On the Parenthesis in T. S. Eliot’s The Cultivation of Christmas Trees

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THE CULTIVATION OF CHRISTMAS TREES, T. S. Eliot’s contribution to the second series of the Faber & Faber Christmas pamphlets, was published in October 1954 in New York and London. The American pamphlet was decorated with an early design by Enrico Arno; the British edition was illustrated by David Jones, the poet of In Parenthesis (1937) and The Anathemata (1952), and Eliot’s friend. Alluding to Christian iconography, Jones supplied a drawing of a wounded stag for the poem’s cover; the page on which the poem ends, in turn, he embellished with decorative lettering, a watercolour inscription comprising the Latin prayer for God’s mercy and for the union with St Lucy and all saints and beneath, in smaller font, a Greek phrase from an Orphic hymn, an invocation of ‘peace’ and ‘wholeness’.1 While the American and British editions were published ‘with no variants’, Jones’s painted inscription actually added eight lines to the British edition of the poem (Poems, i. 780).

Jones’s presence in Eliot’s poem may also be more profound than that of the creator of the visual effects that accompany it. One thing that brought Eliot and Jones together intellectually as friends in the 1950s was their mutual interest in anthropology. As noted by Thomas Dilworth, Eliot shared Jones’s view that the same ritual and symbolic patterns underlay various
religions throughout the history of civilisations – an idea that in-
formed The Anathemata. The same view also shapes the
Christmas pamphlet’s watercolour lettering, in which the Greek
hymn to Persephone appears underneath the Latin prayer, the
figure of the mythological goddess invoked as the ghost preced-
ing, or lingering behind, the figure of St Lucy, both of them
maidens of Sicily. (That Persephone was abducted into the
Underworld when she was ‘gathering roses and lilies, crocuses
and violets, hyacinths and narcissuses’ in the Sicilian meadows,
Eliot would have read early on in James Frazer’s The Golden
Bough.) Eliot would also have agreed with his friend on the
importance of the gratuitous act of imagination, as opposed to
the pure efficiency stressed in utilitarianism which they both
saw as a threat to culture. The Cultivation of Christmas Trees
is indeed a lesson about how to sustain in adulthood the child-
like ability to wonder, the least pragmatic, most disinterested
emotion. But besides those two weighty parallels, there may be
another – more elusive – trace which David Jones left in the
poem, a subtle rhetorical echo which manifests itself as Eliot’s
insistent use of parentheses. This repeated use prompts the
question of how Jones’s understanding of parenthesis, the figure
and its typographical marks, might have influenced Eliot’s four-
fold use of them in the 1954 version of The Cultivation of
Christmas Trees – only one pair of round brackets appears in
the poem’s earlier version of 1952.

Eliot was instrumental in the publication of Jones’s modern-
ist experimental epic In Parenthesis in his capacity as one of
Faber & Faber’s directors, and he genuinely admired Jones’s
work. The poem – drawing on the trench experience of the
Great War, beginning in December 1915 and ending with the
battle of the Somme – was published only two years before an-
other war began. Years later, in 1961, Eliot wrote a ‘Note of
Introduction’ to the first American edition of In Parenthesis,
highly praising the poet and his masterpiece. In it, he remembers
his first reaction of being ‘deeply moved’ and refers to In
Parenthesis as ‘a work of genius’, comparable in its significance
to Pound’s Cantos and to Joyce’s modernist experimentation.
He counts David Jones, along with Pound, Joyce, and himself,
as a quartet of high modernist authors, noting that Jones was
The youngest of them, the last to publish, and the only one who had been a soldier.\textsuperscript{10}

The trauma of war and the need to control and contain it are directly linked to the meaning of the eponymous parenthesis, as Jones explains the figure in the poem’s Preface: ‘This writing is called “In Parenthesis” because I have written it in a kind of space between . . . as you turn aside to do something’.\textsuperscript{11} The parenthesis designates a limited period of time, an activity in which humans engage only for a while, being destined for something else. In this sense, also ‘the war itself was a parenthesis’, with the 1914 recruits, many of them underage, being ‘glad . . . to step outside its brackets at the end of ’18’. Metaphorically, the parenthesis stands for a stretch that is painful, almost unreal, a questionable insert in one’s lifetime, not properly integrated with the main current of living. In a particular way, from Jones’s metaphysical perspective, our whole temporal existence ‘is altogether in parenthesis’. Jones stresses that for many volunteers, including himself (‘a parade’s despair’), being a soldier was a dangerously amateurish occupation; but in the business of living, likewise, one is only ever an amateur, living within the opening and closing brackets of physical existence. Additionally, Jones’s parenthesis captures the dialectic of remembering and forgetting as volitional processes. Stepping outside the parenthesis symbolises the effort to banish the war from one’s thoughts, to shrug it off. Yet the parenthesis also contains the memory of the war. So, while this disturbing content is erased so that life can go on, at the same time it finds itself commemorated. For both Jones and Eliot, the parenthesis became a rhetorical tactic that paralleled a life strategy.

The published version of \textit{The Cultivation of Christmas Trees} consists of thirty-four lines and only two sentences, as if Eliot had taken lessons on style from Walter Pater instead of from Ezra Pound, who indeed, visibly irritated by what he perceived as Eliot’s religiosity, responded to the poem by summoning his readers to ‘lament the psychosis / Of all those who abandon the Muses for Moses’.\textsuperscript{12} The twenty-six lines of the poem’s second sentence keep winding around colons, semicolons, commas, and parentheses, before they finally reach the full stop. The poem’s complex grammar and discursive tone provoked several
hostile, or at best uncomplimentary, remarks. Pound might have suggested that it was disconnected from reality (‘psychosis’); others accused it of sentimentality or intrusive didacticism, or suggested that it was characterised by overt simplicity, monotony, unromantic plodding, and thematic inconsistency. David Jones, despite having illustrated it, might not have liked it either. The youngest of Eliot’s quartet of modernist authors, and the ‘tardiest to publish’, he doggedly stuck to his high-modernist guns, and remained a staunch admirer of Eliot’s early impersonal and densely allusive poetry. (He knew ‘The Hollow Men’ by heart.)

According to Lyndall Gordon, Eliot was upset by the critics’ unfavourable reaction to this ‘first straight poem he had published in years’. As it transpires from his letters to the Reverend Geoffrey Curtis and to Richard Aldington, he did not himself regard it as an entirely ‘good poem’; but the inscriptions in the published copies given to friends (the poet and writer Anne Ridler, who had been a secretary at Faber, and Martin D’Arcy, Eliot’s friend of many years) reveal that, even if Eliot was not content with the poem’s final shape, he was confident about what it was meant to communicate, and stressed his concern with its idea rather than with its aesthetic appeal (Poems, i. 780). This idea, the poem’s main intellectual and religious theme, was directly related to Geoffrey Curtis’s notion of ‘One Coming’ – the conception of the Christian God’s lasting presence in history as manifest through various sacraments and revelations, or of ‘the implications of the parousia [Second Coming] in the Incarnation’. To Curtis’s idea, the poem adds a typically Eliotian inflection. While Curtis speaks of the first things in Christianity and of eschatology, Eliot parallels this notion with the thought of ends and beginnings as pertaining to one’s individual life, thus reiterating the theme he had explored in ‘East Coker’. The poem claims that, among the various attitudes to Christmas listed in the first sentence, the child’s attitude is special and should be cultivated because, ultimately, it is this childlike wonder that will prove itself to have always been the basis for the adult’s mature feelings of elation and awe. Is this the idea the reception of which Eliot worried about in the 1952 draft, in which he asked, rather defensively, at the close:
‘Is this the kind of message you want to send? / Is it the kind that you care to receive?’

Or are there more obscure sources for his misgivings?

Discursive and overtly moralising, *The Cultivation of Christmas Trees* has an extended didactic curve, which it supports with four sets of colons and parentheses. In the first sentence, the colon is used quite conventionally, preparing the reader for a listing of various attitudes to Christmas. In the second sentence, however, the other three colons send the reader step by step through a three-tier structure of argumentation. Comprising nearly 200 words, this second sentence works as an admonition recommending the cultivation of an attitude of wonder. Beginning with a statement of fact (the child gazing with rapture), after the second colon it urges the reader to cultivate this childlike ability to marvel, supporting the lesson with a variety of reasons, each introduced by a separate subordinate clause beginning ‘So that’ (ll. 12, 14, 18, 27). The aim of cultivating such an attitude is to preserve, in old age, the *memory* of childlike elation. Subsequently, however, the parallelism of the clauses is broken: after the third ‘So that’, a two-line parenthesis appears. It is followed by the third colon – in a sense, another typographical *because* – which gestures at a reason of a totally different nature: now, the purpose of cultivating the capacity to wonder is not only to remember the first experience of elation, but also to relive the child’s wonder as the adult’s experience of awe. And finally, with the fourth colon, the poem introduces a bold conceptual parallel between the personal and the metaphysical. The child’s wonder and the adult’s awe, the joy felt at the beginning of one’s life and at its ending, should be made co-temporal: the two brought together as ‘the first coming’ and ‘the second coming’ (l. 34) are all part of the ‘One Coming’ on the metaphysical plane. The beginning and ending of one’s life turn out to be only parts of a larger pattern of correspondences which includes the Incarnation and Parousia, although Eliot cautiously refers to the comings by using minuscules, extending the poem’s appeal to those who may not share his religious beliefs. These four colons move the reader through the levels of argumentation by revealing, with each turn of phrase,
a new and a more compelling reason waiting behind that which immediately precedes it.

Including so many dependent clauses – and apparently encumbered with bracketed parentheses – the poem makes halting progress. However, the parenthetical inserts, similar to colons, are highly effective in the structure of persuasion. The role of two (ll. 4, 28) is explanatory, a matter of scrupulousness; they provide detail that further clarifies the references to the raucous celebrations of Christmas and to the last Christmas of one’s life. The one located amid the images of the Christmas tree, presents, and garnished meats (l. 15) heightens the imagery’s appeal by evoking an involuntary memory of the smells of Christmas. The longest parenthetical insert includes a memory deliberately recalled, breaking into the pontificating tone of the poem with two lines of grateful recollection of St Lucy, a Christian martyr and figure of folk celebrations that take place on St Lucy’s Day (13 December). This parenthesis also opens space for the only ‘I’ in the poem: the ‘gratitude’ is keenly personal:

(And here I remember also with gratitude
St. Lucy, her carol, and her crown of fire.)

(ll. 25-6)

In the poem’s overall didactic logic, this sense of gratitude in an adult grows from the childlike capacity for unqualified appreciation. It is contrasted with the neophyte’s selfish pride, the unwelcome alternative, and with an ennui that blunts the ability to feel wonder.

The two-line parenthesis supports the poem’s argument in at least two ways. On the one hand, it works by providing an example (of personal thankfulness) which, put within brackets, is delivered with due discretion. Enclosed within parenthesis, the lesson is not overbearing, and its non-intrusive teaching will not be instantly opposed. Such a defensive property of parenthesis is stressed by Stefan Schneider who, from the perspective of pragmatics, observes that it provides the speaker with a means
to put forward ‘some information as an argument without submitting it to the hearer’s judgement’. The parentheses – or, to use Erasmus’s term, the lunulae – by introducing a casual tone, render the argument secure from direct confrontation in a debate. At the same time, the two-line bracketed aside steers the reader’s emotive response by incorporating an emotionally charged personal reminiscence: it functions as part of a rhetorical tactic parallel to the ancient technique which James May, referring to Cicero’s *Pro Milone*, described as *ethica digressio* – a digressive recourse to the listener’s ‘gentler emotions’ which is superfluous within a rigorous structure of argumentation, and yet effectively sways the audience. May explains that, while defending Titus Annius Milo against a murder charge (Milo was responsible for the killing of his political enemy Clodius), Cicero deflects the discourse of persuasion from its main point, or logos – the argument that the killing was in self-defence – and begins to digress. During this rhetorical detour, he makes unfavourable remarks on Clodius’s character, surmising that his death might have been willed by the immortal gods, and that his miraculous resurrection would certainly not have been willed by living people. In this way, he appeals to his audience’s emotions – their detestation of Clodius’s behaviour and their sympathy with his killer (Milo’s gladiators acted on their master’s order) – in the hope that this appeal, while not the main argument of the legal defence, will make his audience more amenable to accept the point delivered through the final pathos. In May’s words, Cicero moves ‘from logos (docere) to ethos (delectare) to pathos (movere)’, recognising in *ethica digressio* its emotional and psychological potential to influence the audience in favour of the concluding appeal to acquit Milo. Eliot’s *The Cultivation of Christmas Trees*, remote as its persuasive aim is from Cicero’s, uses a similar strategy. It provides a lesson (*docere*) strengthened by an appeal to emotions, pleasing its readers (*delectare*) with the recalled and (supposedly) shared Christmas memories and introducing them to a secret personal reminiscence. The aim of the parenthetical insert is to establish an emotional link between the reader and the lyrical ‘I’; only after this detour does Eliot deliver the final point about the inherent wonderfulness of the world to be constantly appreciated.
Providing emotional support for the didactic argument, however, does not seem to be the only function of these two lines. Along with the lesson of gratitude, the aside includes the idea of the recurrence of cultural patterns which Eliot shared with Jones. The parenthetical image invoking St Lucy is richly allusive. The image of the patron saint of Christmas, recalled within the poem’s round brackets – within its lunulae, ‘the little moons’ – brings to mind the St Lucy of Donne’s ‘Nocturnal’. Primarily, though, with its image of the ‘crown of fire’ (l. 26), the parenthesis invokes the Scandinavian celebrations of the feast of St Lucy when the Christian martyr is revered with processions of carolling girls who wear wreaths of lit candles on their heads. Alluding to the legendary fire which allegedly did not consume St Lucy’s body (when she was tied to the stake the wood would not burn, forming a wreath above her head), the evocative flaming crown has several other meanings attached to it. It suggests the Pentecostal fire: the Holy Spirit coming to the apostles in the form of fiery tongues. It also invokes the association of Christmas with Christ’s passion and death as they are stressed in the Western Church and as established in cultural tradition. The crown of fire alludes to the crown of suffering, and supremely to the biblical crown of thorns. In several European countries (less so in the Anglo-Saxon world), this association of joy with redemptive suffering is reasserted by the tradition of venerating St Stephen – the Protomartyr – on the so-called Second Day of Christmas (26 December): his name in Greek, Stephanos (Στέφανος), denotes a ‘crown’. And finally, with all these allusions to suffering derived from the legend and from ecclesiastical history, Eliot’s parenthetical reference to St Lucy gestures towards the ‘LUCIA’ of Jones’s painted inscription. The Lucy of the parenthesis is reflected in the Santa Lucia of Jones’s illustration, the latter being summoned in the prayer which appears above the hymn to another Sicilian maiden, the pagan Persephone. The parenthesis and the illustration, the two spaces that are extraneous to the poem, by being brought together intensify each other’s significance. It is because of their resonance that the parenthetical aside is structural, linking the poem and the decoration in which the Christian vision rises typographically from a foundation that is mythological. The
pattern repeats itself. The Scandinavian celebrations of the feast of St Lucy, likewise, have their pagan antecedents. The martyred virgin of fourth century Syracuse is remembered in a procession rooted in the ancient festival of light which was linked to the winter solstice (21 December). The pagan underlies the Christian as the Orphic appeal underlies the liturgical plea in Jones’s decorative lettering, and as numerous old pagan customs, rituals, and figures (including the fairy on the top of the Christmas tree) underlie, and reverberate in, Christmas celebrations. The liturgical has elements of the ludi. Despite new meanings and new purposes assigned to objects and gestures, the memory of the earliest Christmas ever remains one of a festival locked in rivalry with the Roman Saturnalia and the January calends. While writing The Cultivation of Christmas Trees, Eliot did not abandon myth for moralising, and the thought that structured The Waste Land still lingers behind the sensibility that shaped the Christmas poem.

But even if the function of this parenthesis can be described as emotive in its persuasiveness and structural through repeated imagery, the lunulae still contain a mystery. Although the bracketed insert gestures to liturgy, legend, and myth – the public domain of shared memories – it nevertheless remains deeply personal. The speaker, having entered the intimate space of the round brackets, stops perorating, shortens the distance, and moves closer to his reader. Christopher Ricks and James McCue point to Eliot’s letter of 18 December 1948 to his sister Marion (Poems, i. 782), which he asks to be circulated among the family, and in which – still filled with the happy ‘exaltation’ of being awarded the Nobel Prize – he reports on his journey to Stockholm. In closing he recounts how, on the last day of his stay in Sweden (the feast of St Lucy), his morning coffee was brought into the room by a group of girls dressed in white and crowned with papier-mâché headdresses supporting lighted candles. With a courteous bow, Eliot greeted the girls who, as he humorously observes, reminded him of ‘birthday cakes’ having gone for a stroll. In this context, the parenthesis assumes the form of a warm reminiscence, briefly recalled. It participates in the literary tradition of using parentheses to delineate a private space, as they do in works as diverse in purpose, sensibility,
and style as Sidney’s *Arcadia* and e. e. cummings’s two-word poem ‘l(a’. In *Arcadia*, Jonathan P. Lamb says, within the nearly 2,400 round brackets, there takes place an intimate exchange between the reader and the speaking voice or, rather, a voice different to that of the main narrative emerges.\(^{30}\) The parentheses allow Sidney to establish a ‘private’ mode of discourse, parallel to that which is ‘normative and public’; it also allows the two to coexist ‘side-by-side in apposition’, rather than as clearly contrasted – the two are entwined.\(^{31}\) To this parenthetical role – of creating space for privacy – Robert Williams, in his imaginative interpretation of e. e. cummings’s ‘l(a’, adds the task of protection. He associates the purpose of the parentheses with that of a curtain in a temple, preventing the irreverent from gazing at the holy. By analogy, Eliot’s lunulae veil the appearance of St Lucy, so that the saintly figure does not directly enter the ludic scene illuminated by Christmas lights and permeated by the smell of roast turkey. The parenthesis is full of reverence. However, Williams also visualises the parentheses as reflecting the function of ‘partitions, screens, and curtains’ which shield one from prying eyes, ‘hiding from sight . . . shame, embarrassment, guilt, sin’.\(^{32}\) The parenthetical recollection of St Lucy’s Day in Eliot’s poem, likewise, may have an undertone less cheerful than that suggested by the Stockholm context.

The jolly, somewhat nostalgic, memory of the Stockholm episode was included in the first version of the poem, which Eliot wrote in 1952, although in the first draft it does not appear in the middle parenthesis but, rather, near the end of the text – as a final digression. It is introduced ‘in passing’, as an afterthought, a casual addition, an undisciplined divagation.

> But let me in passing, remember St Lucy
> Her carol, and her crown of flame.

\((ms2, ll. 38-9)\)

As the poem grew from the first outline to the first continuous manuscript, through later typescripts, and on to the published version, it underwent many revisions. In its manuscript
form the personal reminiscence is tacked on to the extensive moralising passage, the poet’s authority established ostensibly through his old age, which is stressed not only *expressis verbis* but also through rambling repetitions, Eliot at 60 envisaging his last Christmas Day, which he numbers provisionally as ‘the eightieth’ (l. 28). In the first draft, the private digression follows a phrase referring to Pentecost – the celebration of the coming of the Holy Ghost, also regarded as a foundational event in the history of the Church. The biblical event represents yet another beginning, on a grander scale. In this way, after the longish lesson, the initial version of the poem breaks off, disrupts its own perorative mode, and becomes digressive. This shift is sudden, and the changes of tone – from the solemn to the conversational – abrupt; and it leads on to one more tonic change when the personal memory is followed by direct questions. The 1952 draft concludes with its author wondering whether his Christmas creation might serve as a Christmas gift (which of course it was designed to be). The ending has undergone several revisions. As revised in the draft typed later, the questions appear more defensive: rather disconcertingly, the speaker envisions the recipient’s revenge. These queries take us back to the very first outline of the poem, in which the doubting poet does not ask whether the poem’s recipient would merely ‘care’ to be given the poem, but whether the addressee would ‘hate’ such a gift: ‘Is this the kind of Xmas card you / hate to receive?’ The question can be read as Eliot’s wry address to a potential buyer, a manifestation of the tactic familiar from *The Waste Land* of directly addressing his reader as brother and ‘hypocrite’ (l. 76).

In its final form – which *The Cultivation of Christmas Trees* reached in autumn 1954 – none of these defensive questions remain. During its many revisions, the poem’s sentences have lengthened and four parentheses appear where the 1952 text had just the one. The reference to St Lucy in the final version appears in the mid-point parenthesis. The parenthesis contains nearly the same words as the first-draft digression (only ‘flame’ is replaced by ‘fire’); but, put in a different place, these words acquire a different shade of meaning. Invoking St Lucy, they bring in not only a pleasing recollection (of the episode from
the Stockholm hotel), but also a memory which may be distressing. It might be significant that, in the first draft, the only parenthesis mentions the ‘offense’ of the proud devotion of a religious novice (and one notes that lunulae both de-emphasise and distinguish the aside):

Or in the attitude of the new convert  
Sometimes tainted with a self-conceit  
(An offense before God & before the children).

\[(ms2, ll. 30-2)\]

As a matter of fact, in the years preceding the writing of this poem, Eliot did confess to having no patience with non-religious celebrations of Christmas: \[36\] perhaps those round brackets discreetly veil a sense of ‘shame, embarrassment, guilt’ caused by a memory of this intolerant attitude. \[37\] In the poem’s published version the allusion to the ‘offense’ has shifted from the space enclosed by the round brackets into the poem’s main text, now preceding and providing the immediate context for the parenthetical mention of St Lucy.

As had been his habit over the preceding thirty years, Eliot sent a copy of *The Cultivation of Christmas Trees* to Emily Hale. Several critics have found traces of the figure of Hale in Eliot’s representations of women, a model for the ‘divine women’ in his poetry and plays, according to Henry Hart, a figure standing in opposition to the disturbingly ‘profane’. \[38\] In *The Imperfect Life of T. S. Eliot*, Gordon most extensively describes how Hale haunts ‘Gerontion’ and *The Waste Land*; the lyrics from *Ash Wednesday*, ‘Bellegarde’, and ‘Cape Ann’; *The Cocktail Party*; the essays ‘Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca’ and ‘What Is a Classic?’; and *Four Quartets*. Might she lurk behind the sacrificial figure of St Lucy in *The Cultivation of Christmas Trees* as, according to Gordon, she stands behind Celia, who suffers the martyr’s gruesome death in *The Cocktail Party*? Like Dido, as she is described in ‘What Is a Classic?’, Celia ‘does not say a word; just takes herself away’, like Emily Hale, ‘inaudible’. \[39\] Gordon emphasises the sense of guilt that...
had pervaded Eliot before he finally found his happiness in later years; but she also describes how, within that self-recrimination, he recognised Emily Hale as ‘the saving grace of his life’, a gratitude which *The Cocktail Party* expresses. By 1954 it was obvious that he was not going to propose marriage, something about which he seems to have felt much guilt: Mary Trevelyan acerbically interpreted his hurrying to meet Emily when she arrived in London in 1953 as an attempt to assuage his bad conscience. Whether Emily Hale would have recognised an obliquely contrite reference to her in Lucy, ‘remembered with gratitude’ (l. 25), is of course impossible to say. But there may be indications of her particular interest: according to William Baker, her copy of the poem has a note ‘attached by a paper clip to its back paper’. This is a brief entry typed out from R. L. P. Milburn’s *Saints and Their Emblems in English Churches* (1949), telling the story of St Lucy of Syracuse, whose eyes are gouged out and then miraculously returned to her (this last gruesome embellishment is the fifteenth century addition), able to prophesy despite having her neck pierced by a sword. It cannot be stated with complete assurance that the note was attached by Emily Hale, and it is far from certain that she saw the metaphorical ‘crown of fire’ (l. 26) as an allusion to her thirty years of silent endurance; but the words within the parenthesis mingle indebtedness and a witness to suffering in a way which seems to suggest a deeply personal if obscure reference.

Robert Williams imagines lunulae not only as ‘fences, shields, palisades, [or] breastwork’ protecting their vulnerable content, but also as stopping the dangerous ‘linguistic criminals, textual rogues’ from sneaking out and destabilising the main text. Hence the removal of the round brackets, Williams says, might blemish ‘the righteousness and purity of the primary text’ – might threaten its authority. Brackets are the guardians of propriety, and a sanitising function of this kind is also exercised by the parentheses in *The Cultivation of Christmas Trees*. Had Eliot kept the reference to St Lucy in the main text, without the round brackets, then the allusion to her suffering would be on the same textual level as the reference to the speaker’s ‘offense’, weakening the moral authority of the lyrical ‘I’. In the
The poem’s final version, however, the reference is enclosed within parentheses, so that no disturbing personal implications undermine the speaker’s authority to teach. The lecturing speaker of the main text is not quite the same as the reminiscing ‘I’ of the parenthesis. The moralising ‘I’ shares the experience, but not the guilt, of the ‘I’ that remains both grateful and contrite within the brackets. Eliot used parentheses in *The Cultivation of Christmas Trees* in something like the way he used epigraphs in his earlier work: to confine the ideas which were unsettling and which would provide the poems with contrasting tonic keys. For instance, the epigraph he chose for ‘La Figlia Che Piange’ effectively turns this brief Laforguean lyric into a poem about latent emotion. In the motto preceding the poem, Aeneas asks about the name of the woman whom he encounters, unconscious of his close relationship to her and the nature of this relationship. If the excerpt is read in the context of the poem, then, Aeneas’s ignorance parallels the unawareness of the poem’s speaker of his own emotions which, when disturbed, he tries to shrug off. A comparable function is performed by the epigraph to *Marina*. Often regarded as Eliot’s happiest poem, it is introduced by a disturbing quotation: the words of dismay which Seneca’s Hercules utters on discovering that he has murdered his own children. However, these words, no less worryingly, can be also identified as spoken by Pericles’ wife, Thaisa (or, more precisely, by the wife of Apollonius of Tyre from John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*) on her awakening — expressing confusion and fear. This multiple echo, the epigraph providing not only a contrast (in Eliot’s words, ‘a crisscross’) but also a parallel to the Pericles motif in the main text, makes the poem even more suggestive. Through Thaisa’s elided presence, it suggests the feelings which might be attendant not only on the return of the lost child but also on the recovery of the long-lost wife. A similar function is fulfilled by the parenthesis in *The Cultivation of Christmas Trees*. Its third set of lunulae includes an elliptical insert. Referring to St Lucy, the bracketed aside (the ventriloquist’s trick) gestures towards a rather disturbing silence and a potential disclosure. The parenthesis turns the didactic poem into one that is cryptically personal, while
the round brackets keep its didactic discourse untainted by private revelation.

In doing so, it recalls the similar function which the parenthesis had for David Jones. By curtly, cryptically, and gratefully invoking the female who was saintly and silenced, yet who nevertheless spoke, the parenthetical insert performs this function which the rhetorical figure had for Jones when he titled his long narrative poem In Parenthesis. For Eliot – as, earlier, for the poem’s illustrator – the parenthesis created a space for both remembering and forgetting.

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NOTES

1 Nicolete Gray, The Painted Inscriptions of David Jones, quoted in The Poems of T. S. Eliot, ed. Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue, 2 vols. (2015), i. 782 (hereafter Poems).

2 See Thomas Dilworth, ‘T. S. Eliot and David Jones’, Sewanee Review, 102 (1994), 70-85: 75-6, 83-4. For Jones’s interest in anthropology and myth as manifest in his In Parenthesis, see Vincent B. Sherry, Jr., ‘David Jones’s In Parenthesis: New Measure’, Twentieth Century Literature, 28 (1982), 375-80: 376-7.

3 See Gray, quoted in Poems, i. 786.

4 James Frazer, The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion (New York, 1951), p. 456.

5 See Dilworth, ‘T. S. Eliot and David Jones’, pp. 78-9.

6 Martha Nussbaum considers wonder, along with the feeling of awe, to be the least eudemonistic emotion. See Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 55, 73.

7 On Eliot’s use of round brackets, see John Lennard, ‘In Eliot’s Penumbra: Time and Absence’, in But I Digress: The Exploitation of Parentheses in English Printed Verse (Oxford, 1991), pp. 180-213. Lennard discusses the functions of the parentheses in Eliot’s ‘Conversation Galante’, ‘Prufrock’, ‘Portrait of a Lady’, ‘Humoresque’, ‘Sweeney Erect’, The Waste Land (as
they are limited to Parts I-III), and ‘Ash-Wednesday’. He also considers their significant absence from ‘Burnt Norton’ and reappearance in the remaining three quartets, positing that Eliot’s parenthetical inserts are generally concerned with the motif of time. In his analyses, Lennard also recalls Helen Gardner’s observations on Eliot’s most extensive parenthesis, in ‘Little Gidding’ V (ll. 844-50), and Christopher Ricks’s remarks on parenthesis in ‘The Dry Salvages’ III (parenthesis as the oxymoronic speaking silence) and in ‘The Burial of the Dead’ (parenthesis as the place of pent-up energy): quoted in Lennard, *But I Digress*, pp. 180-3. For the functions of parenthesis as ranging from offering ‘side notes’ to controlling the interlocutor’s reaction, see Stefan Schneider, ‘Parenthesis: Fundamental Features, Meaning, Discourse Functions and Ellipsis’, in Marlies Kluck, Dennis Ott, and Mark de Vries (eds.), *Parenthesis and Ellipsis: Cross-Linguistic and Theoretical Perspectives* (Berlin, 2015), pp. 277-300: 287.

8 Modernist and experimental, the poem, as noted by Janet Powers Gemmill, also invokes the tradition of bardic poetry, relying substantially on myths and legends. See ‘In Parenthesis: A Study of Narrative Technique’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 1/3 (1971), 311-28: 312.

9 T. S. Eliot, ‘A Note of Introduction’, in David Jones, *In Parenthesis* (1961), pp. vii–viii: vii.

10 See ibid., pp. vii–viii.

11 David Jones, Preface, *In Parenthesis*, pp. ix–xv; quotations in this paragraph are from p. xv.

12 Ezra Pound, quoted in Robert Langbaum, ‘Pound and Eliot’, in George Bornstein (ed.), *Ezra Pound Among the Poets* (Chicago, 1985), pp. 168-94: 169.

13 Frederic Fleisher described *Cultivation* as ‘somewhat sentimental’, ‘not above average’, and devoid of ‘objectivity’: see his review in *Books Abroad*, 31/1 (1957), 84-5: 85. Martin Jarrett-Kerr claims that the poem reveals Eliot’s lost sense of drama and his acquired penchant for didacticism – ‘the kind of old uncle shaking his finger at us’: “Of Clerical Cut”: Retrospective Reflections on Eliot’s Churchmanship’, in Graham Martin (ed.), *Eliot in Perspective: A Symposium* (1970), pp. 232-51: 245.
Hugh Kenner, while noting that Eliot could adapt his craft ‘agreeably, to the requirements of vers d’occasion’, and appreciating Eliot’s diction – ‘a spoken idiom unfurbished with plush’ – nevertheless viewed the poem as merely an example of ‘minor versifying’ and its verse as ‘a trifle arthritic’: ‘Plea for Metrics’, review of Canto 85 by Ezra Pound, The Cultivation of Christmas Trees, by T. S. Eliot, and Three Elegies of Quintilius, by Peter Russell, Poetry, 86/1 (1955), 41-5: 42-3. In his review, Karl Shapiro described the poem’s content as a motley collection of ‘religious happiness, innocence, boredom, self-righteousness and wonder’: Prairie Schooner, 31/1 (1957), 16. The poem as one of the pieces expressing gladness and calm would possibly be classified by Hyatt Howe Waggoner as a minor work. Waggoner complains that ‘the quality of [Eliot’s] writing seems ... to have declined as the anxiety’ decreased, that ‘the better man has become the lesser poet’: ‘Eliot as Poet’, Sewanee Review, 92/3 (1984), 432-41: 440. On the other hand, David E. Chinitz notes that the poem’s form and subject bear the mark of Eliot’s ‘struggle to purge his ingrained elitism’: T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide (Chicago, 2005), p. 181. Positive commentaries can be found in John Timmerman’s and G. Douglas Atkins’s monographs on Eliot’s Ariel poems. Viewing it in contrast with Animula, Timmerman stresses its simplicity and quiet happiness: T. S. Eliot’s Ariel Poems: The Poetics of Recovery (Lewisburg, Pa., 1994), pp. 133-7. Atkins notes its discursive quality, describing it as ‘an essay in verse form’ with a ‘thesis’ and ‘antithesis’; he also discusses the reference to St Lucy in the contexts of liturgy and legend. See ‘The Cultivation of Christmas Trees: Through the Eyes of Children (and the Child-Like)’, in T. S. Eliot’s Christmas Poems: An Essay in Writing-as-Reading and Other ‘Impossible Unions’ (New York, 2014), pp. 29-38: 29, 31, 32, 35-6.

14 Jones, Preface, In Parenthesis, p. viii; Dilworth, ‘T. S. Eliot and David Jones’, pp. 80-1.

15 Lyndall Gordon, The Imperfect Life of T. S. Eliot (2012), p. 487. Cultivation was written in 1952 and published, after revisions, in October 1954.
16 See Eliot’s letter to Geoffrey Curtis, 28 Dec. 1953, quoted in Poems, i. 781. See also Poems, i. 780, and Timmerman, T. S. Eliot’s Ariel Poems, p. 135.

17 Curtis expressed the idea in his review of The Coming of the Lord, by ‘A Religious of the Community of Saint Mary the Virgin’ (1953). See Poems, i. 780-1.

18 Cf. ‘East Coker’ I. 1, V. 38, and Cultivation, ll. 33-4.

19 T. S. Eliot, ‘the earliest continuous version of the full draft’ of Cultivation (ms2), in Poems, ii. 441-2, ll. 40-1. Subsequent references to this version are abbreviated as ms2.

20 See n. 17 above.

21 Schneider, ‘Parenthesis’, p. 281.

22 On the typographical marks introduced in the last decade of the fourteenth century by Coluccio Salutati and given their Latin name by Erasmus in 1531, see John Lennard, The Poetry Handbook: The Guide to Reading Poetry for Pleasure and Practical Criticism, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 2005), p. 123. See also Lennard, ‘Introduction: History and Terminology’, in But I Digress, pp. 1-9.

23 James M. May, ‘The Ethica Digressio and Cicero’s Pro Milone: A Progression of Intensity from Logos to Ethos to Pathos’, Classical Journal, 74/3 (1979), 240-6: 245.

24 Ibid., p. 246.

25 For the biblical reference to Acts 2: 42-4, see Poems, i. 782.

26 On the symbolic reverberation of the image of St Mary in the Christmas decorative fairy, see Claire Russell, ‘The Tree as a Kinship Symbol’, Folklore, 90/2 (1979), 217-33: 231.

27 See Edwin, O. James, ‘The Influence of Christianity on Folklore’, Folklore, 58/4 (1947), 361-76: 363.

28 T. S. Eliot, Nobel Lecture, in Horst Frenz (ed.), Nobel Lectures: Literature 1901-1967 (Amsterdam, 1969), pp. 430-8: 435.

29 See ‘T. S. Eliot on the Nobel Prize: “I have never in my life sat at so long a table”’. The full text of the poet’s letter to his sister Marion about his trip to Sweden to collect the literary award in 1948’, Guardian, 7 Oct. 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/oct/07/text-eliot-letter-nobel-prize> (accessed 15 Mar. 2019).
See Jonathan P. Lamb, ‘Parentheses and Privacy in Philip Sidney’s Arcadia’, Studies in Philology, 107/3 (2010), 310-35: 310-11.

Ibid., p. 312; see also p. 323.

Robert Grant Williams, ‘Reading the Parenthesis’, SubStance, 22/1 (1993), 53-66: 64-5.

See ms1, the initial outline, Poems, ii. 441.

Compare the initial outline – ms1, in Poems, ii. 441, ll. 10-11 (‘hate’) – and the first full draft, ms2, ibid., ii. 442, l. 41 (‘care’). For a later version of the question included in line 41 of the first complete draft, see ts1 1st reading in Poems, ii. 447.

The list of manuscripts and typescripts, almost all of them including corrections and revisions, appears in Poems, ii. 440.

See Eliot to Godfrey Childe, 17 Dec. 1928, in The Letters of T. S. Eliot, ed. Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden, 8 vols. to date (2009- ), iv. 360. See Eliot to Ottoline Morrell, 28 Dec. 1931, ibid., v. 784.

Matthew Hart, ‘Visible Poet: T. S. Eliot and Modernist Studies’, American Literary History, 19/1 (2007), 174-89: 184.

Lyndall Gordon, Eliot’s New Life (New York, 1988), pp. 167, 169.

Ibid., p. 149.

Ibid., p. 172.

Carole Seymour-Jones, Painted Shadow: The Life of Vivienne Eliot (2002), p. 573.

William Baker, ‘T. S. Eliot and Emily Hale: Some Fresh Evidence’, English Studies, 66/5 (1985), 432-6: 435. Baker remarks that, according to Valerie Eliot, the typing was not her husband’s.

Quoted ibid., pp. 435-6.

Williams, ‘The Meaning of Parenthesis’, pp. 64-5.

See Anna Budziak, ‘T. S. Eliot’s “La Figlia Che Piange” and the Tradition of Decadent Aestheticism’, Brno Studies in English, 40/2 (2014), 27-45: 40.

See Poems, i. 776. In Jasper Heywood’s translation, the line reads: ‘What place is this? what region? or of the world what coast?’
The parallel with Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, bk. 8, ll. 1206-7, is indicated by J. P. Brockbank. See “Pericles” and the Dream of Immortality, *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespearean Study and Production*, 24, ed. Kenneth Muir (Cambridge, 1971), 105-16.

Eliot to Michael Sadler, 9 May 1930, in *Letters*, v. 166; Eliot to Edward McKnight Kauffer, 24 July 1930, ibid., v. 270; Eliot to G. Wilson Knight, 30 Oct. 1930, ibid., v. 368.