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‘Rimbaud in Embryo’: Collaborative Reproduction in T. S. Eliot and Hart Crane

In ‘The Serious Artist’, an essay published in *The New Freewoman* in 1913, Ezra Pound writes that in communicating an idea the poet preserves ‘some accurate trait of the emotive impression, or of the sheer character of the fostering or parental emotion’.¹ Much has been made of the part Pound played in creating a ‘poetics of co-dependency’ in modernism, most famously by serving as the ‘caesarean surgeon’ or ‘sage homme’ to T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*.² Less remarked on is the connection he makes here between poetry’s emotional origins and a biologically framed discourse of poetic creation. In ‘The Serious Artist’, the notion that evolutionary processes lead to the destruction of stages of human development is mapped onto the ‘apt use of metaphor’ in relation to poetic emotion, as if the correct use of a figure might ensure that what Pound earlier describes as certain ‘lines of demarcation’ are kept in place.³ The ambivalence of these lines of demarcation and their relation to the mobilisation of poetic emotion are taken up in Eliot’s work, nowhere more so than in the context of collaboration, which presents a conceptual challenge to the poet. This article seeks to trace how metaphors of reproduction surface in the context of collaboration in Eliot’s work, how his theories of creativity are bound up with a theory of origins and how they manifest most insistently as shadowy forms that reveal the poet’s creative mind as involuntarily collaborative.

A connection between theories of creativity and a concern with origins permeates Eliot’s work: in one review, he instructs a critic that their methods might be sharpened by a study of *The Origin of Species*.⁴ This article, however, is less concerned with evolutionary ideas than in the way that Poundian metaphors of embryonic and foetal development are crucial to Eliot’s early theories of creativity and collaboration. In Eliot’s ‘Reflections on Contemporary Poetry (IV)’ (hereafter ‘Reflections’), published in *The Egoist* in 1919, a discernible tentativeness exposes the unease around emotion that threads through his ideas of collaboration and, in particular, the notion that a meeting of two poetic minds is a ‘cause of development’.⁵ As late as ‘The Three Voices of Poetry’

(1954), Eliot conceptualizes poetry's developmental stage as 'an inert embryo' that the poet is tasked with bringing to life.⁶

Discussion of embryonic forms in the 1910s and 1920s was inseparable from the contemporary fixation on eugenics, a movement from which Eliot drew an ambivalent language of breeding and degeneration in *The Waste Land*.⁷ When Eliot writes about collaboration, however, such language is replaced by the fertile possibilities of what might be termed embryonic knowledge – that is, a literary process that entails an involuntary collaboration on the part of one of its members. Whereas the family romance in Eliot's pocket epic seems to have been rendered sterile within heterosexual relations ('What you get married for if you don't want children?' is an unanswered question that reverberates through the text), collaboration offers the potential for new, queer kinds of affective and erotic sensibilities that might be borne in this indeterminate space.⁸ Though Eliot's collaborative practices and theories of collaboration are oft-told stories, they are worth revisiting precisely because they are indicative of a conceptual messiness at the heart of authorial relations in modernism. If the author function, as Foucault argues, comes into existence in accordance with certain historical constructions of individuality to make the author identifiable and thus accountable for their own transgressions, collaboration might be conceived of as a way of evading the law, of blurring the lines between the certainty of authorship and the indeterminacy of citation.⁹ The metaphors that accrue to collaboration in Eliot's work, therefore, reveal something of the fantasy that is the precondition for his forging of a poetic community.

Recent criticism has interrogated the image that Eliot provides of the poet as a surgeon-like figure, who employs antiseptic methods to impersonal, abstract ends, putting pressure on the idea, as expressed in the essay on 'Philip Massinger' (1920) that 'an internal incoherence of feelings [...] signifies nothing'.¹⁰ Emerging from this critical turn, drawing out the affective dimension of his early poetic theories, is a focus on the year 1919. The poet and critic was being drawn to strange intimacies and surrenderings of agency, while cultivating an aesthetics of impersonality, which will provide him with a poetic shield to the excess of poetic emotion. The scientific methodology to

which the later essays ascribe can consequently be read as a means of tempering the early work's desire for a more radical, erotic passivity. The dominant affect of Eliot's early critical writing is a yearning for a bond with another poet, a fantasy of merging that is always uncanny because it is bound up, as Rochelle Rives notes, with the 'imperative that the poet set himself "among the dead"'.¹¹ Allied to this intimate bond with a poet from beyond the grave is at once an acknowledgement of the importance of loosening the boundaries of the self for new poetic generation and the potential destructiveness of such desire.

Julie Taylor defines affect as 'non-intentional corporeality'.¹² Its place in Eliot's early criticism emphasizes how poetry is there conceived of as developing from the virtual realm. An affective notion of literary production permits boundary breaking intimacies that are elsewhere seen as a threat to poetic identity and authority. Collaboration emerges as an imitative process that troubles modernist literary production, demanding a rethinking of authorial agency and the boundaries of literary works. This article begins with a reappraisal of Eliot's theories on collaboration, which were also central to the way that other poets in the period came to conceptualize their own literary relations. It will then examine how these theories were taken up by one poet who is often positioned at the opposite end of the modernist literary spectrum to Eliot: Hart Crane. Bringing these two poets into proximity, this article will demonstrate how the foetus-as-metaphor informs both of their collaborative practices. More specifically, it will consider how the fantasy involved in Eliot's ideas of collaboration leads to slippages between co-labour, imitation, and theft.

'The Irresponsible Foetus'

In 'Reflections', Eliot offers an elaborate concept of bonding, grounded in states of fantasy:

a feeling of profound kinship, or rather a peculiar personal intimacy, with another, probably a dead author. It may overcome us suddenly, on first or after long acquaintance; it is certainly a crisis; and when a young writer is seized with a passion of this sort he may be changed, metamorphosed almost, within a few weeks even, from a bundle of second-hand sentiments into a person. [...] We do not imitate, we are changed; and our work is the work of the changed man; we have not borrowed, we have been quickened, and we become bearers of a tradition.¹³

Imitation is seen as a vital and necessary process in the poet's development yet remains wholly individualizing to the extent that it barely acknowledges those bodies by whom the poet is brought into maturity. Eliot's more sober and more guarded later essay on 'The Function of Criticism' (1923) shifts its focus from creative development to the authoritative end of 'true judgement', yet is also replete with the collaborative language of 'common pursuit', 'co-operative labour', and 'unconscious community'.¹⁴ The tone of both essays suggests an ongoing desire for contact, but as the earlier piece reveals, this can only be achieved through a literal merging of the other poet's words with Eliot's own, thus producing phantom-like states. This suggests the contradictions of certain strains of modernism's public image of itself as abstract and unemotional; the poet-critic's most ascetic ideas are bound up with more ambivalent unconscious modes.

Eliot's theories of collaboration have been seen by Richard Badenhause as essential to all aspects of his oeuvre, contextualized by Jewel Spears Brooker within his larger theoretical and cultural programmes, and read by Wayne Koestenbaum as indicative of a queer 'double signature' which remains tangible within his work.¹⁵ This article turns its attention instead to how certain reproductive metaphors, and the creative methodology they espouse, depend on a fantasy that the work must at the same time eschew (what kind of work does fantasy do and its relation to collaboration is one of its implicit questions). For Freud, fantasy is 'constructed by a process of amalgamation' and it is thus constantly eroding the distinction between interior and exterior worlds that it sets up.¹⁶ Fantasy is the imagined fulfillment of a frustrated wish; it is both intensely private

and the condition of sociality.¹⁷ If fantasy is a shield – a psychic wall – then it is also the grounds by which subjects establish an ethical relation with one another. To consider Eliot’s theories of collaboration is thus to see how they are inseparable from the fantasies that sustain them. The danger with fantasy is that it always runs ahead of itself, that it forgets what Eliot refers to as ‘the possibility of co-operative activity’ and the means by which it seeks to achieve its own ends.¹⁸ It is worth pausing here to consider the paradox of a theory of collaboration that is published in a journal titled *The Egoist*. As the reincarnation of Dora Marsden’s feminist magazine *The New Freewoman*, *The Egoist*’s very name suggests the contradictions of individuality, femininity, and collaboration that lie at the heart of modernism, revealing both the fantasies on which these literary products depend and the revisionary principle at their heart.¹⁹

In the conclusion to the lectures collected in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), Eliot encourages the idea that the barrier breaking, self-othering experience of the ‘efflux of poetry’ is accompanied by a feeling less like ‘positive pleasure’ than ‘a sudden relief from an intolerable burden’.²⁰ By contrast, the role played by fantasy in his earlier notions of collaboration foregrounds the pleasure imagined in contact. The common ground that the poet seeks is revealed as a complicated affair: what Freud terms, in a letter to Fliess, a ‘*protective fiction*’ that haunts Eliot’s subsequent, swift refashioning of collaboration as a simple, clean, productive process (and Freud was himself to revise his thinking of fantasy as protection).²¹ This fiction of intimacy protects the author from not simply an erotic relation in reality but also an understanding of the porousness of identity and creativity, whereby the literary product is made out of a reality that the author does not want to know. Thus, Eliot’s essays move towards tentatively recasting the relationship between creativity, emotion, authority, and originality into more distancing terms. This tendency, exemplified in ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1919), written the same year as ‘Reflections’, is still the prevailing frame through which Eliot’s work is read. The stress in the later essays is on tradition attained by ‘great labour’.²² Earlier on, this is achieved through the virtual pleasure of intimate co-labour and an uncanny, phantom-like connectivity; passion is what makes the poet

authentic in 'Reflections'. Eliot's later suppression of these affective ideas points to the suppressed fantasies they bring to light. This also suggests the importance of pleasure, even in its suppression, in structuring the modernist literary canon more generally.²³

Later reflecting on his own poetic development, Eliot wrote in 1940: 'The taste of an adolescent writer is intense, but narrow: it is determined by personal needs' – a taste which for him was 'to be found in French'.²⁴ Paris in 1910 was 'a place', as Nancy Gish notes, 'where Eliot's many selves could find sustenance'.²⁵ Part of what the city offered Eliot (as with many other American modernists) was a realm of fantasy, one in which he might write, to quote an 1883 letter by Jules Laforgue, 'fantasy poems, with only one aim, to be original at any price'.²⁶ Indeed when Eliot evokes a dead poet that changes one utterly in 'Reflections', he most likely has in mind Laforgue (though a biographical reading might also emphasize the role that Jean Jules Verdenal played in quickening the young American's mind).²⁷ As Eliot writes in 'Modern Tendencies in Poetry' (1920), Laforgue, along with Rimbaud, 'showed how much more use poetry could make of contemporary ideas and feelings, of the emotional quality of contemporary ideas, than one had supposed'.²⁸ The French poet seems to have invaded Eliot's 'youthful consciousness' at this time, leading to 'an outburst of scribbling which we may call imitation', while 'writing under a kind of daemonic possession by one poet' – as Eliot would later describe the occult intensity of his youthful experience of poetry.²⁹

The French signature of his early work reminded Eliot of the importance of a mediating presence in releasing his own distinctive poetic idiom. Laforgue was one of the most important influences on Eliot's early development insofar as he released in him the possibilities of a more unstable poetic language. This instability, which reveals the fissure between unconscious and conscious thought, can be seen most clearly in metaphors that Eliot lifts from Laforgue, most notably that of the foetus. The foetus, as Warren Ramsey notes, was 'one of Laforgue's favourite images' and he uses it metaphorically to suggest new poetic life.³⁰ In Eliot's early work, this foetal metaphor is at once embraced and disavowed and seems deeply connected with his thoughts about

the possibilities of a new affective poetic language that would speak intimately to its generation. In Laforgue's poem 'Complainte du fœtus de poète', the *enfant terrible* who emerges from the mother's womb is orphaned and orientated 'vers l'Orient, / Sous les espèces des baisers inconscients!' (towards the East / communing with varieties of unconscious kisses!).³¹ The foetus as poetic presence seems indicative of a different kind of affect which suggests that the unconscious not only contains all our best ideas but that poetry cannot free itself from the fantasy that sustains it.

The subversive nature of this foetal imagery and its bearing on Eliot's poetic development are apparent in his early poem 'Mr. Apollinax', first published in *Poetry* in September 1916. Read alongside Eliot's collaborative theories, the poem embodies the contradictions that are to be found in male–male forms of bonding and the instability they prompt. It draws upon the latent, strange potential of Laforgue's foetal imagery, connecting it to a subversive vocality, which is suggestive of a knowledge that hovers somewhere between psychic and social reality. This subversiveness is ascribed to the arrival at Harvard of Bertrand Russell, whose laugh, 'like an irresponsible foetus', destabilizes the poem's lyricism, emitting a sound that is:

Like the old man of the sea's

Hidden under coral islands

Where worried bodies of drowned men drift down in the green silence,

Dropping from fingers of surf.³²

This eruptive laughter is indicative of a fantasy that cannot be spoken of directly, yet is registered through a sequence of sexual metaphors that indicate the latent potentiality of a different kind of social bond. The image of the foetus emerges in the poem from the effeminacy that Eliot associates with the figure of Fragilion and the lurid gaze of Priapus, a minor fertility god of male genitalia. The foetus is described as 'irresponsible', yet this irresponsibility is positioned as vital. It appears central to the affect from which poetic ideas emerge, as watery figurations are drawn from the

foetus's 'submarine and profound' laughter. Eliot's struggle to reconcile the psychic instability that he associates with French poetry (as cultivating a space for fantasy) with the more rigid moral codes of his Puritanical New England environs is staged through the uncertainty that Apollinax's troubling yet seductive presence embodies. It is the laughter, in which men's bodies drown or are held (the ambiguity is synonymous with the poem's lyricism), that permits a vision of collaboration and social bonding that is at once disavowed and powerfully evoked. To draw upon French poetry is for Eliot to give voice to a desire for a more porous poetic self, one whose desire to connect with other bodies is constantly being renegotiated by the acknowledgement of the subversive nature of such demands.

A Recombinatory Poetics

In 'Philip Massinger', Eliot suggests that the art of collaboration entails producing a work of art that is 'utterly different from that from which it was torn'. The 'basest' form of imitation, Eliot contends, is the 'least conscious form of borrowing'; bad imitation produces the 'ghost of a metaphor' and is not a 'vital development'. The uncanny, spectral nature that accrues to this badness, however, links it back to the fantasy envisaged in 'Reflections' – a ghostliness that appears inseparable from the good poet's welding of theft which Eliot, at this later point, suggests is what produces 'a true mutation of species'.³³ This ambiguity is heightened still further in relation to the notorious case of Hart Crane's literary appropriation. In a surviving fragment of a 1922 letter to Allen Tate, Crane quotes a passage from Eliot's 'Reflections', suggesting the enduring importance of this essay's model of collaboration to Crane's poetic practice.³⁴ James Longenbach argues that Crane discovered and admired not the Eliot 'of the official pronouncement' but rather the Eliot of 'the power of "the awful daring of a moment's surrender"' and that it is this powerful surrendering that he sought to replicate in his own collaborative poetic practice.³⁵ Crane, however, took Eliot's virtual principle a little too literally in the well-documented case of his use of the work of the

relatively unknown and recently deceased young poet Samuel Greenberg.³⁶ Seemingly drawing upon Eliot's essay, Crane sought to quicken what he described, in another letter from the winter of 1923–24, as a 'Rimbaud in Embryo', positioning the agency-less dead poet's Romantic symbolism as the nascent form which his poetry will merge with and so develop into a more modernist poetic sensibility.³⁷

The primary example of Crane's surrogacy of Greenberg's work is his much commented on reworking of the latter's poem 'Conduct' into his own 'Emblems of Conduct' – a poem, among many other transformations, which he includes, without any acknowledgement of debt to Greenberg, in his first collection *White Buildings* (1926). Crane's purloining of Greenberg's work has predominantly been read in terms of questions of plagiarism.³⁸ Beyond judging Crane's decision, though, lies the cultural context in which such a fluid exchange of work and porousness of literary borders becomes desirable and normalized. The presence of a third figure, Rimbaud, in this literary triangulation is key to understanding this context. When Crane reproduces and adapts Greenberg's poem, imitating Eliot's anti-Romantic turn in *The Waste Land*, he substitutes Greenberg's visionary lyric for a more culturally belated one, turning a painterly vista of 'uneven valley groves' into 'valley graves'. Transforming spiritual imaginings into ghostly remnants of what might have been, he evokes Rimbaud as another hand or presence in the poem. Rimbaud's influence is detectable in Crane's updating of Greenberg's poet as 'painter' into the poet as 'wanderer', whose perambulatory movement is mirrored by the former's more pliable syntax. The reason for bringing Rimbaud into this collaborative–imitative matrix is that the French *poète maudit* represents for Crane, as Laforgue did for Eliot, the possibility of a more unstable poetic ground that is shot through with sexual ambivalence. Rimbaud is the famously precocious poet who defies the values of maturity to live out a life of fantasy, and whose work is characterized by a temporal asynchrony that will become vital to Crane's poetic project. For, as Delmore Schwartz writes, Rimbaud was the poet who 'tried out the whole century in advance'.³⁹ Crane might thus be thought of as developing Greenberg towards a certain kind of poetic adolescence – a temporality that he

locates as the time of his poetry – and as emphatically away from an Eliotic maturity. If, as Arthur Symons writes, Laforgue is ‘the eternally grown up, mature to the point of self-negation’, Crane, via Rimbaud, is able to retain the Romantic values of childhood and to figure a more elastic reimagining of the psychological and sexual understanding of literary influence.⁴⁰ Greenberg’s unformed writing seems to chime for Crane with the notion, set out by Symons in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), that Rimbaud is the eternal child; in updating this young poet’s unformed verse Crane channels a Rimbaudian spirit and brings it into a contemporary American poetics.⁴¹

Fantasy in Eliot’s work – as the grounds for the licence and pleasure of creative production – becomes the precondition for Crane’s own licence to use other texts as he pleases. Such poetic interplay depends upon Crane’s sense of the uneducated, unformed nature of Greenberg’s writing, which seems to require the hand of a more sophisticated poet to bring it to (adolescent) maturity and make it suitably modern. Greenberg’s lack of agency in the creation of this new poetic progeny and the obscuring of his marginal body, on class if not sexual lines, is nonetheless difficult to account for. One possible answer is to frame this bond as an involuntary act of collaboration that sponsors a composite subjectivity. Moving critical attention away from policing the boundaries of a literary work to seeing how they blur might paradoxically allow for a recuperation of Greenberg’s role in this new poetic product. Forms of plagiarism, as Lise Buranen and Alice Myers Roy contend, correspond to phases in ‘the social formation’s development’ and at the beginning of the twentieth century to appropriate a work was still ‘simply part of the “creative process”’.⁴² Directly echoing Eliot’s essay on Massinger, Rachel Galvin provocatively and pertinently argues too that all poetry is in some way a form of theft and that the question of collaboration might be refigured by considering the literary canon not as source but rather as the site of radical and constant transcreation or re-authoring, of a ‘recombinatory poetics’.⁴³ By considering ‘Emblems of Conduct’ not simply as a copy of Greenberg’s ‘Conduct’ but rather as an elaboration and development on it, Crane might be

thought of as bringing Greenberg's work into the future rather than simply appropriating it, opening up, in the process, a new field of relationships between the poems.

If, as Fredric Jameson writes, 'history is what hurts', then this kind of collaborative sensibility, even at its most involuntary, might be read as a means of removing the limits set on individual desires, as a way of legitimizing that which has historically been delegitimized.⁴⁴ Greenberg, as an unpublished, penniless writer, might be thought of as one of those who, as Djuna Barnes writes in *Nightwood* (1936), 'cast a shadow a long way beyond what they are' and in whose invisible presence other histories might be brought to light.⁴⁵ Eliot in his introduction to the novel notes the 'puritan morality' of his youth, the desire for and concealment of knowledge, in which he concedes 'all of us, so far as we attach ourselves to created objects and surrender our wills to temporal ends, are eaten by the same worm'.⁴⁶ In Eliot's work, this deathly image appears inseparable from the surrendering of will that collaboration necessitates and which casts its own shadow over the literary object. The Greenberg controversy reveals the inseparability of fantasy from Eliot's collaborative processes and its ability to disavow poetic origins of all kinds.

The Shadowy Forms of Male Collaboration

'Reflections' eroticizes literary influence and liberates it from conventional understandings of literary property. The circulation of what the essay describes as 'secret knowledge' implies a sexual knowledge that the poet cannot unknow and which lies at the heart of Eliot's collaborative theories. But the threat this eroticism poses is neutralized in being placed within the subjunctive form of the essay, just as the subversive potential that collaboration embodies for Eliot is never allowed its full expression – as it does in Crane's work. The homoerotic currents that circulate around its posited 'genuine affair with a real poet' are protected by the authority of the poet's public, critical role and by his reputation for writing poems in which such currents of feeling are ironicized or distanced – for, as Colleen Lamos argues, 'the elegiac mode' of Eliot's early poetry was a means for him to

‘simultaneously affirm and repudiate same-sex affection’.⁴⁷ In ‘Reflections’, the bond also occurs exclusively with a ‘dead author’, so intimacy is seen as at once without agency and also temporally uncertain. This sexual and temporal errancy creates an uncanny effect in Eliot’s work, which manifests most insistently in the form of shadows. I read these shadowy forms as indicative of an ambivalence of relation – shadows which, in Crane’s work, become explicitly about the possibility of queer intimacy and the creation of a world where the intimacies that are suppressed in Eliot’s early work might find their full expression.

This shadowy poetic state can be seen clearly in Eliot’s early poem ‘The Love Song of Saint Sebastian’, which was written in 1914 but which remained uncollected until the publication of *Inventions of the March Hare* (1996). The poem might consequently be seen as a discarded, possibly suppressed, part of Eliot’s mature post-1919 self-conception. What the poem exposes is the ‘torture and delight’ that the poet locates in the physical (and indeed sexual) process of imitation, whereby the religious language invoked by ‘your neophyte’ takes on a masochistic guise.⁴⁸ This notion of a neophyte is suggestive insofar as it represents a threshold figure that has not yet reached maturity, who lurks between identities, as a kind of interface on which new possibilities of poetic personality are imagined, and who is envisaged as the central player in the collaborative process. In this poem, as in ‘Reflections’, Eliot suggests that we might have youth’s sexuality – and, by extension, the affect that collaboration enables – but only beyond the grave, where it no longer threatens to disrupt the composure of his lines (an instability that is contained in the ‘breathless chuckle underground’, a subversive laughter that connects the poem’s affect to that of ‘Mr. Apollinax’).

A theory of impersonality – of *the egoist* – to return to the title of Eliot’s publication in which these collaborative theories were first espoused – protects the poet against all others, occluding the more combinatory processes that inform the trajectory of Eliot’s work. But its shadowy nature suggests not simply a casting out of this otherness but rather a conceptualization of it as negative. In his 1925 essay on ‘Negation’, Freud writes that it is ‘with the help of the symbol

of negation [that] thinking frees itself'; the shadows in Eliot's work might accordingly be thought of as a way of freeing itself from the 'restrictions of repression' to enrich it with 'material that is indispensable for its proper functioning'.⁴⁹ Writing on the use of mysterious shadows in Romantic and Modernist poetry in general, and Eliot's work in particular, John Hollander contends that what is of interest in Eliot's use of the trope is both how he imagines the 'lengthening of the shadow as a temporal matter' and how his shadows 'make unbridgeable so many conceptual categories', whereby the shadow falls between the paired terms of idea and reality, conception and creation, potency and existence.⁵⁰

What these shadows might be seen to conceptualize, more specifically, is the collaborative energies that are curtailed in Eliot's later published work. The figure of the shadow points towards the ghostly, fantastic authority on which certain strains of the modernist lyric depend. For Crane, however, the subversiveness of collaboration's queer relationality becomes the ground of the poem, whereby shadowy forms are transformed into possibility of new poetic relations. In a 1922 letter, writing about Eliot's influence on him, Crane expresses his desire to break away from '[T]he poetry of negation' which can be 'too dangerously [beautiful] for the mind' and to 'risk the realm of the obvious more, in quest of new sensations, humeurs'.⁵¹ The obvious here might be thought as that which moves out of the realm of shadowy possibility, as in the image from Crane's poem 'Sunday Morning Apples' of 'her purple shadow / Bursting on the winter of the world'.⁵²

The figure of the shadow in Eliot's and Crane's work seems to evade propriety, transforming authorial spaces into shifting outlines in which existent forms metamorphosize into something new. This can be seen most clearly in Crane's work in the figure of the shadow in 'To The Brooklyn Bridge', the opening section of *The Bridge*. This shadowy space is where a forbidden sexuality becomes momentarily visible, allowing him to be at once a 'stranger in America', as Robert Lowell writes in his elegy for Crane, and an emblematic poetic subject.⁵³ So that while his work has often been seen as a failed modernist project, it vitally retains the collaborative energies that Eliot sought to forestall. It might thus be connected to the psychic instability through which he

negotiates the shadowy realm between collaboration and imitation. Darkness is posited as a figure of possibility; it is a symbol, like the Brooklyn Bridge, of the transformative effect of intense currents of feeling. What the shadow reveals is the remnants of the potentiality of an erotics of relation. These pockets of shadow in lyric space might, more particularly, be thought of as accounting for the constant negotiation in Crane's and Eliot's work of the realization and the withdrawal from fantasy. In Eliot's poem 'Suppressed Complex', which he included in a letter to Pound in 1915 with instructions to burn it, and which remained unpublished in Eliot's lifetime, we see the poet as 'a shadow upright in the corner', which is to say as a shadow become man. The poem centres on a woman who lies supine on a bed, who has been read by Koestenbaum as suffering from hysteria in the context of Eliot's own complicated relation to femininity.⁵⁴ But something more seems to be going on in the poem, namely the ecstatic merging in the shadows which gives the speaker a supernatural ability to pass in and out the room – and indeed the poem. The speaker evades the restriction of representation by becoming a shadowy dancer. This joyous, shadowy movement enables him to pass 'out through the window', to alter metaphorically the terms of mimetic representation through a destabilization of identity.⁵⁵ Eliot's speaker, to again draw on Freud, takes 'cognizance of what is repressed' so that he might sustain his unconscious fantasies in the schism of representation which turns the speaker into a spectral figure.⁵⁶ The poet not only relies on the disturbance of woman to give himself form, but relies on it to give himself the most shadowy of forms: to make his own desire invisible.

In another 1915 letter to Pound, Eliot notes that his scatological 'Colombo' and 'Bolo' poems 'never burst into print' on account of Wyndham Lewis's 'puritanical principles'.⁵⁷ The existence of these poems, whose fragments were circulated among male friends including Pound, at what might be considered the shadowy margins of Eliot's oeuvre, nonetheless suggests a homoerotic mode of sexual discovery and exchange which is charted through colonial history.⁵⁸ Each fragment contains a sequence of bawdy, outrageous sexual interactions that read as gratuitous titillation: 'King Bolo's big black bastard queen / She was extremely lecherous. / She kissed the

chaplain on the ear / In fashion most infectious'.⁵⁹ The origins of colonialism, in Eliot's poems, appear inseparable from sexual deviancy, though his raucous fragments refuse to pass judgement on such forms of sexual and linguistic errancy. These fragments depend on an intimate, coterie-style readership for their production and circulation, and their quasi-collaborative methods of composition are inseparable from the illicitness of their modes of exchange. Since collaborative relations and dispersed authorship are bound up with the circulation and representation of marginal identities, the shadowiness of collaborative forms might be read accordingly as making visible that which is invisible – namely the marginal bodies that are kept from much modernist aesthetic discourse. So contextualizing the history of the 'Colombo' and 'Bolo' fragments, which are so hard to square with the rest of Eliot's published work, reveals aspects of the forms of contact that Eliot sought through poetic discourse but was only able to realize in his hidden marginalia. In so coupling new world discovery with homoerotic anxiety, Eliot's work demonstrates a deep (if deeply problematic) understanding of the relation between race, gender, and sexuality, and the importance of queer fascination in establishing how male literary authority is formed and maintained.⁶⁰

If collaboration is a shadowy concept in modernist aesthetics, this is on account of the complex affect that it negotiates and to which it gives rise. Insofar as it is an involuntary practice in Crane's and Eliot's work, revivifying a dead author's work, it is an intensely ambivalent one. The work that fantasy performs in forging a poetic community reveals the unfinished business of modernism: namely, the embodiment that it is constantly trying to do away with in its pursuit of aesthetic rigour. The modernist poet's self-figuration as a supremely individualist self-sufficient creator is exposed as inseparable from a desire for co-labour and communion, and with an overwriting of female experience. By examining the role of the foetus-as-metaphor, and its relation to a French poetics in which fantasy is permitted, the complex interplay between a biologically framed discourse of poetic origins and the fantasy of individualism is revealed. The collaborative impulse is both what is suppressed in these poets' work, because it bears the potential to destabilize identity, and the animating principle on which it is founded.

¹ Ezra Pound, 'The Serious Artist' in *The New Freewoman* 1.10 (November 1913), 194–95; reprinted in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. by T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), pp. 41–57 (p. 51).

² Richard Badenhausen, *T. S. Eliot and the Art of Collaboration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 14; *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907–1941*, ed. by D. D. Paige (New York: New Directions, 1950), p. 170.

³ 'The Serious Artist', pp. 43, 52, 48.

⁴ T. S. Eliot, 'The Beating of a Drum' (1923) in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, ed. by Ron Schuchard and others (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), II: *The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926*, ed. by Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (2014), pp. 471–75.

⁵ T. S. Eliot, 'Reflections on Contemporary Poetry (IV)' in *The Perfect Critic*, ed. by Cuda and Schuchard, pp. 66–71 (p. 67).

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- ⁵⁴ Koestenbaum, p. 118.
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- ⁵⁸ For a detailed investigation of these poems' imagery and circulation, see: Gabrielle McIntire, 'An Unexpected Beginning: Sex, Race, and History in T. S. Eliot's Columbo and Bolo Poems', *Modernism/Modernity*, 1 (2002), 283–301.
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