

**(Dis)Locating the Male Body in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”**

The vast scholarship on T. S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” tends to shift the focus away from notions of corporeality. The inclination in examining “Love Song” is to trace the multitude of literary references that his work so readily encompasses.<sup>1</sup> The male body, as envisioned in “Love Song,” cannot be ignored as a central concern regarding contemporary perspectives on the poem. In attempting to reconcile with a fresh outlook on issues of corporeality, recent theories on gender and sexuality have provided a way to re-read texts such as “Love Song” through singling out “the body” as a concrete point of departure for analysis. Yet analyzing the body in poetry requires looking at language: language, like the body, regards notions of materiality. In her famed work on the materiality of the body, Judith Butler investigates the formlessness attributed to female bodily morphology. Using the work of both Plato and Luce Irigaray, she explains what Plato constructs as “the feminine”: “Plato’s phantasmatic economy virtually deprives the feminine of a *morphe*, a shape, for as the receptacle, the feminine is a permanent and, hence, non-living, shapeless non-thing which cannot be named” (Butler 53). This nameless “non-thing,” despite being attributed to “concrete” female corporeality, threatens to overlap gender binaries: “Plato clearly wants to disallow the possibility of a resemblance between the masculine and the feminine, and he does this through introducing a feminized receptacle that is prohibited from resembling any form” (Butler 43). In other words, whatever gendered similarities bodies may have, the subordinating/hierarchizing of bodies will come down to sexual difference. Bodies get compartmentalized according to this sexual difference: “woman” is the difference from the universal “man.” Elizabeth Grosz takes up the feminist concern of problematizing this universalized body: “The proclamation of a position outside, beyond, sexual difference is a luxury that only male arrogance allows. [. . .] The enigma that Woman has posed for men is an enigma only because the male subject has construed itself as the subject par excellence” (*Volatile* 191). Grosz argues for recognition of sexual differences, as the diversity of bodily morphologies cannot be ignored; however her perspective is hardly an essentialist one. She takes care to explicate that these differences can be among a particular sex: each sex’s characteristics are not fixed in being necessarily distinguishable and identifiable.

Contemporary feminist perspectives on hysteria also establish a dialogue of sexual difference; these perspectives, while rather different from each other, point to both a celebratory and problematic status of the female body, leaving behind an unsatisfactory ambivalence. For example, in explicating her concept of femininity, Irigaray writes, “To claim that the feminine can be expressed in the form of a concept is to allow oneself to be caught up again in a system of ‘masculine’ representations, in which women are trapped in a system of meaning” (122). This system of representations is the phallogocentric,<sup>2</sup> what Irigaray argues as the patriarchal crux of psychoanalytic thought from which language cannot be separate. Hélène Cixous, too, criticizes women’s

subordinated status, which she maps out within language. Cixous “writes the body,” meaning that she writes in a manner that is meant to embody a specifically female voice. She claims that writing in a linear fashion is a masculine way of thinking about the world: “And why don’t you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it [. . .] Because writing is at once too high, too great for you, it’s reserved for the great—that is, for ‘great men’” (1455). The “too high” or the “great” should be reminders of the “high modernism” or the “Men of 1914” of which Eliot was considered a part. The purpose in the aforementioned examples of feminist psychoanalytic thought is to establish a dialogue with how hysteria functions within the male body.

Male corporeality in “Love Song,” will expose the problematic construction of hysteria’s association with female bodies and more importantly with (female and male) femininity. Although the body in “Love Song” is a male body, it is hystericized and feminized. The bodily dynamics that the poem constructs perilously places this male body against an appropriated and rejected femininity: the male body is negotiated through femininity, namely in aging constituting that femininity. This body remains at a point of crisis in its need to disavow this femininity and displace age onto another “time”; thus the crisis concerns not just this feminized male body but also the vulnerability of the aging body in contributing to this feminization. Notions of corporeality will then open up to be read beyond binary notions of sexed corporeality. The initial question concerns why hysteria was specifically a “female disease” and, more importantly, how does looking at the manner that hysteria is mapped out on the female body useful in re-reading “Love Song.” To approach such a task it is necessary to first examine why, in the history of hysteria, the illness has been expressly related to the female body. In turn, the strategy of locating hysteria on the male body will attempt to uncover and re-evaluate Eliot’s work in light of new bodily representations.

In her comprehensive recent work on reclaiming hysteria in order to understand trauma, Juliet Mitchell outlines the parameters in which hysteria was sexed female. The word *hysteria*, itself, is biologically specific. Adapted from the word *hystera* (Greek for uterus), *hysteria* as “floating womb” or “wandering uterus” was attributed to grieving widows, who, because of the loss of their husbands were said to have wandering wombs resulting from “the place” of sexual fulfillment being dislocated (Mitchell 8). Mitchell refers to fifth-century diagnoses of hysteria, but in understanding how the illness was imagined and thus historically “created” as corporeally female is of considerable importance. While Mitchell explains that external bodily processes were inhibited because the wandering womb was thought to be pressing up against other internal organs, how literal this process was thought to be happening in hysterical subjects is left unexplored. One can perhaps infer that in the fifth century the notion of a wandering womb was taken literally, but the more interesting question concerning literalness regards “the place” of and on the female body where hysteria can presumably be (dis)located. The female body not only became the site of this disorder and chaotic

“wandering” but was also represented as this “hysterical wandering.” Notions of representation, though, cannot be removed from looking at language. Mitchell writes of the symbolic nature of language and its role within hysteria: “The language of hysteria has been described in a number of different ways [. . .]. I would choose to call it ‘literal’, in order to distinguish it from the so-called ‘concrete’ thought processes of psychosis. Hysteric language is a language of equations rather than of representations” (267). “Equations,” here, presumably refer to the piecing together of the hysteric’s variability, with which language, as representational, is at odds.

It is thus vital to begin with a text that so quintessentially takes up the question of sexed bodies that are problematically tied to particular symptoms. Sigmund Freud’s *Dora*, his well-known case study of a patient “Dora,” is a fitting context in which to understand how “the body” stands through linguistic constructions. Hysteria is traced on the female body through the language that Freud uses, or leaves out, in *Dora*. *Dora/Dora* is language: *Dora/Dora* “becomes” the shape of the nebulous and therefore uncontrollable psychoanalytic subject. As psychoanalytic and linguistic subject, *Dora* is marked as a socially constructed body that has an assumed correspondence to a female morphology. The reference here is the vagina (as the site of castration), which is conceptualized as an “unspecific and unlocatable” sexual organ compared to the penis; in short women’s bodies are read as amorphous. Grosz expands this notion and argues that corporeal femininity has been constructed as uncontrollable flow:

Can it be that in the West, in our time, the female body has been constructed not only as a lack or absence but with more complexity, as a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid; as formless flow; as viscosity, entrapping, secreting; as lacking not so much or simply the phallus but self-containment-not a cracked or porous vessel, like a leaking ship, but a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order? I am not suggesting that this is how women are, that it is their ontological status. Instead, my hypothesis is that women’s corporeality is inscribed as a mode of seepage. (203)

Grosz outlines the construct of the female body as one that is unable to be physically or psychically settled. Regarding hysteria, Grosz’s use of the word *engulf* points to a swallowing or overwhelming, not only of the female subject of herself but also, potentially, of those with whom she comes into contact (as will be demonstrated in Eliot’s “Hysteria”). This female bodily instability significantly comes through in Freud’s (therapeutic and linguistic) “treatment” of *Dora*.

Grosz, then, allows a contemporary re-evaluation of *Dora* to move beyond female corporeality as “lack,” but not necessarily separate from reading the female body as biologically “castrated.” In other words, Freud’s account of hysteria linguistically constructs *Dora* as formlessness, as needing a sense of shape based on what is missing or disordered “within” her. By narrating her hysteria, Freud imposes a shape of *Dora* for the reader, but the text is his shape of her, never belonging to her. This shaping is apparent when Freud initially

explains his methodology for examining Dora's dreams: "The wording of these dreams was recorded immediately after the sitting, and they thus afforded a *secure point of attachment* for the chain of interpretations and recollections which proceeded from them" (Freud, Dora 4-emphasis added). Freud's diction stabilizes the influx of meanings that Dora's dreams contain; if interpreting Dora's dreams will come to reveal the truth of her illness, then "securing" them suggests that her "internal disturbance" has no control and physically manifests throughout her body. The "secure point of attachment" that Freud names must be understood through imagining the female body, as genitally determined by Freud, in the function of multiplicity, as corporeally unlocatable. So, Dora's "corpus" is Dora: the text both rhetorically reproduces hysterical symptoms while simultaneously restricting, or ordering, them and "is" her body itself, a body needing a (genital) attachment that it lacks in order to garner some sense.

This "secure point of attachment" situates Dora's hysteria as operating in the same scope as the presumed uncontrollability of her explanations: "[. . .] this has been done [altering the order of Dora's explanations] for the sake of presenting the case *in a more connected form*" (Freud, Dora 4-emphasis added). Here, the need to "connect" further connotes a chaotic corporeality on Dora's part. To Freud, not only do her explanations need to be "connected," but they need to be "in a more connected form." Form should be taken to correspond to the form of Dora the text as well as the corporeal "form" of Dora the woman. Both "forms"-the bodily and linguistic-present the "truth" or "origins" of Dora's hysteria; this "truth," revealed through her hysteric language (which Freud "connects" together), is made to seem inextricable from the female specificity of her bodily form.

Even when he discusses the sexed specificity of bodies, Freud continues to construct the female genitals as an amorphous, or even invisible, entity that can neither take shape in language nor occupy a formal position on the body. This construction is particularly apparent when Freud "generalizes" sexed bodies in discussing the pertinence of excremental functions to sexual activity. Although "the genitals" in the following quotation should be understood as a universal sense of sexual organs, the female body all but disappears: "[. . .] the genitals can act as a reminder of the excremental functions; and this applies especially to the male member, for that organ performs the function of micturition as well as the sexual function" (Freud, Dora 24). Freud uses the word *especially*, which indicates that he does not completely neglect regarding the body as something other than male; however because of the implied differences that he points out, his *especially* can only problematically be dismissed as not adhering to a phallogocentric concept of bodies and the sexual developments therein.

When Freud does attempt a "specification" of female genitalia, this "specificity" defines as multiplicity and polymorphism; in other words, according to Grosz (who references Kristeva, Douglas, and Irigaray) female corporeality never has, in psychoanalytic definitions, the privilege of determinable limits, whether in physical shape or, in the case of hysteria, in correlating specific symptoms to a

“genuine” or “fixed” cause. As an example, note the following quotation in which Freud addresses speaking to women and girls about “sexual matters”: “A gynaecologist [sic], after all, under the same conditions, does not hesitate to make them [women and girls] submit to uncovering every possible part of their body” (Freud, Dora 41). Once again, the diction here points to a body that is unable to be specifically contained; “every *possible* part” suggests that there is an *impossibility* inherent in detailing female corporeality as other than uncontrollability and multiplicity. These literary elements of Dora connect to those of Eliot’s poetry—both “Hysteria” and “Love Song.” Like Dora, remarkably similar conceptions of female bodily existence take shape, namely in the ways that the male body stands alongside these conceptions as “disparate” to the male psyche.

Reminiscent of Dora, female corporeality is figured in “Hysteria” as not only multiple but unlocatable. Eliot begins “Hysteria” with, “As she laughed I was aware of becoming involved in her laughter and being a part of it” (17). Although the speaker seems to be the one unable to control where he is in relation to her laughter, the laughter itself becomes an engulfing force, like the “spreadability” of hysteria being “randomly” marked on non-corresponding sites of the body. In the poem, Eliot’s word choice presupposes a fear of the “unknown” of the female body; “Hysteria” constructs an anxiety around this “unknown.” Similar to an awareness of “becoming involved in her laughter” the sexualized “short gasps” in the speaker’s being “drawn in by short gasps” (Eliot, “Hysteria” 17) further outlines a de-specified female corporeality: the abstraction of the gasps as entities unto themselves still “belong” to the female subject, all of which are drawing the speaker in. But into where is the speaker being drawn? Reading the “short gasps” as an indicator of sexual activity, the “in” where the speaker is being drawn can be read as simultaneously multiple and unspecific: the throat and vagina of the poem’s female subject become one nebulous entity, functioning to extend beyond itself and absorb its surroundings.

This amorphousness of the female body is underlined even further as the poem continues: “lost finally in the dark caverns of her throat, bruised by the ripple of unseen muscles” (Eliot, “Hysteria” 17). That her “throat” contains “unseen muscles” marks the above-mentioned anxiety that surrounds the female body. Similar to Freud’s failure to (or fear of) delineating specificity to female corporeality, what is “unseen” in the poem not only remains so, but also “bruises” the speaker: the word *bruise* referring to both psychological and physical damage. So, the “dark caverns” fittingly serve as a reminder of Freud’s notion of female sexuality as a “dark continent,” an unknowable and dangerous “place.” This darkness figures the internal nature of the vagina as a morphological jungle, extending to the entire surface of the body. Thus, when the speaker of the poem indicates being “lost,” he is not simply situating the throat as vaginal interiority, but is naming a troubling fluidity in which the problem of representation links directly to the “problem” of women’s bodies.

Yet in "Love Song," the "problem" moves beyond a specifically female body. Although "Love Song" mentions women (who are mostly fleeting in the multiple scenes of the poem: "In the room the women come and go" (Eliot, "Love Song" 6, 7)), it is the male body that is in crisis; this crisis hinges on the need to disavow a femininity that is not only tied to aging in the poem but also to the inability to locate this male body. In other words, the male body in "Love Song" is all over, it is specified only through what it seems to come into contact with or observe: the male body absorbs its surroundings, like (female) fluidity "needing" a patriarchal container to give it shape or meaning. Male corporeality in the poem is thus dislocated; dislocation denotes a lack of being in the "correct" location but also denotes a displacement of a body part. The "correct" location for the male body would be that of phallic masculinity. <sup>3</sup> Therefore the male body in the poem can neither be fixed nor be in one place, which not only makes it damaged or abject but also makes it feminized, and thus corporeal. Stephen Frosh explains the inherent separation of male self-identification from corporeality:

Where men claim to be separate from the body, the body is repressed: men act as if we do not know it, as if it has no part in our experience. Moreover, with an ideology based on an objectifying trajectory, it ceases to be possible to adequately construe the self-to make sense of one's own experience of uncertainty and emotional confusion

. (104) Frosh goes on to explain the fragility of masculinity, which depends on repressing the body's materiality: that is, the location of the male self, to Frosh, is outside a body, unconnected and not readily acknowledged. The body in "Love Song" is a material one, which is problematic to phallic masculinity. As Frosh argues, phallic male bodies are constructed to be separate from the material body, so the speaker's body becomes feminized in making the reader aware of its (aging) materiality throughout the poem. A similar (dis)connection to the body can be observed in looking at hysteria. As previously discussed, hysterical symptoms are those that are manifested on the body without an organic explanation, psychological disturbances that are displaced and re-constituted as physical symptoms. To complicate the question, Monique David-Menard articulates that the displacement of hysterical symptoms on the body deems the hysteric to be regarded only in terms of her symptoms, "without" a body: the hysteric "has no body, for something in the history of her body could not be formulated, except in symptoms" (David-Menard 66). In "Love Song," the speaker's "symptoms" are his various body parts and their independent functions that are detached from a whole sense of a body.

Thus the male body in "Love Song" is, in a sense, locatable in the poem, but only as far as this body is fragmentary and piecemeal. Even as fragments, these body parts are represented through symptomatic effects instead of entities in their own right. For instance, it is the thinness of his extremities (Eliot, "Love Song" 7); the balding of his head (9); and the thinning of his hair (7) instead of the extremities, head, and hair themselves that define the speaker's body. These corporeal "pieces" recur as the poem progresses, and the "uncertainty and emotional confusion" (Frosh 104) of the speaker becomes integrated in these physical

descriptions: "Shall I part my hair behind?" (Eliot, "Love Song" 11). This body "weeps" and "fasts" (9) but never seems to do so as an integrated whole: the body becomes the weeping and fasting, rather than a body that weeps and fasts. "Love Song" configures these different parts and zones as hysteric; they seem to have no connection to the whole of the body, since there is no "whole body" of the speaker that can be identified. As a pastiche of "hysterogenic" zones, the speaker's body has an unsettling relationship to his "body" as necessarily having erotogenic zones. Freud's work on tying erotogenic zones with hysterogenic zones should be called upon here. He argues, "The character of erotogenicity can be attached to some parts of the body in a particularly marked way. [ . . . ] A precisely analogous tendency to displacement is also found in the symptomology of hysteria. In that neurosis repression affects most of all the actual genital zones and these transmit their susceptibility to stimulation to other erotogenic zones [ . . . ] , which then behave exactly like genitals" (Freud, "Infantile" 49-50). The speaker's body parts/effects are dislocated throughout the poem: they seem to not only be erotogenic zones that are displaced onto other zones, but also as displaced psychic zones with no initial body with which to correspond. David-Menard, in questioning the erotogenic body alongside a physiological sense of the body, brings up the significance of a discontinuity between body images: "Between the body as it intervenes in the unconscious and the body as it functions as an organism there is no relation, for these two realities appear only in two disciplines that lack any common model. In one sense these disciplines refer to the same object, but in another sense they do not, for they transform the object they start with in two specific ways *that have no common model*" (80). The common model these disciplines lack is one that can straddle both a bodily and a mental model, one that, as Grosz argues, should be thought of as inextricably linked to each "discipline" to which David-Menard refers.

Critiquing the work of Paul Schilder, Grosz extends the discussion of body images thus: "it is a social relation, in which the subject's experience of its own body is connected to and mediated by others' relations to their own bodies and to the subject's body" (Volatile 68). Grosz specifies that "the body image" is a male body image; for example, to Grosz, a body image after a hysterectomy does not "register" in the same way that a phantom limb would (Grosz, Volatile 71). As a feminized, hysterical entity, the speaker, rather than necessarily become female-like, is also non-male, less than human or less than a body. This "not having a body" of the hysterical subject regards both the subject's relationship to his/her own body and that of an outside observer (David-Menard 66). As a hysteric, the speaker takes up what both Grosz and David-Menard states of others' perceptions of the body as tied into self-perception: "I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,/And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat,/and snicker,/And in short, I was afraid" (Eliot, "Love Song" 9). The speaker's "moment of greatness," which can be associated with masculine fame, is transitory; the Footman is both death and the outside world "snickering" at his deteriorated masculinity and youth, which the fragments that make up his body translate as. This "greatness" as a mental state also links to a deterioration of

sexual functions. To further the question of “greatness,” Rachel Maines emphasizes the components of hysteria that involve sexual functioning: “The hysterical disorder supposedly prevented the female patient from enjoying sex in the ‘normal’ way, that is, in the form of heterosexual coitus. [. . .] [H]ysteria in both sexes was associated with contractures and functional paralysis” (44). Contractures, then, could also presumably be displaced onto the male genitals, making the man “less than a man.” This is significant in pointing to the speaker’s “greatness” against the out of control status of his body, putting the vagueness of the cause in question: is it the anxiety that causes the symptom or the symptom that leads to the anxiety about it? In any case, this vicious cycle seems to be part of regarding the hysterical body as chaotic, without order or predictability.

As chaotic, the male body is never in one place in the poem. The reader gets bits and pieces of the male speaker, but the instability of this speaker is what is at stake in locating the decentralized male body. This decentralization comes through in the very first lines of the poem, “Let us go then, you and I” (Eliot, “Love Song” 5). Because the instability of who is “you” and who is “I,” the first lines can be read as self-referential, indicating the instability of identity.<sup>4</sup> According to Marjorie Perloff, the first line includes the split between the id and the ego but moves beyond this split, suggesting a multiplicity of voices and perspectives: “The pronouns ‘you and I,’ [. . .] are not just self and mask, id and ego, or whatever binaries have been proposed over the years as central to the poem. For the poem’s perspective [. . .] is always unstable, repeatedly shifting, giving us multiple and conflicting views of the subject” (24). Perloff’s argument for multiplicity is an important one, but sexual difference, which is presumably included in “whatever binaries,” needs further attention. George Williamson, on the other hand, questions the pronoun referents regarding sex, but moves away from any sense that the “you and I” and “femininity and masculinity” can inclusively be attributed to a male-bodied speaker: “The ‘I’ is the speaker, but who is the ‘you’ addressed? The title would suggest a lady, but the epigraph suggests a scene out of the world, on a submerged level. Is the ‘I’ giving in to a lady? Going to a more acceptable rendezvous?” (Williamson 59). Williamson’s questions, though potentially outdated, can be re-posed not to a “separate” lady, but to the “less acceptable rendezvous” of femininity constructions and the male body. So, “the submerged level” that Williamson states can be re-constituted as the contemporary disordering of gendered conceptions necessarily following sex characteristics.

Both Perloff and Williamson, then, fail to extend their discussions to the notion of a feminized male body in “Love Song.” The I/you split is the splitting of sexed binaries that are located on the male body itself, as being other than masculine and the anxiety that surrounds the speaker in this position. As Perloff suggests, there is a multiplicity inherent in this linguistic split, but multiplicity corresponds to a crisis of identity for the speaker. The following lines demonstrate the speaker’s unlocatability that translates onto the body itself: “And I have known the eyes already, known them all-/The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,/And when

I am formulated [ . . . ]” (Eliot, “Love Song” 8). “I” in these lines become “eye” as much as “I” and “you” may be construed as one and the same. The “eyes that fix you” determine that the body, in an unstable, multiple position is “fixed” as such; in other words the “eyes” are the bodily “I” of the speaker, who, in the crisis of being feminized, must defer this feminization to “you.” That there is more than one “eye” underlines the constructions of female sexuality as “genitally multilocational, plural, ambiguous, polymorphous” (Grosz, *Volatile* 83); the “I” of the speaker becomes the plural and multiply corporeal “eyes.” Thus, when the speaker is “formulated,” he is formulated according to the paradigms of female corporeality.

Nonetheless, this formulation is in a “phrase,” which references the construction of the body through the language of the poem itself. Poetic language, then, must be called upon here in order to understand how language works into the hysterical rendering of the male body. Wayne Koestenbaum writes, “Hysteria now implies a linguistic condition [ . . . ] it has also affected men, paralyzing them, sheltering them from exigencies of the bed and the battlefield, opening them up to passivity as a sexual and social position” (112). He goes on to articulate Eliot’s “high modernist” poetic style as being aesthetically similar to a type of hysteria (Koestenbaum 113). In short, the structure of a poem such as “Love Song” (Koestenbaum discusses *The Waste Land*) is one of unpredictability and fragmentation. There is no concrete sense of the body; it is associated more with hysterical femininity than as an identifiable marker of the male poet of the era. Koestenbaum also brings up a misogynistic/homophobic streak regarding an epistolary exchange between Eliot and Conrad Aiken, an exchange that “draws our attention to the overdetermined figure [ . . . ] of the female body and its reproductive functions as analogues or images of linguistic offenses and disorder” (Li 324).<sup>5</sup> Both Eliot and Aiken “use” menstruation and female bodily flows in this exchange almost as a substitute for their own writing (or in response to each other’s writing). But while Koestenbaum suggests that the feminine qualities of Eliot’s work can be likened to a kind of homosocial relationship with Ezra Pound, Li describes their exchange as more like a female fluidity similar to Grosz’s theory of female body constructions.

Turning back to “Love Song” and Grosz, female embodiment and engulfment seem to “spread” throughout the poem. The time that “you and I” are destined to go is “When the evening is spread out against the sky” (Eliot, “Love Song” 5). As discussed earlier, “you and I,” at best, is the ambivalence of a male body in a feminized position; so, if a suitable moment to “go” (to die?) is during the spreading out of the evening, this spreading must always remain at a distance from the speaker. Through its spreading, figured as a kind of contaminating, female embodiment contains and overwhelms the speaker who is trying to be distant from it. This female spreading can also be detected in the yellow fog that “Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening” (Eliot, “Love Song” 6). Once again, the self-reflexive element of “you and I” is re-figured through the notion of “licking one’s own tongue.” The body is uncontrollable in these lines; it is

decidedly infinite. There is a moving beyond and spreading outward like the evening against the sky, but the spreading of the tongue becomes “marginal” as it becomes located “in the corners of the evening.” Even so, these “corners” are dislocated space since they are not delineated; the corners are multiple, infinite yet remain marginal in their being corners. It seems fitting, then, that this is the male body’s stance toward an appropriated female embodiment: one that is marginal yet overwhelming.

Also regarded as marginal, or secondary to humans, animals, or animal imagery is significant to how the male body moves away from a secure bodily representation to a devolved, susceptible, almost non-entity (similar to Butler’s argument regarding Plato’s work). Beginning with an amorphous fog that links to aforementioned notions of a chaotic female corporeality, the speaker’s body is read through what it is not: the yellow fog. Peter Nicholls argues that in “Love Song,” “we learn much about what the speaker is not and what he should have been, but almost nothing about what he is. [. . .] Prufrock exists only in tension with the other voices that surround him” (181). Therefore, while it may be difficult to make a claim for the speaker’s body as the fog itself, the fog seems to take over the speaker’s subjectivity as the focal point of the poem moves from the speaker to an “objective” sense of the fog. The fog initially becomes a domesticated animal: the yellow fog “rubs its back” and “muzzle on window-panes” (Eliot, “Love Song” 6); however the fog does not remain fog but turns into smoke, which eventually escapes the confines of the interior (house?) and then “slides along the street” (6) while returning to “rubbing its back upon window-panes” (6). The changeability in these few lines is slight but important. Fog is a natural element, an effect of certain weather conditions. Smoke, on the other hand, is usually the result of something manufactured or created, a “dirty” or toxic by-product. That the fog turns into smoke aligns with the anxiety of the male body “turning” into the “dirty” or “unnatural” elements of the female body.<sup>6</sup> In other words, because there may barely be a perceptible difference between fog and smoke, the anxiety comes through in terms of sexual difference not being accounted for: a crisis of male embodiment.

But the notion of embodiment is what is at stake in “Love Song.” There is no concrete, identifiable body-whether it is animal or human-in the shapeless fog/smoke. The snippets of body parts that the poem mentions continually get displaced onto one another: in the above quotations, “back” equates with “muzzle” and “muzzle” then turns into “back.” Not so unlike the female figure’s “throat-vaginal” entity in “Hysteria” as separate from the male speaker but threatening to take over him, the smoke/fog of “Love Song” remains at a perilous distance from the speaker. The movement from a seeming interior (“window-panes”) to exterior (“street”) also functions to take over the space of male body. In the aforementioned lines, there is no distinguishable space between outside and inside, so that contamination is not only all the more threatening but is also without “definition” (a degree of clear form). If women’s sexed corporeality is “interior” and there is no distinction between interior and exterior in the poem,

“Love Song” once again spells out the crisis that the male body must confront in becoming other than phallic. The sexually suggestive “rubbing” of the fog/smoke also lends to the distancing from the speaker, pointing once again to the need to be separate from female-bodied associations, in this case, sexuality: the anxiety of confronting the “overbearing” sexuality of women’s bodies, much like the speaker in “Hysteria” deciding “if the shaking of her breasts could be stopped, some of the fragments of the afternoon might be collected” (Eliot, “Hysteria” 17) and being “drawn in by short gasps” (17)-this immediacy of potentially getting lost “in the female body” seems to be the most threatening to the speaker. In this instance, the verb tense switches from “rubs” to “rubbing,” a switch from a seemingly continuous action (“rubs”) to the immediacy of the action as it occurs (“rubbing”). Susan McCabe discusses Stein’s continuous present (429), which contrasts Eliot’s use of historical texts in his work. Despite the many classical textual references in “Love Song,” the poem seems atemporal rather than necessarily pining for the past.

Switches in tense, even if not as severe as the above example, are at the very core of “Love Song”’s treatment of time, (the objective measurement that is experienced subjectively). The instability of time, of the temporal moment of the poem, disrupts the male speaker’s association with his own body while simultaneously forcing him to come to terms with its feminization in aging. Like the displacement of hysterical symptoms, “Love Song” displaces the present moment onto the future through the repetition of “there will be time” (Eliot, “Love Song” 6). In short, this repetition evokes the refusal to acknowledge both the present time and failed notions of masculinity. The slippage of time is the dislocation of the aging body onto another place and time; however the need for the speaker to convince himself that there will be time “for a hundred visions and revisions” (7) is complicated in that the present time of the poem, that is, the postwar modern era, is not suited for a kind of “vision” or “revision.” McCabe writes that modernists “had to negotiate the literal, post-traumatic, bodily disfigurements caused by World War I” (430). McCabe refers here to Stein, who, unlike Eliot, wrote without reference to traditional literary works; Stein wanted to write in the present and have her work aesthetically reflect the present post-war “moment.” So, the transcendent view of the world in “Love Song” (the time for “a hundred visions and revisions”) can only problematically be accommodated because of the reality of mass death experienced in the war.

The “visions” and “revisions” that are slated for the future erase the reality of the physical body itself being subject to age or expire in the future. Tense, besides denoting temporality, also signifies physical and/or mental nervousness, a fitting description for the male-bodied position in the poem. The speaker is nervous, fraught with tension; he has control neither over his body nor time. Tying Prufrock’s absence in the poem to Eliot’s interest in “the effect of fragments from earlier works” (Nicholls 182), Nicholls states that these fragments “are now drawn into the ‘vortex’ of the present” (182). So, the spiraling, drawing-in motion of the present is, once again, strikingly similar to the female speaker (in “Hysteria”).

Can this “vortex of the present,” of modernism, then be regarded as a vortex of the female? The time “to murder and create” (Eliot, “Love Song” 6) approaches this question. Juxtaposing death with birth dissociates the body from a normative sense of aging: the cyclic process of human time gets controlled in “murder” and “creation” rather than have any agency, much like the speaker’s wanting to control the uncontrollable femininity that is being manifested in his body. Conventional and historical notions of gender and sex also come through in “murdering” and “creation”: murder ties into men fighting the war while creation signifies the female body’s ability to reproduce, and more significantly, female as body. Of course, that murder is tied with men and creation is tied with women undeniably essentializes corporeal binaries; however the crisis in “Love Song” is the disruption of gender binaries that the speaker embodies in being sexed male. Ironically, the speaker centralizes some of the most telling moments of this anxiety by putting these instances in brackets: “[They will say: ‘How his hair is growing thin!’]” (Eliot, “Love Song” 7), “[They will say: ‘But how his arms and legs are thin!’]” (7). This bracketing off represents the speaker’s anxieties surrounding sexual difference and the potential blurring of these differences in his own body. Earlier discussions of animal imagery are also relevant here; the speaker’s body seems to be other than human, perhaps more insect-like than animal-like. His exclamation of what “they” will say, “how his arms and legs are thin!” (7), degenerates the speaker from the previously mentioned domesticated cat or dog to a spider-like organism. In this insect-like state, the speaker’s body becomes even less graspable. But as a “spider,” the speaker, rather than straddle both male and female positions, can be said to be male position. Grosz’s discussion of the mating habits of the black widow and the praying mantis qualify this male positioning of the speaker, since these insects’ habits link to notions of male desire, anxiety, and the female body: “These two species have come to represent an intimate and persistent link between sex and death, between pleasure and punishment, desire and revenge, which may prove significant in understanding certain key details of male sexuality and desire and, consequently, in specifying elements or features of female sexuality and subjectivity” (Grosz, *Space* 188). Using the work of Alphonso Lingis and Roger Caillois, Grosz notes that the female mantis’s devouring of the male mantis is particularly noteworthy since she devours the male during sex (192). The speaker’s position is like that of the male mantis: he is helpless against female desire, “pinned and wriggling on the wall” (Eliot, “Love Song” 8), and like the male mantis, can only succumb to the threat of female corporeality in all its devouring and engulfing forms. Additionally, he states, “I should have been a pair of ragged claws/Scuttling across the floors of silent seas” (9). What he “should have been” almost radicalizes what Grosz writes of the male mantis; rather than merely retain an insect-like bodily form, he “should have been” the fragment-the pincers (“pair of ragged claws”)-of an oceanic bottom-dweller “scuttling across the floor.”

The speaker’s body then moves from the insect/crustacean-world to an even more disembodied location: not just waves but the sea foam that forms on waves. The dislocation of the male body conceivably becomes disintegration.

Like the foam on waves, the male body is fleeting and can be likened to the “women [who] come and go” (Eliot “Love Song” 6, 7). But unlike the readiness in naming the women in “Love Song” as capriciously moving in and out of the scene, the speaker is less forthcoming about his position as somewhat similar. As disembodied, the speaker, defined through his hair toward the end of the poem, “Shall I part my hair behind?” (Eliot, “Love Song” 11), becomes associated with the feminine “white hair of the waves” (11). The “I” disappears in the latter, a disappearance that signifies the uneasy shift from maleness to femaleness—suggesting a “condemnatory ambivalence” toward the female body while simultaneously appropriating the conceptions that surround it. The male body then remains unable to be specifically located unless one names the “location” as the multiple “places” that constantly shift in the poem. What “Love Song” demonstrates is that the divisions between sexed bodies are not so clear, an ambiguity that is internalized by the speaker and that relies on his escaping constructions of femininity, which can only be as realizable as escaping the inevitability of a body that will age with time.

<sup>1</sup> For example, see Manju Jain’s work, which gives a line-by-line analysis of “Love Song” and points to references such as Dante, the Bible, and Shakespeare.

<sup>2</sup> Used by both Lacan and Derrida, phallogocentric is the combination of a phallic-centered and a word-centered power structure.

<sup>3</sup> Grosz explains phallicizing the male body: “Part of the process of phallicizing the male body, of subordinating the rest of the body to the valorized functioning of the penis, with the culmination of sexual activities occurring, ideally at least, in sexual penetration and male orgasm, involves the constitution of the sealed-up impermeable body” (Volatile 200-01).

<sup>4</sup> The reference, here, goes without saying: see Lacan.

<sup>5</sup> Koestenbaum and Li have contradicting views regarding one of the letters. Koestenbaum asserts that it is Eliot who writes, “Have you tried Kotex for it? [. . .] Used with success by Blue-eyed Claude the Cabin Boy” (Koestenbaum 123; Li 324), to Aiken, who was in the hospital for an anal malady. Li, on the other hand, argues that Aiken wrote the “Kotex” letter in response to a medical description of female discharge sent to him by Eliot. (Koestenbaum also writes that Eliot sent the medical description to Aiken but maintains that Eliot also sent the “Kotex” letter.)

<sup>6</sup> Grosz, in referring to the work of Mary Douglas, explains that dirt, rather than necessarily likened to filth, also connotes disorder: “Dirt [. . .] is that which is not in its proper place, that which upsets or befuddles order. [. . .] Dirt signals a site of possible danger to social and individual systems, a site of vulnerability insofar as the status of dirt as marginal and unincorporable always locates sites of potential threat to the system and to the order it both makes possible and problematizes” (Grosz, Volatile 192).

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**Yetta Howard is a doctoral student in the Department of English at the University of Southern California, where she also is an Assistant Lecturer in the Writing Program.**