--"My son, Sebastian, demanded!" Violet asserts (362; emphasis in original). Sebastian's "demands" were to be in control. And this characteristic is echoed by Catharine's assertion that she "had learned it was better not to seem to have an opinion because if I did, well, Sebastian, well, you know Sebastian, he always preferred to do what no one else wanted to do, and I always tried to give the impression that I was agreeing reluctantly to his wishes . . ." (414). Catharine understood that to be in Sebastian's company, she had to do "what he told me" (416). The concordance between Violet's and Catharine's narratives on the subject of Sebastian's interest in mastery suggests Williams' interest in the importance of this character trait. Sebastian, like the paranoiac, is incapable of a "full and stable identification with another object," and treats others with a detachment of a Kleinian paranoid subject. What this suggests, then, is that *Suddenly*'s enactment of a Kleinian- inspired mother and son relationship is crucial to understanding how cannibalism and non-normative desire in the play relate.

One of the most significant scenes in Williams' establishment of a connection between paranoia and cannibalism within a Kleinian frame is revealed in Violet's discussion of her and Sebastian's ill-fated trip to the Galapagos Islands. For Ohi, in this scene "Mrs. Venable's description evokes a luridly sexualized form of feeding-as-cannibalism that brings to mind Sebastian's obsessively oral metaphors for sex . . . With an oral rapacity worthy of Melanie Klein's phantasmagoria" (39). Sebastian, compelled by "Herman Melville's description of the Encantadas," sets sail in a Melville-inspired schooner with his mother to visit this site that purported to look "much as the world at large might look--after a last conflagration" (Williams, *Suddenly* 354-5). Though Caleb Crain's discussion of the connection between homosexuality and cannibalism in Melville works to confirm the link between homoeroticism and cannibalism in Williams' play, the word "conflagration" suggests an equally crucial link between cannibalism and the erasure of subjectivity within a Kleinian frame. As Nancy Tischler notes, this is one of the "more grotesque images" of Williams' play ("Death" 296). What the couple discovers on their trip is "something Melville *hadn't* written about" (355; emphasis in original): the gruesome and violent life cycle of sea turtles. In a repetitive and explicit dialogue, Violet describes the death and consumption of the newborn turtles by "flesh-eating birds" (355):

'And the sand all alive, all alive, as the hatched sea-turtles made their dash for the sea, while the birds hovered and swooped to attack and hovered and--swooped to attack! They were diving down on the hatched sea turtles, turning them over to expose their soft undersides, tearing the undersides open and rending and eating their flesh.' (356)

Violet's dialogue foreshadows Sebastian's cannibalistic death at the hands of his persecutors, a death that the "exhausted female turtle" can do nothing about.²³ The scene decidedly enacts the sadomasochism of Kleinian phantasy. Ohi, like Crain, connects this cannibalistic imagery with homosexuality: "Mrs. Venable's description seems to trope gay male sex through, in part, the intensity of its fixated revulsion" (39). However, the link between cannibalism and homosexuality in this scene seems forced, at best, given the fact that the sexualization of the violent event is ascribed entirely to Violet. The nexus of cannibalization and non-normative sexuality in this play relies on the perspective of an eroticized spectral mother.

In the Encantadas scene, Violet expends a great deal of energy in her description of the mother turtle's role in birth process: "It's a long and dreadful thing, the depositing of the eggs in the sand pits, and when it's finished the exhausted female turtle crawls back to the sea half dead" (355). This scene does not simply connect cannibalism with homosexuality, but firmly locates violence and queerness within the scope of a familial paradigm. I agree, then, with Gross' discussion of this scene, when he argues that "Williams charts a terrifying movement away from the primacy of the maternal as the paternal intervenes. Death, whether imagined as predatory sea birds, cannibalistic boys, or the passage of time, is ultimately masculine here" (243). As Gross' reading suggests, this scene enacts a separation from a protective maternal orbit that opens up a space in which the self is exposed to persecutory forces that in turn conjures the "terrifying" persecution of the paranoid. Though a figure of persecution that has the potential to incite paranoia, Violet, like the spectral mother of Kleinian phantasy, is a necessary instrument of protection against a masculine world.

Sebastian's vision of an ultimate authority, of "God" (357), is central to the Encantadas scene and to understanding how Sebastian's characterization aligns with Kleinian conceptions of authority. Sebastian, Violet recounts, stays on deck in "that whole blazing equatorial day in the crow's nest of the schooner watching that thing on the beach of the Encantadas till it was too dark to see it, and when he came back down the rigging, he said, Well, now I've seen Him!--and he meant God . . ." (357). In Sebastian's world, "God," the supreme vision of authority, is confirmed as a cruel figure of sadistic persecution that gestures to the intensely sadistic superego of Kleinian fantasy. For a number of scholars, such as Janice Siegel, "what Sebastian sees in the carnage on the beach is the truth about his own life, the truth about social predators" (560).²⁴ In this scene, Siegel writes, Sebastian recognizes the toxicity of his persecutory behaviour, a recognition that compels him to attempt to "escape . . . both his mother and the terrible fate he foresaw for himself on the savage beach" (560). Siegel pins Sebastian's failure to escape his own behaviour squarely on Violet: "Violet cannot allow Sebastian to escape because he is her life . . . From the moment she changes Sebastian's mind, he is irretrievably lost" (560).²⁵ Yet, Sebastian is not "lost" at this point in the narrative of his life. There is no evidence that suggests Sebastian does not successfully continue along in his predatory and libidinally non-normative behaviour as long as his mother is by his side. Williams, in a move that gestures to the "profound" importance of the mother in mitigating the persecutory elements of the superego, reveals that Sebastian's life is not "lost" until after he, like the small turtles, loses his mother. As Gross notes: "Ultimately, it is surprising to discover that it is not the loss of the Son which provides the most profound emotional impulse in the Violet-Sebastian-Catharine

plot in *Suddenly Last Summer*--it is the prospect of the loss of the Mother. It is that prospect that sends Sebastian to Catharine, and to his death” (244). Like the cruelty imposed by an overly sadistic and persecutory superego of the paranoiac, the God of Sebastian’s world becomes inescapable. Catharine asserts, ““I tried to save him, Doctor . . . [from] Completing!--a sort of!--*image!*--he had of himself as a sort of!--*sacrifice* to a!--*terrible* sort of a--”” (397; emphasis in original). Catharine becomes too overcome to complete her sentence and so Cukrowicz supplies the missing word--““God””--to which Catharine responds with an emphatic, ““yes, a--cruel one”” (397). Sebastian is unable to escape the cruelty of his internalized persecutor, at least without his mother. What Sebastian sees on the beach is not a vision of himself, but an enactment of his worst fears--the loss of his mother and his subsequent destruction.

From the opening scene of the play, Violet’s dialogue confirms Sebastian’s investment in his role as a son, an investment that gestures to the paranoiac’s “profound identification” with the spectral mother of Kleinian conception. Though, as discussed, Violet attempts to characterize the pair as a “famous couple” in her effort to escape the role of mother, she reveals that Sebastian repeatedly references his filial role in their conversations. As Violet notes in the initial act, Sebastian would “say to me: ‘Violet? Mother?--You’re going to outlive me !!’” (353). Violet attributes Sebastian’s rather dour thoughts to his ill health as a child, and then repeats Sebastian’s words: ““Violet? Mother? You’re going to live longer than me”” (353). But what is clear is that Sebastian cannot imagine his own existence outside of his filial relationship. Unfortunately for Sebastian, Violet’s stroke forces her son to face the potential destruction of an aging Ideal. Catharine explains that ““[Violet] had a slight stroke in April. It just affected one

side, the left side of her face . . . but it was disfiguring, and after that, Sebastian couldn't use her" (396). At first, Sebastian initiates a manic-like defense that discounts the maternal object's importance by his substitution of Catharine in Violet's place. As Marilyn Claire Ford notes, "Catharine emerges as the leading character for many critics" (129). In respect to Catharine's role as a sexual object in the play, Gross suggests that "Catharine embodies [Sebastian's] sexual desire" (240), a suggestion mirrored by Bruhm's assertion that Catharine makes "Echo-like advances" to Sebastian ("Blond" 98). Yet, although Catharine "so loved" Sebastian (Williams, *Suddenly* 375), her "advances," as Bruhm suggests, are "rejected" ("Blond" 98). Sebastian's substitution of Catharine for Violet fails. The only way Sebastian can "accept" love, Catharine explains, is in "a sort of motherly way" (397). In a move that echoes a movement from persecutory anxiety to paranoia, Catharine claims, "suddenly, last summer, [Sebastian] wasn't young any more, and we went to Cabeza de Lobo, and he suddenly switched from evenings to the beach . . ." (409). Catharine recognizes this "sudden[]" change as a direct result of Sebastian's loss of his mother: "Yes! Yes, something had broken, that string of pearls that old mothers hold their sons by like a--sort of a--sort of--*umbilical cord, long--after . . .*" (409; emphasis in original). As in the case of the paranoiac, Sebastian's "profound identification" with his mother, framed within a Kleinian-inspired sexualized paradigm of mother and son, is both an instrument of protection and annihilation.

"Suddenly," without Violet at his side, Sebastian's appetite for people increases dramatically. "Cousin Sebastian," Catharine tells Cukrowicz, "said he was famished for blonds, he was fed up with the dark ones and was famished for blonds. . . Fed up with

dark ones, famished for light ones: that's how he talked about people, as if they were-- items on a menu--'That one's delicious-looking, that one is appetizing,' or 'that one is *not* appetizing'"(375; emphasis in original). Sebastian, like the paranoiac, developed an insatiable appetite and at the same time evinced an extreme emotional distance from his incorporated objects. Moreover, his fear of persecution is evidenced in his fear of his own health and safety. Catharine "knew he was having a bad time with his heart and was frightened about it and that was the reason we hadn't gone out to the beach'" (414). As Klein asserts, "because the objects and the desire to destroy the objects are internalized, the child must face the fears of sadism turned inward [and that] . . . the objects sadistically destroyed should themselves be a source of poison and danger inside the subject's body" (264). Sebastian's final moments thereby enact the worst fears of the paranoiac--the destruction of the ego at the hands of one's persecutors.

Sebastian's manic defenses of mastery and denial of emotional dependence help to account for his failure to negotiate his world without his mother's presence. Like the paranoiac, Sebastian evinces a "torturing and perilous dependence" on Violet that is "too profound to be renounced." Sebastian is fully inculcated in a Kleinian infantile paradigm. It is not surprising, then, that Catharine fails in her attempt to replace Sebastian's mother in his life. Though Catharine may occupy the role of the "archetypal persecuted maiden of gothic fiction" as Gross argues (233), the gothic centre of this play is the spectral mother. Violet explains:

'When he was frightened and I knew when and what of, because his hands would shake and his eyes looked in, not out, I'd reach across a table and touch his hands and say not a word, just look and touch his hands with my

hand until his hands stopped shaking and his eyes looked out, not in, and in the morning, the poem would be continued . . . He was *mine!* I *knew* how to help him, I *could!* You didn't, you couldn't! . . . I would say 'You *will' and he would, I--!*'

(408; emphasis in original)

Sebastian's "eyes looked in not out" as he fights his inner demons, and it is his mother, the idealized good object, who "*knew* how to help him." In the play, Violet is established as the prescribed sadomasochistic mother, but she is equally confirmed as the Ideal object within Kleinian phantasy whose role is to protect Sebastian from persecutors.

Without Violet, Sebastian loses the battle with his persecutors and assumes the sexualized and vulnerable position of his victims. Catharine describes Sebastian's death scene in graphic terms:

'[H]e was lying naked as they had been naked against a white wall, and this you won't believe, nobody *has* believed it, nobody *could* believe it, nobody, nobody on earth could possibly believe it, and I don't *blame* them!--They had *devoured* parts of him . . . they had torn bits of him away and stuffed them into those gobbling fierce little empty black mouths of theirs.' (422; emphasis in original)

By aligning Sebastian's murderers with the "gobbling fierce little empty black mouths of theirs," Catharine's dialogue connects Sebastian's consumed body with that of the infant turtles on the Encantadas. Like the turtles, without the protection of the "exhausted" mother, Sebastian cannot survive. In terms of a Kleinian economy, Williams' scene gestures toward the disintegration of the ego, the ultimate manic defense mechanism

available to the paranoid. Sebastian's erasure, Catharine claims, "'started the day he was born in this house'" (405). Sebastian's cannibalistic death reflects the culmination of Kleinian drama of the violent and predatory relationship of mother and son. What is truly "shocking" about *Suddenly*, then, is the extent to which its gothic script relies upon and interrogates a culturally prescribed path to normative development.

We All Devour Each Other

Williams' play suggests that within Klein's discourse, subjectivity for mother and son is a phantasmagorical nightmare. While I disagree with Thompson's suggestion that Sebastian's death is depicted as a "fit retribution" for Sebastian's "victimiz[ation]" of others (102), I concur with her acknowledgement of a larger metaphorical significance to Sebastian's erasure (104). Thompson suggests the trope of cannibalism that connects to Sebastian also operates as "an analogue for the savagery inherent in all relationships" (100). Indeed, this suggestion recalls Williams' repeated assertions that *Suddenly* was about how "we all devour each other, in our fashion" (qtd. in Frost 146). Through its critique of the contradictions within Kleinian prescription, Williams' play explores a cannibalistic and sadomasochistic violence that, within Klein's theories, is universally experienced, and thus the characterization of mother and son within *Suddenly* works to expose the untenable exigencies of this culturally sanctioned discourse. But Williams' vision is not simply a condemnation of Klein's normative thinking. Though Williams recognizes that a Kleinian-determined relationship between mother and son condemns both mother and son to a paradigm in which neither figure can rise above the limits of phantasy, *Suddenly* also suggests that the libidinal forces that characterize the Kleinian mother and son have the potential to open up a space for queer compensations.

Notably, some scholars, though they maintain the view that Sebastian Venable's death in *Suddenly* is intimately related to his homosexuality, contest the suggestion the Williams' play condemns non-normative sexuality. Both Gross and Gilbert Debusscher suggest Sebastian's final moments, like his relationship with his mother, reflects Williams' self-referential allusions back to his 1947 play *Steps Must Be Gentle* about Hart Crane and his mother (Gross 246-51; Debusscher, "Minting" 466-70). In the play, Debusscher argues, Sebastian's end invokes Williams "characteristic blend of religious ritual and sex . . . [which] was foreshadowed in *Steps* in a startling equation of Communion with a cannibalistic version of fellatio" (469). For Gross, the connection between *Suddenly* and *Steps* reveals Williams' interest in a "Eucharistic body" where "breaking and consumption need not be horrifying and sublime, but can be loving and salvific" (247). Bruhm argues both that the circumstances of Sebastian's death work to foreground a sense of cultural anxiety in relation to homosocial bonds ("Blackmailed" 533), and that the play "heralds the arrival of a post structuralist queer subject and his sexual/textual possibilities" (*Reflecting* 107). Ohi, in his discussion of the film version of *Suddenly*, suggests that the "film's digestive jouissance" implicates the audience in "rapture" that challenges the stability of heterosexual desire (46). Saddik provides perhaps the most subversive reading of Sebastian's shocking end. Though Saddik does recognize the death as a "punishment for the transgression of yielding to contradictory, taboo desire" ("(Un)Represented" 348), she also notes that Williams' play speaks in broader terms to the instability of the human subject:

In my view, the incorporation of the body in the cannibalistic act signifies a yearning for the wholeness--a oneness--which will put an end to

fragmentation through, on the one hand, the ultimate 'union' with the other, and, on the other hand, an eradication of desire (the source of fragmentation) in the annihilation and death of the 'self.' (348)

In Saddick's view, the cannibalization that results from "taboo desire" opens up a space of resolution for the fragmentation of self. Yet Saddick's suggestion that the performance of the "cannibalistic" act signifies a "yearning for . . . wholeness" is troubled to the extent that Sebastian attempts to evade his persecutors. In fact, Sebastian directed the waiter of the restaurant where he and Catharine dined only moments before his murder to remove the growing band of young men. As Catharine recalls: "This was the first time that Cousin Sebastian had ever attempted to correct a human situation!--I think perhaps that *that* was his--fatal error" (419; emphasis in original). Sebastian does not "yearn" for "oneness" with the Other; he wishes to avoid it at all costs. Though I agree with Saddick, Bruhm, and Ohi that the play explores erotic possibilities, it is nonetheless Sebastian's role as persecutor and persecuted that compels his "fatal error." Sebastian mistakenly believes that he can "correct a human situation," an impossible task given the limitations imposed on subjectivity by a Kleinian paradigm.

The suggestion that Sebastian's death points to a queer potentiality within Kleinian discourse invites a reconsideration of numerous critical readings of *Suddenly* that rely on the play's association with Williams' short story, "Desire and the Black Masseur." That text recounts the longed-for sadomasochistic and cannibalistic death of Anthony Burns at the hands of his "Black Masseur,"²⁶ that, Parker notes, was originally incorporated in an early version of *Suddenly* ("Tentative" 306). Like criticism of the play, discussion of the short story invariably identifies homosexuality as the cause of

Burns' death. John Bak argues that in both "Desire" and *Suddenly*, homosexuality operates as a marker of Otherness and views the death of Burns in "Desire" and Sebastian in *Suddenly* as "violent apotheosis" intended as a "quiet plea for Christian tolerance" that ultimately acts as cultural critique that reveals the inherent Otherness embedded within normative society ("Suddenly" 123).²⁷ Though I agree with Bak that both the short story and the play trouble the stability of normative desire, I suggest that the Otherness Bak recognizes is embedded within a specifically maternal-filial relation. Although there is no mother in the short story, the opening line of the narrative establishes a trajectory toward a sadomasochistic end that begins at birth: "From his very beginning this person, Anthony Burns, had betrayed an instinct for being included in things that swallowed him up" (205). In the narrative, the desire to be "swallowed . . . up" reflects a persistent need to be "secure," to be protected from an originary persecution (205). Significantly, this desire for protection, one that the narrative characterizes as "motherly" (205), is imagined as a "sweet[] repose" (205). The teleology of Anthony Burns' desire to be punished and consumed reflects an erotic annihilation in which the subject returns to a longed-for and lethal maternal embrace. The consumed Anthony Burns is both the Lacanian Sublime body, and the Kleinian phantasmagoric self, par excellence.

Burns' desire, as is Sebastian's in *Suddenly*, enacts the end point of Kleinian punishment, desire and guilt. As Segal explains, in Klein's thinking the child's sadistic and cannibalistic fantasies lead to "guilt and feelings of loss due to the belief . . . that he has destroyed the mother" (70). In a similar way, Anthony Burns longs to "atone" for his sins, and his sins, like all the "sins of the world are really only its partialities, its

incompletions” (Williams, “Desire” 206). Anthony Burns must “atone” for his inability to negotiate his own “partialities” and forge his own “[c]ompletion” with the ambivalent spectral mother. In other words, Burns, like Sebastian Venable, is characterized by and victim to the demands of a Kleinian discourse. In the narrative, “when desire lives constantly with fear, and no partition between them, desire must become very tricky; it has to become as sly as the adversary” (206). Desire, the fundamental and enduring force in the constitution of subjectivity in Williams’ work, exists in relation to a Kleinian battle against predation. But this predatory tension is not without its compensations. As the narrator of “Desire” suggests, the desire for annihilation as punishment for “incompletion” provides a “compensation . . . found in the principle of atonement, the surrender of self to violent treatment by others with the idea of thereby clearing one’s self of his guilt” (206). “Desire,” like *Suddenly*, does not offer a moralizing critique of homoerotic desire; such moralizing stems from critics of the play, not the play itself. Rather, Burns’ desire offers a critique of cultural discourse that proscribes that which it demands, and simultaneously celebrates the uncontainable queer desire that exceeds discourse.

At the same time, Williams’ vision--in both “Desire” and *Suddenly*--falls far short of escaping problematic normative conceptions of subjectivity, especially those that relate to race. Burns’ persecutor is the unnamed “Black Masseur,” and Sebastian, as noted previously, is consumed by “gobbling fierce little empty black mouths.” Bak’s discussion of the libidinal economies of “Desire” and *Suddenly* recognizes that the sadomasochism of both texts rely upon long standing American gothic associations of the desired and feared racialized other. Savran ties the eroticized racism of Williams’ text

to the cultural moment of its creation, and remarks that the short story, like the play, “locates its narrative within the ‘abasement’ and ‘ecstasy’ evinced by a “queer white male fantasmatic of the 1940s and 1950s” such as that produced by Beat writers Alan Ginsberg and William Burroughs (“Eat” 177-8). Indeed, the subversive force of Williams’ narrative relies heavily on cultural associations of eroticized blackness with a longed for transgressive sexuality. In order to challenge the stability of Klein’s normative framework through moments of queer possibility, Williams’ play employs, and thereby perpetuates, reductive and racist conceptions of otherness. In *Suddenly*, the eroticized and institutionalized violence of the mother and son paradigm establishes the “compensation” of queerness, but it is a queerness that operates within the problematically racist and reductive scope of a “white male fantasmatic.”

At the end of *Suddenly*, though Sebastian is absent from the stage, the sadomasochistic desire that characterizes the figure endures. Violet longs for the son whose very existence imposed upon her demands and satisfactions that preclude her own subjectivity. Although Cukrowicz suggests that there is some hope that Catharine’s story ““could be true”” (423), there is no suggestion that Catharine’s incarceration or madness will end as it is intimately related to her undying obsession with the inaccessible man she loved. Though Williams’ play suggests that a stable subjectivity is impossible given the demands of a Kleinian discourse, at the same time Williams exposes queerness that emerges from this same discourse that substantially troubles the efficacy of the paradigm’s attempts to craft normative desire. Clum argues, “in Williams liberation can only come with death. One’s self-body, mind, desires--is a turbulent drama from which one only exits through death” (132). In a similar vein, Guilbert suggests that it is the

death of the homosexual character that “gives life to the play[.]” (86). However, Williams’ primary interest lies not in death, but in desire. As Bak notes, Williams’ work often reveals desire as an instrument that “brings us more into communion” with the Other (“Suddenly” 123). ““We all use each other,”” Catharine suggests to Cukrowicz, ““and that’s what we think of as love, and not being able to use each other is what’s--*hate*”” (Williams, *Suddenly* 396; emphasis in original). *Suddenly Last Summer* does not celebrate death or indict any form of desire. In a world in which subjectivity is predicated on predation, desire is all that binds us to each other and to ourselves, and is all that endures. Through its enactment of Klein’s discourse, the play locates an institutionalized queerness at the foundation of normative discourse and at the very centre of the normative family.

Williams’ exploration into the Kleinian-inspired relationship between mother and son begins in *Menagerie*, a play that reveals an inescapable instability of identity wrought by Klein’s normative and prescriptive discourse. Williams delves even deeper into the exigencies of Klein’s thinking in *Suddenly*, a play that posits the Kleinian mother and son as figures whose existence is always already confined to the limits of phantasy. Williams’ interrogation of the spectral mother of Klein’s figuration reaches its terminal point in *Kingdom of Earth* (1967), the subject of my next chapter. Through Miss Lottie, arguably the most gothic of all of Williams’ fictional mothers, the playwright presents the Kleinian spectral mother as a figure of absolute annihilation. Specifically, Miss Lottie enacts the longed-for annihilation brought about through the resolution of a maternally determined psychic fissure, a fissure Klein situates within the libidinal primordial dialectic of Son and Mother.

Notes

¹ Tanfer Emin Tunç suggests the play is identified as a Southern Gothic drama “because it not only captures the darkness and decay of the New South, but it also questions the metaphoric meaning of the plantation both as a physical space and as a state-of mind” (153).

² Gross also recognizes Sebastian as an ambivalent character. Sebastian, Gross notes, is both persecutor and persecuted, and thus reflects an ambivalence that leads Gross to suggest that Sebastian is “a figure of unresolvable contradiction” (239).

³ Klein argues that the “fixation point” of both dementia praecox--a term that Kevin Ohi discusses at length in his reading of *Suddenly*-- and of paranoid neurosis is to be found in a failure to negotiate the demands of these moments of early development (*Love* 232). Ohi suggests that many of Sebastian’s characteristics gesture to the symptomatology of dementia praecox (30).

⁴ As Klein states, “introjection and projection, though they are rooted in infancy, are not only infantile processes . . . they never lose their importance in the individual’s relation to the world around him. Even in the adult, therefore, the judgment of reality is never quite free from the influence of his internal world” (“Our” 294).

⁵ For a discussion of the autobiographical elements of the play, see Steven Bruhm (“Blond” 99 and *Reflecting* 110-2), Donald Spoto (219), Brian Parker (308) Marilyn Claire Ford (126), and Andrew Sofer.

⁶ See also Emin Tunç, who suggests that the opening setting establishes “Williams’s framework of the decaying, grotesque, and secret-laden plantation” (154).

⁷ In a similar vein, as her stage entrance indicates, Violet requires the use of a cane; yet, this cane is “silver-knobbed” (349). She attempts to obfuscate her age by employing the power of wealth; however, her “light orange or pink hair” confirms a sense of monied artifice that reveals a pathetically obvious attempt to fight the wages of time.

⁸ Violet is described as a “rich, ruthless” woman, a “violent” “authoritarian” who displays “the arrogance of Mussolini and the fanaticism of Hitler” (Gross 229). See also Marilyn Claire Ford (133). Gross engages in one of the more nuanced discussions of Violet. In his consideration of the Sublime, Gross recognizes Violet as the embodiment of the “earth mother” (241) as well as “the embodiment of her son’s poetic aspirations and aesthetic sensitivities” (240). Steven Bruhm offers three separate readings of Violet Venable, each of which I refer to in this chapter. For further discussion, see also John Bak (“Suddenly” 138), Michael Paller (83-4), and Judith Thompson (112-17).

⁹ Throughout the play, Violet relies on Cukrowicz for physical assistance (350, 352, 354, 358).

¹⁰ The intersection of consumption and homoerotic desire in the play is explored by a number of critics. For example, see Steven Bruhm (“Blond”), John Bak (“Suddenly”), Emin Tunç, Kevin Ohi, Brian Parker, Annette Saddik (“(Un)Represented”), and Judith Thompson. For a discussion of the trope of cannibalism in Williams and Melville, see Robley Evans, Caleb Crain, and Judith Thompson (107).

¹¹ As Robert Siegel notes, “Sebastian’s relationship with his mother has the suggestion of incest”(117). See also Thompson (114-5) and Tunç (162).

¹² My reading of Sebastian's "sublime body" relies upon Gross' discussion of the play as a "play of mourning," a play that "distinguishes itself by directly thematizing absence through its story of the relationship of the living to the dead" (239).

¹³ Doane and Hodges go on to explicitly state, "[t]he Kleinian mother is not a person endowed with subjectivity" (17). For a positive reading of Klein's impact, see Janet Sayers who argues that Kleinian thought draws attention to "the conflicts of sexual desire and aggression produced by sexual inequality" (36). See also Sánchez-Pardo, especially page 3. Cynthia Burack offers a discussion of the critical ambivalence surrounding Klein's work, an ambivalence she attributes, in part, to the proliferation of various categories of object relation theories (34-6).

¹⁴ See John Bak, Bruhm ("Blond" and "Blackmailed"), Annette Saddik, Judith Thompson, Kevin Ohi, and Brian Parker.

¹⁵ For example, see Bruhm ("Blond" 98), Ohi (39-40), Gross (233), and Thompson (114-5).

¹⁶ Joseph Mankiewicz suggests that Williams also models Sebastian on two "real life counterpart[s]," Hart Crane, "a homosexual, a devotee of Melville, and a poet who committed suicide when he felt that his artistic gift was atrophying," and Oscar Wilde, "the rich homosexual writer" (176-7). In his analysis of "narcissism's queer disruption of interpretive circles" in respect to Sebastian's poetry, Bruhm also makes a connection between Sebastian and Oscar Wilde, referencing his own article, entitled, "Taking One to Know One: Oscar Wilde and Narcissism" ("Blond" 104).

¹⁷ The imagery here of the “cup” suggests an allusion to the final line of Ovid’s tale of Narcissus: “White petals clustered around a cup of gold!” (66). For a fascinating discussion of Sebastian and narcissism, see Bruhm (*Reflecting* 103-15).

¹⁸ The Virgin, Parker notes, “appears on the reverse of [Giovanni Antonio] Bazzi’s picture however, and also figures frequently in painting of St. Sebastian by other artists” (“Tentative” 306).

¹⁹ Kleinian conceptions of the “good enough” mother generated a great deal of scrutiny and discussion on the role of mothering. For example, W. Ronald Fairbairn goes on at length to identify various incarnations of “bad” mothering that can lead to filial neurosis, which include “the mother who fails to convince her child by spontaneous and genuine expressions of affection that she herself loves him as a person” (13). Similarly, as Sayers explains, object relation theorist Karen Horney argued that the origin of neurosis “lies in the hostility and craving for love resulting from lack of maternal warmth in infancy” (112). For a discussion of Donald Winnicott’s influential, and problematic, views on the “good enough” mother, see Janice Doane and Devon Hodges.

²⁰ Ruby Cohn offers a brief discussion of the gothic elements of this opening scene in his discussion of “The Garrulous Grotesques of Tennessee Williams” (116).

²¹ Janice Siegel’s argument echoes that of Thompson. Siegel writes: “the Venus flytrap is Sebastian’s sarcastic homage to his mother . . . the devouring mother of Freudian psychology” (563).

²² Williams highlights the extreme nature of Sebastian’s “effort[s]” through Violet’s exhausted assertion that she “just can’t do it” any longer (350).

²³ This scene is also read in terms of a social critique. Bruhm, for one, reads the scene as a critique of “systems of power relations” (“Blackmailed” 532-3), and Saddik suggests that the scene reveals both the “consuming nature . . . [of] human desire,” as well as a “cosmic desire of a universe which is characterized by chaos and violence and relies on the annihilation of the subject for its own ends” (“(Un)Represented” 352).

²⁴ As Thompson notes, “several critics of *Suddenly Last Summer* advance the thesis that Sebastian Venable’s interpretation of this naturalistic predatory spectacle as a *reflection* of a ‘terrible’ and ‘cruel’ God is rather a projection of Sebastian’s own introverted, perverted, exploitative, and morally-diseased nature” (106; emphasis in original). See also Paul Hurley (396).

²⁵ Siegel’s view is echoed by Kay Walraven Attaway, who suggests Violet symbolizes the “Vagina dentata” in the play and is thus responsible for Sebastian’s destruction (69-70).

²⁶ For a discussion of the connection between cannibalism, sadomasochism, and homosexuality in the short story and its links to *Suddenly Last Summer*, see David Savran (“Eat”), John Clum (130-4), Robley Evans, John Bak (“Suddenly”), and Annette Saddik (“(Un)Represented” 348-50).

²⁷ See also Saddik who suggests that the short story, in part, reflects the “unavoidable” guilt of a “homosexual writer who grew up, as Williams himself put it, ‘in the shadow of the Episcopal church,’ and was living in the midst of America’s repressive political atmosphere of the 1940s and 1950s” (“(Un)Represented” 350).

Chapter Six

“Killing off all the wispy, willowy women”: The Ecstasy of Annihilation in Tennessee Williams’ *Kingdom of Earth*

Central characters of Tennessee Williams’ plays often experience a life-threatening crisis of identity. This common gothic trope, as I mention in previous chapters on Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie* and *Suddenly Last Summer*, is frequently read by scholars through a biographical lens, with the playwright’s own supposed difficulties being mapped onto his many lost souls and tortured effetes. Yet these readings fail to account for the Kleinian-inspired scripts of Williams’ plays. The underlying instability in *Menagerie*, *Suddenly*, and as I discuss in this chapter, *Kingdom of Earth*, is attributable to the insistent return of the gothic spectral mother of Klein’s discourse. Each of Williams’ plays thereby share much in common with O’Connor’s narratives. The spectral mother of psychoanalytic construction is the focal point of both fear and desire for Tom, Sebastian, and Lot from *Kingdom*, as well as for O’Connor’s protagonists, Haze and Tarwater. For both Williams’ and O’Connor, maternal sexuality posited by Freud and his followers offer an efficacious site for their own literary aims. For O’Connor, Freud’s and Jung’s conceptions of the mother as a libidinal figure aid the author in her attempt to distinguish Catholic doctrine from psychoanalytic theory. For Williams’, Klein’s assertion of the mother as a libidinal object allows the playwright to expose an inherent queerness in Klein’s normative schema. At the same time, as both author’s work reveals, the subject position of mother, from Freud, to Jung, to Klein, is always a placeholder for the child’s subjectivity, for the child’s desires and fears.

Kingdom lasted for only twenty-nine performances on Broadway, and is one of Williams' least considered and performed plays. In many ways, the play marks the apex of his "apocalyptic" vision as well as his own professional and personal nadir (Kolin, "Sleeping" 227). As Craig Clinton notes, in this gothic drama "death is a constant presence" (26). Written during Williams' self-proclaimed "Stoned Age,"¹ the play chronicles the dying moments of Lot, a newly married young man whose family home is threatened both by flood and the transference of the home's legal title, upon Lot's death, to his racially mixed half-brother, Chicken. For the most part, this gothic play is read as an attempt by an ailing playwright to resurrect previously successful themes and thereby operates as failed parody.² However, read through the lens of Williams' significant ambivalence toward the Kleinian spectral mother, *Kingdom* operates as the playwright's searing final dramatic indictment of the horrifying exigencies within object relation theories of subjectivity. In *Menagerie* and in *Suddenly*, the mother appears, on the surface at least, to be present. However, in *Menagerie*, Amanda functions as a spectral mother who exists as the already lost object of her son's memory. Violet, the spectral mother of *Suddenly*, owes her existence to her son's death. Notably, as I discuss in the introduction to my study, depictions of both filial loss and death are common gothic tropes. Significantly, Williams augments this trope through his characterization of spectral mothers in *Kingdom*. Miss Lottie, the spectral mother of Williams' play, is already dead when the drama opens. Central to the action and themes of the play is an exploration of Lot's relationship with his deceased mother, a relationship that culminates in Lot's ecstatic drag performance of his mother in the final moments of his life. In *Kingdom*, Miss Lottie's death initiates Lot's flight to his internalized Ideal, his maternal object;

subsequently, the constitutive mechanisms of splitting identified within Klein's theories spiral into the madness of schizophrenia and the ultimate "transfigur[ation]" of Lot into Miss Lottie (Williams, *Kingdom* 212).³ In other words, in the world of the play, it is Miss Lottie, not Lot, who "bow[s] to an applauding audience" in the final moments of Lot's life (212). As the already dead spectral mother, Miss Lottie's uncanny and ecstatic return in the moment of her child's death is a moment of gothic trauma that reflects the culmination of Williams' dramatic interrogation of the Kleinian-inspired spectral mother.

In a revision process similar to that discussed in relation to *Menagerie*, Williams' interest in the spectral mother as a site of death and sexual desire is evident from his revisions to early incarnations of *Kingdom*. The narrative first appears in a limited edition of Williams' collection *Hard Candy* (1954) as a short story entitled "The Kingdom of Earth" ("Collected" 572). In this first person narrative, Chicken recounts the final visit of his half-brother, Lot, and Lot's new bride, Myrtle, to the family farm. Like the final version of the full-length play, Lot dies from tuberculosis and Myrtle quickly transfers her affections to the highly sexualized Chicken. In this short story, however, there is no mention of Lot's mother, an absence that continues in the 1967 one-act play of the same name that appears in the February edition of *Esquire* magazine. Though Miss Lottie does not appear in this first dramatic version, Williams does introduce the idea of an impending flood, which, as I later discuss, operates as a symbol of maternal power, and suggests that Myrtle's affections for Lot, and subsequently for Chicken, are drawn from the "maternal chord" of her being (100). By the time Williams expands his vision, in the seven-scene play for Broadway (published in 1967 and first performed 1968),⁴ the "maternal chord" of the drama takes centre stage as Lot, dressed in his mother's clothes,

dies with the “ecstasy of a transvestite,” an “ecstasy” of annihilation that Williams’ play reveals as the prevailing covenant between mother and son in Kleinian phantasy (*Kingdom* 212).⁵ The Kleinian-inspired spectral mother who emerges from Williams’ drama enacts the gothic underpinning of psychoanalytic theories of the mother. The maternal Miss Lottie is a constitutive force that annihilates the very subjectivity she is meant to ensure.

In scholarly discussions of *Kingdom*, Lot emerges as one of the most harshly censured characters in Williams’ oeuvre, with a great deal of the negative criticism directed to the character’s sexuality. For Foster Hirsch, Lot’s transvestite performance in the dying moments of his life reflects an indictment of non-normative desire: “Since Williams has never shaken the notion that sex is at least partly sinful, all of his sexually troubled characters are held to a strict moral reckoning; and their unhappy histories are designed as warnings” (4).⁶ Repeatedly in discussions of the play, a heteronormative and often times vitriolic argument emerges that conflates Lot’s drag performance of his mother with his supposed homosexuality. Though Craig Clinton offers a much less moralizing assessment than Hirsch, he nonetheless characterizes Lot as a “pathetic drag queen with a mother fixation” (32). Gene Phillips echoes Clinton’s assessment when he suggests that Lot is a “transvestite homosexual with a deeply rooted Oedipal complex” (70). Relevant to my discussion is the degree to which Williams’ play seems to invite heteronormative discussions. In the stage directions, Lot is described in the stage directions as a “*frail, delicately--you might say exotically--pretty youth of about twenty*” (127). “Delicate[],” “exotic[],” and “pretty” in reference to the young man are markers of effeminacy that in turn gesture to culturally determined associations with homosexuality.

Williams' play also fuels conjecture of Lot's homosexuality through the revelation that Lot has proven impotent on his wedding night as well as Lot's admission to Myrtle that "Chicken calls me a sissy" (137). The play thereby gestures to Freudian-inspired associations of homosexuality and an excessive identification with an overly powerful mother within an Oedipal frame.⁷ Certainly, Myrtle, the "*rather fleshy young woman, [who is] amiably loud-voiced*" (127) appears to confirm this mother and son dynamic as she "*rushes up to [Lot], an avalanche of motherly concern*" (127). As a self-identified "mother" to Lot (130), Myrtle is likened to a threatening force of nature, an "avalanche of motherly concern" that repeatedly threatens to suffocate the effeminate Lot with affection in the opening moments of the play. And the role of castrating father is suggested by Lot's hatred of his own father, a man he characterizes as a "wild beast" (129). Moreover, as Klein suggests in her description of the pubescent Oedipal drama, the son "returns to his original object, the mother, and therefore seeks female objects with consequent jealousy of the father and men in general" ("Our" 295). This "return" to the maternal and "consequent jealousy" of other men in many ways mirrors the basic plot of *Kingdom*: Lot has returned to his familial home with Myrtle, his substitute mother, in order to "save" Miss Lottie from his hated rival, Chicken. I agree, then, with critics such as Clinton and Phillips that Williams' play references an Oedipal struggle; however, Lot's characterization, like Sebastian's in *Suddenly*, troubles the idea that the play merely enacts normatively defined Oedipal associations of non-normative sexuality and excessive identification with the mother.

Fundamentally, the Oedipus complex, which I discuss at some length in my consideration of O'Connor's *Wise Blood*, compels the substitution of an alternate object for the desired but unavailable mother.⁸ In the case of homosexuality, Freud suggests,

Things take a sudden turn: the young man does not abandon his mother, but identifies himself with her; he transforms himself into her, and now looks about for objects which can replace his ego for him, and on which he can bestow such love and care as he has experienced from his mother.

(18:108)

In effect, Freud suggests that the homosexual subject desires to *be* the mother and seeks out male objects that will allow him to replicate his own relationship with his mother through his transformation into her. Steven Bruhm explains that homosexuality in Freud's thinking is "a regression to autoerotism," inherently a narcissistic choice based on the attachment between mother and son (*Reflecting* 84). Similarly, for Klein, homosexuality in men may be, on the one hand, "an idealization of [the subject] himself," a narcissistic object choice, or, on the other hand, an object choice that is "something between male and female, the mother with a penis" (*Love* 112). In *Kingdom*, however, Lot has no interest in the substitution of another object for his mother or his narcissistic self. Though he has married Myrtle, it is clear that he has not "bestow[ed] [his] love and care" on her. As stage directions indicate, Lot views Myrtle with disdain and "*talk[s] to her as if she were mentally deficient*" (128). Even more significantly, Lot states to Myrtle: "'You've married someone to whom no kind of sex relation was ever as important as fighting sickness and trying with his mother to make, to create, a little elegance in a corner of the earth we lived in that wasn't favorable to it'" (160). Lot imagines a desire divorced from

physical sex relations, one confined to his relationship with his dead mother, not sublimated through another object. Williams does not merely rehearse the supposed narcissistic economy of mother and son that leads to filial homosexuality. In the economy of Lot's desire, he maintains both his role as son, and his role as host to a spectral mother who will brook no substitute. In Kleinian terms, the configuration of Lot's desire is decidedly schizoid in that Lot, through the mechanisms of splitting and introjection, is both the subject and object of his own desire.

The ego, in Klein's view as it is in Freud's, is constituted through fissure. Both psychoanalysts suggest a primordial tension or anxiety caused by the competing interests of the libido and death instincts. In order to combat this anxiety, Klein suggests, the ego splits its objects, the first being the mother, into "good" and "bad" portions, corresponding respectively to life and death instincts (*Envy* 236-46). Through introjection, "good" objects, the first being an idealized mother, are separated from the "bad" objects, the first being the frustrating mother, in order to keep the "good" parts of the internalized objects safe. In its earliest development, then, the ego is in large measure constituted by partial objects that are aspects of the "good" and "bad" mother. As Klein states, this process "combats the death instinct because it leads to the ego taking in something life-giving (first of all food) and thus binding the death instinct working within" (238). In other words, the internalized "good" object of the ego, the mother, is intimately bound to both the libido and a remaining portion of the death instinct. At the same time, the ego projects "bad" or persecutory forces, forces aligned with the death instinct, outward to its objects, again, initially towards the maternal figure. Klein suggests that this deflection also "imbues the first object with libido," since the instincts cannot be

entirely separated (238). Fundamentally, then, Klein suggests that the child's ego, like that of Lot, is characterized by a schizoid constitution that results from psychic defenses against anxiety caused by the competing desires for life and death, desires that in turn are intimately related to a sexualized and persecutory spectral mother.

Klein's belief in the mother's role in the child's earliest moments of ego constitution and concomitant fragmentation led to the psychoanalyst's lifetime interest in the mother's role in schizophrenia, an illness characterized by the splitting of the ego (Sayers 248).⁹ Janet Sayers explains that, in contrast to Freud, "Klein described splits [of the ego] resulting not from the social and patriarchal repression of sex but from destructiveness related to earliest mothering" (247). In an ideal situation, Sayers notes, over time, given enough positive mother and child experiences, the ego strengthens, splitting diminishes, and the internalized mother becomes assimilated into a coherent self (248). In contrast, as Ronald W. Fairbairn, a widely recognized authority on the object relations study of schizophrenia, suggests, schizophrenics "gained the conviction, whether through apparent indifference or through apparent possessiveness on the part of their mother, that their mother did not really love and value them as persons in their own right" (23). From a Kleinian perspective, without adequate mothering leading to ego assimilation, Sayers explains, splitting, "*in extremis* can cause mental subnormality or schizophrenia" (*Mothers* 248; emphasis in original). The schizophrenic, Fairbairn asserts, "transfers his [sic] relationships with his objects to the realm of inner reality . . . [and the] distinction between inner and outer reality is largely obscured" (18). Like all forms of psychosis that stemmed from a failure to negotiate early object relation tensions, the subject evinces a "denial of psychic and external reality" and a "slavish dependence on

objects” (Sánchez-Pardo 289). On the one hand, normative ego development relies upon the child’s desire for its mother. On the other hand, in Kleinian discourse, this desire must be mitigated by the mother’s desire for her child, else the child’s desire will lead to the child’s destruction. In other words, the very mechanisms of desire within the mother and child relationship upon which Klein’s normative discourse relies are the same mechanisms that threaten to disrupt a normative outcome. Within the world of Williams’ play, Lot, like the schizophrenic, becomes “only a shell” for the desired and desiring maternal figure, Miss Lottie (*Envy* 9).

Lot’s affection for his mother, as Myrtle’s diagnosis of Lot’s “‘mother complex’” suggests, rise to a level of obsession that reveal his vision of Miss Lottie as an idealized object of phantasy (Williams, *Kingdom* 129). Indeed, once inside the house, Lot and Myrtle immediately proceed to what Myrtle describes as an “‘elegant little parlour’” (129). As Signi Falk notes, the room “has become a kind of mausoleum for the elegant dead mother” (132). Although Miss Lottie exists only through memory, she, like the unassimilated object in schizophrenic phantasy, is a distinct entity upon whom Lot displays a schizophrenic “slavish dependence.” Lot carefully outlines to Myrtle the intricate process of cleaning Miss Lottie’s chandelier, an aesthetic object that reflects Lot’s association of Miss Lottie with beauty and refinement. As Lot suggests, the pendants “‘got to be all taken down, one by one, dipped in hot, soapy water. Then rinsed in a bowl of clear water, then dried off with soft tissue paper and hung back up’” (129). Notably, the imagery of the glass chandelier invites a comparison with Laura Wingfield’s miniature glass collection in *Menagerie*. In discussions of the play, Laura’s collection is most often read, Thomas Adler notes, “as analogous to the ‘breakable’ family unit’ . . .

and, most particularly, to Laura's fragility" ("*Glass*" 41). Certainly Lot's care and concern for the delicate chandelier gestures to his fragile hold on reality, and operates as an instrument through which Lot, like Laura, attempts to isolate himself from the outside world. In contrast to Laura, however, Lot's private world includes his mother. As sole caretakers of the chandelier, Lot and Miss Lottie distinguish, and thereby isolate, themselves as a couple from those around them. Lot explains that, "Beautiful things can only be safely cared for by people that know and love them" (129).¹⁰ The chandelier is an aesthetic object that allows Lot an intimate relationship with his mother, and thereby acts as an object of Lot's sublimated desire.¹¹ In other words, though Miss Lottie is already dead when the curtain rises in *Kingdom*, the play presents a mother and son relationship whose exclusivity gestures towards the intimacy of the maternal-filial union at the foundation of Kleinian phantasy.

Miss Lottie, as the Ideal of Lot's phantasy, emerges in the play as spectral mother whose demands Lot is driven to satisfy (even as they are, within the action of the play, his own phantastic creation). In response to Myrtle's suggestion that Lot is beautiful, Lot responds, "I resemble my mother" (135). Miss Lottie sets the standard of beauty, and, during her lifetime, imposed this image on her son. Lot tells Myrtle:

'Ev'ry morning of the world, and if I'm alive tomorrow I'll do it again .
. . . [I] put a wad of cotton on the tip of an orange stick and dip it into a
bottle and rub the roots of my hair so it never shows dark, and I don't use
peroxide, I use a special formula which my mother invented and passed on
to me. She said with blue eyes and fair skin, I'd look best as a blond, the
same as she did.' (159)

Miss Lottie provides Lot with the tools, the “special formula” that she “passed on to” Lot in order to ensure that his appearance matched her own vision of an Ideal, an image which she has narcissistically assumed. In Freudian terms, as a narcissist, the economy of Miss Lottie’s desire would be relatively closed. According to Freud, the narcissistic woman is likely only to “find[] favour” with a man who would offer love without needing to have that love returned, or in their relationship with their own child (14: 88-9).¹² Lot’s emulation of his mother, then, gestures toward the incestuous mother and son relation of psychoanalytic phantasy. Kathryn Derounian points to Lot’s hair dyeing as a contributing element in Williams’ “debase[ment]” and “caricature[.]” of a recurring character type in his drama; the “impotent aesthete” (154). For Derounian, Williams’ characterization of Lot falls far short of other Williams’ fictional artists, such as *Menagerie*’s Tom Wingfield, in that in *Kingdom* the playwright “completely ignor[es] the aesthete’s intellectual side” (154). However, read in terms of the play’s enactment of phantasy, Lot’s lack of “intellectual side” is not a “debased” attempt at a recurring character type, but reflects the “rul[ing]” power of the spectral mother upon whom Lot imparts a schizophrenic “slavish dependence.” Lot’s morning routine rises to the level of obsession that confirms his absolute deference to his Ideal and his existence, within the play, in the world of phantasy.

Lot’s immersion in the phantasy of his mother as a woman obsessed with superficial appearance and with markers of class such as her chandelier, plainly implicates Lot within the classist economy of Southern aristocrats, and also reveals the extent to which class and race are intimately related in this economy. Lot tells Myrtle that Miss Lottie ““never allowed the colored girl to touch a thing in this parlor or even come

in it” (129). Indeed, Miss Lottie, as is noted by a number of critics of the play, is characterized as a racist, a character who reflects the “repressive colonial culture of Williams’s Two River County” (Kolin, “Sleeping” 229). In fact, the action that initiates the plot, Lot’s marriage to Myrtle and his return home to deny Chicken’s inheritance, is motivated by and hinges upon Lot’s adherence to Miss Lottie’s racist aims. Chicken comments that once his father died, Miss Lottie “[c]alled me in her little parlor one day and fired me like a field hand” (187).¹³ According to Chicken, Miss Lottie did not want him, a “wood’s colt” born to his father’s “dark-complected” mistress, to inherit her property (186). Chicken later confirms to Myrtle: “An, when Miss Lottie, Lot’s mother, dismissed me off this place, she said to me, ‘Chicken, I don’t want my son to be known as half-brother to a nigra.’ Wonderful, huh? Yeah, great” (206). The depiction of the racism of a Southern white woman is certainly not new to Williams’ canon or my discussion of Williams’ work. As discussed in my study’s introduction, a racist undercurrent is a common element of Southern gothic. Leslie Fiedler, in his discussion of the work of Edgar Allan Poe, states: “It is, indeed, to be expected that our first eminent Southern author discover that the proper subject for American gothic is the black man, from whose shadow we have not yet emerged” (397).¹⁴ Especially relevant to my work is the extent to which Williams traces Lot’s racism back to Miss Lottie. Lot unquestioningly adheres to Miss Lottie’s racist dictates, and thus perpetuates her racial hatred. Lot states to Myrtle: “It would haunt me in my grave and my mother in hers if this place went to Chicken” (168). I agree, then, with K. Komissarzhevsky that Lot is in many respects “an ordinary racist” (qtd. in Shaland 79); however, it is significant that Williams’ play purposefully locates the origin of Lot’s racism in his fealty to the racist and racialized Ideal of Miss

Lottie. Through Lot's ventriloquism of Miss Lottie, Williams identifies racism as a product of Miss Lottie's enduring and toxic presence within Lot's psyche. In *Menagerie*, Amanda fondly remembers a number of racist incidents from her sexual past, such as when her family "had to send the nigger over to bring in folding chairs from the parish house" to accommodate her "seventeen!--gentlemen callers" (Reading 148; emphasis in original). In *Suddenly*, as I have discussed, Williams' employs cultural associations of eroticized blackness in order to convey the significant eroticism and violence at the heart of the Kleinian maternal-filial relationship. In *Kingdom*, Williams' terminal dramatic exploration of Klein's conceptions of the mother and son relationship, the Kleinian-inspired spectral mother is affirmed as a site of not only individual, but also cultural, disease. The deeper Williams delves into Kleinian discourse, the more dangerously toxic the spectral mother becomes.

By the end of the play, Lot's inability to distinguish between psychic and external reality is overt; however, evidence of this psychosis is foreshadowed from the opening moments of the drama. Though Lot attempts to portray an image of his mother as an Ideal in his discussions with Myrtle, his vision is challenged by the observations of both Myrtle and Chicken. Lot takes pride in the fact that although his father had the "taste of a hawg . . . Miss Lottie, was socially accepted by sev'ral families with standing in Two River County" (158). In Lot's mind, his mother was a woman of "standing" who "did all she could to give some quality to the place" (129). Miss Lottie, Lot tells Myrtle, "subscribed to *Vogue* . . . [and] had a sense of style that a Paris designer might envy" (157). Yet Lot has no real answer for Myrtle's question, "Why did [Miss Lottie] marry this hawg?" (158). As Lot notes, "That's a question I can no more answer than if you asked me why

God made little green apples” (158). Though it is clear to an audience that, within the drama, Lot’s vision of his mother is troubled by the reality of her life and the superficiality of her connection to “quality,” as well as her imbrication of class and race, Lot’s “psychic reality” in regards to Miss Lottie remains unquestioned. Moreover, Miss Lottie, Chicken tells Myrtle, was a ““little blonde-haired woman that worked in a beauty shop in Clarksdale”” (185). Miss Lottie was a working class woman, not a member of an elite class of “standing,” and she had, according to Chicken, ““begun to cheat on [Lot’s father] with a good-looking young Greek fellow that had a fruit store in town”” (187). Though, in Lot’s mind, Myrtle falls far short of his idealized mother, Miss Lottie’s supposed relationship with the fruit seller creates an interesting connection between the two women. As Chicken tells Myrtle, ““The Greek . . . quit Miss Lottie”” and afterwards ““Miss Lottie couldn’t go on without trips to that fruit store so she quit eating, quit sleeping--quit breathing”” (187). Sexuality was a vital component of Miss Lottie’s existence in the same way as it is for Myrtle. Myrtle tells Chicken: ““A Memphis doctor prescribed me a bottle of pills to keep down the heat of my nature, but those pills are worthless”” (201). Williams employs dramatic irony in his depiction of the two women in order to highlight both Miss Lottie’s sexuality and Lot’s inability to distinguish between reality and his own phantasy. Though an object of his own desire, Lot refuses to imagine Miss Lottie as an object of desire outside his own phantasy.

Although Williams depicts a deeply toxic relationship between mother and son, Lot’s subjectivity, within the confines of the play, like Tom’s in *Menagerie* and Sebastian’s in *Suddenly*, relies on the presence of his persecutory Ideal. As Klein suggests, the loss of any loved object revives the persecutory anxieties of the Oedipal

Complex and a turn toward the internalized mother for protection (*Love* 354-5). In each of Williams' Kleinian-inspired plays--*Menagerie*, *Suddenly*, and *Kingdom*--this filial dependence is the central element of dramatic pathos. In *Menagerie*, Tom is haunted by a mother he abandons but does not leave. In *Suddenly*, Sebastian's erasure is the direct result of the loss of his mother in his life. Like Tom and Sebastian, in *Kingdom*, Lot not only experiences the "loss of [a] loved object," but, critically, this object is his Ideal, the object he "turn[s] toward . . . for protection." Chicken tells Myrtle that following Miss Lottie's death, Lot "gits in his dead mother's clothes--panties, brassiere, slippers, dress . . . Comes downstairs lookin' jus' like her an' sits in her parlor, talkin' to himself in the same voice as hers'" (206). In the play, it is Miss Lottie's death that initiates the disintegration of Lot's ego. The full realization of his impending death comes in his discussion with Myrtle at the end of Scene One: "I'm dying . . . Can you imagine that? I'm goin to die . . . I'm going to die'" (153). As the repetitive and increasingly articulated dialogue indicates, this is, for Lot, a moment of realization and subsequent trauma that marks his final descent into madness. Lot not only loses his external mother, but must face his own impending erasure and the concomitant annihilation of his spectral mother. From this point forward in the play, Lot increasingly takes on his mother's identity, and his schizophrenic "flight to his internal idealized object" is reflected in his appearance. Lot holds his mother's "ivory [cigarette] holder" and wears her "white silk wrapper" (177), as his phantasy "Miss Lottie" begins to manifest more clearly. Lot hears the "soft voice of [his] mother" in the moon (179), and after directing Myrtle to steal the notarized copy of his deed-transfer agreement with Chicken, Lot speaks to Myrtle from two distinct

perspectives: “I wish you luck and my mother does, too” (169). Like the schizophrenic, Lot’s ego becomes “a shell” for his internalized object, Miss Lottie (Klein, *Envy* 289).

In the final moments of the play, the phantasmagoric Miss Lottie completely overwhelms Lot’s self. Lot, dressed in the “gauzy white dress” and “blond wig” of his mother, climbs down the stairs of the house and into the parlour, intending to “order . . . [Myrtle and Chicken] both off the place” (208). As the stage directions indicate, this is a moment of phantasy that rehearses the intersection of the competing instincts towards life and death, and the “*effect is both bizarre and beautiful*” (211-2):

With each step his gasping for breath is louder, but his agony is transfigured by the sexless passion of the transvestite. He has a fixed smile which is almost ecstatic. . . . At the foot of the stairs, Lot turns blindly upstage, his gasping breath now like a death rattle. Even in death he has the ecstasy of a transvestite. (212)

Lot’s final return to his mother, a return that marks the disintegration of his ego and the emergence of his internalized object, is experienced as the “sexless passion” of the “transvestite.” Miss Lottie “*seems to bow to an applauding audience*” (212), and the ecstasy that emerges from her/his performance of the spectral mother is that of both desire and death.¹⁵

In keeping with a psychoanalytic frame, *Kingdom*’s simultaneous enactment of horror and celebration relating to existence and death gestures to the jouissance found in the earliest moments of identity at an intersection of Kleinian and Lacanian discourse.¹⁶ As Jacques Lacan suggests, the infant, “still trapped in his motor impotence and nursling dependence” sees itself in a mirror and makes the “jubilant assumption of his specular

image” as its Ideal-I (*Écrits* 76). For Lacan, the “secret” to the subject’s jubilation involves an “evanescent” establishment and coverage of a “critical lack” through the metonymic exchange of “the part for the whole” (55). For a moment, the image in the mirror “envelops the so-called partial images,” the schizoid self of the “so-called paranoid phase in the phenomenology of Kleinian experience,” for an image of a coherent self (55). In this “evanescent” moment, the subject is whole; his lack satisfied by the transformation of his fragmentary self into the gestalt of the Other (55). In *Kingdom*, Lot’s drag performance, then, rather than enacting a “final parody” as Derounian and others suggest, re-enacts Lot’s primordial “jubilant assumption” of his Ideal, an Ideal crafted by his primordial, schizoid, and phantasmagoric relationship to Miss Lottie. Williams’ play thereby also anticipates Leo Bersani’s discussion of the celebratory “potential for death” of queer sexuality (222), a sexuality that achieves its erotic power through a total “abdicat[ion of] power” and subsequent annihilation of self (212).¹⁷ In effect, Bersani subversively reclaims the erotic potential of “powerlessness” (217). And it is exactly this type of libidinal economy that culminates in the final moments of Lot’s life. Lot’s death in the moments of his transformation into Miss Lottie enact the ecstasy of a longed-for annihilation into the wholeness of the desired, and all powerful, spectral mother.

The ecstasy of Lot’s death, an ecstasy that enacts a resolution to the primordial fissure of Kleinian phantasy, calls for a reconsideration of critical readings of the final moments of *Kingdom*. In the stage directions, Lot, in his final moments, “*staggers into the bizarre little parlor as its concealing scrim is lifted and the room is lighted--a delicate rose light*” (212). Like the “roses” which characterize Sebastian’s partially consumed

body in *Suddenly Last Summer*, the lighting of this scene gestures toward a gruesome phantasmagoric conflation of desire and death (422). In the end, with Lot lying dead in Miss Lottie's parlour, Chicken and Myrtle climb to the safety of the roof just ahead of the oncoming flood. Hirsch suggests that the flood, and Chicken and Myrtle's survival, works as a celebration of the "orgasmic force" of heterosexuality, a view that coincides with that of Phillips (93). For Phillips, "Chicken is the lusty, resourceful heterosexual stud, and Lot is the impotent, ineffectual homosexual . . . [and] it is clear that not the meek but the strong will inherit the earth" (70). Walter Kerr, after watching a 1968 production of *Kingdom*, also reads the flood in terms of a symbol of heterosexuality: "The play ends with the assertion of Chicken as life force; only a sexual partner can save Miss Parsons from the flood. She must join it to endure it, leaving her impotent 'husband' behind" (226). Reading the play in terms of a battle between nature and culture, with Lot symbolizing a "sterile civilization," Annette Saddik argues that, "The last words of the play '*Up! Quick!*' carry a sexual connotation of triumph which serves to completely drown out the civilized impotence symbolized by Lot" ("Inexpressible" 19; emphasis in original). Read in terms of Kleinian phantasy, this "orgasmic force" of nature, the flood, and Myrtle's and Chicken's supposed survival, reflects the overwhelmingly destructive and procreative power of the spectral mother. Though the flood threatens death, it also has a life-giving potential, opening up the possibility of a new future that, Chicken hopes, will include the birth of a son: "'Produce me a son. Produce a child for me, could you? Always wanted a child from an all-white woman'" (214). Myrtle holds the power, the "maternal chord" of her being, to satisfy Chicken's desires. Myrtle, it seems, will become the new Miss Lottie.

While I agree with Philip Kolin that the promise of a child from Chicken and “an all-white woman” works to challenge the racist ideology of the South to the extent that this child, a product of miscegenation, will inherit the farm (“Sleeping” 241), this promise is not at all sure. Though Myrtle, like Chicken, is depicted as a highly sexualized figure, her sexuality, as Derounian suggests in regards to the character’s act of fellatio with Chicken, seems a “parody [of] the regenerative aspect of sexual intercourse” (155). At the very least, Myrtle’s future maternity is presented in ambivalent terms. As Philip Kolin notes, Myrtle has received mixed reviews by critics of the play (*Tennessee* 169). For Kolin, Myrtle is the “new Eve” who will give birth to sons of mixed racial origin, while Foster Hirsch sees her as simply a “silly, good-natured victim” and Kalson reads Myrtle’s act of fellatio as a sign of “complete capitulation” (169, 91). Notably, Williams made changes to Myrtle’s maternity in his revisions to the play. In the 1967 version, Myrtle has, she tells Chicken, given birth to “five children,” but gave them up for adoption (81); however, no mention is made of Myrtle’s prior maternity in the Reading edition of the play. The deletion of this characteristic renders Myrtle’s future maternity even less sure.

The ambivalent projection of Myrtle’s future maternity points to a critical pattern in the mothers of my study, and one that gets to the heart of Williams’ representations of the spectral mother in *Menagerie, Suddenly and Kingdom*: within Kleinian phantasy--as is the case in the Freudian and Jungian spectral mothers in O’Connor’s works--mothers must exist in the not now. With respect to O’Connor’s narratives, in *Wise Blood*, Haze’s already dead mother exists only through the haunting counterfeit maternal figures. In *Violent*, motherhood appears solely as a symbolic force whose role is to act as a mediator to an all-powerful God/Self. In Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie*, Amanda exists only

through Tom's memory. In *Suddenly Last Summer*, Violet's existence is predicated on her very unstable iteration of her forever-lost role as Sebastian's mother. In *Kingdom*, Miss Lottie exists only through the enactment of Lot's phantasy. In each narrative, the mother is presented as a constitutive and threatening force at the centre of the child's subjectivity. At the same time, she is always only constituted by and confined to the limits of filial phantasy. In keeping with psychoanalytic prescription, Williams' dramatic mothers, Amanda, Violet, and Miss Lottie, like O'Connor's spectral mothers, are defined by a phantasmagoric imaginary of persecution and repressed desire that precludes maternal subjectivity. And the psychoanalytically crafted child fares equally poorly. In O'Connor's narratives, both Haze and Tarwater's end is one of psychic annihilation. Similarly, Williams' plays reveal that subjectivity for the child, in Kleinian phantasy, is radically unstable. In *Menagerie*, Tom's existence is haunted by Amanda, and in *Suddenly*, Sebastian experiences the devastating consequence of his inability to survive without the masochistic Violet. Finally, in *Kingdom*, Lot enacts the only possible resolution to the problematic relation of mother and son in Kleinian discourse, the erasure of both mother and son. In a 1969 interview with Mike Steen, Estelle Parsons, the Broadway actress who first brought Myrtle to life on stage, claimed that, "Tennessee told me that when he has Lot die, he is killing off all the wispy, willowy women he has written about, that he wasn't going to write that kind of woman anymore" (266). Miss Lottie's death marks the terminal point in Williams' exploration of the "wispy, willowy women" of Kleinian phantasy: haunting figures who must, at all costs, be denied subjectivity. Williams' work, like that of O'Connor, reveals that imbedded within psychoanalytic discourse of mothers

are mechanisms of desire and death that render normative subjectivity, for both mother and son, an impossibility.

In the next section of my thesis, I conclude my discussion of psychoanalytically informed spectral mothers with an examination of Shirley Jackson's *The Bird's Nest* and *The Haunting of Hill House*. The spectral mothers of Williams' and O'Connor's work gesture to the horrifying exigencies of the theories of maternity in Freud and his followers' discourse, and thereby point to the degree to which culturally sanctioned prescriptions that relate to mothers in postwar America preclude maternal subjectivity. Jackson's depiction of the spectral mother pushes this critique of cultural discourse even further. In Jackson's texts, as Marta Caminero-Santangelo suggests, "psychiatry's appeals to a humanist subject are a discourse violently wielded--a hammer and chisel hacking away at troubling contradiction--against the threat of a potentially uncontrollable feminine self" (69). Jackson's Freudian-inspired constructions of maternity in *Bird's Nest* and *Hill House* reveal maternal subjectivity to be a longed-for and feared site of cultural monstrosity whose prescribed role within the nuclear family undermines the masculinist and heteronormative aims of mid-twentieth-century constructions of motherhood.

Notes

¹ "Stoned Age" refers to the well-noted (and self-identified) period in Williams' life when he struggled with drugs and alcohol (Keith 150).

² As Philip Kolin notes, "Beyond question, the biggest problem for critics with *Kingdom* is seeing it as a parody, an impoverished attempt by Williams to reclaim his fame" (*Tennessee Williams* 171). See also Williams Prosser (54) and Signi Falk (128-9).

Theatre critic John Simon, after watching a 1968 performance of *Kingdom*, writes that the play is “almost completely plagiarized from other Williams’ works” (208). For a discussion of the ways in which *Kingdom* parodies earlier works of Williams such as *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and *Suddenly Last Summer*, see Kathryn Derounian (who offers an extended discussion of *Kingdom*’s parodic elements), Craig Clinton (29), Norman J. Fedder (807), George Niesen (475), John MacNicholas (601), Irene Shaland (69), and Judith Thompson (201).

³ This dramatic moment closely recalls Norman Bates’ transformation into his mother in Alfred Hitchcock’s 1960 film, *Psycho*, which was an adaptation of Robert Bloch’s 1959 novel of the same name, and which I reference in my chapter on Jackson’s *The Bird’s Nest*.

⁴ For its initial stage performance, director Jose Quintero changed the title of the play to *The Seven Descents of Myrtle* (Londré 15).

⁵ The final version of the play, which is a somewhat shortened version of the 1967/68 edition, was published in 1975 by New Directions in the collection, *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams*. All references and quotations in my discussion of *Kingdom* are based on this final printed version. *Kingdom* was translated into the commercially unsuccessful film *Last of the Mobile Hot Shots* (1970). Among the many changes to Williams’ narrative in the film, it is Miss Lottie who gives birth to Chicken by a black handyman; also, James Coburn, who plays Lot (named Jeb in the film), refused to play a transvestite because, as Gene Phillips notes, Coburn “drew the line at playing someone quite so weird” (72). As my interest is in Williams’ vision, I do not address the film here. Williams himself did not support the adaptation, noting in an interview: “Gore Vidal

wrote it, he said, out of friendship for me. Baby, with friends like that . . .” (qtd. in Reed 204).

⁶ Like Foster Hirsch, Williams Prosser harshly censures Lot, noting that the character “is so effeminate and cruel that his death is desirable and necessary. In addition, Lot’s appearance, dressed in transvestite drag, just before his death, makes him a ludicrous figure, laughable and unsympathetic” (54). See also Judith Thompson (193) and Maurice Yacowar (133).

⁷As Steven Bruhm states in his discussion of Sebastian from *Suddenly Last Summer*, a son “strongly cathected on his mother [is] the telltale sign of the homosexual narcissist since Freud” (“Blond” 98).

⁸ This statement is an intentional simplification of Freud’s thinking. The Oedipus complex is an area of discussion that Freud repeatedly returns to and complicates in his work. In his article on “Identification,” Freud suggests that a “normal” young boy both identifies with his father figure as Ideal and at the same time “develop[s] a true object-cathexis towards [his] mother according to the attachment (anaclitic) type” (18:105). While “the two [attachments] subsist side by side for a time,” eventually the boy’s “identification with his father . . . takes on a hostile colouring and becomes identical with the wish to replace his father in regard to his mother” (105). In a normative outcome, for Freud, the young man substitutes another female in his mother’s place so that he may, in effect, take on the role of his father and obtain sexual access to his mother. For a discussion of the complexities of and instabilities within Freud’s thinking on this subject, see Bruhm (*Reflecting* 82-8).

⁹ Klein studied and wrote about schizophrenia throughout her professional career. Although Klein is “ambivalently regarded by many feminists” because of her “implicitly or explicitly prescriptive” ideas about women (Burack 34), Klein’s development of Freud’s ideas on schizophrenia, which include her focus on infantile aggression as opposed to sexual repression, provided “major breakthrough[s] in psychoanalysis,” and continues to lay the groundwork for modern day treatment of schizophrenia by therapists (Sayers, “Melanie” 24-5).

¹⁰ In a similar way, Myrtle does not deserve to sit upon Miss Lottie’s gold chairs (Williams, *Kingdom* 130). Lot places the phantasmagoric Miss Lottie on a pedestal as an Ideal that cannot be replicated, or substituted, in the physical world.

¹¹ Judith Thompson offers a similar reading of Laura’s glass menagerie, noting that the figures reflect, in part, Laura’s “inability to cope with the demands of a flesh-and-blood world” (15).

¹² Freud states: “Even for narcissistic women . . . there is a road which leads to complete object-love. In the child which they bear, a part of their own body confronts them like an extraneous object, to which, starting out from their narcissism, they can then give complete object-love” (14: 89-90).

¹³ In the original incarnation of the narrative, Williams’ short story, “The Kingdom of the Earth,” Chicken is identified as an indigenous American, a “Cherokee Indian.” As Kolin notes, Williams’ change to Chicken’s racial identity in the dramatic versions of the play is “significant” in that it highlights the racism of a Southern “privileged patrimony” (“Sleeping” 229): Chicken is remarkable in the Williams’ canon as the only “character of color . . . [who] plays a major role” (226).

¹⁴ For more recent discussion of the racism of Southern gothic work, see Teresa Goddu and Toni Morrison.

¹⁵ Craig Clinton also discusses the ambivalence of this scene. For Clinton, this moment operates both as a celebratory “means of escape from life’s harrowing prison” and at the same time an ironic comment, “a joke in which the punch line is horror” (27).

¹⁶ Lacan’s theories diverge from those of Klein, especially in relation to the role of signification; however, in a number of instances in *Écrits* Lacan references what he describes at one point as Klein’s “faltering but not altogether misguided work” (462). As I point out, Lacan specifically draws attention to the similarities in their thinking in his discussion of the mirror stage (462).

¹⁷ My argument echoes Bruhm’s discussion of the erotic potentiality of annihilation in the “refusals” of Sebastian’s sexuality in *Suddenly (Reflecting)* 106-10).

Section Three: Shirley Jackson and the Spectral Mother of Annihilation

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

The first two sections of my thesis focus on the representations of mothers and sons as enactments of psychoanalytic discourse in the work of two Southern writers, Tennessee Williams and Flannery O'Connor. Yet, psychoanalysis, of course, is not a regional discourse; nor do Freud and his followers leave unconsidered the relations of mothers and daughters, and the ways in which those relations affect constructions of maternity. In fact, Nancy Chodorow suggests that a daughter's "libidinal attachment to the mother" is even more problematic for Freud's heteronormative vision than are mother-son incestuous relations, which, as Chodorow points out, "can at least produce a child" (132). In order to round out my discussion of the Freudian-inspired spectral mother, in the final section of my study I move to New England Gothic writer Shirley Jackson, and her Freudian-inflected representation of mother-daughter relationships. My consideration of the spectral mothers in Jackson's work allows me to explore the prevalence of Freudian scripts of motherhood in post-war American gothic across geographic regions and filial gender, as well as to highlight how those scripts continually undermine themselves throughout both Freudian and post-war American models of the normative family. In contrast to Williams' and O'Connor's work, it is the relationship between mother and daughter that lies at the heart of two of Jackson's "psychological horror stor[ies]" (Oppenheimer 185), *The Bird's Nest* (1954) and *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959). The mothers of Jackson's narratives, like their counterparts in Williams' and O'Connor's texts, are spectral figures whose existence is relegated to the not now of

the child's phantasy. The spectral mothers of Williams' and O'Connor's work reveal the horrifying exigencies of the theories of maternity in Freud and his followers' discourse, and thereby point to the degree to which culturally sanctioned prescriptions of maternity in postwar America preclude maternal subjectivity. Jackson's constructions of spectral mothers go even further. The spectral mothers in *Bird's Nest* and *Hill House* reveal that psychoanalytic discourse relating to mothers of daughters prescribes a spectral mother who is not only denied subjectivity, but whose subjectivity is inextricably bound up with cultural notions of monstrosity.

A "vice-ridden beast": Maternity as Mental Disorder in *The Bird's Nest*

The Bird's Nest (1954), considered Jackson's "best book" by her biographer, Judy Oppenheimer (161), recounts the story of Elizabeth Richmond, a young woman who suffers from "disintegrated personality" (Jackson 57; emphasis in original). As Darryl Hattenhauer--one of only a handful of critics to explore *Bird's Nest*--states, Jackson sets a gothic tone from the start (119). Jackson, Hattenhauer notes, employs the structure of Elizabeth's workplace--a museum with "an odd, and disturbingly apparent, list to the west" (Jackson, *Bird's* 1)--as a metaphor for Elizabeth's collapsing self (119). Like Williams' and O'Connor's gothic narratives, the vicissitudes of filial subjectivity are an overriding concern in Jackson's text. And, as with Williams' and O'Connor's works, Jackson's text also indicates a psychoanalytic context from the start. Construction at Elizabeth's workplace created a "hole the height of the building, from the roof to the cellar" beside Elizabeth's desk (Jackson, *Bird's* 2-3). Elizabeth hangs up her coat and feels "an almost irresistible temptation to hurl herself downward into the primeval sands upon which the museum presumably stood" (3). Elizabeth, as the narrative ensues, enters

the “primeval sands” of her own mind as imagined through Freud’s discussion of a daughter’s sexual development. Over the course of Elizabeth’s treatment at the hands of Dr. Wright, a psychologist hired by Elizabeth’s Aunt Morgan when the caregiver can no longer cope with her niece’s erratic behavior, Elizabeth comes to understand that she has three “cruel sisters” (215)--independent personalities that live, and battle for existence, within her own body. Wright believes that the disintegration of Elizabeth’s personality began with the death of her mother, and Jackson’s narrative thereby evinces the same cultural fascination with the mother’s role in the child’s subjectivity that characterizes O’Connor’s and Williams’ work. As Wright argues, the origin of Elizabeth’s disorder “must date from the most patent emotional shock in Miss R.’s life, the death of her mother” (63). Already dead when Jackson’s novel opens, Elizabeth’s spectral mother is identified as the source of her child’s mental disorder.

Notably, psychoanalysis is explicitly condemned by Jackson’s novel. Dr. Harold Ryan, Elizabeth’s family physician, is emphatic that Wright is not a psychoanalyst. Ryan states to Morgen: “‘*You* know, Morgen, and *I* know, that I’d be the last person in the world to send Elizabeth to one of these psychoanalysts, knowing her the way I do; no telling *what* they might say’” (29; emphasis in original). Ryan’s disdain of psychoanalysis, Jackson makes clear, has to do with a psychoanalytic focus on sexuality. Jacksons treats this fear of psychoanalysis with ironic humour, which is evident in Ryan’s statement to Morgen, “‘No *couch* or anything, Morgen, you understand’” (29; emphasis in original). Morgen does indeed “understand” the underlying implication; she responds, “‘You’re a dirty old man, Harold’” (29). And “Harold”, after he agrees that he is a “dirty old man,” hypocritically points to the sexual nature of Elizabeth’s problems: “‘I think

she's worried about something. Boys, maybe. You ever ask her about boy friends?" (29). In effect, psychoanalysis itself operates as an uncanny force in *Bird's Nest* in that though characters attempt to repress psychoanalysis as a threatening because sexualized discourse, it insistently returns. In Jackson's text, Dr. Wright derides psychoanalytic work. He writes in his journal,

knowing my own interest in the deep problems of the mind (although, as I cannot say often enough, I am not one of your psychoanalysts, but merely an honest general practitioner who believes that the illnesses of the mind are as reasonable as the illnesses of the body, and that your analytical nastiness has no place in the thoughts of a decent and modest girl like Miss R. (33)

Yet, as is the case with Ryan, Wright invariably returns to psychoanalytically informed conjecture. He notes that his thoughts are "wickedly close to your psychoanalytic fellows, those plumbers to whom all minds are cesspools and all hearts black!" (43). Though Wright attempts to distance himself from the highly sexualized discourse of psychoanalysis, Elizabeth's subjectivity, like that of each of the protagonists in Williams' and O'Connor's work, hinges upon coming to terms with the incestuous mother and daughter relationship that emerges out of Freudian discourse. At the end of the novel, Wright claims to have assimilated Elizabeth's personalities into a coherent subject; however, Jackson's narrative indicates that Elizabeth's future stability is not at all sure. In *Bird's Nest*, Jackson highlights the impossibility of subjectivity for daughter and for mother in a psychoanalytic paradigm. Trapped within the realm of filial phantasy, the female self is relegated to a space of culturally determined psychosis.

The diagnosis of what came to be called multiple personality disorder was a popular topic of discussion in the postwar period, especially in the 1950s. In her discussion of Jackson's text, Marta Caminero-Santangelo notes that this interest in multiple personality disorder was "remarkable" (52), given that the "professional diagnoses of multiple personality had gone markedly out of fashion at some time in the early twentieth century" (52).¹ At the same time, Caminero-Santangelo argues that the diagnosis of multiple personality disorder was also implemented as an efficacious tool in the reconstruction of traditional gender ideology (52). As discussed in the introduction to my study, although women were encouraged to enter the workforce during World War II, they met with an even stronger demand to return to the domestic sphere after the war in order to make way in the job market for returning veterans. Multiple personality disorder, Caminero-Santangelo argues, provided a useful way in which to suggest that working outside the home created, in women, a "contradictory self[f]" that was akin to mental illness, a split personality that was "a potential threat to the precarious [postwar] sense of social order" (53).² In her discussion of multiple personality disorder as a common trope in mid-century novels and film, Caminero-Santangelo contends that each of these "postwar representations of female multiple personality participated at some level in the reconfiguration of women's roles through the depiction of contradictory selves that could not coexist in a healthy, 'normal' woman" (53). In other words, cultural interest in multiple personality disorder had strong ties to a cultural interest in the containment of women to the domestic sphere.

Notably, the patriarchal use of mental illness as an instrument of oppression is not unique to the mid-twentieth century. As Elaine Showalter has discussed, the turn of the

twentieth century saw a number of important changes in the field of psychology that especially related to madness and mothers.³ Clearly imbricated with a racist discourse, doctors in early twentieth-century America warned women that a “pursuit” of intellectual and personal freedom “would lead to sickness, sterility, and race suicide” (Showalter 121). This employment of mental illness as a tool of gender oppression, Showalter persuasively argues, had much to do with a perceived need to silence the New Women who, at the turn of the century, were working for proto-feminist aims (Showalter 121; Leys 182-3). In the early part of the century, as was the case in mid-century America, the diagnosis of mental illness served to further arguments to confine the mother to the domestic sphere, where she was expected to adhere to the dictates of a white, masculinist hegemony.

Jackson’s “point of departure” for *Bird’s Nest*, Oppenheimer points out (162), was a psychological case study published in 1905 by Dr. Morton Prince (162),⁴ a text Ruth Leys identifies as a direct response to the crisis of the New Woman (182). In his study of Miss Christine Beauchamp, a purported sufferer of multiple personality disorder, Prince’s stated central goal was to identify the “real, original or normal self, the self that was born and which [the subject] was intended by nature to be” (1), and to assimilate the alternate selves into that original personality. Clearly, terms such as “real,” “original,” and “normal,” point to normative assumptions, as indicated by Caminero-Santangelo’s suggestion that “the criteria on which Prince based determinations of normalcy were shaped largely by gender ideology” (68).⁵ Caminero-Santangelo, in her consideration of Leys’s discussion, suggests that “[i]f Prince’s text was reacting to ‘the breakdown of traditional separation between male and female spheres’ associated with the emergence of

the New Woman in the early twentieth century, Jackson's novel was in many ways responding to the postwar reinscription of those spheres" (58). Indeed, there are a number of similarities between Jackson's and Prince's texts. Most obviously, the subject of both narratives is a young woman who suffers from "disintegrated personality" (Prince 3; Jackson, *Bird's* 57). Both Prince and Wright adopt similar methodology. They both use the "talking cure" as a way to discover what lies beneath their patient's disintegration, and both employ a numerical system to identify the various splinter selves. Along the way, both Prince and Wright have a number of false starts in which they incorrectly assume the wrong personality as the "real" subject. While both repeatedly attempt to characterize their work as scientific, Dr. Wright, like Dr. Prince, assumes a somewhat informal dialogue with his readers, and stops at various moments to address them. At one point in Jackson's narrative, when Wright explains the pathology of multiple personality, he directly cites Prince's description of the term (Jackson, *Bird's* 57-8). Leys and Caminero-Santangelo focus on the extent to which Jackson's narrative, like Prince's study, imposes normative gender stereotypes upon his vulnerable patient in order to find this "real"--read normatively determined--woman.⁶ Yet, Jackson does not simply fictionalize Prince's account. Crucially, Jackson's departures from Prince's work reveal her skepticism of mid-century constructions of motherhood. Specifically, as is the case with Williams' and O'Connor's characterizations of mothers, Jackson's work highlights the contradictions of the psychoanalytic script that underlies the spectral mother.

Like most of the mothers in my study, Elizabeth's mother in *Bird's Nest* is already dead when the narratives opens. Likewise, and again, as is the case with the other mothers previously discussed, Elizabeth's mother did not fulfill normative expectations relating to

her maternal role.⁷ For instance, Morgen wonders aloud to Elizabeth that “‘Maybe you’ve forgotten how your *mother* treated you’” (202; emphasis in original). Elizabeth’s mother, Morgen claims, was “‘a brutal, unprincipled, drunken, vice-ridden beast’” (178), “‘a cheat and a liar’” (16). In other words, maternity in Jackson’s narrative, as in O’Connor’s and Williams’ work, is characterized as a threatening site of instability. Indeed, throughout the text, Elizabeth’s central problem, according to Morgen, is that Elizabeth “‘act[s] like [her] mother’” (190), a similarity that Morgen repeatedly links to non-normative sexual behavior: “‘You’re your mother’s own daughter mud up to the neck’” (16). The sexual connotation of this colloquialism is evident in Morgan’s repeated association of “mud” with her sister’s relations with “other men” (10, 11, 16). Through Morgen’s dialogue, Jackson characterizes Elizabeth and her mother relationship as a sexualized paradigm that threatens Elizabeth’s subjectivity. Once again, we see a psychoanalytically crafted mother, characterized as a spectral presence who plays an ongoing and destabilizing role in the child’s subjectivity.

One of the most troubling manifestations of Elizabeth’s mental collapse is her receipt of a succession of letters, written by one of her more dominant selves, Betsy. From the first letter in her narrative, Jackson establishes a sexual frame:

‘dear lizzie,’ the letter read, ‘your fools paradise is gone now for good
watch out for me lizzie watch out for me and dont do anything bad because
I am going to catch you and you will be sorry and dont think I wont know
lizzie because i do--dirty thoughts lizzie dirty lizzie.’ (3)

The letter threatens that Elizabeth (aka “lizzie”) is being “watch[ed],” so she should not do anything “bad.” The sexual connotation of lizzie’s purported “bad[ness]” is confirmed

by repeated references to the “dirty” nature of her thoughts and activities. Rather than see the letter as frightening, however, Elizabeth views it as “pleasantly personal” (5). She thinks, “the most exciting thing about it was probably its lingering familiarity . . . it was an act of intimacy from a stranger impossible to picture” (5-6). For Caminero-Santangelo, Elizabeth “is clearly motivated by her sense that someone is confirming her existence as a subject . . . in spite of their contempt, they are love letters of a sort, expressing the primary importance of Elizabeth’s existence for some other person” (71). Indeed, these “love letters of a sort” point to an eroticism that in turn gestures to the Oedipal script that lies beneath Elizabeth’s mental disorder.

Freud only briefly references the “pathological outcome” of “multiple personality” disorder (19:30), though his insertion of the disorder within his discussion of ego development links the “secret of the cases of what is described as ‘multiple personality’” to sexual development and the Oedipal conflict (19:31). As discussed in my chapter on *Wise Blood*, Freud suggests that during the early stage of ego development, object-cathexes, wanting an object, and identification, wanting to be that object, “are no doubt indistinguishable from each other” (19:29). In the case of a girl, according to Freud’s plan, the child’s cathetic desire for her mother transfers to her father, and she develops an identification with the maternal figure (22:118-9). This normative path is an especially difficult one for girls, Freud argues, given a daughter’s object-cathexes for her mother is a “powerful attachment” that “persist[s] through all three phases of infantile sexuality” (22:119). In order for the child to extricate herself from this sexual relation, and to mitigate feelings of loss associated with the “abandoned object-cathexes” (19:31; 18:106), Freud suggests, “there quite often ensues an alteration of his ego which can only

be described as a setting up of the object inside the ego” (19:29).⁸ Though here Freud references a male child, he notes the same mechanism is at play in females (29). The lost object is not lost; rather, it is “set[] up” as a new identification. And it is within this process that Freud posits the potential for the “pathological outcome” of multiple personality disorder (19:30). Freud muses that there are instances in which “the ego’s object-identifications” may “obtain the upper hand and become too numerous, unduly powerful and incompatible with one another” (19: 30). In Freud’s schema, the processes of identification with, and the internalization of, objects operate as both a support, and a threat, to the child’s ego.

Jackson’s text reveals that the spectral mother that is constructed by Freud within the sexualized paradigm of ego development has the paradoxical potential to become the origin of ego dissolution. The potentially lethal effect of the sexualization of the spectral mother is evident in the contents of Elizabeth’s “valentine box.” Besides Betsy’s letter, the only other letter Elizabeth has saved is a letter written by Elizabeth’s mother to her lover, Robin. In the letter, Elizabeth’s mother states, “Robin, don’t write again, caught my Betsy at the letters yesterday, she’s a devil and you know how smart! Will write when I can and see you Sat. if possible. Hastily, L” (6). This letter was purportedly written seven years before, when Elizabeth was a pubescent twelve (6). From a psychoanalytic perspective, Elizabeth’s pubescent status is critical given that Freud argues, “[w]ith the arrival of puberty, changes set in which are destined to give infantile sexual life its final, normal shape” (7:207). During puberty, according to Freud, the Oedipal complex is resurrected, and the “sexual instinct” which “has hitherto been predominantly auto-erotic . . . now finds a sexual object” (7:207). Although it initially appears that it is Elizabeth’s

mother, not Elizabeth, who is in pursuit of the “sexual object” Robin, this letter also establishes Elizabeth’s erotic interests. As is prescribed by Freud’s Oedipal paradigm, mother and daughter are linked in their desire for the father figure. Freud, in his discussion of the internalization of abandoned objects, the underpinning of his thinking on multiple personality disorder, suggests that “[t]he whole subject is so complicated that it will be necessary to go into it in greater detail. The intricacy of the problem is due to two facts: the triangular character of the Oedipus situation and the constitutional bisexuality of each individual” (19:31). For Freud, the relations of desire between mother and daughter were extremely problematic, and a great deal of his concern stems from his assertion of the mother’s incestuous desires. Freudian thinking, Nancy Chodorow explains, suggests that “mothers attain[] instinctual gratification through their daughters” (96). Analysts posit this “gratification,” Chodorow suggests, “not through [mothers] directly using their daughters for autoerotic gratification, but by identifying vicariously with their sexuality and sex lives” (102). Mothers in a Freudian schema are not only the object of the child’s desire, but receive indirect satisfaction from their daughter’s desires for another object. As is the case in Freud’s Oedipal frame, in Jackson’s text the lines of desire between mother, daughter, and father create a complex, and substantially problematic, triad.

Elizabeth’s mother’s letter indicates that Elizabeth (Betsy) has been “bad,” a “devil,” because she of what she has seen, read, and watched with respect to her mother’s illicit sexual escapades with Robin. This conflation between the mother and daughter’s desire is highlighted by the structure and content of both letters. Betsy’s first letter demands an end to Elizabeth’s “dirty thoughts,” “thoughts” that the young “smart”

Elizabeth is identified as having by her mother in the second letter. In other words, both Elizabeth's mother and Betsy admonish Elizabeth in exactly the same way. Jackson's insertion of the letters in her narrative thereby evokes the competing mechanisms of identification and cathetic attachment in relation to the mother. In effect, Elizabeth recreates her mother through Elizabeth's "other" self, Betsy, and thus becomes both mother and daughter, linked in a complex relation of desire that Jackson stages through the characters' relations with Robin.⁹

For Oppenheimer, Jackson includes Elizabeth's molestation by Robin in an attempt to model actual case histories of subjects who suffered from multiple personality disorder. Oppenheimer states that Jackson's "research had convinced her that a multiple personality needed to have an act of sexual abuse as its cornerstone" (164).¹⁰ Indeed, throughout Prince's narrative, Sally, one of Miss Beauchamp's selves, who, like Betsy, is described as "a child of twelve or thirteen years" (112), references "Jones," a man who appeared in Sally's life "shortly after [her] mammas death" (388). In a move that mirrors Freud's paradigm, a male sexual object replaces Sally's mother in her daughter's life. The erotic nature of this relation is made clear by Sally's comments to Prince that Jones "is going to take us away--very, very far away, where you cannot possibly come, and we are going to stay with him and love him for always" (111). However, Prince, like Jackson's Wright, places little importance on this sexual relation. Both the fictional and historical doctors instead focus attention on the patient's inability to cope with the loss of her mother. With respect to Jackson's text, Oppenheimer suggests, "the episode is interwoven so subtly into [Jackson's] book that a careless reader might easily miss it" (163). However, Jackson is anything but "subtl[e]" on this point. I agree with Hattenhauer that

Elizabeth's "worst shock, which . . . began the splitting, was being sexually assaulted as a child" (121). Elizabeth's sexual assault by her mother's lover is central to Jackson's narrative.

Betsy's traumatic encounter with Robin is key to Jackson's gothic enactment of a Freudian script. Betsy, on her bus ride to New York to find her already dead mother, struggles to assert a stable identity. She notes: "If I'm going to keep it all straight and make a real person by myself . . . Robin has to be in it like anyone else; he can't get out of it as easily as that" (90). What Robin "can't get out of" relates to the earlier episode in Betsy's life when she and her mother and Robin "went on a picnic" (90). When she remembers the incident, Betsy thinks, "if it's going to be in, it's all got to be in, right from the beginning . . . from the beginning of that day" (90). After Betsy briefly describes the preparations for the picnic in a first person narrative, Jackson's narration moves into a third person account, and thus codes this encounter as a moment of trauma in which Betsy's self is dislocated (91-2).¹¹ While Jackson's narrative does not provide the details of what happened to Betsy, the violent nature of the event is captured by Betsy's characterization of the episode as a "nightmare" (92). Moreover, Betsy muses, "if my mother knew about him he'd be sorry" (90). The event with Robin establishes a conflict between Betsy, her mother, and Robin. In this same passage, the narration explicitly references this conflict in relation to Betsy's mother:

My mother loves me best, anyway, Betsy told herself forlornly, my mother was only teasing about not loving me best, my mother pulled my hair and laughed and said 'Elizabeth loves Robin best,' and my mother loves me

better than anyone. My name is Betsy Richmond and my mother's name is Elizabeth Richmond and she calls me Betsy. Robin did everything bad.

(90)

In a movement that mirrors an Oedipal script, Betsy moves from an assertion of her mother's love for her, to her "forlorn[]" worry that her mother loves Robin "best," to the suggestion that "Elizabeth loves Robin best."

As Freud argues, while at first "the girl's father is only a troublesome rival" for her mother (22:119), the young girl then "turns to her father" (22:128), and begins to identify her mother as a competitor for her father's love (22:129). Though Freud focuses his attention on the daughter in this scenario, he does suggest that the daughter's "turn[] away from the mother is accompanied by hostility" (22:119).¹² Jackson highlights the mother's aggression through Betsy's assertion that "my mother pulled my hair and laughed and said 'Elizabeth loves Robin best.'" Betsy's mother recognizes, and taunts, her daughter's supposed desire for Robin. And indeed, Betsy's feelings for Robin are ambivalent. Betsy, as Caminero-Santangelo suggests, "courts Robin's sexual attentions at the same time that she fears him" (59). Later in the text Betsy states, "'I want Robin to call me Lisbeth too. Because whatever he calls you he's got to call me'" (100). Betsy's conflation of herself and her mother, as Hattenhauer notes, reflects an "Oedipal confusion" (127), and that Betsy "substitutes" Robin for her mother "within the Oedipal triangle" (127). Moreover, as is the case with the spectral mother of O'Connor's *Wise Blood*, Betsy's mother is both a figure of desire, and the figure who recognizes, and at the same time stands in the way of, filial desire. "The mother not only treated the daughter as if Betsy were the mother's love object," Hattenhauer comments, "but also as if the

daughter is a successful rival for Robin's affection" (129). Yet Elizabeth's desires for Robin do not displace her feelings towards her mother in Jackson's text. Jackson makes it clear that the Oedipal mother, as Freud dictates, maintains her role as an object of identification. Betsy's subjectivity, as is the case for the young girl in Freud's paradigm, remains contingent upon her relationship to her mother: "My name is Betsy Richmond and my mother's name is Elizabeth Richmond" (90). Betsy's self-identification as her mother's daughter is a recurring theme in the character's dialogue, and points to the exigencies of Freudian discourse that relate to the "pathological" dangers of an overwhelming phantasmagoric identification with the mother. As reflected in the many variations of the name "Elizabeth" that Elizabeth's personalities assume throughout Jackson's text, Betsy's identification with her mother--her wanting to be her mother--blurs the boundaries between Elizabeth's subjectivity and that of her mother.

Jackson's narrative identifies the triadic conflict of Freud's Oedipal script, the libidinal contest between mother, daughter, and lover, as the foundation of Elizabeth's mental instability. The importance of this libidinal triad to Jackson's project is reflected in the title, *The Bird's Nest*. As scholars have noted, the title references a nursery rhyme, one that Betsy repeatedly chants throughout the narrative (Lenemaja Friedman 95; Caminero-Santangelo 73). In addition to highlighting Betsy's young age, the title points to Robin's central role in Elizabeth's mental collapse.¹³ Specifically, Robin is the "*Bird*" of the title, and "*Nest*" stands in for Robin's bed, a not-so-subtle symbol of sex. In a scene in Wright's office in which Elizabeth's selves, Bess and Betsy, argue, Betsy states: "better hide the nestegg went together to find" (161). The syntactic irregularities of the phrase draw attention to Betsy's psychologically young age. At the same time, the

unstable syntax also points to a traumatic encounter. This suggestion, that there is something that relates to the “nestegg” that must be ‘hid[den],’ points to Elizabeth’s molestation. The assertion causes Bess to “lift[] her hand violently from the page” (161), though Betsy will not stop; “all went together to find a nestegg Elizabeth beth betsy and bess” (162). In other words, all of Elizabeth’s selves “went together to find a nestegg,” which suggests that Elizabeth was a coherent self before the molestation: she had been “together.” The nursery rhyme thus confirms the origin of Elizabeth’s splintering as the moment of sexual conflict between her mother, Robin, and herself within the Oedipal scene. In *Bird’s Nest*, Jackson, as O’Connor does in *Violent*, problematically employs rape to highlight the sexual characterization of the spectral mother of psychoanalytic thinking.

“the gingerbread man”: Freud’s Matricidal Script

One of Jackson’s significant departures from Prince’s study, a departure that advances the author’s interest in a Freudian spectral mother, is her addition of Morgen as a substitute mother to Elizabeth (8).¹⁴ As is the case with Elizabeth’s biological mother, Jackson repeatedly draws attention to Morgen’s visual perspective. And, like the spectral mothers in O’Connor’s *Wise Blood*, Morgen’s “seeing” is characterized within a sexualized frame. As I discuss in *Wise Blood*, the mother’s sight is linked, in Freud’s discourse, with the child’s incestuous desire and resultant castration. O’Connor’s text in fact highlights the mother’s recognition of desire as a defining feature of the Freudian spectral mother. In *Bird’s Nest*, Morgen references the fact that she has seen evidence of Elizabeth’s mother’s sexuality. Morgen, as previously stated, “knew about the other men” (10), and repeatedly claims that her sister was “mud clear up to the neck” (11). Morgen

recalls that she ““used to undress”” Elizabeth’s mother (11), and, while she helps Elizabeth to disrobe, Morgen states that Elizabeth ““didn’t get [her] mother’s body”” (11). In another scene in the novel, Morgen watches Elizabeth bathe. Notably, this textual moment reenacts a scene from Prince’s narrative in which Sally, one of Miss Beauchamp’s selves, has multiple sponge baths (35-6). However, Jackson’s insertion of the maternal watcher in the scene highlights the sexual seeing trope that first appears in Elizabeth’s letters. In part, then, Morgen’s characterization points to the counterfeit maternal figure who, as is the case in O’Connor’s *Wise Blood*, conveys the extent to which the seeing spectral mother is an inescapable and punitive figure. Notably, Jackson does draw attention to specific differences between Morgen and Elizabeth’s mother. Indeed, one of the dominant and distinct character traits Jackson ascribes to Aunt Morgen is her masculinity. The narrator notes that Morgen ““was the type of woman freely described as ‘masculine’” (8). What is especially relevant to Morgen’s “masculine” characterization is the fact that Morgen’s masculinity is most often referenced by Wright, the self-identified substitute father of Jackson’s text (46). For instance, after Wright arrives for a meeting at Morgen’s home, he feels “unmanned” after she removes his hat and coat” (173).¹⁵ Though I agree with Caminero-Santangelo that Wright is characterized as having a “blatantly obvious, and specifically gendered, pleasure in his power over his female patient, whom he describes as ‘a vessel emptied’” (67), I argue that more often than not Wright’s authority is usurped, or at least troubled, by Morgen’s domination.

In terms of Freud’s discourse, Morgen’s association both with a sexualized and a masculine power gestures to the Phallic mother, a figure of castration that haunts Freud’s paradigm. For Freud, a young girl’s entrance into the Oedipal complex is predicated on

the girl's recognition of her lack of a penis, which she initially "regards . . . as an individual misfortune" (22:126). Over time, however, the girl "gradually extends it to other females and finally to her mother as well. Her love was directed to her *phallic* mother; with the discovery that her mother is castrated it becomes possible to drop her as an object" (22:126; emphasis in original). For Freud, recognition of the mother's lack makes way for the daughter's turn to the father, and the assertion of masculine power. This process of cathetic detachment and identification, Freud suggests, is instrumental in the formation of an "ego ideal" (19:31). Significantly, Freud, in his discussion of multiple personality disorder, references a case of a "young married woman" who "after noticing the lack of a penis in herself, she had supposed it to be absent not in all women, but only in those whom she regarded as inferior, and had still supposed that her mother possessed one" (19:31). According to Freud, this misrecognition of the mother as a mother-with-a-penis, a phallic mother, was at the root of the pathology of multiple personality disorder. Jackson's depiction of the phallic mother in her fictional case history of multiple personality disorder thereby works as an enactment of the subversive force that underpins Freud's own script. Notably, a number of scholars have taken up a discussion of the phallic mother of Freud's thinking. Judith Butler, whom I reference in my discussion of *Hill House*, sees the phallic mother of Freud's schema as a potential site of lesbian agency.¹⁶ As Butler's argument suggests, Freud's discussion creates the possibility, though admittedly only through misrecognition, of the potentially subversive power of the phallic mother.

With respect to *Bird's Nest*, Morgen's characterization as a phallic mother is highlighted through her association with the "Nigerian ancestor figure" that she had "set

up . . . in her front hall” (198-9). As is the case with Freud’s phallic mother, this figure is a site of conflict between Elizabeth’s (substitute) parents. Wright views the figure with “misgivings” and Morgen “disliked having her niece’s doctor jostle it when he left in anger” (198-9). Significantly, Elizabeth’s mental stability hinges upon the removal of this sexualized and threatening figure. Towards the end of the story, when it appears that Elizabeth is at her breaking point, Morgen “turned and moved to the other side of the hall and leaned her head despairingly against the shoulder of the black wooden figure, who had seen and heard everything. I was wrong, she thought, I did harm; I coveted” (232). Morgen must relinquish her hold on Elizabeth, an abnegation of power that is directly referenced by Wright:

‘Morgen?’ asked the doctor; he was standing looking with dislike into the fact of the black Nigerian figure . . . ‘I want you to get rid of this fellow . . . he offends me, this creature; he does nothing but watch and listen and wait hopefully to snatch at people . . . A good many of our sins may go with him,’ the doctor said, and he reached out brazenly, and patted her on the shoulder. (232)

Here, Wright suggests that phallic power must be returned to the male, and “he reache[s] out brazenly, and pat[s] [Morgen] on the shoulder,” which indicates his assertion of control. Yet, in Jackson’s narrative, the mother’s agency in the mother-daughter relationship is not so easily mastered. Although Morgen removes the figure from the front hall, it remains in her attic (234). Hidden from site, but not entirely gone. As Morgen states as the end of *Bird’s Nest* to Wright: ““You can be her mommy, and I’ll be her

daddy” (249). The phallic maternal figure of Freudian discourse appears to prevail in Jackson’s narrative.

Given Jackson’s penchant for ambiguity, and her interest in the enactment of Freud’s theories, it is not surprising that the feminine authority of the phallic mother is destabilized in Jackson’s text. Specifically, while in Prince’s study Miss Beauchamp was present for the death of a younger sibling, in Jackson’s narrative Elizabeth’s mother dies after a “shaking she got from her daughter” (228).¹⁷ Elizabeth’s murder of her mother gestures to a specific passage in Freud’s discussion of a daughter’s aggression. Freud suggests that the daughter’s desire for her father manifests in the daughter’s “death-wish” for her mother so that she can take her mother’s place (1:254-5). Freud states that a “‘maid servant’ makes a transference from this by wishing her mistress to die so that her master can marry her” (1:255). The “maid-servant”/daughter wishes to kill the mother in order to become the mother. Jackson evokes this specific passage from Freud’s discussion in her own narrative. In *Bird’s Nest*, Jackson directly references a marriage scenario:

Betsy muses,

if I had a diamond ring I could tell them I was engaged to be married. If I was engaged to be married they couldn’t take me back because my husband wouldn’t let them. If I had a husband then my mother could marry him and we could all hide together and be happy. My name is Betsy Richmond. My mother’s name is Elizabeth Richmond, Elizabeth Jones before I was married. (100)

In this passage, Jackson invokes the destabilizing effect of the sexual triad of mother, daughter and lover on the daughter’s subjectivity. Specifically, in this moment, Betsy’s

identification with her mother blurs their separate identities. Betsy states, “My mother’s name is Elizabeth Richmond,” and then in the next phrase notes “Elizabeth Jones before *I* was married.” As is the case with the Kleinian-inspired spectral mother from Williams’ *Kingdom of Earth*, mother and child are subsumed into one person. In contrast to the closed relationship of Lot and Miss Lottie, Betsy’s conflation of herself and her mother allows Betsy sexual access to a third object, Robin. Betsy’s imagining moves from Betsy as lover--“if I was engaged to be married,”-- to Betsy as daughter--“then my mother could marry him”--, and finally to Betsy as lover and mother-- “Elizabeth Jones before I was married.” Like the “maid servant” in Freud’s discussion of female aggression, Betsy removes her mother “so that she can take her mother’s place.” Given Jackson’s interest in the spectral mother of Freudian discourse, it would appear that a matricidal desire underlies Betsy’s interest in marriage.

As I have already discussed, the mid-century fascination with Freudian-inspired theories of subjectivity led to the mother’s indictment as the source of mental instability. Indeed, Phillip Wylie’s and Edward Strecker’s work, which I reference in my introduction, were popular manifestations of the degree to which the mother was blamed for a number of perceived problems in children, problems that ranged from non-normative sexuality to mental instability and psychosis. As Caminero-Santangelo suggests, “attention to all forms of mental illness was a hallmark of postwar American culture; never before had the disordered mind been to such a degree a topic for popular consumption” (52). One of the more popular manifestations of the link between the mother and mental instability was Richard Bloch’s 1959 text *Psycho*, and Alfred Hitchcock’s film version of the novel one year later. In the underlying narrative, Norman

Bates murders his mother, and then assumes her identity as he murders his unsuspecting victims. Robert Genter states in his discussion of Hitchcock's film that *Psycho* was in large measure informed by Wylie's work, as well as Frederic Wertham's, often-noted 1941 text, *Dark Legend: A Study of Murder* (151). Wertham argues that in "contemporary culture" the "defining impulse within man was not patricide but matricide" (qtd. in Genter 151). Wertham, as suggested in a 1941 review of his text, saw "matricide" as a "disease of patriarchal society" (Solby 424). This "disease" was of particular threat, Bruno Solby notes, in regards to the "'Active Mother' that will contradict the traditional mother image" (424). In a post-Freudian world, maternal agency was perceived as a site of filial and cultural instability, which in turn evoked fantasies of the mother's annihilation. This cultural desire to eliminate the potential threat of maternal agency underscores the spectral mothers in each of the mid-century works of my study. Mothers are erased from the text in moves that echo cultural matricidal fantasy, so that O'Connor, Williams, and Jackson might interrogate the role of mother as a force of disruption to paternalist and heteronormative ideologies.

The degree to which Jackson's narrative evokes a Freudian-inspired matricidal desire is rendered overt in the closing moments of the narrative, through Elizabeth's self-identification as "the gingerbread man" (238). Freud argues that the little girl has a "fear of being killed by her mother--a fear which, in turn, justifies her death-wish against her mother, if that becomes conscious" (21:237). He then, in a footnote, discusses this fear as a fear of being "eaten up": "Hitherto, it is only in men that I have found the fear of being eaten up. This fear is referred to the father, but it is probably the product of a transformation of oral aggressivity directed to the mother. The child wants to eat up its

mother from whom it has had its nourishment” (21:237). In a move that echoes Freud’s text, in Jackson’s narrative, Elizabeth is characterized as “the gingerbread man” (238, 239) who has “run away from a little old woman and a little old man” (243). Elizabeth suggests that she has escaped the familial triad, but, as the gingerbread reference indicates, she has done so by consuming the maternal figure. Wright is mistaken, then, when he claims at the end of the novel that Elizabeth is a “vessel emptied” (248). To use Freud’s terms, Elizabeth has not “abandoned” her object cathexes; rather she has re-established her mother within the phantasmagoric space of her own ego. Though Wright and Morgen attempt to “re-create [an] entire human being” (249), and re-name Elizabeth after themselves, in the end, Elizabeth “laugh[s]” at their attempt, and states, “I know who I am” (256). In effect, Elizabeth has become her mother. In a move that Jackson echoes in Eleanor’s experiences in *The Haunting of Hill House*, the spectral mother, crafted by a Freudian script, overwhelms filial subjectivity. The horror of Jackson’s “psychological horror story” lies in the culturally prescribed spectral mother of Freudian nightmare.

Monstrous Maternity in Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*

Jackson’s authorial interest in the vicissitudes of the mother-daughter Oedipal relation does not end with her writing of *The Bird’s Nest*. Jackson returns to this theme five years after the publication of that novel with *The Haunting of Hill House*, a narrative Stephen King identifies “as nearly perfect a haunted-house tale as I have ever read” (*Danse* 259). In this novel, Jackson traces the physical and psychosexual journey of Eleanor Vance, a young woman who is invited by Dr. Montague to join him in an investigation of paranormal disturbances at Hill House. Although thirty-two years old,

Eleanor's entrance into the realm of sexual maturity has been delayed by the eleven years she spent tending for her invalid mother, "alone, with no one to love" (3). As Theodora (one of Eleanor's fellow researchers) notes, Eleanor appears to be "about fourteen" (101). Eleanor's pubescent status, like Elizabeth's in *Bird's Nest*, is crucial to Jackson's narrative given Freud's argument that with the "arrival of puberty" the child's infantile Oedipal anxieties are resurrected (7:207). This process re-emerges, Freud argues, so that the young adult's psychosexual identity might achieve "its final, normal shape" (7:207). Intimate with the work of Freud, Jackson invokes an Oedipal context in her narrative by establishing a familial setting for Eleanor's pubescent journey to find a lover. As Tricia Lootens confirms, the inhabitants of Hill House "play at being a family" (166). Dr. Montague is the "infallible" father who has "chose[n] [. . .] to bring [Eleanor] safely to him and to Hill House" (11-12). Luke is the son who "would inherit Hill House" (6), and Theodora is the sexually aware elder sister who, unlike Eleanor, was not a "Girl Scout[]" (5). The individual mother of *Hill House*, like each of the mothers in the texts I consider, is erased from the plot. Eleanor's mother is already dead when the narrative opens, and Jackson's interest in a Freudian-inspired spectral mother is evident from the opening moments of her narrative. Even before she reaches Hill House, Eleanor imagines herself as a "King's daughter" who discovers a magic garden in which a "queen waits, weeping, for the princess to return" (13). I agree with Judie Newman, then, that in *Hill House* "Eleanor's primary emotional relation remains with her mother" (157). Moreover, Jackson's intention to disrupt Freud's heteronormative schema is also evident in these opening moments. Eleanor's fantasy role as princess is troubled by the realization that "once the palace became visible and the spell is broken, the *whole* spell will be broken"

(14; emphasis in original). For Eleanor, the heterosexual ending that Freud deems “normal” destroys the magical familial world and results, as indicated by the ellipsis of Jackson’s text, in a future Eleanor is unable to envision. In fact, Eleanor engages in a number of fantasies on her journey to “Hill House,” and each marks a failure to envision a positive outcome.¹⁸ The central object of desire within Eleanor’s fantasy world is not a “prince,” but a waiting queen.¹⁹ As is the case with each of the narratives I study, the spectral mother of Jackson’s text bars entrance to a heteronormative world.

In gothic fiction, the “Gothic house,” as Claire Kahane notes, often functions as the embodiment of the spectral mother of Freud’s pre-Oedipal schema. In her discussion of *Hill House*, Kahane argues that “the heroine is imprisoned not in a house but in the female body, which is itself the maternal legacy” (343). Indeed, in Jackson’s narrative, Luke identifies Hill House as a “mother house” (156). Yet, as the opening lines of Jackson’s novel indicate, this “mother house” is not restricted to “pre-Oedipal” phantasy:

No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream. Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within. (1)

From the outset, Jackson’s text insists that the monstrous house is “real,” in fact, a “not sane” figure that exists in “absolute reality.” From the opening moments of *Hill House*, Jackson’s spectral mother evokes the gothic “primal and engulfing morass of the maternal” of an embodied Freudian nightmare (Hogle, Introduction 10), of the “darkness within.”

Jackson's subversion of Freud's heteronormative schema is evident in her depiction of an unstable patriarchal authority in *Hill House*. In fact, in both of Jackson's narratives, *Hill House* and *Bird's Nest*, as in O'Connor's *Wise Blood* and *Violent*, and Williams' *Menagerie*, *Suddenly*, and *Kingdom*, the authority of biological fathers is depicted as equivocal at best. In *Hill House*, Eleanor's father reportedly died when she was at the pre-pubescent age of twelve, at which time "showers of stones had fallen on their house" (3), and Dr. Montague, Eleanor's substitute father, lacks authority and he must rely on his title to "borrow an air of respectability" (1). He kisses his wife "obediently" and is displaced in his own family by his wife's protégée, Arthur (133). Moreover, the disruption of a masculine authority in the novel is also suggested by Eleanor's recognition of the caretaker of Hill House, Dudley, as a man with a "little temporary superiority" that he holds only as long as he guards the gate (20). One of the most disturbingly unstable fathers in *Hill House* is the deceased Hugh Crain. Crain's moral advice book to his daughter, Anne, promises that the two "will be joined together hereafter in unending bliss" (126). As Newman notes, the incestuous motivation behind Crain's promise is obvious: "The pretence of guiding the child's moral development is actually an excuse to indulge in sensation, transgressing the guise of moral admonition" (165). Crain's incestuous desire, as Newman contends, "explodes [. . .] the Freudian view of the former as former of the superego" (165). In fact, each of the authors in my study problematize cultural notions of male authority. In *Wise Blood*, Haze's father, already dead at the opening of the narrative, is depicted as a sexual voyeur who exhibits no religious faith (the ultimate condemnation from the staunchly Catholic O'Connor), and whose position of authority in respect to his son is usurped by Haze's "circuit preacher"

grandfather (14). And, in *Violent*, it is Tarwater's evangelical grandfather who assumes the role of father, while the young Tarwater's own father is described as a "hollow-cheeked boy" who commits suicide (98-9). Williams' fictional fathers receive equally harsh treatment from their creator. In *Menagerie*, Tom's father, "a telephone man who fell in love with long distances" (145), abandoned the family "a long time ago" (145). In *Suddenly*, Violet's husband, Sebastian's father, is already dead at the opening of the play, and, evidently, during his life it was Violet, not Sebastian's father, who held the power within the Venable family. Similarly, in *Kingdom*, Lot's already deceased father is described as a "hawg" and an adulterer who Lot, and his mother, despise (158). In terms of Jackson's work, in *Bird's Nest*, Dr. Wright's authority is repeatedly challenged both by Elizabeth and by her Aunt Morgen. Clearly, Jackson's depictions of unstable father figures in *Hill House* are, in terms of my study, a common trope.

The destabilization of paternal authority by O'Connor, Williams, and Jackson may, in part, be read as a reflection of postwar reality. Many fathers simply did not return from war, and many of those who did return faced difficulties reintegrating into life in a postwar America. Benjamin Spock, in his immensely popular *Baby and Child Care* (1946), in fact devotes two chapters to the "Fatherless Child." At the same time, this absence of paternal authority gestures to each authors' disruption of a normative familial schema. This destabilization of paternal authority is a common gothic trope, and one that is tied, David Punter argues, to the gothic's interest in the "subversion of institutions of patriarchal authority" (278). Freud was especially concerned about the consequences that an absence of paternal authority might have on a daughter, Jackson's area of interest. As Nancy Chodorow confirms, in Freud's thinking the presence of the father in the family

unit mitigates the threat of a mother-daughter incestuous relation (132-3). Familial incest, including “love” between “mothers and daughters” (Haggarty 19), as George Haggarty notes, is a recurring tope in gothic fiction that “again and again challenges the status quo with the taboo around which the patriarchal system is organized” (19). And, in terms of Jackson’s narrative, as Newman argues, Hill House is indeed an “ambivalent maternal enclave” (159), one in which “the source of both the pleasures and the terrors of the text springs from the dynamics of the mother-daughter relation with its attendant motifs of psychic annihilation, reabsorption by the mother, vexed individuation, dissolution of individual ego boundaries, terror or separation” (157). Although Eleanor’s own mother is dead, her presence continues to haunt Eleanor. For example, after Eleanor unpacks a pair of “slacks” (29), she thinks, “Mother would be *furious*” and decides to keep them hidden (29; emphasis in original). Bernice Murphy argues that it is a “malevolent” *paternal* influence that is “more dangerous than that of any ghosts” (135). Murphy bases her argument in large measure on the fact that the house was “built to the exact specification for the tyrannical Hugh Crain” (135). However, while Crain is responsible for the house’s design, the narrator notes that “the structure seemed somehow to have formed itself, flying together into its own powerful pattern under the hands of its builders, fitting itself into its own construction of line and angles, reared its great head back against the sky without concession to humanity” (24). As I argue, Hill House embodies a maternal power that supersedes that of the father and his designs. It is Eleanor’s cathetic relationship with the monstrous spectral mother that proves the most difficult challenge to a normative resolution for Eleanor’s Oedipal struggle.

The possibility of mother-daughter incest is raised in Jackson's narrative when Eleanor, in conversation with Theodora, reveals that she has been forced to "read aloud to her [mother] for two hours every afternoon. Love stories" (62). The sexual connotation of this mother-daughter intimacy involving "Love stories" is further indicated by Eleanor's musing: "But that's not all, she thought, astonished at herself, that doesn't tell what it was like" (62). Eleanor's internal dialogue indicates not only that something unspeakable lies beneath her words, but also that what is left unsaid is something she does not "want" to tell, even to herself (62). In a later scene, after Theodora paints Eleanor's toes red, an act which Eleanor recognizes as sexual and therefore "'wicked,'" Eleanor cries "I hate having things done to me . . . I don't like to feel helpless [. . .] 'My mother--'" (86). As the dash of Jackson's text indicates, there is much more to tell. Once again Eleanor conflates sexuality and memories of her mother with her own sense of vulnerability. When Eleanor finally assumes the role of the child, at the height of her neurosis as she enters the library after haunting the halls of Hill House, the sexual nature of her relationship with the "mother house" is clear (156): "And here I am, she thought. Here I am inside . . . Under her feet the stone floor moved caressingly, rubbing itself against the soles of her feet, and all around the soft air touched her, stirring her hair, drifting against her fingers, coming in a light breath across her mouth, and she danced in circles" (171). In this moment, Newman argues, Eleanor "welcome[s] the role of child" and, in this same moment, "[e]go dissolution has become primal bliss" (166). Situated in the tower of the "mother house" with its "fondly warm" temperatures and circular staircase (171), the library operates symbolically as a womb. And so Eleanor's entrance into this space enacts a return to the "primal and engulfing morass of the maternal" that is a defining feature of

“abject monster figures” in gothic fiction (Hogle, *Cambridge* 10). In this moment, Eleanor’s desire for the mother overrules her fears and “genuine[] hat[red]” of the maternal figure as she merges into the body of the “mother house” in a moment that rehearses a decidedly sexual union (Jackson 3).

My suggestion that Jackson’s narrative interrogates the incestuous spectral mother that haunts Freud’s discussion of puberty helps to shed light on what Jackson identifies as “the key scene” of her novel--the “hand holding episode” (Lootens 186). In the scene, written entirely as stream of consciousness, Eleanor hears the “small gurgling laugh” of a child and “scream[s]” ““Why is it dark? *Why is it dark?*””(119; emphasis in original). In this moment, Eleanor “roll[s] and clutche[s] Theodora’s hand” (119) as the phantom child’s “laugh” transfers into a “little soft cry” and a “little sweet moan of wild sadness” (120). Although “monstrous” and “cruel,” the intersection of fear and desire indicated in the “little sweet moan of wild sadness” is suggested (120). In the end, Eleanor wakes to discover that Theodora is across the room, which forces Eleanor to ask, ““Good God-- whose hand was I holding?”” (120). Hattenhauer argues, “if [Eleanor] was actually holding someone’s hand, it had to be her own” (162). Holly Blackford concurs, but nuances her argument by suggesting that Eleanor “is holding her own child-hand, bound to and seeking her mother” (251). Haggarty, I think, hits closest to the mark when he suggests, “the house emerges from [Eleanor’s] consciousness (subconscious?) to substitute itself as an object of desire and lure her to her demise” (148). The representation of the maternal “Hill House” as an “object of desire” is exactly the Freudian nightmare Jackson consciously works to represent as this scene carefully mimics Freud’s discussion of Infantile Anxiety.

Within his discussion of puberty, Freud addresses the behaviour of a child whose sexual instinct “is excessive or has developed prematurely . . . owing to too much petting” by a parental figure (7:224). Freud suggests that these children are often “afraid in the dark because in the dark they cannot see the person they love; and their fear is soothed if they can take hold of that person’s hand in the dark” (224). The parallels between Jackson’s and Freud’s scenes of “hand-holding” are unmistakable. Moreover, Freud argues that in this scenario “a child, by turning his libido into anxiety when he cannot satisfy it, behaves like an adult” (224). This transformation of desire into fear is echoed by Jackson’s text. As Newman notes, Eleanor is first “reassure[ed]” by the hand she holds, then “terroriz[ed]” by that same hand (164). Eleanor’s experience in this pivotal scene thus consciously enacts Freud’s discussion of the potential dangers within a mother and daughter relationship, dangers posed by a decidedly perverse maternal figure of psychoanalytic imagining.

Both Newman and Jodey Castricano suggest that the horrors of *Hill House* gesture to the intimate pre-Oedipal relationship between mother and child. As Castricano notes, Jackson’s novel “dramatiz[es] the Lacanian notion of ‘knowledge in the real’” (89).²⁰ That being said, one of the most terrifying aspects of Jackson’s text is the spectral mother’s power over language. The mother embodied by the house of Jackson’s text does not simply “know” Eleanor’s name; rather, the words, “HELP ELEANOR COME HOME,” which appear first in chalk and later in blood, are figuratively written by the mother on the body of the mother (107, 114; emphasis in original).²¹ These moments of maternal signification in Jackson’s mid-century text both anticipate and challenge the underlying masculinist presumptions of Jacques Lacan’s extensions to Freud’s theories.

Specifically, Lacan posits the symbolic as the realm of phallic, read masculine, power. The maternally identified Hill House's writing, then, is quite a remarkable move, given that such later feminist psychoanalytic theorists as Julia Kristeva, though they have attempted to carve out a space of power for the female within the symbolic, have nonetheless maintained underlying masculinist presumptions that situate the maternal figure within a space outside of meaning, in the pre-Oedipal.²² In *Hill House*, however, it is the maternally identified house that holds the phallic power of language.

Notably, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the idea of a "phallic mother" appears in Freud's writing as a figure of phantasy that emerges in the "Phallic Stage" before the child realizes the mother has no penis. However, the maternal phallus of Jackson's fictional world is much more than a figure of childhood psychic misrecognition. What is remarkable about this psychoanalytic spectre in Jackson's novel is that the phallic mother is not, within the narrative, a phantasmagorical phenomenon. As Dr. Montague attests: "We cannot say, 'It was my imagination,' because three other people were there too" (103). The central horror of Hill House is its embodiment of phallic power. Notably, as David Punter and Glennis Byron suggest, the gothic often takes up anxieties relating to the "frightening power of women" (122). What distinguishes the spectral mother in Jackson's gothic narratives is its crafting as an enactment of Freudian thinking. In Jackson's text, it is maternal agency first imagined by Freud that renders the mother's body monstrous.

What haunts Jackson's house of horror is the embodiment of a phantasy that haunts Freud's masculinist schema. Blackford suggests that the phallic mother of Jackson's text is "a recurrent figure in Jackson's fiction" (251). Given Jackson's intimate

knowledge of Freudian discourse, it is not surprising that she recognized the mother-as-phallus within Freud's theories. Certainly the link between monstrosity and an embodied maternal power is evident throughout Jackson's narrative through the association of the body of the mother with disease. Eleanor recognizes the house as "vile" and "diseased" at her first "face to face" encounter with the house (23). Dr. Montague describes Hill House as "unfit for human habitation" (50), "evil . . . disturbed . . . Leprous. Sick" (51). Theodora characterizes the house as "filthy [and] rotten" (73; emphasis in original). And this link between disease and the maternal body is not limited to Hill House itself; Eleanor's mother was an "invalid" (4), "cross and filthy" (4). As is the case with the other mothers in my study, Jackson erases individual mothers from her text and employs the emptied subject position of mother as a site through which she exposes the monstrous characterization of maternal subjectivity in psychoanalytic thinking.

This link between maternity and disease in Jackson's text anticipates Judith Butler's discussion of instability within Freud's libidinal theory in relation to phallic power. As Butler outlines in her discussion of the Lesbian Phallus, "the phallus belongs to no body part, but is fundamentally transferable and is, at least within [Freud's] text, the very principle of erotogenic transferability" (147). Although Butler's argument does not engage in an extended conversation regarding the phallic mother, her insight into the "pain-pleasure nexus" of Freud's libidinal theory highlights a potential relationship between the maternal body and this filial phantasy figure (147). Butler notes that Freud connects erotogenicity with bodily pain: "Freud first considers organic disease as that which 'withdraws libido from love objects, (and) lavishes libido on itself'" (144). For Freud, Butler explains, "that body part is delineated and becomes knowable [. . .] only on

the condition of that investiture” (144). Pain and erotogenicity form the “precondition” of self-discovery and the “formation of the ego” (144). While Freud’s discussion imagines a multiplicity of erotogenic zones, in the end for Freud, as Butler points out, “the male genitals are suddenly themselves an originary site of erotogenization which then subsequently becomes the occasion for a set of substitutions or displacements” (146). Freud’s move, Butler suggests, “symptomizes a wish to understand these genitals as an originating idealization, that is, as the symbolically encoded phallus” (146). In a move that anticipates Butler’s critique of Freud’s masculinist thinking, Jackson’s *Hill House* effectively reclaims the potentiality of a female phallus by characterizing the maternal body as the originary site of pain and pleasure through which the body of the child is delineated.

Jackson’s depiction of empowered female force as constituted through pain shares much in common with Williams’ depiction of Violet in *Suddenly Last Summer* as a moral masochist. Both *Hill House* and Violet function as the sublime bodies of Lacanian discourse in that they are both constituted by phantasmagoric suffering relating to the loss of a child. As discussed in my chapter on *Suddenly*, the sublime body is delineated, Lacan argues, by the “Suffering [that] is conceived of as a stasis which affirms that that which is cannot return to the void from which it emerged” (322). In Jackson’s and Williams’ texts, the maternally identified figures can only exist within this phantasmagoric space. Perhaps this is why, at the end of Jackson’s novel after Eleanor’s subsumption into the maternal *Hill House*, “whatever walked there, walked alone” (182). Like Violet, *Hill House*’s existence as a maternal figure within the libidinal economy of psychoanalysis depends upon the reiteration of loss. And so too do each of the other mothers in my study. In

Bird's Nest, Elizabeth's mother's death underlies Jackson's discussion of multiple personality disorder. Amanda's existence in *Menagerie*, as is the case with Miss Lottie's existence in *Kingdom*, relies upon her son's reiteration of his loss. The spectral mothers in O'Connor's narrative appear only at the pleasure of Haze's and Tarwater's own repetitive compulsions. As I note in the introduction to my thesis, Steven Bruhm has already pointed out that contemporary gothic fiction presents the "unending cycle of loss and re-identification with a lost object" which "constitutes a sense of trauma" that reflects the gothic's fixation on the Child's experiences in a post-Freudian world. Each of the spectral mothers in my study, as depositories of the child's trauma, reveal the subject position of mother in mid-century America to be a gothic construction because it is always and only a placeholder of filial trauma.

The assertion that Jackson's spectral mothers reflect the author's employment, and critique, of the inherently heteronormative underpinnings of psychoanalytic theory complicates critical readings with respect to the lyric from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* that plagues Eleanor's psyche, "Journey's end in lovers meeting." The lines appear in Eleanor's mind when she enters the house (15, 25); when she meets Luke (25); and when she makes her final decision to "send the car directly at the great tree" (182). The entire song is as follows:

O mistress mine, where are you roaming?

O stay and hear, your true love's coming,

That can sing both high and low.

Trip no further, pretty sweeting.

Journey's end in lovers meeting.

Every wise man's son doth know.

Present mirth hath present laughter.

What's to come is still unsure.

In delay there lies no plenty,

Then come and kiss me, sweet and twenty.

Youth's a stuff will not endure. (*Twelfth Night* 2.3.36-40; 43-8)

Although critics focus on the line, "Journey's end in lovers meeting," save the first and last two lines, every other line from the song appears repeatedly in Jackson's narrative. The entire song was in fact appropriated by Shakespeare from Thomas Morely's *First Book of Consort Lessons* (1599) (Greenblatt 1783), so the lines of the song thereby code Eleanor as a student of desire. Indeed, Eleanor is characterized as a "courtesan" by Luke (45) and by Theodora (85). Newman comments, "Once *en route*, Eleanor is haunted by the refrain 'Journey's end in lovers meeting'" and reads the allusion as a signal "that Eleanor's goal is the realisation of heterosexual desires" (157; emphasis in original). While noting the "sexually ambiguous heroine" of Jackson's play, Tricia Lootens suggests that the lines operate "like a 'blind motif' in a fairy tale" (170). In effect, both scholars read Jackson's allusions to *Twelfth Night* as a signal of a heteronormative context. This view is reasonable given that the song itself follows a typical renaissance lyric in which the speaker attempts to convince the object of his desire to relinquish her chastity and forego promises of heaven because "Present mirth hath present laughter" and "In delay there lies no plenty" (2.3.44; 46).²³ Yet *Twelfth Night*, while ostensibly a love story that ends in the marriage of its central characters, troubles a heterosexual schema. Olivia does marry Sebastian, but only after her advances to his twin sister--a woman

dressed as a male page--are refused. Orsino, unable to capture the heart of Olivia, proposes marriage to Viola while she is still in male garb. In other words, the sexuality depicted in Shakespeare's play, like that of Jackson's novel, disrupts a heteronormative paradigm.

As Haggarty's work in *Queer Gothic* suggests, the gothic often registers a queer disruption in texts that "militate strenuously" against heteronormativity (19). The queerness of Jackson's text is reflected in a question posed by S.T. Joshi: "Who is [Eleanor's] lover? Is it Theodora . . . Is it Luke . . . Or is it the house itself? Perhaps it is all three" (20). In addition to Eleanor's attraction to the house itself, Eleanor's sexual desires are notably ambivalent. As scholars such as Newman note, Eleanor appears to be attracted to both Luke and Theodora (167).²⁴ Even the heterosexually identified characters of the text trouble a heteronormative schema. Dr. Montague and his wife do not share a bed and Luke indicates to Eleanor that his deepest desire is for a mother (133; 122-23). Eleanor's married sister raises the spectre of perversion when she muses, "perhaps this Dr. Montague *used* these women for some--well--*experiments*. You know--*experiments*, the way they do. Eleanor's sister dwelt richly upon experiments she had heard these doctors did" (4; emphasis in original). Eleanor herself recognizes the lines of Shakespeare's play as likely "most unsuitable [. . .] and probably wholly disreputable" (23). Similar to Eleanor's need to repress the sexual nature of her relationship with her mother, the lines of Shakespeare's song "hide . . . stubbornly from her memory" (23). In light of the mother-daughter incest suggested throughout *Hill House*, the clue to unravelling this narrative complexity lies not only in the words of the song but also in its source within Shakespeare's play. Importantly, this song is delivered to Sir Toby and Sir

Andrew, two drunkards from the sub-plot who request a “love song” from Feste, the court fool (2.3.33). Through her repetitive employment of the words of a fool, Jackson’s narrative both conjures, and, through irony, critiques a heterosexual model. Blackford recognizes the irony of Jackson’s text, and asserts that the repetition of the song suggests that Eleanor’s need for a male lover is “machinelike and repetitive, even cliché”; it is a cultural script that belies Eleanor’s true lesbian desires (253). Regardless of Eleanor’s “true” desires, for Eleanor, re-entry into Freud’s familial drama is akin to entering a madhouse. This suggestion is confirmed by Eleanor’s recognition of Mr. Dudley, the gatekeeper of Hill House, as a “sneering Cheshire Cat” (23). Eleanor is about to fall into a rabbit-hole of insanity that is first envisioned not by Jackson but by Freud.

Jackson’s depiction of an all-powerful but diseased spectral mother who disrupts Freud’s masculinist script anticipates Julia Kristeva’s work on subjectivity and the abject. For Kristeva, subjectivity relies upon entrance into a paternal symbolic realm, but this entrance is forever threatened by that which must be persistently “jettison[ed]” in order for the subject to exist as an “I” (*Powers 2*):

A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell or sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death . . . No, as in true theatre . . . refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. (3; emphasis in original).

The materiality of our bodies repulsively, and constantly, “show[s]” us our death. In Kristeva’s thinking the mother is forever associated with the abject, in that the mother reminds the child of a time in which “the borders between subject and object collapse”

and so “threaten[ing] repulsive engulfment”(Parkin-Gounelas 62). In Jackson’s novel, *Hill House*, as Blackford contends, “seems to signify the abjection that Kristeva equates with the maternal body” (251). The maternal body’s “special relationship to the abject,” Barbara Creed points out, is often made manifest through its association with “polluting objects” such as menstruation (10). And, in *Hill House*, Jackson employs numerous images that suggest Eleanor’s journey toward annihilation coincides with the onset of puberty and menses. For instance, the already mentioned red nail polish on Eleanor’s toes (85), Eleanor’s red sweater and sandals (60), and the paint that appears on the walls of Hill House beckoning Eleanor to “Come Home,” which Theodora suggests, is written in “Blood” (113). Scholars have commented on the obvious menstrual imagery throughout the text, and how that imagery ties to “Eleanor’s hatred of ‘dirty’ female bodies, including her own” (Lootens 185). An exploration between the “‘clean and proper body’” and the abject body, Creed states, is a central trope of horror (11). In Jackson’s text the central horror is most certainly the threat posed to Eleanor’s subjectivity through her experience with the monstrously abject “mother house.”

At the heart of Jackson’s narrative is the chronicle of Eleanor’s “threaten[ingly] repulsive engulfment,” her subsumption into the abject maternal body. After seeing her name written on the walls of the house, Eleanor tells her co-investigators: “‘Look. There’s only one of me and it’s all I’ve got. I *hate* seeing myself dissolve and slip and separate’” (118; emphasis in original). Later, after a terrorizing night of supernatural pounding on the walls of the house, Eleanor muses, “I am disappearing inch by inch into this house” (149). In fact, it is this sense of annihilation through return to the maternal body that Eleanor most fears. In keeping with the gothic’s interest in the production of

fear and desire that is evident in each incarnation of the spectral mother in the texts I discuss, Eleanor is equally repulsed by and drawn to this figure of her annihilation. Near the end of the novel, when Eleanor is compelled to visit the tower, she thinks: “I will relinquish my possession of this self of mine, abdicate, give over willingly what I never wanted at all; whatever it wants of me it can have” (150). As this section of the novel clearly indicates, Eleanor recognizes the source of this “call” as a desiring and desired mother of Eleanor’s phantasy: “‘Eleanor, Eleanor,’ and she heard it inside and outside her head; this was a call she had been listening for all her life” (158). Though a figure that promises filial annihilation, the psychoanalytically crafted Hill House is irresistible.

Ultimately, Eleanor’s “ambivalent submission to maternal domination,” as Roberta Rubenstein argues, leads to the character’s destruction (318). Kristeva, speaking in terms of a male subject, outlines this sense of repulsion and attraction to the abject maternal figure. Specifically, Kristeva suggests that to merge with the abject maternal is to

cross[] over the horrors of maternal bowels and, in an immersion that enables him to avoid coming face to face with an other, spares himself the risk of castration. But at the same time that immersion gives him the full power of possessing, if not being, the bad object that inhabits the maternal body. Abjection then takes the place of the other, to the extent of affording him jouissance. (53-4)

The revulsion and attraction Kristeva describes above with respect to the “horrors of maternal bowels . . . affording jouissance” characterizes the maternal body as a monstrous figure who draws us towards our feared and desired erasure. At the same time, Kristeva

also characterizes the maternal body as an efficacious site of displacement through which the horrors of a masculine world, of castration, may be transformed into the thrill of a masculinist and sadistic penetration of the female body. As Kristeva argues, this “jouissance” is in fact predicated upon a sense of defilement that the mother’s body has always already suffered: the “bad object” is already inside the mother’s body. In terms of my study, Eleanor’s erasure into Jackson’s abject maternal house helps connect the recurring pattern of vitriol observed in maternal characterizations throughout my dissertation. From the sexual perversion and threat of spiritual death associated with the Freudian and Jungian inspired mothers of O’Connor’s work, to the “bad” mother of Kleinian thinking depicted in Williams’ narratives, finally to the “horrors” of the all-engulfing Freudian maternal figure of Jackson’s work, the wholeness-through-annihilation, the “jouissance,” that underpins a twentieth century psychoanalytic view of subjectivity is predicated upon, demands, a monstrous maternal figure.

Jackson believed that “ghosts provided the ‘statement and resolution’ of their percipients’ problems--problems that could not ‘be solved realistically’ because ‘impossible problems require impossible solutions, after all’” (Lootens 175). Given the “impossible problem” of Freud’s spectral mother for a masculinist twentieth-century United States, Jackson’s “impossible solution[.]” rests solely in Eleanor’s erasure. In answer to Eleanor’s final questions regarding her suicide--“Why am I doing this? Why am I doing this? Why don’t they stop me?” (182)--one need only turn to the final lines of the Shakespearean lyric that plagues Eleanor’s journey: “Youth’s a stuff will not endure” (2.3.48). As Jackson’s enactment of Freudian models reveals, Eleanor has only two possible futures: either she leaves her mother to enter a heteronormative world--a nearly

“impossible” task given Freud’s discussion with regard to Infantile Anxiety--or Eleanor enters the horror that Freud attempts to bury in phantasy. Jackson’s “impossible solution” indicates that Eleanor’s erasure is far more likely given the dictates of a psychoanalytic script. Castricano suggests, “Eleanor Vance’s suicide is mysterious not only because she appears divided within herself but also because, in terms of the phantom, she seems to be ‘possessed not by (her) own unconscious but by someone else’s’” (87).²⁵ Based on Jackson’s adherence to a Freudian script, that “someone else[.]” is the spectral mother who haunts psychoanalysis. In both of Jackson’s texts, *Bird’s Nest* and *Hill House*, as is the case in O’Connor’s and Williams’ work, the spectral mother of psychoanalytic discourse emerges as a terrifying because inescapable figure of the past who longs for, who demands, filial annihilation. Crafted as an enactment of Freudian discourse, *Hill House* highlights the degree to which the subject position of mother is rendered monstrous in a mid-century, post-Freudian, America.

The Spectral Mother as Cultural Nightmare

The spectral mothers of Flannery O’Connor’s, Tennessee Williams’, and Shirley Jackson’s work exist solely as always already absent figures of the child’s, and mid-century American culture’s, phantasy. Constituted within a psychic space of the not now, these mothers are erased from the plot in each text I study. This erasure, as I have noted, is a common gothic trope. In his discussion of the “absent mother[s]” of daughters in gothic fiction, Robert Miles suggests that this erasure is, in part, “a sign of the worrying absence of the ideal” (27). Certainly, the spectral mothers of my study gesture to the disempowered status of real world mothers within a masculinist and heteronormative postwar America.²⁶ At the same time, O’Connor’s, Williams’, and Jackson’s spectral

mothers also recognize the postwar maternal role as a site of challenge to dominant cultural narratives. Although the mother is removed from the present in O'Connor's, Williams', and Jackson's texts, in each narrative the maternal role occupies a central, and decentering, space. The mothers in O'Connor's *Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear It Away*, though spectral, play a very real role on the parlous road toward filial maturation. And the same holds true in Williams' work. From Williams' depiction of Amanda as an uncanny *imago* that haunts Tom's phantasy world, to Violet's unending masochistic reiteration of the details of Sebastian's life and death, to Miss Lottie's dramatic existence as a performance of filial jouissance, spectral maternity is portrayed as an ambivalent site of desire and fear upon which the child's subjectivity precariously relies. Finally, in Jackson's work, the spectral mothers of *The Bird's Nest* and *The Haunting of Hill House*, crafted as enactments of Freudian discourse, highlight the degree to which mothers are inculcated within a space of madness and monstrosity that demands annihilation. The spectral mother in each of these novels is a figure that haunts not only the child's subjectivity, but also a masculinist twentieth-century American culture.

The emergence of the spectral mother as a subversive force in the texts of my thesis reflects a common gothic trope. As referenced earlier, Jerrold E. Hogle claims, "The gothic is quite consistently about the connection of abject monster figures to the primal and engulfing morass of the maternal" (Introduction 10). Significantly, one consistent thread that ties each of the mothers in my study is their ability to obliterate the child's subjectivity. From the unnamed mother of Haze in *Wise Blood*, who repeatedly returns in the form of a gothic counterfeit, to the archetypal maternal spectre who haunts Tarwater in *The Violent Bear it Away*, O'Connor's enactment of Freudian and Jungian

theories of mothers and mothering reveal spectral mothers who ultimately lead the author's male protagonists away from earthly subjectivity towards the promise of a spiritualized erasure. While O'Connor's novels reflect her theological aims, and Williams' vision of the mother-as-psychoanalytic-text is informed by his interest in the boundaries between normative and non-normative sexuality, both authors' characterizations of motherhood are strikingly similar in terms of the threat to a son's identity. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Amanda appears as a figure of both fantasy and Kleinian phantasy who haunts Tom's present to such an extent that he remains trapped within the reiteration of his forever lost maternal-filial relation. In *Suddenly Last Summer*, as Williams delves deeper into Kleinian paranoia, we begin to see more clearly the enduring hold of a mother on her son as Williams presents Violet as the non-mother who refuses to relinquish her hold on Sebastian, even in the face of his death. Finally, in *Kingdom of Earth*, the nightmarish quality of Kleinian thinking about mothers comes to its full force as Lot is subsumed into the body of his mother, Miss Lottie. Likewise, the mothers of daughters in both of Jackson's texts, *The Bird's Nest* and *The Haunting of Hill House*, epitomize the "primal and engulfing morass" of gothic nightmare. Both Elizabeth and Eleanor, much like Lot from Williams' *Kingdom*, and Tarwater from O'Connor's *Violent*, cannot resist the sublime pleasures of a submission to a maternal force who demands nothing less than everything. In Kahane's discussion of *Wise Blood*, she argues, "The gothic fear is revealed as the fear of femaleness itself, perceived as threatening to one's wholeness, obliterating the very boundaries of self" (346). As enactments of psychoanalytic discourse on mothers, in the postwar gothic, maternity itself is a site of cultural anxiety and horror. The twentieth-century subject position of mother is a

spectralized space that reflects upon the monstrous underpinning of a post-Freudian world.

The spectral maternal presences in the work of O'Connor, Williams, and Jackson thus confirm Peter Brooks' assertion of a twentieth-century narrative interest in "a return to origins and the tracing of a coherent story forward from origin to present" (6). Each of the authors whose work I discuss situate the mother at the centre of their psychological narratives, and thereby grapple with the very beginning and end point of subjectivity as imagined first through Freud. Parkin-Gounelas claims that while societies "pay obsessive tribute to the dead father . . . On another, secret and invisible level, they seek to return to that fusion with the mother which every aspect of culture has worked to render threatening and repulsive" (59). Perhaps the spectral nature of each of the mothers in my thesis reflects this need for "secre[cy]" and "invisib[ity]" and simultaneous engagement, through the distance of a fictional lens, with a cultural desire for annihilation. Steven Bruhm's discussion of psychoanalytically informed contemporary gothic fiction is particularly relevant on this point. Bruhm argues that "in the world depicted in [contemporary gothic fiction], one is forced simultaneously to mourn the lost object (a parent, God, social order, lasting fulfillment through knowledge or sexual pleasure) and to become the object lost through identification or imitation" ("Contemporary" 268). Each of the texts I discuss presents a "forced" re-unification with the "lost [maternal] object." Given that the drive toward the mother, a site of intense cultural anxiety and scrutiny, is in each of these postwar narratives a psychoanalytically crafted drive toward filial death, the authors in my study gesture to profound instability in the modern subject.

Notes

¹ I return to Marta Caminero-Santangelo's discussion a number of times in my conclusion. Caminero-Santangelo explores the links between the postmodern subject and the popularization of multiple personality in mid-century America. In short, she argues that the diagnosis of multiple personality disorder was an instrument through which cultural discourse attempted to repress female agency. Like my reading of Jackson's work, Caminero-Santangelo's discussion identifies a subversive element to Jackson's depiction of mental disorder. Building on Caminero-Santangelo's work, I argue that the subversive aspect to Jackson's text stems from her enactment of specific passages from Freud's writing.

² As Caminero-Santangelo notes, "Between 1954 and 1957 this disorder was the subject of fiction, film, and a nonfiction case study; in all of them the 'patient' was a woman" (52). Notably, Jackson's *Bird's Nest* was one of these films. Made into a movie in 1957, entitled, *Lizzie*, neither Jackson, nor the psychologist who aided Jackson in her research, liked the film version of the novel. In response to the film, Jackson, Judy Oppenheimer claims, said that the psychologist "is going to shoot himself" (qtd. in Oppenheimer 194). For Jackson, the movie clearly failed to convey her authorial aims.

³ As Elaine Showalter notes, late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century proponents of Darwinian theory focused attention on "patrolling the boundaries between sanity and madness and protecting society from dangerous infiltration by those of tainted stock" (18). Darwinian theory thereby contributed to both masculinist and racist aims. After 1870, Showalter points out, there was an "emerging psychiatric Darwinism [that]

viewed insanity as the product of organic defect, poor heredity, and an evil environment” (18).

⁴ Dr. Prince’s text is entitled *The Dissociation of a Personality*. Jackson, Oppenheimer suggests, “thoroughly researched” the subject of multiple personality (161). In addition to studying Prince’s text, Jackson, according to Carolyn Alessio, “also worked with a psychologist at Bennington who provided her with case histories and advice” (124).

⁵ Caminero-Santangelo notes, “[T]hose personalities who attempt to assert their own wills and control their own lives are, seemingly for that very reason, declared not ‘real’ people and therefore without the right to self-determination” (68).

⁶ Similar to Prince, Dr. Wright’s identification of the “real” Elizabeth relies upon normative ideas about gender. As Caminero-Santangelo notes, Jackson characterizes each of Elizabeth’s personalities according to cultural stereotypes, from Elizabeth (R1) the “Victorian woman” (58) to Beth (R2), the “maiden in distress” (58-9), to Betsy, the “demonic dragon” (59).

⁷ The mother of Prince’s patient is characterized in equally damning terms. Prince states, “The general impression left on Miss Beauchamp’s mind to-day is that of her presence having been ignored by her mother excepting on occasions of a reprimand” (12).

⁸ In effect, Freud argues that the ego is composed of multiple internalized erotic objects which allow the ego to move beyond loss: “When the ego assumes the features of the object, it is forcing itself, so to speak, upon the id as a love-object and is trying to make good the id’s loss by saying: ‘Look, you can love me too--I am so like the object’” (19:30).

⁹ In one of Betsy's letters to Elizabeth, the character writes, ". . . i know all about it I know all about it I know all about it dirty dirty lizzie dirty dirty lizzie I know all about it . . ." (19). The letter works on two levels. Firstly, it indicates Betsy's knowledge of Elizabeth's "dirty" or sexual activity. It also again mimics Betsy's discovery of her mother's affair. In this letter, Elizabeth and her mother merge with respect to their sexual desire for the same male figure.

¹⁰ For Angela Hague, the "suggest[ion]" of "Elizabeth's molestation as a child by her mother's lover . . . underscores [Jackson's] desire to paint a very different portrait of contemporary experience, particularly the sexual and emotional vulnerabilities of young women" (81).

¹¹ Betsy first describes being "all alone" and then moves into a fantasy world in which she is the sea-king's daughter who must be rescued from "pirates" (xx). The fantasy ends abruptly, when she "heard Robin saying, 'Leave the damn kid with Morgen next time'" (93).

¹² For Freud, "girls hold their mother responsible for their lack of a penis and do not forgive her for their being thus put at a disadvantage" (22:124). In relation to the girl's turning to the father, Freud suggests, "The wish with which the girl turns to her father is no doubt originally the wish for the penis which her mother has refused her and which she now expects from her father. The feminine situation is only established, however, if the wish for a penis is replaced by one for a baby" (22:128).

¹³ Darryl Hattenhauer suggests the "nestegg" has an "economic base" through which Jackson "deflates the privileged innocent status of nursery rhymes by suggesting their devolution into popular songs of mass culture" (132).

¹⁴ When Elizabeth suggests that she is an “orphan” (191), Morgen states that “orphan or not, I have been for the past six years feeding you and dressing you and doing everything but wiping your nose” (191).

¹⁵ Morgen is characterized as revelling in her ability to castrate men. For instance, in the chapter entitled “Aunt Morgen,” the narrator suggests that Morgen’s lifestyle was “somehow reminiscent . . . [of] living alone on a tropical island . . . lying upon cushions in a tented harem, accepting lazily of comfits from a sandaled eunuch” (189).

¹⁶ As I note throughout my thesis, a number of feminist scholars critique the masculinist underpinning of Freud’s phallogocentric theories. Many of these readings build on Simone DeBeauvoir’s ground-breaking text, *The Second Sex*. In her text, DeBeauvoir offers a chapter debunking Freud’s ideas of the phallus (38-52). Much of Luce Irigaray’s often-cited work is a challenge to Freud’s phallic model, as is Julia Kristeva’s.

¹⁷ Morgen states, “When I talked to Harold Ryan afterward he said it was bound to happen anyway, it was no one’s fault, not to worry, and not to trouble the child with guilt she couldn’t understand. He said it wasn’t anyone’s fault” (228-9)

¹⁸ For example, she imagines “chasing butterflies” and then muses that she will “just hurry on and on until the wheels of the car were worn to nothing and she had come to the end of the world” (11).

¹⁹ The trope of the “waiting” spectral mother is repeated throughout Jackson’s text. The figure appears through Mrs. Montague’s planchette reading (142), and through Eleanor’s repeated statements that Hill House was “waiting” (60, 112, 178). In fact, the “waiting” maternal figure bookends Eleanor’s experiences in Jackson’s narrative. On her way to get her car from the garage before she leaves home, Eleanor accidentally runs into

an “old lady” (9). After Eleanor gives the woman cab fare, she tells Eleanor, “I’ll be praying for you, dearie” (9). Eleanor remembers this encounter during her final moments in Hill House: “‘Someone is praying for me,’ she said foolishly. ‘A lady I met a long time ago’” (179). Although “praying” and “waiting” are obviously different actions, both point to the fact that Eleanor’s journey is framed by the memories of a maternal figure.

²⁰ In contrast, Hattenhauer argues that the house is an allegory for Eleanor as the “dis-unified subject” and that “Eleanor haunts herself” (172). Holly Blackford suggests that the house is “haunted by a companion, committed to a spinster” (250).

²¹ As Steven Bruhm notes in his discussion of Stephen King’s *The Shining*, “King borrows this phenomenon, with important changes, from one of his favourite novels, Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*. In this novel Eleanor Vance is terrorized by the house writing her name mysteriously on its wall” (“On Stephen” 70).

²² Julia Kristeva, for instance, posits a theory of semiotics which, as Ewa Ziarek notes, “opens a specifically feminine point of resistance to the phallogocentric models of culture,” but at the same time, “because the semiotic is associated with the *prediscursive* libidinal economy, the grounds and the effectiveness of that resistance appear problematic at the very least” (91; emphasis in original).

²³ Both these lines appear in the text; for example see pages 18 and 23.

²⁴ Lootens agrees and suggests that Eleanor “does experiment with romantic fantasies about [Luke], but it is Theodora who is the “focus of Eleanor’s romantic and sexual lingering throughout virtually the whole novel” (182). Blackford reads a “thinly veil[ed] lesbian subtext” in her discussion of Theodora and Eleanor’s relationship (234, 240).

²⁵ Jodey Castricano argues that Jackson's novel employs "telepathy, clairvoyance and the sentience of non-living objects" in order to "challenge certain classical models of human consciousness and subjectivity and, therefore, psychoanalytic *interpretation*, by dramatizing the Lacanian notion of the real" (89; emphasis in original).

²⁶ See my introduction for a discussion of the cultural position occupied by mothers in postwar America.

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